

“THE TUNE SEEMED TO ‘CATCH ON’”

THE RECEPTION OF W.H. GILL’S MANX NATIONAL ANTHEM (1907) *

At the Manx Music Festival, the Guild as it is popularly known, on the 21 March 1907, “the *piece de resistance* was the Manx National Anthem composed specially for the Manx people by Mr W.H. Gill of *Manx [National] Songs* fame, and sung by the combined choirs and audience standing.”¹ Gill’s anthem came out of leftfield—there had been no groundswell of demand for one, no resultant competition to write one, neither argument nor debate, just Gill coming forward that year. That said, the *Peel City Guardian* went on to report of the Thursday evening’s performance that “[i]t was most effective, and the tune seemed to ‘catch on.’”²

It seems to have been performed for the first time after its *première* at the Guild on Good Friday (29 March) at the Lhergydhoo Wesleyan Sunday School, “[t]he following is the programme [...] Manx National Anthem.”³ The Watercress and Flower Girls’ Christian Mission of London held a floral exhibition at the Palace in Douglas (9 April) and “[t]he National Anthem and then the new Manx National Anthem were played as their Excellencies entered the building.”⁴ Two days later there was a fund raiser for Ballure Chapel at the Ramsey Palace in Ramsey (11 April), where “[t]he programme opened with the Manx National Anthem (by W.H. Gill), which was sung for the first time in Ramsey.”⁵ Both Lord and Lady Raglan again were in attendance. The London Manx Society held a Bohemian Concert that month (22 April) and “[a] feature of the evening was the New Manx National Anthem, which was sung for the first time at these meetings. The tune is a taking one and should become popular.”⁶

“On Saturday evening, a Band of Hope Concert was held in the Wesleyan Schoolroom, Lower Foxdale. Mr Robert Cain made a capable chairman, the following programme being gone through: [...] Manx National Anthem, E. Cowell, H. Shimmin, and N. Kelly.” This was on Saturday, 11 May.⁷ At a Rechabite meeting in Glen Maye (1 July), “[a] pleasing feature of the winding up of the meeting was the

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1 “The Manx Music Festival,” *Peel City Guardian* 23 March 1907: [8]a.

2 “The Manx Music Festival,” [8]a.

3 “Lhergydhoo,” *Peel City Guardian* 6 April 1907.

4 “Floral Exhibition,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 13 April 1907.

5 “Ballure Church Concert,” *Ramsey Courier* 12 April 1907: [4]c.

6 “London Manx Society,” *Peel City Guardian* 4 May 1907.

7 “[Foxdale] On Saturday evening ...,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 18 May 1907.

playing of the Manx National Anthem by the Band.”⁸ The *Peel City Guardian* when announcing the arrangement for Tynwald Day in 1907, mentioned that “[w]e also understand that Mr W.H. Gell’s [*sic*] new Manx National Anthem will be sung at the service in the Chapel, previous to the promulgation.”⁹ Reporting on the events of the day itself, “[t]he service differed from previous services in that the new Manx National Anthem was sung for the first time at a Government function, and it had an excellent reception.”¹⁰ At a Sunday concert at Ballaquane held as a fund raiser for the restoration of the Parish Church Spire (28 July), “Mr P.C. Moore, the able organist of the Parish Church, had charge of the proceedings, and the following items were rendered to the evident enjoyment of the large number of hearers: Manx National Anthem, Parish Church Choir; [...]”¹¹

Inclement weather the following month led to the Town Nurse Fund concert being held not as planned in the grounds of Ballaquane but in the Albert Hall in Peel (16 August) and “[t]here was not a dull or mediocre piece in the programme, and all went merrily: [...] Manx National Anthem.”¹² That same day at a Patrick School Board treat for its school children, “[t]he band played the Manx National Anthem, and ‘God Save the King.’”¹³ In September a leaving party was held at Windsor Café in Port Erin to see off Mrs Kinrade (24 September), and “[b]efore dispersing, the company joined hands in singing ‘Auld Lang Syne’ and the Manx National Anthem.—Mrs Kinrade left the Island on route for South Africa on Thursday morning.”¹⁴

At a Liverpool Manx Society event at the Temperance Hall in Hardman Street (9 October), “[a] most pleasurable evening wound up with the Manx National Anthem, which was heartily sung; ‘Auld Lang Syne,’ and ‘God save the King.’”¹⁵ That same month the Douglas Choral Society performed in Liverpool at the Central Hall in Renshaw Street (16 October) and “[t]he concert opened with the rendering of Mr W.H. Gill’s Manx National Anthem, the English words being used—Truth to tell, the choir did not shine conspicuously in this maiden effort, [...]”¹⁶ The *Mona’s Herald* was more charitable than the *Examiner* in its assessment of the choir’s performance, “[t]he concert items commenced with the singing of the Manx National Anthem, which was rated a different thing than the slip-shod performance when we heard it at the local Guild last March.”¹⁷ It went to add that “Mr Gill, to

⁸ “Rechabitisim at Glenmaye,” *Peel City Guardian* 6 July 1907: [3]b.

⁹ “Promulgation Day,” *Peel City Guardian* 29 June 1907.

¹⁰ “Tynwald Day,” *Peel City Guardian* 6 July 1907: [5]d.

¹¹ “Sunday Concert at Ballaquane,” *Peel City Guardian* 3 August 1907.

¹² “Nurse Fund Concert,” *Peel City Guardian* 24 August 1907.

¹³ “Foxdale,” *Peel City Guardian* 24 August 1907.

¹⁴ “[Rushen] One of the ...,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 28 September 1907.

¹⁵ “Liverpool Manx Society,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 12 October 1907.

¹⁶ “The Manx Choir at Liverpool,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 19 October 1907: 3f.

¹⁷ “Mr Looney’s Choir at Liverpool,” *Mona’s Herald* 23 October 1907: 5a.

whom we are so much indebted for his version, would have been immeasurably charmed if he could have heard the zest of Celtic fire, which the careful precision of the rhythm in the choir's singing, to the effective organ accompaniment played by Mr Collier, the organist of the Hall, brought forth."

Lady Raglan was present at the Onchan Parochial Concert in November (19 November) and the programme included "Manx National Anthem (arr. by W.H. Gill), (dedicated to Lady Raglan), Onchan Choral Society; [...]"¹⁸ The Douglas Choral Society performed at the Gaiety Theatre in Douglas later that month (28 November) where "[t]he concert opened with the Manx National Anthem (W.H. Gill). The air is reminiscent of "Mylecharaine," and the choir religiously sang the six verses, and then applied themselves to Morley's beautiful madrigal [...]"¹⁹ At a book presentation at Rushen Girls' School, Port St Mary to J.T. Lomas of Castletown (13 December), who had paid for their recent visit to the Fine Arts and Industrial Guild at Douglas, "[...] the scholars pleasingly sang for him in Manx, the Manx National Anthem and the Pan-Celtic anthem, 'Land of my fathers.'"²⁰ As a final mention that year, "[p]romptly at eight o'clock Mr Arthur Cregeen, A.I.S.C., ascended the platform, and the programme opened with a fair rendering of the Manx National Anthem."²¹ This was the Rushen Choral Society concert held in the Town Hall, Port St Mary (19 December).

Mentioned above are seventeen events during 1907 on which Gill's new Manx National Anthem was performed after its première at the end of March that year at the Guild and they are listed here: Lhergydhoo Wesleyan Sunday School (29 March), Watercress and Flower Girls' Christian Mission of London exhibition, Douglas (9 April), Ballure Chapel Concert, Ramsey (11 April), London Manx Society Bohemian Concert (22 April), Foxdale Band of Hope Concert (11 May), Rechabite meeting, Glen Maye (1 July), St John's Chapel, Tynwald Day (5 July), Peel Parish Church Spire fundraiser (28 July), Peel Town Nurse Fund concert (16 August), Patrick School Board treat (16 August), Windsor Café leaving party (24 September), Liverpool Manx Society (9 October), Douglas Choral Society, Liverpool (16 October), Onchan Parochial Concert (19 November), Douglas Choral Society, Gaiety Theatre (28 November), Rushen Girls' School book presentation, Port St Mary (13 December), Rushen Choral Society, Port St Mary (19 December).

Life was not that slow in the Island that everything that happened made its way into the Manx newspapers and there are likely any number of occasions that were not reported where Gill's anthem was sung. Besides indicating that it did indeed "catch on" in the words of the *Peel City Guardian*, what too is shown here is how music permeated Manx social life and where it was encountered along with Gill's newly-

¹⁸ "[Onchan] Lady Raglan and ...," *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 23 November 1907.

¹⁹ "Mr Looney's Choir," *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 30 November 1907: 7c.

²⁰ "[Rushen] The teachers and ...," *Isle of Man Examiner* 21 December 1907.

²¹ "[Rushen] Rushen Choral Society," *Isle of Man Examiner* 21 December 1907: 7e.

minted Manx National anthem, namely Methodist chapels, Temperance meetings, school treats, fund raisers, send-offs, and choral concerts.

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