

Manx Notes 227 (2015)

THE SOPHIA MORRISON & JOSEPHINE KERMODE COLLECTION OF MANX FOLK SONGS *

A PRELIMINARY VIEW

One of the difficulties of seeing Sophia Morrison and Josephine Kermode as song collectors is that there are no notebooks full of folk songs nor, say, a bundle of sheets pinned or grouped together to conveniently stand out as being *the* Morrison and Kermode Collection. There is not, for instance, the four tune books that make up the Clague Collection nor the bound transcript of the Gill brothers collecting to hold reassuringly in the hand. Instead, we have loose sheets scattered amongst her personal papers, others to be found in the hands of Kermode, her close friend and it is argued her fellow-collector. Then there are the song texts published in 1905 in *Manx Proverbs and Sayings*. And then, remarkably, her sound recordings made with the phonograph of the Manx Language Society purchased in 1904, the cylinders now lost. Morrison stands out as one of the pioneers in Europe in putting the phonograph to use in recording vernacular song culture.

It is clear, however, that Morrison's papers and effects have suffered a considerable loss despite them being in family hands until their eventual deposit in the then Manx Museum Library. One always reads through them with a sense that there was once more—considerably more—and so then they can present us at this date only with a partial view of her activities and that any sense or assessment of her achievements as a collector will ever *understate* her work.

She was active as a folklorist, folk song collector, a promotor of the Manx language, and a Pan Celtic enthusiast of note. What comes across is a warm and generous character and one that was then able to draw others into collecting; for example, Cressy Dodd, P.W. Caine, and Frances Corlett, names that we know of for certain. And then there is Josephine Kermode, better known as the poet "Cushag," who was her companion on collecting trips and as seen had Morrison material in her possession related to Manx folk songs. Morrison equally had manuscripts in Cushag's hand amongst her own papers.

Morrison also acquired material from others, the most notable item being a notebook from J.R. Moore with seven folk song texts in his hand. Other manuscripts have no clear author and it is not evident if they were passed directly to her or through another party. Few of the manuscripts are dated, the only ones that are relate to entries to the Manx Guild. The singers too remain unnamed, though some are recorded, such as Anne Bridson of Glen Rushen, Anne McCormick from Peel,

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Elizabeth Craine living at Cooilbane in Lezayre, Thomas Gawne again from Peel, and Thomas Quane at Dalby. Though texts predominate, as is typical with these early collections, there are a small number of tunes present, most untitled and in solfa notation although there are some in staff notation.

Not all of the material is present as single sheets, of which it must be said that some are fair copies of later clear ones so there is an amount of duplication with the collection. What is of interest is that Morrison on a number of occasions gathered together a selection of songs, six seemingly being the favoured number, and wrote them up using disbound page spreads from School Exercise Books, some of which are now incomplete. They bear titles such as “Words to Six Fragments of Oral Music,” “Some Fragments of Folk Songs (handed down orally),” “Six fragments of Oral Music,” and “Manx Fragments of Music.” She is clearly circulating copies of her collecting, indeed there is a copy letter of hers to W.H. Gill wherein she writes “I send also the notes & traditions about the fragments of music which I promised you.”

This last manuscript in fact contains no song texts at all but notes or commentary on a number of songs—Arrane ny Ferrishyn Ghelby, Arrane Sooree, Bahie Veg, Car yn Coog, Hunt the Wren, Lady Margad, Tar dys Mannin—and remarkably an account in Morrison’s own hand of her collecting with the phonograph:

I invited him to my house and asked him to sing some of his father’s songs into the M. L. S. gramophone. He had only about 20 m. to spare but he kindly came with me and sang two songs into the horn, one being the “Song of the Dalby fairies,” the other the genuine Manx version of “Hunt the Wren,” of which Mr A.W. Moore writes that no one ever heard it in Manx until he turned the English version into Manx.¹

The singer’s surname only is known (Callister) and he was part of the Manx *diaspora*, a lead-miner from Arizona who had worked his passage onboard a ship for a final visit to the Island, and Arrane ny Ferrishyn Ghelby was a song learnt from his father and also known after him as “Tom Billy Hals Song.” This either shows his own ownership of the song at singing sessions or more likely that he was well-known as an exponent of the song as it is one that allows for—and thereby calls for—skilled extemporisation in performance.

Finally, what then is to be found in the Morrison–Kermode Collection? Again to be clear this is a preliminary view (and very so) as to its content. Given that there is no core manuscript or manuscripts, the size of the collection was a personal surprise as the papers of Morrison and Kermode were worked through in the Summer of 2015—there are close on sixty titles now to contend with though this number of course incorporates *all* of the material present and mentioned though now lost and is

¹ “Manx Fragments of Music,” MNHL, MS 09495, Sophia Morrison Papers, Box 7.

not a list as such of the songs personally collected by Morrison and Kermode alone and that remains to be figured out as best it can be.

THE SOPHIA MORRISON–JOSEPHINE KERMODE COLLECTION

(1) Arrane Ghelby, (2) Arrane ny ferrishyn, (3) Arrane ny ferrishyn ghelbee, (4) Arrane Sooree, (5) Bahie Veg, (6) Baldwin twooie as Baldwin jass, (7) Buggane gob ny scuit, (8) Car yn Coog, (9) Choolyn fo Chag, (10) The Cormorant, (11) Cray dhoan ec Keeil-eoin, (12) Delaney, (13) Ec ny Fidderyn, (14) Ny three eeasteyryn boghtey, (15) The Fairy Song, (16) Flout er Vooijer Laxey, (17) Flout er Vooijer Ronague, (18) Floutyn er Vooijer Ghelby, (19) Gooyndy Linsee-Wunsee, (20) Yn Graihder Jouylagh, (21) Graih my Chree, (22) Graih my chree ta ayns Ballaragh, (23) Hinkin! Winkin!, (24) Hooindys yn yeastagh Juan, (25) Hop-tu-naa, (26) Humeeho, humeeho, (27) Hunt the Wren, (28) Illiam-y-Cain(e), (29) It was my cruel parents which first didst me trepan, (30) Jack Beg Juan John va singal myr lhon, (31) Jingle the Bells for Charlie, (32) John Gorry, (33) Keayrt va mee aeg, (34) Ny Kirree fo Niaghtey, (35) Lady Margaret, (36) Let's go to the fishing, John, (37) Yn Maarliagh Keyrragh, (38) Moghrey laa Boaldyn, (39) My mraane oast ta'd stoamey, (40) Mylechraine, (41) Neddy Hom Ruy, (42) The Old Bog-Hole, (43) Our Saviour was not born in a palace or a hall, (44) The Plover's Lament, (45) The Sod, (46) Ta mee gollish myr eoylley, (47) Ta'n Ollick veg fo'n vink, (48) Tar dys Mannin, (49) Yn Tigar Priveteer, (50) Tom Billy Hal's Song, (51) Trooid y keyll trooid y keyll, (52) Tune yn Ollick, (53) Tune-y-wheyl vooar, (54) Ushag veg ruy, (55) Where's your father, diddle-dum, diddle-dum, (56) The Wind that shakes the Barley.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2015

