

STEPHEN MILLER

“THE FLOWERING
OF THE MYRRH”



CHIOLLAGH BOOKS
FOR
CULTURE VANNIN
2018

INTRODUCTION



In the *Isle of Times* for 13 January 1872, someone recounted how “[e]ver since I was a little boy, till my present advanced age, it has been a subject matter whether the Christmas Day of December 25, or Old Christmas Day of January 6, was the proper day.” There was, however, a way to find this out. “I have been told over and over again that, on the eve of Old Christmas Day, the bees were coming out of their hives, or rather, that they have been repeatedly heard at midnight hour, on the eve of Old Christmas Day, moving and making a noise at that hour, and that the bullocks went on their knees, and that the myrrh, in a few minutes at that hour, blossomed and budded and came into flower.” A party that year had gone out to Ballanea in German to see if this was the case, though it was noted that there being no bees there they could only “watch the bullocks and the myrrh at the farm house.” The myrrh flowered and the bullocks kneeled and “[t]he myrrh was brought to show me the next day; so that I am an eye-witness to it.” [1]

According to another writing in 1888, it was “all three-year old bullocks—that being, it is said, the class of animals in the stable at the time of the Nativity—fall on their knees and bellow piteously.” They went on to add that “[o]nly a few days ago an old resident of Kirk German affirmed most sincerely that such was the fact; and also that the bees on that night are all astir and noisy in their hives; and that the myrrh plant blooms into flower on the same occasion.” [2] A.W. Moore recorded that it was “all the bullocks of seven years old or more fall on their knees and utter a sort of groan, and, that at the same time, the myrrh plant bursts into flower and so continues for one hour, when it disappears again,” continuing, “[m]y informant is positive that he saw this latter phenomenon last Christmas Eve (1890).” [3]

Henry Duke in his column in the *Isle of Man Examiner* in 1902, dealt with a letter written by “Colby” and sent from Bristol: “Conversing with one or two friends the other day, I was told that last Old Christmas Day they sat and watched the myrrh, as they expressed it, and they said they really saw the myrrh spring and flower. [...] Can you explain?” He was nonplussed about an explanation but did point out that the myrrh in this case was was not the Biblical myrrh, but *Myrrhis odorata* that was involved, better known as Sweet Cicely. [4] Another piece that year was skeptical about it all, “our myrrh has a somewhat doubtful claim to the distinction of flowering at Christmas.” [5] That did not stop a number of people at Peel in 1910, who “journeyed into the fields outside Peel on Tuesday night to witness the myrrh blooming,” the *Peel City Guardian* ending its mention that “[t]his is an old Manx superstition which dies hard.”

Dr John Clague in *Cooïnaghtyn Manninagh: Manx Reminiscences* ([1911]) recalled a time from his youth when he and others went to see the myrrh flower “in Big John’s

wife's garden." At the appointed hour of midnight it did not flower and "[w]e went all home hoping and disappointed." In the end it did flower and word was sent to those who had attended the previous evening. Clague writes that "I went again to the garden with another, and opened the sheath of the flower, and I saw the new leaves." There was another occasion when he set out to watch the myrrh blossom, this time in "John Cannell's garden, on the morning of the eve of Old Christmas Day, and I saw the new buds at that time." [7]

There is a gap now until 1935, when the *Mona's Herald* carried a tongue-in-cheek advert for myrrh plants, "Chalse's Special," which were guaranteed "to flower annually 5–6 January." 3/6 per dozen for those who were tempted.... [8] In 1937, the *Isle of Man Weekly Times* in its "Over the Bridge" column commented that "Old Christmas Day passed almost unnoticed in the south of the Island. Five years ago it was a day of religious observance for nearly everyone, and in the extreme south it was always a general holiday. It is as this day commences following the first stroke of midnight that the myrrh flowers, bullocks kneel in their stalls, and bees commence to hum." [9]

That said, people were still looking for the myrrh, and in 1939, "the early hours of the morning will be spent by some faithful folk in watching for the 'flowering of the myrrh,'" according to the *Mona's Herald* in its issue for the 3 January. "It is said that there is at the Kerrowkeil a garden where the myrrh regularly appears on the morning of Old Christmas Day, and that watchers frequently wend their way thither. The myrrh disappears as quickly as it comes." [10] It flowered at Surby in 1947, "[m]yrrh in the garden bloomed during the night into a tiny white flower and was obtained by Miss Janie Griffin, of Fleshwick." [11] & [12] In 1948, it was witnessed by William Keggins of Ballagarraghyn, St John's, "who claims that—not for the first time—he saw it flower at midnight on January 4th." Here the myrrh was identified as pink stalk myrrh. However, "[r]egarding the bovine half of the legend, Mr Keggins said he had never seen or heard of the cattle kneeling that hour—but as a matter of interest, if you happen to be on a farm, and awake, at midnight next January 4th, you might keep it in mind." [13]

In 1952, E.W. Kinrade and others, "kept vigil in the cold clear moonlight at an old cottage garden behind Ballafesson Farm, Rushen on Old Christmas Eve ... and the buds of the myrrh plant opened!" This was at Ballafesson. "Last year, an old Manxman living at Ronague said he picked it in his garden. Another reported finding it at Cregneish." They were not the only ones. "Mr Frank Duggan and his sister, Miss Dorothy Duggan, of Port Erin, say they watched this plant last year and saw the same kind of development take place around midnight." As proof, Kinrade photographed the myrrh after it had flowered and this duly appeared illustrating his article in the *Isle of Man Examiner*. [14]

Kinrade's article brought forth two letters in the next issue of the newspaper, one pointing out that it was not the Biblical myrrh that people were out seeking, and as

regards the bullocks kneeling at midnight, “unfortunately for the truth of these phenomena on the anniversary of the nativity of Christ the date of His birth is quite unknown.” [15] “After your story last week of the Myrrh, you may be interested to learn that here in the north, the fact is seldom doubted. Year after year people go out to see it for themselves.” So wrote “A Northerner,” the author of the second letter, who went on to mention that “[i]n Ballaugh (new) Church, you can find preserved a spray of pressed Myrrh. It is most fittingly enshrined in, and forming a part of the decoration of the Manger of the Christ Child with Mother in the central painted panel of the Mother’s Union Banner with its inscription in Manx.” [16]

In 1958, *Southsider’s Diary...* in the *Isle of Man Examiner* returned to the topic. “Did the myrrh bloom in the south this year on Old Christmas Eve (Sunday)? For several years I have heard at least one report of the flower being found in the morning of Old Christmas Day but this time I could not discover anyone who had seen it.” It added, “[b]ut it was interesting to find that the people I talked to had no doubt in their minds that the miracle of the myrrh does happen. The belief that the old Manx people had in it still seems to be very strong.” [17]

The next year, 1959, the *Over the Bridge* column in the *Isle of Man Daily Times* reported that “[t]here are still many firm believers in the South of the Island in the legend of the myrrh,” and “we hear that quite a few people were looking for the result of the phenomena both on Tuesday night and the following morning.” However, “[b]ut although we have heard of people who looked for it this year we have not yet heard of anyone who found it and any reports would be received with interest.” [18] The same columnist the following year (1960) recalled once “keeping a midnight vigil to see the development of a myrrh plant in an old garden at Ballafesson, Rushen, on Old Christmas Eve.” He add that “[m]ost of the old cottage gardens in the South have gone now but one can still see the myrrh plant outside the ruins of old dwellings in more isolated parts of the district.” [19]

The final piece here comes from the *Isle of Man Weekly Times* for 23 December 1960: “I have often intended to keep vigil, for I know a place where the myrrh grows, but I have never done so. However, I have been shown a piece of myrrh which has been pressed in a Bible by a friend of mine. It was given to him by an old man who lived in Cregneish, who said he had watched that very piece grow and flower.” [20]

So, for close on a hundred years, the Manx have been going out to see the myrrh flower on Old Christmas Eve—as the the *Peel City Guardian* put it well in 1910, “This is an old Manx superstition which dies hard.”

STEPHEN MILLER, 2018



“THE FLOWERING OF THE MYRRH”



1. “OLD CHRISTMAS DAY,” ISLE OF MAN TIMES (13 JANUARY 1872)

Ever since I was a little boy, till my present advanced age, it has been a subject matter whether the Christmas Day of December 25, or Old Christmas Day of January 6, was the proper day. It is true that December 25 is the day appointed by the law of the land; but I have been told over and over again that, on the eve of Old Christmas Day, the bees were coming out of their hives, or rather, that they have been repeatedly heard at midnight hour, on the eve of Old Christmas Day, moving and making a noise at that hour, and that the bullocks went on their knees, and that the myrrh, in a few minutes at that hour, blossomed and budded and came into flower. However, a party were determined to know the truth of this; and, on the night of the 5th January last, or, which is the same, the eve of Old Christmas Day, sat up to watch the bullocks and the myrrh at the farm house of Ballanea, in the parish of Michael (there being no bees there), and, on the minute of twelve o'clock at night on the eve of Old Christmas Day, the myrrh grew up and budded and came into flower to the height of say six inches, and it was pulled and brought into the house: at the same time the bullocks on a sudden grew restless, scraping their feet and manoeuvring, which disturbed the cow by then, to rise up with them, and, in a short time, the bullocks went on their knees. The myrrh was brought to show me the next day; so that I am an eye-witness to it.

“Old Christmas Day.” *Isle of Man Times* 13 January 1872: 5a.

2. “OLD MANX CUSTOMS OF THE NEW YEAR,” MANX SUN (7 JANUARY 1888)

Respecting Old Christmas Eve (Twelfth Night) there is still a belief existing, that at the midnight hour all three-year old bullocks—that being, it is said, the class of animals in the stable at the time of the Nativity—fall on their knees and bellow piteously. Only a few days ago an old resident of Kirk German affirmed most sincerely that such was the fact; and also that the bees on that night are all astir and noisy in their hives; and that the myrrh plant blooms into flower on the same occasion.

“Old Manx Customs of the New Year.” *Manx Sun* 7 January 1888: 5a.

3. A.W. MOORE, THE FOLK-LORE OF THE ISLE OF MAN (1891)

[131] It is said, that on this Eve, at midnight, all the bullocks of seven years old or more fall on their knees and utter a sort of groan, and, that at the same time, the myrrh plant bursts into [132] flower and so continues for one hour, when it

disappears again. My informant is positive that he saw this latter phenomenon last Christmas Eve (1890).

A.W. Moore, *The Folk-lore of the Isle of Man* (Douglas & London: David and Son & David Nutt, 1891).

4. HENRY DUKE, "OCCASIONAL NOTES," ISLE OF MAN EXAMINER (18 JANUARY 1902)

I have received at my club address a letter from a correspondent at Bristol. The writer is anonymous, the communication being signed "Colby." [...] My correspondent says that:

Conversing with one or two friends the other day, I was told that last Old Christmas Day they sat and watched the myrrh, as they expressed it, and they said they really saw the myrrh spring and flower. Their evidence was indisputable, but does the same thing occur on any other night, and if it does not, why on this particular night, or is it a peculiarity of the Manx myrrh? I have not heard of this outside the Isle of Man, and to me it seems inexplicable Can you explain?

Now, one way and another, I get some tough questions, and certainly this one presents, on the face of it, some difficulty.

I have, ever since I can remember, heard this legend, but I have never witnessed the phenomenon. The word "myrrh" is Semitic in origin, and this plant was one of the gifts offered by the Magi. But the plant, as far as I know, grows only in Eastern climes. I think therefore that the variety referred to in the Isle of Man is different from the Arabian variety. Personally, I am inclined to believe that this is a legend; I cannot anywhere satisfy myself that the laws of nature operate at any time in such a radical way as my friend describes. The botanical description of the Arabian variety differs as far from the Manx species of what is called myrrh as a palm does from a cabbage. I have, however, an open mind on everything I cannot explain, and I shall be glad of authenticated evidence relating to the alleged phenomenon.

If any reader will be good enough to send me a specimen of the Manx plant, I shall submit it to microscopical examination, and give a history of the variety or its class. One species is known in these islands, viz., "Myrrhis Odorata." It has deltoid thrice-pinnate leaves, is aromatic and stimulant. I am not quite sure, but I think it is commonly known as "Sweet Cicely."

Henry Duke, "Occasional Notes." *Isle of Man Examiner* 18 January 1902: 8a–b.

5. "[ARBORY] FOLLOWING ON THE ...," ISLE OF MAN EXAMINER (14 JUNE 1902)

While our myrrh has a somewhat doubtful claim to the distinction of flowering at Christmas, there undoubtedly a variety of hawthorn which flowers at Yuletide.

"[Arbory] Following on the" *Isle of Man Examiner* 14 June 1902: 8e.

6. “[PEEL] SEVERAL PERSONS JOURNEYED ...,” ISLE OF MAN EXAMINER (8 JANUARY 1910)

Several persons journeyed into the fields outside Peel on Tuesday night to witness the myrrh blooming. This is an old Manx superstition which dies hard.

“[Peel] Several persons journeyed” *Isle of Man Examiner* 8 January 1910: 8g.

7. DR JOHN CLAGUE,† COINAGHTYN MANNINAGH: MANX REMINISCENCES BY THE LATE DR JOHN CLAGUE ([1911])

CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR

THE MYRRH

[3] Were you ever watching to see the myrrh coming into flower? I was watching one night, fifty years ago, to see it. It was the right kind of myrrh, growing in Big John’s wife’s garden, and she said that she had seen it flower many a time. Many boys and girls went to her house about eleven o’clock on Old Christmas Eve. It was freezing, and there was not much moonlight. John’s wife was a very religious woman, and we were singing Christmas Carols to pass the time. John’s wife showed us where the “herb” was growing, and she scraped the mould from the herb, for it was not much above the ground. She had a lantern, and she went out to see how it was getting on every ten minutes or quarter of an hour.

[5] It was a very uneasy time with her when we went after her at midnight. But we could not see any change. We waited another hour, thinking it was not the right time. The old woman wondered much what had come over it, for she said she had seen it many a time. We went all home hoping and disappointed. But, on the morning of the next day we heard that when Big John’s wife had gone into the garden next morning, she saw that the myrrh had flowered after all. She sent word to some of the young people, and they were all satisfied. After all the others had gone away, I went again to the garden with another, and opened the sheath of the flower, and I saw the new leaves.

[7] Many years after this I did the same thing to the herb in John Cannell’s garden, on the morning of the eve of Old Christmas Day, and I saw the new buds at that time. The flowering of the myrrh is opening of the sheath at the top, and the new bud appears. Some of the flowers were brought to me from The Howe on Old Christmas Day, but they were new leaves like the others.

Old Christmas Eve that year was on a Saturday, and on Old Christmas Day in the chapel a person said it must be the right day, because the myrrh had flowered last night (night before). The man who opened the sheath of the bud, when he heard it,

was frightened, and he said he was so ashamed of himself that he did not know what to do.

I have been keeping watch on (watching) the same night the bees coming out, but they would not come out without hitting the hive.

I have heard people say that the bullocks go on their knees at the same time, but they do not do so but when they are bothered, and only some of them do it then.

Dr John Clague,† *Cooïnaghtyn Manninagh: Manx Reminiscences By the Late Dr John Clague* (Castletown: M.J. Backwell, n.d. [but 1911]).

1935

8. "MYRRH—CHALSE'S SPECIAL," *MONA'S HERALD* (29 JANUARY 1935)

MYRRH — CHALSE'S SPECIAL.—
Guaranteed (by personal watch and
ward) to flower 5-6 January annually.
Well rooted plants 3/6 per doz. (no tick).
Apply 8-9 a.m., The Positive Nurseries,
Sir William's Park, Douglas.

"[Advert] MYRRH—CHALSE'S SPECIAL." *Mona's Herald* 29 January 1935: 4d.

9. "[FROM OVER THE BRIDGE] OLD CHRISTMAS DAY," *ISLE OF MAN WEEKLY TIMES* (9 JANUARY 1937)

Old Christmas Day passed almost unnoticed in the south of the Island. Five years ago it was a day of religious observance for nearly everyone, and in the extreme south it was always a general holiday. It is as this day commences following the first stroke of midnight that the myrrh flowers, bullocks kneel in their stalls, and bees commence to hum.

"[From Over the Bridge] Old Christmas Day." *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 9 January 1937: 7b.

10. "[NOTES OF THE WEEK] STORMY NIGHT FOR QUALTAGHS," *MONA'S HERALD* (3 JANUARY 1939)

[4f] In other parts of the Island the early hours of the morning will be spent by some faithful folk in watching for the "flowering of the myrrh." I have never had the good fortune to witness this phenomenon, but more than one [4g] person whose veracity

is beyond dispute, assure me that they have seen the slender spikes make their appearance in a spot where, only an hour or two before, there had been no sign of plant life, and that the myrrh has even been known to push its way through soil deeply frost bound. It is said that there is at the Kerrowkeil a garden where the myrrh regularly appears on the morning of Old Christmas Day, and that watchers frequently wend their way thither. The myrrh disappears as quickly as it comes. In these days of high speed photography, the filming of the “flowering of the myrrh” suggests itself as a subject of extraordinary possibilities.

“[Notes of the Week] Stormy Night for Qualtaghs.” *Mona’s Herald* 3
January 1939: 4e–g.

II. “[RUSHEN] THE ANCIENT CUSTOM ...,” ISLE OF MAN EXAMINER (10 JANUARY 1947)

The ancient custom of watching for myrrh to bloom on Old Christmas night (January 4th) was performed in at least one cottage-garden in Rushen—at Surby. Myrrh in the garden bloomed during the night into a tiny white flower and was obtained by Miss Janie Griffin, of Fleshwick

“[Rushen] The ancient custom ...” *Isle of Man Examiner* 10 January 1947:
10c.

12. “[NEWS FROM THE OUT-TOWNS] [SOUTH] THE ANCIENT CUSTOM ...,” ISLE OF MAN WEEKLY TIMES (11 JANUARY 1947)

The ancient custom of watching for myrrh to bloom on old Christmas night (January 4) was performed in at least one cottage-garden in Rushen—at Surby. Myrrh in the garden bloomed during the night into a tiny white flower and was obtained by Miss Janie Griffin, of Fleshwick.

“[News from the Out-Towns] [South] The ancient custom ...” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 11 January 1947: 7d–e.

13. “[MELTING POT] THE MYRRH BLOSSOMED AGAIN,” ISLE OF MAN EXAMINER (16 JANUARY 1948)

[4e] Myrrh is mentioned in the Bible. The ancient Egyptians valued it, and it is claimed to possess herbal qualities. Legend has it that as midnight strikes on Old Christmas Eve the cattle kneel in obeisance—and the myrrh blooms its brief span and dies again within hours.

It did this year, says Mr William Keggan, of Ballagarraghyn, St John’s, who claims that—not for the first time—he saw it flower at midnight on January 4th.—Opinions differ as to whether Old Christmas Day was January 5th or 6th, Mr Keggan claiming that the former date is correct.

Talking to our Western representative this week, he said the plant in point was the pink stalk myrrh—other types flower in summer time—and the bloom was a tiny white flower. With him at the time was the grandson of Mrs Gelling, who resides at Ballagarraghyn, and they went into the garden especially to watch the plant, which they plucked and put in water, but it had died by morning.

Regarding the bovine half of the legend, Mr Keggin said he had never seen or heard of the cattle kneeling that hour—but as a matter of interest, if you happen to be on a farm, and awake, at midnight next January 4th, you might keep it in mind.

“[Melting Pot] The Myrrh blossomed again.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 16 January 1948: 4e–f.

14. E.W. KINRADE, “THE MYRRH BLOOMS AT MIDNIGHT! PHENOMENA OF OLD CHRISTMAS,” ISLE OF MAN EXAMINER (11 JANUARY 1952)

[5c] There are some things which have to be seen to be believed and the myrrh bursting into bloom at midnight on Old Christmas Eve is one of them.

The type of myrrh which grows most commonly in the Isle of Man is described in the encyclopaedia simply as “an aromatic garden plant of the parsley variety.” There is nothing to suggest that it is capable of phenomena contrary to botanical laws by sprouting at night, on the same night each year and in midwinter.

Yet the old Manx people said it did happen, and seven sceptics who set out to see for themselves this year are now quite ready to believe it is more than just a legend....

We kept vigil in the cold clear moonlight at an old cottage garden behind Ballafesson Farm, Rushen on Old Christmas Eve ... and the buds of the myrrh plant opened!

Myrrh was brought to Bethlehem by the wise men on the first Christmas Day, and because of the association, the old Manx people, most of whom had the myrrh plant in their cottage gardens, gave the story of the blooming of the plant on Christmas Eve a spiritual significance.

About 200 years ago. Parliamentary reform of the calendar caused the loss of eleven days in the year, with the result that the real Christmas Day is January 5th, which was last Saturday.

Popular opposition to the change in the calendar existed in the Island right up to the turn of the last century, the old Christmas being kept in some of the villages up to 1900.

Thus it is that the miracle of the myrrh was believed to occur on the night of January 4th, which is the real Christmas Eve.

Before we went to Mr Tom Qualtrough’s Ballafesson Farm, we had been told of people who had known the myrrh to grow six inches during that holy night. It was said also that a small white flower appears on the plant but dies within a few hours, so that it can only be obtained by those who look for it immediately afterwards.

Dr John Clague, the eminent Manx scholar, of Castletown, recorded in his reminiscences that “the flowering of the myrrh is the opening of the sheath so that the new green bud appears.” He also recorded that he had been brought the flower on the morning of Old Christmas Day.

Others have reported that they have seen the flower early in the morning of Old Christmas Day in recent years.

Last year, an old Manxman living at Ronague said he picked it in his garden. Another reported finding it at Cregneish. It has been said that shoots have broken through hard, frosty ground on Old Christmas night and the flower appeared and died again within a few hours.

The type on which the flower comes, appears to be known as the pink stalk myrrh.

SPOTLIGHTED

The plant in the garden at Ballafession seemed to nearly fit the description given by the late Dr Clague.

We arrived at the garden at 11.45—a quarter of an hour before [5d] midnight. Flashlights were concentrated on the plant, which was not difficult to find. It was a large plant, consisting at that time of brown, trunk-like roots protruding from the ground with a number of tiny green shoots showing. One or two of the shoots had already burst and a sticky resinous substance was oozing from them.

The resinous matter is one of the characteristics of some types of myrrh. It was valued by the ancient Egyptians and used for various purposes, particularly as an antiseptic and in connection with embalming.

As midnight drew near, we watched steadily. Could it be imagination, or were the little green buds *really* getting bigger: really beginning to burst? Ten minutes more left no doubt. Development of the plant was taking place before our eyes—and at midnight!

The buds opened and tiny fernlike fronds which appeared, grew bigger. The whole of the shoots were covered with the resinous substance, which also formed on the side of the shoot in the form of a brown tear.

We continued the vigil until 12.30 a.m., and by that time the fronds had grown to as much as two inches in size.

No flower appeared, neither could one be found in the morning. There may be some doubt if this was the type of plant on which the flower does appear, although Mr Qualtrough stated that he had seen the flower on the morning of Old Christmas Day in that garden.

But whatever the type, there is no doubt that development of the plant took place within a quarter [5e] of an hour each side of midnight on Old Christmas Eve.

Whether it was a botanical freak or a spiritual miracle—it did happen.

SPIRITUAL ASSOCIATIONS

Mr Frank Duggan and his sister, Miss Dorothy Duggan, of Port Erin, say they watched this plant last year and saw the same kind of development take place around midnight.

What is more odd about it is that although the plant does not go back after it develops on the night of January 4th–5th, the development after that stage seems to be very slow. During the six days since Old Christmas Day, the plant at Ballafesson does not appear to have developed any further.

It is said that the flowering type of myrrh gives a strong aroma when it breaks through the ground. There was no smell of the plant at Ballafesson, but it had otherwise strong characteristics of the plant which left no doubt of its identity.

There have been other cases where the old Manx people have given spiritual association to plants. Mr William Cubbon, M.A., outstanding Manx scholar, says it is recorded that there was a stumpy red flower known as Keem Chreest (“Step of Christ”) which apparently was found only at the old *keels* (churches).

It was associated with the carrying of the cross by Christ, the little red flowers representing drops of blood.

E.W. Kinrade, “The Myrrh Blooms at Midnight! Phenomena of Old Christmas.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 11 January 1952: 5c–e.

15. P.W. HAMPTON, “[LETTER BOX] FLOWERING OF THE MYRRH,” ISLE OF MAN EXAMINER (18 JANUARY 1952)

Your account of the flowering of the myrrh on twelfth-night is very interesting but it is most unlikely that the European plant we call myrrh is the source of one of the gifts the wise men of the East brought to the young Christ child (Matthew 11, 11).

There is also a legend that calves kneel in adoration on the eve of old Christmas but unfortunately for the truth of these phenomena on the anniversary of the nativity of Christ the date of His birth is quite unknown.

The myrrh of the pharmacopoeia is a gum-resinous exudation from the stem of a shrubby plant found in Arabia and Abyssinia and perhaps this is the material referred to in the Bible.

P.W. HAMPTON.

Governors Road, Onchan.

P.W. Hampton, “[Letter Box] Flowering of the Myrrh.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 18 January 1952: 4b.

16. “[LETTER BOX] MYRRH AT BALLAUGH,” ISLE OF MAN EXAMINER (18 JANUARY 1952)

After your story last week of the Myrrh, you may be interested to learn that here in the north, the fact is seldom doubted. Year after year people go out to see it for themselves.

In Ballaugh (new) Church, you can find preserved a spray of pressed Myrrh. It is most fittingly enshrined in, and forming a part of the decoration of the Manger of the Christ Child with Mother in the central painted panel of the Mother’s Union Banner with its inscription in Manx. This is a unique example amongst “MU” banners. It is the entire work of the donor Miss B. Kneen (daughter of the late T.H. Kneen, MHK), in memory of her mother.

As you may know Miss Kneen is the Island’s most outstanding figure in the matter of the preservation of all things Manx. She acts while most others talk. Some years ago she bought St Mary’s Keeil Church in the glen to save it becoming a building plot. There would be little need for laws to protect such places if only every Parish had someone like her in it. I am sure readers of your paper would like to see a photo of the Manx “MU” Banner.

The Rector is very proud of it.

A NORTHERN READER

Pseud [signed as “A Northerner”]. “[Letter Box] Myrrh at Ballaugh.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 18 January 1952: 4b.

17. “[NEWS FROM THE SOUTH] [SOUTHSIDER’S DIARY....] MIRACLE OF THE MYRRH,” ISLE OF MAN EXAMINER (9 JANUARY 1958)

Did the myrrh bloom in the south this year on Old Christmas Eve (Sunday)? For several years I have heard at least one report of the flower being found in the morning of Old Christmas Day but this time I could not discover anyone who had seen it.

But it was interesting to find that the people I talked to had no doubt in their minds that the miracle of the myrrh does happen. The belief that the old Manx people had in it still seems to be very strong. I wrote an article about it four or five years ago and then was an immediate response from readers who wrote that they could vouch for it. That year I saw the plant opening in the middle of the night at Mr Tom Qualtrough’s farm at Ballafesson, Port Erin, although it did not actually bloom. A reader from Ballaugh said they had no doubt about it in the north and for that reason the banner of the local G.F.S. incorporated the myrrh flower.

The belief is that myrrh, which was brought to Bethlehem by the Three Wise Men on the first Christmas, bursts into bloom at midnight as soon as the old Christmas Day comes in.

Old Christmas Day is January 5th. The calendar was altered by Act of Parliament 200 years ago so that eleven days were lost. It was held that January 5th was the real Christmas, even up to the turn of the century by many Manx people.

“[News from the South] [Southsider’s Diary....] Miracle of the Myrrh.”
Isle of Man Examiner 9 January 1958: 11f.

18. “[NOTES AND COMMENTS FROM ... OVER THE BRIDGE] LEGEND OF THE MYRRH,” *ISLE OF MAN DAILY TIMES* (7 JANUARY 1959)

There are still many firm believers in the South of the Island in the legend of the myrrh. The legend is that this strange plant bursts into bloom on old Christmas Eve (January 5th) and we hear that quite a few people were looking for the result of the phenomena both on Tuesday night and the following morning. At one time most of the Manx people had myrrh in their gardens and we have frequently heard it reported that the flower had been found on old Christmas Day. But although we have heard of people who looked for it this year we have not yet heard of anyone who found it and any reports would be received with interest. There are also strong supporters of the belief in the north of the Island and the G.F.S. banner at Ballaugh has the myrrh plant as part of the insignia in relation to this belief.

“[Notes and Comments from ... Over the Bridge] Legend of the Myrrh.”
Isle of Man Daily Times 7 January 1959: 5b.

19. “OVER THE BRIDGE,” *ISLE OF MAN DAILY TIMES* (6 JANUARY 1960)

[5b] The Miracle Last night (Tuesday, January 5th) was traditionally the night on which the miracle of the myrrh takes place. It was old Christmas Eve—the night on which Christmas came before an alteration of the calendar moved it up 12 days. The miracle of the myrrh is the blooming at midnight on old Christmas Eve of the plant which was brought [5c] to the child Jesus on that wonderful night 2,000 years ago. The old Manx people firmly believed in it. Most cottage gardens had myrrh growing in them and many are the stories of a strange aromatic scent being noticed on Old Christmas Eve and of finding the little myrrh flower in bloom in the morning.

I recall some years ago keeping a midnight vigil to see the development of a myrrh plant in an old garden at Ballafesson, Rushen, on Old Christmas Eve. I discovered afterwards that while this was a type of myrrh it was not the species which produces the flower. There was, however, no doubt that development took place during the night. The plant exuded a resinous substance and produced little fronds similar to the leaves of the carrot plant. It was a really remarkable development to take place on a dark cold night in the dead of winter.

There is plenty of evidence of the myrrh blooming at night, however. In the Ballaugh region there is a firm belief in it and the Ballaugh G.F.S. incorporated myrrh in their banner as a result.

Most of the old cottage gardens in the South have gone now but one can still see the myrrh plant outside the ruins of old dwellings in more isolated parts of the district.

Pseud [signed as "Southsider"]. "Over the Bridge." *Isle of Man Daily Times* 6 January 1960: 5a–d.

20. "[SNIPPETS FROM THE SOUTH] DIARY OF A SCHOOLMARM," ISLE OF MAN WEEKLY TIMES (23 DECEMBER 1960)

[4a] The myrrh which grows in the Isle of Man bears no resemblance to that brought as a present to the Christ child by Balthasar from Samarkand, but it is a popular belief that the myrrh flowers on old Christmas Eve. I have often intended to keep vigil, for I know a place where the myrrh grows, but I have never done so. However, I have been shown a piece of myrrh which has been pressed in a Bible by a friend of mine. It was given to him by an old man who lived in Cregneish, who said he had watched that very piece grow and flower.

"[Snippets from the South] Diary of a Schoolmarm." *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 23 December 1960: 4a–d.

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E.W. KINRADE
"THE MYRRH BLOOMS AT MIDNIGHT!
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(1952)

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E.W. Kinrade, "The Myrrh Blooms at Midnight! Phenomena of Old Christmas." *Isle of Man Examiner* 11 January 1952.

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