

## Frank Dean

### The Manxman who wrote the most famous song in the World

by

**Maurice Powell**

The song in question is *A Bicycle Made for Two*<sup>1</sup>, popularly known as *Daisy Bell*, one of the best-known music hall songs ever written, and for many, the song that defines the music hall era. There can be few people over the age of forty who cannot hum, whistle or sing the first line of the chorus: *Dai-sy, Dai-sy, give me your answer do*.

Frank Dean, who, under the pen-name Harry Dacre,<sup>2</sup> wrote the words and music of *Daisy Bell*, was born in Douglas in 1857, 'the son of a Douglas hotel keeper',<sup>3</sup> and baptised on 6<sup>th</sup> September at St. Thomas' Church.<sup>4</sup> However, despite the world-wide fame of his song, and his successful career as a song-writer and music publisher, he cannot be regarded as a true 'Manx Musical Worthy'. His parents came to the Island from Manchester; he lived here for barely four years as a small child, and I have uncovered no evidence that he ever returned to the place of his birth, either for business reasons or for a holiday.

By the early 1860s the family, consisting of his father Randle Dean, his wife Elizabeth, three daughters and three sons of which Frank was the youngest, were living at number 4, Tennant Street, Chorlton-upon-Medlock, a middle-class district to the south of Manchester city centre. By the time of the 1881 England Census, Frank, then aged 23, was boarding at number 25, Kirby Street, Ancoats, Manchester,<sup>5</sup> the home of Joseph Bowker, shop keeper, and his wife, and was described as a 'dramatic author', presumably a euphemism for song writer.

#### **Frank Dean becomes Harry Dacre**

Harry Dacre's first big hit was *The Ghost of Benjamin Binns* written for Harry Randall who first sung it in 1885, but he claimed to have written between 600 and 700 songs in a period of two years at this time! The strain of such prolific – one might almost say frenzied - song writing affected his health so much that he emigrated to Australia for four years.

Ten years later in 1891 the family, comprising thirty-three-year old Frank, Randle Dean, aged 68 years, Elizabeth Dean, aged 66, were living at number 23, St. Peter's Square, Preston, near the imposing St. Peter's Anglican Church, and he was said to be 'living on (his) own means'. In 1895 he set up the music publishing business Frank Dean and Co. at 31 Castle Street, Oxford Street, London, and was residing at number 48, Westmoreland Mansions, New Cavendish Street, Marylebone, London, together with a boarder, Frank Adlam, described as an 'assistant worker' to Frank Dean, and a female domestic servant. His mother Elizabeth died in 1903 leaving him 'all residuary estate absolutely, after payment of legacy and annuities to siblings'.

Around the turn of the century he suddenly withdrew from the music publishing business because of the pernicious activities of 'pirates' illegally copying, printing and selling song sheets cheaply. After a new Music Copyright Act received Royal Assent in 1906, he resumed

his publishing career and continued to prosper. By the time of the 1911 census the two Franks, music publisher, and 'professor of music', had moved to number 1, Langham Street in fashionable Fitzrovia, London W.1. Frank Dean died on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1922 at number 7, Riding House Street, Marylebone, London, a short distance from Langham Street, aged 65.<sup>6</sup> He never married.

### ***Daisy Bell***

It was in 1892 that Harry Dacre travelled to America, and either took *Daisy Bell* with him, or wrote the song in New York. Whatever the case, there is no need to question the veracity of the well-known anecdote about the song's origin. Harry Dacre apparently took a bicycle with him to America but was dismayed to be charged customs duty upon his arrival. When expressing his annoyance to a friend he was told that 'he was lucky he had not brought a "bicycle built for two" with him', a remark that gave rise to the famous line in the song.<sup>7</sup> He eventually persuaded the serio-comic Katie Lawrence to introduce the song into her act at the 'father of vaudeville' Tony Pastor's theatre in New York that year, and she subsequently brought the song to England.<sup>8</sup> She later maintained that although she took to the song instantly, it did not immediately catch on in London nor in the Provinces. However, when she heard the tune being whistled at a railway station she realised that it had in fact 'caught on'. The rest, as they say, is history.<sup>9</sup>

It is generally acknowledged that the iconic song, in a gentle waltz tempo, whose verses are sprinkled with gentle puns and with an easy-to-remember chorus, was also inspired by the life and character of Frances Evelyn Maynard (known as Daisy), who married Francis Greville, Lord Brooke, later the Earl of Warwick, the year of its publication in 1892. A celebrated hostess and socialite, she conducted affairs with several influential men, and for nearly a decade was the 'Royal favourite' of Edward, Prince of Wales.

What is perhaps not so well known is the fact that in 1895 *Daisy Bell* was the subject of a court case involving a dispute over copyright. Katie Lawrence, who had purchased from Harry Dacre, claimed that the Blackpool Winter Gardens and Pavilion were guilty of over 300 infringements of her 'sole right and liberty of performing the song in Great Britain', because it had been sung there during a pantomime season. She sued the Winter Gardens arguing that the song was a 'dramatic piece' within the meaning of the Copyright Act.<sup>10</sup> Lord Justice Smith of the Queen's Bench disagreed and adjudicated that *Daisy Bell* was nothing more than 'a mere, common, ordinary music hall song', and not a dramatic piece, 'otherwise every boy in the street who sung it would be liable to be proceeded against . . .'

Katie Lawrence appeared only once in Douglas, during August Bank Holiday week 1894. The *Manx Sun*<sup>11</sup> announced her forthcoming engagement as the 'Expensive Engagement of Miss Katie Lawrence, The Star Comedienne of "Daisy Bell" fame'. That week was a propitious one to be on holiday in Douglas as G. H. Chirgwin, 'The White-eyed Kaffir', was on the same bill at the Palace, Marie Lloyd, Harry Randall and Cinquevalli were appearing at the Derby Castle and Marie Loftus at the Falcon Cliff. Katie Lawrence 'created a furore with four tricky songs, sung in bewitching character costumes, and showed distinguished ability both in sentimental and comic singing'.<sup>12</sup> A subsequent review described her as 'a dashing

comedienne and character vocalist, whose winning style and catchy songs make her an undoubted favourite'. Her songs were not named, but we can be sure that *Daisy Bell* was one of the sentimental ones.

### **After *Daisy Bell***

In the inevitable sequel, entitled *Fare You Well, Daisy Bell* of 1894, Daisy Bell bids farewell to her beau after apparently taking offense in verse 1 of the original song to the reference to the 'wheel for two', and objecting in verse 2 to 'a tandem wheel creating a sensation'. Clearly "'Ped'ling" away down the road of life', being 'the bell(e) which I'll ring', and even being invited to 'take the "lead" in each "trip" we take' held little attraction for the thoroughly modern Miss Bell. The prospects of an 'unstylish marriage' and having to make do 'without a carriage', was enough to give her pause for thought, leaving her hapless suitor to lament:

*Fare-you-well, Daisy Bell, I will ride alone.*

*Fare-you-well, sweetheart, thus we have to part.*

*Say goodbye, do not cry when your lover's gone,*

*Now I mean to have a machine especially built for one.*

The sequel did not 'take' as well as the original, and Harry Dacre's other hit songs, including *I'll be Your Sweetheart*, *Elsie from Chelsea* and *As Your Hair Grows Whiter* are barely remembered today. The front cover of the Francis, Day & Hunter edition of 1894 shows Harry Dacre himself seated on a bicycle with the inscription: 'Yours fin de cycle'.

There is actually very little more to be learned about the career of Harry Dacre from the Isle of Man newspapers. His plantation song *I can't think ob nuthin' else but you, Lulu*, (1896) was sung at the Ladies Amateur Banjo and Mandoline Orchestra concert at the Grand Theatre in 1898. In 1902 *Goodbye Mignonette* was apparently 'in vogue in Douglas', and in 1904 some of the music Harry Wood arranged for the Manx pantomime *Babe's in the Wood* was utilised by arrangement with Frank Dean & Co., amongst others. In 1910 the song *Return* was sung by Mr. Fred Wilson at a Lord Mayor's reception for the Royal Society of Antiquities of Ireland at Douglas town hall, and Bert Grapho's pantomime *Beauty and the Beast*, produced at the Grand Theatre in February and December 1914, featured songs selected from Frank Dean & Co's publications.

There is still much to be discovered about the life and career of Frank Dean/Harry Dacre, particularly the years he spent in Australia and America, but further research is beyond the scope of this modest piece.

### **Notes**

1. The edition published by Francis, Day & Hunter says *A Bicycle Built for Two*. *Daisy Bell* may even have been inspired by, or have inspired, another song entitled *Sarah, Sarah* or *A Donkey Cart Made for Two* by Harry Bedford of uncertain date, popularised by Kate Carney. The first line of the chorus is as follows: *Sarah, Sarah, make up your mind now, do*.

2. Sometimes referred to as Henry Decker, which in the absence of further information, I tentatively suggest was an American *nom de plume*.

3. *IoMT* 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 1902. The 1851 England Census states that Randle Girvin (Girven) Dean (1822- 92), a commercial traveller, born in Ardwick, Manchester, was living in Chorlton-upon-Medlock; his marriage certificate dated 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1842, described him as a book keeper resident in Pendleton; the 1861 England Census describes him as a 'proprietor of houses'; he died in Preston. Elizabeth Dean née Bond (1824-1903), also born in Manchester, died in Holland Park, London.

4. Isle of Man, Select Births and Baptisms, 1821-1911

5. 'The world's first industrial suburb' was a thriving industrial area of, cotton mills, foundries and glass manufacturers, known as Ancoats Little Italy after it was settled by immigrants from Liguria.

6. England and Wales National Probate Calendar for 1922. Probate was granted to Frank Adlam, music publisher's manager, and Dora Hannah Coombs, spinster. The estate was valued at £7670 10s 6d.

7. See Richard Anthony Baker, *British Music Hall, an Illustrated History*, Pan & Sword History, 2014.

8. Katie Lawrence (1868-1913) enjoyed her greatest success with *Daisy Bell*, and at the height of her fame lived in a grand house in London's Regent's Park. Her fame was short-lived; her career went into a sad, slow decline during the decade before WWI, and she died in poverty and obscurity in Birmingham.

9. *Encore*, 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1895, cited in Richard Anthony Baker, *British Music Hall, and Illustrated History*, above.

10. Fuller v Blackpool Winter Gardens and Pavilion. Katie Lawrence's husband was George Fuller.

11. *Manx Sun*, 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> August, 1894.

12. *IoMT* 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1894.

## Sources

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