

# Manx Notes 593 (2022)

## “KIRK MICHAEL SEXTON RECALLS HIS LIFE OF QUIET SERVICE”

(1937)

[15c] Along a country road, carpeted with the autumn leaves, there trudged a lonely figure ... memories of bygone days must have passed through his mind as he wended his way homeward through an avenue of trees which were fast losing their mantle of yellow and brown.

He was awakened from his reverie by the call of a passer-by, and, in the casual chat which followed, there was unfolded a story of devotion to duty and of a unique record.

### Nothing Very Dramatic

There is really nothing very dramatic about the chapters in the life-story of a village sexton, and Mr Biset Kewley, of Kirk Michael—the subject of this brief note—has not had an eventful time in following his sombre calling. Nevertheless, his record is interesting.

From the time he was a boy, nine years of age, playing about the old-world village, it was his privilege to help the parish sexton and clerk—James Cannell—by extinguishing the candles, or doing odd jobs.

### Helping the Clerk

One of the big events in village life of those days was a funeral, and so it came to be that on those mournful occasions the old clerk found he had so much to do that Biset—then 11 years of age—was instructed to ring the funeral bell whilst the clerk went about his other duties, which, in those days, included raising the tune for the funeral hymn. The custom of those days was for the parish clerk to lead the singing and be a principal figure in the funeral cortege when it proceeded to the burial, amid much lamentation and song, with everyone in the village in attendance!

### For 58 Years

[15d] For a period of 58 years Biset Kewley has been the bell ringer at funerals in the village.

He was appointed sexton at the age of 17 years in succession to Mr Cannell, and for well over half a century has held that position, and carried out his duties faithfully and well, (He was appointed when Parson Savage was Vicar of the parish).

Mr Kewley has only retired from office just lately because of trouble with his eyesight, and the Vicar and wardens are putting a proposal on foot to make suitable recognition of his long and valued service.

### A Jovial Soul

The men who spend much of their time in tending God's acre are often regarded as solitary and perhaps melancholy sort of people, but Mr Kewley belies this, for he is a jovial soul taking a keen interest in village politics.

In sport he has long been associated with the Northern Billiards League.

In his youth a competent footballer, many people will remember his enthusiasm, and one instance cannot pass without mention.

At the age of 56 years he turned out to play for Michael in a Second League game with Wanderers, and played in the latter half of the game in the outside right position.

And so one could go on writing of this remarkable personality. In the autumn of his life he is 69 years of age nothing gives him greater pleasure than a walk in the countryside with his dog.

Pseud [initialled as "S.B."]. "Kirk Michael Sexton Recalls His Life of Quiet Service." *Isle of Man Examiner* 19 November 1937: 15c–d.

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