

'Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?'

By Maurice Powell, 2017

This is the second of three articles about the music hall songs from the heyday of the Island's entertainment industry.¹ In the decades before and just after World War I the 'Kelly' songs contributed to the spread of the Island's name, image and reputation as one of the most vibrant and popular holiday venues, but with the exception of *Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly*, the 'Kelly' songs are little-known today.

This first official 'Kelly' song associated with the Isle of Man was *Kelly the Carmen*, written and composed by C.W. Murphy² in 1898 for the popular Lancashire comedian Lester Barrett, and was 'the rage of Douglas'.³ The song introduces a different character from 'Kelly the Boatman' who featured in Oliver Gaggs' *Hi! Kelly!* vocal polka of 1887: a certain Casey from Cork who, after spending some years in New York, returns home and attempts to find his friend Martin Kelly - the name Martin does not appear in any other 'Kelly' song - only to be told, 'Why Kelly's in the Isle of Man, I'll swear'.

When Casey arrived in Douglas he found that:

There was Kelly the carman, Kelly the sailor, Kelly the barman, Kelly the tailor . . .

Kellys . . . in millions, billions! Kellys short and tall,

But he couldn't find the Kelly he was looking for at all.

Kelly was, and still is, a common surname on the Island⁴ and Casey soon discovered that there were 'Kellys to the left of him, and Kellys to the right!' Indeed, there were as many Kellys' in Douglas as there might be Joneses in a Welsh village: Jones the post, Jones the schoolteacher, Jones the coal and so forth.

Casey advertises in the newspapers and was overwhelmed by Kellys beating a path to his door - including a 'friendly German Jew, who had the cheek to tell him that *his* name was Kelly too!' - that he began to be haunted by Kellys in his dreams. Eventually 'sure, his mind at last gave way', the final straw being taken by 'Policeman Kelly' to see a doctor - whose name was, unsurprisingly, 'Kelly' - who decided that the poor man was suffering from 'a chronic bout of Kelly on the brain'.

Neither Martin Kelly nor the hapless Casey were from the Isle of Man, therefore, despite *Kelly the Carman* being one of the best of all Kelly songs, it cannot be regarded as the first 'Kelly from the Isle of Man' song.

A decade later in 1908 C.W. Murphy and Will Letters penned the most popular and enduring Kelly song of them all, *Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?* for Florrie Forde.⁵ The catchy 'K-E-double L -Y' in the chorus not only ensured that the song soon became one of Forde's signature songs, but helped perpetuate the 'Kelly from the Isle of Man' brand into the Edwardian era and beyond.

Despite the fact that C. W. Murphy had a hand in both songs, there is no suggestion that the Kelly of 1898 and Kelly from the Isle of Man in 1908 are one and the same character. The story has a theme familiar in many music hall songs: a disreputable young man deserts his girl. In this case Kelly and his sweetheart from the Isle of Man decide to go to London. Inevitably they become separated in the metropolis, 'up Piccadilly way', and she begins to search high and low asking everyone she meets:

Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?

K-E-double L-Y.

Has anybody here seen Kelly?

Find him if you can.

He's as bad as old Antonio,⁶

Left me on my ownio.

Has anybody here seen Kelly?

Kelly from the Isle of Man.

In verse two we learn that not only has Kelly got the return travel tickets but 'her spending money too'. Her wanderings lead her to the Houses of Parliament whereupon a group of Suffragettes, assuming she is one of them, 'chained her to the grille'. In the final verse Kelly's girl evades 'the gentlemen in blue' and, after 'making for the zoo', finally arrives at Madame Tussaud's Waxworks Show anticipating that she might find Kelly there, perhaps in the Chamber of Horrors!

Florrie Forde often sang her own variant of the chorus:

Has anybody here seen Florrie?

F. O. R. D. E.

Has anybody here seen Florrie?

Find her if you can.

She's not all skin and bone-e- o,⁷

And you bet it's all her own-e-o.

Has anybody here seen Florrie? (What Florrie?)

Florrie from the Isle of Man.

From this song and its sequels - none of which achieved the popularity of the original - we learn that Kelly's exploits took place not on the Isle of Man itself where he couldn't have remained elusive for long, but in London. Whoever he may have been: opportunistic young 'masher', 'Jack-the-Lad' or likeable rogue with a twinkle in his eye, he was certainly no Edwardian young lady's steadfast 'best beau!'.

Although it was billed as 'a bigger hit than *Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly*', *Kelly's Gone to Kingdom Come*, c. 1910, with lyrics by Sax Rohmer - the author of the Fu Manchu books and the comic songs *The Pigtail of Li Fang Fu* and *Bang Went the Chance of a Lifetime* - with music by T.W.Thurban, does not continue the saga of 'Kelly from the Isle of Man'. Popularised by Maud Lambert, 'The Queen of Song', and introduced into Lew Field's 1909 Broadway musical comedy *The Midnight Sons*, this promising-sounding sequel tells the exploits of a would-be flying ace named Kelly from Ballashelley who disappeared when attempting to fly the English Channel from Calais: 'I'll knock their records silly, for I'll cross the Irish Sea' he boasted, but there is no reference to the Isle of Man in the song.

The success of *Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly* soon gave rise to a genuine sequel, *They Can't Find Kelly*, written, performed and recorded by Billy Merson in 1911.⁸

Verse I:

Now in these scientific days

It seems to be the latest craze

To make some great discovery with which to make a stir etc

Chorus:

Cook and Peary found the pole, if their reports are true.⁹

Another man has also found what radium can do.¹⁰

To fly around up in the air they've also formed a plan,

But they can't find Kelly from the Isle of Man.

Verse II:

To find him they're trying hard,

Why, all the force from Scotland Yard

Are searching all the country through, in hopes to bring him back etc

The services of Sherlock Homes, Sexton Blake¹¹ and a dozen bloodhounds are engaged together with the enticement of 'a big reward'.

Merson introduced some characteristic 'patter' into his performances:

Fancy a little fellow in the Isle of Man baffling all these people and putting the whole world in - in mystery . . . I'll bet they haven't searched all the public houses. Ha ha!

Further sequels were inevitable, and in 1911 Billy Williams, the Australian music hall star known as 'The Man in the Velvet Suit',¹² recorded *I've Found Kelly* which he co-wrote with William Hargreaves.

Verse 1:

Since Kelly left the Isle of Man and split up from his girl,

They've looked for him you know,

All round the blessed show.

But he has vanished like the frost, beneath the scorching sun,

And Kelly now is suffering for the wrong he's gone and done.

His poor girl's heart is broken

And she's searched both far and near.

But K-E-double L-Y is not very far from here.

Chorus:

I've found Kelly, with a girl named Nellie,

Bowling down the strand upon the sly,

Kelly's left his betters, he's as warm as those two letters,

That separate the K from the ('Y') Why!

Verse II:

The way he missed his sweetheart will a mystery still remain,

They'll never make it clear but I have an idea.

The most peculiar thing is when you're Piccadilly way,

A fellow and his sweetheart always seem to go astray.¹³

He knew the place to lose her, that you may be sure,

Which only goes to prove that he's been round that way before.

Verse III:

Now Kelly was a fisherman, that fact was little known,¹⁴

And London if you wish, is a place to go and fish.

Especially in that stream that runs through Leicester Square at night,

If you possess the right bait well you're certain of a bite.

They say he's with Antonio yes even his sweetheart,

But he prefers a pretty ankle to the ice cream cart.¹⁵

In one recording Williams interpolates a short 'patter' and a slow, mournful reminiscence of *Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?* after the final chorus, the tune of which is almost identical to that of the earlier song.

Meet Me in Kelly Land was published by Francis, Day & Hunter in their sixpenny popular edition, 1911, with words and music by C. W. Murphy and Worton David. Made popular by Florrie Forde, this song does not continue the exploits of 'Kelly from the Isle of Man' but rather tells of the adventures of an odd assortment of characters who visit the Island.

Verse I:

Johnson, who lived far away,

To his sweetheart wrote to say,

'For our holidays where shall we go?

Let me know at once, my sweet,

Just the place where we shall meet,

Somewhere by the sea, darling Flo'.

Flo thought of the Isle of Man, where she had been last year,

Remember'd all the 'spooning', then replied 'Oh! Charlie dear!'

Chorus:

Meet me in Kelly-land, meet me in Kellyland.

Where the boys all love to have a fling,

And the girls all sing 'Oh, Flanagan!'

Meet me in Kellyland, in the moonlight we'll roam;

You can do a lot of things in Kellyland,

You can't do at Home, Sweet Home.

Verse two tells of Simpson who met a ghost who a dozen years before had been his intended bride. 'We shall meet again' she told him; not here he said, 'the wife might get to know'. 'Meet me in Kellyland . . .'

In verse three, Burglar Bill from his prison cell tells his sweetheart not to visit him in prison 'For Winston Churchill's given us all a fortnight's holiday', so 'Meet me in Kellyland . . .'¹⁶

There are two extra encore verses, the first concerning Tommy and his Mary Anne, both Manx cats, who roam the roof tiles at night, but decide that the following evening, tired of meeting at the same old chimney pot, they'll 'Meet in Kellyland . . .' The second additional verse concerns the villain of a drama 'Bertie White' who murders his girl's father and arranges

to meet her at the Old Cross Roads to decide her fate. She replies: 'Don't be silly, dear, we must be up to date' . . . Meet me in Kellyland . . .'

A saucy postcard of the period sent from Douglas to Leicester in August 1911, has the following quotation from the chorus under the picture which shows a young 'masher' chatting up a pretty girl whose pet dog has a very 'knowing' expression:

You can do lots of things in Kelly-Land that you can't do at Home, Sweet Home.

I'm Off to Kelly's Isle and *Mr Kelly's Isle* c. 1914, may be one-and-the-same song. Published by Bert Feldman & Co., written by Tom Mellor, Harry Gifford and Fred Godfrey, famous for his Irish songs and World War I morale boosters such as *Bless 'em all* and *Take me Back to Dear Old Blighty*. Florrie Forde apparently recorded the song for the Zonophone label in April 1914, but it was a poor 'take', and was not released. Although the song was popular in Douglas she never recorded it again in later life. It was just one of many Fred Godfrey songs sung by Florrie Forde including *Hello! There, Flanagan* and *Come and do the Kelly Two-step*.

The first post-war sequel was *Kelly's Come Back to the Isle of Man*, written and composed in 1919 by Harry Carlton and Jay Whidden, published by Bert Feldman & Co., and sung by S. W. Wyndham and Florrie Forde.

Verse 1:

Now I've got a bit of news for that's bound to raise a smile,
About that great celebrity upon that famous Isle.
It's official information, and the censor's let it through,
So keep your seats while I report the glad news unto you.

Chorus

Kelly's come back to the Isle of Man, so we're alright!
Let's be gay, Hip pip hooray!
Good old Kelly's come home today.
Hello! Hello! Shout with all you might (whoops!).
Kelly's come back to the Isle of Man so we're alright!

Verse II:

In the wilds of Portland prison, all the little convicts there,
Were grumbling at the warders at their scanty prison fare.
They were tired of 'Aqua Pura' and their little lumps of bread,
Till convict ninety-nine rushed in with half a ham and said:

In verse III 'a score of merry V.A.Ds and WAACs' abandon their trip to America in search of husbands because of the news of Kelly's return.

In verse IV Neptune announces the glad tidings to 'five-and-twenty Mermaids' who are languishing beneath the waves, harassed by German submarines: 'Now girls, come on, come on, pull up your socks'.

In verse V 'a little Quaker parson' at 'a little Quaker meeting house' is moved to make Kelly's return the subject of his sermon.

There is a hint of *Hello! Hello! Who's your lady friend* in the tune of the chorus, and references to German submarines, the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps and the Voluntary Aid Detachment¹⁷ pinpoint this as a post-war song.

Kelly, I'm Glad to See You Back is another post-war sequel written by John Neat and John P. Harrington about 1919:

Verse 1:

Kelly left the Isle of Man when fighting first began,

In the battle van, he went as a fighting man.

Comes the day he got demobbed and put on civvy clothes,

Though he was a private, still the general cry arose.

Chorus:

Kelly, Kelly, I'm glad to see you back,

You're looking just as larky as when you dressed in khaki.

Beware the girls on Onchan/Douglas Head

They'll catch you if they can.

K-E double L-Y is back on the Isle of Man.

Verse II:

Kelly felt more nervous than he did mid war's alarms,

Girlies full of charms, were busy presenting arms.

He said, 'Sure I can't fall in, I've got a man to meet',

Then this chorus started as they cut off his retreat.

Verse III:

Kelly blushed all over and he seemed to lose his pluck,

When one dear old duck said, 'Kiss him all round for luck'.

Through the streets poor Kelly fled before the enemy,
Half the Isle of Man behind him shouting out in glee.

In *Kelly's Got Married Today*, with words and music by Harry Carlton, published by Bert Feldman & Co., and recorded by Florrie Forde in 1920, the song begs the question: did Kelly make an honest woman of his girl of 1908, or is his Mona's Maid a fresh conquest?

Verse 1 begins:

When Kelly returned to the Isle of Man, about a year ago.

He met with a sweet little Mona's maid,

And said he loved her so.

The Chorus begins:

Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! Kelly's got married today, today.

Jump for Joy. Jump for Joy,

First a girl, then a bouncing boy.

We'll dance the hours away, 'til next St. Patrick's Day.

Singing Kelly's got married today. Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!

With this song the Kelly saga ends,¹⁸ and although Florrie Forde continued to include her Kelly songs into her act in the years immediately after World War I, with the exception of *Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly*, she gradually dropped them from her repertoire during the 1920s.

Notes

1. Maurice Powell, *The Origins of Hi! Kelly*, Kiuall Manninagh Jiu, manxmusic.com, 2017.
2. Clarence Wainwright Murphy, also known as Charles William Murphy, 1875-1913, wrote or co-wrote many of the most popular music hall songs heard in Douglas in the decades before World War I, including Florrie Forde's *Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly*, *Meet Me in Kellyland*, *Oh! Oh! Antonio* and *Flanagan*.
3. Lester Barrett (1855-1924), real name Stephen Barrett, who appeared many times in Douglas during the 1880s and '90s, wrote and performed a number of 'Irish' music hall songs including *Delaney's Chicken* and *Hooligan's Mule*. *Mulligan's Motor Car* was written for him by C. W. Murphy.
4. Maurice Powell, *ibid*.
5. The song was soon incorporated into the musical *The Jolly Bachelors* on Broadway in 1910 with lyrics adapted by William McKenna to tell the story of *Kelly from the Emerald Isle* from County Cork who landed in New York!
6. A reference to her hit song of 1908 *Oh! Oh! Antonio*.

7. A reference to her ample proportions. Florrie Forde was a petite 7st 2lbs in 1900, but ballooned to around 16st by 1922.
8. Nottingham-born Merson's best-known song was *The Spaniard That Blighted My Life*. After a career as a music hall star he ventured successfully into pantomime and revue.
9. Robert E. Peary reached the North Pole in April 1909, but Dr Frederick A. Cook claimed to have reached it a year earlier, in April 1908.
10. Discovered in 1898 by Marie and Pierre Curie.
11. The fictional detective created by Hal Meredith who first appeared in *The Missing Millionaire* in 1893.
12. Born Richard Isaac Banks in Melbourne in 1878 of Irish and Scottish parents. His most enduring song was *When Father Papered the Parlour*, 1910.
13. A reference to Kelly and his girl becoming separated 'up Piccadilly way' in *Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?*
14. This could be a reference to the Kelly of Oliver Gagg's *Hi! Kelly* Polka.
15. The reference to Antonio in verse III suggests that he was the Italian ice cream vendor from Florrie Forde's *Oh Oh Antonio*, which tells the touching story of an Italian hurdy-gurdy player, deserted by her sweetheart who searches 'for her ice cream man' until she fades away. Ice cream carts were a familiar sight in many cities from the 1860s when poor Italian immigrants became associated with the production of ice cream but could not afford to rent shops.
16. A reference to the welfare and labour reforms instigated by the Liberals from 1906, of whom Churchill at the Board of Trade was a rising star.
17. The WAAC was founded July 1917 with the aim that 'women should have some role in the war'. Over 57,000 women served between 1917 and '18. The VAD was founded in 1909 to provide field nursing services mainly in hospitals.
18. Other 'Kelly' songs, but not Kelly from the Isle of Man songs, include: *The Kellys Are At It Again*, written by J. Northworth and Harry Williams, published by the Harry Williams Music Company, New York, and recorded c. 1908 by Florrie Forde. It was a hit song from *The Widow by Proxy* originally sung by May Irwin, concerning an argumentative Harlem couple; *Pretty Kitty Kelly* by Edward G. Nelson and Harry Peas. c. 1920 and recorded by Florrie Forde in 1931. Kitty Kelly is 'a sweet little colleen . . . somewhere in Ireland' who refuses to 'name the day'; *Little Nora Kelly*, written and composed by Will Fieldhouse and published by Francis, Day & Hunter c. 1906. Perhaps the strangest manifestation of *Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?* occurs in the opening scene of Havergal Brian's 1917 opera *The Tigers*, based on his experiences as a raw recruit at the start of World War I, where the slightly adapted tune appears as the theme of a set of variations.