

## Madame Mahy and the Cat

In the past, poor women of the parish would often take on laundry to earn extra money. These 'washer-women' worked in other people's houses and would often overhear gossip. Whilst they shared this gossip amongst

themselves, they had to make sure that it went no further than that. After all, their livelihoods depended on them being trustworthy and reliable.

Once however there was a group of washer-women in the higher parishes whose talk got them into a lot of trouble. The gossip which they thought that they shared only between themselves somehow found its way back to their employers.

As you would expect, they tried very hard to find out who it was that had shared their secrets. Eventually, they learnt that it had come from the wife of an old sea-captain, a woman named Madame Mahy. They found this very strange, because Madame Mahy did not employ any of the women to do her laundry so she couldn't possibly have overheard anybody else's gossip.

One of the young washer-women became suspicious. She remembered that whenever the women met up there always seemed to be a cat there. None of the washer-women owned a cat, but the animal always seemed to be close by; sitting quietly, watching and even *listening!* The young woman began to suspect that something *supernatural* might be going on, so she came up with a plan.

One evening the following week the women were gathered around her kitchen fire swapping gossip, and for sure the cat was there too. So the young woman, very quietly, put an iron into the fire to heat up till it was red hot. Then, quick as a flash, she grabbed the iron and pressed it against the cat's nose! The cat leapt up with an almighty wail and bolted out of the door into the night. All the other women were dumbfounded by her behaviour – but the young woman refused to tell them why she had done it.



*The Folklore Gallery cottage at Candie*

The very next day, news went around that Madame Mahy, the old sea-captain's wife, had suffered an unfortunate '*accident*'. It was said that she had fallen asleep in a chair in front of the kitchen range and tipped forward, burning her nose on the grate. Well! The young washer-woman knew better. She now realised that old Madame Mahy was a Guernsey Witch who could turn herself into a cat! She had been eavesdropping on the washer-women to hear their gossip.

Well. The old lady would think twice before doing that again.

Artwork by David Wyatt. © Guernsey Museums & Art Gallery

Story by Guernsey Museums, adapted from Marie de Garis' *Folklore of Guernsey*