

Manx Notes 129 (2011)

“MARRIAGE CELEBRATIONS. EXCUBERANT BOYS FINED.”

A MARRIAGE CELEBRATION IN BALLAUGH (1913)

William Boyd, Edward Sayle, and William Shimmin were charged at the Magistrates’ Court, on Saturday, with disturbing the peace in Ballaugh village on the previous Tuesday.

Sergt. Faragher deposed that at nine o’clock defendants were blowing horns in the village, and that he had had complaints that the noise started at six o’clock. He cautioned defendants to stop. Half an hour afterwards he had to caution them a second time: while an hour later he cautioned them again. At this time they were outside Mr Kermode’s shop. Witness walked off, and came back suddenly upon them at five minutes past eleven. He seized the nearest boy—William Boyd—who had the horn in his possession; and the other two ran [?] up the Glen-road for home. A young man was to be married the day after, witness explained (laughter).

Capt. Kitto: Isn’t that an old custom?

Witness: It is a custom, but I have never heard the like of this. The whole village was disturbed, and I had no end of complaints from the neighbours.

Inspector Shimmin thought the law ought not to be set at defiance.

The bench, in inflicting a fine of 1s each case, and costs, said they would not have looked upon the matter seriously if the boys had gone away when warned; but they would not get off so easily next time.

Source: Anon. “[Peel] Marriage Celebrations. Exuberant Boys Fined,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 3 May 1913: 5 col. h.



Dr John Clague (1842–1908), in his *Manx Reminiscences* also recalls this custom though in a more neutral and passing fashion: “The night before a wedding horns were blown during the night.”¹ The editorial comment raised the problem now of traditional customs as highlighted by this case:

Old customs are doubtless good—some of them are at any rate—but in this instance there was evidently too much of a good thing, and the offenders were very properly punished.²

One can see a notion of “civility” now being applied to folk customs—indeed, in 1911, the *Peel City Guardian* reported on “Hop-tu-naa” (31 October) that:

¹ Dr John Clague, *Coinaghtyn Manninagh: Manx Reminiscences By the Late Dr John Clague* (Castletown: M.J. Backwell, n.d. [but 1911]) 93.

² Anon, “Discouraging Old Customs,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 3 May 1913.

The old custom of celebrating All Hallows Eve still lingers, though in a subdued and more decorous form, consisting principally in masquerading in grotesque makes-up. On Tuesday evening last, when it was celebrated, quite a number of youths kept up the old traditions in this manner, causing much amusement.³

These are the new watchwords for the observance (and allowed) continuance of folk customs in the Island: that they be subdued, decorous, and offer amusement. Moreover, the Isle of Man Police Force would watch over them. Maybe William Boyd, Edward Sayle, and William Shimmin should have reminded the bench of the old Manx proverb in a language now fast fading: “*Mannagh vow cliaghtey, cliaghtey, nee cliaghtey coe.*” In other words, ‘If custom is not indulged with custom, custom will weep.’⁴

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³ Anon, “Peel Junior Guild,” *Peel City Guardian* 4 November 1911.

⁴ William Harrison, *Mona Miscellany: A Selection of Proverbs, Sayings, Ballads, Customs, Superstitions, and Legends peculiar to the Isle of Man*, Manx Society, vol. xvi (Douglas: Manx Society, 1869) 30.