

Rev. William Gill

William Gill was appointed Vicar (of Malew) on 7th September 1830 and began a memorable ministry lasting until his death in 1871. On any count he was one of the outstanding Manx clergymen of the century. On 7th November 1820 he married, in Ballaugh Old Church, Anne, the eldest daughter of Rector Stowell. On the wedding morning the special licence had not yet arrived, so Gill rode from Ballaugh to Douglas to get it, only to find that the Vicar General had gone to Castletown. There he found him, got the licence, and set off back to Ballaugh, but darkness soon came on and heavy snows began to fall. In those days there were no lamps in the church as Evensong was in the afternoon, so the marriage had to be conducted by the light of torches, and the couple had to spend the night at the rectory. Anne Stowell's mother had died when she was 16, so she kept house for her father and brought up the younger children.

Gill was tall with a strong frame, and abundant white hair, and was reserved and quiet, but with a sense of humour. His judgement and fairness were recognised by all, and, unlike the other Manx clergy, he was a High Churchman. He was the ideal parish priest, as he had love for all, and was devoted to the welfare of his people. He was a great visitor, always on foot, especially to the poor. He could rarely be persuaded to preach in another parish, and so great was his attachment to his home and to the Island that he only left them when official duties called him away – e.g. his work over many years as Diocesan Inspector of Schools and his being on two occasions elected as Proctor for the clergy in York Convocation. He was also secretary of the Diocesan Association, founded by Bishop Bowstead.

Gill was an accomplished Manx scholar. He edited the Manx-English part of Kelly's Manx Dictionary, helped the Revd. J. T. Clarke to compile the English-Manx part, and revised the entire work for publication in 1866. In 1859 he edited Kelly's Manx Grammar which had been finished in 1804. He was the official translator into Manx of the laws proclaimed on 5th July from Tynwald Hill, a very laborious task because until 1865 these were read in full, not in the present summary form.

Gill was a man of iron self discipline, who avoided luxury or self indulgence in any form. He rose early, ate the simplest food, was a non-smoker and total abstainer and even as an old man he would only sit on a hard chair. He was hardly ever ill. After lunch on Saturdays he retired to his study where he remained in prayer and meditation until the first Sunday service. On a stipend of less than £200 he managed to give to the poor (for whom he kept almost open house), to enable his four sons to attend university, a fifth to qualify for the Bar and to educate his four daughters. The self denial which this involved must have been intense.

His hard work in the parish won universal respect. He was a great believer in education and gave particular attention to his day and Sunday Schools, besides doing much for education generally in the Island. This interest in education may have arisen from his lifelong love for children. He was a friend of John Keble, who stayed at Malew Vicarage several times. One of Gill's dreams (never realised) was to have one hymn book for the whole diocese.

He put a stained glass window in Malew Church, and several people ceased to attend, considering this a step towards Rome.

On the Sunday after its installation a lady said to Gill, "I saw the devil behind you in the pulpit this morning". "Indeed madam" he replied quietly and courteously "you must be better acquainted with him than I am, for I would not know him if I saw him".

Gill was unhappy about King William's College Chapel being built in his parish, and went so far as

to ask Lord Russell, then a member of the British Government, not to sanction it.

Almost as well known in the parish as the Vicar himself was John Clague, who was his manservant for 50 years, and who lived in a small cottage in one of the glebe fields near Cross Four Ways.

Extract from *A history of the Manx Church, 1698-1911*, by Canon John Gelling. The Manx Heritage Foundation, 1998, pp.72,73. Quoted by kind permission of the publishers.