

Manx Notes 99 (2007)

“WHO IS MONA DOUGLAS?”

In 1915, *Manx-Song and Maiden-Song* appeared under the London imprint of Erskine Macdonald, the first book of poetry by Mona Douglas.¹ Jessie Kerruish, a London-based writer of Manx descent, wrote to Sophia Morrison in 1915, “I suppose we will see more of Miss Douglas’s work—in ‘Mannin’; no doubt you have got your eye on her.”² Morrison was the Secretary of the *Manx Language Society* and the editor of the small press periodical *Mannin* which concerned itself with supporting the Celtic Revival. Douglas was to succeed Morrison on her death in 1917 as Secretary of the Society and to contribute a poem of her own in the final number of *Mannin* as a tribute to Morrison herself.³

Jessie Kerruish was not the only one with a Manx connection who had read *Manx-Song and Maiden-Song*. W.H. Gill was sent a copy from Castletown by his cousin, Annie Gell, “[a]nd now my best thanks for the book of poems you have so kindly sent me [...] Who is Mona Douglas?”⁴

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“Who is Mona Douglas?” is a question that is only now receiving attention with a number of publications since her death in 1987 seeking an provide an answer of some sorts. Her articles on Manx folk song and dance were collected together in 1994,⁵ a celebration of her life appeared in 1998,⁶ an expanded edition of her writings

¹ Mona Douglas, *Manx-Song and Maiden-Song* (London: Erskine Macdonald, 1915). This was the only occasion on which her full name of Constance Mona Douglas was used.

² Letter from Jessie Kerruish to Sophia Morrison, 12 December 1915, MNHL, MS 09495, Sophia Morrison Papers, Box 3.

³ Mona Douglas, “Ersooyl,” *Mannin* 7 (1917).

⁴ Letter from W.H. Gill to Annie Gell, 1 September 1915, MNHL, MD 96-11.

⁵ Stephen Miller, ed., *Mona Douglas: Manx Folk-Song, Folk Dance, Folklore, Collected Writings* (Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 1994). See earlier, “Mona Douglas: An Interim Checklist of Writings on Manx Folkways,” *Manx Notes: Folkways and Language* 4 (1993).

⁶ Fenella Bazin, ed., *Mona Douglas: A Tribute* (Douglas: Manx Heritage Foundation, 1998). See too, “Mona Douglas, 1898–1987,” *Women and Tradition: A Neglected Group of Folklorists*, eds. Carmen Blacker and H. Ellis Davidson (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000), “Douglas, (Constance) Mona (1898–1987),” 2004, OUP [online source]. Also, “Mona and the Chruinnaght,” *Yn Chruinnaght, Ramsey July 15–23, Programme* (n.p.: Yn Chruinnaght, n.d. [but 1988]), “Mona Douglas (1898–1987),” *Yn Chruinnaght, Inter-Celtic Festival, Ramsey, Isle of Man, 14th to 22nd July, 1989, Programme* (n.p.: Yn Chruinnaght, 1989).

followed in 2004,⁷ and that same year a seminar was held on her activities, the first one ever held.⁸

Her surviving personal papers are now deposited in the Manx National Heritage Library and more material is coming to light to enable us to go some way to answering the question. The plan is to publish such items of interest here in *Manx Notes* as they come to hand (when time can be found for transcription...) rather than waiting until sufficient material has accumulated to justify a second expanded edition of her writings. In any case, it now seems sensible to split the 2004 edition into its two constituent parts, the first being her writings relating to the collection and revival of Manx folk song and dance, the second being material relating in the main to her promotion of the Celtic Revival in the Island. Not unsurprising, there is material from among her personal papers to add to both of these parts.

A new theme is autobiographical, two chapters of her unfinished (so far as is known) autobiography, *Islandwoman*, having come to light, and a number of other smaller pieces, all of interest.

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⁷ Stephen Miller, ed., "Restoring to use our almost-forgotten dances": *Writings on the Collection and Revival of Manx Folk Dance and Song by Mona Douglas* (Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2004). Available <www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/~stephen>.

⁸ "Completed and Restored to Use": *Revival and Dissemination of Manx Folklore and Tradition during the 20th Century* (Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2004).

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