

Manx Notes 467 (2020)

JOHN & SAGE KINVIG

JOHN KINVIG'S NINETIETH BIRTHDAY (1950)

I. ISLE OF MAN EXAMINER (7 JULY 1950)

[4c-d] The statistics which John ("Daniel") Kinvig—Ronague's "John the Contractor"—could quote when he entered his 90th year on Sunday take some bearing.

He has lived in the same district all his life, being born only a short distance from the picturesque croft, Garey Hollin ("The Holly Garden") where he and his wife, Mrs Sage Jane Kinvig, who is in her 80th year, have spent all their married life. They have been married for 58 years, had ten children and now have six grandchildren.

Mrs Kinvig was born in the cottage at Garey Hollin as were her father, grandmother and great grandmother, and has never lived anywhere else. The cottage itself was built at least 200 years ago, and boasts a grandfather clock which is 150 years old and only needed a clockmaker's attention once!

Mr and Mrs Kinvig and their cottage are survivors of the community of old Manx crofters which once flourished at Ronague. Mr Kinvig said at one time there were 32 in the district, all with big families; now there are only two or three.

Both he and his wife speak the Manx language as fluently as other people speak English. They were brought up on it—their parents spoke nothing else—and now Mr Kinvig is probably the best living authority on the "native Manx."

And going back to the statistics again for a final word, Mr Kinvig has been over 40 years southern inspector for the Common Lands Board!

[4c] To get the records straight, it should be said that Mr Kinvig does not have a "Daniel" in his name.

Daniel was his father's name. He is really plain John Kinvig, but when he was a young man there were half-a-dozen John Kinvigs in the district, so that something had to be done to distinguish them.

Mr and Mrs Kinvig are remarkably active, both mentally and physically, despite their ages. According to Mr Kinvig, all the old Manx people up at Ronague lived to ripe old ages, so they are only carrying on the fashion. He attributes their longevity to the good food they had in the old days.

Said he: "There were no tin openers in those days. All we had came off the land. There was plenty of bacon, pork, potatoes and flour, and herrings from the fishing."

Another part of his recipe for long life was hard work.

He said he had worked hard all his life. He had lots of jobs—farmer, fisherman, mason, Common Lands Inspector, Parish Sanitary Inspector, in fact, he added, "I've tried everything but ragman, and I might have done well at that!"

He walked from Ronague to Billown—over four miles—to work at one time, and did a ten-hours day there.

“I never learned to ride a bicycle. I had a good pair of legs, and they got me about all right.”

TAKING HIS HOLIDAYS

He said he had never had a holiday in his life, and added jocularly that he was taking them all together now.

He is 89 now, and has never needed false teeth or spectacles! Talking about the jobs he was at, Mr Kinvig said he first worked on the farms and went to sea with boats of the Port St Mary fleet. He was skipper of the F.S.G. sixty years ago, and sailed to Kinsale and the Shetlands. He had also been a mason, he added.

“I built part of the Ronague Chapel 71 years-ago,” he said, and it might be added that he has been associated with the Chapel ever since. His work as a mason is probably the origin of the affectionate nickname of “John the Contractor.”

The knowledge which Mr and Mrs Kinvig have of the language, customs, dress, and mode of living of the old Manx folk has been invaluable to the Museum authorities and to students.

One of the exhibits at the Museum is a *suggane creel* made by Mr Kinvig as an example of the old craftsmanship. It is a kind of bag made of plaited straw which was used 60 or 70 years ago to carry potatoes, turf, *etc.* Mr Kinvig said he learned it from his grandfather. They have been consulted on all aspects of the life of the old Manx people in the compiling of records.

Mr Kinvig said that most of the people in the district spoke nothing else but Manx in his young days. [4d] He did not learn to write in English at all, but only in Manx.

THEIR VOICE RECORDED

He said he was sorry to see the language passing into disuse. Students did not speak it as the old Manx people used to do.

Both Mr and Mrs Kinvig have had their voices recorded as an authentic record of the language, and many students, including the Speaker of the House of Keys (Mr J.D. Qualtrough. C.B.E.), have visited them to study the pronunciation.

They have a remarkable recollection of local events.

They were at Laa Columb Killey (Arbory Parochial Festival) a fortnight ago, and reference to this led to an interesting description of the old Ballabeg Fair, which was a great event in the district many years ago.

Everyone for miles about would go to it, and Mrs Kinvig recalled how the ladies would dress up in the finery of bonnets with flowers on and voluminous dresses and contribute to the picturesque scene at the fair.

Their cottage at Garey Hollin is very interesting. It was once a typical old thatched Manx cottage, said Mrs Kinvig.

“I remember the *chiollagh*—the the wide open fireplace with the old gun rack over it,” she said. There was a turf corner on one side, and a ling corner on the other. She remembered the old oven pots and the quaint customs associated with the cottage.

Now it has an oven which Mrs Kinvig's mother, who was "keen to be up to date," had put in.

The chiollagh has gone, but the main construction of the cottage remains substantially as it did 200 years ago.

It is poignant with memories for the old couple who have spent such a big slice of their lives in it.

"Ronague's 'John the Contractor'," *Isle of Man Examiner* 7 July 1950, 4c-d.

DIAMOND WEDDING ANNIVERSARY (1952)

2. ISLE OF MAN WEEKLY TIMES (1 NOVEMBER 1952)

In a picturesque little croft at Ronague live two of the few remaining Manx-speaking folks in the Island, who this week-end celebrate their Diamond Jubilee. It is a week with two celebrations, for sprightly Mrs Kinvig, who also reads Manx celebrated her 32nd birthday on Monday, and of Mr John Kinvig, her husband, who is 92, she saying, "He just hung up his hat and stayed when he came to work here long ago."

Mrs Kinvig, formerly Miss Sage Jane Clarke, only daughter of parents who once lived in Patrick, was born at Garey Hollin, where she has remained ever since.

She was married in Arbory Church on November 1st, 1892, by the Vicar, later Archdeacon Kewley, and all her ten children were baptised there by him.

Mr and Mrs Kinvig have 15 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.

They are a very well-known Manx couple, are often visited by students eager to learn the ancient language, and have recorded their voices several times at the Museum, speaking in the tongue of their forefathers.

Mr Kinvig is a son of the late Mr and Mrs Dan Kinvig of Gareymoar, nearby, and has been an Inspector of Common Lands, a churchwarden and sanitary inspector in Arbory, and a chapel steward at Ronague Chapel, which he helped to build, amongst his many jobs.

Another remarkable fact connected with this remarkable couple is that their best man, Mr William Kenna, of Grenaby, and their bridesmaid, Mrs Jane Quayle, of Dalby, are both living.

The celebrations will be quiet, with only relatives present, when the cake with 60 candles will be cut.

"Manx-Speaking Couple Celebrate their Diamond Jubilee," *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 1 November 1952, 1f.

DEATH OF JOHN KINVIG (1953)

3. MONA'S HERALD (28 APRIL 1953)

We regret to report the death of Mr John Kinvig, of "Gahelen." Ronague, at the age of 92 years, which occurred on Sunday. Mr Kinvig was a well known and respected character in the South of the Island, where his many friends called his "the Contractor." He was a fine type of Manx patriot, and a fluent speaker of Manx Gaelic, both he and Mrs Kinvig having made many contributions to the Manx Museum Folklore collection, and also recordings in the Manx language. In his early days he worked on his croft at Ronague, and in the slack periods went to the fishing. He was also engaged in building and assisted in the erection of Ronague Methodist Chapel. For many years he was inspector in the South of the Island for the Common Lands Board. Mrs Kinvig survives him, and he also leaves two sons and seven daughters.

"Death of Manx Patriot," *Mona's Herald* 28 April 1953, 5c.

4. ISLE OF MAN EXAMINER (1 MAY 1953)

Probably the greatest living authority on the Manx language, Mr John Kinvig of Garey Hollin, Ronague—Ronague's "John the Contractor"—died on Sunday in his 93rd year. The late Mr Kinvig spoke the Manx language fluently and was frequently consulted by the Museum and students in connection with it. His wife, who survives him is also a fluent speaker. They were survivors of a community of old Manx crofters of the district. Mr Kinvig's death also breaks a marriage partnership of sixty years standing. They had 10 children. The funeral was on Tuesday interment being at Arbory Churchyard.

"[News from Rushen and the South] Death of an Old Manx Linguist," *Isle of Man Examiner* 1 May 1953, 11f.

5. ISLE OF MAN WEEKLY TIMES (2 MAY 1953)

Less than six months after celebrating his Diamond Jubilee (November 1st), Mr John Kinvig, of Gahelen, Ronague, died on Sunday, aged 92.

He was a great Manx patriot, speaking fluently in the tongue of his forefathers, and has made many recordings for the Museum and Folklore Society, and was often visited by students eager to learn the ancient language.

Mr Kinvig was extremely well known in the South of the Island, and was for many years an Inspector for the Common Lands Board, a churchwarden and Sanitary Inspector in Arbory, and a chapel steward at Ronague Chapel which he helped to build, amongst his many jobs.

He is survived by his wife, two sons, seven daughters, fifteen grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren.

There was a big gathering including members of the Manx Society at the funeral in Arbory Church on Tuesday, which was conducted by the Rev. Norman Hemingway and the lesson was read by the Speaker of the House of Keys, Mr J.D. Qualtrough.

At the graveside, the hymn, "Give Me the Wings of the Faith" was sung in Manx.

"[News from the South] Grand Old Manxman dies at 92," *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 2 May 1953, 11e.

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For obituary notices of John Kinvig, see "Births, Marriages & Deaths," *Mona's Herald* 28 April 1953, 8g & "Births, Marriages, Deaths," *Isle of Man Weekly Times*, 2 May 1953, 9a; see too, "Other People's Money," *Isle of Man Examiner* 17 July 1953, 7f & "Other People's Money," *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 18 July 1953, 1a. For an obituary notice of Sage Kinvig who died in 1962, see "Deaths," *Green Final* 14 April 1962, 3a.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

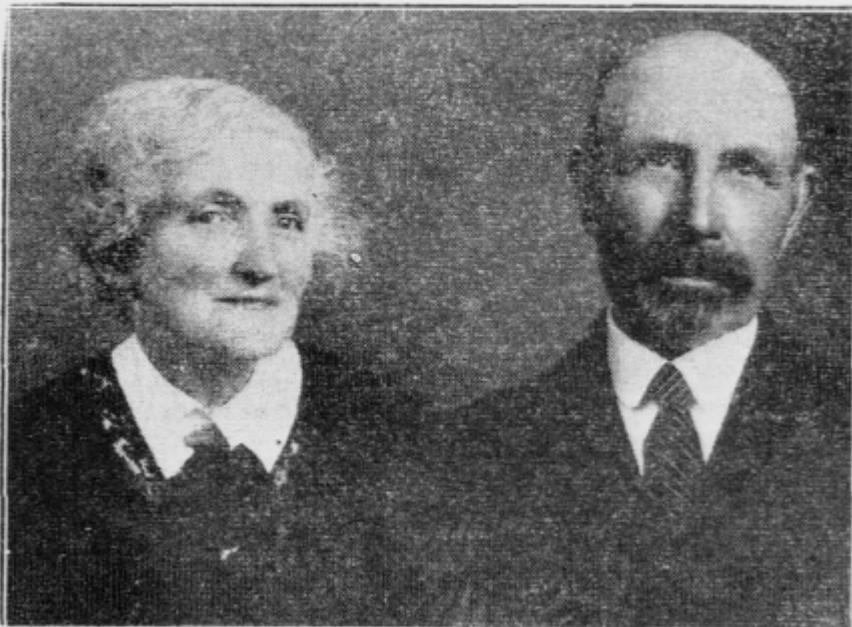
(1)



Isle of Man Examiner (7 July 1950).

(2)

Manx-Speaking Couple Celebrate Their Diamond Jubilee



Isle of Man Weekly Times (1 November 1952)

Given the ages of the pair in 1952, this cannot be a photograph taken that year.

