

Manx Notes 210 (2015)

PHILLIP LEIGHTON STOWELL (1897–1978)
WRITINGS ON MANX FOLK DANCES AND DANCING *

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CHECKLIST OF WRITINGS ON MANX FOLK DANCES AND DANCING

Phillip Leighton Stowell. “Amusing Incidents which have occurred in my Folk Dancing Days.” *Yn Lioran* 12 (1965): 9–12.

———. “Folk Dancing in the Isle of Man.” *Yn Lioran* 12 (1965): 12–16.

———. “How I composed New Manx Dances (Part 1).” *Manninagh* 2 (1972): 79–82.

———. “How I composed New Manx Dances (Part 2).” *Manninagh* 3 (1973): 42–44.

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(I)

AMUSING INCIDENTS WHICH HAVE OCCURRED IN MY FOLK DANCING DAYS (1965)

[9] It was only this summer my wife and I met an old man near the Chasms and, being a true son of Manxland, he wanted to know who we were. After finding out he was a distant relative of my wife, he said to me, “Ah, I know you alright. You’re the fella that dances up an’ down the street in the Port with your braces on!” (Referring I presume to my Morris baldricks I wore in street dancing!)

Some years ago when my team was dancing behind the Castletown band through the streets of the town on the Agricultural Show Day, the route included the Crofts. Outside one house, by the pavement, workmen had dumped a large heap of wet sand, into which half of us plunged to the amusement of onlookers and the detriment of our white flannels, so that by the time we reached the Square, we did not look particularly handsome!

In 1951, when I was rehearsing the Jig in Demesne Road School, I spent over an hour practising with about thirty dancers, and I was most emphatic that they should “hold the stance” in the final salute. First one would fall over, then another, then another—all expert dancers, so at least I showed them how to do it myself, and after a lot of effort it was perfect. *Then*, we went to the Festival of Mann Pageant at Peel, where the massed Jig was to be performed. I danced in front with Walter Clarke and Arthur Watterson, and everything went well—then came the final salute AND I was the only one who fell flat on his face! I haven’t got over the veiled grins of the dancers to this day!

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I suppose many of you remember how we danced at The Nunnery the next week in pouring rain. Do you remember how, the red of our shoulder sashes came off on our white shirts just as if we had been in battle?

On another occasion we danced along the Promenade at Peel, but no band could be procured. In desperation, the organisers fixed a gramophone on an old lorry with a most foul exhaust, so that those of us in the front were nearly overcome and had to drop out. I well remember Walter Moore and myself walking along watching the others fleeing, until only a half-dozen dancers remained.

[10] My team always followed the band at the Port St Mary Regatta Carnival. On this occasion there was a large crowd on the upper promenade, and we weren't half showing off, until without any warning one of my bell-pads became loose and the dancer behind stood on the braids and sent me flying headlong into the crowd standing by the Town Hall. By the time I had the wretched thing tied on again, I had to run nearly 200 yards to catch up. Talk about indignity!

We danced the Street Dance at practically every Castletown Carnival, feeling very bucked up with so great a crowd watching. One visitor asked me why I did not dance with my two arms up as the other dancers did. Little did he know that the two top buttons of my flannels (a borrowed pair), burst on the way, and I danced the whole way with one hand holding my trousers up! Why did it always happen to me?!!

Many amusing incidents happened at the Guild. This time I had an expert drummer, a boy of fifteen. My "A" Team were dancing "Eunnysagh" with the boy standing five steps above us on the Palace platform. Suddenly his drum fell off, bounced down amongst us in the middle of the "hey," bounced off the stage missing the Secretary's head by an inch and finally came to rest at the judge's feet. AND we didn't stop dancing, but that drummer didn't half get a telling off afterwards! Yes, but we had 57 out of 60!

On another occasion we danced "Juan Nan," and I had an excellent team, with whom I hoped to gain full marks. Everything went well until the girls jumped up on to our out-stretched arms, and then the man next to me fell on to the stage with the girl on top of him. I fell over her and my partner over me, and so on until we were a struggling heap of humanity, especially as the girls wore the long, full dresses then. The judge roared, as did everyone else except us. We then found a screw had worked itself loose on the stage and it was over this the dancer had tripped. However, we danced it again and had 59 marks out of 60!

On another occasion I was adjudicating at the GFS Rally at the Villa and the dance, I think, was "Old Mole." Flo Moore's team won, but one dame came up to me afterwards and told me, I knew "no more about folk dancing than our tomcat." This was followed by a lot more abuse and how the affair would have ended I do not know, only for Flo who rushed up and said I was wanted outside!

We once danced in St Ninian's Hall, when our [11] men did "Beaux of London City" Morris dance. In the "shooting" movement we all had to step back on the right

foot. Imagine the commotion, when one dancer stepped right over the stage landed awkwardly and finally sat on the “lap” of a very stout lady on the front row. This good soul exclaimed, “You’re alright, luv! I’ve got yer!” AND he immediately jumped on to the stage and we began again.

One summer evening we were asked to lead the fancy dress possession at the Castletown Carnival on the “Show” Day. About a dozen of us stood in a group discussing the route we had to take, when suddenly a lady came up, handed me £4 and said “This is your prize for the Best Group, Mr Stowell” AND we hadn’t even entered for the group contest!

I well remember another evening when we danced before Lorne House guests, always an hilarious occasion. I taught them the “Courting Dance” and Margy Stewart was dancing with a negro whose name was Austin —. At the end, Margy went down in the “bunch” position, *but* so did the negro, and they just looked as if they were saying their prayers.

My Ramsey team was asked to do “White Boys” in the Villa, at a Rechabite Convention, and I must say we had a grand team. In the play which preceded the dance, Tommy Quayle, taking the part of St George had to be “killed” by Donald Maddrell. Down he went and struck his head on the leg of the piano. Imagine my horror when I knelt down by him to express my “grief” to see him lying in a pool of blood. There was no dance; Tommy had to go to a doctor to be stitched! But the audience all thought I had slipped a piece of red paper under Tommy’s head to make the duel look more real!

Douglas dancers, do you remember that evening at Port St Mary when you could not get your lock up in Flamborough? We danced round you about six times while I gave instructions, and then off we went, but right before the crowd your lock fell to bits! And one visitor said to me, “I was sorry for those *little girls!* You are all a lot older than they.” How old were you then Doris, Marjorie, Mildred and Co.?

That was the night we danced Car-ny-Ferishan, Arthur Watterson and myself being in the middle. My wife and another dancer retired to the edge of the arena and heard one man say, “The old bloke with the white head can’t half jump, and he can’t be a day under *seventy!*”

Another amusing incident happened when we were [12] in Edinburgh. All the various dance teams were marching in procession through Princes Street, Doris Larsen leading with the large Manx flag. Just as we reached a policeman on point duty, the flag enveloped him and knocked his helmet off! When we came back, he was more wary and kept well out of our way, but shook his fist at us.

That was the time too, when we danced before Princess Margaret. When we had danced, she said to Douglas Kennedy, “I suppose these are all peasants belonging to the Island”! Next time we’ll bring our tom-toms and grass skirts!

Well, you’ve asked for a few yarns. Here they are, just a few I can remember, but there are dozens more. There are bound to be in 55 years, aren’t there?

(2)

FOLK DANCING IN THE ISLE OF MAN

(1965)

(A summary of the Lecture given by Mr Leighton Stowell on 15th September 1964 to the members of the Liverpool University Extra-Mural Summer School in Port Erin)

[12] “Today I left Derby House (Castle Rushen) and mixed with the peasants on Market Square, this being their market day. I was greatly pleased with the excellence of the goods on the benches, the order and genteel manners of the townsfolk, but most of all by the fiddling and dancing, so much so I was minded to join in myself, but for the hip injury I told you about in my last letter.”

So wrote James, 7th Earl of Derby, the Great Stanley in 1646, to a friend in Lancashire.

Was this dancing Manx or English? We do not know, but it is quite probable that the Manx by then were acquainted with the English dances, seeing that in those troublesome times of the Civil War, so many exiled Royalists fled to the Island to be befriended by the Great Stanley.

[13] Indeed, until 1925, we heard little or practically nothing of Manx dances, yet we know that they were danced all over the Island, as we have mention of them in the folk songs.

“Soon in the barn they’ll be smoothin’ the floor,
Soon there’ll be fiddlin’ and dancin’ dy-liooar”

In England, the Puritans, long ago almost succeeded in killing folk songs and folk dancing, believing such cult was evil, and were it not for folk like Cecil Sharp, Maud Karpeles, Douglas and Helen Kennedy and others, we would not now have Morris, Sword or many of the country dances, for these people went round collecting dances from the older generation who fortunately could remember them.

In Mann we had a parallel—not from Puritans, but from a great spiritual leader and church dignitary of the greatest enthusiasm and highest character, Bishop Wilson (1698–1755). It is difficult to understand how so great and so generous a soul could be so Puritanical in outlook in many ways. He condemned “all looseness and frivolity as acts of the devil and a few dry sticks on Sunday or drawing water from the well, it is no wonder that he levelled his bolt at folk music and dancing, which he called “evil and idolatrous foolishness.” Had it been Morris dancing, I could have understood his attitude, as these do concern the worship of the God of Fertility, Baal or Bal in Mann, but Morris Dancing was unknown in the Island.

Indeed at one time one could be imprisoned in Peel Castle for singing folk tunes or indulging in folk dances!

Then, in 1777 came the great John Wesley, and Methodism was established in the Island, followed in 1823 by John Butcher’s founding of Primitive Methodism.

Methodism had a great hold on the Manx people, and at an age when Mann had sunk into a low irreligious order (as it has today), the Methodists attacked sin with fire and vigour. Like the Puritans they believed all fun was evil, and so it was that the suppression of folk culture, started by Wilson was continued four-fold in strength.

I am a Methodist and proud to say so, but I know that round about where we are now, there are still older Methodists who look askance at folk dancing, yet they will listen to folk songs and folk stories.

[14] One church not very far from this hotel some years ago asked me to bring my company of Manx dialect players along to give a concert. The main feature was “Mylecharane,” a dialect play in which I took the main part, a murder being committed by me in the second act. To begin the concert I had a few soloists *and* six little girls who danced two Morris dances. Because of these dances—there was no concert, *yet* the folk were looking forward to seeing a murder play.

Also a few years ago in this port, because it was suggested that I should teach Manx and Scottish dances to a chapel Youth Club, the officials of the Sunday School threatened to resign in a block!

I well remember too how a few members of my own chapel in Castletown were greatly distressed because the six little girls were going to dance “Rigs of Marlow” and “Country Gardens” at the annual Chapel Christmas Concert. However, advised by my mother, I called the dances “Stick Drill” and “Handkerchief Drill” and everything in the garden was lovely! A rose by any other name, etc.

By 1922, folk dancing in the Island was practically unknown. Some interested Douglas teachers, Flo Moore, Nance Cain, the Misses Lace, Lottie Gawne and a few others had begun to establish English Country dances, and Mr Bolland, a Laxey headmaster, was teaching his *girls* Morris dancing, for which there was a class in the Guild.

I started Morris dancing by accident. An Oxfordshire Scout Troop came to Douglas for a holiday, and on wet days the Scoutmaster taught them Morris. My uncle was a Scout official and I, then 13 years old, accompanied him to visit the camp. One boy had hurt his foot, so I, an Island scout, was roped in to take his place—and so I started my dancing career, and I have now been dancing for 55 years, so you now all know my age!

My first appointment as Assistant Master was in Ramsey School, and of course I began to teach Morris dancing to both girls and boys, although some years later an HMI advised me to drop the girls’ Morris for country.

In 1925, Miss Mona Douglas, the well-known Manx scholar and poetess, found in an old chest belonging to her great-grandfather, Philip Quayle of Glentrammon, hidden away, some rough notes of a few Manx dances. These she brought to Ramsey School to the headmaster, Joss Killey, who in his youth had been a Morris dancer in Yorkshire.

I was sent for and Mona showed me her notes. Between us, she doing the deciphering and I doing all the jumping about [15] we eventually unravelled first of all, the now famous Dirk Dance which I taught to six boys, one of whom, Billy Caine, was chosen to dance it in the Albert Hall. Since then, I am proud to say I have taught all the Island's Dirk Dancers—Donald Maddrell, Arthur Watterson, Doug. Clucas, Roadley Archibald, Stephen Newbold and Tony Archibald, the last two still performing it.

After that, we worked out “Car-ny-ferishyn” and “Eunnysagh Vona,” *but* what a job I had to induce the boys to dance with the girls, whose hands they held as they were hot potatoes. However, they soon paired off, and “Peter O’Tavy” and “Car Juan Nan” came into being next. In 1933, I brought the team to Liverpool and London, where the boys performed the most difficult of all Manx dances “Mylechranes March” a Manx Stick Dance which I again taught the men of the Manx Folk Dance Society a few years ago.

In 1936, we again visited the Albert Hall and gave a performance of [the] “White Boys,” “Sword Dance,” the “Dirk Dance,” the “Jig” (danced by myself) and “Mylecharane’s March.”

In 1937, we tackled the remaining Manx dances, but, I was transferred to Castletown School, so my activities in Ramsey came to an end. In Castletown I had a class of over 60 adults as well as several school teams, and so it was that Manx dancing came south.

In 1948, the Manx Folk Dancers visited Edinburgh and performed for a week, twice daily, at the Edinburgh Folk Dance Festival, Doris Larsen being my partner on that occasion.

But it was in 1951, that Manx dancing reached its zenith, for that was the year of [the] “Festival of Mann” and the wonderful pageant needed Manx dancing. I was roped in and taught representatives from all parts of the Island, with the result we had close on 80 dancers, including a dozen men, performing reels and jigs.

So successful was this, that folk dancing was included in the list of subjects taught at Night School the next winter, and from these classes arose the Manx Folk Dance Society, whose secretary, Miss Griffiths, is still in office and keeping us all in order with great enthusiasm and efficiency. The Society soon had a good display “A” team in action, four men and four women, *six* of whom are still in the “A” team. By 1959, this team had visited Manchester and had spent a week in Northern Ireland at the CCPR Festival, again dancing twice daily. This is the display team seated near you now, together with Tony Archibald and Aileen Hall, members of the Castle Rushen Folk Dancers.

[16] What of the future? Has folk dancing had its hey-day? There is not the enthusiasm there used to be, and young people do not want to learn anything inclined to be difficult. More so, in certain quarters, there seems to be a apathy towards teaching *anything* Manx. Miss Griffiths has insisted in her capacity as PE

Organiser in Island schools that folk dancing should be taught in all primary schools, but after transfer to high school, there it ends.

In *all my teaching career* I have had only *four* pupils who have gone right through High School yet dancing in my teams! Three are now teachers and the fourth, Tony, goes to Leeds University next week—and so I am short a Dirk Dancer.

Daphne Corlett in Castletown at present has country dance club, boys and girls up to fourteen years, and she has so far had excellent results. I hope that as they grow older, their enthusiasm will not wane.

Before closing, I would like to pay tribute to all the dancers who have helped and encouraged me through the years—dancers of Ramsey and Castletown Schools, the Manx Folk Dance Society, the Castle Rushen Folk Dancers, Miss Griffiths, the “A” Team and lastly my daughter, Aileen, who stands behind me in everything—not forgetting my *wife* who allows me to “gad” about so much with other women! She says she’s going to divorce me soon!!!

I do hope that sincerely that with so many proficient teacher dancers near me now, that our fine old dances may be saved from the fate which befell them of old. May this branch of our heritage be kept alive, dancers, for, as a great British composer once told us in the Villa, “A country which loses its traditions loses its soul.”

(3)

HOW I COMPOSED NEW MANX DANCES (PART 1)

(1972)

GORSE STICKS

[79] It was a fine October morning and I was walking from the Chasms through the fields towards Spanish Head when I met an old man, a Mr Harry Moore, who was collecting gorse bons in a sack. I noticed he had broken the bons into small pieces and tied them in bundles of four with rushes. When I asked him why he had tied the pieces together, he told me that each bundle was a *kiare* (‘four’) and called after the four Gospel writers. He said he was storing them for lighting his fire in the winter months.

I sat by the cairn on Spanish Head and it was there I composed the poem which I called “Gorse Sticks.” My solo dancer at the time was Tony Archibald, a keen dancer and very quick to learn any dance, so I decided to compile a solo dance for him using the poem as a *putt-y-beeal*, or mouth-music. I had to use _ time and I found it rather difficult to compile a solo to that time, but in the end, I had an “A” and “B” arrangement, “A” in the minor key, “B” in the major. I used the stick-tapping in the six man team dance, “Mylecharane,” and Tony mastered the whole vigorous dance in one afternoon session.

And so “Gorse Sticks” came into being. My daughter, Aileen Hall, who had already done quite a lot of *putt-y-beeal*, sang while Tony danced and the

combination proved a great success, not only in Mann, but also in Stafford, Dublin and Cork.

DAUNCE SON TROOR ('DANCE FOR THREE')

[80] When I was Headmaster of Ballasalla School, I was most fortunate to have two excellent folk dancers on the staff, Margy Stewart and Anne Gawne, and in the dinner hour we taught folk dancing to the children, who gave many displays in Morris, country and maypole dancing. One day, Margy asked, "Why don't you compile a dance for the three of us to do together?" and that evening I set to work on a threesome reel based on practically all the Manx steps and figures I knew, for one man with a girl on each side, the man taking the predominant part.

Like most folk dances the reel was in 16-beat time, but I had no music for it. One morning I was sitting on the Stack Rock at Scarlett trying to compose a dance tune, when I found myself humming a lovely, lilting melody, "Springtime clothes the meadows in robes of richest green" and suddenly decided to mould my dance tune from a children's hymn, which had just been sung at our Sunday School Anniversary. Unfortunately, I have never got down to writing a *putt-y-beeal* for it.

"Daunce son Troor" has been performed quite often recently by my own team, a younger section of the MFDS, and because it needs only three dancers, it can be used on concert platforms where a full team of eight could not perform creditably.

DAUNCE NOO GEORGE ('DANCE OF ST GEORGE')

Most of the many displays I have arranged during the last forty-five years have been given indoors, often under cramped conditions, where it was impossible for more than four dancers to perform properly (on one occasion, I found the platform was two trestle tables!) We had the solo Dirk Dance of course, and a jig, both of which need quite a lot of room too, but there was a need for more solo and duet dances.

My Ramsey team in 1937 had performed the six-man reel, "White Boys" in the Albert Hall, London. I have often taken part in the White Boys mumming play when I was a boy, but we did not dance at the end, as my adult team did in London.

Miss Lizzie Corrin, who had a small private school in Castletown, told me that in the play as she remembered it, St George danced alone. She remembered seeing a man whom she called Tommy the Councillor doing when he was a lad of seventeen. I was fortunate too in enlisting the aid of Miss Ada Corrin and Mr James Mylechreest, but as none of these three could dance then, often I was bathed in perspiration after being "instructed" by them.

The dance was done over crossed swords like a Scottish dance, but some of it was performed *behind* the swords. It was not until the winter of 1948 that I had succeeded in compiling the whole dance and its first performance in Port Erin literally brought the house down.

[81] The tune I composed myself, modelled from an old Manx fiddle tune in a book my father had and Miss Mona Douglas very kindly provided words in Manx for the *put-y-beeal*, sung always by Aileen.

Rod Archibald and his brother Tony both learned the dance, and, although it is a man's dance, Margy Stewart learned it at the same time. A few years ago, Tony and Aileen presented it in Cork, Kilkenny and Dublin and later on in Stafford at a display given by the Stafford Morris Men's team.

At the present time of writing (1972) the dance is performed only by a lad of fifteen, who is really only learning to do it properly.

CHAGLYN OARN ('GATHERING BARLEY')

It was late September, and one sunny afternoon I sat on a hedge at Grenaby watching a field of barley being cleared. It had been cut by a reaper and long lines of shapely stooks stretched across the field. Men were busy with horses and carts bringing the sheaves home to the nearby haggart, where other men were building a large stack and much of the field was soon bare, the men working hard, as there was a feel of rain in the air. While I sat there, I started to compose a poem about the harvest and I called it "Gathering in the Barley." At that time in the Castletown School PTA there were two members, Maisie Allison and Daphne Corlett who were talented Manx dancers and members of my demonstration team. In connection with PTA concerts, they had often danced the *Courting Dance*, then our only duet dance, but they wished for something new. One evening they came and asked me if I could compile a dance for them and I immediately thought of my poem.

I spent long hours composing a dance tune to this poem, long before I had started to compile the dance itself, but during the next few days music and dance were completed. Maisie and Daphne came along and in two sessions they had more or less learnt the dance right through.

After that they performed it regularly, Maisie taking the man's part, for I intended it to be performed by a man and a girl.

It has now been performed often by members of my selected team. Tony and Aileen danced it as a duet in Ireland and in England.

MADALCOGH

After the success of "Barley," Maisie and Daphne came again and said, "Compile another duet for us, Leighton," and once more I agreed.

While I was teaching in Ramsey, I was greatly helped by Miss Bella Garrett, who had been a keen dancer in her youth. It was she who told me of a side-step which she called the *back-side-step*, but which for obvious reasons I altered to *side-back-step*!! It was something like the Irish 7/3 step and it took me a while to perfect it, [82] a task in which I was helped by a Wren officer, Mrs Armour, an accomplished Irish and Scottish dancer.

I decided to use this step in the dance, and in a few weeks I had compiled a duet, each figure having two parts, "A" and "B," "A" in the major key and "B" in the minor, but I had difficulty in providing a tune for it, a tune which had to be lively and fast.

One morning I sat on the rocks at Scarlett (I always get inspiration on Scarlett Rocks!) and watched a motor boat with a noisy engine approaching. "Chig-chig-chig-chig" went the engine and at once I knew I had found the timing for my melody. I composed a tune there and then, and that is the tune we use now. When it is danced, I can almost hear the "chig-chig" of the little engine as the boat sped along to the harbour.

Maisie and Daphne worked hard at it and in a month performed it with a piano accompaniment. At present I am at work composing a purt-y-beecal for it, but the singer will have to be "mighty slick," as the tune is so fast.

It too was danced by Tony and Aileen in Ireland and England, and at present I have an excellent pair performing it, Margaret Killey and Pat Nicholson, the latter in my estimation being the finest dancer in the Island. I called the dance "Madalcogh" after the two dancers who asked for it. MAisie ALLison, DAphne COrlett with GH flung in to make it Manx.

DAUNSE NY MOAIN ('THE TURF DANCE')

I had often thought that the Manx folk song, "The Cutting of the Turf" was an excellent dance tune, but I honestly dislike to hear it used as an accompaniment for "The Widow's House." This dance is almost, if not entirely, like the English country dance, "Put on thy smock on a Monday" and therefore not Manx at all.

I was asked to compile an easy dance for a team of young Methodists from Arbory Street Chapel, Castletown. Maisie Allison was training them so I knew they were becoming proficient and not exactly beginners. I agreed, and told them we would do a dance about the turf gathering and use the Manx melody. I compiled the dance, having in mind the joy the Manx folk would have when all the turf had been brought home from the mountain. I had a large piece of turf fastened on the top of a tall red pole, the turf itself being decorated with streamers and evergreens, and the eight dancers danced round it with a deal of rhythmic hand clapping. The result pleased me very much, but unfortunately I lost the notation, and it was only about two years ago I found it again.

The Arbory School dancers performed it at their annual parish festival, Laa Columb Killey, that year and this year (1972) it was chosen to be one of four dances to be performed at the Junior Tynwald before Elizabeth, Lord of Mann.

(4)

HOW I COMPOSED NEW MANX DANCES (PART 2)

(1973)

[42] When the English Folk Dance Society held their first Vacation School in the Island in 1929 a surprise was prepared for them in the demonstration of three Manx traditional dances by the children of the Albert Road School, Ramsey. The Manx dances were at that time almost forgotten although many dance tunes had been recorded, but one well-known singer and dancer, Phillip Quayle of Glentrammon, Lezayre, had fortunately made notes of some of them, and from these, with the help of a number of elderly people who knew steps and figures, the dances were revived under the supervision of the Headmaster, Mr J. Killey, by Leighton Stowell and myself for this demonstration, one of them being our most famous dance, the Sword Dance of the Kings of Mann, performed by the twelve-year old boy who later became our most famous solo dancer, Billy Cain

From then until the present time Leighton Stowell, a keen Morris and folk dancer before he started to work on the Manx dances, has been continually performing, coaching and displaying them, and in recent years he has composed a number of new dances in the Manx tradition, most of which have been demonstrated by his own dance teams. This article tells the story of their origin.

THE MANX JIG ('KEEP WARM THE OLD PETTICOAT')

When Mona Douglas found the notation of several Manx dances in a chest belonging to her grandfather, Philip Quayle of Glentrammon, one of them was a solo jig. I was taught part of it myself, but somehow the matter ended there. It was later included in Book 2 of "Manx Dances." In the meantime I had worked out a succession of figures for a jig we called "Cum shenn oanrey sheh" after Mona's original melody, and I was honoured to be asked to dance it at the International Festival in the Albert Hall in 1937.

I did not want to interfere with Mona's version, so I decided to have another tune. One day I met a sheep farmer up on the Carnanes and we spent an hour or more "yarning." Our talk drifted towards Manx tunes and I casually asked if he had ever heard of one called "Keep the old petticoat warm." He said he had heard one called "The Red Petticoat," and it was all about a grand wedding which was going to take place at St Marks and it had ten verses in it. (I thought, Pity the poor *putt-y-beeal* singer!!) Mrs Watterson from the Level knew the tune so I notated it while she sang it to me.

I was unable to find the words so I composed a poem myself, all about the great wedding and how they must keep the old petticoat aired.

This jig is still performed fairly often, but Pat Nicholson performs it ideally, as her dancing is sheer perfection of movement.

DAUNSE BILLEY KEIRN ('DANCE OF THE MOUNTAIN ASH')

[43] I have always been interested in Manx folklore concerning natural phenomena, birds, trees, rocks, etc, and have collected quite a few stories about them. One tree stands out from all the others, the *keirn* or mountain ash, which was sometimes called the *billey-noo*, 'the holy tree' or *billey casherick*, 'the sacred tree,' because Manx folklore says the Calvary Cross was made of mountain ash. Consequently the wood of the tree had wonderful properties.

I have five keirns in my garden, and one morning a couple of years ago, they were laden with red berries which we call *berrishyn*. I must have been in a poetic state of mind that day, for before evening I had composed eight verses about the *billey-keirn*.

Later on I thought, "Why not a dance about it too" so I started on a six-hand reel for three men and three women. I wanted it to be different from the others, so I introduced quite a lot of step dancing and reels-of-three and in the end another Manx dance was born.

The music came to me quite simply, and in keeping with Manx tradition, I used "A" and "B" music again, "A" in the major, "B" in the minor.

The dance was performed this year at the Guild (1972) by a team of dancers from Tynwald Street Girls School trained by Doris Larsen to such a high standard of perfection that I awarded them 94 out of 100. The *putt-y-beeal* was delightfully sung by a little choir of twelve girls, the first time we have heard a dance accompanied by a choir.

DAUNSE STRAID ('THE STREET DANCE')

It was the summer of 1937 and I had just been transferred to Castletown School from Ramsey. In order to raise funds for the Malew Street Methodist Chapel, I was asked to organise a Rose Queen Festival, which was to begin with a procession round the town behind the Castletown band and end with the crowning ceremony and a folk dance display.

I had taught Ramsey and Kirk Michael dancers a dance to be performed behind a band when in possession, so I set to work to train Castletown dancers too (I had 84 in my class!) On the appointed day I selected twenty-four dancers to perform it while the others walked behind in pairs.

The applause from all sides exceeded our expectations, as the streets were packed with visitors. The music of course was supplied by the band, and the whole of our dance was done in the Gaelic reel step. We loved it, because it was amazingly how the music of the band and the "booming" of the drums filled us with real energy.

The dance is performed in sets of first and second couples, with three figures altogether, "C" being very complicated as it is a reel-of-four across the street.

[44] We danced in many times after that, the most memorable being when we danced behind the Scottish pipers all the way from the Douglas Town Hall to the Villa Marina on the occasion of the crowning of the Hospital Queen in 1943. I think

Doris Larsen and myself are the only two of the twenty-four dancers who still dance. These young ones have a nasty habit of falling in love and then it is goodbye to dancing!!

CONCLUSION

I have now compiled over a dozen dances. People ask me why I still do it at my age, 76. The traditional dances are very beautiful but I think our repertoires should expand and not stay “put” at fifteen dances. After all, English and Scottish dancers are continually issuing new dances, so why not Mann.

I have *never* pretended that my dances are traditional: they are based on traditional steps and figures with a bit of Celtic imagination thrown in as “dhooragh”!

Anyway, if my dances are worthy of preservation, in a couple of hundred years time they will be tradition, won’t they? At least, they have all been compiled by a true-blooded Manxman, whose great wish is, and always has been, to preserve all things belonging to Manx culture in dance, song or poetry.

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STEPHEN MILLER
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