

LETTERS FROM A.G. GILCHRIST
TO MONA DOUGLAS (1922–25) *



THE CORRESPONDENCE

- 1922 (1) 30 September 1922, (2) 19 October 1922. (3) 25 October 1922.
1923 (4) 21 November 1923.
1925 (5) 29 January 1925, (6) 13 February 1925, (7) 14 March 1925, (8) 24 March 1925, (9) 26 May 1925, (10) 4 August 1925.

MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 21 [As seen Summer 2015]

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I. LETTER FROM A.G. GILCHRIST TO MONA DOUGLAS (30 SEPTEMBER 1922)

Headed notepaper embossed

WALNUT BANK, | LANCASTER.

Sept 30th 1922

Dear Miss Douglas,

Many thanks for your kind letter of explanation. I hope you are the better for your holiday and your nerves rested & restored.

I am glad to say that I was able to finish my article a few days ago & despatch it, having not only successfully enlisted the kind help of Mr P.W. Caine but of Archdeacon Kewley, who, I as holder of the copyright, has given me permission to use the tune “Tra va ny Assylyn.” I also obtained [2] that of Messrs Boosey for the tunes which have been printed in Manx National Music—these latter being now wedded (in print) to an English rendering (one verse) of their proper words, for the first time, I believe, as I am unaware of any printed collection of Manx carvals with their tunes. It was a task not without difficulty—as not all the ‘carval’ tunes in the National Music would fit the words as given in Moore’s Carvalyn Gailckagh—so I had to use those which would! Moreover the English versions in the latter would not

* This transcript is a diplomatic one without footnotes and comments. The letters are to be found at MNHL, MS 09594, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 21. For further on A.G. Gilchrist, see, Stephen Miller, “A.G. Gilchrist (1863–1954): A Resource Guide to Her Manx Activities,” *Manx Notes* 198 (2015): 1–10. See too, “A.G. Gilchrist (1863–1954): Her Correspondence on Manx Folk Song,” *Manx Notes* 153 (2013): 1–19. This Guide needs to be updated, not only to take notice of the letters here, but also those written to P.W. Caine recently seen in Summer 2015 in private hands (see KMJ March 2016 for further details).—STEPHEN MILLER, 2016. Research on the Mona Douglas Papers in Summer 2015 was supported by a grant from Culture Vannin which I wish to acknowledge with thanks.

fit the tunes, either, so new ones—which (with the Archdeacon’s help) are, I hope, nearly [3] the original, had to be made. I said to him that to me a folk-tune without its words was blind—and he agreed!

It is interesting to hear that you have been collecting, and I hope the results may be published some time. It is no use waiting for a collection to be completed—for it never is! But the way to complete it is to publish your finds, and then for the first time you hear of other versions!

If you have collected tunes as well as words, I should be greatly interested to see them, as this is the one form in which, alas, I can read Manx!

Yours sincerely | Anne G. Gilchrist

2. LETTER FROM A.G. GILCHRIST TO MONA DOUGLAS (15 OCTOBER 1922)

P.S. I hope you are feeling quite strong again after your holiday.

The Moorings | Sunderland Point | nr Lancaster

Oct 15th 1922

Dear Miss Douglas,

Thank you very much indeed for so kindly sending me the four most interesting Manx tunes, with their words. They are certainly of a character amongst Manx folk-songs which I have not come across before, and I should like to compare them, when I return home (on Saturday), with Miss Tolmie’s collection from the Isle of Skye—as they seem to me more akin to the wonderful old songs she has noted there to anything else I know. The Sea Invocation I suppose to have been a women’s song of labour—sung when spinning or waulking cloth a such like occupation; from the structure I think it has both a solo-refrain and a chorus-refrain (one following the other) as in the Skye songs of labour.

This is certainly ancient, and I suppose “Shonest, Leodest, and the Raa” are sea gods invoked for the protection of the lover on the sea. “Shoni” I have heard of, but I should have to look up the others! I presume they are all Celtic deities.

The tune of the Mananan song strikes me as having been modernised from an early pentatonic form. If you will substitute B for C in the second bar and A for G in [2] the fourth bar



You will get what I guess to be the original form of the tune which would then be purely pentatonic (i.e. minus the 4th or 7th degrees).

The Boaldyn Song reminds me of the old English air “Dargason”—a dance-tune with no definite ending. The Bulgham sea-song has I think a Norse flavour, like one or two of the fairy songs and lullabies in Dr Clague’s collection.

I should like to study those tunes and will write again if I find there is more to say about them. Meanwhile I am greatly obliged to you for letting me see them.

I hope you will publish your Mananan material before long. I should like very much to see the results of your study of the subject.

I do think it such a pity that most of the old Manx tunes have been set to new words. There should have been a collection issued for students with the tunes & words exactly as noted, with all their imperfections. This would have been of permanent value. Of course this is what the Folk Song Society has been doing, & it does not interfere with the use of the tunes in other ways, as contributors retain their copyright of the tunes they have collected traditionally.

I wonder if you would feel at all inclined to let the F.S.S. printed these four tunes?

With kind regards and | thanks again.

Yours sincerely | Anne G. Gilchrist.

3. LETTER FROM A.G. GILCHRIST TO MONA DOUGLAS (25 OCTOBER 1922)

Walnut Bank | Lancaster

Oct 25th 1922

Dear Miss Douglas,

Since my return home, I have turned up Miss Tolmie's Skye collection, and found a distinct resemblance traceable, both in time & words, between your Manx "Sea Invocation" and the 17th cent. song to Macdonald of Valey, by his foster mother. This has a refrain of "O hi ri ri ò," with a chorus refrain of:

"Chall éile, ho ro, o hi ri ri ò"; and the 8th & 9th (& 10th) verses run in the English translation (the Gaelic is not given, as it appeared previously in the Gesto Coll.)

"O King of Heaven, let not the breeze be strong!

Keep the wind peaceful and subdued

So that the warrins may return!"

—Macdonald and his men evidently being on the sea.

There is sufficient likeness to set one speculating. The tune and refrain might well be older than the song to Macdonald. Certainly the Manx invocation of sea-gods suggests an original some centuries older; but what puzzles me is the rhyme-system, which does not seem to me to be ancient Gaelic, though it may be found among Scotch song, such as "Duncan Gray," which has a refrain [2] in the same rhythm, and the triplet of rhyming lines.

I do not know who "Leodest and the Raa" are, though I daresay you may (Does the Raa mean the 'royal' ones, I wonder?) but the sea god, Shony—as you probably know—had libations of offered to him in Lewis at Hallowtide. The representative of the company waded, with a cup of ale in his hand, into the sea [3] up to his waist, and invoked Shony thus: "Shony, I gave you this cup of ale, hoping that you be so

kind as to send us plenty of sea-wave for enriching our ground this ensuring year”—and then threw the cup of ale into the sea. See Dr G. Henderson’s Survivals in Belief among the Celts, also his “Norse Influence on Celtic Scotland.”

The Mananan song opens—the tune, I mean—like the Highland air “Gun chrodh guin aighean,” but there is not much further resemblance. The Boaldyn song is the most English in character of the form, and, as I think I remarked in my last letter, the Bulgham sea-song has a Norse flavour, being reminiscent of a well-known ‘Scandinavian folk’ lullaby.

They are all very interesting, and I should be glad to be allowed to keep them by me on the understanding that I do not make any use of them without your permission. If you should feel inclined to offer them to the Folk Song Society—for printing in the Journal, will you let me know, and I will gladly forward them to the editorial committee (of whom I myself am one).

With many thanks for your kindness in sending me these delightful Manx tunes & their most interesting words.

Yours very sincerely | Anne G. Gilchrist.

4. LETTER FROM A.G. GILCHRIST TO MONA DOUGLAS (21 NOVEMBER 1923)

Headed notepaper embossed

WALNUT BANK, | LANCASTER.

November 21st 1923

Dear Miss Douglas,

Thank you most heartily for your amended copies received this morning. I am very grateful to you for your kind trouble, and believe they will be all right now, as I shall write them very carefully for the English printer! The details as to singers and dates are quite sufficient—it is only to show that they ‘the songs’ have not been obtained from a cultured source (always suspect!) but are genuinely traditional among the people.

I have made further notes about ‘Flaunys’ etc, as I am sure they will be of interest.

I do hope you will recover the fairy song—as it sounds so very old and interesting. Even if you don’t, I should be glad to have the scrap of chorus, and will describe the method of performance, which in itself is worth noting!

I shall be very glad to have the other two songs. I don’t remember seeing the ‘Arrane Ghelbie’ tune in Mannin Perhaps it was in the first number, which I have never been able to see. Mr Philip Caine procured 2 & 3 for me, but couldn’t recover a copy of No 1. So if you have one, I should be greatly obliged if you would transcribe [and *amended by overwriting of d*] any [*word deleted*] tunes in it for me, if it is not asking [2] too much!

I hope Mr Caine may have ‘time’ to look through his carvals.

[*inserted in space under* (It is odd about the Museum ‘carvals,’ as the Archdeacon thought they were there.)]

I am pleased to say that Miss May Morrison is sending me some material, and has also sent on my letter to her sister in Manchester, who has ‘(I believe at any rate may have)’¹ the MS. volume which I wished to see, of ~~the~~ unpublished Manx tunes in from Dr Clague’s collection; I hope to have the loan of this. Everybody is being most kind, and I feel very apologetic for urging the need for haste. But the Manx number was sprung quite suddenly on myself!

I should very much like to see your articles or “Mananan’ in Manx Folk-Lore’—whether outside the scope of the F.S. Journal or not. But I hope it may prove quite a pertinent addition to this Manx number.

Meanwhile with renewed thanks and kindest regards, I am

Yours very sincerely | Anne G. Gilchrist

5. LETTER FROM A.G. GILCHRIST TO MONA DOUGLAS (29 JANUARY 1925)

The Vicarage | Rainhill | Lancashire

January 29th 1925

Dear Miss Douglas,

I feel I have been remiss in not writing before to tell you how the Manx number in which we are both so much interested has been getting on. It has now reached the revised proof stage, and I hope will very shortly be issued. It was really due in December, ‘and’¹ as I had it ready for the printer at the beginning of October the delay had not been with me! At the desire of the editorial committee, the Manx has been revised by Archdeacon Kewley, (to correct misprints or my misreadings only.) As you yourself had revised my transcriptions of your Manx verses, these have not been touched; but where the Archdeacon has expressed any [2] doubt as to spelling or meaning I have placed a “?” for the benefit of anyone specially interested. We do not, in the Journal, improve any versions obtained from folk-singers, but write them down verbatim, as I have no doubt you have done. ‘instead of turning them into the ‘best Manx.’¹ As regards “‘Twas my father and my mother” I thought it best not to print the whole of the words. The Journal is not prudish, but it occurred to one that Manx readers not used to the frankness of folk-songs might be offended, and as this was the only doubtful text in the collection, and not a Gaelic one (there is an “Unnynup” verse which I have printed without translation) ~~the~~ I thought we wouldn’t spoil it in the least for the “young person”—or the “old person” who is the young person’s modern equivalent!

As regards your further gleanings, I [3] should be very grateful for them all. I don’t think the ‘Carval’ part which is to follow will be of the same bulk as the present part, and there may be room for last gleanings of this kind, though it is too late, unluckily,

to include your Hop-tu-naa versions in the section “Songs connected with Customs.”

I am much interested to hear of your lecture in Liverpool, and do hope you may receive your complimentary copy of the Manx number before then, as we are correcting the last proofs now. I saw you had been speaking and singing at the Celtic Congress last year—and wished I might have been there!

Your Mananan article is duly appearing, but it was thought best to make it an “Appendix,” as it could not be fitted in either under ‘songs’ or ‘cante-fables’ (like the Bollan Bane) and would have made the Introduction, where I first thought [4] of including it, rather long, since there was a good deal to explain about the collection. I do hope you will be pleased with the number.

I only wish there were more texts—for there are very few in the Clague coll., and, in many cases I have borrowed a verse ¹(belonging to the tune) from Moore’s Manx Ballads just to set under the tune—of course stating the source. Moore simply did not print ballads he thought improper—though very often there is a quite innocuous first verse at least!—I hate to see folk-tunes without their words—they always look to me blind.

My sister and I return to Lancaster tomorrow. Is there any chance of your being able to come and see us at Walnut Bank before you return to the Isle of Man after the 11th Feb? I should so like to meet you, and it seems a chance, if you could [5] spare a day or two longer while you are on this side of the water! Do think whether you could manage it. Lancaster is a very easy ride ¹(about 2 hours in the train) from Liverpool, and we would meet you at the station and bring you out to our little country nook—which is gay with snowdrops and winter actomites already, though not in its full spring beauty.

I do hope you may be able to come!

With kindest regards, and looking forward to the happy possibility of a meeting

Yours very sincerely | Anne G. Gilchrist.

You could return to the Island by Heysham, perhaps, instead of Liverpool—which would be easy from Lancaster, I expect. One would have to find out about sailings.

6. LETTER FROM A.G. GILCHRIST TO MONA DOUGLAS (13 FEBRUARY 1925)

With kindest regards, and hoping our meeting will not be long postponed,

Yours very sincerely | Anne G. Gilchrist.

P.S. I won’t forget about the 3 copies.

Headed notepaper embossed

WALNUT BANK, | LANCASTER.

February 13th | 1925

Dear Miss Douglas,

This is just a note to say how very sorry I am that you are not able to come and see my sister or self before returning to the Island.

We must look forward to the pleasure of meeting you at the earliest opportunity, and I hope you will not be on this side of the water again without letting us know of your proximity, as we should be so delighted to have you here with us.

I should very much like to see your paper. I am quite sure it would be a [2] success—all the more if you sang to them as well, as I read you done at the Celtic Congress!

I do hope you find no inaccuracies 'of transcription' in your contributions. As "Bollan bane" was typed, and you had the songs and the Mananan article back, to go through, after I had copied them, they ought to be all right.

The Archdeacon would have spelt 'some' words differently, both in the Moore texts quoted and your own, but I have placed his suggested readings in [], { } *in the original* like your own 'keeraght' for 'keeir,' so as not to disturb the text!

I know a Celtic expert who seems to consider the 'orthodox' spelling of Manx-Gaelic the most unsatisfactory of all!

I have just bought an old book—a History of the House of Stanley and [*running up the left-hand side margin*: of the Isle of Man—published in Preston in 1793—but I judge written 20 years earlier. It is most interesting reading.

P.S

I suppose the lines in "Illiam-y-Cain"

"My yishag ren eh me aarlagh son [salteayr,] er cheaul y cheayn."

may be rendered

"My father suit me for a sailor,
to sail the sea."?

I left it to the Archdeacon to ~~to~~ correct the translation if wrong, and he has left it so.

Please tell me if it is wrong (to any extent to matter) and I would [*unreadable word*] have time to correct if you let me know by return.

A.G.G.

7. LETTER FROM A.G. GILCHRIST TO MONA DOUGLAS (14 MARCH 1925)

Headed notepaper embossed

WALNUT BANK, | LANCASTER.

March 14th 1925

Dear Miss Douglas,

I hope you duly received your copies of the Journal, and that you are pleased with the Manx number. I am glad to say that it has proved of much interest to English

friends & members of the F.S.S. One of our members (late musical critic of The Times) says it is one of the best ‘numbers’ of the Journal we have every had.

I hope you would find that I had adhered to your wishes regarding anonymity in the cases you specified. You would see how I distinguished between Miss Mona Douglas and your anonymous self!—and that they do not [2] spell Mannanan the same way (which might have been a ‘give away’!). I was much at a loss over the name, as Miss Sophia Morrison spelt it ‘Manannan’—yourself and others with 2 single ‘n’s—someone else ‘Manninan,’ but the Archdeacon pronounced for Mannanan—so I adopted this form throughout—except in the case of the anonymous correspondent!

Within the last few days the Archdeacon has made an exciting discovery of some of the missing verses belonging to Dr Clague’s tunes—scribbled in pencil in a disused MS. book! ‘formerly belonging to the doctor’ We hope to print them when he has deciphered them, in Part 2. It is such a pity they were not found in time to place them under their tunes, but infinitely better late than never! [3]

I was most delighted of all to find there was a verse of the Glashtin’s song among them—and that the little passage I felt sure was a refrain was indeed such!

I hope Mr Douglas and yourself are well. When you have time, I shall be very glad to have the further versions and gleanings of which you told me—there will be quite an ‘aftermath’ to include in Part 2, besides the carvals and (English) carols.

With kindest regards, and many regrets that you were not able to include a little visit to us when you were over

Yours very sincerely | Anne G. Gilchrist

8. LETTER FROM A.G. GILCHRIST TO MONA DOUGLAS (24 MARCH 1925)

Headed notepaper embossed

WALNUT BANK, | LANCASTER.

March 24th | 1925

Dear Miss Douglas,

I was much pleased to have your letter and enclosures and to hear that you liked the Journal. I have read your lecture with great interest and pleasure—and I think it contains some very beautiful and poetic pictures of the Island and its treasures of history and legend.

I am now returning it, but will keep (unless you want it back) the very good notice of it, as a memento.

Two of your illustrations I have never heard of, i.e.

“O! Bee dty Host, Lhiannoo” and the churning song. Are these to be found in print? and if not [2] are they available for the last gleanings in Part 2 of the Manx collection?

Then as regards your recent collections, I have nothing except what you will find printed in the Manx number—so if you have anything more, do please send it along, as I shall be delighted to receive it!

There is, I may say, a “Mill Mill, O” song, both in Scotland and Mann, but it is not presentable, though old. It is quite likely that the chorus may be of earlier date than the song known to me.

I have made some very curious discoveries in Dr Clague’s collection of song fragments. He has one complete version of “Ec ny Fiddleryn,” which has a verse not printed by Moore. That is the best ‘find’—but many [3] of the others are most illuminating as identifying [the titles with] versions of various ballads—both English, and Manx renderings of English, which couldn’t have been guessed from their titles only!

I am pleased to find I have only made one bad shot at the subject where I have ventured on a guess; and several of Dr Clague’s first verses are practically identical with those I borrowed from Moore’s Manx Ballads to set under their proper times.

Have you, in the carval book you have on loan, a carval beginning:

“Trooid shiu ooilley gys yn vie”

or [(another)] “Easht oo as clasht oo”? I have found a secular song for the latter, and doubt whether there is a carval beginning with those words.* [*at bottom of page* * Some of the ‘carvals’ in Manx Nat. Music are not carvals at all! That is, they have secular titles.]

Or a copy of the “Evil Priests” carval which forms a pair of “Drogh Vraane”? Or any version of the “Carol on a [4] Young Man in a Vision,” with an argument between the soul & body as to who is to blame for their common doom?

Any of these would be of special interest to me, because I have tunes for them. I suppose you never obtained that song of the travelling fairies!

But I should very much like to see the two I have mentioned on the first page of this letter, together with your “Hop ta’n Nay” and other gleanings. I do hope the “O! Bee dty host” will be quite new to me!

With kindest regards and many thanks for the loan of your article and also for your kind appreciation & the Manx number—it has really cost a great deal more time and labour than its bulk suggests—and I do hope [though hardly expect]—free from blunders—

Yours very sincerely | Anne G. Gilchrist.

9. LETTER FROM A.G. GILCHRIST TO MONA DOUGLAS (26 MAY 1925)

P.S. As I know you are so busy, the merest note will do to convey the details derived. | A.G.G.

Headed notepaper embossed

WALNUT BANK, | LANCASTER.

May 26th 1925

Dear Miss Douglas,

Thank yo so much for your letter and enclosures. I am so pleased to have the tunes, particularly the Churning Song. I am loth to trouble you again, but would be very much obliged if you would send me the usual details of singer, place, and date for each 'also translation of churning words' so that I can put them into form with the rest of the material, now nearly complete, and just awaiting a few similarities to go to Miss Broadwood.

I am sorry you could not get the [2] "Travelling Fairies," but it is one of the difficulties with folk-songers that if they don't want to sing, "wild horses" won't drag anything out of them!

I have enough of "Tra va mish roish nish ny Guilley Beg," to know that it was the best thing that could happen to the traditional words to get lost! But I did not know that "O! ee" was the same tune.

Illiam-y-Caine will be a find if you do get the words in time from Mrs Bridson, because this song has, as far as I know, never been printed—at any rate in a Manx version—though there is an English ballad of a Captain's cruelty [3] to a prentice-boy on board ship.

You wish, I am sure, be interested in the Addenda to Part I, as quite a number of curious discoveries have come to light since Part I was printed!—some of the titles in which are quite misleading, now one has discovered the texts—at least enough of them to identify the song.

As regards A.P.G, I was very much astonished to hear what he had been writing to you about! He has never asked me to harmonize any Manx tunes, and I should certainly decline the task, especially if it was for the purpose of fitting new A.P.G. lyrics to them!

Of course if you don't mind letting [4] him have your tunes for this purpose it is all right for him—but I gather that you are not in sympathy with his methods. Why he should drag my name in I cannot understand, unless he meant to approach me after having first obtained your consent to the tunes being used in this way (on account of my telling him some time ago that I had no right to dispose of any of the tunes in the Journal. He would have liked to have some of those in the Clague coll: before even they had apeared in print in the Journal.) It is only right you should know my position and attitude, seeing you have been misled into thinking the scheme had my assistance & approval!

I hope you will have an interesting & enjoyable time at the Congress.

With kindest regards | Yours very sincerely | Anne G. Gilchrist

IO. LETTER FROM A.G. GILCHRIST TO MONA DOUGLAS (4 AUGUST 1925)

With kindest regards | Your very sincerely | Anne G. Gilchrist.

Headed notepaper embossed

WALNUT BANK, LANCASTER.

August 4th 1925

Dear Miss Douglas,

I hope you may now be at home, having got back from your Celtic meetings as I from my Archaeological at Newcastle. I am glad to say that Journal 29 is now finished & complete, with the exception of the details belonging to the enclosed tunes which you kindly sent me not long ago.

Will you be so good as to supply a translation of the churning-song, and to fill in the name of the singer, ~~da~~ locality, and date, in the case of each? (“Hop-tu-naa” I expect would have to be given as sung by children [2] at—some place—unless obtained from a single singer.)

I am sorry to bother you, but the MS. has already gone its editorial round, and as you know the committee make a point of such details being given, as evidence of good faith.

If I might have the tunes back, with the additions required, as soon as possible, I should be grateful.

Every body who has Part I will have to have Part 2, as it contains so much elucidation of Part I!

I suppose you never did get the fairy travellers’ song, nor yet the text of “Illiam y Cain”? And it is no use telling then ‘(the singers)’¹ it is their last chance of getting into print!!

I saw you had been representing the Island at the Celtic [*running up the left-hand side margin*] Congress. Mr Philip Caine had an admirable notice of Journal 28 in the Manx Examiner for July 17. Quite the most well-informed & understanding of any that have appeared.] [*then along the top edge* With kindest regards | Your very sincerely | Anne G. Gilchrist.]

