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CAMMAG

Cammag, *s. pl. yn.* a crutch, a crooked bat or shinty to play hurles, also the name of the game itself. *Dy chloie er y chammag*, to play at shinty.

Rev. John Kelly
(1750–1809)

Enlarged Edition

CHIOLLAGH BOOKS
FOR
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NOTE TO REVISED EDITION



Since the first appearance of this publication references to *cammag* have been found amongst the files of the Manx Museum Folk-Life Survey and this comprises the additional material presented here. A small number of printed sources have also been located and it is the intention to combine all of the available material together at a later date.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2020



INTRODUCTION



CAMMAG, *s. pl.* YN. a crutch, a crooked bat or shinty to play hurles, also the name of the game itself. *Dy chloie er y chammag*, to play at shinty.

Rev. William Gill, ed., *The Manx Dictionary in Two Parts. First, Manx and English; and the Second, English and Manx* (1866), 37a. Dictionary compiled by the Rev. John Kelly (1750–1809).

CAMMAG, *s. f.* a crutch, a cricket ball; *pl.* –YN

Archibald Cregeen, *A Dictionary of the Manks Language* (1835), 32b.

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The first mention of the game of *cammag* (often spelt also as *kammag*) in the Insular press comes from 1843, when By-Laws were proposed for the Island’s towns that sought to prohibit the playing of the game. Levied would be a fine “not exceeding Ten Shillings, nor less than Two Shillings and Sixpence” against anyone caught and convicted, and this passed into law in 1846. [N1843] & [N1846]

In 1851, Thomas Cholmondeley complained in the *Mona’s Herald* that pupils from King William’s College were making use of the public highway as a play ground and “games of marbles, peg-top, kammag, &c” were taking place and, he stressed, “under the windows of respectable persons’ houses.” [N1851] Nostalgia for the playing of the game in times past on Douglas beach came from a piece complaining about the changes there in the town. [N1858]

Cammag was still alive and strong in Ramsey in 1869, when the Clerk to the Commissioners was place posters about the town, “cautioning the children against playing at ‘cammag,’ and other dangerous games in the public thoroughfare.” [N1869] This was to little effect, and in 1871, one of the Commissioners proposed that they write to the Chief Constable, “calling his attention to the dangerous practice of ‘kammag’ playing by the children of the town [...]” [N1871]

A proposed polo match at the Strang in 1877 had the sport being explained (with tongue firmly in cheek), “for the benefit of [the] uninitiated,” as being the “game of ‘Kammag,’ played on horseback.” [N1877]

“W.R.” in 1883 wrote of his memory of cammag being played on the beach at Douglas by the “lads of the town,” adding “none daring to make them afraid.” [N1883]

There was an echo of the letter from Thomas Cholmondeley in 1851, when in 1884 the *Isle of Man Times* published a letter from someone signing themselves as “One in Danger.” His letter opens: “I am very loath to take up my pen at any time to make complaints, but I think it is my duty to do so this time.” This time it was the school

children of Andreas Parochial School who were the problem and the game being played, “was a native one called Kammag, which as every one knows, is very dangerous.” Upon being asked to halt play to allow a baker’s cart to pass, they refused and carried on, firing the ball, described as a wooden one, between the horse’s legs and the wheel of the cart. A further annoyance (and here one can have some sympathy with the writer) was that “these children actually go into the neighbours’ gardens, during playtime, and break the fences and trees to get a kammag.” [N1884]

In 1885, the Glen Audlyn Wesley Chapel had organised a fund-raising picnic, and “[a]ccording to the posters announcing the fete, means were provided for ‘cricket, cammag, quoits, croquet, tennis, aunt sally, and other amusements’ [...]” [N1885/3]

Whilst in 1851 and 1871, it was the children of Ramsey who were playing cammag, 1885 saw the adults of the town coming out to play. Two teams assembled on the Mooragh, the captains being the Rev. T.R. Kneale and J.J. Corlett. “The cammags were of various dimensions and shapes, and the sides which numbered about 20 players each, including several experts as well as a few novices in the game.” The match began at two-thirty in the afternoon, and lasted until four o’clock, when a drive by A.C. Kayll won the game for the Rev. Kneale’s side, who then won the match by six games to four. Such was the new-found enthusiasm for cammag, another match had been arranged for the following week, on the Monday at four-thirty. “The revival of this healthy game amongst those of riper years has been a decided hit, and will be continued during the ‘Season of cammag.’” [N1885/1]

It was indeed the “Season of Cammag” in Ramsey in 1885. Monday’s match was yet again another one of victory for the Rev. Kneale, his side winning by four games to two. The first game lasted for over forty minutes, the hard play exhausting both sides, “and the remaining games were less spirited.” Such was their enthusiasm, however, the match was, it would seem, continued on the Thursday that same week, and this time victory on the day went to J.J. Corlett’s side, with four goals to three. [N1885/2] A new season and round of matches commenced in November, playing this time on the beach below the Promenade, and with reduced numbers, just nine a side. “The next meeting will be the week after next.” [N1885/4] The next report of a match (in December) by what was now referred to as the Cammag Club saw the numbers slightly rise, with ten a side playing four games on the sands below the Albert Hotel, “but there was too much wind for it to be pleasant.” Corlett’s side appeared to be on the up, as it was reported that “Mr J.J. Corlett’s side won three games out of the four.” [N1885/5]

An account of another match that month again referred to the players as being the Ramsey Cammag Club, and playing again in the same location, the five or six games that day being “the best games played this season.” [N1885/6] The Club was active again in 1886, and in February “had some very good games on the sands on Wednesday afternoon.” [N1886] At some date, the “Season of Cammag” came to an

end for in 1890, “[w]e understand that the Cammag Club is to be revived in Ramsey, and arrangements are being made for a game at an early date.” [N1890] There are no further reports of the Ramsey Cammag Club after this date.

In 1893, a Mr Fargher was recalled, once the schoolmaster at the Clothworker’s School in Peel, from whom “I first imbibed a taste for athletics” during their schoolhood days in the 1870s. “It was not in football, it was not in cricket; it was in the old-fashioned game of kammag.” Often Faragher “himself came out and joined us in a game of kammag.” [N1893/1] “Now my friend proposes to have another game of ‘cammag,’ and this question is raised again in this clause.” Not a literal game was involved here, but a verbal to-and-thro in the House of Keys. [N1893/2]

At a presentation to a member of the Douglas Golf Club in 1894, the early days of the game being introduced to the Island were recollected. At first derided, “numbers of our now ardent golfers looked upon the whole thing as a farce,” there was that perhaps inevitable comparison with cammag, “that you were taking them back to boyhood when they indulged in the youthful game of hockey or what is termed in Manx, Cammag [...]” Or sneer in the case of Mr Kneen, who “now in his summer vacation we find him going to St Andrew’s and Musselburgh (laughter).” [N1894/1]

The Lunatic Asylum in 1894 took up the sport. “The old Manx game of cammag was introduced, and played with great good temper and all the enthusiasm called forth by being learnt in youth.” [N1894/2]

The *Mona’s Herald* in 1895 had a letter from “W.R.” which spoke of the changes that he had seen that had happened in Douglas, “the modern devastations of your Town Commissioners have destroyed the ancient thoroughfares where, in days of yore, the boys used to play hoop, tip, scoop, and kammag.” [N1895/1] (He had similarly written earlier in 1883 [N1883].)

In 1895, the issue of public right of access to the Racecourse at Langness came to a head and an enquiry was held at which evidence was taken from a number of witnesses. John Sansbury, aged eighty-four, had lived at Derbyhaven all his life, and “I remember when we used to play ‘kammag’ there on Sunday.” [N1895/2] In another report, he was asked if cammag was played on other days, “Oh yes” was his response. Asked if he had ever played the game, he was empathic in his reply—“I have, man.” [N1895/3] John Clucas, seventy-eight years old, was born in Castletown and lived there until he was fifty. “We also used to play what we called ‘cooks,’ and cammag.” [N1895/4.1] & [N1895/5.2] A younger witness was Thomas Faragher Junior, aged forty-six, residing at Derbyhaven (“with the exception of a year and then I was only living a mile away” he added), and the Racecourse was a favoured resort of youngsters in the area. Asked by Deemster Drinkwater about the sports played there, the answer was “Ball and kockey or kammag as they call it.” [N1895/4.2] & [N1895/5.1] John Wilson was seventy-six and had lived in Castletown since he was three or four years old. He had played on the Racehouse with other children from the age of seven or eight. “We played cammag, something in the golf line, with a

cork and crooked sticks.” He went on to give some further detail. “There would be a lot in the games of cammag. It is played between parties. We played from the Big Cellar down to the Smelt.” [N1895/5.3]

“Head and shoulders above all other sports and pastimes stands KAMMAG.” So wrote “Bombelius” in 1895, going on to declare that cammag was the Manx National Game. However, “[e]ven kammag, the king of all games, has, I fear, largely gone out of fashion.” He raised one point about the playing of the game, namely the threat to windows. “Kammag-players must be wary of exercising their talents in the neighbourhood of windows; for when you go in for giving the ball a fair whack it may take to itself wings and fly away, or your kammag may leap out of your band, and come with overwhelming force against some costly pane.” It posed, on the other hand, “little or no danger to life or limb.” He went on to call for a “Kammag Club” to be formed so that one day “kammag will once more reign supreme as the Manx National Game.” He called upon a fellow columnist to join him in setting one up should no one else come forward to do so. [N1895/6a–b]

“The Watchman” in his column in the *Isle of Man Examiner* replied to “Bombelius” by printing remarks from “C.C.C.” critical of the notion. “Bombelius” was “one of a lot of silly people who look upon what they call the ‘football mania’ as a very bad thing.” Football was the better sport (“one of the manliest of all manly exercises”), and whilst “kammag, as played in my young days, was a very attractive pastime,” it was best that “Bombelius” in his attempts to revive the sport sought “to compete successfully with the, perhaps, less ancient game of golf.” [N1895/7] Golf at that date was still a new and fashionable sport in the Island as a report of the tournament at Howstrake Links in October 1895 shows. Some who turned up there did so “because it was ‘the thing’ to be there amongst the fashionable crowd that assembled.” Watching a game for the first time ever, some “coffed at it as unexciting, and not half as good as ‘cammag’ [...]” That said, those who then took part declared at the final hole, “Well, this is fine.” [N1895/8]

Whilst the Ramsey Cammag Club seems to have faded, cammag continued to be played at the Asylum, though only in the winter months, “while in the summer, cricket has been the chief diversion for the men, and lawn tennis for the women.” [N1896] The year 1897 saw yet another letter by W.R. sent in to the Manx press, and one no different in its themes. “Douglas, of course, is a different place from what it was when I resided there some fifty years ago, and a very different place from what it was as I remember it as a boy—say seventy years ago.” He remembers, again, “when we were lads playing ‘hoop,’ and ‘kammag’ [...]” in the town now so changed. [N1897] (See too [N1883] & [N1895].)

The seat for North Douglas saw an election context in 1898, and the speech of one of the candidates for the House of Keys included the remark that “I cannot even claim the honour and distinction of being the chief Moar among the cushags, or the exterminator of the ‘cammag,’ or even the crusher of the ‘jiny-nettle.’” [N1898]

“The High-Bailiff was in a romantic mood last week, and relapsed into his experiences of old times,” was the comment of *The Manxman* in 1900. He referred to the “old games [...] that occupied the leisure moments of the lads and lasses of Douglas fifty years ago,” one amongst them being cammag. However, “[t]here is scarcely one now who knows what cammag is. You know what golf and tennis are, well, they are almost the same games revived. [...]” [N1900]

Games of cammag was still going strong at the Asylum in 1901, when it was reported to Tynwald that “[d]uring last winter cammag was again cultivated with enthusiasm, and the Asylum team achieved quite a local renown by beating all comers.” [N1901/1] Meeting with a friend who he had last seen in 1835, and talking over the past fifty-eight years, “[w]e found great changes,” and the Hon. J.K. Ward shared these in the *Mona’s Herald* that same year. Tom Quaggin, the gamekeeper to Sir George Drinkwater at Port-e-Chee, was one remembered as he “looked after the boys when they went to cut cammag, &c.” [N1901/2]

Cammag was mentioned in Tynwald in 1909, and as in 1893 ([N1893/2]) not to do with the game itself, but that for Mr Goldsmith “the spirit of sport had passed out of him” in debate. [N1909/1] The changes to the water supply of Douglas saw the closing of Yeaman’s Well and “Yeoitie” wrote of the “[h]undreds of bare-legged ‘stuggas,’ exhausted with a day’s ‘cammag,’ [who] have laved their parched throats” from its waters. [N1909/2] “And now the girls play ‘cammag’—I beg pardon, ‘hockey.’” “Uncle Jack” in his childrens column in the *Isle of Man Weekly Times* stumbled his way into sports played by girls in the Island. “There was very little football when I was a boy. Cammag was then the leading game; and matches between adjoining parishes were organised much in the same way as football matches are organised to-day.” [N1909/3]

The Arcadians football team in 1910 elected a new president for the club, “one who cherishes vivid recollections of oldtime football, and the then popular game of Cammag.” They were different days then, “when in the realm of sport physical might counted more than brain power.” Cammag was a sport full of literal hard knocks and “it was considered ocular demonstration that you had played a good game to finish with a bleeding nose, or a black eye and a few bruises.” Indeed, it was necessary, as “to emerge unscratched was sufficient to condemn a man as a rank outsider.” [N1910]

Four visitors to the Island were prosecuted in 1928 for playing football in the street. The High-Bailiff read them the by-law (still in place from the 1840s) but was thrown by mention of cammag, commenting “whatever that may be.” It was also unknown of course to the four defendants, stating “[t]hey had not played ‘kammag’ and didn’t know the meaning of the word.” [N1928]

In 1934, the *Ramsey Courier* asked the Rev. E.C. Paton to share some of his memories of life in the town and from him comes the first account of any length about how cammag was played. [N1934] On Hollantide Night in 1937 at a meeting of

Aeglagh Vannin, “‘Cammag’ was played lustily” amongst other activities that evening. [N1937]

The Celtic Congress met in the Island in 1939 and featured a *camog* exhibition match between two Irish womens teams. Comparisions as would be expected with cammag were made ([N1939/1–3]) and one account in the *Peel City Guardian* mentioned that it “was frequently played among the young people at least in Peel up to forty years ago.” [N1939/3]

“What is the game of kammag?” This was the question posed by Lieutenant-Commander A.J. Parkes at a meeting of the Island’s Educational Authority, which had received a letter from Brisbane Street, Douglas, written by Miss E.M. Fayle, “requesting that the attention of all school children of an understanding age” should be made aware of the by-law restricting the playing of ball games in public. At this date, it would be football and not cammag that raised her ire. [N1949]

The Lieutenant-Commander’s question was answered the following year in the *Ramsey Courier* when it carried a report of the work of the Manx Museum Folk-Life Survey. After an exhibition of its work put on in Sulby, “Mr W.F. Christian, of Ballacubberagh, made a cammag stick out of gorse to show how it appeared and also gave an old cammag ball.” The wider question, though, was how to play the game itself. “The Museum authorities have never been able to dig out the complete rules of ‘cammag’ and information from those of the older generation who may remember something about it will be welcomed.” [N1950/1] G.E. Colquit duly obliged with a letter to the *Courier* the next month detailing how he played it when a lad on the beach at Ramsey. He also had good reason to remember *cammig* (as he spelt it). “I carry a couple of marks on my shins that will only disappear when I do. It was without doubt a robust game, with no quarter asked or given.” [N1950/2].

David Craine gave a talk on Manx Customs in 1952 to the Albert Road Junior School Parents’ and Teacher-Association. In the course of this, he “appealed to Manx hockey enthusiasts to revert to the old Manx name for the game which was Cammag.” According to Craine, cammag was started to be played only after Christmas and “[t]here was once a classic game of cammag between Ramsey and Peel with one goal at Peel and the other at Ramsey and history did not reveal how it finished.” [N1952/1–2]

A more sober account of cammag appeared the following year, when extracts from the notebooks written up by John Kneen, known wider as the Gaaue, for the Folk-Life Survey were published in the *Mona’s Herald*. [N1953] At a presentation of trophies at a lawn tennis tournament in 1954, Mr Quayle as presenter remarked that “he did not know much about the game of tennis himself” because “as a boy he used to play ‘Cammag.’” [N1954] In Arbory, a Comish (their surname only recorded) who worked in the Ballacorkish lead mines in the parish, was remembered as “the best cammag player in the parish.” [N1957]

INTRODUCTION

In 1958, the Ramsey Commissioners came round to revising the by-laws of the town that had last been amended only in 1870. This was a gift to the *Ramsey Courier* who gleefully listed the many still in force that were now obsolete, “even ‘roll hoops’ are condemned (no mention here of the hula hoop!) and there is an interest prohibition on the game of ‘kammag.’” It went on to add that “[t]his is a game not heard of these days.” [N1958]

If *kammag* was no longer heard of in 1958, the final extract here from 1960 would jog the minds of those in Ramsey at least, as the *Courier* ran a piece of reminiscence about the game. Windows on the Promenade were the casualties of many a game played on the sands. “Often when we were playing ‘crammag’ we would spot a ‘bobby’ (policeman) and ‘scadaddle’ as hard as we could.” [N1960] Here we are returned to the first appearance of *cammag* from 1843, where the sport is first mentioned—but only in order to suppress it.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2019



CAMMAG

1843

[N1843] [2d] 29.—That if any Person shall in any of the Streets, Squares, Courts, Highways, Alleys, or Public Passages or Places within the said Town, play at Ball, Foot-ball, or “Kammag,” or roll Hoops, or wantonly throw any Stone or Missile, or play at the game called Pitch-and-Toss, or shall Slide, or make any Slide, upon any Street, Pavement, Flagging, Footway, or Crossing Way; every Person so offending, shall for such offence forfeit and pay any sum not exceeding Ten Shillings, nor less than Two Shillings and Sixpence, at the discretion of the Justice or High-Bailiff, before whom such offender shall be convicted.

“Bye-Laws for the Government of the Towns.” *Manx Sun* 22 July 1843: 2a–d & 3a–b.

1846

[N1846] The first business was the consideration of the Bye-laws, drawn up by the Justices of the Peace and High Bailiffs for the Regulations of the four Towns.

[...]

29th. [Prohibits] The playing of ball, cammag, hoop-rolling, &c., in the streets, &c. 10s.

“Insular Legislation: House of Keys, Friday, April 24.” *Manx Sun* 25 April 1846: 5b.

1851

[N1851] [3e] And here I would ask—is the public high-road to be used as a regular play-ground, and is it to be allowed that a number of boys, with all their noise and shouting, are daily to play their games of marbles, peg-top, kammag, &c, close at the doors and under the windows of respectable persons’ houses, to the annoyance of the whole family, some of whom have been known to be ill at the time.

Thomas Cholmondeley, “[Correspondence] [King William’s College and Mr Cholmondeley] To the Editor of the Mona’s Herald.” *Mona’s Herald* 15 January 1851: [3]d–f.

1858

[N1858] We would beg them to recur to that period when they have themselves [...] played “kammag,” [...]

“The Despoiled Bathing Shore of Douglas.” *Manx Sun* 19 June 1858: 4a–b.

1869

[N1869] The Clerk was instructed [...] and also to order posters to be placed about the town, cautioning the children against playing at “cammag,” and other dangerous games in the public thoroughfare.

“[Ramsey and the North] Town Commissioners’ Meeting.” *Isle of Man Times* 20 November 1869: 5e.

1871

[N1871] Mr Corlett proposed that the Chief-constable should be written to, calling his attention to the dangerous practice of “kammag” playing by the children of the town; [...].

“[Ramsey and the North] Ramsey Commissioners’ Meetings.” *Isle of Man Times* 4 November 1871: 5b.

1877

[N1877] A Polo Match is being arranged by several gentlemen, resident in Douglas—to come off at the Racecourse, Strang, in about a fortnight. Polo, for the benefit of uninitiated is the game of “Kammag,” played on horseback.

“A Polo Match” *Mona’s Herald* 28 February 1877: 9d [Supplement].

1883

[N1883] That glorious shore—those delightful sands, stretching from the “ship-yard” to the Crescent, where the lads of the town used to trundle their hoops and build their castles and play “kammag” to their heart’s content, none daring to make them afraid,—where are they now?

W.R. “Douglas in Days of Yore.” *Manx Sun* 17 February 1883: 5e.

1884

[N1884] SIR,—I am very loath to take up my pen at any time to make complaints, but I think it is my duty to do so this time. I do not intend to complain of any one personally, my only object being to point out the nuisance, and, if possible, to suggest a remedy. Being in the neighbourhood of Andreas parochial school, the other day, I was surprised to find that, though there is a large playground attached to the school, the scholars are allowed to carry on their games in the public highway. The game in which they were, and have been for some weeks, engaged in, was a native one called Kammag, which as every one knows, is very dangerous. Just as I was going past, a baker’s cart drove up to one of the cottages opposite to the school. I believe the man asked the scholars to stop the game for a few minutes but would they? No; they never took the least notice of him, and I saw the wooden ball, which is used in

the game, sent with the tremendous force right in between the horse's legs and the wheel of the cart. Suppose it had struck the horse, and some damage had been done, who would have been liable for it? But this is only a singular case. I know of several such ones; and very lately a man narrowly escaped a blow in the eye from a stone. Yet this is not all. People proceeding quietly along the road are not let alone. They are shouted after and mimicked in every way, and persons driving past are in danger of their animals bolting and committing some damage. I now of a lady, who, when passing along, was followed by about a dozen boys, who were shouting and singing as loudly as possible just behind her. Then again, these children actually go into the neighbours' gardens, during playtime, and break the fences and trees to get a kammag. I also understand that they go and stand in front of an old man's house (over 84 years) and call nicknames to him. In fact these are but a few fair examples of their unbearable conduct; and, the other day, speaking to a person living near the school, he expressed to me that he felt sorry many a time that he lived so near the school. Remember all this is done between half-past eight in the morning and four in the afternoon, *ie*, during school hours.

Pseud [signed as "One in Danger"]. "[Letter to the Editor] A Public Nuisance." *Isle of Man Times* 16 February 1884: 3h.

1885

[N1885/1] The ancient game of Cammag, as played by Æneid and his followers, the ancient kings of Mann, and the nobility and gentry of this Island in years gone bye, was revived on Wednesday last, when a spirited contest came off on the Mooragh between rival sides captained by the Rev. T.R. Kneale, and Mr J.J. Corlett. The cammag were of various dimensions and shapes, and the sides which numbered about 20 players each, including several experts as well as a few novices in the game. The game commenced at half-past two o'clock, and as the ground was soft and sandy, falls were frequent, but more amusing than injurious, the fine sand affording a soft resting place for the heavy weights upon whom the vigorous exercise soon told a tale. However, the game was kept up with spirit until four o'clock, when a splendid drive right through the ranks and into goal by Mr A.C. Kayll, secured the final game for Mr Kneale's team which won by six games to four for Mr Corlett's. The next game has been fixed for half-past four on Monday afternoon next. The revival of this healthy game amongst those of riper years has been a decided hit, and will be continued during the "Season of cammag."

"[Ramsey and the North] Cammag." *Isle of Man Times* 14 March 1885: 5g.

[N1885/2] The second contest of the season came off on the Mooragh on Monday. The first game, which lasted over forty minutes, was keenly contested, finally resulting in a victory for the Rev. T.R. Kneale's side. The hard work, however, told

its tale, and the remaining games were less spirited. The play resulted in four goals for the Rev. T.R Kneale's side and two for Mr J.J. Corlett's. Play was resumed on Thursday afternoon, when Mr Corlett was more fortunate and secured four goals to one.

“[Ramsey and the North] Cammag.” *Isle of Man Times* 21 March 1885: 5g.

[N1885/3] Monday being a general holiday at the north, the young men in connection with Glen Auldyn Wesleyan Chapel considered it a good opportunity of turning it into account, by having a public pic-nic to raise some funds to pay off a small debt [...]. According to the posters announcing the fete, means were provided for “cricket, cammag, quoits, croquet, tennis, aunt sally, and other amusements,” together with tea, and the requisite adjuncts to make it attractive, and all these for the low price of one shilling.

“[Ramsey and the North] Monday being a” *Isle of Man Examiner* 11 July 1885: 5a.

[N1885/4] The Gents of Ramsey have had some very good games of “cammag,” nine on each side, on the shore below the Promenade, this week, the first this season. The next meeting will be the week after next.

“[Ramsey the North] The Gents.” *Manx Sun* 7 November 1885: 4f.

[N1885/5] The Cammag Club had four games on the sand, below the Albert Hotel, on Wednesday afternoon, but there was too much wind for it to be pleasant. Mr J.J. Corlett's side won three games out of the four. About ten on each side played.

“[Ramsey and District] The Cammag Club” *Manx Sun* 5 December 1885: 4g.

[N1885/6] The Ramsey Cammag Club had some five or six games on the sand opposite the Albert Hotel on Wednesday afternoon, the best games played this season. A great many persons were on the Promenade looking on.

“[Ramsey and District] The Ramsey Cammag” *Manx Sun* 19 December 1885: 5c.

1886

[N1886] The Cammag Club had some very good games on the sands on Wednesday afternoon.

“[Ramsey and District] The Cammag Club.” *Manx Sun* 6 February 1886: 4f.

1890

[N1890] We understand that the Cammag Club is to be revived in Ramsey, and arrangements are being made for a game at an early date.

“[Summaries and Notes] We understand that ...” *Ramsey Courier* 18 October 1890: [4]a.

1893

[N1893/1] Twenty years ago I was associated with Mr Fargher, the master of the Clothworkers’ School, and from Mr Fargher himself I first imbibed a taste for athletics. It was not in football, it was not in cricket; it was in the old-fashioned game of kammag. (Laughter and applause.) More than 20 years ago, when I was a pupil at Mr Fargher’s school, it was one of the greatest pleasures possible for the boys of the school when Mr Fargher himself came out and joined us in a game of kammag.—Mr Quine recited a personal experience of Mr Fargher playing kammag with them, after which he continued: [...]

Pseud [signed as “Grasshopper”]. “[Football Notes] [The Mona Football Club on Tour] Presentation of the Shield.” *Isle of Man Times* 11 April 1893: 2f.

[N1893/2] [5f] Now my friend proposes to have another game of “cammag,” and this question is raised again in this clause.

“[Insular Legislature] House of Keys. Douglas, Tuesday, November 7, 1893.” *Isle of Man Times* 11 November 1893: 5a–h.

1894

[N1894/1] I need hardly tell you that numbers of our now ardent golfers looked upon the whole thing as a farce, and that you were taking them back to boyhood when they indulged in the youthful game of hockey or what is termed in Manx, Cammag; [...]. Calls for “Mr Kneen” were raised, and Mr Bruce said: This is one of the gentlemen who used to sneer at the game and compare it with cammag (laughter), and now in his summer vacation we find him going to St Andrew’s and Musselburgh (laughter).

“Douglas Golf Club: Presentation to Mr G. Drinkwater.” *Manx Sun* 10 February 1894: 8d.

[N1894/2] The old Manx game of cammag was introduced, and played with great good temper and all the enthusiasm called forth by being learnt in youth.

“[The Asylums] Medical Superintendent’s Annual Report.” *Isle of Man Times* 10 July 1894: 3c.

1895

[N1895/1] It is nearly 50 years since I passed a Christmas in Douglas, and I, therefore, cannot say whether this old custom is preserved, or whether the march of intellect, or the drill of the schoolmaster, has driven it away, as the modern devastations of your Town Commissioners have destroyed the ancient thoroughfares where, in days of yore, the boys used to play hoop, tip, scoop, and kammag.

W.R. “[Letter to the Editor] An Old Christmas Custom.” *Mona’s Herald* 2 January 1895: 6e.

[N1895/2] [5c] John Sansbury: I am 84 years of age, and have lived about Derbyhaven all my life as a fisherman. [...] The people have been walking down the Race for a long time now, and I remember when we used to play “kammag” there on Sunday.

“The Racehorse Case: The Evidence.” *Mona’s Herald* 20 March 1895: 5a–c.

[N1895/3] [4e] John Sansbury deposed: I am nearly 84 years of age. I have lived about Derbyhaven all my life. [...]

The Attorney-General: And people were going on and playing games?

Witness: Aye, playing kammag on Sunday, they were.

The Attorney-General: And on other days as well, I suppose?

Witness: Oh yes.

The Attorney-General: Have you played there yourself?

Witness: I have, man.

“The Racecourse Case: Landowners *v.* The People of Castletown.” *Peel City Guardian* 23 March 1895: 4a–e.

[N1895/4.1] [6c] John Clucas deposed: I now live in Douglas, and have done for the last six years. I am now 78 years old. I was born in Castletown, and lived there until I was about 50. [...] We also used to play what we called “cooks,” and kammag.

[N1895/4.2] [8a] Thomas Fargher, jun., deposed: I am a son of the plaintiff. I am 46 years of age. I have lived at Derbyhaven all my life with the exception of a year and then I was only living a mile away. [...]

[...] Lads in my young days used to play on the place and they would be principally from the neighbourhood.

Deemster Drinkwater: What sort of games did they play?

Witness: Ball and kockey or kammag as they call it.

“The Racecourse Case: Landowners *v.* The People of Castletown.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 30 March 1895: 8a–c.

[N1895/5.1] [3d] Thomas Fargher deposed: I am a son of the plaintiff, and am 46 years of age. I have lived at Ronaldsway nearly all my life. [...]

In my younger days they were principally people from the neighbourhood who played on the Racecourse.

To his Honor: The games they were playing were principally games with balls, and cammag and hockey.

[N1895/5.2] [3e] John Clucas, examined by the Attorney-General, deposed: I live in the town of Douglas. I have been living here six years. I am 78. I was born in Castletown, and lived a good many years there. Then I went to Ballasalla, and lived there till I came to Douglas. I would be about 50 when I went to Ballasalla. [...]

Other grown up people were playing other games of ball and cricket. One of the games was called “cooks.” We also played cammag.

[N1895/5.3] [3g] John Wilson, examined by the Attorney General, deposed: I am 76. I live in Castletown. I was born at Kirby. My father was coachman to Col. Wilks; and when he went away we went to Castletown. I was then three or four years. I have lived at Castletown ever since. My father is dead 30 years. He was 84 when he died. I recollect the Racecourse well from the time I was seven or eight years old. [...] I also went often to play games with other boys. We played cammag, something in the golf line, with a cork and crooked sticks. (Laughter). There would be a lot in the games of cammag. It is played between parties. We played from the Big Cellar down to the Smelt.

“Castletown Racecourse Case: Douglas, Thursday, March 27th, 1895.”
Mona’s Herald 3 April 1895: 3d–g.

[N1895/6a] [2d] Many and various are the means of amusement, relaxation, and recreation devised from time to time by the human race. Head and shoulders above all other sports and pastimes stands

KAMMAG

When I went to school, we indulged in many games, such as marbles, tip, hiding, ‘prentice-my-son, shepherds-ho-ward-ho, winch-away-donkey, leapfrog, hammer-down-buttercups, stick-the-knife, tops, drunkards, rounders, ball-in-the-hat, tursey, duck-stone, call-a-call, horses, soldiers, wheelbarrows, and above all, kammag. No doubt many of these alleged games are not universally adopted, and some have, perhaps, already become obsolete. Even kammag, the king of all games, has, I fear, largely gone out of fashion.

[N1895/6b] [2e] I am told that the Manx kammag corresponds to the English hockey, and that it is related to the Canadian lacrosse. I don’t know whether this is correct or not, but I do know that kammag is kammag. It is not within the scope of this

paragraph to give the public instructions as to how the game is played. I would prefer to have the law and order of kammag from some older and more experienced person. I just wish to incite my countrymen to go in for a revival of kammag. Besides being a most interesting pastime and an invigorating exercise, kammag is to be commended as a sport that is attended with little or no danger to life or limb. I have known only one such accident. The ball flew into the month of a certain boy, and cut his tongue. This, however, was his own fault. His mouth should not have been open. He ought to have been breathing through his nostrils. If his mouth had been shut, he would have sustained no further damage beyond having his lips wounded and one or two teeth knocked down his throat. It may be well to bear in mind that “those who live in glass houses should not throw stones.” Kammag-players must be wary of exercising their talents in the neighbourhood of windows; for when you go in for giving the ball a fair whack it may take to itself wings and fly away, or your kammag may leap out of your band, and come with overwhelming force against some costly pane. Seriously, however, kammag, when properly played, is as safe a pastime as you could indulge in. I trust the time will not be far distant when kammag will once more reign supreme as the Manx National Game. If a Kammag Club is not formed before long, I think the Watchman and myself will start one when we have sufficient leisure.

Pseud [signed as “Bombelius”]. “The Manx National Game.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 27 April 1895: 2d–e.

[N1895/7] I hear that, as a result of the stirring article of my learned co-writer “Bombelius” in a recent issue, it is contemplated to set on foot a kammag club up at Foxdale. A patron of football, however, desires to challenge his remarks, and has communicated the following: “Bombelius, who wrote in this column lately, appears to be one of a lot of silly people who look upon what they call the “football mania” as a very bad thing. But kammag—the game he seems to be in love with—has the same amount of danger, with less of the advantages of football. Football is without doubt one of the manliest of all manly exercises, and, kept free from gambling and the public house, it was the most healthy and most desirable for young persons to engage in. It developed most of the qualities which are essential in after life, and brought out that very desirable quality—pluck. So long as football is played without unnecessary roughness—and as a rule it is free from that element at present—it is an excellent thing for young people. But all the same, kammag, as played in my young days, was a very attractive pastime; and I wish Bombelius may be instrumental in popularising it, and to compete successfully with the, perhaps, less ancient game of golf.—C.C.C.”

Pseud [signed as “By the Watchman”]. “Miscellaneous Observations: Kammag v. Football.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 18 May 1895: 5g.

[N1895/8] [5a] Yet such is the fascination of the game, that gentlemen who were attracted to the ground on Thursday, because it was “the thing” to be there amongst the fashionable crowd that assembled, and who, as intending witnesses of the game for the first time, scoffed at it as unexciting, and not half as good as “cammag,” once started, padded the hoof round the full length of the course, all unconscious whether the ground was rough or smooth, up crags or down, only to find their speech at the “home” hole, and give vent to the exclamation, “Well, this is fine.”

“Golf Tournament at Howstrake Links.” *Mona’s Herald* 7 October 1895: 5a–b.

1896

[N1896] [2c] The usual weekly dances are the chief stand-by during the winter months, with “kammag” as an out door pastime; while in the summer, cricket has been the chief diversion for the men, and lawn tennis for the women.

“[Insular Legislature] [Tynwald Court. St Johns’, Monday, July 6, 1896] Lunatic Asylum.” *Isle of Man Times* 11 July 1896: 2b–c.

1897

[N1897] Douglas, of course, is a different place from what it was when I resided there some fifty years ago, and a very different place from what it was as I remember it as a boy—say seventy years ago. [...] where we “old boys” used to congregate when we were lads playing “hoop,” and “kammag,” and exceedingly convenient for hiding when we were playing “scoop” at night.

W.R. “My Last Visit to Manxland [By a Native Otogenarian].” *Isle of Man Examiner* 21 August 1897: [3]e.

1898

[N1898] [3f] Some one may be inclined to ask—what experience has Mr Clucas got to become a member of the House of Keys? [...] I cannot even claim the honour and distinction of being the chief Moar among the cushags, or the exterminator of the “cammag,” or even the crusher of the “jinnny-nettle.”

“North Douglas Election: Speeches of the Candidates and their Supporters.” *Manx Sun* 26 November 1898: 2–4a.

1900

[N1900] [14a] The High-Bailiff was in a romantic mood last week, and relapsed into his experiences of old times. He referred to the old games, scoop, shalley, and cammag, that occupied the leisure moments of the lads and lasses of Douglas fifty

years ago. He says: “There is scarcely one now who knows what cammag is. You know what golf and tennis are, well, they are almost the same games revived. [...]”

[Personal and Otherwise] The High-Bailiff was” *The Manxman* 20 January 1900: 14.

1901

[NI901/1] [4d] During last winter cammag was again cultivated with enthusiasm, and the Asylum team achieved quite a local renown by beating all comers.

“Tynwald Day: Report of the Asylums Board.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 6 July 1901: 4c–d.

[NI901/2] It is now more than seven years since the evening we met at his house. We sat until midnight recounting our wanderings and experiences during the 58 years since we parted in 1835. [...] We found great changes. Oatse’s Mill, at Groudle, had passed away, as also Tom Quaggin, who has gone where there are no rabbits to chase, as at Boringman’s Claddagh in those days, nor cammag wanted. Tom was gamekeeper and Forester to Sir George Drinkwater, owner of Port-e-Chee. Tom looked after the boys when they went to cut cammag, &c.

“Interesting Letter from the Hon. J.K. Ward.” *Mona’s Herald* 8 May 1901: 7b.

1909

[NI909/1] [8d] After the luncheon adjournment, Mr Rigby continued the debate. He opposed the motion, prefacing his remarks by apologising for his weak voice, as he was suffering from a severe cold in the head. He suggested that the motion should be withdrawn at this stage of the House. He did not know what games, whether football or cammag, his friend Mr Goldsmith indulged in as a boy, but he thought that the spirit of sport had passed out of him. It was not, he thought, a sporting thing on the part of the hon. member to bring before new members this resolution.

“House of Keys: Constitutional Reform Motion carried.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 16 January 1909: 8a–g.

[NI909/2] Hundreds of bare-legged “stuggas,” exhausted with a day’s “cammag,” have laved their parched throats and pacified their itching chilblains under thy shadow, and scores of cultured Jemimas in their teens have soothed their itinerant bunions in thy mollient waters.

Pseud [signed as “Yeoitie”]. “In Memoriam: Yeaman’s Well.” *Peel City Guardian* 19 June 1909: [3]a.

[N1909/3] [11a] “Girls’ sports,” you said, was it not? I think I must have been a girl once. Anyway, I used to play hockey. But we did not call it by that name. We called it “cammag”—good old Manx cammag!

There was very little football when I was a boy. Cammag was then the leading game; and matches between adjoining parishes were organised much in the same way as football matches are organised to-day.

And now the girls play “cammag”—I beg pardon, “hockey.”

[...]

[11b] I have just told you that the “cammag” of my boyhood days is the “hockey” of the present generation of girls, [...].

Pseud [signed as “Uncle Jack”]. “Our Children’s Column.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 9 October 1909: 11a–c.

1910

[N1910] In Mr W. Healey, the Arcadians have secured an ideal President. One who was constantly seen at local matches last season, and what is more important, one who cherishes vivid recollections of oldtime football, and the then popular game of Cammag. Those were the halcyon days of long ago, when in the realm of sport physical might counted more than brain power. When it was considered ocular demonstration that you had played a good game to finish with a bleeding nose, or a black eye and a few bruises, but to emerge unscratched was sufficient to condemn a man as a rank outsider.

“[Football Notes] In Mr W. Healey” *Ramsey Courier* 13 September 1910: [2]e.

1925

[N1925] On Friday His Worship intimated that he had referred to the by-laws, and he was now of the opinion that street football, along with cammag, pitch and toss and other games, was prohibited under any circumstances, and that, therefore, no witnesses were required to prove an offence.

The wording of the by-law is “any game which may or might be dangerous or to the annoyance of the public,” and particularly, specifies “ball football or cammag as prohibitive.”

“Street Footballers fined.” *Mona’s Herald* 27 May 1925: 6e.

1928

[N1928] Robert Mackenzie, William Falkner, Peter Cook and Jack Corcoran were hauled before High-Bailiff Lay this morning and charged with playing football in the

street. [...] “No sir, we plead not guilty to playing football we were playing handball!”

[...]

There was some laughter in Court, an the four defendants thought they were on a sure thing and would get away with it but they had reckoned without Mr Hyde who stated the law on the subject, which reads: “No person shall in any street play at ball, football or “kammag” (whatever that may be), or roll hoops, elide, or make slides.”

Bill, Bob, Jack and Pete assumed an air of conscious virtue. They had not played “kammag” and didn’t know the meaning of the word.

“To-Day’s Court: Four Footballers fined.” *Manx Star* 10 August 1928: 1f.

1934

[N1934] There were also games of cammag played on the shore at low tide. Cammag is hockey without any restricting rules. The goals often were 300 yards apart—there were no penalties for “sticks”—no shooting area (you might score a goal from any distance)—and there was no limit to the number of players on each side. In fact I remember one New Year’s Day game which began with about 12 a side and ended with practically the whole male population of the town taking part. And it would have included possibly the female portion, if girls had played manly games in those days. If a player came between you and the ball on his wrong side you were allowed to whack his shins till he got back again. As there were practically no rules, no umpire was required and there were never any disputes.

Rev. E.C. Paton, “Amusements in Ramsey 50 Years Ago: Rugby Stalwarts.” *Ramsey Courier* 22 June 1934: 5e.

1937

[N1937] “Cammag” was played lustily, and the fifty people present took part in many other games.

“The Young Manx” *Mona’s Herald* 9 November 1937: 4d.

1938

[N1938/1] [3e] Camoge has a special interest to Manx people since it has an affinity to the once popular Manx game of Cammag, though, of course, it has been developed in a form which requires remarkable dexterity in the use of the Camog—the stick made of selected ash with a flat blade forming the crook.

“Celtic Congress in Mann.” *Mona’s Herald* 5 July 1938: 3a–g.

[N1938/2] A similar game, the Manx Cammag, was played many years ago, before the advent of hockey.

“Deemster Farrant to meet Mr De Valera: ‘Youth Day’.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 8 July 1938: 9a.

[N1938/3] On Saturday there was a camog match between two Irish ladies teams. This game is equivalent to Manx cammag, which was in existence in the Island and was frequently played among the young people at least in Peel up to forty years ago.

“Celtic Congress.” *Peel City Guardian* 9 July 1938: 3b.

1949

[N1949] What is the game of kammag?

This was another question asked—this time the questioner was Lieut.-Comdr. A.J. Parkes—on a report that a letter had been received by the Authority from Miss E.M. Fayle, of Brisbane Street, Douglas, requesting that the attention of all school children of an understanding age should be drawn to the bye-law prohibiting the playing of football, kammag and other games or pastimes in the public sheets.

“Educational Topics: Streets as Playgrounds.” *Mona’s Herald* 2 August 1949: 3c.

1950

[N1950/1] Mr W.F. Christian, of Ballacuberagh, made a cammag stick out of gorse to show how it appeared and also gave an old cammag ball. The game of cammag, once played all over the Island, was known to be very robust and in some ways resembled hockey. The Museum authorities have never been able to dig out the complete rules of “cammag” and information from those of the older generation who may remember something about it will be welcomed.

“More Glimpses of Old Sulby: How did they play Cammag.” *Ramsey Courier* 29 September 1950: 3a–c.

[N1950/2] In your issue of September 23rd [*sic*] you ask if anyone could tell how the game of Cammig or Cammag (as you spelt it) was played. I remember as a lad playing this game on the shore. As a matter of fact I have a good reason to remember it, for I carry a couple of marks on my shins that will only disappear when I do. It was without doubt a robust game, with no quarter asked or given. I do not remember having seen any rules, at least not as we know them in properly controlled games. But there certainly were rules, the most important being the “shindy.” This rule meant that if you turned your back on your opponent you could be hit with the Cammig until you turned around. Of course your opponent had to call “Shindy” before he could try to shin you. There were other rules. You could not swing your Cammig; that is you could not raise it above your head, that was a foul, and the

game stopped for the other side to knock off again, from the spot where the foul took place. The Cammig must not be raised above the shoulder at any time.

You will see the need for a rule like this when I say that the balls we played with were either cricket balls, wooden balls or hard core balls, covered with pig skin. And when I say that Mr W.F. Christian's gorse Cammig is only a lightweight, you will see the need for the no swinging rule, especially when you could not control the number of players on the shore.

I have seen quite a number of hockey matches and I am satisfied that it is a genteel game of Cammig, because the knock off and the game in general is carried on just as Cammig was without the hard knocks. As in hockey you could not hook a player, that is you could not trip up an opponent with your Cammig. That would be a foul.

I don't know whether it will be news to you to know that this game is played to this day under the name of Camogue in the Irish Free State. At least I saw two teams of Irish players play it in Liverpool between the wars. Mr Dennis Mooney, J.P.. had something to do with running these Irish games, and I am sure if you wrote the "Liverpool Echo" they would gladly put you in touch with him, and I am sure he would gladly give you the rules if any. I may say their game was just like ours, and just as mad.

Yours faithfully,

G.E. COLQUITT.

53, Silverdale Avenue,

Liverpool 13.

G.E. Colquitt, "[Letter to the Editor] How Cammag was played." *Ramsey Courier* 27 October 1950: 5f.

1952

[N1952/1] Giving a talk on Manx customs on Tuesday evening, to the Albert Road Junior School Parents' and Teacher-Association, Mr David Craine, M.A., of Ballaugh, appealed to Manx hockey enthusiasts to revert to the old Manx name for the game which was Cammag.

Too few Manx people realised the extent of their history and traditions. Hockey was a later development of Cammag but the games were similar and the name Cammag meant crooked stick.

Mr Craine said the Cammag season began after Christmas and there was a good deal of rivalry, there was one classic game between Ramsey and Peel which was talked about for a long time.

"It's Cammag—Not Hockey!" *Isle of Man Examiner* 11 January 1952: 3h.

[N1952/2] Mr Craine said the hunting of the wren marked the beginning of the Cammag season. This game was an earlier version of the modern hockey—the name

meant crooked stick, and he hoped Manx people would gradually realise more of their own history and rename the game in the Isle of Man and revert to “cammag”. There was once a classic game of cammag between Ramsey and Peel with one goal at Peel and the other at Ramsey and history did not reveal how it finished. (Laughter).

“[Old Manx Customs: Mr David Craine’s Talk to Parents and Teachers] ‘Cammag’ not Hockey.” *Ramsey Courier* 11 January 1952: 2b.

1953

[N1953] PLAYING CAMMAG: This was a favourite game played by youth; and men about ninety years ago. A stick similar to a hockey stick was used and a small ball about the size of a hen egg. When a right game took place a team or side was picked and the game played in a grass field. The course across the field would be marked out with sticks about forty yards apart, set in the ground. A referee was then chosen to see that the ball did not go outside his own distance. The player had to knock the ball along with the cammag-stick to the next player. It would be knocked along in this manner through the whole length of the field. Those who got the most runs and finished first were the winners. A certain number of runs through the field would be fixed before the start, and so they continued in this manner till the number of runs would be finished. The referee then would have to keep count on the points lost or won.

“John Kneen’s Note Book.” *Mona’s Herald* 3 March 1953: 2d.

1954

[N1954] Mr Quayle presented the two handsome cups and replicas to Mr Pyatt and Miss Clark and the other prizes. He referred to the fact that the competition had been very unlucky in regard to weather and said that while he did not know much about the game of tennis himself as a boy he used to play “Cammag” which was the forerunner of hockey in the Island. The word “Cammag” was Manx for “crutch.” He imagined that much more than crutches were needed to play tennis in these days. (Laughter).

“Island’s Wimbledon.” *Ramsey Courier* 27 August 1954: 3a.

1957

[N1957] Kirk Arbory. He worked in the Ballacorkish lead mines only a mile or so away on the hill. Neighbours jokingly called him “Captain,” he was such a jolly initiator of sport and the best cammag player in the parish.

William Cubbon, “Some people of Orestal.” *Mona’s Herald* 21 May 1957: 2c–d. Surname only given, Comish.

1958

[N1958] The job of revising the bye-laws of the Ramsey Town Commissioners is at present being carried out by the Board in consultation with their advocate, Mr J.K. Green, and an overhaul is long overdue.

[...]

The section applicable to towns and villages only decrees that ball games are not to be played in a public street even “roll hoops” are condemned (no mention here of the hula hoop!) and there is an interest prohibition on the game of “kammag.”

This is a game not heard of these days [...].

“Antiquated Bye-Laws.” *Ramsey Courier* 21 November 1958: 3a–b.

1960

[N1960] When I was a boy we often used to play “Cammag.” There would be three or six a side. Sometimes we would have a rubber ball other times a bundle of rags tied together like a ball. We had great fun. The goal-posts would be six feet in width marked by two stones or two coats.

The pitch would be 50 to 100 yards in length. Sometimes we would play on Ramsey shore in front of the Lifeboat House or on the Promenade between the Lifeboat House and the Rocket Brigade House.

It was a kind of hockey with a stick called a “cammag.” It was in fact a stick with a crook. If you hit any of your opponents on the ankle it was a foul or unfair play and the game would be stopped, A goal was when you knocked the ball between the two stones and then there would be a change round and the teams would play the other way.

Often when we were playing “cammag” we would spot a “bobby” (policeman) and “scadaddle” as hard as we could. They didn’t like us playing “cammag” in the town because glass was easily broken and windows on the Promenade sometimes suffered.

[Peeps into the Past] Memories of the 1880’s: Playing ‘Cammag’.” *Ramsey Courier* 12 August 1960: 6b.

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CAMMAG DESCRIBED

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Gathered together here are the (four) fuller descriptions and accounts of *cammag* from the Manx newspapers (1934, 1950, 1953, 1960).

1934

[N1934] There were also games of *cammag* played on the shore at low tide. *Cammag* is hockey without any restricting rules. The goals often were 300 yards apart—there were no penalties for “sticks”—no shooting area (you might score a goal from any distance)—and there was no limit to the number of players on each side. In fact I remember one New Year’s Day game which began with about 12 a side and ended with practically the whole male population of the town taking part. And it would have included possibly the female portion, if girls had played manly games in those days. If a player came between you and the ball on his wrong side you were allowed to whack his shins till he got back again. As there were practically no rules, no umpire was required and there were never any disputes.

Rev. E.C. Paton, “Amusements in Ramsey 50 Years Ago: Rugby Stalwarts.” *Ramsey Courier* 22 June 1934: 5e.

1950

[N1950/2] In your issue of September 23rd [*sic*] you ask if anyone could tell how the game of *Cammig* or *Cammag* (as you spelt it) was played. I remember as a lad playing this game on the shore. As a matter of fact I have a good reason to remember it, for I carry a couple of marks on my shins that will only disappear when I do. It was without doubt a robust game, with no quarter asked or given. I do not remember having seen any rules, at least not as we know them in properly controlled games. But there certainly were rules, the most important being the “shindy.” This rule meant that if you turned your back on your opponent you could be hit with the *Cammig* until you turned around. Of course your opponent had to call “Shindy” before he could try to shin you. There were other rules. You could not swing your *Cammig*; that is you could not raise it above your head, that was a foul, and the game stopped for the other side to knock off again, from the spot where the foul took place. The *Cammig* must not be raised above the shoulder at any time.

You will see the need for a rule like this when I say that the balls we played with were either cricket balls, wooden balls or hard core balls, covered with pig skin. And when I say that Mr W.F. Christian’s gorse *Cammig* is only a lightweight, you will see the need for the no swinging rule, especially when you could not control the number of players on the shore.

I have seen quite a number of hockey matches and I am satisfied that it is a genteel game of Cammig, because the knock off and the game in general is carried on just as Cammig was without the hard knocks. As in hockey you could not hook a player, that is you could not trip up an opponent with your Cammig. That would be a foul.

I don't know whether it will be news to you to know that this game is played to this day under the name of Camogue in the Irish Free State. At least I saw two teams of Irish players play it in Liverpool between the wars. Mr Dennis Mooney, J.P.. had something to do with running these Irish games, and I am sure if you wrote the "Liverpool Echo" they would gladly put you in touch with him, and I am sure he would gladly give you the rules if any. I may say their game was just like ours, and just as mad.

Yours faithfully,

G.E. COLQUITT.

53, Silverdale Avenue,

Liverpool 13.

G.E. Colquitt, "[Letter to the Editor] How Cammag was played." *Ramsey Courier* 27 October 1950: 5f.

1953

[NI953] PLAYING CAMMAG: This was a favourite game played by youth; and men about ninety years ago. A stick similar to a hockey stick was used and a small ball about the size of a hen egg. When a right game took place a team or side was picked and the game played in a grass field. The course across the field would be marked out with sticks about forty yards apart, set in the ground. A referee was then chosen to see that the ball did not go outside his own distance. The player had to knock the ball along with the cammag-stick to the next player. It would be knocked along in this manner through the whole length of the field. Those who got the most runs and finished first were the winners. A certain number of runs through the field would be fixed before the start, and so they continued in this manner till the number of runs would be finished. The referee then would have to keep count on the points lost or won.

"John Kneen's Note Book." *Mona's Herald* 3 March 1953: 2d.

1960

[NI960] When I was a boy we often used to play "Cammag." There would be three or six a side. Sometimes we would have a rubber ball other times a bundle of rags tied together like a ball. We had great fun. The goal-posts would be six feet in width marked by two stones or two coats.

The pitch would be 50 to 100 yards in length. Sometimes we would play on Ramsey shore in front of the Lifeboat House or on the Promenade between the Lifeboat House and the Rocket Brigade House.

It was a kind of hockey with a stick called a “cammag.” It was in fact a stick with a crook. If you hit any of your opponents on the ankle it was a foul or unfair play and the game would be stopped. A goal was when you knocked the ball between the two stones and then there would be a change round and the teams would play the other way.

Often when we were playing “crammag” we would spot a “bobby” (policeman) and “scadaddle” as hard as we could. They didn’t like us playing “crammag” in the town because glass was easily broken and windows on the Promenade sometimes suffered.

“[Peeps into the Past] Memories of the 1880’s: Playing ‘Cammag’.” *Ramsey Courier* 12 August 1960: 6b.



HOW CAMMAG WAS PLAYED

*

Cammag was glossed by the Rev. John Kelly in his manuscript Manx-English dictionary compiled during his lifetime (1750–1809) but published only in 1866, as “a crutch, a crooked bat or shinty to play hurles, also the name of the game itself.” He also included the phrase, “*Dy chloie er y chammag*, to play at shinty.” Archibald Cregeen’s *A Dictionary of the Manks Language* (1835) is shorter but similar, “a crutch, a cricket ball.” Thomas Faragher junior (born 1849) referred to it as “ball and kockey,” but this was for the benefit of the committee of enquiry into the issue of access to the Racecourse at Langness as he added “or kammag as they call it.” [N1895/4.2] The spelling *cammag* or *kammag* is used interchangeably, the form *cammig* appearing just the once [N1950/2].

Descriptions of the playing of *cammag* come from (1) brief mentions-in-passing, [N1851], [N1869], [N1883], [N1884], [N1895/1–5], [N1897], [N1901], [N1938/3], [N1950/1]; (2) reports of the activities of the Ramsey *Cammag* Club, [N1885/1–2 & 4–6], [N1886] (though the way they played *cammag* reflects other established ball games and will not be drawn on here); (3) reminiscences of those who either played the game or remember seeing the game played, [N1934], [N1950/2], [N1953], [N1960].

Of the four fuller descriptions to hand, two are from Ramsey [N1934] & [N1960], one can be shown to be also from that town (mention of *cammag* being played on the sand and the letter being published in the *Ramsey Courier*) [N1950], and that leaves the fourth, written in this case by John Kneen, the Gaau, born in Jurby and who later lived and worked in the adjacent parish of Andreas as a blacksmith. [N1953]

From other accounts, Ramsey was a place where *cammag* was both actively prohibited [N1869] & [N1871], and later enthusiastically promoted [N1885/1–2 & 4–6], [N1886], [N1890]. The game was also reported taking place at Andreas (where it was took place in the highway) [N1884]; Arbory (no place stated) [N1957]; Castletown (played in the highway) [N1851] and on the Racecourse at Langness [N1895/2–6]; Douglas (on the beach) [N1883], [N1895/1], [N1897], (place not stated) [N1900]; Peel (not stated) [N1893/1] & [N1938/3].

It seems sensible to first discuss the game as remembered being played at Ramsey, and then the one described by Kneen that took place in the rural parishes of the North of the Island. Such a composite account will have its difficulties, as patching together the three sources will not necessarily provide a complete description, and certain questions as to how the game was played remain open, for instance, whether it was seasonal or not as a sport. The decline in the game can be attributed to the heavy emigration from the rural parishes of the Island and the rise of organised sport in the form of Association Football.

The stick for playing *cammag* was fashioned from a gorse root [N1901/2] & [N1950/1], though the schoolchildren of Andreas were wont to “break the fences and

trees to get a kammag” [N1884]. As regards a ball, mentioned are cricket balls, ones made from wood or rubber (presumably of a similar size), “hard core” balls covered with pig-skin, and a simple bundle of rags tied together. [N1950/2] & [N1960] John Kneen described the ball as being the size of a hen’s egg [N1953], while John Clucas played with a “cork,” taken to mean a fishing float [N1895/5.2]

Cammag took place on the beach at Ramsey by necessity due to the prohibition as seen of the game being played in the streets and thoroughfares of the town, though the children of the town put up resistance for many years after the by-laws were promulgated in 1846 and again in 1870, but in the end it would seem they ended up on the foreshore. Not that that prevented windows from being broken. [N1960] There it was played on the beach [N1950/2], specifically at low tide [N1934], either in front of the Lifeboat House or the stretch of sand between there and the Rocket Brigade House [N1960].

The goals were three hundred yards apart by one account [N1934], though this seems excessive, while another puts the pitch at being between fifty and one hundred yards in length [N1960]. As regards the goal posts, they were six feet apart and marked either by a two stones or two coats. [N1960] As regards the number of players, no limit was one answer, and with one New Year’s Day seemingly as many as could fit on the pitch played, the game having started with only twelve on each side. [N1934] Just three or six a-side is given in another account. [N1960] In Jurby, a grass field was used as a playing ground and sticks were used to mark out an area some forty by forty yards. [N1953] On the Racecourse on Langness it was “played from the Big Cellar down to the Smelt” [N1895/5.3]

Kneen’s account is the only way where scoring is mentioned such that it is clear how a game was won. Here a referee was appointed whose role was to call the ball out if it went outside the pitch. A certain number of runs were agreed to and the first team to make it won. Kneen wrote of the referee having to “keep count on the points lost or run”; how points were lost is made not clear. [N1953] As regards Ramsey, all that is mentioned is the rather obvious one that a goal was won by putting the ball between the goal posts. After that, teams would then swop ends and play the other way. [N1960]

The Rev E.C. Paton was clear about how cammag was *not* organised there: “As there were practically no rules, no umpire was required and there were never any disputes.” [N1934] Likewise from a later source, “I do not remember having seen any rules, at least not as we know them in properly controlled games.” [N1950/2] That said, there were accepted ways of playing the game such that fouls were recognised. The first and obvious one due to its danger was raising (or swinging) the cammag stick above shoulder height. Should this be done the match was stopped and the ball knocked off again. [N1950/2] To hit your opponent on the ankle with the stick was a foul [N1960], as was also hooking a player, tripping them up deliberately with the cammag [N1950/2].

Then there was what was known as the “shindy.” This was when you turned your back on a player from the opposite side and they were then allowed to hit you on the shins. “Of course your opponent had to call ‘Shindy’ before he could try to shin you” [N1950] (also, “If a player came between you and the ball on his wrong side you were allowed to whack his shins till he got back again” [N1934]). As G.E. Colquitt wrote in his letter about cammag sent in to the *Ramsey Courier* in 1950, “I carry a couple of marks on my shins that will only disappear when I do.” He went on to add that “[i]t was without doubt a robust game, with no quarter asked or given.” [N1950/2]

To someone writing in 1910, it was more a case of cammag being violent in his eyes rather than “robust.” “Those were the halcyon days of long ago, when in the realm of sport physical might counted more than brain power. When it was considered ocular demonstration that you had played a good game to finish with a bleeding nose, or a black eye and a few bruises, but to emerge unscratched was sufficient to condemn a man as a rank outsider.” [N1910]

As someone wearing the marks on his shins for his passion for cammag, the last words here go to G.E. Colquitt, who having witnessed a *camog* game could write: “I may say their game was just like ours, and just as mad.” [N1950/2]



THE MANX MUSEUM FOLK-LIFE SURVEY

[FLS1] Here again the pocket knife was the boys best friend, with a *cammag* stick we could have games in the winter which kept us hot. The ball would usually be an old tin, but seldom a real ball.

The stick would be chosen with great care to get one with the right amount of crook on the end was important, and much searching would be done. I don't remember us keeping to these play things from one year to another, it seemed to be a pleasure to make them.

I don't remember much about the rules of the game, it seemed to be a case of get the ball and hit it, but being offside seemed to be an offence.

FLS BTA s/7. T.A. Brew, Kella Mills, Sulby. Notebooks 6 & 6a, "Games played as a child."

[FLS2] The eye of a skilled *cammag* player could see on the tree a good stick.

On St Stephen's Day, Arbory and Rushen would play, starting at Colby Bridge and ending at Rushen Church.

A rag-covered ball was used, the size of a fist. There were no special numbers on the sides, just a meeting of sailors in their ganseys and whiskers, the able-bodied men in their prime. An impetuous game!

FLS C/5 H/I. Notes by William Cubbon (October 1952).

[FLS3] The stick was gorse, ash, sycamore, or anything, and we played with a wooden ball. (Mr Fayle: I remember we had a cork ball, but it was a very hard cork.) Sometimes there would be thirty players at it but usually there were twelve a side. It was a rough game. If it was played in a small space and all them sticks going and one fellow, a bully, would be giving you a belt. He would hit you on the back—it was real war declared! Twelve a side if there were enough, but often only four a side.

[...] There was a season for everything, marbles, *cammag*, football.

FLS C/23 A/I. Interview with W.F. Christian, Ballacubberagh, Sulby at Ballabrooie with Mr Fayle also present, 1950.

[FLS3] *Cammag* was the game then.

FLS C/27 B/7. Mr & Miss Christian, Northrop, Greeba. Notebook 1 (1953).

[FLS4] It was a game like hockey, and the stick had a crook on the end. A branch of a tree they usually played it with, and the ball was a piece of wood, often made from holly. It wasn't exactly round, but more the shape of a goose egg. [2] There wouldn't be much shape on it after it had been played with for a few times. It would be all knocked about and pieces knocked out of it. My Uncle Thomas was playing it when

he was a boy at Andreas school and the ball hit him in the eye. His eye came right out and the schoolmaster pushed it back in again. They used to call the ball they were using the *crig*.

FLS C/59 H/1-2. Interview with John Ceasar Callister, West Craige, Andreas, 1962.

[FLS5] Of course when the Spring came along, they could amuse themselves on the green opposite the smithy, playing keits (quoits) with old horseshoes, or cam[m]ag, what they now call golf.

FLS C/61 B/12. James Edward Cowell, Douglas. "Baldwin, 1874-1957," Notebooks 1-3.

[FLS6] A great game played by the men was called shinty (*cammag*) (I think shinty meant "watch your shins"). It was a good deal like hockey. It was played in the highroad and the sticks were usually gorse with a short crook. The players were all lined up on each side of the road with a mark across the road at each end and in the center, and when the ball crossed over the mark across the road, that side lost the game. The start off was on the centre of the middle mark. Players were not allowed to kick the ball, or raise it over two feet off the ground. The ball had to be passed from one payer to another along the ground if possible. Players had to be very careful or they wouldn't get a place in a team. When a team lost two out of three games it fell out and another team took up the position. This, when played properly, was a very good sporting game and the hedges would be crowded with people watching. Each team had eight players.

FLS CFA A/4. F.A. Comaish, Glen Myllin. "Kirk Michael District" (1950).

[FLS7] Many of the old residents of the town declared that golf was only another way of playing the old Manx game of *cammag*, and it wasn't the right way, either. According to them, the players didn't need all those sticks to play with, a different one each time they hit the ball. One good stick, a blackthorn if possible, was all that was needed. By what I could make of it, *cammag* was payed by a party of young men when they would be travelling somewhere, and each one had his turn driving the ball along the roads or across the fields. that was the way we youngsters used to play it, using a heavy root of gorse as a club most of the time. I have heard hockey referred to as *cammag*, too, and from what I remember of it, it was played in the village streets, a sort of free-for-all, the goals being the ends of the streets.

FLS CJ A/2. Notes by John Comaish, Ontario, Canada, 1951-55.

[FLS8] *Cammag*: something like cricket with a pile of stones for wickets and a flat piece of wood, rounded at one end and cut out for a handle at the other. This was

played by the bigger boys and the ball was hard, often homemade of the wool of old ripped stockings, rolled into a ball and covered with leather from old boot-tops cut to shape and stitched together. [18] This was a great game for Good Friday. It was played on the Claddagh in the field on the mill side of the river.

FLS CJH A/17-18. J.H. Cooper, Castletown. "Old Castletown and District," Notebook I (1951).

[FLS9] On Old Christmas Day all the fishermen were playing *cammag* with a gorse stick and a piece of cork.

FLS CRH A/4. Interview with R.H. Cubbin, Douglas, 1949.

[FLS10] We used to play *cammag* too. With sticks made of gorse bons. Sometimes we would have a big lump of cork made into a ball, and hit it, and my word, that was a good game!

FLS GJB A/26. John B. Gawne, "Port St Mary and the Fishing Fleets," Notebook I (1949).

[FLS11] There was a great deal of *cammag* played. *Cammag* stick was ash if possible with a thick end at the heel, the handle and heel being all in one piece with a slight bend to the right in the stick just above the heel. An old spool or hard piece of wood was used for a ball.

FLS K/I B/3. Interview with R.R. Kermodé, Ballakilpheric, 1949.

[FLS12] This was a favourite game played by youths and men about ninety years ago. A stick similar to a hockey stick was used and a small ball about the size of a hen egg. When a right game took place, a team or side was picked and the game played in a grass field. The course across the field would be marked out with sticks about forty yards apart, set in the ground. A referee was chosen to see that the ball did not go outside the sticks or that a man did not outside his own distance.

The player had to knock the ball along with the *cammag* stick to the next player. It would be knocked along in this manner through the whole length of the field. Those who got the most runs and finished first were the winners. A certain number of runs through the field would be fixed before the start, and so they continued in this manner until that number of runs would be finished. The referee would then would have to keep count of the points lost or won to pick out the winner.

FLS KJ A/13. John Kneen, Ballaugh Curraghs, Ballaugh. Notebook I (1950).

[FLS13] I've seen as many as 150 or 200 people playing *cammag* [in] the one field. They were setting two posts, I don't know [how] far apart, and also that would be a couple of people watching that the *bluggan* (ball) did not go past these marks and if

it did, points would be taken off the side let this happen. They were driving the ball the whole length [of] the field—it was a wooden ball. The rules were very [strict?] indeed, and points were knocked off for any off-side or anything like that. The two teams wore coloured clothes, one colour for Jurby and another for Andreas, and it was when the game finished generally. It was not allowed to handle the ball, and the players had to keep their position and not allowed to wander all over the field. *Madje cammag* was the name of the stick, which was a gorse bon selected for its shape, and I never saw a stick made like say (I described the Irish *coman*, or hurling stick).

FLS KJ J/2. Interview with John Kneen, Ballaugh Curraghs, Ballaugh, 1949.

[FLS14] It used to be a great game. I have seen about thirty or forty playing on St Stephen's Day, playing in the meadows. I don't remember hearing of Rushen and Arbory playing at all but we were too far away here to know about that.

FLS KJR N/1. Interview with Sage Kinvig, Garey Hollin, Ronague, 1950.

[FLS15] About Christmas *cammag* was played. It was a kind of hockey, and it was cheap. A sally stick or, better still, one of elm which is a tough stringy wood, was suitable. This you could find easily and instead of a ball a *crig* was used. This was just a piece of wood measuring about two inches each way. We had no end of fun on the cheap and no interference from the master at school.

FLS MRC E/12. R.C. Mylecraine, Liverpool. "Old Ballaugh" (1951).

[FLS16] Mrs Quine recollected that it was the custom on Old Christmas Day at Ballakilpheric to go out and play *cammag* on the roads. They had a bat and a special kind of stick they were playing with. Mr Quine has played himself but does not remember very clearly where and when, but thinks it would be along the roads near the Falcon Cliff where he was brought up as a boy.

FLS Q/43 H/I. Interview with Mr & Mrs Quine, Glen Grenaugh, Santan, 1966.

[FLS17] He has heard of *cammag* being played, for which people used crooked gorse sticks to hit the ball—when asked what kind of ball they used, he said he didn't know, but he supposed they would be able to buy some kind of a *crick*—there would be plenty going then. The *crick* of course was what the *cammag* ball was called—it was made of wood.

FLS W/33 4. Interview with W. Watterson, Lower Lherghydho, German, 1975.



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“*Cammag* was the game then” [FLS3]. This was Mr & Miss Christian’s sole comment on the topic but as with all the material in the Manx Museum Folk-Life Survey it has a directness that is lacking with the newspaper references here (save those later pieces of reminiscences (gathered together in “*Cammag* described.”) A number of the informants comment on the game being played on St Stephen’s Day [FLS2], [FLSI4], [FLSI6], Old Christmas Day [FLS9], [FLSI6], when fishermen were recalled playing it [FLS9], and on Good Friday played on the Claddagh at Castletown [FLS8]. On St Stephen’s Day’s there was a match between Arbory and Rushen, with a start at Colby Bridge and as an end point Rushen Church [FLS2]; again, fishermen are mentioned as being the players [FLS2]. Whilst Winter was mentioned as a time for playing the game [FLSI], Spring was the time in another account [FLS5]. Numbers involved playing vary in the accounts here from “no special numbers on the sides” [FLS2], eight [FLS6], thirty on the field, but more often twelve a side [FLS3], again thirty, or forty [FLSI4], and one hundred and fifty or two hundred [FLSI3].

Sticks to play *cammag* were fashioned from gorse, ash, sycamore [FLS3], blackthorn [FLS7], gorse [FLS6], [FLS7], [FLSI3], [FLSI7], willow, and elm [FLSI5]. The ball was a rag-covered ball the size of a fist [FLS2], wooden, in the shape of a goose egg made from holly [FLS4], one made from cork [FLS3], [FLSI10], ripped stockings rolled into a ball and covered with leather from old boot-tops [FLS8], an old spool [FLSI1], one the size of a hen’s egg [FLSI2], a piece of wood some two-inches square [FLSI5].

“I don’t remember much about the rules of the game, it seemed to be a case of get the ball and hit it, but being offside seemed to be an offence” [FLSI]. Two accounts of *cammag*, one by F.A. Comaish of Michael [FLS6], and John Kneen of Jurby and later Andreas [FLSI2] & [FLSI3] show the game being played in an organised fashion.

Comaish describes it as being played in the highroad, with the players lined up along the road and the pitch itself being marked out at the ends and down the middle of the way. The match started on this mark and the aim was to move the ball across this line when a game would then be won. Two or three such wins and the match was over and then another set of players faced off.

Kneen recalls the game being played in a field with a pitch marked out forty yards wide. A referee was chosen and a certain number of runs would be fixed to with the match, the aim then being to move the ball across the opposing team’s line. Points would be lost if the ball went outside the marks set and if off-side occurred. Teams played in set positions and a mass scrummage was thereby avoided as points were again deducted if players moved all over the field of play. Jurby played against Andreas and sides wore distinctive colours so the players could be distinguished.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2020