

# Manx Notes 411 (2020)

“CHRISTMAS IS UHERED IN...” \*

*CHRISTMAS* is ushered in with a Form much less meaning, and infinitely more fatiguing. On the 24th of *December*, toward Evening, all the Servants in general have a Holiday, they go not to Bed all Night, but ramble about till the Bells ring in all the Churches, which is at twelve-a-Clock; Prayers being over, they go to hunt the Wren, and after having found one of these poor Birds, they kill her, and lay her on a Bier with the utmost Solemnity, bringing her to the Parish-Church, and burying her with a whimsical kind of Solemnity, singing Dirges over her in the *Manks* Language, which they call her Knell; after which *Christmas* begins. There is not a Barn unoccupied the whole twelve Days, every Parish hiring Fiddlers at the publick Charge; and all the Youth, nay, sometimes People well advanced in Years making no scruple to be among these nocturnal Dancers. At this Time there never fails of some Work being made for *Kirk Jarmyns*; so many young Fellows and Girls meeting in these Diverions, Nature too often prompts them to more close Celebrations of the Festival, than those the Barn allows; and many a Hedge has been Witness of Endearments, which Fear of Punishments has afterwards made both forswear at the Holy Altar in *Purgation*. On Twelfth-Day the Fidler lays his Head in some one of the Wenches Laps, and a third Person asks, who such a Maid, or such a Maid shall marry, naming the Girls then present one after another; to which he answers according to his own Whim, or agreeable to the Intimacies he has taken notice of during this Time of Merriment. But whatever he says is as absolutely depended on as an Oracle; and if he happens to couple two People, who have an Averion to each other, Tears and Vexation succeed the Mirth. This, they call, *Cutting off the Fidler's Head*; for, after this, he is dead for the whole Year.

This Custom till continues in every Parish, and if any young Lad, or Lass, was denied the Privilege of doing whatever came into their Heads, they would look upon themselves as infinitely injured. This Time is indeed their Carnival, and they take, and are allowed more Liberties, than, methinks, is consonant with their Strictness in other Cases.

George Waldron, *The History and Description of the Isle of Man* (London: Printed for W. Bickerton, 1744) 97–99.

The Chapter Quest and the Consistory Court have now gone from Island life—indiscretions are now documented by social media and not the *Book of Presentments*...

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