

Manx Notes 430 (2020)

“ONE OF THE OLD SCHOOL”

(1928)

A somewhat rather remarkable character of the old school was laid to rest in the ancient Churchyard of Kirk Maughold a few days ago. His name was Shimmin, and he was typically Manx. William was his title, and he was known to all and sundry as Bill. He was born and reared in the times when education was perhaps looked upon as something for the rich and well-to-do only; the working-man and the working-man's children were rarely ever considered, but were not very much better treated than slaves. But Bill was, fortunately, made of the right kind of stuff, and he plodded along the best way he could. He was a farmer and a fisherman combined. He was true to those appropriate words of the Manx song:

For them, by day, the golden corn we reap,
By night, the silver harvest of the sea.

Bill was a stalwart chap, as strong as he was big, and on a farm could hold his own with any man. His experiences at the Kinsale mackerel fishing and the Peel herring fishing were, of course, many and varied. He could tell us all kinds of stories relating to the sea, as well as to the land, the fairies, and the goblins, to say nothing about the “herb doctor,” and the other somewhat sinister mysteries. He also spent some time in the bowels of the earth, “deep in the mine's dense gloom profound.”

But if there was one thing above another in which Bill took a keen delight, it was in Manx songs and “carvals.” He would travel miles to attend an *oiel verrey*, and, of course, would be included in the list of those taking part. Crude would be the music perhaps, and at times the congregation not what would be termed altogether devotional, yet withal these men of Bill's type put their heart and soul into what they considered was of the best.

Like many more of his contemporaries, he has gone on his lone long journey. A few of his old comrades bade his farewell. As the clergyman uttered the solemn words at his graveside during a beautiful May afternoon, they, too, felt perhaps that they had reached the golden eventide of their days, and would soon follow their friend who had gone before.

“One of the Old School,” *Manx Star* 30 May 1928, 3c.

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There was no “Bill Shimmin” as such recently interned at Kirk Maughold—here we have a portrait (admittedly gendered) of Manx Everyman who to the author has recently passed from Island life. A Manxman who was farmer, fisherman, and a miner as well. One who has “gone to Kinsale,” been at the herrings, one with a store

of reminscences and knowledge of Manx folklore. An enthusiast for the *Oiel verrey* and one keen to sing *carvals* there.

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