

Manuscript Irish Music in the Library of the

Royal Irish Academy

By

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The collection of Irish music in the library of the Royal Irish Academy comprises nineteen manuscripts consisting entirely of Irish music, and seven manuscripts which consist chiefly of material in Irish and English, relating to the antiquities, history and literature of Ireland, but which also contain some Irish airs and articles on Irish music. All of these manuscripts date from the 19th century, except one which is of the 18th century. But a great number of the airs recorded in them, which were taken down in various parts of Ireland from traditional players and singers during the 19th century, date from earlier periods, some from the 17th and 18th centuries, having been handed down from one generation of traditional musicians to another. I will first deal briefly with the lesser items in the collection, leaving to the last the description of the one considerable collection of Irish music in the Academy's library, namely that known as the Forde-Pigot collection.

MS 3 D 8/32

This is part of a collection of autograph letters, bearing the title 'Autograph letters of celebrities' and having the shelf-number 3 D 8. Item No. 32 in this box has the following note in manuscript: 'Moore the poet: a well-known Irish melody, music and words in his own handwriting, a very rare specimen'. This is a single sheet of music, at the left side of which is a printed note — 'Moore, Thomas, Poet. Autograph poetry and music'. The melody is one of Moore's Irish melodies, entitled 'The Fortune-teller' to the air of 'Open the door softly' and commencing 'Down in the valley come meet me to-night'. The music and words of the first two verses are given. There is no instrumental

¹ This text was published in Aloys Fleischmann (ed.), *Music in Ireland: a symposium*, (Cork & Oxford, 1952) and is reproduced here by kind permission of Cork University Press, June 2008. Ms Caitlin Bonfield later became Librarian to the Academy, serving in that capacity until her retirement in 1969.

arrangement. At the top of the sheet the date 'Oct. 5 1820' is written in Moore's handwriting: also, to the left of the air he has written the words 'significantly in moderate time'.

MS 23 A 13

This little manuscript in the Irish language contains a few pieces of Irish music. The manuscript is described as follows in the *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*,² Fasc. 8, p.975, No. 356: 'Modern verse: music: 19th century ... The manuscript is the work of various scribes: it is somewhat fragmentary and in poor preservation and is partially illegible owing to rubbing and discolouration'.

On p.21 there is some music, possibly 'The Spanish patriot', this title being written half-way down the page. Parts of the music are illegible. On p.23 occurs the air 'Lord Seaford's reel', and on p.24 a piece of music entitled 'A Waltz' and 'Lord Hume's reel', which is in waltz time. There are no words or instrumental arrangements accompanying any of these airs.

MS 23 O 47

Described in the *Cat. Ir. Mss in RIA*, Fasc. 14, p.1756, No. 569. It is a miscellaneous nineteenth-century paper manuscript containing 228 pages, with the words 'Songs, Nursery Rhymes, etc. R.I.A.' in gilt letters on the back.

The manuscript is in the nature of a scrap-book of letters, songs, etc., mainly in connection with *The Nation* newspaper. Among other items it contains on p.205 a letter from 'T.D.' (Thomas Davis) to W.E. Hudson about Irish songs, and on p.209 a letter from John Edward Pigot on the same subject.

² Hereafter referred to as *Cat. Ir. Mss in RIA*.

MS 12 Q 13

This is a nineteenth-century paper manuscript, a large volume of nearly 300 pages, containing essays by three contributors on the state of the Irish language and literature. During the years 1873-76 the Council of the Academy offered monetary prizes, open to general competition, for reports on the Irish language and literature, written and unwritten, in the provinces of Munster, Connacht, Ulster and Leinster. After the prizes had been awarded the reports were deposited in the library of the Academy, where they are now bound together in MS 12 Q 13.

One of these reports, which was awarded a prize of £20 for the knowledge and industry displayed by its author, contains a section on Irish music, with many specimens of Irish airs collected by the writer. This was the report of 91 pages entitled 'Essay on the present state of the Irish language and literature in the province of Ulster' by Francis Keane, 20 Newcomen Avenue, North Strand, Dublin, dated 1st March, 1876.

The section of the essay devoted to 'Songs in Irish' extends over 13 pages (pp.33-45). Under the heading 'Ancient Music of Ireland' the writer sets down 26 Irish airs, collected by himself in Ulster and elsewhere, and which he believes to have never before been published. But at least some of the airs had been previously published. There are pencil notes in a different hand against some of the airs, noting them as having been published in the collections of Bunting, Petrie, etc.

Another portion of the essay, pp.59-68, deals with the singing of dialogues in Irish, of which the writer gives the following account: 'These dialogues are sung in parts by the women, in Ulster and in parts of West Munster, whilst spinning, knitting and sewing, to some curious old Irish airs. The women assemble by appointment in certain houses to discharge the '*cómhar*' or mutual co-operation which they have agreed upon; but, in all cases, the work is cheerfully accompanied by a musical dialogue, one commencing the dialogue, another replying, usually with the intervention of a chorus ...' He follows this account with nine specimens of the dialogues and the ancient airs to which they are sung. Some of these songs are very popular at the present day, e.g. '*Im bím báboró*

is oró a ghrádh’, in seven stanzas, followed by the air on pp.61-62. The last example is a milking song, ‘*Crónán na bó*’, six stanzas followed by the air, on pp.67-68.

The essay has also a short section on ‘*Caoineadh*’ or funeral laments with specimens of ‘*caoineadh*’ in Irish, the music of which the writer states to be very ancient. As a specimen of a ‘*caoineadh*’ he gives an old march called ‘Alasdrum’s March’, which commemorates the slaying at the Battle of Knockanass in the year 1647 of Alasdrum MacDomhnaill of Antrim by Lord Inchiquin. This is a well-known martial air, and is to be found in most Irish musical collections under the title of ‘MacAlasdrum’s March’.

MSS 12 C 1-2 and 23 H 10

The next three manuscripts containing Irish airs belong to the Windele Collection.³ This is a collection formed by John Windele, Irish antiquary, who lived in Cork city from 1801 to 1865. From his early boyhood Windele showed an intense love for the language, literature, antiquities and music of his native land, and during his lifetime amassed a considerable collection of manuscripts, many of them in his own hand.

After his death in 1865 the Council of the Academy recommended the opening of a subscription list for the purchase of the manuscript collections of the late John Windele, and at a meeting of the Academy held on Friday, March 16th 1866, it was announced: ‘The Academy has been enabled by liberal contributions, chiefly from its members, at the price of £100, to secure the manuscript collections of the late John Windele of Cork, extending to 130 volumes, and including many manuscripts in the Irish language, sketches and descriptions of Munster monuments, and a large number of original letters’.

Three of the Windele manuscripts contain Irish airs. The first of these is MS 12 C 1, described in the *Cat. Ir. Mss in RIA*, Fasc. 24, No. 1086, p.3032, as follows: ‘Windele Miscellany, a 19th

³ This collection has been extensively catalogued in 2004-7. Apart from transcriptions of Irish airs etc., the collection includes correspondence relating to William Forde (whose collection is described below), Thomas Moore, George Petrie and other musicians and music collectors. See www.ria.ie, Manuscripts Catalogue.

century paper manuscript ... a large volume of over 800 pages, containing transcriptions of letters, drawings of antiquarian interest and lithographed and printed matter’.

On pp.258-277 of the manuscript are recorded sixteen Irish airs, some of them accompanied by words in English. The airs include ‘Kitty’s rambles to Youghall’; ‘Corporal Casey’; ‘Ollistrum’s March’, with the movements as played in the south of Ireland on the pipes. The manuscript Irish airs are followed on pp.278-286 and p.320 by five printed Irish airs, published by Newman & Co., 48 Watling St. London, and include ‘Kitty of Coleraine’ and ‘Savoureen Deelish’.

MS 12 C 2

Another manuscript in the Windele Collection is 12 C 2 described in the *Cat. Ir. Mss in RIA*, Fasc. 24, No. 1087, p.3033. It is a nineteenth-century paper manuscript of 834 pages, part of which was written by John Windele about the year 1854. It is chiefly in English and contains extracts from the Book of Ballymote, translated by Professor Owen Connellan, and miscellaneous notes relating to the history and antiquities of Ireland.

On p.681 of the manuscript commences an essay on Irish music, entitled ‘Irish music by Wm. Forde 184 —’ beginning ‘I propose to consider the music of Ireland under three different heads’. From the context it is evident that this essay was delivered as a lecture, accompanied by the playing of Irish airs, and the essay contains six of the airs with which the lecture was illustrated. On p.685 there is a reference to the lecture as the first of a series. I shall have more to say of William Forde and his lectures on Irish music in describing the Forde-Pigot collection.

MS 23 H 10

The third of the manuscripts in the Windele collection containing Irish airs need only be referred to very briefly. This is MS 23 H 10, a nineteenth-century paper manuscript in the Irish language, containing on p.267 two airs, one entitled ‘Molly Bawn’ (four bars), the other ‘An air from Gottenburg’ (four bars).

MS 12 B² 20

This manuscript does not contain any music, but a short reference to it may not be amiss as it contains matter of musical interest. It is described in the *Cat. Ir. Mss in RIA*, Fasc. 24, No. 1101, p.3056, as an eighteenth-century paper manuscript containing drafts of short biographies of Cormac Common (Cormac Dall), Mathew Dubourg, Turlough O'Carolan and John Colton, a 'Dissertation ... on an ancient marble statue, representing a bagpiper' and some miscellaneous notes mainly on musical matters.

The manuscripts dealt with so far contain only some Irish airs, bound in with other material relating to Ireland. The remaining manuscripts to be described are entirely devoted to Irish melodies and songs.

MS 23 H 27

Described in the *Cat. Ir. Mss in RIA*, Fasc. 17, No. 711, p.2153, as follows: '19th century paper manuscript ... There are several hands, but without ascription. This is a miscellaneous collection of (about 116) airs, chiefly without instrumental accompaniment. From p.31 on, the writing is all in one neat hand, with Irish words to the airs. Notes with names or initials occur throughout, the following are (some of) the names: Dr Hudson; C.G. Duffy, Esqre, Nation Office, 4 D'Olier St. Dublin; Thomas Garvan, Deasyfield, Westport; F. O'F. of Phibsboro' 1844; J. H. M. Knockaderry, Newcastle, Co. Limerick. At least some of these airs were sent to *The Nation* in response to an appeal for Irish music in that paper (see letters on pp.28 and 30).'

The following are the names of some of the airs to be found in this manuscript:

- P.1 'My Connor, Young Charlie Reilly'.
- p.14 Venetian waltz arranged for the piano.

- p.15 'Olistrum's March' — with the movements as played in the south of Ireland on the bagpipes — arranged for the piano.
- p.17 'Caisleán Cille Móire', song with English words and piano accompaniment.
- p.31 'An Cúilfhionn', air with words in Irish beginning 'Is éirigh ad shuidhe, a bhuachail', one stanza.

The words and airs appear to have been copied from those in manuscript 23 F 22, the next to be described.

MS 23 F 22

Described in the *Cat. Ir. Mss in RIA*, Fasc. 17, No. 677, p.2092 as follows: 'Songs, melodies, 19th century paper ... The manuscript was probably compiled for James Hardiman, whose name is written at the top of p.7. Some slips are pasted in before p.4 with a partial list of the songs in the book and some memoranda in Hardiman's hand, and he has written some other notes throughout the book ... Most of the items are versions of well-known Irish songs ...'

There are in all 122 songs in the manuscript, many with musical accompaniment. The words of all the songs are in Irish and include 'An Cúilfhionn', 'Ol Ré Uí Chearbhalláin', 'An bínnsin luachra', 'Seán ua Duibhir an Ghleanna', 'Carolan's devotion', 'Eamonn a chnuic', 'Moll dubh an ghleanna', &c. John Edward Pigot copied out the airs from this manuscript Irish music book of Hardiman's, as we shall see in speaking of the Forde-Pigot collection.

It is interesting to note that manuscript 23 F 22 is described in another Academy manuscript, namely 12 M 1, which is entitled 'Catalogue of manuscripts relating to the history, antiquities and literature of Ireland, 142 volumes, preserved in the library of James Hardiman (the well-known historian of the county and city of Galway) 1832'. This catalogue was not written by Hardiman himself, but contains notes in his handwriting. One of these notes, on p.1, says that Hardiman disposed of most of his collection to the British Museum and mentions a few manuscripts which were not sold, including No. 41, 'a folio containing transcripts of 122 Irish songs, mostly set to

music, in the original words. This is an [sic] unique and very curious book and includes the most ancient and popular songs of Ireland. 131 written pages. Irish'. This description corresponds to that of the Irish musical manuscript in the Academy library, now bearing the shelf number 23 F 22.

The Forde-Pigot Collection

MSS 24 O 19–34

The volumes of manuscript Irish music now remaining to be described form the only considerable collection of manuscript music in the Academy library. They are known as the Forde-Pigot collection. An account of how these manuscripts came to the Academy is to be found in the *Minutes of Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* for the 14th November 1910, where we read that on that date Dr P.W. Joyce read a paper entitled 'A collection of manuscript Irish folk music presented to the Academy by the late Mrs Lyons and her brother, the late Mr Thomas F. Pigot'. In this paper Dr Joyce states that the collection consists of four large volumes and twelve smaller ones, and includes two separate collections — one made by William Forde of Cork, the other by John Edward Pigot, both made about the period 1840-1850. At the death of Forde (in 1850) his collection came into the possession of Pigot, at whose death the whole collection became the property of his sister and brother, Mrs Lyons and Mr Thomas Pigot, who placed them in Dr Joyce's hands, to be used in his edition of *Old Irish folk music and songs*, and then to be presented to the Royal Irish Academy.

The *Minutes* go on to say that the manuscript of Dr Joyce's paper, giving a detailed account of the Forde-Pigot collection, had been placed in the library with the volumes to which it referred. It is now in the Academy's manuscript room, where its shelf number is 23 P 30. It is a folio volume of fifteen pages, bound in dark green cloth and lettered in gilt on the back, 'Royal Irish Academy, Joyce: The Pigot collection of Irish Music'. It contains a detailed description of the whole Forde-Pigot collection. A very similar description is given in the preface to Dr Joyce's *Old Irish folk music*

and songs (Dublin, 1909). In preparing the latter work for publication Dr Joyce went carefully through all the volumes of the Forde-Pigot collection, copying out any airs that he believed had not previously been published. These he used in his book, the airs from the collection forming two-fifths of the book. Of the 842 airs in his *Old Irish folk music and songs*, 413 are from the Forde-Pigot collection and 429 from his own collections. Dr Joyce states that there still remained many airs in the Forde-Pigot manuscripts which had never been published, and that he hoped they would be published at some future date.

The Forde-Pigot collection of Irish music, consisting of sixteen volumes, are numbered 24 O 19–34. Nine of the volumes form the Forde collection and contain Irish airs collected by William Forde, a well-known musician of Cork, who lived in the first half of the nineteenth century. His younger brother was Samuel Forde, the artist. According to Strickland's *Dictionary of Irish artists*, their father deserted them and went off to America, after which William supported the family by means of his musical talents, helping to educate his younger brother, Samuel.

His collection of Irish music was made between the years 1840 and 1850. The principal volume in the collection is manuscript 24 O 19. This is a large folio volume of 422 pages, bound in dark red cloth, with a brown back, lettered in gilt on the front cover and on the back 'Irish Airs. Forde Collection'. It is written on both sides of the page, all in Forde's beautiful uniform music hand. There are about 462 airs, in many cases five, six and even more versions of the air being set down. Joyce says that many of the airs are well known and already published, but that Forde gave as many versions and settings of each as he could secure, with the sources from which they were obtained. There are also in this book great numbers of airs with only a single setting, and many with two or three, never before either written down or printed, contributed by various persons, or taken down by Forde from singers and players. It is from these that the great majority of the airs that Dr Joyce took from the book were copied. They were chiefly collected from the Munster counties, and from a district in the north-west, comprising the county of Leitrim and the adjacent portions of Sligo, Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. Dr Petrie, says Joyce, never saw this great volume of

Forde's, though he had access to the manuscript volumes of John Edward Pigot, from which he took a great number of airs. Petrie has a few tunes in his *Ancient music of Ireland* acknowledged to Forde, but these were obtained indirectly from friends, not from Forde himself nor from his book.

Forde intended his collection for publication and printed a prospectus. There are two copies of this prospectus inserted at the beginning of 24 O 19. The prospectus is headed 'Publishing by subscription' and reads:

A General collection of the music of Ireland, ancient and modern, with dissertations on the peculiar nature and the antiquity of this remarkable style of music, and on its importance in throwing light upon the early history and the origin of the Irish people ... in one large vol. music folio, by William Forde, author of *L'anima dell' Opera, An essay on the key in music, The national melodies of the British isles &c. &c.* Mr Forde has devoted several years to the study of Irish music. He has amassed a collection of melodies, more numerous than the collections of any previous editor; and he possesses many unpublished ancient airs of great beauty.

Next follows a detailed description of the proposed contents of the work. The prospectus concludes 'Price to subscribers, one guinea. The work will go to press as soon as 250 subscribers are obtained. W. Forde, 14 Grand Parade, Cork, 1st January, 1845'. In the second copy of the prospectus the Cork address is crossed out and a new address substituted by hand — 3 Eccleston St., South Pimlico. Forde's projected work was never published.

Forde delivered a series of lectures on Irish music in Cork city during the years 1844-5. The manuscript of one of these lectures we have already come across in 12 C 2, (Windele collection). A volume in the Forde-Pigot collection, 24 O 22, contains the manuscript notes of some of Forde's lectures. One of these lectures is dated Aug. 5, 1844, and another Jan. 7, 1845. This manuscript also contains two printed leaflets announcing the holding of lectures on Irish music by William Forde. There are several of these leaflets here and there in the Forde collection. Forde used the blank backs of them as writing material. The first of these leaflets reads:

Music of Ireland. Imperial Clarence Rooms. Mr W. Forde's Third lecture on the National Music of Ireland, Tuesday, January 9, 1844 ... The lecture will commence at Quarter past Eight. Admission, one shilling. W. Forde, 14 Grand Parade. Printed by Messrs. Bolster.

The second leaflet reads:

Imperial Hotel. Mr W. Forde begs to inform his patrons and friends, that he will give three morning and three evening entertainments of National and Historic Music, combining the features of concert and lecture ...

The names of the performers follow and the day and date of the month of each entertainment, but not the year, which is probably 1844. It is signed as before, W. Forde, 14 Grand Parade, and is printed by Bolster.

Forde was the author of a work entitled *The beauties of Berbiguier for the flute, extracted from that author's work by William Forde*. (London, c. 1830). There is a copy of this work in the National Library of Ireland. Forde died in London in 1850.

The other eight volumes in the Forde collection need only be briefly mentioned, as the airs in them were copied into the large folio volume 24 O 19 described above.

24 O 23 and 24 O 24 consist of an index to the airs in the Forde collection; 24 O 25 consists of Scotch airs; 24 O 26 of Irish airs; 24 O 27 of a treatise on the musical modes; 24 O 28 of a collection of folk music belonging to various nationalities; 24 O 30 and 24 O 32 consist of Irish airs.

The Pigot collection of manuscript Irish music, consisting of seven volumes, was made by John Edward Pigot (1822-71), eldest son of David Richard Pigot, Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer from 1846 to 1873.

John T. Gilbert in the *DNB*⁴ says that Chief Baron Pigot possessed great proficiency in music, especially that of Ireland, and his eldest son took after him in that. John Edward Pigot was a 'Young

⁴ J.T. Gilbert, 'Pigot, David Richard (1797-1873)', revised by Nathan Wells, *ODNB* (www.oed.com).

Irelander' who wrote stirring verse in *The Nation*. In 1851 he was joint honorary secretary, with Dr R. Lyons, his brother-in-law, of the newly founded 'Society for the Preservation of the Melodies of Ireland', of which Dr Petrie was president. An article on Pigot in the *Irish Monthly*, Vol. 24, 1896, signed M.R., quotes an obituary notice which appeared in *The Nation* of July 8, 1871, speaking of Pigot's love of music thus:

Himself an accomplished performer and composer, he gave an impulse to the study of Irish music, and made fashionable in provincialised circles the old, old songs of our land ... He is the author of the spirit-stirring songs, which will be found in the *Spirit of the Nation*— 'Erin, our own little isle' and 'Up for the Green' and the composer of the air of the song 'In a valley far away'.

The principal volumes in the Pigot collection are 24 O 20 and 24 O 21. These are two large volumes bound in dark green half-leather. The two volumes contain 888 written pages, numbered continuously over the two volumes. There are over 3,000 airs, but many of them are repeated several times, the same airs having been given to Pigot by different collectors. The two volumes contain a great number of airs written by Pigot himself and by several members of his family. He gathered up manuscripts chiefly in Munster, from which he copied numerous airs. He also collected airs on his own account. He got airs too from manuscripts borrowed from many well-known figures in the Ireland of their day: Thomas Davis, John Windele, Denny Lane, James Hardiman, William Elliott Hudson and Miss Mary Eva Kelly — 'Eva' of *The Nation*. Forde also obtained airs from many of these above mentioned. At the end of manuscript 24 O 20 there is a list of references to various collections from which airs were taken. One of these is Hardiman's manuscript collection, the airs from which are on pp.307-336 of manuscript 24 O 20. These airs correspond to those in manuscript 23 F 22 described earlier.

Manuscript 24 O 22 in the Pigot collection is a very bulky volume bound in dark green half-leather. It is made up of a large number of books and note-books, all bound together to form one

great volume, containing an immense number of Irish airs, many, however, repeated from other books.

The principal contents are:

- (1) Index to Irish Music 1843-4.
- (2) An alphabetical list of titles of Irish airs, headed W. Forde Catalogue — begun Aug. 28/46 at Cavan.
- (3) Irish airs collected from W.F., Strokestown, Roscommon, 24 Oct. '46, from Mr W.E. Hudson, 39 Upper Fitzwilliam Street, from Hugh Beirne, Ballinamore, Sep. 10/46.
- (4) Irish airs. Holden's collection 83 airs. Smith's *Irish minstrel. Irish melodies*, Sir J. Stevenson.
- (5) Irish airs. Cork, Dec. 1844: Airs from Windele: Airs from Carey: Horncastle's 1st volume: Airs from — —: Horncastle's 2nd volume: Horncastle's 3rd volume: Bunting's 3rd vol. There is a note inserted here by Dr Joyce 'This book was written by Forde, copied from various sources. Anything not previously in print is in my book 'Old Irish Folk Music and Songs.' P.W.J. 22 May 1910'
- (6) Irish Airs: O'Farrell: Bunting's 1st vol.: Various: Walker's *Irish music*: Carey, &c.: Songs and Ballads of *The Nation*.
- (7) A few airs from Bunting's 3rd volume: Collection of airs by Carolan: Airs published in *The Citizen* and the *Dublin Monthly Magazine*: A few airs from O'Farrell, *Dublin Monthly Magazine*. Dr Joyce inserts a note 'The initials of 'W.F.' often occur in this — Forde's.'
- (8) Irish airs. Dr Joyce has a note. 'This book chiefly copied from various scarce books' e.g. *The Dancing master* London, 1727, 17th ed. 'Hibernian Music' London.
- (9) Forde's lectures on Irish music.
- (10) Rough notes of Forde's lectures.

- (11) Extract from 'Historical sketch of the past and present state of the Fine Arts in Ireland,' signed P. *The Dublin Penny Journal*, Part III, Sep. 1832. Extract made Nov. 13, 1849.
- (12) Examples of the modes in Irish music with parallel examples from the Gregorian chant.
- (13) Ealing, Wednesday Nov. 14/1849, an essay on Irish music. Unsigned.

The remaining volumes in the Pigot collection, which consist of airs copied into the two large manuscripts 24 O 20 and 24 O 21, are numbered:

- 24 O 29, an index to Irish airs in the Pigot collection, 1850-51;
- 24 O 31, Irish music manuscript and printed;
- 24 O 33, Irish airs.
- 24 O 34, Irish airs.⁵

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⁵ The Forde-Pigot collection is the subject of a paper by Nicholas Carolan, Director of the Irish Traditional Music Archive, 'The Forde-Pigot collection of Irish traditional music' in Cunningham & Fitzpatrick (eds), *Treasures of the Royal Irish Academy Library* (Dublin, RIA, autumn 2008). See also, Nicholas Carolan, 'More James Goodman music manuscripts', *An Piobaire* 4:45 (April 2008), 23-5.