

Manx Notes 609 (2023)

ARTHUR FREDERICK KILLEY *

Ramsey Town Commissioners as part of their business on 7 November 1899, resolved “[t]hat the applications of Thomas Kaye and Arthur Killey for street musicians Licences be not entertained.”¹ Whilst Kaye has been dealt with in another piece, now there is the name of another street musician to be noted. Like Kaye, Killey also had a fondness for the drink.... In 1901, “Mary Jane Smith and Arthur Killey were charged with having been drunk and incapable in Upper Church-street on the Saturday evening previous.”² The report in the *Isle of Man Examiner* continued that Killey “contrives to gain a livelihood by playing on an accordion.” The *Peel City Guardian* mentioned that he was “a blind man belonging to Peel,” the evidence of one of the police officers stating that “he was a pauper from Peel, who went about with an accordion begging, and the woman went with him.”³ The fine was to be ten shillings or fourteen days in gaol. The next year saw the pair being “charged with wandering on the Loch Parade without visible means of sustenance.”⁴ There had already been further run-ins with the authorities, the pair having appeared twice before the courts within the past six months for drunkenness. This time they were both sentenced to a month’s hard labour.

In 1901, the census found Killey enumerated as an “[i]tinerent musician,” lodging at 9 Charles Street in Peel, and with his age given as thirty.⁵ The next census, 1911, saw him now married and living at Bulrenny Cottage on Richmond Hill in Braddan.⁶ His occupation was given as “Miner (Lead)” to which the census enumerator added first, “Retired” and then “Travelling Musician.” In the column “Infirmary,” entered was the comment “Totally blind (Result of accident at 26).” “A Deserving Case.—An Appeal” was the header for a letter to the *Isle of Man Times* in 1894, written by Robert S. Stephen, of Spring Valley near Douglas.⁷ Killey had just arrived back in the Island, on Good Friday that year. Born in Peel, he went to sea at

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “Arthur Frederick Killey,” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* June (2023), [15].

¹ See “Finance Committee,” Anon, “Ramsey Town Commissioners. Tuesday, November 7th, 1899,” *Ramsey Courier* 10 November 1899: 5c.

² Anon, “A Peripatetic Musician in Trouble,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 30 November 1901.

³ Anon, “Peel Blind Man in Trouble,” *Peel City Guardian* 30 November 1901.

⁴ Anon, “A Blind Musician and his Companion,” *Manx Sun* 31 May 1902.

⁵ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for German 1901, TNA, RG 13/5306, fol. 50, sch. 37.

⁶ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Braddan 1911, RG/14 BPN 34641 RD635 SD1 ED4/2 SN52.

⁷ R.S. Stephen, “[Letter to the Editor] A Deserving Case.—An Appeal,” *Isle of Man Times* 20 October 1894.

fourteen, and was a blue seas sailor. At Iquique in Chile, he fell from the riggings and was taken to hospital. After recovering from his injuries he went to work at the silver mines some seven miles from the port, but “[w]hile engaged in blasting, he was ordered to withdraw a charge which had hung fire. The charge exploded, blew off two fingers of his right hand, and severely injured his eyes.” After being discharged totally blind he had been sent by the British Consul back to England.

The letter writer mentioned that he was now living with his brother and sister in Douglas, adding that “[h]e speaks Spanish fluently, and is learning to play the accordion.” Stephen was attempting to raise £21 in order to sponsor him for the Liverpool School for the Blind where he could learn basket making in order to be able to earn a living in the future. Killey was later admitted to the Poor Asylum and, as with Kaye, there was the inevitable wrangling over who was to pay for his upkeep whilst there.⁸ Mentioned was that he was born illegitimate, his mother abandoning him at the age of five when she moved to England and later married there. It was decided that as she could not traced the charge would fall upon the Poor Relief Society for German and Peel. Killey failed in his attempt to be sent to Liverpool and the suggestion was now to try to find him a place at Edinburgh in a similar institution.⁹ The *Isle of Man Times* in its issue for 2 March 1895, reported that the application for Killey to be admitted to the Edinburgh Blind Asylum had been refused,¹⁰ and the same date the *Isle of Man Examiner* published a letter from Stephen that subscriptions were to be returned to those who had donated.¹¹

Killey was charged in May that year with being drunk and disorderly in Cattle Market Street in Douglas.¹² He was fined five shillings with costs, the High Bailiff commenting that Killey ““had refused many of the kind offers that had been made to assist him, and preferred to walk the streets of Douglas with a harmonium, asking for help.” The month of June saw him arrested again for being drunk and disorderly and fined the same amount, and “Mr Harris warned defendant, that if he was found begging or playing a harmonium in the streets of Douglas he would be sent to prison.”¹³

In 1911, Arthur Killey and his wife, Mary Jane, were admitted to the Poor Asylum. The following year she was summoned before the High Bailiff as it had emerged that

⁸ Anon, “The Settlement of an Indigent Blind Man,” *Mona’s Herald* 5 December 1894. See too, Anon, “A Pitiful Story,” *Isle of Man Times* 8 December 1894.

⁹ Anon, “[Peel and the West] Poor Relief Societies,” *Isle of Man Times* 2 February 1895.

¹⁰ Anon, “[Peel and the West] Poor Relief,” *Isle of Man Times* 2 March 1895.

¹¹ R.S. Stephen, “[Letter to the Editor] The Case of Arthur Killey,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 2 March 1895.

¹² Anon, “The Blind Man Killey,” *Manx Sun* 31 May 1895.

¹³ Anon, “A Blind Drunkard,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 1 June 1895.

her marriage was a bigamous one. Described with the language of the time as a cripple, she had to be “carried into the witness box.” She had married Killey in 1902, having been married before to “a man named Stephenson” when she was sixteen years old, who she later left after sixteen years of marriage. She had been unconcerned about her marital status at the time of her second marriage, answering the question as to whether she knew then if her husband was still alive or not with the answer that “I can’t say I thought of him.”¹⁴ It is not stated how this first marriage was brought to the attention of the authorities but they acted on it: “On Thursday the High-Bailiff of Douglas decided that the settlement of Mary Jane Killey, who was married to Arthur Killey, was Binchester, and an order was made for her removal.”¹⁵

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- . “Woman with Two Husbands.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 25 May 1912: 7g.
- Stephen, R.S. “[Letter to the Editor] A Deserving Case.—An Appeal.” *Isle of Man Times* 20 October 1894: 4f.

¹⁴ Anon, “Woman with Two Husbands,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 25 May 1912.

¹⁵ Binchester is a village near to Bishop Auckland in Durham in England. Anon, “On Thursday the,” *Peel City Guardian* 25 May 1912.

- . “[Letter to the Editor] The Case of Arthur Killey.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 2
March 1895: 4g.

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