

# Manx Notes 590 (2022)

“(YOU’LL UNDERSTAND WHICH PART  
ARNOLD HAS DICTATED)”

ARNOLD AND ROBERTA FOSTER  
WRITE TO MONA DOUGLAS \*

(1930)

*Headed notepaper:*

2, Grove Hill Road, | Denmark Hill, | London. S.E.5.

28.12.30.

My dear Mona,

How very nice of you to send me that Christmas present. You really should not have spent your money, Nevertheless, thanks very much indeed. The tin is very useful. I shall keep coffee in it (not the dandelion variety). I think it is a charming gift and was a lovely surprise.

We are very disappointed not to see you this Christmas or at any rate your Dad. I do wish you could have managed it.

They have decided today to perform one or two movements from Arnold’s suite for strings on English Folk Airs and he is to conduct it at the two performances at the Albert Hall. Rather nice, isn’t it?

I hope you are getting time for writing and have finished the volume of short stories. I am sure you ought to find a market for them as the two you read to us were so very good.

Trusting you are all keeping well and with much love and many thanks again for your present,

Bobbie.

Best wishes for the New Year.

Arnold says “Stainer & Bell asked me to listen in a week last Saturday to “Folk Songs of the Manx introduced and arranged by Dr. James Lyon” with a quartet of soloists illustrating. We listened in and, without saying anything definite he conveyed the impression he had wandered round the Island collecting folk tunes. He acknowledged the work of Gill and Moore and the illustrations he gave were “Love’s Flight” Gill collection, “Sooree” with a translation or rather a rendering into English by Cushag. “Drima Duddle,” “Drog Vraane,” “Mylecharane” and “Sheep under the Snow” sung

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\* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “(You’ll understand which part Arnold has dictated).’ Arnold and Roberta Foster write to Mona Douglas (1930),” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* November (2022), [24].

by solo voice with piano and S.A.T.B. unaccompanied chorus. I did not recognise the version of the words but it was the version of the sharpened 7th of the tune. The most comic thing he said was “I omitted to say that the original words of these old Manx tunes are untranslatable” He finished up by giving “Manin Veen”, R.V.W. arrgt. “Marry Me Mary Veen” Dr. Lyon’s arrgt. (distortion) and the “Ploughman’s Song” from Gill.

Can’t you get somebody to write up to the B.B.C. paper “The Listener” contradicting the statement quoted above and pointing out that “Mary me Mary Veen” is a complete distortion of “Berrey Dhone”? Also point out what we have done together. Someone surely ought to try and arrange with the B.B.C. for you to talk on the songs and Ada Mylchareest to sing the songs in Manx and perhaps the B.B.C. singers do the unaccompanied arrangements.”

(You’ll understand which part Arnold has dictated).

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Mona Douglas (1898–1987) needs no introduction here, but Arnold Foster (1898–1963) is a lesser-known figure to many, a name that appears in connection with her published collections of folk song and dance, where he was responsible for their arrangements. Her personal papers are extensive and whilst now deposited in the Manx National Heritage Library they represent only a small part of what once she had in her hands. Whilst she lived in the same place for most of her adult life, there was considerable discarding of correspondence and manuscripts and such like along the way. That said, the one correspondent whose letters are there in number is Arnold Foster, along with Roberta (“Bobbie”), his partner. The first letter is from 1927, and the last piece is a Christmas card from Roberta to Mona in 1985, wishing her all the best for the coming year of 1986. This letter, reproduced as in the original with obvious typos left to stand, with its acknowledgment of a Christmas present, and wishes for the coming New Year, shows the warmth of the friendship between the three of them. The surviving correspondence is an extensive one and calls for further study. Like most, it is one-sided, as there are no copy letters from Douglas.

The letters can be found in Box 21 of the Mona Douglas Papers, MNHL, MS 09545.

Stephen Miller, RBV

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