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Celtic life

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Bannockburn

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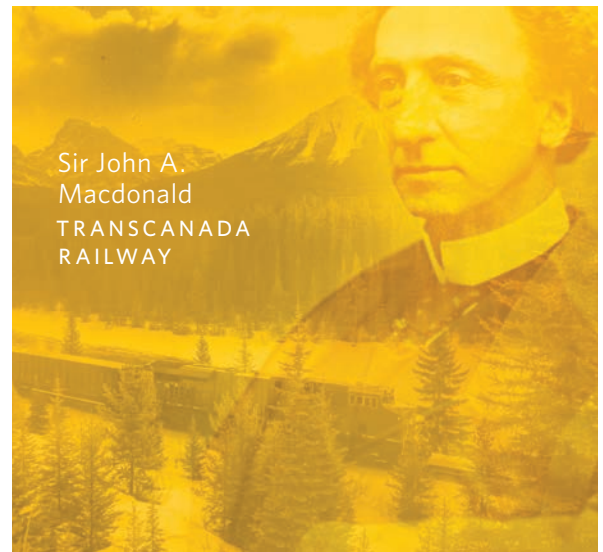
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Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher
Stephen Patrick Clare, Managing Editor
Rosalie MacEachern, Editorial Assistant
Rebecca Dingwell, Editorial Assistant
Michelle Brunet, Senior Copy Editor

Celtic Life International Office
Phone: 902-835-CELT (2358)
Toll-Free: 888-215-6850
Fax: 902-835-0080
Email: info@celticlife.ca
Website: www.celticlife.ca

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Advertising
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Contributors

Andrew Ferguson
Tom Langlands
Cabrini Macquarrie
Lyndsey Shir-McDermott-Pour
Noel Shine
Greg Silver
Tom Stapleton
Simon Whaley

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Fáilte!

A Keppoch Kitchen Ceilidh

Where has the time gone? Another season of Highland Games, Celtic Festivals and other events are again upon us. I am reminded of the many conversations with my mother who so often spoke of how quickly time passes the older we get, and how her childhood days are now fleeting memories of another time and place. My mother, Jennie Gillis, was born at the Keppoch, Nova Scotia, a short distance from the home of the Antigonish Highland Games. On March 25 of this year she celebrated her 94th birthday.

For me, the Keppoch was always a place of intrigue. The stories were of forerunners, mysterious lights, and of strange unexplained events, all intended to animate a young inquisitive mind. It was a Gaelic community of Scottish Highlanders who brought with them the many beliefs and superstitions of the "old country."

The first settler, John (Iain MacRaoil) MacDonald, carved farmland from its forests in 1817. His family was soon followed by the MacPhersons, MacLeans, Stewarts and many more. By 1860 it was a thriving community, home to more than 60 families. Today it is the lair of black bears, hunters and hikers.

One of its more renowned citizens was Alexander MacDonald, the Keppoch Bard (Alasdair Ailein Mhoir, Bard Na Ceapaich). Born in Moidart, Scotland, he emigrated with his family to Keppoch in 1830. MacDonald became one of the outstanding poets of his generation, and the locals - proud and enterprising folk - celebrated his words, alongside their music, song and dance.

This summer, the Antigonish Highland Games will feature A Keppoch Kitchen Ceilidh by Duncan MacDonald. It is a follow-up to his fantastic Ships of 1801 production, which told the story of immigration to this part of the new world. Set in the Keppoch, the new work details the life of the descendants of the pioneers in Nova Scotia in the 1940s, but the story could take place anywhere the Scots settled. It is a time of transition from the Highland tongue, when the grandparents still spoke Gaelic but the young people were learning English as their first language. Their story is told in a wonderful selection of music, song and dance.

Stories like A Keppoch Kitchen Ceilidh will be told time and again in many Celtic communities throughout this Festival season. The Antigonish production will be an experience close to home for me and my family.

Also of note, I had the good fortune of meeting Sam Heughan (a.k.a Jamie Fraser of Outlander fame) a few weeks ago at the annual Tartan Day Parade in New York City. I'm sure even those unfamiliar with the hit STARZ television series will enjoy our interview with this congenial young man. Elsewhere in this issue, we revisit the Battle of Bannockburn, talk to one of the daredevil drivers taking part in this year's TT Races on the Isle of Man, and speak with legendary Irish composer Phil Coulter who, at age 74, shows no signs of slowing down. And be sure to check out Rebecca Dingwell's excellent cover story on the soaring popularity of Celtic Weddings.

Remember to get out and support - and enjoy - local and area Highland Games and Celtic Festivals over the coming summer months, and to always make time for family and friends. Before you know it, you will be asking yourself, where has the time gone?

Enjoy and May God Bless!

Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher



INSIDE

Volume 30, No. 3, June 2016

Special

- 53.** Celtic Weddings
- 71.** Celtic Wedding Gift Guide

Spotlight

- 33.** Phil Coulter
- 49.** Sam Heughan

Stories

- 21.** Guido Parga
- 23.** Michael Rutter
- 25.** Christy Ann Conlin
- 29.** Green Clouds
- 31.** Makem & Spain
- 41.** Celtic Quakers
- 45.** Galloway Collective

Standards

- 13.** First Word
- 15.** Up Front
- 17.** Seven Celtic Questions
- 79.** Taste
- 81.** Dram
- 85.** The Piper
- 87.** The Fiddler
- 89.** The Dancer
- 106.** Last Word

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Photography



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DE a |DOL



Don't Tell the Bride seeks Cornish couples to feature on television

Imagine trusting your fiancé to organize your entire wedding without any feedback from you. That's exactly what the hit television show *Don't Tell the Bride* asks its stars to do. The show, which has been airing since 2007, was picked up by Sky1 this year after it was dropped by BBC. Currently, producers are looking for a Cornish couple to feature on the TV screen. The groom will be handed a hefty sum of £14,000 to help out with the wedding plans. The catch? He must spend three weeks away from his bride-to-be without contact while planning the whole event from the ground up. This includes everything from picking out the dress to ordering the wedding cake. Interested couples can apply at dtb@applyfortheshow.com – what could possibly go wrong?

Prize-winning selfie taken by Welsh father and son stirs controversy

A Welsh man unexpectedly became the centre of a selfie controversy after taking a photo of himself and his son with a “smiling” horse in the background. The man in question, David Bellis, reportedly said he had been walking on a public trail with his youngster when he snapped the picture, calling it the best photo he'd ever taken. Bellis entered the photo in a contest held by UK travel agency Thomson Holidays. When he was announced as the contest winner, the horse's owner voiced her frustration, saying Bellis should have asked permission before the photo was taken. Thomson Holidays later tweeted: “Despite questions over foal play, Mr Bellis and his family will be getting the £2000 holiday prize they won.”

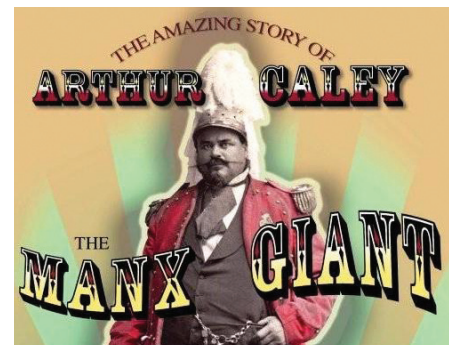


Man spends two months in a haunted lighthouse off the coast of Brittany

One man took it upon himself to spend two months in a supposedly haunted lighthouse all by himself. Marc Pointud, president of the National Society for Heritage, Lighthouses and Beacons, decided to stay in the notoriously creepy Tévennec lighthouse in order to raise the money to restore it. The lighthouse was built in 1874 and stands on an island off the Finistère coast in Brittany. Breton, Welsh and Cornish folklore claim Death's henchman - known as Ankou - takes up residence on that very island. At the end of February, Pointud hopped on a boat to begin his 60-day stay. His long-term hope is to raise €200,000, and for the lighthouse to become an artist's retreat once it has been renovated.

Manx Blind Welfare Society to turn books by local authors into audio books

Visually impaired folks living on the Isle of Man will soon have the chance to enjoy local literature through audio books. In March, the Manx Blind Welfare Society announced plans for the works of published local authors to be turned into audio books in order to make them more accessible. While the society currently offers thousands of books in its audio library, they received feedback that homegrown titles were lacking. The first recordings will be of *The Manx Giant: The Amazing Story of Arthur Caley* and *The Manx Connection*, both by John Quirk. The society is asking for any other willing local published authors to come forward and have their work recorded.



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Celts in the Community



Adrian Metcalfe

Adrian Metcalfe, an actor based in Mumbles, Wales, decided he wanted to put the spotlight on Welsh theatre. In 2011, he established the Lighthouse Theatre Company with his wife, Sonia Beck. At the time, the pair of thespians noticed a small-scale touring theatre company was not something that existed in Wales. As a result, the company formed with the hope of traveling to smaller venues across the country. "The connection that you have with your audience, who at the end of the day are the most important people, is much better than on a big stage," Metcalfe told South Wales Evening Post in February. Since its beginning five years ago, the Lighthouse Theatre Company is still going strong. They've even travelled abroad on three occasions: touring the South American countries of Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. Despite the ventures outside of Wales, Metcalfe stays true to his goal of highlighting homegrown entertainment with his policy to use Welsh-based performers and directors. The company stages the classics as well as contemporary plays. Metcalfe has also worked with other companies in a variety of productions, including works of Shakespeare such as *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He has also hit the television screen on the *Dom Joly Show*, *Mor-Ladron* and *Pirates*. 



Marc Gunn

As someone who has been nicknamed "The Celtfather," Marc Gunn certainly lives up to his title. Although his hometown is Austin, Texas, Gunn has always connected with Celtic culture. He even claims to have worn a kilt on campus at the University of Texas. The self-described "Celtic Geek musician with a comedic twist" quit his day job in 2005 in order to pursue his musical passion on a full-time basis. "My style is based on Irish drinking songs and sing-alongs, as well as great rhythms," Gunn shares on his website. "I call my autoharp musical style rhythm and folk. There's a bit of blues and jazz." He initially got involved with podcasting on his downtime. These days, his Irish & Celtic Music Podcast is one of the top 20 music podcasts on iTunes. A huge supporter of independent Celtic music, he features an eclectic collection of everything from hymns to Brazilian-American Irish punk-lore on his show. It's the number one downloaded Celtic music podcast on the web - with over 30,000 downloads of each episode. In addition, Gunn hosts Celtic Invasion Vacations every year. The goal is to take a small group - around a dozen people - and get to know the region on a personal level rather than simply hitting the usual tourist spots. According to Gunn, these trips usually take place in Ireland or Scotland, but the locations vary from year to year. 



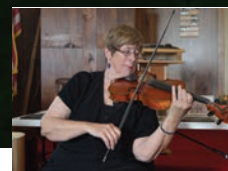
Shay MacMullin

Some say Gaelic is a dying language, but perhaps it's simply dormant. Shay MacMullin is one of the people fighting for its re-awakening. MacMullin is a language teacher in Nova Scotia, where about 1,275 people speak Gaelic according to Statistics Canada. "All Gaels should have an opportunity to reconnect and reclaim their birthright which is speaking their language and recognizing their identity, and being able to feel proud of that," MacMullin told The Canadian Press. Back in 2015, Nova Scotia's Office of Gaelic Affairs faced funding cuts which had many worried about the future of the language in the province. In February, however, the office announced that over \$40,000 will go to nine non-profit organizations for projects dedicated to the advancement of Gaelic. This is good news for MacMullin and other folks who regularly instruct language classes and workshops in the area. She recently teamed up with another teacher, Emily MacDonald, to host a "live-in Gaelic immersion experience." The month-long workshop took place in Cape Breton and targeted adults who were completely new to Gaelic. Without teachers like MacMullin, there would be no hope for a Gaelic revival in Canada. 



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Today, Malad Valley has the largest per capita concentration of people of Welsh ancestry outside the country of Wales itself. For that reason, many residents of the Valley wanted to reestablish their Welsh roots. In 2005, after a 90 year break, this annual cultural event, now called the Malad Valley Welsh Festival, once again became a reality.

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first word



Tom Stapleton

I can't speak, read, or write in my native language of Gaelic. I never learned it, except for a few phrases my mother or father spoke.

From time to time over the years I'd tell myself it would be great to actually learn Gaelic, and I sort of did in fits and starts, but I didn't invest enough of myself in the effort. It never really bothered me until I saw the movie *Million Dollar Baby*, starring Clint Eastwood as a boxing coach who was studying Gaelic. At the time I thought I should re-stoke my interest in learning Irish, though it's generally considered a "dead" language, like Latin, which I did study in high school.

But I didn't get around to putting much time in. I discovered that, when it comes to many of life's endeavors, it's easier to put them off than to actually do them.

A scrap of Irish history I picked up was that, a long time back, the Gaelic League made the study of the Gaelic language a matter of Irish nationalism. About the time of the Gaelic League, my grandfather had been a young boy who attended a hedge school in rural Roscommon. I'm sure that, like my parents, he was bilingual, a capability in our family that would die with my generation.

I was born in Dublin in a house where James Joyce lived from 1894 to 1898, emigrating to the U.S. with my parents and younger sister at the age of two. Since then, I've made two brief trips back to the "old country," where it wasn't necessary to know Gaelic because everyone is fluent in English. In fact, most of my Irish cousins are as ignorant of our native tongue as am I, though they'd greet me each time with a "Céad Míle Fáilte" banner hung over the door.

I grew up Irish-American, which meant that I was raised Catholic, attended a parochial school, went to Mass every Sunday and holy day of obligation, did the Stations of the Cross during Lent, voted Democrat, idolized JFK, and celebrated St. Patrick's Day by drinking green beer while wearing a shamrock-shaped "Erin go Bragh" button. When I came home from school as a kid, having felt dunned by nuns to get my grades up, and would then complain

to my parents, they'd always remind me that when they were in school, they had to study subjects in two languages.

I greatly enjoyed hearing the appealingly descriptive turns of phrase that my parents or aunts and uncles would mouth: "Cheeky," "Gobshite," "Go 'way with you," "I'll be happy to see the back of him," "A bird never flew on one wing," etc. Thinking back, I wish I'd thought to ask what the completely Gaelic version of each would be.

At the Knights of Columbus, just about all my father's fellow members were Irish, some even having recently immigrated. They spoke in heavy accents you could cut with a rig saw. I would sometimes ask them how a word or phrase translated. I'd listen, stupefied, to their incomprehensible responses. All I could do was smile politely and walk away shaking my head. Then, as a young adult, I joined the Ancient Order of Hibernians, which I was sure would be a great help in my cultivation of Irish language arts. But it turned out to be pretty much like the K of C, where everyone sat at a bar imbibing and playing cribbage.

In college I majored in English, which means I did a lot of reading and writing. But of course, it wasn't a language per se that I studied; rather, it was English literature. In my junior year I took a course titled "Irish Renaissance Literature" that covered such writers as Synge, Shaw, Joyce, Yeats, and a handful of others I can't remember now.

In grad school I did independent study and wrote a paper in lieu of a master's thesis on Joyce's *Ulysses*. My graduate advisor liked my paper so much he suggested I have it published. It was about this time in my life that I realized I was still remiss about ever getting around to studying my native language.

I made a few half-hearted attempts to learn Irish by trying to self-teach, but I was a horrible student. I'd download pages of Gaelic phrases from websites and try memorizing the wording, but never got to the point where I could put together coherent sentences properly pronounced. My interest soon fizzled. It was years before it rekindled. It was then I came across something

called "An Cúpla Focal", which contained a brief list of phrasing, including a section titled "Variations on Go to Hell!"

Not long after, I started a local chapter of the Irish American Cultural Institute. I thought I'd be exposed to a variety of Gaelic vocabulary and usage, perhaps thinking that by some sort of passive osmosis I'd take in useful knowledge. The IACI sponsored talks and roundtables with Irish academics and luminaries, and by brushing up against them I hoped something of value might rub off on me. It turned out that all I ended up doing was shuttling these good people from airport to engagement and then back again.

As my parents got older I'd ask them to pass along some simple conversational Irish that would be easy to learn, but my mother would tell me she couldn't remember any of it, and my father would ask me, "Why in God's name would you want to bother with that?"

I recently found what I thought would be a helpful interactive tool to learn Irish: a smartphone app called "Gaeilge." You simply press a lesson button on the screen and a word or phrase is shown in English. Then you press the word or phrase and it's spelled and pronounced in Irish. The only drawback I found is that the pronunciation is difficult to mimic. Every time I try speaking I sound like someone trying to cough up a bone.

I suppose I'll never really learn my native language unless I go for a "total immersion" experience. That might involve moving to someplace like the Aran Islands and living among the indigenous Irish for a while - forced to sink or swim, as very few residents speak anything other than Gaelic.

But I know that's not going to happen, either. I'll have to live with the fact that I'll never master Gaelic. And while I don't think that makes me any less Irish, I do feel there's something - just a little something about being Irish - that's missing.

Tom Stapleton was born in Dublin and grew up in New York. He has written short stories, novels, newspaper and magazine articles, scripts, and plays. He and his wife Jean live in Los Angeles.



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UPFRONT



After a stellar career spanning several decades, John Cherry finds himself busier than ever

“My election as Michigan’s Lieutenant Governor is the highlight of my 28 years in state elective office,” says John Cherry. “I had the opportunity to break bread with U.S. Presidents, interact with U.S. Senators, meet Ambassadors and participate in a number of national political conventions. I was also fortunate to serve as the President of the National Lieutenant Governors Association and as Chairman of the International Great Lakes Commission. More importantly, I was in a unique position to shape public policy, particularly in the areas of education and the environment.”

His passion for politics, he explains, is in his blood.

“Both of my grandfathers were very active politically,” shares the 64-year-old, “one in Michigan, the other in Texas. One of my great paternal grandfathers was an elected justice of the peace when peace was just a notion in Texas, and both my father and mother were local elected officials in Michigan. That tradition carries on with my wife serving as a Michigan State Representative, my sister serving as a Michigan County Treasurer, and my son serving as an elected municipal official in Michigan. My brother was an appointed police chief in one Michigan community. So my history of political activity and elected service comes naturally. Rumor has it that Celts have an affinity for American politics, and it appears that I am no exception to the rule.”

Like most North Americans, Cherry is a hybrid, mostly of Celtic strains.

“My father came from a Scottish, Welsh, and Ulster Scot lineage,” he explains. “Those ancestors migrated to North America during the 17th and 18th centuries. My mother was half Irish and half Polish, and those migrations occurred in the 19th century.

“One of my great grandfathers was a MacLachlan, and as I became interested in my personal heritage, I began researching our family genealogy, the history of ethnic communities from which we sprung, and the national stories of each of them.”

Since retiring from public office in 2011, Cherry has been active as president of Clan McLachlan.

“My primary responsibility is to preside at our AGM. However, I also work with other Clan members to produce a bi-annual newsletter, convene Clan tents at highland games throughout the eastern half of the United States, and launch periodic initiatives to promote Scottish culture among the MacLachlan family. I also represent our association on the International Clan governing board.”

The challenges, he notes, are many.

“Clans today no longer have a monopoly on access to cultural news or history. Competition allows potential members to search elsewhere for the knowledge of personal identity that they yearn

for. That is both healthy and challenging for modern day clans. We have to work harder to be relevant, and what we discover can be exciting, but we seldom have the resources to make it an easy task. Younger generations expect more than the Highland games experience that provided the life blood of clan organizations a half century ago. Clan leadership today must rethink how it markets its appeal.”

The rewards, however, are more than equal in measure.

“I have made friends of people who share my heritage both in terms of Scotland or what our ancestors encountered when they made North America their home. I have learned about North American history, and the history of Scotland. It has brought a whole, new dimension to my understanding and appreciation of Appalachian art - particularly music. I have visited parts of North America I probably would have never ventured to. More importantly, it allowed me to fulfill what much of the Diaspora yearns for - a visit to Scotland, which makes one realize how many more times you wish to return. And I know the same can be said of Ireland and Wales.”

Along with his Clan duties, Cherry is active with a number of other regional and national Celtic organizations

“I serve as the Chair of the St. Andrew’s Society of Detroit’s Board of Trustees (SASD), and I am on the Executive Board of the Council of Scottish Clans and Associations (COSCA). At SASD, we actively promote the Scottish North American identity in Michigan and we raise a significant number of dollars for Scottish Arts scholarships and general charitable giving in southeast Michigan. At COSCA, we have a similar charge nationwide. However, we are also focusing on assisting Clans in their efforts to meet the new challenges of the modern world, and we actively encourage efforts to enhance people-to-people connections between North Americans of Scottish heritage and the citizens of Scotland. As part of that mission, we at COSCA foster our ongoing relationship with The Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs and its respective members.”

The work of bringing that heritage to future generations, he says, is vital.

“Young Scottish North Americans will embrace and become fascinated by the culture and history of their ancestors if encouraged and offered a helping hand. And if that helping hand is attached to another young person in Scotland, I think the resulting bonds become both durable and dynamic. For those of us active in Scottish heritage organizations, we have to refocus our attention from creating experiences that we enjoy to creating experiences that we can share with our younger partners.”



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SEVEN CELTIC QUESTIONS



*John White is the President of the Toronto Cornish Association.
Recently he answered our Seven Celtic Questions.*

What are your own Celtic roots?

My father's family is Cornish, for at least eight generations, which is as far back as I have researched. They were from the St. Just area in West Penwith. This is one of the areas of Cornwall where tin mining was once the main industry. Both my grandfather and great grandfather worked in mining. My mother was from Wales, so I really do have Celtic roots on both sides of my family. However, I certainly consider myself to be Cornish; my mother's family moved to St. Ives, where my parents met and where I first lived.

Why are those roots important to you?

I have always felt Cornish. The Cornish have not been as well recognized as the other larger Celtic countries but, nonetheless, we certainly do not consider ourselves to be English! The Cornish have always had a proud history and a distinct identity, but it is only as recently as 2014 that the UK Government, under the auspices of the Council of Europe, granted the Cornish minority status within the UK. It is a fact of history that in the latter part of the 19th century, when mining ceased to be such an important industry in Cornwall, thousands of Cornish emigrated to many parts of the world to find work. It is often said, where there is a hole in the ground, you will find a Cornishman. These immigrants carried their Cornish identity with them, and in many cases, it has been perpetuated over generations. As a result, there are Cornish societies and associations throughout the world.

What does it mean to you to be of Celtic heritage?

My Cornish roots have always been important to me. When I moved to Canada, it seemed natural to seek out others who shared my Celtic roots and I soon discovered there was a Toronto Cornish Association (TCA). This group consists of about seventy people with Cornish roots and connections. Although we are all far from Cornwall, we can share our genealogy, our culture and our traditions. In doing this, we preserve our heritage and at the same time, we can stimulate interest locally while continuing to maintain our links to those who have remained in Cornwall. The first known Cornish Association was founded in 1873 and over the years, similar associations have been formed that have continued to promote the Cornish culture and heritage. I have also been fortunate enough to visit Cornwall for at least a week each year for most of the 35 years I have lived in Canada. Through this, my three Canadian born children have grown up knowing of their Cornish heritage.

How are you involved with the Celtic community?

I am the current President of the Toronto Cornish Association. In this position, along with a group of dedicated members, I am actively involved in promoting our objectives. Over the years, we have also compiled an extensive library of publications, videos, music and articles about Cornish topics and genealogical research. These materials are made available to TCA members and other researchers. In order for our large collection of books

and publications to be made available to a wider group now and in the future, we donated the majority of our collection to the Kelly Library of St. Michael's College in Toronto in 2014. This college has a Celtic Studies Department whose library had many publications of Irish, Welsh and Scottish literature and history, but very little on Cornwall. Our collection of books has been catalogued under Cornwall and can be referenced by the public. When possible, we attend many relevant conferences, exhibitions and gatherings to promote our Cornish heritage and culture. The Toronto Cornish Association has also published two volumes titled "Cornish Emigrants to Ontario." These are compilations of stories, written by individual members, about their Cornish roots, some going back to the 14th Century.

Why is it important to keep Celtic culture alive?

Much is said about Canada being a multicultural country and we all benefit from this. Our own Celtic culture is what defines us as a group and without it, we are less complete. Over history, Celtic culture has given the world much - in language, literature, art and music, and everyone has benefited from this. In an era in which people are much more mobile and subject to so much mass media, it becomes even more important for us to maintain and nurture our Celtic identity, both at home and where each of us lives in the world.

Is enough being done to preserve and promote Celtic culture generally?

From what I know, there are active Cornish Societies and Associations scattered around the world, each preserving and promoting Cornwall's history, heritage and culture. These days, it is much easier for these groups to communicate with each other, so we are able to exchange ideas and keep in touch. There is also much being done in Cornwall; for example, to reintroduce our language which had basically died out at the end of the eighteenth century. This reintroduction of the Cornish language started at the beginning of the 20th century but, after a slow start, much progress has been made in recent years. Much is done to make sure the many thousands of visitors to Cornwall are given plenty of opportunity to learn as much about our history and culture as they do about our wonderful coast and beaches. There are now many more historic sites, houses and gardens open to the public, each promoting Cornwall's culture and history. Clearly, we can always do more.

What can we be doing better?

We need to find a means to capture the interest of younger people in their Celtic heritage and roots. At the present time, there are so many things for younger generations to do, so questions of genealogy and heritage are not often considered. It is necessary to find the means to make this subject more interesting to young people so they will continue to keep their history and heritage alive as so many others have done in previous generations.

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Keith Jack

*Like his fine Celtic jewellery,
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It hasn't been an easy journey for Celtic jewellery designer Keith Jack, but the destination has been well worth the bumps and bruises.

His drive and determination, he believes, are likely the result of a strong and proud Scottish heritage.

"My mother's family originated in the Shetland Isles," shares the affable craftsman by email from his home in British Columbia, Canada. "She is well and still living in the Perthshire area.

"My father's family comes from the small towns of Crieff and Comrie in Perthshire, and I spent most of my early life growing up in Crieff."

Jack left school when he was still quite young, going to work for an importing business in Brighton, south of London. In the mid-1980s he took a job as a jewellery sales representative, and over the next fifteen years travelled thousands of miles across Scotland and northern England, all the while juggling a new marriage and two young children.

Though blessed with the stability of family life and steady employment, things started to come apart in the early 2000s.

"It was a very tough time; my father was ill with cancer and eventually died. The family business fell on hard times with nothing of any value left by 2006. I also, unfortunately, went through a painful divorce."

Thankfully, life began turning around for Jack when he reconnected with an acquaintance from Canada at a Celtic trade show in New Jersey.

"Helen and I fell in love," he recalls with a smile. "After a couple of years - and with a lot of help and support from her - I moved from Scotland to Canada and set up my business using my own original designs. I have my children, Caitlin and Sam, to thank for igniting my passion for jewel-

lery creation and design. Through good fortune, long hours and hard work my company has grown at an incredible rate. For the first time in my life I am delighted to say I love what I do for a living."

Given the massive popularity of his industry - an estimated \$500 million is spent on Celtic jewellery around the world each year - Jack's timing could not have been better.

"Celtic design has become more contemporary. Today it is much more than just shamrocks and Trinity knots. Gents jewellery has become a huge part of our line in recent years. Many of my designs are suitable for both men and women. We are constantly thinking outside the box, both with design and manufacturing techniques, in order to improve quality and create beautiful, innovative pieces. As a company we are focused towards the higher quality end of the market. We are in the business of producing finely-crafted works of art, rather than competing in the mass jewellery market."

The growth of the sector, he believes, coincides with the growing interest in Celtic heritage and history.

"Celtic culture is stronger than it has been for many years. With the internet and search tools so easily available, people can trace much of their own heritage. In Canada and the U.S., many searches lead back to Scotland, Ireland and the rest of Europe, and the origin of Celtic culture."

Though challenges exist within his vocation, he prefers to think of them as opportunities for excellence.

"Inspiration for original design is a

never ending quest and fills most of my days. Our company is at the stage where we now plan ahead as far as possible rather than reacting to demands as we did in the past. I have a great team of people working with me in North Vancouver, and I am confident that we will build the best Celtic jewellery company possible."

His peers are already believers; last year alone, Jack's firm received four major industry awards, including Best Jewellery Design, Best Packaging and Presentation, Best Company Representative, and Supplier of the Year.

Given that success, his future plans for the business are simple.

"We will keep doing what we are doing and build on our achievements with every opportunity we get. I would love to take the brand into the U.K. and Irish markets in the next few years."

Having survived the tough times, Jack is grateful for the life he has today.

"I live in one of the most beautiful areas of the world with my soul mate. We have time to travel for both work and pleasure. My son is now living in Canada and doing well. I travel back to Scotland to visit with my family and friends at least once a year. I wake up and look forward to every day. Life is good."

www.keithjack.com





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Guido Alvarez Parga

Guido Alvarez Parga spent his youth living in different countries of Europe before making it his mission to entice tourists to his native Galicia

Parga spent his childhood and adolescence dreaming of life in Buenos Aires, Barcelona, Marseille, London, Paris and Montevideo. He suspects he inherited his penchant for travel from his father.

"He was a migratory bird, the son of immigrants, born in Buenos Aires," says Parga. "At 22, he moved to Uruguay and Brazil before crossing the pond to the land of his ancestors."

Parga's DNA is strongly Galician, and he can rhyme off grandparents from all regions of the Celtic country - urban and rural, mountainous and maritime, as well as from the plains. "The seven surnames of my grandparents all reflect my origins - Parga, Lombao, Saá, Prieto, Pérez, Fernández and Álvarez," he notes, itemizing his roots.

From the age of 18, Parga - now 30 - lived in France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and Spain, visiting cities and the countryside at every opportunity. At various universities he acquired first a bachelor's degree and subsequently two masters degrees, all the while working as a tourist information officer, a researcher, a tour guide, a marketer, a concert promoter, a translator or a basketball coach.

"I always imagined myself travelling, and I have a passion for life, but my home is in Galicia and in my city, Lugo. I have a patriotic romanticism that gives me a concern for world culture, art, communication and tourism. I love to share information with people and foster interpersonal relationships."

He is currently a travel agent with Viajes Mundo Galaico, and has partnered with musician Carlos Nuñez to offer a Celtic

Galicia tour. He is also a contributor to the newspaper, Galicia Confidencial.

"My roots are a source of pride and the basis for dialogue as I try to make connections and cultural links with other corners of the planet."

It was Parga's interest in music that first led him to an appreciation of Celtic culture. A cousin shared Celtic CDs with him, and then an uncle brought them to hear Celtic performers.

"I heard the music of Carlos Nuñez and that opened doors for me. I became curious about the Celtic world, about my own identity and the history of my country."

He was curious enough to visit Celtic associations as he travelled with his family. Even today, he continues to study about his homeland so he can communicate the region's richness to visitors. Traditional marketing, web and graphic design and photography are all tools he has used to promote Celtic Galicia.

"My inspiration is always the faces of people when they see Galicia for the first time," he says, recalling the emotional reaction of a Chinese friend to the beautiful estuary area where one of Parga's grandmothers was born.

Parga believes his native city of Lugo - population 100,000 - in northwestern Spain, is destined to become a major attraction.

"I was born in the only city in the world with a Roman wall that remains fully standing, and with plenty of Roman and Celtic heritage both above and below ground. Irish, German and French researchers

come here every year, but soon I believe more and more tourists will be coming to learn the fascinating hidden secrets of Lugo."

His tourism business already attracts a diverse clientele.

"We are visited by national and international cultural associations, retirees, students and migrants, or children of migrants, in search of family roots. We have marketed our tours primarily in France where there is a high demand, particularly for our Celtic Legends tour, but we are steadily expanding."

Parga is intrigued by the old and intricate Celtic threads that connect many countries.

"I wear the Celtic world as a metal sheet in my coat, always present with me. I am always making people aware of the Celtic links between Brittany, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Isle of Man and Galicia. I am fascinated by how inclusive the term Celtic is and even in Brazil and Argentina, we have Celtic music. The Celts have left their mark on our planet."

He dreams of a day when countries and cultures will celebrate what they have in common.

"We must first link Galicia with flights and ground transportation to bring tourists to our region. Then we can promote our cultural links with countries such as Ireland and Brittany, thus strengthening our historic ties to other Celtic nations."

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Michael Rutter

Each spring, daredevils from across the globe converge on the Isle of Man for the annual TT (Tourist Trophy) Races. Recently Celtic Life International spoke with rider Michael "The Blade" Hutter about what it is like to wrestle a 200kg, 200+ horsepower motorcycle at speeds of up to 200mph, where the slightest error in judgement could be fatal.

When and why did you first get involved with racing?

My dad raced for over 20 years, from the 1960s until 1985 when an accident ended his career. He raced all over the world and was extremely successful winning races everywhere he went, including at the Isle of Man TT and North West 200. Right from an early age, all I knew was the paddock. Every weekend we were away somewhere with dad's racing, and a caravan in the paddock was my second home. Like any sportsman, if your dad's involved it is almost inevitable you will follow in his footsteps and that is exactly what happened for me. I started racing in 1989. Even now, coming back to a circuit - whether it's Brands Hatch, Oulton Park or the TT - it feels like I'm home.

Are they the same reasons you do it today?

No, it's different now. My main reason for continuing to race today is quite simple - personal enjoyment and satisfaction.

What are the challenges of the vocation?

The challenges today are to continually keep involved in whatever shape or form that may take. It's not easy putting a team together, and there are a lot of personal challenges both on and off the track. On the track, there are so many young riders coming through, both on the short circuits and on the roads, so trying to get the better of them week in week out is a constant challenge, but also a motivation.

What are the rewards?

Personal enjoyment - there's no better feeling than racing a motorbike on the best circuits in the world.

How has the sport evolved in recent years?

The sport's evolved massively, both in the British Superbike Championship (BSB) and at the road races like the TT. In BSB, if you haven't got an articulated lorry, you're not allowed in! The paddock's unrecognizable from 20 years ago, and has become so professional now from top to bottom. Track conditions and safety have improved immensely too. It's the same at the TT. It's improved greatly, particularly in the last ten years, and it's so much more professional in every single aspect of the event. It's the best road race in the world, and now it is at the highest standard of professionalism it needs to be at to justify that tag. The TV coverage every night on ITV4 - which was unheard of ten years ago - is awesome.

What are your thoughts on the IOM TT races generally?

When the sun's shining, it's one of the best tracks in the world to race on and so many parts of the event make it stand out from anything else we do. A 37 and ¾-mile course speaks for itself. I made my debut there in 1994, and starting on your own is still such a unique experience. Racing against the clock is very different to a mass start and, of course, the TT is the only place where we race like this - it's still a challenge for me racing in this manner. The stature of the event is still as high as ever and, arguably, it's higher than it's ever been right now. Interest in the TT comes from all around the world and everyone's heard of it - that's why more and more people keep going there year after year.

Will you be involved there this year?

Yes, absolutely. I will be riding for Bathams SMT Racing in all classes; we have a BMW

S1000R for the Superbike, Senior and Superstock races and a Kawasaki ZX-6R for the two Supersport 600cc races.

What else do you have on tap for the remainder of 2016?

I'm contesting the British Superstock 1000cc Championship, which takes place at the British Superbike Championship meetings, on the Bathams SMT Racing BMW. I'll be competing again at the North West 200 in May where I'll be riding in six races, two each in Superbike, Supersport and Superstock. I'll also be returning to the Macau Grand Prix in November where I've managed to win eight times before, so it's going to be another busy season.

www.michaelrutter.com





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Christy Ann Conlin



It was a long time between novels for Christy Ann Conlin, but her latest book, The Memento, was well worth the wait

“It took me about twelve substantial drafts to weave together all the elements of *The Memento*,” shares Christy Ann Conlin via email from her home in Nova Scotia.

“I did a huge amount of research and every draft led to more research.”

After the popular and critical acclaim of her debut 2002 narrative, *Heave*, life got busy for the thirty-something author; teaching, editing, speaking, gardening, hosting a radio show, raising a young family, and caring for an ailing father – all the while honing her craft.

“I then took all I learned and poured it back into the last two drafts of *The Memento*.”

The resulting work is already receiving high praise, with one reader calling it “a grab bag of gothic delights - a creaking groaning mansion, a precocious 12th-born twelve-year-old, tea parties with the dead, and an unnerving number of fleeting darting ‘somethings’ only glimpsed in the corner of your eye.”

“There are some thrilling twists and turns, and unexpected moments in the novel,” explains Conlin, “all of which came together through a process of layering, so to speak. *The Memento* is a bit of a hybrid, a literary novel combining elements of a mystery and historical novel with gothic ghost story elements.”

Inspiration for the story came from close to home.

“Quite literally, it was a china tea set my mother told me was haunted. She believes that objects become endowed with the spirit of the person who owned them, mementos of a special sort. And I was also inspired by a childhood steeped in ghost stories told around summer beach fires and winter fireplaces. My mother used to take us for picnics in historic graveyards and we would do tombstone rubbings.

“My grandmother had very strong feelings about my mother and I being sensitive to spirits. To me, this means I am keenly aware of the stories people tell, and the ghosts and memories they carry with them. My grandmother loved to tell ghost stories. She was a curious blend of superstition and pragmatism and I think you need both to write a ghost story. You need to be open to the marvelous and unexplainable but you also need a dose of skepticism.”

A remarkable experience in Ireland also contributed to the new tome.

“In Drogheda, I was with some friends and we found a hole in the high stone wall of an enormous walled garden on an abandoned estate. That moment stayed with me and was the genesis of *Petal’s End*, the haunted garden in *The Memento*.”

Conlin’s passion for storytelling, she says, comes from her Celtic roots.

“Irish and Scottish ghost stories were a part of my childhood. I remember the story of *The Curse of Mathair Nan Uisgeachan*,

which frightens me to this day! My mother’s family, the Grants, came from a line of Scots who left Scotland in the Clearances in the 1770s. The clan motto is *Stand Fast* and we were taught this as children for it hung on the wall with the Grant tartan and Grant family crest. My grandmother loved the family pipe music, the *Craigellachie*. My ancestors settled in parts of Nova Scotia which to this day have a powerful Celtic tradition and culture.”

The paternal side of her family is Irish.

“My father’s grandparents emigrated from County Sligo in Ireland in the 1860s. My father used to read me the poetry of William Butler Yeats. The ghostly songs in *The Memento* are all traditional Irish ballads my father sang to me - the *Connemara Cradle Song*, *She Moved Through the Fair* and of course, *Down by the Salley Gardens*, Yeats’s famous poem put to a haunting melody.”

The process of bringing the book to life, she notes, was not without its challenges. “Holding all the threads of the plot and not letting them drop - it’s an experience like no other; holding an entire novel in one’s head, and weaving it together, in the midst of everyday life. I felt haunted by the book, and that if I didn’t finish it, then it would loom over me for the rest of my days.”

Crossing that finish line brought both euphoria and relief.

“Holding the book in my hands was almost surreal - so many years of work, literally in your hands. It was like being on a deserted island for years, and then suddenly being in the bustle again. And then as soon as my mind was free, my new book idea came pouring in like a flood tide!”

As with *The Memento*, Conlin will likely turn to both inspiration and perspiration for her next novel.

“There is an initial inspiration and then the work begins as the words are laid out on the

page and the story unfolds and the draft writing begins. You have to do the day in, day out solitary writing and the inspiration stays alive, a lantern in the sometimes dark process of writing. A novel is a huge commitment of time and thought and absolute dedication. It’s no different than any other art form, from music to painting or dance. The final product, or performance, has years of training, practice and devotion behind it.

“E.B. White said, ‘A writer who waits for ideal conditions under which to work will die without putting a word on paper.’ Writing *The Memento* taught me the truth of this. There will always be ups and downs, and you write your way through them. Writing a novel is about continuity and tenacity and discipline. You can have all the talent in the world but if you don’t sit down and write on a regular basis, your talent and original ideas don’t matter at all. Slow and steady is my motto now, and the turtle my mascot.”

www.christyannconlin.com



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Music Camp on the Canal is a reminder that Cape Breton is a must-visit destination for Celtic music enthusiasts. Greg Silver tells us more...

About four years ago I had an intriguing phone call from a woman named Barbara in New Jersey who told me she wanted to learn more about the tin whistle and Celtic music traditions. For some time she had dreamed about visiting Cape Breton. She told me she played clarinet and shakuhachi - a traditional Japanese flute. Her call was in response to a modest social marketing campaign we launched to promote our very first Music Camp on the Canal in St. Peter's, Cape Breton.

Well, Barbara did come to Music Camp that year. She was one of about 30 people to attend our inaugural event for an intensive weekend of workshops, intimate jam sessions, and an All Star Concert featuring our teaching faculty.

Other traditional music enthusiasts came from a variety of genres. Some had a background in Celtic music, while others came from Folk, Blues, Appalachian, Acadian and other roots traditions. We hosted people of all ages, from early teens to senior citizens. They came mostly from Atlantic Canada in that first year, but also from the U.S., and in subsequent years from Germany and central Canada. We've even had enquiries from Asia and Australia.

Cape Breton is renowned as a hotbed of Celtic music, being the birthplace of such sonic giants as John Allan Cameron, Natalie MacMaster, Ashley MacIsaac, the Rankin Family, and the Barra MacNeils.

We've been fortunate to attract some of these stars, along with lesser-known but equally high caliber musicians, to teach workshops and perform in the All Star Concert each year since 2012.

Celtic culture is a key component of life in Cape Breton. With the demise of big steel, the coal industry, and our fish stocks, and with the outmigration of skilled workers and their young families, the region has suffered economically. Cultural tourism is one of the assets that can help us turn things around.

Music Camp started as a project called KitchenRackets. We were, and remain, a small group of local and 'come-from-away' amateur musicians. Our goal was to open up our jam sessions to visitors. Cape Breton is famous for its kitchen parties, but if

St. Peter's
Music Camp
ON THE
Canal
2016
June 3-5

you're not a member of the community, or related to one, it is a challenge to get into one of these typically home-based events.

“Our idea was to put our jam sessions into a public venue, and welcome people travelling with instruments to come and participate.”

It had a modest start, but quickly gained notoriety. We ran weekly ceilidhs and jam sessions at the local Bras d'Or Lakes Inn in St. Peter's during the summers, and built a following. People came, and stayed, to play with us.

The autumn Celtic Colours International Festival became a 'friendly giant' upon whose shoulders we could stand. Extending the visitor season from summer to colourful mid-October, this huge annual gathering attracts Celtic music fans from around the world to hear a mix of Cape Breton and international artists in small venues across the Island over nine days.

KitchenRackets was invited to host a community event in association with the Celtic Colours festival. We offered workshops with local artists by day, and open jam sessions after the Festival's evening concerts. Over the past 10 years, these events have been a boon to the local tourism industry, created countless new friend-

ships, repeat visits, and are now putting tiny St. Peter's on the musical map.

Encouraged by this success, we created Music Camp on the Canal in 2012. St. Peter's is home to North America's oldest operating tidal lock canal - an important icon for the community. With support from the municipality, local businesses, music fans, and Celtic Colours, Music Camp attracts more than 70 people to come and learn and play with us, and over 200 to the concert. Attendees enjoy close encounters with Celtic musicians, all happy to share their knowledge and experience. One very rewarding aspect of Music Camp is the opportunity to host a handful of young musicians from our own community - sponsored by local businesses to participate - so they can learn from the masters, and mix and mingle with fellow musicians from near and far.

This year, Music Camp on the Canal runs from June 3-5, and features both returning and new faculty. Workshops will concentrate on stringed instruments, voice, step and square dance. Again, we will blend our Celtic roots with other genres from the Atlantic coast and beyond.

As it turns out, Barbara from New Jersey - a Professor of Music Composition at Princeton University - has become a very proficient whistle player. We invited her back to Music Camp in the second year to lead some workshops and she formed a new music partnership with local guitar wizard Charles MacDonald. They now perform as Fork and Spoon, mixing familiar Celtic melodies and rhythms into new and magical experiences. Barbara will be back again this year, alongside other Celtic-based artists, to provide an experience designed to tickle the fancy of any traditional music enthusiast.

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Green Clouds

They are girls, they are glitzy, and they call themselves Green Clouds

Italian by culture and classically trained, the all-female quintet Green Clouds has embraced traditional Celtic music with a bursting enthusiasm, creating something vibrant and with a distinctive edge.

"Keltronic is our brand," explains founding member Graziana Giansante. "We play because we need to play, and we are very happy to have found a unique way to express ourselves together."

Keltronic, she notes, is a rare blend of Celtic and electronic, something she and her musical friends first brewed up in the northern Italian province of Teramo about eight years ago.

"We love traditional Irish and Celtic music, and no one does it better than a native Irish band. Our idea was to fuse the taste of Celtic music we love with our own culture."

That meant applying classical instrumentation to traditional arrangements.

"We did that with an eye open to electronic music, which is a large part of our culture today. Celtic and electronic together became Keltronic, and with our classical instruments the results have been truly amazing."

The unique sound, which generally includes refrains that audiences quickly catch onto, has picked up a solid following over the years, thanks to the group's relentless enthusiasm and a few lucky breaks.

"In 2009 we were contacted by the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin to open the St. Patrick's Day Festival there. It was a fantastic honour, especially as we were the only Italian group involved."

The five women have also adopted artsy, glittering half-masks for their performances. Recently, the addition of video has

also amped up the band's visibility.

English-born Giansante, who plays oboe and English horn, founded the band along with drummer and percussionist Valentia Lauti Neala. After an early turnover of bandmates, things settled down when three other girls joined and stayed. Marizia Ricciardi Roisin plays violin, Maurizia Reali Erin plays piano and keyboard, and Cristina Patrizi Eirwen is the bass player.

"We found a bunch of mad girls ready to believe in our project and we have stuck together so now we are a great, happy family. We fight sometimes but that happens in the best of families, doesn't it?"

Staying together is a challenge, Giansante admits, noting Erin is about to become a mother.

"Things change, life happens, and we know lots of bands that have broken up. But we have stayed together because we share the ambition to bring the Green Clouds to the top."

The group appears frequently in Ireland, which is always a sort of homecoming for violinist Roisin who studied music at the University of Limerick for two years.

Giansante credits her father with giving the band its unusual name.

"We wanted something that suggested Ireland, and green is definitely the colour of the Emerald Isle. The idea of the clouds, on the other hand, is linked to the idea that music, like clouds, is changing constant-

ly, creating unpredictable and different forms."

Clouds are also, she adds, a feminine noun, reflecting the makeup of the group.

The band, now based in Rome, frequently plays festivals and big Celtic-Irish events, but they have a new project on the go called Green Clouds Wireless - a purely acoustic act geared toward smaller clubs and events.

"We're also working on a big new project called The Quest. It is an out-Celtic project connected to a role-playing game our 'mad scientist' Francesco is bringing to life."

The creative genius that she is referring to is Francesco Marchetti, the group's composer and arranger.

"The band members focus on performances, and Francesco is the guy who is always thinking about our sound and style. We discuss every aspect of what we do with him, and then he works at it until he makes everyone happy."

Giansante is delighted to be part of what she calls resurgence in Celtic music, adding there is a sense of peace and kinship at Celtic events. However, she worries some people apply too narrow a definition to the genre.

"Maybe too many people think Celtic music is synonymous with Loreena McKennitt or Enya, both of whom we love and adore. But it does not have to be slow and meditative; Celtic music can be upbeat, unique, ambitious, creative and colourful as well."

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Makem & Spain

With a new album, and upcoming concerts across Canada, the U.S., and the Emerald Isle, Irish trio Makem and Spain return to their Celtic roots

Makem and Spain's new album, *Four Pounds a Day*, includes thirteen traditional Irish tunes, many of them first heard when the band members were children, listening to their fathers play and sing.

Liam Spain, who handles vocals, guitar, mandolin, bodhran, bouzouki and harmonica for the band, says the album is a compilation of frequently requested songs.

"We had just finished our Sessions project - a big collaboration of American folk songs with some of our folk music heroes - and we started talking about a new recording," he explains by email. "Fans at our shows have always asked what album is this on? - or which album is that on? So we thought it would be a good idea to do an actual recording of those numbers. And I think the new album is also very indicative of our live sound and feel at this point in time."

Spain, along with his brother and bandmate Mick - a rich baritone who, like Liam, plays a variety of instruments - are of Irish and French Canadian ancestry.

"My father's grandparents emigrated from Ireland around 1900," notes Liam. "My mom's family came to the United States from Quebec."

Liam and Mick are the sons of Mike Spain, a popular musician who toured around New England for a quarter century.

"I grew up hearing this kind of music - The Clancys and Tommy Makem, The Weavers, The Dubliners, The Irish Rovers. They were on the record player all the time and I took to it early."

"My best memories as a kid were hearing my dad and his friends sing in our kitchen. As a five or six-year-old, it just looked like so much fun. And today, the best times we have as a band are getting together with friends for kitchen parties. It's just such a natural and honest way to play."

At another New Hampshire home, Irish-born Rory Makem and his brothers were learning the same songs from their father Tommy Makem, a legendary Irish singer who is credited with launching 'trad' into the spotlight. As the Makem and Spain boys grew up, they sometimes found themselves playing at the same events, and eventually began performing together.

The band has now been around, in one form or another, for more than 25 years.

"Rory began playing in a group with his brothers back in the early 90s. My brother Mick and I started performing together around 1994. Both acts merged together around 2003, and the current lineup of myself, Mick and Rory has been touring together for the last few years."

Though they have expanded their repertoire to include different folk streams, Spain says their sound hasn't changed much since the trio began.

"We are just three guys going out and singing the songs we love. We take bits and pieces of the artists we admire and try to meld them into something of our own. Acts like The Corries, Ryan's Fancy and Schooner Fare have all had a huge influence on our sound."

Along with good times, the band is driven by the hope that their ballads will inspire future generations of listeners.

"It is just such an important part of Irish music and history. A great melody is always nice but for us, it has got to have a story to it. When and if you combine the two, then you are on to something special."

That 'something special' includes songs of the sea, of miners and other working people, of love and strife, and the ancestral homeland.

"The songs and arrangements pretty much evolve on their own. If we can't make it sound right after the first few tries, then the song probably isn't for us."

When pressed, Spain acknowledges that his favourite cut on the new album is an old standard, so often performed by The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, *Red is the Rose*.

A second Makem and Spain Sessions album is expected in October, followed by another full tour of Eire.

"We just have to keep bringing it to the people. I think there is always room to further promote and preserve our culture - language, music, history, literature. If folks stop doing so, it might be lost along the road."

"And, at the end of the day, we get to play music on stage for a living. That's something we all dreamed about growing up. It really doesn't get any better than that."

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Phil Coulter

Even at age 74, Irish musical icon Phil Coulter shows no signs of slowing down. Celtic Life International contributor Noel Shine gets us up to speed.



It is only when confronted with the vast array of awards which adorn the walls of his new office in Bray, County Wicklow that one can begin to appreciate the full extent of Phil Coulter's success. A veritable Aladdin's Cave of platinum, gold and silver discs, they stand in mute testimony to a life lived at the heart of popular music. When I meet him, he is reassuringly self-effacing and candid all at once. He is wont to talk about any topic that takes his fancy, but ultimately the predominant force which fires his imagination, wit and repartee, is music.

An accomplished composer, arranger and performer, Coulter's popularity has long since transcended that of mere celebrity to that of a true musical icon. "I have been given way too much credit for being smarter than I actually am," he shares with a wry smile. "Each career progression was preceded by the necessity to change as much as any compulsion to hone one's craft. I certainly never did it for fame. If you want to be famous then don't be a songwriter. When I was growing up in the Fifties, everyone wanted to be Elvis. I wanted to play piano like Fats Domino or be the emcee standing out front with Bobby Darin and his big band."

Born in war-time Derry in February 1942, the young Coulter was as far away from Tin Pan Alley and Rock 'n' Roll as he could ever imagine. Back then it must have seemed unlikely that this teenager would go on to be a presence at many of the pivotal moments in recent history. Further that he would provide his very own soundtrack as that story unfolded.

However, a series of fortuitous breaks assured his date with destiny. After winning a scholarship to attend Queen's University Belfast, he joined its glee club and went on to write, produce and release his first record while still a student. There followed a brief cameo at the heart of the Irish showband scene, before he turned his back on academia and set off to make his fortune across the Irish Sea.

The first wave of Beatlemania had just shifted the world of pop music on its axis - from the Brill Building of New York to the publishing houses of Denmark Street, London. Young Coulter would not be denied. All too soon, he discovered the reality of his posting in a publishing house didn't quite live up to that of his own fevered imaginings. He persevered, moonlighting as a session musician and arranger for the likes of Van Morrison, Tom Jones and The Rolling Stones. He formed a songwriting partnership with Bill Martin, and before long they had their first real break when a bare-footed, Sandie Shaw walked away with first prize in the Eurovision Song Contest, singing the duo's Puppet on a String. They almost repeated that feat the following year, in 1968, when Cliff Richard sang their upbeat composition Congratulations! to a second place finish.

The Seventies saw Coulter at the pivot of a movement which ultimately elevated Irish folk music from the tawdry environs of smoky bars to that of grand theatre status.

Travelling between London and Dublin, he produced three Planxty albums, making a household name of Christy Moore. Luke Kelly and Coulter struck up an unlikely rapport which spawned yet even more hits, including Scorn Not His Simplicity and The Town I Loved So Well. Few songs in the canon of Irish folk music evoke that troubled period quite like this classic. It treads a fine line between a rabble-rousing rebel song and that of a wistful prayer of hope. This has not prevented the more nefarious elements within the wider nationalist community from appropriating it for themselves. Only in recent years has its true purport, as realized by its author, been fully appreciated.

In 1973, My Boy - a song which Coulter composed for Richard Harris - received the King's imprimatur. A plaintive ballad, its tale of marital discord clearly resonated with the newly-divorced Elvis. Coulter's one meet with him was to prove to be the shattering of a myth. Presley, who once heralded the dawn of a new

era from the flip-side of his shiny Sun Records, was now no more than an incoherent wreck. For Coulter it was a sobering experience. The next meeting would take on a decidedly tartan dimension when Coulter became part of the production team responsible for foisting first the Bay City Rollers and then, Billy Connolly, onto an unsuspecting public. Success here was tempered somewhat when Coulter's first marriage foundered, and his professional partnership with Bill Martin came to an end. The world of 'bubblegum' pop had suddenly lost its flavour, and Coulter decided to steal away with new love, Geraldine Branagan and start anew.

The Eighties found Coulter back in the studio, this time with Finbar Furey, to record *Steal Away* and *The Old Man*. Just as Congratulations has become a perennial favourite at Irish weddings, *The Old Man* has become interwoven into the very fabric of Irish life as a funeral song. A reflection on the boyhood memories of a recently departed father, *The Old Man* arrests the listener with a deceptively simple melody, underpinned by lyrics which are universally understood.

In 1984, Coulter's career took a marked departure when he recorded an instrumental album based around his own distinctive piano-playing style. He gave it a nuanced orchestral twist, and his signature piano sound was born. The resulting album, *Classic Tranquility*, went stratospheric in terms of sales, only being eclipsed by its successor, *Sea of Tranquility*. There then followed live performances which presented Coulter with a whole other set of challenges.

“Up to that point I had been largely anonymous to all but aficionados of pop. Then suddenly, I was thrust out there in the spotlight, in front of large crowds every night. It was as exhilarating as it was daunting. There is an immediacy there you would never experience as a songwriter.”

The transition from puppeteer to puppet also demonstrates Coulter's uncanny knack of being on trend in a business which is prone to the whims of the zeitgeist like no other form of the arts.

He honed his act to include the singing of his own compositions “only because they are so personal to me, they have come from my own experience. Like



Scorn Not His Simplicity which is about my son who died from complications arising from Down's syndrome. It's the same with *The Lake of Shadows* - from the Irish translation for Lough Swilly. That's where my sister and my brother drowned.”

In 1998, peace was finally brokered between the warring factions in Northern Ireland and the governing bodies of the Republic of Ireland and the UK. Coulter's *The Town I Loved So Well* was never too far from the lips of those of who had dared to dream of its oft-quoted lyric “of tomorrow and peace once again”. John Hume famously sang the song on the night he and David Trimble received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, and Coulter was on hand to accompany on piano. In so doing, the pair brought to a close a chapter begun many years thence from within the cloistered confines of St. Columb's College in Derry. For it was there that Hume, Coulter, and Nobel Laureate for Poetry, Seamus Heaney, were prepared for university and the world. If Coulter provided the soundtrack to this great era, then Heaney's poetic ruminations would supply the central sound-bite and subtext - “hope and history rhyme”.

It is easy to dismiss as hyperbole, the role played by the ethereal in providing the context by which a peace accord was eventually struck. But on such serendipity do the fortunes of men depend. Wherever the truth lies, the new spirit of détente which prevails to the present day found expression in yet another Coulter composition. Ireland's Call has assumed a much greater significance beyond that of its original remit as a mere rugby anthem. To a whole other generation unencumbered by the myopic vision of nationhood espoused by their forefathers, it has come to represent their notion of what it means to be innately

Irish, without necessarily being defined by the same cultural constraints.

Now, in his mid seventies, Coulter is showing no signs of slowing down. If anything he has upped the ante.

“I am always focussed on what's next - there has to be a challenge.”

His recent acquisition - an office away from home - is as much a statement of intent as it is a desire to create order in an overly busy schedule. By way of explanation he paraphrases Robert Graves' assertion that “domesticity is the enemy of creativity.”

On today's music he is equally effusive. “They say the best thing about modern technology is that it allows everyone the freedom to record their own material. The one drawback is that now everyone is recording their own material! It has become all but impossible for new acts to stand out from the dearth of so-called talent out there.”

He dismisses the TV talent show format as being no more than a platform from which so-called music moguls have been given a licence to print money on the back of viewership ratings, sponsorship deals and merchandising contracts. “The music itself is incidental, and game show hosts are now the arbiters of public taste.”

He is fulsome in his praise, however, of those artists who have adapted a more organic approach, citing fellow Bray native Hozier as “a very obvious talent.”

Coulter sees himself now, in the mode of an ‘old school’ entertainer. “I was lucky that by the time the critical acclaim that came of being a performer came around, I had developed a certain maturity which didn't allow it to go to my head. If I had that crazy level of recognition earlier, well who knows where I would be?”



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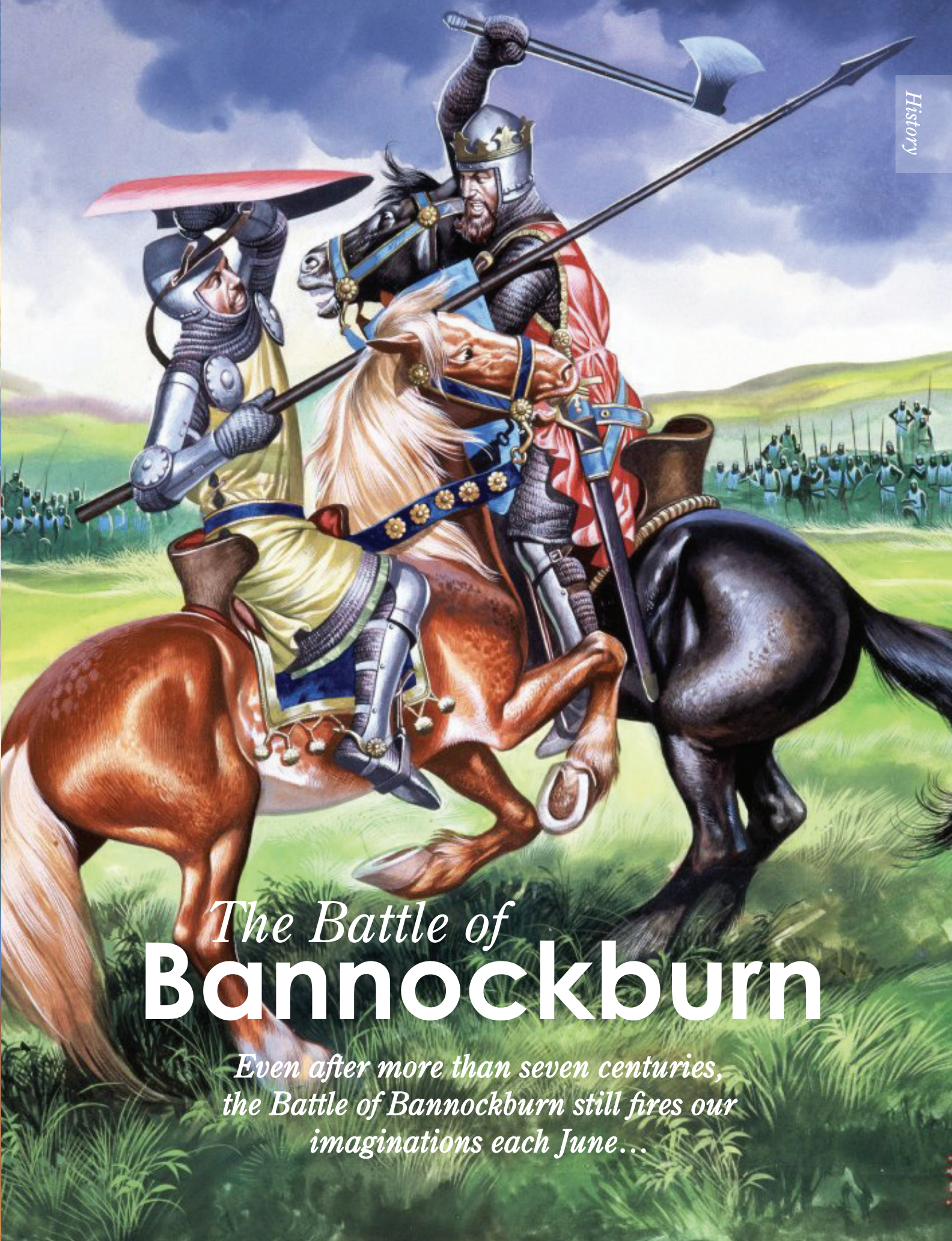


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The Battle of **Bannockburn**

*Even after more than seven centuries,
the Battle of Bannockburn still fires our
imagination each June...*

Background

Edward I of England - known as "The Hammer of the Scots" - had occupied Scotland in 1296 and unceremoniously stripped King John Balliol of the Scottish crown. All opposition was ruthlessly suppressed and garrisons of English troops occupied all the major castles. By 1304 all resistance had ceased.

Robert the Bruce, Earl of Carrick, had a legal right to the Scottish throne and, in February 1306, he started his campaign for the title and Scottish independence. After initial success in capturing some castles, he was heavily defeated in battle at Perth that summer and disappeared into exile.

Edward I died in July 1307, and his young son, Edward II, had to contend with a revolt among his English barons. Scotland took second place and, over the next six years, Bruce gradually chased the English out of Scotland. By 1313 only Stirling Castle remained in English hands.

Robert's brother, Edward, had mounted a long siege of Stirling Castle in 1313 and eventually struck a deal with the commander of the Castle, Sir Philip Moubray; if the Castle was not relieved by an English army within a year and a day, by midsummer's day 1314, the Castle would be surrendered.

Robert was furious with Edward! The last thing he wanted was a major battle with the English who were superior in numbers, arms and lethal archers. But Edward had sealed Bruce's fate. A head-on battle was now inevitable.

Edward sent orders for his nobles to assemble at Berwick, but many refused to join. The English army was close to 18,000 strong, of whom about 3,000 were heavily armed mounted knights. The remainder were men at arms with a strong force of Welsh longbowmen.

Bruce could muster around 6,000 men, of whom 500 were light cavalry. Scottish foot soldiers were mostly armed with 16-foot-long spears. They would fight in "schiltrons" comprising about 1,500 men formed into a square or circle, ranked four deep with spears anchored in the ground facing out. Schiltrons were like giant "hedgehogs", difficult for cavalry to penetrate. From inside the schiltrons small numbers of archers would try to pick off attackers.

The Battle

Bruce's army was camped in Torwood, near Stirling, and commanding the road from Edinburgh along which the English army would advance. Bruce had pit traps dug alongside the road to try and pen the English cavalry to the road. As the cavalry vanguard approached on Sunday, June 23, Bruce moved to open ground in New Park. This was an area festooned with tidal burns and marshes.

The English knights hurried forward in search for glory and encountered Bruce's schiltron. Bruce, lightly armed, on a mere pony and some distance from his schiltron, was exposed. Henry de Bohun, nephew of the Earl of Hereford, thundered across the field on his warhorse, the size of a Shire horse, with his lance levelled for the kill. Bruce, showing great courage, waited until the last possible moment and, with skill, twisted his pony aside. Standing in his stirrups he brought his favourite weapon, the battle-axe, down accurately on de Bohun's helmet killing him instantly. The story of the feat spread among the Scottish troops, with an immediate effect upon morale. Bruce is said merely to have complained that he had broken his favourite axe!

Bruce's schiltron attacked the vanguard, encircled them, and inflicted considerable damage before the English knights withdrew. The Earl of Gloucester, commander of the cavalry, was unhorsed and nearly captured in this initial fighting.

Part of the vanguard tried to bypass the Scots and head for Stirling Castle, but were engaged by the Scottish light cavalry and turned back.

That night, the English camped on the Carse of Balquhidderock by the deep tidal waters of the Bannock Burn and the Pelstream. The ground was marshy and there was insufficient space for tents to be pitched. The English army stayed at arms throughout the night fearing an after-hours attack, as Bruce had a fearsome reputation for guerrilla warfare.

English morale was poor; Edward was no hardened general, like his father, and there was disarray in the English camp that night.

Daylight came on the morning of Monday, June 24, with the Scots army drawn up three schiltrons forward, with Bruce's in reserve, across the wide face of a triangle bounded by the tidal





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Celtic *Quakers*



As Celtic Life International correspondent Simon Whaley explains, there was once a whole lotta shakin' going on in the quaint Scottish community of Comrie

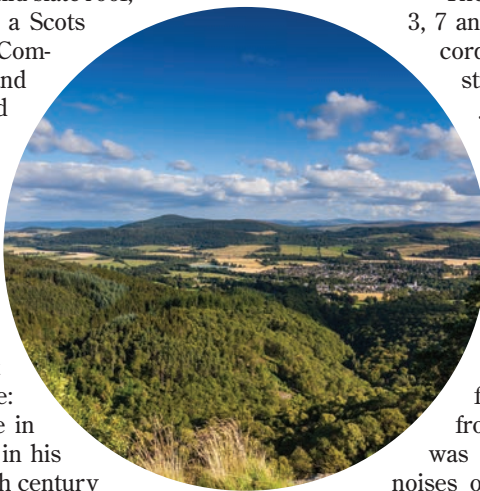


It didn't matter how hard I tried, nothing moved. I stamped my feet. Nothing. I jumped. Nothing. Thinking I needed more weight, I picked up my heavy rucksack and jumped again. Still nothing. I peered through the glass, my nose squashed flat against it so my eyeballs were a couple of millimetres closer, in the hope of spotting even the smallest of movements. But on the floor, standing on a little boxwood cross, the wooden cylinders remained upright. Against the far wall, only six feet away, the pen on the modern seismometer sat poised for action, rather than recording any action. Damn, I thought, there's never an earthquake around when you want one.

Earthquake House squats on a rocky outcrop, half way up a grassy slope, in a field on the outskirts of Comrie, in Scotland's Perthshire. Its name suggests a grander affair than it is, for it is no more than a small stone hut, with a pyramid slate roof, perched underneath the shady boughs of a Scots Pine. It was built on the instructions of the Committee for the Investigation of Scottish and Irish Earthquakes, which was established 175 years ago, in 1841. Overwhelmed by the data collected by several Comrie residents, and drawing upon the scientific discoveries of another Celt across the Irish Sea, the committee realized that proper earthquake investigations were needed. And so the world's first purpose-built earthquake monitoring station was built.

Comrie has a long track record when it comes to earthquakes, hence its nickname: the Shaky Toon. The first recorded quake in Perthshire was noted by a James Melville in his journal in 1597, but it's not until the late 18th century that better records were kept. Rev. Ralph Taylor, who lived four miles east of Comrie, in the small hamlet of Ochertyre, catalogued the tremors and his observations between 1789 and 1791. On November 5, 1789, he noted an earthquake that 'was strong enough to shiver the ice on a sheet of water near Lawers House.'

In 1791, Rev. Taylor left the district, but the Rev. S Gilfillan moved into Comrie and documented his experiences. Like Taylor, Gilfillan recorded what happened and when, but he also noted observations about the earthquake itself. On January 2, 1795, at 1.50am, there was 'a smart shock and a very loud noise at Comrie. The movement in this earthquake was vertical, though apparently horizontal in previous shocks. The trembling noise, which did not last as long as usual, seemed to begin directly below the village and ended suddenly.'



Rev Gilfillan catalogued at least 68 tremors between 1792 and 1822. This is a significant number in one small place for a country not on a major fault line, as with California's San Andreas Fault. Even today, modern equipment only records up to 300 earth tremors across the whole UK in an average year, although people are only aware of about ten per cent of them.

For 13 years after 1826, seismic activity quietened down considerably in Comrie, until the Great Earthquake of 1839. It struck on October 23 at 10.15pm and was felt across most of Scotland. However, in the village of Comrie, residents felt numerous tremors in the three weeks prior to this quake. It was these tremors that led two more of Comrie's locals to catalogue their own experiences: the shoemaker James Drummond, and the local postmaster, Peter Macfarlane.

They both noted minor tremors on October 3, 7 and 9, but on the 10th Peter Macfarlane recorded ten separate earthquakes, 'of which the strongest occurred at 1pm, 3pm and 4pm.' James Drummond recorded not ten earthquakes, but five earthquakes and five noises of the earth moving, often noted as 'earth-sounds'. Although he agrees with Macfarlane's earth tremors of 1pm and 3pm, Drummond claims to have felt the earth move at 2.30pm, 3.00pm, and 4.30pm.

On October 12, a larger shock was felt, strong enough to dislodge slate tiles from houses in Comrie, and some stones from walls in the immediate area. 'The shock was preceded and accompanied by two loud noises of long duration,' Macfarlane noted. 'The trees on the road between Comrie and Lawers were at the time wet with rain, which was thrown off by the shock.'

Both men recorded minor shocks on a daily basis, often several times a day, between then and the Great Earthquake of October 23. It was a frightening event. It was cold and dark, and the ground moved like it had never moved before. Both Drummond and Macfarlane recorded that 'several chimneys were shattered and chimney pots thrown down, some walls were cracked, or dry stone-dykes were overthrown.' As well as recording the effects of the tremors, these Comrie Pioneers, as they became known, also noted what was happening during the earthquakes. 'The shock consisted of two or three strong vibrations followed by a tremulous motion. At Comrie, there were three strong vibrations in a nearly vertical direction.'

With no mechanism for officially monitoring earthquakes, or measuring their strength and intensity, Drummond and Macfarlane created their own device for recording tremors. It consisted of a wooden cross, made from boxwood, upon which they placed wooden cylinders of various thicknesses. Carefully placed, so that one falling cylinder wouldn't inadvertently knock an adjacent cylinder, they chose cylinders of different thicknesses as a means of measuring the strength of the ground's vibrations. Any falling cylinders would be caught and held in place by sand surrounding the device. They constructed several of these, placing them at various points around the village.

Although basic in design, it worked. On October 26, 1840, in the early evening, Drummond felt a vertical movement in the ground. 'The instruments erected at Comrie were affected by this shock, two of them indicating upwards movements of $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, respectively. In a third, designed to measure horizontal movement, the lower end made a furrow in the flour half an inch from the centre.'

In 1841, drawing upon all of their data, the two men wrote a report, which they submitted to the British Association for the Advancement of Science. It was this paper that led to the creation of the Committee for the Investigation of Scottish and Irish Earthquakes, which became responsible for finding accurate instruments and devices for recording these tremors. Although several different devices were tried and tested, another Celt, James Forbes, created an instrument that we might recognize as a seismometer today. Best described as an inverted pendulum, a pencil was attached to the end of a pole, over which was placed a dome, lined with paper. The theory was that when the earth quivered, the pencil would move around the dome, recording its movement on the paper. The bigger the earthquake the more movement the pencil would make.

Six of these inverted pendulums were installed in Comrie, each with different length poles. Results were mixed, although they successfully registered some tremors. On March 10, 1841, at 4.45pm, the Committee noted there was 'a rather strong lateral shock felt at Comrie and to a distance of 15 miles. The two inverted pendulums (39 inches and 128 inches long) at Comrie had their points thrown half an inch to the west.'

Although these pendulums showed promise, they weren't perfect. The Com-



mittee couldn't determine what impact the friction between the pencil and the paper was having on the results. But in 1844 the earth stopped moving.

Across the Irish Sea, in Killiney, south of Dublin, Robert Mallet and his son John were undertaking experiments of their own. They were trying to prove that the energy created when the earth moved could be witnessed as it travelled through the ground. In October 1848, to test out their theory, they buried a keg of gunpowder on Killiney beach, and retreated half a mile before detonating it. Mallet's seismometer projected crosshairs onto a bed of mercury, the movement of which was monitored through a microscope. The experiment worked, with Mallet devising a series of calculations determining the speed of the energy's movement depending upon the type of rock through which it was travelling. In 1857, Mallet travelled to Italy, in the aftermath of the Great Neapolitan Earthquake, one of the most devastating earthquakes known to man at the time, in which over 10,000 people died. He recorded the destructive after-effects of earthquakes, being one of the first to capture them photographically.

During 1869 and 1870, Comrie shook to several more tremors. The Committee decided to construct a building dedicated to the monitoring of earthquakes: Comrie's Earthquake House. It hosted the latest Mallet seismometer. Sadly, this coincided with another reduction in seismic activity in the area, although occasional tremors were still felt every couple of years. By now, the world's scientists were making further inroads into understand-

ing why and how the earth moved.

In 1912, the discovery of the Highland Boundary Fault, the geological division between Scotland's Highlands and Lowlands, running from Helensburgh in the west to Stonehaven in the east, which passes within a mile of Comrie, helped explain why the town shifted on its foundations more frequently than the rest of Scotland and Britain. The theory of tectonic plates constantly moving around the Earth was first noted at the beginning of the 20th century, but it wasn't until the 1950s and 1960s, that the theory was proved and the world's major fault lines identified.

Our understanding of earthquakes today has been hugely influenced by the pioneering Scottish and Irish Celtic community, and scientists agree that no other town has contributed so much to the cataloguing of British earthquakes as Comrie. Between October 1839 and December 1841 Macfarlane recorded 203 earthquakes - an average of two a week.

Sitting down on the bare rock beside Earthquake House, I gaze across Strathearn and over the tops of Comrie's cottages. The setting sun offers a tranquility and peacefulness that seems impossible to shatter. All is calm, and I consider the road users on the nearby A85 whizzing by, probably unaware of the seismic contribution this small Celtic town played in the history of earthquake study. I pat the ground, acknowledging the irony. The frequent tremors catalogued by Comrie's pioneers helped put today's understanding of seismology on solid foundations.



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Galloway Photographic Collective

In southwest Scotland, the creative whole is greater than the sum of its parts

Dumfries and Galloway in southwest Scotland has long been the inspiration for many creative talents: Robert Burns, Thomas Carlyle and James Matthew Barrie were all influenced by this part of the country. The beautiful, rural landscape has also inspired painters such as Archie Sutter Watt, Edward Atkinson Hornel, and Charles Oppenheimer. It is no coincidence that Wigtown hosts one of the country's largest book festivals, or that Kirkcudbright is known as 'the artists' town.' Dumfries and Galloway punches well above its weight in the culture category, with a plethora of artistic gatherings throughout the year.

Historically, photography has been

one of the lesser celebrated arts here. Part of the problem is that photography is an insular art form, with few opportunities for professional photographers to engage with the public at large or to share ideas and seek inspiration. That changed four years ago when several local photographers created Galloway Photographic Collective with the belief that there was more to be gained from sharing opportunities and experiences than from working in isolation across a large rural region.

Today Galloway Photographic Collective is comprised of seven photographers, whose desire it is to promote photography as a major art form, especially to newcomers in the field. The members of the

Collective also inspire and enlighten each other through regular meetings, presentations, internal workshops, and shared excursions.

Interacting with the wider community, Galloway Photographic Collective has its own website and Facebook page, hosts exhibitions, produces a weekly blog, supports local charity events, and runs photography workshops. And there are bigger projects on the horizon as well, including an effort to save a disused historic building through the creation of a major photography centre.

Let's meet the photographers...

Kim Ayres

For Ayres, storytelling is at the heart of his photography. He takes an idea and cranks it up several levels. With photos that move from illustrative to painterly,



vintage to fantastical, detailed to cinematic, he explores how images are created with light, line and composition. For Ayres, studying the techniques of painters and cinematographers is as important as examining the work of other photographers.

He is the first to admit that his photography is less about capturing a moment than it is about creating one. "I have huge respect for those who sit in a hide or on a hilltop for hours until the right combination of light and action coincides, but I've never had the patience for that. I love to construct my images - working out locations, props and outfits, and moving the people and lighting around inside the scene until everything works."

www.kimayres.co.uk



Holly Burns

Burns is as conceptual photographer who creates thought-provoking imagery that is often autobiographical in content. She specializes in compositing - the process of layering many photographs in post-production - to create her surreal art. Although it may appear fantastical and dreamlike, her work is based on her own life experiences, imagination and emotions. Burns works with a selection of models, but given the intimate nature of her visions she often creates self-portraits as a starting point. She then blends these portraits with a combination of Scottish landscapes and studio set-ups, imbuing them with layers of symbolism along the way. Although her images are deeply rooted in her own psyche, Burns endeavours, through her use of semiotics, to provide an insight into her subject matter that the viewer can empathize with. "My work provides opportunities for many interpretations that I hope render it relatable to everyone."

www.facebook.com/hollyburnsphotography



Tom Langlands

After a thirty-five-year career as an architect, Langlands decided to embrace his other passions of writing and photography. Although he enjoys taking photographs of - and writing about - all sorts of subject matter, he has a particular love of the Celtic nations and Scotland in particular. Throughout his student years he worked during holiday periods in photography shops, and spent many hours fly-fishing on Scotland's beautiful rivers. It was this combination of interests that led him in recent years to pursue his love of nature and wildlife photography. He is never more at home than when he is lying beside a mountain stream or Highland loch capturing those special wildlife moments that so many people never see. Through his wildlife images, Langlands attempts to take the viewer into the world of his subjects, providing a new perspective that raises awareness of the natural world.

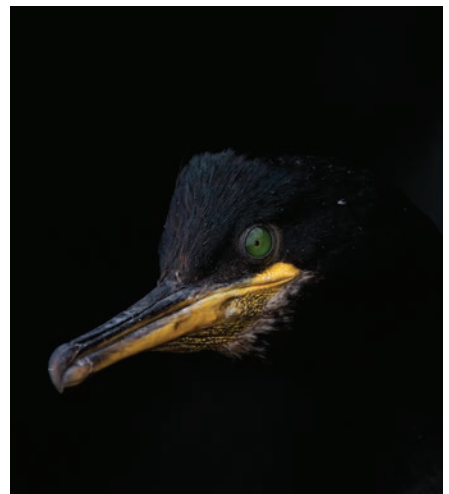
www.tomlanglandsphotography.com

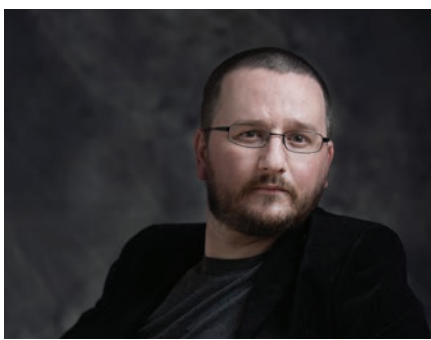


Roger Lever

Lever trained in Edinburgh as a veterinary surgeon but, nearing retirement, reduced his working hours to take his lifelong passion for photography on a trip into the unknown. Perhaps unsurprisingly for a vet, wildlife and nature are at the forefront of his work, but he has now extended this to include portraiture, weddings, and more recently, film. Always exploring new ideas he is passionate about his ongoing '1000 Faces Scotland' project: "I travel all around Scotland photographing and video recording all kinds of people talking about themselves and their varied and often remarkable life experiences. I intend to continue this as long as I can hold a camera." He uploads his fascinating social commentary of a nation's people for everyone to enjoy at www.1000facesscotland.com. His personable and unobtrusive approach also makes Lever a much sought-after wedding photographer who undertakes commissions across Scotland.

www.rogerleverphotography.com





Laura Hudson Mackay

Living in a castle in Scotland, and with a base in Morocco, it isn't difficult to understand how Mackay is inspired by both Celtic and Arabian lore. She explains her approach to this cultural overlap as an endeavour to illuminate mysterious secrets from the most ancient of tales. "I explore the connections between past, present and future - seen and unseen, stillness and chaos. In the natural world I search for nexus points - thin places that afford glimpses between our world and otherworld." Choosing to shoot primarily in black and white, Mackay uses both digital and film cameras, and has recently returned to using traditional darkroom processes to create her work. When she isn't running photographic tours of the ancient walled city of Marrakech, the nearby High Atlas Mountains, or the Sahara desert, Mackay spends time in her studio documenting the fine detail of natural objects and paying particular attention to structure and form.

www.laurahudsonmackay.co.uk

David Moses

The noted portraiture work of Moses peels back the superficial layers of his subjects' appearances to reveal their characters. His project - 'The Scots' - typifies the way he portrays narrative moments in contemporary Scottish life. Placing his subjects in their everyday setting, Moses crafts his images around them. His compositions are sparse and provide only a few clues about the subject, requiring the viewer to fill in the gaps. Moses points out that although some of his images have a similar *feel*, his subjects are not linked. "It is a wandering perspective. The project started at home, worked its way out and collects subjects as it goes. There are no criteria, only a willingness to be photographed. Sometimes it is people who are passed in the street, sometimes an old acquaintance, sometimes someone who has heard of the project." This serendipitous approach allows the project to evolve in interesting and organic ways.

www.davidmoses.photoshelter.com

Allan Wright

Wright has been photographing Scotland's landscape for over 30 years. He has had nine books of his images published, along with hundreds of calendars and postcards. He understands the Scottish landscape intimately, and embraces the vagaries of its weather. "Even on a bad day, Scotland has a depth of beauty I have rarely seen elsewhere in my travels. Its moods, textures and forms are seemingly inexhaustible - there's more than a life's work out there." Wright uses colour and form to generate harmony in his compositions. He spends nearly two years exploring a particular region or theme to generate images that will form the basis of a book, other printed media, or stock library uploads. Current projects include landscapes of the Isle of Skye, as well as his home region of Galloway. When he isn't travelling and taking photographs, he allocates time to developing a program of workshops for aspiring landscape photographers.

www.allanwrightphoto.com

You can follow the work of Galloway Photographic Collective on the group's website or Facebook page, both of which provide links to weekly blogs and more information about the photographers.

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the Outlander

*Sam Heughan is smart, strong, sexy and Scottish
– and he's only just getting started*

Born and raised in New Galloway, Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland, Sam Heughan seemed destined to play the lead role of Jamie Fraser in the STARZ hit television series *Outlander*.

After graduating from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow, Heughan landed a series of small, but steady roles in theatre and on television. His first big break came with the BBC soap opera *Doctors* in 2009. Parts in the Hallmark Channel film *A Princess for Christmas*, and the BBC drama *First Light*, were to follow, along with a stint as the caped crusader in the touring stage show *Batman Live*.

Upon his successful audition for *Outlander* in 2013, series au-

thor Diana Gabaldon said of Heughan, "Oh. My. God. That man is a Scot to the bone, and Jamie Fraser to the heart."

Given the huge popularity of the show's first season - ratings soared exponentially with each new episode - millions of *Outlander* fans obviously agree with Gabaldon's assessment.

And yet, almost despite his new-found sex symbol status, as well as an array of awards and accolades over the last two years, the 36-year-old actor is affable, humble, observant, and philosophical in his approach to his profession.

Here, in this exclusive interview with Celtic Life International, Heughan opens up about his alter-ego Jamie Fraser, and what *Outlander* fans can expect for season two.



CL: *At the end of season one, the scene in the prison was brutal and hard to watch, and it affected Jamie a lot. Can you talk a little bit about how that changes Jamie in season two?*

SH: Yes, he is affected by it, physically and mentally, and we have certainly played that out in season two. However, we are not dwelling on it, and it's not the primary focus of the season. They have gone to Paris to stop history, to change history, so it is definitely played out in the episodes, and it affects Jamie's psychology, and it also affects his relationship with Claire and their marriage, but it is something that they need to get over. I think time is a great healer and, ultimately, he puts his whole body and soul into this mission, and then there is a great revelation that kind of cures him or brings him out of himself, and it certainly brings back the old Jamie. Without giving away too much, he does find some sort of resolution. But it is interesting what that stems out of, and if you read the books you may know what happens. Jamie's definitely still affected by the trauma, and he is quite fragile at the start of season two, but he gets on with it, as he always does. I think under the surface there are still some issues to be dealt with. It has been a really interesting journey to play. I think myself and Caitriona both love any scenes that are kind of quite dramatic that we can really get our teeth into, that

we can really stretch ourselves and our acting ability. I thoroughly enjoyed those episodes and look forward to more challenges.

CL: *What was the feedback to the prison scene like?*

SH: I saw some stuff on various websites and on Facebook and Twitter. You know, I think that if anyone who has suffered any kind of trauma can get something out of it, or feel that they can speak up, or find help in addressing their problems, then we have done a great thing. The story wasn't just about Jamie Fraser and the event that happened to him. For me, it was definitely very interesting about the psychology of where he is at, and how that has affected his relationship with Claire, especially now that they are going to be parents. There are all these elements being played out. It is almost kind of sad in a way. We saw the innocence of season one; so much has been lost, but it is there to be found again.

CL: *Are you excited to kind of take the character into new emotional levels this season?*

SH: Yes, it is funny because Jamie wears all these scars on his body which are like marks of things that have happened to him. It is just very interesting, you know, just even in the physicality of things thinking we now have to carry this through

forever, for how long we film this, so that has been interesting, but also, the psychology of things. I think we are all excited to see where this goes - the psychology and the more emotional stuff, and then when we get to the end of the season where we lose some characters, and it really does become even more emotional.

CL: *Has there been a scene in season two that was particularly tough to shoot?*

SH: Just starting any season is pretty tough, to be honest, because you have to find where the characters are at. And we had a break, as well, so we didn't go straight into it, and it was tricky to place exactly where these characters were in their relationships. Then, logistically, we filmed a lot of our interior scenes in these amazing studios that they built - these incredible Paris apartments. That wasn't too bad. Not like last year where we were out in the elements and the horses and things. But the politics has been pretty tough, as there are so many factions and so many players involved; the Duke of Sandringham, Bonnie Prince Charlie, lots of different politicians, and King Louis as well. It is a different kind of battle that they are fighting, and it has been really interesting to see how Jamie and Claire adapt to that and how their characters change in relation.

CL: Are there are certain new characters or new actors coming into the cast that you were most excited to work with?

SH: All the French cast were terrific, but we've also got some other characters that I'm excited about. Lord Lovat, in particular, is a great character. To read the scenes in the book, there are some great head-to-heads between him and Jamie and Claire as well, and I think, God, I would love to see some famous Scottish actors in those roles. And also, the events - Culloden and Prestonpans - they are big, big battles, and hopefully, we gave them the scale that they deserve.

“I know that people are going to be surprised by the first half of the season which is so luxurious, and beautiful, and pretty, and the second half is going to be muddy and bloody.”

CL: Muddy and bloody.

SH: Yeah.

CL: It's good to have variety.

SH: Yeah.

CL: You mentioned the battles and politics, but we also see a business side of Jamie now that he's working. What is that side of Jamie like? How does he explore that?

SH: Yes, I mean, it seems very fortuitous that Jared leaves them all this property and money, and then he disappears, and Claire goes and buys herself lots of nice dresses, but yeah, I think Jamie is a natural businessman. He is charming, and he has a good head for figures and numbers, so therefore, that side of it, the wine merchant side of it, he does pretty well, and maybe we shouldn't be surprised by that.

CL: Are there are any favourite scenes that you are looking forward to seeing on screen?

SH: I think the chapters on Prestonpans are so well described by Diana - you know what happens in nighttime and these little ambushes and the fires. I think it's just such a historical thing, as well, for Scotland, and it's not been done for a long time on film, so we are very lucky to be reproducing that on film. Yeah, the Court of King Louis XV is going to be very glamorous. We went to set the first day, and I saw the set and I was, like, wow, this is Versailles, it's beautiful; and they're like,

no, that's just your apartment. I was, like, this is my apartment? This is like a palace. I can't wait to see the Court of King Louis XV.

CL: How's your French?

SH: It's okay. I don't speak French, not like Cairtriona. I failed my French exam in school, but it's surprisingly a lot easier than Gaelic. I can understand French, generally, and I can almost read it. I can't really speak it as much, but it's great. We've got a fantastic tutor, and he's worked very closely with us. We've got some really nice character traits in there that we've managed to put into the language, and it brings out another side to the characters as well.

CL: Tell us about the new French actors.

SH: We have some fantastic new characters. The French actors poured in just a new dynamic, a new world, and there's new enemies, new allies. We have Dominique Pinon. We've got Stanley Weber. We have this young boy that Romann Berrux plays, Fergus. He brings this great dimension to Claire and Jamie. He sort of becomes their surrogate son, and it's really nice to see Jaime and Claire play father and mother and sort of play this family. And it brings another entity and dynamic to the whole relationship.

CL: Because you've moved from the Highlands to France, did the style of fighting change at all?

SH: Wow. I would say that the danger in Paris and Versailles is less physical with the swords and weaponry. It is more about politics and backstabbing and poison - more hidden.

“There is a lot more politics at work and a lot more danger, so it's a different kind of world. But we certainly do go back to Scotland where we go back to the mud and blood and gore. So there's something for everyone.”

CL: The idea of shifting to different eras is pretty exciting. If you could visit any era, what would it be?

SH: I've always been obsessed with the King Arthur legends, and I don't really know what period that would be. I'd love to discover the source of King Arthur, I guess.



CL: And what would you be? Would you be King Arthur?

SH: Absolutely. But then maybe Mor-dred's a more interesting character.

CL: This show has launched you into the public eye in a different way. How do you navigate that success, and what's sort of the double-edged sword of being known?

SH: We do have that ability to support charities and have done so, and I think that's definitely the positive side to this industry.

CL: Could you talk about what you like about Jamie, what you admire about him?

SH: I've been very surprised by Season two. Season one was about discovery and about a young man growing up and finding his place in the world and in a relationship. And Season two has been about discovering a side of the character that I didn't know was there, that he's playing someone else. He's being quite deceptive. He's learning to be deceitful, and he does it very well. Jamie is very capable and good at most things. But there's a side to him that I didn't know, and also, he's still obviously traumatized or struggling with what happened to him. So there's not darkness, but there's a side to him that I didn't know existed. And what do I admire about him, I think you asked? I guess his humor and his, just, buoyancy - his natural ability to keep going no matter what's wrong. And I guess, also, his just absolute dedication to Claire is admirable and inspiring.

CL: If you were sitting across from him at a table, what would you want to ask him?

SH: Is he a natural ginger? Or does he dye his hair once a month?

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Tying the Celtic Knot

So your partner has popped the question ~ now the real fun begins. Sure, planning a wedding can be stressful, but as Celtic Life International senior writer Rebecca Dingwell explains, with the right roadmap it can be a beautiful adventure...

Catherine McLeod and her husband Marc Reardon were wed last summer in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The couple, who are of Irish and Scottish ancestry, took their vows in front of over 200 friends and family members. True to their heritage, the celebration had a Celtic twist.

"We did everything a bit differently, right down to the finest detail," shares McLeod. "We put our own personal touches on everything."

While McLeod and Reardon have their magical moments now fixed in their memories, many couples struggle to work out the details of their big day.

Síle Tracey is a wedding planner with Waterlily Weddings in Bray, Ireland. She helps love-birds gear up for the event.

"After my first experience coordinating a wedding I was truly hooked," says Tracey, who has been with the decade-old business for the past two years. "I have been enjoying every minute of planning ever since."

Although preparing for a wedding means tackling a hefty to-do list, she believes it is essential for couples to first have a clear vision of the venue they would like to get married in before other details get worked out.

"In order not to get overwhelmed, couples should have a 'top five' list of things they need the facility to offer," she explains. "This, and knowing their budget. If you get these two things right, the other elements follow naturally."



Venues

Finding the right venue is like finding the right frame for a work of art. It can't be too small for your guests, but it also shouldn't be too big. Do you want to hold your reception in the same place as the ceremony? Do you want to be in a chapel, or somewhere less traditional? Is it a summer wedding or a fall wedding? These are all things you must consider before picking the place for your nuptials. If you are lucky enough to be getting hitched on the Emerald Isle, there are many choices.

"We have amazing castles, manors, estate homes and hotels," notes Tracey. "There are a lot of stunning options to choose from."

Despite their Celtic roots, McLeod and Reardon chose to get married closer to home at the gorgeous 75-year-old Saint David's Presbyterian Church in Halifax. As religion is important to the couple, a formal church setting was appropriate.

"The spiritual focus of the ceremony emphasized God's loving nature as shown through Jesus," says McLeod.

For the reception, the newlyweds and their guests dined and danced at the nearby Lord Nelson Hotel, a local landmark whose suites have hosted the likes of Paul McCartney and Ozzy Osbourne. With large ballrooms, the facility can cater up to 600 guests.

"There was no waiting for drinks, it was fast service," says McLeod, offering a suggestion: "Always serve food when serving alcohol to avoid having drunken guests."

In the United States, Ellis Island in New York City is a great option with Celtic history. About half a million Scottish immigrants passed through the island between the years 1892 and 1954, and Tartan Day celebrations are held there annually. The heritage site books weddings with a waterfront view.

The rewards of a destination wedding usually outweigh the risks, but they are not without their difficulties.

"The majority of our couples are American who want to be



wed in Ireland,” shares Tracey. “However, we also do a lot of planning for Irish couples now living abroad and traveling home for their wedding day. Our clients come from all over the world; Hong Kong, Russia, Australia, the U.S., Canada, and Europe.”

She adds that the most important part of the planning process can also be the most stressful.

“The venue search can be difficult, as the majority of our clients will not get to see it in person until the week of their wedding.”

In Ireland, many couples dream of an outdoor ceremony - not surprising, given the country’s lush landscape. Most weddings planned by Waterlily are “off the beaten track,” explains Tracey, including the popular rural cliff-side, away from tourist traffic. There should always be a back-up plan, however.

“The weather in Ireland is so unpredictable. Venues here are designed with the weather in mind, so the indoor options for most ceremony venues never disappoint.”

The most popular sites for tying the knot, she maintains, are castles.

“They offer an experience you could only find in Ireland. They also provide unique onsite activities, including falconry, horse riding, and archery, and the larger castles have wonderful spas too. But many of them are in remote locations, so you have to be prepared for long drives once you get to Ireland.”

Offering an elegant and picturesque backdrop to an already magical day, beautiful castles can be found in other Celtic nations as well, including Dunnottar Castle in Scotland, Roch Castle in Wales, and Castle Rushen on the Isle of Man.

Once you know “where” your wedding will happen, the next question might be “what?” As in, “What are you going to eat?”

Food

Food is a core component of Celtic culture, and is a key to keeping wedding guests happy. Many venues have a resident caterer, but they may also be open to having couples bring in their own.

Kerra Buchanan of Kerra’s Cornish Catering in Newton St Martin says the choice of what to serve on a wedding day depends mostly on the demographic of those attending.



“Younger crowds are into the feasting platters, and the more ‘fun food’ items can work well,” she explains. “But if you are more traditional, then plated meals are the way to go.”

Last year, casual barbeques were all the rage.

“In hindsight, it was a tricky one because we had the wettest season in Cornwall that we’d had in ten years,” she laughs. “This year, people are a bit worried about the weather so we are going more traditional.”

As such, “high-end plated meals” are becoming popular once again. “Which is where we were at eight or ten years ago,” she notes. “It has come full-circle - back on trend.”

Buchanan makes every effort to source local Cornish produce. She says that lamb is very popular, and is at the heart of one of her favourite meals to prepare - leg of lamb with anchovies and rosemary.

“The smell, when you cook it, is really satisfying...it always gets received really well. We are surrounded by amazing farmers doing great things also, and we’ve got some really great fish as well – the local bass is amazing.”

What is known as traditional Cornish fare, however, is not usually a big part of the main course.

“The Cornish have a very sweet tooth,” says Buchanan. “So a lot of Cornish food is scones, jam and cream, and heavy cake.”

Speaking of which, it’s a good idea to order your wedding cake well ahead of time. Many independent businesses suggest you book at least a year in advance.

Lisa Franchetti, owner of the Glasgow-based shop Little Cake Parlour, has a passion for baking. Her specialty is bespoke wedding cakes. She lists off a few of their most popular flavours: vanilla, raspberry with white chocolate, chocolate with salted caramel, and red velvet.

“People love ruffles,” says Franchetti, noting popular cake styles. “They are quite time-consuming to make but they do look great. Also popular are chalkboards, metallics, superheroes and LEGO - sometimes all on the same cake!”

Most couples have a set idea of what they want. For others, she often looks to other aspects of their wedding for inspiration - invitations or outfits perhaps - to tailor-make something special. She admits that the job can be trying at times, but it is always well worth the effort.

“Because it is such a special day for people, I really want to make sure it’s perfect, both in terms of look and taste. Once the dust has settled it is always rewarding. It is nice to think that, 60 years from now, someone may be looking back through their wedding album and see a cake I made.”

For those wishing a distinctly Scottish touch, Too Good to

Eat Wedding Cakes in Edinburgh offers “tartan cakes” with hand-painted fondant.

“The first time I was asked to design for a Scottish-themed wedding, I wondered if I could make tartan icing,” says shop owner Bernadette Wood. “I still do a lot of them, and have changed designs to fit with trends.”

Just be careful not to get any icing on the dress...

What to Wear

Picking a wedding dress can be a trying task for any bride, as choices must be made around style, comfort, and colour. A traditional Irish bride, for instance, might wear a blue dress rather than white.

According to Welsh designer Stephanie Allin, a stark white dress is not the most practical choice for many people.

“Ivory, rather than white itself, is the vastly preferred colour,” she shares. “I think white is too harsh for our climate and for photography. Many brides are accessorizing with a touch of colour.”

Recent bride Catherine McLeod said “yes” to an ivory dress from Bridals by Lori in Atlanta, Georgia, with the flower girls and bridesmaids also in neutral colours. This contrasted well against the bold colours of the tartan kilts worn by the groom and his groomsmen.

However, Allin also notes that current trends are diverse, and depend on the country, market and price range.

“Most brides have done some research and thinking before they come to me, and I always take this into account,” explains Allin, who has been in the bridal industry for close to a quarter century. “But my expertise as a designer and stylist is to advise them on the opportunities to look their very best, and that is a very personal and subtle judgement based on years of experience.”

To ease the stress of picking a gown, Allin has some advice: first, there’s no need to bring a crowd when you go dress shopping - pick one or two people whose opinions you value.

“Often, a bride can get confused by having too many people with her giving conflicting opinions. They sometimes subconsciously give bias opinions on what they prefer rather than what looks good on the bride.

“And,” she adds, “once you have found your dress...stop looking!”

McLeod was fortunate. Not only did she find a dress she loved, but she was also able to add material from her great-grandmother’s bridal dress, sewing it into the inside of her own.

A bride’s use of family heirlooms is a common touch in weddings. She may use a piece of mother’s or grandmother’s jewelry, and in some cases, she may even have her mother’s dress re-designed to wear.

But as the old rhyme goes, “Something old, something new...” there’s nothing wrong with buying something, too. An accessory can be as important and meaningful as any garment. This is especially true when it comes to rings. Wedding bands can be found in chain stores just about anywhere, but there are also independent businesses which craft handmade jewelry inspired by Celtic designs.

Kanata, Ontario-based jewelers Keltic Nations - run by Ingrid and Greg McPherson - has evolved since its days selling products from stands at Highland Games and Celtic Festivals.

“We call our rings ‘wearable pieces of art’ for a reason,” shares Ingrid. “They are unique, and not at all like a typical wedding



band that you can pick up at a large chain jewelry store. They are of the highest quality, substantial and sturdy with intricate detail carved into the metal. The Celtic knotwork is continuous and the carving is crisp and sharp.”

The continuous nature of the Celtic knot is fitting for a wedding band, and symbolic of a couple’s love: the design shows each individual loop interwoven with the other.

Greg crafts the jewelry by using a mould. “When the original meets our standards, we make a mould in rubber, which allows us to duplicate the most complex design by injecting wax into the mold.”

The cast ring is then filed, sanded and re-engraved, until it hits the mark. If they aren’t satisfied with the result, they start the carving process over again.

The couple’s most popular rings are the ones they call “Na Mara” and “Daonnan” designs.

“Na Mara reminds me of the crashing waves of the Atlantic,” Greg explains. “The name ‘Daonnan’ means ‘continually’ or ‘always,’ which represents the continuous knotwork, and is what we hope for all unions that are symbolized by our rings.”

As there is no dictionary for Celtic symbols, their meaning is open to the bride’s and groom’s interpretation.

“We hope that they attach their own meanings to the rings, making them as personal and beautiful as their relationship,” says the metalsmith. “Fashion changes from season to season, but our past and where we come from will always remain with us. Our

rings are a statement of our heritage and a celebration of our future.”

While attire and accessories are a big part of the wedding experience, when it all comes down to it, the most important part is the big day itself. By then, all the hard work and planning will have paid off.

The Big Day

“It really is an honour to be included in a couple’s most intimate expression of love and celebration,” says Sile Tracey. “No matter how many times we are present for these moments, we are always moved by them.

“I love the look on a bride’s face when she sees her bouquet for the first time,” she continues. “Or when she makes her entrance and sees the ceremony area brought to life in exactly the way she imagined, only better.”

For Catherine McLeod, the fantasies she had for her wedding stemmed from her childhood imagination - as a little girl, she dreamed that her future husband would don a kilt on their special day. Their choice of a Celtic theme had a strong influence on the wedding events, and the couple even had a private communion before the rehearsal, using a Celtic communion cup.

“Many guests commented on how ‘something stirred inside’ of them,” remembers McLeod, “and that our wedding inspired them to go out and buy kilts. The theme bonded many guests. The kilts set the tone in the best way, as did the chill-inducing bagpipe processional.”

In addition, the couple ensured that the ceremony connected with them personally by working with the minister to choose specific scripture readings.

“Our aim was for our guests to experience a wedding like they

haven’t before,” says McLeod.

Whether you chose a religious ceremony or not, there are plenty of ways you can have it reflect your identity as a couple: handwritten vows, live music, and/or with a particular tradition that’s special to you, such as “the blending of the sands” or Celtic handfasting.

A surprise or two never hurts, either.

“I had six flower-girls who surprised me with a performance of the song L-O-V-E by Nat King Cole,” recalls McLeod, who had something unexpected of her own planned for her new husband. “I surprised him at the reception, having the MC play a video of my 19-year-old self telling the camera the expectations my future husband would have to meet.”

McLeod agrees that setting the “party tone” early on is imperative at the reception.

“The critical time in the dance party is after the father/ daughter and mother/son dances. My groom surprised me with a choreographed Highland Fling performance with his six groomsmen and his sister-in-law. People rushed onto the dance floor right afterwards.”

Guests partied long into the night at the McLeod/Reardon wedding, dancing until 3 a.m. to a blend of Celtic music, Maritime music and pop songs.

“I’ve never seen people dance like that at a wedding,” recalls McLeod.

And while putting the pieces of their wedding together wasn’t easy, McLeod and Reardon made it fun and memorable. For McLeod, her big day is not something that she will soon forget: she has kept the shoes in which she walked down the aisle - red, to match her groom’s kilt.

“Each time I put them on I relive a little piece of my wedding day.”



Catherine McLeod
and her husband
Marc Reardon

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Taking *the* Leap

At the end of February 2016, Maureen McGarrity got down on bended knee and proposed to Malachy Houston, her partner of over three years...

The romantic occasion took place outside Belfast Castle, where the pair had first met at age 12.

"We used to pal around with two separate groups of friends," recalls Houston. "We met up at Belfast Castle gates, which was a popular meeting point for youths back then. Our friendship lasted a few years and we went our separate ways."

The two connected again 32 years later. Houston was hosting a singing competition and McGarrity's daughter was taking part. As fate would have it, McGarrity attended the event to support her daughter and bumped into her old friend. They started dating in December 2012.

According to folklore, a woman may propose to her male partner on February 29th. Irish legend states that St. Brigid of Kildare had a grievance that men often took too long to propose, and it was not acceptable for women to propose to men. When she brought the complaint to St. Patrick, they made a deal – women would be allowed to propose every four years. St. Brigid then promptly proposed to St. Patrick, which he refused, but consoled her by offering her a silk gown as a gift.

Leap Day proposal traditions have an additional twist in Scotland. Supposedly, Queen Margaret – who was unmarried at the time – solidified St. Patrick's words through law in 1288. What's more, the law stated that any man who refused a Leap Day proposal would have to pay a fine. There's some discrepancy over the fine itself: some say the man must buy the wom-

an a silk gown, echoing what happened in the legend, while others claim that a pair of gloves must be given, or a cash payment doled out. Whatever the case, there is no actual written record of the law itself.

Fortunately for McGarrity, she received more than a silk gown.

"I wanted to surprise Malachy and do something a little different," she says of her plan to propose, which turned out to be much more than simply getting down on one knee.

"I had left various clues in clubs and hotels that Malachy worked in," she explains. "These were concealed inside balloons, so he had to pop the balloons and read the cryptic message inside."

This led Houston to four different locations. The final message asked him to meet McGarrity outside the Belfast Castle gates, where their story had begun more than three decades earlier.

"I think by clue number two he had an idea of what was going on, but was just expecting to see me at the Castle gates," says McGarrity. "However, as he turned the corner and got out of his car there were quite a lot of paparazzi there as well. What I didn't realize until the week before was that a friend of mine had entered me into a competition."

The Tourism NI contest in question sought to find the most romantic proposal idea in the country.

"Everything escalated, and there were various newspapers, et cetera, there."

Once Houston made his way towards

her, McGarrity popped the question. He said yes.

"I was absolutely ecstatic," she reminisces. "We are planning on getting married in a couple of years."

Thanks to the contest win, the couple enjoyed a two-night stay at a city centre hotel.

While the pair's happy ending was almost out of a fairy tale, the leap year custom has garnered some criticism in recent years. In an opinion piece in *The Spectator* this past February, writer Katie Glass called Leap Day proposals "hideously outdated."

"Women do not need one 'special day,'" Glass argued. "If we want to get married we should just ask."

Glass has a point. Also of note is that the tradition excludes the opportunity for same-sex couples. Still, countless romantics get engaged every leap year. In addition to McGarrity and Houston, multiple couples made 2016 headlines for the very same thing: an English woman proposed to the love of her life with a gummy ring, while another couple sealed the deal at Adele's Leap Day concert in Belfast. And, in Scotland, a woman popped the question to her boyfriend via flash mob at Marylebone station.

Only time will tell whether the age-old ritual will die out or carry on for years to come, but for now, it continues to bring people together.

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As Celtic Life International contributor Lyndsey Shir-McDermott-Pour explains, the tradition of handfasting has been around for centuries

I've been a happily married woman for just over ten years. Nevertheless, five years ago, I asked my husband for a divorce.

Why did I do this you might ask? Having recently started a new job managing a small hotel in the Shetland Islands, I discovered that Pagan weddings - known as 'handfastings' - are legal in Scotland, without the need for a pesky civil ceremony first, and I wanted one!

The word itself has its roots in both the Norse and the Anglo Saxon languages, with the Norse term *handfesta* and the Anglo Saxon word *handfaesting*, both meaning 'to strike a bargain by joining hands'. This is likely the source of the modern term 'let's shake on it'. Later, it would come to be associated with the act of binding the hands of the bride and groom with a rope or ribbon, and is one possible origin of the term 'tie the knot'.

Though the precise origins of handfastings as wedding ceremonies are uncertain, some sources suggest the custom has been around for thousands of years. The Celts that came to Britain from Europe certainly brought their custom of handfasting with them, often infused with their own Pagan religious traditions revolving around one or more goddess figures. Traditionally, the ceremony would take place during Beltane, a time when Celtic Pagans celebrated the fertility of the land and body. Couples would gather around a fire, where a Druid would perform the binding or 'fasting' of the hands, after which they were considered married.

The Picts and Vikings carried on this tradition, with handfastings often used to unite rival clans or forge alliances between two prominent clans where the son of a chief was handfasted to the daughter of

another chief. In those times, the emphasis was on the contract formed between two parties more than the feelings of the respective bride and groom. Traditionally, these unions were temporary, with the couple staying together for a year and a day. If a child resulted from the union it became permanent. Like today, however, couples would often stay together or part as they chose, even if a child was born. There were even different types of handfastings depending on whether or not the man and woman were of the same or differing rank and status.

By the middle ages, the verb to handfast had come to mean "to formally promise or to make a contract" in the context of marriage. Thus, the word handfasting came to signify a betrothal or engagement, where a couple would join hands and declare their wish to marry in the future, usually done in front of witnesses.

Of note is that it took very little to form a legal marriage in Scotland at this time. A man and a woman simply had to exchange consents such as "I take you to be my husband" and they were married. Another method was to exchange consents in the future tense such as "I will take you to be my husband." Once the couple engaged in sexual activity they were considered legally married, even though no formal ceremony had taken place, no priest had been present, and even perhaps no witnesses. Such marriages were known as 'marriages by consent' and were legal under both Scottish and English law.

While handfastings were only intended to imply a betrothal - what we today would consider an engagement - such a ceremony could actually form a legal marriage. This loophole even managed to trip up members of the British royal family

with the marriage of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville being declared invalid by her brother-in-law, Richard III, due to Edward apparently already being 'married by consent' to another lady.

Scotland has certainly been a bit of a rebel when it comes to what it does and doesn't recognize as 'marriage'. The church desperately tried to claw back control, and in 1563 even went so far as to declare that a marriage must be performed by a priest and have the consent of the church to be legally binding. Civil law stubbornly refused to bow to the will of the church, however, and continued to recognize handfastings or 'marriage by consent' right up until the 1939 Marriage Act, which abolished them all together.

It wasn't until 2004 that the Pagan Federation in Scotland gained the right for their celebrants to perform handfastings as religious wedding ceremonies once again.

Today, especially in the former Celtic countries of Scotland and Ireland, neo-pagans and non-pagans alike have adopted the tradition of handfasting as an alternative to a traditional marriage ceremony, drawing on the practises of the ancient Celts. Some choose to marry for a year and a day, while others renew their vows over the course of several handfastings, and still others 'for as long as the love lasts'.

As for me, I never did get my Pagan wedding, but not because of any religious objections on the part of my husband, who - unlike me - isn't a Pagan. He was just too tight to stump up the money to divorce me in order to marry me again!



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Wedding Tips

The modern Celtic wedding is a mix of classic and contemporary traditions. Here are ten tips for planning your big day.

The Engagement Party: Usually it is the father of the bride who hosts an engagement party at which he pledges his daughter's hand and asks the groom to take good care of her. This is more traditional than the father giving his daughter away at the wedding ceremony.

Showing of the Presents: With special ties to Scotland, the mother of the bride hosts an afternoon tea to which guests are expected to bring presents to help the young couple set up home. It can be held either before or after the wedding. In some cases, all of the gifts are unwrapped and displayed, and the bride leads her guests on an informal tour.

Rings: Traditionally only the bride receives a ring, although this is changing. In Ireland, the Claddagh ring is still popular, while in Scotland, rings can incorporate the groom's clan crest. Recently knotwork rings, symbolizing eternity, have become popular. An even newer trend is to have the ring finger tattooed with knotwork to represent everlasting love.

Bride's Wedding Outfit: The bride wears a circlet of flowers or jewels rather than a veil. Handcraft jewellers are often delighted to design a diadem to the bride's specifications. The dress is usually flowing rather than tight fitting. White is still popular, although some brides are choosing to have a dress designed in their clan's tartan. The fabric should be rich, like satin, and beadwork is very trendy.

Flowers: Many Celtic brides prefer bouquets of wildflowers, and both white heather and English lavender are favoured. Quite often the entire bridal party will either wear or carry white heather for luck.

Invitations and Place Settings:

Ideas include embossing wedding invitations and place setting cards with Celtic knotwork or, for a Scottish wedding, with both the bride and groom's clan crests. A sprig of white heather may also be attached to the place cards. You can also buy or rent glassware with knotwork or clan crests etched into them, although these can be quite pricey. Some couples choose to cover the head table with linens made from their family tartans.

The Wedding Cake: The Irish favour whiskey cakes while the Scots lean towards fruitcake iced with marzipan. In Scotland, the bride cuts the cake with a dirk, guided by her new husband's hand. Other cake customs include putting small pieces of cake into tiny boxes to present to each guest, sealed with Celtic knotwork, the groom's clan crest or a tartan ribbon tie. Each box should include the name of the bride and groom as well as the date of the wedding. Some couples like to keep the top layer of their cake to eat on their first anniversary or to serve at their first child's christening. Ask around; you may find an adventurous baker in your neighbourhood keen to ice your wedding cake in tartan.

Music: There are lots of ways to introduce Celtic music into your wedding plans. Hire a bagpiper to play at the entrance to the church as guests arrive or to pipe the bride and groom into the wedding reception or dinner. Arrange to have Gaelic hymns, including "Highland Wedding," played in church. Ask a Celtic harpist to play during the reception. Hire a Celtic band or musician to play at the wedding dance or give your D.J. a selection of Celtic CDs. Dance to the rhythms of Scotland and Ireland: reels, jigs and step dances can be lively affairs. It might also be fun to introduce some Scottish country dances to your guests, but make sure the wedding party has practiced the steps in advance.

The Church Service: Traditionally the bride and groom go down the aisle together while guests throw grains of rice. Vows are often in Gaelic or are English translations of traditional Gaelic vows. In Scotland, after the couple is married, the groom pins a ribbon of his clan's tartan to his wife's bodice to symbolize she now belongs to his clan.

Wedding Dinner: Serve a little honey mead along with a selection of wines, and make sure your male guests are supplied with a shot of good single malt whisky. Male guests may also be given cigars wrapped inside knotwork packaging or the groom's tartan. Female guests may be presented with chocolates soaked in whisky.





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Irish Wedding Customs & Superstitions

There is no denying that the Irish are a superstitious lot. And, with a wealth of traditions, customs and folklore, Irish weddings are not exempt of shibboleth. Interestingly, some of these are still practiced today.



There is one tradition that states: 'Marry in May and rue the day' while another states: 'Marry in April if you can, joy for maiden and for man'.

Another custom saw the groom invited to the bride's house right before the wedding and they cooked a goose in his honour. It was called 'Aitin' the Gander,' and is where we get the expression 'his goose is cooked!'

In the old days, Bunratty Meade was consumed at weddings because it was thought that it promoted virility. Couples drank it from special goblets for a full month following the wedding, which is supposedly where we get the word 'honeymoon.'

Irish brides used to carry a real horse-shoe for good luck.

A charming custom involves having the bride carry a special hanky that, with a

few stitches, can be turned into a christening bonnet for the first baby.

The chime of bells is thought to keep evil spirits away, restore harmony if a couple is fighting, and also remind a couple of their wedding vows.

In the old days, couples ate salt and oatmeal at the beginning of their reception, with each of them taking three mouthfuls as a protection against the power of the evil eye.

When a couple is dancing, the bride can't take both feet off the floor because the fairies will get the upper hand. There's many an Irish legend about brides being spirited away by the little people.

For the same reason, it's bad luck for a bride to wear green.

It's also bad luck for a bride or the groom to sing at their own wedding.

A fine day meant good luck, especially if the sun shone on the bride. If you're a Roman Catholic, one way to make certain that it won't rain is to put a statue of the Infant of Prague outside the church before your ceremony.

It was unlucky to marry on a Saturday.

Those who married during harvest would spend all their lives gathering.

A man should always be the first to wish joy to the bride, never a woman.

It was lucky to hear a cuckoo on the wedding morning, or to see three magpies.



To meet a funeral on the road meant bad luck, and if there was a funeral procession planned for that day, the wedding party always took a different road.

The wedding party should always take the longest road home from the church.

It was bad luck if a glass or cup were broken on the wedding day.

A bride and groom should never wash their hands in the same sink at the same time - it's courting disaster if they do.

It was said to be lucky if you married during a 'growing moon and a flowing tide.'

When leaving the church, someone must throw an old shoe over the bride's head so she will have good luck.

If the bride's mother-in-law breaks a piece of wedding cake on the bride's head as she enters the house after the ceremony, they will be friends for life.



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Celtic Wedding Venues

Say "I do" in one of the charming Celtic nations...



Faro de Illa Pancha

If you have ever dreamed of a romantic wedding by the water, then the picturesque Illa Pancha in Galicia may be the perfect place to say your vows. While the lighthouse - or the Faro de Illa Pancha - dates back to 1880, it has been out of service since 1983. Interestingly, in 2014, it was the first such facility in Spain to be converted into a hotel. The stunning island is near the municipality of Ribadeo in the province of Lugo, one of the country's Celtic hotspots. Illa Pancha is certainly a sight to behold when the flowers are in bloom, offering a sea of magenta across the grass. While a wedding here could be affected by the weather, Galicia enjoys a strong amount of sunshine from spring to autumn. Should you choose to wed at a nearby indoor venue, however, the island and its lighthouse make an ideal spot for post-ceremony wedding photos.



The Grove Museum of Victorian Life

Though museums may not be the first thing to come to mind when considering traditional wedding venues, the Grove might be the exception to the rule, especially during the spring and summer months. Situated in Ramsey on the Isle of Man, the historical site was once a vacation home for a wealthy merchant family known as the Gibbs. The venue would be especially fitting for a wedding with a Victorian or Edwardian theme, as the site features furniture and fashion from the era, as well as the chance for an old-fashioned game of croquet. For a private setting, the garden is full of flowers and surrounded by trees. The apple orchard also offers a lovely backdrop to an outdoor ceremony or photo opportunities.



Tower Hill Barns

A family-owned and operated venue, Tower Hill Barns offers couples the chance to have their wedding take place amidst the beautiful and breathtaking scenery of rural north Wales. Ceremonies can happen either in the barn or under the nearby sandstone railway bridge, which dates back to the 19th century. The folks at Tower Hill have completely refurbished the facilities in recent years, and it now offers stunning views across the Dee Valley towards the fantastic Froncysyllte Mountain. The barns give the location a charming and informal touch, while the surrounding areas ensure great opportunities for gorgeous post-wedding photos. Tower Hill can accommodate up to 150 guests for dinner, and another 50 for the reception. On-site catering makes the spot a one-stop shop for the big day.



Chateau du Val

If you are dreaming big for a royal or regal wedding, there are a variety of castles and castle-like venues throughout the Celtic nations. Chateau du Val in Brittany is a fine choice, with unique architecture nestled amongst lush gardens and a park. The chateau can provide overnight accommodations for the couple and their guests, making it an easy trek back to your room once the celebrations are complete. For a reception with up to 100 guests, the venue can cater to buffet dinners and cocktails in the chateau. For more than 100 guests, they offer sit-down meals in the marquee. If you prefer to hire your own caterer, that can also be accommodated, while still using the venue for the reception. With so many options, it is a practical location for couples looking for some flexibility.





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Lucia McGinnis



Based in County Derry, Northern Ireland, Lucia McGinnis has been playing the harp for 20 years. In addition to teaching others to play the instrument, McGinnis regularly performs at local and area weddings. Recently she spoke with Celtic Life International about her passion for her profession.

When and why did you take up the harp?

I took up the harp in 1995. My sisters and brother were learning after we saw a woman playing a harp in Ennis while we were on holidays. I was studying the fiddle at the time, but started picking out notes on the harp and found it sounded beautiful, so I changed over.

Are they the same reasons you continue to play today?

Yes - it still sounds amazing today, and that is why I still play.

What are the challenges of the vocation?

The biggest issue I have had is actually dealing with the physical injuries from playing or lifting the harp. It's not exactly the lightest instrument out there.

What are the rewards?

The therapeutic sound of the harp, and the effect that it has on guests at weddings, is simply other-worldly. The harp has a calming effect, and both adults and children are drawn to it. And it always makes for a great conversation piece! As I play a lot of requests, it is great opportunity to meet and engage with people as well.

How did you get involved with weddings and other events?

I started out playing weddings and events with my harp teacher Janet Harbison, and that got me hooked! I love playing at weddings now, as I get to contribute

to someone's special day by creating a romantic and soothing atmosphere.

Is it a competitive business?

I am also trained as a music therapist, so I combine that work with weddings, and that keeps me grounded in what matters most. I take as many weddings that I can. And I am a big believer in good karma, so if I can't take a booking I will make sure the couple gets a harpist, usually one that I know personally and recommend.

How many weddings have you performed at?

Far too many to count!

What do you think makes harp music an appealing addition to a wedding?

First and foremost it sounds beautiful with any genre of music. It is also a very attractive instrument, and lends itself quite well to weddings.

Have you ever been asked to play something unique or "off the beaten track" at a wedding?

Oh yes. I've been asked to play No Surprises by Radiohead, One by Metallica, and White Wedding by Billy Idol.

What do you like about playing music at special events?

I love learning new pieces, especially something that is new to my ears and a real discovery on the harp. I usually arrange pieces myself, so new pieces

challenge me and keep me interested, all while keeping my repertoire fresh.

What are your favourite songs in your repertoire?

My favourites are The Swan by Scottish harpist and composer Catriona McKay, I Giorni by Ludovico Einaudi, A Thousand Years by Christina Perri and the theme from Braveheart.

Are young people still interested in playing the harp?

Yes, I get a lot of enquiries for lessons at home, and teach young girls aged 12 to 16 in a local school. There is huge demand in the Derry County area.

What can be done to better promote the instrument and its music?

When mainstream artists like Florence and the Machine or Laura Mvula use the harp in videos and live performances it always brings a new wave of interest. Locally, performing has a big impact on the instrument's visibility. Fortunately, the harp has a huge historical connection to Derry; the ancient harp player Dennis O'Hempson, who played for the Bishop of Downhill, and Rory Dall O'Cahan, whose composition Give Me Your Hand is a key repertoire piece today, are both from the region. And though getting a harp school up and running takes major funding - harps are not nearly as affordable as penny whistles - I hope to open my own soon.

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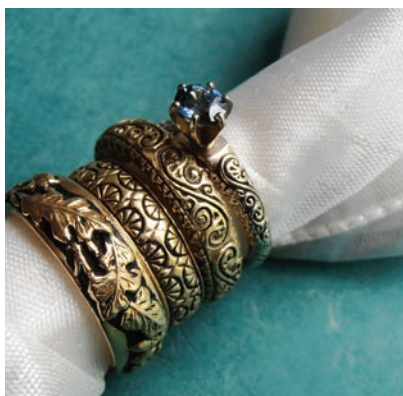
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Established and aspiring whisky lovers soon learn the finely crafted glass is a wonderful complement to the uisge beatha, or water of life. You might be hard-pressed to find a finer fit than with gorgeous glassware from Glencairn Glass in East Kilbride near Glasgow, Scotland. The prestigious company has an exquisite top drawer collection of glasses, decanters, goblets, tankards, tumblers and flutes. Consider the richly attractive Glencairn Glass Flight Tray, available in configurations of two or three glasses with a matching water jug, all available for engraving. The definitive accompaniment to whisky, Glencairn has supplied the trophies for the World Whisky Awards since the annual competition's inception, utilizing a custom-sized block in combination with laser etching and sandblasting engraving. The company is also well-known for supplying Celtic dance and sports trophies. Glencairn products are now for sale on all seven continents, wherever discerning whisky connoisseurs reside. www.glencairn.co.uk



Rebornart
Galway Hooker

Vividly nautical yet full of whimsy, this beautiful balancing boat sculpture is handcrafted in County Galway, Ireland. Fashioned by artist Marcin Calka and his wife Renata, who own and operate Rebornart Wood Studio, this work is inspired by the iconic and legendary Galway Hookers once so prominent on Galway Bay. Perfectly balanced with a rounded base, a gentle push sets it swaying as if on the ocean tide in pursuit of fish. The couple, who insist their inspiration comes from the splendor of the Irish west coast, bring their designs together in a spirit of minimalism and playfulness. This boat is crafted from Irish spalted beech and a base of black walnut, but the sails are generally variations of local timber including yew, cherry, oak and elm. Of primary importance is the natural beauty of the wood, with each piece chosen carefully before being shaped to precision. The boats are available in four sizes, ranging from 20 cm to 40 cm in height, with the option to personalize. Custom orders are also available. www.rebornart.ie



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Wedding Rings

Wild Scottish thistles, acorns, oak leaves and medieval florals can all be incorporated into the design of distinctive wedding rings at Nagle Forge & Foundry, a small, family-run business in Novato, CA, that handcrafts custom jewelry. The company's first wedding band featured oak leaves and acorns, the former symbolizing constancy and strength and the latter, regeneration and fruitfulness. Since then, they have come up with a highly carved and textured Scottish thistle design. Also popular is the medieval floral band, an adaptation of a stylized rose motif popular in France in the 12th century. Matching solitaire or engagement rings are also available and customers have the option of adding rubies or other stones to their designs. Many of the rings are available in 14k yellow, white or rose gold. All rings are designed to weather the storms of a lifetime, look even better with age, and are custom or semi-custom in design, so advance planning is recommended. www.nagleforge.com



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Weddings are one of those times when it can be hard to find the right words – but not if you order a Celtic Wedding Blessing from Jacqueline Originals of Castle Rock, CO. Beautiful thoughts, combined with fine tenth-century Celtic calligraphy, make this unique Irish Wedding Blessing a gift to treasure. Artist and calligrapher Jacqueline Shuler began Jacqueline Originals in 1971, and set up online in 1996. While visiting Ireland, she sketched a wide variety of Celtic crosses which she redesigned by interweaving hearts down the cross center, and then composed the good wishes for the newlyweds. Professionally framed 11" x 14" in a black wood frame, and double matted in ivory on a green liner mat, printed on warm ivory parchment, sealed with a dust cover and finished with a strong hanger. Free personalizing with the couples' names and wedding or anniversary date. Gift wrapping available. www.jacquelineoriginals.etsy.com

Keith Jack
Wedding Rings

Encircled with love and tradition, Keith Jack wedding rings reflect the past, honor the present and symbolize the future by blending ancient Celtic symbolism with contemporary style and elegance. The Vancouver artist, who frequently returns to Scotland, captures something of a grey sky over a highland glen, a moody loch or a rippled sandy beach in each of his custom created designs. In-stock rings come in all sizes, and are crafted with high quality sterling silver with 10k yellow gold. Custom-designed rings are 10k, 14k or 18k gold, in white, yellow or rose gold with delivery in four to six weeks. Depending on the design, some rings may be customized further with the addition of precious stones. Keith Jack also features necklaces, bracelets, pendants, lockets, crosses, and cufflinks. A full selection of products can be found in the company's online catalogue. www.keithjack.com



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www.rosiesdesignstudio.com



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The challenge of finding a personalized gift to last a lifetime could very well end with MilsoMade. Formed by Elycia Ortiz, a US army wife with a definite creative bent, the company produces burlap prints for all occasions, including weddings. One of its most popular prints commemorates the nuptials in a charming framed package containing the names, place and date. The company uses 100% jute burlap with a laminated backing to prolong the life of the print and prevent any fraying of the fabric. It offers burlap prints in two colors, natural and cream, and can custom cut the print to the a variety of sizes. To save on shipping costs, order the print unframed, then find a frame that suits the couple. MilsoMade offers a wide range of other prints that might appeal to any bride or groom so check out the selection online. Personalized burlap wine bottle wraps can also bring a touch of casual class to pre-wedding get-togethers. www.milsmade.com



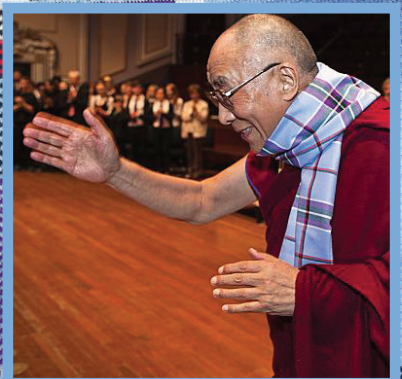
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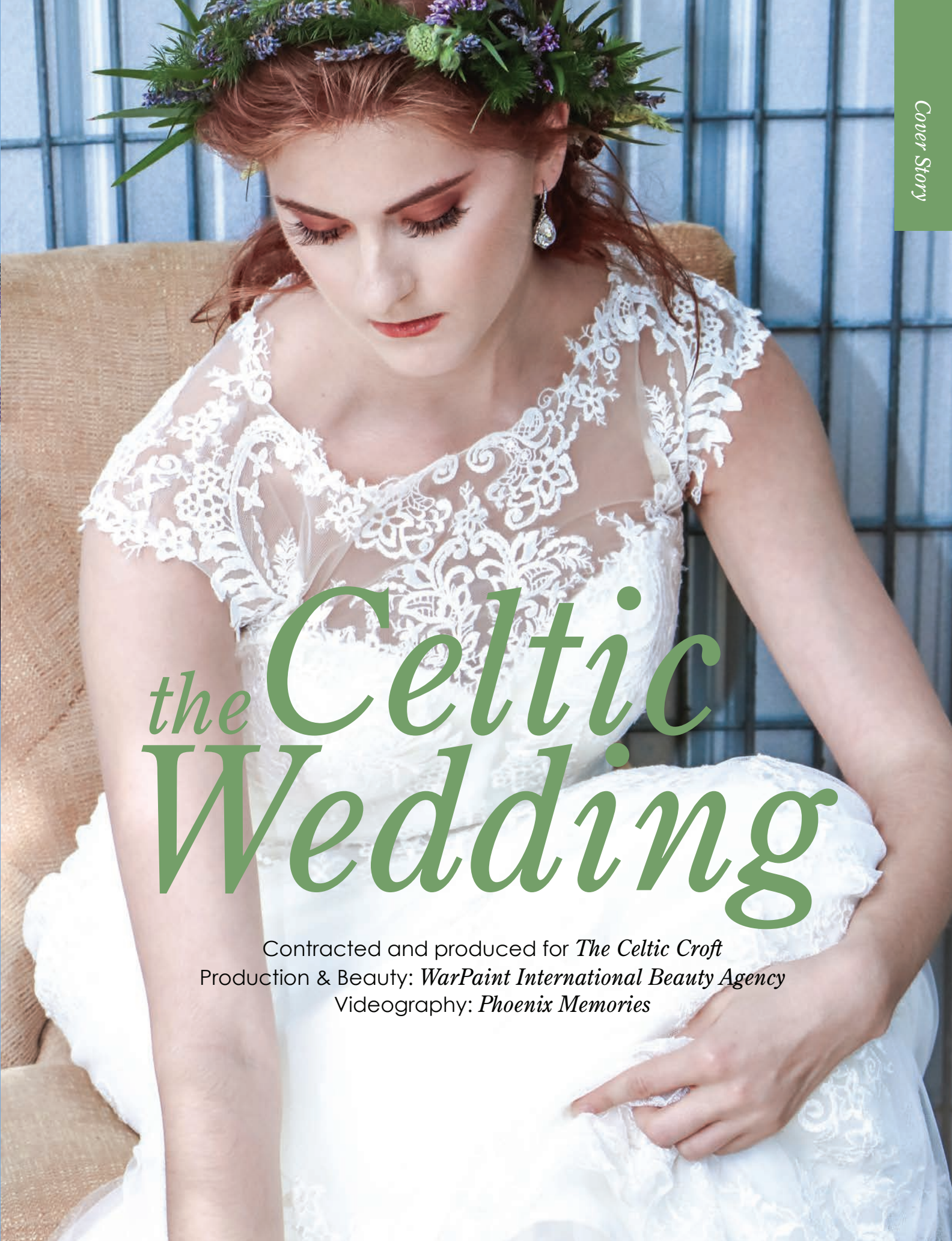
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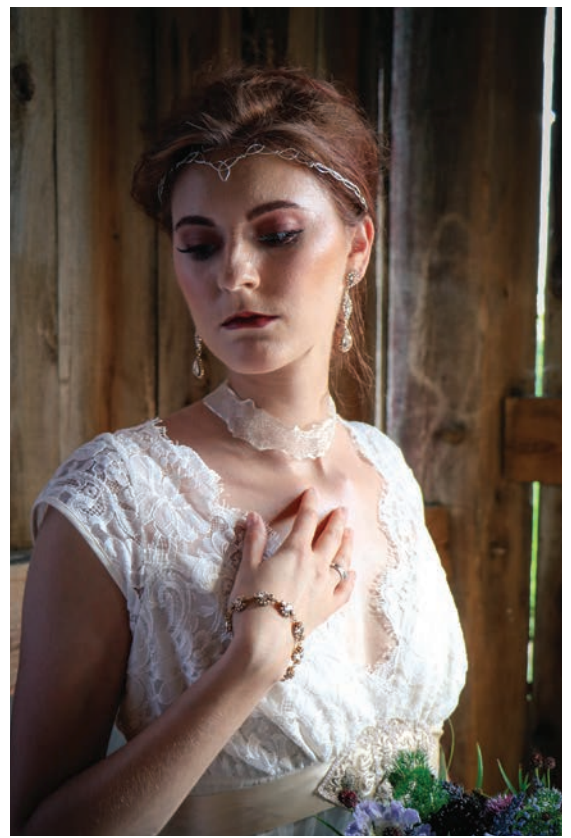
See our website for details! www.celticlife.com

A portion of the proceeds go to the charitable World Peace Tartan Initiative

A woman with reddish-brown hair is seated, looking down. She wears a white lace wedding dress with a sheer bodice and a full skirt. On her head is a crown of greenery and small purple flowers. She is wearing a teardrop earring. The background is a blue and white checkered pattern.

the Celtic Wedding

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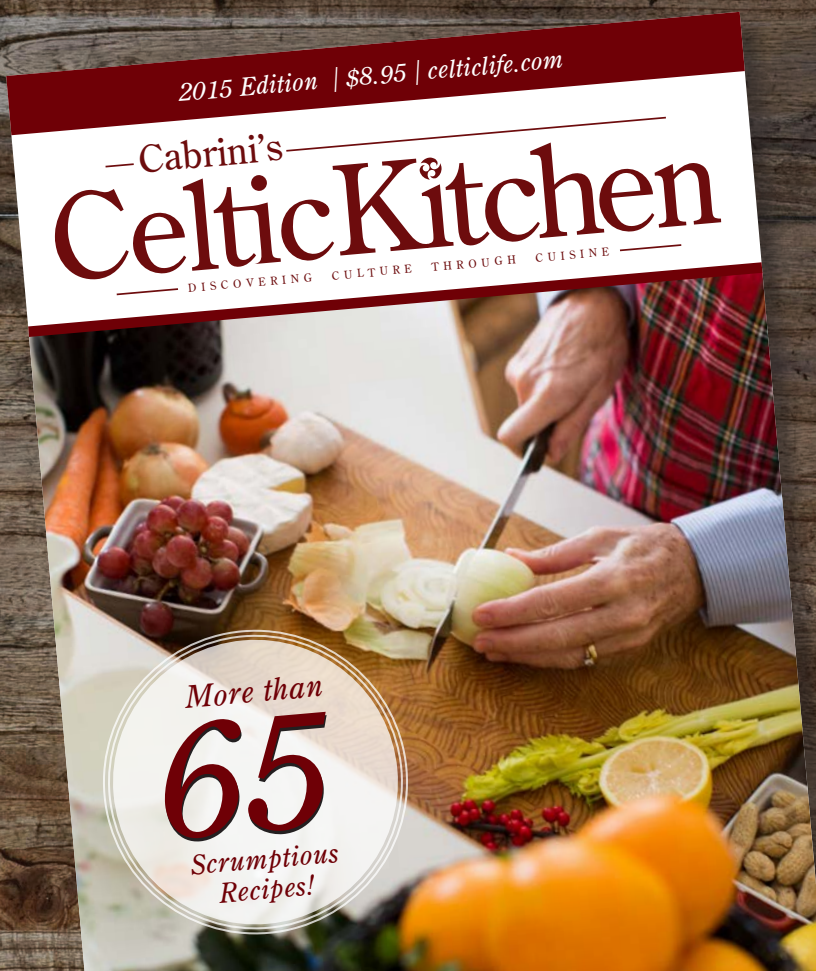


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Cabrini's Kitchen



Peggy A.B. MacIsaac's Pound Cake



My husband and I are married 33 years this summer, and I remember the day and the time leading up to it as yesterday. Many preparations had to be organized, but one morning my task was made much easier when I received a phone call. It was from one of my mother's dear friends, the late Mrs. Peggy A. B. MacIsaac, who was noted for her culinary skills. She offered to make me a pound cake to be used as one of the tiers in our wedding cake. I was honored and accepted her kind offer with

gratitude. It was thrilling and humbling to be the recipient of such a generous tradition. Her cake was every bit as tasty as her reputation purported and I have never forgotten her kindness. I wish to thank her daughter-in-law, Judy MacIsaac, for her help in finding this recipe.

A pound cake is believed to be a Northern European dish containing a pound, or equal weights, of each chief ingredient, typically flour, butter and sugar. It is believed to date back to the

1700s and no leaveners were used other than the air whipped into the batter.

In the days when many people couldn't read, this simple convention made it easy to remember recipes. Nowadays baking soda or baking powder is incorporated to induce leavening and to create a finely textured cake. Through the years the ingredients were adjusted for a lighter cake, however the name remained.

INGREDIENTS

2 cups all-purpose flour

½ tsp. baking powder

½ tsp. salt

1 cup un-salted butter, softened

1 cup granulated sugar

5 large eggs at room temperature

2 tsp. vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS

Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Grease and flour a 9x5-x3-inch loaf pan or a medium sized round pan. In a medium-sized bowl stir together the flour, baking powder and salt. In a large bowl, beat the butter with an electric mixer until fluffy. Gradually beat in the sugar until blended. One at a time, beat in the eggs and then add the vanilla. Add the dry ingredients and beat just until smooth. Turn into the prepared pan and bake until the top peaks and turns golden brown, about 1 hour and 15 minutes. When cake is done, the top will spring back when lightly touched and a toothpick inserted into the center will come out clean. Cool in the pan for 10 minutes. Turn out and cool thoroughly on a rack.

Ith do shàth! Cabrini

P.S: I would like to invite all readers to send me their favourite recipes, and their favourite memories that go with them. Please send to: cabrini@celticlife.ca



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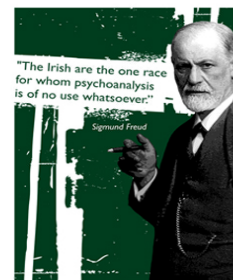


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"The Irish are the one race for whom psychoanalysis is of no use whatsoever."

Sigmund Freud



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*Long the preserve of an inner circle of connoisseurs,
Scotland's Old Pulteney now whets the world's whistle*

Located several hours north of Inverness, the Northern Highland distillery of Old Pulteney is one of Scotland's most remote. Pulteney was once Scotland's northernmost mainland distillery, but lost that title in recent years to the newly built Wolfburn in Thurso. That may be liberating, however, as the claim of "northernmost distillery" is a shallow one, with no effect whatsoever on the quality of the Old Pulteney's world-class spirit.

While aficionados and critics have long praised Old Pulteney's whisky, it has dwelt in the second tier of brands for years. For those in the know, the spirit has been a carefully guarded secret of sorts.

A string of awards over the last five years have pushed Old Pulteney into the international spotlight, however, where it rightly belongs. Most recently, the distillery was awarded Single Malt of the Year at the 2016 World Whiskies Awards for its superb 1989 vintage. The spirit in question, a curiosity of sorts, was made in the distillery's unpeated style, but matured in whisky barrels that had previously been used to mature peated whisky.

Old Pulteney is one of only two distilleries in Scotland that is named after a true-to-life historical figure; in this case, Sir William Pulteney (1729-1805). Reputedly the wealthiest person in the United Kingdom in his day, William Pulteney was a patron to the famous architect Sir Thomas Telford, and the owner of vast lands in both the UK and North America.

He was also responsible for the British fisheries at the time of a herring

boom in the North Sea. Pulteneytown - a purpose built herring port to the south of the Royal Burgh of Wick - was named in his honour. The town was well known for absorbing migrants from the Highland Clearances seeking work in the growing fisheries industry.

Inaccessible by road or rail, Pulteneytown had to be supplied by sea. Residents had difficult lives and a deep thirst. Old Pulteney distillery opened in 1826 and made sense, both financially and otherwise, for the area. Every man, woman and child in the town were said to consume upwards of 500ml of whisky a day. Drink was still a scourge in the town a century later when James Watson purchased the distillery in 1920. By this time Pulteneytown had merged with the Royal Burgh of Wick. Two years later, by majority vote, the local ward declared prohibition in the area, which lasted for 25 years and a day. The distillery survived a few years of prohibition, but closed in 1930.

Its fortunes, however, would soon rebound, and Old Pulteney reopened in 1951 as post-war demand for whisky in Europe began to recover. Major refurbishments took place to modernize the distillery in 1958, and the traditional floor maltings ceased. In 1997 the current owners - Inver House Distillers - launched their 12-year-old single malt in a bespoke bottle, inspired by the distillery's unusual stills. While the whisky would traditionally have been peated, today there is virtually no trace of it. The core range consists of 12, 17 and 21-year-olds, with some older expressions and one-offs in the mix.

Old Pulteney may not be the northernmost distillery on Scotland's mainland anymore, but it has built a solid reputation over the last two decades with its world-class single malt. The coming years look very bright for the company, as it arcs towards its 200th Anniversary.

Old Pulteney 12 Year Matured exclusively in American oak, the whisky is creamy with vanilla, caramel and citrus notes highlighting Pulteney's maritime style. **\$65**

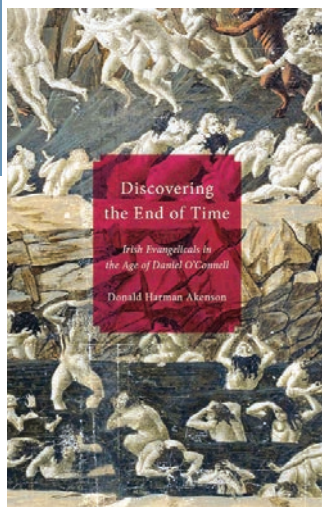
Old Pulteney 17 Year Matured in American and European oak, the 17 Year is woodier with sea salt, honeycomb, dried fruits and a touch of leather. **\$135**

Old Pulteney 21 Year This award-winning combination of 2nd Fill Bourbon and 1st Fill Oloroso Sherry casks is spicy with white chocolate, caramel spices and layers of fruits. **\$190**

Old Pulteney 1989 Vintage Whisky Magazine's Single Malt of the Year, this vintage expression was matured in 2nd Fill American oak casks which had previously matured a peated Scotch whisky. The result is a very complex, creamy whisky with a touch of salt and smoke, and loads of tropical fruits. **\$340**

www.fergusonwhisky tours.com





Discovering the End of Time

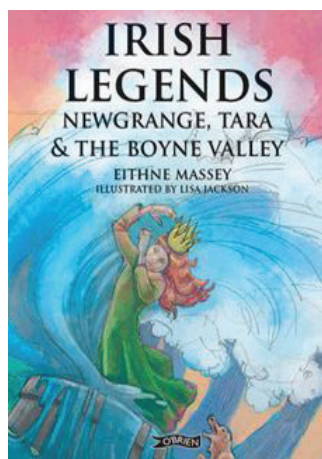
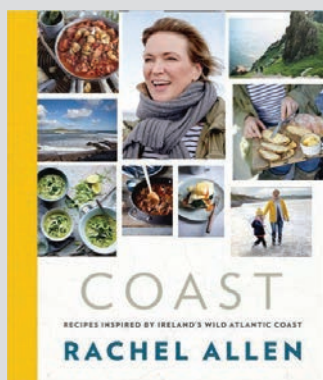
By Donald Harman
Akenson
McGill-Queen's
University Press
548 pp / \$39.95

End-of-times advocates and conspiracy theorists will want to get their hands on Akenson's latest effort of academia, which explores the origins of 'apocalyptic millennialism.' Tracing the movement's roots back to southern Ireland in the early 1800s, the author puts together a detailed - and often disturbing - snapshot of the father of evangelical dispensationalism, John Nelson Darby. A member of Eire's religious elite, Darby laid the groundwork for Christian Fundamentalism, a set of traditional beliefs adhered to by millions of American citizens. The timing is particularly poignant given the circus-like atmosphere surrounding the ultra-conservative element of the GOP in this U.S. election year. Though dry at times, the work is well worth wading through if only to better understand the dirge of doomsday prophets. ~ SPC

Coast

By Rachel Allen
Harper Collins
320 pp / \$29.99

Subtitled 'Recipes Inspired By Ireland's Wild Atlantic Coast', this 320-page tome follows Irish celebrity chef Rachel Allen as she weaves and winds her way up and down Eire's rugged west coast. Part cookbook, part travel diary, this is more than a mere collection of ingredients, instructions, and individual insights; Coast is peppered with fantastic photos and revealing details that capture and convey the full flavour of a hearty land and its people. In particular, the closing chapter on Donegal - seasoned with regional recipes for Grilled Salmon, Pan Fried Gurnard and Fish Gratin - will leave you salivating for both the local landscape and cuisine. As well, her conversations with area farmers and fishermen offer powerful perspectives on the past, present and future of traditional industries. ~ SPC



Irish Legends; Newgrange, Tara and the Boyne Valley

By Eithne Massey &
Lisa Jackson
O'Brien Press
64 pp / €12.99

Of the seven Celtic nations, Ireland is the richest in legend and lore. After centuries of storytelling, mythology remains at the core of Irish culture today. Thanks to author Eithne Massey and illustrator Lisa Jackson, eight of those magical tales - originally put to pen by medieval Christian monks - will be preserved and passed along to another generation. As the Japanese discovered with anime, vibrant colours and text engage, entertain and educate young readers better than any other medium. Here, imaginations will ignite with stirring stories of The Origin of the Boyne, Aonghus and the Swan Maiden, The Hag of Loughcrew and more. Recommended for youngsters aged 7 and up, this is a fantastic way to introduce children of all ages to classic Celtic culture. ~ SPC

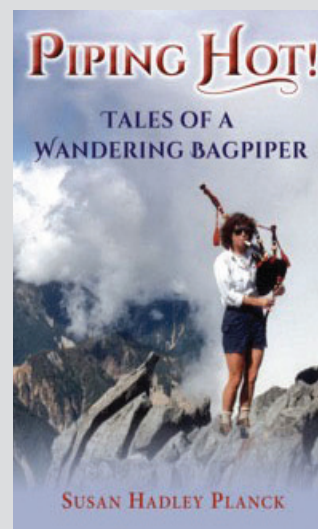
Piping Hot!

By Susan Hadley Planck
Moonscape
364 pp / \$24.99

Does the skirl of the bagpipes stir your soul? Are your Scottish or Irish roots calling to you? Have you ever wondered what a bagpiper's life is like? Do you like unusual travel?

These questions, and more, are at the heart of bagpiper and storyteller Susan Hadley Planck's quaint and quirky memoir Piping Hot! A late bloomer on the instrument, Planck made up for lost time by taking her pipes on the road. The resulting tales of travel to the Great Wall of China, Mt. Fujiyama in Japan, South America, Scotland and across the United States, are both amusing and memorable. The author does well to bring readers behind the scenes with a bagpipe band, detailing the unique personalities that carry on the musical tradition.

~ SPC





Celtic Woman

Destiny

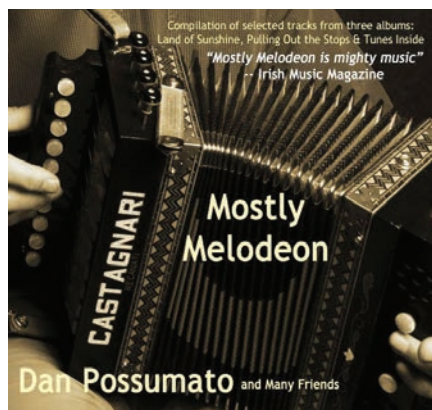
Like their male counterparts in Celtic Thunder, the ladies of Celtic Woman have become a slick and sleek hit-producing machine over the last decade. It would be too easy to criticize the quartet for being a case of style over substance. However, repeated listening of their latest recording, *Destiny*, is a reminder that traditional Irish music, in any form, shines with both spirit and soul. There is no denying the great vocal talent here and, thankfully, the girls never take these 15 tracks over the top, allowing both harmonies and melodies to breathe on their own, sifting their way into listener's hearts. Arrangements and instrumentation are above average, as always, and special kudos for the cover of the Waterboys' classic *The Whole of the Moon*. ~ SPC

Helena Byrne

Scéal

Irish singer and shanachie Helena Byrne sifts through the past, both Eire's and her own, to produce 17 terrific tracks of old-school storytelling. Tales of traditional myths from the Emerald Isle blend seamlessly with quaint yarns from her childhood home, bringing to life the people and places of a different, and perhaps better, time. Ideal for relaxing around the fireplace with family and friends, listeners of all ages - particularly young children - will enjoy classic takes on *The Fairies*, *The Dullahan*, *The Hunchback of Tipperary* and more. The lone musical track – *My Lagan Love* – showcases Byrne's lovely lilt, and leaves one wondering why there aren't more songs in this selection.

Hopefully, it is a teaser track of things to come for this talented tale-teller. ~ SPC



Dan Possumato

Mostly Melodeon

According to Wikipedia, the melodeon is “a diatonic button accordion and a member of the free-reed aerophone family of musical instruments. It is a type of button accordion on which the melody-side keyboard contains one or more rows of buttons, with each row producing the notes of a single diatonic scale. The buttons on the bass-side keyboard are most commonly arranged in pairs, with one button of a pair sounding the fundamental of a chord and the other the corresponding major triad (or, sometimes, a minor triad).” That said, no-one plays the instrument better than Irish-American Dan Possumato, and his latest recording, *Mostly Melodeon*, is a fun, frolicking 16-song romp through his roots that wouldn't sound out of place at a Cape Breton kitchen party. ~ SPC

Fox n Firkin

No Vacancy

Australian Celt-Punks Fox n Firkin come out swinging on their debut recording *No Vacancy*. The opening salvo of *Drink the Lot* sets the torrid tone early, and doesn't let up over the next nine tracks, with driving guitars, pounding drums and take-no-prisoners vocals. The title track is a detour into dub/ska, while the closing number pays homage to The Clash circa 1977. The band's Irish roots shine through with mandolin on *Days Long Gone* and *Too Hip*. Other standout tracks here include the brilliant *El Condor Pasa* and the crunchy *Bastard Brigade*. What's clear by album's end is that the group has earned its stripes playing every backroom bar and pub *Down Under*, and stands as tall as Boston's Dropkick Murphys or Kingston's The Mahones. ~ SPC



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Doug MacRae

Doug MacRae's love affair with the bagpipes began when he was a curious and impressionable eight-year-old boy visiting Scotland

Piper Doug MacRae remembers being captivated by a busker's performance on an Edinburgh street while on holiday as a child with his parents.

"For whatever reason, I was captured," shares the now 34-year-old via email. "And stranger than my interest was my parents committing, right then and there, to finding a store to buy me a set of bagpipes. They must have seen something to make such an impulsive decision and investment."

Whether by chance or fate, MacRae took to the pipes with passion. He recalls his excitement at getting the sheet music for *Amazing Grace* and playing it constantly.

"The sound of the bagpipes is what inspired me to play. And though I continue to play for many reasons, fundamentally, it is the unique sound that continues to motivate me today."

MacRae was raised in London, Ontario, and attended the nearby University of Western Ontario. After four years of teaching bagpipes at St. Thomas' Episcopal School in Houston, Texas - where he led the band to a Juvenile World Championship - he returned home. Today, he continues to teach the pipes via Skype, while managing the shop at Scott's Highland Services.

"While there have been some competitive successes through my career, I would say the career itself is the highlight. The instrument has taken me all over the world and provided the opportunity to meet all sorts of people. The musicians and supporters in the piping community are kind and diverse, and unequivocally the source of joy that trumps any competitive prize or performance success."

When asked if he is a traditional piper in terms of style and sound, he hedges.

"Some might argue what 'traditional' really means in terms of style and sound. It may be more accurately said that I subscribe to current styles and sound. Through its history, the bagpipe has raised its pitch so that today we are higher in pitch than the instrument has ever been."

MacRae notes that when he performs with his band, The American Rogues - who are based in Baltimore - he plays at a lower pitch that complies with western scales.

"With the bagpipe in its own world in terms of tuning, special considerations have to be made when playing with other instruments. Fortunately, there is equipment available that makes this process easier."

The American Rogues has close ties with the United States military.

"They have shown us a great deal of support, including our USO-type tours of Japan, Italy, Spain, Guam and Cuba, as well as our work with honour flights for World War II and Korean War vets," notes MacRae, adding that the group is the official band of the national Navy Seal Museum. "We also do a show with the U.S.



Air Force Symphony at Constitution Hall in Washington."

MacRae enjoys performing on a variety of small pipes, but generally plays the Highland bagpipe when performing with his band.

"I play two sets that are quite different in terms of history and tonal quality. I mostly play a set of Duncan MacDougall bagpipes that were made circa 1890. The set has experienced a few cracks that have been expertly repaired over the years. The other set is a more modern set of Strathmore bagpipes built in the early 2000s."

He adds that seeing beginners take an interest in the pipes is always gratifying.

"In Canada, especially out East, there are more school programs starting up where students have the opportunity to take piping as a class or extra-curricular activity. Here in Ontario, there are a few programs being integrated into the school system. Cadet programs are also huge contributors to the development of youth piping."

He acknowledges there are many people "out there fighting to preserve Celtic culture", though he also points out there are more demands on people's time and less financing available for cultural events and groups.

"It doesn't come down to funding exclusively, as the whole culture needs people, active people, active players, willing to teach piping and other Celtic music, along with organizers willing to host community events to support and promote the culture."

MacRae will spend the summer competing on the festival and special events circuit while travelling with the 78th Fraser Highlanders to compete at the World Pipe Band Championships in Glasgow. When time allows he will continue to tour Canada and the U.S. with The American Rogues.

He will never be too far from home in the coming months, however.

"My wife and I are expecting our second child together in July."

www.dougmacrae.ca



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Mari Black's baby photos show a little girl fiddling with garden trowels and chopsticks - surely a sign of things to come for the world champion fiddler

"I can't remember not playing," shares fiddler Mari Black via email. "As a little kid, everything I saw looked like a violin."

"Music has always been such a big part of how I see and experience the world that I don't recall a specific 'ah-hah' moment the way some other musicians describe. I do remember a very strong sense of being drawn to music, and to this instrument specifically - that's probably why I say 'the fiddle chose me' as opposed to the other way around - and of wanting to play, to create sound that made me feel things."

Winner of the Glenfiddich Fiddle Championship in 2014, and a two-time winner of the U.S. National Scottish Fiddle Championships, Black continues to be drawn to the expressive power of music that moved her as a child.

"I even still play along with recordings that feel magical - trying to become a part of those gestures, tap into that sound. The difference today is that I am now completely focused on how I can share that feeling with other people. Being the catalyst for an impromptu dance of 50-plus children at a tiny outdoors harvest festival in Maine is every bit as thrilling as being invited to compete in, or win, competitions."

Based in Boston, where she grew up, Black is a graduate of Yale University School of Music, and also has a doctorate from Columbia University Teachers College. Today, she balances performing and recording with teaching.

"Fiddling is very similar to when kids play games," she notes. "There is a sense of magic to the play, a sense of 'anything can happen.' I want to draw people into that sense of wonder and fluent expression - of tales old and new, fun and mischief."

Black's musical heritage comes from her mother, a classical cellist and pianist with an admirable collection of vinyl.

"She taught herself to play as a teenager, and I grew up totally immersed in her performing and teaching."



She adds that Celtic was, and remains, her first musical language.

"Celtic fiddling styles were among the first kinds of music I started exploring as a kid. The first love has never left me because, nowadays, when I think of things like flying or freedom or letting loose, the soundtrack to those thoughts is Celtic. I also associate a sense of fun or playfulness with Celtic styles, and that speaks strongly to me in my quest for music that makes people want to dance and smile."

Listening to fiddlers from various genres was a large part of her musical upbringing as well; on car rides, Black and her mother played games to identify composers; she "swooned to the fiddle-playing of Andy Stein", and learned tons of Beatles songs alongside classical pieces.

Not surprisingly, she continues to love music from an array of traditions.

"To me a style or tradition is really a collection of stories about people who created that music. I think about styles of music like languages. The more languages I speak, the more people I can understand, communicate with and share stories with in a fluent way."

She also plays the purist possible renditions of each style, so they may be passed on to both audiences and new gen-

Mari Black

erations of students in their most authentic voice.

"My quest to absorb stories from as many different people as possible has accidentally turned me into a sort of musical chameleon. My goal is to be able to switch seamlessly from sounding completely Scottish to completely Irish to completely Cape Breton and so on, as I attempt to share a diverse range of stories with an audience in a single show."

For all her natural talent, Black still relies on old-fashioned hard work to grow as an artist.

"I am definitely a practicer - much of my best work comes as a result of just putting in the hours, playing tunes slowly, working a metronome, recording myself and listening back to spot things that need improvement. I always want to know why things sound or function the way they do. I also study non-fiddlers to see things from a different perspective."

That includes watching dancers to see how music moves and manifests itself physically.

"I copy pipers and whistle players to find ornaments or phrasing ideas that a fiddler might overlook because they don't sit naturally on the violin. I get a lot out of it, but it is definitely a methodical approach to improving as an artist."

In 2014, Black released her debut CD, *Flight*, and is currently working on two new recording projects. That busy schedule will be accented by an upcoming visit to Scotland, teaching at fiddle camps, and a full slate of performances.

"I think the best way to keep any tradition or culture alive is to simply live it with as much purpose and joy as possible. In my experience, people are naturally drawn to sources of passion, and if you are excited about something, it is pretty easy to get them excited about the same thing."

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Kristine Fulton

Deep in the Alaskan rain forest, where the only way in and out is by boat or plane, the Sitka Spruce Celtic Dancers celebrate a decade of dance



Kristine Fulton arrived in Sitka - 100 miles west of Juneau, 800 miles south-east of Anchorage and 1,000 miles north-west of Seattle - in 2001.

"Dancing has been a very important part of my life since I was five years old," explains the guiding light behind the Sitka Spruce Celtic Dancers. "From that age on to college I studied ballet, modern and jazz. When I first arrived here, I joined a Russian dance troupe."

It wasn't long before Fulton put together the region's first Celtic dance group, a not-for-profit ensemble which performs several shows in the region each year.

"The reason I started the Sitka Spruce Celtic Dancers was to share some of the Scottish and Irish dances I knew with the children in our community. I have done that, and I currently have around 50 students. The reward for me is working with wonderful dancers, young and old.

"I would say only a small portion of our group actually has Celtic blood. Many of my students are Asian, Native American, or other nationalities. They participate in our group because they enjoy the culture and my program."

The daughter of a Scots-Irish mother, and a father with Finish and Swedish roots, Fulton was first introduced to Scottish dancing in the 1980s in Juneau.

"I had a boyfriend who played the bagpipes," she recalls. "The boyfriend is long gone, but as well as introducing me to Scottish dancing, he introduced me to my Scottish husband."

When she began teaching in Sitka, Fulton initially concentrated on the Celtic dances she was already familiar with.

"With the help of the Internet, I expanded the repertoire to include both



Scottish and Irish dancing. I purchased instructional CDs, watched videos and put a lot of my own time into creating the Sitka Spruce Celtic Dancers. Since I do have a solid background in dance, it hasn't been too difficult to learn the dances from these sources.

"I also make 80 per cent of the troupe's costumes."

This past winter Fulton delighted her dancers by choreographing a familiar fairytale.

"I retold the story of Cinderella, as if from the Scottish Isles, and all the music and dancing was either Scottish or Irish in origin."

More recently, she connected with an Irish dance team in Vancouver, BC, that is sending one of its dancers to Sitka to lead a workshop.

"That will be exciting for all of us here."

Fulton has looked into obtaining her official Celtic dancer certification, but given her isolated location, it does not seem practical.

"There are so many rules, fees and restrictions, and the expenses for us to travel to competitions are prohibitive."

Located in southeastern Alaska, on the ocean side of Baranof Island and sur-

rounded by the Tongass National Forest, Sitka - population 8,500 - is beautiful, but quite isolated.

"We have only 13 miles of road. All our food, fuel and supplies come by barge or air and are thus, quite expensive. It is a fourteen-hour ferry ride to Juneau and a four-day ferry ride to Seattle."

A coast guard station works with the local fishing community, but there is only one air carrier servicing the area, so bargain flights do not exist.

"One of our main industries is health care and that is what brought my family here. My husband and I are both pharmacists and work with the Native Health Consortium. Sitka has a community college, a boarding school, and private schools as well."

Fulton also plays mandolin, guitar and a little violin, while her husband plies away at the concertina and button box accordion. They both perform with the local musical ensemble, Fishing for Cats.

She believes that the long, cool, wet and dark winters of Sitka are ideal for studying music and performing aggressive physical activity like dance.

"This group is a gift of love, from me to my community, as I do not make any money out of this and I do it for the love of Celtic dance and music."

Recently, Fulton has been approached to see whether she could add some Chinese dances to her program, and she is considering it.

"I'm not sure how many more years I will keep up this energy but at least two more. Celtic dance gives me great joy, lots of positive energy and keeps our community healthy and happy."



Festival *focus*



Blairsville Scottish Festival

Blairsville, Georgia, USA

June 11-12

Should you find yourself in Georgia this June, Meeks Park in Blairsville is the place to be. The Blairsville Scottish Festival includes a weekend full of activities, which will take place rain or shine. Get there a day early and you can take a swing at the Kilted Golf classic. Though not mandatory, players are encouraged to wear kilts, which will take 10 dollars off the registration fee. The festival itself has all the staples of a Scottish celebration, including music, dance, genealogy and more. In addition, attendees can immerse themselves in the world of ancient Scottish weaponry, or hone their skills in bagpipe and fiddle workshops. Children will also have a chance to learn about all things Scottish via tailor-made activities, including the Passport to the Clans game, which encourages kids to visit different families, clans, and tents. Once the children have gathered enough information, they earn a prize for participating. A favourite activity for the tiny tots is a train ride along the shady banks of Butternut Creek. The festival's Saturday night concert will feature Celtic music trio The Blarney Girls, and renowned rockers Seven Nations. www.blairvillescottishfestival.com



Franklin's Scottish Heritage Festival

Franklin, North Carolina, USA

June 16-19

If you are looking for the true taste of Scotland, be sure to take in Franklin's Scottish Heritage Festival in North Carolina. Four days of events will feature Scottish food, fashion, music, and more. Celebrations kick off with a Clan dinner, including a buffet and live Celtic music. Friday follows with an evening Ceilidh, including tunes from My Three Kilts, a group that describes itself as "a unique brand of Celtic/Pub/Punk." Other musical guests will be on hand over the weekend as well. Saturday welcomes a parade, along with a large spread of vendors, including Ladybug Farms Pottery, Hair Cinch Fashions and Blue Mountain Clay. In addition, Franklin has the only Scottish tartan museum in the United States – certainly worth a visit while you are in town. Although the museum was originally established in North Carolina's Highlands, it found its home in Franklin in 1994. More than 500 tartan samples are on display, including designs for clans, families, districts, and other organizations. Some of these tartan specimens date back to 1725. The Breacan Clann, a living history group involved with the museum, will be in attendance during the heritage festival. www.tasteofscotlandfestival.org



Chicago Scottish Festival & Highland Games

Itasca, Illinois, USA

June 17-18

Get ready to hurl some haggis! For the 30th year running, the Chicago Scots present their annual Scottish Festival and Highland Games. The Itasca, Illinois-based celebrations boast to be the Midwest's largest Scottish event. Witness the heavy athletics competition, featuring classic tests of strength and accuracy, including the caber toss, clachheart (stone of strength), hammer throw, sheaf toss and weight throws. There's even a "mini version" of the heavy athletic events for the wee ones in the children's area. You can also treat your taste buds to a variety of Scottish and American fare, and wash it all down with whisky and spirit tastings. For those with a super-sized appetite, a haggis-eating contest will challenge competitors to devour a pound of the Scottish delicacy quicker than their opponents. Oh – and you aren't allowed to use your hands. There's also the haggis hurling contest for lassies only. Women will throw a one-pound frozen haggis while balanced on a half whisky barrel. Farthest throw is the champion. Perhaps appropriately, Celtic folk-rock band Enter the Haggis will be featured on the festival's main stage. Haggis-free entertainment will be provided by Chelsea House Orchestra. As always, a variety of vendors on festival grounds will be selling baked goods, jewelry, clothing and more. www.chicagoscots.org

Festival *focus*

Moncton Highland Games

Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada

June 18

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Moncton Highland Games in southeastern New Brunswick. Over the past decade, the festival has grown in size from a small city park, to a high school athletic field, and now takes place in a large sports complex. This year, attendees will find a mix of traditional competitions in dance, piping and heavy athletics. Once again, sheep dog herding will be a highlight, along with a performance from JJ White and his Frisbee Dogs. History buffs will be happy to know the Society of Creative Anachronism will be at the games in period costume, featuring full contact combat and knife throwing. Those looking to delve into their own heritage may attend workshops on genealogy, piping and other Celtic interests. In addition, “Clan Alley” will again be well represented by a number of clans from across the region, the country, and the USA. Watch in awe as crafters turn wool turn into a shawl, or order your tartan or highland dress from one of the vendors. Youngsters will enjoy the bouncy castles and sheep herding exhibitions, while adults can cast their luck at a fly fishing workshop. www.monctonhighlandgames.com



Mother Lode Highland Games

Plymouth, California, USA

June 18-19

The Mother Lode Highland Games welcomes Celts of all sorts, anyone with an interest in Celtic heritage, or those who simply like great fish and chips. Located in Plymouth, California, the games take place on the Amador County Fairgrounds. VIP tickets are available for all the weekend's events, including the piping and drumming competitions, heavy athletics, the Highland dance competitions, and more. As always, a clan gathering will be held, and the honoured clans for this year are Clan Lindsay and Clan Donald, both of whom will be on-site to answer questions for those who may be curious about their heritage. One of the musical guests, Golden Bough, will be performing a special tribute to the honoured clans. Other musical guests include Celtic rockers The Angry Brians, folk group Black Irish, Cooking With Turf, Tempest, and Michael “Trio of One” Mullen. For adults, whisky seminars will feature a number of spirits from the various regions of Scotland for tasting, and there will also be a learning session about the distilling process. If a glass of Zinfandel is more to your liking, wine workshops will be held as well. www.themotherlodgames.com



Malad Valley Welsh Festival

Malad Valley, Idaho, USA

June 24-26

Can't make it to the Swansea Valley? Find a touch of Wales in Idaho at this year's Malad Valley Welsh Festival. The region has the largest per-capita concentration of people of Welsh ancestry outside of Wales, and the annual celebration was created to re-ignite the spirit of an eisteddfod, a traditional cultural arts event that was first developed by the area's descendants who settled there in the 1860s. The gathering was held each spring until the First World War.

In 2005, organizers rebuilt the festival from the ground up, and today it draws thousands of Celts of all ages. Event attendees can please their palettes with the “Taste of Wales” food booth, enjoy quilting exhibits, and take part in traditional wagon tours. This year musical headliners, Idlewild, will perform a mix of classic Celtic music from Ireland, Scotland, Wales,

Brittany, and the Isle of Man. For those looking for extra insight into all things Welsh, presentations will take place on the first and second days of the festival, including The History of the Roberts/Stevens Families in Oneida County by Boyd Roberts, Traveling in Wales by Ron Dennis, and Yr Hen Ogledd: The Ancient Welsh in Scotland by Lucie Washburn.

www.welshfestival.com





Armstrong Clan Society (International)

2101 Mc Dowling Dr.
Huntsville, AL 35803-1225
President: Rotates Biannually
Membership: Ms. L. J. Marquis
Treasurer: Mrs. J. F. Armstrong
E: billjohn@hotmail.com
www.armstrong.org



Clan Arthur Association USA (CAAUSA)

Chief John MacArthur of that ilk
Robert M. McArthur, Lieutenant to the Chief
Wm. Ken McArthur, Ambassador to Clan Arthur
Dr. Karen Carlson,
High Commissioner for Clan Arthur in the USA
3415 Bridgefield Dr., Lakeland, FL 33803-5914
E: drkarencarlson.oemc@verizon.net
Dr. Kenneth Phillips, President CAAUSA
3415 Bridgefield Drive, Lakeland, FL 33803
P: 863-640-6749
E: kenphillips321@gmail.com
Kara McArthur, National Secretary
68 West Dixie Avenue, Marietta, GA 30008
P: 404-862-2192
E: karamcarthur42@gmail.com
Membership requests – email Kara McArthur
www.clanarthur.org



Clan Bell North America

A non-profit service and educational organization for all interested in the Bell families and their heritage with Commissioners and members in many locales, states and countries.
Bell DNA Project.
Inquiries may be directed to:
David E. Bell, President
E: debellinn@reagan.com
1513 Anterra Dr.
Wake Forest, NC 27587
Member: CASSOC & COSCA, Facebook.
Membership information can be found on the website: www.clanbell.org



Clan Blair Society

3413 Sunnybrook Drive
Charlotte, NC, USA 28210-4715
James E. Blair, President
P: 303-795-9754
E: president@clanblair.org
Charles Diman, Membership
P: 980-254-2743
E: clanmembership@clanblair.org
www.clanblair.org



House of Boyd Society

Lauren Boyd McLachlan, President
(& Chair of Executive Board)
1609 Truscott Court
Roseville, CA 95661 USA
E: president@clanboyd.org
Donald Boyd Mellen, Treasurer
311 Tanglewood Drive SW,
North Canton, OH 44720
E: treasurer@clanboyd.org

Australia

Michael J. Boyd,
Historian/Member Executive Board
107 Spurs Drive, Wellington Point, Brisbane,
Queensland, Australia, 4160
E: australia@clanboyd.org

Canada

G. David Boyd, Canadian Convenor
718 Jones Fall Rd, RR #3,
Elgin, Ontario K0G 1E0
E: ontario@clanboyd.org
www.clanboyd.org



Clan Campbell Society (North America)

Chief – His Grace The Duke of Argyll
Inveraray Castle, Inveraray, Argyll, Scotland
David A. Stedman, President
766 Mt. Vernon Avenue,
Haddonfield, NJ 08033-2817
E: president@ccsna.org
Cliff Campbell, Membership Chair
359 Wilmette Circle
Ormond Beach, FL 32174-5204
E: membership@ccsna.org
www.ccsna.org



Clan Carnegie Society, International

William D. Carnegie
High Commissioner
234 Grant Street
Redlands, CA 92373
P: 520-975-0801
E: clancarnegie@gmail.com
www.clancarnegie.org



Clan Chisholm Society (Canada Branch)

President: David Holmes
2635 – 30th Street S.W.
Calgary, Alberta T3E 2M3
P: 403-686-6048
E: bandit77@shaw.ca
Vice-President: George Pyron
P: 416-944-2826
E: gcpyron@gmail.com



Clan Cochrane of North America

Keith Cochran, President
E: goblucru@att.net
Steve Cochran, Vice President
E: rscochran@aol.com
Emily Cochran Elkins, Membership
E: clancochrane@live.com
Sherri Cochran Anderson, Treasurer
E: msanderson2@hotmail.com
www.clancochrane.org



Clan Currie Society

P.O. Box 541
Summit, NJ, USA 07902-0541
Robert Currie, FSA Scot
P: 908-273-3509
E: clancurrie@mail.com
www.clancurrie.com
www.clancurriegathering.com
www.pipesofchristmas.com
www.tartandayonellisland.com
@clanMhuirich



Clan Donald Canada

Website: WWW.CLANDONALDCANADA.CA
High Commissioner - John R. MacDonell
P.O. Box 431, 20152 Celtic Lane
Lancaster, ON Canada
P. 613-347-3746
E: jrmacdonell@hotmail.com
Commissioner Nova Scotia - Eric Mapplebeck
P: 902-765-0331
E: bjmax1931@outlook.com



Clan Donnachaidh Society

Robertson-Duncan-Donnachie-
McConnachie-Reid
Clan Secretary:
secretaryclandonna@btconnect.com
Membership Secretary:
managerclandonna@btconnect.com
Bruar, Perthshire, PH18 5TW, Scotland
www.donnachaidh.com
Donnachaidh DNA Surname Project
Family History Research and DNA testing:
www.clandonnachaidhdna.org
Contact: Tim Duncan
581 South Point Rd.
Port Ludlow, WA 98365
P: 760-985-0444
E: tim@clandonnachaidhdna.org



Clan Douglas Society of North America

Mark Peterson, President
E: mpeterson1019@comcast.net
 Jim Morton, Secretary
 4115 Bent Oak Ct.
 Douglasville, GA 30135
P: 770-265-2717
E: douglassecretary@comcast.net
www.clandouglasociety.org



Clan Elliot Society

Catherine Elliot Shaw, President
 58 Cottonwood Crescent,
 London, Ontario, Canada N6G 2Y8
P: 519-641-3929
E: the_shaws@sympatico.ca
www.elliottclan.com



Clan Ewing

Commander: John Thor Ewing
 Church Bank, Burrington, Ludlow
 Shropshire SY8 2HT United Kingdom
E: Thor@ThorEwing.net
Ewing Family Association
 Educational 501(c)(3) Non Profit
 1330 Vaughn Court
 Aurora, IL 60504
E: llcoughlin@comcast.net
www.clanewing.uk
www.ewingfamilyassociation.org



Clan Farquharson, USA

Chief Capt. A.A.C. Farquharson of Invercauld
 Jim McKeenan, President
P: 541-281-8420
E: berfert1@msn.com
 Nick Cardello, Membership
E: ClanFarquharsonUSA@gmail.com
www.clanfarquharson.org



Clan Graham Society Inc.

www.clangrahamsociety.org
 Cliff Fitzsimmons, Membership Vice President
 2919 Denison Ave. Knoxville, TN 37921-6671
P: 865-368-2543
E: celt11@comcast.net
Canadian Residents Contact
 Alan Graham, Membership Chairman
 19 Brae Valley Ct. Port Perry, ON, L9L 1V1
P: 905-982-1534
E: clan.graham.canada.membership@gmail.com



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www.clanchiefs.org.uk

Clan Gregor Society Canada Chapter

Wayne MacGregor Parker, Chairman
 PO Box 232
 Dorset, Ontario
 POA 1E0 Canada
www.clangregor.org

American Clan Gregor Society

Lois Ann Garlitz, Chieftain
 238 West 1220 North
 American Fork, UT 84003, USA
www.acgsus.org

Clan Gregor Society, Scotland

Professor Richard McGregor, Chairman
 5 Alloa Road
 CAMBUS by Alloa
 Clackmannanshire
 FK10 2NT, Scotland
www.clangregor.com



Clan Guthrie USA, Inc.

Membership inquiries welcome
 from all family members in all spellings:
 Guthrie, Guttrey, Guthry, etc.
 President: William 'Jack' Moore
 1755 Ancona Court, Concord, CA 94519
P: 925-686-2400
E: jackmo37@gmail.com
www.clanguthrie.org



Clan Hall Society

Pam Hall, Membership Secretary
 8872 Bison Place
 Gold Hill, OR, USA 97525-9614
P: 541-855-9551
E: shu-shu@centurylink.net
 John A. Hall Jr., President
 5695 Cider Mill Crossing
 Youngstown, OH, USA 44515
P: 330-270-0387
E: skipten29@aol.com
www.clanhallsociety.org



Clan Henderson Society

Tom Hendericks, President
E: tomff2376@yahoo.com
 Mark Henderson, FSA Scot, VP, Members
 204 Beagle Gap
 Waynesboro VA 22980
E: hendo28@comcast.net
P: 540-221-4642
www.ClanHendersonSociety.org



Clan Johnston/e in America (USA & Canada)

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 Victor Gibson, Loveland, CO
 Northwest Region Commissioner:
 Valerie Ensor, Kent, WA
 Southwest Region Commissioner:
 Kathleen Sloan, Tucson, AZ
 Membership inquiries welcome
 from all spellings.
E: Info.clanjohnstone@gmail.com
E: Membership.clanjohnstone@gmail.com
www.clanjohnstone.org
 Join us on Facebook at:
 Clan Johnston/e in America



Clan Lamont Society of Canada

President Jean Watson
 485 Cobequid Road
 Lower Sackville, Nova Scotia, B4C 3Y7
P: 902-864-1994
E: jean.watson2@ns.sympatico.ca
 Membership: Elsie Turner



Clan Lamont Society of North America

R. Scott Turner, President
P: 404-702-0501
E: ClanLamont@gmail.com
 Please send mail to:
 Frank C. Brown, Secretary/Treasurer
 900 Gatling Pointe Parkway, Smithfield, VA 23430
P: 757-279-0812
E: clsnatreasurer@gmail.com
www.clsna.us



Clan Little Society of North America

242 Game Trail
 Thomasville, NC, USA 27360-9432
 Tom Little, Steuart (President)
E: Steuart@ClanLittleSNA.com
 Jim Little, Secratrur/Membership
P: 336-476-7607
E: membership@clanlittlesna.com
www.clanlittlesna.com



Clan Logan Society International

6255 Towncenter Drive, Suite 636
Clemmons, NC, USA 27012
Vernon E. Logan, President
James C. Logan, VP
P: 619-252-3780

E: clanlogan_chairman@yahoo.com
Membership-
E: clanlogansociety@gmail.com
www.clanlogansociety.com



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E: clanmacalisterpres@gmail.com
Membership Chairman: Reba J. McAllister
E: cms.membership@gmail.com
P: 864-991-8881
www.clanmacalistersociety.org



The MacArthur Society of Canada

(Branch of Clan Arthur)
Lloyd K. MacArthur, High Commissioner
252 Kananaskis Green,
Alberta, Canada T9G 1Y8
E: mcartld@shaw.ca

The MacArthur Society of the US

PO Box 190, Pinehurst, NC 28370
E: danm702525@aol.com
www.clanarthur.com



Clan MacCallum-Malcolm Society of North America, Inc.

Fred B. McCallum, Jr. President
E: fred.mccallum.jr@gmail.com
Neil D. McCallum, Secretary/Treasurer
2225 Keyes Ave.
Madison, WI 53711
P: 608-239-5796
E: mccallum2@sbcglobal.net
www.clan-maccallum-malcolm.org



International Clan MacFarlane Society, Inc.

Founded 1911 Glasgow and London,
Re Established 1973 Grandfather Mountain NC
Michael R. MacFarlane, FSA Scot – President
PO Box 398, Glendora, CA 91740 USA
E: President@macfarlane.org
Ragnar McFarland – Director of Membership
P.O. Box 9044
Surprise, AZ 85374 USA
E: membership@macfarlane.org
www.macfarlane.org



Clan MacGillivray Association of Canada

20 East Main Street
Antigonish, NS, Canada, B2G 2E9
E: info@clanmacgillivraycanada.com
G. Angus MacGillivray, Chair
P: 902-867-6404
E: angus.macgillivray@ns.sympatico.ca
www.clanmacgillivraycanada.com



Clan MacInnes International

14 Jakes Lane
Dexter, ME, USA 04930-2194
Eric MacGinnis Perry,
Director Membership Services
P: 207-924-6565
E: eric@macinnes.org
www.macinnes.org



Clan MacKinnon Society

Representative of the MacKinnon of MacKinnon
Gerald McKinnon, Prince George, BC, Canada
Chairman of the Board
John McKinnon, Shelby, Michigan, USA 49455
P: 231-861-6453
E: Stony7854@aol.com
www.themackinnon.com



Clan MacLachlan Association of North America, Inc.

All spellings of MacLachlan,
Gilchrist, and MacEwen.
Founded in 1965
John D. Cherry, Jr., President
E: jcherry@aol.com
www.maclachlans.org
Find us on FACEBOOK at
Clan MacLachlan Assoc. of N. America
& Official Clan MacLachlan Society



Clan MacLellan

Nancy MacClellan Sears, Treasurer
P. O. Box 150
Simpsonville, KY 40067-0150
E: treasurer@clanmaclellan.net
www.clanmaclellan.net



Clan MacLeod Societies of Canada

Judy Tipple, Membership Secretary
P.O. Box 111, Saturna Island, BC,
Canada V0N 2Y0
P: 250-539-5475
E: leodvoice@gmail.com
E: jmtipple@gmail.com
Jim MacLeod, President
338 Riverwood Drive,
Woodlawn, ON, Canada K0A 3M0
P: 613-832-3045
E: glenelg.macleod@gmail.com
www.clanmacleod-canada.com



Clan Macneil Association of America

Robert A Neill, President
183 Pheasant Walk Way
Vilas, NC, USA 28692-8371
E: raneill@juno.com
Rhonwyn Darby McNeill, VP Membership
PO Box 230693
Montgomery, AL, USA 36123-0693
E: rdmatmgn@aol.com
Gwen McNeill, Webmaster
4351 Bridle Path Court
Tucker, GA, USA 30084-6432
E: gwen-cmaa@comcast.net
Kelli Werkmeister, Quartermaster
99 Liberty Drive
Brighton, TN, USA 38011
E: qtrmstr-cmaa@comcast.net
www.clanmacneilusa.us



Clan MacThomas Society (North America)

Chief Andrew MacThomas of Finegand
Wendy Thomson, Convenor, North America
4811 Tullamore Drive Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304
ASSOC. SURNAMES: Combe, Combie, McColm,
McComas, McComb, McCombe, McCombie,
MacOmie, MacOmish, McComie, McComish,
Tam, Thom, Thomas, Thoms, Thomson
E: wsthomson@mac.com
www.clanmacthomas.org



Clan Scott Society

PO Box 13021
Austin, TX, USA 78711-3021
David Scott, Membership Secretary
E: membership@clanscottsociety.org
www.clanscottsociety.org



Clan Wardlaw Association

7807 Lorne St.
New Port Richey, Florida, USA 34653
Mark Wardlaw, President
Brandt Ford, Vice-President
Brandt Ford, Secretary
Diane Wardlaw, Treasurer & Newsletter Editor
E: clanwardlaw@yahoo.com
www.clanwardlaw.com



Clan Maitland Society of North America

7016 Carrondale Way
Las Vegas, NV, USA 89128-3339
Scott Medlin, President
Rosemary Maitland Thom, Secretary
E: rthomnvpdcan@aol.com
www.clanmaitlandna.org



Clan Sinclair Association (Canada)

3621 - 156A St.
Surrey, BC, Canada V3Z 0L4
Jim Sinclair, National President
P: 604-542-2703
E: jim@clansinclair.ca
Roger Sinclair, Nova Scotia President
88 Slayter St., Dartmouth, NS, Canada B3A 2A6
P: 902-425-6438
E: roger@clansinclair.ca
www.clansinclair.ca



Clan Young USA, UK and Canada USA: Clan Young Society, Inc.

Membership Secretary: Warren Sheffield
E: warren.sheffield@hotmail.com
www.clanyoungsociety.com
UK: Clan Young
Major Stuart Young TD, Convenor
Clan Young UK
MachairTigh
Dowlans Road
Great Bookham
Surrey. KT23 4KF
United Kingdom
E: stuartyoung@clanyounguk.co.uk
www.clanyounguk.co.uk
Canada: Clan Young Canada
E: Doug Young: clanyoung@hotmail.com



Clan Matheson Society of Canada

88 Beaumont Drive
Lower Sackville, NS, Canada B4C 1V6.
Al Matheson, Chief's Lieutenant
P: 902-865-5735
E: al@familymatheson.com
www.clanmatheson.org



Clan Thom(p)son Society

Clan Thompson International, Inc.
Office of Record
President: Tom Thompson
1665 Rickman Monterey Hwy
Rickman, TN 38580 USA
P: 931-498-2303
E: Tom@clanthompson.org
Vice President: Cheryl Thompson
E: Cheryl@clanthompson.org
Secretary: Mary Thompson
E: admin@clanthompson.org
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www.clanmoffat.org



Clan Wallace Society

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Macon, GA, USA 31210-2304
Charlie Wallace, Membership Chairman
E: membership@clanwallace.org
Dorothy Wallace Knight,
Advisory Director for Canada
E: dknight@gosfieldtel.com
E: cwsacanada@clanwallace.org
www.clanwallace.org



Clan Munro Association of Canada

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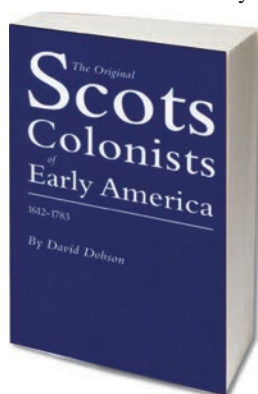
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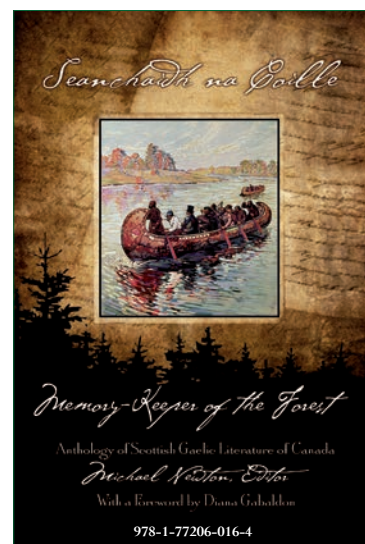
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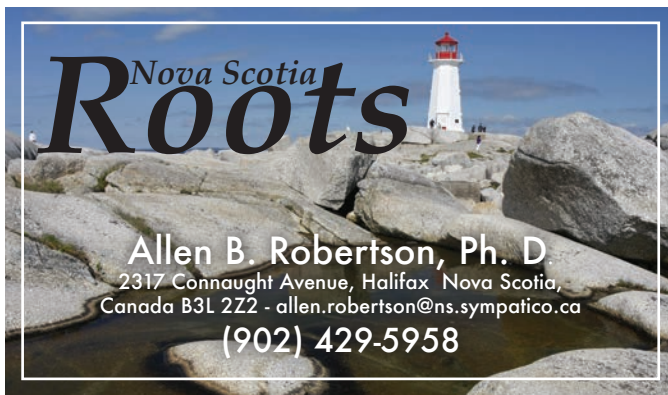
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Long before there was Riverdance, there was Anna McCoy, a stylish Belfast girl who fashioned a name and a career out of her love of Irish dance



When Anna McMurray's death notice appeared recently there was no mention that Belfast had lost a cultural icon - only a simple announcement of funeral and interment, and a request that prayers be offered. No doubt, there were those who failed to realize 89-year-old Anna McMurray was the woman far better known as the internationally renowned Irish dancer and teacher, Anna McCoy.

IrishAmerica.com remembers when she brought her dance team to the United States in the late 1940s and 1950s, performing in Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York, where they brought Irish dance to the stage at Carnegie Hall for the first time. Her dancers captivated the American public with a new Belfast-Derry style, McCoy's creative interpretation of traditional Irish dance.

"The wonder is not that these dancers were so popular in North America, but that Americans ever allowed them to return home," the Cork Examiner trumpeted in 1957.

The invitations to the U.S. came after McCoy and her dancers were filmed in Alan Macauley's *Welcome to Ireland*, which premiered in White Plains, NY. With the film, the Irish Diaspora had found a cultural focus. McCoy, her husband Al McMurray, dancer Brendan de Glin, and soprano Eileen McIntyre toured for six weeks under the name The Four Gaels, paving the way for subsequent visits by her dance team.

"For her, this Irish dance was just as

much about preserving the Irish past as it was about creating an identity in the present," states IrishAmerica.com. "And that is why we must celebrate the memory of the Irish dancer and teacher Anna McMurray (nee McCoy) who was just as much a force for artistic syncretism as she was a conduit for tradition."

The Irish Times quoted her younger brother Paddy McCoy on her death.

"Anna's earthly existence ceased on March 14, but her spirit lives on, tangibly, and in the legacy she has bequeathed to those in many parts of the world where, Irish or not, they learn the beauty, grace and elegance of our native dance."

In 2010, Belfast City Hall commissioned and erected a portrait of five people who had made outstanding contributions to Irish language and culture since the late 18th century. McCoy was the only one still alive.

IrishCentral.com described the initiative as an effort to introduce "an Irish element" at a city hall that had been a "predominantly unionist environment for so many years."

If McCoy, often referred to as a "cross-community" dancer and teacher, saw any irony in that, it went without mention.

"To Anna, dancing was always more important," said Paddy McCoy.

He recalled that his sister was considering taking business courses when she graduated high school, but she responded to the promptings of her boyfriend (Mc-

Murray) to sit for a newly-inaugurated Irish Dance Teachers Certificate. That was the beginning of McCoy's dance school and the name never changed, although she went on to marry McMurray and have two sons with him.

Paddy McCoy described the couple as having a fine partnership, and said his sister always credited her husband with organizing the trips to the U.S.

As an 18-year-old she opened a dance studio in the heart of Belfast's city centre so aspiring young dancers from all across the region could attend. It was the joy of the dance that propelled McCoy, and generations of young dancers took their first steps under her cheerful guidance.

By the 1950s, McCoy was finding success as a choreographer, continuing to stretch the traditional dance steps to include modern interpretation, and devising step patterns to reflect such venerable Celtic motifs as the Book of Kells.

Years later, when areas of her city were under lockdown due to The Troubles, she moved her studio to the outskirts, hoping dancers would be able to travel there in relative safety.

When she was honored by the City of Belfast, one of her former dancers summed up what McCoy had done for her, and countless others, to the Irish Times.

"I came from an ordinary part of Belfast, and when I was four Anna took me by the hand and taught me Irish dancing and led me into a world I never imagined I would experience."



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