

Queltagh



Mr Darcy: a very welcome first visitor on New Year's Day.

My late father, Bernard Kermode, used to be a stickler for Manx traditions including what is known as *Queltagh* or first footing on New Year's Day. This is the first guest to enter a home on New Year's Day and was considered important as bringing good fortune for the coming year.

First footing is also practised in other Celtic countries including Scotland where it is known in Gaelic as *ciad-chuairt*.

In Manx folklore, the *Queltagh* has to be a **dark haired man**.

This is something my father took seriously, to the point of not letting any woman in to the house before the preferred *Queltagh* had entered.

I remember an incident one year when I was a boy growing up in Kirk Michael where a neighbour called Sandra came to see my mother early on New Year's Day but my father stubbornly refused to let her in.

Sandra had to go and get her elder brother Colin, a talk dark haired handsome man, who was warmly welcomed in as a bearer of good luck. Only then did my father allow Sandra in.

I recall that this caused something of hoo-ha with Sandra upset but that is what superstition dictated, although nowadays this quaint custom would undoubtedly be considered politically incorrect and discriminatory against women as well as blonde, ginger haired and bald men!

Another charming Manx practice on New Year's Eve is the sweeping of crossroads.



Ballaugh Crossroads: can it be cleared of "Lil fellas"? Or are they hiding in the river under the bridge?

My later mother Milly had friends called Anne Kelly and Jean Skinner (both now deceased) who lived in Ballaugh village.

On New Year's Eve just before Midnight they would go to Ballaugh crossroads, on the TT course next to the *Raven* pub, and clean the four-way crossing with sweeping brushes.

Apparently, it was something to do with brushing away all sorts of gremlins, sprites and goblins who it seems would travel along highways and meet at road junctions.

Many spirits are believed to inhabit *Ellan Vannin* such as:-

- i) *Jinny the witch*. This is the witch who is mentioned in the *Hop-tu-Naa* song on 31st October each year, "***Hop-tu-Naa, Hop-tu-Naa, Jinny the witch flew over the house, to get some sticks to lather the mouse. Hop-tu-Naa, Hop-tu-Naa, your mother's gone away and she won't be back until the morning***".



She may catch and eat little children as well as mice.

- ii) Bugganes. These are huge monsters with glittering tusks and sharp claws.

One Manx *Buggane* allegedly tore the roof off St. Trinian's Church, Greeba whilst a young tailor called Timothy Clucas was making a pair of breeches inside by candlelight.



Tim – look who's behind you!

Another *Buggane* battled with the magical Irish giant Finn MacCool (Foinn mac Cumhaill) who legend has it scooped out of part of Ireland and threw it into the Irish Sea creating the Isle of Man and leaving behind a void, which filled with water to create Lough Neagh, Co.Antrim.

- iii) Phynnodderees. These are naked pixie like creatures with soft shaggy hair. Some live happily under the *Fairy Bridge*, Santon and must be greeted with a cheery Hello by travellers passing by; otherwise, there could be trouble ahead.

Phynnodderees often live in *Tramman* (Elder) trees on country farms and have a kindly nature but are easily offended. To upset one of these imps can bring ruin to a homestead, with gates naughtily left open, drystone walls spitefully pushed over and sickles mischievously hidden in gorse bushes.

Largely nocturnal, Phynnodderees loyally assist with family tasks such as cutting hay by moonlight in the summer, collecting fresh hens' eggs before breakfast and herding Loughtan sheep on snowy nights.

One friendly critter reputedly helped a family build a house in *Tholt-y-Will*, Sulby by carrying all the required heavy rocks from Ballaugh shore in just one evening.

In return, the humble elves only ask for a bit of leftover food as a reward and are said to be partial to butter milk, warm griddlecakes and bonnag.

The Rev Drummond Brown in his enchanting 1901 poem writes:

PHYNNODDEREE

**High in the heavens the moon holds sway,
And, through that shadowed trees, her beam
Makes jewels in the dancing spray
And silver bars across the stream.**

**Save for the splashing, swift cascade,
And rustling leaves on bush and tree,
A silence fills the sylvan glade
Where dwells the lone Phynnodderree**

**Hark, like the moaning of the wind,
That sorrows through the dreary east,
Wailing, he comes whom fairies bind
To this strange lot,-half man, half beast.**

**Shaggy his coat, his eyes afire,
And strong as twenty lions he;
Yet, so ye waken not his ire
Ye need not fear Phynnodderree.**

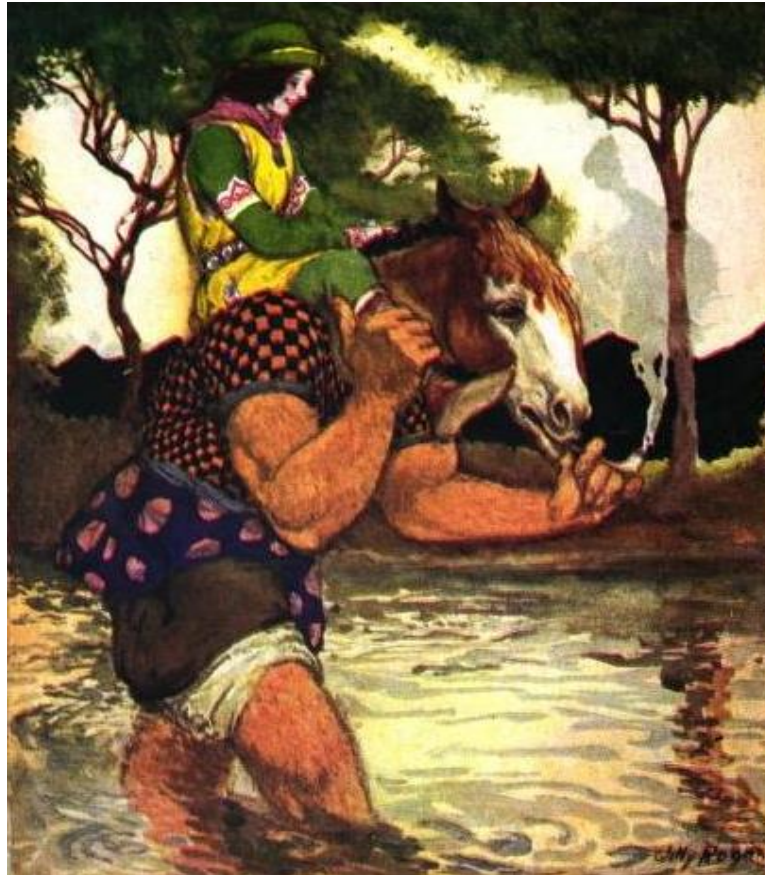
**And so ye serve him well, ye gain,
In him a friend beyond compare;
That service to requite, no pain,
No labour will the goblin spare.**



***Forget "Man Friday", every home needs a Phynnodderree –but
beware that they do bare grudges if crossed.***

- iv) *Glashtyns*. These are strange fiends with horses' ears and hooves, which are "*back to front*". They supposedly smell like rotten seaweed.

Apparently, these scary pucks live by still waters and like to be ridden. They are rumoured to howl loudly, especially when seducing lonely women or when luring them into the sea.



A risky blind date!

- v) *Moddey Dhoo*. This is a ghostly hound with thick black hair and eyes like burning coals of fire, reputed to haunt Peel Castle even to the present day.

It is said to live in a damp underground passageway connecting the medieval castle wall to the old apartment of the Captain of the Guard.

In 1666, a drunken soldier in the Castle was allegedly ripped to shreds by the phantom black dog and died 3 days later.

The eerie dog has also been spotted roaming up Glen Auldyn, Lezayre and lurking in a boggy field called *Robin-y-gate*, Ballamodda, in the Parish of Malew.



Perhaps not a mutt suitable for rehoming.

Brushing the crossroads was meant to sweep away all sinister and dark forces and ensure a propitious year ahead.

But to have a favourable year do we really need a *Queltagh* or to clear crossroads or indeed anything else auspicious such as finding a four-leaf clover or eating Chinese fortune cookies, wearing a lucky rabbit's foot, discovering an old penny in the street or pulling a chicken's wishbone?

Of course not, because the reality is that each one of us has the personal power **within** to bring about valuable change.

All that is needed is a clear vision, a burning sense of injustice or a passion to right a wrong or fire in the belly to tell the truth, then the determination and bravery to see it through.

And so as 2024 begins, simply pick up a pen or open your laptop, perhaps to write a letter for example to the Chairman of the Steam Packet Co asking for details about the generous salaries and fees paid to its executive and non-executive directors and whether such handsome remuneration is deserved for such an unreliable and expensive ferry service.

Or make a *Freedom of Information* request for example to the Clerk of Tynwald asking for details about Treasury Minister Dr Allinson's long standing shareholding in Oxford BioMedica, as declared in the Register of MHK's Interests, the firm which

partnered Astrazeneca to manufacture its Covid-19 vaccine, which was the jab given to most Manx residents.

Or maybe organise a public meeting or protest for example about the acute lack of affordable housing on the Island and then let the political or legal journey begin.

A Mr Darcy *Queltagh* is definitely not necessary, just a ***spirit of resistance***.

The New Year Blessing in Manx Gaelic

Ollick ghennal erriu as blein feer vie,
(A merry Christmas on ye, and a very good year),
Seihll as slaynt da'n slane lught thie.
(Long life and health to the whole household).
Bea as gennallys eu bio ry-cheilley,
(Your life and mirth living together),
Shee as graih eddyr mraane as deiney.
(Peace and love between women and men).
Coid as cowryn, stock as stoyr.
(Goods and wealth, stock and store),
Palçhey phuddase, as skaddan dy-liooar.
(Plenty potatoes and enough herring).
Arran as caashey, eeym as roayrt.
(Bread and cheese, butter and beef),
Baase, myr lugh, ayns uhllin ny soalt.
(Death, like a mouse, in the stackyard of the barn).
Cadley sauçhey tra vees shiu ny lhie,
(Sleeping safely when you lie),
As feeackle y jargan, nagh bee dy mie!
(and the flea's tooth, may it not be well!)

Thank you for your support and encouragement during the year.

With love and best wishes for 2024.

Ian