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“SKINNER CROSBY—BRIDE BETWEEN
DOG MILLS & BRIDE CH.”

WILLIAM SKINNER AND THE OTHER SINGERS
OF THE GILL BROTHERS *

We know of the singers recorded from by the Gill brothers,¹ those by Moore’s circle of helpers,² and now those found by Clague.³ Remarkably, this does not exhaust the names of singers known to us. Whilst song collecting in the 1890s and later was a somewhat familiar activity in the British Isles, it is worth reminding ourselves that the Island saw considerable activity given its size: four principal collectors were involved and that is before the second wave led by Sophia Morrison which found more singers in the 1900s.⁴ Adding in those found later by Mona Douglas raises the number still higher.⁵ The total still needs to be calculated and those individuals to be listed altogether as well as their biographies to be established.

Returning to the Gill brothers, the Deemster had a circle of helpers (as did Moore, but in his case, they carried out all the fieldwork themselves) and they found both singers and potential singers.⁶ Some of these singers interestingly also recalled the names of other singers now past.

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¹ Stephen Miller, “The Gill Brothers as Collectors: (7) The Singers,” *Manx Notes* 57 (2006).

² Stephen Miller, “‘My book of Manx Ballads at last published’: A. W. Moore’s *Manx Ballads and Music* (1896),” *Folk Music Journal* 10.1 (2011).

³ Stephen Miller, “‘The Ploughman in Wind-Swept Fields’: The Folk Singers found by Dr John Clague,” *Manx Notes* 147 (2013).

⁴ Stephen Miller, “‘On the Manx Quest’: Sophia Morrison and Josephine Kermodé,” *Manx Notes* 138 (2012), Stephen Miller, “‘I picked up a most beautiful old Manx tune yesterday’: Sophia Morrison (1859–1917),” *Manx Notes* 148 (2013). Her circle of helpers calls for further research. As a start, for Frances Corlett, Stephen Miller, “‘Mrs W.J. Corlett has picked up a fine air’: Frances Corlett as Collector,” *Manx Notes* 18 (2004), Cressy Dodd, Stephen Miller, “Cressy Dodd: An Unrecognised Manx Song Collector,” *Manx Notes* 131 (2012), Stephen Miller, “‘Written down by Miss Cressie Dodd & myself’: Cressy Dodd as Collector,” *Manx Notes* 137 (2012); P.W. Caine, Stephen Miller, “‘Taking down music in the dorian mode is not so easy as it looks’: P.W. Caine (1887–1956) and Manx Folk Song,” *Manx Notes* 150 (2013).

⁵ Stephen Miller, “‘The list would be as long as this book’: Mona Douglas and her Informants,” *‘Completed and Restored to Use’: Revival and Dissemination of Manx Folklore and Tradition during the 20th Century*, ed. Stephen Miller (Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2004).

⁶ Stephen Miller, “‘The kind cooperation of many local friends’: Deemster J.F. Gill’s Search for Manx Folk Singers (1895–98),” *Folklore* 102.2 (2009).

Two helpers who found singers were Richard (though recorded by some mistake as John) Lace and Harry Wood. Lace was the parochial schoolmaster at Kirk Michael⁷ and he visited John Cannell in January 1896. He collected just one tune from him.⁸ John Cannell (1830–1903), born in Michael, was a tailor and was aged 61 at the time of the 1891 census.⁹ Harry Wood (186–1938) was the brother of the rather more famous Haydn Wood, and like his brother was a musician.¹⁰ Wood came across William Proctor (1822–1917).¹¹ Proctor was one of the many singers who did not fit W.H. Gill’s criteria for a folk singer—he was not as Gill dreamt some aged illiterate cottager hidden away in the Curraghs, but serving as he did on Douglas Town Commissioners between 1883–95, later becoming a Town Councillor between 1895–1904, and in 1902 he was even the Mayor of Douglas. He also held office as a Justice of the peace at some date. Wood visited him in 1895, and recorded, like Lace, one tune Proctor is missing from the 1891 census, but the Directories from the period record him as being a boot and shoemaker, with a shop at 29, later 37 Castle Street and a factory of some size in Senna Road.¹² He lived on the Quarter Bridge Road.

What is interesting about Proctor is that his daughter, Frances Proctor, later Corlett was involved as a collector with Sophia Morrison in the second wave of collecting in the Island.¹³ This was not the only connection at the time between figures involved with the Gill brothers. Frederick Stevenson Tellet (1843–1919) was present on 12 October 1898 with the Gill brothers when recording from John Callister in Parliament Street in Ramsey.¹⁴ Tellet was a doctor and surgeon who lived at Auburn House in Lezayre Road.¹⁵ It is possible that the session was taking place in the house of John Craine, one of the Deemster’s helpers, who lived at 44 North Parliament Street, though his name is not recorded it must be said. Tellet was the

⁷ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Michael 1891, RG 12/4683, fol. 118, sch. 38.

⁸ “THE ORIGINAL COLLECTION | of | MANX FOLK MUSIC | — | MADE BY | HIS HONOUR THE DEEMSTER GILL | MR W.H. GILL & DR. CLAGUE | COMPLETED IN 1895 & 1896”, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2. See p.110/1.

⁹ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Michael 1891, RG 12/4683, fol. 110, sch. 66.

¹⁰ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Douglas 1891, RG 12/4688, fols 101–02, sch. 63.

¹¹ Proctor was not enumerated in the 1891 Census. For biographical notices, Anon, “Mr Alderman William Proctor, J.P, Mayor of Douglas,” *Isle of Man Examiner Annual for 1903* (Douglas & Port St Mary: S.K. Broadbent, 1902), Anon, “[Memorial Notices] William Proctor, JP. Died Feb 16th, 1917,” *Manx Quarterly* 18 (1914).

¹² *Brown’s Isle of Man Directory*, (Douglas: James Brown & Son, 1881), *Smith’s Commercial Directory of the Isle of Man*, (Morley: S. Stead, 1883), *Porter’s Directory for the Isle of Man*, (Liverpool: Rockliff Brothers, 1889), *Brown’s Directory for the Isle of Man*, (Douglas: Brown and Son, 1894).

¹³ Miller, “Mrs W.J. Corlett has picked up a fine air’: Frances Corlett as Collector.”

¹⁴ *Orig. Coll.*, 48/1 (O.91).

¹⁵ *Census Enumerators’ Book*, Ramsey, 1891, RG 12/4685, fol. 21, sch. 7. *Brown’s Directory for the Isle of Man*.

uncle of Margaret Quayle, now Mrs Ferrier, whose husband was the Government Chaplain.¹⁶ Ferrier was a collector and source of tunes for A.W. Moore.¹⁷

The Deemster is now emerging as an equal partner with his brother, and besides his circle of helpers, a phenomenon in its own right, he took down a number of field notes whilst present with his brother, a few of which now survive. James Cannell was encountered on the 2 August 1895 and there is a loose sheet now in the Deemster's personal papers: "Bollan Bane Note from Jas : Cannell 'aged 71' (The Dhoor Lezayre) Aug 1895".¹⁸ In the 1891 census, Cannell was 67 years old, living in Ramsey though born in Michael and working as a general labourer. His wife and children were all born in England;¹⁹ the 1881 census has him recorded as an unemployed labourer living in Toxteth in Liverpool.²⁰ Cannell recalled the name of a singer: "Paddy Pherrick Caine (weaver) lived at Orrysdale—Michael—died—aged between 60 & 70". (He was the singer of "Yn Bollan Bane.") There is a Patrick Caine baptised *circa* 30 April 1815 in Patrick with no other candidates.²¹ He was buried on 10 February 1864 in German, aged 49 years.

There is a second item relating to Cannell, it appears to be a song text, though not badly faded and not easily readable.²² Undated, it was possibly recorded at the same time. The top of the sheet reads "Jas Cannell Ramsey" with "Dhoor" entered above. (Possibly the Cannell family had moved or else that was where the Deemster and brother encountered him.)

Another singer called to mind was "W[illia]m Kewiney" and this was by Thomas Kinrade visited by the Gill brothers on 16 October 1898.²³ "The Wanderscope," also known as "Fairy Music" from it having been learnt by overhearing the fairy folk playing it. As Kinrade himself recalled: "W[illia]m Kewiney used to play this exclusively (60 years) while going from house to house at Christmas[.] He had heard fairies play it in Glen Auldyn[.]"²⁴ Again, there is just one William Kewney [*sic*] born in the 19th century, who was baptised 15 April 1820 in Lezayre and who was buried there 16 October 1860, aged 41 years.²⁵

¹⁶ "Family Tree 4," in Freda Llewellyn Gill, [as "F.Ll.G."], *"Grampy": Recollections by F.Ll.G.* (Douglas: S.K. Broadbent, n.d. [but 1924]) unpagged.

¹⁷ A.W. Moore, *Manx Ballads and Music* (Douglas: G. & R. Johnson, 1896) xxxiii, xxxiv.

¹⁸ Loose, titled single sheet in the hand of Deemster J.F. Gill, dated 2 August 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

¹⁹ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Ramsey 1891, RG 12/4685, fol. 95, sch. 114.

²⁰ *Census Enumerators' Book* for 1881, RG 11/3638, fol. 134.

²¹ *Interational Genaeological Index*.

²² Loose, titled single sheet in the hand of Deemster J.F. Gill, undated, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

²³ *Orig. Coll*, 45/2 (O.80).

²⁴ Annotation to O.80.

²⁵ *Interational Genaeological Index*.

Another field note in the hand of the Deemster contains the name of William Skinner (1844/45–1922), it is untitled and undated and the source of the name is not clear.²⁶ There is no record of the Gill brothers ever visiting him. In the 1891 census, he is aged 46 years old, born in Bride (the 1881 census has Andreas) and farming Crosby in Bride.²⁷ By this death his father was dead and the farm divided between William and his brother, John. In the 1881 census, it was recorded as being 186 acres in size and besides William working it alongside his father, two men and one boy were also employed there.²⁸

Another two singers still remain to be considered. This time they were visited by John Craine, an advocate and musician living in Ramsey,²⁹ a recruit to the Deemster's circle at some date in the 1890s.

The first one was James Kneale (1835–?), Craine writing to the Deemster on 25 April 1895, “[f]ind a shoemaker of name of Kneale (club footed) resides at Dhoon Church.”³⁰ Kneale was later to be found living now in Ramsey and “[...] he promised me too 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 some of our carols, but only knows the tunes by repute.”³¹ There is a note of scepticism here: “so he tells me.” Kneale is not in the 1891 census for some reason; in 1881, he was 46 years old, a shoemaker (a common occupation for a number of the singers), unmarried and living at Cornaa Cottage in Maughold.³² It is difficult to know if Kneale's name was passed by the Deemster to Craine or if Craine was on the lookout for potential singers for the Deemster and came across him.

In the case of the remaining singer, John Quayle (1815–?), his name was passed in a letter from James McWhannell on 4 July 1895.³³ “Write to Mr John Quayle Brick & Tile Maker King St Ramsey.”³⁴ McWhannell farmed Glenduff and had a seed corn and grain merchant business in Ramsey.³⁵ Quayle was in the 1891 census as McWhannell said, a brick and tile manufacturer living at 5 Quayle's Court, Ramsey, aged 76 years old.³⁶ In 1881, he was living at 26 King Street, still in Ramsey, the census enumerating him as a farmer but the trade directories giving him as a brick

²⁶ Undated and untitled list in the hand of Deemster J.F. Gill. MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

²⁷ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Bride 1891, RG 12/4684, fol. 96, sch. 9.

²⁸ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Bride 1881, RG 11/5599, fol. 55.

²⁹ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Ramsey 1891, RG 12/4685, fol. 58, sch. 208.

³⁰ John Craine to Deemster J.F. Gill, 25 April 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

³¹ John Craine to Deemster J.F. Gill, 15 July 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

³² *Census Enumerators' Book* for Maughold 1881, RG 11/5600, fol. 23.

³³ James McWhannell to Deemster J.F. Gill, 4 July 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

³⁴ James McWhannell to Deemster J.F. Gill, 4 July 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

³⁵ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Lezayre 1891, RG 12/4684, fol. 135, sch. 13. *Brown's Isle of Man Directory, Brown's Directory for the Isle of Man.*

³⁶ *Census Enumerators' Book*, Ramsey, 1891, RG 12/4685, fol. 82, sch. 218.

and tile manufacturer.³⁷ There is loose titled sheet amongst the Deemster's papers of the folk song "Barbara Allen, undated on the reverse it has a message evidently intended for Craine: "Ask Quayle if he knows the tune of Colbagh Baack and Sthrat."³⁸ This must have been passed between the Deemster and Craine between McWhannell's letter of 4 July 1895 and Craine's reply of 14 July where he writes: "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."³⁹ It seems, as Craine indeed wrote, that Quayle was another singer such as Kneale who had yet to deliver anything at all.

We now have another eight names of singers to contend with, besides those collected directly from by the Gill brothers. As seen, John Cannell and William Proctor were found by helpers to the Gills. James Cannell was the subject of a note made by the Deemster in the field. He recalled Patrick Caine. William Kewney was remembered by Thomas Kinrade. The Deemster was passed the name of William Skinner, though there is no record of him being visited. And, finally, John Craine visited James Kneale and John Quayle though he seemed not to have come away with anything from the pair.

We have no idea now of how many other names that the Gill brothers may have had in their possession. Nor, for that matter, if the circle of helpers was larger than the names we have from the surviving correspondence. However, it is clear we are dealing with a partial survival of the Deemster's papers but at least they have the virtue of they being extant to some larger or (more likely) lesser degree. His brother's archive appears to now be lost and Clague's papers seem as well to be equally lost from sight after the death of Archdeacon John Kewley in 1941 to whom they passed on his death in 1908. Quite how those papers came not to be deposited in the Manx Museum Library is unclear. A.W. Moore's papers too have gone. Nevertheless, there are still numerous avenues of research to be conducted using the material there is to hand. Seemingly, the more research that is done, the more questions that are raised. Hopefully, they will receive answers. Like the Deemster, we are still on the quest for William Skinner and his ilk.

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³⁷ *Brown's Isle of Man Directory, Porter's Directory for the Isle of Man.*

³⁸ Loose titled single sheet in the hand of Deemster J.F. Gill, undated, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

³⁹ James McWhannell to Deemster J.F. Gill, 14 July 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

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