

Manx Notes 58 (2006)

THE GILL BROTHERS AS COLLECTORS:

(8) DEEMSTER J.F. GILL'S CIRCLE OF HELPERS

“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 [...]”¹ This was W.H. Gill describing his first collecting tour in April 1895. The “many local friends” was a reference to a circle of helpers that his brother had put together to assist the pair of them in their quest for folk songs and their singers. “Shall be most happy to give any assistance possible in writing out or obtaining Songs or Tunes,” wrote John Craine to Deemster Gill in 1895,² and this neatly sums up the role that this particular group came to play.

The evidence for their activities come from their letters deposited amongst Deemster Gill's papers. These number just thirteen in total, written between 1895 and 1898. No doubt, like the correspondence from his brother, they are only part of what was once a larger number of such letters. The number of correspondents is nine; whether these individuals comprised the circle itself or were part of a greater number is difficult to answer now.

These letters, together with several enclosures now missing their covering letters, do form a small corpus of considerable value, and allow us to see the networking aspect of folk song collection in this period in action.³

LETTERS TO DEEMSTER J.F. GILL

1895–98

1895 (1) 11 April, John Callow; **12–19 April (1st collecting tour)** (2) 25 April, John Craine; (3) 10 May, Benjamin Radcliffe; (4) 28 May, Daniel Kelly; (5) 4 July, James McWhannell; (6) 15 July, John Craine; (7) 24 July, James Morrison; (8) 26 July, Robert Corlett; **27 July–5 August (2nd collecting tour)**.

1896 (9) 29 January, Daniel Kelly; (10) 29 October, William Kermode; (11) 20 November, Robert Watson.

¹ W.H. Gill, “Manx Music,” *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) x.

² John Craine to Deemster J.F. Gill, 28 April 1895, Manx National Heritage Library, MS 09702, Box 2.

³ For further on this, and in the same period, see Roly Brown, “Baring-Gould: A Note on Networking” [online source] and Roly Brown, “Revisiting Baring-Gould: Part 2, Collecting” [online source].

1898 (12) 25 May, William Kermode; (13) 1 June, William Kermode; 21 September–13 October (3rd collecting tour).

BY CORRESPONDENT

John Callow, 11 April 1895; **Robert Corlett**, 26 July 1895; **John Craine**, 25 April 1895, 15 July 1895; **William Kermode**, 29 October 1896, 25 May 1898; 1 June 1898; **Daniel Kelly**, 28 May 1895; 29 January 1896; **James McWhannell**, 4 July 1895; **James Morrison**, 24 July 1895; **Benjamin Radcliffe**, 10 May 1895; **Rev. Robert Watson**, 20 November 1896.

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THE HELPERS

NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION	PARISH	RESIDENCE
Craine, John	43	Advocate	Ramsey	44, Parliament Street
Kelly, Daniel	71	Builder	Michael	"Mona House," Village
Callow, John	41	Clerk ¹	Laxey	3, Ballthorn Road
Kermode, William	58	Coroner ²	Peel	2, Derby Road
McWhannell, James	62	Farmer ³	Lezayre	Glenduff
Morrison, James	60	Harbour master	Peel	12, Crown Street
Radcliffe, Benjamin	55	Insurance agent	Ramsey	1, Chapel Lane

Key: ¹ At the Great Laxey lead mine. ² For Glenfaba sheading when the Gills first met him. Alternated with holding the same office for Michael. Also, auctioneer and commission agent. ³ 130 acres [acreage from the 1881 census] Also, corn and seed merchant in Ramsey.

STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2006

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MANX MUSEUM MSS NEW SERIES (MS)

MS 09702 Deemster J.F. Gill Papers, Box 2 (unlisted)
Letter from John Craine to Deemster J.F. Gill, 28 April 1895.

PRINTED SOURCES

Brown, Roly. "Baring-Gould: A Note on Networking." 2003. Musical Traditions.
Available: <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/enth38.htm>.

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Gill, W.H. "Manx Music." *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. v–xi.

