

Manx Notes 34 (2004)

“FOR THE PURPOSE OF ACQUIRING THE MANKS TONGUE”
JOSEPH CHRISTIAN MOORE SENT TO MALEW TO LEARN MANX

(1)

[...] but shortly after this my cousin Philip Moore, brother James & myself were sent to a part of the country [in the Parish of Malew¹ where very little of the English Language [was spoken] for the purpose of acquiring the Manks Tongue however on our return A year after, we had become very little acquainted with the Manks, & while there, being almost entirely our own masters, had as Tutors said, lost a great deal more than we gained.

(2)

[ix] The object of this reprint is not to uphold the Manx as a spoken language,—that were a hopeless attempt, were the end ever so desirable; but to afford some assistance to the student of this interesting branch of the ancient Celtic, and to obtain for it, when its lifetime is gone by, a place among the records of the dead languages of Europe. The decline of the spoken Manx, within the memory of the present generation, has been marked. The language is no longer heard in our courts of law, either from the bench or the bar, and seldom from the witness-box. The courts are indeed still fenced in Manx, according to ancient traditionary form; and the Island laws are still promulgated in that language on the Tynwald Mount, where the last lingering accents of the Gaelic in Man—once the language of Europe, the universal language of the British Isles—will probably be heard. In our churches the language was used by many of the present generation of clergy three Sundays in the month. It was afterwards restricted to every other Sunday; and is now entirely discontinued in most of the churches. In the schools throughout the Island the Manx has ceased to be taught; and the introduction of the Government system of education has done much to displace the language. It is rarely now heard in conversation, except among the peasantry. It is a doomed language,—an iceberg floating into southern latitudes.

Source: (1) “The History of Joseph Christian Moore; or, Some Account of the Gracious Dealings of God with a Sinner. 1820,” Manx National Heritage Library, MS 09464. (2) Rev. William Gill, “Editor’s Introduction,” vii–xxi, to Rev. John Kelly, *A Practical Grammar of the Antient Gaelic, or Language of the Isle of Man, Usually Called Manks*, Manx Society, vol. ii., Douglas, Manx Society, 1859. Originally, *A Practical Grammar of the Antient Gaelic, or Language of the Isle of Man, Usually called Manks*, London, Printed by John Nichols & sold by R. Bickerstaff, 1804.



Joseph Christian Moore was born in Douglas in 1802. He was privately tutored and at some time between 1809 and 1814 was sent off together with his brother and cousin to learn Manx in the countryside. The parish of Malew contained the then capital of the Island, Castletown, but its Anglicising shadow had not even spread over the entire parish. Unfortunately, it is not known exactly where they were sent to or whom they stayed with there. Certainly, a year passed without due diligence having been applied to the learning of Manx. They must have been destined for either the Church or the Law; surely in the case of Joseph Christian Moore the church, given the subtitle of the manuscript, rather than as a pious advocate.

Manx was still needed for those professions but the candidates, at least these three at any rate, had none and now had to learn it as a second language. They were likely to be the last generation to need and use it in professional life.¹

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Broderick, George. *Language Death in the Isle of Man*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1999.



¹ For the trajectory of Manx in the 19th century see Chapter 2 in George Broderick, *Language Death in the Isle of Man* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1999).