

Manx Notes 80 (2007)

“THE QUESTION IS NOT ONE OF A DECIMAL POINT ONE WAY
OR ANOTHER”: CANON E.B. SAVAGE ON THE NUMBERS
SPEAKING MANX (1902)

Dear Sir,

In answer to your letter of the 19th instant I beg to ~~say~~ ~~estimate made~~ enclose a copy of the ~~figures given~~ ^{figures given} by the speaker which were taken by him from the Census returns, or supplied ^{to him} from those returns ~~to him~~ by the Captains of Parishes. It was quite correct ^{therefore} to say that they are “census returns.” The speaker’s hesitation as to the accuracy of the figures arose, I believe, from his surprise to find so many Manx-speaking people in the Island; but that surprise is not ^{by any means} shared by ~~all~~ ^{all} ^{many}. I would draw your attention to the fact that the question is not one of a decimal point one way or another; ~~in fact~~ if it should indeed be shewn ^{indeed} that the percentage is less than 8 per cent that would only show that the case calls more clearly for immediate action on the part of Manx being recognised as a subject, before ~~all~~ details are gone into; surely the principle should be settled first, and details afterwards. Manx might be recognised as an extra subject, as Welsh is, subject to conditions laid down by the Education Board in London, or the Council of Education here.

Source: Draft letter from Canon E.B. Savage, no clear recipient [but Manx Council of Education], no date [but seemingly November 1902], Canon E.B. Savage Papers, MNHL, MS 10846.



The Manx Language Society was founded in 1899 as a result of a wave of enthusiasm for reviving the language.¹ One of the difficulties for these enthusiasts was they had little idea as to the numbers left of native speakers of the language. It had been due to the efforts of the Society that a language question later appeared on the 1901 census schedule and the result was reported by Sophia Morrison that same year:

As to the results of the Census, the feeling of every patriotic Manxman will, I am sure, be one of intense satisfaction. It was scarcely imagined that 4,419 (or 8.1 per cent) of the inhabitants of the Island could still speak the language of their forebears. Many people seemed to be labouring under the impression that Manx was practically dead, but that this is not the case has now been proved beyond the

¹ Anon., “Formation of a National Society,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 25 March 1899. See too, Sophia Morrison, “The Origin of the Manx Language Society,” *Manx Quarterly* 14 (1914). Earlier, Sophia Morrison [as “S.M.”], “The Origin of the Manx Language Society,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 3 January 1914.

possibility of doubt. Indeed, Manx is a living tongue, strong in vitality and vigour in many of the more remote rural districts.²

The official record of the census was only to appear in 1903.³ As Canon Savage's letter makes clear, the Society had access to the figures beforehand due to the direct intervention of A.W. Moore, Speaker of the Keys, and a founding member of the Manx Language Society.

The Society saw that in order to successfully revive the language, its introduction into the primary school curriculum was vital. Evidently, Savage had been corresponding with the Council of Education and the question of numbers had been raised leading to Savage's drawn comment, "I would draw your attention to the fact that the question is not one of a decimal point one way or another."⁴

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VIENNA, 2007

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² Anon., "Manx Language Society: Annual Meeting." *Manx Sun* 14 December 1901: 3 col. c. For an analysis of the census return for Cregneash, see Stephen Miller, "'Here the Manx Language Lingers and May Linger Some Time Longer': Manx and English in Cregneash in 1901," *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* (2007).

³ H.M. Government, *Census—1901: Islands in the British Seas*, Cd. 1473 (London: HMSO, 1903). See Table 18, "Language Spoken," 18.

⁴ The Manx Language Society held its annual meeting each year on the 11 November. Presumably, Moore had prepared the figures for that occasion and soon after Savage had begun corresponding with the Council of Education of which the draft letter reproduced here is part.

“THE QUESTION IS NOT ONE OF A DECIMAL POINT ONE WAY OR ANOTHER”

—— [as “S.M.”]. “The Origin of the Manx Language Society.” *Isle of Man Examiner*
3 January 1914: 2 col. c.

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