

Manx Notes 374 (2019)

“YOU DRINK MANX TAYS AND THINKS MANX WAYS”
(1959)

IT’S A LA MODE—IT’S MANX!

You drink Manx tays and thinks Manx ways and tremble past St Trinian’s,
You curtsy to the Fairy Bridge and bow to Manx opinions,
The House of Keys, the T.T. race, the smoking smell of kippers
Are part of your existence, like the toastracks and the trippers.
You celebrate on Tynwald Day, and go to all the scrambles,
From Point of Ayre to Calf of Man you know the quietest rambles,
Your cat’s curtailed, you “hunt the wren,” you speak of going “across,”
And singing Ellan Vannin never finds you at a loss.
But one more custom added on to all these Manxland rites
Would really have some value here, and help us reach the heights!
A habit and a slogan that would earn the Island’s thanks—
“Shop locally! It’s all our own! It’s a la mode—it’s Manx!”

“It’s a la mode—it’s Manx!” *Mona’s Herald* 20 January 1959: 1C–d.

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This reads as a precursor to those internet-based memes that start with “You know you are Manx when...” and whilst the piece contains a good number of tourist-derived clichés about the Island—kippers, cats, and horse trams—though no Laxey Wheel on this occasion) there are enough references there than only an insider can fully understand—“Manx tays,” “hunt the wren,” “going ‘across’”—that undercut the clichés. This appeared on the front page of the *Mona’s Herald* for 20 January 1959 when one would think at that date the only option in the Island was to shop in the boulevards of Ramsey and the other towns in the Island and not “across” (and never on the Mainland). That apart, this piece is not as straight-forward as first appears as it is based on a poem from 1954:

CONVERSION OF A “COME-OVER”

I drink Manx tays and think Manx ways, and tremble past St Trinian’s,
I curtsy to the Fairy Bridge, and bow to Manx opinions.
The Booster and the T.T. Race and the smoking smell of kippers
Are part of my existence, like the toastracks and the trippers.

I’ve lost a tail and gained a leg, and speak of going “across,”
And singing “Ellan Vannin” never finds me at a loss.
And when it comes to animals, I find it most refreshing

That the Rumpy and the Stumpy can no longer leave me guessing!

I celebrate on Tynwald Day, and go to all the Scrambles,
From Point of Ayre to Calf of Man I know the quietest rambles.
The motor car I drive around has GBM to mark it.
(Though every time I take it out there's no place left to park it!)

I've wondered that the Government, with all those splendid Keys.
Don't open up a few more doors (for Sunday licence, please?)
And when folk ask me questions I am nearly always glad
For I parry off their queries with "I'll have to ask me Dad!"

"Quocunque jeceris stabit"—I'm tempted to amend it
To "Whatever you may throw at me, I hope that I can stand it!"
For I feel as Manx as most of you (and better Manx than some),
So PLEASE don't call me COME OVER, or I'll be OVERCOME!

Pseud [signed as "E.M.G."]. "Conversion of a 'Come-Over'." *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 5 January 1954: 6f–g.

The *Mona's Herald* piece is unsigned and it would be to complicate matters to suggest that another hand is at work here. So what at first sight seems to have been written by an insider is a reworked piece first composed by an outsider wishing to be accepted into Island life. On this score, no attention has yet been given to the term *comeover*, either its first appearance (and tracing its usage thereafter), or the tension that the word evokes in the Island. To illustrate the latter, here is a poem from 1957, one that shows a very different view from those sentiments expressed in 1954.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2019



NOT “COME OVERS” BUT “COME ACROSS”

Two expressions, daily used, are clear cut and defined
And illustrate quite strikingly our Island’s state of mind.
They’re “Gone Across” and “Come Over,” but in a subtle way
(Being Manx!) they do not really mean exactly what they say!

Now take “Across”: this really means “Going to the other side”
So when a person moves away, the word becomes a chide
Reproving him for leaving and disturbing our rapport,
For over there he cannot be “on OUR side” any more!

The dictionary clearly states that “Over” means “Above”
Or “Something of a higher rank.” Now surely you approve
That when we say “Come over” we unconsciously explain
That the person who has just moved in will benefit and gain!

For those of us who just stay put and help the Manx exchequer
There should be found a special word, to act as a reflector
For lighter purses, heavy odds, the cost of living growing.
So why not call us “COME ACROSS,” because We keep Man going!

PANDORA

Pseud [signed as “Pandora”]. “Not ‘Comeover’ But ‘Come Across.’”
Ramsey Courier 5 April 1957: 2f–g.

