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EDWARD BUNTING:
THE DUBLIN YEARS (1819-43)

MARY LOUISE O'DONNELL

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Welcome to *Harp Perspectives*, Cruit Éireann, Harp Ireland's online journal. One of our strategic aims is to establish thought leadership across the harp sector by building up a body of thinking about the harp and harping through a historical and contemporary lens.

Harp Perspectives is a conversation about harping and features key informants, harpers and non-harpers, sharing their authentic views and ideas. We believe that this combination of scholarly research and personal insights will highlight the harping legacy inherited from our tradition bearers and help forge a contemporary harping identity, secure in its understanding of its origin and how it wishes to evolve.

In our October edition, Mary Louise O'Donnell uses the changing role of the nineteenth-century professional musician in Ireland as a lens through which to explore Edward Bunting's life in Dublin as a professor of music and church organist. She outlines the challenges he faced in preparing his final collection, *The Ancient Music of Ireland*, and the constancy and love of his wife Mary Anne, who gently guided and supported him through various difficulties he encountered in the latter years of his life.

Our thanks to each of our contributors for their willingness to add their voices. Their contributions will no doubt enrich and inform our thinking.

Aibhlín McCrann and Eithne Benson

Editors

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EDWARD BUNTING: THE DUBLIN YEARS (1819-43)

Mary Louise O'Donnell

On 27 July 1819, Miss Mary Anne Chapman married Edward Bunting¹ at St Peter's Church, Aungier Street, Dublin. She was a thirty-year old teacher who assisted her mother in running a school for young ladies in Donegall Square, Belfast; he was forty-six years old and, during those forty-six years, had been a musical prodigy, a celebrated pianist and organist, a conductor, a music teacher, a concert promoter and organiser of the Belfast Music Festival in 1813 at which George Frideric Handel's *Messiah* was performed for the first time in Belfast. He was a founding member of two Irish harp societies in Belfast in 1808 and 1819; he was a collector, primarily, of the music of the harpers, but also music of the pipers, fiddlers and singers, and he was the author of two seminal collections of Irish music, namely, *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music*, and *A General Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland*. The breadth and intensity of Bunting's activities over four decades were extraordinary. It is fair to say that his bachelor status and his comfortable lodgings at the McCracken family residence in Belfast enabled him to travel extensively, to collect, to teach and to perform in Ireland, Britain and continental Europe. He was a central and celebrated figure in musical life in Belfast for nearly four decades. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, he was at the height of his musical powers. Yet, in July 1819, Bunting (fig.1) made a brave and bold decision to leave this life in Belfast and move to Dublin, where he would spend the next thirty-four years of his life with his beloved Mary Anne.

Little is known about Edward and Mary Anne's courtship. The scant information that we have is contained in George Petrie's biographical account of Bunting in the *Dublin University Magazine* of 1847.² They both lived in Donegall Square where Mary Anne's mother ran a school with her daughters, and where Bunting lived with the McCracken family. At some point in early 1819, Mrs Chapman and her daughters moved to Dublin

1 For a detailed account of Edward Bunting's life and career, see Colette Moloney, 'Edward Bunting as a collector of Irish music and song', in Sandra Joyce and Helen Lawlor (eds), *Harp Studies: Perspectives on the Irish Harp* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2016), pp. 57-74.

2 P. [George Petrie], 'Our portrait gallery. No XLI—Edward Bunting', *Dublin University Magazine*, vol. XXIX, no. clxix, January 1847, pp. 64-73.



Drawn and Etch. by W. Brocas Jun.
EDW.^d BUNTING ESQ.^r
Author of the General Collection of the Ancient Music of IRELAND.
 To the
Harp SOCIETIES of DUBLIN AND Belfast
This Plate is Most Respectfully Dedicated by their Obed.^t Serv.^r James Sidebotham.

Figure 1: 'Edward Bunting' by William Brocas (1811). (Courtesy of the National Gallery of Ireland)

to start a seminary, or school, for young ladies at 18 Leeson Street.³ It appears that Bunting was smitten with Mary Anne and would not be separated from her. He sought permission from Mrs Chapman to marry her daughter and the newly married couple moved to 18 Leeson Street where they lived with Mary Anne's mother. Bunting was known in Dublin circles as a collector and arranger of two volumes of Irish music; unfortunately, he was relatively unknown as a professional musician. It is generally accepted among scholars that, aside from his work on his magnum opus *The Ancient Music of Ireland* in the late 1830s, Bunting spent his years in Dublin eking out a living as a church organist and music teacher to support his wife and three children—Anthony, Sarah and Mary Ann. Bunting's period of domicile in Dublin is rarely given attention. In this essay, I will shed some light on this period and outline the opportunities he embraced and the challenges he faced in the final decades of his life.

The Dublin that awaited Bunting in 1819 was politically, culturally and socially different to that of his beloved Belfast. There was a core group of Belfast citizens who believed that the application of rational principles and scientific thought could alleviate contemporary social and political problems. They had enthusiastically embraced the ideals of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century – ideals, such as, liberty, progress, tolerance, and fraternity. The people of Belfast were intellectually curious and, as Roy Johnston noted in his book *Bunting's Messiah*, because they were 'situated a long distance from their political masters in both London and Dublin...[they] were free to make up their own minds, to turn their energies into trade and commerce, and in the exercise of their intellectual curiosity, into philosophy, religion and politics.'⁴ While Enlightenment ideals permeated Dublin politics and society, they were never embraced or applied with the same vigour and enthusiasm across the population. The core group of Dubliners, largely United Irishmen like Lord Edward Fitzgerald and James Napper Tandy, who espoused enlightenment principles in the late eighteenth century, were more interested in how these principles could effect radical political, rather than cultural change.⁵ It is fair to say that the intense intellectual curiosity that characterised the people of Belfast in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and which

3 *Freeman's Journal*, 1 September 1819, p. 1. This house was later owned by the Guinness family and now houses the Office of the Ombudsman; see Hugh Oram, *Leeson Street: Upper and Lower* (Trafford Publishing, 2018), p. 4.

4 Roy Johnston, *Bunting's Messiah* (Belfast: Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society, 2003), p. 10.

5 There is a wide literature on the membership, military structure, and strategy of the United Irishmen in the 1790s; for further detail on the Movement in Dublin and its environs, see R. B. McDowell, *Proceedings of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen* (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1998), Nancy J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) and Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *Revolutionary Dublin, 1795-1801: The Letters of Francis Higgins to Dublin Castle* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004).

inspired the organisation of the Belfast Harper's Assembly and the formation of Irish harp societies, was not shared by the inhabitants of Dublin.

Belfast had a population of approximately 30,000 in 1819; the population of Dublin was almost ten times that at over 250,000 people. The Dublin that Bunting experienced on his arrival in 1819 was still reeling from the aftereffects of the abolition of the Irish parliament following the enactment of the Act of Union in 1801. The loss of Irish legislative independence initiated a gradual transformation of politics and society in Dublin in the early decades of the nineteenth century.⁶ London became the centre of political power and Irish MPs increasingly bypassed Dublin en route to London from their country estates or resettled in England with their families. Many houses were abandoned in the north-western part of Dublin city as the wealthy and influential citizens moved from there to the south-east of the city around Merrion Square, Fitzwilliam Square, and peripheral areas around Baggot Street and Leeson Street.⁷ The former residences of the aristocracy around Mountjoy Square, Gardiner Street and Dominic Street were later occupied by impoverished families. A report by the Reverend James Whitelaw in 1805, described conditions of overcrowding in these buildings, lack of sanitation and consequent outbreaks of infectious diseases, such as cholera and typhus.⁸ As the population grew, poverty increased, and early nineteenth-century Dublin became economically polarised.

The area in which Bunting lived during the early years of his marriage was a world away from the misery and squalour of the northside slums. His mother-in-law, Mrs Chapman, wisely established her school in Leeson Street, the fashionable part of the city which was constructed during Dublin's architectural 'golden age' in the eighteenth century. Although her students may have been drawn from the rapidly decreasing aristocratic population, it is more likely that they were the daughters of those who worked in the professions of law, medicine and the clergy. These were the most influential figures in nineteenth-century Dublin, and Bunting, in his role as 'professor of music', capitalised on their interest in providing a musical education for their children.

Pigot and Company's Directory for the Year 1824 lists Bunting as a professor of piano at Leeson Street, but he and his family later moved to 38 Upper Baggot Street, and

6 This transformation is discussed in depth in Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *Acts of Union: The Causes, Contexts and Consequences of the Act of Union* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001).

7 Richard Killeen, *Historical Atlas of Dublin* (Gill and Macmillan: Dublin, 2009), p. 114.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

finally to 45 Upper Baggot Street.⁹ There appears to have been some issues settling into life in Dublin, or more specifically, to living with his mother-in-law. The strong personalities of Bunting and Mrs Chapman clashed, resulting in frequent conflicts. In a letter to his lifelong friend and supporter Mary Ann McCracken dated the 29 December 1820, Bunting was delighted to report that the tense atmosphere at Leeson Street had been replaced by paternal bliss. He wrote: '[Mary Anne] seems happy now to what she did during her mother's superintendence of the household, in consequence of my altered behaviour perhaps. My little darling son, she and I take the greatest delight in. He is grown handsome. All the people are delighted with him.'¹⁰

The Chapmans were not Bunting's only family in Dublin. His older brother Anthony resettled in the city a few years before and worked as a music teacher and agent for the sale of pianos. Through Anthony and his northern connections, Bunting quickly established himself as a successful teacher and organist in the capital. He was appointed organist at St Stephen's Church, Upper Mount Street (also known as 'The Pepper Canister') in 1824. This was a chapel-of-ease for the parish of St Peter's, Aungier Street, and was designed by the architect John Bowden and completed by Joseph Welland after Bowden's death. It appears that the parishioners of St Stephen's were delighted with Bunting's appointment and impressed by his considerable musical skills: they were so impressed they wanted his salary increased. As David Byers has discovered in his research, the initial salary of £40 promised to Bunting was supplemented by Archdeacon John Torrens with a further £20, bringing his salary to £60.¹¹

In 1827 Bunting secured another well-remunerated position, this time as organist at St George's Church, Hardwicke Place. The church was designed by Francis Johnston and construction work commenced in 1802.¹² In a letter to Mary Ann McCracken in December 1827, Bunting wrote:

I received an unsought letter from the Trustees of George's Church (where a new organ price £1000 pounds has been put up lately), to be their organist with a salary of from £90 to £100 pounds a year, for which situation above

9 Moloney, 'Edward Bunting', p. 72. The Bunting family also lived at 28 Upper Baggot Street. Charlotte Milligan Fox included a letter from Bunting to Mary Ann McCracken which was written from this address dated 27 December 1827; see Fox, *Annals of the Irish Harpers* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1911), p. 65.

10 Fox, *Annals*, p. 65.

11 David Byers, 'Hang out the Bunting: A portrait of Edward Bunting (1773-1843)', <https://www.byersmusic.com/edward-bunting.php#Bunting08> (accessed 13 September 2022).

12 A brief history of St George's Church and information on its most prominent architectural features can be found at <https://www.archiseek.com/2010/1813-former-st-georges-church-hardwicke-place-dublin/> (accessed 13 September 2022).

twenty candidates started and canvassed the parish. My appointment is dated 1st December and the duty is twice per week, Wednesday and Fridays and Sundays also. That would not allow me a deputy at present so that I could not go to Belfast to you.

I am indebted for this place to the Attorney-General, who sent for me and spoke to me so kindly and friendly, that I was nearly overpowered with all my old recollections of the Joy tribe, from your dear, dear, departed mother, till the present time, they have been an honour to Ireland from their first introduction into it, and friendly beyond my deserts have they been to me one and all of them since I was twelve years of age, now a period of 40 years.¹³

The attorney general was McCracken's cousin, Henry Joy, who resided at a house on Temple Street (near St George's) that was kept by his unmarried sisters Harriet and Grace.

In 1825, Bunting embarked on a new commercial enterprise. He was one of the four proprietors of the Dublin Harmonic Institution, who published and sold sheet music and musical instruments from their premises at 13 Westmoreland Street. His partners were the pianist William Walsh, the cellist Samuel James Pigott¹⁴ and John F. Sherwin. It was not unusual for musicians to run music shops in the early nineteenth century—Paul Alday, Bartlett and his son Thomas Cooke, and Johann Bernhard Logier worked as professional musicians and also engaged in music publishing and/or the sale of sheet music. It was unusual, however, to go into partnership with three others. In this period, apart from family run businesses, most music stores were run by sole traders. For example, Elizabeth Attwood (Nassau Street); Paul Alday (Exchange Street); Andrew Ellard (Lower Sackville Street); Edmund Lee (Dame Street); Isaac Willis (Westmoreland Street); and William Power¹⁵ (Westmoreland Street). The Dublin market was saturated with general music stores publishing sheet music and selling and hiring musical instruments in the 1820s. As the demand for music waned, the number of music businesses decreased, music publishing declined and was never revived. The partnership between Bunting, Walsh, Pigott and Sherwin was dissolved in March 1827, but Pigott and Sherwin remained in business together.

13 Fox, *Annals*, pp. 65-6.

14 Lisa Parker, 'Samuel J. Pigott', in Harry White and Barra Boydell (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* (Dublin, 2013), vol. 2, p. 840.

15 William and his brother James jointly published several numbers of Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*, but their partnership ended in 1815 following a dispute.

By the late 1820s, Bunting was exclusively earning a living from teaching piano, playing at church services and acting as an agent for Broadwood pianos. These positions would have been considered menial amongst professional musicians in Dublin in that period. Why did Bunting not enjoy more prestigious positions in the Dublin Anglican Church? Why was he not a more prominent performer on the Dublin stage? Why did his reputation as a collector and arranger of Irish music not allow him an entrée into the upper echelons of musical life in Dublin in the 1820s and 30s? To answer these questions, it is necessary to provide a context to musical life (in sacred and secular settings) in Dublin in this period.

To begin, St Patrick's and Christ Church Cathedrals were among the most important centres of musical activity in Dublin in the early nineteenth century. Bunting had connections with the choristers and musicians in both cathedrals through Langrishe Doyle, the former organist of Armagh Cathedral. It is likely that Bunting sought Doyle's guidance when engaging soloists, choristers and instrumentalists for the Belfast Music Festival in 1813.¹⁶ The choral singers and all soloists (except Mrs Cooke) who performed at the festival were largely drawn from both Dublin cathedrals; of the thirty instrumentalists that performed, the majority were based in Dublin and performed with Cooke's Crow Street band. In 1819, Bunting invited choristers from St Patrick's and Christ Church Cathedrals to chant the service and sing anthems from Handel's *Messiah* at St George's Church, Belfast on Sunday 18 July. These collaborations ensured that Bunting was known in Dublin musical circles before he settled in the capital in 1819. Unfortunately for Bunting, musical life in Christ Church and St Patrick's Cathedrals was dominated by the Robinson brothers in the 1820s and 30s. In fact, Francis, William, John and Joseph were active in every aspect of musical life in Dublin, apart from the theatre.¹⁷ Francis was assistant organist at Christ Church from 1814 to 1833 and organist at St Patrick's from c. 1828-30; John was organist at Sandford Church, Trinity College Chapel and was appointed organist at St Patrick's from 1830 onwards, following in the footsteps of his brother Francis; Joseph was a vocalist, composer and conductor of the Antient Concerts Society for twenty-eight years and the University of Dublin Choral Society from 1839 onwards; and William was a vicar choral at St Patrick's Cathedral for over thirty years.¹⁸ Although there are some references to Bunting playing at services at

16 For a fascinating account of Bunting's career as a concert promoter, see Johnston, *Bunting's Messiah*, pp. 60-90.

17 For more information on the careers of the Robinson brothers, see Ita Beausang, 'Robinson family', in Harry White and Barra Boydell (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* (Dublin, 2013), vol. 2, p. 886-8.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 886-7.

St Patrick's Cathedral,¹⁹ he was never invited to join the prestigious rank of cathedral organist or musical director.

In terms of establishing a career as a concert performer, the timing of Bunting's arrival in Dublin was unfortunate. Two factors influenced musical life in Dublin in the 1820s; firstly, the shift in public taste towards opera that spread from London and the Continent, and secondly, the emergence of the professional virtuoso who travelled throughout Europe performing at concerts. Bunting had no experience of conducting or performing in operas and there is no evidence that he had any interest in that genre of theatrical music; this was not a musical path he could pursue. Bunting was, however, an experienced concert performer, not only in Belfast, but also in Britain and France.²⁰ In fact, it was because of his virtuosic piano skills that he was engaged by Broadwood and Sons to showcase their pianos. The role of the professional musician was changing in the early nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, musicians relied heavily on the patronage of the aristocracy to sustain a living; musicians in the early nineteenth century could no longer rely on this patronage so had to find creative ways of reaching new audiences. In this period professional musicians actively sought performance opportunities and built audiences by touring and performing regularly throughout Europe.

From the 1820s onwards, there was a notable increase in the number of European virtuosi performing in Dublin. Apart from the virtuoso pianist/composer Ferdinand Charles Panormo, who was resident in Dublin until the early 1820s, renowned pianist/composer Frédéric Kalkbrenner performed in Dublin in 1824,²¹ Czech pianist Ignaz Moscheles performed in 1826,²² and the celebrated Franz Liszt toured and performed in Ireland in 1840-41.²³ Piano virtuosi were popular, but other instrumentalists and singers were also supported by Dublin audiences. The French harpist Robert Nicholas Charles Bochsá performed regularly in Dublin in the 1820s and 30s;²⁴ the celebrated violinist Nicolò Paganini²⁵ was in Dublin in 1831, and celebrated sopranos Madame

19 P. [George Petrie], 'Our portrait gallery. No XLI—Edward Bunting', p. 72.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 71-2.

21 *Freeman's Journal*, 18 August 1824.

22 *Freeman's Journal*, 17 January 1826.

23 See details of Liszt's Dublin performances in *Freeman's Journal*, 22 December 1840 and 6 January 1841.

24 For a detailed account of Bochsá's performance in Dublin in 1821 and during the 1830s, see Mary Louise O'Donnell, 'In the shadow of Bochsá: A study of three foreign virtuoso pedal harpists in Dublin (c.1850–1900)', in Helen Lawlor and Sandra Joyce (eds), *Harp Studies II: World Harp Traditions* (forthcoming).

25 For an account of his concerts in Ireland, see Fiona M. Palmer, 'Nicolò Paganini', in Harry White and Barra

Catalani and Thérèse Tietjens were regular performers in the capital city. Most of these musicians were ten, twenty, or, even thirty years younger than Bunting and therefore more capable of coping with the gruelling schedule of a concert musician. Bunting, in his fifties, could not even attempt to compete with these contemporary superstars for the attention of Dublin audiences. These audiences were generally not interested in Bunting's compositions or in the Irish airs that he collected so conscientiously over two decades. If Irish tunes were included in contemporary Dublin concert programmes, they appeared as themes in rondos, as sets of variations on Irish airs, or, as Ita Hogan has noted, as part of 'a medley or pot-pourri'.²⁶

Bunting never lost his interest in Irish music or the Irish harp tradition during his period of residence in Dublin. He did not actively source or collect tunes after 1805, but received material from friends and other collectors, including George Petrie. Bunting also maintained strong links with friends and colleagues in Belfast and its environs. He was a committee member of the second Irish Harp Society of Belfast formed on 16 April 1819 to manage remittances from the Bengal Subscription—a generous fund collected primarily by Ulstermen living in Calcutta for the purposes of reviving the performance of the Irish harp and its music in Belfast. The second Irish Harp Society was active until 1839, and Bunting was involved in engaging suitable harp teachers to teach at the Society's school and in tracking the progress of the students.²⁷ In an advertisement in the *Dublin Evening Post* on 5 October 1819, Bunting's residence at 18 Leeson Street was given as the corresponding address for prospective harp teachers. Edward McBride was appointed harp teacher in January 1820; he was succeeded by Valentine Rainey (Rennie) in 1822 and James Jackson in 1837.

The advertisement in the *Dublin Evening Post* of 1819, which was signed by the secretary of the Harp Society, John Ward, is interesting for another reason. Ward writes the following:

The Society, sensible of the many years arduous and successful labours of Mr. Bunting in collecting the original Music of the Irish Harp from its purest sources, request his speedily perfecting the Work by publishing the remainder of the

Boydell (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* (Dublin, 2013), vol. 2, p. 817.

26 Ita Hogan, *Anglo-Irish Music, 1780-1830* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1966), p. 94.

27 For a comprehensive account of the second Irish Harp Society of Belfast and its crucial role in the education of Irish harpers from 1819 to 1839, see Mary Louise O'Donnell, 'The Bengal Subscription: patriotism, patronage and the perpetuation of the Irish harp tradition in the early nineteenth century', in Sandra Joyce and Helen Lawlor (eds), *Harp Studies: Perspectives on the Irish Harp* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2016), pp. 75-89.



Figure 2: Frontispiece of *The Ancient Music of Ireland* by Edward Bunting (1840).
(Courtesy of the Irish Traditional Music Archive)

Ancient Melodies: and that he continue to give that zealous attention in Dublin, to the objects of the Irish Harp Society, which he has done during his residence at Belfast.²⁸

Unfortunately, the ‘Work’ to which Ward referred would not be published for another two decades and the process of collating and preparing the material for publication would be extremely challenging and arduous, not only for Bunting, but also for his wife Mary Anne.

It is unknown when Bunting began the process of working on his final volume entitled *The Ancient Music of Ireland arranged for the piano forte. To which is prefixed a dissertation on the Irish harp and harpers, including an account of the old melodies of Ireland* (fig. 2). He was encouraged by Dr James MacDonnell, George Petrie and other friends over many years. A letter from MacDonnell to Bunting written on 26 October 1836 suggests that Bunting’s plans for another collection had become a source of amusement and bemusement. MacDonnell wrote: ‘When you publish your music, which I now never expect to see, as I am so old and you so indolent, be sure to print some commentary upon the tunes, stating all the conjectures that you can form about them’.²⁹

By mid-1839 Bunting’s enthusiasm for the collection had been successfully reignited. A series of letters between Bunting and Dr James MacDonnell (published by Charlotte Milligan Fox³⁰ in *Annals of the Irish Harpers*) reflects the genuine enthusiasm for the project. In September 1839, MacDonnell wrote to Bunting:

You will scarcely believe how much the receipt of your letter has raised my spirits, ‘tis the best cordial I got since I saw you, and I now think the publication of this volume may be the means of yet reviving this [Irish Harp] Society, for as Rainey was better than O’Neill, and as there was yet two persons nearly as good as Rainey, besides the Master, why need others despair that others might not succeed?³¹

MacDonnell was somewhat over eager. A few months earlier John McAdam, the secretary of the Irish Harp Society, wrote to Bunting articulating the dire state of the harping tradition in Ireland; ‘Our gentry in Ireland are too scarce, and too little national, to encourage itinerant harpers, as of old: besides, the taste and fashion of music no

28 Ibid., p. 84.

29 Fox, *Annals*, p. 275.

30 For Fox’s biographical information and lists of her musical and literary publications, see Sara C. Lanier (ed.), *Annals of the Irish Harpers* (Larne: Ardrigh Books, 2013), pp. xiii-xxv and pp. 311-16.

31 Fox, *Annals*, p. 277.

longer bears upon our national instrument; it had its day, but, like all other fashions, it must give way to novelty.³²

Frequent letters from MacDonnell to Bunting between 1839 and 1840 suggest that he guided and encouraged Bunting through the process of bringing the final volume to publication. He advised on the etymology of Irish words, the choice of font and even how to placate Petrie and John O' Donovan if they disagreed with his editorial decisions. Bunting's health was deteriorating, and his mood was often unpredictable; without the assistance of MacDonnell, Petrie and others to proof the contents, the collection would never have been published. Petrie suggests that Bunting had a particular vision for the volume and found it difficult to find a publisher who shared his vision for the style and layout of the collection.³³ Dublin publishers Hodges and Smith were eventually engaged, and Bunting's magnum opus was published in 1840 and dedicated to Queen Victoria. Petrie contributed some tunes to the collection, as did Miss Murphy from Dublin; he also wrote 'Memoir of ancient Irish harp preserved in Trinity College'. Samuel Ferguson contributed an essay entitled 'Of the antiquity of the harp and bagpipe in Ireland'.

Petrie, Ferguson, and others were duly credited in the 1840 collection. There were two other figures who were not mentioned, both of whom gently encouraged and supported Bunting—one was his beloved wife, Mary Anne, the other, also named Mary Ann, was his lifelong friend and greatest champion. In a series of letters from Bunting to Mary Ann McCracken, we discover the extent of his wife's contribution to the project. On 15 December 1839, he wrote:

...my work is now over, thank God, nearly put out of my hand and my poor wife's also, who has had a weary time of it; indeed, I may safely say for the last twelve months, the pen has never been out of her hand, copying, copying, back and forward, until both her heart and fingers were broken. As for me between the various annoyances, and other distressing things I have met, surely no one would believe how I have surmounted them, in my weakness of both mind and body without a single one to help me with their advice, except my own wise woman, and as but for her I could have done nothing, she has indeed been a good fortune to me—having to struggle with every wayward appearance of ill-health, and what was, I believe, worse on her than all, the extreme irritability of my temper, not improved by the many crosses and jostlings I met with in the publication of this

32 Letter cited in Aiken McClelland, 'The Irish Harp Society', *Ulster Folklife* 21 (1975), pp. 15-24 (at p. 21).

33 P. [George Petrie], 'Our portrait gallery. No XLI—Edward Bunting,' p. 72.

herculean task, and a most dreadful task it has been to me all the time; but now it begins to lighten.³⁴

In another letter to Mary Ann McCracken, written on 9 April 1840, he again acknowledged Mary Anne's contribution.

I may make a little fame but no money I fear, and the trouble of bringing out the book to poor Mamma and me has been immense. No one would believe it, and the knowledge of it sets my brain awondering how we accomplished such a mass of downright hard work. It is certain without her active assistance it could never have been done.³⁵

The process of bringing the 1840 collection to fruition was emotional for Bunting. He remembered those friends from his youth in Belfast that helped him in his early career. He recalled his friend Henry Joy and suggested to Mary Ann that 'he would delight in all this if alive; he comes into my thoughts with many of my old friends very often.'³⁶ The publication of *The Ancient Music of Ireland* renewed Bunting's interest in his previous publications and he was working on revised editions of the 1797 and 1809 volumes – this work was never completed. On 21 December 1843, he suffered a heart attack and died. His son Anthony, a civil engineer, died of cholera in 1849 at the age of 29. His beloved Mary Anne was left in difficult financial circumstances after Edward's death and various attempts to secure a civil pension were unsuccessful; she died on 27 May 1863.

Although Bunting struggled with the preparation of his final volume, he was proud that his life's work had ultimately come to fruition. He never gained financially from his efforts, but his work influenced countless others, including the next generation of collectors, such as William Forde and John Edward Pigot.³⁷ In one of his final letters he acknowledged his extraordinary historic achievements:

My labour at the Irish music is all but closed...We must hope the best, notwithstanding, but the work itself will remain a monument of my unwearied perseverance and industry for nearly fifty years, and I have the satisfaction of

34 Fox, *Annals*, pp. 302-3

35 Ibid., p. 304.

36 Ibid., p. 303.

37 I am indebted to Nicholas Carolan for drawing my attention to Bunting's influence on both collectors and for sharing his published research on William Forde and unpublished material on John Edward Pigot.

reflecting farther, that it could not at any period of the last thirty years have come out half so well, and with so much interest to both the antiquarian and the musician as at present. My discovery of the structure of Irish music...stamps the work with no common interest, which discovery makes the book invaluable...I have no hopes of its being of benefit to me or my family, the only remuneration, I expect, is a sort of introduction for Anthony, as the son of a man who toiled so long at the expense of both money, labour, and health. This last I add as I truly think it has in some degree shortened my stay in this world, in trying to restore...a page in the history of man.³⁸

38 Fox, *Annals*, pp. 304-5.

Mary Louise O'Donnell

Mary Louise O'Donnell is a harpist and musicologist who has performed extensively throughout Ireland, Europe, Africa and Asia as a soloist and with various ensembles. She was awarded a doctorate by the University of Limerick in 2009 and, since then, has published widely on topics relating to Irish cultural history, semiotics and performance studies. Her first book, *Ireland's Harp: The Shaping of Irish Identity c. 1770-1880*, was published in 2014 by UCD Press. Mary Louise's other research on the history,



performance practice and symbolism of the Irish harp has been published in *Utopian Studies*, *Éire Ireland*, the *Journal of the Society for Musicology in Ireland* and the *American Harp Journal*. Her current research interests include the genesis and development of the pedal harp tradition in Ireland from the eighteenth century to the present, the diverse ways in which the Irish harp was used to construct identity among Irish emigrants to North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the pedagogical potential of harp music to assist children and young people with complex needs. Some of this research will be published in *Harp Studies II: World Harp Traditions* (forthcoming) and *Irish Musical Studies 13* (forthcoming).

Mary Louise has received many awards and grants to further her research, including an Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship, Fulbright Scholarship, Dobbin Scholarship (Ireland Canada University Foundation), Centre Culturel Irlandais Fellowship and a Georgian Papers Project Fellowship. In 2019, she was appointed Musician-in-Residence with Fingal County Council and in 2020, was awarded a bursary by Fingal Arts Office to commission Rhona Clarke to compose a new work for voice/harp; *Music, Stars & Atoms* was premiered in 2021. Mary Louise frequently collaborates with her sister Teresa, and they released an album entitled *Heavenly harps, heavenly cloths: contemporary music for the Irish harp by Brian Boydell* in December 2020.