

Manx Notes 347 (2018)

“THE OLD MAN WAS A REAL MANX SPEAKER”

HENRY JENNER SOUGHT OUT
AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

(1886)

David Everett when discussing Henry Jenner’s career at the British Museum (“Henry Jenner and the British Museum,” *Cornish Studies* 19 (2011), 140–58) mentions two letters to his wife, Katherine, written the same day in 1886, wherein he recounts the visit of two Manxmen to the Museum specifically to meet him, their names unfortunately not recorded. Whilst the relevant extracts appear in the article (150), the transcripts here have been taken from the autograph originals and are free from the editorial gremlins that have crept into the piece. The publication referred to in the letters is Jenner’s “The Manx Language: Its Grammar, Literature, and Present State,” *Transactions of the Philological Society* 1875–76 (1877), 172–97.

THE LETTERS

I. HENRY JENNER TO KATHERINE JENNER, 4 OCTOBER 1886

I have just had the prettiest & most unsophisticaed compliment I ever had. An attendant came and told me that two persons, from the Isle of Man, wanted to see me. I came out to the Kings Library & found two working men or small shop keepers, one an old man of 70, rather like James Oates ~~both~~ in voice, manner & face, the other his son. With many apologies & great humility they said they wished to see me. Of course I politely said, “Very happy to do anything I could &c &c.” “Aw, they dednt want me to do nawthing atall; they only wanted to see me.” It appears that being in London they couldnt resist come to the B.M., not to see the Egyptian or Assyrian things or even Magna Carta, but to see the learned author of a work on the Manx language, which they both knew by heart (as it turned out afterwards). Of course I shewed them all over the library & was very civil to them generally. I heard a good deal about the people I had met in the Island & the way they talked about my paper was beautifully complimentary. The old man was a real Manx speaker // They were uncommonly like Cornish men. Tell your father about them. It will amuse him.

Letter from Henry Jenner to Katherine Jenner, 4 October 1886, BL ADD MS 88884/45 [NI].

2. HENRY JENNER TO KATHERINE JENNER, 4 OCTOBER 1886

I was very much amused with my manx friend today. He was a curious specimen of the nation, very comic in his way of talking, with a great idea of a joke. He had spotted a few comic passages in my paper which had amused him very much, and altogether approved vewry highly of the account I had given of the language which he seemed to know very well & to be very fond of. He says there is a great difference between the present state of Manx & its state 11 years ago (when I wrote). So many old manx speakers have died & their children can't speak it, & the Manx services in churches & chapels are all discontinued, so it seems in a fair way to die out altogether. He was much pleased at my using a few manx phrases to him, though not having troubled about it since I wrote my paper, I didnt remember much. Thus, when I was shewing some of the Assyrian things & he was afraid he should have to go, I said, "Traa di looar" (Time enough) a very favourite phrase of procrastinating Manxmen which delighted him immensely.

Letter from Henry Jenner to Katherine Jenner, 4 October 1886, BL ADD MS 88884/45 [N2].

STEPHEN MILLER, 2018

