

Manx Notes 140 (2012)

“THE DEMON LOVER”

ANNIE GELL AS COLLECTOR *

Annie Gell is another Manx female song collector who has been overlooked. Whilst little that she collected now survives, and we are unsure as to the extent of her collecting it must be admitted, that she was interested in collecting at all is of note in itself. She is mentioned in A.W. Moore’s *Manx Ballads and Music* (1896) as one of his network of helpers, in her case helping to record tunes.¹ *Manx Ballads and Music* is difficult to use to see just who collected what from whom. Moore lists the individuals from whom tunes were collected and he lists the numbers of tunes gathered by each of his helpers leaving one to try and make a match between collector and singer. In her case, the best match suggests that she aided Moore by collecting “Kiark Katreeny” from John Bridson of Colby at some date after 1891.²

Annie Gell, aged 37 years in 1891, was the unmarried daughter of Sir James Gell, the Island’s Attorney General and former High Bailiff of Castletown.³ She lived at home, which was both numbers 10 and 11 Bowling Green Road in Castletown. According to the 1901 census she spoke English only.⁴ Incidentally, she was a cousin to the Gill brothers (her branch of the family having earlier changed the spelling of their surname from Gill to Gell).⁵ As regards John Bridson, he was a farmer, aged 50, living on the Cloughbane Road, Colby, in Arbory.⁶ *Brown’s Directory* for 1894 lists him as a tenant farmer.⁷ In 1881, he was enumerated onboard of the “Eden,” CT79, bound for the Irish mackerel fishing.⁸ The 1901 census shows him speaking only English.⁹

We know from a letter to G.W. Wood sent by Moore when he began work on what was to be *Manx Ballads and Music* (originally to be known as *Manx Ballads & Songs*) in 1891, Moore writing simply that “I intend publishing the manx¹⁰ ballads.”¹¹ Hugh Stowell Gill wrote to Annie Gell in December of that year:

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “The Demon Lover: Annie Gell as Collector,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu*, June (2012), [6]–[7]. Reproduced here with sources.

¹ A.W. Moore, *Manx Ballads and Music* (Douglas: G. & R. Johnson, 1896) xxxiii, fn. [12].

² Strictly speaking, just one tune of hers was used, as she may well have sent any number of tunes to Moore; likewise, she could have found other singers and recorded words as well.

³ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Castletown 1891, PRO, RG 12/4691, fol. 29, sch. 49.

⁴ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Castletown 1901, PRO, RG 13/5308, fol. 136, sch. 27.

⁵ For the correspondence with W.H. Gill, see the group of letters at MNHL, MD 96.

⁶ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Arbory 1891, PRO, RG 12/4691, fol. 71, sch. 16.

⁷ *Brown’s Directory for the Isle of Man*, (Douglas: Brown and Son, 1894).

⁸ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Vessels 1881, PRO, RG 11/5609, fol. 94.

⁹ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Arbory 1901, PRO, RG 13/5301, fol. 1256, sch. 13.

¹⁰ In Moore’s letters, “Manx” always appears in lowercase.

¹¹ A.W. Moore to G.W. Wood, 8 June 1891, MNHL, MS 1397 A (undivided).

Malew Vicarage | Ballsalla.

19 Dec. 1891

My dear Annie/

Herewith I send you a copy of Mylechrane & an attempt at a literal translation. The Manx is taken from the Manx Society Vol xvi, "Mona Miscellany"—One of the most unsatisfactory & untrustworthy books of that series—but I know of no other copy. There are one or two other Manx Songs in the volume. E.g. "Ny Kirree fo Sniaghtey"—but the greater part of the contents is utter rubbish.

As to Carols—Miss M Farrant can scarcely do better than order a copy of "Manx Carols," published at the Herald Office by John C. Fargher. There are about 100 of them, & the Editor is M^r A. W. Moore. That he has survived the task says a good deal for the toughness of his constitution. They are one & all wretched stuff!

With kindest regards to yourself & Harry, & best wishes for a happy Christmas.

being sincerely yours | Hugh S. Gill¹²

This letter shows that Gell was interested in folk song and *carvals* and enquiring of her cousin about sources and it must be tied in with her recruitment by Moore as a helper to him. Stowell Gill's disparagement of vernacular song culture is sadly typical for this period though he evidently had a sufficient enough grasp of Manx in order to make an attempt at translating "Mylechrane."

Present amongst Gell's papers in the MNHL, which also contains letters from W.H. Gill, her cousin, is a copy of the song known as "The Demon Lover," or alternatively "The Banks of Italy," with the American version known as "The House Carpenter."¹³ This is a Child Ballad, Child 243 to be precise, and the version present was sent to her by Thomas Kelly. We have the ms. only, the covering letter (if there was one) lost, and no date given. Given Gell's involvement with Moore and the letter from her cousin in 1891, showing her interest in song in this period, it is likely around this date that she received the text. Who Kelly was remains unknown and it is unclear if he collected the text on her behalf or if he is simply recollecting the song himself. Nevertheless, it is present in both Manx and English, and consists of four verses. Kelly added a note of his own to the Manx text and there are several corrections in pencil made to that text in his autograph. It is evident that the translation is from Manx to English and the song was sung in the former.

Whilst the Gell copy has no heading the song is known in Manx unsurprisingly as "Yn Graihder Jouylagh." There is a version in *Manx Ballads and Music*, on facing

¹² Hugh Stowell Gill to Annie Gell, 19 December 1891, MNHL, MD 96-1-1.

¹³ For discussion, see John Burrison, "John Harris' in Britain since Child," *Journal of American Folklore* 80.317 (1967), Alisoun Gardner-Medwin, "The Ancestry of 'The House-Carpenter': A Study of the the Family History of the American Forms of Child 243," *Journal of American Folklore* 84.334 (1971), David Atkinson, "Marriage and Retribution in 'James Harris (The Dæmon Lover)," *Folk Music Journal* 5 (1989). Also, Traditional Ballad Index, *Deamon Lover, The (The House Carpenter) [Child 243]*.

pages of Manx and English, with the Manx as the original.¹⁴ Moore’s text is, however, a composite, one of the many faults with his editorial practice: “‘Yn Graihder Jouyllagh’ (‘The Demon Lover’): ‘The Manx ballad has been obtained partly from Mr Cashen of Peel, and partly from Mr Quayle of Glen Meay.’”¹⁵ Cashen needs little introduction as he is a well-known figure. John Quayle was a tenant farmer, aged 63, working The Cronk, in the parish of Patrick.¹⁶ His three sons were all lead miners, as he had once been. In 1881, he was recorded working as a lead miner but living at Ardole, Patrick.¹⁷ He provided three tunes to Harry Bridson, another of Moore’s helpers, “Arrane Sooree,” “Doooinney Seyr v’ayns Exeter,” and “Yn Graihder Jouylagh.” As seen, the words to “Yn Graihder Jouylagh” were taken down from him as well as those to “Doooinney Seyr v’ayns Exeter.” A closer look at the version of “Yn Graihder Jouyllagh” that appears in the posthumous title that is *William Cashen’s Manx Folk-Lore*, shows that this is reproduced word-for-word from *Manx Ballads and Music*, and so we cannot work out the separate Quayle and Cashen texts.¹⁸

As regards Annie Gell, all we have from her collecting now is just one tune reproduced in *Manx Ballads and Music*, and a ms. copy of “Yn Graihder Jouyllagh.” The wider extent of her work is now lost to us and it is unlikely to be recovered. But does this make her then a “minor” collector as a result? Personally, I believe not—she was a collector in her own right, regardless as to how much she did in fact collect, and here we have the distortion of the Archive as to our view of such an individual. She was sufficiently interested to become involved with Moore and what was to become *Manx Ballads and Music*, and she joins the ranks of the many female song collectors in this period who were emancipated (to a greater or lesser extent) by the folk song movement.

Rather than setting up a league table of sorts of collectors, we need to focus on this group of collectors and helpers as a whole and see song collecting as a specific and social phenomenon where all play a role and where the task is to work out the relationships that were in play in this network of individuals. The ms. copy of “Yn Graihder Jouyllagh” is endorsed at the foot: “To Miss Gell | with Tho^s Kelly’s | compliments”. Thanks to Annie Gell, we have at least a Manx version of Child 243, and the tune for “Kiark Katreeny,” as well as a report of another Manx female collector active in this period. Instead of seeing her as a minor collector, a footnote

¹⁴ Moore, *Manx Ballads and Music* 118–19. This version reproduced and discussed in Burrison, “‘John Harris’ in Britain since Child,” 279–80.

¹⁵ Moore, *Manx Ballads and Music* xxiii, fn. [39].

¹⁶ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Patrick 1891, PRO, RG 12/4682, fol. 62, sch. 103.

¹⁷ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Patrick 1881, PRO, RG 11/5596, fol. 55.

¹⁸ William Cashen, *William Cashen’s Manx Folk-Lore*, ed. Sophia Morrison (Douglas: Manx Language Society, 1912).

either literal or metaphorical, we need to pay her our own “compliments” to her and see her simply but fruitfully as a collector of Manx vernacular song.

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VIENNA, 2012

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