

# Manx Notes 497 (2020)

ISABELLA LENEY  
SHADOWLAND IN ELLAN VANNIN  
(1890)

## INTRODUCTION

[vii] As folk-lore has for so long been thought worthy to hold a prominent position in our literature, it is surprising no patriotic Manxman has come forward to preserve the many weird and fanciful histories, fairy legends, and tales, with which his native isle abounds.

Certainly this island, with its lovely scenery, its hills and secluded glens, its rocky coast, intersected here and there with deep and picturesque caverns, gives suitable locale for fairies, elves, and water-sprites, both malignant and benign. Whilst the sonorous roar of the waves, as they beat against the shore in the drear winter time; the soft sighing of the summer breeze, that might be the faint echo of the mermaid's song, well combine to tempt the imagination to stray into the regions of fancy, and to bring [viii] to mind some of the strange and often poetic ideas of former years, when it was held there was so intimate a connection between nature and the human race that portents of good or ill might be drawn from every passing change in earth and air and sky, and even the simple wayside flowers had their tale to tell.

A few of the folk-tales of this interesting isle I have put together in this volume, but have not, except in the concluding chapter, followed the example of some writers on, or compilers of, folk-lore, who give in bare detail what they have to relate. I have endeavoured to introduce the superstitious beliefs and observances that have existed, or do still exist, in the island, clothed in the embellishment of a story, and introducing, therefore, persons and scenes both imaginary and drawn from the life, hoping by this means to bring before the reader not only their traditions, but also the Manx people themselves—their home-life, character, habits, and surroundings. Neither have I undertaken the labour of comparing any of these folk-tales with those of other countries. This subject has been exhaustively gone into by so many well-known and clever writers, who not only point out the similarities to be found in the legendary lore, [ix] of various peoples, but in many cases trace, or profess to trace, these legends to their fountain-head. The tales in connection with Peel Castle and Castle Rushen, as they are already in print, and to be found in every Isle of Man guide-book, I have not reproduced in the present volume, which I now venture to launch forth on the wide sea of literature, knowing that it will drift to a friendly shore, where the adverse winds of criticism will touch it but gently; for years of experience have shown me not only how beautiful and full of interest is the little Isle of Ellan Vannin, but also how kind and true are the Manx people, amongst whom I am proud to number many of my best and dearest friends.

I.H. LENEY  
Ramsey.

I.H. Lenny, "Introduction," *Shadowland in Ellan Vannin* (London: Elliot Stock, 1890) vii–ix.

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*Shadowland in Ellan Vannin; or, Folk Tales of the Isle of Man* was published in 1890, the author being I.H. Lenny, with her married name also appearing on the title page, Mrs J.W. Russell, the initials in the manner of the period being those of her husband. "I have endeavoured to introduce the superstitious beliefs and observances that have existed, or do still exist, in the island, clothed in the embellishment of a story," she wrote in the introduction and those words speak for themselves. The body of the work consists of just four chapters, lengthy ones it must be said, "Off Maughold Head," 3–54; "The Legend of St Michael's Isle," 57–101; "The Magic Kiern Rod, or, Cur shen sha in gilley clash," 105–32; "The Phynodderee, or Good-Natured Fairy," 135–38. The book finished with "Concluding Chapter of Shadowland in Ellan Vannin," 141–50.

As to the person behind the embellishment, the 1891 census enumerates her as being Isabella Russell aged 38, married to John Wesley Russell, 39 years old, a mathematics lecturer at Oxford University, and living with their seven months old daughter, Eleanor M. Russell, at 10 Fyfield Road in Oxford. Her birthplace is given as Dublin and her husband was born in Kidderminster in Worcestershire.<sup>1</sup>

The Introduction to *Shadowland in Ellan Vannin* is signed from Ramsey and the occasion of her marriage on 19 August 1889 shows up the Manx connection:

RUSSELL–LENEY.—On the 19th August at St Gabriel's Church, Warwick-square, S.W., John Wellesley [*sic*] Russell,<sup>2</sup> Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, to Isabel Hawksley, only child of the late Archibald Hawksley Lenny, M.D., of Dawson Castle, Dublin, and step-daughter of the late R.J. Kelly, advocate, Ramsey, Isle of Man.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Census Enumerators' Book* for Oxford 1891, RG 12/1166, fol. 81, sch. 189. While Isabel here she is properly Isabella as returned in the census for 1871.

<sup>2</sup> He was named not after the Duke of Wellington, but John Wesley, the choice apparent when the 1881 census finds him in Cornwall, living at New Road in Helston, his father enumerated as the Wesleyan minister there for the Helston Circuit. Aged 29, he was tutoring in mathematics. *Census Enumerators' Book* for Helson 1881, RG 11/2323, fol. 35, sch. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Anon, "[Births, Marriages, & Deaths] Marriages," *Isle of Man Times* 24 August 1889. Repeated Anon, "[Births, Marriages, & Deaths] Marriages." *Isle of Man Times* 28 August 1889.

In 1881, she was living at 8 Auckland Terrace in Ramsey, aged 36, with her step-father, Robert James Kelly, 67 years old, advocate, and now a widower.<sup>4</sup> The 1871 census has her aged 28, her first name fuller as Isabella and with a further initial to her credit making her full name to be Isabella C. Hawksley Leney. Her mother was Eleanor M. Kelly, *née* Leney, 54 years old, born in Ireland. They were living then at 2 West Street in Ramsey.<sup>5</sup> Earlier in the 1861 census, they were living on Auckland Terrace and with another age inconsistency for Isabella, as this time she is 21 years old.<sup>6</sup> In 1851, she was living at Albert Row in Ramsey, aged 12.<sup>7</sup>

The reporting of her age in the censuses runs so: 12 years old in 1851, 21 in 1861, 28 in 1871, 36 in 1881, and 38 in 1891 when it is now well out. Taking her age from the 1851 census to be accurate, she would have been born in 1839 and so aged 52 years old by 1891. In the 1901 census her age was 48, and she was now living at 131 Woodstock Road, her husband now a law tutor. She now had a son to add to her daughter, Edgar G. Russell, aged 8.<sup>8</sup> By the 1911 census, John Wesley Russell was now a widower.<sup>9</sup>

As will be seen in the next *Manx Note*, *Shadowland in Ellan Vannin* is not without its merits and here at least we now know more about the author herself and also why the Introduction came to be signed from Ramsey.

STEPHEN MILLER RBV

#### REFERENCES

- Anon. “[Births, Marriages, & Deaths] Marriages.” *Isle of Man Times* 24 August 1889: 5[g].  
 ——. “[Births, Marriages, & Deaths] Marriages.” *Isle of Man Times* 28 August 1889: 4h.



<sup>4</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Ramsey 1881, RG 11/5600, fol. 69, sch. 79.

<sup>5</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Ramsey 1871, RG 10/5773, fol. 131, sch. 89.

<sup>6</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Ramsey 1861, RG 9/4425, fol. 16, sch. 126.

<sup>7</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Ramsey 1851, HO 107/252a, fol. 387, sch. 117.

<sup>8</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Oxford 1901, RG 13/1381, fol. 97, sch. 29.

<sup>9</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Oxford 1911, RG14 PN8133 RG78 PN412 RD152 SD2 ED22 SNI95.