

Manx Notes 33 (2004)

“I HAVE WRITTEN A LITTLE SCITCH OF MY LIFE”
EDWARD FARAGHER’S “A SKETCH OF CREGNEISH”

A SKETCH OF OLD CREGNEISH

In the time of my boyhood every house in Cregneish had a stack of heather at its gable. They called it *conney freoaie*, the gorse *aittin*. Everyone about the Mull that owned a bit of mountain was cutting turf in May—(they called it “sod”) and then, spreading it to dry, and the sods being well dried, they made stacks of them for the winter fire; they called the stack *eekad* also *eek moaney* (turf stack). I don’t remember a fire-grate in any Cregneish houses, but burning heather and sods on the hearth.

There were only two farmers in Cregneish who had a pair of horses, but there were a good many of them who had one; and then two of them joined together at ploughing time, and ploughing together like they are in the West of Ireland at the present time, one man driving and the other holding the plough. They had wooden ploughs in those days. I remember them very well, and one of the little farmers would be lending the plough to the other.

The old folk of Cregneish were very different from the present generation; they only spoke the Manx language, and were clothed with their manufactured clothes. They had a pair of cards in every house to card the wool, and a heckle to heckle the flax, and cards to card the tow. They very often spun the tow and made sackcloth of it, and some of the hard-working men had shirts of it. The women spun the flax and the wool, and there were plenty of country weavers. I recollect five weavers in Cregneish alone—John Gale, nicknamed Joan Vess, Richard Keggan, or Dick mooar, Billie Taubman, often called the *fidder* and old Jenny Quark, and John Watterson (Jack Illiam). They made woollen cloth and flannel for singlets for the men that were going to sea, and petticoats for the women. Then they were sent to the mill to thicken it for drawers and coats to work in: the coats were white and bound with black braid, and looked very stylish. But the *perree bane* is gone out of date for many years. I often think of the old men of Cregneish when I see the Irish in the West of Ireland with the *perree bane*, both old men and young. They were mixing wool of different colours, as black and white, and spinning and weaving them, and then milling the cloth for trousers, *breechyn glooinagh*, or knee breeches. They called the cloth *keir-lheeah*, or brown grey.

The food in those days was chiefly porridge (made of oatmeal) and milk for breakfast, potatoes and fish, or salt herring in the winter, for dinner; and sometimes beef and broth made up of shelled barley and cabbage, and other things such as leeks and onions, and potatoes, and parsnips, mashed up together to eat with, and sometimes potatoes and beans mashed up together—a kind of large bean that grew in the garden. I have sometimes seen potatoes and white cabbage mashed up for dinner, and fresh fish, but it was often groat porridge for supper, and sometimes

potatoes in their jackets, and fish of some kind, with plenty of buttermilk. There was no tea in the evening, and only three meals each day. I have heard some of the old farmers say if they had been in some house and saw the family at tea that they would soon be in poverty. We used to catch as many hake fish and cods with our lines in the herring season as made us a good store in the winter. When they were dried in the sun, and then kept in a dry place, they were very good when broiled before the fire. I would rather them than cheese, but the times are changed. There are no hakes to be got about the Island in these days.

The farmers in Cregneish, and all over the Island, used to steep the husks of the oats in water for some time, and some dust of oatmeal, and run the water through a sieve to get the husks out and then it was like white water; and they filled the biggest pot in the house with it, and stirred it with a potstick all the time it was on the fire, until it was thick and solid, and they ate it for supper with new milk. The Manx people called it *cowree*, and a very good feed it was. (That was the cowree the fairies were so often eating in the houses.) The big pot was emptied into dishes, and it was quite solid when it was cold, and lasted for nearly a week for supper in the farm houses. They boiled the milk with the cowree when it was cold, and it appears the fairies were very fond of it by all accounts. I have not seen nor tasted cowree in the Island for many years.

I think it a great shame to Manx folk that cannot speak their native language. No doubt the old people of Cregneish were not like some others of their neighbours in the little sea-port towns, with the *perery bane*, *keeir-lheeah* knee breeches and *carranes*, but they were more innocent and kinder to one another; they all used to help one another to get the crops down, and in the harvest helped each other to cut the corn and stack it. There was no word about pay.

My aunt was talking about old times the other day—in her youthful days in Cregneish. When the cows of one family were dry, the rest of the neighbours that had cows milking were dividing the milk with them that had none. I recollect myself when there was no paying for milk in Cregneish, and a big vessel, something like a quart in shape but holding half a gallon, standing on the dresser full of buttermilk and thinned with water. They called it a “bumper,” and it was always kept nearly full for anyone that was thirsty, if you asked for a drink.

I recollect when they were no houses nor gardens on the Green, and when I was a boy we had the whole place to run on. We were often, in the winter time when it was moonlight in the evenings, playing hares and hounds on Cregneish Green, but the owner sold it to those who wished to build, and they enclosed the most of it with walls, so there is not a place for the children to play but on the Mull.

In those days they seldom took a cart to the mill, but put the sack across the horse's back. I have been many times at the Colby Mill myself with a sack of corn, and getting the meal again the same way. They had a thing like the two legs of a pair of pants, made of straw, which they fastened on the horses's back, so that the sack

would not slip off. We used to carry the manure on our backs in boxes made of straw. We called them *clein*, but some of them a “creel.”

“Chimer-lye” is the English name in the Island for *mooin*. The people in my young days used a great deal of it; every house used to have an old crock somewhere outside the house where they kept the *mooin ort*, as it was styled in Manx. At that time they manufactured their own cloth and flannel, and the women spun the woollen yarn, and there was always some oil mixed with the wool before it was carded and spun. The women knitted the stockings with oily thread, and the “chimer-lye” with some warm water was the thing for taking the oil out of the long flannel webs and stockings manufactured at home.

I remember when we made our own herring nets, we had shuttles made of the wood of elder trees, or *trammon*, and they were white when new, but we steeped them in the “chimer-lye” pot, which turned them red as if they were painted.

The *foaddan* were the long chips of fir tipped with brimstone, which served as a match to light the fire. On the Mull and in Bradda, as well as in many other places over the Island, the people had their kiln, which was fired for drying the corn and grain.

The nearest school was at the Parish Church, and over two miles from Cregneish. I mean the school where the children were learning writing and ciphering. There was an old woman at Port St Mary who kept a school for infants. We knew very little English at Cregneish in those days. The fishermen were all very fond of the Manx ale or *jough*, and spent a great deal of their earnings in the public houses, and the old men said that a man who would not drink was no man.

And now a few words about the people and houses that I remember when I was a boy. There was one at the Sound, and the occupier’s name was Corrin, but the people called him “Juan Illiam Ned,” and others, “Boy mooar.” The next house was James Carine’s, or “Jemmy Varrey.” Then Keig’s house—he was called “Saggyrt.” His son was called “Rowley” for a nickname, and his daughter, “Wopper vooar.” Collay, or Cowley, wife and family, were eleven in all. Then there were the Faraghers—“Thom ruy,” “Neddy Thom ruy,” and “Ned Thom ruy.” Then came William Taubman’s house, and old Quark’s—and the whole family gone to their rest. Taubman left a son and plenty of grand-children to keep up the family name. Then there was old Crebbin, called “Johnny Tim.” Then old Bill Karran—they called the son “Billy mooar”—and the Bridsons; R. Keggins and Bill Keggins—called “Bill Dee”; William Watterson—one of the sons going by the name of “Illiam beg yn vrandy, or brandy”; John Watterson—called “Jack Illiam,” the father of fifteen children, one third of the people of Cregneish having sprung of him, some of the people calling them, “the tribe of Jack.” Then Mrs Karran. Then there was John Gale’s house, called “Juan Vess” for a nickname; and Jemmy Kelly. John Keggins, the monoglot Manxman, lived in the Chasms.

There have been one hundred and fifty deaths in Cregneish of old people in my time, besides many infants and young people.

I have heard my grandfather telling me about the old Karrans of Cregneish. They were very big men—half giants, and very powerful, who are said to be the offspring of the Spaniards of the Spanish Armada, which was wrecked on Spanish Head. It appears some of them escaped the briny deep and afterwards married in the Island, and one Karran took a Cregneish woman. The father of the Karrans was a very big man and he had some very strong sons. I heard one time they were herring fishing in rowing boats, and the Karrans were all in one boat. The fleet of rowing boats were going so far from the Island that the men could see cattle in the folds in Wales and Ireland. Once one of the Karrans was not able to go to sea with the boat and they got another man in his place, and they had a good haul of herrings that night. When they came to divide the money they gave the strange man only half a share, for they reckoned him only half a man. And he summoned big Karran before Deemster Lacey, and the Deemster asked in Manx: “Row uss som gymmyrt noi gheay as roayrt rish Karran mooar Crenaish?” (“Wert thou able to row against wind and tide like big Karran of Cregneish?”)

And he had to acknowledge that he could not, so the Deemster told him to be thankful for what he had got. I heard of Harry Karran, who was much bigger than the common run of men in the Island, and very powerful, but a very quiet man that would not harm anyone. There was another big man in the parish called “Thommy Howlym Whither” (that was either his real name or nickname), and he was very quarrelsome, and a great bully. Once Howlym quarrelled with Harry on meeting him in a public house, but Karran would not fight with anyone and the others would not allow Howlym to hit him, so he had to content himself until it got late, and near shutting up time. Then Howlym went before Karran and lay by the hedge up Fistard road to tackle Karran when there would be no one to defend him. Karran was no boxer, though very strong, so when Howlym got up and ran at him, taking him by surprise, he caught hold of Howlym and squeezed him that he fainted, and left him on the road. He came to himself after a while, but he never got over the squeeze, and did not live many years afterwards. He had a very little wife for such a big man, but I heard a little woman say once that “a very little crab could lie under a big stone.” All the big Karrans are gone. The trade of the old Karrans was quarrying lintels at Spanish Head. They had a rope ladder going to the bottom of the cliff. There was an old woman living in the village called Etty, and “Black-stocking.” She was a great tyrant, and all the neighbours were afraid of her. She had one brother who was drowned while fishing at the Black Head with a rod. The rod was found on the rock, but his body was discovered only some days afterwards. The old folks were of the opinion that it was the *boggane* that haunted the cave at the Black Head, which frightened him with his roaring, and that this was the cause of his falling in the water. Old Etty had one daughter, Margot, whom she left heiress to the farm. She

was a very good singer and dancer. She lived in the house alone, and it was a great haunt for the young men. She used to learn us to sing and dance. It was a meeting house for both sexes for many years. When she died, the house soon went to ruin. The little garden in front has disappeared, the haggard, where as boys we used to play among the stacks of corn at “tip-lift-thorran” is like the rest of the common, and Margot’s old haggard is trodden like the highway.

Source: Edward Faragher. “A Sketch of Old Cregneash.” *Skeecalyn Aesop*. Ed. Charles Roeder. Douglas: S.K. Broadbent, 1901. 81–90.



I have got the fables finished and I have written a little scitch of my life, too, but I am ashamed that people should see it and think I was such a foolish fellow in my early life and beside that I am unable to write anything gramatically for I know very little about it. I can do pretty well; in rhyme but a very poor hand at prose.¹

Edward Faragher had been engaged over the winter of 1896 in translating *Aesop’s Fables* from English into Manx for Karl Roeder. A selection of his efforts later appeared in the *Isle of Man Examiner* newspaper² and they were reprinted later in 1901 as *Skeecalyn Aesop*.³ Some of Faragher’s poetry was included in this book together

¹ Edward Faragher to Karl Roeder, 19 January 1897, Manx National Heritage Library (MNHL), MS 11064, Box 2.

² Edward Faragher, “Skeecalyn Aesop: The Lion and the Mouse, Yn Lion as yn Lugh, The Father and his Sons, Yn Ayr as e Vec,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 5 January 1901, “Skeecalyn Aesop: Yn Mwaagh as yn Tortoise, The Hare and the Tortoise, The Wolf and the Lamb, Yn Moddey-Oaldey as yn Eayn,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 12 January 1901, “Skeecalyn Aesop: The Dog and the Shadow, Yn Moddey as yn Scadoo, The Farmer and the Stork, Yn Eirinagh as yn Stork,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 19 January 1901, “Skeecalyn Aesop: Yn Assyl, Yn Shynnagh, as yn Lion, The Ass, the Fox, and the Lion, Yn Tortoise as yn Urley, The Tortoise and the Eagle,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 9 February 1901, “Skeecalyn Aesop: Yn Vuc-Awin as yn Daa Hroailtagh, The Bear and the Two Travellers, Yn Moddey ayns y Vanjoor, The Dog in the Manger,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 23 February 1901, “Skeecalyn Aesop: Yn Cabbyl as Guilley-ny-Gabbil, Yn Moddey-Oaldey ayns Coamrey Keyrragh, Yn Bochilley aeg as yn Moddey-Oaldey,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 2 March 1901, “Skeecalyn Aesop: Yn Scollag as ny Undaagaghyn, Ny Guillyn as ny Froggyn, Yn Shynnagh fegooish e Amman,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 16 March 1901, “Skeecalyn Aesop: Yn Phartan as e Moir, Ny Kellee haggee as yn Urley, The Game Cocks and the Eagle, The Crab and Its Mother,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 30 March 1901, “Skeecalyn Aesop: Yn Annag as yn Cruishtin, Yn Shynnagh as ny Berrishyn-Feeyney, The Fox and the Grapes, The Crow and the Pitcher,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 20 April 1901, “Skeecalyn Aesop: The Lion and the Three Bulls, Yn Lion as yn Three Terriu,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 4 May 1901, “Skeecalyn Aesop: Yn Lion as yn Bochilley, The Lion and the Shepherd,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 18 May 1901, “Skeecalyn Aesop: Yn Ven Aeg as yn Curn Bainney, The Young Woman and the Milk Can, Yn Darragh as yn Chuirtagh, The Oak and the Reeds,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 13 April 1901.

³ Charles Roeder, ed., *Skeecalyn Aesop*, (Douglas: S.K. Broadbent, 1901).

with “A Sketch of Old Cregneash.”⁴ This was extracted from a longer piece that he had written which is extant now only in a transcript made by Edmund Goodwin.⁵ Faragher mentions that he was “unable to write anything gramatically” and that he was “a very poor hand at prose.” This was no understatement; his letters (those, at least, written in English) disregard grammar, syntax, spelling, punctuation, layout, but there is a flow to his writing and it is thereby structured in that sense. However, Goodwin has in making his transcript edited Faragher’s original texts heavily correcting his erratic style. Goodwin is likely to have received the originals not from Roeder himself but via Sophia Morrison. He was a member of her circle of Celtic enthusiasts and provided the learner materials for the Peel Manx Classes organised by Morrison.⁶

“Cregneish Notes by E. Faragher” comes from this circle of Morrisons passing around and making personal copies of manuscripts of interest to them. Besides the utility of material having been preserved that is now lost in the original, what is seen here is the “afterlife” of such material, its circulation amongst a group of like-minded enthusiasts, and the necessity that if one wished to retain such material, then one had to literally make oneself a handwritten copy.⁷

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- ⁴ Edward Faragher, “A Sketch of Old Cregneash,” *Skeelalyn Æsop*, ed. Charles Roeder (Douglas: S.K. Broadbent, 1901). Reprinted as Edward Faragher, “A Sketch of Old Cregneash: Reminiscences of a Country Bard,” *Journal of the Manx Museum* v.68 (1943).
- ⁵ “Cregneish Notes by E. Faragher.” This manuscript is a composite of material by Edward Faragher. The “Sketch” can be found between pp. 11–35. First seen when in private hands. Recently acquired by the MNHL and accessioned as MS 09469/1. Faragher’s originals remain unlocated.
- ⁶ Later issued as Edmund Goodwin, *Lessoonyn ayns Chengey ny Mayrey Ellan Vannin* (Douglas: S.K. Broadbent, 1901). Known as *First Lessons in Manx* from the title given on the cover, this book has remained the basic primer for learning Manx. A second edition appeared in 1947. The foreword by J.D. Qualtrough gives a biographical notice of Goodwin but notes the year of his death incorrectly as 1924 instead of the following year, 1925. Edmund Goodwin, *Lessoonyn ayns Çhengey Ellan Vannin liorish Edmund Goodwin* (n.p.: Manx Language Society, 1947) [6]–[7]. See too Frank Cowell Kelly, “Edmund Goodwin,” *Mona’s Herald* 19 November 1935. The third edition was completely revised and re-arranged by Robert L. Thomson and has been subsequently reprinted as demands occasions. Edmund Goodwin, *Lessoonyn ayns Çhengey Ellan Vannin liorish Edmund Goodwin* (Douglas: Yn Çheshaght Gailckagh, 1966).
- ⁷ Goodwin was later involved with making a complete copy of the tune books of Dr John Clague (1842–1908) for Sophia Morrison. This was not without incident and pitched Morrison into a dispute with Canon Kewley to whom the material had passed after Clague’s death.

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