

Manx Notes 236 (2016)

MONA DOUGLAS AND “THE SALMON LEAP” *

In *Kiaull Jiu Manninagh* (January 2016)¹ “Kelly the Blackguard,” whose name is associated through Mona Douglas with the Salmon Leap, was shown to be James Kelly, who, in Manx parlance went “on the roads” or “was going on the houses,” in other words, going from farm to farm and trading odd-jobs for a bed overnight and a meal. Here is the description of the dance from the notebook now in the MNHL in which Douglas records her collecting. A typescript amongst her papers provides further detail about the dance (the description here has not been reproduced).

(1)

The Salmon Leap.

I have heard of this dance from several people, but can never get a full description or demonstration of it. Seems to be a kind of jig or hornpipe, & takes its name from the fact that in one figure the dancer has to lie flat on his back & leap into an upright position, on his feet, in one movement. What else is done, nobody seems to know. Probably the difficulty of getting a demonstration is owing to the difficulty of this figure.

W.W.G. [*ie*, Walter William Gill] says that a man in Glen Rushen, called Kelly the Blackguard can dance the Salmon Leap, but I have never been able to meet him as he is “on the roads” & only lives for short periods in a ruined house up the Glen. He has always been away when I have been in the district. W.W.G. thinks the Leap a special figure which could be used in any jig for elaboration, & not a complete dance in itself; also that it was practised in Scandinavia by boys, but there was actually done in the sea or a river as an imitation of the leaping of actual salmon. This may explain the lack of details about it, but on the other hand I have certainly heard it spoken of as a dance, not a figure only.

(2)

Lheim y Braddan (The Salmon Leap)

This dance has been pieced together from descriptions of the various parts of it given by a number of people, with some demonstration. The most complete outline was given by Captain Thomas Craine of the Sarah Blanche, formerly skipper of a Peel fishing boat and a sailor on the Packet Company’s ships, and he was said it was generally thought of as a fisherman’s dance, but parts of it have been described and

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “Mona Douglas and ‘The Salmon Leap,’” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* May (2016): [16]. Reproduced here with sources.

¹ Stephen Miller, “‘Kelly the Blackguard.’ James Kelly of Patrick and the Salmon Leap,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* January (2016): [10].

demonstrated by Northside crofters like William Caine of Jurby curragh, and the Leap itself was shown to me in the 1920's by a man in Patrick known as Kelly the Blackguard. Kelly the fisherman of Baldrine, Lonan also described parts of it, including the costumes worn, and said it had once been part of the Mollag Band's dnace, for which the men also wore white long sleeveless coats. I have not seen any special steps used in the bits demonstrated [...].

Sources: (1) "The Salmon Leap" in "FOLKLORE NOTEBOOK. | DANCES. | TUNES, DESCRIPTIONS, & NOTES." Undated notebook, MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 9. (2) "Lheim y Braddan | (The Salmon Leap)". Undated typescript, MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 9.

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