

Hop.dy-Naa

Hop-dy-Naa:
Fragments in Manx Gaelic and English
collected from Manx oral tradition

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1. INTRODUCTION

Manx Gaelic *Hop-dy-Naa*, the name given to the last day of the Celtic year (31 October) on which children are wont to go from house to house chanting a rhyme and thereby earning sweets (nowadays money), does not appear to have any Celtic etymology. The phrase *Hop-dy-Naa* forms a vocable chorus to the rhyme chanted, which seems to have given its name to the event, formally *Sauin* (Gaelic *Samhain* ‘end of summer’), *Oie Houney* /öi: 'hounə/ (Gaelic *Oidhche Shamhna*) ‘the night of Souney / *Samhna*, Eng. ‘Hollantide’ / ‘Hallowe'en’. Many customs are associated with this event. Some comments:

According to KELLY 1866(1805) v.s. *Baal-Sauin*,

[...]. On this night [i.e. Hollantide] [...] “the women knead their dough to make cakes to the Queen of Heaven” [...]. Much ceremony is observed in making this cake, which is sacred to love [...] and is called the “soddag valloo” or dumb cake. Every woman is obliged to assist in mixing the ingredients, kneading the dough and baking the cake on glowing embers; and when sufficiently baked they divide it, eat it up, and retire to their beds backwards without speaking, from which silence the cake derives its name, and in the course of the night expect to see the images of the men who are destined to be their husbands [...] (Kelly 1866 v.s. *Baal-Sauin*, quoted also in Paton [1941]: 76).

MOORE (1891: 125), in quoting the above, adds that the ingredients included “flour, eggs and eggshells, soot, &c.” For further details see Moore (1891: 122-125), Clague (1911: 23-31), Paton ([1941]: 76), Gilchrist (JFSS (1924-26): 174-177).

Karl ROEDER (1904: 17), a native of Gera, Thüringen, but then resident in Manchester, notes the following custom associated with *Hop dy Naa*:

On Holy Eve the girls used to go at 12 o'clock at night and carry a ball of woollen yarn in their hand, and steal to a barn without anyone knowing anything about it, and twisting the end of it round their wrist threw the ball in the darkness as far as they could; then after a little while they began to wind it up, beginning at the end twined around their wrist. If the thread was held they would cry out [in Manx]: ‘Who is holding the thread?’ and they expected whoever held it to say who he was; if there was no answer they were to be old maids (Roeder: 1904: 17, quoted also in Paton: [1941]: 77).

HARRISON (1873: 148) notes:

On Old Hollantide Eve, the 11th of November, it is the custom, particularly in country districts, for boys to go from house to house shouting out the above word [‘Hop-tu-naa’] accompanied with any quantity of question and answer as follows: [then comes an abbreviated version of the the text in 14 lines]:

CLAGUE (1911: 31) has the following to say about this tradition:

On Hollantide Eve boys went into gardens and fields, and pulled cabbage and cabbage stalks, and then went about beating the doors.

Young girls and young boys gathered together to make spree, and they used to try different ways of finding out fortunes. When they had tried all the ways (methods) they knew, the girls went to bake the dumb cake. Nobody was to speak one word, and every one was to help in making the dough. It was baked on the ashes, or on the bake stone (griddle). When it was baked, it was broken up, and each girl had a piece of it. She went to bed walking backwards, and she would see a sign of her lover in a dream.

When they did not bake the dumb cake, they ate a salt herring, in the same way, and it would do quite as well (Clague 1911: 31).

MORRISON (MNHL MS. c.1900). Printed in MOORE, MORRISON & GOODWIN (1924: 84):

On Hollantide Eve, the 31st of October, children go from door to door carrying lanterns, some of which are made of scooped-out turnips with a candle inserted and holes cut in the rind in rude imitation of the eyes and mouth of a man. The children repeat the rhyme of Hop-the-nei and collect coppers for a ‘taffy spree’ to be held later in the evening among themselves. If money is refused, the boys bang the doors with cabbage-stalks and turnips.

1.1. *HOP DY NAA (Hollantide chant)*

Texts (Manx / English): Clague (1911: 26-29 from Tom Kermodé, Bradda RU ent. *Hop! Ta'n Oie* with Eng. trans.), various (oral, with Eng. trans.), Roeder (1896: 184-186; versions from Ramsey (Eng.), “A Bannag from the Mull” RU (Mx.), Surby RU (Mx.), Port Erin RU (Mx.; frag.), Ramsey (Eng.; frag.), Ballaugh (Mx; frag.), Glen Maye PA (Eng.)), Morrison (1900 Eng. gathered in Peel¹), Paton ([1941]: 76-82).

Printed texts: Train (1845 II: 123), Harrison (1869: 148 ent. *Hop-tu-naa* (ex Train, qv), also in Paton [1941] 78), Moore (1896: 68-69, ent. Hop-Tu-Naa, seemingly reconstructed), Clague (1911: 26-29), Moore, Morrison & Goodwin (1924: 84), Paton [1941]: 26-29). The version in Train (perhaps with minor variants) also in Harrison 1869, Clague 1911, Gill 1932.²

Tune: Clague C1/49:2 Tom Kermodé, Bradda, ent. *Hop dy nai* (Gilchrist (1924-26): 174), Moore (1896: 243) I: Mrs. [Margaret Frissel] Ferrier, Castletown, II: Philip Cain (‘Phillie the Desert’), Baldwin BN.

2. TEXTS FROM MANX ORAL TRADITION

Rhÿs collected fragmentary versions from the following informants in August 1890:

2.1. *William Killip (1834-1922), Clyeen, Michael, 03.08.1890 (Rhÿs Diary (Notebook 6): 95).*

“He [Killip] had a good deal of knowledge of the old superstitions and he remembers as a boy going with other boys on the Eve of Læ Houna with big sticks with cabbages on the tops of them (turnips also are used in the same way) and beating at peoples' doors repeating the rhyme

1 Manuscript text untitled and undated (but c.1900) on Manx calendar customs by Sophia Morrison (MNHL MS09495 Sophia Morrison Papers Box 6). Printed in Moore, Morrison & Goodwin (1924: 84) under the title *Hop-the-Nei* [hop də nei] (Morrison’s phonetic version). See also Miller (2020) *Manx Notes* 509: 1.

2 List not exhaustive. See Miller (2020) 509: 4 for further details.

[nɔ:x əi sɔuna, hɔp dɛ nɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:
mɛ:rax lɛ: sɔuna, tra lə lɛ:, tra lə lɛ:]

[Noght Oie Souney, Hop-dy-Naa (x2)
mairagh Laa Souney, tra lal laa (x2)]

[tonight is *Oie Houney*, Hop dy Naa, Hop dy Naa / tomorrow is *Laa Souney*, tra lal laa].

But nobody can explain to me „Hop dɛ nɛ“. After repeating it they used to run away, but not before much annoying some people against whom they had a grudge: it goes on still it seems” (Rhÿs *Diary*: 95).

2.2. *John Kermode (1811-1891), Surby, Rushen, & Richard Qualtrough (1835-1903), Port Erin, Rushen 07.08.1890* (Rhÿs *Diary*: 104-105).

“Mr. Kermode and a Mr. Qualtragh who came in told me about the Hollantide practices; boys go about gathering gifts anything they can get - in the North it was sometimes potatoes - and here especially herrings: they sell them and get a toffee spree. What they sing sounds thus:

[nɔ:x əi houna, hɔp dʒu nɛ:, hɔp dʒu nɛ:
famən nə ɡɔuna, tral lal lɛ:, tral lal lɛ:
kjalax nə kiarkən, hɔp dʒu nɛ:] &c.

[Noght Oie Houney, Hop Tu Naa
famman ny gouney, tra lal laa
kellagh ny kiarkyn, Hop Tu Naa].

[tonight is Oie Houney... / tail of the heifer... / cock or hens...].

But there is more though they could not recollect it” (Rhÿs *Diary*: 105).

2.3. *William Corrin (1817-1892), Cronk y Doonee, Rushen 08.08.1890* (Rhÿs *Diary*: 113).

“Our informant was Billy Corrin better known as Billy Jin so called from his mother Jane. He pronounced a few words for us, but there was nothing peculiar in his pronunciation, and he gave us a more sensible form of the Hollantide rhyme than 'famyn y gowna' the heifer's tale [sic], namely:

[nɔ:x öi houna, hɔp dʒəu nɛ:i, hɔp dʒəu nɛ:i
ʃivər nə ɡɔuna, hɔp dʒəu nɛ:i, hɔp dʒəu nɛ:i
kən ɡo:n marmad, hɔp dʒəu nɛ:i, hɔp dʒəu nɛ:i
ɡo:n spo:dax bræk, hɔp dʒəu nɛ:i, hɔp dʒəu nɛ:i]
(WCn).

[Noght Oie Houney, Hop Tu Naa
shibbyr ny gouney, Hop Tu Laa
cre'n gouin marmayd, Hop Tu Naa
gouin spottagh breck, Hop Tu Naa].

[tonight is Oie Houney... / supper of / for the heifer... /what heifer shall we kill... / a speckled spotted heifer...].

There is, however, more of the same sort but he does not recollect but it is clear that " yonder lumps of boys" were bent on something more serious than gathering halfpennies or herrings ?did they at one time use to sacrifice a heifer on November Eve and feast on it” (Rhÿs *Diary* 113).

2.4. “*Paaie Vooar*” (Mrs. Margaret Taylor (1816-1890)), *Surby, Rushen 08.08.1890* (Rhÿs *Diary*: 116-118).

“On the oi Howna [öi 'houna] the girls swept the ashes carefully into the open fireplace and flattened it down level: then in the morning they looked for a footstep in it, and if it pointed towards the door it meant a burial and if the contrary it meant a wedding - that is what she said, and it is

more probable than 'a birth' as I was told in the North. I cross examined severely as to the time but she had no hesitation: it is Hollantide and I believe her quite right for her whole thought is devoted to that sort of thing. That was also the time for eating the salt herring so as to dream of the sweet-heart: the girl remembers doing it but she saw nobody, but she was readily persuaded that she had not done rightly as the roasting and the eating (bones and all) must be done without saying a single word and she ought to have walked backwards to bed. It was then also they made the "soddag valloo" or dumb cake, so called because they must not talk while making and eating it. There was the time too when the girls went with their mouth full of water and hands full of salt to the next door to listen for a man's name, which would be that of the future husband too - old Pei corrected me by saying that it must be the second neighbour's door not the next one. Anyhow it was at Hollantide. She gave me the following version of the rhyme so far as she could remember it:

[nɔ:x öi hɔuna	hɔp dɛ nɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:
fɪðə nə ɡɔuna ("weaver" she said)	" "
kən ɡo:n marməd	" "
ən ʏo:n vɛɡ vræk	" "
kən kɛru vɛrməd sə fɔt dʒɛ:	" "
ən kɛru vɛɡ dʒɛrə	" "]

Then I lost the thread of the yarn and it began again with

[hɛ:st mi ɛr ən jɛuri 'I tasted of the boiling(?)	hɔp dɛ nɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:
skold mi mə hɛn'ə 'I scalded my tongue'	" "
rəi mi dɛdɛn ʃɪvɔrt 'I ran to the well'	
" "]	

There is a string more which I have heard in English somewhere.

[Fair copy:

nɔ:x öi hɔuna , hɔp dɛ nɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:	Noght Oie Houney, Hop dy Naa
fɪðə nə ɡɔuna, hɔp dɛ nɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:	fiddler ny gouney, Hop dy Naa
kən ɡo:n marməd, hɔp dɛ nɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:	cre'n gouin marmayd, Hop dy Naa
ən ʏo:n vɛɡ vræk, hɔp dɛ nɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:	yn ghouin veg vreck, Hop dy Naa'.
kən kɛru vɛrməd sə fɔt dʒɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:	cre'n kerroo vermayd sy phot jeh, HdNaa
ən kɛru vɛɡ dʒɛrə, hɔp dɛ nɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:	yn kerroo veg jerrey, Hop dy Naa
hɛ:st mi ɛr ən jɛuri, hɔp dɛ nɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:	haste mee er yn gheuree, Hop dy Naa
skold mi mə hɛn'ə, hɔp dɛ nɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:	scauld mee my hengey, Hop dy Naa
rəi mi dɛdɛn ʃɪvɔrt, hɔp dɛ nɛ:, hɔp dɛ nɛ:	roie mee dys yn çhibbyrt, Hop dy Naa.

'tonight is Oie Houney... / weaver of the heifer... / what heifer shall we kill.../ the little speckled heifer... / what quarter shall we put in the pot... / the wee end quarter... / I tasted the broth... / I scalded my tongue... / I ran to the well...'].

Another Öi Howna superstition practised by the girls was to place on the floors basins with mould meal, clean water, dirty water, a piece of net &c. Then the girl with her eyes banded tried her luck at the basins, if she put her hand in the clean water basin her husband was to be a good looking one, if in the mould, he was to be a farmer, if in the meal, he was to be a miller, and so on a fisherman, shoemaker, carpenter &c." (*Rhÿs Diary*: 116-118).

3. OTHER VERSIONS OF THE CHANT

3.1. *Recorded from Mrs. Radcliffe, Ohio, Andreas, 1919, by Cyril Paton MNHL MS 1012 C (see §4.2. below).*

Hop tu Naa - Noght ta Houney
" " " - Mairagh Laa Souney
- Kellagh as kiark
- Ceau mee 'sy phot
- Y pot mie broit
- Scoaldehy my hengey
- Roie mee rish chibbyr
- Cre honnick oo shen?
- Kayt mooar gynnal
- Roie mee gys Albin
- Cre honnick oo ayns shen?
- Ben giarey caashey
- Ghiare ee y vair ec
- Lapp ee ayns sheidey
- Trogg [?Vrod] ee lesh freeney

3.2. *Versions recorded in Manx Gaelic and English from various parts of the Isle of Man by Karl Roeder (1895-1900). In: Yn Lioar Manninagh III: 184-186.*

3.2.1. *From Ramsey:*

Hop-tu-naa - This is old Hollantide night
Trollalaa - the moon shines fair and bright
Hop-tu-naa - I went to the well
Trollalaa - I drank my fill
Hop-tu-naa - on my way back
Trollalaa - I met a witch cat (polecat)
Hop-tu-naa - The cat began to grin
Trollalaa - and I began to run
Hop-tu-naa - where did you run to?
Trollalaa - I ran to Scotland
Hop-tu-naa - What were you doing there?
Trollalaa - baking bannocks & roasting collops
If you're going to give us anything, give it us soon
Or we'll be away by the light of the moon.

3.2.2. *A Bannag from the Mull:*

Noght Oie Hauiney	Hopdyn ay!
Famman y ghouney	Hopdyn ay!
Quoi'n gauin marmayd	Hopdyn ay!
Y gauin beg breck shid	Hopdyn ay!
Ren mee in brott	Hopdyn ay!
Losht mee my scoarnagh	Hopdyn ay!

Roie mee gys yn chibber	Hopdyn ay!
Giu mee my haie	Hopdyn ay!
Er yn raad cheet thie	Hopdyn ay!
Veet mee kayt keoi	Hopdyn ay!
Haink kayt dy scryssey	Hopdyn ay!
Hie mish dy roie	Hopdyn ay!
Cre gys roie oo?	Hopdyn ay!
Roie mee gys Nalbin	Hopdyn ay!
Cre honnick oo ayn?	Hopdyn ay!
Va'n vuck vooar fuinney ayn	Hopdyn ay!
Va'n vuck veg cur fo'n gryle	Hopdyn ay!

3.2.3. *From Surby:*

Noght Oie Hauiney	Hopd yn ay!
Shibber ny ghouney	Hopd yn ay!
Quoi yn gauin mar mayd?	
Yn gauin beg breck shid	
Quoi yn kierroo ver mayd ayns phot?	
Yn kierroo beg jerrey	
Hest mee er y brott	
Scolt mee my hengey	
Roie mee dys yn chibbyr	
Giu mee my haie	
Er yn raad cheet thie	
Veet mee chayt keoi	
Ve ginney dy scyssey orrim	
Hie mish dy roie, etc.	

3.2.4. *From Port Erin*

Noght oie hauin	- tral-la-laa!
Kellagh ny giark	- tral-la-laa!
Chibber ny gauin	- hopd yn ay
Yiare mee my vair	- hopd yn ay

As roie mee dys chibber	- hopd yn ay
Er raad back	- hopd yn ay
Veet mee yn chayt keoi	- hopd yn ay
As roie mee dy Nalbin	- hopd yn ay

3.2.5. *From Ramsey:*

Hoptunaa, ringo, ringo
Hoptunaa, billigo, fingo
Hoptunaa, the moon as shining fair & bright, etc.

3.2.6. *From Ballaugh:*

Noght oie houney - Hoptunaa
Maragh laa houney - Trolalaa
Hoptunaa is old Hollantide night
Trolalaa, the moon shines fair and bright.

3.2.7. *From Glen Meay:*

I went to the rock - trollalaa!
The rock gave me cold - hopdynay!
The cold to the smith - "
The smith gave me a lock
The lock to the barn
The barn gave me straw
The straw to the cow
The cow gave me milk
The milk to the cat
The cat to the kitten
The cat began to grin
And I went to run
Where did you run to?
I ran to Scotland, etc.³

4. PRINTED VERSIONS

Hop-tu-Naa ex Joseph TRAIN (1845 II: 123), the first known printed version (14 lines). This is reprinted in HARRISON (1869: 148). CLAGUE (1911: 26-29) prints a much fuller version (with English text) of 42 lines. See above list (§1.1.) for other versions.

4.1. The version in Train:

Noght oie howney hop-dy-naw [sic] [naa]
Hop-tu-naa - This is old Hollantide night
Trollalaa - The moon shines fair & bright
Hop-tu-naaI - went to the well
Trollalaa - And drank my fill
Hop-tu-naa - On the way coming back
Trollalaa - I met a pole-cat
Hop-tu-naa - The cat began to grin
Trollalaa - And I began to run
Hop-tu-naa - Where did you run to?
Trollalaa - I ran to Scotland
Hop-tu-naa - What were they doing there?
Trollalaa - Baking bannocks and roasting collops
++++
Hop-tu-naa, Trollalaa.
If you are going to give us anything, give it us soon

3 For this version see TRAIN (1845) (§4.1.).

or we'll be away by the light of the moon. Hop-tu-naa.⁴

In this regard MORRISON (MNHL MS 09495 c. 1900) notes:

There are various versions of the doggerel rhyme [...] found in Manx and English in the different districts of the Island. The following [text] [in Morrison MNHL MS 09495 next] is one that has been commonly used in Peel. It is repeated antiphonally, one speaker saying 'hop-the-nei' and the other speaker responding with 'put in the pot', and so on throughout (Morrison MNHL MS 09495).

4.2. In this regard PATON ([1941]: 80-82) notes:

This [the Clague version] was from the *south* of the Island. In June 1919 I took down from the recitation of Mrs. Radcliffe of Ohio Cottage, Andreas (since deceased), a very similar, but somewhat less complete, version. "Hop-tu-naa" began each line, as in Dr. Clague's copy [qv]. Variations are Hop-tu-naa ... Cock and hen, ... I threw into the pot ... A good pot of broth ... Scalding my tongue ... A big grinning cat ... She cut her finger ... She wrapped it round with silk ... She fixed it with a pin. Like Dr. Clague's version, it was in Manx.

This formula, we can hardly call it a rhyme, was thus widespread in the Island, both in the South and in the North; but the following extreme version from Glen Maye differs so widely from the others that it deserves to be quoted [see §3.2.7. above].

4.3. In quoting an ms. from J. J. KNEEN, 1935, Paton continues:

Latterly this [foregoing] rhyme seems to have been forgotten by the boys, and they go about chanting the following:

'Jinny the Winny went over the house
To get a stick to leather the mouse.'

After lustily singing this verse they give a door a loud and resounding whack with a huge cudgel and then make themselves scarce. Even this remnant of an ancient custom is fast dying out [1941], although it was common enough thirty or forty years ago (Paton [1941]: 81).⁵

4.4. In this context, according to A. W. MOORE (1891: 125), quotes in PATON ([1941]: 82):

The boys who went round sing this song carried big sticks with cabbages or turnips stuck in the top, and with these they knocked at people's doors till they received herrings and potatoes and such-like gifts (Moore 1891: 125).

4.5. A more modern version of this practice was told to us on one occasion by an uncle of ours then living in Lezayre Road, a main thoroughfare in Ramsey (1958-63):

He said to us that when the boys came round to his house during the evening of *Hop-dy-naa* (at that time looking for money, rather than potatoes or herring) he did not oblige, but stayed in. The following morning he found that his front garded gates had been turned round on their hinges, that they opened out on to the main road! (GB).

4 This is the version I heard chanted from Manx semi-speaker Ewan Christian (1907-1985), Peel, 1978. The chant would involve the first part, the slogan *Hop-dy-naa*, being "ejected" from the mouth at a given pitch, with the second part, the text similarly "ejected" but at an octave lower, and this would continue right through the chant. – GB.

5 Here Paton ([1941]: 81) quotes a similar couplet from the same tradition: "Jinny Squinney [squinting] went up the Claddagh / To get her apron-full of barragh [refuse of tow or flax]." Or "Jinny Squinney went through a hole / To get a rod to beat the foal." For a discussion on this theme and on *Hop-tu-Naa* in general, see MILLER *Manx Notes* 502 & 509 (2020) <<http://chiollaghbooks.com/manxnotes/>>.

This sort of prank, it seems, was not uncommon then.

5. ABBREVIATIONS

ed. - editor.

ent. - entitled.

JFSS – Journl of the Folksong Society.

n.d. - no date.

s.v. - *sub voce* (under the word).

v.s. - *vide sub* (see under).

vol(s) – volume(s).

YLM – Yn Lioar Manninagh.

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