

# Manx Notes 367 (2019)

## “A PREACHER’S REMINISCENCES JOURNEYS FROM SULBY TO AGNEASH” (1957)

One of the features of the Agneash Methodist Chapel centenary celebrations just recently was the remarkable store of reminiscences related by Mr J.R. Corlett of Sulby, veteran preacher who has often officiated at Agneash and received a welcome there.

Mr Corlett told the gathering that with Mr Joseph Cottier he went on to the Primitive plan in October, 1895. At the start it was arranged that Mr Cottier would accompany Mr William Corlett and Mr J.R. Corlett would go with another well-known preacher, Mr James Teare.

However, Mr Corlett found he was planned with Mr Cottier for Agneash early in February, 1896. They set off from Kerrowmoar about noon and proceeded via the Narradale Road carrying a miners’ lantern for the return journey. This lantern by the way is now in the Manx Museum. They made a good trip over the hills and arrived at Agneash about 2-20 pm and after taking part in the service. attended by a larger congregation in those days, they went to the house of Mr and Mrs J. Oliver for tea. There was an even larger congregation for the evening service.

Mr Corlett spoke of his association with Mr Tom Scarffe, Mr William Kermeen and other stalwarts.

Agneash preachers travelled sometimes over the mountain to Sulby and Mr Corlett recalled Mr John Oliver going to preach at Kerrowmoar. His first call was at Close-ny-mona where the mountain farm was occupied by Mr Sharpe who, with his family, was very devoted to Kerrowmoar Chapel.

Such was the enthusiasm in those days, declared Mr Corlett, that it was easy to get ten or more persons to take part in a Sunday evening prayer meeting and testify to their faith. It was the custom in many a Methodist, chapel to hold this meeting after the ordinary evening service. The words of the invitation were in these terms, “Is there one here tonight who would like to start for the kingdom of Heaven?”

There were some outstanding evangelists 60 years ago including Phil Clucas, Glen Maye, Willie Gorry, Peel, John James Reeves, Tom Dolphin and Elijah Oliver.

Mr Corlett said he was “planned” at Agneash three or four times a year, sometimes he went from Kerrowmoar by cycle and on other occasions by foot over the hills. Sometimes he was alone and the journey was made in fair weather and foul. Mr Corlett was sometimes accompanied by other preachers: they included J.C. Quayle. R.J. Allen, R. Fayle, W.L. Quayle, Robert Allen and Tom Corlett. These were young men who came on to the Primitive Methodist plan.

One of the stories which Mr Corlett told of his experiences was when going up the mountainside on the way to Agneash he remembered he had left his purse at home.

He was feeling disturbed about the fact that he would not have any contribution to the collection and was pondering on this problem when he noticed a silver coin lying among some stones—and this solved his difficulty!

Another of the preacher's reminiscences concerned the Shrove Tuesday tea party at Agneash in 1897, and afterwards a young couple were going home and decided to take a short cut. Suddenly the girl disappeared down an old mine shaft and her companion ran for help to the house of Mr and Mrs Oliver. The whole neighbourhood was aroused and a young miner—R. Cowin—volunteered to go down the mine with rope and lantern. He went down and rescued the girl.

Mr Corlett paid tribute to the hospitality recorded visiting preachers to Agneash and said that it was the custom to hold an open air camp meeting on the second Sunday in August each year, the arrangements being made by John Clague and John Scarffe.

The preachers sometimes worked in Snaefell mines, and had to go down each morning at 7 o'clock. But this did not affect their preaching and they would set off from Kirk Michael or Ballaugh or Kerrowmoar, about 9 pm after having fulfilled their appointments to get home on foot by midnight if possible.

Mr Corlett also gave a graphic description of the Snaefell mines disaster of 1897 which hit the little centre at Agneash and recalled memories of say goodbye to some of the Oliver family one Sunday evening they had accompanied him part of the way up the mountain on his way home. He little realised that a week or two after John James Oliver and his father, two of their best local preachers, would met with disaster and be among the 20 victims of the tragedy.

One other interesting memory which Mr Corlett related was in regard to the custom in those days of preachers wearing high silk hats. If, however, they found the return journey was going to be stormy they would leave their hats at the farm of Mr J.H. Quayle, Narradale, Sulby, who would go over the hills to Agneash when the next fine day arrived to return the hats. One of the methods used by the miners to guide them on the right track in fog and storm was to place a number of flat stones on the ground.

Mr Corlett's reminiscences were much appreciated by the Agneash community.

"A Preacher's Reminiscences: Journeys from Sulby to Agneash." *Ramsey Courier* 31 May 1957: 6d.

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"Mr Corlett's reminiscences were much appreciated by the Agneash community." They are equally appreciated now as they capture detail that is never to be found in official accounts. Such accounts also speak to the importance of Methodism in Manx life.