

# Manx Notes 610 (2023)

“TOMMY THE TRUMP” \*

(1899)

Last Saturday, at the Douglas Court of Petty Sessions, the Douglas Poor Relief Committee applied for a declaration of the settlement of Thomas Arthur Kaye, alias “Tommy the Trump,” a pauper, now in the Poor Asylum.—Mr Ll. Kneale, advocate, appeared for the committee, and notice had been given to the Poor Relief Committee of Lonan, where it was thought the pauper’s settlement might be.

Thos. Arthur Kaye, examined by Mr Kneale, said he was 49 years of age. He was born in Ramsey, and was brought up in Laxey, and stayed until he was 23 years of age. He then went to Barrow-in-Furness, and stayed in England until 1881. In England he did not reside for three consecutive years in any one place, excepting when he was “doing time” for seven years. A few months after leaving gaol he came to the Isle of Man and had lived in various parts. Douglas had been his home, but he was going back and forward to other parts—Ramsey, Laxey, and Foxdale. At Foxdale he had stayed for four years consecutively.

Henry Cubbon (Douglas) said that Kaye had stayed with him off and on, once for eighteen months at a time.

Theophilus Hogg said he remembered Kaye living in Laxey when a young man. Since 1881 Kaye had travelled the country as a “wandering musician” playing a concertina.—Cross-examined by the Rev. John Quine, on behalf of the Lonan Committee, Mr Hogg did not know that Douglas was the headquarters of Kaye for years back.

Mr W.J. Moore, Inspector for the Douglas Committee, said that Kaye had for the past ten years been wandering all over the Isle of Man playing a concertina. During the last ten years witness was positive Kaye had not resided in Douglas for three consecutive years.

The Rev John Quine said that if the settlement in Foxdale was proved the liability of Laxey would cease.—The matter was postponed for notice to be given to the Patrick Committee.

“Tommy the Trump’s Settlement. A Wandering Minstrel in Truth.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 11 February 1899: 2g.<sup>1</sup>

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\* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “Tommy the Trump’ (1899),” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* June (2023), [16].

<sup>1</sup> Anon, “Tommy the Trump’s Settlement. A Wandering Minstrel in Truth,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 11 February 1899.

This piece was found as ever by chance and here we have a “wandering musician” in the words of the article here, Thomas Arthur Kaye, who had been travelling around the Island playing a concertina, his nickname being “Tommy the Trump.”<sup>2</sup> He had now fallen on hard times and was in the Poor Asylum and the discussion was over which parish would pick up the bill for his care. His peripatetic lifestyle, shifting from parish to parish in the Island, was what was causing a certain level of consternation, as to which parish the charge for him should fall. Indeed, such was the situation that their deliberations had to be resumed a week later.<sup>3</sup> There are elements of a tragic farce here as each parish tried to pass on the responsibility for Kaye to another and as a result the hearing involved in attendance, as the *Isle of Man Times* reported, two magistrates, their clerk, two advocates, a Poor Relief Inspector, two clergymen, twelve members representing three Poor Relief committees and around the same number of witnesses. In the end, it was adjudicated that Lonan would pick up the tab for Kaye.

By this time, they had discovered that Kaye was born in 1850, in Ramsey but the family moved to Laxey soon after, where he had remained until he was twenty-three years of age. He later left for England, to Barrow-in-Furness, served time for seven years (the offence was not stated), and returned to the Island in 1881. He subsequently worked on-and-off at various jobs, mentioned was working on the Breakwater for eighteen months, spending four years on the washing floors at the Foxdale mines, and working at the fishing for six seasons.<sup>4</sup> However, “[f]or years he had been engaged ‘playing the music’ all over the Island, staying for a few days at intervals of a month or longer at various lodging-houses in the different towns.”<sup>5</sup>

The 1861 census finds Thomas aged eleven and living with his family at 6, Laxey Bridge, in Laxey, his father a lead miner.<sup>6</sup> In 1871, they were still in the village, and Kaye was now working as a labourer at the Laxey Mines.<sup>7</sup> The 1881 census sees him lodging with Ann Quayle and family in Malew; his father too was lodging there. Both men were enumerated as labourers.<sup>8</sup> It is with the 1891 census that he is first enumerated as a musician, residing in a lodging house run by Ann Ross at 3 Strand

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<sup>2</sup> Anon, “Tommy the Trump’s Settlement. A Wandering Minstrel in Truth.”

<sup>3</sup> Anon, “Patrick,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 18 February 1899.

<sup>4</sup> Anon, “The Settlement of Thomas Arthur Kay,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 25 February 1899.

<sup>5</sup> Anon, “The Result of Being Poor and Disowned,” *Isle of Man Times* 25 February 1899.

<sup>6</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Laxey 1861, TNA, RG 9/4423, fol. 10, sch. 66.

<sup>7</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Laxey 1871, TNA, RG 10/5774, fol. 38, sch. 173.

<sup>8</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Malew 1881, TNA, RG 11/5607, fol. 122, sch. 80.

Street in Ramsey.<sup>9</sup> In 1901, he is returned as a labourer living in what was being run as a lodging house in Back Strand Street in Douglas.<sup>10</sup>

That same year of 1899, Ramsey Town Commissioners turned down Kaye's application for a street musicians licence<sup>11</sup>—it had little effect, as in 1900, “[o]n Monday morning, before the High-Bailiff of Ramsey, Thomas Kaye, a musician, well-known throughout the island, was fined 2s. 6d. and costs for being drunk and disorderly on Saturday night.”<sup>12</sup> Poor and destitute, his tunes unrecorded, nevertheless he was determined to carry on playing, and left us a record of at least one person who went about the Island “playing the music.”

Stephen Miller, RBV

#### REFERENCES

- Anon. “Patrick.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 18 February 1899: 5g.
- . “[Ramsey and the North] Drunk and Disorderly.” *Manx Sun* 17 March 1900: 5f.
- . “Ramsey Town Commissioners. Tuesday, November 7th, 1899.” *Ramsey Courier* 10 November 1899.
- . “The Result of Being Poor and Disowned.” *Isle of Man Times* 25 February 1899: 5e.
- . “The Settlement of Thomas Arthur Kay.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 25 February 1899: 6f.
- . “Tommy the Trump’s Settlement. A Wandering Minstrel in Truth.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 11 February 1899: 2g.

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<sup>9</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Ramsey 1891, TNA, RG 12/4685, fol. 78, sch. 165.

<sup>10</sup> *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Douglas 1901, TNA, RG 13/5303, fol. 115, sch. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Anon, “Ramsey Town Commissioners. Tuesday, November 7th, 1899,” *Ramsey Courier* 10 November 1899.

<sup>12</sup> Anon, “[Ramsey and the North] Drunk and Disorderly,” *Manx Sun* 17 March 1900.