

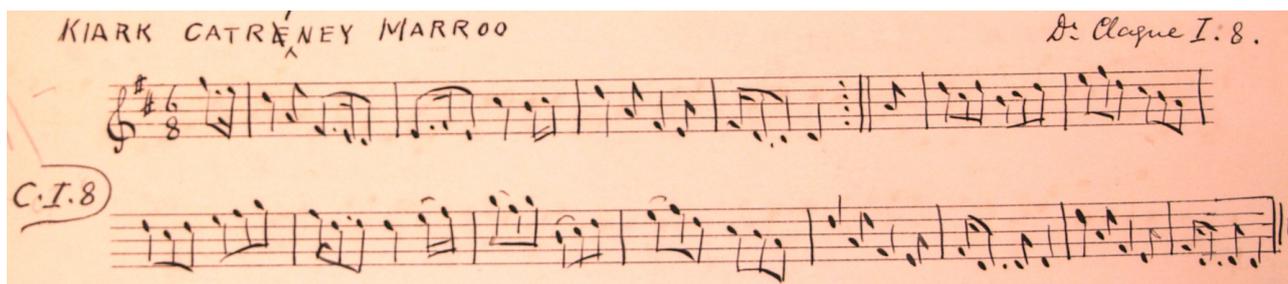
Histories and Mysteries – the secret life of traditional music in the Isle of Man

by David Speers

The tunes in the three manuscript music books that are part of the Clague Collection, held in the Manx Museum Archive, form the bulk of the traditional music recorded in the Isle of Man in the 1890's and earlier. There are other records of the tunes collected by Dr John Clague, W H Gill, Deemster Fred Gill, and others, in music books that appear to be mostly copies of the collections. One of the tunes in a copy owned by Deemster Gill is 'Kiark Catreney Marroo', below.

This is the tenth in this series of articles that sets out to explore some of the links between the traditional music collected in the Isle of Man and that found in Ireland and Britain, to discover some of the hidden histories behind our traditional music, and to show that the Island has produced beautiful music to match any found elsewhere.

Kiark Catreney Marroo / Catherine's Hen is Dead



Kiark Catrina Marroo from Deemster Gill's copy of the music collections (Copyright Manx National Heritage)

Unlike the previous tunes discussed so far in this series, the title: 'Kiark Catreney Marroo' does not relate to a 19th century ballad from Britain or Ireland. The title is from a verse sung at the fair on St Catherine's Day, 6th December, which used to be held in Arbory.

Various accounts tell of men meeting at the fair with a dead hen that they would carry solemnly through the crowds, held by the head and legs. The mock ceremony was concluded with the hen being buried and followed by much drinking, sometimes continuing on the next day. Those suffering from hangovers afterwards were said to have "plucked a feather of the hen".

The verse was sung in the Manx Gaelic (here with translation):

Kiark Catreney maroo,
Gow's y kione,
As goyrns ny cassyn,
As ver mayd ee fo'n thalloo.

*Catherine's hen is dead,
Take thou the head,
And I will take the feet,
And we will put her under ground.*

These words are given in A W Moore's *Manx Ballads and Music*, published in 1896; however, they appear with a different tune, shown below, to that shown above in Deemster Gill's book. This tune has no triplets and only seven bars. There are similarities between the two tunes. The mock-funeral song-tune in Moore uses the phrase that is repeated in the 'a' part and again at the end of the 'b' part of the tune in Gill's book.

The melodies of the two tunes are, then, clearly related. However, they don't have the same structure. The tune in Gill's book is in jig time, 6/8, with a four bar phrase repeated, giving eight bars (the 'a' tune), followed by another eight bars (the 'b' tune), making 16 bars in total.

This is different from the typical jig form in that the repeated four bars in the 'a' tune are more usually a variation of the first four (in this tune they are identical); and the same pattern is usually followed in the 'b' tune (in this tune the 'b' tune doesn't have two repeating phrases). Although these differences make the tune slightly unusual as a jig, its general form is common to most jigs in traditional dance music.

Kiark Katreeney Marroo (Katherine's Hen Is Dead).

Quickly.

Kiark Kat-reen - ey mar - roo; ...

Gow's y kione, As goym's ny cas-syn, As ver mayd ee io'n thal-loo....

Kiark Catreney Marroo from A W Moore's Manx Ballads and Music, 1896.

Another difference between the two tunes is the dotted notes in some of the triplets in the jig. These give different values to the notes in the triplets that jigs are based on, generally placing the stress on the first note in each triplet (that note being dotted).

However, four of the triplets are written with the *second* note dotted (stressed). The effect of this is to give a Scottish 'snap' sound. This might be significant, as we will see below.

This analysis raises a question: if Moore's tune takes its name from the song that accompanies it, how did that title become transferred back to the jig in Gill's book that the song tune is based on? The words can't be sung to the jig so it couldn't have acquired the title by being used for the song. One explanation may be that the previous name on the jig (whatever that was) became supplanted by the better known local name, connected to the Kiark Catreney custom. Another possibility is that the jig didn't have a name so it was named after the (related) song tune.

Did the jig in Gill's book have a life before it was collected in the Island and, if so, where did its journey take it?

In Scotland and the Borders the tune is known as: 'The Deuks/Ducks Dang o'er my Daddie' and it appears in several collections of tunes, both printed and in manuscript form. One early version is in

volume I of: 'A Selection of Scotch, English, Irish and Foreign *AIRS Adopted* [sic] to the FIFE, VIOLIN, or *GERMAN-FLUTE*, Printed and sold by JAMES AIRD', Glasgow, 1782, page 24. This version is almost identical to the jig in Gill's book. Its main difference is that the eight bar 'b' tune is repeated, making the structure asymmetrical. This asymmetry often indicates a tune's use for a particular dance, one requiring a certain number of bars to complete certain figures. Another point worth noting is that none of the notes in the triplets are dotted.



The Ducks dang o'er my Dadie, from Aird's Selection (courtesy of National Library of Scotland)

The tune is indeed used for a Scottish dance that goes by the same name. A video clip of this being performed can be found on the website of the Scottish Country Dance Dictionary (<http://www.scottish-country-dancing-dictionary.com/video/deuks-dang-ower-my-daddie.html>). Interestingly here, the 'b' part is not repeated on the first time through, but is on the second time. Also interesting, given that the tune and dance have the same name, is that after playing the tune through twice the musicians complete the dance by playing several other tunes in a set before returning to 'The Deuks Dang o'er my Daddie'.

Continuing the Scottish link, a two verse song using this tune was written by Robbie Burns. This was called: 'The Bairns Gat Out' and appears in various collections of his songs and poems, such as: 'The WORKS of ROBERT BURNS; with HIS LIFE by ALAN CUNNINGHAM', Volume II, London 1834. The notes given in the 'The Works' show that Burns based his lyric on an older, traditional song that would be thought too rude for contemporary standards.

The tune also appears in manuscript music collections belonging to local musicians in the Borders and Scotland, including the John Rook manuscript of 1840 (mentioned in the last article as containing several tunes that appear in the Manx collections), and the John Robson manuscript dating from 1870 (see below). The first of these collections is from Cumberland in the North West of England and the second from Northumberland in the North East.



'The Deuks Dang O'er my Daddie', from the John Robson manuscript, Northumberland, 1874, reproduced with the kind permission of the Gateshead Libraries.

Earlier manuscript versions of the tune are known, such as that of Henry Atkinson of Morpeth dated 1694. Some versions had different titles, such as: 'She Wants a Fellow' (maybe an allusion to the traditional song that pre-dated Burns' cleaned up 'The Bairns Gat Out'), 'The Retreat', and 'The Buff Coat Hath no Fellow'. This last title leads to an even earlier version of the tune, pre-dating all the Scottish, Borders and Manx examples, called the 'Buff Coat' and appearing in John Playford's 'The English Dancing Master', 1657 (see below).

The image shows a page from a handwritten manuscript. At the top, the title 'Buff-Coat' is written in cursive. Below it is a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written in a simple, rhythmic style. Below the first staff, the title 'The Buff Coat' is written in cursive. This is followed by another musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The page is aged and shows some wear. Below the musical notation, there are several lines of text providing dance instructions. The first line reads: 'Lead up all, back. That again, fall back, set every man to his own wo. The Duckin' Dang O'er my Daddie?'. The second line reads: 'The first cu. cast off into the 2. place, back again, Cross over with your own wo. into the 2. place, and give one clap with your hands, and turn your own wo. round. Do this to the left.'. The third line reads: 'The first man cast off, his wo. following him, then he takes the other wo. by the left-hand and leads her between his wo. and the other man galg round them into the same place, then he takes his own wo. and leads her up the middle, and both cast off, into the 2. place and turn her about. Do this to the left.'. The fourth line reads: 'The first man puts his wo. back into the 2. place, and back again.'.

The Buff Coat, an early version of Kiark Catreaney Marroo, from 'The English Dancing Master', 1657.

But, according to 'THE SCOTTISH MUSICAL MUSEUM; Consisting of Upwards OF SIX HUNDRED SONGS with PROPER BASES FOR THE PIANOFORTE', Volume IV, 1834 edition, the tune was 'probably introduced into England at the time of the 1603 Act of Union' and became popular enough to be picked up by Playford. The authors of the 'Musical Museum' also thought

that the ‘old Scottish name of the tune could not be generally, if at all, understood in England’, being the reason for the different title (possibly being what happened in the Isle of Man). The ‘Buff Coat’ may be a reference to the long leather coats worn by Cromwell’s soldiers (see: Folkopedia.efds.org). For the notation of some the variations of the tune under these other titles, see: tunesearch.org.

The jig we know as ‘Kiark Catreeney Marroo’ has a long history that takes it back in printed form to Playford’s time, in civil war England, with roots probably back to an independent Scotland. So, is it ‘Manx’?

Dr John Clague said in a letter to Deemster Fred Gill, dated 5th December, 1894:

“As to Kiark Catreeney Marroo” I think it is an old Gaelic tune and is as much Manx as it is Irish and Scotch. I have seen the tune in in a collection of Irish airs as well as of Scotch [sic] airs, the Irish title being “The Ducks Dang my Daddie” – the Scotch one “The Deucks Gang o’er my Daddie”. I believe that the “Kiark Catreeney Marroo” procession – by the bye tomorrow is the day for it – is one of the oldest of our national customs, much older than “Hunt the Wren” and the “White Boys”.

Of course, he was not differentiating here between the short song air that is derived from the jig. But he clearly means the jig, having the long lineage that takes it to three countries other than the Isle of Man. But his point was that it was played, and used, in the Island for a long time, became associated with local custom, and by that usage and association can be said to be a Manx traditional tune – regardless of its other roots.

The fact that it appears in other local musicians’ tune books, such as John Rook, and that they contain several other tunes that became established as Manx traditional tunes, points to a wide geographical circulation of such tunes (noted several times in this series). The fact that some other tunes in the same books are completely unknown in the Isle of Man indicates that personal preference also plays a part in what becomes a musical tradition.

As for the other questions that all this raises: how and when did the tune come to the Island? Was the Scottish name dropped because it was in Scottish dialect? Or did it become known in the Island under one of its other names? Or did it have a different name altogether? When did the jig become appropriated and adapted for the custom of Kiark Catreeney Marroo?

Finally, Kiark Catreeney Marroo is generally assumed to be from the main body of the Manx collections, being the three books these articles have concentrated on so far. However, this is not the case. The tune that appears in Deemster Gill’s book is the *only* version that hasn’t been arranged (an arrangement of the tune does appear in the fourth manuscript book, mentioned previously in this series). Deemster Gill’s book is thought to be a copy of material in Dr Clague’s collection and this seems to be confirmed by the references: “C.I.8”, and “Dr Clague I.8” that appear on his copy (shown at the beginning of this article). The references are presumably to a location where the tune was copied from: tune 8, folio or section I?

These are more questions and Mysteries raised by the Histories of these tunes.

Acknowledgments

Manx National Heritage for the image of 'Kiark Catreeney Marroo', from the Clague MS.

The Gateshead Libraries for the image of 'The Deuks Dang O'er my Daddie', from the John Robson manuscript, Northumberland, 1874.

The National Library of Scotland for the image of 'The Ducks dang o'er my Dadie', from Aird's 'Selection', 1782.

David Speers is the author of Manx Traditional Music for Sessions, which discusses history and revival of Manx traditional music and dance (available from the Manx National Heritage Bookshop, manxheritageshop.com). If you wish to contact the author about anything in these articles please email: manx_trad_music@yahoo.com