
INTRODUCTION

THE HISTORY OF THE ISLE OF MAN

The Island (as it is idiomatically called) is not part of either England, Scotland or Ireland and its early history was subject to a variety of influences. The Manx people are of Celtic cultural origin, probably originally Brythonic like the Welsh but more recently to all appearances Gaels; the Manx language – which died out during the course of the c19 as a widespread means of communication – is similar to Irish and Scottish but Manxmen of the c19 and c20 saw themselves in a national context as English or British.

The Island has no written records of any sort before the c10, and then only inscriptions on stone. Written history before this is confined to spasmodic mentions and brief accounts in widely scattered annals and genealogies in English, Welsh, Irish and (especially) Norse sources. They record the names and activities of early kings associated with the Island; for example, a man who was arguably a king, Merfyn, is mentioned in the Annals of Ulster in 682. The first English king associated with the Island was Edwin of Northumbria (†633), who in an English source is recorded as having conquered it in the later years of his reign; he may actually have lived there during his exile c.617. The Norsemen came into the Irish Sea at the end of the c8 but at first seem to have only raided the Island. It was finally settled and brought under Scandinavian control late in the first quarter of the c10, being ruled at various times from both Dublin and York. In 1079 the Island was conquered by Godred Crovan (probably 'King Orry,' the vaguely Arthurian figure of Manx legend); he founded a Kingdom of Mann and the Isles (i.e. the Western Isles) which his descendants ruled until 1265, for practical purposes independent but under Norwegian suzerainty. It passed to Scotland in 1266 after Norse power waned and was separated from the Hebrides. Twenty-five years of Scots rule was followed by forty being fought over by England and Scotland. England won and from 1333, by direction of Edward III, the Montacutes (who had connections to the Norse dynasty) ruled as kings, with their stronghold at Castletown.

After a sale to Sir William Le Scrope and various attainders, Henry IV (in 1406) granted the regalities to Sir John Stanley. By this time the Manx constitution was established. There was a

representative assembly, the Commons of the Isle, of sixty-eight elected members, summoned as and when required to decide especially important issues (the last time in 1652). Alongside it was the still-extant Tynwald Court, which was not elected but the consent of which was necessary to all Insular legislation. It is bicameral, although for many purposes the two houses sit together as one body. The upper house is the Council, presided over historically by the king or his governor and including the barons (all ecclesiastics), the principal officials and the judges. The lower chamber is called the House of Keys, of twenty-four members, perhaps originally elected but an oligarchy in early modern and modern times. Its functions were not purely or even principally legislative; it was also a court of appeal, acting effectively as a jury; a broad-brush characterization might be that the Commons were the *États Généraux* while the Keys were a *Parlement* with pretensions.

The Stanleys, from 1485 earls of Derby, held the crown until 1736, the title Lord replacing that of King under Henry VIII. Their principal seat was Lathom House, Lancashire, and only rarely did they set foot on the Island, and for any length of time only during the Civil Wars of the mid C17 after Lathom was besieged, and, to a lesser extent, in the 1690s. The crown passed from them in the female line to the Murrays, Dukes of Atholl, from whom the regalities, along with Castle Rushen and Peel Castle, were compulsorily purchased by the British Crown in 1765 – an act known as the Revestment – because they were being used as a base for smuggling (euphemistically called the ‘running trade’). The Atholls remained Lords of the Manor and the 4th Duke was appointed Governor by the Crown, although he was largely non-resident, despite building Castle Mona as his Manx seat. In 1828 he sold up to the Crown after years of trying on the one hand to get more compensation for the regalities and on the other fighting an entrenched Manx oligarchy of gentry and merchants – in which he seems to have enjoyed a measure of public support.

The period from the late C18 to the mid C19 was an unsatisfactory one in which all the Insular customs revenue went to London but the House of Keys refused to consider imposing any local taxation to pay for necessary public works. In 1866 a new Governor offered government money in return for the House of Keys submitting to popular election. Gradually since then powers have been ceded from Whitehall and the Governor, first to committees of Tynwald and then to a Council of Ministers, so that now the Island is internally self-governing.

After the end of smuggling in 1765 the Isle of Man subsisted on agriculture and fishing and as a refuge for debtors and half-pay officers. Then from the mid C19 the tourist industry swept all before it, and refreshment rooms opened in the remotest places. There was also some lead, silver and copper mining. However, tourism declined after the Second World War, and the 1950s were a period of depression. Then a Governor decided the answer was to deprive his employers of revenue, and so he set the Island on