

Manx Notes 611 (2023)

“NOT MANX BUT IRISH”

SLEIH GYN THIE AND THE FATHABY JIG *

To the Secretary, Manx Music Festival:

I have learnt with surprise, and some resentment that the Sleih gyn Thie team of Manx dancers was disqualified at your recent festival on the grounds that their performance of the Manx dance The Fathaby Jig, and especially the basic step, was not Manx but Irish, and I am glad to be able to support their justifiable protest, not against their placing, which is, of course, at the discretion of the adjudicator appointed by your committee, but against the grounds of the disqualification.

As you may know, I have been the only serious collector of the Manx dances since the 1920's, and my work in connection with them has been approved and supported by both the English Folk Dance Society and the International Folk Music Council. I was also the first person to teach Mr. Leighton Stowell and his team of children at the Albert Road School, Ramsey for their first demonstration of the revived dances, taken from my notation of traditional dancers and some dance notes made by my great-grandfather, Philip Quayle of Glentrammon, which had come into my hands from the family. As a result of this demonstration, one of the dances was shown as a special item in the All England Festival at the Royal Albert Hall, London the following January.

Later, in connection with the Festival of Mann, the Manx Folk Dance Society was formed, at first with the object of bringing the Manx dances back into more general use, though it later made more use of English folk dances. Five of the dances were published by Stainer & Bell of London with piano arrangements by Arnold Foster, followed later by a further collection of seven. Many of the Manx dances, however, remained in MS, and some of them have been revived by various teams.

The Fathaby Jig was a popular dance in the 19th century and is so referred to be the poet T.E. Brown in one of his letters, and it was noted and taught by me in the 1920's. I enclose a copy of the original notation bearing the names of the persons from whom it was noted. Mrs. Bridson was the mother of the then Glen Meay blacksmith and lived on the Glen Rushen road, and the notation of her demonstration of the step with me was made in the presence of Mr. W. Walter Gill, himself a folk lore collector and author of the Manx Scrap Books, who then lived at Dalby.

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “Not Manx but Irish’—Sleih gyn Thie and the Fathaby Jig,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* July–August (2023), [18].

I have supervised and coached personally the dancing of the team disqualified by your adjudicator, and I feel that their style of dancing is much closer to that of Manx traditional dancing than is that of much taught more formally today.

Mona Douglas

MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 15, [Folder] Sleih gyn Thie.

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Whilst undated, one cannot be but taken by the irony here that the Fathaby Jig, a dance both collected and taught by Mona Douglas, is rejected at the Manx Music Festival as being “not Manx but Irish.” Douglas writes here of collecting the dance in the 1920s, with the added detail of the presence of Walter William Gill when doing so. She writes too of teaching it in that decade though a later letter from 1935 casts doubt on this:

However, I hope to get on with some “home-work” soon again, and meanwhile I have not been absolutely idle about dances, for I have kept up my own small Wednesday group (the only thing outside work that I am doing at present, but they would have fallen to bits without me), and we have gone ahead with the Fathaby Jig, which I started with Mr. Stowell last spring and then found it impossible to work up to demonstration standard in time for the Liverpool lecture. When I get back to Ramsey it will be much easier to teach for the work I am putting into it now. I don't think I sent you the notation, but will try to do so soon it is rather complicated, and I am not sure that I have got it down very clearly.

Stephen Miller RBV

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