

“HAVE A GO”

WILFRED PICKLES IN BALLAUGH *

(1948)



In September 1948, the BBC turned up in Ballaugh in the form of Wilfred Pickles and in the shape of his radio show “Have a Go.” Held in the Church Hall to a ticketed audience of two hundred, it was oversubscribed and those who did not gain admission had to be content to listen to the recording being relayed on loudspeakers set up by Colebourns. There were as many standing outside as were seated inside. Pickles was a well-known and popular figure on the radio and moreover someone with a pronounced regional accent of English, Yorkshire in his case. His name was a gift, reinforcing the promotion of a Northern personality. Reproduced below are the four pieces from the newspapers reporting on Wilfred Pickles and the broadcasting of “Have a Go” from Ballaugh. They appear in date order, but it is the *Ramsey Courier* article, the third here, that contains the greater detail. One feature of the show was the interviewing of John Kneen, The Gaaue, one of the last native speakers of Manx and living at this time in the Ballaugh Curragh.

WILFRED PICKLES AND “HAVE A GO” IN BALLAUGH (1948)

- “Ballaugh ‘Has a Go.’ Excitement in the Village Hall. To Be Broadcast on October 13th.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 10 September 1948: 1a.
- . “Wilfred Pickle at Ballaugh. Great ‘Have a Go’ Night. Radio Personality charms Manx Audience.” *Ramsey Courier* 9 October 1948: 5e–f.
- . “‘Have a Go’ Recording.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 15 October 1948: 5c.
- . “‘Have a Go’ at Ballaugh. Mr John Kneen of the Curraghs.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 16 October 1948: 6h.

(1)

BALLAUGH “HAS A GO”

The village of Ballaugh entered fully into the spirit of the BBC’s “Have a Go” feature on Wednesday, and when the recording is broadcast on October 13th, the programme will doubtless rank as one of the best of the series.

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “‘Have a Go.’ Wilfred Pickles in Ballaugh (1948),” *Ballaugh Heritage Trust Newsletter* 17 (2019), 8–16.

About 200 people were lucky enough to secure tickets for admission to the Church Hall, and a big crowd had to be content with listening to the proceedings relayed from the hall.

Wilfred Pickles, as usual, made friends with everybody as soon as he stepped on the stage, and as the quiz team joined him, there was a special cheer for 95-years-old John Kneen, a retired blacksmith living in the Curraghs.

His interview by Wildred gave the programme a real Manx flavour. He told how he started work when he was 11 or 12, how he could speak the Manx language and said he had ever been attended by a doctor.

His recipe for longevity, he said, was hard work, taking good care of himself, and “a drop of ale and a smook.” He believed in eating common food and confessed he liked a drop of whiskey.

Robert Brew, Sulby miller, said he lived with his 75-years-old mother. He had been courting “ten years to-morrow” and while it was his ambition to wed it would be a shame to leave his mother at her age!

Gwen Kennaugh thought living in Ballaugh was “super,” and Charles Craine, bank clerk, described how Ballaugh was nicknamed “The Garden of Eden.” He said that some years ago when it was proposed to inaugurate a water scheme in the parish, the people objected to water from another parish being brought into their village—the Garden of Eden!

Mother of three young sons, Mrs Brenda Dorey of the Glen, said she formerly lived in the Isle of Wright and her husband was in the RAF.

One of the bright personalities of the quiz was Miss Florence Murray, the “Examiner’s” Michael correspondent who correctly guessed a series of tune-titles and then won the “the jack-pot” by naming the four Manx steamers built since the end of the war.

She said she was delighted that her ambition to meet Wilfred Pickles had been realised, and she put in a good word for the Girls’ Friendly Society in which she is a prominent worker.

A diversion in the programme was the singing of 10-years-old Angush Hutchinson, son of a Douglas head lighthouse-keeper. A pupil of Miss Lilian Pickard, he gave a nice rendering of “The Cuckoo,” test piece in the boys’ solo class in the Manx Music Festival last May.

Before the recording began, a concert was given by the Godfrey Brothers, Frederick Noble and Violet Carson.

“Ballaugh ‘Has a Go.’ Excitement in the Village Hall. To Be Broadcast on October 13th.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 10 September 1948: 1a.

WILFRED PICKLES AT BALLAUGH

The most popular of all radio features—one which mirrors the dreams, ambitions, joys—and sometimes the cares of people in this workaday world, and which in the words of Wilfred Pickles himself is “a friendly and matey” show, came to Ballaugh on Wednesday night and in about a month’s time the recording of “Have a Go,” very successfully made by Wilfred and a local “team” will be broadcast by the BBC.

As is known Wilfred has a very real love for the Island and at the outset he explained to the audience, which packed the Church Hall, that when he was over here in June doing a Children’s Hour broadcast he through Ballaugh and liked the place “such a lot” that he decided it would be a good idea to make it the venue for a “Have a Go” programme.

Ballaugh, it seems, appealed to him as a typical Manx village and it was thought it might be possible through the broadcast to capture some of its old world charm and give listeners a picture of the kind of life which its people live. It was with this object in view that a local committee was set up to select, an audience which would be a section of the parishioners. As the hall only holds little more than 200 people it was impossible to accommodate all who wished to attend and seats were placed in the field outside and Messrs Colebourn Ltd. relayed the programme through loudspeakers to the open-air crowd which was almost as that which filled the hall.

Credit is due to Mr Ned Boyde who was concerned in furthering the suggestion when it was originally made by Wilfred and Barney Colehan, producer of the “Have a Go” feature, and also to the committee who efficiently carried out the arrangements. After all Wilfred is known as the No. 1 Radio personality in this country and Ballaugh was honoured in being chosen for the setting for his second “Have a Go” show in the Island, which he indicated would be the last of this series so far as Manxland is concerned, at least for this year.

To revert to the big event on Wednesday the ball was set rolling shortly after 7-30 when a short variety programme was given by BBC artistes. The Codfrey Brothers, entertainers who it may be recalled took part in the “Sing Song” broadcast from the Ramsey Pool last summer, gave the first items and were followed by Violet Carson, accompanist to the “Have a Go” programme, who delighted everyone with her songs at the piano. Then Frederick Noble, an excellent baritone and just the man to raise the enthusiasm of the audience contributed several and finally he led everyone in singing “Pack up your troubles” which was a curtain raiser to the “Have a Go” programme. The audience sang the signature tune two or three times and were put in good, trim for the appearance of Wilfred, smiling and friendly as ever.

Wilfred told everyone that the show would proceed quite informally and unrehearsed and that it would be broadcast by a coincidence on his birthday—Wednesday, October 13th. He appealed to the audience to join in singing “the

loveliest of all Manx songs”—Ellan Vannin at the end and on went the red light and the recording began.

COAT OFF TO THE JOB

A brief description of the location of Ballaugh was given by Wilfred who by this time had taken his sports jacket off and was “on the job.” He seemed to be in great form and his lively patter and jokes kept the fun going at a fast pace. He had a crack at the Island’s low rate of income tax and added , “No wonder they call it Ballaugh, the laugh’s on us,” a remark which rocked the audience. Another laugh-raiser was his reference to Ballaugh on the T.T. course and the jocular statement that the bikes jumped over the hump-back bridge at 80 m.p.h. and did not touch the ground again until they reached Ramsey!

This flow of humour continued throughout the recording and Wilfred punctuated the proceedings with witty sayings and apt retorts which absolutely convulsed the audience at times.

The first member of the “quiz” team to come forward was Robert Brew, of Kella Mill, Sulby. He told us that he was born in Ballaugh and was a miller.

In reply to the inevitable question as to whether he was courtin’ or not he raised one of the biggest laughs of the night by replying that he had been courting for “ten years tomorrow.” He explained he was one of a family of fourteen and as they were all married but him he thought it was a shame to leave his 75 years’ old mother. But his ambition Was to get married and have a family . Asked who he would take with him if he had to go to a desert isle he replied, “My young lady, and Nat Mills and Bobbie because they say ‘Let’s ge on with it.’” (Laughter).

When some questions were given him about gardening he did not find them so easy but nevertheless got the money.

A young lady named Gwen Kermeen, of Orrisdale, next faced the microphone and said she was born in Ballaugh and thought living there was “super.” She told of her work on the farm, driving a tractor and trying to make a stack and also sang some tunes the titles of which she had to guess.

NINETY-FIVE-TEAR-OLD PARISHIONER

A tremendous reception was accorded the next member of the team. He was a bent and bearded figure who was assisted to his place before the mike and told us his name was John Kneen, retired blacksmith, living m Ballaugh Curraghs. Asked his age he amazed the audience with his answer—“I am about 95 years of age.” He said he had lived on the Island all his life at Andreas and Ballaugh. He started work when he was eleven or twelve years of age. Wilfred persuaded the veteran to give some more information about his early life and when he was asked how much money he earned when he began work he replied amidst laughter, “Oh I got nothing for practising.” The audience marvelled when he said he had never been attended by a

doctor and attributed his long life to “eating all sorts of common food, plenty of hard work, taking good care of myself, and having a drop of ale and a *smook*.” He said he was fond sometimes of a drop of whisky. He also remembered using the Manx language a good deal and said he only talked Manx now when “just odd fellows come to learn from me.” The only time he was ever off the Island was when he was in Belfast. He liked this very well, liked the people and got on all right with them.

A flash of unexpected humour came when Mr Kneen was questioned as to what was the happiest day of his life. He said it was the day he got christened and went on to explain the kind of clothes that children wore in the old days and said that his first boy’s suit was given him when he was christened. Asked if there was anything he didn’t like Mr Kneen replied he didn’t like seeing young women drinking in public houses.

Mr Kneen of course had no difficulty in answering the questions put to him by Wilfred and it was a foregone conclusion that he would be given the money.

A pleasing diversion in the programme was provided by the singing of ten years old Angus Hutchinson, son of the a lighthouse keeper at Douglas Head Lighthouse, who said he was born in the Orkneys. In answer to the familiar question as to which three people he would take with him on a desert isle he said his father and mother and his music teacher, Miss Lillian Pickard.

A TEMPORARY RESIDENT

Wilfred next called on Mrs Brenda Dorey, housewife and mother of three little boys, aged four, five and six years. She said she lived in Ballaugh Glen and came to the Island from the Isle of Wight her husband being a physical training instructor in the RAF. Her recipe for happy married life was, “Have confidence in one another and tolerate one another if you have difficulties, always ‘give and take.’”

Mrs Dorey was very bright on some questions about wild flowers and carried off the money quite easily.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

The tall figure of Mr Charles Craine towered above Wilfred in the next interview. Mr Craine, noticing that Wilfred was writing down his name agreed that it was a good Manx name “if you put the r in it.” (Laughter). He told his hearers he was a native of the village and engaged in banking. Picking up on an earlier reference by Wilfred to Ballaugh as “The Garden of Eden,” he recalled that in the early days of the scheme for initiating a water supply for Ballaugh a local gentleman objected to water from another parish coming into Ballaugh which he described as “The Garden of Eden” and water was not “imported” into the garden of Eden. The nickname had stuck.

Asked what his ambition for the future was Mr Craine very quickly retorted, "To keep alive," which brought a wisecrack from Wilfred about starting from Adam and ending with atom!

Mr Craine's definition of happiness was one which seemed to meet with murmurs of approval, it was "Being content or satisfied," and his dislikes were stated to be cucumbers, bigots and snobs.

WANTED TO MEET WILFRED FOR YEARS

If time had permitted Mr Craine might have been able to add more Manx flavour to the programme for he is, as is known, a Manx linguist but this angle was not taken up and after he had answered some questions on geography and collected the "dibs" he was followed at the microphone by Miss Florence Murray, of Kirk Michael. Florrie, as she is widely known in Michael and Ballaugh, was perfectly at home with Wilfred whom she confessed she had "wanted to meet for years," and she made the most of her brief appearance on the stage. She said she worked as a clerk for Kelly Bros and Wilfred quickly recalled a visit to the workshop in his last Manx broadcast and made some reference to the firm being the village undertakers. Miss Murray spoke of her work for the Girls' Friendly Society, said her hobbies were gardening and stamp-collecting, and guessed a series of tunes connected with flowers. Immediately afterwards she was first with the answer to the jack-pot question and won the money. The question required the names of the four steamers built for the Steam Packet Co. since the war and she was the first member of the team to write down the correct names.

The singing of "Ellan Vannin" brought to an end a memorable and enjoyable evening and those who were not privileged to be present and hear the show should diary October 13th and listen to a recording which, we imagine, will prove one of the merriest of the "Have a Go" series.

Among those on the platform or at the back of the audience for the recording were Philip Robinson, who directs outside broadcasts for the Northern Region, Allan Clarke who does sports' broadcasts for the BBC and of course Mrs Pickles who had a hand in making sure the arrangements went smoothly.

Guests of the evening in the audience included the chairman of the Palace and Derby Castle Co.. Mr [damaged] and the manager, Mr Fred [damaged]. The editors of the Insular newspapers. Mr A.S. Kelly, MHK, who is on the committee which deals with broadcasts from the Island, and Mrs Kelly.

"Wilfred Pickle at Ballaugh. Great 'Have a Go' Night. Radio Personality charms Manx Audience." *Ramsey Courier* 9 October 1948: 5e-f.

(3)

“HAVE A GO” RECORDING

The “Have a Go” programme recorded in Ballaugh Church Hall on September 8th was broadcast in the BBC Light Programme in Wednesday evening and may be heard again on Sunday morning. Introducing the programme a slightly “cut” version of the original, Wilfred Pickles put Ballaugh “on the map” in characteristic style and commented generously on the charms of the island generally. Residents heard in the recording were Robert Brew, a Sulby miller, Mrs Brenda Dorey, of Ballaugh Glen, 95-years-old John Kneen, retired blacksmith, and Miss Florence Murray, of Kirk Michael.

A diversion was a solo by 10-years-old Angus Huthinson, of Douglas Head Lighthouse, for which “he was given the money,” and the half-hour show ended with the community singing two verses of “Ellan Vannin.”

“‘Have a Go’ Recording.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 15 October 1948: 5c.

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“HAVE A GO” AT BALLAUGH

“He is not like other men. He’s got a sharp wit about him.”

This was the comment of someone who knows Mr John Kneen, who lives in a cottage at the Curraghs, over two miles from Ballaugh. On Wednesday that wit and intelligence was displayed to thousands of radio listeners all over the world, and especially Manx people. For his voice was heard in the famous programme, Wilfred Pickles’ “Have a Go.”

Mr Kneen, 95 years of age, is a retired blacksmith, and lives with his daughter Millie. He has a son who works on a farm. His smithy was at Andreas.

Recently Mr Kneen, who speaks fluent Manx, made a record of a Manx conversation with Mr Kaighin, of Bride. An Irish professor visited them with a recording van. The record is to be used for language instructional purposes.

Only once in his long life has he left his native Isle.

He told friends that he was very keen to listen to himself on the radio. We are sure he will be proud of his performance.

“‘Have a Go’ at Ballaugh. Mr John Kneen of the Curraghs.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 16 October 1948: 6h.

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STEPHEN MILLER

