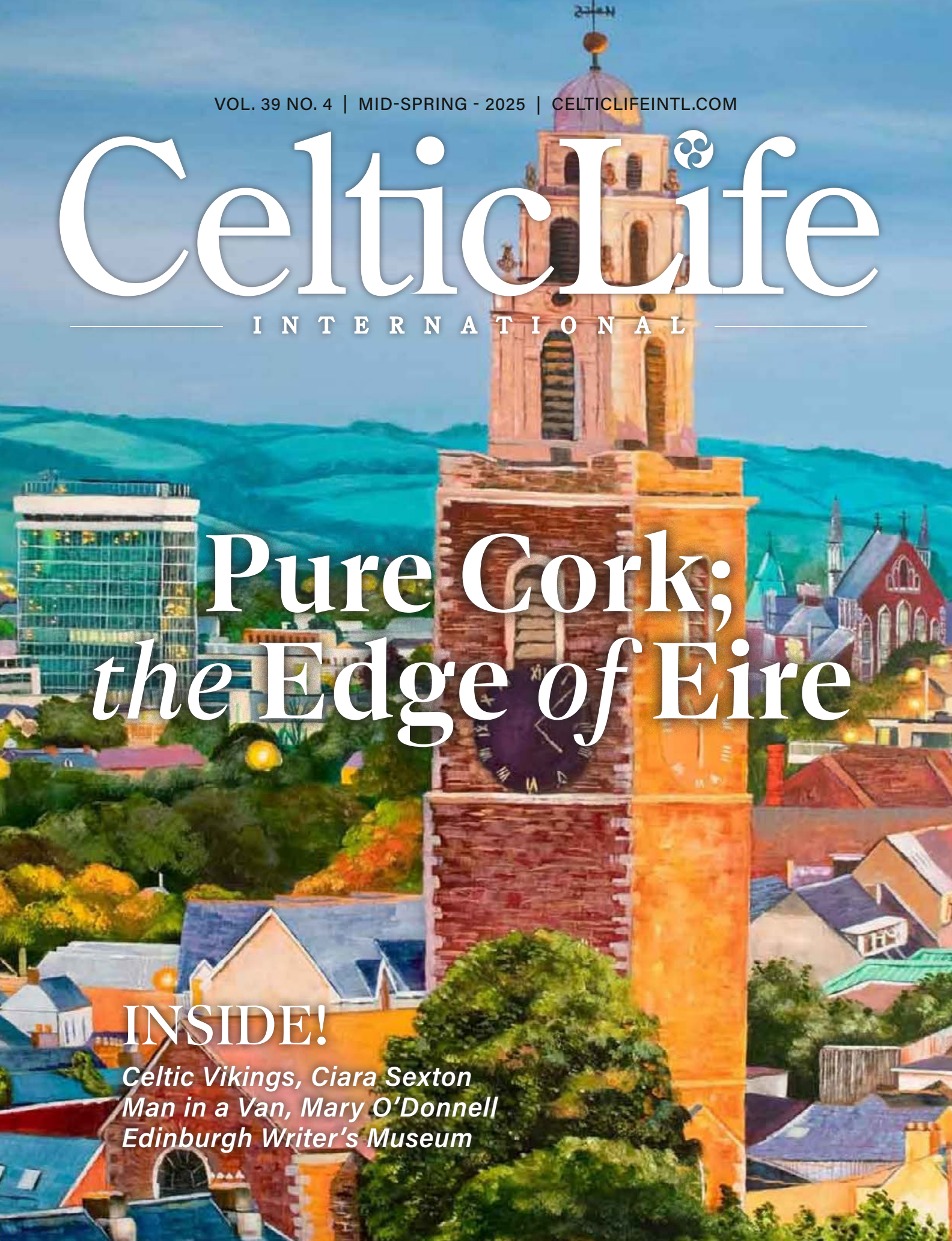
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FÁILTE

Tourists & Travellers

In his landmark travel book The Art of Pilgrimage, author Phil Cousineau suggests that there is a fundamental distinction to be made between tourists and travellers.

Tourists, he implies, look outside of themselves for fulfillment, while travellers seek an internal experience.

Tourism has gotten a bad rap in recent years; for proof, one need only look to reports out of Venice, Italy, or Barcelona, Spain, where visitors are met with a deluge of disgust and disdain, enduring insults and abuse (and water guns!) from resident nationals who - perhaps justifiably - feel overrun and overwrought.

Travellers, on the other hand, mostly go about their business without too much disruption to the lives of locals.

The ideal expedition, I have learned, requires a balance of both.

By way of example, I speak to my recent visit to Cork City on Ireland's stunning, scenic southern coast. By day, my wife Karen and I explored Eire's "real" capital; downtown shops and sites, area attractions, the waterfront district, galleries, churches, restaurants, pubs, and more. At night, often over a late dinner (and dessert!), we discussed the day's events, looking for themes and threads in an effort to capture and convey those events in a cohesive capacity. A small journal was always close at hand to document both our "outie" encounters and our "innie" responses in paragraphs, poems, lyrics, lines, etches, sketches, etc.

Over a proper pint of Beamish at a local pub, Karen noted that the words "journey" and "journal" share the same root word, "jour" - the French translation for "day". Interestingly, both bon mots speak to the immediacy of "now" and "here" - another clever bit of portmanteau; now + here = nowhere.



So, what, or where, is this "nowhere"?

As further hinted by Cousineau in The Art of Pilgrimage, travel induces a sort of spiritual alchemy, where one is transformed from the "lead" of the small self (ego) to the "gold" of the Bigger Self (higher power) - the true destination is dissolution. Suddenly, even if only for a short while, we become part of something bigger than ourselves, and we are changed forever, and for the better.

As I reviewed our journal in preparation for the writing of this issue's cover story, I came across a faint and barely-legible scribble from the trip that I have no recollection of jotting down - "Get out there to get in there!"

Stephen Patrick Clare
Spring 2025

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the Scottish Man *in a* Van



David Honeyman found himself planting roots at a young age, having helped bring his son into the world when he was just 21 years old. While he doesn't regret it, having a little lad to look after kept him from being able to sow his wild oats in his youth.

"Due to having my son when I did, I never had the chance to travel," writes Honeyman in an email exchange with Celtic Life International. "I was living with him in Dundee, until he decided to move out and stand on his own two feet."

Honeyman, now an empty-nester, came to something of a crossroad.

"I had money in the bank; I could either put it into a large deposit on a mortgage, or I could buy a van to live in and travel."

Honeyman chose the path less trodden and became a Scottish man in a van.

"As the famous Scottish proverb goes 'Be happy whilst yer livin', for yer a long time deid.'"

He keeps himself afloat by doing remote work piloting remotely-operated underwater vehicles for the energy sector. "The rest of the year, I am able to afford myself to travel without the need to work remotely."

He also happened upon a side hustle to fund his adventures.

Upon deciding to share his exploits on the road exploring his national back yard online through social media, Honeyman became "The Scottish Man in a Van," with followers joining him on his sojourn from all over the world.

"After I decided to share my story online two years ago, I have accumulated just under 500,000 followers/subscribers, which is crazy," says Honeyman, who has posted across platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube since he began his van life in 2022.

"It was certainly not something I set out to do; I only started sharing my journey online so family at home and abroad in Australia and Canada could see what I got up to. It just blew up – my travels seem to resonate with people.

"My followers come from all over the world, but mostly from the UK, Ireland, the USA, Canada, Australia, Germany, and other European countries. The feedback I've gotten from them has been very positive.

> ***"I think the risk I've taken to follow my dream is something many people want to achieve for themselves. Luckily, I have an amazing canvas in Scotland to share with the world, which helps."***

@SCOTTISHMANINAVAN

Honeyman's travels have gone farther afield than just Scotland, mind you. He and his van (aptly monikered "Skye") have trekked across the UK and parts of Europe, too. But Scotland remains closest to his heart.

"When the sun is shining in Scotland, it's difficult to beat. The people make it what it is. The character, humour, and a warm welcome for all. The history and the culture that is still kept alive in many of the remote places I visit. People say it's like going back in time in some of these places - I hope it stays that way for generations to come."

Honeyman, meanwhile, is looking forward. He already has his 2025 itinerary well-planned.

"First up is The Isle of Mull, then I'm planning to do quite a bit of hiking in Glencoe and beyond throughout May. I then plan to go back to mainland Europe in the van later in the year, possibly back to Switzerland, or the Dolomites in Italy. I loved my time there."

He sees no reason to slow down on the horizon.

"My rewards are unlimited, really. Freedom to roam wherever I please - I get a different back garden view every day - waking up next to a beautiful loch or beach in Scotland, or watching a sunset in some incredible locations. Rewards, like most things in life, are what you make of them.

"My son is doing great, he's financially secure, and I love adventuring and discovering new places. My family is hugely supportive, they love watching my journey with the rest of the world. I do think many of my friends are slightly jealous. They've got young children and wives now. I had my son when I was 21 while they were all travelling. Well, now it's my turn."

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Ciara Sexton's First Book of Irish Dance

It has been a whole decade since Celtic Life International last checked in with Ciara Sexton, professional world champion Irish dancer of Lord of the Dance fame, and it's clear she's not been sitting idle all that time.

"It's hard to believe it's been 10 years," writes Sexton in an email exchange. "I've continued performing and choreographing since then, and I became a mother to three wonderful little boys. I was a tutor and lecturer at the University of Limerick at the Irish World Academy, and I enjoyed every minute of it. I also took over a long-standing dance school, which has been both a huge responsibility and an honour. More recently, I've launched Behind the Beat, a documentary-style series that dives into the real stories behind Irish dance."

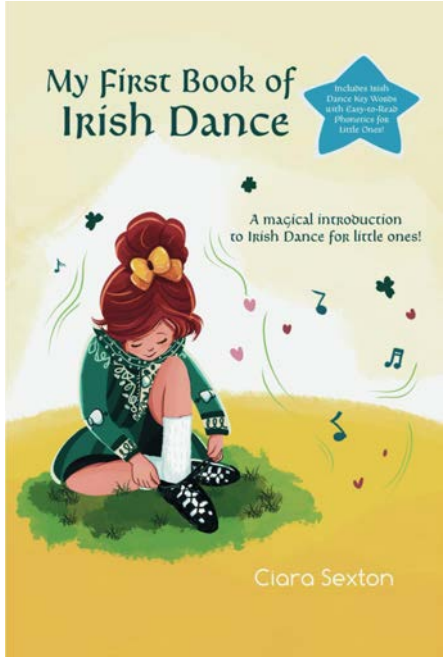
Sexton's latest endeavour, however, has transplanted her from the dance floor to the writer's desk.

"I've written and self-published my first children's picture book, something that combines my love of dance, storytelling and sparking joy in young learners."

The book, My First Book of Irish Dance, takes readers on a journey any young would-be dancer could expect to embark on themselves — their first Irish dance class.

"The idea came to me when I realized that walking into an Irish dance class can be quite a sensory overload for young children, especially since most start between the ages of three and six," Sexton explains. "I wanted to create something that could act almost like a social story, gently introducing the environment, sounds and elements of a class before a child ever sets foot in one. That way, they know what to expect and can feel more confident and excited.

"The most rewarding part has been hearing from parents and teachers who say the book has helped settle beginners and made the first steps into class a little smoother. It's been nice to know that something so simple can make a genuine difference in helping children feel more comfortable and connected from the start.





"I think the biggest challenge was keeping it truly simple. I wanted to make sure the language and visuals were clear, engaging and age-appropriate. It was also important to me that the book be culturally accurate, down to the terminology and the Irish words. I wanted it to have the feel of a real class, while still being accessible to families who might be brand new to Irish dance. Finding that balance was key."

Removing barriers to Irish dance is something of a pet cause for Sexton. She realizes that the world is moving faster than ever, and Irish dance needs to embrace different ways to engage with the youth of tomorrow or risk becoming irrelevant to them.

"The way they're engaging with Irish dance is definitely evolving. I think there's still a real love for the tradition, but younger dancers are also drawn to creativity and connection. Whether it's through social media, storytelling or mixing styles, they're finding their own way in.

"I think we could make a conscious effort to move away from the idea that competitive dance is the only meaningful path in Irish dance. The art form is so much richer than medals and scores. There are beautiful ways to explore it; through performance, choreography, education, community events, or simply for the joy of movement.

> ***"When we give young dancers permission to experience Irish dance in different ways, we open the door to deeper connection and longer-lasting involvement."***

Sexton still has lots planned for 2025, between teaching and filming more episodes of Behind the Beat. She has her writing quill at the ready, too, as her writing career definitely won't be a "one-and-done" situation.

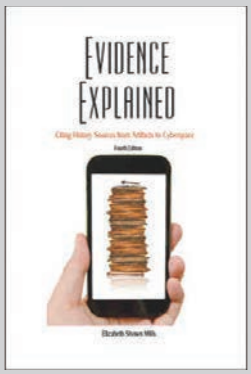
"I'm delighted with how the book has been received; the feedback has been really encouraging. Hopefully it's the first of three, but time will tell. That said, I'm working on the next book, which is currently in the planning stages. This time, I'll be collaborating with someone - I'm looking forward to sharing details on that soon. It's exciting to build on the foundation of the first book.

"Beyond that, I'm trying to find a good balance between all of it - dance, family and creative projects - as the year unfolds."

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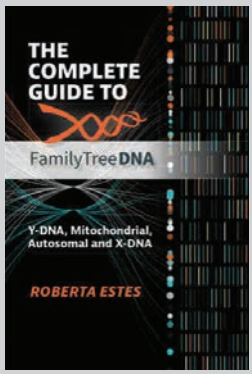
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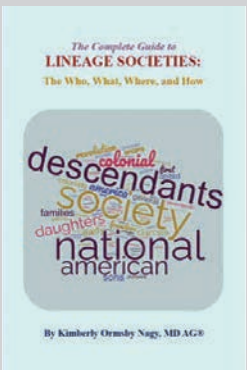
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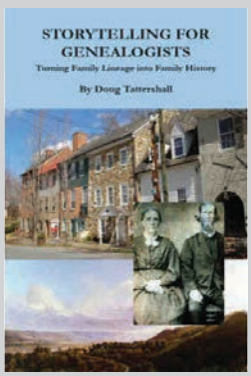
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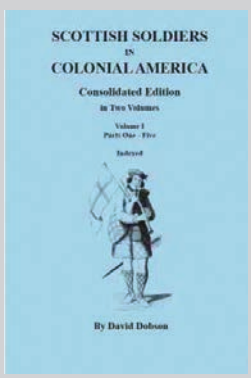
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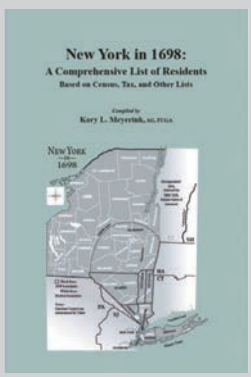
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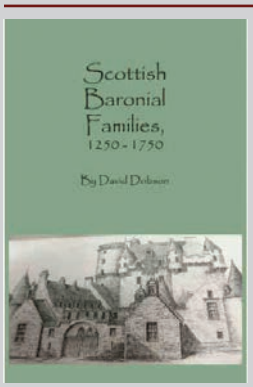
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The Writers' Museum of Edinburgh

A look at the legacies of Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson



Located off Edinburgh's famous Royal Mile, the Writers' Museum gives locals and tourists alike a glimpse into history. Its collections focus on the lives of Scotland's three most celebrated literary legends: Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson.

"They're all just supreme storytellers," says Gillian Findlay, the curatorial and engagement manager at Museums & Galleries Edinburgh. "They all, in their own ways, were able to speak with lived experience of the Scottish culture and Scottish society."

The elegant museum building with its striking stone exterior was once a 17th-century townhouse owned by Scottish noblewoman Elizabeth Dundas (a.k.a. Lady Stair). Since then, much work has been done to preserve and restore the structure, and it was eventually given to the City of Edinburgh. In 1907, Lady Stair's House became a museum of art and social history.

Over time, "the venues have become more specialized," says Findlay, noting that there are four museums along the Royal Mile and several others throughout the city. The Writers' Museum is one of the most-visited sites. Internationally and across generations, the works of Burns, Scott and Stevenson have an enduring appeal.

"In my view, you can't really understand the present until you understand the past," says Findlay. "I think, for that reason, it's important to preserve their stories, because they speak so specifically to a time and place in Scotland."

Despite its dedication to the written word, the Writers' Museum is not an archive or literary depository. "It was felt that there were other places where the works of those writers are best protected and preserved, such as the National Library of Scotland," explains Findlay.

> ***"Much of what we have is about their domestic life or the ways that they worked or the things that influenced their writing."***

The Writers' Museum has a younger demographic and tends to attract more tourists than locals. Findlay says they're working to attract more local patrons, but admits that has its challenges. The space is not designed for large numbers of people, and with its narrow staircases, it's not very physically accessible. Only about 16 people can safety fit in the museum's main hall, making it ill-suited for many events.

Those who do visit the museum, though, are in for some fascinating exhibits. Patrons will come upon artifacts such as a rocking horse that was made for a young Sir Walter Scott. "If you look very closely at the rocking horse, you can see it's been adjusted so that one of the stirrups is higher than the other," says Findlay. Due to an infection of polio that disrupted his growth, one of Scott's legs was slightly longer than the other. "I think that's really touching."

The Robert Louis Stevenson exhibit includes a wooden cabinet made by Deacon William Brodie, a respected Edinburgh businessman who maintained a secret life as a serial thief. Brodie was found out and subsequently hanged for his crimes in 1788, but his story is believed to have inspired Stevenson's novella The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (published almost a century after Brodie's death).

There are some modern additions to the museum as well. As part of a project titled "Disrupting the Narrative," four local writers of colour (Hannah Lavery, Jeda Pearl Lewis, Niall Moorjani and Shasta Ali) were invited to contribute work that responded to the Royal Mile museums through a "decolonizing lens." Some of their poems are on display at the Writers' Museum through August 2025. This is part of Museums & Galleries Edinburgh's effort to address the city's legacy of racism and slavery.

"I think it's really imperative that public bodies are actively trying to do that," says Findlay. "Not to negate the importance of our collection and writers like Burns, Scott, and Stevenson, but to make the point that this is one aspect of our literary heritage and, my goodness, there's so much more."

To be sure, these men were as complex as they are influential. Robert Burns, for instance, once accepted a job on a slave plantation in Jamaica. (Thanks to the success of his book, Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect, Burns never actually made the move.) Should Edinburgh live up to its designation as a UNESCO City of Literature, it must champion writers outside of "dead white men."

To that end, the Writers' Museum is now offering space for a pilot program specifically for contemporary women writers: the Mary Ratcliff Writer's Room residency. This paid program aims to help writers build their portfolio.

"I'm delighted that the Writers' Museum - which is this home to this important, but male-dominated, historical writing - is the place to do that," shares Findlay.

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Jean Menzies

In her latest book, Scottish author Jean Menzies puts her own spin on Arthurian legend



The Lady of the Lake focuses on Viviane, an important but mysterious character in British mythology. In the ancient tales, this "Lady of the Lake" is best known for presenting King Arthur with the sword Excalibur. "The prospect of imagining a version of Viviane in all her complexity — her upbringing and her relationships, her fears and desires — and what might make her who she is, was just an incredibly exciting one," says Menzies.

In her version of the story, Menzies depicts Viviane as a young woman who wishes to be in control of her own destiny. When Viviane's father sends her to Camelot, he hopes she will become a potential bride for the young Arthur. Viviane has little interest in the prince, however, and instead forges a bond with his sister Morgan. Together, the pair learn of their propensity for magic — and the dangers that come with it. Viviane and Morgan's dynamic eventually turns into a romantic one, complicated by their conflicting values and respective relationships with their shared mentor, Merlin.

"I think any writer who decides to tell a story based on myth and legend will find themselves constantly in conversation with the gaps and contradictions," explains Menzies. She points out that the catalogue of Arthurian legend comprises literature written in different languages, from different countries and generations. As such, there is no single "Arthurian canon." The texts aren't necessarily consistent with one another. "I wanted to write a Lady of the Lake who fit between the gaps of the medieval texts and spoke to modern readers."

That said, the fluid nature of mythology and folklore is one of the reasons it fascinates people to this day. Menzies has been drawn to such tales since childhood. "It was an interest that slowly emerged from between my love of stories and history," she recalls.

> ***"I loved listening to Scottish folktales, reading books about ancient Greek mythology, and even watching films and shows that played around with history and myth..."***

"Slowly but surely, I came to realize how myth and folklore underpinned so much of human history, and after that, there was no going back."

In addition to her written work, the author shares her interests through her YouTube channel and her podcast. "I actually started making YouTube videos when I was 20, and it was mainly to make friends," says Menzies, now 33. (It worked. Some of the friends she made through YouTube are attending her wedding this year.) "I definitely didn't expect my channel to grow to the size it has done, or to have so many wonderful opportunities thanks to the content I make online, but I can't imagine my life now if I hadn't started filming on my webcam more than a decade ago."

Today, Menzies mainly uses her YouTube channel to make accessible content on mythology, history and literature. She now has several non-fiction books under her belt, including her 2024 release, ***All the Violet Tiaras: Queering the Greek Myths.***

The Lady of the Lake is Menzies' first traditionally published novel. In her research, she drew from multiple texts of Arthurian legend, and readers will even find hints of Greek and Roman mythology in the story, too.

Le Morte d'Arthur by Thomas Mallory was one of her major sources, although Menzies notes that "everything I read influences my writing to a certain extent." She also cites New Zealand-born author Juliet Marillier as inspiration. "She writes incredible medieval historical fantasy novels, often set in Ireland with elements of Celtic folklore. I don't want to claim to compare to her wonderful work, but I do think she has had an impact on me as a writer."

Generally speaking, Menzies believes "there is a growing appetite for what we think of as Celtic folklore." For one thing, her videos on the topic are popular among viewers — both in the United Kingdom and further afield. "Sometimes it starts the most interesting conversations around the similarities and differences in myth and folklore from around the world."

Menzies says she's "always jotting down ideas" for potential novels, and she is currently working on a draft based on one of her favourite Scottish folk tales. She also has plans for a non-fiction release in 2026. She's mum on the details, however: "It's aimed at adults and it's about antiquity, but I'm not allowed to say any more!"

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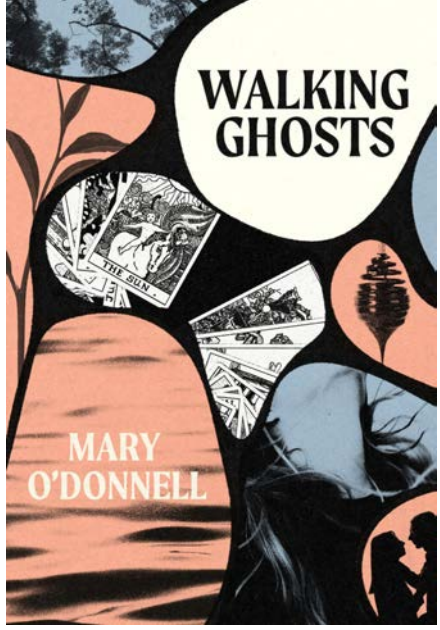
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Mary O'Donnell

A Life Poured into Words



In a publishing world often focused on trends, Mary O'Donnell stands out with the refreshing voice of authenticity and credibility. The celebrated Irish poet, novelist and short story writer speaks not from any literary ivory tower, but from years of steady cultivation of her craft and a keen observation of the human condition.

"I come from two worlds, geographically," O'Donnell begins, reflecting on her roots in North County Monaghan, close to the Northern Irish border. "Although Monaghan is in the Republic of Ireland, the influence of the North was quite strong along the border area."

It's here that her early perceptions of identity and belonging were shaped. "We were exposed to the BBC and British television when the rest of Ireland had one basic TV station in the 1960s. I didn't realize quite how much that influenced me until much later."

From an early age, O'Donnell found herself drawn to words. "I always wrote — a lot of scribbling and dabbling." Raised in bucolic surroundings and with an early love of poets like Wordsworth and Keats, her creative spark was fanned by a nurturing mother who prompted her to send off a childhood poem to publisher Paul Hamlyn. "He replied and said that they didn't have 'a niche' for me just then, but that I should keep writing. How nice of him that was!"

Though she describes herself as an "arty" child, O'Donnell was steered into strictly academic classes by the no-nonsense nuns of her school. That same early encouragement and discipline would serve her well later, not just as a writer, but as a teacher, too. "I am a good and encouraging teacher, especially with people who doubt themselves," she says. "I was full of doubts for a lot of my life, so I know what it's like."

Those doubts, paradoxically, became creative fuel. "Today I write for the same reasons I always have - because I need to."

For O'Donnell, writing is a channel through which personal pain can be transformed. "The inner life is important. For many artists, the withdrawing to create something is like a funnel for pain into which the general messiness of our world can be poured."

Her latest short story collection, Walking Ghosts, bears this mark of emotional truth.

> ***"Motivation for some of the stories has come from knocking up against difficulty."***

Whether portraying lonely people or broken relationships, she says, "there's an underpinning of loss in some of them. Perhaps, in each character I unconsciously pour parts of myself that aren't always expressed."

The collection is the result of years of steady crafting. "I'm a slow burner," O'Donnell reveals. "The current collection of 17 stories is selected from pieces written over the past 12 years."

As a poet and novelist, time for short stories often got "squeezed aside," but she relished returning to the form, reflecting on the evolution from her first collection, Strong Pagans, in 1990. "It reflects the Ireland of social and personal repression. As a young woman and a feminist, I was in a constant rage about the absence of certain private freedoms."

O'Donnell's creative process balances such social perspectives with careful refinement. "I usually start a new story in a burst, write a hurried first draft, and then put it aside." Then comes the building of structure and meaning: "A bare skeleton is good. The challenge is to check where the heart of the story will be placed, where the blood system will run, what will keep it running."

Literary influences still echo in her work. "Flannery O'Connor's short fiction has always influenced me," she says. For her, the essence of a good story lies in "revelation, illumination and perhaps various forms of justice."

O'Donnell finds that today's Ireland is an inspiring place to live and write. "Ireland always needed cracking open from its older form of homogeneity and strict Catholicism," she says. "The arts are well supported." Still, she worries about the undervaluing of the humanities. "If you don't read, how can you know anything about anything?"

For her, reading is about the expansion of mind, heart and self-awareness. Tireless and ever-vibrant, O'Donnell is set to release her 10th poetry collection, Tenderness, with Wake Forest University Press. Her agent is also working on the release of her next novel.

"It's an exciting time," she says. "I'm no longer a young woman, so it pleases me to discover my life force still burns. I hope I recognize the moment when I have no more to say."

Fortunately, that moment hasn't arrived yet, and Irish literature is better for it.

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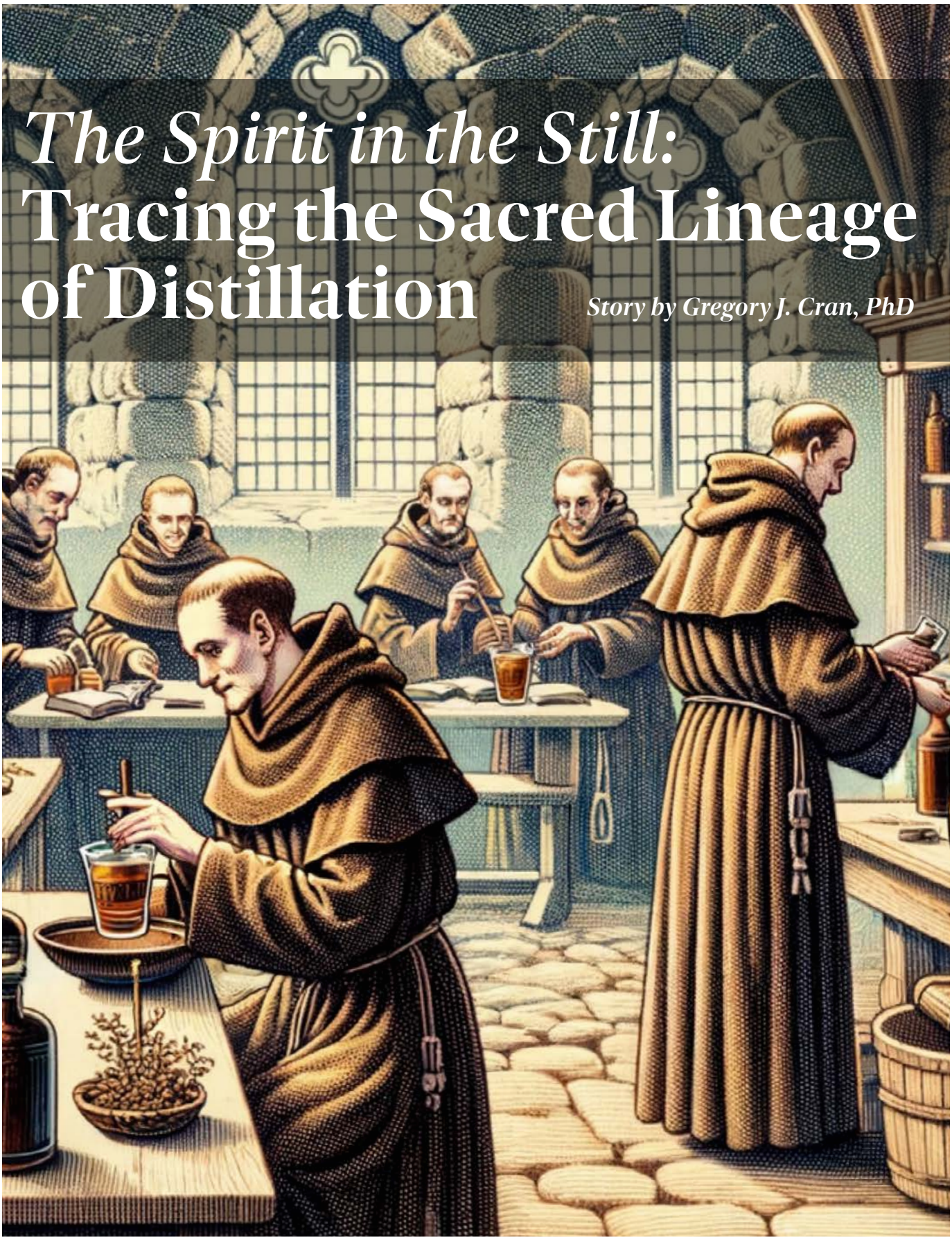
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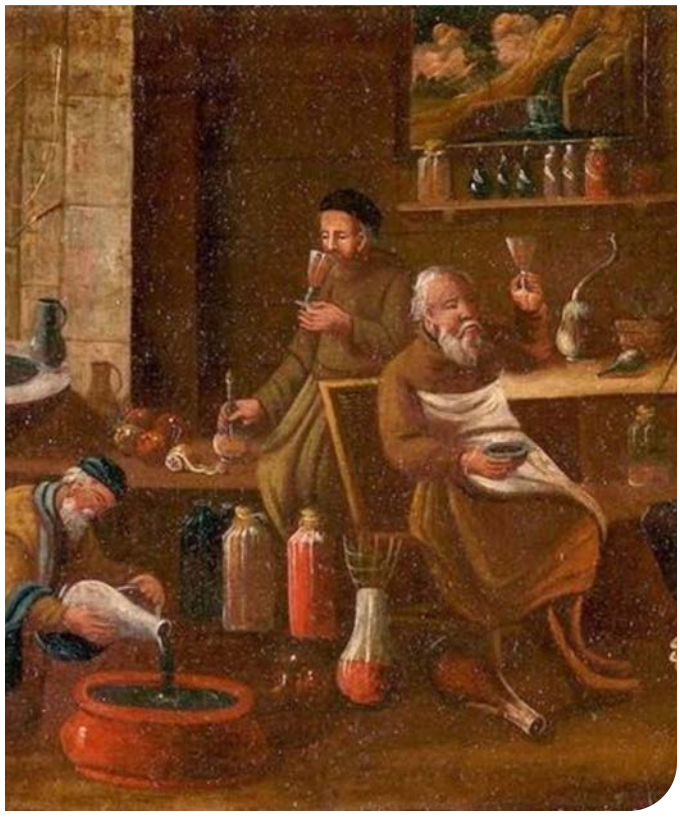
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The Spirit in the Still: Tracing the Sacred Lineage of Distillation

Story by Gregory J. Cran, PhD







In its modern form, whisky is often associated with craft, culture and celebration. But behind every dram lies a lineage that stretches across continents and centuries, a lineage that is both spiritual and scientific, sacred and sensual.

The story of distilling does not begin in Scotland or Ireland, but in the ancient and alchemical traditions of the Middle East. During the Islamic Golden Age (eighth to 13th centuries), particularly in Persia, Mesopotamia and Al-Andalus, scholars like Jabir ibn Hayyan developed early alembic stills for extracting essential oils and eventually ethanol. The Arabic word al-kuḥl, from which the English word "alcohol" is derived, originally referred to a fine powder used in medicine and cosmetics. In its early context, distillation was a tool of alchemy used to symbolize transformation, both materially and spiritually.

This knowledge entered Europe not through trade alone, but also via the Crusades, as returning soldiers and pilgrims brought back not only relics and religious impressions, but also practical insights into Eastern science and medicine. The translation of Arabic texts into Latin sparked a new wave of inquiry within monastic communities. Among the Benedictines and Cistercians, distillation was embraced as a contemplative practice, aligned with their vows of order, silence and devotion.

> ***These early spirits were not beverages but medicinal elixirs, known as aqua vitae, the "water of life" used in healing practices and spiritual rites.***

In the monastic worldview, distillation was a kind of sacred science, a disciplined, almost meditative practice that mirrored the pursuit of divine order and inner refinement.

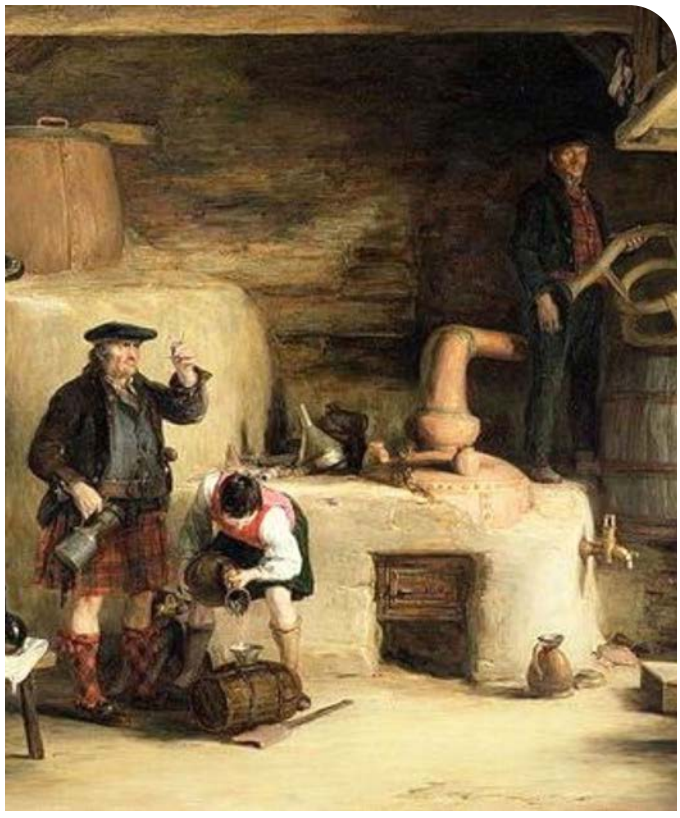
The earliest known record of whisky distillation in Scotland appears in the Exchequer Rolls of 1494, which note the supply of eight bolls of malt (equivalent to about 1,500 bottles) to Friar John Cor, a monk at Lindores Abbey in Fife, for the purpose "to make aqua vitae." Just over a decade later, in 1505, King James IV granted an exclusive licence to the newly formed Guild of Surgeon-Barbers in Edinburgh to manufacture aqua vitae, acknowledging its medicinal value.

Yet long before official records, monks had already brought their distilling knowledge from the continent to the shores of Ireland and Scotland, adapting their techniques to local conditions and grains, particularly barley. In doing so, they began the gradual transformation of a monastic remedy into a cultural tradition.

This newly created monastic tradition would be disrupted by the Reformation, spurred on by Henry VIII's break with Rome. The result was the dissolution of monasteries, friaries and nunneries across England, Ireland and Wales that inadvertently influenced the expansion of whisky distilling in Scotland, leaving unemployed monastics having to fend for themselves. Many who were displaced applied their knowledge of distilling to help generate income by secretly introducing stills into Scotland, where it took root in the hands of farmers, rebels and artisans.

Sensing the potential of the growing industry, the Scottish Parliament introduced taxes on whisky in 1644 to replenish coffers depleted by years of conflict. In response, small-scale distillers retreated to remote, rugged terrain beyond the reach of the excisemen.





What followed was a century-long game of cat-and-mouse between government regulators and the resourceful Highland communities, who viewed distilling not merely as a trade, but as an act of heritage and resistance.

Smuggling became deeply embedded in Highland culture, often aided by sympathetic landowners, clergy and entire villages.

Following the Union of the Scottish and English Parliaments in 1707, the newly formed British government intensified efforts to regulate whisky production. With excise laws poorly enforced and industrial development expanding, illicit distilling flourished, especially in the Highlands. By 1777, there were only eight licensed distilleries in the Lowlands and more than 400 illicit stills operating in the Highlands.

In an attempt to curb illegal production, the Wash Act of 1784 was passed. It aimed to stimulate legal distilling in the Highlands and reduce duties in the Lowlands and England. The Act introduced the so-called "Highland Line," dividing Scotland into two excise regions. In the Highlands, duty was charged on the still's capacity, limited to one 30-gallon still per district, while in the Lowlands, duty was levied on actual output. Highland distilling was restricted further: only one grain type grown and consumed within the parish was permitted.

After years of evasion, tension and failed reform, the government introduced the Excise Act of 1823, which legalized whisky production throughout Scotland, establishing the foundation for the modern whisky industry.

One of the more symbolic moments in whisky history occurred just a year earlier, in 1822, when Sir Walter Scott hosted King George IV, the first British monarch to visit Scotland in over 170 years. At a royal banquet, Scott, who had invited Highland chieftains in full traditional dress (to the dismay of some Lowlanders), toasted the King with an illicit Highland whisky rather than a legal Lowland one. The King was so impressed by its flavour that he requested more, only to find the supply had run dry. One year later, the Excise Act was passed, and the whisky served at that banquet became one of the first to be legally produced under the new law.

> ***"Today, whisky distillation is a blend of ancient art and modern science.***

Processes once guided by instinct, a pinch of gunpowder and the occasional prayer are now monitored by digital thermometers and chromatographs. Yet despite technological advances, many distillers continue to describe their craft in spiritual and poetic terms.

The "heart" of the distillate is often referred to as the "soul" of the spirit, believed to hold the essence of the whisky's character. Casks are said to impart their unique "personality" to the liquid, and the choice of grain contributes its own "essence," shaping the whisky's distinctive profile. This language of alchemy persists - not as superstition, but as a reverent nod to a tradition that is more than chemistry.

To distill is to transform grain into spirit. And within that transformation, a bridge is formed between past and present, between the sacred and the sensual. It is, in essence, an existential relationship between an ancient ritual and a sensory experience waiting to unfold.

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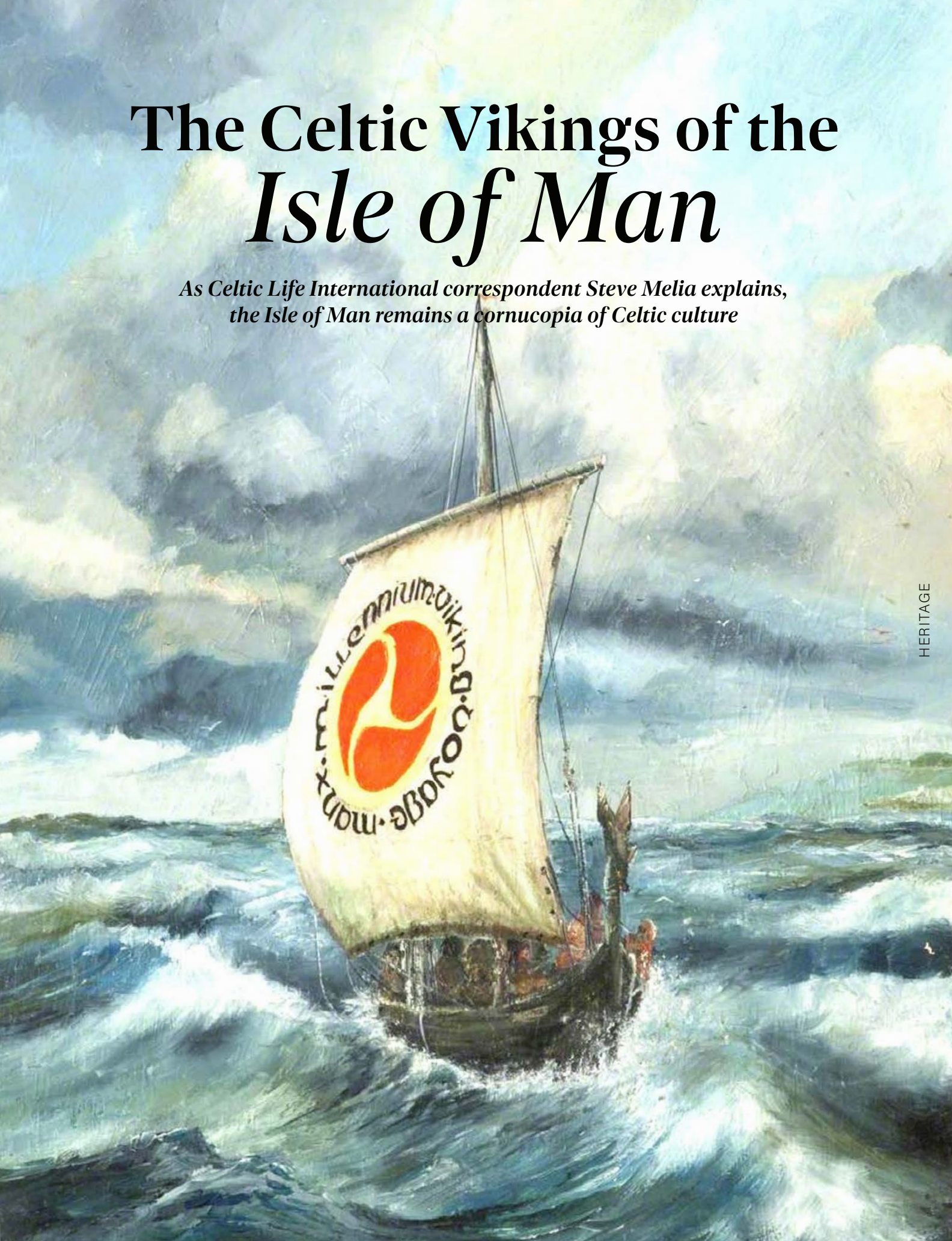
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The Celtic Vikings of the *Isle of Man*

As Celtic Life International correspondent Steve Melia explains, the Isle of Man remains a cornucopia of Celtic culture



"A Viking was a pirate until he arrived somewhere he wanted to be. And to these shores he brought his own customs, his own gods and his own lords. A way of life that was bartered in marriage with the Celt. And the blood that was mingled became Manx blood..."

This is how the Celtic god Manannan Mac Lir - played by the late Irish actor T P McKenna - introduces visitors to the House of Manannan in Peel on the Isle of Man. I had come to explore those origins, and this was a good place to start.

My wife Sara and I had arrived the night before on the ferry from Liverpool to Douglas. The Isle of Man lies roughly midway between Britain and Ireland. Douglas is its 'capital city' - stretching around the bay as far as the eye can see. When the sun rose the following morning, we saw green hills behind the hotels and guest houses on the seafront, and it felt more like its true size: of the 84,000 residents that inhabit the island, 26,000 of them live here.

Internationally, Man is represented by the U.K. government, though it is not part of the U.K. Financially, it is one of the richest places on Earth, however those statistics are misleading. As a tax haven, a lot of money flows in and out of the region, but only some of it impacts the local economy. From earliest times, Man has been forged by international movements of people, wealth, and power.

Manx National Heritage had given us Go Explore cards, which give free entry to their sites, and free public transport for five days. If you are planning to explore here, it may be worth buying one. The public transport was excellent: buses link all parts of the island from early morning to late night, seven days a week, and there are three heritage railways, powered by electricity, steam and horses. The Manx Transport app shows all its vehicles moving in real time, including an icon of a heavy horse, plodding sedately along Douglas's seafront.

Our first visit was to Peel, on the opposite coast, facing towards Ireland. Man is longer than it is wide, so the journey was quite short.

"The artefacts are in the Manx Museum in Douglas" the assistant at the House of Manannan explained. "We do the fun version here." In the foyer stands "the world's smallest car" - manufactured here in the 1960s. The centrepiece of the museum is a replica Viking ship, rowed from Norway to Man in 1979, to celebrate 1000 years of the Tynwald, the oldest continuous parliament in the world. In between, Manannan guides guests through the early history of the island – as much as is known, because there are many gaps. One of those gaps relates to language; the earliest settlers, we believe, spoke Brythonic, the Celtic language which morphed into modern Welsh. What became of them is unknown; later arrivals from Ireland spoke Gaelic. Modern Manx, which is spoken (alongside English) by about 2000 people today, is a form of Gaelic, but did it survive the Viking Age, or was it reintroduced later? Linguists and historians remain uncertain.



Allison Fox and Andrew Johnson beside Viking Age crosses in Manx Museum



Sara with the Peel Trident - the World's Smallest Car

> ***"The Vikings who invaded Man from about 800 AD built the castles you still see here today, but their language left little trace.***

A reconstruction of a Viking Age family illustrated one possible reason for that: a Viking husband bickers with his Gaelic wife, like a modern couple, complaining that their children don't understand his language. "Well, you should speak to them more," she says, teasingly. Remember that cuddly domestic scene when I pick up the story again in the Manx Museum.

The main attraction in Peel is the castle on St Patrick's Isle, overlooking the bay. Viewed from the beachfront, it looks entirely intact but inside is a mixture of standing walls and ruins. The earliest surviving parts were built in the 12th century, a few decades after the Vikings created the Kingdom of Man and the Isles, incorporating the Hebrides, off the West Coast of Scotland. In one corner of the site stand the remains of a Viking Age cathedral, with a dark, dank crypt, used to incarcerate sinners against ecclesiastical law until as recently as 1780.

Archaeologists have made some significant discoveries here, including the 'Pagan Lady' I would meet in the Manx Museum. They have also found traces of an Iron Age settlement and an early Celtic keeill, or chapel, but no structure from those earlier times remains visible today. Across the island, all that remains above the ground are earthworks and a few uncovered foundations.

The next morning, I met Allison Fox and Andrew Johnson, archaeologists and curators, in the Manx Museum. They have written a Guide to the Archaeological Sites of the Isle of Man - 82 of them in all. They showed me around the Celtic and Viking collections, explaining what is known and where there are gaps, particularly in the Iron Age, which lasted longer here as there was no Roman conquest.

Carved stone slabs and crosses are particularly important here. The museum has several, and many others can be found in churches or churchyards across the island. Before the Vikings converted to Christianity and established monasteries, they provide the only surviving written record of Man. Johnson points to one of the crosses, which bears a key piece of evidence on that disputed question about the Manx language:

"This one dates back to the 7th century. That name, Maqleog, is an early Gaelic form of 'Clague', a surname unique to the Isle of Man. That suggests continuity of the Gaelic language since before the Vikings, though it doesn't prove it."

Fox guided me through the Viking excavations, including the Pagan Lady, with her necklace of glass, jet and amber beads, and an iron rod associated with leaders of pagan

rituals. A chieftain buried in his ship was discovered on top of older, simpler, Christian graves. Were the Vikings trying to show, "we are in charge now", or were they trying to say, "we are part of this community"?

Two of the finds were silver ingots - jewellery and coins from surrounding countries. Fox smiled and said: "we were an offshore financial centre, even in the Viking Age."

The next grave reminded me of that domestic scene at the House of Manannan, with its message of peaceful integration. Here, a wealthy Viking man had been buried with a young woman: a loved one or a slave? Someone had killed her by slicing her skull with a sword, then added her remains to the butchered animals who would accompany him in the afterlife - so not so peaceful for everyone!

The next morning, we took the electric tramway to Maughold, near the northwest coast. The 130-year-old narrow-gauge trams trundle along at 24km/h, or slower, which was ideal for admiring the views. If you're not into climbing rocky paths, this is the best way to see the coast.

> ***We were unusually lucky with six days of unbroken sunshine, and the rocky coastline was gleaming yellow with gorse in flower.***

Kirk Maughold is one of the most important ancient sites on Man, not that you would notice if you were passing by. It looks like any other quiet country church, its Viking Age stonework covered by more recent rendering. Saint Maughold was a missionary from Ireland, who was cast to sea in a coracle with no oars, according to legend, and landed on Man, to start a monastery here, two centuries before the Vikings arrived. The foundations of three small keeills used by the monks can still be found between the gravestones in the churchyard.

Opposite the church stands a three-sided shelter, open at the front, containing dozens of stone slabs, crosses and fragments, some from the Viking Age, others even earlier. Some display a fusion of Celtic and Norse styles. There are some familiar patterns and strange stylized images of people and beasts. Time and the weather have eroded most of them, so you have to look closely to make out a Viking longship or the shapeshifting Norse god Ótr, in his guise as an otter, eating a fish.

From Maughold, we walked 8km along the coast to Ramsey, the second largest town. The Manx coastline is still wild in places, with strange rock formations, and teeming with wildlife. Choughs are the emblem of Cornwall, although they are rare today. Here, they were abundant. I never got to see the basking sharks or porpoises, which sometimes surface around this coast, but I did see a family of harbour seals, later that week, including a mother with her pup. The haze of the morning had cleared, revealing the coast of Galloway in Scotland, from where invaders sailed to attack the island on several occasions, during and after the Viking Age.

The Shennaghys Jiu festival of music and dance was running in Ramsey that weekend. Local groups, including children, performed alongside artists invited from across the Celtic world. We learned the difference between an Irish jig and a Manx slip jig (different musical times) and danced Fez-Noz style to Loïc Heurteaut from Bretagne.

A steam railway links Douglas to the south of the island. These trains are faster, reaching the dizzying speed of 46km/h. Our first stop was Ballasalla, home of Rushen Abbey. In 1134, King Olaf Godresson invited monks from Cumbria to establish a monastery here, which would gradually replace Maughold and Peel as the centre of ecclesiastical power. We know this, because Rushen's monks wrote the Chronicles of Mann, the principal source for early Manx history ever since.

You enter through a small interpretation centre to reach the gardens and ruined buildings which remain today. Most of the display concerns the life of Cistercian monks, who followed the rigorous teachings of St Benedict. Their vow of silence could only be broken for "essential conversation" in the parlour and underwear was only allowed when travelling. The Abbot was Deputy Governor of the island and held power of life and death over the inhabitants of abbey lands.

Our next stop was Castletown, and Castle Rushen, which overlooks its harbour. Unlike Peel Castle and the abbey, its walls remain intact. The earliest parts were built towards the end of the 12th century, a few decades after Peel, which it eventually replaced as the royal centre. Inside was a labyrinth



Steve inside Peel Castle

of small rooms and spiral staircases, leading to the rooftop, with battlements facing in all directions, over the harbour, south to the smaller island known as the Calf of Man, inland to Snaefell mountain and outwards to the Irish Sea.

Castletown remained the capital of Man through several changes of political control, from an independent kingdom, to rule by the Kings of Scotland, to a feudal possession of the English crown. A guided tour of the Old House of Keys, which stands beside the castle, brought the story up to date. The House of Keys is the Manx parliament, which was a self-selecting clique until they voted in 1866 to take the first steps towards democracy. Fifteen years later, the Keys became the first national parliament in the world to grant the vote to women. Today, the island effectively governs itself.

Towards the end of our stay, I was reminded of where we began, with Manannan's story of two peoples mingling. How that process really worked, we may never know, but a long-running genetic study, the Manx Y-DNA Project, has revealed some more. A quarter of volunteers with uniquely Manx surnames had Scandinavian male ancestors, with the rest, including the Clagues - classified as "Celtic" - from Ireland or Britain, in the distant past.

Several people told me how the revival of the Manx language and culture has been deliberately inclusive - anyone living there is welcome to join in. Watching the children of recent immigrants dancing the traditional Manx dances at Shennaghys Jiu, I realized that - through all that history of invasion, conquest and peaceful migration - the Celtic identity of Man has endured.

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Pure Cork; *the* Edge *of* Eire

Story by Stephen Patrick Clare and Karen Elizabeth Myatt

"Welcome to Cork City," says our taxi driver John as he picks up my wife Karen and I at the train station after an easy and scenic three-hour ride south from Dublin. "Is this your first visit here?"

As John places our baggage in the "boot" of the cab, I reply that while I have visited Ireland many times over the years I have never been to Cork.

What followed was a bit of classic Irish banter.

John asks if I have ever visited Blarney Castle to kiss its infamous Stone. A bit sheepishly I admit that I have.

"Ah, so you've been to Cork then," he says matter-of-factly.

"First time," I answer, a little confused.

"Have you been to Cobh?" he queries, referring to a nearby community best known as the final port of call for the ill-fated Titanic.

"Yes, it's quite stunning," I share, still wondering where the conversation is going.

"Well, you've definitely been to Cork then," he responds with a smirk, before noting the importance of differentiating between Cork the county and Cork the city.

"Ok, just so we're clear," he concludes as he weaves through traffic, "you are now in both Cork City and County Cork."

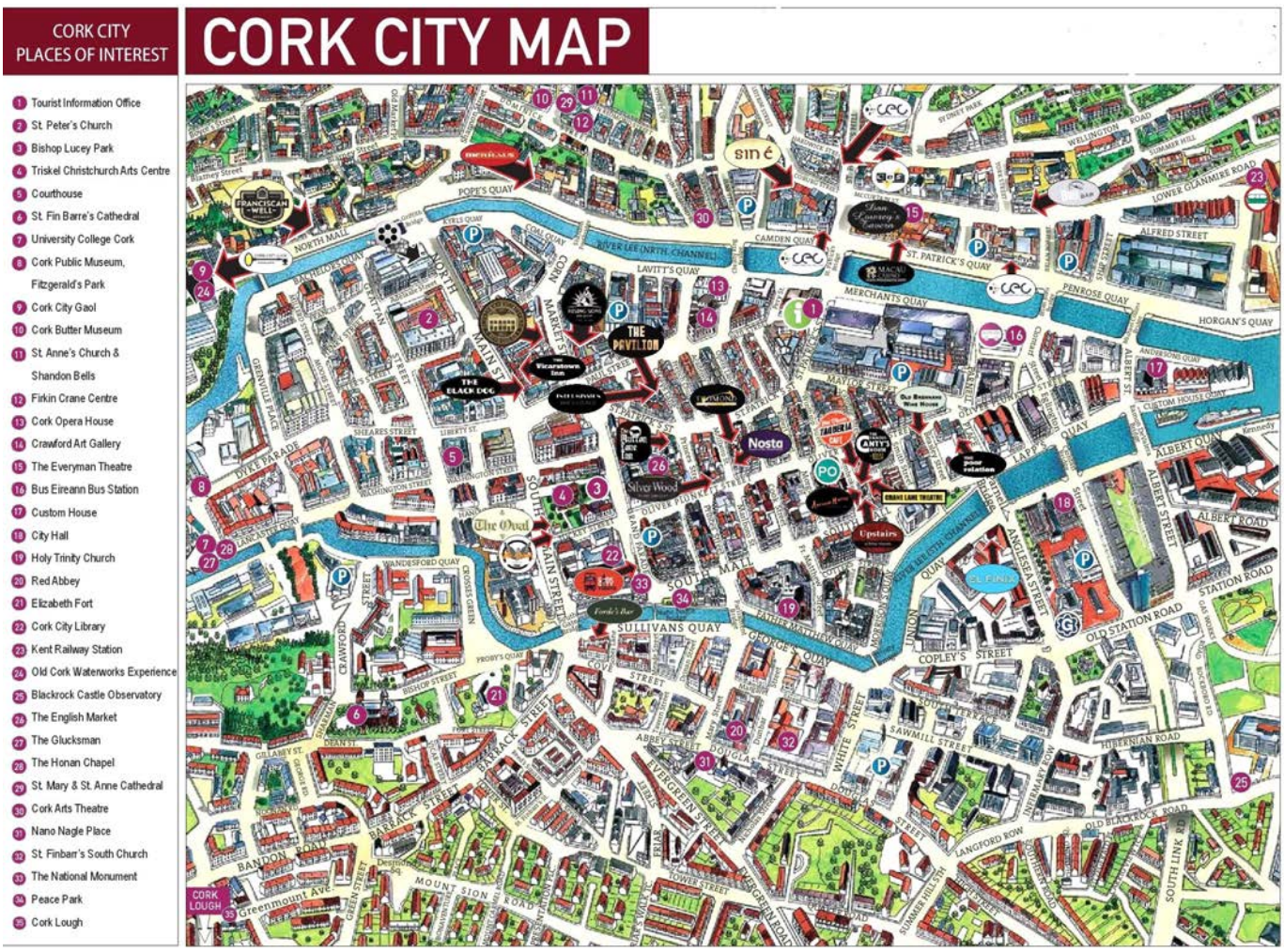
Ironically, it turns out that John is originally from Dublin.

"I moved down here about 25 years ago," he shares from the front seat. "I got fed up with Dublin - it got too big and too expensive too fast during the 'Celtic Tiger' years (1995-2007). Prices started going way up, especially in the housing market. Life here is more affordable, and more authentic."

The relationship between Cork City and Dublin is complicated; not unlike the rivalries between Glasgow and Edinburgh, or Boston and New York City, or Montreal and Toronto, Cork City has stood in the shadow of its "big brother" for generations.

As such, comparisons and contrasts to Ireland's capital are as commonplace to Corkonians as the rain.

"Mostly, it's just good craic," shares 66-year-old Raymond Murphy, a life-long resident of Cork City whose family roots go back in the area for hundreds of years. "We take the piss out of 'Dubs' for all the usual stuff that folks bicker about - sports teams, politics, who's got the better food or the best pint. But we know how to put them in their place when they put on 'airs' - or, as we say




Fianait O'Donoghue

here, when they've 'notions' about themselves. It's not like we get into these massive donnybrooks or anything, no, no - it's all clean fun; a few jokes at the pub, that sort of thing. We've no chip on our shoulders here."

Murphy may downplay the contention, but - like many of his fellow "Leesiders" - there is a slight hint of something simmering just below the surface of his stance. It isn't hostility, or resentment, or jealousy, or envy, but rather more like hometown pride.

"Dublin is no longer an Irish city," he continues, "it has become an international city, corporate and a bit generic - you've all the big-name companies and the big brands there. I mean, it really could be anywhere. You can't say that about this place: Cork City is Cork City - we make no excuses or apologies - and there is no other place like it in the world. So, which is the real capital?"

For those unaware, the Dublin/Cork City capital debate is a "thing."

"Cork City is the real capital of Ireland," boasts local guide and actor Angela Newman.

> ***"It's called The Rebel City for a reason; given our history of resistance to oppression over the centuries, we are the stronghold of Irish identity."***

Indeed, the list of prominent people from Cork (both city and county) includes an array of artists and activists, including - perhaps most notably - Michael Collins, the revolutionary politician and military leader who led the Irish independence movement in the 1920s.

"We're different here, that's for sure," laughs Newman, whose own family have been involved with the area's arts scene for several generations. "We've always had a bit of an edginess to us.

"I've nothing against Dubs, don't get me wrong, but I'd say that Corkonians are more down-to-earth; grittier, quirkier, maybe more eccentric or creative - call it what you will. We're a bit like what alternative music is to pop music - a little rawer and rougher around the edges. That's really what we mean by when we say we are the 'Real' capital of Ireland - people here are real. And most of us aren't afraid to make a point of it."

Dominic Moore fits that bill.

A longtime guide at Cork City's renowned Butter Museum, Moore has met his fair share of curious lard-lovers over the years.

"I am a humanist," he states out-of-the-blue after introductions, before elaborating, "I believe in critical thinking and the possibilities of human potential. I'm not into AI or algorithms, and I've no time for the hocus-pocus of religion."

After 15 minutes of intense discussion on the role of science and spirituality in modern society, the tour seems almost like an absurd afterthought - except that it isn't; in fact, The Butter Museum offers invaluable insight into the vital role the dairy industry played in the area's evolution. More than a mere lesson in history, however, the archive is a reminder that the region's residents were, and remain, both resolved and resourceful.

That ability to adapt is alive and well at St. Anne's Church in Shandon - Cork City's oldest, and now most bohemian neighbourhood - where the building's four-clock tower and bells still run and ring.

Described as "the most important ecclesiastical structure of any period, within the city of Cork and its immediate environs, it is also one of the most important early 18th century churches in Ireland and one of a small number which still retains their original 18th century bells," St. Anne's has been serving the faithful since 1722.

"Well, we certainly don't get the crowds like we used to," admits manager Marisa O'Mahoney. "Most Sundays, we'll have around 30 people, as attendance really dropped off during and after the COVID-19 pandemic."


Reverend Meghan Farr

To atone for that decline in numbers, the church now offers options.

"Obviously, the bells are a big reason why people visit us," notes O'Mahoney. "You can go right up the tower, pull the cords, and the ringing will resonate across the neighbourhood and beyond. And the views atop the tower itself are spectacular."

In addition to the alternate activities, a fresh face of faith has breathed new life into the aging edifice.

"The Reverend Meghan Farr and her family relocated from the USA only three or four years ago," explains O'Mahoney. "She has brought many inclusive ideas to the church, including opening up the space to the community for events and welcoming people of other faiths and denominations."

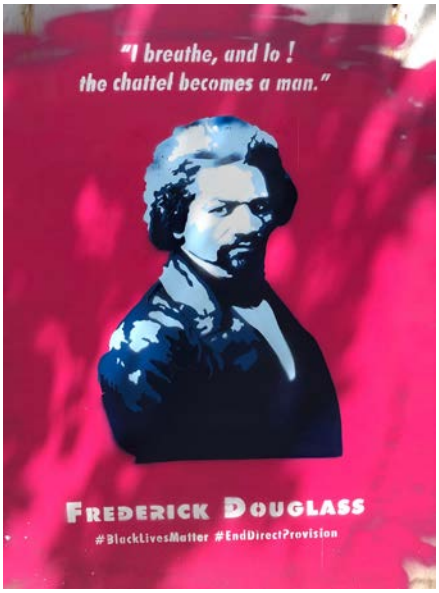
One of Farr's initiatives has been a weekly "Pastoral Pints" session at a local pub, where she meets with those looking for more from their inner lives or who simply want to spin a yarn or two.

O'Mahoney smiles again, before adding,

> ***"Whatever gets them through the door. And in Cork City, nothing gets us through the door faster than the promise of a proper pint."***

Nearby, proper pints are the plat-du-jour at the funky Franciscan Well Brewery and Bar, where craft beer is served up to thirsty hipsters.

"We get people of all ages," notes Fianait O'Donoghue, the venue's Marketing Manager and Tour Guide, while showcasing



the vast array of vats, gauges, and pipes on the premises, which is - as the name implies - a former monastery. "A lot of our regulars come for the wood-fired pizza, which is the best in the city, and maybe in the whole country."

These days, the company caters more and more to younger crowds, especially those with an interest in the culture of craft beer.

"They are quite knowledgeable about the IPA industry," continues O'Donoghue, "except that they don't drink with the same wild abandon that previous generations did; they are more moderate, and many of them drink .0% or other non-alcoholic alternatives like Kombucha. It's a change of headspace from previous generations."

Nowhere is that evolution as evident as with Cork City's LGBTI+ community.

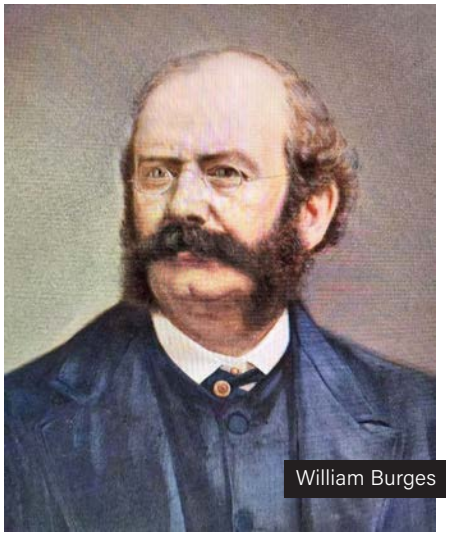
"Oh, I don't even have a coming-out story," smiles Konrad Im, manager of Gay Project, a non-profit organization that provides information and support for the city's LGBTI+ community. "I never made any excuses or tried to explain who or what I am - I just am who I am, and I have always been that way.

"Coming out stories, while still important, are not really what they once were," confides Im. "Thankfully, the stigma surrounding Queer culture isn't what it once was and I'm happy to say that, nowadays, many of the gays, lesbians, and trans under the age of 25 here are quite comfortable in their own skin - most of them simply don't give a shit what others think. And not giving a shit about what others think is a very Cork City thing."

Interestingly, despite past struggles and the always-present challenges facing Im and his peers, that live-and-let-live philosophy might be rooted in history.

Originally built in the 17th century, Saint Fin Barre's Cathedral (called "one of the most coherent expressions of Victorian church architecture in Western Europe") endured a cycle of demolition and reconstruction for close to 200 years.

"In the 1860s, a young Englishman named William Burges was awarded the commission to redesign the church," notes the facility's tour guide Stewart Dorney. "He had a passion for neo-Gothic design, and the decor here reflects that influence."


William Burges

Also on display, albeit devilishly hidden in the details, are reflections of Burges' unique personality.

"There is no doubt that his rather eccentric nature is very much a part of the building's motif," shares Dorney. "He was homosexual, enjoyed his opium and his wine, and had quite an active imagination. He was as much an artist as architect."

Evidence of Burges' unusual approach are hidden in plain sight; upside down figures carved into stone, glaring gargoyles, the 12 astrological signs subtly woven into the stained-glass windows depicting the 12 stations of the cross, and - perhaps most bizarre - a bas-relief of two frogs shaving one another.


Izz Cafe

"We're still trying to figure that one out," chuckles Dorney. "Burges certainly saw the world a little differently - and, in that regard - he likely felt right at home here."

Another historical figure also found Cork City to be welcoming - American abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who visited in 1845 on his European anti-slavery tour. Today, variations of Douglass' visage are visible across the area, including at the Imperial Hotel where he delivered his notable speech "American Prejudice Against Colour" and where the lounge is named in his honour.

Unbeknownst to Douglass at the time, he may very well have set a socio-cultural precedent.

Local walking guide Gerard (who goes by first name only) of Cork City Ramble holds court as we tour an array of inner-city attractions, including Patrick Street, the Crawford Art Gallery, Rory Gallagher Place, the Grand Parade, and the Huguenot Cemetery.

> ***"The ideas of freedom and of equal rights and of resistance to oppression that Douglass addressed during his visit here are a big part of why we are so open to immigration today..."***


Nano Nagle

As if on cue, we pass by the world-renowned English Market, where sights, sounds and scents from other countries and cultures are equally at home alongside stalls showcasing locally-sourced fish, cheese, meat, vegetables, fruit, honey, and more.

"We're no longer just meat and potatoes, bread and butter people anymore," he continues, pointing to a number of Middle-Eastern, Indian, Asian, African, and European food spots. "We've expanded our palate, and we're the wiser - if not the wider - because of it."

It's easy to understand why Corkonians are, um, expanding - the city is quickly becoming a food mecca, with several Michelin-starred restaurants, a strong commitment to sourcing local produce, and a growing variety of international dining options.

One of those options, the Izz Café, serves up heaping platefuls of authentic Palestinian delights, including Haloumi, Musakhan, Fateera, Manooshet, and more.

"Along with serving incredible food, Izz is an example of our sense of inclusivity," says local food guide Laura Creedon, who has witnessed an explosion of eateries across the city over the past decade.

"When people relocate here from other parts of the world they aren't asked to conform to some sort of cookie-cutter culture, because, quite frankly, there isn't one here. So, instead of being thrown into a melting pot of gentrified Irishness - like, say, in Dublin, where they have recently had a number of anti-immigration protests - those new to Cork City are encouraged to keep their distinct cultural identity, which eventually weaves its way into a more colourful, and flavourful, mosaic. There is literally room for everyone at the table, and I am excited by the possibilities - especially when it comes to food!

"And people here, especially young people, find that sense of inclusivity quite appetizing at a time when global powers seem hell-bent on dividing us through fear."

Nearby, the Nano Nagle Place stands as a testament to the power of love to overcome fear. Born in 1718 in Ballygriffin, a little over 50 kilometers due west of Cork City, Nagle was (as per Wikipedia) "an Irish Catholic religious sister who served as a pioneer of Catholic education in Ireland despite legal prohibitions. She founded the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, commonly known as the Presentation Sisters, now a worldwide Catholic institute of religious women. In 2013, she was declared venerable in the Catholic Church by Pope Francis."

Known for championing the rights of the poor and the vulnerable, Nagle is today - like her Irish sister in Christ, St. Brigid - a powerful lesbian icon.

"Oh, Nano kicked ass," laughs Angela Newman. "At that time, I mean, she was the outsider of all outsiders. So, she belongs. In fact, she may have single-handedly set that bar. So that mindset - that heartset really - is part of our psyche here; it's in our soil and it's in our soul.

> ***"We've always been open to outsiders, outcasts, and underdogs – mostly because we've always felt that way ourselves."***

I quote another outsider with strong Irish roots - John Lennon; "Love is the ultimate act of rebellion..."

"Absolutely," replies Newman. "And that's what we do here. We love. And in these crazy times when we are living with so much uncertainty and fear, love places us firmly at the edge - where we like to be. Love heals, and it is real - and that is why we call Cork City the Real capital of Ireland."

Cork City ~ Fast Facts

Settled: 6th century (monastery)
City Founded: 915AD-922AD
Size: 187 km2 (72 sq mi)
Population: 224,000 (2024)
Ethnicity: Irish 84% (2024)
Religion: Catholic 78% (2024)
Demonym: Corkonian or Leesider

Cork ~ Notable Names

Michael Collins - revolutionary leader
Nano Nagle - educator
Cillian Murphy - actor
Jonathan Rhys-Meyers - actor
Graham Norton - TV personality
Frank O'Connor - author
Rory Gallagher - musician
Roy Keane - international footballer
Joe Cleary - major league baseball player
Pixie McKenna – TV personality, doctor

Transport

Cork Airport: *www.corkairport.com*
Bus: *www.buseireann.ie*
Rail: *www.irishrail.ie*

When You Go

Stay: Imperial Hotel
www.imperialhotelcork.com

Eat: Paradiso
www.paradiso.restaurant

Drink: Franciscan Well Brewery
www.franwellbar.com

Do: Everyman Theater
www.everymancork.com
Hysterical Histories
www.hysericalhistories.ie

Tours

Cork City Tours:
www.corkcitytours.com

Cork City Ramble:
www.titanic.ie/tours/cork-city-ramble-2

Cork Food Trails:
www.fabfoodtrails.ie

Cork City Gaol:
www.corkcitygaol.com



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Cruising Cork City

Cork City is yours to explore with a world-class market, historic fort and incredible food and drink to enjoy.



Cork City Gaol

The English Market

The envy of foodies throughout Ireland, the English Market has been around since 1788. Far from being English (it's named for its Protestant origins), this is the place to pick up traditional specialities like drisheen and pigs' trotters, although the 55 or so stalls also stock bread, fish, cheese and fruit and veg. The market has survived fire, civil war and an attempted name change, but it took a failed bid to replace it with a car park in the 1980s for the people of Cork to realise that their culinary capital was worth saving! Today hailed as the "best covered market in the UK and Ireland" by chef Rick Stein, the English Market is thriving. Drop in to the Farmgate Café for delicious dishes made from the market's wares.

Cork City Gaol

A mixture of grand Gothic and classical architecture, Cork City Gaol looks more like a castle than a penitentiary. But don't be fooled – these elegant walls have enclosed some of the most battle-hardened veterans of armed struggle. And not very well, either, if you consider one frosty night in 1923 when 42 prisoners tied clothes and sheets together and snuck over the walls in batches of 14, fleeing silently into the night on stockinged feet.

This was chiefly a women's prison, where many republican women were held during the War of Independence. Take a tour through the gloomy cells and corridors to be transported back to those tough and turbulent times.

Elizabeth Fort

Built almost 400 years ago, this bruiser regularly caught the eye of attacking forces, right up until the Irish Civil War of the 1920s. In fact, after the original structure took shape in 1601, locals were so worried by the potential for invasion that they destroyed it.

Bad idea: when order was restored, the people of Cork were made to rebuild it again at their own expense. The fort was re-



St Fin Barre's Cathedral

placed in 1624 and Oliver Cromwell is said to have added improvements while besieging the city, resulting in roughly what we see today. Take a stroll along the ramparts – many claim this offers the best view over Cork city.

Franciscan Well Bar and Brewery

The weight of Cork's lengthy history adds a certain richness to this city, not least of all to its strong tradition of brewing, reinvigorated today at the Franciscan Well. The brewery is named after the site itself, where a medieval Franciscan monastery once stood – complete with a healing well. While the beer brewed onsite today may not technically have curative powers, it's still pretty good! Patrons can choose from a range of specialist lager, ale, stout and wheat beers, as well as various tipples from micro-breweries all around the world. Relax with a pint in the beer garden, where live music from local musicians often fill the rafters. Cheers!

UCC Campus

There's nothing quite like a stroll through University College Cork, along the leafy banks of the River Lee. The trees adorning this verdant campus lend it a stately air; in the President's Garden, there even stands one that was brought back from the trenches of the First World War as a sapling that had sprouted in the pocket of a fallen soldier. Indoors, the award-winning Lewis Glucksman Gallery hosts regular exhibitions and continues the university's proud tradition of nurturing the visual arts. In fact, the entire campus is dotted with numerous works of sculpture, photography, print and paint.

St Fin Barre's Cathedral

Although the cathedral that stands today is a French Neo-Gothic masterpiece, this site has been used for Christian worship since Cork's patron saint Fin Barre established a monastery here in the 7th century. After numerous changes, renovations and re-builds, the current cathedral was completed in the 19th century, for the princely sum of more than £100,000 – obliterating the paltry original budget of £15,000. When you see the beautiful stained glass, ornate organ and preserved 12th century carved stone heads, you'll appreciate why. Keep a sharp eye on the angel on the cathedral's east side – local legend holds that he will blow his bugle to herald the Apocalypse!

St Anne's Church and Shandon Bells

Just how much the people of Cork love St Anne's Church becomes clear once you learn that the red sandstone and white limestone of the church's tower are said to have inspired the red and white of Cork's sporting colours. Although a church has existed here since medieval times, the one that stands tall above the city today was built in 1722.

Don't trust the clock on the tower, though – locals call it the 'four-faced liar', because the different faces each tell different times. Almost uniquely, visitors can ring the bells, but the system is automated nowadays, so you don't have to swing on a rope.

Cork Butter Museum

Cork honours its more historic tasty traditions, in particular, its past at the centre of Europe's butter trade. The Cork Butter Museum speaks to Ireland's dairy pedigree: the lush local grazing and temperate climate have long made butter, milk and cheese central to the island's fortune and this museum brings the visitor on a wholesome tour down memory lane. From the pretty labels of local creameries to an exhibition on the traditional craft of domestic butter-making, this is a delightful reminder that hearty, homely, high-quality produce will never go out of style in Cork.

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The Old World and the New through Gaelic research and learning at University College Cork

University College Cork is home to the great medieval manuscript storybook, The Book of Lismore. In University College Cork's department of Modern Irish, online education and digital research have combined to place such treasures of Irish literature and culture before an admiring world.

Over the past number of years, the Modern Irish Department has received government and private funding to conduct spectroscopic research on Ireland's magnificent heritage of ancient manuscripts. This research has helped to identify inks and pigments, material aspects such as patterns of medieval stitching and repair, and has brought to light previously hidden texts that were obscured through staining and fading. The multi-spectral research continues through a recent generous grant from the Fexco finance company.

This groundbreaking research feeds into the innovative teaching of the Irish-language scholars in University College Cork. Inaugurated in 2016, the Online MA in Gaelic Literature and Culture has enrolled and graduated students from all around the world, including famous alumni such as Rick Riordan, author of the Percy Jackson books.

This exclusively online Master's degree, taught entirely through English, offers courses in:
Gaelic Language for Beginners • Poetry & Prose • Oral Tradition and Legends • Irish Mythology • Gaelic Books and Manuscripts • Gaelic Placenames • Women's Poetry in Gaelic Society • Literature in Translation
The course is very reasonably priced and may be taken full-time (one year) or part-time (two years).
It enables students from any part of the world to take a Masters Degree in this central element of Gaelic heritage, while studying entirely at home.

In a newspaper interview, Rick Riordan remarked:
UCC's online Gaelic literature MA provided me with everything I needed. It truly is a fantastic program for anyone interested in Irish history, literature, language or mythology. UCC allowed me to immerse myself in the subject, interact with students from all around the world, and have access to the finest faculty available for Gaelic studies, all at my own pace and on my own schedule. There is no other program like it in the world, to my knowledge.



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To learn more about UCC's spectroscopic work on Irish manuscripts contact Professor Pádraig Ó Macháin (p.omachain@ucc.ie).
For the MA in Gaelic Literature and Culture contact Dr Ken Ó Donnchú (ken.odonnchu@ucc.ie) or visit: http://www.ucc.ie/en/ckd13/

Capturing Cork City

While I have travelled to Ireland on numerous occasions in recent years, I had never spent any significant time in Cork City.

Often lost on side streets and down back alleys, I found myself taken with the city's creative, quirky, gritty demeanor.

Simmering just below the surface of that edgy exterior, however, sits the soul and spirit of real people; gentle and generous, caring and kind, warm and welcoming, proud and passionate and - as they are quick to remind visitors - unpretentious.

In that regard, Cork City is indeed the "real" capital of Ireland.

Stephen Patrick Clare
Spring 2025





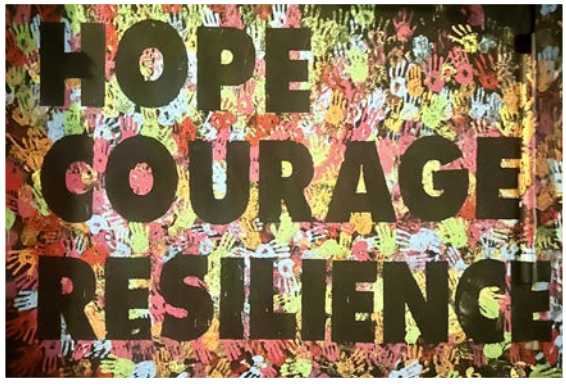









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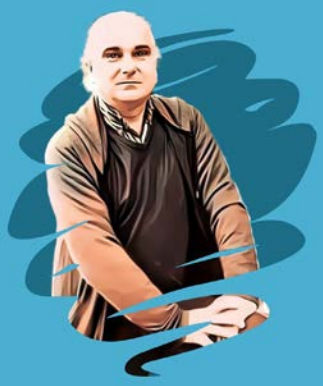














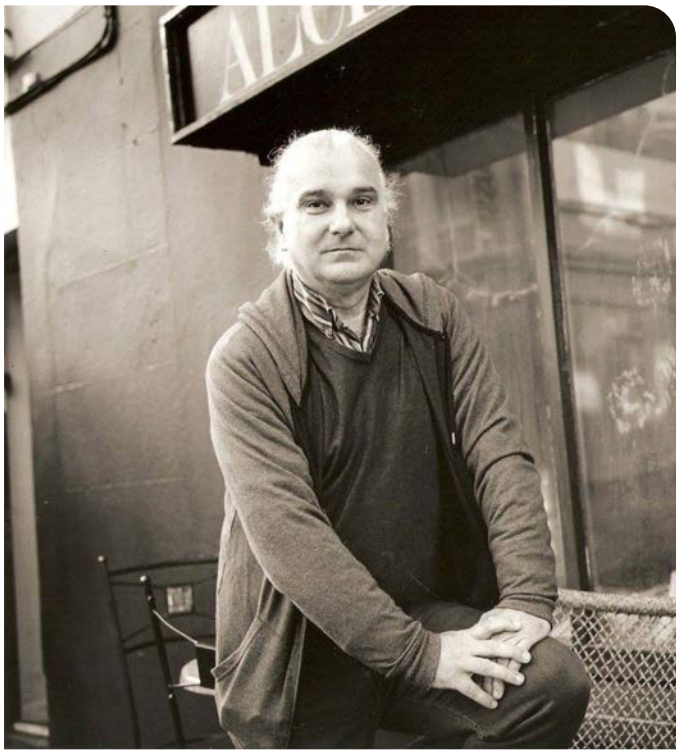



It is said that a place is not defined by its breadth, but rather by the colourful and animated people who breathe life into it.

The Character(s) of Cork





Patrick Cotter

In the quiet of Cork City, award-winning Irish poet and literary event producer Patrick Cotter steadily builds his legacy. Carving a life out of words — layered, playful and haunting — his latest collection, Quality Control at the Miracle Factory, may focus on war and bereavement, but Cotter himself is anything but grim.

"Poetry hasn't made me rich," he says with a smile in his voice, "but it has led me into a pleasant way to make a living. For most of my life, I've worked around books as a bookseller, publisher and literary event producer. Without poetry, I might have spent all my life in a factory or run off to join the French Foreign Legion."

Cotter's literary journey began with an ordinary classroom prompt at the age of nine. "Rhyme," he recalls. "I was taken by the fact that I could create something original of my own."

While it started as a form of amusement, poetry became something deeper over time. "I'm a poet because it is a vocation, a calling. Writing poetry, for better or worse, is an integral part of who I am. At this stage, I have little choice but to write."

Growing up in a working-class family in Cork, Cotter was surrounded by stories of resilience. Both grandfathers were bakers; his father, a factory worker who played skiffle music on a tea chest; and his mother, a showband singer. "Materially, my people never had more than just enough to get by," he says, but it's clear the riches of culture and expression ran deep.

Cotter's poetry has evolved in tandem with his life. "As a young man, I wrote many poems on love," he reflects. "Now aged over 60, death and mortality are elbowing themselves onto the stage." War is another recurring theme - not out of direct experience, but from a childhood steeped in televised conflict, war comics and corporal punishment. "Battlefronts have taken up much real estate in my imagination and consciousness," he explains.

For Cotter, poetry is both a battleground and a sanctuary - a space to wrestle with language, cliches and cultural decay. "Poetry is all about 'making it new,'" he says. "Half the challenge is recognizing the dead language, fossilized metaphors forever aiming to leap onto the tip of our tongues - and eliminating them ruthlessly."

But Cotter doesn't sit around waiting for lightning to strike. "My process used to rely on inspiration, and I wasted a great deal of time being patient," he admits. Now, he invokes Picasso's ethos: "Inspiration must find you working."

Drawing on the work of philosopher Iain McGilchrist, Cotter believes the creative process is deeply neurological. "The left brain dominates consciousness and thinks it knows everything," he says, "but it's the right brain, playful and free, that generates originality." He devotes time every day to cultivating the mental state that allows the right brain to roam.

Art photography often serves as Cotter's muse. "I study and meditate on an image until a weird narrative or original metaphor is prompted," he explains. Pinterest has become a digital gallery that inspires him. "Usually, the resulting poem bears a significant relevance to the world around me, but because it's not directly inspired by humdrum existence, it manages to be more insightful and interesting."

Despite "not really being a writer of place," Cotter acknowledges the influence of Ireland - and specifically Cork - on his evolution. "When I was younger, I believed I was a citizen of a non-nationalist, international youth culture," he says. But his first travels abroad helped him realize how deeply Irish he truly was, even as he bristled at the country's conservatism and clerical power structures. Now, however, he notes the transformation:

> ***"Cork has developed from the kind of place a young person of talent should get out of to one that draws creatives of every kind."***

Although writing is a solitary activity, he continues, "writers can benefit hugely from being part of a supportive community. In Cork, we have a positive community today."

This may explain Cotter's stance on the ongoing relevance of poetry itself, which he describes as a continual study of the society around us. "Poetry is needed to prompt us to question authority and not be slaves to opinion, and to analyze the language of liars and manipulators."

With Quality Control at the Miracle Factory poised for release, Cotter remains as committed as ever to the creative path and writing good poems that convey "originality of language and imagination," he says. "You cannot have empathy, feeling and intellectual stimulation without either of those."

@patrick_cotter_poet

WWW.PATRICKCOTTER.IE



The White Horse Guitar Club

Joe Philpott has continually found joy and solace in song, with a history that has taken him from the U.S. Billboard charts and making the rounds of American talk shows to finding camaraderie and community with The White Horse Guitar Club.

A Cork native and longtime troubadour of the Irish music scene, Philpott isn't just a musician. He's a soulful melody-maker and one of the founding forces behind the 11-man band that began in a pub of the same name 10 years ago.

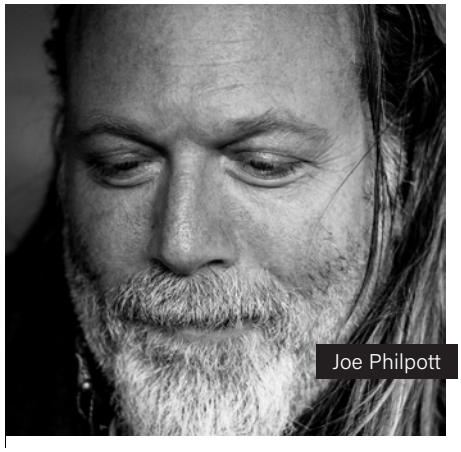
"I'm from Cork City, Ireland — a place where music isn't just culture; it's currency," Philpott explains, painting a picture of a city steeped in rhythm and rebellion. "The city gave me a sense that music could lift you out of whatever corner you were born into."

And lift him it did. In the late '80s and early '90s, Philpott came up through Cork's underground scene with the band Rubyhorse, a group that would eventually make the leap to the Billboard Top 20, chase the American dream and even share studio space with the legendary George Harrison.

"Hearing Rubyhorse's Sparkle on the radio across America, recording with George Harrison, touring coast to coast, from New York to L.A., those were peak moments," he reflects.

With the success came challenges, however. "The grind. The lack of financial security. Trying to hold onto your sense of self." Despite this, Philpott's evolution as an artist continually deepened. "I've gone from trying to break America with a rock band to quietly playing for someone in a hospital bed. That's a more lasting kind of spotlight. The ego has softened."

Philpott's initial foray into the music scene was instinctively about escape and ambition.



Joe Philpott

"Now it's about connection, healing and memories," he says. "Feet on the ground, head in the clouds" is how he characterizes his life now, dividing his time between the countryside and stages across Ireland and beyond. At 52, his voice and guitar have found new resonance through The White Horse Guitar Club, a collective of musicians who share a mission to honour song, soul and the people in the room.

"We started in The White Horse pub in Ballincollig over a decade ago. There was no master plan, just a hunger for authenticity and harmony."

From those informal pub sessions grew a group that now performs across Ireland and abroad, always carrying and communicating the raw matter of their musical roots.

The band name derives from the venue where, with a little bit of magic and myth, it all began. "It started as a gathering of like-minded men who loved music and songs with weight. The White Horse Pub gave us shelter and space. Over time, the name started to feel symbolic - like an old soul carrying a new message."

What sets the White Horse Guitar Club apart, however, isn't merely their harmonies but their mandate. "We're here to honour song and community," Philpott explains. "To bring heart, harmony and stories into the room, whether that room is a theatre, a festival field, a venue or a small town hall. It's not about perfection; it's about presence."

Philpott's framework for songwriting also reflects his respect for relevance. "A good song tells the truth - even if it's dressed up in metaphor. It doesn't try too hard. It usually has a line that makes you stop and say, 'yes. That's exactly it.'"

Predictably, such authenticity carries over into the band's live shows, with Philpott asserting that "the audience doesn't want spectacle - they want honesty. Music helps me make sense of the past and stay present in the moment. It's less about chasing something and more about offering something."

Philpott's preference for keeping it real also extends to his views on the current state of music in Ireland, which – while optimistic – references the increasingly algorithmic criterion that invariably governs the entertainment world today. "Ireland's music is rich, diverse and full of wild talent. But the industry still favours the few. There's a risk of everything becoming too polished, too predictable, and processed. The rawness, the misfits and the truth-tellers need to be protected. Thankfully, Ireland still breeds them."

Protecting their own truth-telling is part of the plan for The White Horse Guitar Club in 2025. "There's an album in the works, our first U.K. date at the Tung Auditorium in Liverpool on May 31 and a massive project yet to be announced," he reveals. "But more than anything, we want to keep the fire lit. Keep the music honest. Keep showing up."

@thewhitehorseguitarclub

WWW.WHITEHORSEGUITARCLUB.COM



Cork on a **Fork**

Cork's Culinary Celebration of Heart and Heritage

Cork may be known for its rich history, culture and charm, but its emerging claim to fame is the calibre of its culinary fare. At the centre of it all is Cork on a Fork Fest, a five-day celebration of the city's unique and ever-evolving food culture. Behind the scenes of this now iconic event is Niamh Murphy, a proud Cork native and the enthusiastic festival manager whose passion for her city and its flavours is enough to drive anyone into a food frenzy.

"I was born and reared in Cork," says Murphy with pride. That deep local connection made her a natural fit when Cork City Council launched the festival in 2022, aiming to spotlight the city as a haven for food and drink lovers. Murphy's agency, ETC (Events, Tourism & Communications), was acquired to bring the vision to life and create a dedicated food festival for the city.

"ETC specializes in the development and promotion of festivals and events," she explains. "As a proud Corkonian, I was excited to be part of something that would showcase our incredible gastronomy and attract food lovers to the city."

Three years later, the festival is thriving, with Murphy at the helm. "I oversee all aspects of programming, working closely with businesses across Cork City. The festival has gone from strength to strength, and it's an honour to continue being part of its growth."

As festival manager, Murphy's role is both broad and bustling. "In addition to programming, I handle event management and the promotion of the festival. The team at Cork City Council is fantastic; they work hand in hand with us."

While challenges may crop up, the rewards remain mouth-watering. "Like any growing festival, we could always do with more sponsors," she admits. "But there's great camaraderie, a real buzz around the city and a strong sense of pride in what we've achieved. It's an incredible week where Cork's food community truly comes together."



The festival's community-driven ethos is key to its success. "As organizers, we see ourselves as facilitators - the program is shaped by the trade itself," says Murphy. That spirit of collaboration extends to a wide network of stakeholders, from Fáilte Ireland and Pure Cork to Cork Airport, the Cork Business Association and, of course, the city's beloved hospitality businesses.

At its heart, Cork on a Fork Fest is focused on encouraging connections. "It celebrates our gastronomy, culinary heritage, multiculturalism, sustainability and strong sense of community," Murphy explains. "We've made it accessible and inclusive, with a mix of free and ticketed events to appeal to both locals and visitors."

What began as an initiative to promote outdoor dining and nightlife has grown into the largest food festival in the county, with more than 70 events planned for this year. "We get a brilliant mix of locals and visitors, all with a shared love of food," she says. Attendees can expect everything from exclusive dining experiences and immersive food trails to cooking demos, live talks and a fun-filled children's program.

Additional highlights include a spectacular long-table dinner on MacCurtain Street, where 22 chefs and 40 wait staff - all championing local producers - will serve 450 guests. "Plus, we'll have a free 150-seat demo marquee and lively markets at Emmet Place all weekend," Murphy adds.

The impact on local producers has been tangible. "Many have told us the festival helped them get listed permanently on menus," she shares.

> ***"It's all about inspiring people to connect with their food, with the land and with one another."***

Looking ahead, the possibilities are as palatable as the food itself. "I can see it becoming one of the city's biggest festivals — on par with the Guinness Cork Jazz Festival," says Murphy. "Cork has already outlined its ambition to be named a World Region of Gastronomy, and with over 60 per cent of Ireland's artisan producers based here, that ambition is well within reach."

No doubt, the festival's success has boosted Cork's status as a far-reaching "foodie" capital. "Talented chefs from all over the world now call Cork home and are helping to redefine traditional Irish cuisine in exciting ways," she says. "There's also a growing commitment to sourcing local ingredients, which is easy when you have the English Market right in the heart of the city."

Whether you're a fussy first-timer or a seasoned culinary connoisseur, Cork on a Fork Fest is a must-taste event that captures the spirit, spice and soul of one of Ireland's most delicious destinations.

@corkonaforkfest



West Cork Literary Festival

Each July, the charming seaside town of Bantry on Ireland's south coast transforms into a haven for readers, writers and literary lovers from near and far. The West Cork Literary Festival, now in its 27th year, is more than a celebration of books — it's a community-wide embrace of the written and spoken word. At its helm is festival director Eimear O'Herlihy, whose passion, dedication and vast knowledge of literature drive the festival's continued growth and respected status.

"I grew up in Cork City, with a mum from the city and a dad from the county, which is where my love of West Cork comes from," O'Herlihy explains. "Most importantly, both of my parents were very keen readers, and they instilled a passion for books in me from an early age."

That early passion matured into a career that bridges the literary and event-planning spheres. Before taking the festival's reins, O'Herlihy had already worked in event management for more than two decades. "I was attending the West Cork Literary Festival as an audience member for years," she recalls. "I was tempted to participate by the big names and became hooked on new authors I discovered. So when the chance came to join the team, I jumped at it."

Now in her 11th year of programming the event, she's built a rich and diverse week-long celebration that attracts some of the most compelling voices in literature while keeping a door open for new talent. "Our three-day writing workshops are a core part of our existence," she emphasizes, "a unique opportunity for new writers to begin or continue their writing journey."

Yet the work behind the magic is, as she puts it, "90 per cent spreadsheets and emailing." From booking authors and co-ordinating logistics to reimagining Bantry's cafés, bookshops, bars and even garden centres into event venues, O'Herlihy and her small team handle it all. "Preparation and attention to detail are key. I have a rolling spreadsheet of ideas and am always planning next year's festival before this year's one even happens."

Although Bantry's lack of a dedicated cultural venue presents some challenges, the limitation has inspired creative improvisation and a communal spirit. "It's great fun putting on a festival in a small town," she notes, "but also challenging, because the majority of our authors and audiences need transport and accommodation." To that end, the festival's parent company, West Cork Music, is fundraising for a world-class music and arts centre - a project that would be transformative for the region.

Still, the rewards outweigh the hurdles. "Just hearing incredible writers reading their stories aloud, watching happy audience members chatting after events, and seeing how bright and busy all of Bantry is during the festival week makes it all worthwhile."

And the rewards aren't just cultural; they're economic and social too. "Our festivals have a positive economic impact on the town and surrounding areas," O'Herlihy explains.

> ***"We support local authors and program-emerging talent from County Cork, and offer a wide range of professional development opportunities."***

The 2025 festival, running July 11–18, will host 94 events and more than 100 authors, illustrators and translators. Attendees can expect a mix of readings, seminars and family-friendly activities, along with inviting experiences like boat trips to Whiddy Island, communal sea swims, historic walking tours and even yoga on the lawn of Bantry House.

Accessibility is a core value for the event. "We work hard to ensure the festival is open to everyone," says O'Herlihy. "We provide wheelchair-accessible venues, free events, support for the deaf and hard of hearing, and dementia-friendly programming. We also train our staff in inclusive practices."

O'Herlihy is also passionate about nurturing young readers. "I really believe young people are still interested in literature," she insists. "My nieces and nephews love their devices, sure, but they also love reading. I'm a firm believer that people should read whatever, wherever and however they like. Comic books, audiobooks, zines, graphic novels - there are no guilty pleasures."

Her ultimate vision for the future of the West Cork Literary Festival includes continued expansion, not just in size, but in relevance and depth. "It's vital that writers feel supported - financially, creatively and personally. I want the festival to remain meaningful for both writers and readers."

Balancing plans for the future with a focus firmly rooted in the present, O'Herlihy muses, "Who knows what the future will bring? For now, I'm very happy working on it. It is one of the most significant and well-regarded literary festivals in Ireland and one that is equally important to writers and audiences."

@westcorkliteraryfestival

Neil Ó Briain

Striking a Chord Between Tradition and Trends

From the soft hills of Cork to the vibrant energy of Belfast, guitarist and composer Neil Ó Briain has carved out a solid space for himself in the Irish music landscape, balancing technical mastery, heartfelt tradition and a commitment to ingenuity.

"I was born and grew up in Co. Cork and am now living in Belfast," Ó Briain shares. "So I've gone from one end of the country to the other!" His move north wasn't just for a change of scenery; it also brought fresh creative energy. "I've been in Belfast for the past few years. There's a thriving music scene and Irish language community here."

Ó Briain's journey with music started early, fostered by family and nurtured by hard work. "There was always a guitar in the house as my dad plays and sings ballads," he says. "I was probably around eight when I started getting lessons. I've been playing ever since."

That early spark never dimmed. "Playing and making music is so ingrained and central to my life that it's hard to imagine not doing it," he reflects. For O' Briain, music isn't just a hobby or even a job - it's a vocation. "It allows you to express yourself. It's the perfect mixture of creativity and craft.

Of course, the life of a working musician comes with its own set of trials. "Business needs and artistic needs don't always match up," he says, laughing. "The aim is to get the balance right, but it's a tough industry money-wise." And when writer's block strikes, he doesn't panic; he pivots. "I use the time to try something else - like studying theory or doing a deep dive into a new genre - then I'm still improving as a musician."

Such openness to inspiration is the key to Ó Briain's evolution as an artist. "My main aim is always to develop my own voice within my compositions," he explains. "I've gotten better from a technical point of view, but the creative process will never feel 'finished' - and that's the joy of it."

As a solo guitarist, Ó Briain blends tradition with innovation. "Over the past few years, I've tried to compose good music that happens to be played on guitar, as opposed to 'guitar pieces' in and of themselves," he says.

His diligence has paid off. Ó Briain's discography includes two full-length albums and, more recently, the EP 'Tobar,' a collection of traditional Irish tunes adapted for solo guitar. "I was lucky to get funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland," he says.

"The melodies were already there; I just needed to make them into solo guitar pieces. I experimented with different chord structures and harping techniques. I'm happy with the results, and the response has been really encouraging."

An approach that combines resilience and perseverance is reflected in Ó Briain's description of his creative process as a composer and songwriter.

> ***"Some pieces might come out of thin air and be finished quickly, while some take ages."***





"I enjoy studying theory and analyzing other music. I think the best approach is to keep learning and improving, so that you're ready when inspiration does strike."

He applies this distinctive pursuit of inspiration when planning for live performances. "I try to be as prepared as possible. People pick up on how you put yourself across on stage, so I make sure I know my set and stay comfortable," and, he adds gratefully, "I've been lucky to have played gigs and festivals in many other countries outside of Ireland, including Canada, Sweden and Belgium."

Ó Briain has kept busy in recent years promoting 'Tobar,' as well as his second album, 'achar,' and composing music for documentaries airing on RTÉ and BBC. "It's not just solo guitar pieces," he says. "It's allowed me to compose for ensembles, which is something I'm developing more and more."

Another recent project is especially close to his heart. "I'm currently working with Raidió Fáilte to produce a documentary on an Irish-language poet from Cork, Domhnall Ó Conchubhair," he says. "He was my great-great-grandfather. His poetry hasn't been heard in nearly a century, so I'll be arranging and playing some of these songs. It's a beautiful way to combine music and family history."

From ancient melodies to original compositions, Neil Ó Briain's dedication to his craft resonates across generations, genres and borders. "While I'm certainly not the only person arranging Irish music for solo guitar, I'm glad that my contribution is being enjoyed by people and I'm doing my bit for the tradition."

@neilobri



Aine O Gorman

The way Aine O Gorman figures it, music wasn't just her chosen path in life — it was her destiny.

"Music has always been the thing that I'm good at. It's the first thing that came naturally to me," writes O Gorman in correspondence with Celtic Life International. "There's something so fulfilling about being able to make a living - very precariously - doing the thing that you love. Deepak Chopra calls it your dharma, the thing we are born to do."

Now residing in the village of Ballinadee in West Cork, O Gorman grew up in North Cork, a locale that proved quite formative to developing her tonal talents.

"My father was a farmer, and my mother was a teacher and organist in our local church; both my parents were very musical. Me and my three sisters all learned instruments growing up. I can appreciate now how privileged we were to be immersed in music from an early age.

"I feel so lucky to have grown up in the beautiful rural countryside. It can be isolating and, at times, quite boring, but being bored as a child was instrumental in me developing my own creativity. I think I owe a lot to walking around the countryside bored out of my brain as a child."

O Gorman started plying her talents on the family's upright piano at the age of five, fiddling with the keys and sussing out tunes by ear. As she grew more comfortable with playing music, she would move on to making songs of her own.

"As a songwriter and performer, you can spend months recording and creating music, and then you must send your work out into the world. It can be very hard on your self-esteem at times, sending out hundreds of emails and getting very little response. It's a vulnerable place. After my first few releases, I got very disillusioned with the industry.

"I think about it differently, now," she adds. "I create something that I am really proud of, just for myself."

O Gorman doesn't let herself linger creatively for long, pushing herself out of her comfort zone in order to explore the frontiers of her creative potential.

"Most of my 20s and early 30s were spent playing music supportively for other artists. It was only at 34 that I first started writing my own songs and thinking about a solo career. I always felt safe in that supportive role, but releasing my own songs has been a wonderful and terrifying experience for me, something I couldn't have imagined."

This ethos has not just allowed O Gorman the room to grow as a creative, but it has brought her to several career high points. She was shortlisted for a Grammy nomination for her most recent solo release, These Empty Rooms; she's currently writing the score for a stage play premiering in September; and she recently landed a gig playing a packed venue in her hometown.

"I have been so lucky to have had so many brilliant gigs in the last few years at venues and festivals. I don't take any of it for granted."

O Gorman doesn't paint her life as an independent songwriter as all warm fuzzies and red roses, however; she's just as quick to point out the thorns.

> ***"As a tiny island, Ireland is really punching above its weight when it comes to music."***

While there are lots of positives in the scene, it is very financially challenging to record and release music and try to make a living.

"There was a time in Ireland where folk musicians came from the working classes. It was from this perspective that we got such a rich canon of protest songs, songs that helped highlight injustices. The rents in Ireland have made it very difficult to maintain a sustainable career as an independent artist.

"The pilot scheme that the government tried the last two years (The Creative Ireland Grant Scheme) could go some way to helping sustain artists; it would allow independent artists to keep creating. Our country is famous for music and the creative arts. If you want artists to be able to afford to create, then you need to support them."

Despite the difficulties, O Gorman still feels fulfilled with the dharma the universe has handed her.

"I feel incredibly fulfilled. Being creative is such a beautiful part of life. I feel lucky. While it is grim financially, the ability to live my life so creatively is something I wouldn't trade for anything."

@aineogmusic

Daragh Fleming's Thoughts Too Big

For as long as he can remember, Daragh Fleming has been enamoured with the written word.

"I was always making things up and writing them down as a child," Fleming - appropriately enough - writes in an email. "I loved writing short stories in English class; it felt like a reprieve from the monotony of the rest of my schoolwork. It feels like I haven't completed my day if I haven't written something down, like an itch I can't reach.

"I write because I can't imagine not writing. I don't know what that life would look like."

The Cork-born wordsmith hasn't needed to worry about what a writing-free life would look like, as he's made a steady career out of putting pen to paper.

"I started taking writing seriously when I was 21. There's no real why; it's just something that has always made sense to me."

Fleming has several literary works to his name. He's dabbled in everything from short stories (both fiction and non-fiction) to poetry and collected essays. He's won several literary awards, and has been nominated for even more.

"I used to hate writing essays," he admits. "Now I love it. And my fiction has become more grounded. In the early days, all my stories were completely surreal. As you grow older, you tend to write about whatever's happening around you, so I suppose as we grow up, our writing grows up with us.

"I've gotten more selective. When I was younger, I'd have an idea and I'd just write about it, without giving much consideration. These days, I think a lot more about what I'm trying to say before I start writing. I love the challenge of making the everyday interesting for people, for them to see themselves in the writing."

Fleming is also a passionate mental health advocate, with a BA in applied psychology alongside his MA in linguistics. His first published non-fiction title, Lonely Boy: Musings on Death, Mental Health and Relationships, is a collection of essays; he's the communications lead for A Lust For Life, an Irish mental health charity; and he holds ambassadorial positions with other organizations like See Change Ireland and Movember Ireland. He's even given a TEDx Talk, Creativity: the answer to crafting hope.

Arguably, Fleming's biggest claim to fame is his mental health blog, Thoughts Too Big. He started the blog to help people overcome daily mental health issues, and to destigmatize mental health care.

"From a community level, I think the people of Ireland are doing as much as they can to support mental health here, and that's really encouraging to see," he says. "But from a government perspective, there's not nearly enough being done. There's this rift between what the people want and what our government actually does. That extends far beyond just mental health. There's a very evident atmosphere of dissatisfaction in Ireland, and rightly so.

"The government needs to actually listen to the people who gave them power - serve the people, not NGOs that come into Ireland and make it completely unaffordable to live in Ireland."

Fleming says being able to put his writing voice to work to help people heal has been the highlight of his career.

"My favourite feedback is when a reader tells me that I've captured how they feel - that they could never articulate it themselves, and I have somehow managed to. That's massive. It feels like you're creating real value for people then, like you're helping them.

WWW.THOUGHTSTOOBIG.IE



> ***"If I could live on that, I wouldn't want for much else."***

More recently, Fleming decided - albeit a bit hesitantly at first - to add his actual voice in service of this mission with the launch of the podcast version of his blog, The Thoughts Too Loud Podcast.

"Podcasting was honestly a reluctant endeavour. I've been guesting on podcasts for years, so I knew how much work goes into making one. For a long time, people were asking for a podcast version of my blog, which I resisted for about four years before I accepted that it was something I had to do.

"Now I love it. It's a really great way to touch base with people and connect beyond the written word. People find the podcast comforting, I think, because it's just me talking about anything and everything. It's been described as 'a long voice-note from a friend,' and I think that's nice.

"I'm so grateful for every listener, every reader; they're so supportive."

@daraghfleming



Peter Cox

Capturing the Soul of Ireland

Tucked away amid West Cork's rugged beauty, photographer Peter Cox has made it his life's work to capture the heart and spirit of Ireland's ever-evocative landscape.

"I was born and raised in Dún Laoghaire, just south of Dublin," Cox recalls, reflecting on his earliest memories. "I grew up by the sea. My childhood was full of Sunday drives through the Wicklow Mountains with my father. The quiet, elemental power of the Irish landscape laid the emotional foundation for what I do today."

Now based in the Gaeltacht village of Ballingeary, surrounded by tradition and untouched terrain, Cox has found a place that both grounds and inspires him. "It's a deeply rural place. I didn't just move here for the scenery, but for the sense of connection."

Although his photographs are filled with sentiment and artistry, his previous career took off in tech, not art. "I played with cameras as a child but worked as a computer systems engineer for years. The arrival of digital cameras around 2000 gave me a new creative outlet. That's when I began to see photography as an expressive craft.

Initially, it was the technical aspect that attracted Cox to cameras. "In the beginning, it was about the tools, the precision, the control," he explains. "But eventually, I started chasing light instead of megapixels and working towards images that conveyed not just what I saw, but what I felt. Today, it's about storytelling through the landscape."

His evolution as a photographer was marked by milestones that went beyond perfect exposure or shutter speed. "A real turning point for me was discovering Joe Cornish's First Light. I realized that landscape photography could be meditative, poetic, transcendent."



A lifelong fascination with flight also paired well with his creative vision. "I trained as a pilot in the U.S., and that love of the sky never left me. When drone technology matured enough to carry professional-quality cameras, I was able to explore the landscape from above. It's a completely different perspective."

Though digital tools have opened doors for many aspiring photographers in Ireland, Cox sees a challenge in finding photos that stand out. "I'd love to see more projects that engage deeply with the land and its history. Not just images, but stories."

Support for the arts, he says, can improve things. "Residencies, grants and real opportunities to exhibit can help artists go deeper, and education that teaches people to really connect with the landscape."

Practising what he preaches, Cox remains rooted in finding joy and presence in his work. "Creative sustainability is a real challenge," he notes.

> ***"When passion becomes your profession, the real work is staying inspired and finding magic in the familiar."***

Yet, remaining inspired may require as much effort as the precision required for the profession. "The inspiration comes from the landscape. The Wild Atlantic Way is a near-infinite source of inspiration. But the images themselves are the product of hard work. Scouting, planning, waiting, returning, failing and trying again."

Those hard-earned results evolved into eventual career highlights. "Publishing my books — The Irish Light, Atlantic Light and, more recently, The Skelligs: Islands on the Edge of the World, represents years of work," Cox says. He also fondly recalls his collaboration with the Commissioners of Irish Lights, when he had the privilege of flying to some of the most remote places in Ireland.

Cox's photographs are displayed in private homes and public galleries alike. "My clients are individuals who fall in love with a particular photograph," whether they wish to reconnect with their heritage or see their home in a new light. A good photograph, he says, "communicates a mood that draws you in and stays with you."

His upcoming projects include achieving a revitalized result using a remote process. "I'm preparing a series using the wet plate collodion process and shooting with large-format cameras on glass plates. It's slow, tactile and almost ceremonial. I want to see how the Irish landscape speaks through that older lens."

Having recently relocated his gallery to Kinsale, Cox enjoys meeting visitors and sharing the stories behind his work. His full collection is online for those unable to make the journey. "That connection, whether in person or across the world, means everything."

Witnessing and capturing Ireland's majestic landscape is his ultimate honour. "Standing on a cliff edge in Donegal or a quiet bay in Kerry in a moment of perfect light is reward enough. The Irish landscape keeps evolving, and I feel compelled to keep up with it."

@petrcoxphotography

WWW.PETERCOX.IE

Hun McCool

Irish performer Beth Brennan takes the stage with a different persona

By day, Beth Brennan works at a Youthreach centre in Cork and is a busy mom of two. But there's another side to them. For the last year, they've taken on a dazzling drag persona: Hun McCool.

At 45 - "which is considered ancient for a drag performer," notes McCool - drag is a relatively new venture for them. Performing, however, is not. "I've been involved in theatre for much longer but drag combines and magnifies my favourite elements of performing: costume, character and comedy. I also love how drag both challenges and emphasizes gender stereotypes, and is so inclusive and celebratory of everyone, no matter what age, race, size, gender or sexuality."

The history of drag goes back centuries, from Shakespearean theatre to Vaudeville stages. These days, drag is a relatively mainstream art form, thanks in part to the popularity of RuPaul's Drag Race. Trixie Mattel and Bob the Drag Queen are household names. Pop singer Chappell Roan considers herself a drag artist, incorporating drag-style makeup and costume into her concerts and music videos.

Smaller, local performers have benefitted from all this too; "drag brunches" are popular events around the world, and they are no longer confined to Pride Month. Modern performers are constantly challenging and reshaping what drag can be, contrary to the idea that it's nothing more than "cross-dressing."

That said, McCool points out that drag is still a misunderstood art, in that some folks don't realize how inclusive it actually is. "People ask, 'can you do drag if you're a woman? Can you do drag if you're straight? Can you do drag that isn't sexualized?'" The answer too all those questions, McCool says, is "yes." They believe that anyone interested in drag ought to try it. "Find a local drag house that has a newcomers' night and just give it a go. It's an amazing way to express yourself and have a whole lot of fun!"



In fact, most of McCool's performances have a comedic slant.

> ***"A great reward is the laughter of the crowd and knowing I'm truly entertaining the audience..."***

While influenced by American drag queens such as RuPaul, they are also inspired by performers from their home country of Ireland. McCool has recently shared the stage with Irish queens Candy Warhol and Mia Gold. "I was a fan of theirs long before I started performing myself."

McCool incorporates Irish myth and legend into their own performances, noting that some of their most successful numbers include folktale retellings. "My very first act was an alternate-reality version of the tale of Fionn Mac Cumhaill and the Salmon of Knowledge," they explain. Fionn Mac Cumhaill is sometimes anglicized as Finn McCool, which is Hun's namesake. The Irish hero of lore was a warrior said to have created the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland. "Whereas Fionn tasted the salmon and became all-knowing, Hun was instead too dazzled by its beauty to eat it and sang a love song to it instead."

Other acts include McCool's take on Children of Lir: an Irish tale about four children who were transformed into swans at the hands of their wicked stepmother. "It ends up as a comedy number referencing a viral Irish TikTok video about a bat trapped in a Kerry family's kitchen," they explain. "I've also recently performed as Drag St. Patrick, banishing the snakes from Ireland, as the legends say he did."

Irish identity is equally important to McCool when they are off the stage - particularly through the Irish language. "I grew up speaking English but always loved Irish (Gaeilge). I studied Irish to university level and my husband and I are raising our two children through Gaeilge. It's absolutely not a dying language, as many believe. Thankfully Gaeilge is alive and well, and social media has very much helped in its resurgence among the younger generation."

In addition, McCool is passionate about the LGBTQ+ community, having fundraised for the Gay Project in Cork. They note that organizations such as LINC (Lesbian and Bisexual women in Cork), Trans+ Pride and BeLonG To are active in the area as well.

"Now, more than ever, there is a need for more resources, support and protection for trans people, especially trans youth."

@hunmccool

Laura Creedon



For Cork native Laura Creedon, the path into the hospitality industry wasn't paved with dreams of fine cuisine or Michelin stars - rather, it was born of sheer necessity.

"I first started working in the sector in 2011," she recalls via email from her home on the Emerald Isle. "Finding work as a student with no work experience was very difficult. I was just taking any job I could at the time, which was a food runner in a steakhouse."

Fast forward more than a decade, and Creedon, now 32, is a respected voice in Cork's culinary scene, managing a restaurant, championing local produce, and advocating for greater support for the industry.

"I became involved in hospitality out of genuine need, but I have stayed in it out of genuine love - it is a vibrant, exciting industry where I meet people from all over the world and celebrate some of their most important life events with them."

While grateful for the good stuff, Creedon acknowledges the many challenges of the vocation.

"The pay and hours put people off, but I have personally found that if you are a passionate person who cares about their job the hours don't matter, and the pay will catch up. My biggest issue is trying to convince people who don't understand our costly overheads and that we are not price-gouging or greedy - our margins are simply razor thin."

More can be done, she believes, to buffer those ongoing financial realities.

"We should, as an industry, be a bit more transparent about how expensive quality produce is," she notes, adding that the government could ease pressure by revisiting policies. "We have been lobbying to lower our VAT (value added tax) rate to 9 per cent, as it was during the COVID-19 pandemic, but to no avail so far."

Ultimately, Creedon finds joy in the work, and lights up while recalling career highs.

"Being nominated for best casual dining in Ireland a year after I took over managing a restaurant was very validating."

> ***"It is the connection with customers, however, that remains the most rewarding aspect of what she does.***

"One couple I served on their first date, then their engagement celebration, then the weekend after they were married, and then again when she was pregnant and due to give birth that week. Being part of these special moments is an honour. "

In addition, the evolution of Irish cuisine is something she has witnessed firsthand.

"When I started working in Irish restaurants, people were very picky or nervous eaters.

"Anything 'unusual' was avoided. But in the past seven or eight years, Irish people of all ages are far more excited to try new things."

Cultivating that culinary curiosity has helped shape a vibrant and thriving food scene in Cork today.

"Not only do we use local produce, but we boast about it quite loudly! I remember a time when using Spanish chorizo or English fish, like Dover sole, was considered superior, but that has all changed."

She notes that the influence of immigration has enriched the experience.

"Food is something that bonds us, and people from all over the world move to Ireland and bring their food with them, which allows us to share heritage and passion - everything from Polish pierogi to Brazilian coxinha, to North African merguez sausage... all of these flavours, and more, are now easily available here in Cork City."

As the hospitality industry evolves and grows in popularity as a vocation, Creedon has some practical advice for those looking to work in the sector; "Don't feel like it's a menial job. We do important work and bring so much joy to people. Go to culinary school. Seek advice."

Creedon herself has some appetizing plans lined up over the coming months. "I'm traveling to Valencia to visit Ricard Camarena's vegetable-led two-star and green-star restaurant, and I am also booking a trip to Galway to visit Daróg, who specialize in amazing wines."

She is also planning on getting busier in her own kitchen. "I love to cook by whim, but I am excited to start exploring some ideas from my collection of amazing Irish cookbooks."

@laura_creedon_93



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Angela Newman

A fifth-generation performer who comes from a long line of musicians, singers, composers and actors on both sides of her family, Angela Newman is an award-winning actor, and the Artistic Director of both Hysterical Histories Cork and Chattyboo Productions. She also operates a seasonal theatre company for young audiences called Scéalta Productions. Recently we spoke with her about her vocation and her passion for her hometown of Cork.



What are your own roots?

I was born and raised in the best place in the world, Cork City. On the Newman side we can trace our roots back as far as the Norman arrival in the 12th century, and the other side goes back even further than that. The Newman coat of arms can still be seen at Kilbrittan Castle which was taken from us by the McCarthy clan some time in the 1500s. Many centuries later it was bought by Walt Disney Jr who researched the coat of arms, looked-up and found my grandfather in the phone book, and called to invite us all down for tea! In true Cork fashion, however, my grandfather wasn't impressed by famous people and said no and just like that my chance to be a member of the Mickey Mouse Club was gone.

Where do you currently reside?

I've travelled, studied, lived and performed all over the world but there's no better place than Cork to raise a family so I've been based in Cork again since 2006.

When and why did you first get into theatre?

I was born into a theatrical family. My family's involvement in the arts in Ireland goes back 4 generations on one side and three on the other. My great-grandfather on my mother's side, Michael Casey, was the first in a line of composers all with the same name who famously wrote "Mick McGilligans Ball". His son, my granddad, would go on to write a song called "Cork My Home" in 1985 for the 800th anniversary of Cork becoming a city, and my uncle who works our national television station RTE, worked on Ireland's first Eurovision winning song "All Kinds of Everything" and has arranged music for many well-known Irish artists over the years. My mother is a costume designer, and my father is an award-winning playwright and stage manager whose parents were both into acting and often worked with the world-famous Carl Clopet Opera. So, I knew that I wanted to perform from an early age. I spent my Sunday mornings watching three-hour operas instead of cartoons even though I couldn't understand a word. And I



Angela Newman

was fortunate to spend hours after school each week in the corners of dusty, cold rehearsal rooms, watching some of the most incredibly talented people to come out of Ireland, all the while taking mental notes. I studied dance, musical theatre, and drama in stage schools here before heading to London to study musical theatre at the age of 18. My grandmother used to say I came out of the womb tap dancing. There was no hope for me, I was born with "the bug".

Are they the same reasons that you continue to remain involved?

I got into the theatre because of my family's involvement, and now my family includes the people I have met in the theatre. When most people get into theatre or performing they think it's magic - the bright lights, the costumes, the applause - and they go in blind to the realities of the industry, so it comes as a shock when it's not all bright lights and big pay checks and so it loses that magic for them. Because I grew up in it, I've worked as crew, painted scenery, made props and helped with costumes, operated sound and lights, been a teacher, stage managed, written, produced, performed - I know that it is hard work and not all glitz and glamour. That said, the magic happens in the writer's room or at rehearsal – to see something start out with an idea and a group of people and - over a matter of weeks or months - create something beautiful together is truly magical, and that is why I remain in this career. I get to experience real magic everyday and then share that magic with the world.

What are the challenges of the vocation?

Obviously, the biggest challenge is financial. Ninety-nine per cent of artists are self-employed, and with that comes very real obstacles. As a self-employed person its almost impossible to be approved for a mortgage no matter what you are earning. There's also no sick pay, and it can be difficult on the social life and relationships when you work in the entertainment industry as it generally means that you are working when all of your friends are off on weekends and at night.

What are the rewards?

I love my job, I don't think that you can be a performer if you don't. It's too hard a life otherwise. I love going to work and I love the creative minds that I get to spend my time with. The biggest reward is the audience reaction. There is no better feeling than making someone laugh, emote a feeling, see something from a different perspective, learn something new, or simply help them to escape reality for a few hours.

When and why did you start Hysterical Histories?

I started Hysterical Histories in 2018 after my company had enjoyed tremendous success with winter productions and my audiences kept asking if we would consider doing something in the summer. It was only meant to run for one month per year as a dinner theatre experience, but the reaction was so positive that we brought it back for three months in 2019 and it has continued to grow. We now run three nights per week from May to September and do some special events over the St Patrick's Festival in March. We also do private events, and recently introduced the "Pick Your Own Path" character-led walking tour through Cork City.



What is the response like from audiences?

We initially wrote Hysterical Histories Cork, where we share the history of the city from its origins back in the 600s right up to modern day through live music, comedy, and food. Originally, we were founded for the North American tourist market, but we are now just as popular with the locals. Cork people are renowned for their honesty - which can sometimes be rather brutal - so the fact that the locals keep coming back and keep telling others about the show says a lot. Last year, we had a local tell us that we made her "proud to be a Corkonian" which was an incredible compliment. Visitors really enjoy the atmosphere as well as the performance itself. The layout of the tables is banquet style, as we wanted everyone to feel like they had come to our home for dinner. So, everyone sits together, and we encourage people to chat with one another over dinner. In fact, we have had people who met the love of their lives at our show, one couple are now married and a second are engaged.

What is it about Cork, and Ireland, that is so inspiring?

Cork residents have a unique sense of humour, the people are friendly, and the city has a more laid-back feeling than others and - because of our size - it is a very walkable city. There are musicians on every corner, art everywhere you look, and the people still stop for a chat. We have been voted the friendliest city in Ireland and one of the friendliest cities in the world because of our people - we are resilient, (you have to be in a place where it rains so much), passionate, intelligent, inventive, and compassionate.

Is enough being done to support culture there?

Theres always more that can be done to support culture. I have always felt that arts and culture here deserves a minister of its own.

How can that be improved?

More funding for actual artists would be a start - a large portion of funding goes towards administration - and extending the basic income for the arts pilot scheme to include all professional artists would help us to continue doing what we do.

What advice might you have for younger people looking to get into theatre?

I always tell my students to only go into theatre as a profession if you absolutely have to with every fibre of your being, if you absolutely cannot survive without creating art and it hurts your heart to stop then it's the career for you. If you have to, do it. If you don't have to, do something else and create part time, but never stop creating - the world needs as much beauty as we can get. For those serious about it then study as many areas of theatre as you can and get practical experience. The more areas of theatre that you can put your hand to the more employable you are.

What is on your agenda for the rest of 2025?

Hysterical Histories Dinner Theatre runs until mid September with a few special dates sprinkled into October for festivals. The "Pick Your Own Path" walking tours will run until mid-November. I am also working on a piece in conjunction with the National Theatre, which will have a work-in-progress showing at Cork Midsummer Festival in June. Hysterical Histories will be a part of Cork Harbour Festival, Cork on a Fork Festival, Heritage Week, and Culture Night in the coming months. Once Hysterical Histories wraps in November, my other company Chattyboo Productions hits high season with its annual winter production which takes us to the end of January 2026.

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Alice Halliday

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I was born in Bristol, England, but my parents moved to their homestead in West Cork when I was a baby. So, to me, this is home, and West Cork is where I have settled and put my roots down, and where I am raising my own family.

I was 9 years old when I decided that I wanted to be a fashion designer. Fashion was always in my blood, and the women in my life were a big inspiration: watching my mother sewing and mending, trying on clothes that my late granny Isobel had made for herself, making fashion cut-out dolls with my auntie Sukey, dressing up with my sister Libby using scarves and vintage clothes from a big, tattered suitcase. We would even host fashion shows for our parents in the kitchen, and invented a game called 'This is the Latest Fashion'.

My work and my creative spirit are such integral parts of who I am, I feel this pulse of inspiration to make things, running through my veins. I design and create for my own peace of mind, it keeps me happy and more balanced. Most of all, I am truly passionate about contributing to slow, sustainable fashion. It brings me great fulfilment to breathe new life into old materials that are full of beauty and steeped in history.

I draw inspiration from nature, particularly flowers, and from the beautiful landscapes around me; meadows, woodlands, hedgerows, beaches. The materials I find, whether antique lace, vintage trimmings, or natural foraged treasures, are what inspire my designs - I let them guide me, draping on the mannequin or on the body, arranging different layouts and combinations on my desk, or sometimes on the floor. My work is intricate and often labour-intensive, and my garments are constructed through delicate hand-stitching, with a little machine sewing. Pieces can take weeks, months, even years to complete. It is definitely slow fashion. The aim is zero waste, to use up every piece of the fabric. As the materials are all reclaimed and repurposed, a design can never be fully replicated. As such, no two pieces are the exact same, each creation is a wearable work of art, made with nature at heart.

I have kept my signature style throughout the evolution of my brand - a very bohemian aesthetic. I have a range of designs that customers can choose from and then have customized. I have expanded my range of offerings over time. As well as focusing on ethereal event wear and bohemian bridal wear, I also make accessories and headpieces, alongside styling for personal, editorial and branding photoshoots, as well as teaching flower crown making workshops for bridal blessings, retreats and group gatherings.



















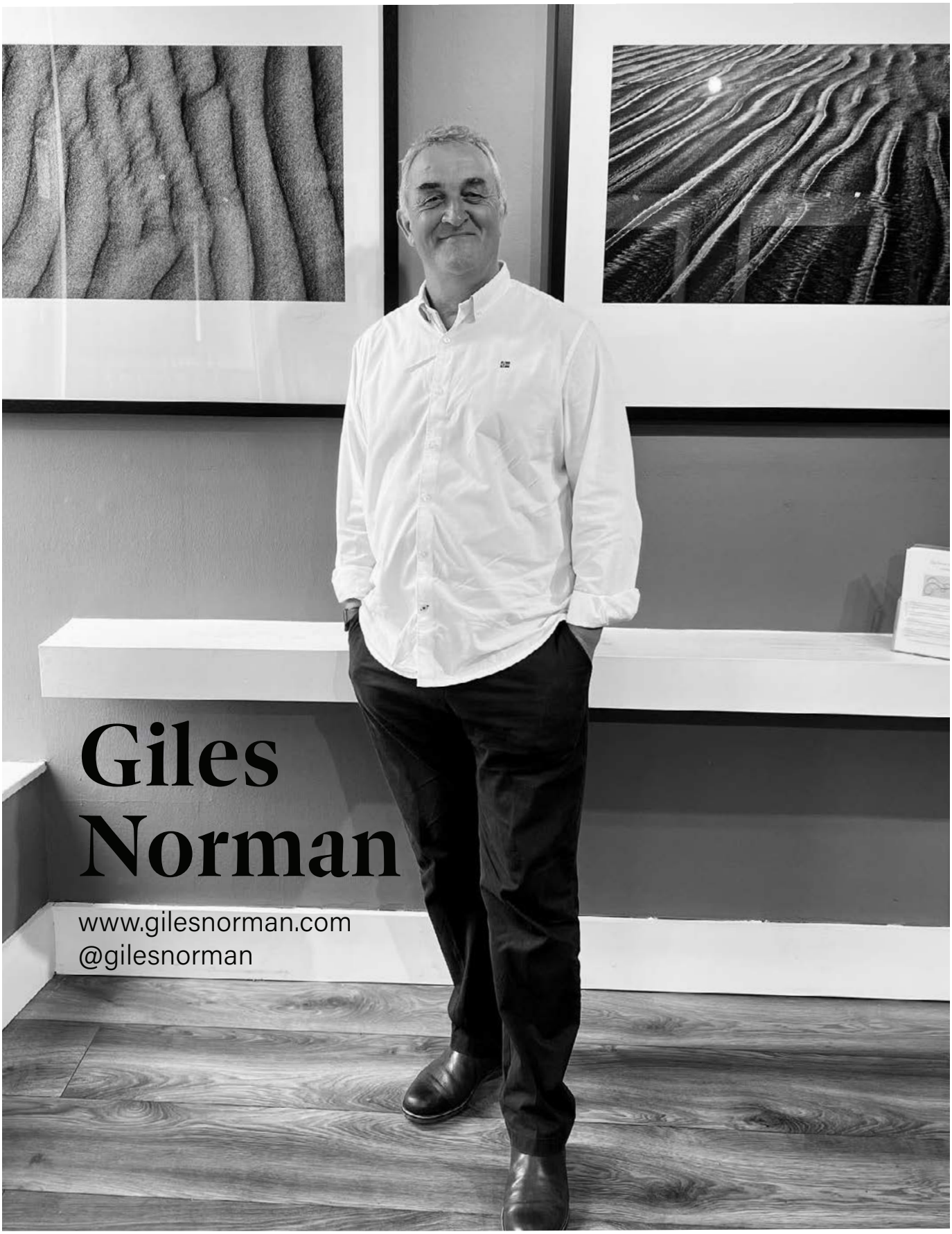





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I was born in the U.K. to Belgian and English parents and moved to Ireland as a child. I now reside in Kinsale, County Cork.

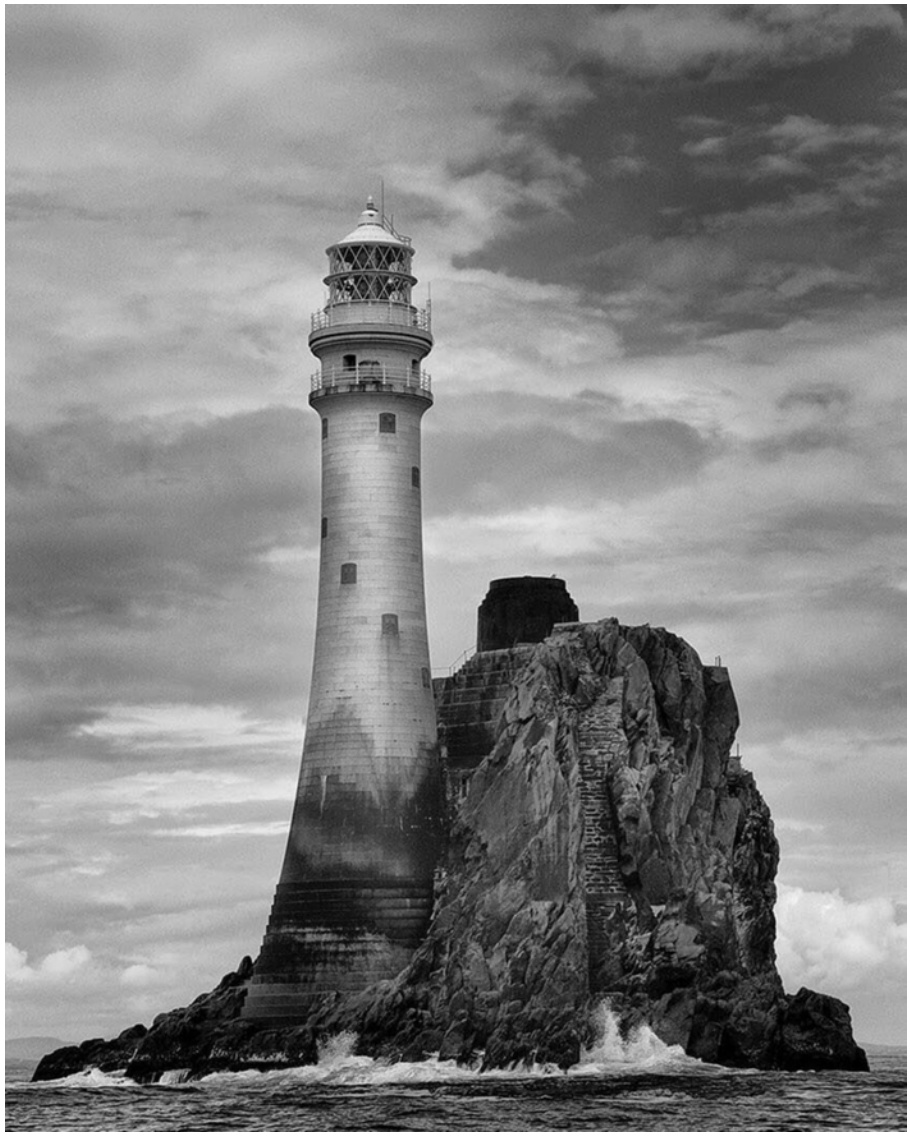
My photographic life started in Ireland. The first click of the shutter for me was during a school project - I used a small Kodak Instamatic camera to photograph the fishing boats in Kinsale. The first darkroom I used was in a beautiful old house in Kinsale, and this is where I discovered the thrill of an image appearing for the first time. I'm entirely self-taught in photography, and it was during my early travels in the 1980s that I became













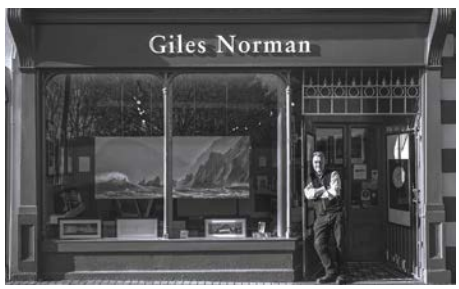


captivated by the medium. The ability to capture fleeting moments, especially landscapes and nature, felt like the perfect way to communicate what I was seeing and experiencing. In 1988, I opened my first gallery in Kinsale and, in 2017, my wife Catherine and I opened the Giles Norman Townhouse, which has since become an extension of the gallery. It serves as both a luxury accommodation and a creative space, housing my studio and gallery.

After 37 years, the chance to capture fleeting moments and the essence of nature still motivates my work. The Irish landscape remains a constant source of inspiration, and my gallery continues to be a space where I can share the images that reflect this ongoing journey. The longer I work, the more I strive for perfection. In my early work, skies were often left out, but over time, they've become a key element in my landscape photography. I've learned to consider the entire image, not just focus on the main subject. As I've evolved, I've learned the importance of perfect composition. My approach now is far more deliberate.

I'm inspired by the Irish landscape - how the light falls on the water, the abstract erosion shaped by nature's elements, and the timeless beauty of Ireland's West Coast. The stillness of reflective waters, landscapes untouched by man, and the raw simplicity of nature all fuel my creativity. I'm also inspired by the great cities of the world, their diverse cultures, and the way they each tell a unique story through architecture and people.

A good photograph captures more than just an image - it should evoke emotion, convey a sense of place, and tell a story. Composition, light, and timing are all critical, but at the heart of it, a good photograph resonates with the viewer and leaves a lasting impression.













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Diarmaid *O'Sullivan*

I was born in 1990, raised in Co. Kerry, in a home beside my uncle's dairy farm. It was a beautiful setting for a childhood - safe, free, and full of adventure with friends across the open fields. I now reside in Cork City.

I started drawing and colouring from a very young age. It gave me a way to explore my imagination and bring my ideas to life on paper. Art quickly became something that helped me stand out. I still paint because I truly love it - it's that simple.

I consider myself a photorealist painter. And while the core concepts behind my work have remained fairly consistent over the years, my technical skills have evolved significantly. I have been working with oils for over twenty years now, and that time has been crucial in shaping my practice. My journey has been a mix of guidance, trial and error, and a whole lot of persistence. The reward is in the joy of losing myself in the creative process.

The visual arts in Ireland remain deeply embedded in our culture. Our tradition of storytelling, along with the wild, awe-inspiring landscapes that stretch across this beautiful country, are a constant source of inspiration.

@dosartist



Dairmaid







WWW.DOSARTIST.COM

Geraldine *O'Sullivan*

I was born in West Cork - a landscape shaped by the Wild Atlantic that has been the most profound and constant element in my work practice.

I always refer to my work as my practice, even after 32 years of working full time as an artist. I am never truly satisfied with my work. I am happy with aspects of my paintings, but never really satisfied that I have reflected in paint what nature has presented to me. It is only an interpretation and it depends on so many elements, such as weather, light, season, movement, mood, and time.

I paint what I know - the landscape that surrounds me; the same landscape and seascapes that have been home to generations of my family. We are an island nation and weather is part of every moment of our day. Often, we experience 4 seasons in every day, and the light changes everything. In fact, capturing the elusive nature of Irish light has been a lifelong challenge.

@geraldineosullivan.fineart

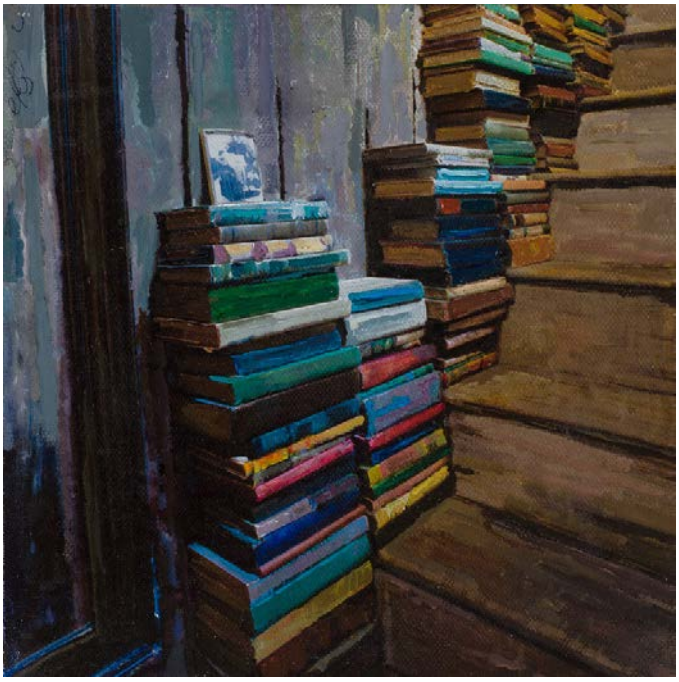


Geraldine











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Helen *Condon*



I was born and raised in Cork City, Ireland, the middle of three girls. I always loved drawing and being creative as a child, and art was a natural escape for me. I was drawn to texture and colour from a young age. Even just experimenting with materials would lift my mood. What began as a joyful escape has become my life's obsession. I'm incredibly passionate about what I do and constantly inspired by other artists and creatives. Painting gives me purpose, energy, and endless room to grow. I'm always looking to challenge myself, explore new techniques, and come up with fresh ideas. That drive to learn and evolve is a huge part of why I continue to paint today.

I'm incredibly proud to be Irish, and that sense of patriotism runs deep in my work. Cork City, in particular, is full of beautiful spots that inspire me every day. From the lively streets to the peaceful coastlines, there's so much to capture.

Ireland is home to so many talented artists, and there's a real sense of creative energy across the country. Dublin, in particular, has great opportunities for artists to display their work, with events like Merrion Square and Peoples Art St. Stephen's Green where artists can showcase their pieces. It would be wonderful to see Cork embrace its creative community with more opportunities for artists to come together and display their work in public spaces.

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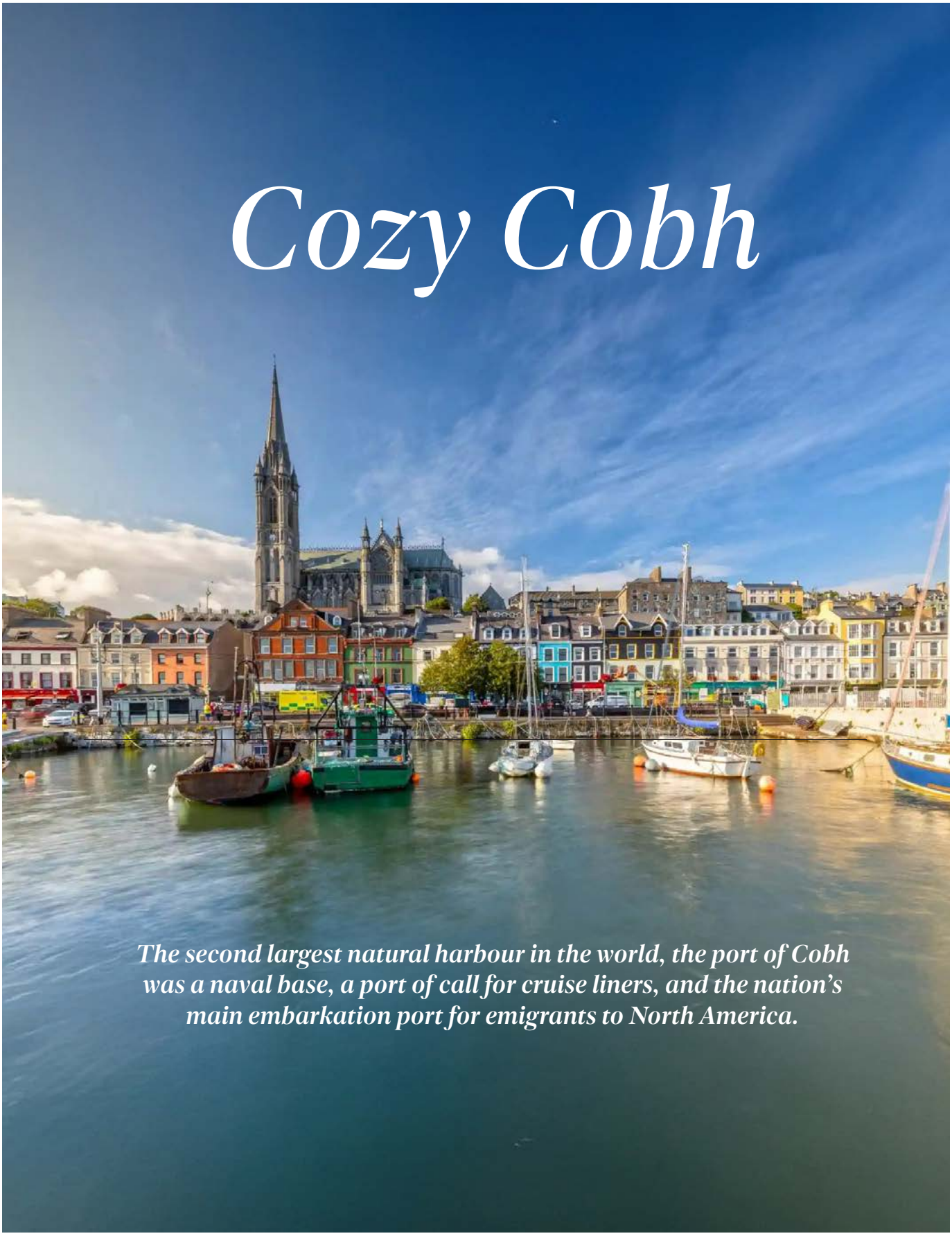
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Cozy Cobh



The second largest natural harbour in the world, the port of Cobh was a naval base, a port of call for cruise liners, and the nation's main embarkation port for emigrants to North America.

Cobh is a small seaport town close to Cork City, Ireland's second largest city. In many ways, it is a typical Irish town with attractive, colourful rows of terraces facing the harbour and rising up the steep hillside. However, what makes this place special is its long historical tradition as Ireland's maritime capital.

The second largest natural harbour in the world, it is said that 300 ships were anchored in Cobh at one time, and that the town has seen millions of people coming and going by sea over the centuries. First a naval base, and later the nation's main embarkation port for emigrants, it is still regularly visited by luxury liners bringing tourists from all around the world.

Originally known by the Gaelic name An Cóbh - "the Cove"- the site was a small fishing village which developed rapidly after the British used its naturally-protected harbour to create a naval military base during the Napoleonic Wars in the early 1800s.

The town's south-facing temperate climate soon began to gain a reputation as a health resort which brought many visitors in search of good weather. One such visitor was Queen Victoria of Great Britain, who visited in 1849 and had the town temporarily renamed as Queenstown.

In the era of transatlantic travel, Cobh was the last port of call of many liners travelling to and from North America. It was also Europe's first port of call for ships going to the Old World. Cobh was the port of departure of the first steam ship to cross the Atlantic, the Sirius in 1838, and the last port of call for the ill-fated Titanic in 1912.

For the Irish, Cobh was infamously known as the country's main emigration port to North America. From the Great Famine of 1846 up until the late 1950s, over 2.5 million Irish men, women and children departed from Cobh to the New World, including 40,000 being deported to British penal colonies such as Australia.

The naval military base created in the early 1800s was still in use and became an importantly strategic outpost for British and American military personnel and equipment during World War I. Following Ireland's independence, the facilities were handed over to the Irish government, which in turn based its own Irish Naval Service on Haulbowline Island, facing Cobh.



During the second half of the 20th century, the port kept on carrying business as usual for naval and commercial fleets, as heavy industries such as shipbuilding and steelworks bloomed in the port area. Today, tourism is one of Cobh's main economic activities, key to the local economy with some 40 large cruise liners calling every year and bringing an additional 30,000 visitors to the area. Where Cobh was historically the last sight of Ireland for many thousands of emigrants, now is the first sight of Ireland for overseas tourists.

> ***Though small, Cobh is well served for the tourist trade with many pubs and hostelries to suit all tastes.***

Pub life is an essential part of Irish culture and Cobh has many excellent places where you can enjoy a drink. Mostly located in the town centre, many pubs have a Maritime theme and contain photos and memorabilia of old ships. Live music, both modern and traditional, is regularly played in a number of pubs.

The town is also easy to get around on foot. The focal point is the 19th century neo-Gothic St Colman's Cathedral, which stands on a hill dominating the town's skyline. The seat of the Diocese of Cloyne, this beautiful Cathedral has the largest Carillon in Ireland and Atlantic Europe and many people from all over the world come over to listen to the sounds of its 49 bells. The Cathedral has great views of the harbour and is an ideal place to see the luxury liners in Cobh. Of the many liners that visited the historic port town, the Titanic and the Lusitania are the two that still remain foremost in the town's memory.

On April 11, 1912, Queenstown was the final port of call for the Titanic on her ill-fated maiden voyage across the Atlantic before



she sank with 2,206 people on board. A Titanic memorial is located on Pearse Square and Titanic Trail Tours are offered to tourists interested in knowing the Titanic story in Cobh. On May 7, 1915, during the First World War, the transatlantic liner Lusitania was approaching Queenstown en route from New York with 1,959 people on board when she was sunk by a German submarine about 15km off the Old Head of Kinsale. Some 1,198 passengers died, and only 761 passengers were rescued. The recovered bodies were buried in mass graves in the Old Church cemetery in Ticknock, and a Lusitania Peace Memorial was erected in Casement Square.

However, for the Irish people, Cobh is most infamously known as the embarkation port of over 2.5 million emigrant Irish men, women and children who left the country between 1848 and 1950. That dark episode of Ireland's history is brought back to life in the museum The Queenstown Story, which is widely acclaimed as the best exhibition about the years of mass exodus in Ireland.

By the 1800s, Ireland had become an impoverished nation after centuries of domination by Great Britain, which ruled Ireland in a way that often did not coincide with Irish interests. The failure of the potato crop from 1845 to 1849 and the subsequent mismanagement of the crisis caused a widespread situation of famine and disease where thousands died, and millions had to leave the country as their only chance of survival.

> ***From 1848 to 1950, over 6 million Irish men, women and children - half of Ireland's population at the time - emigrated from the country. Over 2.5 million departed from the transatlantic port of Cobh, making it Ireland's single most important port of emigration.***

Located next door to Cobh's railway station, by the harbour, which would have been the last sight of Ireland for millions emigrants, Cobh Heritage Centre - The Queenstown Story is a unique multi-media exhibition about the years of mass migration from Ireland.

The majority of the famine emigrants embarked at Cobh went to Canada and the United States. Over 40,000 Irish men and women were deported to British penal colonies such as Australia. Many emigrants to the New World were transported in coffin ships, a term used to refer to overcrowded, disease ridden vessels which resulted in the deaths of many passengers.

The exhibition shows what it was like to spend weeks as a passenger in an emigrant ship. Black and white film and sound effects help to relive the living conditions endured by the more than 2.5 million Irish people embarked at Cobh. Most of the people who left Ireland in those times never saw their homeland again. But many return after several generations, trying to find out any information about their ancestors. The Cobh Heritage Centre provides a genealogy research service for visitors trying to trace an Irish ancestor. The museum also documents other episodes of Cobh's maritime history, such as artefacts, photographs, video exhibits and reconstructions of rooms of the luxury liners, and a section about the ill-fated Titanic, which called in at Cobh in 1912.

Close to The Queenstown Story, in the former Scots Church building overlooking the harbour, the Cobh Museum also hosts a range of permanent exhibitions about Cobh's maritime heritage, including local memorabilia and some genealogical research information.

Outside the Cobh Heritage Centre is the statue of Annie Moore and her two brothers, which together with St Colman's Cathedral is the most photographed monument in Cobh. Annie Moore and her brothers left from Queenstown and became the first ever emigrants to be processed in Ellis Island, New York when it officially opened on January 1st, 1892. The statue, unveiled by the President of Ireland Mary Robinson in 1993, stands as a symbol of the many Irish who have emigrated on that very same journey.


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County Cork Irish Stew

Ingredients

8 small lamb chops
Salt & pepper
1 tbsp vegetable oil
Parsley, thyme, rosemary
Bay leaves
Peppercorns
1 lb potatoes
2 cups finely-shredded cabbage
1 medium onion, chopped
1 large white leek, thinly sliced
12 small white onions
1½ cups celery stalks, diced
1½ cups peas

Instructions

Season chops with salt and pepper. Heat oil in saucepan wide enough to hold all chops in a single layer. Brown on both sides. Spoon off any melted fat and add enough water to cover chops. Bring to a boil and add parsley, bay leaf, peppercorns, thyme and rosemary enclosed in cheesecloth. Lower heat and simmer. Meanwhile, quarter the potatoes, add cabbage, onion, well-rinsed leek, white onion and celery to chops and liquid. Simmer 20 minutes then add peas. Add a little more water if needed during cooking. Simmer 10 minutes more or until potatoes are tender. Adjust seasoning. Garnish with fresh parsley.

Bain taitneamh as do bhéile!



The Madwoman of Cork

By Patrick Galvin

Today
Is the feast day of Saint Anne
Pray for me
I am the madwoman of Cork.

Yesterday
In Castle street
I saw two goblins at my feet
I saw a horse without a head
Carrying the dead
To the graveyard
Near Turner's Cross.

I am the madwoman of Cork
No one talks to me.

When I walk in the rain
The children throw stones at me
Old men persecute me
And women close their doors.
When I die
Believe me
They'll set me on fire.

I am the madwoman of Cork
I have no sense.

Sometimes
With an eagle in my brain
I can see a train
Crashing at the station
If I told people that
They'd choke me.
Then where would I be?

I am the madwoman of Cork
The people hate me.

When Canon Murphy died
I wept on his grave
That was twenty-five years ago.
When I saw him just now
In Dunbar Street
He had clay in his teeth
He blest me.

I am the madwoman of Cork
The clergy pity me.

I see death
In the branches of a tree
Birth in the feathers of a bird.
To see a child with one eye
Or a woman buried in ice
Is the worst thing
And cannot be imagined.

I am the madwoman of Cork
My mind fills me.

I should like to be young
To dress up in silk
And have nine children
I'd like to have red lips
But I'm eighty years old.
I have nothing
But a small house with no windows.

I am the madwoman of Cork
Go away from me.

And if I die now
Don't touch me.
I want to sail in a long boat
From here to Roche's Point
And there I will anoint
The sea
With oil of alabaster.

I am the madwoman of Cork
And today
Is the feast day of Saint Anne.
Feed me.



Konrad Im

As the manager of Gay Project in Cork City, Konrad Im understands the importance of community engagement.

What are your own family roots?

My mom is born and raised in Ballyphehane. My dad is from Hong Kong and has been in Ireland for over 45 years.

When and how did you first get involved with Gay Project?

I first got involved with Gay Project in an official voluntary capacity in 2015 when I won Mr. Gay Cork. I started out as a volunteer planning and running my Mr. Gay Cork fundraising events and then volunteering with the local LGBT+ Youth Group in Gay Project. Through volunteering and the mentorship of my predecessor Dave Roche I then began down the road of studying Community Development.

What are your current roles & responsibilities there?

My roles and responsibilities are varied and far reaching. My official title is Manager, which involves managing staff and day to day operations. But the role also includes fundraising, accounts, social media, community development work, advocacy, representing Gay Project locally and nationally, and at the moment a lot of Project Management for the ongoing building works to the new community centre we just purchased.

What are the challenges of the position?

The biggest challenge is finding more time in the day. As mentioned, it's a very busy role and it's difficult to get everything done. The community and voluntary sector in Ireland is historically underfunded so it can be a challenge to meet the needs of the community we serve while not running ourselves as community workers towards burnout.

What are the rewards?

Community Development work is a job that takes a long time to see change, improvement and rewards as the job is really about changing attitudes and behaviors for individuals - and also of society as a whole - to promote positive outcomes in my case for LGBTI+ people. But when that change becomes visible it can be quite rewarding. An easy example would be with our Drag School program with Mia Gold. It's very rewarding to see a student come in who is very nervous, shy and unsure of themselves on week one before doing a complete 180 degree about face in the 10 weeks where they become a new, confident and proud version of themselves. It's those moments that you know you're doing good and feel the challenges are worth it.

Is enough being done to support the LGBTI+ community in Cork?

I think we have a great support from different angles. But there is always space for improvement. Funding is always an issue for any NGO providing community services that are in high demand. But we could also do with more support from our allies, and even from within our own community in supporting and showing compassion for each other.

How can that be improved?

Funding - more needs to be done from a government perspective in funding the services community organizations provide. The work so many of us do improves the health and well-being of people all over Ireland and is vital in easing the strain on our health systems. I think this is something that goes unrecognized. Community support - we need to all continue to educate ourselves on the issues facing people in our communities. We need to be patient and compassionate towards each other and continue working together to challenge others who seek to tear our communities down.

What advice might you have for young(er) LGBTI+ people in Cork and across Ireland?

Firstly, and very importantly, they need to know that there is a difference between the Gay Scene (clubbing and generally alcohol related) and the Gay Community (places like Gay Project, LINQ Ireland, and the various community spaces for socializing, building community etc.). Take your time to get to know yourself. When you're ready, reach out to your community and find your tribe. Don't expect to find your tribe immediately, you'll find your people and remember that you are never alone.

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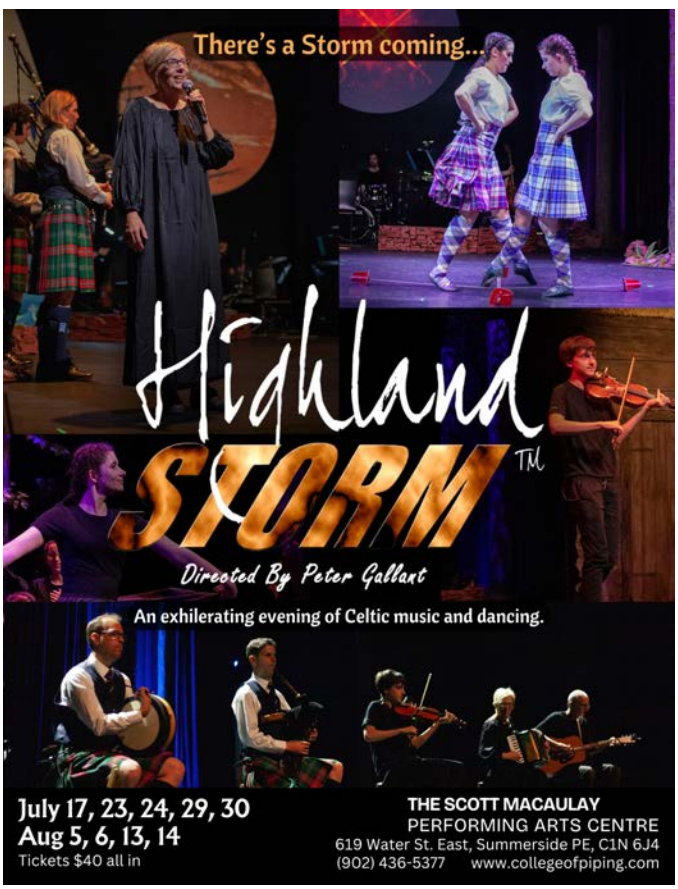
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Bullish Energy Ripe *for* Growth

It is the Flower Full Moon tonight. I reflect on my morning walk in the woods of Summit Park near my home in Montreal, Canada. The energy around me is humming with new life as I witness the myriads of shades of green that have miraculously sprung up and out this past week. My favourite is the chartreuse of ferns unfurling their fronds. Newcomers are the delicate pink and white wildflowers growing out of the dark earth enriched with oak leaves fallen last October. The "Aos Si" - faeries of Celtic lore - have been busy in the forest, but the flowers are a precious, yet fleeting gift. Soon the canopy of maples and oaks will provide shade in the summer to come. My senses are flooded with the beauty I can see, the smell of the flowers and rich earth that rise with the day's heat, the breeze on my bare arms, the songs of birds and calls of forest animals. I'm filled with gratitude and excitement that the season of life and love is here!

Between Beltane and the Sun's longest day on the Summer Solstice of Litha (June 21) is the astrological time of Taurus the Bull. The Taurus constellation was an object of worship for the Druids, whose knowledge of plant medicine and foraging was legendary. Ruled by the planet Venus who represents love, beauty, and fertility, the season of Taurus is the epitome of ripe, divine feminine energy and creativity. Demeter, the Greek goddess of agriculture, fertility and the harvest, is most closely associated with the time of the lengthening days, as is Áine, the Irish Faery Queen. They both represent nurturing qualities, focus on material comfort and stability, and a strong connection to the earth.

As a city dweller, taking time in natural settings is essential to ground myself. Watching the news is bewildering, and confusion is swirling around workplaces as new political and economic realities are forcing change. More sinister are the policy changes that threaten some basic human rights. In "Anam Cara," author and spiritualist John O'Donohue advises us to "remain in rhythm with our inner clay voice and longing." The forest is a place for me to listen to that voice, and to feel connected to something bigger than my reality. The rhythms of the forest make sense while the city beyond dances to its frenetic beat.

> ***"Connecting with nature, whether it be wandering a forest or park, or meandering by a body of water, helps tap into core Celtic values of authenticity, reverence for the land, and connection to the ancestors who came before us.***

Connecting with nature in high spring is also a time to dream - to imagine what could be. This inspires creativity, to identify what we truly desire, and then map out the path we need to manifest our dreams. Like the balance of nature, this may mean letting go of practices or people who no longer serve our path. Also, nurturing our intentions with concrete attention every day. The modern world can seem harsh, but each of us has the power to transform our winter into spring promise. For this form of manifestation, I draw upon the Welsh goddess Rhiannon for inspiration. Her name means "divine feminine" and Night Queen. She is the goddess of horses, forgiveness, rebirth, and the Moon. A symbol of feminine resistance and resilience in the face of adversity and injustice, she is able to find beauty even in troubled times. By practicing compassion and forgiveness, Rhiannon teaches that transformation is possible through love and intention. With action, we can create any change we desire by moving away from disempowering aspects of living. Rhiannon encourages us to be bold, and to draw on the bullish energy of Taurus season to be inspired by the beauty of high spring and dream big! Affirm that you have the courage to overcome your doubts and fears, and Rhiannon may amplify your deepest wishes. The seeds we planted at Ostara were fed by the fire energy of Beltane. It is now time for manifesting our desires, while the sun is high in the sky and warming our hearts.



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