

Manx Notes 404 (2019)

THE HARMONIUM AND THE HYMN TUNE RAISER

There were no organs in the chapels in those olden days, instead there would be some old gentleman who was looked on by the congregation as being a good singer. He would be there in the Chapel, Sunday after Sunday. It was his job to lead the singing as the preacher announced each hymn.

For many years one old man had performed his duties faithfully and well. As time went on and Chapel underwent improvements, a house-to-house collection was made and the money raised to purchase an organ. There was great excitement and a full house when the new instrument was to be played for the first time. In his place as usual was the old hymn raiser. To everyone's astonishment, no one turned up to play the new organ. Everyone waited for a while, the preacher begun to be uneasy, and at last he asked the old man to raise the tune.

The organ was there in the room, covered with black cloth, and, as the preacher asked him if he would lead the singing once more, the old chap indignantly and with great disgust pointed to the organ and said, "Let that black monkey in the corner raise the tune! Take the cloak off that black monkey in the corner, and he'll raise the tunes for you."

Notebook by John Kneen (1949), MNHL, MANX MUSEUM FLS JK B(I4).

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The purchasing of harmoniums by Methodist chapels in the Island brought change to the mode of singing at services and made redundant the need for someone in the congregation to raise hymns. Often this was not well-received, and here is an account of one such occasion as remembered by John Kneen (1860–1958), the blacksmith at Jurby East and later at the Lhen in Andreas.

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REFERENCES