

Manx Notes 250 (2017)

“A MANX SONG IN LONDON”

ROBERT BECK AND THE GRAND GAELIC CONCERT

(1899) *

The London Gaelic League, an association formed for the preservation of Irish as a spoken language, and for the cultivation of the National Literature and Music, held a Grand Gaelic concert at the Bloomsbury Hall, Hart-street, Bloomsbury-square, W.C., on Tuesday evening last. At these concerts, which are held periodically, all other branches of the Gaelic tongue are represented as well as the Irish, with the result that a programme so varied in speech, and so effective from a musical point of view, could scarcely be presented anywhere else than in London, where, it is said, and to be found representatives of all the nations upon earth. The Gaelic League, is true to its name. It seems odd that in these latter days a meeting can be held in England consisting of people of British or Irish both, and yet not a single word of English spoken from the platform during the course of a long evening. Irish there was galore, Welsh, Scotch Gaelic, Cornish, Breton, and Manx. The indefatigable lady secretary, anxious that no Gaelic tongue should be omitted, hunted up the London Manx Society, and by their help, ran to earth a singer of songs in the Manx language, and accordingly Mr Robert Beck, of Douglas, now residing in London, readily and patriotically consented to represent Ellan Vannin Veg Veen in this modern Babel of tongues, and right well did he perform his task by singing “Mylecharane.” Mr Beck’s song was beautifully rendered, and elicited much applause. The plaintiveness and branty of the air surprised those who had no former acquaintance with the language and music of the Island. It in much to the honour of Mr Beck, who was accompanied by Mr John Prowde, of London, that he so well represented the Island on such an important and interesting occasion. The programme of songs, was varied by instrumental music, consisting of Irish pipes and harp, and Scotch pipes; Irish jigs, reels, hornpipes. Scotch sword dances, etc., and altogether the gathering made up a unique sort of entertainment.

“A Manx Song in London.” *Peel City Guardian* 11 November 1899: [2]g.

In the 1891 census, Robert Farish Beck was 15 years old, and a pupil school teacher living with his family at 11 Dalton Street in Douglas. His father, William, was a corn and flour miller, born in Ballaugh. His other sibling, Sarah, was born in Douglas and their mother, Eleanor, was English.¹ By the time of the census in 1901, he was now boarding in London at 102 Elderfield Road, Hackney, and employed by the London

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¹ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Douglas 1891, RG 12/4689, fol. 51, sch. 22.

County Council as an assistant school master.² The 1911 census saw him married to Amelia Mary Beck, from Sheffield, and with a two-year old daughter, Beryl Aldwyth Beck. Whilst still an assistant school master, the family were now living in Walthamstow, Essex, at 18 Silverdale Road, Highams Park, Chingford.³

STEPHEN MILLER, 2017



² *Census of England & Wales* for 1901, RG 13/218, fol. 150, sch. 10.

³ *Census of England & Wales* for 1911, RG14PN9730 RG78PN514B RD188 SDIO ED56 SN67.