

Manx Notes 402 (2019)

MONA DOUGLAS AND THE HARVEST DANCE *

Between 1940–41, C.I. Paton published a series of articles on Manx Calendar Customs in *Folk-Lore*,¹ later gathered together and published in book form in 1942.² The first number appeared in the March number for 1940, and dealt with seasonal customs and those attached to particular months of the year.³ As regards the section on harvest customs, Mona Douglas wrote to Paton in May that year, “I notice, however, that in your notes on the Mheillea you do not mention the ‘flying home’ of the last sheaf or the dance around it. Unfortunately I have not yet been able to learn all the details of this dance, but it was definitely done, according to the testimony of several old people I know, & some of the movements have been shown to me. The form was circular.”⁴ In her notebook recording Manx folk dances, there is the following description which matches her comment:

Circular Harvest Dance.

Both Grany⁵ & Charles Watterson⁶ of Castletown have told me of a circular dance, apparently ceremonial in character wh. was performed round the Queen of the Mheillea, but the only description they could give me was that the dancers took hands & went round the Queen in a big ring, she holding the babban, & then around in & out in a sort of chain, going the way of the men raising their hands above their heads, & giving “hohgs” at intervals. This seems too fragmentary to work out with a set of dancers. Also no particular tune remembered. ‘More’ information may turn up later.⁷

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “Mona Douglas and the Harvest Dance,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* September (2019), [18]. Reproduced here with sources.

¹ For details, see Stephen Miller, “Cyril I. Paton: An Interim Checklist of Writings on Manx Folkways,” *Manx Notes: Folkways and Language* 9 (1993).

² Cyril I. Paton, *Manx Calendar Customs*, Publications of the Folk-Lore Society, vol. cx (London: Folk-Lore Society, 1942).

³ Cyril I. Paton, “Manx Calendar Customs. Introduction. Seasons and Months,” *Folk-Lore* li.1 (1940): 55–59.

⁴ Letter from Mona Douglas to C.I. Paton, 7 May 1940, MNHL, MS 09505, C.I. Paton Papers, Box 3.

⁵ “Grany” [*sic*] is Eleanor Holmes (*née* Quayle), born 1841, and whose date of death remains to be established.

⁶ Charles Edward Watterson (1870–1955) was aged 85 when he died, having served as Clerk to Castletown Town Commissioners for 37 years, and only retiring from the post in 1946, when aged 77. Anon, “[Southside News] Death of Mr and Mrs Charles Watterson,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 25 February 1955.

⁷ “Folklore Notebook. | Dances. | Tunes, Descriptions, & Notes.” Undated notebook. MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 9.

However, the next year (1941) saw a full description of the dance published by her in the *Journal of the Manx Museum*,⁸ along with a tune credited to “J. Kelly Baldrine,” who can be identified as John James Kelly (1860–1938).⁹ The tune is not present in the notebook of dances but that does not mean it was not collected from him; the date of his death, however, as well as the date of the letter here, precludes this detailed account of the dance as having come from his recollection.

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⁸ Mona Douglas, “The Traditional Dances of Mann,” *Journal of the Manx Museum* v.64 (1941): 6b–7a.

⁹ For obituary notices, Anon, “Births, Marriages, Deaths,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 28 October 1938, Anon, “Births, Marriages, Deaths,” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 29 October 1938. Also, [see “Acknowledgments”] Anon, “Births, Marriages, Deaths.” Further, Anon, “[News from the North] Death of Mr John Kelly, Garwick,” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 29 October 1938, Anon, “[News from the North] Baldrine,” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 5 November 1938.