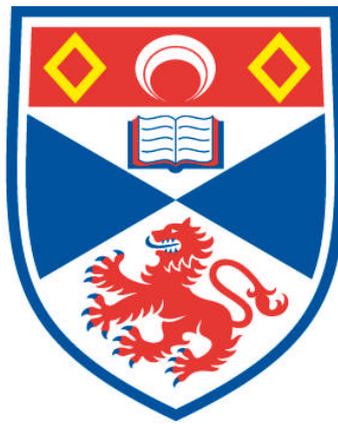


**ROOTS OF/ROUTES TO : PRACTICE AND PERFORMANCE
OF IDENTITY IN THE ISLE OF MAN**

Susan Lewis

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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ROOTS OF / ROUTES TO: PRACTICE AND PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY IN THE ISLE OF MAN



*When the summer day is over, and its busy cares have flown,
I sit beneath the starlight, With a weary heart alone,
Then rises like a vision, Sparkling bright in nature's glee,
My own dear Ellan Vannin,
With its green hills by the sea.*

Words by Eliza Craven Green.

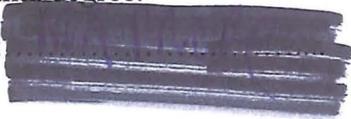
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For the degree of: Ph.D. (SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY)

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Thanks to Dave Roche, University Reprographics Unit, for his invaluable assistance with the illustrations.

Thank you also to the other (much better) photographer whose work lifts these pages.
We journeyed together for a while, and it was good.

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THE ISLE OF MAN



Figure 1 : Map of the Isle of Man showing the towns, large settlements and key features. Higher ground shown in white. Reproduced from *The Official Isle Of Man Handbook*, 1999.



Figure 2 . The Tynwald Ceremony, officials and guests of the Tynwald Court are seated on the Hill, while the audience observes from the grandstand and the Front Field. Photograph : Sue Lewis.

Abstract

This thesis takes as its ethnographic focus the Isle of Man, a British Crown Dependency. In the 1960s, the Manx government faced an economic crisis. The response was to open the Island to international banking, becoming an ‘offshore’ financial centre. The new industry sector has encouraged substantial immigration, to the extent that the Island-born are now in the minority. The Island now has economic success on one hand, but a new ‘identity’ crisis of cultural confidence on the other, raising the question ‘what is it (now), to be Manx?’ The Manx have always accepted incomers and are not, or ever have been, a clearly defined ethnic group. Rather ‘Manxness’ is an idea, a set of values, a way of relating to place and to each other. Defined thus, ‘Manx identity’ could be, and has been, shared with incomers. The current situation is, however, perceived as substantially different in its speed and volume, resulting in concerns that Manx culture and identity is disappearing under the weight of an alien cultural import.

Reaction is demonstrated in renewed interest in the Manx Gaelic language and other ‘traditional’ pursuits, with individuals selecting routes to identification with place that satisfy personal motivations. Included in this performance of culture are members of the ‘incomer’ group blamed for its demise, while many Island-born show little concern. Through subtle analysis of this complex context, I add to anthropological understanding of ‘identity’ and ‘way of life’ by juxtaposing personal and collective responses to this process of change, and investigating the importance of scales of difference. And, in a disciplinary context that has shifted attention from bounded to boundless ‘homes’, I ask how far anthropological constructions go in explicating how and why our informants still struggle to strike a meaningful balance between their *roots of* and *routes to* identity?

Acknowledgements

That this particular journey has reached its end is due to the efforts, support and love of many people. If, in the following words, I fail to mention any one of those people by name, be assured that I still value your contribution.

First and foremost, my thanks go to the people of the Isle of Man who welcomed me, helped me to learn and gave of their time. Particular thanks go to those people whose voices are heard within this text, but most of all to Verity, Fenella and Breesha, to Shirley, Jim and the girls, and more recently to Nicky and her family. *Dty charrey beayn.*

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To Nigel Rapport go my respect and thanks for his endless support over the past few years, without which I may well have lost my way. He offers freedom and opportunity. Intellectual lifeblood. I have no idea where the road ahead will lead, but I can set out – now – with confidence. *Really.*

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To my friends and colleagues (past and present) in St. Andrews, thank you. Not a paragraph each, I'm afraid, but full of gratitude nonetheless. You have listened

endlessly to my 'half empty' ramblings, and been patient. Special mention, though, to Andrew (my longest travelling companion), to Liza for sharing the laughter and the tears, to Estelle for those so-valuable conversations on 'all things anthropological' and to Suzanne for her smiling patience during this final stage. May your own futures bring all you desire. To Lisa and Donna, the department's guardians, thanks for keeping me grounded (and for the cups of coffee). And last of these, but by no means least, my love and thanks to Alex Greene: for her advice, support, for the opportunities she has presented to me but most of all, for her friendship.

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Preface

‘Manxness will never come back’

A Manx Nationalist, personal communication

‘Imagine an island with two mountains on it. A quantitative change, a rise, in the level of the ocean may convert this single island into two islands [...] The quantitative pattern was latent before the quantity had impact on it; and when the pattern changed, the change was sudden and discontinuous [...] There is a strong tendency in explanatory prose to invoke quantities of tension, energy, and whatnot to explain the genesis of pattern. I believe that all such explanations are inappropriate or wrong.’

Bateson 1979: 64

‘Despite the complete absence of any Manx people coming to the Island over the past seven millennia, we find ourselves today facing the miraculous fact that there are now thousands of Manx people living here. Any culture thrives on the nutrients that are fed into it, and the Isle of Man is no different. The unique combination of people that come in here [...] continues to produce a unique, though ever-changing mix of language, music, dance and attitudes. It’s called Manx culture.’

Guard n.d.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTIONS

Nagh insh dou cre va mee, agh insh dou cre ta mee.

Don't tell me what I was, but tell me what I am.

Chapter 1.1: Roots / Routes: Introducing a Journey

July 5th – Tynwald Day¹ – and the weather looked more than promising. It was still only 9.30 in the morning, and the sun was already warming the air. A few early arrivals were chatting and laughing as they walked up the road toward the centre of the village of St John’s, and as they crested the small rise the focus of the day’s forthcoming activities came into view. Framed by a backdrop of green hills, and the dense trees of the National Arboretum, the Tynwald Hill, site of the annual open-air sitting of the Manx parliament, stood adorned with a white canopy. The top of this circular, tiered and grassy mound also boasted a great chair, awaiting the Lieutenant Governor. Flagpoles lining the processional pathway to the facing church proudly flew the bright red Manx national flags with their three-legged emblem, and the Manannan’s rushes lay on the path. Behind, the temporary grandstand gleamed in the sunshine, and on the Front Field members of one of the traditional dance groups were preparing for their performances, the women in their distinctive jackets of bright red and the men in traditional grey-brown loaghtan wool. The scene was set for another Tynwald Day.

On Old Midsummer’s Day each year, the people of the Isle of Man gather – as it is said they have for over a thousand years – to hear the Island’s new laws read aloud in both English and the Island’s Gaelic language. This ‘national day’ is a day of pageantry. More importantly, however, it is a day for the meeting of friends, the exchanging of ideas, and of diverse interpretations and identifications. The long and unbroken history of this gathering is today conflated with the ‘political’ presence of the British Crown and the ‘economic’

¹ The word ‘Tynwald’ comes from the Norse; from *thing*, or assembly, and *völlr*, meaning place (Kinvig 1944[1975]: 72).

presence of international banks, but the ceremony continues to carry widely differing, symbolic significance for all those – Manx-born, *stayover*, *comeover*, Crown representative – who have a connection to the Island. In this Day, then, all the current contestations over Manx identity find expression.

Raising Questions

At the core of this thesis lies the question of ‘identity’. Stuart Hall opened his book on the subject by stating, correctly, that ‘there has been a veritable explosion in recent years around the concept of ‘identity’’ (1996: 1), adding that this explosion has been accompanied by an ‘anti-essentialist critique’ which resists new paradigmatic closures and offers, he suggests, a discursive approach to identity (or, identification) which sees it as always ‘in process’ (op.cit.: 2). I will suggest that this text – which takes as its own discursive focus the contemporary question of identity in the Isle of Man – intimately demonstrates Hall’s proposal.

At first glance the thesis appears to ask, as many a current resident of the Isle of Man might ask, a rather determinate question: ‘what is it, to be Manx?’ Over recent decades, in a rapidly shifting context, the Island’s people – Island-born or more recent incomers – have had just cause to debate the issue of the Island’s social and cultural identity. In-migration resulting from the development of a buoyant international finance industry – the arrival of international banks, insurance houses and ship management companies – has changed the demographic so that now the Island-born are in the minority. As a consequence and in coming face-to-face with the ‘Other’, they find themselves, reflexively, face-to-face with themselves.

Reactions are diverse. Collectively, the practice and performance of identity demonstrates both conscious and tacit responses to the changed and changing situation. The first ethnographically grounded part of the thesis (that is, Part Two: *Roots*) looks at various forms of collective performance and seeks to understand how these contribute to an ‘(always in) process’ of identity. Within these processes, Island residents must come to terms with a number of apparently contradictory ‘facts of the case’. First, where now immigration is being cited as the prime culprit in a case of identity ‘dilution’ or loss, it is also recognised that

the Island has always accepted ‘incomers’. Second, it must also be acknowledged that some ‘incomers’ are more active in the apparent ‘salvage’ of Manx traditional cultural activity than those who were born and bred to it. And last, but certainly not least, it must be accepted that those who ‘self-identify’ as ‘Manx’ may themselves be the product of recent arrivals to the Island. Each of these issues – and more – informs any conscious or unconscious responses to the debate on identity.

Individually, a scant few insist on an idiom of essentialism. The majority is pragmatic or appears unconcerned, whilst another relative minority seeks ways to keep ‘the Manx way of life’ at the forefront of social and cultural activity. And, whilst contributions to the identity debate might be performed and practiced collectively, each has his or her own tale to tell, grounded in life experiences. The subsequent part of the thesis (that is, Part Three – *Routes*), offers insights into these individual responses. Drawn from interviews and other one-to-one interactions, I reproduce personal narratives that work to ‘make sense’ for the tellers their own intimate responses to the discourse of Manx identity.

This is, then, a collective tale of social and cultural complexity. I aim within this text to maintain a sense of that complexity – to be faithful to the shifting, fluid context with which my informants are trying to establish their own individual relationships. That said, I do not offer apparently unmediated narratives.² Whilst I present here what I hope will be an enjoyable and colourful ethnographic portrait of an Island that I believe (briefly removing my professional hat) is one of the most beautiful and intriguing places in these British Isles, I also seek to contribute to a body of anthropological knowledge that itself aims toward greater understanding of the identifying relationship between the individual and the collective. To do so, I must make my own interpretations of the ethnographic context, which is my vehicle.

That said, I do see those interpretations as also contributing to local discourses on the subject of identity. Whilst some Island residents might read this text as over-emphasising the debate, there is no doubt that it does exist. It takes many forms and, as the descriptive presentations that follow will illustrate, some

² In any case, such a claim would be a falsely based one. The very act of selecting which parts of interviews to reproduce is itself an act of interpretive mediation.

of those forms may be ‘unconsciously’ practised. That is where the eye of the observing beholder holds temporary advantage: through intimate analysis of the minutiae of quotidian life, is revealed the endless creativity of humanity’s ‘sense-making’ processes. In the discussions of revived forms of gathering and performance, I propose that it is the identity debate which acts – albeit silently – as the catalyst. But I also here engage with the conscious forms of this debate – what might be termed a reflexive auto-ethnography. Whether in the actions of devoted nationalists or in the attempts by incomers to learn to belong, these conscious engagements also contribute to a process of ‘coming-to-terms’ with a complex social and cultural reality.

Understanding the Present

On the 6th April 1961 the Isle of Man government abolished surtax and reduced its standard rates of income tax (Solly 1994: 9). It then began to make advances to retirees from colonial administration to make their home in a financially advantageous environment not too far from the UK.³ This fiscal move was later supplemented with other regulatory measures, creating an infrastructure that was to prove an open invitation to the various organisations which now go to make up the international financial sector of the Island’s economy. Combined, these two economically focused moves have encouraged significant in-migration. From a population of 47,177 in 1961, the population has increased steadily to 76,315 in 2001.⁴ The 1991 census reported that for the first time the Manx-born were in the minority, a revelation that exacted a strong response from nationalist sympathisers and more generally from those concerned with the maintenance of the ‘Manx way of life’. This latter had been perceived to be under threat ever since the earlier in-migrations of retirees and, along with the pressure on land and housing and the concomitant increases in prices for both, was cause for comment. The Island’s changing social and cultural milieu became part of a growing discourse on what it meant to be ‘Manx.’

³ And without the restrictions relating to income and capital required by the States of Jersey and Guernsey. There is currently no restriction on incomers to the Island on buying property, although at the time of writing a Residency Bill is under consideration which may introduce changes.

⁴1961 census figures from Solly, page 7. 2001 census figures taken from Isle of Man Government Census Report.

The financial and business sector is now the biggest revenue generator for the Island, and the Island has benefited from the sector's success. In 2001, for the first time the Island's GNP per capita exceeded that of the UK. At the time of the fieldwork there was full employment, and a national insurance fund surplus. Those in receipt of state pension receive a substantial amount more than their counterparts in the UK, and salaries are on a par with levels in the southeast of England (though perhaps not as high as those in central London). And it is also true that economic success has resulted in an increase in amenities, such as a high-quality sports centre in Douglas, an improved airport, a new hospital, good restaurants, smart bars and high-quality shopping.

Some may wish that the finance industry had stayed away in the first place, but the majority now accept that as it is here and well established, and so much an integral part of the Island's economy that it has to stay. Traditional Island industries have declined beyond the point at which they could support the economy, and the remainder of the industrial and economic base is insufficiently diverse or cost-effective to be openly competitive. But the finance industry is a fickle industry, and with ever-improving global communication can afford not to be 'loyal' to its geographical base. The corporate chiefs have already accepted a tightening of the fiscal regulations, but threats by the European Union and its associated financial institutions to harmonise European tax levels have made them nervous. Any significant change which would adversely affect their profits would probably send them scuttling further overseas, leaving the Island bereft of economic support.

Consequently, the Manx administration must tread a very careful path between keeping the finance sector happy whilst ensuring that they do not exceed acceptable boundaries. Financial scandals in the early 1980s, the most notorious being that of the failure of the Savings and Investment Bank (SIB) in 1982, severely dented the Island's reputation. Although the Island has since taken great care to close operational or regulatory loopholes, such a loss of standing can have repercussions beyond the financial sector alone. It casts doubt on the integrity of all of the Island's people and could readily be set alongside false 'facts' such as the use of the birch and the intolerance of homosexuality as 'proof' of an irresponsible, conservative or reactionary society.

To demonstrate the Island's intention to the operate a responsible international financial sector, the Manx administration has recently fulfilled the requirements of the OECD.⁵ Although this action does not satisfy some of the critics within, who still see an industry riddled with corruption and complicity in third world debt and other asocial activities, the Island is no longer in danger of being included on a 'blacklist' of renegade jurisdictions. Further, in September 2001 the Island opened its unique 'International Business School', currently the only educational establishment in the world offering courses dedicated to international finance. This move, mirroring as it does previous creative and proactive moves to maximise the Island's potential (such as 'the running trade'⁶ and its establishment of this international financial sector) demonstrate a willingness – historically, as well as contemporaneously – of the Island and Islanders to look outward and forward rather than inward and backward.

Taking a further step back

The Isle of Man is situated mid-way between England and Ireland, in the centre of the Irish Sea. It is approximately 30 miles long, 10 miles wide, and covers an area of some 227 square miles. It has a landscape of amazing contrasts for an island of such relatively small size – low-lying, willow-edged fields in the north, a backbone of high moorland slopes, wooded river glens, rolling hills, and rugged cliffs at its southernmost tip. Four main towns all but mark the cardinal points; Douglas in the east serves as the modern capital, with Ramsey to the north. The ancient Norse capital of Peel guards the west coast, and its one-time successor Castletown, with its fine medieval castle, dominates the south. St John's, site of the National Day, lies at the heart of the Island, and other villages and hamlets pepper its valleys, a reminder of the Island's now diminished

⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The Island has been subject to the codes of the OECD since 1990. These codes require members to 'remove restrictions on specified lists of current invisible operations and capital movements' (<http://www.gov.im/relations>). In 1998 the OECD extended its concerns, focusing specifically on the 'elimination of harmful tax practices' (http://www.oecd.org/daf/fa/har_tax/harntax.htm). Concerned at the potential loss to global welfare funds if investors could continue to avoid their responsibilities by 'hiding' funds in offshore 'tax havens', they announced a further code of practice and threatened inclusion on a 'blacklist' for those jurisdictions that did not comply.

⁶ The 'running trade' was the local term given to what the British Crown called smuggling. The current threat posed to the Isle of Mann's economic base by the OECD, and the potential of EU tax harmonisation, bear a striking resemblance to these earlier moves to bring the Island into line.

farming industry. The fishing fleets, too, have all but disappeared, and tourism, which once provided healthy revenues, succumbed to the pressures of package holidays to sunnier climes in the 1950s. Faced with economic crisis, since the 1960s the Island's governments have created the fiscal conditions that have encouraged the development of the offshore finance industry. The population has grown rapidly, and today a third of the Island's current population of more than seventy thousand residents live in and around Douglas, the focus of that new and economically successful venture.⁷

Of Mann's⁸ earliest social history, tales are told of how Manannan, son of the Irish god Lír, made his home on the Island and gave it his name. He would hide the Island from potential invaders by bringing down a mist to obscure it from view, and ruled over the Manx until, in the fifth century, the Christian monks of St. Patrick arrived to convert the pagan Celts. Today, it is 'Manannan' who guides visitors around the many heritage sites, and thus through the remainder of the Island's story: of how Mann came under the suzerainty of the Norse kings in the latter part of the eighth century, and of how the great king Godred Crovan took the Island in 1079: of its great hero *Illiam Dhone*,⁹ who surrendered the Island to Cromwell's Parliamentary forces in 1651, in return for retention of the Island's 'laws and liberties' (Kniveton 1997: 26); of its period of prosperity when the millworkers of Lancashire came as tourists, and of the dedicated men and women who worked to save the Gaelic language and folklore for future generations.

The rule of Godred Crovan was a golden age in Manx history, as the Island became the centre of an empire of 'Mann and the Isles': the Island's current political and legal structures are largely based on the Norse systems of this time.¹⁰ The Crovan dynasty ruled until defeated by the Scots in 1266, and between 1290 and 1405 the Manx people suffered the consequences of the

⁷ Although work permits are required, there is currently no restriction on residency for those not subject to British immigration controls, and many of the finance sector workers have settled on the Island. Others, however, take up only temporary residence. For a comparative study of offshore finance centres, see Vered Amit-Talai's discussion on expatriacy in the Cayman Islands (1998).

⁸ When omitting 'Isle of' in the name, Mann is spelt with double 'n'.

⁹ Details of this Island hero are introduced later.

¹⁰ Although some have argued that the Tynwald gathering has its roots further back into Celtic political and social systems the history of the Tynwald Court is dated from this time. Tynwald celebrated its millennium in 1979.

ongoing battle between Scotland and the English Crown. Henry IV finally granted the Island to Sir John Stanley, for payment to each succeeding British monarch of 'two falcons on the days of their coronations'. The Stanley¹¹ family, and later the Dukes of Athol, ruled as Kings or Lords of Mann until the 1765 *Act of Revestment* returned the Island to the British Crown. This move, which perhaps signals the beginning of 'colonial rule', was a response to customs revenues lost to the British exchequer due to the success of the enterprising Manx 'running trade'.

Although much of its political autonomy was lost after 1765, this has been won back through careful negotiation over the last one hundred and fifty years.¹² Tynwald now has full responsibility for internal and taxation affairs, and the Island retains its own legal system. Since 1990, the Lieutenant Governor no longer presides over the Tynwald Court,¹³ but as a British Crown Dependency the UK government retains ultimate responsibility for the Island's foreign affairs and 'good government'. The Island is not part of the United Kingdom, and has no elected representation at Westminster. It also remains outside the European Union, but 'inside' the Community for trade and customs purposes.¹⁴ Its anomalous situation, being at the same time at the geographic heart of the British Isles whilst 'outside' the political and economic body, is perhaps the major contributory factor to the Island's¹⁵ social and cultural predicament and potential.

¹¹ The Stanley family, which from 1485 was granted the earldom of Derby, ruled until the Dukes of Athol took the Lordship of Mann in 1736, through the female line.

¹² In 1866, '[r]epeated demands by the Keys for further financial control and by the inhabitants of the Isle of Man for a popularly elected House of Keys eventually bore fruit' (Kermode 1979: 31). Kermode points out that 'home rule' initially was something of a myth, but greater control over internal affairs has gradually been achieved, and continues to be a stated objective of the Manx government.

¹³ Previously, the Lieutenant Governor presided over the Tynwald Court (the 'Court' is comprised of the lower house or 'House of Keys', the upper house or 'Legislative Council', and the President of Tynwald) and retained executive authority in his capacity as the Queen's representative. Since 1990, the Island has appointed the President from amongst its own number, and the Lieutenant Governor's duties have been reduced to more of a ceremonial role.

¹⁴ Under Protocol 3 of the 1972 European Act of Accession.

¹⁵ I discovered a subtle but significant change in my fieldnotes some three months into my stay: the island became the Island. There is a notion of centrality built into this mode of reference, supported by the terms 'the adjacent island' or 'across' used for the neighbouring islands (i.e. Ireland and Britain), and the rejection of 'mainland' as a reference to England/UK.

The Tynwald Ceremony

But let us return to St. John's. As the starting time for the Ceremony approaches, the grandstand starts to fill and the seated audience looks down on the green expanse of the Front Field with its gathering crowds. The ladies of the Manx Folk Dance Society weave in and out of a complex jig. Hundreds of people jostle for position along the retaining wall of the processional pathway, keen to gain a good view. Further back, others wander at leisure around the field, or in and out of the Homecomer's Tent, or play with children, or sit on the grass having an early snack, paying little attention to the 'goings on' near the grandstand. Perhaps they have seen it all before, or are here for the atmosphere, to meet friends, or for the 'family day out'?

A commentary begins. The military band takes over from the fiddles and whistles, and a clear Manx-accented voice begins a 'history' of Tynwald Day and its ceremony.¹⁶

'If you are here this morning because you've been coming to the Tynwald Ceremony each year for as long as you can remember, you'll have a pretty good idea, probably without being told, of what's going to happen, and of course, we can't rewrite the history books.'

'The fact that so many people feel the need to come to the Tynwald Ceremony each year is a measure of the importance people attach to it. In the days when travel was less easy than it is now people used to meet friends here that they didn't see from one Tynwald Day to the next. They maybe still do.'

'So, why is it so important to Manx people? Well, it's the annual open air sitting of the Isle of Man Parliament, the Tynwald Court, over one thousand years old and said to be the oldest parliamentary assembly in the world. The Vikings started it, as they did in many other places as well, but

¹⁶ The following extracts (given in italics, here and below) are taken from the commentary which accompanied the Tynwald Day ceremony on 9th July, 1999, and which I recorded.

Tynwald is the only one that survives in the form that it was established. Basically, what we are to see here today is what separates the Isle of Man from the United Kingdom.'

The commentator continues, sketching for his listeners the story of the British Crown's involvement, explaining the presence of a Lieutenant Governor, or links to other parliaments elsewhere.¹⁷ Then, with the precision demanded by the 'meticulous planning' of state ritual (Cannadine 1992[1983]: 134), at 10.38 a.m. the Lieutenant Governor arrives, alighting from his car to a fanfare. Dressed in a black uniform and a hat with impressive white plumes, he works his way along a line of hand-shaking. At 10.42 a.m. a flypast by four RAF Hawk jets entertains the assembled crowd, the UK National Anthem is played, the assembled military guard of British troops is inspected and a wreath is laid at the foot of the Island's War Memorial. The commentary then continues:

'The annual assembly was a place to proclaim the law and to punish those who broke it. Today, over 1,000 years later the legislative part of this still remains, and we shall be hearing all the new laws passed by Tynwald in the last twelve months summarised in Manx as well as English. The whole ceremony is now quite unique in the world.'

'For something as old as the Tynwald ceremony it's not surprising that all sorts of traditional customs have become associated with it. Like the Isle of Man and its people they're a mixture of Celtic and Norse, Christian and Pagan. One such Pagan tradition is the laying of the green rushes on the pathway leading to Tynwald Hill. In early times they would have been laid on Midsummer Eve, as a tribute to the great sea-god Manannan. One of the more obvious Christian traditions is that a church would always be built at the place of assembly, wherever that was.'

¹⁷ Iceland's parliament, the 'Althing', has similar roots to those of Tynwald, and there is evidence from remaining place-names of similar meeting-places elsewhere (for example, Dingwall, north of Inverness in Scotland, and Tingwall in the Orkney Islands).

Following an ecumenical service in the Chapel of St. John's, the Ceremony gets under way. All Acts of Tynwald must be promulgated on Tynwald Hill within eighteen months of enactment - pronounced for all to hear - or else they cease to have effect. The Island's two Deemsters¹⁸ summarise each law, one speaking in English, and the other in Manx Gaelic. Petitioners then present their 'Petitions for Redress of Grievance' at the foot of the Hill, the Manx National Anthem is sung (with perhaps more enthusiasm than that of the UK), the Bishop gives his blessing and the Ceremony comes to an end. The official attendees file off the tiered Hill and process again along the rush-strewn pathway. And as the members of the Court enter the church to participate in a sitting of Tynwald,¹⁹ the audience prepares to enjoy whatever entertainments the rest of the day has to offer.

A wealth of opportunities beckon. Behind the grandstand, the Fair Field is packed with stalls. The colours of the candy-striped awnings, the different aromas, the buzz of voices, all mingle with the sights and sounds of folk dancers whirling around to the sounds of traditional music. The police dog handlers prepare to give a display. There are exhibition tents to visit, homemade teas to consume, raffles to enter, an evening concert and ceilidh to anticipate – and all-day access to the public houses to exploit. And, above all, there is the opportunity for friends to catch up on the *skeet* - the gossip.

A Symbol that Separates?

The commentator asks us to ponder on why this day is so important to Manx people: 'what we see here today is what separates the Isle of Man from the United Kingdom.' But for a nationalist friend it demonstrates internal contradictions. Through the presence of the Crown's representatives, it makes a 'mockery of independent government,' but also acts symbolically as a 'public assertion of independence.' The Island is not politically 'independent', yet control over its internal affairs continues to increase. That said, the economically

¹⁸ There are two Deemsters, or law officers; one for the northern regions, one for the southern.

¹⁹ The Ceremony is concluded with an official sitting of the full Tynwald Court, but contentious issues are no longer debated, the occasion being limited to the 'captioning' of the Acts that have just been promulgated (Solly 1994: 247).

vital finance industry, with its global outlook, must be constantly courted if it is to remain on the Island.

For many people, economic success has been achieved at a cultural and social cost. An old lady had complained to me of the 'dilution' of the Manx and their way of life. The influx of new ideas, the influx of new people, had all contributed to a loss of 'Manxness'. This was a loss that seemed to blur not only the social and cultural boundaries between the Island and 'the adjacent island', but more importantly for her and others like her, boundaries within the Island itself. Concerns have been expressed in terms of loss of the local accent, of the importation of 'foreign' customs such as Hallowe'en, which has all but supplanted the Manx *Hop-tu-naa*, and in a lack of knowledge or interest from those who have moved to the Island of Manx history and culture.

In this 'dilution' there are elements of what Paine terms 'cultural compression' (Paine 1992: 190ff): a 'combining' of cultures, rather than a 'mixing'. This thesis will demonstrate that 'Manx culture' is not disappearing under the weight of an imported 'English' alternative, but rather is experiencing creative re-selection from a range of cultural resources that seeks to reassert the Island's cultural distinctiveness. It is a re-selection that has the possibility to work both ways, offering Manx-born and incomer alike access to a 'new' and shareable set of symbolic forms. Such a process, however, faces problems. The Island has always absorbed incomers, but there is an intensity of concern about the changes of these last few decades which has resulted not only in a 'cultural intensification' (Paine op.cit.:199) and concomitant increase in the 'performance' of 'traditional Manx' culture, but also in more extreme forms of culturally motivated protest.

'For Sale'

In June 1988, a 'For Sale' sign was erected on the Tynwald Hill. This was a tangible sign of popular discontent at the Manx government's handling of the social changes, and shifts in values, which were seen as a direct result of the Island's recent economic success.²⁰ For the previous two decades, the

²⁰ An earlier campaign of direct action in the early 1970s had been similarly motivated.

government had actively and successfully pursued its goal of creating a buoyant offshore finance centre. This had not only increased the Island's population, and resulted in seemingly uncontrolled development of new housing and other amenities, but the finance sector itself was apparently poorly regulated²¹ and open to potentially 'immoral' trading. Further, the new industry seemed to offer little employment opportunity to local Manx people. In the eyes of the protesters, the Manx government had abdicated its authority to the finance sector and to the new 'incomers'.

A campaign of direct action continued. Letters to the Manx national newspapers demonstrated wide support, if not for the actions, at least for the sentiments that drove them. In the decade since, the 'Quality of Life' Survey in 1989 (in which the government sought public opinion on social and cultural matters), subsequent moves to increase the teaching of the Manx language in schools, and growing financial support for cultural events and heritage, might seem to indicate a reactive shift in governmental priorities. Verbal opposition to government policies still continues, however, particularly in regard to planning, immigration controls, and the risk of further 'marginalisation' of the Manx-born population and of 'Manx culture'.

Letters about the Island's future and identity are testament to the public discourse that has been created, as is the growing local and external academic interest in a wide range of Island-based issues. Yet there are also 'unconscious' performances at work. Manx social customs such as the *oie'll verrey*²² and *eisteddfods*, which had never wholly ceased but had vastly reduced in number, have also undergone something of a renaissance in the last ten to fifteen years. If one asks why this has occurred, the response is one of uncertainty, and so they suggest that 'it's better than staying at home in front of the television.' Taking turns to step up on stage to offer a song, a poem or a tune played on anything from a fiddle to a saw, they are at once performers and audience. People are using these events to perform a sense of 'Manxness' to themselves.

²¹ Today, the Island's finance industry is closely regulated, and was praised for its audit systems in the recent Edwards Report, commissioned by the UK government to investigate all finance industry controls at home and in its adjacent Dependencies.

²² The *Oie'll Verrey*, or Mary's Eve, was a community gathering which would once have taken place on Christmas Eve. They now take place anytime from autumn to spring, in small chapels, where people gather to entertain one another with hymns, songs, music and poetry.

Incomers are also using these sites of cultural performance to get to know, or participate in, their newly chosen 'home'. Those that do are often introduced as newcomers, but they are encouraged to overcome their reticence and become part of the event. The perceived divide between Islander and incomer is thus shown as open to a level of boundary negotiation, broadly similar to the process of cultural resource exchange described by Ingold in his analysis of Skolt and Finn interaction (1976: 248ff). A new source of identification is available to those *stayovers* who believe their 'interests' may be satisfied by what the Island has to offer, and Island-born residents can partake of the opportunities offered by a buoyant economy, whilst retaining the concept of uniqueness that is publicly performed on Tynwald Day. The attempts to enact this exchange led to an 'espousal' of 'Skoltness' which was based in 'an external perspective' of Skolt culture as equivalent to the dominant Finnish culture (op.cit.: 249). Such externally sourced 're-evaluation' is, I would argue, at the heart of debates over how 'Manx culture' is contemporaneously represented – and is therefore also at the heart of current 'processes' of identity.

As with the Skolt case, then, despite this process of negotiation the current and prevailing image is still one of a Manx community of two parts. An inclusive society, a member of the elected House of Keys observed, will require 'two different strands [...] forming one picture, so that the traditional purists can be catered for, but also [...] the new Island residents who feel very supportive towards the local community' (personal communication). The statement refers directly to a public discourse that has abstracted the debate into one of two sets of 'interests'; 'the Manx' (those who are Island-born, or who have a familial connection with the Island), as opposed to the Finance Sector and its incomer employees. And, it obscures the reality that some of the 'purists' are themselves 'incomers' while some who are Island-born have no interest in saving 'traditional culture'.

The period of change that the Isle of Man has undergone in the last four decades is not unique in its history. It has been dramatic, and it has had a variety of consequences, but it remains the case that the Manx have always accepted incomers. 'The Manx' are not, and perhaps have never been, a clearly defined ethnic group, although they express unequivocally the Island's Celtic heritage. Rather 'Manxness' could be said to lie in an idea, a set of values, a way of

relating to place and to each other. Defined thus, 'Manx identity' is, and has always been, shared with incomers; that is, it is accessible to the 'diverse subjective motivations' suggested by Devereux (1978: 126). This, then, leads to the first of the contributory questions with which this thesis aims to deal: why the current heightened concern about 'Manx culture and identity', when the Island has always accepted incomers?

In responding to that question I take the opportunity to add to anthropological understanding of 'identity' via what Cohen would refer to as people's construction of nation 'through the medium of their own experience' (Cohen 2000a: 146). Devereux also proposes that social 'movements and processes' are not the results of the actions of identically motivated individuals, but rather that 'movements and processes' provide 'ego-syntonic outlets' (ibid.). Issues of identity – personal and collective – may thus be seen as both the fuel and fire in this dynamic relationship. And in this we come to the crux of what this thesis aims to address. In what does contemporary Manx identity inhere? What are the 'social movements and processes', and what the 'motivations', that act dynamically in this Manx context? How are these processes performed and represented (both in this specific context and, perhaps, more broadly)? And, in a disciplinary context that has shifted attention from bounded to boundless 'homes', how far do our anthropological constructions go in explicating how and why our informants still struggle to strike a meaningful balance between their *roots of* and *routes to* identity?

If this chapter was founded in a rather particular, but public, view of the tensions and contestations over identity in the Isle of Man, what follows in this thesis aims to paint a more intimate, and often private, portrait of issues of identity. To begin, however, the next chapter invites the reader to experience my own entry into the Manx milieu (and into the world of 'being an anthropologist'). I will leave the introductions to subsequent chapters until that first exploratory venture draws to a close. So, without further ado, we begin our journey.



Figure 3 : Looking along the south - western coast, toward the Calf of Man.

Photograph : Sally Crumplin.

Chapter 1.2: In a Place in Time: Methodology and the Sharing of Experience

The opening chapter was intended to give the reader a particularised view of the everyday complexity with which this thesis deals. Its focus was the Isle of Man's national day, an occasion that in time and space juxtaposes the explicitly and implicitly performed discourses on Manx identity that characterise contemporary Island life. In this second chapter, it is my intention to utilise my own research experience – from initial plans, via time in the field, to the final analysis – to provide a different view of that everyday complexity. In reliving my personal journey to, in and from the Isle of Man, I here begin interpretations of Island life that I hope will provide the necessary contextualisation for the discussions that will follow in the subsequent chapters.

My interpretation of the concept of identity as it relates to the Island has been developing from the moment I started to put this project together. Viewing the Island's websites, I came across a diverse range of ideas and approaches to Island life, along with web pages devoted to the revival of the Island's Gaelic language. The language revival became the initial focus of my planned study, and although that focus of the study would later widen, language revival remains a significant 'symbol' of Manx identity for many, as later chapters will demonstrate. And if interpretations made in the early stages have been amended by the fieldwork experience, they have also been enhanced by later reflection and return visits to the field. This chapter aims to show how I have come to draw the conclusions that will eventually bring this thesis to a close. This chapter is, in short, the story of how my interpretation of 'identity' in the Isle of Man took form.

In introducing the thesis in this way, I recognise that I am perhaps in danger of appearing to present an overly 'personalised' view. Introducing a

section on 'post-modernism', Rapport and Overing write that 'anthropology has often felt 'uncomfortable' as a 'discipline' of study, desirous of being 'non-specialist' in order to tackle the complexities of experience in socio-cultural milieux' (2000: 294). I went to the Island as a 'non-specialist' of that particular milieu, and what is presented herein is distilled from my interpretation of my informants' understandings of the Island's politics, its history, of its economic situation and of the relationships between the people who now inhabit the Island. The 'facts' that are brought to evidence in their stories may or may not stand up to academic scrutiny, but I would argue that, as anthropologists, we should pay attention to 'personal' over 'academic' knowledge: that is, I argue for the primacy of the subjective appreciation of the milieu over an 'objective' academic appreciation. Where academic knowledge is used in this thesis, it supports or enlightens the personal. Or, it is included as an 'objectification' of current cultural discourses.¹

With the above in mind, I aim also for this chapter to offer an introduction to my own thoughts on the anthropological endeavour, and its role in understanding the social and cultural setting of the British Isles. In regard to the latter, the kind of doctoral level anthropological research undertaken here is still a relatively rare phenomenon among graduates studying at UK universities. While studies of major institutions and in specialist areas such as health are increasing, 'area studies' still tend to be the domain of those more experienced researchers who have cut their anthropological teeth on 'proper' fieldwork, far from home. Further, the kind of study presented here might be considered anthropology 'at home' and indeed, my first 'on-the-spot' impressions may have confirmed that view. But I would argue for such study on several fronts. First, quoting Cohen, 'if anthropology cannot enlighten the complexities of its own national contexts, then it is impotent and trivial' (1982: 17). Secondly, the relative level of cultural heterogeneity and homogeneity in itself deserves investigation. The result of a nuanced study in the British Isles is unlikely, in my view, to offer anything less theoretically or ethnographically sound as a study

¹ I include in a later chapter, for example, a discussion on the timing of the production of a 'New History of the Isle of Man'.

undertaken by a doctoral candidate working in more ‘traditional’ ethnographic settings (cf. Rapport 2002a: 3ff).

As for the process of studying, interpreting and writing up one’s chosen ‘field’, however much we might debate the possibility of the interpretive frame extending before and beyond the study site, ‘doing fieldwork’ is still presented as the anthropologist’s ‘rite of passage’. It is the time at which one learns not only how to ‘be’ in a culture different from one’s own but also, apparently, about how to ‘be’ an anthropologist.² But it could be argued that for today’s fieldworker – bearing in mind that one is now able to communicate with informants after leaving the field site³ – one’s knowledge of the field is never concluded in the way it may have been when the fieldworker packed his final notebook into his luggage. Indeed, some of the data upon which chapters in this thesis are based do come from supplementary visits. Perhaps that difference – of concluded versus continuing experience of the field – has done as much to inform the way we now attempt to address our analyses than any theoretical engagement with our endeavour.

Virtual Meetings

My first ‘experience’ of the Isle of Man was a virtual experience. In searching out a focus for my doctoral studies I came across numerous World Wide Web pages dedicated to this relatively small island in the middle of the Irish Sea. Some of those pages were official Manx government sites: on the legislature, on the advantages of Island life (aimed at attracting yet more financial institutions and their workers to the Island and to the benefit of its economy), on tourism, and ones dedicated to the Island’s heritage, with virtual tours round castles and glimpses into the past and ‘the way they were’. Amongst the myriad of other offerings there were contributions from private individuals offering an insight into the actualities of contemporary Island life, and politically motivated sites detailing the aims and objectives of the Island’s Independence Party, *Mec Vannin*

² That is, if the period spent in the field is indeed considered the ‘liminal’ phase (van Gennep [1960], Turner [1967]). Alternatively, one might consider the entire research period the ‘liminal’ phase, guided throughout as the doctoral candidate is by the institution and the supervisor.

³ And in this particular case, with the relative proximity of the fieldwork site allowing frequent additional research visits.

(‘Sons of Mann’). And, most importantly at the time, there were numerous pages dedicated to attempts to ‘revive’ the Island’s Gaelic language.

Those pages led me to plan a project that would focus on this ‘myth-symbol’ (Smith, cited in Banks 1996: 130), and its use by a grass-roots movement that aimed to put language at the core of a fight to maintain a Manx identity.⁴ The fight was necessary, according to many, because of the recent dilution of the ‘Manx way of life’. The last few decades of the twentieth century has seen a massive influx of mainly English workers needed to service the Island’s recently formed offshore finance industry. The fiscal conditions necessary to this lucrative economic sector had been established after ‘regional self-government’ had been fully secured in 1958 (Belchem 2000a: 9) and tax differentials between the Island and the ‘adjacent island’ (that is, the UK) had been re-established. The Manx government’s plans to attract banks and financial institutions have been extremely successful but the consequent demographic changes, as the 1991 census proved,⁵ have gradually pushed the Manx-born into the minority.

The web pages hinted at the antagonistic feelings that had arisen amongst sections of the population at this demographic change and the accompanying social and cultural effects. Amongst the mass of material on offer, Stephen Miller’s article *Mending Up the Rags: The Return of Manx Gaelic to the Isle of Man* (1993) was reproduced in full, and its tone seemed as informative as its content. Of the economic changes it stated that ‘not all now share in the harvest’ of offshore deposits, as finance sector jobs were not open to the untrained, unprepared Island-born residents. House prices were ‘out of the reach of young people’ and farmland prices out of the reach of anyone but developers, because the economic laws of supply and demand pushed house and land prices higher and higher. For Jamys Kermodé, member of *Mec Vannin* and author of his own web site, the Manx government had ‘embarked upon a policy of systematic

⁴ According to Banks, Anthony D. Smith asserts that ‘only a ‘myth-symbol’ complex is durable enough to sustain an ethnies through millennia until it emerges into the modern world as a nation’ (ibid.). The history and symbolic import of the Manx Gaelic language are most often narrated together, and the language is seen by its diverse supporters as vital to the Manx nation’s identity, and its survival in the contemporary world.

⁵ See Appendix.

marginalisation of the Manx people by seeking to import as many new residents as possible for tax evasion purposes'.⁶

Miller went on to bemoan the lack of information on contemporary Island life: 'more is known of the health of herrings in the Irish Sea [...] than the very schoolchildren from the Island's sink estates who are learning Manx [...] David Glyn Nixon's *Dissent in a Celtic Community: Class and Ethnicity in the Isle of Man*⁷ stands as the only attempt to date to provide an anthropological perspective [...] on contemporary Island life.' To a budding anthropologist the invitation was too tempting to ignore. Despite the peculiar demands which a study in this type of environment would exact (a mix of urban, semi-urban, rural, in which the focus would have to be on interest groups and individuals rather than on the more traditional 'village' study), what was being presented was the possibility of a project which could contribute both to the complex array of theoretical approaches to the concept of identity and to the growing and important body of ethnographic material on the British Isles.

Comparative material relating to language-focused cultural identities was considerable. McDonald's research on the Breton language (1989), Emmett's work in northern Wales (1982a, 1982b), Heiburg's analysis of Basque nationalism (1980, 1989) and Handler's on cultural politics in Quebec (1988) were among those which immediately sprang to mind. Indeed, Quebec's 'equation' of 'One Nation, One Language' (Handler, op.cit.: 159) bore a striking similarity to the motto of Mann's Manx Language Society. '*Gyn Çhengey, Gyn Çheer*' roughly translates as 'No Language, No Country', and gave yet more support to a growing impression, gained through the wealth of language learning and information pages, that language was *the* symbolic focus.

A research project took shape around these initial findings. I would investigate the role of language revival in contemporary Manx cultural politics, asking what function this seemingly 'grass-roots' movement had in the shaping of identities. What relationship did the 'incomers' have to this movement? Did all Manx-born residents have a positive attitude toward support for the Manx Gaelic language? How did language work to establish, maintain or otherwise

⁶ <http://homepages.enterprise.net/mkermode/polcul/mv.html>

⁷ An unpublished MA dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1983.

symbolise Manxness? And how did individual life stories, and their relationship to the Manx Gaelic language and Manx culture, inform *their* notions of *their* identity?

Preparation

As will become clear, when I eventually experienced Island life, the language issue was quickly shown to be but one route to the expression of 'Manxness'. But despite the fact that relatively few people actually take up language learning, or see it as a key symbol in the expression of a sense of contemporary Manx identity, its importance should not be underestimated. It has provided a focus for shareable action for otherwise potentially contesting groups: the Island-born who wish to retain the 'Manx way of life'; the incomers who bring an 'alien' (and often dominating) culture with them but wish to have a share in their new home's culture; the banks who wish to operate undisturbed and therefore recognise the economic value of supporting local issues; and finally, the Manx government who need to keep all parties content.

The language revival initiative has not been government led. During the pre-fieldwork year I received a copy of a report presented to the Manx government which dealt with the reintroduction of Manx Gaelic teaching into Island schools. The report had been commissioned by the government in response to a rather surprising result in a 'Quality of Life' survey undertaken in 1989: a large proportion of the population wished to have the language available to children, and some of the higher percentages in favour came from incomer dominated areas. This fact, perhaps combined with demands from and direct action taken by Island-born residents for the government to combat the social and cultural problems explicitly linked to the economic in-migration, prompted the Manx administration to pass the necessary legislation. In 1993 teaching of the language was introduced, on a voluntary basis, at junior level. In 1997 this was extended to secondary education level, and in 2001, the first Manx-medium primary unit was opened.

Preliminary research also appeared to demonstrate that there were key individuals and events which had worked to keep the language and, more generally, 'Manx culture' (in terms of dance, music and drama) alive during the

twentieth century. Mona Douglas (1898 – 1987), a protégé of Sophia Morrison who had been one of the founders of *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh*, wrote inspiring literature, taught dance, spoke Manx Gaelic and organised children and young people into culturally-focused groups throughout her life. Her Celtic gatherings, which flamed briefly in the 1920s were rekindled in 1978 with the establishment of *Yn Chruinnaght*: at the same time as the first ‘underground’ movement⁸ was using arson as a means of protest against the actions of the Manx government. Doug Fargher, among others, learned his Manx from the few remaining native speakers, and acted as a figurehead for those keen to learn during the 1950s and early 1960s. Indeed, it was suggested to me (personal communication) that during Fargher’s absences from the Island for periods in the 1950s and 1960s, the language movement lost impetus.

The question arising, therefore, was what was happening on the Island today a revival movement, or simply another peak in a cycle of highs and lows for the language and its use as a symbol of Manx identity? I would go to the Island and work with various groups and individuals who had a specific interest in reviving or simply learning Manx Gaelic, in order to understand how the language was being used symbolically by a grass-roots level movement which sought to stay in touch with a fast-disappearing ‘Manx way of life’. This I would put in the context of other such language-based movements, and with those earlier revivals on the Island that had seen the birth of *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh*.

Journey

Journeying to one’s fieldwork site is a peculiar experience. Leaving behind the security of familiar surroundings, the neophyte anthropologist steps out into what feels like an experiential void. Everything is open to chance, for no amount of proposal writing and planning can anticipate whom one will encounter, what one will see, or how one will feel. And, at that point of leaving for the field, any ‘formal’ training one has received suddenly seems wholly inadequate for what the imagination is dreaming up. This is where the project becomes personal, embodied. Watson writes that ‘there is still a powerful lobby within the

⁸ The organisation, known as *Fo Halloo* (meaning, literally, ‘under ground’), also produced a newsletter. Its membership remains a closely guarded secret.

profession that argues [...] that one cannot be an anthropologist without having undergone that *rite de passage* which is constituted by fieldwork' (1999: 2). It certainly feels that way, but if fieldwork is the 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1967) or liminal phase, then should there not be a guiding presence? There was. I had my supervisor's words ringing in my ears: 'record as much as you can, and be what they want you to be.'

But the weather that morning of my own leaving did little to alleviate my immediate fears and apprehensions. Thick fog accompanied much of the journey to the ferry port, and I could not avoid recalling the Island legend I had read; that the god Manannan brings down a fog to hide the Island from view when strangers approach. Was this to be my welcome?

I was relieved to watch the fog lift as the boat neared the Island, and the welcome I received from the staff at the Centre for Manx Studies was comfortingly warm. A research centre linked to the University of Liverpool, the Centre was to be my home for the first few weeks and a haven from the rigours of fieldwork for the coming months. Not the kind of haven so often mentioned in monographs, where the anthropologist seeks out those who speak his or her language or share knowledge of 'home', but a haven familiar in its academic atmosphere. Here, I would find much of the research literature I needed, but more importantly, the opportunity to talk over my experiences and developing ideas with Manx-born researchers who helpfully applied their scholarly skills to subjects often close to their cultural hearts.

Not that they interfered with or attempted to influence the process of my fieldwork. There was the occasional mention of a social event that I might wish to attend, or text to read, but this was no core from which to 'snowball'.⁹ I had made one contact prior to arriving: I had arranged to attend a Manx Gaelic Beginners' Language course. That would be the start of my 'participant observation'. I would also need to work to support myself, and would make that particular necessity into another research opportunity. There would be library-

⁹ Although one or two of the staff and students at the Centre do appear in this thesis, they do so in relation to other, unconnected activities. I felt the need to keep this domain separate from my main study – a place in which I could reflect upon my findings, and check out conclusions and questions with the people there. To have confused the two would have impacted on my desire to keep separate the 'personal' and the 'academic' (see opening comments above).

based research to supplement and support my other findings, questionnaires if and when they seemed appropriate, and interviews with individuals.

My particular problem here was the size of my study group. The population of the Island at this time was estimated at 72,000. I could not base myself in a small town or village and focus my efforts there, because the demands of my own employment each day forced me into the capital, as did theirs.¹⁰ The interest groups that I aimed to work with – language learners and speakers, and later, musicians, dancers, friends and colleagues – were all working people too, with homes dotted around the Island, who came together in the evenings and weekends to pursue their goals. I would have to adapt my research methods and opportunities to fit their patterns, and use that experience to understand the difficulties of trying to keep something of the past alive whilst living a modern, mobile life. As will be seen in later chapters, this ‘de-centring’ of community life and its effects on the ‘way of life’ are not lost on those who work to maintain a sense of Manxness for themselves and others. Consequently, this text should be read as one which is defined as a ‘field of relations’ rather than as a locality (Hastrup and Olwig 1997: 8).

Learning to Belong

How does one begin this process of fieldwork? This society at first glance appeared familiar: the language of everyday communication was my own; the high street shops are the same as at home; the currency is ostensibly the same (but issued by the Island’s banks); common courtesies and modes of address appeared all too familiar. No need here, then, to learn to converse in a foreign tongue, to learn the communicative competencies that inform the anthropologist of so much? No ‘culture shock’ to bring the differences starkly into focus.

Far from it, as I was soon to learn, for the subtleties of communication – the nuances of humour, the knowledges brought to bear in any social situation – are here as telling as in any ‘Other’ situation.

¹⁰ In order to fund my research I had to take full-time employment. Given my skills (as an ex-accountant), the easiest and best options were in Douglas, within the Finance Sector. Similarly, most employment opportunities for residents are to be found in the larger centres. Consequently, most villages are ‘dormitories’.

Switching on the Senses

My first step was to orientate myself, to visit the main museums and tourist sites, and to drink in some of the Island's beauty. Not, then, a strictly socially interactional experience, but a method of personal contextualisation for forthcoming experiences. You might ask how this helped: after all, I was seeing through my own eyes, making interpretations through my experiences alone. Is the problem of subjectivity not raising its ugly head? But you can tell a lot from how people express and represent themselves, as many a volume on museum display has shown. And you can look. Watch. Listen. A little like Baudelaire's flaneur walking the streets of Paris unnoticed, this was a time of wandering unknown, unhindered.

They say that this small Island holds in miniature every type of landscape to be found throughout the British Isles. There is no doubt, it *is* beautiful. Nowhere are you far from the sea, which on a fine day acts as a beautiful backdrop to the untamed hills, wooded glens and picturesque villages. In late spring, the hedges are filled with fuchsia, and the aroma of wild garlic fills the air. In summer everywhere is green (the reward for the many wet days in winter), and the Island's residents take full advantage of the wonderful beaches and dramatic coastal walks. And in autumn and winter, when the tourists have gone, the smell of peat smoke in Peel drags you back into a time-warp of bygone days.

The Island is also, somehow, mystical. Many may say it tongue-in-cheek, but the very fact that you are told, unequivocally, to greet the fairies as you cross the Fairy Bridge – *fastyr mie, mooinjer veggey*¹¹ – makes you immediately aware of different possibilities for the world, or worlds, to those left behind. Tales, now mostly confined to books but still told to children, of *bugganes*, *glashtins* and *phynnodderees*, and of the *moddey dhoo*, or black dog, that haunts Peel castle; Neolithic tombs, Norse farmsteads and ship burials; an ancient Celtic god, Manannan, and those rushes strewn on the pathway on Tynwald Day in his honour; all these serve to create the impression of an ancient land still partly,

¹¹ Which translates as 'good afternoon/day, little people'. There are tales of misfortune befalling motorists who fail to greet the fairies; for example, punctured tyres within yards of crossing over the bridge. The standard greeting is to say good morning or good afternoon, as appropriate, and preferably in Manx Gaelic. I have heard non-Manx speakers repeat the phrase in the Gaelic, demonstrating their familiarity with the custom.

pragmatically, in touch with its pre-Christian roots. And although many of the customs and traditions are long-forgotten, there are some which are still the focus of attention when lines of cultural difference are to be drawn or affirmed.

Bilingual signs (*Failte dhys Purt-ny-H'Inshey* – welcome – as one enters Peel), the *triskele* painted on the sides of houses or tattooed on to people's arms, the Manx national flags flying from poles erected in gardens, the pride demonstrated on Tynwald Day: these things too are outward, explicit expressions of people's pride in their Island identity. But this is not a country that looks only to its past. Throughout its history it has found enterprising ways to make economic ends meet, and the introduction of the finance industry in the late twentieth century is another such venture. It has wrought its changes. New or refurbished buildings housing banks and insurance companies line the streets of Douglas, often shoulder-to-shoulder with fading guesthouses, the remnants of what was once a thriving tourist industry. Well-known retail outlets from the UK are moving in or increasing their local profiles. Shiny new cars (very few old ones) buzz around the streets, and estate agents' windows and developers' boards declare how expensive their beautiful new properties are.

In many ways, then, what one sees and hears in this Island varies little from what one might see in any thriving town in England. But the point of fieldwork, and the length of time one takes over it, is to achieve something close to 'total immersion'. I was there only a year, but the 'heightened intensity' (Watson 1999: 2) of the observing, listening, participating and reflecting that is the backbone of the process perhaps concertinas the learning of several years into that one special period of fieldwork. There is a saying in the Island that if you come, and stay for five years, you will never leave. Whether it is because people become so used to a slower pace of life, or like the relative security, or the scenery, or the reduced taxes, is difficult to say, but there is an element of temporally *minimum* qualification for belonging in the maxim. More important a qualification is a willingness to acknowledge the Island's unique qualities: in other words, to learn and to immerse oneself. I have to admit, when the time came, the leaving was hard.

Opening my Eyes (and Getting Stuck In)

But I am here concerned with how I acquired the ‘social knowledge’ (Hastrup and Hervik 1994) which forms the basis of my interpretations. Orientation is important: learning one’s way around, becoming familiar with the places that people talk about, or where they travel from to participate in social events, is important in analysing what one sees and hears. But social anthropology is about people. The first step to meeting people was as pre-planned as the fieldwork preparation might have suggested: attendance at the beginners’ Manx Gaelic class. The day after my arrival I drove half way across the Island to its national ‘heart’ – St John’s, site of the Tynwald Hill and of that Ceremony which formed the focus of the introductory chapter. Close to the Hill stands *Thie ny Gaelgey*, or ‘House of the Manx Gaelic’, a language resource centre funded by *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh*.¹² With a dozen or so others, and under the tutelage of a fluent speaker of the Manx, I sat for two hours grappling with basic words and phrases in the Island’s ancient language.

There were people of all ages around me: a young girl no more than thirteen or fourteen years of age unable to fit the language into her normal school curriculum, young mothers trying to learn a little so they could understand what their own children were being taught in school, and older folk who had decided it was about time they knew a bit about their own language. And sitting beside me was the woman who was to become my main Island guide: Doona.

Doona’s knowledge was to be instrumental to my fieldwork. English-born, she was herself a *stayover*, but one who had taken the Island to her heart. Volunteer on archaeological digs around the Island, film ‘extra’ and music festival steward, fundraiser for cultural events and amateur historian, she had walked the length and breadth of the Island during her many years of residence. She had married a Manxman, and had spent the majority of her time in Peel, known as the ‘most Manx’ of the Island’s towns. A well-known member of the community, she was also what Russell Bernard has termed a ‘deviant’ member of Manx society (1988: 178). Although present and active at various social events, especially those concerned with maintaining a sense of ‘Manxness’, she

¹² Manx Language Society. This particular centre serves the south of the Island. Another, similar centre at St Jude’s serves the northern area.

was not an acknowledged member of any particular group. Her desire to adopt this country, combined with her marginality, gave her an insight which was to be invaluable to my research efforts.

It was Doona who would provide me with my initial ‘historical’ orientation by showing me some of the ancient sites: *Cashtal yn Ayr*,¹³ a Neolithic burial chamber; the ruins of a Norse farmstead known as the *Braaid*; the *Meayl* stone circle on a windswept hilltop in the south; and the misnamed *King Orry’s Grave*, another Neolithic chamber falsely linked to the legendary Norse king who was said to have introduced the form of government still extant in contemporary Mann. And it was she who pointed me in the direction of the weekly music sessions. It was at these sessions that I began to see the Manx Gaelic language in use, but also where I began to realise that there were many ways for individuals to express their ‘Manxness’, and that the research would need to deal with the diversity of these expressions. That first Saturday night, and for many other Saturdays, I watched while people laughed and joked and put the world to rights. The musicians would play, and sometimes there would be silence as someone played solo. A Manx choir would come in after practice, and would offer a song or two. There were debates. Which way should the legs face on the Manx emblem? Should there be controls on population numbers? Why did the EU think it could dictate who is Manx and who is not?¹⁴ And there would be the favourite pastime of baiting each other into heated, but friendly, discussion about politics.

It was among this group that I identified some of those who would be ‘key’ informants. These were people I would come to observe in many different social contexts, and whom I would later approach for interviews. Some I had already contacted for information before arriving, such as the government-employed Manx Language Officer and a member of the nationalist party. Others would soon become fellow choir members or simply friends to spend an evening

¹³ ‘Castle of the Heights’

¹⁴ EU regulations state that anyone of Manx birth who has four Manx-born grandparents is Manx, and is therefore excluded from the opportunities offered by freedom of movement in terms of employment etc. (i.e. they are not EU citizens). However, this also means that, under these regulations, anyone who does not have four Manx-born grandparents is **not** Manx.

with, but who would give of their time and knowledge over the coming months – whilst always reserving the right to have a laugh at my rather odd enterprise.

While musicians, nationalists or ‘chatters’ tended to sit at their informally designated tables, there was movement between these groups. Those who had interests in more than one ‘camp’ would, some weeks, choose a different table at which to spend the evening. Others would move during the evening, attracted by the chance to talk to an old friend or to join a conversation of particular personal interest. It was a microcosm of what I was to witness over the months: people wishing in some way to express their desire to stay in touch with what it was to be ‘Manx’, but choosing ways which satisfied their own interests. Some would have an almost casual interest, attending events and coming along to these evenings to meet with friends, while others actively and determinedly strove to keep ‘Manx’ issues at the forefront of cultural politics.

Also telling was the way they dealt with newcomers, with strangers. A visiting student from Israel, known to several people in the group for his web-based interest in the Manx Gaelic language and Island music, was welcomed. A researcher into traditional music, who came along unannounced and showed her ignorance of the music being played, was given short shrift. And I, who at the start sat watching and listening without offering opinion, was told many months later this approach had been a major contributory factor in their happy acceptance of me.

Over the months I was to hear stories, in the pub and elsewhere, that perhaps went some way to explaining this caution around strangers. Some had been treated by the ‘New Residents’ of the Island, attracted here by the Manx government and by the favourable taxes, with the contempt thought reserved for the colonial subjects of far-flung lands. And all were aware that the demographic changes to their Island over the past few decades had had an effect, most often expressed as detrimental, to the social and cultural fabric of the Island.

It was that awareness that struck me as perhaps the most important feature of Manx life, especially for these self-appointed cultural ‘guardians’. They had made themselves somehow ‘marginal’ to the general flow – modernisation, globalisation – of Island life. By insisting on the maintenance of their native tongue, by dancing and playing music in the traditional way, by lobbying for government attention to the plight of an ever-diluting way of life,

they had become observers of their own culture. They had made themselves into auto-anthropologists, and were attempting to draw the boundaries against the alien culture that was being brought in – whether that be English, Anglo-American or ‘global’ culture – whilst at the same time struggling to define and make relevant what it was / is / will be ‘Manx’. By watching, listening and participating over the months of fieldwork, I hoped to understand something of how this process of ‘identity’ worked, for the Island, for these groups, and for individuals.

Following my Nose (or the Carrot?)

Realising that the research was to take a slightly different tack to that originally anticipated did not change my intended approach. I was concerned with identity, taking as a starting point the kind of discussion Cohen undertakes on the relationship of personal identity to national identity (Cohen 2000). I wanted to discover why it was, at this particular time in the Island’s history, the fundamental question of ‘Who are the Manx?’ had taken on such significance (cf. McCrone 2001), how these questions were affecting the actions of individuals and groups and how, in a context of major in-migration and social and cultural change a community can hang on to, or reformulate, its concept of its unique self. The key, therefore, was to understand the relationship – in this time and place – between the individual and society. The method of research, therefore, would necessarily be ‘informant- or person-centred’ (Wolcott 1999: 156).

Given the size of the Island’s population and the way that potential informants were dispersed around the Island, combined with the particular lines of intended enquiry, the most effective way to gather the data I needed was to seek out key individuals whose stories would provide an insight into Manx culture as it is currently lived and experienced – and from a number of diverse perspectives. Indeed, as Wolcott goes on to explain, ‘under any circumstance where it is a viable alternative to a standard ethnography, a person-centred approach should [...] perhaps be given priority if everything points to it as a way to achieve one’s intended purpose [and] serendipity plays a role’ (op.cit.: 166)

Meeting Doona was, to an extent, serendipitous, but as researchers we make a choice as to whether or not we follow up on such meetings. Recognising

a key informant is a vital part of the research process, as is recognising the potential of the direction (whether toward another person or to an event) in which that key informant next points you. I could give the methodology a name – snowballing – but would rather root it in informed and reflective common sense. And for those same reasons it seemed necessary first to understand, before talking at length with any of these informants, the diverse contexts in which they interacted with others. I therefore spent the initial period of fieldwork attending a range of social events, some of which they attended (and some from which they were absent – sometimes understandably, sometimes notably).

The first Part of the thesis will draw upon these contexts, to give an overview of the ‘roots’ people were consciously or unconsciously tapping when performing their culture. It will also provide a backdrop for the personal narrations which follow in the subsequent Part.

It was Doona who had pointed me toward the sessions, and it was she who also informed me about the various *eisteddfods* and *oie’ll verrey* that took place around the Island during the winter months. One dark and stormy night we ventured down an unlit country road to find a tiny, whitewashed chapel at its end. We had come to witness an *oie’ll verrey* (St. Mary’s Eve) – an evening of mutual entertainment which in the past had been the Islanders’ way of passing Christmas Eve, but which had now become the name for such gatherings in Methodist chapels at any time of the year. That first experience was a feast for the researcher’s antennae – the role of the master of ceremonies, the way the members of the audience stepped up to entertain, the satirical poems which had people laughing until they cried, the ‘tea’ in the interval which was taken while people remained seated (there was no chance to move anyway), the ‘incomers’ who were giving it a go.

I would repeat the experience several times, at other *oie’ll verreys* and at their associated gatherings, termed *eisteddfods*. The *eisteddfods* differ in that they are competitive and lack the religious element of the *oie’ll verrey*, and are – in general – more raucous affairs. Having had that first accompanied experience, the others I attended ‘alone’, enabling me to talk to fellow audience members, asking brief but direct questions about the events. I also learned to participate (well, partly), singing along when I could, laughing at the jokes, and joining one couple in a quiz in which we were runners-up, but declining the husband’s

invitation to compete in the ‘hymn-raising’ (which requires one to sing solo and unaccompanied). At events such as these, joining people who on dark nights journeyed to remote halls but who could not explain why the popularity of these evenings had increased in recent years, I saw another form of expression of ‘identity’.

But attending events was not enough. Learning to be part of the community involved learning to participate, a fact which became an increasingly apparent as time went on. I was already participating in the workaday world of the office, and making of it, fieldwork. I had begun the Manx classes, and now, armed with the little knowledge of the language I had acquired, I joined a Manx Gaelic choir. There are two Manx choirs on the Island. The choir which often came to the session in the pub after practice had no need of new singers with rather ropey Manx, so I joined the other – an all-female choir based in the Island’s north. And the emphasis here was on fun. These women were not making any determined, conscious effort to keep alive ‘things Manx’. Rather, they *were* Manx – at least, some of their number expressed no doubt about this – and most had been introduced to the language and to Manx music at some time in their lives, and had found enjoyment in singing together. They would teach me the importance of trust and sharing, and the leader of the choir, Cara, would later teach me – unwittingly – not to make assumptions about a person’s ‘identity’.

Together we provided the entertainment at Manx *tays* – another form of gathering where a homemade tea is served and the audience is entertained, usually for charity – and we competed at *Yn Chruninnaght*, the annual inter-Celtic festival on the Island. In this way, standing there in front of the audience and desperately trying to stay in key (the choir is not called *Cliogaree Twooie*, or ‘croakers of the north’ for nothing!) I gained a little of what many a Manx-born has experienced. I had initially been amazed at the willingness of so many people to stand in front of an audience and sing or play an instrument, but I soon learned that this is something they are encouraged to do from an early age. Later, in the spring at the annual music and drama festival – the ‘Guild’ – I watched as children as young as five were gently nudged on to the stage and encouraged through a couple of verses of a song. This was how they learned to ‘perform to themselves and for themselves’.

I made another participatory breakthrough in the latter part of my fieldwork. It had become increasingly clear that this willingness to perform was a key to being 'in' but also 'of' whichever group one happened to be with at the time. Whether talking about politics, singing or playing music, it was not enough always to be an observer. Accomplished musicians had told me about their early experiences of 'playing live' and joining in. It was something people went through, their own *rite of passage*. And so I learned to play the *bodhrun*, the Irish drum. I had tried the whistle – painful – and so I asked one of the best *bodhrun* players in the Island to give me lessons. When I had mastered one or two tunes I managed to join in at a session, much to the apparent delight of my now *fellow* musicians. Was it my imagination, or did their attitude change toward me after that? Or did mine toward them?

These selected experiences aside, much of the fieldwork was done, as Peace describes, by 'hanging around' (2001: 9). Sitting with Jamys outside a pub in Peel as the sun went down behind the headland, I would listen while he gave his version of the political situation. Chatting with friends at the sessions, we would talk over everyday issues, because the conversation did not always revolve around 'cultural' matters. In the pub after Manx Gaelic lessons, I would watch and listen as my colleagues bantered with friends in the bar. Conversations between tourists were overheard as I sat in my favourite spot at Cregneash (the heritage village, later to be used as the setting for the film *Waking Ned*), overlooking the Calf of Man off the Island's southernmost tip. Viewing exhibitions of children's artwork, I saw the Island's history through their eyes, and reading letters to the newspaper I 'heard' the views of those who I could not get to meet.

Part 2, *Roots*, looks in more detail at these different social gatherings, observations, and other similar events and happenstances I experienced throughout my year on the Island. In the descriptions of these events, I provide contexts within which to place the actors who appear in Part 3 of the text. But more importantly, the first section and the discussions arising from it will illustrate the importance of 'roots' in people's perceptions of who they are and what their identity is. Forming an internally discursive contrast with the thesis's third Part on 'routes' to (new) identities, the aim is to understand how people are talking about their personal relationships with the changing context that is Manx

society. As Billig states, ‘an identity is not a thing; it is a short-hand description for ways of talking about self and community’ (1995: 60). While Billig’s statement utilises potentially problematic terms – identity, self, community, all of which will be addressed in the preamble to Part Two – it does make clear the importance of focusing on what people talk about and how they mundanely ‘perform’ their culture. Part 2, then, focuses on a ‘way of doing things’ (Cohen 1982: 5), while the third will take its lead from what the people of the Isle of Man say about ‘identity’.

Using my Ears

Given the relatively small number of informants whose voices figure directly in this study, the question of whether the data collected would be ‘representative’ was a concern, despite the fact that Bernard affirms that to seek out, observe and work with cultural experts is an accepted methodology (1988: 171). However, I do believe that the sensitive researcher will not only take advantage of any serendipitous opportunities that present themselves, but will also take care to pick out those potential informants who demonstrate high levels of cultural competence. The third section of the thesis largely focuses on the personal stories of such informants. Not the sort of life histories which provide a chronology of events through which to understand the culture, but rather stories that turn on those events in a life – significant, remembered events around which flows can later be made manageably ‘concrete’ – which have caused people to reflect upon their culture.

Chapter 3.1 gives voice to three young men who at interview described their reasons for becoming active in cultural politics. A chapter that uses – by the informant as much as by the anthropologist – personal history to explain how such a ‘turning point’ made each one reflect upon their personal relationship to a shifting context. As Wolcott explains, such an account can be a ‘vehicle to describing a culture’ (1999: 158), and here their stories not only evoke some sense of how lives have changed in recent years, but also provide an insight into how groups or shared actions may act symbolically to satisfy current motivations whilst at the same time incorporate differing views and aspirations for the future.

Another opportunity to gain a wider insight arose out of the practical necessity to work to pay my way. The office in which I worked was staffed with

a group of people, some Manx-born, some not, who in the main appeared unconcerned with 'Manx culture'. As chapter 3.2 will show, their reflections – or rather, lack of reflection – on the changing contexts in Mann demonstrate that not everyone in the Island shares an active concern for the 'dilution' of the Manx 'way of life'. The apparent absence of discussion on identity was to prove as revealing as its presence was in other contexts, but it was also one of those situations where the presence of the anthropologist – by suddenly being a researcher rather than a co-worker – could be used to change 'behaviour' and elicit responses. When asked direct questions, they began conversations among themselves about 'being Manx'. The conversations were short, and strikingly few, but as the chapter will demonstrate, they offered insights into how subtle or mundane 'habits of social life' (Billig 1995: 8) reveal an often unspoken 'discourse' on identity.

By 'following my nose' (or by following Doona's carrots), or by 'snowballing' people and events, I was finding my informants. The chapters within Part 3 offer diverse views on Manx life, with the aim of building from reflexive insights a comprehensive 'description' of contemporary Manx culture. But having widened my data net (though not exactly in the way Malinowski meant), I needed access to informants and contexts which would provide perspectives on Manx life other than those I would encounter from the language enthusiasts, dancers and eisteddfod-goers. One way was through the media, which provided more 'informants' than I could hope to meet. The national weekly newspapers – the *Manx Independent* and the *Isle of Man Examiner* in particular – publish letters on matters of local concern. These may range from debates on where to site the new hospital or prison to the very question of what it means to be a contemporary 'Isle of Man Resident'. As will become clear throughout the thesis, these means of sharing ideas and opinions are options within a wide range of available methods for the practice of identity discourse, and some of these letters contribute to Chapter 3.3 on *stayovers*, where they are juxtaposed with conversational data.

Chapter 3.4 returns us to Island-born views. The older generation are often said to be at best ambivalent about the revival of the Manx Gaelic language and other attempts to keep cultural traditions alive, yet it was this very generation that seemed most strongly to support the cultural events – the *oie'll verrey* and

the *eisteddfods* – that I attended. In their pragmatic considerations of the various debates and issues is revealed a quieter, but nonetheless concerned, opinion on where a Manx identity may be or should be sought. And finally, in Chapter 3.5 we enter into more intimate conversation with two ‘cultural enthusiasts’ who, by the sharing of their own ‘practice’ of their identity, open a route to Manxness for others.



Figure 4 : Same route, different roots. For a discussion on this photograph, see Chapter 2.0 . Photograph : Sue Lewis.

PART TWO: ROOTS

Mannagh vow cliaghtey cliaghtey, nee cliaghtey coe.

If custom be not indulged with custom, then custom will weep.

Part Two: Roots

During the first months of fieldwork, I was asked to participate in a photographic competition that was being run in conjunction with that year's *Feailley Gaelgagh* (Manx Language Festival). The aim was to picture the Manx language in contemporary usage and, armed with a rather inadequate camera and little photographic skill, one Sunday afternoon I began my search for inspiration in the streets of Peel. As I wandered towards the city's ancient castle, I spotted a signpost for the Island's coastal pathway. Nestled in a flowering bush of gorse, the signpost was directing its readers with two 'arms' pointing in the same direction. The first of those arms was inscribed with the unremarkable legend, 'Public Footpath'. The second, more intriguingly, was adorned with the image of a gull in flight and was named *Raad ny Foillan*. I later learned the Manx Gaelic meant 'path (or road) of the seagull', but I didn't need to understand the words themselves in order to understand what the juxtaposition of these two signs meant for my thesis, let alone the photographic masterpiece I was trying to create.¹ Two signs pointing along the same 'route', but with different linguistic 'roots'.

As stated earlier, in that very early phase of this study the focus was to have been the revival of the Island's Gaelic language. The play on language contained within the signpost was therefore relevant to that planned research, but despite the fact that the scope of the project has since widened, the image of the signpost has remained with me. As I hope will become clear within this introductory chapter and the companion piece which will later introduce the Part to follow, the pairing of *roots* and *routes* opens up a number of analytical

¹ The reader may be interested to know that my photograph achieved a creditable third place.

possibilities. In almost every aspect of the thesis – in its consideration of the Island's history and contemporary situation, in its review of relevant anthropological literature, in its conclusions about where this study leaves us as anthropologists and as citizens of the world – I come up against a rooted past being left behind as we move, *en route*, to our futures.

The sociologist, Jock Young, wrote that 'just as community collapses, identity is invented' (quoted in Bauman 2001:15). Phillips, in a critical appraisal of such communitarian thought, concurs that '[f]or communitarian thinkers and ordinary people alike, social change has come to mean the destruction of community' (1993: 149) but adds that such thinking is flawed, based in a 'myth' that would have us believe that the past was 'characterised by localism, continuity, tradition, and harmony' (*ibid.*). Myth or not, those same sentiments about the past – about community – exist within the representations which inform this thesis. And if it also informs people's hopes for the future, when that future is to be sought in Manx 'identity', then that is perhaps indicative simply of people's attempts to represent their experiences in terms of the available language.

The structure of this thesis appears at first glance similarly to dichotomise past and present/future, and a review of the anthropological literature on the concept of identity might seem to support such a separation. Having once focused attention on apparently fixed and bounded communities whose 'identity' was presented as unproblematic (anthropology's roots), more recent anthropological concerns have focused on how a sense of identity can be situated and maintained in a fluid world of constant movement (the discipline's contemporary route). And yet 'localism' (Nadel-Klein 1991) and an ethnographically observed imperative to maintain cultural diversity in a world which threatens to become increasingly homogeneous (cf. Paine 1992; Hannerz 1992, 1993; Drummond 1980) are also a feature of this new anthropological landscape. This appears to place us in an analytical paradox, and so whilst accepting that the pairing of roots/routes could only have come into being in the context of these recent debates (it is certainly not a pairing normally associated with structurally-focused analyses, unlike, for example, raw/cooked, nature/culture), I argue that to 'dichotomise' them – or to at least place them in creatively opposed tension – is to offer the opportunity of exploring this paradox:

of asking how moves to make conscious roots in a shifting context inform and are informed by individual's routes to their own sense of identity (or, in Rapport and Dawson's (1998) terms, their search for 'home').

In their introduction to the above text, Rapport and Dawson (op.cit.: 8ff) make reference to two approaches which have contrasting resonance for this text. For Hobsbawm, *Heimat* – 'public and collective' – attempts to impact upon *Heim* – 'private and individual' – to impose 'a social fact and a cultural norm to which some must belong and from which others must be excluded' (op.cit.: 8). Whilst recognising the caution implied in his use of the word 'attempts', I would argue that Hobsbawm's thesis presumes a level of ideological advantage on behalf of *Heimat* which will be challenged by this thesis. He writes that 'we belong to [*Heimat*] because we don't want to be alone,' adding that, 'it doesn't need us' (Hobsbawm 1991: 68). But it needs *an* us, and will only continue whilst it offers a route to satisfaction of individual motivations.

In contrast, Kateb's formulation of 'transience and displacement' (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 9) has an ironic relevance for the search for belonging and identification expressed by many of my Island-born informants. Their individual stories often express a sense of coming to terms with a present which appears to 'exile' them from the past. Consequently, events, characters, practices and behaviours from that past come to be invested with a newly realised cultural value; and in becoming aware of these indicators of belonging, people are indeed involved in a process of coming to know themselves.

I mention here something which might fit more meaningfully in the second section, *Routes*, in order to stress that not only am I here concerned with collective performance and representation, but with the individual's relationship to the social. This first Part focuses on events and collective practices: on *eisteddfods*, on groups learning the Manx Gaelic language, on gossip. That is, it focuses on performance by themselves, to themselves. Yet whilst dealing 'collectively', I attempt not to lose sight of the individuals that make up these collectivities. In contrast but also in creative complement, the third Part, *Routes*, will focus attention on the words and world-views of individuals by considering the different routes each takes to his or her sense of belonging. Taken as a pair,

then, these two Parts of the thesis, with their respective introductions, attempt to relate 'tradition' to 'the invention of tradition'² which, Hall (1996:4) writes, we are obliged to read not as 'the so-called return to roots but the coming-to-terms-with our 'routes'.'

A Brief 'Return to Roots'

In understanding where we are going, however, we need first to understand from whence we have come. My task here therefore requires me to make a brief sojourn through anthropology's relationship with 'identity' as a concept which, Banks assures us, is a 'child'³ of that rather unsatisfactory parent 'ethnicity' (1996: 142). Influenced by discourses relating to 'race' in a post-colonial world and of migration to the centre, 'ethnicity' as an analytical concept lost its flavour as a suitable rubric under which anthropologists could discuss the indigene European 'ethnonationalisms' which they were beginning to study in response to the 'ethnic revival' of the 1960s (op.cit.: 141). According to Ardener, 'identity', whilst retaining the sense of self-definition (Macdonald, 1993: 11), provided a broad term with which comparatively to discuss entities not concerned with ethnicity *per se*.

Banks' assertion both reflects and is challenged by Byron's short explanation of the concept as it pertains to anthropological usage, which he states is 'ambiguous' (1996: 292). 'Identity' borrowed from its psychoanalytic origins refers to the individual 'sense of self', but has been more comfortably used sociologically to re-label earlier anthropological concerns with 'selfhood' and a sense of collective (classificatory, bounded) 'sameness'. In her introduction to the edited volume which looks 'inside' European identities, Macdonald highlights the importance to anthropology of '*social* relations' and '*social* representation' (1993: 6) in the formation and maintenance of a *social* identity.⁴ 'The social' was the discipline's primary concern (only to be emphasised rather than contradicted by Cohen's slightly later appeal for an individualised *alternative* approach (1994)): that is, to understand the formation and

² Cf. Wagner 1981, on invention versus convention.

³ The other being the concept of 'nationalism'.

⁴ Emphasis added.

maintenance of social bonds and allegiances under various circumstances of change.

By including both their subjects', and their subjective disciplinary identities, Macdonald and her collaborators (op.cit.) point to a further consideration; that of the effects of anthropological practice on the concept of identity. As Rapport and Dawson state (1998: 4), 'a traditional concern of anthropological description and analysis has been the identification of socio-cultural 'places' [...] separate and self-sufficient worlds (of relations, culture, *identity*⁵ and history).' The 'image' is a falsifying one based, among other things, in disciplinary demands for 'bounded' fieldwork (both in terms of space and time) and distanced analysis (ibid.), the resulting conclusions pointing to static, unproblematic, uncontested concepts of group, self and other. But it is an image that has crept into common usage. In his text on Québécois nationalism (1988), Handler notes that 'the presuppositions concerning boundedness that dominate nationalist discourse equally dominate our social-scientific discourse, which takes discrete social entities, such as "societies" and "cultures", as the normal units of analysis, and the "integration" of such units as the normal and healthy state of social life" (op.cit.: 7). These discourses – nationalist and social scientific – he explains, then feed off one another. Whilst social scientists present nationalist narratives of neatly bounded 'nations' (and 'identities'), the nationalist imperative seeks, in turn, to create and maintain our theoretical ideal. Established social-scientific approaches (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1992[1983]; and, to an extent, Anderson 1983) have supported this notion, presenting ideologically unproblematic 'inventions' of national identity as necessary tools in the modernist move toward the structured centralisation of political power. 'In principle,' writes Handler, 'a nation is bounded – that is, precisely delimited – in space and time: in space, by the inviolability of its borders and the exclusive allegiance of its members; in time, by its birth or beginning in history' (1988: 6).⁶ Thus have certain 'principles' entered into common understanding of what a 'nation' or 'identity' might be.

⁵ Emphasis added.

⁶ Handler is here outlining the various principles which characterise the 'ideology' of nationalism (and also, he adds, of social scientific approaches to the study of nationalism). Inclusion of this extract does not imply that he subscribes to this view.

And if the image of the bounded nation has crept into common understanding, we might argue that so too has the familiar image of the 'romanticised peripheries,' who could 'find themselves "museumised", turned into quaint exemplars of outsider's visions [...] a standard "package" of ethnic culture' (Macdonald 1993: 10). Cairns Craig describes how, at the end of the classic novel of a romanticised Scotland, Waverley looks at his own portrait and sees 'his life in history [...] turned into art; it has been "framed" and removed from the flow of events' (1996: 39). In the contestations over the definition of 'Manxness' that follow, the (reasoned) application of such 'museumised packaging', and corresponding objections to being represented as so packaged – 'framed' and removed from a flow of events – are all too evident. Hall writes that 'identities are about using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being; not 'who we are' or 'where we have come from' so much as what we might become [...] Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation' (1996: 4). How the Island is perceived – internally as well as externally – depends on how the debate over, or process of, representation proceeds.

Much of the ethnographic material which follows will illustrate diverse responses to the negotiation of a symbolic boundary between two conceptual groups in the Isle of Man: Island-born and incomers. The reality is, unsurprisingly, far more complex than this binary pairing would have us believe, but Barth's seminal work (1969) drew anthropological attention to the importance of the boundary in maintaining a sense of 'we', and in the continued existence of the group as a separate category. As the 'New Residents' and the workers for the finance industry began to arrive from the 1960s onwards, the Island-born began to fear that their 'way of life' and their unique cultural 'identity' was under threat. According to Barth, it is 'the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses (op.cit.: 15). Cultural 'stuff' that can work to symbolise 'us' as opposed to 'them' is revealed and is mobilised to maintain the boundary and group integrity, and can include anything from language to dress, idioms of kinship to concepts of personhood.

The notion of the symbolic boundary is a familiar one to those of us who work 'at home'; Anthony Cohen's work alone (1982, 1985, 1986) offers

significant evidence of the relevance of this 'symbolic'⁷ concept in the ethnography of the British Isles. Offering a diversity of comparative material, such ethnographies demonstrate the limitless positioning of boundaries; from relationships between Welsh and English played out through language (Emmett 1982a, 1982b) to 'internal' boundaries, variously expressed, between locals and incomers in the same village (Phillips 1986). Whilst a study on a completely different scale to that offered within this text, Phillips' analysis demonstrates the great variety of cultural markers which might be used to represent local identity within the one community. In Muker's case these include kinship, dialect, feel for farming and land or length of association with the locality. He also draws attention to both a dualistic and a scalar use of these markers (op.cit.: 144); dualistic when local is contrasted directly with incomer, scalar when more subtle, temporal qualifications are used to denote 'degrees' of localness. Theoretically, Phillips' work has relevance to the Manx ethnography described here, except that the 'certainty' with which cultural referents are spoken of as shared markers in Muker is, in Mann, currently confused.

But why the need for symbolic expressions of belonging? For Cohen, symbolic investment in contemporary boundaries is a direct result of the blurring of structural boundaries (1985: 44). Diverse and more widely originating ethnographic examples support his claim. In describing Corsican nationalism, Savigear makes clear that culturally and socially symbolic expressions of 'local' identity have remained 'self-evident', operating as a constant in an unclear political situation since the island gained 'special constitutional status' in 1982 (1990: 86): while for the Owambo women of Namibia, it is their literature which symbolises their attempts to reclaim their 'traditional' role in political life following the demise of colonialist structures which assumed male dominance of the public sphere (Orford and Becker 2001: 289ff).

Symbolic boundary construction is, therefore, what we have left with which to express our diversity. So, whilst acknowledging critiques such as that put forward by Nadel-Klein, who questions Cohen's 'failure' to address localism

⁷ 'Symbolic', that is, to both the ethnographies' concerns and to an anthropology of the British Isles' concerns to offer a comprehensive and meaningful analysis of work developed 'at home'.

as a ‘product’⁸ of modern political economy’ (1991: 502), I align my own interpretation of this Manx ethnography with Cohen’s (et. al.) symbolic readings. In what might be read as a response to Nadel-Klein, Cohen writes that whilst ‘the mainstream forces of economic, political and administrative life attack the structural bases of local diversity (1986: 1), local responses to the ensuing changes will differ: ‘interpretation, meaning [...] is not mechanical, and frequently is not overt’ (op.cit.: 2). The extra-local political and global economic ‘structures’ the Isle of Man finds itself part of⁹ may have a causal link to the negotiations of identity discussed within this text, but they do not provide the focus or the medium for the expression of those negotiations.

Cohen directs us to look for organic, and possibly tacit, responses. The local, communal responses I observed and engaged in fall, however, into the categories of both implicit and explicit. Some of the gatherings to be described, such as those at *eisteddfods*, serve to illustrate an efflorescence in ‘traditional Manx’ activity which appears to be reactive of the contemporary situation rather than reflectively responsive to it. Other responses, however, are consciously constructed. According to Bauman, to have ‘community’ means to share ‘natural’ or ‘tacit’ understandings – Tönnies’s *Gemeinschaft* – which ‘will not survive the moment in which understanding turns self-conscious [...] and becomes an object for contemplation and scrutiny’ (Bauman 2001:11). ‘Spoken of’ community, he adds, ‘is a contradiction in terms’ (op.cit: 12). Yet Socrates taught us that ‘the unexamined life is not a life for a human being’ (quoted in Scruton 1996: 14). Much of what I describe herein could well fall under the rubric of a ‘(conscious) discourse about identity’. And much of that discourse seeks to ‘root’ identity in...something.¹⁰

There is in Mann, then, a desire to debate and express ‘cultural variation’, built on a belief that ‘we are different’.¹¹ Barth argues that ‘cultural variation

⁸ Emphasis in the original removed.

⁹ Such as its relationship with the UK government, the European Union and the OECD and other international monetary ‘watchdogs’.

¹⁰ If the reader finds this statement unsettling, be assured I do so myself. We ourselves seek to ‘root’ our academic texts in grounded analysis, but to do so here would not be true to the research data. The very problem with the debate/discourse on identity in the Island at this time was that there were no clear forms on which to *explicitly* hang Manx identity.

¹¹ ‘We’, the Island-born or committed resident, being different both to the world outside and to the recently-arrived ‘tax exiles’ and money managers.

may be an effect and not a cause of boundaries (cited in Eriksen 1993: 39). This is not to say that variation between groups is falsely created where none existed before (as Anderson criticised Gellner for proposing when Gellner wrote that 'nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist' (Anderson 1983: 15), as 'invents' alludes to falsity), but rather that those differences that do exist are made relevant to the situation. However, the cultural problem then arises: what are the differences and how are they brought effectively to the boundary?

'To produce news of difference, i.e., information,' said Bateson (1979), 'there must be two entities (real or imagined) such that the difference between them can be immanent in their mutual relationship; and the whole affair must be such that news of their difference can be *represented*¹² as a difference inside some information-processing entity, such as a brain or, perhaps, a computer.' He then adds that:

[T]here is a profound and unanswerable question about the nature of those 'at least two' things that between them generate the difference which becomes information by making a difference. Clearly each alone is – for the mind and perception – a non-entity, a non-being. Not different from being, and not different from non-being. An unknowable, a *Ding an sich*, a sound of one hand clapping (op.cit.: 78).

Cultural activity in Mann over the last few decades has then, in Bateson's terms, been focused on establishing – on informing – implicitly or explicitly, about 'difference that makes a difference'. To secure one's own continued representation in the world, one must establish an immanent relationship with an Other. Incomers, in this context, provide a ready source for such a relationship.

I emphasise the word 'represented' above, because I would like to suggest that such representation might be made in other information-processing forms: for example, in museums, in the tales people tell of themselves and in the ways in which they perform this process of immanence – the very process with which this thesis deals.

¹² My emphasis.

Rooting Around for a Sense of Identity

In part as a response to the trans-global reality of individual ‘migrants of identity’ (Rapport and Dawson 1998), more recent anthropological works have begun to question the possibility of discrete social and cultural entities,¹³ but the desire of administrations still to create or maintain a ‘nationalism’ of secure boundedness should not be ignored. For the Isle of Man such necessity arises from its situation as a small player in a fluid political and economic world context. A largely self-governing but politically ‘dependent’ territory, it nevertheless is responsible for its own economic survival. Consequently, it has to ‘sell’ itself in the global economic market. Furthermore, the Manx government has to deal with the reality of a shifting population of two conceptual halves – Island-born and incomer – and the need to present a united front to the outside world.

In its ‘Policy Review’ of 1999, the Manx government made the following statement:

At a time of changes in the resident and visiting population structure, the work of Manx National Heritage¹⁴ in securing the roots of Manx identity promotes internal stability and pride as well as the basis for international and economic promotion. The international prestige and image of the Island will be considerably increased in the future by a continuation of the quality-controlled presentation of the Island’s unique cultural and natural assets (1999a: paragraph 197).

The desire here is to create a society which can safely and successfully accommodate difference within its sameness and which will be seen by the outside world as a cohesive whole. As the chapters that follow will however show, what flows from this project is a tension between the establishment of a society based on what Gellner (1983: 7) terms a ‘voluntaristic’ (or what might be termed ‘civic’) nationalism and one grounded in shared cultural understandings (a ‘cultural’ nationalism).

¹³ And, indeed, this thesis will go on to address these more recent approaches and their relationship to the ‘processes’ under review here.

¹⁴ Manx National Heritage is a separate but government funded organisation which exists to ‘preserve, promote and communicate the unique qualities of the Manx natural and cultural heritage [...] to a level which guarantees the permanent retention of these unique assets for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby providing for the continuing security of the Manx identity [...] a platform for national pride [and] a focus for marketing the Island’ (MNH n.d.: 5)

In seeking to achieve an inclusive nationalism which favours a 'sense of place' over a 'sense of tribe' (McCrone 2001), the Manx government has mobilised characteristics that are deemed 'unique' but which can be objectively shared, by all, with pride: the Island's natural environment, its constitutional history, its position in the British Isles. These have been packaged for neat presentation and consumption – either in the Island's museums or on the government's website – in a manner which utilises the 'ambivalence' that Bhabha points to (2001: 360): an ambivalence arising from nations being both new (that is, a 'modern' phenomenon) but yet steeped in history. Much effort has been expended in creating 'The Story of Mann', a combination of museums and accessible installations telling an 'official' history, the ontology of which belongs to a time before the arrival of the first human settlers and which thus brings the very fabric of the island into play, but which serves only to create a shared, objective knowledge of the Island as it is now (and will be in the future).

The modernist paradigm, Macdonald writes, views 'cultures whose elements do not 'cohere' as dysfunctional; communities in change are depicted as 'dying' (1997b: 4). Given the need to present itself as a self-determining and self-confident player on a global economic stage,¹⁵ at a self-acknowledged 'time of changes' and faced with a society of two perceived halves – Island-born and incomer – it should come as no surprise that the Manx administration seeks to represent a sense of unity and order. As this text unfolds, however, it will become clear their project makes but a contribution to an ongoing, contingent and dialogic 'process' to which many different voices contribute. According to Kahn, we are in a period when 'tropes such as cultural difference' are being marshalled against the very structures of the modern state and modern economy, adding that this 'explains the seductiveness of invitations to 'listen to the voices' of the cultural other' (1997: 80). The voices herein – particularly those with subjective experiences or desires who might sense themselves being 'othered' out of existence – speak out with alternative, personal stories to those offered in the museums and official histories. As they attempt to come to terms with their situation, individually they speak of tensions between the benefits of living in

¹⁵ A need which arises from the necessity to remain competitive and to retain as great a say as possible in its future.

this global world and the detrimental disappearance of a 'Manx way of life'. Admittedly there are those who, unconcerned with localisms (they may be 'itinerant' workers in the finance industry, or young people seeking a way out of what can seem an oppressive social environment), look to external, global and media-driven 'culture' as a source of identification. However, there remain many who continue to seek a means by which to express – consciously or unconsciously – a rooted identification, whether the individual is newly resident or 'as Manx as the hills'.

Like the Scottish Highlands, the Isle of Man has ridden the late-twentieth century wave of Western European ethnonationalism; a 'time of challenge to the claims of [...] earlier nation-states to represent the identities of all their inhabitants' (Macdonald 1997b: 7). Self-determination of minority national identities has led to a focusing of attention on key symbolic referents; a particular construction of local political history in the case of Basque nationalism (Heiberg 1980, 1989; Grugel 1990), the role of legislation in Quebec (Macmillan 1990), and 'lesser-used languages'¹⁶ in the case of Brittany (McDonald 1989), Wales (Emmett 1982a, 1982b) or Cornwall (Payton and Deacon 1993).

'A shared language,' says Eriksen (1993: 103), 'can be a powerful tool of cultural unity.' In Skye, the concern was to reverse the decline of the Gaelic language (Macdonald 1997b: 7), whereas in the Isle of Man the focus has been on keeping alive a language already lost to everyday speech. For a limited but increasing number of interested people, the Manx Gaelic has become the means by which they can express their identification of what it means to belong to this place; and the option to learn the language is available – shareable – for Island-born and incomer alike. Over recent years, the Manx government has provided resources to support teaching and learning of the language in schools, the provision of Manx-medium playgroups and now a Manx-medium primary unit and various language-focused events. But it cannot be denied that, despite a steady increase in interest, the Manx Gaelic language is *not* 'shared' and thus cannot be seen as an effective (or affectively performative) 'tool of cultural unity'.

¹⁶ To borrow the European Union's classification.

Neither is history shared. In its efforts, the Manx administration has attempted to place the Island's history in a potentially shareable role, but as later discussions will show, individual voices seek to deny their ambitions, seeing the project as tantamount to a denial of the lived past.

Other 'cultural' pursuits have also experienced an efflorescence of interest in recent years, and the following chapters will consider the place of these in the search of 'a sense of Manxness'. Understanding the role of these various 'performances' – raising the question of their contribution to 'invention' – makes this ethnography a valuable contribution to the understanding of identity processes in the European (and, indeed, 'Western', whatever that might mean) context. Trosset claimed a similar position for her study of 'Welshness' (1993: 6), arguing for a comparative study of ideologies of personhood as a way of understanding differing approaches to nationalism in a context often assumed to be homogeneous. The contemporary search for 'Manx identity' is very much a search for 'what it means to be a person in contemporary Manx society'. However, where Trosset's discourses on 'Welshness' are 'dominated by a particular ideology that defines Welshness in terms of specific essential components' (op.cit.: 17), the Manx situation continues to be one of uncertainty regarding such components.

Trosset does not take a historical approach, but other anthropological analyses of the Welsh situation provide more than sufficient proof that 'Welshness' has long been defined in opposition to a culturally dominant 'Englishness' (see Frankenberg 1957; Emmett 1982a, 1982b). Further, as Trosset makes clear, Wales 'does not control most of its own social institutions'¹⁷ (op.cit.: 6); the sites, she infers, of the ideological construction of identity. Lacking 'collective self-control' (op.cit.: 7) and with a long mingling of populations, people come to express a sense of distinctive identity through cultural forms, forms which are 'fundamental and shared' (op.cit.: 5). On that basis, the Manx situation must be viewed as significantly different. Whilst long ruled by external lords, the Manx have always retained at least the symbolic illusion, via the Tynwald parliament, of independent self-governance. In tandem,

¹⁷ Although it should be noted that, since Trosset's fieldwork and resulting text were completed, Wales has gained an Assembly which has limited powers over those social institutions.

the Island has always had its own legal system and civic institutions: rhetorically, at least, its social institutions are its own. One would assume, then, that Mann's distinctiveness was assured and unproblematic. Yet 'identity' is very problematic. Why, in the presence of distinctive social institutions, does there exist a culturally focused 'contest' to establish a dominant 'ideology' of Manxness?

In his discussion of nineteenth-century Manx cultural nationalism, Belchem points to a 'gentlemanly' drive to 'safeguard Manx cultural distinctiveness and its devolved political status' (2000c: 217) against the threat of anglicisation resulting from the success of the Island's role as the north of England's favourite holiday destination. Bolstered by a more general 'Celtic' revivalism, these 'cultural' moves complemented the Manx government's attempts to strengthen the Island's constitutional position and right to increased self-determination. At the end of the twentieth century, the erstwhile 'tourist' (who returned home at the end of summer) has become the 'New Resident'. Encouraged to set up home in the Island by the Manx government, they bring new ideas that have been perceived as threatening to Manx social and cultural life. Therefore, while the government works to include their new arrivals in a 'civic nationalism' which appears to objectify (and thereby distance and 'other'), I describe a grass-roots renaissance of cultural performance which equates to a contest over the right to determine the root metaphors of Manxness.

Describing this process of contestation elsewhere (Lewis 2002), I have argued that such contestations are not processes which require to reach (or indeed are able to reach) a synthesising end point. Despite his structuring of his chapter to describe five 'characters' of local Mucker identity, Phillips was able to write that 'their significance varies in and through time depending on the context of social interaction' (1986: 141). Nevertheless, the demand for explanatory definitions is difficult to resist. We come again to mutual principles – for social scientists and for nationalisms seeking identity solutions – to strive to arrive at bounded, unproblematic conclusions, and the tension created between this and the processual socio-cultural reality. I attempt here to break that cycle. Learning from the experience of the field, and accepting that attention to such tensions may only be possible in a 'critically expressive' modern or post-modern context (or indeed, where such perspectives come into contact), I here bring together a

'flavour' of the discourses which inform contemporary Manx life. The text, of necessity, does have a structure but the contrasting and contributory Parts – *Roots* and *Routes* – are framed as they are to highlight the dialogical (and therefore not mutually exclusive) relationship between group and individual performances of identity.

In this first Part, I consider 'collective' expressions of identity performance. Whilst not losing sight of the fact that the events described offer individuals a means of expression, I describe various forms of 'gathering' as a means of understanding how people seek a 'rootedness' in such communal activities. Whether it be a 'language community', as practiced by those who express their sense of 'Manxness' by learning the Manx Gaelic language (see Chapter 2.1), a 'musical construction of place' (Stokes 1994: 3ff) enacted via pub 'sessions' or culturally focused festivals, a 'community of understanding' performed through the sharing of ironically loaded satire (Taylor 2001: 175) – as discussed in Chapter 2.2 – or as represented in the work of the heritage organisations (see Chapter 2.3), the conflict over 'Manxness' might appear to inhere in a search for objective referents. What characterises and underpins this diversity of expression, however, is an attempt to understand a socio-cultural framework that is summarised in the phrase 'the Manx way of life'.

The latter is a term I heard frequently during my time in the field. Consequently, it is one to which attention should be paid. In a study of the changes wrought by the oil industry in the Shetland Isles, Varwell argues that the term is a valid analytical concept which is 'independent, although supportive, of [the concepts of] culture and community' (1981: 29). Reviewing social scientific as well as 'popular' definitions of the term, he concludes that 'way of life' expresses a certain 'X' factor which we need to account for if we are to fully understand 'expressed concerns for meaning, identity, control over one's destiny and care for the environment (op.cit.: 39). If 'way of life' is thus understood to embrace the concepts of culture, community, independent and moral action and a concern for one's surroundings, I would argue that this equates very well with the sense of things that the people of the Isle of Man describe. Or rather, it describes what they feel they are losing. Each of these elements appear in the stories that follow.

Chapter 2.1: Speaking Roots

I heard the following story from the friend of the family. A Manx Gaelic speaking father was on a recent trip to Scotland with his wife and children. As they drove away from the boat in Liverpool, his bi-lingual six-year old son asked, 'Dad, where are we?' 'England,' said his father. 'What language do they speak in England?' queried the boy. 'English,' replied his father. 'Yes, but what *other* language do they have?'

There is another story on the Island, much repeated amongst those who take an interest in the Manx Gaelic language, that goes as follows: back in the late 1960s, three men were sitting in a Peel inn, conversing in Manx Gaelic. The landlord approached them and told them that if they continued to speak the language, they would be asked to leave. The licensee's reasons are not explained. The purpose of the story is to demonstrate how once the language was despised and rejected, and how now, a few scant years later, people can speak it freely in pubs and in public. This chapter will explore this renewed interest in the language. Through language evening classes, opportunities for children to learn the language in school and take recognised qualifications, Manx-medium pre-school playgroups, language festivals and Gaelic-only evenings in the pub, the language has found new exponents and a renewed role in Manx life.

This is not to say, however, that the language is universally supported. Its position is far less stable than that, and those who campaign for its increased use can often be seen as misguided and wasteful of public money. One *stayover* of some twenty years residence in the Island made it clear to me that in his opinion, 'it's a waste of money, a dead language. I'd rather my taxes be spent on something useful.' Such opinions raise questions about the role of the Manx

Gaelic language as a potential dominant cultural symbol. If the Island is in the process of a reordering or re-acknowledgement of the cultural 'stuff' of Manx identity, where does language fit into the jigsaw?

Symbolic Language

For those who campaign actively for the maintenance of the indigenous language, the last few years' successes are the still-precarious rewards of a determined struggle to change its image. The Manx Gaelic language probably began to decline as a language of daily use some two or three centuries ago, and, like the Irish Gaelic of Inishkillane (Brody 1973) has been for much of that time linked to a sense of backwardness. A letter to the *Manks Advertiser* in 1822, and signed 'A Native', declared '[t]here was a time, no doubt, when our ancestors were savages, and could understand each other by nods, and signs, and inarticulate sounds. But those times are past and gone. Wherefore, then, should we recall them? What better is the gibberish called Manx than an uncouth mouthful of course [sic] savage expressions' (*Manks Advertiser*, 6 June 1822).

Those so-called savage expressions may first have been introduced to the Island around 500 A.D. (Broderick 1991: 63), supplanting an earlier British language. A later invasion of Norse, brought to the Island by Scandinavian conquerors in the ninth century, failed to oust the Gaelic. The Norsemen, first raiders and then settlers, have left their mark on the Island both politically and toponymically, but apart from a few Manx Gaelic words which show a Norse influence, it was Manx which remained the Island's vernacular. Indeed, a scene in the Island's 'Story of Mann' exhibition purports to tell the story of how Manx retained this position. As the audience sits in a replica farmstead, a film shows a Norse raider-cum-settler being chided by his Celtic wife for not yet learning the language that his own children speak: Manx was the language learned at the breast – was/is thus the *real* 'mother tongue'.

A branch of Goedelic Gaelic, Manx is in the same 'family' of languages as Irish and Scots Gaelic, but due to the late (17th century) establishment of a written form of the language, Manx does not utilise the Goedelic orthography, but instead one based upon English. Broderick suggests this was because administration of the Island had long been in the hands of English speakers

(Broderick 1993: 230), and thus any written form would be more closely associated with English rather than with the other Goedelic languages. Furthermore, by using an orthography familiar to the clergy, the translation of the Book of Common Prayer into Manx Gaelic in 1610 by Bishop John Phillips¹ may have aided religious communication with those members of the Manx congregation who remained at that time Manx speaking.

In spite of the publication above, and that of various translations of the Bible between 1748 and 1775 (Broderick 1991: 91), by the mid-nineteenth century there appears to have been little attempt to stem the flow of the language's lifeblood or to retain the language in order to, in Steiner's words, keep secret the 'inherited, singular springs of identity' (cited in Edwards 1985: 16). Although Manx Gaelic was still widely used in newspapers and courts and in the churches (Thomson 2000: 312) during the first few decades of the nineteenth century, by 1840 William Kennish was moved to publish his *Dobberan Chengey ny Mayrey*, or *Lament of the Mother Tongue*. A work of some nineteen verses in which 'Manx Gaelic' is personified as an old woman dressed in rags, in the following extract she bemoans the neglect of the Manx of their native language, and links the language to the loss (but also to the potential rediscovery) of identity.

'I am thy dying Mother-tongue,
The first speech of this Island race,
Dying, because of the deep wrong
Of their neglect and my disgrace'

'Twas I who kept the strangers out,
And kept unspoiled our Island home:
'Tis I could put them still to rout,
And spare my children grief to come'

¹ Then Bishop of Sodor and Mann, an ancient diocese based on a similar geographical area to that of the old Norse Kingdom of the Isles.

Language decline continued throughout the nineteenth century. Broderick asserts that the abandonment of the language was due largely to external forces² rather than 'rigorous action against it from within' (Broderick 1991: 94). He points to the use of English as the medium for education, the emigration of Manx speakers in times of economic decline, the in-migration of mine workers from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, the growth of tourism and increasing mobility as factors which encouraged the abandonment of Manx Gaelic. Broderick's arguments are well made, but there was also a determined effort on the part of those 'within' to consign the old language to the past, and replace it with English, the language of administration, commerce and increasingly, of visiting tourists. Popular history has it that parents suddenly refused to speak to their children in the Island's language, and within the generations which spanned the last half of the nineteenth century the mother tongue all but disappeared.³

As Broderick makes clear though, the underlying reasons for this desire to abandon the language were both commercial and political. The Island had been 'purchased' by the British Crown in 1765. Concerned at the ever-increasing losses to the British Exchequer caused by the very successful Manx 'running trade' – the favoured local expression for what was known to the Crown as 'smuggling' – and the use of the Island as a haven from justice by bankrupts, the Crown had acquired the Island from the then Lord of Mann, John, third Duke of Athol. The Island became part of the expanding British Empire. A Lieutenant Governor with wide executive powers was installed and English was reconfirmed as the language of power, control and commerce. Although the Island won back a certain amount of 'home rule' in 1866, the final nail had been put in the linguistic coffin. The British Crown and nineteenth-century commercialism appeared to have succeeded where the Norse invaders had failed.

All was not lost, however. In 1899 a small group of Manx intellectuals founded *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh*, or The Manx Language Society. They were

² For a more detailed discussion on the decline of the Manx language, see, amongst others, Lockwood (1975), Broderick (1991), Thomson (2000).

³ Indeed, according to Broderick (1991: 64) the major period of language shift to English can be dated between c.1840 and c.1880, although some more remote rural areas (for instance, Cregneash village in the south, now a 'heritage village') remained Manx-speaking until 1900.

perhaps prompted by a more general flowering of interest in the Celtic arts and language in the late-nineteenth century, but the formation of the group was in some way recognition of the work that had already been completed by its various members and works published by the Manx Society: for example, A.W. Moore had collected and published a book on Manx carvals (specially written, popular religious songs⁴) in 1891, and a phonology had been completed by Rhys in the 1890s. The group was concerned at the speed at which the Island's language was disappearing, and along with their other project of gathering as many folk tales and songs as they could, they gave themselves the task of preserving the Manx Gaelic language. To keep the tongue alive as a national language was perhaps too ambitious an aim, but the Society has since become a source for the publication of Manx literature, something that had been notably absent in its past.⁵ There have been differences of opinion and approach along the way, not least in the apparent change of focus in the earlier years of the twentieth century to recording the local English-based dialect known as Anglo-Manx,⁶ which was also under pressure, but the society remains today an important element in the overall task of keeping the language alive.

Among the reasons Broderick specified as contributing to the decline of the Manx language was the influx of English tourists at the end of the nineteenth century. The latter part of the twentieth century has seen its own version of an influx, from the bankers of the International Finance Sector, but in stark contrast to that earlier movement, this influx has been accompanied by an apparent rise in interest in the language. As will be demonstrated from the scenes and interactions recounted herein, many supporters of the language use it to express their response to the changing demographics and to the resultant changes they perceive in the 'Manx way of life'.

The wave of renewed interest began in the late 1960s, and continued throughout the 1970s. In 1984, a Select Committee for the Greater Use of Manx

⁴ For details on this Manx musical tradition see Bazin 1995, 1997 and 2000.

⁵ Some theorists have linked the availability of written documentation in a language both to its survival and to its relevance to nationalisms. For the latter, see Gellner 1983, Goody and Watt 1968, Anderson 1983.

⁶ See Maddrell (2001) and Pressley (2002), unpublished theses from the Centre for Manx Studies' (Douglas, Isle of Man) socio-linguistic project.

Gaelic recommended to Tynwald that it extend public use of the Manx, and provide for the teaching of it in schools (Solly 1994: 11). Governmental progress on the educational aspect of this recommendation appears to have been somewhat slow, but in 1991 the Manx government held a 'Quality of Life' survey, conducted by Gallup. The survey included a question on the learning of Manx Gaelic in schools, and asked if parents wanted their children to have the opportunity and choice to learn the language. The strength of the positive response may have taken the government by surprise,⁷ but they responded with the appointment of a 'Manx Language Officer' in 1992 (op.cit.: 12), whose remit was to develop a teaching programme for the schools. As a result of these initiatives, Manx Gaelic is now available to children from the age of seven years, taught by a team of peripatetic teachers. In 1997 the opportunities were extended to a qualification entitled *Teisht Chadjin Ghaelgagh*, or T.C.G., equivalent to the G.C.S.E., and in September 2001 the first Manx-medium primary school opened in the village of St John's, opposite the Tynwald Hill.

Although the peripatetic teaching team has been extended during the last few years, demand continues to outstrip teaching supply, particularly at primary school level. Finding sufficiently qualified teachers is one major hurdle, as is finding space within the school day to set aside for Manx classes. At present, primary school children attending mainstream schools get one half-hour per week tuition. The pressures are even greater at secondary level, where Manx Gaelic must compete with the demands of the 'National Curriculum' (the British National Curriculum which the Manx Department of Education voluntarily follows). Consequently, the numbers taking the General Certificate remain small.

Exposure to the language has also been extended to pre-school age children. With financial assistance from the Manx Heritage Foundation,⁸ a Manx-medium playgroup was established at Braddan on the outskirts of Douglas in 1996. Later established as a charitable organisation, in the year from October 1999 a further three groups were opened in the north and south of the Island. The various *Mooinjer Veggey* ("Little People") groups now cater for up to sixty

⁷ A later survey, in May 1992, showed that roughly 2,000 primary and secondary pupils (c.20%) wanted to learn the language. In the primary schools, some 40% of pupils aged 7 years and over had registered to learn Manx Gaelic (Crennell 1998).

⁸ Which is itself funded by the Manx government.

children per week, with a staff of fourteen. Not necessarily fluent speakers, the staff are able to give all instructions in Manx Gaelic, although the children are not expected to respond in the language unless and until they choose to. The parents are also encouraged to join in. A newsletter highlights 'monthly themes', such as the garden or the sea shore, and parents are given lists of words and their translations to help answer their children's questions.

Mooinjer Veggey continues to receive financial support from the Manx Heritage Foundation, and has recently been supported by *Yn Cheshaght Ghailkgagh* (The Manx Language Society), and by a grant from the Department of Education. In its early days the organisation's chairman also held the government-sponsored post of Manx Language Development Officer. A part-time position, jointly funded by the Heritage Organisation and the government, the post was established to promote general awareness of the language both in the Island and in the wider inter-Celtic context. One of his most successful projects to date has been the establishment of *Feailley Ghaelgagh*, or Manx Language Festival, held in November each year. Through social events and workshops, people have the opportunity to use the language in conversation, song and drama, and also meet musicians and poets from other Celtic countries.

The Manx government has shown a willingness to support language initiatives, both through legislation and financial support. Most official signage is now bi-lingual, as are the titles of official documents (although, somewhat surprisingly, the Tynwald official headed stationery is not). It will also refer to the *Coonseil ny Gaelgey*⁹ for advice on translations, especially where these may impact on the promulgation of laws at the annual open-air sitting of the Manx parliament, where new legislation is read in both English and Manx Gaelic. Such government support is, however, limited and pragmatic. On its web pages, the government notes the important place of Manx Gaelic in the culture and heritage of the Island, and mentions the opportunity to learn the language in schools, but draws the line there: it does not give the language any special symbolic significance in the present and future social and cultural development of the Island.

⁹ *Coonseil ny Gaelgey* is a group of fluent speakers (one a linguist), whose task is to advise the government and any other group on new translations for technical and other words.

Fortunately for the ongoing survival of the language, learning opportunities are not restricted to the school classroom. There are distance-learning opportunities through a correspondence course, and there are numerous evening classes available throughout the Island. These cater both for adults wishing to learn Manx Gaelic and for school children who find it impossible to fit the language into their normal school day. What follows is a portrait of one such evening class – one I attended each week in St John’s.

“...making a Manxman into a Manxman”¹⁰

In small buildings dotted around the Island, several nights each week, people attend a variety of evening classes in Manx Gaelic. Offering the opportunity to improve knowledge of the language to everyone from the complete beginner through to the advanced student, as well as in-depth study groups, the classes are taught by fluent-speaking volunteers. At the very least they provide an understanding of the place and street names people see each day, and at best a stepping-stone to, or enhancement of, their involvement in other culturally focused activities. The classes, however, are nothing new. Anecdotal evidence demonstrates that the teaching of the Manx Gaelic language has continued in village halls and private homes since the beginning of the twentieth century, and today’s classes are not symptomatic in themselves of a ‘revival’ of interest in the Manx Gaelic language. That said, interest in learning the language has increased in recent years, and if one considers this alongside the efflorescence of other cultural institutions and activities, both formal and informal, it is possible to conclude that there has been a significant and positive change in attitude toward the language in that time.

But why are people giving up their spare time to attend such classes? As suggested above, for many it may offer a way of expressing personal concerns about the changes the Island has recently experienced. Those sentiments will be found expressed below. Some attendees never persevere with it, while several return each year entering again and again at the beginner’s level, never progressing. For two of the ladies in the parallel class to my own, it simply

¹⁰ Referring to a classmate’s attempts to learn the language, these words were spoken to him one night in the nearby inn, after class.

presented an interesting and cheaper alternative to evening classes in Spanish at the local secondary school (but one that has at least some relevance to the learners' immediate surroundings). Several do continue though, eventually working their way toward a level of competence which will allow them to interact within the 'community' of Manx Gaelic speakers. Scant few, however, would aim to make the Manx language the entire focus of their search for identity.

The class described below is small, but nevertheless manages to provide a picture of the diversity of backgrounds, and reasons for being there, that class attendees are likely to represent. It took place each Tuesday night at *Thie Ny Gaelgey* ('the house of Manx Gaelic') in the village of St John's. Due to the large number of enrolments that September of my fieldwork year, my own beginner's class was split into two groups of unequal size. The main group of about seven students was of a wide age range, from one young girl of around eleven or twelve years of age, to others in their sixties. The teacher of this main group was a woman who had begun learning the language some twenty-eight years before, her teacher being Doug Fargher,¹¹ one of the key figures in the maintenance of Manx language and culture during its difficult days of the 1950s and early 1960s.¹² What follows, however, is drawn from my own participation in and observation of the smaller of the two groups, the tutor of which was a softly spoken man from the Island's south.

John,¹³ our tutor, had left the Island temporarily in the early 1960s when the economic life of the Island was at a low ebb. He had returned at that very time when the three young men were 'thrown out' of the Peel pub at the end of that same decade. He recalled being angered on hearing this tale; that it had come as a last straw, and his reaction was to learn the language that his fellow countrymen had been harangued for speaking. He joined a class in 1971, and also had the

¹¹ Doug Fargher had been one of those who had learned his Manx from one of the last native speakers of the language.

¹² It is not my aim to offer any kind of history of interest in the language during the twentieth century, but following a certain revival of interest in the early decades, in the economically depressed decades following the 1939-1945 war, its survival was again dependent on the ministrations of a small band of enthusiasts.

¹³ John's story is presented in far greater depth in Chapter 3.5.

good fortune to meet one of those privileged Manxmen who had learned directly from the last native speakers. For several years John received one-to-one tuition from this man, and today is one of the most accomplished speakers of the language on the Island. But he is not a language ‘activist’. Although he regularly teaches the evening classes and attends Manx-speaking evenings, he takes no prominent role in language workshops or more general publicity for the language.

John settled us in to our studies quickly and comfortably. He had taught beginners before, but was honest with us – he preferred not to. However, we soon began to enjoy the weekly classes, which were often punctuated with laughter, and we made extremely quick progress. And I have to confess, there was a certain element of ‘competition’ between our group and the other class of beginners.

There were five students in the class, and they were quite a mixed crowd. One, Doona, was to become a close friend and guide. She had moved to the Island from the north of England some twenty or so years before, had married a Manxman and had spent many years of her time in the Island learning about its history, archaeology and the language. A stalwart in many cultural activities, such as the traditional music sessions and the Island’s inter-Celtic festival, *Yn Chruinnaght*, she had started classes before but had never quite managed to complete a full year’s course. She already had some knowledge of common phrases in Manx Gaelic, such as those for ‘good morning’, ‘how are you?’ or ‘would you like a drink?’ and was keen to extend this knowledge as a passport to deeper involvement in Manx cultural activities.

Brendan was what one might term ‘a real Manxie’. Born in Peel, where he had lived all his thirty-odd years, he had a broad Manx accent, the requisite four Manx grandparents¹⁴ and a Manx surname which clearly announced his Island pedigree. Although his great-grandparents had been native Manx speakers,

¹⁴ ‘Requisite’, that is, in terms of EU definitions of what makes a Manxman (or woman). Those with four Manx-born grandparents are excluded from rights to free movement within the Union. This in itself has become an ‘identity badge’ for some, but is not a principle that can have wider symbolic application because of the relatively small number of Manx-born people who would be entitled to make the claim. For details of the relevant clauses, see Solly 1994: pp168-169.

Brendan himself had no prior knowledge of the Manx language, apart from one or two poorly pronounced phrases. More used to spending his leisure time as part of the Island's "pub culture" or indulging in his passion for motorbikes, Brendan explained that he had 'decided it was about time I learned my own language'. He was supportive of efforts to encourage the teaching of the language in schools, because 'otherwise it might be lost'. To Brendan, the language was, or was becoming, a symbol of his maturing 'Manxness', and he would often attempt to connect colloquial phrases to the Manx Gaelic by checking their origins: did his everyday language stem from the Manx, he would enquire of John, or were they just local slang words from the imported English?

Tom was of that older generation which is often accused of retaining a negative attitude toward the Manx Gaelic language.¹⁵ A quiet man, he was able to lay claim to sufficient qualifications in his eyes to prove himself a *Manninagh dooie*, or 'true Manxman'. Although his mother was Scottish – 'I can't help that' – he was able, and very willing, to trace his Manx roots back to the 1500s. He had started to learn the Manx some years prior to joining this class, but had returned again in an attempt to find some expression for his 'nationalist' sentiments. 'Independence is coming: not right away, but it'll happen,' he said. He had stopped attending the classes before, he said, because the only creature ever to hear him speak outside class was his dog. He was hoping that with the increased awareness and interest in the language, that there might be other opportunities to practice his developing skills and hear the language spoken freely. 'It's important for our heritage to be looked after. There are ways of saying things in the dialect that are important too, that are disappearing. The modern language is taking over fast enough, we ought to look after our heritage while we can.'

Claudia was a language teacher at a local secondary school. A German national, she had moved to the Island to be with her future husband, who was already a fluent speaker of Manx. He was also an Englishman. Claudia had decided to join the class as she wanted to broaden her basic knowledge of the

¹⁵ These assumptions are founded in tales of older generations. As one regular attendee at Manx language and cultural events recalled, 'I know my grandfather spoke Manx. I just wish I could turn the clock back and learn from him. My father didn't have any Manx. He despised it, and I felt much the same when I was younger.'

language to complement her role as a member of one of the Island's Manx language choirs. She was also a member of a traditional dance group, and an accomplished musician who contributed at traditional music sessions. And she had the best opportunity of all of us to practice the language outside of the classroom.

The final member of the group was the anthropologist. Prior to fieldwork, she had believed that understanding attitudes to the Manx language was *the* route to understanding attitudes to a developing Manx 'identity'. Joining the group therefore had many purposes; to meet informants, to test out those theories of cultural symbolism in a practical setting, to learn a little of the language so as to participate in cultural activities, and to show some level of commitment to what many people were trying to achieve in preserving the language for current and future use.

Together, and with the dedicated help of the tutor, the group spent several months grappling with the complexities of word order, lenition, nasal tones and irregular verbs; learned, that is, to put the verb first and to change *moddey* to *voddey* in the correct circumstances. Discoveries were not restricted, however, to the learning of a language. In the process, we learned more about the recent fortunes of the language. At one point John was to say, 'they think that because you're learning the language, you're learning all things Manx. You're not.'¹⁶ But he did agree that anything that contributed to the survival of the language was a good idea. 'Only thirty years ago the number of Gaelic speakers, well, they'd be like the number in this room now,' he said (referring to the five students of the group and himself). 'Now it's really gathering pace, and we have to keep it that way.'

In contrast, he felt that language activity outside classes had reduced considerably in the last few years. Some twenty years before, people would enthusiastically gather in a public house in the south each Thursday, where some twenty or so musicians and speakers would turn up. 'Now we have it the first Thursday in every month, and we're lucky to get six speakers,' he said, but

¹⁶ A revealing comment for the anthropologist listening, and one which may have contributed to the widening of my search.

placed his explanation in the context of practical issues rather than in reducing interest in the language. 'The old men don't want to travel in winter, or come down from Laxey or Ramsey,' he said. 'It's a long way. And there's less of a social life since the drink-driving thing came in,' he added.

If he seemed a little pessimistic about the future, his reasons arise out of his direct experience. Among our group of 'new' learners, there was an expressed desire to see the language 'in use' in such social settings and outside the rather 'false' context of the classroom, but several found it difficult to take the step. Our own classes would often be followed by informal visits to the inn across the road, where the group practiced simple phrases that had relevance to the situation. Here was a chance to escape from the classroom phrases of 'I have a dog' or 'the house has a black door', and to practice the 'real life' use of the language with phrases such as '*by vie lhiat jough?*' (or, 'would you like a drink?'). But while we could laugh at our own linguistic incompetence in the confines of the classroom or the neighbouring inn, few could be persuaded to try out a limited knowledge on other Manx Gaelic speakers.

Opportunities to meet with beginners from other groups were initially greeted with enthusiasm, but when the time came many of the group found it impossible to face the difficulties of using Manx Gaelic 'in public'. The language festival in the autumn included a gathering, or *cruinnaght*, to which all classes throughout the Island were invited. Although a large and enthusiastic crowd did gather, there were several people from the St John's groups who made their excuses, many at the last minute. Despite the assurances of the teachers and other fluent speakers that no-one would be made to feel awkward about their ability, or lack of it, there remained a reluctance to mix with more accomplished speakers. This reluctance was further expressed when the members of the group decided not to accept the tutor's invitation to attend the monthly *Oie Gaelgagh*.

Oie Gaelgagh

Every first Thursday in the month, a small group of fluent Manx speakers gather in a public house in Castletown, and spend a convivial evening chatting in the Island's native tongue. Apart from when ordering their drinks at the bar (or translating parts of the conversation to a bemused anthropologist) all

conversation takes place in Manx Gaelic. Taking over one corner of the room, glasses of beer on the table, the members of the small group of some six or seven people discuss all manner of daily subjects; the garden, what so-and-so has been up to, trips away. They may also talk about the correct word for this or that and its roots, or tell jokes they have heard in English but have translated into Manx. Above all, their desire is simply to use Manx in a social setting.

When I arrived on my first visit to the group, John welcomed me and directed me to a seat beside his own. Knowing well the command I had of the language – or, rather, did not yet have – during the evening he whispered translations in my ear, allowing me to follow the conversations. He is a stalwart of this group, which is also attended by his own teacher, the old gentleman who had learned his Manx from a native speaker. Another regular is a fisherman from the south of the Island, who has memories from his younger days of hearing the old men on the quay use Manx Gaelic words and phrases. Another member, Alison, is one of the team of peripatetic teachers who teach the language in the Island's primary and secondary schools, and she and her partner, who has more recently taken up the language, are also regular attendees. John's partner, who learned her Manx a few years before at an evening class, on this evening sat chatting happily with his old teacher, whilst the others gossiped and laughed their way through the next two hours.

During the evening John showed me a cutting from an English newspaper. He had kept the travel journalist's article, entitled 'A wanderer in MacLir's land', since its publication in the Sunday Telegraph in 1990. He pointed to a particular extract, and invited me to read it for myself:

'Castletown has a salty, old fashioned air to it. In the upstairs bar of the Ship Inn a group of enthusiasts had gathered round a table for an evening's conversation in Manx, a language kept alive in this way against all the pressures of the 20th century. As I listened to the rising and falling cadences of their talk, more like a deep-toned singing than speech, and thought back over those sunny, lonely miles of walking, the everyday world seemed a good deal more than 50 miles away.' (Sunday Telegraph, 1.4.90).

John's pride in this article was obvious. One of the criticisms often levelled against the Manx language is its 'guttural' sound, but this reporter had offered a different assessment of the Gaelic sounds. It also showed again how far things had come in those years since the incident in the Peel inn, and confirmed for John what he was already fully aware of; that the language survived through meetings such as this, as much as through more 'official' channels. He was clearly frustrated with the reduced numbers that now attend these evenings but, despite an air of mild disappointment, the group clearly enjoys the opportunity to join together to use the language in a convivial setting. Many of the regular attendees have studied the language in depth over many years, teaching, working with Bible translations, and attending lectures on language issues. Yet as the Sunday Telegraph reporter observed in 1990, they have a more fundamental belief in keeping the language alive through simple conversation. Perhaps it is this fact that is at the heart of John's concerns. With no 'new blood' attending these social evenings, and the reluctance of new students to use the language outside the classroom, all their teaching may be in vain

Gaelg Vio!

It means 'Manx Gaelic lives', and in contrast to John's fears at the apparent reduction in interest in the monthly get-togethers in Castletown, other evenings at other venues were being arranged, and the first of these was welcomed with enthusiasm. The inspiration behind this new initiative was the Manx Language Development Officer, who organised these evenings as part of his remit to expand awareness of the language. This first gathering was taking place in the bar of a hotel in the Island's south, with the intention that the evenings 'move around' the Island to make it easier for people to attend. This differed from John's *oie gaelgagh*, which has always taken place in Castletown, and draws its group from the local area. And where the Castletown group is the domain of a few regulars, this new evening attracted a wide range of Manx speakers, including the younger members of the 'speech community' and speakers from the central and northern parts of the Island. But this was not an 'exclusive' evening. John and his fellow *oie gaelgagh* regulars were also there. The chatter may have been faster, and the joking more personal – an easy translation of the

Island's everyday 'pub culture' into a different linguistic context – but this was a time and place for everyone who wanted to support the Manx.

At one point in the evening's proceedings, someone called for everyone's attention and announced that the number of Manx Gaelic speakers in the room now outnumbered the English monoglots. There was a loud cheer, and the atmosphere took on an even greater of air of celebration and achievement. Where the regulars of the *oie gaelgagh* sit quietly in one corner of the inn in Castletown, talking quietly and appearing somewhat overwhelmed by the groups of golfers also using the bar, this new gathering had achieved a level of vocal self-confidence as a result of their numbers (as evidenced by their rumbustious behaviour throughout the remainder of the evening).

Feailley Ghaelgagh

On way home from work one evening, I heard that same Manx Language Development Officer on the radio, being interviewed about the forthcoming *Feailley Ghaelgagh*, or Manx Language Festival. As organiser of the newly created mixture of workshops, social gatherings and meetings, he was asked what he wanted the week to achieve. He responded by saying that if as a result just one person decided to take it further – that is, to learn the language or do something to promote it – he would be happy. Created as a festival to headline the Manx Gaelic language, as opposed to it being a co-present symbol in other Island festivals such as *Yn Cruinnaght*, it is now a well established annual event. The emphasis is again on using the language in social activity, as well as on enjoyment. Each year, guest performers are invited from neighbouring Celtic nations to perform alongside the Island's own home-grown talent, and the opportunity is taken to compare and learn from Manx Gaelic's linguistic siblings.

And so, in one of Douglas' shopping malls on the first Saturday of the festival, volunteers manned an information stall to promote both the festival and the various opportunities to learn the language that are on offer. It was, unfortunately, a rather lack-lustre affair, with most of the information being directed at children's learning through the Manx-medium playgroup or through the classes available in schools. The festival's programme was available, but there was little else there to make it easier for those not already involved in the

'language community' to become part of it. One potentially interested *stayover* complained that it was 'difficult' to get involved with things, or to find information about the language or things related to 'Manx culture'. It was, she alluded, a rather 'private club', and this perceived 'exclusivity' is a theme which will appear elsewhere in thesis. But, in a local school that first afternoon of the festival, people of all ages – including the school's own traditional dance group – gathered to learn songs, dances and new tunes.

One workshop – the one I chose to participate in – revolved around learning newly created 'traditional style' songs in Manx. A group of a dozen or so 'retired' to a quiet, upstairs room, shut the door and began to learn the songs selected in advance by our 'tutor'. Singing unaccompanied clearly came naturally to most of those in the room, and the songs were speedily mastered, with harmonies, to be performed later in the afternoon in front of the other 'workshoppers'. Elsewhere in the building, musicians were learning tunes from other Celtic lands. The dancers had been divided into three groups, each asked to create part of a new dance (to a specially commissioned tune) which would be put together for the performance. And later, a room full of soon-to-be-very-confused people tried to get to grips with a bit of Irish Gaelic poetry. It may have sounded intelligible to many of the Manx speakers in the room, but we had to giggle at our attempts to decipher the unfamiliar orthography.

That evening – after what felt like a quite demanding afternoon's work – the festival faithful gathered at the White House in Peel for a 'Traditional Singing Night'. The room was packed, but true to Manx form did not really get going until half an hour or so after its billed start time: *traa dy liooar* (time enough). The evening is worthy of note, however, because most 'pub sessions' tend to focus on the playing of instrumental music. With the purpose of the week being the Manx language, this was an opportunity to have fun with it, and to give everyone the chance to sing traditional songs – a domain more normally confined to the work of the Island's choirs. Fortunately, there were copies of the various songbooks that have been published over the last few decades available,¹⁷ so

¹⁷ For the relevance and importance of these publications, see the discussion in the following chapter.

those of us who were unfamiliar with the lyrics could join in, and the result was a very enjoyable evening.

An evening, however, that was peppered with a hint of 'internal' tensions. As the evening wore on and we had sung our way through a substantial quantity of the Island's repertoire, one or two people began solos of their own favourites. These were generally welcomed, but when at the end of the evening one soloist¹⁸ struck up in English, the reaction was not unanimously favourable. The song selected went on for some time, and told of a man lying in his deathbed thinking of his love. It seemed the words were almost metaphorical. Here at the end of the evening, a song in English was 're-asserting' the power of the English language over the Manx.

But, after the soloist had finished, and as people were preparing to leave, another voice struck out in a short but loud burst of a Manx song: the Manx had the last word.

Meeting the Problems

That such tensions exist is symptomatic of the finely balanced situation of the language. It is never likely again to be used for everyday communication. As a cultural symbol it has a value, but in a context where the government aims more toward a civic rather than a culturally based nationalism, it is one that must be carefully mobilised in order not to 'exclude'. Consequently, those who work to maintain its profile and status must do so carefully, but seriously. So, in contrast to the 'fun' of the singing night, the festival also featured a small 'conference' to discuss the way forward.

The following gives a sense of the discussion that went around the table that evening.¹⁹ The question was asked: 'How far do we want to go? Do we want to push for 'official status'? It was pointed out that there are no official languages in the Island, or indeed in the UK. Such status, therefore, was unimportant. Rather than 'top-down' status, what was needed was 'a grass roots thing to establish it - it's difficult to implement it if you haven't got that.' A 'softly-softly' approach seemed to be the favoured route, an opinion gained, it

¹⁸ The soloist was a Manxman.

¹⁹ Reproduced from handwritten notes taken by me at the meeting.

seemed, through experience. An earlier ‘project’ to persuade the Manx government to provide the legislation to allow people to write cheques in Manx Gaelic had been done slowly, persuasively, and had succeeded.

The conversation then turned to placenames, corruption of which is seen as an insidious way of further destroying the language. Indeed, it was something that John, my Manx Gaelic tutor, spoke about on many occasions. One contributor at the meeting wanted to force people to use a Manx placename whenever one existed. Such coercion was not favoured by the rest, but heads nodded when another said the names at least needed more ‘protection’. There were, he said, even incorrect spellings on the Ordnance Survey maps.²⁰ If errors were found in ‘the dominant language’, said one, they were corrected. No such concern was shown to the Manx spellings. It was suggested that developers could not be forced to maintain local placenames, but the situation became somewhat urgent when their own councils could not be relied upon to take care over such matters. The reason, he continued, was that ‘many of the members are opposed to it, [because] they’re Manx and have a chip about it’ (that is, about their Manxness).

That such ‘embarrassment’ about Manx roots exists was further expressed in the meeting’s criticism of the local Commissioners’ refusal to make the signage for the village of St John’s – the home of the Tynwald Hill – bilingual. ‘It’s a psychological problem,’ concluded one member. They agreed that the older Manx people, often ‘ashamed of the Manx language, because they’re Manx,’ were a barrier to further progress, especially when they held positions of political influence. But they might be able to do something to influence the developers: a ‘glossy’ brochure, perhaps? It would have to be glossy, because if not ‘they’ll think it’s those nuts again.’ To be taken seriously, the language movement had to present itself professionally and in the manner expected by the audience.

And finally, the agenda turned to the subject of Gaelic medium education. Its ‘champion’ at the table introduced the issue by discussing its use in the neighbouring Celtic countries. Some offered a pessimistic response: ‘it’s a good

²⁰ For an intimate portrait of the effects of the Anglicisation of placenames, see Brian Friel’s play *Translations* (1981), which details the remapping of an area in County Donegal in the 1830s.

thing, but difficult to implement, as there are not enough fluent speakers [of Manx]. And we're native speakers of the most powerful language on earth.' Pragmatically, one added that there was no shortage locally of people wanting to send their children to Gaelic medium playgroups, 'but to be honest, for some they like it because it's cheap.'

Discussion moved to the practicalities of learning Manx for adults, ostensibly as a 'foreign language'. A fluent speaker admitted that, however much one might want to fight for the language, everyday life made it very difficult. 'We try to speak Manx at home,' he said, 'but we do it for a week or so, then we get tired from work, we slip into English, and so we're back where we started.'

Such difficulties do not stop the group being ambitious, however. They discussed the establishment of three Gaelic medium primary units within ten years, accepting as a 'fact of life' that the children would always revert to English in the playground (cf: Frankenberg 1957). And despite a comment or two to the contrary, it was agreed that they should not campaign for compulsory teaching of the language. 'There's a lot of sympathy for Manx,' said one, 'and in the Tynwald debate in '92 there was a lot of sympathy. Yet we would never win a straight fight. The supporters just wouldn't stand up.'

There are, and will always be, practical problems. To find sufficient teachers of Manx Gaelic, they need to encourage qualified teachers who are also fluent speakers of the language to devote their career to its teaching. Opinion in the group was divided as to whether the Manx government was sufficiently committed to the language to support the language movement in sourcing and supporting such candidates.

Other Views

Whilst much of what has been reproduced above comes from those who have consciously put themselves forward to learn or otherwise get involved with the language, the comments contained in this concluding discussion derive from encounters outside the more 'formalised' structures of Manx activism. In this concluding section I will look in more detail at the salient points about Manx Gaelic revival through these alternative views, seeking in the process to

understand where Manx Gaelic fits into the ongoing search for a contemporary ‘Manxness’.

One of the final points raised in the meeting recounted above dealt with the issue of making the learning of Manx compulsory. This is the case in Eire, but the political origins and symbolic purposes behind the compulsory teaching of Irish Gaelic are quite clearly unique to that context. However, anecdotal evidence invoked by my informants had it that students forced to learn Irish had been known to ‘turn their backs’ on it, a prospect which would be devastating to the delicate situation of Manx Gaelic. For Manx language enthusiasts this offered proof that compulsion has a detrimental effect on ‘sympathy’ for a language. With a government unlikely to support such moves – a strategy alien to a policy of an inclusive society built on ‘civic nationalism’ – any attempt by the language movement toward the compulsory teaching of Manx would place them firmly in the role of idealistic ‘nuts’.

‘Sympathy’, then, as a public response, demonstrates a far more plausible way forward for Manx, as the following exchange might show. During a conversation overheard in a hairdressing salon the owner, who had come to the Island as a child, said he could not understand why anyone would want to learn a language that no one spoke anymore. His client responded by saying that her children could speak it; that they had been learning at school. He still would not accept that the language was worth learning, saying ‘if it’s that worthwhile they should make it compulsory in schools.’ She disagreed firmly with his comment, adding that people should have the choice. In that case, he asked, why should his money go on a useless language? She responded by saying that it was ‘their heritage and their right.’²¹ If ‘heritage’ and ‘right’ here infers some connection to historicized place, the language was here was seen as a symbolic means of expression of that connection.

But will the language survive? My tutor was somewhat pessimistic about its future, despite his deep personal commitment to it. His reason, also expressed in the meeting’s frustration at the inaction of ‘older Manx’ on local councils, is made all the more real in comments such as that which follows. Talking with a

²¹ Amusingly, she went on to say that the children now used Manx to communicate with one another at home, by way of some ‘secret code’ that excluded their parents.

Manx couple at the famous T.T. races, they asked me what I was doing here in the Island. In responding, I mentioned the language. 'It's all about money now', he said. 'About the finance sector. That's all they worry about.' They spoke about their awareness of the efforts of some to save the language, and he added that he felt quite guilty that he, a Manxman, made no effort himself. He went on: 'We Manx are reticent. We don't like pushing ourselves forward.' His wife gave her assessment: 'Well, everyone in England and here, well, we're all lazy about learning languages.' 'I don't think it's that,' he said. 'It's just, well, there's a reluctance to learn the language because it never did us any good.' And an old lady I met in a Douglas car park told me that her grandparents had been Manx speakers, but she had been told that they decided not to speak Manx to their children, as it was considered more 'posh' to speak English. She said that until a few years ago she still used Manx dialect phrases but people didn't understand her so she had stopped. Some dialect words may still be heard in rural areas, and one prominent politician (also a farmer) publicly expressed a desire to 'restore' some of these words to the Island's vocabulary,²² but it could be argued that in this contemporary context of 'localism' and the search for symbolic referents, a language that is understood to have a long and resilient history with the Island – is *of* the Island – has more value in that search than the local version of an imported tongue (cf. Macdonald 1997b: 35ff). And small tales of optimism are always at hand to counter the fears of the language's demise. The tale that opened this chapter is one. Another was relayed to me by one of the peripatetic teachers. Shocked at the news that the Manx class in her primary school was facing cancellation (due to ever-increasing curriculum pressures), one little girl had rushed up to the teacher and cried that 'they're going to stop me learning my language.' An uplifting story for any language activist, but for the storyteller it

²² Whilst I focus in this thesis on the 'revival' of the Manx Gaelic, the Anglo-Manx dialect has also held an important place in Manx cultural history over the last century. The Manx Language Society (*Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh*) focused much of their attention on the dialect in their early years (founded 1899), and the Island's most famous poet, T. E. Brown, wrote many a verse in the dialect. In revealing contrast to the contemporary situation, Belchem writes that given the difficulty experienced by some Celtic enthusiasts at the end of the nineteenth/early twentieth century to learn the Manx Gaelic, 'Anglo-Manx...soon became the decisive linguistic issue, the voice of resistance to incorporation into England' (2000a: 7).

was made all the more potent because the young girl had moved to the Island with her parents less than a year before.

Is Manx Gaelic a meaning-making symbol in contemporary Manx society? Cohen writes that 'the quintessential referent of community is that its members make, or believe they make, a similar sense of things, [which] inheres in their attachment or commitment to a common body of symbols' (1985: 16). We have already heard how various sections of Manx society have either an ambivalent or a hostile response to the presence of Manx Gaelic in contemporary Island life. In this respect, the language might be said to 'fail' in its potentially symbolic role. One retired teacher of Manx birth said that as far as she was concerned, language did not provide one with an identity. For her, language 'wasn't Manxness,' and for a farmer of long Manx pedigree, the language was perhaps worth keeping alive, as long as no time was taken up with it in school. 'Anyhow, he said, 'most Manx won't make the effort,' or are nervous because, said another, 'it would be too difficult to learn.' For some *stayovers*, as we have seen, it is just a 'waste of money', while for others it becomes a means to express their sense of belonging to their chosen home. Given this diversity of opinion, it might be argued that the Manx Gaelic and its accompanying 'revival' have a greater capacity to divide rather than to symbolically unite.

But Cohen also writes that 'symbols do not tell us *what* to mean, but give us the capacity to make meaning (ibid.). Despite the diversity of opinion that exists internally about the 'revival' and position of Manx Gaelic, it cannot be denied that the language is understood by its supporters and detractors alike as something specific to the Island. To that extent, it does have a 'symbolic' role, and as Macdonald explains in relation to the rise of European ethnonationalisms since the 1960s, 'linguistic specificity [is] now firmly cast as at the heart of a coherent cultural identity' (Macdonald 1997b: 62). Coherent, that is, in terms of a collectivity's 'external' image and now, supported by the Manx government, Manx Gaelic is included in that catalogue of cultural forms available for outwardly expressing the Island's 'uniqueness'.

The history of Manx Gaelic, and the process by which it has been returned to its role as the language of the Island, may be read as largely paralleling that of the history of Scots Gaelic as described by Macdonald (op.cit.:

passim, partic. chapters 2 and 8). But where the Scots Gaelic is linked directly to the *Scotti* under whom Scotland achieved nation-statehood, and thus becomes an ontologically loaded symbol, Manx Gaelic's credentials require further historical justification to claim equivalent status. It could be argued that nation-statehood was achieved in Mann during the rule of the Norse kings, but unlike the Scottish dynasty who spoke Gaelic, these lords spoke Norse. In resolution, in the Island's museums one is told that the Manx Gaelic language survived 'at the mother's breast': was (and is) a true 'mother tongue'. As such, it can claim to be a 'heritage language' (Macdonald 1997b: 219).

Manx Gaelic enthusiasts are perhaps seen as espousing a 'heritage language' model of identity. Such languages are those 'with which a person should particularly identify on account of their ethnicity, which usually would be the mother tongue [...] seen to lie at the heart of a deep-seated identity from which people should not be estranged' (ibid.). When internally expressed in this way, that is, as 'essential' to Manxness, the Manx Gaelic language again threatens to divide – and not only Manx-born from incomer. If the individual does not include 'language', for whatever reason, in that fund of forms which constitutes a notion of personal identity, a model of identity that appears to insist on making that particular selection excludes rather than includes. Yet as some of the stories recounted in this chapter show, the language also has the capacity to act as a unifying symbol and a means of expressing – of performing – a social and cultural commitment to the Island. That said, at present the Manx Gaelic language remains but one cultural form through which such identity and belonging might be expressed. In the next chapter, I discuss other kinds of 'performance' through which people choose to explore their sense of identity.

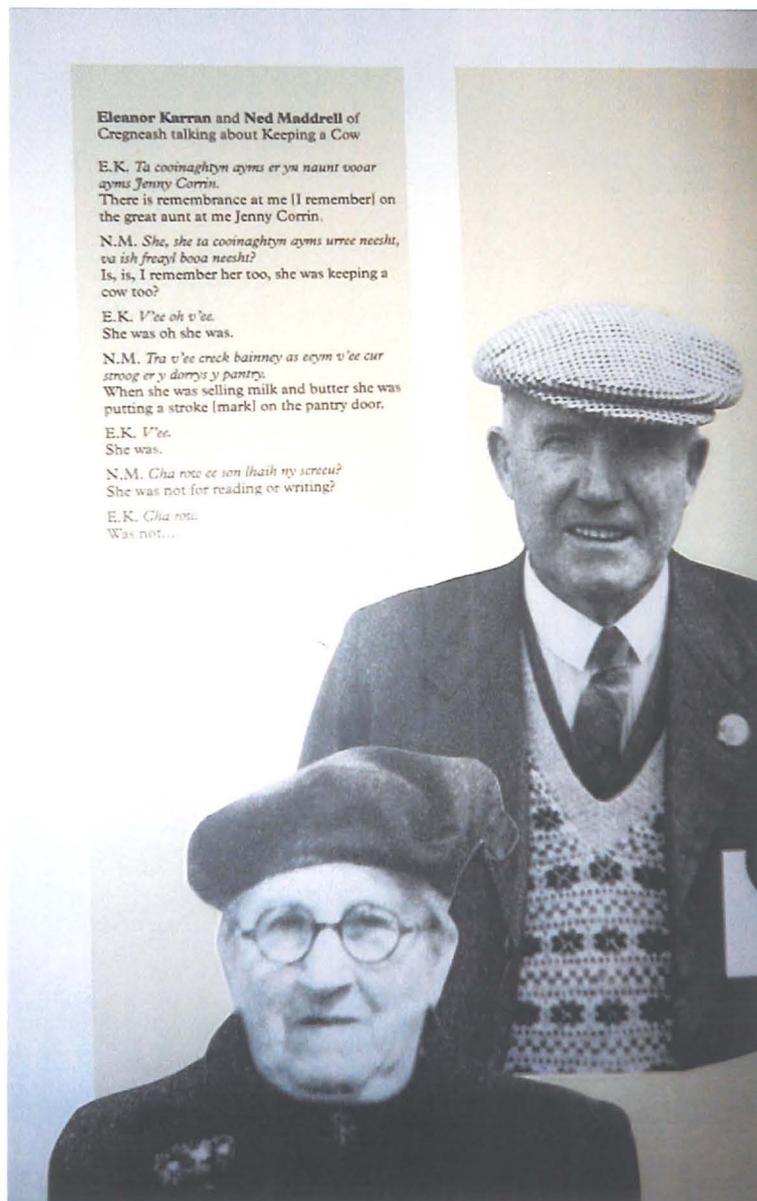


Figure 5 : Part of a display in the Manx Museum which details the history of the Manx Gaelic language. The gentleman in the picture is Ned Maddrell, the last native speaker of the language, who died in 1974. Photograph : Sue Lewis.

Chapter 2.2: Performing Roots

The learning and speaking of the Manx Gaelic language is, of course, a form of ‘cultural performance’, but its status in Manx cultural history (that is, its longevity) merited the detailed discussion of the previous chapter. In this chapter I introduce the other forms of performance – of music, of dance and of verse, in community halls or in pubs – which are a constant feature of Manx life. Some of the events described are the result of conscious revivals, whilst others indicate an unconsciously enacted efflorescence of traditional gatherings. By giving a taste of just a few of these performances, this chapter will ask how these forms of expression contribute to the search for a ‘rooted’ but contemporary Manx identity, and will situate that search within the context of the last few decades.

Expanding upon Giddens’ concept of ‘place’, Stokes argues that music – or the ‘musical event’ – ‘evokes and organises collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity’ (1994: 3). That music is an important feature of past and present Island life is well documented (see Bazin 1995, 1997, 2000; Faragher 1992; Speers 1995), but as will be seen from the descriptions of the ‘gatherings’ featured below, other modes of expression make similar evocative contributions. It is the ‘event’ that matters, and the desire to understand the social and cultural consequences of the Island’s recent, or present, experience through remembered forms of gathering will be a clear feature of this chapter. Therefore, I follow Stokes’ use (1994: 4) of Bourdieu (1977) and De Certeau (1984), understanding these social performances as vehicles for the making of meaning and the negotiation and transformation of space – that is, they are a means by which to perform the process of ‘making sense’.

I open with one of the more intimate but conscious manifestations of this performance of process – the ‘pub session’. Another explicit ‘revival’ follows – that of the *Yn Cruinnaght*, a large annual gathering which draws in groups from fellow Celtic countries. We return to intimacy again, in the form of the *oie’ll verrey*, a small gathering in a chapel with overtones of yesteryear, before moving on to a description of the more raucous version, the *eisteddfod*. Finally, we look in a little more detail at the role of satire – spoken or sung, but affectively ‘performed’. Along the way, I will also offer a participatory insight into what it means to be a ‘performer’, but I would ask the reader to bear in mind that what is offered here is but a small taste of musical and other forms of performance which saturate the Island’s social diary. Sadly absent from this chapter (but expertly dealt with elsewhere: see Faragher 1992, Griffin 2001) is a discussion on the Manx Music and Drama Festival, or ‘Guild’. The various concerts given by the Island’s orchestras,¹ and the numerous classical concerts, and the ‘Isle of Music’ festival which brings ‘world music’ in the guise of names such as Ladysmith Black Mambazo, must also remain unexamined. I attempt herein to give an analysis that derives from intimate knowledge – both as observer and performer – of the various events I have included. I could not claim that level of engagement with those events not included, and have consequently left their exposition to others better positioned.

A Session

There are several ‘pub sessions’ to be found around the Island. At around the same(ish) time, on the same evening of a week and in the same place, one can be almost guaranteed to find a group of musicians ready to play, and a selection of familiar faces ready to listen. Some sessions centre round an established group of musicians, while others are dependent on who decides to turn up on that particular night, but in both contexts any willing musician will be happily received.² At all such sessions the focus will be on Manx, or at least Celtic,

¹ The Island offers superb music education, with a dedicated facility in Douglas and a team of peripatetic teachers. Several of the young musicians I watched playing ‘traditional’ music are also accomplished musicians playing with the Youth Orchestra.

² With certain provisos: whilst there can never be too many fiddle players, the same cannot quite be said about those who turn up with a bodhrán tucked under their arm. I play the bodhrán!

traditional music. At the time of my fieldwork, one of the most popular of these 'sessions' happened each Saturday night at the very inn where, only thirty years before, that small group of Manx Gaelic speakers had been asked to leave the premises for conversing in the language. Today, the Manx Gaelic speakers and their musical fellows are more than welcome.

The White House in Peel (or *Thie Bane* in Manx Gaelic) is a large public house, with several rooms. At around 9.30 each Saturday evening a few musicians and regular 'listeners' will begin to arrive and settle themselves in to one half of the lounge bar, usually choosing to sit at the same table. As the musicians unpack their instruments, tune up and make themselves comfortable, the 'listeners' will make their way to the bar to get the first round of drinks in. Very soon, as people settle down, the musicians will cease their talk and warm into the first 'set' of tunes. The 'listeners' will appear to do anything but listen, joking and laughing and striking up conversations about the latest news and engaging in the *skeet* (or gossip).

The number of musicians can never be guaranteed, but very rarely do they fail to begin playing within a few minutes of their arrival. One regular musician will normally take the lead, playing the first few notes of a tune, with the others quickly joining in. None of the musicians appears to use a musical score, with all the tunes learned by heart. One regular musician told me of the experience of learning this skill, which in her case was a product of ten years of repetition. Recalling her early attempts, she said that 'by the time we'd recognized the tune, and found it in the book, we'd be lucky to start playing by the last bar', and added that the opening bar of one particular tune, and its promised level of complexity, was guaranteed to have her running for the safety of the ladies toilet!

There are numerous 'sets' in the repertoire, a set usually being a combination of three tunes which meld well together, and which are played one after the other, seamlessly. Each tune itself tends to be made up of two 'parts', and it never failed to amaze me how this irregular grouping of musicians would move flawlessly from one part to another, back again, into the next tune, as if they practiced together daily and knew each other's style intimately. Occasionally, a soloist would offer to play, or be cajoled, and very occasionally

someone would be encouraged to sing a traditional song, sometimes in Manx Gaelic.

There is an etiquette applicable to these sessions. Of prime importance is the ethos that anyone can join in. Visiting musicians from other nations are welcomed with great enthusiasm, and are encouraged to play tunes from their own tradition and to meld their music with that of the Manx. And for any musician wishing to 'have a go' musical ability, or lack of it, is no barrier to involvement or acceptance. Rather, it is the willingness to participate – or contribute – that matters. The talk around the tables continues whilst the musicians play, but no offence is meant or taken. The end of each set comes and goes unacknowledged, and applause is unsought and out of place. Indeed, 'strangers' are often revealed by their burst of applause at the end of a tune – and tend to draw a mass glance of mild disapproval as a reward for their efforts. Only a soloist deserves the cessation of conversation and appreciative applause at the close of their tune. In describing an Irish 'session' Stokes writes that 'the musicians usually form an inward-facing circle, and once the session has got going, the musicians play for themselves rather than for the benefit of non-musicians on the bar' (1994: 109). It would be easy enough to gain the same impression from the Manx 'session', but the ability to dip in and out of playing and the very fact that the 'being there' is also part of this 'cultural performance', defines this not as a 'performance given by' but a performance shared. The gathering of people, the debates and general conversation, the drinking and the laughter – and the occasional pushing back of table to make room for a dance – are all part of the performance.

As too is its 'origin'. The core of this group of musicians is a musical 'concept' named *Bwoie Doal*, the appellation having come from the nickname of a blind fisherman who, at the end of the nineteenth century, saved many traditional songs from extinction. The information about the group and the White House sessions which appears on the World Wide Web pages devoted to the Island's folk music describes *Bwoie Doal* as follows: 'most Manx musicians have, at one time or another, played as part of the amorphous aggregation which is *Bwoie Doal*. The Saturday night sessions at the Whitehouse Inn, Peel, have always been part workshop, part social, part performance and some would even say part group therapy. During the years, because of a stimulus from one of the

stalwart regulars, they have been a forum for extending repertoire and expanding the style, form and scope of Manx tunes.³

'Part workshop' because the musicians welcome all-comers. They may be beginners, either to their instrument or to the concept of the 'session', or they may be musicians visiting from other countries, interested in learning about Manx music. A musician may pick from a vast repertoire of tunes and sets, and gaining familiarity with the first few bars of the tune, and where to join in, is one part of the learning process. Regular musicians will be familiar with which tunes comprise the set, the number of repetitions of each tune and other subtle changes. The newcomer has, then, to learn not only the tunes but how each tune seems to flow seamlessly into the next. They also have to become familiar with playing in that 'amorphous aggregation' of musicians, the composition of which changes each week.

In addition, the sessions are also the means through which new tunes are disseminated. In the 1970s, new technology in the form of the photocopier gave affordable access to the vast collection of manuscripts of traditional Manx music held by the Manx Museum. The Manx National Song Book, published in 1896 by Manxman Dr. John Clague, had collated many of these tunes, but the book had been 'tidied up for performance in the Victorian parlour'.⁴ Now copied, the tunes in their 'raw' form with lyrics re-translated into Manx Gaelic, were again available for performance. As a consequence, musicians have not only learned these tunes but have begun to write new music in the traditional idiom, and these new tunes are brought to the sessions to be played by their composer and passed on to the other musicians assembled. As Bob Carswell stated in his second of the 'Music of Man' programmes for BBC Radio 3, 'the oral tradition is not dead and gone, it lives on with old tunes, new tunes and influences being swapped at sessions in houses and pubs' (Carswell/BBC).

That the sessions are 'part workshop' and 'part performance' is therefore clear. But as indicated in the piece from the Web reproduced above, they serve another purpose – as 'group therapy': needed perhaps because this relatively small band of people who dedicate time and energy to maintaining various

³ <http://www.manxman.co.im/music/bwoie>.

⁴ From the transcript of 'Music of Man', a programme written and presented by Bob Carswell, for BBC Radio 3. A Heavy Entertainment production.

aspects of Manx cultural activity need to confirm for themselves the importance of the social element of that activity – is, therefore, a shared activity. So, while the musicians settle themselves around one table, others fill with ‘performers’ of another kind. Around the ‘political table’ will sit the various members of the Manx Nationalist party, or others who enjoy the vocal to and fro of the weekly political debates. As the music continues, the debates get more and more heated – they remain good-humoured – whilst they argue about the handling of local issues by the government, about the Finance Sector, the European Union, or the representation of Mann by way of the Island’s entry into the BT Global Challenge yacht race. Occasionally, one or two of the men around this table will temporarily ignore the debate and pick up an instrument and join in with a tune, but throughout the evening they provide a ‘side-show’ for the other patrons of the inn.

Around another table sit ‘the rest’; those who have come to listen to the music, and also talk and debate about anything and everything from the T.T. races to the state of language teaching in the schools. But also noticeable, or rather unavoidable, is that this one corner of the inn, filled with musicians and Gaelic speakers and political activists, is ‘separate’ from the rest of the inn’s clientele. In other rooms and around the bar the noise and general hubbub of a Saturday night goes on almost untouched by this ‘Manx’ cultural, linguistic and political activity. There are some who come and listen, or others who pop a head around the door to see what is going on. Maybe there are some who feign disinterest as they perch on a stool at the other end of the room, secretly listening? Generally, though, these cultural and musical ‘enthusiasts’ are ignored.

It would perhaps be stretching a point to say that these Saturday night sessions stand as metaphors for attitudes toward traditional culture and language. Or would it? A small group of people perform their version of this culture in one corner, sitting side-by-side but separated from the rest of the inn and its clientele. For those who participate, this opportunity to meet together and play music, or talk politics, makes real the communitarian aspect of the traditions they are trying to revive. It also provides a focus for the individual interests of those who participate. The nationalist can bring personal reflections on debates into a public arena whilst remaining securely contained by the group. The young girl who has been introduced to Manx traditional music at school has a place in which to

engage in the 'scene' that she wishes to become part of. And there is a certain security of knowledge for the others, knowledge that the culture is there, but they themselves need to make little effort to ensure its continuance. For those who wish to attract attention from the outside – attention from people who might wish to buy in to this 'romantic' Celtic idyll – it is available as a curio, a novelty to sell. And its existence appears often to be of little interest to the rest.

As Chapman explains, 'there is often a great gulf between the real representatives of "ethnicity" (the man and the woman in the street, so to speak), and the self-conscious and enthusiastic exponents of the same "ethnicity"'. This is as manifest in musical as it is in other matters. Secondly, music provides an entry into practices and sentiments of ethnic belonging, for those whose commitment is small, and who require enthusiasm rather than effort' (1994: 35). Each of those points is reflected in the picture of the session above, and will be seen in the scenes that follow. I will return to Chapman's useful 'thoughts on Celtic music' (op.cit.) later in the chapter, but we now turn to a further 'self-conscious' expression of Celticity – *Yn Cruinnaght*.

Yn Chruinnaght

Every year, in July, the Island hosts an inter-Celtic festival of music and dance called *Yn Chruinnaght*, or 'the gathering'. The week begins with competitions between Manx dance groups, choirs, musical groups and soloists, and with Island-wide demonstrations by the visiting musicians and dance groups who come from all the other Celtic nations. It then develops into a joint celebration of the 'Celtic tradition', centred on a large marquee in Ramsey,⁵ in the north of the Island. First introduced in the 1920s, *Yn Chruinnaght* was revived in the 1970s by Mona Douglas, as part of her life-long attempt to focus Manx minds on the maintenance and retention of the Manx cultural traditions. Then, it had been just a two-day affair but today it draws large numbers of contributors from near and far, as well as substantial and enthusiastic local audiences.

In 1999, the year of my fieldwork, I volunteered to assist at the gathering, and so on its first day I arrived at the marquee, ready to sell tickets. As I stepped

⁵ This was the case during the year of fieldwork. The festival has since moved to the 'Grand Island' hotel in Ramsey.

through the door of the marquee, my attention was immediately drawn up to the roof, where the flags of the six Celtic nations were hanging – Manx, Scottish, Irish, Cornish, Welsh and Breton. On the far side of the tent a small stage had been erected, fronted by a wooden dance floor laid over the grass of the festival field. To one side there was a bar and refreshment facility, and to the other the souvenir stands. All around, trestle tables and benches were laid out to first accommodate those invited to the festival’s opening, and later to offer rest and respite to the frantic dancers who would step their way through a mix of dances from all the Celtic nations represented.

With a few colleagues from the choir, I waited for the day’s proceedings to begin. The festival was to be officially opened later in the day by Sir Charles Kerruish, the recently-retired President of Tynwald.⁶ During his opening speech, he quoted the festival’s founder, Mona Douglas: ‘a modern and alien life is all about us now, and before its onslaught the old Gaelic culture of our land, and race, is in danger of being lost, unless we can persuade the rising generation to learn, appreciate and use our national heritage of artistic expression.’ This is, then, a very conscious act of cultural performance. The original concept for *Yn Chruinnaght* had come from William Cubbon in the early years of the twentieth century, and was run in those early years by *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh* and the World Manx Association (Bazin 1998: 106). It lapsed at the start of the Second World War, but was rekindled by Mona Douglas in 1978.⁷ For several years she had been encouraging that rising generation to learn the dances and songs of Mann through the auspices of *Aeglagh Vannin*, or ‘Youth of Mann’, and perhaps *Yn Chruinnaght* was a further step in the public promotion the Island’s place in a wider, Celtic culture.

Since those early days, the festival has expanded into a week-long showcase of Celtic music and dance. During the day the groups visit different parts of the Island to give demonstrations and concerts, but in the evening everyone returns to the marquee to dance the night away. It is a frantic, breathless week, and translating the experience into prose could not do the

⁶ The quote that follows is taken from a recording made by me during this *Cruinnaght* speech. The speaker, a stalwart of Manx politics and the first president of Tynwald, died in July 2003 on his 86th birthday.

⁷ This followed a small, one-day gathering the year before.

atmosphere of the event justice, and so I reproduce below a précis of the journal I kept during the week. A few weeks prior to the festival I had been invited by a fellow choir member to lodge in her house for the week: full enjoyment cannot be achieved, it seems, if one has to 'restrain' oneself to drive back to Douglas each night. The record below was scribbled into a notebook when I had returned to her house each night, the warm nights allowing me to leave the window open so that I might hear fellow revellers finding their own way back to digs and hotels around the town.

Saturday 24th July

Well, the week has arrived. Amongst those who loosely make up the 'culture club'⁸ this is the week of the year. Annual leave from work is often planned to coincide with it. The organisers have regular meetings (weekly close to the event), and dance group organisers and choir leaders have it mind for months before the days of competition arrive. We've been practising for weeks, and much more seriously than usual.

Drove up to Ramsey mid-morning, and found the house where I'm staying. She wasn't in, so I made my way into town and to the marquee, where I found her manning the ticket desk. Gave me a key and told me to make myself at home. I barely know this lady, or she me, yet here she is trusting me with the contents and security of her home.

After settling in, went back to town to the 'Food and Folk', which began tentatively. It was the turn of the Manx musicians to lead off, though they seemed reluctant to. The Manx musicians seem to appear tentative and overly 'defensive' of their music (or is it musical ability?) in front of their counterparts from the other Celtic nations. It took most of the available session time for them to get going. Not everyone in the pub appreciated the music. On leaving, one man was overheard to say 'I could do without that kind of thing while I'm having a drink.'

Afternoon: to marquee to watch the Manx dancing competitions. There were competitions for solo male and female, couples, small groups and a large team

⁸ This was my fieldnote shorthand for the cultural enthusiasts. I apologise to them for its irreverence, but I do not believe they would object.

competition, in which each team presented a choreographed set of approx. 14-15 minutes in length. Competing dancers watching their rival groups discussed the 'technical' aspects of the performance, but it was all done with great humour. Judging (both official, and by the competitors watching) focused on creativity, precision of steps, fit to the music. There is an emphasis here on creating something 'new'. Groups attempt to 'debut' a new tune and dance combo at the festival, attempting to outdo each other in the process.⁹ Steps (often new) and movements – and the weaving of one dance into another – are made complex. Although dances are built on 'traditional' foundations (with some of the most important dances remaining largely and authentically intact), there is also a demand – and a premium placed on, in terms of points awarded – for innovation.

At 4pm I went 'on duty' on the ticket sales desk. I was amazed at the amount of money we took - people buying several tickets and several people buying 'season tickets' at £35 each. I'm performing on several nights so those times I get in free, but it costs a fair sum to attend the whole week. After the sales stint we got ready for our concert appearance at Ballure Church. The concert went well - we were on first (which was good, because the audience would have forgotten us quickly, and not compared us to the Cooijaghs – we were flat as usual!), and were followed by a harpist, *Share ny Veg*, *Fo'n Chracken*, *Caarjyn Cooijagh* and *Paitchyn Vannin*.¹⁰

After the concert (which was reasonably well attended) made our way back to the marquee. Things were already well underway - people in various costumes, dance groups from Brittany and Cornwall already arrived. All ages, mature people to teenagers. The young children were running around freely, everyone keeping an eye on them, while their mums and dads danced and played.

Arthur Caley Giant band were playing, and Fynn was calling. Everyone joined in what was basically a Manx dance night. Didn't get chance myself to dance as the dance floor was always chokka. If it's like that now, what's it going to be like at the end of the week when all the Scots and Irish get here and join in?

⁹ There is a friendly but fierce rivalry between the different dance groups, especially between *Ny Fannee* from Ramsey and *Perree Bane* from the south, both of which are led by strong, creative Manxmen.

¹⁰ All Manx choral or instrumental groups.

Sunday 25th July

Went to the festival's Church Service where various musicians from participating groups played, in a little church just up the road from the marquee site. Small groups of musicians from the various countries played/sung, and there were also readings of prayers in the various Gaelic languages. Following the service everyone made their way back to the marquee for the 'official opening'. All the usual faces were there - it was an 'invitation only' event, but I'd asked permission the day before. Mayor of Ramsey there, and selected representatives of the visiting Celtic nations, and Sir Charles Kerruish who was to open the festival.

There was a rush for the eats (a normal buffet - in previous years it's been a 'Manx style' spread with soused herring, bonnag etc – some disappointment expressed at the loss of this). During the tea *Staa* played gently, and people sat with friends and family, and the kids ran around and played (a familiar sight – there's no restriction on children of any age attending any part of this festival - and when they get too tired they're laid down in a corner to sleep). Sir Charles gave a speech, in which he paid tribute to the festival's founder, Mona Douglas. He commented on how she has often been misunderstood, but expressed his belief that she should be lauded as a key figure in the maintenance of 'Manx culture'.

Concert followed: the dancers from Ireland started proceedings - a 'traditional' style dance group of female dancers ranging in age from 7-17, followed by Manx groups. The dancers were itching to get up and join in, but this was supposed to be a concert/display. The Breton dancers were notably young (in contrast to the several grey-haired Welsh dancers) and the music was so loud (those bombards again!). But it created a great atmosphere. The Manxies I know have always expressed a love of Breton music and especially dance, and they jumped at the chance when they were asked to join in. They dance in a long line, hooking their little fingers and moving their linked arms in circles whilst 'shuffling' with what are deceptively difficult steps. Then all of a sudden they'll bob to the floor! It seems to go on for ages, same pace, same rhythm, but they love it! (contrast to the opinions expressed about the 'boring' Welsh dances). This was a great day – no wonder everyone loves Chruinnaght.

Thursday 29th July

Tonight returned to Chruinnaght (after a couple of days back at work) to a concert at Peel Cathedral. *Staa* were playing for the audience as everyone settled in. The

audience sat in the main aisle, with performers seated in the side aisles. The cathedral had a slightly raised but substantial platform in the cross nave, forming a good stage.

The MC began to introduce the various groups. First on were the Cornish. They came in from the main door, processing down the aisle as the music played, and were led by a hobby horse with lighted eyes! The hobby horse was a masquerade (complete with white Nike trainers on 'its' feet!) - a bizarre combination only out-bizzared by seeing this pagan symbol in a cathedral.

Various other groups followed. The Welsh again did a sedate demonstration, but my colleague complemented the dancing, saying these slow dances are even more difficult to perform than the fast ones. But she added that they do dance fast and furious too ('fast and furious' is what the youngsters want, it seems - the 'art' of the dance is compromised in favour of explosive action). The Irish dancers looked awkward in the confined space, and were perhaps displeased to be away from the marquee. Rumour has it that the older girls are enjoying themselves a little too much.

We returned to the marquee, arriving around 10.30. The evening was in full swing, and tonight there was a different crowd in, attracted by a different style of music, with home-grown bands playing a bluesy-rock sort of mix.

Friday 30th July

Friday evening was to start earlier than usual as the headline band *Anam* were to play a concert. They are a mixed Celtic band - by that I mean there are members from Ireland, Scotland and Cornwall - and they played tunes composed by members of the group in 'traditional' idiom. They were very popular, and stayed afterward to join in the general fun. (They'd flown in that day - they are professional performers and travel round the festivals throughout the British Isles and beyond - but they stayed for the final day to be present at the Survivor's Ceilidh).

After the main concert, other groups had a turn, and the ceilidh recommenced. There were far more people in than earlier in the week, and with the heat the tent was getting very hot and sticky. However, this was apparently preferable to the

state they'd got in in previous years - if the weather's wet it gets muddy underfoot. One year it got so bad it had to be abandoned.

Part way through the evening I witnessed a very interesting conversation between Jenna and Jamys. Jamys was saying that although he enjoyed the *Cruinnaght* and still supported it, he felt it had somehow lost its way. It was no longer a showcase for the Manx music and dance - for local culture - as it had been originally intended to be. On top of that the prices were increasing to a level such that local people couldn't enjoy it all, and the visiting groups - who get to all the events free - were dominating it. The competitions for Manx songs and dance were consigned to the first Saturday, before it had all got going, or to places outside the main arena and were therefore sidelined. Jenna responded by telling him that his inflexible ideas about 'things Manx' - identity, culture, history - were out of place. People were here to enjoy themselves and nothing else. This was a very heated and intense discussion.

Saturday 31st July - Survivors' Ceilidh

I did! (but don't ask me how).

The debate between Jenna and Jamys above returns us again to Chapman's point, referenced above. In Jamys we see the 'self-conscious' and enthusiastic exponent of Manx ethnicity, while in Jenna we see an example of the interested individual who finds in music and dance (and other 'Manx' activities) 'an entry into practices and sentiments of ethnic belonging, for those whose commitment is small, and who require enthusiasm rather than effort' (1994: 35). Where Jamys, the committed nationalist, lives and breaths his 'Manxness', Jenna has recognised that for many people it is a pleasurable, rather than a 'political', way to demonstrate a wish to belong. That it should be enjoyable and easily accessible is beneficial to the status of Manx cultural traditions, but the format of *Yn Chruinnaght* has been brought under the spotlight in the last year or so after criticism that it no longer worked as a 'showcase' for Manx music and dance. The Manx element was thought to be in danger of suffocating under the greater Celtic weight of Irish, Scots and Breton presence, and recently a greater emphasis on local competition has been restored. Not interfering in the party atmosphere - allowing people still to 'enjoy themselves and nothing else' - the

restoration of the competitions puts back into the event the opportunity for the Manx competitively to perform themselves to themselves, and to restore a certain confidence in that performance – to avoid that reticence to take the lead, as they perhaps demonstrated in the pub on that opening day.

Ec Yn Oie'll Verrey

As I outlined in this chapter's introduction, it would be misleading to confine the discussion to music alone for, as Fenella Bazin points out in her book *The Manx and their Music* (Bazin 1997: 98), it is the Island's oral tradition that remains at the heart of today's performances of music and song. As important as the music are the words that accompany it, an importance born out by the desire to recite in Manx dialect, tell humorous tales of local flavour and recite satirical homemade verse. Chapman reports nineteenth century observers, who found 'in Celtic areas, that stories were chanted in 'musical' form' (1992: 40): it would appear that this tradition is, in part at least, still extant in Mann. I therefore extend the 'musical' discussion thus far to include the other elements that go to make up an evening's 'performance' in the Island. We find ourselves, therefore, picking our way down an unlit, single-track road, in the middle of winter and in search of a tiny chapel...

The Manx Gaelic phrase *oie'll verrey* means 'Mary's Eve', and these evenings of self-entertainment were once confined to Christmas Eve, when members of the community would gather together to sing hymns, play music, recite poetry or tell stories. Today they still take place in the small, rural Methodist chapels around the Island, and although these evenings can now take place at any time during the months outside summer, their format remains much the same. In the Manx Museum's archives I found a copy of a poem written by a young girl in 1910, in which she described the *oie'll verrey* she had just attended. She might have easily have been describing the event I now relate here.

The chapel hosting this particular *oie'll verrey* was extremely small, found at the end of that long country lane with only one or two cottages nearby. As far as I knew, there had been no advert in the local papers publicising the event; the details were passed by word of mouth. Yet by the time the proceedings got under away, the place was packed with around sixty people from all parts of

the Island, seated in the pews and huddled in their coats against the cold. An accompanist sat at a piano at the front of the chapel, and ladies bustled around in the back room, boiling kettles and sorting sandwiches.

The First Half

In accordance with the tradition of 'Manx time', the chairman opened proceedings some fifteen or so minutes later than verbally advertised. A chairman is always present, invited by the organisers to look after the evening's proceedings. Often an experienced public speaker, it is the chairman's role to persuade members of the audience to take their turn in entertaining the rest, to provide humorous interludes and to step in with a contribution when volunteers are few or less susceptible to persuasion.

After a short introduction and prayer, the evening's chairman and its accompanist started up with a hymn, setting a Christian theme that would continue throughout the evening. The audience soon joined in, taking up the various harmonies without prompting or assistance. When the last strains of the hymn had faded, the chairman addressed those assembled by saying that this was 'an example of a remarkable event. I looked around to see the likely faces...' which he would call upon to come to the front and take their turn. One lady readily responded to his request, and had come prepared, handing her sheet music to the accompanist. She proceeded with a song with religious lyrics. Next followed a pair of ladies, one with accordion accompanying the other's singing. During this contribution, the audience began to hum along, the harmonies rising easily from the various voices around the small room.

More hymns, with the audience joining in. A recitation followed, and then a local poet offered her latest piece of satire, this time directed at the Island's ferry operators. Appreciation for the poet's efforts was clearly demonstrated by the laughter that resulted, and which continued as other contributors offered first a musical version of another satirical piece, and then another poem, each with the Steampacket Company and its latest fleet

addition, the *Ben My Chree*, as their focus:¹¹ ‘with terra firma she’s made a bond: like the Olympic flame, she never goes out.’

The Interval

These events can last several hours, with no clear or predetermined finishing time. Rather, the end of the evening is reached by consensus, when all those who wish to perform have had the opportunity to do so. Consequently, it is usual for a small meal of sandwiches and cakes to be served during the interval. As they eat, the audience remains seated (the chapel being far too small to allow for the movement of many people), and the chairman moves around, greeting friends and colleagues.

This particular chairman was a well-respected farmer, broadcaster and local Methodist preacher, and was clearly well known to many in the audience. It appears to be part of the chairman’s task during the interval to encourage talk and reminiscence, and add his encouragement to the participants. The *oie’ll verrey* would originally have brought together members of outlying and isolated farms in the centrally located chapel, and the chairman may have been one of the Methodist circuit preachers, most of whom would have been members of local Manx families.

The Second Half

The chairman announced the start of the second half of the evening’s entertainments, and called upon a lady of the audience to sing a further religious tune, which re-established the overall tone. A *stayover* and novice to *oie’ll verrey* performance was then persuaded to recite John Macefield’s ‘I must go down to the sea again.’ Her efforts were rewarded with warm applause, which also welcomed to the ‘stage’ an old hand, who proceeded to play a saw with great expertise. He was followed, to the great amusement of the audience, by his 70 year old pupil, who played with far less expertise but a

¹¹ The Steampacket Company had been the focus of criticism for some time, having purchased a new boat whose main purpose was the transportation of containers. Not only does this boat offer reduced comfort for passengers, but its configuration makes it less stable on rough weather, a factor which often keeps it confined to port. Another nickname earned by the boat is ‘Ivy’, as it seems to wish to cling to the harbour wall.

great deal of enthusiasm (accompanied by waves of laughter from the audience). A recitation from Kipling, a hymn played on the cornet, a duet. Another *stayover* from Yorkshire with a tribute to her home county, an ensemble playing more hymn tunes, the chairman with a hymn, and a lady on a borrowed melodian playing 'Going Home.' 'It's amazing, the quantity of talent,' the chairman enthused. They do not worry if what they attempt is not perfect. They will have a go on unfamiliar instruments, and joke about the results. In between contributions and in the interval they recall previous performances and old characters. And as the end of the evening arrives, they disappear into the night, knowing that when word reaches them of another gathering in another tiny chapel, they will enjoy the same songs and hymns again.

The Eisteddfod

An eisteddfod is an *oie'll verrey* that has let its hair down. Reprising many of the features of the *oie'll verrey*, its style and effect are nevertheless very different. But why eisteddfod? The word appears to be borrowed from the Welsh, and I could exact no explanation as to why these gatherings have been labelled in this way. Although Fenella Bazin calls these events '*country cruinnaghts*', she also clarifies the use of that more Manx term by also using the term eisteddfod (Bazin 1995: 146). It may be to distinguish the eisteddfods from the recently revived *Yn Cruinnaght*, 'the gathering'. Equally, use of the term may be linked to a revival of interest in eisteddfodau in Wales. Whatever the reason, it is clear that the eisteddfod, as a form of Manx cultural performance, has undergone a renewal of interest in the last few years.

Most of these events have long histories and are rurally based, but at one *eisteddfod* in the south of the Island I was told that it had started just four years before. The women I was speaking to had no clear understanding of why, in what was an expanding dormitory village close to Douglas, a new *eisteddfod* had been created. One woman, who remembered similar events from the days of her youth some fifty years before, thought that it might be because the village had grown so much. The village has proved popular with many of the *stayovers* who have moved to the island to work in Douglas, lying as it does between the business

centre and the airport. But few of these newcomers were thought to be present, and it was pointed out to me that the audience came from all parts of the Island. And as we spoke, the hall filled with some seventy to eighty people.

Introducing myself a few minutes later to my 'neighbour' in the audience, I found myself sitting with the organiser of another popular *eisteddfod* in a rural village on the centre of the Island. He said he and his wife had been running that *eisteddfod* for some thirty-eight years: 'we've struggled on,' he said, 'even when there were only a handful of people coming along to compete. But over the last few years it's become popular again.' I asked him why that was. 'I don't know, but I think they're fed up with the TV. You'll see the same faces around. Faces from St John's, Cronk-y-Voddy, Peel, and if they're not doing this they're singing in choirs and the like. Never still.' He proceeded to guide me through the opening stages of the event, even nudging me to have a go at the 'hymn raising.' I declined, but took the opportunity to ask his advice for my plan to attend the biggest *eisteddfod* on the Island, which was to be held the following week, and from which the following details are drawn. 'Get there early, take a cushion and be prepared to be there 'til two in the morning.' And so to 'The Braaid'...

The Braaid

The Braaid *eisteddfod* takes place in a none-too-large village hall in a small hamlet a few miles outside Douglas. Also well known for being the site of the ruins of a Viking homestead, the hamlet is but a few houses perched on the hills overlooking the central valley and the east coast, clustered around a crossroads. A slumbering place then, yet when I arrived at around 6.30 in the evening, well before the advertised 7.30 start, there was a traffic marshal complete with fluorescent safety bib preparing to deal with the parking difficulties. And as the starting time approached, the hall began to fill to more than its apparent capacity. More chairs were found and placed along the aisles. Benches were squeezed in between the front row and the stage. Eventually, the organisers resorted to sitting people on the edges of the stage, and in every possible tiny space they could find. When the 'master of ceremonies' arrived on stage to open the evening's proceedings, there must have been in excess of three hundred people packed into the tiny hall.

Unlike the *oie'll verrey*, there was a mixture of age groups represented on this evening. The children's competitions had taken place that afternoon and several young people, perhaps early to middle teens, were still in the audience. There were also many familiar faces from previous *eisteddfods* and *oie'll verrey*, and many of the entrants for the forthcoming classes would be from amongst those who were clearly regular attendees at those more sedate events.

The competitive element is but one aspect of how *eisteddfods* differ from the *oie'll verrey*. There are several classes, each of which is adjudicated and for which prizes are awarded, but the mood is far from serious – and it is in the humour, laughter and general hubbub that these events also differ from their chapel-based counterparts. The 'MC' for this Braaid was a well-known Island character who is also a member of a 'Manx Concert Party', a group of entertainers who appear at various charity events throughout the year. He began the evening as he continued, with jokes and the exchange of witty comments with various members of the audience, and by the time the first class got under way, the audience was already settled for an evening of fun.

The first class was the 'hymn raising'. One by one, entrants stand up and start to sing unaccompanied the first line of a hymn from the Methodist Hymn Book. The remainder of the audience then join in, until the verse is complete. When the singing ends, by picking up the last few notes the accompanist will check the pitch against the music in the hymnbook, and those entrants pitching their attempt closest to the given key will go forward to the final. Bazin suggests a possible source for this class and records that, before the introduction of church organs, singing was led by the Parish Clerk who was selected partly for his vocal talents (1995: 145). She adds that in contemporary classes, the accompanist may transpose the key to spoil the chances of some eminent figure (op.cit.: 146).

That may well be what happened to the Manx politician on this night. 'Way out,' was the assessment of the accompanist. 'Just like all politicians,' declared the MC, 'always far from the truth.' Then a voice from the audience: 'I don't know any of these hymns.' Another well-known character, who makes regular contributions to the local radio 'phone-in', she attracted the attention of the Chairman, who retorted, 'I expect to hear you on the radio admitting to something you don't know!' The hall erupted with laughter, and so it continued. We moved through the classes of solo and duet singing, recitation, original works

of verse and prose (some of which brought a brief shift to reflective mood), instrumentalists, and all interspersed with repartee from the stage and heckling from the floor. There was an enthusiastic response for a witty piece of satire directed at the Manx government's willingness to rely on 'experts from across', and calls for encores when two young, highly accomplished teenage girls sang an amusing song written especially for, and about, the MC. The anthropologist scribbling away in the corner became the centre of attention for a moment, when the Chairman declared 'hey, we've got the Times in!' just before the satirist returned with a piece about the Island's new sewerage system, the lyrics of which do not bear reproduction here.

Another Island celebrity then came to the stage. Despite it being noted she was unsuitably slotted into the folk song class (it was agreed that she could neither sing, nor was her planned presentation a 'folk song'), she proceeded with one of her witty pieces of satire, this time directed at the politicians responsible for the building of the Island's new prison. The local community affected, a village not far from the Braaid, had objected to the choice of site. Despite a vigorous campaign, they had failed to change the plans. To the tune of a song from a well-known stage show,¹² selected verses went as follows:

'So there's a black cloud now upon the prison,
All the natives are banging the drum,
Fever pitch it is high,
Let's smack him in the eye,
He'll not build it here,
For the cause they will die,'

'Then Dinger¹³ said I'll hire some experts,
They've got degrees and are well read,
Then they'll scarper with shed-loads of money,
And I can blame that lot instead' (Tilbury 1999)

¹² The Rodgers and Hammerstein tune, 'Oh what a beautiful morning', from 'Oklahoma'. The awkward 'fit' of words to tune is a characteristic of her pieces.

¹³ The nickname used here arises from the surname of the MHK in question. The vast majority of those present would be fully aware to whom the performer was referring.

The first verse reproduced here tells of the battle against the building plans, while the second refers again to the reliance on off-Island experts, a subject which is often the cause of bittersweet comment. That they signal a certain lack of 'self-confidence' is witnessed in the stories offered by the contributors to *Routes*, the third Part of this thesis, and in self-ironic humour. Although the Island has a substantial measure of self-governance, it has always been at the mercy of others' intent. Taylor, speaking about the Irish tradition of self-irony, writes that 'while irony is often the tool of the powerful, self-irony can be nearly irresistible for those who find themselves at the opposite end of the stick and have the wit to use it – as a manner of seizing the situation, if not in one way, than in another' (2001: 185). 'Wit' is ever-present in the Island, and performances of satirical poetry are a regular feature at social events around the Island, continuing a tradition which can be traced back through submissions to newspapers over the last two centuries. Today it is still utilised by various performers and writers to make political statements, some of which are openly and directly critical of government performance. The author will often perform with the named 'victim' – such as the poor MHK in the verse above – sitting in the audience, but the commentary really speaks to the Island's population as a whole and asks it to ask questions of itself. If the government is relying on 'experts from across', their constituents are as guilty for allowing the situation to persist, and for not having the confidence to challenge the situation. Further examples of such commentary will feature elsewhere in this thesis, but for a moment we must return to the Braaid, where the audience is still laughing.

As the evening wore on, laughter had threatened to bring the roof down. We had sniggered conspiratorily at the satire, listened intently to vocal performances, and winced at some of the comments to and from the stage. I had watched, amazed, as a group of women produced a plate of sandwiches and cakes, and a cup of tea, for everyone in the hall from the tiniest kitchen. Competition dissolved into sheer entertainment when everyone cheered as one old trooper received a prize for colour co-ordinated tie and accordion, and specially written verses to familiar songs gave further cause for pain-inducing laughter. Then, at close to two o'clock the next morning, those that remained – probably a third of the original number – sang a verse of the Manx National

Anthem then rose stiffly but happily from their seats to reluctantly make their way through a cold, wet night to homes across the Island.

Skeet

I was once asked, on returning from fieldwork, how the Manx ‘performed’ their daily lives; that is, how they conducted themselves in day-to-day interaction. In this brief and final part, I will attempt to answer that question, and thereby move toward drawing the various elements of this chapter together. And my first response to the question would be to remind the reader that ‘the Manx’ is in itself a problematic term. Only half of the Island’s population is Island-born, but that fact alone does not mean that all would happily claim to be Manx. Of those born outside the Island, some would self-identify themselves as Manx – having, perhaps, a familial connection with the place. And some have no such connection, but maintain that their ‘Manxness’ arises through length of residence combined with a love of the Island, its values and traditions. Attempting, therefore, to draw any conclusions about Island life from ‘daily performance’ must be approached with due consideration of this complexity.

That is not to say, however, that a consideration of ‘performance of daily life’ is impossible. Far from it, because one of the key elements in that daily life is, I would argue, fundamental to the events we have shared in this chapter. *Skeet*, or gossip, might have disappeared as a named column from the newspapers, but it is still important to daily Island life. The word comes from the Manx Gaelic, and in a web-based Manx-English dictionary¹⁴ is translated as ‘sneak, news’. The pejorative theme runs through associated translations: *skeetagh* becomes sneaking, prying, nose-y as well as inquisitive. It is the ‘prying’ aspect that most upset one young Manx-born woman, who told me how difficult it was to find anything to talk about when meeting someone for the first time – because quite often much of the information people tend to exchange in those first moments of getting to know each other is already known from the *skeet*. This is not the ‘gossip’ of Mediterranean sexual control described by Delamont (1995: 177ff), but rather the ‘controlling functions’ described by Parman in her

¹⁴ www.ceantar.org/Dicts/Manx/mx42.html

description of Gaell in the Outer Hebrides: '[i]t is difficult for people raised in the anonymity of an urban environment to imagine living in a setting in which you are continually confronted with the living memory [...] of your mistakes and failures' (Parman, quoted in Delamont op.cit.: 178). And the women I worked with in an office in Douglas were true exponents of the art. As soon as a bit of *skeet* came to their notice, telephone calls would be made to mothers, sisters and female friends (or emails sent), so that the news might be passed on as quickly as possible. If the *skeet* described an error of judgement, or the failure of some venture, all the better.

It is this closeness of attention paid to people's movements and actions that makes Island life difficult to take for some who take up residence, but it is an activity that is still regarded with affection by those who have lived with it for much of their life. And if not a necessary skill to acquire if one is to settle in the Island, it is certainly something with which one has to come to terms. An amusing web site gives the neophyte Islander a quick lesson in the term (as part of a 'primer' on learning to live in the city of Peel). The page is presented as a conversation between 'teacher' and 'pupil', and presents *skeet* as something of a treasured artefact of Manx culture:

'Pupil': Skeet?? I'm lost now.

'Teacher': A wonderful word. It has a number of meanings including but not limited to:

Gossip (noun): "What's the skeet, yissir?"

Look (verb): "Just have a skeet down the road fer us and see if he's comin' yet"¹⁵

The word is one of the few Manx Gaelic words which remains in daily use, though most would be unaware of its linguistic origins. Heard regularly in daily conversation, it is also used strategically to stress the 'localness' of things, such as when a flyer was sent out announcing a meeting about a matter of

¹⁵ www.gobbag.com/primer.html. The text also gives a flavour of modern Manx dialect.

interest in one village: 'you've heard the skeet, now come and hear the facts'.¹⁶ If the statement implies that *skeet* does not always relate to 'truth', it still makes full use of its role in 'community'. 'I love the community atmosphere here', said one vicar on leaving his post, continuing 'in the morning I [...] walk to the shop, pick up the skeet [...] there's a lot of leg-pulling and laughter.'¹⁷ Rapport writes that '[i]n gossip a community can be seen to paint a self-portrait: the gossip of a community is an inherent part of its identity, a confirmation indeed of its very existence' (2002b: 314). That 'confirmation', I would argue, is what has been described throughout this chapter, but 'confirmation' in the sense that the community affirms to itself that it has continued viability a context of significant change.

Skeet is, then, the most intimate, day-to-day version of 'performance to themselves, for themselves'. In the conscious and unconscious revivals and continuations of events – of 'performances' – the members of this community make 'a Manx reading of Manx experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves' (after Geertz 1993: 448). Geertz explains the Balinese cockfight not as a reinforcement of social statuses, but as a 'metasocial commentary' and an interpretative exploration of the socio-cultural milieu. In Tynwald Day (as described in the introductory chapter to this thesis) this commentary is seen on a 'macro' level. In contrast, the events described within this chapter and the more individual interpretations which will follow in Part Three, offer a quotidian 'micro' self-reflection of the changing state of Manx society. While Geertz's 'meta' implies a 'beyond the social' reflection and interpretation, Rapport's insistence that a community's 'wholeness' also relies on its physicality (Rapport 2002b: 314) is mirrored in the coming together – the 'gathering' – which is common to all the events described above. In revival and renaissance, this community can be seen reinscribing itself to itself – and in the process, inviting those *stayovers* who wish to belong, to learn to do so performatively.

In describing the *Aros* exhibition in Skye, Macdonald also points to a 'story they tell themselves about themselves' (1997a: 173). In the chapter which follows, I

¹⁶ Isle of Man Examiner, 3 September 2001

¹⁷ Isle of Man Examiner, 25 August 2003

describe the various heritage sites that make up 'The Story of Mann', and an exhibition which allowed non-curatorial voices into the interpretations of Island life which those sites offer. Having listened to the *skeet*, we will now take a *skeet* at the exhibition.



Figure 6a : Perree Bane (or “White Jackets”), one of the Island’s traditional dance groups, performing during Yn Chruinnaght, the annual Inter - Celtic festival.

Photograph : Sue Lewis.



Figure 6b : Phynnodderee and guest playing - as usual - at the Friday night session in St. John’s. Photograph : Sue lewis.

Chapter 2.3: Representing Roots

‘A heritage centre is, I suggest, a useful site in which to explore questions about local identity [...]. It is a purpose-built representation of what is considered an appropriate depiction of the past and the locality; and as such constitutes what John Dorst has called an ‘auto-ethnography’ – a text that culture has produced about itself’ (Macdonald 1997a: 155). So writes Sharon Macdonald in the introduction to her detailed analysis of the *Aros* cultural centre on the Scottish island of Skye. Her article demonstrates that this particular centre, run by locals for locals, offers the islanders an opportunity to narrate their own ‘people’s story’ from the installations presented, and thus to build a history of themselves that is internally constituted rather than externally ascribed.

In this chapter I will explore the extent to which the museums and heritage centres of the Isle of Man also constitute an ‘auto-ethnography’ by analysing the representations offered in the Island’s various cultural sites. I also make reference to a play which, as part of the Island’s Millennium celebrations, presented the Island’s history as a series of humorous sketches. Staged among the ruins of Peel Caste and reflecting ‘key moments’ in Manx history, *The Story of Mann and All That* related a ‘folk history’ as it is represented in contemporary personal narratives. This ‘folk’ version often differs from the more ‘official’ narratives offered through the museum displays.

As a consequence, the play offered a pointed commentary on the local relationship between history and heritage. Indeed, it did so explicitly. ‘*My name is Manannan Beg Mac y Lir.*’ So speaks the god of Mann, who in the opening minutes of the play finds himself with the task of presenting the story of Island to his people. To assist, he summons History. A fanfare sounds and a lady, her head held low and dressed in shades of grey, walks on to the stage. ‘History?’

speculates Manannan. ‘That **was** my name’, she replies. ‘You **were** history?’ ‘I’ve been redefined as heritage, but I suppose it’s all the same.’ Manannan is concerned. ‘Are you alright? You look a little...’ ‘Dull, grey, unimportant? Neglected? Or how about irrelevant? Yes, that’s good. As brittle, and absolute, as a well seasoned lump of wood. That’s what history has become, or rather what you’ve made me. You put me on a pedestal, and by doing so degrade me. In a museum, in a book, put a fence around me. Pay an entrance fee to look. At what? At what you’ve decided to let me be. Where’s the music? Where’s the poetry? Where’s the fun? Where are the stories? All gone? All gone.’¹

In an article which links history to heritage, and heritage to identity, Ashworth (1994: 13ff) outlines political and economic models for, and the consequences of, the selection of what constitutes a nation’s ‘heritage’. He points to the potential ‘disinheritance’ which can be created for some sections of a society by this process of heritage selection (op.cit.: 26), a feeling strongly expressed within the play. By here placing the images from the Island’s museums alongside a mother’s tales as she takes her children into their familial and cultural history, a woman’s recollections of summers past, imagined walks through a now-changed streets and other simple recollections of Island life, I offer an insight into the possible source of such ‘alienation’, and discuss the consequences for discourse on Island identity.

On the way, I will revisit the museum, focusing on two more recent exhibitions – one temporary, one permanent – that aim to address some of the more personal relationships with Island life. In the Millennium year, the Manx Museum presented an exhibition which offered material interpretation of people’s written responses to the question ‘Is there one thing that represents the character of the Isle of Man for you today? In viewing the exhibition and considering the curator’s words, the reflexive process which this new approach appeared to represent will be set aside the much broader process of cultural and social self-reflexivity that this thesis describes. The chapter will close by setting these discussions against the demands of the newly restored and reopened ‘old

¹ From the play *The Story of Mann and All That*, written by Daniel Hopkins (2000), and performed at Peel Castle in July of that year. Reproduced with the kind permission of the author.

House of Keys' in Castletown. Here, visitors are asked to engage in important political debates of the last two centuries – but is it an engagement too far?

The Story of Mann

'The Story of Mann' is, according to Manx National Heritage's (hereafter, MNH) publicity material, 'the main public presentation' of the organisation's work. A Manx statutory body, MNH exists to 'preserve, protect, promote and communicate the unique qualities of the Manx natural and cultural heritage.' It is involved in purchasing vulnerable but culturally valuable sites, in education programmes, in archival work, in conservation and is a partner in the expansion of academic study in and about the Island through the establishment of the Centre for Manx Studies. Yet it is through its permanent and temporary exhibitions that MNH aims toward a representation of the Island to visitors and to the Island's residents.

There are seven museums or heritage sites scattered around the Island, but anyone aiming to make the offered journey through the Island's history is guided first to the Manx Museum in Douglas and to its introductory film presentation. In the hushed and darkened surroundings of the museum's lecture theatre, the opening scenes of the film 'fly' the audience over the wild, open spaces of the Island's uplands and its rocky south-western coast. Accompanied by a specially composed musical soundtrack with haunting Celtic overtones, the film introduces a history of the Island which will be reiterated during the journey around the Island's heritage sites. This is a story similar to the one told in the play, but this has a contrasting gravitas which is confirmed by the use of a professional voice-over. The film goes on to celebrate the Island's distinctiveness with pictures of Tynwald Day, and its proud and independent character by explaining its economic rise from herrin' to high finance. It connects beginning to end – establishes continuity – by opening with a Celtic saying: 'the sea is the beginning and end of all things' and closing with the hills and sea still 'keeping watch' over the thousands of years of history. And bringing everyone safely back to the present, the doors open to spill the visitor out into 'the Story of Mann'.

'Uh-hum, hol' on there! I'm a piece of slate.' A Manx-accented voice echoes around the gallery as the poor, unsuspecting (and rather embarrassed)

visitor realises that she has triggered this amusing bit of chicanery.² The ‘rock’ at one’s feet proceeds to inform the visitor of the Island’s physical makeup, and nearby maps and diagrams tell of ice ages and their effects. Around a corner and the skeleton of a great deer – proof that ‘prehistoric’ beasts once roamed – peers down as you pass. Mann’s social history begins, and one is led past cabinets filled with archaeological artefacts. Onwards, and into rooms where the harsh life of the crofter is described. Old choices then have to be imitated – to go to the mining, to the fishing, or to emigrate? Make a choice, and follow the path. The visitor decides to stay on the Island, and on negotiating the way Old Manx Gaelic voices can be heard. The words of the Manx national poet, T. E. Brown, are read. Then one emerges – having survived the rigours of the harsh crofter life – into the light of relative prosperity, tourist fun and frolics when the holidaymaking ‘visitors’ start to arrive at the end of the nineteenth century. And finally, mid-twentieth century, the ‘little Manx nation’ arrives on the global stage, offering the world of finance a safe ‘haven’ for its profits.

An Island friend expressed his feelings about this museum (and about the ‘heritage’ project in Mann) by first recalling a conversation with his primary school teacher. ‘We’re going to go to the Museum tomorrow,’ she had said. He tells of how he piped up, ‘is that the National Museum?’ ‘Don’t be silly,’ she had responded, ‘that’s in London!’ ‘And I thought,’ he said, ‘the Manx National Museum, the national museum for us, is in Douglas.’ And pondering further, he added that ‘museums are places of ‘history’, not about ‘living culture.’ But that, he said, was where the newest addition to the Island’s ‘Story’ and the next point of call on our journey offered some hope. The recent opening of the excavations at Rushen Abbey combined the usual information panels, installations and film presentations with the opportunity to watch the archaeologists at work. One could even speak to one of the team on the dig as they worked. This, said my friend, was ‘living culture’. They may be dealing with an ancient site, digging up the past, but they were doing it in a way that allowed people to interact with that process in the present. This was not a history consigned to the past, but one which was ‘living’.

² After several visits, one notices how those clearly familiar with the museum hop over this particular spot, avoiding the invisible beam which acts as a trigger.

There is a resonance here with the *Aros* objective. With the ability to speak personally to those who have a constantly evolving relationship with the site, the visitor has the opportunity to also build a 'history' of their own interactions with this place. The site has another, recent relevance to people born and brought up in the Island, having been until recently the site of a dance hall where, on warm summer afternoons, strawberry teas would be served. Where the dance floor once stood the archaeologists have discovered the abbey's graveyard, but as one contribution to the Millennium exhibition described later makes clear, individual memories of a space remain even when the present changes that place's physical appearance.

A similar sentiment is expressed in the poetic reminiscence of Douglas' streets below, but where the centre of the Island's current capital has been remodelled, the site of the next stage in the 'Story of Mann' is at Castletown where the ancient castle walls still dominate the town. One of the best preserved medieval castles in Europe, it now houses a range of installations which demonstrate its role as political centre and prison over the centuries. In the banqueting hall, frozen aristocrats sit behind a table laden with cardboard food. Overseers for the absentee lord (an English courtier), they lived in relative splendour, as symbolised by the peacock being delivered to the table by a serving boy. In the great hall, then, history is presented as unequivocal, but in the tower exhibition room a set of display boards ask questions rather than make statements about the nationalist's 'Manx martyr', *Illiam Dhone*.³ Here in the castle he is

³ The execution of William Christian, known as *Illiam Dhone* or Brown-Haired William, opens the second half of the *Story of Mann and All That*. The play places him as the heroic Manx martyr, and demonstrates no doubt about Christian's position; he was executed for his loyalty to the Island. The display recounting his story in the Castle Rushen heritage exhibition takes a more open line by asking the question 'patriot or traitor?' Prior to the outbreak of the English Civil War, he was Receiver of Revenues to the Lord of Mann, and trainer of the ordinary Manx militia. In 1651, while the earl was in England fatefully attempting to restore Charles II to the throne, *Illiam Dhone* besieged Castle Rushen aided by a small force of some eight hundred Manxmen. The uprising had been a response to the new land lease laws instigated by Lord Stanley, and when Christian later surrendered the Island to the forces of the Commonwealth, he did so in return for the retention of the 'lives and liberties as formerly they had' (Kinvig 1975: 106). Debates continue about Christian's status, but for contemporary Manx nationalists he stands as a key symbol for Manx independence. On the 2nd January each year for the last few years members of the nationalist party, *Mec Vannin*, and others who wish share in the acknowledgement of Christian's 'martyrdom' meet at Hango Hill, where he was executed. There they make politically motivated speeches on the contemporary state of the Manx nation which are often reproduced in full in the national newspapers. It is a ceremony unlikely to attract attendance of the majority of

presented as either traitor or martyr, the visitor left to be judge and jury on the basis of the information given. And yet William Christian's place of execution lies a short mile to the east of where the castle stands, standing virtually unmarked, open to the elements and not included in this official Island 'Story'.

Near the Island's south-west tip lies the 'heritage village' of Cregneash, where rural life is placed in an early twentieth-century 'time-warp'. Whitewashed walls and thatched roofs fulfil demands of what the rural idyll should be, and fields are farmed and sheep sheared in traditional manner (cf. Green 1990, Williams 1993). When they are not at work, the heavy horses graze in the fields, and the rare four-horned Manx loaghtan sheep offer the visitor a museum-like curiosity to puzzle over. But this place is more than a museum. Many of the houses are still privately owned, those that work in the village live in the village, the church still holds its Sunday services and there are too many 'living' memories for it to be consigned to a schismogenic past. Tourists and new residents might see the village as a museum of Island life now past, but for those who have access to those individuals who remember the stories make intimate contact with a real, lived past.

As the 'Story' moves to Peel, so the visitor arrives at the 'House of Manannan'. This award-winning centre offers 'state-of-the-art' display techniques, and 'explores the Celtic, Viking and Maritime traditions of the Isle of Man' (MNH n.d.: 14). Rooms recreate Celtic scenes or a kipper factory, a ships' chandlers and the eighteenth-century quayside in Peel. Smell – of a peat fire – and sound – of Manx voices, thickly accented – is used to add atmosphere and vitality. The children who visit seem to love it. One work colleague, a resident of Peel, told me that her daughter regularly asked to visit. And as I sat in a café in Douglas, I overheard a father asking his small daughter what she would like to do that Saturday afternoon. 'I want to go and see the grandfather,' she replied. He seemed somewhat puzzled and asked her to explain. 'The grandfather's house,' she insisted. She meant, he realised, the House of Manannan. The first display is the Celtic roundhouse. Here, as an expectant hush descends over the audience, the figures seated or reclined under the eaves of the rebuilt, dimly-lit

the Island's residents, but it does stand as further indication of the importance of Christian and his actions in maintaining the Island's 'lives and liberties' and of its relative independence.

dwelling seem to come to life. By the glowing, smoking fire an old man sits, his grand-daughter with her head in his lap. Poking at the fire with a stick, he begins to tell her about her legendary ancestors while behind, on the wall, a short film plays out the story he tells. She seems a little frightened, and he comforts her, pats her shoulder. Her sleeping family stir. A dog stretches. The young visitors are drawn in, quietly transfixed, trying to work out whether the people around the fire are real or not. Then, released from the spell a few minutes later, they go on to enjoy the other interactive elements of this centre, pressing buttons and turning virtual pages.

The interactivity that characterises this exhibition does allow the visitor a certain amount of personal interpretation with the stories told. The Manx man or woman whose grandparents worked in the kipper factories or went to the fishing may have their own stories to tell in relation to the installations, but this is not a 'going beyond the story books' (Macdonald 1997b: 160). There is still an 'official' history being told here. Arriving at the installation, which tells of the hard work in the kipper factory, static models stand next to benches painted with bloody effects, knives in hand. Through small windows, row upon row of plaster 'kippers' can be seen 'smoking' in the kilns. But a few yards up the road, a private enterprise invites the visitor to experience a working factory. On a visit that lasts well over an hour, a man who knows the business explains the process in immense and fascinating detail. Here the smells, and the emotions, are real.

In his 'Travels in Hyperreality', Umberto Eco proposed that our world is now characterised by fabrications that are 'more real than real'. Writing about a 'Palace of Living Arts' in Los Angeles, he records that the 'Palace's philosophy is not "we are giving you the reproduction so that you will want the original," but rather, "we are giving you the reproduction so that you will no longer feel any need for the original." But for the reproduction to be desired, the original has to be idolized, and hence the kitsch fashion of the inscriptions and taped voices, which remind you of the greatness of (the art of the) past' (1987: 19). Being so used to its hyper-real installations, expectant of it, is perhaps what made the placement of a small and simple photographic exhibition in the lobby of the House of Manannan so striking in its contrast. Judging by the number of people clustered around the photographs on the display boards, the 'Images of Peel' exhibition was a success. As its title might suggest, the objective had been to

collate various photographs of the town. Many of these were now displayed in pairs, older and more recent views being juxtaposed to demonstrate the changes the town had undergone. But although people were interested in the general scenes, it was the people in those scenes that drew most comment. Clustering around particular photographs, the exhibition's visitors – locals – were using them to remember people. Next to some of the photographs sheets of paper had been pinned up, inviting visitors to note down the current whereabouts of the people in the photographs. A letter was displayed from a Manxman of Peel who now lives in England, welcoming the exhibition to which he contributed from a distance by sending a photograph from school days. The small group gathered around it were pointing to various figures and conferring: 'oh, he's dead now'; 'she's now living in Australia, or is it New Zealand?'

And next to the photographic contributions were displayed the results of a children's drawing competition, which had asked them to design a postcard for the Island. The subject matter they had chosen was as wide as it was colourful. Several featured the god Manannan, with a couple having him declare a 'welcome' or '*failt erriu*' ('welcome' in Manx Gaelic). There were the usual visitor attractions: the Laxey Wheel, Peel Castle and Castle Rushen. The Island's famous trams and steam trains also featured, as did the ferries, the flag and a map directing the visitor to all these highlights. And there was a wonderfully amusing Norseman, complete with horned helmet, rushing toward the viewer on a TT motorbike.

One informant told me how, in his opinion, the focus of the Story of Mann was incorrectly directed: 'I think generally the ethos of Manx National Heritage is to portray things for visitors. That's the thing, which by my mind is the secondary thing. The first thing is, you do it for the Manx people.' For another resident, the presentation of the Island's history in these various ways has both advantages and disadvantages. 'I think it's really good on one level,' he said. There was value, he thought, in offering the children an enjoyable and active way of learning about the Island's past. 'But it's trivia on the other,' he added. 'I can see how thin it is. It's not real culture. It's ancient displays of what happened years and years ago. That's important as well, to look past, to look back and see the past, but I would like to see it developed into much more of a living cultural tourism, where music, song and dance can be used [...] but there

again, if you use that for tourist purposes you tend to end up with it being all business.’ He might have said, then, that the two temporary displays in the centre’s foyer represented these two outcomes of ‘official’ representation of Manx culture. For the children, the Island should be represented through images of visitor attractions or Manannan as he appears in his guise as tour guide in this very centre (with snippets of Manx Gaelic). For the older locals, it was the narration of social networks, past and present, which they hungered for.

If not the overt separation between ‘heritage’ and ‘history’ that we saw played out at the head of this chapter, the views expressed above still demonstrate concern that the view of the Island’s past that visitors and residents are receiving lacks both continuity with, and relevance for, contemporary Island life as it is now lived. The people who ‘performed’ their culture in the previous chapter have no permanent place in these exhibitions, and the displays therefore appear to represent a past or legendary culture rather than one lived on a daily basis. The fears expressed are therefore either fears of ‘collective amnesia’ (Ashworth 1994: 14), or of the commodification of memories that are meaningful to individuals’ lives (or, more accurately perhaps, the denial in that commodification of some histories in favour of others (op.cit.: 16)). This chapter can in no way attempt a detailed analysis of the heritage presentations offered by Manx National Heritage and thus assess whether these informant perceptions are matched by the ‘backstage’ intentions of the producers (Macdonald 2001) or state-building intentions of politicians, but what it does attempt is to demonstrate the place of ‘heritage’ (re)presentations in the quotidian public discourses on contemporary Manxness. In contrast, and also perhaps in complement, a mother’s relating of familial ‘history’ places offers an intimate and social ‘mapping’ of history on to her children’s lives.

Mapping Memories

As Roseen drives her two daughters around the Island, she tells them of the strange and mythical creatures connected to the places that they pass. When I asked her about keeping a sense of Manxness alive for herself and her children she said, ‘I suppose it’s the tales, really. You pass down the tales. I suppose that’s something I do to the girls.’ They have heard them all many times. ‘Tell us

about the church with no roof,' they demand as they pass the roofless building on the road from Douglas to Peel, and she repeats the story of the *buggane*⁴ of St Trinian's chapel. The little chapel stands, grey stoned, roofless and desolate, in the middle of a pasture. Tradition has it that the building was never finished, as each time the roof was nearing completion the *buggane* would come at night and throw it to the ground. Eventually the builders gave up.

Or Roseen repeats again the ghostly tale of the *moddhey-dhoo*, the black dog that haunts Peel Castle, or why one must always greet the fairies as one crosses the Fairy Bridge. But perhaps more importantly, she tells them about their family. About how her own grandfather had dug up one of the famous Manx crosses,⁵ and how the other – himself a stonemason – had buried a secret beneath a monument he had carved and erected. Or why an alley in Peel was 'their alley', named after the family many generations before her children's time. And how she herself remembered the town where she was born before they tore down its streets and built anew. 'I was only seven when they pulled it down,' she said. 'I can remember the little handy shop on the corner, and every one of the neighbours. Not the names, but I can remember the faces and there was that community. If any one of them was ill they were all round each other. It was close-knit, it was like a little village inside the town, that community.'

'There's a photo in the Peel Exhibition in the House of Manannan,' she continued, 'with a girl walking down Christian Street, I think it is. Now my grandmother would have been eighteen, and she lived in that sort of Edwardian house. She was born there. But her dad, when the church spire got struck by lightning in Peel, he had to get a stonemason to come and take the spire down, so he got my granddad, and my granddad met my grandma, my great-granddad's daughter, and got married! So, *I* feel Manx, so I tell the kids and I pass that on, and so I hope it gives them a sense of being Manx.'

⁴ A *buggane* is a malicious spirit, and in the story of one Timothy the Tailor's valiant attempt to challenge the creature, it describes itself as having a great head, large eyes, long teeth, large and long nails (Moore 1994[1891]: 60)

⁵ The Manx crosses are standing monuments of Celto-Norse origin, carved with intricate designs and figures. Many were commissioned from the stonemason as memorial stones, the names of both the deceased and the bereaved appearing on the cross in ogam script. Unusually too, many of the crosses bear the signature of the stonemason. One such is signed 'Gaut made this, and all in Mann'.

I heard the same mapping of lost streets in an original poem performed during an *eisteddfod*. As he told of a journey past the newly built or refurbished banks and insurance houses in the financial district of Douglas, the poet redrew for his audience the scene as it was in his younger days. The buildings as they once were, were described in colour and size, the names of long-gone hotels recalled. He walked down streets remodelled, stepped off curbs no longer there. As he spoke, I watched the audience, many of who were of similar age to the speaker, their faces telling of their mind's eyes' agreement with the scene he sketched. Nods and smiles greeted his performance, the end of his tale greeted by hearty applause.

Such reminiscences of an Island long-gone can be heard everywhere. A Manx graduate student was presenting a paper one Saturday afternoon. In the audience sat her grandmother, and during the questions it was revealed that this old Manxwoman had actually been born and brought up in what is now the heritage village of Cregneash. All attention turned to her, and with little prompting she began to recall the characters that had lived in the village and who, since it has become 'heritage', have simply become faces on the old photographs that illustrate the museum's introductory display. In her reminiscences, these Gaelic-speaking forebears became living history, and the largely Manx audience revelled in this opportunity to hear what life had been like in what is believed to be the last bastion of the native tongue.

On another night I attended a meeting of a local heritage trust, and sat amidst a substantial audience similarly transfixed by the words of an Island farmer recalling in great detail the farming days of his youth. As he recalled the hard physical work – the turning of the cut hay by hand, gathering it into *butts*, and finally lifting it fork by fork into the *rucks* – he painted a picture of a hillside farm where horses still pulled the ploughs and from where one could keep watch on the activities of neighbouring farmers, and of a time when the men would divide the year between fishing and farming and seaweed was carted to the farms to act as fertiliser.

And in a car park in Douglas, one sunny afternoon in summer, I helped an old woman up the slope with her heavy shopping. Thanking me, she began to talk, asking me what I was doing in Douglas; my accent, she knew, situated me as *stayover* at best. I explained my interests, and she began to tell me of the old

days, of Douglas when it was a heaving hive of holidaying activity. As we looked down onto the very streets she spoke about, I could almost see her, as she described being forced off the pavement by the sheer mass of visitors as they poured out of the numerous guesthouses and onto the promenade. Where now the seafront is all but abandoned, then it was a flow of factory-workers in Sunday best, making their way onto the town's expansive beach. Today, the people that generate the Island's wealth stay hidden in their banks. And so she expressed her disappointment at the changing face of the town, with its concrete buildings and walls of glass. Why could more companies not follow one example, she asked, and build their modern offices behind an old façade? It was an observation that neatly symbolised the perceived schism between past and present, or between history and heritage.

Right Here, Right Now: Telling it as it is

The car park where I met the old woman also acts as a bridge between the town and the Manx Museum. And thus does her story also act as our bridge back to the museum's exhibits. I have appropriated the title of this section from an exhibition presented at the Manx Museum in the year 2000, where the following words appeared on the panel facing the door of the exhibition space.

Right Here, Right Now.
In December 1999, we asked a number of people,

“Is there one thing that represents the character of the Isle of Man
for you today?”

Their responses are displayed here. Take a walk around our time
capsule and see what they have chosen.

You will find the natural beauty of the Island and traditional
elements of Manx culture, such as literature and language, are
still important icons for some people.

Others are more concerned with contemporary changes such as
the impact of the growing economy on the population of the
Island.

The room was dimly lit. Ahead was a small video booth showing a film of a walk through the Manx countryside, its soundtrack causing the evocative call of the choughs⁶ to echo constantly around the exhibition space. Around the room, walls and display boards were hung with large photographs and snippets of text. Complying with exhibition etiquette, the visitor turns to the left, and sees the first display, headed 'conservation'. In its centre, the respondent's letter is displayed surrounded by used envelopes, and thus speaks of our continuing lack of concern for the environment. Moving on, another display reproduced in large scale a black-and-white photograph of dancing couples, recalling the heyday of that very tearoom in the south of the Island where summers and strawberries were enjoyed. Supporting her local Island football team was of key significance for another respondent, the ancient carved crosses for another.

In one corner of the exhibition room, one found oneself standing at the doorway of an untidy little room. A senior manager of an offshore bank had responded with comments about the nature of the Island's workforce, writing that 'a one bedroom flat and a half eaten pizza represents for me the new transient population in the finance industry.' The curators had decorated the room in garish, uncoordinated colours, the remains of the said meal and an empty can of Coke on the floor. And then, moving around the exhibition and on towards the end, the visitor comes across an extract of Island literature to read. Above the legend 'Identity', T. E. Brown's verse might well be read as having the same resonance in today's Island, as it did at the end of the nineteenth century:

Dear Countrymen, whate'er is left to us
Of ancient heritage-
Of manners, speech, of humours, polity,
The limited horizon of our stage-
Old love, hope, fear,
All this I fain would fix upon the page;
That so the coming age,
Lost in the empire's mass,

⁶ The chough is a large black bird, a member of the crow family. These relatively rare birds are a familiar sight over Manx farmland in the Island's south-east, as they swoop around each other making their distinctive sound.

Yet haply longing for their fathers, here
 May see, as in a glass,
What they held dear-
May say, "'Twas thus and thus
They lived"; and, as the time-flood onward rolls
Secure an anchor for their Keltic souls.

Under the verse, the contributor's words – his reason for selecting the verse – were reproduced: 'The dedication in T. E. Brown's collected poems sums up the state of – or should I say – the loss of our heritage and Manxness. Will this change in 2000 and the next Millennium?

The museum had wanted a locally focused exhibition to celebrate the Millennium year. The curators selected and approached people they felt would feel comfortable expressing an opinion, and received what the curator called 'a strange picture of the Isle of Man.' Where she had expected the 'Three Legs' (the Isle of Man's emblem) and cats with no tails, the responses included everything from the Island's natural beauty to broader concerns about security and conservation. Yet when they began the process of interpreting and illustrating the written responses with visual images, various themes emerged. Expressed, she said, was 'a need for preservation, conservation and the need to appreciate what we've got or we'll blow it. That was a very strong opinion that came through, so we started off with that. And then it went into the more recreational things; fishing, the Lido, stuff like that. And then there was a lot associated with the Finance Sector and the changes, and comparisons, so you get people like the Bishop choosing the dedication of the bells at St George's, and saying this to him represents the history of Christianity in the Island, and its long associations with the Island. Long associations with certain places in the Island, like St Patrick's Isle, but at the same time, with the dedication of the bells at St George's he mentions that they're bearing witness from the tower on the Finance Industry, and it's almost an expression of sort of, a fear in a way, of what's happening in

Athol Street,⁷ y'know, what's happening to the Island. And then you've got somebody like the prison officer [...] again using the Finance Sector to say, the Island is not living in the past any more. It can't cling on to that, so things are changing. It is moving with the times. The finance industry is forcing the economy to be updated, and you can't cling on to this halcyon view of the Isle of Man anymore.'

'So, there's lots and lots of comments that relate back to the Finance Sector and it seems to be blamed for everything. And then when you move round the corner that's when you get the cultural, the language, the likes of Chris Killip. What I find really fascinating is the extract from his book that he wrote in 1980. If you read that, it's so relevant twenty years on. He had the vision in 1979, 1980. He saw what was going to happen, and it's still happening, and we're still saying 'we're losing our heritage,' so we don't feel we've lost it yet. We're still saying it's going, we're going to lose it, but people were saying that back in the 1970s. And then what I quite like is the juxtaposition there with the choice from T. E. Brown's poetry. Now that was written at the turn of the century, and he's saying exactly the same; what have we got left of our ancient heritage?

In relation to the collecting of material for the British Museum's Paradise exhibition, its curator Michael O'Hanlon⁸ commented that 'while at one level [the collection] certainly reflected my own conception of what a 'collection of Wahgi material culture' should include, at another level the collection necessarily embodied local conditions and processes' (O'Hanlon 1993: 60). While the 'objects' on display in this Manx exhibition were people's thoughts and feelings, textually expressed and then materially interpreted, there are revealing parallels between these two collecting and curatorial descriptions. For O'Hanlon, only those objects which were made by Wahgi hands should be included (op.cit.: 58). For the Wahgi, however, what was Wahgi encompassed all that was used by the Wahgi, regardless of the source.

⁷ Athol Street is one of the streets around which the financial district clusters.

⁸ O'Hanlon visited the New Guinea Highlands to collect the material for this exhibition, having spent some time there previously on anthropological fieldwork.

The curator of *Right Here, Right Now* had expected to see the ‘brand’ symbols (cf. McCrone et.al. 1995): the cat, the Three Legs, and perhaps the Laxey Wheel or Tynwald Day; those things which appear on the tourists’ souvenirs. What she had been presented with instead were those ‘artefacts’ which held contemporary relevance for the people she had asked to participate in this process. Where collecting in the New Guinea Highlands ‘reproduced local social structure, including its characteristic tensions’ (O’Hanlon 1993: 60), this Manx exhibition reproduced the discursive themes, and tensions, which run throughout this thesis: preservation (or conservation) of that which makes the Isle of Man unique, against which the flows of change can be assimilated; the inevitability and acceptance of that change, appeased through the resentment of its contemporary cause (the Finance Sector). And finally, the awareness that these discourses on the risks to a unique identity, however real they may be at the time, are but steps in a relational process: relational, that is, both in terms of time (remembered and written pasts) and in terms of ‘the other’.

Writing to Represent

Whilst much of the material presented in this thesis draws on the thoughts and feelings of ordinary Island residents, the written contributions made by the Island’s academics to the debate on identity cannot be ignored. Mention has already been made of contributions by the Island intelligentsia of the late-nineteenth century to the preservation of Manx language, folklore and music. To these might be added a wide range of observations on such subjects as archaeology, geology, social and cultural history and politics, but the focus of this short discussion will be the more recent establishment of an Island-based research unit. The Centre for Manx Studies was created in 1992 to promote research into Manx studies, and in its own brief history has supervised projects on subjects as diverse as archaeology, climate, the history of the Island’s major brewery, the work of folklorist Sophia Morrison and on linguistic change. The Centre offers Masters degrees in Manx Studies and evening and day courses in a variety of subjects, and draws wide audiences – academic and non-academic – to its regular seminars and conferences.

In a set of guidelines published in 2001, the Centre's primary focus on teaching and research was reiterated. However, added to this and its desire to work toward greater international academic recognition was a stated objective to 'support the Isle of Man Government's Corporate Plan strategy for 'Culture and Heritage',⁹ which is to 'protect, present and promote the unique cultural heritage of the Island.'¹⁰ Further, it aims to support the education department's strategy of 'taking due account of the Island's Manx language, history and culture in the school curriculum' and to support MNH in its work to 'preserve, protect, promote and communicate the unique qualities of the Manx natural and cultural heritage'. I would argue that the initial establishment of the Centre, as evidenced through this recently stated set of objectives, places the Centre at the very heart of the process of (and, perhaps, politicisation of) representation.

As a substantive contribution to that process, the decision was taken in the early 1990s to produce 'A New History of the Isle of Man'; a wide-ranging project to be published in several volumes, and covering a period from prehistory to 1999. Earlier histories have been written, such as Manxman A. W. Moore's two-volume history published in 1900, and his compatriot R. H. Kinvig's *The Isle of Man: A Social, Cultural and Political History* (1975[1944]), but the timing of this new undertaking is significant in relation to contemporary discourses on identity. Indeed, the back cover of the fifth volume of the set, covering the period 1830 to 1999, says as much: 'Wide in coverage, embracing constitutional, political, economic, labour and cultural developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the volume is particularly concerned with issues of image, identity and representation. From a variety of angles and perspectives, contributors explore the ways in which a sense of Manxness was constructed, contested and amended as the little Manx nation underwent unprecedented change from debtors' retreat through holiday playground to offshore international financial centre.'¹¹

The book's editor adds in the introduction that the 'complex and symbiotic cultural context' – a context of in-migration, demographic change and reassertion of cultural difference – 'has stimulated interest in Manx studies and

⁹ <http://dbweb.liv.ac.uk/manninagh/strategicguidelines.htm>

¹⁰ [http://www.gov.im/infocentre/docs/pdfs/IOM GOVT PLAN.pdf](http://www.gov.im/infocentre/docs/pdfs/IOM%20GOVT%20PLAN.pdf) (2003-2006)

¹¹ Reproduced from the back cover of Volume 5 of 'The New History'.

led to this *New History*' (Belchem 2000a: 15). 'Add writing,' wrote Goody and Watt, 'and history proper begins' (1968: 27). 'The annals of a literate society,' they continued, 'cannot but enforce a more objective recognition of the distinction between what was and what is' (op. cit.: 34). The importance for Island 'identity' here is not just in the recognition that things change, but in the recognition of continuity. T. E. Brown and his late-Victorian contemporaries called for a 'fixing upon the page'¹² of Manx histories and traditions to provide the objective 'truth' of the Island's right to existence. Lacking a literary tradition of temporal depth,¹³ the race was on to achieve a body of texts that would underpin claims of self-determination and national identity.

That race appears still to be underway. For Belchem, 'in the changing balance between core and periphery, the Isle of Man has yet to find a place, despite its [geographical] position' (2000a: 2). In such an assessment, then, writing a history and bringing it up to date remains a resource in the continuing battle for a recognisable identity – and therefore a presence – on the global stage. I would argue, however, that contra to Belchem's pessimism, the establishment of the Centre for Manx Studies is symptomatic of a heightening of interest, from academics and non-academics alike, Island-based or no, for 'things Manx'. Manxman Charles Cain points out that such interest is not only the result of the particular circumstances – the 'complex and symbiotic' context – but also of the recent relative wealth of the Island: 'paupers,' he writes, 'have little time to think about poetry, music and history (n.d.: 19). The volume of interest is, then, a product of the very 'wealth' (and, to an extent therefore, of the success of the Island's promotion of itself on that global stage) that for some is the root cause of the loss of the social, cultural and personal 'stories' – history – that will be preserved – conserved – in the 'museum' of the written text.

But the academic text is not the only source of textual preservation. As we have seen in the previous chapter, there is a rich 'history' of writing – of satirical poetry, of short stories and recitations given at *eisteddfods* – which also give their versions of Island life. The problem is that they have been largely ephemeral, shared only verbally in the space of the performance, and not

¹² I refer the reader back to T.E. Brown's verse above.

¹³ There is little attributable written literature dated earlier than the seventeenth century.

‘recorded’ or ‘archived’. That situation is changing, with audio recordings being made and research being focused on these aspects of Manx cultural life, but this important part of Manx life does not currently feature in MNH’s museums or presentations. This might be read as another gap between real and the ‘hyper-real’.

Old for New (Interactions)?

In Castletown, in the Island’s far south, Manx National Heritage has recently opened a new ‘visitor attraction’. This is the newly restored ‘Old’ House of Keys, a building which housed the Island’s parliament until its move to the new capital of Douglas in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Outside the building, information boards direct the visitor where to buy tickets, where to await the next ‘sitting’ and how to conduct oneself when called into the House. At the appointed time, a gentleman in morning dress greets the assembly outside the House, and invites ticket-holders in.

We pass through the front door, into a newly decorated and carpeted, but otherwise unremarkable hallway. A stand in one corner holds a top hat, and half way up the stairs a Victorian figure stands frozen in time, but otherwise there is little clue as to what awaits. Then we enter a formal room, and stand behind ‘the bar’ to the House. In front of us is a long table, each side of which is set with a blotter and a name plate, indicating where the various members should sit: ‘the Member for Garth’ here, the ‘Member for Middle’ there.¹⁴ On the walls are four large ‘portraits’, framed pictures of pompous looking gentlemen in eighteenth and nineteenth century costume. They look a little odd. Facing us is the raised podium of the Speaker, behind which sits a pale, bewigged figure. A model.

The usher invites us forward, and we take our seats as temporary ‘Members’ of the House. To hand we have an agenda paper, listing key issues that have come before the House over the last century and a half. Our task today, we are told, is to listen to the debates and vote on the issues. We shuffle nervously. Suddenly, the ‘Speaker’ comes to life. He speaks, and though his head

¹⁴ ‘Garth’ and ‘Middle’ are the names of two Island constituencies.

makes no movement, his mouth and eyes match the words we hear.¹⁵ After clarifying the proceedings, he introduces the first debate, and we realise why the portraits around the wall looked so odd. They are televisual screens, and each begins to run a short film in which a character from Island history relates one side of the debate or the other. As they argue, other film clips appear on the end wall, giving a taste of the contemporaneous world outside. And, when we have heard each argument, we are asked to vote, loudly calling ‘aye’ or ‘nay’.

Thus, we were asked to consider the ramifications of giving women the vote in 1881,¹⁶ of opening the Island’s roads to motorcycle traffic – and thus the TT – in 1902, and of making way for the finance industry in the 1960s. Finally, we reach the last item on the agenda paper, independence. This is a parliamentary debate that is yet to happen, but here the visitors are asked to consider the various sides of the argument and vote for or against this emotive step. The debate is cleverly tabled. Should the Island work toward independence *within* the Europe Union? Set in this context, one is forced to contemplate the ramifications of European directives that could enforce measures that would undermine the basis of the Island’s current economic success, such as tax harmonisation. It is a question that leaves little room for manoeuvre. ‘In the ghost town,’ writes Eco, describing some other animatronic attraction, ‘since the theatricality is explicit, the hallucination operates in making the visitors take part in the scene and thus become participants in that commercial fair that is apparently an element of the fiction but *in fact represents the substantial aim of the whole imitative machine*’ (1987: 43, emphasis added).

For the tourists this must be a fascinating but bemusing experience. Although one report described it as ‘without doubt, the most remarkable interactive, high-tech demonstration [...] the most brilliant way to slip history onto a visitor that I have ever seen,’¹⁷ it is an exhibition for internal consumption. It forces one to

¹⁵ The effect is created in a similar way to that of the ‘old grandfather’ in the ‘Story of Mann’ exhibition in Peel, with a film being projected onto an opaque, moulded ‘head’.

¹⁶ ‘Although technically a pioneer exercise,’ writes Belchem, ‘the grant of ‘parliamentary’ suffrage to women in 1881 [...] was limited in impact, less of an advance than that secured contemporaneously by ‘ladies elect’ in English municipal elections’ (2000b: 88). Today, however, the proud boast is that the Island was ‘the first’ to grant votes to women.

¹⁷ <http://www.sandylyon.com/ireland2002/seg4.html>

come face-to-face with the minutiae of the debates that have exercised Manx minds, and for the very few Island residents I have spoken to that have so far experienced it – and for myself – it can be a remarkable, challenging, disturbing or enlightening experience.¹⁸

Discussion

The photographer and feminist activist, Jo Spence, once produced a photographic piece entitled ‘Write or Be Written Off’ (Nead 1992: 82). Its message to women was that a ‘literal’ presence, be it scriptural or visual, was necessary if the gender was to be accorded her rightful place in western history: was to be seen to exist. This concept of the vitality of ‘inscription’ – of making a sign of historical presence and rightful continuity – emerges also in Macdonald’s introduction to *Inside European Identities*. Writing that ‘the relationship between texts and identities is not only one of texts as voice for existing and emerging identities: *texts can also play a part in shaping and even creating identities*’ (1993: 16, emphasis added), she points not only to the importance of the written text in European nationalisms, but also opens the way to consideration of the ‘heritage site’ as a ‘inscription’, a text on identity, placed in the landscape. If, as argued above, the text of the new history is a ‘museum’ for the conservation of identity-validating memories, then the museum or heritage site might be read as a dynamic identity-forming (or identity-negating) ‘text’. Indeed, this is exactly the thrust of Graham’s article in Ashworth and Larkham’s volume (1994: 135ff). In the newly-formed Irish Republic, ‘heritage’ was used to reinscribe a history which negated the Irishness of the Anglo-Irish, and has situated the country as essentially ancient, Celtic and Catholic. Yet its long history is shown to be a ‘melting-pot of different cultures, in which the other inhabitants of the country could become fully Irish by Gaelicizing themselves (op.cit.: 139).

So who are these Manx ‘texts’ for, and what purpose do they serve in the current discourses on Manx identity? The *Aros* centre on Skye was explicitly created for local consumption and not for tourists, but in its policy review for 1999, the Isle of Man government stated that ‘Manx National Heritage provides a

¹⁸ How I voted will remain ever my secret.

focus for marketing the Island in a prestigious and attractive way by presenting an image of one of the most concentrated and best cared for historic landscapes in Europe.’ The review continues:

The main marketing strategy for the combined activities of Manx National Heritage is publicly presented through “THE STORY OF MANN” presentation, Island-wide. This presentation provides a portrayal of the Island’s history, museums, monuments, buildings and landscape in a dynamic and co-ordinated way which has developed an incremental power for visitor attraction and community pride (Isle of Man Govt. 1999b: 100).

The report also includes an extract from the Council of Minister’s¹⁹ report of January 1999, stating that ‘The Island should continue to develop and innovate the heritage product [...] vigorous promotion and marketing of the Island’s unique assets [allow] the Isle of Man to retain a competitive advantage in this market as a result of the integrity and quality of its heritage product’ (op.cit.: 101). Clearly, then, the Island’s heritage is seen in economic and political terms, here explicitly stated as a resource for the marketing of the Island to potential contributors to the Manx economy. There is no corresponding inclusion or exclusion of groups here, as with the Anglo-Irish, and any relevance to ‘identity’ must be read as implicit.

This is not to say that the internal relevance of Manx heritage is politically unimportant, or that MNH or the Manx government regard it as such. Quite the opposite, as this discussion will demonstrate. This chapter has been included for the very reason that the representations of Manx social and cultural life offered through the sites were so often referenced by informants, whether critically or favourably. This internal interest may well be due to the high profile the “Story of Mann” has within the world of European museums,²⁰ and the way

¹⁹ The Council of Ministers is the ‘cabinet’ of the lower House of Keys.

²⁰ Between them, MNH, the “Story of Mann” and the House of Manannan have twice won British Museum of the Year, an ‘Interpret Britain’ award, and awards from European Museum of the Year and the Gulbenkian Foundation. The organisation often plays host to visiting representatives of European museums keen to experience this success. ‘They are particularly attracted by the way formal museums, monuments, natural sites, and initiatives within the local community are brought together by Manx National Heritage to create the possibility of an interpreted historic

in which this is made to work to MNH's commercial advantage, but whatever the reason, the interaction between Island resident and the representation of Island life presented in the museums and heritage sites has a clear role in contemporary negotiations of Manx identity.

Although it is impossible to separate residential from tourist numbers from the details given in the government review (1999b), in a year when MNH recorded 374,000 visits to Manx Heritage sites (that is, in 1998),²¹ there were only 160,000 'visitors' recorded as staying in paid accommodation. It would seem possible, therefore, to conclude that the Manx Heritage sites are indeed popular with the Island residents. The organisation operates an active programme of temporary exhibitions and weekend activities, and during the same period 190,000 schoolchildren benefited from its Education Service,²² and from anecdotal evidence from informants and my own observations, I would suggest that a visit to a heritage site is a popular, and regular, weekend activity for Island residents.

Given the apparent popularity of the sites for some, but yet the negative responses elicited from some of my informants, the 'product placement' of Manx heritage as outlined in the government's statement above demands attention, especially in regard of its relationship to current discourses on Manx identity. In his article on the 'layered' relationship between history and heritage, heritage and identity, Ashworth (1994: 13ff) offers a model for understanding such placement and its relational meanings. Choices for the style and type of heritage presentation largely depend on whether the desired effect is politically and/or economically driven, but within the European context discussed in his text, the creation of political 'place-identities' works to facilitate the 'preservation and enhancement of ethnic and regional identity' (op.cit.: 21). In the case of the Isle of Man, I would argue, such 'ethnic and regional identity' – the maintenance of 'uniqueness' – is a resource utilised in the economic promotion of the Island, and the attraction of inward investment.

landscape extending over 227 square miles' (MNH Press Releases, <http://www.gov.im/infocentre>).

²¹ Figures are here shown for the years of fieldwork. Numbers have grown since, with MNH reporting figures in excess of 400,000 for 2001 (<http://www.gov.im/infocentre>).

²² Some of who would be from off-Island.

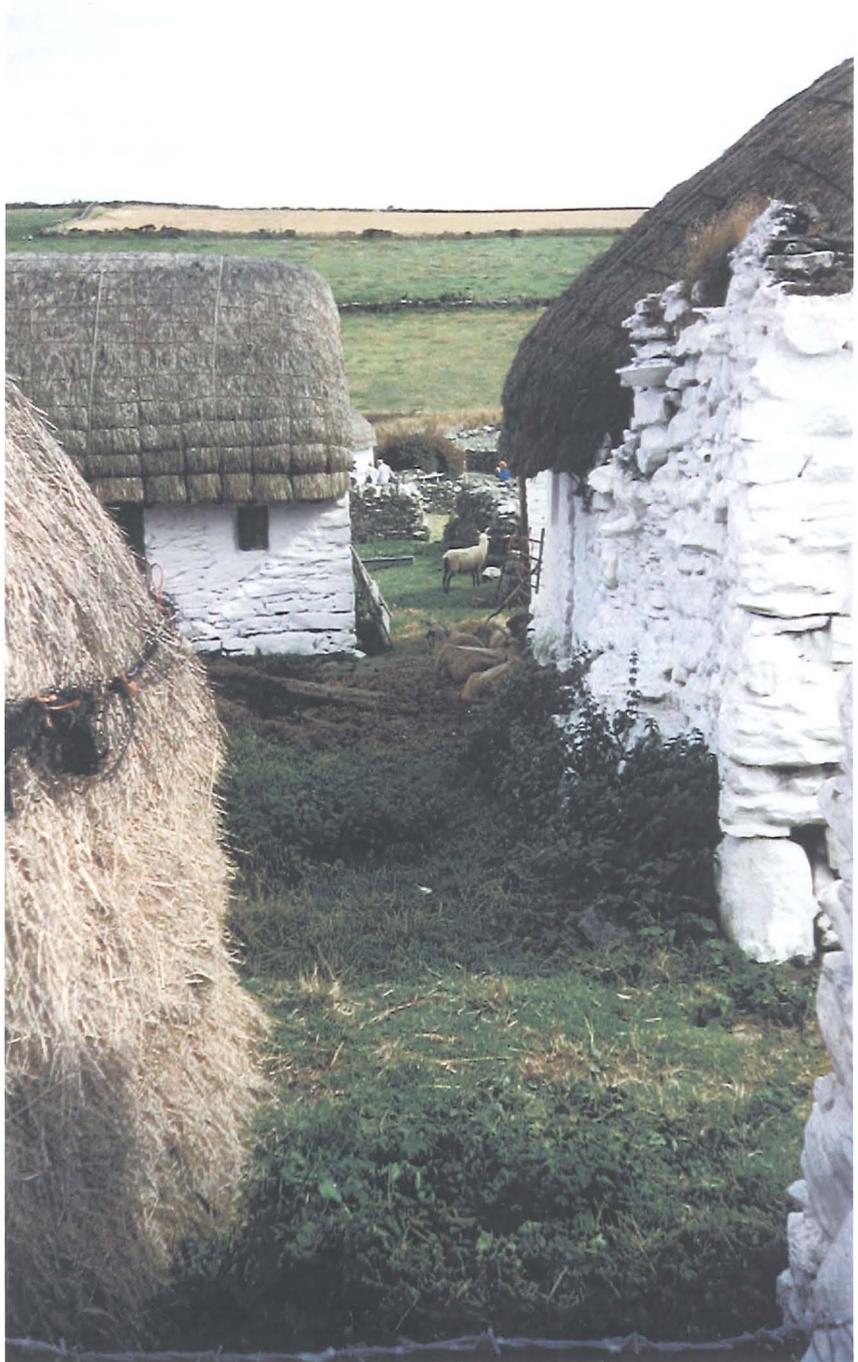
But in attracting such investment, and the economic migrants who service the resulting industry, there is a need also to present an image of a ‘community’ to which the incomers can belong: an inclusive society. Where a ‘generalised’, simplified and recognisable style of heritage presentation will suffice for tourism, ‘heritage products designed to shape or reinforce political place-identities,’ will favour ‘particularisation’ (op.cit.: 25). In this latter, sites are spatially dispersed and ethnically diverse. The sites discussed above are scattered widely around the Island, and if not ‘ethnically diverse’ they do present a picture of diverse historic, social and cultural sources which have come to ‘settle’ and work together in the Island. In Ashworth’s assessment, particularisation risks an obvious ‘conflict with the necessarily homogeneous national identity’ (op.cit.: 26), but I would argue that this past diversity – richness – is exactly what is seen as being at the heart of Manx identity.

It is the current ‘diversity’ of cultural activity that is seen as missing from heritage presentations. Criticisms levelled by informants focus on the lack of ‘living culture’ and lack of emphasis on ‘Manx language and culture’. Again, Ashworth provides a clue to this dilemma: ‘heritage implies the existence of a legatee and is only definable in terms of that actual or latent user (op.cit: 17). This partially particularised heritage product, I would suggest, looks toward a new civil society of legatees, Island-born and incomer alike. The picture therefore needs to be simplified, or partially generalised. In the process, some will experience a sense of ‘schism’ or alienation with a past too complex and socially interwoven to make sense to those new to the milieu.

And so we return to the ‘text’. In writing – in the production of a reflective text – write Rapport and Overing, we find a tool of ‘socio-cultural alienation and distance out of which a sense of greater unities comes,’ and ‘a technique for the fixing of discourse, *preserving* it as a possible archive of later analysis and translation’ (2000: 405, emphasis added). Further, it is ‘the composition, in symbolic form of a sequence of thoughts and ideas and senses such that a set of meanings is created and retained from passing experience’ (op.cit.: 406). Herein we have considered the tools – the ‘writing’ of a ‘New History’ and the ‘inscription’ of heritage in the landscape – available to the creation of a unified sense of identity in a shifting context. But exclusion from this text equates to exclusion from the future. ‘Write, or be written off.’

Perhaps sensing that danger is what prompted the creation of the *Aros* centre, and the desire for an ‘auto-ethnography’. And McKechnie describes how ‘years of theoretical activity delimiting Corsican identity’ led to terminological glosses being ‘tied down into people’s own descriptive frameworks [...] what had been ethnographic convention had become a tool for self-description’²³ (1993: 141). Their self-descriptions were situated in terms of ‘honour and shame’. Substituting the work of the anthropological treatise with that of the museum and the heritage centre, one might come to expect – and indeed, will presently find – a Manx self-description as part Norse, part Celt, uniquely positioned historically and politically, sometimes poor but always resourceful, principled but pragmatic, with a longevity of relationship with land and sea. That is the text extracted and repeated in the “Story of Mann”. But the texts, tales and plays which have also featured in this and other chapters tell of another, reflexive element to that identity. Section Three of this thesis will go on to offer an insight into some of the individual, personal ‘texts’ which attempt to establish relational meaning with the broader discourses that have been described in this current Part.

²³ McKechnie is referring particularly here to the wealth of Mediterranean ethnography that describes patron/client relationships, and the concept of honour and shame.



*Figure 7 : The heritage village of Cregneash, part of “ The Story of Mann”.
Cregneash is farmed as it was at the beginning of the twentieth century, a time
when many of the inhabitants may still have been Manx Gaelic speakers.
Photograph : Sue Lewis.*

Chapter 2.4: Roots End

In *Roots*, I have presented a taste of collective performance and representation that the residents of the Isle of Man variously use to express, or gain entry to, a sense of Manxness. The selection presented is by no means exhaustive.¹ Examples of ‘traditional’ events may well have included Manx ‘tays’, gatherings where people share an afternoon tea and are entertained by the Island’s dancers and musicians. There are numerous annual fairs and festivals, such as *Laa Columb Killey*, which on the 20th June in the village of Arbory in the south celebrates the feast of St Columba. Church services conducted in the Manx Gaelic language might have featured, or services by harbours that remind of the Island’s intimate relationship with the sea. Omitted also are the annual *Manx Young Farmers* events: these include competitions for debate and public speaking,² and a drama competition held in Douglas’ theatre which offers another hilarious opportunity for satirical commentary on Manx life. And during winter months, there are those simple gatherings where people come to listen to talks on all manner of things.

Describing aspects of life in a former mining town, Dawson writes that ‘[w]ith change [...] the referents of community are steadily disappearing. As such, a sense of community is increasingly obtained at a second remove, through learning rather than direct experience’ (1998: 216). In relation to his latter point, it could readily be argued that the ‘representations’ offered in the ‘Story of

¹ The selections I do include and describe are simply those that, on balance, I had more intimate knowledge of, both from personal participation and observation and via the insights of others. The events excluded do, however, inform my interpretations of the social and cultural importance of such ‘gatherings’ in the Isle of Man.

² I was told that many an old Manx politician first cut his (and now, her) public teeth in these competitions.

Mann' evidence a similar learning at 'second remove'. But I would argue that what we have seen in the preceding chapters is also indicative of either a return to former personal experience (as with those who are again attending the *eisteddfods* they remember from their youth) or the gaining of new personal knowledge – knowledge that tells of the importance of gathering – by very direct experience (as in the learning of the Manx Gaelic language or that first performance at an *oie'll verrey* for the committed incomer).

Many of my informants would, however, agree with Dawson's former point. I proposed in the introduction to this Part that there is an uncertainty about the 'components' of Manxness and, by extension within this Manx context, of achieving a sense of 'community'. Further, at the very beginning of this thesis I drew attention to the question being asked, if implicitly: 'what is it to be Manx?' I would argue that implied in such a question is the hope of a definitive response. In a constantly changing and uncertain milieu, what is being performed in the events described is a quest not only for the return of a (mythical) 'past rootedness' (Phillips 1993: 149ff) but also for a sense of sharedness. At the present time, the search is taking place in the performance – often collectively, gathered together – of 'traditions'.

The response to too much difference – difference, that is, as introduced by incomers – is to reassert, through performance, a sense of sameness. And indeed, even Phillips agrees with the pro-communitarian thinkers he otherwise criticises, in recognising the 'importance of homogeneity as a precondition for realizing their³ conception of community and sustaining a collective identity,' adding that people who share origins, language and the like 'are more likely than members of a heterogeneous group *to share a common history and to have similar values*' (op.cit.: 157: emphasis added): homogeneity is, in short, a situation less likely to lead to conflict. Hastrup appears to concur, writing in her ethnography of Iceland that a 'shared sense of 'pastness' is an all-important parameter in the identification of a 'we'' (1998: 24). But what are the consequences for a sense of shared identity when more than half the population – recent arrivals with stories of their own – has no connection to that shared past? Can there be no 'we'?

³ And here, *their* can be read to refer interchangeably to both social scientists *or* nationalists.

In *Roots* we have witnessed the playing out of a dilemma. Social life without conflict is assumed to be achievable in homogeneity, in shared values and a shared 'pastness'. Consequently, for those Island-born trying to come to terms with the changing situation, the practice of the Manx Gaelic language, the performance of traditional skills in dance and music, mundane performances in *skeet* and the re-presentation of the Island's history (added, of course, to the symbolic importance of the Tynwald Court and its annual open-air sitting) evidence for them, individually and collectively, their place in a long, shared and continuous Island history. But such history can be learned, as can cultural skills. A current doubt remains: can a learned history really have the same communitarian value as history *experienced*?

To add fuel to this fiery dilemma, there is the inescapable fact that the Island-born, by their own admission, have always accepted incomers. Go back far enough, they say, in anyone's history, and you will find a *comeover*. And those *stayovers* who show cultural commitment enough to 'have a go' at the *oie'll verrey* or *eisteddfod* are welcomed and have the potential to belong, to share. Furthermore, many of those who actively support these events and activities are, in fact, incomers. And so explanation for any confusion – for what might appear to be an abandonment of a Manx principle of welcoming all comers – is given as contingent upon the situation: it is due to the speed and size of the influx of incomers over the last few decades. No community could hope to absorb such, and if some traditions and forms of cultural performance are to be protected against such threatening change, that should be expected and understood.

Expected, because there remains a danger to the Manx way of life in the presence of alien ideas, values and forms of cultural expression. If Barth was right, the cultural 'stuff' contained within the boundary is made relevant because of the boundary. But if the 'stuff' inside becomes suddenly and increasingly unrecognisable to those who see themselves as rooted within the boundary (becomes more 'theirs' than 'ours'), then the continued existence of the boundary between inside and outside, and with it Manx identity, is threatened. Cultural pluralism comes to be perceived as threatening, to both collective and personal identity, and the reaction in the case considered here has been to 'practice' community in gathering, and to demonstrate to one another that 'Manxness' still

inheres in ‘performing themselves to themselves’ by way of *cruinnaght*, *oie’ll verrey* and *eisteddfod*.

Yet, tacitly, in choosing different options within which to practice their own particular idioms of Manxness, individuals are maintaining a level of internal ‘difference’ that is required for a culture to remain vital. In an essay that considers the future of Europe, Derrida proposes that ‘there is no culture or cultural identity without [...] difference with itself’ (1992:9). This I read not as the difference between self and Other through which we know the self, but a dynamic internal difference through which those within the cultural setting can exercise their personal motivations. And so, if this first Part appears to have described a search for identity in a communitarian past, it should be remembered that different individuals have exercised their identifications in different components of that collective. And in the Part that follows, we hear from those individuals, who narrate their own responses to the socio-cultural changes and in doing so look to the present and the future. In finding ways to express their individual identity through these different ‘communities of interest’, my informants seek not only to share a *common history* but also to build social relations with those who share *similar values* (Phillips op.cit.: 157). Along the way, they may find themselves questioning roots, for many of those born within the Island appear not to share their values whilst some incomers do. They find themselves back amid the dilemma, seeking a new Manx ‘way of life’.

PART THREE: ROUTES

Ta lane eddyr raa as jannoo.

There's much between saying and doing.

Chapter 3.0: Routes

Each working day during fieldwork, as I drove to the office in Douglas I negotiated the main road which runs between Peel on the Island's west coast, where I lived, and the redeveloped capital in the east where my employers had their modern offices. Travelling toward Douglas each morning, my route took me into an unbounded world constantly in flux. This was a de-territorialised, virtual world, in which the giant tanker ships we managed existed only as names on computer screens or reports, manned by crews similarly imagined in their travel warrants as we arranged their individual movements from port to distant port.

And then, as I returned to Peel each evening, I travelled back: back into a 'real' space and, it seemed, in time. I would pass the Tynwald Hill and sites of legendary tales. As I got closer to Peel more Manx flags flew, staking their claim on the land. I would see the city's ancient castle still standing guard and would finally be welcomed back into the town in Manx Gaelic – *'faiit erriu ghys Purt n' Hinshey* – into watchful streets with names which spelled out their origins in Manx as well as English, and where evocative peat smoke emerged from chimneys.

Like hundreds of anthropologists before me, and undoubtedly many to come, I naively sought a bounded place in which to do fieldwork. An island, no less. I sought also, initially, to 'fix' my attention on the revival of the Manx Gaelic language as symbolic of a concern to 'root' Manx identity in something of local significance. But in spite of my attempts to do otherwise, this was always destined to be a project related to 'movement' rather than fixity. This most recent revival of interest in the language was itself prompted by the in-migration of the

workers for the international (offshore) finance industry.¹ That industry was created to compensate for the loss of the tourist or ‘visitor’ industry that had previously brought wealth to the Island. People travel within the Island to meet with others who share their interests – whether that be music, dance or lectures on the latest thinking in global finance. They travel outwith its boundaries to meet with fellow Celts, or business partners, or for holidays in the sun. And, like me on my daily commute to and from work, they move between worlds, real and virtual. Travel – and encounter – is and always has been part of Manx lives. No Man(n) is an island unto itself.²

Much of anthropology’s recent concern with identity has shifted focus from its relationship with ‘fixity’ (Rappport and Overing 2000: 262) to its creation and maintenance in a world of constant movement – on rootlessness, displacement, migration and diaspora. Contemporary life is seen as lived in the transit lounge (Clifford 1997: 1). Our socio-cultural milieux are ‘creolizations’ (Drummond 1980), or points on the spectrum of Hannerz’s global ‘cultural flow’ (1993). Cultures are ‘compressed’ (Paine 1992), or variously ‘-scaped’ (Appadurai 1990). Ethnographic attention is paid to immigrant groups learning to live in the ‘centre’ (Amit Talai 1989), to migrants whose attention still points toward ‘home’ (Olwig 1997) or to ‘ex-pats’ who carve a ‘centred’ niche in erstwhile peripheries (Amit Talai 1998).

Despite the work referred to above, much of the social-scientific material on migration has analysed movement from periphery to centre: on arrival, the migrant – now of an ethnic minority – must learn to manoeuvre through a new, strange and dominant socio-cultural context. The ethnographic experience described here focuses on a situation that is somewhat different. In broad terms, the migrants arriving in the Isle of Man do not immediately³ perceive themselves as moving from one socio-cultural context to another. Any ‘flow’, on their part would be seen as intra-cultural. Furthermore, they are perceived by those already

¹ I refer the reader back to the Introduction for details on this in-migration.

² With sincere apologies to Donne.

³ I say ‘immediately’, because there are many who become sensitive to the notable differences between Island life and that of the UK. As described within this text, others remain either unconvinced or unconcerned about its political, historical, social and cultural uniqueness within the British Isles.

resident in the Island as bringing with them a potentially dominating culture, destructive to the Island's own 'way of life'.

There is, for some of these immigrants, a sense of displacement; but this is temporally experienced and represented, narrated within the stories in this Part as ruptures with a past. And despite indigenous fears, 'Manx culture' is not disappearing. In writing a review of *The Story of Mann and All That*, Charles Guard wrote that 'any culture thrives on the nutrients that are fed into it, and the Isle of Man is no different. The unique combination of people that come in here, some of whom stay, some of whom don't, continues to produce a unique, though ever-changing mix of language, music, dance and attitudes. It's called Manx culture' (n.d. 26). As for 'creolizations', as Kuper says in a recent article, 'it is well-known that the history of all European countries is a history of successive migrations' (2003: 23). In acknowledgement of this fact, there is no essentialising rhetoric of Manxness to be mobilized against the incomers. The Island's culture is not 'withering on the vine' (Paine 1992: 199), for culture is not a 'thing' that can wither. Yet there is no doubt that, given the influence of the global media (or even UK television and newspapers), it is the local version which is perceived as the cultural 'underdog'. Charles Guard's words are not yet sufficiently convincing to calm the cultural waters. I am therefore more inclined towards Paine's notion of 'compression' as a means to understanding the cultural *intensification* which, individually experienced, has led some of this Part's contributors to express their own identity through a personally relevant cultural idiom.

The shift in anthropological attention from fixity to fluidity is the paradigmatic result of the discipline's (or rather, its exponents') reflexivity. It follows from the methodological imperative to follow our newly-voiced subjects (post *Writing Culture*) on their journeys through space; our self-imposed demand to justify our representations of those subjects, and from our inability now to distance ourselves from the field – to 'bound' it temporally. This project started with a visit to an World Wide Web site, and continues – years after fieldwork – with weekly updates from the Island's e-news pages, 'IOMOnline', emails to and from friends ('informants') and tuning in to the Sunday afternoon Manx Radio programme via the Internet. This continued contact denies us the opportunity

(should we ever desire it again) to create ‘grand narratives’ about the Other, and we are encouraged to engage instead with our informants’ personal journeys. Thus, while Clifford writes that ‘in the history of twentieth-century ethnography “informants” first appear as natives, they emerge as travellers’ (1997: 19), we must keep in mind that we, and our disciplinary practices, have travelled through that history with them.

Not only, then, do we have a modern world represented as a constant movement of people, we also have a world understood as a constant communication and exchange of ideas, where ‘identity [...] becomes a freely chosen game’ (Bauman 1996: 18). The personal journeys we ethnographers are therefore required to attend to are ones in which individuals can draw from an ever-increasing choice of cultural forms, yet we are all aware that, rather than the homogeneity once predicted as a result of the spread of McLuhan’s ‘global village’ (1964), there has been a heightening of local identifications, some so forcefully applied as to lead to violence and further, enforced movements of peoples. As Rapport suggests, ‘with individuals making different cultural selections and combinations – different from other individuals and different from themselves in other times and places – global movement can be expected to be volatile. Advocates of different selections [...] can be expected to be exclusionary if not hostile’ (Rapport and Overing 2000: 266). In a globalising world – a world of movement – we have an intensification of focus on the ‘local’.

And so ‘[h]ere is our greatest problem as anthropologists,’ proposed by Raymond Firth in 1954: ‘to translate the acts of individuals into the regularities of social process. How do we do it?’ (cited in Paine 1974: 1). We appear still to have some distance to go in answering Firth’s question, and in understanding the relationship between an individual and the social context within which he or she constructs a sense of identity, wherever it might be situated. In the introduction to their recent edited volume on identity in a globalising world, Campbell and Rew are critical of the attempts made thus far ethnographically and sensitively to illuminate the ‘complex uniformities and diversities that result’ (1999: 2) in a world of movement, fracture and ‘kaleidoscopic recombination’ (op.cit. 5). In this section of the thesis I wish to explore different ‘routes to identity’ through this other ‘creative dualism’ of ‘uniformity and diversity’ – or, as I prefer,

‘sameness and difference’ – and thus to contribute both to answering Firth’s query and responding to Campbell and Rew’s call for more sensitive expositions of identity processes.

This Part focuses, then, on the ‘acts of individuals’. As we explore their narratives, we will also explore very different ‘routes to identity’. Movement here is an individually perceived experience, and whilst I have taken the liberty of drawing their experiences together into chapters, the unique nature of each experience should not be forgotten. I use their stories to demonstrate the very different kinds of journeys that go to make up the complex world in which we live, and which we as ethnographers attempt now to describe.

Sameness and Difference

There is a conceptual theme of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’ running through this introduction, and through the forthcoming Part. All those we will hear from are resident in the Island. In that, they are ‘the same’. None are ‘itinerant’, using the Island’s flourishing financial industry to further their own fiscal ends. All have, or are making, some level of commitment to life as part of Manx society. In that way they are all the same. There is ‘sameness’, too, in the way people are seen to express their cultural selves – through language, dance, or even in their ‘inaction’ (Rapport 2002a: 10). But there are significant differences too. Manx-born and *stayover*, as categories of origin, are symbolically significant terms in current discourses about a disappearing Manx identity and ‘way of life’. By origin, then, they are different: a constructed, stereotypical difference (McDonald 1993). But then there are the differences – the exceptions – that prove that ‘rule’. That is, that among those whose origin lies elsewhere, there are those who ‘belong’, by dint of their actions (that is, a greater level of commitment). And then, at a more interpersonal level and within the groups of shared ‘interest’, there are differences of opinion and a vast diversity of personal reasons for being there, for ‘belonging’.

In his article on identity in the Shetland island of Whalsay, Cohen quotes a friend and informant saying: ‘we’re aa’ da same here – but different too’ (1978: 449). Many of my own informants might have made a similar statement, but with one difference. Despite a wide acknowledgment of the subtleties of sameness and

difference outlined above, the ‘aa’ would need to be a qualified, because at some point in the imagining of the community, different would become just *too* different. ‘Same but different’ is an inclusive term. ‘Different’ is potentially exclusive, and there are still those present who will always be categorised as strangers.

And if there is an ambiguity in the above, then that is to be expected. According to Byron ‘anthropological uses of ‘identity’ are ambiguous. In one sense, the term refers to properties of uniqueness and individuality, the essential differences making a person distinct from all others [...] In another sense, it refers to qualities of sameness, in that persons may associate themselves, or be associated by others, with groups or categories on the basis of some salient feature’ (1996: 292). The mutually supportive relationship between social scientific and ‘nationalist’ theories of identity was established in the introduction to *Roots*, and so we should not be surprised at the similarities between our own ‘ambiguous’ use of the concept, and its indeterminate application within the socio-cultural milieu we are attempting to describe. And the reader should not look for a solution to that ambiguity in this text. A. L. Epstein wrote that ‘identity [...] is essentially a concept of synthesis. It represents the process by which a person seeks to integrate his various statuses and roles, as well as his diverse experiences, into a coherent image of self’ (cited in Cohen 1994: 11). They seek, but in a world of constant movement and perpetual encounter, it is a process never completed.

Mid-way through my fieldwork, I said to my Island mentor that it seemed to me that in order to *see* the Island, one had to *know* (or understand) it. What I was trying to express, poorly, is more succinctly summarised in Berger’s words: ‘We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice [...] As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach [and] to touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it’ (1972: 8). Within this Part we are specifically concerned with the relationship between the individual and society (and its cultural representations). There are those currently resident on the Island who have never, and will never, *choose* to look, touch and therefore establish any kind of relationship with Manx society and culture. The implication in Berger’s words – and in the actions of those itinerant *comeovers* – is of the consciousness of that

choice and of the effect of it on (Manx) selves. Apart, then, from the concerns expressed by the Island-born about an 'alien culture' threatening to extinguish their own (a concern which assumes, to an extent, that 'culture' is a thing to be lost), there is also an 'individual' ingredient in their concern about these incomers. This latter is a concern that demonstrates a certain awareness of the interactional roots of social and cultural form, but one that lies in the uncertainty of whether interaction with 'difference' might prove culturally constructive or destructive.

For Simmel, 'for something to exist [...] contrast must be construed between it and other things distinct from, or opposed to it; oppositional entities, processes and tendencies are, thus, ultimately complementary because a constitutive force inheres in the tension between them' (cited in Rapport and Overing 2000: 11). For Bateson, 'your identity, your self, depends upon the people and things that compose your associations. And perhaps even more important, your knowledge of yourself and your development as a person are both predicated on those same associations' (1982: 3), and for Clifford 'the making and remaking of identities takes place takes place in the contact zones' (1997: 7). Identity – even for the theorists – is again shown to be ambiguous, found in the sameness of association and the differences exposed at the frontier.

How, then, do individuals make sense of this world? For Rapport and Overing, 'human beings construe of their lives as a moving-between – between identities, relations, people, things, groups, societies, cultures, environments and times' (2000: 268), and 'recount their lives to themselves and others as movement' (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 33). But we might turn that around and say that the movement – the 'moving-between' – is recounted as a life-journey. In response to my questions about their identification with the Island, most of my informants performed a narrative of their lives. Marianne Gullestad's experience with authors of such life stories rings true to my own experience. 'Some life stories,' she writes, 'explicitly display a reflexive search for identity. [The] authors attempt to shape and objectify their identities through reconstructing and patterning their life experiences. During [our] conversations the authors have made touching efforts to show me or otherwise let me know the things which they feel are relevant for the understanding of them as persons' (1996: 36). Some of the contributors to this current telling recall what might be termed an

‘epiphanic’ moment in their journey – a point at which their conscious thoughts and emotive responses are crystallized into some sort of action. And these tellings are focused on mutually intelligible events – the reading of a report in a newspaper, or the hearing of the lyrics to a song. Others tell an on-going procession through life, punctuated by personal and influential encounters with fellow travellers. Again, the narrative is formulated so that the listener can relate to it – if not to *the* experience, but at least *about* it (Kapferer 1986: 191). Those accounts are reproduced here, so that you too can relate to the diversity of experience which abounded in that moment in time, in that place.

In the telling of their stories, much of what is recounted relates to a ‘coming-to-terms’ with the current (and possible future) socio-cultural context within which the tellers are situated. The way they narrate their personal history is a form of justification for their current expressions of themselves. Whether that be through the Manx Gaelic language, through nationalist politics or through dance and song, each maps a route through a life which makes their past meaningful in their present. In this, their project differs little from the retelling of histories in the processes of broader, nationalist identity politics (cf. Friedman 1992) or our own anthropological project – if we are to listen to Sally Falk Moore – to treat fieldwork as ‘current history’ (1987: 727).

But if life is a moving-between, it is not just a moving between past and present. Moore adds (ibid.) that the fieldworker should also ask ‘what is the present producing?’ And like that fieldworker, my informants have – in telling their stories – an eye both to the past *and* to the future. They speculate on the possible social content and cultural form of that future – the eventual demise of the Manx language for one, the continuance of ‘traditional’ music and dance as the Island’s young grasp it as their own for another. And they are aware, if they can be aware of nothing else about the future, that the Island’s social and cultural life will still be a complex of sameness and difference. Probability – based on past experience – affirms this: as the Manxman Charles Guard again points out, ‘it is only the arrival of so many people over thousands of years, all with their contribution to make, that our culture is what it is’ (Guard n.d.). The coming-to-terms with the present (and the present’s past), is perhaps a way of learning – deuterologically for Bateson (1982: 6), or as part of a ‘dialectical process’ for Pocock (cited in Rapport and Overing 2000: 197) – how those who have come to

reside *in* the Island might become *of* the Island (cf: Strathern 1981), as others have before them.

As will become clear from the stories that follow, recent experience of immigration has perhaps been more keenly felt than at other times in living memory. Its sheer volume, increasing the population from 53,228 in 1971 to 76,315 in 2001 (IOM Census, 2001) has perhaps helped to focus reflexive minds, and so comparisons are drawn with other times when concerns were expressed about influxes of 'visitors', the effects on the balance between Manx-born and incomer and the possible threat to Manx culture (see Beckerson 2000, Belchem 2000c, Maddrell 2001). And similarly, people look to key cultural figures for inspiration on how to keep a 'sense of Manxness' in the present, to ensure its availability in the future.

Preparing for the Journey

In the opening paragraphs to his beautifully crafted piece on identity in a South Wales mining village, Leonard Mars discusses the use of the interview as a complement to the more 'traditional' anthropologist's tool of participant observation. After he has observed and described the ceremonies and events, he then conducts 'formal interviews' with the key players (1999: 253). I have followed the same schema, finding that not only are the observations made at such events a necessary prelude to any discussions but that the participatory commitment that this entails on the part of the researcher is meaningful to those one wishes to 'interrogate'. It also provides some level of reciprocation for the knowledge they are about to impart.

If our ethnographic choices are now to take account of movement, our methodologies need also to account for the disturbing fact that people can no longer be relied upon to live their lives in one observable place. Events, such as those described in the previous Part, are as mobile as the people who travel to participate in them. For the foreseeable future people will continue to travel to and from their work, and in leisure time they will still journey to satisfy personal interests. Consequently, the anthropologist will seek people out where they gather, unable to observe them as they disperse. But occasionally, these

‘informants’ may allow the researcher to follow them into their homes, where they may agree to narrate their personal journeys.

Much of the data for this section of *Routes* comes from such interviews. In coming to terms with the changes that they have experienced in their Island lives, several of the contributors narrate their life stories as a ‘journey’ of identity discovery. What they describe recalls Kateb’s ‘exile, alienation and estrangement’ (1991: 137) from a ‘lost past’ (Rapport and Overing 2000: 264). For Kateb, such alienation can be ‘good’. ‘Each one of us,’ he states, ‘needs a little distance, needs to learn to see as from a distance’ (ibid.), for in this way we enter into a process toward self-reliance (which I interpret here as self-ascription of identity). And where ‘identity concerns what you consider you belong to, both at the level of ideas and explanation but also in terms of emotional experience and the expression of affect’ (Campbell and Rew 1999: 8), such distance gives one an opportunity to reflect on and define for oneself one’s ‘belonging’. In the case of some, this distance may initially have been experienced as spatial, but has come to be represented to themselves – in their personal narratives – as temporal. ‘Thinking historically is a process of locating oneself in space and time,’ writes Clifford. It is, he adds, ‘an itinerary rather than a bounded site – a series of encounters and translations’ (Clifford 1997: 11). Whether the initial realisation came through their own travels ‘abroad’, or from the arrival of the ‘Other’ (in the guise of the Finance Sector workers) in the Island, they tell of a moment in time when they realised they had to find a way of expressing their ‘Manxness’. An ‘epiphanic’ moment, perhaps, but one which is also represented as a distancing break with a past: ‘narrative mediates one’s sense of movement through time, so that in the telling one becomes, in Rushdie’s (telling) observation, an émigré from a *past* home’ (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 28: my italics).

If some continue to narrate a story of spatial shift, subtle readings soon reveal a temporal dimension. *Stayovers* are those in-migrant workers who service the Finance Sector or other industries in the growing economy, and who have decided to settle in the Island. Voluntary exiles from their former home (the majority from England), they are *en route* toward acceptance within a new socio-cultural experience. In describing the life and identity relationships in the place he called ‘Coal Valley’, Mars informs us that the valley ‘tolerated a variety of different identities on condition that incomers demonstrated *commitment*, for

example through residence and work' (1999: 257, emphasis added). In the Isle of Man a *stayover's* attempts are more likely to be accepted if they similarly demonstrate a commitment to the Island's project to keep vital its social, cultural and historical uniqueness. And, as in Mars's example, such assessment is made on an individual basis: it was the doctor's 'ordinariness' that led to his acceptance in the valley, along with the time he and his family had spent there – long enough for a 'shared history' (op.cit.: 271) with the valley folk. As Simmel stated, 'the stranger' is 'the *potential* wanderer' (1950: 402, emphasis added) who 'is not radically committed to the unique ingredients and peculiar tendencies of the group, and therefore approaches them with the specific attitude of "objectivity"' (op.cit.: 404). Objectivity sees the objectified as only 'sameness'. The 'stranger' who wishes to learn to belong must not only learn the 'unique ingredients' of belonging, but also to recognise the 'differences' that energise that 'sameness' .

The informants grouped herein are examples of voices in an on-going debate about Manx identity. They might be thought of as 'representative' of the two perceived sides in that debate – Island-born versus 'incomer' – but to leave it there would be to misrepresent the complexity of the socio-cultural context. Whilst our informants might seek to simplify the situation through such 'stereotyping' (cf: Rapport 1995), Friedman exhorts us as anthropologists not to shy away from complexity. Whilst accepting that analytical lines have to be drawn somewhere, he argues that where once the search for real things was 'a hallmark of classical anthropology's attempt to simplify the complexity of the world...[n]owadays, complexity itself, in all its cultural confusion, has become the new *real thing*' (Friedman 1997: 285, emphasis in original). This is perhaps no more than a rewriting of Leach's warning (1993 [1954]: Introduction) about the disciplinary reification of models (whether our own, or our informants'). As such, it should make us all the more sensitive to the *real* context as it is practiced and manipulated. Although Eriksen wonders if 'perhaps dichotomies are necessary for the anthropological enterprise' (1995: 305), he goes on to advise that they 'may be envisaged as scales marked by differences in degree rather than as absolute contrasts' (ibid.). It was concluded in Chapter 2 (*Roots*) that rather than a dichotomous 'us' and 'them', the Island's intra-communal classifications of sameness and difference tended to be 'scalar' (cf. Phillips 1986). To be true to

that scalar reality, and to respond to Friedman's request, I therefore include in Chapter 3.2 voices that appear ambivalent about reflexively distancing themselves from their socio-cultural context.

And although I group these voices together into chapters, I hope that our hearing of their individual voices will demonstrate the diversity of opinion within these arbitrary groupings. My aim is that in offering a glimpse into the scalar range, and in keeping in mind the relationship to the collective performances described in the first section, we might gain an insight both into the processual route to identity and into what Cohen calls the 'triumph' of collective behaviour (1994: 7). What both the anthropological voices above and the informant voices herein hold in common is their insistence that within whatever category we might analytically place them, there are discrete voices belonging to 'thinking selves' (op. cit.: 133ff). It behoves us, as fellow human beings as well as social scientists, to listen.

Cohen adds (and it is worth here quoting him at length) that:

[M]y concern is not with the self for its own sake, but is to consider critically and constructively the assumptions we conventionally make about the relationship of the individual to society. Western social science proceeds from the top downwards, from society to the individual, deriving individuals from the social structures to which they belong [...] My argument is that we should now set out to qualify these, if not from the bottom upwards, then by recognising that the relationship of individual and society is far more complex and infinitely more variable than can be encompassed by a simple, uni-dimensional deductive model (op.cit.: 6).

I make no claim that those we hear from in this section 'represent' contemporary Manx society: are, if you wish, the whole diversity at "the bottom". I do, however, insist that they are as representative of individuals attempting to make sense of their socio-cultural journeys as any others I might have selected – or might have selected me. Further, by placing them together, with all their different opinions and approaches, the possibility of analysing them into a deductive model is denied. What kind of anthropology this therefore becomes, I will aim to clarify in the concluding remarks to this thesis.

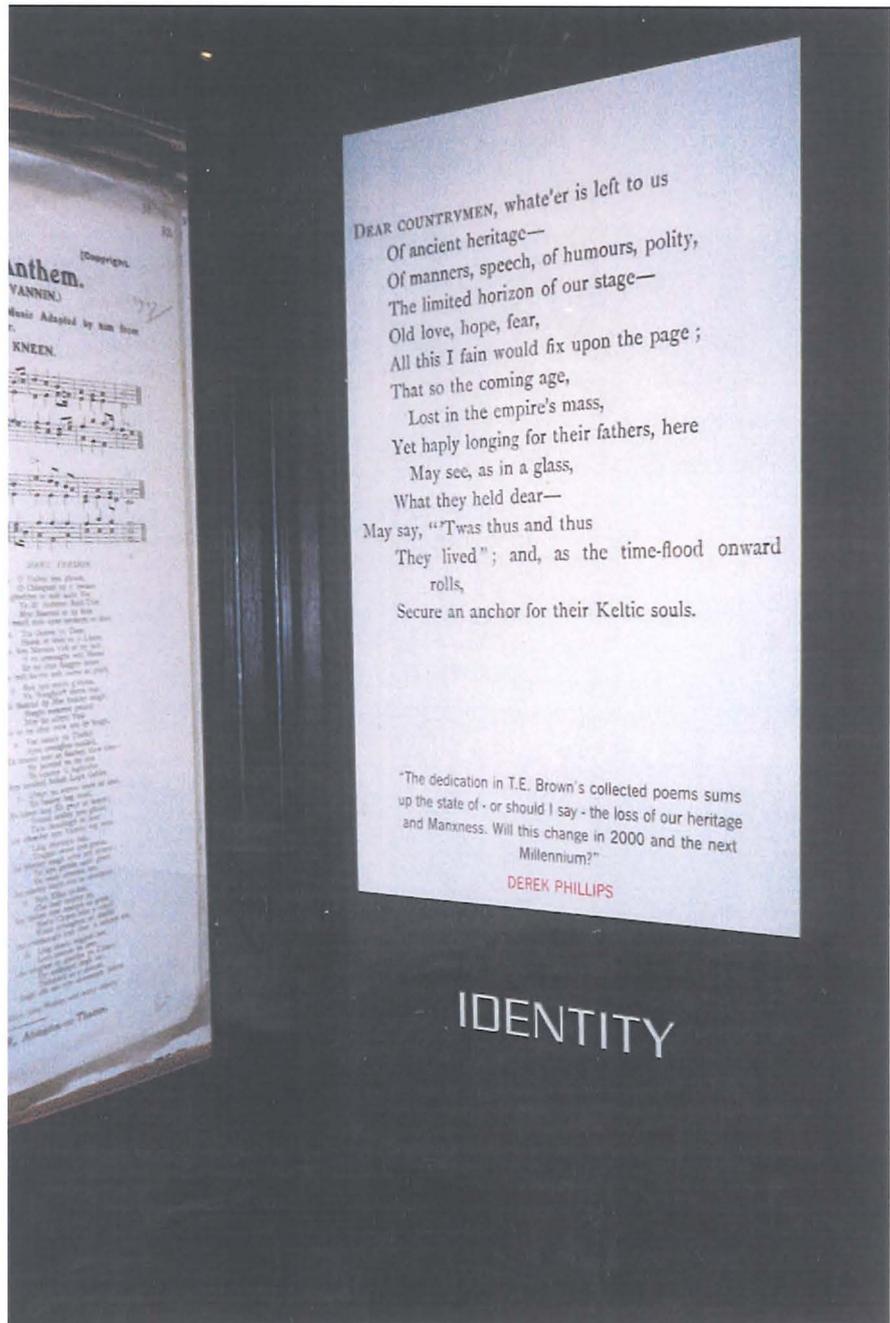


Figure 8 : " Identity ". Part of the Millennium year exhibition, " Right Here, Right Now", at the Manx Museum, Douglas. This display reproduces a verse from T. E. Brown written in the late nineteenth century, the poet speaking then of a waning Manx culture. Photograph : Sue Lewis

Chapter 3.1: Conscious Routes

Every Saturday evening, at that ‘session’ of traditional music and of enthusiasts’ chatter we have already visited, one table – the ‘political table’, as it is known – is filled with members of the Manx Nationalist Party, *Mec Vannin*. Along with anyone else who wishes to join in or listen, with pints in hand they begin an evening of political debate and argument, interrupted only by the occasional desire to join in with a particular tune. The deliberations are congenial and often highly amusing, particularly when the alcohol intake has loosened their tongues and they have found a subject that draws on the most extreme and diverse opinions present. Opinion varies from the extreme viewpoint, which would prefer the exclusion of all residents without familial connection to the Island, and ejection of the hated Finance Sector, to a more inclusive, pragmatic approach which accepts the realities of the current demographic and economic position, but which focuses on changing the status quo for a more “moral” future. Here, in a space which seems to be perceived as neither wholly public nor private, they let down their official guard of political solidarity to air their views, whilst remaining sufficiently aware that this is not the place for signs of fracture and fundamental disagreement. That many of the debates, week by week, focus on similar issues and follow the same pattern, would seem to indicate this meeting’s role in affirming their own, rather than discovering each other’s, positions.¹

In keeping with the overarching theme of this Part, however, the concern of this chapter is not with group interaction but rather with how certain members of this group negotiate an ongoing relationship with the changing social and cultural context they find themselves enmeshed in. This chapter begins a

¹ For a discussion on this type of affirmatory interaction, see Rapport 1993.

response to Cohen's call to 'redirect attention back to what people actually say about themselves' (2000b: 5) in relation to their 'lived experience', and in doing so will contribute to the developing picture within this thesis; that is, of a society trying to understand that thing which is, by them, termed 'Manxness'. Again to draw on Cohen's recent work on national identity, he insists that such identity is a 'personal construct' based on that 'lived experience', but that this personal construct also requires what is termed in his text an 'objective correlative' (2000a: 150ff) against which to make identifications. In other words, there must be a common understanding of what 'Manxness' (or, in Cohen's example, 'Scottishness') is. The detail, the content, of 'Manxness' is irrelevant. What is important is that 'it' is 'out there, somewhere' (ibid.). In a context of rapid demographic, social and cultural change, any 'objective correlative' has become blurred.

This discussion will focus on three nationalists and their particular attempts to redefine this blurring. Each has had a role in the recent history of Manx nationalist politics and action, and each is in some way still involved in 'cultural politics'. If asked, as nationalists, they would each stress their agreement over the ultimate aim of political independence for the Island. In contrast, their private expressions offer a more subtle insight into their relationships, their identifications, with the Nationalist Party and a social context in a constant state of flux. Demonstrating a 'lived experience' in which their nationalisms have different roots, they also have diverse opinions about routes to a 'new' Manx identity.

At the Saturday night sessions Jamys can always be found around the 'political table', at the very centre of every debate. Niall will often arrive after choir practice, musical colleagues and fiddle in tow, and when the mood takes will ignore the music and join the political debate. Fynn, although chairman of the Party, brings his guitar and his musical repertoire and focuses his attention on the music. Public debate is not for him.

The Party

The Manx Nationalist Party *Mec Vannin*, meaning ‘Sons of Mann’, was first established in the 1960s in response to the first of the late twentieth century waves of incomers. In its initial attempts to bolster the local economy, the Manx government had reduced taxation levels and instituted the ‘New Residents Policy’, making the Island attractive to wealthy retirees. As the story is now narrated, many of these incomers were ex-colonial administrators, who proceeded to treat the Manx as a ‘colonised’ people. Feelings ran high during the early 1970s, as demonstrated by the emergence of a covert protest movement known as *Fo Halloo*, meaning ‘underground’. Pamphlets were produced and direct action taken, but the protest was not sustained. Similarly, the Nationalist Party’s fortunes also declined, and were not revived until after the *FSFO* protests of the late 1980s, in which this chapter’s key actors were involved and which their personal stories will narrate.

The Nationalist Party’s stated aims and objectives are as follows: To achieve national independence for Mann as a sovereign state, to further and safeguard the interest of Mann, and to protect the individual and collective rights of its people. The policy summary goes on to describe a Manx nationality that would be inclusive of all residents at the time of independence, regardless of origin, and further expresses the Party’s fundamental opposition ‘to the presence of the international finance industry in Mann’, which, they believe, ‘to be morally dubious for both ourselves and its effect upon the Third World’. The Party has few official members; between thirty and forty was the number quoted at the time of the fieldwork, and currently has no elected representation in the House of Keys.² Yet, in a political system where party politics is officially absent, it does provide a focus for oppositional debate, and acts as a lobbying force. Its leading members regularly voice their opinions, drawing reaction in the form of letters to the press from both serving politicians and members of the general public. As such, it plays an important role in Manx political life.

² The Party has returned a Member to the House of Keys, but I was told that he abandoned his nationalist ticket immediately upon taking his seat. There are, however, Members of the current House who have sympathies with some of the aims, if not sometimes the methods, of the Nationalist cause.

But it is to the personal stories that we should return, if we are to begin to understand the relationship between the individual and ‘identity’.

Fynn

Fynn has paid a tangible price for his nationalism. Along with Niall, whose story follows, and another colleague, he was arrested and jailed in 1989 for taking direct action in protest against the Manx government’s handling of the Island’s social and cultural problems. The previous year had seen a number of articles in the press outlining the difficulties experienced by young Manx people trying to afford housing in an inflationary market, or being evicted by landlords seeking higher rents. The blame was firmly placed on the rapid in-migration of highly paid workers for the booming finance industry, which was also the focus for fears about the damaging effects such a change in the cultural mix would have on Island life. Already involved in what they termed as a ‘movement to revive Manx cultural awareness through music, dancing and language’ (Manx Life 1989), the group of three decided to take a more direct route to drawing the public’s attention to what was happening in the Island.

Frustrated by the politicians’ refusal to listen and take action after their initial campaign of daubing slogans, and the erection of a ‘For Sale’ sign on Tynwald Hill, the three finally and reluctantly resorted to arson. Following their arrest and conviction, they issued a joint statement to the press, in which they detailed their reasons for the action they had taken: the threat to the ‘Manx way of life’, an emerging unequal society based on wealth creation and immoral financial dealings, the threat to the environment,³ and their perception at the time of no effective political route through which to address the issues. As they stated, ‘the only previously influential nationalist party was then virtually defunct; our MHKs appeared to be heavily involved in and sympathetic to new economic policies; letters of protest were already being written to the press, but no political debate was occurring or being stimulated’ (Manx Life 1989).

³ This concern for the environment was not restricted to the Island, but also focused attention on the involvement of finance companies based in the Island in activities which served only to exploit global resources and proliferate Third World debt.

Since his release from prison, Fynn has been a member of that then 'defunct' national party, becoming its Chairman in 1998. Although electoral success has continued to elude the Party, he believes that the direct action he and his colleagues took in the late 1980s has had a lasting and beneficial effect, and has given the Nationalists a strong position in terms of public political debate. His own personal political ambitions began and ended during the General Election of 1991, and he has now refocused his attentions on music and dance; that is, on a return to those original motivations to revive Manx cultural awareness through cultural performance.

Fynn was already a father when he became involved in the FSFO protests. A song, written about his experiences after his arrest, tells of the threats offered against his daughter by the authorities should he not cooperate. Now married again, to another musician, and with two young sons, his actions have mellowed but his viewpoints have not. But, as we shall see from his story, it is in cultural awareness that he now places his confidence.

He starts his story by describing how he was first introduced to the music and dance:

'It was purely by chance, I think. I was at the Tech [...] and one of the tutors asked me did I want to join with *Bock Yuan Fannee*,⁴ when they'd really not long started. And, well, I just went along for something to do really, but I was hooked from the word go. I danced with them, well, for several years after that. And I'd played the guitar as a child at school, so I had that in me past, and I'd danced for several years. And I'd been to the session that was then at the Central Hotel just down the road,⁵ and I went along and learned a few tunes, and I joined in with the session. When did I start playing the guitar? I would say 15 years ago, more or less. Early to mid 80s. And, I mean, it's gone through ups and downs has that session. It comes and goes, but it was at a particularly low ebb because I can remember going there for many, many weeks and there was only the three of us. But since it's moved it's grown quite big. And so that's how I got interested in the music. The dancing? Well, *Bock Yuan Fannee* went through a low stage, and

⁴ He refers here to a dance group, based mainly in the north of the Island, which is still active.

⁵ This is the same session described at the head of this chapter, which has now moved to another inn.

they, they weren't doing anything, and I couldn't find a way of expressing myself through it. I was dead keen to do something, so I set up *Perree Bane*. That was the year my first daughter was born, eighteen years ago. I found that a wonderful source of being able to express myself artistically. You can create new dances, and it's, without being derogatory to the dancers, you can use them as a tool to express your, your artistic ideas.'

'Over the years I've had attempts at learning the language, and they've failed for one reason or another. But this last time, since the boys have been born, I've thought to myself, well, I had a go at teaching them to speak Manx, even though my Manx wasn't particularly good, but I made a concerted effort this time, and I've stuck at it. And I've come on, I think, in leaps and bounds.'

'So, finally it was the politics that I got involved with, the, to the FSFO, when things, when the situation on the Island changed very dramatically in a very short space of time. '87, '88, there was a huge influx of new residents, and, again coincidence, I think, I met up with two other very like-minded people, and we, we just came up with this, this course of action that we took which was very direct. I mean, we thought 'can we go through *Mec Vannin*?' Then we thought, well, we couldn't get into the political system like that, so we took a very direct course of action, in protest to the situation as it was at the time. But perhaps it got a bit out of hand, although we were always very cautious that we should never damage anybody. Any buildings that we ever damaged were, were in the course of being constructed. Nobody ever lived in them, there was no personal property. However, we got caught and we spent a year in prison. It was after, after coming out of prison that I stood for the House of Keys, and it was at the same time I joined *Mec Vannin*, and I spent several years as editor of the paper, *Pabyr Sehr*, and then this is my second year as Chairman. Did the direct action have an effect? It's virtually impossible to monitor, to judge it, but I think so. The politicians must have thought to a certain extent, y'know, that people who'd got nothing personal to gain from the actions that they took, have only done it for what they considered the good of the place that they live in, there must be something awry to make them react so intensively, and so I think it did have, and it still continues to have an effect.'

'Independence? From my point of view, with the faith that your fortunes can be generated from within the Island, as far as possible, so you create self-

reliance, the majority of our income is drafted in from the outside, with the influence and the power of the organisation coming from the outside, albeit creating enough jobs for people on the Isle of Man, but no control over it whatsoever, really. The government has to do what they say, because if they don't, they leave. The finance sector's not a necessary evil, it's evil. I haven't softened my views towards it, although I'm sort of sceptical that were we to just go for independence now, all it would do was shift the, the power source completely into the hands of the banks. And because we rely on them so heavily, were we to sever ties with Whitehall then we'd be completely at the mercy of the banks, and although I don't like being linked to Whitehall, I think I'd rather be linked there, to a, albeit a body elected by somebody else, than I would be to the banks. The government are shy of independence, although they've spoken of it, because it's an unknown. Y'know, they think, well, we'll just tickle on as we are.'

'I mean, I still view the music, song, dance, language and such as quite a minority interest on the Island. The majority of people, if you play a Manx tune to them, they wouldn't know what it was. Although after saying that, it's grown many-fold in the last twenty years, and there's many, many more of the next generation will know more what a Manx tune is than the generation past. After saying that, the sacrifice, really, has been too great, in that the day to day culture of people in the Isle of Man has been so, so much of it has been eroded, lost in the last 15 years or so, because of such a big influx of people from outside, and from the television and stuff like that. The subtle changes that are so difficult to put your finger on. And I know there's been by the government and other sources encouragement for the ancient tradition, but I would forego the ancient tradition anytime to see the day to day slower pace of life based more on – it sounds a bit sentimental, I suppose – on a trust. A lot of it has to do with world culture as well. I mean I'm not blaming it all on the government policy and that, but I think there are things that you can do to encourage the social structure, through some cultural activity. I have worked for many years with music, song and dance, not only through the clubs that I've been a part of but tried to within Peel, y'know, the place that I actually live, so that you do actually get to know people, meet people, and I think that's as important, if not more important, than actually doing stuff throughout the Island. The government have put a lot of money into culture

and heritage, and unfortunately with putting money into that they think that ‘oh, well, we’ve done it.’ I mean, it’s fine as, as a tourist thing, but it’s not the *living* culture.’

Over recent years, under the auspices of organisations such as Manx Heritage, increasing attention has been paid to traditional music and dance from diverse sections of Manx society, albeit as a form of ‘heritage’. Creating new dances in the traditional idiom, to new tunes written by the musicians who play for the dance group, Fynn is able to make a contribution to this fund of heritage knowledge. At the same time he finds a personal satisfaction – an ‘artistic⁶ outlet’ – in directing and choreographing the dancers. This he does with a dance group, *Perree Bane*, the members of which make a substantial commitment of time and energy in order to appear at all the major social events throughout the Island’s year. These include Tynwald Day and the Island’s numerous fairs, and they and other dance groups have played a major role in keeping Manx dancing and music in the eyes and ears of Island residents.

Despite this contribution and the personal satisfaction that it brings, Fynn worries about the changes in everyday life, and would prefer to keep his cultural activities close to home. Although he placed his concerns in the wider context of changes in global culture and the effects of the global media, he returned to a reflection on the more intimate changes within his own locality: ‘like a circle of friends or acquaintances,’ he said at one point: ‘now, instead of the people in your street and round about, they’re all dotted all over the Island. I mean, most people, unless they’ve been living in a street for a very long space of time, they won’t know all the people in the street, but I think there are things that you can do to encourage the social structure through some cultural activity. I have worked for many years with music, song and dance, not only through the clubs that I’ve been a part of, but tried to within Peel, the place that I actually live, so that you do actually get to know people, meet people, and I think that’s as important, if not more important, than actually doing stuff throughout the Island.’

For Fynn there is a balance to be struck between keeping the cultural traditions alive to all of the Island’s current population, and his personal concern

⁶ Or ‘ego-syntonic’ (Devereux 1978: 126)

for his immediate community. Cultural activity here is the 'glue' that holds the society together. Consequently, he makes every effort to contribute to local town events. He fronts a band as its lead singer, and through the lyrics of his songs gives public expression to his personal engagement with cultural tradition and national politics. Amongst songs that recount amusing traditional stories, songs of protest call for debate on a range of issues. Some are in English, and some in the Manx Gaelic language, the latter of which he has only recently begun to tackle again.

The Manx language, then, is becoming more important because of his younger children and their future, but his own, individual focus remains on the politics of his environment. The first selection of lyrics below is taken from a composition entitled 'When Nightmares Become Reality', and demonstrates a link between his concerns for his community and for the wider environment. The Island's housing developers are the named 'villains' of the piece, responsible for what appears to be unrestrained and ill-considered development. Often stuccoed in imitation of white, lime-washed walls, from afar they appear as a strange rash on the green hillsides. But aesthetics is not the point here. This concern for the environment is for Fynn symbolic of the changes in the social and cultural context of the Island, materially expressed in the changes in the landscape around him.

In the song, the Sally – the willow tree – calls for divine assistance, but the future appears bleak. With the politicians happy to see the landscape disappear under the symbols of economic success, Fynn's words echo many of the criticisms which have been laid at the government's door.

When Nightmares Become Reality

And we are in Dandaraville

And Carvilville and Jarvisville

The bricks and the mortar slop and spill

And they're out of the fields and over the hills.

Sally prays "God pity me

In the shadow of obscenity"

Nightmares become reality

And the M.H.K. cries dithery idle day

We're not going to stop until we've covered the lot.

She prays they won't, but fears they will.

G Joughin. *Into the Tide.*

There is, I believe, a sense of 'dispossession' from his environment in what Fynn describes. His words echo those of other Island poets, one of whom wrote 'leave Mannin green when your prosperity ends' (Liebedinski n.d.). Left in no doubt of the uncaring attitude of the financiers, these poets express also an affective relationship with this environment. Ingold has recently asserted (2000) that the environment is not merely something to be inscribed upon, but something that has a dynamic and processual relationship with the body/person that inhabits it. Fynn has not only experienced the immediate changes in his street and town, but has seen those changes visibly marking the landscape in which he works, building dry-stone walls. What he senses is the lack of knowledge he has of the social relationships that have created this changed landscape, being disconnected from the industry and its incomer workforce whose demands have created the need for such housing developments.

Ingold quotes Adam, who claims that the landscape is a story, 'a chronicle of life and dwelling' (op.cit.: 189), continuing that 'the present is not *marked off* from a past that it has replaced' (op.cit.: 196). If Fynn is part of this temporal process, how can he feel dispossessed of it? The clue might lie in the social element, in the creative 'attending to one another' that Ingold further describes and which Niall describes below: that is, being unable to 'narrate' one's social networks or being able to situate oneself in relation to others, is indeed a symptom of 'marking off' from the past.

The second lyrical selection, always performed with great humour and received with great delight by those in the audience familiar with the band's repertoire, makes direct reference to the Manx judicial punishment of 'the birch'.⁷ This punishment has now been suspended, but not yet removed from the

⁷ Following a number of successful appeals by young men sentenced to receive 'strokes of the birch' to the European Court of Human Rights, in 1982 the Manx Attorney General addressed the Island's magistrates, saying, 'I personally find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to visualise circumstances under which a birching sentence could now be properly imposed. But what I must not say is that a birching sentence is illegal. It is still a lawful sentence which, in practice, can be imposed' (Solly 1994:201). The refusal to remove the punishment from the

Island's statute books. According to many, this suspension is the root cause of the general increase in crime in recent years, but along with other issues, such as the delay in relaxing laws relating to the age of consent for homosexuality, this 'conservatism' has given the 'outside world' an impression of a 'backward' society resistant to change.

Megasorearse

*Justice comes in many ways
Just as it did in the good old days
The fat cat despot sits on high
Laughs at the underdog scratching by,
And if there's any that's cause to stray
From this nation's crooked way
Well hunt them down!*

*Hunt them down and then
When you've got them,
Bend them down and smack their bottoms.*

[...]

*Now that you have sold all that's dear to you
Now that I have lost all that's dear to me
Please don't tell me all that's left is our bigotry.*

G. Joughin, *Into the Tide*

Whilst the main lyrics refer to the judicial process, the last three lines refer back to the link between the 'sale' of the Island to the highest bidding international banks, of the reliance on so-called 'experts' who come from outside to give advice on anything from building hospitals to sewage disposal, of the loss of the things that were good about being Manx, and the leaving behind of the

Statute Books is a show of 'independence' by the Island's administration over their internal affairs.

bad. These are shared notions. As will be seen from the other personal narratives that follow, and from the comments of many other contributors to this Part of the thesis, there is a wider discourse of 'a lack of self-confidence' in the ability of the Island, or Islanders, to resolve their own problems. Fynn speaks of his belief that independence must be tied to a self-reliance. Independence is not, therefore, simply a political move, but must be based on a 'confidence' of cultural identity. In discussing the sources of Scottish identity, McCrone et.al. state that '[n]ormal societies are deemed to be those in which national culture and politics are fused' (McCrone 1995: 63). Full political independence for the Isle of Man is, potentially, a waft of the pen away. But if achieved now, what would the 'national culture' consist of?

This pessimism and uncertainty for their own present and future gives way, however, to a hope invested in the future generation. Aligned to Fynn's dance group is a younger offshoot, the members of which create their own dances. One member is Fynn's own daughter, and together with young musicians, they travel to Inter-Celtic festivals to perform their culture. A young band, taking their inspiration from Fynn and other musicians, they are playing traditional tunes on synthesizers and electric guitars. More widely, children now have access to learning the Manx Gaelic language, and as Fynn says there are more of the next generation who will know a Manx tune when they hear it.

That there is confusion in Fynn's story is clear. He, and the many others who work with the language or the music and dance are trying to keep 'Manx culture', whatever that may be, alive. Fynn's aim appears to be not to 'preserve' it like some heritage attraction, but to perhaps broker it for the next generation. This raises a question, however, of how far one can go in consciously 'creating' a culture.

Jamys

I had known of Jamys before my arrival on the Island, through his 'presence' on the Island's Web sites, and responses to questions on the various Internet bulletin boards. Probably the most 'public' of the three characters whose stories inform this chapter, Jamys's political convictions have drawn strong reactions from correspondents in the various media. His rhetoric can sound uncompromising,

and his publicly voiced opinions – on the state of the Manx nation, of the role of the Nationalist Party, and of the Island’s future – are unwavering. That said, his personal approach, expressed in the many conversations we had, both demonstrates his pragmatism yet gives insight into a personal worldview born in the frustration at seeing his ‘culture’ disintegrate around him.

I open this section with a vignette. It was towards the end of a long, hot Tynwald Day. I had returned to the Fair Field, and was taking advantage of a seat behind *Mec Vannin*’s stall when Jamys returned to pack the stock away. He began telling me how well the stall had done, but was interrupted by a young family who had wandered over toward the stall. The woman, pointing up to the *Mec Vannin* banner which still hung over the frame, asked what the words meant. ‘Sons of Mann’, Jamys translated. She thought for a moment, and then asked if it was true that the party was anti-English. Before Jamys could respond, she continued, ‘I’ve heard it’s true, that you hate the English? Because I’m English. Well, I’m a Geordie really, but I married a Manxman and my daughter was born here, so she’s Manx. I love living here on the Island but I feel, well, it’s difficult to explain, but a kind of embarrassment about being English.’

Jamys responded with the Party line, mingled with his own personal viewpoint; ‘*Mec Vannin* isn’t prejudiced against anyone, regardless of race, colour, religion. And I don’t personally work like that. We’ve no more objection to the English coming here than anyone else, just as long as they are sympathetic to the Island’s traditions. The problem is that many of them aren’t.’ The woman’s husband, clearly aware of recent history, began to recall the FSFO campaign: ‘I remember when they daubed that slogan on the hill up there. On a Tynwald Day. And the arson. I remember it was difficult back then, with young kids not being able to get places to live when they got married and that. I’ve been to prison, and you can only have respect for people who’d put themselves there for things like that.’ His wife added that, of course, she still liked to visit her family but this was now her home. As they departed, she expressed her hope that one day she might be able to feel less awkward about her roots. As the family walked away, I asked Jamys how he had become so deeply involved in Manx cultural politics.

‘I was aware of having our own language before I went to school. My father, probably very typical of Manx people, was not a political nationalist, but

was proud of being different and both through him and more probably my mother, we grew up aware, myself and my brother, that the Isle of Man was different, and we had our own language, our own government, and we had a sense of uniqueness. Now the culture, the identifiable culture, I wasn't aware of until later because you grew up with it. Things like *Hop-tu-Naa*. What do you do on the 30th October? You go out and do *Hop-tu-Naa*. Then later on, as non-Manx people came in, this thing about Hallowe'en comes in. What's Hallowe'en? And a lot of people say, well, *Hop-tu-Naa* is Manx for Hallowe'en, and Hallowe'en is *Hop-tu-Naa*. Possibly there's a link back somewhere, but it's not the same thing.'

'Although all my primary teachers bar one or two were Manx and naturally imparted knowledge to you, it wasn't until [one particular teacher] came along that we were actually offered the language, which was something the class jumped at. And that was after school, as well. That was 1971. Unfortunately it didn't carry on. So, really it's not a case of I can say that, oh I woke up one morning and decided that, hey, I'm a nationalist. It was always there. I was a nationalist from my earliest recollections. I was aware of our distinct identity and our political status and not only did I want to preserve it but extend it. I don't know how overt I was about it; some people expressed surprise in my class when I took up the language, for instance, but people later said to me that they were aware that I was a nationalist.'

Jamys is in his thirties, and attended school before the legislative changes, introduced in response to an official 'life-style' poll undertaken in the late 1980s, that allowed for the teaching of Manx Gaelic from the age of seven. Knowing Jamys to be a fluent speaker of the Manx Gaelic, I asked him how and when he had returned to learning the language. As he remembered the incidents that eventually persuaded him it was time to join a class, he began to laugh. 'I can identify it to one Christmas. 1987 or '88. I'd been listening to a Frank Zappa record, and you'll have to forgive the language here, but in one of the lines of the song he's talking about people being afraid of the future, and he says "you can't even speak your own fucking language." And also at the same time I was in a take-away at Christmas and somehow the thing of 'do you speak Manx?' comes up and I'd always wanted to, and I'd started to learn, and I knew snatches of

Manx. I thought, I'm 25 and I've let all this time go and I still can't speak my own language.'

In relating his own actions to the unsettled atmosphere that had prevailed on the Island at that time, he admitted a coincidence in timing if not a direct influence. He stressed the grass roots support that the action had received. 'People wouldn't turn round and say, yeah, good, get on with it, but they said, "What do you expect?" We're just a doormat. Manxness will never come back. It's been destroyed. It's still there at individual level amongst the younger generation, but as a community it's gone. I mean, our accent's gone. In my area of Douglas I'm probably the last generation to grow up with a Manx accent. You'll find Manx accents still being spoken by young children on the estates, and that's another reflection of what's gone on, the indigenous population has been forced into lower class housing, virtually ghetto-ised.'

I asked him what he meant by 'Manxness' disappearing from the community. He responded by first blaming the influx of British and American culture via the television and other media, but quickly turned his attention to the particular circumstances of change that the Island had experienced over the previous two or three decades, saying 'obviously things will change.' He was referring to the adaptations to change made by any community, but 'whereas the identity was always a bit uncertain, when it came to more overt matters we never had any problem with knowing, people of my generation, knowing we were Manx. There was no question about it. No matter what or who our parents were, we were Manx. Increasingly a lot of children are uncertain about saying 'I'm Manx.' There's a great uncertainty about that, which is pretty disturbing, and the everyday culture has changed, has become heavily anglicised. The way we speak, the things we do for entertainment, our outlooks on everything; very, very anglicised. People coming in to the Island probably still do appreciate a difference, but nothing like what they would have experienced thirty years ago. But whenever we stand up and say what's happening is wrong, we're accused of being xenophobes, anti-English. But you can't assimilate what's happened. We're being assimilated into another culture.'

But in trying to express how this assimilation might be halted, or some sense of 'Manxness' be maintained, he struggled to find the words and the ways. 'You can't inflict a culture on people,' he said. 'Culture is a thing that, it's very

hard to put your finger on. You don't know what it is 'til it's gone. If the children grow up being exposed to Manx music, Manx language, Manx traditions, whether they choose to follow them in later life is completely their own choice, but at least the grounding is there. We've got a situation at the moment where we have, theoretically, the political independence. We do have the economic independence, and there is a new culture establishing itself, but it's a colonial or transient culture, and it isn't *my* culture. It hasn't developed from my culture. It's alien. You can't legislate for that.'

For Jamys, nationalist sentiments can be explained by understanding 'roots'. His parents made him aware of the Island's unique position, and his identification with the Manx Nationalist Party is presented as a 'natural' culmination of his personal history. Although he returned to learning the Manx Gaelic language at the very time that the protests were at their height in the late 1980s, his decisions are related to personal moments, such as the listening to the Frank Zappa album. On defining identity, Gordon Mathews writes, after Giddens, that an ongoing sense of self is 'conditioned through [...] ongoing interactions with others. Identity is how the self conceives of itself, and labels itself. There is both personal and collective identity, the former referring to one's sense of oneself apart from other...and the latter referring to who one senses oneself to be in common with' (2000:17). There is an element of stability in Mathews's formulation which is absent from Jamys's narration, for although Jamys stresses the 'natural' source of Manx nationalism, he is unsure where to find the foundations for and the common building blocks of any continuing or future sense of Manxness. For him, even teaching the children Manx traditional dance and music is no guarantee to a Manx 'future', because what existed has been supplanted by an alien culture. He is one of the last, he feels, and despite legislation and effort, 'Manx culture' can never return. 'If you're talking about culture, a way of life, that's something that's alive, that's something that is now,' he said. Even the annual showcase of Manx traditional music and dance, *Yn Chruinnaght* is not, for him, a reflection of Manx culture. 'When it started off,' he explained, 'people went to the pub, sang songs, got drunk, which was an excellent reflection of Manx culture!' He laughed. 'And now that's all changed. You can't maintain a culture by throwing money at it because you can only

maintain false or accentuated elements of it. The only way to protect it is to encourage the people and give them confidence in it.’

There is here a realisation of the inherent dangers of objectifying ‘culture’. He dislikes the heritage sites, and stresses, like Fynn, the need for a ‘living culture’. To ignore the Manx traditions, as previous generations have been accused of doing, is to consign it to the past. Yet to select and objectify chosen elements is to create something false. For Jamys also, even the work of the cultural brokers may run into difficulty because, he believes, what is developing is based on an already changed fund of cultural forms. Yet he continues his work on the political front, which is something he gets a personal satisfaction from. For Niall though, whose story follows, Jamys’s publicly expressed, uncompromising attitude does not bode well for the future.

Niall

Niall was the youngest of the three involved in the direct action at the end of the 1980s. Now married, with two bi-lingual children,⁸ he focuses much of his time and energy on his work in encouraging the teaching and learning of the Manx Gaelic language. In 1997, he was appointed to a part-time, government funded post as *Yn Greinneydyr*. The practical translation of the title would be ‘Manx Language Development Officer’, but a more subtle one would be ‘stimulator, encourager, inciter’ (Kelly 1993). His role is therefore to establish and support schemes through which the Manx Gaelic language can be brought to attention of, and made more accessible to, a wider range of people. He is also deeply committed, indeed perhaps more so, to the aims of *Moojnjer Veggey*,⁹ the Manx-medium pre-school playgroup organisation, which in the year of fieldwork had one unit, but which has subsequently been increased to four.

He also spends part of his working life on the team at the Island’s heritage farm. Son of a local farmer, he was first introduced to the Manx Gaelic language and the Island’s dance and music tradition, history and folktales, whilst at primary school. The language tuition, from just one enthusiastic Manxman, he

⁸ There are now several children on the Island who might be termed ‘bi-lingual’. Both Niall and his wife are fluent Manx Gaelic speakers, and their children have been familiar with the language since birth.

⁹ The phrase translates as ‘little people’.

now realises was pronounced badly and was not grammatically correct, but it gave him a foundation on which to later build. Sadly, no such access to 'things Manx' was available at the secondary school, and although he tried to learn a little more of the language from books, it was at university that he met the next influential character.

'In the first week we were there we joined the Gaelic Sports Association, and somebody there said "there's a fellah here who's a Manx speaker." And so we ended up doing Manx, or how much Manx we did, and how much moaning about the fact that the Steampacket was pulling out of Liverpool, or whatever, but certainly got a lot of grounding. I suppose the other thing as well was the family, and the people that lived in the farming community, and the way that the changes were going. In the Seventies there was this great revival of interest in Manx culture and particularly in the language. Well, of course, this was brought about by all the social upheaval that was beginning and certainly I was aware of that as I was growing up and that helped a lot to get me where I am now. My grandmother's, and my grandfather's families were all relatively big families, particularly my grandmother's family, and a lot of them, well most of them lived through most of me childhood, and I dunno, it was nice that they were sort of the original, your sort of more traditional feel of community where people talk to each other and everybody knows everybody and you knew what was going on and every Sunday we would, most unfortunate culture for the ladies, but that's by the by [laughter], mother would be at home getting the dinner on, father and myself and brother would be out in the van, and we'd disappear round to different farms. You'd stop here and there and everyone would have a yarn. You'd be talking and talking. Amazing the stories that were coming out, because of course it was all, not all, but old aged people, people in their 60s mainly. They would be talking, active farmers, type of thing, they'd all be congregating, half a dozen or more, telling yarns and talking. It was great and you got to know about the place, about all the stories and all the different people involved, and this was, this was marvellous. Then the further we went through the '70s, more newcomers were coming in, and this, this just wrecked the whole thing, y'know. The boys'd be just sitting their with their caps on, talking away, when suddenly, well, somebody from the new estate would come in and start talking about what they'd seen on the telly or something like this, and that was it, that was the finish

of it. And even if they didn't, even if they were fairly quiet – and generally speaking they weren't – generally speaking the Manx people were the gold-medal winners when it came to quiet, to be honest. Generally, I don't think they push themselves, and I think this is a lot of the trouble. We've ended up just not pushing ourselves. But, of course, that stopped it all. Half a dozen of them'd be round the table, one of the fellahs'd be workin' there, and maybe one of my grandmother's brothers'd be down, we'd all be havin' broth or spuds an' herrin', I don't know, whatever there was, and talkin' away "oh, I see there's been an accident down such-an-such." "Oh, yes, that was young so-an'-so. Oh ah, it's terrible isn't it? That's the brother of such-an'-such, and he's in with so-an'-so, and that's the one that's livin' there." And this was going on, and we'd have the full history of every side of the family, and who he was, and "well, his father and his grandfather, they were just the same, tearaways the lot of 'em," and you'd have all that goin' on. Again, the further we went on through the population booms, they were, well, this all started to break down, because nobody knew who the people were. "There was an accident at the bottom of the hill there." "Oh yes, I read about that in the paper. It was somebody from the new estate." "Yes, yes." And they just couldn't. Well, there were a few valiant attempts at trying and work the system, but it just didn't. It was like trying to fit round pegs in square holes. Didn't work. And you were very much aware of this, growin' up and thinkin' 'this is not right,' and feelin' a great sense of injustice about something that is really speaking not something you should feel injustice about. After all, it's only a few ol' fellahs tellin' yarns. It's not like people are being kicked out of their homes and being called names or anythin' else, it's just... But to me it just felt really bad and I just thought it was wrong, and I really didn't like it at all, and I didn't really know what you could do about it. And certainly there was, I suppose, a fair amount of racism would come into it, and you'd start thinking it's not right, 'ah, it's the bloody English.' And this would start to become prevalent to a certain extent, but the further I've gone on, the more I'm thinking it's the bloody Manx who couldn't get off their own backsides and sort their own bloody problems out.'

'As far as I'm concerned, [the language is] the most distinguishing feature of Manxness, y'know, apart from the actual country itself. Bearing in mind we're moving far more towards an independent country, then surely to

goodness you've got to revive the crucial, the key element to the culture. That only a few people speak it regularly is irrelevant. The point is, that this is the way to save Manxness, to redevelop or redefine Manxness. I think this is a big thing we're going to have to get round fairly soon, this definition of 'Manx people'. In the Isle of Man even the Manx people daren't call themselves Manx for some reason. You talk about 'oh, in the Island this week,' instead of the Isle of Man. Y'know, don't like to use 'Isle of Man'. Island Residents! It's important that we recapture this term 'Manx' and start using it again, because people are frightened of it. People daren't use the word 'Manx'.'

In his recent book on community, Bauman quotes Weeks. 'When the old stories of group (communal) belonging no longer ring true, demand grows for the 'identity stories' in which we tell ourselves about where we came from, what we are now and where we are going' (2001: 98). I believe that is what we are witnessing, on a very personal level, in the first part of Niall's story. He tells how he became involved with cultural identity issues through meeting a fluent Manx Gaelic speaker whilst at university, but the route to that involvement itself started when wider social changes began to impact upon his own, intimate community network. 'Just a 'few ol' fellahs tellin' yarns', he says. People are not being evicted, and no physical harm has ensued, but the sense of injustice at the loss of this social network is tangible all the same.

His reluctant foray into politically motivated direct action at the end of the 1980s was the act of a frustrated young graduate, who had returned to the Island and found himself with no choice but to take employment as an office junior within the industry that was the cause of the Island's social problems. There, he witnessed first hand the kind of immoral financial trading that, for the Nationalists, signifies the uncaring attitude of those at the Finance Sector's helm.¹⁰ This experience, mixed with the knowledge that Manx people were being priced out of the housing market is expressed in his indignation at what he describes as a 'superior attitude that [the incomers] all had, the fact that it was

¹⁰ Niall was working for an accountancy firm investigating the Savings and Investment Bank (S.I.B.) scandal, in which many small investors lost their life savings. This episode contributed enormously to the tightening of regulations within the Island, and today it is one of the most regulated Sectors in Europe.

OK if Manx people wanted to clean the toilets and sweep the roads, but we're not havin' 'em do anythin' else.'

Since his experience in prison, the gap between Niall's personal approach and the politics of the Nationalist Party has begun to widen. He expressed to me his disappointment at the confrontational stance the Party maintain in their relationship with government. I later heard that he had further expressed the hope that their 'hardening attitude does not continue to grow' (personal communication). The language has become his route to an 'identity story', as it should be for Manx society in general. He seeks in the language something of a Turnerian, iconic symbol through which 'the Manx' can collectively come to know themselves (1967). He had explained to me on several occasions that, whilst he was aware that the language was not the only possible 'symbol', it was the most distinctive and therefore the one that should receive attention first and foremost. Its loss has, for Niall, separated the Manx from the 'attitude', the way of thinking and of doing, the morality, which should characterize 'Manxness'.

In his desire to use 'culture', and particularly the language, as a tool for a potentially shareable and 'new' Manx identity, I see a parallel in what Macdonald has described for Skye. There, Gaelic culture is being used as a resource, as 'potentially active, as a transformative tool' with which to make development locally relevant (1997b: 160), and not something which is imposed from outside. In other words, Niall is seeking an acceptance of the changed social situation by 'the Manx', and an acceptance by the incomers who choose to settle of Manx culture and history, and thus a return to a cultural context within which those local networks of local knowledge – gossip – can again operate. This is his redefined Manxness; one that relates to a memory of what Heidegger described as a 'matter-of-fact' community (Bauman 2001: 10).

Such investment in the future, through the children of *Mooijer Veggey*, is to be grounded on work done now. He has seen his own social world dismantled, but has taken great pains to learn how best to create the conditions for a 'Manxness' that has the potential to include all Island residents. Hence his call to work out how they should label themselves. To return to Giddens, 'identity is how the self labels itself.' Uncertainty in labelling (or, in form), for Niall connotes an uncertainty in content, and consequently leaves them vulnerable as a nation.

Discussion

That 'identity' is a topic of continuous debate in the contemporary Manx context is clear, as is the cause of this debate. Whilst it is widely acknowledged that the Island has always 'absorbed' incomers, to the point of jokingly competing as to when one's ancestors moved to the Island, the experience of the last four decades is perceived as an influx of a different order. Headlines from Manx newspapers of mid-1988 demonstrate the problem - 'Victims of the boom', 'Stay of execution for 'eviction victims', 'We have no home for our baby' (Manx Independent, July 1988). In July 1988, a cartoon depicted a hapless young couple staring forlornly at their tent, under a heading 'A monument to a Just and Caring Society'. Yet not all residents agreed that the Finance Sector was the harbinger of social doom. In a letter to the paper printed on 3rd December 1988, a reader writes that '[i]n any small community progress must take place and change is inevitable [...] this is not a 'nation destroyed', this is a nation developing and it is this development that must be geared to the advantage of all residents on the Island, whether Manx-born or not' (Manx Independent).

Concerns were also voiced over the effect on the 'Manx way of life' and 'culture'. In February 1989, the Manx Independent newspaper reported that the Rector of Ballaugh had told his congregation that 'the Isle of Man has improved its standard of living at the cost of its quality of life [...] the principles that had made the Manx nation strong and good to live in, such as honesty, kindness, neighbourliness, thrift etc. had been replaced by making money for money's sake [...] and other standards that are eroding the Island's way of life' (Manx Independent: 22nd February 1989). In such a situation it is perhaps not surprising that protest groups such as 'FSFO'¹¹ resorted to direct action.

More recently, the economic advantages have become available to a far greater proportion of the population, although the poorer sections of Island society are still mostly Manx-born. Many incoming families have decided to settle, and some of their children are now learning the Manx Gaelic language,

¹¹ The 'meaning' of the acronym was the cause of considerable debate at the time. At that year's Tynwald Fair, badges were sold with various humorous 'translations'— they were even seen sported by serving members of the Manx parliament. However, at that point the 'direct action' had been restricted to the daubing of the slogan in prominent places. The action was not to escalate until later in the year.

traditional dance and music, and Manx history. These *stayovers* can be found attending traditional Manx events, and joining many other earlier incomers in making a sizeable contribution to Manx cultural life. That said, Jamys may have a point: he accepts that people coming to the Island will probably appreciate a difference in cultures, but insists it is nothing like they would have experienced previously. 'You can't assimilate what's happened, he said. 'We're being assimilated into another culture.'

Each of the three men whose stories form the basis of this chapter have experienced first-hand these recent social changes, and have been intimately involved in the discourses and their consequences. But they also have their own personal and diverse histories. For the author Amin Maalouf, individual identity is not a given but is acquired; 'He is not himself from the outset; nor does he just "grow aware" of what he is; he *becomes* what he is. He doesn't merely "grow aware" of his identity; he acquires it step by step' (2000: 21). We must therefore ask how the similarities and differences between these personal stories inform our understanding of how these men are making sense of what their 'identity' actually is.

For Fynn, the music has long been his route to expressing his feelings. He has tried the politics, but through music and dance can now combine personal satisfaction with brokering something for the future. For Niall too, politics has not resolved the problems. A community knows itself, first and foremost, through its language. Whilst recognising that the Manx Gaelic language can never return to daily use, it can be an iconic symbol for a new Manx identity. For Jamys, in contrast, politics remains the answer. It brings personal satisfaction too, as his enjoyment of confrontation often demonstrates.

But what are they expressing? They each struggle to explain what 'being Manx' actually means. Jamys actually says 'you don't know what it is 'til it's gone,' and holds on to things like the accent and the swamping of Manx traditions to make concrete what is disappearing. Concern is expressed through personal identifications with the changing context, and these in their turn both inform and are informed by wider debate. 'What we need,' said Foucault, is 'not a theory of the knowing subject, but rather a theory of discursive practice' (Hall 1996: 2). Hall concludes from this that what is needed is not a theory of 'identity', but rather of 'identification' which also acknowledges 'process'. Of

having, that is, ‘something out there’ to identify with. Cohen’s ‘objective correlative’ is revealed as not *one* thing, but *something* (2000a: 150). And is not the same thing for everyone, and not the same thing for all time.

That these men should feel ‘dispossessed’ of their identity would indicate that they, personally, have experienced difficulty in finding that ‘something’ in the contemporary Manx setting. Such a conclusion would, however, serve to deny the ‘tacit’ contributions to a discourse on identity as expressed and experienced in the rooted and flourishing *eisteddfods* and *oie’ll verreys* that were discussed. It would also fail to explain the mundane but subtle performances of ‘Manxness’ that will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3.2: Mundane Routes

As I have described earlier, in the late 1960s the Isle of Man Government made the necessary legislative changes to create an advantageous trading environment for offshore, financial and ship management companies. Over the last three decades these business sectors have offered an economically successful alternative to the Island's traditional and declining industries of fishing, farming and tourism, and now provide the Island with an enviable economic position and full employment. Ambitious young Island-born people arguably now have the opportunity to build careers without leaving the Island, and the new sectors have gradually opened their doors to offer Manx workers more financially beneficial employment than they could previously have expected.¹ Despite being seen by some as the cause of cultural dilution through its attraction to the Island of non-Manx workers, the financial and related sectors now form the major source of employment on the Island.

The practical necessity of taking employment in the finance sector presented a number of experiential advantages for my field research. Not only did it provide the opportunity to experience for myself the difficulties of keeping alive a set of traditional symbols whilst earning one's living in a modern, globally focused industry,² it also opened up a new 'network' of contacts. Some of these were *comeovers*; that is, residents attracted to the Island because of the economic and tax advantages. Others were children of such *comeovers*, schooled on the Island, whilst the remainder were Island-born 'Manxies' who might be

¹ I refer the reader back to the discussion in the previous chapter, on the earlier more limited access to employment in the finance sector.

² If this statement should make the actions of those active in 'traditional' cultural activities – nationalists and/or revivalists – sound 'self-conscious' or possibly 'contrived', I would argue that to an extent, they are.

numbered among those whom an informant once termed ‘lukewarm’ Manx. As a contrasting fieldwork experience to that gained at traditional music sessions, Manx Gaelic language festivals or talking to committed nationalists, working within the business sector provided an interactive and comparative research opportunity and a useful analytical balance to the conclusions drawn from the opinions offered by the culturally aware ‘revivalists’ with whom I interacted in those other situations.

In seeking to understand the construct of a particular cultural milieu, ethnographies focus on what people say, what they do, or what they say they do. In this chapter I too am concerned with how people speak about or action their identity, but here – in contrast to much of the remainder of this study – I focus on what little they say and do about ‘Manx identity’ or ‘Manxness’. As such, it is an exercise in ‘reading between the lines’. The conversations that are reproduced below were a rare occurrence, and I will argue that their brevity and apparent lack of depth provides an opportunity to extract a very subtle analysis of an alternative range of identifications with contemporary Manx identity than those indicated elsewhere in the text.

I spent a period of some eleven months in the offices of a ship management company, working in an open-plan office alongside other accounts and sales staff. The short exchanges that are reproduced here were most often prompted by my presence. As a *comeover* interested in the Manx Gaelic language, in Manx music and dance, and in the Island’s history, I was viewed as somewhat eccentric, and the staff would make amused comments on my plans to attend various ‘cultural’ events such as *Yn Chruinnaght*, the Inter-Celtic Festival which takes place on the Island each July. On only one occasion during the eleven months that I sat with them, the first exchange to be detailed below, did a conversation about some aspect of Manx ‘identity’ arise in response to some stimulus other than myself. Conversations between members of the office staff most often revolved around the storyline in the previous night’s television ‘soap operas’, the results of the weekend’s UK football league matches, or the latest

*skeet*³ on some mutual acquaintance. This first, therefore, took me by (excited) surprise.

Exchange One

The company was based in a modern building on the edge of Douglas, the Island's capital and main business centre. Much of Douglas' centre has been redeveloped to provide the modern offices required by the international finance houses, and the offices of the company I joined were housed in a mock-gothic building painted glowing white. Inside, 'traditional' panelled doors led into large, open and flexible interior plan. The place was always a hive of activity, with telephones ringing, people chatting – or often arguing – or laughing at the latest email they had received from a friend. All staff below management level were seated together in this open-plan office environment, each team being seated together at a separate 'island' of grouped desks. This was a ship management company, one of many such organisations on the Island, whose task was to administratively and financially organise the ships on behalf of their owners. The division of the company I worked in dealt with the travel arrangements of the ships' companies, and involved moving officers and crew from one global port to another, never seeing or speaking to the clients. The teams took a constant flow of telephone calls, but although very busy, they always found plenty of opportunity to enter into conversation.

Our division constituted an arrangement of three groups of desks, accommodating fourteen staff. The majority of staff were travel agents, but I had joined the small supporting accounts team. As a temporary staff member, however, I was found a seat opposite the travel agents' section manager and one of the senior agents, Liz. The following short exchange took place one morning, prompted not by my presence, but by the reports in the media that morning about a problem with backlogs on the issuing of passports in the UK.

³ *Skeet* is a word which remains in common use, and is discussed in more depth in Chapter 2.2.

Sharon: 'Did you hear about the problems they're having with passports across? I'd have to apply for a Manx passport if I needed one now, but I don't want one. I want a British passport.'⁴

Nancy: 'What is 'Manx' anyway?'

Karen: 'You have to have four Manx grandparents, don't you?'

Stan: 'I'm Manx. I'm probably the only true Manxie in the room.'

Margaret: 'No you're not, I'm Manx too. Manx born and bred.'

This outburst from Margaret was unusual, and momentarily stunned the majority into silence. As the office junior, she found few opportunities to express her own opinions on any subject. As ever though, Stan – the section manager – took little notice of Margaret, and her declaration did not put him off his stride. He proceeded to 'prove' his Manxness by detailing his family ancestry, complete with names and places of birth, demonstrating to us that he had the requisite four Manx-born grandparents.

Liz (turning to, and addressing Stan): 'I still don't believe it. With a surname like that? It doesn't sound very Manx. I didn't know you were Manx...'

She looked over to me and continued, '...and I've been sitting beside him for over a year.' Turning then back to Stan, she added, 'Anyway, you don't sound very Manx.'

These observations from Liz drew a somewhat defensive explanation from Stan. Stan's surname is not amongst the distinctive set of Manx surnames. Indeed, it

⁴ The passport offices in the UK were handling a large backlog at the time, the report on which had prompted this conversational opening. Sharon was referring, however, to the fact that as a Manx resident, her passport would indicate such, but would also demonstrate her eligibility or otherwise for employment within the EU.

sounded more Scots than Manx,⁵ and he did not speak with the modern local Douglas accent which shares similarities with the accent of south-east Lancashire. His next comment marked the end of his involvement in the exchange.

Stan: 'I haven't got an accent because I spend as much time off this Island as possible. And when I was a kid we spent four or five weeks each summer across.'

Hazel then joined in the conversation. Although her contribution was short, she had been listening to the exchange. It was important for Hazel that she be involved with any exchange which may include new information. As a key exponent of *skeet*, or gossip, any information she gathered that was worthy of note would be quickly passed around friends in and around Douglas.

Hazel: 'I was born in Manchester, but my Mum's Manx. We came back to the Island when my father got a job here. My Mum's a Quayle, one of seven, and her mother was a Quilliam.'

As Hazel listed her maternal Manx pedigree, Sharon looked on with disdain. Young and unmarried, and like many of her contemporaries she spends her leisure time in the clubs and pubs of Douglas. To this group of young people the Island is a socially restricting place. Few popular music bands can be persuaded to come to the Island to play concerts, and the cost of going across to England to see live music is prohibitive.

Sharon: 'My Mum's Manx, but as I was born in England as far as I'm concerned that makes me not Manx. And I'm happy about that, thank you.'

⁵ Many Manx surnames begin with a Q, C or K (for example, Quirk, Quayle, Cain, Kermode, Kerruish), which derives from the Gaelic 'mac', meaning 'son of'. There are other particularly Manx surnames which do not follow this convention, but which are easily recognised as long-standing Manx families (for example, Skillicorn, Looney). Over the centuries, many Scots families have moved to the Island, and this would account perhaps for Stan's family name, although he offered no such explanation during the exchange.

At this point, the telephone rang. Jeff answered, and after passing the call through to Hazel, and imitating the caller's accent, he said,

Jeff: 'That was Hazel's Mum. Now *that* was a *real* Manxie.'

Reflections on the first exchange

What is it to be Manx? Nancy, a recent arrival or *comeover* to the Island, asks that very question in the conversation above. The opening exchanges attempt to ground an explanation in current and popular beliefs that to be 'Manx' one has to have four Manx-born grandparents. Such a 'definition' has no relevance for internal purposes, and if applied would exclude the majority of those who consider themselves to be 'Manx'. The Isle of Man has for centuries attracted *comeovers* who have become *stayovers*, and their descendants are now considered Manx: Stan's Scottish-sounding surname may be testament to such a family history. Many proud 'Manxies' have an English-born parent. Karen's response to Nancy's enquiry had its source in the recent reflections on identity and its 'structuring' in this European Union regulation.

The Isle of Man maintains a relationship with the European Union under the provisions of Protocol 3 of the Act of Accession. Article 6 of the Protocol states that 'a person shall not be regarded as a Channel Islander or Manxman if he, a parent or a grandparent was born, naturalised or registered in the United Kingdom. Nor shall he be so regarded if he has at any time been ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom for five years' (Solly 1994: 168). Under this definition, the only 'true' Manx men or women are those who have four Manx-born grandparents, and who have remained residentially 'loyal' to the Island. For the rest, many of whom would still, under their own personal definitions, consider themselves Manx, the Protocol offers access to 'freedom of movement' and access to employment within the Union. But for those 'true' Manx, Article 6 of the Protocol 'denies' them this access.

The exchange above was prompted by another official manifestation of this 'identification'. In making her statement about not wanting to hold a Manx passport Sharon was consciously denying for herself any connection to Manx identity, and questioned the very desirability of 'being Manx'. Her comment

drew a reaction from members of staff who felt they could, or perhaps should, claim their identity as Manx. Stan stakes his claim as Manx after a perceived official level of 'qualification' for Manxness has been ascertained. For him, the legal definition perhaps provides a framework for non-committally claiming an identity that he appears somewhat reluctant publicly to aver as one to be claimed by choice. Before this conversational exchange he had given no indication of his cultural heritage, as Liz's surprise at his declaration to Manx identity would evidence. Ignoring her comment about his surname, Stan explains away his lack of accent and thus qualifies his expression of Manxness, by stating his wish to be 'off the Island' as often as possible.

Hazel's reaction is brief, and qualitatively different. Under the terms of Protocol 3, Hazel is not 'Manx' as her own father is English. Yet whilst she does not make the explicit statement 'I am Manx', the very act of listing her family connections demonstrates a positive 'choice'. This very Manx way of situating herself, and in her skilful use of gossip, or *skeet*, Hazel daily and comfortably demonstrated her socio-cultural competence. This contrasts directly with Sharon's attempts to distance herself, despite her mother's heritage, from any such identification. As we will see below, Hazel's 'choice' manifests itself in other, albeit often contradictory, ways.

This was the first time I had heard Stan make any declaration about 'Manxness', but I was surprised to hear Liz say that she too was unaware of Stan's identity as Manx. After all, she had been sitting beside him for some considerable time, and whilst Stan did not often join in with the usual office conversations, he and Liz frequently discussed matters unrelated to work. Yet he had clearly never spoken about 'being Manx'. Had she assumed that, because his surname and accent gave no clue to his 'Manxness' that he was a *comeover* like her? She had come to the Island as a twelve-year old, a not unusual story, and had therefore received her secondary schooling in Manx schools and had grown to adulthood in Douglas. Reminiscences about schooldays, or first experiences at work, would not have given clues as to their different origins. Furthermore, other contributors to the exchange above were without the signatory Manx surnames or accents; factors that Liz would have been well aware of. In the absence of any earlier discussion about 'identity', an assumption of non-Manx roots in relation to Stan was understandable.

This first exchange and the other examples that follow were isolated incidents, and did not spawn much in the way of further discussion or related reference to ‘things Manx’. Perhaps the most interesting outcome was the reaction from Stan. For a short time following the above conversation, he would occasionally sing a well-known Manx song in Manx Gaelic – one he had learned at school – with reference back to me as to whether his memory of the words and pronunciation was accurate. During that same period, and on further prompting from me he also changed his usual ‘smashing’ to the Manx Gaelic version *s’mie shen*, which translates as ‘that’s good’. The novelty soon wore off. These short outbursts of interest had not led to any deeper discussion and as before cultural, political or economic topics stayed determinedly off the conversational menu. Yet in those short outbursts Stan revealed an earlier undemonstrated willingness to ‘confess’ to cultural knowledge and claim what he realised was a certain ‘uniqueness’ of identity and a way of making himself ‘stand out from the crowd’ in a competitive business environment. In this, his actions reveal an interesting parallel with those of the Island’s government in mobilising the Island’s unique cultural identity for publicity purposes on the global economic stage.

But as most members of staff appear to have been comfortable with their ignorance, lack of concern or assumptions – be they correct or incorrect – about people’s roots or of cultural issues, we should perhaps ask why the subjects appear to be of such little importance. As I have detailed in the introductory chapters of this text, the Island’s demographic mix has changed substantially over the last three decades following continued in-migration, and concerns regarding ‘cultural dilution’ or ‘pollution’ have been the subject of debate in the local media, in the House of Keys, and have even led to direct action. The ‘Fo Halloo’ campaign in the early 1970s, and ‘FSFO’ in the late 1980s were the nationalists’ method of drawing to the attention of Manx-born residents the increasing dangers to the Island’s culture of this continued ‘influx’, and there was a general awareness and sympathy amongst the Manx population for the ‘spirit’ of their actions.

More recently, during the period of fieldwork, another external ‘threat’ to the Island’s economic base caused further discussion. Germany’s heavily-publicised desire to harmonise taxation levels throughout Europe was widely discussed on the UK television networks which also cover the Isle of Man, and

Island newspapers and Manx radio featured detailed debates on what was seen as a very real threat to the Island's economic viability, based as it is on the very precept of tax differentials. Each of these topics have been in the public domain. Coupled with the vigorous and successful campaign to reintroduce the teaching of Manx Gaelic in the schools, and the constant efforts of the nationalists and 'revivalists' to keep such matters in front of the public gaze, why was there not more discussion amongst the staff of this office that centred around the positioning of us/them?

The question, I will argue, is a redundant one. It is my contention that a more subtle analysis of what is or is not being said will lead to the conclusion that such positioning is constant, if 'covert'. Drawing on the exchanges that follow, I will consider the statements of several individuals more closely. In doing so it will be revealed that what people say about social events, language or other cultural issues provides us with a real and useful insight into their personal identifications with the issue of contemporary 'Manxness'.

Exchange Two

Sitting opposite me at the work desk was Liz who, as I have mentioned above, came from Yorkshire to live on the Island at the age of twelve when her parents purchased a guesthouse in Douglas. Now in her mid-thirties, she is married to a Northern Irishman from Belfast, and has a young son. The Island provides a profitable economic context within which to bring up a family, as her husband is a partner in a successful business. They have a comfortable life, but despite this she does not foresee a future for them on the Island. Although she maintains a network of good and close friends, she has no personal, actively practised connection which makes this place, for her, a social or cultural 'space' within which to action an identification with it (de Certeau 1984). The following short exchange was prompted by my mention of my plans for the forthcoming weekend.

Me: 'I'm going to the Braaid this weekend.'

Liz: 'What's that?'

Me: 'It's the biggest of the *eisteddfods*. There are several of them around the Island throughout the year. People either sing or recite poetry, or play instruments, and although it's a kind of competition it's also a concert, and a good laugh.'

Liz: 'I've never heard of them.'

Me: 'Have you heard of the *Chruinnaght*?'

Liz: 'No, not heard of that either. That sort of thing doesn't bother me. I'm not interested in history and all that.'

Me: 'Do you think you'll stay on the Island?'

Liz: 'No, given the chance I'd leave tomorrow. It's not that I don't like it here. The Island's given us a lot of chances, and the business wouldn't have been so successful anywhere else. But family's too important, and there's none here now. We'd be better off in Northern Ireland where Eamon's family are; where Philip would have some grandparents close by. But we certainly don't intend to be here in ten years time.'

Reflections on the Second Exchange

Like Hazel and Sharon, Liz moved to the Island during her childhood. However, unlike the others, her family had no previous connection to the Island. Having decided to purchase a boarding house in Douglas in the mid-1970s, her parents had moved the family away from their native Yorkshire and they settled on the Island as Liz was about to start her senior level schooling. She has remained on the Island since. She did not go away to university, but stayed to find work in Douglas, training to become a travel agent at the local further education college. She had married a few years before our meeting. However, following the recent death of her mother Liz was relying more heavily on the remaining Yorkshire-based family connections through her mother's sister, communicating with them

several times a week and visiting regularly. She sadly had a strained relationship with her father who still lives on the Island and this, coupled with her desire to provide a stable, extended-family environment for her son, may have increased her motivation to leave the Island at some future point. That said, she often demonstrated a 'lack of connection' to the Island.

Coupled with her lack of awareness of cultural events, Liz also declared a lack of interest in 'history and all that'. This is, of course, a perfectly reasonable personal position, and possession of such knowledge does not confer or affirm 'identity'. As will be clearly shown in the exchanges that follow, even a Manx-born lad like Jeff, son of a fisherman and complete with full Manx accent, may be ignorant of events such as the *Cruinnaght*. But Liz often demonstrated what I above term a 'lack of connection' to the Island. For example, during a discussion about day-to-day things, I used the phrase *traa dy liooar*, meaning 'time enough'. The phrase, although in the Manx Gaelic, is one which still remains in common usage and if not used personally, its meaning is widely understood. Yet Liz had asked me what I meant by it. Assuming she had misheard me, or misunderstood my poor pronunciation of the Manx Gaelic words, I had repeated the phrase, but when she continued to look confused I had quizzed 'you know, time enough?' She insisted she had never heard the phrase, either in the Manx or in English. I would argue, then, that she has no room in her 'identity space' for things that might symbolically belong to 'Manxness'.

I could perhaps be accused of reading too much into this simple incident, were it not for the knowledge I built up about Liz and her feeling, or perhaps ambivalence of feeling about the Island during our many conversations. She showed no interest in its museums or places of interest, refusing me on one occasion when I attempted to give her a free family ticket to the *House of Manannan* in Peel. She showed no interest in matters of local concern. She had no desire to roam the countryside or visit the other small towns and villages on the Island. She made no comment, either for or against, my attempts to learn the Manx Gaelic language or sing in the Gaelic choir: as she said herself 'that sort of thing doesn't bother me.' She did engage in gossip with Hazel – a good 'Manx' pastime – but more important than her attitude to the Island was her animated and positive attitude to her Yorkshire-based identity.

Similar in this sense was Jackie. Jackie is a Scot, of the same generation as Liz's parents and who also moved to the Island to set up a guesthouse. The business venture failed but she and her husband decided, at that time, to stay on the Island. There was no comfortable lifestyle for this family, but they had assumed that the skilled labouring job Jackie's husband had acquired and kept was better than the prospects had they returned to central Scotland. Jackie's husband had become quite deeply involved in Manx trades union affairs, but this local involvement did not compensate for the 'detachment' they felt from 'home'. Consequently, every spare moment and pound was spent visiting Scotland, and they are now looking toward retirement and a permanent return to their native land. Their daughter, on the other hand, born and raised on the Island and successfully managing a local business, intends to stay.

I do not here suggest a conclusion that 'roots' – whether these be characterised in terms of family connection or connection to another 'space' – are a determinant in questions of identity. What I do suggest, however, is that routes to identity are diverse, personal, complex and contingent. At this moment in time, the Island may offer economic security to her family, but it does not offer the kind of familial security that Liz sees as necessary for her own and her son's future. Consequently, Liz does not 'imagine' this Manx community as hers. Hers lies elsewhere, identified in the 'form' – or what Devereux would term her 'ego-syntonic outlet' (1978: 126) – that is contained in physical connection with her extended family.⁶ It is this kind of disinterested, disconnected presence that those struggling to keep 'Manxness' to the forefront of public attention find threatening to their endeavours.

Exchange Three

Hazel sits with the other sales 'team' in the office, with Shona, Karen and Sarah. The General Manager, knowing I was interested in the recent revival of the Manx Gaelic language, had mentioned to me that Hazel's daughter was learning Manx Gaelic at school. As I stood near their desks awaiting a fax, I directed a question to Hazel.

⁶ For further discussion also on the importance of 'physicality', see Rapport (1994: 117), and Lewis (2002: 62).

Me: 'The manager tells me your daughter is learning Manx at school, Hazel. Is she enjoying it?'

Hazel: 'Yes. She's eight now. She started last year.⁷ I'm pleased. We didn't have the chance to learn when I was at school. Well, we should have had the chance to learn it, but it's a fairly new thing that's started in the last ten years or so. It was her choice. She wanted to do it.'

She added, by way of further explanation for her daughter's interest in learning the language, that her daughter was the sort to 'have a go' at anything new. There is perhaps a paradoxical mix of desire for connection to, and a distancing from, 'things cultural' here. In stressing her daughter's 'personal' decision to learn the Manx Gaelic language, she appeared to be distancing herself somewhat from it. This would not have been an unexpected or unusual stance to take, as taking an interest in such things would risk alienating herself from friends and colleagues who see such activity as 'odd' or eccentric.⁸ However, in her 'disappointment' at not having the opportunity herself to learn it at school, in her support of her daughter's decision and in her earlier declaration of her 'Manxness' (see *Exchange One* above), she demonstrates a desire for maintaining a connection to her cultural 'roots'. This was further affirmed through her introduction of the next subject.

Hazel now turned the conversation to the Guild. The 'Guild' is the Island's annual music and drama festival. It began in 1892 (Faragher 1992: 10) and still attracts large numbers of contestants from the Island and from the north of England. Young children have always been encouraged to take part, and many Manx people recall, with varying degrees of relish, their own Guild 'debut'.

Hazel: 'She's singing in the Guild too. She's not entering under the name of her school though. I don't see why the school should get any recognition when they

⁷ Primary schools in the Isle of Man offer voluntary classes in Manx Gaelic to pupils of seven years of age and above. These classes are taught by a small team of peripatetic teachers, are of one half hour per week in length and normally take place 'outside' the standard curriculum.

⁸ See further 'reflections' on this below.

don't give any time to singing or to the Guild. Other schools do. Hayley has to do her lessons privately and outside school hours. Our school used to do lots. I entered when I was Hayley's age. But my old school doesn't do anything these days, so they're obviously not interested, or there's no-one there who is. My sister's coming back from across to sing in the duet competition. She comes back every year for it, but they never get the chance to practice much before the Guild. They just do it for the fun of it.'

Shona: 'I won at the Guild once, when I was about ten. Is your choir⁹ doing anything in the Guild, Sue?'

Me: 'No, but we're entering one of the classes at the *Chruinnaght*.'

Shona: 'Oh, the *Chruinnaght*. So you'll be dancing and singing, will you?'

Jeff: 'The *Cru*...what?'

Shona: 'And you call yourself a Manxman!'

Karen: 'It's bad, isn't it. We don't know any of the language.'

Shona: 'I used to know the words to the *Hop tu Naa*¹⁰ song in Manx. I got a prize for saying it when I was little (she tried at this point to remember and recite a few words of the song). And then there's '*shoh Radio Vannin*.'¹¹

Jeff: 'I know how to say hello in Manx. 'How are yer, yissir'.¹² It was up on the board at the TT last year. 'Hello' in lots of languages, and that was the Manx.'

⁹ My colleagues were aware that I sang with a Manx language choir, based in the north of the Island.

¹⁰ I refer the reader back to Jamys's discussion of this Manx tradition in the previous chapter.

¹¹ The Manx national radio station uses 'touches' of Manx Gaelic in jingles and advertisements for forthcoming programmes. *Shoh Radio Vannin* means 'this is Manx Radio'.

¹² This phrase comes from the Anglo-Manx dialect, which like the Manx Gaelic language is also 'endangered'. It is one of a few phrases in either Anglo-Manx or Manx Gaelic that remain 'common knowledge'.

At this point the girls moved on to a new subject, and I decided to ask Hazel if she would be willing to do a more 'in-depth' interview. Despite my attempts, she could not be persuaded.

Hazel: 'I wouldn't be any use to you: I don't know anything about Manx stuff. Ask Sarah, she's Manx.'

Sarah: 'Don't ask me - I hate the bloody place. I can't wait to get away.'

Reflections on the third exchange

Hazel's declaration that she would be of no use to my research because she 'doesn't know anything about Manx stuff' strikes a further discordant note with her apparent familiarity, expressed a few short minutes before, with the Manx language and dance, and with the Guild. As discussed above, however, aligning herself explicitly with such activities could possibly alienate her from her friends and colleagues. When I discussed my own involvement with such things as learning Manx or attending events such as the Braaid, my work colleagues would gently mock me, but as an outsider this stance neither threatened their worldview nor adversely affected my social networks or my own sense of identity. A young man I met at a 'business awards' event further expressed this dilemma to me. After I had outlined my research he told me of his involvement with one of the Island's traditional dance groups, but also of how he kept this 'secret' from his work colleagues. Being 'mocked' for something so directly relevant to the performance of his identity would have had significantly detrimental effects. 'It'd somehow undermine my Manxness,' he said. He had no problem with his ex-schoolfriends knowing he dances, or his friends, but he believed his work colleagues 'just wouldn't understand.'

Yet Hazel still finds it possible to express an interest in 'things Manx' and become involved 'once removed' through her daughter. Similarly, Shona – also a mother – expresses her own knowledge of cultural activities such as the *Chruinnaght*, and even goes as far as to admonish Jeff for his ignorance. Shona had told me before that her own daughter loves to attend the House of Manannan, and in this exchange she boasts of and attempts to re-perform her

knowledge of an important traditional song, but her personal involvement goes no further than that. Both Shona and Hazel appear willing, at least, to act as cultural gatekeepers to their children, and in their understandably limited 'support' for Manx culture – a level of support possible, whilst not alienating themselves from their own networks – they counter the attitudes of some of their younger colleagues who decry the Island and its traditions at any given opportunity.

There should be no assumption, however, that this evidences a difference in approach between mothers and those who have no responsibility for passing on a 'sense of identity' to a child. The two remaining 'characters' in this exchange – Jeff and Karen – are single. Yet both are content, in their way, with their Manxness. For Jeff, his cultural identity lies not in 'Celticised' tradition but in the traditions of the Douglas harbourmen, of whom his father is one, and in his love of motorbikes and racing. Unlike many of the women in this office, Jeff's social networks lay outside the office. Similarly, Karen's social world was situated in Belfast, to where she permanently moved a short while after this exchange. Although she loved the Isle of Man, she could see no future for herself in the Island, having no supportive network of friends in the village where she lived, or through her workplace. Her own 'ego-syntonic' outlets (Devereaux 1978), like Jeff's, were to be found elsewhere.

For the other young, single girls there were plenty of friends to be found either in or around work, but life in the Island was experienced as far too restricting. Not only were they subject to *skeet*, but they expressed frustration at not being able to live their young lives to the assumed full: no choice of nightclubs, no good bands to see, unable to fly off to exotic destinations easily, not having the pick of well-paid jobs and, most frustrating of all, having still to live with their parents because flats and houses were so expensive. 'Backward' Mann was, for them, to blame.

Exchange Four

The most senior member of staff in the open-plan area of the office was a *stayover* from the north of Ireland. There is a relatively small number of Irish living in the Island (1,774 from the North, with another 1,762 from the Republic,

according to the 2001 census figures). They are probably most ‘visible’ in the Irish pub in the centre of Douglas, which at the weekends is virtually impossible to enter due to the crush, but as the Irishman who features in this next exchange told me, they tend to ‘mix with their own’. This assessment was confirmed by ‘Manxies’, who said of those Irish that have settled on the Island that, ‘they keep in their own groups, they don’t want to mix’. But amongst the Manx ‘revivalists’, the Irish connection – the maintenance of ‘cultural contact’ with Ireland – is seen as a valuable tool in positioning the Isle of Man as a valid member of the group of Celtic nations. Some of the traditional musicians may see the Irish as a source of musical ‘competition’, but they are always an important contingent at any inter-cultural festival.

The following exchange was prompted when I requested the time off to attend the forthcoming *Yn Chruinnaght* festival.

Kieran: ‘There’s not much culture left here now. What there is, is Irish. Though I perhaps feel my culture more, being exiled from it. Of course, in Northern Ireland we’re made aware of it from an early age. How do they expect it to survive here when they don’t teach it in school. Look at Joe.¹³ He doesn’t have any Manx culture.’

Me: ‘He has expressed an interest in the language. And anyway, what is it ‘to be Irish’? How does one become Irish?’

Kieran: ‘You have to be born there.’

Repositioning this argument in the Manx context, I proceeded to query his reasoning.

Me: ‘So, can someone born here to a *comeover* English family, and who goes back across to boarding school, be Manx?’

¹³ Joe was Kieran’s junior, and the butt of all Kieran’s jokes. A quiet, shy young man of about 18 years of age, he found it impossible to stand up for himself. He was born and brought up on the Island.

Kieran: 'Well, a parent has to be Manx. Or Irish.'

Turning to Joe, I brought him into the conversation. At this point, Kieran lost interest and returned to his work.

Me: 'What do you say when you're asked, Joe?'

Joe: 'Manx, I suppose.'

Me: 'Are your parents Manx, either of them?'

Joe: 'No. One's Scots, one's Irish. It depends who I'm talking to. If I was talking to someone who didn't like the Irish, I'd be Scots or Manx. If I was in America, I'd be Manx. It's more interesting.'

Me: 'What is 'Manx'?''

Joe: 'I guess they're all mixed up now. You'd find it hard to find a true Manx person. By the way, how do you say 'I am going to the cinema tonight' in Manx? I'm not interested in learning, but...'

Me: '*Bee'm goll gys thie-alloo noght.*¹⁴ Did you learn any Manx at school?'

Joe: 'I had the chance at school, but I decided the other GCSE subjects were more important at the time. Anyway, I'd rather learn something useful like French or Spanish.'

Me: 'Why? After all, you were born here, weren't you?'

Joe: 'Yea, but I don't feel like it's my home.'

¹⁴ If this immediate response sounds impressive, do not be deceived. He had asked me the question the week before, and I had looked the translation up. He was simply reminding me.

Me: 'Why? Do you think you'll stay on the Island?'

Joe: 'It's a pleasant place to live. I'll just have to see what opportunities arise. But I'd perhaps like to go somewhere else, but not England. What I've seen of England I don't really like. But Ireland, I'd like that. In the south. Home.'

Reflections on the fourth exchange

There are two contrasting and personal views of 'identity' demonstrated in this exchange, but in analysing it here – as with the other exchanges in this chapter – I draw upon my year-long relationship with these people. In this instance, Kieran expresses his 'Irishness', and its basis, as clear and unequivocal. Identity is rooted in one's place of birth, and one's 'heritage'. In an earlier conversation he had told me that where he comes from, in the far north of Ireland, 'identity' – or as he termed it, which group one belongs to – has always been significant. When I first joined the company, we had spoken about language and he had talked of how his dialect or accent is now being talked of as 'Scots Irish'. The links between Scotland and that part of Ireland have over the centuries, he told me, been very strong. There is commonality in names too, as indicated by the fact that many of his friends have Scots sounding names, and indeed his own mother's maiden name was MacLellan. It had struck him that perhaps, with the prospect of a united Ireland and the fact that people were going to have to learn to live together, that new, cultural groups were being 'created'. That is, for Protestant, read 'Scots Irish' or for Catholic, read 'Irish Irish': a pragmatic move to redirect people away from the old religious divides.

We had also talked about the Manx people and their 'cultural revival', and he had expressed his opinion that it was perhaps prompted by the fact that the Manx are now in the minority.¹⁵ With Barthian insight he added that 'when we feel we're under threat somehow, we tend to draw into groups and support each other.' Yet in his comment above he appears to be saying that contemporary Manx culture is becoming increasingly reliant upon Irish forms, and that the young Manx are 'alienated' from their culture. So, whilst on the one hand, for

¹⁵ A common opinion based in recent 'fact', and well publicised by the Nationalists when this statistic first appeared after the 1991 Census.

Kieran identity is acquired through blood and birthright – *roots* – on the other it must be supplemented through learning – *routes* – for ‘how do they expect [Manx culture] to survive if they don’t teach it in schools.’

Such lack of certainty about one’s identity is read by Kieran as cultural weakness, but for Joe it equates to unproblematic flexibility. He feels comfortable enough to say he is Manx, especially when it makes him more interesting to others, but has other options to hand should the occasion arise. But this is apparently not a denial of Manx identity. When I relayed this conversation about Joe’s practical use of his identity to other Manx-born friends, they chorused ‘*that’s Manx!*’ In the pragmatic mobilisation of his options, Joe was apparently performing, and thereby convincingly (more convincingly in a final analysis, perhaps, than any consciously performed version) declaring, his Manxness.

Exchange Five

There were several opportunities throughout the year for the staff to meet up out of office hours and enjoy an evening out. Such evenings would normally start in one of the bars down by the quayside of Douglas’s harbour. These are popular pre-nightclub venues, with popular music playing loudly, music videos entertaining the pub-goers from screens in the corners, and crowds of young people pushing their way through the crowded bars. During one such excursion, I had the opportunity to talk to Hazel again. We started by talking about *comeovers*.

Hazel: I’ve worked with *comeovers* in the past. I’ve never called them that though, as it usually causes a reaction. They’re quite sensitive to it. But it’s a pity they never seem to pick up anything about the local culture, or appreciate the countryside, or the fact that the Island has its own parliament. It is right, isn’t it? The Isle of Man does have the longest parliament?¹⁶ I can’t understand how they can drive from Castletown to Douglas and back every day for work, and never

¹⁶ This enquiry seems to support Kieran’s observation above, that Manx culture is not taught in the Island’s schools. On several occasions I was asked by Manx-educated young adults to confirm such historical or cultural ‘facts’, and here Hazel is asking me to confirm the boast that the Island has the longest continuous parliament in the world.

look at the rest of the Island. There are some beautiful spots. I think they should ‘vet’ the *comeovers* more carefully. They let any riff-raff in.

Some time having passed since our initial conversation about her daughter learning Manx Gaelic, I asked her how she was getting on. I added, too, that I was still going to my classes.

Hazel: She’s enjoying it. But I don’t know if she’ll carry on doing it after she leaves this school. It depends on her. I couldn’t start now, but I think people like you learning puts the natives to shame. I think it’s really sad that more people aren’t interested in learning Manx. I used to think so even at school, used to think that perhaps they should make it compulsory. I mean, they do in Wales, don’t they?

Colleagues around the table then interrupted the conversation. They had been talking about a television programme featuring the Bee Gees, shown the previous night. The three brothers who form the group were born in the Isle of Man, and during the televised concert they had performed a version of the song *Ellan Vannin*,¹⁷ with a backdrop formed from a series of views of the Island and the Manx flag, with its ‘Three Legs’ emblem. The concert had been the subject of discussion on Manx Radio news that morning.

Shona: Did you see it, Hazel?

Hazel: Yes. I liked *Ellan Vannin*. And did you see? They sang it in front of a picture of the Three Legs.

Reflections on the fifth exchange

In this brief conversation, Hazel manages to align the disinterest of *comeovers* in Manx history and culture with the lack of interest the ‘native’ Manx appear to have in their own heritage, but the criticism levelled against the ‘native’ is

¹⁷ The words and tune of *Ellan Vannin* were written in the nineteenth century, and today the song is regularly sung at social events and is recognised perhaps as the Island’s ‘unofficial’ anthem.

stronger than against the *comeover*. I had heard similar comments from others, and indeed, Niall had said something similar during our interview (see Chapter 3.1). The in-migration of ex-colonial administrators and, later, workers for the Finance Sector, may be the least socially damaging and disruptive explanation. It does not openly place the blame on the apathy of its own, but rather blames the incomer/outsider (cf. Frankenberg 1957) for the ‘dilution’ of Manx culture and the pressure on ‘Manxness’. It hides also what is privately expressed as a more insidious cause. After all, *comeovers* come, but they go. *Stayovers*, interested ones, must also be acknowledged as having made valuable contributions to Manx culture over recent years. What endangers cultural life on the Island more effectively, is the lack of interest from those who *should* be interested in their own cultural heritage.

Although Hazel offers mild self-criticism in her own lack of engagement in cultural activity, she makes it clear to me that it is not lack of interest or concern which keeps her from it. She ensures that I am aware that she has always been interested in the language and in its preservation, and that it is circumstance that has stood in her way. By supporting her daughter’s learning, and in expressing the opinion that perhaps the teaching of the language should be compulsory, she situates herself as a supporter of Manx culture despite, on that earlier occasion, having told me that she did not ‘know about Manx stuff.’

Closing Thoughts

This chapter has drawn together a number of brief and rare exchanges. Despite their brevity, however, I would argue that in considering what is said or indeed not said, in drawing conclusions from the apparent lack of ‘depth’ in the conversations, and in dealing with exchanges between Islanders not normally involved in conscious cultural debate or enthusiast/revivalist activity, we gain valuable insight into the place of the identity debate in the domain of the ‘mundane’. Other chapters have dealt, or will deal, with such enthusiasts or ‘communities of [cultural] interest’, or with specific groups such as *stayovers*. This chapter, in contrast, has described the interactions between an anthropologist and a diverse group of people whose connection is simply that they happen to work together. ‘Nationalism’ is shown to be advantageously

present here; advantageous, because in order for a nation to survive, ‘banal practices, rather than conscious choice or collective acts of imagination, are required’ (Billig 1995: 95).

That said, there was one element in the interactional equations above which, it might be argued, were not of the everyday. I refer, of course, to the presence of the anthropologist. Liz’s learning of ‘new’ information about Stan, and the surprise shown by the women when Jeff showed his ignorance of the *Chruinnaght*, would indicate that the subject of one’s identity was not a subject of daily discussion. My presence and my questions therefore appear to have acted as a catalyst to such discussion, although they readily – if briefly – engaged in it. As one involved in Manx ‘cultural’ activities I was a contrastive presence against which my interlocutors could compare and declare their own feelings towards cultural nationalism, but the speed at which they ‘changed the subject’ demonstrates how *relatively* unimportant this debate is, within this context.

‘The patriotic card,’ writes Billig, ‘represents a particular political strategy, but [...] not all flags are waved in the same vigorous manner’ (op.cit.: 103). Cultural identification is not here *irrelevant*, rather it is differently relevant for these individuals when compared to those who choose to express themselves through language, music or dance. I would therefore enhance Billig’s dictum with a slight amendment: that is, that the manner in which the flag is waved also represents ‘a particular *personal* strategy.’ For many of the remaining contributors to this thesis, and as illustrated through their telling of their *routes* to their performed identities, maintaining a relationship with a ‘conscious’ version of Manxness – a vigorous flag waving – is central to that individual performance. In contrast and as shown herein, for these office colleagues other aspects of their lives have priority.

If this text were to remain confined to understanding the enthusiasts and their more ‘made conscious’ expressions of cultural identity, it would exclude the subtle performances of identity – such as in Hazel’s handling of *skeet*, in Joe’s flexible approach to his identity and in Sarah’s denials – that contribute to the overall, Island-wide debate about Manxness. I was once told that ‘Manxies’ such as these were ‘lukewarm’. This was, as far as I can ascertain, a term and a position personal to the individual that related it to me, but it does reflect a

general level of concern about the ‘apathy’ displayed by the Island-born in relation to their culture (indeed, such concern was hinted at within the third exchange above). For the nationalists, and for those who see conscious performance as necessary to the maintenance of cultural identity, such apathy – such a ‘lukewarm’ approach – undermines ‘Manxness’. But, as the above exchanges have demonstrated and Billig’s assertions confirm, ‘Manxness’ is present in the more subtle performances of everyday life.

The inclusion of this chapter has therefore aimed towards a more ‘textural’ ethnography; one that offers at once a wider, but at the same time more subtle, glimpse at the complexity of cultural life. Placed in contrast with the previous chapter, which presented the voices and views of representatives of that very ‘conscious’ – nationalist – performance, this chapter reveals something of the quotidian ‘reality’ of cultural discourse. I would further suggest that in omitting these exchanges, the opportunity would be missed to embrace the discipline’s ‘capacity, as a technique of knowledge production, to generate productive uncertainties and disjunctive possibilities for social engagement’ (Battaglia 1999: 114): in other words, to engage creatively with ambiguity.

This chapter has focused on the thoughts and feelings of people who, even if not Manx-born, are at least tacitly familiar with Manx social life. Even Liz, who sees her identity as connected to and performable in another space, is comfortable enough in her current milieu to feel able to live her life effectively without engaging consciously with ‘things Manx’. In contrast, the following chapter seeks to explain how those Island residents who are termed *stayovers* are situated, or seek to situate themselves, in relation to this debate on Manx identity.



Figure 9 : An abandoned mine above Foxdale. It was mining which, in the mid - nineteenth century, encouraged another wave of incomers to the Island.

Photograph : Sue Lewis.

Chapter 3.3: Classificatory Routes

It should be clear by now that much of the current public debate about Manx identity, around which this thesis is centred, has been prompted by the influx of economic migrants over the past few decades. The Island's history is peppered with stories of movement both to and from the Island, both permanent and temporary. From Norse invaders who became settlers, to nineteenth century miners and twentieth century tourists, the Isle of Man has always accepted incomers. Those who stayed, over time, have become 'Manx', but in the shorter term people find themselves classified not simply as 'incomers', but as either *comeovers* or *stayovers*.

As far as I could assess, there is no strict temporal qualification by which one shifts from the status of *comeover* to *stayover*, or eventually to being 'Manx'. I have heard it said that those who stay for five years or more will never leave, but have evidence to the contrary. The label could rather be said to relate to one's attitude. Whilst many people settle and make a meaningful contribution to their new home, many of those who arrive in the Island (particularly those who have come to work in the finance sector) consider the stay to be a temporary one and make no effort to learn about their 'host culture'. The words of one 'new resident' sum up well the contrast and the process of moving between one status and the other:

When I first came here, I thought 'right, it's a job, a few years and I'm out of here', and after a year it sort of got under the skin, y'know. And like I say I'm not going to get totally obsessed with the cultural things because I don't actually feel comfortable with it, but it's, it is, it's my home now, and I think that's the difference in that transient "it will never be their home". It's a matter of making money, whereas there are other people that come, it's their home. It might not be where they come from, but it's their home, and they love it and they're prepared

to put something back into it, whereas the transients are just taking and then they're off, and they also have an attitude, like. I met one not so long ago. He was from London, and he was here just for work, and he couldn't believe that people weren't sort of falling over backwards to be his friend, because he was from London. He thought we must have such boring lives.

Such 'transients' would be labelled *comeovers*. Arriving from 'across',¹ they are assumed to take whilst giving nothing back. The perception of this stereotype is that they have no interest in the Island's culture, history, its unique political situation, or its future. They consider Island life tedious and parochial, and find 'cultural activities' quaint, if not amusing. The reader will recall the young Manxman who works within the finance industry with such *comeovers*, who told me that he does not talk with these colleagues about his dancing with a Manx traditional dance group, as he was not sure he would be able to withstand the 'ribbing' he would receive, adding that such ridicule would 'undermine my Manxness.'

Stayovers, in contrast, are those who have made some kind of unspecified commitment to the Island. Of the many *stayovers* (or, as the first correspondent below refers to them, *stopovers*) I met, some were almost apologetic about the status, such as the woman who approached Jamys on Tynwald Day and asked if she would be allowed to join the Manx nationalist party. She insisted that she loved and respected the Island, would not wish to live anywhere else, and was teaching her children all she could about it. She had the advantage of having married a Manxman who had his own memories to draw upon, but several people I spoke to who had also decided to stay to raise their families (the Island is considered by many incomers as a comparatively 'safe' place for children) were beginning to take their first steps to learn something about the Island's culture. I met one such couple at the opening concert of the Isle of Music Festival, held each summer in Peel. They had been living on the Island for five years, but this was the first time they had attended anything like this. 'To our shame, we don't usually get involved.'

Others, despite a length of time in Mann, appear still to find the Island a rather 'temporary' home. I met one woman whose parents had moved to the

¹ The neighbouring islands, though normally referring to England.

Island and who, after university, had come to join them. Now married to another *stayover* with two young children, she was finding it difficult to integrate with the village community. 'I don't blame anyone,' she said. 'It's natural to protect one's community.' However, she had decided to send her daughter to a playschool in Castletown, some twelve miles away, because the kind of people who took their children there – bankers, finance people – would be the kind of people that would talk to her. She also felt that the 'maintenance' of culture meant, for her, that 'Manx culture' was something exclusive and not open to her. Consequently, she invests little time or effort in understanding the Island better.

The same diversity of approach to settling in this Island is reflected in the letters reproduced below. Selected from a number of examples recorded from Manx national newspapers, the letters serve to demonstrate the very public nature of these debates. As often, the authors of the first example have been prompted by events 'off the page' to readdress the question of their status. They are, to quote, 'people who care about this Island and its heritage'; they know themselves, therefore, as *stayovers*. Angered by what they read as 'essentialist' arguments from the MHK, his statements were in direct contrast to their own understanding of their position as settled and accepted. Further, they see themselves as part of a 'minority' (as perhaps they were when they first arrived, but now, as the 1991 census has demonstrated, 'incomers' now outnumber the Island-born) that has worked hard to learn how to live in a host culture. Indeed, the wording they use in their letter is 'inclusive': they are part of the 'us' who should be focusing attentions on the 'them' that is the European Union.²

² The Isle of Man, along with the Channel Islands, maintains a relationship with the European Union under the provisions of Protocol 3 of the Act of Accession. None are directly represented in the European Parliament through an elected MEP. Article 6 of the Protocol states that 'a person shall not be regarded as a Channel Islander or Manxman if he, a parent or a grandparent was born, naturalised or registered in the United Kingdom. Nor shall he be so regarded if he has at any time been ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom for five years' (Solly 1994: 168). Under this definition, the only 'true' Manx men or women are those who have four Island-born grandparents, and who have remained residentially 'loyal' to the Island. For the rest, many of whom would still, under their own personal identifications, consider themselves Manx, the Protocol offers access to 'freedom of movement' and access to employment within the Union, but appears to deny them the right fully to identify with their place of birth. In addition, it *theoretically* places those who are not 'true' Manx at risk of being taxed under any future provisions for European-wide taxation – without representation.

Manx Independent, Friday, February 12, 1999

This is a copy of an open letter sent to Home Affairs Minister Allan Bell by a group of new residents. The letter was sent to the Manx Independent for publication.

After hearing your recent comments on Manx Radio (February 3) regarding Manx independence and the 'interference of English politicians' we felt that we were sufficiently angered by your remarks to write to you personally.

As the 'little Islanders' you referred to, not Manx-born, we were disgusted to hear your derision of us.

It seems that you are of the opinion that we are not able to make valid comments or contributions to the debate regarding independence from the UK.

You have, obviously, spent many years inside a box. You, quite clearly, have not been made aware that

many people living in the Isle of Man are not, in fact, Manx-born.

We are people who have come here by choice, to lead better and safer lives with our families. We also bring our working skills and money, vital to the economy of the Island.

If we 'little Islanders' are as unimportant and insignificant as you choose to portray us, perhaps you should consider making political moves to deport us from our shores, perhaps introducing 'ethnic cleansing' as a new policy.

If such derisory remarks had been made about any other minority group, you would be forced to account for your remarks, which we, as 'stop-overs', found offensive.

We are not all 'interfering busy-bodies' who know nothing of the Manx system - we are people who care about this Island

and its heritage.

We are people who have also experienced both political systems and have been subjected to UK laws and taxation, and have seen job losses, bankruptcies and recession as a result.

Now that the UK has chosen a path that will, effectively, lead to Germany having full control of the British economy, it seems that Germany is dictating that the UK can only come and play with the 'big boys' on the provision that it rids itself of all offshore tax havens. That means us!

Britain, under Labour, appears to be happy to treat us as if we were a country village, not a self-governing entity, and intends to drag us along into its mistakes.

The UK needs the Isle of Man to 'toe the line' in order for Britain to follow the dictates of other foreign powers.

This shows no respect for the wishes of the Manx Government or its Islanders (whether they be Manx or otherwise!). John Redwood's comments were intended to act as a warning to the Manx Government of impending disaster, a warning we feel it would do you no harm to heed.

You may also consider the recent words of our own Chief Minister, when he said that the Islanders must show a united front over whichever path we choose in the future.

There is no room in this debate for 'them and us' - we do not need mindless politicians trying to split the Island into Manx and 'come-overs'; it is a reckless and stupid thing to do when so much is at stake.

MRS C.F & 12 others

Isle of Man Examiner, February 16, 1999

Don't bite the hand that feeds you, Allen Bell

SIR - I find the recent remarks made by Allen Bell MHK in a radio interview to be extremely insulting. As an Englishman living in Ramsey and paying taxes in the Island, I find his recent comments extremely derogatory.

Clearly he believes persons contributing to the Island's economy by paying taxes, rates, water rates, airport taxes etc have no standing when it comes to having a vote in their own and the Island's future.

The majority of residents, as you are aware, are not born Manx, so his words are repulsive to the majority.

What about his colleagues who are not Manx-born - does he think they should resign - because surely he considers them to be inferior to Manx

born and not capable of representing his or her constituents?

Mr Bell should always bear in mind not to bite the hand that feeds him and one that gives him the opportunity of reaping such a good salary (17.5 per cent rise last year was approved by the members of Tynwald themselves, lest we forget).

An unreserved statement of apology is called for, not a politician's apology that says nothing!

If, however, Mr Bell stands by his remarks, I hope he does not forget to remind us of his views prior to the next election so that we know the contempt he apparently holds 'comeovers' in.

Then perhaps, after the election, he can register for jobseekers' allowance.

C.W. Name and address supplied

We're welcomed, but we must not swamp the Manx

SIR – Your columns have recently been, quite correctly, filled with news and comments on the current round of elections taking place in the Island and I have been carefully listening to the comments of several Manx friends and acquaintances, all of whom I have met since my arrival here three years ago.

While expressing a genuine welcome for us comeovers and the benefits associated with the new prosperity, my friends are more than a little concerned that they are in danger of becoming swamped with people who have no interest in or respect for, the Manx people and their traditions. I am inclined to agree with them.

I was privileged to be able to establish residence here, set up in business and take advantage of the many benefits the Island has to offer. I chose to leave, I was not asked to come over.

I have no wish to tell the Manx people how to run their affairs. Could I suggest that accord with our hosts could be reached with the implementations of one or two restrictions, which would affect only those who wish to make their adopted homeland more like the from which they have escaped?

Entitlement to vote, after a minimum period of residence of 15 years for those of us, like me, who choose to retain our original nationality, and the acquiring of Manx nationality to be a prerequisite for all those standing for public office would be a good start. A little humility would not go amiss either.

D.S. Name and address supplied

The author of the second example above is correctly aware of the majority status of incomers. He makes it clear that the incomers, and the industries for whom they work, have made the Island economy strong and are thus 'the hands that feed' the Island's politicians (but perhaps, by implication, the Island too?). As a taxpayer he rightly wants a say in how the Island is run, but offers no acknowledgement of the 'Island and its heritage' as did the previous contributor. He further assigns himself the identity of 'Englishman', seemingly affirming that this is a society of two groups.

The final selection, a more recent offering and one which contributed to a debate centring on the establishment of a population ceiling and immigration controls,³ is written by a self-styled *comeover* who could perhaps claim to be a

³ Unlike the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man currently has no restriction on immigration for UK and EU citizens (although all these administrations are subject to and comply with the UK's general immigration controls for citizens of non-EU areas). Workers from the UK and EU are required to obtain a work permit before commencing employment, but as the Island enjoys a

stayover. He has made a life for himself in the Island, includes in his social network 'Manx friends and acquaintances' and has listened to their concerns, and acknowledges that there are traditions to be respected. Yet he – like Keren, whose words introduced this chapter – is reluctant to inflict his beliefs and attitudes onto the 'Manx people', or to attempt to share in what they see as a 'Manx culture'. Keren made it clear that she would 'never [...] learn Manx, I will never learn Manx dancing, and I will never skip around in a kilt [...] I will never pretend that I'm anything but English, and I try to make that as clear as I can.' She was here not rejecting or ridiculing these modes of performances of Manx culture, but was stating her belief that she has no right to involve herself in these activities. They were not *hers*. She added, however, that being in the Island 'does make you think about your own heritage and your own culture, because you sort of feel a bit rootless when you come somewhere like this with such a strong sense of something, but what is it?'

Both Keren and the correspondent are clearly aware of the current debates about 'Manxness'. But I would also argue that in their determination to hold themselves separate – by trying to do the right thing – the actions of *stayovers* like Keren are as unintentionally separatist as the attitude of the *comeovers*. Whilst those sensitive to the 'dilution' of Manx culture place the blame for this on *comeovers* who pay no attention to the Island's unique characteristics and belittle its culture, the good intentions of these *stayover* 'separatists' simply increase the sense that culture is a 'thing' that cannot be shared.

That there should be a continuing sense of 'division' is understandable. As John's story will later demonstrate (Chapter 3.5), the initial influx of 'New Residents' in the 1960s and early 1970s caused much resentment. Earlier in-migrations, such as that to service the mining industry in the nineteenth century, are long forgotten and indeed, those migrants have now been assimilated and see themselves as, and are considered, 'Manx'. In contrast, the more recent and more numerically significant influx is still very real, as are the memories of the social problems that accompanied it. The consequent debate about 'Manxness' is

buoyant economy and full employment, demand always exceeds supply and therefore the work permit system is no deterrent to continuing in-migration.

therefore played out 'vis-à-vis' (Boon 1983) a single group of 'incomers', regardless of their ascribed or self-assigned status as *comeover* or *stayover*. For the purposes of debate the categories are de-personalised, but in the perceptions of those individuals on the receiving end – which ever 'side' they happen to be on – they are not. Consequently, the debate goes on.

Kieran

We briefly met Kieran earlier, in the office, but here I take the opportunity to expand upon the discussions I had with him on the comparative situation of Manx and Irish culture and identity. Whilst the Irish as an incoming group are not held to blame to the same extent for the 'dilution' of Manx culture, I have heard Island-born residents expressing their concern at the Irish community's determination to hang on to their ways, their music and to keep to themselves. Whilst this is clearly not true for all – a friend and temporary landlord of mine was married to a Manxwoman and was well integrated into Island life – Kieran's comments below go some way to confirming this perception.

Kieran hails from the north of Ireland, although Irish *comeovers* and *stayovers* arrive from both sides of the border. He had moved to the Island some five years before to take up an accounting post in an Island-based manufacturing company. This had since ceased trading, but he and his Irish wife, a nurse, had decided to stay on. He and I were now work colleagues, and once or twice, when he was tired of reconciling his accounts, he would ask about my research. He had interesting views on the subject of 'identity'. In the north of Ireland, he said, 'identity' – or as he also referred to it, 'which group you belong to' – had always been significant. He felt that this recent concern of the Manx with their identity was perhaps prompted by the fact that they were now in the minority, adding that 'when we feel we're under threat somehow, we tend to draw into groups and support each other'. He went on to add that he was perhaps more aware of his 'culture' now that was exiled from it, and that this had perhaps encouraged him to seek out other Irish *stayovers*. His circle of friends was all from Northern

Ireland.⁴ For him, this was ‘normal really. You react to the voices you hear that are like your own. Only last Saturday a young lad who’s only been here a few days stopped us in town to speak to us. He’d recognised the Northern Irish accents. In a strange place you need something familiar around you.’

There was also criticism for ‘Manx culture’ from this fellow Celt. ‘There’s not much culture left here now’, he said. ‘What culture there is, is Irish. You only have to go down to O’Donnells.’⁵ How do they expect it to survive here when they don’t teach it in schools.’ Quite what he meant here by ‘Manx culture’ was not made clear, but over the months the staff in the office had spoken about ‘what it meant to be Manx’ in various guises (see Chapter 3.2) and it had become clear that knowledge about Manx history, politics, the Manx Gaelic language and the Island’s traditions and folklore was uncertain and unclear. Contradicting his earlier statement that Manx minority status had led to a certain consciousness of identity, Kieran was here expressing that the ‘awareness of culture’ that he said he felt for his own was not present amongst the young people he knew.

In a few words he had summarised fears I had heard expressed by other informants; that ‘Manx culture’ was fast being diluted. You will recall Kieran’s comment from the previous chapter: that Manx culture may be too weak to withstand the challenge from the invading culture or cultures. Or was he saying that, if the Island wanted to stress its Celticness, it would have to adopt an Irish version? I am not aware that Kieran was conscious of the Island’s attempts to be taken seriously as a Celtic nation, but he does provide another perspective on a fear that had been expressed by Island-born people sensitive to these issues. Several had complained to me that, despite comments to the contrary, it was in fact the Manx-born themselves who should shoulder some of the blame for the situation they now found themselves in. Where *comeovers* and *stayovers* have been, and are, criticised for their lack of interest in the Island’s unique qualities, there are many Island-born who similarly share this lack of interest. This may be

⁴ The group had once entertained one non-Celt, an Englishman, whom they ‘ribbed endlessly’. The poor man had since left the Island, but Kieran insisted that this decision to leave had nothing to do with their teasing of him.

⁵ O’Donnell’s bar: an Irish public house which serves as a focal point for the Irish community, where one can hear Irish music played live and which aims to replicate the atmosphere of the public houses ‘back home’. That said, it is not ‘exclusive’ and is a popular stop-off point for a night out.

through personal choice, a failure of education (a detail Kieran pointed to above), lack of opportunity or the misfortune never to meet a mentor, but as the case studies briefly touched upon in this chapter demonstrate, the stereotypical vision of the uncaring *comeover* or *stayover* bears only partial resemblance to the facts.

Rebecca

Rebecca is a very recently arrived *stayover*. I use the term *stayover* deliberately, because even as a new arrival, Rebecca has thrown herself immediately into Manx life with immense gusto and has been easily accepted. I first met her on a return visit to the Island in 2002, when I again attended one of those Saturday evening gatherings or ‘sessions’. For someone I was told was a relative newcomer (for I had noticed her almost immediately as she laughed and joked), she was very relaxed with all the regulars, and in turn they seemed at ease with her. For a group which usually takes its time in accepting newcomers, this relaxed inclusion of her into their midst was sufficiently rare to be worthy of investigation, so I joined the table⁶ and their conversation. She was talking to people I knew well, and we were all very soon involved in the kind of conversations that tend to flow on those evenings. In between the jokes and the stories, and the odd tune from Jamys on his harmonica, I learned that she was a teacher, recently arrived from Liverpool, and that she was thoroughly enjoying her life on the Island. She in turn, after checking my credentials with the colleagues around our table (which prompted further jokes at the expense of the anthropologist) agreed to an interview.

I met her at her home a few days later. As I walked in, I was immediately struck by the number of paintings, posters and family photographs which featured the Island. Asking her about them, she explained that she had been visiting the Island since she was six months old. The Island had been her family’s favoured holiday destination since the 1950s, and she recalled how they seemed to come alive when they stepped off the boat from their Liverpool home.

⁶ The reader will recall that at these Saturday ‘sessions’ there are various tables: the musicians at one, the politicians at another, the choir around a third and ‘the chatters’ at the last. Whilst the configuration of these tables remains largely the same from week to week, the ‘inhabitants’ can shift, depending on what the individual wishes to do – talk politics, play music, chat about the mundane – that week.

Unlike the times in between, this bit, the time on the Island, ‘was real. [The Island] always felt like home, even when I was young.’ She added that the family had long wanted to move to the Island, but for practical reasons had never managed to take the step. ‘It was always, if we won the lottery we’ll go and live on the Isle of Man,’ she said. ‘So I’ve won the lottery.’

Now a qualified teacher, she had moved to the Island three years before our meeting, and had been fortunate enough to be placed⁷ in one of the most modern of the Island’s schools which is very active in Manx music and dance, and which now houses the Manx-medium primary unit. These immediate links suited her well, as they would later provide the opportunity to satisfy her love of music. She enjoyed Celtic music, she said, and had attended ceilidhs at the various Irish centres in Liverpool. She also recalled how she and the family had ‘discovered’ the *Cruinnaght* one year, and how she had taken tapes of Manx music back with her to Liverpool. Classical music and performance had also been important, with regular visits to the Liverpool Philharmonic and membership of a choir featuring highly in her priorities.

‘It’s important for me to hear music live,’ she said, and so one night she and a friend just ‘turned up’ at the Saturday night session. She does not play an instrument, and so she sat at what she termed ‘the sitting-there table,’⁸ and gradually started to get to know the regulars. She later ‘plucked up the courage’ to ask about singing with a choir, and has since joined *Cliogaree Twooie*. This has further led to Manx Gaelic classes,⁹ and it seems that these various activities are now satisfying her own interests as well as a desire to ‘show an interest’. ‘People are very welcoming here, she said, but added thoughtfully ‘well, they’re welcoming if you’re interested, showing an interest, if you’re not coming here to change the place.’ What determines one’s welcome is ‘the attitude you come in with, definitely.’

⁷ Rebecca also explained to me that primary level teachers accepted for teaching posts on the Island are placed in a ‘pool’, and are then allocated to vacancies by the Education Department.

⁸ The table I have termed ‘the chatter’s table’, there for those who wish to talk, and to listen to the music.

⁹ She had been asked by a work colleague why, as a Liverpudlian, not Manx, she had wanted to take this step. She had replied that she wanted to be able to speak to her partner (a Manx Gaelic speaker) in his language. She had explained, ‘If I was going out with an Italian, I’d learn Italian. I’m going out with a Manxman, so I’m learning Manx.’

She extends this ‘attitude’ into her classroom, ensuring that the children learn about the Island’s history and folklore. ‘It’s like repaying something, isn’t it, passing on the information, and it’s important for the children to know their own identity. It shocked me that some of them hadn’t been through to Peel,¹⁰ and they didn’t know the difference between a picture of Peel Castle and Castle Rushen. In history and geography you’re allowed to put the Manx element in, so we did Tudors and we did it through Castle Rushen and the Stanley family, and we did placenames [...] for places on the Island.’ Not all teachers share her approach, however. They are either unaware of the Island’s story,¹¹ or just ‘want an easy life’ and follow the UK national curriculum. In her comments she reflects the experiences of other informants: knowledge of, or interest in, the Island’s story can often be serendipitously attributed to the enthusiasm of an individual teacher. For Rebecca, what she gives them is ‘a taster. Teaching is to widen experiences, and they might take something up later...’

But along with the music and her devotion to teaching, she also relishes the ‘closeness’ of this Manx community. ‘I like that – some people find it very intimidating – that everyone knows everyone else’s business, but I love it. But I come from a very close family, and Liverpool can be very close too.’ For Rebecca, then, the *skeet* and the intimacy of Island social relations was a comforting rather than an alienating experience, one she was familiar with. And so I reminded her about the conversation we had had a few nights before at the session. We had spoken then about ‘identity’ and I asked her now how she felt now about the issue. ‘I belong here now,’ she replied. Could she ever be ‘Manx’? I added. ‘I don’t know. Manx in outlook, yes. I might not be Manx by birth, but Manx by outlook.’ And she went on to illustrate her point with the following tale. ‘The first year I came here, there was a quiz in the paper at Christmas, “How Manx are you?” And my friend and I did it. Questions like “How do you say the word ‘book’?” We both laughed at this, because Rebecca’s Liverpudlian accent is very close to the modern Douglas accent. She continued.

¹⁰ The school Rebecca teaches at is situated on the edge of the capital, Douglas, with a suburban catchment area.

¹¹ Rebecca told me (and thereby confirmed information received from other sources) that only Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) are given the mere one-day induction into the Island’s history and culture. Experienced teachers like herself receive nothing but a trip around the Tynwald building.

‘And I got 99% of the questions right, knowledge about stuff, and how you say things and she (her friend, Manx-born) didn’t, and she was quite miffed.’

‘I identify with the Isle of Man. I suppose my identity is as someone who has been brought up in Liverpool, but who identifies strongly with this place. I like the way of life, the pace of life, not getting into that hectic rush of things that don’t matter. Things matter here, but they’re the right things. People [elsewhere] get so angry going from A to B, always in a rush. People in Liverpool looked unhappy, racing, in work situations, so stressed. I’ve always liked the attitude here that it’ll always get done. I suppose city living was never my cup of tea. Here they have time to talk to each other. You don’t get people talking about their possessions and their money. The chap downstairs, he’s very material, and he hasn’t really settled.’ And looking over to the castle, she said, ‘I stood on a favourite spot near the castle [the other day], and thought I wonder who’s stood here before, and thought I’m now here, part of it. I felt really at home. I’m part of the place now.’

Tony

Not all those who have arrived in the Island to service the financial industry have been in a hurry to leave. What the Manx government likes to advertise as the ‘high quality of life’ encourages some to stay. Tony, whose story follows, came in those early days of the sector’s growth in the 1970s, having been sent to the Island by his employers to manage a new addition to their offshore folio. He recalls, ‘I was called into the staff office on the Friday afternoon, and the manager said fly to the Isle of Man on Monday and take over’. He laughed, and added, ‘[s]o that was my introduction to the Isle of Man. But when I came here I must say, I was appalled in a way at the dereliction. Places were falling to bits. Very unattractive, and I wondered what the hell I’d walked into. But [the manager] had said to me ‘don’t worry, it’s three years maximum.’

Initially a *comeover*, then, Tony and his family finally settled in the Island. He has now retired and intends to spend the rest of his days in Mann. In his capacity as a senior member of the financial sector, he had privileged insight into the workings of the Island’s influential institutions, and has interesting views on aspects of culture, population, economics and the Island’s future. Describing

his early experience of life in the Island, he said that when they first arrived he and his business contemporaries were viewed with suspicion, but added that he 'always took the line that if you come into a community like this, you don't go and bash open the door and say 'I'm here!' What you do is, you knock gently and you let them open it, let them see you and let them invite you in. Now that's the line that I took, and therefore gradually I was accepted and I was taken in.'

As time went on he followed his personal interests and became involved in various activities, and through this involvement extended his social network: 'I've always been interested in history and archaeology, so I joined the Antiquarian Society. I look, and see that there's an archaeology course, so that gave me chance to do a bit of digging at Peel. That was what I was interested in. It was what my wife was interested in. So we started to take an interest in that particular thing. She was interested in the art, and so of course she got into the arts, so that's how it tends to happen, how you join these type of things and then, another instance, I had a couple of business men come to me one day and say 'come and have lunch', and I thought 'well, there's never a free lunch.' There never is, but this is the way things happen, and they said well, y'know, we've got a branch [of a trade organisation] here on the Island. Will you come and be the Chairman? So I did that. You get involved.' He went on to add how his business contacts, interests and responsibilities had only served to increase his work on various committees, much of which he still continues, despite retirement.

His gradual, steady approach has seen him accepted into many areas of Island public and social life, but when he speaks of his ideas about the Island and its future, he takes what could be viewed as an outsider's or objective stance. 'If we look just at Guernsey, Jersey and ourselves [...] y'know we've all developed a good business, but to keep ahead of the field what do you need? You need expertise, you need staff, and believe it or not you need somewhere where you can expand. The Isle of Man has got space. Now I'm not advocating that we flood the place and make it the Hong Kong of the north-west or whatever, I'm not advocating that at all, but you can certainly have steady growth and expansion without causing too many problems. Now you've got good roads, the Iris scheme is putting the sewerage in. I don't necessarily agree with the

incinerator,¹² but you've got to do something. That's coming on, and you've got a new hospital and whatever misgivings we might have about cost or all the rest, or even location, the point is you're getting what I would call the infrastructure in place. Now is it right that you should have a big infrastructure, a very expensive infrastructure and not be able to fund it because you're not allowing business to expand?'

His words go directly to the debate alluded to in the final letter above, and appear to fly in the face of the arguments put forward by those who have concerns about the Island's environment, as well as its culture, should the population continue to rise. Whilst an improved infrastructure which benefits all is generally welcomed (even if the particular solutions are not), there is a wide consensus that the Island can only sustain a limited population if those aspects which contribute to the Island's 'quality of life' – the unspoiled beauty of its natural environment, the relatively relaxed way of life, the lower incidence of crime compared to its neighbour – are to be sustained. And he is not wholly insensitive to these issues. New housing should be in small, unobtrusive developments, he says. Being a 'great walker' he does not want 'anything happening to those hills.' 'Don't forget', he added, 'we don't want the environment spoiled; we don't want things to change. The reason we stay here, more so than the locals, is because we like it here...But we've got to keep a steady expansion, because if you don't keep steadily expanding, you stop still, and that means you're falling backwards.'

He told me that he had once been called 'an honorary Manxman', and that this had pleased him greatly. Like the correspondent in the first letter, he clearly likes to include himself in the 'we' that is the Manx community, but at the same time he also seems to separate himself from that community. '[W]e stay here because we like it here', he said. He was here identifying himself with the incomer community, and so I asked him what the move to the Island had done for his personal sense of identity. In response, he confirmed his roots as part

¹² The Iris scheme (referred to in one of the satirical poems reproduced in Chapter 2.2) is an Island-wide scheme for the handling of sewerage. The planned incinerator, a multi-million pound development, will deal with much of the Island's refuse by burning. Both schemes are controversial and are the subject of endless debate in the media. The location of new hospital was also the subject of heated debate (and was also the subject of a Dot Tilbury satire).

Welsh, part English, but expressed a satisfaction in identifying with the Island which seemed ‘routed’ in his experience of coming to the Island and learning to live as part of this community. Contrasting this experience with his former life in England, he said ‘I can’t walk down the street [in Mann] without somebody knowing me, talking to me.’ And he added that ‘[i]n a funny sort of way, I like being different, and the Island makes you different. I never felt different in the UK. If you go abroad, and they say where are you from and you say the Isle of Man, they’re interested. And I don’t think it’s different enough. Phone boxes should be purple. We should emphasise the difference. The Island should be more politically independent. I think it will go that way, despite the politicians trying to do nothing.’

For Tony, claiming a relationship with the Island satisfies personal motivations. He gains from the ‘quality of life’, from walking the hills, from involving himself in the Island’s archaeology, from ‘giving something back’ in his work on various committees, from being a big fish in a small pond. As for his position as a *stayover* and the ‘carrier’ of outsider values, whilst his opinions on encouraging growth in the Island might at first appear to be at odds with the ‘Manx’ half of Island society, there may at second glance be more common ground between Tony, a *stayover*, and the Nationalists than between the Nationalists and the Island-born ‘locals’ we met in Chapter 3.2. As he himself stated, whilst ‘locals’ often seek to leave, he and his fellow *stayovers* choose to stay because they like the Island life. Furthermore, he desires greater political independence for the Island (but, like the Nationalists, sees little hope of the Island’s politicians demonstrating the political wherewithal to handle such responsibility) and he wishes to see it prosper. He relishes its history, its natural beauty and its ‘difference’ (its ‘uniqueness’), and he understands the value in being seen to ‘put something back’ into the community.

Coming and Staying – A Discussion

We. A seemingly simple word, but as can be seen from the various stories around which this chapter has formed, it can have significant implications. To a greater or lesser degree, several of the contributors have slipped back and forth between a ‘we’ which places the speaker side by side with the Island-born, and a ‘we’

which recalls their other status as a *stayover*. That they appear to move between these two ‘identities’ should not be seen to support a thesis of distinct and discrete identity possibilities, but rather should be understood as symptomatic of the prevailing discourse on the Island of a society of two halves, Island-born and *comeover/stayover*. It is hoped that the stories contained within this text make it clear that the reality is significantly more subtle and complex, but the fact remains that those who are attempting to make this Island their home must do so in the face of the assumption that their presence works to further ‘dilute’ Manx culture and to threaten the very existence of a sense of ‘Manxness’.

There is, however, a difference between those who ‘come’ and those who choose to ‘stay’. In his introduction to his edited volume on migration in Britain, James L. Watson wrote that ‘[i]n all studies of migration, one must distinguish between “settlers” who intend to remain permanently abroad and “sojourners” who plan to return to their home society upon retirement’ (1977: 5). This thesis makes that distinction because the distinction is made by its informants and in their discourses. However, Watson goes on to add that ‘[i]t is not always possible to sort out the sojourners from the settlers [...] because they commonly share a ‘myth of return’”(ibid). Whilst Jackie and Kieran – and many other *stayovers* I met – certainly have ‘return’ in mind, the major voices in this chapter, those of Tony and Rebecca, make it clear that return is not an option, because they have *chosen* to remain.

These are not migrants who have been forced to abandon their home through force of circumstance. They have made a positive choice because the ‘quality of life’ on the Island satisfies some personal motivation or interest. For Tony it is the opportunity to be recognised when he walks down the street, to make a meaningful contribution to life even in retirement, to satisfy his fascination for history and archaeology and – he was reluctant to reveal this to me – to satisfy a feeling that he had, perhaps, returned to Celtic roots. For Rebecca, at the start of her career, living on the Island is ‘like winning the lottery’. It is the satisfaction of not just a personal but also a familial desire to live in a place that she said had, ‘always felt like home.’ Liverpool, her former ‘home’, had provided every opportunity to participate in those activities which are meaningful to her, but the Island offers something which defies explanation.

A dichotomy exists. On the one hand, the *stayovers* are categorised as ‘other’, vis-à-vis the Island-born. As such, they are part of the problem, and are subject to inclusion in that invading group responsible for the damage being wrought on Island life and culture. On the other hand, it is readily accepted that not all those who today are considered ‘Manx’ (that is, Island-born) have been on the Island since time began. As discussed at the head of this chapter, there is no temporal qualification for making the shift from migrant to ‘Manx’. Indeed, the subject may provide the basis for a humorous rejoinder. One eisteddfod MC, responding to a heckler from the audience, joked that the heckler should remember that his family had come to the Island a mere two hundred years before, while his own family had been here much longer.

Furthermore, there is acceptance that individual *stayovers* make invaluable contributions to Island life and culture. *Stayovers* have become actively involved in Manx Gaelic language issues (and have won awards for their contributions). It was a *stayover* who was credited as providing much of the impetus for the ‘revival’ of Manx traditional music in the 1970s.¹³ And Manxman Charles Guard recently reminded the people of Mann that the Island’s history is one of constant movement and creative change. ‘The unique combination of people that come here,’ he said, ‘continues to produce a unique, though ever-changing mix of language, music, dance and attitudes. It’s called Manx culture’ (n.d.). Charles appears well aware, just as anthropology has come to accept in recent years, that cultures are not, or ever have been, discrete entities. For Drummond (cited in Rapport, 1997: 70), movements of people and the push (or pull) to modernisation have ‘transformed’ societies, resulting in cultural *continua*, to *creolisation*. But in Charles’ words – and in the recognition that *stayovers* have made cultural contributions – we hear acknowledgement that such creolisation has been happening for long centuries.

Yet in that same chapter, Rapport discusses Paine’s theory of ‘cultural compression’. For Paine, the coming together of individuals making cultural choices can lead to ‘an insistence of socio-cultural difference’ (op.cit.: 71) which can be ‘exclusionary’. However, in the face of a reality which insists that (a) the Island has always welcomed migrants, (b) that individual *stayovers* are making

¹³ See Chapter 2.2

valuable contributions in the maintenance of Island traditions, language and social life, and (c) that many 'Island-born' are themselves the product of incomers, any 'insistence' to difference must be played out in its abstracted form; that of drawing a boundary between Island-born and incomer.

But why the need for the debate at all, if this is yet one more example in a history of in-migrations? The answer lies in the speed of the change.¹⁴ Population growth on the Island has continued, the 2001 census reporting a total population of 76,315, with the Island-born now constituting just 48.1% of the total. With official projections estimating a total population of 79,810 by 2010, it is hardly surprising that population growth remains a matter for public and political debate.¹⁵ In his manifesto for the 2001 General Election, one prospective MHK wrote, 'I believe, without doubt, that the biggest threat to the quality of life on our Island is uncontrolled population growth. Just as serious, to my mind, is the insidious erosion of 'Manxness' of the Isle of Man. I fear that the culture, the quality and pace of life, the intimacy with the environment, and the Manx voice, all of which help to make our Island life unique, are being diluted so quickly that all too soon they may be irretrievably lost.'¹⁶

I stated earlier that acknowledgement has been given to the fact that 'new residents' have made a valuable contribution to Island life, but calls for the Manx government to restrict future population growth are not diminishing. Sheer volume – being swamped – is the fear; being given no chance fully to introduce the *stayovers* to the Manx way of life, or for them to be given opportunity to appreciate the quality of life, or to gain experience enough to understand the true value of *traa dy liooar* ('time enough'). Decisions lie in the hands of the politicians, but those hands are tied to keeping the lucrative financial sector (that sector which Tony reveals desires yet further growth) happy. And as will be seen in the next chapter, even the tolerance of those who are happy to accept all-comers is stretched when they contemplate a Tynwald filled with *stayovers*.

¹⁴ Figures taken from IOM Interim Census Report 2001. For further information see the tables in the appendix.

¹⁵ Especially when one bears in mind that the projections appear to be underestimations. In 2001, the Chief Minister's Office was reporting an estimated population in that census year of 75,500 (Press Release 19/01, June 2001, Chief Minister's Office). The actual figure was 76,315.

¹⁶ www.iomelections.com/manifestos/candidate/beattie_brian.html



Figure 10 : The girls of “Perree T” dance at Tynwald. Here, they have taken a traditionally male dance and made it their own. Photograph : Sue Lewis.

Chapter 3.4: Pragmatic Routes

In contrast to other contributions in this section of the thesis, this chapter will give voice to members of the Island community who grew to adulthood before or during the arrival of the banks and trust companies and who have clear memories of a life of ‘spuds and herrin’; a life which may well have been economically poorer but which is seen, by some, as having been socially ‘richer’. By accident rather than by design, the contributors to this chapter are all Manx-born, with long (if not perfect, in EU terms) Manx pedigrees. I have heard it said that many of these ‘older’ Manx people are at best ambivalent about attempts to revive the Manx Gaelic language or to keep alive Manx traditions, but as their words will show, they take a very practical approach to the situation the Island community finds itself in.

Such a ‘common-sense’ approach may simply be due to their personal experience of the ‘before and after’. They all recall the waning of the tourist (or, as it was known, ‘the visitor’) industry and the speedy economic decline in the 1950s, and have felt the very real improvements in standards of living resulting from the strong finance industry. But they, too, feel the loss of aspects of the Manx ‘way of life’ which are, or were, important to them. Not uncaring or even ambivalent, then, about the changes they have witnessed, but rather ‘pragmatic’ about changes which have had benefits as well as costs. The aim of this chapter, then, is to examine their apparently ‘balanced’ view on the reality of contemporary Island life, and to understand their contribution to the process toward a contemporary sense of ‘Manxness’.

Alice

I first had opportunity to talk to Alice about her experience of life on the Island when she invited me for tea, following a lecture we had both attended. What follows is a distillation of that conversation, other brief exchanges we had had previously and were to have over the ensuing months, and a taped interview she kindly agreed to at a later date. Having been a co-committee member with her, and having been aware of her own research, I knew she had an active interest in the Island's history. But it was her thoughts on contemporary Island society and cultural politics that I was more interested to talk to her about. It was Alice that had, early in my fieldwork, expressed to me her 'vision' of contemporary Manx society as 'being like a Venn diagram' of overlapping circles of interest. My own experience would demonstrate just how apt a description this was, and her willingness to reflect this way on the Island's situation makes her contribution to this thesis invaluable.

Alice now lives in the town where she worked before her retirement, but she was born and brought up on the other side of the Island, daughter of an active socialist. She has never left the Island to live or work, and now spends her time gardening, walking in the Island's hills and along its coastline, and satisfying her academic interests. She has watched the Island develop from the economic impoverishment of the 1950s and early 1960s, which offered few opportunities for young Manx people, to the increasingly confident and economically healthy place it is today. Consequently, her perspective tends to contrast with the more idealised visions of the 'nationalists' who would prefer to see the back of the finance industry. Like other contributors to this chapter she prefers an approach which is accepting and inclusive of *stayovers*, but is not outspoken on these issues. However, as will become clear, public pragmatism can often hide private convictions which contrast with, even contradict, a person's public stance.

She had begun our first in-depth conversation by expressing her belief that I was 'restricting' my study by focusing too closely on the activities of a minority cultural sector. I was subjected to a similar response when I met and chatted to William and Ronan (see below). These pragmatists may keep their own counsel, but they have no wish to be ignored or have their life histories

erased from the developing picture of contemporary Manxness. And so she informed me that I should widen my net, better to discover hooks other than that of the revival of the Manx Gaelic language on which a notion of ‘identity’ might hang.

During those early conversations she stated unequivocally that, as far as she was concerned, language did not provide one with an identity. Some months later her opinion seemed to have softened somewhat, allowing her to say that she was ‘mildly interested’ in the Gaelic language, but insufficiently so to learn it herself. As before, she went on to qualify her assessment. ‘I don’t see it as an essential part of my Manxness. Somebody was trying, I remember, at one of these events, somebody was trying to define what Manxness was. And Mary – she’s the same age as me, brought up in the same village together – she’s a farmer’s daughter, and she nudged me and said “if that, if language defines Manxness, that counts you and me out”.’

There was a hint here of the same sense of ‘exclusion’ expressed by Hazel in a previous chapter: that the very ‘conscious’ act of placing language (or some similar cultural symbol) at the core of Manx identity threatened to make that identity the preserve of those who had access to these qualificatory skills. And so I asked Alice to reflect on what, for her, would define ‘Manxness’.

‘Very difficult,’ she responded. ‘You can’t do it by birth, necessarily, because my brother-in-law across the road there, who’s as Manx as *come ooilley*,¹ was born in Manchester. Some of those who are prominent in language revival are English. So, you can’t define it. And I know if I go to England, I know that I would say, I wouldn’t press it particularly, but I’d say ‘I’m Manx’, not English. On the other hand I’m very wary about the ‘blood and soil’ type nationalism. It can lead to something very unpleasant. So, if you ask me to define Manxness, I get myself in a mix. It could be said, growing up with what we call the incomers, the ‘when-Is’, Manxness is defined as ‘not English’ rather than anything positive. And it’s to do with kinship as well. You track people’s ancestry back through the generations, but as my friend says, if you track it back far enough there’s one of the earliest people came from somewhere else. So

¹ I believe I have transcribed this phrase correctly. Alice had used a phrase which appears to be a mix of English and Manx Gaelic, the *ooilley* meaning ‘all’. The phrase may therefore be understood as meaning ‘come all’, or ‘anyone else’.

although you've been in the area for six generations, if you go back far enough there's a *comeover*.'

It is perhaps an unfair question, to ask anyone to define their identity. But her reflexive response reveals several factors common to the stories throughout this thesis. There is the notion that 'Manxness' can never be defined in terms of birthplace or parentage. Although she does not tell us whether her brother-in-law has a Manx ancestry, her affirmation that he could claim to be as Manx as anyone else and the qualification that many of those who are deeply involved in cultural politics are English, reveals a comfortable acceptance that identity here in the Island is built on something other than blood. Indeed, she says as much in raising the objection to what she terms 'blood and soil' nationalism. Her implicit criticism is one that is often levelled against the nationalists – an issue raised by Jamys himself in the discussion in Chapter 3.1, where he actually agrees with Alice – but is a fear encouraged by the kind of direct action which flared up in the early 1970s and late 1980s. Reflecting further, she proposes that Manxness might be defined vis-à-vis the incoming 'English',² an assessment familiar to anthropological studies of identity and one which recurs throughout this text. And finally she raises – in apparent contradiction of her earlier consideration – the importance of ancestry. But this, I would argue, is ancestry as an indicator of the social network. I would ask the reader to recall the tale outlined by Niall in an earlier chapter, where one's place in the social and cultural world was once narrated in terms of social connectivity. It is a practice I myself witnessed, among younger members of the community and even among the office workers: on giving one's family name, the response is to discover which part of the Island one hails from and therefore to which group of Cain, Quayle or so-on.³

'You can't define [Manxness] as some kind of Celticness either,' she continued, 'because of the influence from Lancashire for generations, with the soldiers and the officers who came in for the garrisons. The links have been with northern England rather than with Scotland or Ireland. Because the Lords⁴ came

² 'English' here should perhaps be taken as a term inclusive of all incomers.

³ A few weeks before submitting this thesis, I met a man who was married to a Manxwoman. On informing him of my thesis's subject, he exclaimed, 'The Manx: an anthropologist's dream! They're a real tribe. The Island first. No. *Family* first, then Mann, then the rest.'

⁴ The 'Lords of Man' were, for centuries, members of the Stanley family, Lancastrian aristocrats who brought English administrators to the Island, along with English militia.

from Lancashire, and they brought people over.’ Here she took both the conversation and the established debates off on a different tack. Common representations tend to define Manx social and cultural origins as being a combination of Celtic and Norse rather than as having ‘English’ roots, and rarely had I heard the links with the north of England being voiced in this way. Whilst it is readily acknowledged that the millworkers of the English north-west flocked to the Island each summer, or that the miners from its north-east came to work its mines, the social and cultural consequences of such migrations is underplayed. Alice’s own reasoning may have been grounded in her academic historical knowledge or in her individual beliefs and interests, but the stress was again towards inclusiveness and practicality. ‘As for the nationalist movement,’ she said, ‘I’m not really involved with it. I’ve always been more Labour you see, with a political programme of social redistribution, whereas the nationalists’ one has always been more airy-fairy.’

The nationalist agenda, for Alice, is idealistic and narrowly focused. Calling on an assessment of the Manx administration’s perceived lack of international ability which appears to be reasonably widespread and public,⁵ and what appears to be a lack of trust, Alice turned to the issue of independence. ‘I’m going back 40-odd years,’ she said, ‘[but] independence for the Isle of Man would mean giving control to people you wouldn’t necessarily want to have control over you. The Westminster people, at least you’d feel they wouldn’t have their hand in the till. Independence never had a great appeal. It was always more important from the political point of view to keep reciprocity with England. Of keeping contact with England, because England’s always been the standard for social security and equality, health and education and so on, so that was always more important with the people with whom I worked, than notions of independence as such.’ Her words reflect the practical reasoning that influences connections with ‘the adjacent Island’. Students needing to go to UK universities need equitable qualifications, patients need easy access to specialised health

⁵ Opinion has it that the Manx administration is little more than a glorified ‘town council’. Whilst the Manx government is now successfully representing the Island’s interests on external committees directly (previously the responsibility of Westminster), the appearance of ‘amateurism’ is perhaps difficult to shift. Solly (1994: 441) also points to the transfer of ‘local’ services to central control as contributing to a perception of ‘an excessive preoccupation with local issues within Tynwald to the detriment of the consideration of national issues.’

services in UK hospitals, pensions need to be paid to immigrant retirees and employers need to move workers to and fro with relative ease. There therefore seems little point in reinventing the entire wheel when updating legislation on common themes.

Agreeing with the then Chief Minister, who was advocating ‘evolution, not revolution’ in regard to independence, Alice added that ‘we have good deal at the moment. I think we’ve got as much independence as we need. We’re more or less left to our own devices, as long as we behave ourselves, and frankly, the kind of things we’re asked to behave ourselves in are the ways we should behave in, and independence doesn’t necessarily mean greater freedom of action. So, no, I wouldn’t vote for independence.’ As described in the introductory chapters, the opportunity for political and economic self-determination has gradually increased in scope over the last century and a half. The pace of change may even have increased further in the most recent years, with the Lieutenant Governor losing his executive powers in 1990, but majority public opinion still appears to concur with Alice’s viewpoint. Wishing to remain ‘under the wing’ of Westminster should not, however, be taken as signifying lack of confidence. ‘Certainly there are problems about being an offshore Finance Sector, but it’s given us our money and without it we’d be in the position of Cornwall; lots of beautiful scenery, no tourists, no natural resources, no industry and a great deal of poverty.’

We had returned to pragmatism once again, and so I asked her if she felt there was anything particularly ‘Manx’ about being so practical. ‘I think there probably is,’ she replied. ‘It might be linked with the fact that we’ve always been quite a small population. You had to get along. You haven’t really got a lot of choice. And even my father and a contemporary, a die-hard Tory, when they met, shook hands. Two old Manxmen.’ And although the following story was not used to illustrate that particular comment, I believe it is relevant to this notion of ‘having to get along’. She told me of her mother’s relationship with a woman in the same village. ‘Mother went down there cleaning, but typical Isle of Man, although this woman was a bank manager’s wife in the days when bank managers were something special, they were also friends because they’d grown up together. They used to walk down to school together and play together, but then their lives diverged. But when they were working together they were Dora and Millicent. But then this woman [she worked for] got into the social scene, as

the new people came in from the colonies. Tea-parties and so on. And she would say, 'Millicent, would you do this?' Then one of these women also started calling mother Millicent, much to her disgust. So she said to Dora afterwards, "will you please ask your friends not to call me Millicent. I'm Mrs Quayle to them. They don't know me." It's only a small point, but the assumption that she was a servant, whereas in fact the Isle of Man's not and never has been classless but there's a kind of egalitarianism.⁶ I mean, these two women, with very different social backgrounds, they'd walked down and sat together in the schoolroom, and therefore they'd always on first name basis, but mother certainly wasn't going to have these, I don't know, I think she'd come from Africa somewhere, she certainly wasn't having *them* call her Millicent.'

The stress on the word 'them' is interesting. Alice had mentioned the 'When-Is'⁷ earlier, in passing, but had indicated no particular animosity toward the incomers. In response to her mother's story I had asked if she herself had experienced anything similar. 'Not personally,' she had replied, 'but there was that sense of, um, that we were there as cheap labour, and of course we were cheap labour in those days. There was no work in the 60s, well into the 60s, so of course that caused a lot of resentment, and of course, typical, the price of houses started spiralling out of the reach of locals. But that happens. That's Derbyshire, the Lake District, it's everywhere. It's attractive scenery.' Again, the balancing viewpoint; that the changes have hit the Island hard in many ways, but its story is perhaps little different to many others. But then she adds that she could understand the reaction of those young people took direct action in protest. '[I had] a certain sympathy with them, I would think. And a feeling, well, yes, that even if you knew who they were – nobody that I knew, knew who they were – but the feeling was that even if you did know and the police came asking, you wouldn't tell.'

But, she said, 'there has always been slightly a sense of inferiority, I'd think, in saying "I'm Manx". Sometimes said with some defiance as well as

⁶ For other discussions on egalitarianism in a British Isles' context see, for example, Frankenberg 1957; Cohen 1978, 1987; Macdonald 1997b.

⁷ This is the nickname given by the Manx to the arriving ex-colonial residents in the 1960s and on. It derives from the observed habit of these incomers to start each conversation with 'When I was in Kenya [or India, etc.]'. The anecdote is relayed now with an exaggerated and highly amusing 'posh' English accent.

pride.’ She had said earlier that she would declare herself as Manx if asked. Had this been different in the past? ‘Well, we certainly think more about being Manx [today]. Certainly in the 1960s, when we had these newcomers come, there was a sort of bristlyness. This is our place, what are you doing here, coming and telling us what to do and looking down on us. In the last few years there’s been a more government conscious promotion of things Manx. It’s almost like a branding exercise. I think it’s almost a commercial thing. That’s not something that is generally felt, but I think it is a deliberate branding exercise. Then there’s the *Mec Vannin*, aggressive type of Manxness. Take your pick. But not the same Manxness. It’s to attract business, make it attractive, stand out.’

As she tries, throughout the interview and our other conversations, to come to terms with what she sees as *her* Manxness, Alice refers to contrasting and often contradictory modes of identification. Saying “I’m Manx” is both something loaded with inferiority but also something to be said unashamedly and with dignity. ‘Manxness’ can be both aggressive and appealingly commercial. It is accepting of all-comers, but resistant to those who do not comply with Manx egalitarianism. And it is rhetorically open to all, but potentially closed if it be situated entirely in language (or similar cultural symbols). I would therefore suggest that “not the same Manxness” is a theme which not only recurs throughout Alice’s story but is a significant theme throughout this thesis, and in Alice’s story we see these different modes placed alongside one another in a process of coming to terms with an identity made consciously significant (‘we think more about being Manx today’) because of the changing context. If there is a sense of fateful resignation in the words and apparent cultural inaction of this generation, is it because they know that they are enmeshed, after all, in a process that will still result in ‘Manxness’? Not the same Manxness, to be sure, but still Manxness.

Sheila

In making Sheila a contributor to this thesis, I depart somewhat from the self-imposed constraint that I would only interview and include those who I knew

from various social settings.⁸ I say somewhat, because I had chatted with Sheila during an Island event for which she was a co-ordinator, and I had gleaned enough from those conversations to know that her contribution to this thesis would not only shed light on the operation of local government and the importance of community-led 'institutions', but would also offer the opportunity of hearing from a Manxwoman who is both pragmatic about the Island's social and cultural situation and wholly accepting of all those who have come to live in and contribute to the Island. Well, almost wholly.

Sheila was born and raised in that town which is known as the most Manx in all the Island. Its narrow streets twist and turn as they wend their way down to the harbour-side, and even narrower alleyways named for local families sneak off into quiet corners of this already sleepy place. Against this backdrop, Sheila recalled for me a childhood which was filled with carefree days on the wonderful beach or walks on the hills and cliffs behind the town. Hers was an old Peel family going back many generations, and in her younger days there would have been far fewer *stayovers* to disrupt the sense of the town's 'Manxness', certainly after the summer 'visitors' had checked out of the town's guesthouses. In Sheila's youth the pace of life would likely have been even slower than its current leisurely state; perhaps it is that that accounts for Sheila's calm approach to life.

In her later teens Sheila met and married a young Manxman. She, her husband and her two teenage children today live in an old Manx cottage in a rural area that has more recently become a favoured place for residents new to the Island to settle. The popularity of the area for incomers has tended to push house prices up, putting pressure on local young couples searching for first homes. A similar pressure on land prices affects the farmers of this area, as it does throughout the Island's farming industry. The area also has a rather dispersed settlement pattern. I mention these factors – the surrounding area, and elements of social import – because understanding something of the context is

⁸ The discussion and analysis contained within this section are drawn from handwritten notes taken during the interview. Consequently, the section contains no verbatim reproduction. I did attempt to use a tape recorder, but the interviewee was inhibited by its presence and it was therefore turned off.

important in understanding Sheila's story. For this quiet and unassuming woman is a key figure in her local community.

When I visited her, Sheila was busy with the final stages of organising a parish exhibition. Although I was aware that she was likely to be taking a leading role in its organisation, she would say very little about the part she was playing in this busy enterprise. To be held in the village hall in the centre of the parish, this was to be a 'social history' of the area using photographs and the words of local people, and as we talked she worked hard to stress that it was the community that had put this display together. This was clearly to be a special event, but on a weekly basis clubs in the area arrange various events and activities for all age groups within the parish: from youth groups to opportunities for the elderly to meet and talk. From what I had heard from other sources, Sheila is a vital cog in this communal wheel, but she is not one that can be encouraged to talk about herself as anything more than a fellow parishioner. And in addition to this involvement in community events, as a parish commissioner Sheila is also part of the local tier of Manx governance. Considered by some a 'rather antiquated system' (Solly 1994: 432), the elected parish commissioners⁹ are responsible in their areas for a range of services from street lighting, refuse collection and sewerage to parks and playgrounds, markets and fairs (op.cit.: 440). They may also be responsible for the allocation of public housing, and during our conversation she relayed the story of a young married couple who had recently come to the Commissioners for help.

The cost of housing has been, and continues to be, a subject of contention in the recent history of the Island. The problem may not be as acute as at the end of the 1980s, but young people still find it difficult or impossible to find affordable properties. The husband and wife who had approached the Commissioners were having to live separately in their respective parents' homes. As everywhere else on the Island, the public housing stocks are limited, but Sheila was clearly disturbed at the Commissioners' inability in this case to end

⁹ For local government purposes the Island is divided into one borough (Douglas), three town (Castletown, Peel and Ramsey), one 'district' of Onchan, four villages (Laxey, Port Erin, Port St Mary and Kirk Michael), and sixteen parishes (Bride, Andreas, Lezayre, Maughold, Lonan, Braddan, Santon, Malew, Rushen, Arbory, Marown, Patrick, German, Michael, Ballaugh and Jurby).

the young couples' separation. At no time during her recounting of the sorry tale, however, did she apportion blame – to the government, to the finance industry or to the *stayovers* – for their plight. I asked her if she had ever felt sympathy for the actions taken by *FSFO*, which had largely been sparked by similar housing problems in the 1980. Concurring with an oft-repeated sentiment (and one expressed also by Alice above), she said she had had sympathy with the group's reasons, but could never condone the method of protest. Here, was a chink in the pragmatic armour.

The conversation continued to wend its way around life on the Island 'then and now', about her work as a Commissioner, her children and her husband, but as we finished the pot of Fairy Bridge tea it began to draw to a close. The children had returned home from school, and it would soon be time for Sheila to start cooking the evening meal. Throughout the interview and in every aspect of our conversation, Sheila had maintained a fair and pragmatic stance: yes, *stayovers* had moved to the Island and into the area, had changed the social mix, had pushed house prices up, but they should still be welcomed. Yet I could not help thinking that there must be a limit to someone's pragmatism and patience with the Island's social and cultural situation. Was she so deeply 'rooted' in this Island that nothing could disturb her sense of equilibrium? As I began to gather my things together, we chatted casually and I probed a little further.

I raised the issue of the recent 'selection' of the new Lieutenant Governor. The final appointment had been made from a shortlist of two, one of whom was a well-respected Manxman with a great deal of political experience. The post had, however, been granted to a retiring Royal Air Force officer, who in the Manx newspapers had been reported as quipping that 'he'd never been to the Isle of Man, but he'd flown over it once.' The immediate public reaction had been one of anger and Sheila expressed a certain 'disappointment' that the opportunity had again been lost to appoint a Manxman to the post, but was content enough to accept it. I asked her then about the situation in Tynwald. How did she feel about people who had moved to the Island gaining seats in Tynwald? She immediately responded with the expected acceptance of their right, as residents of the Island, to stand for and be elected to the Island's parliament. But

then she paused. 'You've made me think,' she said. 'I don't mind them getting in.' She paused again. 'As long as there aren't too many of them.'

I felt somewhat perturbed that I had pressed this woman into becoming conscious of a sentiment that she, apparently, had not been conscious of before. As I expressed my final thanks and picked up my coat, I could not help feeling that she would be mulling over her statement for some time to come. Yet I cannot ignore the importance of what she had revealed. Sheila had spent some considerable time that afternoon impressing upon me a secure, accepting and inclusive philosophy. Like William and his friend below, she had seemed assuredly 'rooted' in her identification with the basic tenets of Manx sociality – a sense of equality (for all, including new residents), a knowledge that relationships have to be worked at and a sense of where one is situated in the social network. Yet this security could, possibly, be placed at risk. If those basic tenets were not fully and properly understood by those who govern, they might – despite the work of those like Sheila – be lost forever.

Two Farmers

One evening I heard a Manx farmer recount the days of his farming youth. In a packed village hall, he stood on the stage and spoke to the audience that had gathered especially for the occasion, without the aid of a note, for two entrancing hours. He began his talk with a poem from T. E. Brown which spoke to his own connection to the Island, and how life lived and stories told work to provide one with a sense of identity and belonging.

I wonder if in that fair isle,
Some child is growing now, like me
When I was a child: care-pricked, yet healed the while
With balm of rock and sea.

I wonder if the purple ring
That rises on a belt of blue
Provokes the little bashful thing
To guess what may ensue,

When he has pierced the screen, and holds the further clue.

I wonder if some day he, chance-conducted,
Attains the vantage of the utmost height,
And, by his own discovery instructed,
Sees grassy plain and cottage white,
Each human sign and pledge that feeds him with delight.

At eventide, when lads and lasses dally,
And milking Pei sits singing at the pail,
I wonder if he hears along the valley
The wind's sad sough, half credulous of the tale
How from Slieu-whallian moans the murdered witches' wail.

T. E. Brown, Braddan Vicarage, selected verses.

William's family farm lay on the slopes of the featured Slieuwhallian.¹⁰ The view suggested in the poem was a familiar one to this farmer, and I had heard him before reciting other works which described his love of the Island's landscape. And as he now described the farm of his youth; its layout and its rotational system, the horses and their carts, the long hot days of haymaking and the drinking of slightly sour buttermilk to quench the thirst, and of the values of those times, William painted a picture of an Island where life was economically poorer but richer in the certainty of knowledge people had of themselves. 'We knew who we were,' he said.

A familiar figure around the Island and one I was to come across on several and diverse occasions, I never heard this man say anything which could be taken with offence by incomer or nationalist alike. And yet there are in his words, in the things I did hear him say, which might offer a glimpse into how he feels about the changed and changing circumstances of the Island. Many attempts at trying to arrange an in-depth interview with him failed, due to his incredibly

¹⁰ I was only to understand the reference in the poem to the witches much later. One day, as I stood in Peel's cemetery near the grave of Sophia Morrison, about to participate in a ceremony to recognise her contribution to Manx cultural history, my friend told me of the tale of the witches who were 'done to death' by rolling them down the slopes of Slieuwhallian in barrels. It is said that the strange 'moaning' sound made by the wind as it moves over Slieuwhallian's slopes are the cries of the dying witches.

busy schedule. I did, however, manage to talk to him and another Manx farmer one evening at his house, an evening when they were supposed to be rehearsing for a forthcoming choral competition. It was, shall I say, an entertaining evening. With one eye each on the international football match that was being broadcast that evening, they spent much of the time (when not singing) collapsing with laughter whilst recalling characters from their mutual past. I doubt whether they answered any of my questions directly, but the essence of that meeting informs the analysis of it and of the other occasions when I came across these two remarkable Manxmen.

William's colleague that night was an influential landowner of an old Manx family and someone who is also well known around the Island. Like William, he involves himself in many diverse strands of Manx social life, and as I sat listening to them talk amongst themselves, they kept harking back to a world which existed before the finance industry arrived. They had laughed at my naivety when I had explained that I was seeking to understand the Manx culture and identity. They declared that if I wanted to understand such things, I would have to do the impossible and to go back to the early 1970s.

The minutes following were all but lost in their paroxysms of laughter at remembering a particular satirical column in the Manx newspapers of those times. 'If you read that column,' said William 'all of Manx culture will unfold before your eyes.' The column William and his colleague were referring to was entitled 'Kelly's Eye', created by the satirical poet Vera Martin and telling the story of Kelly and his wife, their son, and friends Willie and Fanny. The poems were used to comment on the state of the 'little Manx nation' at a time of transition – before and after the arrival of the 'New Residents' and the finance industry.

'Did you hear them MPs, boy (said Kelly),
On the wireless on Radio Four
As they bradcas' their Westminster antics?'
'Never laughed so much,' Will said, 'before.'
'Well meself,' said l'il Fran, 'I was frikened.
Never heard such a racket, did you?
So much brayin' an' roarin' and cussin',
You would think yourself trapped in some zoo.'

‘Shockin’ awful it was,’ muttered Willie,
 Couldn’t hardly believe me good ear,
 And they’re thinking of broadcastin’ Tynwald?
 They’re outa their l’il minds, I fear.’
 ‘Aw, I don’t know,’ said Fanny Golightly,
 ‘They is gentlemen here, one an’ all.
 An’ if one or two don’t seem too bright Will,
 Well, that isn’t their fault at all,
 Loyal awful, the one to the other
 Is the Keys boys,’ said Fran, ‘if you note.’
 ‘An’ what else can they be, gel,’ roared Willie,
 When they’re all wedged in one l’il frail boat?

(Vera Martin, *Inheritance*, 3: 46)

The performance of satirical poetry is a tradition that William and his colleague are more than familiar with. *This*, they were telling me, was Manx culture (or was, rather, a representation of a version of Manx culture *they* wished to identify with). The tradition of using satirical poetry for political comment has continued, but they seemed to be suggesting that the more recent works not of *their* culture. Why?¹¹

I was unlikely to get a direct answer to such a question, and could only sit, watch and listen to their ‘performance’. They began to reminisce about ways of working on the farms, and about the dialect words they used to use but which have fallen into disuse. They talked about the characters that had brought colour to their youthful lives. ‘D’you remember’, one would say, and off they would go into another tale of “what he dids”, and on through the social networks that these tales brought back to mind. Throughout, the conversation was interrupted by

¹¹ It is not my intention here to enter into an analysis of Manx satirical poetry. However, a brief explanatory comment is called for. Vera Martin has, I would suggest, has a modern counterpart in Dot Tilbury, who performs her work at *eisteddfods* and various charity events around the Island. It would be possible to speculate that Dot Tilbury’s work would be seen as part of William and Ronan’s version of Manx culture, in that she offers her works as public comment about Manx politics and institutions and performs them in the expected venues. Contrastingly works by, for example, Paul Lebedinski or *The Mollag Band*, whilst following in the same satirical tradition, are perhaps tainted with associations with more direct protests against Manx government action and are performed to limited audiences at ‘atypical’ events.

tear-inducing laughter, and yet it reminded me of the sad story Niall had told of those Sunday morning gatherings of the local farmers, where they would catch up on the news and recount the social connections. Was this why these two farmers imagine that their 'culture' belongs to this pre-finance sector time? Like Niall's 'ol' fellahs', these two divided the social and cultural milieu into a 'before' and an 'after' – and the 'after' was not, in their estimation, *really* Manx.

I was later to hear William confirm this analysis, on Tynwald Day in the millennium year. On that evening, after the day's celebrations and ceremonies, he came into the ceilidh tent. Looking on with obvious pleasure as the dancers whirled around and seeing in their enjoyment just a sample of the day's success, he said – in my hearing but, I felt, to himself – 'this was a *real* fair day.' The stress on the word 'real' was significant. The day had been fine and warm from its first moment. Thousands had gathered on the fair fields to meet old friends, doing what Manx men and women do. I would suggest that, for William, the 'real' had lain not in the trappings and the arranged entertainments, but in the sheer enjoyment of people gathering together.

Performing and recounting social connections: was it in these that *Manxness* inhered? If so, how might these two farmers continue to perform *their* sense of identity when the practices in which that identity is presumably rooted had apparently been left behind many years ago? I believe the answer may be sought in considering the activities these two men still involve themselves in. This section opened with William holding an audience in thrall to his reminiscences. At weekends, he travels around the Island as a lay preacher. He also gathers with others, regularly, to perform as a member of a choir and he can also be found fronting events such as the *oie'll verrey*. As master of ceremonies, he has the task of encouraging people to come to the front and entertain their fellows. A smallish man whose eyes shine with generosity of spirit, he also has a powerful grin and an aura of self-assured calm (when not collapsing with laughter), which encourages people to join in the event. One particular evening I watched as he enticed a *stayover* to come to the front and try her hand at this most Manx of arts – stepping out from the audience to take a turn on stage. Like Alice and Sheila above, William welcomes all-comers to his Island and in introducing this obviously nervous lady, he made the point of informing the audience that this was her first time at an *oie'll verrey* and that she was from

across. One felt that his purpose was not to 'exclude' her, but to inform the audience that she may not be familiar with the rites and routines of such an evening. It is not 'perfection' in performance that is expected here. It is the taking part which matters, and trips over the tongue or losses of way are almost enhancements to the performance rather than diminishments of it.

William's friend that laughter-filled night at his home is similarly involved in communal activity. I had seen Ronan also acting as MC for an *oie'll verrey*, during the interval of which he had spent time with the more elderly among the audience, reminiscing about years past. I had also seen him perform at *eisteddfods*. This night in William's home he was practicing, with William and two younger colleagues, their quartet's entry into the year's forthcoming 'Guild',¹² and I sat and listened as they ran through their two songs, time and again. This was serious business: clearly the Guild adjudicators would not be as forgiving as those at an *eisteddfod*, but they soon returned to the fun and laughter when they adjourned for tea and biscuits. It was then that William and Ronan drew the two younger men into the conversation. One had been, I was told, a 'nationalist' when he was a little younger, but had seen the error of his ways. They were telling me that 'nationalism' (and, thereby, cultural politics routed through language revivals and the like) was not the way to maintaining a real sense of Manxness. That lay, rather, in the practice of the everyday, in gathering socially together and doing what they themselves continue to do – performing for each other, telling stories, reminiscing – despite the changes which have occurred around them. This is not to say that they reject attempts to keep the Gaelic language or other cultural traditions alive. It is rather to propose that for them at least, the 'tradition' that best exemplifies their identity is their desire to gather together and perform to themselves, for themselves.

Discussion

By bringing these four together in the same chapter, I am not arguing that every similarly situated Manx man or woman acts or feels this way. Indeed, as a later chapter will demonstrate, another Manxman with knowledge and experience of

¹² 'The Guild' is the more familiar name of the Island's annual Music and Drama Festival. For a more detailed discussion of this event and its importance see Faragher 1992 or Griffin 2001.

life on the Island before the finance sector wrought its changes has taken a quite different 'route' to his understanding of his Manxness. What I have attempted to demonstrate within this chapter is that an individual's 'route' through the present context can have 'roots' in the familiarity and security of a time which has passed, and that this can offer yet another mode of identification with what it means to be Manx in the present context.

'The modernization of work relations, history and nature detaches these from their traditional roots and transforms them into cultural productions and experiences. The same process is operating on 'everyday life' (MacCannell, 1976: 91). Although MacCannell is here introducing a discussion on the role of authenticity in the tourist's search for the 'real life' of others, I believe the observation provides a useful starting point to understanding what it is that Alice, William and like-minded contemporaries are experiencing in relation to their sense of what it means to be Manx. Elsewhere in the thesis we have heard from those who are seeking identity in culturally significant symbols. As Niall himself described, everyday life had become 'detached' from rooted practices which allowed the 'ol' fellahs' to narrate their own and others' place in the social network. For Niall and his young colleagues, the solution to this schismatic dilemma was to be found in a renewed or revived sense of Manxness which was founded in language, dance or music (that is, in MacCannell's 'cultural productions and experiences'). Another solution is, perhaps, to 'back stage' (Goffman, 1990 [1959], *passim*) the schism and practice identity as if the changes had not occurred.

I am not arguing that these Manx men and women are involved in some kind of resistance to the changes that have resulted from economic in-migration. They do express sympathy for the depth of feeling that has led to direct protest, but at the same time they aim to maintain the traditional acceptance of *comeovers* (for, as Alice says, go far enough back in any family's history, and you will find a *comeover*). They also have a limit to their 'inclusiveness', but that too is placed in the context of maintaining that all-important atmosphere of 'getting along' (cf. Cohen 1978, 1987). What they are playing with here, I would suggest, is a feeling of 'hanging on' to the Manx way of life which was relevant when closeness of community and interpersonal relations could still be managed.

William said 'we knew who we were'. One might conclude from this that he feels that 'we no longer know', but throughout the individual stories within this chapter each person demonstrates how they practice their identity in ways still 'rooted' in forms which are concretely social rather than ones that might be understood as abstractly cultural. And there is a quiet confidence in this practice. Doubts and uncertainties may still arise, but I would argue that a conclusion as easily to be drawn from William's words might be 'and in that body of knowledge and practice Manxness still inheres'. For Alice such knowledge and practice means maintaining the concept of egalitarianism (expressed, for her personally, through an interest in Labour politics and represented through the tale of her mother's experience of the incomers). For Sheila, it lies in active involvement with the community and in acceptance of all. And for William and Ronan, 'being Manx' means sharing in the sheer enjoyment of people gathering together to perform for each other (and thereby, to perform their sense of themselves). Perhaps those people who have again begun to attend the *eisteddfods* and *oie'll verveys* feel a similar sense of wishing to 'hang on' to this particular way of being Manx?

Postscript

As indicated above, I have heard it said that the generation represented here can often be dismissive of the importance of the Manx Gaelic language and other such symbols in maintaining a sense of Manxness. The implication is that they are happy to sit back and watch whilst 'Manx culture' slips into oblivion. Whether caused by such criticism or not, Alice expressed some 'confusion' in her feelings toward saying 'I'm Manx': a certain inferiority combined with pride. Yet as she said, when those incomers arrived back in the 1960s and 1970s, those native to the Island did begin to think more about what it meant to be 'Manx'. They played the vis-à-vis. I would like to bring this chapter to a close with the final few verses of that poem that William recited on that spellbinding evening. Whilst the words were written many decades before Alice and her contemporaries watched the changes in the Island taking shape, they do, I believe, express something of the pride, rooted security and quiet certitude that these four pragmatic Manxies have demonstrated.

I wonder if he deems the English men
 A higher type beyond his reach,
Imperial blood, by Heaven ordained with pen
 And sword the populous world to teach;
If awed he hears the tones as of an alien speech;

Or, older grown, suspects a braggart race,
 Ignores phlegmatic claim
Of privileged assumption, holding base
 Their technic skill and aim,
And all the prosperous fraud that binds their social frame.

Ah! Crude, undisciplined, when thou shalt know
 What good is in this England, still of joys
The chiefest count it thou was nurtured so
 That thou may'st keep the larger equipoise,
And stand outside these nations and their noise.

Chapter 3.5: Practiced Routes

This chapter contrasts the personal experiences of two people who today commit time and energy into the teaching – the handing on – of modes of cultural performance. In considering the routes that these individuals have taken to their personal involvement in music, dance and language the chapter will reprise many of the themes that have appeared in earlier chapters. More importantly, however, it will bring to the fore two stories which I believe are vital to the understanding of contemporary processes of Manx identity; that is, how does the *practice* of identity, when observed, imitated, received via family, friends or through the classroom, compare with the *ideology* of cultural politics as a tool in the process of identity creation and maintenance? Further, the chapter will ask how we might categorise those who involve themselves in this ‘sharing of practice’ – a sharing which is largely an extension of their own individual motivations – and consider whether this is indeed in any way different to the actions of those more overtly ‘political’ players introduced in Chapter 3.1.

In the contexts of cultural conflation such as described in this thesis, anthropologists have focused on key interest groups (ethnic associations), and on patrons or cultural brokers, with the work of Paine (1971, 1977) and Ingold (1976) coming immediately to mind in regard to the latter. Whilst the ‘association’ is often seen as ineffectual and inward-looking, the broker is presented as a self-interested, outward-looking individual who stands *out* from the crowd. Whilst unarguably of major importance, such analyses tend to ignore those quiet individuals who get on with the very personal task of practicing their culture and who, through such practice, influence others. Yet to label them as ‘practitioners’ is again to extract them from the rest of Manx society who likewise ‘practice’ their personal version of contemporary Manxness. As the

attendees of the *eisteddfods* in Chapter 2.2 or the office workers in Chapter 3.2. clearly demonstrated, it is not necessary to strive towards an explicit sense of what constitutes a contemporary Manx identity in order to practice that identity. Indeed, that very paradox lies at the very heart of this thesis. The challenge for this chapter is therefore to hear Cara and John's stories, understand their role as cultural carriers whilst retaining a sense of their being 'one of the crowd', and to consider how such a role might be anthropologically understood.

The first, Cara, leads a Manx Gaelic choir and is a committee member of *Yn Chruinnaght*, but gains the greatest satisfaction from having encouraged her own children to learn and make their own the traditional tunes and dances, which they now play on electric fiddles in a style which fuses Celtic tradition with contemporary rock music. Cara's own influences lay with her childhood neighbours, who from the time she was a young child included her in their family and introduced her to what she now terms 'the scene', a world of Manx music and dance and the charismatic Mona Douglas (a woman who really did 'stand out from the crowd'). The second, John, teaches the Manx Gaelic language to people with a wide range of abilities. For John, who came to his 'heritage' alone and later in life, the key influences have been those Manxmen who determined to learn the Manx Gaelic language at the feet of the last native speakers. Neither of these contributors takes an overtly 'political' stance, even if their efforts indirectly are used by others to support the aims of Manx cultural politics. Both have a passion for – to use Cara's words – 'our tradition' because 'this is what we do.'

Cara

I first met Cara when I joined the Manx Gaelic choir she leads. My own motivation for joining this choir was to experience 'performing', the importance of which has, I hope, been made clear in earlier chapters. I was aware that the choir performed at the annual inter-Celtic festival, *Yn Chruinnaght*, and also at various social events around the Island and that, of the two Manx Gaelic choirs on the Island, and on a point of personal consideration, Cara's *Cliogaree Twooie* was the one that required minimal expertise in both language and musical skills.

It was thus my obvious choice, and I was pleased to receive a positive response when I first telephoned Cara to ask if I might join. I already knew several of the members from the Friday and Saturday evening ‘sessions’, and very quickly settled into the weekly routine of Monday evening choir practice (and the visits to the pub afterwards, where we would often find other local musicians and finish the evening with a sing-song).

Where I was interested in the role of performance in the processes of identity creation and maintenance, it appeared that Cara’s personal motivation was in simple performance rather than with any intentional performative affect. Despite her organisational involvement in *Yn Chruinnaght* and, as will be seen from her story, her almost life-long engagement with people and activities which stand at the forefront of the maintenance of Manx cultural tradition (and with those who have ‘politicised’ that cultural tradition), there is little or no overt political motivation in Cara’s involvement in these various activities; no explicit engagement with the affective potential of cultural performance¹ (Parkin 1996: *passim*). Rather, her motivation is expressed in terms of personal enjoyment. ‘The scene’, as she terms it, is made up of the activities and the people that provide for her a fulfilling social network.

That said, something other than personal enjoyment does come into the picture when she begins to talk about passing her skills on to her children. From our conversations it became clear that the children have been encouraged, but often also cajoled, into keeping up with their musical studies. Having received minimal encouragement from her own parents but having neighbours who introduced her to ‘the scene’, she perhaps is aware of how close she came to missing out on this rich vein of social and cultural experience. Consequently, she is determined that her children should be equipped with the cultural tools to make their own informed choice.

Some of the informants whose stories have thus far formed the basis of this thesis have legitimised their involvement with their particular ‘cause’ by way of an almost revelatory moment or experience. In contrast, for Cara it was not one moment but a slow ‘enculturation’ into a personally satisfying social

¹ I draw on Parkin’s notion of the ‘affective’ here to stress that Cara’s involvement is not consciously intended to make others, in turn, consciously aware of, and emotionally engaged with, Manx ‘cultural politics’.

network that placed her on her personal route to involvement in cultural performance. Due to her mother's illness, Cara spent much of her childhood with her neighbours. They were members of a Manx cultural group, *Ellynyn Ny Gael*,² and were, and still remain, supporters of Manx cultural tradition and language. Indeed, the father of the family is a fluent speaker of the Manx Gaelic language. The families had a long association, Cara's own father having spent his childhood as school friend to these now 'stand-in' parents: 'I was always part of their family,' Cara says, and as part of this family she was introduced to the formidable Mona Douglas. Under the auspices of her youth organisation *Aeclagh Vannin*, for twenty or more years Miss Mona Douglas taught Manx children to sing Manx songs, dance traditional reels and jigs, perform plays in the Manx language or dialect, and generally receive the cultural education which she saw as missing in the schools and homes. Cara became one of Mona's young protégés.

Cara is an exemplar of Mona Douglas' success, which is further evidenced by the number of former *Aeclagh Vannin* (meaning 'Youth of Mann') members who form the backbone of the various groups and committees which today organise cultural events or work at keeping Manx cultural traditions alive. In recalling her early encounters with 'Miss Douglas', Cara tells the story of how she, too, has come to dedicate a large part of her life to Manx language, song and dance.

'I can't remember how old I was when I met Mona. Ten, thereabouts. Ten, eleven, I can't actually remember. Our neighbours brought me down to it, and she used to do singing and dancing with us, and Mona was Mona. She was the fierce Mona in the corner back in them days. She was only a little woman, about five foot nothing, y'know. There was very little of her, really, in height and size, but she was big in other ways, and powerful...'

Cara's reminiscences of those days are strikingly similar to those of the neighbour's own daughter Catreena, with whom Cara spent those early years. In a tribute given to Mona Douglas in 1988, Catreena recounts those weekly visits

² *Ellynyn Ny Gael* was first formed in the 1950s, with the aim of promoting Manx and Celtic arts, and was the forerunner of other organisations, such as that which revived *Yn Chruinnaght*.

to the rickety hall where *Aeglagh Vannin* met: ‘with me in this damp setting were all sorts of children: raggy, thin children with runny noses; bonny children who learned elocution; older boys, with whom Mona frequently did battle, and yet they returned; and girls, girls with sisters, girls with friends, girls galore who giggled as they danced’ (Bazin 1998: 124).

The indomitable Mona Douglas was destined to appear somewhere in this thesis.³ Born at the close of the nineteenth century, Mona was herself a beneficiary of the work that had been done that small group of middle-class cultural enthusiasts that had resulted in the birth of the Manx Language Society.⁴ She was strongly influenced by the work of Sophia Morrison, who had been one of its founding members, and at age nineteen Mona Douglas became the Society’s Secretary and later founder and editor of the journal *Mannin*, which became a focus for the work of Manx writers and artists. It might be said, then, that Mona Douglas continued Sophia Morrison’s⁵ earlier work. She became involved in various cultural organisations and events, supporting the Manx Gaelic language, and Manx music and dance. She wrote numerous articles, novels and poetry, all of which were aimed at keeping Manx cultural traditions at the forefront of the minds of everyone on the Island and further afield. She also recognised the importance of future generations in the maintenance of those traditions. Fenella Bazin takes up the story:

³ Although she died in 1987, Mona Douglas is still a significant ‘presence’ at cultural events. A controversial figure at times (it was rumoured that she had contact with German National Socialist party officials during the 1930s, at a time when they were interested in Celtic ‘nationalist’ organisations that might oppose the British government) she nevertheless is held in high regard and affection by those she nurtured culturally. She caused a further ripple of controversy among local Nationalists when she accepted a MBE for her services to Manx culture in 1982.

⁴ Influenced by the wider ‘Celtic’ revival and its associated search for a cultural identity, and a general interest in ‘folk’ culture, a small group of Manx men and women began to collect tunes and tales. W. H. Gill published his ‘Manx National Songbook’ in 1896, having made Dr. John Clague’s collection of local folk songs more acceptable for Victorian parlour taste, and it was these songs that Mona Douglas first heard and which kindled her interest in the Manx language and cultural tradition.

⁵ Morrison, along with Manx scholars such as A. W. Moore and J. J. Kneen, had thrown herself into that late-nineteenth century Celtic revival and along with their involvement in Pan-Celtic organisations made the collections of Manx tales, music and songs, the Manx language and the Anglo-Manx dialect which today provide so much of the material for the current ‘resurgence’ of interest in ‘things Manx’. For a detailed exposition of Morrison’s life and work, see B. Maddrell’s unpublished Ph.D. thesis (2002).

Her role I think, really, is that of the great creative traditional musician. Not just copying what other people have done and reproducing it without thinking [b]ut then she takes these ideas and she develops them. She not only develops them in her own singing but she gets other people to do things, and of course this was the great genius of Mona, was her role as a catalyst. She would haul the most unlikely people in and say 'right, you're going to dance, you're going to sing, you're going to do this in a concert next week', and small children would be drawn in. (transcribed from Carswell, *The Music of Mann*)

Interestingly, Cara was to follow in Mona's own footsteps by becoming her assistant secretary when she was sixteen, having spent the earlier years performing in Mona's plays, or singing at the annual festival of music and drama, affectionately known locally as 'the Guild'. However, by the time she was eighteen, other calls were being made on Cara's time. Catreena, her peer and erstwhile neighbour and companion, had gone off to university. *Aeglagh Vannin* had disbanded, and Cara too found other interests. Engaging in 'traditional' activities was not, and is not, 'trendy', and so she 'vanished for a couple of years, and was off the scene just to go out nightclubbing, and as you do when you get to eighteen and that.' She then married, but all this while stayed in touch with Mona, who both attended her wedding and took to visiting when Cara's first children were born. Later the roles were reversed, and Cara tells of how she would take the boys to Mona's cottage up in the hills behind Ramsey: 'the boys started toddling around [...] I used to go up to Mona's house once a month in the winter, but in the summer, more once a month, and bring the boys up and used to have tea with her. Mona and I'd have a sandwich and a cup of tea, and the boys'd always have cake and milk, and a piece of jam and bread, and she'd always talk to them, and she's get them to say 'good morning' or 'good afternoon' in Manx.'

This return into Mona's personal life was also accompanied by a gradual return to music and dance: 'I'd spotted things that were on and gone to see them, but not involved myself in them, y'know, because, well, my husband Paul wasn't into it really, y'know. I wasn't lucky enough to find someone that was into it. I

mean, it disappointed Mona that I was marrying an Englishman.⁶ Then I started going back again. I don't know how. Oh, it was through Catreena actually. I started doing *Cruinnaght* stuff. Catreena and I had this little group of sorts, and we just got a couple of songs together and tried a couple of parts out, and I played the guitar and I think Catreena did the whistle, and someone actually picked the chord out. She used to have a little harp that she used to play, and we started going back to *Cruinnaght*, and I went back to it again. I never sort of left it as such, but there's a space where you don't go for a year or two, and then you go back again.'

And so, for a period of approximately two years, Cara had left 'the scene', and had experienced the 'night life' of the Island's capital. She tells other stories of 'walk arounds' in Laxey, moving from pub to pub, and of adventures driving around the Island in the dark, along unmarked lanes, in the knowledge that one can never get truly lost. But she had remained somehow in touch with the important people of that 'scene', and was able to go and watch others performing, probably those with whom she had danced and performed as part of the youth group. The call to return to performing came again through her childhood neighbour, Catreena, and together they put together a small, accompanied singing group under the guise of which they could enter the recently revived *Yn Chruinnaght*.

Yn Chruinnaght is perhaps Mona Douglas' most tangible legacy. The first *Cruinnaghts* had been instituted in the 1920s, and it was perhaps from the memory of those earlier 'gatherings' that Mona first got her idea to bring together the best performers of Manx song and dance for a festival in Ramsey in 1978. For two or three days, people performed and competed in classes for music and dance, met in neighbouring pubs for informal sessions and sing-songs, and enjoyed a forum through which they could promote the rich tradition of the Island. There was an element of pageantry about it, which still remains despite the growth of the festival today to a week-long inter-Celtic feast of visiting dance groups, professional off-Island musicians and local talent. Cara believes Mona would have been proud to see the success of her 'gathering' today.

⁶ This should be read in the context of Mona's apparent perspective on Manx culture and identity. Her intense passion for both, and her writings, might lead such as my informant here to believe that any lack of Manx 'purity' would place another nail in the cultural coffin.

The competitive element remains too. These are restricted to local entries – the visiting groups confine their activities to showcasing their cultural contributions – and it was into the competitions that Cara first entered, with Catreena and the rest of her small group. Since then, Cara has entered *Yn Chruinnaght* classes as a soloist, and as a member of larger singing groups, and as the conductor of the small Manx Gaelic choir I had joined. Often using music arranged by herself, or by her son, the choir also gives small concerts around the Island during the spring months or provides the entertainment at local ‘Manx tays’. The focus and culmination of the year’s practice is, however, the *Cruinnaght* competition, during which abilities are tested against other local choirs. Somewhat fortuitously, in my fieldwork/performing year the Island’s better Manx Gaelic choir had commitments elsewhere, and we won our class – a class in which we were the only entry! The choir’s name, *Cliogaree Twooie*, meaning ‘croakers of the north’, is well chosen.

If the name fits, the ability to laugh at the group’s ‘limitations’ is also testament to its spirit. Its purpose is enjoyment, and to provide an opportunity to interested women⁷ to perform Manx songs – many of which will be somewhat familiar to them from school days or various events – without ever needing to take it too seriously. Cara may get somewhat agitated when sections of the choir persist in singing out of tune, but her (mostly) patient guidance opens up new avenues for individuals to explore should they wish. For one woman it offered a simple but enjoyable way to express her strong identity as Manx (in case anyone should assume she was equally English through her mother). Another very shy member had gone on to compete as a soloist in Island eisteddfods, yet another younger woman had found in it a supportive environment within which to explore her Manx heritage (in the face of disinterest from her Manx-born parents) and through it at least one anthropologist became better equipped to join in with the singing at pub sessions.

That Cara’s involvement in maintaining Manx music and dance is prodigious is clear. In addition to leading the choir, organising concerts, attending weekly dance practices with a Manx dance group, arranging music,

⁷ The choir is, in the main, a female-voice choir, although Cara’s sons and other choir members’ husbands often swell the ranks.

socialising at music sessions, in recent years she has also become a member of the *Yn Chruinnaght*'s organising committee. Here her concern is to continue Mona's vision of what the festival should be. 'A few years ago now I said, so, y'know, it's supposed to be a Manx festival, I said, "Where's all the Manx stuff?" Only Mona had gone by this stage, 'cause she wouldn't have allowed that. She'd have had to have had something Manx in it.' The reason, she said, was economic. Having paid for the invited guests from the other Celtic nations, it was necessary to showcase them at the expense of the Manx content. But, she added, 'in my thinking, well I think it should be more on the local mobs, promoting their own culture and language to these people who are coming over to do a little bit of theirs.'

If she voices opinions here, and in committee, few others would be aware of her feelings. For most, Cara is one of those who simply does 'Manx stuff', for her own and others' enjoyment. Yet in her encouragement of her own children's involvement, her convictions on how and why cultural knowledge should be passed on come to the fore. She asserts that they need firm encouragement, but also an introduction to all aspects of playing and performing from their earliest years. Cara introduced the two boys to dancing when they were two and three years old, and has since sat with them whilst they practiced their musical talents on various musical instruments. When asked if they have ever objected, she replied that they were too young to object, and were 'brought into it at a very young age, and kept at it, y'know. You've got to, well, push isn't the right word, it's not push, firmly encourage sometimes. There'd be moments, "I'm not doing that", y'know, but if they really enjoy it, and I think, as well, if you look at the *ceilidhs* and the things that we go to, it's adults and children. It's not something that adults do that children know nothing about. It's a mixed thing, so you feel quite at home with it all, and they feel quite at home with the adults, y'know.'

The boys continue to be involved in performing, making music, and in the enjoyment of the social aspects of the Manx cultural tradition. One son has enjoyed success with a band of fellow school friends, who between them have taken the traditional tunes and have adapted them to be played on modern, electronic instruments, which has led to the production of a CD of their music and an invitation to play at the important annual inter-Celtic festival in Lorient. Meanwhile, they still turn out, when requested, with acoustic instruments in

hand, to play at a more gentle level at dinners or for the dance groups. The boys and their friends will also sing with the choir, or dance, seemingly able to turn their hands to anything that is culturally required of them.

The roots of the Manx language are also in place. They are not fluent speakers, but as those early experiences with Mona reveal, they have had an awareness of the language from their earliest days, and use it constantly in the songs they sing. Cara, too, has a long relationship with the language, perhaps longer than that of her relationship with music and dance. She tells of how she first took herself off to Manx Gaelic classes at the age of eight, when they were offered as an after-school option at her village school:⁸ ‘I trotted along off my own back to Manx classes when I was eight at school. A man who was then teaching at Onchan school thought, well, I’ll teach them Manx, so he said after school, like, at 4 o’clock. So, off I trot, y’know, “oh, I’ll go to this,” and the class was packed out. You should have seen it, you couldn’t move in the class. By a couple of months later there was probably six of us sitting there, y’know, but there was a very, very keen interest in the very beginning stages. And I trotted home, and my Mum said, “where’ve you been?” “I’ve been to Manx classes,” and said something like “*moghrey mie*”⁹ to her or something that we’d learnt that day, and she started rabbiting all these words back to me, and I gave her a look and said “what’s that?” She said, “it’s Irish.” She went on to speak a little bit more, and on odd occasions she’d speak it to me, but that was it, she never used it. And I thought, god, if she’d have spoke it then to me, like a lot of people do now to their kids, there’s quite a possibility that I’d have picked it up, y’know.’

Interim Thoughts

In the introduction to this chapter I offered these two stories of Cara and John as complementary examples of the ‘practice’ of identity, but drew attention to the contrasts in their ‘coming to’ this practice. If asked to define their identity, John and Cara might answer much as the anthropologist does, who when asked what anthropology is, replies ‘it’s what anthropologists do’ (Fabian 1991: Preface, ix).

⁸ Offered, interestingly, by that same teacher who had first inspired Jamys (the Nationalist) to become interested in the native tongue.

⁹ Meaning ‘good morning’.

Manxness, for them, is what *they* do. It is not rooted in blood and soil, but rather is in the way the live their lives. Like many people who interact socially with Cara, I had assumed that she was thoroughly 'Manx' by birth. Perhaps that is why I missed a key revelation during the interview. As I was transcribing the taped interview with her, I heard the following words:

I mean, it disappointed Mona that I was marrying an Englishman...you can say that, but I thought, well, there you go, I daren't tell her I wasn't actually born here, but there you go. In fact none of us is Manx! My Dad and grandparents and my mother's Irish, but you can't help where you're born. But I still say I'm Manx if anyone says "oh, were you born here"? I always tell 'em yes, if that comes out, y'know, yes, I was born here. So I never had the heart to tell her that actually. Whether she ever knew, I don't know. But I don't think it would matter, because I remember talking to somebody else once about it, and they said "bah, that's nothing to do with it, you're Manx," y'know, and that was it. They were convinced I was. It didn't matter where I was born.

It is a somewhat embarrassing admission to make, that the 'observant' anthropologist should miss such an interesting piece of information during a conversation. But I would argue that it reveals more than just Cara's origins. I had spent some considerable time in Cara's company. We had gossiped during journeys to and from choir practice in her car, and I had withered under her piercing stare when getting a note wrong in the middle of a concert. She had borrowed my bodhrun during a Friday night session and we had talked about playing music with friends in these sessions, and we had shared time together in a Ramsey pub, drinking with friends and partaking in a 'sing-song'. Not once during these interactions had it occurred to me that she was not 'Manx'.

From all her interactions with others, too, there seemed to be an understanding of shared 'history'; of a deep and long acquaintance with the people, places and ways of being and belonging that for Cara override any consideration of where she was born, or where her own family's origins were. It was Cara that had chided me at the Tynwald Fair, when I had been reluctant to partake of her picnic because I had nothing to contribute: 'we share things here,' she had said. 'You should know that. If you want something, have something'.

Yet Cara herself seems to have had an element of doubt about the importance of origin at one stage, and recounts how she gained the ‘approval’ of someone she trusted to confirm her ‘Manxness’, but still could not bear to reveal to Mona that she was not of Manx origin. There was no overtly stated ‘ideology’ of essential ‘Manxness’ in Mona Douglas’ work, and there is no attempt to base social or cultural identity in such ideology today. Many of the contributors to this text take pains to stress the ‘inclusivity’ – the ready acceptance of incomers – of Manx social and cultural life, now and in the past. Yet throughout Douglas’ work, there was always a thread of ‘spiritual connection’ to place available only to those with a hereditary ‘title’. In a piece published in 1941, she wrote that ‘through this age-long tumult that would have been the death-struggles of a less tenacious race, the Manx people have retained to a very large degree their independence and their traditions’ (cited in Bazin 1998: 52). In her novel, *Rallying Song*, published in 1981, she tells the story of a young American-born girl who revisits her ancestral home and makes that ‘spiritual connection’, being told that ‘surely you must realise now through your dreams that are more than dreams that your innermost self, the spirit that is essentially you, goes away back through the long history of your race and is not confined to the life [you] are living now’ (Douglas 1981: 239).

Whilst consideration should be taken of the times in which the above was written and therefore the language used (such as ‘race’), ‘the Manx’ is presented as an unproblematic term, and one deeply ‘rooted’. In the face of such ideological rhetoric from a powerful character in Manx cultural life, it is not surprising that Cara felt the need to hide her own, different ‘roots’. Yet in her ‘practice’ of ‘similarity’ in everyday social interaction and cultural expression, she illustrates what Barth wanted us to focus our attentions on – to look at ‘what people do’ (Jenkins 1996: 93). That is, in choosing to be ‘similar’ in local practice, but ‘different’ to external practices, she self-identified and performed herself as ‘Manx’.

For John, whose story now follows, ‘similarity’ (or sameness) and ‘difference’ as aspects of social and cultural life were brought starkly into focus when he first set foot on ‘Other’ soil. Since returning to his own native soil and experiencing the influx of ‘New Residents’, he has been continually faced with ‘the Other’ and has developed his own, personal way of dealing with the tensions

this creates for him. Having once, in the 1970s, been involved in cultural politics and its associated ideologies of equitable rights for those born and educated on the Island, he now places faith – albeit a rather pessimistic faith – in cultural ‘practice’. In many ways, John is not unlike those ‘nationalists’ of Chapter 3.1, except that today he takes no part in explicitly political debate. The manner in which he distances himself from cultural politics may have its own roots in the ‘two camps’ approach to nationalism that he initially encountered, and so what he does today is hand on the language that he loves, and offer stories of interaction with ‘the Other’ as he does so. That there is an ultimate paradox in this practice – that it risks creating a cultural identity that does not ‘fit’ his own conception of Manxness – as will be shown, makes his story all the more important.

John

For John, it is the language that has become, to use his own words, ‘the be-all and the end-all of my Manxness’. Unlike Cara, though, John did not have culturally aware ‘parents’ to introduce him to the Manx language, music and dance at an early age, and did not discover his ‘roots’ in language until he was an adult. Born to a Manx mother and English father, he joined the British Army at the age of seventeen, and says he had known nothing until then of the Manx being ‘different’ to those ‘across’. He had been taught a traditional song or two in Manx Gaelic when at school, which he had learned parrot-fashion, but did not connect these with the existence of an indigenous language and identity. It was in travelling to England for the first time and then in meeting his army colleagues, drawn from all over the British Isles, that he first realised that the island of his birth was ‘different’.

In his inimitable style John related the significance of this ‘culture shock’ – a Barthian raising of boundaries between his own socio-cultural milieu and this ‘other’ world – by telling the tale of arrival in Liverpool. ‘I’ll tell you how innocent I was. I got off the boat in Liverpool, 17 years of age, and I must have stood for ten minutes looking at traffic lights because I hadn’t got a bloody clue what they were. And that is the god’s honest truth. I came up from the boat, up past the Liver Buildings, stood there, and here’s these bloody traffic lights going

green, red. I'd never seen 'em. We hadn't got them here, I didn't know what they were, and I must have looked a sight standing there, gobsmacked'.

When he joined the army in the early 1960s he left an Island with an ailing economy. The tourist industry, which before the Second World War had kept the Island's guesthouses and hotels full, had all but died out. The farming and fishing industries had also declined, and with little or no local industry to provide employment, the 1950s and early 1960s had seen young Manx men, including his elder brother, leave the Island for seasonal work in the sugar beet fields of East Anglia. He returned some years later to a changing scene. During his absence the Manx government had instituted its 'New Residents Policy', which had encouraged wealthy retirees to move to the Island to take advantage of rates of taxation much lower than those of the UK. Taking a job in a local business, John began to witness at first-hand how these *comeovers*, many of who were believed to be retired colonial administrators, treated the Manx people. 'They would push in, y'see', he explains, 'and they'd be snapping their fingers, and the one thing that we didn't like was to be called "boy".' John said that thankfully for those like himself who lived in the south of the Island, most of these incomers settled in and around Maughold in the north-east – to the extent it became known as 'Little Kenya' – but it is clear that there was an atmosphere of resentment. However, the Island-born found ways to exact sweet revenge. The following tale was told to my fellow students and I during a Manx Gaelic class. I remind the reader that John was our tutor.

This old biddy came in, and she would only ever let the boss, serve her, y'see. So, anyway, she came in, straight up to the counter, and said [*he here affects an upper-class accent, his nose in the air*] 'You there!' So Charlie sort of looks. He had his back to her at the time. 'You there!' So Charlie turns round, he says 'Yes'. She said, 'Where, where's Mr Quayle?' So he said, 'Well, he's not here, he's not here at the moment', he said, 'but will I do?' She said, 'No, no, no, I'll wait.' So she goes over in the corner, and she sat on a chair, y'see, and Charlie just kept on working, didn't say anything, so she, she gets up and says, 'Will Mr Quayle be long?' So Charlie says, glancing over at the calendar, 'Aye, about ten days. He's in Tenerife at the moment.'

John often regaled his students with these amusing but significant tales. He told us how the boss feigned ignorance when he asked another customer how to spell the ‘hyphen’ when Mrs Smith-Jones was dictating her name, or how the locals nicknamed the incomers *mwannal liouyr*, or long-necks, because of the way they stretched their necks when greeting each other. While making us laugh he gave us a sense of the atmosphere of resistance that had persisted in the early 1970s, and a context for the story of how he had noticed the piece in the newspaper which acted as a catalyst for his own involvement in cultural matters. ‘I remember reading in the paper about these guys who had been thrown out of a pub¹⁰ for speaking Manx, and I thought to myself, I didn’t even know we had a language. Y’see, here I am, 24 years of age, and I don’t even know we’d got a language! [...] So I thought to myself, well, I’d like to find out more about this language, and about a year or so after this, 1968, 1969, I read in the paper again that they were starting Manx lessons up at the college of further education, so I thought, aye, right, this is for me, so when I went to sign on it was full, the course was full, they were taking no more.’

He had to wait until the following year, but has never looked back. He counts himself fortunate, however, to have soon found his own personal mentor in a fluent speaker who could trace his own language skills back to the last native speakers. John’s skills increased immeasurably under his mentor’s tutelage, but John also got a flavour at this time of the different ends to which the language could be mobilised. The unrest of the late 1980s has already been described in earlier chapters. A similar, and seemingly more serious, period of direct action characterised the early 1970s. Under the name of *Fo Halloo*, which means ‘underground’, a group of Manx men and women protested at the changes the recent ‘influx’ of wealthy retirees was having on Manx society, with leaflets, songs and arson as the weapons of those frustrated at seeing their Island-born contemporaries priced out of the housing market and increasingly excluded from new job opportunities within the growing financial sector. Although it is impossible to get anyone on the Island to reveal who was involved in this action,

¹⁰ This tale has become something of an ‘urban myth’. I was told it by several different people, and the story remained significantly similar at each telling. The incident took place at The White House in Peel, which today happily hosts those regular Friday evening ‘sessions’ we visited in a previous chapter.

John told me of '*Yn Troor Tromode*' – the Tromode Trio – who were responsible for the burnings around a suburb of Douglas also popular with incomers, Tromode. The tale has striking similarities with the protests of the late 1980s described in earlier chapters.

It should not be surprising, then, that there was a major resurgence of interest in the Manx Gaelic language amongst younger Manx people at that difficult time, and that it became a political 'badge' for some. John describes 'two camps' within the Manx Gaelic movement; one which sought to utilise the language as a symbol of exclusion, and the other, characterised by those older speakers like John's mentor, who sought to include and invite in all those who demonstrated an interest in the language and all that it symbolised. Where John's own loyalties lay at this time is perhaps indicated in his tying of these two 'camps' to attitudes to nationalism; 'there were two sort of distinct camps within the Gaelic movement. There were those that were out and out nationalists, and those that were nationalist in what I would say is the true sense of the word; you were for your own nation. They [that is, the 'out and out nationalists'] didn't seem to want to speak, unless you could sort of keep going with them they didn't seem to want to help, but then you've got the older ones, they were all for 'come on, you must learn it', y'see.'

This assessment of the situation, and his own relationship with the events of the time, take on a further dimension, however, when considering a later statement he made to me during our discussion. We were talking about the work he now does as a teacher of the Manx Gaelic language, and the enjoyment he gains from this involvement with new learners of the language. 'I would like to think, if I could give somebody half the enjoyment that I've had out of it, then it's a nice thing. I mean, I don't do it for any political motive. I think maybe in the beginning I might have done [...] but at the same time I was enjoying my language, so maybe that excuses it. No, I just enjoy it. But I, I can't see any solution. I, I've never really sat down and thought about it, y'know, as an exercise, "What could we do to save the language?" because I think at the back of my mind I believe there's nothing we can do to save the language. It's up to the people themselves. I mean, you can take horse to water, but by dang, you can't make it drink! I mean, you can push all the Manx you want on the, you can create a Manx television, you can create Manx, your papers can be a 100%

Manx, you can do what you want, you can, y’know, you can bombard the people with it every hour of every day, but, you ain’t going to make them interested in it.’

There are several elements to be drawn from John’s words above. I knew him as my tutor in Manx Gaelic, as a softly spoken man, as one passionate about the Manx Gaelic and as having a reputation for knowing an immense amount about the language. Over the months I discovered that he works ‘in the background’ on language issues, advising on translations and assisting with the transcription of recordings of native speakers.¹¹ He ‘practices’ his Manx Gaelic, and his Manxness, quietly, and behaves towards newcomers to the language in the same manner as his mentor – with quiet, inclusive encouragement. Once a month he and a few fellow Manx speakers (including his now elderly mentor) meet in a pub in Castletown for an *Oie Gaelgagh* – an evening of Manx – where all conversation takes place in the Island’s ancient tongue. I would often attend these meetings, and was made to feel very welcome. John would spend some part of what to him was precious time, sitting next to me and whispering in my ear translations of the more difficult parts of the conversation. For me, this was emblematic of his approach to his cultural involvement.

His assertion that there is no ‘political’ motive behind his current interest in the language therefore sat comfortably with my own knowledge of him. He teaches each week at *Thie ny Gaelgey* in St. John’s, but ensures that the classes finish in late May so he is free to indulge in his other passion, fishing. He studies the language, but does so for private purposes or so he can discuss the finer points of grammar and the like with other experienced Manx speakers. He attends the occasional lecture on matters cultural, but is unlikely to be seen at ceilidhs or other cultural events. His own children have no interest in the Manx

¹¹ During the 1930s, one Dr Karl Marstrander was commissioned by the Irish Language Commission to travel around the Island and record those native speakers he could find. The collection has recently been transferred to CD-ROM, and is being transcribed by the Island’s current fluent speakers. The style and manner of speech differs from the more ‘standardised’ manner now being learnt in classrooms, and is therefore difficult to understand. The experience John has gained by having a language mentor who was closer to those native speakers – learnt his Manx from them – is important to the transcription process. However, this ‘preservation’ and subsequent archiving of the material does nothing to alleviate John’s fears for the language. It may, indeed, serve to fuel them.

language or wider cultural issues, and he has not tried to transmit such interest to them. His love of the language, as he asserts in the opening sentence of this section, relates to *his* Manxness alone.

The private nature of his relationship to his Manxness is further highlighted by his attitude to what he sees as intrusions into this privacy. During one Manx Gaelic evening class we were joined by the Manx Language Development Officer, who was visiting various classes around the Island in order to distribute and explain the purpose behind a questionnaire he had designed. He was hoping to gather statistical information about why people were learning the language, their past knowledge of it and their opinions on its future. Also contained within the questionnaire were questions which asked about people's 'identity': whether they considered themselves 'Manx, not British', or 'More British than Manx', and questions which touched on political beliefs and affiliations. John refused to participate. Despite the ultimate objective of gaining further government backing for language initiatives, he would not compromise on his principle of keeping his politics – cultural or otherwise – private.

Yet his involvement in language issues appears once to have been politically motivated. He was deeply affected by the atmosphere at that time: he might tell the tales of retribution with humour, but it is a humour tinged with long-held bitterness and resentment. His separation of the Gaelic movement into two distinct 'camps' might also be read as symbolic of his own change of approach over the years: the initial political motivation, fuelled by the strained atmosphere of the 1970s, and his later 'softer', inclusive approach. But in his assertion that nothing can be done to save the language and, therefore, 'Manxness', another 'political' version is perhaps revealed. Keeping his identity 'private' allows him to perform his Manxness as an individual, unchanged and unchangeable. To make 'a new Manx identity', one that is inclusive, risks changing it into something even further removed from John's personal understanding of it. He has retreated behind his own, personal cultural border that is not open to Barthian negotiation.

Discussion

The aim of this chapter was to introduce the contrasting stories of two individuals who through their personally motivated ‘practice’ of their Manxness stimulate and encourage others to (re)discover a cultural heritage, and to use those stories to complete the picture of contemporary processes of Manx identity which this section of the thesis has aimed to present. Stories presented in earlier chapters have demonstrated how the political machinery, economic reality and cultural responses have worked overtly to fuel a very public discourse on the changing face of ‘the Manx way of life’. Although equally personally motivated, those earlier stories focused on actors who had made the decision to ‘go public’ with their opinions. In contrast, this chapter has presented stories in which the players have kept their practice largely private.

I say ‘*largely private*’, because a social actor cannot avoid participating in the creative dialogic of culture. In their various activities, the informants at the centre of this chapter are very much part of the debate about what has happened/is happening to the ‘Manx way of life’. Yet, I would argue that Cara and John (who here act as representatives of the many others who make similar contributions) it is the practice of *their* Manxness that demonstrates the possibility of doing something proactive toward the retention of symbolic cultural markers without having to take an overtly political stance. But the question raised in the introduction was, how might we understand this ‘role’ anthropologically?

In contexts of cultural confrontation, anthropologists often focus attention on groups or individuals – cultural associations or cultural ‘brokers’ – who for some reason ‘stand out from the crowd’. It might be argued that by selecting these two informants I have demonstrated how, for me and for those others who may have been inspired by them, John and Cara do indeed ‘stand out’. To an extent that is true, but I came across them by placing myself in the same orbit as them. Unlike the cultural broker described by Ingold (1976) who placed himself in a very public (and political) position between cultures, neither John nor Cara are public figures. If not self-interested brokers, then to consider them as ‘gatekeepers’ might have some value in understanding their role as disseminators of cultural knowledge. I am uncomfortable with the term, however, because it

implies some element of control on the part of the gatekeeper over who enters. As John described in relation to those Manx Gaelic speakers who were ‘nationalist in the true sense’, both John and Cara take an inclusive approach to their cultural heritage. For them, music, dance or language are not the building blocks of a wall of Manx ‘essence’ which requires a guardian at its gate to check eligibility of access, but rather are activities which are open to all who express an interest. Having been given the opportunity to partake of this rich heritage themselves, they take pleasure in sharing what for them is, simply, a personally rewarding experience.

They are, undoubtedly, cultural enthusiasts. They are equally ‘promoters’, emblematisers, or any number of synonymous terms that one might introduce, but all such labels would achieve what I set out to avoid in this chapter; that is, the categorisation of people into a role and thereby the ‘loss’ of opportunity to take account of the influence of those who simply are involved in ‘Manx things’ because it satisfies some personal interest, and who through that interest and involvement contribute to the cultural dialogic. According to Anthony Cohen, a ‘personal nationalism expresses the idea that people refract their identities as ‘nationals’ through their own selfhood’ (2000: 150). In other words, ‘if I identify myself to myself as Manx, the Manxness to which I refer is a personal construct of experience and values.¹² It may or may not be like other people’s Manxness, but is most unlikely to be identical to theirs’ (ibid.). That the two individuals in this chapter have personal constructs of their Manxness should now be clear. That they share these constructs with others in interaction – whether that be with singers in the choir, with their children, or with their students in a Manx Gaelic class – simply means that their personal view enters into a more particularly focused domain of cultural debate. As such, it is not private, but neither is it wholly public, in the way that those ‘nationalists’ of Chapter 3.1. might ‘publicise’ their group constructs of Manxness. Not brokers then, nor cultural politicians, nor patrons or gatekeepers. Rather, I would think of them as involved in a ‘commensality of cultural knowledge’, in which they take – in simple respect of a certain ‘seniority of knowledge’ – a guiding, but not a categorising, role.

¹² I have here, with due apology to the author, substituted Manx/Manxness for Scottish/Scottishness.

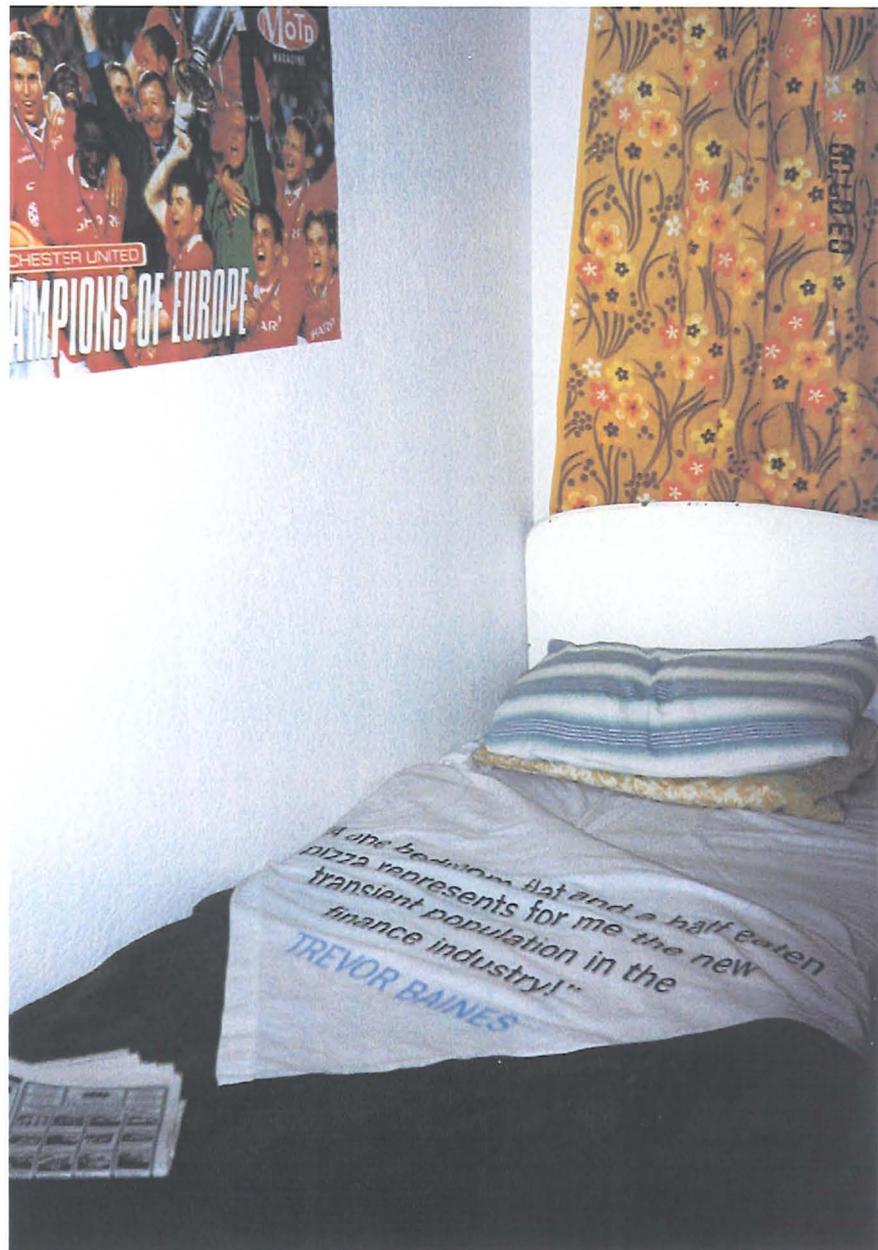


Figure 11 : Also from the “ Right Here, Right Now ” exhibition, this display comments on the finance industry’s often transient workforce.

Photograph : Sue Lewis.

Chapter 3.6: Routes End

One exhibit in the Manx Museum's Millennium exhibition 'Right Here, Right Now' consisted of a small 'bed-sit' type room, the bed unmade with an empty take-away pizza box lying on the floor beside it. The installation illustrated the thoughts of a *stayover* entrepreneur, someone who had come to the Island some years before to benefit from the lower rates of taxation. 'He points to something', said the curator. 'The transience of it. So, maybe in the past people like him did come here, but they perhaps put down more roots and turned it into a home, whereas now the population has changed, and it's a six to twelve month stopover. And somebody like him is noticing that. So there's degrees of people who come and go.'

There is nothing new for the Island in the experience of temporary residents. Since 1902 the Island has been 'invaded' for two weeks each year by motorbike enthusiasts keen to watch the racing (it is said that the Island's population doubles for those two weeks). From the end of the nineteenth century to the late 1950s, each summer saw the population further swelled with English holidaymakers enjoying the delights of the Island's beaches and scenery. But as the curator recognises, there is something qualitatively different in this most recent experience of meeting the stranger.

The thread of 'sameness and difference' has been present throughout this thesis. In this preceding section of *Routes*, we have seen how different individuals have or are coming to terms with a context of 'cultural compression' (Paine 1992), and with meeting new and ever-changing internal differences of scale (Phillips 1986). Recent anthropological work has drawn our attention to the freedom of individuals to select from a range of cultural options in building an identity for themselves (e.g. Bauman 1996: 18, Rapport and Overing 2000: 206),

but we cannot ignore the very real fact that people appear still to desire to be locally rooted. The response for some, demonstrated herein, has been an intensification of cultural involvement, practiced through individually selected idioms that satisfy personal interests and that can be justified through a telling of personal histories.

In contrast, we have also heard from those who appear not to have involved themselves in such cultural intensification. My purpose in including such voices was not only to demonstrate the complexity of the context but, as I pointed out in the closing remarks to Chapter 3.2, to show that the practice of identity is not confined to consciously performed idioms. Whilst those who try to keep Manx traditions alive and in the forefront of cultural imagination may despair of those we met in the office, a subtle reading of the office workers' daily performances allows us to conclude, I would argue, that the 'banal practices' that Billig (1995: 95) insists are vital for national survival are alive and well.

As for those incomers who bear the brunt of blame for the shifting cultural context, whereas *comeovers* may refuse to situate their own identities in relation to Mann, *stayovers* must negotiate their belonging in the face of a discourse which places them on the wrong side. And, as the readers' letters showed in Chapter 3.3, to be awakened to this discourse, when one may believe a level of belonging has been achieved, can be a newly alienating and excluding experience. I once heard a Manxman of extreme views, puzzle over why these incomers wanted to come to his Island and adopt *his* identity, when they had a perfectly good one of their own already. Whether or not these incomers would see themselves as constructing a 'new personal identity' is impossible to say, but their self-identification with the 'we' would indicate that they are part of the complex reality that makes the 'coming-to-terms-with' the route to a community of which they are a part.

In the introductory comments to *Routes*, I drew attention to A. L. Epstein's words: 'identity [...] is essentially a concept of synthesis. It represents the process by which by which a person seeks to integrate his various statuses and roles, as well as his diverse experiences, into a coherent image of self' (cited in Cohen 1994: 11). But, as W. H. Auden points out, 'for every individual the present moment is a polemical situation, and his battle is always on two fronts: he has to fight against his own past, not only his personal past but also those

elements in the previous generation with which he is personally involved [...] and simultaneously he has to fight against the present of others [...]' (1951: 46). And so, as I added in that introduction, and as has been demonstrated in this Part's narrations, it is a synthesising process which is never completed. Hence, we continue to *seek*, adding new experiences to those Epstein refers to and which equate to an individual's (hi)story.

I would further suggest that the processes we consider applicable to the individual, we can also consider applicable to the broader, national situation. In its attempts to establish 'a society which can safely and successfully accommodate difference within its sameness' (see Chapter 3.0), the Manx government seeks also to create a coherent image. Similarly, it must do so in the light of a national history and the different pasts of those others who now make up half of its citizenry. This requires a reconciliation of different views of past, present and future – something I will return to in the concluding remarks that follow.

PART FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

Stroshey yn theay na yn Chiarn.

The commons are stronger than the Lord.

‘The Manx have always been noted for their ability to maintain their independence when it was threatened’ (Moore 1891: 190)

Chapter 4.0: Concluding the Journey

The relative independence of the Isle of Man, along with its cultural and political symbols, has often come under threat. In her book *This is Ellan Vannin*, Mona Douglas (1964: 7ff) outlined a couple of those occasions and demonstrated how the people of the Island can be moved to act to protect their way of life. In the 1760s, presumably in line with the Revestment (the purchase of the Island by the Crown), the British government suggested Tynwald be abolished. The outcry was such that the Crown relented (op.cit.: 9). In the first decades of the twentieth century it was suggested that the Island be annexed to Lancashire. Again the reaction was strong, and Manx men and women, as the following tale will tell, demonstrated their rejection of the notion through attendance at the Tynwald Fair. Douglas recounts the story from her own experience of talking to neighbours on the day of the Fair during one of these ‘annexation agitations’.

[T]hough they may generally be somewhat inarticulate about their patriotism, [the Manx] definitely know their own minds in this matter, as they have shown unmistakably, and are prepared to stand firm. I shall never forget a typical incident [...] Near my home lived two elderly brothers, both quiet, labouring men, who seemed to have no interest in politics and hardly ever took a holiday or went beyond their own parish. Never had I known them attend Tynwald Fair. But that year, on July 4th, as I was passing their cottage I saw Sunday suits being brushed and laid out to air, boots being polished, and one of them cutting the other’s hair with the aid of a basin turned upside down on his head. Not really expecting an affirmative answer, I called out: “Are you going to the Fair, John?” And got the unhesitating reply: “Aye. The both of us are thinking of having a sight over. If there’s ones trying for to take the Tynwald from us like they’re saying, we were thinking we’d best go and support them that’s holding on to it.” Afterwards, for

many a successive year, they never missed attending the Ceremony and Fair (ibid.)

As I write this conclusion, several years after fieldwork, the latest of these threats to the Manx 'way of life' continues to exercise people's minds. In the Internet-based version of the Island's newspaper, a poll is asking the question 'are 'comeovers' destroying Manx culture and identity?' Although by no means 'scientific', the results evidence a split, with 53% voting that 'yes, they marginalize Manx people' and 47% voting 'no, they make little difference to the Island's identity'.¹ Readers' comments add a necessary gloss, with *comeovers* insisting upon their love and respect for the Island and an Island-born contributor calling for 'honesty, openness, trust, honourable intentions, friendliness, charity, showing hospitality to others [...] TRUE Manx people, will realise this [...] So let's not talk anymore of immigration, racism or the like, as this is against the very essence of all that holds dear to the island. Look instead to the positive and constructive elements of our very society' (ibid.)

This thesis has recounted many such reactions, whether individually or collectively expressed. Ethnographically, then, I have given a localised picture of a 'coming-to-terms' with those shifting contexts which comprise, according to much contemporary anthropology, the social and cultural milieux in which we are all enmeshed. In doing so I have attempted to give an account of the diversities of thought and feeling – differences – that energise the local setting, but that can be taken as either constructive or destructive to a sense of identity. The poll above may be used to illustrate my point. Taken at face value it appears to confirm the rhetoric of a divided society, Island-born against incomer. But its accompanying comments, and this thesis, have shown that the reality is more complex, more challenging and more revealing. I would ask the reader to recall Friedman's words, quoted in Chapter 3.0: '[n]owadays, complexity itself, in all its cultural confusion, has become the new *real thing*' (Friedman 1997: 285). This is not to say that such complexity did not exist before, but is to suggest that in listening to the diversity of voices we, as anthropologists, should work toward

¹ www.iomonline.co.im, 08.01.04

representing the *real* context as it is lived, experienced, represented and narrated by all the voices that come to contribute to our completed texts.

Clifford and Marcus have long since described the discipline's move from objective accounts to 'diverse ways of rendering negotiated realities' (1986: 15). The *real* – or a representation of it – has been rendered in this text through an engagement with many individual voices, some of who are explicitly present through their own words and some of whom are implicated in my interpretations. I have attempted to address Cohen's call (1994: 6, and see also Chapter 3 above) for a responsive anthropology that attends to the complex and variable nature of the relationships present in a socio-cultural milieu. Avoidance of the more traditional 'top downwards' approach which concludes in a 'deductive model' (ibid.) does not require, however, a simple shift to a 'bottom upwards' approach that pays no heed to the reality of the social. As we have seen, the desire for community is present in many of the stories told; a desire, that is, for a viable, sustainable, mutually supportive environment of shared values within which the individual can satisfy his or her interests. By placing collective expressions of Manxness (in *Roots*) alongside, but in creative tension with, the individual and diverse representations of the social and cultural reality in Mann (in *Routes*) my aim was to go some way to offering a solution to this analytical challenge.

In the diversity of cultural practice and performance, collective and individual, explicitly expressed or elided, social and cultural process is revealed, I suggest, as a never-to-be-resolved dialectical process. Yet within this process people are shown constantly to attempt resolution. In the first Part of the thesis, such attempts were made through collective events: through, that is, a performance of homogeneity of experience and feeling, and the physicality of gathering together. And within these gatherings, attempted by the 'caretakers' of cultural tradition in opening the skills of language, music and the like to all those who may be interested, and in calls to the realisation that 'Manx culture' has always resulted from a flow of people and their ideas.

In the second Part, however, resolution is shown also to be an individually experienced project, where the manner of personal identification with the current social and cultural context is justified in narrated stories or 'epiphanic' moments. Revealed, that is, in Frank Zappa lyrics or ol' fellahs' yarns, or in 'be-all-and-end-all' engagement with the Manx Gaelic language.

And shown to be not solely an Island-born's prerogative. For a *stayover*, the attempt is revealed in the sharing of 'feeling different'.

What is sought, perhaps, is simple resolution as mutual respect for different viewpoints on the relationship between past, present and future. In the introduction to 'Pig Earth' (1999[1979]: xix), John Berger offers a comparison between 'cultures of survival' and 'cultures of progress'. While 'cultures of progress' see a future of ever-widening possibilities, 'cultures of survival', he suggests, see the future in the repetition of traditions. Now, whilst I would not suggest that the Isle of Man is any kind of 'peasant society', his conclusions are enlightening for this Manx case. 'The peasant,' he writes, 'is continually improvising. His faithfulness to tradition is never more than approximate. The traditional routine determines the ritual of the job: its content, like everything else he knows, is subject to change [...] A peasant's ingenuity makes him open to change, his imagination demands continuity' (op.cit.: xxii). Mann has long been accused, from the outside, of being a 'conservative' society. That there is a security to be gained from continuities – from the retention, required by *Illiam Dhone*, of the Islanders' 'lives and liberties' and of the symbolic open-air sitting of the Manx parliament – is experienced as self-evident in its continued existence as an 'independent' and unique nation. Yet this Island, each time its economic or political viability has been threatened, has been creative in its routes to survival. There is, then, an ability and willingness to embrace change.

There has been, in the ever-creative responses to threat, an openness to the future. This latest solution to hardship has, however, introduced into the Island an opposing and powerful cultural vision in the guise of international financiers who see progress in terms of constant expansion. Constant expansion that means further in-migration, further cultural 'dilution' and further desecration of the landscape. But in a global context where, as Berger indicates, capitalism currently reigns (op.cit.: xviii), it is as a 'culture of progress' that Mann needs to be recognised to ensure its international – commercial, if you will - survival. These two opposing positions also, then, lie at the heart of the current struggle over what might constitute 'Manx identity'. And lie, perhaps, at the core of each comparable example of 'localism'.

Where, then, might 'identity' be found? I would argue that, if anywhere, it is found in scales of difference. 'Difference' is necessary to the dynamics of a vital milieu, but such differences can become *too* different. Over the past few decades, the people of the Isle of Man have experienced a period of 'too much difference'. Yet I would suggest that – for the present, at least – the perceived 'threat' to Manx identity that results from this difference is where current Manx identity lies. And it lies, in terms of disciplinary concerns, in the interstices between those theories of bounded homes, and the diverse concepts of mobility, creolisation and cultural flow. Where the concept of boundedness tended to subsume the subtle differences which vitalise the socio-cultural, contemporary notions of constant flow deny the desire to be rooted. Neither of these approaches then, by themselves, would satisfactorily explain the processes that have been described herein. And so, just as there are no frameworks to solve the dilemma faced by the informants of this thesis, so the reader will find here no alternative anthropological models to apply in other contexts.

If we are to deal satisfactorily with the *real*, then *we* must resist the temptation to 'attempt resolution' by way of theoretical models, which place social and cultural milieux in explicatory straightjackets. That does not mean, however, that I propose a purely descriptive anthropology. Far from it, because in place of such models I would propose 'an orientation to enquiry'² and an altogether more nuanced analysis of complex realities that remains interpretively representative, but that may be conducted in a manner that acknowledges the uniqueness of each shifting, contextual moment.

This perhaps returns us to the extant challenge of 'writing culture', for also to be acknowledged as present throughout this text is the voice of the anthropologist. In places, such as in the office, it is present in the encouragement to others to voice opinions on subjects outside their usual interests. In other places, it contributed – shakily, sometimes, when singing – to the performances and practices that are the process described. And elsewhere, it is voiced only after the event, in drawing out those components of the field that fit with my academic interests. Much of the fieldwork experience is not here. This text, for that simple

² With acknowledgement to A. Charnock Greene.

reason, can only be a ‘fiction’ (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 6), but is one that aims to tell a truth of the anthropologist’s experience before, in and after the field.³ As such, it becomes in turn, my own Auden-esque ‘polemical present’ and one that needs to acknowledge that the ‘present’ of my informants has since moved on.

What do I wish to take from this thesis?

My Island mentor⁴ once comforted me with the wisdom that this thesis is, and will only ever be, my ‘apprentice piece’. In preparing to write this conclusion, I have recognised omissions and found potential paths of further enquiry. In her own ‘coming-to-terms’ with her new context, Rebecca reveals in one short statement a set of terminological relationships which beg attention. Rebecca says ‘I *identify* with the Isle of Man. I suppose my *identity* is as someone who has been brought up in Liverpool, but who identifies strongly with this place. I like the *way of life*...’ These three – identity, identification and ‘way of life’ – have been used either interchangeably or as glosses for one another by this text’s contributors. Given social scientific ambiguity in the use of these terms (outlined earlier), and the previously discussed mutually attendant relationship between social scientific theorising and ‘nationalisms’, this is unsurprising. Perhaps it is time to clarify our own thoughts.

I would propose, then, that ‘identity’ as a concept has here come to hold within it the very notion of ‘once-and-for-all-ness’. ‘My identity *is*...’ says Rebecca. Having moved away from her home town, Rebecca may find this statement easier to make, as that ‘identity context’ is now fixed in memory. It is, experientially, no longer ‘in process’. But when amid that process, I would further propose that what people require of (or assume arises from) an ‘identity’ is a level of anchoring, of resolution – of rootedness – albeit that this may either be unachievable or the ‘false’ product of ideological rhetoric. Unachievable, that is, perhaps, at the level of ‘nation’ – or even, ‘Mann’. Observing the reaction to global communication and movement, the apparent push toward cultural homogeneity, we have noted a concomitant increase in conscious differentiation;

³ That said, I would further argue that the ‘fiction’ presented here is no more or less a fiction than the representations made by those other contributors to this text – to me, and to themselves.

⁴ A Manx academic, who listened patiently to my neophyte musings and who has always given generously of her advice and support. *Gura mie mooar ayd, my charrey.*

of nationalisms and localisms. It may be that, as this global train moves on, 'identity' will only be found in those yet smaller 'communities of interest' – in the sharing of an ancient language, in dance, in family – through which people currently performance their search for 'rootedness'.

'Identification' (after Hall 1996: 2), therefore, may more readily have suited this current accumulation of discursive practice and performance. 'I identify' does, after all, allow Rebecca to account for her journey to her present. Allows, then, an incomer to situate herself within a process and to begin to put down roots in shared performance, and may offer analytical support in understanding people's routes to their current understandings of their relationship with the social and cultural processes which surround them. To reiterate, we must attend to how people express themselves and search for their own explanations. For those people of the Isle of Man who thought themselves already rooted, perhaps 'way of life' (something that may be 'diluted' but not, perhaps, lost altogether) offers a collection of values, meanings, concern for the environment and control over one's destiny (Varwell 1981): encompasses, that is, all those things with one may identify.

These, perhaps, are my future routes. This thesis has been, then, an introductory reconnaissance into what is likely to be a life-long search for my identity as an anthropologist and as an ethnographer of Mann. I therefore take comfort from Cohen's words in his opening chapter to *Signifying Identities*. Introducing texts by Barth, Paine and Fernandez, among others, he writes that their essays 'deal with the continuous and continuing struggles of their authors to unravel some issues [of identity]. For all that they are grounded in intricate, detailed ethnographic knowledge, there is about them a quality of provisionality, a sense that there are always further difficult questions to be asked and answered' (2000: 6). As there are for our informants, too.

And finally, what do I wish readers to take from it?

I have attempted, in this text, to represent the diversity of reaction in a changing social and cultural scene, to look at the variety of forms individual and collective reactions took, and from that gain some understanding of why the question of

'Manx identity' took on, and continues to hold, such significance. The question has been shown to have arisen in response to the rapid in-migration of workers for the finance industry, the rate and volume of which was perceived as causing irrevocable damage to the Island's own 'culture' and 'way of life'. And it retains significance because, I would argue, at this moment in time it is in this 'threat' to Manx 'culture', 'identity' or 'way of life' that identity – or something to identify with – can be found.

Through the rather unusual manner of its presentation – in two differently focused but intimately connected Parts – I have aimed also to provide a textual representation of the interplay between personal and social performances of identity. I hope, therefore, the reader is able to accept this text as a worthy contributor to a body of ethnographic work which seeks to enlighten disciplinary understandings of social and cultural change.

In terms of theoretical engagement, this study aims at no more than a perhaps more subtle analysis than is often presented, but one which aims to stay true to the very intimate connection between the individual and his or her everyday lived context. Along the way, I have offered possible answers to the diverse range of questions raised by the data. It is my hope that whomsoever has embarked upon this journey has found within it some food for theoretical thought.

Finally but most simply and straightforwardly, I would hope that the reader has gained an appreciation for this beautiful and fascinating Island that sits quietly in the middle of the Irish Sea. Further, an understanding that, despite this very locally focused study, this is not an introverted society but one which is outward-looking and creative – if, at times, less than sure of itself. Of all the island sea-dogs Melville could have chosen, it is an old Manxman we find on Ahab's *Pequod*. The Manxman, having given at one point of his wisdom, receives the following response from Ahab: 'There now's a patched professor in Queen Nature's granite-founded college; but methinks he's too subservient' (2003 [1851]: 566). Small nations such as Mann, despite their proven ability to survive – their tenacity in the face of all manner of threats – appear still to assume their cultural demise, victims of a powerful and irresistible 'global' culture. But

'threat' has been shown here to be the energising force behind cultural health, expressed as cultural efflorescence and reflection on what it means to be Manx. The 'content' within the boundary may change, but it remains 'Manx' if that is what those identifying with it want it to be. The 'practice and performance' of cultural identity described herein has demonstrated that this is the case, albeit that the current processes toward a 'we' are experienced as somewhat painful for some. I hope this text may go some way to persuading the 'little Manx nation' (and others) that they need not feel subservient or vulnerable to 'alien' culture. The last word can be theirs.

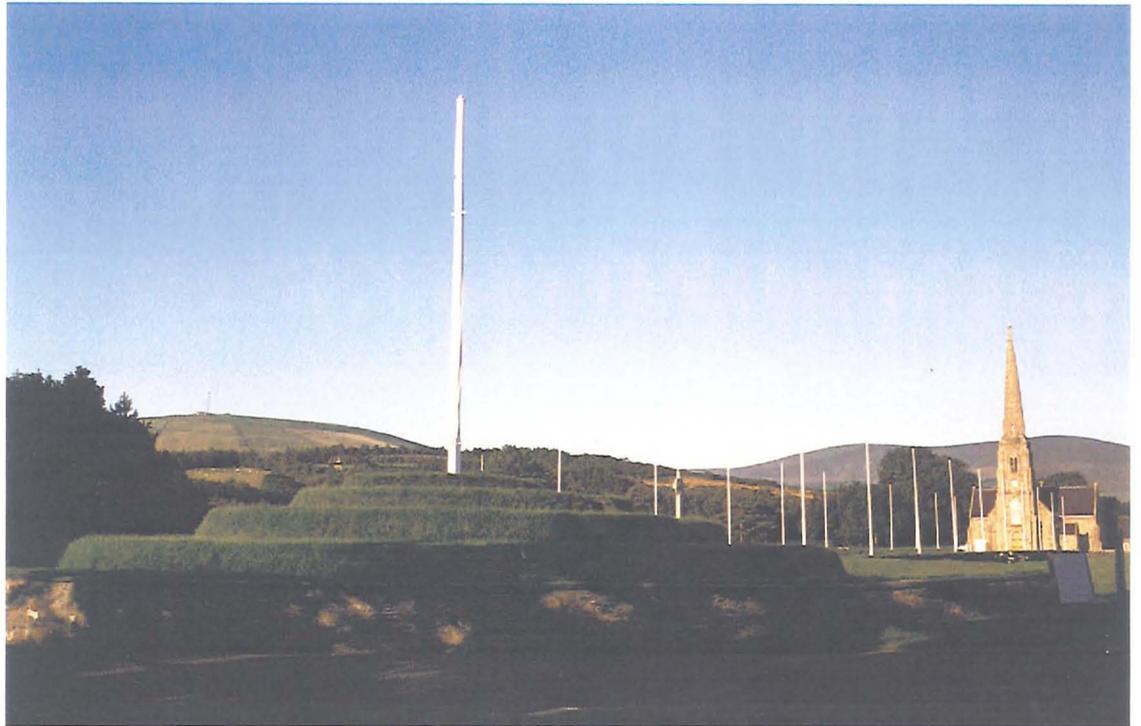


Figure 12 : Tynwald Hill as it is seen for 364 days of the year. Situated by the side of the road that runs from Peel to Douglas, it stands as an ever - present symbolic reminder of the Island's status. Photograph : Sally Crumplin.

Appendix

POPULATION CENSUS FIGURES, 1821 – 2001 inc.

Adapted from Beckerson 2000 and adjusted for the 2001 Census (provisional figures)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Census Population</i>	<i>Male Population</i>	<i>Female Population</i>	<i>Non-Residents in Census Population</i>	<i>Resident Population</i>	<i>No. of Manx-born</i>	<i>No. Born Elsewhere</i>
1821	40,081	19,158	20,923	-	-	-	-
1831	41,000	19,560	21,440	-	-	-	-
1841	47,975	23,011	24,964	-	-	42,184	5,791
1851	52,387	24,915	27,472	-	-	44,817	7,570
1861	52,469	24,727	27,742	-	-	45,143	7,326
1871	54,042	25,914	28,128	-	-	45,941	8,101
1881	53,558	25,760	27,798	-	-	45,453	8,105
1891	55,608	26,329	29,279	-	-	45,736	9,872
1901	54,752	25,496	29,256	-	-	44,910	9,842
1911	52,016	23,937	28,079	-	-	41,825	10,191
1921	60,824	27,329	32,955	11,014	49,270	36,431	23,853
1931	49,308	22,443	26,865	1,014	48,294	36,558	12,750
1939*	52,029	23,675	28,354	-	-	-	-
1951	55,253	25,774	29,479	1,229	54,024	35,521	20,002
1961	48,133	22,059	26,074	967	47,166	32,345	15,788
1971	54,581	25,528	29,053	1,353	53,228	32,374	22,207
1981	66,101	31,658	34,443	1,422	64,679	34,399	31,702
1991	71,267	33,693	36,095	1,479	69,788	34,608	36,659
2001†	76,315	37,386	38,929	-	-	36,755	39,560

* Mid-year estimate

† From provisional report

RESIDENT POPULATION BY COUNTRY OF BIRTH

Reproduced from Isle of Man Government Publication, 2001 Census Provisional Report

<i>Place of Birth</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>2001</i>
Isle of Man	35,811	36,755
England	26,896	29,093
Scotland	2,383	2,647
Wales	818	867
Northern Ireland	1,503	1,774
Republic of Ireland	1,749	1,762
Other EU Countries	555	751
Channel Islands	155	196
Rest of the World	1,789	2,317
Unknown	55	153
Total Resident Population	71,714	76,315

Glossary of Manx Words

I do not profess to any level of proficiency in the Manx Gaelic language, or in phonetics and linguistics. What follows is a brief guide, in layman's terms, of the Manx Gaelic words that appear in this text.

On the page, Manx Gaelic looks very different from its fellow Goedelic languages of Irish and Scots Gaelic. When Bishop Phillips set out to translate the Anglican Book of Common Prayer in the early seventeenth century (Broderick 1993: 228), he used an English-based orthography. Consequently, Manx Gaelic often suffers from the same kind of 'inconsistencies' between spelling and pronunciation as does English (Lockwood 1975: 139).

In the following list and pronunciation guide, it should be noted that:

- 'gh' is sounded much as the 'ch' in Scottish 'loch'
- vowel sounds are short: for example 'a' is sounded as in 'bad'
- c and g are 'hard' sounds as in English **cat** and **good**
- y is a neutral sound, as in English **but**
- stress is normally on the first syllable

oie'll verrey [OYul VERRah] Lit. *St. Mary's Eve* (Christmas Eve). Lit. *St. Mary's Eve* (Christmas Eve). Originally, these 'gatherings' would have taken place on that night, but today the term may be used for gatherings for entertainment held at any time in small chapels.

Yn Chruinnaght [Un CH*RUNyaght] Lit. *The Gathering*. The name given to the Island's annual Inter-Celtic festival based in Ramsey each July.

Feailley Ghaelgagh [FAYill-ya GILgagh] *The Manx Gaelic language festival*, held each November.

Traa dy Liooar [TRAIR duh LEEoor] *Time enough*. A favourite Manx idiom, which hints at the steady pace of life in the Island.

Moghrey mie, mooinjer veggey [MAWra my, MUNjer VAYgah] Good morning, little people. *Said in greeting to ‘the shining ones’ – faeries – as one goes over the Fairy Bridge (if one wishes to complete one’s journey!)*

Gura mie mooar ayd [GOORa mye MAW Ed] Thank you very much (*familiar form*). *Polite form would replace ayd with eu (pronounced EEoo)*

My sailliu [mu SALL-yoo] Please.

Gaelg Vio! [GILg vee-oh] Manx Gaelic Lives!

* As with other Gaelic languages, some consonants change after a definite article. Here the ‘C’ of *cruinnaght* (‘gathering’) changes and softens to a ‘Ch’ sound, as in **loch** (Lockwood 1975: 142).

Details above reproduced from, with adaptations and additions, from the *Yn Chruinnaght* festival guide, July 1999.

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