

Manx Notes 29 (2004)

“MISS GAWNE”

MARY GAWNE AS SINGER

On 14 May 1895, W.H. Gill delivered a lecture at the Musical Association with the title “Manx Music.” He had recently returned from Man having been there during the previous month collecting folk songs with his brother, Deemster J.F. Gill. Amongst many other topics, he had the following to say about the singers they found:

With the assistance of my brother, and the kind cooperation of many local friends, we had the good fortune to interview in different parts of the Island quite a goodly number of old Manxmen of ages ranging from sixty-five to eighty-four, all more or less musically gifted and some of whom had in their younger days enjoyed a local reputation as singers in church, chapel, farmhouse or inn, as the case may be.¹

The Gill brothers collected again that summer and once more in 1898.² That year they visited Mary Gawne in Peel and the initial interest here is that she does not fit at all into this age pattern. The 1891 census enumerates her as being just 39 years old and so by the time the Gills turned up on 30 September 1898 she was just in her mid-forties. Born in the adjacent parish of Patrick, she was working as a net finisher.³ Peel in this period was still a prominent fishing port and besides boat building, had developed ancillary industries of rope and net manufacturing as well as fish processing (smoke houses for making kippers). Unmarried, she lived at 26 Circular Road and shared the house with Elizabeth Bell and family. In the 1881 census, she was a housekeeper and possibly played this role as well in 1891.⁴

In 1898, they recorded the following tunes from her:

1898

30 SEPTEMBER

- “Yn Sheen Dolphin,” MusBk, 43/3 (O.73);
- “Jemmy as Nancy,” MusBk, 43/4 (O.74);
- “Yn Kirree fo Niaghty,” MusBk, 44/1 (O.75);

¹ W.H. Gill, “Manx Music,” *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* xxi (1895): 127.

² 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, Manx National Heritage Library (MNHL), MS 09702, Deemster J.F. Gill Papers, Box 2. This will be referred to simply as the “Music Book,” abbreviated hereafter as “MusBk.” Reference in the body is by page number and order of appearance of the tune. This is followed in parentheses by the reference given by W.H. Gill. The Gills noted down only tunes.

³ There were two candidates for “Mary Gawne” in the 1891 census. Fortunately, W.H. Gill made a note that she was “Miss Gawne” and so the unmarried Mary Gawne is the singer.

⁴ *Census Enumerator’s Book* for Peel, 1881, RG 11/5597, f.91.

“[The] Loss of the Herring Fleet,” MusBk, 44/2 (O.76);

“Car y Phoosee,” MusBk, 44/3 (O.77);

“Eirey Cronk yn Ollee,” MusBk, 44/4 (O.78).

Gawne also sung a “Lullaby” and “Mraane Kilkenny,” but they were not noted down as they were to be found in A.W. Moore’s *Manx Ballads and Music*.⁵ Moreover, she was the source of them; in fact, she supplied a total of 5 tunes to Moore.⁶

The following tunes were collected from Gawne:

“Yn Coayl jeh ny Baateyn Skeddan,”

“Car-y-Phoosee,”

“Eirey Cronk yn Ollee,”

“Lullaby,”

“Mraane Kilkenny.”

Putting these together with the tunes from the Gill brothers collection:

GILLS	MOORE
“Eirey Cronk yn Ollee,”	“Eirey Cronk yn Ollee”
“Car-y-Phoosee”	“Car-y-Phoosee”
“Jemmy as Nancy”	
“Yn Kirree fo Niaghty”	
“[The] Loss of the Herring Fleet”	“Yn Coayl jeh ny Baateyn Skeddan”
[“Lullaby”]	“Lullaby”
[“Mraane Kilkenny”]	“Mraane Kilkenny”
“Yn Sheen Dolphin”	



The interest with Mary Gawne does not end here and it is more than just a matter of her age or her repertoires as recorded by the Gills and for Moore. 1872 saw a number of activities in an attempt to revive the Manx language.⁷ One of these consisted of gatherings, known as “Manx Readings,” where Manx was used in set-piece recitations alongside performance of religious pieces and folk songs. The first was

⁵ A.W. Moore, *Manx Ballads and Music* (Douglas: G. & R. Johnson, 1896).

⁶ Moore, *Manx Ballads and Music* xxxiv.

⁷ For example, it was reported that, “A Sunday school has been opened in Peel, under the management of Mr John Dawson, and a few other gentlemen, in which the instruction given is in the Manx language, and we understand that it is largely attended by the youth of Peel and neighbourhood.” “Peel and the West,” *Mona’s Herald* 15 May 1872.

held in Peel early in January.⁸ It was repeated with a similar programme in Douglas on Monday 19 January in the Victoria Hall and according to the newspaper report of the event attracted 1,000 people.⁹ As regards “Aarey Jacob,” “It proved rather long and tiring for the singers, but they received an encore and repeated the two last verses.” The pair of singers in question was Mrs Sayle of Douglas and Miss Mary Gawne of Peel.¹⁰ In 1872 she would have been around 20 years old; whatever her age, she was taking part in a revival event and the question arises if she subsequently acquired a repertoire as a revival singer.

STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2004

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BY | HIS HONOUR THE DEEMSTER GILL | MR W.H. GILL & DR. CLAGUE |
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⁸ [“From A Special Correspondent”], “The Manx Readings at Peel,” *Mona’s Herald* 10 January 1872. The programme in the form of a single-sided leaflet survives. See *Ordyr yn Lhaih Gaelkagh*, (n.p.: n.pub., n.d. [but 1872]). This is pasted up in the “Manx Language Scrapbook,” MNHL, H.140/1X–97.

⁹ “The Manx Readings,” *Mona’s Herald* 1 May 1872: 6 col. c.

¹⁰ “The Manx Readings.”