



Some more odds and ends on John Crossley Clitheroe

These are just a few additional facts about the life of John Crossley Clitheroe who featured across Belfast's musical life in the 1930s and 1940s. It's not meant to be comprehensive but fills in a few gaps without creating a long digression on the William Rea webpage!

Father:	Fred Rigby Clitheroe (1877-1952), cotton mill designer (from 1911 census)
Mother:	Mary Crossley (1877-??), they married c.1901
Birth:	June 1902, Longridge, Lancashire, England
Death:	21 June 1962, Guildford, Surrey
Residence:	02 April 1911 Alston, Lancashire, England

JCC had four younger brothers in 1911.

He was appointed organist of St Nicholas Parish Church, Galway, c.1921 when he was just nineteen.

Clitheroe was appointed organist of Omagh Parish Church a few years later and apparently he taught at Omagh Academy (see New Zealand newspaper report later).

For reference: Miss Mabel A. Barnes, daughter of the late Rev. I. P. Barnes, Ballycastle, was appointed organist of Omagh Parish Church in March 1923; Mr. W. F. Wood, organist of St. Mark's Church, Portadown, was appointed organist of Omagh Parish Church in July 1928.

So J.C.C. would perhaps have been organist for Omagh Parish Church sometime between 1924/5 and early 1928.

Londonderry Sentinel, Saturday 30 January 1926, page 3

VIOLIN RECITAL AT OMAGH.

The Duchess of Abercorn and Lady Katharine Hamilton were present at a violin recital and concert given by Mr. E. Stevenson in the Town Hall, Omagh, on Wednesday evening, when a programme of outstanding talent was submitted, and the violin selections given by Mr. Stevenson met with such a pleasant reception that he was obliged to reappear on several occasions. Mr. J. Crossley Clitheroe, who had composed one of the pieces which Mr. Stevenson played, was the accompanist.

Belfast Telegraph, Thursday 22 April 1926, page 11

CANTATA AT OMAGH.

The parish church of Omagh was crowded on Wednesday evening for the sacred cantata, 'From Manger to Cross', which was given by the choir, trained by Mr. J. Crossley Clitheroe, organist and choirmaster. ... Mr. Clitheroe contributed the organ solo, 'Grand Choeur' (Guilmant) with much acceptance.

Londonderry Sentinel, Thursday 29 September 1927, page 4

TYRONE WAR MEMORIAL UNVEILED BY ULSTER GOVERNOR. IMPRESSIVE CEREMONY AT OMAGH.

The people of county Tyrone paid tribute to their honoured dead yesterday afternoon, when the County War Memorial, subscribed for by the inhabitants of the county and erected by the committee in charge, was solemnly unveiled by his Grace the Governor of Northern Ireland, who was accompanied by her Grace the Duchess of Abercorn. ... Excellent arrangements had been made for the unveiling ceremony. A prominent place was allocated on the right-front of the monument to the relatives of the fallen. A massed choir, composed of members of all the church choirs in the town, occupied a stand inside the railings in the Orange Hall grounds opposite, where the band of the Sherwood Foresters, Londonderry, was also stationed. The band was under the conductorship of Bandsmaster Smith, and the massed choir under Mr. J. Crossley Clitheroe, organist of Omagh Parish Church. A programme of music was played by the band.

It seems likely that J.C.C. left for a new job in New Zealand in early 1928. Did he marry Martha Elizabeth (born 10 September 1908) before he left Northern Ireland? Or perhaps in Lancashire before he set sail? Or did he marry in New Zealand? What was her maiden name?

Otago Daily Times, Friday 18 May 1928, page 10

The Education Board has appointed Mr J. C. Clitheroe to the position of lecturer in school music at the Dunedin Training College. Mr Clitheroe has had considerable experience in conducting church choirs and choral and orchestral societies, and is at present music master at Omagh Academy, in the North of Ireland. He has been musical advisor to primary schools and musical trainer of school teachers, and was a member of the committee which drew up the programme of musical education for North Ireland. He is both an organist and a pianist, and is spoken of as a brilliant recitalist.

In August 1928, Mr. J. C. Clitheroe, 'a highly qualified and experienced musician from England, took charge [as Lecturer in Music] at Dunedin Training College. The value of the work done by these gentlemen is already evident ...' (from the *Report of the Supervisor of Musical Education*, May 1929).

On 17 January 1933, Mr John C Clitheroe, aged 30, and his wife Martha Elizabeth, aged 25, arrived in Hull, England, on the Largs Bay (Aberdeen and Commonwealth Line), having travelled from Brisbane, Australia, via Sydney, Newcastle, Melbourne, Adelaide, Fremantle, Colombo, Port Said and Malta. He was described as a university lecturer and their address in England was given as 40 Hayward Street, Elton, Bury. Their last permanent residence was in New Zealand.

That year he took up the position of Organist and Choirmaster of St Peter's Church, Antrim Road, Belfast.

Alongside the Excelsior Male Voice Choir and the Oriana Singers, J. Crossley Clitheroe conducted several other choirs, including the Derry/Londonderry* and Newry Philharmonic Societies, and the Carrickfergus Choral Society. He also conducted the Belfast String Orchestra with great success. He was principal of the North Belfast School of Music.

* In October 1936, J.C.C. succeeded J.H. McBratney who had resigned on health grounds.

Belfast News-Letter, Wednesday 12 June 1935, page 1

BIRTHS

Clitheroe – June 3, 1935, at 283 Antrim Road, to Mr. and Mrs.J. Crossley Clitheroe – a son.

J.C.C. organised choral and orchestral concerts in Belfast during the war years under the auspices of the Civil Defence Services – including special symphony concerts for schoolchildren. He contributed a number of essays, *Music in Ulster*, to the *Belfast News-Letter*, authored as J.C.C., and argued strongly and publicly that Belfast should have its own municipal orchestra.

The Ulster MP Harry Midgley wrote to the *Belfast Telegraph* (Wednesday 11 August 1948, page 3) pointing out that ‘Had we taken our courage in our hands three years ago we might have written a similar report. But, though late, it is not too late. I ask all in Belfast — especially members of the Corporation — who agree with this musical objective, to take fresh heart and again work for the establishment of a municipal symphony orchestra so that when we finally obtain our magnificent hall (envisaged in the Memorial Hall Scheme) we will be able to have the first musical performance by our own orchestra. — Yours, etc.

Where nowadays are the City Councillor and MLA voices raised in support of the Ulster Orchestra? Would that not be welcome?

Five years earlier, Capt. Brennan and John Crossley Clitheroe had clearly tried their best:

Belfast Telegraph, Friday 29 January 1943, page 5

CITY ORCHESTRA PROPOSAL. BELFAST SCHEME UNDER CONSIDERATION.

The provision of a municipal orchestra for Belfast is to be further considered at a special meeting of a sub-committee of the General Purposes Committee of the Corporation on Monday week.

The committee to-day heard the views of Captain C. J. Brennan. Mus. Bac., city organist, on the proposal, and for their next meeting have invited Mr Crossley Clitheroe, one of the leading sponsors of the scheme, to attend. Captain Brennan will be present.

The idea of the scheme is to provide concerts for the people and to encourage music. Another suggestion is that concerts should be given for school children.

The committee have inquired about orchestras across the Channel and replies included the following: —

Birmingham — The Corporation make an annual grant of £2,500 towards the expenses of an orchestra and have representation on the Committee of Management.

Edinburgh — No municipal orchestra, but the Council guarantee £150 per annum towards the Reid Orchestra Endowment Fund.

Leeds — No municipal orchestra, but the Corporation guarantee a sum not exceeding £500 against loss in respect of concerts promoted by an orchestra and have representation on the Committee of Management.

Liverpool — The ownership of the Philharmonic Hall has passed to the Corporation for a capital payment of £35,000. The Corporation makes an annual grant of £4,000 to the Philharmonic Society, which undertakes to maintain the orchestra and provide concerts.

Manchester — For many years the city provided municipal concerts, but not since the war.

Newcastle-on-Tyne — No municipal orchestra but use of City Hall is granted free for concerts for the encouragement of music and the arts-

Bradford and Bristol — No municipal orchestra and no subsidies for the provision of concerts.

John Crossley Clitheroe moved to Guildford in 1945 as Director of Music of the Guildford Corporation which had decided to sponsor a scheme of municipal music. He also became conductor of the new Guildford Municipal Philharmonic Orchestra and, soon after, conductor of the new Guildford Festival Choir.

As the Guildford Festival website currently states:

Guildford Borough Council has funded and managed the Philharmonic as part of its arts provision for the Borough since the orchestra's inception in 1945, when it was the Guildford Municipal Orchestra. En Shao was appointed Principal Conductor in 1995, following in the illustrious footsteps of Crossley Clitheroe, Vernon Handley, Sir

Charles Groves and Sir Alexander Gibson; the orchestra now works with a variety of conductors covering all musical styles.

In his first year or two at Guildford, Crossley Clitheroe arranged 26 concerts, orchestral (65 players), choral (200 singers) and chamber – all ‘made possible by a Corporation subsidy of less than one penny in the pound of the local rate in the first two years’.

Belfast Telegraph, Friday 22 June 1962, page 2

A FORMER ORGANIST

Mr. John Crossley Clitheroe, organist at St. Peter’s Parish Church, Belfast, from 1933 to 1944, died at his home at Worplesdon, Surrey.

He was appointed organist of St. Nicholas’ Parish Church, Galway, at the age of 19 and later transferred to Omagh.

Later he went to New Zealand, returning home in 1933.

Belfast Telegraph, Wednesday 01 August 1962, page 2

£2,687 — Mr. John Crossley Clitheroe, of Burdenshot Cottage, Worplesdon, Guildford, Surrey, formerly of Hughenden Avenue, Belfast, who died on June 21 last, aged 60. Guildford borough director of music, he previously conducted orchestral and choral societies in Northern Ireland, lectured for Queen’s University extra-mural department and broadcast.

Index of Wills

CLITHEROE John Crossley of Burdenshot Cottage Worplesdon
Guildford died 21 June 1962 Probate London 26 July to
Martha Elizabeth Clitheroe widow. Effects £2687 15s.

CLITHEROE, Martha Elizabeth see CLITHEROE, Martha Elizabeth
Crossley 8752416405B

CLITHEROE, Martha Elizabeth Crossley otherwise Martha
Elizabeth of 12 Wilderness Ct Onslow Village Guildford
Sy died 11 August 1987 Probate Winchester 22 October
£58219 8752416405B

This compilation – David Byers, February 2021