

AFTERWORD TO NEWSLETTER NO. 15 (2017)
“TIMES HAVE CHANGED” *



In 1896, R. Keig, described as “a middling old man, and he has been a big time in the parish,”¹ gave evidence regarding the Rev. William Walker Bequest in the parish of Ballaugh. He recalled the old school, the one that had been closed in 1876, where, in his own words, “[w]hen I was a little boy, of course, that was the school I went to, bringing a little sod of turf under my arm. Times have changed. Now, we come up by train.”²

The Manx Northern Railway was the most visible evidence of change in Ballaugh, and the other parishes through which it ran on its course from St John’s to Ramsey. It sliced its way through the countryside bringing bridges, crossings, and stations in its wake and physically changing the landscape. The trains ran on a schedule and there was now a timetable to consult and so a regular rhythm was brought to the day in a parish where the daily labour was agricultural and one that moved on a seasonal cycle and whose success was governed by the weather. But change was a part of life in Ballaugh and the nineteenth century saw two fundamental changes: the loss of Manx as a community language in the parish, and alongside with that, the loss of people themselves, as they emigrated, most to America, or simply drifted from the land. Each of the newspaper clippings reproduced here needs to be read with change in mind.

“The fairs, which are not infested with sharpers, showmen, &c. as in England, serve to enliven the friendship of different parts; and the assemblies, races, &c. that originate from them, afford an opportunity of a mutual association of the nothern beaux and belles, with the southern.”³ So wrote George Feltham in his *A Tour through the Isle of Mann, in 1797 and 1798* (1798), though in the case of one Ballaugh Fair held in August 1804, money went a-missing amidst the “mutual association” of that year [1804]. Feltham is astute in stressing the social rather than the commercial function of the fairs, and seeing that there was a division between the North and Southsides of the Island. But the Fair was still to fall into decline and at some date ceased to take place. The coming of the Manx Northern Railway was also intended

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¹ Anon, “An Ancient Bequest: What Shall be Done with the Money?” *Ramsey Courier* 28 February 1896: 6e.

² Anon, “An Ancient Bequest: What Shall be Done with the Money?” 6e.

³ John Feltham, *A Tour through the Isle of Mann, in 1797 and 1798* (Bath: 1798) 133.

to cross this divide between North and South, but the planned route was changed to skirt the Northern Plain, due to its declining population there [1879].

Philip Craine in a letter to the *Mona’s Herald* wrote that “I have been rejoiced to see that the long-contemplated railroad is again mooted,” adding, “I sincerely hope that the enterprise will be a success” [1871]. He was not writing from the Island, but from Geneva, the one in Ontario County in New York State that is, having left Ballaugh on 16 May 1827, as he precisely recalled, to emigrate to America. Ohio was the destination and life there for the first wave of Manx settlers was hard at first: “Trees had to be felled, with much hard labooyr, [sic] before they could raise a crop. They had to endure much sickness, and many died at an early day. Well, those that lived were enabled to see the fruit of their labour in fine cultivated farms and pleasant homes.” A field, the “Faie Claddy” (Faaie Claddagh), part of Ballakinnag in Ballaugh was the subject of a legal dispute the next year [1872]. It had been willed to Jametta Craine in 1849, who emigrated to America in 1851, and she received the proceeds of the rental of the field until her death in 1857, when her son was sent the monies by John Craine. Upon Craine’s death, Thomas Craine took the field for his own, whereupon Jametta’s son, John Thomas Horne, living in Canada, went to law to win back control of his mother’s link with Ballaugh and the Island.

Hugh Stowell, the Rector of Ballaugh, responded to a Circular Letter from a Select Committee of the House of Commons on Education of the Poor, &c. and provided details of schooling in the parish [1818]. Besides the familiar Parochial School, there was a private girls school, but also a school taught one day in the week “for the benefit of poor children whose parents are unable to pay for their education,” adding “they are principally instructed in the Manks language.” This was carried on by Stowell himself, who was an enthusiast for the Manx language and went on to publish *Yn Chied Liolar Gailckagh*, the first Manx Primer [1818]. Stowell was the contact person in the parish for the Bible Society and a copy of the Bible in Manx was available from him for the sum of six shillings [1821]. But even at this date, Manx was becoming marginalised and was starting its decline. By the time of the 1901 census, whilst 155 of the 699 persons enumerated in Ballaugh declared themselves to be Manx speakers (there were no monolinguals), 131 of them were aged 50 and over, leaving just 24 speakers under that bar. The language was spoken, but it had not been transmitted to the young.

The 1831 census recorded 1,411 inhabitants of Ballaugh (compared as seen to 699 in 1901), and there were 279 households, again compared with some 175 in 1901 [1831]. Already the population is in decline, a drop of 56 in number from the 1,467 recorded in 1821. The later development of the census represented the increasing interest of the state in its population, moving from a simple headcount as here to the more familiar household schedules of the later censuses. Those retailing alcohol in the parish encountered the Isle of Man Government in having to pay a fee in order to do so and such indirect taxation was the way that Government finances were raised [1820].

Another way in which the state intervened in people’s lives was the rounding up of people to repair and maintain the High Roads in the parish and organised by the Parochial Surveyor [1847].

Harvest Homes mark the passage of the agricultural year with the harvest gathered in and thanks offered up [1871]. This was, however, far away from the *Mhellia* as described by Thomas Quayle in 1812: “The Manks peasantry being much attached to dancing, it is a constant practice on the evening of the day on which the last corn is cut, for the farmer to call in a fiddler or two. Laborers, young and old, then assemble; and often the family and friends of the farmer himself join in the merry dance.”⁴ Now there was a church service, followed the next day by the Harvest Home itself, where much tea-drinking took place and no dancing was on offer. Gentility rather than celebration was now the order of the day—and *jough* had given way to tea in the process. Accounts of such events now featured in the newspapers and those involved were all named, a new way of acknowledging the social prestige associated with participation in them. They were in themselves an innovation in associational culture.

The Ballaugh Harvest Home Tea Festival and Concert held a few years later was “For the Benefit of the Poor” [1874]. The poor survived on charity and money was always needed for their support, but later on this system of voluntary contributions came under strain and a Parish Rate was to be proposed. It was the lack of social welfare reform in the Island in the early twentieth century during the autocratic governorship of Raglan that many proposed Annexation as a solution to the issue of Old Age Pensions.

“Blue is true, Yellow’s jealous, Green’s forsaken, Red’s brazen, White is love. And Black is death.” A rejected lover wearing leeks was present at the wedding of Thomas Caley and Ann Crane as reported so in the *Manx Sun* [1829]. The activities of the Press Gang in the Island during the Napoleonic Wars were resisted by someone from Ballaugh named Cowell, who “headed a number of men to resist and attack a ‘press gang’ that was patrolling the country,” and subsequently died in an encounter with them from a gunshot wound, an incident recalled upon the death of his wife [1848]. An unknown writer visited the parish that same year, “for the recovery of my health” as they wrote, and described turf cutting in the Curragh there as well as a place legend about the Killane [1848]. Small glimpses then, but welcome ones, into the folklore and popular memory of the parish.

“[W]e hope that the worst is now past, and that no further danger may be apprehended,” written following the report an outbreak of rabies in the parish [1874]. Agricultural life was precarious, and if not threatened by the weather, then by the chance of disease. The killing of animals so affected was the only remedy then to hand. As regards that weather, the Harvest Home church service in 1871 had “a

⁴ Thomas Quayle, *General View of the Agriculture of the Isle of Man* (London: W. Bulmer, 1812) 124.

very attentive though not large congregation, owing to the state of the weather, which prevented many farmers from assembling [...]” [1871].

The parish did not live by agriculture alone and a small number pursued fishing, and especially the mackerel fishing in the spring of the year at Kinsale in Ireland [1881]. The census enumeration took place at the time the fleets were assembling at Peel and Port St Mary, and in 1881, some twenty-three fishermen from Ballaugh were onboard waiting to set sail. All bar Edward Boyde, a tailor, were listed as full-time fishermen. By 1901, there was just Robert Craine, sailing with the Peel-registered fishing boat, the *Damsel*, the Irish fishery having since collapsed in the time since 1881. As ever, change.

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But there is one continuity here, and that is that people continued to make lives in Ballaugh. It would be interesting though hard labour, similar one feels to carting gravel at the time off the shore at Ballaugh to fill in the holes in the roads, to figure from the censuses as to just how many individual lives were lived in Ballaugh, and of those lives how many of them we know further than an entry in the census itself.

Ranajit Guha, writing from an Indian perspective, called in 1995, for “the small voice of history” to be better heard.⁵ Much earlier, in 1966, E.P. Thompson had talked about the need for a “History from Below,”⁶ and that phrase came to be used to characterise the work of the History Workshop Movement,⁷ one associated with the figure of Raphael Samuel.⁸ Sven Lindqvist, a Swedish activist, wrote an handbook on how to research the history of a factory titled *Gräv där du står* (1978), in English, *Dig Where You Stand*.⁹ Place and Voice, the tangible and the intangible, are one approach to the history of Ballaugh. The newspapers here record some of that voice, but many more need to be heard. And on that theme, the voices of today need to be recorded for those who will continue to come and make their lives in the parish.

STEPHEN MILLER

⁵ Ranajit Guha, “The Small Voice of History,” *The Small Voice of History: Collected Essays*, ed. Partha Chatterjee (Ranikhet, India: Permanent Black, 2009).

⁶ E.P. Thompson, “History from Below,” *Times Literary Supplement* 7 April 1966.

⁷ Raphael Samuel, “History Workshop, 1966–80,” *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

⁸ Raphael Samuel, ed., *People’s History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

⁹ For its manifesto, see Sven Lindqvist, “Dig Where You Stand,” *Oral History* 7.2 (1979).

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