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Sorry, Not Sorry

Mark Critch is co-creator, co-writer and star of the hit CBC series *Son of a Critch*, based on his best-selling memoir. For 22 seasons, Critch has also been a cast member and writer of CBC's longest-running comedy series, "This Hour Has 22 Minutes." He is the recipient of six Canadian Screen Awards and three Gemini Awards and is a best-selling author. His latest book is *Sorry, Not Sorry*.

What are your own roots?

I was born in St John's, Newfoundland. Our family goes back a long time there. My father's people were fishermen from Stoke Fleming in England. Mom's crowd came from Waterford, Ireland. They were farmers. The sea and the land. It was a hard life for generations and I'm thankful for the deep roots. They ground you when the wind starts blowing.

What motivated you to write *Sorry, Not Sorry*, and why now?

When President Trump started to talk about the 51st State, I was livid. I get to talk about current events on *22 Minutes*, but I wanted to do so in longer form. Pretty soon, a series of essays evolved. Each one is very different from the last. Some are in my voice, one is in the voice of Trump, and another is in (Canadian founding father) Sir John A MacDonald's voice. And I do them all on the audiobook.

What were the challenges involved?

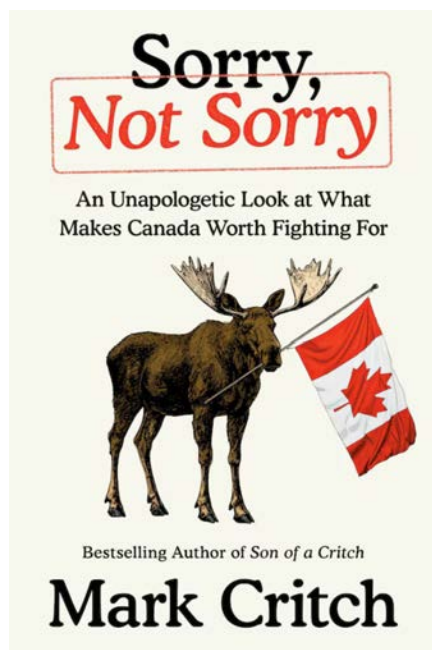
Carving out the time to write. I wrote this book while filming *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and putting together the 5th season of *Son of a Critch*. So, I had a lot on my plate, but I have a big appetite.

What did you find rewarding about the process?

Sitting down at the computer and seeing the blank page is always intimidating. But as I went through the process, I started to see that there was a book there. I wanted to make each essay unique, and I hope to think that's the case. That to me was very rewarding.

Did anything surprise you during the process?

Whenever I told people what I was writing, I would often hear how excited folks were to read it because they felt the same way I did. I



hope that sentiment transfers to readers once the book is released.

How did your perspective of Canadians change over the writing of the book?

It's all my own point of view, so it didn't really change. But it certainly helped me to focus in on those feelings. I love this country. My work as a comedian has allowed me to travel the country, and not enough Canadians get to do that. Each province or territory is a unique space. Canada is at its best when we come together to celebrate those differences and regard them as strengths.

What does it mean to be Canadian today, and how does that differ from just a generation ago?

I think the main difference would be how diverse the country is. For more and more Canadians, Canada is a place that they chose to make their home. Not just a place where they were born.

Do you consider people's response to the book while you are writing it?

I want people to enjoy it, of course. But you can't control what happens to a book once it's out. You can't have that in mind while writing or it colours everything. You just have to do your best and hope it connects.

Why is it an important work, and what do you hope to accomplish with it?

I think at this time in our history we need Canadian voices to stand up and be counted. I hope readers see the humour inside as a little light in a dark time. A reminder that if you can laugh at something, it doesn't own you. We have a lot to smile about.

Why was it important to bring so much humour to the book?

Humour is a shared moment. You have to have something in common to laugh. Laughter brings us together and can reveal a truth in a softer way. It can let a little steam out of the kettle before you burn yourself.

Has there been any discussion about bringing the book to the small screen?

No. It's a group of essays not a memoir or a novel so it wouldn't adapt.

Will there be a sequel?

Hopefully not!! Hopefully, Mr. Trump backs down before we need one!!

What's on your agenda for the rest of 2025?

More *22 Minutes* and the filming of the 5th season of *Son of a Critch*. Canada has been very good to me. I'm honoured to have a place to tell my stories. I wouldn't want to do it anywhere else.

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The Craic in the Country

Celebrating humour, heart, and haystacks, the Irish Farmer's Calendar captures rural life on the Emerald Isle with unmistakable charm. Depicting Irish life from a pastoral perspective - with a little cheek thrown in - it is the perfect combination of the craic and the iconic for producer Shauna Byrne.

Launched by Ciara Ryan 16 years ago, Byrne took over the helm and couldn't be more pleased.

"This year is only my second year running the show. When the opportunity came up, I thought it was a no-brainer. How often do you get the chance to carry on a tradition that is basically part of Irish culture at this point?"

Often referred to as "Ireland's favorite calendar," the annual agenda captures the land's most handsome farmers in fun and festive poses that bring a touch of pride and plenty of smiles.

Although Byrne herself isn't from a farming family, she's no stranger to the rustic spirit the calendar celebrates. "I grew up in Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow. Farming was part of the backdrop of my childhood, and being surrounded by that rural charm, the fields, the animals, and the sense of community definitely shaped me."

She, in turn, has been instrumental in shaping the calendar. "In the short time I've had it, it's grown legs and a personality of its own. The photo shoots have become bigger, bolder, and even funnier. I've also brought a more modern, social-media-savvy feel to it, and people love seeing the behind-the-scenes chaos. But at its core, it's still the same cheeky, charming celebration of farm life that people adore."

Byrne adores the work, even if it means wearing many hats.

"I basically run the entire operation myself. I'm the PR team, the social media manager, the press office, the website developer, customer service, logistics, and the person



who packs every single order. I'm a one-woman show, but I also rope in my family during packing season. It's definitely a balancing act, but that is all part of the fun."

And fun is the actual operative word, for buyers and Byrne alike, along with her resolve to carry on a quirky Irish tradition.

“The best part is the reactions. Seeing people laughing, smiling, hanging it in their kitchens, or sending it to relatives abroad ‘for the craic’ is honestly priceless...”

"Photoshoot days are a real highlight. There's always at least one moment where everyone is crying-laughing, usually because an animal decides to steal the show."

Putting the calendar together is quite a show in itself, as Byrne recalls many memorable moments that make the photo sessions sound like slapstick. "Honestly, you couldn't make up half the things that happen. We've had goats doing their business at the most inopportune times, tractors that refused to start, and farmers who come out with spontaneous poses so outrageous they end up being the main image for the month. It's chaotic and hilarious."

Even with all the fun, the depiction of Irish farm life is authentic. Although the calendar is known for handsome men, Byrne is not necessarily looking for models but 'real

farmers with real personality.' "I want charm, humour, a glint in the eye, and someone who'll have fun with it." She also requires that her subjects have an actual day-to-day involvement in rural life. "You need to actually be involved in farming - dairy, beef, sheep, tillage, horses, veg - I'm not fussy. As long as you're willing to muck in, enjoy the process, and maybe take your top off if the moment calls for it, you're in the running."

Beyond the laughs, Byrne is aware of a deeper aspect to her work that blends the craic with classic Irish culture, which she brings not only to farming families but to those with a soft spot for rural Ireland. "And then there is the diaspora: thousands of Irish people abroad who want a little taste of home - specifically, a home with farmers posing with hay bales. We reach them through social media, national press, TV, radio, and word of mouth. Once people buy one year, they tend to become loyal. It's like an addiction, but wholesome."

Byrne is keen on fulfilling that demand by making the calendar available in bigger Irish stores and growing its international presence. She is also considering producing special editions during the year and possibly some merchandising items. "There's so much potential, and I'm only getting started."

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Whisky at a Crossroads

Travelling through Scotland - and after visiting several distilleries across Speyside and the Highlands while following developments in the Irish whiskey industry - it feels timely to note that the whisk(e)y world is entering an era of profound change. A generational shift toward non-alcoholic preferences, climate stress, and economic uncertainty are converging to reshape its future.

The Ozempic Generation

Leon Webb of Tamnavulin Distillery aptly describes today's whisky culture as the "Ozempic generation" - a market increasingly focused on wellness, restraint, and image rather than high-ABV indulgence. Borrowed from the popular weight-loss drug, the phrase has come to symbolize a broader social movement centered on optimization and health. For much of the twentieth century, whisky was marketed as a mark of success and maturity. Today, younger consumers are more likely to measure achievement through fitness metrics and personal sustainability than luxury or status. Non-drinking has become socially aspirational rather than exceptional, leaving the industry in a quandary as it considers its future.

Climate Change

On a less personal, more challenging note, the University of Aberdeen warns that climate change models predict longer droughts and prolonged low-flow periods, prompting Speyside distilleries to consider investing in water storage and catchment management. Because roughly half of Scotland's malt whisky distilleries draw water from the River Spey or its tributaries, the region is especially vulnerable to basin-wide shortages as both surface and groundwater become less reliable. Already, several distilleries have reportedly had to halt or slow production earlier than usual. Glenfarclas and Glenglassaugh have spoken of "pause reduction" due to insufficient water, while others - including Macallan - have curtailed output following recent SEPA water-scarcity alerts. The effects ripple through the Spey catchment: Glenfiddich and Balvenie rely on the Robbie Dhu springs (within the Spey system), and Mortlach, Dufftown, Glendullan, BenRiach, Longmorn, Glenlivet, Glen Grant, Aberlour, and GlenAllachie, to name a few, all depend on the same fragile



system. Highland distilleries such as Wolfburn, Glenmorangie, Old Pulteney, and Dalmore are not without challenges either. SEPA has issued early-warning water scarcity alerts for parts of the region, and their coastal locations, also bring exposure to North Coast storms and surge. To build resilience, Glenmorangie has installed an anaerobic digestion wastewater plant as part of the Dornoch Environmental Enhancement Project (DEEP). Dalmore - currently closed to visitors for renovation and expansion - has not been subject to SEPA production restrictions at the time of writing. Other distilleries have yet to announce major adaptation projects, though Old Pulteney explicitly leans into its maritime identity.

Economic Headwinds

Beyond environmental stress, distilleries appear to face mounting economic pressure. International trade has become less predictable, given tariffs, shifting rules, and supply chain disruptions, while energy prices remain volatile. Costs for barley, glass, packaging, while shipping have risen sharply in recent years. Whisky, which once seemed relatively insulated, now competes in a more cautious marketplace. In Ireland, the past 15 years brought a boom: from four operating distilleries in 2010 to around 50 by 2023, with the United States as the largest export market. But cracks are showing. Oversupply, slowing U.S. demand, rising input costs (energy, packaging, labor), and softer tourism revenues are all creating headwinds. A key differentiator is tariff exposure. Irish whiskey originating in the EU currently faces a 15 per cent U.S. tariff, whereas whiskey distilled in Northern Ireland - treated under the U.K.-U.S. framework - faces 10 per cent, the same rate as Scotch. This cre-

Climate, Economics, and the Ozempic Generation

By Gregory J. Cran

ates a de facto tariff boundary within the island. Major producers have already signaled strain. For instance, Roe & Co (Dublin) has entered an "extended pause" in production; Pernod Ricard temporarily suspended operations at Midleton; the Dublin Liberties Distillery closed in May; and others, such as Killarney Brewing & Distilling Co., have ceased operations, citing tariff and cost pressures. U.S. demand has softened as shipments declined from 2022 to 2024, roughly a third below the 2022 peak - amid pricing pressure and slower growth. The Irish Whiskey Association warns that even a 10 per cent tariff costs producers thousands of euros per week, given extreme export dependence (about 95 per cent of Irish whiskey is exported).

Ireland vs Speyside: Different Exposures

Irish whiskey's dependence on the U.S. market and the prevalence of smaller, newer producers with tighter margins make the sector highly sensitive to cost disruptions. Scotch, while also export-oriented, often benefits from larger multinationals with global portfolios, but it faces intense climate pressure on water, alongside energy and regulatory costs. The upside? Irish producers may pivot towards non-U.S. markets or adjust production profiles. Scotch producers, on the other hand, can further diversify markets and may enjoy a relative advantage if tariff policies tilt towards U.K. goods.

A Paradigm Shift

For whisky in both Scotland and Ireland, the challenge is not merely economic but philosophical: how do you preserve the mystique of a centuries-old craft when consumers are moving towards moderation - or abstinence? What's clear is that the "water of life" now depends more directly than ever on the health of the rivers that sustain it, the lifestyle choices of its consumers, and geopolitical tensions in key export markets. Ultimately, each distillery faces a hard choice: accept intermittent shutdowns, invest heavily in infrastructure to secure future water, or diversify into new products and markets. Not long ago, distilleries primarily competed on flavor, identity, and brand. Increasingly, they now compete for relevance. In the wider view, the very element that gave whisky its soul may yet decide its survival.



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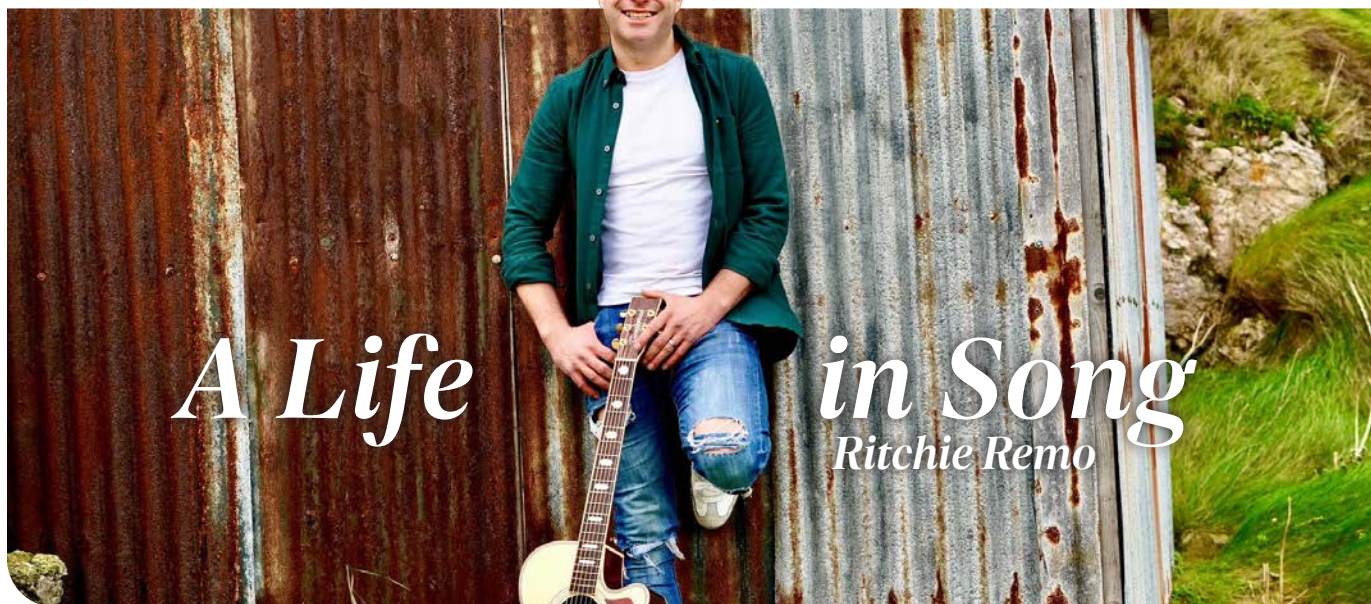
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A Life in Song

Ritchie Remo

Ritchie Remo has built a solid career on hard work and a commitment to the craft of songwriting.

Remo was first bitten by the bug in his early teens. “I picked up the guitar around 12, and my first proper gig was at 14. I just had this love for music and performing.”

Growing up amid the bucolic beauty of the Claudy countryside southeast of Derry in Northern Ireland proved to be the perfect environment for the budding Irish country singer.

“It was a wee housing site, maybe 22 houses or so, everyone knew everyone. My dad was into music big time, and it was a huge part of our lives growing up.”

Those rural roots, a home filled with melody, and steady family support set the tone for his future on stage. “My dad was the driving force. He took me to gigs, helped buy gear, and drove the van. We used to clean windows on Saturdays to save up for more equipment.”

While that kind of dedication ultimately paid off, it also meant some sacrifices. “I didn’t get a typical teenage life. While my friends were out at nightclubs, I was gigging every weekend. For about 20 years, I didn’t have a Saturday night off. I don’t regret it, I loved it.”

Even now, decades later, his passion hasn’t faded. “When you love performing, you just keep going. It excites me every time I get on stage. It’s never about the fame or the

money. It’s about that feeling when you’re on stage, connecting with a crowd.”

Thirty years and thousands of shows later, that spirit has remained steady, though the sound has evolved. “When I started, I was doing pure Irish country, but over the years, music and audiences changed. I started blending folk, pop, and American country music, creating my own fusion. That’s the beauty of music, it keeps moving, and I wanted to move with it.”

True to his word, Remo kept moving, following a schedule that reflected the often-gruelling realities of life as a musician. “At one point, we were doing so many shows I couldn’t even go on a holiday. We just kept saying yes to bookings. The success was great, but the pace was intense.”

Yet, the hard work brought worthwhile rewards. “The memories mean everything. The buzz from the crowd and knowing people want to hear your music, that’s huge.”

Equally big were the artists and performers he was exposed to, who – while influential – merely helped him to develop his own unique sound. “Growing up, there was always a rock ‘n’ roll vibe in the house. But I never wanted to copy anyone too closely. I’ve always wanted to find my own style.” Ricky Skaggs and Don McLean were two of many to leave their mark. “I took little bits from many artists and made it my own.”

The result was a career filled with many memorable highlights. “I’ve played big fes-

tivals with thousands of people, but sometimes those intimate gigs are more powerful.

“When the crowd is close and you feel that connection - that’s electric...”

Remo’s turning point came at CountryFest in 2011. “Nobody really knew me then, and I stepped out in a cowboy shirt and boots, performing all the big hits like The Devil Went Down to Georgia. I’d worked so hard to be ready for it. That really launched me.”

Speaking of launching, he is now putting the finishing touches on a new album. “The new stuff reflects where I’m at musically, not just Irish country, but a mix of styles that I’ve grown into, that is also inspired by the fans.”

As Christmas approaches, Remo is working on a holiday single. “Christmas songs are fun and full of emotion and nostalgia. This one came from looking back at my own childhood memories. I sit down to write with one idea, and it turns into something totally different. That’s the creative process.”

That process, he notes, has been varied but ever-present. “Sometimes an idea hits me out of nowhere. Other times, it’s weeks of chipping away.

“It’s never been about chasing fame. It’s been about doing something I love and doing it as well as I can.”

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The Pet-Sit

For author Carol Moreira, writing has never been a conscious decision but a calling she had little choice but to answer. “I’ve always been a writer, just as many people begin life singing or kicking a ball and stay with it,” she shares via email with Celtic Life International from her home in Nova Scotia. “Sometimes I don’t like being a writer - it can be lonely and discouraging, but it is innate. It is how I cope with life, understand it, and communicate with others.”

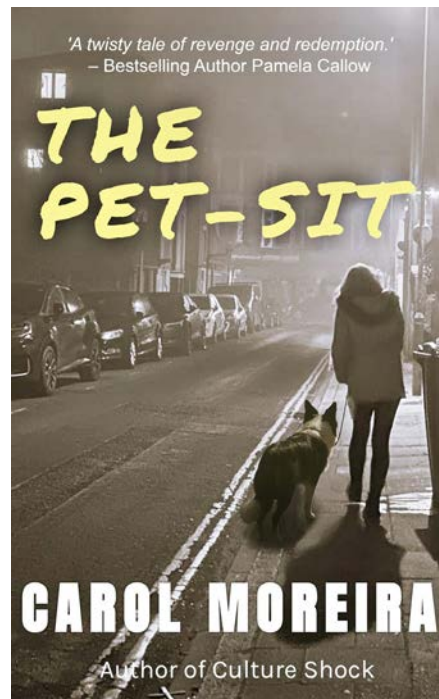
That blend of self-awareness and persistence reflects some of the compelling themes in Moreira’s latest literary effort, *The Pet-Sit*. A psychological mystery set both in the seaport of Portsmouth, U.K. and the streets of San Francisco, the new narrative explores themes of trauma, secrecy, and ultimately redemption through two women whose paths cross in unexpected ways.

Inspiration for the book came from the author’s real-life experiences with pet-sitting, an endeavor she undertook with her husband, Peter Moreira, author of *The Haight Mystery Series*. “We work at home, and it can get lonely, so we signed up as pet-sitters,” she explains. “The novel was inspired by a particularly strange house in which there was little privacy. It evoked thoughts of a woman who thinks she has escaped her past, but, of course, she is wrong.”

In the novel, Moreira’s central character returns to her native Portsmouth from America to confront the demons of her former life in the U.K.

“My character Marion was abused as a youngster. Now in her forties, she has fought all her life to become free of her past and live a normal existence. She now lives in the U.S. and is married to a man who doesn’t even know she is British. She has come home to Portsmouth to lay her past to rest, but finds that it is not done with her yet.”

Marion eventually meets Paula Moore, a disgraced detective who balances the main character’s vulnerability with gritty defiance. “As a counterweight to Marion, I created Paula Moore, a bisexual detective, who has just



been thrown out of her marriage and the police force for attacking a criminal who kicked her police dog. Marion is timid and lacks confidence. Paula is attractive to men and women and is confident in her sexuality, which she uses to her advantage.”

For Moreira, layering her characters and plot with depth and ingenuity is at the core of her craft.

“I like originality and twists and turns in all my novels. I also like it when place and history are properly evoked...”

And, for Moreira, place is never just about scenery.

“Portsmouth also evoked the past in me as I grew up in the British military, and the city is bursting with maritime history.”

But she wanted a second setting to reveal the protagonists’ inner conflicts. “San Francisco seems such a gorgeous, sad city to me. It reflects a lot about my characters’ internal struggles as they get older and find life wondrous yet also deeply painful.”

Capturing and balancing out that depth



is key to Moreira’s work on the novel.

“Marion remains deeply traumatized in middle age. It was a struggle to reflect her trauma realistically, and to use a lot of introspection, but make her sympathetic and keep the plot moving along.”

The dynamic between Marion and Paula drives the novel’s themes of gender bias, injustice, and thwarted power. Ultimately, Moreira hopes readers “identify with the two women and their unlikely friendship and ultimate solidarity.”

Although *The Pet-Sit* delves deeply into psychology and trauma, Moreira sticks to the conventions of the mystery form.

“We all love a good puzzle,” she says, adding that she may have another mystery in mind for her female sleuth, Paula Moore, as a sequel in the future. “I am currently juggling another two projects: a novel for teens and a fantasy for adults. Sometimes I find it helps to mix things up.”

Mixing things up shapes *The Pet-Sit* itself, which is more than merely a tale of suspense. It’s a study on identity, trust, and how what unfolds beneath the surface can play out in real life. “We are all fascinated by the dark side of human nature,” notes the author.

Moreira herself continues to fascinate readers, mostly women, of all ages. “This book has themes of abuse and injustice, of powerful men getting away with too much, but women fighting back. It is quite a contemporary story.”

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CELTIC WINDS



The Piper's Lullaby

Long-percolating legacy sequels have been very much in vogue for the last several years. Top Gun took to the skies again, 36 years after the original film launched. There have been two Ghostbusters reunion flicks in the last half-decade, and even Beetlejuice came back from the dead just last year, just to name an exceptional few.

Something must be in the air, because much like those dusted-off film franchises, Canadian author Gil Waugh felt the creative compulsion to return to a narrative universe he began more than a quarter-century ago and has added a new volume to his Sandalwood Investigation Agency series.

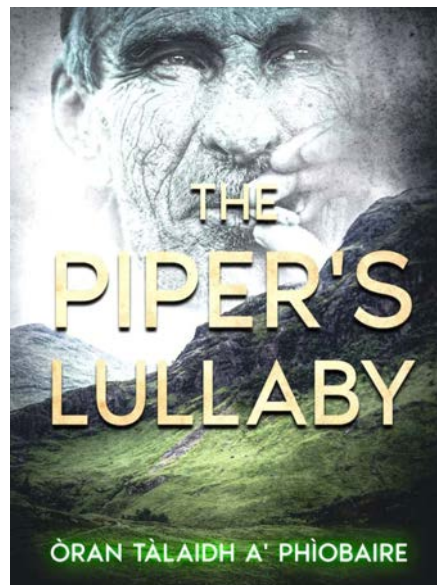
"The first two books - Mind Surfing and Evening Song - were published over 25 years ago and provide much of the origin story and background that fed into this newest work," the author shares with Celtic Life International in an email correspondence. "The Piper's Lullaby is the third instalment."

Hailing from both Highland and Lowland Scottish heritage, Waugh is something of a polymath; he took to the arts following his recovery from a spinal cord injury in 1993, but before that, he had storied careers in private investigation, computer programming, commercial piloting, IT architecture, and security analysis.

He draws from all these well-trodden career paths to inform his prose, but his most recent tome borrows much from yet another one of his former professions - music.

"I am a lifelong musician and multi-instrumentalist, with over two decades of experience as both a bagpiper and a piping tutor. Music has always been central to my life, and I've long sought ways to connect that passion with my heritage - especially with my ancestral island of Islay and the rich cultural landscape of 18th-century Scotland.

"It all began with a seemingly wild idea; what if my favourite classical composer had ties to royalty, who in turn had links to the ancient MacLeod clan of Dunvegan, and ultimately to the legendary MacCrimmon piping dynasty? It was a 'what if' born of curiosity,



but as my research unfolded, the historical threads began to weave together, like echoes across time."

Such is the inciting incident of The Piper's Lullaby; a retired fisherman on the Isle of Islay suddenly dies, and his grandson Alasdair finds an ancient bagpipe chanter among his belongings that points to a mystery that the Sandalwood Investigation Agency - helmed by a married couple - is tasked with solving.

"Karen Simpson - a dedicated police officer - was my first long-form protagonist, introduced in Mind Surfing," waxes Waugh. "In that first book, she meets Steve Johnson, an NRC physicist, and their relationship grows from friendship to love, culminating in their marriage before tackling their first major case together in Evening Song.

“Their dynamic continues to evolve in *The Piper's Lullaby*, and one of the great joys of writing this series is discovering where their journey will lead next.”

With such a gap between the last instalment in the series and the newest chapter, Waugh was reminded of the toils - and the thrills - that come with penning a full-length novel.

"Writing a novel is no small feat; it's a long, often solitary journey, and it requires a deep personal investment.

"There is something vulnerable about creating a full-length work and then releasing it into the world, trusting that it might resonate with others...

"I had almost forgotten just how much work goes into producing a novel. It's been 25 years since I wrote the previous books in the series. Of course, I'm now 25 years older; I also have 25 more years of experiences, ideas, and creative fuel to draw from."

Waugh is already drawing from that well again and has no plans to wane anytime soon.

"This project has truly reinvigorated me. The next instalment in the series, The Ploughman's House, is already halfway written and will be ready to finish this winter. I also have a solid concept and detailed plot line sketched out for the book that will follow.

"I have rediscovered how much I've missed the process of storytelling - especially the thrill of crafting narratives with more twists and turns than the catacombs beneath Odessa, Ukraine. It's demanding, yes, but it is also deeply satisfying."

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Beyond *the* Blue Line

Brendan Kelly looks at life on and off the ice

Brendan Kelly has spent his career writing about culture, including music, film, and politics. So, when the veteran journalist and broadcaster set out to write a book about the famed Montreal Canadiens, it's perhaps not surprising that he wasn't only writing about hockey. Just released in English, *Habs Nation* skates beyond the stats and Stanley Cups to reveal how a hockey team became a mirror for Quebec's identity.

"This is not a book about hockey," insists Kelly. "It's a book about culture and society."

For more than a century, the Canadiens have been a vital chapter in Quebec's collective narrative. From the 1950s to the early 1990s, the team reflected the province's own transformation. From the Quiet Revolution to the rise of nationalist politics, Kelly argues that the Habs didn't merely represent Quebec; they helped shape it.

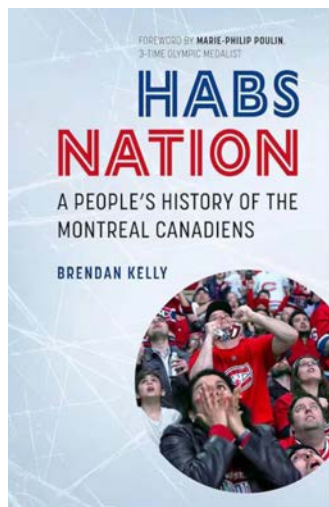
"The Canadiens had an impact on Quebec," he explains, "and at the same time, the province and the society had an impact on the team."

That relationship continues to fascinate him. While most sports books focus on players and championships, *Habs Nation* tracks how the team evolved simultaneously with the province. Between 1955 and 1995, the Canadiens won 17 Stanley Cups, with a team comprised of many Quebec-born players, including Jean Béliveau, Guy Lafleur, and Patrick Roy. "When there were that many Quebec players, they played harder and it meant something more," says Kelly. Even today, with players from around the globe, the Canadiens' identity remains deeply rooted in 'French Canadian' culture.

Kelly sees this cultural continuity as a progression from one social chapter to another.

"What the team is going through seems to be what society is going through. The biggest political story in Quebec over the past twenty years is identity: who are we as Quebecers? Well, the team is living that too."

It's an idea that is not exclusive to the province. First published in French, *Habs Nation* was translated by Peter McCambridge for an English-language audience. Some warned



that the book's uniquely Quebec perspective might not resonate outside the province. They were wrong. "There are Canadiens fans from coast to coast," laughs Kelly. "People from British Columbia to New Brunswick write to me. They see the Habs as part of Canadian history, not just Quebec history."

The parallels he draws aren't limited to North America. Kelly, who was born in Glasgow, sees similarities with European clubs that show strong regional pride.

“When you think of teams that have that cultural resonance - something more than just being a sports team - there are really no examples in the NHL other than the Canadiens...”

"In European football, there's Barcelona and Catalonia culture, and then there's Glasgow Celtic," he continues. "As someone who comes from Glasgow, there are incredible parallels with that team, which was founded for the Irish immigrant community. That's literally on par with the Canadiens, which was created specifically for the French-Canadian community."

That sensibility of heritage and identity expressed through sport permeates the book. "If you look at Glasgow Celtic today, those green and white colours are still wrapped up in Irish heritage. It's the same with the Canadiens. Even if the players come from every-

where, the cultural story remains."

Community is also a key theme. Kelly remembers when stars like Ken Dryden and Bob Gainey rode the bus through Montreal's Westmount or NDG and were visible in everyday life. He believes that spirit is returning. "It's not the same, of course, they're multimillion-dollar players now, but there's a sense of connection again. The younger players live downtown, they're in the coffee shops, they are part of the city." That renewed sense of community, he says, mirrors the team's past and offers hope for its future.

Writing *Habs Nation* took Kelly three years, alongside his ongoing work at *The Gazette* and his *What the Puck* column, as well as his many other cultural projects. "Writing a book is a hard thing," he admits. "You have to really want to do it. It's a long, painstaking process."

Luckily for readers, Kelly stayed the course with *Habs Nation*, which ultimately offers more than nostalgia. It's a thoughtful reflection on how sport and culture intertwine, how a team derived from humble beginnings becomes a symbol of belonging for millions. Whether read by die-hard fans or those who can't tell a power play from a penalty box, Kelly's book makes one thing clear: the Canadiens are more than a hockey club; they're an enduring emblem of identity, history, and heart.

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NOV 29 Nanaimo, BC (Port Theatre)

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DEC 4 Calgary, AB (Knox United Church)

DEC 5 Winnipeg, MB (Burton Cummings Theatre)

DEC 7 Montreal, QC (Théâtre Beaufield)

DEC 9 Ottawa, ON (Shenkman Arts Centre)

DEC 10 Belleville, ON (Empire Theatre)

DEC 11 Brantford, ON (Sanderson Centre)

DEC 12 Meaford, ON (Meaford Hall Arts and Cultural Centre)

DEC 14 St. John's, NF (RJAG Soundhouse)

DEC 16 Oshawa, ON (Regent Theatre UOIT)

DEC 17 Orillia, ON (Orillia Opera House)



The Celtic Tenors

*As Irish vocal supergroup
The Celtic Tenors prepare to hit the road with their
Celtic Christmas show, Celtic Life International
shares a “proper cuppa” with the ensemble’s
newest member George Hutton*

Supporting a classic Aran Sweater and a smile a mile wide, vocalist George Hutton is the epitome of Irish charm.

"And I've my cuppa tea, so I'm good-to-go," shares the 37-year-old over a Zoom call with Celtic Life International from his home in Derry, Northern Ireland. "There are very few things in life that you cannot handle with a good cup of tea."

Born and raised on the Emerald Isle, Hutton comes by love of the leaves honestly.

"I'm from Derry. My mother was from Creggan Heights, and my dad was from the Bogside. In the 1970s they lived on Blucher Street, which is sort-of between those two areas. And the stories that they would tell about the trials and tribulations that they went through during The Troubles were just horrific."

In 1978, Hutton's father moved the family to the periphery of the city.

"I was very fortunate to grow up in a mixed area. As a youngster, my two best friends were a boy whose family were from India and another boy who was a Protestant. I was blessed because my parents never tried to drill a point of view into me or my siblings. They always believed in kindness - do unto others as you would do unto yourself - just really good values."

And, as it turned out, really good music.

"It was an interesting mix - on the one hand, my mother was a big fan of opera and of Maria Callas in particular, while on the other hand I was immersed in folk music and exposed at a very young age to the sounds of Luke Kelly and the Dubliners, Paul Brady, Planxty, Christy Moore. And Phil Coulter had a huge influence on me.

“Honestly, I didn't really understand much about how these singers did what they did...I just loved listening and singing along.”

After attending music sessions at neighbourhood pubs, Hutton started taking vocal lessons from singer/songwriter Eoin O'Callaghan (AKA Best Boy Grip). He also joined a local choir.

"My parents were always supportive of my love for music and singing, but they were also adamant that I pursue a proper education as well."

After graduating from St Columb's Col-

lege in Derry, Hutton studied Ancient and Modern History at Queen's University in Belfast.

"Going to Queen's was probably one of the proudest moments of my life. I often wondered why it meant so much to my mother, but very few young Catholic Derry men went to Queen's when she was growing up - the list consisted of Seamus Heaney, John Hume, and Phil Coulter. My brother, Christopher, was there at the same time also, and mum cried when she witnessed her two youngest graduate on the same day."

Music, however, followed Hutton wherever he went, and it wasn't long before his training and natural tone opened doors of opportunity.



Invited to join the longstanding Celtic classical-crossover vocal group ANÚNA, Hutton recorded two albums with the band (Illuminations, 2014, and Revelations, 2015). Also in 2015, he recorded the song "My Beautiful" which topped the Easy Listening charts in the U.K., Ireland and Canada. He has since released solo albums, sold out shows around the world and has shared the stage with the likes of Irish megastar Hozier, Academy Award/Grammy winning songwriter Glen Hansard, and his early hero, Phil Coulter.

"Touring with Phil for five years was a dream come true. He's an incredible musician, and a real gentleman. Watching him on the road - the way he carried himself both



on and off the stage - really helped me take my game to the next level. It was like taking a masterclass in performance. I learned so much from him musically - how to say more with less, listening to the spaces between the notes - all of the subtleties of the craft that would have taken me a lifetime to learn.”

Soon after, Hutton got a call from The Celtic Tenors.

“So, there’s a bit of a story about how this all happened. Two years ago, I took part in a Caribbean cruise that featured the Tenors and Phil and a few other artists. I didn’t realize it at the time, but it was in some ways an audition of sorts.

“And then Matthew (Gilsenan, co-founder) contacted me and said, ‘Look, there

are four names in the running and you’re one of them’. Of course, I was delighted, but at the time I was shooting a movie with Hugh Jackman. Believe it or not I was Hugh’s body and photo double for a movie called *The Death of Robin Hood*, which comes out next year. And so, I was pretty much working with him every day. And because he is an absolute gentleman, he would ask me about my life and my career. One day we were walking along the coast in Ballycastle in Antrim, having just wrapped a scene, and I told him about The Celtic Tenors situation and how much I wanted the gig and so forth. It was a very surreal moment, actually, looking back on it. And you know what Hugh does? He sends Matthew a video, saying ‘Matthew - Hugh

Jackman here - I’m not sure if you know me, but I want you to know that I think George is a legend and you better give him the bit or I’m going to find you, I’m going to hunt you down.’

“I mean, who’s going to mess with Wolverine, right? And then, lo and behold, I got the part.”

So far, the transition into The Celtic Tenor family has been seamless and smooth.

“When James (Nelson) left after having been with the group for 25 years I was a little nervous about trying to fill those big shoes. He’s an absolutely fantastic singer with a background in classical music. And while I am also classically trained, I bring more of a folk tradition into the mix - maybe more of a crossover sound. It’s taken a while to find my footing - my own voice - and discover what I can add to the group that is unique and won’t take away from what has been there for the last quarter century. I cannot pretend to be a singer that I’m not. I’ve never tried to simply copy a song. If you give me a song to learn, I’m not just going to emulate someone else’s interpretation - I’m going to find out where it came from, who wrote it, why they wrote it, and then add something within me that is distinctly different.

“Thankfully, Matthew and Daryl (Simpson) have both been incredibly supportive and I think they are excited with the new direction.”

That new direction will take center stage over the coming months as the band tours North America.

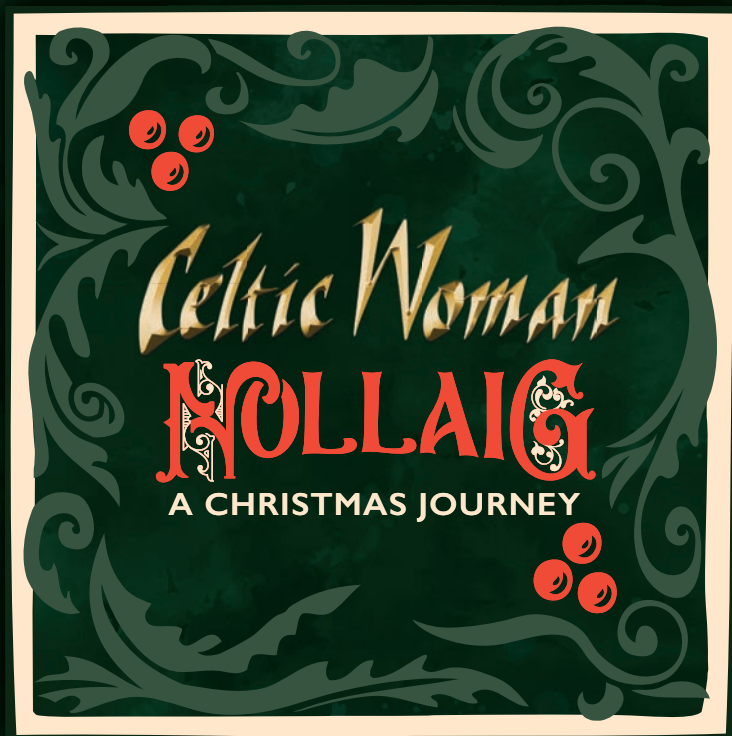
“We’re on the road with our Celtic Christmas show across Canada in November and December with a really nice mix of classic and contemporary carols and more - audiences are going to love the way it sets the tone for the whole season.

“I love Canada - the landscape is incredible, and the people are always so welcoming and warm, which is great because it gets quite cold over there at that time of the year! And Canada has excellent tea! If there’s one thing I can’t do without on tour, it’s a good cup of tea!”

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Caitríona Sherlock

We chat with Irish vocalist - and the newest member of Celtic Woman - Caitríona Sherlock on connection, culture, and community...

What are your own roots?

I grew up on my family's dairy farm in County Monaghan, surrounded by the beauty of the Irish countryside. Music and culture oozed out of every corner of the house - the tape recorders and CD players constantly serenaded us with The Chieftains, Bagatelle, Horslips, and songs by the iconic Mary Black, Sinéad O'Connor, and Cara Dillon. So, I was exposed to music from a very young age. I have fond memories of my Grandad Nicholas taking the fiddle down off the wall to play when we'd visit. My father wrote poetry and recitations, and my mother was known to sing Danny Boy at sing-song gatherings. I also have an older brother, Oisín, and much of my childhood was spent playing in the forest, helping on the farm, and singing 'til the cows came home. We were brought up knowing a lot about our history and culture and took pride in respecting our identity, music, and language - especially being from a border town. My parents taught me to believe in myself, lead with integrity, and always follow my dreams. That mindset really laid the foundation for my career in music.

Where do you currently reside?

I still reside in my beautiful homeland. Honestly, I couldn't think of a place I'd rather be right now. Family is incredibly important to me and being able to call in to see my relations, and my godson, and cousins, and spend time with them is a luxury not everyone has, so I have to cherish and make time for that when I can. It also keeps me connected to Ireland's vibrant music scene while touring and collaborating internationally. My home county of Monaghan is also the birthplace of the poet Patrick Kavanagh, singer Big Tom, and actresses Caitríona Balfe, Charlene McKenna and Aoibhinn McGinnity. There's something in the air here that keeps the creative spirit alive.

When and why did you first become interested in music?

I started singing from a very young age - it was my aunties who suggested to my mother that I take singing lessons because I "wouldn't stop singing around the house." From there, I began traditional singing lessons with a wonderful woman named Monica



Beagon. Learning these songs opened a gateway for me to connect with the history, heritage, and stories of my ancestors, which I was enthralled by. I always had a love for reading - especially Irish literature - so that's one reason I was drawn to traditional song. It felt like the pulse of my ancestors moving through me. We were taught that we're not meant to be the focus; we're just vessels through which the stories and songs flow. That idea really stuck with me - it is sacred, in a way. Even though these songs are hundreds of years old, I felt that I could always find a piece of myself and my story within it and getting to express myself through music and song is extremely cathartic.

Are they the same reasons that you continue to be involved today?

Yes, absolutely. Music is still about storytelling, connection, and emotion for me. I've said for the longest time that I don't really view myself as just a singer - I am first and foremost a

storyteller. My goal has always been to share stories that connect people, move people, and pay homage to our history. Seeing the light dance in someone's eyes when they feel that internal pull during a song - that's everything. Whether it's three people by a fire in the local pub or thousands in a venue, the goal is the same: connection, culture, and community.

How has your craft evolved over the years?

My craft has grown tremendously. I've developed greater technical skill, artistic expression, and versatility across genres. With my roots being grounded in traditional singing, sometimes people assume that means I can't branch into other genres like pop, classical, or choral music, or even have the ability to do so. But for me, it's very much like sport - a Gaelic footballer can go and switch up to play American football or Australian rules football. The context and rules may change, but the core skills and instincts are transferable in every sense. I learned and grew immensely during my time in the Choral Scholars in UCD. The guidance and skill I learned there catapulted my ability to explore more avenues and explore my vocal agility. Traditional singing gave me discipline, a finely tuned ear, and a deep connection to storytelling. Now those qualities carry into everything else I do, whether it's choral, classical, or contemporary work. Over time, I've learned to adapt, explore new textures, and stretch my voice in different directions while still staying true to my roots.

What are the challenges of the vocation?

Balancing travel, rehearsals, performances, and personal life can be tough. There's the constant need to evolve and improve while staying authentic and of course, self-doubt creeps in for every artist, no matter how experienced. But you learn to push through it and trust the process. Another big challenge is to always be "on" as performers. Obviously we want to put on the best show possible and give people a night they'll never forget. But at the end of the day, we're human. Some nights, your 80 per cent

might be your 100 per cent for that moment because you're exhausted, sick, or just human and that's okay. It doesn't mean you care any less or give any less effort; it just means you're not a machine. Social media has also made things more difficult in some ways. People have become very comfortable throwing wild comments out into the abyss, things they'd never say to someone's face. There's a casual cruelty that's crept in, where people think it's perfectly fine to comment on someone's appearance, their body, their smile, their teeth, their weight or asking extremely personal things that are frankly none of their business. You'll always hear, "Well, that's part of the job you put yourself out there." But there must be boundaries. There has to be a line. We forget there's a person on the other side of the screen, someone who feels and bleeds and hurts like everyone else. That side of the job can be very hard, and it's something I think we need to have more open conversations about.

What are the rewards?

The rewards are immense. There's nothing like that feeling of connection with an audience, the thrill of performance, the shared emotion, and the ability to move people through music. It is quite touching to hear stories from audience members who find solace and comfort in music that you have performed. I'm not a doctor, mechanic, or schoolteacher, so this is my way of helping people - in a way, this is my calling and my skill set. Getting to travel and see all corners of the world with music as my passport still feels surreal. In every artist there is a desperate ache to perform and feed that craving, so you can imagine what it feels like to do that every night alongside virtuosos who inspire you each and every step of the way - every day is a school day! Honestly, the friendships and bonds you build along the way are priceless. Some of the most genuine, inspiring people in my life are ones I met through music. The most rewarding thing is knowing my parents are proud of me and the person that I have become through the years.

What inspires you?

I'm inspired by so many things. You



could throw a stone in Ireland and hit inspiration. It's in the land, the rise and fall of the mountains, the horizon, the golden tones of autumn, the icy touch of winter creeping in. It's in the people, the characters you meet in your local pub or coffee shop, the stories they tell. Storytelling, nature, and the human experience all feed me creatively. Songs that evoke deep emotion, history, or wonder always light that spark in me.

What makes a good song?

A good song resonates emotionally, tells a story, and feels authentic. Melody, lyrics, and arrangement should all work together to leave a lasting impression. But of course, what makes a "good" song is subjective - what moves me might not move someone else. And that's the beauty of it. Music is personal - it meets you where you are.

What makes a good live show?

A good live show is about connection, energy, and presence. The audience should feel part of the experience, and the performer should be fully immersed in the moment. For me, a great show allows you to step away from the painful realities of the world, even if just for a short while. It gives you space to breathe, to escape, and to feel free - but it can also gently remind you to go back out into that world, make memories, challenge what's not

right, and be grateful for all that we have. In a truly good show, you're not thinking about your nine-to-five, your worries at home, or your fears. You're just there - fully present, fully alive.

When and how did you get involved with Celtic Woman?

Like so many singers in Ireland and abroad, I've admired Celtic Woman for years and grew up watching them. They were this beacon of what it meant to be a professional Irish singer, blending tradition and modernity in a powerful way and reaching far and wide across the world. I've only been in the group a short time, but I'm excited for what's ahead. It's an honour to be part of that legacy of incredible women.

What has that experience been like for you so far?

It's been inspiring and incredibly rewarding. Straight away, I was in the studio recording an album with the group. I'll admit, that first day I was full of nerves, but the minute I met the girls, and we started singing together, everything just clicked. Singing with Máiréad and Muirgen felt so natural. We blended instantly. It's a very special thing when you feel that kind of ease right from the start. The musical arrangements and compositions by Brian Byrne are beautiful and I'm honored to sing his work and to go and perform it in winter with orchestras all around the U.S. Our new album 'Nollaig - A Christmas Journey' will be out by then and I can't wait for everyone to hear it.

Along with Celtic Woman, what's next on your creative agenda?

Even when you're focused on one big project like a tour or album, there's always a creative side of you that wants to keep dreaming and building. I've really enjoyed working more with presenting this year, and I'd love to explore that further. I've been writing and developing an idea for a miniseries tied to my local area and its history. I have the script in the works and excited to see where it leads.

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STYLE

Fresh Faces of Fashion

“One should either be a work of art or wear a work of art...” ~ Oscar Wilde

From Donegal to Limerick, a new wave of Irish designers is reshaping what Celtic fashion means for the next generation. Twenty-somethings Mary O'Sullivan, Emma McKinney, and Holly Marie Gallagher are rooted in tradition, yet also brimming with innovation, blending crochet with tweed, taffeta with storytelling, and art with sustainability.

Celtic Life reached out to the young designers to gather their insights into what shapes and inspires their work. The result is a collective tapestry of Celtic fashion that is bold, sustainable, proudly local, and rich in narrative.

The Source of the Craft

Mary O'Sullivan's fashion vision came through art and tattoo design before she discovered the possibilities of textiles at the Limerick School of Art and Design. McKinney hails from Donegal and recounts a childhood filled with DIY projects and art classes that eventually evolved into crochet - her pandemic passion. Gallagher was born to a Tyrone mother and Donegal father and remembers styling her twin brothers before she could spell "couture."



Fashion always whispered to me. The mixture of art and design within one discipline was what appealed to me the most.

~ Mary O'Sullivan

While O'Sullivan's quiet call became a constant, McKinney had a similar sense of discovery that shaped her vision.



Early on, I was figuring out who I wanted to be as a designer. I want to have an impact on the industry in a thoughtful, sustainable manner, connected to my home.

~ Emma McKinney

Whereas McKinney was busy working on DIY projects, Hollie Marie Gallagher was more about dress-up.



I come from a long line of entrepreneurs, hard workers, and creatives who weren't afraid to stretch themselves to achieve their dreams. I don't remember a time when fashion wasn't on my mind.

~ Hollie Marie Gallagher

Finding the Weave

For all three, their purpose was found in the first threads woven with their personal artistry and worldview. O'Sullivan incorporates integrity and passion, and a love of home. "I've gotten braver and better at what I do. I suppose the core subject matter has always remained the same: Limerick and the larger Irish culture. My projects require that I feel a genuine connection to the piece. I've never been one to do something if there isn't meaning in it."

McKinney's approach is equally in line with her own personal philosophy and tends toward slow fashion. "I want to create positive change in the fashion industry. I focus on sustainability and fell in love with remnant and second-hand fabrics," she shares.

Gallagher sees fashion as an opportunity for reinvention: "I love the way a design comes together and how by changing a colour, a fabric or an accessory, it can become something else entirely."

Shaping the Pattern

As their craft developed, so did each young designer's personal brand.

O'Sullivan draws from the depth and details of everyday life where meaning hides in plain sight.



Inspiration comes to me constantly — through conversations, books, history, or even just simple observations - and those sparks are what fuel my ideas.

~ Mary O'Sullivan



Each piece is a conversation starter; it carries culture, symbolism, and narrative within it, inviting people to reflect, share, and engage.

~ Mary O'Sullivan

While O'Sullivan tells a story through print and pattern, McKinney found her signature in sustainability and crochet, transforming a traditional craft into a modern expression of design.



I am excited to share what crochet can be. I source all my fabrics second-hand, either from charity shops or as remnants from local producers. ~ Emma McKinney



I love combining contrasting materials, such as leather and tweed, to create interesting textures. There's something really satisfying about combining the traditional with the contemporary.
~ Emma McKinney

Where McKinney incorporates sustainability and texture into her designs, Gallagher's evolution moved from her early street-style influences on the shimmer of taffeta.

In London, I trolled the fabric shops in Shepherd's Bush... It was here that I fell in love with taffeta and the beauty of its iridescent sheen.
~ Hollie Marie Gallagher



My creative process is inspirational, my designs are the fruition of pushing boundaries, celebrating individuality, and empowering people.
~ Hollie Marie Gallagher



Connecting the Threads

Ask any of these three young Irish designers what makes a good garment, and the answer isn't trends or turnover but craftsmanship, community, and connection.

"A good piece of clothing is more than just functional clothes," says O'Sullivan. "It tells a story, reflects personality, and sparks a connection. It's a balance of design, craftsmanship, and functionality: the cut, fabric, and construction need to be considered, but also how it makes the wearer feel."

A similar commitment runs through McKinney's work, which reflects intention and sustainability. "A good garment is something made with care, intention, and the wearer in mind. A truly great piece should make you feel confident and excited to wear it, as if it were made just for you."

Gallagher shares that respect for longevity, favouring pieces that endure with distinc-

tion. "A good item of clothing is one with a unique silhouette and a classic design that will only get better with time, yet it should challenge boundaries and offer something individual and bold."

The Fabric of The Industry

There's a quiet confidence running through Irish fashion today with a sense that the next wave of designers is building something lasting. These young designers are re-defining Irish fashion through creativity, sustainability, and a proud sense of place.

"I think we're experiencing a cultural renaissance in Irish fashion right now," shares O'Sullivan. Designers and the wider creative community are coming together with Irish Fashion Week. It's an exciting moment for the industry as we make our mark globally, and it's been wonderful to take part in. I love seeing Irish people coming out in force to support local designers," she adds.

McKinney agrees, citing that Ireland's renewed appreciation for the craft and eco-awareness is becoming part of the country's creative DNA. "It's exciting to see a growing emphasis on sustainability and traditional Irish craftsmanship, like heritage knitwear and tweed. We need to change our mindset around clothing. Supporting local, ethical production is key."

Gallagher continues that thread, promoting recognition for Irish creativity at home as well as abroad. "Events such as Ireland Fashion Week are highlighting the talent this small country has to offer, and designers who appreciate looking after our heritage. Irish designers should not have to leave Ireland to showcase their designs."

For O'Sullivan, McKinney, and Gallagher, the future of Irish fashion looks as enduring as the fabric they work with - textured, eco-conscious, and authentically Irish.

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SIGHTS

I was born in Haverfordwest, the county town of Pembrokeshire in West Wales.

When I was seventeen, I bought a motorbike, which gave me the freedom to explore parts of Pembrokeshire I never knew existed. I bought a camera to take with me on my aimless rambles, snapping artless pictures, but falling in love with photography. I suffered an accident which left me with a broken neck, back and a few other bones and bits. In the dark years following the accident, along with the support of my family and friends, the camera kept me going.

It was to be many years before I could make a living from photography. Approaching forty, I was stuck in the latest of a succession of soul-destroying jobs, and I decided to see

whether photography could pay. It was madness to cash-in a secure job to become a landscape photographer. Factor in my determination to specialize in black and white, and that madness was twofold. Then, to complete the insanity, there was the considerable challenge of a physically compromised person accessing that landscape when just walking along a street was a challenge. And so, of course, I took the plunge.

When I started out, I was content to disappear into the middle of nowhere alone and shoot what I found. The solace and silence were beautiful. But over the years, and especially since earning a living with a camera, my work has evolved.

Photography has brought a sense of achievement and provided me with

a haven of peace and mental calm. Becoming a professional photographer completed my personal renaissance - I had discovered something within me that gave me a sense of fulfilment.

Everything is just a reinterpretation of something that's already been produced. My work appeals to a niche market which provides me with the motivation to continue ploughing my furrow.

A good photograph is one that causes someone to stop and look at it and appreciate it. It's that simple, really.

I feel a connection to Wales in the way that all people native to a country feel a connection. I see and feel the stories in the landscape which helps me to incorporate a visual narrative into my images.







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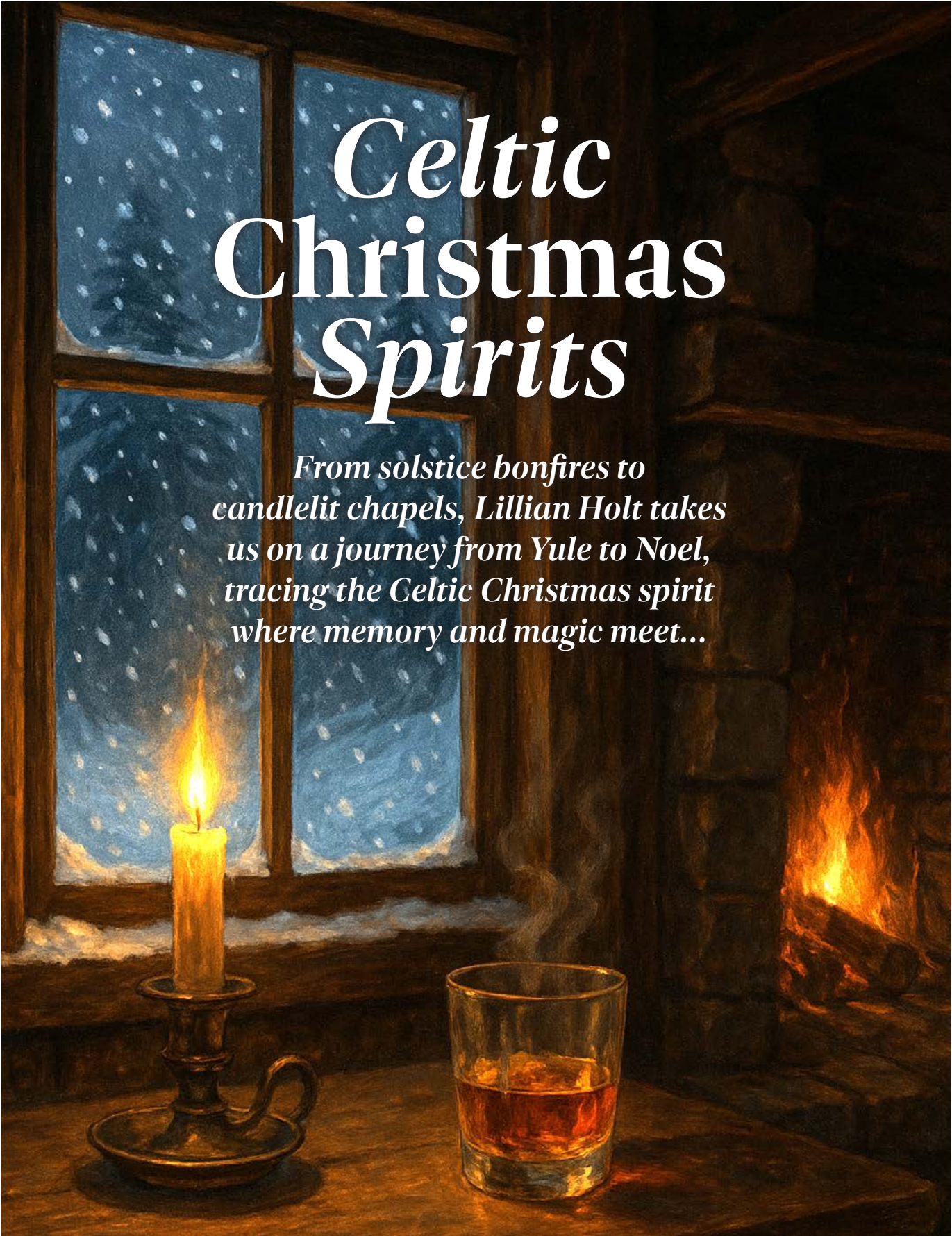
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A detailed illustration of a cozy winter interior. In the foreground, a lit candle sits in a brass candlestick on a wooden surface, next to a glass of amber liquid. In the background, a stone fireplace is filled with a warm fire, and a window looks out onto a snowy night.

Celtic Christmas *Spirits*

*From solstice bonfires to
candlelit chapels, Lillian Holt takes
us on a journey from Yule to Noel,
tracing the Celtic Christmas spirit
where memory and magic meet...*



A Light in the Dark

Snow falls like mist outside a window. Upon its sill, a candle flickers - an old Irish custom that in ancient times served as a guiding light for lonely travelers, and later, symbolically, as a lodestar for the Holy Family. Inside, by the fire, a glass of whisky glows amber, its vapour rising upwards like an invisible ghost. In that space of light and warmth, a question lingers: What is the Christmas spirit? When did it begin, and is it still with us today?

In the literal sense, “spirits” can be defined as fiery beverages created from grain or fruit. These spirits were often shared with others during winter’s darkest season, and very well might bring forth something beneath the surface when the howling wind was the only constant.

Lisa Roth reminds us in her essay *Whiskey and the Irish Language*, that even the word whiskey has roots in the sacred. “*Uisce beatha*,” she explains, “first appeared in Irish texts in the 15th century and was gradually anglicized into ‘usquebaugh,’ ‘usky,’ and eventually ‘whiskey.’” Its original meaning, ‘water of life,’ tells us that spirit, in all its forms, was always meant to warm both body and soul.

Aside from the spirits in Christmas cocktails, the holiday spirit is something a

little harder to distill. It might be compared to the glow of whisky by the fire, or the candle in the window, but is there more to it?

Tracing that Christmas spirit through time leads us back through centuries of change, from pagan bonfires that called for the return of the sun, to the candlelit vigils of early Christians, to the harsher glare of modern celebrations. Each generation has tried, in its own way, to keep the light and spirit of the season alive.

Historically, the idea of a seasonal spirit evolved from centuries of solstice festivals as communal acts to combat winter’s bleakness through light, song, stories, and shared food and drink. Dickens went even further with *A Christmas Carol*, which illustrated the transformation of a hardened soul who finally ‘saw the light’ through visits from spirits in ghostly form.

So, is the Christmas Spirit derived from meaning and memory? History provides some clues.

Before Bethlehem

Long before Bethlehem, midwinter was a sacred time of both darkness and hope. Across the Celtic world, people gathered around big bonfires to honor Yule and the turning of the year’s wheel when the sun sank low before beginning its return.

As one Celtic Life International historian writes, “in December, at the very darkest time of the year, we head towards the Winter Solstice, when the new light is born out of the womb of winter.” The word “solstice” signifies a standstill for the three days when the sun seems to pause before it is reborn. During those long, cold nights, the land appears barren yet slowly awakens as light ascends again. For the pagans, such nights were about gratitude and survival. With food scarce and temperatures harsh, the ancient Celts shared warmth, ale, and song.

The great Yule fires blazed not only to banish the dark, but to affirm the coming of light. This was the first whisper of what we might call “Christmas spirit.” Across time and culture, that sentiment found many expressions.

While the Celts celebrated Alban Arthuan - the Druidic solstice festival that honored the sun’s rebirth - the Church later adopted the same season for the Nativity of Christ, although there is some debate as to the actual date of Jesus’ birth.

“By whatever name, the season has never really changed in its purpose: to bring hope out of despair, light from darkness.”



Among the old tales, the Oak King and Holly King battled over the seasons. The Oak King, representing light, was reborn at Yule, while the Holly King, guardian of shadow, began his retreat. Their eternal exchange revealed an ancient rhythm of death and renewal that a large part of humanity would later retell in the story of Christ's birth, his death, and resurrection.

The making of the spirits themselves - ale, mead, or whisky - was a rite in itself. Turning grain into liquid fire was a sacred way of transforming the earth's gifts into a spirit, too.

Irish storyteller Tomaseen Foley remembers that spirit from the winters of his childhood. "It was as if, at Christmastime, an errant angel left the door to Heaven slightly ajar," he writes, "and the heavenly light shone down on us mere mortals. The neighbors, drawn together by that light, would gather around the fire and almost raise the rafters with the wild joy of their jigs."

Before Christmas had its Christian name, there was already faith in the sun's return, in the merriment of kinship, and in the belief that light triumphs over dark. Every

candle that flickers today, every shared cup, still honors an ancestral hope.

And so, the spirit of Christmas, born from ancient fires and midwinter faith, continued to evolve, shifting its form, yet carrying the same light forward into the next part of its story.

From Yule to Noel

Early Celtic Christianity emerged in the British Isles around the 4th century, melding the region's ancient pagan traditions with the growing Christian influence of Rome. The result was a distinct faith attuned to nature, marked by ritual and creativity, and carried by missionaries who preferred persuasion to conquest. "See in each herb and small animal, every bird and beast, and in each man and woman, the eternal Word of God," wrote St. Ninian, one of the earliest Celtic saints. A Briton trained in Rome, he returned north to bring Christianity to the Picts, bridging old and new worlds with strategy, yet subtlety.

Missionaries like Ninian reinterpreted familiar symbols to express Christian meaning. Evergreens, long recognized as signs of

endurance in winter, came to represent the Christian concept of eternal life. Gift-giving, once an offering to spirits and an exchange of goodwill between clans, was linked to the Magi's offerings at the Nativity. Even sacred fire rituals endured, such as the eternal flame once tended for the goddess Brigid, continued under Christian nuns in honour of the saint of the same name. And let's not exclude the modern cities and towns lit up like... well, Christmas trees, each December.

According to the 2024 article *Celtic Christmas Customs*, "although a celebration of the Son's birth replaced that of the Sun's, a number of Christmas-tide traditions - including those the ancient Celts practiced - remain today." Holly, once a pagan emblem of rebirth, became a symbol of hospitality; mistletoe, believed to hold powers strong enough to "ward off evil spirits and cure illnesses," survived as a blessing of peace. Candles placed in windows to light the way for strangers symbolically welcomed Mary and Joseph, linking ancient fire festivals with Christian faith.

The heart of this new faith beat in places like Iona, where St. Columba and his followers brought the gospel to Scotland, and to the Book of Kells, where monks illuminated the story of Christ with mystical illustrations from pre-Christian art.

“It was a meeting of heaven and hearth - a Celtic Christianity born of community and continuity.”

Centuries later, that same spirit endured in song. From the Welsh services sung before dawn, to Irish "Calling the Waites" and the Manx Carval traditions, the voices rose in carols with devotion and merriment. Cornish singers, as one 19th-century account noted, "walked miles to chapels to practice their Christmas songs," keeping the season alive through music and fellowship.

The blending of old and new created a Christmas that was both mystical and human, a festival of light and generosity born on Celtic soil. As centuries passed, the story unfolded, and the spirit of Christmas evolved through people who still carried its light.

A Celtic Home at Christmas

For the Celts, the season has always been about home, hearth, music, and song, bridging one generation to the next.

In Ireland, the candle still sits in the window, and holly still hangs in the doorway. Before midnight mass, houses are scrubbed, the scent of soap and peat mingling with meals cooking in the kitchen. Afterwards, neighbours gather in low-lit pubs where fiddles play, and glasses lift in a quiet toast of Bean-nachtraí na Nollag.

In Scotland, when the kirk banned Christmas, the Scots kept the day alive through kindness and hospitality. The “first-footer” was welcome, bearing gifts of coal, shortbread, salt, and whisky, to ensure good fortune for the year ahead. Peat smoke rose from stone chimneys; card games and reels carried the night until Hogmanay morning. As one nineteenth-century account in the Celtic Christmas Customs recalled, “the Scots did keep Christmas-day, and in the same kindly Christian spirit that we all do.”

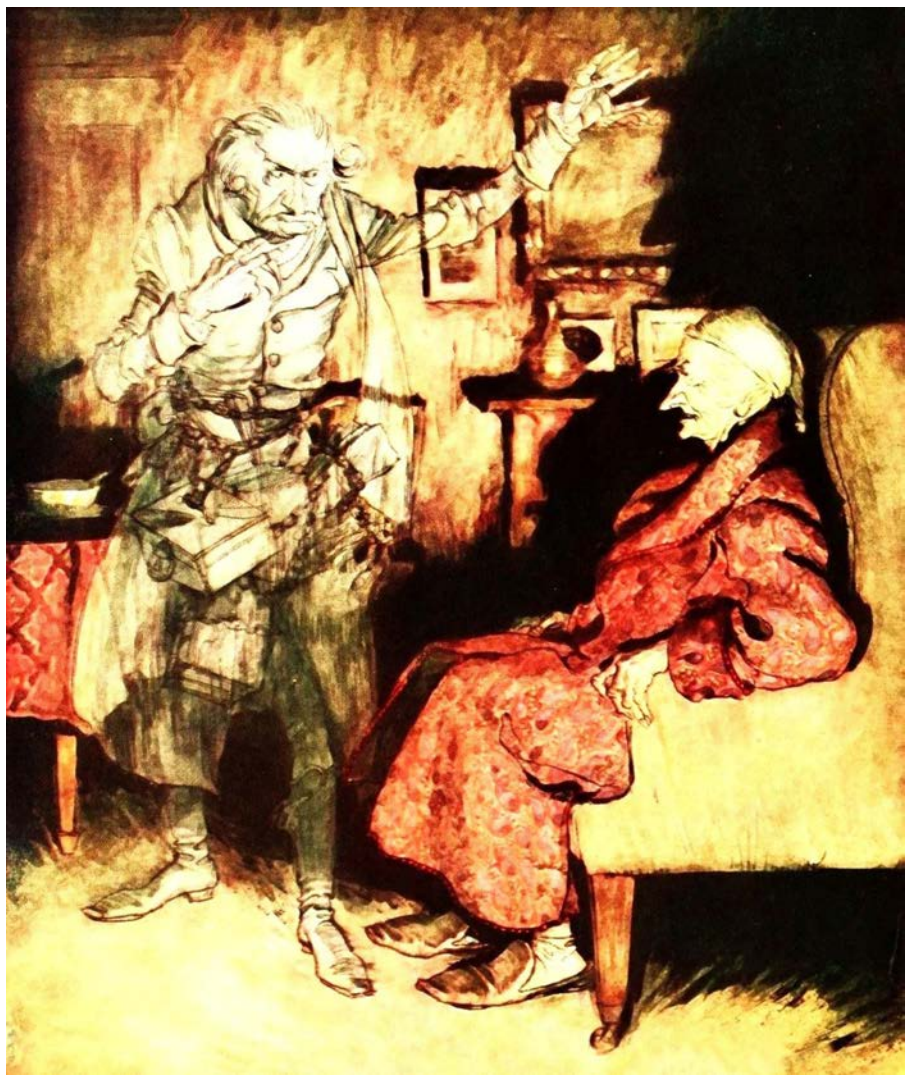
Farther west in Wales, men rose before dawn for Plygain services sung in ominous three-part tones. Later came Eisteddfod carols, wassail bowls spiked with ale, and the eerie parade of Mari Lwyd. Behind all of it lies the same intention of every Celtic feast: to call in luck, laughter, and light, and dispel darkness.

Through all of these traditions runs the belief that no one should face the darkness alone. All offerings were to both the living and the dead, serving as reminders that the veil is thin and kinship is eternal. It was in the quiet following the festivities that the Christmas spirit grew stronger.

Yet, there is another spirit associated with Christmas: ghosts. Do such darker spirits have their place in Yule? History would indicate that indeed they do.

The Ghosts of Christmas Past

“I will honour Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me.” - Ebenezer Scrooge, from *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens.



Christmas has always been linked with ghosts. Dickens merely reflected what the Celts, and later the Victorians, already knew: that midwinter is when the veil grows thin, and the living and the dead can meet again. In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge's haunting becomes an awakening through memory. Each of the spirits that visit him - the Ghosts of Past, Present, and Yet to Come - reveal what a haunting truly means: to remember.

In the British Isles, ghost stories were once a Yuletide staple shared long before Halloween claimed the custom. With the landscape buried beneath frost, stories were told by the fireside against the cold and darkness. As essayist Eric Know writes in *The Supernatural Creatures of Christmas Folklore*, “Winter has always felt a bit spooky...the air feels charged and crackles as if spirits dance around us.” The Victorians simply brought back what pagans always understood: that paradoxically, we find illumination within the shadows.

One of the most prominent examples is the Mari Lwyd - a draped horse's skull knocking at doors in Wales at Christmas. Part mummer's game, part dialogue with death, the custom brought both laughter and unease. In the Highlands, tales of the Cailleach, the Winter Hag who governs storms, reminded everyone that nature was supreme and often harsh. In Norse and Gaelic lore, the Wild Hunt thundered across the sky with a folkloric procession of macabre spirits and creatures as part of a winter blizzard believed to be an omen of doom.

“Such tales were not only meant to be frightening, but served as an otherworldly lesson that kept people mindful of their place in the turning of the Great Wheel.”



Every bit of Christmas cheer, from fires lit to sharing a cup, was both a devotion and a defiance against despair.

Perhaps the ghosts of Christmas remain as a reminder that joy is forged from gathering together against the harsher aspects of life, both literal and figurative, and offering gifts not as a sacrifice, but as an affirmation of our gratitude. From ancient pagan practices to Dickens' Victorian tale, to modern families huddled at home together, sheltered from winter storms and shopping fatigue, those darker spirits are instrumental in creating bright and lasting warmth as we attempt to conjure a Christmas spirit each year.

The Modern Disconnection

Today's Christmas ghosts are not folklore but human, like shadows that haunt our own hectic hearts. In the clattering crowds of busy shopping malls, the ever-present glow of phone screens, and the quiet exhaustion of the season's frenetic pace, we struggle to create meaning in an age that may not value Christmas spirit at all. The wind may still howl outside the door, but we don't notice amid our many distractions, our restlessness,

and our disconnection from nature, purpose, and one another.

Christmas has become, for many, a paradox: still wondrous yet weary, abundant, yet somehow as empty as our bank accounts in January. The old stories of community, song, and sacred fire have been replaced by blaring refurbished carols in concrete settings and glaring lights across cities and towns. Beneath the frenzy, though, is that longing still there? To gather, to give, and be warmed by a unifying presence?

One Scottish distiller believes as such. "When people raise a dram together, they remember who they are. That's the real spirit - not what's in the glass, but what it brings out of us." In Wales, a choir director held a similar truth: "Every voice that joins the carol carries something older than the song - a sense of belonging to be shared."

Even now, despite the din of consumerism, candles still flicker in windows, a stranger still pays for another's coffee, someone visits an elderly neighbour, and a parent whispers an old carol to a child. The rituals may have changed form, but the impulse has not. The spirit isn't gone, only dispersed - muffled under fatigue and some cynicism, no doubt, but

waiting to be remembered. Maybe if we pause and offer a moment of our time, forgiveness, or warmth, it will burn brightly again.

An Inner Light that Endures

In the end, the Christmas spirit isn't one single thing. It's a shared field of energy we co-create when goodwill outweighs self-interest - even for just a short while. It's in the moments when people soften, when memory, myth, and ritual briefly override the numbness of ordinary life. Psychologically, it is a collective return to meaning and memory; hopefully, belonging; perhaps even innocence, and ultimately, grace. It is the longing to reconnect with something greater than ourselves.

The Celts of old knew this truth. They believed that divinity resides in all things. They understood the true meaning of 'anam cara' - soul friendship - and how each act of kindness strengthens the bond between beings. The flame that once burned for Brigid at Kildare still burns in us each time we come in from the cold and help someone else do the same.

Perhaps then, Christmas is not a season but a memory we collectively acknowledge each year to somehow affirm the light in the darkness, within and without. And it endures and waits for us there in the lamplight, the snow, and the close and holy dark.

"Looking through my bedroom window, out into the moonlight and the unending smoke-colored snow, I could see the lights in the windows of all the other houses on our hill and hear the music rising from them up the long, steadily falling night. I turned the gas down; I got into bed. I said some words to the close and holy darkness, and then I slept." - Dylan Thomas, A Child's Christmas in Wales.

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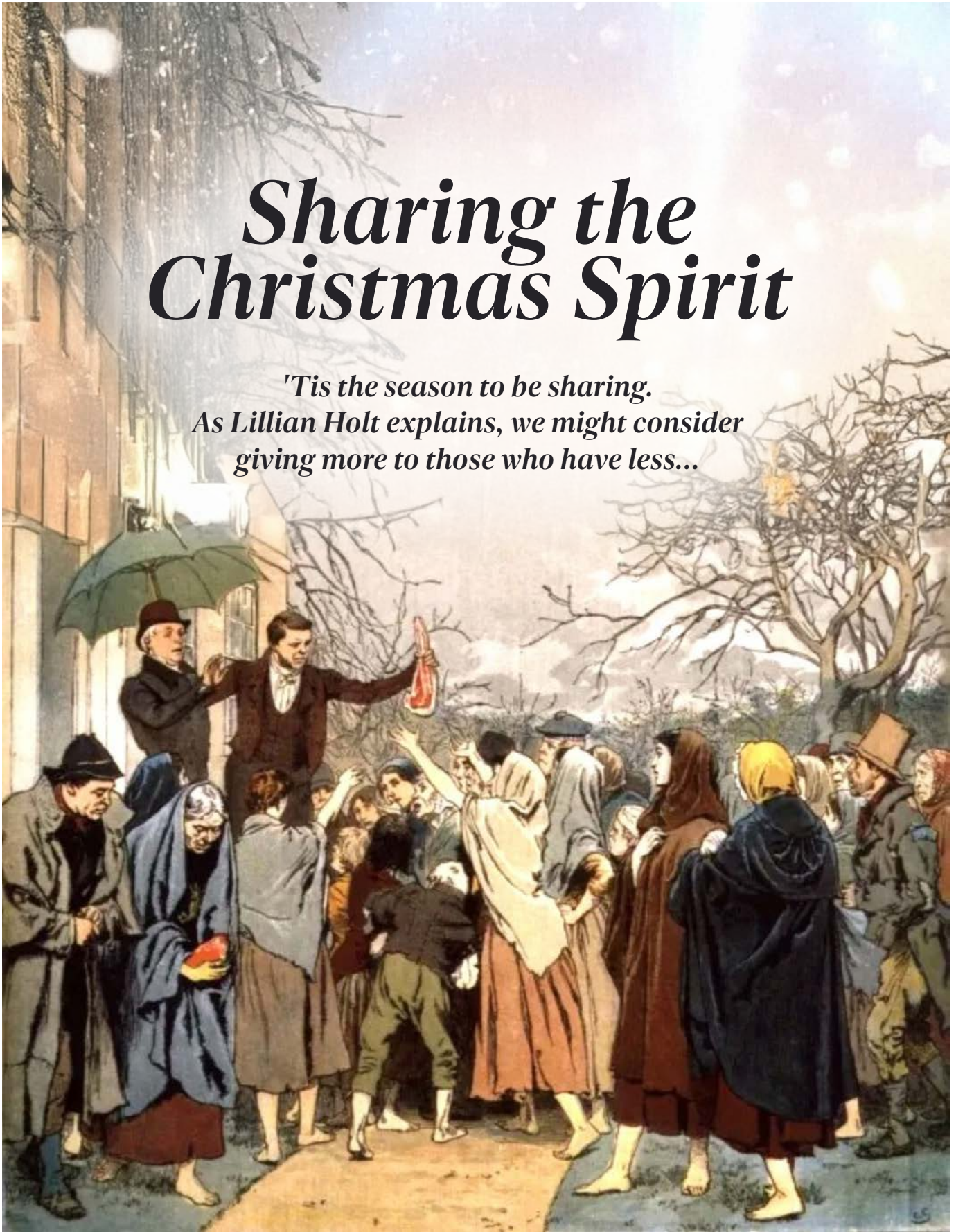



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Sharing the Christmas Spirit

*'Tis the season to be sharing.
As Lillian Holt explains, we might consider
giving more to those who have less...*





The Spirit of Columbanus

Christmas may be all about tradition, yet celebrating the holiday with all the trimmings - especially during these difficult economic times - can put a serious dent in the average budget. With inflation steadily increasing since the COVID-19 pandemic, many people who don't fit the profile of a typical social service recipient now find themselves needing extra support year-round.

For just over a century, the spirit of St. Columbanus has done its part to keep the holiday happy for many in Dublin. Each year, on December 25, the savory scent of roast turkey permeates the Royal Dublin Society Hall as hundreds of people - some homeless, others lonely, and some simply down on their luck - are seated along rows of long tables decorated with tinsel and ornaments. In addition to the free three-course Christmas dinner, the event features live music, dancing, and honored guests. Bringing it all together are the many volunteers of the Order of the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic organization inspired by a 6th-century Irish monk who once fed the poor.

At Christmas, the challenge to make ends meet is more difficult in many parts of Ireland and around the world. According to a 2023 report by Trussell Trust, "Working-age adults are much more likely to turn to a food bank than pensioners. Paid work is also not providing a reliable route out of hardship. One in four people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network are in working households."

The Order has been trying to alleviate the struggle over the holidays for the past 100 years. Last year's centennial anniversary of the Columbanus Christmas dinner hosted 550 guests at the sit-down meal, and an additional 5,500 meals were distributed across the greater Dublin area. "This is what it's all about," James Byrne told the Irish Times, gesturing around him inside the RDS as hundreds of people gathered to enjoy Christmas dinner and listen to live music. "I come here every year with my Mum. I just love the atmosphere."

What began in 1924 at Dublin's Mansion House (before its move to the RDS 70 years later) has grown into one of Ireland's most enduring charity events. "It's about companionship as much as food," explains Malachy McDaid, Supreme Secretary of the Order.

“St. Columbanus preached that hospitality was holiness. We just try to live that out for one day, the way he did every day.”

Last year, over 300 volunteers donated their time to the cause, joined by the Dublin City Council, members of St. Vincent de Paul, Alone, Age Action, and the HSE, who delivered meals to people at home or in shelters. The city's Lord Mayor and Archbishop of Dublin have also attended to offer their blessings. A total of 2,500 gift bags were handed out across Dublin last year as well - often the only visit many recipients had on

Christmas Day, according to the Irish Independent's 2024 report.

"The atmosphere is electric," shares Trevor MacNamara, Chairman of the Christmas Day Dinner Committee. "People walk in cold and anxious but leave smiling and full."

"Although the event is run entirely by volunteers, rising costs are affecting our ability to maintain the high standards we continue to uphold."

"The demand for takeaway dinners increased significantly from 1,200 in 2012 to 5,500 this year, reflecting the difficulties experienced by families and the poor, especially if we consider how the housing cost in Ireland is becoming more and more expensive, with a number of families that cannot afford to buy or rent a house."

"While it's a great celebration, it's a real challenge. Every year we think, this is the year we're going to turn the corner, and the numbers will start to go down again."

According to recent statistics, however, no such decrease is in sight for the near future.

"While food banks used to be for crisis intervention, the ongoing cost-of-living crisis has made them part of life for a lot of families," reveals a September 2025 report from the Irish Farmer's Journal.

In the spirit of ancient Celtic hospitality, the Knights' work keeps a thousand-year tradition alive, one that sees generosity not as charity but as kinship, captured in the words of one anonymous attendee last year. "I'm hoping things get better with the whole housing crisis. But for now, I'm looking forward to my dinner. It's amazing to see the volunteers spending Christmas with us when they could be spending it with others."

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Giving Back This Holiday Season



Scotland

The 12 Dips of Christmas

Participants brave cold-water swims over the holiday season to raise funds for VOCAL, a charity supporting unpaid carers. Safety tips are given in sessions by cold water therapists for extra security. It's a refreshing way to improve one's own wellbeing and give back to Scotland's caregiving network this Christmas.



Ireland

Blackrock College Christmas Trees for St. Vincent de Paul

For 28 years, students and volunteers at Blackrock College have sold Christmas trees to raise funds for St. Vincent de Paul. What began with two students and an inspired idea has grown into one of Ireland's biggest charity tree sales, spreading holiday cheer while supporting families in need.



Wales

Crisis at Christmas

Each December, volunteers with Crisis help provide hot meals, essentials, and companionship to people experiencing homelessness. From cooking and deliveries to personal grooming and advice for general well-being, the smallest act of service matters. The charity's Christmas programme seeks to provide warmth with dignity at one of the hardest times of the year.



Cornwall

Sing It Home

Cornwall Air Ambulance's Sing It Home album brings together over 100 local musicians to raise funds for a second rescue helicopter in 2025. With strong community support, the release topped the charts last year. When you buy or stream the album, you're helping to keep Cornwall's emergency services running at Christmas and throughout the year.



Isle of Man

Manx Santa Dash

Hundreds of runners in Santa suits take to the streets of Douglas each December for the annual Isle of Man Santa Dash. The one-mile fun run raises funds for local charities, including Isle Listen, the Foodbank, and Crossroads Care. Think of it as festive fitness for a good cause.



Bretagne

The Green Valley Brittany

This animal-rescue charity needs volunteers year-round to care for abandoned pets, help out at its Boutique Solidaire, or raise funds for rescued animals. Over the holidays, extra hands are needed for festive events. It's a heartwarming way to help Brittany's four-legged friends this Christmas.



Galicia

Fundación Érguete-Integración

In Vigo, Fundación Érguete-Integración hosts its Navidad Solidaria programme, serving Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve meals to people in need. Volunteers help prepare food, dole-out dinners, and organize activities. It's a simple yet meaningful way to share community spirit in Galicia during the holiday season.



Nova Scotia - Halifax

Parker Street Food & Furniture Bank

Participate in the "Christmas Hamper" program that provides decorated boxes filled with the ingredients for a turkey dinner, plus toys for children and families facing hardship. Volunteers help pack hampers, sort and pack donations, and deliver the boxes for Christmas.

If you don't live in these areas, look for volunteer opportunities in your own community and stir up some true holiday spirit in this season of giving.

What
fills my
heart?

A home away
from home

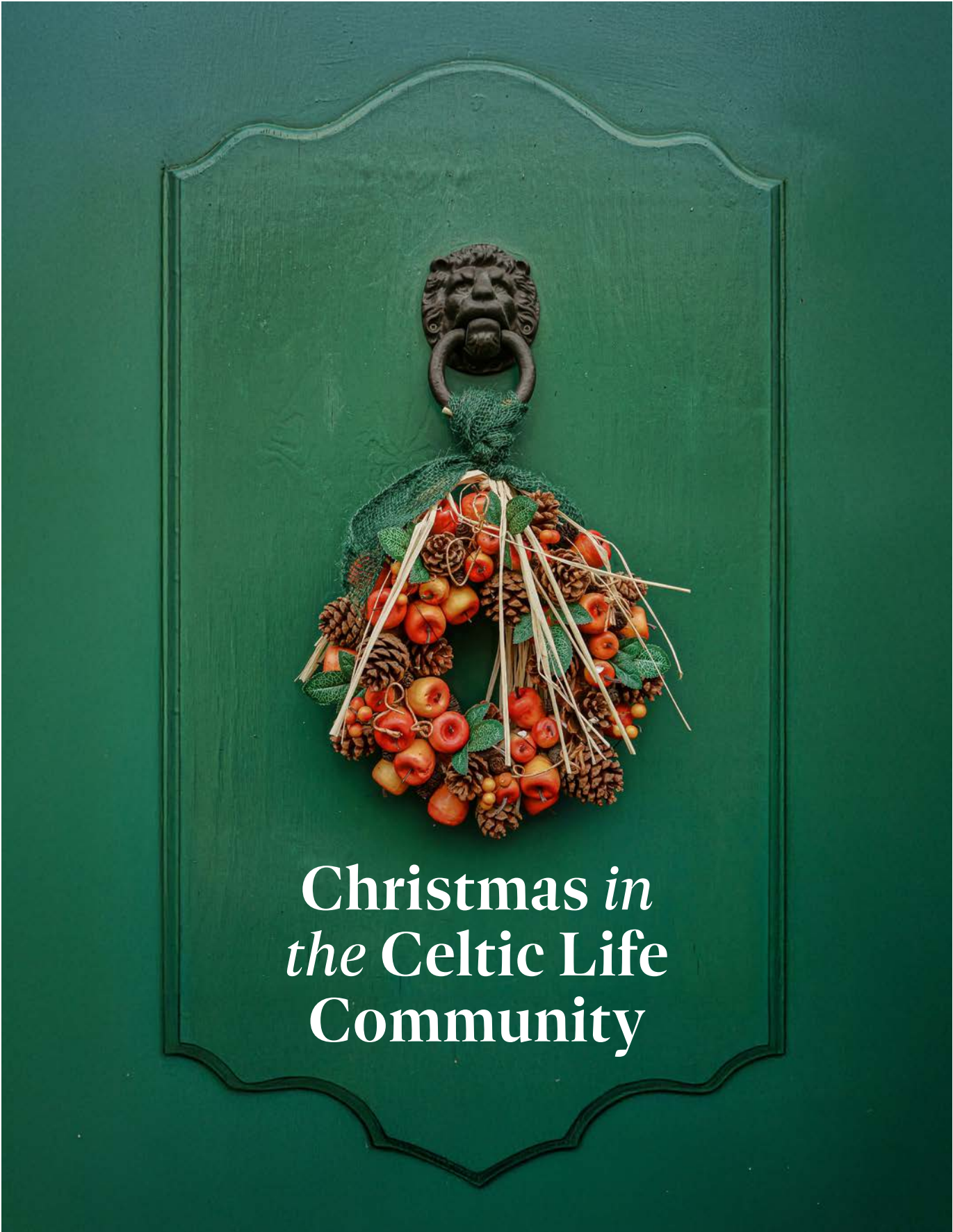
Fill your heart with Ireland

Sometimes, the most meaningful journeys aren't measured in miles, but in moments. Moments spent sipping tea in a quiet village pub, tracing ancient footsteps along cobblestoned streets, or sharing easy conversation with a local who feels like an old friend. This is travel that lingers long after you've returned home.

In Ireland's unhurried corners, you'll discover a beauty that asks nothing of you but your presence. From bright winter mornings to the warmth of an evening spent in a lively pub, every place feels like a gathering - and everyone belongs. Here, you'll experience the serendipity of being exactly where you're meant to be.

So come on, fill your heart with Ireland...

 **Ireland.com**

A green door with a lion head knocker and a festive wreath of apples and pinecones.

Christmas *in* the Celtic Life Community



Marcas Mac an Tuairneir

I like to read a lot of folklore at this time of year. The stories of the wren in the Isle of Man, Scotland and Ireland are fascinating and remind us we live with living traditions within a wider Gaelic cultural continuum. I also love the tradition of Nollaig na mBan. In modern times, it has many modern interpretations, but it's fantastic to have a day to celebrate the women in your life. Family traditions for us revolve around music too - we always listen to Fiona J. MacKenzie's Scottish Gaelic Christmas Album, but perhaps my favourite Christmas song of recent times is Andrea Corr's reimagining of God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.



James Acken

Our family celebrates the Yuletide outside the usual Christian fashion but overlapping in some key ways. The heart of the season is the nine days centred on the solstice, so the proper festival starts on the 17th and ends on the 25th. We green the house with holly, pine and ivy in the old fashion. Illumination isn't with candles anymore but electric lights, but we do light yule torches of mullein in the old fashion on the night of the solstice. We have two main feasts, one on the Solstice and one on the eve of the 25th,

exchanging gifts that morning on the last day of the festival. We also have a ceilidh on the Roman New Year, though Samhain is our proper New Year in the house. There will be lots of music, songs, stories and laughter.



Joanie Madden

I am one of seven children who grew up in a proud Irish household, with both my parents emigrating from Ireland, so Christmas has always been full of tradition and music. The phone never stops ringing on Christmas Day with relatives calling from Ireland. My dad was a fantastic accordion player, so music was always at the heart of every gathering, and even though he's passed away, my brother, nephews, and I still carry on that tradition. After dinner, we always end up playing a few tunes and songs, and no Christmas would be complete without my mother's homemade Christmas cake, the kettle boiling on the stove, friends dropping by, and the sound of laughter filling the house.



Dave Bagdade

We always do a Scottish-style tea as part of our festivities, with Walker shortbreads, mince pies, scones and Nova Scotia oatcakes. There will likely be a single malt toast at some point. Also,

we've traveled extensively through Nova Scotia and Ireland, and to a lesser degree, Scotland, and the ornaments on our tree are often artifacts from our personal travels, mostly from Cape Breton and Ireland.



Tom Langlands

Many Christmas customs have their origins in Celtic pagan traditions. There is every likelihood that we will be eating a chocolate yule log in this season of over-indulgence - a tradition that is rooted in the ancient Druids' belief that the sun didn't move for the twelve days of midwinter. They marked this occasion by burning an oak log continuously through this period. We always get a real pine tree for inside the house and decorate it with lights, and we put lights on the outside of the house too - also rooted in the Celtic tradition of hanging candles from pine trees in the winter months. These candles symbolize the missing stars, which are often not seen in winter and also represent the spirits of loved ones who have passed in the previous year. We also put candles in our windows, and that ancient symbol of fertility and life - mistletoe - will be found amongst our decorations. Perhaps the most obvious custom we hang on to is the Scottish tradition of first-footing when neighbours may drop in after midnight on New Years Day to toast the new year and wish each other good health and luck.



Randy Waugh

Just before Christmas Eve, my youngest daughter, Cairistiona and I go hunting for the perfect tree. In our annual ritual, we decorate it together as a family, using an assortment of ornaments that mark milestones from various points throughout our lives - many of them handmade. On Christmas morning, we rise early for breakfast before opening presents. Then everyone heads off to visit their other families and repeat the celebration. In the quiet days that follow, until the New Year, we host guests and visit extended family. Hogmanay - like Samhain - has always been a bigger event in our household. Ours is a blended family, as complicated and unique as we are. My wife and eldest daughter bring Russian and Ukrainian traditions, my son adds a touch of French-Canadian spirit, I carry the Scottish-Canadian heritage, and our youngest embodies the mix of it all - truly Canadian. Some Celtic Christmas customs have endured in our home, especially baking and certain philosophical traditions: the reflection on time at Samhain and the sense of renewal at Hogmanay. On occasion, we've been lucky enough to have a dark-haired young man be the first to cross our threshold as the bagpipes play at midnight on New Year's Eve - a moment that feels almost magical.



Kyle Dawson

I'll be spending the holidays with my loved ones, celebrating the season

together and enjoying some quality time as a family. We always have a full roast turkey dinner with all the trimmings; it's a tradition we look forward to every year. To me, the Christmas spirit is about being thankful for the people around you and cherishing time spent with family and friends.



Sheena Smith

I spend Christmas with my husband and daughter, but then with the in-laws for Christmas Dinner and my brother for Boxing Day and I'm looking forward to lots of crisp winter walks. My husband and I got engaged between Christmas and New Year so, we always mark the occasion by returning to the proposal spot at Loch Lomond. It's become a bit of a tradition and this year marks 10 years since the proposal. And, of course, we decorate the tree and make sure we put a mince pie, carrot and dram of whisky out for Santa and Rudolph!



Geoffrey Carroll

Every member of my immediate family had their own Santa mug, each with our names on it: Geoffrey, Alice, David and Mum & Dad. I still have all these Christmas mugs that I bring out every

year for the Christmas season. As well, my mother used to hook rugs, and I still have her bright red Christmas rug with Santa's reindeer on it that I bring out and place inside my front door for the month of December. I also still have the original stocking that I had as a wee boy and hang it every year on my fireplace mantle. More recently, I now hold a large Scottish Christmas Party for the Dressed to Kilt community here in NYC. We welcome over 300 guests to our Christmas party, and play Scottish music, Celtic Christmas music, and American Christmas carols. We also serve Scottish drink and food and take the opportunity to announce the next Dressed to Kilt show.



Siobhán L. Covington

While we don't Deck all of the Hall, we certainly festoon the mantelpiece with a garland of greens - holly when it is available - and light candles. A Yule log will burn over the holidays, and the tree will sparkle with lights and candles. The most enduring of the Christmas traditions is the dousing of the Christmas pudding with brandy and setting it aflame. It is mostly a symbolic remembrance of wonderful childhood Christmas celebrations since few of us actually enjoy eating it. This Christmas will be a special one for us with a new addition to the family - my first grandson, Thomas!



Andrew Ferguson

My Scottish ancestors have been in Canada for a couple of centuries now, so our Christmas traditions are very Canadian. However, it should come as no surprise that there will be plenty of single malt Scotch enjoyed with family and friends.



Mike Davies

Our Christmas starts the first weekend in December with me and my son Llywelyn taking off in my old Citroen van to purchase the family Christmas tree. We go to the Penpont Estate - a grand old house near where we live - where we choose our own tree and cut it down ourselves. Our tree gets bigger every year - last year's was 14 feet! Rugby is a religion in Wales, and it is a tradition for local teams to play one another on Boxing Day and New Year's Day. We will visit both our local pubs on Christmas morning and doubtless on many other days over the festive period. One very traditional Welsh custom that had all but died out but is making a return to prominence is the Mari Llwyd custom of decorating a horse skull, placing it on a pole and processing through the village. The idea is to stop at each house and invite the homeowners to a rhyming competition. The idea is to gain access to the house and be offered hospitality, usually in the form of a drink. This tradition goes back to pre-Christian times and has connections to Wassailing

and Hobby Horse festivities.



Bob Creighton

We always have a Scottish fry-up for breakfast on Christmas Day using bacon (the good Irish stuff), Scottish sausages, black and white pudding, and potato scones purchased locally from one of the excellent food vendors in New England. Christmas Dinner later in the day has many traditions we have brought with us from Scotland. These include individual Christmas crackers and mince pies. Dinner itself typically starts with Cock-a-leekie soup, followed by turkey with all the trimmings and finishes with a Scottish trifle. Scotland's national chef, Gary Maclean, is a dear family friend and we always follow his never-fail recipes.



Ellen MacIsaac

For me, music is always a big part of the season. Christmas isn't Christmas unless I can play some Voice Squad, some Cherish the Ladies, Danu, and other beloved seasonal recordings. I am also the designated baker in the house, so in addition to my husband's family vina terta recipe (an Icelandic tradition), I make sure to make mince tarts and shortbreads.

Bill Petrie

Despite some differences, we still consider our traditional family butter tarts recipe to be in the spirit of Scottish Ecefechan Butter Tarts. There will be mealy pudding during visits with some in-laws and, unfortunately, most of the family can't be the first ones over

the threshold on Hogmanay, given the overwhelming number of them being redheads and blondes!



Jeff Justice

I always send Christmas cards in Gaelic, Irish, or Welsh to friends and family. Much of the seasonal decorations I use in my home are Celtic-themed, and many of the seasonal musical selections I play are Celtic, including music in Celtic languages. I also enjoy mulled wine during this time of year, and I frequently do the traditional Twelve Days of Christmas - my home decorations and music remain up until January 5.



Liz MacRae

I will spend Christmas Day with friends. They have a big, wonderful, fun family, and I adore them as much as I cherished my mom, dad, brothers and relatives. I have vivid memories as a child of being at the Christmas table, all dressed up in a pretty party dress. I was a happy kid, and I loved Christmas. I remember my Uncle Lorne, sharpening his carving knife at the head of the table, the swishing sound as he prepared to carve the perfect turkey that my Auntie Lil had basted and cooked to perfection every year. The smell of those Christmas crackers that went 'bang' hung in the air for a few moments

as we eagerly looked for the little trinket inside. Food was plentiful and delicious: homemade shortbread cookies, oatcakes, butter tarts, and Grandma's fruitcake. Dad wore his MacRae tartan tie and mom wore her red kilt! Proud Scots!



Scott MacLeod

When I was younger, I used to do a first footing with my Scottish Grandmother Margaret Gillespie-MacLeod for New Year's Day. She would have me come into our home with a piece of coal (for warmth) and silver (for prosperity), as I was too young to bring whisky. A first footing is a Scottish New Year's tradition where the first person to enter a home after midnight brings good luck for the year ahead. Traditionally, the first footer was a tall, dark-haired man - I eventually fit the profile as I got older - who brought symbolic gifts like coal, salt, shortbread, or whisky to represent warmth, health, food, and good cheer.

Samara O'Gorman

I prefer to celebrate Yule instead of Christmas. Yule is a winter solstice festival with roots in ancient Norse and Germanic cultures, marking the return of light and the promise of sunnier days. This celebration runs from December 21 to January 1 and involves feasting, gift-giving, singing, and dancing. On December 26, I celebrate Wren Day, which is an old Irish holiday. I go birdwatching in the woods, which is a good way to walk off the previous night's dinner!



Gus Noble

I look forward to spending Christmas with residents & families at Caledonia Senior Living & Memory Care, Chicago Scots, primary charity. Christmas is such a special time at Caledonia. A few years ago, we received an incredible Christmas donation. One of our Board members, Nancy Strolle, has a childhood friend, Mark Wilken, who owned a Christmas store in Oklahoma. When Mark decided to retire, he donated his entire inventory to Caledonia. The local community comes in every year and volunteers to help decorate our home. The whole place sparkles and shines with festive joy. Christmas at Caledonia reminds me of Robert Burns' words "Friendship, Virtue, Every Grace. Dwelling in this Happy Place."



Bethany Bisaillon

I spend Christmas with my brother and sister. We visit each other and share gifts, a wee dram or two, and listen to music. I am quite busy with extra student lessons, as people are off work and school, and get more time to play. At the New Year, we have a party with pipes and more drams, and I always insist upon the tradition of the 'First Footing' to make sure the first person through my front door has a wee gift and good wishes.



Roger Goeddey

Christmas this year will most likely be spent with friends and family as usual, but with all the stuff that's happened to me in the last couple of months, I'm definitely going to take the time to be by myself and do a little self-reflecting on life. I still put a candle in the window, and I leave a small glass of whiskey out for Santa Claus - but I also do that on St Patrick's Day just in case.



Ryan Miller

Although I am not religious, I fully understand and appreciate 'the reason for the season'. We very much participate in holiday traditions and Christmas, but with an emphasis on togetherness, kindness, and selflessness. As parents of young children, our 'Christmas Spirit' is experiencing the magic of the season together. Finding moments of pure joy, laughter, hugs, and outward expression of appreciation for those who make our lives fuller.

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"How did you do this?! Am I like a royal now?"

St Hilary's Bethlehem

Story by Chris Muike

COVER STORY

As a touring comedian, Paul Kerensa has no illusions about the uphill battle he faces trying to compete as a Cornish comic against the giants of the genre from London, Ireland, Scotland, and abroad.

"I was just saying to my kids, 'I'm off to do this interview with Celtic Life International,' and they were like, 'why do they want to speak to you,'" he parrots via Zoom. "I said I didn't know, but it's probably Cornwall. It's probably the coolest thing about me from their perspective.

"Paul Kerensa is my stage name," he adds. "Kerensa is a Cornish name, which I chose because I am proud of my Cornish roots."

Along with sharing his love of his heritage, he also opens up about his other passion - the history of broadcasting.

"I treasure my upbringing and my origins in Cornwall," says Kerensa, whose podcast, *The British Broadcasting Century* with Paul Kerensa, covers the topic of 20th century broadcasts across the U.K. "As I'm gigging around, doing my stand-up stuff, my love and joy at the minute is this project I am undertaking on the origins of broadcasting, and in particular the origins of the BBC.

"One of the stories I have particularly fallen for - one that I am writing a script about at the minute - is about a Cornish church far, far west of Cornwall, near Land's End. It became the first BBC outside broadcast drama."

Poised almost literally at the remote, westernmost edge of Great Britain that is possible, Kerensa speaks of St Hilary's Church in St Hilary, Cornwall - a humble chapel whose bricks were first laid in the 13th century. In the infancy of wireless broadcasting, a Northern Irish radio broadcaster and producer for the BBC by the name of Filson Young was holidaying in the region when he caught wind of the Nativity pageants put on by St Hilary's vicar, Reverend Bernard Walke.

"Fildon went to practice playing the organ and found a nativity play in progress. The priest eventually agreed to the broadcast once they said, 'we can raise money for your orphanage if we do so.'"

Thus, on December 22, 1926, the parishioners of St Hilary's and many of its townsfolk aired Bethlehem: A Nativity Play to the nation - the BBC's first-ever remote, outside broadcast.



Paul Kerensa

"It's a lovely tale of bringing local voices to the nation - just quaint villagers, really - and they became radio stars. They didn't have radio in Cornwall at this point, so oddly, they were stars of a medium they couldn't even listen to."

Rev. Walke wrote the play himself - although he would balk at the use of the word "play" to describe them.

"Walke consistently spoke, in this off-beat way, of Bethlehem as a 'presentation,'" writes Joshua Gleaves of Cambridge University in his dissertation, *Fr. Bernard Walke's Bethlehem*: at St. Hilary, on the Wireless, which he shared in an illustrated talk earlier this year at St Hilary's. "In part, Walke was probably avoiding the word 'performance.' As he always maintained, Bethlehem was 'an act of worship, not a performance.' From its genesis as a local production in 1923 onwards, this was the play's constant identity.

"The players moved 'from place to place around the church' in a 'kind of pageant,' ending at the Lady Chapel, where the Nativity set was arranged as at any Christmas. This Crib directed the players away from the spectators, and towards their true 'audience': 'the Holy Child and His Mother and all the company of heaven.' Walke saw this as 'the secret of the play,' the source of its enduring appeal: that the players were simply 'children at their prayers.' They felt and behaved within the presentation just as they were 'accustomed

to' elsewhere."

Walke took his work as a man of God seriously and was something of a controversial figure during this time. An Anglo-Catholic priest in a predominantly Protestant Cornwall, some of the practices he undertook in his church - including elements of his Bethlehem pageant - stirred up much ecclesiastical friction.

"Worship under Walke was so controversial that members of the Protestant Truth Society carried out a famous anti-Catholic raid of the church in 1932," writes Gleaves.

Ironically, while Walke's sectarian proclivities drew a great deal of ire from the likes of J.A. Kensit, who organized the raid, the Catholic underpinnings of Bethlehem went largely unnoticed by the listening public at large, including vigilant Protestant watchdog societies.

"This could be explained in various ways," writes Gleaves. "Like amateur drama, early radio drama was prone to being trivialised, and sheer luck may well have played a role too...Anyway, the BBC was unmoved by this 'protest'; it held that the 'ecclesiastical controversy' Walke faced 'in no way affects or detracts from the artistic value of the play as a broadcast'. But treating the play as 'art for art's sake,' divorcing it from the church's worshipping life, the BBC degraded it just as Kensit had. If the BBC had taken the St. Hilary plays as intended - that is, as worship proper - they may never have been broadcast."

It wasn't controversy that rang the death

St Hilary



ing up and growing out into the world — some of them have children of their own. In other words, the play has seen out one generation of children, and both Father Walke from the author's point of view, and I from the broadcasting point of view, feel the play has done its work, and that we would rather withdraw it while it is still at the climax of its appeal than face the risk of its losing some of that appeal through being presented by a new set of players to whom its manner of performance would not be a matter of tradition. But a permanent sound record of this last performance is being made, and some future generation of listeners may hear what you will hear to-night long after every voice that sounds in this church has been silenced in death.”

knell of the St Hilary broadcasts - quite the opposite, as they were immensely popular in their time. “It was a huge hit, and for the next ten years it was the biggest drama on the BBC every Christmas,” shares Kerensa. “George Bernard Shaw and the Prime Minister became fans.”

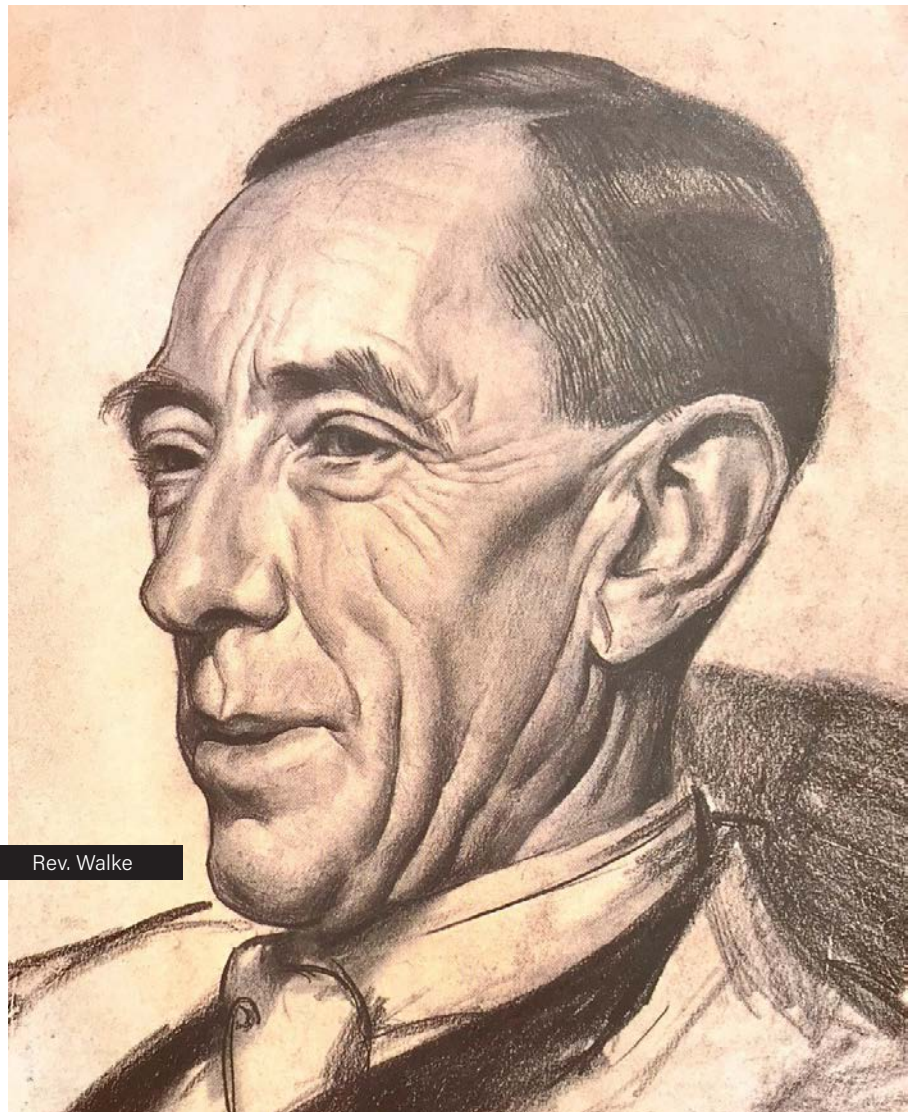
Rather, it was apparently the same kind of regional preference that Kerensa knows all too well.

“It was cancelled in the 1930s as the BBC wanted more London voices and fewer regional voices. That’s still a battle we have today. It is interesting to see how it began nearly a century ago - London versus the regions.”

The last broadcast of Bethlehem from St Hilary aired in 1934, two years before Rev. Walke retired from his clergy. Luckily, the performance was recorded for posterity and can be found online in its entirety, performed by the original cast.

The broadcast opens with the following prologue:

“This is the ninth and probably the last year that we are broadcasting the nativity play Bethlehem from Stephen Hilary. For next Christmas, Father Walke has written a new play more adapted to the age of the St Hilary players, for the little people of nine years ago have been grow-



Rev. Walke



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For nearly three decades, The Pipes of Christmas (POX) has been presented in churches and concert halls in New York City, Summit, New Jersey, and beyond, featuring vibrant voices, bold bagpipes and brass, organ, harp, fiddle and more, in celebration of music, heritage, faith, and family.

Founder Bob Currie looks back on the legacy's lasting magic, the growing "Pipes" family, and the joy of welcoming a new generation into the tradition.

"On a personal note," he begins proudly, "my wife and I have become grandparents twice over! We have a three-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter and a one-year-old grandson. It's been great fun to introduce them to our Pipes of Christmas family, and it's amazing that their mother - my daughter - was a participant in the very first concert and now has a family of her own."

That continuity in music and family through the years has always been part of the magic of POX. What began as a simple one-night concert 27 years ago has become, as Currie says, "an integral part of our clan experience."

"When we first presented the concert we thought it was to be a 'one and done' experience. With a surprise 'over capacity' exceeding 600 that first year, we've never looked back."

Today, The Pipes of Christmas serves as a link between past and present, and a testament to an 800-year-old literary lineage of Gaelic bards, storytellers, and musicians.

"The program falls right into the wheelhouse of the Learned Kindred of Currie. It conjures the feeling of a warm seat beside a crackling peat fire, bringing to mind childhood memories of the Yuletide season."

The repertoire continues to combine classic carols and newly created works, with more than fifteen original pieces having been introduced under the Pipes banner to date.

"In addition to dipping into an incredible wealth of Irish and Scottish tunes, we also take pride in supporting new composers by premiering their work on a world stage. Our most recent commission was a pipe tune entitled The March to St. Giles to commemorate the City of Edinburgh's 900th anniversary. We were thrilled to have the tune performed in the presence of the Princess Royal."

That commitment to excellence has held firm since the very first concert. Since then, POX has welcomed the B-Line Brass, fiddler Caitlin Warbelow, Irish vocalist Madelyn Monaghan, guitarist Steve Gibb, two world-champion pipe bands, and many more magnificent musicians.

For Currie, though, the music is only part of the story.

“To find a soulful reflection of Christmas takes some searching these days. We don't leave out the heart and soul - or the reason for the season.”

That desire to capture and convey true Celtic Christmas spirit has always been a priority, particularly with their upcoming foray into Boston this December, which will be - Currie admits - somewhat bittersweet.

"Boston audiences relied on the annual 'Celtic Christmas Sojourn' produced by broadcaster Brian O'Donovan. He was a legend who sadly passed away in 2023, and we knew his shoes could never be filled. I was encouraged by Boston friends to offer an alternative to his annual holiday event, and Brian's widow, Lindsay, embraced the idea."

Beyond the outstanding performances, the Pipes of Christmas gives back through scholarships and preserving culture, supporting budding musicians and Gaelic language initiatives across Scotland, Canada, and the U.S.

Even with all the hard work and acclaim, Currie's priorities remain clear: "It's all about family. Celebrating the holidays is an incredible part of our family DNA. This is what we hope to accomplish with our loyal audience members who come back each year."

And they keep coming back, gathering like a large clan each December, laughing, singing, and sometimes weeping, to the sounds of the pipes. For Currie, these connections are deeply personal and rewarding. "Our family extends far beyond Clan Currie. I am a very grateful producer."

Looking ahead, Currie and his team have just completed a new Pipes of Christmas EP and their annual Yule Log music video, both available on their website. Virtual audiences around the world can tune in across borders to enjoy the concert, uniting families and friends.

"Our principal mandate is to produce a world-class concert event which honors our Celtic heritage and faith. You never know who may be experiencing their heritage for the first time at The Pipes of Christmas. We have an obligation to strive for excellence in all that we do."

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Custom-Made Kilts

The Plaid Place - plaidplace.com

Founded in 1970, the Plaid Place remains the first choice for authentic Celtic treasures imported from Scotland, Ireland, and the British Isles. Specializing in custom-made Highland wear, the company also offers stunning Irish knit sweaters, Scottish crystal, tartan scarves, blankets and clothing, Irish and clan-crested jewelry and timeless handbags made with Harris tweed. This Nova Scotian Highland hub is the one-stop shop for holiday gift-giving. With an array of tartans registered with the Scottish Tartan Authority, customers can choose from a variety of colours, styles, and clan affiliations. The Plaid Place offers year-round shopping with its flagship shop in Bedford, online store, and two seasonal locations in downtown Halifax from April to November.

Fiddle Pendant in Sterling Silver

Sheila Fleet - sheilafleet.com

Inspired by an instrument once owned by the famous 19th-century Orcadian explorer John Rae, this hand-finished pendant by Sheila Fleet captures Scotland's artistry and spirit of adventure. Measuring 12mm by 32mm and made with oxidised sterling silver, the pendant is exquisitely hollowed out like a real violin, with every feature from the fingerboard and tuning pegs rendered into a miniature likeness. Rae's original fiddle, now displayed in Scotland's Stromness Museum, was thought to have been brought along on his Arctic expeditions, surely adding warmth and music to long, cold nights. Designed and hand-finished in Sheila Fleet's Orkney workshop, the pendant honours the island's musical heritage and its enduring artistry. It serves as a unique and timeless keepsake that carries both fine craftsmanship and cherished history.



Luxury Celtic Escapes

Sheenco Travel - sheencotravel.com

This Christmas season, give a once-in-a-lifetime experience with the timeless gift of an unforgettable journey. Specializing in tailor-made adventures across Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales, Sheenco creates dream getaways that connect travellers with heritage, landscape, and one another. Surprise the golfer in your life with a round on Scotland's historic links or plan a quiet stay in an Irish castle fit for romance and relaxation. Families can trace their roots together through villages, valleys, and ancient dwellings. From chauffeur-driven tours to elegant accommodations and authentic local activities, every detail is thoughtfully planned. It's not just a vacation, but a chance to wind down and create memories that become part of your own Celtic legend.



Irish Holiday

The Cottages Ireland - cottages-ireland.com

Nestled on Ireland's east coast, just steps from the shoreline, The Cottages Ireland present a truly unique getaway. These 300-year-old thatched homes have been restored with loving care, surrounded by organic flower gardens and beautiful landscape that offers a sheltered atmosphere within a private, gated setting. Each cottage blends old-world charm with the comfort of modern living, including feature fireplaces, well-equipped kitchens, and cozy comfort for relaxing after a day of exploration. From this tranquil home-away-from-home location, you can wander through the historic Boyne Valley or leisurely travel to Dublin and Belfast. Whether you seek reflection, romance, local adventures, or time to breathe in the fresh sea air, The Cottages urge you to slow down and immerse yourself in the enchanting beauty of Ireland. Come and embrace the magic of this remarkable destination.

KWM Whisky Advent Tastings (Calendar)

Kensington Wine Market - kensingtonwinemarket.com/tastings/whisky-advent

This year's Advent Tastings selection features an all-new range of 25 carefully curated 28ml whiskies. The lineup is primarily single malt Scotch, with an average age of roughly 19 years, with the oldest whisky aged 44 years. Kensington Wine Market will be hosting five whisky tastings on December 5, 10, 15, 20, and 28 at 7pm (MT) on Zoom. If you are unable to attend, fret not - the company posts the tastings on YouTube and Facebook the following day. Also featured is the "one-whisky-a-day" on the company's blog and social media accounts, beginning December 1. The Whisky Advent Tastings Full Set also contains a KWM Whisky Advent Discount Card and a wee Glencairn glass, all in one box which - coincidentally - looks a lot like an Advent Calendar called the 25 Days of Dram Fine Whisky!"



Ginkgo Leaf Pendant

Keith Jack - keithjack.com

Born in Scotland and now based in Vancouver, master jeweller Keith Jack combines ancient legend with contemporary design to create heirloom pieces that connect generations. Recently named Best Jewelry Designer 2025 by NACTA in Dublin, he continues to honour his Celtic and Norse roots while exploring fresh influences. His latest collection, Alchemy & Echoes, was inspired by his journey through Morocco, where the bold patterns and colours of art nouveau gave him a fresh creative perspective. The result is jewellery that reflects movement and meaning, including a quintessential silver and 18k Vermeil design adorned with stunning lab-grown gems. A signature piece - the Ginkgo Leaf Pendant with an emerald centre - evokes transformation, legacy, and renewal, as the light of the past meets the beauty of becoming.



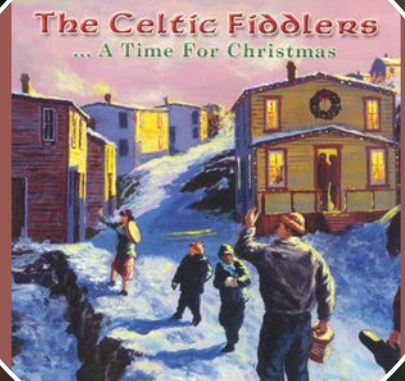


Tweed Kilt Jackets & Waistcoats
Lochcarron of Scotland - lochcarron.co.uk

For more than a century, Lochcarron of Scotland has carried forward the art of tartan weaving with care and precision. Founded in 1892, the mill is one of Scotland's most respected textile makers, where every thread is dyed, warped, woven, treated, and tailored by skilled craftsmen. Their tweed kilt jackets and waistcoats reflect the dedication to tradition and utmost quality that results in a full Scottish sartorial look. Designed and made in Scotland, each piece pairs perfectly with a kilt or tartan trousers for weddings, gatherings, or any formal occasion. A truly global brand that provides rich textures and timeless cuts, they offer an authenticity that is unmistakably Scottish. Wearing one is more than just a fashion statement - it's like donning a piece of heritage itself.

A Time for Christmas Book & CD
The Celtic Fiddlers - kbmusicpublishing.square.site

Filled with Newfoundland spirit and Celtic charm, A Time for Christmas brings together the musical talents of The Celtic Fiddlers in a sincere celebration of the season. Together, the CD and accompanying book blend favorite carols carefully chosen to reflect the magic of Christmas, including O Holy Night and Silent Night, along with Newfoundland classics like Gary O'Driscoll's The First Christmas Day. Completed by Korona Brophy, each arrangement showcases the ensemble's layered harmonies and instrumental artistry. The companion book provides notes on history, technique, and theory, guiding learners through Irish, Scottish, English, and Newfoundland repertoires. Complete with chords and teaching tips, it's an educational tool that can be used to enhance classrooms, choirs, and family gatherings, keeping Celtic melodies alive at Christmastime.



The Haggis
Stahly Haggis - thehaggis.com

Since their first haggis was born over one hundred years ago in Dunfermline, Scotland, the Stahly family's line of haggises has earned the respect of aficionados worldwide. Much of the acclaim in the USA for the Stahly brand is due to the easy availability of their Canned Traditional Scottish Haggis. This popular version is ready to serve whenever the occasion seems right - just pop the can, heat, and serve. The ingredients include water, lamb heart, oats, pork fat, lamb liver, pork, salt, dried onion, malt extract, and fine spices. Stahly's Haggis contains no artificial colours or preservatives. For more information, please visit the company's website.





12-Day Luxury Escorted Irish Tour
Michael Cowell Tours - michaelcowelltours.ie

If Ireland is calling you this holiday season, MCT Irish Tours has the answer for the new year. Their 12-day escorted journey for 2026 is designed for travelers who want comfort, culture, and connection without confusion. From lovely hotels to scenic drives, each detail, including accommodation, transport, attractions, and meals, is arranged and prepaid before you arrive. MCT specializes in small groups of 6 to 12 people, though larger groups are also welcomed, creating the right space for family, friendship, and flexibility along the way. Visit historic landmarks, lively towns, and quiet countryside within the beautiful Emerald Isle, guided by hosts who know the stories behind the scenes. Book before December 21, 2025, and each traveler receives a €200 discount toward a truly unforgettable Irish experience.

Whispers of Earth ~ La Tène Inspired Brass Cuff with Deschutes Jasper
Scoti Creations - scoticreations.com

Hand-crafted by Scoti Creations, Whispers of Earth draws inspiration from the ancient La Tène art of the Celtic world. The etched brass surface features flowing patterns that evoke ancient stone carvings, river paths, and the quiet resilience of the land. At its heart lies Deschutes Jasper, a rare stone formed by fire and time, its russet and moss tones linking the piece to the rhythms of nature, recalling mossy glens and misty moors. The cuff embodies both the ancient and the modern, a reminder of how beauty and strength endure through the ages. More than mere jewellery, it is a small work of art that speaks of heritage, earth, and the heart and hands that shape legend.



Gary Maclean National Chef of Scotland
The Scottish Kitchen

More than 100 Timeless Traditional & Contemporary Recipes from Scotland



Scottish Kitchen: Seasonal Recipes from Scotland's National Chef
Gary Maclean - garymacchef.com / amazon.com

Bring the taste of Scotland home this holiday season with Scottish Kitchen, the latest cookbook from Scotland's National Chef, Gary Maclean, winner of BBC MasterChef: The Professionals. This beautifully photographed collection celebrates the best of Scotland's larder with over 100 recipes that are simple, authentic, and full of flavour. From hearty Cullen Skink and tender venison stew, to elegant smoked salmon starters and modern takes on traditional desserts, Maclean shares his passion for local produce and seasonal cooking in every dish. Whether you have Scottish roots or simply love honest, wholesome food, Scottish Kitchen captures the warmth, history, and creativity of Scotland's culinary heritage - perfect for cooks of all levels and an ideal gift for that someone special in your life.



Custom Tartan Nutcracker
Thistle & Stitch - thistleandstitch.com

Add a wee touch of Highland cheer to the holiday season with Thistle & Stitch's Custom Tartan Nutcracker. Each one is dressed by hand in the tartan of your choice, turning this classic Christmas figure into a proud celebration of clan and heritage. Whether standing guard by the tree or sitting atop the mantel, it brings a bit of Scotland's warmth and humor to any home. Made with care and a keen eye for tradition, every detail from the kilt to the sporran reflects the craftsmanship of a true Christmas keepsake. A female version, complete with tartan skirt and shawl, is also available. Together they make a festive pair, ready to bring plaid, charm, and hearty well wishes to your holiday traditions.

Genealogy in Reverse: Finding the Living
Genealogical.com - genealogical.com

Most family historians look to the past for deceased relatives, but what if the key to your Celtic backstory lies with the living? *Genealogy in Reverse: Finding the Living* by Cheri Hudson Passey introduces a modern approach to tracing living relatives who may hold the answers to your clan's history and genealogy. Offering clear strategies, real-life examples, and expert guidance, Passey instructs on how to use archives and digital tools to reconstruct family networks and reconnect with blood relatives. This practical guide helps genealogists bridge past and present, linking Highland, Irish, Welsh, and any Celtic lineages to their living counterparts around the globe. Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned researcher, *Genealogy in Reverse* offers fresh insight into the living heart of heritage, roots, and kinship.

Genealogy in Reverse: Finding the Living
A Practical Guide for All Genealogists

By
Cheri Hudson Passey



Highland Storm
The Scott MacAulay Performing Arts Centre - smpac.ca

There's nothing quite like the power of live performance to stir the spirit, and Highland Storm delivers it with substance and style. This high-energy evening showcases the artistry of Highland and step dancers, the commanding rhythm of pipes and drums, and the stirring beauty of traditional Celtic song. It's a show that celebrates both power and grace, with each song and step combining to create a moving and authentic Celtic experience. Presented by Scott MacAulay Performing Arts Centre, Highland Storm has become a much-anticipated summer highlight for lovers of Scottish culture and its distinctive sound. Tickets for the 2026 season go on sale soon and can serve as an unforgettable gift for anyone who feels the music of the Highlands in their heart.



Men's Countryman Wax Jacket
Oxford Blue - oxford-blue.com

Built for a climate suited to brisk walks and blustery weather, the Countryman Wax Jacket from British maker Oxford Blue combines country stylishness with down-to-earth practicality. Made in the UK from durable wet-waxed cotton, it's showerproof and wind-resistant, with a soft plaid lining for warmth and comfort. Classic touches like a corduroy collar, elasticized storm cuffs, and a detachable hood are perfect for treks on the trail, while a two-way zipper and deep pockets are well-suited for the man about town. Regarded as one of the finest outdoor garments available today, an Oxford Blue Wax Jacket is rugged yet refined, and the kind of coat that lasts for years, and seems to get better with age. It makes a lovely and practical gift for the winter season.

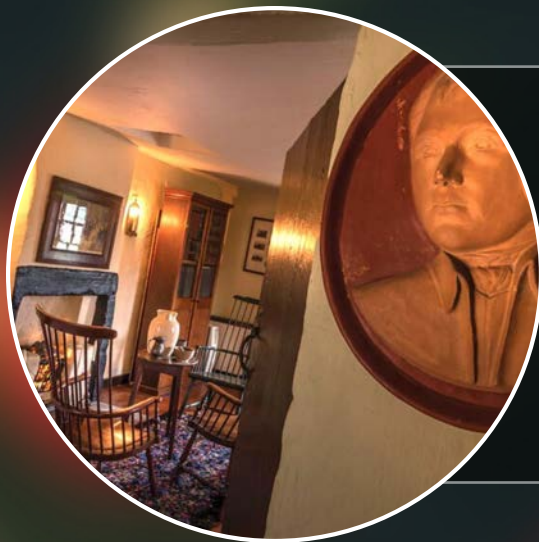
Big Bore Low Whistle
Carbony Celtic Winds - carbony.com

Carbony Celtic Winds provides high-quality wind instruments for use by professional musicians around the globe. For players drawn to the deep and earthy tones of traditional Celtic music, the Carbony Low D Whistle offers the timbre and craftsmanship for balanced harmony. Made from lightweight carbon fiber with a tapered body and chimney extenders, it provides easy, comfortable finger spacing without losing the rich register that players seek. A tunable anodized aluminum mouthpiece adds durability and control, while the marbled ebonite tip gives the whistle a polished, classic look with a hydrophobic windway that never clogs. The result is an instrument with warmth and presence that comes with a lifetime warranty. Whether you're performing on stage or playing by the fireside, it's a reliable essential for exploring the heart of Celtic melody.



Vacation Stays
Wilderness Cottages - wildernesscottages.co.uk

Located across Scotland, Wilderness Cottages offers a cozy and comfortable collection of pristine properties for both seasoned and rookie travellers. From couple friendly small cottages with crackling fireplaces to larger locales set up for families or groups of friends, guests will enjoy the opportunity to explore some of the most spectacular and scenic locations in Scotland, including the West Coast, the Isle of Skye, Loch Ness, Cairngorm National Park and Dumfries and Galloway. These self-catering facilities are open year-round, with shorter breaks available in selected properties. In addition, several of the cottages are pet friendly.



Membership

Scottish Heritage USA - ScottishHeritageUSA.org

For 60 years, Scottish Heritage USA has helped to preserve the places and stories that keep Scotland's spirit alive. As a proud partner of the National Trust for Scotland Foundation USA, the organization has contributed more than \$1.5 million to projects like the Culloden Visitor Centre, the Burns Library Project, and the restoration of St. Kilda. Members have a direct role in protecting cultural landmarks while enjoying special benefits, including digital and print magazine subscriptions, youth scholarship support, and complimentary entry to over 100 heritage sites across Scotland and beyond. As Scottish Heritage USA celebrates its 60th anniversary, membership offers something rewarding and lasting, and a way to give back to the heritage you love while staying connected to it all year round.

Customizable Scottish Themed T-shirts and Gifts **Jim Barker - jimbarker.net**

A Scots-born graphic designer and illustrator from Falkirk, Jim Barker has spent a lifetime bringing passion and precision to his work. After years in the graphic arts world (perhaps too many, he jokes), he's now semi-retired and happily sketching what he loves best: clever, humorous takes on Scottish life. His online print-on-demand shop features customizable T-shirts, mugs, and gifts that celebrate Scotland's wit and charm, with the occasional Irish touch thrown in. Whether it's a humorous Highland phrase, a cartoon ninja haggis, or a witty reference to everyday Scots, Jim's work keeps the laughter flowing. Almost every piece is customizable with your own choice of name or phrase, fonts and colors to make a Scottish-themed gift that's really personal.



Peiteag Shithiche na Coille

Northern Bohemian Studio - northern-bohemian-studio.square.site

From Northern Bohemian Studio, where Gaelic heritage meets handmade craftsmanship, comes the Peiteag Shithiche na Coille - the Forest Fairy Baby Vest. Carefully designed and made in Canada using quality yarns, natural fibres, and unique, sturdy buttons, it will keep wee ones warm as they explore their world. Inspired by the folklore and forest landscapes of the Highlands, this bespoke vest is completely customizable, combining tradition with playfulness that carries the special magic of Gaelic storytelling into everyday life. A portion of every sale supports the Seanchaidhean Gaelic Society, helping to preserve the language and its oral traditions. Sustainable and sweet, it's a special keepsake gift that celebrates heritage, healing the planet, and the happiness that children bring to home and hearth.



Knives and Accessories

Grohmann Knives Ltd - gknives.com

This holiday season, give a piece of handcrafted history that extends back to the Second World War when the Grohmann family began making handmade knives in Pictou, Nova Scotia, Canada. Offering a large selection of kitchen, hunting, and pocket knives crafted in the old-world tradition, Grohmann products are frequently passed down as heirlooms through generations. Created from both German carbon steel and stainless steel - famous for standing the test of time - Grohmann's knives are carefully set with several options of handles, including rosewood and resinwood. In addition to hunting and kitchen sets, other available products include cleavers, skinners, fillets, folders, and a complete line of sheaths, sharpeners, and other specialty items for the kitchen. Engraving and gift wrapping are also available on-site or online.

Ingles Buchan Tartan Throw

Northern Watters Knitwear - nwknitwear.com

What better way to bundle up this winter than with a cozy tartan throw? The Ingles Buchan Tartan Throw is made from the highest quality 100 per cent pure new wool yarn, sourced through dedicated yarn merchants, and delivered in the colour ecru. The yarn is dyed into over 100 different stock colours in Selkirk, Scotland, before being broken down into cones for each colour ready to weave. The piece measures around 54" x 70" in size. Located on Granville Street in Halifax, and now with a second location at Pier 20, Northern Watters Knitwear is the only tartan shop in the city's downtown core. With a large selection of Clan kilts, traditional Highland dress products, British Worsted Wool Sweaters and Accessories, along with hundreds of different items to complete your Clan or Irish family collection, the company has many Celtic-themed gift options for everyone on your holiday list.



Custom Kilt & Tartan Design

Red Label Kilts - redlabelkilts.ca

Dress to impress at your next important event, or gift your favorite lad or lassie with a custom tartan from Red Label Kilts. Tell the story of your life and lineage with a hand-stitched, premium quality, custom-designed tartan created by the clan crafting authentic designs since 1995. Choose your colors and then co-create a unique design with Red Label craftsmen before the weaving begins at a select tartan mill in Scotland. Each original design is then submitted to the Scottish Register of Tartans to make it official. Exemplify your familial heritage or company brand and bring your newly created tartan to life with Red Label's specialty Highland wear for men and women that includes finely crafted kilts, along with other traditional wear. Further enhance the distinctive look with buckles, brooches, blankets, and other baubles from a complete line of products and accessories for that extra splash of style and sophistication.



Reciprocal Membership Program *Chicago Scots - chicagoscots.org*

Join the Chicago Scots Reciprocal Membership Program with the National Trust for Scotland Foundation USA and receive benefits from two great organizations. Enjoy free access at 100+ heritage sites in Scotland and 400 more across the UK. Join us in Chicago to see the (World Champion!) Inveraray & District Pipe-Band at the 40th Annual Scottish Festival & Highland Games, June 12 - 13, 2026, DuPage County Fairgrounds, Wheaton, IL. Game tickets go on sale January 2026. Become a member today. Individual, family, and lifetime memberships available. All proceeds will benefit the Chicago Scots primary charity, the Caledonia Senior Living & Memory Care. A great gift idea this Holiday season!

The Wolfe Tones Phenomenon

Alex Fell - choicepublishing.ie / omahoneys.ie / amazon.com

The Wolfe Tones are widely acknowledged as the leading Irish Nationalist band, as well as traditionally-trained folk music exponents. They have influenced many younger bands, as well as established artists like Rod Stewart - whose version of "Grace" followed a visit to Glasgow Celtic Football Club, where longtime fans of the band are renowned for singing The Wolfe Tones' songs at matches. After 61 years of touring together they performed their final Irish concert in Limerick in July and were recently granted a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Irish Post. In *The Wolfe Tones Phenomenon*, Alex Fell recaps all the highlights, including the band's 22 "Top-20" hits, the fastest selling single ever on the Emerald Isle, the "best single ever" as voted in the BBC World Service poll, the double-platinum and gold albums, the civic awards of keys to the cities of New York and Los Angeles, and the numerous proclamations attesting to their devotion to the ideal of a peaceful and united Ireland. With a soaring narrative arc, a recorded repertoire of the band, and peppered with historical facts and contemporary colour photographs, the work is a must read for music lovers and all who have an interest in Irish history and culture. Watch for the author's second edition of her popular reference book - *The Irish Draught Horse* - coming soon!



The Celtic Deck - Celtic Myth Playing Cards *Acken Studios - ackenstudios.com*

The enduring power and presence of Celtic myth shine through this deck of unique playing cards. Designed directly from Old Irish legends, Middle Welsh texts, and La Tène designs, each face-card presents two figures from ancient Celtic tales - including the Acallamh na Senórach, Leabhar Gabhála hÉireann, and others such as Niall of the Nine Hostages, Balor of the Baleful Eye, and Brighid herself. The suits are transformed into the Four Jewels of the Tuatha Dé Danann: the Sword of Nuada, the Spear of Lugh, the Cauldron of the Dagda, and the Lia Fáil - said to cry out in the presence of the true High King of Ireland. Truly Celtic, and as eternal as lore itself, these cards make for a thoughtful and timeless gift this Holiday season.



Learn the Irish Language *Oideas Gael - oideasgael.ie*

Since its foundation in 1984, Oideas Gael has attracted thousands of participants to its highly acclaimed adult Irish language courses and cultural programs in the northwest of Ireland. The Donegal Gaeltacht, with its breathtaking scenery, rich heritage, and warm welcome, is the setting for a unique holiday learning experience. Enjoy learning the Irish language with engaging, practical courses that cater to all levels from beginners to experienced speakers. The bilingual cultural activity programs span Irish traditional music, hill walking, exploring the environment, art and craft traditions, archaeology, geology, and more. All tutors are experts in their chosen field. Every year, participants of all ages come from across Ireland and from over 20 countries worldwide to learn in an immersive and informal environment.

Perfume Oils *SAOR - saorperfume.com*

SAOR - the Gaelic word meaning "to be free" - creates calming, captivating pure perfume oils for both women and men. Alcohol and water-free, SAOR's 10ml roll-on perfume oils last from dawn to dusk. SAOR's original fragrance - a hAon - transports you through the fragrant, enchanting mist that blankets the Irish hillsides infusing bergamot, fresh white tea, and airy musk. The warm, woody a Dó infuses neroli, ylang-ylang, oud, cedar, and sandalwood, and is ideal for both women and men. SAOR's "sunshine in a bottle" - a Trí - infuses uplifting grapefruit, soothing ginger, and warm cedar scents. You can enjoy all three, as SAOR now offers The Trilogy Collection, which includes a 5ml roll-on bottle of all three signature fragrances. The Find Your Fragrance link on the company's website helps you choose your SAOR fragrance. Free shipping in the USA.



Claddagh Copper Bracelet *Magnetic Mobility - magneticmobility.ie*

The Claddagh Copper Bracelet from Magnetic Mobility blends timeless Irish tradition with natural wellness, featuring the iconic Claddagh symbol - representing love, loyalty, and friendship - paired with pure copper for everyday relief. Copper is a natural anti-inflammatory that can help reduce pain and stiffness, making this bracelet an excellent choice for anyone managing back issues, arthritis, or general aches and pains. The adjustable design ensures a comfortable fit for daily wear, while the elegant finish makes it suitable for any occasion. Each bracelet arrives in a luxury eco-friendly gift box, ready to delight your loved one or yourself. The Claddagh Copper Bracelet is more than a beautiful bracelet - it's a thoughtful tool for comfort and wellbeing, infused with Celtic heritage and care. This holiday season, give the gift of meaningful relief with a touch of tradition.



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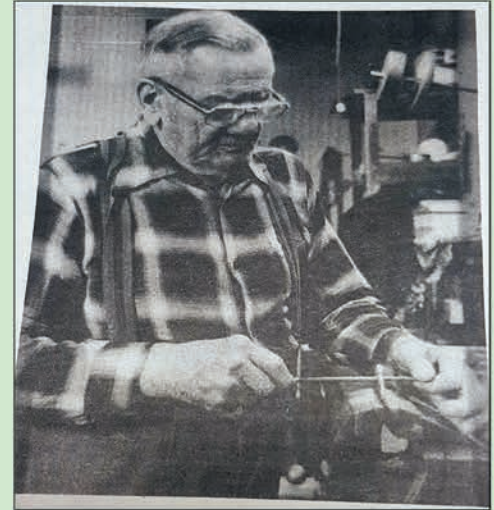
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A Christmas Poem

by Josephine Neill

*A caald winter's nicht
Starn heich in the lift
A lass wi a bairnie
Ahint a snaa drift.
Come in through the byre
Step ower the straw
Draw ben tae the fire
Afore the day daw.
The bairnie will sleep
By the peat's puttrin flame
Oor waarmin place, lassie,
This nicht is your hame.
Come morning the snaa
Showed nae fuitprints at aa
Tho the lass wi the bairnie
Had stolen awaa.
An we mynded anither
A lang while afore
Wi a bairn in her airms
An the beasts roun the door.*



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S.A. Pipes & Drums - Laura Freeman & Friends
The Otter Space Band Hardy Gurdy Harry
Caítlín Sickels - Thomas 'Doc' Grauzer
Archery Tournaments - Solar Rain Fire Show

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