

***Tipperary* and the Isle of Man: new evidence**

The story of how *It's A Long Way to Tipperary* came to be written is well known, even if some details are disputed even to this day, and need not concern us here.¹ Two questions, though, do require definitive answers even at this distance in time:

1. Did the great chorus singer Florrie Forde² introduce *Tipperary* to the Isle of Man during the summer season of 1913?
2. Were serving soldiers on the Island during this period, the first soldiers anywhere in the world to adopt *Tipperary* as their marching song a year before World War I was declared?

Our story begins in the London offices of B Feldman and Co, Music Publishers, during the high summer of 1912. According to one account of events³, Jack Judge, the composer of *Tipperary*, had earlier sent Feldman a selection of songs, and when the publisher asked him which one he thought 'the most rousing', Judge sang it for him. At that moment, the great chorus singer Florrie Forde 'floated in', and is reputed to have exclaimed, 'Good afternoon gentlemen, and good song too! . . . That one ought to go well on the Isle of Man, Bert, mind if I run through it, it's a catchy one'. As there is no source quoted for this verbatim conversation, and as we shall learn later, Florrie Forde certainly did not immediately take to *Tipperary*, we must conclude that the conversation between Feldman and the great entertainer is entirely fanciful. Indeed, all part of what we may refer to as the *Tipperary* myth.

According to another, more believable, account of the meeting,⁴ Feldman thought that *Tipperary* would suit Florrie Forde, and that it should be introduced to Douglas on the Isle of Man the following season. A few weeks later, on 18th September, 1912, Judge and Feldman met again at the publisher's London offices to sign the customary royalties agreement.⁵

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The above accounts are more-or-less recapitulated by Bert Feldman himself in the *Isle of Man Examiner*, September 12th, 1914, re-published from an interview Feldman had given to the *Daily News* just the day before:

STORY OF THE SONG THAT INSPIRES OUR SOLDIERS.

POPULARISED IN THE ISLE OF MAN.

‘The *Tipperary* song only just managed to be published at all, as Jack Judge had tried his song on practically every other publisher in London, before coming to me . . . He played it over and I liked its lilt, so I undertook to publish it. It’s a good song of its kind - a good marching tune, quite simple, and it doesn’t require much breath to sing it. I had great difficulty in getting any of the pantomime artists in the 1913 season to try it . . . and then Miss Florrie Forde sang it a Douglas, Isle of Man, *in the summer* (my italics). There it became immensely popular, and it swept into favour throughout the North of England’.

No reference here to Florrie Forde being present at any meeting between Feldman and Jack Judge in 1912 or 1913.

Another, similar, version of the *Tipperary* story appeared in an article entitled *Fifty years of Manx Amusements* by Arthur Q Moore, in two parts in *Mona’s Herald*, March, 1932. Under the sub-heading *Tipperary-The Truth*, the writer suggests that Feldman bought the song outright from Jack Judge for £5 in 1911, an early date that is not supported by any other source.

Tipperary at the Derby Castle

Further references suggesting that *Tipperary* was sung on the Isle of Man before it became universally popular, come from both Clarke and Gibbons. Clarke states that after the songs initial success with Jack Judge at the Grand Theatre, Stalybridge, in January, 1912:

. . . the words were sung many, many times before ever being printed as Jack successfully performed as far afield as Mossley, Manchester and *the Isle of Man* (my italics).

Clarke further asserts that Jack Judge’s brother – actually an adopted brother – Ted Judge, also a popular entertainer, introduced the song to the Isle of Man at the Douglas ‘singing halls’, where for many years he worked as an agent for the publisher Bert Feldman, publicising songs by day and performing them at night. This reference is supported by the following extract from some lines of doggerel by Jack Judge:

Tell’em about my brother Ted,
Well known for years on Douglas Head,
At Marsden’s, Douglas Head Hotel,⁶

Where drinks and songs 'go down' so well . . .

Gibbons places both Jack and Ted Judge on the Isle of Man during the summer season of 1913, and suggests that they were present at the Derby Castle on July 21st to witness Florrie Forde sing *Tipperary* on the Island for the first time as her act finale:

. . . it was an instant hit, so she kept it in her act.

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Florrie Forde did indeed appear during the summer season of 1913 at the Derby Castle, the week beginning Monday July 21st, taking over the 'top spot' from the versatile singer and tap-dancer Gertie Gitani.⁷ The *Ramsey Courier*⁸ had announced her forthcoming appearance the previous week, and billed her as 'The World's Greatest Chorus Singer', and promised that she will introduce ' . . . several new songs'. Florrie Forde's greatest successes in 1913 were *Dance Your Troubles Away*, *Hold Your Hand Out you Naughty Boy*, and later in the season, *The Way the Wind Blows*. 'Bumper houses' were recorded in the newspapers⁹ for the annual Caledonian week, and following her re-engaged in early August, reported that

. . . her new chorus songs this year are exceedingly popular.

However, there is no mention of *Tipperary* in any Derby Castle preview, advertisement or review in the Isle of Man newspapers for the summer seasons of 1912-14.

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Until now, unequivocal documentary evidence – as opposed to anecdotal evidence, often dating from twenty years or more after the period in question - that Florrie Forde sang *Tipperary* on the Isle of Man in 1913 has been lacking. My recent researches into a fascinating and hitherto little-known archive of material relating to Harry and Haydn Wood and their family, in Canada,¹⁰ have revealed four important sources which finally confirm the true course of events:

1913: undated postcard from Bert Feldman to Harry Wood:¹¹

Bay Hotel

My Dear Wood

You can do me a great favour by getting F Forde to sing 'Tipperary'. She will be guided by you.

See you at 3 o'clock

Yours

Letter dated June 17th from Bert Feldman to Harry Wood from the Metropole Hotel, Blackpool:

My Dear Wood

I have just ascertained Florrie Forde's address: Hippodrome, Preston.

I should take it as a great personal favour if you would write her your views regarding 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary'. I hope to return to town tomorrow and will attend to the several numbers I promised you . . . All good wishes and many thanks for all your favours.

The subsequent events were outlined in a type-written note from Harry Wood, discovered by myself in one of his scrapbooks of letters, newspaper cuttings and programmes, attached to a letter from Bert Feldman discussing unrelated matters, dated 28th April, 1927:

Mr Feldman gives me credit for persuading Miss Florrie Forde to sing his publication 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary' at Derby Castle, Douglas, Isle of Man. At the first rehearsal in 1913, she said she would not sing this song. I told her that the M.S. (manuscript) had been sent to me at the beginning of the season – that I liked it so much that I arranged it as a Military Two-Step. It was such a favourite with the dancers that I purposed (sic proposed) playing it every night whether she sang it or not. This fact persuaded her to sing the song and she did well with it.

Harry Wood further confirms these events in his *Cavalcade of Music*¹²

Miss Florrie Forde sang 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary' for the first time at the Derby Castle (her first appearance that season was Monday, July 21st). We played the chorus of this song in my Lancers.¹³ We played it continuously from Whit week to the end of the season. It was uproariously acclaimed at every performance.

So, the great entertainer Florrie Forde did introduce *Tipperary* – albeit reluctantly at first – into her act at the Derby Castle, Douglas, Isle of Man, during the summer season of 1913, and again in 1914, after it was firmly established as a popular dance. It does not seem, though, to have been one of

her personal favourites; she did not record it until 1929, and then only as part of a medley.

Were soldiers on the Isle of Man the first to march and sing to *Tipperary*?

Martin Faragher, in *With heart, soul and voice*¹⁴ refers to *Tipperary* as

. . . a ditty which legend says was first used by soldiers on summer camp in the Isle of Man who sang it as they marched to the boat upon mobilisation.

Intriguing though this snippet is, it hardly amounts to 'evidence', and regretfully, Faragher fails to cite the source for this 'legend'. Is it therefore possible that serving soldiers on the Isle of Man were the first serving soldiers to sing and march to *Tipperary*?' The answer to this second fascinating question is a resounding YES!

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At the foot of the note attached to the letter cited above from 1927, Harry Wood added a further two lines:

Liverpool Territorials who were camping at Ramsey heard this song at Derby Castle & made it their marching song. Later on –in 1914 – they again sang it and it became so famous with all armies.

In *Cavalcade of Music*, for the year 1914, Harry Wood noted that during the summer season Florrie Forde sang *It's a Long Way to Tipperary* and *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling*, and further recalled the events of the previous year:

It is a fact that in 1913 the Battalion of the Liverpool Scottish Territorials were encamped on the Island for some weeks & most of them came to the 'Castle' and join'd merrily in singing the chorus of 'Tipperary'. The result was, that when this battalion was ordered out to the front it sang the chorus of 'Tipperary' as a marching song. They did this also when they arrived in France. The other regiments took it up with the result that this song is known universally.

Several battalions of the Liverpool Territorials - part of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment - eventually incorporating the 7th Battalion, the Loyal Manx Volunteer Force, did indeed take part in annual training weeks on the Island in the years before World War I, and the 9th and 10th Battalions were indeed made up of Scottish Territorials. The largest number of training encampments

were in the Ramsey area, particularly at Milntown, just a mile from the town centre.

Hopefully, in this year of remembrance, it will be with some pride that the Isle of Man - *pace* the acute business acumen of Bert Feldman,¹⁵ the musical instincts of Harry Wood and the formidable stage personality of Florrie Forde - can claim to have played the decisive role in establishing the popularity of that most iconic of World War I songs: Jack Judge's *It's a Long Way to Tipperary*. As Harry Wood wrote in *Cavalcade*:

No wonder they call Douglas the birthplace of popular songs.¹⁵

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By September 1914, *Tipperary* had begun its meteoric rise to world-wide popularity with soldiers from the armies of all nations. Should there be any lingering doubts as to the phenomenal popularity of *Tipperary*, the following extract from *The Bulletin*, the Voice of the North American Manx Association,¹⁶ should be convincing:

'An Irish engineer, 2000 miles up the Amazon, was astonished to find that the only song the local Indians knew was *Tipperary*.'

Maurice Powell

Andreas, October, 2014.

Notes and Sources

1. The following online sources contain some of the most up-to-date information about the origins of the song: *It's A Long Way to Tipperary* Wikipedia entry; Richard Anthony Baker: *The British Music Hall, An Illustrated History*, 2005; Bridget Haggerty: *It's a Long Way to Tipperary*; *The Fame of Tipperary Group* presents; the Isle of Man newspapers online from the Manx National Heritage iMuseum. All are well worth investigating.
2. Florrie Forde (1875-1940) appeared at the Derby Castle during the summer seasons for over thirty years. Many of her most popular songs were about the Isle of Man including *Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly? Flanagan, Meet Me in Kellyland, Kelly's Come Back* and *Let's Have a Song about the Isle of Man*.
3. *Jack Judge, the Tipperary Man*, by Verna Hale Gibbons (Sandwell Community Library Services, 1998).

4. *Jack Judge and the origins of the First World Song 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary'*, by Glenn M Clarke, Kindle edition 2014)

5. Reproduced in Gibbons, p.99.

6. The Douglas Head Hotel was built in 1869, and was a popular venue for trippers to Douglas with its entertainment rooms, dancing platform and resident band. The proprietor during the period in question was Arthur Henry Marsden, Mayor of Douglas 1908-09.

7. *Mona's Herald* on July 23rd.

8. *Ramsey Courier*, July 18th 1913.

9. *Isle of Man Examiner* on July 26th.

10. Haydn Wood Music (haydnwoodmusic@yahoo.ca), the collection of Marjorie Cullerne (the niece of Haydn Wood).

11. Harry Wood, 'Manxland's King of Music', the most renowned, popular, and longest-serving musical director in the Island's history, enjoyed a career lasting fifty years. He was the elder brother of the composer Haydn Wood and the flautist Daniel Wood.

12. *Cavalcade of Music (1938)*, a 'Record of Popular Music sung and played in Douglas during the last fifty years'. This very rare unpublished record contains a wealth of information about the progress of Harry Wood's remarkable career on the Island, and fascinating glimpses of the great performers: Florrie Forde, Vesta Tilley, Marie Lloyd and Dan Leno, to name just a few, who appeared in Douglas between 1888 and 1938, from the *Hi! Kelly* vocal polka to the Fox-trot *Whistle While You Work*. It is dedicated to Charles Fox, the Managing Director of the Palace & Derby Castle Limited, and dated 7th May 1938.

13. *Harry Wood's Up to Date '1913' Lancers*.

14. *100 Years of the Manx Music Festival*, Leading Edge, 1992.

15. Harry Wood refers to Feldman as 'The King of Songs' in his *Cavalcade*.

16. Dated Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1936.