

MONA DOUGLAS

THE FLITTER DANCE

Flitter Dance

(1) Mrs Callow, Curle Vay, says that when she was a girl there was a ^{special} dance that used to be danced on the shore when the people went there on Good Friday to gather flitters. The whole business used to be quite a ceremony - a fire was made of mychurachan, some bread & cakes baked on it which had to be made without the aid of iron or steel. No griddle could be used, so they were baked in the ashes like Wodday vallys. Flitters were also baked in their shells, & everyone ate of them & the cakes & drank milk. Then food, milk, & a sod from the fire were thrown into the sea with a yoken charm, & after this everyone danced. Could get no details, but that the men & women couple join a long line that wound about in a sort of S shape.

(2) Mrs Teare Ballough, also remembers this dance, & says it was just a sort of extension of the game, "Pandaps & flitters", some done to the music of that rhyme in English, at Ballough about 40 years ago, but there was the name of the food ceremony except that they made a fire on the shore &

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The first mention of the Flitter Dance comes from 1937 in an article where Mona Douglas discusses her folk dance collecting to date. Some nineteen dances are mentioned, and they are discussed under two headings: “Completed and restored to use” (covering fourteen dances in total); “Dances partly noted but still incomplete” (numbering five), with the Flitter Dance belonging to the latter:

“The Flitter Dance.” “Flitters” are limpets, and it is the custom in the Island to gather these on Good Friday and eat them on the shore. Formerly a cake was baked to eat with them, and milk brought to drink, and after the feast the remains were thrown into the sea with some kind of prayer or charm, and then the people all danced a kind of chain dance, winding in an S-shape back and forwards over the dying fire until it was stamped out. No particular steps remembered, nor any clear form for the “chain.”¹

On the evidence of a notebook now amongst her personal papers in the MNHL, this dance was collected by Douglas from three individuals. Her first informant was Eleanor Callow of Cardle Veg in Maughold:

M^{rs} Callow, Cardle Veg, says that when she was a girl there was a ‘special’ dance that used to be danced on the shore when the people went there on Good Friday to gather flitters. The whole business used to be quite a ceremony—a fire was made of mychurachan & weeds & cakes baked on it which had to be made without the aid of iron or steel. No griddle could be used, as they were baked in the ashes like the soddag valloo. Flitters were also baked in their shells, & everyone ate of them with cakes & drank milk. Then food, milk, & a sod from the fire were thrown into the sea with a spoken charm, & after this everyone danced. Could get no details, but that they were in couples & in a long line that wound round & about in a sort of S shape.²

¹ Mona Douglas, “Manx Folk Dances: Their Notation and Revival [1937],” *Restoring to Use Our Almost-Forgotten Dances*: *Writings on the Collection and Revival of Manx Folk Dance and Song by Mona Douglas*, ed. Stephen Miller (Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2004) 32–33. Originally published as Mona Douglas, “Manx Folk Dances: their Notation and Revival,” *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, iii.2 (1937), 110–16.

² Mona Douglas, “Folklore Notebook. | Dances. | Tunes, descriptions & notes”. Undated notebook. MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 9. See page [9].

Whilst the notebook is undated, Callow died in 1916, aged 81, and was buried in Maughold, and so this recollection was taken down early on in her collecting activities.

The second name listed is a “Mrs Teare” of Ballaugh:

Mrs Teare, Ballaugh, also remembers this dance, & says it was just a sort of extension of the game “Pancakes & Flitters,” & was done to the singing of that rhyme, in English, at Ballaugh about 40 years ago, but there was there [*word repeated*] none of the food ceremony except that they made a fire on the shore & cooked oats & flitters there.

The rhyme is pretty well known itself as a children’s game, but it may as well go down here:

Pancakes & Flitters
 is the way of cantailers,
 I owe you my treasure
 I’ll pay when I find it:
 I’ll give you tomorrow
 The first of my fortune:
 Here comes the candle to light you to bed,
 And here comes the tide for to drown your head³

“Mrs Teare of Ballaugh” is possibly Elizabeth Teare who died in 1933, aged 87, and buried in Ballaugh.

It was, however, to be Ada Skillicorn of Maughold, who was to provide the details of the dance itself:

Ada Skillicorn remembers the dance being performed on the Dhoon beach about 1900. Took part in it herself as a child & showed me steps & movements. Seems to be a kind of processional, but she was very emphatic that the line of couples must follow the S shape, not go straight. This confirms M^{rs} C., who remembered the shape as the most distinctive things about the dance⁴

Christian Ada Skillicorn died as late as 1961, aged 82, and whilst not a child as such in 1900, was nevertheless of an age to allow her reminiscences to overlap with those of Eleanor Callow and Elizabeth Teare.

Douglas was to provide a second printed account (and one written at some length) of the Flitter Dance, this time from 1957, and so some twenty years later on now from that of 1937:

Of the last dance [*ie*, The Flitter Dance] I shall mention very little survives, but that little is interesting; partly because it employs a “stamping” step not found in any of our other dances and is performed to a curious modal air, and partly

³ Mona Douglas, “Folklore Notebook. | Dances. | Tunes, descriptions & notes”. Undated notebook. MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 9. See pages [9]–[10].

⁴ Mona Douglas, “Folklore Notebook. | Dances. | Tunes, descriptions & notes”. Undated notebook. MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 9. See page [11].

because I think it links a very ancient Celtic ritual with a custom which still survives quite strongly, at any rate in the country districts of the Island—that is, the custom of going to the nearest seashore on Good Friday to gather “flitters,” or limpets, and often to cook and eat them at a picnic meal on the beach.⁵

The opening paragraph acts as a framing device, the dance linked with the gathering and eating of flitters, itself now cast as a “very ancient Celtic ritual” but one still practised, the familiar trope of the ancient past still being present. The next paragraph recollects the account from Eleanor Callow:

My first informant about this dance and custom, Mrs Callow of Maughold, said that when she was a child the whole business used to be quite a ceremony. A fire was made of flotsam and jetsam (*mychurachan* was the Manx Gaelic word she used) gathered on the beach, and cakes were made and baked on it of barleymeal. They had to be made without the use of iron or steel, so neither a knife nor a griddle could be used, and they were mixed and moulded by hand and baked in the hot ashes. The “flitters” were also baked there in their shells, and then everyone ate of them and the cakes, and drank milk which had been brought with the party. After the meal, all the food and drink remaining was cast into the tide with the words: “Gow shoh as bannee shin” (“Take this and bless us”). The fires were then put out, and everyone danced over the ashes in a chain of couples, which had to wind to and fro in the shape of an S.⁶

Notice here that the “spoken charm” from 1937 is either now known or stated for the first time. The third and final paragraph introduces the material from Elizabeth Teare and Ada Skillicorn:

Mrs Teare of Ballaugh also remembered the cooking and eating of “flitters” and cakes on the shore, and a dance in the shape of an S, but not the food being thrown into the sea afterwards, or the spoken invocation. Later, I got a more detailed description of the dance, with a demonstration of the two steps used, from another informant in Maughold, Mrs Ratcliffe [Ada Skillicorn *meant*]. The side-step is one found in several Manx dances, but the other “stamping” step, presumably used to stamp out any remaining live embers in the fires is peculiar to this one.⁷

It is clear that the notebook is drawn upon for the text of both the 1937 and 1957 accounts, and in one sense there is no great surprise there, but what needs to be noticed is that the dance itself was unknown in 1937, but later recovered from Ada Skillicorn and so evidence that Mona Douglas was collecting *after* 1937. There is also internal evidence that the notebook has been compiled on two separate occasions,

⁵ Douglas, “Some Ritual Dances of Mann [1957],” *Restoring to Use Our Almost-Forgotten Dances: Writings on the Collection and Revival of Manx Folk Dance and Song by Mona Douglas*, ed. Stephen Miller (Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2004) 54. Originally published as Mona Douglas, “Some Ritual Dances of Mann,” *The Folklorist* 4.3 (1957), 75–77.

⁶ Douglas, “Some Ritual Dances of Mann [1957],” 54–55.

⁷ Douglas, “Some Ritual Dances of Mann [1957],” 55.

the details of the Flitter Dance supplied by Skillicorn being entered in a larger and more expansive hand than that used for the Callow and Teare material.

There is a further mention from 1960 of more detail as regards the Flitter Dance, a correspondent of the *Isle of Man Times* who had attended a lecture by Douglas that year reporting that:

At one time the flitters (limpets) were gathered, cooked and eaten on the shore. Afterwards the party gathered up the remains, threw them as an offering to Shaunee, then danced a ritual dance round the fire, stamping it out before returning home. The Manx Team performed the Flitter Dance, which was revived by Miss Douglas.⁸

Now there is an offering made to “Shaunee,” or rather that figure is invoked as in the 1957 account; meant here is *Shoni*, a supposed sea-deity from Lewis, who figures in “The Sea Invocation,” a folk song collected by Douglas.⁹

As regards the gathering of limpets themselves on Good Friday, accounts are scarce. The first newspaper mention is from 1871, in a report of a Tea Festival held at Knocksharry where:

One of the speakers in the course of his speech remarked that there was always something wonderful happening when he came to Knocksharry. This year he came in a donkey-cart; last year, when he arrived at the chapel, he got so nervous on hearing of the great guns who were to speak along with himself, that he went down to the shore to gather flitters, and fell in the tide.¹⁰

In evidence given during a Right of Way dispute in 1889 concerning the Creg Malin in Peel, John Cain deposed that “I remember on Good Friday and Easter Monday people going over to gather shell fish and ‘flitters,’”¹¹ while another John Cain recalled that “[h]e knew Ballagyer, but he had not been out this particular path. He had seen fishermen and children on it, generally at Easter time.”¹² According to Robert Kelly, “[p]eople generally came there on a Good Friday to gather shell fish off the rocks.”¹³ In another such case from 1895, this time over access to a piece of ground known as the Racecourse near Castletown, Edward Martin recalled that:

On Good Friday and Easter Monday people would come from Ronnag to gather limpets, or flitters, as they call them, on the shore there. They used to walk over the Racecourse to get to the shore.¹⁴

⁸ Anon, “[Snippets from the South] the Flitter Dance,” *Isle of Man Times* 22 April 1960.

⁹ Though considered to be a composition from her own hand. Discussed further in George Broderick, “Mona Douglas and Her Songs,” *Béaloides* 76 (2008): 223–25.

¹⁰ Anon, “Tea Festival at Knocksharry,” *Isle of Man Times* 15 April 1871.

¹¹ Anon, “The Creg Malin Right of Road Case,” *Mona’s Herald* 15 May 1889: 5d.

¹² Anon, “The Creg Malin Right of Road Case,” 5e.

¹³ Anon, “The Creg Malin Right of Road Case,” 5e.

¹⁴ Anon, “The Racecourse Case: Landowners v. The People of Castletown,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 30 March 1895: 8b.

“Flitter Gathering: A Dangerous Experience” was a headline in the *Manx Sun* in 1905, and went on to recount how two men with their sons from Foxdale went flitter gathering, described as “a very old custom of Manx country people,” on Good Friday at Glen Maye, and the subsequent misadventure of both men in being cut off by the incoming tide (both survived it must be said).¹⁵

The final two mentions as such relate to Douglas, she writing in 1926 that:

On Good Friday most of the countryfolk repair to the nearest seashore to gather limpets, locally known as “flitters.” These are cooked and eaten on the shore, and the debris thrown into the sea, the use of any kind of metal being avoided during the whole process.¹⁶

And much later, 1960, when someone attended one of her folk dance lectures and reported:

Miss Douglas showed how the thread of song and dance was woven through the pattern of Manx life, which had two distinct sides—the narrow homespun world of those who stayed on their crofts and worked the land and the broader influence of the seafaring folk, who travelled all over the world. She showed the Celtic and Norse influence in the various songs and told us of the old custom of flitter gathering on Good Friday. I can well remember gathering the flitters, but the rest was new to me.¹⁷

STEPHEN MILLER, 2018

REFERENCES

- Anon. “The Creg Malin Right of Road Case.” *Mona’s Herald* 15 May 1889: 5d–e.
 ——. “Flitter Gathering: A Dangerous Experience.” *Manx Sun* 6 April 1905: 5c.
 ——. “The Racecourse Case: Landowners v. The People of Castletown.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 30 March 1895: 8a–c.
 ——. “[Snippets from the South] The Flitter Dance.” *Isle of Man Times* 22 April 1960: 4b.
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 Douglas, Mona. “Manx Folk Dances: their Notation and Revival [1937].” *Restoring to use our almost-forgotten dances: Writings on the Collection and Revival of Manx Folk Dance and Song by Mona Douglas*. Ed. Miller, Stephen. Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2004. 27–34.

¹⁵ Anon, “Flitter Gathering: A Dangerous Experience,” *Manx Sun* 6 April 1905.

¹⁶ Mona Douglas, “Miss Mona Douglas on Manx Customs,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 10 September 1926.

¹⁷ Anon, “[Snippets from the South] the Flitter Dance,” 4b.

- . “Miss Mona Douglas on Manx Customs.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 10 September 1926: 9b–c.
- . “Some Ritual Dances of Mann [1957].” *Restoring to use our almost-forgotten dances”: Writings on the Collection and Revival of Manx Folk Dance and Song by Mona Douglas*. Ed. Miller, Stephen. Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2004. 51–55.

*

Gathered together here are (1) scans of the pages from the Folklore Notebook, (2) a line-by-line transcript of the text, (3) details of the three informants (though it must be noted that the identification of Elizabeth Teare is a provisional one), (4) descriptions and mentions of the dance by Douglas, (5) flitter gathering and the folklore of Good Friday, (6) dictionary entries for *flitter* and *flither*.

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THE FLITTER DANCE



Flitter Dance

(1)

Mrs Callow, Castle Vey, says that when she was a girl there was a ^{special} dance that used to be danced on the shore when the people went there on Good Friday to gather flitters. The whole business used to be quite a ceremony - a fire was made of mycharaban, some of the cakes baked in it which had to be made without the aid of iron or steel. No griddle could be used, so they were baked in ashes like Wodday valleys. Flitters were also baked in their shells, & everyone ate of them & the cakes & drank milk. Then food, milk, & a sod from the fire were thrown into the sea with a spoken charm, & after this everyone danced. Could get no details, but that the women couple join a long line that wound about in a sort of S shape.

(2) Mrs Teare Ballough, also remembers

this dance, & says it was just a sort of extension of the game, "Pankafes & flitters", which goes to the name of that game in English, at Ballough about 40 years ago, but there was the name of the food ceremony except that they made a fire on the shore &

cooked date to flitters here.

The rhyme is pretty well known still as a children's game, but it may as well go down here:

Pancakes of Flitters

15 rows of cantailers,

I owe you my treasure,

I'll try when I find it;

I'll give you tomorrow

The first of my fortune.

Here comes the candle slight you shed,

And here comes the tide to drown you dead.

3) Ada Skellern remembers the dance

being performed on W. D. Hoar beach

+ 0 about 1900. Took part in it

+ 20 herself as a child & showed

me steps & movements. Seems

Side-steps to be a kind of procession, but

(> she was very emphatic that the

line of couples must follow

to S shape, not go straight.

This confirms 11720C, who

remembered the shape as the

most distinctive thing about the dance.

Counts 1 2 3 1 2 3

step is (a) R. L. R. pause⁴ L. R. L.
 pause² R. L. R. pause⁴ L. R.
 L. R. L. pause: R. L. R. pause: L.
 R. L. pause: R. L. 3-4: L. end of

bars of air. Then 1st
 couples dance 4 side-steps to
 sides, man to 2 down to
 R, & 4 move back while
 1st couples turn in & dance &
 slipping-skip steps back against
 moment of dance, ^(down) coming
 into 2nd position. They then
 turn to face forward (up)
 again, & continue skip-step
 back to places, while 2nd couples
 turn in & dance skip-step back
 to places. All finish round
 with stamp R. stamp L. &
 R. post. start off again repeatedly or

NB - this 1st part is not a changing step.



THE FLITTER DANCE

Mona Douglas, “Folklore Notebook, | Dances. | Tunes, descriptions & notes”.
Undated notebook. MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 9.

*

Flitter Dance

[9]

(1)

M^{rs} Callow, Cardle Veg, says that when she was a girl there was a ‘special’ dance that used to be danced on the shore when the people went there on Good Friday to gather flitters. The whole business used to be quite a ceremony—a fire was made of mychurachan & weeds & cakes baked on it which had to be made without the aid of iron or steel. No griddle could be used, as they were baked in the ashes like the soddag valloo. Flitters were also baked in their shells, & everyone ate of them with cakes & drank milk. Then food, milk, & a sod from the fire were thrown into the sea with a spoken charm, & after this everyone danced. Could get no details, but that they were in couples & in a long line that wound round & about in a sort of S shape.

(2) Mrs Teare, Ballaugh, also remembers this dance, & says it was just a sort of extension of the game “Pancakes & Flitters,” & was done to the singing of that rhyme, in English, at Ballaugh about 40 years ago, but there was there none of the food ceremony except that they made a fire on the shore & cooked oats & flitters there.

[10]

The rhyme is pretty well known itself as a children’s game, but it may as well go down here:

Pancakes & Flitters
 is the way of cantailers,
 I owe you my treasure
 I'll pay when I find it:
 I'll give you tomorrow
 The first of my fortune:
 Here comes the candle to light you to bed,
 And here comes the tide for to drown your head

3) Ada Skillicorn remembers the dance
 being performed on the Dhoon beach

t¹ o about 1900. Took part in it
 t² o herself as a child & showed
 me steps & movements. Seems
 side-step to be a kind of processional, but
 < > she was very emphatic that the
 line of couples must follow
 the S shape, not go straight.
 This confirms M^{rs} C., who
 remembered the shape as the
 most distinctive things about the dance

[II] Counts 1 2 3 4 1 2 3¹
 step is (a) R. L. R, pause: L. R. L.
 1 4 1 2 3 4 1-2 3-4¹
 pause: R. L. R. pause: L R:
 L. R L. pause: R. L. R. pause: to
 1-2 3-4¹
 R. L. pause: R L: to end of
 1<1 [8 *overwritten by* 4] bars of air. Then 2nd
 couples dance 4 side-steps to
 sides, men to L & woman to
 R, & 4 men back while
 1st couples turn in & dance &
 slipping-skip steps back & joint
 movement of dance, *one word unreadable*¹ coming
 into 2nd position. They then
 turn to face forward (up)
 again, & continued slide-step
 back to places, while not completely
 turn in & dance slide-step back

to places. All finish round
with stamp R stamp L. &
start off again repeating on
[*left hand margin*] R foot.

[*Down left hand margin against <*]

NB—This 1st part is not a springing step.



DANCE INFORMANTS



ELEANOR CALLOW (1865–1916)

Informant for Mona Douglas at some date before 1916 for (1) The Flitter Dance {M^{TS} Callow, Cardle Veg}, [NOTEBOOK/DANCE 2]; (2) Stick Dance {M^{TS} Callow, Cardle Veg}, [NOTEBOOK/DANCE 6].

1911 Widow (76), born in Maughold, living at Cardle Veg, Maughold. Household: William Edward, son (61), farmer, born in Maughold (now Head). Also present, Thomas Evan Looney (15), farm servant, born in Lonan. *Census Enumerators' Book* for Maughold 1911, RGI4 PN34722 RD635 SD2 EDI4/2 SN58.

1901 Widow (65), born in Maughold, farmer, living at Cardle Veg, Maughold. Household: William E[dward], son (41), farmer, born in Maughold. Also present, Fred[erick] Kermode (20), farm servant, born in Douglas. *Census Enumerators' Book* for Maughold 1901, RG 13/5302, fol. 15, sch. 3.

LANGUAGE Manx and English (1901 and 1911).

BMD Buried 29 January 1916 in Maughold aged 81 (Lawson); 10M Civil Reg., Maughold, A/465 (Manx BMD). For obituary notices, see “Births, Marriages & Deaths,” *Ramsey Courier*, 4 February 1916, 8c; “Births, Marriages & Deaths,” *Isle of Man Examiner*, 12 February 1916, 1a.

NOTES (1) “Perhaps the most impressive of all my teachers, however, was old Mrs Callow of Cardle Veg, Maughold. To my childish eyes she seemed like an ancient Druidess translated into my own day, and apparently there was nothing she did not know about traditional lore, be it song, story, dance or custom. Mrs Callow it was who first took me to see Jack Kermode perform the Sword Dance of the Kings, having first prepared me by telling me the old traditions about it. To her, too, the ancient seagod and first King of Man, Mannanan Mac Leirr, was no meaningless name out of a forgotten past but a living presence for ever about us; and a song like the ‘Lament of the Seal Woman’s Lover’ related a tragedy that might happen to any Islandman even today.” Mona Douglas, “‘A Chiel’ Amang ’Em’: Memories of a Collector on the Isle of Man,” *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* viii.3 (1958), 156–59. Reproduced in “*Restoring to use our almost-forgotten dances*”: *Writings on the Collection and Revival of Manx Folk Dance and Song* by Mona Douglas, ed. Stephen Miller (Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2004) 57–60, see 60.

CHRISTIAN ADA SKILLICORN (1879–1961)

Informant for Mona Douglas at some date for (1) The Flitter Dance {Ada Skillicorn}, [NOTEBOOK/DANCE 2].

1911 Farmer's daughter (31), single, born in Maughold, living at the Dhoon. Household: Margaret, mother (73), widow, farmer, born in Maughold. *Census Enumerators' Book* for Maughold 1911, RG14 PN34724 RD635 SD2 ED14/3 SN4.

1901 [Farmer's daughter] (21), single, born in Maughold, living at the Dhoon. Household: Margaret, mother (62), widow, farmer, born in Maughold. *Census Enumerators' Book* for Maughold 1901, RG 13/5302, fol. 23, sch. 9.

LANGUAGE English (1901 and 1911).

BMD Buried in Maughold on 6 June 1961, aged 82 (Lawson); 10M Civil Reg., Douglas, 234/3675 (Manx BMD). For obituary notices, see "Deaths," *Isle of Man Daily Times*, 5 June 1961, 8a; "Births, Marriages and Deaths," *Ramsey Courier*, 9 June 1961, 1f–g, see 1g; "[Births, Marriages and Deaths] Deaths," *Isle of Man Daily Times*, 6 June 1961, 19a.

NOTES (1) Her mother was a Manx speaker (1901 and 1911).

[ELIZABETH TEARE (1846–1933)]

Informant for Mona Douglas at some date for (1) The Flitter Dance {Mrs Teare, Ballaugh}, [NOTEBOOK/DANCE 2].

1911 Aged 65, born in Ballaugh, living at "Railway View," Ballaugh Village, Ballaugh. Household: Philip (63), husband, Coroner for Michael, with children, Philip James, son (36), Master Baker, and Millie [*ie*, Millicent], granddaughter (13). All born in Ballaugh. Also present, Robert Christian (30), lodger, baker, born in Micheal. *Census Enumerators' Book* for Ballaugh 1911, RG14 PN34637 RD635 SD2 ED12/2 SN5.

1901 Aged 54, born in Andreas, living at "Railway View," Ballaugh Village, Ballaugh. Household: Philip (53), husband, Coroner for Michael, with children, Elizabeth, daughter (27), millner, Philip, son (25), baker, and Millie [*ie*, Millicent], granddaughter (3). All born in Ballaugh. Also present, Evan Gell (25), [lodger], baker, born in Peel. *Census Enumerators' Book* for Ballaugh 1901, RG 13/5300, fol. 43, sch. 5.

LANGUAGE Manx and English (1901 and 1911).

BMD Buried 8 December 1933 in Ballaugh aged 87 (Lawson); 10M Civil Reg., Ballaugh, c/215 (Manx BMD). For obituary notices, see "Death of Ballaugh Octogenarian," *Ramsey Courier*, 8 December 1933, 4e; "Funeral of Mrs Philip Teare, Ballaugh," *Ramsey Courier*, 15 December 1933, 3c.

NOTES (1) With no access to the 1921 census, one has to fall back on the Valuations Lists for the parish—the destruction of the Electoral Registers has clearly removed that source from consideration. Teare is not a common name in Ballaugh it must be said, though there is more than one family with that surname. Nevertheless, the list for 1924 throws up an Elizabeth Teare assessed for Ballacrosha. She certainly falls in the age category that folklore collectors target, *ie*, the oldest inhabitants who can be found in a parish and there is here the added interest that she was also a speaker of

Manx. This decade too is one in which Douglas was active in collecting folk dances. As ever, further research could throw doubt on this identification.

OBITUARY NOTICES (1) At the advanced age of 87 years, Mrs Teare, widow of Mr Phillip Teare, Coroner for Michael, passed away at Railway View, Ballaugh, on Monday after a brief illness. Mrs Teare had only been seriously ill since the Thursday previous. Her husband, Mr Phillip Teare was a prominent figure in the life of Ballaugh and district and was Coroner for Michael for some years. He predeceased her about twelve years ago.

Mrs Teare was a native of Andreas being a member of the Goldsmith family and she has two sisters surviving—Mrs Quayle, of Douglas, and Mrs Davenport, living in Manchester. The deceased lady, it is interesting to note, attended Andreas Sunday School in the days of Archdeacon Moore. On her marriage she went to live in Ballaugh and took a keen interest in Church affairs and she was highly esteemed by all who knew her. She leaves four sons—Mr Phillip J. Teare, of Railway View, Ballaugh; Mr R.W. Teare, draper, of Peel; Mr Goldsmith Teare, living in Manchester, and Mr H.S. Teare, of Ballaugh. A daughter, Miss Liza Teare, died some years ago. She leaves seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

The funeral took place to-day (Friday) the interment being at Ballaugh Churchyard.

“Death of Ballaugh Octogenarian,” *Ramsey Courier*, 8 December 1933, 4e.

(2) The funeral of the late Mrs Teare of Railway View, Ballaugh, whose death was recorded in last week's *Courier*, took place on Friday, and was attended by a large number of parishioners and others, who gathered outside the deceased's home. The hymn, “Jesu, Lover of my Soul,” was sung, and the cortege then proceeded to Ballaugh Church, where the burial service was conducted by the Rector (the Rev. T.R. Kneale), and the hymn, “Rock of Ages,” was sung, Miss F. Gawne being at the organ. The Dead March (in Saul) was played as the coffin was borne from the church, and the committal rites at the graveside were performed by the Rev. N. Hemingway, Vicar of Jurby.

The mourners were as follows: Messrs. P.J. Teare, H.W. Teare, Goldie Teare. and Herbert S. Teare (sons), Mrs R.W. Teare (daughter-in-law), Messrs. Philip, Robert, Harold and William Teare and Misses Ida, Elizabeth and Edith Teare (grandchildren), Katie and Daisy, Bell and Dora, Mr and Mrs Cannell (Lhergyvreek), Mr and Mrs Brew (Baldromma), Mr and Mrs Teare (Ballagawne), Mr J.T. Radcliffe.

The bearers were: Messrs R.T. Keig, P. Kaneen, P. Mylecraine and A. & Corlett.

Wreaths and floral tributes were sent by the following: Phil; Bob and Alice; Florrie and Herbie, Baldromma; Herbert and family; Bell and Dora; Katie and Daisy; Cousin Liza and family; Sister Emma and Beaty; Mrs E. Callister; Mr W. Cowell and family; Mr T.E. and Mr and Mrs T.R. Keig; Mrs Looney and family; Ann and

THE FLITTER DANCE: INFORMANTS

Mary; Mr Robert Corlett and family; Miss F. Gawne; Mr and Mrs Cannell, Lhergyvreck; Mr J W. Harrison, C.P., and family.

“Funeral of Mrs Philip Teare, Ballaugh,” *Ramsey Courier*, 15 December 1933, 3c.



FLITTER DANCE DESCRIPTIONS



1937 [Dances partly noted but still incomplete] (2) “The Flitter Dance.” “Flitters” are limpets, and it is the custom in the Island to gather these on Good Friday and eat them on the shore. Formerly a cake was baked to eat with them, and milk brought to drink, and after the feast the remains were thrown into the sea with some kind of prayer or charm, and then the people all danced a kind of chain dance, winding in an S-shape back and forwards over the dying fire until it was stamped out. No particular steps remembered, nor any clear form for the “chain.”

Mona Douglas, “Manx Folk Dances: their Notation and Revival,” *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, iii.2 (1937), 110–16.

1957 Of the last dance [*ie*, The Flitter Dance] I shall mention very little survives, but that little is interesting; partly because it employs a “stamping” step not found in any of our other dances and is performed to a curious modal air, and partly because I think it links a very ancient Celtic ritual with a custom which still survives quite strongly, at any rate in the country districts of the Island—that is, the custom of going to the nearest seashore on Good Friday to gather “flitters,” or limpets, and often to cook and eat them at a picnic meal on the beach.

My first informant about this dance and custom, Mrs Callow of Maughold, said that when she was a child the whole business used to be quite a ceremony. A fire was made of flotsam and jetsam (*mychurachan* was the Manx Gaelic word she used) gathered on the beach, and cakes were made and baked on it of barleymeal. They had to be made without the use of iron or steel, so neither a knife nor a griddle could be used, and they were mixed and moulded by hand and baked in the hot ashes. The “flitters” were also baked there in their shells, and then everyone ate of them and the cakes, and drank milk which had been brought with the party. After the meal, all the food and drink remaining was cast into the tide with the words: “Gow shoh as bannee shin” (“Take this and bless us”). The fires were then put out, and everyone danced over the ashes in a chain of couples, which had to wind to and fro in the shape of an S.

Mrs Teare of Ballaugh also remembered the cooking and eating of “flitters” and cakes on the shore, and a dance in the shape of an S, but not the food being thrown into the sea afterwards, or the spoken invocation. Later, I got a more detailed description of the dance, with a demonstration of the two steps used, from another informant in Maughold, Mrs Ratcliffe. The side-step is one found in several Manx dances, but the other “stamping” step, presumably used to stamp out any remaining live embers in the fires is peculiar to this one.

Mona Douglas, "Some Ritual Dances of Mann," *The Folklorist* 4.3 (1957), 75-77.

1960 At one time the flitters (limpets) were gathered, cooked and eaten on the shore. Afterwards the party gathered up the remains, threw them as an offering to Shaunee, then danced a ritual dance round the fire, stamping it out before returning home. The Manx Team performed the Flitter Dance, which was revived by Miss Douglas.

"[Snippets from the South] The Flitter Dance," *Isle of Man Times*, 22 April 1960, 4b.



FLITTER GATHERING
&
GOOD FRIDAY FOLKLORE



I. JOSEPH TRAIN, THE HISTORY OF THE ISLE OF MAN (1845)

[117] Good Friday, which is observed as the anniversary of the crucifixion of our Saviour is in some instances superstitiously regarded in the Island. No iron of any kind must be put into the fire on that day, and even the tongs are laid aside, lest any person should unfortunately forget this custom and stir the ire with them; by way of substitute a stick of the rowan tree is used. To avoid also the necessity of hanging the griddle over the fire, lest the iron of it should come in contact with a spark or flame, a large bannock or *soddag* is made, with three corners, and baked on the hearth.

Joseph Train, *An Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man*. Vol. ii. 2 vols. (Douglas: Mary A. Quiggin, 1845). See Chapter xvii, "Manners and Customs," 102–41.

2. E—KERMODE, CELTIC CUSTOMS [1885]

[179] The Manx people have—or, until recent times, had—a peculiar custom of going to the sea-shore on Good Friday to gather shell-fish. If the day proved fine, large numbers of both sexes wended their way to the rocky shores and creeks, particularly round the south and west coasts of the Island, for the purpose of gathering pennywinkles and flitters. An old chisel, or knife, was generally carried by each, to be used in detaching the limpet from the rock to which it tenaciously clings. Considerable dexterity, and prompt decision, is required to do this; as, if the limpet is not attacked unawares, and removed at one stroke, before it has had time to think, it instantly draws itself closer to the rocky surface (something on the principal of a boy's leather sucker), and will suffer its shell to be pounded off its back before it will let go. Most people have very likely heard the story of the fox, who, on attempting to lick a limpet out of its shell, was held a prisoner by his tongue, and so kept until the advancing tide had risen and drowned him. Flitters are boiled in, or fried in fat, and sometimes eaten raw—tasting not unlike an oyster. [...]

This employment was an especially appetising one—to meet the demands of which the thick bannock (*bonnag*, or "*Soddhag*" cake)—generally made of oatmeal—was usually baked early in the morning, on the embers, without the intervention of the iron "griddle," on which the "clapt" cakes, or "griddle" bread, was originally baked. The "*Soddhag*" would be divided on those who went on this customary outing, on the field operations, and at a time when its qualities would be duly appreciated.

E— Kermode, *Celtic Customs* by E. Kermode 1885: *Superstitions, Customs, and Observances Connected with the Manx Calendar* (n.p. [Peel]: Privately, by Frank Quayle, 1985). Facsimile reproduction of the handwritten manuscript.

3. A.W. MOORE, THE FOLK-LORE OF THE ISLE OF MAN (1891)

[109] Good Friday.—*Jy-beiney chaist*, or, as Bishop Phillips has it, *Jy-beny-ghayst*, “Easter Friday,” was a day on which several superstitious customs were observed. No iron of any kind was to be put into the fire, and even the tongs were laid aside, lest any person should unfortunately stir the fire with them, a stick of the mountain-ash (*cuirn*) being used as a substitute. To avoid placing the iron griddle on the fire,—a large thick cake, called a *soddag*, which is triangular in shape, was baked on the hearth. It was also a custom for people to go to the shore on this day to gather shellfish.

A.W. Moore, *The Folk-Lore of the Isle of Man* (Douglas & London: David and Son & David Nutt, 1891). See Chapter vi, “Customs and Superstitions,” 102–40.

5. MONA DOUGLAS, “MANX CUSTOMS,” ISLE OF MAN EXAMINER (10 SEPTEMBER 1926)

[9b] On Good Friday most of the countryfolk repair to the nearest seashore to gather limpets, locally known as “flitters.” These are cooked and eaten on the shore, and the debris thrown into the sea, the use of any kind of metal being avoided during the whole process.

Mona Douglas, “Miss Mona Douglas on Manx Customs,” *Isle of Man Examiner*, 10 September 1926, 9b–c.

6. W.W. GILL, A MANX SCRAPBOOK (1929)

[432] NIARBYL (*yn Arbyl*) [...] [433] “The” Niarbyl, with its magnificent South-Westerly outlook, is a favourite resort of the few summer visitors who penetrate to that out-of-the-way spot, but the local people do not take much interest in it summer or winter, excepting on tolerably fine Good Fridays. On that day it is their custom to meet there on the shore. Nothing special happens; cakes, sweets and “pop” are consumed, perhaps shellfish—flitters and so on—are gathered, or were till recently; the people merely walk about, sit if it is warm enough, and chat; not only Dalby people, but outsiders from as far off as Peel. The habit suggests that some sort of a fair was held there once, even as Periwinkle Fair was held on the shore near Strandhall in Malew.

W.W. Gill, *A Manx Scrapbook* (London & Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1929). See Chapter iv, Place-Names and Place-Lore, The Parish of Patrick, 427–97.

7. “[SNIPPETS FROM THE SOUTH] THE FLITTER DANCE,” ISLE OF MAN TIMES (22 APRIL 1960)

At one time the flitters (limpets) were gathered, cooked and eaten on the shore. Afterwards the party gathered up the remains, threw them as an offering to Shaunee, then danced a ritual dance round the fire, stamping it out before returning home. The Manx Team performed the Flitter Dance, which was revived by Miss Douglas.

“[Snippets from the South] The Flitter Dance,” *Isle of Man Times*, 22 April 1960, 4a–c.



FLITTER *or* FLITHER



A DICTIONARY OF THE MANKS LANGUAGE (1835 [1837])

BAR'NAGH, *s.f.* a limpet, a common kind of shell fish which adheres to rock; it is also called *flitter*, in English, in this Island; *pl.* 67.

Archibald Cregeen. *A Dictionary of the Manks Language.* Douglas & London & Liverpool, 1835 [1837], 23b.

THE ENGLISH DIALECT DICTIONARY (1900)

FLITHER, *sb.* Yks. I.Ma. Also in forms *flidder* n.Yks.; *flitter* I.Ma. [fl̩·ðə(r)] 1. The common limpet. n.Yks. *Science Gossip* (1882) 161; n.Yks.¹; n.Yks.² He sticks like a flither. ne.Yks.¹ Them's t'lasses getherin flithers. m.Yks.¹ 2. *Comp.* (1) **Flither-girl**, (2) **-picker**, a girl or woman who collects limpets for bait; (3) **-scar**, a low, flat expanse of rock from which limpets are gathered. (1) n.Yks.¹ Usually the daughters and other female connections of the fishermen, who collect the flithers to serve as bait; often walking considerable distances for the purpose, and bringing back their spoils in baskets poised on their heads. (2) n.Yks. Them lasses is flidder-pickers (I.W.). e.Yks. You're feared he's goin' to disgrace hissself, an' you, wi' marryin' a flither-picker, LINSKILL *Exchange Soul* (1888) ii. (3) n.Yks.² 3. *Phr.* *to spend money like flitters*, to throw money away, or waste it. I.Ma. Whips of money at him, Liza. He's spending it like flitters, CAINE *Manxman* (1895) pt. v. xii.

Joseph Wright, ed., *The English Dialect Dictionary: D-G*, vol. ii. (London: Henry Frowde, 1900) 414b.

