

“THERE IS DANCES USED ON  
SONDAY AFTERNOONE”



HISTORICAL REFERENCES TO  
MANX FOLK SONG AND DANCE BEFORE 1896



Compiled  
by  
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## INTRODUCTION

This compilation of material gathers together historical references to Manx folk song and dance from 1634 up to the year 1896, which was the year when *Manx Ballads and Music* and *Manx National Songs* both appeared.<sup>1</sup> It builds upon the work of David Speers who first showed that sufficient material existed that deserved to be better known.<sup>2</sup> The extracts compiled here have all been seen and the source verified as regards bibliographical detail.<sup>3</sup> The intention has been to be as inclusive as possible. The material is presented here in date order of publication, modified in those cases where internal reference establishes an earlier date to which the description refers. There is no attempt to provide a commentary to the material gathered here as that would considerably delay the production of this compilation. It is essentially work-in-progress aimed at providing a source book for others working in the same field.

\*

The earliest source dates from 1634, drawn from the answers to the articles of visitation sent round by Bishop Foster that year, where the incumbent at Arbory answered:

To ye viiiith article, viz: whethr: any pastymes bee used to ye hyndrance of Devine srvice; ringing of bells; worshippinge of crosses; & prayinge for ye dead: we answere yt heretofore many have used dancinge on ye Sabath afr: ye services; but have given it ovr nowe. Saveing that some doth pray upon the graves.<sup>4</sup>

From the response that same year at Onchan (this time to Article 29):

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- <sup>1</sup> A.W. Moore, *Manx Ballads and Music* (Douglas: G. & R. Johnson, 1896), W.H. Gill, *Manx National Songs with English Words: Selected from the MS. Collection of the Deemster Gill, Dr. J. Clague, and W.H. Gill, and Arranged by W.H. Gill* (London: Boosey, 1896).
  - <sup>2</sup> David Speers, *Manx Traditional Music and Dance: A Chronology of Source Material*, Manx Research Series Report 1 (Ramsey: Manx Academic Press, 1995). Reproduced, with commentary, as David Speers, "The Historical References to Manx Traditional Music, Song and Dance," *Béaloides* 64–65 (1997 [for 1996–97]).
  - <sup>3</sup> It will be seen then that a comparison with Speers, *Manx Traditional Music and Dance: A Chronology of Source Material*, shows a small number of items missing from this compilation that appear there. These are items drawn from newspapers clippings in scrapbooks in the Manx National Heritage Library that have incomplete bibliographical references. It is hoped that fuller references will be found for them and they will then appear in revised versions of this compilation.
  - <sup>4</sup> "Unpublished Documents in the Manx Museum Library: Document No. 10, 1634, The Visitation of Bishop Foster, Arbory [Arbory]," *Journal of the Manx Museum* ii.29 (1931): 29 col. a.

We have no beare batynge nor battinge heare: but sometymes younge folkes when they meatt at a weddinge, dothe use tow much dancinge.<sup>5</sup>

As ever, traditional culture is something that is seen to be excessive, needing to be contained, if it is not possible to erase it.

Bishop Wilson's charge to the parish churchwardens in 1700 included the following duty:

And whereas it is observ'd that Many Idle persons appoint Meetings on Saturday Night, wch are generally spent in Dancing, even untill after Midnight, whereby they are render'd incapable of performing the Dutys of the following Day. Upon Intimation hereof you are to Enquire who were the Fidders or Musitieners. And for Expedition Sake present ym and as many more of ye Company Come within Your Knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

Presentments to the church courts by the chapter quests of such individuals provide much of the early material presented here. The Bishop's influence was still felt nearly half a century after his death as a diary entry from 1799 shows:

This day [Sunday] is kept strictly here [Douglas] by the Manx people, no musick allowed one of my friends wished to shew his musical abilities, which our Landlay informed him, she would be fined and be brought before the Damester or Majestrite [...]<sup>7</sup>

The anonymous author of this diary, who described himself as "a strange Irishman," sailed for Man from Dublin, 28 November 1799 and then left on 22 December for Liverpool. During this period, besides attempting to join a card game in Douglas, he and his party travelled around at least part of the Island. They were nothing if not hardy given the likely state of the weather. Under the heading "Kirk Arbory," the diarist recorded the following note:

near Port Mary & Port Iron people are very hospitable and fond of Dancing &c, particularly at fairs [...]<sup>8</sup>

Given the period covered by the diary, this must mean that they attended Saint Katherine's fair, held on 6 December, and thereby, presumably, witnessed the

<sup>5</sup> "Unpublished Documents in the Manx Museum Library: Document No. 18, 1634, The Visitation of Bishop Foster, The Parish of KK. Conchane [Conchan, latterly Onchan]," *Journal of the Manx Museum* ii.30 (1932): 42 col. a.

<sup>6</sup> "Unpublished Documents in the Manx Museum Library: Document No. 86, 1700, September 6th, The Church Wardens' Charge, Bishop Wilson's Strict Regulations," *Journal of the Manx Museum* ii.40 (1934): 203 col. b.

<sup>7</sup> *Voyage to, and Tour of Isle of Man for 24 days* (1799), Manx National Heritage Library, ms 32 A. The author (and party) sailed for Man from Dublin, 28 November 1799 and then left on 22 December for Liverpool. The identity of the writer remains unknown but in trying to join a card game in Douglas he refers to himself as "being a Strange Irishman."

<sup>8</sup> Undated entry, *Voyage to, and Tour of Isle of Man for 24 days* (1799), Manx National Heritage Library, ms 32 A.

custom known as "Katherine's Hen is Dead."<sup>9</sup> That we cannot be certain that they did, shows the oblique nature of many of these accounts.

In the case of those dealing with the *Oie'l Voirrey*, they show that traditional culture here was far from static, and underwent change in the period in question.<sup>10</sup> This should not be of surprise given that the period under consideration here is over two hundred and fifty years.

What did not change was the pleasure that individuals took in participating on occasions where song and dance were performed:

The Wardens present the Rev John Gell curate of the parish for intemperance & insobriety frequenting Public Houses oftener than necessary on St Stephens' day and St Johns last at a Public Dance & the two nights in an inn and other times since shewing bad example & leading the youth into other vices.<sup>11</sup>

That was in 1797, and the charge continued:

Robert Kelly the chapter quest saw Mr John Gell at the dance in an unbecoming manner among the Rabble asked why he was there Replied I challenge thee present me & rudely calling "plague on thee."<sup>12</sup>

It is thanks to such individuals that we have such a trace in the records. Likewise, William Fry and John Caine who were presented in 1705 for "y<sup>e</sup> misbehaviour in y<sup>e</sup> Ch: on X<sup>s</sup>tmas day in y<sup>e</sup> morning by Striking others with bushes of holling to y<sup>e</sup> disturbance of y<sup>e</sup> people," thereby giving us the first record of the existence of what appears to be the *Oie'l Voirrey*.<sup>13</sup>

STEPHEN MILLER

VIENNA, 2005

<sup>9</sup> Dr John Clague, *Cooineaghtyn Manninagh / Manx Reminiscences*, ed. Stephen Miller (Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> For the Methodist criticism of the *Oie'l Voirrey*, see Stephen Miller, "The practice was condemned by all present: Methodism and the *Oie'l Voirrey*," *Manx Notes* 24 (2004).

<sup>11</sup> "Lonan Presentments 1797," *Isle of Man Family History Society Journal* xxv (2003).

<sup>12</sup> "Lonan Presentments 1797."

<sup>13</sup> Book of Presentments, Kirk Michael, 1705, General Ms Collection, Manx National Heritage Library. *Hollin* is Manx for holly.

STEPHEN MILLER

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“THERE IS DANCES USED ON SONDAY AFTERNOONE”

HISTORICAL REFERENCES TO  
MANX FOLK SONG AND DANCE BEFORE 1896



1634

FOR YE LAYTIE

9. To ye viiiith article, viz: whethr: any pastymes bee used to ye hyndrance of Devine srvice; ringing of bells; worshipping of crosses; & praying for ye dead: we answere yt heretofore many have used dancinge on ye Sabath afr: ye services; but have given it ovr nowe. Saveing that some doth pray upon the graves. [29a]

\*

PRESENTMTS 1635

Wee also doe present yt there is Dances used on Sunday afternoone. [29b]

**Source:** “Unpublished Documents in the Manx Museum Library: Document No. 10. 1634. The Visitation of Bishop Foster. Arborie [Arbory].” *Journal of the Manx Museum* ii.28 (1931): 28–29.

1634

23. We have no beare batynge nor battinge heare: but sometymes younge folkes when they meatt at a weddinge, dothe use tow much dancinge. [42a]

**Source:** “Unpublished Documents in the Manx Museum Library: Document No. 18. 1634. The Visitation of Bishop Foster. The Parish of KK. Conchane.” *Journal of the Manx Museum* ii.30 (1932): 41–42. [Conchan, latterly Onchan]

1656

[...] they are at this day a very civill People, [...] much addicted to the Musick of the Violyne; so that there is scarce a Family in the Island, but more or lesse can play upon it: but as they are ill Composers, so are they as bad Players; and it is strange they should be singular in affecting this Instrument before others, their Neighbours; the *Northern English*, the *Scots*, the *Highlanders*, and the *Irish*, generally, affecting the Bag-Pipe: [...]

**Source:** James Chaloner. *A Short Treatise of the Island of Man*. London: Printed by John Streater, 1656. 5.

1676

CHRISTENINGS IN ANNO 1676

Reg Mary 'Clarke' daughter to the blinde fidler and Mazon's daughter bapt: Decemb<sup>r</sup> v<sup>th</sup>

Source: *Parish Register* for Kirk Malew, 1676. General Ms Collection, Manx National Heritage Library. See, “Notes from the Registers: The Parish of Malew,” *Manx Note Book* iii.10 (1887): 75.

1693-94

The people are naturally of a jovial, sociable temper, much inclined to music, very loving among themselves, good natured, but choleric, as it is observed of most Islanders. [B3v]

\*

As for their utensils and terms of art, most of them are English with a Manks termination, as *dorus* for *door*; thus they say, *jough a dorus* for drink *at the door*, which is as religiously observed among them at parting, as a stirrup cup with us. [8]

**Source:** William Sacheverell. *An Account of the Isle of Man*. London: Printed for J. Hartley & R. Gibson & Thomas Hodgson, 1702. **Note:** Sacheverell was Governor of the Island between 1693-94.

1700

4. [...] And whereas it is observ'd that Many Idle persons appoint Meetings on Saturday Night, w<sup>ch</sup> are generally spent in Dancing, even untill after Midnight, whereby they are render'd incapable of performing the Dutys of the following Day. Upon Intimation hereof you are to Enquire who were the Fidlers or Musitieners. And for Expedition Sake present y<sup>m</sup> and as many more of y<sup>e</sup> Company Come within Your Knowledge. [203b]

**Source:** “Unpublished Documents in the Manx Museum Library: Document No. 86. 1700, September 6th. The Church Wardens' Charge. Bishop Wilson's Strict Regulations.” *Journal of the Manx Museum* ii.40 (1934): 203-04.

1705

Jan: y<sup>e</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> 1704/5

W<sup>m</sup> Fry and Jo: Caine p<sup>r</sup>esented by Rob<sup>t</sup> Caineon one of y<sup>e</sup> Questmen for y<sup>r</sup> misbehaviour in y<sup>e</sup> Ch: on X<sup>st</sup>mas day in y<sup>e</sup> morning by Striking others with bushes of holling to y<sup>e</sup> disturbance of y<sup>e</sup> people

1 . dies in Ecclâ & acknowledge their (? refform)

**Source:** Book of Presentments, Kirk Michael, 1705. General Ms Collection, Manx National Heritage Library.

1731

[127] Another Instance they gave me to prove the Reality of *Fairies*, was of a Fidler, who, having agreed with a Person, who was a Stranger, for so much Money, to play to some Company he should bring him to, all the twelve days of *Christmas*, and received Earnest for it, saw his new Master vanish into the Earth the Moment he had made the Bargain. Nothing could be more terrified than was the poor Fidler; he found he had entered himself into the Devil's Service, and looked on himself as already damned; but having recourse also to a Clergyman, he received some Hope: he ordered him however, as he had taken Earnest, to go when he should be called; but that whatever Tunes should be called for, to play none but Psalms. On the Day appointed the same Person appeared, with whom he went, tho' with what inward Reluctance 'tis easy to guess; but punctually obeying the Minister's Directions, the Company to whom he play'd were so angry that they all vanished at once, leaving him at the Top of a high Hill, and so bruised and hurt, tho' he was not sensible [128] when, or from what Hand he received the Blows, that he got not home without the utmost Difficulty.

\*

[139] The Natives of this Island tell you also, that before any Person dies, the Procession of the Funeral, is acted by a sort of Beings, which for that End render themselves visible. I know several that have offered to make Oath that as they have been passing the Road, one of these Funerals has come behind them, and even laid the Bier on their Shoulders, as tho' to assist the Bearers. One Person, who assured me he had been served so, told me, that the Flesh of his Shoulder had been very much bruised, and was black for many Weeks after.

There are few or none of them who pretend not to have seen or heard these imaginary Obsequies, (for I must not omit that they sing Psalms in the same Manner as those do who accompany the Corps of a dead Friend) which so little differ from

real ones, that they are not to be known 'till both Coffin and Mourners are seen to vanish at the Church-Doors. These they take to be a sort of friendly Demons, and their Business, they say, is to warn People of what is to befall them: accordingly they give notice of any Stranger's Approach, by the trampling of Horses at the Gate of the House where they are to arrive.

\*

[154] In their Sports they retain something of the *Arcadian* Simplicity. Dancing, if I may call it so, jumping and turning round at least, to the Fiddle and Base-Viol, is their great Diversion. In Summer, they have it in the Fields, and in Winter, in the Barns. The Month of May, is every Year ushered in with a Ceremony which has something in the Design of it pretty enough, and, I believe, will not be tiresome to my Reader in the Account.

In almost all the great Parishes they chuse from among the Daughters of the most wealthy Farmers a young Maid, for the *Queen of May*. She is drest in the gayest and best manner they can, and is attended by about twenty others, who are called Maids of Honour: she has also a young Man, who is her Captain, and has under his Command a good Number of inferior Officers. In Opposition to her, is the *Queen of Winter*, who is a Man drest in Woman's Clothes, with woollen Hoods, Furr Tippetts, and loaded with the warmest and heaviest Habits one upon another: in the same manner are those who represent her Attendants drest, nor is she without a Captain and Troop for her Defence. Both being equipt as proper Emblems of the Beauty of the Spring, and the Deformity of the Winter, they set forth from their respective Quarters; the one preceeded by Violins and Flutes, the other with the rough Musick of the Tongs and the Cleavers. Both Companies march till they meet on a Common, and then their Trains engage in a Mock-Battle. If the *Queen of Winter's* Forces get the better, so far as to take the *Queen of May* Prisoner, she is ransomed for as much as pays the Expences of the Day. After this Ceremony, *Winter* and her Company retire, and divert themselves in a Barn, and the others remain on the [155] Green, where having danced a considerable Time, they conclude the Evening with a Feast: the Queen at one Table with her Maids, the Captain with his Troop at another. There are seldom less than fifty or sixty Persons at each Board, but, as I have said before, not more than three or four knives.

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[155] *CHRISTMAS* is ushered in with a Form much less meaning, and infinitely more fatiguing. On the 24th of *December*, toward Evening, all the Servants in general have a Holiday, they go not to Bed all Night, but ramble about till the Bells ring in all the Churches, which is at twelve-a-clock; Prayers being over, they go to hunt the Wren, and after having found one of these poor Birds, they kill her, and lay her on a Bier with the utmost Solemnity, bringing her to the Parish-Church, and burying her with

a whimsical kind of Solemnity, singing Dirges over her in the *Manks* Language, which they call her Knell; after which *Christmas* begins. There is not a Barn unoccupied the whole twelve Days, every Parish hiring Fiddlers at the publick Charge; and all the Youth, nay, sometimes People well advanced in Years making no scruple to be among these nocturnal Dancers. At this Time there never fails of some Work being made for *Kirk Jarmyns*; so many young Fellows and Girls meeting in these Diversions, Nature too often prompts them to more close Celebrations of the Festival, than those the Barn allows; and many a Hedge has been Witness of Endearments, which Fear of [156] Punishments has afterwards made both forswear at the Holy Altar in *Purgation*. On Twelfth-Day the Fidler lays his Head in some one of the Wenches Laps, and a third Person asks, who such a Maid, or such a Maid shall marry, naming the Girls then present one after another; to which he answers according to his own Whim, or agreeable to the Intimacies he has taken notice of during this Time of Merriment. But whatever he says is as absolutely depended on as an Oracle; and if he happens to couple two People, who have an Aversion to each other, Tears and Vexation succeed the Mirth. This, they call, *Cutting off the Fidler's Head*; for, after this, he is dead for the whole Year.

This Custom still continues in every Parish, and if any young Lad, or Lass, was denied the Privilege of doing whatever came into their Heads, they would look upon themselves as infinitely injured. This Time is indeed their Carnival, and they take, and are allowed more Liberties, than, methinks, is consonant with their Strictness in other Cases.

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[169] They have Bride-Men, and Bride-Maids, who lead the young Couple, as in *England*, only with this difference, that the former have Ozier Wands in their Hands, as an Emblem of Superiority: they are preceeded by Musick, who play all the while before them the Tune, *The Black and the Grey*, and no other is ever used at Weddings. When they arrive at the Church-Yard, they walk three times round the Church, before they enter it. The Ceremony being performed, they return home, and sit down to the Feast; after which they dance in the *Manks* Fashion, and between that and Drinking pass the remainder of the Day.

\*

[170] When a Person dies, several of his Acquaintance come to sit up with him, which they call the *Wake*. The Clerk of the Parish is obliged to sing a Psalm, in which, all the Company join; and after that, they begin some Pastime to divert themselves, having Strong Beer and Tobacco allowed them in great plenty. This is a Custom borrowed from the *Irish*, as are indeed many others, much in fashion with them.

\*

[170] [...] The Procession of carrying the Corps to the Grave is in this manner: When they come within a Quarter of a Mile of the Church, they are met by the Parson, who walks before them singing a Psalm, all the Company joining with him.

**Source:** George Waldron. “A Description of the Isle of Man.” *The Compleat Works, in Verse and Prose, of George Waldron*. Ed. Theodosia Waldron. [London]: Printed for the Widow and Orphans, 1731. 91–191.

1754

To the Revd. Robert Radcliffe, Vicar Gen<sup>tl</sup>.

The Humble Petition of James Sayle of KK. German. Sheweth That Your Pet<sup>r</sup> being presented by the Wardens of KK. Mich<sup>l</sup> for turbulent behaviour in Church there on Christmas day in the Morning—Your Pet<sup>r</sup> having owned this Comp<sup>lt</sup> and professing hearty sorrow for his offences, faithfully promises not to be Guilty of the like Crimes for the future. There fore your Pet<sup>r</sup> Earnestly prays Your Reverence will be pleas’d to Grant him Enlargment Trusting to God never to fall into the Like Sin for the time to Come w<sup>ch</sup> Granted your Pet<sup>r</sup> as Dutifully bound shall Ever Pray, &c.

15th Apl: 1754.—The Petition giving Bonds of £3 ad usum Dni to behave him reverently in the house of God for the future he is to be released. Ro: Radcliffe. 15 Aprile 1754.—The Petitioner is in Custodie. Jn. Murray.

Wee Tho<sup>s</sup> Shimin and John Dawson of Peele Do become Bound in the sum of Three pound Ad Usim Domini That James Sayle the within Petition<sup>r</sup> shall behave himself Reverently in the house of God for the Future As Witness our hands at Peele this 15th Aprile 1754.

John Dawson. | Thos: Shimin his x mark.

Taken per Jn<sup>o</sup> Murray, D. Constable.

**Source:** “Unpublished Documents in the Manx Museum Library: Document No. 177. 1754. Turbulent Behaviour in Church on Christmas Day in the Morning.” *Journal of the Manx Museum* iii.50 (1937): 182a

1757

To the Revd. Mr. Robert Radcliffe Vicar Gen<sup>tl</sup>.  
The humble petition of John Cowle of Douglass.

[245a] Sheweth that your pet<sup>nr</sup> was sent for to Mrs. John Vinche’s Barn on the fast Day about nine o’clock at night and that M<sup>r</sup> Vinch wanted to spake to your pet<sup>nr</sup> and when there found Rob<sup>t</sup> Radcliffe playing on the fiddle, and M<sup>r</sup> Vinch [245b] your pet<sup>nr</sup> was prevailed upon to play for his, and Robert Quilling’s Children which was by great perswasion, and played about half a Tunes for which fault your pet<sup>nr</sup> was presented at the Last Circuit Court at Douglas and Ordered to St. German’s to give bonds to perform penance in Douglass Chappell & KK. Braddan Church & is now under Confindment.

Therefore your pet<sup>nr</sup> humbly implore your Reverences Tender Clemency, & grant your pet<sup>nr</sup> his Enlargement hoping not to offend in any such Irregularity for the future which granted your pet<sup>nr</sup> & his numerous small familly as in Duty bound shall pray &c.

The Pet<sup>r</sup> is in custody.—Jn<sup>o</sup> Murray.

April 5th, 1757. Upon the petition<sup>r</sup> giving Bonds of £3 ad Usum Dni submissively to perform his Censure and upon no other term he is to be released.  
Ro. Radcliffe.

We Robert Caine & Patrick Coole both of Douglass do become bound in the sum of £3 ad Usum Dni that John Cowle above mentioned will submissively perform his Censure in Wittness whereof we have put our names to our this 5th April, 1757.  
Robert Caine his x | Patrick Coole my x

NOTE

It was the custom at the above date to observe Saturday night as a part of Sunday. It was called Oie Ghoonnee, the “Eve of Sunday.” “John Vinche’s Barn” was probably on the site of the present St. Mary’s Schools, behind Government Office, on the upper side of Finch Road, Douglas.

**Source:** “Unpublished Documents in the Manx Museum Library: Document No. 190. 1757. St. German’s Prison for playing the Fiddle on Saturday Night.” *Journal of the Manx Museum* iii.53 (1937): 245.



1762

To the Reverend Robt. Radcliff Vicar-General, The Humble Petition of John Cannell of Douglas sheweth:

That your Petitioner was Presented by the Wardens for Playing on the fiddle Late on Saturday Night for which he is very sorry and as he did not Apprehend it was so Late and he now Stands Confined in Kr Germans for the Same he hopes your Reverence wil of your Wonted Goodness grant his Releasement and he as in duty bound wil for ever pray, &c.

Peel Jan. ye 21 1762. The Petitioner is in Custody. Wm. Lidderdale, Deputy Constable.

Jan. 21 1762. Upon the petitionrs giving Bonds of £3 ad Usum Dni to perform his Censure his Enlargemt is granted.

Peel Janr ye 21 1762. We John Keig and Wm. Kelly both of Kk Braddan doe become bound in the Sum of £3 ad Usum Domini that John Cannel performs his Censure witness our Subscriptions.

John Keig's Mark x | Wm. Kelly's Mark x

Taken by Wm. Lidderdale, Deputy Constable.

[John Keig, in whose house Cannell was playing, was also sent to St German's Ecclesiastical Prison (though he pleaded ignorance of the offence being committed) and was released on the same terms as John Cannell.]

Source: “Unpublished Documents in the Manx Museum Library. Document No. 16. 1762. Sabbath Breaking.” *Journal of the Manx Museum* ii.29 (1932): 37b.

1762

To the Revd. Mr Radcliffe Vicr Genll. The humble petition of John Keig of the town of Douglas humbly sheweth:

That yr petr stands confin'd in St. German's prison, by a censure Issued out against him for having a *fiddler* musick in his house on an unlawfull hour of the Sabbath night. yr petr begs leave to assure yr Reverence that it there was any such thing as a *fiddler* musick in his house that night which was alledg'd to have him in, it was Quite contrary to his knowledge, by his not being at home. yet notwithstanding yr petrnr has thought it most adviseable to comply to yr order altho the alegation was never

prov'd against yr petr perswadeing himself that the Courts censure was grounded on a good design in order to stop breaches of that kind.

Yr petr therefore humbly beg that yr Reverence [...] be pleased to grant his releasement upon giving Bonds that he will perform what ever censure the revd Court has been pleased to inflict upon *yor petr* him, also promising faithfully that there shall be no such disorder in his house if any such was, for the future. This granted, will engage yr petr to pray for yr Reverences health and happyness, etc.

[The words in italics are crossed out in the Ms.]

Peel Jan. ye 21 1762. The Petitioner is in Custody. Wm. LIDDERDALE, Deputy Constable.

Jan. 21 1762. Upon the petitionrs giving Bonds of £3 ad Us[um] Dni to perform his Censure his Enlargemt is granted:

Ro : RADCLIFFE.

Peel Janr 21 1762. We John Cannell and [W]m Kelly both of Kk Braddan [have] become bound in the Sum of £3 ad usum d[om]ini that John Keig of sd Parish performs his Censure as witness our Subscription.

John Cannel's Mark x

Wm. Kelly's Mark x

Taken by Wm. Lidderdale, Deputy Constable.

Source: “Unpublished Documents in the Manx Museum Library. Document No. 17. 1762. Sabbath Breaking.” *Journal of the Manx Museum* ii.29 (1932): 38.

1779

Unerigg | August 20th 1779

Dear Sir

I am happy, in the H<sup>nor</sup> of presenting to you, a Manks Fragment and shall be much flatter'd if it be found worth your attention. The Translation is made as literal as possible—Should anything further of this kind be discover'd will presume upon your goodness & take the liberty of troubling you with it. I beg leave to offer compliments to Mrs Percy. And have the Honor to be with the greatest Respect

D<sup>r</sup> Sir | Your Ob<sup>dnt</sup> Servant | John Christian

[The “Manks Fragment” is “Fin as Ossian”]

**Source:** Letter from John Christian to Bishop Percy, 20 August 1779. Bodleian Library, Ms Percy C.1, f.87.

1781

A | [4 lines separated by ornament (“Three Legs of Man”)] MANKS [ornament] ELEGY, | ON [ornament] THE | MUCH [ornament] LAMENTED | DEATH [ornament] OF | RECEIVER-GENERAL CHRISTIAN, | OF RANALDSWAY, | Who (for giving up the *ISLE* to the Usurper CROMWELL, then Master of the *Three King-ldoms*, and irresistable) was cruelly and unjustly put to Death, (*January*, 1662) by a Tyrannical and wicked Faction in the ISLE;—Some of whose Descendants, are at this Time, | endeavouring to destroy the Constitution of the Country, and introduce *Vassalage* and *Slavery*. | —It is therefore thought expedient to republish this ingenious Performance—to open the | Eyes of a *deluded People*.

1781

[within black border] A | MANKS ELEGY, | ON THE MUCH LAMENTED | DEATH | OF | Receiver-General Chritian, | OF RANALDSWAY, | Who (for giving up the *ISLE* to the Usurper CROMWELL, then Master of the *Three Kingdoms*, and | irresistable) was cruelly and unjustly put to Death, (*January*, 1662) by a Tyrannical and wicked | Faction in the *ISLE*;—Some of whose Descendants, are at this Time, endeavouring to destroy the | Constitution of the Country, and introduce *Vassalage* and *Slavery*.—It is therefore thought expedient to | republish this ingenious Performance—to open the Eyes of a *deluded People*.

1781

Peel, 13 October 1781

Q. 26. What shall we do for Festival Hymns in Manx?

A. 26. Let care be taken to translate some from y<sup>e</sup> English Festival Hymn Book, that they may always be ready ‘for use’ on all proper occasions; & lay aside as soon as possible all Carrols on Christmas days, because most of them are really unfit to sing in a Religious Assembly. But let y<sup>e</sup> Translators always bring their translations to y<sup>e</sup> Conference next ensuring, that they may pass thro’ an examination there, before they are committed to public use: You see little dependance can be given to y<sup>e</sup> people’s bare promises, so as to print any more; but by this method y<sup>e</sup> public wants may in some degree be supplied by Manuscript Copies.

**Source:** *The Manx Conference Book of Minutes Commencing March 25<sup>th</sup> 1780* (1780–1838), entry for 13 October 1781, Manx National Heritage Library, MD 10097.

1788

Ballaugh, 30 June 1788

Q. 38. How are we to act, with respect to the introduction of New Manx Hymns amongst us for the future?

A. 38. Let any (or every) Manx Preacher, who proposes to introduce any new translated Hymn or Hymns, to this Conference, observe, that they shou’d be generally such as are taken from the Hymn-Books already in use among us, as being best calculated for common use, & most agreeable to the Standard Minutes: And let every such Hymn or Hymns so introduced, have y<sup>e</sup> Book (out of which it is taken) Edition & Page annexed to the bottom of every Hymn, that y<sup>e</sup> Committee may always consult the Originals, read & compare ‘it or’ them together, & that ‘it or’ they may also be re-examined by a full Conference e’re the Hymn or Hymns are or shall be admitted to public use.

**Source:** *The Manx Conference Book of Minutes Commencing March 25<sup>th</sup> 1780* (1780–1838), entry for 30 June 1788, Manx National Heritage Library, MD 10097.

1788

Castletown, 17 October 1788

Q. 39. Have we been diligent in Learning our People to sing English Hymns?

A 39 No, it hath been disregarded. How shall we proceed to amend this? Let an English Hymn, or part of one, be sung in every Manx Class

**Source:** *The Manx Conference Book of Minutes Commencing March 25<sup>th</sup> 1780* (1780–1838), entry for 17 October 1788, Manx National Heritage Library, MD 10097.

1789

Several years ago, when the first Edition of the Poem of Fingal and Ossian by Mr. McPherson appeared, a Revd. Clergyman of my acquaintance, (since deceased) was then at the Bishop’s country Seat in this Isle, engaged with one of the Vicar’s Genl in revising and correcting a translation of the Scriptures into the Manx Language, and telling the Vicar Genl. of that new production—of which he read him some Episodes in the hearing of the Bishop’s Gardiner, an old Man, who was at work near the Door of their Laboratory and listening. He stept in on hearing frequent mention of Fingal and Oshian & Cuchullin &c and told him he knew who could sing a good song

about these men & Cchullin, and that was his Brother’s Wife, a very antient Woman.—on which they sent for the old Dame, who very readily sung them eight or ten verses which my friend immediately took down in writing, and the next day on recollection she brot them the rest, and of which he obliged me with a copy. My friend asked her, wher she learned this song, and she said from her Mother & Grandmother & many more—that they used to sing them at their work and wheels.

**Source:** Letter from Heywood to Thorkelin, 25 October 1789. British Library, Add. Ms 11215.

1789

To George Holder | Near London, November 29, 1789.

Dear George,

You did well to remember the case of Dewsbury House and to send what you could to Mr Mather. I exceedingly disapprove of your publishing anything in the Manx language. On the contrary, we should do everything in our power to abolish it from the earth, and persuade every member of our Society to learn and talk English. This would be much hindered by providing them with hymns in their own language. Therefore gently and quietly let that proposal drop. I hope you and your fellow labourers are of one heart. Peace be with your spirits!

I am, dear George, | Your affectionate friend and brother.

**Source:** John Telford, ed. *The Letters of Rev. John Wesley*. Vol. viii. London: Epworth Press, 1931. 189.

1794

[33] The Manks are solicitous to pay every veneration due to deceased friends. When an inhabitant dies, he is attended to the church-yard by a great concourse of friends and neighbours. Before the corpse a funeral hymn is sung, which closes on leaving the [34] town;\* but is resumed on approaching the place of burial. The corpse is then interred, according to the rites of the church of England: the solemnity of which, at Kirk-Braddan, is considerably heightened by the quiet and gloom of the surrounding scenery.

\* The Manks church-yards are generally in some romantic spot, retired from the towns and villages.

**Source:** David Robertson. *A Tour through the Isle of Man*. London: Printed for the Author by E. Hodson, 1794.

1794

Douglas, October 1794

Q 40 As our printed Manks Hymn Book is grown old among our People; what shall we do in this case to revive their minds?

A 40 It is agreed that a Manks Hymn Book shall be Printed; if there should be any gain it shall go to the use of this Circuit. If any loss the Circuit shall make it up.

**Source:** *The Manx Conference-Book of Minutes Commencing March 25<sup>th</sup> 1780*. (1780–1838), entry for October 1794, Manx National Heritage Library, MD 10097.

**Note:** “2. *Aght Ghiare dy beet gys tushtey jeh’n Chredjue Chreestree; Ny as toiggal jeh catechism ny Killagh kiarit son ymmyd sleih aegey ellan vannin*. 24mo. 1778. This publication may be very proper for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge to adopt in their next distribution; as it is a short summary of the Christian religion, or an explanation of the Church Catechism; and was translated into Manks by Daniel Cowley, of Kirk Michael, who was educated by Bishop Hildesley, and by him apprenticed to a printer. He published also Mr Wesley’s Hymns in Manks, for the use of the Methodists in the Island.” John Feltham, *A Tour through the Island of Man, in 1797 and 1798* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1798). 70.

1794

Now, to shew you how difficult it is to trace the origin of our airs, I have heard it repeatedly asserted that this [“The Banks o’ Doon”] was an Irish air; nay I met with an Irish gentleman who affirmed he had heard it in Ireland among the old women; while, on the other hand, a Lady of fashion, no less than a Countess, informed me, that the first person who introduced the air into the country was a Baronet’s Lady of her acquaintance, who took down the notes from an itinerant Piper in the Isle of Man.—How difficult then to ascertain the truth respecting our Poesy & Music! [274]

**Source:** Letter from Robert Burns to George Thomson, November 1794. J. De Lancey Ferguson ed. *The Letters of Robert Burns*. Vol. 11 (1790–96). Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1931. 274.

1795

A | COLLECTION | OF | HYMNS, | *Translated into Manks from the late Reverend | Mr. Wesley’s Books*; | And approved of by a Committee chosen at | a Conference held between the | *ENGLISH and MANKS PREACHERS*. | [rule] | *Rejoice unto him with trembling*. | Psalm 2. 11: | [rule] | Douglas, Isle of Mann; | PRINTED BY CHRISTOPHER BRISCOE. | MDCCXCV.

**Note:** “The Hymns which follow are taken from D. Cowley’s Book” [114]. These consist of 39 hymns, being numbers 108–46.

1797

On the information of Mr Quark and others besides our own knowledge.

The Wardens present the Rev John Gell curate of the parish for intemperance & insobriety frequenting Public Houses oftener than necessary on St Stephens’ day and St Johns last at a Public Dance & the two nights in an inn and other times since shewing bad example & leading the youth into other vices. And for lying [?] to ourselves about the Poor Money which he took and made use of and could not get it from him to divide.

And upon this Report and Information Recd by Thos Hogg & Thos Quine & [?] Quark they present the Rev John Gell for being so drunk lately coming on the road from Douglas that he could not walk and were obliged to help him home. And by others Reports at times since in the like condition & Robt Kelly one of the chapter quest to that purpose.

Wardens

Wm Cowin my mark  
John Killey  
Henry Skillicorn  
Thos Quayle my mark  
March 8th 1797

Robert Kelly the chapter quest saw Mr John Gell at the dance in an unbecoming manner among the Rabble asked why he was there Replied I challenge thee present me & rudely calling “plague on thee.”

Robt Kelly my mk +

**Source:** “Lonan Presentments 1797.” *Isle of Man Family History Society Journal* xxv.3 (2003): 90.

1798

[136] From political ballads we may catch the sentiments that prevail. Sitting around the blazing hearth one evening with a number of Manksmen, and rocking the cradle of an infant beside me, the toast and song went round, in one of which I recollect the following lines, alluding to the transfer of the island:

For the babes unborn will rue the day,  
That the Isle of Man was sold away;  
For there’s ne’er an old wife that loves a dram,  
But what will lament for the Isle of Man!

[137] When what they here denominate the *trade*, that is, smuggling, was carried on, the access to ardent spirits was so easy, that drunkenness was a common vice, and the morals of the lower orders were in a most depraved state.

**Source:** John Feltham. *A Tour through the Island of Man, in 1797 and 1798*. Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1798.

1799

[within ornamented border] LIOAR | DY | HYMNYN, | AS | ARRANEYN SPYRRYDOIL, | *Chyndait gys Gailck, veih Lioaryn* | WESLEY as WATTS, &c. | *Gymsaghey as coyrlaghey yn derrey yeh yn | jeh elley ayns psalmyn, as arraneyn-|moyllee as spyrrydoil, goaill arrane | lesh grayse ayns nyn greeaghyn gys y Chiarn*. | Col. 3. 16. | [ornamented rule] | DOOLISH, | PRENTIT LIORISH T. WHITTAM. | [ornamented rule] | 1799.

1799

1 December 1799

This day [Sunday] is kept strictly here [Douglas] by the Manx people, no musick allowed one of my friends wished to shew his musical abilities, which our Landla<sup>y</sup> informed him, she would be fined and be brought before the Damester or Majestrite [...]

\*

Kirk Arbory

near Port Mary & Port Iron people are very hospitable and fond of Dancing &c, particularly at fairs [...]

**Source:** Anon. *Voyage to, and Tour of Isle of Man for 24 days* (1799). Manx National Heritage Library, MS 32 A. **Note:** The author (and party) sailed for Man from Dublin, 28 November 1799 and then left on 22 December for Liverpool.

1802

[731a] It is extraordinary, that in so small a place a distinct tongue should still be preserved. The Manks language is in some respect similar to the Erse. Almost every Manksman can speak English; their accent is very like that of Ireland, and they may easily mistaken for Hibernians by those who have not attended closely to the niceties of pronunciation.

Little Manks music is to be met with. There are a few original airs, which have much of the wildness of the Irish. To these are sometimes sung ballads in the Manks language. The following is a literal translation of the first stanza of one of them: probably the complaint of some philosophical, though love-stricken fisherman, who has not caught more herrings than what are sufficient for a bachelor!—

Oh! we must postpone it  
 Until the time come;  
 For if it be our fate to be each other's,  
 We cannot be disappointed:  
 We shall entertain esteem for each other,  
 If we can never be married,  
 You will still be in my mind,  
 And I shall often be speaking of you.

**Source:** Anon. [initialled “W” so W.H. Watts?]. “A Sketch of the State of Manners, and of the Present Condition of the Isle of Man, in a Letter from an Artist who lately passed a Few Months there.” Part 2. *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* [?] December (1802): 729–733 col. a.

1811

The ceremony of a funeral is similar to that practised in the north of England. The bellman goes about the streets inviting all persons to attend. The solitary bell at the top of the church is rather rung than tolled. A little way from the church-yard, the attendants of the corpse, with their hats off, commence a psalm which they terminate when met by the clergyman at the gateway. The coffins of the poor people are made of stained deal, and mourners are not clad in mourning. [88]

\*

The day which I spent on this retired but hospitable island [the Calf of Man], was the harvest-home, the *meller* of the Manks, a time of jubilee. The labourers had plenty of ale, and the master dealt out his excellent rum with a cautious, not sparing hand. Though of ten or twelve people all were merry, none was absolutely intoxicated. A dance in the barn concluded the festivity of the day: and Mr Gourlay conducted me to the opposite shore in his own boat. [146]

**Source:** George Woods. *An Account of the Past and Present State of the Isle of Man*. London & Edinburgh: Printed for Robert Baldwin & William Blackwood, 1811.

1812

[124] The Manks peasantry being much attached to dancing, it is a constant practice on the evening of the day on which the last corn is cut, for the farmer to call in a fiddler or two. Laborers, young and old, then assemble; and often the family and friends of the farmer himself join in the merry dance. The reason of fixing the period of this festivity, which is called the *mellow*, not at harvest-home, [125] but on the day when the last corn is cut, is probably because the females' share of the labour then ceases, and they disperse. During the dance, a diminutive sheaf, formed of the last cut corn, bound with ribbands, which had been borne in procession from the field by the queen of the mellow, passes from hand to hand among the young woman, and in dancing is waved above the head. English country-dances are still unknown to them. Jigs and reels, in which four or five couples join, take their place, the fiddler changing his tune, and often playing one of the few national lively airs, preserved from early times, resembling strongly in character the Irish.

**Source:** Thomas Quayle. *General View of the Agriculture of the Isle of Man*. London: W. Bulmer, 1812. 124–25

1817

Peel, 1 January 1817

The principal conversation which took place at this Meeting (after the Ordinary Business of the Day) was on the impropriety of the Local Preacher encouraging and holding (what they term) Ill-Veries. The practice was condemned by all present, But I fear some of them will not give it up.

**Source:** *The Manx Conference Book of Minutes Commencing March 25<sup>th</sup> 1780* (1780–1838), entry for 1 January 1817, Manx National Heritage Library, MD 10097.

1817

Ballakaneen, 13 October 1817

Secondly. Another long conversation took place respecting the evils of holding Ill-Veries, And they were again condemned by all present except two or three who pleaded for them. They were condemned, first as being contrary to our Lord’s words, G John chap. 4th and verse 24th where it is declared that “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in Truth But in these Meetings an Individual will start up and sing a Corral twenty or thirty verses long, some of it sense, and some of it Nonsense, and one after another continuing this practice for several hours, and ~~that~~ the worst of Characters for Miles round the places where they are held.

Secondly. They were condemned on the ground of the disorderly work which is carried on at them.

**Source:** *The Manx Conference Book of Minutes Commencing March 25<sup>th</sup> 1780* (1780–1838), entry for 13 October 1817, Manx National Heritage Library, MD 10097.

1819

☞ We received the much esteemed favour of our Correspondent AMICISSIMUS, and although we do cordially coincide with him in his view of the subject, so far as it respects the abuse of an ancient practice, we must deny ourselves the pleasure of inserting the letter. We regret with him the abuse of a custom which originated, doubtless, from a laudable design of promoting Christian piety, and a meritorious desire of keeping alive a grateful remembrance of the blessing conferred on mankind, in the advent of our blessed Lord and Saviour. Yet must we be allowed to differ with our worthy Correspondent, as to the opinion, that the custom ought at once to be abolished. Many Christians of the primitive school are yet among us, who feel real satisfaction, and are impressed with sentiments of real piety, on the annual recurrence of the solemn festival of the Feaile ’Veary. And, for the partial irreverence exhibited in the conduct of a few idle sots, to rob their sober old fashioned bretheren, those honest rustic souls, of their wanted satisfaction—which, to say the least of it, must be an honest one—would not be to deal fairly with our country friends, who esteem the Christmas solemnities and festivities as the most pleasing varieties of their rural enjoyment in the otherwise dark and dreary season of the year. [...]

**Source:** “[Oie’l Voirrey].” *Manks Advertiser* 30 December 1819: [2] col. d.

1820

MR. BARROW respectfully informs the Ladies and Gentlemen of the Isle of Man, that the *Mona Melodies* are now published and ready for delivery, at his House, 2, Cambrian Place, and at Mr. Jefferson’s, Duke Street.

Price to Subscribers, 7s.—Non Subscribers 8s.—To be paid for on delivery.  
*Douglas, July 18, 1820.*

**Source:** “Mona Melodies.” Advert. *The Manks Advertiser* 20 July 1820: [3] col. c. Repeated until 7 September 1820.

1820

The | MONA MELODIES, | A Collection of | Ancient & Original Airs, of the Isle of Man. | ARRANGED FOR THE VOICE, | with a Piano Forte, accompaniment, by | AN AMATEUR. | *The Words by M. J. Barrow,* | Dedicated by Permission To Her Royal Highness | THE DUCHESS OF KENT. | [short bevelled rule] *Price 8/- | London, Published at Mitchell’s Musical Library & Instrument Warehouses. | 159, New Bond St. (opposite Clifford St.) & 13, Southampton Row, Rufsell Square.*

**Source:** John Barrow. *The Mona Melodies*. London: Mitchell’s Musical Library & Instrument Warehouses, 1820.

**Note:** *Mona Melodies* exists in two issues distinguished by differing titlepages, one bearing a dedication by Mrs C. St. George, which is the rarer, and the other having no personal dedication. This one survives in a greater number of extant copies and is described here first. The setting of the titlepage, besides the dedication, also varies between the two editions. Only four copies are known to date of which just two are in a complete state.

(1) Manx National Heritage Library, ms 192/1 c, copy from A.W. Moore’s personal library, complete; (2) Glasgow University Library, Special Collections, Euing Collection, Cb6–d.10, complete; (3) British Library, H.1250.(59.), pp. 3–4 & 19–20 missing; (4) Manx National Heritage Library, G.W. Wood Collection, J48/2xf (DUP), pp. 5–18 missing.

1820

THE MONA MELODIES, | A Collection of | ANCIENT & ORIGINAL AIRS | of the Isle of Man. | ARRANGED FOR THE VOICE, | with a Piano forte,

accompaniment, | BY AN AMATEUR, | The Words by M<sup>r</sup> J. B. | Dedicated by Permission, To Her Royal Highness | THE DUCHESS OF KENT, | By Her Royal Highness's Grateful | and Devoted Humble Servant. | C. S<sup>r</sup> GEORGE. | [short bevelled rule] Price 8/- | London, Published at Mitchell's Musical Library & Instrument Warehouses. | 159, New Bond St. (opposite Clifford St.) & 13, Southampton Row, Rufsell Square.

**Source:** John Barrow. *The Mona Melodies*. London: Mitchell's Musical Library & Instrument Warehouses, 1820. **Note:** Only one copy known: (1) Manx National Heritage Library, G.W. Wood Collection, J48/2x, complete.

1820

ADVERTISEMENT

In offering to the Public, a Selection of Original Manks airs, newly arranged, with appropriate Symphonies and Accompaniments, it appears necessary that the Authors should premise a few observations, explanatory of the motives of their undertaking, and of the difficulties attending its execution. They are well aware of the unfavorable circumstances, under which a production appears, that is modelled upon the Lyrical effusions of a Bard, whose genius has conferred immortality upon the once forgotten melodies of his native country. But, however hazardous the adventure they have embarked in, they beg to plead in their defence, firstly;—the Illustrious and Noble Patronage which has been so liberally extended to them;—particularly by Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent, to whom they have the honor of dedicating the result of their labors;—and secondly, —a multitude of precedents. Not to mention India and Hindostan,\* even Ireland, Scotland and Wales have successively charmed the Public by the pathos and simplicity of their National Airs, and it is at least but fair, that the harp of MONA should be heard at the same tribunal. It has lain indeed, long neglected among the wild recesses of her mountains; and, if we may believe the romantic traditions of her peasantry, none but “Fairy” hands have woke the music of its strings: it has vibrated only among her rocky solitudes! It is hoped therefore, that an attempt to rescue from oblivion, and to introduce to public acquaintance, these Ancient Melodies, may meet with pardon on the score of its design, and with some encouragement on account of its novelty. With respect to the difficulties which the Authors have had to encounter in preparing these Airs for Publication, they have certainly been many, and after all, will form perhaps, their best claim upon general indulgence. It has been observed, that the Manks Dialect can scarcely be considered a written language; the observation is still more applicable to the Insular Music. written [sic] notes are a species of fetters, with which so wild and unpolished a Muse appears to have been altogether unacquainted. It has been matter of considerable labor therefore, and discrimination, to transcribe, in the first place these oral

Melodies, (if we may be allowed the term;) and afterwards to harmonize them. The authors were greatly assisted in their researches, the fruits of which are respectfully submitted to the Public, by one or two Gentleman of the Island; whose active zeal, as amateurs, furnished them with the Airs of some these Melodies; and who are requested to accept the Authors thanks for their valuable services. In conclusion, it is perhaps unnecessary to add, that the words, adapted to the original airs, are entirely new; as the subjects of the Manks Ballads were not esteemed to be of sufficient general interest to warrant thier translation.

The Authors are at a loss how to return their adequate acknowledgements to their numerous Illustrious, Noble and Distinguished Subscribers, but they are entirely sensible of the unmerited support which they have thus received from all their patrons and friends and beg leave most gratefully to express their thanks.

London 30<sup>th</sup> May 1820.

\* See the “Hebrew” and the “Indian” Melodies.

**Source:** J[ohn] Barrow. *The Mona Melodies*. London: Mitchell's Musical Library & Instrument Warehouses, n.d. [1820]. 2.

1827

[...] In this festive time of Christmas much feasting amongst farmers, takes place [sic] all over the country, particularly at the North, where the rites of hospitality continue to be performed with hearty good will. There is one custom, however, which we deplore, and that is the keeping up of the ancient Feilvary, or Christmas eve in the country Churches. Crowds flock to witness the usual decoration of evergreens with which our places of worship are hung, to see the lights, and to hear the carols which untutored peasants sing. The vigil is in itself [bea]utiful for its solemnities—were it not that the inconsiderate and the untaught convert the occasion into untimely merriment and profane regards. It is difficult to stem the torrent of ignorant licentiousness which reigns in the mind of the unlettered clown, who too often converts the solemnities which ought to remind him of great objects and excite his ardent hopes to a happy futurity, into objects of a more earthy and sensual nature. We understand that from the increasing irreverence and abuse of the ordinance on the last Christmas-eve, owing, doubtless, to an increase of immoral sentiment among the people, several of the Clergy have determined to discontinue these nocturnal festivities.

**Source:** “[Oie’l Voirrey].” *Manks Advertiser* 27 December 1827: [3] col. c.

1827-38

At Christmas Eve, called “Eel Varrey,” the church presented an extraordinary appearance. Crowds came with candles stuck in hollow turnips and holly boughs which they held before them. They sung carols of their own composition and kept watch until midnight.

**Source:** A.G. Bradley. *Our Centenarian Grandfather*. London: John Bale, Sons, & Danielsson, n.d. [1922]. 199. [Parish in question is Andreas]

1830

Feillvary.—The anniversary of Christmas Eve has been always esteemed a treat by our old countrymen, and much pleasure it gives them to be allowed to sing their carols. Many of these primitive Manks compositions have been written by our Clergy, and contain summary representations of our Saviour’s history—his birth, life, sufferings, and death. The Christmas carol boasts a very ancient date, and the custom of attending the parish church on St Mary’s night, as it is called, has been usual in this Island time out of mind. This ceremony is, however, sometimes dreadfully abused—so much so that it has been advisable to put an end to it altogether. An instance of this abuse occurred in a certain church as the west side of the Island last Friday evening. After several carols has been sung—a *stripling*, said to be all the way from London, and employed as a handicraft in the neighbourhood, accompanied by a set of mob, got seated on the gallery, and very gravely rose and sang out of a profane song book some theatrical ditty. The effect was almost instantaneous on the auditory, and approved at once the right feeling of the congregation. They all, as if with one consent, rose and left the church to himself and his dissolute companions. It is to be feared so horrid a blasphemy will sooner or later be visited on the young man’s head.—the occurrence took place after the Minister had left the church, otherwise it would most probably have been prevented in the attempt. It is said that a prosecution will speedily be issued against the rash youth who so unadvisedly exposed himself.

**Source:** “Feillvary.” *Manks Advertiser* 28 December 1830: [3] col. c.

1830

LIOAR | DY | HYMNYN | ARRANEYN SPYRRYDOIL, | *CHYNDAIT GYS GAILCK*, | VEIH LIOARYN | WESLEY as WATTS, &c. | SON YMMYD CREESTEENYN. | Gynsaghey as coyrlaghey yn derrey yeh yn jeh elley | ayns PSALMYN, as ARRANEYN-MOYLLEE as SPYRRYDOIL, | goaill arrane lesh grayse ayns nyn

greeaghyn gys y | Chiarn.—COL. III. 16. | DOOLISH: | PRINTIT LIORISH J. QUIGGIN. | 1830

1832

During the whole year there was but one evening service. It was on the evening of Christmas Day, and it bore the name of *Ill-vary*; I do not know how to spell the word; it is Manx, and I believe has reference to the Virgin Mary. The service concluded with one or two Christmas carols, sung by some rustics who had got them up for the occasion. What those in Manx were I cannot tell; but I remember one in English in which the singers spoke of Mary in such horrible fashion that my father could bear it no longer; he stood up in the reading-desk, angrily rebuked them for their abominable indecency, and brought the service to a hasty close. Such was Kirk Braddan when my father went to it in 1832, and such, or worse, were almost all the parish churches in the Island.

**Source:** W.S. Caine, ed. *Hugh Stowell Brown: His Autobiography, His Commonplace Book and Extracts from his Sermons and Addresses*. 2nd ed. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1887. 14. (From Chapter iii, *Removal to Kirk Braddan*, 11–15.)

1835

BANNAG

I cannot tell what this word means, if not the Manks of ballad. I have heard it used for a rhyme said or sung on Hollantide eve. The Welsh have Bann for a poem, and a Bannag for an article. [23a]

\*

QUAALTAGH OR QUALTAGH

The first person met on New Year’s Day, or on going on some new work, &c. A company of young lads or men, generally went in old times on what they termed the *Qualtagh*, at Christmas or New Year’s Day to the house of their more wealthy neighbours; some of the company repeating in an audible voice the following rhyme:

Ollick ghennal erriu as blein feer vie;	A merry Christmas on ye, and a very good year,
Seihll as slaynt da’n slane lught thie;	Long life and health to the whole household;
Bea as gennallys eu bio ry-cheilley,	Your life and mirth living together,
Shee as graih eddyr mraane as deiney;	Peace and love between women and men;
Coid as cowryn, stock as stoyr.	Goods and wealth, stock and store,
Palchey phuddase, as skaddan dy-liooar;	Plenty potatoes, and enough herring;
Arran as caashey, eeym as roayrt;	Bread and cheese, butter and beef,
Baase, myr lugh, ayns uhllin ny soalt;	Death like a mouse, in the stackyard of the



Cadley sauchey tra vees shiu ny lhie,      [barn;  
 Sleeping safely when you lie,  
 As feeackle y jargan, nagh bee dy mie.      And the flea’s tooth, may it not be well.

When this was repeated, they were then invited in to partake of the best thing that the house could afford. [132b]

\*

RONNEEAGHT OR RONNIAGHT

Reverie or revery, ribaldry, a foolish song, ranting talk, raving in drink, &c.; *Job*, xxx. 9. [136a]

**Source:** Archibald Cregeen. *A Dictionary of the Manks Language*. Douglas & London & Liverpool: J. Quiggin & Whittaker, Treacher, and Arnot & Evans, Chegwin, and Hall, 1835 [but 1837].

1837

NEW MUSIC

Mr Quarterman begs to inform his Friends, that he intends Publishing Variations to all the Manx Airs that are generally known, he having made several Tours around the Island, in order to gain (as near as possible,) the original mode of Singing these Airs.

“Molly Charrane” will be Published Shortly.

**Source:** “New Music.” Advert. *Manx Sun* 17 February 1837: 7 col. d.

1837

NATIONAL MUSIC

It will be seen by our columns, that Mr Quarterman has published the favourite national melody of “Mylechrane,” with variations. It is almost superfluous to say that Mr Q.’s variations are of the highest order of merit, as every performer and amateur on the Island have so pronounced them previous to their publication. There can be little doubt but the whole series which Mr Q intends publishing will become very popular, not only in this Island, but also the whole United Kingdom—Mylechrane especially, as the melody is one of the finest and happiest belonging to any nation. We wish Mr. Quarterman every success in his commendable undertaking in bringing before the notice of the finest national airs known to exist, ans for which the Island is justly indebted to him.

**Source:** “National Music.” *Manx Sun* 5 May 1837: 4 col. c.

1840

[...] on Christmas Eve, or Mary’s Night, the people assemble in vast numbers at the parish church where the solmen liturgy is duly read, & a sermon preached; & afterwards the people remain in church, singing carols until midnight [...] too often a great deal of rioting & revelling takes place; & in more than one instance the civil power has been called in to suppress the holding of an Eaill Voirrey, in some particular parish, for several years: & now it is common for an agreement to be made that no public-house shall be opened on that day before church-time. [193a]

**Source:** “An Account of the Manx Clergy, &c., in 1840.” *Ramsey Church Magazine* ii.22 (1897): [192] col. a–[93] col. a. [Taken from *Frazer’s Magazine* of May 1840]

1841

Several musical gentlemen being present\* the evening was past most delightfully, and *Molly Charane* [“Mylecharane”] which was given in a masterly style, was warmly and deservedly encored.

\*

Mr Bonnyman provided dinner for all the ploughmen at his farm house.

\* At that evening’s dinner for the organising committee only held at Braid’s Cumberland Hotel

**Source:** Anon. “Ploughing Match.” *Manx Sun* 26 March 1841: 4 cols. c–d. [Extracts]

1844

MONA’S ISLE  
 CANTO II

The yellow corn when ripen’d in the ear  
 Call’d forth the rustics to its gathering in,  
 With sharpen’d sickles in their hands to shear,  
 And choose the right-hand rig, the race to win.

To be the first to share the hearty fun  
 Beneath the shade ’mongst the luxuriant grass,  
 There round the stooks with many a playful run

Each lad would chase and oft trip up his lass.

While thus the youth the victory to achieve,  
In cutting down the lengthen'd rig throughout,  
The aged made the bands and tied each sheave,  
Cheering them on with many a hearty shout.

When cut the barley, and the full-ear'd wheat,  
And snugly stack'd all ready for the flails,  
They on the oats their labour would repeat,  
When pass'd autumnal equinoctial gales.

Then Kitty, eldest of the youthful band  
Of females, challenged all within the field  
To be the first to cut with friendly hand  
The last oat sheaf the farm that year did yield,

To form the Maiden in its usual style  
With ribbon-bows and plaited straw-made arms,  
Then with a light-heel'd skip and playful smile,  
Which added beauty to her native charms,

She bore it forth in triumph in her hand,  
Leading the shearers to the highest ground,  
Where met the rural and the happy band,  
Whose hearty cheers did through the air resound,

Proclaiming loudly thus, with three times three  
Expressive cheers, the welcome harvest-home;  
Then homeward bend their course, in mirthful glee,  
Where the brown ale o'er topp'd the jug with foam

Fresh from the spigot of a hissing keg  
Of famed Mylrea's best double-ex entire,  
And hotly pepper'd by old thrifty Peg,  
With jovial pranks the rustics to inspire.

When seated all, each on a three-legg'd stool,  
The hopeful lads and lasses, pair and pair,—  
Waiting the haggis in the dish to cool,—  
Would make appointments for next Ramsey fair.

When the host had offer'd up the grace,  
And cut the haggis with his horn-haft knife,  
Each honest rustic with a smiling face  
Gave ev'ry credit to the cooking wife.

The good old sire proposed the yearly toast,  
“May he that did come in the first this day  
Of his own partner as a good wife boast,  
Ere hawthorn's bloom proclaims the coming May.”

The well-known pair were seen full soon to blush  
As all the toast with three times three did crown,  
Whilst the good dame repeated, “Lads, hush! hush!  
I now declare, I'll give the wedding-gown,

And feather-bed, of sixty pounds in weight,  
And curtains, made from my own spinning too,  
And sheets and bolsters, for the bridal night;—  
Now, my sweet Kate, what more, love, can I do?”

“What canst thou do, my Peg?” exclaims the host,  
“Why give them Bridgen, first of milking cows—  
Of such a pair Kirk-Maughold well may boast,  
And they shall have the best the farm allows.”

Encouraged thus, the young and bashful pair  
Exchanged soft looks of innocence and love,  
In which the rest could not but help to share,  
While the good dame call'd blessings from above

Upon their union,—should it e'er take place,—  
And hoped their nuptials, by divine decree,  
Would be to multiply the human race,  
And that they might their children's children see

In peace, and love, and perfect happiness,  
In future years when she should be no more,  
But long removed from sorrow and distress  
To great Emanuel's everlasting shore.

The dame now made her exit with the sire,—

Leaving the youths to love and merriment,—  
And sat them snugly by the kitchen fire  
Rehearsing over how to pay their rent.

The parish fiddler—well he loved the ale,—  
Then took his seat close by his heart’s delight,  
With a determination not to fail  
To give it a full benefit that night.

He drew the rosin up and down the hair  
Of his strung bow, and screw’d each peg well tight,  
Declaring often though the strain was fair  
That strings would snap, and leave him in a plight.

But when the pegs had ceased the strings to snap  
And yielded not to his adjusting strain,  
Each maid took off her bonnet and her cap  
To join the dance with her intended swain.

The Champion was the first to lead his lass,  
Who was ere hawthorn bloom’d to be his bride,  
Up and then down the well-shorn plat of grass  
That did the stack-yard and the barn divide,

To meet the second pair, the reel to form,  
Four-handed, with an unaffected grace,  
And with the good old maxim to conform,  
They join’d their hands and then whirl’d round apace

Towards the left hand, then towards the right,  
Then all at once they’d quit each other’s hand  
And cross alternately most blythe and light,  
While the impatient swains their turns demand;

For well they knew the fiddler soon would fail  
In holding out, that each might have a turn,  
While he kept still replenishing with ale  
The old brown jug, in size next to the churn;

And so it proved, for ere the second reel  
Had led unto the courage-testing jig,

The barns and stacks begun round him to wheel,  
And down he fell, and off came hat and wig.

When disappointed thus, each loving pair  
Betook themselves unto their seats once more,  
And for sweet vocal harmony prepare  
To drown the prostrate drunken fiddler’s snore.

The Champion, of course the first to sing,  
Struck up a lively and a loving ditty,  
Making the rafters of the old barn ring  
As thus he tuned his rural lay to Kitty

KITTY OF THE GREEN

As down tow’rds Coma’s flowing brook  
One morn I took my route,  
To angle with my line and hook,  
And catch the spotted trout,  
I met by chance upon my way,  
So gentle and serene,  
A perfect beauty;—need I say  
‘Twas Kitty of the Green?

I stood awhile in reverie  
Eve I could her address,  
For something strange came over me  
Which I could not express,  
When I beheld her auburn hair,  
In ringlet tresses flow  
Adown her well-form’d shoulders faire  
And cheeks of ruddy glow.

But when her eyes of hazle shade,  
Sparkling beneath her brow,  
Their Wrst impression on me made,  
I felt I know not how;  
SuYce to say if I had been  
Great Ballacregan’s heir,  
My charming Kitty of the Green  
Would be the matron there.

Yea, if I'd been of,  
Or Derby's royal race,  
She'd as the Queen of Mannin shine,  
The Tinwall Court to grace.  
But oh! how can I now express  
How glow'd this heart of mine,  
When first I heard her lips confess,  
“Young angler, I am thine.”

At these last words young Kitty blush'd with shame,  
Hiding her face behind her lover's chair,  
Though in her heart she could not Hughy blame,  
She heartily wish'd that night she'd not been there.

The next in turn was call'd to tune his lyre  
In praise of Etty of the farm Renwee,  
At all the maidens' and the swains' desire,  
And e'en herself did to the call agree,

With bashful blushes playing o'er her cheek,  
And sparkling eyes with glist'ning tears be-dew'd,  
While all the maids, with sympathy so meek,  
Her love-embarrass'd situation view'd.

But when her lover struck the tuneful chord  
Unto her praise so simply and so kind,  
The mirthful band the rural song encored,  
Saying it was exactly to their mind.

Then he, with self-exulting modesty,  
Attuned his voice to suit the simple strain,  
In all the pride of rustic honesty,  
And as here follows tried his lay again:—

ETTY OF RENWEE

One morn, as o'er the flow'ry lawn  
Sweet gentle zephyrs blew,  
I bent my way just at the dawn,  
Ere rose the spangling dew,  
Along the margin of the green,

The fleecy flocks to see.  
Where stray'd, bedeck'd like summer's queen,  
Sweet Etty of Renwee.

She wore a garland and a crown  
Of interwoven flowers,  
Which she pluck'd along the down  
From Nature's simple bowers:—  
This sweet enchanting merry maid  
Skipp'd lightly o'er the lea,  
And when I ask'd her name, she said,  
“I'm Etty of Renwee.”

Art thou, indeed, my love, said I,  
That blooming flower fair?—  
To sit thee down then be not shy,  
And share this balmy air:  
“Let's not sit down, I need not rest,  
But come to youder tree  
And see the warbling linnets' nest,”  
Said Etty of Renwee.

Who could deny this sweet request  
From such persuasive lips?  
And as the lamb as pure as her breast,  
When round its dam it skips:  
She tript along the dewy grass  
Just as the air as free,  
This fair and charming Manx young lass,—  
Sweet Etty of Renwee.

She led me to the fragrant thorn,  
To see the callow brood,  
And hand in hand that blissful morn  
We roved in happy mood:  
The blackbird on the highest spray  
Did with the thrush agree  
At our approach to tune their lay  
To Etty of Renwee.

Her accent sweet—her sparkling eye

My bosom made to glow,  
Though inexperience made me shy,  
It was my fate to know  
That something latent in my heart  
Was left alone for thee  
To bring to light, by beauty's art,—  
Sweet Ety of Renwee!

As thus went round so merrily the songs,  
With pure and unaffected heart and voice,  
A wag took up the poker and the tongs  
To ape the fiddler with his grating noise,

And sung in native tongue the ancient rhyme  
Which cheer'd the Melya-night in days of yore,  
Composed by Manxmen back in olden time,  
Ere pride invaded happy Mona's shore.—

MOLACARANE

Molacarane, Where got'st thou thy store?  
I got it embedded  
Deep, deep, 'neath the moor,  
Tra ma lomercon dage ou me.

The rest of this most ancient song  
Is so laboriously long,  
To sing it through would all the while  
This mirthful scene both mar and spoil.

The next he chose p'rhaps I may venture  
In this rude verse of mine to enter;  
It treats of scenes in dark December,  
And well do I those scenes remember:—

TA NA KEERY FO-NAUGHTY

Come, rise up, my lads,  
And haste to the mountain,  
The snow-drifts are deep on  
Each valley and fountain,

Our sheep in the nooks  
Are cover'd all over,  
Put on your carranes,  
And call the dog Rover.

And arm yourselves, lads,  
With the long-probing poles,  
And Rover will lead you  
To their round breathing holes;

Near Corna-Chesgia  
They're buried, no doubt,  
Then, lads, down that way  
Be sure take your route.

And do not delay  
In your beds fast asleep  
While smother'd and perish'd  
Lie my round hundred sheep,

Beneath the white snow  
That is gathering fast  
Around them in flakes  
From the furious blast.

As they the wag so loudly did encore,  
In honour of the good old native songs,  
The noise awoke the fiddler from his snore  
Ere could be hid the poker and the tongs.

“Who dares to mock my fiddle and my bow?”  
He said, as he came scrambling forth to light,  
“By the ‘Three Legs,’ this night I'll lay him low  
For thus encroaching on my fiddling-right.”

But the wag the sudden threat evaded  
By hiding snugly underneath the straw,  
While the rest old Illam soon persuaded  
To sit while Kit another jug would draw,

And not take notice of the mimic fool,

Assuring him none wish'd him any harm:  
So they endeavour'd Illam's wrath to cool  
With the kind help of barley's soothing charm.

Though reign'd, full-orb'd, the mellow harvest-moon,  
To light the neighbouring rustics to each cot,  
Old Illam-Nelly thought it yet too soon  
To make a start while foam'd the brimful pot,

Until the dame with modest air appear'd,  
Saying, “My children, you must now disperse.”  
She, above all the rest, old Illam fear'd,  
And to the fiddling art was much averse;

And Illam, as well, hating her pious lore,—  
It being at variance with his trade,—  
Put on his hat, and stagger'd to the door,  
And for the year his drunken exit made.

**Source:** William Kennish. *Mona's Isle, and Other Poems*. 1844. (1) “Mona's Isle,”  
Canto II, 11–39, extract (26–38).

1844

THE MANX ILVARY

When dark December's dismal gloom  
Came louring o'er the sky,  
And snow-storms gather'd drear around,  
And Christmas-feast was nigh,  
With all its merry-making time  
Of festival and glee,  
Beginning with the good old rule,  
The Parish Ilvary,

When each young rustic with his lass,  
Dress'd in their best attire,  
Trudged onwards to the Parish Church,  
Oft o'er their shoes in mire;  
But it was good old Christmas Eve,  
At which time of the year

They pass'd each glen and haunted road  
Without a spark of fear,

For many a merry-making laugh  
Was heard along the moor,  
Where meet in groups the neighb'ring swains  
Around some cottage door,  
Selected by majority  
To be the starting post,  
Through the good nature of the dame,  
And drollery of the host;

And daughters smart perchance they had,  
Attractive too and fair,  
While none seem'd happier than the dame  
To see them, pair and pair,  
Start off in all the pride of youth,  
As she had done before,  
On many a merry Christmas Eve,  
From the same cottage door,

The parish bell rung merrily,  
Indeed as well it might,  
For through the year, save at that time  
It never rung at night.  
Group after group now fast arrived  
From all the parish round,  
While mirth and rural jollity  
Did 'mongst the whole abound.

Some came across the mountain's side,  
Some many weary miles  
O'er hills, and lowland marshy fields,  
O'er hedges, gates, and stiles;  
But it was good old Christmas Eve,  
Which comes but once a year,  
Hail, rain, or snow, could not detain  
Them from th' Ilvary cheer.

The lasses with their gowns tuck'd up,  
And strongly pinn'd behind,

Were led by lads along the aisle,  
Their landlord's seat to find,<sup>1</sup>  
With candles formed in many a branch,<sup>2</sup>  
The pew t' illuminate,  
Fused in the crescit<sup>3</sup> by young Peg,  
And dipp'd by thrifty Kate.

Along the gallery and nave  
Of the old church were seen  
Festoons of many a holly-branch,  
Relieved with heben<sup>4</sup> green.  
When in full light the sacred pile  
Of many a year appear'd,  
And the selected prayers were read,  
The pastor homeward steer'd,

Leaving the delegated clerk  
To rule the rustic train,  
While each in turn his carol<sup>5</sup> sang,  
Celebrity to gain.  
A veteran old, of many years  
Experience in song,  
Was still the first each Ilvary  
Amongst the rustic throng,

To draw the time-worn sheet from out  
His leathern breeches' fob,  
In creases deep by dint of years,  
But plain enough for Rob,  
For he had learnt it all by heart,  
As the old saying goes,  
But to be thought he could not read  
In writing, rhyme or prose,

Was a dishonour to his fame,  
Such as he could not brook,  
Tho' he had never learn'd the use  
Of letters or a book;  
But, to be candid, perhaps he might,  
If educated well,  
Have been a Milton, or a Pope,

A Johnson, or Boswell;

But here we had him as he was,  
An honest Manxman bred,  
With all the marvels yet extant  
Well hammer'd in his head;  
And with self-consequential air  
He'd lean out o'er the pew,  
And tune his quav'ring annual note  
As if each year 't were new;

While at the end of every verse  
The wags around the door  
Would loudly cry, with mock applause,  
“Well done, Rob-Jack!—encore!”  
But he was proof alike to scorn,  
And flattery's magic spell,  
His own so oft-tried power of song  
He knew himself full well,

And that he could his voice command  
O'er all their “hems” and “haws,”  
Knew where to lay the emphasis  
On words, and where to pause;  
Yet notwithstanding all his powers,  
Few did appreciate  
His music or his eloquence,  
Saving his old wife, Kate,

Who would, with great pretension too  
To St. Cecelia's art,  
Chime in to help him through each verse  
Towards the latter part.  
The next whose customary turn  
Was to perform, stood up,—  
And being stimulated well  
By famed old Nelly's cup,—

Commenced his diatribe against  
The cassock and the gown —  
Each bishoprick and vicarage

He would that night cry down;<sup>6</sup>  
The curate too came 'neath his lash  
As did the easy clerk,  
Whom he would view with look askance  
At every shrewd remark;

For many a home-directed stroke  
Was drawn in metaphor,  
In this his yearly tilt against  
The episcopal lore.  
When those two yearly champions  
Had finish'd each his song,  
The one so fraught with satire keen,  
The other dry and long,

The youthful band the moment hail'd  
With many a smiling face,  
For now the time for shutting up  
Was drawing on apace,  
Now went each joke, and shrewd remark,  
Around from pew to pew,  
And maids their stock of parched pease  
Amongst the rustics threw:

By custom taught for ages back,  
The lasses brought their pease,  
In pockets full each Ilvary,  
The bachelors to tease,  
By taking opportunity  
When they were least aware,  
To throw their pulse artillery  
And make the rustics stare.

Now when each chanting candidate  
Had done his best to please,<sup>7</sup>  
And lasses tired of the sport  
Created by the pease,  
They'd all agree with one accord  
To take the dreary road,  
Re-passing through each haunted glen  
Ere all reach'd their abode;

But on that merry-making eve  
There is no cause to fear  
Nor ghosts, nor witches, for 'tis said  
They dare not then appear:  
Upon each road a half-way house  
Was ready to receive  
Each courting pair, on their return  
From church on Christmas Eve:

A noted one amongst the rest,  
The far-famed Brumish Veg,<sup>8</sup>  
Well stock'd with home-brew'd beverage  
Fresh frothing from the keg;  
And blithely on that jovial night  
Each toast and jest went round,  
And with their rustic merriment  
Did Brumish Veg resound!

The ale was season'd to the taste  
In each full foaming pot,  
Not with ground ginger mix'd with spice,  
But good black-pepper hot;  
And junks of wheaten-flour bread,  
So seldom used in Man,  
After being toasted on the turf,  
Would hiss within the can.

Such was the fare at Brumish Veg  
As flow'd the mirthful tide,  
And many a youthful pair, whose home  
Was on the mountain's side,  
Sat down to quaff the barleycorn's  
Most stimulating juice,  
And in their turn another sort  
Of songs would introduce

From those which they had sung at church  
An hour or two before,  
While they would pass the jug about,  
Regardless of the score,  
Until each lass, persuasively,



Would hint the way was long  
They had to go, which would give rise  
Unto the parting song.<sup>9</sup>

The parting verse they sang that night  
I well remember yet,  
It aye reminds me of those scenes  
I never can forget;  
Though many years have pass'd away  
Since last I heard that strain,  
Its tones oft o'er my memory steal,  
And bring home back again.

After the parting verse was sung,  
And *jough yer dorrys*<sup>10</sup> drank,  
And the large Christmas candle had  
Within the socket sank,  
They of the host of Brumish Veg  
Then took a parting leave,  
And thus the merry rustics all  
Closed that auspicious eve.

Each lad would see his lass safe home,  
Whose parents would invite  
Him in, and sanction his request  
To stop with her the night,  
While they would go unto their bed  
And leave them by themselves,  
With a good fire upon the hearth  
And plenty on the shelves.

Thus they would pass the happy night,  
Still daring not to stride  
O'er Hymen's bound'ry, or attempt  
What virtue has denied,  
Observing the old adage still  
Which they were wont to say,—  
“To keep the feast strictly preserved  
until the festal day.”

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> As but few of the better-thinking sort of the community visited the church on this night, the rustics had free access to each of their landlord's.

<sup>2</sup> It was customary for the females to manufacture candles formed into branches for this occasion.

<sup>3</sup> A piece of a broken iron pot, commonly made use of for melting tallow for tile purpose of dipping half-peeled rushes in the grease, and so making “rush-lights” of them.

<sup>4</sup> Ivy.

<sup>5</sup> The custom was for one or two men to stand up at a time, and sing their carols to the audience, after the church service was over; and the church door was kept open until a late hour for that purpose.

<sup>6</sup> This person, whose farm lay next to the glebeland of the parsonage conceiving that the parson had encroached on his forefather's land-mark, or boundary, composed a Christmas carol from that part of the Apocrypha which treats on the priests of Baal, who robbed the Temple each night of the food that was supposed to be devoured by the Idol, and thus he gave vent to his supposed injured feelings each Christmas eve in song.

<sup>7</sup> There was considerable rivalry on these occasions, in displaying their vocal abilities.

<sup>8</sup> A well-known public-house, situate on the banks of the river Corna, in Kirk Maughold.

<sup>9</sup> The “Parting verse”

Te traa goll thie da goll da lhie  
Te tarn dys traay ny lhiabbagh,  
Ta'en stoyl ta foin grainagh shin roin  
Te'er signal dooin da gleasagh

Which may be rendered thus:

Now we all to our homes, lads,  
'Tis time to go to bed;  
Each rocking-stool a warning gives—  
The fire's flame hath fled!

<sup>10</sup> The stirrup-cup.

**Source:** William Kennish. *Mona's Isle, and Other Poems*. London: J. Bradley & Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1844. “The Manx Ilvary,” 76–85.

1845

On Thursday last, being St Stephen's day, hosts of young urchins were wandering about the streets, singing at the doors of the inhabitants, the dirge *Hunt the Wren*. This is an old Manx custom, not yet extinct. The song may be found entire in Train's *History of the Isle of Man*. [4c]

**Source:** “[Untitled Piece].” *Manx Sun* 4 January 1845: 4 col. c.

[116] On the eve of the first day of February, a festival was formerly kept, called, in the Manks language, *Laa'l Breeshey*, in honour of the Irish lady who went over to the Isle of Man to receive the veil from St. Maughold. The custom was to gather a bundle of green rushes, and standing with them in the hand on the threshold of the door, to invite the holy Saint Bridget to come and lodge with them that night. In the Manks language, the invitation ran thus:—“*Brede, Brede, tar gys my thie, tar dyn thie aymys noght. Foshil fee yn dorrys da Brede, as lhig da Brede e heet staigh.*” In English:—“Bridget, Bridget, come to my house, come to my house to-night. Open the door for Bridget, and let Bridget come in.” After these words were repeated, the rushes were strewn on the floor by way of a carpet or bed for St. Bridget. A custom very similar to this was also observed in some of the Out-Isles of the ancient kingdom of Man.

\*

[122] The Manks *mheil* or reapers, at the close of harvest, bind up with ribbons the last handful of corn that is cut and bear it in procession to the top of a neighbouring hill, and there, while the *Queen of the Mheillea* waves the corn or *kern baby* over her head, the reapers express their joy in loud huzzas. This is supposed to be a rude continuation of the custom of presenting the wave-offering of corn at the close of the harvest, mentioned in scripture. After this ceremony is performed the reapers retire to [123] partake of the *mheillea*. The reapers, young and old, assemble, and, with the family and friends of the farmer, join in the merry dance. This is called the *mheillea* or reapers' rest, because the female share of the harvest labour then ceases, and they disperse.

\*

[123] The Druidical festival of *Allhalloweven*, called by the Islanders *Sauin*, has been observed in the Isle of Man till a late period, by kindling of fires, with all the accompanying ceremonies, to prevent the baneful influence of fairies and witches. The Island was perambulated at night by young men who struck up at the door of every dwelling-house, a rhyme in Manks, beginning:—

Noght oie howney hop-dy-naw.

This is Hollantide Eve, &c.

On Hollantide Eve, boys go round the towns bawling lines, of which the following is an extract:—

*Hop-tu-naa*, This is old Hollantide night;

*Trollalaa*, The moon shines fair and bright.

*Hop-tu-naa*, I went to the well,

*Trollalaa*, And drank my fill;

*Hop-tu-naa*, On the way coming back,  
*Trollalaa*, I met a pole-cat;  
*Hop-tu-naa*, The cat began to grin,  
*Trollalaa*, And I began to run;  
*Hop-tu-naa*, Where did you run to?  
*Trollalaa*, I ran to Scotland;  
*Hop-tu-naa*, What were they doing there?  
*Trollalaa*, Baking bannocks and roasting collops.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Hop-tu-naa*. If you are going to give us anything, give us it soon,

Or we'll be away by the light of the moon—*Hop-tu-naa!*

For some peculiar reason, potatoes, parsnips, and fish, pounded together, and mixed with butter, form always the *mrastyr*, or evening meal, on Halloweven and Christmas, the parsnips, however, being excluded from the Christmas dish.

\*

[124] *Hunting the Wren* has been a pastime in the Isle of Man from time immemorial. In Waldron's time it was observed on the 24th of December, which I have adopted, though for a century past it has been observed on Saint Stephen's Day. This singular ceremony, says Mrs Bullock, which is, I believe, peculiar to the Isle of Man, [125] is founded on a tradition, that in former times a fairy of uncommon beauty, exerted such undue influence over the male population, that she, at various times, induced, by her sweet voice, numbers to follow her footsteps, till by degrees she led them into the sea, where they perished. This barbarous exercise of power had continued for a great length of time, till it was apprehended that the Island would be exhausted of its defenders, when a knight-errant sprung up, who discovered some means of countervailing the charms used by this siren, and even laid a plot for her destruction, which she only escaped at the moment of extreme hazard, by taking the form of a *wren*. But though she evaded instant annihilation, a spell was cast upon her by which she was condemned, on every succeeding New-year's-day, to reanimate the same form with the definitive sentence, that she must ultimately perish by human hand. In consequence of this *well authenticated* legend, on the specified anniversary, every man and boy in the Island (except those who have thrown off the trammels of superstition), devote the hours between Sun-rise and sun-set, to the hope of extirpating the fairy, and woe be to the individual birds of this species, who show themselves on this fatal day to the active enemies of the race; they are pursued, pelted, fired at, and destroyed, without mercy, and their feathers preserved with religious care, it being an article of belief, that every one of the relics gathered in this laudable pursuit, is an effectual preservative from shipwreck for one year; and that fisher-man would be considered as extremely foolhardy, who should enter upon his occupation without such a safe-guard." When the chase ceases, one of the little

victims [126] is affixed to the top of a long pole with its wings extended, and carried in front of the hunters, who march in procession to every house, chanting the following rhyme:

We hunted the wren for Robin the Bobbin,  
 We hunted the wren for Jack of the Can,  
 We hunted the wren for Robin the Bobbin,  
 We hunted the wren for every one.

After making the usual circuit, and collecting all the money they could obtain, they laid the wren on a bier and carried it, in procession, to the parish church-yard, where, with a whimsical kind of solemnity, they made a grave, buried it, and sung dirges over it in the Manks language, which they called her knell. After the obsequies were performed, the company, outside the church-yard wall, formed a circle and danced to music which they had provided for the occasion.

At present, there is no particular day for pursuing the wren; it is captured by boys alone, who follow the old custom, principally for amusement. On St. Stephen's day a group of boys\* go from door to door with a wren, suspended by the legs, in the centre of two hoops, crossing each other at right angles, decorated with evergreens and ribbons, singing lines called “Hunt the Wren.”

If, at the close of this rhyme, they be fortunate enough to obtain a small coin, they gave in return a feather of the wren; and before the close of the day, the little bird may sometimes be seen hanging almost featherless. The ceremony of the interment of this bird in the church-yard, at the close of St. Stephen's day, has long since been abandoned; and the sea-shore or some waste ground was substituted in its place.

\* In 1842, no less than four sets were observed in the town of Douglas, each party blowing a horn.

\*

[127] The Christmas festival is introduced by young persons perambulating the various towns and villages, in the evenings, fantastically dressed, and armed with swords, calling, as they proceed, “Who wants to see the *White Boys* act?” When their services are engaged, they, like the Scotch *Guisards* or *Qubite-boys* of Yule perform a rude drama, in which St. George, Prince Valentine, King of Egypt, Sambo, and the Doctor, are the dramatis personæ. “The fiddlers” go round from house to house, in the latter part of the night, for two or three weeks before Christmas, playing a tune called the *Andisop*. On their way they stop before particular houses, wish the inmates individually, “good morning,” call the hour, then report the state of the weather, and after playing an air, move on to the next halting place.

**Source:** Joseph Train. *An Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man*. Vol. ii. 2 vols. Douglas: Mary A. Quiggin, 1845. (From Chapter xvii, *Manners and Customs*, 102–39.)

1846

LIOAR | DY | HYMNYN | AS | ARRANEYN SPYRRYDOIL, | CHYNDAIT GYS GAILCK | VEIH LIOARYN | WESLEY, WATTS, | AS | SCRITUDEYRYN ELLEY. | SON YMMYD CREESTEENYN. | Gynsaghey as coyrlaghey yn derrey yeh yn jeh elley ayns | PSALMYN, AS ARRANEYN-MOYLLÉE AS SPYRRYDOIL, goaill | arrane lesh grayse ayns nyn greeaghyn gys y Chiarn.— | COL. III. 16. | DOOLISH: | PRINTIT LIORISH M. A. QUIGGIN. | MDCCCXLVI.

1851

OLD CUSTOMS

Many of our ancient customs have passed away, and but [f]or their presentation in the pages of Train, the very memory of their existence would have perished from human recollection. There are a few however which seem not unlikely to hold their ground for many years to come, seeing that their upholders are fully as numerous as we ever recollect them to have been in our boyish days. Among this class we may enumerate “The Whiteboys,” “The Fiddlers,” or Waits, just prior to Christmas, and that still more singular relic of a forgotten antiquity called “Hunting the Wren,” on the anniversary of the protomartyr St Stephen. The votaries of these ancient customs show no symptoms of diminished numbers, and the customs themselves have stood their ground for untold centuries untouched by the enenerating hands of time and change; while of others, the only evidence of their former existence, is alone traceable through the channel of a dim and misty tradition. [4b]

**Source:** Anon. “Old Customs.” *Manx Sun* 27 December 1851: 4 col. b.

1852

But I was going to telling you that Jemmy and Willy and me was at the ellevery on Christmas eve.

**Source:** Letter from George Tyson to his daughter, 28 December 1852. MNHL, MS 5146 B. [Extract]

1855

( 1 )

23 August  
 [Douglas] [...] Talk with an old fisher-looking man [...] I asked him if there were any songs in the language; he said there were many hymns. “Anyting else?” said I eagerly.

“Yes,” said he, “there is an old song called ‘Molly Herayne’ [‘Mylecharane’] which the old people sometimes sung; the air or tune is very sweet.” [459]

[Onchan] [...] discourse with a man who spoke almost unintelligible English; [...] that there were songs in it [i.e., Manx], one of which he mentioned, and which he said he had seen in print, but of which he could give me no intelligible account; that it was for twenty years against the parlour wall of a farmhouse, over the hill. [459–60]

31 August

[Port St Mary] [...] overtake sailor with whom I enter into discourse; [...] said he was acquainted with a great many Manx songs; found, however, that he was unable to give the name of any of them, with the exception of “Molly Charane” [“Mylecharane”]. [484–85]

[Port Erin] [...] the public house fire; the dinner; the seat by the kitchen fire at evening; the tipsy fiddler; “Molly Charane” [“Mylecharane”]; [487]

1 September

[Port Erin] [...] the old fisherman; held discourse with him; asked if he knew Manx songs; said that he had heard hundreds in his youth; asked him what they were about; said that they were about drowned seamen and matters of love, and that some were from the English; [488]

( 2 )

4 September

[Douglas] [...] In the afternoon, feeling rather unwell, I remained within and translated the Manx song “Mollie Charane.” [131]

6 September

[Douglas] [...] Mr. Goldsmith the night before left me a scrapbook in which was an elegy in Manx on the Death, or rather Murder, of William Christian in 1662. Endeavoured in the afternoon to translate it. [133]

7 September

[Douglas] [...] At night sat up late studying “William Doo.” [133]

8 September

[Onchan] I had a good deal of conversation with the woman in the churchyard. I asked her if she knew any Manx songs. “I know some hymns,” said she. “Anything else?” said I, “any old Manx songs?” “No,” said she. “What! Not one?” “no.” “not ‘Mollie Charane’?” said I. “Oh, yes,” said she with a kind of start, “I know that.”

“Then,” said I, “why did you tell me that you did not know one Manx song?” “Oh, sir,” said she, “I should never have thought of mentioning ‘Mollie Charane.’” “Do you know anything else?” said I. “No, Sir, nothing at all—no, Sir, nothing.” “What!” said I, “don’t you know the ‘Kirree fo Sniaghtey?’” “Oh, yes,” said she, “I know that, of course.” “How, of course,” said I, “you just said that you knew nothing besides ‘Mollie Charane,’ nothing, nothing.” “Oh,” said she, “that is such a simple song; I should no more think of mentioning such a simple song as that to a gentleman like you, than I should think of doing what was very wrong.” “Why,” said I, “what harm is there in the song? any cursing? adultery?” “No, Sir, but, but, the truth is that the Methodists set their faces against songs of that kind.” “Are you a Methodist?” said I. “No, Sir; I wish I were a good Methodist.” “And why not be a good Churchwoman?” said I. “I should be glad to be either,” said she. “Well,” said I, “you may be a good Methodist, at any rate a good Churchwoman, and yet know ‘Mollie Charane’ and ‘The Sheep beneath the Snow,’ and sing them too.” “Do you know anything else,” said I. “No, Sir.” “What! not ‘Illiam Dhoo?’” “Oh, yes,” said she, “I know that. Ah! that is a song indeed. Whenever it comes to my mind, my eyes fill with tears. Ah, that’s a song indeed! About him who was shot at Hangoe the old Chapel at Castletown. And yet they say there is something wrong about that song; great folks don’t like us to sing it, or have it hung up in print on our cottage walls.” “There is nothing wrong in it,” said I, “it only breeds hatred against butchery and tyranny. Do you know any other songs?” “No, Sir.” “I believe,” said I, “if I were to name a dozen other Manx songs, you would know them all; but I know no more,” “No, Sir, I really know no more; but every Manx born knows those three songs.” [137–38]

12 September

[Douglas] [...] I occupied myself during the afternoon and evening in translating into rhyme “Illiam Dhoo,” or “Brown William.” [142]

15 September

[Douglas] [...] I overtook three men who were talking in Manx [...] I asked if they could sing “Molly Charane,” whereupon they set up a loud laugh and said “Yes.” [145]

**Source:** (1) Clement Shorter ed. *Miscellanies*. The Works of George Barrow. Norwich Edition. Vol. xvi. 16 vols. London: Constable, 1924. Extracted from *An Expedition to the Isle of Man in the Year 1855*. (2) William I. Knapp, ed. *Life, Writings, and Correspondence of George Borrow*. Vol. ii. 2 vols. London: John Murray, 1899. Extracted from Chapters xlix and l, *Selections from George Borrow’s Note Books on the Isle of Man*.

1858

The quaint, primitive style of “MYLECHARANE” proves its antiquity. We think that some (connecting) verses are lost, for these Manx Melodies were not reduced to writing until comparatively modern times.

A friend tells me that, when a boy, he was acquainted with an old, blind piper who used to sing at the Manx fairs and fire-sides of his countrymen. This old, blind singer often asked him “to write his songs down.” He now regrets that he allowed such an opportunity of collecting legendary lore to pass.

The Kings of Mann had always a Court Minstrel. Where are the good old Manx lays gone these Minstrels were wont to sing?

The Manx are remarkable for their singularly sweet, musical voices. They possess much highly poetical, descriptive poetry. If our upland Singers will commit any they may have to writing, and kindly send them to Mrs QUIGGIN, Bookseller, North Quay, Douglas, they will be duly valued.

E. C.

1, Stephen Terrace, | Woodburn Road, Douglas.

**Source:** Elizabeth Cookson. “Preface.” *Mylecharane: The Popular and Most Ancient Manx National Song*. Douglas: M.A. Quiggin, 1858. [3]. [From the cover motto: “Manxmen love their native vales / Island songs, and Island tales.”]

1858

[ix] The Manx possess many highly poetical, descriptive poems, legends, and songs, and are remarkable for their sweet, soft, musical voices.

The quaint, primitive style of “MYLECHARANE” proves its antiquity. We think that some (connecting) verses are lost, for these Manx Melodies were not reduced to writing until comparatively modern times.

A friend tells us that, when a boy, he was acquainted with a blind old man who used to wander up and down the Island to sing at the fire-sides of his countrymen. This old, blind Singer often asked him “to write his [x] songs down,” and my friend regrets that he allowed such an opportunity of collecting Manx legendary lore to pass.

The Kings of Mann had always their Court Minstrels. Where are the good old Manx lays gone these Minstrels sang?

If our upland Singers will commit any they may have to writing, and kindly send them to Mrs QUIGGIN, Bookseller, North Quay, Douglas, they will be duly valued.

E. C.

Woodburn Road, Douglas, | December, 1858.

**Source:** Elizabeth Cookson. “Introduction.” *Mylecharane: The Popular and Most Ancient Manx National Song, Rendered into English Verse, Adapted to the Old Manx Air*. Douglas: M.A. Quiggin, 1858. [Extract]

1859

[ix] The Manx possess many highly poetical, descriptive poems, legends, and songs, and are remarkable for their sweet, soft, musical voices.

The air of “MYLECHARANE” is singularly plaintive and of very high antiquity. The Song and Melody have a strange fascination for the imaginative Manx; but I think that some connecting verses are lost, for these primitive writers were precise and given to detail;—when they had a story to tell, they told every bit of it;—and these Insular Melodies were not reduced to writing until, comparatively, modern times.

A friend tells me that, when a boy, he was acquainted with a blind old man who used to wander up and down the Island to sing at the fire-sides of his countrymen. This old, blind Singer often asked him “to write his songs down,” and my friend regrets that he allowed such an opportunity of collecting Manx legendary lore to pass.

[x] The Kings of Mann had always their Court Minstrels. Where now the good old Manx lays these Minstrels sang?

If our upland Singers will commit any they may have to writing, and kindly send them to Mrs QUIGGIN, Bookseller, North Quay, Douglas, they will be duly valued.

E. C.

Woodburn Road, Douglas, | May, 1859.

[Since the publication of the first Edition of MYLECHARANE a Manx version, containing four additional verses, has been sent to the Translator.]

**Source:** Elizabeth Cookson. “Introduction.” *Mylecharane: The Popular and Most Ancient Manx National Song, Rendered into English Verse, Adapted to the Old Manx Air*. 2nd edn. Douglas: M.A. Quiggin, 1859. [Extract]

1859

[27] [...] Whilst engaged writing this Manx tradition, on this present 27th day of December, 1858, a party of Wren Hunters came to my house, carrying the dead body [28] of the pretty bird in the interior of a little bower made of evergreens, tied with ribbons. I gave them some pence, and received three feathers.

**Source:** Elizabeth Cookson. “Introduction.” *Mylecharane: The Popular and Most Ancient Manx National Song, Rendered into English Verse, Adapted to the Old Manx Air*. Douglas: M.A. Quiggin, 1858. [Extract]

1859

[xix] The carvals are all in manuscript. There is, however, a small, but not uninteresting, poetic Manx literature existing in print, though not easily procurable. First of all, there is the grand historic ballad, in which the fortunes of the various races and families, which have at different times held the island, are narrated. Then there is the noble ballad concerning the death of Brown William, and the vengeance inflicted by God on his murderers and their progeny. Then there is the ballad of “Molley Charane,” the miser, a humorous and satirical piece of great poignancy; and the one of a similar character, and very little inferior to it in any respect, called “Kirree fo Sniaghtey; or, the Sheep beneath the Snow.” These four are the most remarkable compositions in the printed vernacular literature of Man: though there are other pieces of considerable merit,—for example, a little piece commencing with “Ushag beg ruy,” and two or three elegies on drowned seamen. Besides original, the Manx language contains translated poetry. There is the *Phargys Caillit* of a rector of Marown, who flourished about the commencement of the present century; which is, however, not a translation of the whole of *Paradise Lost*, as the name would seem to imply, but consists of translations of particular parts of *Paradise Lost* into Manx rhyme, neatly and smoothly done, but with very little vigour, and not much fidelity. Then there is the *Lioar dy Hymnyn*, or Book of Hymns, from Wesley, Watts, and others, by George Killey, of Kirk Onchan; which is done in a manner which shews that the poor Methodist, who, singular enough, was *parish clerk*, possessed powers of versification of the very highest order.

**Source:** Rev. William Gill, ed. “Introduction.” *A Practical Grammar of the Antient Gaelic, or Language of the Isle of Man, usually called MANKS*. By The Rev. John Kelly, LL.D. Manx Society, Vol. ii. Douglas: Manx Society, 1859. xix. [Extract of a letter from George Borrow to Gill]

1861

THE QUALTAGH

[130] This is a new-year’s greeting, somewhat unique, it being purely a Manx custom. A company of young men go to the houses of the more wealthy, repeating in Manx or in English the following rude rhymes

Again we assemble a marry New-Year,  
To wish to each one of the family here,

[131]

Whether man, woman, or girl or boy,  
That long life and happiness all may enjoy.  
May they of potatoes and herrings have plenty,  
With butter and cheese and each other dainty;  
And may their sleep never, by night or by day,  
Disturbed be, by even the tooth of a flea;  
Until at the *Quaaltagh* again we appear,  
To wish you, as now, a happy New-Year.

On this being repeated at the door with an intonation peculiar to Manx chanters, they are invited into the house to partake of its hospitalities.

\*

THE MHEILLEA

[132] [...] *Mheillea* strictly means the reaper’s rest, but instead of rest they generally dance all night.

\*

SAUIN

[133] Or Hollantide Eve, was first a Druidical and afterwards a Roman festival. The first Christian missionaries to Mona were obliged to incorporate some of the rites of the Druids, and even those of the Wodin into the Christian worship, before the adhesion of the people to ancient customs could be overcome. The present name of this festival is derived from the word *sane*, which means *save*, and points to the prayer for the salvation of departed saints. On this occasion bands of boys go round the town repeating a doggerel rhyme commencing

*Hop-tu-nan*—This is old Hollantide night  
*Trollalaa*—The moon shines fair and bright, &c

The supper of this night with the peasantry is a compound of potatoes, parsnips, and fish, dressed with butter.

\*

HUNTING THE WREN

[133] This custom takes place on St. Stephen's day in some parts of the Island. It is founded on a tradition that a syren fairy once charmed the warriors of Mona by her sweet notes, and decoyed them off into the sea where they were drowned. She had thus well nigh stripped the country of its chivalry, when a knight sprang up so bold and artful that he had certainly slain the fairy, but that she escaped by taking the form of the wren. The knight cast a spell over the wren, and condemned her and all her race to destruction by Manx hands, which destruction has been going on once a year from that time, with the hope the fairy-one may thus fall into their hands. The feathers of the slain are craved as charms to preserve mariners from shipwreck. The sport ended, the supposed witch wren is tied to the top of a pole with its wings [134] extended and decked with evergreens and ribbons.

The more probable origin of this custom is vested in a tradition connected with Ireland, whence it may have been introduced. The protestant army having halted for the night, the drummer was suddenly aroused from his slumber by the sounding noise of his own drum, and looking up he found the wren pecking some crumbs of bread, the remains of the soldier's evening repast. This opportune circumstance saved the army, as the enemy were on the point of attack, hence the wren became an object of persecution by every Romanist.

Another opinion prevails, that this barbarous practice is intended to commemorate the martyrdom of Stephen, if so, it ought to be abolished.

The sport is now principally pursued by boys for a few pence realised from the exhibition and charmed feathers.

\*

THE OIEL VERRY

[134] This is a great night for the displays of the church. It is celebrated on Christmas-eve, and continued till after midnight. The church is gorgeously decorated with holly, laurel, ivy, variegated laurestina, and December blossoms and evergreens of all sorts, brilliantly illuminated by wax candles of immense size, and made harmonious with all the music available. The whole ceremony of course commemorates the salutation of the angels to the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem. Before the break of day the singers traverse the streets, chanting “Christians awake,” and other hymns adapted to the occasion.

\*

THE WHITE BOYS

[135] This grotesque custom of introducing Christmas is not exclusively of Manx practice and origin, as it prevails in many parts of the north of England. Some half-dozen of lads dress in white, with piramidical paper caps, appearing fantastic enough, and carrying wooden swords. They cry out at the doors, “Who wants to see the white boys act?” They then essay a rude comical drama, half verse half prose, in which St. George, Prince Valentine, King of Egypt, Sambo, the Doctor, and Bedzebug himself, are the principal actors. The hurried manner and the burlesque intonations of the speakers, make the performance unique and odd. At the close of this ludicrous affair a few half-pence are looked for.

**Source:** F[rederick] Leech. *Leech's New Illustrated Tourist's Guide to the Isle of Man.* Ramsey & Douglas: F. Leech & J. Mylrea, n.d. [1861?].

1862

BROWN WILLIAM

[37a] This ballad was written in consequence of the execution of William Christian, generally called William Donn, or Brown William, from the darkness of his complexion, who was shot at Hango Hill near Castletown, in the Isle of Man, shortly after the Restoration, for alledged treason to the Derby family, who long possessed the sovereignty of Man. Christian had been Receiver-General of the island, and on its being threatened by a powerful fleet sent by Cromwell, had deemed it expedient to deliver it up on honourable conditions, the little kingdom being in an almost utterly defenceless state. For doing so, however, on the downfall of the Protectorate, he was tried, and being convicted by a packed jury, was shot. He died with great courage, and with his last breath prayed God to forgive his enemies. His body was buried, the day after his execution, in the chancel of the church of Malew, or Saint Lupus, in the neighbourhood of Castletown. He was a man of great irreproachable morals and of great piety; had old Danish blood in his viens, and lived principally at a place a little way to the [37b] north of Castletown, which bears the Danish or Norwegian name of Ronaldsway, or Ranild's Oe. Christian has been mentioned in a certain novel by Walter Scott, called *Peveiril of the Peak*, for the Manx materials of which Scott was chiefly indebted to an acquaintance of his long resident of the island. Not daring to attack Christian directly, whom he hated on account of his puritanical principles, he gave him a side-thrust, by making it appear that Christian had no brother at all. The name of Christian is still held in the highest veneration in Man; and the ballad of “Brown William,” which gives an account of the betrayal of the poor patriot, and the vengeance taken by the hand of God upin his murderers, is the most popular of the wild songs of Ellan Vannin.

\*

MOLLIE CHARANE

[38a] This ballad is of considerable antiquity, being at least as old as the commencement of the last century. It is founded on a real character—a miser, who by various means acquired a considerable property, and was the first person who ever left “tochter,” that is fortune, to daughter in Man. His name was Mollie Charane, which words interpreted are “Prasie the Lord.” He lived and possessed an estate on the curragh, a tract of boggy ground, formerly a forest, on the northern side of the Snaefell range and the sea. Two families bearing the name of the miser, and descended from him, still reside upon the curragh, at the distance of about half-a-mile from each other. The name of the head of the principal [38b] family is John Mollie Charane; that of the other Billy Mollie Charane. In the autumn of the year 1855 I found my way across the curragh to the house of John Mollie Charane. On my knocking at the door it was opened by a respectable-looking elderly female of about sixty, who, after answering a question which I put, asked me to talk in, saying that I looked faint and weary. On my entering, she made me sit down, brought me a basin of buttermilk to drink, and asked me what brought me to the curragh. “Merely to see Mollie Charane,” I replied. Whereupon she said that he was not at home, but that she was his wife and any business I had with her husband I might communicate to her. I told her that my only motive for coming was to see a descendant of the person mentioned in the celebrated song. She looked at me with some surprise, and observed that there was indeed a song about a member of the family, but that he had been dead and gone many a long year, and she wondered I should give myself the trouble, merely because one of their forebears was mentioned in a song. I said that however strange the reason I gave might seem to her, it was the true one; whereupon she replied, that as I was come I was welcome.

I had a great deal of discourse with her about her family. Amongst other things, she told me that she had a son in Ohio, who lived in a village where the Manx language was spoken, the greater number of the people being Manx. She was quite alone in the house when I arrived, with the exception of two large dogs, who at first barked and were angry at me, but eventually came and licked my hands. After conversing with the respectable old lady for about half an hour, I got up, shook her by the hand, and departed for Balla Giberagh. The house was a neat little white house, fronting the west, having a clump of trees near it. However miserly the Mollie Charane of the song may have been, I experienced no lack of hospitality in the house of his descendant.

**Source:** George Borrow. “Ballads of the Isle of Man.” *Once a Week* vi (1862):37–39 col. a. [The two song texts have been omitted here]

1863

“A VERY OLD BALLAD”

[64] As a specimen of the nervousness and strength of the Manx tongue the following verses [“Ny Kirree fo-Niaghtey”] are submitted to my readers. This antique lyric is an extreme favourite with the poorer class, and I have heard it sung in isolated country places where the advent of an Englishman was not an every-day occurrence. My friend, Mr Mosley (whom I hope soon to see in a position more befitting his wonderful linguistic acquirements, and whose abilities as a student of languages would render him invaluable to a public institution or college, or private nobleman of literary taste), has favoured me with a literal translation, which I have (as old writers say) “done into rhyme.” I trust it has not lost none of its point by being versified.”

\*

[65] Arrived at the final page of this book, let me conclude by stating that in addition to the three little volumes which I have already written concerning the Island, I intend to produce a fourth, the subject of which shall possess nothing in common with its predecessors. In it I propose to introduce other original ballads, gleaned from the honest agricultural Manx scattered over comparatively untrodden portions of the Isle,—regions whose scenery is alike impressive and beautiful, but remote from the “busy hum of men.” I have long cherished the idea of undertaking and describing a thoroughly adventurous ramble through the *unknown* parts of Mona; and the result of wanderings will be given to the public under the title of

“WILD MAN.”

Gentle Reader, respond to my sincere and ardent hope that we may live to meet again! *Au revoir!*—

**Source:** William F. Peacock. *The Manx Table-Book & Keepsake*. Manchester: John Heywood, n.d. [1863].

1863

[41] He returned to the Isle of Man for Christmas, little thinking it was to be his last Christmas in Manx land, that he should never again see the churches lit up on Christmas Eve for the national Manx festival, the Oiel bene. This ancient custom is now among the things of the past, but was then still partially observed, especially in outlying parishes. For those of my readers who are ignorant of how this strange service was conducted, I will give a slight sketch of the ceremony. Oiel bene, in the Manx tongue, means the eve of Mary. It took place on Christmas Eve, and was the great service of the year. After evening prayer, the officiating clergyman quitted the church, and the congregation was left to themselves. The church had been previously decorated with holly, and the corner of each pew with wreaths of ivy; it was also



lighted with candles in the chandelier and sconces. Anyone in the congregation who chose was at liberty to sing a carol, first in the Manx tongue, then in English, standing in the west porch, and holding a thick taper in his hands. This candle was [42] generally manufactured for the occasion, and was decked out with many coloured ribbons. Alas! as the singers advanced, step by step, towards the communion table, as each verse was droned forth, the grease guttered down on to the ribbons, and even on to the hands of the men. But by no means discouraged, they continued through thirty, even forty verses, carolling a half religious, half profane, story of our Lord’s life; sometimes varying this with an incident of Manx history, a wreck, or the public punishing of some sinner. One verse of a very favourite carol ran thus:

Long time they wandered up and down,  
To find a lodging in the town,  
And when no lodging they could find,  
To sleep in a manger she had a mind.

This work of genius, we are told, was composed and sung by Tom Dipper.

The aspirants to the honour of singing a carol were numerous, and the late winter dawn often found them still in the church; many of them sleeping heavily, adding a far from harmonious nasal accompaniment to the droning voices. It was by no means an edifying ceremony, and often led to regrettable misdemeanours, but the clergy were obliged to sanction it, on account of its national character and great antiquity. Its suspension has been viewed with general satisfaction.

**Source:** Eliza F. Pollard. *Thomas Howard Gill: His Life and Work*. London: S. W. Partridge & Co., n.d. [1895]. See Chapter v, “St Mark’s,” 37–42. **Note:** The year in question is 1863.

1869

PREFACE

[vi] Of the Ballads and Songs here introduced, some [vii] are no doubt familiar to the general reader, while others are not so well known. Many of the old ballads never having been printed, or, if so, only in the form of an occasional broadside, and even then very incorrectly, are only to be met with floating about in the memories of old people, who here and there remember a verse or two, hence the unconnected nature of some, and the difficulty in procuring a perfect one. Some are reported to be in the hands of the curious collector, which, as yet, I have had no opportunity of seeing, while others are said to be irrecoverably lost.

The version of Illiam Dhône, with the translation, is from an old Ms written by the Rev. John Crellin, who was vicar of Kirk Michael in 1774, afterwards rector of Bride, a gentleman gifted with the poetic muse, and I have been assured this

specimen of his native Manx is very correct, and is the source from whence the broadside of 1781 was printed.

From the statement introducing the loss of the Herring Fleet in 1787, it is to be hoped it will be the means of setting in a true light a long-standing misconception as to its extent. The French print alluded to is now in the possession of Richard Quirk, Esq. of Parville, Receiver-General.

I am indebted to the kindness of a friend for the copy of “Hunt the Keys,” which created considerable interest at the time of its appearance, as also for the [viii] notes to the same. In the desire to present the Manx in as correct a form as possible, the editor has had the able assistance of the Rev. John Thomas Clarke, the joint editor of the *English and Manx–Dictionary*, published by the Manx Society in their 13th volume, 1866, which will be a guarantee for the correctness of the Manx renderings in this volume. Since this portion has been printed off, several songs, supposed to have been lost, have been placed in the editor’s hands, which he hopes at some future time to be able to present to the members of the Society.

Some Manx Ms songs are also in his possession, which might be printed should the Council of the Society think proper to allow them to appear in that language without an English rendering. Also various Carols in Manx, which were formerly chanted at Christmas time, no doubt to the great edification of the people of that day, a custom now rapidly declining. One of these carols, written in 1740, extends to fifty-six verses; another, “A Hymn of Man’s shameful fall,” by the Rev. Thomas Allen of Kirk Maughold in 1758, contains sixty-five verses in Manx. A specimen of these *carvals*, being a short one, is given in the present collection, composed by the Rev. Vicar-General Cosnahan, rector of Bride in 1733, and who died in 1749.

The Manx language not having been a printed one before the Scriptures were published in 1772, with the [ix] exception of a few short pieces by Bishop Wilson in 1707, was necessarily in a very unsettled state, arising in a great measure from the many mutations in writing this dialect of the Celtic tongue.

**Source:** William Harrison, ed. “Preface.” *Mona Miscellany: A Selection of Proverbs, Sayings, Ballads, Customs, Superstitions, and Legends peculiar to the Isle of Man*. Manx Society, Vol. xvi. Douglas: Manx Society, 1869. v–x. [Extract]

1872

5 August

Walking to Laxey, which is the next considerable bay north of Douglas—a little place Groudle or Growdale lies between—we heard a little girl sing a Manx song, though indeed it was but four lines, a rhyming couplet and the third line repeated, and she recited it only. It sounded just like English words done into nonsense verses: thus the third and fourth lines or burden seemed “The brow shall loose, The brow

shall loose.” Manx can be understood by a speaker of Irish. The people are the most goodnatured I think I have ever met.

**Source:** Humphrey House, ed.. *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. London: Oxford University Press, 1937. 162. [From Hopkin’s *Journal*]

1873

PREFACE

[ix] The Council of the Manx Society having expressed a wish that the editor should make a further selection from his store of the folk lore of the Island of Man, to form a second series to that which appeared in the 16th volume of their publications in 1869, he has been induced to prepare the present volume, in the hope that it may be received as favourably as its predecessor. He was led to expect that he would have received some aid from members of the Society who had documents of a similar nature in their possession, but he has been disappointed, with the single exception of one, to whom he now wishes to express his warmest thanks for the great interest he has taken in the present volume, and the valuable assistance he has rendered in making it as perfect in its details as possible, although not wishing to be mentioned by name.

To the Rev. John Thomas Clarke, who was ever ready to assist in procuring Manx songs which otherwise would have been lost, as well as to Mr John Quirk, of Cairn ny Greie, for his willingness to give them an English dress, the Editor also begs his acknowledgments and thanks.

[x] There are, doubtless, many Manx songs that might still be rescued from oblivion that would throw light upon many a long-forgotten fact, if some one could be found capable and diligent enough to collect them. It may be said that many of these are only of a very homely nature and rude verse, yet what are the generality of ballads?—written for the day, nevertheless may contain truths that otherwise would have escaped the notice of the historian of after years. As such, those given in these volumes, it is hoped, will be found useful, if not for their elegance of diction, yet for the truths that may be found in them.

A specimen of a Manx *carval* is given in the present collection, with an English version of the same, on the “Bad women mentioned in Scripture,” which the Editor believes has not hitherto been translated. It would have been easy to have given many of these carvals, which may be termed a literature entirely peculiar to the Manx people, consisting chiefly of ballads on sacred subjects which have been handed down in writing to the present time, and are yet to be found in many an out-of-the-way mountain farm-house, preserved in smoke-dried volumes redolent of peat. A collection of these would some years hence form quite a literary curiosity, many of them possessing considerable merit, but are yearly becoming more difficult to procure, either from being altogether lost, or the unwillingness of the peasantry to

part with their treasured manuscripts. Most of these carvals are from 50 to 150 years old, and amongst the favourites may [xi] be mentioned “Joseph’s History,” “Susannah’s History,” “The Nativity,” “The Holy War,” “David and Goliath,” “Samson’s History,” “Birth of Christ,” with the specimens that have been given in the present collection.

The editor has every reason to believe that the two volumes of “Mona Miscellany” contain the largest collection of the “Folk Lore” of the Isle of Man that is to be met with, and which the author of the term (Mr Thoms, for many years the editor of *Notes and Queries*) defines to include “Popular superstitions, ballads, legends, and generally, as the name implies, the lore of the people.”

In the present volume the editor has the pleasure of giving a copy of the scarce print of the shipwreck of the herring fleet in Douglas Bay in 1787, mentioned in the first series of *Mona Miscellany*, as also a plate of the curious silver cross formerly in the possession of Mylecharaine, which he hopes will be found an acceptable addition.

**Source:** William Harrison, ed. “Preface.” *Mona Miscellany: A Selection of Proverbs, Sayings, Ballads, Customs, Superstitions, and Legends peculiar to the Isle of Man, 2nd Series*. Manx Society, Vol. xxi. Douglas: Manx Society, 1873. ix–xi.

1874

9–13 March 1874

Singing not so good; one boy, who has been converted at the “revival meetings” held in this Chapel at the present time, refused to sing school songs, as he thought it wrong to do so.

\*

16–20 March 1874

Kept some of the second class boys in to do their home exercises, & made them understand that if they are attending the evening meetings at the chapel, they must not for that reason neglect their home & school duties.

\*

Yearly Report, 12 August 1874

[...] The course of school work was a good deal interrupted in the spring by the revival meetings which were held in the chapel close by in the evenings, as a great many of the children attended them regularly & were in consequence much fatigued during the daytime, as the services which they attended in the evening were much too long for children. The singing too has very much improved as the scholars were very backward in this subject, but our progress in this was a good deal retarded by the same cause mentioned above [...]

**Source:** Logbook for Baaregarroo School, Kirk German (1873-74), kept by Agnes Wicksey. Manx National Heritage Library, MD 10025.

1874-75

[Q6 can you tell me of any songs, poems, ballads, stories &c still current among your parishioners in Manx?]

PATRICK

“No.”

FOXDALE (PATRICK)

“Molly Charane is the only Manx Song much known.”

ST JOHNS (PATRICK)

“‘Molly Charane,’ a Song—Also one on the loss of the Herring Fleet—and sundry legends which are to be found in Waldron.”

GERMAN

“Bessy Lee | Macmillan.” [In Jenner’s hand]

CRONK-Y-VODDY (GERMAN)

“No—.”

MICHAEL

“If any very few of the old Mx songs be now remembered now excepting here & there. Viz the afsd The present generation appear to know or care very little about them—Cregeen’s Dictry is full of Proverbs.”

BALLAUGH

“There are at present very few of songs or stories in Manx.”

ANDREAS

“I cannot—but the Rev. T.E. Brown—Vice Principal of Clifton College near Bristol & formally (*sic.*) Fellow of Oriel, Oxford: took a great interest in this subject some years ago.”

ST JUDES (ANDREAS)

“There are some, but I do not know them.”

LEZAYRE

“None peculiar within Parish,—except a few versions of carvals.”

ST STEPHEN (SULBY)

“They sing a few Manx Songs at times.”

RAMSEY

“There are a few old songs—the Proverbs used in Manx are published in one of the Manx Society’s Publications. No 21, none peculiar this District—Many fanciful Stories of Fairies.”

MAUGHOLD

“I do not know of Any—there are a few old Manx Carols still sometimes sung at Christmas.”

ST BARNABAS (DOUGLAS)

“There are such I believe—but I cannot tell of them—.”

ST GEORGES (DOUGLAS)

“Molly charain is a ballad in Manx and I have been told there are Carols in Manx. Mr George Borrow found some Manx Poem I believe.”

ST THOMAS (DOUGLAS)

“I have postponed sending this paper off in the hope of gathering some information for you from a dear old Manx Lady who is full of Manx lore—but she now tells me that her strength will not allow of her with writing or dictating anything.”

MAROWN

“I know of none peculiar to this Parish.”

ARBORY

“I believe there are 2 or 3 Manx Songs in existence—the copies of which are exceedingly rare—but I know of no one in this parish conversant with either of these songs.”

MALEW

“No.”

RUSHEN

“No I cannot.”

**Source:** Henry Jenner. *Information respecting the State of the Manx Language in the years 1874-5 obtained from the Clergy of the Diocese of Sodor & Man*. British Library, Add. Ms 29894.

1877

1 January  
Had spell of fiddling till tea. Afterwards had a jolly practice with Harry out of “Silver Songs.”

4 January  
It was arranged for an Ilvary in Chapel tonight but owing to a very wet evening was not held.

9 January  
At Shimmin’s seeing about tea-party, could not settle on a night.

12 January  
Spent till eleven o clock looking out tea-party tunes. Afterwards went on the Money Search. Afterwards at singing practice.

15 January  
Wrote music and words of tea-party tunes. Had practice in schoolhouse.

16 January  
Wrote music and words of tea-party tunes. Got “Messiah” from Ned Quayle.

17 January  
Practice in schoolhouse.

19 January  
Tea-meeting put off till the 22nd February.

20 January  
At Foxdale got Glee Book, Anthems, Christys Minstrel Album &.

22 January  
Wrote music of “Behold the Great Messiah Comes.” [...] Practice in schoolhouse.

9 February  
Singing practise.

16 February  
Practice in schoolhouse.

19 February  
Wrote tea-party music this morning. [...] Practice in Schoolhouse.

21 February  
Sent Music to Caesar for tea-party. Decorating Schoolhouse this evening. Singing practise afterwards.

22 February  
Elly Shimmin came for me at Mid-day to finish off the decorations which were done at 4 pm. Rained wild shower between 12 & 2 or 3 pm but cleared afterwards. I lit the fires about 5. Wind shifted north and blew strong and cold. Richd Wood and I shifted the fires from east gable to Johnny Maddrell’s field, then Grenaby Tea Festival began about 7-30 pm, and continued till 10-20. The after meeting lasted till 20 minutes to 12. The speakers were the Vicar, the Curate, and Mr. T. Jones. The pieces sung: “Heavenly Seraph,” “The Wondrous Story,” “Sound the Trumpet” (with Introduction, part of Chorus “Worthy is the Lamb”), “Behold the Great Messiah Comes,” Solo by Lizzy Kennaugh and chorus by the choir, “Something Sweet to Think Of,” and as an encore gave “Army with Banners,” Glee, “Hark! the Curfew’s Solemn Sound,” and as an encore, “Hark the Lark,” “Doxology.” H. Curphey and E. Quayle, clarionets, C. Taggart, cornet, T. Taggart, violincello. [...] Scholar’s Tea this evening.

26 February  
At Schoolhouse. Settled Tea Party hiring. Balance in favour £4/14/0-.

5 April  
Played a while on the violincello.

3 July  
Went from thence to “Ballakilley Tea Festival.”

24 July  
Singing practice in the schoolhouse.

30 July  
Practice in schoolhouse.

- 1 August  
Practice in schoolhouse.
- 6 August  
Singing practice in schoolhouse.
- 23 August  
At Scholar’s Tea, Kerrowkiel Chapel.
- 5 September  
Grenaby Sunday Scholar’s Tea. Singers & Teachers.
- 26 September  
Cut the Noll woar hoese which was the Mhellah.
- 7 November  
Service in schoolhouse tonight. Proposed having the Harvest Home on the 22nd.
- 8 November  
I went to Mrs Shimmins to consult about the tea-meeting. We determined upon having it the 22nd inst.
- 14 November  
I intended having a practice tonight but it rained fearfully.
- 15 NOVEMBER  
Had practise in schoolhouse for tea-party.
- 17 NOVEMBER  
Practise in the schoolhouse tonight.
- 19 November  
Practise in the schoolhouse tonight.
- 20 November  
John St Mark’s with a notice of Harvest Home Tea. I at Eary Stain with d[itt]o and stuck one on Dick Cubbon’s smithy door.
- 21 November  
Decorating the schoolhouse till singing practise.

- 22 November  
Wrote music of tea-party tunes for Caesar in morning. Decorated and finished the Schoolhouse for Grenaby Harvest Home Tea Festival. Dreadful windy. Small attendance in consequence. Pieces sung—1st, Monkland 4–7th; 2nd, Anthem, “The Lord is King”; 3rd, Anthem; “Behold the Great Messiah Comes”; 4th, “Girl with a Calico Dress”; 5th by Miss E. Kennaugh, “The Men are so Stupid”; 6th by Robert Curphey, “But in the Starlight”; 7th, “Hail! Smiling Morning”; 8th, National Anthem.
- 23 December  
Children’s Tea Festival.
- 25 December  
At Foxdale Tea Festival.
- 2 January 1878  
Worked on T. Corlett’s suit till I went to Foxdale for Band of Hope entertainment which was a success.

**Source:** Thomas Taggart. *Diary* (1877–78). Manx National Heritage Library. MS 1498 A.

1880

The day being finished, the shearers proceeded on their way home, where a supper was provided, and after supper sports were commenced, frequently including music and dancing, and plenty of beer &c. But these things have died out, and now-a-days if there is a harvest supper at all it is when the corn is all saved, and very properly so.

**Source:** Kelly, I. Margaret. “*Twas Thus and Thus They Lived.*” n.p.: Privately, by the Author, n.d. 154. [Originally published in 1880]

1887

DANNY, THE MADCAP

[140] [...] It was an old Manx custom that on Christmas Eve the church should be given up to the people for the singing of their native carols or carvals. The curious service was known as Oiel Verree (the Eve of Mary), and [141] at every such service for the last twenty years Hommy-beg, the schoolmaster, had officiated as singers in the strange Manx ritual. Great had hitherto been the rivalry between these musical celebrities, but word had gone round the town that at length their efforts were to be

combined in a carol which they were to sing together. Dan had effected this extraordinary combination of talent by a plot which was expected to add largely to the amusement of the listeners.

Hommy-beg could not read a syllable, yet he never would sing his carol without having the printed copy of it in his hand. Of course Mr Quirk, the schoolmaster, could read, but, as we have seen, he resembled Hommy-beg in being almost stone-deaf. Each could hear himself sing, but neither could hear another.

And now for the plot. Master Dan called on the gardener at his cottage on the Brew on [142] the morning of the day before Christmas Day, and “Hommy,” said he, “it’s morthal strange the way a man of your common sense can’t see that you’d wallop that squeaking ould Jemmy Quirk in a jiffy if you’d only consent to sing a ballad along of him. Bless me, man alive, it’s then they’d be seeing what a weak, ould cracked pot of a voice is at him.”

Hommy-beg’s face began to wear a smile of benevolent condescension. Observing his advantage, the young rascal continued, “Do it at the Oiel Verree to-night, Hommy. He’ll sing his treble, and you’ll sing seconds to him.”

It was an unlucky remark. The gardener frowned austere. “Me sing seconds to the craythur? No; never!”

Dan explained to Hommy-beg, with a world of abject apologies, that there was a sense in which seconds meant firsts, and at length the gardener was mollified, and consented to the proposal; but one idea was [143] firmly rooted in his mind—namely, that if he was to sing a carol with the schoolmaster, he must take the best of care to sing his loudest, in order to drown at once the voice of his rival, and the bare notion that it was he who was singing seconds to such a poor creature as that.

Then Danny trotted off to the schoolhouse, where he was no longer a scholar, and consequently enjoyed an old boy’s privilege of approaching the master on equal terms, and “Jemmy,” he said, “it’s morthal strange the way a man of your common sense can’t see that you’d wallop that squeaking old Hommy-beg in a jiffy if you’d only consent to sing a ballad along of him. Do it at the Oiel Verree to-night, Jemmy, and bless me! that’s the when they’ll be seeing what a weak, ould crackpot of a voice is at the craythur.”

The schoolmaster fell even an easier prey [144] to the plot than the gardener had been. A carol was selected; it was to be the ancient Manx carol on the bad women mentioned in the Bible as having (from Eve downward) brought evil on mankind.

Now, Hommy-beg kept his carols pinned against the walls of his cottage. The “Bad Women” was the carol which was pinned above the mantelpiece just under the pendulum of the clock with the facetious face. It resembled the other prints in being worn, crumpled, and dirty; but Hommy-beg knew it by its position, and he could distinguish every other carol by its place on his walls.

Danny had somehow got a “skute” into this literary mystery, and after arranging with the schoolmaster the carol that was to be sung, he watched Hommy-beg out of his cottage, and then went into it under pretence of a friendly call upon blind Kerry. Before he left the cottage he had taken down the carol that [145] had been pinned above the mantelpiece and fixed up another in place of it from the opposite side of the room. The substituted carol happened, oddly enough, to be a second copy of the carol on “Bad Women,” with this radical difference: the copy taken from under the clock was the version of the carol in English, and the copy put up was the version in Manx. Towards ten o’clock that night the church bells began to ring, and Hommy-beg looked at the clock, took the carol from under the pendulum, put on his best petticoat, and went off to church.

Now, there were to be seasonable rejoicings at the Court on the morrow, and Kerry had gone over to help at the Christmas preparations. Ewan and Mona had always spent their Christmas at Bishops’s Court since the day when they left it as children. That night they had arrived as usual, and after they had spent some hours with Danny in dressing the [146] house in a green and red garment of *hibbin* and *hollin*, the Bishop had turned them off to bed. Danny’s bedroom was the little crib over the library, and Ewan’s was the room over that. All three bade the Bishop goodnight and went into their rooms. But Danny did not go to bed; he listened until he heard the Bishop in the library twisting his chair and stirring the peats, and then he whipped off his boots and crept upstairs to Ewan’s room. There in bated breath he told of the great sport that was to come off at the Oiel Verree, announced his intention of going, and urged Ewan to go with him. They could just jump through the little window of his room and light on the soft grass by the library wall, and get in again by the same easy means. No one would know that they had been out, and what high jinks they must have! But no, Ewan was not to be persuaded, and Danny set off alone.

[147] Hommy-beg did not reach the church until the parson’s sermon was almost over. Prayers had been said in a thin congregation, but no sooner were they done than crowds of young men and maidens trooped down the aisles. The young women went up into the gallery, and from that elevation they shot down at their bachelor friends large handfuls of peas. To what ancient spirit of usage, beyond the ancient spirit of mischief, the strange practice was due, we must be content to leave, as a solemn problem, to the learned and curious antiquaries. Nearly everybody carried a candle, and the candles of the young women were adorned with a red ribbon or rosette.

In passing out of the church the parson came face to face with Hommy-beg, who was pushing his way up the aisle. The expression on his face was not at the moment one of peculiar grace, and he stopped the gardener and said sharply in his ear, “Mind you [148] see that all is done in decency and order, and that you close my church before midnight.”

“Aw, but the church is the people’s, I’m thinkin’,” said Hommy-beg, with a shake of his tousled head.

“The people are as ignorant as goats,” said the parson angrily.

“Aw, well, and you’re their shepherd, so just make sheeps of them,” said Hommy-beg, and he pushed on.

Danny was there by this time, and, with a face of mighty solemnity, he sat on the right of Hommy-beg, and held a candle in his left hand. When everything was understood to be ready, and Will-as-Thorn, the clerk, had taken his station inside the communion-rail, the business of the Oiel Verree began. First one man got up and sang a carol in English; then another sang a Manx carol. But the great event of the night was to be the carol [149] sung by the sworn enemies and rivals, Hommy-beg and Mr James Quirk.

At last the time came for these worthies. They rose from opposite sides of the church, eyed each other with severe looks, stepped out of their pews and walked down the aisle to the door of the porch. Then they turned about in silence, and, standing side by side, faced the communion.

The tittering in the gallery and whispering in the body were audible to all except the persons who were the cause of both. “Hush, hush, man alive, that’s him, that’s him.” “Bless me, look at Hommy-beg and the petticut, and the handkercher pinnin’ round his throat.” “Aw, dear, it’s what he’s used of.” “A regular Punch and Judy.”

Danny was exerting himself at that moment to keep order and silence. “Hush, man, let them make a start for all.”

The carol the rivals were about to sing [150] contained some thirty verses. It was an ancient usage that after each verse the carol-singers should take a long stride towards the communion. By the time the carol of “Bad Women” came to an end the carol-singers must, therefore, be at the opposite end of the church.

There was now a sublime scorn printed on the features of Mr Quirk. As for Hommy-beg, he looked, at this last instant, like a man who was rather sorry than otherwise for his rash adversary.

“The romantic they’re looking,” whispered a girl in the gallery to the giggling companion beside her.

Expectation was at its highest when Hommy-beg thrust his hand into his pocket and brought out the printed copy of the carol. Hommy unfolded it, glanced at it with the air of a conductor taking a final look at his score, nodded his head at it as if in approval, [151] and then, with a magnanimous gesture, held it between himself and Mr Quirk. The schoolmaster in turn glanced at it, glanced again, glanced a third time at the paper, and up into the face of Hommy-beg.

Anxiety was now on tiptoe. “Hush, d’ye hear, hush,” whispered Danny from his pew; “hush, man, or it’s spoiling it all you’ll be, for sure.”

At the moment when Mr Quirk glanced into the face of Hommy-beg there was a smile on that countenance. Mr Quirk mistook that smile. He imagined he saw a

trick. The schoolmaster could read, and he perceived that the carol which the gardener held out to him was not the carol for which he had been told by Master Danny to prepare. They were, by arrangement, to have sung the English version of “Bad Women.” This was the Manx version, and though the metre was the same, it was always sung to a different [152] tune. Ah! Mr Quirk understood it all! The monster wanted to show that he, James Quirk, schoolmaster, could only sing one carol; but, as sure as his name was Jemmy, he would be equal with him! He could sing this Manx version, and he would. It was now Mr Quirk’s turn to smile.

“Aw, look at them—the two of them—grinnin’ together like a pair of old gurgoils on the steuple!”

At a motion of the gardener’s hand, intended to beat the time, the singers began. Hommy-beg sang the carol agreed upon—the English version of “Bad Women.” Mr Quirk sang the carol they held in their hands—the Manx version of “Bad Women.” Neither heard the other, and to dispel the bare notion that either was singing seconds, each bawled at the utmost reach of his lung power. To one tune Hommy-beg sang—

“Thus from the days of Adam

Her mischief you may trace.”

[153] And to another Mr Quirk sang—

“She ish va’n voir ain ooilley

Son v’ee da Adam hen.”

Such laughter! How the young women in the gallery lay back in their seats with hysterical shrieks! How the young fellows in the body made the sacred edifice ring with guffaws! But the singers, with eyes steadfastly fixed on the paper, heard nothing but each his own voice.

Three verses had been sung, and three strides made towards the communion, when suddenly the laughter and shouting of the people ceased. All eyes had turned towards the porch. There the Bishop stood, with blank amazement printed on his face, his head bare, and one hand on the half-opened door.

If a spectre had appeared the consternation had scarcely been greater. Danny had been rolling in his pew with unconstrained [154] laughter, but at the sight of the Bishop his candle fell from his hand and sputtered on the book-rail. The Bishop turned about, and before the people had recovered from their surprise he was gone. At the next moment everybody got up without a word and left the church. In two minutes more not a soul remained except Hommy-beg and Mr Jemmy Quirk, who, with eyes riveted on the printed carol in their hands, still sang lustily, oblivious of the fact that they had no audience.

When Danny left the church that night it was through the lancet window of the vestry. Dropping on the turf at the north-east of the church, he leapt the wall that divided the churchyard from the meadow on the north, and struck upon a path that went round to Bishop’s Court by way of the cliff head. The path was a long one, but

it was lonesome, and its lonesomeness was no small merit in Danny’s view that night. The Bishop must [155] return to the Court by the highway through the village, and the Bishop must be in front of him.

The night was dark and dumb, and, laden with salt scent, the dank vapour floated up from the sea. Danny walked quickly. The deep boom of the waters rolling on the sand below came up to him through the dense air. Late as was the hour, he could hear the little sand-piper screaming at Orris Head. The sea-swallow shot over him too, with its low mournful cry. Save for these sounds, and the quick beat of his own feet, all was still around him.

Beneath his stubborn bit of scepticism Danny was superstitious. He was full to the throat of fairy lore and stories of witchcraft. He had learned both from old Billy Quilleash and his mates as they sat barking their nets on the shore. And that night the ghostly memories would arise, do what he might to [156] keep them down. To banish them Danny began to whistle, and, failing to enliven himself much by that exercise, he began to sing. His selection of a song was not the happiest under the circumstances. It was the doleful ballad of “Myle Charaine.” Danny sang it in Manx, but here is a stave of it in English—

Oh, Myle Charaine, where got you your gold?

Lone, lone, you have left me here;

Oh, not in the Curragh, deep under the mould—

Lone, lone, and void of cheer.

**Source:** Hall Caine. *The Deemster: A Romance*. Vol. i. 3 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1887. From Chapter vii, “Danny, the Madcap,” 135–64. [Extract]

1891

MANX LANGUAGE

[107] [...] Manx is a dialect mainly Celtic, and differing only slightly from the ancient Scottish Gaelic. I have heard my father say that when he was a boy in Ramsey, sixty years ago, a Scotch ship came ashore on the Carrick, and next morning after the wreck a long, lank, bony creature, with bare legs, and in short petticoats, came into the market-place and played a tune on a little shrieking pair of smithy bellows, and then sang a song. It was a [108] Highland piper, and he sang in his Gaelic, but the Manx boys and girls who gathered round him understood almost every word of his song, though they thought his pronunciation bad. Perhaps they took him for a poor old Manxman, somehow strayed and lost, a sort of Manx Rip Van Winkle who had slept a century in Scotland, and thereby lost part of his clothes.

\*

MANX BALLADS

[115] Next to the proverbs of a race its songs are the best expression of its spirit, and though Manx songs are few, some of them are full of Manx character. Always their best part is the air. A man called Barrow compiled the Manx tunes about the beginning of the century, but his book is scarce. In [116] my ignorance of musical science I can only tell you how the little that is left of Manx music lives in the ear of a man who does not know one note from another. Much of it is like a wail of the wind in a lonely place near to the sea, sometimes like the southing of the long grass, sometimes like the rain whipping the panes of a window as with rods. Nearly always long-drawn like a moan rarely various, never martial, never inspiring, often sad and plaintive, as of a people kept under, but loving liberty, poor and low down, but with souls alive, looking for something, and hoping on,—full of the brine, the salt foam, the sad story of the sea. Nothing would give you a more vivid sense of the Manx people than some of our old airs. They would seem to take you into a little white-washed cottage, with sooty rafters and earthen floor, where an old man who looks half like a sailor and half like a landsman is dozing before a peat fire that is slumbering out. Have I in my musical benightedness conveyed an idea of anything musical? If not, let me, by the only vehicle natural to me, give you the rough-shod words of one or two of our old ballads. There is a ballad, much in favour, called “Ny Kirree fo Niaghty,” “The [117] Sheep under the Snow.” Another, yet better known, is called “Myle Charaine.” This has sometimes been called the Manx National Air, but that is a fiction. The song has nothing to do with the Manx as a nation. Perhaps it is merely a story of a miser and his daughter’s dowry. Or perhaps it tells of pillage, probably of wrecking, basely done, and of how the people cut the guilty one off from all intercourse with them.

O, Myle Charaine, where got you your gold?

Lone, lone, you have left me here.

O, not in the curragh, deep under the mould,

Lone, lone, and void of cheer.

This sounds poor enough, but it would be hard to say how deeply this ballad, wedded to its wailing music, touches and moves a Manxman. Even to my ear as I have heard it in Manx, it has seemed to be one of the weirdest things in old ballad literature, only to be matched by some of the old Irish songs, and by the gruesome ditty which tells how “The sun shines fair on Carlisle wa’.”

\*

MANX CAROLS

[118] The paraphrase I have given you was done by George Borrow, who once visited the island. My friend the Rev. T.E. Brown met him and showed him several collections of Manx carols, and he pronounced them all translations from the



English, not excepting our famous “Drogh Vraane,” or carol of very bad woman whose story is told in the Bible, beginning with the story of mother Eve herself. And, indeed, you will not be surprised that to the shores of our little island have drifted all kinds of miscellaneous rubbish, and that the Manxmen, from their very simplicity and ignorance of other literatures, have had no means of sifting the flotsam and assigning value to the constituents. Besides this, they are so irresponsible, have no literary conscience, and accordingly have appropriated anything and everything. This is true of some Manx ballads, and perhaps also of many Manx carols. The carols, called Carvals in Manx, serve in Man, as in other countries, the purpose of celebrating the birth of Jesus, but we have one ancient custom attached to them which we can certainly [119] claim for our own, so Manx is it, so quaint, so grimly serious, and withal so howlingly ludicrous. It is called the service of Oiel Verree, probably a corruption of “Feaill Vorrey,” literally the Feast of Mary, and it is held in the parish church near to midnight on Christmas Eve. Scott describes it in *Peveiril of the Peak*, but without personal knowledge.

Services are still held in many churches on Christmas Eve; and I think they are called Oeil Verree, but the true Oiel Verree, the real, pure, savage, ridiculous, sacrilegious old Oiel Verree, is gone. I myself just came in time for it; I saw the last of it, nevertheless I saw it at its prime, for I saw it when it was so strong that it could not live any longer. Let me tell you what it was.

The story carries me back to early boyish years, when, from the lonely school-house on the bleak top of Maughold Head, I was taken in secret, one Christmas Eve, between nine and ten o'clock, to the old church of Kirk Maughold, a parish which longer than any other upheld the rougher traditions. My companion was what is called an original. His name was Billy Corkill. We were great chums. I would be thirteen, he was about sixty. Billy [120] lived alone in a little cottage on the highroad, and worked in the fields. He had only one coat all the years I knew him. It seemed to have been blue to begin with, but when it had got torn Billy had patched it with anything that was handy, from green cloth to red flannel. He called it his Joseph's coat of many colours. Billy was a poet and a musical composer. He could not read a word, but he would rather have died than confess his ignorance. He kept books and newspapers always about him, and when he read out of them, he usually held them upside down. If any one remarked on that, he said he could read them any way up—that was where his scholarship came in. Billy was a great carol singer. He did not know a note, but he never sang except from music. His tunes were wild harmonies that no human ear ever heard before. It will be clear to you that old Billy was a man of genius.

Such was my comrade on that Christmas Eve long ago. It had been a bitter winter in the Isle of Man, and the ground was covered with snow. But the church bells rang merrily over the dark moorland, for Oiel Verree was peculiarly the people's service, and the ringers were ringing in the [121] one service of the year at which the

parishioners supplanted the Vicar, and appropriated the old parish church. In spite of the weather, the church was crowded with a motley throng, chiefly of young folks, the young men being in the nave, and the girls (if I remember rightly) in the little loft at the west end. Most of the men carried tallow dips, tied about with bits of ribbon in the shape of rosettes, duly lighted, and guttering grease at intervals on to the book-ledge or the tawny fingers of them that held them. It appeared that there had been an ordinary service before we arrived, and the Vicar was still within the rails of the communion. From there he addressed some parting words of solemn warning to the noisy throng of candle-carriers. As nearly as I can remember, the address was this: “My good people, you are about to celebrate an old custom. For my part, I have no sympathy with such customs, but since the hearts of my parishioners seem to be set on this one, I have no wish to suppress it. But tumultuous and disgraceful scenes have occurred on similar occasions in previous years, and I beg you to remember that you are in God's house,” &c. &c. The grave injunction was listened to in silence, [122] and when it ended, the Vicar, a worthy but not very popular man, walked towards the vestry. To do so, he passed the pew where I sat under the left arm of my companion, and he stopped before him, for Billy had long been a notorious transgressor at Oiel Verree.

“See that you do not disgrace my church tonight,” said the Vicar. But Billy had a biting tongue.

“Aw, well,” said he, “I'm thinking the church is the people's.”

“The people are as ignorant as goats,” said the Vicar.

“Aw, then,” said Billy, “you are the shepherd, so just make sheeps of them.”

At that the Vicar gave us the light of his countenance no more. The last glimpse of his robe going through the vestry door was the signal for a buzz of low gossip, and straightway the business of Oiel Verree began.

It must have been now approaching eleven o'clock, and two old greybeards with tousled heads placed themselves abreast at the door of the west porch. There they struck up a carol in a somewhat lofty key. It was a most doleful ditty. Certainly I have never since heard the like of it. I remember that it told the story of the Crucifixion in [123] startling language, full of realism that must have been horribly ghastly, if it had not been so comic. At the end of each verse the singers made one stride towards the communion. There were some thirty verses, and every mortal verse did these zealous carollers give us. They came to an end at length, and then another old fellow rose in his pew and sang a ditty in Manx. It told of the loss of the herring-fleet in Douglas Bay in the last century. After that there was yet another and another carol—some that might be called sacred, others that would not be badly wronged with the name of profane. As I recall them now, they were full of a burning earnestness, and pictured the dangers of the sinner and the punishment of the damned. They said nothing about the joys of heaven, or the pleasures of life. Wherever these old songs came from they must have dated from some period of

religious revival. The Manxman may have appropriated them, but if he did so he was in a deadly earnest mood. It must have been like stealing a hat-band.

My comrade had been silent all this time, but in response to various winks, nods, and nudges, he rose to his feet. Now, in prospect of Oiel Verree I had written the old man a brand new carol. It [124] was a mighty achievement in the sentimental vein. I can remember only one of its couplets

Hold your souls in still communion,

Blend them in a holy union.

I am not very sure what this may mean, and Billy must have been in the same uncertainty. Shall I ever forget what happened? Billy standing in the pew with my paper in his hand the wrong way up. Myself by his side holding a candle to him. Then he began to sing. It was an awful tune—I think he called it sevens—but he made common-sense of my doggerel by one alarming emendation. When he came to the couplet I have given you, what do you think he sang

Hold your souls in still communion,

Blend them in — a hollow onion!

Billy must have been a humorist. He is long dead, poor old Billy. God rest him!

\*

MANX SUPERSTITIONS

[136] [...] “Ballamona’s Mheillia’s took!” That night the farmer gives a feast in his barn to celebrate the getting in of his harvest, and the close of the work of the women at the harvesting. Sheep’s heads for a change on Manx herrings, English ale for a change on Manx jough; then dancing led by the mistress, to the tune of a fiddle, played faster and wilder as the night advances, reel and jig, jig and reel. This pretty rural festival is still observed, though it has lost much of its quaintness. I think I can just remember [137] to have heard the shouts of the Mheillia from the breasts of the mountains.

\*

MANX “CHARACTERS”

[143] It is an amusing fact that in some wild way the bardic spirit breaks out in all of them. They are all singers, either of their own songs, or the songs of others. That surely is the Celtic strain in them. But their songs are never of the joys of earth or of love, or yet of war; never, like the rustic poetry of the Scotch, full of pawky humour; never cynical, never sarcastic; only concerned with the terrors of judgment and damnation and the place of torment. That, also, may be a fierce and dark development of the Celtic strain, but I see more of the Norse spirit in it. When my ancient bard in Glen Rushen took down his thumb-marked, greasy, discoloured poems from the “lath” against the open-timbered ceiling, and read them aloud to me in his broad Manx dialect, with a sing-song of voice and a swinging motion of body,

while the loud hailstorm pelted the [144] window pane and the wind whistled round the house, I found they were all startling and almost ghastly appeals to the sinner to shun his evil courses. One of them ran like this

HELL IS HOT

O sinner, see your dangerous state,

And think of hell ere ’tis too late;

When worldly cares would drown each thought,

Pray call to mind that hell is hot.

Still to increase your godly fears,

Let this be sounding in your ears,

Still bear in mind that hell is hot,

Remember and forget it not.

There was another poem about a congregation of the dead in the region of the damned:

I found a reverend parson there,

A congregation too,

Bowed on their beaded knees at prayer,

As they were wont to do.

But soon my heart was struck with pain,

I thought it truly odd,

The parson’s prayer did not contain

A word concerning God.

\*

[145] [...] There is not much satire in the Manx character, and next to no cynicism at all. The true Manxman is white-hot. I have heard of one, John Gale, called the Manx Burns, who lampooned the upstarts about him, and also of one, Tom the Dipper, an itinerant Manx bard, who sang at fairs; but in a general way the Manx bard has been a deadly earnest person, most at home in churchyards.

**Source:** Hall Caine. *The Little Manx Nation*. London: Heinemann. 1891. (Three lectures delivered at the Royal Institution on 22 & 29 January, 5 February 1891). Taken from “The Story of the Manx People,” 106–59.

1891?

I had A long talk in the summer with A Catholic Priest and he could read my manx writing very well and pronounce every word and understand it well enough he told me he had been in the Island 6 years ago and had published some manx songs that he had learned from Tom Kermode in Bradda. blind Tom. but I neve come across any of them.

**Source:** Letter from Edward Faragher to Karl Roeder, 25 December but no year [1891?]. Manx National Heritage Library, MS 2146/6 A. **Note:** This must be Father Richard Henebry who visited in 1883 with John Strachan.

1892

FIDDLERS

There used to be a great many fiddlers on the Island, four used to come on the floor, two men and two women, and they danced an X. [323]

\*

FAIRY MUSIC

As the husband and an ould man, coming home over the mountains, passed a ruined cottage, which serves now for a cow-stable, they heard music, and such carryings-on. Well, they could not fancy who it was, the windows of the cottage being stuffed with sods. So the auld man goes and puts one of his eyes to the keyhole, and see the fairies dancing and fiddling away, an' one of the fairies put his fiddle-stick right through his eye, an' he has never seen since, an' that's true. [324]

**Source:** Charles Roeder. “Manx Folk-Lore, 1882 to 1885.” *Yn Lioar Manninagh* i.xi (1892): 323–28.

1894

THE MELLIAH

[...] The same night the Melliah supper was held in the big barn. There was plenty to eat, but no strong drink (for “himself” was a teetotaler); there was singing, but no dancing (he was a local preacher, and high up on the Plan-beg). [29]

**Source:** Hall Caine. *The Little Man Island*. Douglas: Isle of Man Steam Packet Co. Ltd, 1894. 29. [Recollection of Caine’s childhood]

1896

[54] In the summer of 1883 I spent a few days at Port Erin in the Isle of Man along with Father Henebry, from County Waterford, Ireland, who speaks Irish as his native tongue. During that time we went about among the surrounding villages to see if we could discover any of the old folksongs or folktales of Man. For the most part our search was unsuccessful. The people have ceased to care for these things, and so they have fallen into oblivion. But as a compensation for many disappointments we were lucky enough to obtain the following sweet little song [“Ec ny Fiddleryn” (“At the Fiddlers”)] from a genuine Manxman, Thomas Kermode of Bradda, near Port Erin, who, though he lost his eyesight in his boyhood, pursued until about three years ago the calling of fisherman. He recited the song to us, and explained it, and we took it down as well as we could. In September of the present year I again visited Man, and I had the song recited to me again. Unfortunately Mr Kermode was ill during part of my visit, and I was unable to see as much of him as I could have wished. Above anyone whom I met he is interested in and acquainted with the old lore of Man, though he told me that he had not heard a Manx song sung for the last forty years.

**Source:** John Strachan. “A Manx Folksong.” *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* i (1897): 54–58. **Note:** Despite the date on the title page, this issue of the *ZcP* appeared in 1896.

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