

Manx Notes 243 (2016)

“SANG TWO SONGS INTO THE HORN”

SOPHIA MORRISON AND THE
MANX LANGUAGE SOCIETY PHONOGRAPH

Arrane ny Ferrishyn Ghelbee

“Song of the Dalby Fairies,” or, “Tom Billy Hals Song.” Tom Billy Hal, about 60 years ago, was an old man ‘goin’ on the houses,’ and he lived in Glen Rushen. But, though he and his family have long since departed—some having died, some emigrated, his memory still keeps green with the old people as a singer of sweet old Manx songs. Therefore I was greatly pleased that I happened to be in a house two summers ago when his youngest son walked in to say good bye. The man, a miner in Arizona who was home on a very short visit & had worked his passage across on board a ship, was leaving the Island that day, never to see it more, he said.

I invited him to my house and asked him to sing some of his father’s songs into the M. L. S. gramophone. He had only about 20 m. to spare but he kindly came with me and sang two songs into the horn, one being the “Song of the Dalby fairies,” the other the genuine Manx version of “Hunt the Wren,” of which M^r A.W. Moore writes that no one ever heard it in Manx until he turned the English version into Manx.

Callister however says that his father knew it only in Manx. Unfortunately Callister was fearfully nervous and in a hurry to be off [*remainder of manuscript missing*]

From the *Sophia Morrison—Josephine Kermode Folk Song Collection*.
“Manx Fragments of Music.” Incomplete. Undated. In Sophia Morrison’s hand. MNHL, MS 09495, Sophia Morrison Papers, Box 6.

“[T]he horn” belonged to the phonograph purchased by the Manx Language Society in 1904, and here we can see it being used by Sophia Morrison herself. Two songs were recorded, Arrane ny Ferrishyn Ghelbee and Hunt the Wren, the latter in Manx, the only version known to Callister’s father. One feels a clear sense of urgency on Morrison’s part, to record what she can in the twenty minutes left of Callister’s visit, what was to be his last time in the Island and she clearly took whatever opportunity there was to hand to collect material. The cylinders are now lost, as well as the other sheets of the manuscript, and so we do not know the outcome of Callister being “fearfully nervous,” although this was a common problem when recording with the phonograph as singers did not feel at ease. This often led to hesitant performances and this may well have happened here. But at least Morrison seized the moment, whatever the outcome.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2016

