

Manx Notes 175 (2014)

“THE RESULTS ARE MOST INTERESTING”

THE SOUND RECORDING PROGRAMME OF THE MANX LANGUAGE SOCIETY *

In 1905, the *Peel City Guardian* reported that:

The Manx Language Society has decided to obtain gramophone records of the Manx language, as spoken by residents in various parts of the Island familiar with it, and for the purpose of procuring such records from people in the South, Mr R.A. Shortland and C.T. Cowell, jun[io]r, went to Port Erin on Wednesday. A slight readjustment in the mechanism of the machine suggested itself to one of the young men, and an improvement was effected, with the result that some splendid specimens of Manx were recorded. Those who spoke in the gramophone were Mr and Mrs Moore, Mr Keggen (who is 84 years of age), and Mr Kneen; and the selections recited were the most part Biblical passages. A few hymns and verses of well-known songs were also sung. The results are most interesting.¹

Not only do we have yet more names to add to the collectors of Manx folk song, but more names of singers themselves. As regards the collectors, Charles T. Cowell was 18 years old, a schoolboy at the time of the 1901 census and living at home with his family at 4 Victoria Road in Douglas.² Ramsey A. Shortland was 20, a stationer's assistant in 1901, again then living at home with his family at 22 Berkeley Street in Douglas.³ While Cowell was Manx-born, the Shortland family were all born in England.⁴ Evidently, they the pair were presumably members, and enthusiastic ones at that, of a Manx language learner class.

But what of the singers themselves? The Moores were Thomas, aged 68 in the 1901 census, a retired farmer living at Ballafesson with his wife Annie, aged 63.⁵ William Keggen, farming at Glendown was 79 years old, his wife Ann, 67.⁶ William Kneen was another retired farmer, aged 74, residing at Croit-e-Caley with his wife, Elizabeth, who was 83.⁷ All couples were bilingual in Manx and English.

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “‘The results are most interesting’: The Sound Recording Programme of the Manx Language Society,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* August (2013), [12]–[14]. Reproduced here with sources.

¹ Anon, “Gramophone Manx Records,” *PCG* 15 April 1905. The piece given here in full. It is likely authored by Morrison.

² *Census Enumerators' Book* for Douglas 1901, RG 13/5304, fol. 107, sch. 18.

³ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Douglas 1901, RG 13/5304, fol. 73, sch. 17.

⁴ The 1901 census had a language question as to knowledge of Manx. Both families were English-speaking ones.

⁵ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Rushen 1901, RG 13/5301, fol. 122, sch. 100.

⁶ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Rushen 1901, RG 13/5301, fol. 106, sch. 114.

⁷ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Rushen 1901, RG 13/5301, fol. 135, sch. 87.

Béla Vikár in December 1896 was the first person in Europe to record traditional music with the phonograph, making use of it because of his inability to notate music.⁸ Even those who could were to find it a difficult task as Vic Gammon has commented:

There can be no doubt that taking down songs by the pencil and paper method was an arduous business. It required the complete attention of the collector and the complete co-operation of the singer. It sometimes also required some sort of transaction between the collector and singer. It was best done by two collectors working together, one to take down the words, the other the tunes. Collectors usually preferred working in pairs but this was not always practical. The result of solo collecting was that songs were often incomplete, usually tunes were collected without full words but sometimes the reverse occurred.⁹

P.W. Caine conveyed the difficulty of notating in the field in a letter to Morrison much later in 1914, commenting that “[t]aking down music in the Dorian mode is not so easy as it looks, & one is apt to lose the key, especially when the singer’s voice has lost some of its pristine freshness.”¹⁰ This placed a limit on the amount of material that could be comfortably gathered in one session. Three tunes per session seems to have been the norm for Dr John Clague.¹¹ His collaborators were the Gill brothers, Deemster J.F. Gill and W.H. Gill, the pair collecting in Man in 1895 and 1898. The latter’s experience of notating in the field caused him to reflect in a letter from 1897 on “the enormous difficulty (if not impossibility) of getting an absolutely true first record.”¹² The solution: “Next time I come over I will ‘fetch a compass.’ In other words I will bring a Phonograph.”¹³ There is no evidence that Gill did so—but if he had done so, then he would have been placed with Vikár as an innovator in field collecting techniques in Europe.

⁸ Sándor Kovács, “The Ethnomusicologist,” *The Bartók Companion*, ed. Malcolm Gillies (London: Faber and Faber, 1993) 52.

⁹ Vic Gammon, “Folk Song Collecting in Sussex and Surrey, 1843–1914,” *History Workshop Journal* 10 (1980): 64.

¹⁰ P.W. Caine to Sophia Morrison, 24 February 1914, MNHL, MS 09495, Box 1.

¹¹ “An old blind man—Tom Kermode by name, has given me three splendid old songs, and I think I shall be able to get three more yet. I have had three from old Fargher who gave me ‘Shannon Rea,’ and he has another which I shall probably get this week.” Dr John Clague to Deemster J.F. Gill, 25 December 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

¹² W.H. Gill to Deemster J.F. Gill, 27 July 1897, MNHL, MS 09702, Deemster J.F. Gill Papers, Box 2. This issue of what specifically to notate is discussed (using the figure of Béla Bartók) in Judit Frigyesi, *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 237–38.

¹³ W.H. Gill to Deemster J.F. Gill, 27 July 1897, MNHL, MS 09702, Deemster J.F. Gill Papers, Box 2.

“A new ally has come to the cause in the form of an Edison Phonograph, whose function it is to preserve the Manx sounds as uttered by native speakers.”¹⁴ So reported Sophia Morrison, Secretary of the Manx Language Society, in her annual report for 1905. The balance sheet outlined the expenditure on this new found ally: £7 15s 0d on the phonograph itself, complete with an extra horn, stand, and basket, £1 16s 0d on blank records, and the sum of 12/- for repairs to the phonograph itself, perhaps damaged in transit to the Island.¹⁵

The reference to “verses of well-known songs” in the *Peel City Guardian* piece raises the question as to where this recording session of 12 April 1905 sits with what is known of the history of sound recording of traditional song and music in the British Isles. It had been assumed that Percy Grainger was the first to collect in this manner, using a phonograph in Lincolnshire in 1906.¹⁶ It is now known that he was preceded by Graham Peel and James Campbell McInnes who made recordings on the Isle of Syke and showed them to Lucy Broadwood in May 1905.¹⁷ However, at the *Feis Ceoil* held in Belfast in May 1897, “Saturday’s doings [...] ranged from ‘the recording of unpublished Irish airs in the phonograph’ to a ‘country fiddlers’ competition.”¹⁸ It is likely though that

According to Morrison’s report to the Society in 1905, the phonograph had been used in the south and the west of the Island and “[t]he instrument is to go to Laxey and Ramsey within the next few weeks, and then come back to Douglas again.”¹⁹ There was, however, a difficulty in collecting, and one that was not technical this time:

¹⁴ Sophia Morrison, “The Secretary’s Report,” *Annual Meeting, 1905* (n.p.: Manx Language Society, 1905) 4. For a history of the phonograph, see George List, “A Short History of the Cylinder Phonograph [Part 1],” *The Folklore and Folk Music Archivist* 1.2 (1958), George List, “A Short History of the Cylinder Phonograph [Part 2],” *The Folklore and Folk Music Archivist* 1.3 (1958). The early history of recording with the phonograph is discussed in Alexander Rehding, “Wax Cylinder Revolutions,” *The Musical Quarterly* 88.1 (2005). See too, Erika Brady, *A Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography* (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, 1999). The extant sound recordings of Manx Gaelic are detailed in George [as “Shorys y Creayrie”] Broderick, “Recording Native Manx Speech,” *For a Celtic Future: A Tribute to Alan Heusaff*, ed. Cathal Ó Luain (Dublin: The Celtic League, n.d. [but 1983]).

¹⁵ Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh, “Balance Sheet from Hollantide 1904, to Hollantide, 1905,” *Annual Meeting, 1905* (n.p.: Manx Language Society, 1905).

¹⁶ C.J. Bearman, “Percy Grainger, the Phonograph, and the Folk Song Society,” *Music & Letters* 84.3 (2003): 436. For further on Grainger, see Michael Yates, “Percy Grainger and the Impact of the Phonograph,” *Folk Music Journal* 4.3 (1982). Bearman here is a response to Yates.

¹⁷ Bearman, “Percy Grainger, the Phonograph, and the Folk Song Society,” 439.

¹⁸ Pseud. [as “By Our Special Correspondent”], “The *Feis Ceoil* at Belfast,” *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 39.664 (1898): 391b.

¹⁹ Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh, “Records of the Manx Language,” *Annual Meeting, 1905* (n.p.: Manx Language Society, 1905) 8.

One difficulty in the way of obtaining the material which we want, has been, as I have found by experience, the unwillingness of our intensely earnest and religious peasantry to speak into the instrument such “boghtynid” [Manx, *lit.*, ‘rubbish’] as folk-stories and sayings and secular songs. They prefer that such a serious thing as a record which is to be handed down to posterity shall consist of Hymns, Scripture, or Carvals. One who knows them can understand the feeling, but, for the purposes of the M.L.S. more frivolity is to be desired.²⁰

This view was not just confined to the “peasantry,” one of the collectors, namely John Nelson, also shared this view. As Morrison wrote to Kneen in 1905, after having failed to encourage Nelson to produce some learning materials for the MLS:

I have done my best to persuade Nelson to give us some every day jig-jog yarns in homely Manx—but he looks upon that kind of work as just so much “boghtynid”—his one ambition being to translate Moody & Sankey. It is such a pity as we have so much of that wishy washy stuff in Manx—& of no real value.”²¹

After the end of the formal business of the meeting, a number of the recordings were played aloud to the meeting and “[a]mong the records put through were the following”:

By Mr Edward Cubbon, Peel, a song “Neddy Hom Ruy”; by Mr W. Cashen, Peel, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, Boxing the Compass; Mr Thos. Moore, Surby, Rushen, Corinthians, 13th Chapter, and song, the “Wreck of the Herring Fleet”; Mr Jack Cregeen, Peel, song, “Ec ny Fiddleryn”; Peel boys trained by Miss Morrison, song, “Hop-tu-naa”; Mr W. Kneen, Croit-e-Caley, Rushen, two hymns; Mr Wm. Cain, Glen Helen, “Mylechraine,” and “Kirroo-fo Niaghtey”; Mr John Quirk, Peel, an original yarn about the fishing; Mr Caesar Cashen, Peel, two hymns; and also some miscellaneous renderings by Mr W. Cashen, tailor, Peel; altogether a very excellent and creditable series.²²

As can be seen, a mixture of sung and spoken items, with both secular and religious material recorded.

As regards the singers and reciters, William Cain was a gardener at Glen Helen, a waterfall attraction in the parish of German, living in at the hotel there.²³ Aged 74,

²⁰ Morrison, “The Secretary’s Report,” 4.

²¹ Sophia Morrison to J.J. Kneen, 22 November 1905, MNHL, MS 1086/13 c. Nelson was later in 1906 to have own column in the *RC* where this material was to appear; for his first contribution, see John Nelson, “Manx Column,” *RC* 3 August 1906. This erosion of traditional Manx song culture had begun in the 1870s during the Methodist Revival as an entry in the school logbook for Baaregarroo School, Michael, shows: “Singing not so good; one boy, who has been converted at the ‘revival meetings’ held in this Chapel at the present time, refused to sing school songs, as he thought it wrong to do so.” Entry for the week 9–13 March 1874, Baaregarroo School logbook, MNHL, MD 10025.

²² Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh, “Records of the Manx Language,” 8.

²³ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for German 1901, RG 13/5306, fol. 69, sch. 13. Cain was also known as “Willy-the-Fairy”: “‘Willy-the-Fairy,’ as he is called, who lives at Rhenass, says he often hears the fairies singing and playing up the Glen o’ nights. I have heard him sing airs

he was unmarried, and spoke Manx and English. Ceasar Cashin [sic] was a greengrocer, aged 46, living at 1 Castle Street in Peel with his wife, Elizabeth, 46, who spoke only English.²⁴ His age suggests that his Manx was acquired later in life. Edward Cubbon was a milk dealer, 57, residing at 36 Douglas Street, Peel, with his wife and family.²⁵ Ann Cubbon was 52 and spoke only English, as did their three children, aged from 8 to 19. William Cashen, aged 66, was the Custodian of Peel Castle, living with Susannah, his wife of 63, and their 27 year old son at 3 Marine Parade, Peel.²⁶ The only Manx speaker was William Cashen himself.²⁷ While the second William Cashen is described as a tailor, he is recorded in the 1901 census as a fisherman, aged then 66, and living with his wife Ellen, 60, at 3 Tynwald Road, Peel, both of them recorded as bilingual.²⁸ (The spelling there is as Cashin.) John (“Jack”) Cregeen was a mariner, 76, widowed and living with his daughter, Matilda, 36, at 19 Stanley Road, Peel.²⁹ She spoke only English. John Quirk, aged 60, was a mariner and boarding house keeper living at “Tynwald House,” 56 Marine Parade, Peel, with

which he said he had thus learned from the ‘Little People.’” Sophia Morrison, “The Taking of Evidence, iv: In the Isle of Man,” *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1911) 118. The waterfalls at Rhenass were renamed “Glen Helen” by the proprietor who developed the attraction there. For further on “fairy music,” see Ríonach Uí Ógáin, “Music learned from the Fairies,” *Béaloides* 60 (1992).#, Barbara Hillers, “Music from the Otherworld: Modern Gaelic Legends about Fairy Music,” *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, eds. Pamela Hopkins, *et al.*, vol. xiv (Cambridge, Mass.: Department of Celtic Languages and Literatures, Harvard University, 1994).

²⁴ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Peel 1901, RG 13/5306, fol. 8, sch. 53.

²⁵ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Peel 1901, RG 13/5306, fol. 32, sch. 86.

²⁶ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Peel 1901, RG 13/5306, fol. 7, sch. 48.

²⁷ “Personally, I shall greatly miss our almost daily *cooish* [Manx ‘chat’] about things Manx, and our readings together of the Manx Bible in his cosy kitchen in long winter evenings. He could see at a glance the inner meaning of a line in Manx, so that to read with him was a revelation of the beauty of the language. I am indeed indebted to him for his teaching.” Sophia Morrison, “Introduction,” *William Cashen’s Manx Folk-Lore* (Douglas: Manx Language Society, 1912) xvii. For further about Cashen, see Stephen Miller, “Introduction,” *William Cashen’s Manx Folk-Lore*, Expanded ed. (Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2005).

²⁸ William Cashin is listed in the 1881 census as a tailor, his wife (recorded then as Eleanor) as a dressmaker, living at 5 Church Lane in Peel. *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Peel 1881, RG 11/5597, fol. 92, sch. 14. In 1891, they were living at 6 Station Road, and Ellen was listed as a fisherman’s wife; William was absent, being enumerated onboard of the fishing boat “Emma,” PL181, preparing to sail with the rest of the Peel and Port St Mary fleets to the Irish mackerel fishing at Kinsale. *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Peel 1891, RG 12/4683, fol. 65, sch. 146 and *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Fishermen 1891, RG 12/4692, fol. 97, sch. 46. In 1901, he was on dry land and living at 3 Tynwald Road, Peel, but still listed as a fisherman, aged 66, his wife, Ellen, 60 years old. Both were bilingual. When not fishing, he was tailoring over the winter months. *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Peel 1901, RG 13/5306, fol. 22, sch. 267.

²⁹ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Peel 1901, RG 13/5306, fol. 10, sch. 85.

his wife, Honora, 63, and their four daughters.³⁰ While their parents were bilingual, the siblings, ranging in age from 20 to 29, spoke only English. Quite why Morrison felt the need to “train” a group of Peel schoolchildren to sing “Hop-tu-naa” is unclear given the vitality of the custom as the *Peel City Guardian* attested to in 1911.³¹

The Society’s recording programme ran from 1904 until 1908 at the latest, judging from the purchasing of blank records listed in the yearly expenditure of the Society. Smaller numbers of records were bought over the years: £1 16s 0d was spent initially, followed by 11s 6d in the Report for 1906,³² (the 1907 Report never appeared),³³ 8s 1d in 1908,³⁴ and, finally, just 5s 6d in 1909.³⁵ After the 1909 report, no further expenditure is listed, but recording activities were taking place as late as 1913, Morrison writing to Kneen in September of that year, “I am hoping you will be able to use the M.L.S. Phonograph during the winter.”³⁶ This was announced in the annual report that year³⁷ with further detail appearing in *Mannin*:

The Manx Language Society’s phonograph is still hard at work. In the past it has stored up much of Manx song and speech, which otherwise might have been lost. Even should the spoken language die out altogether, which Heaven forefend, it will be possible for future generations to hear the pure old Manx enunciation. Mr Kneen will have the phonograph this winter at Port Erin.³⁸

³⁰ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Peel 1901, RG 13/5306, fol. 8, sch. 53.

³¹ “The old custom of celebrating All Hallows Eve still lingers, though in a subdued and more decorous form, consisting principally in masquerading in grotesque makes-up. On Tuesday evening last, when it was celebrated, quite a number of youths kept up the old traditions in this manner, causing much amusement.” Anon, “Peel Junior Guild,” *PCG* 4 November 1911. And in the same issue: “In consequence of ‘Hop-tu-Naa,’ the attendance was not so good as usual, but there were about fifty juniors present.” Anon, “Peel Junior Guild.”

³² Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh, “Balance Sheet from Hollantide, 1905, to Hollantide, 1906,” *Annual Meeting of the Manx Language Society, held in the Librarian’s Room, Public Library, Douglas, on Thursday, November 22, 1906* (n.p.: Manx Language Society, 1906).

³³ “Report not printed for 1907”, pencilled annotation on the cover of Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh, *Sixteenth Annual Meeting held in the Town Hall, Douglas, on Hollantide Day, 1915* (n.p.: Manx Language Society, 1915).

³⁴ Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh, “Balance Sheet,” *Annual Meeting of the Manx Language Society, held in Empire House, Promenade, Douglas, on Tuesday, March 24th, 1908* (n.p.: Manx Language Society, 1908).

³⁵ Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh, “The Balance Sheet,” *Annual Meeting of the Manx Language Society, held in Empire House, Central Promenade, Douglas, on Tuesday, March 23th, 1909* (n.p.: Manx Language Society, 1909).

³⁶ Sophia Morrison to J.J. Kneen, 14 September 1913, MNHL, MS 1086/36 c.

³⁷ “Mr Kneen has also the society’s phonograph in Port Erin for the winter in order to store up records of Manx speech and song. Anyone who knows of a good unpublished Manx song should communicate with him.” Anon, “The Manx Society: Annual Meeting,” *Manx Quarterly* 13 (1913): 96b–97a.

³⁸ Sophia Morrison, “Notes,” *Mannin* 2 (1913).

This is puzzling, given that expenditure by the Society on blank records ends in 1909, after that year Morrison and the others must have carried on by paying out of their own pockets for some unknown reason. The minute books do not provide any background,³⁹ but nor is there any mention in the surviving correspondence between the individuals involved as to any difficulty with the Society continuing to fund the purchasing of cylinders. On another tack, frustratingly there are no mentions of the phonograph in Morrison's annual reports as Secretary, save a mention in the 1906 report:

Before passing on to the social events of the past year, I must not forget to mention the work accomplished by an inanimate member of this Society. I mean the phonograph. Many most interesting records have been obtained from Manx speakers, and various paragraphs have appeared in the English Press commending the idea of thus preserving the native sounds, and quoting us as a good example. We hope that during the coming winter the phonograph will pay visits to those parts of the Island to which it has not yet been sent.⁴⁰

This is a further puzzle, as the annual reports cover in depth the activities of the Society.

The Rev. E.B. Savage in his 1905 Presidential Address to the MLS spoke of the phonograph in these terms: "Our phonograph will preserve the speech and accent of Manx people of this generation, from different parts of the Island."⁴¹ Given the eventual fate of the MLS collection cylinders, the size and nature of which we can only guess at, the unintended irony here is that those recorded with the "new ally" outlived the cylinders themselves. The MLS phonograph itself survived and sits in a museum in Peel,⁴² the home town of Sophia Morrison, a mute testament to what is a remarkable episode in the early collecting and recording of Manx Gaelic.

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VIENNA, 2014

³⁹ Remarkably, no minutes were recorded for the Executive or Committee meetings for 1906 through to 1908; while the minutes of both committees do exist for 1909, the last year in which the MLS are recorded as purchasing cylinders, there is no record of any debate about the continuance or abeyance of the recording program. *MLS Minute Book (1899–1913)*, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh archive.

⁴⁰ Sophia Morrison, "Secretary's Report," *Annual Meeting of the Manx Language Society, held in the Librarian's Room, Public Library, Douglas, on Thursday, November 22, 1906* (n.p.: Manx Language Society, 1906) 6.

⁴¹ Canon Ernest B. Savage, "The President's Address," *Annual Meeting, 1905* (n.p.: Manx Language Society, 1905) 2.

⁴² Its inventory number is IOMMM 1954–6335.

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