

# MHEILLEA & HOP TU NAA TOOLKIT

This resource set should give you all the information you need to teach about the two Manx traditions of Mheillea - the Manx harvest- and Hop tu Naa on 31st October.

It includes dances, songs and videos all available on the Culture Vannin website.

<https://www.culturevannin.im/manxfolklore/>



# THE MHEILLEA

September is the time of year for music, feasting, and dancing. The harvest was so important in the traditional Manx calendar that the Manx for 'September' is 'Mean-fouyir' (pronounced Main Fower) meaning the middle of harvest. Harvest is an ancient Manx custom which originates in Celtic times. Harvest has always been a time for celebration and tradition on the Isle of Man and at the centre of these customs is the Babban ny Mheillea. This harvest baby (as the Manx Gaelic translates) is a small doll made from the last sheaf of corn. About twelve inches high and decorated with ribbons and wildflowers, the Babban was plaited and tied into a female figure with the ears of the corn as the head. It was met with cheers in the field before then taking pride of place at the centre of the Mheillea celebrations which followed, with the Babban ny Mheillea danced in the Queen's arms in the middle, or passed around amongst the young women. The babban is then kept on the chimney piece, where it brings good luck or wards off evil in the house, until it is replaced the following year. The practice of making "corn dollies" stretches across Europe, but the Manx practice on the Isle of Man is unique in both the form which the babban takes and in the way it fits into the wider Mheillea celebrations.

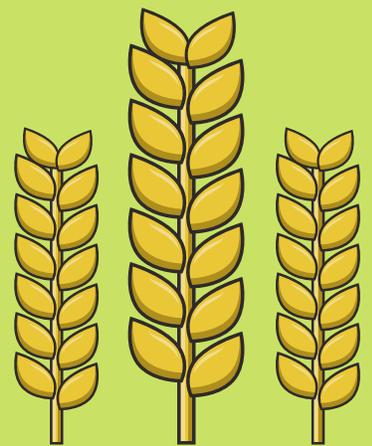
## Background Information

### Suggestions:

Watch the Babban ny Mheillea video available here: <https://www.culturevannin.im/manxfolklore/yn-mheillea-491585/>

### Note:

Mheillea is pronounced MELLya and can be spelled in several different ways including Mhelliiah, Melliah and other variations!



# THE MHEILLEA

Before the development of farm machinery, large numbers of people were needed to take in the harvest.

Teams of men, women and children would work until only the final handful of corn was left. One of the women, often the youngest of them, was then called upon to act as the Queen of the Mheillea to cut these last stalks. The Queen then held this last sheaf aloft to shouts and cheers:

“Hurray for the Mheillea! The Mheillea is took!”

Then there was a great feast in the barn laid on for all the workers by the farmer. All manner of hearty Manx food was on offer, from porridge to barley bonnags. And, of course, there was always ‘an abundance of strong beer’! The grateful workers ate well.

Dancing to the fiddle was once very popular amongst the Manx, and the Mheillea celebration was no exception. The benches were pushed aside and the dancing began.

It would have been late into the night before the celebrations at last drew to a close, and the Babban ny Mheillea was carefully lain on the farmhouse chimney piece.

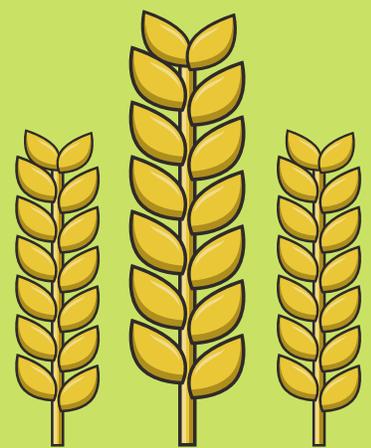
<https://www.culturevannin.im/manxfolklore/>

## Background Information

### Suggestions:

Have a crown ready to pop on one of the children who could be the Queen of the Mheillea!

Listen to the Yn Mheillea tune here. Clap along and try to imagine what it would have been like celebrating after that harvest:  
<https://soundcloud.com/culture-vannin/yn-mheillea-tom-callister-malcolm-stitt>



# THE MHEILLEA

## **What sort of food would they have harvested over 100 years ago?**

Vegetables and fruit - spuds, turnips, leeks, cabbage and kale, parsnips and apples. They would have picked blackberries too. We didn't have sunny weather like the hot countries and could only eat what we grew in season. Not like today when you can get strawberries all year round.

## **How would they have kept their meat and fish all fresh?**

No fridges or freezers so meat and fish would have been smoked or salted and the fruit made into jam.

## **How did they get the harvest in a long time ago?**

By hand! They would have had carts and horses BUT there were no tractors or combine harvesters. It would have been cold, wet and hard work. No wonder they had a big celebration!

## **How would they have celebrated?**

No CD players or balloons or Tescos to buy party food from! They would have eaten a feast provided by the farmer and his wife, and they would have played music and danced and sung all night long!

## **How do we celebrate Harvest today?**

Some schools have Harvest assemblies. Children bring in food for the food bank. Some churches have Harvest services. Some charities hold 'Mheilleas' where people bring lots of fruit and vegetables and cakes and it is auctioned off for charity. Normally in a pub!

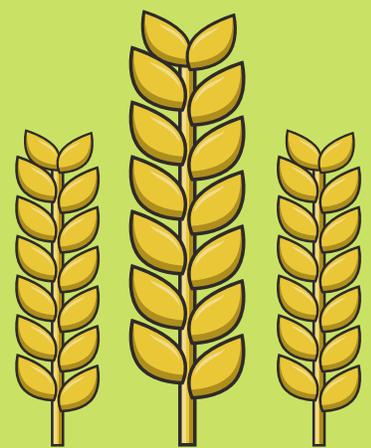
## **Questions for the children**

### **Suggestions:**

Have examples of the fruit and vegetables ready to show to the children.

Have a Harvest festival!

Try and create a SEASONAL meal.



# THE MHEILLEA

This is an EASY version of the dance!

Children need partners.

Make a circle holding hands altogether with partners next to each other. (Two smaller circles are easier than one big one). A quoit or bean bag in the middle helps keep the circle.

Everyone does 8 steps (or side steps if you want) around to the left. Then 8 steps back again.

Then still holding hands everyone takes 4 steps into the middle and gives a big shout of 'OY!' then 4 steps back out again.

Let go of hands. And turn to face your partner.

Do 2 balances and a single turn.

**Balance:** point your toes. Take your left foot in front of your right leg - like a gentle kick that softly scrapes the floor. And then do the same with the other leg at the same time as your partner. Then both turn on the spot.

Then all join hands in the big circle once again and repeat!

This time after your balances and turns, join hands and sing "Yn Mheillea! Yn Mheillea! A reesht a reesht a reesht!" That means: 'the harvest, the harvest, again, again, again!'

Repeat the dance twice more.

Finally after your balances and turns join hands and sing "Yn Mheillea! Yn Mheillea! T'eh ayn, t'eh ayn, t'eh ayn!" This means: 'the harvest, the harvest, it's in, it's in, it's in!'

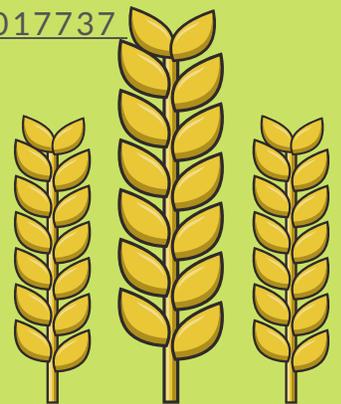
## The Dance

### Suggestions:

Watch the video of the dance on the Manx Curriculum Itslearning site first here: (make sure you are logged into Itslearning first before clicking the link) <https://isleofman.itslearning.com/ContentArea/ContentArea.aspx?LocationID=214&LocationType=1>

The music for the dance is here: <https://soundcloud.com/culture-vannin/yn-mheillea-tom-callister-malcolm-stitt> or can be played on the [video](#) or can be played with the music on the next page.

The full version of the Mheillea dance can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/309017737>



# THE MHEILLEA

piano

♩. = 96 Introduction & Chorus

Manx trad.  
arr. B.G.F. Osborne

Piano

1 2 3 4

G C Am D G

5 6 7

G C D

8 9 10 11

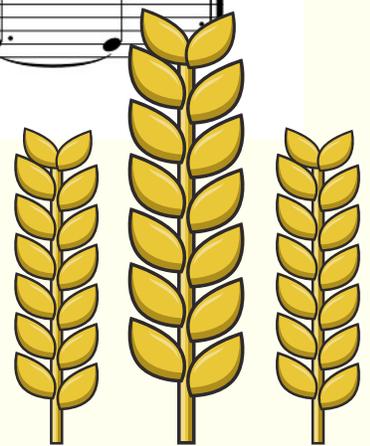
G A D

12 13 14 15

G Em C D

16 17 18 19

G C Am D D<sup>7</sup> G



# HOP TU NAA

Hop tu Naa is the oldest continuously-existing tradition in the Isle of Man.

Celebrated on the 31st of October, Hop tu Naa is the Manx equivalent of Halloween, with some very important differences.

Unmistakably, one of the key features of Hop tu Naa is the "moot" (turnip), which is hollowed out and decorated; there is also a range of popular folk songs with regional differences, in both English and Manx; there is a traditional folk dance still practiced across the Island today; and there are some unusual customs and superstitions which link back to the ancient Celtic beliefs about this time of year...

The phrase Hop tu naa is thought to derive from the celebration of the Celtic New Year (like Hollantide and Hogmanay). It marks the end of Summer and the start of Winter. It's also Celtic New Year's Eve - Sauin in Manx Gaelic.

<https://www.culturevannin.im/manxfolklore/>

## Background Information

### Suggestions:

Look at the Culture Vannin Hop tu Naa leaflet here. It's set out very simply:

<https://www.culturevannin.im/media//media%20-%20Customs%20and%20traditions/Hop%20tu%20Naa/hop%20tu%20naa%20leaflet%202018.pdf>



# HOP TU NAA

How do children celebrate Hop tu Naa?

Probably in much the same way as children did a long time ago. Before turnips, children used cabbages on sticks and banged on people's doors with those!

Today some children use pumpkins. This is an American tradition - a long time ago we didn't have pumpkins in the Isle of Man. So turnips were used - and are still used here and also in Ireland.

Children would hollow out the turnip (with adult help) and use a candle to light it up. Sometimes they would put marbles in the eyes to stop the wind blowing out the candle. And they would also sometimes use old matchsticks for teeth!

Instead of a face, sometimes they carved pictures into the turnip such as - a moon, stars, a cat, a witch, a castle, a boat and a cottage with smoke coming out of the chimney!

Children today get sweets, chocolate and sometimes money for singing. Children a long time ago received butter taffy (toffee), apples, bonnag and hollantide fairings (ginger biscuits).

Hop tu naa was also the time when young women could find out who they would marry one day! They would bake a 'soddag valloo' (Manx Gaelic for dumb cake) made out of flour, salt, egg shells and soot, eat it and walk backwards to bed in silence! That night they would dream of their future husband.

<https://www.culturevannin.im/manxfolklore/>

## Turnips

### Suggestions:

Carve a Hop tu Naa turnip all together. Maybe try two? One with the stalk on the top and one with the stalk on the bottom.

Make bonnag, butter taffy or Hollantide fairings.

Look at the Culture Vannin Hop tu Naa leaflet here. It's set out very simply:

<https://www.culturevannin.im/media//media%20-%20Customs%20and%20Traditions/Hop%20tu%20Naa/hop%20tu%20naa%20leaflet%202018.pdf>



# HOP TU NAA

And you don't get treats for doing nothing!  
What do you have to do to get the rewards?  
Dress up in a costume and sing a song! A long time ago children didn't have elaborate costumes like today. They would disguise themselves by wearing their clothes inside out or backwards and by covering their faces.

The songs haven't really changed! BUT there are different songs in different areas of the Island. This one is the best known and is from Douglas:

Hop tu Naa!  
Your mother's gone away and she won't be back until the morning.  
Jinny the witch flew over the house to fetch the stick to lather (or fetch or get) the mouse.  
Hop-tu-naa,  
Your mother's gone away and she won't be back until the morning.

There is a video of the song here:  
<https://www.culturevannin.im/manxfolklore/hop-tu-naa-468995/>

Ask the children if they know other songs? There are lots! There is a list of the different songs here:  
<https://www.culturevannin.im/media//media%20-%20Customs%20and%20traditions/Hop%20tu%20Naa/Hop%20tu%20naa%20Songs.pdf>

It's important we carry on singing all the Hop tu Naa songs as it is part of our tradition. Our great grandparents and grandparents and mums and dads taught the songs to us and we need to keep singing them.

<https://www.culturevannin.im/manxfolklore/>

## Songs

### Suggestions:

How many different songs are sung in your class?

Try and learn a new Hop tu Naa song.

Compose your own!



# HOP TU NAA

Who do all the songs have in common?

Jinny!

some people think the songs refer to a real person called Joney Lowney who lived 300 years ago.

There weren't real witches a long time ago. They were just old people, usually ladies, who looked a bit different or strange. People didn't understand science and the weather and wanted something or someone to blame when things went wrong, so they blamed witches...

Before the development of modern medicine and trained doctors and nurses, knowledgeable people like Jinny were hired to make charms and herbal medicines to help cure illnesses and bring good fortune - the same women who were called witches and often blamed for causing bad luck!

Listen to the story of Joney Lowney here:

<https://soundcloud.com/culture-vannin/jinny-the-witch-a-true-story-by-sue-woolley>

<https://www.culturevannin.im/manxfolklore/>

## Jinny the Witch

### Suggestions:

Look at the Culture Vannin Hop tu Naa leaflet here. It's set out very simply:

<https://www.culturevannin.im/media//media%20-%20Customs%20and%20traditions/Hop%20tu%20Naa/hop%20tu%20naa%20leaflet%202018.pdf>



# HOP TU NAA

The traditional Manx Hop tu Naa dance is very easy and is still danced today. It also has a song that goes along with the tune. The song is in Manx Gaelic. Here are the words with the pronunciation. Sing along with Bunscoil Ghaelgagh here: <https://vimeo.com/239632085>

## Hop-tu-Naa [Condensed Version!]

Ta shenn Oie Houney, Hop-tu-naa! Ta'n Eayst soilshean, Trol-la-laa!  
(ta shenn ee howna, hop-chu-nay! Tan aist solshane, trol-la-lay!)

*Hop-tu-naa as Trol-la-laa, Ta shenn Oie Houney, Hop-tu-naa!*  
(hop-chu-nay as trol-la-lay, ta shenn ee howna, hop-chu-nay!)

Noght Oie Houney, Hop-tu-naa! Mairagh Laa Houney, Trol-la-laa!  
(nockt ee howna, hop-chu-nay! Mare-ugh lare howna, trol-la-lay!)

*Hop-tu-naa as Trol-la-laa, Ta shenn Oie Houney, Hop-tu-naa!*

Veeit mee poul kayt; Hop-tu-naa! Ren eh scryssey, Trol-la-laa!  
(veetch me pole ket, hop-chu-nay! Ren a scritha, trol-la-lay!)

*Hop-tu-naa as Trol-la-laa, Ta shenn Oie Houney, Hop-tu-naa!*

Ren mee roie, Hop-tu-naa! Roie mee gys Nalbin, Trol-la-laa!  
(ren me rye, hop-chu-nay! Rymey gus nolbin, trol-la-lay!)

*Hop-tu-naa as Trol-la-laa, Ta shenn Oie Houney, Hop-tu-naa!*

You can learn the easy dance right here. The instructions are on the video. Children just need to be in groups of four.

<https://vimeo.com/335952590>

<https://www.culturevannin.im/manxfolklore/>

## Dance

### Suggestions:

You can do your own Hop tu Naa dance to this music here:

<https://soundcloud.com/culture-vannin/hop-tu-naa-manx-jamie-smith?in=culture-vannin/sets/manx-dance-tunes>



# EXTRA RESOURCES

Everything you need to teach about Hop tu Naa and the Mheillea is included on the Culture Vannin Manx Folklore webpage here: <https://www.culturevannin.im/manxfolklore/>

- You could complete projects all about Hop tu Naa
- Have a turnip carving competition
- try to weave a Babban ny Mheillea
- Have a Harvest festival or Hop tu Naa disco or cake sale
- You could have a Hop tu Naa assembly and sing some of the Hop tu Naa songs.
- Organise a collection for the Manx food bank
- You could try and get everyone in the whole school to do the Hop tu Naa dance!
- You could make your own Hop tu Naa animation like the Bunscoill Ghaelgagh did.
- You could make posters all about Hop tu Naa and yn Mheillea so it's not forgotten about.
- Try some of the other Hop tu Naa recipes like taffy or Hollantide fairings

