

Manx Notes 205 (2015)

ANNE GEDDES GILCHRIST

NOTES ON TWO EARLY MS. COPIES
OF THE MANX TRADITIONAL CAROL
“WE HAPPY HERDSMEN HERE” *
(1926)

21.—WE HAPPIE HERDSMEN.

FIRST VERSION.

FROM THE SHANN M.S.
[B.M. Add. MS. 38,599.]

TRIPLIX.

TENOR.

BASSUS.

We hap - pie hirds - men heere, Maye

We hap - pie hirds - men heere, Maye singe and

We hap - pie hirds - men heere, Maye singe and eke re -

singe and eke re - joice, For An - gels bright and clear

eke re - joice, For An - gels bright and clear We sawe, and

- joice, For An - gels bright and clear We sawe, and hard a

* A.G. Gilchrist, “Notes on Two Early MS. Copies of the Manx Traditional Carol ‘We Happy Herdsmen Here’,” *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 7.4 (1926), 153–58.

We sawe, and hard a voice, We sawe, and hard a voice.

hard a voice, We sawe,..... and hard a voice.

voice, We sawe,..... We sawe, and hard a voice.

- 2 Glad tidings they us told,
The Kynge of all mankind
Newborn and in clothes fould
They say we shall Him find.
- 3 At Bethlem in a stall
And eke his mother free,
Great comfort to us all,
Oh blessed maie he be.
- 4 Now let us with much joy
In haste to Bethlem trudge,
To see that Blessed Boy
That once must be our Judge.
- 5 When we to Bethlem came
We sawe, as it was said,
That Child of glorious fame,
In manger he was laid.
- 6 We shepherdes doune did fall
And synge with voice on hie,
The Angylls said we shall
Sing glorie in excelsie.*
- 7 All hail! O Christ. O Kynge!
All hail, O Virgin's Son!
We pray Thee us to bring
In heaven with the to woon; [*wonne* = dwell]

* Such methods of dealing with a difficult rhyme may be found in other verse of the same period. In Christopher Tye's *Actes of the Apostles*, 1553, from which several of our fine old psalm-tunes, such as "Southwark" and "Winchester" (Old) are derived—the "Actes" being "translated into Englyshe Metre," chapter by chapter, by one who was a better musician than poet—Tye rhymes "far and nye" and "Samarye" [Samaria]; and in the *Gude and Godlie Ballatis*, 1567, of the Wedderburn brothers "Hosanna" appears as "Osan"—to rhyme with "Gudeman." [155]

8 Where we the Father may
 See with the Holy Ghost,
 Him magnify alway
 With all the Heav'nly Host.

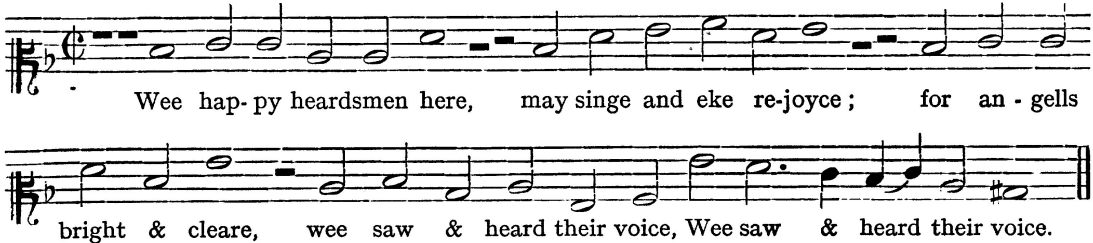
Some divergencies in the above text (Miss Broadwood's transcription) from Dr Dunstan's reading of the ms. are confirmed by a reference to the Carlisle copy. Dr Dunstan omits the "excelsie" verse, which only occurs in the Shann version.

WEE HAPPY HEARDSMEN.

SECOND VERSION.

ALTUS.*

3 Voc. From MS. PART-BOOK, CARLISLE CATHEDRAL, 1637.

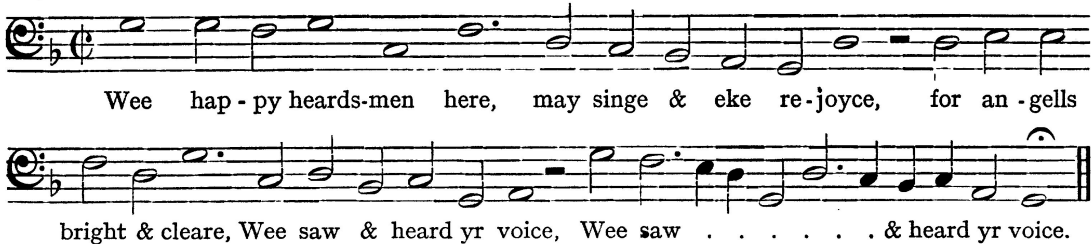


Wee hap-py herds-men here, may singe and eke re-joyce; for an-gells
 bright & cleare, wee saw & heard their voice, Wee saw & heard their voice.

* Or 'Triplex,' as in the Shann copy.

BASSUS.

† 3 Voc. From MS. PART-BOOK, CARLISLE CATHEDRAL, 1637.



Wee hap-py herds-men here, may singe & eke re-joyce, for an-gells
 bright & cleare, Wee saw & heard yr voice, Wee saw . . . & heard yr voice.

† Modern F clef substituted for an obsolete form.

The Carlisle text follows the Shann copy closely in the first four verses, omits v. 5, and ends thus:

"All Haile ô Christ our Kinge,

All Haile ô Virgin's sonne;
Wee pray thee us to bring
In Heaven with thee to wonne:

Where wee ye Father may
See, with ye Holy Ghost,
And glorify alway
Him that of might is most."

[156] This, though transcribed later, would appear to be an earlier version than the Shann copy, as the *Gloria Patri* at the close retains an archaic sixteenth-century form of ascription which seems to have been altered in the Shann version. In an English Psalter of 1576 the *Gloria Patri* after the *Venite* begins:

"All laud and prayse be to the Lord
O that of might art most!"

There are also early Scottish psalter forms of the same phrase, with 'micht' and 'maist' in place of 'might' and 'most.' The Manx traditional version of the carol is less corrupt than might have been expected. The old word 'won' [dwell] has disappeared from this, though still current in eighteenth-century Scotland and Lancashire, as in the Scotch song:

"There's auld Rob Morris that wons in yon glen"
and in Collier's "Tummus and Meary" Lancashire dialogue: "Then aw asht him wheer Jack o' Ned's wooant ... his feyther and moother wooan at Rossenda; but his gronny's alive, and wooans wi' his noant Margery."

When, in editing the Clague Collection for the *Journal*, I included in the English section the traditional Anglo-Manx carol "We happy herdmen here" (see *Journal*, Vol. vii, pp. 281–82), I expressed the hope that a copy of this carol, which seemed to bear marks of a cultured origin, might some day come to light in print. But a more interesting thing than a printed copy has been discovered, for already, had I known it, the carol had been found (a) as a three-part song, of unknown authorship and composition, in a collection of Elizabethan music transcribed c. 1635 by Thomas Smith, afterwards bishop of Carlisle; and (b) in a manuscript book, dated 1591–1627, in the British Museum, transcribed by Thomas Shann, priest, and known as the Shann mss. (BM Add. ms. 38,599). This was the commonplace book of the Shann family of Methley, Yorkshire, containing an appendix of "Certaine pretie songes ... drawn together by Sir Richard Shann, Priest, 1611." (The "sir" here denotes a priest, not a knight.)

The Carlisle ms., though a little later, provides the more accurate copy both of music and text, but unfortunately only the Triplex (or Alto) and Bass parts are extant, the Tenor part being lost. The Shann ms. contains some obvious mistakes of the music copyist, but possesses two more verses than the Carlisle copy. Miss

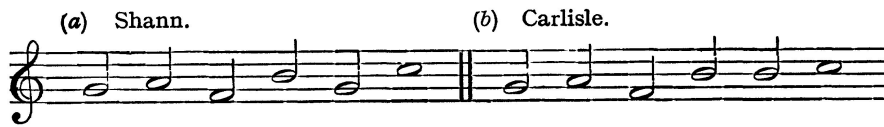
Broadwood's and my own attention was called to the Shann version by one of our members, J.K. Hudson, who had seen a transcription in Dr Ralph Dunstan's *New Book of Christmas Carols*, 1923. This copy, however, had been slightly altered and corrected to suit modern ideas of harmony, and Miss Broadwood kindly made for me an exact transcript from the original ms. in the British Museum, from which the version here is derived.¹ For convenience of reading, it has been put into modern [157] notation and barred (the *Alla Breve* time-signature is given in the Carlisle copy). Though the Tenor part is missing from the Carlisle music, the Alto and Bass parts are of value in checking the Shann version and giving the correct notes where Thomas Shann seems to have been a careless copyist.

The Carlisle part-books containing the *Altus* and *Bassus* of the song have an almost romantic history. In 1916, a friend of James Walter Brown of Carlisle—the latter long a chorister in the Cathedral, and an historical and musical antiquarian—bought from an old book-stall in Edinburgh two ancient ms. music-books which had once belonged to Carlisle Cathedral. He died shortly afterwards, and his widow presented the books to Brown. A full description of their rare and interesting contents may be found in two articles by Brown on "Some Elizabethan Lyrics" in the *Cornhill Magazine* for May, 1920, and September, 1921. The books, two oblong volumes, stitched in parchment covers, bear the label of the Dean and Chapter of Carlisle in eighteenth-century printing, and inside the front cover of each volume is the dated autograph of the original owner, "Thomas Smith, Jan. 8: Ann: 1637." This Thomas Smith (1614–1701), born at Asby, Westmorland, entered Queen's College, Oxford, in 1631, and by 1637 was a Fellow and Tutor of his college, the books being evidently transcribed while he was at Oxford, during which time he seems to have been a member of a small musical society there. He became Canon of Carlisle in 1660, Dean in 1671, and Bishop from 1684 till his death in 1701, gave an organ to the Cathedral, and bequeathed his books to its library. These old part-books, as Brown thinks, were probably included in a quantity of other books cast out of the library in that dangerously drastic period, the 'fifties of last century. Besides the carol which is our present study, they include a song-cycle by Richard Nicholson, organist of Magdalen College, Oxford, in the late sixteenth century. An echo of this song-dialogue, "John and Joan," has come down to later times in folk-song. By mistake, the "Happie Herdsmen" was at first attributed to Alf. Ferrabosco the Younger, but Brown saw later that Ferrabosco's name had only been appended to a composition following the carol on the same page, and the composer remains unknown.

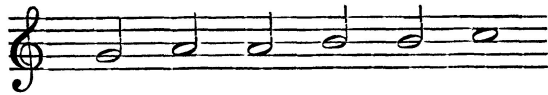
On comparing the three-part song with the Manx carol-tune, it is evident that if the latter did originally derive from it there are but a few thin strands of connection left. A Tudor three-part song is not easily convertible into a solo. And yet there are

¹ Owing to Miss Broadwood's sudden and lamented death, I have been unable to compare my copy with the original transcript, and to verify one or two spellings and the repetitions of the words under the music.—AGG.

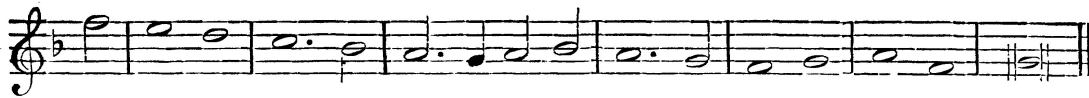
fragments which do suggest such a derivation, such as the descending scalar phrase of six notes which is common to both, and in the passage:



[158] in the three-part song, which appears in the perhaps rubbed-down form:



in the Manx tune. But the first two phrases in the Manx carol may have been influenced in the eighteenth century by the very similar opening of Dr Croft's Proper Tune to Ps. 136 (known also as "Croft's 148th"). Miss Broadwood has pointed out the likeness of phrases in the "Happy Herdsman" composition to the old air "Western wind, when wilt thou blow?" (which is the subject of Masses by Taverner, Tye and Shephard), particularly in this passage from "Western Wind":



See Wooldridge's edition of Chappell's *Popular Music* for this tune.

Lastly, as regards the form of the carol-verses, John Pullain, divine and poet (1517–65), and John Craig—John Knox's one-time colleague—(1512?–1600) used the same double-rhyming Tudor quatrain of 6.6.6.6. metre, but softened its abruptness by a change into 4.4.4.4. Craig, in the *Scottish Metrical Psalter* of 1564, uses it for his version of Psalm 136, and the break into 4.4.4.4. may have been originally suggested by the recurring refrain of that Psalm:

"The Lord of Lords praise ye
Whose mercies ay do dure;
Great wonders only hee
Doth work by his great power: [probably pronounced "pooer"]
[Ref.] For certainly
His mercies dure
Most firme and sure Eternally."

It is curious to note that Shann, Smith, and Shepherd (the music-teacher who seems to have brought the carol into the Isle of Man) were all north-country men, rather suggesting a north-country origin for the carol. In any case it illustrates a very interesting survival of Tudor song in the Isle of Man, paralleled by the "Unnysup" song and custom (see *Journal*, Vol. vii, pp. 190–94) which in the Island have come down from "The Hunt is up" of the reign of Henry viii, probably through the Stanleys—for centuries lords of Man—and their Lancashire retinue.

