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FÁILTE

The Love of Learning

Tom Langlands and I have
been working together
for over 13 years - more than
enough time to really get to
know someone, both profes-
sionally and personally.

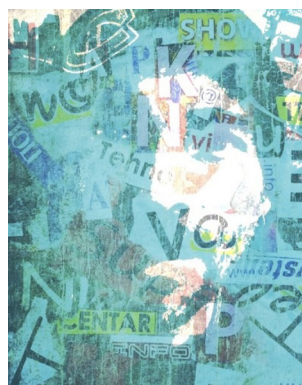
Interestingly, and despite
our lengthy relationship, I
must confess that I still don't
really know the man. Even as-
sembling this issue of Celtic
Life International - revisiting
his previous contributions to
the publication, reviewing his
cover story Q&A, and reap-
proaching his poetry - I am
still putting the puzzle pieces
together.

And, as I am learning,
while there is much to say
about Tom, truth be told, I
don't always have much to say
to him. In fact, when it comes
to work-related matters, our
email exchanges are usually
somewhat short and succinct.

TL: "I'm thinking of doing a
piece on..."

SPC: "Works for me. We'd
need that in about a month."

TL: "Very good."



Weeks will pass without
a word, and then, suddenly,
the article arrives in my in-
box - on time, on target, and
replete with plenty of good,
hi-res photo options.

Tom's work is consis-
tently excellent, entertaining,
engaging, educational and
- perhaps most pertinently
(from my perspective any-
way!) - edit-friendly. He is
the consummate professional,
concerned more with his sub-
jects than his own subjectiv-
ity.

It was only after he vis-
ited Montreal a couple of years
ago, and we enjoyed an excel-
lent meal together with our

significant others, that I first
began to connect the dots.

As it turns out, we share
a number of common (and un-
common) interests, including
fine cuisine, poetry, photog-
raphy, philanthropy, music,
architecture, fly fishing, and a
deep reverence for Japanese
culture - especially the work
of that country's foremost
storyteller Haruki Murakami.

What I admire and re-
spect most about Tom, how-
ever, is his life-long love of
learning. Furthermore, his
passion to present that new-
found knowledge to others,
including our lucky readers,
is a testament to the merits
of self-mastery and service.
This is, perhaps, his greatest
legacy.

Be sure to take the time
to get to know him over the
coming pages - I promise you
it won't take you 13 years!

*Stephen Patrick Clare,
Executive Editor
Summer, 2025*



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The Women of Ireland Project

One woman explores the women of Ireland...

What does it mean to be a woman of Ireland? Through her passion project, Dr. Belinda Vigors explores that question via the context of history, politics, mythology, and more.

"I feel very culturally and spiritually of Ireland," says Vigors via email with Celtic Life International, noting that her time elsewhere has cemented this identity. A social scientist by trade, Vigors hails from rural Co. Wicklow and currently lives in England. "I



became aware of the intersectionality of my gender, culture and national identity, and realized that how I was as a woman could not be separated from the fact that I was also of Ireland. Once I caught sight of that, I decided to create a whole research project around the question I kept asking myself: how have we, the women of Ireland, come to be the way we are?"

Vigors launched the Women of Ireland Project in 2020, working on it in her spare time outside of her day job. It was a simple Instagram page in the beginning, where Vigors shared posts about Irish women in history. The venture grew and, by 2022, she had left her day job in favour of freelancing so she could dedicate more of her attention to the project.

"Between 2021 and 2023, I interviewed 37 women of Ireland to gather their life stories, and their perspectives are really the heart of the whole project. Once gathered, I spent another couple of years meticulously analyzing this precious collection of female experience and pulled together the common threads and themes in their stories."

"The whole project is based around connecting the past to the present, as I explore the socio-cultural forces and historical conditions which have shaped womanhood in Ireland and made us the way we are."

These interviews - as well as her own research - allowed Vigors to get writing. She then started a page on the online media platform Substack to share her work. "All of my writing and essays are open-access and are available for anyone to read. I want to ensure as many people as possible have access to the nuggets and insights I've discovered over the years of running this project." She also gives public talks about the project, both online and in-person.

Since the project's inception, Vigors has written about a wide range of topics, including diaspora grief, Ireland's witch trials (of which there were merely four!), gender roles, and more. In December of 2024, she released her first book, *Threatening Women: A Cultural History of Why Ireland Shamed and Contained Women*. Inspired by a BBC Radio

4 Woman's Hour episode on the Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home scandal, Vigors decided to write about "why women were so strictly monitored and punished in Ireland." The brutal story of the Tuam institution, which housed unmarried women and their children between 1925 and 1961, is just one example of how Irish society abused women.

"I have been left somewhat struggling to really grasp the impact this book seems to have on those who read it. I am pretty much a one-woman show, and classically terrible at marketing and promoting myself - every sale of *Threatening Women* has come about through word-of-mouth, with people sharing it with others and telling them about it, and I kind of love that."

A one-woman show, indeed. Vigors manages the Women of Ireland Project alone, without any organizational funding. It is a responsibility she does not take lightly, and at times, it can be overwhelming.

"On more than a few occasions, I have crumbled under the worry that I might never be able to fully do justice to all that these women have gifted to me, but I'll keep trying."

Vigors recently returned to Substack after a few months off. She has also been busy working on another book. "This second book I affectionately refer to as 'the book,' as it is the one that will weave together the voices of the women I have interviewed with my own, along with detailed cultural and social analysis and insights, as I reflect our experiences against Ireland's past."

Those 37 interviewees "are really the heart of the whole project," she adds. "I learned so much from them and not a day goes by that I do not think of some piece of advice or words of wisdom they shared with me."

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nhhgs

The New Hampshire Highland Games celebrates a milestone...

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the New Hampshire Highland Games, and Executive Director Terri Wiltse is ready to celebrate. With wit and unwavering dedication, Wiltse has spent nearly a decade leading NHSCOT - the organization behind the festival - guiding it from an annual event into a year-round cultural movement.

"I embarrassingly admit that I am not Scottish, worse, I am English," Wiltse confesses jokingly. "However, I am very good at running large cultural events and was hired for my professional skills rather than my heritage."

Her love of Scottish culture runs deep, however. "Through NHSCOT, I have become a wannabe Scot. I am totally in love with the country and its culture."

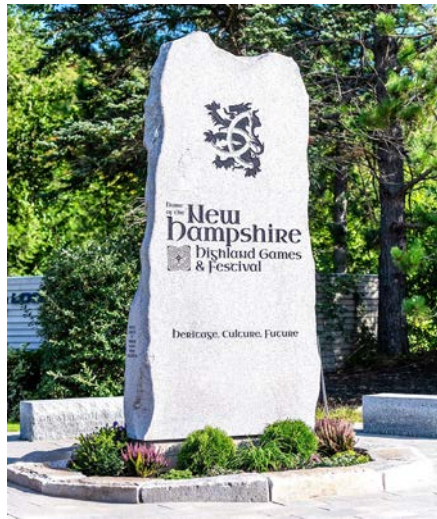
Wiltse joined the organization in 2016 with a mission to broaden its scope.

"I was hired to transition NHSCOT into year-round events and to have more diverse streams of income, and I have accomplished what I was hired to do. As Executive Director, I am intent on leading the organization and making sure we're mission-focused. I manage the staff & operations of the business, and I help keep the programming moving forward."

The range of each of her responsibilities is also no small feat. "New events are always in various stages of planning. I report to the Board of Governors and work to keep them informed and engaged in their committee work and strategic planning. I'm always working to establish relationships with potential donors and sponsors. There are a lot of balls to keep in the air and moving."

That juggling act is not without its challenges. "I must keep the entire Board engaged and raising money in the current political climate. Unfortunately, there is a perspective out there that views nonprofits as frauds and money scams rather than as assets to a region or community."

Wiltse also grapples with changes in charitable structures: "Many of the smaller community foundations that granted money to NHSCOT have become part of larger companies, and there is no regulation - so funding



Terri Wiltse

is harder."

Yet despite the setbacks, the rewards are rich. "Watching a young woman who started playing bagpipes as a young girl grow to the point of being able to teach bagpipes to beginners, or seeing an event that's been in the works for months or years turn out to be a success, makes it all worthwhile."

The hard work has paid off. The New Hampshire Highland Games have grown far beyond their original format. "It started as a Murray Clan picnic in 1975 and has grown to one of the biggest in the US, which welcomes

almost 40,000 people annually and contributes \$10 million to the state economy."

NHSCOT is more than just a festival, however.

“The organization now hosts events monthly, has a ceremonial Pipe & Drum Band, a Highland Dance team, takes groups to Scotland annually, hosts a virtual book club that features Scottish writers, and much more.”

And this year's milestone event promises to be memorable. "We're bringing back a traditional haggis toss," explains Wiltse. "We're hoping to break a world record for most pipers piping the same song. We will be presented with our Coat of Arms on Friday. We have a few other fun surprises planned."

"35 to 40,000 people attend," she continues. "At least half are from New England, but we get people from every state and several countries."

Although attracting younger attendees is a challenge for many festivals, NHSCOT thrives. "We are very fortunate to have generations of families come to our event."

Wiltse attributes this to long-standing community involvement, both promoting and preserving Scottish heritage.

She is particularly adamant about preserving traditional competitions, even at a loss. "Each competitor costs about \$200, but I won't charge them that to compete. It's important to keep growing our group of harpists, fiddlers, dancers, pipers, drummers and athletes to keep up customs more than just profits alone."

As NHSCOT celebrates its golden anniversary, it's clear that the spirit of the Highlands is alive and well, thanks to both the community and to Wiltse herself, who has no plans on leaving anytime soon.

"I am looking forward to many more years of involvement with NHSCOT. I dream of being retired and volunteering alongside our amazing 400+ volunteers. I may even join the band as a drummer since I don't think I have the lungs for bagpipin."

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Given how he got his sonic start, musician Michael Darcy might have found himself a contemporary of “Weird” Al Yankovic.

“I learned the accordion first,” Darcy shares with Celtic Life International. “It was unavoidable being from Kilmihil in West Co. Clare - we were surrounded by traditional music growing up, and I remember playing a weekly trad session in Kenny’s pub in Lahinch back in the summer of 1997 when I was just 12 years old - something that likely wouldn’t be legal nowadays for children to play in pubs!”

Luckily for Weird Al, Darcy found his true calling in the arms of another instrument.

“Once I discovered Irish folk legend Christy Moore, I immediately wanted to learn the guitar. Slowly but surely, my poor accordion was put to one side. I was enthralled by his ‘Live at the Point’ album that came out in the 1990s, and I wanted to learn as many of his songs as possible. He is still my hero to this day.”

Darcy made his way across the bog in 2010 at 25 years of age, landing in Toronto on the other side. He would then cross paths with Dan MacDonald, James McEleney, and John Murphy - whom he affectionately calls The Atlantic Tramps - and start plucking out tunes together.

The group took off in the 2020s, building a solid fanbase while touring Celtic festi-

vals across the US and Canada and releasing a few albums.

“It was a real honour to get nominated for both a Canadian Folk Music Award and an Ontario Folk Music Award back in 2023 for our previous album, *Down to the Roots*. Going out on our first US tour with the band a few years ago was also a highlight, after years of threatening to do it.”

Darcy’s Irish influences continue to inform the band’s music, though they have added other styles to their repertoire.

“With the addition of John Murphy’s tenor banjo playing on our new album (*Homemade*) our sound leans more on the Irish folk/trad style, but there will always be a North American influence in our music. Our bassist, James McEleney, comes from a bluegrass background, while our fiddler, Dan MacDonald brings a bit of East Coast flair from Cape Breton.”

Fittingly, the new recording lives up to its name.

“This was my first attempt at home recording,” Darcy admits. “I made a little studio in my house here in Paris, Ontario, and then I got stuck into the nitty-gritty details of how to actually do it. Once the band and I had our parts recorded, I then passed it over to Mark Westberg and Ivan Rosenberg, who mixed and mastered the album - they really got it over the finish line, and I am delighted with the end result.”

So are the fans, according to Darcy. Online response to the new compilation has blown the band away, and it has been getting good radio coverage both in Canada and back home on the Emerald Isle.

It is, believes Darcy, an acknowledgement of his artistic evolution.

“My confidence has grown as a songwriter, and I am more careful selecting songs that I want to sing, no matter when or where we are performing...”

“The best songs are the ones that come quickly and effortlessly. When an idea or a line hits you, it is best to strike while the iron is hot. If the bones of the song aren’t there after 20 or 30 minutes it’s probably not worth a curse, at least for me.”

When he and the Tramps hit the road over the coming months, Darcy and his peers will have plenty of feedback on the new material.

“Having an audience is always handy that way,” he chuckles. “If the crowd have invested their attention and energy into the music and the performance, then the band will feed off that and send it right back into the audience. That’s when gigs become magic.”

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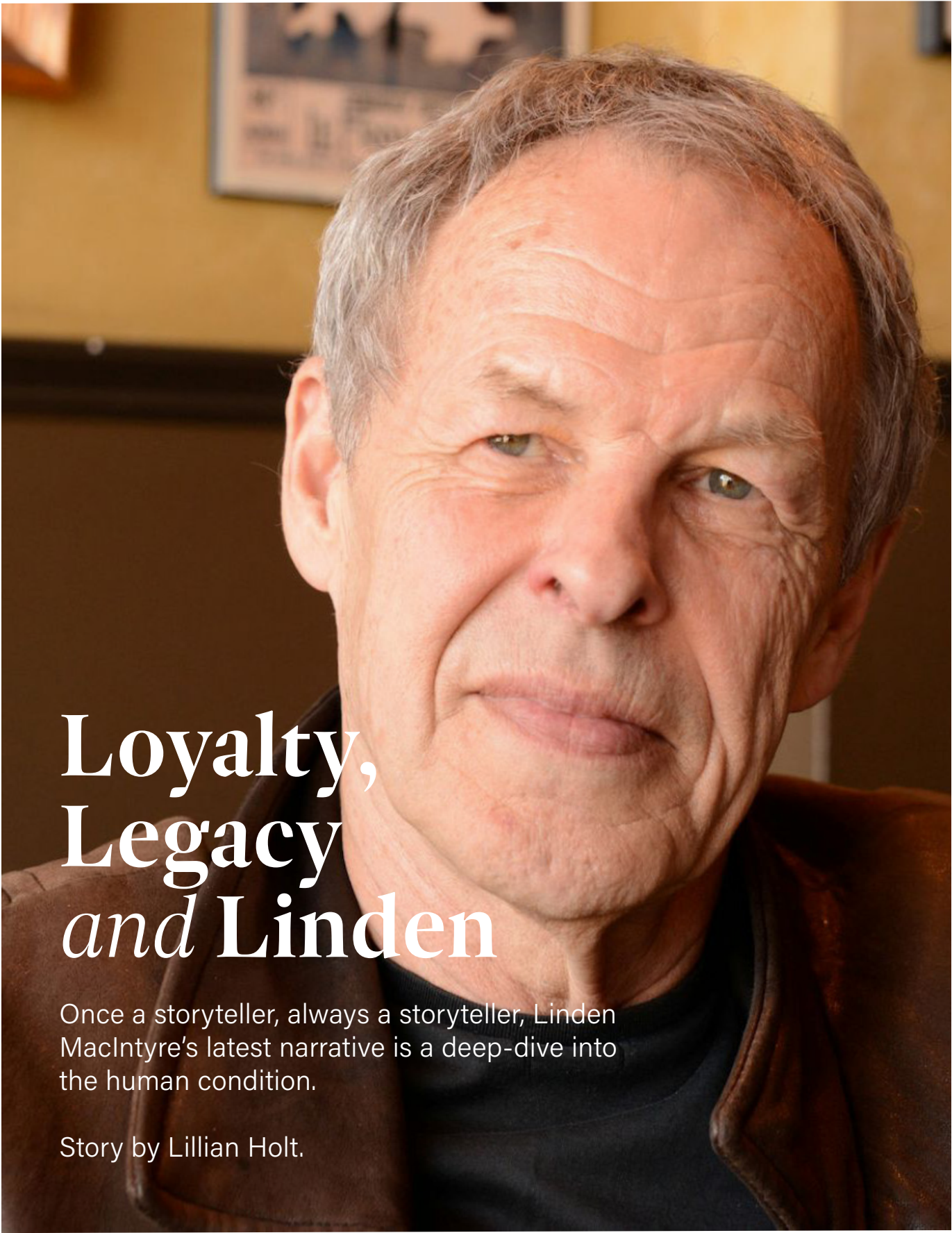
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Loyalty, Legacy *and* Linden

Once a storyteller, always a storyteller, Linden MacIntyre's latest narrative is a deep-dive into the human condition.

Story by Lillian Holt.

“He had not come to Ireland to make war on civilians. And yet that is what the job became.” - From *An Accidental Villain* by Linden MacIntyre.

Though he humbly resists the title, Linden MacIntyre is widely regarded as a Canadian literary and media icon. With a career that spans decades - and includes ten Gemini Awards, an International Emmy, and a Giller Prize-winning novel (*The Bishop's Man*) - the 82-year-old Canadian journalist, broadcaster, and novelist's body of work is formidable.

His latest narrative, *An Accidental Villain*, might well be his most comprehensive undertaking to date.

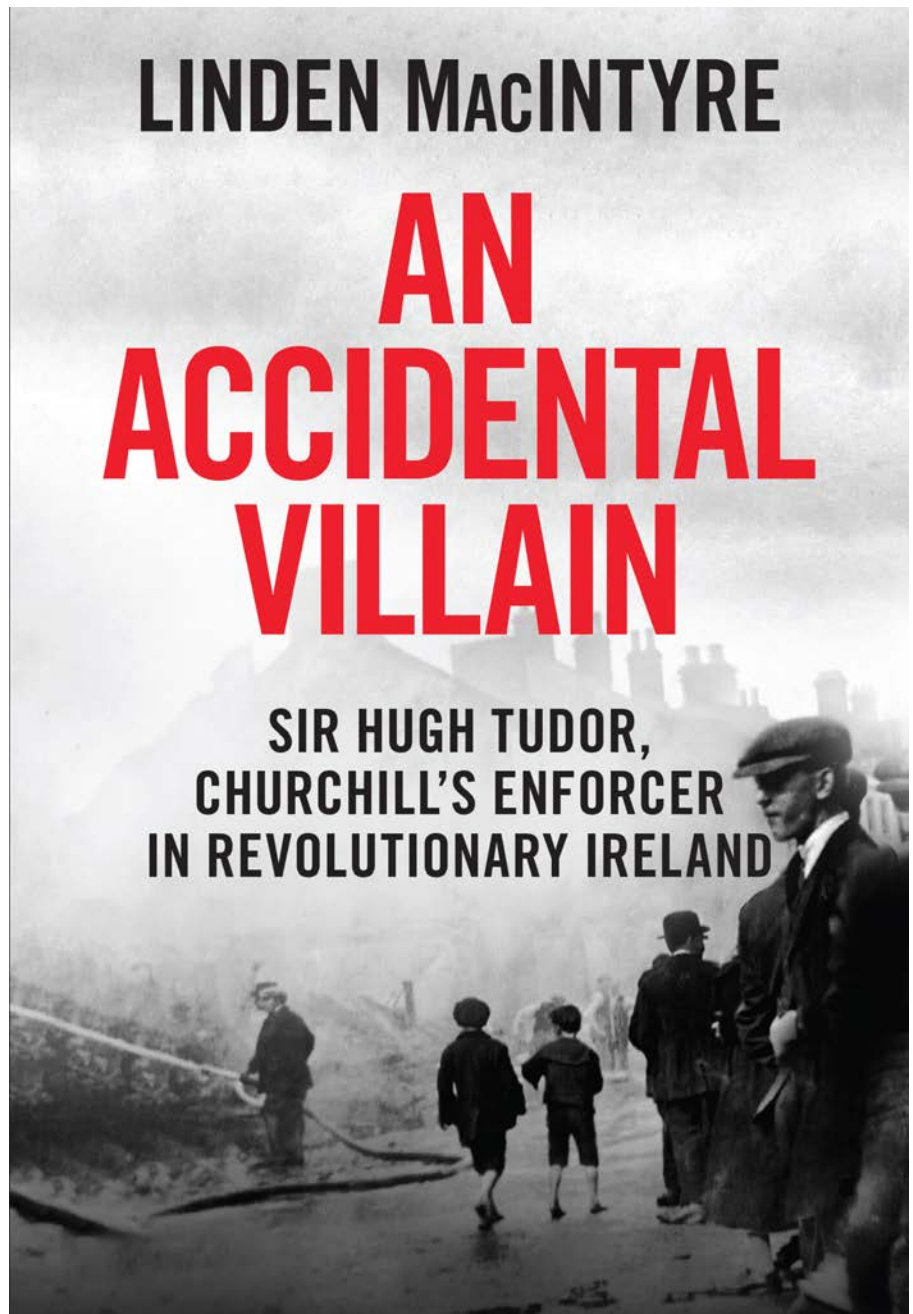
“You are only as good as your last book,” shares the scribe over the phone. “So, when somebody says it's a good read, I find that quite rewarding.”

An Accidental Villain is a riveting blend of biography, history, and political critique, centering on the controversial figure of General (Sir) Hugh Tudor, a British military officer and head of the Royal Irish Constabulary during the Irish War of Independence of the 1920s. The book reveals Tudor's complex legacy, examining how loyalty, duty, and personal conviction collide within a system of imperial power.

One of the author's greatest hurdles was initially tracking down information, but true to form, he quickly adapted. “I discovered online sources I didn't even know existed. I found a way to government documents and parliamentary records. But the biggest challenge was dealing with the obscurity of Tudor as a human being.”

That inconspicuousness made the research both painstaking and historically provocative. MacIntyre describes Tudor as a man who “kept his head down and his mouth shut” - especially in the decades following his controversial role in Ireland. “He didn't write memoirs, didn't publish diaries, didn't give many speeches, so people were left to draw their own conclusions, which were often one-dimensional and could be harsh.”

Dedicated to depth and accuracy, MacIntyre's breakthrough came in the unlikelyst of places - a St. John's newspaper gossip column that mentioned Tudor bragging about a grandson being accepted to Oxford's

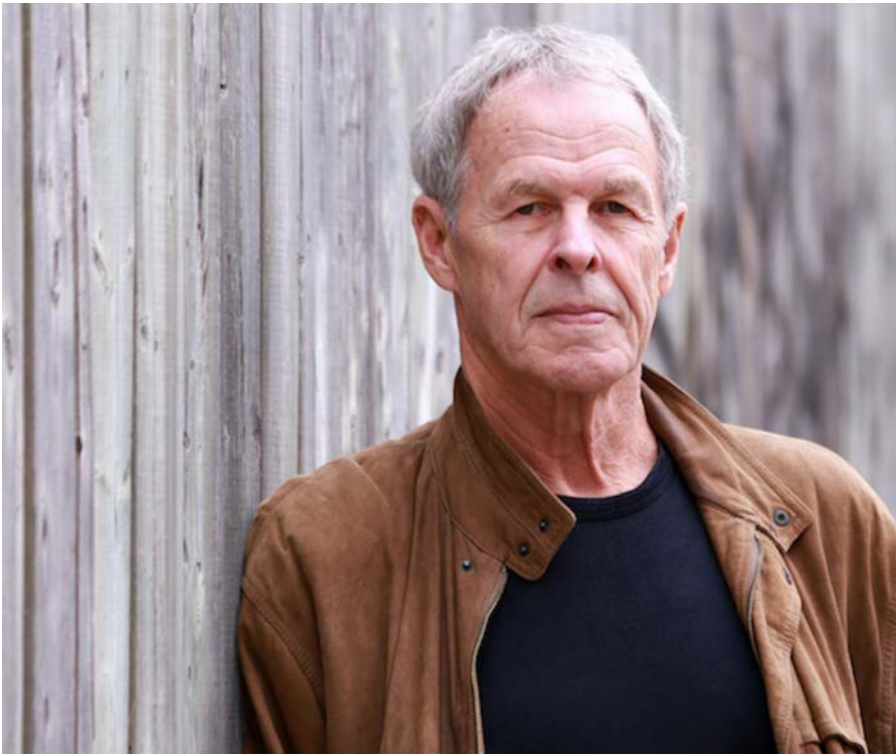


rowing team. That breadcrumb led the author to discover living descendants of the General. “I met one of them, a lovely old chap, who was unsparing in what he could give me. After reading the manuscript, he said, ‘I think I have finally come to know my grandfather.’ His acceptance was really telling and gave me a sense of completeness with the portrait that I had patched together.”

Winston Churchill looms large in the narrative as well, and MacIntyre notes that Tudor's relationship with the then Secretary of State for War was central to both Tudor's

rise and downfall. “He (Tudor) was completely infatuated with this friendship. When Churchill got in touch after WWI and said, ‘I have a job for you.’ Tudor didn't question it. He said, ‘Churchill needs me. I'm going to go and do it.’”

“That ‘job’ was overseeing police operations during Eire's struggle for independence, which ultimately plunged the dutiful but politically uninitiated Tudor into a storm of controversy.”



Although initially detached from the broader implications, Tudor's personal losses during the conflict ultimately influenced his actions.

"When the IRA murdered a very close friend of his and then that friend's younger brother, it was a turning point for Tudor, and he became the accidental villain of that piece of history."

MacIntyre contends that while the protagonist's orders and tactics were brutal, they were shaped by private sorrow and institutional pressure. "He wasn't so politically naive by the end."

Tudor left few traces of his time in Ireland as commander of the Black and Tans. A man caught in the roles of hero, scapegoat, and exile, he never recorded any justification for his role in the 1920 Bloody Sunday uprising, or other episodes of bloodshed.

MacIntyre brilliantly constructs a nuanced portrait of the Irish War of Independence by walking a fine line between biography and moral inquiry. "I had to draw on skill sets I developed over decades in journalism - basic research, tracking down people, interviewing, piecing together fragments. At times, I didn't even realize how blank the slate was until I started digging."

Those "skill sets" arose from his early

days in print journalism through his years hosting television's *The Journal* and *The Fifth Estate*, and later as an award-winning, best-selling author, and equipped MacIntyre with a rare, panoramic view of the media landscape.

He points out that the current media climate is dramatically different from the broadcast era, though its benefits are still being debated.

"We have a problem and it's not with the people or the storytellers - it's the delivery systems."

MacIntyre notes the erosion of traditional media and the rise of unregulated digital platforms. "Who could ever anticipate that radio and TV would be diminished as primary sources of information, replaced by a huge and unrestricted industry of information? I'm not saying information should be controlled by anything more than taste and need, but if anybody can pitch a message that solely appeals to their bias, it can create massive problems for humanity."

Yet he sees glimmers of hope in new, decentralized forms of journalism.

"The Substack world, for example, has some structure. You see people applying journalistic standards of accuracy, fairness, and clarity, because they have to. There's no

regular payday anymore. The freelance economy demands rigor."

Despite these shifts, he insists that the core principles remain the same.

“Good journalism is still about curiosity and an honest attempt to understand...”

"Journalism began with someone simply describing what happened that day around a fire; the weather, the hunt, etc. And that is still the most effective way to convey information - through story."

With his novels receiving both popular and critical acclaim, MacIntyre approaches character, whether real or fictional, with a deep sense of empathy. "You don't invent emotion, but you have to know enough about yourself to find the traces of the universal condition that is present for almost everybody."

That understanding of the human experience became a wellspring for his creative process. "When I started writing fiction, I had the voices of people I had interviewed in my head. I just had to bring them out and put them on the page."

Even after five years spent writing *An Accidental Villain*, MacIntyre is not quite ready to put down his pen. "I must have said a dozen times, 'I'll never write another book.' But I am actually working on a novel now. It brings me downstairs in the morning and occupies my imagination. And I think I will finish it."

Readers can expect the same intelligence and insight that have long defined MacIntyre's work. Whether broadcast to millions or shared on the page, his voice remains unwavering and marked by lasting resonance, courage, and clarity.

In *An Accidental Villain*, he not only sheds light on a controversial figure but also illuminates the deeper truths of moral complexity, reminding readers that history, like journalism, is never just black and white, but layered and messy, and a story that is always worth telling.

"I've been lucky," he says, "But luck alone doesn't tell the tale. It's the art of really listening and absorbing the voices of the people who make up your stories."



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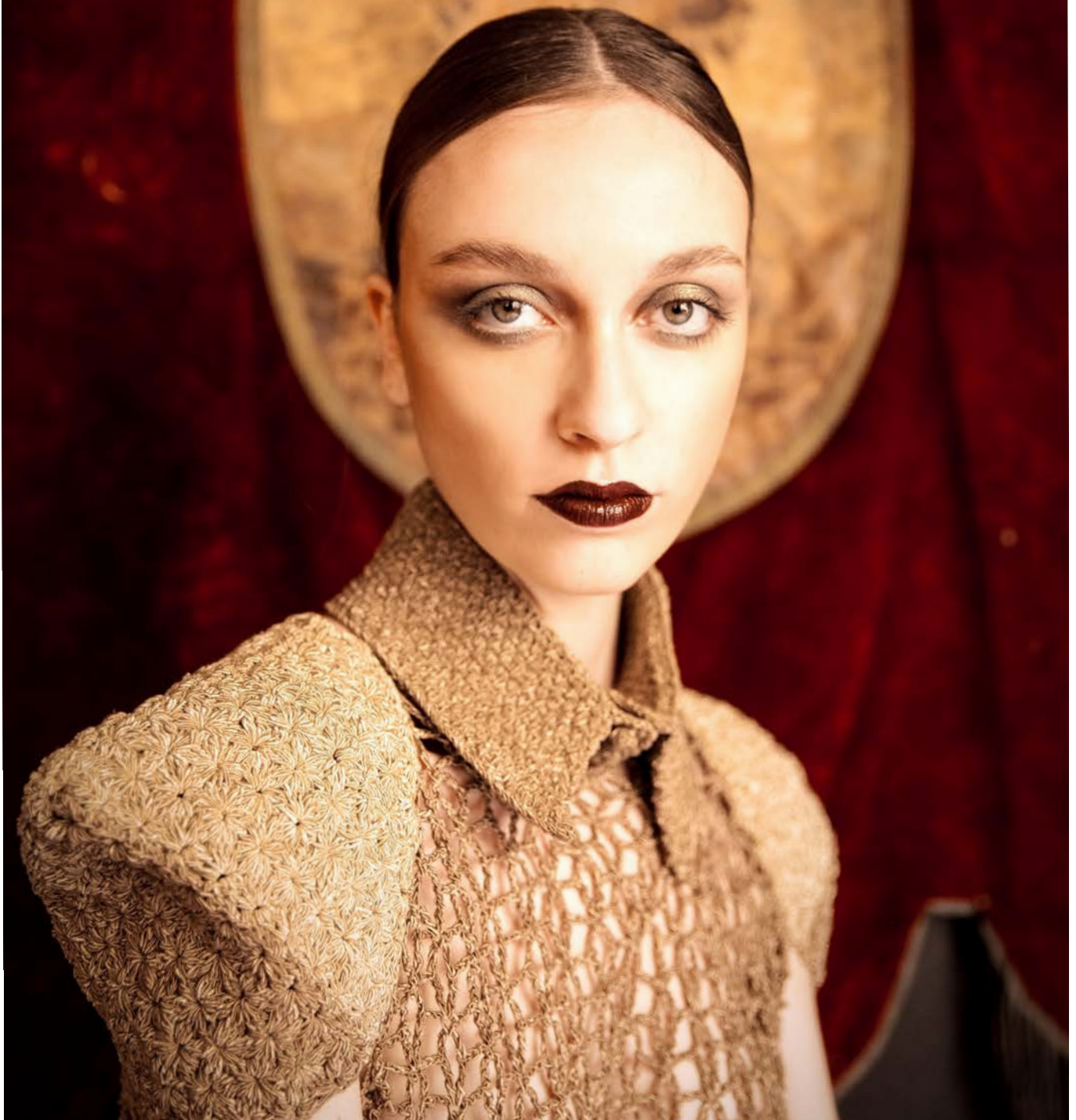
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SIGHTS

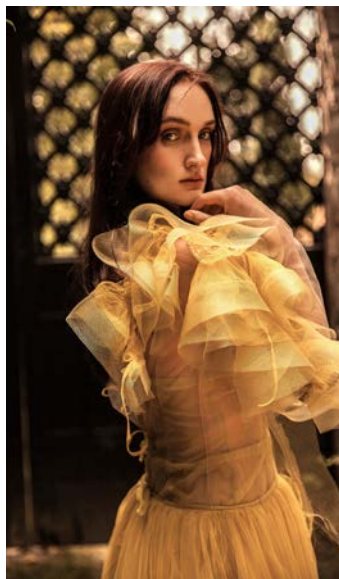


I was born in Dublin, however, I would consider my roots to be of West Cork. I currently reside between Bantry, West Cork, and Andalucia, Spain.

I explored many creative disciplines in college — from textiles to painting — but it was during a trip to Australia that I truly connected with photography. Initially, I picked up the camera simply because it was the most convenient way to document my experiences. But, very quickly, I realized the unique power and intimacy of the medium. It allowed me to capture not just moments, but emotion and atmosphere in a way that felt immediate and honest. Since then — over 20 years ago — photography has been at the heart of my creative practice.

While the camera began as a simple tool of documentation, over time it's become something much deeper — almost like a portal. It allows me to access a sense of presence and connection, both with the person I'm photographing and with the moment itself.

Photography brings me into such a focused state that time seems to stand still. There are no outside distractions — just a pure sense of flow, like meditation. It's in that split second, when you hold your breath, press the shutter, and instinctively know you've captured something special — something real, something that can never be recreated — that I feel the true pull of this medium. And that feeling

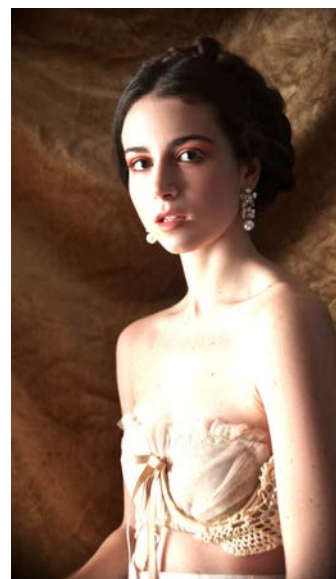
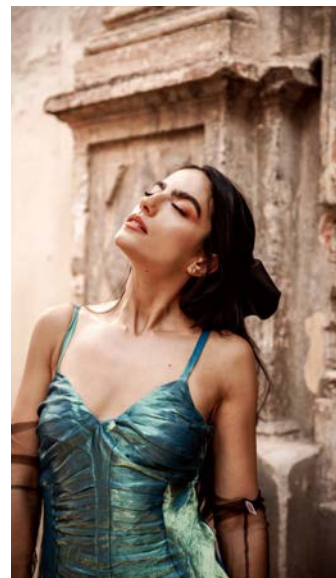




is irreplaceable. No matter how advanced AI or other technologies become, they can't replicate the raw, human experience of being fully present in that fleeting, magical moment.

A defining aspect of my work is that I shoot exclusively with natural light — most often outdoors. I prefer to work with the light, not control or manipulate it. That collaboration with the natural elements brings a softness and authenticity that I truly value. People often tell me that my images don't look like they're from this time — that there's a timelessness to them. I find that incredibly beautiful. I hope my work feels evocative and emotive — something that stirs a memory, a mood, or a quiet feeling that might be hard to name, but easy to feel.

They say photographs have a strong connection to memory — and I believe that deeply. A good photograph is one that moves you. If an image stirs something inside — a memory, a sound, a feeling — then it has done its job. It doesn't matter what the subject is, or even what era it feels like it's from. If something in that image speaks to you, if you feel drawn to it, then to me, it's a good photograph. I don't follow strict rules like the rule of thirds, or insist everything be perfectly in focus. I believe in instinct over instruction. If you're emotionally pulled toward an image — that's it. That's the power of photography.





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Roselle Doyle

www.roselledoyleart.com
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I was born in Montreal. In my teenage years, I lived in England, before returning to Ontario, where I met the love of my life - a wonderful man from Newfoundland who became my husband. I am very fortunate to now live in Newfoundland's beautiful Avalon Peninsula. As both an artist and a lover of nature, I can't think of a more perfect place to live.

I embraced art in my early teens and used painting and sketching as a form of meditation and, in some respects, healing. That meditative, calming aspect and the healing vibes are still present in every stroke, brush, and colour. The only difference now is that I am a professional artist selling my works and I want to help others heal through art the way it helped me heal. It is a big goal, but I believe that all artists have a responsibility to spread

their creative energies in the hopes that they will positively affect others' lives.

Much like my years as a professional choreographer and show performer, which spanned more than 25 years, I always look to refine my art. Today, as a visual artist, I find myself adapting similar aspects to those years of choreography, but now using brushes and paints to convey emotions.

The kinetic aspect and energy of my work, coupled with my colour palette, give my own pieces a very distinctive look and feel, reflecting my own rhythm, personality, and the way I see the world. Whether it's how I transform the real world into my imaginary vision of it, the cleanliness of my brush strokes/lines, the balancing of colours and patterns to lead the eye around the canvas, or the emotions conveyed through the piece, I'll

try to improve upon these aspects a little each time I create a work.

Inspiration starts my creative engine, but once I start a new work - because of my technique and style, repeated layering, swirling motions, and clean fine lines - it is effort and energy that get me to my destination.

A 'good piece' of art is all about emotion - not just the emotion that flows from creating the piece, but the reaction from someone experiencing it.

Going forward, I aspire to continue growing as an artist and furthering the evolution of both my style and technique, plus doing my own part to get my work out into the world. I have also started a gift shop which, operates a few times a week, giving me time to create more work.





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Louise Boughton



I was born in Dublin and grew up in the suburb of Ballyfermot. Today I live in the gorgeous little seaside town of Rush in North Dublin. It is close to various beaches, so it is a wonderful place to spend time walking and drawing.

Growing up, I was surrounded by a lot of creativity in my home. My mum and grandmother were always creating garments, knitting, embroidering, and crocheting. My mum made her own clothes and encouraged me to draw clothing as a child. She would tell me about different types of sleeves, hems, skirts, and dress shapes, and show me how to draw them. I was fascinated by the illustrations on sewing patterns that were around the house and copied them. I got my first book of fashion drawings when I was quite young. When I later worked in fashion and textiles, I naturally used garment illustration as part of my process.

I studied textiles, specializing in weaving, and worked in fashion when I graduated. I collaborated with designers, making fabrics for them before creating my own collections of textile accessories. In both cases, fashion drawing was always there to work out initial ideas for garments and then to record them visually once they were finished. When I stepped away from making, I continued to illustrate in my sketchbooks, always focusing on what people were wearing and how they put their look together, no matter how simple.

Creative practice is consistent hard work, but I absolutely love the process and all the different aspects of it. I revel in working with different media to try to achieve a particular texture or pattern.

Drawing live at fashion shows is fantastic, and I have met some wonderful people along the way who I have long admired - designers and artists alike.

A good item of clothing is all about detail and silhouette. I love something that is beautifully and skilfully made, with a dramatic outline and surface manipulation or interesting features. My favourite contemporary designers are Vivienne Westwood, Zandra Rhodes and Alexander McQueen, who have pushed boundaries and narratives with their clothing in the most amazing ways.





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COVER STORY

A man of many hats, Scottish journalist, poet, actor, painter, photographer and philosopher Tom Langlands is leaving a lasting legacy...

When and why did you first become interested in writing and photography?

Somewhere around the age of ten I began to realize through the comments of others that I had a vivid imagination. That manifested itself in stories that I would tell and write but also across all aspects of what we now call the creative arts. I was good at drawing and painting and my enthusiasm and further development of all those subjects continued throughout my senior school years. My writing and sketches appeared in several school magazines at that time and I won the senior school poetry writing prize. That felt a particularly special moment as the entries were judged by a professor from St. Andrews University and he said some nice things about my winning poem. I guess moments like that made me aware of how you can inspire and incentivize people. I started dabbling in photography around my mid-teens and I got a Saturday and school holiday job in a photography shop in Dundee. Members of staff were permitted to borrow second-hand camera equipment and over a few years I experimented with most of the cameras that could be found on the market at that time, and I soon understood the technical aspects of photography; the creative side took a bit longer! I got to know many of the professional photographers in the town, and I had the opportunity to chat with them about different aspects of photography. I became fascinated with the creative and expressive side of photography. A career guidance teacher spotted my interests and skills. He had a son who was studying architecture, and he suggested I should consider it as a career. At that time, my grandmother had a job as a cleaner and one of her roles was cleaning the offices of an architectural practice. She spoke to the partner of the firm, and I got a placement as tea-boy for a

couple of weeks. That gave me a bit of an insight into what architects did. Around the same time, I started to teach myself to play guitar, and I was friendly with a bunch of people who were involved in amateur dramatics. All these things happened through my early to mid-teens and all of these skills came together when I chose to study architecture. I had a vivid imagination and was a competent draughtsman, I could draw and paint and take photographs and I even presented one of my projects about inner city deprivation as a play that I wrote. While at university I got together with a couple of friends, and we formed a band that played in the clubs and pubs around the Dundee area for a few years. I think we mostly got paid in food and beer which seemed like a good deal as a student.

Are they the same reasons that you remain involved today?

All of these things are still important to me. My enthusiasm for the creative arts in general and my desire to write, draw, paint and take photographs remains. I am seldom without a notebook and a camera. Although I type things on my laptop or phone I have a rather nice fountain pen - given to me by my family on my seventieth birthday - and a few special, hardback notebooks. I enjoy the art of physical writing. There is something special about watching words flow from the nib of a pen. The ensuing scribbles and corrections are part of the artistic process, and it leaves an indelible record of the art of writing. Typing on a laptop is functional and practical but part of the creative process is altered and lost. I love looking at copies of notebooks by the likes of Bob Dylan or Leonard Cohen. What I see comes from their hand and not a keyboard. I would frame a handwritten note before ever considering framing a typed page. In essence, the reasons that drew me into all of these subjects remain unchanged - I enjoy creating.

How have you evolved as a creative over that time?

There has definitely been a change in why I create and how I use my creative

skills. After graduating as an architect, I took a Master's degree in Semiotics and it changed the way I look at things by giving me a greater understanding of human perception and how we acquire meaning. I developed a deeper understanding of how to appreciate the arts and through that I developed a greater awareness of how to connect with people through the use of the arts - and how to connect people using the arts. When I started working as an architect I was designing buildings for individual clients. Over the ensuing years I got more commissions for community architecture projects. In early 1989 I was asked if I would take on the rebuilding of many houses destroyed in Lockerbie following the Pan-Am disaster of December 1988. That became a high-profile project, and I found myself involved with individuals who had experienced loss and pain at a level I had never known and who were thrust into the limelight of the world's press. That project changed my outlook on what is important in life. I wanted my creativity to connect with, and have a positive impact on, people and communities. As a creative, that remains my prime objective to this day. Away from the pressures of work I found my escapism in fly-fishing, music, amateur dramatics, writing and photography. I always knew that someday I would retire from the architectural practice that I co-founded in 1988, but I could never imagine living out retirement in some slow, passive way. As I neared retirement I started developing the writing and photography

Annan Through a Pandemic 2020-2021



Tom Langlands Photography



aspects in earnest as I thought they would enable me to remain active but also had the potential to allow me to connect with people. I think the first piece I ever wrote for Celtic Life was back in 2009 and I have been a regular contributor ever since. I have written pieces for other publications, and my photographs have appeared in numerous books and exhibitions but there is something special about connecting with people through a publication in which we all have a shared interest. I took early retirement from architecture in 2013 to allow me to concentrate on my other interests - mainly writing and photography. Three years ago, I retired to the wonderful Perthshire town of Auchterarder. That was to prove to be a pivotal moment that has opened many doors and enabled me to immerse myself in many facets of the creative arts. After a few months here I was asked if I would run the adult education creative writing classes. Out of that I connected with a few people who were interested in drama, and I persuaded some of the class to take an interest in poetry. I also became president of the local camera club. With a core group of like-minded individuals, I set up a new drama group and with the help of a local businessman who owns a 1926 picture house in town we have a home with access to excellent technical equipment and support. I have teamed up with a fellow writer and we co-write and direct our own productions. From the poets within the writing class we established a poetry group and now run our own open-mic nights that attract

some of the best writers in Scotland. We are currently exploring ideas for bringing music events to the town on a regular basis. All of this is done to engage the wider community and bring new ideas and events to the area. It is proving to be a huge success story and I am now leading many aspects of the creative arts in the area. We have many projects in the pipeline that involve pulling different groups of people together to make happen. I believe in the importance of building bridges and connecting communities and people. Almost everything I do now has people and communities at its heart.

What are the challenges of the vocation(s)?

One of the main challenges - certainly as a journalist - is deciding what to write about next. I'm always thinking about what might interest a reader. Then it's a question of deciding on how much factual information is beneficial and educational but at the same time creative. I try to research topics well so that I can impart knowledge and information and hopefully give the reader enjoyment but leave them more knowledgeable at the same time. Another big challenge comes with the photography. My main interests as a photographer are wildlife and street photography. Strangely enough, architecture, wildlife photography and street photography are much more connected than may be apparent. As an architect I understand buildings and the built environment. I am comfortable in cities and when I photograph buildings I am often looking for interesting patterns, texture, form, light and shade, colour and detail. As a wildlife photographer I have spent many hours with different animals in their natural environments. If you do that for long enough you start to understand how different animals behave and how to interpret signs that give clues as to what may happen next. That is key to being ready for that split-second moment that presents the image you want to capture. The great American photographer Elliot Erwin once said, "All the technique in the world

doesn't compensate for the inability to notice." One thing I had learned was how to observe and anticipate. As animals, humans are no different. Desmond Morris understood that rather well when he wrote *The Human Zoo* back in 1969. The progression to photographing the human animal in its natural, city environment was therefore a relatively easy step for me, but I also understood that street photography had to be more than just capturing a moment. There needed to be a narrative, a story that would draw the viewer into the shot and hold them. I want my images to evoke feelings, to make the viewer ponder and interpret, to make them want to know more about the story that lies behind the image. For me, street photography is visual prose. As the Belgian surrealist René Magritte observed, "Each thing we see hides something else we want to see." The challenge in all of that is how do I draw the reader or viewer into my stories or images to leave a lasting thought, a memory or an emotion? It is the same with all the creative things I do. How do I connect with the viewer or listener, whether it be through journalism, creative writing, poetry, painting, theatre or music? I mentioned before that almost everything I do has people and communities at its heart. I would add that everything I do is also about making connections. The other challenge is how do I manage my time? I am fortunate to be surrounded by a great group of like-minded people who share my enthusiasm and the workload. I tend to come up with the ideas, but I could not deliver all that I dreamed up without wonderful friends and colleagues.

What are the rewards?

The principal rewards are meeting other creative people, making new friends, learning new things through research and writing and making people happy. Of all the creative things I do if I can bring enjoyment to others and entertain and enlighten in some small way then I am happy. Writing for Celtic Life has enabled me to explore many parts of the Celtic world. My search for stories and images has taken me all over Scotland,

from big cities to remote islands. It has taken me to Galicia and Italy and, as a journalist, has given me access to events, places and situations that otherwise would not have been possible.

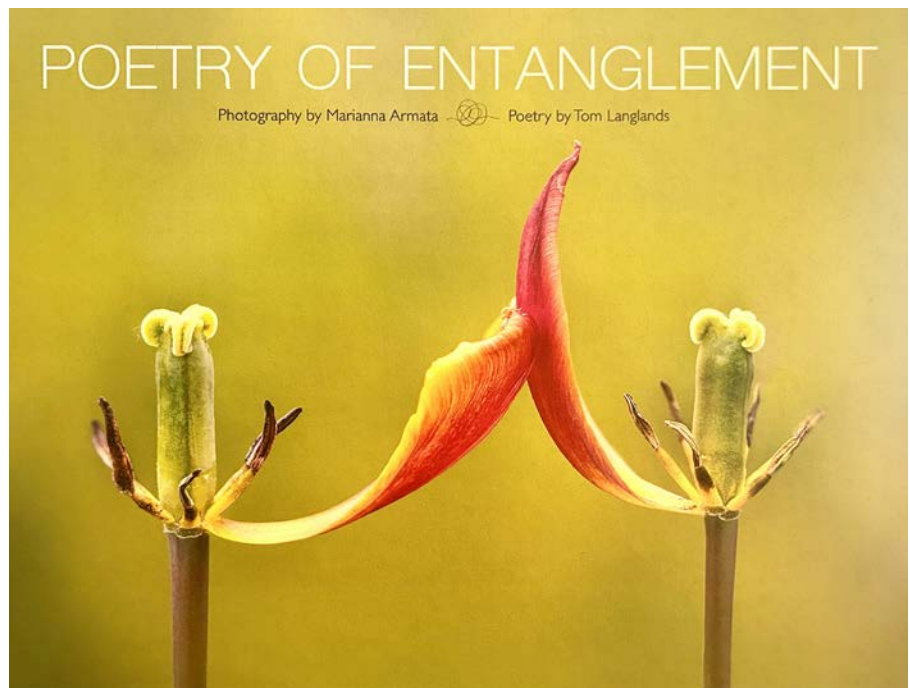
What have been some highlights?

Chasing photographs has given me some spectacular opportunities to witness wildlife all across the country. I have photographed gannets on the Bass Rock, arctic terns in the Outer Hebrides, white-tailed sea Eagles off the coast of Mull, leaping dolphins in the Moray Firth, spectacular starling murmurations in the Scottish borders and squirrels in the Highlands to name but a few. Many of these images have won awards and have been featured in international salons and exhibitions.

Is your creative process more 'inspirational' or 'perspirational'?

I guess the normal answer to that question would be that it is about 10 per cent inspiration and 90 per cent perspiration. I'm not sure that is the case for me and I'm not sure categorizing creativity like that is useful. It's a much more complicated process. I am by nature an ideas person. I guess I am what you would describe as 'a creative'. I am always exploring new ventures using the creative arts - such as establishing a writing class, a drama group, a poetry club or a music team. Within each and all of these groups I come up with ideas of how we can use the skills and resources we have or expand them and connect with others. The inspirational part is a continual process as I explore new things and try to work out how we can engage across all of these groups and with the wider community. Each stage brings with it a further layer of inspiration. s an example -

Once I had the creative writing classes up and running I realized some people were good at script writing and had a skill for acting. From that I joined forces with another writer, and we now write our own productions. Then we created a drama group and approached the local picture house owner with a view to establishing the newly founded drama



group and its half dozen members in the empty building. In discussions with him and his contacts we got access to an incredible range of technical equipment and expertise that enabled us to start combining film and theatre. We now have access to a videographer, green screen technology and associated software and sound and vision specialists. Having been involved with theatre in some form or another for most of my life I direct as well as write and with a desire to engage with the wider community we connected with the local history society to ensure productions based on local events and characters are accurate and we also brought in a dancing teacher and her pupils. These things give other community groups an opportunity to be part of a bigger picture. The drama group now has some 25 members with the full range of skills you would expect to find in any theatre production. The age range of the members is 8yrs to 80+yrs. I now spend a lot of my time dreaming up what we can do next and where we could perhaps take it. It is a similar approach that has given rise to a small writing group now having a dedicated poetry section and widely acclaimed, spoken word, open-mic event on a monthly basis. This

not only draws great writers to us but enables our group to connect with others in other parts of the country. The local photography group now provides images for marketing and also records what we do. It is all a process of community building and making connections. How much of all of that is inspiration and how much is perspiration is a difficult division to make. The inspiration process can be part perspiration, and the perspiration often informs the inspiration process. For me they are inextricably combined.

What is it about poetry that you find so inspiring?

It's the way you can express ideas and trigger emotions through the creative use of language. For me, poetry is the ballet of dance or the opera of music. It's the clever, imaginative use of minimal words and the reimagining of language. It's all tied up with semiotics again. I also find the formatting of poems, the way they are split into lines and stanzas and the way they are arranged on a page is that fascinating connection between the written word and art. Similarly, there is nothing to beat listening to a poem being read; it gives it life and a connectedness. I enjoy reading and writing prose, but I also love exploring poetic prose, prose

poetry and poetry. The boundaries between those genres may blur at times but the gap between prose and poetry is significant. I am passionate about poetry. Somehow it comes from, and reaches, the soul - a bit like some music. That is why I am drawn to those singer songwriters that I would refer to as the poets of song - Paul Simon, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Tom Waits. I find most modern pop music to be trite and unimaginative - perhaps its just an age thing!

What makes a good poem or photograph?

I have combined those two questions because I feel the answer to each is inextricably linked. Poem or photograph - it has to make me stop and take note. There has to be a meaning beyond the obvious, a layering or depth that makes me want to scratch the surface to find the hidden message - the narrative. I want to be made to stop and to pick it apart to discover the hidden gems that lie within the words or the photograph. Its like uncovering gold hidden in seams of quartz or nuggets within the tempting silt of a riverbed. The locations may be wonderful in themselves but there is more to discover if we know how to look. Once we discover that first glimpse of gold the dig for treasure is ever more tempting, exhilarating and exciting. For wildlife photography it is about capturing the special moment, for street photography it is about the hidden meaning - both involve a narrative which brings me back to the power of words and particularly poetry. Language is what defines us, how we use it elevates us.

What is it about Scotland that lends itself so well to photography?

It is stunning scenery, changeable weather, great wildlife, fascinating urban environments with a sense of history and the people. When weather fronts roll in from the Atlantic, places like the Outer Hebrides can bring all four seasons in one day. It's inspirational for photographers, artists and poets alike. I am a visual thinker. Over a lifetime I have come to realize that not everyone



thinks like that. I think in pictures, I can see clearly whatever it is that I am imagining, and I think that is what defines me. Whether it be a photograph, a poem or a piece of prose they all end up as strong images in my head. It's a two-way process for me - words become images and images are what I try to convey in words. Words, poetry, music and photography are all image building mediums, Scotland with its history and culture is a rich image building enabler.

What advice might you have for younger people looking to start a career in writing and/or photography?

Simply go for it! As you start on that journey, make it joyful and exciting and never forget that is where it started. As you progress, delve more into the masters of writing and photography and learn as you go. Formal courses may be advantageous but immersing yourself in the subject and retaining the excitement and joy and sense of adventure that took you there in the first place is what will keep you there.

What's next on your creative agenda?

I have more ideas than the time or energy left to accomplish them all. However, without doubt this is the most creative time of my life. I have just completed writing a Christmas play called "The Christmas That Almost Wasn't" and

am in the process of directing that and working with an exciting team of people to bring it to reality this Christmas. I am collating a poetry anthology featuring the work of a group of local poets - including my own poetry. I have pulled a small team of people together to explore the possibility of bringing an annual music and words festival to Auchterarder using a range of locations and options across the town. I am working with the drama group to create a Culture Trail utilizing QR codes located on plaques fixed to key buildings so that reading the code brings a live actor in period costume on to viewers screens to explain the history or characters relevant to that location. I am currently exploring podcasts featuring interviews with local people or documentary style audio recordings about places and events. I have a forthcoming meeting with a radio station to explore the promotion of arts and culture and am involved in setting up a photography exhibition with the local camera club and also an exhibition of my own street photography. Along with those specific projects I run photography workshops, creative writing classes, open-mic evenings, a drama group and still find space to paint watercolours, draw and sketch, write - journalism and poetry, take photographs and occasionally go fly-fishing for relaxation. When I put all of that on paper I realize just how full-on my creative life is, but I wouldn't have it any other way!

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INSPIRATION ORCHESTRA - SUMMER 2024

The Inspiration Orchestra

A small Scottish musical ensemble is making a big splash.

*Words and photos by
Tom Langlands.*



I first heard The Inspiration Orchestra when a small ensemble of members played in the Garden Room at Pitmeadow Farm, Dunning, Perthshire as part of their 2023 Concert Tour. It was Christmastime and the atmosphere was magical. Vine branches meandered across a translucent ceiling below a starlit sky as I enjoyed a warm glass of mulled wine. As the musicians took up position and started playing, it hit me that I was witnessing something profoundly inspirational, moving, and humbling. Led by musician and tutor Ian White, the orchestra comprised individuals with varying degrees of mental and physical disability - some quite pronounced - and almost all requiring the help of an assistant. To produce a performance from the challenges I saw before me was nothing short of a seasonal miracle.

Fast forward to May 2024, and I am in the wonderful setting of Pitmeadow Farm once again - this time for an all-day event of farmyard fun, classic cars, and music from The Inspiration Orchestra. Farm owners Ewan and Fiona McLean-Foreman had converted their large barn into a concert venue. When I arrived, White was running around like a madcap roadie setting up keyboards, music stands, a mixer desk, microphones, amplifiers, monitors, and lights. Despite the anticipated four hundred visitors comprising mostly family, friends and caretakers, there is much at stake - namely, the reputation of The Inspiration Orchestra as an outreach project, the expectations of audience members, and, most importantly, the enjoyment of the individual musicians - many of whom regard this as the highlight of their year. Given the logistical challenges and the needs of participants, concerts were delivered in three thirty-minute sessions throughout the day. Each performance featured a different combination of musicians of all ages - always fronted by White on guitar and vocals, holding things together. I attended all performances and listened as audience mem-

bers were wowed with a selection of ballads, gospel songs, country and folk classics, good old-time rock 'n' roll, and even two numbers co-written by Bob Boyd - the band's bassist - and White. I zeroed-in on lines from Boyd's song Beautiful Lady -

*It's not been easy, it's been painful
But she gives courage to me and it's wonderful*

and his equally poignant Waiting for Monday -

*He's lonely and sad, dreams of love that he had
Now he's walking alone, lost in his dream*

These were powerful words that hit hard. I watched tears flow, comforting arms placed around neighbours' shoulders, and an emotionally charged silence fill the room.

“Each performer was different; some were born with disabilities while others were affected by illness or injury later in life. Many were unable to comprehend or even articulate their own story.

Away from the poignant lyrics, any awkward tensions were assuaged with uplifting numbers that offered sing-along or accompanying hand-clapping opportunities.

White is the musical and production brains behind The Inspiration Orchestra. His mantra is simple, “If you are disabled and want to play music with The Inspiration Orchestra, we will find a place for you irrespective of your disability or your musical ability.”



The delivery is more complex. Looking around I see individuals in wheelchairs, others with major mobility issues, some unable to lift their heads, and some with significant sight or hearing loss. Undaunted, White has created devices or adapted instruments to meet their specific needs. A guitarist has his instrument laid flat on a table. It has a single string. Before each song a capo, is fitted at the relevant fret to ensure that when plucked, the string is in harmony with the key of the song. A keyboard player has a sensor fitted that, when touched by her head, plays a note. Coloured lights sit before some players. These flash when White presses a foot pedal, indicating a change of note. Drums, tambourine, and a drink can filled with rice provide the percussive drive. The result was remarkably harmonious. I witnessed solo performances on violin, harmonica, guitar, keyboards, and vocals. Audiences showed their appreciation with rapturous applause, and participants beamed with joy at the acknowledgement of their achievements.

Keen to learn more about White and the background of The Inspiration Orchestra, we met at his Perthshire home. Coffee and a comfortable sofa seemed a mile away from the stresses of performance. "Music has always been my passion," he remarks casually. It is an understatement from a man who rose through the ranks of school concerts and the folk music scene in Ayr, and, later, in Aberdeen in the 1970s and early 1980s. It was

while studying for an arts degree at Aberdeen University that he met his wife, Carol. He acknowledges her influence, "She opened me up to the Christian faith, changing me from folk club performer to Christian evangelical singer-songwriter. None of this would have happened without her." He recalls the moment of transition, "I was playing a gig at Inverary in late '78 when I felt something tell me to stop this pub work." He cancelled all engagements for the next three months. A week later he was in a church in Aberdeen listening to touring evangelist singer Dave Pope, who ran a band called The Alethians that had toured with Cliff Richard. Pope offered White a place in his band, and for the next six months they engaged in an evangelical music tour of the U.K. In the early 1980s, he undertook a theology degree, but it was music that drove his evangelical outreach. For over two decades, he was one of the most influential Christian singer-songwriters of his generation, selling over 250,000 albums and undertaking multiple trips to perform in the USA (20), New Zealand (12), Europe (6), Australia (4) and Africa (1). Times change, however, and by 2012 his 'big era' was over.

In 2014, while playing at a Capability Scotland disabled home, he noticed a girl holding down a single note on a keyboard. The resultant drone was a unique moment of harmony and gave him the idea of musical partnering with disabled people. He puts down his coffee cup and momentarily loses

himself before announcing, "That was the moment The Inspiration Orchestra was conceived."

He acknowledges other 'nudges' along the way, such as the time he was playing to 1,200 people in a hall in Aberdeen. In the audience was a woman named Margaret Benson who had a disabled son. Years later, she told him that she turned to her friend that evening, saying, "I feel in my bones that one day I will be in a disabled ministry with that guy, but he doesn't know it yet and I've not to tell him." In 2014, White met Benson and asked her to help him set up a charitable trust for disabled people. The following year, The Inspiration Orchestra became a registered Scottish charity. Currently, its members are drawn from Tayside, but White regards it as a 'start-up' project that could be expanded and rolled out across the country. He tutors the musicians at home, in small groups within community halls or in places such as Pitmeadow Farm.

***“Back in the barn, I note the pride, sense of achievement, and self-worth that pervades the orchestra - moments when the human spirit rises highest to defy great adversity.*”**

Living in a profit-oriented society that often alienates the disadvantaged, we diminish the value of what they can offer and what they can teach us. When these individuals make music, there is a joy in the way they connect and communicate despite the enormous hurdles they overcome to do so. When the music ends, the hugs, the congratulations, and the laughter spill out far beyond the confines of a barn. I leave Pitmeadow Farm, profoundly inspired, moved, and humbled - even more so than the first time I heard The Inspiration Orchestra play. ~ Words & photos by Tom Langlands

The Inspiration Orchestra is seeking funding to commission a video for promotional purposes. Donations may be made through The Inspiration Orchestra website and would be received with gratitude.

Pitmeadow Farm offers high-quality, self-catering accommodation in a stunning location in rural Perthshire. The Inspiration Orchestra acknowledges the contribution of Ewan and Fiona McLean-Foreman with gratitude.

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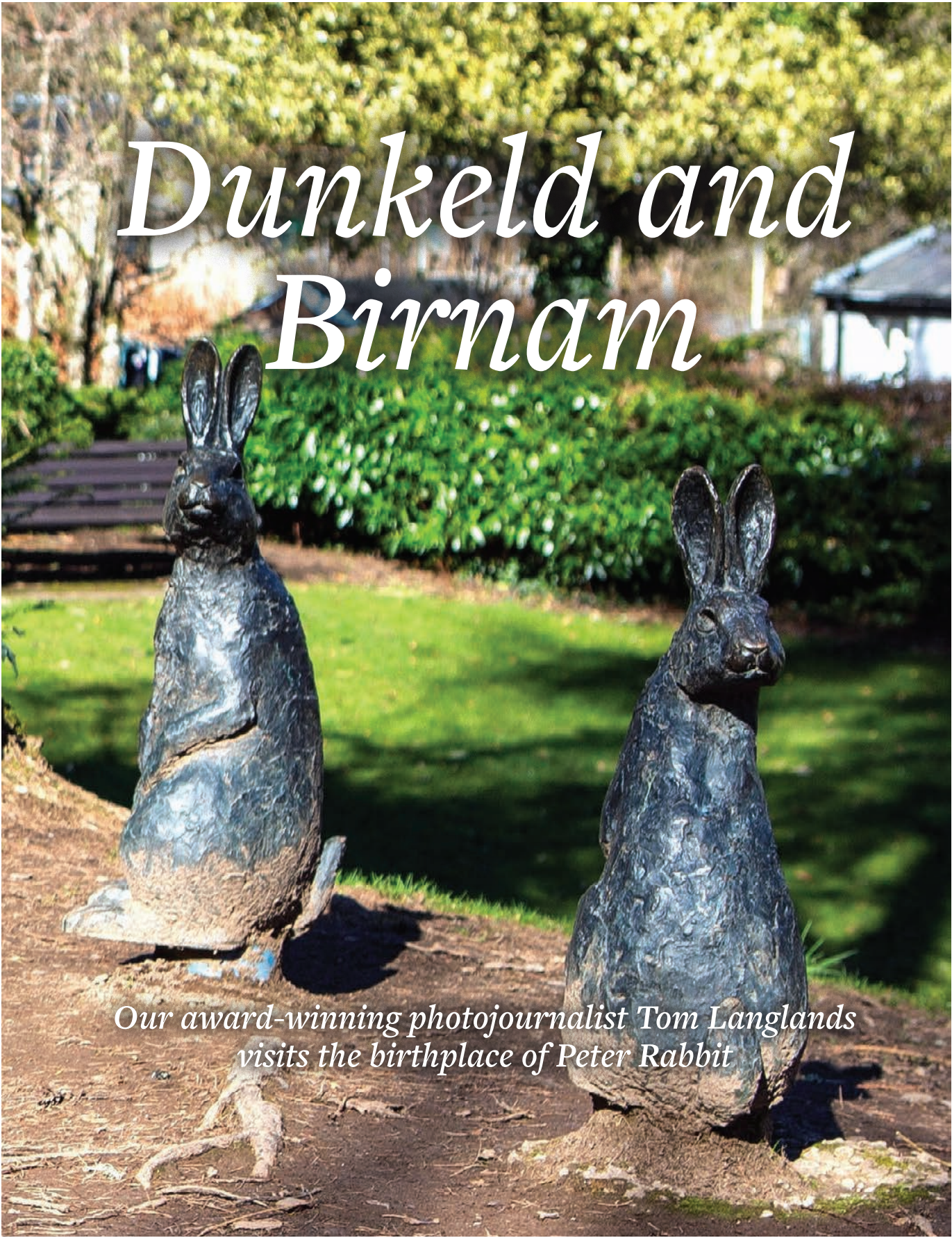
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A photograph of two bronze statues of rabbits standing on a dirt mound in a garden. The rabbits are facing forward, slightly angled towards each other. The background is a lush green garden with trees and a wooden path. The title 'Dunkeld and Birnam' is overlaid in a large, white, serif font.

Dunkeld and Birnam

Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands visits the birthplace of Peter Rabbit



Having spent 20 years researching my family tree, the fun now is in discovering what places were like at the time my ancestors lived there and trying to interpret the clues embedded in old photographs. One such photograph in my possession is a Victorian-era image of my grandmother as a small girl with a bucket and a spade at the side of a river. My grandmother was brought up by friends of the family after her own mother died when she was an infant.

Although all the families involved came from Dundee, there are many images of my grandmother as a child taken at locations across Perthshire that suggest her surrogate parents had connections with the area. I have never discovered what those connections were. Thanks to the bridge in the background of the faded photograph, I managed to trace this location to a crossing over the River Tay between Dunkeld on the north bank and Little Dunkeld and Birnam on the south bank. The original image dates to around 1900, and the bridge remains to this day. Keen to learn more about the history of where the photograph was taken, my starting point was Birnam Arts.

Birnam Arts has a history dating back to 1880, when it was known as the Birnam Institute and was founded as a community facility for “education and entertainment.” The original stone building was extended in

the early 2000s to form The Birnam Arts and Conference Centre.

Rachael Livingston is Shop Manager and Manager of the Beatrix Potter Exhibition that is housed there. Standing before an ornate 18th-century stone column rescued from the grounds of nearby Dalguise House, Livingston explains, “Many people are familiar with the stories created by the children’s author Beatrix Potter and are aware of her connections with England’s Lake District. Less well known is her link with rural Perthshire and the decade of summers spent at Dalguise House. The young Potter would have been familiar with this column, having spent many hours playing in the garden where this was located.”

Perusing the excellent exhibition, I learned that Potter was born in London in 1866. She enjoyed a privileged upbringing, but her parents were wealthy socialites and her childhood was a rather lonely one. During the summer months, the family escaped London to take lengthy breaks at the beautiful but rather isolated Dalguise House. Throughout her formative years, this was Potter’s summer playground, and it was here amongst the wildlife of the woodlands and riverbank, that she let loose her imagination. In subsequent years, she returned on several occasions and in 1892, she met local postman Charles Macintosh. Together, they explored a mutual fascination with fungi,

leading Potter to further develop a growing interest in the natural sciences and conservation. In that same year, she sent an illustrated letter from Scotland to the son of her former governess. This letter is acknowledged as the forerunner to her first book - *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Further books, such as *The Tale of Jeremy Fisher* and *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggly-Winkle*, also have their roots in rural Perthshire. My visit to Birnam Arts culminated with a walk through the Beatrix Potter Garden inspired by the characters Potter created.

“Of course,” noted Livingston, “Potter wasn’t the only writer to have been influenced by this part of rural Perthshire. Birnam Wood on the banks of the Tay was central to William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.” I thanked Livingston for an enlightening tour and took a short walk to the river in search of the Birnam Oak.

Perthshire is known as Big Tree Country, and Birnam Wood is one of the pivotal aspects of Macbeth, for it is when the titular character meets the three witches that they predict - “Macbeth shall never vanquish’d be until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him.”



Later in the play, Birnam Wood does indeed move toward Dunsinane Hill when the English army cuts off branches from the trees to use as camouflage during their advance on Macbeth's castle. It is believed that Shakespeare got his inspiration for this part of his play following a visit to Birnam in 1599. The Birnam Oak is a sessile oak and, given its size and girth, it is estimated to be around 600 years old. At that age, it would have been a mature specimen at the time of Shakespeare's visit. I found the iconic tree on a strip of land by the riverbank. Its ancient branches, gnarled and heavy, are now propped on timber supports for fear the trunk can no longer support their weight. To see the last remaining tree from the wood that existed when Shakespeare visited was a moving experience. Before leaving, I took a photograph, and as I looked through the camera lens, it felt rather like watching an aged relative leaning awkwardly on a walking frame. I didn't feel there was much chance of this specimen advancing anywhere and so I left it in peace and headed for the bridge. Before crossing into Dunkeld, I paused to admire a statue of Niel Gow - the legendary 18th-century Scottish fiddle player and contemporary of Robert Burns, whose tunes influenced the airs of many of Burns' songs. There is now an annual Niel Gow fiddle festival held in the town.

Dunkeld is a fine example of a Scottish country town; its mainly two-story buildings of simple, vernacular design, punctuated with some fine traditional shopfronts and rooftop dormers line each side of Bridge Street. I head down High Street to the impressive, ornately carved Mercat Cross - or Atholl Memorial Fountain. Here, the street widens into a large triangular space with many of the buildings having been sensitively restored by the National Trust for Scotland. One such building is the Ell Shop. Affixed vertically to the corner of the building is a metal rod approximately 45 inches (1.14M) in length. This historic unit of measurement is known as an ell and this piece of metal memorabilia was likely used in a tailor's shop when cutting cloth.

Further west, by the gentle, grassed banks of the Tay, lies Dunkeld Cathedral. Around AD 730, the first monastery was built here by Celtic missionaries and the site has remained one of Christian significance since then. The relics of St Columbus were moved here from Iona in AD 849, following concerns about Viking raids on the Western Isles and consequently, Dunkeld became the religious center of Scotland. The current building, constructed between 1260 and 1501, is now a church of two halves - with the west end an historic ruin and the restored east end a functioning church. The cathedral and Dunkeld have suffered badly on two occasions in the past - once during the Reformation when anything considered "Catholic" was destroyed and again in 1869 during the first Jacobite rebellion. Having defeated the Royalist forces at the Battle of Killiecrankie to the north, the Ja-



cobites advanced on the Cameronians based at Dunkeld. The battle was a brutal and significant one that saw the Jacobites defeated and the town destroyed by fire. The Dunkeld that exists today was mostly rebuilt in the 18th-century and the early 19th-century.

I take a stroll along the river, head back toward the bridge, and find the exact spot where the photograph of my grandmother was taken over a century ago. The view is just the same as it was back then. When I look at old photographs, it is easy to miss simple clues that can reveal more. Looking closer I note that the women in the photograph are wearing large hats decorated with what appears to be flowers and ribbons. Could this have been an Easter excursion with the ladies dressed in Easter bonnets? Although my grandmother is smiling, I know that she had a rather lonely and isolated childhood perhaps not dissimilar from the loneliness felt by the young Beatrix Potter. As I ponder the scene before me, there are rabbits running along the riverbank, and I wonder if my grandmother saw any Easter bunnies that day or perhaps got a glimpse of Peter Rabbit himself.



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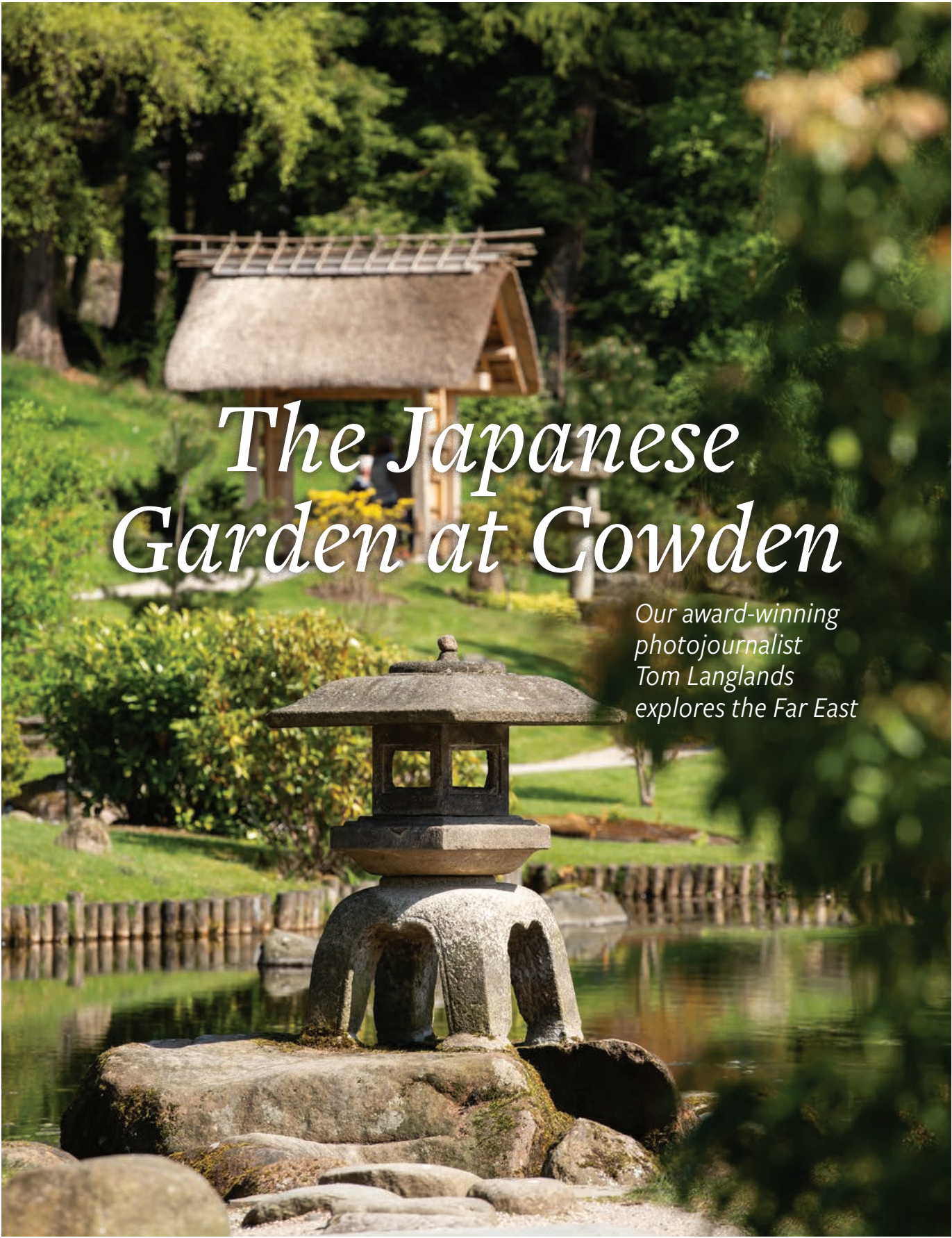
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The Japanese Garden at Cowden

*Our award-winning
photojournalist
Tom Langlands
explores the Far East*



Isabella “Ella” Robertson Christie was a remarkable Scotswoman whose visionary legacy lives on in a Japanese Garden she named Sha Raku En - “the place of pleasure and delight.” Sitting on a wooden bench and looking across the still water of a lochan towards the thatch-roofed Garden Pavilion, and with the faint smell of cherry blossom drifting in the air, I can vouch for the accuracy of the name - Sha Raku En. It is a place of exquisite beauty also.

Christie was born in 1861 in Midlothian. When she was four years of age, the family moved to Cowden Castle near Dollar in Clackmannanshire, where the climate and soil suited her father, who was an enthusiastic arborist. Being wealthy landowners, the family enjoyed the privilege of foreign travel. By the time of her father’s death in 1902, she had travelled extensively across Europe, as well as visiting Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. There then followed a series of ever more adventurous journeys that would have required a considerable degree of fortitude for a single woman at that time. She is known to have visited the ancient city of Samarkand, lying on the Great Silk Road linking China and the Mediterranean, becoming the first Western woman to visit the Khanate of Khiva. Her travels took her through India, Ceylon, Kashmir, Tibet, Malaya, and Borneo. She met the Dalai Lama, attended a banquet hosted by the Maharaja of Kashmir, and had dinner with Commander in Chief, India, Lord Kitchener. Between 1907 and 1908, she visited China, Korea, Hong Kong, Russia, and Japan. While in Japan, she developed an interest in Japanese gardens. In Kyoto, she met sisters Ella and Florence du Cane. Together

they spent time visiting Japanese gardens. Ella du Cane produced acclaimed watercolour paintings and Florence was a writer. In 1908, they jointly published *The Flowers and Gardens of Japan*. That same year Christie returned to Scotland and started work on the creation of a Japanese Garden in the grounds of Cowden Castle.

Christie appointed Taki Handa - a female Japanese Garden designer and horticulturalist - to design the garden. She was affiliated with the Royal School of Garden Design in Nagoya, Japan, but in 1908, she was studying in England. Handa’s design wraps the garden around a lochan created by damming a small burn running through the estate. Resting at the foot of the gentle slope of the Ochil Hills, there is a similarity to geographical aspects of Japan, with the slopes of Mount Fuji being

noted as a particular inspiration.

For 17 years following the garden’s completion, Professor Suzuki, the Hereditary Head of the Soami School of Imperial Garden Design at Nagoya, visited regularly. Overseeing a team of Japanese gardeners, he ensured trees and shrubs were trimmed and pruned in accordance with the ethos and requirements of an authentic Japanese Garden. Working on Handa’s creation, he acknowledged it as being the best Japanese Garden in the Western World!

*Prior to this, no woman
had ever been officially credited
with the design of an authentic
Japanese Garden.*





Suzuki wasn't the only Japanese person responsible for the maintenance of the garden. Shinzaburo Matsuo lost his entire family in an earthquake and came to Scotland to embrace a new life as a gardener at Cowden. Arriving in 1925 and remaining until his death in 1937, he became a well-known figure in the local community. Fascinated by the man who had lost everything before coming to work in the Japanese Garden at Cowden and making Scotland his home, I went in search of his final resting place. I found it in a small peaceful corner of Muckhart Churchyard only a few miles from the garden he tended for 12 years.

Ella Christie passed away in 1949. Her adventurous, globetrotting spirit resulted in her being in the first group of women to be elected Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in 1913. She was also elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of Scotland, becoming Vice-President of the latter in 1934. With her death, the garden passed to her great nephew, Robert "Bobby" Christie Stewart. Cowden Castle was demolished in 1952 and, other than being opened a handful of times a year, the Japanese Garden closed to the public in 1955. Sadly, in a single night of mayhem in 1963, it suffered irreparable damage. Four teenagers entered the grounds, set fire to the buildings, destroyed the bridges, and threw the shrines and lanterns into the water. It had taken decades of painstaking work to bring to maturity and it was wrecked in a few hours of wanton destruction.

By the 1980s, the garden had fallen into disrepair with vegetation out of control and the pond choked with weeds. Despite its



condition, it still attracted the interest of those in the West who knew of its existence, as well as Japanese visitors who understood its significance. During the 1990s, the garden passed to Sara Stewart - the youngest daughter of Bobby Stewart and the great-great niece of Ella Christie. With Sara working in London, Bobby spent much of his retirement endeavouring to maintain control of a garden that was succumbing to nature. He used a carhorse to remove trees that were endangering rare shrubs and erected temporary bridges to access the overgrown island. The lochan was drained in 2012 to remove overgrown weeds and to locate fragments of the lanterns and shrines that had been vandalized in 1963. The scale of the task was daunting. As it happened, Professor Masao Fukuhara of Osaka University was in Scotland in 2013. He was responsible for the restoration of the Japanese Gardens at Kew, London and Tatton Park, Cheshire. In 2001, he received the gold medal at the Chelsea Flower Show and his winning garden is now in the National Botanic Garden of Wales. Aware of the importance of the garden at Cowden, he requested to visit it. After several hours of soulful contemplation on site, he agreed to lead a full restoration project. Commissioned by Sara, he returned in the spring of 2014 with a team of volunteers, associates, and students. Within two weeks, they restored the islands on the west side of the garden, but it became apparent that a significant investment would be needed in order to continue. Sara established the charity, The Japanese Garden at Cowden Castle

SCIO, with its purpose being the restoration and maintenance of this historic site. Since its formation, the charity has benefited from donations by various foundations and public funds, with the National Heritage Lottery being the principal funder of the new Garden Pavilion. Although only partially restored, the garden opened again to the public in 2017. Visitor projections had been set at 10,000 per annum, and notwithstanding the impact of Covid lockdowns, the garden was able to remain open for 11 months between 2018 and March 2020 and attracted 30,000 visitors. In 2021, it welcomed over 40,000 visitors.

The restoration project is still ongoing. There are plans to build a Japanese Pavilion, housing a restaurant, lecture room, shop, and event space. Existing visitor facilities are adequate, but don't complement the beauty of the place and need to be replaced. Raising funds for such ambitious plans remains the biggest challenge, but speaking with Sara, it is evident that she remains passionate about the project. "I am an artist's agent by trade, and I never imagined I would put myself through the cold fear of driving a project such as this from concept to fruition. The garden offers so much enjoyment to so many, and I owe it to Ella Christie and all of our visitors to ensure that a day at the Japanese Garden at Cowden continues to be as wonderful and restorative as it was in her day."

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Purves Puppets and Biggar Puppet Theatre

As our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands explains, one family takes a hands-on approach to puppetry.



BIGGAR PUPPETRY - AUGUST 2021

In an age of computers, tablets, smartphones and sophisticated gaming consoles, you may be forgiven for thinking that the ancient art of puppetry must have succumbed to the onslaught of modern technology. However, a small, family-run puppet theatre company in Scotland understands and appreciates that there is still a fascination with this old-school form of storytelling.

Biggar Puppet Theatre is the home of Purves Puppets and is the realization of a lifetime of dreams and effort by Ian Purves, with the help of his wife Jill and their children Colin and Victoria. Purves can trace his fascination with puppets back to some of

his earliest childhood memories. His parents were teachers; his father was Scottish and his mother English, and they spent some years in India prior to Purves' birth in Islington,



London. Soon after, the family relocated to Hawick in the Scottish Borders, where they settled. It was there, at around the age of four years, that Purves started to take an interest in puppets, perhaps influenced by the Asian art and artefacts brought back from his parents' travels that adorned the family home.

This was also an era of few television sets, and families made their own entertainment rather than having it streamed into the home. With teacher parents, the Purves' house was a place that inspired fun learning and imaginative exploration, and puppetry was a perfect outlet for the creative imagination of a young boy.



As a child, Purves' early puppets were made from just paper, cardboard, and string, but they would become ever more interesting and complex as time went on. His father built him a little stage from plywood, complete with painted scenery and a miniature lighting set-up, while his mother helped him write storylines, and with a gramophone player providing suitable background music, they would put on shows.

It soon became the norm that a puppet show was part of the entertainment whenever friends and family gathered.

Meanwhile, future wife Jill had been born in Plymouth but brought up in Dunfermline before her family relocated to Hong Kong where she lived for three years. Like Ian, she was influenced by cultural traditions of the Far East, developing a special enthusiasm for dressmaking before returning to Scotland.

They were destined to meet at Edinburgh University, where Ian was studying for an honours degree in English Literature, while at the same time running a university puppet club. By now, he was performing with his puppets at Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and their collective interests in puppetry and dressmaking made for a perfect combination as they began creating their own productions. They married in 1970, set up home in Edinburgh, and during the same year, Purves Puppets was born as a professional enterprise. This would be followed by a son, Colin, and a daughter, Victoria. Ian initially



Ian Purves and family

worked as a teacher and in his spare time put his literature degree to good use writing his own puppet theatre scripts, including 'I-don't-know-what, from-I-don't-know-where' - an adaptation of a famous Russian folktale. This became their first professional production and their respective parents assisted with the show. They soon made their mark on the Edinburgh scene and - on the back of appearances at the Fringe - It wasn't long before the Purves Puppets name began to spread internationally.

The children were involved from a young age and travelled with them as they took their shows on the road in the U.K. and abroad. Under the auspices of the Queen Noor of Jordan Foundation that promotes

cross-cultural links between countries, they were invited to perform in Jordan and Syria. There were also invitations to showcase in Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, where they performed in the National Theatre in front of an audience of 2,500. Other countries included Spain, Italy and Malta, and they were amongst the first Westerners to perform in Poland, behind the Iron Curtain. Although Ian wrote the scripts, he made sure that the accompanying storyline was recorded in the native language.

"It was important to us that our act was easily interpreted by whatever country we were performing in and relevant to that specific audience. For that reason, we avoided storylines or gags that might be interpreted as having a political slant."

They learned over the years that interest in puppetry, like many forms of expressive art, can come and go and is subject to both changing national tastes and the influence of new things that come on the scene. As Jill explains, "Puppetry is a greater part of the culture of Slavic countries than here in the U.K., but when something like Jim Henson's Muppets or the British satirical Spitting



Image show comes along, then there is a resurgence of interest in puppetry.”

Although the family had moved from Edinburgh to resettle in the village of West Calder in West Lothian, their desire to promote the art of puppetry was still driving them towards new goals - particularly the idea of establishing their own theatre. It was Jill who found a property in Biggar - a town in the former burgh of South Lanarkshire in Scotland’s Southern Uplands and, importantly, located midway between Edinburgh and Glasgow. The property was an attractive family home that also had an adjacent coach house that could be converted into a puppet theatre. They acquired the property, and Biggar Puppet Theatre was created.

With experience in most types of puppetry, they now specialize in productions using black light where scenery and characters are illuminated using ultra violet light, and the operatives, clad in black, can move about unseen. For Ian, it is a method that reflects vivid colours, draws viewers into imaginary worlds, and enhances the experience. “It is not without its problems though, as it is all too easy for black-clad puppeteers to trip over each other on a dark stage.”

Productions were family affairs with Ian and Jill writing the scripts together and all family members recording the voices. Jill and Victoria created stunning costumes



for puppets, and Colin became increasingly involved in the technical side with special effects, lighting, and sound. Victoria is the Grand Puppeteer, holding all the strings of the business together.

Over the decades, they have worked alongside some of the most famous names in Scottish show business, including Andy Stewart, Jimmy Logan, and The Krankies. Purves Puppets has spent years promoting Scotland and aspects of its popular culture to international audiences. The Loch Ness Monster - Nessie - has been seen on stages across the world and Scottish music has been heard - and sung - by many foreign audiences. As a family, they are cultural ambassadors and continue to entertain

audiences worldwide. Now in their 80s, Ian and Jill have concentrated their efforts at Biggar Puppet Theatre, where they also offer puppetry workshops and tend to a shop, a tearoom, and a playpark.

Colin has taken the skills he inherited and has moved on to working with some of the biggest names and companies in film and stage productions. He has operated puppets in Star Wars, Jurassic Park, and The Muppets, but also works on other aspects of computer-generated imagery and special effects. He still lives locally and assists with family productions whenever possible.

As with many businesses, it has been a difficult period for Purves Puppets with the theatre closed due to the COVID-19 lockdown. They have used their website and social media to continue reaching out to audiences with online theatre, backstage tours, and productions available for download. As the world starts to open up, Jill is excited to get back out doing what she loves most - entertaining audiences with puppet shows. Ian agrees enthusiastically, adding, “We would love to have the chance to perform in North America. It is one corner of the world where Purves Puppets hasn’t yet been staged!”

All photographs courtesy of Purves Puppets

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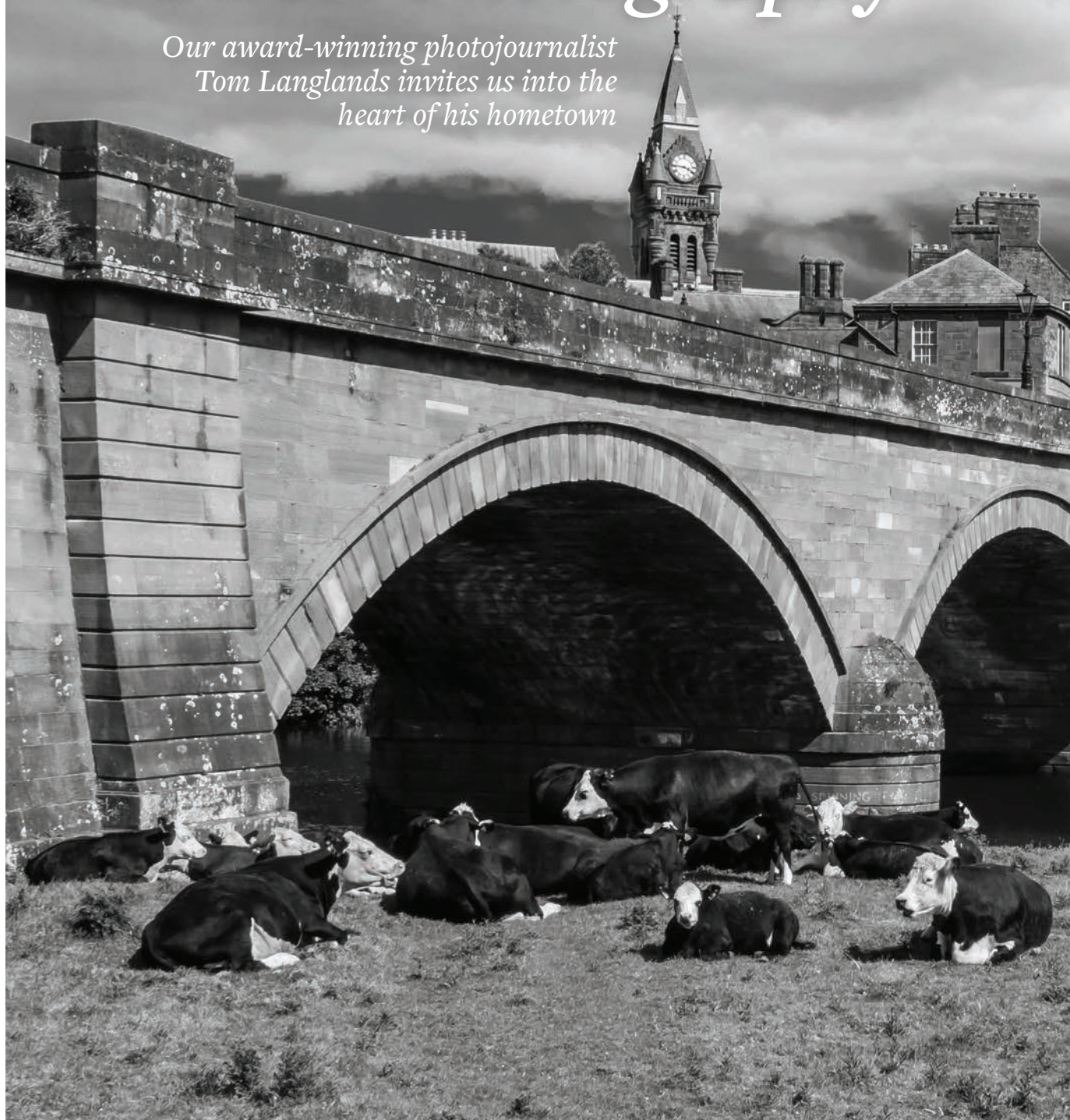
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Annan Street Photography

*Our award-winning photojournalist
Tom Langlands invites us into the
heart of his hometown*





My wife and I moved to Annan in southwest Scotland almost 40 years ago. It was never meant to be a permanent stay but rather a temporary pause on a return journey where the outbound leg had taken us from Dundee to London in search of work. After a year in Annan, we realized how much this small market town had to offer and how its location was ideal for road connections to other parts of the U.K. When we wanted the bustle of city life, a little over an hour by car would take us to Glasgow or Edinburgh, and when we wanted scenery and solitude, the rural landscapes of Dumfries and Galloway or the English Lake District were on our doorstep. Wanting to better understand the town, I immersed myself in learning about its history and, in those early years, I teamed up with a local history teacher and together we gave guided walking tours of Annan for visitors and incomers like myself.

As the coronavirus swept the world at the start of this year a strange and unexpected thing happened to me; I saw Annan in a different light. When lockdown came and the government encouraged us to take daily exercise, I often found myself wandering through the town. Devoid of vehicles and people, the empty streets came alive in a surprisingly different way. Free from the need to watch out for cars and pedestrians, and in the absence of the other sights and sounds that bombard us daily, I was able to

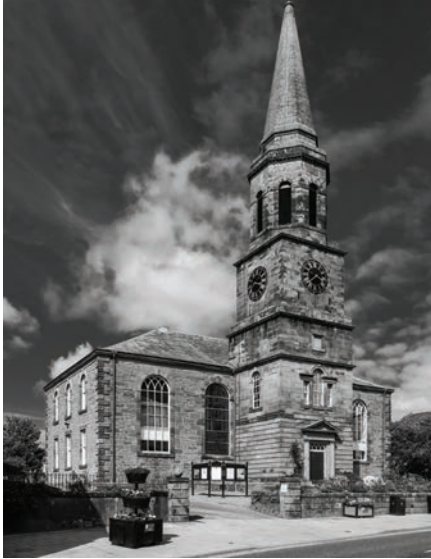
look around and let my mind roam free in the silence. I stood on the hill that once elevated the famed Bruce family's 12th century, motte-and-bailey castle and I swear I heard the toing and froing of horsemen crossing the river shallows below. Fast-forwarding the centuries, I was jolted by the sound of gunfire accompanied by shouts and screams as yet another English raid razed the town. As the imaginary smoke and flames subsided, I wandered the High Street and saw the people mingling around the open-air meat market, and, further still, I was hit with the smell from Fish Cross, where the local fishermen sold their catch. I passed Robert Burns making his way from the Provost's House to the Buck Inn, clutching his freshly-penned *The Deil's Awa Wi' the Exciseman*. Hans Christian Anderson stepped out of the Blue Bell Inn, Thomas Carlyle bade me "good-morning" as he headed to school, Hugh Clapperton stopped to inform me he had just returned from Canada and was visiting his hometown before heading off to explore the course of the River Niger and local preacher Edward Irving was being drummed out of town for heresy! Dorothy Wordsworth passed through noting, "The town of Annan made me think of France and Germany; many of the houses large and gloomy, the size of them outrunning the comforts. One thing that was like Germany pleased me: the shopkeepers express their calling by some device or painting; bread-bakers have

biscuits, loaves, cakes painted on their window-shutters; blacksmiths' horseshoes, iron tools, etc.; and so on through all trades."

In this mishmash of time and people, I heard the clattering of horses and carriages associated with the coaching inns and I witnessed the future Emperor of France - Prince Louis Napoleon - staying at the Queensberry Arms Hotel as he headed to the medieval re-enactment tournament at Eglinton in Ayrshire.

I stopped to watch the master stonemasons working on the prestigious buildings that still define the town today.





A young Ben Nicholson was building some of the world's largest tea-clippers at Annan harbour and Port Street was bustling with shipbuilders, joiners and sailmakers. These were the heydays before trains and cars changed the economic landscape and returned the town to more modest times. These were also the days captured by early photographers who left a legacy of images that provide an insight into Annan's past.

As a photographer, I was fascinated with these old images, but it wasn't the recording of static moments in time that intrigued me. As I looked beyond the blurred figures in their flowing black dresses and dark suits, I could see faces that spoke of prosperity or misery, of wealth, and of poverty. These photographs were not just a record of their day; they were a window into the soul of a town and its inhabitants. Walking Annan's empty streets, I became conscious of the fact that while we exist in a given moment in time, we are also part of a story that started long before our own chapter began and will continue to be read long after our chapter has ended. How it is read by future generations depends upon how it is recorded by the current one. That was when I knew that I had to use my camera to capture the spirit of the town and its people through this unique and difficult period in its history.

The lack of people and cars made the architecture more prominent and so I began by photographing the empty streets and buildings. It felt important to capture the

beauty of what previous generations had left us and, in doing so, show the current generation what was at risk of being lost through decay and lack of investment. As the days and weeks passed, I switched my attention to recording people returning in small, tentative numbers and then in greater numbers. I needed to show what it was like when the wearing of masks became compulsory and how some people found fun in personalizing them. I wanted also to capture the difficulties, the sadness and the hope and joy that shine through the masks. Having experienced the emotions evoked when viewing the photographs of previous generations, I knew my images needed to be more than just a record.

For me, street photography is visual prose - the difference between recording a moment and creating a mystery. It has as much to do with what the image doesn't show as what it does.

For my street photography, I prefer to work mostly in monochrome. In some instances, colour is effective, but it can also distract as different colours draw the eye to different parts of the image. Monochrome photographs allow the viewer to concentrate on the subject matter and the story behind an image as well, as creating a timeless qual-

ity that allows photographs to retain their impact through the ages.

There are, however, always exceptions, and one of my favourite photographs from Annan is indeed a colour one. It was of a young woman standing outside a shop on a sunny day. As I went to press the shutter, she looked directly at me. Her red hair, purple mask and gold, reflective sunglasses expressed strength and beauty, but with an air of mystery. To me, her appearance suggested that she respected this coronavirus but that she would not be cowed by it. In many ways she embodied the Celtic spirit and the ancient Celts' fascination with gold. I gave this image the title Pure Gold.

As the Belgian surrealist René Magritte noted, "Each thing we see hides something else we want to see." I aim to create images that evoke feelings and in which the viewer not only sees the obvious but is drawn to interpret and imagine. I want viewers to look into my images - not at them - as I strive to capture the true spirit of the time. The spirit of Annan lives in its history, its architecture, the people of yesteryear and the people of today. Through my photographs, I hope to show future generations what we have gone through in a small market town in southwest Scotland. We may be sharing the same coronavirus problem as the rest of the world, but Annan is unique, and so are its people.

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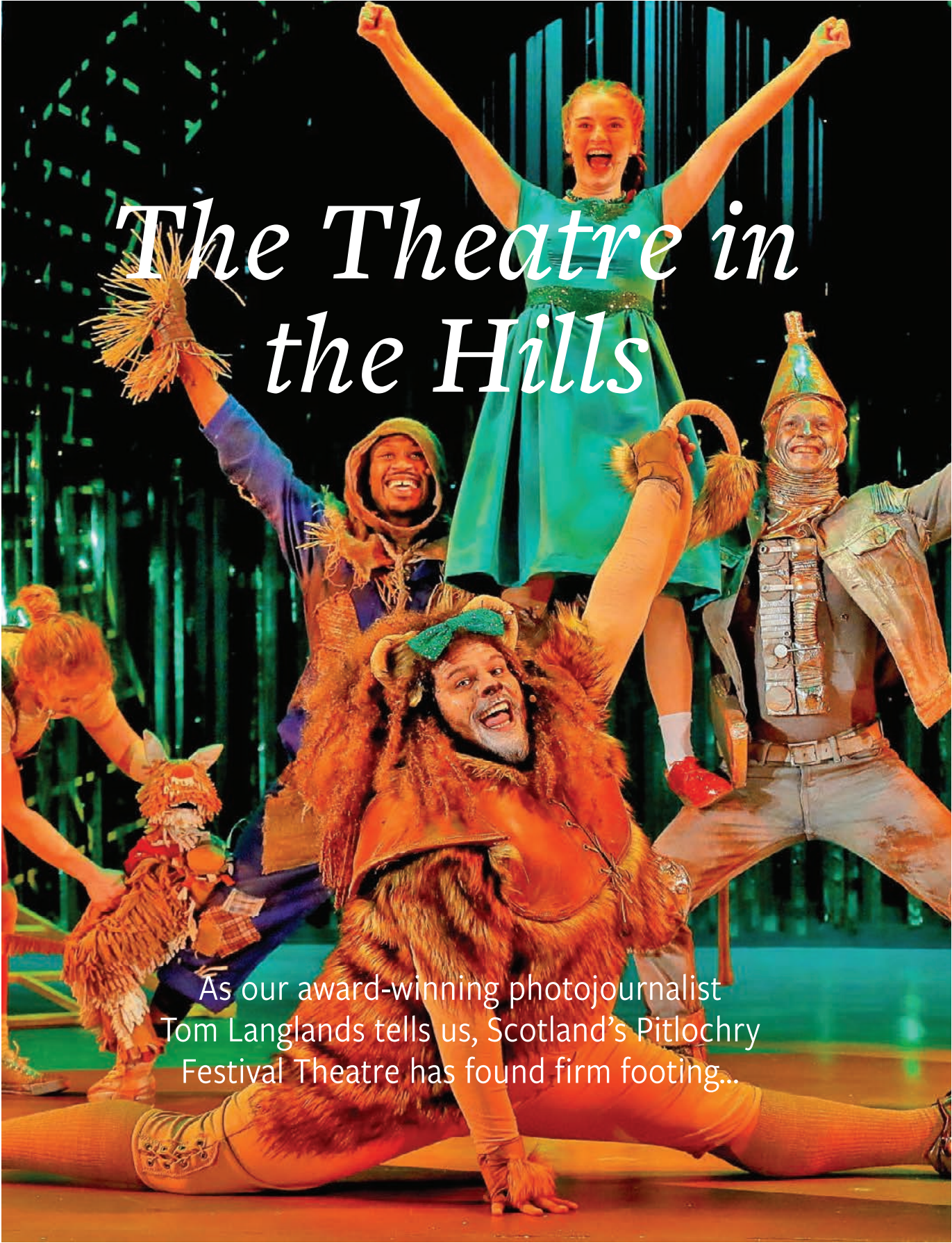


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The Theatre in the Hills

As our award-winning photojournalist
Tom Langlands tells us, Scotland's Pitlochry
Festival Theatre has found firm footing...

THEATRE IN THE HILLS ~ OCTOBER 2019



Elizabeth Newman



The Shoogly Bridge - so called because of its propensity to bounce and sway in use - is the name given by locals to the suspension footbridge that links the town of Pitlochry on the north side of the River Tummel with Pitlochry Festival Theatre by the old ferry port of Port-na-Craig on the waterway's south bank. I crossed the bridge several times this summer. On each occasion, I paused mid-span to let the oscillations subside and to watch the salmon in the water below head upstream to negotiate the salmon ladder at Pitlochry Dam before heading into Loch Faskally and beyond. I feel a real affinity with this part of Scotland, having spent many years fishing its rivers and photographing its wildlife. It engenders a sense of escapism, and it may be for that reason that I return most years to see productions at what has become known as the Theatre in the Hills.

Pitlochry Festival Theatre attracts visitors from all over the world, though few appreciate that its origins are as shoogly as the bridge they cross to get to it.

During the 1930s, John Stewart was a member of The Curtain Theatre that operated from the drawing room of a large townhouse at Woodside Terrace, Glasgow. Sadly, it closed its doors in 1939 when WWII broke out. Stewart, who was a director of the well-known Skerry's commercial colleges - with premises throughout the U.K. and Ireland - was not prepared to put his passion for theatre on hold when, in the darkest of hours, lighter moments were desperately needed. In 1940, the year before Luftwaffe bombers unleashed the Clydebank blitz, he launched The Park Theatre in the building next door to the former Curtain Theatre. Known as Glasgow's First Little Theatre, it hosted a string of plays and events throughout the war years and beyond. In 1946, Stewart appointed his friend Kenneth Ireland as General Manager and together they saw the small theatre through to its final performance in 1949. Stewart, who was harbouring

a vision for a "festival of theatre" in Scotland, wanted a larger venue in Glasgow. However, back then, such dreams were considered a distraction and a frivolous use of much-needed building materials. Frustrated by what he regarded as the machinations of bureaucracy, Stewart, in his closing speech at The Park Theatre, prophetically announced, "Glasgow's loss will be Scotland's gain."

Stewart knew Pitlochry and the pull that it had as a quaint Victorian spa town and a gateway to the Highlands. In 1944, he visited Pitlochry with Ireland and an eye towards the future. In fact, sometime during the latter years of the war, he hid a piece of paper by a marker on the banks of the River Tummel. On VE day - 8 May 1945 - he is reputed to have recovered the note on which he had written,

"When peace is declared I shall return to this spot to give thanks to God and to establish my Festival."

In the same year, Knockendarroch - a large Victorian mansion in Pitlochry with over four acres of grounds - caught Stewart's attention. He purchased the property and founded the Pitlochry Theatre Company. His dreams of building a theatre were quickly thwarted, however, when the Ministry of Works declined to grant a licence for the project on the basis that construction materials were scarce, and the works were not essential. Undaunted, Stewart visited tent structures at both Regents Park in London and the Arena Theatre in Birmingham, soon embracing the concept of a theatre in a marquee. On this basis, the Ministry of Works capitulated, a licence was granted, and Pitlochry Festival Theatre held its inaugural performance on May 19, 1951, in a tent on the grounds of Knockendarroch House; the British première of Maxwell Anderson's *Mary of Scotland*. At the launch, Tom Johnston, chairman of the Scottish Tourist Board, spoke

of Stewart's determination, "This theatre is a monument to one man's courage, one man's persistence and one man's great faith."

Already bearing heavy financial losses, disaster struck towards the end of the theatre's second year when a storm ripped the tent apart. Faced with possible bankruptcy, a non-profit society was formed and Stewart signed over his house, land, ancillary buildings and the damaged tent. In exchange, he was permitted to remain in his home. He was appointed Festival Director and Ireland was appointed Company Secretary. Despite the setbacks, Pitlochry Festival Theatre had already established itself as an important player in the local arts scene and as a tourist attraction. Following a profitable third season and successful funding appeals to public and private donors, enough money was raised to enlarge the theatre, combining semi-permanent additions with the original tent structure. The result was a five-hundred-person capacity theatre that would last almost three decades.

By the early 1970s, the theatre had outgrown its premises. It was attracting large numbers of visitors, but its quirky appeal was falling behind modern expectations of a theatre experience. After considering many options, a site at Port-na-Craig was chosen for a permanent theatre and, in 1981, Pitlochry Festival Theatre opened the doors of its new, purpose-built home. Sadly, Stewart never saw the new building, but he did live long enough to see his dream of a Festival Theatre established in Pitlochry before he passed away in 1957. Ireland, however, succeeded Stewart as Festival Director and continued to shape the theatre until 1983. Today, Stewart's vision and the tenacity of the dynamic duo in realizing that dream continues apace. Additional offices and workshops have been constructed and, at the turn of the century, a major program of renovation and redevelopment was instigated. Last year, a commitment from the Scottish Government of £10m to part-fund a further £25m expansion plan will enable the theatre to enter another phase under the guidance of its new artistic director, Elizabeth Newman.

And while Pitlochry continues to attract visitors from across Scotland and further afield, the challenge is to engage the Theatre in the Hills with people beyond the confines of picturesque Perthshire.

To that end, Newman's plans include taking productions to venues across the Highlands and Islands, and in spring 2020, Pitlochry will team up with the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, to co-produce Neil Simon's *Barefoot in the Park*. Other ideas involve youth work, writers' workshops and accessibility to all aspects of theatre for everyone.

Stewart's dream was to enable patrons to see "six plays in six days," and Newman uses that as a mantra for broader ambitions that will underscore Stewart's vision of a "festival of theatre."

Theatre, says Newman, is needed now more than ever. "The world faces great struggle at the moment, so each of this year's dramas has been selected to investigate our world, challenge the status quo in some way, and, we hope, bring great joy and offer much-needed hope," she notes.

I saw three plays at the theatre this year, each by a different director. They were all enjoyable. However, it was Newman's outstanding production of *The Crucible* - Arthur Miller's allegory on McCarthyism told through the events of the Salem Witch Trials - that made me contemplate where Pitlochry Festival Theatre finds itself today. In a wonderful piece of theatrical design, a replicated section of the Shoogly Bridge hung in tension over the stage. It connected the play with the present time and place, served as a device to enable characters to arrive and leave, and provided a locale around which events unfolded. But, as with the real bridge over the River Tummel, it could both link and divide people and communities. The next day I stopped again on the Shoogly Bridge and looked at the whole scene; the theatre, the river, the dam and the bridge itself. I saw in that picture an allegory for the oscillating fortunes of a man and his dream: the waters that have to be crossed, the people and places that have to be connected, the suspended reality that is theatre and the often shoogly path to success.





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Scotalian



Our award-winning photo journalist Tom Langlands
tours the town of Barga, Tuscany...



Before visiting any foreign country, it is customary and polite to learn a few words of the local language, such as ‘good morning,’ ‘please’ and ‘thank you.’ In the historic Tuscan hill-top village of Barga overlooking Italy’s stunning Serchio Valley, however, my efforts at Italian were met not only with replies in English, but often with a distinctly Scottish accent. My curiosity was further piqued by a plaque on a wall proclaiming Barga as “The Most Scottish Town in Italy.”

In order to unravel the mystery behind the claim, I took a walk through the old streets, accompanied by local resident Sonia Ercolini and local historian Virginia Fabbri.

Barga is beautiful and unspoiled; a place of narrow lanes, hidden piazze, steep stone staircases, ornate wooden doors, and shuttered windows bedecked with geraniums. Winding our way through the stone-paved streets, I saw several flags hanging limp in the heat of the day - Italian, Brazilian (the Brazilian Expeditionary Force fought alongside the Allied forces on the Gothic Line around Barga in WWII), and the Scottish Saltire.

There are various legends linking Barga and Scotland; some sources claim that during the 1890s, the Duke of Argyll took ill while staying in nearby Lucca and was taken to Barga to recuperate in the clean air of a landscape not dissimilar to his homeland. In thanks, he offered to employ local foresters on his estate in Scotland, thus establishing a link that exists to this day. My preferred tale is that a group of Barghigiani were en route to America via Scotland, but spent so much

time enjoying the hospitality of a Scottish pub, that they missed the boat and ended up staying!

For Fabbri, the answer is more pragmatic.

“The latter part of the 19th century saw great political change and economic disruption in Italy, and the people of Barga found themselves struggling to make a living from the poor quality of the area’s agricultural land. Many sought a better life elsewhere.”

It isn’t clear why some emigrants chose Scotland, but it is possible that they were headed for the Americas and found work and opportunities on the way.

Such events can trigger ‘chain-migrations’ - where migrants from a particular town follow others from the same town to a new location.

Chain-migration is familiar to Ercolini: “My great-grandfather Pietro emigrated to Scotland at the beginning of the 20th century. My grandfather Raffaello followed him, and my father Peter was born there, although he spent most of his childhood in Barga before returning to Glasgow in his teens to work in the family fish and chip shop.” Similarly, Ercolini’s mother, Silvana, was born in Ghivizzano, near Barga, but after WWII was forced to go to Glasgow and work in her aunt’s fish and chip shop. It was in Glasgow that Ercolini’s parents met, got married, and set up their own fish and chip shop. Erco-lini and her brother Ralph were educated in

Glasgow, but returned to Barga where they have lived since.

We called in at the hostel of Scottish-born Adele Pierotti, who explained her family’s connection with Scotland.

“In 1886, my great-grandfather left to work in the coal mines of Wishaw. In turn, he sent for my grandfather and soon the family established a fish and chip shop in Cathcart where my father and his brother became fish-friers.” Her husband, Riccardo Orsucci, worked as a chef in Glasgow and, having run several restaurants over the years, has just opened a new fish restaurant - Giro di Boa - in Barga.

Back in the streets of the old town, we climbed to the crest of the hill and rested by the impressive Duomo di San Cristoforo (Cathedral of St. Christopher).

St. Christopher is the patron saint of Barga, although no one is certain why.

The views across the valley to the Apuan Alps are stunning, and the strategic importance of Barga’s location is self-evident. Constructed with local limestone, and sparkling under the Tuscan sun, the cathedral is the best example of Romanesque architecture in the Serchio valley.

Exiting the city walls through the Porta Reale, we called in at Il Bar del Paologas to meet the owner, Paolo Marchetti. Apart from his obvious Scottish-Italian accent, the first thing I noticed were the green and white



hoops of a Celtic Football Club shirt hanging from the ceiling, along with a photograph of the former Celtic striker Henrik Larsson on a green and white wall alongside a host of other Celtic memorabilia. The bar boasted a decent selection of Scottish whiskies and a sign that said 'Proud to serve Scotland'. Over a drink, Marchetti reiterated a now-familiar story.

"My father moved to Scotland in the early 1900s because my aunt was already there. I was born in Barga, but grew up in Scotland, where my parents had a fish and chip shop in Byres Road in Glasgow." Marchetti spent his summer holidays in Barga, and by the time he returned permanently at the age of nineteen, he was an avid Celtic supporter. His Italian friends soon shared his passion and they formed the local football team, Gatti Randagi (Stray Cats) in 1991. Gatti Randagi was welcomed at Celtic Park in Glasgow last year. As for their football strip – well, natu-rally it is green and white hoops! Marchetti is also ranked second in the Italian 250CC 2-stroke Motorcycle Championships, and Il Bar del Paologas is also home to a size-able collection of trophies that he has won on his self-built Benelli. As the rest of the world knows, Italians love football and mo-torcycles!

It is estimated that 70 per cent of Barga's population of 10,000 has connections with Scotland.

When their ancestors first arrived as poor migrants, they found work wherever they could; in the coalmines, shipyards, textile and catering industries, amongst others.

With an indomitable spirit, they worked long, hard hours making enough money to bring other family members over. They learned to use the skills they brought with them, including their ability to make wonderful ice cream, and an inventiveness when using local produce such as fish and potatoes to create new dishes (disclaimer: fish and chips is not a traditional Italian dish!). The new tastes appealed to their Scottish hosts, and it wasn't long before the Barghigiani migrants opened coffee shops, ice cream parlours, and fish and chip restaurants. The prosperity that came with their hard work and endeavour over the years enabled many to return to Barga and build sizeable villas in Il Giardino (The Garden), the new section of Barga that is located below the old town.

By the Via Giovanni Pascoli - the road linking the old and new parts of Barga - Ercolini pointed out 'the smallest library in Italy' - a red, U.K. telephone box filled with books for the community to share. It was shipped from Scotland to Barga by former fish and chip shop owner Mauro Cecchini, whose family originally hailed from Barga. We called into Ercolini's brother's shop - La Bottega del Pane. As well as local produce, he caters to a community still seeking things they became familiar with in Scotland. On the shelves I noticed Irn-Bru, porridge oats, oatcakes, shortbread and tea!

For a small town Barga punches well above its weight culturally.



The Scottish painter John Bellany, who depicted Barga in many of his paintings, is commemorated on a plaque in Piazza Anglio. As well, the great Italian poet Giovanni Pascoli settled here, and the composer Puccini was a regular visitor. The town theatre, Teatro Dei Differenti, has been established for two hundred years, and there is an annual international Opera Barga Festival and Barga Jazz Festival. Barga's impressive program of summer events includes a Scottish Week, with a special school dedicated to teaching traditional Scottish and Gaelic songs, music and dance. Organized by Scottish musician and bagpipe maker Hamish Moore, the course features world-renowned tutors from Scotland and Cape Breton and culminates in an outdoor public performance in one of Barga's main piazze. Of course, no summer festival program in Barga would be complete without an event to mark the very thing that brought so many Barghigiani the good fortune that they sought when emigrating all those years ago – a three-week-long Fish and Chip Festival!





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Scottish Seabird Centre

*Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands
explores the ecology of the Scottish Seabird Centre*

PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

Each of the modern-day Celtic lands has a coastline and a special relationship with the sea that, in many ways, defines them. Over the centuries, the ocean has been an important source of food and a means of travel. It has both separated and united seafaring Celtic peoples, and has been the inspiration for many aspects of Celtic culture. It has shaped our history, and we ignore its importance at our peril.

It was a warm sunny day when I visited the picturesque harbour at the historic heart of North Berwick. Here, on Scotland's east coast by the southern approach to the Firth of Forth, I inhaled the delicious aroma of cooked lobster as it drifted over the small fishing boats bobbing in their sheltered haven. The Lobster Shack was doing brisk business. Its offerings of fresh langoustine, crab, mussels and line-caught mackerel served on the quayside, typified a Celtic nation's relationship with the sea.

A harbour seal surfaced between the boats and it eyed me quizzically before sliding back into the depths. A few miles offshore lay

nology that could permit viewing of the birds from the shore.

Following years of hard work and determination, the Scottish Seabird Centre opened its doors to the public in 2000. The facility is a registered charity and is one of the world leaders in remote wildlife viewing. It started with two cameras on the Bass Rock, and one on the island of Fidra. This was followed with cameras on the Isle of May Nature Reserve, relaying images and sound from both the grey seal colony during the winter pupping season and from the breeding puffins in summer. From these humble beginnings, the Centre grew into a venue that now attracts over 270,000 visitors each year.

Chief Executive Tom Brock is aware of the important role that the centre plays, and also the need for diversification.

"We are a conservation and education charity, and all income is reinvested in this focus. So, for example, we lead and collaborate on conservation projects such as SOS Puffin, and also engage around 4,000 schoolchildren a year through pre-booked educational visits.

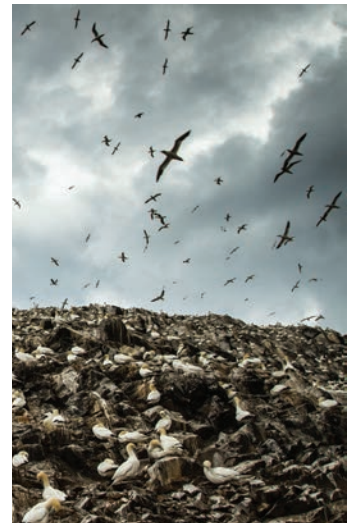


PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

the craggy outcrop of the Bass Rock that I had visited on numerous occasions to photograph the world's largest colony of northern gannets. Standing by the harbour wall, picking the succulent flesh from my takeaway lobster, the relationship between man and the ecology of this coastal environment was apparent all around me. It was a fitting place to find the Scottish Seabird Centre and learn about why it came to be here, along with its plans to become Scotland's National Marine Centre.

North Berwick was granted Royal Burgh status in 1373. It was a small ferry port in Medieval times, and over the subsequent centuries became an important fishing port. Like many small towns around the country, North Berwick benefited from the arrival of the railway in 1849, and around that time, the creation of an open-air seawater swimming pool that now sits alongside the Scottish Seabird Centre. By the early 1900s, summer visitors flocked to the quaint historic town with its bracing sea air, and for many years, North Berwick flourished. Over the decades following WWII, disposable income increased for many, and cheap foreign travel became a reality. The nature of tourism changed, and with it so did the good fortune of North Berwick. By the late 1980s, North Berwick was at its lowest ebb.

It was then that a local businessman - community councillor and keen ornithologist, Bill Gardner - had an inspired idea. Gardner understood the international importance of the Bass Rock and its gannet colony, and he was also aware of the existence of remote camera tech-

"We understand that seabirds are part of a complex ecosystem, and they should be researched and appreciated within the wider marine environment."

"This is part of our rationale for evolving into the National Marine Centre."

The National Marine Centre is a £5.7M project that will build upon the success of the existing facility, and is destined to become Scotland's leading marine science visitor attraction. Through expansion and alterations to the existing Centre, the new building will provide much needed additional space and unique facilities designed to engage, excite and inspire audiences of all ages. It will be a hub for education, conservation and research-based activities that, according to Brock, will "build environmental citizenship that will help in the vital work of protecting and conserving our marine heritage for future generations."

The National Marine Centre's foundation is the valuable legislation and work of the Scottish Government, which has shown a commitment to the protection of the important, yet often fragile, marine environment around Scotland's shores. The 2015 National Marine Plan promotes both the sustainable development of marine environments and the sustainable use of their resources within the country's inshore and offshore waters. The Scottish Government has also created several



PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

Marine Protected Areas in order to safeguard some of the most iconic and endangered habitats and species.

Professor John Baxter is the Head of the Scottish Seabird Centre's Marine Advisory Group, as well as Principal Advisor for Marine at Scottish Natural Heritage. He is only too aware that our seas are often low on the priority list when it comes to the environmental concerns of the general public, believing it is often a case of 'out of sight - out of mind'. But with amazing habitats that support over 5,000 species of invertebrates and plants, along with a vast array of birds, fish and marine mammals, Baxter knows the pressures that are being placed upon these ecosystems.

"The marine environment of Scotland supports a fantastic array of habitats and species."

"However, it faces a growing number of pressures such as climate change, ocean acidification, pollution, and invasive species, as well as challenges such as the sustainable exploitation of living resources and the potential consequences of offshore renewable energy developments which are as yet not quantified."



PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LANGLANDS

Baxter is passionate about the sea and the incredible variety of life that it supports, but he also understands the need to find the right balance between man and the sea.

"There is increasing pressure on the marine environment due to reliance on seas for food, transport and energy."

Education lies at the heart of the National Marine Centre project. The current arrangements with schools will be expanded to create an outreach program to engage with institutions all across Scotland. The focus of the Centre's current exhibitions will diversify to interpret, explore and share more widely the marine environment and marine wildlife - above and below the waves - with interactive exhibits.

Partnerships are planned with area organizations, including universities, to share aspects of local, national and international research.

To date, there has been development funding of £290,000 awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and a further £3.5M is ring-fenced for the cost of the building works. There has also been support from East Lothian Council. The full project team, including architects, has now been appointed, and the final challenge is to raise the remaining £2M that will bring the plans to life.

I breathed the sea air by the swimming pool that had once made North Berwick a special place for visitors, and I looked up at the Scottish Seabird Centre and out to the Bass Rock with its white-encrusted cap comprised of thousands upon thousands of birds. I could only see a fraction of the incredible marine environment encompassed by the blue sea in front of me. Through the vision of Bill Gardner, and the many who have made his dream a reality over the subsequent years, it seems that North Berwick may once again become a place to take a very special dip into Scotland's seas.

Donations to the National Marine Centre project can be made via the facility's website;



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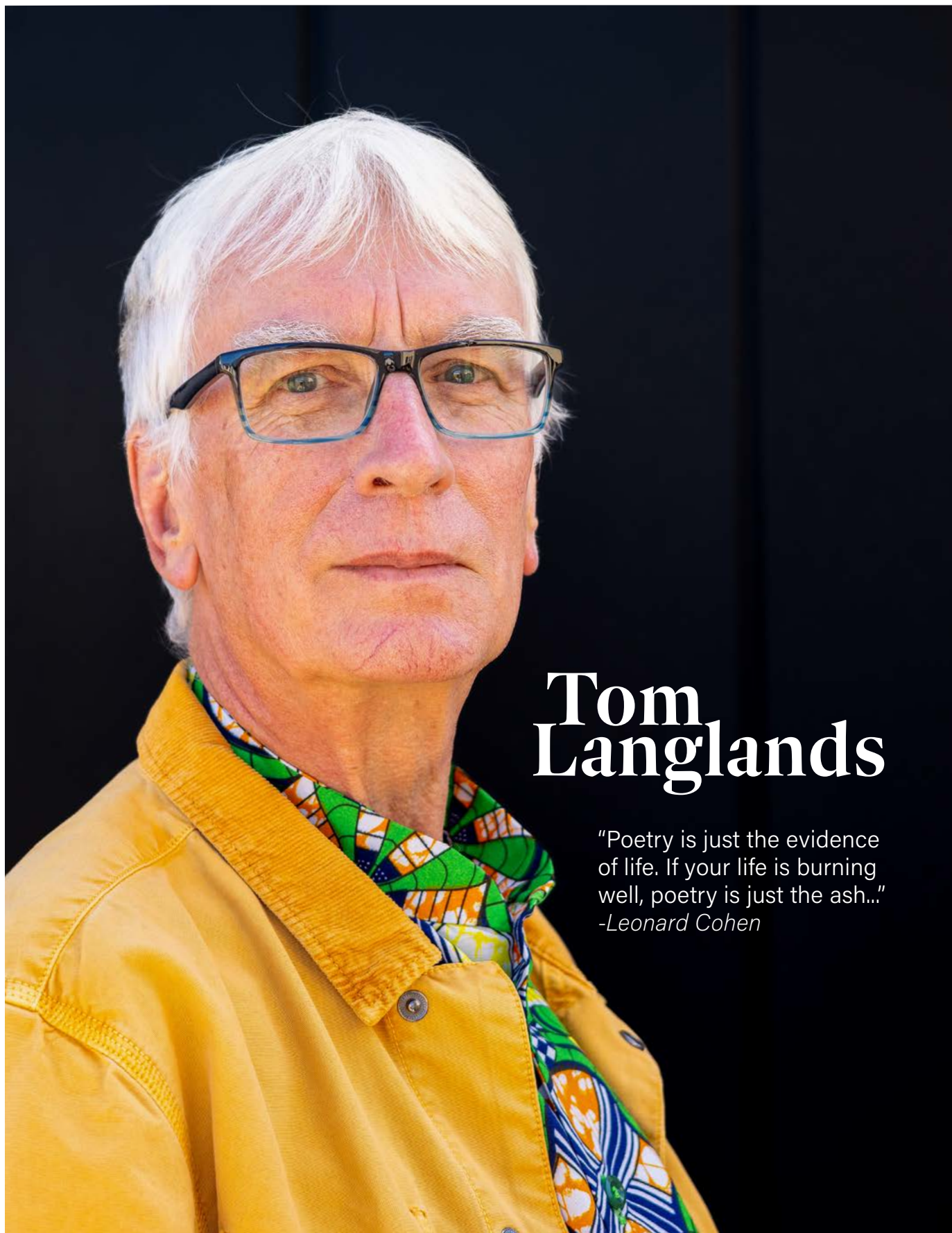
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Tom Langlands

"Poetry is just the evidence of life. If your life is burning well, poetry is just the ash..."
-Leonard Cohen

Don't Stop The Dreamers

Don't stop the dreamers,
the ones who see the unknown,
who invent the non-existent,
who navigate by stars while others sleep.

Don't stop the dreamers,
the ones who paint and sculpt,
who fashion tools,
who carve the shapes of sounds on walls of caves.

Don't stop the dreamers,
the ones who rub sticks to make fire,
who see tomorrow in yesterday,
for they saw you long before you were.

The Key

And then, reflected on the wet road
of a cold night fleetingly warmed
you are gone,

like a shimmering ghost
dissolved in February's rain
and I am empty again.

You asked if I get lonely,
only the streetlight knows I lied,
in truth, I am lost.

My heart is in a tattered, red suitcase
in an old, left-luggage locker;
I have handed you the key.

Melancholy is Fertile

it is in moments of deep sadness
that poems are born
laughter makes its own sound
in crinkled cackles and
open-mouthed guffaws
but it is in the sharp intake of grief
and the exhalation of silent pain
where poems grow

unstructured emotions
stirred into guttural sounds
shaped into words and stanzas
dripped on to the page
to stain it raw with hurt
and seeping sorrow
those are the poems that never die
fading only with pages turned

New Skin for the Tiger

we stole the fire
from the tiger's eyes
to light the coals

we sucked its roar
into the bellows
that fanned the flames

we took its stripes
black and strong
and we hammered
hammered
hammered
on the forge
until each wavy bend
and curve
was straight and true

then we plunged
each glowing stripe
into water
where it hissed and spat

with these
we made the tiger
a new skin

for its own protection

now we peer
between the stripes
believing we see tigers

The Old Gardener

His garden was his passion
seeding, feeding, weeding
blooms that broke records

until slowly the petals fell
and the bees left
yet in his baldness they buzzed

among the dying cerebral branches
Now he rubs sunscreen on lettuce leaves
"It makes them taste of summer," he says

The Scent of Change

I dislike the way street names
misappropriate the past
as if nostalgia is a substitute for loss

The multi-storeys of Hawkhill
have known nothing
other than feral pigeons

And the tarmac streets of Pinewood
have seen only
the bulbous stumps of pollarded planes

The skill of the fake florist
is selling the fragrance
of plastic forget-me-nots

Turning Back To Buddha

walk the pilgrim half mile path
lined both sides with trinket stalls
salvation is bought through the
tantalising temptation of this and that tat
get the T-shirt
get the hat
get the bag with the green eyed yellow idol
made somewhere north of Kathmandu
hire a colourful kimono
get a flower or two
buy a parcel that predicts your fortune
from a stallholder who foresaw a future
in the wants of the unwary
follow the wafting scent of burning incense
breathe deep
vaping venerates the vulnerable
we are all victims of the vicissitudes of faith
now turn your back to Buddha
raise your silvered selfie stick
see him sit upon your shoulder
smile
and click
you are the new faith
the influencer
load your moment of vanity
to a Chinese media platform
they turned their backs on Buddha too

Worm Moon

if earthworms had voiceboxes
I imagine they'd howl at the worm moon
like demented below-ground demons
stirred from hibernation

I can see the elongated heads snaking upwards
still anchored in the humus of last autumn's leaves
waving to and fro against the night sky
strong muscular mouths howling and gulping
I watch them devour time and see it
disappear in a millennia of peristalsis
back underground where all life begins

Why Do I Write?

I owe it to the line maker in Blombos Cave, South Africa
to the hashtag engraver of Gorham's Cave, Gibraltar
to the zigzag scratcher of a shell by Solo River, Java
they were the first scribes
the markers standing at the dawn of sentient thought
they were in the beginning
before the word was born

I owe it to the cave painters of Lascaux, France
who captured the spirit of horses and stags
and the thunderous charge of running bulls
to the Cave of Swimmers in the mountains of the Sahara
to the gods and the festivals of the ancient Balkans
adorning the walls of Magura, Bulgaria
to those who left their timeless handprints
waving across the millennia
in Cueva de las Manos, Argentina
they were the story-tellers, the capturers of moments,
the creators of myths and legends
authors without words

I owe it to the proto-writers scattered across the Earth
to the sign-makers, the curators of meaning
to the unknown phonologists
to the precursors of inscribed Chinese oracle bones,
Sumerian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs
to the joiners of lines, the creators of letters,
the founders of alphabets
to the connectors of symbols and sounds
to the constructors of language

I owe it to the thinkers, the philosophers,
the linguists, the communicators
to all the great civilisations of Earth
to every author who has ever written
to every book penned
to every poem read and every song sung
to every message sent in a bottle,
fixed to a landing craft on the moon
or attached to a spaceship
hurtling beyond our solar system

I write because it excites me
I write because I can
I write because there was a time when we could not
I write because I owe it to those who have made it possible



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Lochcarron of Scotland

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In the rolling hills of the Scottish Borders, Lochcarron of Scotland continues to weave a story of heritage, craftsmanship, and innovation. As the world's leading manufacturer of authentic tartan, Lochcarron has become synonymous with timeless design and enduring quality—producing over 500 tartans that honour Scotland's past while embracing the future of fashion and interiors. For over 75 years, Lochcarron has been at the heart of the global tartan industry, supplying luxury fashion houses, interior designers, and discerning customers with textiles that are as meaningful as they are beautiful. Each piece is woven in their Selkirk mill, where traditional techniques meet modern technology to create cloth that tells a story—of clan, culture, and creativity. Today, Lochcarron is more than a textile mill. It is a brand with a bold vision—reimagining tartan for a contemporary audience through thoughtful design, sustainable practices, and digital innovation. From bespoke kilts and scarves to curated lifestyle collections, the brand continues to evolve while staying true to its roots. As featured in The Celtic Collection, Lochcarron represents the best of Scottish design: authentic, adaptable, and deeply connected to place. Whether dressing global icons or crafting heirlooms for future generations, Lochcarron's work is a celebration of identity, artistry, and the enduring power of tartan.



MCT Irish Tours

www.michaelcowelltours.ie

For Michael Cowell, guiding others through the wonders of Ireland is not just a job, but a lifelong labor of love. As founder and owner of MCT Irish Tours, Michael brings a wealth of experience, a love of storytelling, and a genuine pride in his homeland to every travel experience he designs. Michael's career began in hospitality, working behind the bar before moving into supervisory roles. Looking for adventure, he joined the cruise industry, where he traveled from the Bahamas to Brazil, Argentina to Europe, and even circled the globe twice aboard the legendary QE2. Those years at sea not only gave him a legacy of adventures to draw upon but also a deep appreciation for both connecting with others and being of service. Once home in Ireland, Michael sought to share the treasures of his own country with the same sense of magic he'd found abroad. Today, as a fully certified National Tour Guide and coach driver, he has made that dream a reality. MCT Irish Tours specializes in luxury escorted tours, each one tailored to the interests of the traveler. Whether it's exploring ancient castles, tracing family roots, sampling world-class cuisine, or simply soaking in the scenery along the Wild Atlantic Way, Michael ensures every detail is thoughtfully planned. With his warmth, professionalism, and immense local knowledge, Michael turns a tour of Ireland into an unforgettable experience that stays with travellers long after the journey ends. Offering more than mere travel, MCT Tours is a way of immersing yourself in Ireland's stories, landscapes, and spirit.



Scottish Heritage USA

www.scottishheritageusa.org

Since 1965, Scottish Heritage USA has been dedicated to building bridges across the Atlantic. Early on, the organization partnered with the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), supporting student exchanges between Threave Gardens in Scotland and Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania. That spirit of collaboration is still central today. Over the decades, Scottish Heritage USA has contributed more than \$1.5 million to NTS and its USA Foundation, ensuring the preservation of Scotland's historic treasures. Major contributions have included \$300,000 for the Culloden Visitor Centre, \$250,000 toward restoration of the Dwight Eisenhower suite at Culzean Castle, and support for projects such as the online Robert Burns Library, archaeology in St. Kilda and Arran, the Glencoe Restoration Project, and renovations at Falkland Palace, Hill House, and many other properties. "Our work has never been limited to Scotland alone," says President Peter McC. Wilson IV. "Scottish Heritage USA has supported cultural initiatives throughout North America as well." These include the An Crios Gréine global piping contest, Blue Ridge Pipes and Brass, Mill Prong Preservation, the Pipes of Christmas concerts in New York, New Jersey, and Boston, and the American-Scottish Foundation's Tartan Week concerts in Bryant Park. Closer to home, the organization is well known for its sponsorship and management of the Scottish Cultural Village at the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games each July. In addition, Scottish Heritage USA provides funds for summer camp scholarships, giving young people the opportunity to learn highland dance, piping, drumming, and fiddling to help keep Scotland's traditions alive for future generations.

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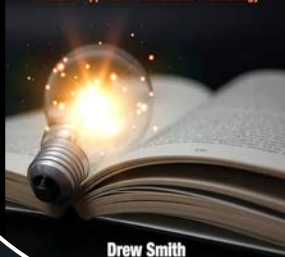
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