



THERE may be some islanders who believe the revival of the Manx Gaelic language is something only of interest to residents of the Isle of Man.

The fact that it has created a stir more widely, however, was reinforced for me when I got off the bus at St John's on Sunday in order to walk to Tynwald Mills to hear the latest Ned Maddrell Lecture, an annual feature of the Cooish language festival.

It soon transpired that another bus passenger who was taking the same route down the lane as me was a student named Morgan, aged in his early 20s and from Florida, who was studying the revival of endangered languages.

As well as learning Irish back in the USA, he had just spent some weeks in North Wales learning about the way Welsh was taught to new learners. But in the past year he had become gripped by what he had heard about the revival of Manx, particularly the use of music and song to achieve this end, and had arranged to come and stay in Douglas for a month to attend the Cooish and to see this remarkable language revival at first hand.

While part way down the lane we were given a lift by Breesha Maddrell from the Manx Heritage Foundation, who Morgan had already met, along with Manx language officer Adrian Cain, during an introduction to the Cooish.

When we parked at Tynwald Mills, Morgan spotted a bearded figure getting out of the car in front and exclaimed: 'Is that Brian Stowell?'

Soon after he introduced himself to this leading architect of the Manx revival – not to be confused with the Onchan election candidate of the same name – declaring several times that it was 'really cool' to meet him, as if it had been a movie star like Brad Pitt or Julia Roberts he had just bumped into, rather than a slightly embarrassed recipient of the Tynwald Honour.

Two years ago, when delivering the Ned Maddrell Lecture, Cornwall Council's language officer admitted that she was basing many of her booklets encouraging people to learn Cornish on Manx examples, so we can be sure that the revival of our misty island's native language is creating waves – something that this year's speaker, Chris Moseley, general editor of the third edition of UNESCO's Atlas of World Languages in Danger, was ready to admit.

In 2009, he and his colleagues sparked an angry reaction in the Isle of Man and Cornwall when, in an earlier edition of their atlas, they declared Manx and Cornish to be 'extinct' – largely because the last native-born speakers had died in the 1970s and 1770s respectively.

Apparently, despite other large parts of the world being covered by the atlas, the strongest reactions and complaints all came from western Europe – and then Isle of Man Chief Minister Tony Brown was the highest-ranking person to write in to object about the status accorded to a particular language!

Mr Moseley said he had now seen for himself plenty of proof of the revival of Manx Gaelic.

He began his lecture by saying that in his hotel room that morning he had discovered a DVD of the film *Waking Ned* next to the television set – an event strangely appropriate for someone about to deliver the Ned Maddrell Lecture.

He said years ago he remembered reading Ned's name in the Guinness Book of Records as the last native Manx speaker, but now the island's language was being well and truly



SPEAKING YOUR LANGUAGE: Professor Chris Moseley, left, with Manx language officer Adrian Cain

Alive and kicking

Manx is being held up around the world as an example of how a 'dead' language can be revived. While on his way to attend the annual Ned Maddrell Lecture in St John's as part of the Cooish festival, **Simon Artymiuk** met an American student eager to find out more – while the lecture itself, conducted by Chris Moseley, editor of UNESCO's Atlas of World Languages in Danger, reinforced the view that a tongue can be learnt all over again

reborn as a living language once again.

Explaining his own languages background, he said he was a teaching fellow of Latvian at the School of Slavonic and East European Languages at University College London (UCL).

Although Latvian itself is not endangered, the Finnish-Baltic language Livonian, formerly spoken by people living in the west of Latvia, had become extinct following the death of the last native speakers.

Happily, it was now being reborn thanks to the memory of it being kept alive by various fishing communities – a situation, he said, with strong parallels to the story with Manx.

Of his role in editing the third edition of UNESCO's Atlas of World Languages in Danger, he said the concept had grown out of the 'red books' listing aspects of nature and the en-

vironment across the world that were now in danger of extinction. It was a natural extension to compile a similar catalogue of aspects of human culture that were similarly endangered, since UNESCO's remit covers both nature and culture.

Earlier editions of the atlas, the first being published in 1996, provided just a snapshot of endangered languages – 600 being listed at that stage and then 800 when the second edition was launched in Paris in 2009 in both book form and digital format, appropriately enough on February 24, Mother Tongue Day.

Now the third edition was being produced to be much more ambitious in scope, with 2,500 languages covered and, in the digital version, new maps based on Google technology illustrating something of the topography of the areas of the globe in which particular languages have been spoken.

Unfortunately a fault with the system at Tynwald Mills meant that he wasn't able to demonstrate the features of the digital version but apparently if you click on a particular symbol representing an endangered language on the world maps, windows pop up giving information about that language, the number of speakers, projects to encourage use of the language and details of how to find out more. Readers can access the maps at www.unesco.org/culture

For this exercise the world has been divided up into regions and information about the status of different languages co-ordinated at UNESCO head-



MANX SPEAKER: Ned Maddrell

quarters in Paris, with each language being given a three-letter code. This is perhaps just as well as there are, for example, a number of languages called Tongan, all unrelated and in widely differing parts of the globe.

Following the outcry over the 2009 atlas, two new categories have been introduced in the colour coding accorded to languages – including, of course, that controversial pair Manx and Cornish.

The original categories were:
– 'vulnerable' (white)
– 'definitely endangered' i.e. no longer the mother tongue or taught in the home (yellow)
– 'severely endangered' i.e. only spoken by grandparents and old relatives (orange)
– 'critically endangered' i.e. if the youngest speakers are of the great

grandparents' generation (red),
– 'extinct' i.e. if no one has spoken or remembers the language for 60 years (black)

But now there are also the new categories: 'Revived' (brought back from the dead) and 'Revitalised' (brought back from the brink of death).

Difficulties are created by differing opinions as to what is language and what is dialect.

Bavarian, for example, is included as a separate language as it is spoken in the area around Nuremberg and is quite distinct from 'standard' German.

However, a German member of the audience pointed out that Low German did not appear to have been included – yet it was important as an ancestor of English (via the Anglo Saxons), was a language which she could hear and understand as it had been spoken by her parents, but was distinct enough for her to be unable to actually speak it herself.

Some audience members controversially questioned whether governments could afford to revive and encourage use of dying languages and bilingualism.

Mr Moseley agreed that some, for example Mexico, probably could not but nonetheless keeping a record of the world's endangered languages was important for cultural diversity and UNESCO could have a role in giving impetus to movements seeking to gain recognition for threatened languages.

The Manx example is certainly one that can give encouragement to such groups.