

Manx Notes 231 (2016)

“KELLY THE BLACKGUARD”

JAMES KELLY OF PATRICK AND THE SALMON LEAP *

In a previous piece for *KMJ* (September 2013)¹ looking at the dance informants of Mona Douglas, there was a suggested identification for “Kelly the Blackguard” or “Blaggard” depending as to how you wish to spell it. “Is he the William Kelly, aged 52 years old, single, a Manx speaker, to be found living on Ballachrink, Dalby, and farming a piece of ground there in 1901 or not?” Not is the clear answer as will be explained here. “Kelly the Blackguard” was known to be able to dance the Salmon Leap and he was sought out by Mona for that reason. His name was given to her by W.W. Gill, the author and compiler of the *Manx Scrapbooks* series, but Kelly was not to be an easy man to find as he told her that he was in fact a tramp, “going on the houses” in Manx parlance, and when he was not engaged on that activity, he lived in an uninhabited house on the Glen Rushen Road in Patrick.² Gill at one time lived around Dalby and so this is how he came to know of him.

By sheer chance, as is ever the way, when working on another topic I came across in the 1901 Census enumerated at Ballaman in Lonan, one James Kelly, aged “about 50,” born in Rushen and an English speaker. Crucially, he was entered as a Tramp and as occupation “Begging (Sleeping in Barn).”³ Never wishing to multiply possibilities, this must be the match for “Kelly the Blackguard.” In 1891, Kelly was an unmarried farm labourer at Kilkenny on Clooney’s Road in Braddan.⁴ Clearly, at some date after this he gave up working life to tramp around the Island. A James Kelly aged 77 was buried in Rushen on 23 April 1927 and this fits the Kelly of the census.⁵

We know from a typescript description of the Salmon Leap amongst Mona’s personal papers in the MNHL that the dance was not collected from Kelly alone—there was also Thomas Craine, William Caine of Jurby Curragh, and John James

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “‘Kelly the Blackguard.’ James Kelly of Patrick and the Salmon Leap,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* January (2016): [10]. Reproduced here with sources.

1 Stephen Miller, “‘A Hard Man, and Wild Mighty...’ Mona Douglas and her Informants,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* September (2013).

2 “W.W.G. says that a man in Glen Rushen, called Kelly the Blackguard can dance the Salmon Leap, but I have never been able to meet him as he is ‘on the roads’ & only lives for short periods in a ruined house up the Glen. He has always been away when I have been in the district.” See, “The Salmon Leap” in “FOLKLORE NOTEBOOK. | DANCES. | TUNES, DESCRIPTIONS, & NOTES,” undated notebook, MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 9.

3 *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Lonan 1901, RG 13/5307, fol. 27, sch. 67.

4 *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Braddan 1891, RG 12/4690, fol. 25, sch. 95.

5 *An Index to Manx Burials*, compiled by Brian Lawson [online resource].

Kelly of Baldrine, but “the Leap itself was shown to me in the 1920’s by a man in Patrick known as Kelly the Blackguard.”⁶ It can be shown that he is James Kelly of Patrick, and with that yet another of the dancers found by Mona Douglas is now identified, slowly but surely.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2016

REFERENCES

Miller, Stephen. “‘A Hard Man, and Wild Mighty...’ Mona Douglas and her Informants.” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* September (2013): [6].



⁶ “Lheim y Braddan I (The Salmon Leap)”. Undated typescript, MNHL, MS 09545, Mona Douglas Papers, Box 9.