

# Newspaper articles marking Culture Vannin 40

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By Breesha Maddrell, Director of Culture Vannin

*An exploration of the journey of Manx culture and its importance to our sense of identity and belonging.*

March 2022

## Looking back at 40 years of Manx culture

Sometimes we think that nothing ever changes, and when it does, we don't always notice how significant that is. It's only when we take enough time to look back that we see the turning points, the moments that make a difference.

Throughout 2022, Culture Vannin will be celebrating its 40th anniversary and the ways that we work with others to celebrate Manx culture and cultural heritage in the Island and throughout the world.

Forty years ago, Manx culture was full of excitement and energy, but didn't always feel joined-up. People were speaking and teaching Manx, musicians were discovering old tunes and songs in the archives, groups were representing the Island internationally at festivals, books were being published, and artists, writers and historians were hard at work, but Manx culture didn't have a home or central focus, it didn't have the support it deserved.

Crafts expert and former art teacher, Sheila Tarr, was determined to make a change. Well-known for her work in organising the arts and crafts displays and competitions at Yn Chruinnaght Celtic festival, she had seen first-hand how amazing cultural centres and organisations in other countries were, and the kind of support and recognition those involved in Manx culture deserved as they told the story of the Isle of Man nationally and internationally.

In July 1980, she presented a petition to Tynwald, calling for a permanent centre for the Island's art, culture, craft, language, literature, festivals, and so much more. She had a vision for a space which could be used by different cultural groups for conferences, meetings, performances, archives, and even to be used as a youth hostel. The petition received support in principle from Tynwald, a Select Committee was appointed with Clare Christian MHK as Chair, and their report led to the Manx Heritage Foundation Act 1982 which was agreed by Tynwald.

Under the name of the Manx Heritage Foundation for many decades, or the more recent trading name of Culture Vannin, we have worked to support and promote Manx culture by partnering with the community, government agencies and business in order to fulfil our founding objects. Communication, education and accessibility are key to this, and development work for Manx language, Manx music and dance, and online and educational resources makes sure that is possible. The charity also supports grassroots projects through an annual grants scheme, knowing that the time, knowledge, skill and enthusiasm of those involved with Manx culture adds enormous value by effectively applying a multiplier effect to what are often modest sums of money.

Culture Vannin is proud to support, promote and celebrate contemporary Manx culture, drawing on our cultural heritage to help shape an exciting future. Look out for special releases, projects and events – March sees the award of special 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary grants totalling £40,000, in addition to our regular grants scheme.

The year will be an extra-special celebration of Manx culture and all those who create, practise and enjoy it, and who have done so for decades. If you would like to find out more, check out: [www.culturevannin.im](http://www.culturevannin.im)

April 2022

## Can you complete the 40 Manx things challenge?

40 Manx things – surely there are more?! Of course there are! But when we were thinking of ways to help celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Culture Vannin, we naturally looked at how best to put the number 40 to work – giving out 40k in extra grants, sharing 40 films from our archives, capturing 40 voices talking about 40 years ago...and then we hit on our #40Manxthings challenge. We set to work, dreaming up 40 things that you might like to try – from learning Manx phrases like ‘gura mie ayd’ (thank you) to reading some fairy tales, visiting one of the Island’s beautiful nature reserves, or a glen or beach that you haven’t spent time on. Could you take part in traditions linked to the Manx calendar, or simply spot things your walk to school or work? The idea is to make it fun and accessible, but also a challenge – will you be able to complete all 40?

We’ve already asked some people you might know to take up the challenges on social media, too, and post when they complete each one – watch out for the tag #40manxthings and see if you can beat them to it!

These 40 Manx things all relate to what we do at Culture Vannin, relating to the living culture of the Isle of Man. We work to support, promote and facilitate all of the wonderful people here and around the world who are involved with Manx culture in its widest interpretation – and that includes you. Our intangible cultural heritage includes traditions handed down over the centuries, performing arts, festivals and calendar customs, knowledge of the environment around us, traditional crafts, and anything else handed down by word of mouth. It’s also, quite crucially, about what we do today. How we understand ourselves is a key way of finding a voice in an increasingly globalised world. If we understand where we have come from, we have more chance of understanding and respecting other cultures around the world.

We’re looking forward to hearing about you getting involved – wearing bollan bane at Tynwald Day, paying rent to Manannan at the top of South Barrule, or carving a moot (turnip) for Hop tu Naa. All of the activities will be free and accessible, and there will be links to help you complete them. There should be something for everyone – maybe you could take on the challenge as a family, or as a group of friends, or maybe the #40manxthings challenge will bring out the competitive spirit in you. Head to [www.culturevannin.im](http://www.culturevannin.im) for full details – Easter is the starting point, and we’ll be posting regularly about it on our social media channels.

Culture Vannin is proud to support, promote and celebrate contemporary Manx culture, drawing on our cultural heritage to help shape an exciting future. 2022 will be an extra-special celebration of Manx culture and all those who create, practise and enjoy it, and who have done so for decades. If you would like to find out more, check out: [www.culturevannin.im](http://www.culturevannin.im)

May 2022

## **Mona Douglas, Manannan, and Manx culture for future generations**

The first patron of the Manx Heritage Foundation was Mona Douglas, an extraordinary woman who collected and created and inspired others to keep Manx culture alive and kicking. She wasn't someone who fitted into any pigeon-hole – she was awkward, determined, at times obsessive, and, as a woman who 'didn't know her place' at a time when you were often expected to, totally unfathomable to a lot of those around her. Uncompromisingly unconventional may be the best way to describe her.

Mona Douglas published poetry, revived Yn Chruinnaght Celtic festival, created an arts organisation, Ellynyn ny Gael, a youth movement, wrote two novels and published books of articles about Manx matters, took Manx dance to the Albert Hall in London, collaborated with and inspired composers from other countries, and taught tribes of children that Manx culture belonged to them, and that they should take it into their hearts. She did this at a time when there wasn't always much respect for Manx culture, let alone government support, and she didn't receive a penny for most of what she achieved. Even so, she took our Island story to international audiences, performing and broadcasting, as well as participating in inter-Celtic events and happenings.

Most importantly, perhaps, she was one of the key forces in developing the story of Manannan as legendary first ruler of the Isle of Man that we know so well today. Of course, stories about Manannan existed before she was born, but the Irish poet, George Russell, known enigmatically as 'AE', told her that she should 'make more of the Manannan myth' and so she promoted him as the original patron of Manx culture. Through her work, we know Manannan in songs and stories, and trophies in his honour which are now awarded for the greatest contribution to Manx culture.

Mona's story is one that reminds us of the many hands that have held and nurtured Manx culture over the centuries – she learnt from Sophia Morrison, she rubbed shoulders with J J Kneen and William Cubbon, and then she taught so many children through Aeglagh Vannin, people like Annie Kissack and Clare Kilgallon, who have, in turn, taught so many others, whether at the Bunscoil Ghaelgagh, their own children, or the many choirs, music and dance groups they've been involved with.

The Manx Heritage Foundation honoured Mona Douglas with the Reih Bleeaney Vanannan – Manannan's Choice of the Year award posthumously. The Foundation is known today as Culture Vannin, an organisation that continues her legacy of teaching people of all ages about Manx culture and cultural heritage.

Manx culture is a journey we've all been on since the time of Manannan – whenever that may have been or will be – if you're a shape-shifting sea god, perhaps you can be a time-traveller, too. Now that would make an interesting episode of Dr Who.

June 2022

## **Festivals as a meeting place for culture**

Who doesn't love a good festival – an opportunity to celebrate culture by coming together for concerts, sessions and talks, friendly competitions, but always threaded through with a deep sense of friendship, community and enjoyment. Since the early days of Culture Vannin, when we were known as the Manx Heritage Foundation, right up to the present, we have supported festivals which are now part of the established Manx cultural calendar, because they bring so much to us all and to our quality of life.

Yn Chruinnaght Inter-Celtic festival is one of the longest-running festivals, taking place each July, and gathering together musicians, dancers and languages from all of the Celtic countries. Last month, I was talking about the work that Mona Douglas did to promote Manannan, and the revived Yn Chruinnaght was her brainchild, too. Now celebrating over 45 years, it has been joined by other festivals such as Shennaghys Jiu each Easter, and the Cooish Manx language festival each Autumn. Culture Vannin supports the Manx cultural elements of the IOM Flower Festival, Oie Voaldyn and Manx Litfest, and many more besides.

Festivals are important to the development of Manx culture for so many reasons. They provide a focus for Manx music, dance, and creativity, giving extra reasons for new material to be developed, arranged or choreographed. They also – rather wonderfully – forge friendships, both on-Island and with visiting performers and audiences. Visiting acts bring new ideas, which in turn inspire us, and connections made often lead to invitations to other festivals around the world.

For Yn Chruinnaght Celtic Gathering, the opportunity to celebrate the myriad of cultures in the Isle of Man has also been a highpoint, especially in their colourful dance displays. Bulgarian and Irish musicians and dancers have featured in recent years, and the wonderful Manx Bulgarian project dreamt up by Our Island, Our World festival, showed how much cultures can gain by 'talking to each other'. Culture helps us see what we have in common, and offers ways to celebrate our differences.

But what about those not on stage but in the audience? Festivals are a great 'extended family' to become part of just by showing up, offering shared experiences full of joy and affirmation! But we shouldn't forget the volunteers who run the festivals, working all year long to prepare what may only be a week-long event. Having had the privilege to work on various voluntary committees for festivals and organisations over the years, I have found them a great way to get to know new people of all ages and backgrounds in a way that has enriched my life. If you want to help out, let one of the organisers know and they will welcome you with open arms!

Which festival will you go to next? For the summer festivals, programmes are published, tickets are on sale, but don't forget that there are also many free events, too – there's something for everyone. Time to try something new and to tick off one of the Culture Vannin #40manxthings challenge as part of our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations! Find out more at: [www.culturevannin.im](http://www.culturevannin.im)

July 2022

## **Cultural Connections – Manx culture around the world**

Manx culture isn't bound by the Irish Sea, it has long since spread its wings and is performed, enjoyed and created all around the world. Next month, there are two big events which put it centre-stage – the North American Manx Association's convention in Plymouth, Massachusetts, and Festival Interceltique de Lorient in Brittany.

The North American Manx Association (NAMA) was founded in 1928, and developed out of the large Manx presence in Cleveland, Ohio. It has over 850 active members, who are mainly second and third-generation North American, and some of them are Manx. In the USA, it shouldn't surprise you that there are chapters or branches in Chicago, Illinois; Cleveland, Ohio; Rocky Mountain; Galva, Illinois; the Greater Washington, D.C. area; Minnesota; Nebraska; Northern California; San Diego, California; Wisconsin; and Butte & Western Montana. In Canada there are societies in Ottawa and Vancouver.

At the start of August, celebrations focussing on the 400th Anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims aboard The Mayflower originally planned for 2020 will finally take place. The NAMA Convention brings together people who identify with or who are interested in the Isle of Man, and this year they particularly remember one of the Manxmen on board The Mayflower, Captain Myles Standish. The convention will help spread an understanding of Standish's life and work, and will celebrate Manx language and culture through workshops and performances by Ruth Keggin Gell. Find out more at: [namanx.org](http://namanx.org)

Rather closer to home, and in the spirit of inter-Celticity, there will be a strong Manx presence at Europe's largest Celtic festival in Lorient, Brittany. The ten-day festival attracts up to one million visitors and is a celebration of Celtic cultures, languages and friendships. Making sure the smaller Celtic nations are not overlooked are Manx delegates Grainney Sheard and Sarah Hendy, who help Manx bands, dancers, artists and craftspeople share their talents with large audiences from all around the world. This year a mix of traditional and original songs, tunes and dances will be shared by Ny Manninee, Clash Vooar, Biskee Brisht, Adam Rhodes, Tomas Callister, Neear Nesañ, Mec Lir and Ímar. They will be joined by traditional craft experts, Desi Robinson and Alix Morrey demonstrating how bumbee cages are made.

If you want to find out more about Manx culture's international connections, sign up to the KMJ Manx Music and Dance newsletter on [www.culturevannin.im](http://www.culturevannin.im) – in its pages you will find Manx culture being performed in all manner of places – Lithuania, North America, India, Brazil, Germany – and on harps and dulcimers, fiddles and flutes, not to mention by dancing feet that may never touch our shores, all driven by an interest in minority cultures and languages.

Manx culture is a wonderful way of spreading the word about the Isle of Man internationally, and an amazing way to keep the Manx diaspora connected to the Island.

We're proud of everyone who flies the flag for the Isle of Man globally, and everyone who finds a way to connect with us through our music, dance, language and literature.

Find out more at: [www.culturevannin.im](http://www.culturevannin.im)

August 2022

## Books to get you out and about

August is a great month to get out and about and enjoy the Manx countryside – from the beautiful glens and hills to the myriad of beaches. When I'm thinking about what to pack in my rucksack or beach bag for a more determined outing, a real adventure, I turn to two great books and one handy leaflet which help me understand the natural world and our rich archaeological landscapes.

Featuring stunning watercolours by the author, Dr Stella Thrower, *Manx Beetles, Bugs and Butterflies* is a beautiful book to have on your shelf but small enough to take out and about. A guide to the habitats and life cycles of some of the most colourful and interesting insects to be found in the Isle of Man, it's ideal for everyone, as the illustrations and drawings show you exactly what to look out for. I particularly like the butterflies, as we have lots of butterfly-friendly flowers in our garden and on the walks around us. There are some amazing buddleias in central Douglas which have been mobbed by red admirals in recent years.

Rucksack-ready is the cleverly designed *A Guide to the Archaeological Sites of the Isle of Man* by Andrew Johnson and Allison Fox. The Isle of Man has one of the richest archaeological landscapes in the British and Irish Isles, with sites both big and small accessible on public land. The book tells you precisely how to reach each one, how accessible it will be, and what to look out for when you are there. Written by experts in their field (no pun intended!), MNH archaeological curators Andrew and Allison tell you about the findings of excavations, and point you to further reading if you want to delve deeper. No matter where you live, there will be a site that has always intrigued you but which you've never fully understood – this guide will help you connect with the amazing 10,000 years that the Isle of Man has been inhabited.

For those of us who would rather dip our toes in the sea, then the *Isle of Man Rocky Shore Name Trail* is a great way to see what can be found, and to learn the Manx names for everything. Published by the Field Studies Council, it's a handy fold-out leaflet which tells you what sorts of seaweeds, sponges, lichens and tube worms you might hope to spot. The intuitive flowchart guides you to identify what you're looking at. Perfect for rockpool gazers!

Now you may be wondering what all this has to do with Culture Vannin – well the archaeology may be a more obvious fit, but ecology and natural history are also listed in our founding legislation under a broad definition of culture and cultural heritage. One of the key ways identified at that time was to publish books and leaflets. Over the decades, we have produced a whole host of books in conjunction with amazing historians, artists, musicians, linguists and writers to ensure that the story of Manx culture is accessible to all.

Find out more at: [www.culturevannin.im](http://www.culturevannin.im)

September 2022

## **Manx culture is safe in the hands of our youth**

I was at school when the Manx Heritage Foundation was created in 1982, not that it would have registered with me at the time. What I do remember at primary school, though, was longing to be in Mrs Hook's class next door, where great fun was to be had, and where Manx phrases were used every day in a way that seemed really special and yet totally natural. But I wasn't, and for me, Manx culture only appeared in the form of songs like 'Ellan Vannin' played on the trusty plastic recorder, or the occasional class project with some Manx content. Don't get me wrong, I had many wonderful teachers, but it was the luck of the draw each year as to whether we'd do anything Manx.

What a different opportunity faces students today. This is not only down to the Island's amazing teachers, but also because we have an approach that makes Manx culture and Manx Studies accessible to everyone, no matter which classroom or school they find themselves in. The Education Act lists the Manx language, culture and history specifically, and the Department of Education, Sport and Culture has a wonderful team delivering peripatetic language lessons, and an advisory teacher, Jo Callister, who supports schools by producing resources, training and offering workshops.

Throughout 2022, Culture Vannin is celebrating its 40th anniversary and the ways that we work with others to celebrate Manx culture and cultural heritage – one of the things I'm proudest about is how we have been able to help Manx schools over that time.

Dr Chloe Woolley, our Manx Music Development Officer often teams up with Jo to deliver workshops in primary schools on Manx music, dance and folklore, with themes like Hop tu Naa, Manannan, or Hunt the Wren. Workshops are a great way to encourage everyone to join in, to show that Manx culture is for everyone. Chloe also leads the Bree youth music movement, which meets once a month for sessions, as well as workshop weekends which are packed tightly with creativity and fun. You can find out more on [www.manxmusic.com](http://www.manxmusic.com)

Culture Vannin regularly produces school resources ranging from short films on coastal erosion or the Isle of Man during World War Two, to worksheets and books on music, traditional industries, folklore and calendar customs. The aim is always to support schools as much as possible, so that teachers have excellent resources to hand. Working with a former head of history resulted in the free web-based app, [manxhistory.com](http://manxhistory.com) which is aimed at secondary school students, but which is great for adults, too!

You can find our short films on YouTube and Vimeo, and there are lots of educational resources on our main website, [www.culturevannin.im](http://www.culturevannin.im)

The important message is that Manx culture is for everyone, and working with schools is a great way of reaching a good cross-section of our Island community, of giving everyone a way to 'be in Mrs Hook's class next door', to be involved, to enjoy it, and to share it with others.



October 2022

## Bringing the Isle of Man into focus

In recent months, there have been various meetings, conferences and strategies which look at the future direction of the Isle of Man. Knowing where we are going as an Island very much depends on understanding where we have come from, and how people have adapted over centuries to make this their very special home. What opportunities lie within these shores, and how do we embrace them sustainably – for our communities and for the planet?

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, people again started to think about who the Isle of Man is in terms of culture, heritage, archaeology, art, literature, etc. They wanted to strengthen a sense of Manxness, to celebrate what was good about the Island, and to make it stand out from the islands around it. In many ways, this is the very thing we are trying to do nowadays in terms of business and international relations, as well as community well-being. Over 120 years ago, they didn't want the Island to be seen as 'a bit of Lancashire gone adrift' – our history, culture and political make-up show us as something very different to that. I can't help but wonder, though, if we sometimes lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with a very particular set of circumstances here? That is one of the reasons that the Manx Heritage Foundation was set up 40 years ago, to help celebrate that sense of identity.

A solution that would suit a small city or region with 85,000 inhabitants doesn't automatically work for the Isle of Man. We can't rely on hopping over a border to access a service because we are an island, with our own systems and approaches. We can use that sense of knowing who we are to help us to stand out internationally. Provenance is a word that is used a lot in relation to artisan foods or products – how can we celebrate that more effectively? Some businesses do it brilliantly and are sought out by locals and visitors alike – I will just mention three: ElementIsle connect us with the natural beauty of the Island with its stunning jewellery, Fynoderee Distillery weaves folklore through its wonderful tipples, and Noa Bakehouse use the Manx language and Laxey flour to give a sense of place and exceptional quality.

Articulating the identity of the Isle of Man can be expressed through stories that connect others with the places, products, and communities here that are so special. After all, stories are the essence of culture; how we express ourselves, how we adapt, how we thrive, and how we have done so for generations. Cultures meet, cultures dance together, and are never shy of taking on new influences whilst always knowing their very core.

When we think about what we want our future to look like, we must bring the Isle of Man into focus and embrace our particular set of opportunities. We can safeguard the future of these shores if we know our history, our culture, our sense of place, if we tell our stories and enable people to connect with them. Manx culture, history and heritage all show us that innovation does, in fact, go hand in hand with carrying forward all that is special about the Isle of Man. Culture helps make this a somewhere place rather than an anywhere place.

November 2022

## **Grassroots, grassroots, everywhere!**

Manx culture wouldn't exist without strong grassroots, I can say that without any hesitation or doubt, and from personal experience. I have been involved in grassroots activity as a musician, Manx speaker, and festival organiser for many decades now. It's helped me find lots of ways to connect with the Isle of Man and it's been a great way to meet many amazing and talented people, both here and around the world.

One definition of grassroots is 'the very foundation or source'. When we talk about grassroots in culture, we mean the things people 'do themselves' rather than have organised for them. For Manx culture, that's everything from researching and writing talks or books about Manx history, folklore, and archaeology, to the Manx language, music and dance, and more besides.

When we considered how best to celebrate 40 years of the Manx Heritage Foundation and Culture Vannin, we knew that it would be important to recognise those grassroots as the very reason the organisation came into being. If people hadn't been excited about Manx culture, about practising and performing and enjoying it, Sheila Tarr would have had no reason to put a petition to Tynwald. Everything we do is a partnership with the community – without the grassroots, there would be no Culture Vannin.

It's only right that what we have done over four decades has adapted and changed in response to the needs of the cultural community – for many years we focused on publishing books, but were able partly to take a step back as the Manx book scene strengthened. At one time, we helped extensively with research into Manx Studies so that we could all understand more about this Island. At other times, we've put the focus on materials for schools, on producing short films, on recording CDs. Nowadays, we have three dedicated development officers who support Manx music and dance, Manx language, and online and educational resources. Their focus is on partnering with the community, on supporting and facilitating projects and ideas. There's so much that needs to be done for Manx culture that they couldn't hope to deliver it all themselves, and they would be the first to acknowledge the breadth and depth of talent in our cultural communities. Our grants support grassroots community initiatives and ideas, and ensure that we help what is a very broad definition of Manx culture. Find out more on: [www.culturevannin.im](http://www.culturevannin.im)

You can imagine my frustration when people suggest that things aren't what they used to be – of course they're not! Life is about change, it's about that delicious tension between innovation and conservatism, it's about what we keep, what we adopt, what we create, and how we mix those influences together. And Manx culture is no different. That doesn't mean that the grassroots have disappeared, in fact today they occupy more spaces than they ever did. Becoming part of the story that is Manx culture is more accessible now than it ever has been.

December 2022

## Feasts and festivities – a most cultural Christmas

I first heard ‘Hunt the Wren’ being sung by my grandfather’s friend, Tommy Mylchreest. He knew more verses than I could count on my fingers, and he gave the performance of his life, even though he was sat on a wooden chair in my grandmother’s kitchen with only three of us watching and listening. I best remember his face folded up in laughter at a silly story of their past that they had just shared, or something ridiculous that was going on. Both of them carried so much culture with them without ever having to name it as such. They knew the names of vast networks of families, and could recall them as easily as you would look up your contacts on your phone. I am lucky to have recordings of my grandfather, and somewhere, just somewhere, there might be a cassette with Tommy on it.

How we pass on culture without even thinking about it is, as often as not, through songs, stories, poems and rhymes. They give us a means to remember, to recall and repeat. Many songs and stories are linked to feasts and festivities, because they are times when we gather together as communities in celebration.

Christmas is no exception. I always think that the Manx loved Christmas so much they had two of them. I’m not joking – there’s a little Christmas and a big Christmas, an Old Christmas as well as a new one. What we know of the whole Foolish Fortnight is that it was a time when there was lots of music, dance and merriment, a time when fiddlers appeared to rule the roost. Mind you, the thought of hiring a fiddler to wake people up on Christmas Morn would be a wicked one these days!

Traditions are, of course, captured in various books describing folklore and folklife, but songs tell you things without you perhaps realising. The Manx Christmas customs I recall most easily are the ones that newer storytellers have shaped into songs and poems. Teacher and Manx dance enthusiast, Leighton Stowell, wrote ‘The Stranger’, a song which describes the myrrh coming into bloom, and the cattle falling on their knees to welcome the Christ child. I don’t sing Leighton’s version, because the song has been carried to me through the hands of Colin Jerry, who translated it into Manx, and Annie Kissack, who arranged that translation for her unaccompanied choir, Caarjyn Coidjagh. Culture is about what is carried forward, what is shaped and re-shaped, what is enjoyed.

There are so many ways to make this Christmas a Manx one – from attending special services in chapels and churches, to larger open-air gatherings, street theatre, concerts and fairs. If you don’t want to hire a fiddler to annoy your neighbours, then perhaps hanging a Nollick Ghennal ‘Happy Christmas’ decoration on your tree or sending a beautiful handmade card is the way to go. But don’t forget there are wrens to be hunted, saints to dramatically die and be resurrected courtesy of the Doctor’s pxiun and praxun, homemade cammag sticks to be wielded in the battle between the North and the South, and much more in between. And if any of that sparks your interest, you’ll find more on [www.culturevannin.im/manxfolklore/](http://www.culturevannin.im/manxfolklore/)

January 2023

## Capturing the Isle of Man on film

As I look back at 40 years of the Manx Heritage Foundation and Culture Vannin, I am struck by the power of the stories that have been told, especially those which we have been lucky enough to record in one way or another. As regular readers of this column will know, stories are at the heart of culture and community; they bring us together across time and space.

What stands out from those early years of the Foundation is the pioneering work of Charles Guard in capturing the Isle of Man on film. Charles is one of life's gifted story-tellers, whether through music, radio or TV, and he fully embraced the opportunity to develop, present and produce short films at a time when not many people were doing so here. He knew that young people in particular needed film as a way of understanding their Island, researching, scripting, producing and presenting educational videos, often in collaboration with Alex Brindley.

Over the years, Charles put various teams together to capture what might have seemed perfectly ordinary at the time, but which, decades later, prove fascinating viewing. Through his 'curiosities' series he helped unlock hidden places like the secret bank vault in Castletown, which has had over 1.4 million views on YouTube alone.

Back in May 2022, we released a collection of 40 historical films that focused on important buildings, events and services which have now disappeared, or which have changed radically. These include the final Manx Airlines flight in 2002, and a tour of the Summerland building in 2003 before its demolition. Protests and festivals are also captured, as well as the development of new infrastructure such as the IRIS network, and the laying of a MEA national grid cable.

Today, films continue to be made as part of our development work, officers partnering with talented filmmakers to capture something beautiful or interesting, or to witness a significant change in Island life. They run alongside our oral histories and photographs which tell stories of their own, and which, we have no doubt, will be treasured by future generations, and by everyone interested in the Isle of Man around the world.

Some of my favourite films include performances by young people from Bree, Scran, and at the Manx Folk Awards, and by all ages at concerts and events. I am fascinated by Keith Kennaugh's garden at Fleshwick, as well as more delicate films such as 'Thatching Down South' or 'Cornaa' which bring new ways to appreciate poetry, music and our beautiful landscapes.

Our online collection totals over 1,000 films, all freely available on the Culture Vannin website, or on our YouTube and Vimeo channels – what will you discover next?

February 2023

## **Finding out more about Manx culture**

As we continue to look at the highlights of our journey as the Manx Heritage Foundation and Culture Vannin, the difference to our understanding of Manx culture, history and heritage made by so many different people over the decades stands out.

Culture Vannin has supported research into Manx Studies for many years, whether in the form of an archaeological dig, or work in university and museum archives so that a new book can be written. It's all part of developing a deeper understanding of the Isle of Man, of building a sense of place that means something, that has integrity.

The more we know about our past, the more we can understand our present and future. We like to talk about our nation of Vikings and Celts, of the ruling families and acts of rebellion, mass tourism, of internment. We are keen to see the people who made a difference, who effected change, to hear the voice of the people, and to understand what is happening right now, too. That all starts with research, with someone with the knowledge and skill to understand and contextualise records from different points in time in order to tease out important stories.

Often, Culture Vannin has been able to help through grants to enable research trips to the archives at Manx National Heritage, or to look at papers relating to the Isle of Man that are held in archives elsewhere. But we've also supported fieldwork and excavations, as well as book projects. Over the past forty years, research into Manx studies has blossomed, with researchers keen to share their findings on social media as well as in journals and books.

From its inception in 1992 until 2015, the University of Liverpool's Centre for Manx Studies provided a real focus for on-Island research. The synergy created by the Centre's work with Manx National Heritage and us under our full name, the Manx Heritage Foundation, as funding body, was impressive. The Centre brought researchers from various universities around the world to the Island to conduct fieldwork, to work on archival projects, to speak at conferences and seminar days. Their work complemented that of the Island's existing learned societies, too, such as the IOM Natural History and Antiquarian Society, and the IOM Victorian Society.

What is exciting is to see that May 2023 brings a new conference from the University of Galway, 'Language and Society in the Isle of Man'. Based at the Manx Museum in Douglas, it is free to attend, and offers talks on a variety of subjects including the idiosyncrasies of small islands, what happens when languages change or are revitalised, and how we can compare the Manx experience to language contexts around the world. Culture Vannin is delighted to be helping with a modest grant.

When I next pick up my copies of Manx books, I will be thankful for the years of research that sit behind them. I will be reminded that, without this expertise in telling our Island's stories, we would have a poorer understanding of who we are, and of where we might be heading next.

March 2023

## Language matters

The way we communicate with each other is fundamental to our sense of identity and community. The Isle of Man has welcomed people from different places in the world over its history, just as it has set out people to explore and settle in all corners of the earth. The wonderful thing about culture is that we carry it with us, and we all have a role to play in the way that it is shaped as a community.

Language is a distinctive way of expressing identity, one that transcends our need to be understood. The way we shape our accent and speech patterns is often one of choice, something that becomes very personal to us.

In the Isle of Man, we have something very special in the Manx language, and in the Manx English (Anglo-Manx) dialect, which we know from recitations of T E Brown and from our daily lives. Even if you don't speak Manx, you will know phrases such as 'traa dy liooar' (time enough) and 'graih my chree' (love of my heart) because they have become part of our cultural make-up. What is wonderful is that all schools now offer Manx lessons to those who choose it, giving our young people a greater confidence and sense of place.

The Manx Heritage Foundation – our full charity name and the name we went by for decades – now Culture Vannin, has been privileged to have been involved in the success story of the Manx language for some time. That success is a longer story of community cooperation for over 120 years, with more recent targeted government support. We played a lobbying and funding role in relation to the first Manx Language Officer within the school system in 1992, something now firmly established as the Manx Language Unit. We have also employed a language development officer since 1998 to work with the community. Today our 'Greinneyder' (Manx for 'encourager') teaches adults around the world on Zoom and in person, as well as supporting the language in many varied ways.

Working together with the Manx Language Network, Jeebin, we have been delighted to help the Isle of Man strengthen the protection of Manx internationally, signing up to Part 3 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 2021. This was only possible because of the wonderful work in the community, in education – from Moonjer Veggey's nursery provision, to DESC's peripatetic teachers and the Manx medium Bunscoil Ghaelgagh – and through rich archives at Manx National Heritage, as well as research and resource development. Language shows us that we are best when we work together – so much so that Manx Gaelic has attracted the attention of the *New York Times*, the *Irish Times*, Italian and French TV, to name but a few in the last few months. The Manx language is a story of global significance.

If you've ever thought about becoming involved, Culture Vannin will hold a Manx Gaelic summer school, suitable for beginners and intermediates this July. If you want to find out more, check out [www.learnmanx.com](http://www.learnmanx.com) and sign up while there are still spaces!

Gaelg aboo – hurray for Manx!

April 2023

## Looking to the future

I've had just over a year looking back at 40 years of the Manx Heritage Foundation and Culture Vannin, and for my final column, it's about time I fixed my gaze more firmly on the future.

By the time this article appears, two significant events which celebrate and effectively safeguard the Isle of Man's future in terms of culture – the Manx Folk Awards and Shennaghys Jiu Celtic Festival – will have happened, and everyone will be gearing up for a third in the form of the Guild.

Back in September, I talked about how different things are today than when I was young, with all schoolchildren now having access to Manx culture and cultural heritage. The Manx Folk Awards, organised by Culture Vannin and the Department of Education, Sport and Culture, are a great example of how to provide a supportive space for young people to share what they are doing within the friendliest of competitions. The Awards place emphasis on having fun while celebrating Manx culture, with opportunities for complete beginners as well as seasoned performers.

Shennaghys Jiu Celtic Festival also focuses on youth, with family ceilis, concerts, and sessions at its heart. It's full of fun and friendships between Celtic nations, and this sense of exchange of ideas and inspiration is incredibly important. The festival name means 'Tradition Today' and it certainly makes Manx culture part of the lives of many talented young dancers, musicians and singers, as well as those who just love to join in with a ceili or enjoy a performance.

With events like these, we might be forgiven for thinking the future is secured, and in many ways it is. One of our roles at Culture Vannin is to think of the challenges that may face Manx culture in coming years, to think about creating an environment in which those young champions will thrive. We need to remember to dream, to have a vision, to be innovative and ambitious. Sometimes, that's through commissioning or developing new projects, at other times, it's by providing funding in the form of grants. A common theme in these columns has been the fact that culture doesn't sit still. We all have a role to play in pulling the threads of the past forward to weave them into new patterns. We do that best by looking after those old threads, by safeguarding and carrying them forward, but also by not being afraid to add in new, bright threads of our own.

UNESCO summarises why intangible cultural heritage is so important very clearly, talking about maintaining cultural diversity, about understanding our own culture as a way to enable communication with other cultures. Developing this kind of mutual respect for others also happens to be inter- and multi-generational by its very nature. We carry things forward from one generation to the next, and, as long as we do that in ways that are inclusive and have integrity, then we will serve Manx culture properly.