

Manx Notes 132 (2012)

FATHER RICHARD HENEGBRY AND JOHN STRACHAN
AS COLLECTORS *

“I had A long talk in the summer with A Catholic Priest and he could read my manx writing very well and pronounce every word and understand it well enough he told me he had been in the Island 6 years ago and had published some manx songs that he had learned from Tom Kermodé in Bradda. blind Tom. but I neve come across any of them.”¹ So wrote Edward Faragher to Karl Roeder on Christmas Day from Cregneash, but a letter frustratingly without a date.

This person must be Father Richard Henebry (1863–1916). He had visited the Island in 1883, together with John Strachan (1862–1907), Hulme Professor of Greek, 1885–1907, and Professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Religion, 1890–1907, in Owens College and later the University of Manchester, “to see if we could discover any of the old folksongs or folktales of Man.”² However, they were to be a disappointed pair: “[f]or the most part our search was unsuccessful.”³

They did, however, collect one song, “Ec yn Fiddleryn” (‘At the Fiddlers’), from Thomas Kermodé of Bradda, which was later published in the first numbers of the newly-founded *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* in 1896, Strachan returning alone in September 1895, to take it down (presumably, his original copy now lost). Interestingly, Kermodé told Strachan “that he had not heard a Manx song sung for the last forty years.”⁴ As will be seen, he certainly knew enough of them.

Kermodé was later to be “rediscovered” by Dr John Clague in December of 1895, writing (on Christmas Day), “I have discovered a new ‘mine’ at Bradda.”⁵ Continuing, “[a]n old blind man—Tom Kermodé by name, has given me three splendid old songs, and I think I shall be able to get three more yet.” Clague was to gather more in than that as Kermodé is the biggest single contributor to the Clague Collection. While blind, he had married and raised a family and worked as a fisherman. In passing, someone in *Mannin* 7 (1916), wrote

My grandfather was on the Primitive Methodist plan-beg, I have heard him preach in the ill-fated Bradda Chapel, now an artist’s studio. He spoke in English and then in Manx for the benefit of a blind man who had no English.⁶

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “Father Henebry and John Strachan as Collectors,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu*, September (2011), [8]. Reproduced here with sources.

¹ Edward Faragher to Karl Roeder, 25 December [1889?], MNHL, MS 2146/6 A

² John Strachan, “A Manx Folksong,” *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* i (1897): 54. The *ZcP* first appeared in 1896 but the first three parts were bound together to create the first volume and dated for 1897.

³ Strachan, “A Manx Folksong,” 54.

⁴ Strachan, “A Manx Folksong,” 54.

⁵ Dr John Clague to Deemster J.F. Gill, 25 December 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

⁶ Anon, “Correspondence,” *Mannin* 7 (1916): 434.

This fits Kermode and though he died before the 1901 census with its language question, Clague found him to be a speaker of Manx. His wife, however, could only speak English.⁷ Evidently, he liked the comfort of his chapel services in Manx.

As Clague later wrote of him in *Cooïnaghtyn Manninagh / Manx Reminiscences* (1911):

He had a wonderfully good memory, and he was good to sing, and he knew the Manx language very well.

The greater part of the words and songs that I have are taken down from his singing, and I spent many happy hours in writing them down.⁸

A number of questions are raised here, the first being why did Strachan collect so little from him when he became likely the only Manx traditional singer that we know of now to have likely his entire repertoire recorded? And second, why did it take Clague so long to find him? There was evidently no contact between Strachan and Clague in 1895. Clague's letters do not survive in any large number, but certainly when he wrote to Deemster Gill to announce his new find, he was clearly unaware that someone had already found the mine but chose not to exploit it.

Finally, what are we to make of Faragher's statement that Henebry had told him that he "had published some manx songs" collected from Kermode. Is he referring to the *ZcP* article, though this is signed with just Strachan's name and he mentions Henebry only in connection in the 1883 visit. Is there instead some Irish language journal then that contains this material?

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REFERENCES CITED

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Strachan, John. "A Manx Folksong." *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* i (1897): 54–58.



⁷ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Rushen, 1901, RG 13/5301, fol. 118, sch. 12.

⁸ Dr John Clague, *Cooïnaghtyn Manninagh: Manx Reminiscences By the Late Dr John Clague* (Castletown: M.J. Backwell, n.d. [but 1911]) 25.