

Manx Notes 82 (2007)

“TO INSTIL A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE OF WRITTEN MANX”
WILLIAM RADCLIFFE ATTEMPTS TO TEACH MANX (1902)

Parochial School, | Andreas. | I.O.M. | Jan 23rd 1902 | Miss Morrison,

Dear Madam,

I have been extremely busy preparing papers for Mutual Improvement Societies &c just lately, and when dates are fixed one has to sacrifice everything that can possibly stand over. That must be my excuse for neglecting to reply to your letter, for which and enclosures, please accept my thanks.

The prize scheme might come in later on, and especially if we succeed in getting the subject of “Manx” entered in the Code. I have not much hope of seing Manx used for conversational purposes by the young;—it is too much boycotted by their parents. Some time ago I attempted to instil a little knowledge of written Manx into my upper Standard children by way of Home lessons, but found that it was those parents who knew the language best that gave it the least encouragement; and in fact I had to withdraw the thing altogether. If we get it in the Code, of course, it will make a great difference. The other day, I discovered what I believe will be a valuable way of interesting the children in the language and may lead to results. I chanced to repeat four lines from an old Manx ballad and it seemed to interest them so greatly that they wanted to learn it off by heart, although they did not understand it. Afterwards I had to tell them the meaning. It is my intention to try this course for a bit to see how it will work.

I am sorry to say, I’m afraid our Manxmen in Ramsey are losing interest in the Class which we formed. I purchased 7 copies of your Mr Goodwin’s “Manx Lessons,” from Mr Broadbent the day of our M[ee]t[ing] in Douglas and sold them to members of the Class. If you think it worth while to send me a parcel on “Sale or Return,” I’ll do my best to dispose of copies in this neighbourhood. I’ll undertake to keep all unsold Copies clean & will send on whatever amount I can obtain. I sh[oul]d not like to take the responsibility of buying a Number out & out.

Trusting this may be agreeable to you.

I remain, | Dear Madam. | Yours faithfully | W[illia]m Radcliffe

Source: Letter from William Radcliffe to Sophia Morrison, 23 January 1902, in bound volume of correspondence to Sophia Morrison, Manx National Heritage Library, MS 5495 A.



Described by E.S. Dodgson in 1901 as “the Gaelic-loving schoolmaster of Kirk Andreas,”¹ this letter to Sophia Morrison details William Radcliffe’s own personal efforts in attempting to revive the Manx language among the school pupils of Andreas village school:

Some time ago I attempted to instil a little knowledge of written Manx into my upper Standard children by way of Home lessons, but found that it was those parents who knew the language best that gave it the least encouragement; and in fact I had to withdraw the thing altogether.

In this case not successful, but it shows that there was a reservoir of native speakers in the parish as well as documenting their attitude towards the transmission of the language.²

Radcliffe had only recently returned to the issue of supporting Manx:

The other day, I discovered what I believe will be a valuable way of interesting the children in the language and may lead to results. I chanced to repeat four lines from an old Manx ballad and it seemed to interest them so greatly that they wanted to learn it off by heart, although they did not understand it. Afterwards I had to tell them the meaning. It is my intention to try this course for a bit to see how it will work.

With no further correspondence to draw upon, we do not know how successful he was in this initiative.

STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2007

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRINTED SOURCES

Dodgson, Edward Spencer. “Some Inscriptions in the Gaelic of Mann.” *Manx Church Magazine* xi.10 (1901): cxxviii col. a–cxxx.



¹ Edward Spencer Dodgson, “Some Inscriptions in the Gaelic of Mann,” *Manx Church Magazine* xi.10 (1901): cxxx col. b.

² However, it is unlikely that any of the parents had any knowledge of Manx as a *written* language. Nevertheless, this was likely not to have formed the basis of their opposition to Radcliffe’s scheme.