

# Manx Notes 511 (2021)

## “THE LATE BROS. COWLE, THE NOTED ‘CARVAL’ SINGERS” \* (1906)



In April 1906 a Bachelors’ Tea and Concert was held in the Wesleyan Schoolroom at Crosby.<sup>1</sup> After tea, “a concert was given, the items of which were contributed by local artists, together with some friends from Douglas and Peel.” It was only after midnight when a halt was called to the proceedings and “[i]n the opinion of one who was present, the only thing the service lacked as a reminder of old times was the presence of the late Bros. Cowle, the noted ‘carval’ singers.” It is thanks to the Gill brothers that we know the name of one of the Cowles, namely Thomas Cowell as he was visited by the pair on 21 September 1898, “Tho : Cowell—The Braid Marown [b. 15 July 1815]” being their record of the encounter. Eight tunes were recorded that day from him, namely (1) Drogh Vraane, [oc] 41/1 (0.63); (2) The Prodigal Son, [oc] 41/3 (0.65); (3) While Shepherds watched their flocks by night, [oc] 43/1 (0.71); (4) [Untitled], [oc] 42/3 (0.69); (5) [Untitled carval], [oc] 41/2 (0.64); (6) [—], [oc] 41/4 (0.66); (7) [—], [oc] 42/2 (0.68); (8) [—], [oc] 42/4 (0.70).<sup>2</sup> In the 1891 census, he was enumerated as being 75 years old, a labourer, and unmarried. He was living at Stuggadoo, Slieau Charn, with Elizabeth Stephen (17), his grandniece and there was also a note, “Blind accident.”<sup>3</sup> The *Manxman* in its issue for 1 October 1898 mentioned that:

Mr W.H. Gill, brother of Deemster Gill, is over on a short visit to Douglas, and is spending much of his time in pursuing his research for old Manx music. Along with the Deemster, he has truded over a great part of the Island within the past few days in search of fresh tunes. The other day, in Marown, they came across an

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<sup>1</sup> Anon, “Crosby,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 21 April 1906.

<sup>2</sup> THE ORIGINAL COLLECTION | OF | MANX FOLK MUSIC | [RULE] | MADE BY | HIS HONOUR THE DEEMSTER GILL | MR W.H. GILL & DR. CLAGUE | COMPLETED IN 1895 & 1896. MNHL, MS 09702, Deemster J.F. Gill Papers, Box 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Marown 1891, RG 12/4683, fol. 85, sch. 75.

old blind Manxman, over four score years old, who sang melodies which they had never previously heard, and which have never been committed to type.<sup>4</sup>

This “old blind Manxman” was Thomas Cowle and here we see the hoped-for singer of the folk song collectors at this time, unlettered and illiterate and so singing songs learnt then only by ear.

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REFERENCES

Anon. “Crosby.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 21 April 1906: 7f.

———. “[Personal and Otherwise] [Personal] Mr W.H. Gill ...” *The Manxman* 1 October 1898: 13b.



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<sup>4</sup> Anon, “[Personal and Otherwise] [Personal] Mr W.H. Gill ...,” *The Manxman* 1 October 1898.