

# Manx Notes 503 (2020)

## “GUILTY OF ‘ROMPING’ ON HALLOWEEN”

(1873)

(1)

THOMAS RADCLIFFE *v.* MARY ANN MCGREGOR, ALFRED GOLDSMITH, MARGARET KENNAUGH, JAMES DUGDALE, and THOMAS QUAYLE.—Suit brought for unlawfully and wilfully damaging real and personal property, *viz.*, the walls, doors, and windows of a certain dwelling house belonging to complainant, in the village of Andreas, on the 11th of Nov. last contrary to the 6th clause of the 3rd section of the Summary Jurisdiction Act. Mr Cruickshank for plaintiff, and Mr LaMothe for defendants. This case appeared a very paltry one, and forcibly reminded us of Burn’s “Halloween”:

Some merry friendly countra folks,  
Together did convene,  
To turn their nits, an’ pon their stocks,  
An’ haud their Halloween;  
Fu’ blythe that night.

From what we could gather from the evidence (a host of witnesses) it appeared that the cottage belonged to Mr Thomas Radcliffe, of Ballaradcliffe, and that it was getting cleaned down and repaired preparatory to being occupied by Mr John Sayle, whose wife, Sarah, was inside at the time, when these young women, seeing a light in, struck the door; not with a cabbage head (as it should be, and always has been) but with a turnip, which caused great consternation and alarm to those inside. Mrs Sayle informed her husband (who had not been in at the time) of the circumstance, and whilst doing so another bang came on the door. Mr Sayle at once went in pursuit, and captured Mary Ann McGregor, who at once confessed to her guilt. John Sayle stated how he had got hold of the runaway, the terrible blow the door received, and that Alfred Goldsmith and Mary Kennaugh were in the company. Thomas Radcliffe, owner of the cottage, considered the door, &c, had been damaged, which concluded the plaintiffs case.—Mr LaMothe called Benjamin Radcliffe, who had been the last occupier of the cottage, and asked him if he had seen the door since he left. He replied that he had seen it to-day and examined it minutely, and he could not see any more damage than when he left it, except a crack in one of the panels, which might be a little longer, and that might be caused by it being hard to open and shut. The hinges and catch were bad. I don’t think it is a farthing less than when I left it.—Wm. Skinner was called, and said he was in the smithy yesterday, and John Sayle was there when he stated that the girls did no harm, but he thought they should not be allowed to go romping about, as they were so near the church and chapel.—We believe there were other witnesses, who were not examined.—Mr Cruickshank very ably reminded the Bench that a breach of the law had been

committed. Mr LaMothe, on the other hand, contended that there was no damage done; and even it so it being an old custom, it no doubt could have been made up again without bringing it in this form.—Their Worships, after a brief consultation, *non press'd* as to defendant Quayle, and dismissed without costs as to Dugdale. The other defendants were fined one farthing and costs.

“[Ramsey and District] Magistrates’ Court: Saturday, Nov. 29, 1873,”  
*Mona’s Herald* 3 December 1873: 2f.

(2)

The time of the magistrates Colonel Thelluson and E.C. Farrant, Esq., was for a long period occupied in trying a suit brought by Thomas Radcliffe, of Andreas, against four or five young persons for throwing turnips instead of cabbages (which are the customary missiles on such occasions) against his house door on Halloween. Nothing nor anybody seem to have been injured, but complainant objected to girls “romping near a church or chapel,” and took this method of explaining the wickedness of such conduct. He did not, however, receive such assistance from the magistrates, who considered a farthing and costs a sufficient punishment for so grave an offence. It is positively shocking to hear that young people could be guilty of “romping” on Halloween, and we hope Mr Radcliffe will give a public lecture on the impropriety of such conduct. No doubt, the lecture would be well attended.

“[Ramsey and the North] Petty Sessions,” *Isle of Man Times* 13 December 1873: 5c.

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It is thanks to Thomas Radcliffe’s pursuit of Mary Ann McGregor—once literally as seen and then again through the law—that this incident comes to be reported. The Bench was more exercised it would seem with the breach of tradition, with turnips being thrown against the door rather than cabbages, and the case was effectively thrown out with a single farthing being awarded in damages (though the defendants found guilty did have to bear the costs of the case). This was “Thump the Door Night,” though the phrase does not appear here, a calendar custom where young people went door-to-door seeking gifts of food, and when mischief was licensed in the community against those who would not open their doors and dispense largesse. The date here was the 11 November, the evening before Hollantide Fair held the next day, and at this time also considered here to be Halloween. “Thump the Door Night” is poorly documented and it is with such chance material as here that a partial view is gained of the custom. As to those involved “romping” around, four of them can be identified for certain in the 1871 census: Thomas Alfred Goldsmith (15), Margaret Kennaugh (18), Mary Ann McGregor (13), and Thomas Quayle (17). There are two with the same name of James Dugdale enumerated in Andreas, one aged 20

and the other just 15 years old. Given the ages of the others it is possible that it is the younger one of the pair who was a member of the party. All were from Andreas bar McGregor herself, who was from Peel, or rather living there at the time of the census in 1871. As regards Sarah Sayle, she was 35 years old when enumerated residing at Regaby that year and with John Sayle her husband considerably older at 60 years of age.

STEPHEN MILLER RBV

THE DEFENDANTS

JAMES DUGDALE

There are two candidates: (1) James Dugdale, aged 20, a farm servant born in Jurby, and living in at Kiondroghad farm in Andreas;<sup>1</sup> (2) —, 15 years old and residing at Larivane, described as a lodging house.<sup>2</sup>

THOMAS ALFRED GOLDSMITH

Thomas Alfred Goldsmith was 15 years old and the son of the proprietor of the Grosvenor Hill at Andreas.<sup>3</sup>

MARGARET KENNAUGH

Margaret Kennaugh was aged 18 and a domestic servant at Ballaradcliffe farmed by William Joughin (the quarterland split into two farms with the same name).<sup>4</sup>

MARY ANN MCGREGOR

Mary Ann McGregor (though given as Greggor in the census) was 13 years old and lived at 11 Queen Street in Peel.<sup>5</sup>

THOMAS QUAYLE

Thomas Quayle was a farm servant, aged 17, and residing at Ballabane in Andreas.<sup>6</sup>

THE PLAINTIFF

THOMAS RADCLIFFE

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<sup>1</sup> *Census Enumerators' Book* for Andreas 1871, RG 10/5772, fol. 170, sch. 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Census Enumerators' Book* for Andreas 1871, RG 10/5772, fol. 170, sch. 62.

<sup>3</sup> *Census Enumerators' Book* for Andreas 1871, RG 10/5772, fol. 171, sch. 68.

<sup>4</sup> *Census Enumerators' Book* for Andreas 1871, RG 10/5772, fol. 171, sch. 64.

<sup>5</sup> *Census Enumerators' Book* for Peel 1871, RG 10/5771, fol. 172, sch. 349.

<sup>6</sup> *Census Enumerators' Book* for Andreas 1871, RG 10/5772, fol. 152, sch. 9.

Thomas Radcliffe was 52 years old in the 1871 census, the owner of Ballaradcliffe, reckoned at 108 acres and farmed with the aid of two men and a boy.<sup>7</sup>

THE SAYLES

JOHN & SARAH SAYLE

Sarah Sayle was living at Regaby in 1871, aged 35 years old, married to John Sayle, 60, who farmed there with a workforce of 4 men.<sup>8</sup>

OTHER NAMES

WILLIAM SKINNER

William Skinner was a farm labourer, 26 years old, living on Larivane with his family.<sup>9</sup>



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<sup>7</sup> *Census Enumerators' Book* for Andreas 1871, RG 10/5772, fol. 171, sch. 63.

<sup>8</sup> *Census Enumerators' Book* for Andreas 1871, RG 10/5772, fol. 195, sch. 61.

<sup>9</sup> *Census Enumerators' Book* for Andreas 1871, RG 10/5772, fol. 156, sch. 55.