

Manx Notes 348 (2018)

“I AM SORRY TO BE SO LONG ABOUT
ANSWERING YOUR QUERY”

MONA DOUGLAS WRITES TO HENRY JENNER
(1931)

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Thie-ny-Garey, | Laxey, | Isle of Man.
15. 8. 31.

Dear D^r Jenner,

I am sorry to be so long about answering your query, but I have been passing it on to one or two other people whom I thought might be interested in it.

Yes, aille is the common Manx word for fire, & the sound of it in ordinary speech is exactly the same as that of ainle, angel, a very slightly nasalised vowel. I have heard the “n” made almost into “ng” by old Manx speakers when reading the word ainle in the Bible or in hymns, but that might be a conscious effort to make a distinction from aille. In the first case the word would be spoken without thought, & in the second it might not be.

chenney is scarcely even used except in place-names, as in one near me, chenneyghyn, “place of fires,” a spot where beacons used to be lit.

A rather interesting folk-derivation for ainle is that “the angels were given that name because they were like flames of fire”; but M^r Cyril Paton one of the friends to whom I mentioned your query, points out that this may derive from a passage in the Psalms, “He maketh His minsters a place of fire.” Neither M^r Paton nor I know of anything in Manx folklore to correspond with the Irish custom you quote. Protection by fire is common enough, but losht or losey seem usually to be the words used in this connection.

I think you might find Cregeen’s Dictionary useful. It was reprinted some years ago by the Manx Society, & ought still to be obtainable through a bookseller, I think. I don’t know if what I have written above will be of much help to you, but it is all I can gather on the point at the moment. As regards the use of aille here, this may be an example of a usage, obsolete in Scottish & Irish, being retained in Manx Gaelic. I believe there are several of them.

We are all very pleased that you have been elected President of the Congress this year, & that it may go to Cornwall next. I hope that I shall be able to attend if Cornwall does receive it, as I have wished to see your country for a long time. It would also be a great pleasure to meet yourself. You Cornish folk seem to be the one branch of the Celts who have an even greater struggle to preserve language & individuality than we in Man, & therefore we feel a close sympathy with you.

Yours sincerely, | Mona Douglas

Letter from Mona Douglas to Henry Jenner, 15 August 1931, BL ADD MS
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STEPHEN MILLER, 2018



“xxx”

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REFERENCES