

**“TALKING AND TELLING  
STORIES ABOUT THE FAIRIES”**

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# The Fairies

“The people in those days were all going to each other’s houses, and talking and telling stories about the fairies—it was all the entertainment they had.”

Mrs Sarah Christian, Sulby Glen (1961)

# The Fairies

“I remember when I was a young boy at home down at Cranstal the old people were very fond of talking about the fairies and about signs, and whenever a neighbour came into that house at night, it was always this kind of talk that was going. I’ve been too frightened to stir from the fire after listening to their talk all night. It was wonderful the things that would be happening to them.”

Tom Crennell, near Ballaslieu, Andreas (1957)

# Major Manx Fairy Lore Sources

- George Waldron, “A Description of the Isle of Man,” *The Compleat Works, in Verse and Prose, of George Waldron*, ed. Theodosia Waldron. (s.l. [but London], 1731) 91–191.
- Edward Faragher (1831–1908) & Karl Roeder (1848–1911): Letters & Notebooks
- Manx Folk Life Survey (1948–)

# The Manx Otherworld

“It need scarcely be mentioned that all such humble disciples as would be any way eligible, connect with their political creed a religious belief in faries [*sic*], witches, mermaids, the Tharroo Ushtey, the Doinney Oie, the Lhannan Shee, the evil eye, the Mauthe Dhoo, the big Boghane of Gob-na-Scoote.” (*Mona’s Herald*, 1847)

“[...] we have even here among us, besides the commonplace fairies, and every day mermaids, the wonderful Tarro Ushtey, the Doinney Oie, the Phynnodderree, the Lhiannan-shee, and the big Boghane.” (*Mona’s Herald*, 1847)

# The Manx Otherworld

- *Buggane*, essentially a shape shifting creature.
- *Glashtin*, an ogre who would challenge you to a strength contest.
- *Keimagh* haunted and guarded churchyard stiles.
- *Moddey Dhoo* or Black dog was seen on the roads at night.
- *Foawr* or Giant, was no longer seen.
- *Scaan* or Ghost, was still ever present.
- *Scaa goanlyssagh* or malicious ghost, who could cut the clothes off a person without being seen or felt.
- *Dooiney oie* or night-man, was a nocturnal spirit heard but not seen, helpful to mortals by warning farmers and fishermen of coming storms.

# The Manx Otherworld

- *Cabbyl ushtey* or water horse, often referred to as a *glashtyn*, sought to drown its rider who mistook it at night for a regular mount.
- *Taroo ushtey* or water bull came amongst cattle at night.
- *Nikessen* was a river-spirit.
- *Cughtagh* a sea cave-dwelling spirit.
- *Ben-varrey* or mermaid, and the *pohllinagh* or merman.

# William Cashen (1912)

There was a major difference between the fairies and these other supernatural figures as Cashen pointed out:

“The fairies differed from the *bugganes* and other evil things in that the fairies might be in any place, and at any time, and would not covet a full-grown person, but only infants and children, whereas the *buggane*, *lhiannan-shee* and so on, kept to well-defined places beyond which they were not to travel.”

He added that “[a]ll fairies, *bugganes*, and ghosts and spirits of every sort would vanish at the cock crowing,—particularly *bugganes* and ghosts.”



“With the fairies at Knock-e-dooney”

“Phillip ffarcher [Faragher], for Confessing that he himselfe was in the companie of the ffary Elves that night they came to Knock Doony when the good Wiffe was strucken with the ffairyeyes”

Kirk Andreas Presentments (1665)

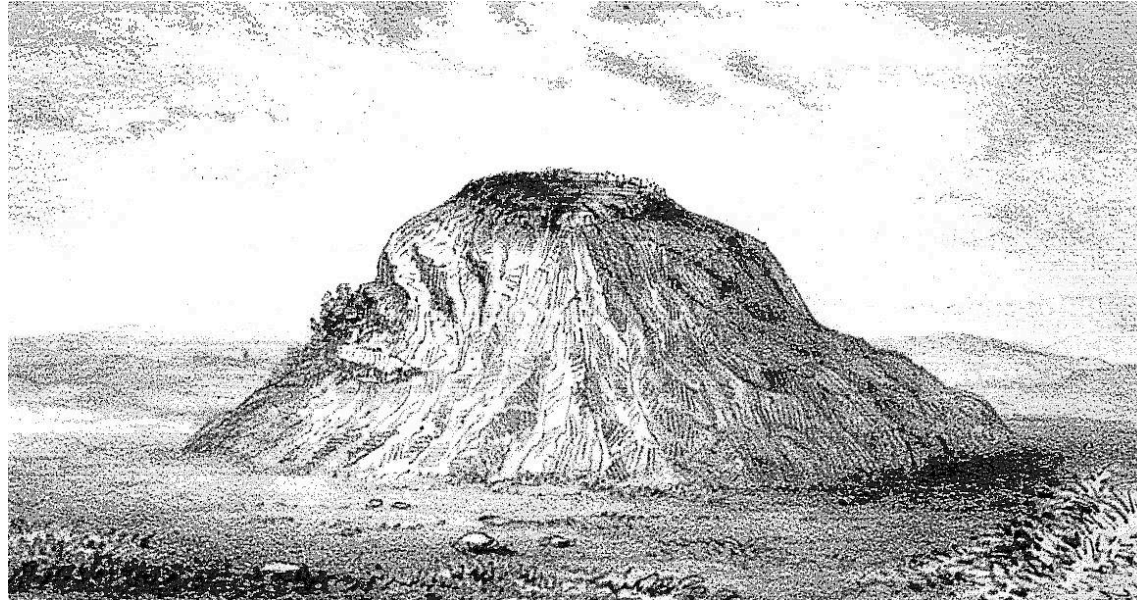
# Topics

- Cronk Mooar, the Fairy Hill
- “Stealing the Silver Cup from the Fairies”
- Fairy Abductions
- Fairies Mislead at Night
- Harm from the Fairies
- Fairies and the New-born Child
- Fairy Changelings
- Fairies and House-Water
- Fairies and Food
- The Lhiannan-shee
- The Pynnoderree
- Edward Faragher and the Fairies
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# The Manx Fairies

- *Ferrish, Shee*
  - The Good People (Waldron)
  - The Little Gentry (Waldron)
  - Mooinjer-veggey (Kelly, Cregeen)
  - Mooinjer-ny-gione-veggey (Kelly)
  - Sleih Beggey* ('Little People') (Rhys)
  - Guillyn veggey* ('Little Boys') (Morrison)
  - Themselves (Morrison)
  - Li'l Fellas (Morrison)
  - The Little People (General)
- *Lhiannan-shee*
- *Pynnodderree*

# Cronk Mooar, the Fairy Hill



Cronk Mooar, the Fairy Hill, Rushen (Oswald, 1860)

“yet it is still much Celebrated among the Natives by the name of the *Fairy Hill*, upon which a very odd Story depends that would tire your Patience rather than gain your belief.” (Sacheverell, 1702, 14–15)

# Stealing the Silver Cup from the Fairies

Waldron was told the story of a man led by fairy music to a feast around a table in the open air. Some of the faces seemed familiar but he thought nothing of it, but upon “the little People offering him Drink,” someone tugged at his coat and told him not to drink anything as if he did, then “you will be as I am, and return no more to your Family.” When a large silver cup was put into his hands, he threw its contents on the ground when suddenly the music stopped and those there all disappeared leaving him standing alone and holding the cup. The next day he went to see the Vicar of Malew to ask his advice what to do with the it and “this very Cup, they tell me, is that which is now used for the consecrated Wine in *Kirk-Merlugh*.”

(Waldron, 1731, 126–27)

ML 6045, *Drinking Cup Stolen from the Fairies*

# Fairy Abductions

Young or old, male or female, day or night, all were at risk from fairy abduction.

Waldron related how the daughter of the family's butter seller was once abducted by the fairies when sent on an errand. (Waldron, 1731, 131)

A man from Kirk Andreas "was absent from his people for four years, which he spent with the fairies." (Rhys, 1891, 288–89)

It was three years for a woman who met two fairy armies at South Barrule before she managed to escape. (Pseud [initialled "A.C."], 1852, 341a)

From 1895, "[a] superstition is still extant that fairies will take children who are out alone after sunset, unless they are marked on their faces with soot." (Moore, 1895, 178b)

The bride of Magher-y-Breck was stolen away on her wedding night but when the fairies were threatened with their hill being dug up, "[s]he returned home the same day, but did not know she had been away at all." (Gill, 1929, 415–16)

# Fairy Abductions

Two young men once called in at a fairy house where there was a party going on. One danced away and took a drink while the other tired of waiting for him and left. Visiting the house exactly one year later his friend was still dancing away and on leaving did not realise that a year had passed. (Roeder, 1897, 146)

In another version the fairy house disappears after the man goes outside and urinates against the side of the house. It then reappears seven years later and the man goes in to draw his friend out who was oblivious that he been dancing away all those years. (Roeder, 1897, 147)

Sometimes it was simply bad luck as when “[t]he fairies took you if you lose your way over the mountains.” FLS QK B/17 (1951)

“If a person had a fit of the shivers or came out in a rash, then the old people would say ‘Oh, he’s been took by the fairies.’ Meaning that he had been out in the meadows and got mixed up with these little folk.” FLS KJ A/31 (1950)

# Fairies Mislead at Night

“I went astray in a field on Ballamoddey one night. I knew the field well enough, but I couldn’t get out. I walked around until I came to a gorse fence and I found the gate and got out.”

FLS G/2 A/1 (1949)

On Ballamooar in Jurby was a field that was “haunted by fairies” and where a servant girl was unable to find her way out until dawn came.

FLS PCI A/7 (1948)

There were other fields of this nature, such as “the Gravel Field where a man walked around all night and couldn’t find his house until the morning,” and another one, “where somebody was once *took* by the fairies—he went round and round in it and couldn’t find the gate.”

FLS WA E/18 (1950–51), FLS R/19, 2 (1975)

For some the explanation was spirits of a human nature: “he also remembered a man who told a story of being carried by the fairies across the fields, when the obvious explanation was that he had lost his way through emptying a rum bottle.”

(Anon, 1919)



# Harm from the Fairies

“On the road they passed a man, bent double as with rheumatism. The farmer told how the cripple was quite a young man, who in some way had angered the fairies, who in a single night had struck him helpless.” (Anon, 1916)

There were numerous ways in which mortals could fall foul of the fairies:

A woman complained when the fairies helped themselves to her food and drink and was blinded in one eye. (Lee, 1797, 199)

A boy stealing money from a healing well sickened and died. (Hall, 1939, 39–40)

Cursing the fairies when drunk led one man to die. (Teignmouth, 1836, 262)

A mean farmer begrudged the fairies taking potatoes from his field and died soon after. (Crellin, 1891, 222–23)

Spying on the fairies through the keyhole caused a man to lose his eye from a poke with a fiddle stick. (Roeder, 1892, 324)

# Harm from the Fairies

Complaining of the smell of the fairies caused one woman to lose her sense of smell. (Crellin, 1901, 196)

Being angry with the fairy dogs met at night led a man to being bed-ridden for six months. (Roeder, 1902, 47)

Illness again followed when answering a fairy's whistle. (Anon, 1903, 14)

A drunk man threw a stick at the fairies who were crowding the road to have it thrown back at him with such force that he was lamed and bed-ridden. (Sophia Morrison, MS 09495, Box 5)

“My daughter went over a stile once and came in with a crooked mouth.” FLS C/33 C/1 (1949)

This could happen simply by being around the fairies: “The old Manx people used to believe that if people walked on ground where the fairies had been, they would be injured—became halt or lame or crippled.” FLS T/33, 3 (1977)

# Fairies and the New-born Child

“It was common for fairies to substitute fairy babies for human infants. [...] It was not uncommon for women expecting to be confined to see troops of seven or eight little women come into the chamber at night bearing a baby.” (—, 1883, 13)

Waldron recounts at length attempts made on one woman for each of her two new-born children. (Waldron, 1731, 129)

In a later account, two fairy women tried to seize the baby from the mother’s arms when she exclaimed, “Jee jean myghin orrym” (“God have mercy on me”) they disappeared. However, visible were “marks made on the baby’s heel made by the fairy fingers. They were quite clearly printed, though at that time the baby had become an old woman.” (Sophia Morrison, MS 09495, Box 6)

When at home the child needed to be protected: some tied a red thread around the neck or put a *crosh cuirn* in the cradle (Waldron, 1865, 108), or used tongs: “her mother said they wouldn’t go out of the house, without putting a pair of trousers or else the tongs cross the cradle that the fairies wouldn’t come and take the child.” FLS C/86 C/4 (1971)

# Fairies and the New-born Child

They were also used outside of the house when necessary: “I remember hearing of them taking the babies down to the fields and leaving them in the corners of the fields while they worked and putting the tongs across them so the fairies would leave them alone.” FLS W/11 A/2 (1953)

Children were at danger until they were baptised and even then there was danger on the way to the church. Carried was “a piece of bread and cheese, to give to the first person she met, for the purpose of saving the child from witchcraft or the fairies.” (Thomas, 1853, 617b)

# Fairy Changelings

“The old Story of Infants being changed in their Cradles, is here in such Credit, that Mothers are in continual Terror at the Thoughts of it.” This is Waldron from 1731, and the belief was still current in 1953: “There is a fairy child down at Maughold today [...] His mother was busy and went to work and they came and changed him.” FLS W/11 A/2 (1953)

As it was simply put a century earlier, “[f]airies change children; a woman had one for eighteen years, and could not make it walk or speak.” (Pseud [initialled “A.C.”], 1852, 314b)

Harvest and haymaking times were dangerous times with children left unattended in the fields as was recounted on numerous occasions, as well as on one occasion just leaving the house to draw water from the well. For late printed accounts, see (Stubbs, 1932), (Anon, 1939)

# Fairy Changelings

The fairies could be forced to take back the changeling. The common most solution was to simply not attend to the crying child and the fairies would be forced to take back the changeling. (Roeder, 1897, 154)

Placing it across a pot of urine was another, or leaving the changeling out on the doorstep at midnight. (Roeder, 1897, 154), FLS QK B/18 (1951)

Nevertheless, some children lived out their lives as changelings and one such living in the Ballaugh Currags was remembered as late as 1964. FLS K/22, 2 (1964)

# Fairies and House-Water

“A Person would be thought impudently profane, who should suffer his Family to go to Bed without having first set a Tub, or Pail full of clean Water, for these Guests to bathe themselves in, which the Natives aver they constantly do, as soon as ever the Eyes of the Family are closed, wherever they vouchsafe to come.” By *guests* Waldron means the *fairies*. (Waldron, 1731, 126)

Whilst described in 1874 as a passing custom, the Folk Life Survey shows that it continued much later: “[t]hey always put the crock full of water filled every night for the fairies. My people never minded that very much, but I knew others that did mind.” (Jenkinson, 1874, 75), FLS KJR B/10 (1948)

This neglect of hospitality could bring one to harm. The fairies wanted to bake one night but finding there was no water left out the fairies punished the servant girl by “bleeding her under the big toe until they had enough to wet the dough and finish their baking.” The girl fell ill and it was only when an old beggar woman called again who had heard the fairies talking that the farmer went to a herb doctor and she was cured. (Roeder, 1903)

# Fairies and Food

“At every baking, and every churning, a bit of dough, and a bit of butter, is stuck upon the wall, *for the little folks*. This custom still prevails very much amongst the country folks; especially up in the mountains.” (Townley, 1791, 208, fn. [1])

This was done in another account, “to make sure of the butter and milk being good, some farmers used to put food and drink for them on the kitchen table before going to bed.” (Anon [initialled as “M.L.Q.”], 1907, 149)

As regards *bonnag*, “the last cake was left behind the turf-flag for the little people.” (Thomas, 1853, 618a)

The fairies had to be thought of at harvest time, when they too would join in with the harvest home. (Roeder, 1897, 153)



# Fairies and Food

Failure to provide food and drink would lead to fairy displeasure and harm followed as happened to the servant girl who was too busy during the harvest to leave out their supper, who was abducted and found in the stable yard the next morning: “[s]he was taken up insensible, but fortunately some recovered from the effects of the little people’s vengeance.” (Stowell, n.d. [but 1902])

As for the fairies cooking for themselves, they seemingly made broth, baked, and cooked up beef. (Roeder, 1902), (Roeder, 1903), (EF, Notebook (1897), MS 09447)

## *And when baking bonnag...*

“Old Manx people, when baking bonnag, used to make criss-cross marks on top of the loaves with a knife. My mother says that they did this because they believed that once the completed bread had been marked by steel or iron the fairies could not harm it or take the good out of it, as they might otherwise do.” (Stowell, 1930)

# “The fairies eating the *cowrey*”

“I went to see a man last night at glenchass to get some fairy tales, but his stories was but very short and many of them you have heard already he was telling me about the two young men that came to the window and saw the fairies eating the *cowrey* and spitting in the dish to fill it again.”

Edward Faragher (1897)

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“I went to see a man last night at glenchass to get some fairy tales, but his stories was but very short and many of them you have heard already he was telling me about the two young men that came to the window and saw the fairies eating the cowrey and spitting in the dish to fill it again. **and the one that would not eat it died very soon afterward**”

# Lhiannan-shee

They were the *lhiannan-shee*, fairy woman seen at night, either on their own or in a pair, dressed in white or yellow silk dresses, and with long blonde hair. (EF, Notebook (1897), MS 09447)

Edward Faragher of Cregneash was once spotted besides one, “they all said they saw some person beside me dressed in white,” and on another occasion, “I met a young lady in a yellow silk dress rustling, as she passed me by, she had a white parasol in her left hand hanging down by her side,” adding “but neither of us spoke [...] if I would have spoken to her she would have followed me.” (Roeder, 1897, 162)

That bond was for life, a drunk fisherman once met a *lhiannan-shee* unbeknownst at a fairy house, and after dancing with her, “[t]he lady gave him her dainty handkerchief with which to wipe his face” and that was sufficient for her to follow him unseen to others for the rest of his days. (Roper, 1894, 194–96)

Likewise, kissing a *lhiannan-shee* had the same effect as happened once in the fairy house at Ballahick. (EF Notebook (1898), MS 09495, Box 5)

# Lhiannan-shee

The *lhiannan-shee* was able to have children with a mortal, though they were also unseen. (Roeder, 1897, 161–62)

A man from Surby once went to meet his wife one night, and “[h]e met a woman and thought it was his wife, and spoke to her, and she followed him long enough afterwards. He got clear of her somehow, but I forget the charm.” (Roeder, 1897, 162)

## **Edward Faragher and the *lhiannan-shee***

He was later to come across a *lhiannan-shee* when coming back from a meeting at the Methodist chapel in Port Erin, though he did not recognise her as being one. “I met a young lady in a yellow silk dress rustling as she past me by she had a white parasol in her left hand hanging down by her side but neither of us spoke so the people were telling me it was a llananshee and I would have spoken to her she would have followed me.” (Faragher to Roeder, 20 July 1896, MS1246/1 A)

Despite the dangers of such a fairy woman and knowing well what talking to her would lead to, “the next sunday night I went across the hill at the same hour intending to speak to her but she was not there.” (Faragher to Roeder, 20 July 1896, MS 1246/1 A)

# The Phynnoderree

“He assists both farmer and shepherd in their duties, threshing corn for the one, provided the sheaves are left untied, and driving the sheep of the other to the fold on the approach of a storm.”

(Laughton, 1847, 157–58)

As the Folk Life Survey recorded, “[w]hen the farmer wanted to thresh, he filled the barn with corn and the housewife made a big pot of broth at night and put the ladle in it and put it in the barn. The *phynnoderree* was supposed to thresh the corn by himself in the night while the farmer slept.”

FLS KJ A/31 (1950)

At Ballaskelly, it was bread and milk and cake that was left out for him, at Ballamilgyn it was porridge, at another farm *pinjean* (curds and whey).

FLS Q/37 B/4 (1957), FLS KM G/2 (ND), FLS KM C/4 (ND)

On one occasion using a sickle he harvested two fields of corn at Bride overnight.

(Moore, 1891, 57)

# The Phynnoderree

“The *Phynnoderree* and the *li'l loaghtyn*”

One stormy night “the *phynnoderree* came in the house to them, and shouted upstairs that he had all the sheep gathered, but he'd had to go three times round Snaefell for the *li'l loaghtyn*, and when they went in the morning, they found a hare shut in the sheep pen!”

FLS Q/32 B/2 (1957)

As for a final task done by the *phynnoderree*, “[h]e has carried huge stones of many tons weight from the bottom of the lowest vallies to the top of the highest hills, and placed them as corner stones to mansions about to be erected.”

(Johnson, 1851, 4b)

Many farms, however, were to lose their resident *phynnoderree* as happened at Ballaskelley, when “they took the notion that they would put some clothes out for him, and after they did that he was never seen there again, and never give them no more help.”

FLS C/24 C/2 (1961)

# “The nature & probable origin of the Manx fairy-creed?”

“I wonder what is your own general point of view in respect to the nature & probable origin of the Manx fairy-creed?” This was Sophia Morrison writing on 26 June 1910 to Josephine Kermode (“Cushag”)

For one of Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Schools in 1851, it was due to the Manx having “nothing to interest their thoughts, and rouse them to constant activity, and an injurious sluggishness is superinduced. One of the consequences which might be expected from such a state of mind is certainly prevalent, I mean *superstition*.” (Anon, 1851)

“Those terrible creatures are only euphemistically named “Good-folk.” If offended in the slightest degree they proved themselves vindictive in the extreme. [...] There are thousands of legends illustrating the deadly vengeance of the fairies—their good deeds have scarcely a single record. It may be that prosperity was attributed to a Divine Providence, while the insulted gnome got the benefit of ill-fortune. Child-stealing, bodily hurt, and destruction to property were the works of these ill-mannered fairies. Nor had the provocation to be great—never was there much, often none.” (Anon, 1903, 12)



# Edward Faragher and the Fairies

“I think I cannot pick up any more fairies tales as the old people who knew about them are all gone and few of the young ones that believe in fairies but the world is gone to be very unfaithful and there are many that dont believe even the bible in these days people are getting enlightened.” (EF, Notebook (1897), MS 09447)

The language the fairies spoke was Manx: “The woman that keeps the shop in C[regneash] was telling me this morning that she heard the fairies in the garden again but not understand their language very likely they are speaking the manx language yet and there is very few can understand them I never heard them talking mysel I spose they would not like me to hear them for I might understand them if they speak manx and might expose them.” (EF, Notebook (1897), MS 09447)

The fairies were once widespread, “[b]ut it appears they have deserted all the countries round about us as well as our little Island there is a shetland woman living at glenshass and she has great yarns about shetland fairies, it appear the fairies were all over Europe in old times.” (EF, Notebook (1897), MS 09447)

# Edward Faragher and the Fairies

Not only were people becoming more enlightened, also “not so simple as the people used to be but I believe they are more wicked and are not so friendly as the people were in the past.” (EF, Notebook (1897), MS 09447)

There were other wider changes too, and “I fancy the old farmers wives that used to provide for the fairies was far kinder to the poor than they farmers wives of our days even my own Mother kept a bed for the poor that came our way to lodge them but beggars get very little nowadays.” (EF, Notebook (1897), MS 09447)

Whilst the fairies were still around, “[o]ne of my neighbours has been telling me about hearing the fairies very often but very seldom getting a peep at them,” they were on the wane, “[b]ut it seems the ghosts are like the fairies and dont like to shew themselves as they did formerly.” (EF, Notebook (1897), MS 09447), (EF, Notebook (1898), MS09495, Box 5)

# Edward Faragher and the Fairies

And just fairies but mermaids as well, “I sopose the mermaids and their families are gone to fairy land with the fairies for mermaids and fairies have disappeared.” (EF, Notebook (1901), MS 09447)

The reason for mermaids in particular no longer being seen was a matter of climate change: “Though mairmaids are very seldom seen in our days I have no doubd but such things exist still but may have gone to some fairer clime for this climate has changed in my own days and not like it was when I was a boy there are far more storms and changeable weather and not at all like old times.” (EF, Notebook (1898), MS 09495, Box 5)

In 1898, Faragher sent one of his notebooks on to Roeder with this comment at the end, “I send you this book as I am not likely to get anymore fairy yarns and they are only foolish things to make the best of them yet the may amuse children.” (EF, Notebook (1898), MS 09495, Box 5)

# Where are the fairies now?

According to an informant for the Folk Life Survey in 1961, “[t]hey say that the fairies all went over the mountain to Laxa fair, and after that they never came back. They were never seen much about after that time. That must have been the time they went away and left the Island.”

FLS C/24 C/2 (1961)

Earlier from 1949, the fairies all shouted ““Hi! for Ireland!’ and they were gone.”

FLS KB F/2 (1949)

