

# Manx Notes 360 (2019)

“MR J. CAIN (BLIND) SANG A SOLO IN MANX”

THOMAS WILLIAM CAIN  
(1833–1913) \*

“Mr J. Cain (blind) sang a solo in Manx: ‘Tar shiuish ta nish cumraagyn dou,’ and was heartily applauded.”<sup>1</sup> [The title translates as “Come ye who are now my comrades.”] So reported the *Mona’s Herald* in 1899 of an event at the Seaman’s Bethel in Douglas, where William Kneen, the Town Missionary there, also sang “O Yee, cur skianyn credjue dou,” (‘O, For the Wings of Faith and Love’) from *Lioar dy Hymnyn* (1846). “He said that he had sung this hymn in Manx amongst his Gaelic friends at a religious service in the Highlands of Scotland a few weeks ago, and he had been treated with great kindness from the people while staying there.” Kneen was the instigator of the revival of Manx, holding a conversation class at the Bethel in 1898,<sup>2</sup> and events there featured as here items sung in Manx and often by Cain.

The newspaper was wrong about his first name and so the initial, as he was properly Thomas William Cain (1833–1913). In the 1901 census, he was enumerated as a street musician, living with his English-born wife, Jane, at 9 Nelson Street in Douglas, and a speaker of Manx.<sup>3</sup> The 1911 census found him residing at 35 Allan Street in the town and recorded that he had been blind for some 30 years.<sup>4</sup> He was a musician in the 1891 one (then at 4 Post Office Lane in Douglas),<sup>5</sup> but in 1881 he was a carter (though blind then).<sup>6</sup> Enumerated as a miner in 1871, and said to be have been blind for seven years, he must have lost his sight through an industrial accident of some nature.<sup>7</sup>

Of interest here is not Cain and the Bethel as such (though that is worth pursuing) but his involvement with Dr John Clague, as tunes credited to him turn up in the Clague Collection in two places. Of the dated material, there are two untitled *carval* tunes dated 25 October 1899, ascribed to “Blind Cain.”<sup>8</sup> The undated but titled tunes are “Ben aeg waagh ayns Mwyllin Sayle” (‘A fair young woman in Sayle’s Mill’) and

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\* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “‘Mr J. Cain (Blind) sang a Solo in Manx.’ Thomas William Cain (1833–1913),” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* February (2019), [17].

<sup>1</sup> Anon, “[Local and District] Treat to Afflicted and Infirm Persons,” *Mona’s Herald* 8 November 1899.

<sup>2</sup> Anon, “[Douglas] [A service in ...],” *Isle of Man Examiner* 8 October 1898.

<sup>3</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Douglas 1901, RG 13/5305, fol. 126, sch. 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Douglas 1911, RG14 PN34665 RD635 SD3 ED18/12 SNI18.

<sup>5</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Douglas 1891, RG 12/4687, fol. 63, sch. 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Douglas 1881, RG 11/5604, fol. 50, sch. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Douglas 1871, RG 10/5776, fol. 24, sch. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Dr John Clague Collection, MNHL, MS 448/2 A, 23.

“Va oie aynd Cronk Ollee Moooar” (‘One night in Cronk Ollee Mooar’), also known as “The Glashtin’s Song.”<sup>9</sup> There is a problem here in that Clague has entered “Philip Cain l Douglas” against both these tunes, though later squeezing in “[Blind man” against the first occurrence of the name. It is possible that Clague has confused him with Philip Cain of Baldwin (“Phillie the Desert”) from whom he never collected, it was the Gill brothers who visited him. Whilst the Clague tune books also contain those collected by the Gills, they did not gather these specific ones from Cain, and so it is fair to assume that these tunes do indeed come from Thomas William Cain. The 1899 date is of interest showing that Clague collected on at least one occasion after his involvement with the Gills that ended with their last collecting tour in 1898.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2019

#### REFERENCES

- Anon. “[Douglas] [A service in ...].” *Isle of Man Examiner* 8 October 1898: [5]c.  
 ——. “[Local and District] Treat to Afflicted and Infirm Persons.” *Mona’s Herald* 8 November 1899: 7c.




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<sup>9</sup> Dr John Clague Collection, MNHL, MS 448/1 A, 15.