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CelticLife

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INSIDE!

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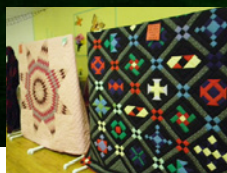
*Tommy Tiernan, NYC Tartan Week, Isle of Man
Hurling, World Irish Dance Championships*





malad valley welsh festival

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Today, Malad Valley has the largest per capita concentration of people of Welsh ancestry outside the country of Wales itself. For that reason, many residents of the Valley wanted to reestablish their Welsh roots. In 2005, after a 90 year break, this annual cultural event, now called the Malad Valley Welsh Festival, once again became a reality.

For more info visit

www.welshfestival.com

The Malad Valley Welsh Festival would like to give a special thanks to:



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A woman with blonde hair pulled back, wearing a dark, patterned jacket over a black top. She is shown in profile, looking down and to the left. She is wearing a matching Celtic-style earring and a necklace with a large, ornate pendant. The jewelry features intricate scrollwork in silver, gold, and purple.

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Clansman Publishing Ltd.
PO Box 8805, Station A, Halifax,
NS, Canada B3K 5M4

Celtic Life International is an ethnic journal
published in Canada six times a year by
Clansman Publishing Ltd.

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Please send review books and CDs to:
223 Bluewater Road, Bedford,
NS, Canada B4B 1H1

Please return undeliverable
copies of Celtic Life International to:
PO Box 8805, Station A, Halifax,
NS, Canada B3K 5M4

Publication Mail Registration
No. 40050439 ISSN 1918-0497

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Celtic Life International acknowledges the
financial support of the Government of
Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund
of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Canada 

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Fáilte!

*There is an old Irish proverb that states, "Laughter is brightest
where the food is."*

Food connects us; it brings families and friends together in great conversations over delicious meals; it draws food enthusiasts to rural communities to enjoy tried and tested recipes; it attracts tourists to local produce markets and many destinations are being promoted accordingly. And, food makes us happy.

In 2014 Scotland celebrated Homecoming Scotland. This year they are inviting us back to celebrate Year of Food and Drink 2015. Their aim is to market Scotland as a destination for deliciousness. Monthly themes from traditional food groups are being promoted to inspire and guide visitors. Many of our contemporary Celtic recipes came from the ancient hills of Scotland.

My mother is a grand lady of 93 years and still bakes the best biscuits around. When we were children she would often regale us with stories of her early days at the Keppoch where she was born. She worked the farm with her parents and six siblings. I was always impressed by their independent and self-sustaining ways. She had her chores, and among her first experiences was learning to bake *bonnach*, an important staple diet among the early Scots.

The late C.D. Gillis of Arisaig, Nova Scotia once told me a story of his pioneer ancestor, John Gillis and his wife, and how *bonnach* brought an unsettling situation to a happy conclusion. John Gillis spent two years in the late 1700s clearing land and building a log cabin at Arisaig. He then sailed back to Morar, Scotland, and returned with his wife and small child. Apparently many of the European settlers had heard stories of local Mi'kmaq stealing white babies and - whether or not this was true - it was an obvious concern. Shortly after arriving in the new land, Mrs. Gillis was at home alone with her child when two Mi'kmaq ladies suddenly appeared inside the cabin (no texting to announce a visit). Startled, Mrs. Gillis recalled the stories she heard and knew to act quickly. Fresh out of the oven was a pan of newly-baked *bonnach*, which she broke in two and gave it to her guests. After tasting the *bonnach*, the guests giggled and left, to the relief of Mrs. Gillis.

Bonnach, as well as many other traditional recipes, are still very popular. With this issue Celtic Life International will publish a collection of classic Celtic recipes from the seven Celtic nations, as well as Nova Scotia. Cabrini's Celtic Kitchen will be available on newsstands and mailed to all subscribers to enjoy.

As well, Celtic Life International has joined with Visit Scotland to offer subscribers a chance to win a trip for two to Scotland to savour the Year of Food and Drink 2015. Check our website for details.

Enjoy and May God Bless,
Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher



INSIDE

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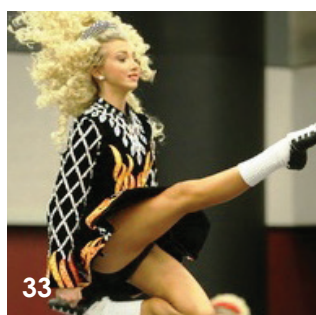
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Our Mar/Apr cover shot features Guy Grieve of Scotland's Ethical Shellfish Company



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DE a |DOL



Neeson nixes Irish homecoming

Actor Liam Neeson has reconsidered relocating home to Ireland, but not after the country's government introduced new charges for water. The Independent reports that Neeson is hopping mad over the country's new austerity measures and carped at The Irish Sun: "To tax people for their water. Just wrong. I've always thought about coming home, especially with my empty nest, but this is just insulting. It turns me completely off." Neeson, 62, comes from Ballymena, Antrim, according to the paper, but has made his home in New York for the last 20 years. His most recent film is Taken 3, which has become a popular thriller franchise. The role, Neeson said to the paper, makes up for having lost the James Bond slot to Pierce Brosnan. Talking of the water bill, the actor added: "I really hope the government is doing something about it now and listening to the people and finding a solution."

Ruined estates transformed into art

The homes down isolated roads on the Outer Hebrides have been left to rot, often with their contents intact. They are the legacy of families who can't bear to part with ancestral properties, so rather than sell them they turn down all and any estate agent offers, according to a story in The Scotsman. Now the houses show up in a series of photos which are the work of John Maher, the former drummer for the punk band The Buzzcocks. Despite a number of hit singles, the band didn't last long and Maher ultimately found himself living on the Isle of Harris in 2002, where he began shooting very distinctive photographs of often decaying man-made objects against the beauty of the islands. His latest exhibition titled Leaving Home features images of the houses, and opened in Edinburgh in January. The Scotsman reported that Fife-based photographer Ian Paterson also contributed work to the show, which included a new concerto to composed by former Scots Trad Music award-winner Mike Vass.



From hero to ambassador

A bonafide Canadian hero is the new ambassador to Ireland. Kevin Vickers is the former Sergeant-at-Arms of the Canadian parliament who confronted a gunman in front of the parliamentary library and is believed to have fired the shot that killed the shooter. Michael Zehaf-Bibeau triggered panic in the Canadian capital of Ottawa in October 2014 when he shot a reserve soldier standing guard at the National War Memorial. According to CBC News, Vickers – who replaces former Conservative cabinet minister Loyola Hearn – has a strong Irish-Canadian background. CBC quoted Irish Foreign Affairs Minister Charlie Flanagan, who said that Vickers is "a very good friend of the embassy of Ireland in Ottawa, and his family has been involved in Irish affairs in New Brunswick for many years." Vickers is a former Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman and previously worked as an aide-de-camp for New Brunswick's lieutenant-governor.

Future of piping in danger

Important figures in the world of bagpiping have sounded the alarm that the future of the instrument could be dire unless lessons for the musical instrument are introduced into the curriculum of schools. Both Craig Munro, the lead piper for the Red Hot Chilli Pipers, and David Johnston, Championship Convenor for the Scottish Schools Pipe Band, told the Scotsman newspaper that more needs to be done to preserve the heritage of the bagpipes. In an interview with the paper, Munro said, "It is clear that several schools are trying to get school pipe bands up and running, but it's becoming increasingly difficult to get piping and drumming onto the curriculum... What many people perhaps don't realize is that it is possible to build a fulfilling career from the bagpipes." Johnston warned the Scotsman that "unless more is done to bring pipe band instruments into state school classrooms, this [piping] could become a thing of the past."



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



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first word

In the second installment of a year-long, six-part series examining Celtic culture, Joseph Lennon, Director of Irish Studies and Associate Professor of English at Villanova University in Pennsylvania, shares his perspective on what it means to be Celtic today.

To be Celtic today is to find a place in the stories and heritage of the modern diasporic Celtic cultures. The emotional register of those stories is rich, its pains resonant, its pride distinct, and its accumulation of connotations surprisingly consistent. As with any culture, a good deal of invention and reinvention has occurred to keep it vital, but some associations have long endured. Celtic culture most often risks, not least in North America, disappearing into whiteness, with its bland allure of privilege, anonymity, and acceptance. But Celts have a sturdy history of resisting irrelevance.

Texts like James Macpherson's pseudo-translations of Ossianic legends in 1760 and Charlotte Brooke's 1789 translations, *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, spurred the first Celtic revival in the British Isles. Celtic appreciation has always stemmed from the sense that the Celtic (a relatively new appellation) was an ancient culture, of which only fragments, relics, and traces existed. That impression, despite evidence to the contrary, has long given those interested in Celtic cultures a poignant sense of the past and an obligation to tradition.

In the late 18th century, the six Celtic languages—Irish, Scots-Gaelic, Welsh, Breton, Cornish, and Manx, identified as such in 1709—began to be more closely associated with the lands and folk cultures where they were spoken. Since then, those cultures and their diasporas, have maintained a keen sense of cultural history and, a pervasive sense of the dissolution of their cultures.

The ideas and writings of scholars and

poets such as Ernest Renan, Matthew Arnold, William Butler Yeats, and Ethna Carbery, all contributed greatly to our modern understandings of the Celtic. Arnold, an English writer, school inspector, and admirer of Celtic literature, described the Celt in many positive respects, yet he also described in *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), the Celts as passionately idealistic yet impractical. Ireland's great poet, W.B. Yeats put a more positive spin on Celtic culture, treating it as imaginative, convivial, nature-loving, and in touch with humanity's ancient ways.

When I consider what it means to be Celtic today; language, music, literature, and art come to mind, as does the history of "undefeat" (to quote Frank Gallagher's modernist hunger-striking diary, *Days of Fear*.) This connotation has also been with the Celtic for centuries. In 1707 when Edward Lhuyd first applied the term Celtic to the related grammars of the modern Celtic languages, he replaced the then-standard term for the languages and cultures of Ireland and Scotland: "Scythian," whence the name Scotland was derived. Long before these countries were considered Celtic, they were called Scythian, a descriptor even more flawed than the one that suggested the Irish were the historical descendants of the Keltoi to the north of Greece and Rome. Lhuyd sought the new term to astutely link these languages and to associate the cultures with those who supposedly sacked Rome and dissolved its empire.

Naming these cultures Celtic coincided with British fascination with Roman

culture—the Augustan Age of Great Britain—when writers, thinkers, and imperialists compared Britain (purportedly named for Brutus) with Rome. As the British became the inheritors of the Roman Empire, the modern Celts inherited the mantles of the barbarians that attacked Rome's science, learning, religion, and might. It's small wonder that modern Celtic cultures embraced the arts and sciences, and resisted strenuously those connotations. In a sense, Celtic cultures sought ways to exceed the expectations Great Britain helped create for its backyard barbarians.

What these modern Celts created, instead, continually strove to demonstrate an easy and ancient civility. Such civility, along with wit, ardor, intelligence, and hospitality, remain cardinal qualities of most Celtic places I know. Archness, arrogance, and dismissiveness do not easily exist in Ireland—from the office of An Taoiseach and Áras an Uachtaráin to pubs and churches in west Cork, where common ground is sought and culture highly valued. As with the iron-age La Tène culture, one remarkable aspect of modern Celtic cultures, is the portability and attraction of its culture. Tourism is a staple of Celtic homelands; and with the appointment of Ireland's first Minister for the Diaspora last summer - whose hope it is to attract over seven million visitors to Ireland in 2015 - it is obvious that Celtic ties are stronger than ever.

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Paul Tobin and Erica Dalton

Paul Tobin and Erica Dalton visited seven Celtic festivals in their home state of Colorado last year and much to the surprise of the dog-doting couple, they didn't find a pet-themed vendor at a single one of them. Dalton points out that their dog, Kessel, a Belgian Malinois, isn't a Celtic breed; however, she says, "We certainly consider her a furry member of our clan and it was disappointing that we couldn't find anything for her while we were hitting up the vendor areas."

And there you have the origin of The Caledonian Canine, a Celtic pet business that Tobin and Dalton opened in November 2014.

"Our mission is to promote the celebration of Celtic heritage and culture with unique pet care items designed to foster expressions of Celtic pride," according to Tobin.

If that sounds like a tall order to fill, then consider the couple's products. Tobin and Dalton currently offer collars and bandanas. Dalton hand-makes all the collars and makes them to order so they're custom fit for the dog. The leather collars that The Caledonian Canine sells are hand-carved, hand-tooled and hand-painted by a local artist in southern Colorado, and the designs are exclusive to Tobin and Dalton's company. A local company screen prints the clan bandanas as well.

"We care and pay attention to Celtic traditions and heraldry," Tobin says. "As an example, the Lord Lyon Court of Scotland prefers Scottish clan badges in graphic form to have the disclaimer in Scots Gaelic: 'An cean cirean cinnidh,' which means 'The badge is for the chief of the clan.' We've included this disclaimer on our bandanas."

Tobin continues: "I recall during our product development phase that we spent

an hour making sure we got the language and the reasoning correct. We don't have to add the text in our bandanas, but we want to because we feel it is important to abide by heraldic traditions and respect the preferences of the Lord Lyon. Our products are not just beautiful tartan patterns around a dog's neck. They are legitimate celebrations of pride in our shared culture."

Dalton jokes that her dog owns more collars than she does pairs of shoes. Not only that, but all of Kessel's collars are custom or semi-custom made. Dalton notes that she loves purchasing gear for her pooch from small businesses because they provide a personal touch that large, corporate stores can't, and also because she likes to support businesses that clearly pour all their passion into each item they create.

That same philosophy guides The Caledonian Canine, according to Dalton.

"It was important to me to provide that same feeling to our customers. Additionally, our tartan collars are cut on the bias diagonally, which showcases the sett beautifully on even the smallest of collars – much better than our competitor's collars, which are cut on the straight grain. We also use only metal hardware, rather than plastic, for durability and longevity."

When it comes to the Celtic marketplace generally, Tobin asserts it is approaching a period of globalization brought about by popular media such as the film *Brave*, and the *Outlander* books. He notes the Internet has also played a role in bringing the Celtic people and fans of Celtic culture together.

"I believe more exposure to Gaelic culture in academia would foster greater interest in the Celtic community and marketplace," Tobin says. "Even from reading Plutarch's *Lives* and Livy's accounts of the early history of Rome in college, I wanted to know more about Celtic history and culture. Unfortunately, many of the classical studies texts are from a Roman perspective. No such course was available and I just did my own independent research. I would have taken a class in Gaelic studies in a heartbeat."

Looking ahead, Dalton says the couple plans to expand their product line to include tartan collar bowties, Scottish clan badge collar tags and additional leather collar designs.

"We're super-excited about rolling out our new product lines in the future," she exclaims.

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SEVEN CELTIC QUESTIONS



President of both the Illinois Saint Andrew Society and the Chicago Scots, Gus Noble, carries the values of his forefathers – education, enterprise and equality – to future generations. Here he answers our Seven Celtic Questions.

What are your own Celtic roots?

I am Scottish - by birth, by heritage, by inclination and by employment. I was born in Dundee in 1969, grew up in Duns, Berwickshire, studied at Stirling University (1987-1991) and moved to Chicago on 16 November 1992.

Why are those roots important to you?

My identity as a Scot informs everything I am, everything I do and everything I hope to be. As James Baldwin said, "If you know from whence you came, there really are no limitations to where you can go."

What does it mean to you today to be of Celtic heritage?

Devilishly handsome good looks! My roots and my identity have a profound influence on my sense of place and time. I feel a deep connection to the lives of those who went before us and an obligation to those who will come after us. I'm very proud to be a member of the Scottish American community. When I became an immigrant 22 years ago, I looked to Chicago's Celtic community for support. I found warmth, generosity, thoughtfulness - true friendship. And I felt a real, living bond back to the land I had left - a bond that went beyond the Scotland of "breeks, bonnets and Brigadoon," but to contemporary Scotland and to the culture that made me.

How are you involved with the Celtic community?

My involvement in the Celtic community is both personal and professional. I'm

the President of the Illinois Saint Andrew Society. In this capacity I oversee our elder care operations at our nursing home (the Scottish Home) and our cultural work as the Chicago Scots. I started attending Chicago Scots' events in the early-mid '90s. After working for the British Consulate General in Chicago and the Welsh Assembly Government, I started working for the society in 2004. Being involved with the society is one of the most rewarding things I've ever done.

Why is it important to keep Celtic culture alive?

By keeping our culture alive we transmit from one generation to the next the proud assurance of what it means to be Scottish. And we can also do a lot of good, warm a lot of hearts and make a lot of people smile. We measure our reward not by dollars and cents, but two other standards - by the sense of identity we help people to develop through connecting them to Scotland, history, heritage and home and by the fact that a daughter can put her head on a pillow at night and sleep soundly, knowing that her mother is cared for and loved at the Scottish Home.

Is enough being done to preserve and promote Celtic culture generally?

We can always do more. I see great opportunity in the education of the next generation. I'd like to see a series of educational modules tied to the world's only Scottish American Hall of Fame, which recognizes people of Scottish heritage who have shaped life in the

USA. The Hall of Fame is located at our Scottish Home. These modules will be available online for school teachers, parents, or Scottish cultural organizations to download, perhaps in conjunction with significant occasions like Tartan Day or Saint Andrew's Day. The modules will feature important Scots and detail Scottish accomplishments and contributions to North America.

What can we be doing better?

To truly engage with the next generations, we must be more inclusive and focus on what it means to be Scottish. While blood and birthplace are and will always be very important, I believe that, particularly to the coming generations of Americans who will likely have a claim on multiple heritages, Scottish identity will become more about inclination and choice. I believe that there are three values shared by every Scottish identity - a belief in education that is inspired by the Scottish enlightenment, a belief in enterprise that is inspired by Scotland's great spirit of innovation and a belief in the equality of every individual and every opportunity that is inspired by Robert Burns' great poem, A Man's A Man. These values are the best qualities of the Scots. By focusing on these values, we will be inclusive, welcoming and focused on what it means to be Scottish - and this is what will inspire the next generation.

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Finnegan's Hell

They call themselves Finnegan's Hell and play Celtic music, but audiences might be surprised to learn the folk-punk band is "100 per cent Swedish." Not that there's anything wrong with that, according to band member, Mick Finnegan.

"Some people think this doesn't make us qualified to play Irish music, but we beg to differ," he says. "We also think it's possible for white people to play the blues and we're convinced that black people can play country music."

Anyone who's heard their debut, full-length album (they previously released an extended play recording) titled *Drunk, Sick & Blue* won't debate the band's Celtic bonafides. The recording is receiving

plenty of airplay on Swedish radio and positive reviews from European music critics.

While the recording is achieving popular and critical success, it didn't come without its challenges, one of which was getting the children's choir to sing in tune on the song, *Drunken Christmas*. Finnegan notes the drummer also had to force himself to slow down on the tune, *Reversed Evolution*, or the song would have become too fast for anyone to listen to.

Finnegan's Hell formed in 2010. According to Finnegan, all the band members began struggling with instruments at an early age.

"Some of us wanted to be Gene Simmons or Peter Dinklage; others Kurt Cobain.

And one of us inherited an accordion from his dad."

Finnegan asserts most of their songs come to them without a struggle and says the title track was written within a matter of minutes.

"A good song has a refrain which makes you want to sing along, and it has a melody that you can whistle as soon as you hear it," Finnegan adds.

Looking ahead into 2015, the band anticipates touring Europe and already plans to release another recording in the fall.

www.finneganshell.com



Keltikon

The next big Celtic rock band just may be from...Switzerland? Meet Keltikon; a quintet from Zurich, which plays "Celtic boogie and folk punk." Singer and guitarist Olaf Ohl says the group's music ranges from ballads to rock to harsh punk, a sound reflected in the band's first recording titled *Agenbite of Inwit*.

Founded in March 2012, Keltikon is quickly becoming a fan favourite, having worked its way up through pubs and festivals in Switzerland. In 2014, the group played abroad for the first time, touring through the Czech Republic. In the meantime, *Agenbite of Inwit* has managed to chart in the top 10 on a number of European radio stations.

If a Swiss Celtic band sounds a little unlikely, then Ohl points out that several Celtic tribes – the most important of them known as the Helvetians – settled in Switzerland.

"Many names of cities and rivers and certain words only used in the spoken Swiss-German are the remains of our heritage," comments Ohl.

But the real Scottish influence in Keltikon must be credited to bagpiper Iain Duncan. According to Ohl, Duncan brought the first couple of jigs and reels into the band before it began to write its own Celtic songs.

Duncan will be leaving the band soon as work outside the band demands his at-

tention.

"After looking for a new piper, we discovered that it's not easy to find somebody suitable quickly," Ohl says, adding that the group has decided to go forward without the pipes.

Nonetheless, Ohl says Keltikon is fortunate to have Savannah Childers on fiddle and Adrian Studer on flute and whistle, who are able to replace Duncan's instrumental parts.

"Many songs get a new flavour and we are currently in a very interesting developmental process. We are all curious exactly how it will all end up."

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Heather Blanchard

As an only child growing up in the Scottish Highlands, Heather Blanchard says it was easy to get carried away with her own imagination from a young age. Local folklore and ghost stories always intrigued her and influenced the type of books she read – and now writes.

Dark is the Sea is Blanchard's first novel, which definitely contains elements of the author's childhood and features a Celtic heroine. The book revolves around 18-year-old Rowan Munro who leaves London to return to Dorchay, the remote Scottish village of her childhood to try and unearth the source of her mother's disappearance and of her own nightmares.

In Dorchay, she uncovers the buried secrets of her family and awakens a centuries-old malevolent force, the Hunter, who is intent on killing her and her family. To battle the Hunter, Munro must learn to harness new-found powers discovered with the help of an eccentric aunt.

Blanchard's family moved away from the Highlands when she was 12, but the author is still homesick on occasion.

"There is something about the Highlands which haunts me and I keep returning to it in my writing," Blanchard notes, adding that the supernatural elements in her book come from her love of Gothic literature and film, while her own personal experiences with nightmares and sleep paralysis also inspired her.

Blanchard says she initially began writing after an author visited her school. She continued because she enjoys creating characters.

"I enjoy the planning stages and can't start writing until I have researched and decided on names and backgrounds for the major characters," Blanchard shares. "I get inspiration very easily, through music, travel and interesting historical pieces on the Internet. Another reason I love writing so much is its solitary aspect."

For the author, a good book consists of a central character with whom she can identify, no matter how different that individual's circumstances may be from hers. She adds that escapism is important too.

"I like to get completely lost in the book I'm reading. A compelling story helps, as does beautiful language and a sprinkling of magic."

Writing, for Blanchard, is a mix of inspiration and perspiration. In the planning stages, she finds writing inspiring as she "plants and waters the seeds of her story." However, she admits that when editing and redrafting deadlines loom, the writing becomes more perspirational. "Sometimes I worked through the night and my hands seized up."

Nor are those the only challenges for the writer.

"During the writing process, there are difficult days where writing doesn't come easy and self-doubt comes easy," Blanchard says. "Once the book is completed, you then have to get it out there and try and encourage people to read it. I went the self-publishing routes, so I had more control, but even traditionally published authors have to do a lot of their own marketing these days."

Through writing, Blanchard learned that structure and routine are key to having a productive day. She'd rise early, brew an espresso, light a scented candle and play film scores to set the mood. She also discovered that she couldn't edit as she wrote.

"I have to complete the first draft first; otherwise, I'd languish in chapter one forever more," she jokes.

Blanchard says she was ecstatic when she completed the book.

"I had envisioned the moment many times, but the relief and pride was immense. I had champagne and my husband took me out for a meal to celebrate."

For the future, Blanchard says she has a number of ideas for other novels.

"I'm writing my next book and the protagonist is very different from Rowan Munro. She is free-spirited and a little wild. Celtic elements will remain ingrained in my stories as it is a part of who I am and what interests me."

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Touring Tommy Tiernan

“Sure, I’ve been known to push things a little too far on occasion”

When Irish comedian Tommy Tiernan lands on Canadian shores this April, he will be returning to friendly and familiar grounds; audiences north of the 49th parallel adore him, and critics have been quick to praise his profound, and sometimes profane, perspective on life.

“There are few stand-ups on the planet – Louis C.K. and Lewis Black notwithstanding – who can match this Irish wit when he is on his game,” noted the Montreal Gazette.

“The Irish comedian’s success is huge,” added the Winnipeg Free Press. “The audiences that flock to his shows are huge. The scale of his touring - and worldwide popularity - are huge. Even the nicknames he attracts - like “the Bono of Irish comedy” - are the stuff of grandeur.”

Tiernan’s new show, entitled Whirlwind, is aptly named; the tour begins in St. John’s, Newfoundland on April 7, and closes on April 22 in Vancouver, British Columbia. En route, the comedian will entertain thousands of fans in 11 cities.

The 40-something funny man is equally adored in the U.K., the U.S.A., Australia and New Zealand. However, if last year’s sold-out Mega Stars of Comedy Gala at the Just For Laughs Comedy Festival in Montreal is any indication, Canada has embraced him wholeheartedly.

“Canadians have a brilliant sense of humour,” Tiernan tells Celtic Life International. “They understand the nuance and subtleties of comedy. Not that there is very much that is subtle about being Irish.

“That said,” he continues, “the crowds in Canada don’t come out to see me just because I’m Irish. Sure, there will always be the nostalgia factor for North Americans – you know, the older expats who will go to anything with the word Ireland stamped on it – but that’s the exception rather than the rule for me and what I do.”

Not that he makes excuses for his roots.

“Look - I’m Irish, there is no way of escaping it, those are my roots and they are on display every time I take the stage. I don’t

shy away from the fact that I come from where I do, but at the same time I don’t consider myself some sort of spokesperson or poster-child for my country. I am a stand-up comedian - I try to make

people laugh. And it just so happens that the Irish are generally pretty good at that.”

Born in Carndonagh, County Donegal, Tiernan’s father is a native of County Kerry, and his mother is from County Limerick.

“At heart, I am a storyteller,” he explains. “You can blame that on my roots; gift of the gab and all that.”

As Canadians will soon see, it is part of Tiernan’s mandate to take risks that other humourists do not, often using a high-energy, non-apologetic delivery to challenge audiences.

“Sure, I’ve been known to push things a little too far on occasion,” he grins, devilishly. “But who ever said that being funny has to be bland and syrupy? All the great comedians – Lenny Bruce, Louis CK, Jerry Seinfeld – have all used comedy to invite their audiences to see the world in a different light and to perhaps think about life in a new and exciting way.”

That fresh perspective has earned Tiernan popular and critical acclaim around the world over the last two decades, as well as a number of awards. And, in April 2009, he set the Guinness World Record for the longest stand-up comedy show by an individual, performing for a continuous 36 hours and 15 minutes at Nuns Island in his hometown of Galway on the Emerald Isle’s plush west coast.

“That’s the gift of the gab thing I mentioned earlier,” he jokes. “I’m pretty sure that’s an Irish thing. I don’t think I would have been able to set that record if I was from India or Japan.”

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Hurling

It may be an integral part of the Irish identity but the ancient sport of hurling is just catching on in Halifax, NS, thanks to the enthusiastic efforts of a bunch of expats.

The Halifax Gaels, with players from Kilkenny, Kerry, Cork, Waterford, Clare and beyond, have pulled a few locals - including some born of Irish parents - into their ranks and will return to the pitch in May. The highlight of their season will be hosting the Eastern Canadian Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) Championship in September.

"Sports, entertainment and culture are all part of the same package in Ireland and that's what we want to present," said Halifax Gaels co-manager Colin Dorgan.

An artist, architect and musician from Ballyhooly, a village in the north of County Cork, Dorgan can hardly imagine a life without hurling.

"It is bred into us, you see. All the lads are dragging around hurley sticks from the age of two and can hardly wait to play. Everybody supports the local teams."

Dorgan admits it was a girl, rather than the prowess of the local hurling club, that brought him to Halifax.

"The truth is I was lured here by a Nova Scotian nurse I met travelling in New Zealand. Learning there was also a hurling team in Halifax was very good news, indeed."

Hurling has components of soccer and rugby as well as lacrosse and hockey, according to Dorgan.

"It is fast with a lot of running but it is not as tackle-oriented as rugby. Unlike soccer, you have to wear a helmet because it is a physical game but nobody is out there to maim anyone."

The origins of hurling are said to be prehistoric, with official sanction from the GAA since 1885. The object of the fast-paced game, simply put, is to use a wooden stick, known as a hurley, to hit a small ball called the sliotar, into the opponents' H-shaped net. The sliotar can be hit along the ground, into the air or carried for short distances and, like all games, hurling has a list of rules. It also has a lot of fans as an Irish national championship match can attract more than 80,000 spectators, most of them waving their team's colours.

One of the greatest rivalries in Irish hurling is between County Waterford and County Cork so it was fitting that Brian Walsh, of the former, and Ciaran Faherty, of the latter, were among those ex-pats who met in a bar to organize a Halifax team in 2012. They began training, held a few demonstration games and agreed to call themselves the Gaels. By the time the first Eastern Canadian GAA championship took place in St. John's, NL, last summer, they were ready.

"There were teams from St. John's, Quebec City, Montreal and Ottawa, as well as ourselves. We were short a few players so the competition was tough, but we did all right. We won the hurling and we lost Gaelic football in the final."

Dorgan said the expats have had to shelve their traditional rivalries to form a united team.

"We all know the lads from Kilkenny are no good, but we let them play anyway," he joked. "Seriously, though, we need players and they don't have to be Irish. They just need to be willing to get on the field with a bunch of Irishmen and we'll teach them to play."

The Gaels will be out for Halifax's St. Patrick's Day Parade and will also participate in the city's Celtic Festival in September. As interest in the game grows, Dorgan predicts matches will take on a festive atmosphere.

"We'd like to see the championship have a bit of the excitement we'd have back home. We'd like to have Irish music and a bit of an Irish market set up to showcase the culture. It is important to preserve and promote the Gaelic games because they are so much part of the culture. Down the road, we'd like to work at getting the sport into the schools."

While hurling is generally regarded as a new sport in Nova Scotia, it might actually be older than first estimated. Those who contend Windsor, NS, as the birthplace of hockey, credit transplanted Irishmen with adapting the game of hurling for play on frozen waterways.

By Rosalie MacEachern



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The New World of Harris Tweed

How does a traditional Scottish industry on the verge of extinction suddenly find its fabric the darling of 21st century design and fashion? Look no further than Harris Tweed Hebrides and its creative director Mark Hogarth.

Outside, dark clouds churn, winds howl and the cold waters of the North Atlantic lash the coast lying just beyond an adjacent field. Mark Hogarth looks up from his phone and nods. "Japan" he mouths silently. Minutes later he's on his feet, hand extended. "Welcome to Harris Tweed Hebrides." He glances through a window. "Aye, weather here is rather unpredictable."

Hogarth, 38, is creative director for Harris Tweed Hebrides, a firm using the traditional talents of 130 self-employed at-home weavers to provide the raw fabric with which it commands 90 per cent of the world's Harris Tweed market. Glasgow-based, Hogarth visits company headquarters every six weeks, heading 300-plus miles north to the windswept Isle of Lewis, where there is little but green fields, bleating sheep, a few houses and the Great Beyond. Go west and the next stop is Newfoundland.

Launched in 2007, Harris Tweed Hebrides doesn't actually make finished products, only the fabric, which is purchased by major designers and fashion houses around the world. In the hands of clever designers that wool takes on the warm glow of desirability, commanding eye-watering prices. Even exclusive Italian fashion house Ermenegildo Zegna uses the firm's famous fabric. Notes Hogarth: "Zegna is first and foremost a fabric maker, so it's a very significant compliment to get interest from these kings of the fabric and design industry in Italy."

Meanwhile top designers Judy Clark in Edinburgh and Alan Muir of Glasgow's Ten30 keep the flag flying closer to home.

"As creative director I am the link between the mill and the consumer, articulating and communicating the value of Harris Tweed," Hogarth asserts. Surprisingly, he studied politics and communication, not fashion or design - though a stint as a model led to his current position.

"When working in Japan I was in the fashion industry, so I was on the fitting and pattern cutting floors of all the top designers," Hogarth elaborates.

"I learned about the textile industry and I understand the pro-

cess. Though I'm not a qualified designer, I do have a good eye. But I'm in the demand side of the business, so ultimately I need to understand the zeitgeist," he notes, referring to the mood of the moment. "Then we can tailor the creative process to fit, even proactively change that zeitgeist to allow ourselves to be aligned with a movement."

Hogarth is both an artist in creative marketing sense and a salesman.

"Yes," he concedes. "I'm selling the value of the process while marketing the legend of the brand. The challenge is to confound stereotypes that see Harris Tweed as a jacket or a pattern. It's neither. Harris Tweed is a fabric, an industry, a worldwide brand. Tokyo is a big market. Italy and southern Germany are growing. France, Korea, Canada.... We may sell to French, Italian or American companies, but they have worldwide markets, so the product does get around."

Plainly put, he's selling a centuries-old message to a 21st century buyer.

"Yes, so we've had to do a much better job of telling the story. The audience for Harris Tweed in the '70s was mainly gents buying jackets. Now young girls buy tweed handbags, so our audience is changing. Potentially it is anyone with an appreciation of the quality, provenance and heritage of the Harris Tweed brand. There is no specific demographic."

Hogarth undersells his role in the success of Harris Tweed Hebrides and the resurgence of the industry as a whole. But isn't he the only creative director actively branding Scotland's legendary fabric to the world? And attending fashion shows including Pitti Uomo in Florence and Première Vision in Paris?

"My expertise is in monitoring the market, assessing trends and making sure fashionistas and journalists get the right story. Though we've become something of a namecheck for all things heritage and provenance, I think we've also put a spotlight on other Scottish textile companies who use traditional artisanal methods. There are great products made all over Scotland," Hogarth modestly concludes.

Story by Wayne Blanchard





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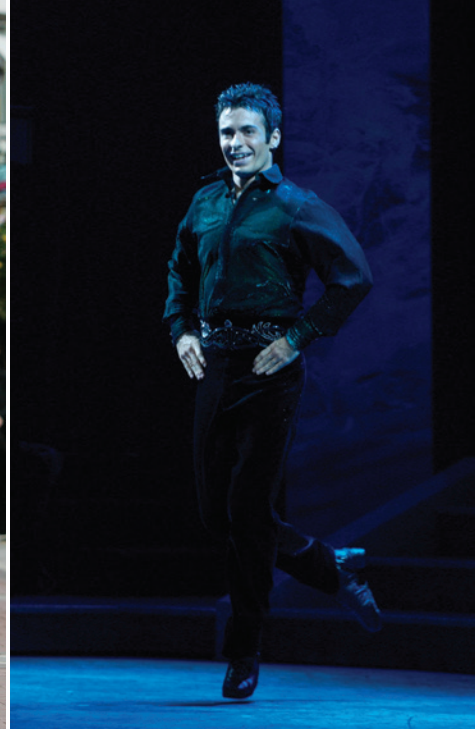
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the Riverdancer

Irish Dancer Padraic Moyles is happy to put his feet up

Padraic Moyles is home, and he couldn't be more pleased.

"We have just returned from a four-month Riverdance tour in China," he explains over the phone from Dublin, where he and his wife Naimh have recently taken up full-time residence. "The shows and the reception were absolutely brilliant, but it is always exhausting."

As the long-time Principle Dancer for the smash Irish spectacle, and now the show's Associate Director, Moyles has been criss-crossing the planet since 1997.

"You take the breaks when you can get them," sighs the thirty-something. "There is something about coming home to Ireland, to Dublin, that just feels so warm and welcoming. It feels like I can stop, put my feet up awhile, and just breathe."

Though he has lived away from Ireland for years, Moyles - like many Irish - is keenly familiar with his roots.

"My parents are from the west coast; my mother's family is from Roscommon, and my father's family is from Mayo. My brothers and sisters and I were born and raised in Dublin, before we moved to New York City - specifically the Bronx - when I was nine."

Moyles continued to study Irish dancing in the Big Apple, under the tutorship of the legendary Donny Golden. By the age of 12 he had turned pro, eventually leaving home to pursue his passion permanently six years later.

"And, essentially, the road has been my home since that time," he says, noting short stints on Broadway and elsewhere, along with his regular Riverdance gig.

Over that time, Moyles performed with the likes of Mariah Carey, Cher, Shania Twain, and the Chieftains. He has also appeared on numerous television programs, including *Dancing With The Stars*, *The Ellen Degeneres Show*, and *Good Morning America*. As well, he has showcased for several political leaders, including US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton.

Amidst all the running around, he still found the time to study sports psychology, and, along with Naimh - whom he met and courted on the set of *Riverdance* - start up an Irish dancing school in Manhattan.

"To be honest, it has all been a bit of a whirlwind," he admits. "I am not sure where the time has gone, but I am happy to be sitting still for a spell here."

However, with *Riverdance* scheduled for shows in Germany and Japan through the spring, Moyles won't be resting on his laurels for too long.

"Ha, true," he chuckles. "However, we will be home in Ireland for shows in Cork and Dublin this summer, so that will make life a little easier on both Naimh and I."

This fall will see the production doing double duty in both Canada and the USA.

"Both shows will be out on the road in North America for almost a full year," notes Moyles. "That's familiar ground for us, and we always get a tremendous reception when we tour there."

"Lots of Irish expats, yes," he continues, "but there are always lots of non-Irish in attendance as well. Irish at heart, we'll call them. Along with U2, *Riverdance* is perhaps the most recognizable cultural export from Ireland. Ask anyone what they think of first when you mention Ireland and we are always at, or near, the top of that list."

Moyles adds that, aside from the satisfaction of a job well done, meeting fans brings him the greatest rewards while on tour.

"The feedback is always welcome. I believe that all of the cast members, from the dancers to the management to the tech crew, love seeing people smile or hearing how the show has touched them in some way."

He is particularly enthused by the response from younger people.

"A lot of the kids are inspired to take up Irish dancing, or some other style of dance, which is a fantastic way for them to immerse themselves in something active and healthy. Some of them remind me of myself at that age, actually, and who knows - they may very well end up performing in *Riverdance* themselves one day."

"Which will be good for me," he laughs, "because by then I will likely be ready to put my feet up for more than just a few weeks."

www.riverdance.com



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the Outlander

Scottish actor Graham McTavish is never far from the warmth of home

Graham McTavish is shivering as he hails a cab in downtown Philadelphia.

"Aye, it is bitterly cold," says the 53 year-old thespian over the phone. "This is the only unpleasant part of the job. Actually, being outside in winter is probably the only unpleasant part of life."

McTavish is in the City of Brotherly Love to film *Creed* - the latest in Sylvester Stallone's ageless Rocky Balboa saga, which is scheduled for release this fall.

"Except for Sly, I might be the only actor who has appeared in both the Rocky and Rambo movies," he laughs. "Sly is a consummate professional on set, and he's had an incredible ride with Rocky."

It has also been an interesting professional journey for McTavish. From school-days productions to his current role, the native Glaswegian has seen all sides of the performing arts; theatre, television, cinema, voice-over work for animated films and video games, and more.

"Everything except radio," he notes. "I just sort of picked up acting as a youngster and ran with it. I have been quite fortunate that way; the work came to me, and I simply put in the hours."

McTavish says his "ah-ha" moment arrived when he was cast as Dwalin in *The Hobbit* film series.

"It struck me quite suddenly that I had really arrived as an actor, and that I was reaching a pinnacle in my profession. Given the popularity of both the books and the films, the challenge became where I could possibly take my career from there."

And then, along came *Outlander*.

"Well, it's a perfect fit for me, don't you think?" he grins, referring to his portrayal of Dougal MacKenzie on the award-winning, Diana Gabaldon-inspired TV series.

"Dougal is a complex character," he continues. "He is a man of contradictions, and very self-conflicted at times. Still, he is someone with a very firm set of principles, and deep down, he has a heart of gold."

The *Outlander* experience has been as rewarding personally as it has been professionally.

"I really miss my cast-mates," he shares. "We are very much a family on set, and it has been good fun getting to know and work with everyone. I still speak with Sam, Stephen, Gary, Grant and



Duncan all the time, and I can't wait to work with them again."

Filming in Scotland also afforded McTavish the opportunity to trace his own roots.

"In my down time I explored the National Records to get a better understanding of my ancestor's history and heritage. Though I am the only actor in the lineage, it turns out there is a lot of interesting fruit in the family tree. It was quite revealing, and made me even prouder to have been born and raised in Scotland."

A staunch supporter of Scottish independence, McTavish was encouraged with the results of last year's referendum.

"Despite the loss, there were several positive signs; voter turnout was huge, as was the number of young people engaged in the political process. Although the older voters opted for the status quo, the younger voters were decidedly in favour of independence. That bodes well for the country's future."

His pride will be on display again this April 11, when McTavish leads the annual New York City Tartan Day Parade.

"It's a great honour and thrill to be involved as Grand Marshal," he says. "And it will be exciting to be surrounded by my fellow countrymen and women. I meet expats all the time - the accent gives us away - and I feel that connection, that bond, each time. And, being Scots, there is always something for us to talk about - or, perhaps more accurately - something for us to argue about."

That Scottish presence is also strong in New Zealand, where McTavish and his wife and children settled in 2011.

"I am amazed at the number of expats I have met there. There are probably more McTavishes in New Zealand than back home in Scotland! And it's such a lovely part of the world, and a perfect place to raise the kids."

"And," he sighs, stepping out of his cab and into his hotel, "it's certainly a wee bit warmer there this time of the year."

Season 2 of Outlander debuts this April on STARZ



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Pipe Bands, kilts, clans, Outlanders, Scottish beer – this year's New York Tartan Day Parade has it all...

Interviewed by the Carluke Gazette, John Dickman of the Lark & District Pipe Band said, "It's the biggest Scottish celebration held in the States and we'll be very proud to be playing a part in it." Dickman was talking about the New York Tartan Day Parade. His pipe band is one of the contingents travelling from Scotland to march down 6th Avenue in NYC on April 11th.

"The Parade and other celebrations during Scotland Week [Tartan Week] mark the signing of the Declaration of Arbroath, which recognised Scotland's independence and inspired the American Declaration of Independence," explains Katrina Tweedie, editor of Scotland Now, the official Scottish media partner of the New York Tartan Day Parade. "We're proud to support the many thousands of people, for whom Scotland remains important, who will march through the streets of the Big Apple."

After the U.S. Senate officially recognized Tartan Day in 1998, Alan Bain, Chairman of the American Scottish Foundation, was tasked to organize a Tartan Day celebration for New York City. The first New York Tartan Day Parade happened in 1999. Organizers and participants had to stick to the sidewalks as they had not yet secured a parade permit.

"It was early on a Saturday morning, we had a group of people, a couple of pipe bands, and the sidewalk had not been really cleared, so we were having to dodge dustbins and other paraphernalia," chuckles Bain, who is also serving as President of The New York Tartan Day Committee this year. "But everybody really enjoyed the spirit of the moment!"

Now, thousands of people march in the annual event, while 30,000 or more line the streets to watch; and parade organizers are expecting even more people coming from Scotland this year.

"Every year, we have a youth band come over," says Camilla G. Hellman, MBE, Executive Director of the American Scottish Foundation. "This year we have the Oban High School Pipe Band coming over. It's wonderful to see these youth bands, which are absolutely fantastic, performing. We organize concerts now at lunchtime in Bryant Park in the days leading up to the parade and on the morning of the parade."

Interest from groups across the United States is also keen, adds Hellman. For example, contingents of Outlander fans from

Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia and other areas have already registered to march, she says.

A number of events, from ceilidhs to exhibits, take place leading up to the parade, including a Tartan Day Observance on April 6th, which Hellman initiated.

Belhaven, the producer of Scotland's top ale, is the Official Beer of the Parade, and will host a number of events throughout the week, such as beer and dinner tastings and a "tap takeover" at one of the city's most popular Scottish pubs, the Caledonia.

"George Howell is our master brewer and he's got 22 years of experience brewing Belhaven," adds Gordon Muir, marketing manager for Belhaven. "He'll be coming over to Tartan Week and we will be hosting numerous tastings and 'Meet the Brewer' type of events."

Belhaven's export manager, Sonia Lawrence, is excited to be a part of this year's festivities.

"All of the events around the parade will provide so much fun for people, a lot of whom will have travelled a long way to come to New York just for this week," says Lawrence. "We can't wait to be a part of that fun and showcase the best of our beers."

It is not too late to register to march in this year's parade and it is free to participate. If you do not belong to any organization or clan, you can register as an individual and march with one of the organizer groups, such as the American Scottish Foundation; individual musicians can join the parade's Massed Band.

The National Tartan Day New York Committee is made up of several local Scottish organizations. As the committee continues to grow the New York Tartan Day Parade, it still remembers what it is all about.

"The Scots were so much part-and-parcel in the beginning of this country," says Bain. "The purpose of Tartan Day is to educate our fellow Americans of the role Scots had and continue to play."

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Devin Shanks

While Montreal may be gripped by hockey fever each spring, things are heating up for the city's Celtic community.

The intersection between cartooning and politics is bound to come up at the convention, Celtic MTL 2015, in early May. The top speaker at the convention is Terry Mosher, better known as Aislin. He is an icon in Montreal and well known throughout Canada for his outspoken editorial cartoons. Following the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, France over cartoons in the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, it's a given that the subject of satire will form an important topic of conversation at the convention.

"What makes Aislin so great is that he never holds back when it comes to politicians and is not afraid to speak his mind through his art," declares Devin Shanks, the president of the Montreal Celtic Society, who is also the organizer and host for the convention.

Aislin, of course, won't be the only speaker at the convention. Others include Paul Birt, the chair of Celtic Studies at Ottawa University; Mike Burns, a story-teller well known for his Irish tales; and Emer O'Toole, an assistant professor of Irish Performance Studies at the School of Canadian Irish Studies at the University of Concordia.

Overall, the convention is designed to educate people about the Celtic Nations and will feature numerous Celtic societies and organizations which will showcase their heritage, along with performances, readings and more.

Shanks notes the convention holds a lot of meaning for the Montreal commu-

nity as a deep connection exists between the Celts and the founding of the city. Both the Scottish thistle and the Irish Shamrock are represented in the city's flag, for instance. He further points out that such groups as the Scottish St. Andrew's Society and the Irish St. Patrick's Society have been around since the early-to-mid 19th century, donating to charities and handing out education grants to support the integration of new immigrants from those countries into Montreal society.

Also noteworthy is that the United Irish Societies of Montreal organize and produce the St. Patrick's Day parade, which is the longest running parade in North America.

"Sadly, most people believe that it's the City of Montreal who puts on the annual parade, and this is why there is such an importance to re-educate and re-introduce such organizations to modern society," Shanks says.

The idea for the festival came to him in October 2013. Originally, he hoped to host it in 2014, but quickly realized he wouldn't be able to organize the event in time and bumped it to 2015. Why he decided to put the conference together is simple; "I have a passion for my heritage and I want others to experience and learn what and who the Celtic people are, by having guest speakers, musicians and artists to guide them along the way."

Shanks himself was born in Montreal and raised on the south shore region off the island. Both sides of the family feature

Scottish ancestry. The Shanks arrived in New Brunswick, Canada in 1821 from County Down, Northern Ireland.

While this might be the first year for the convention, the organizer has great hopes for it. He would like to see the show spread to other cities in Canada and the United States.

"I'm hoping this show will create a ripple effect and encourage others that it is possible to gather all the Celtic nations together to proudly showcase our culture."

He believes conventions like his help keep Celtic culture alive, particularly at a time when he opines that not much effort is being made to reach young people.

"It's unfortunate that the old traditions no longer pique the curiosity of the young," Shanks shares, adding that the conference plans to feature events designed to attract a younger audience. One way will be to demonstrate Celtic culture's influence in pop culture today, spanning everything from *Lord of the Rings* and *Game of Thrones* to writers and artists of comic books.

"For our Celtic heritage and culture to survive, we need to adapt. If not, then surely we will be only a whisper in the wind and fade into history," he warns. "I have faith that this event will not only create awareness among new people, but among ourselves in what needs to be done."

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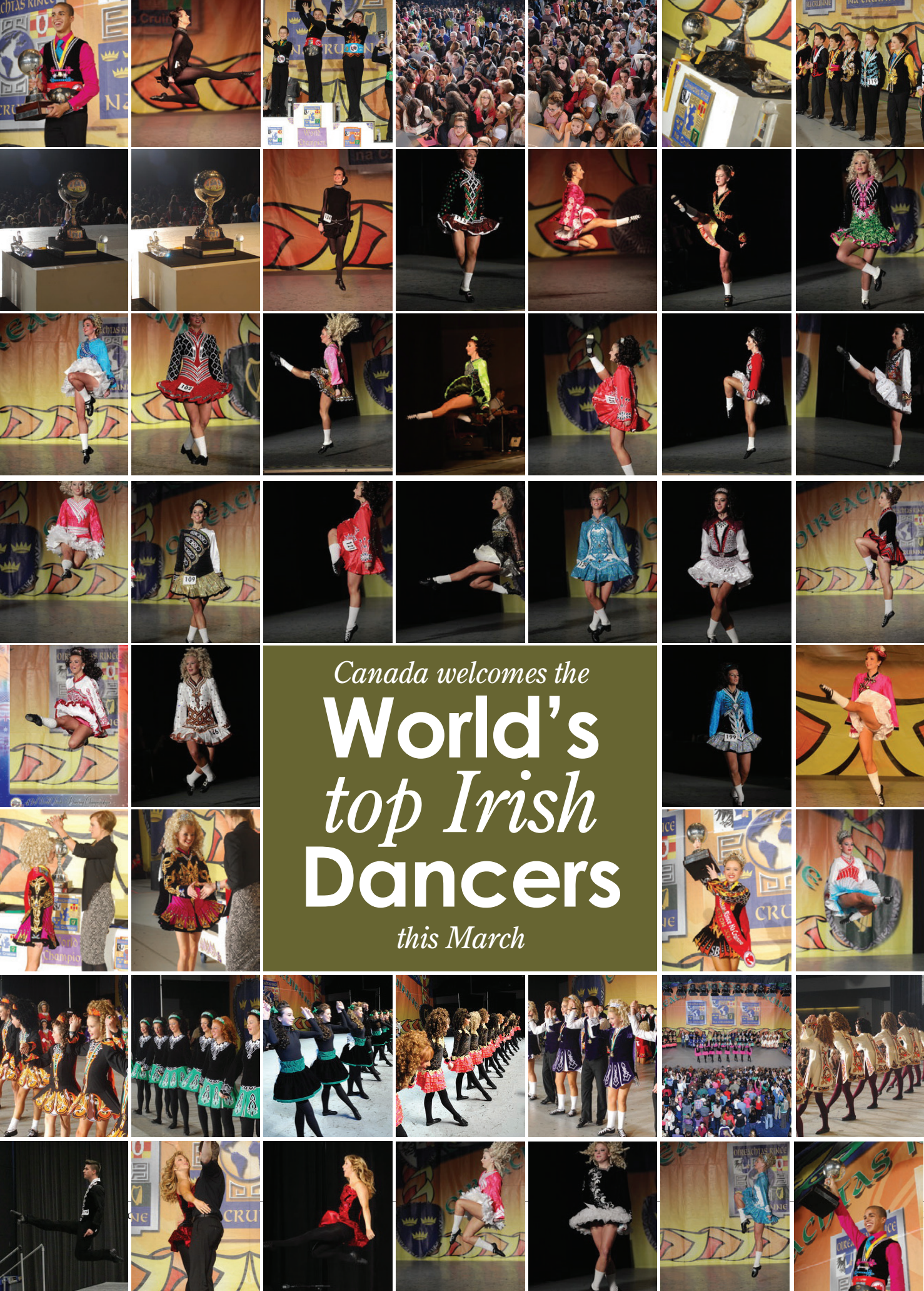


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The above could be a description of Olympic gymnasts, figure skaters or the like. But in this case, it encompasses those who compete at what's often dubbed the "Olympics of Irish dance," the Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne (the World Irish Dancing Championships).

The 45th edition of the World Irish Dancing Championships takes place March 29th – April 5th, 2015, in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The annual event is organized by Dublin-based An Coimisiún le Rinci Gaelacha (The Irish Dancing Commission or CLRG).

"Those who compete in the World Championships are at the very height of their amateur dancing careers," says Galway resident, John McDonagh, Chair of the CLRG's Oireachtas committee. "They have come through a tough qualifying process either at a regional or national level and their years' work will culminate with their participation in Montreal."

Gerard Carson of Belfast has extensive experience competing on the Irish dancing world stage. It all started when he was seven and began dance lessons at the Reid School of Dancing. "I loved the steps the most," muses Carson. "The difficulty in the steps made me love it more as it gave me a challenge."

Carson competed at his first World Championships in 2000 when he was 11; that year it was held in his hometown for the very first time. "I remember the excitement," he recalls. "I had danced on Easter Sunday and all my family came to watch me. It was one of my first majors and I got fifth place, which I was over the moon with."

Carson went on to win the World Championships five times, the first in Ennis, Ireland (2005), the last in Philadelphia, USA (2009). "I loved the excitement and adrenaline coming up to the championships and all the hard work beforehand being paid off," he says. "It made it all worth while."

The inaugural World Irish Dancing Championships took place in a small hall in Dublin in 1970. Five years later, the founder of Riverdance, Michael Flatley, was triumphant at the event. "When I won the Worlds it was back in '75 and it was at the Mansion House [in Dublin]," shared Flatley a couple years back in the TV3 docu-

mentary called Strictly Irish Dancing. "...It was a very prestigious event...It was a completely different sort of competition those days. It was much smaller. It's much bigger now and much more glamorous."

The Worlds have grown to host some 5,000 competitors, spanning age groups from under 10 to over 21, McDonagh explains. They come from across the globe representing Commission-certified teachers in 32 countries worldwide, covering all the continents.

"Without doubt, the biggest changes came when the Worlds were held outside the island of Ireland for the very first time in Glasgow, Scotland [in 2002]," McDonagh adds. "Since then, we have been back to Ireland three times and the highlight has to be 2009, when the event was first held in North America in Philadelphia and again in 2013 in Boston. It was also a huge experience when the 2014 Worlds were held in London, a huge tribute to the massive Irish population [there]."

McDonagh adds that now cities approach them in hopes of hosting the championships. Montreal won this year's bid, making it the first Canadian city to host the Worlds.

"It's quite a big thing for us that the World Championships are going to be held here," says Bernadette Short, a native Dubliner who runs an Irish dance school with her daughter in Montreal. "There is a nice European flavour to Montreal. People from overseas will like that, I think."

As Chair of the World Championships' local committee, Short says part of the committee's duties is programming local Quebec entertainment to perform during the eight days of competition. "The French influence is nice here and the French Canadian music and dance are similar to Irish music and dance," she explains.

Short moved to Montreal from Ireland 40 years ago, just as an influx of immigrants did during the 19th century. She speaks to the city's strong Irish identity still alive today, pointing out Concordia University's School of Canadian Irish Studies, the Saint Patrick's Society of Montreal, and its St. Patrick Day Parade - North America's longest running - as examples of the Irish culture that flourishes in Montreal.

Short is thrilled that 10 of her students, four boys and six girls, have qualified for this year's championships. One is 21-year-old Lucas Lawton who has already competed in five Worlds and won at least two top 10 World medals.



Last year Lawton, who practices five to six days a week, had his best performance to date, placing eighth in the Men 20-21 category. This year will be his most challenging yet as he is competing in the Senior Men age group for the first time.

"We have three different choreographed dances," says Lawton, explaining the solo competition process. "There are two rounds at the beginning and after that there's a recall, so the other half of the competition is essentially gone. The [remaining] top half does a third round and then you're placed. I've been fortunate in all my years in the Worlds to make it into the top half! And it's even a little harder for girls because it's only the top third [recalled]. It's super competitive!"

Lawton will also compete in a mixed céilí team event with seven other dancers from his school.

"I love the team events," enthuses McDonagh from Galway. "[They are] performing dances as prescribed in our 'Bible' *Ar Rince Foirne*. This book is a collection of Irish dances as performed in the early 1900s which have been collected by folklorists... There will also be dances choreographed especially by their teachers... and a special drama competition where teams will interpret an Irish historical theme."

Eighteen-year-old MacKenzie Mahler of Calgary, Alberta will be watching as many competitions as she can at the Worlds - when she's not competing, that is.

"She's definitely passionate to the extreme," laughs Mahler's teacher, Barbara Blakey. "She will sit and watch every single competition during the event. She'll be there at the beginning of the day until the end, every day, cheering on friends and people whose careers she likes to follow."

Mahler, a 2013 Great Britain Irish Dance Champion, who practices between two and six hours a day, says Irish dance is her "favourite thing in the whole entire world."

"I love that it's artistic and athletic and there are so many opportunities to be creative and develop your art form," she continues. "And of course I love all my friends that I've made through dancing and my teachers and it's been such a cool thing for my family and me to do. I love the music too a lot. I don't know, I just love everything about it!"

In past World Championships, Mahler has placed in the top 10 at least three times, including seventh in the Ladies 17-18 division last year. This year she's focusing on "practicing loads" while enjoy-

ing every minute leading up to the Worlds.

"When I was little, I never thought that I would ever be able to dance at a Worlds in my home country," she shares. "So that's extremely exciting to be able to represent your country in your country...and to have a shorter plane ride is kind of nice too!"

In addition to coaching Mahler - and her school's 13 other students that qualified - Blakey is also busy as Chair of the CLRG's marketing committee, preparing such projects as an Irish Dance Canadian Hall of Fame for the international event.

"We are honouring Sally Houston, Fínnuala Irwin, Violet Moore, Margaret Mullen, Mary Bryan, Brigid Grant, Paula Woodgate and the Butler family," says Blakey. "These are all the founding members of Irish dancing in western and eastern Canada."

The hall of famers will be honoured through a display at Montreal's impressive Palais des congrès, this year's venue for the Worlds, as well as on stage and in the program.

"This event is open to the public and if people are either resident in Montreal or travelling to Montreal, the doors are open to anybody to come and be a spectator," invites Blakey, adding that besides the competitions, the event will feature an exciting opening ceremony, nightly award ceremonies, international vendors with merchandise and mementos, entertainment and more.

World champion Gerard Carson will be one of the thousands in Montreal March 29th to April 5th. For this Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne he comes not as a competitor, but as a teacher. His school, Belfast's Carson Kennedy Academy, has 13 dancers competing.

"I am looking forward to watching my students perform and watching some of the finest Irish dancing from dancers all around the globe," Carson enthuses.

He adds, "I think it's very important that dance is a part of Irish tradition. I would encourage anyone that is Irish or has Irish background to keep involved in the Irish tradition whether it is dance, music, language...It's such a unique tradition and it should be spread around the world!"

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Story by Michelle Brunet





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A group of people, mostly of Asian descent, are dressed in green leprechaun costumes. They are wearing green hats with a yellow shamrock, green suits, and orange beards. They are all jumping in the air with their arms raised, smiling and shouting. The background shows a city street with buildings. The text "Going Green on March 17" is overlaid in the center of the image.

Going Green on March 17

Call it what you like: the Feast of St. Patrick, Lá Fhéile Pádraig or St. Patrick's Day. What matters most is that it's once again that time of year when you rummage through your closet, scrounge up as much green as possible and head out to one of the hundreds of annual mid-March parades held around the world in honour of the Emerald Isle's favourite Saint. Sara E. Baxter tells us more.

St. Patrick himself was actually born in England in 385 AD, died on March 17th, 461 in Ireland, and is buried in Downpatrick, County Down. The first bishop of Armagh is the primary patron saint of Ireland as are Saints Brigit and Columba.

Although Saint Patrick's Feast Day has been celebrated in Ireland since the ninth century, the celebration of the Apostle of Ireland only found a place on the universal liturgical calendar in the 1600s. In 1903 the celebration of the saint became an official public holiday. Southern Ireland's first St. Patrick's Day parade took place in Dublin in 1931.

St. Patrick's Day is celebrated on the day of the saint's demise, every year all around the world. And, all around the world, many cities go above and beyond by making a week-long celebration of the saint's day. The grand event, however, is always the parade.

Major cities and many small towns alike are known to host their own annual parades either on the 17th or the closest Saturday or Sunday to that date. In Ontario, for example, Toronto (pop. 2.5 million) hosts an annual parade, as does Vankleek Hill (pop. nearly 2,000).

"It's almost a full-time job, with thousands and thousands of hours put in," points out Kevin Murphy, vice president of advertising and public relations for the United Irish Societies of Montreal, and one of about 20 people on the organizing committee.

"Organizing starts at the end of one parade and goes until the next parade."

St. Patrick's Day parades have taken place in Montreal every year since 1824, with the United Irish Societies of Montreal organizing the event since 1929.

"This year's event will be the 102nd annual parade," says Murphy, noting that while New York has cancelled its parade on several occasions, only one attempt was

ever made to put a halt to the parade in Montreal. That was in 1917 with the onset of World War I.

"Irish people went out and marched anyways," notes Murphy. "That's how important heritage is to the Irish in Montreal."

There are 118 entrants set to take part in the 2015 Montreal parade on March 22nd, including some 20 floats, numerous walking groups, bands, entertainers, businesses, and community groups and organizations.

"Usually there's anywhere between 250,000 and 700,000 spectators," says Murphy noting attendance is always heavily dependent on the weather the day of the event.

Montreal's parade route runs two kilometres, with many spectators lined up along Ste. Catherine Street well before the noon start.

"When the first entry in the parade reaches the end point, some entrants haven't even shown up yet to take their place in line," said Murphy, demonstrating just how far the parade line-up extends. "We have staggered arrival times because there's not enough room for everyone to line up even though the staging area is three lanes wide along a 1.5 kilometre stretch."

About 3,000 people take part in the Montreal parade with an audience made up of those from all across Canada, as well as the US and abroad.

This year's Grand Marshall will be local Liberal Party MNA Geoffrey Kelley. "This is an honour we wanted to bestow on him and of course we're honoured to have him," says Murphy about the politician who has helped promote the Irish community throughout the region.

Murphy points out that the Montreal event is always very much an all-inclusive affair, with many cultures and nations registered and represented in the parade.

Interestingly enough, points out Murphy, Irish roots can be found in almost half of all Quebecers who reside in the predominantly French-speaking province.

"It's said that 40 per cent of Quebecers have Irish heritage," he says. "If you're talking about eight million people in Quebec, that means about 3.25 million Quebecers have Irish in them. That's unbelievable when you consider the population of Ireland is about 4.5 million."

Possibly a highlight of the Montreal parade is the fact that there's always a good chance you'll bump into someone that you know. "This really is a neighbourhood parade, on a much larger scale," says Murphy. "Your neighbour can walk by and you'll recognize him, whereas in other cities it's just more of a march-past."

New York City has long hosted the world's largest, oldest St. Patrick's Day parade, begun in 1762. The 2015 parade will make its way along the 1.5 kilometre stretch on 5th Avenue between 44th and 79th Street, starting at 11 a.m. on St. Patrick's Day. As always, the parade will be broadcast live from start to finish. Keeping with tradition, the 69th Infantry Regiment will lead the five-hour-long event. New York City's parade differs from most in that all 150,000 people registered to take part in the event make their way along the parade route on foot. No motor vehicles whatsoever take part along the parade route. About two million spectators show up every year to enjoy the spectacle.

In Massachusetts, South Boston's St. Patrick's Day Parade is ranked as the second largest parade of its kind throughout the US. The event, which got its start in 1901, is televised from start to finish, with as many as one million spectators lining the parade route to celebrate the grand event.

In Belfast, the 9th Annual St. Patrick's Day Parade is set to get underway on the 17th at noon.



"It's a huge challenge but it's what we do," says Matt Vernon, a development worker and carnival artist with Beat Carnival, which organizes the event. "It's complicated here because St. Patrick's Day is not a national holiday for everybody in Belfast. Only half the schools would have the day off."

The parade's lineup includes several floats, marching pipe bands, and a large contingent of community participation. "There are about 500 people who take part in the parade," notes Vernon. "Our crowd numbers are normally in the region of 30,000."

Belfast's Lord Mayor Nichola Mallon will lead this year's parade, followed by a pipe band and a large St. Patrick's puppet, as it makes its way from City Hall, down to Chichester Street and onto Victoria Street. The parade will end at Custom House Square where a massive free open air concert will take place.

"We're trying to make the event as inclusive as possible for all members of society, and halt St. Patrick's Day from being a partisan parade," says Vernon. "There's absolutely no politics involved in it for us. It's a tightrope and that's the difficult line we have to tread. We want to try to please as many people as possible, and that's why it's a challenge."

While the event always receives positive feedback, Vernon is well aware that parades outside of Ireland attract the hugest fanfare. "Definitely America and Canada go hell for leather at it," he laughs. "Some people over here may look at the parades in Canada and America as a benchmark for what to aim for here but actually, in Ireland, a St. Patrick's Day parade is a small community parade. It's understated. The budget they have for these types of events in New York and Montreal is a lot bigger than what we have to work with over here."

In Dublin, however, the 2015 St. Patrick's Festival Parade is set to be a grand affair indeed. The parade sets off at noon on the 17th, commencing a winding 2.7 kilometre journey before reaching its ending point just past St. Patrick's Cathedral.

About 500,000 spectators are anticipated at the parade, which will include Irish president Michael D. Higgins and Dublin's Lord Mayor Christy Burke, and will be televised globally.

"As Lord Mayor of Dublin, I lead Dublin's St. Patrick's Day Parade in the historic Lord Mayor's Coach until the Parade reaches the viewing stand," says Burke of his role in the grand affair, followed by his stepping out of the coach and reviewing the parade. "I have attended many St. Patrick's Day parades but this is my first as Lord Mayor."

Ireland's largest of such parades is a major international event, reminds Burke as he shares a moment with Celtic Life International. "I'm happy to take this opportunity to extend my best wishes to all the Irish Diaspora living in Canada and all over the world."

While Japan might not be among the first countries that jump to mind when considering St. Patrick's Day parades, the Asian nation does host its own selection of parades to celebrate Ireland's patron saint.

Haruka Masumizu is public relations officer of Irish Network Japan. "We hold St. Patrick's Day parades in nearly 10 prefectures in Japan," said Masumizu. "The oldest and the biggest is held in Tokyo, which will mark the 23rd parade this year."

Possibly one of the smaller, quirkiest St. Patrick's Day parades will be the one that takes place in the hometown of past US President Bill Clinton.

Chrissy Eggleston is the marketing director of Visit Hot Springs, which hosts the annual World's Shortest St. Patrick's Day Parade. This year, on the 17th, the 12th annual Arkansas parade will make its way along what is arguably the shortest of such parade routes throughout the entire world.

"Bridge Street in downtown Hot Springs was named by Ripley's Believe it or Not as the world's shortest street in everyday use," says Eggleston of the parade route. "It comes in at a whopping 98 feet long."

But don't let the name of the Spa City's parade fool you.

About 40 entrants participate each year, including marching groups, floats, Irish wolfhounds, dancers, singers, performance artists, celebrities and Dallas cowboy cheerleaders. One of the parade's highlights is the much-anticipated International Order of the Marching Elvi, which includes 50 Elvis impersonators in their finest green attire. Celebrities like Bo Derek have held the post of Grand Marshal in years past, with NASCAR legend and Arkansas native Mark Martin assuming the role this year.

"It's not a short parade, it's just a short street so that's where the name comes from," says Eggleston, noting the population of Hot Springs proper is about 35,000 and the attendance at last year's parade was 30,002. "We've already announced the anticipated attendance for this year," declares Eggleston. "It's going to be 30,006."

One might wonder, of all places for a St. Patrick's Day parade, why Arkansas? "You know what they say," laughs Eggleston. "Everyone's Irish on St. Patrick's day."





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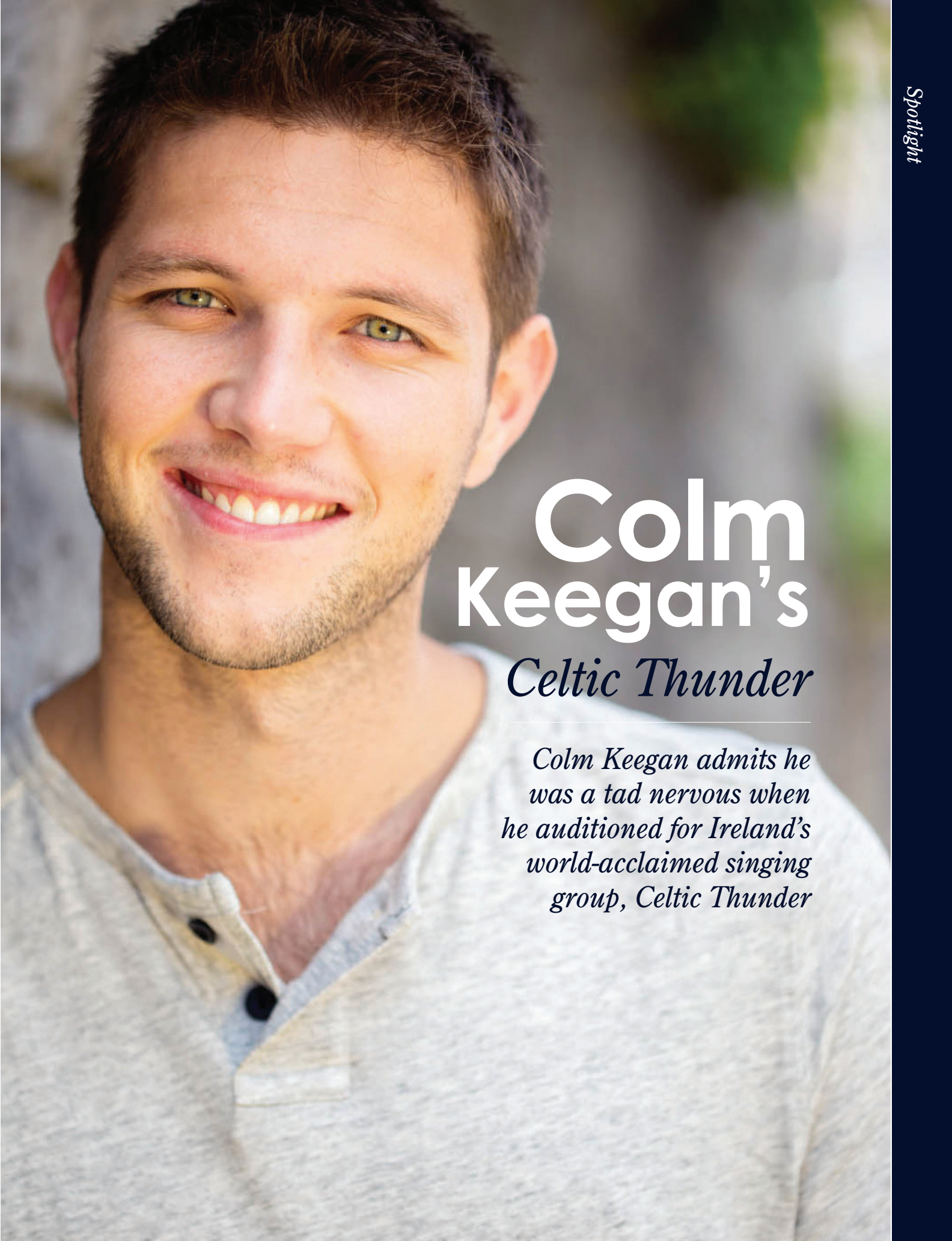
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A close-up portrait of a man with short brown hair and a light beard, smiling warmly at the camera. He is wearing a light grey polo shirt. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green foliage.

Colm Keegan's

Celtic Thunder

Colm Keegan admits he was a tad nervous when he auditioned for Ireland's world-acclaimed singing group, Celtic Thunder

“Scary I think is an understatement. It was absolutely petrifying!” shares Keegan. “For the guys who were there from the start, the original members, you know, Ryan and Keith and Neil, they had no idea how big the show was going to become. I suppose that was the nerve-wracking thing for me when I was auditioning, I did know how big the show was and the fan base was and seeing how it was number one on the Billboard charts. There was this kind of weight of a lot of things on my shoulders going into the doors of the audition.”

If you are a loyal Celtic Thunder fan, then you know that Keegan proved successful during that “petrifying” audition. He joined the musical group and stage production back in 2012, and describes the last few years as a whirlwind, admitting that he’s enjoyed every second.

Twenty-five-year-old Keegan was born and raised in Dublin in a family of five boys. He remembers music being a part of his life early on.

“All of us were kind of thrown into the local cathedral choirs since we were pretty much able to speak,” he shares. “So singing had been second nature to us, just like everyone else in the country. I think everyone in Ireland has some sort of musical background.”

Keegan sang solos and won music awards from a young age, and his choral experiences brought him to such remarkable venues as Catedral de la Santa Creu i Santa Eulàlia in Barcelona, Brno Cathedral in Prague, St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York and St. Peter’s Basilica for the Pope in Rome.

Those choral experiences were quite different than those, more recently, as part of the choir that performed with Celtic Woman, and now Celtic Thunder.

“I was used to standing in a robe with a folder in my hand looking at a conductor,” Keegan laughs. “All of a sudden there was no folder and no conductor, and in front of me was an audience, and I didn’t know where to look or what to do with my hands. It didn’t really come second nature at the start, but you kind of jump in the deep end, and luckily it has worked out well.”

Before touring the globe with either of Sharon Browne’s Celtic music groups—both of which have topped the Billboard

world music charts—Keegan completed an honours degree at University College Dublin.

“When I was in university I studied music and the Irish language, and at the time I would have had to have spoken Irish almost as my main language,” he says. “So to do an Irish music show afterwards for me was kind of an amalgamation of a

few different Irish cultures that I love, so it’s been brilliant. And that was one of the things that I asked on my first show [with Celtic Thunder]: to be able to sing a song in Irish.”

Keegan’s first solo with Celtic Thunder was a song in Irish Gaelic and English called Buachaill On Eirne, previously performed by Damian McGinty, which invites listeners to “Come by the hills to the land where life is a song....”

Highlights for Keegan have been many since becoming one of Celtic Thunder’s principal singers; and the making of the group’s Mythology DVD might just outperform all the rest of his fond memories to date.

“We were standing on the stage back in Dublin at The Helix theatre and it was an invite-only audience, so it was all family and friends of the cast,” he describes. “When you’re standing there and you see your mom and dad, and grandparents and your friends and your rugby mates and everyone in the audience, I remember thinking I hope the camera doesn’t see my legs shaking on stage. To be honest I think that was probably the most nerve-

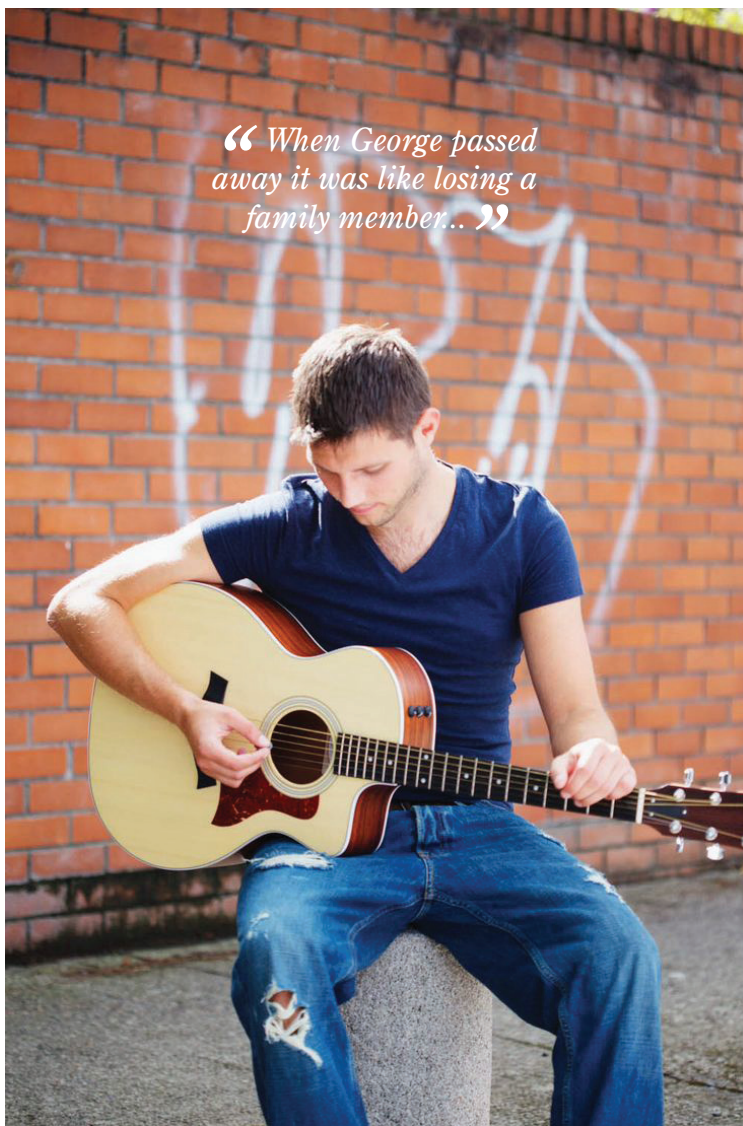
wracking show I’ve ever done, and with that, it probably had to be the most sense of relief at the end of it.”

With a Celtic Thunder cruise, a symphony tour across the United States and a Mythology tour across Australia, 2014 was a very busy time for Keegan and his fellow Irish songsters.

In August, Keegan also embarked on his very first solo tour accompanied by Laura Durrant, the Celtic Thunder band’s cellist.

“It was a real treat for me to perform with someone of her musical calibre every night,” notes Keegan.

On the road throughout the eastern United States, Keegan and Durrant played Irish pubs and other performance venues, and also wrote some of their own songs; a relatively new project



“When George passed away it was like losing a family member...”

for Keegan that he plans on pursuing further.

With the amount of time the Celtic Thunder lads have spent touring together, as well as recording and rehearsing, Keegan says they've all become a very tight and special group.

"You know they're the people you wake up with, and you fight over the fact that someone took the last Corn Flakes. All the kind of 'important' topics to complain about, we fight about them all; and we laugh about everything and we cry about everything," admits Keegan. "The second we get back from a tour and we're not waking up in the same bus, we're all ringing each other wondering what we're wearing and having for breakfast that day."

The Irish singers have together experienced many highs, as well as lows, including the passing of their fellow Celtic Thunder mate, George Donaldson, in March of last year.

"When George passed away it was like losing a family member," shares Keegan. "For the 'Very Best Of' tour, it's going to be very difficult to have that gap on stage. He was a huge, loveable character. We'll miss him and it's going to be very difficult; but it's kind of nice that we're all feeling it, and without speaking about it all the time, we know George is being thought about all the time by everyone."

When Celtic Life International chatted with Keegan, he, and Keith Harkin, Ryan Kelly, Emmett O'Hanlon, Neil Byrne and guest artist McGinty were gearing up for their February to April, North American, Very Best of Celtic Thunder Tour.

Over the phone, Keegan's enthusiasm indicated his good spir-

its while he stood in the corridors of the very secondary school he had attended, Gonzaga College. He was helping out with the school's production of Bugsy Malone.

"I like to keep busy," explains the Dubliner, who was just as busy before joining Celtic Thunder. Some of his pursuits included starring in and helping direct other musical theatre productions, volunteering with Habitat for Humanity in Ghana and Zambia, completing triathlons, playing hurling, rugby and Gaelic football, and teaching singing at a youth performing arts school, among other endeavours.

Today what Keegan seems most passionate about is sharing some of what he loves about his homeland. "I've always been a huge lover of travelling and different cultures," he says. "To be able to travel as part of my job and sing Irish songs that I've known and loved since the time I was in a cradle and heard my parents and grandparents sing, you almost have to pinch yourself."

Keegan adds, "One of my favourite aspects of the show is standing on stage and singing songs, maybe even in the Irish language, and seeing some American or Canadian or Australian audiences singing along with us."

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Story by Michelle Brunet





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A Secret History of the Isle of Man

The Isle of Man possesses a rugged and beautiful landscape, and the culture is rich and appealing, but the isolated island offers much more than meets the eye. If you're looking for that special place with a hidden and colourful history – here is where it is found. Desiree Anstey takes us behind the scenes.



Smuggling Tunnels

The Isle of Man's independence from the Crown and free-trade policy became strained during the early 18th century when Britain placed custom duties on all goods. Manxmen called the policy protectionist and a few decided to take matters into their own hands. They built several tunnels or secret passages - many in the coastal town of Peel - under homes and surrounding cliffs. These passages became a hive of activity at night revolving around an underground malt and beer brewing industry. However, smuggling deprived the British government of valuable tax, and parliament eventually retaliated with the Smuggling Act in 1765. The enforcement of strict penalties caused the closure of the tunnels, many of which are now lost in time.



Castle Prisons

Forget death row. The Crypt at Peel Castle (1229-1780) was a cold damp hole, where guards chained prisoners to the walls in darkness. Not only was it the first prison on the Isle of Man, but anyone could be sent here for something as simple as not paying tithes. In the 18th century, the conversion of the Castle Rushen - located in the Isle of Man's ancient capital - into a jail was meant to be a vast improvement from the Crypt. But for many years, the unfortunate prisoners were only kept alive by members of

the public and the benevolence of the governor. Many starving prisoners reverted to eating rodents that scurried into their cells, and they suffered severely from the cold. Eventually the Castle was remodeled, serving not only as a prison but also as a lunatic asylum up until the late 19th century.



Behind Church Walls

Fourteen centuries of Christian worship can be traced to the former parish of Braddan, which was consecrated in 1876. Stones from the first Celtic Keeil (Chapel) are found here dating back to 400 A.D., and include many Celtic and Scandinavian crosses. But the most remarkable story linked to the old Braddan church dates back to 1832 when men came off the boat sick with typhus and cholera. Ultimately, more than 83 fell victim to the disease and ended up buried in the churchyard.



Towering Graves

On the top of Peel Hill stands a 50-foot high landmark. People from around the world climb the hill and admire the panoramic views of the ocean and the town below. They then chisel their names on the tower walls. Some of the names date back hundreds of years. However, the entrance to the tower is always locked to protect the Corrin family's historical writing chiselled in the four chambers. The eccentric Mr. Thomas Corrin built the tower in 1806 in memory of his wife Alice. Before his death, Thomas spent a lot of time reading in the narrow chambers. But ships far out at sea mistook the flickering of his candlelight for a lighthouse. As a result, people complained to the government, resulting in

the blocking up of the narrow windows at the top. The Corrin family was strongly associated with Athol Street Congregational Church, which believed in burying members in consecrated ground. Mr. Corrin, however, had alternative plans. He wanted to be buried on Peel Hill with his family, believing it would bring them “closer to God.” When Mr. Corrin passed away, his son decided to bury him with Alice in Kirk Patrick churchyard (because they lived down the road at Knockaloe Beg). Despite his son’s wishes, friends of Thomas exhumed the bodies of he and his wife and moved them to the tower on the hill. This resulted in a compromise. The graves could remain on the hill only if they were enclosed in a walled area. A walled area of earth was then built around the graves, and later a more permanent stone wall.



Internment Camps

The concern over spies infiltrating the government during the First World War (1914-18) and Second World War (1939-45), saw enemy aliens within Europe and the United Kingdom dispatched to the Isle of Man. There, men, women and children were divided and placed behind the barbed wire of internment camps. The biggest and the worst internment camp on the island was Knockaloe in Kirk Patrick. Originally designed for 5,000 German civilians, Knockaloe ended up housing more than 20,000 men in cramped, dirty conditions. A rail-link built from Peel carried food and supplies to the camp. Despite efforts, more than 200 died in captivity and many were buried in the grounds of Kirk Patrick church. After the War the remaining internees were deported. Those that were buried at Patrick church were re-interred at Cannock Chase in Britain, in 1962. But two Jewish and a few Turkish graves still remain at the church. Although Knockaloe returned to its former glory as a farm, you can still see a section of the camp built from stone. And along the drive are a handful of small private cottages that were once used as meat sheds. According to the locals this area is also extremely haunted.



Hidden “Radars”

Round, peculiar land moulds are scattered across the farmlands of Dalby. These moulds are actually bunkers that once formed part of a system of Radio Detection Findings (RDF) or pylons. The bunkers were built to draw away enemy fire during the Second World War. Also nicknamed “radars,” the pylons helped prevent German invasion by directing a small force of fighter aircrafts to their appropriate positions for attacking incoming aircrafts. These comprised the world’s first comprehensive radar system. Eventually, locals using explosives took out the pylons after the war and used the wood to build nearby farm houses.



Tailless Cats

The Manx cat is no secret. Bred on the Isle of Man, these gentle-natured tailless cats are the result of natural genetic mutation. Females weigh around eight to 10 pounds and males average between 10 to 12 pounds. Sadly, Manx cats are on the decline. The dominant Manx gene that causes the cat to be born tailless is also lethal. Known as “Manx Syndrome,” the gene causes a shortening of the spine, leading to damage of the nerves, bowels, bladder and digestive system. This lethal side effect is more common with the Rumpy breed that exhibits a dimple at the base where the tail should be. In order to prevent genetic defects, the Rumpy can be bred with the Stumpy, a variant of the tailless breed.

A story awaits around every corner on the Isle of Man. To unlock the island’s colourful history, which has helped shape its current culture and independent identity, leave the guidebook in the hotel and take the road less travelled.

With breathtaking natural scenery, storybook castles, ancient monuments, historic buildings, rare animal breeds, and heroic acts of kindness, an abundance of reasons exist as to why this emerald isle calls out to the hearts of everyone.



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— Linda Jacobs, The Hamilton Spectator, ON



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Style





My roots are European ~ Scottish on my father's side, and German and English on my mother's side.

I was a creative child and spent my youth playing with textiles, creating quilts and clothing. As I grew older this

love of fashion continued. I made my clothing as a teen and continue to do so to this day. I found that the clothes I was seeking were just not available. I was looking for beautiful feminine clothes, and I could never find what I was looking

for, so began making my own.

I do all of my own sewing, and I make primarily wedding gowns. I work with one bride at a time, spending hours consulting and coming up with exactly what she wishes.



I love Celtic knots and the mysticism and romance surrounding them. The Faerie Bride logo has a love knot, or Eternal knot, and I try to add Eternal knots to many of my gowns. Placed between the breasts, over the heart, the

Eternal Love knot represents the love between the bride I am sewing for and her betrothed.

Celtic fashion and symbolism is going to become more popular, and now is an ideal time to find artists and

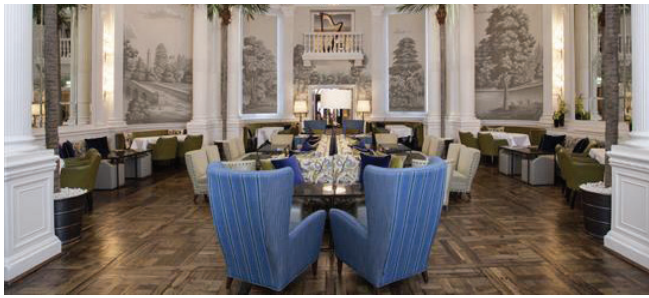
craftspeople who do quality work and showcase them and get them on the front lines.

www.katherinefeiel.com



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prestigious, Belmond Royal Scotsman Train - the Scottish equivalent to the Orient-Express, the chance to experience the finest Scottish food and drink during a VIP tour with Tasting Scotland, visits to historic castles and stays in some of the most luxurious hotels in Scotland!



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While Scotland might not yet enjoy the reputation for 'haute cuisine' found in Italy, France or Spain, that is quickly changing. As Celtic Life International's Senior Editor Charles Mandel discovers, the country now has a seat at the table.

Scotland's Year of Food & Drink





Haggis. Whisky.

For the outside world that pretty much summed up Scotland's national cuisine for a long time. But that is swiftly changing and now the northern country plans to celebrate its bounty of victuals and beverages with a year-long celebration of food and drink. And why not? Things have changed considerably when it comes to food in Scotland. Brenda Anderson, the director of Tasting Scotland, calls the country's culinary scene today "electrifying."

According to Anderson, Scotland's food is becoming recognized across the world at what she declares is a feverish pace.

"The justification for this fascination is that people are really waking up to what an extraordinary, yet accessible, natural and healthy larder Scotland has. Fearless chefs, too, are playing their part. Serve Scotland's bounty naturally and let it - in the words of Tom Kitchin, one of Scotland's most inspiring chefs - sing."

The organizers of Scotland's Year of Food and Drink hope that not only will the food sing, but that consumers and visitors will sing the praises of the food and drink they dine upon. VisitScotland, one of the organizers (along with EventScotland and Scotland Food & Drink), assert the country's food and drink form an important part of Scottish cultural identity and heritage.

Catherine Brown doesn't argue with that. The former food columnist for The Glasgow Herald and a one-time co-presenter of television's Scotland's Larder, says the country's culinary heritage is largely peasant-based. Scottish cooking originally developed from a one-pot cooking system over an open, slow-burning peat fire. This produced excellent slow-cooked broths and stews, but wasn't much good for roasts or grills. Out of this technique came the famous haggis as well as black puddings and cloutie dumplings.

Brown notes that the native grains which grow best in Scotland's soil and climate are oats and barley. The former found use in oat cakes while the latter of course helps create Scotland's famous whisky. According to Brown, conditions are perfect for ripening soft fruits, resulting in an especially sweet and luscious taste; native breeds of cattle and sheep provide prime beef, lamb and mutton; and seafood, from the cold, unpolluted waters around the Scottish coast is one of the nation's most valuable foods.

Then came the influences from those who invaded and protected Scotland, bringing with them their cultural tastes. Anderson says the Vikings contributed smoking and salting, which

worked well with both oily and white fish, including smoked salmon, trout, Arbroath Smokies and salted herring. The Europeans played a role as well. The Auld Alliance partnership with the French saw a trend for French terminology and cooking inspiration come to the fore.

Also, Anderson notes, until the 1950s, Scotland's cooking wasn't given to a lot of spices; in fact, pepper would have been about as adventurous as it got. But when a substantial migrant population arrived in Glasgow, that all changed, and today the city is known as the curry capital of the country.

"In the last couple of decades, the hospitality industry has begun to market these assets on their menus," Brown says. "Also, the old peasant slow-cooked broths and stews, using cheaper cuts of meat have seen a revival as some chefs create their own interpretation of nose-to-tail cooking."

Tom Lewis, owner of Mohr - a group of two hotels, a bakery



Brenda Anderson



and a fish restaurant – suggests that the seasons form Scottish cuisine. He cites mushrooms and wild garlic in the autumn; and winter kale as examples.

“The Scots have fallen back in love with their own food – a great bowl of soup, a great cheddar. And now you can find a double espresso in every town and village!”

But Scottish chefs no longer just look to their own flavours either.

“Today, as is the case with everything, we operate on a global stage,” Anderson asserts. “Influences from all around the world are tried, tested, embellished or parked. Molecular gastronomy is here, but it isn’t as eminent as in Spain or Scandinavia. In the last few years it has been about creating stunning, contemporary versions of time-served traditional dishes.”

Mark Greenaway, who owns a highly regarded restaurant carrying his name in Edinburgh, says Scottish food celebrates

the produce the country has to offer.

“It involves working closely with local suppliers and producers to enable my kitchens to create truly Scottish dishes. It has evolved in recent years as people have become more aware of food provenance and it is something which is now expected of Scottish restaurants.”

Brown agrees, citing a more vibrant food and drink culture now brought about by the cooks and producers who have created a higher profile for Scottish food.

“More high quality produce is staying in Scotland, so those who visit now have a better chance of also eating Scottish.”

What exactly does it mean to eat Scottish? The country offers an amazing variety of indigenous food and drink. Meat and game that Scotland is renowned for includes venison, which is recognized as the most nutritious of red meats and extremely low in fat; wild hare and rabbit – the former has dark, lean red meat, while the latter is low in fat and tender; and game such as grouse, pheasant and partridge.

Angus Scotch beef is famous globally and holds the coveted Protected Geographical Indication brand, a European initiative that identifies high quality products unique to a particular region. Scotch lamb also features the same brand. Specifically, Scotch beef is sourced from selected Scottish farms that must adopt best practices in terms of animal welfare and natural production methods. The farms and processors are independently audited to ensure they meet those requirements.

When it comes to seafood, Scotland is a recognized global leader. The country exports more than 70 per cent of its seafood to Europe because of high demand. The bounty of the sea includes scallops, mussels, crab and lobster. The country’s wild salmon is equally prized, but it is not the only species of fish pulled from Scottish waters. Others include brown trout, pike, carp, hake, haddock, cod and bass.

Another Scottish speciality is soft fruit, with the country producing thousands of tonnes of strawberries and raspberries along with lesser amounts of gooseberries, blueberries, black currants, red currants and blackberries. Perthshire and Angus are Scotland’s main growing areas, particularly in the fertile Strathmore Valley. The fruit thrive in the cooler Scottish summers where long daylight hours help them ripen.

And, yes, haggis is still a specialty with producers zealously guarding their recipes which include the minced heart, lungs and



Tom Lewis



liver of a sheep, cow or pig mixed with oatmeal, suet, onions, spices and seasoning boiled in the stomach of the slaughtered animal. Along the same lines is black pudding. Black pudding contains suet, oats, barley blood and a special blend of spices stuffed in a protein casing.

Of course, what's a meal without a drink? Scotland's beverages are legendary, with whisky topping the list. The most recent figures on the Scotch Whisky Association's website date back to 2013, but even so they add up to an impressive list. At that time 109 distilleries were licenced to produce whisky (it's likely that number has since increased) and the industry employs 10,000 people. In Scottish warehouses some 20 million casks are maturing. Not surprisingly it is sold in 200 markets overseas.

But Scotland is not just about the whisky when it comes to drinks. The country also supports vibrant beer and gin industries. The former includes such well-known brands as Innis & Gunn and Belhaven Brewery. The latter has been produced in Scotland for centuries, but recently has regained popularity in the form of bars, cocktails and pairings throughout the country.

That hardly sums up the Scottish larder. Cheeses, ice cream, cereals and shortbread, and heather honey are in the mix as well.

All this diversity is being put to good use during Scotland's Year of Food and Drink. The presenting agencies have developed a number of "trails," which guide gourmets along various foodie routes. On offer are whisky and ale trails, seafood, cheese and chocolate trails, and even an Arbroath Smokie trail.

The Scottish Cheese Trail, for instance, helps visitors put together an itinerary enabling them to visit some of the independent producers across the country. Following the cheese trail, one might find him or herself sampling the full-flavoured cheeses from the Island Smokery on Orkney or watching the cheese-making process from a special viewing gallery at the St. Andrew's Farmhouse Cheese Company in Pittenweem.

The fact of the matter is, Scotland's larders – and hospitality – will be overflowing during the year with just about every imaginable food and beverage event available on tap. Whisky Month and World Whisky Day both take place in May, for instance. The Spirit of Speyside Festival kicks off the month, which includes Edinburgh's Whisky Strammash, the international celebrations around World Whisky Day on May 15, and ends with the Feis Ile, the Islay Festival.

If you're looking for something a little more offbeat, consid-

er the Scone Palace Chilli Festival in Perthshire in September. Taking place at the Scone Palace – one of Scotland's most stately homes where both Macbeth and Robert the Bruce were crowned – the festival features chilli variations of popular foods, experts on hand to answer questions, live music and, of course, a chilli eating contest.

Or perhaps you want to see competitors from around the globe compete for the coveted Golden Spurtle trophy, the prize for winning the title of World Porridge Making Champion. The 22nd annual porridge making championships take place in October in the village of Carrbridge in the Cairngorms National Park. The festival also celebrates the "diversity of porridge through a



Mark Greenaway



specialty section and includes porridge, craft and local produce stalls for visitors.”

Of course, you don’t need a festival for an excuse to dine out in Scotland. The country boasts 16 Michelin starred restaurants, with five of those located in Edinburgh; in fact that city has more Michelin starred restaurants than any other city in the UK, outside of London. Beyond that, there are many other exceptional dining establishments that highlight seasonal cooking, showcase Scottish produce and demonstrate creative flare.

Some of the places awarded Michelin stars include the Number One at Balmoral, 21212, The Kitchen, Martin Wishart, and the Castle Terrace Restaurant. Andrew Fairlie’s restaurant is the

only double-starred Michelin dining place in Scotland and one of 21 double-starred restaurants in the UK. Fairlie has secured a Victorian kitchen garden a few miles from Gleneagles and now 95 per cent of the fresh produce used in his restaurant kitchen originates from there.

Some other exceptional places outside of the aforementioned restaurants include The Loch Fyne Oyster Bar & Restaurant, and The Dome. The former is located in Argyll where the mountains meet the sea, and is a beautiful destination in itself. The latter in Edinburgh oozes class. The Victorian-era bank-now-restaurant features Corinthian columns, intricate mosaic floor tiling and a marble-topped bar.

Truly, between the restaurants, cafes, destination hotels with dining and bars and pubs, it would be easy to fill a book with the listings of fine places to tuck into a superb meal.

With such a wealth of food and drink, it seems easy for Scotland to rest on its laurels, but all the individuals in the business whom Celtic Life International spoke to agree that further improvements could be made.

Anderson remarks that the Scottish food and drink industry has never been stronger, with exports breaking all previous figures. That said, she said peoples’ conception of the country’s food is still rooted in stereotypes.

“We are not all about haggis and shortbread and do we really eat deep-fried Mars Bars? No, we don’t. I don’t know a single Scot who has ever eaten one. Whatever the reason, the story stuck. It was the single worst thing to happen in a country with one of the best and healthiest larders in the world.”

Lewis says the country needs to sell itself better.

“Okay is never good enough,” he declares. “We should always continually push as a nation.”

Anderson agrees, commenting that she’d love to see Scotland host the World Food Travel Association Summit in 2021.

“I have recently become the certified ambassador in Scotland for the World Food Travel Association and would love nothing more than introduce my country to the global food travel population. Before I retire, Scotland will be regarded as a culinary destination in the same way as France, Italy, or the like. Then, and only then, will I look back, full and happy.”



Catherine Brown

Immerse... Partake...Imbibe

Ten Essential Food & Drink Experiences in Scotland



Drive the only Malt Whisky Trail in the World

With at least 119 distilleries across the country, according to The Scotch Malt Whisky Society, it is no surprise that whisky is one of Scotland's most renowned products. The country has a number of distinctive whisky-producing regions, including its most famous, Speyside, which you can explore via the Malt Whisky Trail. The scenic, self-drive tour will take you to eight distilleries, including Glenlivet and Glenfiddich, as well as the only remaining cooperage in the UK. If you want your entire itinerary to revolve around uisge beatha, consider also touring The Whisky Coast or travelling to Scotland for Whisky Month in May.

www.maltwhiskytrail.com

www.visitscotland.com/en-ca/see-do/itineraries/malt-whisky-trail



Discover where it all comes from...

If you are looking for a holistic, "ground-to-table" experience, look no further than Whitmuir the Organic Place. Located 16 miles south of Edinburgh, Whitmuir Farm raises its own organic meat, vegetables, fruit and eggs – all of which visitors can experience in a multiple of ways; from dining in their onsite restaurant to touring the picturesque farm. The farm's extensive grocery shop has won multiple awards, including being named one of the UK's top 10 farm shops by BBC Good Food magazine. As if this were not enough, Whitmuir is also one of the stops on the delectable Scottish Cheese Trail.

www.whitmuirtheorganicplace.co.uk



Visit Scotland's "Food Town"

With fishmongers, butchers, brewers and bakers, chocolatiers, restaurateurs and a bountiful greengrocer, a certain Dumfries & Galloway town seems to cater to every foodie's desires. Castle Douglas, a designated Food Town that strongly draws from the area's local producers, has 50 or more food and drink businesses, from retailers to places where you can enjoy a café, drink or meal. Castle Douglas hosts related events, including Food Town Day on June 6th.

www.cd-foodtown.org



Put on the Chef's Hat

The Edinburgh New Town Cookery School is a fine example of a place to immerse in Scottish and global cuisine in a hands-on way. Shortlisted last year for the Food and Travel Reader Awards, the school offers a variety of courses, geared for amateurs to emerging professionals, accessible to both tourists and locals alike. Examples of topics include knife skills, shellfish, and a beer and food matching session featuring many of Scotland's larders like venison, haggis or cheese complemented by quality brews.

www.entcs.co.uk



Stay at Scotland's Best Fishing Hotel

East Haugh House, a four-star country inn with self-catering cottages, has won Fishing Hotel of the Year six times in a row. While staying at the Perthshire accommodations, you can arrange to go fishing at their prolific salmon beat on the River Tay. "Our Chef and Proprietor Neil McGown, who is a keen sportsman himself, is always delighted to fully prepare, cook and serve your catch of the day," says Emma Aitken, East Haugh House's PR and marketing manager. East Haugh also hosts hunting and stalking parties on their grounds. For Scotland's Year of Food & Drink, the hotel is organizing a number of events, like a seafood and champagne weekend in July and a game tasting menu in November.

www.easthaugh.co.uk



Dine by Moonlight

The Secret Herb Garden, just outside Edinburgh, is home to more than 500 types of herbs, from medicinal and aromatic to edible and culinary. Visitors can explore and engage their senses around the glasshouse and gardens and find a “hidden seating area” in which to relax for a while. The site’s organically-grown produce and herbs are also ingredients in their café’s homemade recipes and used to make products sold in their shop. The Secret Herb Garden hosts workshops—including introductory bee-keeping—and is kick-starting a monthly full moon dinner series where guests can enjoy a four-course meal with wine inside the glasshouse as the “full moon shines through.”

www.secretherbgarden.co.uk



Immerse in “All Things Food and Drink”

The 10th annual Loch Lomond Food & Drink Festival takes place September 5th and 6th, 2015. Practically every sustenance characteristic of Scotland is featured at the festival, from venison, Highland beef, smoked fish and black pudding to cheese, shortbreads, gin and local brews. Highlights include a haggis eating contest, cooking demonstrations and live entertainment. Throughout the year, the Loch Lomond Shores also hosts a farmers’ market twice a month. For 2015 Year of Food and Drink, Loch Lomond will additionally host a springtime food and drink festival on April 4th and 5th.

www.lochlomondfoodanddrinkfestival.co.uk



Treat Yourself to Michelin Star Cuisine

Scotland now boasts 16 restaurants with Michelin Stars, the most prestigious recognition in the culinary world. Of the impressive list are two restaurants that lure you to more remote regions of the country, and conveniently both offer overnight accommodations: The Albannach in Lochinver—“Britain’s most northerly Michelin-starred restaurant”—and Kinloch Lodge on the Isle of Skye. The Michelin Guide also awards those exceptional restaurants with “good food at moderate prices” the Bib Gourmand title. One of Scotland’s Bib Gourmands is Stravaigin in Glasgow, a chic, pub-like restaurant, known for its extensive bar and spirits list, and its world-fusion spin on Scottish cuisine.

www.thealbannach.co.uk

www.kinloch-lodge.co.uk

www.stravaigin.co.uk



Enjoy a dram with live music

Sandy Bell’s in Edinburgh has a long creative history, and today is a world-class folk venue representative of the city’s music scene. Locals and tourists alike enjoy visiting the haunt to hear or participate in the nightly “traditional music sessions.” Sandy Bell’s also has an impressive selection of whiskies from across Scotland and the world, as well as a comprehensive listing of local ales, and offers a small but comfort-food menu of homemade eats.

www.sandybellsedinburgh.co.uk



Explore the Outer Hebrides

A chain of islands off Scotland’s northwest coast, the Outer Hebrides is the source for a cornucopia of the country’s famous produce. “The clear air, fresh waters and fertile farmland of the Outer Hebrides have resulted in some of the most succulent meats, seafood and sweets around,” states VisitScotland.com. Some famous products include the Hebridean Brewery’s craft ales, Stornoway Black Pudding, Hebridean Toffee, Stag Bakeries’ shortbread and Abhainn Dearg’s single malt whisky, as well as fresh lobster, salmon, scallops and crab, beef, lamb and more. Several transportation options will conveniently take you to the Outer Hebrides, allowing you to travel the multiple islands where you can indulge at numerous restaurants, pubs and farmers’ markets.

www.visitscotland.com/en-ca/about/food-drink/local-produce/outer-hebrides/

Annandale Distillery

Once abandoned, Scotland's fabled Annandale Distillery has been restored to former glory. Words and photos by Tom Langlands

A description of the former Annan Distillery in the book, *Scotch Missed: Lost Distilleries of Scotland*, led David Thomson and his wife Teresa Church to the site in June, 2006. A decade earlier, Thomson had previously imagined the possibility of establishing a distillery in Scotland's south. But with family roots in nearby Dumfries going back several centuries, finding the derelict distillery on his doorstep sealed the deal. In 2007, Thomson's dream became reality when he and Church acquired the site and formed the Annandale Distillery Company Limited.

The newly restored distillery is tucked from view in the undulating landscape of the River Annan Valley. The development of striking red sandstone buildings ooze history, character and charm. A towering brick chimney and elegant sculpted malt kiln roof rise to acknowledge a skein of geese cackling their way inland from the nearby Solway shore.

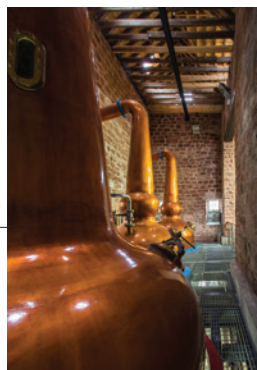
Annandale Distillery is one of the old-

est legal distilleries in Scotland. Former excise officer, George Donald, acquired a lease on the land, opening the first distillery here in 1836. Living on site with his family, Donald, assisted by his son, ran the distillery until 1883. In 1883 the lease passed to John Sykes Gardner, the son of a former Liverpool mayor. During Gardner's 10-year custodianship he made a significant investment in equipment and machinery before the "modernized" distillery came under the ownership of the renowned John Walker and Sons. They retained it until its closure in 1924. Around this time the Robinson family was producing their famous Provost porridge oats in nearby Annan and they acquired the distillery buildings and adjacent farmland from John Walker and Sons. The family used the buildings for drying grain and housing cattle. Over the next 80 years the former distillery buildings fell into a state of disrepair.

The present owners, Thomson and Church, co-own the MMR Group; a UK-

based holding company with principal interests in market research. Based in Oxford, they have offices in London, Leamington Spa, Manhattan, Shanghai and Singapore. Both Thomson and Church are well-educated. He possesses a B.Sc. in Food Chemistry and a PhD in Sensory & Consumer Psychology, while Church has a B.Sc. in Animal Physiology and Nutrition. Before reading for his PhD, Thomson specialized in cereal chemistry. His considerable knowledge of cereals includes aspects relevant to brewing. As well, with their market research company, Thomson and Church can bring to bear on their new venture extensive knowledge of brand and product development, product optimization and sensory evaluation.

Despite their impressive credentials neither Thomson nor Church had any previous experience in distilling. To fill this gap they appointed Malcolm Rennie as distillery manager early in the project. Rennie's considerable experience in the whisky industry includes a stint as the for-



mer distillery manager at Kilchoman Distillery, Islay.

Before they could produce anything, the practical issues of restoring and altering the buildings came to the fore. Despite their poor condition, Historic Scotland declares the buildings of historic importance. The roof of the former malt kiln is identified as an example of the Scottish architect, Charles Chree Doig's work. Doig specialized in distillery projects, garnering acclaim for his highly functional and aesthetically pleasing pagoda-style chimney ventilators. Beyond that, the couple had to deal with the discovery of important archaeological evidence relating to the previous distilleries, a lengthy planning process and practical problems of water ingress through old walls and foundations. Eventually, work began on site in 2011 and finished in the latter part of 2014.

Thomson is philosophical about the difficulties of the project. "They were very frustrating at first and almost 'finished' the project, but we eventually overcame them. Having said that, the associated delays bought us some thinking time and allowed us to investigate various financing routes."

With the exception of a £350k grant from Historic Scotland the multi-million pound project was privately funded.

Standing in the completed mash room and still house, the result is stunning. It is a blend of technology and functionality contained within the architecture of the local vernacular.

Stone walls and wooden beams evoke memories of yesteryear. The doors on the mash tun are open and a golden glow illuminates the liquid inside. The Douglas fir washbacks are a

beautiful mellow golden brown and the shining copper stills stand over everything. The equipment, lights, liquids and heat create a sense of mystical alchemy at work.

Of course, the most important part of the whole venture is the resultant malt whisky, which will remain something of a mystery for another three years. The spirit produced in the distillation process is known as "new-make spirit" and in Scotland that can be marketed, but it must be matured for a minimum of three years before it can be called Scotch Whisky. Named "Rascally Liquor," after a comment made about whisky by Robert Burns, Annandale Distillery's new-make spirit was launched this year on Burns Night. The new-make liquor will mature in American white oak bourbon barrels, with the first of those filled in November 2014.

The assumption is that a lowland distillery will produce a gentle whisky, but Thomson is quick to point out that historically this is inaccurate.

"The modern genre of Lowland Single Malts as 'gentler' whiskies is a modern aberration. There is historical evidence that all of the four distilleries located in the Dumfries & Galloway region (including Annandale) produced peated/smoky whisky," says Thomson. "Indeed, their locations were probably determined by the abundance of peat and water."

With that in mind, Annandale Distillery will produce two distinct malts; Man O' Sword will be a smoky, peaty whisky inspired by Scotland's warrior king, Robert the Bruce. The second, Man O' Words, will be a non-smoky whisky paying tribute to Scotland's national bard, Robert Burns. Both Bruce and Burns had strong Annandale connections and the historical references will fit nicely with the distillery's own August background.

www.annandaledistillery.com



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with Andrew Ferguson

Our resident specialist on spirits Andrew Ferguson takes in this year's Victoria Whisky Festival

Even for a mid-sized city, Victoria has a reputation as a bit of a sleepy place. A beautiful town with one of Canada's mildest climates, it is largely the preserve of retirees, government workers and tourists. It may come as a surprise, then, that Victoria has a thriving whisky culture – one of Canada's hottest – and that it is home to Canada's finest whisky festival. Volunteers run and manage the Victoria Whisky Festival, with all of the proceeds going to local charities. This January marked an auspicious anniversary for the festival, which celebrated both its 10th anniversary and a total of more than \$200,000 raised for worthy causes.

The festival takes place over four days in the middle of January each year, with events centered around the Hotel Grand Pacific on Victoria's harbour front. The weekend event draws whisky connoisseurs from all over British Columbia, as well as the rest of Canada and the United States. The festival also attracts an impressive number of whisky brand ambassadors from all over the world, especially Scotland. For both brand ambassadors and connoisseurs this is the one can't-miss whisky event in Canada each year.

What makes the Victoria Whisky Festival stand out, is not the province's selection or pricing; in both cases Alberta firmly has BC beat. Rather, it is the outstanding vision and management of the festival's organizers. The event begins on a Thursday with a marquee tasting and the Canadian Whisky Awards. Momentum picks up on the Friday night with six, two-hour grand tastings, each hosted by a brand ambassador.

Saturday is when the festival truly hits high gear, with 36, one-hour master classes, each with 15-40 participants taking place during the day. In the evening the festival tasting is held with the first of four hours reserved for VIP ticket holders. A total of 450 tickets are sold to the tasting,

which typically features more than 200 different whiskies. A final "by invite only" dinner is held on the Sunday night for volunteers and some invited guests.

Victorians Lawrence Graham and Iain Hooey started the event. The two are prominent members of a couple of local whisky clubs. Graham is a member of the Malt Maniacs, an exclusive group

BC and other Canadian whisky clubs first, ensuring that the brand ambassadors get the right crowd. The remaining tickets sell out in hours on a given November day at the Strath, Victoria's finest whisky store. People queue for hours for the chance to get into the event and its master classes.

The 10th Anniversary Victoria Whisky Festival raised \$25,000 for Victoria



of independent international whisky critics, and also runs the influential whiskyintelligence.com blog. It takes a lot of volunteers to pull off an event as complex as the Victoria Whisky Festival. A core group of four individuals do most of the heavy lifting, with Al Giesbrecht and Jonathan Adams joining Hooey and Graham over the years.

Over the last decade the Victoria Whisky Festival has grown from a small local event to an internationally recognized and respected whisky festival. Tickets for the event are increasingly hard to find. Graham and his team look after

Charities, including Q's Fund for Kids, and Crime Stoppers. The volunteers also arranged safe rides home for the many dozens of locals who attended the event.

One testament to the event's importance globally is Graham's appointment to the Keepers of the Quaich in the fall of 2014. The Keepers are an organization that recognizes individuals who have made a significant impact on the global success of the Scotch whisky industry.

www.fergusonwhiskytravels.com



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For visitors with Welsh ancestry Dragon Tours offers a service to help you trace your family tree in Wales. Mike has helped numerous clients in this way and can even provide a genealogy tracing service prior to your arrival and can assist in your use of libraries, record offices and archives when you are here. We have helped many people find 'the old family home' and even long-lost relatives! We can plan your tour around places where your Welsh ancestors lived and/or combine a general tour of Wales with visits to places of family interest.

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Savouring Celtic “Champagne”



À la Cork

My old neighbour, great friend and wine mentor, Dr. Andrew Dunn once told me of his frustration when he would offer someone a glass of Champagne (from his wonderful cellar) and they would refuse on the grounds that they “don’t like Champagne.” His point was that saying you “don’t like Champagne” is like saying you don’t like wine after only ever trying one sip or one glass of a possibly poor example. Dunn passed away a few years ago, but I feel that he is still with me in spirit in more ways than one.

Champagne and other sparkling wines come in a huge variety of styles and different qualities. One problem has been the generic use of the word Champagne to describe any sparkling wine and even the labelling of products as Champagne when they are produced nowhere near the Champagne region of Northern France.

That is not to say that sparkling wines outside of Champagne are always inferior. It’s just that Champagne has always been the benchmark. Dunn was the first person to introduce me to a wine he called “spurgle.” This is a sparkling red made from the Shiraz grape in Australia. My first impression on seeing this deep red fizz was that it seemed very strange, but it tasted wonderful.

The climate, geography and geology of Southern Britain have a lot in common with the Champagne region. Recent changes in climate seem to have made this even more apparent to the point where there are rumours that French Champagne producers are buying up tracts of land in Southern Britain, not necessarily to plant vines, but rather to stop British producers from making wines to compete with theirs. That has not prevented a great expansion in the amount of land in Britain now devoted to winemaking. Perhaps unsurprisingly



the best examples of British wines on the market today are the sparkling ones.

My favourite British sparkling wine comes from that most Celtic corner of England, Cornwall. Despite being part of England, the Cornish see themselves as Celts in the same way that the Welsh, Scots and Irish do, and the Camel Valley Vineyard is located in an area that is steeped in Celtic history, myth and legend (one theory is that King Arthur’s Camelot is derived from the Camel River which runs below the slopes of the vineyard).

They have produced wine at the Camel Valley vineyard since 1989 and are seen as pioneers and experts within the British wine industry. To me, one of their most impressive attributes is their ability to produce wonderful wine from the classic Champagne grapes of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay as well as using more traditional British varieties. This was

borne out at the 2014 International Wine Challenge where their 2012 Pinot Noir Rose Brut and 2009 Chardonnay Brut both won gold medals.

I recently took a small group of people to the Camel Valley for a tasting as part of a general tour of Wales and Cornwall. A few of the group were from the Mosel Valley in Germany and really knew their wines. They were very impressed, and believed the vineyard’s claim that its wines had won a number of blind tastings over the years against much more renowned competition from around the world (including Champagne).

The famous chef, Rick Stein, opened the vineyard. His seafood restaurant and hotel in nearby Padstow has Camel Valley wines on his impressive list. Food lovers from all over the world make a beeline for Padstow to visit the restaurant. A great way to spend a day is to hire a bike in Padstow and cycle the Camel trail (very flat and easy) up to the vineyard. Taste the wine and have lunch there before returning to Padstow and dinner at Stein’s seafood restaurant. A bottle of the local fizz would be perfect with Stein’s seafood taster menu.

Dunn introduced me to so many wines over the years that I was very pleased to introduce him to a bottle of the Camel Valley Rose. I was even more pleased when he tasted it and compared it favourably with his favourite “everyday” pink fizz, Billecart Salmon Rose from Champagne – affectionately known in Wales as “Billy Cart.”

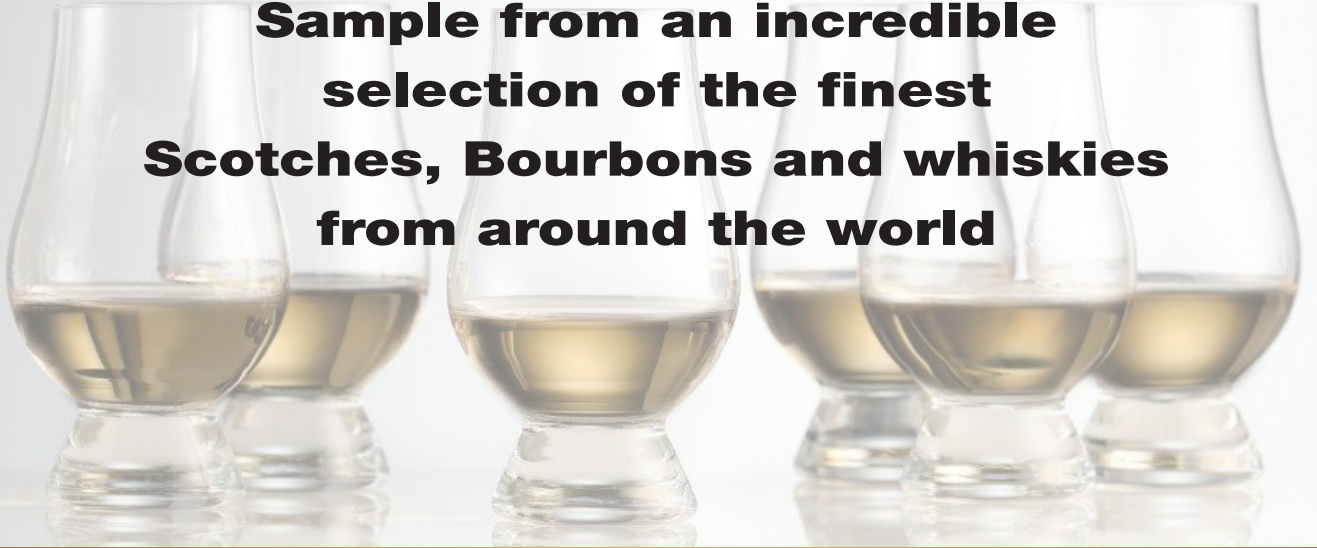
Dr. Michael Davies is an author, historian and wine expert in Wales.

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Whether you fancy a pint of ale, a dram of the good stuff, a hearty meal or great conversation, these three spots will bring you back for the Craic!

O'Neill's Cardiff, Wales

Good food brings people together. That is more than a mere slogan at O'Neill's in downtown Cardiff, which has become a hub-of-sorts for the Welsh capital's large Irish community. And, with a boatload of breakfast, lunch and dinner options on the menu, there are plenty of reasons to gather at the St. Mary Street locale. Classic fare, including Irish stew, steak and guinness pie, sausage and colcannon mash, and curry chicken are scrumptious staples, and the fresh and crispy cod 'n' chips are second-to-none in the city. An affordable buffet is also very popular for those on a budget, and – perhaps



surprisingly - the kid's menu is loaded-up with an array of healthier alternatives. Good spirits bring people together as well, and with a solid selection of domestic and imported ales, ciders, wines and spirits, there is sure to be something for everyone at the bar. Live music gets the place hopping most nights, except for rugby game-days, which are reputed to be (mostly) good-natured as locals and those from away share the big screens. While the décor leaves a little to be desired, this small shortfall is more than made up for with the professional, personable and timely service.

Shamrock Irish Pub Rennes, Brittany, France

There is only one place to be in western France this St. Patrick's Day and that is the Shamrock Irish Pub in Rennes. In a few words; go for the whiskey, stay for the whiskey. The quaint and cozy Celtic locale on la rue St. Hilier stocks a surplus of special spirits year-round, including Jameson, Tullamore Dew, Bushmills, Connemara and many more. And they will certainly be adding extra for March 17 celebrations. If the "water of life" isn't your thing, the bar boasts a bevy of Emerald Isle-influenced



options, including an assortment of imported beers and custom cocktails (be sure to try Le Gaelic, La Douceur Irlandaise, and L'orgasme Celtique). Small pub-style snacks are available, but only as an aside to your liquid feast. Things do get busy – and often heated apparently - during rugby and soccer season, with three giant screens to follow the action. Get there early to ensure a seat. Similarly, regular live entertainment – including many touring Celtrock and Celtpunk bands – promises all a rowdy and rollicking time, especially on special occasions like St. Pat's. Oh, did we mention the pub is open until 3am? Locals have been known to stay until the sun rises however.

The Celtic Harp Pontevedra, Galicia, Spain

The best of both worlds come together near the lovely little fishing port of La Guardia in Galicia, where traditional Spanish dishes are accompanied by the finest in Irish spirits. Just minutes from the region's best beaches, and one of the most stunning sunsets you will ever experience, the Celtic Harp offers up two floors of tastiness. Downstairs, the Irish-style pub atmosphere is replete with a smattering of art and artifacts from the Emerald Isle, dartboard, pool table, as well as Guinness, Harp and

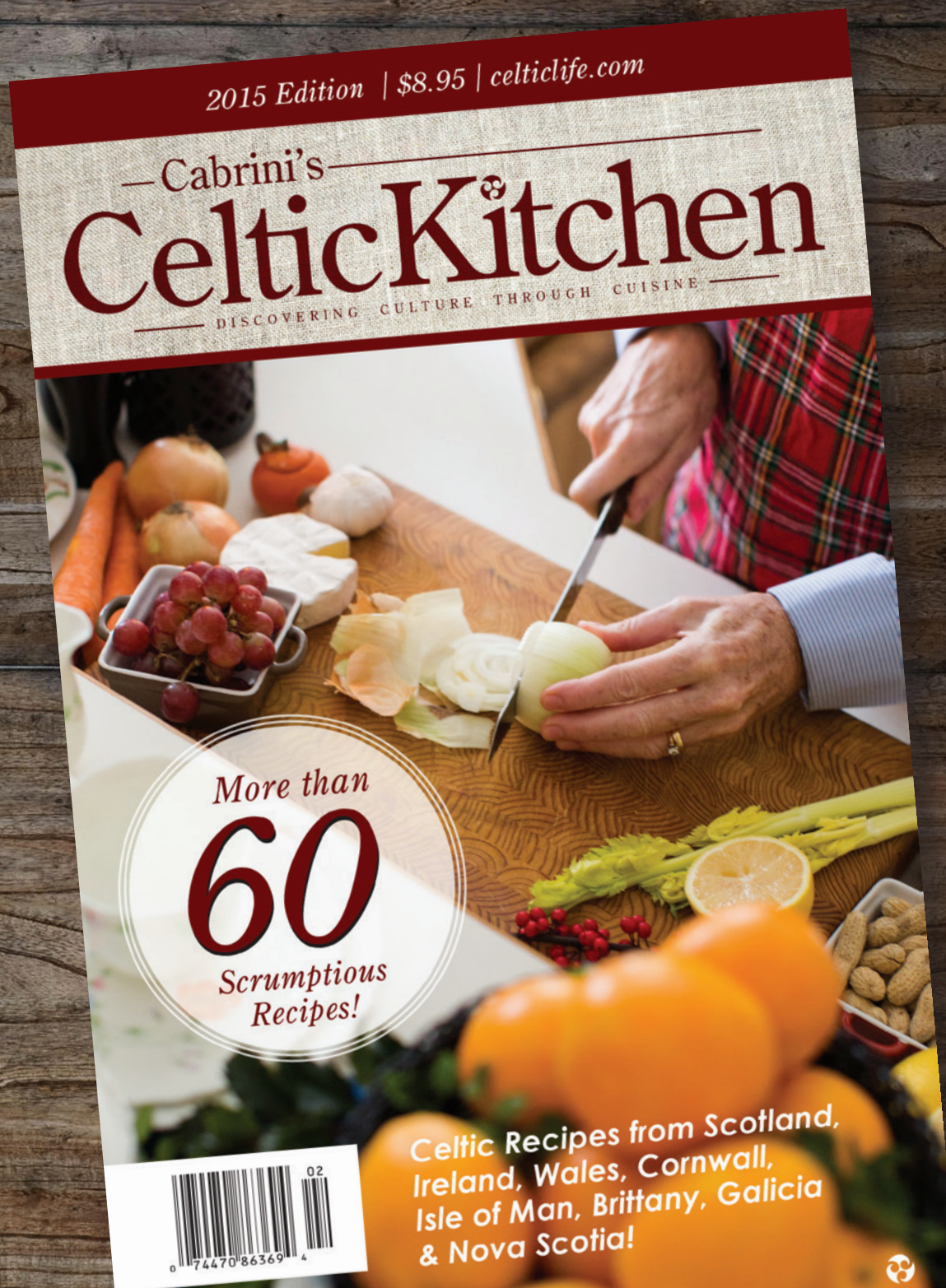


Smithwicks on tap. An impressive selection of imported whiskies and area wines are also available. Upstairs, patrons can savour the best in regional seafood dishes, including a Maritime paella that is reputed to be the most flavourful in the country. Be sure to sample the pulpo á feira (slow boiled octopus), the percebes (goose-neck barnacles), the zamburiña (variegated scallops) and the nécora (velvet crab) – all delicacies that are particular to the region. Chef Manuel has been plying his trade for more than 60 years, so it's the real deal. Suffice to say that if the food and drink are not reason enough to visit, then the region's balmy mid-winter temperatures make it all the more attractive.



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Cabrini's Kitchen Frances MacIsaac's *Black Pudding*



Black pudding is made from the blood of an animal and was often used as a favourite breakfast food of the Celts. Sometimes

made as a sausage, using the intestine of the animal and other times baked in a pan, it has been around since animals were

slaughtered. This recipe received first prize in our recent Celtic Recipe Contest and was submitted by Ellen MacIsaac.

INGREDIENTS

*750 mls beef blood
(we get Dugo brand blood
from the Asian market)*

¾ cup milk

2 tsp freshly ground black pepper

2.5 to 3 tsp salt

4 oz pinhead oatmeal, toasted

16 oz lard, diced finely

3 onions, chopped very finely

INSTRUCTIONS

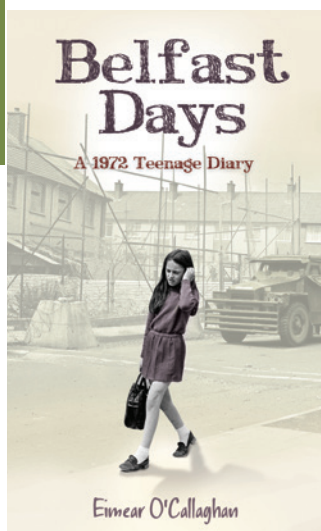
Preheat oven to 350F. Combine blood and milk, and set aside. Prepare a lasagna pan by lining completely with parchment paper. Combine remaining ingredients in a bowl and mix to combine thoroughly. Pack "dry" ingredients into the prepared pan, and pour blood mixture over, making sure the liquid reaches all corners of the pan. Bake for 1 hour, then remove from oven, and let cool. Chill thoroughly in fridge before slicing.

To serve: fry slices in a dry frying pan on a low heat until browned and heated through. It's not necessary to add fat to the frypan. Alternatively, you can use pork blood, but use either side pork or pork belly in place of the lard.

Ith do shàth! Cabrini

P.S: I would like to invite all readers to send me their favourite recipes, and their favourite memories that go with them. Please send to: cabrini@celticlife.ca





Belfast Days; A 1972 Teenage Diary

**By Eimear O'Callaghan
Merrion Press
344 pages / €16.95**

Much has been made in recent years of Northern Ireland's almost miraculous rise from decades of ruin and rubble. And while politicians and pundits have been quick to cash in on peace, the Troubles left a generation of civilians scared and scarred. Journalist Eimear O'Callaghan recounts her teenage angst growing up in Catholic West Belfast with touching insight and intimacy.

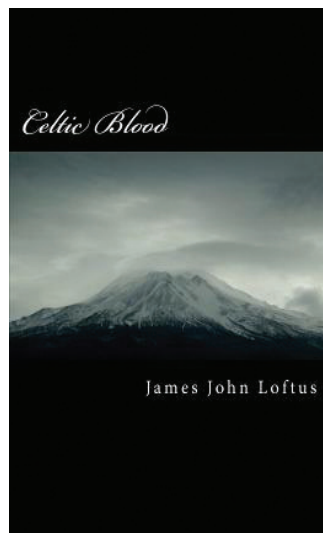
Diary entries, paired with observations from later life, capture and convey the fears and hopes of an individual, her family and a community.

The author's inner-life – thoughts, feelings, opinions, etc – are both profoundly personal and political at once. As such, *Belfast Days* is more than one young girl's coming-of-age experiences during trying times; it is a poignant perspective of a people and place under siege. ~ SPC

Tinker & Blue **By Frank Macdonald** **CBU Press** **388 pp / \$19.95**

Following the passing of Alistair MacLeod last year, Nova Scotia scribe Frank Macdonald has assumed the throne as Atlantic Canada's finest storyteller. The critically-acclaimed author of *A Forest for Calum* and *A Possible Madness* flexes his literary muscles again with his latest effort, the rollicking and revealing road-tale of two youngsters who take off from Cape Breton for San Francisco in the mid-1960s. Hijinx, hilarity, and homespun

humour abound as the carefree pair weave and wind their way across both culture and continent. And all the while there is Macdonald's wily and warm wit and wisdom, accompanying his travelers like a cozy quilt of acumen. A world-weary flashback to the beat and beaten generation, Kerouac, Cassidy and Ginsberg would surely smile at their Canadian counterparts. ~ SPC

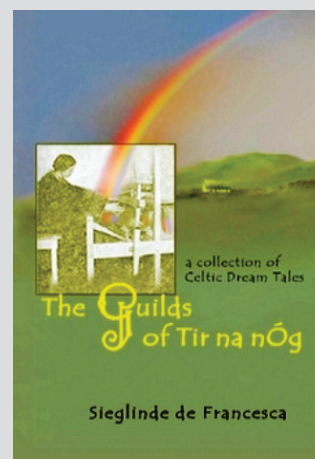


Celtic Blood **By James John Loftus** **Independent** **312 pp**

While this work only recently came across my desk, it has enjoyed something of a cult-like status since first being published in 2010. And though I have struggled with self-published books over the years, this one made the grade. Set in 13th century Scotland, *Celtic Blood* is the story of Morgand MacAedh, the son of the murdered Earl of Ross, who is declared a traitor to his people. As the young fugitive matures into manhood, he founds the Clan Mackay. Treachery, murder and mayhem come to life vividly over the strong narrative arc, finely detailed descriptive passages, and characters which are by turns tender and tough. The author should be applauded for going it alone, and ensuring that this gem-of-a-tale didn't fall through the cracks. ~ SPC

The Guilds of Tir na nÓg **By Sieglinde de Francesca** **Lulu** **166 pp**

I love unique reads, and *The Guilds of Tir na nÓg* certainly qualifies as quirky. San Francisco-based artist, teacher, traveler, dreamer, and teller of traditional tales, Sieglinde De Francesca lets her hair hang down to show her Celtic roots in this unique collage of 19th century Irish stories, visions, letters, dreamscapes, myths, and more. Over time, what emerges is a kaleidoscope of colourful characters, rich and robust like the land upon which they live. By book's end, readers will be left with more than a mere impression of the Emerald Isle, however; they will have sampled the soul of a storytelling people. A handy and helpful glossary of words and terms in the closing pages is a smart add-on also. Looking forward to a sequel! ~ SPC





The Burren Backroom Series; Volume 1

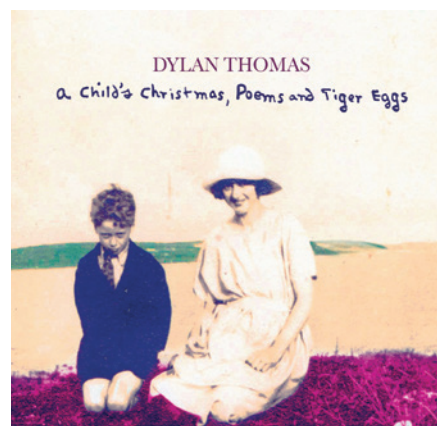
Independent

The Burren Irish Pub and Restaurant in Somerville, Massachusetts has become a hub for both established and emerging Celtic musical artists. The venue's nightly sessions have become the stuff of legend amongst those in the know, as has their regular concert series. Credit co-owners Tommy McCarthy and Louise Costello, – both accomplished players themselves – for capturing the essence, energy and enthusiasm of these soirees with a creative and captivating collection of 14 terrific tracks. Highlights include pieces from Carlos Nunez, Sean Keane, Liz Carroll, and Teada with Seamus Begley. Truth be told, with solid sound production - and the wonderful subtleties and nuances inherent to live performances – there isn't a bad take on the disc, nor likely a dry eye nor sober patron in the house. ~ SPC

Dylan Thomas; A Child's Christmas, Poems and Tiger Eggs

Cerys Matthews

My recent sojourn through Wales afforded me the opportunity to rediscover Dylan Thomas and his work. Alongside American producer-arranger Mason Neely, Welsh singer/songwriter, author and broadcaster Cerys Matthews brings the magic and myth of the witty wordsmith alive with this stunning 2-CD set of orchestrated narrations. Fun, fantastic and fabulous, the double-disc will alight the imagination, set fire to childlike wonder, and spark the soul and spirit of attentive listeners both young and old. Not since his own recordings of the 1940s and 1950s has Thomas' poetic lyricism and lilt been presented with such profound poise and poignancy, making it a frontrunner for Celtic recording of the year. Enjoy with biscuits and a hot cuppa' while sitting around the fireplace on a cold winter's eve. ~ SPC



Celtic Colours Live; Volume 2

Independent

If you have ever needed more reason to visit Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, then look no further; following the popular and critical success of 2013's Volume 1, Celtic Colours International Festival has released highlights from last year's celebration, and the 16 song selection will surely inspire you to make the autumn experience an annual pilgrimage. Like "Capers" themselves, this recording is both passionate and playful. And, like the region's plush and diverse Highland-esque landscape and heritage, tracks from Phil Cunningham and Aly Bain, Laura Smith, the Chaisson Family, Maeve Gilchrist, Tony McManus and more showcase the musical diversity of the nine-day gathering. Recorded at several unique venues, each performance sounds as intimate as if it took place at one of the area's now-infamous kitchen parties. ~ SPC

Favourite Scottish Songs

Greentrax

True to its title, Favourite Scottish Songs is a strong selection of 11 classic tracks from "ye' ould country" that will appeal to both traditionalists and those just discovering the genre. Performed by contemporary Scottish artists, each song has been handpicked by world-renowned piper Hamish Moore, with the end result being a sum that is greater than its parts. From the opening notes of Sheena Wellington's A Man's A Man to the fading chorus of The Cast's Auld Lang Syne, the familiar assortment of gentle jigs, reels and ballads will transport listeners from across the global Diaspora back to the highlands, the lowlands, the borderlands and beyond. Standout numbers include Rod Paterson's sweet Ae Fond Kiss and Gordeanna McCulloch's stirring take on In Freenship's Name. ~ SPC





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Michael MacDonald

At age 62, Michael MacDonald jokes he's almost too old to pipe any more

“At this point, I’m usually the oldest piper in any bagpipe competition I play in,” says the Toronto resident. “I really am over the hill, but I believe I can crank out the odd jig or Piobaireachd that others can enjoy.”

Truth be told, MacDonald’s got a lot of life left in him yet. He’s just released his first CD that he describes as a music CD that happens to have a bagpipe on it.

“I had always wanted to make a CD,” he relates, “but I wanted to do something that was different and that would appeal to non-bagpipers. I wanted to make something that would be easy to listen to for everyone, not just other bagpipers.

“But I also wanted to make music that was true to the Celtic idiom. I tell people that this is not a bagpipe CD,” says the piper whose own blood is a mix of Irish and Scottish backgrounds. His earliest relatives arrived in Nova Scotia from Scotland in 1831. As well, MacDonald points out he lived in Scotland for a year in 1976, playing with the Muirhead and Son’s Pipe Band.

“I have been back to Scotland many times since because I love it there – especially the west coast and Glasgow.”

The story goes that MacDonald was asked to play a funeral for a friend’s brother who came from Cape Breton. Naturally, he was asked if he knew any Cape Breton tunes or songs.

“The bagpipe only has nine melody



notes, so it has a limited capacity to play certain songs,” MacDonald explains. “I have always loved Rita MacNeil and her songs, so I listened to a couple of CDs trying to find something that would fit.”

As it turned out, he picked MacNeil’s *Working Man* and *Home to Play*. At the funeral a number of Cape Bretoners approached him to tell him how much they enjoyed hearing the MacNeil songs and how they’d never heard them before on the bagpipes, and that planted the seed for the recording.

When MacDonald had the notion to record the CD titled *Geoffrey Street Piper and Friends*, he happened to be visiting with his 90-year-old father in Truro, Nova Scotia, when by chance his dad asked him if he needed any money.

“Normally, I would say no, but this time I asked him if he wanted to make an investment. I told him I wanted to make a CD and that any sales made would be

returned to him. He immediately went into his bedroom and wrote me a cheque, thereby becoming the executive producer of the CD,” MacDonald recalls.

MacDonald had some help from his friends, musicians he’d previously played with in Toronto joints such as Hugh’s Room and the Gate 403. The musicians went into the studio cold, with no rehearsal.

“I knew all these people were really good and I was confident that we could pull it all together. The first day (after about five hours) turned out better than I ever imagined, but it was still quite rough.”

Help from the likes of Tony McManus and Pat Simmonds helped smooth everything out. MacDonald’s brother, who produced the recording, suggested having Michelle Rumball sing on the CD.

“Her smoky voice is perfect on the hymns and the Rita (MacNeil) songs,” MacDonald says.

So, is the CD as popular as MacDonald had hoped it would be? He points out that he gave a copy to the Polish woman who cuts his hair.

“I cautioned her that it might drive customers away. She told my wife that she played it in her shop for two days in a row and found it relaxing. Others have remarked that they never knew that bagpipes could sound so good. So I think I’m off on the right track so far.”



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Sue Aston

Cornish fiddler Sue Aston may play in the privacy of her own living room, but she reaches a global audience

Thanks to YouTube and Google Plus, Aston's self-named show regularly attracts a large audience eager to see the classically trained violinist perform with her husband and two sons. Aston also interviews guests on her Internet broadcasts and has a regular segment called "Fiddling with Food," where she shares recipes with her audience.

Extending her interest with technology even further, Aston is currently working on a project she calls The Diary of a Coastal Composer, which is available by subscription through her website.

"On this platform, I visit a location, and create music, video, podcasts and artwork, which is all inspired by Celtic myths and legends," Aston notes.

A graduate of the Birmingham Conservatoire, Aston describes her music as a blend of classic and Celtic influences.

"It's a melting pot of all the music I have ever experienced," she says. "My music has structure, which comes from my classical background, but my melodies are strong and haunting, which reflects my love of the Celtic tradition."

Training as a classical musician provided Aston with discipline, she notes, adding that it was exciting to obtain a degree-diploma in violin performance skills, enabling her to go on to play in professional orchestras.

"In my heart, I always yearned for a more organic and natural way of expressing myself musically. My grandfather was a soloist at social events and parties and earned good money doing this. He taught

my father to play, who then went on to teach me."

Aston points out that for her playing the violin was part of a family tradition and a way to bring joy and happiness to people in an entertaining way.

"This contrasted with the more formal music training I received at music college," she says.

Aston began playing when she was young, as violins could readily be found around her home. As an only child, she used to pick up the instrument to entertain herself. When she was seven, Aston started lessons at school. Of the violin, she says "It came easily to me. I remember playing through the whole of my first violin book in one afternoon. The teacher always used to ask me to play duets with him in front of the class and before long I went on to have private lessons."

Aston describes her music as purely inspirational and says it comes into her mind, flows out of her fingers and she has no idea where it comes from. On the other hand, marketing her inspiration and earning a living involves pure, hard work, along with planning any concerts she puts on.

Career highlights include meeting and working with musicians such as Martin Carthy, Dave Swarbrick and Nigel Kennedy.

"A personal highlight has been launching my Internet shows and bringing my love of music and folklore to a world-wide audience. We performed to the Rock School judges at Summerfest in America

last year – and did this live from our living room, to the amazement of everyone there."

Nonetheless, Aston finds the profession carries its challenges, noting that it can be difficult to keep up the momentum of playing music professionally.

"It's a demanding career," she points out, "and can be tricky to do when you have a family and don't want to leave them to go off traveling in order to play gigs. It's easy to fall back on teaching and that can be an issue if you aren't fulfilling your dreams as a performer."

Looking ahead, Aston plans to continue growing her audience for her live shows.

"Some of my shows are produced by a team in America – My Music Hangout – who love seeing me perform alongside my family."



Adds Aston: "If music is truly in your heart, then you must pursue your dream always. It's a tough path, but don't ever give up – even if you do other things to fund your ambitions. A time will come when people will get to hear you and appreciate your work."

www.sueaston.com





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Heather Morris

In 2011 at the Miss America pageant in Las Vegas, Miss Vermont performed Highland dance as part of her routine while millions of Americans watched on their televisions. Credit for the Celtic dance form showing up at the pageant goes to Heather Morris, a dedicated Vermont native who runs the Heather Morris School of Dance and has dedicated herself to teaching Celtic dance. In this instance, Miss Vermont – a student named Katie Levasseur – actually learned Highland dancing from Morris at the St. Johnsbury Academy in Vermont, where Morris taught.

Morris confesses that as an adult she never aspired to become heavily involved in Celtic dance. But as she began to explore her career options in her 20s, she realized she could offer a unique and invaluable way to reach kids who might not otherwise have an opportunity to fit in with society. She began to build the Heather Morris School of Dance as a way to continue her hobby and share the art form of Celtic dance.

“As interest and demand grew, I was working hard for very little return financially,” Morris recalls.

“Every time I assessed whether or not to continue, I had come to the conclusion that the most important part of what I do is give young, developing minds and bodies a platform to work hard, take risks and feel the great sense of failure and accomplishment, all in a safe setting,” Morris says. “I couldn’t find any other field where I might be able to have this impact paired with a creative outlet and the freedoms afforded an entrepreneur.”

Of Scottish, Irish, Welsh and English heritage, Morris first became involved in Highland dancing at the age of seven in

the late 1970s. She notes that back then Highland dancing was a great way for families to spend time together and celebrate their heritage.

Morris first began teaching while she was still in college, where she was awarded a Scottish arts scholarship to the College of Wooster in Wooster, Ohio. The scholarship came with the proviso that she had to offer instruction. Recalls Morris: “From then on I was hooked on sharing my love of dance.”



Morris credits her partner, Doug Webster, with helping with her success. Webster grew up in Vermont with his Scottish grandmother and began playing the bagpipes at 11. On his own, he’s developed some successful Celtic Christmas events and started the non-profit that allowed the Gaelic College to offer a few sessions in 2004. Morris and Webster came into contact with each other as he was looking for dancers for his events.

For the past six years the two have collaborated on what began as a Highland dance competition and turned into

a weekend event featuring a concert, workshops and Highland and Irish dance competitions known as the Celtic Winter Gathering. More recently, the duo have performed together in several different capacities.

Morris concedes that her work in dance with the Celtic world is “pretty all consuming,” but notes she is also a member of the local St. Andrews Society, where she has served on the executive board for Vermont for years. She is also instrumental in running the Highland dance competition at the Quechee Scottish Festival every August.

“Unfortunately, for as hard as we work, I don’t think enough is being done to promote and preserve Celtic culture in general,” Morris comments. “There is so much pulling at people these days, so it takes a lot to get their attention and keep it.”

She points out that numbers have been dropping for Celtic events, while attendance at such traditional events like the Burns Night suppers and Tartan ball have also been in decline over the last couple of decades.

“Organizations have to work hard to keep themselves relevant and offer opportunities that will keep the audience engaged,” she observes.

For her part, to help engage young people, Morris tries to integrate popular music into her repertoire and more contemporary themes and works at doing her best to stay on top of the cultural trends that tie into work she does while still preserving the heritage. Concludes Morris: “It’s a tricky balance.”

www.celticheather.com





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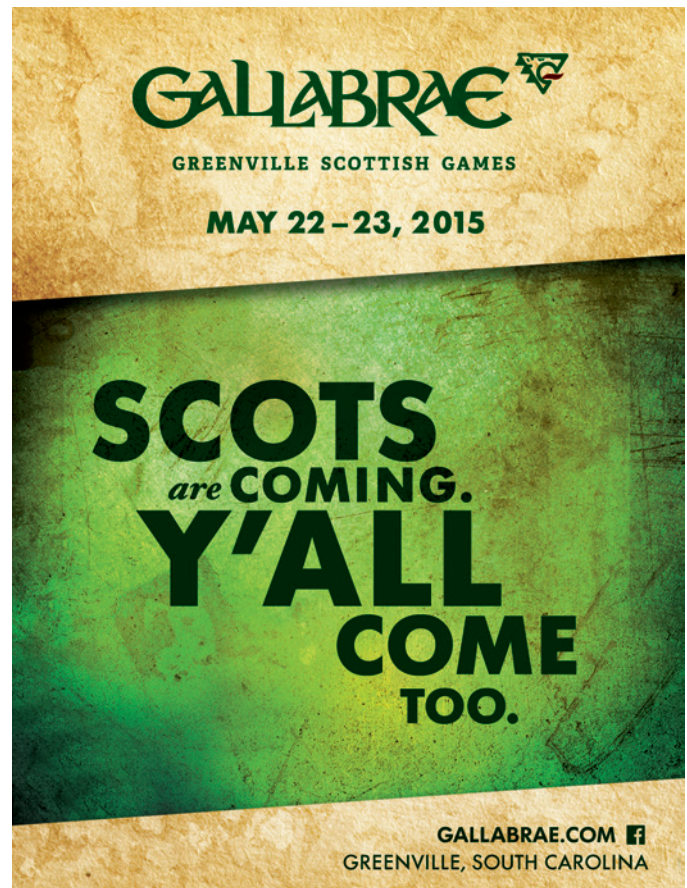


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ShamrockFest

Washington D.C., USA, March 21, 2015

If you were performing onstage at ShamrockFest, you'd be gazing over a "sea of green:" a crowd wearing green shirts and beads, wigs and extra large top hats, leggings and moustaches, maybe even a unicyclist wearing a green tutu. Dubbed "America's Largest St. Paddy's Day Celebration," the Washington D.C. extravaganza is now in its 15th year and promises "a day full of shenanigans." ShamrockFest features over 30 bands and entertaining acts playing on at least five different stages, representing a range of genres and themes, like Celtic rock, Irish punk, Irish dancing, fiddling and piping, party bands and DJs. Also on the day's agenda are an Irish marketplace, food and drink options, "interactive games" and contests. The festival is open to all ages; those under 11 get in free if in the company of someone 18 or older. Those who opt for a VIP ticket have access to an exclusive area plus get a bottomless beer mug!

www.shamrockfest.com

Tartan Day on Ellis Island

Ellis Island, Jersey City, NY, USA, April 10-12, 2015

Between 1892 and 1954, more than 12 million immigrants—half a million of them Scots—went through the Ellis Island station in Upper New York Bay. More recently, in 2012, more than 70,000 visited Ellis Island over ten days to celebrate Scottish heritage, making the occasion the world's largest Tartan

Day event. April 10-12, 2015 marks the 14th annual Tartan Day on Ellis Island organized by Clan Currie Society, the same producers of The Pipes of Christmas. This year, thousands will enjoy some of the area's best Scottish talent, like John the Kilted Juggler, the Rampant Lion Pipe Band, kilt maker Bonnie Greene and other dancers, musicians and entertainers. Each year, as part of the Ellis Island celebration, Clan Currie also presents a new exhibition.

This year's theme is Captain Kidd, a Scot who was charged and executed for piracy—today some historians are convinced the sailor's conviction was unjustified. Tartan Day on Ellis Island is a free event, open to the public. It is one of the major events taking place during NYC Tartan Week, a time to honour the Declaration of Arbroath or Scottish Independence of April 6, 1320, and to celebrate the contributions of Scottish Americans to the U.S. This year's event is co-sponsored by ScotlandNow.com.

www.tartandayonellisland.com



Ontario Welsh Festival

Niagara Falls, ON, Canada, April 24-26, 2015

Since 1961, the Ontario Gymanfu Ganu Association has been hosting gatherings to celebrate Welsh culture. This year's weekend in Niagara Falls features numerous heartwarming and heritage events, including a number that confirm Wales is indeed the Land of Song. On the Friday night, for instance, at the Noson Lawen, guests can participate in a "merry night" getting on stage open mic-style to sing, play, dance, tell or share another beautiful or fun-filled talent. Also, as per tradition, the festival invites a top choir from Wales; this year it will be Côr Rhuthun from Denbighshire performing Saturday night. On Sunday, attendees will be able to sing in four-part harmony as part of a traditional Cymanfaoedd Canu. Plus the weekend will include

a plethora of other activities, like children's performances, cultural seminars, a marketplace, various social times over a meal or refreshments, and more! You can reserve a room for a special rate at the Marriott Gateway on the Falls Hotel where the festival takes place. www.ontariowelshfestival.ca





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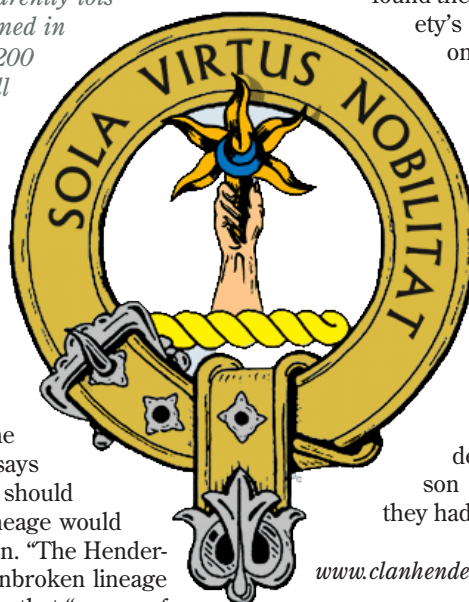


Clan Henderson

"We have a saying: 'You are born into the clan; you join the society,'" comments Mark Henderson, membership secretary for the Clan Henderson Society. And apparently lots of Hendersons have joined the society. Formed in 1988, the group has grown to more than 4200 members in all 50 American states as well as in nine other countries.

"Interestingly," notes Henderson, "there is a very large contingent of Hendersons in Uruguay who communicate often via Facebook. One of our past presidents visited with them in Montevideo and they were very enthusiastic, but the language barrier has yet to be overcome."

The sons of Henry represent five separate bloodlines, with each evolving as surnames became more common, including the Irish Ulster-Scot Henderson's. Henderson says that Lord Lyon decided that all Hendersons should be grouped into one clan and the oldest lineage would be chief of the name and arms of Henderson. "The Hendersons of Fordell have that honour, tracing unbroken lineage back to the 1400s," Henderson notes, adding that "scraps of Henderson lineage go back to the Dark Ages and, there is some conjecture of ties to Pictish Kings."



www.clanhendersonsociety.org

An overhaul of the Henderson Society's website in 2011 led to an increase in membership as Hendersons across cyberspace found the society. In fact, over 50 per cent of the society's new members have found the clan society online. As well, the group maintains a strong presence at Highlands games and events.

Of the over 150 Scottish and Celtic festivals annually held in North America, the clan society has a presence at approximately 45 of them.

It should come as no surprise then that in 2015 the society plans to participate in many regional festivals. As well, it intends to visit the National Scottish Immigrants Memorial in Philadelphia as a clan in December to dedicate a Clan Henderson Memorial paver stone they had installed there.



Clan Little

They might be Littles, but they have a large presence. In the English-speaking world, the Littles currently number some 45,000. Originally, the Little Clan was numbered among the 51 Scottish clans in the 1587 Act of the Scottish Parliament.

During the Anglo-Scottish Wars of 1296-1603, the Border Littles formed one of the fighting clans of the Scottish West March and were in the forefront of the confrontation with England. Some 700 years ago, Edward Litiil of Meidledale fought alongside Sir William Wallace in the Wars of Independence.

In the 17th century the clans began to scatter, moving into Ireland, England and crossing over to North America, Australia and New Zealand.

In contemporary times, A. Patterson (Pat) Little of Savannah, Georgia formed the Clan Little Society in North America. He contacted Johnnie Little of Scotland who was also forming an historical society, but the latter expressed disinterest in forming a clan society.

After Pat went ahead with his plans, Johnnie then became interested, but the two weren't able to settle on agreeable terms. Once Canadians began to join, the USA branch

accommodated them by amending its title to "North American." Finally, in 2000, the two societies forged a friendship, but still remain separate.

According to Jim Little, the clan society's secretary, recognition has come to the society through attendance at Scottish games and festivals.

"We will never be as well known as the more famous clans like the Stewarts and the Campbells, but we will continue to thrive within the Anglo-American community," Jim said.

Currently the clan society's membership numbers around 150. Jim became involved in 2005 as the society's secretary while Thomas Little is the current president. The clan society plans its AGM for 2015 at an as-of-yet to be determined site.

"Otherwise," Jim said, "We will continue to make our name known through games and festivals, online and in print."



www.clanlittlesna.com





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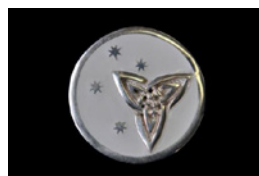
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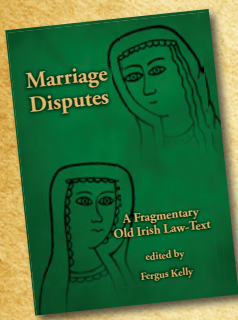
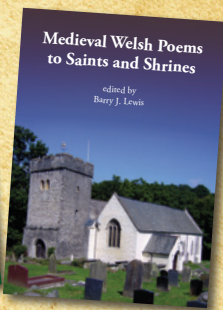
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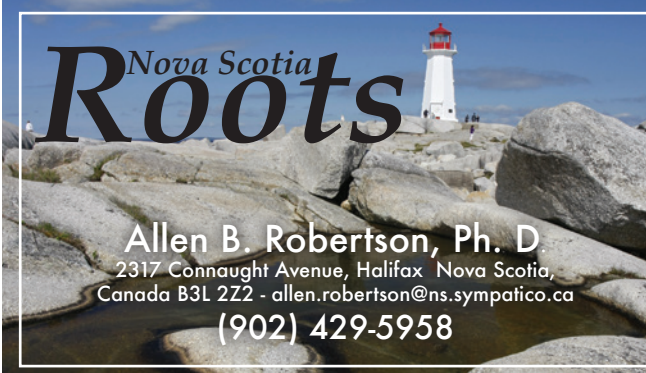
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 Like

Elizabeth Ann McKenzie Blanchard

7 February, 1955 – 11 November, 2014



Chances are, you didn't know Ann. She wasn't a leading actress, chart-topping musician or poet of note. But for daughter Jane, family, friends and me she was the most wonderful person in the world. Serene, soulful, smiling, she was kind and compassionate, with a staggeringly real sense of self. Still, little did we know that until the uncertainty of life put her to the test, she was also brave beyond belief.

I first met Ann McKenzie, then 20, in a stone walled pub deep beneath the cobbled High Street of Edinburgh's Old Town. I was playing in a band with a mutual friend. It was 1975. Gorgeous as she was, it was her warm voice and genuine personality that captivated me. The irony of that initial encounter in a drinking den in Scotland's capital was that pubs weren't our thing. Still, separately we'd show up at The Yellow Carvelle (now The Tron) once a week, smile across the room, nod and say hello. Eventually we got together. Within days she told her mother she'd met the man she'd marry.

Ann was employed with the National Trust for Scotland, and though she'd purchased a property in her late teens, she rented that. So home for us was a top floor tenement flat with a bay window offering a sprawling vista, while out back was a view of Edinburgh Castle. She worked occasional evenings at a pub across from where we lived. She made life magical.

Born in Isleworth, West London, this demure young woman was the daughter of Scottish parents James and Jean McKenzie, and younger sister to Robert, Laurence and James. She spent 11 years at the Royal Soldiers Daughters School on Rosslyn Hill in beautiful Hampstead. North London during the '60s saw studies and chores highlighted with daytrips to the

likes of Kew Gardens, while clandestine escapades at night piqued the wrath of the matrons. Spotting pop star neighbours like Hollies' singer Alan Clarke was a thrill, but the greatest joy was when her dad visited and they spent time in the galleries and cafes bordering Trafalgar Square. For her, memories of those halcyon days remained big and warm.



A move to Canada in 1979 saw Ann adapt to her new world with vigour. When she launched Bodylines, a fitness studio Chatelaine magazine selected as one of Canada's top 10, little did she realize what a profound effect she would have on the lives of so many women. But when she was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour, a new reality beset her life. Never one to accept anything at face value, Ann challenged the dire prognosis of just a year to live. Though a second opinion was less damning, finality became a fact of life. Still, that reality didn't stop the wee Scots lass from rising early every morning,

singing quietly and savouring her days.

More than anything, Ann wanted to live long enough to have and to raise a daughter. Jane McKenzie Blanchard is that lucky girl. And despite the initial one-year prognosis, Ann lived an amazing twenty-one years – long enough to see Jane, now 20, grow up to be a wonderfully confident and talented young woman. Still, Ann's situation persisted, and surviving until the next birthday, hers and Jane's, became her goal. This she did with no complaints aside from "Why me?" a couple times during those ups and downs, of MRI scans, operations and eventually, chemotherapy - through all those years of waiting for the axe to fall in a life where the future was forever uncertain.

We are still absorbing the reality of Ann's departure. I notice more photos of her appearing in Jane's flat (the upstairs of our house). On a chair and nestled within a ring of flowers in one corner of the bedroom where Ann spent so much of her final year is the pewter urn containing her ashes. Beneath that is a portrait of her, smiling, holding her baby Jane. A wee red bag containing her wedding rings hangs from that. Seated on adjacent chair is the threadbare "Teddy" that kept Ann company throughout life...still looking on.

Jane and I aren't the only ones – friends, family - so many others also miss Ann. When we take her ashes home to Edinburgh we'll celebrate the young Scottish lass who became such a wise and wonderful woman, a perfect wife, devoted mother and friend to all. She was the light in our lives, a light that will forever shine brightly.

Wayne Blanchard



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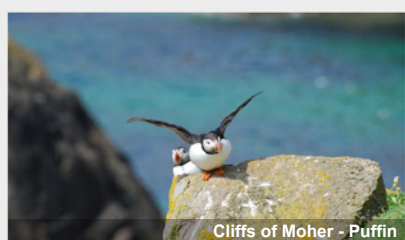
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