

Manx Notes 173 (2013)

“I CAN HARDLY SAY WHERE SHE WOULD BE COMFORTABLE”
SOPHIA MORRISON WISHING TO STAY AT CREGNEASH (1909)

Just received *

56. B.Well. Colliery | 25.8.09

Dear Mr. R.

I am sorry I have had no time to answer your letter and P.C. Thank you very much for [*word deleted*] It is a good one (I have one you sent Dad). I have been thinking about your enquiry re Miss Morrison. I can hardly say where she would be comfortable. as you know all the cottages about Cregneish are almost crowded.

My advice would be to write Mr. E. Collister Senior. The Howe. He would be likely to know or perhaps could take Miss Morrison in. He has a nice comfortable cottage.

I remain | yours sincerely W.A.F.

Source: Postcard from W.A. Faragher to Karl Roeder, 25 August 1909, MNHL, MS 09495, Sophia Morrison Papers, Box 5. **Note:** * In the hand of Karl Roeder.



Earlier in 1909, Sophia Morrison wrote to Josephine Kermodé (the Manx poet “Cushag”) that she was reading Synge’s *The Aran Islands*, published in 1907, and “I had Dalby & the little cottage on the Niarbyl shore before me while I read it.”¹ Synge went to the Aran Islands on the advice of W.B. Yeats—“Go to the Aran Islands. Live there as if you were one of the people themselves, express a life that has never found expression.” For the leading light of the Pan Celtic Revival in the Isle of Man, Morrison had to find the Manx version within the Island itself, there being no western isles to visit (nor could the Calf of Man be pressed into service). Cregneash then had to stand as proxy. It had the attraction of having been the home of Edward Faragher, Neddy Beg Hom Ruy, the friend of Karl Roeder for whom he had acted as a folklore informant. Morrison too was an acquaintance of Roeder; as seen in the postcard here, he was a go-between to find her someone to stay at Cregneash.

There is a late (postmodernist) irony in all of this—Morrison went to seek her own Manx version of the Aran Islands, Gaelic-speaking communities on the cusp of modernity. For those who have watched the film “Waking Ned” will have seen

¹ Letter (partial) from Sophia Morrison to Josephine Kermodé, 12 January 1909, MNHL, MS 08979, Kermodé Family Papers.

(though most will be unaware) “the little cottage on the Niarbyl shore” and Cregneash, but standing in now for Ned Devine’s Ireland.

The film was shot in the Island not just because of the generous financial breaks, Ireland has a similar regime of support, but because the producers of the film could not now find a village in Ireland that looked “Irish” enough to the perceived audience, the financial farming subsidies from the European Union having brought about double glazing and satellite dishes, as well as numerous rancho-style bungalows dotted about the Irish countryside.

Returning to Morrison, she did go on to stay at Cregneash and recounted at length her time there in a letter to Kermodé in 1911:

I made many pleasant acquaintanceships at Cregneish. I send two “snaps” of some—the old couple are 60 years married—she is 79, he is 84. Like your Nussy they feel sorry for people who have to live in cities “among favers & durts.” Neither can read nor write. They have, I think the youngest, kindly blue eyes, I have ever seen. The photo gives no idea of the charming colouring of their thatched cottage with its wealth of golden shrubs & bright spring flowers. The other “snap” is of a grand-niece of Ned Faragher the Manx poet. She lives in his cottage—is a particularly nice young woman with lovely soft black eyes & hair. She has eight bonny sons—the eldest not nine years—those who could speak said the Lord’s prayer in Manx for me.²

Evidently, she had found her own Manx *Aran Islands*.

STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2013



² Letter from Sophia Morrison to Josephine Kermodé, 10 May 1911, MNHL, MS 08979, Kermodé Family Papers. These photographs are now lost.