



# looking out to sea:

Mona Douglas's cultural connections

Breasha Maddrell, Culture Vannin, March 2023  
All images my own except where stated



threshold

**'Conflict'** by Mona Douglas (*Island Magic*, 1956)

The voice of the sea is continually loud in my ears,  
The movement of tides is for ever shaking my soul---  
Dweller on land though I be, yet the heart of me hears,  
Always, breakers that crash, billows that roll,  
And the cold, shrill music on sandy shores when the daylight disappears.

Yet I cannot arise and answer the call of the sea  
Or give myself utterly to the winds and tides,  
For the bare hills and woods are too dear to me,  
And I may not turn away from the earth that hides  
Dark wells and the green-springs of life and the birds' voice in the tree.

Being torn asunder between the sea and the land,  
I will seek some place on a lonely coast, and stay  
Between the hills and the ploughed fields and the sand,  
Within sound of trees, within touch of the flying spray,  
In a small house thatched with yellow straw and grey as the rocky strand;  
  
And there I will watch through stormy and quiet days  
the changing lights on the sea, the clouds on the hills,  
Till earth and water mingle in subtle ways,  
And they and I are lost in the life that fills  
The glow of noon and the deep of night, and flows beyond time and space.

***Times Literary Supplement, Saturday November 6 1943***

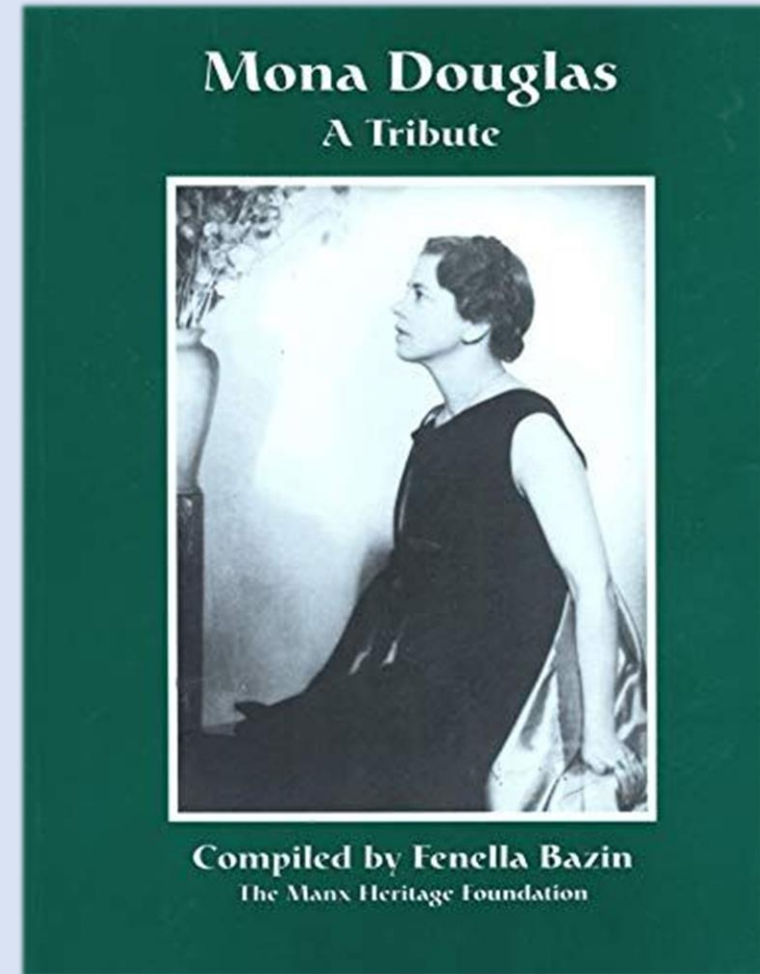
*The Secret Island. Poems and Plays in Verse.* By Mona Douglas. Victoria Press, Limited (Douglas, Isle of Man).

The influence of the early Yeats and the poets of the Celtic twilight is felt in Miss Douglas's three poems and three poetic plays. The kind of illusion she continually aims at creating is that of a world in which men and women are shapes of a dream...She creates this illusion with skill and sensitiveness and it is appropriate to the Manx and Irish mythology from which she draws the themes of her plays...



photo of Mona Douglas  
by Valerie Cottle

she, herself





# ‘Who is that Mona Douglas?’

Original song by  
Annie Kissack,  
performed and recorded  
as part of the  
Mona Douglas Project



Druids memorised our history and lore, fed it back to us, and gained importance. People heard things and told them to other people, to lengthen evenings and to shorten roads. But, even with events that really happened, with each teller something tends to change. Hair colour, or the food served at a feast. The number of eyes in your head, the numbers of scars on your back. The right and wrong of it. We put ourselves into the tales we tell, and to do that, we must remove a part of someone else.

from *Savage Her Reply* (Little Island: 2020) by Deirdre Sullivan



theosophy  
[universal brotherhood]

Madame Blavatsky

- 1) pan-Celticism and developing a larger audience for Manx culture
- 2) support and friendship – the importance of creative equals/peers
- 3) the Isle of Man as a source and inspiration for creative work

W B Yeats

A P Graves


George Russell - 'AE'

Professor Agnes O'Farrelly



nerin

# Ellynyn ny Gael 'the arts of the Gael'



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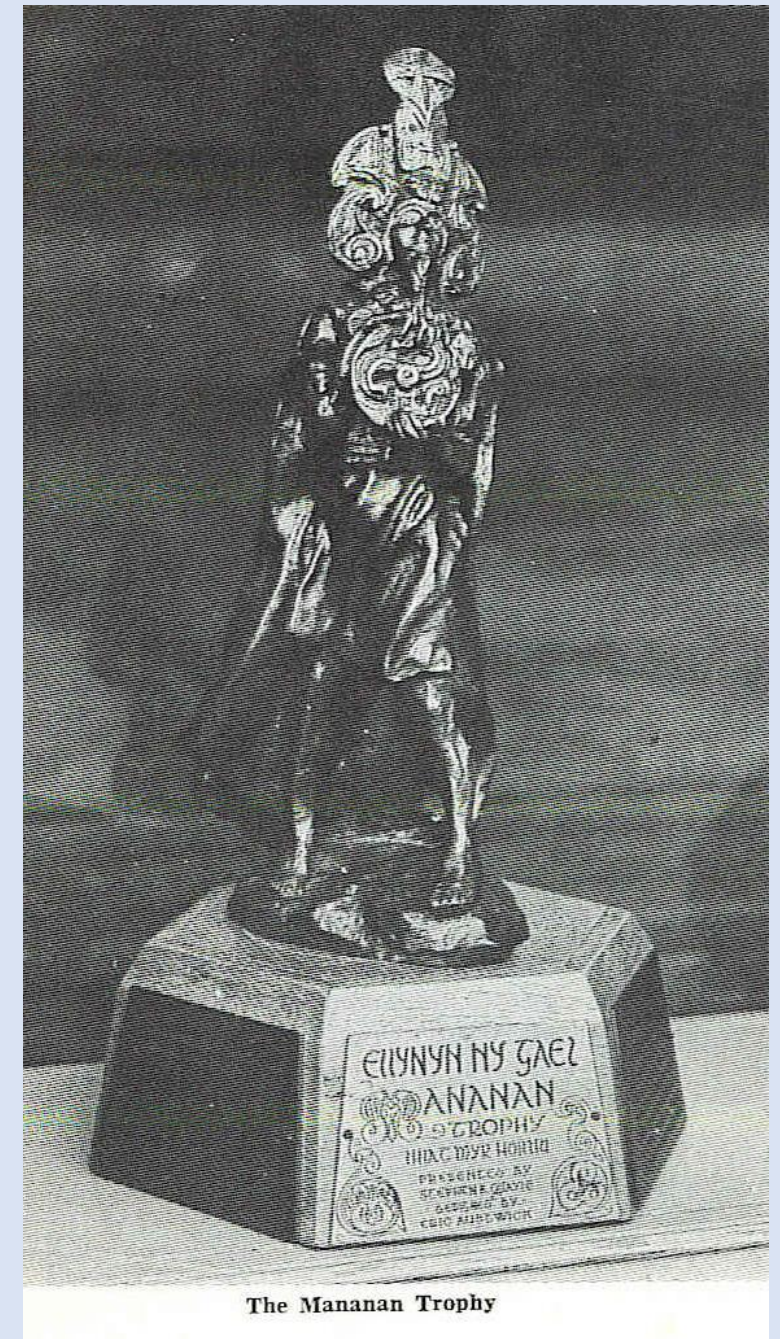
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The Mananan Trophy

Róisín ní Shé  
Eric Austwick  
Nikolai Giovannelli  
Eibhlín Ní Chathailriabhaigh



Eric Austwick

[www.imuseum.im/search/collections/people/mnh-agent-470.html](http://www.imuseum.im/search/collections/people/mnh-agent-470.html)



Róisín ní Shé

[www.flickr.com/photos/tg4/6835743207](http://www.flickr.com/photos/tg4/6835743207)

### ***An aside:***

*Mona's great friend, Nikolai Giovannelli, was mentioned in passing during questions. I hadn't wanted to make him a focus of this talk, choosing instead to focus on some lesser-known/talked about people from her life.*

*One thing I should have said is that he helped amplify the international message for folk culture that she already understood, partly through his membership of the International Folk Music Council. He was also a key member of Ellynyn ny Gael, something Mona was criticised for in quite hurtful ways, with letters in the Mona Douglas Bequest damning her for having an Italian on the committee.*

*Articles in the Journal of the International Folk Music Council show the international interest in Manx culture, as well as Mona's determination to share information widely.*



“I first heard of Mona from Professor Agnes O’Farrelly of University College, Dublin in the early thirties...Mona had been Secretary of the Celtic Congress on the Isle of Man in 1921. She came to Ireland then and...met such people as Eamon De Valera, Dr Douglas Hyde, W B Yeats, Lord Ashbourne and many others involved in the revival of the Irish language.” (talking in 1987).

Mona Douglas and Eibhlín Ní Chathailriabhaigh  
with John Kaneen as Mananan, Yn Chruinnaght  
Yn Chruinnaght archives

***Another aside*** (addressed briefly in the discussion after the talk):

Yn Chruinnaght – ‘the gathering’ – an inter-Celtic festival which was set up from the Ellynyn ny Gael event ‘Feailley Vanninagh Rhumsaa (the “Ramsey Manx Festival”)’ in 1977.

It joins the calendar of national festivals in the Celtic countries such as Oireachtas na Gaeilge (Ireland), Yr Orsedd y Beirdd and Yr Eisteddfod Genedlaethol (Wales), and An Mod (Scotland).

For more information about Yn Chruinnaght, see:

[www.ynchruinnaght.com](http://www.ynchruinnaght.com)



An Mhuintir Seo Againne  
**Mona Ineen y Ghoolish**



Mona Ineen y Ghoolish agus Aeglach Vannin. Beidh Aeglach Vannin le cloisteáil ar Radio Éireann Dé Domhnaigh seo chugainn ar 5.30 i gclár ceoil agus amhráin.

Aeglach Vannin at Radio Éireann: *The Irish Press*, 18 August 1961  
 Clipping in Mona Douglas Bequest, Manx National Heritage Library

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SEAOHTAIN mhór na gCeilteach, i seo, An Chomhdháil is mó ariamh acu ar bun thiar i nGailtinn, agus buíon daoine óga sa Oileán Mhanann sa Phríomh-Chathair.

Ní miste na Manannaigh óga seo a áireamh mar chuid den Mhuintir Seo Againne, mar is i nGaeilge a bheas siad ag caint is ag ambránáil ar Radio Éireann sa tráthnóna Dé Domhnaigh seo chugainn. Gaeilge a n-oileáin féin atá i gceist, dar ndóigh: "Gailick" mar a thugann siad féin uirthi.

**Bean chróga**

Ní cainteoirí dúchais iad. Ná ní ar scoil a fuair siad, a bhfuil acu de theanga a sinsir

—ach go bhfuil bean chróga dhúthrachtach ina mbun, bean a bhfuil na blianta caite aici ar son dúchais Ghaelaigh Mhanann, bean mheidhreac óigeanta den Mhuintir, Mona Ineen y Ghoolish.

Móna Iníon Uí Dhubhglais, adéarfaimis féin. D'admhaigh sí dúinn nach i Manainn, ach i Sasana a rugadh í—táisime a bhain do go leor deá-Chael—ach gur Mhannaigh a hathair 's a máthair agus gur san Oileán atá a saol caite aici.

Bhí Gaeilge ag a seanmháthair, mar a bhí ag na céadta de na seandaoine nuair a bhí sí féin ag éirí suas. Ba file maith Gaeilge a sin-sheana-thair, agus bhí léinnscríbhinní Gaeilge sa tigh—lad breactha sa litríú aisteach úd a cheap ministéir Breatnach trí chéad bliain ó shoin do phobal a raibh dearmad déanta acu ar léann Gaeilge Éireann agus Albain agus iad scartha óna mhuintir sa dá thír. Is dá chionn san a scríobhadh "Jee" ar "Dia" agus "Gailick" ar "Gaeilge" agus "Ellan Vannin" ar "Oileán Mhanann".

**An ghlán óg**

Ach má briseadh ar shruth an léinn níorbh amhlaidh don bhéal beo. An sean-fhear óna bhfuair Móna Dhubhglais formór a cuid Gaeilge ba fear meán-aois é san a raibh aon Bhéarla aige, agus bhí aige sin agus ag a chomhaosánaigh neart amhrán agus scéal agus seanchuimhní cinn.

Collgite fragmenta na pearsant... Ní hálbh Móna ach in aola a deich mbliana nuair a thosaigh sí ag bailiú. Is é sin thar éinne eile de mhuintir a linne a bhfuil ach go bhfuil amhrán agus rince tíre Mhanann ar lámh sábhála. Ní ghéillfeadh sí féin sin, ach is fíor é.

Ach ní bean fórraimh ar bith í. Níor leor léi an seanmhanach a thabhairt slán gan é thabhairt don ghlán óg. Agus té glán óg fonnmar chuide.

Té feicthe aici, le na linn féin, thrí meoin ag teacht ar Mhanannaigh. Ba scoirn íeo anois í. Cailleadh an teanga in aon ghlan amháin, ach tá glán eile ag breith ar a n-aiféala súd. Tá na mílte de mhuintir an Oileáin bródúil as an nGaeilge anois—ach, mar a deir Móna, ní ach cuid bheag acu sásta tuas a foghlama a chur orthu.

**Bródúil**

Ach tá sí foghlamtha go maith—ón mbéal beo—ag an mbeagán san. Agus an dream óg so, Aeglach Vannin ("Ogra Mhanann"), a thug sí anall léi anois, tá siad san fíor-bhódúil as a bhfuil foglamtha acu.

A thuilleadh gradaim atá de dhíth ar an teanga dar le Móna. Gheobh a dh Gaeil Éireann, teana a thabhairt don ghradam san, dar léi, ach iad dul ar thóir lucht na Gaeilge agus iad ar saoire thall. Is leor nod.



Ansin thit mé ar bhrollach an ghineraíl!

Folk-Song Society &  
English Folk Dance Society

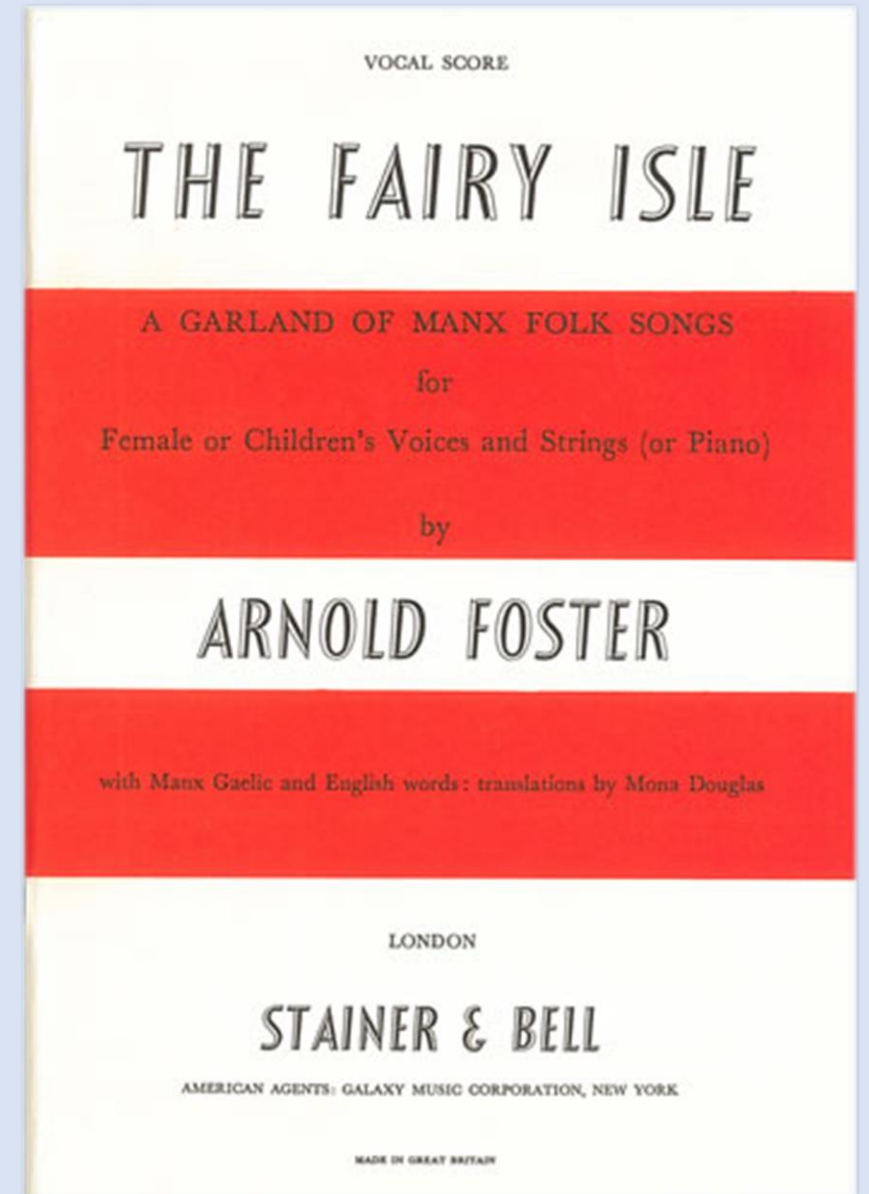
*merging to become the*

English Folk Dance and Song Society

Arnold Foster

Peter Crossley-Holland

E L M Prichard

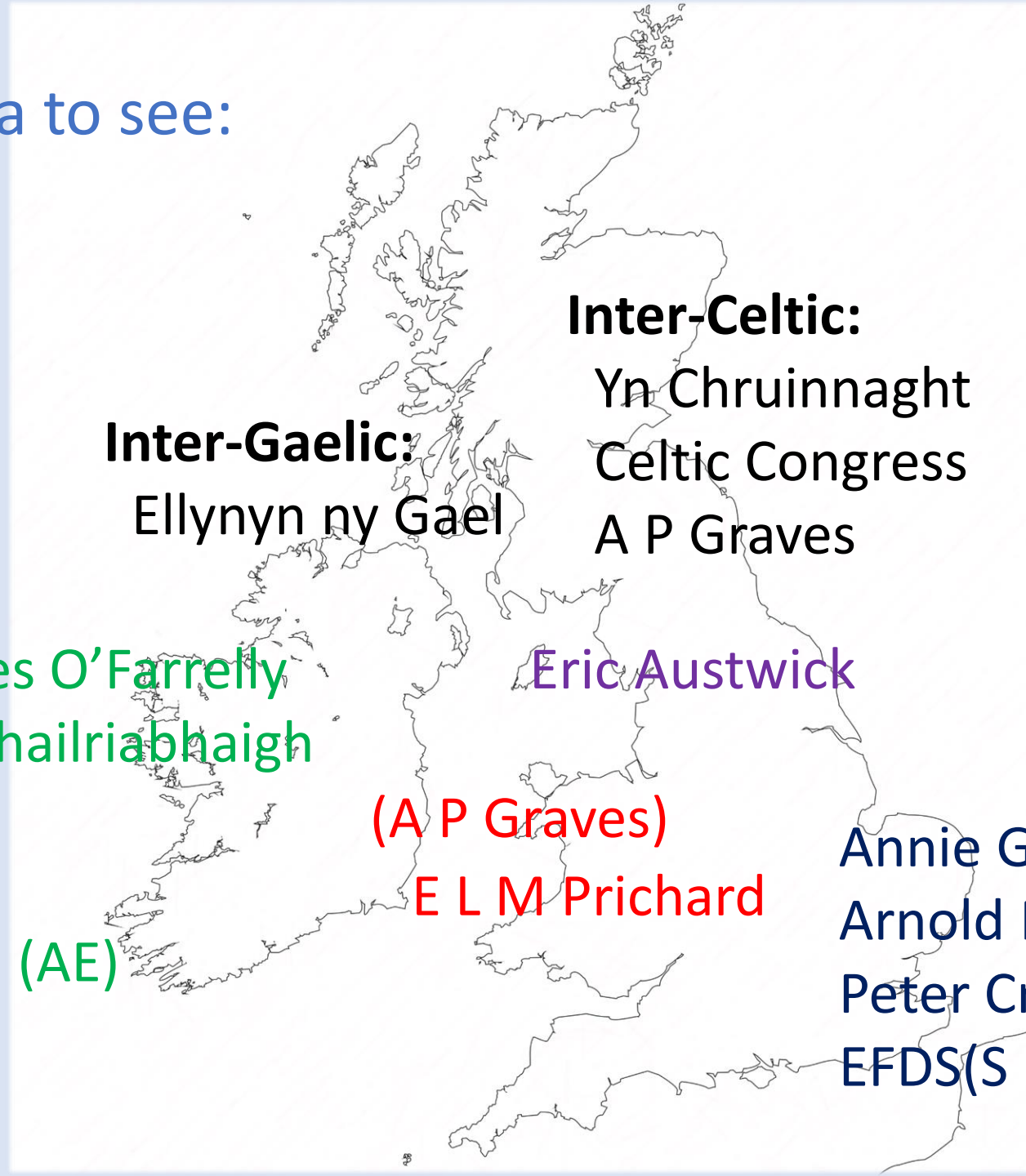


I love the rhythms of all your poems, and have approached each setting with a sense of reverence for the genius which shines through every line of your work...three of my settings from 'Mychurachan', - including two first performances – are to be sung at a recital at the Liverpool Music Guild on March 1<sup>st</sup>, with myself accompanying at the pianoforte.

ELM Prichard, writing in 1937

Mona Douglas Bequest, Manx National Heritage Library

looking out to sea to see:



**Inter-Gaelic:**  
Ellynyn ny Gael

**Inter-Celtic:**

Yn Chruinnaght  
Celtic Congress  
A P Graves

Professor Agnes O'Farrelly  
Eibhlín ní Chathailriabhagh  
Róisín ní Shé  
Mary O'Hara  
George Russell (AE)  
Douglas Hyde  
W B Yeats

Eric Austwick

(A P Graves)

E L M Prichard

Annie Gilchrist  
Arnold Foster  
Peter Crossley Holland  
EFDS(S) & Royal Albert Hall

- a creative willing to collaborate
- a better reputation outside the Island than within?
- responsive to enquiries
- future focused
- aware of and inspired by developments elsewhere (especially Celtic countries)
- appreciated where larger audiences lay

Inspiration is a queer thing,  
it makes you believe in dreams...

**Seaward** by Mona Douglas (*Island Spirit*, 1937)

Under thick veils of light all colours lie;  
Muffled behind the clouds the winds cry;  
Only the white edge of the sea is clear,  
And the sound of water on rocks comes sharp to the ear.

Slowly they come out of fathomless depths of light,  
Waves like blue flames curling to white---  
One on a dark point spilling like milk,  
One on the smooth sand folding like silk.

Fallen away from life is the heavy land;  
Only the sea is left, and the bare strand,  
And spray of broken waves filling the air,  
And light caught in the water and held there.



Dr Breesha Maddrell, March 2023