

Manx Notes 185 (2014)

“DR CLAGUE’S AIRS SHOULD BE PUBLISHED”

THE CLAGUE COLLECTION AND THE MANX LANGUAGE SOCIETY (1914) *

In 1914, the Executive Committee of the Manx Language Society met on Friday 6 February. As regards Point d of the Agenda:

(d) Discussion on the publication of Dr Clague’s Music. Mr Craine moved that in the opinion of the Committee Dr Clague’s Airs should be published, and that the Secretary [*ie*, Sophia Morrison] be instructed to ask for estimates for their printing from Messrs Curwen, & from Bailey & Ferguson, & any others. Dr Marshall seconded the motion which was carried.¹

This being a minute of the meeting there is no record of the nature and extent of the deliberations over the Clague Collection. At the Committee meeting later that month, the issue was once again on the Agenda, it being recorded:

(4) That the Secretary ask for quotations for 250 or 500 copies (octavo) of Dr Clague’s Collection of Airs from Messrs Curwen. A letter from Mr W.H. Gill was read in which he objected to the publication of the Airs on the ground that he has prepared all that is of value for publication. It will be represented to Mr Gill that while the importance of his work in thus preparing and restoring the Airs is fully recognised, it is believed that the preservation of the Airs exactly as they were taken down by Dr Clague, and with all the variants, will also be of great value and interest.²

Gill’s letter in full is now lost but there is correspondence from 1913 between him and Morrison showing that the issue of publishing the Clague Collection (either in part or in whole) had been raised that year and that either Gill had been informed of it or had come to hear:

Meanwhile I have been pondering very seriously the whole problem of Dr Clague’s Supplem[entary] Collection and as I am now satisfied that you and I are unconsciously working on the same material and yet in some instances arriving at different results I am anxious to come to some definite understanding so that we may not (to put it strongly) cut each other’s throats in the dark.³

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, ““Dr Clague’s airs should be published”: The Clague Collection and the Manx Language Society (1914),” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu March* (2014), [8]–[9]. Reproduced here with sources.

¹ Minutes of the Executive Meeting of the MLS, 6 February 1914, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh archive, MLS Minute Book (1913–28).

² Minutes of the Committee Meeting of the MLS, 20 February 1914, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh archive, MLS Minute Book (1913–28).

³ W.H. Gill to Sophia Morrison, 16 September 1913, MNHL, MS 09495, Box 2.

His letter continued: “To that end I am concocting a scheme of which the object is my making over to your Society to have and to hold all that was entrusted to me by Dr C & my Brother.”⁴ Then there was a sting—“This need not interfere in the least with your present proposal for I find that three out of four airs if not the whole four are already in my hands and ‘treated’ in one way or another!”⁵ This is a reference to Morrison’s intention to start to publish tunes from the Clague Collection in *Mannin*, the small press magazine founded and edited by herself.

As to what Gill was referring to with use of the word “treated” a letter soon after this one made it clear:

As regards the vexed question of Restoration the most recently ~~records~~ published records whether phonographic or oral convince me that hardly one tune in a hundred is worth publishing without more or less correction and ~~musica~~ Grammar is as real a thing in music as in language.⁶

This was his abiding obsession, that tunes collected in the field were in need of restoration, that they were deficient in musical grammar, and moreover, that he was the very man to attend to them. As he wrote to Morrison in 1912, admittedly at some length:

On one point I held a very strong opinion viz. My own individual right as an old man, a Manxman, and a musician, to take part in forming and re-forming Manx National Music i.e. Traditional. Surely I am a link in the Chain of Tradition just as much as Tommy the Mate or Phillie the desert and therefore I claim that my version is at least as good as theirs and ought to be better because of my better training as a musician. [...] All I contend for is that all my own music is Manx Music ‘simply’ because I am a Manxman, and all Manx traditional Music to which I have added a few links, as presumably others have been doing unconsciously from Generation to Generation, ~~is~~ does not cease to be traditional music directly I appear on the Stage as a kind of Mephistopholes or bogy and try to improve upon my immediate predecessor in the procession of bards.⁷

This letter also contained the line that “Dr Clague’s ‘gibe’ about this or that being ‘not Manx Music but Mr Gill’s Music’ is merely an echo of one of my hypercritical audience at one of my London lectures.”⁸ Clague’s comment must have cut Gill to the quick—and it was one shared by many in the Island if not all that he must equally have realised. There is no extant correspondence between Clague and Gill, both sets of personal papers now being lost (and likely to be truly lost rather than

⁴ W.H. Gill to Sophia Morrison, 16 September 1913, MNHL, MS 09495, Box 2.

⁵ W.H. Gill to Sophia Morrison, 16 September 1913, MNHL, MS 09495, Box 2.

⁶ Extract from Sophia Morrison to W.H. Gill, 14 April 1912, quoted in circular letter (“Leaves”) from W.H. Gill, 22 September 1913, now in the hands of Sophia Morrison, MNHL, MS 09495, Box 2.

⁷ W.H. Gill to Sophia Morrison, 20 November 1912, MNHL, MS 09495, Box 2.

⁸ W.H. Gill to Sophia Morrison, 20 November 1912, MNHL, MS 09495, Box 2.

presently unlocated) and so what passed between them after their collaborative collecting in the 1890s is unknown.

Gill seemed to have blown hot and cold over plans to publish from the Clague Collection. He objected in 1914 but was perfectly ready in 1913 to see material published:

Re Manx Music I have much to say and am preparing what may prove to you surprises both good and bad, but it is a long job & will take some time, so I will not anticipate matters in that line. Suffice it now to assure you of my entire approval of your present scheme as regards the publication of raw material.⁹

The explanation might lie in the differing arenas involved, Insular publication as against a Metropolitan one. He was later to learn that A.G. Gilchrist was to be involved in selecting or advising on the tunes from the Clague Collection appearing in *Mannin* and feared a commentary on them which would point up his “restoration” activities:

I certainly should not publish, if I were you, either Miss G’s Verities nor yet my Heresies. As you know, if there’s anything that disconcerts a Manxman more than another it is to be “mocked,” Anglicé laughed-at; and Miss G’s criticism ‘if published’¹ is calculated to damn our cause.¹⁰

As seen, “Miss G’s criticism” in form had already come from Clague himself. Gill is here playing to the crowd, with his mock self-criticism (“my Heresies”), his playing of the Manx card, and his attempt to win Morrison to his point of view by insisting that they share the same point of view.

Returning to the 1914 proposal of the Manx Language Society to publish the Clague Collection, Morrison must have written to him in April that year raising the issue with him again despite—or likely because of—his letter to the Society read out earlier in February. There was now a change of course by Gill:

But now to answer your present question. As to my having any objection to your Soc[iet]y publishing the Doctor’s original MSS, how could I object? It is obviously quite the right thing for your Society to do ‘as Antiquarians’¹ quite irrespectively of what I have done or tried to do ‘as a Musician & a Manx Musician.’¹ Therefore I cannot but be sincerely grateful for what you and Mr Goodwin are doing.¹¹

Why the change of heart? Why the mock phrase “how could I object?” with its emphasis? The letter went on to mention “[o]ne other point you ought to know and this has only just now arisen. My ‘Sussex Songs’ Scheme has been abandoned in favour of a larger project. viz. a Collection of Folk-Songs [...]” And who was to be the publisher? None other than Curwen. Just what did Gill know? That Curwens were not interested or that their quote would likely prove prohibitive for the Manx

⁹ W.H. Gill to Sophia Morrison, 25 June 1913, MNHL, MS 09495, Box 2.

¹⁰ W.H. Gill to Sophia Morrison, 28 September 1916, MNHL, MS 09495, Box 2.

¹¹ W.H. Gill to Sophia Morrison, 6 April 1914, MNHL, MS 09495, Box 2.

Language Society? This is surmise at present but something happened to change Gill's mind—or rather remove his objection. And on that very point of publication, the Clague Collection was not to appear.

STEPHEN MILLER
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