

# Manx Notes 163 (2013)

## “DR CLAGUE’S FIRST LOT” DEEMSTER GILL’S TRANSCRIPT OF THE CLAGUE COLLECTION \*

On 24 May 1895, W.H. Gill wrote to his brother, Deemster J.F. Gill that:

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.<sup>1</sup>

In a previous letter a few days earlier, 20 May, he passed on to his brother a piece of practical advice: “If you have a punch you might drill a hole thro’ my sheets (mine is at the P.O.) and run them thro’ with a bit of someth[in]g to keep them tog[ethe]r.”<sup>2</sup> He added: “Let me have them back again.” In order for the Deemster to have access to the “Doctor’s last contributions,” he would have to make his own copy, and fortunately this survives amongst his personal papers now in the MNHL.<sup>3</sup>

With the loss of the papers of his own brother, William Henry, we know now only of their own collecting, *ie*, the “O” series, from the copy made by the Deemster. However, the interest here (at first) in this piece is the “C” series, in other words, “Dr Clague’s 1st lot.” Until the release of Deemster Gill’s personal papers in 2000, the collecting of the Gill brothers had been hidden, and many, including myself, were skeptical as just what their activities in the field were. Since then the pair of brothers have grown in stature as research has developed and they can now be seen as major figures in the collecting of Manx folk song.

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\* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “‘Dr Clague’s first lot’: Deemster Gill’s Transcript of the Clague Collection,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* June (2013), [12]–[14]. Reproduced here with sources.

<sup>1</sup> Letter from W.H. Gill to Deemster J.F. Gill, 24 May 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Deemster J.F. Gill Papers, Box 2.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from W.H. Gill to Deemster J.F. Gill, 20 May 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Deemster J.F. Gill Papers, Box 2.

<sup>3</sup> MNHL, MS 09702, Deemster J.F. Gill Papers, Boxes 1–3. For an overview of the folk song material contained within, {Miller, 2007 [for 2003–05] #1508}

It is now clear that the Gill brothers and Dr John Clague pooled the material that they collected in the field, and so the Clague Collection, made up of the four tune books now deposited in the MNHL,<sup>4</sup> can now be seen to contain material *not* collected by him. As a consequence, the number of tunes found by him is reduced in number, this total still has to be worked out, one of the many issues involving the Clague Collection.

As seen, Gill devised a reference code so the two sources of the material collected in the field could be distinguished. More importantly, unlike Clague, the Deemster in making his transcript faithfully copied down the reference code. There is little extant correspondence between Clague and the Deemster, but in that between the Gills the codes are used as shorthand when discussing the tunes. When a similar situation occurred with Clague and Gill, then Gill's sharing of material with Clague would surely have also carried the same code as used between the pair of brothers. Clague must have had in his hands a transcript of the "O" series, a sharing of the material collected, and coded so, as shown in Gill's letter, such that easy reference could be made when writing. If both Gill brothers used the codes when discussing the tunes, surely Gill when writing directly to Clague (or Clague to the Gill brothers for that matter) must too have used them too: Gill must have provided Clague with a key to his own material such that a dialogue could take place.

The four Clague tune books contain no such codes entered and so without the transcript amongst the Deemster's own papers, it has been assumed that the tunes there were all collected by Clague. Another feature of the Clague Collection is the poor documentation of the date of the collecting of the tunes and the singers. The Gill brothers documented their collecting with the date and place where the session took place and also with the name of singer; they also recorded the names of others who were present with them. This has allowed their collecting tours to be reconstructed and the singers to be found in the census and other records. Clague haphazardly annotated his tunes and so the pattern (and date) of his collecting is difficult to discern.

The transcript made by the Deemster contains material sent by Clague to Gill in some fifteen batches. They are as follows: c.i.1-10, 13-14; c.ii.1-20; c.iii.1-8; c.iv.1-7; c.v.2-11; c.vi.1-8; c.vii.1-2; c.viii.1-12; c.ix.2; c.x.1-2; c.xi.1; c.xii.1-4, 9-24; c.xiii.1-8, 10-39 [also, 30a, 32a]; c.xiv.1-15; c.xv.1-3. As can be seen, not all batches are seemingly complete—did Clague send just two tunes with batch c.vii? Or just one with batch c.xi for that matter? This is unlikely give the size of the other batches. If so, then it is curious as to why the Deemster *selectively* transcribed the Clague material sent to him. But it seems that he did so. However, the Deemster evidently had a complete copy of the Clague material sent him from his brother in his hands otherwise he would not have been able to correspond on the topic of the tunes with

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<sup>4</sup> MNHL, MS 448/1-3 A & MS 449 B.

his brother. That said, all-in-all, the Deemster must have received (at least) 170 tunes as collected by Clague, not all of which as seen he chose to transcribe. As regards their own collecting, the “O” series is complete, in the sense that it runs unbroken from 0.1–101. As a consequence, what we are dealing with in the Deemster’s transcript is, for some reason, a *selection* of the Clague material: at some time, the Deemster’s personal papers must have contained a complete transcript of all of the Clague material, one that is now lost.

Of these fifteen batches, just four are dated: c.vi August 1895; c.vii September 1895; c.viii September–December 1895; c.x July 1895. Presumably, these represent Clague’s collecting in the field and may help us to identify the pattern and dating of his collecting. As regards Clague’s fieldwork we know for certain when he came across Thomas Kermode, namely in December 1895, the Doctor writing somewhat excitedly on Christmas Day to Gill:

I have discovered a new “mine” at Bradda.

An old blind man—Tom Kermode by name, has given me three splendid old songs, and I think I shall be able to get three more yet.<sup>5</sup>

There had once been copper mining at Bradda Head hence the pun.

One question that still needs to be answered is whether any of the tunes sent the Gill brothers is *not* present in the Clague Collection. Another issue with the Deemster’s transcript is that some of the tunes received from Clague contain in places information not in the Clague Collection—for instance, a number of tunes are assigned to two different singers. In the Clague tune books they are credited to R[obert] Shimmin of Ballasalla; in the Deemster’s transcript to Edward Shimmin, a shoemaker who also lived in the village. So the question arises, which is the more accurate? Is it Robert *or* Edward Shimmin who is the singer? Another issue is that some tunes in the Clague tune books not assigned to a singer when copied into the Deemster’s transcript have the name of the singer there. And regards tunes from Clague’s own father, Henry Clague of Ballanorris, they have the date of the year of his death in the Deemster’s transcript but not in the Clague tune books. Clague’s original copies of the tunes are now lost although they were once in the hands of the Rev. John Kewley to whom his personal papers and library passed on his death in 1908. A number of these surfaced when A.G. Gilchrist was editing a selection of the Clague Collection for the *Journal of the Folk Song Society*. Kewley died in 1941, and after that Clague’s papers and library have disappeared from sight.

As ever, with the record of Manx folk song collecting, none of the artefacts of that collecting are straight forward. The Deemster’s transcript of the Clague Collection is also bound up with a transcript of the brothers’ own collection as well as other material. We know when the material was bound together as the fly-leaf is annotated

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<sup>5</sup> Letter from Dr John Clague to Deemster J.F. Gill, 25 December 1895, MNHL, MS 09702, Deemster J.F. Gill Papers, Box 2.

“Mrs J. Fred Gill. | 1912.” It must be remembered that the Deemster died in 1899, but not before a second marriage in 1892, to Lucinda Brooke Bell *née* Symes, of Killiney, Co. Dublin, Ireland.<sup>6</sup> After his death she returned to live in Dublin. This raises the question (as ever) as to where the Deemster’s personal papers were at this time. When his brother, W.H. Gill, was preparing his own papers for deposit (which never happened) he mentioned that “[...] there may possibly be other documents on the subject which M<sup>rs</sup> J.F. Gill says are in the keeping of D<sup>f</sup> Mackenzie (in a locked drawer) but she thinks this is highly improbable.”<sup>7</sup> Just who Dr Mackenzie was is unclear and likewise why he was a likely candidate to have possession of some of the Deemster’s personal papers. And, where was Mackenzie living, Ireland or the Isle of Man? And just what, if anything, was in this “locked drawer”?

Returning to the transcript, it was bound up in stiff green boards with the cover bearing the title so:

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 <sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, there was a map inserted, bearing the annotation, “The red lines indicate places | Where singers lived. | (of Manx music)”. Lucinda Gill had evidently carefully read through the O. series of tunes and clearly understood that they represented the collecting of her late husband and his brother and was sufficiently moved to find a map of the Island and mark on it the places visited by her late husband and brother-in-law.

But why 1912? Why wait until then to bind up what was present amongst the Deemster’s personal papers? The binding is haphazard to say the least, another issue that needs to be dealt with, and we have yet to see just how the material must have looked in a disbound state—in other words, just what Lucinda Gill had, literally, in her hands in 1912. And, again, is the year 1912 of any significance? She refers to the O. series as “THE ORIGINAL COLLECTION | OF | MANX FOLK MUSIC” and there is a stark and definite element here of a statement being made—she is promoting her late husband’s work, that much is certain, and furthermore stating his place in the history of Manx folk song collecting. In 1912, Archdeacon Gill died and amongst the mourners at his funeral were “Mr W.H. Gill, Angmering, Sussex; Mrs J.F. Gill, Dublin [...]”. The previous year, Gill had become concerned about the fate of his own papers after his death, asking Sophia Morrison if she would look after them.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> There was a child from this marriage, Lucinda Olive Brooke, born on 23 December 1893.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from W.H. Gill to Sophia Morrison, 10 April 1913, MNHL, MS 09495, Sophia Morrison Papers, Box 2.

<sup>8</sup> The date of 1896 is incorrect, 1898 is meant.

<sup>9</sup> Copy letter of Sophia Morrison to W.H. Gill, 22 January 1911, MNHL, MS 09495, Sophia Morrison Papers, Box 4, Letter copy book (1908–13).

Perhaps when meeting Lucinda Gill he raised the issue with her of the fate of his brother’s own papers?

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