

# Manx Notes 608 (2023)

WILLIAM CURPHEY, FOLK SINGER \*

There used to be an old man when I was a boy—he was called Willie Curphey, a Jurby man, and he used to be breaking stones by the roadside—this was when we lived at Kerrow garroo in Andreas. He taught my brother Fred to sing Manx songs—he was older than me, and just of an age to learn them—eight or nine, I was only four. My brother used to sing these songs, Ny Kirree Fo Niaghtey was one and there were others, but I have forgotten the titles of the others—but at that age he was good at learning them, and the old man would be singing them to him. When he got older however he got to be that he wouldn't sing them, and he let his knowledge of them go. I was far younger, and I would have had a greater interest in them, but of course I was too young at the time to learn them as Fred had done, from old Curphey. For some reason we always called him “Uncle Peter.”

MNHL, Folk Life Survey, C/214, F/1 (1972)

This was the recollection of Robert Christory of Bride interviewed by the Folk Life Survey in 1972. In the 1911 census for the Island, there is a William Curphey, aged 79, whose occupation was given as a stone breaker, living at “Lilac Cottage” in Andreas with his son, John (37), a farm labourer, born in Newtown, Whitehaven, and whose wife was Catherine Agnes (37), born in Dublin. William was a Manx speaker, whilst his son was not. As for breaking stones, this was for the repair and maintenance of the Highways. Robert Christory was twelve at the time of the 1911 census, living with his parents, Robert (40) and Emily (39), at Kerrowgarrow in Andreas, his father working as a farm labourer. All were English speakers. We have here a rare glimpse of the transmission of folk songs in the Island, though sadly with just the one title remembered, “Ny Kirree fo Niaghtey,” but a song in Manx itself.

Stephen Miller, RBV

For William Curphey in the 1911 census, see *Census Enumerators' Book* for Andreas 1911, TNA, RG14 PN34629 RD635 SD2 ED17/1 SN63; for Robert Christory, *Census Enumerators' Book* for Andreas 1911, TNA, RG14PN34631 RD635 SD2 ED17/3 SN58.

\*

---

\* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “William Curphey, Folk Singer,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* May (2023), [20].