

Manx Notes 81 (2007)

“IT IS A *LIVING* LANGUAGE”

THE REV. E. B. SAVAGE ON THE MANX LANGUAGE (1902)

MANX GAELIC (9th S. viii. 460).—In the first place, I should like to thank your correspondent for the interest he shows in the preservation of Manx as a living language; and, in the next place, I should like, as president of the Manx Language Society, to explain what has been done, and what is being done, to keep the language alive.

We have all felt the need of a satisfactory grammar, and now that want is met for beginners by ‘First Lessons in Manx’ by Edmund Goodwin, published by the Celtic Association, Dublin, price 6*d*. A convenient reading-book, ‘Æsop’s Fables,’ in Manx and English, written by an old Manxman of Creigneish [sic], and edited by Mr Roeder, of Manchester, is also published at the same price at the *Examiner* office, Douglas. For more advanced students the appendices to vol. xxxiii. of the Manx Society’s Publications (pp. 1–183) on Manx phonology, by Prof. Rhÿs, of Oxford, will be found to go into the matter very thoroughly.

During the winter months classes are held in the island for teaching Manx, but these have to be abandoned while “the season” lasts. The Manx Language Society is now trying to get Manx placed on the same footing as Welsh in the education code, and so to be officially recognized as an extra subject, which may be taught in elementary schools. This would be a great step forward, but we do not yet know what view those in authority will take.

There is much enthusiasm among real overs of Manx in the island, as distinct from those mercenary folk who will learn and teach only what will pay; but such are in the minority. If those who take an interest in the preservation of Manx will communicate with me (Canon Savage, St Thomas’s Vicarage, Douglas), I shall be pleased to give all the information I can, and to forward a report of the annual meeting of the Society held last month. In such a case as this outside interest would greatly help to strengthen our hands; for we are looked upon by many here as unpractical enthusiasts who are simply hunting a shadow. It ought to stir up half-hearted Manxmen to see the efforts that intelligent people elsewhere are making to prevent the language from dying out.

Manx is spoken far more than people know; but not before strangers. When going “after the herrings” in some of the Peel luggers not a word of English is spoken by the crew from the time they leave the harbour to the time of their return next morning, every order being given in Manx. Dr Clague, of Castletown, an excellent Manx scholar, has told me that in many houses that he visits in the south of the island all the directions as to the treatment of his patients are given in Manx, and frequently no word of English is spoken during his visit; so that it is a *living* language, and more young people are able to speak it than is commonly known. We

have asked to have the ages of those who can speak Manx specified in the census returns, which will give us accurate figures, if they are published.

ERNEST B. SAVAGE, M.A., F.S.A.
St Thomas's Vicarage, Douglas.

Source: Canon Ernest B. Savage, "Manx Gaelic," *Notes & Queries* (9th ser.) ix (1902): 11b–12a.



"[I]t is a *living* language, and more young people are able to speak it than is commonly known," wrote Canon Savage above, but as he and the other enthusiasts of the revival of Manx recognised, it was essential to have Manx formally taught in the Island's schools. A small amount of correspondence exists of letters to Sophia Morrison, the Society's Secretary, from a number of schools, a fraction one assumes of what must once have been an Island-wide canvassing of interest and support (or lack of).¹ However, it was not to be until 1992 that Manx was to be "recognized as an extra subject."²

STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2007

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRINTED SOURCES

Miller, Stephen. "Mending up the Rags': The Return of Manx Gaelic in the Isle of Man." *Planet: The Welsh Internationalist* 101 (1993): 83–87.



¹ This correspondence gathered together and separately bound as Manx National Heritage Library, MS 5495 A. This will be reproduced in the next three issues of *Manx Notes*.

² See Stephen Miller, "Mending up the Rags': The Return of Manx Gaelic in the Isle of Man," *Planet: The Welsh Internationalist* 101 (1993).