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The Celts were the first people to live in the Isle of Man who left signs which tell us about the names they gave to places and people.

Celts also lived in Ireland and they help us to know about life here as they spoke the same language.

Some of these Irish Celts wrote stories which mention the Isle of Man. To them it was a special place they knew about, but most of them had never seen.

Today we know the Island as the Isle of Man, and this word comes from a very old Celtic word Mon, which means Mountain.

If you come by boat towards the Isle of Man, the first thing you notice as you come closer is the range of hills, high above sea level.

On a good day you can see them from parts of England, Scotland, Ireland and even Wales, although it’s a bit farther away.

Although the Romans didn’t come to settle in the Isle of Man, they certainly knew about it. Julius Caesar referred to the Island as Mona, but the Romans sometimes also gave this name to the Island of Anglesey, off the North-West coast of Wales.

A few places on the Island still keep the early names they were given by the Celts, although usually the spelling is a bit different today.

Parts of the landscape which are very noticeable, like hills, rocks, rivers and streams sometime have their early names.
Some of the higher hills are called ‘slieau’, another Celtic word for mountain, while the lower ones are often called ‘cronk’.

Another word for a high place is ‘ard’ and some places like Cashtal yn Ard in Maughold are on high ground, with a good view on all round.
There are lots of rivers and streams, but very few of them still have their Celtic names. One place which does is **Glen Auldyn** just outside Ramsey. It still has the mountain stream rushing down the steep valley which gave its name hundreds of years ago.

As well as the places, we know the names of some Celtic people which are found carved on memorial stones. Some of these had writing in an alphabet called ‘*ógham*’ which was also used by Celts in other places, especially Ireland. These stones tell us some of the Celts’ own names.

Douglas, the capital, also keeps its old name as the two Celtic words ‘*doo*’ and ‘*glais*’ join together to mean ‘black stream’.

One stone is broken, but still has the words **CUNAMAGL MA** on it. This tells us it was the stone for the grave of **Cunamaglos**, but there is only part of the second word **MAQI** which means *son of*.
Today Cunamaglos' name has been altered and has probably become the Manx surname Cannell.

We use Mac or Mc at the beginning of some Irish and Scots surnames where it still means *son of*.

The other way we can find out about some of the Celts’ names is by reading Old Irish stories.

Although they were written later than any events they describe they give us a good idea of how the Celts imagined their gods and how they thought about Paradise.

Although *Inis Manann* is Irish for the *Isle of Man* the stories also called it *Tír na nOg*, the *Land of Youth*, and they described *Manannán* as being the God of this Otherworld across the sea, where Celtic heroes went after death.
The summit of South Barrule is 483 metres high, yet on it there are the remains of over seventy round stone walled huts. Exposed to wind and rain and sometimes covered in mist or low cloud, it’s not the kind of place you would expect people to choose to live.

The one good point about the hilltop is that it’s easy to defend, and whoever lived there built extra defences, so that attackers, already tired after a long climb, would be deterred from trying to take the settlement by force.

To find out why people lived on South Barrule we have to go back in time at least 2,500 years, to around 500 B.C.

The people who lived then knew how to make tools and weapons from copper and bronze, as well as from stone.

On such a high, bleak hilltop they would not have been able to grow grain crops, although they could store them, but they would have kept animals.

They would be able to control the south of the Island from here.
At that time the climate was growing cooler and wetter, and the lower fertile crop growing farm land was in great demand. Even this good land was producing less and less food. This may have led to an unsettled time when families needed to defend the land they already owned, and when the stronger families would try to take more of the better land for themselves.

There are certainly bronze swords and spearheads from that time. It may be that people who had shared land before were now fighting over it among themselves, but it was also a time when new people were moving in to settle in many parts of Britain.

These newcomers knew how to make their tools and weapons from another, stronger metal - iron. Iron ore is common and is found in the Isle of Man as well as in many other places. The problem is that it requires great heat in a special furnace to smelt it before it can be used. The newcomers could do this, but the people already here could not. It is quite likely that these people needed to defend themselves against the new people, whom we know as the Celts.

On South Barrule the main defence surrounding the huts was a rampart, or bank, made of turf and faced with stone slabs outside. The hilltop is rocky and it would be impossible to dig a ditch outside the rampart. Instead a 2 metre wide belt of four or fives lines of timber posts with sharp pointed ends was placed in front of it, looking rather like a large wooden spiny hedgehog. Inside the defences the people cooked their food on hearths in the huts and they left pottery there which is very like some pots from this time found in other places on the Island.

Later they built another rampart which enclosed more of the summit, but they didn’t build any more huts.

All we can tell today is that the people who first built the fort were not newcomers to the Island, and that it must have been great danger that caused them to live on the top of South Barrule.

In the north of the Island at Sulby is Cronk Sumark, a steep hillock, separate from the main range of hills, which overlooks the flat land of the northern plain. Today that land is flat and fertile, but around 2000 years ago it was very water-logged, with marshes and lakes, and only a few ‘islands’ which were of dry land. On two sides Cronk Sumark is so steep that it doesn’t need any extra defences to make it safe from attack, but it has stone and turf ramparts to defend the other sides where the slope is gentler. Cronk Sumark is much smaller than South Barrule and was probably occupied by fewer people. We cannot be sure exactly how they lived there because the hillock seems to have been used again more recently, damaging the earlier remains.
AN ISLAND FORT

About the same time there was a settlement on St. Patrick’s Isle at Peel where archaeologists found round timber framed houses. Some of the buildings had been replaced at least six times which shows that the village was there for hundreds of years altogether. One of the biggest huts had been used to store grain. St. Patrick’s Isle is very exposed to the weather, just like South Barrule, but it was a safe place too, because it was surrounded by sea.

It seems that the people there used it as a place to store the grain which was grown on the more fertile land round about Peel. So far we don’t know whether the people there built a rampart or not. They may have felt safe enough living on their Island.

Celtic Forts

The Manx promontory forts were built later than the hill forts and were used during the time when the Roman Empire had taken over more countries in Europe, including England and Wales in Britain. Once again they were built to give protection in dangerous times, although the danger was from different people. Once the Romans had settled in these other parts of Britain they left the Isle of Man alone, but they still had trouble with tribes in Scotland and Ireland and the Irish Sea area saw lots of raids from Ireland into Roman Britain.

The four promontory forts which we know most about were built in the South and South East of the Island, although there are about twenty which archaeologists have not looked at yet. They are small forts and they all have ramparts of earth, or earth and stone, with deep ditches outside on the landward side of the fort. Enemies would find it too difficult to attack the fort directly from the sea and would try to capture the fort by landing somewhere easier and moving round to attack from the land.

PROMONTORY FORTS

A promontory is usually where a piece of land juts out to the sea, so that three sides of it are surrounded by water. The forts were built mainly on high cliffs. Occasionally forts were built away from the sea, but still on a high piece of land jutting out into a valley.

St. Patrick’s Isle in the Iron Age

Cronk ny Merriu Fort (the rectangular house remains inside the fort are later)
At Cronk ny Merriu in Santon the ditch looks quite shallow now, but it was much deeper when it was dug out over 2000 years ago. Just inside the earth rampart there was a row of closely packed wooden posts supporting a wooden walkway which was high enough for defenders to see over the rampart. There was only one weak place and that was probably blocked by a heavy wooden gateway. A later Viking house was built inside the fort, which makes it difficult to know about the houses of the Celtic people who built the rampart, ditch and wooden stockade.

A little further down the coast from Cronk ny Merriu is another very similar fort at Cass ny Hawin in Malew. It was also reused later for a Viking house.

Near Scarlett in Malew is a Celtic fort at Close ny Chollagh. It’s at sea level, although the shore is very rocky. There were at least four small stone walled round houses inside the rampart and ditch. Because the stone there is limestone, the stones for the rampart wall could be shaped easily and have lasted very well. People were living there just after the birth of Christ.

Well away from the sea is a fort at Ballanicholas by the Santon Burn in Marown. Its small timber framed round house was up on a steep grass bank, with marshy land round it. There wasn’t even enough room for a path right round the house. On the side where the ditch had been dug, the house’s timber wall was protected outside by a bank of clay, so there was no room at all there for a path. If there was a farmyard, it must have been down on the flatter ground. The people who lived at Ballanicholas left very little there, except a bronze brooch which tells us the house was lived in about the same time as the houses at Close ny Chollagh.

Bronze penannular brooch from Close ny Chollagh

Looking from Close ny Chollagh over to Port St. Mary
## CELTIC FORTS ON THE ISLE OF MAN

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<td>SOUTH BARRULE</td>
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<td>MALEW SC 258759</td>
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<td>CRONK SUMARK</td>
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<td>CASTLEWARD</td>
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<td>HILL</td>
<td>BALLADOOLE</td>
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<td>ARBORY SC 246682</td>
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<td>ST. PATRICK’S ISLE</td>
<td>IRON AGE SETTLEMENT NO KNOWN RAMPARTS BUT POSSIBLE DEFENCES ON EAST SIDE OF ISLET</td>
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<td>BALLANICHOLAS</td>
<td>PRIVATE LAND INLAND PROMONTORY FORT, ON SPUR ABOVE MARSHY VALLEY, DITCH RAMPART ON ONE VULNERABLE SIDE, SMALL ROUND TIMBER FRAMED HOUSE</td>
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Some Celtic farm houses were occupied by people who lived there without needing to build great ramparts and ditches to keep them safe. We know most about three big timber round houses, two of which were side by side at Ballacagen in Arbory, and the third was about one kilometre away at Ballanorris. They are all on low, marshy land near the Dumb River which flows to the sea to the west of Castletown. The Celts who farmed there grew crops and kept animals. The houses were well built and their owners repaired them so that they lasted for a long time.

All three houses had big oak posts to make the main outside walls. These walls were supported on the outside by thick banks made of tightly packed clay which was dug out nearby, leaving wide, but shallow ditches round the houses. In such wet places these were useful to drain any flood water away from the houses if there had been heavy rainfall, but were not deep enough to defend the houses from enemies.

The houses had up to four rooms inside which needed strong posts set into the ground to bear the weight of the roof overhead.

To fill in the gaps between the main posts inside, the builders used lighter upright posts, sometimes of pine, on which they could weave long split tree branches to make wattle partitions.

Sometimes the rooms inside looked like rings, getting smaller towards the centre of the house, but in one house there were two square rooms too. Because the land was so marshy, when archaeologists were digging at Ballacagen they found that some of the wood was still there after two thousand years.

Each house had at least one entrance with a hall or corridor going part of the way in. Sometimes these had floors made of stones, while further into the living rooms of the houses the floors were often made of beaten clay which had to be dry to make it easy to keep them clean. Sometimes the floors were covered with rushes or straw which would be swept up and replaced regularly.

The floors sloped down towards the centre of the house. These houses had no drains under the floors, and so we know that the houses must have been waterproof. The clay floors would have become big ponds in the centre if any water had got into the
house. In the sections near the outside walls there might be stone floors too, as the farm animals were kept there at night and during the winter months.

Near the centre of the house, where the roof was highest, there was a hearth which was usually lined with flat stones. The fire gave heat and light to the living area of the house and was used for cooking.

There was a strong post beside the hearth where a cauldron could be hung over the fire. Any smoke from the fire would rise up and collect under the roof. Some houses had a small pit sunk into the floor nearer the outside where it was cooler for storing food.

The biggest round house was about twenty seven metres wide. This is why the house needed so many posts to support the roof. Inside the house you could look up and see the wooden frame, strapped together with hide thongs, with the underside of the turf roof showing earth and roots.

Outside the roof was green with short grass, growing a little, because its roots were still there. Some of the turf had been cut and rolled up in broad strips from the land near the house when it was first built.

This house had to have a wooden fence right round it to stop the farm animals from getting on to the low roof to eat the grass.

There are at least twelve other round houses like these on the Island which have not been excavated yet by archaeologists.

At the Braaid in Marown there is a stone walled round house which was a Celtic farm. It was built about five hundred years later than the big wooden round houses. Although the farm was on high land, it is still quite marshy as there are a lot of springs there.

The farm was later taken over by Vikings who built their own type of house beside the earlier Celtic one.

These farmhouses were lived in for a long time before they were abandoned. We don’t know why the people left.

Perhaps they just had a chance to move somewhere where there was better farm land and the houses were left to fall down.
In the Isle of Man the Celts’ farms varied according to the height of the land above sea level and the type of land they owned. On the higher land and on the marshy low land like that at Ballacagen the Celts had pasture farms where they grazed cattle and sheep. Their animals were smaller than ours today. The cattle had short horns and the sheep looked very much like Manx Loghtan sheep - in fact their bone structure is the same.

Some farmers kept pigs, but not in pigsties. They were allowed to root for food during the daytime in the woodlands which were outside the farm enclosure and they looked much more like the wild boar which are still found in some places in Europe than the breeds of pig kept on farms now. The cattle and sheep were kept for milk as well as meat. When there was too much milk in the early summer some of it would be made into butter and cheese which keep a lot longer.

As the weather grew warmer in summer the sheeps’ wool was plucked off by hand or perhaps clipped with iron shears and kept to make warm clothes for winter.

Most animals had to be killed at the beginning of the Celtic winter which started with the festival of Sauin in November as there was never enough hay and dried leaves to feed them all during the winter when the grass doesn’t grow much. Only the best animals were kept indoors during the winter to breed the following spring. The meat had to be hung over the fire to smoke, or salted down in containers. Before this the salt had to be dried from sea water during the summer when the sun was hot. The sea water would be run into big shallow clay-lined ponds at the shore and as it grew hotter the water evaporated leaving crusty rims of salt round the edges.

Hides from the dead animals were tanned to keep them soft and supple, so that shoes, cloaks, bed covers and leather buckets could be made from them.

Even some of the bones were used, often for small tools like spoons, combs or needles. A shoulder blade from an ox made a fine shovel for the fire at Close ny Chollagh.
There were quite a number of wild animals living on the Isle of Man in Celtic times. The Celts hunted some of them and ate the meat. Venison from red deer would make a welcome change for a meal, as would the meat from the hares which also lived in the hillier parts of the Island.

At Close ny Chollagh hedgehog bones have been found - not many, but they were found in a food dump by the houses which may mean that hedgehog was occasionally on the menu.

Chickens were kept at Close ny Chollagh for their meat, eggs and feathers.

As well as keeping farm poultry, the Celts hunted and trapped wildfowl. Some rounded bones have been found, all with holes in them, which would make good weights on a net for trapping birds like mallard ducks or geese, which were plentiful.

Others birds caught might include woodcock, pigeon, lapwing and curlew, and seabirds like Manx shearwaters, puffins, great auks and gannets which used to be common.

On the more fertile land the Celts had small fields in which they grew wheat and barley. From the grains found in the Celtic grainstore on St. Patrick’s Isle we can tell that they grew emmer and spelt wheat.

Scientists have grown emmer wheat as an experiment to see how good it is to grow and to eat. They have found that it produces good heads of grain with plenty of seeds which have a high protein content and that even when there are lots of weeds in the field it still grows well. Both wheat and barley seeds can be ground into flour using a quernstone.

It was then baked to make tasty flat wholemeal bread. Barley was used to make beer too which was flavoured with bog myrtle leaves to make it taste good. In other parts of Britain the Celts grew oats and rye, as they possibly did on Mann too.

There were plenty of vegetables which were grown or collected like cabbage, leeks, onions, beans, sea beet and rock samphire.

Wild plants were used also as herbs to flavour food and sometimes for medicines. Mint, tansy, feverfew, and fennel can be used either fresh or dried for the winter. Some herbs like dill and celery seeds were
probably imported from other areas too. Wild mushrooms were collected and sometimes dried, and fruits like apples, crab apples, blackberries, raspberries and gooseberries were popular. Honey was used to sweeten food.

Where people lived by the sea they ate plenty of fish. It could be salmon, trout, cod, herring, ling or skate. Archaeologists also know that oysters, limpets, winkles, mussels, cockles, crabs and lobsters were eaten, although the people who lived on St. Patrick’s Isle seem to have been quite tidy with their food rubbish - they probably threw the remains of their food into the sea.

The Celts in the Isle of Man might not have enjoyed all the different foods we have today, but they certainly knew how to make the most of what they could produce and find for themselves.

A rotary quernstone
Wool was the most useful material for clothes, because it was warm to wear, and easy to spin and weave. Sheep’s wool wasn’t all white as it tends to be with today’s breeds, and natural browns, greys and blacks were used as well as dyed wool. Flax plants were grown so that some cloths could be made from linen which is more comfortable when the weather is warm. The linen fibres are processed from the stems of the flax.

The Celts used hand spindles for spinning thread. The slate whorls which were used for spindle weights are quite often found. They wound the threads on to the bobbins which might be made from wood or bone.

To weave the threads into cloth they built big upright wooden looms. The warp threads were weighted with large round or oval stones with holes in the middle for tying the threads.

The weft threads were wound on to a wooden shuttle which was passed by hand through the warp threads on the loom.

Clothes had to be quite simple because all the sewing was done by hand, using bone needles.

Men wore tunics and trousers while women had long dresses. In winter a thick woollen cloak was worn to keep out the cold.
The Celts enjoyed bright colours, and Roman writers described the Celts in Britain as liking checked and striped patterns, although no examples of cloth have been found yet in the Isle of Man.

We know what plants grew in Celtic times and this can help us work out the natural dyes used for their clothes. Shades of red, blue, purple, green, yellow, brown, and grey could be got from lichens, blueberries, blackberries, nettles, weld and heather, acorns and sloe berries.

There were other plants growing in the Isle of Man then too which could be used for dyes. The Manx Celts traded with other parts of Britain and perhaps bought more expensive imported plant dyes like madder which makes a lovely red colour or woad, which gives blue.
Their shoes were made from soft leather. **Carranes** are soft shoes with the hair still showing on the outside which Manx country people made at home until in recent times ‘ready made’ shoes became cheap to buy from shops. They are just like the shoes the Celts wore.

The Celts were interested in their appearance. They combed their hair with bone combs and possibly they painted or tattooed themselves, although evidence of this comes only from other areas.

Celts who could afford jewellery liked to wear rings and bracelets which might be made from glass, *shale* or *amber*. Bead necklaces were popular and many people wore bronze pins or brooches to hold their cloaks in place.
The time from around 500 B.C. on, when the Celts lived and ruled in many parts of Europe, is known as the Iron Age. By then they were skilled metalworkers, using iron for tools and weapons, and bronze, silver and gold for more delicate work for use as ornaments and jewellery. Early Celts sometimes used long bars of iron as money before they began to mint coins. They were either exchanged for goods, or kept so that a blacksmith could melt them down to make or repair tools from them. Any smith was respected for his skills by the Celts, wherever they lived.

In the Isle of Man there is no evidence that the Celts who lived here actually made their own iron goods until the 800s A.D., and before this time they probably imported these ‘ready made’ from other parts of Britain. Bronze goods were made on the Island, but the bars of metal had to be brought here first so that the finished goods could be made. Crucibles, clay containers for heating up the metal, have been found at Close ny Chollagh in Malew and, from there and other Celtic settlements, there are some small clay and stone moulds into which the hot liquid metal was poured to set into different shapes.

Bronze pins for fastening cloaks have been found. Some pins and brooches are quite plain, but others are decorated - one bronze brooch from the roundhouse at Ballacagen still shows the red colour where the surface of the bronze was enamelled.

These more expensive pins and brooches were brought to the Isle of Man, like the brooch found at Close ny Chollagh.

Archaeologists know that it is just like others which were made in Roman England and sold in different areas in Britain.
The Celts in some parts of Europe learned how to make coloured and patterned glass which was shaped into beads, bracelets and small ornaments. Some rich Manx Celts brought this glassware. Glass beads and bracelets have been found at Ballacagen.

The family who lived there must have been in touch with other parts of Britain to have these goods. Some of their yellow and blue beads come from Somerset in the south of England.

Other jewellery was made of black shale or jet which comes from England and the amber for beads which have been found must have come from other parts of Europe.

Imported Celtic jewellery has been found in different places on the Island as far apart as Close ny Chollagh and Ballacagen in the south to Braust in Andreas in the north.

Although Celts in other places made good quality pottery, the only pieces found in the Isle of Man at Ballacagen were very rough and simple ‘home-made’ containers.

Earlier peoples had made pottery on the Island, but the Celts must have used more organic materials like wood and leather for their containers, which have rotted away in time. A few fragments of pottery imported from Roman Britain have been found.

The only wooden household object found in the Isle of Man is a ladle handle at Braust. Most everyday objects which have been found are made of stone, bone and horn.

It is much more difficult to know what the Celts who lived in the Isle of Man sold to other parts of Britain. Probably they exchanged goods like wool and hides as they kept animals on their pasture farms.

Trade was not so important that the Romans ever became really interested in the Isle of Man.
The pagan Celts believed that the natural world was full of spirits - each plant, tree, stream, pool, or any living thing had its own spirit. Some of these were very powerful - trees stretched their branches upwards towards the sky and sun while their roots reached down into the earth or underworld.

All trees were regarded as sacred, some like the oak even more so. Water was essential to life, but could also kill, if you were out on a stormy sea for example.

Some Celts put offerings into pools, lakes and rivers to please the water spirits. No offerings have been found in the Isle of Man, but here too the Celts thought that wells, where water came to the surface from deep underground, were holy places. Much later on people were still visiting wells which were believed to have the power to heal illnesses.

To the Celts the natural world was so important to life that their beliefs helped to explain things that were difficult to understand. It might be the weather - sometimes it was good and harvests gave them enough food for the whole year, but at other times floods or droughts could mean there was not enough for people and animals to survive on.

For them the seasons were so important that they had special Festivals when the spirits and gods could be asked to give good weather with plenty of food so that people could live well.

**CELTIC SEASONAL FESTIVALS**

At **Sauin**, at the beginning of November, the Celts’ New Year began. It was the beginning of winter, when their cattle and sheep had to be slaughtered and the meat preserved to last the people over the hard winter months, as they had little or no food for animals to feed on, except for those which were kept to breed the following spring.

They feasted while there was still plenty of fresh food and burned bright fires to keep away the spirits they believe haunted their world as one year came to an end and another began. Even today lighted turnip lanterns on **‘Hoptunaa’** night, October 31st, remind us of this Celtic custom on the night when the spirit and human worlds came closest together.

**Imbolc**, a word lost now in Manx, was the Festival celebrated at the beginning of February, the start of the spring quarter of the year. It was the Festival of the goddess
Brigit, later chosen as a Saint by Celtic Christians, who was associated with this time of the year when the ewes which had been kept for breeding came into milk.

Brigit was an interesting goddess who healed illnesses, protected women in childbirth, foretold the future, and presided over the ale harvest! In the Isle of Man Brigit has become St. Bridget (Brede or Bride in Manx) and the parish of Bride is named after her.

May was Boaldyn, the start of summer, when animals could be put out to graze again. Fires were lit to encourage the sun’s summer warmth which would ripen the crops.

In some areas the Celts drove their animals through a narrow gap between two fires to purify them and keep them free from disease through the summer months. More recently in the Isle of Man little crosses of rowan twigs, crosh keirn, were tied to the tails of the animals for the same reason.

The cross itself is the Christian symbol, but the rowan tree was one of the pagan Celts’ magic trees which was believed to keep the people and their property safe from evil spirits.

With Luanistyn in August came the Festival of Lug, the Shining One, god of Light, who was in Irish tales a great warrior, and associated with marriage, fertility and the harvest. Once again fires were lit on the hills and celebrations began for this harvest month.

Until quite recently people still walked up to the hilltops at the beginning of August, particularly high areas where there were also ‘healing’ wells like Snaefell, South Barrule and Maughold Head where it was believed that illnesses could be cured.

The Celts also celebrated Midsummer, which is still celebrated in the Isle of Man as Tynwald Day on July 5th, although our calendar was altered in the eighteenth century to keep it accurate. Midwinter, the shortest day, is today kept as the Festival of Christmas.

If you wonder why the Celts were so keen on lighting fires at every quarter of the year, it was because they believed that fire purified everything, and that from the ashes of fires new life sprung. This is true with wood fires as the ash is a good fertiliser and plants grow well from seeds which have lodged there or roots which have survived underground. They also thought that fires on earth were just like the sun in the sky.
MANANNAN, GOD OF THE SEA

Manannan Beg Mac Lir, God of the Sea, was a powerful Celtic God. He was known in several Celtic countries, especially in Ireland and the Isle of Man. Irish tales tell us most about him, although stories in Manx, like the 16th century ‘Traditionary Ballad’, mention him too.

Manannan was said to have his palace on the summit of South Barrule, surrounded by the mists which he could create at will.

He could change his shape or appearance and so you might see him as the great armoured God of the Sea, with his terrible sword the ‘Answerer’ from whose blow no enemy could recover.

At other times he might appear like an ordinary looking young boy, or perhaps an old man. He might travel by his fast ‘Wave Sweeper’ or astride ‘Enbarr’ who could travel swiftly over sea and land alike.
Manannan could create illusions so that his shape changed into three legs and would roll downhill like a wheel gaining speed on the steepest of slopes.

Every Tynwald Day rushes are still spread on the procession path from St. John’s Church to Tynwald Hill. This is a custom which has come from the time when the people of the Isle of Man were said to go to South Barrule on that day each year to pay a rent of rushes to Manannan for their land. Manannan, of course, could find a good use for some of the rushes - he might make a model boat and set it sailing on the water. His own people knew it was only a little rush boat, but his enemies would believe they saw a whole fleet of a hundred great wooden ships coming to attack them!

When Christian priests came to the Isle of Man they did not want the Celts to believe in the old gods any more, but the tales about Manannan have become legends, which are still told today.

With Manannan’s help one man could appear as one hundred men coming over the brow of a hill, causing enemies to flee before them.
The Celts enjoyed stories of heroes, giants, fairies and strange creatures as well as tales of their gods. All good storytellers were held in honour and much later some of their best stories were written down.

HOW MANN WAS MADE

Finn Mac Cooil was a famous Irish giant. Giants didn’t often get on very well with each other and this was certainly true of Finn when a red headed giant boldly came over the sea from Scotland to challenge Finn’s strength on his own territory. The Scottish giant didn’t succeed in the fight, and he started to run off as fast as he could, back towards the sea. Finn could see that the Scot was a faster runner than he was and he was determined he wasn’t going to escape.

Down Finn bent, grabbed a good handful of Irish soil and stones, and threw it after the retreating Scottish giant. His aim wasn’t too accurate and he missed.

The Scot bounded over the sea homeward, the great lump of soil fell in the middle of the Irish Sea where it still is now and, if you look at the map of Ireland, you will see Lough Neagh in the north-east where Finn stooped down and left a huge hole where he grabbed the handful of soil which became the Isle of Man.
TEEVAL, PRINCESS OF THE OCEAN

Culain, the blacksmith of the Celtic gods, lived in the Isle of Man, Conchubar, a young man living in Ireland, went to visit a great druid there who told him that if he travelled to the Isle of Man and asked Culain to make him a sword, spear and shield, he would one day become the King of Ulster.

He did this and Culain agreed to make the special weapons as he had also heard the prophecy and recognised Conchubar.

While he was waiting for the weapons to be made Conchubar spent a lot of time walking round the Island.

One day he was walking along the shore when he came across a beautiful mermaid sleeping soundly on the sand. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen and, while she slept, he tied her with his girdle as he was afraid she would swim away and he would lose her.

When Teeval woke up she pleaded with him to let her go, promising that if he asked Culain to engrave the image of her face on his shield, he would become so strong in any battle that he and his men would always win. Conchubar could not resist Teeval’s pleas and let her go.

Teeval swam away, and, although he never saw her again, whenever he went into battle he looked at her image on the shield that Culain made and gained the strength of a giant.

Once Conchubar had made himself King of Ulster, Culain was invited to leave the Isle of Man and was given lands in the Kingdom of Ulster.
THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY

As we have no writing from the time to tell us how and when the Celts in Mann became Christians we have to rely on stories which were written down much later and on the clues that archaeologists have worked out. These don’t always agree!

Christianity is said to have been brought to the Isle of Man by St. Patrick, although archaeologists have not found any proof of this. There are plenty of places in the Isle of Man named after the saint, including St. Patrick’s Isle at Peel, and St. Patrick’s Chair in Marown where Celtic Christian priests preached in the open air.

From the fifth century A.D. there were Christian priests, mainly from Ireland, but from Scotland too, travelling in the Irish Sea area and to the other parts of Britain, preaching about Christ to the people there. Probably people were reluctant to change their beliefs to start with and the Christians had to become storytellers who were as good as the pagan priests. This is why a Celtic pagan goddess like Brigit re-appears in the Christian story as St. Bridget. In some ways she was still very like the old goddess and her festival of Imbolc in February was renamed St. Bridget’s Day, which is why people were prepared to accept the Christian ideas.

Archaeologists have found some early Manx memorial stones from this time which have the name of the dead person written in Ogham on them.

A few stones have the name written in Latin. One has been found at Knock e Doonee in Andreas which has the name in both Ogham and Latin. Simple cross designs were carved on some early stones, but these don’t always have names on them.
The Celtic Christians also began to build little chapels called *keeills* for the priests to pray in. At first they were made with timber frames but, if they were rebuilt later, they were built with stone, so that we still know today where some of them were in Celtic times.

**THE STORIES OF ST. PATRICK**

The Manx sixteenth century poem the ‘Traditionary Ballad’ is an early writing which mentions St. Patrick.

‘Then came Patrick into the midst of them; He was saint and full of virtue; He banished Manannan on the wave, And his evil servants all dispersed’.

The poem describes how St. Patrick blessed other priests who came to the Isle of Man and became leaders of the Christian Church.

Of course, other Christian storytellers made the arrival of St. Patrick seem more exciting by saying that the pagan god Manannan summoned thick mists to hide the Island when he heard St. Patrick was on his way on horseback from Ireland to change the Manx Celts into Christians. St. Patrick was lost out to sea until, out of the mists, he heard three sounds - a curlew calling, a goat bleating and a cock crowing. These guided him to a safe landing on Peel Hill where he blessed the creatures who had helped him and banished Manannan from the Isle of Man.

St. Patrick sent other priests to the Isle of Man too, according to some Irish stories. One of these was a chief, MacCuill, from Ulster who led a band of thieves. Some of his men had become Christians when they had listened to St. Patrick and had left his band. MacCuill boasted that he would kill St. Patrick, but when they met, St. Patrick saved the life of one of MacCuill’s men and convinced him that Christianity was the only true belief. To prove that he had genuinely changed his way of life, St. Patrick bound MacCuill in chains, threw the key away into the nearby river, and sent him drifting out to sea in a little hide-covered *coracle*. The tides took the little open boat to the Isle of Man where it came to land at Maughold Head. MacCuill became the leader of the Christians there who built a monastery at Maughold, which is named after him. The key to unchain him did turn up after a while - in the belly of a fish which was caught and served up for dinner in the monastery!

*Miracle stories* like this were told by priests to impress people, but archaeologists agree that there was an early Christian monastery at Maughold with at least four little *keeills*, even if we don’t really know who built it.

One of the *keeills* in Maughold Churchyard
CELTIC KEEILLS AND CROSSES

From the 600s A.D. the most important Christian monastery was at Maughold, where a group of priests lived and worked together, and travelled round the Island to tell people about Christ. Each area of the Island had its own small chapel or keeill which the priests from the monastery probably visited. They were so small that they were not used like churches today. The people who came to listen to the priest stayed outside where he preached in the enclosed grounds round the building. The priest prayed inside at the altar on his own so that he could feel close to God and, in some remote places like Lag ny Keeilley in Patrick and Spooyt Vane in Michael, he lived in a tiny one-roomed cell beside the keeill. These priests had their own gardens where they grew vegetables and fruit for food, and herbs that were good to help some illnesses.

The altar stones from the keeills are very beautifully decorated, especially the one which was found on the Calf of Man which shows Christ on the cross.

The Calf of Man Crucifixion altar stone

Stone keeills sometimes had paved floors and a window opening at the altar end of the building. Small rounded stones which had been hollowed out to hold oil were used as lamps to light the altar.

Stone cresset lamp from Bride Church

There would be special occasions too, like the christening of children or adults, which would be held outside. Most keeills had a holy well nearby - probably the same well that the pagan Celts a long time before had also believed was sacred. The water would be blessed and small stone cups have been found which were used to hold the holy water.
Funerals took place outside and the dead were buried in stone-lined *lintel* graves in the enclosed grounds of the keeill.

The priest would say prayers for the soul of the dead person as the coffin was placed in the ground.

Before it was covered the family and friends put white *quartz* pebbles on to the coffin lid. Perhaps they believed it would help the soul to reach heaven.

In memory of the dead person simple slate slabs were placed at the head of the grave to mark it.

The crosses carved on them might be very simple, but as more and more Celts became Christians, richer people wanted grave markers which had complicated *interlace* designs. These were expensive and took a stone carver a long time to make, but they would last and look beautiful.
The design of the carved cross became more complicated too. One of the most popular designs was a cross with a ring round the head. The stone carver might show figures as well.

One of the cross slabs from Maughold shows a ring-headed cross with two figures who are wearing habits. They may be two priests from the monastery, or perhaps two of Christ’s disciples, but there are no names on the cross.

Another Maughold stone has Latin writing which tell us that ‘Branhui led off water to this place’.

Supplying water to the monastery was an important task which needed an engineer’s skill to build a stone-lined water channel.

Branhui was probably a priest who learned how to do that, but on this stone there is no figure to show us.

One of the biggest compliments to the skills of Celtic stone carvers is that, when the Vikings came to the Isle of Man in the 900s A.D. and met the Celts, many of them became Christians and asked stone carvers to make stone cross slabs like the Celtic ones to mark their family graves too.

Even today, memorial stones often use Celtic designs.

Celts liked to carve animals too, and a stone from Onchan shows two dogs with wide open jaws crouching on either side of the cross.
PLACES

When you look round the Isle of Man today you can still see evidence that has remained since the Celts lived here.

On the Island many farm names start with Balla which is the Celtic word for a farm or small settlement. Some of these have stayed as separate farms in the countryside, but others, like Ballasalla the settlement of the willows (or sallies as they are sometimes called) have grown big enough to become villages today.

Even names which have become much shorter like Ballaugh possibly used to be Balla ny Loghey, the settlement of the lake. Long ago the land round Ballaugh was much wetter than the area of land there which is still wet and marshy enough to be known by its Celtic name the Curraghs.

Most of the Manx hills have the Celtic names slieau, cronk or knock, (depending on the height of the hill), with a second word after to describe them.

There are nine hills in different parts of the Island which are called Cronk Mooar, which is Big Hill and another eight called Cronk Doo, Black Hill.

PEOPLE

It’s difficult to know what early Celtic names were as hardly any of them were written down in the Isle of Man, but some are still used today. If you know anybody whose name is Fiona, you can trace the name back to the time of the Vikings, when it was Find, and even as far back as the time when the Celtic family lived in the roundhouse at Ballacagen when the woman’s name was Vinda.
LANGUAGE

Although the Celts’ language has changed over many years, you can still hear and speak it. There are now two main branches of Celtic. The Manx Gaelic language sounds like the Gaelic spoken in Ireland and Scotland, but in Wales and Cornwall, the other Celtic parts of Britain today, the languages have become quite different from the three Gaelic areas.

If you meet Manannan in one of his many shapes you can say ‘Good Morning’ to him in Manx and he will reply.

Look around and see some signs in Manx;

**THIE VANANNAN**
HOUSE OF MANANNAN, Peel

**SCOILL VAROONEY**
MAROWN SCHOOL

CUSTOMS

Before the Celts became Christians they believed Manannan could save them from drowning at sea. Later St. Patrick was thought to have the same power. There is still a Manx fisherman’s prayer which says:

‘Manannan, Son of Lir,
Bless us and our boats,
Manannan, Son of Lir,
Good going out, but better coming back,
With the living and the dead. Manannan, Son of Lir’.

The fishermen were the ‘living’, and the ‘dead’ were the fish they hoped to catch.

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

Some of the places where the Celtic Christians built their *keeills* are still used today. Newer, bigger churches were built, like Maughold Church where the remains of the stone walls of three *keeills* are in the churchyard and the fourth one has been used as the site for the church.

Maughold Church and churchyard
CELTIC ART

Maughold and other Manx churches have collections of cross slabs, from Celtic and Viking times, Artists and sculptors are very interested in the designs on them. Some have copied the patterns and others have made different designs using some of the ideas they had when they looked at the crosses.

A well known Manx artist who designed his own Celtic patterns from the ones he saw was Archibald Knox. From writing in a swirling Celtic style, to ornaments in pewter and silver, and even his own gravestone, Archibald Knox has inspired many people to admire the art of the Celts.

In some ways the Isle of Man is still a Celtic Island, with its Celtic language which has lasted through the times of newcomers like Vikings, Scots and English who came to the Island after the Celts, and with the interest today in the art and culture of its Celtic past. Other ideas from different places have now mixed with those of the Celts, which is how people adapt to changing times, but still remember how the Island’s story was made
**Amber:** a clear yellowish fossil resin used for ornaments  
**Druid:** a Celtic priest who could foretell the future  
**Emmer:** a primitive grain, like wheat  
**Enamelled:** a glossy or glazed coating applied to a metal surface  
**Habit:** robe worn by a priest or monk  
**Interlace:** to draw two or more bands across each other, passing each alternately above and below  
**Jet:** hard brown coal which can be polished  
**Keeill:** a small Celtic chapel  
**Latin:** language of the Romans  
**Lichen:** primitive plant which grows on the surface of rocks and trees  
**Lintel:** flat slabs of stone placed over a grave  
**Loom:** a wooden frame on which threads are woven into cloth  
**Miracle stories:** fantastic stories made simple to understand  
**Ogham:** a Celtic alphabet with twenty characters formed of lines  
**Organic:** substances which exist naturally as parts of animals or plants  
**Pagan:** belonging to a religion which usually believes in many gods  
**Protein:** essential food for growth  
**Quartz:** a mineral which forms quartzite rock; a milky white rock in Mann  
**Quernstone:** two stones for grinding corn; the upper stone turned by hand  
**Rampart:** a bank of earth, sometimes faced with stone, raised to defend a place  
**Shale:** a rock, often found over a coal seam  
**Smelt:** to melt ore to extract metal  
**Spelt:** a primitive grain, like wheat  
**Warp:** threads running lengthwise on a loom; sometimes held down by weights  
**Wattle:** wooden stakes interlaced with branches to form fences, walls and roofs of buildings  
**Weft:** threads carried on a shuttle and woven crosswise in and out of warp threads

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