

Manx Notes 598 (2022)

“JOHANNESBURG TYNWALD DAY BROADCAST NORTHSIDE FOLK IN PROGRAMME”

(1940)

[7a] A Tynwald Day broadcast arranged by the Transvaal Manx Association proved most interesting and successful.

The speaker was the Society’s “Reiltagh,” Mr W. Carine, who also gave the commentary on various items, and those who took part included Mesdames A. Lewin, the accompanist; E. Leece, G.M. Quayle, D. Cringle, E. Killey, E. Greggor, M. Carine, M. Mainprize, and A.F. Bain; Misses E. Eason, C. Dodd, E. and M. Kewley, and Messrs J.W.D. Kelly, the conductor, A. Lewin, A. Crye, C. Quayle, R. Taggart and C.W. Bain. Mr Bain, it is interesting to relate, was born in a house at Bowring Road, Ramsey, and the Mrs Cringle mentioned was formerly Miss Dorothy Kee, of Ramsey. Mr Crye also had relations in Ramsey.

Northside folk will be interested to hear that a canteen built on the Union grounds in Johannesburg is called the Ted Sayle Hut, after Mr E.A. Sayle and his son, Major T.E. Sayle, R.E., who presented the canteen for the benefit of the soldiers, and which is run by the Women’s Auxiliary Services, a purely voluntary organisation. The canteen has proved a blessing to troops moving off early in the morning, and the lady helpers are always on the scene with hot tea and coffee and sandwiches for the boys.

The full text of the Tynwald Day broadcast feature, which will be read with much interest, was as follows:

HEART-STIRRING TRIBUTE

Cr’en ag ta shiu, dy ooiley poble Maninagh. Good evening, everybody. The Transvaal Manx Association sends greetings to Manx folk everywhere. World shattering changes have taken place since last we sent out greetings on Tynwald Day, and to-day the little Manx nation is ranged beside its more powerful neighbours fighting for the restoration of peace and sanity in the world.

Small though the Isle of Man is, and remote though it may be from the fighting line, its inhabitants have shouldered their full share of the burden of war. In the last war the Island sent more men to the front, in proportion to its size, than any other part of the British Empire. In the present struggle, one out of every five of the adult population of the Island is already serving in the Army, Navy or Air Force. It is with pride mingled with sorrow that we read of the gallant part played in the evacuation of Dunkirk by Manx ships manned by Manx sailors, so many of whom never returned.

But in spite of it all, the ceremony of reading the laws from the summit of Tynwald Hill was duly carried out in the Island to-day, just as it has been for over a thousand years. The significance of this ceremony has been brought home to all

Manx people with greater force than ever in these days, when democracy, and that that word stands for, is so gravely threatened.

The ceremony symbolises the freedom which was so hardy won by our forefathers, and which has been handed home to all Manx people with greater force than ever in these days, when democracy, and that that word stands for, is so gravely threatened.

The ceremony symbolises the freedom which was so hardly won by our forefathers, and which has been handed down in an unbroken line for centuries. It dates from the days of the Norse overlords of Man when the Freemen of the Island gathered to hear and ratify the laws which had been made by their representatives, the twenty-four Keys. To this day no Manx law is effective until it has been read from Tynwald Hill.

The Isle of Man attained its greatest political influence during the four or five centuries of Norse rule, and the Island is a treasure house of ancient Norse folk-lore. Many beautiful stone crosses have been found, inscribed in Runic characters, and as they were carved at least a hundred and fifty years before the introduction of Latin letters into Norway, they form one of the main sources of Norse mythology.

A most interesting event took place in the Island on Tynwald Day last year, when the Norwegian Ambassador to Britain unveiled an exact replica of an ancient Viking ship. The Norse Kings of Man adopted the Viking ship as their heraldic device, and such ships must have been a common sight in Manx waters at that period in the Island's history. Traces of the old Viking custom of ship-burial were found in the Isle of Man some years ago, although the greater part of the ship had decayed away, leaving only a few timbers and the remains of the iron rivets which had held them together. This vessel was probably built in the ninth century, and is one of the oldest Norse relics which have yet been discovered.

“INFLUENCE OF NORSEMEN”

The influence of the Norsemen is still to be found not only in the Island's political institutions, of which Tynwald itself is one of the most important, but also in many of its place-names and surnames. The Norse invaders intermingled with the ancient Celtic population, and formed with them the present Manx race. Strangely enough, however, the Manx language was very little affected by the long years of Viking rule, and still retains its original gaelic form.

Prior to the coming of the Norsemen, the Isle of Man, lying as it does almost equidistant from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales was preyed upon by each of them in turn. The fragmentary history which has come down to us from those far off days reveals how bitter was the struggle for existence. The crofter following his plough and the fisherman tending his nets each kept his spear and shield close at hand in readiness against a sudden attack. Almost every headland on the Island's rocky coast had its lookout point while every able-bodied man had to take his turn at “Watch and Ward,” which was maintained night and day.

The Vikings, themselves a free and independent people, gradually established a settled and orderly life in the Island, and founded the system of government which is still the basis of our Manx laws and customs.

It can readily be understood, then, just what the age-old ceremony of Tynwald means to the Manxman. To him it is not merely a quaint survival from the past, but the key-stone of his rights and liberties. To him that little artificial mound near the centre of the Island is sacred ground.

And so, on the Fifth of July each year, the thoughts of Manxmen the world over are turned for a few moments towards the Island set in the midst of the Irish Sea, as they recall its green rolling hills, the murmuring waves upon its shores the swift turbulent waters of the Sound, and the raucous cries of sea-birds wheeling about its towering cliffs—all those things which remind them of Ellan Vannin Veg Veen—the dear little Isle of Man.

("Ellan Vannin" sung by the choir).

Manx music remained oral and traditional until well into the nineteenth century, when a few of the better-known tunes were written down. The words and tunes were handed down from generation to generation and in some cases the original words have been lost altogether. This has happened in the song you are about to hear. The tune is a very old one, and is simply known as "Arrane ny Clean" the Cradle Song, and to it have been set the words of Sir Walter Scott's poem—"Oh, Hush thee, My Babie."

("Oh, Hush thee, My Babie"—sung by the choir").

"Ramsey Town" is one of the best-known of Manx song, and is generally to [7b] be heard wherever half-a-dozen Manx people are gathered together. It tells of a sailor who is off on a long voyage. His thoughts are, of course, occupied with the girl he has left behind him in "Ramsey," but not, I fear, for very long. For he comes to the conclusion that, although grey eyes and golden hair are likely to be rare in the Southern Seas—why, black or brown will probably do just as well.

("Ramsey Town" sung by Mr J.W.D. Kelly; chorus by the choir).

The next song is one which was commonly sung by the women at their spinning wheels in the days when spinning was part of the work of every household. It is written to the quick rhythm of the treadle of the wheel. The "Bollan Bane" mentioned in the song was a plant which was supposed to be peculiarly efficacious as a charm. It was excellent for warding off the evil eye, for counteracting the machinations of unfriendly fairies, for ensuring the speedy "turning" of the butter in the churn, and for avoiding the breaking of the thread when spinning. The "Phynodderree" was a most industrious fairy, who was usually willing to make himself generally useful around the house by doing such jobs as spinning, weaving, sewing or cleaning up. These duties he performed while the household was asleep, and in return it was the custom for the farmer to leave bowls of food in the kitchen for him. But woe betide the farmer who, having accepted his services, failed to provide his just

dues. From a friendly, industrious helper he would turn into a powerful and implacable foe. That farmers cows would be certain to go dry, his crops fail, and his cream turn sour in the pan. So it was essential to keep on the right side of the Phynodderree and in case of on handy.

("Spinning Wheel Song," sung by the ladies of the choir).

We now have an old Manx Ballad, "Oh, what if the fowler my blackbird has taken." It is a simple little folk-song but contains some very expressive phrases. Thus "The mountains grow white with the birds of the sea" aptly describes a common occurrence in the Island, when the sea-birds settle on the land in such vast numbers that from a distance they have the appearance of snow on the ground.

("Oh, what if the fowler my blackbird has taken," solo).

The next song concerns William Christian, who was known as "Illiam Dhone." fair-haired or brown-haired William. He was in command of the Manx Militia under the seventh Earl of Derby. When the Earl was captured at the battle of Worcester and later executed, the Countess of Derby attempted to defend Rushen Castle against Cromwell's forces. William Christian, however, frustrated her effort by going over to the Parliamentary side. In this he had the support of the majority of the people of the Island, who looked upon the Earl of Derby as a tyrant and an oppressor.

On the restoration of the monarchy in 1650, Christian was immediately imprisoned by the order of the new Earl of Derby, in spite of the Act of Indemnity which had been signed by Charles II. He appealed to the King, who issued an order for his release. Unfortunately, this arrived too late to save Christian, who had already been executed at Hango Hill. It was said that the Earl of Derby had deliberately arranged for the King's order to be delayed.

Though Illiam Dhone had proved disloyal to the Countess of Derby and was executed as a traitor, his fellow country men have always regarded him as a hero and patriot.

("Illiam Dhone," sung by the male members of the choir).

It was customary on the Manx fishing boats, before shooting the nets each evening, for the master of the boat to call the crew together and hold a short service. The hymn sung on these occasions was that known in Manx as "Eaisht oo as Clashtyn." It has become known all over the world as the Manx Fishermen's Evening Hymn.

("The Harvest of the Sea," sung by the choir).

It is now "Ta traagoll thie," and with the singing of the Manx National Anthem, "Arrane ashoonagh dy Mannin," I bid you all good night, Oie Vie, Bannagh Lhait.

("Manx National Anthem.")

This magnificent broadcast must surely be one of the finest tributes to the lil Island ever delivered on the wireless to overseas listeners.

“Johannesburg Tynwald Day Broadcast. Northside Folk in Programme.”
Ramsey Courier 16 August 1940: 7a–b.¹

Stephen Miller, RBV

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¹ {Anon, 1940 #2300}