

Ned Maddrell died on December 27, 1974, and, according to many sources, with him went Manx as a native language. (Broderick, 1991, p. 65) In this paper, I set out to determine whether that is indeed the case—Was Ned Maddrell truly the last native speaker of Manx? Is the Manx that is spoken now simply a revival of a dead language, as was the case with Hebrew? Or has the Manx language been continually spoken through all these years?

The Manx language, also known as Manx Gaelic, is a language native to the Isle of Man, an island in the Irish Sea, off the coast of the United Kingdom. (Thomson, 1992, p. 100) It is closely related to the Irish and Scottish Gaelic languages, and the three languages together make up the Goidelic branch of the Insular Celtic language family. This family also has the Brythonic branch, which consists of the Breton, Cornish, and Welsh languages. (Borsley and Roberts, 1996, p. 2)

George Broderick has written extensively on many topics related to the Manx language and his works serve as the basis for this paper. He appears to be an expert in the study of the Manx language, and he was directly involved in the language's revival. In at least one of his works, he described the revival of the Manx language as having occurred in three phases, which refer to three separate periods of time, spanning from the late 19th century through the present. (George and Broderick, 2002, p. 654)

Some sources report that the Manx language does not have any official status on the Isle of Man. (Juaristi et al., 2008) However, it appears that Manx Gaelic has come under the protection of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which was ratified by the United Kingdom in 2001. (The Isle of Man is a crown dependency of the UK; Manx Gaelic was added to the UK list of minority languages, on behalf of the Isle of Man, at some point in 2003.) This is because, while not widely spoken, the Manx language is one that is closely associated with the history and national identity of the Manx people, especially with regard to traditional folklore and songs. (Broderick, 1999, p. 174) This concept is reinforced

by the YCG motto *Gyn çhengey, Gyn çheer* (“No language, No country”). (George and Broderick, 2002, p. 656)

The history of the decline of the Manx language begins as far back as the 17th century, when there was a power struggle between the Earl of Derby (part of the Stanley lordship)—who controlled the Island—and the local Manx people—led by Receiver-General, and head of the Manx militia, William Christian (known in Manx as *Illiam Dhone*). Since Christian’s supporters were the Manx people who spoke the Manx language, the Earl of Derby associated Manx with “rebellion”, beginning a long conflict between English speakers and Manx speakers. (Broderick, 1999, p. 14)

Sometime after the rebellion, Bishop Isaac Barrow arrived on the Island and concluded that the Anglican Church there “[left] a lot to be desired”. (Broderick, 1999, p. 15) He had discovered that the Manx clergy were improvising their Manx sermons based on the English texts because their congregations could not speak English. Barrow believed that the lack of knowledge of English was interfering with the complete and proper understanding of the scriptures, so he set out to implement a systematic schooling system to teach the Manx people English. (At the time, it was generally felt by the British that English was superior to the native languages found in areas of the British Empire.) (Broderick, 1999, p. 15)

Barrow’s program was not very successful until Bishop Thomas Wilson arrived at the turn of the 18th century. Wilson threatened parents with fines if they did not send their children to the schools to learn English, but the success that that method brought the process was short-lived. It was met with outrage and opposition from the Manx people and the system had all but collapsed by 1736. (Broderick, 1999, p. 16)

Wilson did recognize, however, the need for Manx translations of the scriptures, and printed a bilingual edition of his *Principles and Duties of Christianity* in 1707 which was known in Manx as *Coyrle Sodjey* (“further advice”). A Manx translation of St. Matthew’s Gospel, credited to Dr. William Walker, followed in 1748. Wilson also encouraged the publication of a new Anglican Prayer Book translation, which became available in 1765.

(Broderick, 1999, p. 16)

Wilson's successor, Bishop Mark Hildesley, was much more supportive of the movement to use the Manx language in scripture education, especially with access to these newly-available translations. As a result of his support for the use of Manx, the number of parishes using Manx-language instruction increased greatly—by 1766, only one parish was not using the Manx language. Hildesley also was a big proponent of having the full Bible translated, an event which occurred between 1763 and 1773. However, when Hildesley died in 1772, further support from the Anglican Church for Manx-language instruction dwindled. By 1782, there were only 5 parish schools still teaching in Manx. (While English continued to be favored by the Church well into the 1800s, there was a limited reintroduction of Manx-language education in the 1820s, in the form of Sunday Schools for children.) (Broderick, 1999, p. 17)

While there was a counterculture, of sorts, for religious education in the Manx language, it was only limitedly successful, and quietly died out around 1872. Instead, throughout the 1820s and beyond, the idea that Manx speakers were “backward” and “morally lax” began to spread, combining with other factors to quickly advance the use of English on the Isle of Man. (Broderick, 1999, p. 21) A variety of socioeconomic factors related to increased access to the Island—including trade, migration, communications, tourism, agriculture, mining, and increased mobility—were the driving force behind the increase of English usage through to the 20th century. (Broderick, 1999, pp. 22–26)

This increase in English usage, however, did not mean that Manx immediately disappeared. Statistics show that there were 12,350 Manx speakers in 1874 (well over 25 percent of the population), but only 4,419 speakers—or 8.1 percent of the population—in 1901. (Ellis, 1974, p. 149) In fact, the decline of Manx usage was a gradual process over hundreds of years, and it progressed more slowly in the rural areas of the Island. Throughout this time, proponents of Manx usage tended to be supporters of the Manx national identity, while opponents—or proponents of English usage—were more favoring of the influx of British and other European influences. (Broderick, 1999, pp. 26–34)

By the time Manx was down to its last native speakers, it was being used both as a secret language by its speakers and a mark of low esteem by its non-speakers. Usage of Manx among children resulted in ridicule. These are some of the classic signs that a language is dying. As is also usually the case, certain phrases remained in the vernacular, and certain contexts retained Manx usage. (Broderick, 1999, pp. 35–37) However, the decline of the Manx language, and the deaths of its last native speakers, overlapped with the spirited revival campaign that Broderick describes as having three phases.

According to Broderick, phase one of the revival of the Manx language began with the founding of *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh* (YCG), which has been inconsistently translated into English as both “the Manx Language Society” and “the Manx Gaelic Society”. (Henceforth, I will use the abbreviated Manx form to avoid the conflict.) Broderick states that the YCG constitution lays out two goals for the society:

1. The preservation of Manx as the national language of the Island of Man.
2. The study and publication of existing Gaelic literature and the cultivation of a modern literature in Manx.

In order to fulfill these objectives, YCG members organized Manx education lectures and group meetings, and encouraged more advanced speakers to speak Manx frequently. The members made an effort to have Manx taught in schools, as well as attempting to promote Manx music and literature. (George and Broderick, 2002, p. 654) The former endeavor was short-lived around the turn of the century—Manx and British law did not encourage Manx-language education, so it was determined that the issue would be left up to the individual schools; only one school chose to teach Manx, and only for a short period of time. The latter effort ended around 1917, when YCG’s own literary journal, *Mannin*, ceased publication following the death of its editor. (George and Broderick, 2002, p. 655)

According to Broderick, the second phase of the revival effort began around 1930 and continued until the beginning of World War II. Behind this round were two prominent

individuals in Manx history: J. J. Kneen, who had also been active in the first phase, and Mona Douglas, who collected Manx folklore and songs during the period of time following the first phase. Throughout the period, Kneen wrote a large number of works relating to the Manx language, including its grammar and the names of people and places in Manx culture. In his lifetime, Kneen served YCG as its secretary and as its president. Douglas was involved in political causes related to Manx language and culture, and their relationship with the upcoming war. (George and Broderick, 2002, p. 656)

The Nazis also “took a keen interest” in Manx and other Celtic matters, as Broderick explains, during the period leading up to World War II. (George and Broderick, 2002, p. 656) They operated based on the observation that “it was possible for a Celtic country to detach itself from its domineering occupying power”, with the hopes that they could use that method to reduce Celtic countries’ support for the British. (George and Broderick, 2002, p. 657)

The revival of the Manx language was reignited after World War II for its third phase, this time by Douglas C. Fargher and Joe Woods, who were both secretaries of Manx-language organizations (the former of YCG and the latter of the Manx Branch of the Celtic Congress). Together, they printed an editorial plea in the September 30, 1952, edition of *Mona’s Herald* to conjure up support for the Manx language. This occurred around the time that YCG was collecting additional sound recordings of the remaining dozen or so native Manx speakers, to the point where YCG felt they had enough material to begin the revival process again. (George and Broderick, 2002, p. 658)

The third phase began slowly, over the 1950s and ’60s, but it started to take off during the 1970s, when a number of new and reprinted publications were released. This encouraged the production of additional books, records, maps, dictionaries, and many other Manx-language materials. During the 1980s, Manx-language films were produced for public consumption, and, in 1985, YCG established the annual Ned Maddrell Memorial Lecture (in honor of the last known native speaker of Manx), which are given by academic individuals in the field of Celtic Studies. (George and Broderick, 2002, p. 658)

Inspired by this new influx of teaching and learning materials, YCG began holding monthly meetings (called *Oieghyn Gailckagh*) in the early 1970s to encourage the use of, and to practice speaking, the Manx language. These meetings were officiated by Manx speakers who had learned the language from the last surviving native speakers. Thus, modern Manx—spoken by about 643 speakers, as of 1991—has essentially the same pronunciation as used by those final few native speakers. (George and Broderick, 2002, p. 659)

The idea of teaching Manx in schools was resurrected in 1974, following the appointment of Alun Davies—who was sympathetic to the Manx language cause—as the Director of Education. However, in the beginning, there weren't enough trained teachers who were also fluent in the Manx language, so Manx lessons began in 1976 as part of a school club activity. (Broderick was involved in that process.) In 1982, a General Certificate of Education at an Ordinary Level (GCE O Level) was instituted for the Manx language, with the original intent being that adults would become O-level certified in order to teach the language, but it was suspended four years later due to lack of exam-takers. (George and Broderick, 2002, p. 660) It was replaced in 1997 by an exam, known as *Teisht Chadjin Ghaelgagh*, that is equivalent to the newer General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exam. (Broderick, 1999, p. 181)

In 1991, a Gallup Poll showed that 36 percent of responders favored the addition of Manx as an optional subject in schools. This, and other factors, inspired the Manx Heritage Foundation to establish the position of Manx Language Officer (*Oaseir Gailckagh*) in 1992, with support from the Department of Education. The original holder of this position, Brian Stowell, had the task of designing various syllabuses for the teaching of Manx to students between the ages of 5 and 19. Stowell has since left the position. (Broderick, 1999, p. 182)

According to 1991 census data (Broderick, 1999, pp. 182–185), 741 people had some knowledge of Manx, with 643 people being able to speak it. Of those speakers, 12 were under 5 years old and 20 were between the ages of 5 and 9. Even further, there 57 speakers between the ages of 10 and 15, and 43 between the ages of 15 and 19. Overall, there were

147 people under the age of 20 (in 1991) who had some grasp of the Manx language, whether speaking, reading, or writing. All of these children (born between 1971 and 1991) grew up before Manx was formally taught in schools.

There are some caveats to these numbers, however. First and foremost, they do not differentiate between those who would be considered fluent from those who know only a few phrases. Also, they are not likely to include any actual native speakers, because there were no all-Manx-speaking households in 1991—“simply because Manx is no longer the community language of the Isle of Man.” (Broderick, 1999, p. 185)

Statistics about speakers of the Manx language are only collected with the full census, which occurs once every decade, during the year ending in “1”. The latest statistics currently available, therefore, are those from the 2001 census—and these statistics only include those individuals who consider themselves fluent in Manx Gaelic. According to the census, in 2001, there were 1,689 people on the Isle of Man who could speak, read, or write Manx Gaelic, of the total population of 76,315—amounting to 2.2 percent of the population. (Unfortunately, these figures do not break down Manx knowledge by age.) The 2001 census notes that 2 percent of the Island’s population could speak Manx, up from 0.9 percent in 1991, “due to the efforts of the Department of Education’s Manx Language Unit introducing Manx Gaelic more comprehensively into the Island’s schools.” (Isle of Man Government Treasury, Economic Affairs Division, 2001)

It appears that the last of the native speakers of the original Manx language did, indeed, die with Ned Maddrell in 1974. However, the legacy of the language has continued beyond him, and there has been a new resurgence of interest in learning the all-but-extinct language. Manx language education has not even been officially available in schools for 20 years, so it is difficult to assess how well the revival effort is progressing.

While the number of speakers of the Manx language is growing, they have all learned the language as secondary to English, usually through official schooling. It is still too early to determine whether there have been, or ever will be, any native speakers of Modern Manx.

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