



Dorothy Kelly, pianist from Tobermore

Dorothy Kelly was a daughter of Rev. and Mrs Robert J. Kelly of Kilcronaghan Parish Church, Rectory, Tobermore. Rev. Kelly had been rector there from 1906 until his retirement in November 1945 because of failing health. He was described as ‘a prominent member of the Orange Order, a chaplain of South Derry District Royal Black Chapter and also a county chaplain’. He retired to Rostrevor and died in a Newry nursing home in February 1947. He was buried in Dundonald cemetery.

Dorothy Adeline Kelly, born on St. Cecilia’s Day, 22 November 1918, had a brother Herbert, and an elder sister, Kathleen Louise who married Mr. W.E. Gilmore of Belfast.

There was a court case at the Magherafelt Quarter Sessions in February 1936 which must have been somewhat embarrassing for all involved.

Mid-Ulster Mail, Saturday 22 February 1936, page 7

Alleged Marriage Agreement

Mrs. Kathleen Louise Gilmore, of 7, Joanmount Drive, Cliftonville, Belfast, sued her father, Rev. Robert J. Kelly, of Kilcronaghan Rectory, for £26, arrears of annuity payable as a marriage settlement at £2 per week. ...

... Mrs. Gilmore gave evidence of being engaged to be married in December, 1933. Her father approved, and entered into an agreement to pay her £2 per week from date of marriage in December, 1933. Witness was not married until May, 1934, in London. The payments were kept up to May, 1935. At the date of the process there was £26 due.

... Her father had sent her sums of money up to May, 1935, in different amounts, which came to be the same as £2 per week. In all she had received £35 instead of £61. His letters were always of an affectionate nature, and her replies, acknowledging receipt of the money, were of the same nature. There was correspondence between her father and her husband prior to her marriage, when witness was in London. ...

... The Rev. Mr Kelly (defendant) said that he had given his daughter the Agreement (produced), which related to the marriage which was to have taken place in December 1933. He had arranged for the celebration of the marriage in St. Peter’s. Belfast. This marriage was broken off and he considered the agreement came to an end. After his daughter’s marriage in London he made payments to her, as he had money to spare — sometimes £5, and sometimes £10, as her husband was unemployed. About October 1935, his daughter wrote that the payments were not being kept up. ... Before the marriage in London he had written to his prospective son-in-law that he would do as he had promised regarding his daughter. ...

... He wrote to his son-in-law that he could not send as much as he had done, but he would send some until his daughter’s husband got work. Witness was anxious for the happiness of his daughter. ...

... His Honour, giving judgment, said that defendant had written to his prospective son-in-law, in April 1934, stating he would do his part and do what he promised. In His Honour's opinion this meant a renewal of the agreement of December, and he gave a decree for £26, arrears for period ended 13th November 1935. His Honour added that he was glad to see that the affection between father and daughter still existed, as shown in the letters produced.

Meanwhile Dorothy Kelly was winning first and second places at music festivals for her piano-playing. She also helped with the music in her father's church.

Mid-Ulster Mail, Saturday 15 August 1936, page 6

The annual service under the auspices of South Derry District Black Chapter was held in Kilcronaghan Parish Church on Sunday evening. A large contingent of brethren from Coleraine and South Derry Black Preceptories assembled at the Orange Hall and marched to the church, wearing regalia ... Sir Kt. Rev. R. J. Kelly, B.A., C.G.C., preached an impressive sermon, and the Rev. R. E. Sloan, B.A., of Tobermore Presbyterian Church, also took part in the service. The offering was for the Lord Enniskillen Memorial Orphan Fund ... Miss Dorothy Kelly had charge of the music, and at the conclusion of the service the National Anthem was sung.

Mid-Ulster Mail, Saturday 02 January 1937, page 8

The Christmas Day Service in Kilcronaghan Parish Church was conducted by the Rector, Rev. R.J. Kelly, M.A. Suitable hymns were tastefully rendered by the choir, under the leadership of Miss Dorothy Kelly.

A report in the *Londonderry Sentinel* in 1950 (see a few pages below) noted that Dorothy Kelly 'gave her first broadcast in 1935 when still a schoolgirl at Coleraine High School. In the same year she was awarded a scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music in London, where she spent three years studying solo piano playing and accompanying.'

The Belfast Philharmonic Society advertised for an accompanist in September 1938 and appointed Dorothy Kelly. She attended the Philharmonic's Dance in November and her dress details duly made it to the papers!

Northern Whig, Wednesday 30 November 1938, page 7

The Philharmonic Dance / Brilliant Event in Plaza / Novel Feature / Original Cabaret by Street Musicians.

In recent years Belfast Philharmonic Society have acquired a reputation for running good dances as well as concerts, and the Plaza was crowded last night for their annual autumn dance.

This is always the bigger of the Society's two dances, and most of the leading musical celebrities in the Province were there. ...

... Mrs. E. Godfrey Brown had a spray of red carnations on her black crepe gown. She was accompanied by Mr. Brown. Miss D. Kelly, the Society's accompanist, who was in a shell pink lace frock over a foundation of Wedgwood blue; Mrs. B. Watts, whose black chiffon gown had spiral patterns of white; Miss Margaret Erskine, whose sheath gown of black velvet was embroidered in sequins; and Mrs. Tucker, who was in black. ...

Poor Mrs Tucker. Meanwhile, *Rathcol* (aka Norman Hay) had clearly kept tabs on Dorothy through her many Musical Festival competition appearances. This is the relevant portion of his review of a Wellington Hall concert by the Belfast Singers, conductor John Vine:

Belfast Telegraph, Monday 27 February 1939, page 10

... It is sufficient praise to Miss Dorothy Kelly to add that her playing in two groups of solos was right worthy of this concert. She played with very notable technical fluency and admirable artistic judgment; and especially good were her interpretations of Debussy's *Sarabande*, a lovely old piece (new to me) entitled *Mr Shields's Giocoso in five-four time* [arr. Alfred Moffatt, pub. Augener] and two very engaging pieces by Waldo Warner.

Miss Kelly has advanced strikingly as a pianist since her festival days and is now a player of mature technique and very good artistic perception — though I could not see eye to eye with her in certain of her readings such as a Brahms Intermezzo.

In conclusion, let me say that this concert (as much for the singers' part for the wonderful art of Joan Coxon [soprano]) was the most outstanding event of this season, so far ...

The music critic of the *Belfast News-Letter* agreed:

Belfast News-Letter, Monday 27 February 1939, page 10

Miss Dorothy Kelly is a pianist whose playing is elegant and urbane. Her tone is good and her phrasing is deserving of praise. That she is a thoughtful musician is obvious and that she possesses a sense of humour is evident in her playing of such things as *Sing a Song of Sixpence*, by Leo Livens, and *The Clown*, by Waldo Warner. This latter I enjoyed immensely, and I was amazed to see so many solemn faces around me; there were many occasions for laughter so well did Miss Kelly depict the character of the composition. Her playing of Debussy had the right atmosphere and the player was evidently in sympathy with this composer.

The music critic of the *Belfast News-Letter*, Friday 07 April 1939, page 9, also reviewed a recital in the Musgrave Hall, Chlorine Gardens, given by Joyce Forster, viola, Dorothy Kelly, piano and the baritone Frank Capper. 'Miss Kelly's work throughout the evening was admirable and she played the [Ernest] Walker *Sonata* with great fluency.'

Ballymena Observer, Friday 10 November 1939, page 1

DOROTHY KELLY
A.G.S.M., A.M.R.S.T.,
Solo Pianist, Teacher, Accompanist and Coach.
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**Tuition Centres—BELFAST, BALLYMENA
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Page 3 of the *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, Saturday 23 December 1939 covered prize day at Cambridge House School, Ballymena. Amongst the list of part-time teachers is Miss D. Kelly, A.G.S.M. (music) plus the comment that ‘At midsummer we very much regretted to lose the able and valued services of Miss O’Neill. A.R.C.M. who had been responsible for the singing classes in the senior forms. We are fortunate in having her place so ably filled by Miss Dorothy Kelly, A.G.S.M., whose work during the past term has been in keeping with her high qualifications.’

Page 2 of the *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph* for Saturday 28 December 1940 reported that at Cambridge House School’s Prize Day in Ballymena Town Hall, there were some staff changes; congratulations were extended to Miss Dorothy Kelly, A.G.S.M., on her appointment as BBC accompanist in Belfast.

The Musical Times, June 1942, page 190, reported that ‘At a recent “Music for the People” concert [in Belfast], Joyce Forster and Dorothy Kelly gave the first performance of a Viola Sonata by the Viennese composer Kurt Roger, who has been resident in Ireland and has now gone to America. *Rathcol*, the well-known critic of the *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, spoke very highly of the work.’

And then marriage beckoned:

Belfast News-Letter, Saturday 10 October 1942, page 4

WEDDING IN COLERAINE

Askew—Kelly

Three clergymen — the Venerable the Archdeacon of Derry; Rev. Thomas Baird. B.D.; and the Rev. L. V. Uprichard, M.A., rector of St. Patrick’s, Coleraine — officiated at the marriage of Miss Dorothy Adeline Kelly, A.G.S.M., younger daughter of the Rev. R. J. Kelly, B.A., and the late Mrs. Kelly, Kilcronaghan Rectory, Tobermore, Co. Derry, and Mr. Raymond Askew, M.A. (Oxon), youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Askew, Pulham St. Mary, Diss, Norfolk. The wedding took place yesterday at St. Patrick’s, and Miss Given presided at the organ.

The bride, who was given away by her father, wore a distinctive frock in a shade of amber greige on which a spray of orchids was effective. The smart matching hat was in Breton shape with rolled brim and softened with a cobwebby lace veil. Mrs. Edmund Moran, B.Mus., matron of honour, was wearing a frock of cheviot green wool with matching felt hat finished with an eyeveil. On her frock was pinned a cluster of amber carnations. A reception was subsequently held at Seabank Hotel, Portrush.

When leaving for the South of Ireland, Mrs. Askew wore a suit of heather mixed tweed with a honey-coloured blouse. The hat, of hunter’s green felt, was decorated with bird’s plumage in brown.

Northern Whig, Saturday 10 October 1942, page 3

Ulster Pianist Wed at Coleraine

Musical circles were interested in a wedding at St. Patrick’s Church, Coleraine, yesterday. The bridegroom was Mr. Raymond Askew, M.A. (Oxon.), the youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Askew, of Pulham St. Mary, Diss, Norfolk, and the bride, Miss Dorothy Adeline Kelly, A.G.S.M. is the younger daughter of the Rev. R. J.

Kelly, B.A., of Kilcronaghan Rectory, Tobermore, Co. Londonderry, and the late Mrs. Kelly. The bride is regarded as one of the finest pianists in the Province. She was given away by her father, and Mrs. Edmund Moran, B.Mus., was the matron of honour and the only attendant. ...

And who was Raymond Percy Askew, M.A. (Oxon)?

In 1939, he wrote a paper on *The Marketing of Eggs in Northern Ireland* for the fifteenth summer session of the American institute of cooperation at the University of Chicago, August 7 to 11, 1939.

Raymond Percy Agnew was born in Pulham St Mary, Norfolk. His parents married on 17 October 1895 at Hackford, near Hingham and had lived at Church Farm, Pulham St Mary, South Norfolk, from 1919. They had nine children – seven sons and two daughters.

Newspaper reports (*Diss Express*, Friday 19 October 1945, page 4) of the celebrations for their Golden Wedding anniversary at the King's Head in Pulham St Mary stated that 'Five of his sons are farming, another is resident inspector for the N.U.F.O at King's Lynn, whilst the youngest, Mr Raymond Askew, M.A., holds a Ministerial appointment at Belfast.'

I guess he worked in Northern Ireland for the Ministry of Agriculture, probably until 1946 when we know that Dorothy moved to London.

Meantime, Dorothy Kelly gave further concerts with Joyce Forster, viola, including for the Waterford Music Club (2 December 1942). Joyce Forster eventually married the composer Kurt Roger (see the feature about Joy Roger Hammerschlag on this website – byersmusic.com).

There was a BBC Light Programme broadcast on Tuesday 4 December 1945 at 9.45am.

The *Radio Times* billing reads:

Keyboard Cavalcade – An accompanist plays some well-known piano solos – Dorothy Kelly.

It seems that Dorothy Kelly remained as accompanist of both the Belfast Phil and the BBC until 1946, when she moved to London.

The Belfast Philharmonic Society advertised for an accompanist in August 1946, so perhaps that was when William Rea was appointed the Phil's accompanist, though I've not been able to find any press coverage or Phil programmes to verify that.

Dorothy Kelly gave a 15-minute recital of piano music for the BBC NI Home Service on Tuesday 30 March 1948 at 6.45pm.

Two years later there was another: BBC NI Home Service, Wednesday 1 March 1950, 6.55pm – 7.10pm, Dorothy Kelly (piano). They didn't give much away in the *Radio Times* those days!

Londonderry Sentinel, Tuesday 21 February 1950, page 2

Noted pianist returns

Music lovers, who are particularly interested in the piano, will be pleased to note that the Ulster pianist, Dorothy Kelly, will be giving a recital over the B.B.C. on March 1.

Dorothy Kelly joined the B.B.C. in Belfast as an accompanist in 1940 when Frederick Stone, the staff accompanist, was transferred to London, and she continued to play almost daily in the studios until she went to live in London in 1946.

She gave her first broadcast in 1935 when still a schoolgirl at Coleraine High School. In the same year she was awarded a scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music in London, where she spent three years studying solo piano playing and accompanying. She has broadcast in all about 400 times and has also played as accompanist in various celebrity concerts and as solo pianist in concerts organised by the Belfast Philharmonic Society, the Pilgrim Trust and C.E.M.A.

The Stage, Thursday 15 March 1951, page 7

CIVIC HALL CONCERT

Richard Standen, the young bass who has come rapidly to the fore of late, gave a concert at the Civic Hall, Croydon, with Patricia Flory and Dorothy Kelly, on Tuesday last. Three operatic arias served to show Mr. Standen's easy breath control and good diction. He made much of the humour of the "Catalogue" song from "Don Giovanni", and in his later group of British ballads he was especially popular in Michael Head's "Money O" and the equally jolly "Yarmouth Fair", by Peter Warlock. Dorothy Kelly, an accompanist from Northern Ireland, gave admirable support. Patricia Flory combined an unpretentious style of piano-playing with a charming platform appearance. She was at her best in interpreting the varying moods of Ravel's Sonatine, after having earlier given a fluent performance of Chopin's Fantaisie in F minor.

I've not tracked such concert appearances thereafter, but Dorothy Kelly was the accompanist for the annual Ballymena Musical Festival across the 1940s and also continued to fulfil that role across the 1950s decade despite living in London.

Dorothy Adeline Askew, née Kelly, died on 27 September 2010 at Woodbridge, Suffolk. Her husband, Raymond Percy Agnew (born 12 December 1910) had pre-deceased her, dying in March 1975, at Caterham, Surrey.

Those wishing to undertake further research should explore the Bourne Society Bulletins. The index includes these mentions (which I've not been able to explore):

Askew, Dorothy (Mrs) (Glenshane, Caterham, 1947-1964) B181.8 – B181.10 and B186.2
Askew, Raymond (Glenshane, Caterham, 1947-1964) B181.9 and B181.10

Text and transcriptions by David Byers, March 2021, Belfast.