

Manx Notes 113 (2009)

“SOME NOTES ON THE PRESENT STATE OF THE MANX LANGUAGE—APRIL 1946”

CHARLES LOCH AND HIS LIST OF NATIVE MANX SPEAKERS

Some Notes on the Present State of the Manx Language—April 1946

Nearly half a century ago, as a small boy in London, the writer first made the acquaintance of the Manx language. A school friend whose home he often visited, was the son of a Manx lady, who was herself a sister of the late Deemster C.T. Cheslyn Callow. This lady handed on to her children and incidentally to the writer, many Manx expressions, which were learnt, but are now, alas, forgotten. Some thirty-eight years ago, when as a young man, the writer worked underground on the East Murchison Goldfield in Western Australia, he had as a mate, an old Manx miner, one Bill Cubbon, from Laxey. And many a talk about the island and the Manx language they had together. He must have been a fluent Manx speaker, having been born at Laxey about one hundred years ago. A valued possession is an old Manx Prayer Book, dated 1777, given to the writer in Kalgoorlie, by a schoolmaster who had lived in Peel.

As the writer's occupation has compelled him to live abroad, it was not until this year that the opportunity presented itself to visit the island and personally enquire into the present state of the Manx language. It is thought that these notes, if put on record, may be of interest to future generations, as presenting a fairly accurate account of the condition of the language, as seen by an outsider, as it flickers on the verge of extinction.

Who were the last of the old people, able to speak Manx but no English? When did they pass away, and where? Jenkinson, in his *Practical Guide*, of 1874, mentions two women living on Craigmooar above Sulby Glen, who could speak no English and he suggests that they were the last of them. However, in the year 1874, seventy-two years ago, Mr Henry Jenner, of the staff of the British Museum, who was a great authority on Cornish and author of the standard grammar in that language, made a census of the Manx speakers on the Island with the help of the parish clergy. He found out that there were then some 190 people still alive who could speak Manx only. These were presumably all old people and have long since passed away. Who were the last of them? The late Professor Rhys of Oxford and author of *The Phonetics of the Manx Language* was of the opinion that a Mrs Kegginn of Cregneash was the last person who spoke Manx only.

Mr Edward Maddrell of Glenchass can recall that even, as a child, he lived at Cregneash there was an old couple of the name of Kegginn—she was born Charlotte Christie—who lived in a thatched cottage at the foot of the road leading up to

Cronk-ny-arrey and who spoke only Manx. On the occasion of the weekly visit of the breadman, he, Maddrell, as a small boy would interpret for the old lady as she bartered her eggs for bread, money being a scarce commodity in those days. This would be nearly sixty years ago, in the '80s of last century. The subject seems to be of great interest; and to place on record the last half-dozen speakers of Manx only, who they were and when and where they died should be done without delay. This could possibly be carried out by carefully questioning the last of the native Manx speakers and by following it up by checking the date of decease from relatives or from gravestones. Can one of the Island's Manx scholars be persuaded to do this before it is too late?

Speakers of Manx must be divided into several categories, the first being Native Manx Speakers, that is, those who spoke Manx from the cradle. There still exist on the island some twenty of these people who are enumerated in detail below—

Native Manx Speakers in the Isle of Man as at April 1946

North of the Island

1. William Wade of Sandygate, Jurby.
2. Mr Charles Kneale of Ballagarrett, Bride.
3. Mrs. Kneale, his wife do.
4. Mr John Thomas Kaighin do.
5. Mr John Kneen of Lhen Mooar, Andreas.
6. Mr Robert Fayle of Ramsey, Lezayre.

Centre of the Island—West

7. Capt James Kinley of Peel, German. A native of Ballafesson, Rushen.
8. Mrs. Clague of Dalby, Patrick.

Centre of the Island—East

9. Miss Kaye of Onchan, Conchan. A native of Glen Maye, Patrick.
10. Mr Harry Boyde of Kirk Braddan. A native of Ballaugh.

South of the Island

11. Mr Edward Maddrell of Glenchass, Rushen. A native of Cregneash.
12. Mr John Maddrell, his brother of Port St. Mary. A native of Cregneash.
13. Mrs Karran of Cregneash, Rushen.
14. Mr Crebbin do.

15. Mr James Karran do.
16. Mrs. Lowey of Kirkill, Rushen.
17. Mr Thomas Leece of Moaney Mooar, Malew.
18. Mr John Kinvig of Ronague, Arbory.
19. Mrs. Kinvig, his wife do.
20. Mrs. Watterson of Colby, Arbory.

These appear to be all who can be found of the Native Speakers who learnt Manx as children; and of these at least three almost qualify for the next category, in so much as they have forgotten much of the language learnt when young and find difficulty in conversing.

Figure 1 indicates the location of the Manx Native speakers, as found during April 1946.

Secondly—Many old people have heard Manx spoken in their homes as children, perhaps from sixty to eighty years ago. They probably at one time understood some or all of it, but never spoke it. Nevertheless they can perhaps count in Manx or remember some expressions or words. There must be many of these alive to-day; the writer has come across several and has heard of as many more, but as their knowledge of Manx varies so much it would be all but impossible to enumerate them.

Thirdly—There are many persons of middle age or younger, who, though not speaking Manx as children, have acquired it later from the older generation of native speakers. In many cases they speak it with a surprising accuracy, fluency and correctness of accent. The writer considers that these people should also be specified by name as they are responsible for carrying on the language to succeeding generations and deserve well of their country. Such a record will be of interest in fifty years time. Amongst these may be mentioned, Mr J.D. Qualtrough, J.P., Speaker of the House of Keys, of Castletown; The Revd. C.A. Cannan, B.A., R.D., Vicar of Kirk Michael; Messrs David Craine, M.A. of Ballaugh, F.W. Moore and Mrs. J.J. Kneen of Douglas, Messrs Mark Braide and P.W. Caine of Douglas, C.C. Craine of Ballaugh, John Gell of Port St. Mary and Miss Mona Douglas of Ballaragh; Mr William Radcliffe of Ramsey; Messrs Thomas Dodd, Ewan Christian, Walter and Leslie Quirk and Louis Crellin, all of Peel;¹ the Misses Kathleen and Margaret Killip of Laxey and Mr Eric Cregeen, also Mr C.I. Paton of Castletown—perhaps about twenty in all. There are probably a few others, inadvertently omitted, whom the writer did not have the opportunity of hearing. In submitting this record, it must be understood, that while some of the above speak the Manx language with the greatest fluency, others specialise in reading and translation, at which they are very efficient. Others again interest themselves more in the collection of Folk Lore. But they are all actuated by a great love for the language. If some names have been omitted, it is on

¹ “Miss Frances Davidson”. Marginal addition to the Peel speakers.

account of the writer having so little time at his disposal to go into the matter more fully.

Fourthly—Learners in general of the Manx language. At the present time there are four classes held on the Island for learners of Manx. Elementary and Advanced in Douglas, under the instruction of Mr John Gell. There is another in Peel taught by Capt Kinley. In Port St. Mary there is also a class conducted by Mr Edward Maddrell with the assistance of Mr John Gell. Each class meets once a week and each has about a dozen or so students, let us say fifty in all. There may also be a few others who are endeavouring to teach themselves. There are Manx classes in Liverpool and London and possibly elsewhere. These students learn to speak, read and write with a varying degree of success, but all show enthusiasm.

As is well known, the laws of the Isle of Man promulgated during the year, have still, at the annual Tynwald, the titles and a short summary of the purport of each act, read out in Manx as well as in English. One of the last, if not the last official proclamation, printed in Manx, for public announcement, was issued in March 1863. A reward of £100 was offered for information received relative to the destruction of certain boundary walls at Park Llewellyn. A copy of this is in the Library of the Manx Museum.

The Manx Society has organised a series of religious services in the language, latterly about four a year. They are held all over the Island. The Church of England Service being taken by the Revd. C.A. Kannan, alternately with the Non-conformist which is conducted by Mr J.D. Qualtrough.

As regards the publication of literature in the Manx language the position is far from satisfactory, to say the least of it. Very little is now procurable; an elementary lesson book, a small but useful English-Manx-pronouncing dictionary and the Gospel of St. John are about all that can be bought at the present time. All grammars, Manx-English dictionaries, Bibles and prayer-books, are now out of print. There must be a great many old Manx Bibles, prayer-books and other books still extant, scattered round the Island, but they are valued and retained for sentimental reasons by the owners, and few are obtainable second-hand. *The Journal of the Manx Museum* has of late been printing in each copy, under the title of *Chengey ny Mayrey*, samples of Manx Gaelic, edited by Mr C.I. Paton. The Annual Report of the Manx Society also now contains a page of Manx. It is generally hoped that when the paper shortage is less acute, something may be done as regards the re-printing of some Manx literature. Students are seriously handicapped by having so little easy reading matter. It is unfortunate that there is no monthly magazine or paper containing matter in the Manx language, to keep readers up-to-date with current affairs and matters of Manx interest.

There has been very little broadcasting in the Manx language. A Manx service from St. George's Church, Douglas was broadcast about fifteen years ago. Two of the native Manx speakers, Mr Edward Maddrell and Mrs. Lowey gave a two or three

minutes conversation in the *Children's Hour* a year or so ago. The Tynwald Ceremony with its Manx summary and titles of the acts is usually broadcast annually.

Surprisingly enough, the Manx Education Department does not seem to be doing anything as yet, as regards encouraging evening classes under paid teachers.²

Decline of the Manx Language. Bishop Wilson writing earlier in the eighteenth century stated that “English is not understood by two-thirds at least of the island”. The census of Mr Henry Jenner in 1874 indicated that, outside the town of Douglas, 12,350 out of a total of 41,084 people still spoke Manx, or about 30%. In the government Census of 1901 some twenty-seven years later 4,419 or 8.1% of the population of the whole island then spoke Manx. In 1911 they had dwindled to 2,383 and in 1921 to 806. The figures for Manx speakers in the Census of 1931 appears to be quite unreliable. Now in 1946, we have perhaps twenty native speakers and twenty or more others, let us say fifty at the outside.

Figure 2. is a sketch map of the island showing the percentage of Manx speakers to the whole population, arranged by parishes according to the 1901 Census—45 years ago. It will be seen that the highest percentage—over 20% were to be found in Bride and Jurby in the north and in Arbory in the South. Andreas and Ballaugh follow closely at 19.2%. It would appear that the current use of the Manx language continued longest in the north-west part of the island, in German in the west and in the extreme south-west, in Rushen and Arbory. It is in these areas that one would expect to have found those old people, now passed away, who spoke Manx only.

A generation or two ago, as in Scotland and Ireland, it was thought amongst the old people that a knowledge of Manx was a handicap to a child's progress in the world. There was also a strange inferiority complex which gave the impression that Gaelic was the language of the ignorant, the humble and the servants; whereas English was the language of the educated and superior classes. Many cases have occurred of native speakers who pretended that they knew no Gaelic; and parents in the Island have refused to let their children learn Manx, and have spoken it together only when they did not wish their children to understand what they were saying. Curiously enough one or two of the last of the native speakers seem to have learned their Manx, not from their parents but from another relative. Fortunately this form of snobbishness no longer prevails, in fact in Scotland to-day, it is considered rather fashionable to learn Gaelic.

Of the twenty native Manx speakers enumerated, the writer was fortunate enough to contact a dozen and with his own ears hear them speak Manx. Mr William Wade read from his Manx Bible and was teaching Manx to his grandson,³ he appeared to

² Added in orange crayon: “Classes acknowledged & teachers paid”. Added in margin: “Oct. 1947”.

³ Originally read: “Mr William Wade read from his Manx Bible and is understood to be teaching Manx to his grandson, [...]”

be a most intelligent man and was in possession of several old Manx books including a copy of the sermons of Bishop Wilson, all of which he could read. Captain Kinley, Mr Robert Fayle and Miss Kaye can read Manx. There may be others. A charming old lady, Mrs. Watterson of Colby entertained us most hospitably, and sang in a beautifully clear voice the old hymn,

“O Yee cur skianyn credjue dou

Dy gholl erskyn yn aer,”

Her daughter with whom she lives, although she does not profess to speak Manx, seemed to know a great deal more than she made out. Mr Edward Maddrell who may be said to be the *doyen* of the native Manx speakers and who is now in charge of the Folk Museum at Cregneash, is a most fluent speaker of the language. The writer had the good fortune to be taken, by the Manx speakers, to hear half-an-hour’s conversation between Mr Maddrell and Mrs. Lowey at Kirkill, in a lonely and romantic setting, near the south-east-coast; a most interesting experience. It is worthwhile placing on record that a year before this, in April 1945, Messrs Mark Braide and John Gell, both fluent Manx speakers, were present at Ronague during a two hours conversation between Mr Maddrell, Mr Lowey and Mr and Mrs. Kinvig. It is possible that such a gathering, including four native speakers, may never occur again. Being present at a class for learners of Manx at both Peel and at Douglas was a very encouraging experience. The writer found that with his knowledge of Scottish Gaelic, he could, after a while, understand much of the conversation.

Many stories of great interest in connection with the dying out of the Manx language were heard. Many of the older people who can remember back for fifty years, have heard Manx spoken in daily conversation. Mr J.D. Qualtrough recalls, how some fifty years ago in his father’s shipyard at Castletown, the shipwrights always spoke together in Manx. It was stated by the late Mr J.J. Kneen, that some sixty years ago, on a Saturday night, almost as much Manx as English might have been heard in the public houses of Douglas, when visited on that night by people from the countryside around. All these anecdotes about the passing away of the language are worth placing on record.

These notes are concluded with thanks to the many who gave assistance. The writer is fully aware that there are Manx scholars on the island who could have carried out this scheme in a much more efficient manner. Sometimes, however, it happens that what is so familiar to the native, does not seem to be worth recording as being of special interest and an outsider may be able to present it from a new point of view. That these notes are inadequate and somewhat amateurish is due to the short time available—under one week—almost two days of which were wasted in pursuit of an alleged Manx speaker amongst the hills behind Laxey. Mr Mark Braide and Mr C.C. Craine were kind enough to put the compiler of these notes in touch with native Manx speakers and so expedite the work. Mr John Gell was more than kind in taking him by car to where Manx speakers could be found. Lastly the writer would

like to record his great indebtedness to Mr Mark Braide of Douglas, who has checked over these notes. The writer however takes full responsibility for any mis-statements or inaccuracies that may inadvertently have occurred.

“Mr Braide & several Conchan people know little of No. 9 (Miss Kaye)”. Added at end in hand of William Cubbon.

Source: Charles W. Loch, “Some Notes on the Present State of the Manx Language” (1946), MNHL, MS 5134 B.



Charles Loch visited the Island in April of 1946, for just a one week trip in order to ascertain how many native speakers of Manx were still living. Quite why he gave himself such a narrow period in which to comb the Island is unclear but even within that time (and likely aided by scouting by others on his behalf ahead of his turning up), what he produced was a list of some twenty speakers of the language though doubts were raised about some of the names as to whether they had truly learnt Manx first as children and then later English. For those familiar with the recordings made by the Irish Folklore Commission⁴ and later *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh*,⁵ many of the names are readily known. This list was passed on to A.S.B. Davies who published it in the body of an article (in Welsh) in 1948.⁶ Loch’s personal papers are now in the Department of Celtic at the University of Glasgow and contain Manx material of great interest.⁷

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VIENNA, 2009

⁴ Manx National Heritage, *Skeelalyn Vannin: Stories of Mann. The Complete Collection of Manx Language Archive Recordings made by the Irish Folklore Commission in 1948* (Douglas: Manx National Heritage, 2003).

⁵ Listed in George [as “Shorys y Creayrie”] Broderick, “Recording Native Manx Speech,” *For a Celtic Future: A Tribute to Alan Heusaff*, ed. Cathal Ó Luain (Dublin: The Celtic League, n.d. [but 1983]).

⁶ A.S.B. Davies, “Cyflwr Presennol Iaith Geltaidd ynys Manaw,” *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* xii.iv (1948).

⁷ Anja Gunderloch, “The Loch Papers,” *The Gaelic Manuscripts of Glasgow University: A Catalogue* (Glasgow: Department of Celtic, University of Glasgow, 2007).

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