

NEWSLETTER Autumn 2013

Editor – Douglas Barr-Hamilton

Tynwald Cooish

Scorching sun, Scrumptious food, Scintillating conversation, and Superb hospitality - that could summarise the Midsummer Cooish held at the home of Elizabeth and Nicolas Watson in Hitchin on 6th July. There were fourteen LMS members who gathered on a hot summer Saturday and sheltered under a large gazebo in the delightful garden of the Watson's home. "Manxies" came from North and South, from Cambridge and Ealing, and it was great to welcome Margaret Hunt from Cambridge, a member of the Lowey family from Colby who joined LMS two years ago, attending her first Society event.

The Hitchin team of the Watsons and the Bells had planned for what turned out to be a most memorable event and had put in a great deal of hard work. Mavis gave us sprigs of Bollyn Vane to wear and Dave Bell had prepared the kippers which he and Mavis had brought over from the Island. Elizabeth provided delicious food and drink supplemented by other "Bring and Share" contributions. Jack Honeybourne had just celebrated his 85th birthday and Maron had brought a cake so we were able to celebrate and sing "Happy Birthday" to him .

There was no shortage of conversation on a variety of topics. It was so entertaining, the food so tasty and the weather so hot that it suddenly became necessary to employ Dave Bell and Mike Fiddick as firemen. It was good that our special nonagenarian Maisie Sell was able to be there. Another Maisie, the Watson's grand-daughter put in an appearance and lowered the average age considerably; such an animated afternoon that the neighbours later asked, "Were you entertaining a group of teenagers?" Or more poetically described by Maisie, "It has been a perfect golden afternoon."

It really was a day to remember and we are all so grateful to Elizabeth and Nicolas for hosting the event.

Anne Alexander

with additional detail from **Mavis Bell**



Hitchin Mhelliah

Manx evening in Letchworth

Within a week of our Tynwald cooish in Hitchin, North Herts. was flying the Manx flag at another event which took place at the Central Methodist Church in Letchworth Garden City.

Malcolm and Sue Peacock have recently moved there after completing an eleven year term of office for the Methodist Church on the Isle of Man. They decided to put on a Manx evening for their congregation helped by their daughter, featuring the Manx language, traditional music and dances with local scenes shown on a large screen. Sadly, we could only stay an hour due to a previous engagement, but we did not want to miss being greeted by "Fastyr Mie" in the middle of Letchworth, then giving our table an unfair advantage with all the answers to the Manx Quiz.

David and Mavis Bell

Bishop back

It is five years since Right Reverend Graham Knowles spoke to our Mhelliah; a former bishop of Sodor and Man, he was then Dean of St Paul's Cathedral where he later spent many days in the news headlines. Those there will recall an amusing and interesting account of his time as Bishop and we look forward to Monday 7th October when he is due to address us with more anecdotes of his time at Bishops court, tell of his challenges at St Paul's and let us know how he is getting on in Bury St Edmund's where he is an honorary assistant bishop in his retirement.

A notice with full details is enclosed with this newsletter and Sam Weller is eagerly looking forward to hearing that many will be joining us.

Ben Seyr

Andreas' harvest festival service on 16th October 1938 would have been a sombre occasion. The reason was not that the harvest had been poor; the congregations' thanks to God for it had been real enough. Sadly, all now realised that much of the grain for which they had laboured must have perished after harvest. While there had been anxiety the week before at Festivals in neighbouring parishes, hope had now gone.

A week before that on 2nd October, the 267 ton Ramsey Steamship Company ship, *Ben Seyr* had set sail for Cardiff from Ramsey with a cargo of oats and, as a later history says simply and poignantly, she was not heard of again. It is presumed that the ship was lost that same day in a severe south-westerly gale. For a short time some hope seems to have been encouraged by Manx newspaper reports that the vessel had been seen sheltering off Rosslare in County Wexford until about 2.00 p.m. on Wednesday 5th but the sighting was never substantiated and in due course the Board of Trade decided there was insufficient information to warrant an official enquiry. Hope for the vessel and her crew seems quickly to have disappeared since a memorial service for the sailors was arranged for Saturday 15th at St Paul's Church in Ramsey.

Then on 13th came the only clue to the disaster when the body of the ship's mate was washed ashore at Middleton Sands near Heysham still clothed in his best suit but wearing a life belt, suggesting that the vessel was lost soon after leaving harbour because if he had taken the helm he would have changed into his working overalls. Next day, the whole Island knew.

One especially sad foot-note on the calamity is that the mother of crew member David Lace had lost her father and a brother in the "Nellie" disaster, when, in April 1897 this open Ramsey fishing boat was swamped while hauling in her lines after fishing on the Bahama Bank. One slightly happier note is that the ship was insured under a policy available at the time that included "War Risks" so some £400 additional cover was provided. Neither the shipping company nor the cargo owners thought it appropriate to take the money and it was given to a "Ben Seyr Relief Fund" that had been set up to support to the families of the lost seamen which was not finally wound up until December 1954.

This year is the centenary of the founding of Ramsey's shipping company and a commemorative book of its history has been published but, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the *Ben Seyr* tragedy, we remember the six man crew: the Master, Ambrose Crebbin, aged 46 from Port Erin, Engineer, William Morrison, 47 from Pulrose, Mate, James Bradford, 33 from Ramsey and the Able Seamen: David Lace, 46 and Jerry Thomas, described as a boy, both from Ramsey and Cecil Barbour (or Barber) only 18 and from Liverpool. All except the two young men were married and with children. Ramsey mariners who "sailed away to the blazing south" even on a stormy Autumn day.

DBH

With kind contribution from Tony Kennish, Managing Director of Ramsey Steamship Co. Ltd. and with the help of the Manx Museum iMuseum.

Surrender in Ramsey Bay

In a response to my piece in June about Manx glens, Clare Christian told me how much she liked the medieval fishponds in Bishopscourt Glen, relics I had not discovered on line. They are well worth a look as I found when next on the Island. I also took the opportunity of looking at Bishop Hildesley's "Mount Aeolus" a mound of which I was aware but knew little except that he had it built to commemorate the surrender of a French fleet in Ramsey Bay in 1760. It made me curious to find out a bit more about the event.

The story begins with the Act of Settlement 1701, designed to secure protestant succession to the throne. According to the Act, succession went to Princess Sophia, Electress of Hanover (James I's granddaughter) and her protestant heirs. However, Sophia died before Queen Anne so the throne passed to her son, George, Elector of Hanover and in 1714 he became King George I. However, with around sixty with a better claim but barred for being Roman Catholic, his arrival was not popular and was violently opposed by the Jacobites with uprisings in 1715 and 1745 that were ruthlessly suppressed.

During the reign of George II (1727 -60) the British Empire had grown in size and strength and, almost as a side show to the Seven Years' War of 1754-63 in which Britain supported Prussia and Hanover against France, Austria, Saxony, Sweden and Russia after Austria had tried to regain Silesia seized by Prussia a few years earlier, France disputed with Britain as French colonies in Canada, India and the West Indies looked all but lost. In 1759 France hatched a plan to invade the British Isles.

That autumn they assembled an army in and around Nantes and an invasion fleet which the Royal Navy under Admiral Hawke blockaded in western Brittany to prevent the embarkation of troops until storms drove him to shelter in Torbay. However, probably as a diversion, the French commissioned a privateer named Thurôt to sail from Dunkirk with five ships and 1,700 men and recruit more soldiers after landing. He set off in October and continued as if unaware that the brilliant Admiral Hawke, a generation before Nelson, returned and destroyed the main fleet at the Battle of Quiberon Bay, near Brest on 21st November.

Thurôt eventually landed in February 1760 in Ireland and fought the Battle of Carrickfergus in which he was victorious but, having lost two ships and many men and having secured no local support, sailed into the Irish Sea. He was pursued from the Mull of Galloway towards the Point of Ayre by three Royal Navy frigates under a Captain Elliot but, Thurôt having been killed early in the action, the fleet surrendered after a heavy loss of men and damage to ships and it was escorted into Ramsey Bay. So the Bishop named his mound, Aeolus after Captain Elliot's ship. It was an early sign of coming cooperation between the Island and Britain.

DBH

Sources: History and Account (Train) 1844, A Concise History of Ireland (Joyce) 1903, Royal Navy web site, sundry references.

The Legion Players win at Drama Festival

Each year the British All Winners Festival showcases the best of British amateur theatre in a week-long celebration, and this year The Legion Players from the Isle of Man were invited to participate after clinching top place in the Island based One Act Festival in February this year.

Competing against eight other teams in the British All Winners Festival, The Legion Players were supported by the Isle of Man Arts Council as they successfully picked up the gauntlet at the Carlton Theatre in Teignmouth.

Drama groups from throughout the British Isles who have won full-length, or one act member festivals, during the preceding 12 months are eligible to compete on the invitation of the National Drama Festivals Association, but The Legion Players saw off the competition with their dramatisation of Kecks by John Chambers.

The play, centred in an up-market lingerie shop in Manchester, featured Karen (Pia Galante) and her mother Petula (Stephanie Gray) as they look to purchase something special for Karen to wear on her wedding night. But their shopping spree soon exposes something far more revealing as the conversation between mother and daughter takes an unexpected turn, which clinched the title for the Isle of Man.

Valerie Caine

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Island of Culture

For about ten years the Island has been developing a strategy to develop the arts and plans are advanced to make it an Island of Culture for 2014. It is hoped all can celebrate through dance, music, theatre, visual arts, literature, film and digital work. While essentially for Island residents, it should also prove an attraction for visitors and with the North American Manx Association making a Homecoming next year, could provide another reason for London Manx to go over soon.

DBH

Visiting LMS web site

London Manx Society website – londonmanxsociety.com

For items on what's happening on the Island, go to **NEWS** and then

MANXLIFE

Wendy Ellis Kneen

Viking Silver in Andreas

Northern parishes seem something of a backwater and during the nineteenth century they lost over half their population to poverty. When I was growing up in Andreas, folk in Ramsey called it "Darkes Andrus" and in her book Sally McCambridge records the response from a Peel-born friend to the news that she was moving to the Island, "Andreas! Crikey! Or as Frank Sinatra would say, 'East of the Lhen and west of the Dhoon'" But there were riches there a thousand years ago.

Evidence of this was unearthed in 2009 when a silver ingot from the Viking era was found in a field at Ballaseyre (Teare's farm: Place Names of the Isle of Man, J J Kneen), just south of the village on the Ramsey road. In April this year, two more ingots and fragments from a silver brooch were found in a ditch in the dubh field at the same farm by a Ramsey man with a metal detector and the finds have been declared 'Treasure Trove' with the farmer and the finder sharing the reward if they are acquired for the national collection. Alison Fox, Head of Archaeology at Manx National Heritage is quoting as saying it is likely that they had been buried for safe keeping but the owner never returned, adding that there is no known Viking site in the area while explaining that such finds are usually part of a much larger hoard and the two finds were probably part of the same one with the items separated by years of ploughing.

The hearing was told that the silver dates from between 930 and 1080AD so will prove another clue to the nature of Manx life under its Norse rulers. It was they who were rich; the locals probably for sale as slaves.

DBH

Sources: McCambridge, Andreas, BBC News, IOM Today.

Esther Richmond care brings Arctic experience

Kelly McCarthy who edits the North American Manx Society newsletter spent five weeks on the Island earlier this year. Sadly, the visit was to help nurse her aunt, the renowned Manx journalist Esther Richmond who had specialised in legal reporting for the Island's newspapers and Manx Radio for over forty years, suffering terminal cancer until her death in mid April. There are fulsome tributes to Esther on the Manx Radio web site.

Kelly's visit coincided with March's blizzards and she has written a graphic, warts and all, description of the experience in the latest American newslettter. That blocked roads prevented her from getting to Noble's Hospital for several days is only a part of the story and the article is illustrated with a wonderful photograph of a flock of sheep immediately following rescue.

Kelly expects to be back on the Island for the Homecoming next year and her Association is hoping there will be a good number joining them from other expat groups. How about joining her? Absence of snow guaranteed!

BOOK REVIEW

A De-Tailed Account of Manx Cats

Manx cats have long been a source of fascination to both curious onlookers and cat lovers alike, and although now more prevalent in the USA than the Isle of Man, this new book is likely to draw readers from both sides of the Atlantic. Much has been written about their distinctive characteristics which doggedly link them with the Island, but this inexpensive, little volume would be a purr-fect addition to any bookshelf.

Split into bite-sized morsels devoted to the Manx cat's history, their contemporary setting and folklore, Sara Goodwins has provided a gently humorous portrayal of this much-loved feline with its untroubled demeanour and curious traits. There's a selection of anecdotes to whet your appetite and some interesting suggestions as to the possible origin of the singular Manx moggy, not only renowned for its physical attributes, but also as an excellent mouser.

A cat-alogue of useful information, its pages are awash with colourful photos and comical pictures of regional souvenirs, providing an insight into this iconic symbol of the Isle of Man which still holds its appeal in the twenty first century. Presented to us on innumerable postcards, stamps and mementoes from the once burgeoning visiting industry, the Manx cat has lost none of its attraction, demonstrated recently by a children's short story competition which attracted several entries, including that of Megan Kneale of St Mary's RC School in Douglas. Her winning entry entitled Kayt Manninagh has been included in the book.

Available at many Island bookshops - re-tailing at £4.95.

Valerie Caine

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(Courtesy of Manx Tails)

Free lessons in Manx

To augment its lessons in Manx Gaelic that we have featured in the past (www.learnmanx.com) Manx Heritage Foundation is making lessons available on your smartphone, iPad or iPhone. Introduced late last year, currently the app comprises ten units but these will be expanded over time to thirty. There are also two "revision" lessons that provide a stimulating way for you to check your progress.

Download from Google Play or the Apple Store.

Reflections of a Village Through Flowers and Photos Concludes with Anniversary Service

A special Songs of Praise to celebrate the 174th anniversary of St James Church in Dalby was a fitting closure to a very successful heritage exhibition, which coincided with the Tynwald Day celebrations and Manx National Week. Entitled A Reflection of a Village Through Flowers and Photos, this unique exhibition attracted visitors Island wide who soon discovered that Dalby was not quite the sleepy backwater that they had imagined.

The anniversary service was led by local Minister Cheryl Cousins, who thanked everyone involved in the exhibition for all of their hard work before introducing Michael Killey and Thomas Doyle to relate their individual, and sometimes revealing stories, about what it's like to be born and bred in Dalby. In addition Margy Killey recounted the memories of Voirrey Curphey.

Meanwhile members of the Manx Gaelic choir, Cliogaree Twoaie, sang The Invocation to St Bridget, an evocative request for the popular saint to bless the house and Shee, a more reflective composition asking for peace.

Wending their way from church to schoolroom, their curiosities were aroused by old photographs of the village, its people and a fantastic array of memorabilia which provided a glimpse into the daily life of its inhabitants.

The exhibition was a community based exercise, which, although focused on the village of Dalby reached out to Glen Maye and Eary Cushlin; featuring tales of local characters, history, legend and folklore. Particular attention was paid to some of the more notable stories of the area, such as the famous music hall artist Florrie Forde, eccentric Manx millionaire Colby Cubbin, the Christian heritage of Lag ny Keeilley and the shenanigans of the Dalby Spook.

A wide selection of refreshments was also available, tempting visitors to sample anything from simple lunches to afternoon tea.

The service was followed by refreshments in the schoolroom.

All proceeds from the exhibition will be divided between the Friends of Robert Owen House, the Malawi Mission Project and the restoration fund for St James Church.

Valerie Caine
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Island Quiz

(open to non-members through the web site)

1. Where is the Island's magnetic hill

On the road between (a) Andreas and Bride, (b) Braaid and Foxdale, (c) Crosby and Greeba, (d) Ronague and Round Table?

2. In which parish is Snaefell

(a) Lezayre, (b) Lonan, (c) Maughold, (d) Michael?

3. What was the name of Parliament Street, Ramsey before the mid-nineteenth century

(a) Lezayre Road, (b) Lezayre Street, (c) Market Street, (d) Peel Street?

4. In what year did a distinctive Manx postage stamp first appear?

(a) 1953, (b) 1958, (c) 1968, (d) 1973

5. Prior to the three legs, what symbol represented the Island

(a) flower of cushag, (b) leaf of skeaig, (c) raven, (d) viking ship?

Answers to the editor by post or email, please. Closing date 14th October.

The first reader to send me five correct answers will receive a £20 voucher to spend at a Harbour Lights restaurant on the Island

Our thanks for their kind support.

Answers to June's quiz:

1. Hannah Waddingham starred in Kiss me Kate,

2. Manx Music, Speech and Dance Festival is popularly known as the Guild.

3. Ronaldsway Airport used to be HMS Urley (Manx for Eagle).

4. Louise Corkill, is from Douglas.

5. Below Sulby Reservoir is Tholt-y-Will.

No all-correct answer was received.

A Visit Home

I hadn't been home for many a year
And decided to visit when summer drew near,
I longed for a sight of the land of my birth,
Dear homecomers' isle, that gem of God's earth.

A very kind friend, an "exile" like me,
Had asked me to stay in her house by the sea;
Though at times we each went our separate way,
We met up of course at the end of the day.

What joy to see Peel after so many years,
Evening sky all aglow as the sun disappears,
The steadfast old castle, the tower on the hill,
The headlands, the prom - I see them all still!

Such a welcome from my kinsfolk, what a treat to sit and natter;
Though we really needed weeks to catch up on all the chatter;
There were cousins and their children, through both my father and my mother,
But however we're related, we all care about each other.

Oh, the coming and the going, the to-ing and the fro-ing!
The photos we were showing set the memories aflowing.
The meeting and the greeting of old friends I'd known at school,
The warmth of their affection felt, though the day be cool.

Coffee mornings, lunches, gatherings here and there,
And that memorable day when I was taken to the fair.
I enjoyed a cup and cooish with friends who've known me all life through,
Not just in Peel but Douglas and up in Onchan too.

Yes, the memory of this visit will stay with me evermore,
Where the wavelets murmur yet as they kiss the fairy shore.

Maisie Sell

Twin Tynwald Cooish

Every few years, the North American Manx Association holds its convention on the Island: appropriately called the Homecoming. The next one is just nine months away: 3-7th July 2014. As always, the World Manx Association organises a host of activities to which members of other Societies are welcome.

Typically, events begin with a reception on the opening evening and continue with sight-seeing trips, a formal dinner, invitations (for a selected few) to the Governor's Garden Party and, of course, watching or participating in the Tynwald Day ceremonies.

If any members are considering being on the Island over this period and would like to participate in any of the activities, please let the Secretary (Douglas Barr-Hamilton) know so he can make it known to the organisers. At very short notice during the last Homecoming, a dozen members discovered they were all over at the same time and came together with a couple of Manx resident members for an impromptu "cooish" in a Ramsey restaurant. It would be good if we could make it an even bigger event.

DBH

Acknowledgements

The Editor thanks Anne Alexander, David and Mavis Bell, Valerie Caine, Tony Kennish, Kelly McCarthy, Maisie Sell for their kind contribution and also the Manx National Heritage and Manx Radio. News about you and articles (of around 450 words) about Island life are welcome and of interest to all. If in doubt, please contact me - contributions can be sent at any time for inclusion in the next newsletter, if possible by email (*barrhamilton@btinternet.com*) or 132 Bush Hill, N21 2BS.

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Closing date for the next issue, 23rd November

Dates for your diary

Mhelliah

Monday 7th October 2013
St Bride's Church and Press House Wine Bar
full details enclosed

NEXT NEWSLETTER DUE IN THREE MONTHS

PLEASE SEND NEWS TO:

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