Religion played a large part in people's lives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Church of England [Anglican Church] was supported by the government, with some of its officers themselves also members of government. The Church had its own law courts which could try people for many offences which were thought to be against religion and morals, as well as dealing with marriages and wills until 1884. Money to maintain the Church and its officers was raised from TITHES, a percentage of the crops produced by farmers. Attempts by the Church to enforce payments of tithes on potatoes led to riots in 1825 and failed to gain any acceptance. Payments of money tithes, however, lasted until 1946.

In 1777 John Wesley, the Methodist leader and preacher, visited the Isle of Man and soon his followers increased in numbers.

When Wesley preached at Peel, he was:
"...agreeably surprised. I have not heard better singing either at Bristol or London."

Many, both men and women, have admirable voices; and they sing with good judgment. Who would have expected this in the Isle of Man?"

(John Wesley's Journal)

By 1805 there were so many Methodists that the Island became a separate "district". By the mid nineteenth century there were around ninety chapels and a few Methodist schools.

Sometimes people would attend both church and chapel.

"There was always a good feeling between the chapels and the church. The number of people who went to church only was very small. A local preacher might be a warden, and very often a person might go to church in the morning and to chapel at night, as did my own parents"

(The Misses Brown)
The Church and the Manx Language

John Phillips, Bishop of Sodor and Man from 1604-1633 translated the Anglican Book of Common Prayer into Manx by 1610, although it was not printed at the time. Later Bishops like Bishop Wilson and Bishop Hildesley in the eighteenth century organised the translation and publication of the Manx Bible and Prayer Book. Bishop Hildesley encouraged the clergy “to use their best endeavours to improve the use and practice of the Manks tongue.” He hoped that the translation work of the clergy would provide “for the instruction and comfort of such persons as do not understand English” As Methodist congregations increased, there were many translations made of hymns, in addition to the existing tradition of CARVALS [carols]

Although Manx was no longer so common in services by the late nineteenth century, it was still appreciated if a clergyman could speak it.

“It was the rule to have a service in Manx in the churches once a month.”
(Mr. Edward Christian, Northop, Greeba)

“He was a wonderful preacher and he could preach in Manx and English and he was explaining the scriptures to them in Manx.”
(Mrs. Kermode, the Howe, Cregneash)

Social life and societies

Religion was the influence behind much of the social life of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

“In the winter the chapels held their tea parties. Tea would commence about 5 pm and continue until 8. Following that came a meeting at the chapel with singing and addresses.”
(Mrs. Kermode, the Howe, Cregneash)

The TEMPERANCE movement had many supporters on the Island, particularly from those who attended church and chapel. One such group were the RECHABITES who had groups [tents] in a number of areas. They were totally against the drinking of alcohol which is why they were called tee - totallers.

James Teare of Kirk Andreas [1804-1868] was a founding member of the temperance movement after he left the Island to live in Preston in 1823. He travelled throughout Britain from 1832-3 onwards, including a visit to the Isle of Man in 1855.

Oiell Voirreys were important events.

“...many of the hymns and sacred songs were sung in Manx and I have heard of an old man who used to ‘sing sixteen verses with the sweat pourin’ from him.’ Very often the Manx singer used to ask the congregation to ‘sing the chorus in English while he recovered his breath’.”
(Mrs. Kinvig, Ronague)
Politics, too, was an area where temperance supporters became involved. In the 1934 election to the House of Keys one of the candidates standing for Garff, Elijah Oliver, was a preacher whose supporters were urged to bring along song sheets to his election meetings.

Verse 1

All the hungry little children will have quite enough to eat,
No more shoeless little youngsters will be found upon the street,
And the poor degraded drunkard will be sober every day,
When the pubs are closed for ever and the drink is swept away.

Chorus

Swept away! Oh, swept away!
When the drink is swept away,
There'll be work for everybody
And we'll get better pay
When the pubs are closed for ever
And the drink is swept away.

(Elijah Oliver’s election programme, 1934.)
Children attended Sunday Schools, which sometimes had to teach basic reading and writing.

“Sunday was an awful day for us, for we had to go to the Wesleyan Chapel to Sunday School in the morning, again in the afternoon, a prayer meeting often half an hour before evening service, and then another prayer service for another long half hour.”

(Eddie Leece, Peel.)

“It was usual in those days for them to be teaching the alphabet and the first steps towards learning to read in the Sunday School.”

(Mrs. Lahmers, Bride)

Sunday School “Anniversaries” were important local events as were the annual Sunday School outings.

“The anniversaries were considered great affairs and practising hymns would go on for some weeks beforehand. People would come to the Chapel to see the scholars on the stage and open house was kept that day. Plenty of slim cake and pinjane [junket] as well as something more. Substantial food was provided...... Music was provided by a choir, and the scholars were supposed to take part. The Anniversaries were held to provide funds for books awarded for regular attendance at the school and were distributed in the month of November.”

(Mr. Mylecraine, Ballaugh)

“In those days the Sunday School outing was a great event. Floats and bogeys - horse drawn, were used to take the children to the Niarbyl or to Glen Wyllin - later they used to go by train to Silverdale.

There was a farm at Niarbyl where stalls and stabling were supplied for the horses, and the children had their tea in Clague’s tearoom, the cottage on the shore [around 1910].”

(Mr. Eddie Moore, Peel)