

Manx Notes 19 (2004)

“HER DAUGHTER TOLD ME THAT THEY HAD OFTEN SUNG TO YOU”

W.H. GILL AND THE CRAINES OF COOILBANE

Aug 13th

Dear Mr Gill

Many thanks for your letter—it has followed me from place to place & it should have been answered sooner. I do indeed feel honoured that you should suggest my name as a coworker with you in your proposed new book of songs. I am afraid that I cannot do much, but it will be a real pleasure to me to do the little that I can do to help you. I am here keeping house for my brother & so am away from my papers but I have written to my sister to forward to you the music played at the Manx Concert. It included all the fragments which I have so far been able to collect. The airs which Sammy Robinson played were from my collection—he set them for two violins & I shall send you his setting. He told me two weeks ago that he had collected nothing on his own account I have the Manx words to these little bits of music & the tradition in connection with each & “Cushag” our new Manx writer (Miss Kermode) has promised to write English verses to some. She is however, unfortunately, on her way to Nova Scotia to nurse a sister who is seriously ill out there, & she will probably not return this year. I think more scraps of music might still be gained. I heard some bits the other day in Sulby Glen at the house of Mrs Craine, but when Mrs Craine & her daughter told me that they had often sung to you, I felt assured that you had collected all they have to give. I have heard that Tommy Gawne, a herb doctor & charmer who lives in Peel has a good song hitherto unpublished, but when I called to see him about some Manx plant names, I could not persuade him to sing it as he said the Manx words were not suitable for me to hear & he could not sing it without the words. I think he called the tune “Delaney.” Tommy Quane, a fisherman, has another song, a beautiful one he says, but “it always runs away” from him when he wants to sing it to me or to put it down himself. I am delighted to hear that you think of bringing your Song Book out locally. I know Mr Cubbon will do his best, as he always does for the Manx cause, because he works con amore. I will let Dr Clague & Mrs Laughton know what you propose doing.

Yours etc | S.M.

Source: Letter from Sophia Morrison to W.H. Gill, 13 August [1907], Manx National Heritage Library, ms 09495, Sophia Morrison Papers, Box 4, Disbound Copy Letter Book (1904–07).



W.H. Gill together with his brother John Frederick collected in the north of the Island in 1895 and again in 1898, the fruits of those trips resulting in *Manx National Songs* (1896)¹ and *Manx National Music* (1898).² J.F. Gill died in 1899 obviously putting an end to their collecting partnership. It was not known until the release of this letter that he continued after his brother's death to visit Man and to carry on collecting.

Sulby Glen lies in the northern parish of Lezayre. In the same parish the Gills had previously found two singers, Thomas Caley, a stone quarrier living on the Clenaugh Road, and Ann C. Corlett, a tenant farmer working 50 acres on Ballagarrow in Glen Audlyn. The singers mentioned here are therefore both new names. "Mrs Craine & her daughter" are Elizabeth C. Craine, age 59, born in Jurby, and her daughter also Elizabeth C. Craine, age 28, unmarried, working as a dressmaker, and born in Lezayre.³ Husband and father was Daniel J. Craine, born in Lezayre, also aged 59, and working as a roadman. He appears not to have been a singer. As regards the "the house of Mrs Craine" that was Coolbane. All three were fluent in both English and Manx Gaelic.

This letter shows not only that Gill continued to collect but also certainly in the case of the Craines made more than one visit to see them, "Mrs Craine & her daughter told me that they had often sung to you," and so this was not a one-off return by him to collecting. A further point is that it is not just one but both of the Craines who are singers. In the case of the daughter, she is half the age of her mother and when the Gills were first in the field, she would have been in her early twenties. This raises the question whether she acquired her repertoire solely from her mother or if the singing tradition in the countryside was more vibrant than has been thought. However, as regards Sulby Glen itself, it was rapidly becoming deserted with the upland farms around its rim being abandoned leaving just those on the valley floor to be worked.⁴

¹ W.H. Gill, *Manx National Songs with English Words: Selected from the MS. Collection of the Deemster Gill, Dr. J. Clague, and W.H. Gill, and Arranged by W.H. Gill* (London: Boosey, 1896).

² W.H. Gill, *Manx National Music* (London: Boosey, 1898).

³ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Lezayre, 1901, RG 13/5300, f.63. The ages are obviously those from the census. Competency in English and Manx by those enumerated was a question asked in the 1901 census.

⁴ The density of settlement in the early 19th century can be seen from Stephen Miller, "Unpublished Documents from the Manx Museum Library: No. 1, Subscription List to slate the Mountain School in Sulby Glen (No Date) (MS 963 C)," *Journal of the Isle of Man Family History Society* xv (1993), "Unpublished Documents from the Manx Museum Library: No. 2, Volunteers to work on the Bridge in Sulby Glen, 1805 (MS 962 C)," *Journal of the Isle of Man Family History Society* xv (1993). See George E. Quayle, "Our

“I think more scraps of music might still be gained,” wrote Sophia Morrison. We know now that W.H. Gill was still in the field and still finding singers but as regards what he collected from the Craines, and any others for that matter, we have nothing since his personal papers are lost. And but for Morrison maintaining a copy letter book we would have known nothing at all about Gill’s visits to “the house of Mrs Craine.”

STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2004

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