

Manx Notes 365 (2019)

ROBERT GAWNE (1815–45) AND THE GAWNE COLLECTION *

In *The Robert Gawne Collection (Manx Ballads and Music Working Guide*, No. 7) from 2017, I either overlooked, or did not fully look at, Robert Gawne (1815–45) in the context of the Robert Gawne Collection of Manx folk songs that was drawn upon by A.W. Moore in *Manx Ballads and Music* (1896). In the 1841 census, he was aged 25 and living in London, residing at Walcot Place in Lambeth, and working as a Government clerk.¹ His death in 1845 was sudden,² and its circumstances were reported in the *Manx Sun*. “He had been some time ailing, with a spitting of blood, and by medical advice was leaving the Tithe-office, in London, of which he was one of the clerks, to pass a few weeks with his mother.”³ Travelling in the company of his cousin, he alighted from the train at Wolverton, “coughed, a blood-vessel burst, and he expired almost immediately.” He had been a pupil at the Athol Street Academy, one of a number of private schools in Douglas, and the public examination results published in 1828 (when he would have been thirteen) show him passing classes in Latin, French, and English Grammar and being placed in the First Class.⁴

The connection of Robert Gawne with the Rowany at Port Erin comes only from A.W. Moore and it is fully clear that the Gawne family there cannot provide a link. William Harrison in *Mona Miscellany* (1869) mentions, as regards the song “Shenn Arrane Ghaelgagh er Mylecharane,” that “I have one by Mr Robert Gawne of Douglas in 1837, with some slight alterations, containing nine verses.”⁵ This would make the Robert Gawne here aged twenty-two years old. Harrison retired to the Island in the 1840s, and so is considerably closer to Gawne than Moore, born in 1863, ever was to him, and for whom he was always “the late Robert Gawne.” However, Moore also mentions that Gawne was an unacknowledged copyist of documents for Oliver’s *Monumenta de Insula Mania*, 3 vols (Douglas: Manx Society, 1860–62);⁶ as seen Gawne lived in London, worked at the Tithe Commission Office, and had

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¹ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Lambeth 1841, HO 107/12/29/17.

² Anon, “Births, Marriages, & Deaths,” *Mona’s Herald* 28 May 1845, Anon, “Births, Marriages, and Deaths,” *Manx Sun* 24 May 1845.

³ Anon, “[Local News] The Late Robert Gawne,” *Manx Sun* 24 May 1845.

⁴ Anon, “Athol Street Academy,” *Manks Advertiser* 3 January 1828.

⁵ William Harrison, *Mona Miscellany: A Selection of Proverbs, Sayings, Ballads, Customs, Superstitions, and Legends Peculiar to the Isle of Man*, Manx Society, vol. xvi (Douglas: Manx Society, 1869) 57.

⁶ A.W. Moore, “Some Account of the Manx Society,” *Manx Note Book* ii (1886): 176, fn. [1].

Latin. But the difficulty here is the gap in years, given that Gawne died in 1845, and Oliver's edition appeared much later in 1860.

If Moore was incorrect the first time, and wrong on a subsequent occasion, then it is possible (though near difficult to prove) that this Robert Gawne, whose "worth was acknowledged by all who knew him," was the one behind the collection that eventually ended up in Moore's hands and which appeared in part in *Manx Ballads and Music* in 1896.

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