

Manx Notes 242 (2016)

“TO DISCOURSE MOST EXCELLENT MUSIC”

THE RUSHEN PARISH WEST GALLERY PLAYERS *

(1864)

The *Manx Church Magazine* for 1892 contained a piece that reminisced about Rushen Parish Church, and mentioned that “[t]he organ, which well maintains its excellence, was placed in the Church in November, 1864, during the incumbency of the Rev. Hugh Gill.”¹ There was, however, to be a consequence, namely that:

It superseded a violinocello, a flute, and a clarionet, on which instruments, as all the older parishioners could testify, the late Messrs Thos. Qualtrough, James Turnbull, and Edward Kneen were wont to discourse most excellent music, to the no small edification and content of the congregation.²

This was soon to be a familiar outcome of the installation of an organ or harmonium, with the services of individuals such as Thomas Qualtrough and others then to be dispensed with. The musical life of the parish church was reduced as a result and individuals lost a space in which they could demonstrate their musical skill to their fellow parishioners and worshippers. The tone of the piece shows that the writer too felt the loss of their contribution to the musical life of the church.³

As regards the musicians mentioned here, two of them can be identified for certain as there is no one else with their names in Rushen in the census for 1861. As regards Thomas Qualtrough, there is a choice of three individuals, as can be seen below. The Parish Clerk and Schoolmaster was yet another Thomas Qualtrough, aged 50, and living at Ballakilley, Rushen.⁴ As parish clerk, it was his role to lead the singing and so not to be found playing in the parish orchestra. He was at that time elected by the parishioners of the parish themselves, later it was down to just the vicar or rector and the church wardens, and the post was eventually abolished and replaced by the office of sexton.

THE RUSHEN PARISH WEST GALLERY PLAYERS

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¹ Anon, “Rushen Parish Church: With Extracts from old Parish Book,” *Manx Church Magazine* ii.4 (1892): liia.

² Anon, “Rushen Parish Church: With Extracts from old Parish Book,” liia.

³ For further on this topic, see Vic Gammon, “‘Babylonian Performances,’ The Rise and Suppression of Popular Church Music in England, 1660–1870,” *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590–1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure*, eds. Eileen Yeo and Stephen Yeo (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981).

⁴ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Rushen 1861, RG 9/4430, fol. 49, sch. 19.

EDWARD KNEEN

In 1861, Edward Kneen was aged 40 years old, a joiner, living with his father (also a joiner) living in Lime Street in Port St Mary.⁵

THOMAS QUALTROUGH

(1) Thomas Qualtrough, Miner, aged 30, living at Shenvally, Rushen.⁶

(2) ———, Harbour Master, aged 32, living in Main Street, Port St Mary.⁷

(3) ———, Blacksmith, aged 34, living with his brother and family at Corvalley, Rushen.⁸

JAMES TURNBULL

In 1861, James Turnbull was aged 32 years old, a shoemaker, living with his brother and family who farmed 30 acres on Ballaqueeny in Rushen.⁹

STEPHEN MILLER, 2016

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⁵ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Rushen 1861, RG 9/4430, fol. 71, sch. 24.

⁶ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Rushen 1861, RG 9/4430, fol. 85, sch. 9.

⁷ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Rushen 1861, RG 9/4430, fol. 91, sch. 21.

⁸ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Rushen 1861, RG 9/4430, fol. 60, sch. 2.

⁹ *Census Enumerators' Book* for Rushen 1861, RG 9/4430, fol. 50, sch. 21.