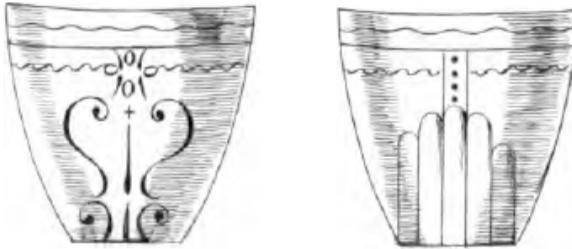


FAIRY LEGENDS FROM THE ISLE OF MAN (3)

THE BALLAFLETCHER LUCK

THE LLANANSHEE CUP OF BALLA FLETCHER

Fig 3.



*The Llananshee Cup of Balla Fletcher
(Front & Side Views)*

OSWALD (1860), PLATE IX, FIG. 3.

JOSEPH TRAIN ([1830])

I The estate of Ballafletcher, on which stands the parish church of Braddan, now called Kirby, was long in the possession of a family named Fletcher. Colonel Wilks, the late proprietor of this estate, had in his possession an antique crystal goblet, resembling those old fashioned wine glasses still to be met with in the store of the curious housewife. This goblet was presented to him by an old lady, a connection of the family of Fletcher, the former proprietor of the estate. It is larger than a common bell-shaped tumbler, and is ornamented with carved sprigs and white lines. It is supposed to have been dedicated to the *lhiannan-shee*, or “peaceful spirit,” of Ballafletcher by the former owners of the estate, and to have been held in great esteem, being only used once a year, at Christmas, when the lord of the manor drank a bumper from it to the *lhiannan-shee* of his “hearth and domain.” This was treating the familiar spirits with greater respect than was usually done, they being often considered troublesome and dangerous. To break this fragile memorial would have been deemed a great misfortune to the family and displeasing to the spirit of peace. Colonel Wilks, honouring and respecting the fancies of olden times, caused it to be encased in a strong oaken box, mounted with silver: and in all probability, the old lady donor was glad at having got it safe out of her hands.

Communications from Dr. H. R. Oswald, of Douglas, July, 1830. Joseph Train, "Popular Superstitions," *An Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man*, vol. ii (Douglas: Mary A. Quiggin, 1845) 153–54.

H. R. OSWALD (1860)

2 This drinking cup,* now in the possession of Major Bacon, of Seafield House, upwards of two hundred years ago adorned the beaufet of Ballafletcher House. It was purchased at the sale of the effects of the last of the Fletchers, in 1778, by Robert Caesar, Esq. who gave it to his niece for safe keeping, in consequence of an ancient tradition "that whosoever had the misfortune to break the glass would surely be haunted by the Lhannon Shee of Ballafletcher" (the peaceful spirit of Ballafletcher). The cup is a crystal cyathus, engraved with floral scrolls, having between the designs, on two sides, upright columellae of five pillars, and was a votive offering to the goddess for her protection or forbearance. The following is the legend: In ancient times there stood in the parish of Braddan (of which the bishop is legal vicar) a mansion called Kirkby. It was so named because it was the place of entertainment for the Bishops of Sodor, in their progresses to and from the Isle. Of this building nothing now remains except its site, near an ancient encampment, and the picturesque churchyard of Braddan with its numerous runes and tunic crosses. More than two centuries ago, when Kirkby merged into the Fletcher family, its ancient name was changed, and the place took the designation of the new owner. To the first of this family was given the cup, with the injunction "that as long as he preserved it, peace and plenty would follow; but woe to him who broke it, as he would surely be haunted by the Lhannan Shee." The glass stood in a recess, and was never taken from its place or used except on Christmas and Easter days. It was then filled with wine, and quaffed off at a breath by the head of the house only, as a libation to the spirit for her protection. The cup belonged, it is said, to Magnum, the Norwegian king of Man, who took it from the shrine of St Olave, when he violated the saints sanctuary.

* See Plate ix, fig. 3. This cup is uncommonly light and chaste in appearance, and might pass for a specimen of the glass of ancient Sidon, once so famous.

H. R. Oswald, *Vestiga Insule Manniæ Antiquiora*, vol. v (Douglas: Manx Society, 1860) 189–90.

ISLE OF MAN TIMES (4 NOVEMBER 1876)

3 This interesting relic, which links the superstitious past with the present, was sold by auction by Mr Taggart on Monday week at the sale of the effects of the late Major Bacon, at Seafield House, Santon. The origin of the cup is not known. The history, so far as it is known, dates from the family named Fletcher, who owned the estate called Ballafletcher, on which the parish church of Braddan stands, now called

Kirby. Colonel Wilks, a subsequent proprietor of the estate, owned the Luck-Cup which was presented to him by an old lady connected with the Fletcher family. The cup is an antique drinking glass, a little larger than a tumbler, ornamented with rudely carved sprigs round the upper part of the glass. It is a very perfect specimen of blown glass common in the 16th century, specimens of which are not uncommon in old farm houses of the present day. The Luck-Cup is supposed to have been dedicated to the *Lhiannan-shee*, or “peaceful spirit,” of Ballafletcher, by the former owner of the estate, and to have been held in great esteem, being only used once a year, at Christmas, when the lord of the manor drank a bumper from into the Lhiannan-shee of his “hearth and home.” Generally the superstition of the Island has gone in the direction of belief in spirits of evil, and efforts have been made by oblations and ceremonies to conciliate and obtain their goodwill. To this day many a farmer’s wife leaves food upon the hearthstone for the fairies, and when found consumed (no doubt by rats or mice) the good luck of the little people is supposed to have been secured. The Ballafletcher Luck-Cup, however, only retains its virtue when undamaged; to break it would be considered an irretrievable misfortune to the family and most displeasing to the “spirit of peace,” which, if traditionary rumour is correct, would no longer be a spirit of peace, but a spirit of discord, haunting in some horrible shape the destroyer of the cup. Colonel Wilks, probably to humour, if not to honour, the prejudices and superstitions of the old family, had a strong oak box, mounted with silver, made for its preservation. The oak box, however, was not sold at the sale. The cup was knocked down for £7 10s.; the bidding having commenced at 10s. the purchaser was Mrs Bacon, who, no doubt, would not have allowed the cup to have departed from the family at any price. It is to be hoped that the “peaceful spirit,” in consideration of the long price given for the cup, will secure to the purchaser a large amount of good luck.

“[Local] The Ballafletcher Luck-Cup.” *Isle of Man Times* 4 November 1876: 5c.

[A. W. MOORE] (1891)

4 Mr Moore, who was a delegate to the international conference on Folk Lore, read a paper on that subject. Amongst other interesting subjects the paper dealt with the ancient ceremony on Tynwald Hill and the Ballafletcher Luck, or Fairy Cup, of which, by Mr Bacon’s permission, he had obtained a copy. It was made of ordinary glass, and was now in the possession of Mr Bacon, of Seafield. He said there were only three of the Luck cups known to exist—one was the Ballafletcher Luck Cup, the other the Eden Hall Luck Cup, and the third was at Lord Muncasters. The Ballafletcher cup, while it remained intact, was supposed to be a sign of peace and plenty, but if it got broke the peace and plenty were supposed to depart.—The Bishop: It was very interesting.—The Secretary asked for a photograph of the cup for the benefit of the Society, and Mr Moore promised to get one. He said there was no

doubt it was a great curiosity, and it had an undoubted history of 300 years. It was in the family of Fletcher, of Ballafletcher, for a long period, and then came into the possession of the Bacons, of Seafield. It was only supposed to be brought out at Christmas and Easter, and then the head of the family drank the health of the “Llanan Shee” out of it. When in the possession of the Fletchers they undoubtedly took great care of it.

“Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society.” *Manx Sun* 28 November 1891: 2g.

[A.W. MOORE] (1892)

THE CUP OF BALLAFLETCHER

5 [3b] Mr A.W. Moore also read the following “note” on the above-named interesting relic of Manx antiquities:

The “Luck” or Fairy Cup of Ballafletcher, is said to have once belonged to Magnus, the King of Norway (1093–1103) and over lord of Man and the Isles, who took it from the shrine of his predecessor, St Olaf. From this time till towards the end of the sixteenth century, we know nothing of its history. But then it came, together with the estate of Kirby, into the possession of the Fletchers, a distinguished Lancashire family, who held high official positions in Man under the Earls of Derby. This Kirby estate was held on the tenure of providing for the entertainment of the Bishops of Sodor and Man (now commuted for a small money payment) when going to and from the Island, as it was near the port of Douglas; and, assuming the truth of the legend about Magnus having been the owner of the cup, we may, perhaps, conjecture that he handed it back to the Church or its representative, the Bishop, in order to expiate, as far as possible, his crime of having violated St Olave’s shrine; and that the cup was kept at Kirby for the Bishop’s use. However this may have been, we know that the Fletchers became its owners, and that the estate of Kirby, in accordance with the old Manx custom, took the name of its new owners, being called Ballafletcher, or “Fletcher’s Farm.” But with the possession of this cup, there came a serious responsibility, for connected with it there was a Lhiannan-shee, or “Spirit Fiend,” its guardian spirit, who, according to an ancient tradition, would keep its owner in peace and plenty, long as the cup was preserved unbroken, but who, if it were broken, would haunt the unfortunate person who broke it, and cause the peace and plenty to depart.

From this tradition we perceive that this cup, like that which, according to Waldron’s story, once belonged to Malew, was supposed to have a fairy origin, and it thus becomes clear why it was in like manner originally consigned to the care of the Church, St Olaf being the custodian in the one case, and St Martin in the other. In 1778, the last of the Fletchers, in the direct line, passed away, and the cup was purchased at the sale of their effects, by Robert Cæsar, of Ballahick, who handed it to

his niece, Mrs Bacon of Seafield, also a Cæsar, the nearest representative of the Fletchers in Man. Since then, it has continued in the possession of the Bacon family, being now the property of Mrs Bacon's great great grandson, Cæsar Bacon, of Seafield. This cup was never taken down for use, excepting on Christmas and Easter days, when it was filled with wine, and quaffed to the health of the Lhiannan-shee by the head of the family only. The cup, or rather tumbler, as it is very like a modern tumbler in appearance, though rather broader at the top, is encircled with a running indented border, fluted, and having between the columellæ elaborately chased floral scrolls. It is $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height, $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter at the top, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the base. The pattern is the same all round.

In answer to a remark of the President,

Mr Moore said there were only three such "cups" now in existence, two in England, and this one.

A photograph of the "cup" was handed round for inspection. From this photograph it appeared that the cup, which is of glass, somewhat resembles an ordinary drinking glass.

Mr Moore asked if it was possible to get a photograph of the cup for the Society.

Mr Moore promised to present to the Society a photograph, remarking that, whatever ought be thought of the traditions connected with it, the cup had an undoubted history of 300 years, and no doubt the Fletcher family had taken extraordinary care to preserve it.

"Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society." *Manx Sun* 16 January 1892: 3a–b.

WILLIAM CUBBON (1934)

6 One of the most interesting exhibits in the Manx Museum is the so-called Fairy Cup of Ballafletcher. [...] In recent times the glass exhibited in the Manx Museum has certainly been associated with this legend, and it must be supposed has taken the place of the original Cup. The vessel in the Museum is not considered to be very ancient and is declared to be of English make. An illustration is given with this issue of the Journal. The vessel measures $4\frac{3}{4}$ in. high by $3\frac{3}{4}$ in. to $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter; is fluted and bears between the columella elaborately-chased floral scrolls. It was given to the Museum by Mrs MacDougall-Rawson, who got it from the Bacon family.

William Cubbon, "One of the ...," *Journal of the Manx Museum* ii.39 (1934) 173.

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STEPHEN MILLER RBV

