

Manx Notes 138 (2012)

“ON THE MANX QUEST”

SOPHIA MORRISON AND JOSEPHINE KERMODE *

Sophia Morrison (1859–1917) is well known for her involvement with the Manx language movement, especially her many years as the Secretary of the Manx Language Society.¹ She was also a Pan-Celtic activist of note.² As J.J. Kneen wrote in 1915, “[i]f we had not Miss Morrison at the wheel, I am afraid our ship would have foundered long ago. I only hope that she may be long spared to carry on her labour of love.”³ Her death was a shock to all in the movement.⁴ She was succeeded by the rising star that was Mona Douglas (1898–1987), who had met Morrison as a young girl and then propelled herself into “the cause” as Morrison referred to the cultural struggle for all things Manx and Celtic.⁵

Whilst not the instigator of the purchase of the MLS’s phonograph as often thought, that suggestion was made by John Taylor the Douglas Borough Librarian,⁶ Morrison was, nevertheless, the driving force behind its purchase and the guiding

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “On the Manx Quest’: Sophia Morrison and Josephine Kermode,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu*, April (2012), [8]–[9]. Reproduced here with sources.

¹ For biographical notices, see Breesha Maddrell, *Morrison, Sophia (1859–1917)*, 2004, Oxford University Press; J. Stowell Kenyon, *et al.*, “Morrison, Sophia (1859–1917),” *New Manx Worthies*, ed. Dollin Kelly (Douglas: Manx Heritage Foundation, 2006).

² For more on these activities, see Breesha Maddrell, “Speaking from the Shadows: Sophia Morrison and the Manx Cultural Revival,” *Folklore* 113.2 (2002). Her activities are extensively discussed *passim* in Breesha Maddrell, “Contextualising *A Vocabulary of the Anglo-Manx Dialect*: developing Manx identities,” PhD, Liverpool, 2001.

³ J.J. Kneen to William Cubbon, 9 November 1915, MNHL, MS 09913, Box “WC: Correspondence.”

⁴ P.W. Caine, “In Memoriam [The late Sophia Morrison],” *Mannin* 9 (1917). Morrison had founded and edited *Mannin*, a small-press publication.

⁵ This is taken from a letter Morrison wrote to Amy Gill in 1904, when pairing her up with John Nelson to record with the phonograph: “It was thought well to bracket together for the work persons of education & musical ability with others, who, though full of zeal for the cause have not those advantages[.]” Sophia Morrison to Emily Gill, 26 November 1904, MNHL, MS 09495, Box 4, Letter copy book (1904–07).

⁶ Anon, “Manx Language Society,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 15 November 1902: 5 col. d. This passage does not appear in Manx Language Society, *Annual Meeting November 12, 1902* (n.p.: n.pub. [Manx Language Society], 1902), which is a reprint of Anon, “The Manx Language Society,” *Manx Sun* 15 November 1902. It was only found when examining the original Minute Books of *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh*, where it was found pasted up in the Minute Book for 1899–1913. I am grateful to Fiona McArdle for organising access to the YCG archive.

light of the recording programme. As seen with Cressy Dodd,⁷ she was able to draw into her circle younger members of the movement who in this case duly equipped with said phonograph ventured out to record from native speakers of Manx. In this case, the first were to be, as the *Peel City Guardian* reported in April 1905, “Mr R.A. Shortland and C.T. Cowell, jun[io]r,”⁸ who were responsible for the first known recording in the field of Manx speech and song.

But what of Morrison’s own collecting, what do we know of this?⁹ Firstly, she did not collect on her own—or, more precisely, she did not travel alone. One of her companions was Josephine Kermodé (1852–1937), the Manx poetess known better by her pen-name of “Cushag,”¹⁰ who she seemed to have met in 1907,¹¹ though soon off to Nova Scotia to nurse a married sister: “I was very greatly disappointed as we had planned a series of excursions on the Manx quest for the ensuing week. She spoke Manx when a child.”¹² In 1909, she wrote to Cushag “I am delighted that you are coming to Peel for a week. I do hope the weather may be fine. I shall much enjoy going round with you to see some of the old people.”¹³ It would seem that Kermodé’s navigation skills in the Manx countryside were not of the best—“I think that if there is any truth in the old saying, you of all people, should possess a bollan cross—country roads are sometimes misleading,” she enclosing *crosh bollans* “for luck.”¹⁴

The manuscript evidence for her song collecting lies split between her own papers (MNHL, MS 09495, Box 6) and those of the Kermodé Family (MNHL, MS 08979).¹⁵

⁷ Stephen Miller, “Cressy Dodd. An Unrecognised Manx Song Collector,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* August (2011), Stephen Miller, “Written down by Miss Cressie Dodd & myself: Cressy Dodd as Collector,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* February (2012).

⁸ Anon, “Gramophone Manx Records,” *Peel City Guardian* 15 April 1905. It is likely authored by Morrison.

⁹ For her collecting with Cressy Dodd, see Miller, “Written down by Miss Cressie Dodd & myself: Cressy Dodd as Collector.”

¹⁰ (Manx) “Ragwort or ragweed.” Archibald Cregeen, *A Dictionary of the Manks Language* (Douglas & London & Liverpool: J. Quiggin & Whittaker, Treacher, and Arnot & Evans, Chegwin, and Hall, 1835 [but 1837]) 52 col. a. For her only folklore publication, Josephine [as “Cushag”] Kermodé, “Folklore Notes,” *Mannin* 1 (1913). For biographical notices, see Breesha Maddrell, *Kermodé, (Margaret Leotitia) Josephine (1852–1937)*, 2004, Oxford University Press, Available: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/76336>, Sue Woolley, “Kermodé, Josephine (‘Cushag’) (1852–1937),” *New Manx Worthies*, ed. Dollin Kelly (Douglas: Manx Heritage Foundation, 2006).

¹¹ “Mrs Boyd Dawkins kindly invited her to Peel for a fortnight to make my acquaintance [...]” Sophia Morrison to J.J. Kneen, 10 August 1907, MNHL, MS 1086/18 c.

¹² Sophia Morrison to J.J. Kneen, 10 August 1907, MNHL, MS 1086/18 c.

¹³ Letter (partial) from Sophia Morrison to Josephine Kermodé, 12 January 1909, MNHL, MS 08979, Box “Josephine Kermodé (‘Cushag’).”

¹⁴ A *crosh bollan* prevents you from being lost on your way. Sophia Morrison to Josephine Kermodé, 28 September 1910, MNHL, MS 08979, Box “Josephine Kermodé (‘Cushag’).”

¹⁵ MNHL, MS 08979, Box “Josephine Kermodé (‘Cushag’).”

Whether the material came to Cushag after Morrison’s death in 1917 is unclear. My suggestion is that in fact this material is a copy for Kermode and so forms a record of at least some of their collecting. A point that remains unclear is regardless as to whether they were in fact collected by the pair together, are these song texts transcriptions from wax cylinder recordings? Morrison certainly availed herself of the use of the phonograph and it would be curious if *all* of this material was noted down and *none* transcribed from field recordings.

The later years of Morrison’s life were to see her suffer, first problems with her eyesight,¹⁶ and then increasing deafness.¹⁷ An obvious barrier to fieldwork and editing but we can still see her in the field in 1915 from a letter written to her by Cushag suggesting that they meet at Ballaugh, the train arriving here at 1.11 pm:

If I have not got to the station in time will you stroll on to Mary’s. We will put a sight on her & then I have a house up the Glen to visit & we would afterwards go to see my friend Mrs Cuptain Stephen (pace Mrs Henry Duke) who if at home will probably give us tea, then we might drive down to Sulby and see Lizzie Craine & you could catch your train at either the Glen or the Bridge [...].¹⁸

This “Lizzie Craine” is Elizabeth Craine, either the mother or the daughter, who were living at Cooilbane in 1901 as shown by the census. The pair were Elizabeth C. Craine, age 59, born in Jurby, and her daughter also Elizabeth C., age 28, unmarried, working as a dressmaker, and born in Lezayre.¹⁹ Husband and father was Daniel J. Craine, born in Lezayre, also aged 59, and working as a roadman. He appears not to have been a singer. All three were fluent in both English and Manx Gaelic.²⁰

The Craines were first visited by Morrison in 1907, the same year as she met Cushag. Whether this was a coincidence or not is unknown. What is known, however, is this pair had previously been visited by W.H. Gill as Morrison recalled in a letter to him:

I think more scraps of music might still be gained. I heard some bits the other day in Sulby Glen at the house of Mrs Craine, but when Mrs Craine & her daughter

¹⁶ “I am going to an eye-specialist’s nursing home shortly to have an operation performed on my eye—& I shall have to stay there some time, I believe.” Sophia Morrison to J.J. Kneen, 8 August 1912, MNHL, MS 1086/32 C

¹⁷ “I greatly admire your pluck in starting so many Manx classes. I wish I could do more than I do but my deafness is an impassable barrier to teaching.” Sophia Morrison to J.J. Kneen, 3 October 1913, MNHL, MS 1086/37 C.

¹⁸ Even if a social call, it still shows Morrison maintaining contact with those we know to be her informants. Josephine Kermode to Sophia Morrison, undated [1915?], MNHL, MS 09495, Box 3.

¹⁹ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Lezayre, 1901, PRO, RG 13/5300, fol. 63. The ages are obviously those from the census.

²⁰ Competency in English and Manx by those enumerated was a question asked in the 1901 census.

told me that they had often sung to you, I felt assured that you had collected all they have to give.²¹

This material gathered by Gill is now lost but we do have at least one of the songs collected by Morrison from a session at some date with Elizabeth Craine, “Keayrt va mee aeg,” noted as “Taken from the singing l of Mrs Craine, Sulby Glen.”²²

In 1903, W. Boyd Hawkins wrote to Morrison:

I am fascinated by the lore of the Island, which I hope you will not allow to pass away without record. All the fragments should be collected so that nothing be lost. You can do this quietly in Peel—without publishing for the present—I fear, that, if you publish, the old people will not tell you anything!²³

The “old people” are now past and it is time that we collect “the fragments” together and finally publish them.

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KEAYRT VA MEE AEG

Keayrt va mee aeg as nish ta mee shenn
 Keayrt va daa sweet-heart aym as nish cha vel 'nane
 As jeeagh shiu er my laue, kys ta craa, kys ta craa
 As jeeagh shiu er my laue kys ta craa

Lineyn tayms da scrieu son dy hoil shagey diu
 Kys ta deiney aegey meolhit liorish mraane, liorish mraane
 Kys ta deiney aegey meolhit liroish mraane

Ta ny mraane aegey cha laue da frae-terys
 Agh tad my-greddin, cha laue ta vy-soon
 S'beg cha n'erree vaym's ta beigns mol-tyo liosts,
 Yn keayrt jerree vows my hoie, er my lioon, er my lioon
 Yn jerree, vows my hoie, er my lioon

Hems roym gys ny cheeraghyn foddey
 Ny re dys my reljyn, ta spring-al dy glass
 Dy vod fys va echey yn serhll

²¹ Sophia Morrison to W.H. Gill, 13 August [1907], Manx National Heritage Library, MS 09495, Box 4, Letter copy book (1904–07). Reproduced with commentary in Stephen Miller, “Her daughter told me that they had often sung to you’: W.H. Gill and the Craines of Cooilbane,” *Manx Notes* 19 (2004).

²² “Keayrt va mee aeg,” 4 verses, no date. This is not in Morrison’s hand. MNHL, MS 08979, Box “Josephine Kermode (“Cushag”).”

²³ W. Boyd Hawkins to Sophia Morrison, 15 August 1903, MNHL, MS 09495, Box 1.

Ta ren uss mish tregail
As da ren son ben aeg whagh-jioms baase, yiomays baase
As da ren &c. baase

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VIENNA 2012

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