

Manx Notes 59 (2006)

THE GILL BROTHERS AS COLLECTORS:

(9) "THE MUSIC BOOK"

In May 1895, W.H Gill wrote to his brother, "I am sending you my transcript of original material and my own ideas as to their relative merits."¹ A little further on in the same letter, he passed on a practical tip: "If you have a punch you might drill a hole thro' my sheets (mine is at the P.O.²) and run them thro' with a bit of someth[in]g to keep them tog[ethe]r. Let me have them back again."³ Two days later, in a subsequent letter, he referred again to the transcripts, but this time in further detail:

I have been putting the best of the Doctor's last contrib[utio]ns into shape and am delighted with some of them especially; and am now proceeding with a selection from our Oral Collection. In the transcripts I sent you the referencing at the left hand bottom corner refer to the Sources.

C.I = Dr Clague's 1st lot

C.II = Do. 2nd "

C.III = Do. 3rd

O.—Oral (Ap. 1895).

M.M.—"Mona Melodies."

This may be a convenient short hand for purposes of reference.⁴

The sources as can be seen are three-fold: tunes taken down by Dr John Clague, and passed on to the Gill brothers,⁵ those collected similarly by the Gills themselves, initially those found in April 1895, and the tunes copied from Barrow's *The Mona Melodies* of 1820. Clague had certainly been keen to see the results of their Easter trip of 1895, writing to the Deemster on 27 April, "I wish I had a rough copy of the 'airs' of the songs Willie has taken down." The traffic was to be both ways, Clague receiving transcripts of the tunes, which he subsequently copied up into his own collection.⁶

¹ W.H. Gill to Deemster J.F. Gill, 20 May 1895, Manx National Heritage Library (MNHL), MS 09702, Box 2.

² P[ost] O[ffice]. In Gill's case, the headquarters of the General Post Office.

³ W.H. Gill to Deemster J.F. Gill, 20 May 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

⁴ W.H. Gill to Deemster J.F. Gill, 22 May 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2.

⁵ W.H. Gill received (on the evidence of the transcript made by his brother) at least fifteen batches of tunes from Clague, in all a total of 164 tunes. Nine tunes are missing from the transcripts made by the Deemster. These are from five batches: C.i.11–12; C.v.1; C.ix.1; C.xii.5–8; C.xiii.1. The number of tunes in each batch varies from the two in the tenth batch to forty-one in batch thirteen.

⁶ This set of four tune books are now deposited in the Manx National Heritage Library. MNHL, MS 448/1–3 A, MS 449 B. See, Anon. [but William Cubbon], "Dr John Clague's

At some date between the end of their last collecting tour in October 1898 and the his death in that same month the following year, Deemster J.F. Gill made a complete transcript of all the tunes from the “Oral Collection,” as his brother had put it.⁷ He also copied the tunes received from Clague as well. In 1912, these loose sheets were gathered together by Lucinda Gill (*née* Brooke), his second wife, and bound up into a more permanent form between boards covered in green cloth, inset near the edge with a pair of scored lines in gold inlay, and in the centre, stamped in gold capital letters, the following legend:

THE ORIGINAL COLLECTION | OF | MANX FOLK MUSIC | — | MADE BY | HIS
HONOUR THE DEEMSTER GILL | MR W.H. GILL & DR. CLAGUE | COMPLETED
IN 1895 & 1896

And in the bottom right-hand corner, in similar (but mis-aligned) gold caps:

MRS. J. FRED GILL

Her hand appears on the top right-hand corner of the fly leaf, where the date of the compilation is stated: “M^{rs} J. Fred Gill. | 1912.” Tipped into the fly leaf was a folded map of the Island that has a number of place names on it underlined in red ink, and at the foot of the map an annotation in the same hand:

The red lines indicate places | Where singers lived. | (of Manx music)

The third line is in red ink, the other two in black. The places highlighted on the map relate to both the collecting of the Gill brothers and Clague. The same hand is also responsible for the pagination (which runs up to page 122).⁸

Little care was taken in binding up the music to form, for ease of reference, the “Music Book.” Despite each tune bearing the shorthand reference established by W.H. Gill in May 1895, they have been gathered together on seemingly no principle but randomness. For instance, tune O.1 is on page 101, while the first page opens with O.53.

The title is incorrect. There was no collecting in 1896, and 1898 is meant. It is difficult to know if anything is to be read into the date of 1912, other than it was the

Collection of Folk-tunes,” *Journal of the Manx Museum* iii.44 (1935). Also appears as William Cubbon, “Dr John Clague’s Manuscripts,” *A Bibliographical Account of the Isle of Man*, vol. ii (Oxford University Press [for the Manx Museum and Ancient Monuments Trustees], 1936). Edmund Goodwin made a transcript of the Clague Collection, a photocopy of which forms MNHL, MD 778. (The originals remain in private hands.) He also compiled an index to the tunes, the original now at MNHL, MS 956 c.

⁷ Gill fell ill in March 1899 and became worse in July so the work of transcription must have been carried out over the winter of 1898–99. Anon., “His Honor [sic] Deemster Gill,” *The Barrovian* 62 (1899): 106.

⁸ The following sheets are numbered but are blank: 8, 14, 18, 20, 40, 52–54, 64, 66, 68, 71–72, 74, 76, 82, 84, 87–88, 120–22.

year when Lucinda Gill decided to gather together in permanent form her late husband's music.

The transcript of the "Oral Collection" is not without problems of its own. Missing is tune O.3, which is a curious oversight, and of the three tunes noted down from William Boyde, only two have been assigned reference numbers. The tune missing a number is "Oh cre ta dooiny!" and a pencil note under reads: "See O.60." This is "Let Christians all with one accord rejoice," recorded from William Kaighen earlier that day, and the inked note "(got also from W[illia]m Boyde, same day)" explains why it was not allocated a number.

A further problem is that the tunes are not initially in numerical order. The second tune collected was "The Wreck of the Herring Fleet," and in making up the transcript J.F. Gill decided to gather other renditions of this tune together, so tunes O.19 and O.29 then follow and these finish off the page. Turning over, tunes O.4 to O.6 then follow, with O.3 omitted (and turning up nowhere else in the transcript). The order is interrupted again after O.12, when O.14 and O.20 follow. The next page begins with O.13. Tune O.15 is next, and the tunes run on to O.28 in order (barring O.19 which had appeared earlier). After O.28, Gill decided to squeeze in O.31 at the bottom of the page, in order to allow the next page to start with "Thurot and Elliot" (O.30) followed by another rendition (O.33), and with a third version, this time taken from the transcripts provided by Clague (C.v.1). The next tune is O.32 and after that is O.34 running in order to O.37 that ends the block of tunes collected in April 1895.

The material from that summer's collecting in 1895, tunes O.38 to O.62, is more straightforward. Gill made a mistake in transcribing O.44, the first tune from their session with Catherine Lawson, and scored it through. This reappears on another page, sandwiched between two Clague tunes (C.vi.2 and C.ii.11). The following tune, O.45, also from Catherine Lawson, has the wrong date entered for the session, 3 April instead of 3 August. Likewise, for O.47, the date for the session with James Quayle has been altered from 3 July to 3 August. After tune O.61, there is a tune entered without a reference number (see above.) This block of tunes ends with O.62, which is at the head of the page. Curiously, what then follows is material from the Clague transcripts, whereas it would be a reasonable expectation that their own orally collected material would continue. Evidently, he chose to break off after the last tune from their summer tour.

The Gill brothers next went collecting in autumn 1898, and the tunes from that tour, O.63 to O.101, are transcribed in running order. Nevertheless, problems still occur. Tunes O.89 and O.90 have the exact date of their recording omitted, "Oct: 1898" simply appears in the transcript. The tunes from the next two sessions, O.91 to O.93, are dated 12 October 1898. However, tunes O.94 to O.96 are dated 11 October, the previous day. They were recorded from two singers, O.94 from Ann Corlett, and O.95 and O.96 from Catherine Lawson. The next two tunes, O.97 and O.98, are

dated 13 October and come from the latter singer. It is possible that instead of their being two sessions with Catherine Lawson, there was just one, and that took place on 13 October. However, that still leaves the date for O.94 as being 11 October. The three final tunes, O.99 to O.101, are simply dated to October 1898 and so we do not know when the Gill brothers as a pair ended their collecting.

The transcript is better thought of as a working rather than as a fair copy. There are numerous notes and comments entered, some in ink and others in pencil. Several of these relate to the ages of singers and result from further enquiry. The entries in pencil are now difficult to read having faded badly in many cases; also, Gill's hand is not the easiest to read at times. It is probable that in making the transcript he was literally copying out the material supplied to him by his brother, errors and all. For example, the session from April 1895 with James Morrison is annotated "[Jas] € Morrison—Harbour Master Peel." This amendment could only have been after October 1896 when William Kermode pointed out to Deemster Gill his error over Morrison's first name so this is not a correction made to an error in copying but the form of the original.⁹

The Music Book in general bears out Gammon's general comment on the manuscripts of folk song collectors in this period:

The manuscript collections poses substantial problems for the student. One is never sure how complete a collection is; in the case of the Broadwood collection it is clear from published sources that parts of the manuscript have been lost. Even when a collection appears complete in terms of representing the activities of the collector fully, the songs are often gathered in an incomplete form, with the tunes usually outnumbering the texts. In addition the manuscripts tend to contain unscribed pieces, ambiguous references and are sometimes illegible.¹⁰

Nevertheless, in the case of the Music Book, its very existence is its virtue.

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⁹ Kermode was distributing copies of *Manx National Songs*, recently published. "I will deliver at once to Cashen, but I presume that the other is for Mr J. Morrison Harbour Master, instead of Mr C Morrison as directed." William Kermode to Deemster J.F. Gill, 29 October 1896, MNHL, MS 09702, Box 2. This despite the Deemster having received a letter from Morrison in July 1895 clearly signed as James Morrison.

¹⁰ Vic Gammon, "Folk Song Collecting in Sussex and Surrey, 1843–1914," *History Workshop Journal* 10 (1980): 67.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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MANX MUSEUM MSS (MS)

MS 448/1-3 A Folk song tunes collected by Dr John Clague.

MS 449 B ———.

MS 956 C Title index compiled by Edmund Goodwin to his transcript of MS 448/1-3 A & MS 449 B (see MD 778).

MANX MUSEUM MSS NEW SERIES (MS)

MS 09702 Deemster J.F. Gill Papers, Box 2 (unlisted)

Letter from W.H. Gill to Deemster J.F. Gill, 20 May 1895.

———, 22 May 1895.

Letter from William Kermode to Deemster J.F. Gill, 29 October 1896.

MISCELLANEOUS DOCUMENTS (MD)

MD 778 Transcript made by Edmund Goodwin of MS 448/1-3 A & MS 449 B .

PRINTED SOURCES

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