

# Manx Notes 354 (2018)

## THE ST MATTHEW'S MINSTREL TROUPE

(1896) \*

This photograph appeared in the *Isle of Man Times* for 1953, sent in by a member of the troupe then still living, Clara Barton *née* Fitzsimmons of Colby.<sup>1</sup> The link with St Matthew's was that they were also the St Matthew's Church Choir. They performed first on 23 April 1896, in the Regent Hall,<sup>2</sup> in aid of funds for the Sunday School.<sup>3</sup> "The Watchman" in his regular column in the *Examiner* for 2 May was not, however, taken with their performance, writing that "[t]he singing was on the whole poor."<sup>4</sup> This brought forth a response from a letter signed as "Not One of the Troupe," who pointed out that "[s]uch was *not* the verdict of the audience, as most of the pieces were re-demanded."<sup>5</sup> The letter appeared in the *Times* for 16 May, the *Examiner* in its own issue that day remarking that "[t]he writer evidently takes the criticisms of our contributor who wrote a fortnight ago too seriously."<sup>6</sup> There are no further mentions of the troupe in the newspapers thereafter, but one feels that it is not the criticism they faced that is the factor here, rather that the choir performed a one-off concert. (That said, the newspapers of the day do not capture everything that was going on in the Island).

The photograph is said to date from 1899, however, the concert details match those for 1896, and so make it more likely to be that year. The names of the St Matthew's Minstrel Troupe are as follows: (Back row) Jack Cubbon, Eddy Cowin, Jack Quayle, George Cain, Willie Gell. (Front row) Frank Naylor, Alice Cubbon, Ben Alexander, Clara Fitzsimmons, John Kneen (conductor), Annie Binns, J.D. Fell, J.P., Marion Langness, John Cowley, Katie Gell, Alfie Kneen, Maud Fitzsimmons.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2018

### REFERENCES

- Anon. "[Douglas] St Matthew's minstrel ...." *Isle of Man Examiner* 11 April 1896: 4g.  
———. "Fixtures." *Isle of Man Times* 21 April 1896: 4g.  
———. "Minstrels in Victoria's Day." *Isle of Man Times* 18 April 1953: 4b–e.

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\* Originally published as Stephen Miller, "The St Matthew's Minstrel Troupe (1896)," *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* November (2018), [17].

1 Anon, "Minstrels in Victoria's Day," *Isle of Man Times* 18 April 1953.

2 Anon, "Fixtures," *Isle of Man Times* 21 April 1896.

3 Anon, "[Douglas] St Matthew's minstrel ....," *Isle of Man Examiner* 11 April 1896.

4 Pseud [signed "The Watchman"], "Miscellaneous Observations," *Isle of Man Examiner*.2 May (1896).

5 Pseud [signed "Not One of the Troupe"], "[Letter to the Editor] St Matthew's Minstrel Troupe," *Isle of Man Times* 16 May 1896.

6 *Isle of Man Examiner*, "To Correspondents," *Isle of Man Examiner* 16 May 1896.

Isle of Man Examiner. "To Correspondents." *Isle of Man Examiner* 16 May 1896:  
[page not scanned].

Pseud [signed "Not One of the Troupe"]. "[Letter to the Editor] St Matthew's  
Minstrel Troupe." *Isle of Man Times* 16 May 1896.

Pseud [signed "The Watchman"]. "Miscellaneous Observations." *Isle of Man  
Examiner* 2 May 1896: [8]c.

