

Mona Douglas

Manx Folk-Song,  
Folk Dance, Folklore

Collected Writings

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Manx Folk-Song, Folk Dance, Folklore



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Mona Douglas

Manx Folk-Song,  
Folk Dance, Folklore

Collected Writings

Edited  
by  
Stephen Miller

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*Isle of Mann*

'Print-on-Demand'

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## Introduction

*Manx Folk-Song, Folk Dance, Folklore* collects together all the substantive articles written by Mona Douglas (1898–1987) outside of her activity as a journalist for various Island newspapers throughout her many years as an activist in the cause of matters Celtic and Manx. Several of the articles inevitably incorporate material published in earlier pieces.

A collection of the writings of Mona Douglas on Manx traditional cultural forms, their collection and revival, has long been overdue—nevertheless, care is needed with their use. In a piece dating from 1937 she wrote that ‘much of my own life has been spent among the shepherds and farmers and fisher-folk to whom what is officially known as folklore is no mere field of scientific enquiry but a vital and important part of every-day life; and I have absorbed that point of view to such an extent that I feel I am not and never shall be a satisfactory collector from the scientific standpoint.’

An earlier paper from 1930, on animals figuring in Manx folklore is a clear, detailed piece of writing based on material collected in the field and presented with an apparatus of footnotes detailing informants. It is the very model of an approach to the presentation of material which she sought to reject and which she indeed did so.

The introduction to her first publication, *Manx Folk-Songs* (1928), shows her position—‘It is true that several sets of words are sometimes recorded as having been sung to one air; but in such cases I have tried to choose the best words available. I have also, in some cases, found it desirable to select the best verses from songs which had too many for all to be printed.’ Again, in the second number—‘No actual alteration of traditional words has been attempted beyond a word here and there to help the sense; but in most cases several variants of the song treated were available, and the version given consists of a careful blend of the best lines and verses from all the variants’ (1929).

Mona Douglas was never a collector as such but a revivalist, and it is the Romantic standpoint of the latter that determined the former. She was concerned not to be seen collecting fragmented memories of ‘defunct’ folkways—‘The attempt to restore the tradition [folk dance] to its former vigour and importance is, therefore not merely the exhuming and articulating of dry bones, but rather an effort to

reincarnate through still living forms and worthy element in our national spirit’ (1941). Continuity was essential—‘it is still ... possible to find in the remoter spots quite a lot of old people with the genuine feeling for song and dance—folk who do these things as naturally as they speak—and it is chiefly from such persons ... that my descriptions and part-demonstrations of the Manx dances have come’ (1937). It is restoration not revival in the eyes of Mona Douglas.

‘As naturally as they speak’—the typical conceit of the Romantic. The unlettered, unaffected folk. This overwhelming need to seek deep-rooted folkways led to an arch piece of fakelore, the so-called ‘Dirk Dance of the Kings of Mann.’ The originator of this dance, Jack Kermode, was well known as a joker, but Mona Douglas was so taken by it that references to the dance occur throughout her writings, even devoting a single article to the ‘dance.’

Kermode was (apparently) the hereditary ‘possessor’ of a ceremonial dance performed at the annual Tynwald gathering of freeholders of land before the King of Mann. In Kermode’s own words—‘It’s the dance the young Kings of Mann were doing one time, when they would come to be men, and the Druids were teaching it to them. They had to move around the way of the sun, and finish saluting the place of the sun’s rising, to bring light and liberty to the people. It’s all in old history, how the Kings from the North stopped doing the dance themselves and made a Manxman dance it before them at Tynwald’ (1957). But as Mona Douglas herself wrote earlier in 1941, ‘Of the dance itself, however, I can find no trace in the records of Tynwald, so that if it ever was actually performed as part of the Ceremony, it must have been discontinued at an early date.’

So how did it come then to the Kermode family? According to Douglas, it must have passed from being danced by the King of Mann himself to an officer of State, who then passed this privilege on to members of his own family, and ‘that later the actual dance may have passed out of State usage but remained as a tradition in a certain family or families.’ But, as she writes, ‘This is pure surmise, of course, and I do not know of any similar traditional ‘privilege’ dance’ (1941). Indeed. There is no suggestion at all that Kermode is simply ‘faking it,’ no willingness to disbelieve such is the desire to believe.

To the Romantic folklorist, the so-called 'Dirk Dance of the Kings of Mann' is simply too attractive with too many elements to ignore. The Druid myth of origin, the 'Pagan' sword-dance, the attendant Sun Worship, the preservation of the dance amongst the peasant fisher-folk after its removal from the Tynwald ceremony, the dance a Celtic custom which even the Norse Kings of Mann felt bound to continue and which was only apparently abandoned when the Island passed into English hands. And the ultimate conceit—that one who has lived among the 'shepherds and farmers and fisher-folk,' should be the one to record this dance and see to its 'restoration.'

Of course, Mona Douglas was not alone in this attitude to folkways, then or even now. 'A modern and alien life is all about us now, and before its onslaught the old Gaelic culture of our land and race is in danger of being lost unless we can persuade the rising generation to love, appreciate and use our national heritage of artistic expression' (1941). That 'artistic expression' was essentially the folk dance. There is an echo here of de Valera's infamous vision of 'comely maidens dancing at the crossroads and the laughter of athletic youths' in the new Éire. Dance had the convenience of being obviously a visible spectacle, and an activity which can be easily learnt by all age-groups.

The weakness of the Romantic folkloric position is its inability (or its unwillingness) to understand the forces which are leading to the cultural dissolution of the society under its gaze. Instead of a critical reflection, it leads a retreat into a concentration on a set of stylised forms of dance and song which, if continually re-circulated in a fixed and unchanging manner, act as a guarantee of cultural 'wholeness,' by an implied link with the past.

Given all the above, why then this collection? First of all, Mona Douglas cannot be ignored—she was active continually until her death in promoting the Celtic cause, admittedly the Celtic cause as she saw it, but active nonetheless. A judicious and balanced summary of her activities and achievements is still waiting to be written and it is hoped that gathering this material together under one cover will help with that project.

Secondly, she has a place in the history of the recording and revival of Manx folkways which deserves to be acknowledged. Following on from the latter, her sentiments towards the revival animate still and need to be challenged. There can be no room any longer for the 'Dirk Dance of the Kings of Mann.' Jack Kermodé must not have the last laugh.

Stephen Miller  
30 JANUARY 1994

# Manx Folk-Song, Folk Dance





## Ceremonial Folk-Song, Mumming, and Dance in the Isle of Man (1928)

Among the folk-songs of the Isle of Man are found certain songs or airs connected with particular customs or ceremonies which have peculiar interest.

The best known of these is the song called 'Hunt the Wren,' which is sung on St Stephen's Day (December 26th) by parties of boys who go round to the households carrying 'The Wren,' a pole with an erection of crossed hoops fixed to the top of it. The hoops were formerly thatched, but now they are merely decorated with holly, mistletoe, ivy, and coloured streamers. Formerly, too, a wren was hunted, killed, and hung between the hoops, and its feathers, which were supposed to bestow great good luck on their possessors, were plucked out and sold one by one to the various houses at which the singers called generally—for a good price. At the end of the singers' round, the body of the wren was taken to the churchyard and buried in some corner of it with the words, 'Shee er yn Dreean, shee er yn cheer, shee er y cheeyl, as shee er meehene'—'Peace on the Wren, peace on the country, peace on the church, and peace on myself.' Some versions of the tradition state that this was done at night.

Fortunately, from the humanitarian standpoint, this hunting, killing, and plucking of the Wren has now fallen into disuse, but the Wren Pole is still carefully made and carried round, and the song sung (in English now, formerly in Manx), in return for which the singers, called 'The Hunt the Wren Boys,' receive food or money.

Variants of this song and custom are found in various places in Ireland, and in Tenby, South Wales, but none such have been noted in England to my knowledge.

This killing and carrying of the Wren appears to be quite ceremonial in character, as the bird is held in some veneration generally among the people, and is never molested except on this one day of the year; but if inquiry be made as to the origin of the custom one meets with the following somewhat strange legend—it would be interesting to know if a similar story is related in the other districts where the Wren Song is found:

Many years ago there came to the Island a beautiful woman of the fairy people. She went all through the land, and wherever she appeared she put such enchantment on the men, by her beauty and her wonderful attractive powers, that they one and all left their work and their homes to follow her. When she

had them all collected in this way, she led them across an apparently shallow ford in a wide river. She herself went across almost dryshod, but when her followers attempted the fording, the river rose in fury and drowned nearly all of them. Upon this the survivors, brought to their senses by the disaster, gave chase to the woman, seeking vengeance upon her; but she, laughing in mockery, changed herself into the shape of a wren and flew away. Some say that this particular wren was the first to be hunted, killed, and carried round for exhibition, others that the actual witch-woman escaped; but it is generally believed to be in memory of this event that the wren is hunted and carried annually.

Another curious little song is 'Kiark Catriney Marroo,' or 'Catharine's Hen is Dead.' The custom with which this is associated is indicated by the words of the song, of which only one verse survives. There may never have been more. It runs: 'Kiark Catriney Marroo! | Gow shiu yn chione, | As goyms ny cassyn, | As vermayd ee fo yn thaloo.' ('Catharine's Hen is Dead! | Take thou the head, | And I will take the feet, | And we will put her under the ground.')

On St Catharine's Day a black hen was killed, its blood sprinkled on the threshold of the house, and sometimes also (when interference by fairies or witches was suspected) on the thresholds of cowhouses, etc; then the hen was carried sunwise round the house and buried somewhere on the east side of it. This is evidently a protective ceremony, but I can find no tradition as to its origin or meaning, and the ceremony itself has now fallen into disuse, though the song is well known.

The song said in the north of the Island to be connected with the old Manx May-Day celebrations is called 'Tappaghyn Jiargey,' or 'Red Top-Knots,' and is apparently a song of greeting to the May Queen.

The old Manx May ceremonies were quite different from the usual English ones. A Queen of Winter was elected, as well as the Queen of Summer, or May, and each Queen had, besides her attendant maidens, about a dozen male followers to do battle for her. The two forces engaged in mock battle; the Queen of Summer might even be captured and held to ransom, but her side always won eventually, and the play concluded with the rendering of homage to Summer by Winter and her followers, and the singing of 'Tappaghyn Jiargey,' after which the whole company gathered for supper, games, and dancing.

The title of the song probably refers to the wearing of cockades of red and green and black ribbon by the Queens and their maidens. The Queen of Winter and her followers wore the heaviest of winter clothing and sprigs of evergreen.

'Hop-tu-naa' is another folk-song which seems to be of a ceremonial nature, but the meaning of the custom associated with it is not known, and probably the custom itself now only exists in a corrupt form. It consists in parties of boys and girls going round to all the houses of the villages on Hollantide Eve (November 11th), hammering on the doors, and leaving turnips carrots, and cabbages on the thresholds. At the doors they sing a long rhymed-couplet song, with the refrain 'Hop-tu-naa! Trol-la-laa!' occurring once at the end of each line and twice after each couplet. This song is sometimes sung in Manx, but more often nowadays in English, and is somewhat incoherent. The singers are usually given food in return for their efforts, but rarely money as in the case of the Wren Song.

A kind of song which is, perhaps, not exactly ceremonial, but which, so far as I know, is peculiar to the Isle of Man, is the mocking or satirical song. The only example of this class which has survived in actual use up to recent times is the children's mocking-song, used in the same sense as the English term 'cry-baby.' The victim is pointed at by his playmates while they sing the song with its stinging refrain, 'Juan-y-Quirk va keaney!'—'Johnny Quirk was crying!': a punishment which was much dreaded a few years ago, to my own knowledge, though I fancy it is somewhat out of fashion of late.

I am led to think, however, that this custom of satirising people in song was once fairly general in the Island, as several other songs of a similar nature survive; for instance, the Mummings' song, in which the strolling players mock the village women who run out to watch them pass, and 'The Kilkenny Women,' a song which gives a satirical account of two women of Kilkenny Farm who undertook to drive the milk-cart to Douglas—'And whatever came on the horse, there was great mischief done on the new milk!' The satirising does not end with the exposure of the women as bad drivers, however; they must also have been poor farmers, for the spilt milk was so thin that no animals would lap it up except 'two starved pigs of Kinley Beg's.'

The Mummings, known locally as 'The White Boys' from the white overalls which they wore, were a familiar feature of Manx Christmas festivities up to a very few years ago. Their play was a variant of the usual theme, 'St George and the Turkish Knight.' There is, however, a comic character not usually found, so far as I am aware, in the English versions of the play 'Devil Doubt.' I have been told that this play formerly ended with a dance, but have not been able to get a clear description of the latter. It appears to have been a kind of circular reel, however.

Another Christmas custom associated with singing is the 'Oie'll Voirrey' ('Eve of Mary'), or carol-singing service held in the churches on Christmas Eve. The carvals, or carols, sung at these gatherings are in many cases composed by the singers or their immediate ancestors, but a number of them are much older, and nearly all are sung to old folk-airs. Most of them have nothing to say about the Nativity. One, known as the 'Carval Drogh Vraane' ('Carol of Wicked Women'), it is customary to sing in a peculiar manner. Two men usually sing it. They start at the church door, each holding a candle, and take a stride up the aisle at each verse, ending up somewhere near the chancel steps.

'Oie'll Voirreys' are still commonly held in the country districts, but not always now on the correct date, and modern or English carols have to a large extent replaced the native carvals. Chapels hold them as well as churches, and you may come upon one at any time between December and March!

There are very few characteristic Manx dances recorded, and in general they seem to have been variants of English and Scottish models, but one or two are perhaps worth noticing. The old courting-dance, called 'Hyndaa yn Bwoailley' ('Exchange the Blow'), is almost identical with the usual type of English country-dance except in the refrain, where the woman runs up to the man, strikes him on the cheek, and runs back. He follows her, turns her round facing him, kisses her, and brings her back to the centre, where they both set and turn. At the end of the last figure the woman drops on one knee and the man folds his arms and kicks his right foot over her head.

There is also a Manx sword-dance (solo) which is not quite like either the English or the Scottish sword-dances though nearer to the latter. The dancer starts with the sword on the ground before him, picks it up and makes certain passes with it during the dance, and finishes in a kneeling position.

Then there are two other dances recorded as having been danced commonly in the Island some years ago—the 'Frog Dance' and the 'Salmon Leap.' The former resembles the Russian Cossacks' dance, all the steps being performed in a squatting position, and the latter is a kind of jig in which the dancer has in one figure to lie flat on his back and leap in one movement to his feet. These last dances were only performed by men, and were very difficult. They are now practically obsolete, and I have not been able to get either an exhibition or a detailed description of either of the last two; but about three years ago I was told of a man—whom I was never able to meet—who could dance the 'Salmon Leap.'

## Manx Folk Dances—Their Notation and Revival (1937)

When the 'English Folk Dance Society' held an Easter Vacation School at Douglas in 1929 it came as a great surprise to many of the Manx members of that school, no less than to the English visitors, to find there were still surviving in living memory, in a sufficiently complete state to be recorded and demonstrated, some of the traditional dances of the Island. So far had our Manx dance traditions passed into oblivion with the general Manx public that even as long ago as the 1890s, when Clague and Gill and Moore were making their valuable collections of Manx folk music, they noted quite a number of well-known dance airs and disregarded completely the actual dances belonging to them in spite of the fact that most of these dances must have been perfectly familiar to the peasantry at that time. This sad neglect of opportunity was however probably not entirely the fault of the collectors; for the average Manx countryman was in those days (and is still, to some extent) apt to think of any form of dancing as an unsuitable pursuit for any decent Christian—'of the Devil,' in fact! A century and a half of somewhat Calvinistic religious thought has consistently discouraged among the Manx people as a whole any tendency to frivolous play and sports; and by the end of the last century they had almost completely lost the gay and child-like mood of those eighteenth-century Manx writers of 'Carvals' or religious poems who would speak of 'fiddling, dancing, singing, playing at cards and praising the Lord'—all in one breath, so to speak; while they had not yet reached the modern belief that the healthy and graceful use of the body is no sin, and that the songs and dances and traditional usages of former generations are a valuable part of a national heritage. Therefore the people from whom those early collectors derived their material would be ashamed rather than proud of any knowledge of dances that they possessed; and unless the collector was actually looking out particularly for dances, and knew his informant extremely well at that, it was natural that he should be told nothing of them.

Yet traditional dances were known and used in various places scattered all over the Island long after Gill and Clague and Moore were at work: in fact some of them were still being enjoyed at 'Mheilleas' ('Harvest Homes'), weddings and other festivities, in remote corners, even in my own childhood. The fishermen have always been fond of dancing, and I still know one or two who will dance in a public-house for a drink—though the more respectable members of the community think this practice very wicked indeed! Apart from dancing for drinks, however, I have found that the fishers as a class (the

older men) can describe and demonstrate dances more convincingly than any other people.

In some parts of the Island folk have partly got round the religious difficulty by calling reels and set dances 'games'; and under this name I have been able, since I realised what the term might cover, to gather much interesting information. Traditional practices like the Mummings' Play and the Wren Singers have also, by some queer twist of reasoning, been brought under the tolerance of religion as harmless Christmas customs like carol-singing! But on the other hand, certain ritual dances such as 'Mylecharane's March,' or 'Cutting Off the Fiddler's Head' and the 'Mollag Dance,' are still regarded with fear and believed to be magical—'the sort of thing that was going a-doing at the old Druids before now,' as one old lady said to me.

Despite all discouraging influences, however, it is still (or was until a year or two ago) possible to find in the remoter spots quite a lot of old people with the genuine traditional feeling for song and dance—folk who do these things as naturally as they speak—and it is chiefly from such persons (growing fewer every year, alas! as one after another passes away) that my descriptions and part-demonstrations of the Manx dances have come. Much of my own life has been spent among the shepherds and farmers and fisher-folk to whom what is officially known as folklore is no mere field of scientific enquiry but a vital and important part of every-day life; and I have absorbed that point of view to such an extent that I feel I am not and never shall be a satisfactory collector from the scientific standpoint. But I have been collecting stories, songs, dances and other lore, in a very catholic fashion, ever since I was ten years old; jotting down notes in old exercise-books or on scraps of paper whenever and wherever I heard or saw interesting things that I wanted to remember. It was from this hopelessly untidy mass of material that I dug out descriptions of the dances which were shown to the Douglas Easter School mentioned above; and that demonstration aroused so much interest in the Island that I straightaway began to look out further dance-notes and to compare them, whenever possible, with the actual steps and further descriptions of various old people who were still active and interested. This work progressed much better after I learnt to call the dances 'games'!

The work of (1) writing out airs and causal notes carefully, (2) completing and comparing descriptions and getting demonstrations of steps and part-

demonstrations of figures wherever possible, and (3) working out the actual movements with Mr P.L. Stowell's team of junior dancers, has been going on continuously for the last seven years. As a result we now have some fourteen dances which we believe to be complete and approximately correct, and we are trying to persuade school and other teams to revive these all over the Island. I have partial descriptions of other dances which I have not yet been able to complete, and this aspect of the work grows more and more difficult every year, naturally; but I hope still to complete at least one or two more.

After these years of collecting, learning steps from traditional dancers, and doing practical work with the Ramsey team, I have come to feel that our Manx dances, although so few in number, have a distinct character of their own; they are not quite like either English, Scottish or Irish folk dances, but they are very enjoyable and invigorating to perform and interesting to watch.

With regard to the airs, in every case I have heard the air attached to a dance sung or played for it by a person who would not be likely to have access to any printed music of that type. Most of the older singers and fiddlers perform entirely by ear; in fact I only know of one old fiddler who could read music, and he had only learnt with some difficulty to play printed hymn-tunes for use in the services of a small Methodist chapel in the south of the Island. The version of the Courting Dance that I noted from a Lonan fiddler (John Faragher) must have come originally from Gill, whose *Manx National Music* had been in circulation, although it was never well known, for some fifteen years at that time; but I am certain that Faragher could not read either music or letterpress, and must have learnt the tune from some other fiddler or singer. The version in the Clague Collection has not the right rhythm for this dance, which is in reel-time like several of the other Manx dances. The 'Courting Dance' was sometimes performed to other airs, notably 'Hunt the Wren,' although this air has a dance of its own attached to it; but the Manx name of the dance, 'Hyndaa yn Bwoailley,' is given by Gill to the air as printed in his book. I suggest that the true air belonging to this dance has been lost, and various other airs have been fitted to it by different dancers, including Gill's tune of the same name, which seems to be quite well known now (and for some years past) in its present form, and may have been learnt by ear in that form by the non-readers of music whom I have heard sing and play it. Actually, Clague's fragment just as it stands would fit the 'Frog Dance' perfectly, and I have heard it, or a close variant of it, hummed by two different men who have tried to show me the very difficult 'Frog Dance' step. But I have not yet been able to get either a really good demonstration of this step or a complete description of the figures of the dance—it is one that I still hope to complete some day.

Another air which will probably call forth criticism is that of the 'Car ny Ferrishyn,' or 'Fairy Reel.' I took this down from a woman singer, and it is a very popular tune all over the Island; but of course I knew that it had been previously noted by Gill and was known in almost the same form pretty well all over Britain. Three years ago in Donegal I heard this air played by a traditional fiddler, and to my great interest the dance attached to it showed a similar form to our Manx one, the minor-set of the Donegal progressive dance being composed of two men and four women as is our complete set, but the steps and figures being quite different. It is rather difficult to know what to do in a case like this, but it seems to me a pity to separate a dance and air that are definitely linked together traditionally because the same air may be used for other dances elsewhere.

It is curious that the air to which our Dirk Dance is done was previously noted in Skye as a lullaby! How this virile air could ever have been used effectively for that purpose is beyond me; but from the earliest times almost down to the present day communication between Mann and the Hebrides has been continuous and fairly close, so that the actual fact of the air being known in both places presents no difficulty. I am inclined to think that both this air and the dance itself may be Scandinavian in origin; perhaps introduced into Mann during the period of the Kingdom of Mann and the Isles, and possibly later into Skye by some Manx fisherman who has not passed on the dance but only the air. I noted the dance some years ago from a Maughold fisherman named Kermode and the air from the singing of his wife, who always used to sing it as the accompaniment to his dancing. Kermode told me that he had learnt it from his father, who said it was 'the dance the old Kings of Mann was using to do before now, when they would come to be King'; and that he believed none but members of his own family had danced it in the old days, and not all of them, but that the one to whom it was taught had to have 'the build and making of a dancer.' Other fishermen of the district, though able to dance the usual reels and step-dances, never attempted the 'Dirk Dance.' In this connection, it is curious that although Mr Stowell and I taught this dance to a number of boys in the Ramsey school, there is still only one generally recognised exponent of it, young Billy Cain, who has himself very much the build and manner of old Jack Kermode. Coincidence, certainly, but it fits very aptly into traditional feeling here. There is another interesting point about this dance. Its obvious aspect is that of having originated in sword worship, but I am inclined to think that long ago it formed part of Manx State ritual. The oral tradition of its performance by the Kings of Mann at their accession points to this, and it is perhaps worth noting that all through our recorded history the Manx Sword of State has borne an important part in the Tynwald Ceremony which is the centre of our nation and government, and it still does so. In the early 14th

century a state instruction to a newly arrived ‘foreign’ Lord of Mann gave minute and particular details as to the bearing of the Sword of State and the position and attitude of the Bearer during the Tynwald Ceremony, while no other article of regalia or officer’s position was even mentioned. And the attitude given for the Sword Bearer (still observed at Tynwald today) is the same as the kneeling attitude with which the Dirk Dance ends. Of the dance itself, however, I can find no trace in the records of Tynwald, so that if it ever was actually performed as part of the Ceremony, it must have been discontinued at an early date. I think it possible, however, that the performance of the dance as ritual may have passed long ago from the King to some officer of State who would pass on the hereditary privilege to his descendants, and that later the actual dance may have passed out of State usage but remained as a tradition in a certain family or families. This is pure surmise, of course, and I do not know of any similar traditional ‘privilege’ dance.

Following is a list and short description of the dances recorded up to date.

Completed and restored to use:

- (1) ‘The Dirk Dance’ (‘Reeaghyn dy Vannin’). Solo. Dancer carries dirk round in circle at arms’ length forward, point upward, then lays it down, salutes it, and dances round it. Then he picks it up and does side-steps and leaps, kicking dirk at head level. Then lays it down again, dances round it, and salutes four times. Then he lifts it and makes slashes over his head and about his body, passing dirk between his legs. Finally he carries it round again, and finishes kneeling to the dirk.
- (2) Jig, ‘Cum yn sheen oanrey cheh!’ (‘Keep the Old Petticoat Warm!’) An intricate and vigorous step-dance, often danced by one or two men on a ‘spring-board’ in public-houses. The shape of this dance (circle side-steps to right and left, move forward) is somewhat similar to the ‘Dirk Dance,’ but steps and general movement are quite different, and this dance gives no impression of ritual whatever.
- (3) Courting Dance, ‘Hyndaa yn Bwoailley’ (‘Exchange, or Return, the Blow’). For man and woman. Both dancers advance and retire, balance and turn, then clap each others raised hands, balance and turn, then dance across to opposite positions and back with balance and turn, and finally arm right and left, balance and turn. Between each of these figures is an interesting refrain in which the woman smacks the man and runs away, he following and pretending to kiss her. After the last figure the same refrain is danced, but the man actually does kiss the woman, and she finally kneels and he kicks his right foot over her head.
- (4) Four-hand Reel, ‘Jemmy as Nancy’ (‘Jimmy and Nancy’). Has the usual reel crossings and one figure in which the alternate women are ‘captured,’ enclosed in a ring, and released. Not, however, done in the usual reel step, but in running step, with an English ‘set and turn single’ instead of the reel balance and spin.
- (5) Slow Dance for Four, ‘Peter-o-Tavy.’ A graceful and difficult slow dance with the first half of each figure danced in a stationary position. Oral tradition says it is a relic of the Spanish Armada.
- (6) Six Hand Reel, ‘Car ny Ferrishyn’ (‘Fairy Reel’). Danced by two men and four women in the usual Manx reel step, with a crossed-hands swing. Two versions noted in different parts of the Island, both being danced to the same air.
- (7) Stick Dance, ‘Mylecharane’s March,’ or ‘Cutting Off the Fiddler’s Head.’ Possibly this dance should have been placed with the 8-hands, but there are only six actual dancers, the other two ‘characters’ being the fiddler and the ‘Laare Vane’ (‘White Mare’). It is a ritual dance which used to form part of the New Year ceremonial. Each dancer has two thick sticks, the figures are quick and rather intricate and the steps difficult, and at the end the fiddler is ‘killed,’ resurrected, and after being put in contact with the ‘Laare Vane,’ consulted as an oracle.
- (8) ‘The White Boys’ Mummers Play And Dance. Different version in several respects from the English ones known to me, but probably a variant of them. There is no ‘lock,’ but the swords are formed into a woven cross-seat upon which the ‘Doctor’ sits. The seat is then raised shoulder-high and the Doctor carried off by the dancers. Six men and the Doctor are required.
- (9) Eight Hand Reel, ‘Eunyssagh Vona’ (‘Mona’s Delight’). A lively and popular reel with the usual ‘body’ and figures, finishing in cross formation.
- (10) Eight-hand Reel ‘Car Juan Nan.’ Very quick and vigorous, with some difficult steps. At the end the men lift the women shoulder-high on their locked arms.
- (11) Eight-hand Jig, ‘The Fathaby Jig.’ Something like the 8-hand reels, but danced to jig-time and having a lead round at beginning and end instead of the usual reel structure of ‘body’ and figures.
- (12) ‘Hunt The Wren!’ Now a dance-game for four couples, an odd woman, and the bearer of the ‘Bush,’ or decorated pole, who is also himself called ‘The Bush.’ The ceremonially killed wren was formerly slung between crossed hoops on top of this pole, but now the hoops are used minus the dead bird. The object of the game, as now played, is for the odd woman to capture someone else’s partner, and whoever is left without a partner at the end has to

spin round and round with 'The Bush.' Formerly this dance is said to have been performed by boys only, but half of them had their faces blackened and the rest were dressed in girls' clothing and whitened their faces with chalk-water, or with chalk stone of the kind used to make the threshold designs on house and dairy doors.

(13) Long Ways, 'Yn Guilley-Hesheree' ('The Ploughboy'), for any number, danced in reel and running steps, with a progression by means of the so-called 'Manx Waltz,' which is a kind of spinning reel step danced in couples, man and woman being side by side and facing the same way.

(14) Processional, 'Hop-tu-naa!' A simple processional formerly danced through the street of Douglas, to the accompaniment of the Hop-tu-naa song, on the night of Hollantide Fair (November 12th), at which farm servants were hired for the year. The dancers carried turnip lanterns or torches and were in sets of four.

Dances partly noted but still incomplete.

(1) 'The Frog Dance.' Only the step of the refrain of this dance is noted, and I understand that this is practically identical with what is known as 'The Cobber's Jig' in Lancashire. It is danced in a squatting position, and is difficult to perform. I am told that the whole dance was done by six men, with some 'fighting' figures and much winding in and out. The 'jig' step was done in two rows, facing, and the men brandished sticks at each other while doing it!

(2) 'The Flitter Dance.' 'Flitters' are limpets, and it is the custom in the Island to gather these on Good Friday and eat them on the shore. Formerly a cake was baked to eat with them, and milk brought to drink, and after the feast the remains were thrown into the sea with some kind of prayer or charm, and then the people all danced a kind of chain dance, winding in an S-shape back and forwards over the dying fire until it was stamped out. No particular steps remembered, nor any clear form for the 'chain.'

(3) 'The Salmon Leap.' I heard of this dance first as a very difficult and unusual solo dance, then as a figure ending a dance, and now find it appearing in a curious dance or ceremony formerly performed by the fishermen of Dalby. Characters are the Skipper, the Mate, the Skit (Fool?), and 6 men. The first three danced a 3-hand jig, Skipper and Mate taking the Skit's hands and forming arches under which he ran. Then all three took each other round waists and led off in a sort of S-shaped procession (moving abreast), with the other six men following in single file, carrying peeled hazel rods in their right hands. They then formed a circle, and afterwards two files, with the Skipper, Mate and Skit at the top, facing down. The Skit then knelt before the Skipper and Mate, and the other men came up one by one and

struck him with their rods. When all had struck him the Skit fell and lay flat on his back, while the men made a ring round him (on the ground?) with their rods, danced round him, and then stood back. During all this the Skipper and Mate stood in place at the top. The Skit then leapt upright and out over the ring of rods in one movement (the actual Salmon Leap), and danced another 3-hand jig with the Skipper and Mate, while the other men bowed to them. At the end the Skipper and Mate lifted the Skit on their locked arms to shoulder level and carried him off and aboard the ship, the rest of the men following, shouting and stamping. I am inclined to think this dance virtually the same as

(4) 'The Mollag Dance,' which belongs to Castletown, and was also formerly danced by fishermen, though later by men of the town. Here 'mollags' (inflated dog-skin buoys) slung, on ropes were used to chase one dancer and imprison him, and although I have not got nearly such a complete description, certain features of the dance suggest the above. Both dances seem to have inspired great terror in all except those actually taking part in them.

(5) Circular Harvest Dance performed round the Last Sheaf, the Harvest Queen, and the 'Babban ny Mheillea' ('Harvest Baby'). No steps or figures described closely enough to attempt revival, but the dance seems to be pretty generally known.

No article on the collection and revival of our Manx dances would be complete without mention of the splendid work done by Mr P.L. Stowell and his team of junior dancers at the Ramsey Elementary School. I have to speak of these dancers as a team, because the individual members of it have naturally changed during the five years that we have been working together on these dances; but both past and present members have worked hard and long and with the greatest keenness and pride in their job, so that their dancing is a real delight to watch and has, I think, the genuine joy and spontaneity of true traditional dancing. One member of the original team—still as keen as ever—is Billy Cain, well known to all English folk dancers. Mr Stowell, teacher of the team ever since I have been associated with it, deserves our gratitude for the unflagging energy and real artistic sense with which he has co-operated in the work of restoring to use our almost-forgotten dances, for without his help and enthusiasm the revival would never have achieved its present popularity. We have far to go still before the dances are generally in use again throughout the Island, but at least we have made a good beginning.

## The Traditional Dances of Mann (1941)

The late Philip Quayle, of Glentrammon, was famous throughout the Northside for his love and knowledge of the old Manx songs and dances. About a hundred years ago, wherever in the Northern parishes was held a *giense* or a 'Mheillea' or an 'Oie'll Voirrey,' or any other excuse for music and dancing, Philip Quayle would be found in the midst of the fun, and taking a leading part in it moreover. Those who remember him even in old age say that he had a sweet tenor voice and a brisk and witty knack of repartee, and was reckoned the best dancer in the North.

His youngest and favourite child was my grandmother, who also loved singing and dancing, using both as naturally as speech. With her most of my early childhood was spent, in a house not far from her own birthplace of Glentrammon, and among the first things I can remember are her stories of Philip Quayle and his doings. She would often tell me how he taught her and all his children to dance almost as soon as they could walk, holding them between his knees beside the fire on winter evenings while he taught them to do the steps correctly, and later making them form a set out on the flagged floor of the big kitchen where they learnt figures and positions. Sometimes, as a great treat, Willy Caley the Fiddler would come in and play for them, but for the most part they danced to their father's singing and the hand-clapping of their mother and the servant-lass.

These tales of my grandmother's were my first introduction to Manx traditional song and dance, and from her I learnt many steps and figures; but she had, I think, forgotten more than she had remembered of her own childish lessons, and would sometimes, when at a loss for a movement, refer to an old book of notes written out by her father. Later on, I myself copied out most of those notes, and, cryptic though they were, they became the foundation of my rebuilding of several dances of which the actual movements were almost forgotten, and also the pattern of what to look for in my own later collecting.

### A LIVING TRADITION

I have dwelt at some length upon this matter of my early acquittance with the tradition of Manx dancing within my own family circle because I want to emphasise the fact that such a tradition does—or did

in my childhood—actually exist, accepted by the country people as a natural part of life, in spite of its having been largely ignored and lost sight of (probably owing to religious influences) during the last generation or so. The attempt to restore the tradition to its former vigour and importance is, therefore not merely the exhuming and articulating of dry bones, but rather an effort to reincarnate through still living forms a beautiful and worthy element in our national spirit. The 'English Folk Dance Society,' working for a similar revival in their own larger tradition but alive to and interested in folk art everywhere, were kindness itself when I—very tentatively—showed them something of my early work on the Manx dances, and for such success as has attended that work so far I owe a very great deal to their interest, help and criticism as expressed through the person of the Society's Director, Mr Douglas Kennedy, and others; and I am especially grateful for their support in my struggle to get the dances published absolutely free of performing or other fees.

When I was ten I met the late Miss Sophia Morrison, a keen folklorist and then Secretary of the 'Manx Society.' She was kind to my childish enthusiasm for old Manx lore and encouraged me to put down in writing all I could glean of tales, songs, dances, place-names and so forth. It was chiefly owing to her encouragement that my conscious collecting of folk-material began: but I had no idea of arranging or classifying what I did collect, so my early notes are all jumbled together anyhow. It was only many years later that I began to dig out notes on particular subjects and put them together, and therefore I did not realise for a long time what a lot of material I actually had relating to Manx dances—not, in fact, until I wanted to have one or two of them demonstrated as illustrations to a lecture that I was giving to a Vacation School of the EFDS held in Douglas in 1929.

That lecture was really the start of the modern revival of the Manx dances, for three of them were shown by the children of the Albert Road School, Ramsey, who had been taught them by Mr J. Killey, then headmaster, Mr P.L. Stowell and myself. These three dances were received with surprise and enthusiasm by the assembled folk dancers, both Manx and English, and I have told elsewhere [Douglas (1937)] the full story of how since then some fourteen dances have been carefully

reconstructed and revived with the help of the few surviving traditional dancers and of the Ramsey team. Since that article appeared I have been able to complete one more dance, a simple harvest round, of which the description and accompanying air will be found at the end of this article. [Air not reproduced here—Ed.] A description of the completed dances and those partially noted but still incomplete is given in the article referred to above.

I had not long been working seriously at the reconstruction of our Manx dances before I realised that, although their number was small indeed as compared with the English or Irish or any other national tradition, yet those that have survived are extremely interesting and varied; and that, moreover, though the Manx dances and their accompanying tunes are, as one would expect, influenced by the Island's surrounding countries and also by places much further afield they do also show distinct characteristics of their own, the product of the Manx folk spirit. There is no other British dance, for instance which has the lovely flowing lines of the 'flying arches' figure in 'Eunyssagh Vona'; and there is nothing else in these islands just like our 'Dirk Dance' with its ancient and virile symbolism—though both in that and in the 'White Boys' Dance' some of the steps danced over and around the dirk or the crossed swords on the ground are slightly reminiscent of the Scottish Sword Dance. To my own mind, however, the chief influence shown in these two dances is Scandinavian; and this influence appears also, I think, in the opening movement of the simpler social dance 'The Fathaby Jig,' where the couples perform a lift and leaping turn that brings strongly to mind the Swedish tradition.

According to oral tradition in the Island, our one graceful slow dance, 'Peter-o-Tavy,' had a Spanish origin long ago, with some survivors of the ill-fated Armada who reached our shores and settled here; and certainly this dance has a dignity that scarcely appertains to social dances in general; yet it must not be forgotten that there is a very dignified element in the Manx character, often obscured by its more matter-of-fact aspect but apt to appear unexpectedly under stress to the disconcertion of foreigners.

Mr Eric Austwick, who has made many drawings of the revived dances from teams and solo dancers in action has shown in the illustrations to this article certain typical steps, movements and poses, but lack of space has made it impossible to show any one dance completely. [Drawings not reproduced here—Ed.]

For teaching purposes detailed descriptions of all the dances found possible to restore have, however, been included in a series of three volumes now in course of publication (one is already available), together with simple piano-forte arrangements of the accompanying

airs by Mr Arnold Foster. It is hoped that these volumes, when complete, will be the means of re-popularising our traditional dances among Manx-folk everywhere, and I would here put in a plea for their more general use by Manx school children and in the social gatherings of Manx Societies at home and abroad. Why cannot we use them in our ballroom programmes, as the Scottish folk use their national dances? Our own are quite as enjoyable to perform and as pleasant to watch.

#### AN UNRECORDED DANCE

Collected by Mona Douglas

Round for any multiple of four

Music:            Movements:

A 1                Eight slips clockwise and eight counter-clockwise.

B 1                Hands all to centre, forward a double and back. Partners loose hands and face each other. Men step knee-high and turn by R, holding both hands above their heads, while women place hands on hips, balance to right and left, and then pivot on right foot with hands extended.

A 2                Half-chain with two couples. Partners face each other and pass by the right in Manx reel step. Man meets next woman on his right and joins crossed hands with her, while woman meets next man on her left and joins crossed hands with him. All swing one-and-a-half times round, so re-gaining their original positions, when partners release their opposites' crossed hands and join each other's inside hands to re-form ring.

B 2                As B 1.

A 3                Partners face each other and arm right in running step, then pass on as in A 2, meet opposites and arm left with them. Then arm right with opposites, pass back and arm left with each other, finishing with inside hands joined in ring, in original positions.

B 3                As B 1.

A 4 & B 4        'Manx Waltz,' moving clockwise.

The dance was usually continued ad lib., and 'When the dancers were wishing for the fiddler to go on playing for them, they used to balance in the ring and sing out: *Y Mheillea! Y Mheillea! A-reeshb, a-reeshb, a-reeshb!*' until he picked up the tune again.' The short connecting musical phrase is written in at the end of the dance-tune.

## Folk Song and Dance in Mann (1941)

The Isle of Man is very small, a mere dot on the map, but it claims proudly that it is far more than just an Island; it is a nation, with its own individuality, its own Government, language, customs and traditions, which last include a distinctive national folk lore and music. Like the People of Faery in W.B. Yeats' poem, Mann is

Old and grey, Oh, so old—  
Thousands of years, thousands of years,  
If all were told—

And Manx history goes away back until it is lost in mythology. From the earliest times almost down to the present day, that history reads like a romance, for the Island, as you may know, has seen many invasions and has often been a battle-ground and a land of forlorn hopes. Yet all through this age-long tumult of events that would have been the death-struggles of a less tenacious race, the Manx people have retained to a very large degree their independence and their traditions.

Now, music has always been an essential part of life for the Celt. Long ago bards and harpists and pipers played our heroes into battle and sang their victories, lamented the death of chieftains and the sorrows of the clan, or in the gatherings of peace-time evoked the lovely magic of gaiety and love, or sleep and fair dreams. Those were the professional musicians, but their influence and their music penetrated through all Gaelic life, so that no task was too mean to have its appropriate song, and no joy or grief or high event was fully realised until it was expressed in music.

In Mann we have no surviving written records of heroic times, but we have certain fragmentary versions of the ancient sagas carved in stone on our famous runic crosses, and we know from references in the classical literature of the other two Gaelic countries, Ireland and Scotland, that the bards, and the general love of music in the people, existed in our Island as in all Gaeldom. In the Manx folk music of to-day we may perhaps see, still alive and vigorous though greatly changed, that same bardic spirit reincarnated.

For the folk-songs of Mann, all of them collected during the last hundred years, range over the whole gamut of human emotions, and have evidently been produced and preserved through the centuries simply because the folk loved music, and used it naturally on every occasion of life. There are songs of birth and

death, of love and religion; invocations to ancient gods and tunes stolen from the fairies; but there are also sleep-songs and mocking-songs, semi-humorous narrative ballads, sewing-songs and churning-songs and songs for the grinding of corn, songs about witches, and the kind of lilt that you make up, verse by verse, as you sing it, about anybody in the company. This last type is still sung at the salting-down of herrings for the winter 'stock' by a group of merry girls working and chaffing each other about their sweethearts.

The old Manx people sang as naturally as they talked, and with as little effort; but they knew quite a bit about the management of the voice, and were keen critics of the manner of singing, which, it was held, should be even in tone open and easy as to the production of the voice, and full of rhythmical balance. At the winter-evening gatherings of neighbours round the turf fires certain songs, usually well-known ballads or love-songs or sometimes a famous national song like the 'Lament for Illiam Dhone,' would be sung by one person, much as a concert solo is sung to more sophisticated audiences, and in these the voice and technique of the singer would be carefully observed and criticised. In other songs, such as general lilt, hymns, carvals, humorous songs and so on, several people or perhaps the whole company would join. But the charms and fairy-songs and songs of death were not used in these gatherings at all, for it was believed that to sing these in the wrong place and time, and without need might well cause evil happenings. For this reason also this class of song has been the most difficult of all to collect.

Dancing, like singing, was an intimate and essential part of old Manx life. Since we had music in our bones, so to speak, it followed inevitably that we were rather apt to set a dance to any odd kind of occupation. We have a simple but lively processional which was used on such varied occasions as the carrying home of the 'Mheillea,' or 'Last Sheaf,' the escorting of the carts which went to the mountains in June for the annual turf-cutting which provided winter fuel, a turnip-lantern procession through the streets of Douglas on Hollantide Night (November 12th) after the big annual fair at which farm servants were hired for the year, the marching of fishing-boat crews to their Boat Supper, and so on. We danced various reels and rounds and long dances, too, of a purely social nature, and most of these are both

enjoyable to perform and pleasant to watch. But just as there were certain sung charms and other songs of a ritual nature which were not sung for entertainment or as the natural accompaniment to work, so also some of our Manx dances had their own special significance, and were never performed except for practice but as part of the ceremonial to which they belonged. Such a dance is 'Mylecharane's March,' or 'Cutting Off the Fiddler's Head,' the ritual of which has associations with the oldest things in folklore everywhere. It was performed at New Year only. After the New Year supper the 'Laare Vane' was carried in—an imitation horse's head carved in wood and painted white, with hinged jaws which could be opened and snapped together by anyone carrying the head. A white sheet was attached to this, and one of the men would drape himself in it and hold up the 'Laare Vane' ('White Mare') above his head. He would then appear in the company and chase some of the girls, snapping the wooden jaws at them and finally chasing one out-of-doors. The whole company would follow, and when the girl was actually caught by the 'Laare Vane' she had to assume the disguise and re-enter the room holding the head above her own head as the man had done. She was then seated apart from the company, the dance was performed—an intricate figure dance by men only, each dance carrying two stout sticks and the Fiddler taking an active part in the dance, which ended with the 'cutting off his head' figure in which the dancers imprison him within their locked sticks and he falls to the ground—after which the 'dead' Fiddler was blindfolded and led up to the seated girl. He then had to place his head in her lap and answer questions put to him by a third person as to events to take place during the coming year—usually, in particular, which couples should be 'legads' or valentines. The Fiddler's answers were regarded as oracular.

There is also the 'White Boys' Sword Dance,' performed at the end of the well-known folk-drama of St George and the Turkish Knight, and the 'Mollag Dance,' which survived until quite recently in Castletown but which I have not yet been able to complete, though I still hope to do so. The 'Mollag Band' of men dancers paraded the town on St Stephen's Day after the Wren Singers had finished their rounds, dressed in tall hats and old tail coats and white trousers, generally a bit ragged and all decorated with holly and ivy and coloured ribbon or paper streamers, and carrying 'mollags' (inflated dogskin buoys used by the fishermen) slung on ropes. They also carried holly branches, and they went through the town singing and dancing, lashing themselves as they went, and anybody else who came near them, with the branches and the whirling 'mollags,' and whenever they stopped for a few moments the people would run out and offer them food or drink or both, for luck. The man who told me

about having seen this dance often in his childhood did not know the words of their song, but he hummed the air over for me—an old variant of the Wren Song—and said that they danced round in a circle with a peculiar spiral action of the body, without joining hands, and every now and then they all leapt up together and shouted. This dance is even to-day regarded by many people with a certain amount of fear—a sort of unspoken feeling exists that it is definitely magical.

But probably the most unusual of all our ritual dances is the 'Dirk Dance of the Kings of Mann,' which you will see performed at the close of this paper by its most famous modern exponent, Billy Cain. I noted this dance some years ago from a Maughold fisherman named Kermode, and the air to which it is performed from the singing of his wife, who always acted as his accompanist. Kermode told me that he had learnt it from his father, who said 'It was the dance the old Kings of Mann was using to do before now, when they would come to be King'; and that he believed none but members of his own family had danced it in the old days, and not all of them, but that the one to whom it was taught had to have 'the build and making of a dancer.' Other fishermen of the district, though able to perform the usual reels and step-dances, never attempted the 'Dirk Dance.' In this connexion, it is rather interesting to note that when the dance was noted and revived, although Mr Leighton Stowell and I taught it to a number of boys in the Ramsey school, which was the cradle of our Manx folk dance revival, and though since then it has been taught to quite a number of boys and men in various parts of the Island, there has always been only one man recognised as its typical modern interpreter Billy Cain, who was chosen unanimously to interpret it years ago in Ramsey by both his schoolmates and Mr Stowell and myself, and also by the traditional dancer Jack Kermode, who saw Billy perform it in the school without his knowledge: coincidence, certainly, but in this instance it fits very aptly into traditional feeling!

There is another interesting point about this dance. Its obvious aspect is that of having originated in sword worship, but also it probably once formed part of the Manx state ritual. The oral tradition of its performance by the Kings of Mann at their accession points to this, and it is perhaps worth noting that all through our recorded history the Manx Sword of State has borne an important part in the Tynwald Ceremony which is the centre of our nation and Government, and it still does so. In the early 14th century a state instruction to a newly-arrived Lord of Mann—the first of the Stanleys to assume that title—gave minute and particular details as to the bearing of the Sword of State and the position and attitude of the Sword Bearer during the ceremony,

while no other article of regalia or officer's position was even mentioned. And the attitude wherein laid down for the Sword Bearer (still observed at Tynwald to-day) is the kneeling attitude with which the dance ends, and which is known traditionally as the 'Salute of the Sword' and given as an honour to the most important person before whom the dance is performed.

In Mann the fiddle is the usual accompanying instrument for dancing; in fact it has been for the last couple of hundred years at least virtually the Manx national instrument, for harp and bagpipes, though once probably as common in the Island as in Scotland and Ireland, have fallen completely out of use in modern times, while the pipe-and-tabor and the later concertina, so beloved of the English folk dancer, never found popularity in Mann. So long ago as the mid-eighteenth century, however, a traveller recorded of the Manx-folk that they were 'much addicted to the music of the violin, and few there be that cannot make some shift to play upon it.' In 1728 another visitor to the Island writes of how the whole community made holiday for a full fortnight over 'the Christmas,' hiring fiddlers at the public expense and holding dances in every barn, most of them lasting the whole night through, while the days, except for the unavoidable work of preparing meals for the humankind and feeding and milking the beasts, were given over to rest, feasting and gossip. The days between December 21st and January 6th are still known in Mann as 'Kegeesh Ommadagh'—'The Foolish Fortnight'—but alas! the days of full holiday and continual merriment belong to the past.

Later in the same century, yet another writer observing our social customs says of the Manx fairs that they 'are not infested with sharpers, showmen, etc, as in England, but serve to enliven the friendship of different parts (i.e., of the Island); and the assemblies, races and dances that originate from them afford an opportunity for mutual association of the northern beaux and belles with the southern. The ladies are sensible, polite and accomplished, pleasing and elegant in their address, and of a more domestic turn than the ladies of England of the same rank or fortune. They are also fond of musick and dancing, and excel in each.'

Besides the violin, the human voice is often used as an accompaniment to dancing, with hand-clapping in the more vigorous airs to accentuate the rhythm. This is more often done by women than by men, and certain dance-tunes have more or less nonsensical words attached to them which seem to be used merely as a mnemonic for the air. The rhythm and easy continuity of a good dance-singer is rather marvellous to hear, and the whole thing—singing, clapping, patterned movement—has a curious effect on the

sensitive observer, almost as though a spell were being woven about him. One of these dance-singers, the wife of the dancer, sang our 'Dirk Dance' when I used to see it as a child and when I first noted it down; and although since then I have heard it played many times on various instruments, and once in the fine orchestral setting of Mr Arnold Foster, it has never since given me the same thrill of sheer beauty that I felt in those old days in the fisherman's cottage by the singing tides, when a tall old man danced and leapt and knelt to his shining blade between the sunlight from the open door and the red glow of the turf fire, while the old woman crouching by the hearth, sang swaying and beating her foot to the throb of the air: 'O-hi-io y varrey ho! O-hi-io, my skian gial!'

The collection and revival of our Manx songs and dances has not, I feel, been conducted in a particularly scientific manner but simply by amateurs with a strong love for their country and determination to gather up and preserve, before it was too late, these unrecorded but precious and vital fragments of our national heritage. Three good Manxmen, Dr Clague, W.H. Gill and A.W. Moore, towards the end of the nineteenth century made a fairly comprehensive collection of Manx airs and a good many song-words, part of which saw print in three published volumes entitled respectively: *Manx National Music* (airs arranged for the piano by W.H. Gill), *Manx Ballads and Music* (forty airs simply harmonised by M.L. Wood, and a large collection of words), and a popular selection of airs arranged for voice and piano by W.H. Gill, with English words by various authors entitled *Manx National Songs* and published by Boosey's in their 'National Song Books' series. These were all published in 1897-98; a few airs selected from the still large unpublished manuscript collection were printed in the Manx Society's magazine, *Mannin*, between 1913 and 1917, and in 1930-33 the remainder of the collection was edited by Miss A.G. Gilchrist for the 'English Folk Song Society,' and most of the airs published, with notes and comments, in the Society's *Journal*. This last is the most serious attempt at treatment by a scientific folklorist which the Manx airs have received, and is a most valuable mine of information.

But until the 1920s nothing at all was done about the dances. When the 'English Folk Dance Society' held an Easter Vacation School at Douglas in 1929, it came as a great surprise to many of the Manx members of that school, no less than to the visitors, to find that there were still surviving in living memory, in a sufficiently complete state to be recorded and demonstrated, some of the traditional dances of the Island. So far had our folk dance traditions passed into oblivion with the general public that even when Clague and Gill and Moore were making their collection they noted quite a number of well-known

dance airs—and disregarded completely the actual dances belonging to them, although most of these must have been perfectly familiar to the peasantry at that time. This sad neglect of opportunity, however, was probably not entirely the fault of the collectors, since the average Manx countryman was in those days (and is still, to some extent) apt to think of dancing as an unsuitable pursuit for any decent Christian! A century and a half of somewhat Calvinistic religious thought has consistently discouraged among the Manx people as a whole their natural tendency to gaiety on social occasions, and by the end of the last century they had pretty well lost the charming and child-like naivete of those eighteenth-century Manxmen who could speak and write quite naturally of ‘Fiddling, dancing, singing, playing at cards and praising the Lord,’ as one ‘Carval,’ or religious poem, puts it; while they had not yet reached the modern freedom which is theirs to-day. Therefore, the people from whom those early collectors derived their material would be ashamed rather than proud of any knowledge of dances that they possessed, and unless the collector was actually hunting for dances, and knew his informant extremely well at that, it was natural that he should be told nothing of them.

Yet traditional dances were known and used long after Clague and his collaborators were at work; in fact some of them were still being enjoyed at ‘Mheilleas’ (‘Harvest Homes’), weddings and other festivities, even in my own childhood. The fishermen have always been fond of dancing, and I still know a few who will dance in a public-house for a drink. In some cases the folk have partly got around the religious difficulty by calling reels and set dances ‘games’; and under this name I have been able, since I realised what the term might cover, to gather much interesting information. Despite all the discouraging influences, I have found in the remoter places quite a number of old people with the genuine traditional feeling for song and dance, and it is chiefly from such persons—growing fewer every year, alas! as one after another pays the debt of nature—that my descriptions and part-demonstrations of the Manx dances have come. Much of my own life has been spent among the shepherds and farmers and fisher-folk to whom what is officially known as folklore is no field of scientific inquiry but a vital part of everyday life, and I have absorbed that point of view to such an extent that I shall probably never be a satisfactory collector from the scientific standpoint. But I have been collecting stories, songs, dances and any other lore that came my way, in my own very catholic fashion, ever since, at ten years old, I was encouraged to do so by that distinguished national worker and folklorist, Miss Sophia Morrison of Peel—jotting down notes in old exercise-books or on scraps of paper whenever I heard or saw interesting things that I wanted to remember. It was from this hopelessly untidy mass of

material that I dug out descriptions of the three dances which were shown to that folk dance Easter School at Douglas, and that demonstration aroused so much interest in the Island that I straightway began to look out further notes and to compare them, whenever possible, with the actual steps and further descriptions of various old people who were still active and interested. This work progressed much better after I learnt to call the dances ‘games’!

The task of (1) writing out airs and casual notes carefully; (2) completing and comparing descriptions and getting demonstrations of steps and part-demonstrations of figures wherever possible; and (3) working out the actual movements with Mr P.L. Stowell’s young dancers, has been going on more or less continuously ever since 1929. As a result, we now have some fifteen dances which we believe to be complete and approximately correct. These have been arranged in piano score by Mr Arnold Foster and put into technical dance-notation by Miss Edith Jones, and five of them have been published by Stainer & Bell. The war has held up publication of the remainder, but it is hoped to issue them very shortly in two more volumes each continuing five dances. I have partial descriptions of several other dances which I have not yet been able to complete, and this aspect of the work grows more difficult each year, inevitably, but I may still be possible to complete one or two more, at least.

After these years of collecting, learning steps from traditional dancers, and doing practical work with Mr Stowell’s teams, I feel that we can justly claim for our Manx dances, even though they are so few in number, distinct character of their own; and this view has been endorsed by the ‘English Folk Dance Society,’ whose kindly support and help has been of the greatest possible value to us all through our campaign for the general recognition and revival of our dances among our own people.

For that is the main object of all our work. We are, as I have often said, grateful for the interest and help of the ‘English Folk Dance Society,’ and also of the Celtic Congress and of Gaelic folklorists in our sister-nations of Ireland and Scotland; but the issue of success or failure in what we tempt rests finally with our own folk. A modern and alien life is all about us now, and before its onslaught the old Gaelic culture of our land and race is in danger of being lost unless we can persuade the rising generation to love, appreciate and use our national heritage of artistic expression. In doing so we believe sincerely that they will keep our tiny but proud and ancient nation continually nourished and revitalised from the inexhaustible springs of racial tradition, eternally young and vigorous and full of the deathless beauty of Tir-na’n Oge.

## The Manx Dirk Dance as Ritual (1957)

It is a curious fact that our most distinctive Manx ritual dance has become generally known, in its modern presentation, by a name which was never used for it traditionally in the Island. The original name has been lost and the present title is quite modern.

In my childhood, long before I ever saw this dance, I used to hear it spoken of as something very mysterious and difficult. I do not think I ever heard the word 'sacred' used, but certainly the way it was always mentioned with a respectful lowering of the voice suggested something sacramental; most of the Northside parishes of the Island knew it by reputation as 'The Kirk Maughold Sword Dance of the Kings,' and when I was actually taken to see Jack Kermode perform it I had the feeling of an important and exciting event. There was ceremony in his approach to the performance. In his thatched cottage on the sea beach the weapon hung in the place of honour over the big 'chiollagh,' or open hearth-fire, and he removed his shoes and his cap as his wife took it down and handed it to him. Then she poured and handed to him a beaker of whiskey, which he took in his left hand to drink, while holding the sword, point upright, in his right hand. Then he handed the beaker back to her, she set it down on the table, and crouched down beside the fire to sing, the *port-e-beayll*, while he danced.

In the popular mind there is a deeply-rooted feeling that this dance has something to do with the bearing of the Sword of State before the representative of the Ruler of Mann in the annual Tynwald Ceremony. The weapon used by Kermode in the dance as 21 inches long. It was narrow-bladed, very thin and flexible, and sharpened on both edges. The hilt was of silver, or a metal closely resembling it, the cross-pieces were curved back from the blade, and at the conjunction of blade and cross-piece on each side was a small raised boss, one of these bearing the Three Legs device and the other what seemed to be a representation of the sun with rays; but both carvings were very much worn down.

It used to be said that 'Only one man in the Island can dance the Kirk Maughold Sword Dance'—and that was probably true, at any rate by the time I came to note it down, for Jack Kermode, its last traditional performer, was the last man of his family able to dance. He had a son, and would normally, I suppose, have taught him the dance as his father had taught it

to him, but owing to an accident the boy was a cripple. Kermode claimed that his family had been the only performers of the dance for generations back, but until now there had always been one or two Kermode boys who knew it, and he was very sad about the break in the tradition, but gave his whole-hearted approval when I proposed to teach it to some other Manx boy. He accepted the transition from his own family philosophically, saying: 'Well, first it was done at the Kings, and then they gave it to the Kermodes, to be King's Dancers, and now it must go to some person else—but see ever that the one you teach it to has the build and making of a dancer, for that was the day it was taught from the beginning, not just to every boy of the house. The Sword Dance of the Kings is not for every person to do.'

Kermode's own version of the traditional origin of this dance is somewhat ambiguous, as such things often are. He attributes the earliest teaching of it to 'the Druids,' but goes on to speak of 'The Kings from the North.' Now, the Druid traditions, in Mann at any rate, are purely Celtic—the Norse pagan religion was quite different from the ancient Celtic, or Druidic, faith—yet 'The Kings from the North' must mean the Norse-Manx rulers of the isle. The inference seems to be that the dance is of Celtic origin, and I believe it is now generally accepted that the Celts show a strong Eastern influence in some of their traditions (in this connection Don Nikolai Giovannelli has a pertinent note on some affinities of the Manx dance); but that the Norsemen, like the early Christian Church, adopted and perpetuated this and other ritual practices already operating in Mann when they came to its throne.

It would seem that the dance was, in fact, an important piece of State ritual long after the Norse period; for when, in 1445 Sir Thomas Stanley was installed as the first of his house to become Lord of Mann, precise instructions were given him, and recorded in a State Paper still extant, regarding the positions of the Sword of State and Sword Bearer in the final salute of the dance at Tynwald, and also that he himself must have 'His visage unto the East.' The relative positions of the Governor and Sword Bearer remain unchanged in the ceremony to the present day, but the kneeling salute is no longer offered, nor is the dance performed.

The description of Kermode's tradition, in his own words, is as follows:

'It's the dance the young Kings of Mann were doing one time, when they would come to be men, and the Druids were teaching it to them. They had to move around the way of the sun, and finish saluting the place of the sun's rising, to bring light and liberty to the people. It's all in old history, how the Kings from the North stopped doing the dance themselves and made a Manxman dance it before them at Tynwald, and that's how the Kermodes first came to be King's Dancers, and have been ever since, or the name means Mac y Mod, the son of the assembly. But when the old Kings went, the new Lords didn't regard the dance, and it was left out of Tynwald, but they still had to have the Sword held up before them and face the rising sun, and the Governor does that in Tynwald to this day.'

The air to which the dance is performed was noted from the singing of Kermode's wife, along with the mnemonic words, which in this case seem to have a definite link with the dance, though many 'purt-y-beayll' words are just nonsensical syllables made up to fit the tune. Kermode always danced to her singing, and he told me that it was the right thing for a woman of the family to accompany the dancer in this way, for it was a fairy tune that was first taught by a woman of the sea to the mother of one of the ancient Kings, who sang it for her son and then for her grandson. It used to be always the mother of the dancer who sang for him; later any woman of the family might do it. But no woman must ever perform the dance.

When I learnt it from Kermode, he would never allow me to go right through it, saying it would be 'unlucky mighty'; and he made me promise that if I taught it to any boys I would only show them a bit at a time. Apparently, it was only the complete dance which formed the ritual—to practise sections of it was innocuous. He also said the dance must never be performed to any other tune; and as a matter of fact this would hardly be possible, so closely are movements and music welded together. The same air has been found in the Hebrides as a lullaby, and that seems very strange to me, for to Island folk the air seems to hold all the vigour of the dance itself.

However, I have also heard that air played, without the dance, by a traditional fiddler in the west of the Island; and when Arthur Darley, the Irish fiddler and folk-song collector, visited the Island some years ago he told me he had found an air of somewhat similar character in Galway—in the guise of a love-song.

The actual movements of the dance are obviously symbolic, but also practical: the crouch and pick-up after the first dance round the sword is a demonstration of the performer's speed and surety of attack; the kicking of the sword is a test of both the

weapon's strength and the dancer's agility; the slashes and changing of the sword from right hand to left show that he can fight on, even if wounded in the sword-arm (the old Gaelic tradition of the hero as one who is 'never down till he is dead' is still strong in Mann); and the carrying of the sword in honour, emphasised in the words of the port-e-beayll, prior to the final salute, is symbolic of the highest authority subject only to the Sun or Supreme Power. The young King of Mann in ancient times would offer his sword only to the Sun; the King's Dancer offered it only to the King—and the echo of that rule is heard today in the living tradition for the final posture of the dance: the performer kneels in the Salute facing East, except when offering it to the Ruler of Mann, when he faces West, because the Ruler or his representative in the Tynwald Ceremony is still seated 'with his visage unto the East.'

## Some Ritual Dances of Mann (1957)

Only one of our Manx ritual dances is known outside the Island: the 'Dirk Dance' ('Reeaghyn dy Vannin'), traditionally performed at one time by the young Kings of Mann on their taking of arms, and later by a specially trained dancer before the King, the honour of being King's Dancers being hereditary in one particular family, from a descendant of which I noted it; and as this dance has been described in a former article I shall pass over it with this brief mention and write of some lesser-known dances of a ritual nature of which the tradition still remains reasonably vivid. In most of these the information available has been sufficient to make a workable reconstruction possible.

In folklore the term 'ritual' has a wide connotation, ranging from a definite religious observance to a tenuous and often jocular folk-memory of some ancient rite or belief preserved in a children's game. Here in Mann, apart from the 'Dirk Dance,' which always seems to have been regarded with a certain reverence, I have not found complete and faithful observances, but only fragments of old beliefs, told half-seriously; and in one case a definite fear of ritual dancers, but with no actual reason given for being scared of them. In other case I have had clear descriptions from several unrelated sources of a whole dance and ritual, with demonstrations of steps and movements, given without any understanding that these had any special significance.

The one set of dancers who seem to have inspired fear in their beholders in all parts of the Island, even well within living memory, is the 'Mollag Band.' There seems to have been one of these Bands in each of the towns, and in some country districts also. They were men (number uncertain, but eight or ten seems to be the general opinion) dressed in rough white suits, sometimes with open sleeveless coats having one or two short shoulder-capes worn over them, and tall-crowned blue or black felt hats, once made in the village of Ballasalla; with brightly-coloured ribbon cross-gartering over their trousers and long trails of ivy and other greenery decorating the whole costume. They carried long staves of about six feet, also decorated with ivy twined around them, and 'mollags,' the inflated skins used to float fishing-nets, dangling from ropes, which they swung about them, giving blows with them on house-doors, and sometimes hitting anyone who got in their way, as they danced through the streets of Ramsey or Castletown, shouting and leaping high in the air and flourishing their staves.

Unfortunately, I have not been able to get a demonstration of this dance, or even a workable description of the step used, though I am fairly certain that the High Reel Step would come into it. But I have seen one of the old 'Mollag Band' costumes, and heard many general descriptions, all of them emphasising the fear motive. In fact, more than one informant has said: 'Aw, you'll not get any person to show you that dance, at all, for the only ones that can remember it were just little ones when they saw it, and would be far too scared to take notice, of steps and the like.'

Probably the same thing would have happened to another of our ritual dances, known as 'Mylecharane's March,' but for the fortunate chance that my own great-grandfather, Philip Quayle of Glentrammon, actually danced in a set which performed about 1870. He left notes of this dance, as of many others (it was these notes, incidentally, which became my first basis of collecting Manx dances); and his daughter, my grandmother, having seen it danced every year round the Christmas-New Year season in her girlhood, was able to give me a detailed description, show me the steps used and the stick movements, and sing the tune—which turned out to be the one recorded by the late W.H. Gill and printed in an arrangement for piano in his *Manx National Music* under the caption: 'Mylecharane, Modern Version.' Why 'modern' I don't quite know, unless because it is a major variant, not the minor one usually sung traditionally. This, however, is essentially a fiddle tune, with very strong rhythmic stresses—fine for dancing to but not very easy to sing to the words of the Mylecharane folk-song; and as a matter of fact my grandmother could not remember ever hearing it sung, but only played by the itinerant fiddler who used to accompany the dance team on their rounds.

Whatever musicians may think of the tune, however, I feel that the dance itself is very old; it strongly suggests to me an ancient war-dance, for some of the figures, and the names given to them seem to mimic fighting and the testing of weapons. As folk-ritual, it is associated with the New Year and with prophecy.

At the New Year's Eve gatherings a terrifying object would fling open the house-door and dash in—a whiteclad figure maybe seven feet high, topped by a wooden, white-painted horse's head with red jaws opening and closing as they tried to snap at anyone

within reach—especially the prettiest girls. After a good deal of this quite literal horse-play, the figure would gradually herd the Fiddler and maybe a couple of girls out through the open door into the night. There would be screams, groans and laughter from outside, and then the Fiddler would march back playing the Mylecharane tune and followed by the dancers swinging and clashing their sticks, with the tall white figure gambolling clumsily around them. Then the dance was performed, the Fiddler actually taking part in one figure and at the end being ritually ‘killed,’ while the dancers gave a wild yell. Next, the whiteclad figure, called the ‘Laare Vane’ (‘White Mare’) seated itself a little apart, and the leader of the dance raised the Fiddler, blindfolded him, and led him to the Fiddler, where he had to kneel down with his head in its lap and answer questions as to happenings to be expected during the coming year. These answers were regarded as oracular, and I think every informant of mine who remembered the dance and ceremony at all has assured me solemnly that the Fiddler was seldom wrong on these occasions.

The ‘Laare Vane’ links up in folklore with the Welsh ‘Mairi Llwyd’ and the well known ‘Hobby-Horse’; and I think possibly also with the various Water-Horse traditions found in all the Celtic countries. The only Celtic dance I have heard of, however, which seems to have some affinity with ‘Mylecharane’s March’ is a fighting dance called ‘Brian Boru’ which I once saw mentioned in an article on Irish dances, but no detailed description was given of this, only a statement that ‘The dancers fought each other with clubs, often causing broken heads, and the steps were very difficult.’ I may say that broken heads have on occasion occurred in ‘Mylecharane’ teams, not to speak of bruised and broken fingers, while all those who have tried it say that the ‘sand-step’ occurring in this dance is far the most difficult of any Manx steps.

I have referred to the fact, well known in folklore generally, that a former serious ritual observance may survive as a children’s game, and we have an example of this in Manx folklore in the well known song and dance, ‘Helg yn Dreean’ (‘Hunt the Wren’). To go into the complete history and ramifications of this custom would take far too much space here; but I would recommend anyone who would like to follow it up to read the scholarly chapter on it in *A Second Manx Scrapbook*, by W.W. Gill, published by Arrowsmith and available at most bookshops and public libraries. Here, I will just quote his initial summary of the custom, and add that he relates the Manx ritual, in the course of his essay, to similar observances in many countries. To quote him, then:

‘On a certain day of the year a wren was caught and killed. It was carried round by a singing procession of

men or boys, in a decorated receptacle, from house to house, its feathers, in exchange for food or coins, being distributed to be worn as protective charms or luck-bringing amulets, or to be kept in houses and fishing-boats for the same purpose. The body of the bird was afterwards buried to the singing of ‘dirges,’ formerly in the churchyard with subsequent circular dances, but latterly on the seashore or in any convenient piece of waste ground.’

In the days when it was truly a ritual observance, the Wren was buried in all solemnity, by torchlight at night, to the accompaniment of singing, dancing and ‘keening.’ The song and dance were both performed by men or boys, but one of these was dressed as a woman, and another, who actually buried the Wren, either wore a mask or had his face blackened. The ‘keening’ was done by the women-folk of the neighbourhood, who had to remain outside the church-yard wall, and keep their heads covered. In its passage down the years, most of this ritual, and all of the solemnity, has been lost; but the song and the dance still survive, and the dance is now regarded by children as a game, in which form I noted it. Girls as well as boys now take part, and the ‘Man-Woman,’ a figure familiar in folklore, has become an extra girl who tries, at the end of each round of the dance to grab another girl’s partner, the one left partnerless at the end of the dance having to ‘dance with the Bush’—which means carrying off the decorated pole and cage, and spinning round and with it. The ‘Bush,’ be it noted, is still honoured in each round of the dance; but there is also a suggestion of mockery in this final carrying by the girl left over.

Another dance which savours of ritual is that known variously as the ‘Frog Dance,’ the ‘Knife Dance’ and the ‘Fishermen’s Walk,’ in which short knives are carried in the belts of the (men) dancers, flung down in a row so that they are embedded by the point in the ground, danced around, and finally lifted in a flourish above the dancers’ heads. This dance was traditionally performed at the Boat Supper, when a crew of men acted also an impromptu play depicting the putting to sea of a fishing-boat, the shooting and hauling of the nets, the coming of a storm, a man overboard, and his rescue. This play, or one of them, was recorded in 1855 by the late Dr Clague of Castletown, and is printed in his *Cooïnaghtyn Manninagh* (‘Manx Reminiscences’) published about 1911 by M.J. Backwell of Castletown—a book which is a perfect mine of folklore.

Yet another ritual dance noted in description and steps but not so far revived in demonstration is to my mind older than anything else I have collected, with the possible exception of the ‘Dirk Dance’: this is the one known as ‘The Salmon Leap.’ I have heard it

associated traditionally with Finn Mac Cooill and the Salmon of Wisdom, a most unusual direct link with Pagan Celtic religion; and it is also connected in several references with the Ards Stone Circle in Maughold, a primitive temple popularly believed to be druidical. It involves characters known as the King, the Queen and the Skit (Fool?) and a circle of masked male dancers called the Priests, who carry wands of rowan and/or elder wood with which they strike the Skit as he lies on his back within the circle, after which he has to leap upright and out over the linked wands (this is the 'Salmon Leap' which gives its name to the dance), and perform a special dance with the King and Queen. The names of these characters are also sometimes given to the stones of the Circle.

Of the last dance I shall mention very little survives, but that little is interesting; partly because it employs a 'stamping' step not found in any of our other dances and is performed to a curious modal air, and partly because I think it links a very ancient Celtic ritual with a custom which still survives quite strongly, at any rate in the country districts of the Island—that is, the custom of going to the nearest seashore on Good Friday to gather 'fitters,' or limpets, and often to cook and eat them at a picnic meal on the beach.

My first informant about this dance and custom, Mrs Callow of Maughold, said that when she was a child the whole business used to be quite a ceremony. A fire was made of flotsam and jetsam ('mychurachan' was the Manx Gaelic word she used) gathered on the beach, and cakes were made and baked on it of barleymeal. They had to be made without the use of iron or steel, so neither a knife nor a griddle could be used, and they were mixed and moulded by hand and baked in the hot ashes. The 'fitters' were also baked there in their shells, and then everyone ate of them and the cakes, and drank milk which had been brought with the party. After the meal, all the food and drink remaining was cast into the tide with the words: 'Gow shoh as bannee shin' ('Take this and bless us'). The fires were then put out, and everyone danced over the ashes in a chain of couples, which had to wind to and fro in the shape of an S.

Mrs Teare of Ballaugh also remembered the cooking and eating of 'fitters' and cakes on the shore, and a dance in the shape of an S, but not the food being thrown into the sea afterwards, or the spoken invocation. Later, I got a more detailed description of the dance, with a demonstration of the two steps used, from another informant in Maughold, Mrs Ratcliffe. The side-step is one found in several Manx dances, but the other 'stamping' step, presumably used to stamp out any remaining live embers in the fires is peculiar to this one.



## 'A Chiel' Amang 'Em': Memories of a Collector on the Isle of Man (1958)

'Is your dog good for sheep, lovely girl?'

A twelve-year-old was already wise enough in country ways to discount the adjective as the old shepherd's way of ingratiating himself with a potential helper, and I well knew that the dog, not I, was the attraction; but having counter-designs of my own I was very willing to play along with him, so I answered laconically, in the accepted manner—'Aye'.

After some further searching inquiries as to where he was bred, who had trained him, and how I came to own him, since I had neither sheep nor cattle, 'Jack' was duly passed as adequate for work, and John Matt informed me that he had recently lost his old dog and had not yet got another, and invited both of us to go after his sheep with him.

At that time I had already been for some time collecting and noting down old Manx stories, songs and dances, and John Matt Mylechreest (to give him his full name, which was hardly ever used) was reputed to be a great hand for all of these—but only likely to display his accomplishments over drinks in a pub. As I was not permitted inside such places, I had to grasp any other possible means of notation that might turn up, so this one was far too promising to neglect. Sure enough, as I trudged over the hills with John and 'Jack' through that long winter, I heard many a tale and song, and was even taught dance steps and figures away on the tops where no censorious neighbours could observe us and chide John Matt, as one stern farmer's wife had done, for 'hankering after sinful pleasures when his thoughts should be on higher things, now he was getting to be an old man.'

But John's life was far indeed from being given over to pleasures, sinful or otherwise. He was a shrewd, hard-working crofter-shepherd living in a thatched cottage up against the mountain, and his flocks ranged over some half-dozen miles of rough grazings and open mountain land. A strange mixture of mystic and realist, he could tell a fairy or ghost story and give a practical explanation of it with a gleeful laugh—but he could also tell with wonder and reverence of mysteries beyond material explanation, as when he told me how one night soon after his sister and housekeeper died, when he was feeling lonely and ill himself, the 'Lhiannan Shee,' a fairy woman gowned in shining yellow silk, came in at his door and stood there with light surrounding her, and

sang to him in the old tongue until he fell into a healing sleep—and in the morning his sickness had left him. Even when speaking English he often used a vivid and memorable phrase. He had only one arm, having lost the other by its being torn off when he was working on the building of the Snaefell Mountain Railway, and one day when he spoke of this accident I said it must have been excruciatingly painful. But, 'No,' he replied thoughtfully, 'I was gone to the other side of pain'. It was John Matt who first told me the story of the folk song, 'Ny Kirree fo Niaghtey' ('The Sheep Under the Snow'), and guided me over all the places mentioned in it, talking of Nicholas Colcheragh, its hero, as though he had been a personal friend, though Colcheragh died in the late 18th century. John it was, again, who could remember 'Jimmy-Juan-Nan of the Clarum,' the famous singer, dancer and fiddler whose name is perpetuated in his favourite reel, the 'Car Juan Nan' which, incidentally, John himself described and demonstrated for me to note down.

John Matt was one of the first people from whom I noted folklore, and I remained in fairly close contact with him for a number of years. It was through him, too, that I got to know another man who proved a rich source of material, especially dance material—John Kelly the Fisherman, of Baldrine.

Kelly was a very different type from John Matt: a merry, practical sailor-man and one of the best dancers in the Island, with an astonishing flair for natural history and a fine collection of sea birds and beasts captured and preserved by himself over many years and proudly displayed in cases in his little parlour. From Kelly I noted many songs and dances, and many a happy hour I have spent in his house practising steps, learning body-movements, and going through intricate figures again and again until I was sure that I could follow my own written descriptions. For these practices his wife and young niece, and anyone else who happened to be in the house, would be pressed into service, and as by no means all of these folk were habitual dancers, the result would sometimes have appeared very funny to an observer. However, the impromptu demonstrations served their purpose, for without Kelly's help I could never have noted down or taught, for instance, 'Mylecharane's March,' or the still more difficult and dramatic 'Boaill Baccagh,' sometimes known as 'The Fishermen's Walk'. Incidentally, Kelly is the only traditional dancer of whom I have

been able to secure a photograph taken in action. In 1936 he appeared in a film of a traditional wedding taken for the Isle of Man Tourist Board, and I am indebted to the Secretary, Mr L. Bond, for obtaining for me a 'shot' of Kelly dancing to the 'purt-y-beayll' of a traditional singer, Robert Kewley.

Kelly, however, never performed the 'Dirk Dance.' That was the special privilege of Jack Kermode of Port Mooar, who claimed that it had been handed down in his family for generations, ever since the first King's Dancer was appointed. It is certainly curious that although many other fishermen were good dancers none but Kermode ever, to my knowledge, performed this dance. A photograph of his cottage on Port Mooar beach was taken by me about the time when I recorded the dance; but I would never have dared to suggest taking one of Kermode actually performing it. He would certainly have regarded that as 'unlucky'—which useful word could, in this case, be taken as a euphemism for sacreligious.

Another man who often sang and played tunes for me was Tom Taggart of Grenaby. He was a fiddler, and his 'fiddle' was no small instrument but a large cello. Tom was a great Methodist, and his 'fiddle' led the singing on Sundays in the little Kerrowkiel Chapel on the slopes of South Barrule—but served other purposes during the week.

He seemed to harbour a slightly guilty feeling on that account, and once said to me: 'The old fiddle has never what you could call sinned to, girl, but she's fond of a lively tune now and then, I'm admitting'. Besides his musical activities, Tom was something of a 'Charmer,' an excellent amateur vet, and sometimes an amateur lawyer, doing 'bits of writing' for his neighbours, for he was a friend to all and sundry. His cures of sick animals were famous throughout the south of the Island, and I have known people cured of various troubles by his charms.

Another well-known man of the south was Jack Davis of Ballasalla. He once had a carrier's cart which plied between Douglas and Castletown, but when I knew him had long ceased from work and was a very old man living a little way out of the village and generally to be found sitting on a stone in the sun. He claimed to be on intimate terms with the fairies, and averred that he had often seen 'Themselves' 'as thick in the road as the scholars coming out of Ballasalla school'. He was too old to dance when I knew him, much to my regret, but he had formerly been a member of the Castletown 'Mollag Band,' and there is a photograph of him in the white home-made suit which he wore as a Mollag dancer, and which, in his old age, became his normal wear, for he believed that white was the colour for good health and longevity—incidentally a

fragment of ancient Druidical lore. It seemed to be true in his case, for he lived to be well over a hundred. He gave me many descriptions of dances, but his great talent was story-telling, at which he was a real artist.

On the west side of the Island I found most of my material coming from women. Mrs Bridson of Glion Meay was full of stories, songs and lore, and also a mine of information about traditional crafts and customs. A tall, 'sonsy' woman with a twinkle in her eye and the truly Gaelic habit of vivid gesture, she was a joy to watch and listen to.

Mrs Clague of The Niarbyl was another well-known character. Wife and mother of fishermen, she lived in a thatched cottage on the beach, where in summer she made teas for visitors and told them tales of mermaids and fairies and warning spirits of the storm. She was also a good herb-woman, and though well over seventy when I knew her had hair black and shining as a young girl's, wound in thick plaits round her shapely head, sparkling, snapping dark eyes, and a body still lithe and slender. She knew many songs and dances, and was always kindly and patient about instructing the persistent youngster who was continually worrying her for details of words, steps and figures.

Perhaps the most impressive of all my teachers, however, was old Mrs Callow of Cardle Veg, Maughold. To my childish eyes she seemed like an ancient Druidess translated into my own day, and apparently there was nothing she did not know about traditional lore, be it song, story, dance or custom. Mrs Callow it was who first took me to see Jack Kermode perform the Sword Dance of the Kings, having first prepared me by telling me the old traditions about it. To her, too, the ancient sea-god and first King of Mann, Mannanan Mac Leirr, was no meaningless name out of a forgotten past but a living presence for ever about us; and a song like the 'Lament of the Seal-Woman's Lover' related a tragedy that might happen to any Islandman even to-day.

These men and women who companioned my childhood and youth have gone the way of all flesh and with them has passed the last vigour of the older Island life. But I count myself more than fortunate to have known them, and many others of similar type, and to have been able to gather from their store of tradition, just before it was too late, at least a little of the riches that in an earlier generation must have been far more abundant. And what has been saved is, I believe, sufficient to form a solid foundation for the claim that the Manx people, small though they be as a national community, have a true and characteristic traditional culture of their own.

## Hunting the Dance in Mann (1973)

My interest in the old songs and dances of the Island started at a very early age. Most of the time, as a small girl, was spent with my maternal grandmother who lived then near Lezayre church and later moved to Ballaragh, Lonan, where I still live; so I have virtually live-long associations with those two districts and between them most of my collecting has been done, though I have also been lucky enough to find songs and dances in other parts of the Island.

Like all small children I used to plague my elders for stories, and Granny had a rare fund of these, mostly centred around Glentrammon, Lezayre, where she was born, and connected with her father, Philip Quayle, who was in his day the most noted exponent of folk songs and dances in the Island. His first wife, the mother of my grandmother, was a cousin of Dr Clague, that well known folklorist who, along with Deemster Gill and his brother W.H. Gill, did yeoman work in the first concerted and serious attempt at the collection of Manx folk music. It may have been through this connection that Phillip Quayle was first prompted to record in writing some of the dances with which he was so familiar.

One of the stories I loved best was about the Quayle family dancing on winter evenings in the big flagged kitchen of Glentrammon, with a great fire of peat and wood burning on the 'chiollagh' and candles alight. Phillip Quayle would bring out his fiddle then and play dance-tunes, or sometimes just whistle them while he taught his three children the steps and figures of the old Manx dances. Sometimes, when they had learnt a dance and could perform it fairly well, he would get his wife to partner one of the boys and Nell (my grandmother) the other while he played the fiddle, and at other times other children and young people from neighbouring houses would come in to join in the fun, and they would dance 6-hand and 8-hand reels, jigs and long dances instead of just the 4-hand reels and couples dances.

But these happy days came to an end after the woman of the house died. The boys, young men by then, went abroad when Phillip Quayle remarried, and a little later Granny herself went to live in Liverpool where she met my grandfather, a wild Irishman, and emigrated with him to Canada for some years. Later they came back to the Island, where my grandfather soon became known through three parishes simply as 'Pat,' so typical of his native land did the Manx-folk consider him. My grandmother was a beautiful dancer, and it was from her that I first learnt some of the Manx dances.

She also had her father's written notes on them giving descriptions of steps and figures, the names of the dances and so on, and she used to sing the tunes for me to write down. At the time I did not realise the value of what she gave me, but later on when I began collecting folklore in earnest I was lucky in being able to get them from her as a foundation for my own notes on what I collected, and they proved invaluable in giving me a clear indication of basic steps and patterns.

It was Granny, too, who told me how notable men dancers used to go about in pairs or small groups, carrying with them their spring-board on which they would sprinkle sand and perform, usually in pubs for a drink. The sand used was a very important item, especially in performing what was known as the 'sand-step.' Many of the dancers preferred a special kind of sand and would bring their own, often from a distance. These boards seen only to have been used by men for solo or double jigs and step-dances and for ritual dances like 'Mylecharane's March'; the social dances in which both men and women took part were danced either out of doors, as at the 'Mheillea,' or on the flagged or earthen floors of dwelling houses or in swept haylofts.

My knowledge of the spring-boards stood me in good stead once, when I was trying to get a demonstration of a particular step from John Kelly the fisherman of Baldrine. It is extraordinary how one seemingly small point will occasionally turn one's persuasive failure into success. I had got Kelly to the point of saying that he might dance for me if he had his spring-board, but it had got broken long ago. I said I would get one made for him, and then added that he had better provide the kind of sand he liked best himself. He looked up sharply at that, and said, with quite an altered expression: 'Aye-aye! So thou do know something about the old dances for all!' After that I had no more trouble in getting him to dance. I had not realised that this fastidiousness about a special kind of sand was only known among really good dancers, and was regarded by them as a sign of knowledge and ability.

From very early days I had heard quite a lot about what was called 'The Kirk Maughold Sword Dance of the Kings of Mann,' but I had never actually seen it performed until 'Pat' gave me the opportunity of collecting it. He used to make business calls on a number of people in Maughold, one of whom was Jacky Kermode, the dancer from whom I learnt it. One day 'Pat' took me with him to Kermode's

cottage on Port Mooar beach and asked the old fisherman if he would 'Let the child (me) see his sword dance.' Without much demur Kermode took off his sea-boots, reached down a short, thin old sword from hooks above the 'chiollagh,' and made ready to start. His wife poured out and brought to him a pewter beaker of whisky, which he drained and handed back to her, and then she crouched down beside the turf fire and began to sing. He stood perfectly still through the first phase of the air, holding the sword upright before his face, and then he began to dance, at first slowly, then gradually quickening and moving with more vigour as the sword flashed about his body and was slashed over his head, and on to the thrilling final leap and salute, for which he knelt at the open doorway as though saluting the sun—as he said the young princes of the Manx royal line used to do when they took arms.

That was my first and greatest experience of the traditional air which was an evocation of sheer beauty, and it will be remembered as long as I live: the low-beamed, white-walled kitchen where the fireglow from the 'chiollagh' mingled with sunlight coming in through the open door, the old woman crouched by the hearth crooning the noble air in a vivid and continuous rhythm, and the tall old dancer, vigorous and graceful despite his years, so utterly absorbed in the dance of which he carried on the tradition from far mists of antiquity.

Later I had many adventures, and also made many friends, when hunting down Manx dances. The solo jig, 'Cum yn Shenn Oanrey Cheh,' was noted in places as far apart as Jurby and Lonan. After I had procured with some difficulty an introduction to an old man who could perform it, he wouldn't dance a step until his wife was out of the way, so I had to get a friend to persuade her to go away for some reason while I got him going and noted his steps. Once when trying to contact dancers at the Michaelmas Fair in Kirk Michael I was almost hired myself by a farmer before I realised what was happening. This was the fair for hiring women farm servants, and I looked quite strong and capable of hard work.

But perhaps my most amusing experience was with a man known as 'Kelly the Blackguard'—quite a different person from Kelly the fisherman. When living in the south of the Island for a time I often heard of a dance called the 'Salmon Leap,' but could never get either a demonstration or a full description of it. "Kelly the Blackguard' is the only living man that can do it,' I would be told, 'He can tell you all about that dance, for it was done in the old days by a boat's crew from the Niarbyl, and he's the only one of them left. But he's a hard man, and wild mighty, and it wouldn't be very good for a young girl like theeself to be chasing him at all.'

All the same, I tried, but could never succeed in meeting him. And then one evening I was walking

along the back road to Foxdale on the west of Barrule when I met what looked a wild and shaggy gipsy, a huge man with black hair, dark skin and a most disreputable air. He passed on without responding to my 'Good evening,' and a bit further on I met a farmer I knew and asked him who on earth that fellow could be. 'Oh, that's 'Kelly the Blackguard,' was the reply. 'He'll be making for Dalby it's like.' The man must have wondered what had struck me, for I halted in dismay, wondering if I had missed my chance to note the 'Salmon Leap.' He certainly did look a tough proposition—but I wasn't going to give up if there was a chance at all of seeing him dance the 'Salmon Leap,' and I realised that I had just the possibility of meeting him again if he did go down to Dalby and on to Glen Meay. I made off down past Cly Feeiney and over Dalby Mountain as hard as I could run, down through Doarlish Cashen, and out on to the Dalby road near Ballaquane, where I turned south again and made towards the Lag. Sure enough, there was my bold boy coming down the road from the Round Table—but I was quite unprepared for his reaction when he saw me. He shrank back against the sod hedge, drew a cross and a circle on the road with the heel of his boot, stood inside the circle and made the sign against the Evil Eye while he muttered 'Ayns ennym yn as y Mac as y Sperryd Noo.' Then, apparently surprised that I did not vanish in sulphurous smoke, he regarded me nervously and said, 'My gough! Is it a 'Lhiannan Shee' thou are or what? Didn't I see thee on the mountain, so how in the world are thou before me again now—thou can't be a right thing at all. Tell me what thou are wanting, then, and see thou do me no harm.'

Well, I tried to convince him that I was human, wished him no harm, and only wanted to ask him to show me the 'Salmon Leap.' He was very civil and told me all he knew about the dance, and even lay down flat on his back in the road and showed me how he could leap to his feet and stand upright from that position, the movement which gave the dance its name. But I think he remained unconvinced that I was really a human being, for when I left him and went on up the hill I turned round to see him standing again within his circle looking after me, with his right hand held out making the Sign.

I was very fortunate in doing my collecting just in the nick of time, for most of the old dancers who taught me and gave me information have now left this mortal scene. But their dances survive and are being learnt and enjoyed by some of the younger generation; and also, working on the basic steps and movements, at least one dancer of today is composing new Manx dances, as must have been done from time to time when they were a regular feature of Manx country life.

## Introduction to *The Leighton Stowell Book of Manx Dances*

(1981)

Away back in 1928 the English Folk Dance Society decided to hold a vacation school in Douglas the following Easter (1929), and I, as a collector of Manx folk music was asked to give a lecture to the members of the school on Manx music—not dances, for at that time none of the people interested in folk dancing realised that there were any distinctive Manx dances though Morris and some English country dances were being taught in some schools, and a few Manx teachers had already attended previous vacation schools of the ‘English Folk Dance Society’ in England. In fact there was a class for Morris in the Manx Music Festival.

But I had been working for some years on the collection and notation of dances as well as songs, and I knew from what I had been able to gather piecemeal through descriptions and step and figure demonstrations, mainly by elderly fishermen and farm workers, that there was actually a still living though almost defunct Manx folk dance tradition, sternly repressed for at least two generations by a rather puritanical Methodism, and at least some of the dances were quite well remembered as ‘games’; so I set about trying to find a way in which these could be shown to the ‘English Folk Dance Society’ school.

My quest for the dances had first been stimulated by my maternal grandmother with whom I was mainly reared. She told me how she had learnt to dance as a child at Glentrammon from her father, a well known singer and dancer, and she taught me many steps and figures and the characteristic (as I learnt later) arm extension of the Manx dances she knew; and later, when I was old enough to read and understand it, she gave me a precious manuscript book in which Great-Grandfather Quayle had noted in outline several more. He was born in 1824 and died in 1900.

Another great stimulus—really the one which started my serious collecting and noting—was being taken by my own Irish grandfather to see Jackie Kermod of Port Mooar, Maughold perform the famous ‘Sword Dance of the Kings of Man,’ of which he was the last traditional dancer.

I decided to give the ‘English Folk Dance Society’ school a surprise if I could get a team, perhaps of school children, to demonstrate one or two Manx dances as an illustration to my lecture, so I went to see Mr J. Killey, Headmaster of the Albert Road school, Ramsey, who I knew had put a Morris team

from the school into the ‘Guild’ competitions. He was interested, and said immediately: ‘Yes, I have on my staff the very man to help you, he’s very keen on Morris and country dancing—I’ll get him to come and talk to you.’

That was my introduction to Leighton Stowell, and it soon developed into a long and fruitful collaboration which was to prove the beginning of the Manx Folk Dance revival, and later of the ‘Manx Folk Dance Society.’

Leighton Stowell had a capacity for infecting others with his own enthusiasm for a subject in which he was interested, and he soon had the Albert Road children very enthusiastic about this new project, which had to be more or less an extra-curriculum activity. He formed a special group which used to practise in play-time and after normal school hours and even on Saturdays, usually in the school playground but with special permission to use the school hall if it was very wet or snowy weather, and I went down nearly every day to help, taking my notes along. We all worked very hard all through that winter, and by the start of the Easter holidays all the boys of the top form had been taught the ‘Sword Dance’ and the mixed team had learnt ‘Hyndaa yn Bwoailley’ and ‘Eunyssagh Vona.’ We were ready for the demonstration—almost; but we still had to choose one boy to demonstrate the solo ‘Sword Dance.’ Finally the choice was made on the voting of the boys themselves, and it was unanimous: Billy Cain, a nephew of the Rector of Bride. As we know, Billy later won fame both for himself and for the Manx dances in London and many other folk dance centres, his first triumph being an immediate invitation from Douglas Kennedy, President of the ‘English Folk Dance Society’, to perform the ‘Sword Dance’ at the All-England Festival in the Royal Albert Hall the following January, to a special arrangement of the air commissioned from Arnold Foster and performed by the London Symphony Orchestra.

Leighton Stowell and I worked together for some years, carefully preparing one after another of the traditional dances and teaching them from my notations, while Arnold Foster, who had been the musical director of the 1929 ‘English Folk Dance Society’ vacation school, wrote piano arrangements of the tunes and the ‘English Folk Dance Society’ backed their publication by Stainer & Bell. The

Albert Road team gave many performances both around the Island and in England, and appreciation of the Manx dances increased steadily.

After that first period I worked in London for a few years, but Leighton carried on teaching both junior and adult teams, and eventually the 'Manx Folk Dance Society' was formed in connection with the Festival of Mann. I was still able to take part in a number of programmes by talking about the dances even before coming back to live in the Island, and through the years we have continued that early friendship and collaboration right on until Leighton's death. I always recognised that he was a far better teacher and 'showman' of the dances than I, and I left most of that aspect of the work to him; but sometimes he was inclined to elaborate on traditional forms, and I think I helped to correct this trend, which was never very strong.

Also, we both recognised that the recorded traditional Manx dances were limited in number, so when Leighton started to compose new dances of his own I was very glad, for I cannot think of anyone else so well qualified to do this by a long working knowledge of the traditional dances themselves. And as he used to say: 'All folk dances must have been composed at some time and by some person. Mine are really Manx dances composed by a Manxman, and I hope they will someday become traditional.'

That hope is now well on the way to fulfilment through the propagation of his dances by the 'Manx Folk Dance Society' both in schools and adult classes and their presentation at festivals, and especially by the publication of this memorial volume with arrangements of the airs (some of which have also been composed by Leighton himself) by Bernard Osborne, a good Celt from Cornwall well integrated into Manx cultural life and a friend of Manx music

and dance. The volume contains eight composed dances and one—the 'Southside Jig'—which Leighton always claimed to have learnt and danced himself as a boy in Castletown; and it will be a very welcome addition to the somewhat scanty literature of the Manx folk dance revival for generations of dancers to come. Some of the younger groups are already using these composed dances and showing them at festivals with great acceptance.

Of Leighton as a person we of the older generation all have nostalgic memories: his perfectionism as a coach, his happy knack of arousing enthusiasm, and perhaps most of all his ever bubbling sense of humour which enabled him to carry off triumphantly any situation and make fun out of any contretemps, as on the occasion when his team had to dance in the Grenaby schoolroom on rickety trestle tables which finally collapsed under them; whereupon Leighton, after extricating the (fortunately undamaged) dancers, remarked: 'Well, if we didn't bring the house down we certainly brought down the platform!'

Leighton Stowell was a true Manxman and a true artist of the dance. In 1966 he was awarded the supreme prize for an outstanding contribution to Manx culture, the Mannanan Trophy, for his work on behalf of the Manx dances, of which he was very proud, and I believe that this final salute by his friends and pupils would have pleased him enormously. Perhaps it still does, for he was also a truly religious man, with full and firm faith in a future life.

## Introduction to *Rinkaghyn Vannin—Dances of Mann*

(No Date)

When, in some trepidation, I organised the first demonstration of the revived traditional Manx dances for the Easter Vacation School of the 'English Folk Dance Society' held in Douglas in 1929, I would never have dared to anticipate that the practice and performance of Manx music and dance would achieve the expansion and general popularity it enjoys today; nor would this have seemed probable for a good many years after that date.

Well before the opening of the present century the Manx dances had fallen into disuse, mainly owing to the mental atmosphere first introduced into the Island by the Stanley family and their adherents and later reinforced by the Victorian dominance of social and commercial interests under which nearly everything Manx was denigrated as inferior and the imported language, arts and general way of life was too often regarded as a much needed 'civilising' influence. The traditional dances of the Manx people in particular were held to be only clumsy gambollings of country bumpkins, ignored even by the small section of educated people among whom were the first men to start collecting Manx traditional music, Dr John Clague, Deemster Gill and Speaker A.W. Moore. These collectors noted a considerable number of dance tunes, but not the dances performed to them although at that time these must have been popular at such gatherings as the 'Mheillea.' Fortunately, one or two of the dancers themselves did make some notes of steps and figures, among them my great-grandfather Philip Quayle of Glentrammon, and his notes were my first inspiration for collecting the dances; but when I started the only way of getting any demonstrations of steps and other movements was to hunt out old men in pubs or elderly women who remembered dancing at the 'Mheillea' in their youth, and, occasionally, to join children who were performing a free version of such a dance as 'Hunt the Wren' and calling it a game.

In the 1920's, however, a few school teachers were introducing English country and Morris dancing into the elementary schools, mainly due to the growing influence of the English Folk Dance Society, and it was a team of children at the Albert Road School, Ramsey that I coached for this first demonstration with the co-operation of the Headmaster, Mr J.Q. Killey, and his assistant teacher, Mr P.L. Stowell. The dancing of this team soon became popular, and they were followed by other school groups and a few

adults who practised the dances in order to teach them to children. But these groups were regarded as entertainers for concerts and so on, and the dances themselves as museum exhibits, and there was no sign of Manx dances coming back into general usage as the Scottish national dances have always been used, mixed in with current ballroom dancing, though they were used to some extent in Manx Folk Dance Society parties.

But in the last twenty years this prevailing attitude has altered, Manx traditional music and dancing becoming part of the curriculum in our schools and both traditional and modern instruments played under school tuition. Also a number of adult groups, mainly of young people, are practising and performing the Manx dances all over the Island, inviting and gaining community participation, and taking them to folk festivals in other countries.

Mr Colin Jerry, himself both a school teacher and a performer, has published several volumes of Manx tunes arranged in a suitable form for use by school children with their own instruments (and of course also by adult performers), and now comes this new volume published by two of these groups, 'Bock Yuan Fannee' and 'Sleih gyn Thie,' in co-operation. He has collected here the airs, instrumental guides and dancing instructions of all the Manx dances except those composed by the late Mr Leighton Stowell, which are under copyright restrictions. And the Manx dance revival today is not confining itself to the dances already noted. As all living art must, it is becoming creative. The distinctive character of Manx traditional dancing is now well established and recognised internationally, and by slow degrees the dancers are themselves beginning to create new dances, as their forebears did when the dances were known and used all over the countryside. Two of these new dances in the traditional idiom are included in the present volume which comprises twenty-eight dances noted at various times and places. Many of these have hitherto only been available in manuscript but all have now been brought back into practice from my original notes under my own supervision with teaching instructions carefully written, while the two new ones referred to above have been similarly treated. It now only remains for our enthusiastic young dancers to make full use of their new dance book.



# Manx Folklore





## Lezayre Folklore (1916)

'My father was often telling us children of one time when he was a little boy. He was up Snaefell cutting turf with the Creggan ones, and he got away from the others some way and was digging by himself when, all at once, he saw a little woman in a red cloak with a can at her standing in front of him. Sprung up out of the ground she must have done, for my father was quick to notice a stranger and he never heard nor saw her coming. Anyway he thought she was a fairy, so before she had time to speak he made the sign of the cross and said the charm Nelly Comaish had given him to keep them away, and then she gave a sort of a howl and vanished clean away before his eyes. My father didn't wait to see what had become of her at all, but threw down his spade and ran for all he was worth all the way back to Creggan. That fairy didn't do him any harm, but it was a long time before they could get him to go out the mountain again.'

'When we first started the choir practices at Lezayre we had them in the church, until one night we got a fright there. This time we were up in the gallery singing away, when all of a sudden we heard a terrible scream. Of course the singing stopped, and we all looked to see what it was that did it; and there was one of the girls looking as white as a ghost, and when we asked her what was the matter all she would say was that she had seen something white up at the communion rail. There was a great talk with the people for a long time about this thing that had been seen in the church, and we never had the practices there again but went in the school-house.'

'There was talk of a sort of a 'Buggane' that was walking up by Ballakillinghan front gate. They said it was like a big, grey bulldog, and an awful howl in it. I have heard it howling myself. One night after choir practice, I had been up the Skyhill Road with one of the girls, and coming back, just when I got to the gate, I saw something moving in the shadows. Knowing about this 'buggane,' I was middling frightened and I went over the hedge and through the fields, so I never knew whether it was the 'buggane' or not I saw, but I believe it was something.'

'When I was a girl there would be great work with us getting up on Easter Sunday to see the sun rise. They say that as it rises on that day it reflects the figure of Christ in the sky. I believe I saw it once—a big, white shining thing, like an angel. I don't know what it was, but it was something.'

'We had a pig overlooked once, and an old beggar-woman gave my mother a charm to put on it. She was to go at day break to Ballakillinghan front gate, where the Buggane walked, gather three handfuls of dust, put them on the pig's back and say some words in Manx. I forget what the words were, but mother worked the charm and the pig got all right again.'

'I had been up to Glentrammon for milk one night, and was coming down by the water-trough, when I saw a little woman with a grey-shawl over her head, stepping along in front of me. I didn't think anything of it until she went aside, like into the hedge, and when I passed the place there was no person there. Then I remembered that there had been some talk of something being seen about the water-trough, and I suppose that was what I saw.'

'One night in the back-end of the year, when the dim was coming on middling early, my father was going to shut the door, when he noticed a thing like a big white cat sitting out in the street. He went to 'sthoo' it away and gave it a hoist with his foot, when, all at once, the thing stood up and began to grow and grow until it seemed to reach up nearly to the sky, and then it went away. When my father came in he was all white and shaking and he was bad all night, but he would never say whether it spoke to him or not.'

These stories have been told to me by an old native of Lezayre.



## Animals in Manx Folklore (1930)

The subject of animals in folklore is a very far-reaching one, but my object here is simply to make a sort of inventory of the various animals which come into the folklore of the Isle of Man, and to put on record some few beliefs and tales which have been heard orally by myself and have not, to my knowledge, been printed before.

A very large proportion of Manx folklore has to do with animals. There are the animals who are themselves the heroes of tales, mythical or fairy animals, ordinary animals who have fairy connections or are 'taken' by the fairies or 'overlooked' by people having the Evil Eye, etc. There are various customs and charms connected with animals, and also there are traces of a belief in human beings assuming animal form on occasion. It is rather difficult to arrive at any method of classification of this tangled mass of lore, but I have decided to devote a section to each kind of animal represented in our folklore, and fit the mythical creatures into the classes which seem to be their nearest affinities as I proceed. I will take the more familiar animals first.

### DOGS

The most famous dog of Manx folklore is the 'Moddey Dhoo' of Peel Castle—a large black dog of supernatural nature and aspect who is supposed to haunt the Castle and used to appear to the soldiers in the guardroom. One of these soldiers is said to have met his death by the agency of the 'moddey dhoo' through following it one night. The 'moddey dhoo' is known and dreaded throughout the Island to this day. There are also other 'black dogs' reported from various parts of the Island, and they all seem to be of similar habits. They appear almost every night in a certain place, are extremely large with great fiery eyes, and cannot be heard walking or breathing, though they are occasionally heard howling in the distance, and this howling is always an omen of evil. They seem to cause extreme terror in the beholder, but do no harm unless molested. I know of nearly a dozen altogether, one of them 'taking,' as the phrase goes, at Ballamoddey, a name meaning 'farm of the dog'.<sup>1</sup> I think the general impression regarding them is that they are either impersonations of the Devil or his agents. Anyway, people do not care to meet them. 'Mr Roeder was told that people had been seen to have been pulled off horses by black dogs...'<sup>2</sup> Yet they had their uses, as it was considered that the best method of catching a witch was to pursue her with a

black greyhound not having a single white hair.<sup>3</sup>

Of quite a different type is the 'Fairy Hound,' or 'Coo ny Helg,' which is sometimes seen running across the fields in the evening, or may even race past one on the road. This fairy dog is white with red ears or feet, and it is reckoned very lucky to see it, especially if you say 'Shee dy row adhene' at the time. There is also a smaller kind of fairy dog—also with red ears, but it may be either white or grey—which is sent into the cottages at night by the fairies as a sign that it is time for the household to retire to bed and leave the kitchen to 'Themselves' (the fairies) for the night. It is always wise to take this hint, as otherwise the Good People may take their revenge by playing malicious tricks on you!<sup>4</sup>

Some years ago in Lezayre I was told that after Ottar, the King of the North, was killed at the Battle of Santwat, he returned to his own territory in the form of a 'moddey dhoo,' and haunted North Barrule for many years in the form first of a dog and then of a falcon.<sup>5</sup>

The superstitions about ordinary dogs are but few, and of the type found in most places, as for instance, that dogs howling outside a house presage the death of one of the inmates. It is not considered lucky in some parts of the Island to take a dog to sea on a fishing-boat, or to mention the word 'moddey' in the boat.<sup>6</sup> Dogs are believed to be able to see fairies and supernatural beings generally, and to fear them.

### CATS

I have never heard of a 'Fairy Cat' corresponding to the 'Fairy Dog,' but cats in general are believed to be on intimate terms with the fairies and with all the inhabitants of the invisible world. 'Pussy Boght' is the only member of the household who is permitted to remain in the kitchen when the fairies come in to warm themselves at the deserted 'chiollagh' ('hearth') and eat their supper after the human inhabitants have retired; and I have been told on several occasions and by different people that after the cat had been put out at bed-time 'with the shake of a stick,' she would come in again with the fairy visitors and be found curled up near the hearth in the morning.

There is a belief that the cats of the Island have a King of their own, who lives the life of an ordinary house-cat during the day but at night assumes his

regal powers and travels the land in fiery state. Woe betide the householder with whom he lives then if he has been unkind to his royal guest, for the King of the Cats may take terrible vengeance.<sup>7</sup>

It is also said that there are cat-witches, i.e., witches who take the form of a cat instead of that of a hare. This belief is referred to in the old Hollantide Mummers' Song, 'Hop-tu-naa'.<sup>8</sup>

A curious story is that of the Ballure Miller's Cat. Briefly, it is to the effect that, in order to help her master to answer a question put to him by the fairies, the Cat went on a pilgrimage to find out who was the wisest living creature. She enquired of various animals, and was sent to several extremely wise creatures in turn—the Wren, the Heron, the Eel, and, finally, she was told by the last-named that the Herring under the tenth wave was the oldest creature and the wisest. She decided to take the Eel's word for it, and returned with the information to her master, who told it to the fairies, thus winning his freedom from their power over him.<sup>9</sup>

#### HORSES

A number of tales relate to a kind of water-horse, usually called the 'Glashtin.' Like the Moddey Dhoo, the 'glashtin' appears in several places, or perhaps I should say that there are several 'glashtins,' all displaying similar characteristics. The story about them always follows the same lines; they meet a girl going for water, seize hold of her skirt, and attempt to pull her into the river, whereupon she extricates herself by unfastening her apron or skirt and running away, leaving the monster with it in his teeth; or else a man will meet on the road what he takes for a quiet grey horse, mount it, and then find that his steed is making for the nearest river at a headlong gallop, when he usually jumps for his life. In one tale of this latter class which I heard, the horse was said to have human ears, and, as soon as the rider noticed them, he jumped from its back.<sup>10</sup>

The 'Nikkessen' is a Lonan water-spirit who also takes the form of a horse at times, but he usually appears in the shape of a handsome youth who sings a very sad and beautiful song in an unknown tongue, and occasionally entices young girls into his deep pool in the Awin Ruy. These water-horses seem each to haunt his own special river and the land in its immediate vicinity. The 'nikkessen' is even more restricted in his territory, as he is never seen except on the banks of his own secluded 'dub.'

We have another breed of water-horse in Mann, connected not with rivers but with the sea. This is the 'Cabbyl-Voor,' or 'Cabbyl-Ushtey,' who may be met with on the shore at low tide or seen grazing on

the brooighs. He is white or brown in colour, not grey like the 'glashtins,' whose name may have some connection with the colour of their coats; and he can travel equally well 'on the sea or under the sea or on the land.' If you mount him he will probably take you into the tide, but it is said that, if he does so, his rider is not drowned but becomes able to breathe under the water. I have also heard of these sea-horses coming ashore ridden by beings having the appearance of men, helping with some special work, and afterwards plunging back into the tide again.<sup>11</sup>

Then there are the horses which the fairies ride when hunting. These are very seldom seen, but often heard galloping across the fields on moonlight nights, the sound of their hoofs and their neighing and snorting mingling with the shouts and laughter of their fairy riders. I have often heard of people hearing the 'Fairy Hunt' sweep past them 'like a cloud or a gush of wind' on lonely roads, and an old man in Lonan told me that once, when he was clearing the ditches on a mountain road, he heard a horse snorting and looked up, and 'there on the other side of the hedge was a li'l white horse looking at me, about the size of a middling big foal he would be, and two ears on him as red as fire, an' a li'l man wis a red cap sittin' on his back. An' behoul' ye, while I was lookin' on them they were gone away, an' I navar seen them no more.'<sup>12</sup>

When the fairy hunters happened to be short of a mount they did not scruple to borrow one from the farm stalls, and the poor beast would be found next morning dead tired and bearing the marks of a hard night's work, for they did not spare their steeds. But there are also stories of horses who seem to have a liking for these night rides, and will follow the 'Hunt' of their own accord when left outside for the night; and of yet others who have carried their riders miles across country at a mad gallop in the train of such a 'Hunt,' finally throwing him in some lonely spot and returning home alone, leaving the poor man to shift for himself as best he might.

The only general superstitions about horses known to me are: that it is lucky to see a young foal standing with its tail towards you; that to dream of horses is very lucky; and that the words 'cabbyl' or 'horse' must not be mentioned on board ship for fear of storm.<sup>13</sup>

#### CATTLE

The 'Tarroo-Ushtey,' or 'Water-Bull,' is a mythical animal resembling the 'glashtin' in some respects, but partaking of the nature of cattle instead of that of horses, as his name indicates. He is generally black, though there are accounts which say that he can change his colour so as not to be easily distinguishable in any herd of cattle. He is usually

seen in the morning or evening, and will sometimes entice one or two cows of the herd to follow him into a river. He may occasionally be seen alone, but more often among ordinary cattle, and he does not appear to be regarded as actively unfriendly to human beings or apt to entice them into the water like the 'glashtin.' Nevertheless people seem to be very much afraid of him, and not very long ago I was told, in all seriousness, that a certain mountain croft in Lonan had been empty for many years 'because of the 'tarroo-ushtey' that was in the Laxey river down under. There's a li'l 'struan' ('stream') coming nearly up to the house, and when there was ones living there a long time back the 'tarroo-ushtey' wasn't pleased someway, and he was coming up the 'struan' from the big river every night and roaring outside the house till the dishes was all shakin' on the dresser wis the noise he was makin,' or he would go bangin' on the door wis his horns the way the people was getting no rest. So they left the place, and no person would live there after.'<sup>14</sup> The ordinary bulls of the herd are the only animals who seem to be disturbed by the presence of the 'tarroo-ushtey.' They always indicate his presence by bellowing loudly and getting into a great rage; but the 'tarroo-ushtey' invariably refuses to fight them and walks off unconcernedly into the nearest river.<sup>15</sup>

There is one famous cow, or witch-cow, in Manx folklore—'Berrey Dhone,' who gives the title to one of our most spirited folk-songs, and about whom there are still a number of traditions floating about Cornaa in Maughold, where she lived. In the version of the song printed in Moore's *Manx Ballads and Music*, (which I believe to be two or three songs tangled together), she appears simply as a cow belonging to a witch called 'Margad-y-Stomacher,' but in the oral version of the song and in the fragments of tales about her which I have heard in the district 'Berrey' herself seems to be the witch, a sort of queen of the witches and a person of great power, who often assumed the shape of a small brown cow and had dealings with some supernatural beings who dwelt within or beneath North Barrule. She was connected also with the 'Buggane of Gobny-Skuit.'<sup>16</sup> It is sometimes said that witches have to be able to assume various animal forms before acquiring full powers, and that the cow is the last or highest, but the hare the most common.

Ordinary cows are regarded as being more susceptible to witchcraft than other animals; consequently special care is taken to guard them. Unless salt is placed in the doorway of the cowhouse when a cow is expected to calve, the calf may be 'overlooked' and die in a few weeks. Witches often take the form of a hare, enter the cowhouse in the early morning, and suck one or more of the cows dry of milk. If you find a cow uneasy or ailing, there are

ten chances to one that someone has 'cast an eye on her,' and the remedy is to sweep the road carefully outside your gate and throw the dust over her, saying as you do so, 'Ayns Ennym yn Ayr as yn Vac as yn Spyrryd Noo' ('In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost'). Overlooking by a witch is also believed to be the cause of a cow giving little or poor milk, and of cream refusing to churn properly. On May Eve fairies and witches have special powers, so to protect the cattle on this night green trammon branches and primroses are placed in the cowhouses and a 'kern cross'—a cross shaped from twigs of the mountain ash without the aid of a knife or any steel instrument—over every doorway. On Tynwald Day (July 5th) a large fire was formerly lit on the 'Thalloo Losht' ('Burnt Land') possessed by virtually every farm, and the cattle all driven through the ashes as a protection against witchcraft for the ensuing year. This practice is now virtually extinct, but most farms still have their 'Thalloo Losht,' and the cattle are usually put into this field on Tynwald Day.

#### SHEEP

Sheep seem to be less associated with fairies, witchcraft, etc. than any of the foregoing animals; but the 'Fairy Lamb' is sometimes seen in the flock about the beginning of lambing-time, and is regarded as a sign of great fertility and luck with the sheep for the farmer in whose flock he appears. Unlike the other fairy animals, the 'Lamb' is not white with red ears, but is usually described as having a brilliant scarlet fleece, though I have heard of him as being all white and wearing a scarlet coat or collar or saddle. Red seems to be the invariable sign of a fairy animal; perhaps because a pure red is scarcely ever seen among the colours of ordinary animals.

I have heard it said that it is impossible to count sheep correctly unless the eyes are washed in running water before starting. In several folktales fairies interfere during the counting or gathering of sheep and play some trick on the shepherd which doubles or trebles his work.

#### PIGS

There are a number of 'Fairy Pigs' to be found in parts of the Island by the careful gleaner of folklore, these animals are not nearly so well known as the fairy dogs, horses, bulls, etc. Like the dogs, however, they are of two kinds—good, or lucky, and bad, or unlucky; though in this case both kinds seem to be white in colour. The most remarkable example of the bad kind of fairy pig that I know is the 'Buggane' known as 'Jimmy Squarefoot,' who haunts the Grenaby river and bridge in the form of a large white boar and is greatly feared—not without reason, as he is said to be able to carry mortals off up the river and

through his cave somewhere near Barrule to the dark underworld.<sup>17</sup> There is another 'Pig Buggane' which 'takes' up the old Skyhill road in Lezayre which is also greatly disliked and feared.

In pleasing contrast to these malicious creatures is the 'Ark Sonney,' whose haunt is along a tiny overgrown track crossing the Niarbyl road in Patrick. This is 'a beautiful little shining white pig,' and is sometimes seen, especially by children, running along in the dusk. To see the 'ark sonney' is reckoned very lucky. There is another 'Fairy Pig' in the same district, and this one wears a red hat and appears at a field gateway near Glenfaba.

A curious pig story comes from Lezayre, wherein a large boar is said to have worried the people, long ago, and finally been hunted by all the men of the district. The boar uses magical defenses during the hunt, and finally escapes over a high cliff; and when the man who has pursued him to the cliff-edge looks over he sees first the Pig, unhurt, on a flat rock in the tide, and then—'no Pig at all, but a terrible big fish, as big as a rock nearly, going slithering off into the water.' After this the boar troubled Lezayre no more.<sup>18</sup>

#### GOATS

I think the 'Phynodheree' must come under this heading, though it is rather difficult to know just where to place him. However, as he is a fairy being who is said to have the body of a goat and the head and shoulders of a man, he may perhaps be called a sort of mythical goat. He is friendly to man, but rather malicious if offended; if he is offered clothes in return for the services which he often renders the farmers of his own free will he departs, lamenting loudly, and has no more to do with the person who has offered them. He is extremely strong, and can compass seemingly impossible tasks, such as the removal of great loads of stone from one place to another in a very short time, the reaping and 'stooking' of three fields of corn single-handed in one night, the gathering home of large flocks of sheep from the mountains in half-an-hour when a storm is brewing, etc. He is believed to watch over the crops and herds of farmers in storms and other dangers, and to guard them from the Evil Eye of witches. In fact he seems to be regarded as a being who keeps all the unruly inhabitants of the unseen world in something like order, and holds the human inhabitants of the Island under his protection, although there are not wanting stories of his playing severe practical jokes upon them on occasion, as in the story where he met a blacksmith and asked him to shake hands. Feeling none too sure what the strength of the hand-grip would be, the smith extended to him an iron plough sock he happened to

be holding, whereupon the 'phynodheree' squeezed it as though it had been a piece of clay.<sup>19</sup> The 'phynodheree' comes into a fairy-song which is sometimes sung to children:

'What if the Tarroo-Ushtey, sporting,  
And the Glashtin take thee,  
And the Fenodheree of the Glen, the erratic one,  
Make of thee a bolster against the wall?

'Finn Mac Coole and all his company,  
The Fairy of the Glen and the Buggane—  
If all these would gather together about thy bed,  
Then would they run off with thee  
(tied) in a straw rope.

He also has a charming song all to himself, called 'The Nimble Mower':

'The Fenodheree went to the meadow  
To lift the dew of the grey dawn;  
The maiden-hair and the cattle-herb  
He was stamping under his two feet.

He was reaching out on the floor of the meadow,  
He threw the grass on his left hand.  
He put wonder on us last year,  
But this year he is far better!

He was reaching out on the floor of the meadow,  
Cutting the herbs in flower;  
The bog-bean in the rushy Curragh,  
As he was going it was all shaking.

The iron he had was cutting all,  
Shaving the meadow to the sods,  
And if a wisp were left standing  
He stamped it down with his heel.'

There do not seem to be many superstitions about ordinary goats, except the well known one of keeping a goat running among the herds to avert ill-luck. A good many place-names incorporate the word 'goayr' ('goat'); and it is said that there used to be large numbers of wild goats in the Island, and it was considered very unlucky to molest them. There is also a tradition of an old 'Breast Law' to the effect that 'Any Manxman may kill a Scotchman if he afterwards go to Scotland and bring back two goats.' Whether or no this ever actually was law in Mann I should not like to surmise, but I have heard it as a tradition in several places, all in the north of the Island.

Hares and Rabbits are both closely connected with witches and witchcraft, in fact are often said to be witches under another form. Hares are believed to run sometimes among sheep and lambs and suck the milk from the ewes, thus depriving the lambs of part

of their nourishment. It is only possible to shoot or otherwise hurt a witch-hare with silver or with a 'fairy arrow,' i.e., a flint arrow-head. Rabbits are believed to be used at times by the fairies as messengers etc.

## MISCELLANEOUS

Bats are also thought to be sometimes witches in disguise. To see them flying is a sign of fine weather; for one of them to fall upon a person is an omen of very good luck, and there are a couple of children's rhymes in which they figure.

Bees are said to be the wisest of all insects, and there is, or was, a belief that the human soul can leave the body during life by way of the mouth in the form of a bee, and assumes that form for a short time immediately after death. Bee-keepers should always inform their hives of any special event in the household, such as birth, marriage, death, or a stroke of good or ill luck. In the case of a bee-master dying, the people of the house should put a piece of crepe on each hive, leave it there for a month, and inform the bees as to who is to be their new master.

It is very unlucky to kill the small black beetle called the 'creg.' Besides general ill-luck to the killer, such an act will bring seven days' rain to the district in which it is committed.

Spiders should be treated with respect, and if one of them runs over any article of clothing, the wearer thereof will be sure to have it renewed before long.

Snails assume prophetic powers on Hollantide Eve, and if one is imprisoned on a flat dish during that night, his message regarding the person you are to marry will appear in tracks on the surface of the dish next morning. He must then be transferred on a leaf of 'fairymeat' ('pennywall') to the nearest hedge, and the plate washed in milk and dried out-of-doors. If you meet a snail on the road when going on a journey it is wise to say—'Snail, snail, put out your horn, and give me your good wish this morn.'

Doubtless there are plenty of other insect tales, rhymes, or superstitions still to be unearthed by some industrious gleaner. There are many tales etc. about birds and fish, but the consideration of length has led me to omit them.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Account of this one given by W. Davies, Ballasalla, and others.

<sup>2</sup> A.W. Moore, *Manx Folklore*, 25.

<sup>3</sup> John Corkill, Ballarragh.

<sup>4</sup> M. Quayle, Lezayre.

<sup>5</sup> J. Callow, Lezayre.

<sup>6</sup> J. Kermodé, fisherman, Port Mooar.

<sup>7</sup> M. Quayle, Lezayre

<sup>8</sup> A.W. Moore, *Manx Ballads*, 68.

<sup>9</sup> J. Callow, Lezayre.

<sup>10</sup> C. Cashen, Peel.

<sup>11</sup> R. Kerruish, Maughold.

<sup>12</sup> J. Corkill, Ballarragh.

<sup>13</sup> J. Kermodé, fisherman, Port Mooar.

<sup>14</sup> J. Mylechreest, Clybane.

<sup>15</sup> J. Kinvig, Ballasalla.

<sup>16</sup> Mrs Callow, Cardle.

<sup>17</sup> T. Taggart, Grenaby.

<sup>18</sup> M. Quayle, Lezayre.

<sup>19</sup> J. Callow, Lezayre.

<sup>20</sup> This story has been noted in several parts of the Island, but occasionally Finn Mac Coole is substituted for the 'Phynodheree'



*Manx Folk-Songs* Sets I — III (1928, 1929, & 1957)





## Introduction

(1928)

When the Manx songs were first collected by our pioneer folk-song enthusiasts, to whom all honour and praise are due for their timely and excellent work, the songs of the people were generally regarded as rude and barbaric; of considerable interest to the antiquarian but of little use to the musician. Since then musical opinion has changed, and we have today a large and growing school of British composers who are not afraid to use these songs exactly as they have been sung traditionally for generations by the folk themselves, altering and adapting their technique to fit old modes and unorthodox rhythms.

In this spirit Mr Foster and I have attacked the Manx songs here presented. He has chosen and arranged the airs—most of them from A.W. Moore's *Manx Ballads and Music*, in which connection we are greatly indebted to Mrs G.F. Clucas for her kind permission to make use of any of the songs contained in that volume.

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My own part has been the translation of the Manx folk-words into English. These words have been neglected by previous arrangers of Manx airs, and a strong impression exists that they are of little or no value. I differ from this view. I feel strongly that they are valuable in themselves and fit the airs better than any more sophisticated modern poems could do. It is true that several sets of words are sometimes recorded as having been sung to one air; but in such cases I have tried to choose the best words available. I have also, in some cases, found it desirable to select the best verses from songs which had too many for all to be printed. Most of the words used are taken from Moore's collection, and I have translated them as literally as possible and at the same time tried to keep the rhythm of the original Manx—not always successfully, I fear.

This little volume doubtless has faults, like its predecessors; but it is a sincere attempt to present a few of the Manx songs—words and airs—as they really have been sung traditionally, while giving them an adequate setting for the use of modern singers.



## Introduction

(1929)

Continuing the work begun in our first volume of Manx folk songs, we here present a further twelve arrangements. The reception of the former volume has been sufficiently encouraging to make us feel that this work meets a real need among Manx singers, and opens a fresh field of interest to lovers of folk song in general. We hope to publish a third volume later on.

The arrangement of the present volume has been more difficult than the first, the reason being that more adjustment of the material has been necessary. No actual alteration of traditional words has been attempted beyond a word here and there to help the metre or the sense; but in most cases several variants of the song treated were available, and the version given consists of a careful blend of the best lines and verses from all the variants. In this volume, too, we have drawn upon some of the fine airs in the Clague Collection, most of which were unfortunately recorded without any words, or with only a fragmentary verse. We have combined these airs with suitable words, either from Moore or from later manuscript collections. Wherever possible we have tried to use any recorded verse, or even the title attached to the air, to identify and work in with the full text adopted, and in each case I have indicated such fitting together of separate words and airs in an individual note to each song. We hope that this method makes the position clear without detracting from the interest and intelligibility of the song.

It remains to record our sincere thanks to several kind helpers. First of all we must again mention gratefully Mrs G.F. Clucas of Cronkbourne, to whose generosity we are indebted for most of our words and several airs taken from the late Ven. the Archdeacon of Mann (Revd J. Kewley, M.A.) who holds the copyright of the Clague Collection, for his very kind permission to us to make use of any of those songs, and to Mr P.W. Caine for kindly allowing us to use the version of the 'Ushag Veg Ruy' air recorded by him and printed in the *Folk Song Journal*, No 30.

In the recording of songs from so many different sources and by various people, mistakes and discrepancies were bound to creep in, and so we wish particularly to thank Mr J.J. Kneen, M.A., our chief authority on Manx Gaelic, who has kindly revised the spelling and syntax of the Manx original texts.

Finally, we wish to thank Miss A.I. Caine for her kind help in making our work known amongst the Manx people.



## Introduction

(1957)

This third volume of Manx folk-songs, appearing after a long interval, is a further selection from the wealth of material preserved in the Clague Collection, the *Folk Song Journal*, Moore's *Manx Ballads and Music*, and hitherto unpublished songs of my own collection, some of them noted since the publication of the second volume.

In every case the original Manx Gaelic words are printed besides the English translation, and it is my hope that all of our folk-songs so made available for modern use—a musical heritage of which we can justly be proud—may be restored to their former familiarity among the Manx people of to-day in the Gaelic language which clothes them so much better than any translation I can make. Perhaps that restoration may come through the school children, who are learning to sing more and more songs in Manx Gaelic as more teachers become interested in the old tongue, just as our Manx folk dances were first revived by a school team.

Mr Arnold Foster has had the schools particularly in mind when writing his beautiful and sympathetic arrangements, but he also remembers our soloists and choirs and small orchestras, so many of the songs in this series may also be had in choral arrangements, and parts for a small string orchestra may be hired.

We both hope this this volume, like its predecessors, may be of interest to singers and musicians outside the Island, and that although the Manx contribution to world folk-music is only a very small one, those who study the subject may find it well worth preserving and handing on.



*Manx Folk Dances* Sets I & II (1936 & 1953)





## Introduction (1936)

The dances in this and the succeeding columns have been collected from Manx fishermen and countryfolk over a period of some twenty years. Their recovery has not been an easy task, for in Mann the general use of traditional dances at country festivals and social gatherings has been steadily declining during the last fifty years or more on account of the somewhat Puritanical outlook of the older Manx country people, many of them, even to-day, view any kind of dancing with disfavour. Such of our folk dances as have survived in actual usage are now regarded merely as children's games.

Formerly, however, songs and dances were a vital part of Manx country life. In 1796 Waldron in his 'Description of the People and Customs of the Isle of Mann' mentions the great love of the Manx-folk for music and dancing, and tells how during the Christmas fortnight every parish hired fiddlers at the public expense, and how folk would gather at their playing into the swept and lit barns and there dance and sing the long nights away. Even at the beginning of this century all the great seasonal festivals—New Year, May Day, Midsummer, Harvest, Hollantide, Christmas—were celebrated in song and dance; but by then the actual performance was relegated to children and adolescents, and looked upon by older folk as a kind of jest.

Many of the fishermen however, as distinct from the farming folk, have retained their love for dancing and their skill in performance right down to the present; and it is therefore chiefly from men of this profession, from the actual performances of children, and from the descriptions of old people who remember 'playing' these dance-games in their youth, that my information is derived. The actual steps of the dances I have been taught almost invariably by fishermen. Some notes made nearly a century ago by my great-grandfather, the late Philip Quayle of Glentrammon, have also been of great value.

Although I have been able to recover only a few of the old Manx dances in anything like complete form, I feel that in this small collection enough has been saved to show that we have in the Island a distinct and interesting type of folk dance, well worth preserving and passing on to the rising generation. I hope that the Manx people, and especially the young people and children, will revive the general use of these dances both because they are a valuable part of our national heritage and because they are thoroughly enjoyable to perform and watch. In this matter of revival mention must be made of the excellent pioneer work done by Mr P.L. Stowell and his team of junior dancers at the Ramsey elementary school, who have learnt the dances from my notations and have been showing them for some years past at concerts and festivals all over the Island, thus doing a great deal to make them generally popular once more. The *English Folk Dance and Song Society* has also given me much help and encouragement; by its interest in our dances and their revival, and in this connection I have to thank particularly Mr Douglas Kennedy, the Director of the Society, Miss C. Holbrow, Organiser of the Mersey and Deeside Branch, and Miss Edith Jones, who has put the dances into the more usual phraseology of folk dancing for publication and shown several of them with her Friday Club team at London Festivals.

If I were to name all the Manx friends who have taught me dances or steps or given me descriptions, the list would be as long as this book; but the following have contributed so much material of value that I wish to place my special indebtedness to them on record: Mr & Mrs J. Kermode, Maughold; Mr J. Kelly, Lonan; Mr J. Faragher, Lonan; Captain T. Craine, Douglas; Mr W. Caine, Jurby; Mr J. Mylechreest, Lonan, Mr T. Taggart, Malew; Mr J. Moore, Patrick; Mr W. Quine, Peel; Mrs Shimmin, Patrick; Mrs J. Kelly, Malew; Mrs Moore, Malew; Miss B. Cooil, Arbory; and Miss M. Quayle, Lezayre.

In the course of notation of dances and their accompanying music I have several times taken down airs or variants of airs which had been noted previously by those industrious early collectors of Manx folk-song, the late Dr Clague, A.W. Moore and W.H. Gill. Three of these airs have been printed in piano arrangements by W.H. Gill, in *Manx National Music* (1896), and one of them is a reel-tune well known all over the British Isles—'The Fairy Reel.' I have therefore to acknowledge, with thanks the permission of Miss Gill, daughter of Mr W.H. Gill, and of Messrs Boosey & Co, publishers of *Manx National Music*, to reprint the airs of 'Hunt the Wren,' 'Hyndaa yn Bwoailley' and 'Car ny Ferrishyn.'



## Introduction

(1953)

Seventeen years have passed since the publication of the first volume of *Manx Folk Dances*. During this interval I have managed to piece together a few more of our Folk Dances, by careful combing of all the remaining sources of information. Mr Leighton Stowell and a few other teachers have continued to coach a succession of teams, both children and adults, and Miss C.M. Griffiths, P.T. Organiser for the Education Authority, has greatly encouraged the teaching of Manx Dances in the schools giving them a prominent place in the All-Island folk dance festivals.

Early in the winter of 1951-52 these various activities coalesced in the formation of the *Manx Folk Dance Society*, which is now the recognised body for the propagation of folk dancing in the Island, and it is largely owing to the determination and hard work of this society that it is now possible to issue this second volume. There are a further dozen dances in preparation and it is the aim of the Society to have these published later. Records of Arnold Foster's arrangements of the airs are also contemplated.

I must again sincerely thank all the old friends who have helped me in recording the dances, the teachers and dancers who have built a new Manx dance-tradition on the foundation of an old one recorded only just in time, and to the workers in the *Manx Folk Dance Society* who are stabilising that tradition and will carry it into the future.



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