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Dara Knot Inc.
10 Peter St
Markham, Ontario, Canada
L3P 2A4

Celtic Life International is an
ethnic journal published in Canada
eight times a year by Dara Knot Inc.

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Please send all review
requests to info@celticlife.com

Please return undeliverable copies of Celtic
Life International to: Dara Knot Inc.
10 Peter St, Markham, Ontario,
Canada, L3P 2A4

Publication Mail Registration:
No. 40050439 ISSN 1918-0497

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Funded by the Government of Canada
Financé par le gouvernement du Canada

Canada

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or the editorial stance of materials submitted
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FÁILTE

Food For Thought

Many of our life stories are formed around the tables that we share with family and friends - over laughter, long conversations, and memorable meals and moments. Food has always been more than mere nourishment - it is history and tradition served on a plate.

And the story of food is fascinating - from seed to soil to savoury creations that make their way straight to our senses. Truthfully, I find nothing more captivating than a great food biography: a book that tells the origin tale of a specific food item and then traces its journey around the globe. My revelation came after I stumbled across *Salt: A World History*, Mark Kurlansky's riveting story of how salt shaped our civilization. It should be no surprise that the ancient Celts settled in parts of the world associated with salt production. While the Celts were certainly not the first to mine salt, they were expert innovators who expanded the industry. In fact, they were considered master miners and traders in the commodity referred to as "white gold." Realizing that the value of salt was in its preservative nature, the Celts began to specialize in - and trade - rock and processed sea salt, and even more valuable finished goods, including cured meats. Some believe that the Celts contributed salt-cured ham to Western civilization.

This is where the story takes an even more interesting turn as the ability to preserve food was a significant catalyst for world exploration, allowing voyagers like Francisco Pizarro and the Spanish conquistadors to make the arduous

journey from Europe to South America without starving. There, they discovered something far more valuable than the gold and silver they were searching for - the Inca papas tuber, aka the potato. Today the humble spud is recognized as the world's third most important food crop for human consumption. Potatoes are such a versatile plant that they are grown on every continent with the exception of Antarctica. The story of the potato is told over and over again with a multitude of other crops - tomatoes, corn and chili peppers are all similar immigrants.

Those ingredients have made their way into the kitchens of novice and professional chefs around the world and have inspired countless concoctions - from traditional hearty Breton fish stews to modern Irish Nachos and Welsh Rarebit Jacket Potatoes.

Somewhere along the way that food ended up in our own kitchens on stained and well-loved scraps of paper tucked inside recipe tins. When we revisit these dishes, the smells and tastes flood our senses with vivid memories of laughter and lively conversations around a table shared with loved ones.

Pull up a chair and enjoy our latest issue - my hope is that it inspires you to start a new food adventure.

Siobhán L. Covington,
Publisher

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first WORD
with James Acken

The Culture of Celtic Identity

When most people consider culture, they tend to think of an aesthetic, a sense of style characterized by a particular feel or collection of intangibles. This is because the word ‘culture’ comes down to us from the Latin word *cultura*, meaning “things about to be tended and venerated.” As such, a given culture relates to so many things: language, clothes, art, music, and - of course - food and mythology. One’s *cultura* are the collected choices you are about to make. What songs will you choose to sing? What language will you choose to speak? What food will you choose to eat, and what stories will you tell?

Mentality is both knowledge and a collection of perceptions that inform one’s culture, and identity can be understood as its outward reality. Your mentality gives rise to your culture, which in turn gives rise to your identity; and all of this is tied to storytelling. The collections of stories that we tell, particularly ones that can be called “core narratives,” reinforce our culture in often marvelous - though sometimes circular - ways.

Take, for example, the story Aislinge Meic Con Glinne, ‘The Vision of Mac Con Glinne.’ In short, Aníer Mac Con Glinne was a scholar during the reign of Cathal Mac Finnguinne, who was plagued by a “demon of gluttony.” This demon compelled him to eat enormous amounts of food without ever being satisfied, and had come to him through cursed apples. Cathal was vying for the kingship of Ireland with Fergal Mac Maeldún, but had fallen in love with his sister, Lígach. Fergal hired a poet to curse the apples so that this demon of gluttony formed from them, causing Cathal to consume huge quantities of food every day. The resultant poverty affected all of Munster so that, when Aníer traveled there and stayed at the ‘guest house,’ he found it in shambles, full of fleas, and with only the barest necessities. After the monks who attended him offered a pitiful breakfast, Aníer composed a satire against their lack of hospitality, escalating the situation until the monks decided to kill the poor scholar. The night before the execution, though, Aníer related a poem about the dream



he had, and the abbot revealed that his own vision was that this *aislinge* would cure the king of his gluttony. Sure enough, after its recitation - a vision of a whole world made of every possible kind of food - and a fair amount of wily manipulation, Aníer lures the demon out of Cathal’s mouth, and disposes of it, though there is some variance between the versions of the tale as to how that was done.

This tale is a perfect example of how myth relates to culture and thereby to identity. The essential problem to be solved is the king’s inability to provide abundance for his people. A chieftain is not a figure of controlling authority in early Ireland but realizes their *fíor flaithemhón*, their “truth of kingship,” by ensuring the prosperity of the people. Cathal’s failure to do so changes the nature of his people, their poverty turning to vindictiveness. Aníer, the clever scholar, leverages his poetic art and mantic resourcefulness to heal the king and thereby the people. The *Aislinge* is a cultural treasure trove, if only for the information it gives us about food in ancient Ireland: porridge was made with chunks of meat and bacon in it and cheese was called *bánbhiadh*, “white-food!”

In this tale, we see the nature of kingship (revealed by a king’s failure), the role poetry has to play in maintaining the best order of things, and how the Celts conceived the often-strange workings of inspiration and the metaphysical. These were core aspects of Celtic culture and identity, and that food is the central object of the tale is no mistake.

“How we relate to and think about food involves how we work with the land, invent our economy and manage our social bonds.

It is the medium of our generosity and the gauge of our prosperity, to say nothing of its relationship to our body and how we relate to that! There is also an element of comedy in this tale as Aníer begins his journey because he craved *cacha bánbhiadh do fhághbháil dó*, “all the (kinds of) cheese he could get.”

Generosity and hospitality, the power of poetic art, the mysterious workings of inspiration, and uncompromising audacity moderated by skill and humour are all core aspects of the Celtic identity, exemplified here and found throughout the whole of the tradition. Similar themes show up in the *Mabinogion* in the story of Bran and Branwen, and their influence can be found in countless other tales from “The Madness of Sweeney” to the stories of King Arthur.

So, if you’re looking to tap into Celtic identity, make the food, find the tales, and share them with others.

James Acken is a philosopher, professor, and the Creative Director at Acken Studios. He lives in British Columbia.

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De Tha Dol



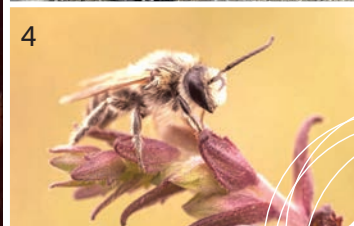
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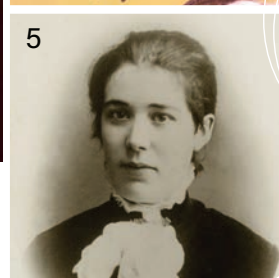
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1 Scotland-France Link

A new ferry linking Scotland and France is slated to set sail this spring. The planned route goes from Rosyth to Dunkirk, including both cargo and passenger services. The service is expected to run three return trips per week. According to The Guardian, the ferry will become one of the longest sea journeys in Europe if all goes as planned, with trips taking about 20 hours. There is a chance the ferry launch could be delayed, however, due to the need for a new border control post facility in Rosyth.

2 Irish Horror Film

Irish filmmaker Damian McCarthy's latest film, *Hokum*, will be released in theatres this May. Adam Scott leads the cast as protagonist Ohm Bauman, an author who travels to an Irish inn to spread the ashes of his deceased parents. Unbeknownst to Bauman, the inn is said to be haunted by the spirit of a witch. Little else has been revealed about the film's plot, but most of the filming reportedly took place in West Cork, where McCarthy is from. *Hokum* is McCarthy's third feature film, following *Ca-veat* (2020) and *Oddity* (2024), both of which he wrote as well as directed.

3 Mystery Shoes

Hundreds of leather shoes, believed to date back to the 19th century, have washed up on a beach in Wales. Since September 2025, volunteers tasked with cleaning up litter on the Ogmore-by-Sea shore have discovered the shoes in and around rock pools. As of December, beachcombers have found more than 400 shoes. It's unclear how long they may have been trapped there or where they could have come from, but there are theories. Some suspect the shoes are from the wreck of an Italian cargo vessel, which sank a few kilometres away about 150 years ago.

4 The Red Bartsia Bee

A rare species of bee has been found near the coast of Cornwall. The Red Bartsia Bee had previously been spotted in only one other Cornish region, near the Towans, in 2022. Earlier this year, it was reported that the same species has been found in North Cornwall. The United Kingdom's Invertebrate Conservation Trust (a.k.a Buglife) will work with the National Trust to preserve the habitats of these bees, which - as their name implies - are known to collect pollen from Red Bartsia flowers.

5 Manx Roll of Honour

Author and linguist Sophia Morrison was among those recognized on the Isle of Man parliament's Roll of Honour at the end of 2025. Morrison is most well known for her 1911 book *Manx Fairy Tales*, a collection of the island's folk stories. In addition to her celebrated literary publications, Morrison was also an advocate for the Manx language and culture, having helped found the Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh (Manx Language Society) in 1899. She was a key figure in regenerating the language by introducing it to schools, as well as recording early phonograph reels of Manx speech and music.

Northern Nevada



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Saturday, May 16, 2026

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www.irishnevada.org

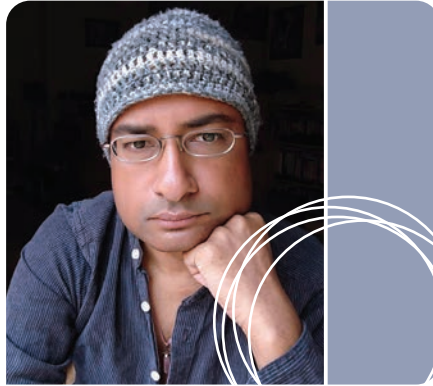


Celts in Culture



Niela Nell Kalra

Niela Nell Kalra is a knitwear-focused designer and maker based in the Shetland village of Hoswick. Born in Canada to an Indian father and Scottish mother (the latter from whom Kalra learned about textiles), Kalra eventually moved to Aberdeen to study law. She worked as a criminal defence solicitor until a visit to Shetland College sparked her career change. She studied contemporary textiles at the college and, after graduating, founded Nielanell. Her knitwear label is influenced by a blend of cultures, including the clothes worn by the Indian members of her family. What started as a studio in Kalra's garage has grown to take up "a cluster of historic sheds and small croft houses" in Hoswick. Her goal is to create wearable art, experimenting with a variety of colours and textures while staying true to the level of quality present in traditional Shetland knitwear. "This path I've chosen - or which has chosen me - hasn't always been easy," Kalra writes on her website. "Any type of manufacturing brings its own difficulties, and sleepless nights. Selling what you design yourself is stupendously difficult: you open yourself up to such acute scrutiny (real or imagined!), which is not a very comfortable place to be." Nevertheless, Kalra has been putting her work into the world since 2008 and continues to do so. The studio focuses on small batches of products, rather than mass production; from capes and jumpers to tunics and scarves.



Taz Rahman

Cardiff-based writer Taz Rahman spent his childhood in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and has lived in Wales for more than three decades. His career as a poet began relatively recently, as he first began penning poetry and short stories in 2019. That same year, Rahman started the Just Another Poet YouTube channel to celebrate the poets of Wales through interviews, analyses, and more. Rahman has since made his mark on the Welsh literary scene and beyond, publishing his work in journals such as Poetry Wales, South Bank Poetry magazine, and Bad Lilies magazine. In 2021, he was selected for Literature Wales' inaugural mentorship scheme - "Representing Wales" - for which he was paired with writing mentor Zoë Brigley. "My mentor introduced me to a world of reading widely, and with great sensitivity, instilled the realization that the sanctity of a private world could become the wider world if only I could devise the means of a language to say what I felt comfortable in saying," Rahman wrote in a recent piece for Nation Cymru. "When this process came to fruition, I wasn't seeing obstacles on the road, but the crushed stones under the veneer of a mixture of aggregates, binder and filler for me to stir in as my own asphalt on each highway I wanted to construct." His first poetry collection, *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*, was published in February 2024 and was subsequently longlisted for the Laurel Prize: an annual nature and eco-poetry prize.



Adria Jackson

Harpist and singer Adria Jackson draws inspiration from her Celtic, English, and Scandinavian heritage. In addition to English language vocals, Jackson has been known to sing in Gaelic, Norwegian, and even Elvish. The multi-talented musician lived throughout Canada and the United Kingdom before landing in her current home of Nova Scotia. She's performed at venues and events such as the Atlantic International Film Festival, Harmony Bazaar Festival of Women and Song, Nova Scotia's Government House, Helen Creighton Folk Club, and the Halifax Celtic Festival. Initially a classical performer and educator, Jackson holds a Bachelor of Arts with Distinction in Music (classical voice) from Brock University. She has since emerged as a traditional folk musician, influenced by the likes of Loreena McKennitt and early Joni Mitchell. Jackson released her debut album, *Troubadour*, in 2023. This record features traditional Celtic tunes, original songs, Canadiana, and folk-inspired classical pieces. "Drawing from her extensive training as a classical soprano and a heartfelt passion for the harp, Adria has crafted an album that bridges the gap between time-honoured traditions and modern melodies. Her song choices are a testament to her rich cultural background," raved the Scotlander podcast. Two years later, Jackson released a historical folk EP titled *Helen Creighton & The Songs of The Red Parlour*. In addition to writing and performing, Jackson also offers vocal coaching and workshops.



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Northern Nevada Celtic Ceilidh

May 16
Reno, NV

www.irishnevada.org



This spring, the Sons & Daughters of Erin (SADOE) host the 4th Annual Northern Nevada Celtic Ceilidh in a new venue; the Reno Public Market, located in Midtown Reno. The popular day-long gathering offers up an array of activities for visitors, including performances from the Sierra Highlanders Pipe Band, Scottish Dancers, local Celtic entertainers, and more. Musical headliners include the Black Irish Band and other Celtic entertainers. Clan tents and vendors will be on site as well. The festival continues the legacy and traditions of the region's original Celtic Celebration, which was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The non-profit Irish Heritage organization SADOE presents and sponsors Celtic artists, celebrates Irish history and culture, donates to local charities, and participates in community events. The event is free and open to all.

Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival & Games

May 16-17
Townsend, TN

www.smokymountaingames.org



Scotland in the Great Smokies welcomes visitors to celebrate the 44th annual Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival & Games - Tennessee's oldest festival of Scottish, Irish, and Celtic culture, which will be held this year on May 16-17 in the scenic town of Townsend, just outside Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The yearly gathering offers a lively mix of music, athletic competition, and plenty of Scottish tradition. Guests will enjoy the best in folk, roots, and pop music, alongside the stirring sounds of Highland bagpipes and drums. Other festival highlights include the caber toss, kilted clans, whisky tastings, vendors' wares from the homelands, and the Southeast Regional Highland Dance Competition, showcasing some of the best dancers in the world. Wee ones will also be treated to their own Highland games, with free admission for children under 15.

Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival & Highland Games

June 6-7
Hiawassee, GA

www.gamtnscottishfestival.org



The Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival & Highland Games takes place in Hiawassee, Georgia, about two hours north of Atlanta, at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds on the shores of Lake Chatuge. Formerly known as the Blairsville Scottish Festival & Highland Games, the event continues a tradition that began more than two decades ago. This year's gathering includes Highland Games athletic competitions, piping and drumming, Highland dancing, and live Celtic music. Visitors can also browse artisan vendors and food stalls set up across the fairgrounds. Demonstrations and activities for children are part of the schedule, along with opportunities to learn about Scottish culture and traditions. The lakeside venue provides space for performances, competitions, and vendors throughout the grounds, with many shopping, dining, and entertainment options on the scenic fairgrounds.

The 20th Annual Greater Moncton Highland Games & Scottish Festival

June 9-13
Moncton, NB

www.monctonhighlandgames.com



The Greater Moncton Highland Games & Scottish Festival proudly celebrates two decades of cultural connection and community building this year. Set along the banks of the Petitcodiac River - part of the Bay of Fundy UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve famous for its Tidal Bore - the festival reflects the strength, resilience, and living traditions of Scottish Canadian culture. Anniversary celebrations culminate on June 13 at the Hal Betts Sportsplex in downtown Moncton, with heavy athletics, Highland dancing, piping and drumming competitions, clan gatherings, local artisans and vendors, agricultural displays, horse-and-wagon rides, and toe-tapping Ceilidh Tent entertainment. Come and discover why the Greater Moncton Highland Games & Scottish Festival stands as a signature cultural event in the region, honouring tradition while continuing to grow, evolve, and welcome new communities.

Chicago Scots 40th Annual Scottish Festival

June 12-13

Wheaton, IL

www.chicagoscots.org



Scotland comes to the Midwest again this June 12-13, as the Chicago Scots host the 40th Annual Scottish Festival and Highland Games at the DuPage County Fairgrounds. This year's games marks four decades of celebration with an anticipated appearance by the acclaimed Inveraray & District Pipe Band as part of North America's largest bagpiping and drumming championship. A Family-Friendly Friday is also planned, showcasing the caber toss, Highland dancing, and an evening Ceilidh. Saturday's schedule features a full slate of competition, music, and cultural displays, including a World Cup watch party, as Scotland's national soccer team takes the field. Other festival highlights include traditional Highland games, pipe bands, Celtic music, whisky tastings, genealogy info, the dogs of Scotland, a British car show, and a lively Scottish marketplace. The weekend concludes with the powerful 1,000 bagpipers performing a tribute to U.S. veterans, honoring America's 250th birthday. All proceeds go to support Caledonia Senior Living & Memory Care.

Holland Waterfront Celtic Festival & Highland Games

June 26-27

Holland, MI

www.hollandcelticfestival.org



For the fifth year, the Holland Waterfront Celtic Festival & Highland Games will be held on the shores of Lake Michigan, June 26-27. Sponsored by Guinness, the two-day gathering offers a full program of traditional Highland Games with 65 athletes, piping and drumming, Highland and Irish dancing, and two stages of live Celtic music. Visitors will also enjoy a Scottish village representing more than two dozen clans and societies, as well as food tents and trucks, craft vendors, and many family activities. Other highlights include sheepdog demonstrations, Highland cattle, axe throwing, and an on-site Irish pub. Special events include performances from four live bands on Friday evening for adults and more than a dozen musical acts are featured for all ages on Saturday, with free admission for those under 15.

Embro Highland Games

July 1

Embro, ON

www.embrohighlandgames.ca



This year marks the 87th Embro Highland Games, a celebration of the region's rich Celtic roots which hail back to 1820 when the area was originally settled by those forced from their lands in Sutherland, Scotland. That heritage will again be celebrated on Canada Day (July 1) with several special events. The always-popular Tug-of-War contest will be "international" in 2026 with teams from Northern Ireland, Nova Scotia, Ontario and the United States of America competing. Competitive Highland dancing, massed pipe bands, piping & drumming competitions, heavy events for men and women, including the very popular caber toss, Scottish animals on display including Highland cattle, sheep and horses, agility dogs, children's Scottish-themed crafts and outdoor activities are all included with admission. New in 2026 are the Jacobite re-enactors with their camp, costumes and knowledge! Guests will enjoy live Celtic music at the Muckle Tent. Adults are welcome to stroll and enjoy a wee libation on the fully licensed grounds, and the vendors' area is always worth a visit with its fine array of Scottish wares and fabulous food trucks.

Kincardine Scottish Festival & Highland Games

July 3-5

Kincardine, ON

www.kincardinescottishfestival.ca



This July 3-5, the Kincardine Scottish Festival and Highland Games takes place on the shores of Lake Huron. The annual gathering begins Friday evening with a concert launching the weekend's program of music and cultural activities. Saturday features the main Highland Games competitions, including traditional Heavy Athletics and a pipe band contest. Visitors can also explore Clan Avenue, where Scottish societies and family associations share information on ancestry and heritage. Vendors offering Scottish goods and festival food will be set up throughout the grounds, alongside activities for families and children. A concert on Saturday evening closes the day's events. Sunday is designated as Family Day, with crafts, games, inflatables, and an afternoon concert. The festival brings together music, athletics, and community traditions that have long been part of Kincardine's summer calendar.

Glasgow Lands Scottish Festival

July 18

Northampton, MA

www.glasgowlands.org



As the only Scottish festival held in Massachusetts, and the second largest of its kind in New England, The Glasgow Lands Scottish Festival returns to Northampton on July 18 for its 31st year. This summer's festival line-up features a wide range of Celtic and Scottish cultural activities, including Highland athletic, dance, pipe & drum competitions and more than 30 pipe bands! Visitors are invited to explore a clan area, genealogy info, fencing demonstrations, and the wee ones will enjoy an array of age-appropriate activities, including a spray park. Live music runs throughout the day, with performances by Albannach, Seven Nations, and Haggis X-1. Food vendors, artisan stalls, and the Celtic Pub offering beer, wine, mead, and whisky tastings are also part of the festival fare. Proceeds from the event support local non-profit organizations.

Sherwood Park Highland Gathering

July 25-26

Sherwood Park, AB

www.sphg.ca



The Sherwood Park Highland Gathering brings Celtic spirit to Alberta this summer for two days of traditional pipes, drums, live music, dancing, and Heavy Games. A celebration of Scottish, Irish, and British heritage featuring the caber toss and more, the annual gathering will feature over 400 competitors. Visitors are welcome to explore a Celtic marketplace featuring artisan jewelry, handcrafted items, and festival souvenirs while enjoying a wide selection of food fare. The festival's Beer Garden offers a cheerful atmosphere, with the local band West of Mabou performing at the Ceilidh on Saturday evening. Weekend highlights include sheep and duck herding, the British Car Club, Dandie Dinmonts, Irish Wolfhounds, local performing artists, and more. Families will enjoy the kid-friendly entertainment and activities.

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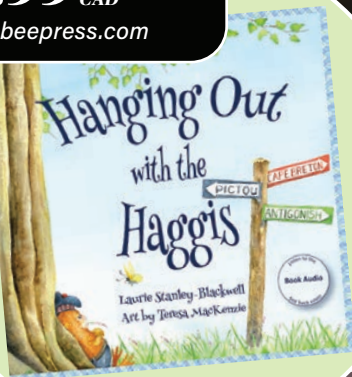
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Le Chardon et la Fleur de Lys

“I have always had a passion for history,” shares Ewen Booth, head of Tours Chardon, based in Quebec. His enthusiasm is well placed, given the enduring Scottish and Irish heritage that still runs through the predominantly French-speaking province. As a lifelong lineage explorer, Booth recently established his tour company to provide in-depth Celtic cultural experiences of the region.

“As a student, I used to work at the Military and Maritime Museum on St. Helen’s Island in Montreal,” he recalls. “I dressed in the uniform of a Fraser Highlander, and busloads of tourists watched us fire muskets, cannons, play bagpipes, and conduct tours.”

Booth also shares the legacy he promotes. “My father moved to Canada in 1952. He was proud of his Scottish heritage and served with the Black Watch and the Cameron Highlanders in Scotland. My siblings and I adopted our Scottish roots - it gave us an identity.”

For most of his life, Booth volunteered at museums and tourism groups while undertaking his own historical research, which is now chronicled on his social media pages, *Le Chardon et la Fleur de Lys*. His wife, Kathleen McKen, and her own ancestry have also been an inspiration. “She is French Canadian with Scottish roots that date back to 1760 at the end of the Seven Years War. Her original family name was McKinnon.”

Booth’s interest and extensive study eventually prompted him to present his cultural findings to others. “After 6 years of working in ‘Vieux Quebec’ and having an office next to a major tour guide business, I felt I could showcase the local area and share the information from my research.”

As a self-proclaimed “historian, researcher, presenter, and bagpiper,” much of his material is designed for sightseers. “I will be sharing these stories on my tours. I also draw upon more than 150 family trees for factual information.”

Currently, Booth offers a number of tours. “I have two in Quebec City, as well as other day tours between Levis and Kamouraska, a distance of approximately 190 kilometers.”



He also makes a point of being as accurate as he is thorough. “I’ve had to visit every location and research everything to make sure I have the right facts.”

The tours are further enhanced by his commitment to the characters in his stories. “I take on the persona of a historical character who has a close connection with the location. I have two personas who are Irish settlers, and I have acquired period clothing to wear on my tours.”

Booth’s dedication and detailed planning are not without some challenges. “This area is large, and there are distances to travel from one site to the next.” To keep things running smoothly, he has connected with regional cultural organizations. “I have great partnerships with the museums and historic sites so that we complement each other and offer a great experience.”

One of the defining rewards is the satisfaction that comes from using his research and experience to trace family roots for sightseers. “I have introduced people to their ancestors on paper, and shared documents and stories they were not aware of.”

“If someone has roots in early Quebec, I search their genealogy, build a family tree, and then take them to the places where they lived, laughed, and loved...”

Ultimately, Booth is dedicated to bringing Celtic culture in Quebec to light and keeping it alive. “I identify Scottish immigration points but also highlight the Irish at the same time. Even the French from Normandy and Breton have deep Celtic roots here.”

Following a busy year forging partnerships and creating stories along with his tour maps, Tours Chardon is ready to hit the road this spring. “I will have my big kick off at the Ottawa Travel and Vacation Show in April,” he says. The customized tours will be conducted on what he calls “The Clan Van,” which functions as “a travelling billboard that turns heads wherever it goes.”

Inclusivity is the guiding principle. “My tours are for everybody,” shares Booth. “There are many options and day tours to pick from along the St-Lawrence River to the north, and the Appalachian Mountains to the south.”

His mandate has remained the same since the start;

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The Connemara Pony Heritage Centre

Nestled in the picturesque Connemara National Park now sits the Connemara Pony Heritage Centre, a unique cultural experience in Co. Galway. The Heritage Centre may be new to the area, but the ponies themselves are not, having resided in the park since it opened in 1980. Cathy Snow has been looking after the herd for more than 20 years, and her family's connection to the breed goes back generations.

"As custodians for the Connemara Pony Breeders Society we have played a part in being responsible for this special pony living and thriving within its own habitat," explains Snow. "A deep love and respect for the Connemara pony has always been part of who I am."

Connemara National Park is an ideal home for the animals, lush with plant life such as heather, gorse, sedge, wild herbs and flowers. There are areas for the ponies to shelter and plenty of room for them to live and grow. Also important is the opportunity the park provides for people to observe the ponies in their natural habitat.

Snow gives regular information sessions about the pony, its characteristics and historical significance. Meanwhile, she also runs a stud farm with her husband: Moorland Connemara Ponies. "It is important to encourage breeders to breed ponies that have the true conformational characteristics of the stud book. That includes strong, short legs made of good flat bone, deep bodies, short backs and heads with well-rounded jaws and big eyes."

On top of that, the Connemara pony is generally described as good-natured and sure-footed. In other words, they prove to be an ideal companion as well as an impressive partner in sport. Snow breeds her ponies to a high standard and shows them at events like the Clifton Connemara Pony Show, which she describes as "the Olympics for ponies." She has also been invited to judge at international shows, and she's always thrilled to see the global reach of her beloved breed.



"The Connemara pony is like the Irish person in that they have been to so many countries and are a success. There are breed societies throughout the world with many members and they love to visit the home of the Connemara pony, as the pony is part of their family."

According to Tourism Ireland, the pony's origins are a matter of debate, but one story says they landed on the nation's shores in 1588, swimming from the Spanish Armada. Others speculate that the breed may be traced all the way back to the Iron Age. One thing is not contested, however: these ponies are deeply important to Ireland's past and present.

The Connemara pony was historically a working animal, pulling cargo such as peat from bogs (used to fuel the fires that once heated Irish homes) and stones for the fields. Snow came up with the idea for the heritage centre in hopes of paying tribute to the breed that was once so important to the survival of families on the Emerald Isle.

“They were an integral part of our Irish culture which we are grateful for. This centre provides a way for us to say, ‘thank you...’”

Additionally, it's a place where equine enthusiasts can learn all about Ireland's native pony, its history and its roots. There are games for younger visitors as well as a simulated carriage ride around the park, ideal for folks with mobility issues. The centre is open seven days a week and admission is free.

"The visitors come from all over the world. Some are visiting the park and see the Connemara ponies for the first time and fall in love with them," shares Snow. "Others are breeders who want to see the ponies in their natural environment and come especially to meet the pony here. The Connemara pony herd is one of the main attractions for visitors within the park. Often people approach me at pony talks and say that this experience has made their holiday."

It's rewarding for Snow to see other people share her enthusiasm. She plans to be at the centre for the duration of the summer, available to answer any questions visitors might have. The hope is to continue to provide educational opportunities, such as seminars and lectures, all centred around the Connemara pony.

"It is a job that allows me to share my passion for this wonderful pony."

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From Clan to Crown

At 26, Glasgow native Eilidh MacDonald found herself in her final year of eligibility to compete in Miss Scotland. With some modeling under her belt and the intention of raising money for a worthy cause (not to mention the chance to wear a fabulous dress), she entered the annual competition, winning the title this past November at the Grand Central Hotel ballroom in Edinburgh.

"I had done everything that I wanted to do with my life up to that point," she explains via email. "I had the job, completed university, moved to Edinburgh, and Miss Scotland would top the whole thing off. So, I thought, what is the absolute worst that could happen? Honestly, I didn't think I was going to win, so when they said my name, my jaw hit the floor."

Despite her initial surprise, MacDonald's roots tell a fitting story. As her name suggests, her ancestry runs deep in Scottish soil. "I don't think you could get more Scottish than my family. MacDonald is my dad's family that goes all the way back to the Jacobites. We were the proper Clan Ranald / MacDonald. My dad's cousins have traced everything back even further to ancient times."

As such, Miss Scotland is more than a title; it is an opportunity to explore and honour her lineage - a lineage that is also connected to her family's ongoing involvement with St Andrew's Hospice, which they endorsed before she even won her title. "We have been involved with supporting the hospice for a number of years."

After connecting with patients and their families, MacDonald has taken the stories and the cause to heart. "Getting involved completely opened my eyes to the other side of it. I'm going to do everything I can to raise further awareness."

The Glasgow native is determined to bring the real-life accounts to light and offset the usual perception of such facilities. "It is so important to tell the stories of people and families who have used the hospice - the good, the bad, and the ugly. One of my favourites is of a woman who had kids and a partner but had never gotten married. She had her wedding in the hospice's chapel with the full wedding dress, flowers, the bridesmaids, family, and friends."



"I was expecting to walk in, and that it was going to be heavy and dark and...it wasn't. It was unbelievably bright, and the staff and volunteers were all smiling." MacDonald hopes to raise awareness, along with some funds, to improve the quality of life for residents and support the children's hospice CHAS (Children's Hospices Across Scotland) as well.

Despite using her title for the greater good, Miss Scotland has faced some criticism that the competition belongs to a bygone era. "One of the comments on Facebook was that beauty pageants should be kept in the 1990s, and it's ridiculous that girls are doing this now," she reveals. MacDonald firmly disagrees. "I've got a degree in international business, and I've been given this opportunity to shout about the charities that I'm supporting."

“The misconception around beauty pageants is completely skewed - it's not clowning about in a dress.”

The title has also allowed MacDonald to travel and represent Scotland abroad, including the upcoming Dressed To Kilt event in New York City this April. She is excited to represent her birthplace abroad. "I've never been to New York. In fact, I've never been to America. It's funny to think that I will be in America surrounded by Scottish culture."

Yet, as expected, her heart remains with her homeland. "I've always loved Scotland; it is my home. I lived in Glasgow my entire life before I moved to Edinburgh in 2024. I love speaking to people about Scotland, and when I get to go to Miss World at the end of May, I'm hoping to drag as many people back here as possible."

As she moves through the year of her reign, the future beyond it looks promising: "I would love to eventually get into radio or presenting or more modelling as well."

For the time being, however, she is savoring every moment of this chapter. "I just want to be Miss Scotland forever. I'm a big believer that everything happens for a reason, but for now, I am focused on doing the best I can for the role of Miss Scotland."

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Anna Clifford

The multi-talented Anna Clifford is often on the road. Originally from Dublin, she splits her time between three places: her Irish capital hometown, London, and Barcelona. Her latest stand-up show, Soapstar, made its debut at Dublin Fringe last September, and Clifford plans to take it on tour this year.

“You just have to try not to think too much and enjoy the buzz it gives you,” she says of her chosen path. “Not knowing when your next job or pay cheque is coming wouldn’t be for everyone, but for me it’s like that rare moment of receiving some mail that isn’t a bill.”

Growing up, Clifford had a mind for play and little interest in academics. She preferred to dress up in her mom’s old clothes or watch Father Ted with her family. The likes of Glaswegian actor Billy Connolly and Irish comedian Tommy Tiernan made her realize “it could be a job being silly,” and the comedy seed was planted. “I just knew college and a normal career path was not for me,” she explains. Instead, she took up the full-time acting program at the Gaiety School of Acting (The National Theatre School of Ireland) and graduated in 2012.

“I was a young kid who questioned what on earth we were doing here at all, and no parent, god, or Tamagotchi could answer me straight.”

“Playing, entertaining, and storytelling feel like the closest things to making sense of something we will never get the full answers to...”



To start her stint at stand-up, Clifford had to leave home. “You don’t grow up in Dublin with any notions that you’re better or funnier than anyone else,” she says, noting that she first took the comedy stage after she’d “run away” to Vancouver, Canada. Today, she finds inspiration in her fellow Irish women making their mark on the comedy scene: Aoife Dunne, Rachel Galvo, and Aideen McQueen are just a few examples of whom Clifford is proud to call her peers.

The large number of Irish comedians doesn’t mean it’s an easy road, though – far from it. Clifford says it’s a career often mired by rejection and self doubt, “but it does set you up nicely for the dating apps,” she quips. Her excitement and passion for the work are what keeps her going in the face of scrutiny and the challenges of being her own boss. Putting herself onstage, she explains, gives her a natural high she will chase for the rest of her life.

“It has taught me that I can overcome anything, that the scariest places teach us the most, and that laughter really is the best medicine – followed closely by gin,” she laughs. “I’d like to think it’s not all selfless validation, and it is giving something to people, too.”

Over the years, Clifford has seen the acting and comedy scenes become increasingly digital and online, which is convenient, but comes with its own set of issues. Social media, for instance, has pros and cons. “I think social media has ultimately let more people take charge of their careers and reach

their right audience, which is a huge positive. That being said, we all have to be the writer, director, editor, sound, lighting, and producer. Big production companies now seek people with big followings, which leaves a lot of talent behind, so I’d love to see this become more balanced in the future.”

Fortunately, the increasing importance of online platforms doesn’t mean that live shows have suffered, nor does Clifford feel threatened by the rise of machine-learning tools such as ChatGPT. Her onstage work is a point of pride, which includes her two stand-up specials: Soapstar and I See Deadly People (the latter is available on YouTube). “I also started a show called Comedy For Witches – an interactive comedy night that centres female and non-binary comedians that has grown into something really special.”

Over the course of her career, Clifford has performed at venues like Vicar Street and has also graced the stage at a variety of festivals, including Electric Picnic, Kilkenny Cat Laughs, and the Edinburgh, Brighton, and Dublin Fringe Festivals. She’s opened for a number of fellow comedians as well, such as Josh Pugh, Sophie McCartney, and Jake Lambert.

“Live shows have always been my passion, authentically showing up and being in a room together – AI can never take that from us.”

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Sophie Calon's

Long Going



Many writers draw on their childhood experiences, but for Sophie Calon, writing began as a way of sorting things out when she was just a wee lass.

“When I was five, my dad sat me down to write,” she shares via email. “I’ve been making notes about life ever since. Finding the right words helps me to think and feel better.”

Born and raised in Cardiff, Wales, Calon describes herself as “state-educated,” having studied classics at Oxford University before training as a journalist in her hometown. She now lives on the Welsh border with her husband, daughter, cats, and cows, “where we are returning nature to our surroundings.” Motherhood and the slow pace of rural life have since shaped her approach to writing.

“I am shifting genre and turning to fiction drawn from life and history.” That shift has come with some changes to her method of ‘pen to paper.’ “Since becoming a mother, I write more quickly and am less precise about exact words or phrases, simply because I have less time to linger. I also think harder about why I write and make sure I’m doing it for the right reasons.”

Those purposeful reflections are at the heart of *Long Going*, Calon’s deeply personal book about her father’s life and death from alcoholism. “It’s a story of my dad’s presence and absence in my life - he was my greatest influence until alcoholism took him.” When her father passed at 55, the reflection began immediately. “I began writing *Long Going* the next morning. I knew my dad would want me to tell our story.”

In writing that story, Calon draws a powerful portrait that, while a tribute to her love for her father, his wit and eccentricity, also recounts his unravelling. Not merely a chronicle of her family’s difficulties, the book is ultimately a tribute to her own commitment to resilience.

Calon’s father influenced her craft from the start. “He always said, ‘write what you know,’ but this book is about what I can’t know as much as what I do know.”

The balance between love, loss, and unanswered questions flows through the work, which she approached honestly.

“I was very aware of the inherent risks of sharing such a personal story, particularly the possibility of hurting anyone or of being judged. Thankfully, neither seems to have come to pass.”

Calon edited the book during maternity leave, a period that was already full of demands.

“It was quite a challenge, but also in some ways a relief - an opportunity to switch on another part of my brain.” Research involved poring over the many fragments of her father’s rough periods. “I had to read and reread a lot of written documents - emails, texts, notes, letters - to try to make a coherent narrative of this story.” Some moments were painful. “Revisiting some of the old messages between my dad and me brought highs and lows. There was love and anger.” With those, however, came clarity. “Look-

ing through my dad’s notes from the time when he was homeless and in prison was difficult, but even so, his sense of humour shone through.”

Publishing the book brought Calon not only a new sense of perspective, but a new-found community. “Without a doubt, the most rewarding part is engaging with readers and other writers. I have done over 20 events and loved every single one.” Each conversation, she notes, brings “new ways of looking at things and a growing sense of solidarity.”

That sense of connection has evolved into a growing awareness, which Calon is keen to share. “The most significant realization I’ve had is that I am far from alone. One in five children in the UK is thought to be impacted by a parent’s drinking.” Through the book, she connected with Nacoa, the National Association for Children of Alcoholics, a free helpline that received over 37,000 calls last year. “I was shocked to learn that all funding for children of alcoholics was cut in 2021. This needs to be corrected.”

For her part, Calon continues to craft meaning from memory that resonates with readers. “I’ve received hundreds of notes from across Wales and the UK, Australia, and the US. It has been an extraordinary experience. In some ways, I don’t think the book will ever really be completed. The ending was a new beginning.”

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Highland Games and Hippodromes



Ian Douglass

American author Ian Douglass' story of how he came into a career in writing isn't as romantic as one might expect from a successful and passionate wordsmith.

"The primary reason I took to writing was because it was the academic discipline that I was the most comfortable with," shares Douglass, who is half Bahamian on his mother's side and has strong Scottish ties on his father's. "The more I wrote, the more positive responses I received from my instructors in middle school, high school, and beyond. I simply leaned into that positive feedback loop and began looking for careers that were writing-intensive."

Whatever passion Douglass may lack in the medium of his oeuvre, however, is more than made up in the passion he has for his subjects.

"Today, I write for several reasons, but much of it is habitual. My days seldom feel complete unless I've written at least 1,000 words, and most of my recent books have been a byproduct of my efforts to find a focused writing outlet that aligns with my interests and helps me to maintain my consistency.

"It's also helpful that writing has enabled me to make the acquaintance of several talented writers in the sports, wrestling, and health-and-wellness spaces."

Among his many interests and pastimes - some of which include being a volunteer firefighter and, as he writes on his website, being "the worst masters swimming All-American in recorded history" - Douglass harbours a fervour for professional wrestling:

he even helps pro wrestlers write their autobiographies.

"At some point in the next year or two, I hope to complete the autobiography of Mike Rotunda, a retired professional wrestler I've been working with for a few years, who is one of the key contributors to one of the most prominent pro wrestling dynasties in the United States."

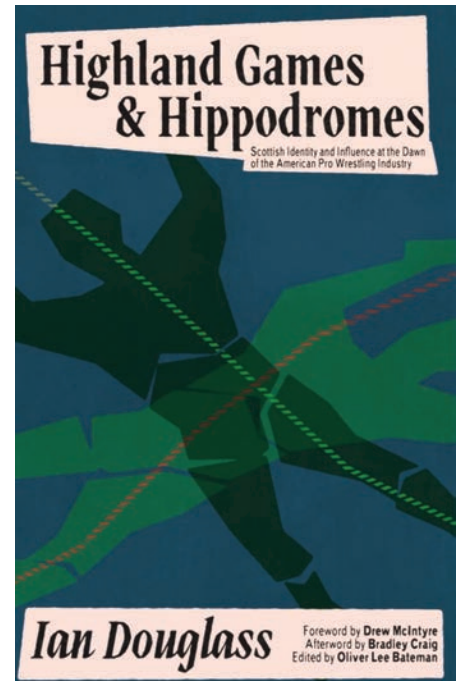
After exploring the history of black wrestlers in the Bahamas and the U.S. in earlier works, he set his sights on the topic of his latest book, *Highland Games and Hippodromes*.

"I had a brief internal discussion about whether or not there were any remaining topics that I would regret not making an effort to write about. Almost immediately, the idea materialized in my mind that I should look into a book about Scottish wrestling pioneers in North America, as long as I could identify ways in which the careers of those individuals could cohere into a steady narrative that made sense."

Turns out, that would not be a problem for Douglass. A number of Scottish wrestlers from the late 19th and early 20th centuries were instrumental in legitimizing the sport, with Scottish athletes like Donald Dinnie, Duncan C. Ross, Duncan McMillan, and Dan McLeod garnering attention and getting butts in seats.

"I discovered quite early that the Scottish contributions to pro wrestling in the U.S. - within a larger context of Celtic participation in pro wrestling - were unique, prominent, and essential to establishing the credibility of professional wrestling as an industry that attracted and featured legitimate athletes.

"I learned that Scottish natives and second-generation Scots - through their participation in the many Highland Games events hosted within the powerful network of Caledonian organizations that dominated Celtic social life during the late 19th century - established themselves as some of the most respected legitimate athletes (some would say 'professional athletes') in North America. From there, they leveraged the fame they acquired through legitimate competition to



become major attractions in the growing pro wrestling circuit."

As passionate as he is about wrestling, in this case, Douglass says he's even more proud that he was able to contribute something to his heritage through this book.

"The biggest reward was showcasing Scottish contributions to the developing sports and entertainment industries of North America."

"The way I see it, Scottish identity in North America is often a costume that people are able to slip in and out of with ease, while native Scots aren't afforded the same privilege. As a result, many people on this side of the Atlantic become net consumers of culture, without truly contributing to it.

"With that in mind, it was an honour to create something that can help others to understand the ways in which the Scottish immigrant experience helped to shape the foundation of professional wrestling."

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Kate Heneghan

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At just 27, Kate Heneghan has already built a career spanning concert halls, classrooms, and broadcast studios around the world. A talented harpist, violinist, and pianist, the Castlebar, Co. Mayo native now brings her formal training, performance experience, and deep-rooted Irish musical tradition to Celtic Woman. Across international stages, her journey reflects technical mastery and a sincere passion for sharing Ireland's rich musical heritage.

How and why did you first get into music?

Everyone starts off playing the Tim Whistle in primary school in Ireland. Growing up, my mom knew she wanted all of her children to play music; Irish culture is really important to her. She's a primary school teacher and a Gaeilgeoir. We all did Irish dance and learned how to play music. I was given a Tim Whistle at five, and handed a fiddle at seven, but I don't think she ever thought my siblings or I would take it to the level that we did. I really connected with it and absolutely loved it. I'm happiest when performing. I can be practicing, and get lost in it, and time just passes without me noticing. For as long as I can remember, playing music has been something I've always done, and it's always been a part of our family life. My three siblings, my mom, my aunts and uncles all play. It's innate in us - a family affair.

Are they the same reasons that you continue to do it today?

I suppose what I'm trying to do is tell a story through my music and enjoy the moment. I love performing and sharing Irish music with others. One of my favourite things is to play in an Irish traditional music session; it's heaven on earth for me. When something is being performed live, in real time, that's where the magic is in performance, for the listener as well as the performer. It's fun and relaxed, and there is an inclusivity. When we're playing in a pub here in Ireland, and someone sitting at the bar has a song, they're invited to

come in and sing. It's a really inviting space where everyone is getting something out of it. You can join in on the choruses of songs and tap your feet to the music. The most enjoyable parts of my life are being in a session on stage.

The Celtic Woman gig - is this something that was on your musical horizon at any time?

It definitely has come out of the blue. I've been playing the fiddle since I was seven and grew up in an era when the internet and YouTube were becoming popular. I have been following Celtic

Woman since its inception. As a child and a teenager, I spent my time watching violinist Mairead Nesbitt. I grew up when Irish music was so globalized, and I thought it could be a job I could do too. I followed Mairead Nesbitt and bought all her albums. She was one of my favorite fiddle players. I remember in 2015, I had just gone to college to study Irish music when Tara got the gig. I followed Tara for eight or nine years, and knew it was something I wanted. It's the pinnacle of fiddle playing in the Celtic music world. It's an honor to step into the role that both of those women have shaped so beautifully.





When you have previously toured across Canada and the States, Irish expats were very responsive. And are you experiencing that again with Celtic Woman this time through?

Absolutely. The response we get from audiences is really visceral. People have such a connection to it. I've also performed in Australia and New Zealand; I didn't think I'd get the same responses because I toured the States so much, but people had grannies and granddads who had emigrated, gone to Australia, gone to the States, gone to Canada - everyone has a connection to Ireland. We're all over the world. I hope the music we bring on this tour is doing the same. No doubt it will. The girls are absolute pros at what they do, and I can only hope that my music will evoke a sense of emotion in my audiences. That's what I'm always trying to do.

Irish music is in a very different place these days, but always with a nod to its roots.

There was a real folk revival in the 1970s. That's when the likes of the Chieftains were huge bands, like Tudannón. That was a very niche kind of traditional Irish music with singers like Dolores Kane and Mary Black. Then, with the emergence of Riverdance in the 1990s, it hit an audience like no other. It really became global then. Riverdance paved the way for the likes of me and a new generation of young musicians, singers, artists, and creatives to travel and live as Irish musicians. All of a

sudden, that became a possibility. When I decided I wanted to do music as a career at 15 or 16, I was lucky that my parents fully supported me. My mom is also a fiddle player and had wanted to tour while growing up. It's a real honor. We're lucky in Ireland to have such a strong sense of identity and culture, and music and the arts are at the forefront of that. To be able to travel and share our music with people from all around the world is what it means for me to be Irish. I'm lucky I got to grow up dedicating myself to my music and my art for my entire life.

The role of the fiddle has changed as well.

The fiddle is a really versatile instrument. It can be played for absolutely any genre. I look at the fiddle as a voice and a means of expressing myself as if I'm singing and evoking emotion. Growing up, I was predominantly a fiddle player. I learned by ear and by sitting in on Irish traditional music sessions with older musicians. As I got older and began taking formal classical violin lessons, my approach changed in the way I played, listened, and performed. As a musician, you're never done learning. It's always evolving. Depending on the scenario I'm in, whether on stage, in my sitting room with my family, playing at home, or just jamming or competing, the sound and style changes.

Along with the Celtic Woman gig, are you also composing original material?

Yes; I also play the piano and the harp. Piano is my third instrument, between the harp and fiddle. I absolutely

love composing - I did my master's degree in composition. I approach all of my composing from a chordal point of view. I've written a few tunes for the fiddle, but most of my writing is always done on the harp and the piano, because I start with chords. I find it easier to approach writing music on those instruments. I've definitely written music in difficult periods in my life as a way of coping with my emotions, but I also often write music when I feel happy, or when I learn a new chord progression. It's something I'm always tinkering away at. My Voice Memos app on my phone is full of 30-second recordings.

Social media has taken the music industry to different places in recent years.

I grew up on the cusp of the age of social media. I've known nothing different. It is so important nowadays to have a social media presence. I don't get too bogged down with followers or views, but I look at my social media as an online CV. I enjoy making videos myself and sharing music. It's another platform for creating and sharing music. When I've spoken to older, successful musicians, they had to make a CV. That's not the case anymore. Putting on live shows and concerts is what I enjoy most. There's direct feedback from listeners and fans.

Do you get to interact through social media with these folks? And if so, what are those exchanges like?

I've had some lovely messages and emails from Celtic Woman fans, which I really appreciated. If I put up a video and people have the option to reply and comment, that's always a really nice form of communication. It's lovely to know that if you're putting yourself out there, and putting music online, that someone is enjoying it. I try to respond as much as I can and enjoy that part of the job very much.

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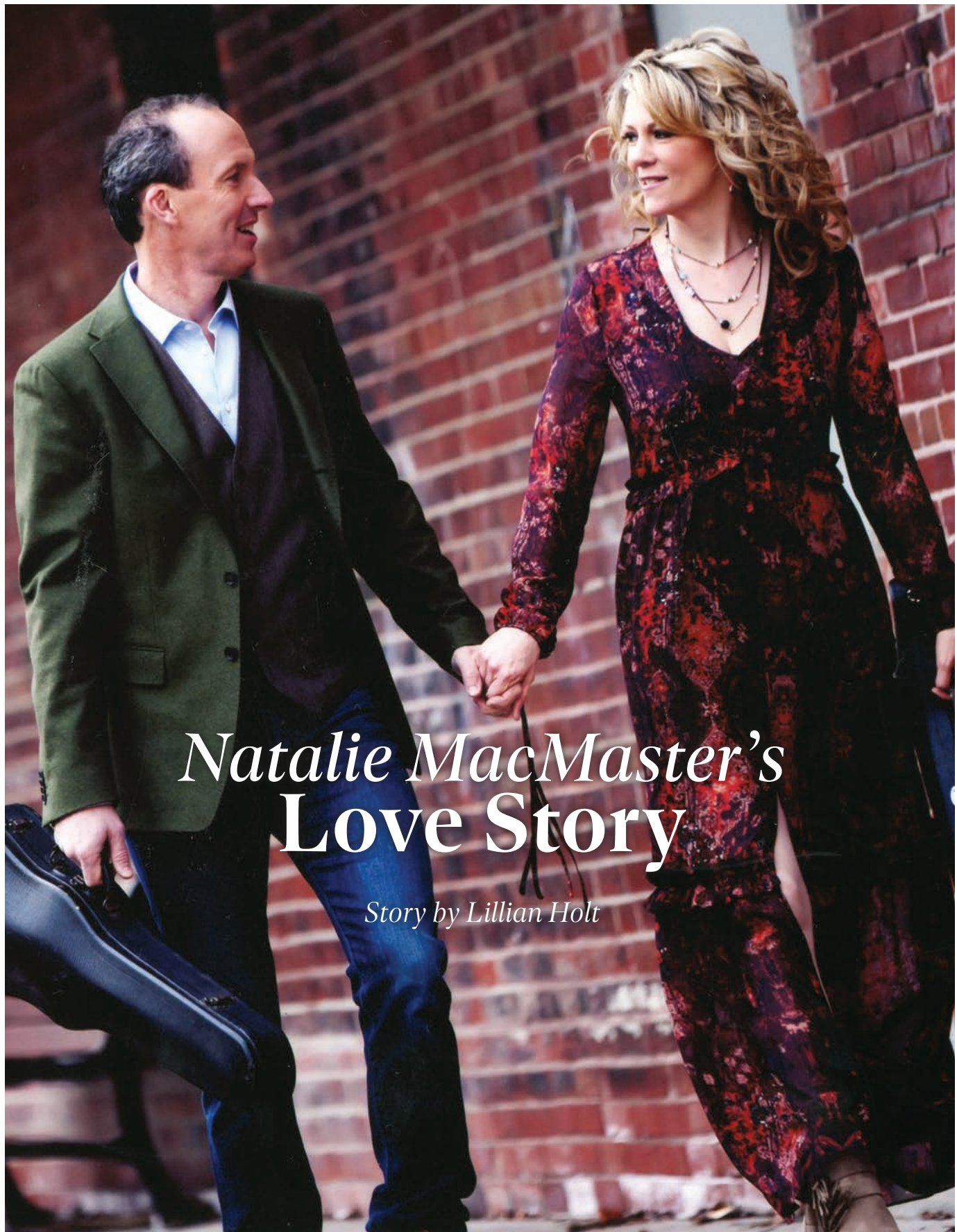


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Natalie MacMaster's **Love Story**

Story by Lillian Holt

SPOTLIGHT



“It was my parents who shaped my identity in the beginning to love-thy-neighbor-as-thyself kind of thing. They were just good people.”

Beyond the modesty and proper morals, her environment was filled with music - lots of it, creating the very fabric of the young fiddler's family and community life. “I was given a great home environment and great support through my musical years. There were so many local concerts I was asked to play in.”

Yet long before she even stepped onto a stage, that sense of sharing music - so central to Cape Breton customs - laid the foundation for her touring years. Raised in a world of kitchen parties and foot stomping gatherings, MacMaster quickly absorbed the repertoire and style surrounding her before getting her first fiddle at the age of nine.

A defining influence in her life was, of course, her uncle Buddy Macmaster - the consummate Canadian and international fiddler. “As a musician, I listened to him more than any other, especially his live performances. I tried to mimic his playing and the inflections that he put into the music.”

Just as important was the example he set as a person. “He lived his life just giving and giving...my goodness, he gave so much. He would sometimes play the fiddle for ten hours a day while traveling. He might do three gigs in a day just because he didn't want to say no to people. He was a good soul, in a genuine way.”

With strong musical influences and values from the start, MacMaster released her first album, *4 on the Floor*, as a teenager.

“Well, I thought it was kind of out of the norm, maybe, but I decided to do it. Here I was at sixteen making my first record, and my Uncle Buddy, arguably the most famous fiddler in Cape Breton, didn't make his first recording until he was sixty.”

From that point on, there was no stopping her, and she soon found herself well beyond the kitchen gatherings and community halls of Cape Breton. Over the years, she became one of the most recognizable musicians

Before the tours, the tunes, the toddlers - and prior to the many years writing, recording, rehearsing and performing music - a young Natalie MacMaster was just a kid in Cape Breton growing up in a world of family, music, and community. In her new memoir, *I Have a Love Story*, MacMaster looks back on those early influences of home, the start of her music career, and her marriage to fellow fiddler Donnell Leahy.

The couple, who now tour together with their seven children, differ on the details of their first date decades ago. “Recalling the specifics for the book was sometimes challenging,” MacMaster admits in conversation with Celtic Life International. “I was trying to remember what I was wearing when we met. I thought I wore a white blouse, but he says I had on a black jacket. Sometimes when we look back, we see things in a storybook kind of way.”

While MacMaster's story does indeed read like a fairytale, it is nonetheless rooted in reality. “The book is only partially about my journey as a musician. It has a deeper meaning: receiving love in life.”

And there was certainly no shortage of that. MacMaster, a Juno and Gemini award winner with multiple Canadian Country Music and East Coast Music honours, tells a story that is much more than mere romance. Love and music took root in the home where she was raised, grew through the support of family and community, and eventually blossomed into the family she built with Leahy. Her reflections also extend beyond her own good fortune. “Several years ago, I became overwhelmed, especially as a mother of seven, thinking, ‘What kind of world will my kids have to live in?’ with all this harshness in the world.”

That reflection gave way to gratitude rather than fear, and her desire to express something simple in these complex times. “There are so many messages being thrown at us every day, and maybe the most important one is quiet and beautiful. I had a moment about seven years ago when I realized, ‘Oh my gosh, I have a love story.’”

MacMaster's optimism was cultivated in a childhood filled with kinship, community, and kindness.

of the region's distinctive fiddling tradition, bringing its characteristic sound to audiences across Canada and around the world.

Yet even when the stages got bigger and the tours longer, the traditions that formed the foundation of her career remained firmly in place and, according to MacMaster, continue today.

"I will say that house parties were more frequent when I was a child but, generally speaking, it's the same. The square dances are still happening, and there's one on Monday nights in the summer in Brook Village that's wildly popular with young people. It's really great to see that things are carrying on even fifty years later."

That same spirit of continuity would eventually shape the next chapter of MacMaster's life as well, particularly in her relationship with fellow fiddler Donnell Leahy and the musical family they would build together. Like many great partnerships, their collaboration flourished from shared instincts.

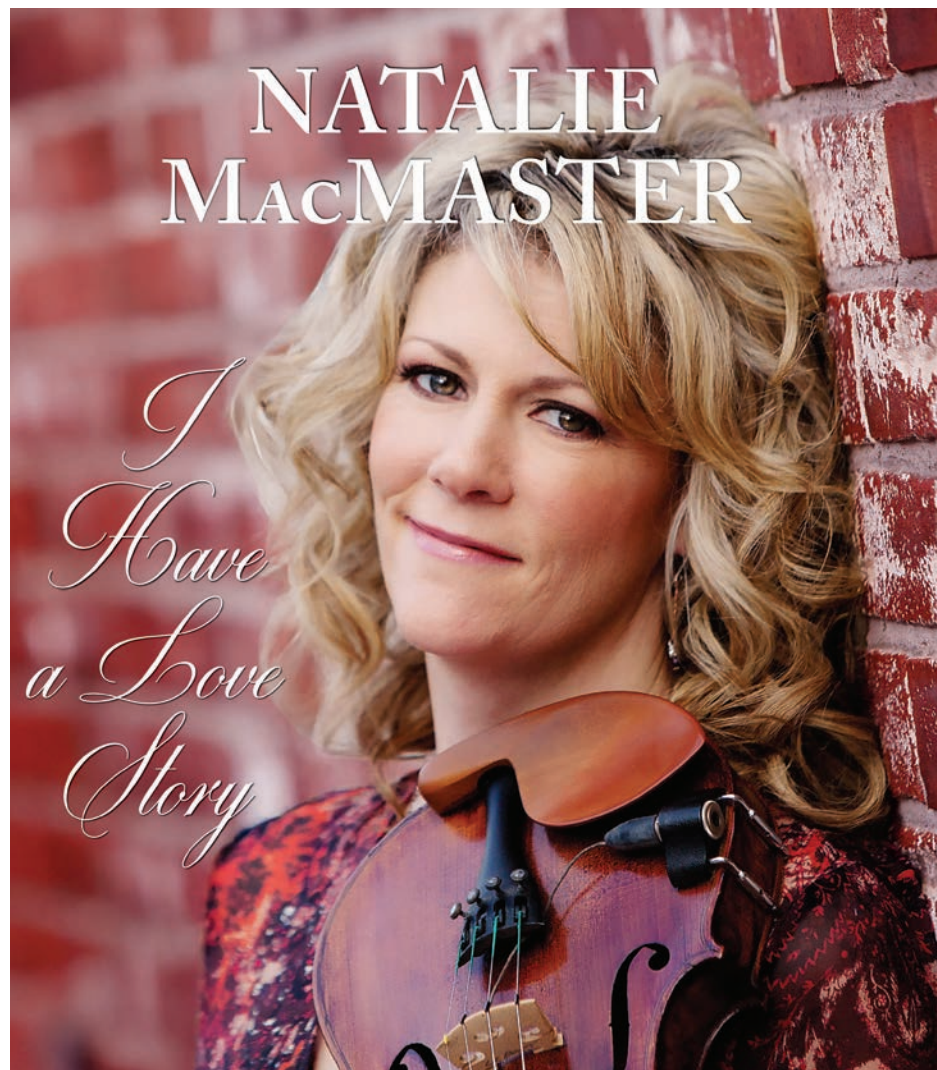
"We have the same taste in music," MacMaster explains. "When we're working out arrangements, Donnell's got a great way of hearing things. He's got a good sensibility, and I have my own as well. Sometimes it's different from his, but when we talk it through and try it out, we generally come to the same consensus."

Even when they disagree, whether about the details of their first meeting or the arrangement of a song, they are ultimately speaking the same musical language.

"Sometimes we have to hash it out a bit, but generally speaking, I like his musical taste, and he likes mine."

Their audiences reap the benefits of that creative synergy. "Over the years, we've learned how to craft a show that includes the beautiful tradition of slow airs, ballads, and music that tugs at the heartstrings."

Balancing family life with a demanding touring schedule has not always been easy. MacMaster recalls a particularly exhausting period when she and Leahy were raising five



children under the age of seven while continuing to perform. "I remember being really, really exhausted. But when I look back, I think, wow, we did it." Life on the road meant homeschooling between performances, teaching stepdance lessons in hotel rooms, and sometimes nursing an infant before heading onstage. "There were a lot of things to take on, but we navigated through it all."

Throughout those years, the faith and gratitude that run through the pages of her book are clearly central to how she approached both music and family in real life. "I believe in God, and I practice my faith to support that belief," shares MacMaster. "That's the lens through which I look at life." For her, gratitude is a way of staying grounded amid the pressures of touring and parenting. "If everything crumbled away tomorrow, I've got a great family, and I've come from a great family, and we always have music."

Today, MacMaster continues to share that spirit with audiences around the world.

"We've managed to sculpt a sound that I think is very broad and appeals to people beyond just those who want to hear fiddle music."

Currently performing on the Celtic All Stars tour, she and her musical family have also planned a summer tour followed by performances overseas, including Scotland, and the hugely popular Christmas shows that have become a holiday tradition across Canada.

Whatever the setting, her hope for audiences remains simple. "I do believe music is soothing and healing. If someone comes out to one of our shows, I hope they feel a lightness in life and something that resets the soul."

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Just the Brave

**Five young men from Scotland
are set to take on the world...**

Story by Chris Muisse



SPOTLIGHT



Don't tell anyone, but Backstreet's back, alright?

Well, not really. But a quintet of lads from Glasgow are bringing back the format made famous by The Backstreet Boys, NSYNC, and many more musical groups in the 1990s - the boy band.

That said, nothing about Just The Brave (JTB) feels dated, as Celtic Life International discovered when we sat down for a video conference call with Seany (19), Fin (18), Caleb (15), Rocco (18) and Lewis (17) to discuss their music.

Clustered on a couch somewhere in Glasgow, JTB do what teenage boys do; crack jokes with one another while excitedly explaining where they see themselves fitting into the sonic scheme of things.

"We're bringing boy bands back," exclaims Fin. "There's been this long gap in time where there were no new boy bands. A lot of good solo artists have come out during those years - Justin Bieber and many others - but I think we had to bring it back," and, turn-

ing to his peers huddled around him, "didn't we, boys? We've got to bring the sound and especially bring a Scottish feel to it.

"When we write songs," he continues, "we are usually in somebody's living room, like we are right now, and one of us has a guitar and starts playing chords. If it has a Scottish feel to it, it will come naturally - good songwriting just comes from the heart."

Seany confirms, "we always try and piece a bit of Scotland into whatever we write."

Most of the band came together in 2023, with Lewis being the newest addition late last year. They've released five tracks through their social media channels so far, with accompanying music videos on their YouTube page. Their most recent release is Beautiful Crazy.

You might have to search through their YouTube catalogue to find those songs, however - much of the content feature behind-the-scenes videos of the ensemble's escapades. Social media was not available to

the older generation of boy bands, but JTB wields it expertly as a way to get their music, their story, and their personalities across to their audience.

"Vlogs are important," Rocco chimes in, "because it's one thing for fans to be listening to the music and seeing your gigs, but being able to connect with you on a level where you're FaceTiming your mates? It's a different kind of experience. They get to see how things work, and how we all treat each other."

"We owe it to our fans to do that," adds Fin. "I mean, most of them are all over the world, so they might not be able to get to our gigs.

“To share a bit of our lives with them - we owe it to them for giving us all that support and love...”

JTB affectionately calls their fans “bes-ties.”

"It's usually teenagers," notes Fin,



“people around our age. And we’ve got lots of mums that love our stuff too,” he adds with a wink, followed by a round of chortles from the rest.

As their star has risen, JBT have gone beyond vlogs and social media in expanding their reach, sharing the stage with major artists like Sophie Ellis-Bextor, Callum Beattie, and Blue, and have been featured on television and radio programs like BBC Introducing, CBBC’s Saturday Mash-Up, Radio Clyde, Capital Radio, and Virgin Radio.

The band has also started to spread their wings beyond Glasgow and the UK, with their first major appearance abroad set for April in the Big Apple.

“Dressed to Kilt will mark our debut in America,” announces Caleb, setting off a flurry of excited chatter.

“That week is especially for the Scottish tartan,” says Fin, referring to the annual NYC Tartan Week, “and I can’t wait to get on it.”

“We’re so looking forward to getting our tartan on,” echoes Rocco. “We are still trying to figure out things to wear.”

“I’ve got lots of ideas for all these scarves and kilts,” adds Fin.

“It’s also quite cool, because Sean Con-

nery co-founded it with Geoffrey Scott Carroll,” Lewis pipes up. “I’m a big Sean Connery fan - I love all his movies.”

“We cannot wait to meet everyone there that’s coming as well, like the Navy SEALs charity,” Caleb interjects. “It’s a big thing for us, like as a band,” he continues, adding with a sigh and a wistful smile, “I feel so lucky!”

JBT are aware of how fortunate they are to experience the glamorous, fast-paced life of a boy band, and none of them want to take it for granted. Instead, Fin explains, they hope their music can help, heal, and even inspire their fans.

“There is just simply never enough time and place for music...”

“It is such a massive part of my life in terms of how I feel. If I’m ever feeling down, the boys and the music make me feel better. It’s such a positive thing to bring about in the world, and there’s never, ever going to be enough of it.

“We perform at local schools here and we are always sure to talk about mental health and bullying,” he continues. “I think we can really connect the two when it comes to posi-

tivity in music - it’s such a brilliant tool for that.”

Perhaps one day - after the band has established itself as elder statesmen of the genre - younger musicians will come forth and cite JTP as an influence.

“I will cry that day, and I’ve never cried in my life,” admits Fin. Rocco, under a fake cough, retorts, “liar!”, leading to yet another round of jocular laughter and good-natured ribbing.

If you miss the halcyon days when groups like 98 Degrees, Hansen, and Boyzone were at the top of the charts, try and find yourself in JBT’s neck of the woods this fall.

“We’ve got our own show in September,” declares Seany. “Our first-ever gig!”

“It’s our first ever headline concert,” Fin shares. “We’ve done lots and lots of festivals and whatnot.”

“We’re also playing a major solo show in London in October at a venue called The Grace,” notes Rocco.

“It’s definitely an exciting year for us,” adds Fin, “and hopefully for our fans also.”

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Celtic Life International may have its roots in Halifax, Nova Scotia, but it quickly branched out across all four Atlantic Canadian provinces by the mid-1990s. Within a decade, it wove its way across Canada through Quebec and Ontario, en route to Alberta and British Columbia. Then, like all good Canadian snowbirds, it trekked south over the next ten years, taking hold on the US eastern seaboard through Maryland, the Virginias, the Carolinas and Florida, before heading west to Texas and California, north to the state of Washington, and back east via Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Massachusetts.

In recent years, the publication took its place on newsstands in more exotic locals, including Australia, New Zealand, Cuba, Brazil, Hong Kong, Indonesia, South Africa, and beyond. And, of course, it found its way home to the motherlands of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Man, Bretagne, and Galicia.

Today, it connects the Celtic dots all around the world, linking people with their history and heritage, and creating a vision for the future of a global community. Between the bi-monthly print and digital editions, an engaging website, strong social media channels, newsletters, and a bi-weekly Substack, Celtic Life International annually reaches

millions of Celts and non-Celts in over 70 countries, making it the largest community of its kind.

The publication has also partnered with the biggest Celtic-themed events on the planet, including the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo, NYC Tartan Week, Festival Interceltique de Lorient, Celtic Colours International Festival, Dressed to Kilt, and countless Highland Games and Celtic Festivals.

Through it all, it remained a family-run endeavor.

For the Macquarries, Celtic customs have been shared in blood as well as ink; music has been an ever-present soundtrack in the family home - son Hector won local and international piping competitions, and Alison, along with her younger sibling Sheena, plays the piano, as does the youngest daughter, Meaghan, who plays the fiddle as well.

In addition, Alison was a Highland dancer.

"I danced for years, beginning as a small child and continuing into my twenties," she recalled. "Highland dance, step dance, and Irish dance. Mom and Dad always encouraged my development and never hesitated to take me to competitions and summer camps at the Gaelic College (Nova Scotia) to further my abilities.

"Both my parents are proud of their heritage, family, and Celtic culture. They taught us the importance of knowing who we are, and where we come from. The ability to connect with our past has been important to





them, and it is a beautiful value they taught all of their children.”

By turns, as Marcie and Cabrini passed along Celtic customs to their own children, Celtic Life International was an extension of their commitment to the global Celtic family.

“The passion Marcie had for it kept it going when others, God knows there must have been many, couldn’t make a go of things,” shared Halifax businessman Denis Ryan, who grew up in Tipperary, Ireland.

“He always had a fierce determination to get it done - every issue getting better and better, always informative, and the presentation is first class.”

Dr. Breesha Maddrell, director of Culture Vanin on the Isle of Man, suggests the bi-monthly is a “bright and modern way” of connecting Celts from around the world.

“Being one of the smaller Celtic countries, we - maybe more than anyone, perhaps - know the importance of sharing ideas, of belonging to a continuum - a seamless cloth - whether for the language, music and dance, or culture, generally.”

The late Alan Bain, president of the American Scottish Foundation, was instrumental in establishing Tartan Week in NYC and co-chaired the annual Scottish North American Leadership Conference.

“I always found the magazine of great interest,” he noted in 2016, “and it is through sharing information that we strengthen our various organizations. Teaming up with other

Celtic peoples creates additional opportunities for all of us.”

Bob Currie, president of the Clan Currie worldwide and founder of both The Pipes of Christmas and Tartan Day on Ellis Island, looks to the publication for inspiration

“I’ve been with Celtic Life International since it was Celtic Heritage, printed on dingy newsprint. I love its new energy and social media presence. It has been a great teacher in how to use social media to promote the culture. Keeping in touch can be as simple as a poignant photo or a bagpipe joke.”

Tartan Day founder Jean MacKaracher Watson of Halifax, Nova Scotia, a warrior for Celtic culture, said that Celtic Life International’s evolution has been nothing short of triumphant.

“There were years when promoting our culture took very hard work, so it is encouraging to see how far we have come. I still love the local stories, but isn’t it a wonderful thing that a little magazine from Nova Scotia has become so well known and read in places like Toronto, the U.S., and in Scotland itself?”

Catherine McArthur, whose Scottish family history moves back and forth across the Quebec-Ontario border, put her daughters into Highland dancing at a young age. Today she has a daughter who plays the pipes, a grandson who pipes, and another grandson who is a fiddler. She also purchases five subscriptions each year to Celtic Life International.

“I received it first as a gift, and after reading a few editions I started giving it as a gift. I read most everything, but I certainly enjoy the recipes.”

Many transplanted Celts, including history buff Andy Thomson of Antigonish, Nova Scotia - who had his DNA analyzed to see if there was anything he did not yet know about his Scottish heritage - turn to the magazine to stay in touch with their roots.

“I grew up in Glasgow and came to Canada in 1965. Growing up, I think we Scots felt a connection to our homelands, as many of us had a grandparent or two come from there, but we didn’t have any sense of Celts around the world. I find it quite amazing to read stories of Celts in such far-flung places.”

Long-time reader, Ron “D.D.” McDonald - also of Antigonish - sees Celtic Life International as a window to the world.

“You almost believe that you can make your way to Ireland right through the pages themselves. Every issue is a journey to places I may not have been or may not even have thought to go.”

Macquarrie found the analogy fitting.

“I like to think that we take you somewhere with each issue... and not necessarily with any particular destination in mind.”

“If anything, the journey is the destination - with a beginning, middle, and an end... similar, perhaps, to a fine meal with an entrée, a main course, and a delicious dessert. When done, we want our readers to feel fulfilled, and that their lives have been enriched.”

To that end, he noted that Celtic Life cut its teeth on the quality of its content.

“In our ‘surf and scan’ world of macro and micro media, the Celtic life International experience - both in print and online - has to be entertaining, educational, and, perhaps most of all, engaging. Preserving and promoting cultural identity, especially to the younger generations, is a huge responsibility. It’s not enough for us to be successful; we must continue to be significant to our readers and to our community.

“As it has been since we put out that little newsletter all those years ago, and as it remained over the years, our readers have been the most important part of Celtic Life International. They are the reason that we do what we do.”





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Rebecca Dingwell's *Deep Dive*

FEATURE STORY

Photo credit: Snickerdoodle Photography



When Celtic Life International Managing Editor Rebecca Dingwell was offered the opportunity to deep-dive into her family heritage she jumped at the chance.

"I have always been interested in certain aspects of my family history, but generally speaking, it's not something I've explored very much," shares Dingwell from her home in Halifax, Nova Scotia on Canada's east coast. "Both of my parents were born in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and there are places on 'the Rock' that are very close to my heart. I have always lived in Nova Scotia, but I spent many childhood summers at the family cabin in Codroy Valley, and in my teens I considered Corner Brook a secondary home. So, I've long felt a connection to Newfoundland, but I never seriously looked very far back into my ancestry."

Her curiosity was piqued by a passion for the ethereal.

"In the past few years, I've become increasingly interested in Irish spirituality, which is part of what inspired me to go back further when it came to my mother's roots."

Dingwell had a rudimentary understanding of her family's past prior to working with experts Mike and Kate Lancor of Old Friends Genealogy.

"From what I remember, Dad was definitely more of a genealogy buff than my mom when I was growing up. Dad was very proud of his grandfather (my great-grandfather), Samuel Wesley Dingwell, who worked for the Newfoundland Railway. I did not know Samuel Wesley, but I actually have an old telegraph in my possession that once belonged to him. Dad taught me a little bit about our Scottish roots as well, though I was young and I don't remember much. I know a relative was working on a Dingwell family tree for a time, but I haven't been able to get a hold of that. Sadly, Dad died in 2016, so his in-depth family history will likely remain a mystery to me unless I do the research myself.

"When it comes to my mom's ancestry, all I really knew was that my maternal grandmother's family, the Daleys, lived around Newfoundland's 'Irish Loop.' My grandmother died when I was 10 days old, so I was never able to ask her questions, though I certainly would have liked to do so. I've only visited my grandmother's hometown of St. Joseph's twice that I can recall, but it is a beautiful place and the accents in that region are very close to Irish! I knew the Daleys had Irish ancestry, but that's about it. Hence why I asked Mike and Kate for help."

The Lancors, who have been in the

ancestry game for decades and specialize in Irish genealogy, were able to uncover some interesting and invaluable information;

Dalys or Daleys of Salmonier, St. Joseph's, Newfoundland

There is a plaque in St. Joseph's Cemetery in Salmonier, Newfoundland that reads: "In Memory of Denis and Mary Flynn Daley Pioneer Settlers Early 1800s Natives of Dungarven, Waterford City Ireland". Denis and Mary were Dingwell's 3rd great grandparents who were likely born circa 1810. It was determined that Denis and Mary were in Newfoundland as early as 1829 when records for their son Maurice J. Daley, Sr. state he was born circa 1829 in St. Joseph's.

In addition to Maurice J. Daley, Sr., Denis and Mary also had sons William, James and Lawrence. Finding records for those living in Newfoundland in the early to mid 1800s is often like "looking for needles in a haystack". Baptism records for Roman Catholic Parish St. Mary's only go back to 1874 while marriage records go back to 1844. It is very likely that Denis and Mary also had daughters, but with the lack of birth or baptism records daughters were often "lost in time."

Dingwell's 2nd great grandparents Maurice J. Daley, Sr. (1829 – 1922) and Catherine Yetman (1844 – 1916) were married in St. Mary's



RC Assumption of the Blessed Virgin on 9 Jan 1867. One of the witnesses was an Ann Daley who may have been one of Maurice's sisters. My great grandfather Maurice J. Daley, Jr. was born in Salmonier, St. Mary's Bay in 1883 and married Christine Carroll in 1918 in St. Joseph's, Newfoundland.

Salmonier is a historic area in St. Mary's Bay in Newfoundland and is known for its long association with the Atlantic Salmon fishery. By the 1800s, the population was predominantly Irish Roman Catholic, and residents depended on water as their primary means of transportation. In 1890 a road was constructed connecting Salmonier to other bay communities. Indeed, this area of Newfoundland was very remote by modern day standards.

Newfoundland did not become a Canadian province until 1949 and was not included in Canada censuses prior to that date. Fortunately, Newfoundland was a British dominion and was included in the 1921 British censuses. An incredible bit of luck for genealogy buffs searching for their ancestors in Newfoundland.

There were 32 Dalys on one page of the 1921 Census for the District of Placentia and St. Mary's for the town of St. Joseph's which includes Salmonier. Most incredibly, in one household lived Dingwell's 2nd great grandfather Maurice Daly, Sr. who was 92 years old and living, her 38-year-old great grandfather Maurice Daly, Jr. and 25-year-old great grand-

mother Christine Carroll Daly, along with her great aunts and uncles Cyril, Alphonsus, Edmund and Katherine Daly - three generations of Daly ancestors lived in one household in 1921. Her grandmother Margaret Daley was born in 1923 two years after the 1921 Census.

There were an additional 21 Dalys on the next page of the 1921 Census. That's a total of 53 Dalys on two consecutive pages in the census. Of those 53 Dalys, 11 of them were fishermen, one was a farmer, and two of them also cut pulp to support their fishing income.

It is not known if Denis Daly and Mary Flynn were married in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, Ireland or in Newfoundland. Either way, they were two of those Irish Roman Catholics emigrants who settled in the Salmonier area in the early 1800s. As noted earlier, Denis and Mary's son Maurice J. Daly, Sr. was born in Newfoundland circa 1829. So where in the Dungarvan, Co. Waterford area did Denis and Mary live prior to making the long trip to Newfoundland.

Baptism records for Roman Catholic Parish Dungarvan are sparse, and no baptism record was found for Denis Daly or Mary Flynn. Marriage records for RC Parish Dungarvan begin in 1829 which is after Denis and Mary had emigrated to Newfoundland. A search of Griffith's Valuation land records in 1846 for Civil Parish Dungarvan shows 45 Daly heads of households. Interestingly, there was a Denis

Daly in Townland Ballynalahahessery South and a Maurice Daly in Townland Ballynalahahessery North. These two bordering townlands are just east of the village/town of Dungarvan and are both on the ocean.

In the early 1800s, Dungarvan was a major fishing town and by 1840 approximately 40 per cent of the town depended on the fishing industry. So, it is not surprising that when Denis Daley and Mary Flynn left the shore of Dungarvan that they ended up being among the many Irish Roman Catholics who made their way to Salmonier, Newfoundland.

For Dingwell, the data drives home her determination to deep-dive into her past even further.

"I haven't been able to visit Ireland yet, but when I do, I would like to visit the region where my ancestors lived before coming to Newfoundland," she shares. "That is partially why I wanted to look into this side of my ancestry. I want to know more about how my ancestors lived and what their day-to-day experiences might have been like.

"This journey has roused my curiosity even more. I'm excited to learn what further information might be out there if and when I am able to go to Ireland and do some research in person."

NEW PUBLICATION

Launch Date

30th April 2026

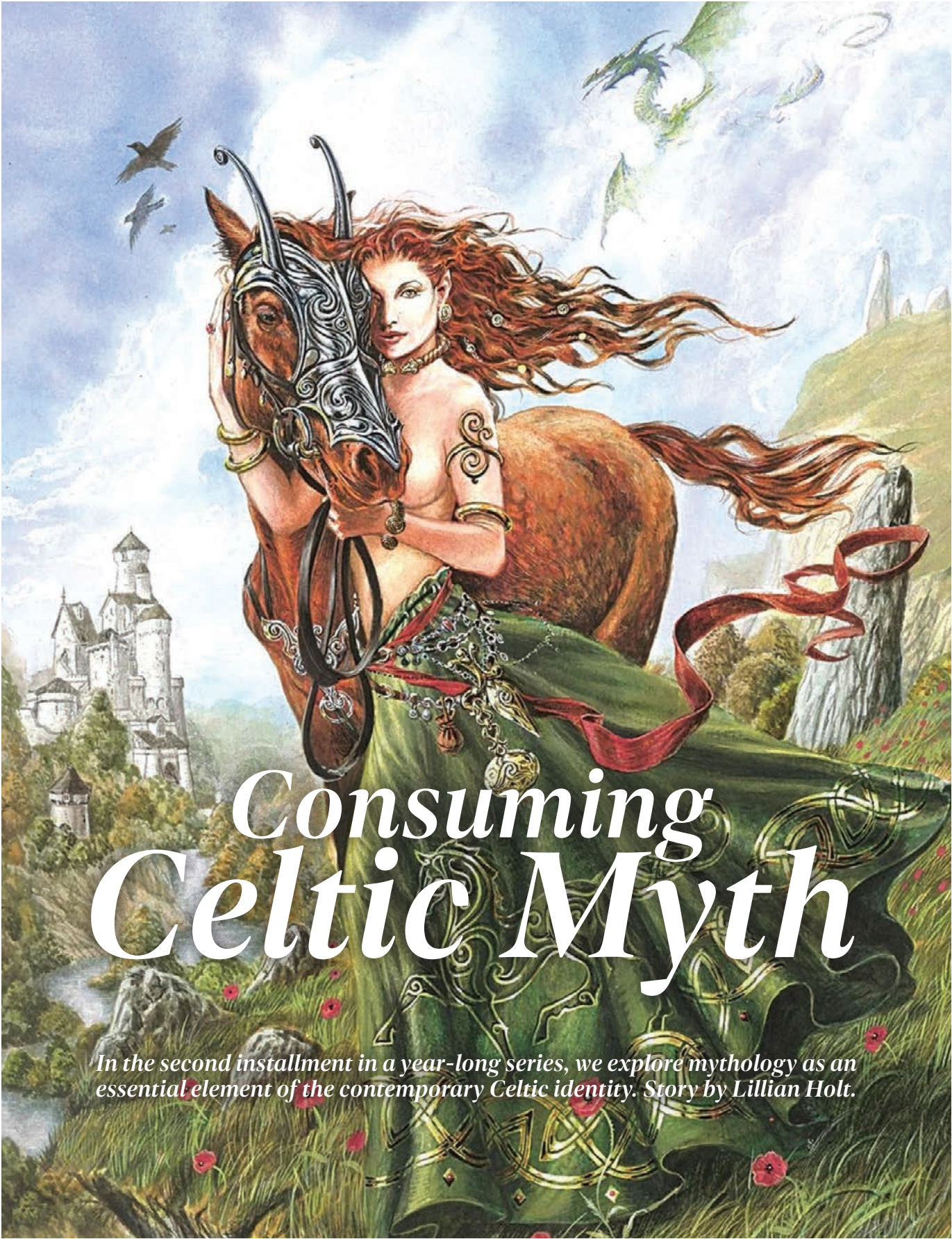
Propaganda and History in the Medieval Celtic Lands Interrogating a Paradigm



EDITED BY
BEN GUY AND PATRICK WADDEN

'Propaganda' has been a potent label to apply to texts written by the Celtic-speaking peoples of the Middle Ages for nearly a century. It carries emotive connotations for modern readers and encourages us to apply certain critical strategies when reading the texts. The propaganda paradigm has helped us understand the importance of interpreting texts in their own historical contexts, and discern how contemporary political views could shape them. But to what extent is 'propaganda' an appropriate description of the many texts that have been characterised in that way? This book offers the first thoroughgoing analysis of the propaganda paradigm as it has been applied to medieval texts written in Irish, Welsh and Latin across the Celtic-speaking countries. It presents theoretical reflections as well as key case studies, covering material from the early to the late Middle Ages. It is hoped that the book will sharpen our methodological awareness of a paradigm that has become foundational for the study of medieval Celtic texts and their roles in society.

www.celt.dias.ie



Consuming Celtic Myth

In the second installment in a year-long series, we explore mythology as an essential element of the contemporary Celtic identity. Story by Lillian Holt.



Cú Chulainn

“What emerges from the murky historical record of Celtic myth, in particular, suggests that myths are less effective at helping anyone escape reality and more about finding ways to live with it.

It helps to define how myth is perceived and organized within a given culture in the first place. Unlike the Greek and Roman pantheons, the lore and legend that spanned the Celtic nations and parts of continental Europe included a range of interconnected languages and tribes. It was never a fixed or unified system. In addition, what we now recognize as “Celtic mythology” was not firmly established or recorded until the medieval period, which surely altered the original stories told in ancient times.

Initially, these stories were handed down through an oral tradition in a pre-Christian era. They were shaped by region, landscape, and communal experience, creating a shared identity and collective memory. Most were only written down much later by Christian monks and scholars who then likely filtered them through their own worldview. In addition, these myths underwent continuous revisions over centuries.

“Celtic myths were composed over hundreds of years during constant socio-politico-cultural change,” notes Gaelic researcher Séamus Dráigall. The adaptations of the Christian scholars in the centuries following the original oral versions of myth were revised once again by the Celtic Revivalists of the 19th century. A group of Anglo-Irish intellectuals like Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats, and Maude Gonne, “set off to recover, re-write and, most importantly, re-interpret the mythology into the late 1,800s,” notes Dráigall. He is not alone in this viewpoint.

Like many other scholars and researchers, he asserts that “the earliest stories are from the 700s AD, well after the establishment of a network of monasteries and schools,” and it didn’t stop there. “With the coming of Vikings (late 800s AD), Normans (1,100s AD), and up to the dissolution of monasteries in the Tudor times (mid 1,500s AD), Celtic mythology kept growing and changing.”

Some depictions of modern Celtic spirituality almost feel like fast food. We can log in to any social media platform and be given a one-minute crash course on manifesting money with a candle and a handful of herbs, courtesy of a bright-eyed influencer ‘channeling’ a goddess. Similarly, a casual web search for Celtic lore may find us scrolling through Instagram reels explaining how a mythical figure can ‘help’ us attract a mate, win back an ex, or, if necessary, put a hex on them instead. In today’s noisy new-age culture, exploring myths and legends is often portrayed as a quick convenience or like some otherworldly trip to the amusement park.

As author Trevor Miller observes in his reflection on Celtic spirituality, “publishers were falling over themselves to get books published while the interest was there,” comparing much of today’s quick-fix spiritual fascination to “‘being a Celt for a day-type experience, like some sort of spiritual Disneyland.”

Although this type of enthusiastic re-

vivalism does reflect genuine interest, it can miss the mark. With global uncertainty at a fever pitch, many people are looking for clarity and get hooked by the empty promise of instant relief. While the search for the sacred might be sincere, it is clear how easily mythical characters can become content, packaged for quick consumption.

Now, admittedly, the true purpose of legend and lore is not easily discerned. To be fair, the dilution of myth into a mood or a little magic is not necessarily blasphemy. In uncertain times, people seek meaning wherever they can find it, especially when consumerism and spectacle no longer satisfy. Still, something essential is lost when myth, particularly Celtic myth, becomes a caricature of its original condition.

Carl Jung says that “the primitive mentality does not invent myths, it experiences them.” In other words, myth is not a customized fantasy we can create for wish-fulfillment. Rather, if anything, it helps to create *us* as a culture.

It is obvious then that the original meanings of the myths may have been distorted or even lost entirely. Draoi gall asks an important question: “Should we really build our idea of what Celtic spirituality was like in the Iron Age from a mediaeval Christian author writing about a tribe of ‘god-peoples’ 1,100 years later?” There may not be a clear answer, but one thing we know for sure: what survived is not a perfect record of ancient belief, but a layered legacy subject to memory, interpretation, and historical circumstance.

The reworking of myth over time shows up in the figure of Brigid. As Welsh scholar Gwilyn Morus-Baird explains in his discussion of Imbolc, many of the associations accepted by modern practitioners (and influencers alike) are not supported by historical evidence. “We have different names and depictions - Brig, Brigantia, Brigid - for what we might assume to be the same mythic figure,” he notes. “Yet when we look at the actual sources for Imbolc in the Irish tradition, it is not clear whether the pre-Christian Brigid had anything to do with Imbolc at all. Most people assume Brigid to be a Christianized version of an earlier goddess, but we have no evidence of this.”

Morus-Baird is careful to mention that this is not a dismissal of modern practice. “I do not want to invalidate anyone’s beliefs,” he adds. “They are valid and coherent. We simply do not know whether the early mythological Brigid was associated with Imbolc before her absorption into Christianity.” Despite anyone’s winsome wishes, the gap between historical uncertainty and casual contemporary content is very real.

So, while myths may not be historical facts, they are not merely stories either. As Donn Harper Jr. writes in *The Power of Myth*, they provide “our sense of individual identity as well as our communal sense of identity,” forming the framework through which meaning, language, and cultural imagery are understood. In that sense, myth subtly affects how a society collectively and subconsciously orients itself - not with a strict set of instructions, but as a kind of cultural shadow, shaping what we value without us even noticing.

“Seen this way, Celtic myth was less about belief and more about belonging - its history is layered, complex and not easily traced.”



Séamus Draoi gall further cautions that “too many mainstream authors and popular social media personalities keep running on programs of this face-value approach to their own heritage.” Rather than approaching with a critical eye, he says, many are “happy to be told what their own spiritual inheritance is.” Delving into myth, he warns, demands “interest, depth of mind, consistency, discernment and love” if it is to be understood at all.

Seemingly, then, Celtic myth is derived from a vast and uneven repertoire, shaped by time, place, and transmission, rather than any precise pantheon. Even so, certain gods, goddesses, and legends have endured not because they provide a blueprint for modern life, but offer, perhaps, an old-world method for handling the hard choices within it.

Speaking of choices, one of the most popular figures in Irish mythology is Cú Chulainn, whose story forms the foundation of the Táin Bó Cúailnge. He is remembered for his bravery and brilliance as a warrior, yet the Táin does not depict him as an invincible

hero. It is a cautionary tale about the dangers of pride and power, which, like any intoxicant, can do more harm than good.

Cú Chulainn’s strength is tangled up with his limits. He is bound by *geasa*; sacred vows that both empower and restrict him. Although the vows are meant to shape his character, they also become the cause of his downfall. Facing an impossible choice, his story ends in tragedy. Ultimately, his courage demanded sacrifice, isolation, and relentless endurance.

Like the rest of us, Cú Chulainn is not immune to consequence. His story reflects a recurring pattern in epics, in which the hero answers a call that cannot be refused, even at the cost of death. Author Joseph Campbell writes, “you must give up the life you planned, in order to have the life that is waiting for you.” This rings true not only for Cú Chulainn but also for any modern-day spiritual seeker.

If Cú Chulainn exemplifies the cost of bravery when pushed to its limits, the Tu-



Tuatha De Danann

atha Dé Danann reveals how such power is not easily maintained. Traditionally associated with beings of the natural world, the Tuatha Dé Danann are the mysterious peoples of the goddess Danu. According to the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (The Book of Invasions), they came to Ireland with the Four Treasures, bringing great skill in magic, warfare, and craftsmanship. They fought the Fir Bolg, and became rulers of the land, and were later overpowered by the Milesians and driven underground. As one account from the Bagtown Clans explains, after their defeat, the Tuatha “became the Sidhe (fairy folk), living in mounds and caves, which became the origins of Irish fairy lore.” With that retreat came a message that power does not always remain within easy reach.

The Tuatha stories may reveal that magic and presence are not always available to humans. The article “The Garden of Eden and the Tuatha Dé Danann” connects these Otherworld beings to the influence of the Christian monks who recorded the story. It suggests that “the Tuatha Dé Danann somehow represent an unfallen aspect of creation, existing unperceived all around us.” Further, the original “sin” in the Garden is compared to the “consequence of no longer seeing (true) reality the way the Tuatha Dé Danann do.” It might be a stretch, but the point is that the withdrawal of the Tuatha after their defeat is a lesson on how even great power has limits and must be earned over time - there are no shortcuts.

If the Tuatha Dé Danann reveal a world where power is withdrawn and hidden, the tales of the Morrígan teach us to move into and explore that darkness.

One of the most frequently misunderstood figures in Celtic mythology, the Morrígan in contemporary culture is often called upon to handle righteous anger, or even revenge. A quick search on social media connects this dark goddess with everything from war and personal power to shape-shifting and social justice. As a modern-day bardic baddie, she is called upon to invoke protection, dominance, or retribution. In “The Morrígan Is A Goddess for Protest,” the author writes, “To many modern devotees, she’s a goddess who represents the right to rule yourself and your body as a kingdom inviolate. There’s an argument that this isn’t historical, that the Irish didn’t conceptualise sovereignty that way, but honestly, it doesn’t matter.”

Or does it matter? In older surviving sources, the Morrígan is not a goddess who grants favors or butts in on behalf of individual desire. She appears at moments of change, conflict, fate, and the messy aftermath of human actions. She does not rescue heroes from their choices, nor soften the cost of excess or pride. The Morrígan does not offer easy solutions but stands at the point where responsibility and consequence converge.

Perhaps, for a modern practitioner anyway, the point of any myth may be to simply awaken our own intuition and come to our own conclusions.

“Yet, if Celtic myth teaches us anything at all, it is that power is never casual and transformation is never instantaneous.”

The Tuatha retreats. The Morrígan reveals. Cú Chulainn pays the price. These stories do not exist as fast-food wish fulfillment, to punish social enemies in the evening, or soothe our anxiety in the afternoon. They point to a slower, more solid kind of spiritual work. The kind that builds character, not content.

Despite all, many Celtic myths have survived and remain popular through the many changes of the ages. Even with all the fragmentation over centuries, the patterns and themes within Celtic lore remain visible, though the messages take some work to absorb. And that may be the point. Celtic myth may not dole out precise instructions, but it can provide a measure of timeless insight when left to simmer in our consciousness for a while rather than being served up for instant consumption. It then becomes less about getting what we want or changing our circumstances, and more about recognizing what we have and changing ourselves.



The Morrigan



A brief guide to well-known Celtic figures and stories

Tuatha De Danann

Associated with: Skill, sovereignty, magic, the Otherworld

Interpretation: Wisdom in nature, patience, earning respect, balanced power

The Morrígan

Associated with: War, shape-shifting, crows and ravens, conflict, consequence

Interpretation: Discernment, self-empowerment, truth without illusion, courage

Cu Chulainn

Associated with: Heroism, duty, sacrifice, pride, tragedy

Interpretation: The price of fame, the cost of unchecked power, dignity in defeat

Brigid (Bríg / Brigantia)

Associated with: Sacred fire, poetry, protection, renewal, the divine feminine

Interpretation: Compassion with strength, transforming pain into purpose, hope

The Dagda

Associated with: Abundance, wisdom, life and death, leadership

Interpretation: Responsible power, balancing of extremes

Lugh

Associated with: Mastery of many skills, light over darkness, harvest, rightful leadership

Interpretation: Competence earned over time, service to others, discipline, confidence

Manannán mac Lir

Associated with: Sea, mist, the Otherworld, threshold-crossing, the subconscious

Interpretation: Trusting intuition, living with uncertainty, seeing beyond the surface

The Children of Lir

Associated with: Endurance and exile, grief, loyalty, suffering

Interpretation: Resilience, devotion in hardship, enduring love

Oisín and Tír na nog

Associated with: Escape and return, longing, loss, mortality

Interpretation: Memory as a burden and a gift, accepting what time changes

The Banshee

Associated with: Omen, death, keening, inheritance, the veil between worlds

Interpretation: Lineage, honoring grief, accepting the inevitable

The Selkie

Associated with: Love and loss, captivity and freedom, the sea, longing for home

Interpretation: Staying true to oneself, respecting boundaries

The Puca

Associated with: Trickster energy, unpredictability, mischief

Interpretation: Humility over arrogance, respecting the unknown, staying grounded when confused

The Cailleach

Associated with: Winter, the crone, land-shaping, cycles of life and death

Interpretation: Letting go, surviving hard seasons, honoring nature's timing

The Sidhe / Aos Sí

Associated with: Hidden realms, fairy lore, ancestral presence, the Otherworld

Interpretation: Respecting boundaries, reverence and respect for things unknown

The Tain Bo Cuailnge

Associated with: Conflict, honor, pride, fate, war, power struggles

Interpretation: Glory has a cost, culture under strain, strength with restraint, human limits

Finn MacCool (Fionn mac Cumhail)

Associated with: Leadership, fate, wisdom, warrior, coming of age

Interpretation: Growth over time, the burden of knowledge, earned insight

The Salmon of Knowledge

Associated with: Wisdom gained through nature, sudden insights

Interpretation: Knowledge that changes you, wisdom with a price, insight with humility

Geasa (sacred vows)

Associated with: Binding obligations, honor, fate, duty

Interpretation: The power of commitment, integrity under pressure, consequences

Imbolc

Associated with: St Brigid, early Spring, renewal, light returning, new beginnings

Interpretation: Fostering new growth carefully, Building hope, meaning through ritual



Albannach



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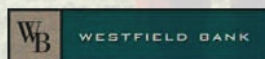
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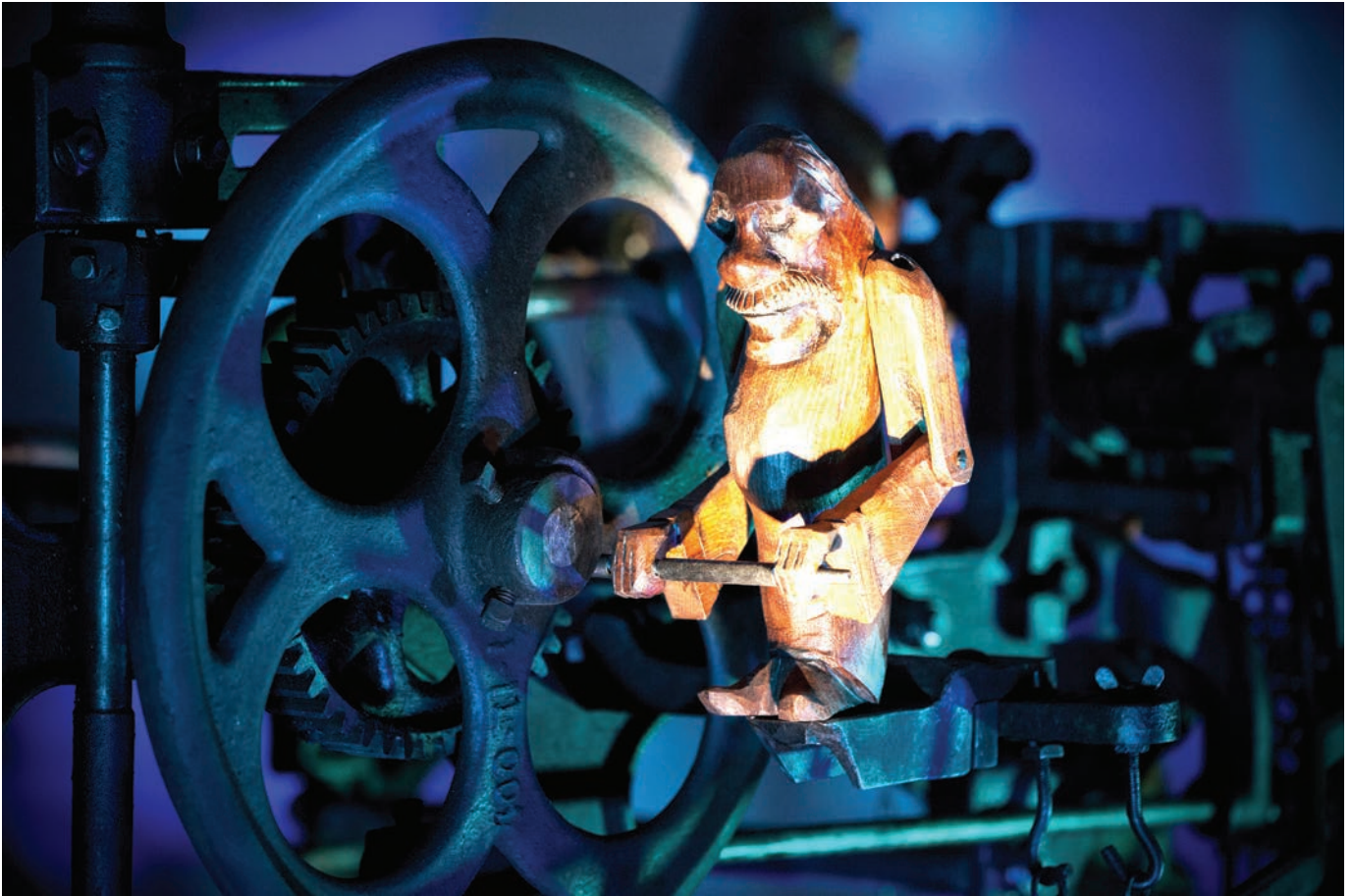
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Sharmanka Kinetic Theatre

By Tom Langlands



The first time I heard the word ‘Shar-manka,’ it conjured up a sense of something mysterious, magical, perhaps eastern, with images of Aladdin or Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves racing through my mind. In truth, it is the Russian word for ‘barrel organ,’ and although my preconceptions may have held some element of truth, nothing prepared me for my recent visit to Sharmania Kinetic Theatre in Glasgow’s Trongate.

Stepping inside, it felt part theatre, part gallery. The large, rectangular room featured sizeable, free-standing objects along the walls. In the centre, two smaller, three-sided rooms placed back-to-back with three rows of elevated seats in front of each gave the audience a sense of looking into a domestic living space filled with mechanical contraptions. There was an underlying truth to this that I would come to understand later. The objects were made of wood, industrial and household scrap, and a mesmerizing myriad of strange, carved figurines, animal skulls, wires, chains, wheels, and even sections cut out of Venetian blinds. There were angels and demons,

bellringing monks, a mole, rats, clocks, and even an image of Vladimir Lenin. In themselves, they were fascinating pieces of static, *objet d’art* - but the real magic was that they didn’t stay still. Each work came alive to the accompaniment of eerie, theatrical lighting, dancing shadows, and powerful music covering everything from classical, pop, blues, and jazz, through to the accordions of the golden age of Paris. It is against this background of whirring wheels, beating wings, spinning acrobats, animated figures, and accompanying locomotive toots and whistles that the meaning of Sharmania takes form. It is wild, it is crazy, and it is riveting (no pun intended). I observed moments of humour interspersed with the dark and macabre, political satire, and spiritual contemplation in equal measure alongside references to the cycle of life and what it means to be human.

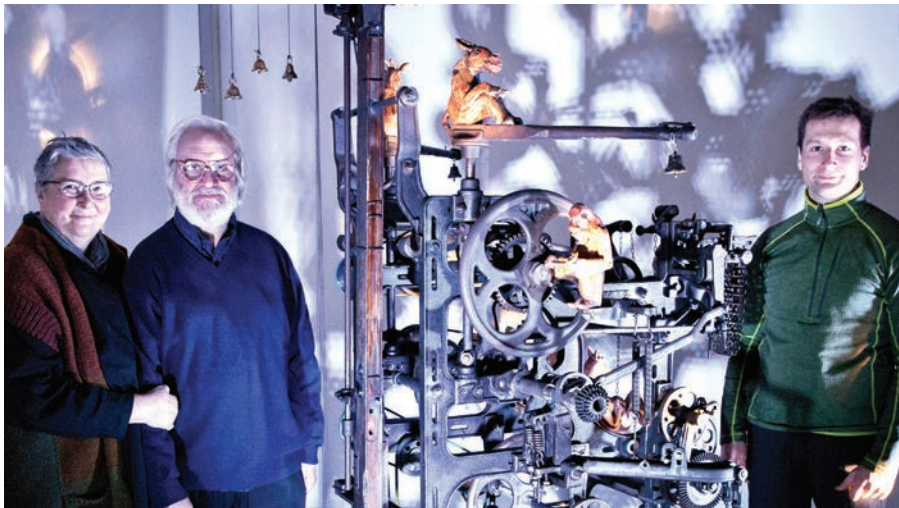
Sergey Jakovsky runs Sharmania Kinetic Theatre and is its artistic director. He is the step-son of the creator of these works, and as we sat in the kitchen next to the artist’s workshop, he explained - with a distinctive Scottish-Russian accent - that Glasgow’s

Sharmania is a long way from its origins in modern day St. Petersburg, Russia.

“My step-dad, Eduard Bersudsky, grew up in what was then Leningrad, USSR. Amongst spells in other jobs, he was a night guard and a boiler man. In his spare time, he carved small, wooden figures. At first, it was little more than a serious pastime, but soon it grew into something more.” Around the mid 1970s, Bersudsky began to breathe life into his creations.

“By fitting small motors and sophisticated electro-mechanical devices, he experimented with kinetic sculptures that he called kinemats.”

He was a non-conformist artist with no formal training, and experimenting with an art form that was ideologically and aesthetically unthinkable at a time when communist Russia was promoting ‘social realism.’ Consequently, his ever-growing collection of kinemats filling his single room in a communal flat were hidden from the authorities,



and seen only by close friends and family. When Bersudsky met theatre critic, director, and wife-to-be Tatyana Jakovskaya in 1988, Gorbachev's perestroika (restructuring) had been in place for three years, and rules were easing. Jakovskaya saw the potential to turn Bersudsky's kinematic art into a theatrical experience, and together they launched Sharmanka Kinetic Theatre in St. Petersburg the following year. It was the beginning of encompassing lighting, exploring the use of dramatic shadows, and capturing the power of synchronized music.

Sharmanka began to attract international attention, but just as it was gaining recognition, Russia entered a period of economic decline, and funding for the arts was withdrawn. It became apparent that the family would be unable to continue their theatrical journey in their homeland. With the help of renowned furniture maker Tim Stead and his wife Maggie - a linguist and graphic designer respectively, who lived in Scotland and had visited their theatre in Russia - the family moved to Scotland, where their work was already garnering attention. Glasgow Museums purchased several pieces, and Sharmanka held its first Scottish exhibition at the McLellan Galleries, Glasgow, in 1994, with a permanent base opening in 1996 in Glasgow's Trongate area.

The family quickly adapted to their new home, learning about its people and culture. By the time Sharmanka relocated to Trongate 103 Arts Centre in 2009, they had already exhibited extensively across the UK, Ireland, mainland Europe, USA, and Israel. While the early works are understandably influenced by

his upbringing in Russia, Bersudsky's later works find themselves rooted in Scotland's culture and heritage. With the area around Saint Petersburg being flat, the family embraced the opportunity to climb Scotland's hills and look across a landscape dominated by mountains, rivers, and lochs. They developed a fascination for Celtic mythologies, folklore, and storytelling, resulting in some uniquely Scottish works such as Jock's Jokes - created with scrap from the collection of a chimney sweep called Jock Redburn. Last Eagle Of The Highlands is a suspended, winged artwork featuring two antlered skulls dedicated to Mike McGrady, who fastidiously studied Golden Eagles, while Willie The Barrel Organ is dedicated to a pony named Willie who watched Bersudsky work and unknowingly provided psychological support as the artist transitioned to life in a new country. What makes Bersudsky's work stand out from other automaton sculptures is that not only is it complex and visually stunning, but it also embodies deeper meanings that the viewer is enticed to discover; one can observe and be fascinated, but looking beyond the obvious leaves one enlightened. Jakovsky observes, "My step-dad doesn't feel that he creates these works. In a sense, they exist unseen in the mystical qualities of people, time, and place. He considers himself to be the vehicle by which they come into being.

“Scotland, with its rich Celtic history connected to the land and its flora and fauna, has been an artistically enriching experience...”

He pauses, takes a sip of coffee, and adds, “We came here by chance; we stayed by choice. In Glasgow, we felt in the right place as it's full of crazy people like us.”

One of my favourite pieces in the exhibition was called Am Beairt (“The Loom”). Commissioned by Ann Lanntair - an arts centre in Stornoway on the Outer Hebrides - it honours the deep tradition of Harris Tweed weaving on these islands. Artist and stepson collaborated on this - their only, and last, large-scale work. By disassembling an original Hattersley pedal loom and reconfiguring it as a metaphor for regeneration, the viewer is invited to consider what this industry once meant to the islanders, and the effect the loss of such skilled crafts has upon those who live there. Operating the huge loom is a small, solitary figure who works tirelessly to support all the other animals that populate the artwork. It is a powerful piece with a sense of timelessness, portraying not only a localized craft industry, but man's relationship with the land and nature at large.

Bersudsky's creations have featured in international touring exhibitions, while individual pieces have been acquired by, commissioned for, or exhibited in museums and galleries across the UK and abroad, as far away as Korea and China.

My afternoon at Sharmanka Kinetic Theatre felt like I had been inside someone else's inescapable dream. When you get to a certain age in life - and I've been here for a while now - you feel that there is little left that will amaze and surprise you; Sharmanka did that in bucketloads! The nearest I can get to describing it is to take the imagined creations of Heath Robinson, the surrealism of Salvador Dali, the religious, macabre morality of Hieronymus Bosch, and the gothic, horror fantasy of Tim Burton, place them in a blender with a smattering of scrap, and press the switch. The result was an afternoon of sheer wonderment.

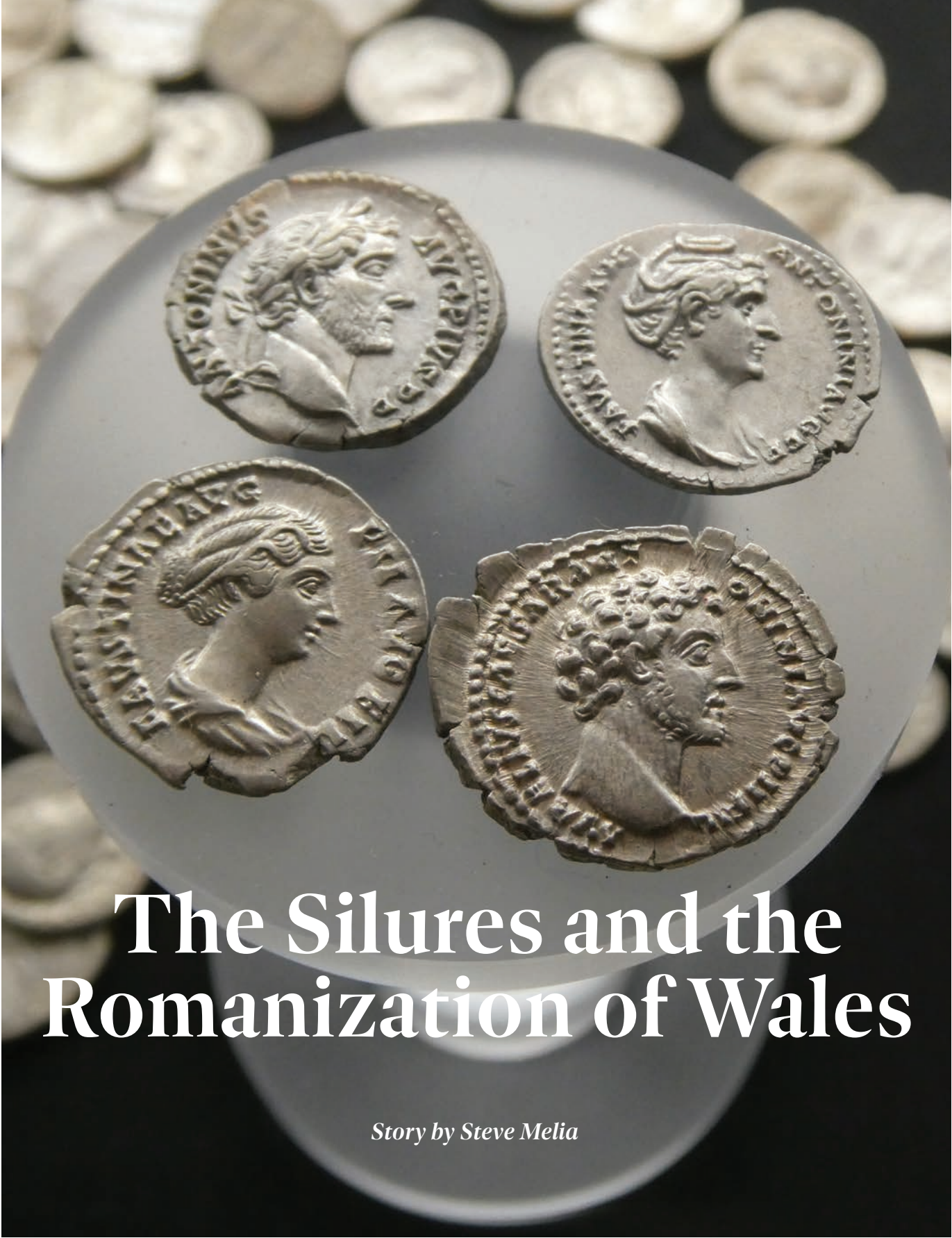


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The Silures and the Romanization of Wales

Story by Steve Melia

During the Roman conquest of Britain, one Welsh tribe resisted the longest, defeating a Roman legion and conducting a guerrilla war lasting a quarter of a century. Roman writer Tacitus described them as “a powerful and warlike race... neither sternness nor leniency prevented the Silures from fighting.” Eventually, the Romans prevailed and built a military fortress - Caerleon - on Silurian territory, followed by a civilian town, Venta Silurum, now known as Caerwent, 15km east of Caerleon. Remains of both sites survive to this day.

Earlier this year, I planned to cycle through the land once occupied by the Silures in southeast Wales, but some of the sites were closed for a couple of weeks, so I started at the National Museum Cardiff, where I met curator Adam Gwilt. Adam is an experienced archaeologist specializing in the Iron Age and early Roman period, and has researched pottery from Llanmelin hillfort, a Silurian site which I also planned to visit.

Who were the Silures? I asked him.

“We don’t know if they called themselves the Silures, but they were called that by the Romans. For most of the Iron Age, there were relatively small hillforts and farming communities of a few hundred people. In the final 50 years or so before the Roman invasion, elites began to emerge, with local leaders rising and falling, but power remained quite fluid until the emergence of a common enemy.”

When the Romans conquered the tribes of southeast England, one of their leaders, Caratacus, fled to Silurian territory and organized their resistance. Around 50 AD, the Romans defeated an allied Celtic force, somewhere in mid-Wales, and Caratacus was captured. But the Silures fought on, defeating a Roman legion two years later. Tacitus, our only written source, mentions no final victory, but around 75 AD, the Romans began building their fortress at Caerleon.

“Large parts of Wales remained a military frontier,” explained Gwilt. “There was a network of forts spread across the territory to control the sitting population.”

Around the same time, work began on Venta Silurum, a town which became a *civitas*, or regional centre, for the Silures, who were allowed some autonomy - providing they collected imperial taxes.

A few years ago, Amgueddfa Cymru

(Museum Wales) transferred its archaeological displays to St. Fagans, an open-air museum with reconstructed buildings on the edge of Cardiff, where I was heading next. Before I left, Gwilt offered to show me some finds from Llanmelin hillfort stored in the basement of the central museum. Llanmelin hillfort rises a few kilometres north of Caerwent. It was once considered the “tribal capital of the Silures,” but that is no longer believed today. So, what was it?

“It was occupied for long periods, before and after the Roman occupation. It was built in phases, so its use probably changed over time, but it wasn’t just a fort. It probably started as a community focus. Some evidence for roundhouses has been discovered in the main fort, and there’s an annexe beside it, which might have been a cemetery or a cattle enclosure.”

From a box full of pottery sherds and metal objects, he pulled out the largest object - a cattle femur. “Cattle and horses were important to the Silures.”

The bus takes half an hour from central Cardiff to St. Fagans, passing briefly through green fields before reaching the museum. You could spend days exploring it. Buildings threatened with destruction have been painstakingly dismantled and rebuilt in its extensive grounds. I would have liked to sample the beer in the First World War pub, but I was on a mission to find two recent additions: reconstructed Iron Age roundhouses. As the originals were made of wood, their structures had perished, leaving only traces in the soil.

“There was an element of guesswork,” said the guide. “This is how they might have looked.”

Their roofs were thatched, and the only light came from the doorways and fires burning inside them. Beside one of the fires stood another reconstruction of a famous object on display in the museum, the Capel Garmon Firedog. Pairs of fire dogs were often found within the roundhouses of leaders.

“There are two museum buildings on the site, with objects ancient and modern displayed under different themes, including ‘Celtic Art.’”

A few objects, including an impressive mosaic, were from Caerwent.

A few weeks later, on a cold sunny win-



Adam Gwilt

ter morning, I set out on my bike towards the Severn Estuary, which separates Southwest England from South Wales. Two motorway bridges cross it, but only one of them has a track for cyclists. The shoreline on the English side is a nature reserve - a “transatlantic refuelling station” for migratory birds, according to an information board. Curlews were calling over the mudflats, and a flock of Canada geese took off towards the bridge as I approached.

From the bridge, the Welsh shoreline and everything ahead looks industrialized and ugly, but I didn’t have to ride very far inland to reach farmland. Narrow lanes climb into the hills between Mathern and Shirenewton. From there, northwards, some of the quietest countryside in Britain stretches along the Anglo-Welsh border; but I was turning west, weaving between post-industrial South Wales and its idyllic uplands.

Llanmelin hillfort is easy to find on a map, but its entrance is not. I realized I had cycled past it when I heard a hunting horn in the distance and saw a man gazing over the fields. He lived in Shirenewton but had no idea that the wooded hill in front of him concealed an Iron Age hillfort. He pointed me back the way I had come. Halfway back up the hill, I found a half-hidden fingerpost pointing into the woods, with a ‘no parking’ sign opposite. I leaned my bike against a tree and followed a narrow path, climbing through the woods to a gate, with an information board for the few people who make it this far.

Like most hillforts, the builders of Llanmelin evidently chose this hill for the plateau



Steve Melia

at its summit. It was covered with coarse grasses, making its features difficult to identify, but the banks and ditches of the main fort were clear enough, as was the annexe beside it.

Trees had grown all around the plateau, obscuring the views in most directions, but I caught a glimpse of the sun reflecting over the estuary in the distance. A green woodpecker squawked somewhere in the trees below and I was struck by a sense of privilege, to be standing alone with the ancestors, in this place unknown to most of the world.

From Llanmelin, it's a rapid roll down the hill towards the Roman town of Caerwent. That title, which you will see on signs all around Caerwent, is arguably misleading. How "Romanized" the Silures became is still debated by archaeologists.

"Caerwent was laid out as a Roman town with its forum and basilica," shared Gwilt. "Those buildings are very Roman, but this was on the western edge of the Empire. For some people in the hinterland, you pay your taxes, but you carry on living in a roundhouse and things don't change very much."

I had stopped in Caerwent before, but didn't realize how much of Venta Silurum remains visible today. The square outline of the ancient town is particularly clear in aerial photographs. Most of the town walls - five metres high in places - are still standing. You can walk around half of them, from above or below, to the Roman road, which bisects the modern village. Within the walls, four sites have been uncovered, revealing the foundations of shops, houses, the forum, basilica, and a Romano-Celtic temple.

“That fusion of Roman and local deities was common across the empire.

Another example stands inside the porch of the parish church: the base of a statue dedicated to Mars-Lenus, the Roman god of war and the Celtic god of healing, an interesting combination in this context. Beside it stands an altar with an important inscription: it tells us that Venta Silurum was a *civitas*, governed by an *ordo*, a local council.

The only pub in Caerwent was not serving food that day. They pointed me towards the next village, where the pub was closed. I ate a few peanuts and started the long climb through Wentwood forest, the largest area of ancient woodland surviving in Wales, though it doesn't take long to ride through it.

The road then narrows and descends towards the Usk valley and Wentwood Reservoir, where I stopped to admire the views over the hills towards the Severn Estuary. A main road runs down the valley, but everything on the other side is quiet and green. I stopped to admire the small stone church at Tredunnock, where a Roman burial inscription was discovered three hundred years ago.

The sun was setting as I arrived in Caerleon, a small town with a population of around 8,000 and the greatest concentration of Roman remains in Wales. Here, I had a choice of pubs, restaurants, and places to stay for the night.

The following morning, I began with a visit to the barrack block, excavated in the 1920s. The foundations of one block are visible; the others are replicas. The star attraction of Caerleon is the amphitheatre - a huge oval structure, seating 6,000 people. In summer, it swarms with tourists, but there were only a couple of locals walking their dogs when I arrived. It was built just outside the fortress walls, some of which still stand nearby. Recent excavations have uncovered other buildings outside the fortress - some of them quite large - but there is no evidence of a large civilian population, so their purpose remains uncertain.

There are two museums on the High Street. One of them houses the remains of the Roman bathhouse. This is the only one of Caerleon's attractions to charge a modest entrance fee; the rest are all free. A raised walkway surrounds the different sections: a pool

for swimming and three baths; cold, warm and hot. The drain, just visible beneath them, revealed a treasure trove of lost property, displayed in the Roman Legionary Museum nearby.

The museum was filling up by the time I arrived. They had introduced a new system, where you point your phone at an object and a woman's voice starts explaining all about it. Most of the objects were found in or near Caerleon. My eye was drawn towards a stone coffin with a complete skeleton visible through its damaged lid. The occupant grew up locally, a Silurian perhaps, and seems to have died a wealthy man.

A cycle path follows the River Usk for four kilometres from Caerleon towards the city of Newport, where it twists and turns through industrial areas and across main roads, towards the city centre. Newport Museum is almost as well-hidden as Llanmelin hillfort, tucked between a Taco Bell and a building society in a pedestrianized shopping area. You take a lift to the library, which seems like an adjunct to the museum, but when I reached the prehistoric section, I was impressed. There were coins, military and medical equipment, tools, jewellery, writing implements, and a magnificent mosaic, many of them from Caerwent.

“So, some of the Silures were clearly living a Romanized lifestyle.

However, two stone sculptures tell a different story: a carved head and a seated figure, probably a goddess. The head was found by an altar in a house in Caerwent, dated to the fourth century, towards the end of Roman Britain. Its style harks back to an earlier era, with no hint of Roman influence. For Professor Ray Howell, author of two books on the Silures, this sculpture tells us how Celtic culture endured, even in the "most Romanized bit of Siluria."

Did the post-Roman kingdom of Gwent, and modern Wales, inherit that Celtic culture from their Silurian ancestors? Much less evidence survives from those post-Roman centuries, so that is a question, like so many in Celtic studies, which continues to exercise the archaeologists and remains surrounded in mystery.

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Poking Around Pembrokeshire

*In the first installment in a three-part series,
Lesley Choyce cruises Wales' western coastline
in search of Celtic life...*



November is probably not the most cheerful time of the year to visit the Pembrokeshire Coast of Wales, but we'd been getting more accustomed to travelling during difficult weather with spring trips to Iceland and Norway, so we figured we could handle whatever Welsh weather bombs might come our way. It was, as usual, images of the green hills, rugged coastal paths, and warm, antiquated pubs that were luring us across the Atlantic from our Nova Scotia home yet again.

So, my wife Linda and I were on our way.

The insanity of Heathrow hordes, M&S take-away food, congested roundabouts, and irate British road-ragers impatient with my clumsy left-hand driving skills all sorted itself out once we cleared Windsor on the M4, and it was fairly clear sailing across the kingdom all the way to the Prince of Wales Bridge and the Welsh border. The drizzle kept the wind-screen wipers nicely employed as we cajoled ourselves into believing that if this was all the fall weather gods could throw at us, we were laughing.

Of course, the mere sky drool turned to ponderous buckets of voluminous rain by the time we reached our rental cottage on a Palmerston farm just outside Haverfordwest.

But the cottage was clean and cozy as we soon settled in to sit by the gaslight of the fireplace and watch the troubled news of the world as only the BBC could report it.

Here I also did my usual short-but-deep dive into local history, to learn that the area around Haverfordwest was the ancient tribal territory the Demetae Celts. Evidence was found of one of those Iron Age hill forts and settlements that date back to around 1,000 BC. As elsewhere in Europe, the Romans came along and mucked things up for the Celts in their maniacal efforts to rule the world, but after they bowed out, the locale was absorbed into what was delightfully known as the Kingdom of Dyfed. This land was populated by British, Irish, and Roman descendants, and two of the earlier kings were named Aircol Lawhir and Vortipor.

By morning, I was less interested in history and, as usual, anxious to get to the coast to commune with the Atlantic on this side of the pond so far away from my Nova Scotia home. Our first stop was Newgale Beach, a well-known surf spot. The waves were big

and unruly, not the sort that would lure me into a wetsuit, but we were able to stretch our legs in search of what was reported to be the remains of a petrified forest at the northerly end of the strand. Alas, the tide was a bit too high and, as Geoffrey Chaucer once put it, "time and tide wait for no man." Nonetheless, we were pleased to see locals concerned with keeping their canine friends in shape by tossing rubber balls far off to the waterline and then watching their pets race into the foamy water to retrieve them. Always a comforting site in the UK.

Further along was the little picturesque village of Solva, set back from the sea on a small, tranquil inlet. We parked in the centre of town and hiked a well-marked trail to what was once the location of lime kilns and yet



another Iron Age fort. Higher up was a most-excellent lookout with a breathtaking view of the churning waters of St. Brides Bay. Always trying to enhance my knowledge of hagiography, I asked a local man sitting on a stone wall back in town who exactly this St. Bride was. At first, he seemed to ignore my annoying touristy question, but at length he relented and admitted she was better known as St. Brigid, a name I was much more familiar with.

"Ah," I said, "one of the three patron saints of Ireland," not realizing that this was precisely the wrong thing to say and exactly what he had expected from a bloody tourist.

"The Irish don't deserve her," he said and turned away from me to take advantage of a momentary blast of morning sunshine. I was savvy enough not to ask why that was

the case, but instead, I bid him a good day and walked on to catch up with Linda in a gift shop. There (as if by a miracle) I found a book about the sanctified lady and learned that legend said she sailed across the Irish Sea to Wales on a chunk of turf (like the kind they burn in Ireland for heat) and proceeded to perform several miracles. She turned reeds into fish and ash into butter. Turns out she is the patron saint of healing, dairy cows, and poetry, among other things. I was impressed by the fact that she apparently was able to hang her garment on a sunbeam, much like that ribbon of light that shone down on the man on the wall.

In another book, I learned that Celtic mythology also has a goddess by the name of Brigid, and she either is or isn't the same person. She too believed in the importance of caring, cows, and poetry. There is a feast day in her honour (or in honour of both women) on February 1, where people celebrate by (guess what?) drinking beer. Well, they call it ale.

“I wondered exactly how many saints there were down through history and learned that the number depends on who you ask...”

In the early days of Christianity, you could achieve sainthood simply if you were a popular bloke among your peers. Later, the rules tightened a bit, involving miracles and such. Suffice it to say, there could be as many as 10,000 saints, so I'll never know them all, but officially there are 1,700 canonized saints. I like that St. Bride is a kind of two-for-one personage: both saint and goddess rolled into one. I decided to keep my eye out for any further references to her in the days ahead. Certainly, there would be more to discover in St. David's, our ultimate town destination for the day.

Instead, we drove further on to Whitesands Bay and nearby located the trail to St. David's Head. It was a steep and glorious climb in a freshening breeze that soon became what is officially termed as a strong breeze (25-31 mph). With watering eyes, I could still appreciate the magnificence of the view, and soon discovered we were walking on the Wales Coast Path, which stretches a full 1,400 kilometres from Chepstow to Queensferry. The Welsh pride themselves,

and for good reason, in the creation of this, the first “uninterrupted” hiking trail along the full length of a nation’s coastline. The nation presumably refers to Wales.

And, lucky us, we were on the most dramatic section, the 300-kilometre-long Pembrokeshire Coast Path which opened in 1970.

Beneath our feet atop St. David’s Head were some of the oldest rock formations in Wales: bedrock dating back to the Pre-Cambrian era, 600 million years ago. Having descended from the windy heights, we learned that we had missed visiting a nearby, yet another Iron Age fort known as Clawdd y Milwyr, or Warrior’s Dyke, near the summit. There were burial cairns high up there and ancient foundations of a village that we missed.

Lesley and Linda



We vowed to return some day and undertake a pilgrimage to as many such historical sites as we could, since they always, always seemed to exist in the most fascinating locations. But now was our time to backtrack to civilization and get to know the famous, sacred, and beautiful town of St. David’s.

Another brief-but-impressive rainstorm caught up with us as soon as we arrived in town, so we sat it out in our rental car in a parking lot eating some stale airplane cookies I had in my backpack until the sun broke through the clouds. The grass and leaves glistened as we hiked a backroad path through lawns and graveyard to the famous St. David’s Cathedral, gloating perhaps that we were the only dry visitors among several dozen other soggy sightseers and pilgrims.

For some curious reason, St. David’s (the town) is known as the “smallest city in the U.K.” with its resident population of 1,800 living souls. Why bother making such a claim, you might ask? I reckon it is because those living there prefer to call itself a “city” instead of a “village” or “town.” Apparently, the citizenry is proud of this.

According to VisitWales, the cathedral is “a 12th-century masterpiece built from purple sandstone on the site of a sixth-century monastery founded by St. David. It houses the shrine of the saint and the tomb of Edmund Tudor, father of King Henry VII.”

“The cathedral visit, of course, begged the question, “who was St. David, and what did he do to achieve sainthood among his many holy brethren and sistren?”

The story goes that he was born during a violent storm (no surprise there) on a cliff-top to his mother, St. Non. Nicknamed Dewi Ddyfrwr or David the Water Drinker, he lived in the sixth century and was known for his most modest diet of eating only vegetables, bread, and (one would guess) drinking lots of water. Some sources refer to him as a teetotaler. The leek was an important staple of St. David’s diet and remains a national symbol of Wales. He created quite a few monasteries, was a grand preacher, and obviously was well liked enough to earn his way into sainthood. He believed in self-sufficiency and thought all men should “pull their own plows.” He also advocated for folks to lead a happy life. (Apparently not everyone agreed with his happiness advocacy.) The great man pulled off a few miracles in his life, including bringing sight to a blind man and causing a hill to rise beneath his feet so he could properly preach to a very large crowd.

And guess what? His life is celebrated a month after Brigid on March 1 and is hailed by people drinking copious amounts of beer (not water).

The cathedral itself was located in the most gorgeous small ravine on the edge of town and right alongside was the ruins of Bishop’s Castle, what must have been a most impressive edifice famous for its elaborate architecture and opulence. Once home to a string of bishops known as the “Marcher

Lords,” these high-and-mighty types lived anything but the lifestyle prescribed by the original Bishop David.

Other notable bits of town history include sixth-century raids by the troublesome Vikings, removal of St. David’s head and arm in 1284 by the English King Edward I for display in London, and the creation of a very delectable dish called the “Oggie,” which was a pasty filled with lamb, red currants, and leeks.

We walked on into the UK’s smallest city in search of lunch, and settled on a pub appropriately called The Bishop, where Linda had a fulsome fish pie and I chowed down on a cod dinner that could have sustained a portion of the tiny city’s protein needs. I had a craving to poke around for some new reading matter, so a wee bit of aimless wandering soon brought us to St. Davids Bookshop in a part of town called Maes Dyfed, or Field of the Dyfed People. It was a tidy little store as would befit such a tidy town. We were the only customers, and the proprietor seemed to have woken up that morning in a bad mood, as he was rather grumpy with us.

He asked what part of the States we were from, which always makes us Canadians a tad defensive, so I may have been a bit churlish when I corrected him and pointed to the westerly wall lined with greeting cards indicating we came from Nova Scotia directly on the other side of the Atlantic from here. My second mistake was to peruse a copy of Dylan Thomas’s collected poetry that I had no intention of buying. He observed my interest in the book and wondered out loud why “ALL the tourists are so interested in that old drunk.” While Linda was giving me side eye, meaning we should leave, I felt obliged to engage in the matter, indicating that while in graduate school I had once visited the great poet’s favourite bar in New York and that, on a recent trip to Wales, we stayed in an Airbnb accommodation called Under Milkwood. The man grunted something unintelligible but offered a small polite smile. I reshelfed the poetry book as Linda was halfway out the door, the tiny bell above her ringing a clarion call of exodus. I bid the proprietor a good day and headed back out into what had once been the ancient kingdom of Dyfed.



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Neil Barr

I studied Fine Art Printmaking at Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen plus a brief stint at Louisiana State University. A few years later I set up a web design company and grew that over nearly 20 years into a fairly large company with 25 staff, offices in London and Glasgow and clients such as Channel 4, Scottish Ballet, and Holiday Inn Express.

After selling my business in 2014, I had no idea on what I was going to do. I went travelling around Scotland and I realized that every time I went walking - even in the most miserable of weather - all my worries, anxieties and stress would just disappear. At the same time, I was constantly stopping to take shots with my phone.

I went out every single day, regardless of the weather. A couple of months into it, I was beginning to think I had the beginnings of something as I'd taken photographs in my first 4 weeks that

went on to win competitions and gain commendations in respected national competitions. By this point, I was getting enough interest in my photography that I wrote a business plan, got some funding and put on my very first solo exhibition in a Glasgow gallery.

In the very early days, I hadn't read any photography magazines. I wasn't a member of any photography groups online. I didn't know any other landscape photographers. I hadn't really seen anyone's work. Because I was out all day every day, I was voracious in my appetite for new locations. So, the minute I saw anything online I jumped in the car.

There's still a lot of Scotland I've yet to see. Scotland gives us so much in a fairly compact area. The geology is varied and when you throw in the weather and quality of light we can get, we really are spoiled. I think there is more than enough in Scotland alone to fill a lifetime of work. The weather is

hugely integral to my appreciation of the Scottish landscape. I love shooting in unpredictable weather. Despite the repeated soakings or standing at the top of a cliff in gale force winds, hail, rain and snow, I just love watching the huge variations in light this gives you. The forms, light and weather that Scotland gifts us creates a multitude of possible canvases. I am particularly interested in those fleeting moments as one weather system moves in and another moves off that reveal the personality of the landscape. Where the light creates shifting patterns of drama or in some cases a sense of calm.

I truly love Scotland. At times I've been reduced to tears by the sights I have seen. If I hadn't picked up a camera, I might have missed out on all that.

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STYLE

I am originally from Broughty Ferry, just outside Dundee. I completed a degree in Edinburgh, specializing in textiles. I really didn't know what I wanted to do, but had a passion for all things fabric related, making many creations for myself, along with family members and friends.

As a buyer of Scottish textiles, I was a customer of Strathmore's and regularly purchased tartan fabrics for our highland dress division. I was aware that the owners were keen to retire having built the Strathmore brand over the previous 40 years. I jokingly suggested that they could sell the business to me. Little did I know that just two years later, this would indeed become a reality, and I took over the business in 2018.

It was important for me to honour the company's core mandate; to design and procure premium quality tartan fabric, garments and accessories, combining traditional UK craftsmanship with exceptional service, whilst honouring heritage and supporting individual expression.

The design of a bespoke tartan is a rewarding task with the yarn colours chosen, sett size, weight of tartan (11oz or 13.5oz) and the all-important design features of the tartan – all carefully considered to reflect the history, legacy and end use for the customer. A finished garment has to exceed the customers expectation in both: a perfect bespoke fit, twinned with top class craftsmanship.

The majority of our customers are other businesses: wholesalers, retailers, museums, corporate businesses, interiors specialists, educational establishments and the military. We also supply direct to retail customers via our own shop in Forfar, our 'shop in shop' at Glamis Castle, and via our website. Our customers are 'global' and we currently export to 39 countries around the world.

We also make a large variety of finished items - including menswear, ladieswear, children's kilts, dog accessories, and more - from our fabrics onsite, so we offer a complete package from design of

your own tartan through to finished products to wear. We now have two kiltmakers onsite as well, who can offer that extra premium 'hand stitched' kilt option.

Scotland remains an iconic source of both fashion reference and future style. Tartan drifts in and out of current fashion, but it's always there somewhere - used in many creations by Vivien Westwood and Alexander McQueen. Scotland's outdoor ruggedness is regularly represented in fashion via brands such as Barbour and Hunter, and it's cashmere knitwear always features somewhere on any catwalk. In particular, Siobhan McKenzie is doing a fabulous job of taking tartan and giving it a 'twist' for a more contemporary look. Our country is famous for its fashion and textiles colleges and Universities, and additional public funding would ensure new generations of creativity from Scotland continue to thrive and inspire a much bigger worldwide audience.

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Eating on the Emerald Isle

Story by Stephen Patrick Clare



COVER STORY

The Ingredients

American chef, author and travel documentarian Anthony Bourdain once called Ireland the “next great culinary superpower.” The much-conflicted and often-controversial culinary icon visited Ireland twice during his storied career, sampling both its pub-grub and fine-fusion dining.

Of Irish cuisine, Bourdain was philosophical.

“Here, it’s all about the ingredients. The best ingredients - like the best relationships - bring out the best in each other, often creating something even more beautiful, something greater than the sum of its parts. It’s alchemy, actually.”

And while the country’s culinary traditions remain rooted in natural ingredients from the sea and land, Irish cuisine has evolved significantly in recent years, embracing eco-sustainability, a farm to fork ethos, celebrity chefs, food influencers, Michelin star restaurants, street feasts, and waves of immigrant influence on major centers like the Irish capital city of Dublin.

The Entrée

Standing in front of St. Catherine’s Church in Dublin, Kevin Adams is holding court for an audience of one.

“Ok, though we may only be two this morning, I will say to you what I say to all of our clients, ‘lift your glasses, move your asses, do your talking while your walking.’”

As the owner/operator of Walking Food Tours, the good-natured and gabby Adams knows and loves his hometown as much as anyone.

“Our walks take place in and around the Liberties area of Dublin, which is often considered the “real” Dublin. It’s a neighbourhood rich in history, culture, and storytelling. There are countless fascinating stories connected to the area, and the food scene is fantastic.”

“I have always enjoyed meeting people and working within the tourism and hospitality sector,” he continues. “My wife, Aoife, and I met while we were both employed at the Guinness Storehouse. We launched the tour during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, the idea was to encourage people to get out and explore their local area while

also supporting local food vendors who were struggling.”

On cue, Adams opens the door of a small café, and we wedge our way inside. The place is packed with locals enjoying a mid-morning break. The few small tables of four are full, however two spots soon open up and we move quickly.

“Do you mind?” Adams asks the older couple who appear to be the only ones in the café not surfing their phones.

“Not at all,” replies the gentleman with a thick Irish brogue, nodding towards the two vacant chairs. “There’s room at the table for everyone.”

As we snack on scones and strong coffee, Kevin’s passion for Ireland’s exploding culinary culture becomes clear.

“When I was growing up, food in Ireland was generally simpler and more traditional; stews, Shepherd’s pie, chowders, colcannon, coddle, boxty, and the like. Today, however, we are far more international, bringing global flavours and influences into Irish kitchens, often combined with high-quality local ingredients. The result is a vibrant and evolving food culture. Food has also become more experiential. Today, you can enjoy everything from fine dining restaurants to exciting street food, all built around exceptional local pro-



Kevin Adams

duce. It's a very exciting time for Irish food."

A short time later, we are back on the street. The air is cool and the sky is grey and a few drops of rain fall as we wind our way towards our next dining destinations. En route, we pass a number of hole-in-the-wall eateries with exotic names and unique food offerings. International accents abound in the Liberties; French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Arabic, Asian, South American, Eastern European, and more.

"That's become the rule here rather than the exception," notes Adams. "And I'm all about it - as yer' man said earlier, 'there's room at the table for everyone.'"

"One of my favourite aspects of the tour is seeing people from different countries and cultures come together, share food, and connect with each other.

“Food has a wonderful way of bringing people together...”

Later that afternoon, I meet with Linda O'Neill, Sean Doran and Chef Anton of the Octopussy Seafood Bar & Tapas in the cozy seaside fishing community of Howth, about 40 minutes east of Dublin.

"Come on in," smiles O'Neill, escorting me to a small snug in the back of the restaurant. "Go on now...don't be shy, grab a seat... there's room at the table for everyone."

The four of us small-talk over creamy chowder and freshly-baked soda bread for a few minutes before talking shop.

"You won't find fresher seafood anywhere," beams Doran, whose family has been plying their trade on local waters for generations.

Sure enough, bite-sized servings of scampi, scallops, squid, mussels, oysters, crab, and a variety of fishy finger-foods arrive and we dig in. There is no seasoning or spices, only a few dipping sauces on the side.

"No need to flavour it," continues Doran. "It's been flavoured by nature - you are tasting it exactly as it is meant to be tasted."

Though off-season, Octopussy has seen a steady stream of customers come and go all day. Most are locals (including 'Dubs') as tourists don't usually start showing up in droves until late spring to walk the pier, stroll the nearby cliffs, check out the community's two lighthouses, cruise the coastline by boat, tour St. Mary's Abbey ruins, or explore the



Linda, Chef Anton and Sean

expansive grounds of Howth Castle and Deer Park.

"A lot of folks visit Howth because of our history, actually" continues Doran. "Along with being a strategic military port, we've generations of sailors and fishing families and all of the stories that go along with that."

Doran is concerned that those stories, and Howth's longstanding and pivotal place in the country's culinary canon, might soon vanish.

"Ah, the industry isn't what it was. Younger people today aren't really interested in fishing anymore, at least certainly not as a career. We get kids looking for summer jobs on the water, but most of them would rather be on their phones than listen to some aging codger like me show them how to catch and cook seafood or regale them with old war stories. I mean, surely it is important to preserve

all of those traditions, those memories, those stories..."

Ann Marie Duffin is a writer and documentary producer from Co. Wexford whose work is rooted in uncovering and preserving cultural memory. She runs Bia Duit, an Instagram account and digital project which explores the history, heritage, and traditions of Irish food.

Duffin now calls Dublin home, where she first became interested in Ireland's culinary culture while working in radio.

"At the time, I was mainly involved in history and culture features, and I found that food offered a particularly revealing lens on the past. It captured elements of social history that other approaches often overlooked or simply took for granted."

Bia Duit documents the rich and often overlooked stories behind what we eat and how we remember it, examining everything



Chef Ritchie Wilson

from food customs and seasonal rituals to regional dishes, forgotten ingredients, and the cultural significance of everyday Irish food brands. The project aims to spark conversation and curiosity around Ireland's food past, and to preserve knowledge that might otherwise be lost to time.

"I definitely don't refer to myself as an influencer, I probably see myself more as an archive digger and a cheerleader. Social media allows for a far more direct connection with people who genuinely care about our food.

Her efforts have opened up conversations and connections.

"Last year, I spoke on the food stage at the Beyond the Pale Festival about the history of Irish soft drinks. I also co-hosted a food-history-inspired supper club with the incredible cook Yohan Irani. Being able to chat with people in real life about this area, and to share the stories and research I've come across has been lots of fun. I'm constantly coming across tales and records that challenge my assumptions or reveal just how nuanced, complex and exciting our food history really is. What made me share this work online though is a hope to spark a bit of curiosity and, hope-

fully, a sense of pride in our food heritage."

She notes that, when it comes to Irish food, the biggest shift has been the change in perspective.

“People now recognize how incredible our produce is, how exciting the ideas and people behind it are, and how deeply rooted the connection has always been between our land, our sea, and what we eat and drink.”

Television personality Michael Londra concurs.

"The culinary sector has evolved greatly in Ireland, as we have started taking the crafts of tourism and hospitality and food seriously. We have the best tasting food in Europe now - I'll stand up to anyone on that. Our vegetables taste like there are no chemicals injected into them, so when it comes to foraging or farm to fork or whatnot the rest of the world is using words like provenance, but we were already doing that - mostly as there just were no other options. We simply had to use local food. And, even today, we don't use words like "grass-fed" - that's just beef to us. That

is the way it has always been. And, going forward, I believe that this is going to be the message of Ireland."

That newfound pride is evident at the Burren Smokehouse in Rathburn, Co. Clare, on Eire's plush west coast.

"We smoke the salmon right here on site," says Birgitta Curtin, who along with her husband Peter own and operate both the facility and the Roadside Tavern next door.

The couple set up shop in 1989, inspired by their surroundings.

"Ireland has never really been industrialized," she explains. "Because of that, the landscape is as it has been for hundreds, if not thousands of years, and the water and soil are still relatively pure."

As members of EcoTourism Ireland, Good Food Ireland, and other local and national community organizations, the Curtins understand the importance of preserving the island's natural habitat. "A clean environment makes for better tasting and more wholesome, nutritious options right across the entire food spectrum," notes Curtin.

Jessica Murphy agrees.

"We only source the freshest local produce," shares the co-owner of the Kai Restaurant in Galway. "And, thankfully, the west coast of Ireland is abundant with fresh produce."

With an array of artisanal meat, fish, cheese and vegetable dishes on the menu, Murphy and her husband David are pioneers of the Emerald Isle's Slow Food movement.

"It's kind of a philosophic throwback to older times, when the planning, preparation and eating of a meal was an all-day event to be shared by family, friends and acquaintances. It's a healthier process, and you can really taste the difference."

Ireland's Slow Food movement has gained serious momentum in recent years, with local chapters putting on more events each season to promote the region's burgeoning food sector. All up and down the country's west coast, eateries of all shapes and sizes are now combining contemporary cuisine with classic cookery, creating an edible expression that is an essential ingredient of the Irish identity.

And, with customers now much more aware and pickier about what they will put into their bodies, Ireland's sustenance sector has had to re-examine what and how it

prepares and serves food. It is no longer only about eating - it is about creating an experience that includes education, engagement, entertainment, and more.

The Mains

Tucked away on Drury Street in Dublin's bustling downtown core, the award-winning SOLE Seafood & Grill is a quiet oasis of culinary calm; families, friends, associates, and couples sample savoury delights from both the À La Carte and Table' d'Hôte menu options. The restaurant's décor, lighting and music are simple, spacious, chic, and complementary.

Culinary Director Richie Wilson surveys the room before taking a seat as a plate is set down before us.

"So, what you have here are oysters from different parts of Ireland - Connemara, Carlingford, Achill and Galway," he explains. "They each have their own distinct flavour and texture, which is impacted by the change in the seasons and the temperature of the sea."

SOLE's specialty are its Seafood Towers; Howth-smoked Irish organic salmon, shrimp, Dublin Bay prawns, and Rock oysters laid atop a bed of crushed ice; and grilled Irish lobster, pan-roast brown crab claws, steamed West Cork mussels, drenched with white wine and garlic cream and served steaming hot.

“As a people, as a country, our palate is evolving. We have the same core produce from the sea and the land that we have always had, but the way we select, set-up, season, spice, and serve those ingredients has changed.”



Chef Andy McFadden

"That is a relatively recent development, and it is part of our duty to bring people up-to-speed on what they are eating, where it comes from, and how it is prepared."

Along with the popularity of celebrity cooking shows, social media food influencers, and hit streaming series like *The Bear*, Wilson points to several socio-cultural factors for that growth.

"A huge part of the transformation has come from travel - specifically the Irish travelling abroad and bringing home new perspectives from their food experiences, including a greater appreciation for what we have to offer here in terms of fresh produce."

In recent years, immigration patterns to Ireland - and Dublin in particular - have had a huge impact.

"The Celtic Tiger era (1995-2007) saw our economy explode in ways it never had before," recalls Wilson. "Quite suddenly, there were all of these jobs available and too-small a working population to support that growth. Now we have people from all over the world working in Ireland's food sector. Inevitably, and thankfully, those foreign flavours have made their way onto our menus. So, Dublin is really no longer an Irish city, it is an international capital and destination - a fusion of people and of food. And that's great - there is room at the table for everyone."

Nearby at Glovers Alley, Chef Andy McFadden scrambles to keep his kitchen running with some sense of sanity during the dinner hour.

"Oh, this is very normal," he smiles, reaching for a plate. "In fact, this is relatively quiet - most nights it's organized chaos back here - more like a crossover between a traffic roundabout and a zoo. I am very fortunate to have the staff that I do - even if I don't know what the heck is happening most of the time, someone here does...hopefully."

On cue, an array of accents bark orders back-and-forth across the room.

"Along with rising operational costs, the biggest issue we have here in Ireland is labour, and that is across all sectors. Many Irish no longer want to work entry-level jobs, so the majority of those positions are now filled by immigrants. Almost all of them are fluent in English, however, so the language barrier isn't an issue."

Both professional and personal, the staff at Glovers Alley is a big reason why the restaurant was awarded its first Michelin Star in 2022.

"It was incredibly meaningful for all of us," shares McFadden. "And, absolutely it has helped business, especially with tourists who often seek out Michelin Star restaurants as part of their travel itinerary. Our staff are a major part of that experience, as they are the face and first impression of the restaurant - being greeted at the door with a smile and a few warm words can make a massive difference for our diners. My hope is that they all open their own eating establishments someday."

His leadership and example aren't McFadden's only skills, however, and Glovers Alley has built its reputation upon his creative culinary prowess, exemplified nightly with a world-renowned Tasting Menu that includes Kilkeel Crab, Kohlrabi, Ponzus, Thyme, Beet Tartare, Hazelnut, Mustard, Dill Scallop, Dulse, Lemon, Parsley, Shellfish Bisque, BBQ Irish Wagyu Beef Sirloin, Celeriac, Wild Garlic, Truffle, Wicklow Bán, Pecan, Truffle Honey, Ruby Grapefruit, Velvet Cloud Sheep's Yoghurt, Sliabh Aughty Honey, and Lime Valrhona Azélia with caramel, mandarin, and vanilla.

"Absolutely, at the end of the day the food is - sometimes literally - the proof in the pudding. But it is all of those little personal touches that make a meal more than a meal; flowers on the table, having the lighting and music just right. Ultimately, though, people want to have a human experience - they want a smile, a handshake, a kind word, they want to feel welcome, like they belong, like there is a seat at the table for them."

At the Michelin Star Muddlers Club in Belfast, General Manager Barry Fletcher still meets diners at the door, even after a decade in the role.

"We opened the venue low-key in 2015, with the wish to be a welcoming space for everyone to feel comfortable. We don't have a strict dress code - guests can wear whatever they feel best in. Whether that's slides and shorts or a tuxedo, we want people to feel relaxed when they join us."

"We have managed to strike a really good balance of fine dining and a casual feel," he continues. "Here, we pop on our sneakers, smack on a smile, darken the room, turn up the tunes, smash-out refined flavour bombs course after course and dole-out the Northern Irish craic and hospitality."

“We want our guests to simply chill and forget about everything else in the world for a few hours...”

A native of Belfast, Fletcher has seen the city’s food scene evolve over his 30+ years in the industry.

“Peace has meant prosperity,” he notes, alluding to the 1998 Northern Ireland Peace Accord that brought an end to three decades of regional sectarian violence. “I remember, and it wasn’t that long ago, when there were only two spots to eat here in the Cathedral Quarter; one was an actual restaurant, and the other was a pub. So, either way, you were having fish ‘n’ chips and a pint of Guinness for supper.”

Like Dublin’s Temple Bar district, Belfast’s bustling Cathedral Quarter is a cultural hotspot, replete with restaurants, pubs, cafes, artisan food shops, art galleries, bookstores, thrift shops, music stores, craft jewelers, and more.

The Muddlers Club earned its single star status on the strength of its seasonal Tasting Menus, which are carefully crafted for all dietary requirements. On any given night, the restaurant’s “standard” Tasting menu might include seven courses, including Sourdough Onion Bread with Arbequina Olive Oil and Charred Leek Butter; Sea Trout garnished with Sesame, Yuzu, Foie Gras, Gingerbread, Seville Orange, Goats Cheese, Fig and Chestnut; Scallop and Chicken Tarragon; Lamb with Mushrooms and Celeriac; Halibut with Bisque and Fennel; Salt Aged Beef with Short Rib and Black Truffle; Lemon, Blueberry Violet (a dish my dining partner called “Sex in a Bowl”); and Rhubarb, with Pink Peppercorn and Mascarpone. Between courses, of course, small and sweet amuse-bouche servings cleanse and renew the palate.

“Two entrees, three main dishes, and two desserts,” adds-up Fletcher. “It certainly sounds like a mouthful, doesn’t it? Make sure you’ve something strong from the bar to wash it down properly.”

Our server (Super) Massimo brings more beverages before excusing himself with a bow and a burly Italian accent, “I will be back shortly - now I must go and present the food.”

I note his choice of the word present and my mind turns to the idea that food is a gift,

perhaps from the Gods, or maybe to give and receive from one another. I am also struck by the thought that the act and art of eating, and of eating well, requires one to be present, fully immersed in the here and now.

Perhaps, as “music exists in the spaces between the notes” (Miles Davis) so it is that authentic eating experiences exist in the moments between bites, where we put down our knives and forks, savour the flavour, sigh, and simply - and sacredly - connect with company in culinary communion.

Massimo reappears with a smile. “More drinks for you?”

The Bar

Back in Dublin, Alex Lawes and Alan Wolfe built their brotherly bond - and their burgeoning microbrewery business Whiplash - on beer.

“We have both been working in beer since we left school,” shares Lawes. “Prior to starting the brewery in 2019, we had a combined 20+ years of experience in the beer sector. When we met, we developed a friendship immediately from a shared passion for good food and great beers. We’d head off on beer trips together just to try what was interesting in different cultures on the continent and further afield, but when we realized we wouldn’t be able to drink that kind of stuff in Ireland unless we did it ourselves, we took the leap.”

Today, Whiplash is one of more than 80 micro-breweries in Ireland - up from just 15

in 2012. While overall beer consumption in Ireland has fallen in the last decade, craft beer consumption has risen by 13.5 per cent over the same period. Today, independent micro-breweries hold a 3.4 per cent share of the domestic beer consumption market.

Lawes notes that he and Wolfe simply followed the most basic law of economic success - find a need and fill it.

“Before we started doing this all you could really get in Ireland was a Lager, a Stout, or a Red Ale.

“The younger generation wanted something different with their beer lineup, so here we are...”

“It really speaks to our desire for variety, taste, and innovation rather than sheer quantity.”

That desire isn’t just at home, however.

“About six out of every ten pints we make are exported,” adds Lawes. “People seem to love our beers all over the world and we are now sold everywhere from the UK to Japan in over 30 markets. Still, the people here in Dublin who love drinking Whiplash every weekend are our priority, and they keep us going.”

He also credits the company’s continued success to community involvement.

“We have produced over 200 beers so far and with beautiful, commissioned artwork every time. At the moment we are working with five visual artists, but we also collaborate with musicians, DJs, poets, film directors, chefs, photographers, and more. We have become a part of the creative scene here with our craft beer, which is an art also, and have joined forces with others in our field. We didn’t imagine when we started that it would have this kind of reach, but beer can build community and we aim to continue that.”

Cider has also grown in popularity among the Irish and is now the third most popular alcoholic drink in the country with residents consuming roughly 64 million litres each year. Irish cider exports have bloomed to nearly €85 million annually, with the UK as the top export destination.

Currently, there are more than a dozen specialized cider producers across Ireland and Northern Ireland, including Long Meadows Farm, 30 minutes due north of Dublin by car.



Alex & Alan from Whiplash



Three generations of McNallys

“My grandmother planted these apple trees 60 years ago,” shares twentysomething Aoife McNally who - along with her siblings Sarah, Niamh, Stephan and Patrick - works alongside parents Jenny and Patrick nurturing and harvesting crops.

“We’ve been certified organic growers for over 25 years - all our produce is grown with nature in mind, free from chemicals.”

Along with the facility’s organic fare, which includes fruit, vegetables, herbs, preserves and more (all sold onsite), the seasonal family farm produces its signature cider.

“We sell our products primarily at markets across the region - Temple Bar, Glasnevin, and a few others. Our regular ciders sell very well, although we are seeing significant growth with our non-alcoholic offerings.”

The non-alcoholic cider sector in Ireland grew by nearly 19 per cent in 2025, up 5 per cent from the previous year. Those statistics support a growing global trend away from spirits.

“My friends and I don’t drink a lot of alcohol,” shares Aoife. “And when we do, it is a healthier option - IPAs or cider mostly.”

Again, the numbers tell the tale; according to Alcohol Action Ireland, consumption rates across the country have decreased by more than 30 per cent over the last two decades. In addition, Alcoholics Anonymous’ head office in Dublin reports that the number of young people attending 12-step meetings in the past ten years is down almost 20 per cent, and both alcohol rehab admissions and alcohol-related deaths are also significantly lower during that same period.

“That’s very un-Irish,” laughs Aoife. “Maybe we’ve learned our limits from watching previous generations. Me, I’d rather enjoy a fine meal at a posh restaurant - that’s where I’m spending my money.”

Despite inflation, it is estimated that island residents spent more than €2.2 billion on dining out in 2025, with another €1.1 billion coming from visitors.

The Ingredients, Reprised

“This isn’t ‘101 Ways to Prepare a Potato’ guys...”

Belfast born chef Niall McKenna doesn’t mince words as he leads a Saturday morning class of eight wannabees through the preparation and cooking of wild game rabbit, chicken and venison at the Waterman House School of Cookery in the city’s Cathedral Quarter.

After years of plying his trade and accumulating an array of accolades and awards, McKenna opened the facility in 2019, incorporating the cookery school, events spaces and tasting rooms alongside a restaurant.

“I suppose I’m still a bit young to be thinking about legacy, but this gives me the chance to pass on history, recipes, methods, and the like.

“So much of our food culture is now immersive, meaning that people want to learn more and be more involved.”

“It’s no longer just about entertainment,” he continues, “it’s also about education and engagement. Food has always been a big part of our story here, but now more people want to be a part of that story.”

With that, McKenna opens the oven door, and his eight “students” take a seat at the table. The chicken is superb, the venison delightful, but it is the tender and tasty wild game rabbit that proves most popular.

“So, what we’ve done here guys is taken our classic stock - in this case rabbit - and added a few unique, contemporary components to it, including locally-grown vegetables, along with a slight splash of seasoning and sauce. So, the flavours you are now savouring come from that fusion of fresh ingredients.

“But do you know what the best part of any meal is guys?” McKenna asks out loud, looking at each one of us. “It’s the company you keep.”

“Absolutely it is,” agrees Chef Richie Wilson.

“Oh, yes, for sure,” concurs Chef Andy McFadden. “It’s all about who you’re with.”

“People make the meal memorable,” adds Linda O’Neill.

“Food gives us the chance to connect with what is most important in life,” echoes Kevin Adams. “And that is our family and friends.”

“It’s alchemy, actually,” adds Barry Fletcher, “and it’s all about the ingredients. Just as the right ingredients bring out the best in one another to create something greater than themselves, so the right company complements the Irish eating experience. And in our part of the world, there is room at the table for everyone.”



Stephen Patrick Clare



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Yes Chef!

Two Irish celebrity chefs dish out the details on a delectable Emerald Isle culinary classic

Brian McDermott

Brian McDermott is an award-winning Irish chef, author, radio and TV presenter, consultant and mentor from County Donegal whose work is rooted in seasonality, provenance and a deep respect for traditional food culture.

What are your family roots?

I'm originally from Burt in County Donegal, one of thirteen children in a busy household where food was central to everything. My mother was a wonderful, instinctive cook and she showed me early on that good food doesn't have to be complicated, it just needs care. That grounding in family and generosity has stayed with me ever since.

Where do you currently reside, and how old are you now?

I live in Moville in Donegal with my wife Brenda and our two daughters Niamh & Aoife. I turn 50 in May this year, which feels like a natural milestone and a moment to reflect on how far the journey has come while still feeling very much energized for what lies ahead.

When and why did you become a chef?

I became a chef in my late teens. Growing up in a large family, the kitchen was always active, and those homely smells had me intrigued from a young age. I was lucky enough to get a job as a kitchen porter at 15 and that was my first time in a professional kitchen. I feel in love with the buzz and excitement of it all and I started at Killybegs Catering College by the age of 16. I spent three years at college full time to qualify.

Are they the same reasons you do it today?

The heart of it is the same, connection through food and the endless learning that cooking gives me. Today I'm equally motivated by mentoring young chefs, championing Irish producers, and helping home cooks feel more confident. It's about sharing knowledge as much as creating dishes and I am



lucky I can do that across many media platforms on Radio and TV as well as live festivals and events.

What are the challenges of the vocation?

It's a demanding profession, both physically and mentally. The hours can be long and the standards rightly high. There's also the responsibility of representing Irish food culture well, particularly in media, which requires thought and preparation beyond the kitchen itself.

What are the rewards?

The rewards are both personal and professional. There's deep satisfaction in seeing someone cook confidently for the first time, watching young chefs grow in belief, or helping shine a light on the work of dedicated producers. I've also been fortunate to publish books and build a meaningful career through food, something I never take for granted. To be able to make a living from a craft you love, while contributing positively to Ireland's food culture, is a privilege.

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

It starts with inspiration, often from seasonality, memory, or a conversation with a local producer but it's refined through repetition and attention to detail. Creativity in cooking is rarely accidental, it's built on craft and experience you build up.

What makes a good meal?

A good meal feels balanced and generous. It respects the ingredient and the person eating it. Often the simplest dishes, when thoughtfully prepared, are the most memorable.

What is Irish cuisine, and what makes it so unique?

Irish cuisine is rooted in exceptional produce like our dairy, seafood and meats which are world class. What makes it unique is the clarity of flavour that comes from our climate and landscape, and a culture that values hospitality deeply. At its best, it is honest, seasonal and quietly confident.

How has it evolved in recent years?

There's been a real maturity in how we talk about Irish food. Chefs are more confident in expressing regional identity, and there's greater respect for provenance and sustainability. We're no longer trying to imitate that we're comfortable in our own voice. That voice is a trusted one and gaining a wider audience, which brings focus on our food, and who produces, cooks and serves it.

What do you have on tap for the rest of 2026?

The year ahead will see me continue my work across broadcasting, festivals and consultancy, while developing projects that celebrate Irish ingredients and, just as importantly, the people who produce them. As I approach 50, I'm very aware that I still have much to contribute - particularly in passing on the skills and food traditions many of us inherited but could easily lose if we don't make the effort to share them. I'm fortunate to have platforms across media and live events that allow me to do exactly that, and I see it as a responsibility as much as a privilege.

@ChefBrianMcD

WWW.CHEFBRIANMCDERMOTT.COM



Brian McDermott's Herb Roast Leg of Donegal Lamb

Ingredients

1 leg of lamb, approx. 2kg
4 cloves of garlic
2 sprigs rosemary
5 sprigs thyme
6 Mint Leaves
Zest of 1 lemon
Drizzle of rapeseed oil
Fresh ground black pepper
Tablespoon of tomato puree
2 potatoes peeled
2 onions peeled and halved
2 carrots peeled and halved

Instructions

Preheat the oven to 170C. Using a pestle and mortar, crush the peeled garlic with the thyme, mint, rosemary and black pepper. Add a drizzle of oil and lemon zest. Rub the mixture over the whole surface of the lamb. Lay the potatoes, onion and carrots on base of a roasting dish and rest the lamb on the vegetables. Cover the lamb with tin foil. Roast in thy oven for 2 hours, or until cooked to your liking. When cooked, remove the lamb to a tray to rest for at least 15 minutes before carving. Return the roasting dish to the heat add in a splash of red wine and using a wooden spoon stir removing everything from the tray into the liquid while breaking up the vegetables allowing them to thicken the gravy. Add 250ml of boiling water. Add a tablespoon of tomato puree and allow simmering for 10 minutes - this is the gravy to be strained and poured over the freshly carved lamb.

Brian's Tip:

Slice the leftover lamb and fill some naan breads with mint yoghurt dip for evening snacks.

Aisling Larkin

Aisling Larkin is a food and wellness strategist, tv chef & media broadcaster. Her mission is to provide modern, flexible, effective, and sustainable solutions for overall well-being.

What are your family roots?

I was raised at the foothills of the Comeragh Mountains, where food was never just food - it was place, season, and story. My uncle would leave fresh salmon, wrapped in newspaper, at our back door before dawn. We ate lamb that grazed on heather and wild herbs, and dairy from cattle overlooking the sea. Everything was cooked from scratch, most days beginning with freshly baked brown bread. That foundation shaped everything I do.

Where do you currently reside?

I live in County Waterford, where we returned to six years ago. Our home sits between the Comeragh Mountains and Mahon Falls, with the Copper Coast and Clonea Beach just minutes away. It's a landscape that constantly informs how I cook and live - wild, grounding, and deeply connected to nature. There's a quiet rhythm here that keeps you close to what really matters.

When and why did you first become involved with the culinary arts?

On my 15th birthday, I began working in a seafood restaurant on the waterfront in Dungarvan. It was a masterclass in simplicity and quality - daily catch, handled with care. I grew up around incredible produce, including brill, John Dory, lobster, and crab, and that early exposure stayed with me. I went on to formally study culinary arts, nutrition, and food science, followed by a Masters in food product development and culinary innovation.

Are they the same reasons you remain involved today?

Yes, entirely. Food is connection, joy, and a deep sense of contentment. It's how we care for ourselves and each other. If anything, my understanding of food as a tool for living well - for

creating calm, satisfaction, and meaning - has only deepened. It's still about love, at its core.

What are the challenges of the vocation?

Balancing creativity with commercial reality is always the tension. There's a constant negotiation between innovation and margin, vision and viability. But I see that as part of the craft - designing ideas that are not only beautiful and impactful, but sustainable and scalable in the real world.

What are the rewards?

The rewards are deeply human. Food creates connection, brings joy, and offers a real sense of satisfaction and ease. To be part of that - to create experiences or systems that genuinely improve how people feel in their daily lives - is incredibly meaningful. It's work that feeds both others and I.

Is your creative culinary process more "inspirational" or "perspirational"?

It begins with inspiration - place, produce, a feeling - but it is grounded in process. There's a discipline to creating something that works, not just conceptually but practically. So, it's both. Inspiration sets the direction, but consistency, refinement, and attention to detail bring it to life.

What makes a good meal?

A good meal is rooted in seasonality and simplicity: beautiful ingredients, thoughtfully handled. It's about balance, flavour, and restraint. But beyond the plate, it's about how it makes you feel: nourished, satisfied, and at ease. True satiety - that quiet sense of "I've had enough, and it was exactly right" - that's what defines it.

What is Irish cuisine, and what makes it so unique?

Irish cuisine is defined by the integrity of its produce. Our terroir - rich soil, clean air, Atlantic waters - creates ingredients of exceptional quality. It's a cuisine grounded in land and sea, shaped by season and environment.



That natural advantage is what makes it quietly extraordinary.

How has it evolved in recent years?

There's a growing confidence in Irish food. We're less interested in overworking ingredients and more focused on letting them speak. There's a clarity and restraint now, a celebration of produce over ego. Sustainability has always been part of our food culture - it's simply being expressed more consciously and creatively today.

You wear a number of hats - television, radio, podcast, writing, events - how do you manage it all?

Everything I do is anchored in the same philosophy, so it feels cohesive rather than fragmented. I'm very intentional with my time and energy, and I work within a clear framework - if something doesn't align with my values or the impact I want to create, it doesn't move forward. It's less about doing more, and more about doing the right things well.

What do you have on tap for the rest of 2026?

2026 is a meaningful year of expansion. I'm launching Satiety - the space between food and freedom - a new way of eating that reshapes the conversation between you, your body, and your mind. It's about nourishment, regulation, satisfaction, and joy. Alongside that, I'm writing my first cookbook, travelling, and leaning into storytelling - bringing food to life through festivals, events, and experiences that feel both creative and deeply connected.

[@aisling_larkin_](https://www.instagram.com/aisling_larkin_)

WWW.AISLINGLARKIN.IE



Crispy Cumin-Scented Comeragh Lamb on Creamy Hummus

Instructions

Peel the garlic and pop it in the food processor with the lemon juice. Drain the chickpeas, rinse and de-shell. Combine the chickpeas (hold back about 10) with the garlic and lemon juice. Add in the tahini, 1/2 tsp cumin and 4 tbsp of the oil and water. Blitz for 2-3 minutes. Season with sea salt. Taste, adjust consistency by adding more oil and water, more lemon juice or salt. Allow to sit for a few moments and taste again. Transfer to a container, drizzle with olive oil, sprinkle with cumin and garnish with some chickpeas.

Flatbreads

Sieve the flour and baking powder into the bowl. Make a well in the centre and stir in the yogurt and the olive oil. Combine until it forms a stiff dough. Place back in the bowl to rest for a few minutes while you make the hummus and the cous cous. Dust your work surface and using a rolling pin roll out 4/6 flatbreads. Approx the size of a golf ball. Roll them out to be about 3mm thick and 10cm in diameter. Heat a little oil on your pan, cut 2 small slits in the top and cook for 12 minutes on each side. Allow them to puff up and char a little.

Cumin Scented Lamb

Heat the pan up nice and hot. As a little smoke begins to rise, pop in the minced lamb. Sear and allow the brown up quickly. Move the mince around in the pan for about 2 minutes until it starts to brown. Juice and fat will begin to come out, that is fine. Keep cooking. Being to add our spice, sprinkle in the cumin, smoked paprika, onion and garlic powder, cinnamon and turmeric. Cook these out for about 1 minutes. Then add tomato puree and stock. Turn the heat down and allow to simmer for 25-30mins. You want all the liquid to drain off and for the meat to become almost crumbly. You will have to stick with it for the last 5-10 minutes giving it the occasional stir to prevent it sticking and burning. Season with a little salt if needed. Allow to cool a little and serve on top of the platter of hummus. Drizzle over some toasted pine nuts and the left-over garlic and parsley oil from the flatbreads.

Ingredients

Cumin Scented Lamb

500g Comeragh/ Irish lamb mince
1 tbsp cumin
1 tbsp smoked paprika
1 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp turmeric
1/2 tsp fennel seeds crushed optional
1 tsp chopped anchovy
2 cloves garlic optional
1 tbsp tomato puree
200 mls chicken stock
50g pine nuts / pistachios
Fresh mint / parsley / sea lettuce

Hummus

1 tin chickpeas
1/2 lemon
1 clove garlic
3/6 tbsp vegetable oil
3/6 tbsp water
2 tbsp tahini
Salt and pepper
1 tsp cumin
Flatbreads
250g self-raising flour
250g Greek yoghurt
1 level tsp baking powder
1 tsp olive oil
Seaweed butter

A photograph of four students walking along a paved path on a university campus. From left to right: a man in a light green polo shirt and khaki pants, a woman in a teal dress, a woman in a black dress, and a woman in a teal blazer and jeans carrying a laptop. They are walking past a large tree and a modern white building with large windows.

Irish Studies Program

www.fairfield.edu/irishstudies

FAIRFIELD, CT

Fairfield University, located in southwestern Connecticut only 75 minutes northeast of New York City, offers a dynamic program in Irish Studies. With a significant Irish-American representation among its students and alumni, interest in Ireland has characterized Fairfield for decades. This interest continues unabated today, as Irish people on both sides of the Atlantic have sought to resolve long-standing issues amidst an increasingly global economy. Fairfield's Irish Studies program enables students to investigate

Irish contributions to a wide range of disciplines, including literature, history, film, and art. Courses focus on the troubled history of the nation, its colonial and post-colonial significance, the difficult politics of Northern Ireland, and the inspired art and

literature that emerged from the turbulent Irish past. To complete the Irish Studies minor, students must complete a capstone research project in an area of their choice. Affiliated with the National University of Ireland, Fairfield's Irish Studies program, through study abroad in Galway, also allows students to take Irish-focused courses in archeology, economics, sociology, linguistics, and the Irish language. The program also offers on-site lectures, concerts, plays, and readings that complement the academic courses.



Fairfield
UNIVERSITY

College of Arts
& Sciences



Reaching For *the Stars*

Lillian Holt explores the history and heritage of Michelin stars which are prestigious, anonymous ratings awarded annually by the Michelin Guide to restaurants that are deemed the best in the world. Inspectors evaluate restaurants based on ingredient quality, flavour mastery, technique, chef

personality, and consistency, awarding up to three stars. With two more Emerald Isle eateries picking up honours this past February - The Pullman (Galway) and Forest Avenue (Dublin) - Ireland now boasts more than two dozen Michelin star dining experiences.

Two Stars

Terre, Castlemartyr Resort, County Cork

Dining is an experience at Terre in the 5-star Castlemartyr Resort, nestled in the County Cork countryside. Described as “a culinary journey celebrating the brilliance of nature”, you can expect a tasting menu that combines the best of French cuisine with dynamic Asian flavours, all created using the best of local, seasonal produce. The restaurant gained a Michelin star just six months after opening, and now is onto its second, an amazing achievement in just two years.

castlemartyrresort.ie/terre

Chapter One, Dublin city

Cementing his reputation at Chapter One is acclaimed Finnish chef, Mickael Viljanen, who joined forces with Ross Lewis to create a dream team of Dublin’s restaurant scene. Viljanen’s use of luxury ingredients presented with striking creativity has wowed critics and diners alike. And Chapter One itself has long been renowned for its friendly staff, unbeatable atmosphere and dining room adorned with Irish art.

chapteronerestaurant.com

Liath, County Dublin

After first opening as Heron and Grey in 2015 and blowing its patrons away, Liath quickly became the hottest ticket in town. Based in the much-loved Blackrock Market in south County Dublin, Liath offers a very personal dining experience, with chef Damien Grey and his team explaining the dishes to their guests. The full tasting menu is a real treat – packed with bold, original Irish cuisine and complemented by great wine pairings.

liathrestaurant.com

Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud, Dublin city

Inspired and supplied by the best of Irish growers, farmers and fishermen, Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud marries French influence with local produce to create exceptional menus. At the peak of Dublin’s food scene for 40 years, this is one of the city’s more established top-tier restaurants – and with their sights set on a third star, they’re not going anywhere soon.

restaurantpatrickguilbaud.ie

Dede, County Cork

In Baltimore, a town that feels like it could be at the edge of the world, you’ll find some of the

best food on the planet. Chef Dede’s self-named restaurant Dede expertly combines his Turkish heritage with his love of top-quality, local food. Prioritising a minimal-waste approach and drawing on a local network of experienced foragers and producers, Dede’s dishes are not to be missed.

customshousebaltimore.com

One Star

Aniar, Galway city

Like Aimsir, Aniar is listed as up-and-coming on the Michelin Green Star list. A boutique cookery school as well as a champion of contemporary Irish food, Aniar distils Galway and puts it on the plate for the diner. Chef JP McMahon reinvigorates old Irish culinary practices, like curing and pickling, to breathe new life into much-loved traditional Irish dishes and reimagine Irish food through the ages. aniarrestaurant.ie

Bastible, Dublin

Inspired by the cast iron pot which once sat on the hearth of every Irish home, the name may sound traditional, but Bastible is in fact a modern, vibrant and lively eatery. Owner Barry Fitzgerald expertly takes the lead in the open kitchen, creating superb contemporary cuisine using the best Irish ingredients. bastible.com

Bastion, County Cork

It may come as a surprise to learn that Kinsale, the town known as the culinary capital of Ireland, only welcomed its first Michelin star in 2020. Run by husband-and-wife team Paul and Helen McDonald, Bastion pays homage to its seaside roots by giving seafood a starring role on its 8-course tasting menu – though its vegetarian menu is just as expertly designed. bastionkinsale.com

Campagne, Kilkenny city

Inspired by French cuisine and elevated by local Irish ingredients, Campagne’s menu is pure indulgence: think foie gras crème caramel followed by wild venison and hazelnut bavares. Chef Garrett Byrne worked previously at Dublin’s Chapter One, so the Michelin pedigree here runs deep – and at just an hour and a half from the capital, it’s well worth the trip! campagne.ie

Chestnut, County Cork

In a cozy village of Ballydehob in the heart of West Cork, a Michelin-starred restaurant has set up camp in the shell of a once run-down old pub on the main street. Chestnut seats just 18 lucky diners at each sitting, treating them to the glorious spoils



Dede, County Cork

of the West Cork wilderness. From turf-smoked butter to freshly gathered cockles, every mouthful is a masterpiece. restaurantchestnutwestcork.ie

D’Olier Street, Dublin 2

Set within a high-ceilinged, late-19th century building in the centre of Dublin close to Trinity College, D’Olier Street has become one of the city’s hottest restaurant openings. If you like to watch the masters at work the chef’s table seating is the perfect choice for a menu that unfurls over 12 magnificent courses. Executive chef and co-owner James Moore honed his craft in some of the world’s top kitchens and brings his experience to bear on dishes that mix homegrown ingredients such as Smoked Gubbeen cheese with exotic global flavours. dolierstreetrestaurant.com

Glovers Alley, Dublin

Set in a prime spot on the second floor of the Fitzwilliam Hotel overlooking St Stephen’s Green, Glovers Alley is a chic, elegant restaurant named after Dublin’s glove-makers, who once occupied the neighbouring alleyway. The room has an opulent and contemporary feel, brilliantly juxtaposed with Andy McFadden’s bold cooking. gloversalley.com

House, County Waterford

Perched on the cliffs above the Irish Sea, House is a treat for the eyes and the soul, as well as the taste buds. The team behind this beautifully located eatery focuses on sustainable practises and sourcing produce with a low footprint – meaning the seafood you eat was likely caught by fishermen on the waves outside the restaurant window. So, take a big breath – and take a big bite! cliffhousehotel.ie/house-restaurant

The Bishops’s Buttery in County Tipperary

Set in the basement of the beautiful Cashel Palace



Patrick Guilbaud, Dublin

Hotel in County Tipperary, the Bishop's Buttery is a warm, relaxed and elegant space perfectly tailored to slow lunches and dinners. Service is friendly and engaging, the wine list is interesting and the food sings thanks to dishes such as Atlantic scallop with butternut squash, trompette, lardo and citrus, and wild Sika deer with Jerusalem artichoke, Roscoff onion, chanterelle and quince. The restaurant is open to both residents and non-residents of the hotel.

cashelpalacehotel.ie/dining/the-bishops-buttery

Lady Helen, County Kilkenny

There's no escaping it: Mount Juliet is the epitome of opulence. So, it makes sense that its star culinary attraction, the Lady Helen restaurant, is equally lush. Using ingredients from the surrounding estate, as well as local farmers and artisan producers, the team knows the quality of every single item that enters and leaves the kitchen – and they only accept the best. ladyhelen.ie

OX, Belfast

With a proud tradition of showcasing Northern Ireland's seasonal produce in all its glory, OX is an art gallery for nature's bounty. The team's larder changes each month and is updated online for those looking to whet their appetite before making a reservation. Expect the usual luxuries – duck, wild salmon, venison – alongside little sparks of whimsy, like dandelion and salsify. oxbelfast.com

Homestead Cottage, Doolin, County Clare

Flagstone floors, stone walls and a fireplace decorated with jars of herbs – there's something special about the inside of Homestead Cottage in Doolin. Dating back over 200 years, the building retains much of its original character while adding bursts of warmth and interest – shelves lined with cookery books, and walls decorated with contemporary photography. But it's the food here that shines

thanks to a mix of exceptional cooking and produce that comes from local farmers, growers and artisan food producers, all within a stone's throw of the Atlantic Ocean. homesteadcottage.com

The Muddlers Club, Belfast

Named after the secret society that met in this spot over 200 years ago, The Muddlers Club is an absolute delight. The interior design is industrial, yet warm, just like Belfast itself; while the staff are famously friendly. Known for its deceptively simple menu, the food here needs no frills or fancies to convey its excellence – and the secret fine wine menu is top notch.

themuddlersclubbelfast.com

The Oak Room, County Limerick

The Oak Room, otherwise known as the dining room of the 1830s Adare Manor, nabbed Limerick's first Michelin star back in 2019. Even before the mouth-watering food arrives, a seat here is worth it for the luxurious surroundings alone. As well as the locally sourced food, the delicious menu is lifted by plants foraged from the estate and honey from its beehives.

adaremanor.com/dining/the-oak-room

Variety Jones, Dublin city

One of the few higher-end restaurants to reside in the older, more rugged part of Dublin city, Variety Jones has an open, relaxed air and fun, funky design. And the food! Most dishes are cooked over an open flame in the open kitchen, in full sight of the dining room; and each one is an adventure. Try the pig's head terrine. varietyjones.ie

The Morrison Room, Carton House, County Kildare

The Morrison Room is one of the most luxurious dining locations in Ireland, nestled amid the Palladian-style grandeur of the five-star Carton House in County Kildare. From a high, curved ceiling to Greek Corinthian columns, the opulent surroundings set the scene perfectly for a meal to remember. And, of course, the food more than matches up. Fine local and foraged ingredients are showcased to an exquisite degree. Achill lamb, Union Hall crab, West Cork lobster...it's a sumptuous menu of classical cooking, elevated by some wildcard flavour combinations.

cartonhouse.com/dining/the-morrison-room

Ballyfin Demesne, County Laois

The five-star country house hotel of Ballyfin Demesne in County Laois is the setting for one of

Ireland's most lavish dining experiences. Freshly sourced produce from the estate's kitchen gardens and woodlands is served in the splendid surroundings of the State Dining Room and the Van Der Hagen Room, both of which are architectural wonders. As for the food, it's just as stunning. From artisan cheeses and sika deer to Guinness bread rolls and lemon tart, the menu takes Irish country house cooking to delectable new heights. ballyfin.com/dining

Lignum, County Galway

Wood-fired cooking that adds a smoky dimension to innovative dishes is the order of the day at Lignum in County Galway. In fact, "lignum" is the Latin word for "wood", highlighting the importance of the wood-burning stove in the kitchen here. There's no set menu, instead, the larder changes with seasonal ingredients sourced from local suppliers and growers. Think fresh vegetables, tasty preserves, elegant seafood and gamey meat. The wood theme also extends to the setting – bare wooden tables in a converted barn that gives chic, Scandic vibes. lignum.ie

Forest Avenue, Dublin

Nestled close to the pleasant Grand Canal in Dublin, Forest Avenue is casual elegance personified. The family-run establishment has a minimalist vibe that carries over to the food, with dishes free of overcomplication and emphasising excellent ingredients. The seasonal menus champion fresh, local produce from farmers and producers. Think wild sea bass for lunch and a ragout of duck for dinner, all tastefully paired with a well-chosen wine list. Top tip: try booking a table by the open kitchen, it's the coziest spot in the house. forestavenuerestaurant.ie

The Pullman, County Galway

The Pullman at the five-star Glenlo Abbey Hotel & Estate in County Galway is one of the most unique dining experiences in Ireland. This fine-dining restaurant is housed in two original Orient Express carriages, lovingly restored. It's an exquisite setting, made all the sweeter by views of the golf course and Lough Corrib. Thankfully, the food more than matches the location, as perfectly balanced dishes showcase the best of Irish produce. The tasting menu includes West Cork turbot, fallow deer and a selection of sweet treats. This is one meal you'll always remember. glenloabbeyhotel.ie/the-pullman

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Fabulous Farmers' Markets

When you buy something at a farmers' market in Ireland, chances are that the person who has grown it is right in front of you. "Hours can be spent wandering from food stall to stall meeting proud local producers who can tell where and when your vegetables were picked, and how to cook them to perfection," says Grace Cox of LoveIrishFood.ie. "You might start out with a small bag, but you will likely leave with it filled to the brim."

English Market, County Cork

For history and artisan food, Cork's elegantly vaulted English Market - one of the oldest of its kind in the world (1788) - is not to be missed. Same for the artisan food hotspot of Midleton Farmers' Market, about 22km east of Cork city. Darina Allen's own Ballymaloe Cookery School has a stall here, and you'll also find Frank Hederman's award-winning smoked salmon.

St George's Market, Belfast

Built in the late 19th-century, Belfast's award-winning St George's Market is a gourmet treasure trove and an eclectic mix of traditional and modern life in the city. There has been a market here since 1604, but this one dates from 1890 and takes place every Friday to Sunday morning.

Naas Farmers' Market, County Kildare

Naas Farmers' Market in County Kildare takes place every Saturday from 10am to 3pm, and includes organic produce from the Wicklow hills, fresh breads, farmhouse cheese, and sweet treats from ChocO'Neill Chocolates.

Walled City Marketplace, The Walled City, Derry

Not only can you find delicious regional produce here, but you can also purchase one-of-a-kind artworks, homemade candles, jewellery and more on the first Saturday of every month.

Dungarvan Farmers' Market, County Waterford

Head to the historic Grattan Square for the Dungarvan Farmers' Market in County Waterford every Thursday until 2pm, with Crepe Cuisine, Barnawee Foods and Barron's Bakery.

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Celebrating Irish Cuisine

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Ireland Festivals

Dublin Coffee Festival

April 10-12, 2026

Waterford Festival of Food

April 24-26, 2026

The Donegal Festival of Food

May 2-4, 2026

Burren Slow Food Festival

May 10, 2026

Ballymaloe Festival of Food

May 15-17, 2026

Howth Maritime & Seafood Festival

May 22-24, 2026

Street Feast

May 23-24, 2026

Borda Bia Bloom

May 28 - June 1, 2026

Taste of Dublin

June 11-14, 2026

Comber Earlies Food Festival

June 20, 2026

Flavours of Fingal

July 4-5, 2026

Hagstravaganza

August 8, 2026

Cork on a Fork

August 12-16, 2026

The Big Grill

August 13-16, 2026

Féile Vegan

August 14, 2026

Taste of Kildare

August 15-16, 2026

Crisp Festival

August 28-30, 2026

Dalkey Lobster Festival

August 2026

Dublin Beer Festival

September 11-12, 2026

Cromane Seafest

September 18-20, 2026

Galway International Oyster & Seafood Festival

September 25-27, 2026

Dingle Food Festival

October 2-4, 2026

Savour Kilkenny

October 22-26, 2026

Samhain Festival of Food & Culture

November 5-8, 2026

Kinsale Restaurant Week

Winter 2027

Cork Whiskey Fest

Spring 2027

Polish Wine Fest

Spring 2027

Tours & Trails

- Walking Food Tours Dublin
- Delicious Dublin Food Tours
- Fab Food Trails (Dublin, Cork)
- Galway Food Tours
- Waterford Heritage Taste Tour
- Emerald Tea Tours (Wexford)
- Kilkenny Food Tours
- Sligo Food Trail
- Wild Kitchen Walks (Lahinch)
- Sea Louth Scenic Food Trail
- Irish Food Trail (Dublin)

Northern Ireland Festivals

Belfast Whiskey Week

July 24 - August 1, 2026

Newquay Eats & Beats Festival

August 2026

Armagh Food & Cider Weekend

September 3-6, 2026

Bushmills Salmon & Whiskey Festival

October 2-4, 2026

Florence Court Harvest Fair

October 24-25, 2026

Belfast Beer & Cider Festival

November 2026

Tours & Trails

- Belfast Food Tour
- Belfast Bred Food Tour
- Far and Wide Foodie City Cycle
- Coast and Country Foodie Tour Experience (Causeway Coast)
- Enniskillen Taste Experience
- Taste of Strangford Food Tour

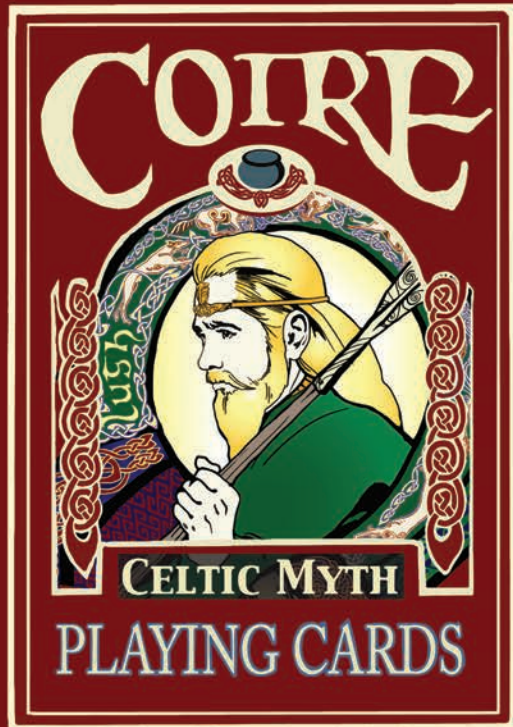


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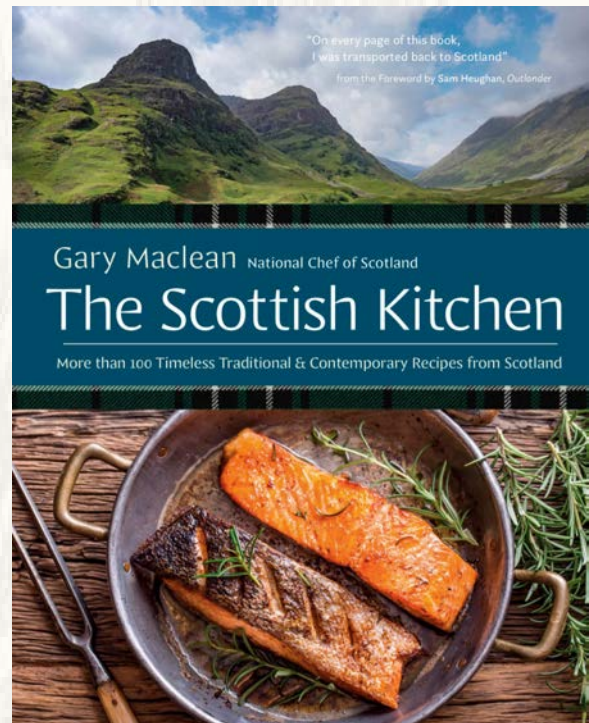
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By Gary Maclean

National Chef of Scotland



"On every page of this book, I was transported back to Scotland."

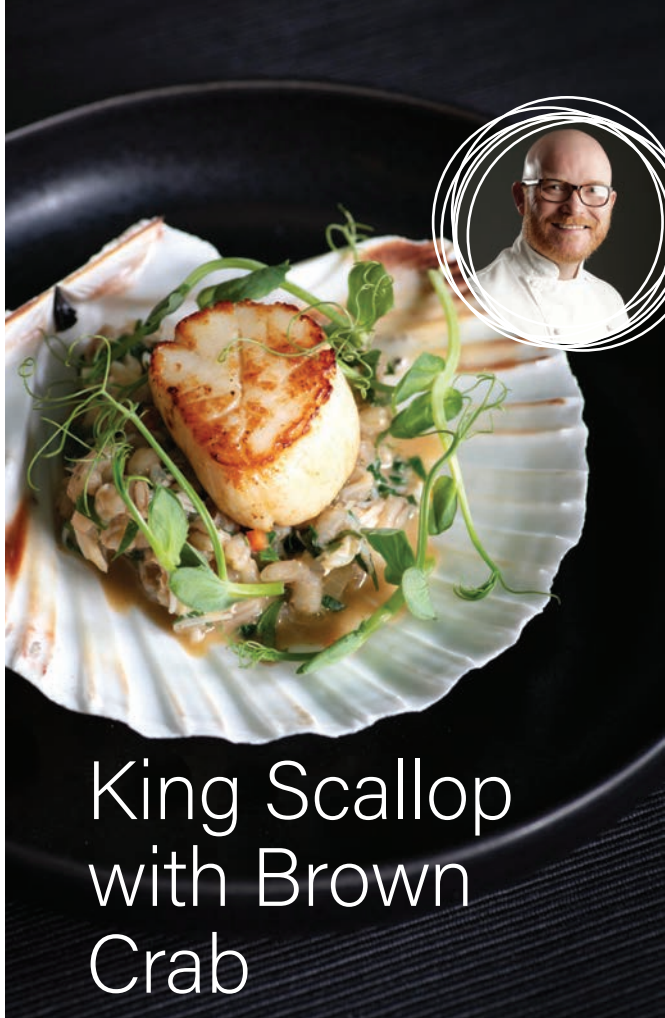
— Sam Heughan

"A cookbook that gives haggis its due."

— The New York Times

A definitive celebration of Scotland's food culture, bringing together classic dishes and modern interpretations inspired by the country's landscapes, seasons, and exceptional produce.





King Scallop with Brown Crab

Ingredients

200g (7 oz) pearl barley, soaked overnight in water
150g (5 oz) crabmeat, white and brown
1 shallot, finely diced
Small bunch of spinach, shredded
1 carrot, cut into small dice
3 cloves garlic, finely minced
Small bunch of parsley, chopped
50g butter
300ml (10 fl oz) shellfish stock
85g (3oz) cheddar cheese, grated
100ml (3 1/2 fl oz) white wine
Small bunch of pea shoots to finish
Salt/Pepper

For the Scallops

4 king scallops
25g (1 oz) butter, unsalted
1/2 lemon

the CELTIC CHEF

with Gary Maclean

One of the real joys of Scottish cooking is the incredible quality of the seafood we have on our doorstep. From the cold, clear waters around our coast come some of the finest shellfish in the world, and when ingredients are this good, the chef's job is simply to treat them with respect. This dish celebrates two of my absolute favourites: sweet, perfectly seared king scallops, and rich brown crab. Together they create a wonderful balance of flavour and texture. I've paired them with a creamy pearl barley base, which acts almost like a Scottish-style risotto, soaking up the shellfish stock and bringing a gentle nuttiness to the dish. A little spinach, fresh herbs, and a squeeze of lemon keep everything bright and fresh. It's a dish that looks impressive but is surprisingly straightforward to prepare. Much of the barley can be made ahead of time, making it ideal for entertaining friends and family. In fact, it's a recipe I've cooked many times at private dinners and events around the world, always with great success. For me, this plate perfectly captures what modern Scottish cooking is about - beautiful produce, simple techniques, and flavours that speak for themselves. Makes four portions.

Instructions

Heat a saucepan. Add 1/2 of the butter, then add the chopped shallot, diced carrot, and garlic. Sweat for 3 to 4 minutes without colour. Now add the soaked barley and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, then pour in the wine and reduce until the wine has totally evaporated. Once the wine has been absorbed, start to add the stock a ladle at a time, making sure the previous ladle of stock has fully been absorbed. Continue this method until all the stock has been absorbed and the barley is cooked. Check seasoning; add crabmeat, spinach, and parsley.

Scallops

Make sure the scallop is clean; dry the pan and sear on one side until golden brown. Remove the pan from the heat and flip over the scallop. Add the butter and a little squeeze of lemon juice. Remove from the pan and serve with the barley and top with some pea shoots.

Slàinte Mhath! - Gary

www.garymacchef.com

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DRAM

with Andrew Ferguson

Remembering Duncan McGillivray



the tour confirmation I was waiting for, but also the promise of accommodation. Life on Islay moves at a different pace than the rest of the world - even more so in the mid-2000s.

In the week before my trip, my mother was chatting with her gardener, who was Scottish, telling her all about my planned trip, and then something serendipitous happened. Mom noted my frustration at waiting to hear from a distillery whose name she couldn't pronounce on some island on the west coast. "Do you mean Bruichladdich [pronounced brook-lad-dee]?" the gardener asked in reply. By quirk of fate, it just so happened that the gardener's brother-in-law was Duncan McGillivray, Bruichladdich's General Manager. She gave him a call, and everything was sorted the next morning.

Duncan was my host at Bruichladdich in 2006 and would be again on many subsequent trips I made to Islay in the following years. A born and raised Ileach, he was kind, genuine, and humble, with a great sense of humour and a love for weaving a good yarn too.

Duncan McGillivray started at Bruichladdich in 1974 as a Stillman and was Distillery Manager in 1994 when it was shut down. He would stay on to keep an eye on the facilities and its stock of maturing whisky in the years that followed.

When Bruichladdich was reborn in 2001 under new ownership, Duncan was part of the new team. Mark Reynier and Jim McEwan - the men most associated with the Islay distillery's revival - both acknowledged that they could never have done it without him. Duncan would prove instrumental in restarting production and keeping its ageing equipment running. He was in many ways the heart and soul of the distillery.

Duncan retired in 2014 and passed away in 2020. The last time I saw him was during Feis Ile, at Bruichladdich in 2015. He was in the early stages of dementia by that time, but true to form, he was still in good spirits. It was a hectic day, Duncan and Jim were busy signing bottles for all their fans, but time was found for a quick chat. I extended my hand to say hello, and after a short pause, he replied: "Ah Andrew, yes, isn't my sister-in-law your mother's gardener?!"

I wasn't intending to write this column about Duncan McGillivray - it was supposed to be about Bruichladdich Distillery. Instead, I found myself reflecting on the twenty years that I have been travelling to Scotland and the wonderful people I've met along the way.

“Islay is renowned for its hospitality, and Duncan was emblematic of that.”

That hospitality is still alive on the island today, especially at Bruichladdich.

I'll get around to writing a column about the Bruichladdich Distillery, but until then, I hope you won't mind my little reminder of how small the world really is. The first time I ever tried Port Charlotte (one of Bruichladdich's peaty expressions), PC5 to be specific, was with Duncan, on Islay, in 2006. I can't think of a more appropriate dram with which to raise a glass to Duncan and all those we meet along the way.

PC5 is hard to come by these days, unless you bought it 20 years ago or find it at a present-day auction. Port Charlotte 10 Year is commonly available, however, and it is fine dram for those who don't mind a wee smoke.

I made my first trip to Scotland twenty years ago this fall. The two-week road trip was a whirlwind. After a few days in Glasgow, my journey took me to Arran, Campbeltown, Islay, Mull, Skye, the Speyside, Stirling, Edinburgh, and The Borders. Along the way, I visited at least 25 distilleries, the Speyside Cooperage, a dozen castles, and I even found time to hike up Ben Nevis. It was a pace of travel I can't even fathom two decades later.

I spent months researching and planning my first sojourn with almost military precision. But with only a handful of days until my departure, one detail had yet to be ironed out: a visit to Bruichladdich. It wasn't just

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the Port Hope Piper

As far as first impressions go, bagpiper Broderick Ewing displays humility and enthusiasm in equal measure. Still in his teen years, he is recognized as the “Port Hope Piper” - a reference to his home base in the small Ontario town where he honours his family heritage by playing the pipes at community gatherings and events.

“I was born here in Canada, and my parents were both born in Scotland, so I grew up in the culture,” he explains via email. His grandad - whom he affectionately calls “Grumpy” - also played the bagpipes and still listens to the genre. Ewing, in turn, is committed to his heritage in every way, noting that “Yes, I eat haggis.”

Starting on a chanter at the age of 10, Ewing got his first set of bagpipes at 13. A family friend who was involved in a local pipe band helped arrange lessons. The youngster quickly took to playing and, with the support of his mom, found a band and took on the challenges of the instrument.

“Bagpipes are the most physically demanding instrument to play,” he concedes. “It takes a lot of lung power and strength. Then there is memorizing dozens, if not hundreds of tunes. Have you ever noticed that, in parades, all the other musicians have their sheet music, and pipers do not?”

The challenge doesn’t diminish his passion, however, as he’s equally aware of the rewards piping has brought him.

“Everyone thinks I’m so cool. I get to work with my band, and we learn together, compete together, win together, and some-

times, not win together. It has been a great way to be part of a team.” He and the band enjoy performing during the summer and in the off-season at local hockey games, award ceremonies, Burns Night events, and other community gatherings.

While being part of a band involves tradition and discipline, Ewing is also developing his own style, exploring more contemporary tunes as he experiments and evolves.

“If I enjoy playing a song and it challenges me and gives me the opportunity to improve, it’s a good tune...”

His musical influences go back to early childhood. “I always loved music. I was even put to bed with traditional lullabies. My mom says if I were crying for no reason, she would put on ‘music’ and I would calm right down.” These days, he listens to “music from video games and anime soundtracks,” adding the ancient instrument to modern musical forms.

Along with the development of his personal style, his pipes have also evolved over time. Ewing’s original set was created by Roddy McLeod, who has continued supplying customized parts as Ewing grows and progresses. He jokingly compares the constant upgrades to the trials of an ancient Greek hero. “They have become the Bagpipes of Theseus as the chanter has been replaced a few times, I outgrew the bag and got a bigger one, and the blowpipe was also changed last year.”

Beginning at such a young age felt natural for Ewing, yet he suspects many young people don’t realize piping is a possibility for them. “Unfortunately, I think a lot of people feel playing pipes is out of reach, something only certain people get to do - which isn’t true.”

Even so, he believes the interest is absolutely still there. “I think a lot of kids are quite fascinated by bagpipes. One of my mom’s friends has a little boy who loves them, so his birthday gift from me was piping at his house!”

Ewing believes that education and community outreach are key to keeping the tradition alive. “I would love to see a booth at Highland Games that would give people - especially kids - the chance to talk to pipers, ask questions, try out a chanter, and learn how to get lessons.”

He supports outreach through his band by inviting schools in the area to try piping, and he also celebrates the efforts of the newly formed Ontario Youth Band, introduced as “The future of piping.”

Ewing remains hopeful. “Piping has gotten me attention and opportunities that a lot of people my age might never dream of.” Just as importantly, he adds, it is “a great way to show the world that piping isn’t just for old people.”

Indeed, it is not. It is likely that Ewing’s enthusiasm and music will remain when he has reached a ripe old age himself.

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Jonathan Moorman



Although an accomplished fiddler and headlining the Celtic punk rock band The Bedlam Boys, Montreal-based musician Jonathan Moorman's gift of trad wasn't inherited in the hereditary sense.

"My dad is English and Italian, my mother is half American, half Canadian, and I was born in London," reports Moorman. "So, no Celtic blood to speak of!"

What he lacks in blood, he makes up for in how the love of the music flows through his veins; in his case, it was just a matter of nurture over nature.

"My family is very musical, and my dad was always playing Irish folk music around the house when we were growing up, so it got into my DNA somehow. I started playing classical violin at the age of six and began learning folk music at 18, so it's been a year or two now," he jokes.

"When I moved to Montréal from Victoria, BC, in 1994, I started hanging around Irish pubs, and soon realized that I could play the music I was hearing on my violin. A major inspiration for me was the fiddler Gerry O'Neill and his partner Brendan Nolan, who used to perform regularly at The Old Dublin Pub. Once I started playing the music, I was absolutely hooked, and it didn't take long for me to be performing in pubs myself.

“The real reason behind it all is simply my love of the music...”

Moorman has made a quarter-century career out of playing across the Montreal pub scene, and that acoustic environment has cultivated a fiddle style that, Moorman admits, is something rather acutely Canadian.

"Because of my classical training, and the fact that I learned to play in Montréal, my playing isn't particularly 'traditional' in the sense that I don't really adhere to one particular style. Most naturally, my sound tends towards a mix of Québécois and Cape Breton styles, but I can sound pretty Irish if I need to as well. A lot of Montréal players like me grew up in the pub scene, and we all play fast tunes in a style that is more 'Canadian' than anything else. Lots of fast bow work and double-stops."

Moorman knows how fortunate he was to be able to take flight with the fiddle from a warm, culturally nurturing nest like Montreal, but he's also adamant that much more can be done to encourage other fledgling artists in the province who just need to find their wings.

"I believe that here in Québec, the government should fund traditional culture more actively. Québec's traditions are an important part of Celtic culture, and sadly, they are not being supported the way traditional culture is supported in European countries. There are so many fantastic musicians, dancers, and artists here, and it's often hard for projects to find the financial support they need to get off the ground."

Eventually, Moorman's musical acumen

expanded to include career highlights that go beyond the local pub scene.

"I've had the incredibly good fortune to tour internationally with various groups, which has certainly been a highlight. Playing Québec City's Plains of Abraham in front of 100,000 people on the largest outdoor stage in Canada was a pretty big thrill, as was touring Canada and the U.S. with John McDermott; playing in some of Canada's most renowned theatres will always be a fantastic memory.

"A week-long recording session at Ocean Way studio in Nashville; jamming by candlelight at a backyard barbecue in Romania with a bunch of Roma folk musicians; playing the Celtica festival in Italy's Aoste Valley at the foot of Mont Blanc...the list is too long to record here, but I have been very fortunate to travel as much as I have done."

Most recently, Moorman has moored his sonic sails to his band, The Bedlam Boys.

"My plans for this year revolve primarily around the band - we're in our second year of life, and we are already getting pretty active on the festival circuit with many shows booked for this summer. And I have an album's worth of material ready to be recorded, so hopefully that will materialize later this year also. If that wasn't enough, I'll be one of the featured musicians on a bus tour of Ireland.

"Of course, I'm sure I'll have the chance to play a few pub gigs along the way..."

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Christie Glover

Although Christie Glover has been dancing for decades, she began her journey with Irish dance much more recently. Glover grew up with ballet, jazz, and tap dancing, and eventually took to Irish dance as an adult.

“Irish dance is precise, musical, and deeply rhythmic,” explains Glover via email. “It offers a strong sense of identity and belonging.”

Based in Ottawa, Ontario, she notes how both her hometown and Irish ancestry have influenced her relationship to the art - and how Irish dance has developed in Canada in general.

“Here, Irish step dancing has always lived in conversation with Ottawa Valley step dancing, Highland dance and, later, ballet and athletic training. That blending is part of our cultural inheritance. Irish communities in Canada gathered through music and movement long before competitive structures existed.”

As such, dance was a large part of social events in homes and community halls. The rise of competitive Irish dance in Ottawa is relatively recent, however. Echoes of the dance’s social history reverberate through the teachings at Glover’s studio, the Ottawa Irish Dance Company. Opened in 2018, it continues to operate as a nonprofit. Although the studio offers classes for a variety of age groups, Glover specifically hoped to fill the gap in resources for adult dancers. As someone who took to the style as an adult, she knew precisely what was lacking and set out to address it.

“Adult dancers are often treated as an afterthought or are expected to fit into systems designed for children,” Glover says. Ottawa Irish Dance now has one of the largest adult programs in North America, offering classes for multiple levels of experience and a clear path to progress through the program. “Adults come to dance for many reasons, including artistic fulfillment, physical challenge, cultural connection, and community. We respect all of that.”

The school also offers classes for children as young as three. The lessons, Glover



notes, involve more than dance itself. “We teach children how to be in a class, how to listen, how to take correction, and how to work alongside others. We teach them how to pursue excellence without losing joy, how to develop self-discipline, and how to respect both tradition and themselves. Those skills stay with them whether they continue dancing or not.”

While Irish dance has leaned into the competitive side of things on an international scale, Glover wants students to see competitive dance as one potential path, rather than a necessity. Competition, she says, “can produce strong technicians. It can also narrow the definition of success.”

What’s more, it’s logistically difficult to be a competitive dancer in Canada. Unlike in Ireland and the United Kingdom, Canadian students often must travel several hours to attend a competition. This means it’s even more important for places like Ottawa Irish Dance to offer experiences outside of the competitive sphere.

“Our school focuses on values first, including strong fundamentals, musicality, enjoyment, cultural literacy, and long-term development.”

“We offer both competitive and non-competitive streams, and dancers can move between them as their goals change.”

As for Glover, her aims are more administrative, working behind-the-scenes rather than on stage. “I may not have been the greatest dancer who ever lived, but I know how to create environments where dancers can thrive. I bring in exceptional choreographers, teachers, and specialists who elevate our students and broaden their experience of Irish dance. Leadership, to me, is knowing when to step back and let others shine.”

Ottawa Irish Dance also offers workshops and guest instructors, so even students who are unable to travel can experience outside perspectives and opportunities. Performance is a significant aspect of the studio’s work as well, with its dancers taking the stage at community events, schools, and festivals in a city-wide tour every March.

“That visibility allows dancers to see themselves as artists, not only as competitors,” explains Glover. “Our long-term goal is to formalize this work into a professional touring and performance company as the school grows.”

The hope is that the studio will continue to expand, and the overall presence of Irish dance in Ottawa along with it. Music, history, and community are all pieces of the puzzle that make up this long-honoured tradition.

“It is a discipline that rewards patience, integrity, and consistency. It also connects people across generations, cultures, and skill levels in a way few art forms do.”

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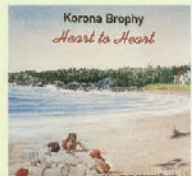



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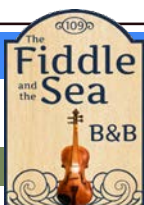
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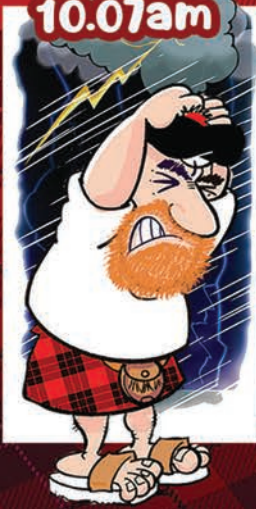
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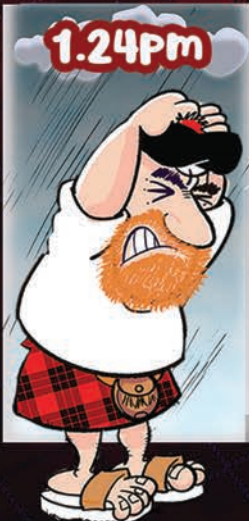
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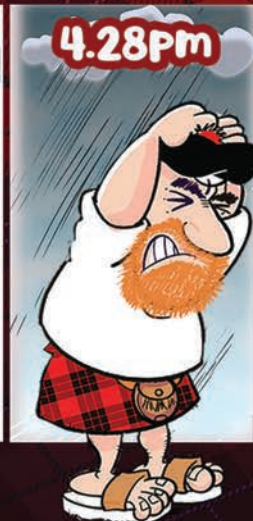
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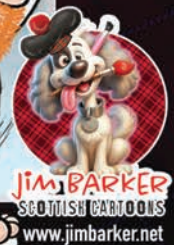
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