

Loose Ends

As part of my research into the life and career of Harry Wood for my book *Manxland's King of Music*,¹ I recently undertook a journey to Vancouver Island, British Columbia, to investigate the archives of Haydn Wood Music,² maintained at the home of Marjorie Cullerne, the niece of Haydn Wood, who is currently writing a book about her uncle, and Gilles Gouset, archivist and Haydn Wood scholar. Of particular interest – indeed a treasure-trove of hitherto little-known material – is the Marjorie Cullerne Collection, which she discovered some years ago in West Yorkshire, near Slaithwaite, where the remarkable Wood family: parents Clement and Sabra, hotel owners and amateur musicians, their three musically gifted sons Harry, Daniel and Haydn, four talented sisters and an elder brother, lived before most of the family moved to the Isle of Man in 1885.

The core of the Collection consists of four 'cuttings books' covering the period from 1934 until 1938, the year of Harry Wood's death; two 'scrapbooks'; a small black 'cuttings' book; a large 'cuttings' book; a Wood family photo album; a rare copy of Harry Wood's *Cavalcade of Music*; many rare editions of Waltzes, Schottisches, Lancers and novelty dances by Harry Wood, and an early proof copy of Manx National Songs (1896), inscribed to Harry Wood by the Gill brothers, with grateful thanks for his efforts in helping to organise the first concert of Manx National Music in 1897. Of particular significance is Harry Wood's Engagement Diary (1878-1885), which covers the period from his first engagement as a violinist at the Theatre Royal, Huddersfield, to the year he was first engaged 'as leader and soloist in Mr Edgar Ward's large band', at the Falcon Cliff Castle Hotel, Douglas. Much of this valuable collection must have been preserved by Harry Wood's devoted sisters, unofficial music librarians and supporters, Adeline and Elise after his death, as at least one of the cuttings book contains material dating from 1948.

The 'cuttings books' and 'scrapbooks' contain dozens of newspaper reports of concerts featuring the three Wood brothers; photographs, letters from theatre managers, music publishers, such as Bert Feldman, eminent 'stars' such as Vesta Tilley and Florrie Forde, concert programmes, recollections and reminiscences of Harry and Haydn's sisters, Mary Hannah, Adeline, Sophia and Elise, and a record of Harry Wood's First World War service in the Loyal Manx

Volunteer Force, guarding the internees at Knockaloe Internment Camp, near Peel.

I have thus been able to fill in some significant gaps in my knowledge of the career of Harry Wood, the longest-serving musical director to have worked on the Island; some of the great entertainers who performed here;³ the life of the violin teacher and conductor Kathleen Rydings;⁴ the story of the first concert of Manx National Music (1897)⁵ and the compositions of John Edward Quayle. There is also a letter from Sophia Morrison to Harry Wood, the contents of which may not be revelatory, but I suspect maybe unknown to scholars of the Celtic revival. Here then, is a selection from the wealth of fascinating material discovered in Canada.

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Kathleen Rydings

A programme of the Royal College of Music's production of Hermann Goetz's opera *Francesca da Rimini* (1876) at His Majesty's Theatre, on 3rd December, 1908, names Kathleen Rydings in the first violins. Her colleagues Herbert Kinsey, violin, Frank Bridge, viola and Cedric Sharpe, 'cello, also played in the orchestra for this production.

The single most exciting find for me was an undated hand-written letter from Kathleen Rydings to Harry Wood:

Laxey Lodge

Avondale Road

Onchan

Isle of Man

Dear Mr Wood

Many thanks for your letter. I shall be pleased to play at the Gaiety for the week starting July 12th. Of course you will let me know later about rehearsals.

I started at the College three weeks ago, Again, many thanks for giving my name to the Principal.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

Kathleen Rydings

This is the only known letter from Kathleen Rydings to have survived. The contents indicate a date of c. 1930, for the following reasons: the house in Onchan was not purchased or rented by Kathleen's mother until 1918; Kathleen did not return to the Island permanently after her years in Eastbourne until 1923, and her Trio – performing under the name The Strand Trio - were immediately engaged by the organist Dr George Toothill, to provide music for the silent films at the Strand Cinema and the Picture House, until 1930. Her first advertisements in the local newspapers as a violin teacher date from that year, so until further information comes to light, it is reasonable to suggest that that was the year that she began to teach at King William's College, Castletown, the 'College' referred to in the letter.

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The Manx National Concert, 1897

In my article *A rare Manx Concert*, I gave a brief description of the First Concert of Manx National Music, which took place on 7th February, 1897, at the Grand Theatre, Douglas, which inaugurated a series of similar concerts which became a significant feature of the Manx musical calendar for decades up to World War II. The following letters from late 1896, from the Gill brothers⁶ and Dr John Clague, give further insights into how this spectacular musical event was planned.

Letter dated 3rd September, 1896, from WH Gill to Harry Wood:

Dear Mr Wood

Our book of Manx songs is on the eve of publication. I think today was the day fixed, but I have an advanced copy.⁷

We have in contemplation a concert of Manx Music this Winter and can I think make a very attractive programme if it can be carried out as we would wish. I should like to consult you as to details. If you could spare me an hour of your time on Saturday next or any time after noon tomorrow . . .

Yours faithfully

Notice to prospective choirs and choir members, dated 2nd November, 1896:

MANX CONCERT. The Deemster Gill is interested in a concert of Manx Music to be given in the Grand Theatre, Douglas, on February 7th next (proceeds to the Hospital). May he count on your help in the chorus, and if so, will you kindly attend the first meeting for practice, and for arranging details, at the Central Hall (foot of Broadway), on Tuesday, 10th November, at 8 p.m.

Anfield Hey

Letter from WH Gill to his brother Deemster F Gill, dated 13th November, 1896:

My dear Fred

'Hunt the Wren'. My idea . . . was that of a School Song for **Boys and Girls Only**, all singing in **Unison** throughout. Semi-chorus consisting in schools concerts of 12 voices and full chorus of 100; or at the Chrystal Palace say 100 and 3000 respectively! Indeed I hope some day to see this dream realized **There** at some school festival. But for your present purpose with **Mixed** voices some sort of compromise seems advisable.

There is a difficulty – viz this melody is **Not Capable of a Good Harmony**, therefore in such case the right thing is still **Unison** for all the voices with a strong accompaniment *a la* Bagpipe.

But I will have to try and see if a tolerably decent vocal harmony can be continued but I am not hopeful. If only you could get **Plenty** of Boys and Girls, the original idea is in long was the right one. Another idea is Boys and Girls only & one with a good voice singing the Questions (solo) and the rest the answers in imitation. This, for your purpose would be musically the best & dramatically the most effective.

Your affectionate brother

In the event, *Hunt the Wren* was performed in Part I of the concert, by a semi-chorus of six boys and the childrens' choir.

Letter dated 7th December, 1896, from Dr John Clague to Deemster Gill:

Crofton

Castletown,

Isle of Man

My dear Deemster

I am very sorry that I am unable to write a longer letter, but I have to go out at once.

I have given you the best version that I can obtain⁸. It differs slightly from our other in the 'The Refrain'.

You will find another version of (the) words in Mona Miscellany Man Soc Pubs Vol XV! Page 102. You must alter some of the verses and PREFIX them to the 'Refrain'. I have heard all of them made use of by White Boys.

I have no photographs of old Manx costumes.

Yours faithfully

The song referred to in the above letter is known as the *White Boys Carol*, sung by the Knights during the old folk drama, or mummers' play, *The White Boys*, customarily performed in the days preceding Christmas. The open lines of the carol are:

'Then here's success to all brave boys of stout and gallant heart.

In battlefield or banquet board prepared to play a part'.

At the end of the play, the cast perform a sword dance – the *White Boys' Dance* - to the Manx tune *Creg Willy Syl (Willy Sylvester's Hill)*.

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John Edward Quayle

Letter dated 30th March, 1930, from JE Quayle⁹ to Harry Wood:

'Summerland'

Brunswick Road

Dear Harry

Many thanks for your very kind note of appreciation. I am glad to know that you liked the Variations.¹⁰ It is rather curious that you should have referred to the Orchestra. I struggled to write them for orchestra and had scored some half dozen for you but found that the medium did not fit somehow, hence the organ.

I agree with your view as to the Comparative Merits of the organ and the orchestra.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

A significant figure in the musical life of the Island from the 1890s until the 1950s, the Manx violinist, composer and conductor John Edward Quayle, was a friend and musical colleague of Kathleen Rydings and Harry Wood. His fine orchestral compositions are becoming more widely respected and performed.¹¹ The composition referred to in JE Quayle's letter are the Variations for Organ on a XVIIth Century Manx Carol. A hand-written dedication on the front page of the copy at Culture Vannin reads:

G. Tootell with best wishes from J E Quayle.

Dr George Tootell was a well-known and highly respected cinema organist, and the composer of orchestral and choral works with a Manx flavour, of no mean ability.

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Sophia Morrison

The Manx Society

Yn Cheshaght Gailchagh

Mannin:

Peel August 6th 1916

The Journal of Matters

Past and Present

relating to Mann

Dear Mr Wood

On July 23rd, Mr Cubbon forwarded to me your subscription to Mannin for Numbers 5-8, for which I send you the receipt (no 182).

Yesterday, August 5th, he handed the same sum (4/6) for the same numbers to me!

Shall I keep it for Numbers 9-12? – that is, of course, if you have confidence in the future of Mannin – I cannot guarantee the publication of these numbers, but shall certainly continue to publish Mannin, if in any way possible.

With many thanks

Sincerely yours

Sophia Morrison.

Sophia Morrison was perhaps the most significant figure in the Celtic revival, and her endeavours helped bring Manx literature and drama to the general public. A collector of folklore, a promoter of the Manx language, the author of *Manx Fairy Tales* (pub. 1929) and the collaborator with AW Moore and Edmund Goodwin of *Vocabulary of the Anglo-Manx Dialect*, she was Secretary of the Manx Language Society and the editor of the journal *Mannin*, referred to in the above letter, which she founded in 1913, but which foundered after her death in 1917.

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Vesta Tilley and Florrie Forde

And finally, two letters from two of the most popular artistes ever to have appeared on the Island:

Letter dated 2nd August, 1910, from Vesta Tilley to Harry Wood:

Dear Mr Wood

Would you please score the enclosed song for me in the key of Eb. I want it to open with on Monday and I particularly want it done on small sheets.

Yours sincerely

The song in question may have been *The Giddy Little Isle of Man*.¹² Vesta Tilley, who like Florrie Forde, appeared at the Derby Castle for many summer seasons, in 1910 performed each evening 9.50pm and sang 'her new Isle of Man song'.

A hastily scrawled note from Florrie Forde to Harry Wood, dated 16th June, 1930:

Dear Harry Wood

All being well I will be with you on Monday morning. Please let me know to Castle Mona (Hotel) time of rehearsal.

Yours sincerely

Maurice Powell, Andreas, October, 2014.

Notes

¹ Envisaged for Autumn 2015.

² www.haydnwoodmusic.com

³ Harry Wood (1868-1938) first played violin solos with the orchestra of the Falcon Cliff Castle Hotel during the summer of 1884, and was engaged for the whole summer season in 1885. In 1904, he became the overall musical director of the Palace & Derby Castle Limited. He instigated the Harry Wood Annual Students' Concerts in 1900, and was musical director of the Blackpool Winter Gardens from 1917-27.

⁴ Maurice Powell: *A Very Gifted Manx Lady, The Life of Kathleen Rydings*, Wibble Publications, 2014.

⁵ Maurice Powell: *A rare Manx Concert*, KMJ, October, 2014.

⁶ Deemster F Gill and his brother WH Gill, who with Dr Clague produced Manx National Songs in 1896, and who were the guiding spirits behind the concert.

⁷ Harry Wood received his inscribed proof copy of MNS in September, 1896.

⁸ The tune of the *White Boys Carol* is of English origin.

⁹ Maurice Powell: *JE Quayle* in *A Supplement to New Manx Worthies*, Culture Vannin, 2014.

¹⁰ Variations on a XVIIth Century Manx Carol for organ c. 1930, published by Augener Ltd. The carol is the *Carval Abban Rushen*, which JE Quayle used earlier in his *Choral Variations on Carval Abban Rushen*, for four- eight part a cappella choir, published by the Manx Society, 1914.

¹¹ Maurice Powell: *The Magic Isle*, KMJ, August 2013; *On Maughold Head*, KMJ, Sept 2013.

¹² *The Giddy Little Isle of Man* was not in fact new, but may have been new to the Island. It was written and composed by Clarence Wainwright Murphey (co-author with Will letters of *Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?* 1908, and *we Must Have a Song About the Isle of Man*, 1912), in 1903. Vesta Tilley first appeared at the Derby Castle in 1892.