

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-69272-5 - Cambridge County Geographies: The Isle of Man

The Rev. John Quine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

## **1. The Isle of Man. The word Man : its Origin and Meaning.**

The early history of the Isle of Man is veiled from our knowledge. Though the veil begins to lift from over Britain shortly before the Christian Era, and Ireland comes into the light some three centuries later, there is a uniform lack of direct information about Man until the period of the Viking invasions. In this chapter we shall briefly mention the early authors who notice the island, and then consider what is known about the history of its name.

The earliest mention of an island in the Irish Sea occurs in Caesar's description of Britain (B.C. 54). He says that Mona lies midway across the sea separating Britain from Ireland. The position so described is that of the Isle of Man ; but the name Mona is that of Anglesey, and at a later period was unmistakably applied to this latter island. From his knowing of but one island in this region of sea, it is obvious that Caesar's information was vague, but derived nevertheless from men with some definite knowledge of the Irish Sea.

The Roman conquest of Britain does not date from the expeditions of Caesar, but from the time of the

Q. I. M.

I

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-69272-5 - Cambridge County Geographies: The Isle of Man

The Rev. John Quine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

2

ISLE OF MAN

Emperor Claudius nearly a century later (A.D. 43). The historian Tacitus describes the conquest of Mona by Suetonius Paulinus (A.D. 60), with details that clearly identify it with Anglesey. A little later the Brigantes, whose region included Lancashire and Cumberland, were conquered in the reign of Vespasian (A.D. 69–79); and Pliny, this emperor's intimate friend, in his description of Britain, mentions six islands between Ireland and Britain, among them Mona and Monapia—the first certainly Anglesey; the second, Man. Ptolemy, writing about A.D. 120, speaks of an island called Monarina, which is considered by some to be a mistake for Monava.

There is no written evidence that the Romans sent a military expedition to Man, and there are no vestiges of Roman occupation, such as stations or camps, on the island. This does not, of course, imply that the island had then no connection with the outside world. The importance of the trade connections of Ireland with Gaul in the centuries before and after the Christian Era is only now being realised, and there is every reason to suppose that the Isle of Man shared to some extent in this over-sea trade. There was a Roman road from York to Preston, terminating on the Ribble at Freckleton, which was called the Port of the Segantii. From here, in clear weather, the island may be seen on the north-west horizon. The fact that the terminus of this Roman road from York to the shore of the Irish Sea was a port, implies that during the four centuries of the Roman occupation of Britain there must have been communication with the island. And in the same way a Roman road, a branch

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-69272-5 - Cambridge County Geographies: The Isle of Man

The Rev. John Quine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## ORIGIN AND MEANING

3

of Watling Street, went to *Caer Segont* opposite Anglesey, and through Anglesey to Holyhead, the great port for the Irish.

With a port on the Ribble in Roman times, a port at Ravenglass, and a Roman station at Lancaster, from which Man is visible in clear weather, communication with the island was simple and easy; and Orosius (A.D. 416) seems to have written on the basis of information derived from persons who had visited it, for he calls Man “*Mevania*—of considerable extent, fertile in soil, and, like Ireland, inhabited by tribes of Scots [i.e. Irish].”

In Saxon times, Bede (A.D. 734), referring to islands in the Irish Sea which Edwin of Northumbria made subject to the English, calls them the “*Mevanian Islands* of the Britons.” Later again, the various chroniclers whose work covers the Saxon period generally refer to Man as “*Mevania*”; one writer using the form *Monaeda* and *Manavia*. In the Saxon Chronicle, under date 1087, William the Conqueror is said to have (i) conquered Wales, (ii) obtained full rule over *Mann-cynn* (supposed to be Man), and (iii) purposed to subjugate Ireland.

Nennius, writing not later than the tenth century, speaks vaguely of an island, which he calls *Eubonia*; Jocelin, writing in 1192, definitely identifies “*Eubonia*” with “*Mannia*,” and this name *Eubonia* is used as late as 1393 in a record of the transfer of Man from the Earl of Salisbury to the Earl of Wiltshire. Welsh annals mention *Eubonia* (A.D. 584), and again (A.D. 684), and *Eumonia* (A.D. 987); but it is impossible to say what place the annalists had in mind.

1—2

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-69272-5 - Cambridge County Geographies: The Isle of Man

The Rev. John Quine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 4

## ISLE OF MAN

The native name for the Isle of Man is *Ellan Vannin*, in which the first word means island, whilst the second corresponds to Irish *Manann*, the genitive singular of *Mana* or *Manu*, ‘Man.’ The Welsh form is *Manaw*. Now it is interesting to note that the same name was also given in ancient times to a district in Scotland, where it survives in the modern *Slamannan* and *Clackmannan*. Prof. Sir John Rhŷs traces the name to an old Celtic *Manaviō*, genitive singular *Manavionos*. What the origin of the name was it is impossible to say at the present day. But it is difficult to separate the ancient designation of the island from the name of the *Menapii*, a tribe in Belgium, and the *Manapii*, who dwelt in the south-east of Ireland, on the one hand, and from the name of the Irish Neptune *Manannan* son of *Ler* (the origin of Shakespeare’s *Lear*) on the other. In Irish story *Manannan* has a special connection with the island, where he is still known as *Manannan Beg Mac y Lir* (Little *Manannan*, Son of the Sea).

On a twelfth century cross still standing at *Kirk Michael* in the Isle of Man, with an inscription in Old Norse and in Runic letters, the island is called *Mön* (probably pronounced *Maun*). The Goidelic *Mana* and Old English *Monig* (man-island) gave rise to the later Latin form which is always used in the *Chronicles of Rushen Abbey*. Subsequently the name was written either *Mann* or *Man*; and eventually and finally *Man*.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-69272-5 - Cambridge County Geographies: The Isle of Man

The Rev. John Quine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

5

### **2. General Characteristics. Position and Natural Conditions.**

Man is more or less rightly named the Midway Isle. The shortest distances to the opposite coasts are, to Scotland (Burrow Head in Wigtownshire) 16 miles; to England (St Bee's Head in Cumberland) 28 miles; to Anglesey 45 miles; and to Ireland (the Ards of Down) 38 miles.

The island lies, in elongated form, about N.N.E. and S.S.W., with a diagonal range of mountains from north-east to south-west, at both ends terminating abruptly over the sea; these mountains being of the same slate formation as those of Wales and Cumberland. The island has therefore two districts, with general aspects south-east towards England and Wales, and north-west towards Ireland and Scotland. In clear weather from the various summits of the island one can see very plainly, as great mountainous masses, "the four countries"—the Galloway highlands, the Cumbrian group, the Snowdon range, and the Mourne mountains. And, given exceptionally favourable conditions of atmosphere, one can trace the coast border of southern Scotland from the Mull of Galloway to the Solway; the coast of England from Workington to Barrow; low-lying Anglesey backed by the Welsh mountains; and the Ards of Down from Strangford Lough to Belfast Lough. It is not without significance that North Barule and South Barule, the former at the north-east end of the mountain range and

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-69272-5 - Cambridge County Geographies: The Isle of Man

The Rev. John Quine

Excerpt

[More information](#)



Spanish Head

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-69272-5 - Cambridge County Geographies: The Isle of Man

The Rev. John Quine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

7

the latter near the south-west end, should be called "Barule," a corruption of Ward-fell, i.e. the Hill of Watch and Ward.

On the eastern side of the island the mountains and their lateral spurs have a gradual slope; on the western there is more abruptness, and the spurs are in effect foot-hills trending somewhat parallel to the main chain of mountains. Towards the southern end the slopes flatten out into levels on a formation of horizontally-bedded limestone; but towards the northern end the alignment of the foot-hills abuts steeply on a wide alluvial plain. Inevitably the character of the scenery on these opposite sides of the mountain range is distinct; nevertheless, from the fact that the island is remarkably bare of timber, the general characteristic of bare hills and fenced fields on their lower slopes is common to both sides of the island alike.

The extreme length of the Isle of Man, from Spanish Head at the south to the Point of Ayre at the north, is 33 miles; the extreme breadth, about midway, 12 miles; but generally the breadth is about 10 miles for the greatest part of its length. The coast line is about 80 miles; the area 145,325 acres, or 227 square miles, of which about a fourth part is mountain waste and common.

Snaefell, the highest mountain, reaches 2024 feet; North Barule, 1842 feet: both these summits are near the north-east end of the range. South Barule (1584) and Cronk-na-Irey-Lhaa (1445) are similarly grouped near the south-west end. Between are five summits above 1500 feet, two above 1000 feet, and many lateral eminences

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-69272-5 - Cambridge County Geographies: The Isle of Man

The Rev. John Quine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

8

ISLE OF MAN

little short of 1000 feet. The abutments on the coast—except at the ends of the main chain—generally do not exceed 400 feet; Maughold Head (north-east) being 373, and Spanish Head (south-west) 350 feet. The Point of Ayre, the extreme northern limit of the island, is the termination of the alluvial plain, and is a low spit



St Michael's Chapel on St Michael's Isle

of shingle formed by the scour of the North Channel tides. The Stack of Scarlett and Langness Point at the south-eastern end of the island are low—the former, the margin of horizontal limestone beds; the latter, slate jutting out from the over-lap of the limestones.

Naturally one must expect many streams in an island of many mountains: and, not including the tributaries in



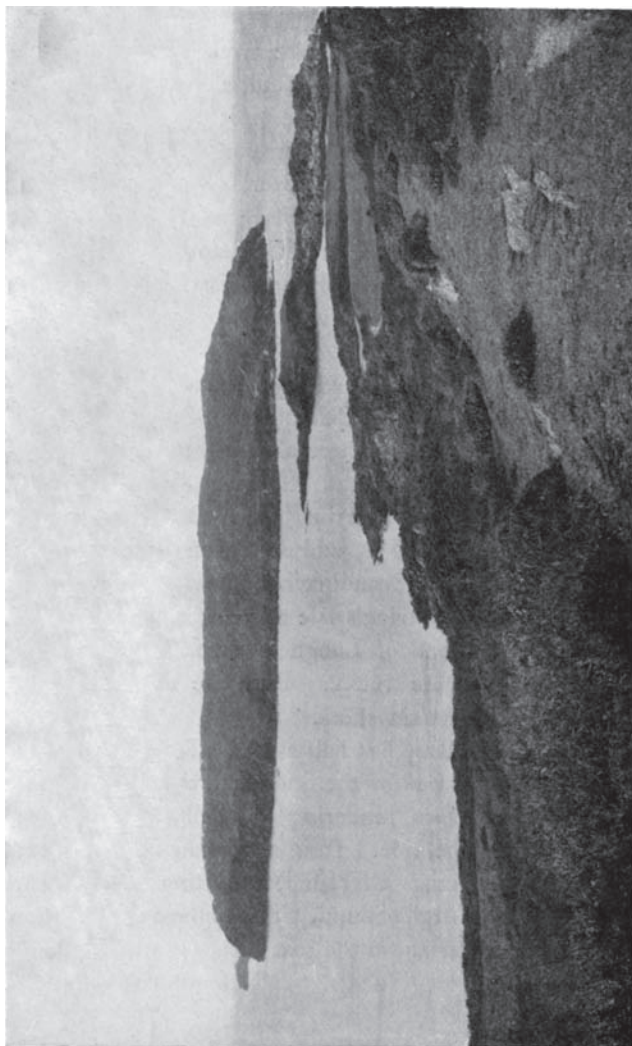
Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-69272-5 - Cambridge County Geographies: The Isle of Man

The Rev. John Quine

Excerpt

[More information](#)



Calf Island

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-69272-5 - Cambridge County Geographies: The Isle of Man

The Rev. John Quine

Excerpt

[More information](#)

every converging glen, there are twelve that enter the sea on the eastern side of the island, and fourteen on the western side. They flow for the most part laterally from the central watershed, and their courses are rapid and short. The Sulby River, however, entering the sea at Ramsey, has a course of ten miles; and the rivers that debouch at Douglas, Peel, and Castletown have courses of about eight miles. All of them rise on the divide of the island, and flow parallel with rather than transversely to the mountain range.

Adjacent to Man, but widely distant each from the other, are three islets, the Calf of Man, St Patrick's Isle, and St Michael's Isle. There also was formerly a delta islet of considerable size at Ramsey, but it has been destroyed by the tidal bore in Ramsey Bay. The town stands on a fragment of it, and derives its name from the islet. The name is Scandinavian, meaning the Isle of Hrafn (raven). St Patrick's Isle at Peel, and St Michael's Isle at the north end of Langness, each with an area of about five acres, are rocky. Both are now joined by causeways to the main shore.

The Calf of Man lies half-a-mile off the south-west end of Man, separated by the Sound, through which runs a dangerous tide race, rendering the Calf accessible only at the slack of the tide. It is a plateau of 800 acres, with precipitous crags all round, admitting of a landing only at one point in the Sound. The highest eminence on the islet is 470 feet above the sea.