

Manx Notes 130 (2012)

“TOMMY THE MATE”

A NOTE ON THOMAS CRELLIN *

We have few likenesses of Manx traditional singers but here we can see Thomas Crellin standing, somewhat stiffly it must be said, as part of a group photograph of the Peel Wesleyan Quarterly Meeting that was reproduced in the *Examiner Annual for 1903* (published in 1902).¹ He is standing in the back row, second from the left. Crellin sold coal off the quayside at Peel, though earlier he had been a Master Mariner and so gained the nickname “Tommy the Mate” as a result.²

He was a singer for both Harry Bridson (collecting on behalf of A.W. Moore) and the Gill brothers showing that he had a recognised reputation. Seven tunes of his were used in *Manx Ballads and Music* (1896), namely, “Graith my Chree” (with words), “Inneenyn Eirinee,” “Juan y Jaggad Keear,” “Mannin Veg Veen,” “Marrinys yn Tiger,” “Snieu Wheeyl Snieu,” and “Ushtey Millish.”³ His words for “My Callin Veg Dhone” were also used, though not his tune.⁴ The Gill brothers collected from

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “‘Tommy the Mate’: A Note on Thomas Crellin,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu*, June (2011), [6]. Reproduced here with sources.

¹ Isle of Man Examiner, *Isle of Man Examiner Annual for 1903* (Douglas & Port St Mary: S.K. Broadbent, 1902) 19.

² In the 1891 census he is aged 67 years old, born in Peel and with his occupation given as Mariner [Seas added]. He was married, living with his wife Ann at 3 Christian Street, Peel, who was born in Patrick. They had a domestic servant, Lydia Leece, 14, born in Peel. *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Peel 1891, PRO, RG 12/4683, fol. 7, sch. 28. For an obituary notice, Anon, “Death of Mr Tho[ma]s Crellin,” *Peel City Guardian* 25 May 1907. For his reminiscences of life in Peel, see Anon, “What Mr Thos Crellin Remembers,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 2 March 1901. Reproduced with commentary in Stephen Miller, “‘They would fiddle and dance to a late hour’: Thomas Crellin looks Back,” *Manx Notes* 25 (2004). Crellin was also known to the Rev. T.E. Brown as he wrote to S.T. Irwin in 1893: “These Peel men are most interesting: they were the upper class, not ‘Tommy the Mate’ & Co. I saw Tommy, though, next morning. He recited to me some of his verses. The nice old creature! but really egotistic in a degree which—Well, they don’t get much from us, and the kindly listener is to them at once a solace and a temptation.” Letter from the Rev. T.E. Brown to S.T. Irwin, 11 November 1893, in Sidney T. Irwin, ed., *Letters of Thomas Edward Brown*, vol. i, 2 vols. (London: Archibald Constable, 1900) 227–28. Brown also collected various items relating to Thomas Crellin: (i) Letter from T.E. Brown to Thomas Crellin, 30 July 1895; (ii) Receipt (in rhyme) sent by Thomas Crellin to Hall Caine, undated; (iii) “Peel Wesleyan Basaar,” undated poem; (iv) Master’s Certificate of Service, No. 70438, issued 27 May 1851. MNHL, MD 299. Other ephemera is at MNHL, MD 948. Two notebooks in the hand of Crellin at are MNHL, MD 865. One contains reminiscences of Methodism in his Peel and the other poems composed by himself.

³ A.W. Moore, “Introduction,” *Manx Ballads and Music* (Douglas: G. & R. Johnson, 1896) xxx.

⁴ A.W. Moore, “Introduction to Music,” *Manx Ballads and Music* (Douglas: G. & R. Johnson, 1896) xxxiv.

him on three occasions, twice in 1895 and again in 1898, their last joint collecting tour. They took down “The Farmer’s Daughter,” “Jacob’s Ladder,” “Juan y Jaggad Keear” (×2), “Yn Shenn Dolphin,” “Spinning Wheel Song” [*ie*, “Snieu Wheeyl Snieu”], and “Yn Stroieder.”⁵

Crellin provided the Gills with six tunes (with one variant) and Moore with seven tunes. They only overlap twice (“Juan y Jaggad Keear” and “Snieu Wheeyl Snieu”). As regards the two sets of words supplied by Crellin, as the tune for “Graith my Chree” was taken down as well as the text it is reasonable to assume that the tune for “My Callin Veg Dhone” was also collected. In the case of “Graith my Chree” Crellin’s tune appeared, for “My Callin Veg Dhone” the tune was taken from *Mona Melodies* (1820).⁶

Overall then, we have a recorded repertoire of eleven tunes and two sets of words; that there was only an overlap of two tunes poses the question as to how Bridson and the Gills elicited their material, one now unlikely to be answered. Also, the presence of “The Farmer’s Daughter” makes one speculate how many other songs with English titles did Crellin know but were filtered out as not being felt to be Manx at all.

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⁵ Stephen Miller, “‘Thos Crellin (The Mate) Peel’: Thomas Crellin as Singer,” *Manx Notes* 26 (2004).

⁶ J[ohn] Barrow, *The Mona Melodies* (London: Mitchell’s Musical Library & Instrument Warehouses, n.d. [but 1820]).

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