

The following is an extract of an interview between David Callister (DC) and Hampton Creer (Mr C) for the 'Time to Remember' series on Manx Radio.

The recording was made in October 2004 and the subject matter was Hampton Creer's research into Jinny the Witch.

A copy of the recording is on your CD [track 06].

DC So we come on to the person now that was known as Jinny the witch.

Mr C That's right, she was Joney Lowney of Braddan. Theories have abounded over the centuries as to who she was, people on the north claim she came – emerged from a bog in Ballaugh and she had green teeth. To others she came from Cheshire, some said she originated on the Continent and flew, literally flew in here with her sisters. But no, Joney Lowney was Manx and one of my fellow members of the Isle of Man Family History Society spotted a trial in Douglas at which she was involved and she was accused, and it led to doing a lot of research on Joney Lowney and I was astonished to find that my great grandparents x 7 were involved as well. They were key witnesses and really I searched the Island looking at the Manx Museum library, looking for Joney Lowney, who fitted everything. And there were an awful lot of blind alleyways, but eventually I found – the answer came, it was right under my nose in the end. She was living on the Mount Murray back road, just up the road here, and I found that her reign of terror, really, I suppose you could call it, reigned – ranged from Kewaigue Mill to Ballacallin in Marown and this trial was the culmination of all sorts of accusations against her of causing great troubles. But anyway lets just go back to the beginning. She was on trial in – at Bishops court on June 1st 1715. This was Mr David Craine, MA, the late David Craine, who was a brilliant Manx historian, found this and she was accused of cursing and leading a wicked life. At the end she was, like most of them, quote: 'hath promised reformation'. But it was during this trial that a Santon man apparently told how one stormy evening he had called at a house seeking lodgings, it was getting dark, it was Joney's house. He was taken inside. Shortly after going to bed he saw Joney in the glow of the fire, there was a *saagh*, or a vessel, on the floor, and it began to move and Joney quote: 'went into it'. Soon after, whoosh, both Joney and the *saagh* flew out of the house leaving an astonished man and Joney's family behind. She did not return quote: 'until the following morning with plenty of fishes'. Now if you think about the song, *Jinny the witch*, they used to sing on this side of the Island,

*Jinny the witch flew over the house
To get the stick to lather the mouse,
Hop tu naa, me mother's gone away
And she won't be back until the morning.*

There it is, that's obviously, that's where that's come from. From the moment the man told of this the greatest and craziest of all Manx legends was born. Joney had aviation capabilities and anyway, I don't know what the man had given – Joney had given the

man for his supper that night, but there was probably an innocent explanation to what had happened. More than likely he had dreamed the whole thing. And when he saw her returning with fishes she was probably just coming from Douglas after buying fish from the fishing boats landing their catch at dawn. Dr Larch Garrad has stated that many people in those times took herbs and plants for ailments and I suppose food and all sorts of things which distorted their minds. There was probably nothing more to the whole thing than that. But news of her exploits spread like wildfire, and long, and in my view, long may it continue and delight Manx children. But Joney did not reform and two years later she faced the biggest witchcraft trial ever at Douglas before Bishop Wilson himself, accompanied by the hierarchy of the powerful church sitting in an ecclesiastical court on the 4th and 5th November 1716. My interest in this trial was heightened when I discovered that my great grandparents x 7, Christopher and Catherine Hampton, neighbours of Joney, were witnesses speaking in her defence. Here's a summary of the evidence recorded. The three defence witnesses were heard first. Mr. Kermode of Ballamiddle told how his servant was at Kewaigue Mill having corn ground into meal. Joney Lowney was there and remarked to Mr. Kermode that his horse, the horse that he was holding was, as a Manxman would say, unly maul. But on being told that the animal would eat neither corn or grass, Joney took some meal, uttered some words over it, and gave it to the horse, which rapidly recovered and quote: 'did eat providender'. Later in 1712 my great grandfather and great grandmother x 7, Catherine and Christopher Hampton, were in a state of desperation because their son, Thomas, was gravely ill on the farm here and with no medical help available, went against all church teaching and sent for Joney, who lived close by. When she arrived she examined the child and told his parents he was in a critical state, and she seemed reluctant to become involved. Catherine pleaded with Joney Lowney quote: 'for to try her skill upon the sick child'. Again she told them that the baby was lying in a heavy achæd, a fever, and if he died not to blame her. Some water was requested over which she said some strange words, it was given to the baby. The water, Joney said, was very heavy, indicating the child was near death. I don't know how long it took but Thomas made a complete recovery and lived at Ballabunt to a great age, the father of twelve children.

DC This in itself is an extraordinary because you're talking there about charms, aren't you?

Mr C Yes, charming, it was just as serious as witchcraft, but we'll come on to more serious witchcraft in a minute. Christopher himself gave further support. He was very ill once, she was sent for once again, and she gave him some ale and after drinking some Christopher recovered. This is all evidence taken from the great trial in Douglas, it's perfectly recorded. As a descendant of them I find it pleasing that Christopher and Catherine didn't forget the efforts of Joney Lowney when they heard she faced trial. Indeed it is likely their evidence was the deciding factor as to whether or not Jinny the witch would hang. Joney's supporters, however, were few, compared with the dozens who came forward and blamed her for a reign of terror and destruction they believed she had wreaked in Braddan and Marown for more than a decade. Here is a sample:

Anne Cretney of Stuggadoo at The Braaid told how Joney came to her house asking for some milk. None was available and as she left Joney passed Mrs Cretney's herd of cows. One of them immediately fell, best cows, immediately fell down and could not be made to stand despite the efforts of eight men to lift her. Joney Lowney's young daughter found it all hilarious and sat on the hedge laughing. Tempers flared, Mrs Cretney declared quote: 'Joney to have been the author of what had happened as she always had an ill name'. This is probably a cow had – with what they call staggers now. And today it's treated with calcium injection. Mr Thomas Cubbon told the court that there was a common saying that if anybody denied Joney Lowney they got no good by it.

Christopher Kinley testified that one dark night he became aware that someone or something was standing close to him, nervously he called out as to who it was, 'it is I, the great witch, the great sister', was roared back at him. It was Joney, and doubtless Christopher took to his heels. She was now openly confessing that she was the arch witch. Obviously enjoying her Island-wide fame and frightening the living daylights out of everybody.

John Gelling of Cly Benith at The Cooil explained how one day he was tending his sheep when Joney and her young son passed by. The boy had a dog which began pestering the sheep. Mr. Gelling asked why they couldn't pass by as other people did and began to beat the dog with a stick, thus upsetting the child. Joney intervened telling Farmer Gelling she would be even with him. That night both his oxen died. He felt certain the action had been the action of the witch, Joney, the ill character she always went by.

Jane Corrin told how she was at William Cubbon's house at Ballacubbon, Braddan, combing wool. Joney Lowney came begging and was given alms but didn't go away, in fact the shady visitor stayed until dark. When dinner was placed in front of everyone seated at the table Joney sat on the floor and seemed startled when Mrs Cubbon took the precaution quote: 'the tongs in the fire in her name'. Joney asked why she did this and Mrs Cubbon told her that she always heard that Joney Lowney was a witch. The tongs remained in the fire until after Joney had gone. Hardly surprisingly, Mrs Cubbon suffered a long illness shortly after. Mrs Cubbon's servant told that he had requested the tongs be taken out of the fire for fear of antagonising Joney and later his master asked him to move the sheep to shelter, he found ten so feeble that they could not stand. Next day all ten lay dead in a puddle of water. The evil character, Joney Lowney, was suspected. Probably this was just pulpy kidney disease. Mrs Cubbon told how at Easter Joney had come to their house and was given alms. She also demanded ale but Mr. Cubbon told her that she had none. Joney said a neighbour told her that she did have some. Next day Mr. Cubbon found his best cow dead. The only cause he knew of was the farrah, the wicked practices of Joney Lowney. Farrah was quote: those who delight in sorcery involving cattle or sacrifice'.

It went on Thomas Callin told he'd been gravely ill and in his fever saw the similitude of Joney. Christian Stephen claimed Joney offered him the farrah of a neighbour.

The long trial entered its closing stages at Ballaglonney, on the Mount Murray back road. Joney lived about 200 yards away, and arrived and asked for some milk. They were churning milk into butter. Joney was told if she waited she could have some. Joney was furious and stormed off saying 'you shall have milk enough before I come again. All day the Craine family continued churning but the milk could not be brought quote: 'to any perfection, merely turning into cheese and cream quite useless'. It was Joney Lowney that caused it.

But her most spectacular feat was the one that ended her career and this took place at Ballaughton Corn Mill down the Saddle Road, known as the Bishop's Mill. This was Bishop Wilson's miller. William Corrin was there, he told the court he was grinding wheat into flour for distribution on the poor when Joney Lowney arrived. She criticised the miserable quality of the grain and became infuriated. There was a crowd there and she publicly rebuked Bishop Wilson by telling Mr. Corrin that the poor should be served of the best. Incidentally the millers often reserved the rubbishy grain for the poor, that's the expressing 'grinding poverty'. Mr. Corrin explained that although she stood some distance from the mill Joney stopped it dead. What kind of a person would do that? Not only that, but the machinery could never be made to work again.

The destroyed mill was the property of the very man now standing facing Joney in court as a judge. It had been a disastrous mistake and it must have been this incident that led to Bishop Wilson finally ordering Joney's arrest and trial. Such was the importance of it that months passed before the jury returned the guilty verdict. The little nation must have held its breath speculating as to whether Jinny the witch would hang. It didn't look good for her as she languished in St. German's prison because the jury added, I think they call it a rider now, for a crime of charms, sorcery, and other wicked and diabolical practice tending very much to witchcraft, she deserves to be punished. It was at Douglas in February 1717 that Bishop Wilson returned – delivered the sentence in an aggressive manner. He considered Joney Lowney has utterly abandoned herself to ye highest degree of impiety by practising for many years several kinds of sorcery, charms and other diabolical means tending to witchcraft, by which she has not only captivated a soul but also deluded and ensnared many ignorant people and ye said offender seeming to be utterly insensible of her wickedness. It is therefore highly necessary to treat her with an uncommon degree of rigour in order to save her, if possible, from perishing eternally. She was therefore hereby censured to fourteen days close imprisonment in St. German's, to penance in all ye churches and chapels of this Isle in ye most solemn manner, to confess her abominable crimes and pray God and the church's forgiveness. Afterwards she is to stand at ye four market crosses in sackcloth with a white wand in her hand and paper on her breast on which are to be the words in capital letters FOR PRACTICES IN SORCERY AND WITCHCRAFT. And it went on she was also to be fined £3 when she was released from St. German's.

DC So that was, I suppose, in those times and with the accusations that were made the most gentle sentence he could give, perhaps, was it?

Mr C Oh, yes, she was desperately lucky. Had this happened in England she would certainly have gone to the gallows. Bishop Wilson was a man renowned for mercy, as I have said, except perhaps to Catherine Kinrade, who he ordered to be dragged by the hair around Peel Bay, so her soul may be clean, because she had an illegitimate child. And she was very lucky that it was him that presided over the case because his view was that witches should be ignored and the judgement left to God alone. Perhaps ...

DC That was fairly enlightened wasn't it, really?

Mr C It was, it was very modern view of it, really. And perhaps a concern for baby Thomas Hampton, saved her life, well, I will never know. But it would certainly have ended on the gallows in England or Scotland. Jinny the witch's reign was over. Joney Lowney died in January 1725 and is buried at Old Kirk Braddan.

DC Now, what about her descendants, if any.

Mr C Oh, no, I've never gone ...

DC Researched that?

Mr C She had six children, I've never gone into that, no.

DC Somebody must do then.

Mr C Well, the number of – so many Joney Lowneys in the Island at that time it took a lot of tracking down to find the right one, so whether there are any descendants I honestly don't know, but ...

DC Now, the song itself then, there were different versions of it, was there?

Mr C Yes, all over the Island. I think I've referred earlier to a ??? here, kids used to sing:

*Jinny the witch went over the house
To get the stick to lather the mouse,
Hop tu naa, my mother's gone away
And she won't be back until the morning.*

which fits in with the trial. I can't remember all the rest of it, but on the north, do you want me to read this one?

Mr C Well, I think so, this is part of the northern version, is it?

Yes, this is the northern version:

*Put in the pot, put in the pan,
I scalded my throat, I feel it yet,
I ran to the well, I drank my fill,*

*What did you see there,
I saw a pole cat.
The cat began to grin
And I began to run,
Jinny the winny came out of the lake,
A griddle in her hand already to bake,
Her teeth were green, her eyes were red,
And a thickness of hair at her upon her head.
Baking bonnags, toasting sconnags,
I asked her for a bit,
Guess the bit she gave me,
A bit as big as my toe.
I dipped it milk, and then lapped it in silk,
And went home by the light of the moon.*

???

This was sung in Peel on Old Hollantide Eve, November 11th. I found that in the

DC The songs then must have been composed shortly after these events took place, would you think?

Mr C Yes, it would be, it was a great thing to compose songs. Not only here, on the Island here, but if you take England for example, 'Ring a ring a rosies, atishoo, atishoo, we all fall down', that's known to come from the great plague, and so on. It was a common thing. Of course they had to make their own entertainment and with Jinny the witch's fame spread throughout the Island like wildfire and you can just imagine the children gathered the fireside of a night and their parents would be telling them of her and these incredible happenings and they wouldn't – as I say, they wouldn't have any entertainment and each time they'd be repeated a bit more would be added to, and the whole thing – well, long may it continue, it makes our Island so unique.

DC Hop-tu-naa it is. Now you must have scoured out a few turnips in your time as well.

Mr C My goodness, yes, when you were sitting on a bale in the cow house, in the warm cow house and you'd be given an old blunt knife so you wouldn't – as a child you would be given an old blunt knife so you wouldn't cut yourself, or a spoon. And usually you'd have to end up resorting to your parents to have to finish it for you, but it used to be so annoying having the candles blowing out in the turnip.

DC That's right they do.

Mr C But I don't think any child in the country anyway will ever forget the smell of the hot turnip cooking above the candle. It's a part of the childhood and long may it continue...