

Manx Notes 75 (2006)

THE GILL BROTHERS AS COLLECTORS:

(15) DORA BROWN ON W.H. GILL

[13] Mr Gill was a delightful guest. He was just bringing out his Manx Song Book and played to us beautifully in the summer twilight, which we found most soothing after our lengthy walk.

Many were the genuine old Manx tunes, but many we suspected of being his own compositions, such as: “Oh, what of the fowler, my blackbird hath taken.” A very lovely song.

Source: Dora Brown, “Our Great Walk around the Coast from Maughold to Ballaglass,” Manx National Heritage Library (MNHL), FLS, BDE-A, 12–13. This is, however, copied from an undated notebook of reminiscences by Dora Brown at MNHL, MD 148–214, [21]–[22]. The FLS file has a date of 1950, presumably the year of transcription from MD 148–214.



Gill is a real Musical enthusiast, and a learned Musician. He treats the Song freely, and puts into them a lot of himself, and his self is very charming. Mr Moore will have to entrench himself within his antiquarian position, which is a true one and teneable, but hardly popular.¹

So wrote T.E Brown to Egbert Rydings in June 1896. For some, he was more than a little free. Sometime that summer, W.H. Gill was out walking with a party that included T.E. Brown and his daughters, Dora and Ethel. This day out was later recalled by Dora as seen above. As regards “Oh, what of the fowler, my blackbird hath taken,” rather than being of “his own compositions,” this tune had been taken down by Clague from the singing of Mrs Thomas Kennaugh of Ballakeighan in Arbory.² He had subsequently sent it on to W.H. Gill as part of their collaboration in which they, in effect, “swopped” tunes. It shows how early questions, or rather outright doubts, were being raised about the authenticity or otherwise of the material Gill was producing.

This was not the only occasion on which Gill and Brown were together that summer: “Up Glen Aldhyn to-day, arra [at a] picnic with Willy Gill,” wrote Brown to Rydings on 16 July 1896.³ Incidentally, it was to be in Glen Auldyn, in 1898, that Gill was to find his oldest singer: “An old woman I found in Glen Auldyn near

¹ T.E. Brown to Egbert Rydings, 28 June 1896, MNHL, MS 1272/52 A.

² Dr John Clague, Music Collection, Tune Book No. 1, [25]/2, MNHL, MS 448/1 A.

³ T.E. Brown to Egbert Rydings, 16 July 1896, in Anon., “T.E Brown–Egbert Rydings,” *Mannin* 9 (1917): 509.

Ramsey broke the age-record by several years for she was 93," he wrote in a letter to his daughter in November 1898.⁴

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VIENNA, 2006

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MS 448/1 A Dr John Clague, Music Collection, Tune Book No. 1.

MS 1272/52 A Letter from T.E. Brown to Egbert Rydings, 28 June 1896.

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Brown, T.E. "Seven Days in the Isle of Man." *Brown's Guide to the Isle of Man*. 3rd ed. Douglas: James Brown & Son, 1877. 98–102.



⁴ W.H. Gill to Dora Radcliffe Brown (*née* Gill), 15 November 1898, MNHL, MS 1059/1 c (a). The "old woman" was Ann Corlett, aged 91, and farming 50 acres of ground on Ballagarrow. *Census Enumerators' Book*, Lezayre, 1891, RG 12/4684, fol. 136. Acreage detail from *Census Enumerators' Book*, Lezayre, 1881, RG 11/5599, fol. 115.