

Manx Farming Communities and Traditions. An examination of Manx farming between 1750 and 1900

C J Page

Introduction

Set in the middle of the Irish Sea, the Isle of Man was far from being an isolated community. Being over 33 miles long by 13 miles wide, with a central mountainous land mass, meant that most of the cultivated area was not that far from the shore and the influence of the sea. Until recent years the Irish Sea was an extremely busy stretch of water, and the island greatly benefited from the trade passing through it. Manxmen had long been involved with the sea and were found around the world as members of the British merchant fleet and also in the British navy. Such people as Fletcher Christian from HMAV *Bounty*, (even its captain, Lieutenant Bligh was married in Onchan, near Douglas), and also John Quilliam who was First Lieutenant on Nelson's *Victory* during the Battle of Trafalgar, are some of the more notable examples.

However, it was fishing that employed many Manxmen, and most of these fishermen were also farmers, dividing their time between the two occupations (Kinvig 1975, 144). Fishing generally proved very lucrative, especially when it was combined with the other aspect of the sea - smuggling. Smuggling involved both the larger merchant ships and also the smaller fishing vessels, including the inshore craft. Such was the extent of this activity that by the mid-18th century it was costing the British and Irish Governments £350,000 in lost revenue, plus a further loss to the Irish administration of £200,000 (Moore 1900, 438). Not being able to countenance these losses any further the British Government took over the island for the Crown under 'The Revestment Act' in 1765. This put a stop to the main smuggling routes and it threw the Manx economy into chaos. Traders and merchantmen moved on to more lucrative areas and the Manx were left to look towards farming and fishing for their income. This event had the effect of stimulating agricultural development and numbers of the larger land-owners (who had also mainly been merchantmen) began to invest in the land.¹

¹In an undated letter (c.1813) in the Atholl collection in the Library of Manx National Heritage, Douglas: Major Taubman (one of the largest landowners) is identified as 'the son of the Taubman whose extensive

The status of agriculture began to rise, especially after 1765, with more attention being paid to increasing returns. The Manx were not unaware of the changes taking place within the farming industry abroad. As seafarers they were much travelled, with even the smaller farmers coming into contact with farming men in England, Scotland and Ireland, wherever they put into port during trading or fishing expeditions (Radcliffe 1991, 9).

The land on the island was also a temptation to farmers from England and Scotland who moved to take advantage of cheap farms, whilst having expanding markets close at hand, especially in Liverpool and the growing cotton towns. Some of these 'strangers' as they were called were wealthy, others succeeded by borrowing. Manx laws at this time protected residents on the island against debts incurred elsewhere. This encouraged many debtors to settle on the island, most were in Douglas and the other towns but a few farmed. This changed after 1814 when the law was repealed. Retired military officers and their families soon replaced the debtors. They were on half pay and, with low prices for commodities on the island, their pensions would go a long way (Belchem 2000, 18-22).

Many of the immigrant farmers worked their land to the latest methods of the time, and in a highly commercial fashion. However the levels of investment these people were putting into their businesses sometimes proved their downfall, with more than one farmer ending up in the debtors prison at Castle Rushen, Castletown.²

By the mid-19th century agriculture had become the mainstay of the island's economy. Tourism was growing, but this growth, although slow, helped to provide a lucrative market for the farmers. Only the smaller farmers and crofters still worked the dual economy of fishing and farming, coupled now with the added incentive of mining. Mining flourished from the 1830s to the 1890s but, by the end of the century, tourism had become one of the main sources of wealth. This is shown by the annual returns for visitors to the island between 1830 and 1900: In 1830, 20,000 people came to the island annually; in 1866 this had reached 60,000 and in 1880, 93,000. By 1885 it had jumped to 183,000, in 1890 to 294,000 and by 1900 it had reached 384,000. All these people had to be fed and serviced and this provided seasonal employment.

Tradition played its part within the Manx farms, but these traditions were tempered with economic reality. To a subsistence farmer the level of capital input was small, the main income for the family coming largely from fishing and mining. Traditional farming also provided continuity for that society. Its pace was governed by the state of the seasons and the involvement of the local community, especially at high points such as the hay and corn harvests. These farming methods were often referred to in a disparaging manner by contemporary writers and agricultural propagandists, yet they

smuggling transactions were the principal means of my family (Duke of Atholl) being deprived of their rights in the Island.'

²Isle of Man Gazette, 9 June 1812, a letter from Mr S. Bullock, a well known farmer who had settled from England and was now writing to his creditors from the debtors gaol, Castletown, pleading to be let out to harvest his crops.

had an efficient and effective use of labour, giving a good return on the limited capital available, especially on marginal land. This point was discussed by Bell (1986, 24-41).

The returns from the land had to be viewed against what was required by the farmer from his farm. The primary wish was to feed his family, which left only a small surplus to sell at open market (and fairs). With limited capital and time the low outputs of the farm matched the low inputs. The farmers and crofters gave their time to fishing as it was seen to give an assured and regular income. By the mid-19th century fishing was being challenged as the other part of this dual occupation with farming, with the rise of mining and tourism. The Manx farmer pursued this dual economy to achieve a level of efficiency that was reflected in their quality of life.

The agricultural methods used on the small Manx farms in the 1750s were vastly different from those used on such farms in 1900. The types of crop, rotations and equipment all were different, yet to mainstream agriculturalists they were regarded as traditional. The use of the iron swing plough on the upland farm of 1900 had been at the cutting edge of technology in 1800, when the small farms were still using wooden ploughs. Indeed many such farms at this time were still using lazy beds to grow crops and the spade to cultivate, a method that gradually died out by the end of the 19th century (Figure 1).

Change reflected the age and attitude of the farmer and also the surrounding community along with the economic pressures faced by the families. In general the change from subsistence to commercial farming was made between 1820 and 1850 with only the marginal small farmers hanging on until the early years of the 20th century.

Many of these small farms were referred to as crofters. This was not the same as the Scottish crofter but covered small farms on marginal land, either occupying high ground or stony and wet soils. The Manx word for croft was *croit* and land holdings bearing that name could be found in 17th and 18th century documents such as *Croit Casteena* (Christian's Croft) from *Bride Mortgages of 1725* (Radcliffe 1982, 68).

The land and its administration

The island is divided into six administrative and political areas known as Sheadings. These are Ayre, Garff and Michael in the north and Glenfaba, Middle and Rushen in the south. Each had its own courts and maintained officers, the most important being the Coroner, who served summonses, returned juries and levied any fines, as well as disposing of estates on behalf of creditors.

Within each Sheading there were three parishes, apart from Glenfaba with two. These each had 'Locksmen' who aided the coroner in his work. The Sheading took on increased importance after 1866 when the Island's government, 'the House of Keys' became an elected body. Each Sheading put forward three members, with Douglas also represented by three members and Peel, Ramsey and Castletown each having one member.

Within each parish the land was divided down further into Treens, which certainly date from the medieval period and may possibly be earlier. Each Treen was further subdivided into Quarterlands. There were generally four to each Treen and were about



Figure 1: Two swing ploughs made by T and J Lewin, blacksmiths, Marown.

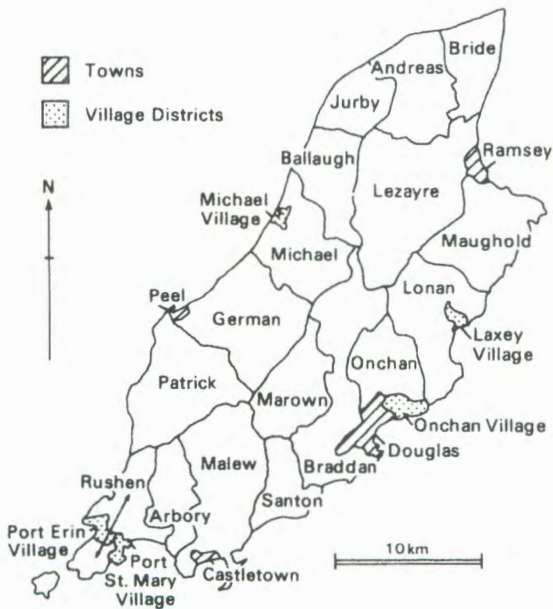


Figure 2: Parishes of the Isle of Man.

50 to 100 acres in size. They formed the land holding for the main farms, following similar subdivisions to those found on the West Coast of Scotland and within the Irish clachan (Page in preparation, 24) (Figure 2).

Some Quarterland farms were further subdivided as a result of marriage settlements or inter-family agreements. These small farms formed the crofts and their sizes could range from as little as 1 acre to around 30 acres (Radcliffe 1993, 6). Below these came a further group referred to under the English classification of cotter. The cotters generally were landless but grazed their livestock on common land and on the roadside, referred to as 'grazing the long acre'.

All land had originally belonged to the Lords of Man, who had been the Earls of Derby up until the 'Act of Settlement' in 1704, when ownership was confirmed to the existing tenants, and the rights of accession to the tenants' heirs was assured. From 1736 the lordship passed into the hands of the Dukes of Atholl (Kinvig 1975, 114). The common land, which included most of the upland above 600 feet, remained in the hands of the Lord of Man until the 'Act of Revestment' in 1765 when it was acquired for the British Crown. The common land became Crown property under the direction of a Forester, who was appointed to manage it including control of the livestock being grazed on the ground by neighbouring farmers and crofters. This common ground also provided domestic fuel in the form of turf, and it was these grazing and fuel rights that were so jealously guarded by the surrounding communities. Where this had been challenged it had often drawn a violent response.

Over the years, adjacent quarterland farms had gradually enclosed portions of these commons - sod-hedges or stonewalls being constructed to surround them. These grounds were known as 'intack land' and were bought from the Lord of Man. They provided secure rough grazing land, mainly for sheep, though some were cultivated for corn production. The grievances against enclosing such land came to a head in 1724 when a riot occurred over the granting of a licence for land on the mountain. Further disturbances occurred later in the century as more land became enclosed. In 1763 when John Llewellyn of Ramsey took over a large stretch of mountain land above the town, the Duke of Atholl was petitioned by 28 inhabitants of the parish of Maughold objecting to this enclosure. The dispute was settled relatively quietly but other occasions saw a more aggressive result. One of the more fierce was the 'Battle of Perk ny h' Earkan' which took place in 1854. Here a group of local men, known as the 'Sulby Cossacks', continuously destroyed the newly constructed walls surrounding a 300-acre stretch of land and threatened the new owner's life. This dispute eventually came to the House of Keys, resulting in the Disafforestation Act of 1860, which gave one third of the land to the Queen, a third to the people and made one third available for sale (Quayle 1979, 19).

This Act did not stop the animosity, however, as a new wall enclosing Park Llewellyn was thrown down in 1861 and tempers had to be cooled. Another volatile confrontation took place above Foxdale. Here the authorities used strong tactics through the use of the Militia. On throwing out the crofters from land soon to be sold, they then set fire to all their turf butts that had been drying ready for collection. This caused a riot that became more serious when the crofters were joined by the miners from Foxdale. It was only the intervention of the Mines' manager that stopped it escalating further. The soldiers that carried out this work were later reprimanded for



Figure 3: A stone-faced hedge being constructed at Manx National Heritage's farm at Cregneash in 1997. This was part of a competition designed to help preserve such skills.

their action. The people's third was vested in a board of trustees, which later became absorbed by the Manx Government under the Department of Forestry.

The distinctive hedges surrounding a patchwork quilt of numerous small fields shape the character of the Manx countryside. These hedges are formed from earth banks faced either with sod or stone and topped with gorse. There was no formal enclosure of the land but ground was temporarily enclosed in the summer, using turf banks, which were thrown down each winter. In 1656 these banks were ordered to be retained until later in the year due to the lateness of the harvest and in 1665 legislation was passed to retain these banks throughout the winter.

The sizes of these hedges were specified by law as 5' high, increasing to 5' 6" in 1691 or 6' if there was no trench by the side, the trench being set at 1'6" deep and 3' wide (Moore 1900, 918). Gorse was set in the top, with seeds being set into straw rope laid into a slot cut into the hedge. The rotting straw provided nutrition for the young gorse. The gorse protected the top of the hedge from livestock but it was common until the end of the 19th century to lanket both sheep and cattle to stop them jumping over the hedges and walls. These lankets, made from straw (suggane), tied one front foot to a back foot, so restricting the animal's ability to jump hedges. There are still lanket making competitions held on the island, although the act of using lankets has long since been banned due to animal welfare regulations and improved stock proof fencing. The sizes of fields range from 1 to 10 acres and are often of an irregular shape, the hedges being far from running a straight path. There are various reasons put forward as to why these hedges are not straight and of these the more credible include: that they were following secure ground for the foundations, or that they offer more protection to the livestock from strong winds.

Specific designs for spades have evolved to construct the Manx hedges and examples can be seen at the museum in Douglas. Reproductions have been used to good effect at Cregneash Village Folk Museum to enable the hedges to be restored using early construction techniques (Killip 1970, 60-66) (Figure 3).

In contrast, the stone walls of the upland farms and mountain intacks were built straight and bold, negotiating rock outcrops and often covering ground that looked impossible to traverse. These had been constructed since the 1860s, many by Cumberland wallers. Different styles can be found throughout the island and may reflect where the builders had originated. In Laxey some of the walls are tall and wide, capable of taking a cart on the top, similar to some northeastern Scottish dikes. A more consistent style is found in the large stone gate pillars, which reflect Irish practice more than English (Figure 4).

In an island such as this, one of the more constant problems other than wind is rain. There is a high average rainfall throughout but on the uplands this can very high indeed, 40 inches in Douglas and 57 inches in Druidale (Birch 1964).³ Good for growing grass, it presented problems for producing crops, with cold soils, late germination and mildew being just part of the difficulties. To control this the lazy bed system of cultivation lasted until well into the 19th century. These were raised beds, formed with a spade, wide for corn, narrow for roots. This allowed excess water to safely drain away between the rows. The small fields enabled a system of surface

³These figures refer to information gained between 1918-1957.



Figure 4: Stone walling by students learning traditional skills at Manx National Heritage's farm at Cregneash in 1996.

drains to take water away quickly, these being supplied by slate lined box drains constructed 18 inches below the ground surface. This method of drainage seems to have begun in the late 18th century and was wide spread by the 1820s. Clay tile drains were introduced by Turnstall and Co at a brickworks near Ramsey, and attracted much attention when they exhibited examples at the Manx agricultural show of 1845 (Manx Sun 1845). As with hedge building, thatching and wall building, under draining was a recognised practice used by most farmers and farm workers.

The structure of the farm and cottage

Farms were generally found in isolated positions, set around the countryside to take advantage of shelter and fresh water. There were few villages and towns of size until the 19th century, the urban expansion really beginning after the 1820s.

Table: Population growth in the Isle of Man

Year	1792	1821	1841	1861	1881
Town	7237	11522	15167	20623	25816
Country	20676	28559	32819	31846	27742
Total	27913	40081	47986	52469	53558
Douglas	3625	6054	8647	12511	15719

Structures relied upon local material, and early buildings had their walls constructed of stone in the south and earth in the north. Stone buildings however were more common throughout the island with the style changing to accommodate the type of stone available. In the north they mainly used rounded stone collected from the shoreline. In central areas the walls were often found constructed of granite but slate was the main building material used. Sod houses could also be found throughout the island, especially used for temporary summer dwellings (sheilings) when cattle were taken out to the upland pastures. They were far more common in the north of the island where examples lasted until the 20th century (Figure 5).

Timber had always been a problem as the Isle of Man was devoid of significant woodland until recent years. Most timber had to be imported but there was a high level of re-use. Ships' timbers were common for roofing with masts, spars, even old oars being used in the cottages found at Cregneash. Discarded parts of agricultural equipment, especially old cart shafts found favour, as well as timber from earlier buildings. 'Waste not, want not' was a proverb well understood by all Manxmen.

The roofs were thatched, marram grass being preferred in the north, and wheat straw elsewhere, although oats, the prominent crop in most upland areas, would possibly be used (oats has a much shorter life span and would require thatching each year). Ling may also have been used especially for outbuildings.

The method of thatching was simple but effective with a base of turf strips, *skraa*, first being laid on the roof. The straw was then laid on this surface. It was not pegged as in the English style but was placed in layers then an old fishing net was laid over to be tied down tightly by a series of ropes running the length of the building and across, each rope *suggane* tied firmly to stone pegs *bwhid-suggane* set into the walls. The rope was originally made from straw but later, around 1850, it was replaced by coir. The hay



Figure 5: Mrs Mary Gilrea's sod cottage in the parish of Jurby, c1897; she was known as 'Gilrea of the Gorse'. The walls were built entirely of sod blocks and the roof was thatched with Marram grass.

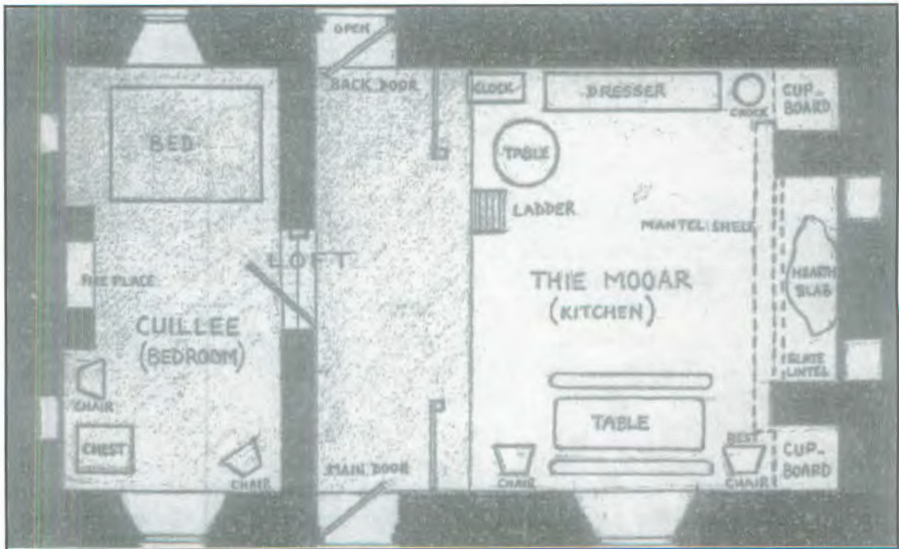


Figure 6: Ground plan of Harry Kelly's cottage at Manx National Heritage's museum and farm at Cregneash; it is typical of many Manx Cottages.

and corn stacks, often made in the round and called *thurrans*, were thatched in a similar way.

Inside a Manx cottage the dominant room was the kitchen/living room or *thie mooar*. This contained the open hearth (*chiollagh*), with its turf fire. At the other end of the building was a bedroom for the head of the family. Above was a half floor or cock loft, where the children slept. Below, between the two main rooms was the front door, which often had a second door in the opposite wall, so allowing for an airflow to aid the winnowing of the corn after threshing (Figure 6).

There were various ground plans to the farms in the island but two forms predominated. In one, the main farm buildings are placed at right angles to the farmhouse, and in the other they run parallel. The area between these farm buildings and the house was known as the street. A cow house (generally holding between 4 to 5 cattle), stable, pigsty or *mucklagh* and a calf house made up the early farms (Figure 7).

By the 1840s the designs were changing. The cottages on the small farms remained largely the same, but two storied barns were now being built, with space for cattle below and hay above. Stables were also built in a similar way. Pigsties now had runs rather than just letting the animal roam about the street. On some farms these sties were in two tiers, the pig occupying the bottom floor and hens above. This was more common on the large quarterland farms.

The quarterland farm houses were often two storied with two rooms on the ground floor plus a dairy and back kitchen. Above there were two to three main rooms with some smaller servants' rooms. The roof was usually covered with Welsh slates, a status symbol in itself; also a cast iron range had replaced the open *chiollagh*, especially when it was near the town where coal was readily available. During the Napoleonic period, between the 1830s and 40s, again in the 1860s and the last decades of the 19th century there were periods of extensive improvement to buildings and land. Indeed, the second half of the 19th century saw a much more steady economic growth with the development of the tourist industry.

A feature of the 1860s was the growth of threshing mills; many were light two horse machines with a distinctive circular horse walk set outside the barn, a characteristic symbol that appeared on the Ordnance Survey maps of the period. Many were powered by water and some by wind. Some of these machines were made on the island by firms such as Kelly and Corlett of Kirk Michael. Some were imported from Scotland. Drummonds of Cummnock constructed one at Cregneash in 1885.

A Scots farmer who had settled in the island first introduced threshing mills to the Isle of Man in 1798. This was only a few years after Andrew Meakle near Edinburgh had invented them in 1796. By 1812 there were 23 such mills in operation, both horse and water powered, and one driven by steam (Quayle 1812, 38). Two covered horse walks from this period still survive.⁴ They were for the larger farms and were costly items to install. They replaced the flail that remained common until the end of the 19th century. Generally a jointed flail was used but in some areas of the island a crooked stick was used, with the operator having to kneel down to the work (Figure 8).

⁴One is at Balladoole, Castletown and the other is in Santon.



Figure 7: Karran's croft, 1947, a typical croft layout with the cottage on the right and the farm buildings at right angles (to the left of the cottage) with the stable occupying the left end of this building and the cow house the right.



Figure 8: Threshing corn flails. These are fixed flails formed from angled branches; the operators have to kneel down to enable the flail to hit the crop flat on the ground.

By the 1860s portable threshing machines had appeared, with one of the earliest being owned by William Farrant at Ballamoore Castle, in the north. He owned a Clayton and Shuttleworth machine bought directly from Lincoln, but he hired an engineer from Scotland to attend it and train local people in its operation.⁵ By the end of the 19th century there were a number of such machines run by farmers and contractors who travelled them around the country (Figure 9).

Investment by the bigger landowners resulted in large, well appointed farm buildings, often set around a central yard to give shelter. Staward Farm is a typical example; built in 1842 for Major Caesar Bacon it contained all that was modern and labour saving. Constructed in Manx slate with a Welsh slate roof, it was built by a Northumberland stone mason (the Bacon family had come from that county in 1724). It contained stables, cart sheds, loose boxes, a beef house, turnip and straw houses and stalls for milking cattle. The threshing mill added a year later had a Clayton and Shuttleworth machine driven by water. The Bacons had made their money as merchants, similar to many of the Manx gentry. Other native landowners had similar farms, which rivalled those operated by the immigrant Scottish and English farmers.

Farm Management

At the beginning of the 19th century reports on the state of Manx farming drew statements such as 'agriculture is here yet a recent art' (Quayle 1812, 20). This came from 1812, ten years later Hainings' guide to the island stated 'although agriculture is too much of the ancient kind, yet improvement has made good progress within these last thirty years' (Hainings 1822).

Those commentators were typical of their time being more concerned to promote the latest improved agricultural techniques as opposed to the older methods then popular. A primary subject for their disapproval was in crop management. Continuous cropping was practised by many 'native farmers' when they took successive crops until the yields fell away. At this stage the general practice was to let the land 'tumble down to grass'. Christian Curwen found that some of those employing 'more improved current practice' were only taking 2 to 3 white crops consecutively. Curwen also illustrated the work of one of the larger landowners from the south of the island, Edward Gawne. 'His rotation was: 1st - clover ley, 2nd - barley, 3rd - potatoes, 4th - undersown barley, 5th - hay; the land was limed every 5th or 6th year' (Curwen 1807, 66).

Rotation had become established practice by the 1840s, especially on the quarterland farms as recorded by the newly established Manx Agricultural Society. The formation of this organisation was in itself a mark of the rights of passage towards the dominance of commercial farming over the subsistence farming mentality. This was the first major, local, agricultural society, although a short-lived organisation had been formed between 1798 and 1801. After this the next attempt was made between 1806 and 1813, as a branch of the Workington Agricultural Society. John Christian Curwen, a remarkable, energetic character who was both a member of the House of Keys and the House of Commons, promoted it. Manx people are very suspicious of government interference and possible taxation and this caused the demise of both organisations

⁵An agreement was made on 27 August, 1861; in Farrant papers, MNHL.



Figure 9: Threshing by steam at Ballamona farm, October 1941, using a Clayton and Shuttleworth 7 h.p. traction engine to drive a Clayton 54 inch threshing mill.

prior to 1840. This new society did not fare much better as most farmers did not like paying a subscription and so it died through lack of funds in 1847. A further reason for its demise was the age-old distrust of the inhabitants of the north of the island for those in the south and vice versa. A further agricultural society, founded in 1858, also suffered in a similar way but it managed to survive, mainly through skilful diplomacy by Richard Nickling, the secretary, who was also one of the main machinery dealers at that time.

The establishment of these organisations spread the knowledge of technological advances; their support of ploughing matches, trials of reapers and mowers provided a practical display. The more theoretical aspects were covered by the establishment of the Farmers Club in 1859; this held dinners and lectures in Douglas mainly attended by 'gentlemen farmers'.

One important area of agricultural development, encouraged by the societies, was livestock. Thomas Quayle had described the native cattle as being small, having poor conformation and yielding low levels of milk and meat. This also was said of the Manx sheep that were described as having a small carcass, producing only limited amounts of wool (Quayle 1812, 106 and 111). By the beginning of the 19th century such breeds were changing as natural developments of market forces were having an effect even on the remoter parts of the island. Irish cattle were regularly imported at this time and they were being crossed with the native breed. Quayle noted that although the quantities of meat and milk were small it was of a high quality. Also the local cattle thrived on the rough pasture and did not mind the sometimes-hostile weather. The Irish cattle however, required some time to acclimatise especially on the upland farms. This ensured the survival of the original breed in these more remote places although various crosses soon overtook them. Other breeds of cattle such as the Holderness, later to become the Shorthorn and the Dunlop, later to become the Ayrshire, were the province of the wealthy agriculturalist (Figure 10). Their importation during the early years of the 19th century provided a genetic base that eventually found its way to even the smallest farms. Again, the earliest examples of these animals found the Manx climate somewhat taxing and some like Joseph Foulder of Ronaldsway adopted the practice of 'soiling', that is keeping the cattle in shelter all year round and bringing the fodder to them (Curwen 1810, 148-9). As these cattle became hardier so their numbers grew with the local fairs being the main distribution points.

Sheep followed a similar pattern with the Leicester and Linton (later known as the Scottish Blackface) being preferred. The Cheviot soon followed but the use of the Marino, fashionable around 1810, was doomed to failure, despite crossing with the local breed. The Cotswold longwool found favour by the 1870s and soon after, the Shropshire dominated flocks through into the 20th century until the Suffolk gained popularity. The Manx breed survived for some time, being mentioned in sales of the 1850s but it became crossed out with the Blackface and Cheviot. This preserved its hardiness and wool but gave a far better carcass. An interesting survival of this early breed however was the Loughtan. This was a brown sheep variety and had gained a reputation with many Manx farmers and crofters especially with regard to the wool colour. The Loughtan still exists today as a rare breed, and there are thriving flocks on three of the museum sites managed by Manx National Heritage, one being on the small island at the extreme south of the country called the Calf of Man (Figure 11).



Figure 10: Shorthorn cow and calf at Manx National Heritage's farm at Cregneash in 1996.



Figure 11: Loaghtan ram from Manx National Heritage's flock at Druidale farm, Lezayre, in the summer of 1977.

Sheep were popular on the upland farms as they formed an easily manageable asset on the open hills. Folding was also practised, using single sod hedges that could be easily removed; some of these still survive on the outer fields at Cregneash. The sheep was an important commodity to the small farmer and crofter as the wool formed another area of income. Many wills refer to the spinning wheel in the main room, *thie mooar*. Weaving also formed another occupation to run with the farm work, other than fishing. Four of the cottages at Cregneash still have loom sheds (*thie coigee*), and such buildings can be seen at other parts of the island. Mechanised weaving came in by the beginning of the 19th century with William Kelly's factory at Union Mills near Douglas. Now a distinct village, the site of the mill can still be seen. Woollen mills could be found in a number of places throughout the country but the largest was at St Johns, known as Tynwald Mills, which still exists, although now in use mainly as the focus of a retail complex. A smaller mill at Laxey continues to operate however, complete with hand as well as mechanised looms.

The People

The condition of the small farms and crofts at the end of the 18th century and the living conditions of their inhabitants within these 'mere hovels' drew comments of concern by visiting strangers (Killip 1971). The clothing and food likewise was looked on with distain, yet the families proved healthy. What was overlooked was that the buildings were ideal to cope with the weather, as was the clothing. It was mostly home produced, even to the shoes, if worn at all. These shoes were called *carranes*, and made like a moccasin out of cowhide, still with the coat intact (Radcliffe 1993, 14). The food was rather bland but wholesome, consisting of milk products, some meat and, most important, 'spuds and herring'. This dish remained dominant on the small and even medium farms until well into the 20th century. The reason for its popularity was not the taste, which had to be acquired, but rather economy. The potatoes were home grown and the salted herring were locally caught (Figure 12).

The income from such small farms is hard to identify. Thomas Quayle in 1812 estimated the annual outgoings of a cottager to be about £24 and the income left just 1/7d as clear profit. Wages also provide a guide but more as an indicator that they were static. In 1812 a single farm worker's wage was between £12 and £20. By 1857 it stood at £23 and by the end of the 19th century it was still between £18 and £20 (Killip 1971, 64). In 1812 Quayle thought that '... a croft is generally a losing concern ...'. The croft, however, thrived throughout the 19th century with its peak around 1890 and survived into the 20th century as a working unit (Birch 1964, 80).

The pace of work on the land was steady and continuous. However, there was always time for a talk, to collect the *skeet*, which brought the Manxmen into conflict with the commercially minded English and Scots farmers. This caused comments about laziness and lack of motivation. Yet with the use of traditional methods the work of the small farmer and crofter demanded both strength and stamina. The use of the creel on their backs to carry turf from the mountain, manure out to the potato ground and to harvest corn back to the farm needed a tenacity that denied laziness. These operations were not just confined to the men as the women had to manage the farm for the length of time the men were away at the fishing.



Figure 12: A posed photograph, c1890, of the Crennall family in front of their stone cottage at Ballacallow, Cranstal, Bride. Mr Crennall was a crofter/fisherman. This shows the *suggane* ropes holding down the thatch and anchored to the building by the stone *bwhid-suggane*. Hanging from the wall is a *mollag*, which is a dog-skin fishing float.

Teamwork was also a feature of such communities, with the crofters and cottagers helping the larger neighbouring farmers. This may have been part of the rental arrangements if the croft formed part of the farm. Ploughing, potato planting and the hay and corn harvests were the most common shared arrangements but it also extended to carting. One of the hardest tasks on the farm was to collect wrack, seaweed, from the beach after the autumn storms. It took much strength to fill a cart full of wet wrack, then with a pair of horses cart it, often two to three miles, to the farm.

Harvest was often women's work whilst the sickle was in use, the men doing the binding and stooking, although the roles changed when the scythe began to dominate after 1860 (Figure 13). By this time mechanisation had started with the first horse-powered reaper being used on the island in 1852 (Manx Sun 21 August 1852). This had been made by a blacksmith, Thomas Teare from Ballaugh, who had been to the Great Exhibition, London in 1851. Men, women and children all became involved with the harvest and mechanisation served to speed the operation up so that more crops could be saved at an optimum time. The reaper binder further increased that efficiency, coming on to the larger farms by the 1890s. The small farms and crofts held to the scythe or the reaper until the coming of the tractor in the 1950s (Figure 14).

The crofters supported each other at certain crucial events. The local fair was more than a place of excitement and jollification, where the beer (*jough*) flowed freely. It was all of these things but also the place for selling the surplus young stock on to the lowland farmers. A man recalling to the Manx Folklife Survey, gave an account of his parents meeting up with other crofters at an arranged place, then driving their livestock down to St Mark's Fair. They all helped to keep the animals safe on the road until they could be sold. Some of these fairs were also the hiring fairs for the larger farmers and so the major ones lasted until well into the 20th century.

Conclusion

What is traditional? To many it was perpetuating the methods of farming that had been perfected by their forefathers. Most of the crofts in the 1890s used techniques that had been at the cutting edge in 1800. For example, a crofter in 1800 was still using the lazy bed method of cultivation, but by 1890 he had the iron swing plough. This type of plough had been the latest item of equipment on an 1800 farm, whilst by 1890 the larger farmer had adopted the wheeled plough, with replaceable castings and bar point. The same can be seen with the livestock and the crops, even the management of the farm, as the crofter had by 1890 adopted liming and rotations to improve soil fertility.

The survival of the small farm and the croft was in many ways due to the prudence of the Manxmen and the ability to operate a dual economy. Fishing and mining were replaced by jobs in the tourist industry that dominated the island after 1890. With a low capital input the level of profit, often called the gross margin, was reasonable and sustainable, hence their survival. The upland crofts were the first to decline and did not last beyond the 1930s but it is only in recent years that the small farm has come under threat. However the role of a dual economy has started again with farmers running part of their income by working in the booming finance and building industries.



Figure 13: Harvesting corn with a sythe at Greeba.



Figure 14: Harvesting oats using a 'put-off' two horse reaper; the operator engaged in raking the corn off the knife, is just seen behind the horses; the two women have been tying bands to put around the crop to form a sheaf, c1890.

It is now left to a very small number of older Manx farmers to perpetuate the older methods. Whilst few of these traditions date beyond the turn of the 20th century, they do maintain the philosophy of life and belief that could be recognised by a farmer and crofter of 1800.

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