

Orry Corjeag

by Maurice Powell

Manx Violinist and the first Baume Scholar

Baptised 27th January 1889.

Died: 20th October 1937.

Father: James, born c. 1855.

Mother: Jane Killey, born c. 1865.

Spouse: Mona Calluna Hunt, born in Douglas 31st January 1879; died 9th August 1956, Hampstead, London.

Daughter: Greeba Merula, born in London 26th July 1915; died 2nd August 1956, Warsash, Hampshire.

Spouse: Dorothea (Dorothy) Christina Helena Marno, born Sydenham, South London, c. 1905.

Orry Corjeag was the professional name of the Manx-born violinist, composer, arranger and conductor George Samuel Robinson, normally known as 'Sam'. It is not known why he adopted the name 'Corjeag', but the rare Manx surname was known particularly in the Parish of Michael and surrounding area.*



* The name, a Manx variant of the English name Cavandish, has been traced in Isle of Man Land records to the 16th century. The Isle of Man Family History Society, Wills Index, lists various versions of the name from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries: Corjeage, Corjiag, Cordjeag, Corheage, Curjeag, and is mainly associated with the Kirk Michael area. The name appears in Agatha Christie's short story *Manx Gold*, written in 1930 to help boost the island's tourist industry but the last person bearing that surname is thought to have been born before World War I. Today the name may be seen on the foundation stone of Kirk Michael Primitive Methodist Church: 1891 John Corjeag, Superintendent of the Sunday school, July 1915.

Sam Robinson was born in Kirk Michael in 1889 and baptised on 27th January. His father, James, was born in Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbright, Scotland, c. 1855. His mother, Jane Killey, was born in the Parish of Braddan c. 1865. The family home was given as 34 Whitehouse Cottages, Kirk Michael, in the Isle of Man 1901 census, Erin Ville (View?), Kirk Michael, in the 1911 census and Ballyre House in the 1921 census.

His sister Mary J(ane) was born c. 1887 and became a schoolteacher in Denton and Haughton, today, Tameside, Greater Manchester. She married John Denerley in October 1911. Sam had two brothers: Harold Stanley Robinson, born c. 1904, married Miss Muriel Jones in February 1932, and W(illiam) Robinson, birthdate unknown, but present at the funeral of their father James in February 1932.

According to the *Isle of Man Times*, Sam took his first music lessons from Mr. Richard Lace,* later a master at Santon Board School, but he is first mentioned in the local newspapers in the *Ramsey Weekly News* of 14th Sept 1895, aged six years, when he took part in a Grand Concert of 'songs, drolleries and glees' in the Parochial School, Kirk Michael on Wednesday 11th and Thursday 12th September presented by the children of the school. He was a member of the Michael Midget Group and offered a recitation entitled *My New Brother*. The following year 'little Sammy Robinson's' recitation *The Curlew must not sing tonight* won him a silver coin, and in April 1897 his recitation *Half-way doings* at a meeting of the Parish Band of Hope earned him the following words of praise from the *Peel City Guardian*: 'the little boy has a good memory . . .'

* *Isle of Man Times*, 22.02.1908.

In August 1897 we hear of him singing for the first time with Fred Crowe - a song entitled *Foolish Ned* - at a Board School Entertainment at the Church Room. During the next two years he is commended for his recitations at a Wesleyan Tea and Concert and another Board School Concert when his 'clever performance' received 'a special word of praise'. Clearly young Sam Robinson was a natural performer.

On 17th February 1900 the *Ramsey Weekly News* reported that Master Samuel Robinson, described as 'quite a boy,' played the piano accompaniments in first-rate style at a Temperance Meeting at the Kirk Michael Wesleyan Chapel. In December that year he was awarded a special prize for 'the best boy' in the Kirk Michael Board School.

From March 1902 we read of Sam in the local newspapers as a young violinist when he won 1st prize in the under 17 Violin Class at the Manx Music Festival with *Elfentanz* by E. Jenkinson. The adjudicator said of Master Sam Robinson: 'Playing studied. Good intonation,' which earned him full marks. Harry Wood* presented the prizes, and Kathleen Rydings of Laxey, one of his violin finest pupils, 1st prize in Senior Class.** Sam, referred to in one newspaper as 'formerly a shepherd boy', may have been 'discovered' by Mona Hunt, of whom we shall learn much more, and was a violin pupil of hers during this period. *** In August that year he performed a violin solo at the Coronation Celebrations in Ballaugh Village Hall, and in November at the reopening of the Kirk Michael Reading Room.

* See Maurice Powell, *Manxland's King of Music, the life and times of Harry Wood*, Lily publications, 2018.

** See Maurice Powell, *A very Gifted Manx Lady*, Wibble Publications, 2014

*** *Manx Sun*, 17.03.1906; *Isle of Man Times*, 26.05.1906.

'Sammy would certainly be Prime Minister of one of the Colonies'.

So believed Joseph Mylchreest of the White House, Kirk Michael, known popularly as 'The Diamond King,' after hearing Sam play a violin solo. According to the *Manx Sun*, by 1903 he was a pupil of Harry Wood and a member of his famous Students' Orchestra for his Grand Orchestral Concerts, inaugurated in 1890, where his most talented pupils gained experience in orchestral playing including his younger brother Haydn, his nephew Hilton Cullerne, Cecil Corlett and Kathleen Rydings. Sam played the challenging *Air and Variations* in G major by Rode at the Gaiety Theatre Concert on Thursday 5th March 1903, when he

was described as ‘one of Mr Wood’s most promising students’. Later at the Manx Music Festival he ‘acquitted himself most creditably in a piece full of technical difficulties’. A review of a concert in April 1904 referred to him as ‘a clever young violinist (who) successfully sustained his reputation’. At this time, Sam became a protégé of Lady Raglan, the wife of the Lieutenant Governor, Lord Raglan. She was an amateur pianist, the composer of the *Raglan Waltz*, dedicated to her husband, ‘presided socially over the Island’s Edwardian heyday’ and supported a number of local charitable causes. Lord Raglan was the least popular Lt. Governor in the Island’s history.*

* See *Governors of the Isle of Man Since 1765*, Derek Winterbottom, Manx Heritage Foundation, 2012.

Baume Scholar

In 1905, after entering for the first competitive examination held at Douglas Grammar School on 27th and 28th January, Sam was awarded the first Baume Scholarship from the fund held in trust for talented Manx musicians to study at the Royal Academy of Music for four years.* The following year he became the leader of the Ellan Vannin Quartette, whose highly successful debut took place at the Caxton Hall, London, on 3rd March 1906. The quartet was organised by his former teacher Mona Hunt, who played the viola, and included the ‘cellist Eva Druce and Peel pianist Marion Dodd. Sam’s playing was described as ‘extremely characteristic and brilliant, and (in) a fine style’. The members of the ensemble were ‘proud of their Island . . . and the island may well be proud of its native talent.’ A promising future was predicted for all concerned.

* Henri Josef Baume, 1797-1875, born in Marseille, was something of a shady character. Diplomat, spy, debt collector to the Prince Regent, maybe even a murderer known as the Islington Monster - he may have been all or none of these – and a wealthy refugee from France who moved to the island during the 1860s. Eccentric and reclusive, he left his considerable fortune to Douglas charities, including £300 (£50 per annum) in trust for the Island’s talented musicians to study at the Royal Academy of Music administered through the Manx Music Festival.

Mona Hunt was thirteen years of age in 1892 when a pupil of Harry Wood and a member of his Students’ Orchestra together with Master Haydn Wood, the talented Mew Sisters and Lawrence Rushworth. From 1897 until 1902 she was student at the Royal College of Music and studied harmony and singing, and later the Celtic harp, under Walter Parratt, and was a member of the prestigious College Orchestra. In 1902 she offered to conduct and train the young string players of the proposed Peel Orchestra during her holidays and organised a concert for the new orchestra on 27th August that year at the Garden Fete at Ballaquane.* Mona conducted and led the orchestra which soon became known as Miss Mona Hunt’s String Band and Sam Robinson was often among the violinists. At a later concert she and Sam and a Miss Rainbow performed a trio by Schubert. Her playing and singing to her own harp accompaniment were praised at a concert in Peel in April 1903. There were several concerts and recitals throughout 1904 including one for the London Manx Society.

* *Peel City Guardian*, 26.04.1902.

Sam was the soloist at a concert at the Steinway Hall, London, in May 1906 in aid of the Girls’ Realm Guild Trust Fund organised by Lady Rachel and Lady Irene Byng, at which the

Ellan Vannin Quartette also performed, and for which Sam arranged 'very clever and quaint accompaniments for violin, viola and 'cello for Madame Cadic de la Villebrunne's Breton songs. These were deemed 'novel and striking enough to attract the attention of even London's music lovers,' and Sam was identified as 'so rapidly coming to the front in the London musical world.' *

* From *The Lady* of 24th May, cited in the *Ramsey Courier*, 12.06.1906.

For the Manx Tea and Concert held in the Albert Hall, Peel, on Friday 4th January 1907, Sam arranged two Manx Airs for two violins performed by himself and Mona Hunt: 'a treat that was worth travelling a very long way to hear' and performed a composition of his own for solo violin entitled *Manx Tunes*. His performance of *Ellan Vannin* 'was beautiful and 'heartily encored'. *

* See the *Peel City Guardian*, 12.01.07 for details of this Celtic Concert which included 'two old folksongs' recently discovered by Sophia Morrison. The concert was repeated 'for the delectation of a number of interested persons at present staying in Peel' in July that year.

In 1907 Sam was awarded the Charles Rube Prize for ensemble playing, and as leader of his quartet received a prize of £20. The other members of the string quartet were Raymond Jeremy, Eric Coates and Edgar Fawcett. 'That excellent young 'cellist', a certain Mr. Giovanni (John) Barbirolli, was a joint winner of this prize in 1914. Rube himself was one of the first recipients of the Worshipful Company of Musicians' Company Gold Medal in 1903.

From the *Isle of Man Times* of 22nd February 1908, we learn of Sam's newly formed Celtic String Quartet (the Ellan Vannin Quartet renamed perhaps) and their recent recitals for The Society of British Composers; a Royal Academy of Music Students' Chamber Concert at the Queen's Hall; a Charter House Concert and a Royal College of Music Patrons' Fund Concert. After a concert in Hitchin the *Hertfordshire Express* of 12th December 1907 wrote: 'From a musical standpoint the concert was probably better than any previously organised at Stevenage.' Sam also played Bach's *Air on a G String* and a set of variations by Vieuxtemps.

The *Peel City Guardian* of 5th December 1908 announced that Mr. G. S. Robinson had been elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM) by the directors, having completed four years of study in June at the age of nineteen. It was at this time that he became a member of the Hambourg String Quartet, adopted the professional name 'Orry Corjeag' and toured to South Africa, Madeira and Holland with them. The quartet, founded in April the previous year by Jan Hambourg, leader, Boris Hambourg, 'cello and Eric Coates, viola, disbanded in 1909 when two of the brothers returned to South Africa.*

* See *The Life and Music of Eric Coates* by Michael Payne, Ashgate Publishing, 2012. A third brother was the concert pianist Mark Hambourg who visited the Isle of Man on several occasions to perform at the Sunday concerts.

On 20th February 1909 Sam made his debut as soloist at the Caxton Hall, Westminster, together with his Celtic Quartet, arranged by Mona Hunt (a member of his Ellan Vannin Quartet), with whom he recently appeared at the Royal Academy Concerts chamber concerts. The auditorium was crowded and the enthusiastic and distinguished audience

included Lady Raglan, the Dowager Lady Loch and the Countess of Kerry. The members of the quartet were Sam, leader, Raymond Jeremy, violin, Eric Coates, viola, John Munday, 'cello together with Frank Merrick, pianist. The guest vocalist was Miss Gertrude Newson who sang songs by Schubert and Coates accompanied by the composer. Sam played the Andante and Finale of Mendelssohn's violin concerto and other pieces by Saint-Saëns, Gade, Bach, Schubert and Rameau. The Quartet played Glazunov's Noveletten and Dvorak's Piano Quintet in A major 'in faultless style'. The audience were 'charmed and delighted' for over two hours.*

* *Peel City Guardian*, 06.03.1909.

Marriage and the Great War.

The *Peel City Guardian* of 04.12.1909 published a full account of the wedding of Sam (referred to as Orry Corjeag of Kirk Michael) and Mona Calluna Hunt, formerly of Peel, daughter of Rev. Percy Wm. Hunt of Killymard, Donegal, Ireland, on November 18th, 1909, at St. Gabriels, Warwick Square, Pimlico, London S.W.* He was twenty years of age and Mona was thirty, although their marriage certificate gives her date of birth date as 1883. Their address was given as number 1 Charlwood Place, Pimlico. The reception was at Caxton Hall where a string trio of friends provided the music together with vocalist Leonard Tickert. The large gathering of one hundred guests and friends at reception included Sir Henry and Lady Stanley and George Moore of the London Manx Society gave a brief speech. Telegrams of congratulation were received from members of the Hambourg Quartet, Miss M. L. Wood, and the eminent clarinettist Manuel Gomez. The wedding gifts took two columns to list in the *Peel City Guardian* and included a book from Harry Wood, a silver chain from Hall Caine and from the Secretary of the Manx Music Festival, Mrs Laughton, a travelling writing case.

* 'Mona Calluna' means Manx Heather in Manx Gaelic. Her father was referred to as the Rev William Hunt MA of Carnaween, Peel, in the *Manx Sun* of 09.06.1906; her mother was Harriet Jane Hester Hemmings Hunt. Her grandfather was Dr. Hilary Vane Hemmings, LL.D of Dublin University.

Sam was one of the artistes appearing at a London Manx Society Concert at Caxton Hall on 15th February 1910 under the patronage of Lady Raglan and Sir Robert and Lady Perks in aid of Ellan Vannin (Disaster) Fund, organised by Miss Mabel Corran of Douglas, all of whom gave their services free. Sam played three pieces by Grieg, Vieuxtemps and Bach's Air on a G String. *

* One of the few references to Sam at this period comes from a sale notice from the Chiswick Auctions of 9th Nov 2011, Lot 821: an autograph album of the son of Dr. Stephen Boyd which contains the autographs of Orry Corjeag, together with those of Ernest Shackelton and Robert Baden-Powell, the musical hall stars Vesta Tilley, Harry Lauder and Harry Vardon and author Rudyard Kipling.

Sam Robinson's military service during World War I was distinguished. He enlisted early, in November 1914, as a Private Soldier and in 1915 was attached to the 14th Battalion the Royal Sussex Regiment in training at Bexhill as a Sergeant Musketry Instructor. In July 1915 a daughter was born to Sam and Mona in Knightsbridge, London, and named Greeba Merula. Sam was wounded in 1916 and was released from hospital by March 1917 and

transferred to the Regimental Head Quarters in Newhaven as a Company Sergeant-Major. The local newspaper speculated that he might soon be made up to Lieutenant *

* *Ramsey Courier*, RC 30.03.1917. The nature of Sam's wounds is not known, but they were serious enough to affect his life to an extent thereafter and contribute to his early death.

Post-War

Sam Robinson largely disappears from the local newspapers after the war, and we learn of his subsequent career from comparatively few concert programmes, reviews and other official documents. In 1919 he became the conductor of the Carl Rosa Opera Company (founded in 1873) and conducted Verdi's *La Traviata*, Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* and Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffman* when on tour in Scotland. During a subsequent season of thirteen weeks the Company gave performances in Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, Greenock and Edinburgh, where he conducted performances of *Carmen*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Il Trovatore*, *Don Giovanni* and *Tannhäuser*. The *Glasgow Herald* of 15th December 1919 wrote: 'The orchestra played smoothly under the direction of Mr. Orry Corjeag who made the most of the few opportunities for grandiose effect that the score (*La Traviata*) allows.'

The 1921 England Census lists Orry and Mona Corjeag and their five-year-old daughter Greeba lodging with Edwin and Ellen Kirby at 6 North View Terrace, Bridlington, Yorkshire. Sam is described as a violinist employed by Bridlington Corporation with Maney's Orchestra.* Sometime during the 1920s Sam and Mona divorced, for reasons not recorded. Thereafter, Mona and Greeba essentially disappear from our story. **

* Possibly Edmund Maney, a violinist with the newly formed London Symphony orchestra in 1904, and later conductor of the Margate Municipal Orchestra.

** The 1939 England and Wales Register lists her as Mona C. Corjeag-Robinson, of 19 Oppidana Road, Hampstead, London, NW3, widowed and living from private means, together with her daughter Greeba Merula Corjeag-Robinson, spinster, a shorthand typist, and were still resident at that address at the time of her death in August 1956. Her estate was valued at the not inconsiderable sum of £7,370 1s 6d. Greeba died in Warsash, Hampshire, in August 1994 aged 79 years.

Sam was then associated with the British Symphony Orchestra,* probably as an occasional player, but by 1922 was once again with Carl Rosa as leader and soloist of the Carl Rosa Orchestra and may also have been a member of the London Symphony Orchestra under Beecham. He participated in a morning concert in Bournemouth as the guest soloist with the Station String Octet on Saturday 28th May 1927 which was broadcast on BBC Radio's 6BM station. He performed the Manx Air *The Sheep Under the Snow* and a set of variations by Vieuxtemps, and with two other soloists, the concerto for three violins by Vivaldi accompanied by Ernest Lush, piano. During 1923-24 Sam was associated with Frederick Hudson's production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* at the Old Vic for which he arranged a special performing edition for small theatre orchestra.

* This orchestra, founded in 1905, was conducted by Adrian Boult in the early 1920s. It disbanded in 1939.

At this period Sam was also a member of David de Groot's Piccadilly Orchestra of between six and ten players resident at the Piccadilly Hotel Grill Room. The string orchestra made several BBC Radio broadcasts and gramophone records.

At some stage during the 1920s Sam met the young 'cellist Dorothea (Dorothy) Marno and they married April-June 1931.*

* At the time of her marriage Dorothy, aged 26 years, was living at 87 West Street, Mitcham, in the Parish of Carshalton together with her mother, Ida, her brother Hubert and a sister, Barbara. Her father, Ludwig Johann Alfred Marno, then deceased, was born in Austria c. 1853, and became a naturalised British citizen 1893.

Whilst still a full-time music student Dorothy took part in four experimental broadcast radio transmissions inaugurated by a group of leading wireless manufactures including Marconi. They took place on 5th January 1922 to the first all-British Wireless Exhibition and Convention at the Horticultural Hall, Westminster. Dorothy played four pieces during two short recitals. Three further broadcasts followed that year and from November, there were daily broadcasts from Marconi's London studio (2LO) in the Strand, London.*

* The British Broadcasting Company was formed in October 1922 and became the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1927.

A thoroughly Manx occasion

In October 1931 Sam and Dorothy spent a few days on the island in Kirk Michael visiting his eighty-one-year-old father. Earlier that month Sam and Dorothy appeared at the Annual Liverpool Manx Society concert on Wednesday 7th October at the Central Hall together with Ada Mylchreest, Eileen, Lilian and Annie Pickard (Manx Music Festival prize winners), Lily Duggan, reciter, and John Christian, tenor, in the presence of the Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man. An instrumental trio consisting of himself, violin, Dorothy, 'cello and Therese van der Meerschen, piano, gave a recital including Sam's arrangements of Melodies by Schubert and popular operatic arias, and the *Tzigane* by Moretti. Dorothy played Saint-Saëns *The Swan* from *Carnival of Animals*. The recital, which featured many Manx traditional songs and poems, was preceded by an organ recital given by William Clegg FRCO of Douglas.

During 1931 and 1932 he was leader of the Alhambra Orchestra, Leicester Square, London, for Sir Oswald Stoll's production of Johann Strauss' *Waltzes of Vienna*. In December 1931 Sam was appointed conductor of the Worthing Municipal Orchestra, a position he held until May 1935. In January the Manx singer Norah Moore appeared with the orchestra for an afternoon and evening Sunday concert.*

* *Ramsey Courier* 04.11.1932.

Sam's father James died aged 86 on Sunday 16th February 1936 in Kirk Michael but Sam and Dorothy were not among the principal mourners according to the brief notice in the *Isle of Man Times*.*

* *Isle of Man Times*, 22.02.1936.

Sam Robinson, of Carshalton, Surrey, died in Surrey County Hospital on Wednesday 20th October 1937 where he was admitted in May the result of an illness contracted during WWI. The funeral took place in Croydon with representatives from Sadler's Wells Opera Company, New Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Society of Musicians and the Carl Rosa Opera Company.

Andreas, April 2025



PHOTO: The Hambourg String Quartet, Capetown 1908.

Jan Hambourg, Boris Hambourg, Orry Corjeac [sic.] and Eric Coates (left to right)

From *The Life and Music of Eric Coates*: Payne, Michael (Routledge 2012)