

Manx Notes 22 (2004)

“A SHOEMAKER OF NAME OF KNEALE”
JOHN CRAINE AND HIS SEARCH FOR SINGERS (1895)

(1)
25 APRIL 1895

Ramsey | 25th Apl 1895

Dear Sir

Yours re Manx Music rec^d early on week. Find a shoemaker of name of Kneale (club footed) resides at Dhoon Church. No one of name in Church St. Proposed visiting him but it has rained heavily each afternoon since I first ascertained his address. Will walk out there first opportunity. Shall be most happy to give any assistance possible in writing out or obtaining Songs or Tunes[.]

Most sincerely Yours | John Craine
His Honor Deemster Gill | Douglas

(2)
15 JULY 1895

Ramsey | 15th July 1895

Dear Sir

Jemmy Kneale lives in Church St., Ramsey: I went to Dhoon, Maughold where he at one time lived, to find he had removed to Ramsey but two weeks before my visit to Maughold. I thought I had informed you of this : he promised me to call. & sing over some carols, but he has not yet done so. He has (so he tells me) a large collection of the words of our carols, but only knows the tunes by repute.

I have also interviewed John Quayle, who said the portion of “Colbagh Vreck” is either the chorus only or the Air without the chorus. He promised to look it up for me, & also to let me have any other Manx Airs in his possession, but like Kneale has not yet got beyond the promising stage. I have since this interview called twice at Quayle’s house but have not been fortunate enough to find him at home.

Kneale’s address is as you stated Church St, Ramsey; Quayle’s is King Street Ramsey. I will call upon Mr Nelson tomorrow morning & ascertain what he knows of particular melody already referred to[.]

Most sincerely Yours | John Craine
His Honor Deemster Gill | Douglas

Source: (1) Letter from John Craine to Deemster J.F. Gill, 25 April 1895. (2) —, 15 July 1895, Manx National Heritage Library, MS 09702, Deemster J.F. Gill Papers, Box 2, unlisted.



The Gill brothers, W.H. Gill and Deemster J.F. Gill, were active as folk song collectors in the north of the Island in 1895 and again in 1898. J.F. Gill had a small network of helpers and John Craine is one of a number of correspondents from this circle whose letters survive. “Shall be most happy to give any assistance possible in writing out or obtaining Songs or Tunes” as Craine himself wrote, which neatly sums up their role.

John Craine was an advocate in Ramsey. Given that Gill was the Northern Deemster one was no doubt known to the other that way. His father, also John Craine, was a retired saddler who also taught music.¹ *Brown’s Directory* for 1894 has a listing for a “Professor of Music” at 4 Waterloo Road where the pair of them resided.²

The Gills undertook two collecting tours in 1895, the first one between 12–19 April and the second from 27 July to 6 August. During this first trip the Gills presumably had Kneale’s name passed to them as a potential singer and J.F. Gill followed up by sending Craine around to see him. By the time of the first letter, W.H. Gill was back in England where he lived, and J.F. Gill was back in Douglas where he lived.

Craine was not to find Kneale as he did not live in Church Street in Ramsey but out at the Dhoon on the highway from Ramsey to Douglas. “Will walk out there first opportunity.” This was a time when people walked, and he was willing to tackle the steep climb out of Ramsey and then striding out for the Dhoon. So long, that is, as the weather was fine...

By the time of the second letter in July, Kneale had been found; he was one James Kneale who now was indeed living in Church Street having recently moved from the Dhoon to Ramsey. Kneale was a *carval* singer (more likely by this date in the past tense) and had one or more carval books in his possession (implied by “a large collection of the words of our carols”) from which he was going to recite for Craine.³

¹ The 1891 census enumerates them as being at 44 North Parliament Street. John Craine was aged 39, his father 74 years old. *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Ramsey, 1891.

² *Brown’s Directory for the Isle of Man*, (Douglas: Brown and Son, 1894). There is a separate entry for that address for John Craine as advocate.

³ *Carvals* are carols locally composed in Manx Gaelic and sung on Christmas Eve (*Oie’l Voirrey*) in the parish church. They are in manuscript and bound up to make what are referred to as “carval books.” As Archdeacon Kewley recalled of the Oie’l Voirrey, “the carvals of interminable length, doubtful rhyme and metre, and successfully disguised melody.” Rev. John Kewley, “Rambling Memories of a Manx Sexagenarian,” *Ellan Vannin Magazine* i (1923): 19.

As to the tunes, they were not noted down with the carvals, so he knew them “by repute,” from memory only. No more is heard of Kneale; he is passed over by the Gills at the time of their second collecting tour in the summer of 1895.

Craine must have been a little perplexed at being directed to Church Street. Ramsey had a shoemaker by the name of Kneale. *Brown’s Directory* for 1894 lists him, however, as having premises in the town’s main thoroughfare at 75 Parliament Street.⁴ But this was John Thomas Kneale who lived elsewhere at 28 Bowring Road.⁵ At 14 Church Street was a lock up shoemaker’s shop.⁶ Maybe John Kneale had once worked out of Church Street before moving to Parliament Street and so leaving it vacant for James Kneale to move there.

It is difficult to track James Kneale down.⁷ It was difficult enough after all in 1895 as Craine found out. In 1881 James Kneale was enumerated as a shoemaker then living in Cornaa Cottage in the parish of Maughold, aged 46 and unmarried.⁸ Despite bearing the same surname and working as shoemakers they appear to be unrelated to each other.⁹



“Write to Mr John Quayle Brick & Tile Maker King St Ramsey” was James McWhannell’s advice in a letter to Deemster Gill in July 1895.¹⁰ He continued:

he is a very old Man and a devoted admirer of Manks Music he has all his life been teaching Singing in Chapels & and was an authority upon Music Manks and English. he is thoroughly sound in Reason, and I feel certain he can give you more information than any person I can think of at present.

Gill wrote not to Quayle but again to Craine and around he went this time to King Street. There John Quayle was indeed living, at No. 26, along with his son, another John Quayle, the pair of them listed in the 1891 census as working as brick and tile manufacturers. More likely, employed as workers in George Kay’s works at Port

⁴ *Brown’s Directory for the Isle of Man.*

⁵ *Brown’s Directory for the Isle of Man.* He was not there in 1891 as 28 Bowring Road was occupied by Mary Corlett and Mary Cowin. *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Ramsey, 1901.

⁶ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Ramsey, 1891.

⁷ He is still to be traced in the 1891 census.

⁸ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Maughold, 1881, RG 11/5600, f.23.

⁹ James Kneale was born in the parish of Maughold, John Thomas Kneale in Andreas. The closest candidates in the 1G1 for the latter all have different mothers from James.

¹⁰ James McWhannell to Deemster J.F. Gill, 4 July 1895, Manx National Heritage Library (MNHL), MS 09702, Box 2. McWhannell was another of Gill’s correspondents. He had a grain and seed merchant business in Ramsey as well as farming Glenduff in the parish of Lezayre.

Lewaigue.¹¹ This was a change from 1881 when both father and son were enumerated in King Street, improbable as it sounds, as farmers.¹² Another change was that they were back living at 26 King Street, the 1891 census finding them at 5 Quayle's Court.¹³

As regards "Colbagh Vreck" ("Yn Colbagh Breck er Sthrap"), it had been recorded from Philip Caine on 18 April 1895 and was being taken to Quayle as there was a query it seems about exactly what the Gills had recorded.¹⁴ His opinion duly canvassed, "He promised to look it up for me, & also to let me have any other Manx Airs in his possession." But, as Craine continued, "like Kneale has not yet got beyond the promising stage." To this end, he had called twice, "but have not been fortunate enough to find him at home." Like Kneale, Quayle too was passed over when the Gills next went out collecting.

"Mr Nelson" now enters the scene, as another source to be canvassed as regards "Yn Colbagh Breck." This is John Nelson (1840–1910) who was then the proprietor of the Albion Hotel and as a total abstainer was not tempted to drink the profits.¹⁵ Nelson was an enthusiast for the revival of the Manx language and later had his own Manx column in the *Ramsey Courier* newspaper.¹⁶ He was also involved with Sophia Morrison and others in the sound recording of Manx Gaelic.¹⁷

These letters show Deemster Gill actively using networking, in this case to track down potential singers and the canvassing of opinion on tunes already collected in the field.¹⁸ The singers are shoemakers and labourers, the helpers advocates and grain merchants, the collectors judges and civil servants. Such were the social divides to be crossed in nineteenth century folk song collecting.¹⁹

¹¹ *Brown's Directory* has an entry for John Quayle the son where he is simply "labourer, 26 King-street." *Brown's Directory for the Isle of Man*.

¹² *Census Enumerators' Book* for Ramsey, 1881, RG 11/5601, f.2.

¹³ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Ramsey, 1891. And this is not a case of a property with two addresses as there is a separate enumeration entered for 26 King Street.

¹⁴ "THE ORIGINAL COLLECTION | OF | MANX FOLK MUSIC | [rule] | MADE BY | HIS HONOUR THE DEEMSTER GILL | MR W.H. GILL & DR. CLAGUE | COMPLETED IN 1895 & 1896," bound up by Mrs J.F. Gill in 1912, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2. See p.107, tune O.28.

¹⁵ Anon., "Memorial Notices: John Nelson, Died August 8th, 1910," *Manx Quarterly* 9 (1910).

¹⁶ Commenced in 1906, for the first column see John Nelson, "Manx Column," *Ramsey Courier* 3 August 1906.

¹⁷ Although, in his case not successfully: "I am sending you a Box Containing 8 broken records, & 4 cut records which has some blemish's (sic) on, and they are not to my mind satisfactory to leave for after generations to hear." Ironically, this box survives, the rest of the records now being lost. John Nelson to William Cubbon, 28 November 1906, MNHL, MS 5606 A.

¹⁸ For work on networking in the collecting of English folk song in the nineteenth century see Roly Brown, "Baring-Gould: A Note on Networking" [online source], "The Singing Miller: A Gloss" [online source], "Mark Wyatt and his Songs" [online source].

¹⁹ This is of course an extra detail to be dealt with, namely the crossing of this divide between collector and singer: "I had a most delightful five weeks' sojourn in the Isle of Man among

STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2004

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Letter from James McWhannell to Deemster J.F. Gill, 4 July 1895.

“THE ORIGINAL COLLECTION | OF | MANX FOLK MUSIC | [rule] | MADE
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my old singers, the Last Minstrels. They were so pleased to see me again and I them.”
W.H. Gill to Dora Radcliffe Brown (née Gill), 15 November 1898, MNHL, MS 1059/1 C (A).