

Manx Notes 117 (2010)

“WHO IS MONA DOUGLAS?” (3)

“I WAS BROUGHT UP FIRST IN LEZAYRE” *

I was brought up first in Lezayre and later at Ballaragh and educated mainly at home, but studied for two years at the Liverpool School of Art, at the same time having private lessons in the violin from William Edge of the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and in piano, singing and theory from Professor Crappa, also attached to the Philharmonic. It is this early musical teaching which has enabled me to take down the Manx songs and dances, plus a book of notes on Manx dances made by Philip Quayle of Lezayre who was a well known musician and dancer and my great-grandfather. These notes were given me by my grand-mother, his daughter Ellen. I have been a member of Manx national groups from childhood, and started my folklore collecting at ten years old, encouraged by the late Sophia Morrison. As I did not attend any school I had a good deal of free time which I spent among country folk from I learnt the old stories and songs. I was also writing poems and articles and producing plays.

While still in my 'teens I was elected Secretary of *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh* and of the Manx branch of the Celtic Congress, and was invested as a Bard of the Third Degree in the Welsh Gorsedd, with the bardic name of *Mona Manaw*. I worked in London for about three years as a free-lance journalist, and during that period was collaborating with the late Arnold Foster in the preparation and publication of the three books of Manx folk songs and two of Manx dances issued at intervals by the firm of Stainer & Bell.

In the late 1920s I took a librarianship course in Dublin, and in 1932 was appointed Rural Librarian for the Island under the Education Authority. I continued my work for Manx national and cultural interests and became the leader of *Aeglagh Vannin*, and also continued to contribute articles to various publications outside the Island, and published several books of verse and one of plays.

In 1963 I joined the staff of the *Ile of Man Times*, and have continued working for that firm ever since as a reporter and feature-writer, and also with the firm I published several volumes of articles under the general title of the *Ellan Vannin* books. I have done a fair amount of broadcasting, and while in London worked for a time under a producer at Elstree film studios.

I have trained several groups of Manx dancers, including the group of Ramsey school children who first revived our dances in connection with a lecture I was invited to give to the English Folk Dance and Song Society's vacation school held here, and have also trained soloists and children's choirs in Manx Gaelic songs, and

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coached entrants for the Celtovision Contest of the *Pan Celtic Week* in Killarney, and have written songs for this and also many poems in Manx Gaelic.

In 1975 I edited the Manx section of *Folk Songs of Britain and Ireland* under the general editor, Peter Kennedy, published by Cassels, and in 1976 contributed the section on the history of the theatre in the Isle of Man to the *Encyclopaedia della Spectabile Universtata* published in Rome, and for this and other works was awarded in 1971 the gold medal for literature of the Accademia della Scienze e Art i di Roma with the diploma of Accademico di Merito, and in 1979 was awarded the Diploma Professori di Literatura e Musica (Hon. Causa) of the International Academy of Pontzen in Naples. In 1969 I was elected an Honorary Life Member of the *Manx Folk Dance Society*. In 1972 I published the novel *Song of Mannin* with the Shearwater Press. In 1977 I initiated the revival of *Yn Chruinnaght*, and have worked for it ever since, but most of its success has been due to the wonderful support given by Manx people generally especially in the North.

Source: Mona Douglas, ["I was brought up in the Isle of Man"] untitled and undated typescript, MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 4.



STEPHEN MILLER
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