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Celtic Life

INTERNATIONAL

Celtic Holiday Traditions

INSIDE!

*Holiday Gift Guide, Christmas Recipes
Tartan on Display, Joanne McNally
Valley of the Rocks, The Lasses*



DISPLAY IN LIFESTYLES
UNTIL JANUARY 2024



A collection of jewelry pieces by Keith Jack, including necklaces, pendants, and earrings, displayed on a beach with sand, seashells, and a dark rock. The jewelry features intricate Celtic knotwork, pearls, diamonds, and gemstones like amethyst and citrine. The brand name 'Keith Jack' is written in a white script font on the dark rock.

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Fáilte

Dòchas - Gobaith - Esperanza

Celtic culture resonates deeply within us as it embodies the profound sense of connection that we all crave, especially given the current state of the world.

Celtic symbols characterize the belief that we are all connected to both one another and to the natural world that sustains us. The Celtic Tree of Life - Crann Bethadh - represents the interweaving of the heavens and the earth - a middle ground where branches reach skywards, and roots entwine the ever-generative soil. The tree is an important symbol in Celtic culture, signifying the continuous cycle of the seasons that move from replenishment and solitude to regeneration and plentitude. The oak tree, in particular, is the expression of endurance, longevity and hope. While human existence, in comparison, may seem insignificant, we have a huge impact on this planet, for better or for worse.

I am sure that many of you, like myself, thought that surviving a global pandemic would allow us to take a breath and start embracing life again. And yet, in 2023, we have been challenged by both an ongoing climate crisis and conflicts in both Ukraine and the Middle East.

In search of perspective - and perhaps seeking some solace - I recently had the privilege of attending a Jane Goodhall event in Toronto to better understand how a person that has spent six decades inspiring action can make sense of a world that is often senseless. Born in London, U.K. in 1934, Goodhall is a world-renowned primatologist and conservationist. She is also a passionate storyteller, and her message was powerful and uplifting. At the gathering, Goodhall was asked what advice she had for those who felt their efforts were futile against the negative onslaught. Her response was inspiring; "There is still so much in the world worth fighting for. So much that is beautiful, so many wonderful people working to reverse the harm, to help alleviate the suffering. And so many young people are dedicated to making this a better world. All conspiring to inspire us and to give us hope that it is not too late to turn things around if we all do our part."

In support of this vision, we have donated to the Jane Goodhall Institute, contributing to their global initiatives aimed at halting biodiversity loss, addressing climate change, and promoting environmental equity. We encourage all those who can join us by making a donation of their own.

From all of us at Celtic Life International, we would like to extend warm wishes for a holiday season filled with compassion and hope for a transformative 2024.

Sláinte!

Siobhán L. Covington, Publisher

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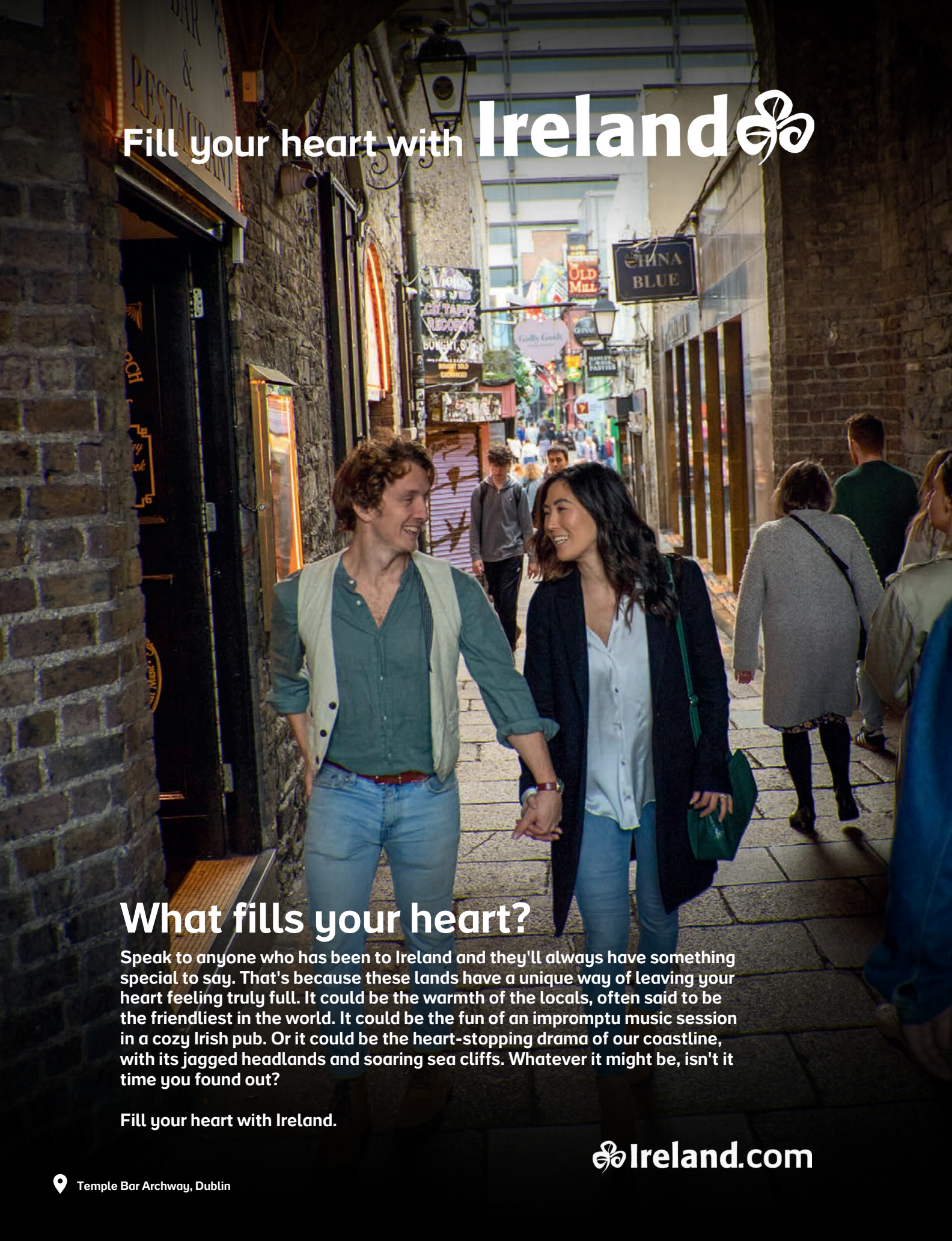
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First Word with James Acken

We, who live in a state of polished life, frequently indulge ourselves in frivolous conceits, far-fetch'd allusions, and thus degenerate into a false-sublime. The rude scenes of nature, so exquisitely painted by Ossian, would not affect a modern writer in the same manner, and consequently could not be so expressively described by him. MacPherson, Fingal, a Poem in Six Books by Ossian (1777)

These sentences, published just 12 years before the onset of the French Revolution, not only encapsulate the Romantic fascination with the natural world as a foil for the then newly industrialized culture of the city, but also the appeal of the Celt as another iteration of the noble savage. Those of us with an interest in Celtic culture often forget to place the familiar narratives of heroism and loss alongside the great myths of modernity based on revolution and progress. After all, what does Bonnie Prince Charlie have to do with Thomas Newcomen? Even modern narratives like Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* focus more on the interaction of culture and the impact of political movements than the intersection of technology and culture, but our lives are now defined by the technology of information, a technology completely alien to our Celtic forebears. How do we invent a continuity with the past that honours Celtic heroism without falling into the "frivolous conceits, and far-fetch'd allusions" that seem to be the common currency of modern social media?

The 18th century is perhaps a good place to look for examples for how to answer this question. By the time Charles Stewart, the



James Macpherson

Bonnie Prince himself, had landed in Scotland for his ill-fated revolution and the last-pitched battle on British soil at Culloden moor, there were more than 100 of Thomas Newcomen's steam engines pumping water out of mines in England and Wales. For a century the English monarchy had been engaged with draining the Fens of England, against which there was considerable opposition, as part of the ongoing modernization of the country.

Industry and economic progress were the great political endeavours driving massive technological and social change, and Celtic culture, under siege for more than 250 years, was in retreat. Welsh culture was beginning to be dominated and redefined by the mining industry, primarily in slate, lead and silver. Gaelic culture in Ireland, associated with Catholicism, had been driven largely into Connacht by Cromwell's army in the 1650s, and the Penal Laws of 1695 ensured that the language and beliefs of the Gael would be vilified and suppressed for more than a 100 years.

In every way, Celtic culture was associated with barbaric history, and the prevailing wisdom of those in power insisted that modern progress needed to drain away the fetid waters of its heroic past.

In the midst of this maelstrom came James Macpherson, a student of divinity who was born in Inverness-shire and grew up in the wake of Culloden. A poet himself who had struggled with the very question of how to find a way forward for Gaelic culture, he published two translations of epic, Gaelic poetry: *Fingal* in 1761 (first edition) and *Temora* in 1763. By the

time he published *The Works of Ossian* in 1765, fame and controversy had been drawn to him in equal measure. The accusations that he forged them into poems have pursued him to this day, mostly because there is no single textual source he could point to, but his books were also translated into every European language. A version of *Ossian* even accompanied Napoleon on his campaigns across Europe. This was the first glimmering of the romanticization of Celtic culture that would blossom into W.B. Yeats's *Celtic Twilight* and eventually bear the title of Celtic Revival or Renaissance.

The brilliance of MacPherson's work is not in its authenticity but in its celebration of something more difficult to define and thus impossible to quell. Despite accusations of being an imperfect Gael incapable of managing the difficulties of traditional poetry, his English "translations" touched off an interest in what modern audiences could appreciate in Celtic culture. The very thing that rendered Celticism anathema to the Enlightenment, its heroism and courage in the face of unspeakable tragedy, was thus the very thing that endeared it to popular Europe. For us living in this transitional time when the cacophony of current online communication makes it increasingly difficult to navigate the treacherous waters of post-colonial society, Macpherson's example in the *Works of Ossian* provides a refuge in a strong love of the past, a celebration of what we have in the present and a hope for a future that allows both to thrive.

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

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1



2



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4



5



6

one

The Mari Lwyd

This winter holiday tradition predates Christmas and Christianity itself. The Mari Lwyd (or the “grey mare”) was once a popular custom in Wales, not dissimilar to the mummering practices of Newfoundland and Labrador. A horse’s skull was decorated and placed on a pole, and someone wrapped in a white sheet would play puppeteer while going door-to-door with a procession of singers and musicians. While the tradition declined in the early 20th century, it has since undergone something of a revival and the Mari Lwyd has even become a popular meme online.

two

The Isle of Man to the Moon

Digital postage stamps from the Isle of Man are on their way to the moon. The Isle of Man Post Office and Digital Isle of Man collaborated to digitize stamps in exclusive designs. These stamps will be transmitted to the moon and back via a “lunar data centre” by space start-up company Lonestar. According to a press release, the mission will explore how data can be stored on the moon and retrieved in the event of a catastrophe on Earth, such as an extreme natural disaster.

three

Aquaman Seeks Cornish Home

Jason Momoa might soon be a resident of Cornwall. The actor, made famous by Game of Thrones and more recently as Aquaman, is reportedly scoping out properties in the region. While he has filmed on location in Devon and Charlestown, it’s the village of St. Mawgan that has caught Momoa’s attention. Mawgan Porth (in English, St. Mawgan’s cove) features beautiful dunes, cliffs, and a beach that has proven to be a popular surfing location. Other stars such as Chris Martin and Cate Blanchett have also purchased properties in the area.

four

Unreal Unearth

Irish musician Andrew Hozier-Byrne, better known as Hozier, has incorporated the Irish language into his music for the first time. The singer-songwriter recently released his third album. While Celtic influence has always been present in his work, Unreal Unearth takes it to new heights. The album is partly inspired by Dante’s Inferno, but Hozier brings other cultural and literary references into the mix. The Irish language also plays a significant role. The song Butchered Tongue, for example, explores loss of language and culture at the hands of colonialism.

five

EU languages

The Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs has requested that three languages, including Galician, be added to the official languages of the European Union (EU). As of August 2023, the EU has 24 official languages, and The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states “EU nationals have the right to use any of the 24 official languages to communicate with the EU institutions, and the institutions must reply in the same language.” Minister José Manuel Albarez formally submitted a petition to the Council of the EU, asking for Catalan, Basque and Galician to be added.

six

Isle of Man Online

You can now tour the Isle of Man’s natural landscape without leaving home. The Isle of Man Government recently collaborated with video production company Isle of Man 360 to create virtual tours of the island’s national glens. There are 18 of these areas around the island, maintained in a semi-natural state by the Department of Environment. However, the rugged natural terrain also makes these areas difficult to traverse - especially for those with physical disabilities. Now, each glen is available to “visit” via Google Street View technology, with the next phase of the project still to come.

Have an interesting tidbit to share with our Celtic community? Drop us a line anytime at info@celticlife.com

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The Henry Bloom Noble Healthcare Trust



Noah Herniman



Brian Stowell

A charitable trust on the Isle of Man recently launched a new series of grants to help local doctors and other medical professionals. Through these grants, the Henry Bloom Noble Healthcare Trust aims to reward outstanding general practices by helping them purchase new medical equipment. If a patient feels they have received exceptional care from their medical practitioners, they may nominate a practice for up to £5,000. This money goes towards a specific piece of equipment, for which the practice has demonstrated a need. Snaefell Surgery in Douglas was the first practice to benefit from the GP Grant Scheme in September. As of early 2023, Snaefell Surgery became the first nurse-led practice on the Isle of Man. “We have a fantastic team of nurses, GPs and more recently a health care assistant and pharmacist, with the support of a fantastic management and administrative team,” reads a statement from the practice. “We were thrilled to be approached by the Trust and to be considered for their grant. We have been looking at the management of patients with long term conditions and - in particular - asthma and those patients with suspected asthma. The grant has enabled us to purchase a FeNo [fractional exhaled nitric oxide] machine which can be used as an aid in the diagnosis of asthma and also in the management of asthma in those that have symptoms despite using inhaled corticosteroids.” The grants will be awarded on an annual basis and the Trust is not putting a number on the amount of grants it awards each year.

A Welsh teenager is helping sick kids and their families go on holiday together for free. Noah Herniman, who lives with a condition called neurofibromatosis, was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour in 2021. Knowing his condition was unlikely to change, Herniman decided he would raise money for others rather than fundraising to travel abroad for treatment himself. Now 17, Herniman has collaborated with a charity called Morgan’s Army to raise money for the purchase of a luxury caravan. He successfully fundraised more than £35,000 and donated the caravan to the Swansea-based Kids Cancer Charity. It’s been dubbed “Noah’s Retreat” and will serve as a respite lodge for young patients and their families. “We’re very proud and a little sad it’s almost over with our caravan dream. It’s really strange because you spend all of this time working towards something, and then all of a sudden, we’ve done it, and Noah’s like: ‘What’s next?’” Herniman’s mother, Shelley, recently told Wales Online. “What we’ve found through Noah’s time in hospital and through his fundraising over the years is that there are so many families who’ve had similar experiences to us who are all doing wonderful things. There is a whole network of lovely people turning horrible experiences into something brilliant.” Noah’s Lodge officially opened in Burnham-on-Sea, England, in mid-September. While this was not Herniman’s first fundraiser venture, it has undoubtedly been his biggest.

In 2009, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization declared Manx to be an “extinct language.” The late Brian Stowell helped change that. Born in Douglas in 1936, Stowell learned Manx Gaelic as a young man and later worked as a nuclear physicist in England. He returned to the Isle of Man in 1991, where he became the nation’s first Manx Language Officer. He dedicated nearly 30 years of his life to teaching Manx Gaelic thereafter. By 1992, Manx was offered as a language option in island schools. In addition to being an educator, Stowell was also a musician, writer, and radio broadcaster. He released a Manx translation of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, as well as other written works. He was recognized with various awards and accolades for his efforts. Although Stowell passed away in 2019, his impact on Manx culture won’t soon be forgotten. “Brian was one of those rare people who we could genuinely and automatically think of as a national treasure, someone who made an impression on so many people, who talked with passion and knowledge about what was important to a sense of Manxness,” read a statement from Culture Vannin following Stowell’s death. “What can not be said enough, though, is how he affected so many people’s lives on a one-to-one basis, mentoring them in the language, encouraging, giving confidence and precious time. And all this from someone whose career was mostly spent as a physicist.” Since his passing, Culture Vannin has published Stowell’s autobiography.

Ireland's language and culture



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Rockbridge Guitars & TinkerTars

One Scottish-American is hitting all the right notes

How many professional, superstar guitarists plucked their first string on a toy guitar, lighting that lifelong flame in their youth? Likely more than a few.

But how many of those musicians play a guitar as adults designed by the same person who made their childhood instrument of inspiration? It is quite possible that luthier Brian Calhoun has created a generation of rock stars.

Calhoun comes from Rockbridge County, Virginia by way of the ancestral Calhouns of Scotland. He co-founded the Rockbridge Guitar Company in 2002, where - alongside three friends and business partners - he crafts about 65 professional-grade custom guitars a year.

"Most of our clients are professional musicians and serious players," Calhoun tells Celtic Life International. "We basically found a formula for building really great guitars early on and have just stuck with it and honed our skills."

Over the years, Rockbridge Guitar has crafted six-stringed axes for the likes of Dave Matthews, Keith Urban, and a bevy of other high-profile guitarists.

"In the old days, I would reach out to bands all the time to try and show them guitars. Now, it is much more about word-of-mouth - that is, usually, our customers find us.

"Our guitars have a unique sound,"

Calhoun continues. "It is hard to put into words, but you can feel it when you play one. The main feedback we get from customers is that our guitars are incredibly balanced and very versatile. Rockbridge Guitar Company makes many different models of acoustic guitars; my current favourites are the SJ, the OO, and the Smeck J."

Calhoun shares that he is pleased with where the company is these days, feeling as though Rockbridge Guitars has hit a steady stride.

"I am really happy with Rockbridge Guitar Company right now. There is not much I want to change, though we are considering making a few electric guitars.

"When we started the company, I was building guitars all day..."

"I do much less building now, but I am still involved in the building process. I primarily spend my time running the business; getting orders, helping customers figure out what guitar to have built, meeting artists, that sort of thing."

Not one to rest on his laurels, though, Calhoun recently created a second guitar manufacturing business - toy guitars.

"My newest company, TinkerTar, produces children's guitars, designed to get kids started playing music at a really young

age," he notes, explaining that TinkerTars are one-string instruments with a colour-coded fingerboard that corresponds to provided teaching material. His first TinkerTar creation was a one-stringed dinosaur. "Now we have a variety of shapes and styles, from tigers and leopards to pizza and rainbows.

"I believe they are the easiest way to introduce kids to stringed instruments. TinkerTar is currently being marketed as a toy, but I want to slowly shift that and get it into more and more schools and early childhood music centres.

"I think it is an incredible tool for sparking a love of music in young kids, and I can't wait to watch it grow."

Whether he is crafting precision instruments for hard-core rockers, or tiny twangers for tots, the joy Calhoun gets from seeing his work being of benefit to musicians across their lifespan is rewarding.

"I really enjoy working with three of my great friends in this company. Happy customers; hearing amazing musicians play our guitars, and knowing that most of them will play these instruments forever is important to us. And now with TinkerTar, the reward is seeing kids play their first song, and realizing it could be the beginning of a lifetime love of playing music."

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Scots in New England

Bob Creighton is on a mission



Scots in New England is a fledgling foundation made from the pooled efforts of numerous Scottish communities, businesses, and associations in the New England region of the United States - an area well-populated by the Scottish diaspora.

Recently, Bob Creighton - director and president of Scots in New England - spoke with Celtic Life International about what he hopes the organization will achieve with its first public efforts, including the New England Scot of the Year awards.

"I was born, raised, and educated in Glasgow in Scotland," shares Creighton. "I was the oldest of six children and I, along with the rest of my brothers and sisters, went to university. I studied economics and history at the University of Strathclyde. After graduation, I went into work in marketing services, market analysis, and economic development."

Creighton moved to the United States in the 1980s to work in the investment circuit - in particular, to bring American business interests to the U.K. He quickly became aware that, in America, 'Scottishness' tended to be seen as a monolith - tartans, kilts, bagpipes, etc.

"That is actually quite wrong. Scottishness and Scottish interests are a very, very broad table."

Over the years, Creighton launched his own business, and connected with Scottish sectors across New England. He joined - and eventually became president of - the board of NHSCOT, New Hampshire's Scottish society, which runs the Loon Mountain Highland Games each September. He was then able to do what he felt had yet to be done; unite all of the Scottish sectors of New England.

"There was no real connectivity between the Loon Mountain games and other Scottish interests across New England," he explains. "My view is, it doesn't matter whether your interest is in traditional pursuits like piping, drumming, and athletics, or whether it's more modern, like in business, education, charitable organizations, media, or just general interest, even if it's Outlander-type interest. There's a seat at the table for everyone."

"But one of the things that struck me about Scots in New England - not the organization, but just Scots in New England - and I'm going to use an expression my mother used to use; they weren't playing very well with each other. So, the original concept was, 'let's try and pull some groups and some interests together.'"

Between the COVID lockdowns and other speed bumps, Creighton says there were a few 'false dawns' to the Scots in New England initiative. But it got started for real earlier this year, when the British Consul General in Boston invited several Scottish groups to revive the Burns Supper event in Beantown.

Creighton says that Scots in New England is looking beyond the classic elements of Scottish culture - without outright ignoring them - to cast their net wider, and connect with contemporary Scots throughout the original colonies.

"If you look at some of the hospitals - for example, Brigham Young Women's Hospital - the cutting-edge cancer research being done there's been led by a Scot. One of the finest Scottish events in the year is run by the National Trust for Scotland Foundation, USA; now they are headquartered in Boston, but run their annual gala dinner in New York."

"We have all these different activities, and what we hope to do is develop a project, an event, or an initiative that can pull these groups together so that they may learn from each other and exchange ideas."

The signature event this year is the New England Scot of the Year Awards, aimed at highlighting people behind the scenes in their communities.

"It's tempting to think about the great contribution Scots have made in history; penicillin, tarmacadam, you name it. We almost forget the continuing impact that Scots are having on their communities. With the awards initiative, we are welcoming nominations through to the end of September and the awards will be presented on Saint Andrew's Day, November 30, in Boston. The winners - in the categories of New England Scot of the Year, Emerging New England Scot of the Year, and the New England Scot Lifetime Achievement Award - will be announced then, and the awards will be presented."

This is just the start for Scots in New England, Creighton stresses, hoping the organization will be the tide that raises all ships.

"We are building a community of Scots, and developing initiatives, events, and programming - stuff that any single organization might not be able to do on its own but will now be able to as we bring the collective together."

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The Lasses

*A Dutch duo
is making beautiful
music together*



Sophie Janna and Margot Merah - better known as The Lasses - have been creating and performing music collectively for more than 10 years. They first met in Amsterdam in 2012, but before that, both women were raised by talented families.

Both of Merah's parents are singers, and her mother has been in a choir for four decades. It was inevitable that Merah, too, would go down the path of music. "As a kid I played a whole range of instruments: trumpet, tenor horn, saxophone and the organ," she recalls. "The question wasn't if I wanted to play music, or why. It was more a matter of what. As a student I wanted to play a quiet instrument because I didn't want to disturb my roommates. So, I taught myself to play guitar quietly and to sing songs. I have always written little poems and when I played the guitar, those poems later became songs."

Janna's story is similar: her mother was in a vocal group, and so Janna and her siblings witnessed rehearsals and performances from the time they were children. "My family performed at village fairs and churches from a young age, and we learned to play instruments from our aunts and uncles. We used to sing all the time - while playing, while doing the dishes, on long walks - I think you would find me singing more often than you would find me quiet."

Music was so ingrained in Janna's life, in fact, that it didn't even occur to her to pursue it as a career. It wasn't until she was doing her PhD that she realized her weekly Irish singing sessions were keeping her going.

"I discovered that if I wanted to really live, I needed to put music at the center of my life."

"Of course, it took another few years before I discovered how I could actually pay my rent from making music, but I play music because I wither if I don't."

As fate would have it, Janna met Merah at one of those Irish singing sessions.

"We realized very quickly that when we sang together, everyone stopped to listen," recalls Merah. The pair then decided to perform some concerts together.

"As both of us are prone to self-doubt, it was really helpful to work together," notes Janna, adding that the more they played together, the more confident they both became. "It wasn't hard to put together a set, since both Margot and I already used to play and sing solo. We just combined our songs and whoever didn't sing lead would sing the harmony."

That same year, the pair created their first recording together as The Lasses. In those early days, they would record everything themselves, then burn a handful of copies and print out their own album covers before a gig. Recently, they released their fifth album, *Near Far*.

"The main thing is that we have started to take things a bit more seriously," explains Janna. "When more people started to get excited about our music, we realized that maybe we could invest a bit more money in making a

professionally recorded album, and I feel that with every new album, we have dared to invest a little bit more, thinking our music might in fact be worth it and that people might want to buy it."

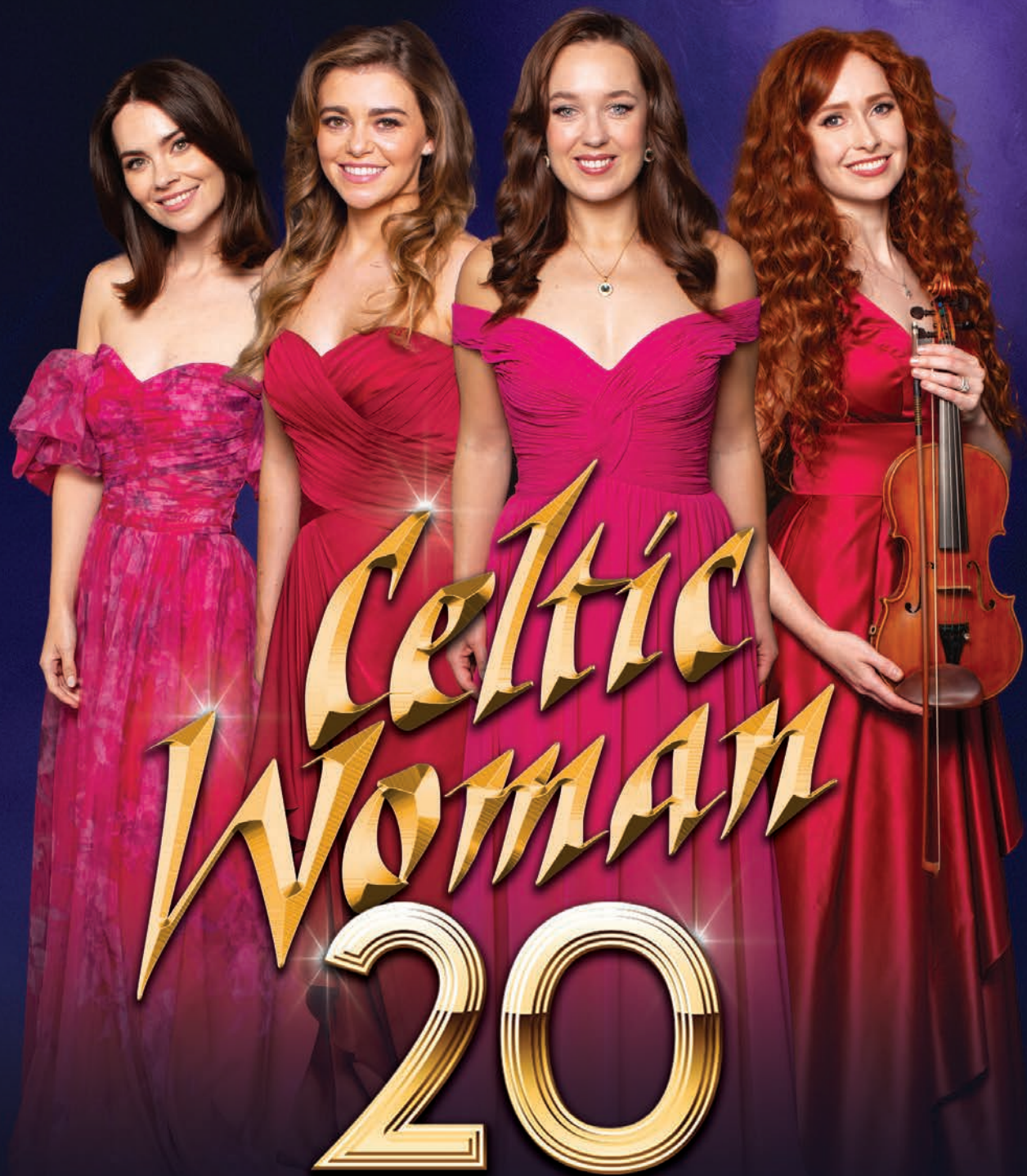
Although The Lasses call the Netherlands home, they share a passion for Celtic music. As Janna points out, their roots can be an advantage - even traditional Celtic songs sound "fresh" to them, as they didn't grow up listening to 20 different versions of those staple tunes.

Near Far, which was recorded in collaboration with Janos Koolen, is largely inspired by The Lasses' tours of Scotland in 2018 and 2019.

"We were a bit apprehensive at first to play Scottish traditional songs in Scotland, us being a Dutch duo. But as it turned out, people were proud that we sang their songs," says Janna. "We've learned most of our songs from sessions in Scotland or back in Amsterdam and started playing them out of sheer love for that song. During the pandemic, when we couldn't get back to Scotland, we decided to bundle some of our favourite Scottish songs, both contemporary and traditional - and the result is *Near Far*."

Merah describes the record as "a beautifully crocheted blanket": "The instruments we play are like a little bed where our voices and harmonies can rest on and Janos adds the beautiful extras."

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A portrait of Joanne McNally, a woman with blonde hair and blue eyes, wearing a red and purple striped blazer, a gold chain necklace, and gold hoop earrings. She is looking slightly to the side with a soft expression.

Joanne McNally



If there is one thing that Irish comedian Joanne McNally is always down for, it's a laugh. The Killiney, Co. Dublin native has an impressive comedic resume; the on-stage one-woman show *Bite Me*, her wildly popular podcast *My Therapist Ghosted Me* with friend Vogue Williams, an array of television appearances and live gigs, and her hilarious stand-up comedy tour *Prosecco Express*, which she continues to perform around the world. Recently, *Celtic Life International's* Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns caught up with McNally to discuss touring, her ongoing projects, and her unwavering reverence for the world of comedy.

What got you into comedy?

I did it to impress a boy!

Did it work?

The boy is long gone. Ha! But yes, I did it to impress a boy. A comedian suggested I could do it, should do it, and then I did it to impress him. That is honestly how I got into it!

Have those reasons evolved over time? Is it still about the boy?

I just decided that I really liked it. Okay, well, I wasn't working at the time I started - actually, I was in treatment for an eating disorder, so I had to quit my job. I wasn't really doing anything. And then a friend of mine, Una McKeivitt, was putting on a play called *Singlehood*. It was going to be half "normal people" and half comedians, and they were going to share stories about their love lives. Una said to me, "Stand up and tell a story about your love live." So, I stood up and told a story and people started to laugh. And then this other comedian said he thought I should give stand up a go, and I kind of fancied him, so I agreed. Then I put the work into it, and it gave me a good reason to recover from my illness. I wasn't really bothered with getting better, to be honest with you. I didn't have the motivation. But comedy gave me a sense of purpose. And then I decided I was just going to try to be really good at it. And I worked at it like a maniac.

Who are some of your influences?

I love Michelle Wolf, Amy Shumer, and Katerine Ryan. And there is another comedian that I just started listening to that I really like - Leanne Morgan. She is new to me but obviously not new, but someone I just found out about. I am trying to think of men! I like Bill Burr, and I really love Kevin Hart and Eddie Murphy. The big hitters!

What have been some career highlights?

Travelling - I basically get paid to travel! I see so much of the world. I would say being in Montreal has been the biggest highlight to date. That, and doing shows in New York was another highlight, and when I did the *Apollo* in London. It is stuff like that. It is also amazing to see my own growth, both professionally and personally. I have been working very hard for a long time, so it has been wonderful to see it finally pay off. And I mention Montreal because I had never

been to that side of the world. Obviously, I am Irish, but I have an American agent and I got to perform in Montreal. I want to start doing more stuff like that.

Your Prosecco Express tour just keeps on rolling.

It's amazing! Processo Express is just a little show I put together, but I am going to get another year out of it, I think. I have done tours in both Europe and North America, and soon I will be back in Australia and then Europe. And it is all for my little show.

It must feel rewarding to know that this little thing you made has grown into such a big thing.

It is rewarding to make the money back for sure! Ha! Seriously, I have put a lot of money into stand up and at the start I was making pennies – in fact, I worked for free most of the time. And there is a lot of sacrifice involved, like with anything you really want to put your heart and soul into. I have missed a lot of family events, I have had a lot of failed relationships, I have missed things with my friends – all that sort of stuff. That is why it was great when I started to see a return, and the shows start giving something back – kind of like, “Oh yeah, this is why I have given up so much of my life for the past four years.”

Is that the main challenge of a career in comedy?

The time alone is also very challenging. I am very mentally prepared now, but it took a while. After the show, I go back to my trailer alone. There is a lot of alone time. Though, I think now I prefer it. Now I am perfectly fine being alone from one end to the other. You know, my boyfriend is like “Ring me after the show,” and my mother is like “Ring me after the show.” But I am very happy on my own now.



You have a way of taking weighty and difficult topics – eating disorders, motherhood – and bringing levity to them, finding the comedy.

It's just how I am. I just always find everything funny. I'm always down for a laugh! Me and my friends are all a bit like that. We would laugh at a funeral – respectfully! It was not something I had to learn to do for my own inner peace. I have just always been like that. There was no other way I was ever going to do it.

Has this helped you to develop a stronger, more dedicated fan base, do you think?

It did in a way. I don't really consider comedy to be therapy, you know? I don't find it cathartic in that way. But it is great when I tell a story about something completely wild that I did and someone goes, “Oh, I did that, too!” The first show I did was Bite Me, and it was a very dark one-woman comedy about bulimia. That show put me in contact with a lot of women who had been through the same thing. We all want something to make us feel connected, and comedy is really cool for that. It reminds people we all do the same stupid shit.

You also have other projects lined up, like the show Sex Drive you did with Vogue Williams on E4. How was that?

Oh, grand! Vogue and I decided we wanted to do a show together – and we really wanted to go to Ibiza. Though I have to say I will never work in heat like that again. I am not equipped! Vogue is perfection personified, but I was just a wet, hairy mess. I told her if we get a series we're going to Finland or Canada. Who knows, though! We will definitely do more stuff together. Stand up is my main thing, though – the audience is there. It's intoxicating, hearing people laugh. It's great craic!

What is next for you?

I signed a book deal a while ago, but I haven't gotten around to writing it. But next year I will! I have been on the road pretty much nonstop for the last two years, so next year I am going to chill and write my book. It will be essays. It's not fiction, but it is not a memoir either. I did sociology in college, and I love a bit of pop psychology. But I haven't even written the introduction yet, so I really can't tell you. But it will come together. It has to! Or I will be in court, ha!



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On the Road to the Valley of Rocks

Lesley Choyce explores the Celtic coast of Devon



Snug in my pellet-stove heated living room one day a few winters ago, I was looking for escape from a dreary Nova Scotia February and began reading *The Salt Path* by Raynor Winn. The story, as described by the publisher, went like this: “Just days after Raynor Winn learned that Moth, her husband of 32 years, was terminally ill, they lost their home and livelihood. With nothing left and little time, they impulsively decided to walk the 630-mile Southwest Coast Path from Somerset to Dorset, via Devon and Cornwall.”

Right then and there, I decided that - if these two hearty but desperate souls could do it - I, too, should walk that very path. I was neither terminally ill nor homeless and I figured that should make the arduous trek that much more doable, right?

Well, maybe.

I have made pledges to do difficult treks before: circumnavigating the coastline of Nova Scotia (7500 kilometres) on foot, hitchhiking across Canada (7623 kilometres), and even the modest task of traversing Spain’s spectacular Camino de Santiago (a

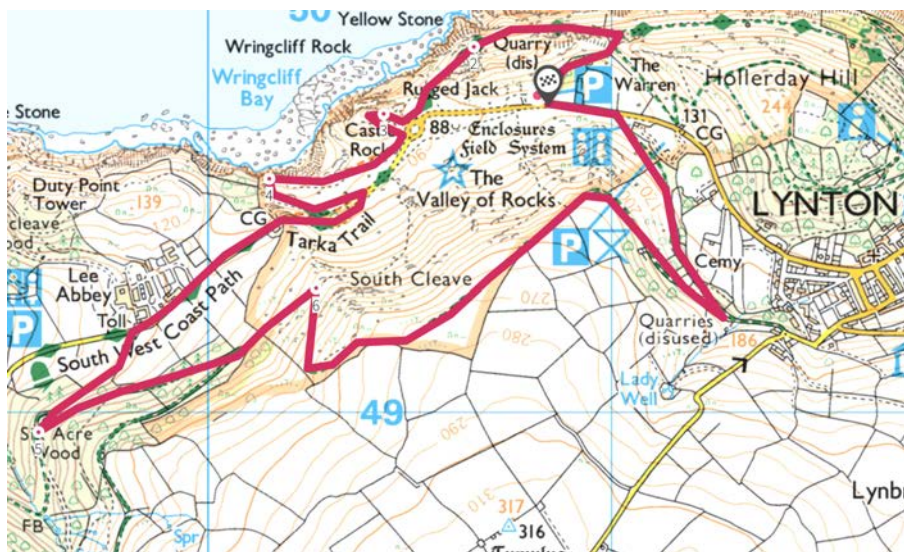
mere 790 kilometres).

Alas, I have never followed through completely on any of these pilgrimages.

Nonetheless, I was now inspired to visit yet another stretch of the magnificent Southwest Coast Path that I had found so intriguing in the past. I closed the book, closed my

eyes, flipped open to a random page of *The Salt Path* to determine my destination.

On page 58 I read, “And here we were, rucksacks on our backs, at the Valley of Rocks...the sea broke against the base of the cliffs leading up to Castle Rock.” Then and there I decided I would set foot at least on





this one section of that most-luring coastal trail as soon as possible in honour of Raynor and Moth Winn.

Months later, on a wind-whipped day in November, my wife Linda and I found ourselves winding east, west, south, and north along those higgledy-piggledy back roads near Widmouth Bay, headed towards Lynton and the entrance to the Valley of Rocks where I hoped to climb to the top of that famous pinnacle known as Castle Rock while Linda would get her morning run through the length of the valley itself.

Heading east on the A399, I noted that Combe Martin Bay looked like a good place to surf if the wind and tides were right and the proper swell was headed this way, but on this particular day, the sea was flat. The town of Combe Martin itself looked tidy and prosperous, but I had foolishly looked up some info about it on a rather unkind British website called ilivehere.co.uk where I read this:

"I'm Bob and I live here. Combe Martin is definitely not interesting, lively or quaint. In any way. It's dark, humourless, miserable and depressing...The village is blessed with a lovely sweet shop and bakery, but no available women whatsoever, they're not stupid."

Now I don't take that as a definitive statement about a town. It was bright and cheerful to my way of thinking. I did see a few women walking about shopping at stores but couldn't say if they were "available" or not. And I do hope Bob either moves to a less miserable place or finds the right partner to bring a little Devonian sunshine into his existence.

There is an Iron Age fort hereabouts, along with records of silver mining going back to the 13th century. Some of that silver even went into the making of the Crown Jewels. I couldn't help but notice a pub with a rather unusual name - The Pack O' Cards - and later learned that it was built with gambling winnings by George Ley around 1700. It was designed with 52 windows, the number of cards in a deck. It is also worthy of note that Combe Martin has the Guinness World Record for the longest street party, but I believe that reference is to the length of the street the party was on, not how long the party lasted. (My friends in Cape Breton must certainly hold the world record for the latter.)

Clearly, some folks both deceased and living, have been trying to put lowly Combe Martin on the world map for some time.

This includes whoever conjured up the Combe Martin Wildlife and Dinosaur Park with its popular wolves, sea lions, primates, meerkats, and penguins but especially its "life-size animatronic dinosaurs."

Out on the coastal path, not far from downtown, are Hangman Cliffs. Both Great Hangman and Little Hangman were referenced by Raynor Winn as a particularly tough section of their homeless trek. Great Hangman is said to be the highest sea cliff in England (244 metres). According to legend (that is, Old Willard, a regular down at The

Pack of Cards), the name of the place is derived from a story about a local sheep thief who stopped for a breather up there one day when his struggling ewe somehow got the cord that had been wrapped around her legs entangled around the man's neck and strangled him. Old Willard's story is backed by a number of other pub goers in the area so I assumed there must be some credence to it. The trouble with this tale is that a local academic, a diehard party-pooper who will remain unnamed as to ensure his safety, told me that man is a common term of Celtic origin that simply means hill and hang is the German word for slope and thus the colourful name may simply mean "sloping hill." But I still prefer Old Willard's version.

Sadly, we had to turn inland, away from the coastal path if we were going to make it in our rental car to the Valley of Rocks, so we motored past the wildlife and dinosaurs towards Blackmore Gate, enjoying the lush inland scenery of hills and green fields. If we were to stay on the A399, we would have headed straight into the lovely untamed wilderness of Exmoor, but instead, I turned left to get us back to the northern shoreline and the town of Lynton. Soon, however, I took a wrong turn into Paracombe where I had to ask directions from a courier driver who wanted to know what us Yanks were doing rambling around North Devon. I corrected him, of course, telling the lad that we were from Nova Scotia, Canada and not the U.S., and that we were headed towards the famous Valley of Rocks. He apologized for assuming wrongly about our nationality, said he'd never heard of such a valley (which was only a few kilometres away) and then said he had a cousin in Toronto.

At length, he told us which unmarked road would get us to Lynton, but that before we left town - and I didn't know we were actually in a town - we should visit Holwell Castle and St. Petrock's Church. I apologized saying that we probably would push on for the coast but that I'd mention those two places in an article I was writing for Celtic Life International. He said that was a good idea since Paracombe needed a few more tourists and thanked me with an odd expression I'd only ever heard used on Coronation Street.

Various bits of tourist information urged us to spend some time in Lynton, a coastal town referred to as "Little Switzerland." Like other mock-Swiss locations (such as Bear River, Nova Scotia which is also called "Little Switzerland"), the town looks nothing like the European nation, but it does have some high hills, ragged cliffs and you can

buy hot chocolate there. It seems that the poet, Robert Southey, long ago suggested the Alpine-esque nature of the surroundings and it stuck; this from the same man who helped popularize the children's story "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" in 1837.

Railway buffs would know the town for its Lynton to Lynmouth Cliff Railway which is really a funicular that ascends and descends an 862-foot cliff with its "opportunity to create lasting memories with your loved ones" and that even includes dogs, so I give them my vote of confidence. Linda and I, however, were chomping at the bit to get our feet moving - she running, and me hiking. I had read what Ms. Winn had to say about the coastal trail. She wrote, "Out of Lynton the path narrowed to the edge of a hillside, until it became a right-angle bend on a cliff edge. This was our most exposed point so far and we nervously rounded the corner to come face to face with another Australian striding fearlessly along."

*The path was indeed narrow
and magnificently perched
along the cliff edge above the sea.
It was slippery with wet
leaves and redolent with the
smell of the salt of the sea.*

Dogs and local joggers bounded along, but no fearless Australians, as we made our way west out of town into some magnificent territory.

Not long after, we drove further west



Devil's Cheese Ring

out of town and entered the Valley of Rocks, known for its fascinating and unusual tall rock formations. The valley itself was covered in lush green grasses and it felt like an ancient place where one might hope to encounter dinosaurs or mythic creatures. Evidence suggests late prehistoric peoples lived here and there is a Bronze Age burial cairn in the area. Today, there were a number of very proper looking hikers zig-zagging about, but it was easy to steer well away from them and get happily lost in this most-beautiful and bizarre glen.

Linda put her running shoes on and sped off down the narrowly paved road to

take in the full beauty of the valley while I clambered about on some jagged pinnacles of stone to see what I could see. I had read that Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth had tromped around here in 1797. I had made myself another vow to try to hike as many paths as possible where Wordsworth had trod, so I was now in my glory. I had never been disappointed when seeking out pathways of the great poet that Lord Byron had once called "Turdsworth." And today I was not to be disappointed.

On the coastal path itself you can find Chimney Rock and Rugged Jack, but I wandered inland a bit to see what the Devil's Cheese Ring looked like. It was an interesting piling of flattish stones for sure and it turns out it is well documented in a few famous paintings.

It didn't look like any cheese ring I'd ever encountered at Christmas parties, and I was not brave enough to mount the wobbly-looking cheese myself, but I silently congratulated the structure on its odd beauty before heading off to my real destination.

There is naturally a local legend involving the devil as there is almost anywhere in the U.K. that sports odd rock formations. In this case, Druids were having a feast or party of some sort out by Rugged Jack when the devil himself showed up uninvited and turned them all to stone. He did things like this so often around the south of England that it must have put a significant dent in the Druid population and made him a most unwelcome guest. But at least he left a cheese ring.





Castle Rock

As I tromped across the centre of the valley towards Castle Rock, I could see the feral goats perched randomly along the steep sides of the formation.

Their ancestors dated back to at least the 11th century, and they had been both loved and reviled down through the ages. Some were blamed for head-butting profitable sheep off the cliffs into the sea. In more recent times, they'd wandered into town as goats do and wreaked havoc on Lynton vegetable gardens. Their defenders claim, however, the goats have a right to be here and help control the valley vegetation.

These beautiful four-legged beasts didn't seem to mind my presence at all as I began my ascent of Castle Rock. The winding trail was easy at first but got steeper as I mounted the rock and I did have to shoo a few of the noble beasts out of my way to slink by on the narrow footpath, noting their otherworldly (and devil-like) eyes as I interrupted their lunchtime munching on low grasses.

Somewhere on the side of this formation is an image seen from below known as the White Lady formed by cracks in the rocks. She was a witch immortalized in Richard Blackmore's *Lorna Doone*, a novel I had "read" as a Classics Illustrated comic book when I was roughly nine years old. I think the trail went right over the White Lady's left eyebrow which was the one spot where I stumbled and dribbled loose stones down her face as I made my ascent.

Once the goats and the witch let me pass, I was breathing heavily and favouring a weak knee as I made my way to the summit of this ancient and storied little mountain. The view was incredible. It was near here that Raynor Winn and her dying husband had hiked and looked around and she remarked, "I was transfixed."

Transfixed is a great word that describes exactly how I felt. From the pinnacle, I looked north towards the wide open mouth of Bristol Channel, west towards the rising chimney smoke of Lynton, south towards the Lego-like Cheese Ring and then finally east along the valley to where I could see Linda heading back my way, finishing her morning 10-kilometre run in this extraordinary narrow valley. I stood up tall and waved my arms as if I'd just ascended a formidable

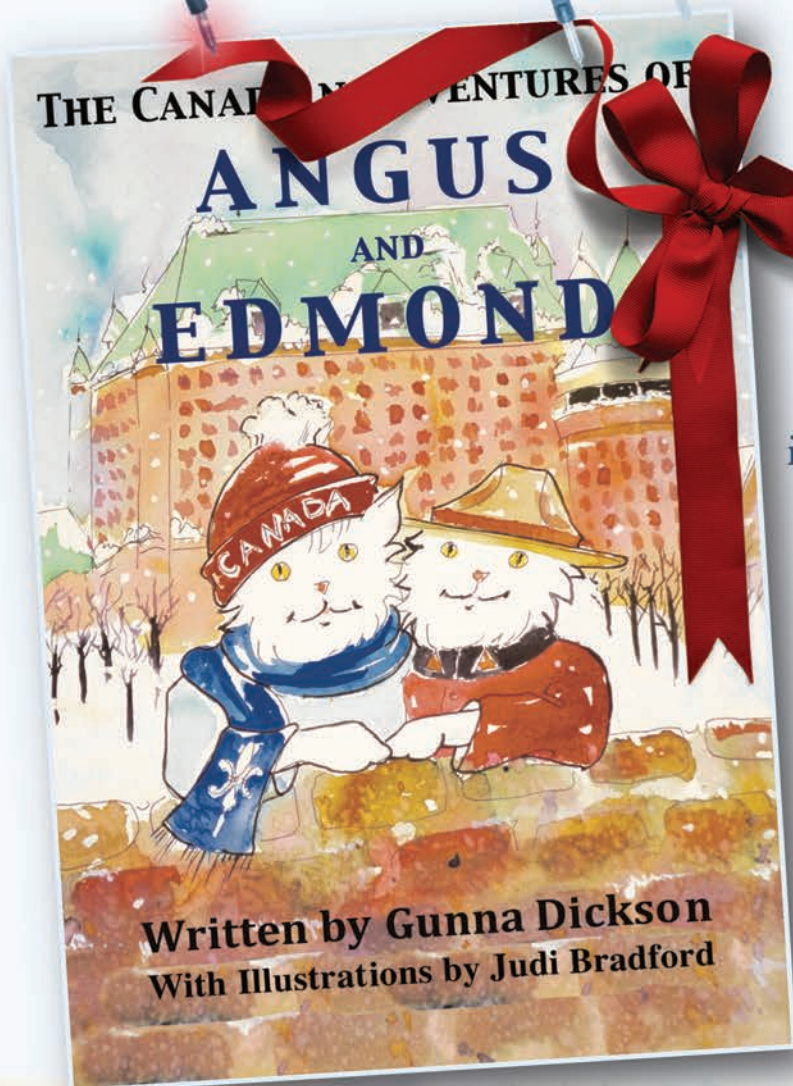
Himalayan peak and shouted her name.

At first, she didn't see me as I was a full 138.9 metres above sea level, so I had to yell again, disturbing a few of the goats who had followed me to the top. Linda saw me this time and waved back. That's who we were: a runner and a climber, exploring high and low but always finding our way back together even here in one of the most exotic, primitive landscapes the United Kingdom has to offer.



Lesley

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Ooh, Canada!

Angora-mix brothers Angus and Edmond find purrfection in the wintry warmth of Montreal festivities and the pre-Carnival glow of Quebec City.

Author Gunna Dickson is a New York-based writer and editor. Illustrator, fine artist and milliner Judi Bradford lives and works in Florida.

"The Canadian Adventures of Angus and Edmond" is available on *Amazon.com* and other online sites.





*Celtic Life International correspondent
Tom Langlands takes in a new exhibit
featuring an old classic*

Tartan - V&A Dundee



From Regimental Highland Dress to punk-rock fashion, car interior upholstery to sexy undergarments, shoes to Xbox controllers, Bonnie Scotland posters to bawdy postcards and now, with a dedicated exhibition on display at Dundee's prestigious V&A Museum, there is the sense that tartan has truly come of age.

If, indeed, that is the case then it has taken at least five centuries to mature. It is therefore perhaps fitting, that on its fifth anniversary, Scotland's first dedicated museum of art and design should host the nation's first major exhibition in 30 years to concentrate solely on that internationally recognized, defining product of Scottish heritage and identity - tartan.

As V&A Dundee Director, Leonie Bell says, "Tartan is a symbol of Scotland, representing tradition, rebellion, innovation, legend, power, and multiple identities, which is at home around the world."

In addressing these multifarious aspects of this iconic textile and pattern, the exhibition delves deep into both the classic and contemporary uses of tartan, juxtaposing everyday objects with items of high-end luxury and separating fact from fiction.

Organized around five central themes, the show explores:

-Tartan and The Grid: how the rules of colour, geometry and pattern form the foundations of a grid with infinite possibilities.

-Tartan and Innovation: how tartan intersects with technical innovation resulting in the capacity to influence the appearance of an astonishing range of natural and man-made materials.

-Tartan and Identity: the global influence of tartan as a mark of identity - from product design to the clothing choices of individuals to the sense of identity and belonging of entire communities.

-Tartan and Power: the use of tartan to express political views, unify armed forces and promote a sense of power.

-Transcendental Tartan: how tartan infiltrates modern art, media and popular culture serving as both catalyst and vehicle through which alternative narratives can be explored.

Inspired by Professor Jonathan Faiers' book of the same name, the exhibit consists of over 300 objects encompassing the fields of fashion, architecture, graphic and product design, photography and film, and performance and art.

Near the start of the show, I spent time studying the oldest piece of tartan discovered in Scotland. Dated between 1500 - 1600 A.D., and found in a peat bog in Glen Affric, this unassuming piece of yellowing fabric is constructed with several colours of dyed yarns arranged in a multiple-striped, grid pattern. Although older samples of checked cloth using undyed yarns have been found, this is the oldest known example of true tartan. I contemplated how everything else that I would see had its origins in this fragment of ancient cloth once worn in a Highland glen.

Next, I found myself on a whirlwind tour of how tartan is designed, manufactured, and used. Vintage film footage of weaver Willie Meikle on his 200-year-old home handloom was a nostalgic look back to the cottage industry it once was before the advent of mass

production mills. Stunning pieces by high-end fashion designers revealed how tradition could be repurposed for modern interpretations. The Auld Alliance with France extending back to the 13th century ensured a shared textile heritage and although the formal Alliance fizzled out around the 16th century its influence ripples on in the exhibits by Dior and Chanel. Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel's affair with the Duke of Westminster in the 1920s-1930s - and the likely influence of her numerous visits to his Scottish estates - is manifest in her Ottoman silk cape in Gordon tartan. Also present are several items from a Karl Lagerfeld collection designed for Chanel. Launched in 2012 at Linlithgow Palace - the birthplace of Mary Queen of Scots - these fittingly reflect Chanel's interest in Scotland and its former queen. In my mind, I juxtaposed these examples of high-end fashion with the much-cartooned figure of a tartan-festooned George IV on his visit to Edinburgh in 1822 - an outrageous extravaganza of "tourist tartan" orchestrated by the literary legend Sir Walter Scott. As the Edinburgh Advertiser noted back then, the city appeared to be having "a fit of tartan."

The most moving part of the exhibition revolved around how tartan has been exploited to exert power and control.

Several items associated with the Jacobite Rebellion, including the 1748 Act of Parliament prohibiting the wearing of items



of Highland attire, serve as stark reminders of the subjugation that ensued in the aftermath of Culloden. Other items include a circa-1750 Staffordshire Jacobite teapot underscoring the political affinity of its owner and a circa-1753 martyr's snuff-box dedicated to those who were brutally executed for their involvement in the uprising. The unwashed, mud-encrusted kilt of Private James Calder, injured at the Battle of Auber's Bridge in 1915 while serving with 1st Battalion, Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, is a sobering reminder of the reality of war. Two film exhibits further explore the theme of tartan in conflict: *Black Watch* by Gregory Burke and the BAFTA-nominated film *1745* by Gordon Napier. The former is a 2006 production by the National Theatre of Scotland showcasing the history of *Black Watch* uniforms (1739-2004). Told through a masterful piece of choreography, inspired by the military exercise of assembling a cannon, a young recruit is "assembled" into the relevant historical uniforms by his fellow soldiers on a fashion runway. Highlighting the forced use of tartan dress for enslaved peoples, the latter film follows two Black girls in tartan dresses making a bid for freedom across a bleak Scottish landscape.

The exhibition reminds us that tartan was once part of the transatlantic slave economy. In 1785 the Grant family tried selling "fancy check" plaids in exchange for enslaved people on the west coast of Africa. It is reputed that William Wilson and Sons of Bannockburn, recognized as the "birthplace of the modern tartan industry," not only provided tartans for the kilts of soldiers in Scot-

tish regiments but also supplied cloth to be worn by enslaved people in North America and the Caribbean. Their "Kidd" pattern was created for a plantation owner. Certainly, Wilson Mills was perfectly positioned in the marketplace to capitalize upon the romanticized resurgence of tartan that followed King George IV's visit and the later acquisition of Balmoral Castle by Queen Victoria. Such was her over-exuberant use of tartan as decoration that Balmoralisation is now a term given to 'over-tartanized' interiors.

Of course, no exhibition about tartan would be complete without asking that age-old question, "What is worn under the kilt?" While the age-old answer may be, "Nothing Lassie. Everything's as good as new!", alternative answers may be found in any one of the stereotypical and clichéd items on display: saucy postcards, provocative posters, and mocking cartoons. The idea of the rugged, muscular, kilted Scot has persisted since Romanticism swept Europe at the end of the 18th century. While the Scots historically have taken pride in their iconic dress, on occasion enemies have used it as a source of mockery, to undermine and belittle an entire race of people.

Tartan is now found internationally in all areas of design.

But its ability to connect peoples through the creation and use of 'clan tartans' is part of its widespread appeal. These tartans, often designed and manufactured for the Scot-

tish Diaspora, are the means by which individuals and groups retain a sense of identity as well as connectivity with their ancestors and their historical roots. At the end of the exhibition is a specially commissioned piece from Lagos-born and Glasgow-raised designer, Olubiyi Thomas. Titled *Intersectional Family*, this beautiful exhibit of a family, clad in Thomas' newly designed tartan and accompanied by his words, perhaps best describes how we should look at tartan; "For me, tartan means kinship, it means family. You bear a mark that identifies you. Through each line, each width and each colour, your own personal narrative is constructed. It tells my story and symbolizes my journey and my experiences through the complexity of my cross-cultural identity."

As a Scot I thought I had a reasonable knowledge of the origins of tartan and its uses. In visiting this exhibition, I had not anticipated a journey of such emotive enlightenment; it is serious, fascinating, humorous and deeply thought-provoking. Two hours after entering I emerged with a greater understanding of tartan, its inextricable connection to a nation and its people and its universal appeal. I left also with an enormous sense of rejuvenated pride.

"Tartan" runs to January 14, 2024.

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Faye Dinsmore

www.fayedinsmore.com

I grew up in Donegal, in the north-west of Ireland. I moved to Dublin to study French and Classics at Trinity College when I was 18. I needed a job and just happened to be spotted by a model agent at a college fashion show. I knew nothing about fashion or the fashion world at the time, I just needed to pay my rent!

I worked as a model for most of my 20s - in London and New York City, but mostly in Paris. I remember, in the beginning, my agent in Paris asked me to attend a dinner event and Karl Lagerfeld was there and I hadn't a clue who he was. A few years later I was working in London for Ralph Lauren, and I was wearing a white fisherman sweater unmistakably like a traditional Aran sweater. This gave me the idea to start my own hand knit sweater company. I had grown up around women who knit by hand

and I wanted to showcase their work to the world.

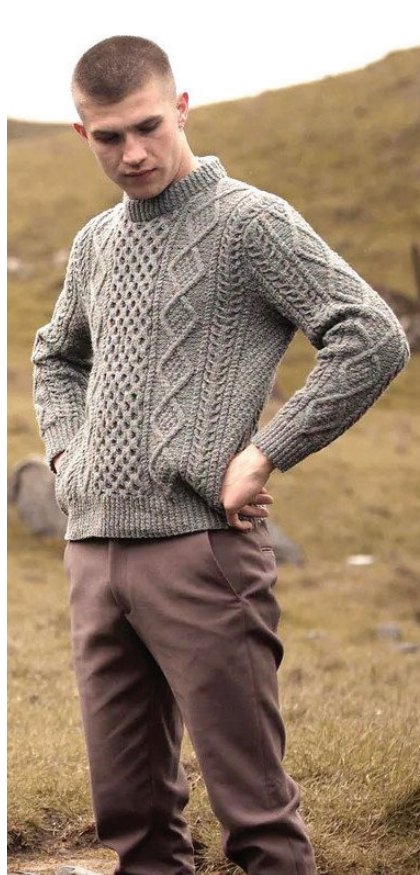
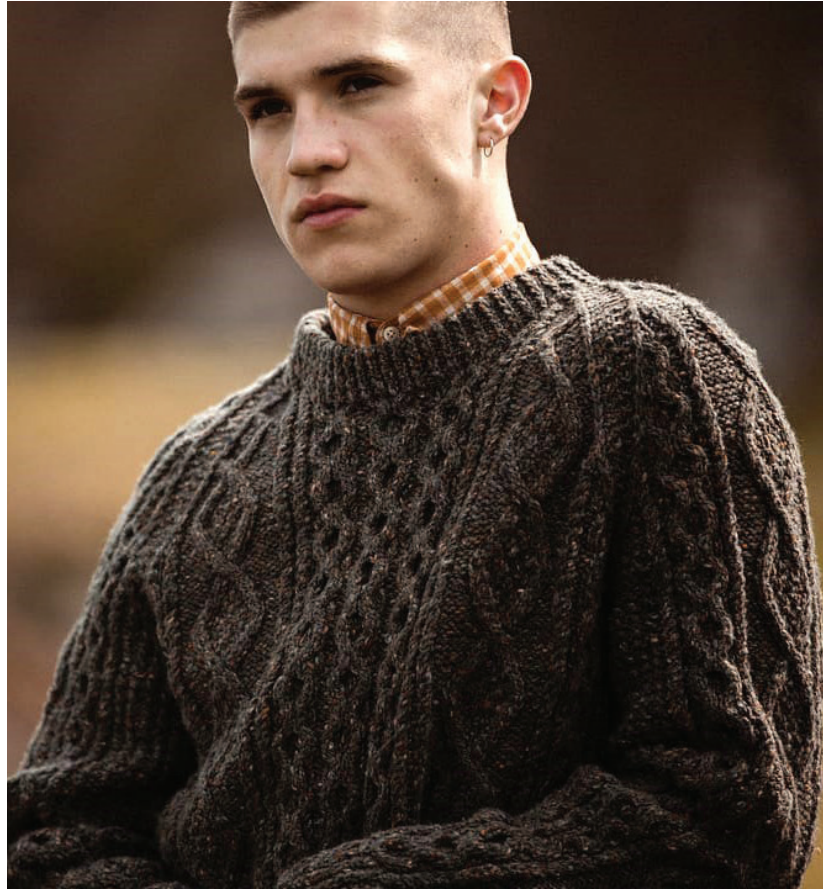
I started my hand knit sweater company almost 10 years ago now, and I moved back to Donegal during the pandemic. All my pieces are hand knit in Donegal and I know who knits each piece. My first cousin Muriel knits every single one of my baby cardigans. I grew up here, my family have sheep whose wool is sheared. The factory that processes the wool is here in Donegal. I can absolutely say that my sweaters stand up to anything you will find at any luxury store.

A good piece of clothing, like any item, should be functional - fit for purpose and made well to last. My sweaters are made as they always have been - to keep you warm. They are not throw-away fashion, nor are they meant to be worn only for one season - they are designed to last a lifetime.

The Aran sweater is a classic wardrobe staple, I don't feel the need to change it very much. I don't feel pressure to create new collections twice a year, I trust my sweaters will be worn for years and years and remain very much in style.

My sweaters tick along and take care of themselves, after almost 10 years I have it set up in a way that suits me. My sweaters don't have an Instagram page, I don't do daily tweets, I don't collect emails and send newsletters, I don't try go viral, I don't do try-ons, I don't do any of the things that I probably should as a 'fashion brand' so I can focus on what matters, which is the actual product. So as long as my knitters are happy knitting, I don't have anything to worry about!



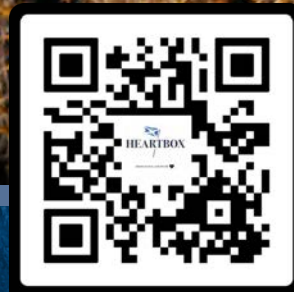




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Celtic Holiday Traditions



According to the longstanding theory, the origins of Christmas stem from pagan winter festivals. One main reason early Christians were able to spread their religion across Europe so quickly came from their willingness to embrace celebrations prevalent among regional populations.

One such example is the Celtic “Alban Arthuan,” a Druidic festival that took place around December 21st, the Winter Solstice. This traditional fire festival celebrated the rebirth of the Sun.

Although a celebration of the Son’s birth replaced that of the Sun’s, a number of Christmas-tide traditions – including those the ancient Celts practiced – remain today.

As we look at the Celtic nations, it is interesting to note some similarities among Christmas traditions that cross geographic boundaries. They include, for example: Holly (a symbol of rebirth among Pagan Celts, but also of hospitality—it was believed fairies sought shelter inside the evergreen leaves to escape the cold); Mistletoe (believed to have

healing powers so strong that it warded off evil spirits, cured illnesses and even facilitated a truce between enemies); fire and light (most notably the Yule log or candles placed in windows to light the way for strangers and symbolically welcoming Mary and Joseph); and door-to-door processions, from wassailing to Wren Hunts.

Each of the seven nations possesses its own variations of Celtic Christmas customs. Surrounding cultures and local identity shape these practices as well.



SCOTLAND

Christmas was not officially recognized in Scotland for over three centuries. The Puritan English Parliament banned Christmas in 1647 and it did not become a recognized public holiday in Scotland until 1958.

However, according to Andrew Halliday, in his 1833 piece Christmas in Scotland, Scots were not discouraged from celebrating Christmas. Halliday wrote, “We remember it stated in a popular periodical, one Christmas season not long ago, that Christmas day was not kept at all in Scotland. Such is not the case; the Scots do keep Christmas-day, and in the same kindly Christian spirit that we do, though the Presbyterian austerity of their church does not acknowledge it as a religious festival.”

Halliday’s 19th century account went on to describe festive sowens, (sweetened oat gruel) ceremonies with “beggars” (described as “strapping fellows”), singing yule song with dances, card parties, and children’s teetotum games.

Despite Puritan rule, some long-time Christmas traditions are preserved. These include burning the Cailleach (a piece of wood carved to look like an old woman’s face or the Spirit of Winter) to start the New Year fresh; or on Christmas Eve, burning rowan tree branches to signify the resolution of any disputes. The Celtic tradition of placing

candles in windows was also done in Scotland to welcome “first footers” (strangers, bearing a small gift) into the home.

Traditional dishes also continue to be featured at Christmas lunch and throughout the holidays, including Cock-a-Leekie soup, smoked salmon, beef or duck, Cloutie dumplings, black buns, sun cakes, Christmas pudding and Cranachan.

Because Christmas was not an official holiday until the late ‘50s it is no surprise that today, for some Scots, Hogmanay (New Year’s Eve) is the most important event of the season. Arguably, locals ring in the new year with much more gusto than any other place on the planet.

IRELAND

A fall-time clean up was a common practice in Irish homes to prepare for Christmas. Women looked after cleaning the interior, while men took care of the outdoors, including whitewashing all exterior surfaces. Then holly, grown wild in Ireland, was spread throughout the house with cheer. Contemporary Ireland also highlights this clean-up ritual. Once complete, fresh Christmas linens are taken out of storage.

Other customs include the Bloc na Nollaig or Christmas Block (the Irish version of the Yule log), candles in the window (perhaps one for each family member), and leading up to Christmas, “Calling the Waites,” where musicians would wake up townspeople through serenades and shouting out the morning hour.

Christmas Eve Mass is still a grand affair, a time for friends and family to reconnect. It is not uncommon for churchgoers to end up at the local pub after service to ring in Christmas morn.



On Christmas Day, traditional dishes include roast goose or ham and sausages, potatoes (such as champ), vegetables (such as cabbage with bacon) and plum pudding, whiskey, Christmas cake and barmbrack (currant loaf) for sweets.

Traditionally, on December 26th, St. Stephen's Day, Wren Boys with blackened faces, carrying a pole with a dead bird pierced at the top, tramped from house to house. Today, the custom sometimes sees children caroling throughout the neighbourhood to raise money for charity. It is also quite common to go out visiting on this day.

One modern-day Irish tradition of note is to gather around the television to watch The Late Late Toy Show in late November/early December, which is said to be the most watched program in Ireland.

WALES

Dylan Thomas' story A Child's Christmas in Wales is renowned around the world. An excerpt offers a glimpse of a traditional Welsh festive season.



"Always on Christmas night there was music. An uncle played the fiddle, a cousin sang 'Cherry Ripe,' and another uncle sang 'Drake's Drum.'... Looking through my bedroom window, out into the moonlight and the unending smoke-coloured snow, I could see the lights in the windows of all the other houses on our hill and hear the music rising from them up the long, steady falling night."

Music was and still is a major part of Welsh holidays. Plygain is a Christmas day church service, traditionally held between three and six a.m., featuring males singing a capella in three or four-part harmonies. While today this may be mainly practiced in rural areas, Eisteddfodde (caroling) is abundantly popular in homes, door-to-door and as part of annual song-writing competitions.

Other delightful Welsh traditions include toffee making; drinking from a communal wassail bowl of fruit, spices, sugar and beer. Children visit homes on New Year's Day looking for their Callenig gift; and Mary Lwyd (Grey Mare) featuring wassail singers go door-to-door carrying a horse's skull and challenging residents in a contest of mocking rhymes.

ISLE OF MAN

Traditionally, Manx caroling had an unconventional twist. On Christmas Eve, large numbers attended church for Carval. While the congregation sang, all of a sudden women would begin the traditional food fight, having peas on hand to throw at their male counterparts!

Accounts from the 1700s and 1800s describe 12 days of non-stop Christmas celebrations where every barn was filled with dancers accompanied by fiddlers hired by the parish. "On the twelfth day the fiddler lays his head on one of the women's laps, which posture they look upon as a kind of oracle," recorded Reverend John Entick (as published in 1774). "For one of the company coming up and naming every maiden in the company, asks the fiddler, who shall this or that girl marry? And whatever he answers it is absolutely depended on as an oracle."

As in Celtic fashion, Hunting the Wren processions occurred on the Isle of Man and today the practice is going through a revival, characterized by costumes, singing and dancing.

Other Manx customs include Mollag Bands, wearing eccentric clothing, swinging a mollag (fishing float) and demanding money (a practice since outlawed); the kissing bush (a more elaborate ornament than a sprig of mistletoe); and Cammag, a sport that originated on the Isle of Man traditionally played on December 26th and/or Easter Monday.

Finally, in older times but even as recently as the early 20th century, Christmas decorations were not taken down until Pancake Tuesday (when they were burnt under the pancake pan). Now holiday décor tends to be packed away on Old Christmas (January 6th).



CORNWALL

As a result of Oliver Cromwell banning Christmas, authentic holiday carols began to fade through much of Britain. However, throughout the 1800s, Cornish composers and collectors sparked a revival of local Christmas songs.

“Contrary to the effect Methodism might have had on the English carollers, in Cornwall its impact was to stimulate song,” states the Cornwall Council (Cornish Christmas Carols – Or Curls, 2011). “In those areas where Methodism was strongest, music and singing had their greatest appeal, and notably so at Christmas. The singers would practice in chapels and school-rooms, some of them walking miles to be there.”

Certain carols well-known around the world, such as Hark the Herald Angels Sing, and While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks, are credited to Cornish origins.

Today, Cornwall erupts in festivals, fairs and markets during the holidays. The Montol Festival in Penzance (named for Montol Eve on December 21st) is a six-day celebration highlighting many Cornish traditions. These include Mummers plays, lantern processions, and Guise dancing (participants dress in masks and costume, such as mock formal dress, to play music and dance).

Montol is also the time for burning the Mock (Yule Log). A stickman or woman is drawn on the block of wood with chalk. When the log burns, it symbolizes the death of the old year and birth of the year to come.

BRETAGNE

Bretagne boasts a wealth of folklore and supernatural beliefs around Christmas time. Christmas Eve was known as a night of miraculous apparitions from fairies to Korrigans, and at midnight, for just a brief moment, waters in the wells would turn into the most sweet-tasting wine. It was also at midnight, when families were either at mass or in bed, that ghosts would surface. Traditionally, food was left out for deceased loved ones just in case they visited.



During the holidays, Christmas markets come alive in many Breton towns, vending hand-made crafts and toys, baked cakes and bread and ingredients for Christmas dinner. You can also buy Galette des Rois at stalls, as well as bakeries, which are traditionally eaten on January 6th (Epiphany). A tiny figurine (the fève) is hidden inside the puff pastry cake, and the person who finds the figurine in their piece gets to be king or queen for the day and wear a crown. Another special tradition through all of France is a meal after Christmas Eve's midnight mass, called Réveillon. Specifically in Bretagne, the traditional dish for this occasion is buckwheat crêpes with cream.

GALICIA

Galicia has its own unique Christmas gift-bearer that predates Christianity. He is called Apalpador, a giant who lives in the mountains. For Christmas, he descends into the villages below to make sure each child has a full belly. He brings treats, such as chestnuts, and well wishes for a year full of delicious sustenance. While Apalpador may not be widely observed in Galicia, his legend is seeing a revival.

Food is very important during the Galician holidays, featuring at least two feasts (on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day). Not surprisingly, seafood is on the menu, including lobster, prawns, shrimp, sea bass, and cod with garlic and paprika sauce. Other culinary delights consist of cured meat, cheese and bread, roast beef with vegetables and for dessert tarta de Santiago (almond cake), filloas (stuffed pancakes) and turrones (nougats).

Throughout all of Spain, including Galicia, children anticipate the coming of the Three Kings or Magis who fill their shoes, left out on Epiphany Eve (January 5th) with gifts. Many Galician municipalities also host a parade featuring the Kings on January 5th.



Celtic Holiday Markets



Celtic Yuletide traditions have a long history that harkens back to pre-Christian winter solstice celebrations that include the classic seasonal symbols of mistletoe, the wreath, and the yule log - each derived from ancient pagan practices. Today, Celtic holiday traditions seek to maintain a balance of old and modern modes of merriment found in the many Christmas markets across the Seven Celtic Nations.

Ireland

Belfast - Mark your advent calendar with the Belfast Christmas Market, running from November 18 to December 23. Expect a memorable Yuletide experience amid the breathtaking backdrop of City Hall flowing steadily with tasty food, drink, and unique gift items for a full plate of festive fare. Visit Santa's magical grotto, stand atop the Helter Skelter, and sample the mouth-watering continental cuisine that includes the finest Belgian chocolates, heavenly French crepes, and savory Bratwurst enjoyed with a warm mug of Gluehwein.

Galway - If you are looking for a classic seasonal celebration, consider the Galway Christmas Market in Eyre Square beginning November 10, through January 7, 2024. Gather the family to marvel at the brightly lit city center spreading joy and Christmas cheer. Now in its 13th year, Ireland's premier Christmas market at Galway enhances any seasonal celebration with 50 wooden chalets featuring finely crafted collectibles and delicious treats. Take a fanciful ride on Santa's express train and pop your Christmas list in Santy's postbox, ride the

traditional carousel, and head to the beer tent for unforgettable festive fun.

Scotland

Edinburgh - With over 2.5 million attendees last season, the Edinburgh Christmas market offers extra holiday cheer this year. From November 17 to January 6, visitors to the Scottish capital are in store for the sensational opening of Light Night on the Royal Mile and the magic of Santa Land in the spectacular East Princes Street Gardens. Enjoy a unique multisensory experience with Night Walk, showcasing Edinburgh's past and present, and discover the best of the city's emerging young artists featured in the festive Winter Windows exhibit. Christmas vendors add to the merriment with locally sourced tasty treats and an eclectic selection of finely crafted Christmas gifts and decorations.

Glasgow - St. Enoch Square and George Square are the chosen locations for the Glasgow Christmas markets from November 18 to January 8. More than 50 merry merchants from 32 countries will showcase

wonderful wares and traditional Scottish and international holiday treats. Visitors are in for a feast of fun and frolic for the whole family at locations featuring an ice-skating rink, amusement rides, and cozy Christmas chalets.

Wales

Cardiff - Featuring 100 market stalls and over 200 exhibits, Cardiff's Christmas market will transform the capital into a vibrant and veritable Christmas wonderland from November 9 to December 23. From medieval fairs and stalls stuffed with holiday handicrafts to gastronomic competitions and street theatre performances, Cardiff is one Welsh city making things merry this season.

Caerphilly Christmas Market - Take a break from the capital's Christmas activity and travel 10 miles away to the Caerphilly Christmas Market in early December. Visit the town's castle and over 100 stalls serving mulled wine, festive food, and artisanal items.



The Aberglasney Winter Fair –

Running from December 1 to 3, the annual gathering promises to capture the magic of Christmas with two formidable pavilions packed with Christmas wares and tasty Welsh food and drink.

Bretagne

Nantes - Touted as one of the most popular in France, the markets on Place du Commerce and Place Royal offer quaint Christmas cheer, hundreds of artisans, and unbeatable culinary excellence. Everything from perfectly roasted chestnuts and mouth-watering waffles to cozy chalets and luminous light displays promises to delight visitors from November 23 to December 30.

Rennes - With multiple locations, Christmas markets begin setting up on December 1 with Place du Colombier as the central gathering spot. Children of all ages can indulge in the many activities, fine food, and craft stalls. Make a special note to visit the “mail” François Mitterrand which offers a whimsical landscape of luminous Christmas decorations, Santa’s chalet, a Ferris wheel, and a traditional wooden carousel.

Cornwall

Cornwall Christmas Fair - Add an earthy element to your Christmas celebration on November 22 and 23 this year and behold the ethereal blue biomes of The Eden Project. Enjoy festive food samplings,

ethical fashion, and sustainable gift items with a portion of your purchase donated to the Cornwall Community Foundation to mark the season of giving.

Truro Christmas Market - An annual month-long winter celebration hosted in partnership with the Truro Farmers Market and Truro BID, this gathering on 29 November to 24 December, features fine food, drink, and crafts provided by talented locals committed to making the Christmas season very merry for visitors.

Falmouth’s Festive Weekend - In early December, take the family on an adventure that includes snowy streets (made with eco-friendly snow machines), ice skating, mulled wines, Christmas choirs, seasonal stalls, and more in early December at Event Square and The Moor off Killigrew Street.

Padstow Christmas Market - From December 7 to 10, this is the perfect place for the festive ‘foodies’ among us. The town’s harbor serves as a scenic setting to welcome celebrity chefs and their delightful delectables alongside live music and a lantern parade.

Galicia

Santiago de Compostela - Experience the enchanting beauty of old Europe this Christmas at the Market in Santiago de Compostela beginning in early December. Renowned for its picturesque stalls selling

succulent Spanish gastronomy - including exotic cocktails, pastries, and other Christmas sweets - this Galician city market promises to make seasonal celebrations both merry and memorable.

Vigo - The Cies Christmas Market in Vigo is only one of the many locations with a breathtaking display of Christmas lights glistening upon hundreds of (artificially rendered) snowy streets in this vibrant Galician city. Expect extra special savory and sweet holiday treats and other Christmas activities on upcoming dates for 2023, soon to be announced.

Isle of Mann

Infuse Manx merriment into your Christmas this year with the many festive markets and activities featured across the Isle of Mann from early November to late December. Highlights include: The Milntown Christmas Market in the Milntown Estate on November 18; Laxey Village Christmas Market, Laxey Working Men’s Institute in Laxey on November 25; The ManxSPCA Christmas Fair, ManxSPCA, in Foxdale on December 2; Manannan’s Winterfest #6 at the Gaiety Theatre on December 8; Milntown Santa Teas in the Milntown Estate on December 12; Christmas Party Night at the Ramsey Park Hotel on December 15; Groudle Glen Railway Mince Pie Trains, Onchan, on December 26, and A New Year’s Eve Party at the Ramsey Park Hotel on December 31st.



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Celtic Christmas Recipes

These five Celtic Christmas recipes are sure to serve up the scrumptious this holiday season!

Ith do shàth!





Irish Roast Goose

The Goose

Prepare the stuffing first (see below). Allow at least 1lb (450g) uncooked weight per diner. Assuming the goose is already gutted, you just need to wash and dry it and cut away any excess fat around the neck cavity. Prick the skin all over and rub it with lemon and seasoning. Season the main cavity with salt and freshly ground pepper and fill it with the cooled stuffing. Place the goose in a roasting tin and roast in a very hot oven 240°C (475°F, gas 9) for ten minutes. Reduce the heat to 180°C (350°F, gas 4) and cook for 2 – 2 1/2 hours, but remove the bird from the oven three or four times to pour off excess fat. If you don't do this, your goose will taste very greasy. To test whether cooked, prick the bird at the thickest part. When the juices run clear, Christmas dinner's centre-piece is ready.

Apple & Potato Stuffing

2lb (900g) potatoes
1lb (450g) cooking apples, peeled and chopped
1lb (450g) roughly chopped onions
2oz (55g) butter
1tbs chopped parsley
1tbs chopped lemon balm
Salt and pepper.

Boil the potatoes in salted water. When cooked, mash without using milk or butter. Melt the butter into a pan and, over a low heat, fry the onions for five minutes without allowing them to brown. Add the apples and cook until they are softened. Stir in the mashed potatoes, parsley and balm. Season. Allow to cool before stuffing the goose.



Christmas Cornish Hens

Ingredients

4 Cornish hens
2 onions, coarsely chopped
2 tablespoons honey
12 slices bacon or pancetta
6 leeks, trimmed, chopped into 2-inch pieces
1 tbs olive oil
½ tsp salt
Freshly ground pepper

Instructions

Heat oven to 400°. Stuff the hens with onions. Brush all over with honey; cover the breast of each with 3 slices bacon or pancetta. Settle into a roasting pan. Toss the leeks with the oil; add to the pan, tucking them in around the birds. Season with the salt and pepper to taste. Roast 45-60 minutes. If the bacon begins to blacken, cover hens with foil. Remove the birds from the pan; keep warm. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the leeks to a serving dish; keep warm. Tilt the pan to one side; skim away any fat. Pour a little hot water into the roasting pan; set over high heat. Heat to a boil, scraping up any crispy bits from the bottom of the pan; simmer for a few minutes. Pour the pan sauce into a gravy boat or pitcher; serve with the hens and the leeks.



Scottish Christmas Clapshot

Ingredients

1 small swede, roughly 500g
3 medium potatoes, roughly 500g
1 medium brown onion
Small bunch of chives
Butter
Salt and pepper
Nutmeg

Instructions

Prepare the turnip by removing the outer skin, then cut it into small and even cubes. Peel the potatoes and chop them into cubes. Boil both vegetables in salted water in separate pots. Meanwhile, peel and slice the onion as thin as you can, then fry it slowly in a pan with a little butter, or cooking oil, until well browned, sweet and crispy. When the turnip and potato are soft, when they can be pierced easily with a sharp knife, drain them and leave them to steam for 5 minutes to help get rid of any excess water. Mash the turnip and potato together in a pot over a low heat, this helps to remove any excess water, and to keep it hot. Add a generous knob of butter, a grating of nutmeg and grinding of black pepper. Stir half the onions through and save the rest for the top. Check for seasoning and serve sprinkled with the remaining onions and chives.



Bretagne Bûche de Noël

For the Roulade Cake and Filling

14 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened, divided
8 oz. bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
1 cup heavy cream
7 egg whites
8 tbsp. sugar, divided
2 tbsp. dark rum
4 oz. semisweet chocolate
3 egg yolks

For the Chocolate Ganache Icing and Decoration

12 oz. semisweet chocolate
8 tbsp. unsalted butter
2/3 cup heavy cream
Meringue Mushrooms
1/2 cup confectioners' sugar

Instructions

For the Cake: Preheat oven to 375°. Line a 16 1/2" x 12" heavy baking pan with buttered parchment paper, cut large enough to hang over sides of the pan by about 1". Put bittersweet chocolate in a large mixing bowl and set aside. Bring cream just to a boil in a saucepan over medium heat, then pour over bittersweet chocolate and whisk until smooth. Set aside to cool. Beat egg whites in the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with a whisk on medium speed until frothy; increase speed to medium-high and gradually add 2 tbsp. sugar, beating constantly, then increase speed to high and beat until stiff, glossy peaks form, 30-40 seconds more. (Don't over-beat.) Mix one-third of the whites into chocolate using a rubber spatula, then gently fold in remaining whites in two batches, taking care not to deflate batter. Spread in prepared pan and bake until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 10-12 minutes. Set aside to cool in the pan.

For the Filling: Melt semisweet chocolate with 2 tbsp. water in the top of a double boiler set over simmering water over medium heat. Stir to combine, then set aside to cool. Combine 6 tbsp. sugar and 3 tbsp. water in a small heavy saucepan; cover and bring to a boil over medium heat, swirling pan several times until sugar has dissolved, about 1 minute. Uncover and continue to boil until syrup reaches the softball stage or 236° on a candy thermometer, about 5 minutes more. Meanwhile, beat egg yolks in the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with a whisk on high speed until thick and pale yellow, about 3 minutes. Reduce speed to medium and gradually pour in hot syrup. Beat constantly until mixture cools to room temperature, about 10 minutes. Beat 12 tbsp. butter into egg mixture 1 tbsp. at a time, waiting until completely incorporated before adding more; continue beating until thick and smooth, about 5 minutes total. Stir in cooled semisweet chocolate and set aside.

For the Icing: Melt chocolate and butter in the top of a double boiler set over simmering water over medium-low heat, whisking often. Remove from heat and gradually whisk in cream. Transfer to a medium bowl and set aside at room temperature, stirring occasionally, until icing thickens, about 4 hours. (Don't refrigerate; it makes icing hard to spread.)

To assemble the bûche: Transfer Cake with parchment to a clean work surface, sprinkle with rum, then spread Filling evenly over top using a metal spatula. Grab the long edge of the parchment paper with two hands and gently roll roulade onto itself, pulling off paper as you roll. To make stumps, diagonally cut a 2" length from each end of bûche; then, to make the stumps thinner than the bûche, partially unroll each piece, trim off flap, and discard. Set stumps aside.

Using two long metal spatulas, carefully transfer bûche to a serving platter lined with strips of waxed paper. "Glue" stumps onto bûche with some of the Icing. Melt 1/4 cup of Icing in a saucepan over low heat, then spoon it over stumps to coat completely. Spread remaining Icing on bûche, dragging spatula along Icing to simulate tree bark. Remove waxed-paper strips. Decorate with Meringue Mushrooms, then sift confectioners' sugar over mushrooms and bûche.



Welsh Plum Pudding

Ingredients

1 1/2 lb of raisins
1/2 lb of currants
1/2 lb of mixed peel
3/4 lb of bread crumbs
3/4 lb of suet
8 eggs
1 wine-glassful of brandy

Instructions

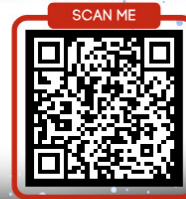
Stone and cut the raisins in halves, but do not chop them; wash, pick, and dry the currants, and mince the suet finely; cut the candied peel into thin slices, and grate down the bread into fine crumbs. When all these dry ingredients are prepared, mix them well together; then moisten the mixture with the eggs, which should be well beaten, and the brandy; stir well, that everything

may be very thoroughly blended, and press the pudding into a buttered mould; tie it down tightly with a floured cloth, and boil for 5 or 6 hours. It may be boiled in a cloth without a mould, and will require the same time allowed for cooking. As Christmas puddings are usually made a few days before they are required for table, when the pudding is taken out of the pot, hang it up immediately, and put a plate or saucer underneath to catch the water that may drain from it. The day it is to be eaten, plunge it into boiling water, and keep it boiling for at least 2 hours; then turn it out of the mould, and serve with brandy-sauce. On Christmas day a sprig of holly is usually placed in the middle of the pudding, and about a wineglassful of brandy poured round it, which, at the moment of serving, is lighted, and the pudding thus brought to table encircled in flame. Time: 5 or 6 hours the first time of boiling; 2 hours the day it is to be served. Serves 8 persons.



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Christmas in Killarney

A seasonal spectacle brings Ireland home for the holidays

A major touring production will bring Ireland home to Irish ex-pats across America this holiday season.

Co-created by worldwide touring Irish musician Chris Smith and the 2009 World Champion of Irish Dance Scott Doherty, Christmas in Killarney combines the excitement of Irish dance with the harmonies of traditional Christmas classics.

"Christmas in Killarney is a story about love, family, and tradition," shares Smith via email with Celtic Life International. "Through our story we show how those core values back in Ireland over a century ago have shaped the way we celebrate Christmas here in America."

Both Smith and Doherty have deep family roots in Ireland and Scotland.

"The importance of our Celtic heritages has been passed down to us through our parents, grandparents, and beyond," shares Smith. "Whenever we are creating a show, it feels like a family project we are working on with generations behind us."

The dynamic duo started workshopping the idea of Christmas in Killarney in 2015.

"We originally designed it for theme parks. That project didn't end up happening, but we loved the concept that we had came up with so much that we decided to create and debut a full touring production of the show in 2018."

Christmas in Killarney was the first time that both had worked on a production strictly behind the scenes.

"Me being a musician, and Scott being an Irish dancer, we were usually also on stage in our shows. Now, we do everything

- designing, building, music, choreography, touring logistics - you name it. Luckily, we have an amazing team that works with us and once we get the show rehearsed and send it on the road, they run the production and the tour themselves with us supporting from our home office. We are always working on new projects and shows so it is great that the tour of Christmas in Killarney has become a well-oiled machine visiting cities all over the country.

The 22-date U.S. tour begins November 24 in St. George, Utah, and concludes on December 22 in Fairfield, Ohio.

"There is nothing quite like seeing a dream become reality. We worked on this show for years before debuting it, and we are always making tweaks and changes to keep it fresh. Seeing the show happen every night is a huge accomplishment in itself, but watching the joy it brings to crowds is exactly why we do what we do.

"The one thing we hear over and over is, 'That is exactly what I needed to get into the Christmas spirit! Now it finally feels like Christmas!'"

That sense of satisfaction doesn't just happen on its own, however.

"Touring around the country brings a new challenge every day," admits Smith. "It is our job to anticipate anything and everything that could pop up. We have tons of stories, but luckily with

both our touring experience and the amazing crew and cast we have in the company, there is almost nothing that would stop the show from happening. It is the truest example of the ages-old adage that show must go on!"

Smith adds that Christmas in Killarney has been designed to be enjoyed for the whole family.

"There really is something for all audiences each night. We have made sure that everyone that comes to the show has all sorts of different elements to enjoy - the music, the stories, the laughs, and - of course - who doesn't like Irish dancing?"

"Live entertainment is always evolving, and that is no different for us. Each year we add things to change it up a little, so the show is always fresh for both the cast and anyone in the crowd that has attended before.

"We have worked extremely hard to preserve the stories and traditions from Ireland that have been passed down. So many older generations of Irish people have seen the show and have told us that they really felt like they were at home."

The spectacle's future, he notes, is promising.

"We are looking forward to keeping this snowball rolling! Our plans are to have multiple American tours running every year at Christmas time, as well as expanding into Canada very soon!"

www.christmasinkillarney.net

Sheila Fleet.

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30

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Holiday Gift Guide!

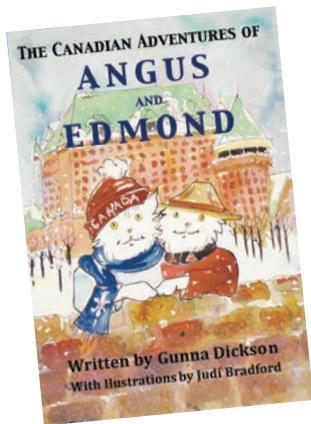
*Looking for that special something for
that special someone this holiday season?
We've got you covered with our annual
Holiday Gift Guide!*



Tartan Christmas Stockings

ScotlandShop - www.scotlandshop.com

An online retailer specializing in tartan, ScotlandShop offers a unique, seasonal gift that can be used year after year - Tartan Christmas Stockings. A ScotlandShop staple, these charming stockings are made to order using a variety of 100 per cent wool tartan fabrics. Available for order in over 500 clan and family tartans, they are fully customizable with a choice of complementary lining colour and the option of having a name embroidered to the fabric. The stockings can be shipped in a beautiful ScotlandShop gift box. For those interested in bundling up with another gift this year, the company also carries a variety of custom-made tartan products, including clothing, upholstery, home décor accessories, and more.



The Canadian Adventures of Angus and Edmond

Gunna Dickson / Judi Bradford - www.gdicksonbooks.com / www.judibradford.com

In their sixth adventure, feline duo Angus and Edmond set off for a quick visit to their neighbor to the North - and find themselves in a different world. The enchanting hospitality of pre-Christmas Montreal - the most European city in North America - surrounds them as they visit the majestic 17th Century Notre Dame Basilica and go skating in the shadow of La Grande Roue in the historic Old Port. The Angora-mix brothers then succumb to the wintry wonderland charms of snow-clad Quebec City. Angus is in his element in the French-speaking province of Quebec and Edmond finds his voice in a most unusual way. Author Gunna Dickson is a New York-based writer, editor, and translator. Illustrator, fine artist, and milliner Judi Bradford lives and works in DeLand, Florida. The book is available from Amazon and elsewhere online.



Perfume Oils

SAOR - www.saorperfume.com/shop

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



Ingles Buchan Tartan Throw

Northern Watters Knitwear - www.nwknitwear.com

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

Celestial Pendant

Keith Jack - www.keithjack.com

Scotland-born, Vancouver-based artist and designer Keith Jack remains world-renowned as a master craftsman of Celtic jewelry. After the birth of his children, Jack was inspired to create lasting, legacy pieces - of modern design and ancient meaning - designed to be passed on for generations, creating new family traditions while retaining Celtic and Norse legend. One of his new collections explores the Celestial path that guides us through time and space within the orbits of those we love. This divine energy unites us with our Universal family in eternal love. A quintessential representation of the collection is this Celestial Pendant featuring a stunning, brilliant Mystic Blue Moissanite set in Sterling Silver with 10k yellow Gold knotwork - the perfect gift for that special someone this holiday season.



Bia Sensitive Skin Set

CODEX - www.codexlabscorp.com

Treat yourself or someone you care about to the ultimate in plant-based skincare with the Bia sensitive skincare set by Codex. Named for the literal translation of the Gaelic word meaning “food”, Bia products are carefully formulated with natural ingredients derived from the soothing herbs that proliferate amid the wet and rainy climate on the West Coast of Ireland. Clinically proven and consumer-approved, step 1 starts with a delicately balanced unscented soap that removes dead skin cells without stripping away your skin’s essential microbes. Next, apply a fast-absorbing hydrating oil that smooths away dryness, and finally, lock in moisture with an award-winning signature “superfood” formula that acts as a protective barrier for even the most sensitive skin. Based on the wisdom extracted from the Irish herbalists of old combined with today’s most advanced science-based biotechnology, Bia upholds the highest skincare standards without compromising sustainability.



Bespoke Luxury Tours

Sheenco Travel - www.sheencotravel.com

Let’s face it; Christmas is grand, but it is a lot of work. Consider keeping up the celebrations - but passing over the preparations - by setting off on a jovial journey instead. Experienced travel aficionado Genevieve Sheehan and her team of Luxury Travel Specialists promise to put the “sheen” on that dream vacation you’ve set your heart on, with seamless travel planning from start to finish. Turn an ordinary trip into an extraordinary experience anywhere in Ireland and/or the UK, with many opulent options customized to match your imagination and interests. Whether you desire to revel in a regal ambiance fit for royalty on a Castle vacation; or embark on a serene and scenic tour in a chauffeur-driven luxury vehicle, Sheenco Travel is unwavering in its commitment to satisfying the most cultivated wanderlust in comfort and style. Unlock the unimaginable with organized group tours, golf vacations, and corporate travel in Ireland, England, Scotland, and Wales and transform mere travel into a personal pilgrimage of passion and play.



Nollaig Shon Pin

Nine Arrow - www.ninearrow.com

Share the ‘saibhreas na Gaeilge’ and celebrate the Irish language with the wonderfully whimsical illustrations from Nine Arrow. Owned and operated by a young Irish illustrator (simply known as) Cat, who, after struggling with her Gaelic school lessons, was inspired to create endearing prints of Irish words and phrases that restored her commitment to the language. The endeavor has brought much pleasure and a pinch of pedagogy to her many followers, with stocklists on sites in many counties across Ireland. Her extensive portfolio contains an eclectic mix of flora and fauna, and the Irish alphabet, with each drawing artfully scripted and sketched in dreamy pastels. Born from her love of the language, and a desire to be part of the world’s fondness of all things ‘Gaeilge’, Nine Arrow’s prints and illustrations make unique gifts for anyone with Irish heritage or those who are Irish at heart.





Let Us “Chase” Your Ancestors

Old Friends Genealogy - www.olderfriendsgenealogy.com

Old Friends Genealogy was established in 2015 by Kate and Mike Lancor. With their 70 years of combined experience in “chasing ancestors,” the duo created a genealogical experience unlike any other. Old Friends Genealogy focuses primarily on Irish and Celtic ancestry and, through DNA analysis and research techniques, creates detailed family trees that “bust through brick walls,” bringing customers closer to their ancestors - or, as the Lancors call them - “old friends.” A great gift for anyone who wants to learn about their family history but hasn’t the time to do the detailed research themselves. You’ll love their services and prices!



Outlander Tours of Scotland

A Happy Place Travel - www.ahptravel.com

Immerse yourself in the beautiful vistas of Scotland (where Outlander’s Jamie and Claire lived and loved) with knowledgeable and fun guides who share their love of Scotland and its history on an eight-night, micro-group (seven passenger) tour which includes hotel stays and transportation. The Outlander Immersion Tours of Scotland reveal the spectacular sights and scenery of both the Outlander television series and Diana Gabaldon’s original book series. This is one of the few Outlander tours that takes you to Craigh na Dun and includes a performance by “The Bard” from Castle Leoch and period costumes! The Outlander Redoux Tours of Scotland include two nights on the Isle of Skye, visits to the mill (where Jamie got naked!), the lovely little church where Jamie and Claire were married, the intriguing Rosslyn Chapel, the picture-perfect Eilean Donan Castle, and a ride on the famous Jacobite Steam Train.



Ancient Scotland Tours

A Happy Place Travel - www.ahptravel.com

The Ancient Scotland Tours explore several exceptional and extraordinary sites from living Scottish history. Exclusive to seven guests, this intimate, eight-night tour includes stops at Kilmartin Glen - home to over 300 ancient monuments - Old Inverlochy Castle, as well as the Medieval Cathedral and Priory of St. Andrews on the mainland of Scotland. The highlight of this tour is two full days on the Orkney Islands where travellers will experience an amazing array of ancient sites including the Standing Stones of Stenness, the Ring of Brodgar, the Ness of Brodgar, Maeshowe, Skara Brae, the Italian Chapel, the Orkney Winery, the Bishop’s Palace, the Earl’s Palace, as well as St. Magnus Cathedral.



Celtic Journals & Ancient Irish Maps

O’Brien Celtic Gifts - www.obriencelticgifts.com

Direct from their dedicated Celtic craft bindery in Dublin, O’Brien Celtic Gifts offers a range of top-quality Celtic/Irish Gifts including Deluxe Celtic Journals and Notebooks with classic Celtic embossed cover designs. Choose from 3 different editions; the Claddagh Journal, the Celtic Journal or the Glenoge, each designed and developed in Dublin to the highest standards. Adorn the living-room wall with an exquisite matted and framed Ancient Map of Ireland (circa. 1779), with special “raised” effect, and reproduced in fine detail. Other historic items from the company’s craft bindery include the 1847 Irish Emigrant Trail Map, a superb reproduction of The Historic 1916 Irish Proclamation - available in 3 different sizes - as well as stunning reproductions from the epic Book of Kells. All are matted and ready to frame. Take it a step further by personalizing your gift with the recipient’s name embossed on the front cover. Other classic Celtic/Irish notebooks, journals and wall hangings are available via O’Brien’s website.

Stag's Head Cufflinks

Sheila Fleet - www.sheilafleet.com

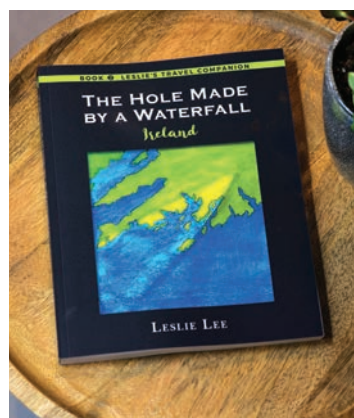
When searching for the perfect gift for that special someone, opt for originality and award-winning design found in a superb set of Stag's Head cufflinks by premier Scottish jewelry artisan, Sheila Fleet. Inspired by the dignified and distinguished deer that is their namesake, each set is hand-enamelled using Sheila's exclusive 'Moss' colourway. With hand-crafted cufflinks and jewelry collections created from her state-of-the-art workshop in Orkney, Scotland, Sheila Fleet has evolved over decades from a small business into one recognized worldwide for its distinctive designs and made-to-order service. Available in 9ct yellow gold or sterling silver with enamel, explore Sheila's Stag's Head collection including cufflinks, kilt pins and tie tacks - the perfect trio of treasures that can be passed down with pride.



The Hole Made by a Waterfall, Ireland

Leslie Lee - www.leestudioc.com

In this charming travel memoir, the author-artist Leslie Lee searches for her maternal origins in southwest Ireland. The book is fully illustrated with people, landscapes, musicians, and meals that she encounters on her journey as she captures and conveys her unique personal experiences. The text is lightened by descriptions of chance meetings, visitors, and the vagaries of travel and is alternately sobered by her growing understanding of the generations of brutal starvation and subjugation of the Irish people. In this final piece of her Celtic Trilogy, which includes *We Are the Land, Ireland*, and *Six Degrees of Latitude, Ireland and Scotland*, Lee experiences a powerful sense of connection and understanding of her mother's people and the places that nurtured them. As with the pocket-sized *Leslie's Field Guide to Ireland*, the books include helpful travel information - from ancient and historical timelines, formative history, and mythology, maps, places of interest, and packing lists. The Trilogy is available as a box set.



Traditional Shortbread Gift Boxes & Tins

Granny Fi's Shortbread - www.GrannyFis.com

Originally a medieval food item that was more of a bread than a cookie, Scottish shortbread was adapted through the ages (most notably by Mary Queen of Scots) and often reserved for special occasions only, particularly Christmas and New Year (Hogmanay) celebrations. With a history like that, it is easy to see why this classic holiday treat makes the perfect gift for Christmas, particularly when prepared by experts such as those at Granny Fi's. Based in Oregon and providing shipping throughout the USA, this family-run business offers melt-in-your-mouth authentic shortbread (made in small batches only) from an original recipe passed down by a beloved Scottish grandmother. Available in its classic and traditional flavor and form, Granny Fi's also provides gluten-free and vegan versions as well as chocolate variations and a festive flavor of the month. Packaged perfectly for the Christmas season in traditional tins, baskets, boxes, or pretty wrapping, create a custom gift package for those extra special occasions.



Eirelan: Saga of the Latter-Day Celts

Liam O'Shiel - www.amazon.com

Have a speculative fiction fan on your Christmas list? Liam O'Shiel's *Eirelan*, Book 1, Saga of the Latter-Day Celts, might be the perfect gift for an adventurous family member or friend. At the dawn of the 30th century, Gaelic-speaking folk from the British Isles and Bretagne evolve into five Celtic nations. These new countries - united by language, spirituality, and determination - aim to preserve and promote Celtic culture and traditions, as well as protect the natural world amidst the destructive and chaotic Age of Machines. The story opens ten centuries later, when the Celtic Nations are threatened by an ever-colder climate and by powerful and resolute enemies. The three volumes of this vast trilogy, which includes *In the Bleak Midwinter* and *The Blood Upon the Rose*, tell the tumultuous and thrilling story of a single year in the lives of these noble and indomitable Celtic peoples.

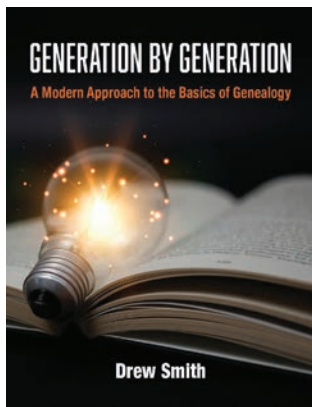




Scottish Sea Salt Flakes

The Scottish Grocer - www.thescottishgrocer.com

Most of us agree that fine food is one of the best things about Christmas. When carefully selected, no gift is more meaningful than authentically prepared specialty cuisine that is a warm reminder of simpler and more wholesome times. Grace any holiday table this year with some of the finest selections from The Scottish Grocer to enhance Christmas or any celebration with a taste of the old country, including their world-renowned Sea Salt Flakes. Based in the USA, but with a long-standing association with the best Scottish food producers, order your exclusive edibles to be shipped anywhere in the country. Featuring classic brands like Brodies of Edinburgh, Caledonian Kitchen, and Cloutie McToot, dig into a feast of the finest Scottish fare from a range of food categories. Choose from a lengthy list of traditional family favorites like yummy Christmas pudding from Cartmel Village Shop, and melt-in-your-mouth shortbread from the Edinburgh Shortbread House. Add some superb scones, breads, fruit curds, and luxury preserves from a luscious list that is as appetizing as it is endless. Hearty meat pies and pasties, succulent sausages, heavenly Highland beef, and, of course, haggis, are available to make any occasion memorable. Be sure to ask about The Scottish Grocer's elaborate, customized gift arrangements.



Generation by Generation: A Modern Approach to the Basics of Genealogy

Genealogical.com - www.genealogical.com

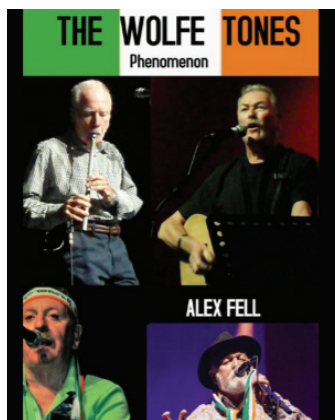
As the ongoing popularity of tracing our genealogy continues, many have become fascinated with not only discovering their heritage with a saliva sample sent to a lab for a fee but also investigating the process behind it. A perfect guide for a budding genealogist, or those seeking to research their roots on their own, Drew Smith's latest book turns what might be a formidable challenge into an intriguing journey. In addition to providing the reader with a range of fact-finding tools and a blueprint for formulating a family tree, Smith shares tips and tricks for accessing free resources from big-name genealogy sites. Using a manageable step-by-step process and internet screenshots that cut search time in half, the author guides us through a discovery process that begins with the individual and extends back through generations breaking down the basics of DNA testing for the layman and covering specific periods from the present day to the colonial era. Of particular interest to those of Celtic heritage, Generation by Generation also devotes several chapters to the origins of families in records from Great Britain and Ireland, as well as Canada and the USA.



Celtic Jewellery

SilverWood Jewellery - www.silverwoodjewellery.com

Nothing says Mo Cuihshle more than a finely crafted piece of Celtic or Claddagh jewellery. Connect with your loved one and your Irish heritage by gifting a time-tested treasure from the extensive collection of necklaces, bracelets, brooches, and classic Claddagh rings from Silverwood Jewellery with four locations in Limerick, Galway, Cork, and Clonmel. Select from a stunning array of birthstone settings in fine sterling silver and Trinity and Celtic knot bands that are as unique as your special someone. Hand-crafted with pride and distinction, Silverwood specializes in exclusive designs and unusual treasures that can be customized to include personal messages to create precious memories at affordable prices. Family-owned and operated since 1997, each piece of Celtic jewellery is hallmarked by the Irish Assay Office in Dublin Castle.



The Wolfe Tones Phenomenon

Alex Fell - www.choicepublishing.ie / www.amazon.co.uk

The Wolfe Tones are widely acknowledged as the leading Irish Nationalist band, as well as traditionally-trained folk music exponents. They have influenced many younger bands, as well as established artists like Rod Stewart - whose version of "Grace" followed a visit to Glasgow Celtic Football Club, where longtime fans of the band are renowned for singing The Wolfe Tones' songs at matches. The band is going into its 56th year of continuous touring with the same line-up - a music industry record - and still spends time each year in North America and wherever else the Irish Diaspora is found. Alex Fell recaps all the highlights with this terrific tome, including the band's twenty-two "Top 20" hits, the fastest selling single ever on the Emerald Isle, the "best single ever" as voted in the BBC World Service poll, the double-platinum and gold albums, the civic awards of keys to both New York and Los Angeles, and the numerous proclamations attesting to their devotion to the ideal of a peaceful and united Ireland. With a soaring narrative arc, a recorded repertoire of the band, and peppered with historical facts and contemporary colour photographs, the work is a must-read for true music lovers and all with an interest in Irish history and culture. Watch for Alex Fell's second edition of her popular reference book - The Irish Draught Horse - coming soon!

Heartbox Scotland Subscription

Heartbox - www.heartboxscotland.com

Wherever in the world you may be, Heartbox is committed to bringing you the very best in Scottish pride, culture, history, heritage, and heart. Each month, subscribers will receive a unique and bespoke assortment of Scottish treasures. Simply choose a plan and the Heartbox team will prepare and pack a selection of carefully hand-picked gifts from a panel of local, sustainable Scottish suppliers. As there is no minimum term, gifting options include year-long subscriptions or a single box. Particularly popular this year is the Fall for Scotland Heartbox, a warm and welcoming Christmas gift for family, friends, or for yourself.



High Whistle in D with Presentation Box

Carbony Celtic Winds - www.carbony.com

Music brings the Holidays to life. For the instrumentalist or music aficionado on your Christmas list, Carbony Celtic Winds is offering a limited-edition Celtic Winds High D carbon fiber whistle with presentation box - approximately 14" x 3 1/2" x 3", and beautifully detailed with a brass latch and velveteen lining designed by Quiltboxes. Described as a "tapered whistle that allows for close finger spacing," the instrument offers both "rapid passage articulation" and a balance in volume, and includes - for the very first time - an anodized, serialized, laser-engraved fipple body and ebonite tip. Made of Bloodwood and fumed oak, the High Whistle in D and Presentation Box is available via the company's website.



Genealogy Tours

My Ireland Family Heritage - www.myirelandheritage.com

Looking for a unique gift that spans the ages and lasts a lifetime? The Irish-certified genealogist team at My Ireland Family Heritage offers personalized genealogy research that includes Ancestral townland tours - the family-owned business boasts a 95 per cent success rate in finding the precise location of one's ancestral home. Using an extensive database with access to national archives and financial records for all of Ireland, substantiated historical facts are painstakingly assembled from civil records, church, graveyard, and parish documents and deeds. Your family's townland and settlement home are then traced within ten yards of its exact location going back as far as the 1700s. In addition, a customized tour is organized for each family or individual, complete with luxury vehicles tailored to your preference and budget. Choose from several packages that include basic research and consultation by phone; to lavish three-day Ancestral Townland tours with all the trimmings enabling each client to walk in the footsteps of their ancestors. Each package includes a family keepsake book and offers the opportunity to discover 'Fantastic Finds' associated with your ancestors.



Scottish Thistle Necklace

Scoti Creations - www.scoticcreations.com

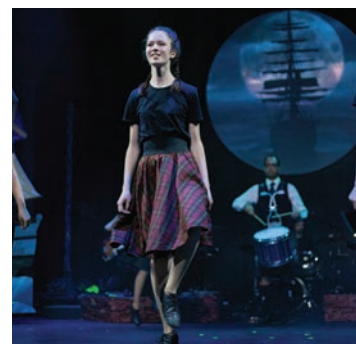
Step back into the world of Celts, Picts, and Vikings with Scoti Creation's extensive array of handcrafted artisan jewelry designed to connect you with your heritage. Metal Smith Marilyn Scott combines precious metals and ancient forming techniques to give each piece a unique, antiquated look. The Scottish Thistle necklace nestles rare Maw Sit-Sit in Sterling Silver. The pendant ironically hangs from a handwoven sterling silver Viking Knit chain. The Scottish Thistle reminds us of the legend of the Scots defeating Norse Vikings intent on sneaking into the Coast of Largs at night. A bear-footed Norseman stepped on a thistle alerting the Clansmen of their arrival. Other timeless and beautifully crafted gift items are available via the company's website, just in time for the holiday season.

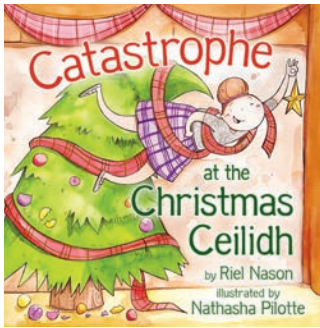


Highland Storm

The College of Piping, July/August 2024 - Summerside, PE - www.collegeofpiping.com

It has been said that experiences make the best gifts - and what better gift than an evening of Celtic music and dance? Highland Storm showcases Highland and step dancing accompanied by the breathtaking sounds of pipes, drums, and fiddles, as well as the melodies of traditional songs. Audiences will be transported back over 250 years to a pivotal time in Prince Edward Island's history, when three ships - the Annabella, the Edinburgh, and the Palmouth - arrived in Canada, having carried families from their homeland in Scotland. Recounting the first year of settlement and the challenges that came with it, Highland Storm shares the experience, strength, and hope of first-generation Scottish immigrants. Directed by Peter Gallant and featuring fiddler Gilbert Arsenault and vocalist Christine Gallant, the show includes performances from The College of Piping's instructors and students.





Catastrophe at the Christmas Ceilidh

Bradán Press - www.bradanpress.com

Kate the Highland dancer is back in a sequel to *Disaster at the Highland Games!* Now it's December, and Kate is excited to perform her first solo in the Christmas ceilidh. But as she waits her turn backstage, Kate's imagination starts to run wild. She pictures every possible mishap in vivid detail, from forgetting her choreography to knocking over the Christmas tree. Can she remember the advice of her dance teacher in time to prevent a Christmas ceilidh catastrophe? Whimsical watercolour illustrations by Nathasha Pilotte complement award-winning author Riel Nason's rhyming verse with a reassuring message for every dance student. Published in Nova Scotia, Canada, the 32-page paperback is perfect for ages 4-8 and children's picture book lovers of all ages.

Echoes from Scotland Candle

Book Scents Candles - www.bookscentscandles.com

Comforting scents that elevate the reading experience make an ideal gift for book lovers. Book Scents Candles has an array of candles with aromas inspired by characters and bookish delights. One of the company's bestsellers is inspired by the love story at the centre of the *Outlander* series by Diana Gabaldon. 'Echoes From Scotland' is a blend of sage, moss, leather, and oak, conjuring the magic of letters left behind from a bygone era. Available in various sizes, including eight-ounce candles and six-ounce melts, this scented masterpiece promises to be the ultimate gift for *Outlander* enthusiasts and anyone yearning to experience the allure of Scotland - the closest one will get to being transported through time. Book Scents Candles, a dedicated artisanal candle company hailing from Pennsylvania, celebrates ten years of crafting literary-inspired candles in 2013.



Personalized Crest Badges

Crest Badges - www.crestbadges.com

Give the gift of legacy with a handmade, heirloom-quality crest badge made from the finest Argentium sterling silver. With 40 years of experience as a meticulous master silversmith, Don Kimble has crafted pins, pendants, bolos, and badges for 200 clans and counting. Pay homage to your heritage with a perfectly polished, sterling silver crest, that is carefully created using a detailed multi-step process and intricate attention to detail and design. Whether you require a specialty badge for Armigers, Chiefs, or Chieftains or a customized crest adorned with your preferred artwork in mind, Kimble and his crew can design personalized heirlooms that will be passed down through generations with pride. Available in gold plated sterling or solid 14k gold, no clan is too small, and no customized order too cumbersome. Inquire about their exquisitely jeweled plaid brooches and other specialty items for the ultimate in meaningful gift-giving this year.



Custom Kilt & Tartan Design

Red Label Kilts - www.redlabelkilts.ca

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



The Haggis

Stahly Haggis - www.thehaggis.com

Since their first haggis was born, over one hundred years ago in Dunfermline, Scotland, the Stahly Family's line of Haggises has earned the respect of haggis aficionados worldwide. Much of the acclaim in the USA for the Stahly brand is due to the easy availability of their Canned Traditional Scottish Haggis. This popular version is ready to serve whenever the occasion seems right - just pop the can, heat, and serve. The ingredients include water, lamb heart, oats, pork fat, lamb liver, pork, salt, dried onion, malt extract, and fine spices. Stahly's Haggis is free from artificial colours or preservatives. For more information contact Stahly's US distributor at 251-405 0032 or via email at info@camwrap.net.



The Lewis Chess Set - 'Scotland's Hidden Secret'

Scottish Creations - www.scottishcreations.com

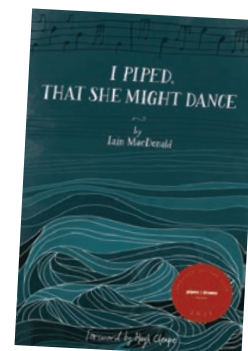
The romance of the mystery of its discovery on a remote beach, perhaps near Uig on the Isle of Lewis some time before 11 April 1831, is loved by Scots and further adds to this land of mist, myths and legend. Is it true that they were found in a sandbank by a farmer who mistook the pieces for elves and promptly fled, then returning to retrieve them only due to his wife's urging? Historians believe the pieces were probably made in Norway about AD 1150-1200. The belief is that the pieces were buried for safe keeping on route to be traded in Ireland. The plot thickens... the skilled craftsmen at Berkeley Chess have interpreted the iconic chess pieces to produce magnificent chess sets which exemplify the majesty of the original sculptures. Pieces are available in ivory & red, ivory & brown.



I Piped, That She Might Dance

Reelpipes.com - www.reelpipes.com / www.blackwaterpress.com

I Piped, That She Might Dance by Iain MacDonald, with a foreword by Hugh Cheape, is a historical novel based on the life of Angus MacKay (1813-1859), first Piper to the Sovereign, appointed by Queen Victoria. MacKay, who is one of the most significant figures in the history of Scottish music, died after a long battle with physical and mental illness, though he left behind collections of pipe music still played today. This account of his life traces his long journey, from humble origins on the Isle of Raasay to the height of fame in Her Majesty's service and beyond. His story is one that has long deserved to be told, and Iain MacDonald has obliged in style. The book was named 2021 Product of the Year by pipes | drums magazine.



Scottish Leather & Lassie Wear

Time-Period Clothing - www.timeperiodclothing.com

Scottish Leather and Lassie Wear may have changed its website name to Time-Period Clothing, but the high quality and wide-ranging assortment of old-world attire remains the same. Serving North Carolina and adjoining southern states since 2004, go back in time with custom-fitted, high-quality dresses, blouses, and bodices that offer a distinctive look. Simply choose your colors and accents, and the bodice, overdress and chemise will be made-to-measure for you by owner and foremost seamstress Jacquie Habenicht. Bring your cosplay fantasy to life and embody your bygone era of choice with selections from Medieval, Renaissance, or the Victorian age, to Steampunk, Peasant, or a wickedly dressed wench! Revisit your roots in custom-made Highland finery or Irish garments from days of old. Finish off the look by adding uniquely crafted accessories that include leather pouches, finely woven fabrics, or a cape with Celtic trim.



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Workshop for Pipers

Balmoral School of Piping & Drumming - www.bagpiping.org

Do you know a musician whose New Year's resolution involves honing their craft? If so, gift them with a weekend-long, online Winter Workshop from The Balmoral School of Piping & Drumming for pipers, to be held Feb. 2-4. Attendees will receive online instruction via Zoom from award-winning pipers Robert Mathieson, Derek Midgley, and Andrew Carlisle, along with tech help if needed. As part of your Winter Workshop experience, any band that brings along some of its members will receive a customizable band clinic tailored to their requirements. In addition, any attendee who refers new students will receive \$50 off the price of the workshop for each new referral.





From Edinburgh to Oregon

As a young adult, I relocated from the UK to the USA, settling down in Oregon with my family. I've always used my mother's recipe to make my shortbread, which was passed down from her grandmother who resided in Edinburgh. The recipe remains the same, and I still make small batches to achieve that authentic homemade taste that melts in your mouth. However, while the classic buttery taste and texture remain, I've experimented with adding different flavors to the mix over the years. I only use natural, high-quality ingredients and avoid adding any preservatives.

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THE CELTIC CHEF with Gary Maclean

Christmas Mince Pies

Mince pie is an essential part of any Christmas celebration in Scotland. The name itself stems from its early origins - a blend of minced mutton and dried fruit. Over time, however, the amount of meat was reduced, and the pie evolved into a delectable dessert - a beloved treat in Scotland. In fact, Walkers of Speyside, a renowned Scottish bakery famous for their shortbread, began selling mince pies across the U.K. in 1899.

Pastry Ingredients

200g (8oz) plain flour
50g (2oz) ground almonds
Pinch of salt
125g (4oz) butter, chilled
1 egg
50g (2oz) sugar

Pastry Instructions

Sieve the flour, ground almonds, and salt into a bowl. Dice the chilled butter and add to the flour mixture. Lightly rub in the butter to achieve a sandy texture by running your hands down the insides of the bowl and going right to the bottom; when your fingers meet, slowly lift them out of the bowl, rubbing your thumbs over your fingers as you go. The secret of perfect pastry is to make sure you do not work it too much at this stage. I always try and make sure that I don't rub all the butter in completely. I like to see little flakes of butter once I have finished rubbing in. Mix the egg and the sugar. Make a well in the centre of the flour and butter and add the sugar and the egg mixture. Gradually incorporate them into the flour and carefully bring it together until you have a smooth paste. Press into a flat round, then wrap in cling film and allow to rest in the fridge for an hour before using. The reason you press the pastry into a flat round is so that you can roll it straight from the fridge.

Mincemeat Ingredients

170g (6oz) seedless raisins
125g (4oz) sultanas
125g (4oz) currants
50g (2oz) mixed peel
50g (2oz) dried prunes, chopped
170g (6oz) soft brown sugar
1 Braeburn or Cox apple, peeled, cored and grated
100g (3½oz) shredded suet or veggie suet
1 orange, juiced and zested
1 lemon, juiced and zested
50g (2oz) sliced almonds
½ tsp mixed spice
½ tsp ground cinnamon
Pinch of nutmeg
100ml brandy

Mincemeat Instructions

Mix all the ingredients, using only half the brandy, in a large, deep baking tray and cover and leave to stand overnight. The next day, preheat the oven to 120°C (250°F). Cover the tray with foil and place in the oven for about 2 hours or until the fruit is softening and the juices are sticky to the touch. Leave the mixture to cool slightly, then mix in the rest of the brandy. Sterilize clean glass jars and spoon the warm mincemeat into them.

Pie Instructions

Lightly butter your tin. Thinly roll out the pastry. Cut out 12 circles with a fluted pastry cutter, large enough to fill the base of the prepared tin. Press gently into each hole, then fill with the mincemeat. Cut out another 12 slightly smaller discs (or you could use a shaped cutter and use to cover the mincemeat). Press the edges together to seal. Make a small hole in the top of each, then brush lightly with milk. Place into the fridge for 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F). Bake the pies for approximately 15 to 20 minutes until golden brown. Let them settle for a few minutes and then decant them onto a cooling rack. Dust with icing sugar. Makes 12 portions.

Nollaig Chridheil agus Bliadhna Mhath Ùr!
Gary • www.garymacchef.com

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The last time I wrote about the wave of new distilleries sweeping across Scotland there were around 30 to speak of. In the less than 2 years that have transpired since then you can add another dozen to the list. Making whisky takes expertise, time, and money...lots and lots of money!

Scottish grain spirit cannot be called Scotch Whisky until it has rested a bare minimum of 3 years in an oak cask, and - as with most things in life - the bare minimum is often, but not always, not good enough. Firmly established distilleries such as Kilchoman and Arran began by bottling well-received 3- and 4-year-old whiskies in their infancy, and many of the new kids on the block are following a similar path.

Let's start with the Isle of Harris Distillery, which was founded on the Outer Hebridean island for which it was named in 2015. Fun random fact about the Isle of Harris; it is the southern half of the Isle of Lewis, and connected to it by a short isthmus, but it has always been considered culturally and geographically separate from Lewis (only in Scotland). It is on this isthmus, in the town of Tarbert, that the distillery was built.

Anderson Bakewell, a local musicologist concerned about the island's dwindling population, came up with the idea of building a distillery, despite not being a fan of the drink.

He wanted to give islanders a reason to stay and work, so he found a partner with industry experience, and the rest is history.

The "Social Distillery"- as they like to call it - started with just 10 employees, but now has more than 50.

While it waited for its whisky, the Harris Distillery released a very well-regarded gin, made with local ingredients including sugar kelp. Its first single malt Scotch whisky, The Hearach (the name for a Harris Islander), was recently released in Scotland, and will be popping up in markets around the world over the next few months. This lightly-peated whisky was matured in a mix of Bourbon and Sherry Casks and has been extremely popular so far, selling out almost immediately in the U.K.!

Holyrood Distillery was established in what might be the opposite location from Harris, in the heart of Scotland's capital city of Edinburgh. It was founded in 2019 at the foot of Arthur's Seat, in an old train shed, across the street from fictional detective Rebus' very real police station. The distillery was the brainchild of Canadians Rob and Kelly Carpenter, and a Scotch industry friend of theirs, David Robertson. It became the first whisky distillery to produce spirit in Auld Reekie in 100 years.

Holyrood Distillery also produced gin while waiting for its own whisky to come of age, as well as rum, single malt spirit, liqueurs, and blended whiskies. The distillery's first single malt, Arrival, was released in the U.K. in October, and will shortly start appearing in other markets around the world. The name is doubly appropriate when you consider that the spirit has finally come of age, and that it was made in an old rail shed. Holyrood has done a lot of experimentation with malt, yeast, fermentation times, and cask selection in its short history, and it is sure to release some interesting creations in the year to come.

Finally, we are back to the west coast to check in on the Torabhaig Distillery, estab-

lished on the Isle of Skye in 2016. The vision for a second distillery on the Isle of Skye started with the late Sir Iain Noble, an island landowner with a passion for preserving the Gaelic language. He wanted to create more opportunities for young people to work, live, and stay on the island, and identified a ruined old farmstead as the perfect site for Skye's second distillery. When Sir Iain passed away in 2010, Mossburn Distillers stepped forward to carry the vision forward.

Rather than look to attract experienced distillers to the Island, Torabhaig set out to find people on the island interested in a career in whisky, and then they had them trained. The production at Torabhaig is heavily peated, but not in the Islay style. They call their peat style "well-tempered" - and it does have a softer impact on the spirit. Once a year each of the production employees at Torabhaig is given 2 weeks to make any style of production they want, which means there will be some very interesting one-offs coming out of the distillery in the years and decades ahead. The Distillery's first release, 2017, named for its first year of production was released in 2020. The second release Allt Gleann, named for one of the burns that feed the distillery, is out now, and will be followed by a higher proof Batch Strength version later this year.

All three of these distilleries are quite small. Scotland's largest malt whisky distilleries, Glenlivet and Glenfiddich, produce 100 times as much spirit as Holyrood in a year, and 40 times more than Torabhaig. But though they may be small in stature, each has a compelling story and is looking to carve out a unique niche for themselves in the pantheon of Scotch Whisky.

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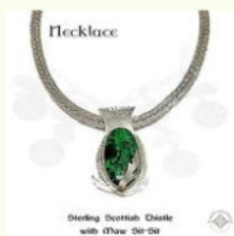
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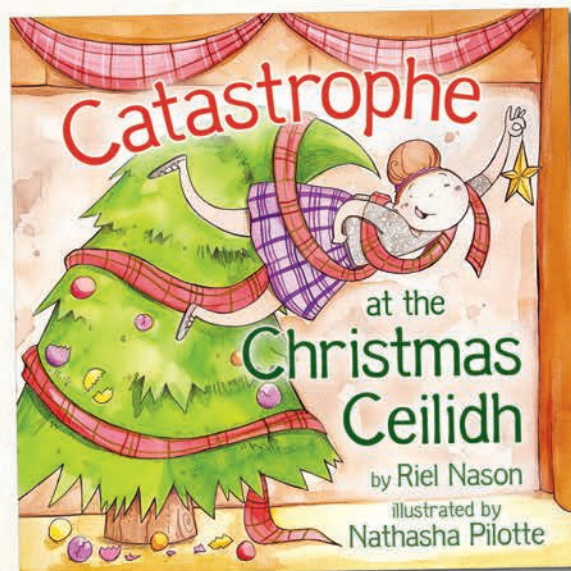
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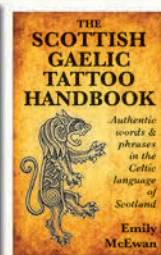
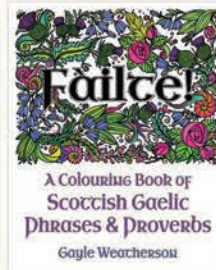
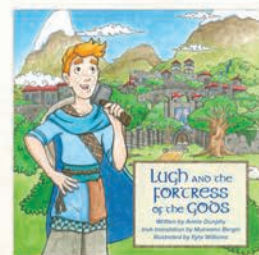
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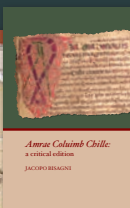
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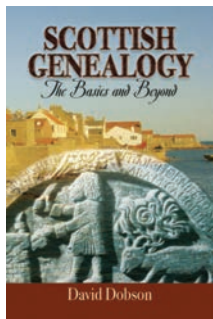
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records that most researchers have not heard of. It would take years for any other individual to compile such a far-reaching bibliography and compilation of relevant records in Scottish archives. David Dobson was born in 1940 in Carnoustie, Scotland. Most of his working life was spent at Madras College, St. Andrews. He has been an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Aberdeen, the University of Edinburgh, and at present, at the University of St. Andrews. He is the author of more than 200 books, including *Scottish Emigration to Colonial America, 1607-1785*, *Scottish Trade with Colonial Charleston, 1683-1783*, and numerous historical and genealogical source books. He now lives in Dundee and is working on further source books.

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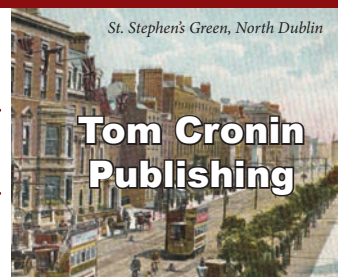
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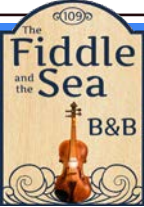
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In the final installment of a six-part series, Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns looks at one of Celtic mythology's most significant figures, Cailleach, the Goddess of Winter

There is a change in the air, as the cold and quiet settles in. The leaves on the trees have long fallen, swapped out for icicles and freshly fallen snow. Amid the screaming of the winter wind is the soft murmur of voices.

It is a family - a mother, a father, and a young son. They are lost and cold, desperately searching for warmth. The child is in his mother's arms, wrapped tightly in a blanket, as the father leads the way with a small lantern.

"Who's that?" calls the mother, her voice muffled.

In the distance they see a woman. She is old - her face is wrinkled and tired - but the most striking thing about her is her skin, so pale it is almost blue, and her eyes, arresting even in the distance. Draped over her body and covering her long white hair is a dark grey cloak. In her hand she carries a staff. It is not long before the family realizes that it is

Cailleach, the Celtic Goddess of Winter.

The story of Cailleach is far reaching and vast; as a character, she shows up in stories, poems, and histories around the world. And, although she is deeply tied to Celtic culture (the name itself is derived from the old Gaelic word "cailech" - meaning old woman and hag), there is evidence that her worship predates the Celts. Today, however, her story is most associated with Ireland, Scotland, and Isle of Man.

The Cailleach goes by many other names, the most common of them being the Veiled One.

But she is also known as the Queen of Winter, the Hag of Winter and, on the Isle of Man, Caillagh ny Groamagh - meaning old sullen woman.

While the monikers may vary, her roles are similar; first, she is the bringer of winter. This is perhaps her most popular characteristic, as she is known most for bringing the cold and dark winter months at Samhain, an ancient Celtic pagan festival that signals the end of both summer and the harvest season.

The Cailleach is also known as a weather witch. There is an array of ways in which she affects or controls the weather, the most blatant being the bringing of winter. However, she is also known for creating violent storms, thunder, and wind.

In many stories it is also said that she is responsible for the layout of landscapes, including mountains and large hills.

Lastly, she is known as both a goddess of destruction and, simultaneously, creation. In many stories she is associated with death and is sometimes said to gather the souls of the dead. In these tales, the Cailleach, now a one-eyed crone, flies through the skies during the Winter Solstice. However, as a guardian during the winter months, no life would survive the long and harsh cold without her. In this regard, she is most notably aligned with wild animals, including wolves, boars, and deer.

One of the more vibrant versions of the story comes from the Irish tradition, which sees the Cailleach as a triple goddess - a concept that is not uncommon in other cultures. The triple goddess is related to the three stages that were, at one time, considered the main phases of a woman's life: maiden, mother, and crone. Often, she will appear as a maiden to signify youth and new beginnings, or as a mother to suggest creation and fertility, and finally, as a crone, denoting both wisdom and transformation.

With a history as dark and wild as the winter itself, the Cailleach's presence remains strong today. Alas, the next time you are out in the cold, listening to the whistle of the wind and feeling the cold pinch at your skin, take a look around. You might just see her.



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