

# Manx Notes 211 (2015)

## REV. JOHN KEWLEY'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF MANX FOLK SINGERS \*

In 1924, publication began in the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* of a selection of folk songs from the Dr John Clague Collection,<sup>1</sup> then in the hands of the Rev. John Kewley, Clague's close friend and to whom his library and personal papers had passed on the death of Margaret, his widow, in 1911, the Doctor himself having died in 1908. Kewley had contributed a series of pen portraits of some of the singers with Gilchrist adding that "[t]he Ven. Archdeacon Kewley possesses photographs of five of the above singers, so interesting and characteristic that I wish they could have been reproduced in this *Journal*."<sup>2</sup>

Kewley had sent her notes about seven singers: Thomas Kermode, Ellen Costain, Philip Caine, William Duke, John Cubbon, Charles Clague, and Mrs Elizabeth Clague. There is no clue about which five names Kewley had photographs of in his possession. However, William Duke can be easily eliminated as he is a figure from Clague's childhood. Of the others, Ellen Costain was once housekeeper to Clague's parents, Elizabeth Clague was his own mother and Charles Clague his cousin and coachman. If it is taken that these individuals were photographed as being close to Clague then three of the five are accounted for and that leaves just two to puzzle over from the remaining three names of Thomas Kermode, Philip Caine, and John Cubbon.

Kermode is "Blind Tom" or "Boy Doal," a blind fisherman from Bradda who was the major contributor to the Clague Collection; Philip Caine is better known of as "Phillie the Desert," from Rensault in East Baldwin; John Cubbon was a marble mason from Castletown. Of the three, Caine was never collected from by Clague; his tunes ended up in the Clague Collection due to the Gill brothers pooling their material with Clague. It seems likely then that it was Kermode and Cubbon who were photographed.

Of these five names, there is just one photograph known, that of Thomas Kermode. There is no evidence that it is indeed one of the photographs in Kewley's hands—nor, for that matter, do we know if these photographs were taken at roughly the same time as Clague was collecting and that there are others documenting his singers; this of course presupposing that they were taken in the first place as a record of his collecting.

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<sup>1</sup> A.G. Gilchrist, "Songs from the Isle of Man (Part i)," *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* vii.28 (1924).

<sup>2</sup> Gilchrist, "Songs from the Isle of Man (Part i)," xiv.

Turning to the photograph of Thomas Kermode, the only other folk singers of whom a likeness is known are Catherine Lawson and Thomas Crellin—they are not exactly common. Kewley had a photograph of Kermode and possessed Clague's archive; Kermode was found by Clague to whom he paid fulsome praise as an informant. This one photograph then of Blind Tom must come from Clague's hands. If Clague systematically photographed his other singers (and it is a big *if* it must be admitted), then these are now lost with his personal papers after Kewley's death in 1941.

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REFERENCES

Gilchrist, A.G. "Songs from the Isle of Man (Part i)." *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* vii.28 (1924): v–xvi & 99–198.

