

STEPHEN MILLER

THE QUAAALTAGH

THE LATER  
NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS  
(1901–61)

Give the Qualtagh Tea!

When the old Manx custom of welcoming the dark-haired “qualtagh,” or “first foot,” is observed on New Year’s Day, he should be given “a nice cup of tea” instead of the usual glass of wine or spirits.

(1938)

CHIOLLAGH BOOKS

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## THE QUAALTAGH



QUAALTAGH or QUALTAGH, *s. m.* one who meets; *pl.* 71. *Pro.* xvii. 12. *Hos.* xiii. 8. 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 bleïn feer vie,  
Seihll as slaynt da'n slane lught thie;  
Bea as gennallys eu bio ry-cheilley,  
Shee as graih eddyr mraane as deiney;  
Cooïd as cowryn, stock as stoyr.  
Palchey phuddase, as skaddan dy-liooar;  
Arran as caashey, eeym as roayrt;  
Baase, myr lugh, ayns uhllin ny soalt;  
Cadley sauchey tra vees shiu ny lhie,  
As feeackle y jargan, nagh bee dy mie.”

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

Entry for headword “Quaaltagh or Qualtagh,” in Archibald Cregeen, *A Dictionary of the Manks Language* (Douglas & London & Liverpool, 1835 [but 1837]), 132b.

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1901

[N1901/I] The match in the afternoon with Douglas was not much of an affair, and evidently some of the players had not entirely recovered from the effects of the previous night's “qualtagh.”

Pseud [signed “Touchline”]. “Football Notes.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 5 January 1901: 6a–b. See, “Derby *v.* Douglas,” 6a.

1902

[N1902/I] The remarkable enterprise of the directors of the Isle of Man Banking Company, Limited in regard to the provision of new head offices, was consummated on Monday, when the doors of the magnificent building were opened to the public. Punctually, at 10 o'clock the outer gate was unhinged, the door stood open, and Mr Maitland (the Chairman of the Board of Directors) smilingly received the waiting customers, who had assembled outside. It had been arranged that his Worship the

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High-Bailiff (who was one of the founders of the Bank in 1865, and a director from that time onwards for many years) should be the first customer to enter the Bank and transact business.

“The New Bank Building: The High Bailiff as ‘Queltagh’.” *Isle of Man Times* 14 June 1902: 6e.

### 1906

[N1906/1] Bad weather did not prevent the usual custom of the “Quaaltagh.” The nature of the beverage principally used this year did not seem to be of the fighting sort, and in few cases was the footpath too narrow.

“Watch-night services ....” *Isle of Man Examiner* 6 January 1906: 7b.

### 1910

[N1910/1] [8c] The pleasant old custom of the Queltagh (or “first foot”) seems to be somewhat falling into abeyance. It seems a pity that one by one these old-time observances should fall into decrepitude and contempt. Of course “the Queltagh” was an institution designed for those people who happen to have a dark complexion. It was they only who could be certain to bring good luck over the threshold on New Year’s morning; fair people, it seems, were not so auspicious, though we have heard of fair people officiating as harbingers of the new year, and that year being an exceptionally fortunate one. Still, those cases must have been accidental or exceptional; if you want real good luck, your Queltagh should be as dark as Othello, if that be possible.

“The New Year.” *Mona’s Herald* 5 January 1910: 8c–d.

[N1910/2] In the parish of Rushen the New Year was ushered in in quiet fashion, though the “qualtagh” was as much in evidence as ever.

“[Rushen] The New Year.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 8 January 1910: 5b.

[N1910/3] Thereafter, throughout the “small hours,” dark men were much in demand to serve as “qualtaghs.”

“The New Year.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 8 January 1910: 7d.

[N1901/4] The Qualtagh, or first foot, will be in evidence, for there seems to be little or no diminution in this time-honoured custom.

“[Xmas & New Year Events] New Year’s Day.” *Ramsey Courier* 23 December 1910: 8c.

[N1901/5] The Qualtagh, or first foot, will be in evidence, for there seems to be little or no diminution in this time-honoured custom.

“[New Year Events] New Year’s Day.” *Ramsey Courier* 23 December 1910: 2e.

1911

[N1911/1] After the customary effervescence which usually appertains to and is associated with New Year’s Eve, such as itinerant singers and the inevitable Qualtagh, not forgetting the Watch-night services, which are held in most places of worship, Anglican and Nonconformist, the old year will be rung out, and the New Year rung in.

“[Christmas Arrangements and Festivities] New Year’s Day.” *Ramsey Courier* 22 December 1911: [5]b.

[N1911/2] After the customary effervescence which usually appertains to and is associated with New Year’s Eve, such as itinerant singers and the inevitable Qualtagh, not forgetting the Watch-night services, which are held in most places of worship, Anglican and Nonconformist, the old year will be rung out, and the New Year rung in.

“[Christmas Arrangements and Festivities] New Year’s Day.” *Ramsey Courier* 27 December 1911: [3]f.

[N1911/3] After the customary effervescence which usually appertains to and is associated with New Year’s Eve, such as itinerant singers and the inevitable Qualtagh, not forgetting the Watch-night services, which are held in most places of worship, Anglican and Nonconformist, the old year will be rung out, and the New Year rung in.

“[Christmas Arrangements and Festivities] New Year’s Day.” *Ramsey Courier* 29 December 1911: [4]f.

1913

[N1913/1] The custom of having in the “quaaltagh” was observed in true Manx style in numerous instances.

“The New Year.” *Peel City Guardian* 4 January 1913: 8e.

1915

[N1915/1] Sorry I can’t be your “qualtagh” this year.

“Letter from the Front.” *Peel City Guardian* 2 January 1915: 6b.

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[N1915/2] The close of the services coincided with a break in the weather, and rain fell in torrents, entirely forbidding choir singing, but, perhaps, encouraging an increase in the old “quaaltagh” custom, friends being anxious to meet friends.

“Neither the weather ....” *Peel City Guardian* 9 January 1915: 4e.

### 1916

[N1916/1] There were not so many choirs about the streets as is usual, while the “Quaaltagh” custom was more honoured in the breach than the observance. The inclement conditions of weather deterred both choristers and quaaltaghs from making their usual peregrinations, and many people who sat up to see the New Year in missed the melody and the good wishes which are in ordinary times so abundant during the wee sma’ hours of New Year’s morn.

“The New Year.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 8 January 1916: 2h.

### 1917

[N1917/1] The old Manx custom of “the quaaltagh” was celebrated as enthusiastically as in other years.

“New Year.” *Peel City Guardian* 6 January 1917: [4]e.

### 1921

[N1921/1] Before the High-Bailiff of Castletown on Wednesday, William Whitham, licensee of the Eagle Hotel, Port Erin, was charged with permitting persons to be on his premises after legal hours; and Edward Collins, John Edward Crebbin, William Moore, and John Philip Nelson were charged with being on the premises on the same occasion. All the defendants admitted, but Mr Lay appeared on behalf of Mr Whitham, to plead extenuation.

P.C. Alfred Corris said that on December 31st, at 10-25 pm, he visited the hotel, and found the five defendants, together with George Duggan, who is now off the Island, in a private room of the hotel. They had intoxicating drink before them. Witness spoke to them and to the licensee, and afterwards he remained outside the hotel. About a quarter of an hour later, two of them came out, but witness did not see the others leaving at all.

Mr Lay pointed out that this occurrence took place on New Year’s Eve, when everyone was happy, and jolly, and nice, and glad to see the end of 1920. In the kitchen on that evening there were sausage-rolls and mince-pies, which the landlord had kept nice and warm for his customers, and just before closing time he invited them into a private room to partake of these refreshments. It was not intended to be a defiance of the law that they stayed a little while after the constable had spoken to them. It might have been foolish of the licensee, but he thought it was an old Manx custom that you entertained your “quaaltaghs” on New Year’s Eve.

The licensee was fined £3 10s—(the penalty for the last offence of the kind was £5); and the other defendants were each fined £1.

“Qualtaghs’ in a Public-House.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 15 January 1921: 6e.

1922

[N1922/1] Several choirs turned out to serenade the inhabitants of the city, while the custom of entertaining the “quaaltagh” was observed.

“The New Year.” *Peel City Guardian* 7 January 1922: 3d.

[N1922/2] Should you require wine and spirits, or beer and stout, the firm of Heron and Brearley, Ltd., can be relied upon to supply your needs in the best manner possible. Castletown ales and Clinch’s beers are all brewed from pure hops and barley, and as beverages in this line are unsurpassed. It will never do to let the “qualtagh” in in a shabby manner; goodness knows what may befall us if we do that, so let’s take no undue risks. The very best in mineral waters can be obtained from Qualtrough and Co’s, Downward and Co., and R.H. Kelly will supply you with what you require.

“[Round the Shops] Wine and Spirit Dealers.” *Mona’s Herald* 20 December 1922: 5b.

[N1922/3] [5a] A gentleman interested in Manx [5b] customs told me that in the old days, and in some places even now, it is customary for the mother, when taking her child to be christened to carry a biscuit in her pocket, and give it to her “Qualtagh.”

Pseud [signed “A Looker-On”]. “[Talk of the Town] Who is going ....” *Ramsey Courier* 29 December 1922: 5a–b.

1923

[N1923/1] Should you require wine and spirits, or beer and stout, the firm of Heron and Brearley, Ltd., can be relied upon to supply your needs in the best manner possible. Castletown ales and Clinch’s beers are all brewed from pure hops and barley, and as beverages in this line are unsurpassed. It will never do to let the “qualtagh” in in a shabby manner; goodness knows what may befall us if we do that, so let’s take no undue risks. The very best in mineral waters can be obtained from Qualtrough and Co’s, Downward and Co., and E.H. Kelly’s.

“[Round the Shops] Wine and Spirit Dealers.” *Mona’s Herald* 19 December 1923: 8b.

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1924

[N1924/I] The “Qualtagh” was busy this year, friends and foes crossed over each others doorstep and exchanged greetings for ihe New Year with the usual “dope.”

“The ‘Qualtagh’ was ....” *Ramsey Chronicle* 4 January 1924: 4b.

1925

[N1925/I] At the Douglas Police Court on Thursday, Frank Radcliffe, driver of a milk float for the Alderney Dairy, was charged with leaving his horse and float unattended in Strand Street on New Year’s Day.

Mr E.W. Faragher appeared for the defendant. From the evidence it appeared that Radcliffe was delivering milk as usual at Mrs Borrowes, who keeps a butcher shop at the bottom of Drumgold Street. Mrs Burrows lives over the shop, and it had been the custom for the defendant to go up the stairs to the kitchen to deliver tbe milk. While doing so on New Years Day the from door hanged to with the wind.

[...]

The High-Bailiff suggested that it being New Year’s Day, perhaps the driver stopped longer than usual, partaking of some hospitality. [...]

“Was he the Qualtagh? What happened to the milk boy on New Year’s Day?” *Mona’s Herald* 14 January 1925: 3e.

[N1925/2] Should you require wine and spirits, or beer and stout, the firm of Heron and Brearley, Ltd., can be relied upon to supply your needs in the best manner possible. Castletown ales and Clinch’s beers are all brewed from pure hops and barley, and as beverages in this line are unsurpassed. It will never do to let the “qualtagh” in in a shabby manner; goodness knows what may befall us if we do that, so let’s take no undue risks. The very best in mineral waters can be obtained from Qualtrough and Co’s, Downward and Co., and E.H. Kelly’s.

“[Round the Shops] Wine and Spirit Dealers.” *Mona’s Herald* 16 December 1925: 6f.

1926

[N1926/I] Some practical joker or maliciously-minded person broke the iron gate leading to “Studley House,” Queen’s Promenade, occupied by Mr G.H. Wilkes, on New Year’s morning. Mr Wilkes left his house at 11 pm to attend the watchnight service, and found that this unwelcome sort of “quaaltagh” had visited the place during his absence. Mr Wilkes is well-known in religious work, and is one of the two Labour members of the Douglas Board of Guardians.

“Some practical joker ....” *Isle of Man Examiner* 8 January 1926: 3f.

1927

[N1927/1] [5a] The ancient custom of the “quaaltagh” was observed very generally and in the usual spirit.

“The New Year.” *Peel City Guardian* 8 January 1927: 5a–b.

1929

[N1929/1] Following the services several choirs went round carol singing and the custom of “quaaltagh,” was well observed, though the milkmen the following morning came in for the greater shares of the celebration.

“New Year.” *Peel City Guardian* 5 January 1929: 1c.

[N1929/2] The Douglas Corporation Electricity Department has entered the Christmas gift trade this year; and why not? What more suitable than a hair-curling set for a lady, or a not-steaming mirror that even a “qualtagh” breath cannot dim?

“[Round the Shops] The Douglas Corporation ....” *Mona’s Herald* 18 December 1929: 7c.

[N1929/3] If the Qualtragh prefers a tankard of home brewed beer, brewed from pure hops, malt and sugar—what (better than Castletown, Clinch’s or Okell’s ale?

“[Round the Shops] If the Qualtagh ....” *Mona’s Herald* 18 December 1929: 7c.

1930

[N1930/1] As usual the old custom of “quaaltagh” was celebrated generally.

“[Peel] The New Year ....” *Isle of Man Examiner* 3 January 1930: 11c.

[N1930/2] In England a publican may entertain his friends after closing hours on licensed premises but Manx publicans cannot. This fact Mrs Lily Robinson, licensee of the Old Market Inn, along with several others, found out, in a case which lasted over three and a half hours in the weekly Police Court at Douglas, on Friday, before High-Bailiff Lay. The other defendants were Charles Convery, Douglas Henshaw, Miles Postlethwaite, Theresa Bradley, Doris Marlow and John Hilton.

The Police evidence showed that Sergeant Kermode, accompanied by P.C. J. Lace visited the Old Market Inn about 3-40 on the morning of New Year’s Day. In the sitting room there was the licensee four men and two girls. The licensee said they were friends and were staying all night. There was intoxicating liquor on the table; the licensee said it had not been paid for and asked the Sergeant to overlook the offence. A register was shown to the police, but the names of Convery and Hilton were not on it. There was stout in glasses in front of Convery, Postlethwaite,



Renshaw and Hilton. in different parts of the room. The two girls, Bradley and Marlow, were sitting on a couch near a table, on which were two glasses, and the girl Marlow said it was her wine in the glass; the other girl's glass was empty and she said nothing.

Mr Cowell said it would shorten matters if he said that Postlethwaite and Renshaw did not deny taking liquor, but the girls did.

The licensee said that she was a widow, and on New Year's Day she invited the two Miss Marlows to a small party, and her brother, over on a holiday, asked if he could invite a few friends. She agreed, on condition they would stay the night. Renshaw was the "Qualtagh," and when he arrived she brought him up to the sitting room, where the table was laid with sandwiches, mince pies and Xmas cake. Miss Marlow arrived shortly after and asked could Miss Bradley come, and she agreed to that. Postlethwaite arrived within a few minutes and signed the book and went upstairs. Convery arrived twenty minutes before the police, and Hilton just before. The last named was not invited, but Convery was. He failed to sign the visitors' book. Neither Convery or Hilton had a drink. The two girls had lemonade and the men had stout, and the barmaid (Miss Evans), and the licensee had port wine. There were eight bedrooms in the house ready for occupation. None of the party brought night clothes. Mrs Robinson could not understand how two strange names could get in the visitors' book among the signatures of the people at the New Year's party. The defendants Convery, Marlow, and Bradley denied having intoxicating liquor at the hotel. Renshaw and Postlethwaite admitted having "baby" Guinness. Hilton was off the Island and was not summoned.

The High-Bailiff said that the case would have been dealt by him in a lenient manner, it being New Year's Day on which the offence occurred, only the defendants aggravated the offence by bringing forward evidence in the form of the bogus visitors' book, which he considered a mere sham. One redeeming feature of the case was the fact that there was no evidence to show that anyone was intoxicated. He found Mrs Robinson guilty and fined her £3, and Renshaw, Postlethwaite and Convery £1 each. Hilton was fined 10s. The case against the two girls was dismissed.

"New Year Celebrants in Trouble." *Isle of Man Examiner* 10 January 1930: 1c.

[N1930/3] [*Same report of the case as above*]

Renshaw was the "Qualtagh," and when he arrived she brought him up to the sitting room, where the table was laid with sandwiches, mince pies and Xmas cake.

"Drinking after Hours." *Mona's Herald* 15 January 1930: 2f.

1931

[N1931/1] The custom of “qualtagh” was observe[d] fairly extensively though a large number were without a “qualtagh” until the arrival of the milkman on New Year’s Day.

“The New Year.” *Peel City Guardian* 10 January 1931: 6c.

1932

[N1932/1] After midnight the old Manx custom of “qualtagh” was observed.

“The New Year.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 8 January 1932: 11c.

1933

[N1933/1] The New Year came in quietly in Ramsey, the customary quaaltagh or “first foot” ceremony being generally observed, and Watch Night services were held at several places of worship in the town.

“[Ramsey] The New Year ....” *Isle of Man Examiner* 6 January 1933: 12d.

[N1933/2] The New Year was ushered in on Sunday morning with the sounding of ships’ syrens, and the old Manx “qualtagh” custom of letting in the New Year was faithfully observed in most households, dark-haired men being in demand for this purpose.

“New Year’s Wild entry.” *Ramsey Courier* 6 January 1933: 2d.

[N1933/3] The “qualtagh” at Douglas police station was a reveller who was taken in to custody for his own safety when the New Year was but five minutes old

“The ‘qualtagh’ at ....” *Ramsey Courier* 6 January 1933: 4c.

[N1933/4] The old custom of quaaltagh was observed with all the seriousness of the old tradition and dark males were in demand, females being debarred whatever their qualifications as to colour.

“The New Year.” *Peel City Guardian* 7 January 1933: 2e.

1935

[N1935/1] The New Year was welcomed quietly in the north of the Island, and the old “qualtagh” or first-foot custom was observed in many homes.

“[Ramsey] The New Year ....” *Ramsey Courier* 4 January 1935: 10d.

[N1935/2] The ancient custom of entertaining the “qualtagh” or “first foot” was carried out with the usual ceremony and following tradition dark males were in

preference. This custom still holds an important place in the ushering in of the New Year and a considerable number of Manx people will not retire until the qualtagh has been honoured.

“The New Year.” *Peel City Guardian* 5 January 1935: 3c.

[NI935/3] Mr Arthur B. Kelly, the Secretary of the [North American Manx] Association, and Mrs Kelly, include in their message the following version of the Qualtagh’s greeting:

Again we assemble, a happy New Year  
 To wish each one of the family here;  
 Whether man or 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 as the Qualtagh again we appear,  
 To wish you as now a happy New Year!

In our last issue we gave other versions of the old Manx greeting, a form of which evidently survives across the Atlantic.

“Hands Across the Sea.” *Mona’s Herald* 8 January 1935: 5e.

### 1936

[NI936/1] There was the usual “qualtagh” observance in connection with which men with dark hair and a reputation of being lucky were in great demand.

“How the New Year came in.” *Ramsey Courier* 3 January 1936: 4c.

[NI936/2] There was the usual “qualtagh” observance.

“[News from the North] The New Year in Ramsey.” *Isle of Man Times* 4 January 1936: 6c.

[NI936/2] The story of the quaaltagh at the Douglas Police Station was told in the Douglas Magistrates’ Court on Saturday by Constable A.L. Corteen. Quarter of an hour before the arrival of the New Year he was in James’ Street, where he found Alfred Edward Carman drunk and disorderly, he said. Carman had his coat off and his shirt sleeves rolled up, and he was calling out. “I’m going to settle this yet.” A woman asked him to go home quietly, but he replied “I will — well do what I like in the street.” “I told him that that was what he could not do,” the constable added, “and as he still refused to go home quietly I took him to the police station.” He was bailed out. at 7-15 on New Year’s morning.

The Chairman said having regard to the fact that it was New Year's Eve they would impose a fine of only 7s. 6d. Another reveller, Geo. D. Taggart, who was found drunk on the New Road, Laxey, on New Year's Day, was fined 2s. 6d.

“Policeman's Quaalagh.” *Mona's Herald* 7 January 1936: 3g.

1937

[N1947/1] He thought he could take a share in Mr Evans' victory because for a great number of years he was the “quaalagh” at New Year, but last year by some mischance of circumstances there was some other “first foot,” and he was not so successful in that election as he had been that day. (Laughter).

“Mr T.J. Ruebens out by 14 votes.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 19 November 1937: 14d.

[N1947/2] Mr Reubens philosophically declared that “if you never fight you will never be defeated.” He congratulated Mr Evans and Mr Callow on their election and jocularly remarked that he could claim to have had some part in Mr Evans success. On several occasions he had been his New Year quaalagh, but not last year. This year, however, Mr Evans knowing the election was in prospect had invited him to be “first foot” and they saw the result.

“Town Board Election Contest.” *Ramsey Courier* 19 November 1937: 5a.

[N1947/3] New Year's Day was once called in Manx “Laa Nolllick beg”—“Little Christmas Day,” and we all know that most popular Manx custom of welcoming the “quaalagh” or first visitor of the New Year. The “first foot” should preferably be a man of dark complexion to bring good luck to the house—a fair person, particularly a woman—was considered unlucky.

Nowadays we welcome the “quaalagh”—man or woman, dark or fair—with equally joyous hospitality, confident that only the best of luck is wished us by friend and fellow countryman. And so, in the words of that old, well-known and typically Manx greeting, let us extend to every Manx man and woman, wherever they may be, the best wishes we know how to convey:

A merry Christmas, and a very good year to you;  
Luck and health to the whole household,  
Life, pleasantness and sprightliness to you together,  
Peace and love between men and women;  
Goods and riches, stock and store,  
Plenty of potatoes and herring enough;  
Bread and cheese, butter and beef.

“Christmas in years gone by.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 24 December 1937: 4a.

[NI937/4]

Blein Noa vaynrey erriu as dy jean  
yn qualtagh eu cur lesh aigh vie as  
slaynt da'n lught-thie eu.

A Happy New Year to you,  
May your qualtagh bring good luck  
and health to your household

“[New Year Salutation] Blein Noa vaynrey erriu as dy jean ....” *Mona's Herald* 28 December 1937: 4c.

1938

[NI938/1] With the arrival of 1938 the quaaltags will once more have been on their rounds, and the “first foot” over the threshold will have been accorded the traditional hospitality. Very, very few of them will be able to say anything in Manx except quaaltagh, and probably mispronounce that, but there were times when the quaaltagh sang:

[...]

If you look up “quaaltagh” in Cregeen’s Manx Dictionary, you will find there this rhyme, which has a savour of times of sturdy and independent Manxmen, taking their living from the land and the sea.

But these are not potatoes and herring days in Manxland, and nobody sings it any more.

“[At Random] With the arrival ....” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 1 January 1938: 8e.

[NI938/2] The New Year was ushered in in the good old-fashioned way in the south of the Island. Nobody under 80 was abed before 1 am, it appeared, and many younger folk were abroad well after that hour, going from house to house providing the traditional “qualtagh” and celebrating the occasion in right merry style.

“[Notes Southside News] [Rushen] [Notes of the Week] Midnight Revels ....” *Isle of Man Examiner* 7 January 1938: 10d.

[NI938/3] The New Year celebrations in Ramsey end the north took place last weekend, and the traditional custom of “first-footing” was widely observed. Dark men were in great demand to carry out their duties of good-will and good-luck, and perform the role of “Qualtagh.”

“[Notes Northside News] [Rushen] [Notes of the Week] New Year Celebrations ....” *Isle of Man Examiner* 7 January 1938: 12b.

[N1938/4] When the old Manx custom of welcoming the dark-haired “qualtagh,” or “first foot,” is observed on New Year’s Day, he should be given “a nice cup of tea” instead of the usual glass of wine or spirits.

This was the advice given to people who attended the Ramsey P.S.E. meeting on Saturday last.

The speaker was the Rev. J.K. Elliot, Methodist minister, who stated he had never accepted alcoholic liquor in the Christmas and New Year festivities.

“[Ramsey] Give the Qualtagh Tea!” *Isle of Man Examiner* 18 November 1938: 15c.

[N1938/5]

Blein Noa vaynrey erriu as dy jean  
yn qualtagh eu cur lesh aigh vie as  
slyant da’n lught-thie eu.

A Happy New Year to you,  
May your qualtagh bring good luck  
and health to your household.

“[New Year Salutation] Blein Noa vaynrey erriu as dy jean ....” *Mona’s Herald* 28 December 1938: 4e.

### 1939

[N1939/1] 1938, a year of unhappy memory. made a stormy exit, and the New Year was ushered in with wind and rain, and by an amazing flash of lightning which lit up the sky. The qualtaghs were undeterred, and were ready to perform their important duties of “first foot,” while the church bells and the steamer syrens were greeting the newcomer with customary gusto.

“[Notes of the Week] Stormy Night for Qualtaghs.” *Mona’s Herald* 3 January 1939: 4f.

[N1939/2] The New Year arrived in a downpour of rain over the Island, and when only two days old, brought a fall of snow. New Year’s Eve revels on Saturday night were, however, none the less gay, and in spite of the heavy rain, the “quaaltaghs” were on their rounds in good numbers—mostly in cars.

“Snow follows rain.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 6 January 1939: 9f.

[N1939/3] The downpour also put rather a damper on the ancient and jolly custom of “quaaltaghing” in Rushen.

The happy crowds which are usually observed making rounds from midnight until as late as 2 and 3 am in the district were absent, and in most of the houses the dark

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man who is to bring good luck to the household for the New Year did not make his appearance until Sunday morning.

“[Notes Southside News] [Rushen] [Notes of the Week] The downpour also ....” *Isle of Man Examiner* 6 January 1939: 10c.

[NI939/4] The weather conditions on New Year’s Eve resulted in few people being about, and people going the rounds of the “quaaltagh” had an unpleasant time.

“[Laxey] New Year Festivities.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 6 January 1939: 15b.

[NI939/5] While there was less singing and standing about the streets, the first-foot or “qualtagh” ceremony was traditionally observed in many homes, and dark-haired, handsome men could be seen hurrying about with their coats well buttoned up, on their errands of good luck—so it was hoped.

“1939 comes in.” *Ramsey Courier* 6 January 1939: 2a–b.

[NI939/6] Those who “saw the New Year in” at Douglas mostly did so from doorways, sheltering from a pitiless rain. [...] Soon the streets became deserted, save for a few valiant “quaaltaghs.”

“Downpour ushers in New Year: Valiant Quaaltaghs.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 1939: 14g.

## 1940

[NI940/1] But if the public demonstrations were subdued there was no diminution in the gaiety of the household celebrations when the “qualtaghs” stepped over the threshold to bring good luck and good wishes to their friends.

“No Bells to greet 1940.” *Mona’s Herald* 3 January 1940: 4e.

[NI940/2] The “qualtaghs” ushered in the New Year in the customary fashion in the Parish of Rushen.

Nowhere in the Island is this delightful old Manx custom more zealously kept. Everyone is familiar with it—if a dark man is first to enter the house in the New Year good luck is supposed to follow the household for the twelve months which follow. Let us earnestly hope that the qualtaghs this year will truly bring luck to every household and to the people as a community.

“[Rushen] [Notes of the Week] 1940?” *Isle of Man Examiner* 5 January 1940: 4c.

1941

[N1941/1] After the unofficial midnight, we had a reminder of the Quaaltagh custom, when all the dark young men deserted the ballroom, and left the blonde young men to it...

But the blonde young men didn't mind a bit...

Not with all those charming wallflowers about!

“On Guard for 1941's First Three Hours] The New Year.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 3 January 1941: 4f.

[N1941/2] The new year was ushered in in Peel with much the usual ceremonial despite blackout condition. There was of course a difference due to so many being away on active service with the result that there was not so much activity, but the old custom of quaaltagh was observed with the time honoured custom.

“The New Year.” *Peel City Guardian* 4 January 1941: 4c.

1942

[N1942/1] Quaaltaghs were in evidence as in former years, but they weren't so plentiful as usual, because dark men, who are supposed to be luckier than the fair species, have had to go into the Services just the same.

“New Year gets mixed reception.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 2 January 1942: 1f.

[N1942/2] [...] the “quaaltagh” came round, and people wished each other “all the best.”

“The year of ....” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 3 January 1942: 4a.

[N1942/3] The custom of quaaltagh was observed with all its characteristics, dark persons, especially male, being the favoured ones.

“The New Year.” *Peel City Guardian* 10 January 1942: 3c.

1943

[N1943/1] Blackout conditions had a some what subduing effect on the New Year festivities, which was, however ushered in with customary celebration and the honouring of “the quaaltagh” was again the main feature.

“New Year.” *Peel City Guardian* 9 January 1943: 4d.

[N1943/2] Their Christmas parcels proved a miniature Christmas dinner, and in the evening the Manxmen in the camp got together for a concert. Many of the items given were those which entertained the men when stationed in England, and brought



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back many happy memories. They ushered in the New Year with plenty of noise, and Bdr. D.H. Orton, who was their quaaltagh, was well received on his visits.

“[From the War Front] Second Christmas in Captivity.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 5 February 1943: 1g.

[NI943/3] The old custom of forming parties for the Quaaltagh at the New Year, like that of “Hunt the Wren,” has latterly been less in evidence, although superstition is still rife as to the luck attached to a dark complexioned person being the first to cross the threshold on New Year’s morning.

“[Melting Pot] The Quaaltagh.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 31 December 1943: 4f.

## 1944

[NI944/1] When the midnight hour struck, the “quaaltags” began their rounds. The “quaaltagh” is the first person calling by chance after the birth of the New Year, who crosses the threshold; but superstitious folk are not disposed to run the terrible risk of a short redhaired woman calling to borrow salt, and they take the precaution of arranging in advance for a tall dark, man to cross the threshold as soon as the witching hour has struck. With some of them it has been a standing engagement for years. In some cases, the “quaaltagh” is required to bring with him a piece of coal, which is ceremoniously deposited on the mantel-piece, where it remains until the following New Year’s Day, when it is replaced by a new piece, the twelvemonth old one being cast into the fire as a sort of symbolic scapegoat carrying with it any ill-luck that may have sneaked its way into the house in spite of the “quaaltagh.” In prerationing days, some “quaaltags” brought with them a bottle of beverage, a cake and a lump of coal, which were carefully preserved, the idea being that so long as these offerings remained under the roof-tree the household should never lack “something to drink, something to eat and a fire to warm them.”

“[Quiet Welcome for 1944] The Quaaltaghs.” *Mona’s Herald* 4 January 1944: 5a.

[NI944/2] On New Year’s Eve Battery-Sergt.-Major Baker acted as “quaaltagh” at the various huts. He got plenty of strong tea on his round.

“Manx Prisoners ‘Enjoy’ Xmas.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 4 March 1944: 5d.

## 1945

[NI945/1] Quaaltaghs were scarcer than ever this year, and elderly males whose lack of hair might have aroused superstitious suspicions in peacetime were tacitly accepted as

the first “dark” men to cross the family threshold after midnight. In other words, their bald pates got the benefit of the doubt!

“[New Year Flashes] Qualtaghs were scarcer ....” *Mona’s Herald* 3 January 1945: 5a.

[N1945/2] Following the midnight hour the custom of “The Qualtagh” was celebrated pretty generally, some favoured lucky ones being in demand at several places, but the milkmen, as usual, came in for a heavy share.

“New Year Celebrations.” *Peel City Guardian* 6 January 1945: 3c.

#### 1947

[N1947/1] The “Qualtagh” or first-foot ceremony was more or generally observed [...].

“How 1947 came in.” *Ramsey Courier* 3 January 1947: 4f.

[N1947/2] Many of the people saw the New Year in at their homes, and “quaaltagh” or first-footing ceremony was generally observed [...].

“[News from the Out-Towns] [North] the New Year ....” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 4 January 1947: 9c.

[N1947/3] The Quaaltagh is finished until next Hogmanay. He does not need the empty syphon now. Return it to your supplier to help out some sick person.

“[News from the Out-Towns] [North] The Quaaltagh is ....” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 1 March 1947: 7c.

#### 1948

[N1948/1] [...] there appeared to be the usual number of qualtaghs and calls at friends’ houses.

“The Toast in 1948.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 3 January 1948: 6d.

#### 1952

[N1952/1] As the church congregations and the dancers dispersed to their homes they were joined by those who were keeping up the old Manx custom of the quaaltagh and paying calls on their friends to bring them luck in 1952.

“Douglas greets the New Year.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 5 January 1952: 5e.

1953

[NI953/1] “A Happy New Year.” As people in the streets of Douglas greeted each other with the old wish, and the qualtaghs wished the residents in the houses health, happiness and prosperity in 1953, the New Year was ushered in quietly. One or two ships’ sirens were heard, and a peal of church bells. In Upper Douglas, where several qualtaghs were waiting together to let the New Year in at neighbouring houses, no sound of beils or sirens was heard at all, and one of the qualtaghs called inside to make sure of the time.

“1953 came in quietly.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 3 January 1953: 6e.

[NI953/2] There appeared to be fewer carollers about than usual but there were many who had the traditional “first foot” or Manx “qualtagh” and dark men were in great demand for this old custom.

“How 1953 came in.” *Ramsey Courier* 9 January 1953: 2c.

1954

[NI954/1] “A Happy New Year.” The greeting of friends with the old, old wish, by qualtaghs, was heard in the streets of Douglas soon after midnight on Friday, after ships’ sirens and church bells had ushered in the New-Year.

“Quietest New Year since the War.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 9 January 1954: 7e.

1955

[NI955/1] “It’s good of you to let the New Year in,” said the host, “and I’m going to offer you a drop of real old whisky. Taste that, it’s 20 years old.” The qualtagh smacked his lips appreciatively. “Twenty years old,” he said. “It’s very small for its age.”

Pseud [signed “Islander”]. “[At Random] Sub-Standard.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 7 January 1955: 3c.

[NI955/2] To the peal of church bells, the hooting of ships’ sirens in Douglas harbour, and the exchange of greetings by “qualtaghs,” the New Year was ushered in joyously in the traditional manner.

“Quietest New Year since the War.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 7 January 1955: 7e.

1957

[N1957/1] Not so many years ago it was the fashion for people to assemble after the watchnight services and go around the town singing carols—the custom of welcoming a dark haired “qualtagh” or first foot was more generally observed and revellers could be heard going the rounds almost until daybreak.

“New Year’s Festivities in Ramsey.” *Ramsey Courier* 4 January 1957: 5a.

[N1957/2] Scotsman Alex Comb, who had been looking forward to being home for Hogmanay, had another disappointment yesterday when unfavourable weather made it impossible to land the relief boat on Chicken Rock lighthouse. Along with another Scot, Andrew Brown, he had been on duty for five weeks, and with a Manx colleague at the lighthouse, Tom Kermode, should have been relieved a few days before Christmas. [...]

“No Qualtagh Yet for Chicken Rock.” *Isle of Man Times* 4 January 1957: 1c.

[N1957/3] Television, of course, may well be one of the distractions that the Director of Education has warned us against in his New Year message. Yet there still remains one way that we can allow our youngsters diversion and at the same time give them something to learn—the piano! And tonight when your qualtaghs call it’s quite likely that someone will be strumming that piano you have at home

Pseud [signed “Vanessa”]. “[What looms ahead] Television, of course ....” *Mona’s Herald* 31 December 1957: 4f.

1958

[N1958/1] Unlike previous years, when the streets are generally lively with happy singing crowds making their way to the homes of relatives and friends for their qualtaghs, there was a lost air about the place.

“Old Year rained out!” *Isle of Man Times* 3 January 1958: 8g.

[N1958/2] But we regret that New Year’s morning will probably show that the custom of the Qualtagh, or first foot, is dying out.

“[Southern News] Watchnight services will ....” *Ramsey Courier* 31 December 1958: 8a.

1959

[N1959/1] How would you like to be a lucky QUAALTAGH—and find the door opened to you by THIS pretty maid? ...

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Arthur Moore, “[Arthur Moore’s Island Notebook] [Timely Topics ...] How would you ....” *Isle of Man Examiner* 1 January 1959: 4e.

### 1960

[NI960/1] [4f] A number of people have expressed appreciation of the latest Kathleen Faragher poem “The Qualtagh” which appeared last week. While some New Year customs have died away in the last 20 years or so this observance of having a dark man as the “first foot” is still very popular and at many [5f] Manx homes last Friday morning dark-haired visitors were welcomed and given appropriate hospitality.

Pseud [signed “Man about Town”]. “[Notes and Coments] The Qualtagh.” *Ramsey Courier* 8 January 1960: [4]f & 5f.

[NI960/2] New Year customs in the Island are rapidly dying out. Even those who half-heartedly observe them, no longer leave things to chance. Dark haired men are in great demand as “Qualtaghs,” as they are commonly supposed to bring good luck to the household. Arrangements are made to ensure that the first foot is a man of suitable colouring. But the “Qualtagh” should be a matter of chance, not design. At one time it was the custom to sweep the house from the front to the back. Sweeping out the dust through the back door swept out any of the old year’s ill luck that remained. If a fair man was the first to cross the threshold, the year would not be a very prosperous one, but if the “Qualtagh” had a squint or if a woman was the first to enter the house, the year would be a disastrous one.

“[Snippets from the South] [Diary of a Schoolmarm] Qualtaghs!” *Isle of Man Times* 30 December 1960: 4a.

### 1961

[NI961/1] [2b] There I was, gazing at the close-printed pages of the “London Gazette” (and trying to get rid of the mince-pie and cake crumbs in my pocket after carrying out my duties as Qualtagh at numerous homes) [...].

John Quirk, “[John Quirk’s Diary] May I do the Honours?” *Isle of Man Daily Times* 3 January 1961: 2b–e.

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