

“THERE IS AN OLD MAN NAMED OATES”
THE LAST MANX MONOLINGUAL OF BALLAUGH? *



[*Headed notepaper*: Ballaugh Rectory, | Isle of Man]

Jan^{ry} 15th 1884

My dear Mr Savage,

There is an old man named Oates in this parish aged about 76 or 78 who is unable to express himself in English, but I think can understand pretty well what is said to him. An old woman died in Maughold about 10 years ago when I was there, who I believe could neither speak nor understand English. This I think is the only case of the sorts I ever came across.

[*Remainder of letter not relevant*]

Yours faithfully | W^m Kermode

Letter from the Rev. William Kermode to the Rev. E.B. Savage, 15 January 1884. Correspondence of the Isle of Man clergy with the Rev. E.B. Savage, 1884, The John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester, Sir William Boyd Dawkins Papers, WBD/2/E/17.

*

In 1884, the Rev. E.B. Savage circulated a letter to the clergy of the Island seeking information as to whether there remained anyone in their parish who could not speak English, in other words what was called at that time a monoglot (a monolingual is now the preferred term). William Kermode was at that time the incumbent at Ballaugh his answer is reproduced above. The 1881 census enumerates William Oates as being aged 80, born in 1801, in Onchan, now living at Ballacyre in Ballaugh on an annuity and married to Catharine Oates, 69 years old. Present too was Jane Corkill (38), his wife’s cousin.¹ In 1871, William and Catharine were still on Ballacyre, though he was then declared as being 75 years old but with his wife aged 60.² Still living on an annuity, his parish of birth was given as Braddan. The 1861 census has him as farming Cooilbane in Lezayre, aged 60 and now born in Michael. Catharine is present (50), and so too is Daniel Craine (21), their son-in-law and his

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “‘There is an old man called Oates.’ The Last Manx Monolingual of Ballaugh?,” *Ballaugh Heritage Trust Newsletter* 14 (2016), 12.

¹ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Ballaugh 1881, RG 11/5598, fol. 61, sch. 2.

² *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Ballaugh 1871, RG 10/5772, fol. 87, sch. 5.

wife, Elizabeth (20). Daniel was born in Lezayre, Elizabeth in Jurby, Catharine's parish of birth.³ In 1851, Catharine (39) with Elizabeth (9) were living at Borlane in Jurby at her widowed mothers, Margaret Moughtin (75), incidentally born in Ballaugh.⁴ William's own whereabouts are a mystery as he does not turn up in the census. At present, he is difficult to trace earlier in the 1841 census, there being two candidates, both aged 40, one living in Lezayre, the other in Michael. Catharine Oates died aged 76 and was buried on 12 May 1888 in Jurby. A William Oates, interned in Michael on 25 July 1885 aged 90, is the only match for her husband. Their daughter, Elizabeth, went on to speak Manx, as did her own daughter, another Elizabeth. They were also folk song singers, for both W.H. Gill and Sophia Morrison. It is possible that William Oates was not unable as such to "express himself in English," rather that he preferred not to do so.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2016



³ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Lezayre 1861, RG 9/4422, fol. 8, sch. 35.

⁴ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Jurby 1851, HO 2524, fol. 12, sch. 55.