

Manx Notes 77 (2007)

“THE QUAIN T OLD ‘CARVAL-SINGING’” WILLMOTT DIXON’S RECOLLECTION (1880)

SINGING CAROLS IN CHURCHES. (6th S. i. 18).—I am reminded by Mr Boase’s query of a singular and grotesque form of carol-singing in churches which was prevalent in the old Manx parish churches till within a few years ago. On Christmas Eve, or Oiel Verry (Mary’s Eve) as it is called in the Manx, a number of persons used to assemble in each parish church and proceed to chant carols or “carvals.” There was no unison or concert about the chanting, but a single person would stand up with a lighted candle in his or her hand, and chant in a dismal monotone verse after verse of some old Manx “carval” until the candle was burnt out, when another person would start up and go through a similar performance. No fresh candle might be lighted after the clock had chimed midnight. An elaborate “service of song,” with trained choirs and all decorous musical and religious accessories, has now taken the place of the quaint old “carval-singing.”

WILLMOTT DIXON.
Godolphin Road, Shepherd’s Bush.

Source: Willmott Dixon, “Singing Carols in Churches,” *Notes & Queries* (6th ser.) i (1880): 201b–02a.



An addition to Stephen Miller, “*There is dances used on sonday afternoone*”: *Historical References to Manx Folk Song and Dance before 1896*, Preprint ed. (Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2005).¹

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VIENNA, 2007



¹ Available <www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/~stephen>