

JOHN KELLY AND THE MANX BIBLE

(1771)

In 1837, the Rev. Stowell gave a lecture to the Bible Society in Dublin, in the course of which he mentioned John Kelly and his somewhat remarkable role in the publication of the Bible in Manx—or rather, on the way to it being published in Manx:

At last Bishop Hildesley got one correct copy of the Manks Scriptures completed, which he committed to Doctor Kelly who went to the Isle of Man, where he had his manuscript carefully laid up, and sometime after visited Whitehaven to get it printed, but it pleased God that as the vessel was about to enter Whitehaven, she was driven on some neighbouring rocks, and went to pieces. Dr Kelly saved himself by getting on a rock, and when the tide rose to his chest, sure to his trust, he held the manuscript, which he had never let out of his hand, above the water, until at last a boat came and carried him and his treasure safe to land.

“The First Bible in Manks.” *Limerick Chronicle* 26 April 1837: 1e.

The newspapers of the time report it differently and reading those accounts show it to be a more dramatic turn of events than the one imagined by Stowell.

STEPHEN MILLER RBV

(1)

Newcastle Courant (23 March 1771)

On Wednesday se’nnight,* in the evening, a sloop from Douglas, in the Isle of Man, with sixteen passengers, bound for Whitehaven, was drove ashore near Harrington harbour, and broke upon the beach; and the goods, parcels, &c. belonging to the Gentlemen on board, were entirely lost, except a manuscript copy of the Bible, in the Manks language, which has been above three years in translating and preparing for the press, by the clergy of the island, and now printing at Whitehaven, by the generous benefactions of the society for propagating christian knowledge, and for propagating the gospel in foreign parts.

* “a week” (*archaic*).

“On Wednesday se’nnight [...]” *Newcastle Courant* 23 March 1771: 2c.

(2)

Caledonian Mercury (27 March 1771)

Wednesday evening, the 13th instant, a sloop from the Isle of Man, bound for Whitehaven, with nineteen passengers (among whom were the regulating Captain of the island, his Lieutenant, the steward of one of his Majesty's cutters, and a clergyman) was put ashore near Harrington harbour, and broke upon the beach. All the goods, parcels, &c. belonging to the gentlemen on board, were entirely lost, except a manuscript copy of the bible, translated into the Mank's language, which the young clergyman (who is the corrector of the Mank's press at Whitehaven) swam ashore with, above three hundred yards, in his right hand, like Cæsar, buffeting the waves with his left. The passengers were all saved.

“[Edinburgh] Wednesday evening, the [...].” *Caledonian Mercury* 27
March 1771: 3a.

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