

VOL. 36 NO. 6 | \$6.95 CDN/USA | NOVEMBER / DECEMBER - 2022 | CELTICLIFEINTL.COM

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INSIDE!

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Winter Fashion, On the Trail of Celtic Europe*



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

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

Siobhán L. Covington, Publisher
Stephen Patrick Clare, Editor-in-Chief
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Advertising:
Toll-Free: 888-215-6850
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Please send review books and CDs to
160 Park Road, Beaconsfield, Quebec
Canada, H9W 2M8

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

Publication Mail Registration:
No. 40050439 ISSN 1918-0497

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

Canada

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We do reserve the right to edit all submitted
manuscripts prior to their publication.

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Fáilte

Celebrating Yule

In the natural world, the Winter Solstice marks the ongoing struggle between life and death, creation and conclusion.

This time of the year brings to mind the ancient Celtic myth of the Holly King and the Oak King - locked in an eternal and cyclical battle in their efforts to conquer the season and, ultimately, decide whether light or darkness would prevail until the next solstice.

As the legend goes, the Oak King claims victory on December 21st and, as a result, the days begin to lengthen as we yearn for the warmth and rebirth of Spring. Surprisingly, the Celts did not view the waning months from mid-June to mid-December - dominated by the darkness of the Holly King - as something to dread. On the contrary, the months preceding the winter solstice were meant to be a time to replenish in solitude and quiet. The Celts believed that all new beginnings started to flourish in the dark.

Although the last few years have been difficult for many - and a glance at the world today can easily envelope us in darkness and despair - we can embrace this holiday season knowing that the wisdom of the contrasting twin Kings will, in the end, bring balance. We embrace the light of the Oak King to renew our faith - a welcoming candle placed in a window, the warmth of a roaring fire, a sparkling star atop a tree. I imagine the Holly King a more raucous guest, appearing with sprigs of red berry and green leaf to adorn the Yuletide table - symbols of strength, love, and everlasting life.

These are the holiday traditions that have the most significance for me, personally, as they provide quiet moments to reflect - perhaps fondly remembering past celebrations filled with the laughter of loved ones, while looking forward to the promise of many merry festivities yet to be enjoyed. It is also a time to remember that the simplest deeds often have the biggest impact - helping those in need, spreading happiness, and bringing delight and wonderment to the season.

This year we have made a donation to UNICEF in support of their ongoing efforts in Ukraine, all in the hope that we can bring brightness, joy and a smile to (to quote Irish scribe William Butler Yeats) "a stranger...a friend you haven't met yet." We encourage you to do the same.

From all of us here at Celtic Life International, we would like to take this opportunity to wish you a holiday season that is filled with light, warmth, and new beginnings for 2023.

Laethanta Saoire Shona!
Siobhán L. Covington, Publisher



43 Celtic Christmas Concerts!

17

One small Manx company hopes to make a big difference

19

One Irish woman seeks to inspire through song

21

For one Montreal musician, music is a family affair

23

Máiréad Nesbitt is casting spells

27

Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands hits the books

31

On the Trail of Celtic Europe

35

Lesley Choyce keeps Georgia on his mind

39

Winter fashion with Kate Davies

53

Christmas in the kitchen with Gary Maclean

57

Holiday Gift Guide

9. First Word / 11. De Tha Dol / 13. Celts in the Community
15. Nua / 67. Dram / 82. Last Word



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A Lust for Life

One Irish organization carries the mental health message



Awareness of mental health issues - especially those impacting youth - has grown since the COVID-19 pandemic began. In Ireland, A Lust for Life - a non-profit organization that partners with schools - has been expanding its work in order to assist and empower more youngsters.

The multi-award-winning charity says it reaches youth and adults through content rooted in psychology, mindfulness, and education. Since entering schools in 2020, the program, which is free to educators, has been delivered in close to 655 schools.

"We want to be in every single school and every single classroom in Ireland so that no child is denied the opportunity to grow up empowered to manage their own mental health effectively," Managing Director Bernie Keogh tells Celtic Life International via email.

"Getting young people involved in tackling social challenges in their communities and the world has profoundly positive impacts on their mental and emotional wellbeing..."

Keogh - whose own family roots are in Wicklow, Cork, and Dublin - believes that even very young children can be taught skills and tools to become more psychologically aware and emotionally resilient, effectively improving the country's mental health systems as well as the lives of individuals.

A Lust for Life is currently boosting awareness of its Schools Programme to the media and key health officials. It is also busy

piloting its Gone Past Talking (GPT) teenage programs before proceeding to a full-scale launch next year. GPT is aimed at 15 and 16-year-old students. It is hoped that the 26-week educational and mentoring program will enable young people to change their communities.

The group's multi-featured website also offers podcasts and live, interactive events, as well as feature articles written by individuals who share their personal struggles with mental health - covering subjects ranging from anxiety to alcohol dependence, and offering hope to others going through a tough time. The site also hosts Not On My Watch, described as "a tribe" of adults committed to protecting youth mental health.

Keogh says the group's priorities include developing a solution for college-level students who are suffering severe anxiety and mental health challenges during the pandemic and supporting parents and teachers who are themselves supporting youth.

"For 2023, we will be developing the school's programs for the first two years of primary school, which will involve working with the mental health panel to develop the content and then producing it, before piloting in a number of schools and evaluating its impact via PhD research students from University College Dublin and Dublin City University. It is going to be a busy year."

The group's website and social media channels have reached 41 million people since 2015. Ambition and fast growth naturally create challenges, particularly around funding.

A Lust for Life does not aspire to be a big

charity. Their goal is to develop digital, scalable programs which are free and can reach a lot of people. However, admits Keogh, if they had more income, they could invest in their solutions more quickly.

Supporters are asked to donate, and Keogh says that 90 per cent of funds go to program development. Supporters are also invited to share their own struggles with mental health.

"If you have had mental health challenges of your own and would be happy to share your story...we would love to hear from you."

Though small, the organization's reach is growing fast. Keogh works with co-founders Niall Breslin and Paula McLoughlin, as well as "a very committed board, and a very talented and passionate team".

The ultimate aim is to introduce and implement their programs in other countries. Keogh herself is new in the job, moving in June to A Lust for Life after 20 years in business management. Her commitment to her new role runs deep: as well as working as managing director, she is training to be a psychotherapist.

She feels inspired by the organization's mission, believing in the goal of ensuring that future generations are equipped to be guardians of their own minds and better able to navigate the inevitable ups and downs of life.

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one

Rare Manx Wildflower

Thought to have gone extinct, a rare wildflower has been rediscovered on the Isle of Man. The flower, called Skullcap, was last recorded in the 19th century. Skullcap has blue flowers with petals 1-2cm long and can reach 20-45cm in height. Environmental officials take the flower's reappearance as good news for the island's biodiversity, given that 45 species of native Manx wildflowers have gone extinct since botanical recording began. The flower was found in an area of wet, cattle-grazed marsh, significant as it reveals the important role of traditional grazing practices for Manx biodiversity. Grazing keeps thorny shrubs at bay, allowing for rare wildflowers to grow. The Manx Wildlife Trust is now working with farmers to ensure that these farmland habitats are protected.

two

Cornish Tree's New Life

During a winter storm last year, an iconic tree was ripped from the ground in the small coastal town of Bude, Cornwall. The 23-tonne tree was a Monterey Cypress and had stood in the center of town for generations. Residents cherished the tree and were saddened to see it fall. Rather than getting rid of it, however, the town has now commissioned a collective of local furniture makers, Atlantic Makers Ltd., to create six bespoke benches of the beloved tree. The benches will each have a unique wave design in order to reflect the town's close relationship with the Atlantic. According to the town council, these benches will not only serve as a permanent reminder of the special tree but will also support local artists.

three

Hidden Canal in Wales

In Cardiff, Wales, a hidden canal has suddenly emerged thanks to the city's plans to restore its historic central waterway. The canal, which once transported steel and iron to the city, was paved over between 1948 and 1950. Recently, around 70 meters of the canal was uncovered. The restoration is part of Cardiff's larger One Planet strategy which aims to make the city carbon neutral by 2030. The canal project includes a redesign of the area to better manage traffic and surface water drainage. The new district, which will be called Canal Quarter, will feature rain gardens with special soil that will purify the surface water before it drains into the canal. This will reduce costs and strain on the whole sewage system.

four

Reinventing the Galette Sausisse

The galette saucisse is one of Brittany's most famous food items. Since the 19th century, almost nothing has changed in the way that Bretons prepare this dish. An authentic galette saucisse requires that a pork sausage be grilled and rolled inside of a buckwheat crêpe. While people have been partaking in this Breton tradition in the same way for centuries, one chef is challenging the status quo. Céline Périclès operates a food truck in Rennes out of which she serves galette saucisses that are fully vegan. Périclès swaps the pork sausage for a stuffing made of chickpeas, vegetables, and spices. She hopes that by offering a vegan version of this traditional dish she will be able to introduce more people to plant-based cooking.

five

Ancient Ruins in Galicia

This summer, Spain experienced one of the worst droughts on record with reservoirs as low as 39 percent. The heat and lack of rain led to many rivers reaching their lowest levels in decades. In Galicia, the Limia River's levels were so low that a 2000-year-old Roman military camp emerged from the water. In 1948 a dam was built on the river which increased the water levels and flooded the Roman site. The camp, called Aquis Querquennis, was built in 69-79 AD. It was used to house approximately 600 Roman infantry and cavalrymen who built the Via Nova Road - a well-known Roman road that currently crosses Galicia. The camp was abandoned around 120 AD and first studied in the 1920s.

six

A New Start in Nova Scotia

18-year-old Ukrainian twins Mariia and Yulia Lytynchuk fled the war in Ukraine and found a fresh start as they began the school year in Nova Scotia. Both girls decided they wanted to come to Canada to continue their schooling after Russia invaded Ukraine. Mariia is now studying creative writing at Dalhousie University and Yulia is studying visual arts at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Both universities offered the girls scholarships to help cover tuition, but the twins still needed financial aid to cover other costs. Dalhousie professors Heather Jessup and Christina Luckyj (whose father was a Ukrainian refugee during the Second World War) were compelled by the sisters' story and started a GoFundMe campaign which has raised \$27,000 so far.

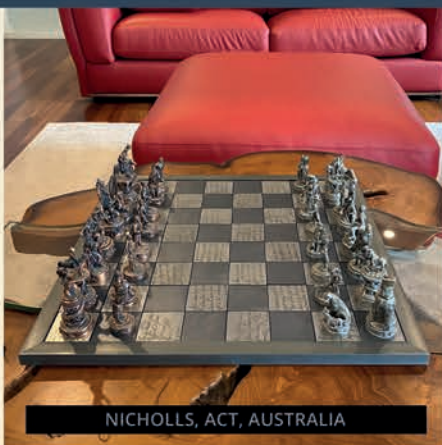
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ZIERIKZEE, THE NETHERLANDS

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Disability Week in Rennes

Recently, the city of Rennes, France marked the second edition of its Disability Week. From September 24 until October 1, the city partnered with 70 associations and organizations to raise awareness about people living with disabilities. Throughout the week, over 40 events were offered to the public to highlight the importance of making cities and public spaces more accessible and inclusive to those living with disabilities. Since the 1980s, Rennes has taken steps to develop as an inclusive city, notes Deputy Mayor Jean-François Monnier. According to a survey conducted by APF France Handicap, Rennes is France's second most accessible city after Grenoble. This is no small feat. Disability inclusion is in fact necessary for cities to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and adhere to the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. During Rennes' Disability Week, members of the public enjoyed street shows, theatre and dance performances, talks, and exhibitions. "We wanted to make the issue of disability a positive one," says Monnier. "Disability is not just about accessibility or discrimination, it also allows for social or technological innovations, new cultural or sports practices, humour, and celebration."



Holly Bendall

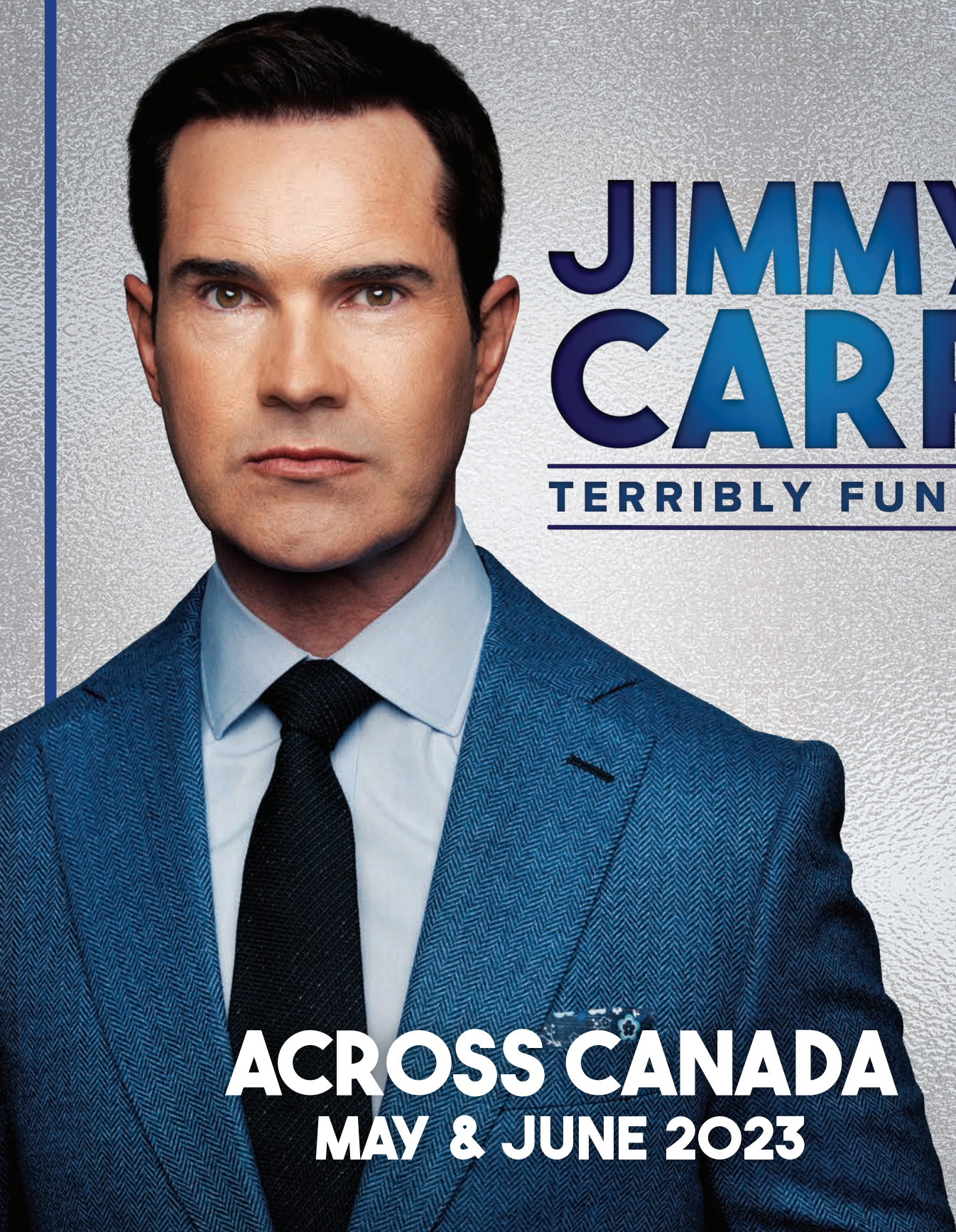
In the fishing town of Porthleven, Cornwall, a life-sized bronze sculpture of a man and a seagull looking out to sea has been unveiled in the harbour. The sculpture, nicknamed Dave & Bird, was revealed as part of the 2022 Porthleven Arts Festival. Sculptor Holly Bendall was inspired during a sketching trip in Cadgwith where she observed a man and seagull sitting together on a bench looking out to sea waiting for the local fishermen to return. On Bendall's Crowdfunder page, she writes that "the purpose behind this project is to highlight the importance of small boat fishing in Cornwall and hopefully pose the question of where our fish come from." Porthleven used to be "a thriving fishing port" and current industrial fishing practices not only erode the traditional way of life of historic fishing communities but also threaten the delicate balance of the U.K.'s marine ecosystems. With the help of 80 supporters Bendall raised over £20,000 in 28 days, allowing her to cast Dave & Bird in bronze using the ancient technique of lost wax casting. Dave & Bird are now on permanent display for the public. "Ultimately my vision is for Dave to be a guardian of the sea - I hope he inspires positive change for our future generations."



Neil Norman

Neil Norman, aged 93, walked a half-marathon in memory of his late wife this September. Family, friends, and neighbours cheered him on as he closed the 100th lap of his neighbourhood block in Swansea, Wales. Norman's walk was his way of giving back to the Alzheimer's Society which had helped him and his wife Anne. Norman's wife was diagnosed with dementia in her later years and passed away in December 2020. Norman's initial goal to raise £100 for the organization was greatly surpassed by the end of his walk - as he finished the last lap his tally was over £4,500. In an interview with the BBC Norman explained that the idea to fundraise through walking started as a bit of a family joke. Upon buying a walker to help him with his arthritic hip and knee Norman began walking laps around the block. "Two down, 98 to go", he recalls texting his family. Reflecting on his challenge Norman realizes that it has helped him stay motivated and uplifted during this difficult time. "Grieving is a form of self-pity and with my hip going, I realized I was sitting around too much." When asked whether he will keep on going now that the 100 laps are complete, Norman told the BBC he doesn't plan on stopping any time soon. "I've got to keep moving. It's the old saying, if you don't use it, you lose it."

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MUSIC

The Mahones

Jameson Street



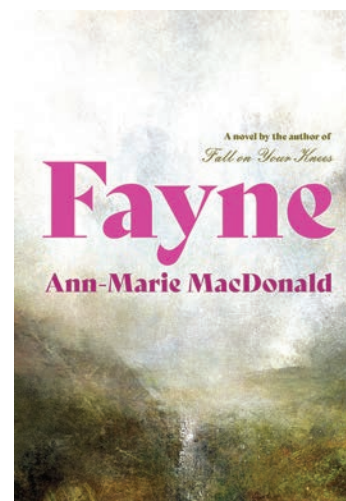
Veteran Canadian Celt-rockers The Mahones have been plying their trade for more than 30 years. Their latest recording, *Jameson Street*, is a return to roots of sorts for the four-piece band, showcasing their passion for the past with a rip-roaring musical melange of eight original tunes and a trio of covers (The Pogues, Uncle Tupelo, Finbar Fury). Mahones frontman Finny McConnell promised listeners a post-pandemic album “full of positivity and good vibes - an album to make you feel you’re having a nice night out. No politics, no religion, just good times and everybody having fun, talking about music, singing and dancing, just like the old days” - and he and his bandmates have delivered in grand and glorious style. Best enjoyed at maximum volume. ~ SPC

LITERATURE

Fayne

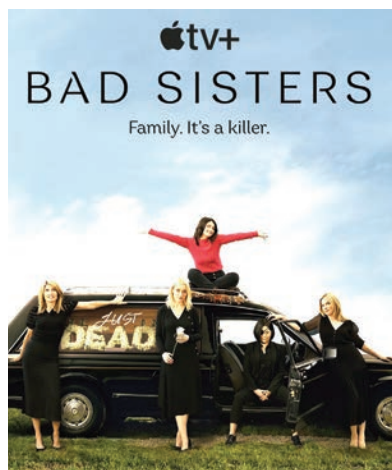
By Ann-Marie MacDonald

With roots in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, award-winning Canadian author, actor, playwright, and broadcaster Ann-Marie MacDonald deep-dives into Scottish heritage with her latest novel, the complex and compelling *Fayne*. Set against the Scottish/English borderlands, *Fayne* tells the tale of a young Charlotte Bell and her drive to uncover family secrets and discover her own identity. Despite a difficult relationship with her father, who aims to make her the son he never had, the feisty protagonist’s thirst for knowledge outgrows her ties to the family estate - all of which takes place under the watchful eye of an ominous portrait of her deceased mother and younger brother. Rich in history and robust in emotion, the author does well to detail one woman’s complex inner life. ~ SPC



STREAMING

Bad Sisters



Based upon the book (and Flemish TV series) *Clan* by Malin-Sarah Gozin, Irish black-comedy *Bad Sisters* features the lives of five Dublin siblings. Following the death of an abusive brother-in-law, the conniving quintet find themselves mired down in a life insurance investigation. The end-result is ten episodes of lighthearted, easy-going television that won’t tax the brain - ideal for a lazy Friday night. While somewhat short on plot and character development, sometimes confusing with a timeline that goes back-and-forth from past to present, and occasionally difficult with dialogue, the series does serve to showcase the brilliant on-screen talents of actresses Sharon Horgan, Anne-Marie Duff, Eva Birthistle, Sarah Greene, and Eve Hewson. The real star here, however, is the warmth and wit of *Eire*’s capital city. ~ SPC

PODCAST

The Irish Passport

Although, admittedly, I do not attend to many podcasts, *The Irish Passport* has gone into regular rotation on my playlist. Created and co-hosted by journalist Naomi O’Leary and lecturer Tim Mc Inerney, the weekly audio clips clock in at just over an hour and cover all areas of life on the Emerald Isle, including politics past and present, history and heritage, arts and culture, and more. Most appealing, however, is the back-and-forth banter between the hosts, which can run the rails from profound to profane - a rare chemistry of characters whose sum is bigger than their parts.

As such, each episode is engaging, entertaining, and educational, and listeners will likely find themselves gasping one minute and giggling the next. Put it on your playlist. ~ SPC



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Mama & Joey

One small Manx company hopes to make a big difference



As a young mother - and the founder of Mama & Joey, an Isle of Man-based company that offers sustainable maternity and breastfeeding-friendly clothing - Katy Collister has her hands full.

The Manx businesswoman launched Mama & Joey earlier this year and has since been busy doing everything from designing the company website, to sourcing suppliers, and handling marketing.

"We try to pick items that can be worn before, during and after pregnancy so clients can get the most wear out of these carefully selected items," explains the mother of two young girls.

Collister is also conscious about conservation, noting that budget prices combined with clever marketing from large corporations encourage consumers to make impulse purchases without thinking about the wider implications, including the environmental impact and even factory working conditions.

"The fashion industry contributes enormous amounts of carbon dioxide to our atmosphere and fast fashion items just aren't designed to last. I like to stock timeless styles that don't follow current trends, won't go out of fashion, and won't be thrown away in a few months' time."

She also prefers to stock items made in Britain, but this has proven difficult and is one reason why she has been looking at developing her own product range. Her current suppliers are global, and Mama & Joey now offers handmade tops and dresses made from repurposed saris in India, and brands that use recycled materials or are made from organic cotton or hard-wearing linens that stand the test of time.

"We also use eco-friendly compostable postal bags and brown paper bags when selling in person."

Her brand appeals to other new parents who share her environmental concerns.

"It is our children's generation that will be left to try and repair the damage caused by global warming."

The mental and physical load of being a parent can be overwhelming at times, however, and she occasionally needs to take a break from living sustainably - resorting to disposable diapers once in a while.

"Sometimes we just have to be kind to ourselves and realize that it is okay to be imperfectly trying our best. As a family, we continue to do what we can do to reduce our environmental impact. We switched to a plant-based diet - doing our best to eat locally sourced produce - and we try to minimize our packaging and food waste and buy lots of second-hand items."

Although - like parenting - running a business can be exhausting, it has also been a dream come true. Still, it took Collister a long time to tell her husband that she longed to start her own venture.

"He was incredibly supportive, but for me it has brought fears and anxieties to the surface that I didn't know existed, and yet I wouldn't change a thing...It is absolutely worth it and every time someone tells me that they love an item that I have stocked, or I make a sale, I can't describe how happy it makes me."

Family love and encouragement is the most precious reward of all.

"My eldest daughter Elowen is three and she tells me she is proud of me and wishes me luck every time I head off to a pop-up shop event and that makes it all worth it."

Collister says we can all be doing more to reduce our environmental impact on the planet.

"Particularly within the fashion industry, as consumers we need to look beyond the price tag of an item and think about how that item came to be. More generally, I have noticed that vegan alternatives are becoming more mainstream, and there are so many more choices available now."

She says that producers and manufacturers have a big responsibility to ensure they move towards sustainable practices, and consumers need to support the companies that have already taken that step.

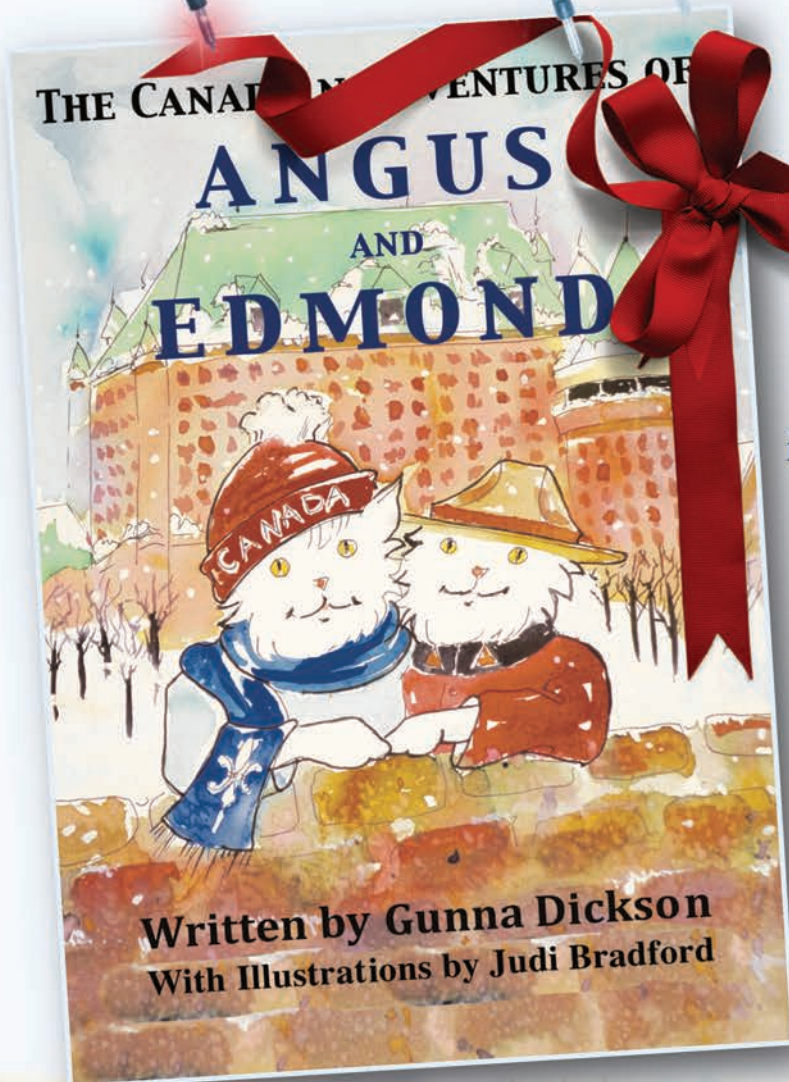
"The biggest thing we can do is just consume less. Investing in slow fashion pieces will cost more initially but remember that fast fashion pieces are not designed to last. If you take a longer-term view, you can absolutely save money on the cost per wear."

In her own business, Collister plans to increase her range of products and move into stocking reusable and eco-friendly mother and baby essentials.

"I also want to open a retail store if I can find the right space. Longer term, I have plans to launch a Mama & Joey-branded range to offer sustainable and ethical slow fashion pieces that can be worn throughout breastfeeding days and beyond."

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Ooh, Canada!

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

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

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



Grace Foley

One Irish woman seeks to inspire through song



Donning a bright pink blazer and bathed in glowing stage lights, Grace Foley delivers the final notes of Elton John's classic ballad *Your Song*. The judges and contestants of Ireland's *Last Singer Standing* show are visibly moved upon hearing her rendition, which is dedicated to her then four-month-old daughter, Anna. The November 2021 performance may have only lasted a few minutes but that was all it took for this "very proud County Kerry woman" to touch everyone's hearts.

Foley, who lives in Killarney, is proud of her heritage. "I am Irish through and through, as far as I am aware."

Although she may not have grown up in a musical household, the songstress was surrounded by "a family who supported me, no matter what." That love, paired with the mentoring of her teacher, the late Aine Nic Ghabhann, as well as Virginia Kerr at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, helped Foley to unleash her gift of song on the world.

"That and John Travolta," she chuckles. "I think I was singing since I was in the womb, but the movie *Grease* started a lifelong obsession with music. I was born with music in me, and people like my parents, Aine, Virginia, and John Travolta just helped to bring it out."

Foley was just 13 years of age when she met Aine, who helped her to recognize her unique sonic textures.

"My voice is dark and engaging and goes right to the heart..."

"Because of my classical training, there is always a touch of a 'classical' sound to my singing, but it is fused with a more contemporary sound, with hints of Enya and Annie Lennox."

And though Foley fits in the "Classical Crossover" genre - a style that fuses classical and contemporary melodies, made popular by the likes of Josh Groban and Katherine Jenkins - her rich, smooth vocals have allowed her to carve out a niche all her own.

Along with her technical prowess, Foley's ability to connect with audiences makes her unique. It is, she notes, one of the biggest rewards of doing what she does.

"Be it people in an audience, people who are grieving, or other musicians who I have worked with, and who have become lifelong friends - music connects people."

In an industry that makes it challenging for independent artists to thrive, the satisfaction that comes from successfully putting on a show, recording an album, and connecting to listeners makes the difficult moments worthwhile.

"It is a constant juggling act. There are days I want to walk away from it all, but I always pick myself back up and remember that this is all I want, so I have to keep going."

Foley's ambition to continue singing is fueled in part by her having lost her voice at one time in her life. "Back then, I promised myself that I would truly value my voice, were it to ever return." That epiphany morphed into a newfound sound which, she hopes, will bring comfort to those "in their darkest hours."

While she sings for many people, there are a few special fans that Foley always keeps in mind. "My husband has been an incredible support. He believed in me when I didn't, and I want to do him proud. Now, we also have our little girl, Anna. Early on in my pregnancy, I promised myself that I would not only tell her to follow her dreams, but I would also show her."

Foley has enjoyed many career highlights over the years, with each resulting in new revelations about who she is as an artist.

"Winning my first big music competition at the age of 16 made me realize I wanted to do this forever. Returning to singing when I was absolutely terrified made me realize I would never give this up. And, of course, a real highlight was recording my EP *Unleashed*, which was really when I started to find my own voice."

"And singing on national TV for my daughter was the moment I realized that I wasn't doing this just for me anymore. I want to be a strong role model for her. She will always see me work hard and pick myself up when I am knocked. I sing from a place of love, and I sing for love."

Foley is currently prepping her Christmas EP - *A Time for Christmas, Vol. 2* - which is scheduled for release in the coming weeks. She will also continue to perform her new show, *Women of Note*.

www.gracefoley.ie

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Jason Lang

For one Montreal musician, music is a family affair

While it is true that the COVID-19 pandemic hit the music industry harder than most - resulting in financial, mental, and emotional challenges for many performers who make their living on the road - some artists managed to keep their sense of humour intact.

"Blond," laughs Montreal singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist Jason Lang, when asked about his roots. "I know it may be hard to believe at my age, but my hair hasn't changed colour yet."

All joking aside, the 50-something, married father of two is open about both his genetic and artistic heritage.

"My grandfather left Scotland with his family in I believe 1928 or 1929. He was from Edinburgh. On my grandmother's side, the McVicar - as I understand - left Scotland earlier and went to Ontario before making their way to Quebec. My mother (renowned folk singer) Penny Lang - the first-born Canadian of our family - had a little thing in her late twenties with American folk singer Dave Van Ronk, and I am the bastard child of that affair."

It didn't take long for those musical seeds to come to fruition.

"I remember being at my grandparents' house when I was about five or six, and there was a guitar in the living room. When I strummed it, it didn't sound right. So, I tuned it to play a chord - that way I could basically move one finger up and down the neck and have a nice major chord playing. I also remember my grandfather coming into the room and asking me 'who taught you that?' - and I replied that it just sounded right. I started playing music because it was there, and I could hear it. And when I was in my teens, it helped me to feel free and alive, and I thought that I could project images and feelings through the sounds emanating from my guitar."



He continues to play for many of those same reasons.

"It is still there, and I can still hear it - I think even a little better..."

"It's funny, as we get older, if we are lucky our ideas begin to change. Success has so many potential meanings. If we are truly fortunate, that which is truly important comes to the foreground. Is it fame and fortune that I seek? Is it the love of others? Is it capturing the moment that I am in? All are valid. All can be beautiful. Whatever is in your heart, just do it."

Lang has enjoyed both success and significance over the years - including writing and recording songs with a variety of players and performing for millions of people around the world with some of Canada's most prestigious artists. However, his focus in recent months has been on piecing together a new recording - *Handled With Care* - that pays tribute to his late mother.

"My wife has been pushing me for a few years to do this. 2022 - being what would have been the 80th birthday of my mom - it seemed an appropriate time to finally put a project of her songs together."

Officially launched with a release party in his hometown on October 27, the first single from the album, *Happiness Is*, is now available via all streaming platforms. More songs are scheduled to be rolled out over the coming months.

The sonic apple didn't fall too far from the tree, it would appear, and - like his musical mother - Lang understands and appreciates the power and beauty of bringing melodies and lyrics together.

"In my opinion, a good song is one that captures something - a moment, a feeling, essentially the truth. Something that, ultimately, we as humans can connect with and relate to and feel like we are not alone. Sometimes they are deep and sometimes they are not, but both are completely valid and essential."

He feels the same way about the in-person concert experience.

"A good live show is one where you are connected to the people that are participating in the event. I got to witness my mother perform a sort of magic sometimes where it felt like we were all in the same place at exactly the same moment in time, physically, mentally, and - dare I say - spiritually? For me, that is about as good as it gets."

www.linktr.ee/jasonlang

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Máiréad Nesbitt

As a founding member of Irish super-group Celtic Woman, violinist Máiréad Nesbitt has recorded more than a dozen albums and performed to appreciative audiences all over the world, sharing the stage with the likes of Michael Flatley, U2, Van Morrison, Sinéad O'Connor, Clannad, Emmylou Harris, David Bowie, Sting, and many more. Recently she spoke with Celtic Life International about her latest recording Celtic Spells, which is due for release in early 2023.



What kind of impact did COVID-19 have on you, both personally and professionally?

The pandemic was devastating to so many people, especially with regards to arts that were deemed “nonessential” - music and live concerts were the first to go and have been the last to come back. As a musician, it was very worrying, and the frantic feeling of no work for the last two and a half years was eclipsed by a feeling of guilt, as so many people had lost their lives. So, it had a very strange effect, because on the one hand both myself and my husband - being in the same industry - were very worried about our livelihood and what had taken so much work to build, and on the other hand, we were lucky to be healthy and felt funny even saying or feeling anything. From a professional point of view, I knew we had to keep going. So, I was lucky to work on three incredible projects during the pandemic; Celtic Spells, my new album and show, Harmonious Live for Disney+ in which I got to play with superstar Lindsey Sterling, and my own jewelry line with JTV. Creatively, those three projects kept me sane and ticking. I did free shows online every week for my “Fan-ily” called Máiréad Mondays,

where people checked in from all over the world. My online lessons and shop kept going as people were thankful to have things to do while in isolation.

What inspired the recording of Celtic Spells?

Celtic Spells is the true story of a couple (my agent’s great-great grandparents) that fell in love and fled Ireland as they were from different backgrounds and religions - a huge taboo back then. We wanted to tell their story in a series of “spells” and, in doing so, take people on a journey - their journey - to a new world.

What were the challenges involved?

Obviously, the main challenge was COVID. As necessity is the mother of invention, I had to quickly learn how to record all the tracks needed for the album and show. Luckily my manager - and amazing percussionist - Neil Grover had all this in his vast skill set. So, I just had to take care of my own recordings and then transfer them all over to him. I also had the playing and harmonic brilliance of

my brother (multi-instrumentalist Karl Nesbitt) and stunning orchestral arrangements from Peadar Townsend. This whole album was recorded remotely in New Hampshire, Boston, Ireland, the U.K., and Nashville, and was then mastered in Los Angeles at Aftermaster Studios.

How did you feel when it was done?

It feels amazing to have the album done. It sounds massive and expansive, but also intimate. I am very happy with my playing as, in the limited time I had and being a novice user of home recording, I did not, and could not, even “drop in” or edit my fiddles. So, they are all full takes, and I am proud of that. We spent hundreds of hours going through everything and everyone on the album to make sure that we were happy with the whole recording.

Do you have a favourite track?

I have a lot of favorite tracks. Like a lot of people, I am a huge Netflix and Showtime fan, and watching shows that have incredible music in them - like Outlander and City on a



Hill - has really inspired me. The first single to be released from the new recording is a selection called Man of the House. This tune was the theme tune for the show City on a Hill starring Kevin Bacon, and it is one of my favorites. The Outlander theme - Skye Boat Song - is fabulous too, with the beautiful vocals of Ryann Murray.

What has the feedback been like so far from those who have heard it?

We have just finished a survey / focus group where we invited about a hundred people to listen to the album and list their favourites. The feedback was hugely positive.

What can listeners expect?

The listeners can expect to be taken on a journey from the very beginning, and end in an anthemic way. I always felt that people should feel transported, relaxed, and energized from a recording, and I believe Celtic Spells does just that.

What makes a good song?

A good song grabs you in both its genuine content portrayal and its beautiful, memorable melody. The Ballad of the Perfect

Storm from Celtic Spells is another of my favorites. It is an original song written by Ed Keane and vocalist John McAndrew and explores "The Perfect Storm" which took place near Gloucester, Massachusetts about 30 years ago. It is a tribute to the fishing families there and to the six fishermen who never came home. I play the whistle solo on this, and I was blown away by John's vocals. It is such an incredibly powerful song.

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

I think it is both. My mind is always very open to being inspired by everything. The creative process is very inspirational, dynamic, and joyful, and the perspirational side of it comes next with all the recording and mixes before the tracks go to mastering. And that is just the album - the show has additional tracks, sound, lighting, staging...you name it. More perspiration!

What makes a good live show?

A show must immerse the audience and sweep them away on a journey. I think people want that experience more than ever now, especially after the last few years of not being able to do that. The audience is also "in" the show to an extent and should leave feeling that they have literally "been somewhere" and can go home feeling contented, elated, and exhilarated.

Will you tour in support of the new album?

Yes, there are already shows set for March of 2023, and more dates are being added daily.

How have you evolved as a player and performing artist since we last spoke?

As an artist, one is always evolving, and certainly as a player that is true as well. Since we last spoke, Celtic Woman's Destiny album was nominated for a Grammy - that was my last album with them. I released another solo album, Hibernia, and our family album, Devil's Bit Sessions, which was named after a local mountain near our home in Ireland. I am delighted to have done a show called Harmonious for Walt Disney's 50th Anniversary in Orlando, Florida, and which

will appear on Disney+, which includes a fiery Celtic duet written especially for me and Lindsey Sterling - so many people the world over had been asking us to do a collab and at last we got a chance to do it on the best stage in the world in the Happiest Place on Earth! Pre-COVID, I played Carnegie Hall at Christmas for several years, and debuted on Broadway in a rock show called Rocktopia - which was one of the best times in my life after Celtic Woman. I do feel very blessed that my life continues to evolve in amazing ways. I am extremely fortunate to come from a wonderful musical family and I get so much musical and personal inspiration from my parents. We are all very passionate about playing music together every chance we get. To us, playing music is like breathing. This is very grounding and important, especially when playing slightly different genres in different places worldwide - it brings you "home" to what matters.

What are your thoughts on the current state of Celtic music, and the music industry in general?

Celtic and Irish traditional music is in great shape. There are many amazing young musicians out there who are very eager to excel. There are also plenty of older musicians whom they can get invaluable playing, advice, and workshops from. The music industry will take a while to recover from the last few years, but artists always persevere and keep going. We might be deemed "nonessential" but I believe that we have been essential to people's wellbeing, especially during hard times. Long may it continue.

What advice might you have for younger people looking to pursue a career in music?

I would advise doing a business course alongside your music course in college or outside college. Social media courses are so important now also to get the most from your platforms. A good manager and business mentor in your corner is hugely beneficial. All this of course is on top of being the best you can be musically, which means a lot of practice, playing, and listening to people who are the best and to keep your mind open. Work hard, play hard, listen hard and above all, love your music!

www.maireadnesbittviolin.com

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Innerborough Feb. 1 1784

The Journeyman in Southlands of Inverpaffray borrowed out of the
Library of Inverpaffray Garrett Edmond Stuart Librarian
in Scotland promise to return safe six weeks after the said date
3 Feb. 1794

B. Feb. 17th 64
J. H. Peay received in hand of Nathl Gell borrowed all of the
^{above} Library Charleston Phil. Socy & has
promised to return it. Exacted of North Ab. da
James B.

Feb: 26 1784

g Taylor in the fears of Emess borrowed out of the library of the
Fishes of the Gallatin which I promise to return safe & well after the above date
March 3rd December 1866

Decem^r 13th 1783

John Tinden on board of Annapassay borrowed out of the Library of the University of
Durham on the 1st of January 1782 which promises return on the 1st of March 1782
27 March 1782
John Tinden

Decem^r. 16 1789

~~David Morison Farmer in Cellum of Chatham moved out of the
inner office Purchased a house which I promise to sell
in this state~~

Sept. 17 1783

Davis Morris

John Fox, vicar in parochial of Innerpallway borrowed out of the
Innerpallway, England. He made a receipt for same
date as which, after the above date John Fox

Innere Pfaffray 1784 Jani.

~~9. MacNorton in Collation of Brathgath Parish of Muthill Commis
in Library of James Jeffrey University of the Christian
which promise to turn safe~~

Feb. 7 11th 1784

~~F - mason in Cobol house of chimney & gaffray borrowed out of the library
James gaffray & his wife Sarah happened which I promise to return in
off of the house~~

[illegible]

I had Gallagher borrowed out of William Lloyd
the Library of Anna C. Gallagher, Robertson's sister
Charles V. which I promise to return on the
of the date.

June 22^d 1841
 Mr. Copley borrowed out of the library of James Marshall
 Harlan Shoultz and told which I promised to return in
 six weeks after Sept. 1841
 James Marshall

*Our award-winning photojournalist
Tom Langlands hits the books!*



Innerpeffray Library

1680 marked the start of a decade known in Scotland as The Killing Time. In that same year David Drummond, 3rd Lord Madertie - whose ancestral home was at Innerpeffray in the beautiful countryside of Perthshire, Scotland - made his entire library of some four hundred volumes available for the public to borrow without charge. That simple action saw the creation of the country's first free public lending library.

Drummond fought on the side of the Royalists through some of the bloodiest civil wars the country had experienced and was no stranger to the use of weaponry. The desire to make his books available, spread knowledge, and demonstrate "the power of the pen" during such turbulent times provides a valuable insight into his character, and speaks to the ages-old adage that "the pen is mightier than the sword" (Edward Bulward-Lytton).

Today we take the existence of libraries

for granted. Despite the advent of the internet and e-readers, there is still something wondrous and tangible about holding the words of another voice printed on paper. There is the feel of the cover (with perhaps a tantalizing image), possibly a leather-bound volume with embossed, gold lettering, the thickness of the paper, the style and type of the lettering used by the printer, and, in the case of older works, there is both the metaphorical and literal smell of history. Those reasons, coupled with either a search for knowledge or entertainment, have ensured that libraries can still be found in many cities and towns across the world. Even small villages often have their own library or a visiting library on wheels. When I located Drummond's legacy to the people, however, Innerpeffray Library was neither in a city, nor a town, nor a village; it was atop a gentle hill overlooking an ancient ford on the River Earn in a wooded part of an otherwise agricultural landscape once dominated by a Roman fort and road. The nearest town, Crieff, lies four miles away.

Following the Battle of Bannockburn between the Scots and the English in 1314, King Robert the Bruce granted lands in Perthshire to Sir Malcolm de Drummond as reward for his support at the battle. One branch of the Drummond family established its seat at Innerpeffray Castle by the hamlet of Innerpeffray in Strathearn. By the early 16th



Keeper of Books - Lara Heggarty



*In addition to the library
there is evidence that
a school formed part of the
original arrangement
of chapel and library provision
and was part of the
Drummonds' legacy for the
education of future generations.*

century, the family erected Innerpeffray Chapel nearby as a private, chantry chapel, subsequently establishing it as a collegiate chapel by the mid-16th century - a popular move with the wealthy at that time. Its use as a place of Catholic worship was, however, short-lived - being ended by the Protestant Reformation of 1560. On account of its use, principally as the Drummond family mausoleum, it escaped the worst, destructive ravages of the upheaval in the church. It was from the loft of this chapel, a century later, that David Drummond made his impressive collection of books available to the public to borrow freely.

*Originally comprised
of about 450 volumes on
such diverse subjects as religion,
witchcraft, gardening,
and history, the library
continued to acquire books,
eventually expanding its
collection to include treatises
on medicine, travel, philosophy,
and the natural world.*

Although many of the works were in English or Latin, other languages were also represented. Drummond left instructions in his will that following his death he wished the library to continue to exist for future generations. He bequeathed significant funds for the purpose and following his passing in 1692, his successors, in compliance with his wishes, established a Trust Fund under the somewhat macabre title of the Innerpeffray Mortification. The Trust exists to this day.

In 1739, ownership of the estate and its library fell to Robert Hay Drummond who, in 1764, became Archbishop of York. Under his guardianship the library continued to grow. This was the age of the Scottish Enlightenment, and Innerpeffray Library - and its col-

lection - played no small part in furthering the spread of knowledge. The original arrangement of housing the books in the loft of the old chapel was neither conducive to encouraging borrowing by the more learned gentleman nor was it the best arrangement for storing important volumes that had been acquired over the course of a hundred years. Hay Drummond commissioned a purpose-designed library that opened its doors in 1762 and remains the Georgian-style building sitting alongside the old chapel that can still be seen today. At the same time, he expanded the collection significantly. The upper floor of the library was designed as a bright, reading room with an open fireplace that once warmed the patrons as they perused oversized, leather-bound volumes from the comfort of large, padded chairs or seated at wooden tables. Now, glass cabinets display some of the rarer books in the room. There is also a small anteroom housing further books in a more intimate setting with a window directly overlooking the river through the trees.

The Innerpeffray Library collection boasts many valuable and irreplaceable items - including a 1633 pocket bible in French carried into battle by the 1st Marquis of Montrose (and bearing his signature), Henry VIII's Great Bible (1539), Poisson by Pierre Belon (1555), and John Knox's *Historie of the Reformation* (1644). The collection received a major boost in 2013 when a New York bibliophile with Scottish ancestry - who had visited the library twenty years previous - donated a substantial quantity of rare Scottish volumes. Mrs Janet Burns Saint Germain's gift included an incunabula edition of the works of John Duns Scotus (1476), numerous first editions such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1882) and Samuel Johnson's *Journey to the Western Isles* (1775), as well as works by Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott and first editions of some of the great thinkers from the Scottish Enlightenment period.

The most recent Innerpeffray School classroom sits a short walk from the chapel and was constructed in 1847. It closed to pupils in 1947 and today it is used for events - often related to books and reading - and private functions.

The library is managed by Lara Haggerty the current Keeper of Books. It is a role she has undertaken since 2009. Originally from Wales, but having lived in Scotland for over 35 years, Haggerty studied English Literature and Theatre at Glasgow University and worked previously with heritage and museum organizations, including the National Museum of Scotland. With great care she removed the Borrowers' Register from inside a glass case and laid it open carefully on a cushion. "This," she exclaimed enthusiastically, "is one of the oldest, continuous Borrowers' registers in Europe. It records every person who has borrowed a book from the Innerpeffray Library between 1747 and 1968." As it lay open at the pages that recorded loans between October, 1783 and June, 1784, I observed that the most borrowed books related to the Christian faith but also included such others as a *History of Charles V* and Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion* - a 16th century work looking back at the civil wars that had wreaked such havoc across the country in the preceding century. The handwritten notes of the loans offered a fascinating insight into what occupied the minds of those using the library over two hundred years ago.

As a consequence of falling interest in borrowing rare, historic books - and also considering the value and importance of the collection - the library stopped lending books in 1968. It does, however, continue to operate as a reference library and has established itself as an important visitor destination for anyone who loves history, books, or buildings with fascinating stories.

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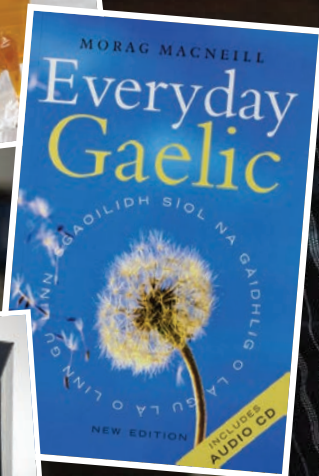
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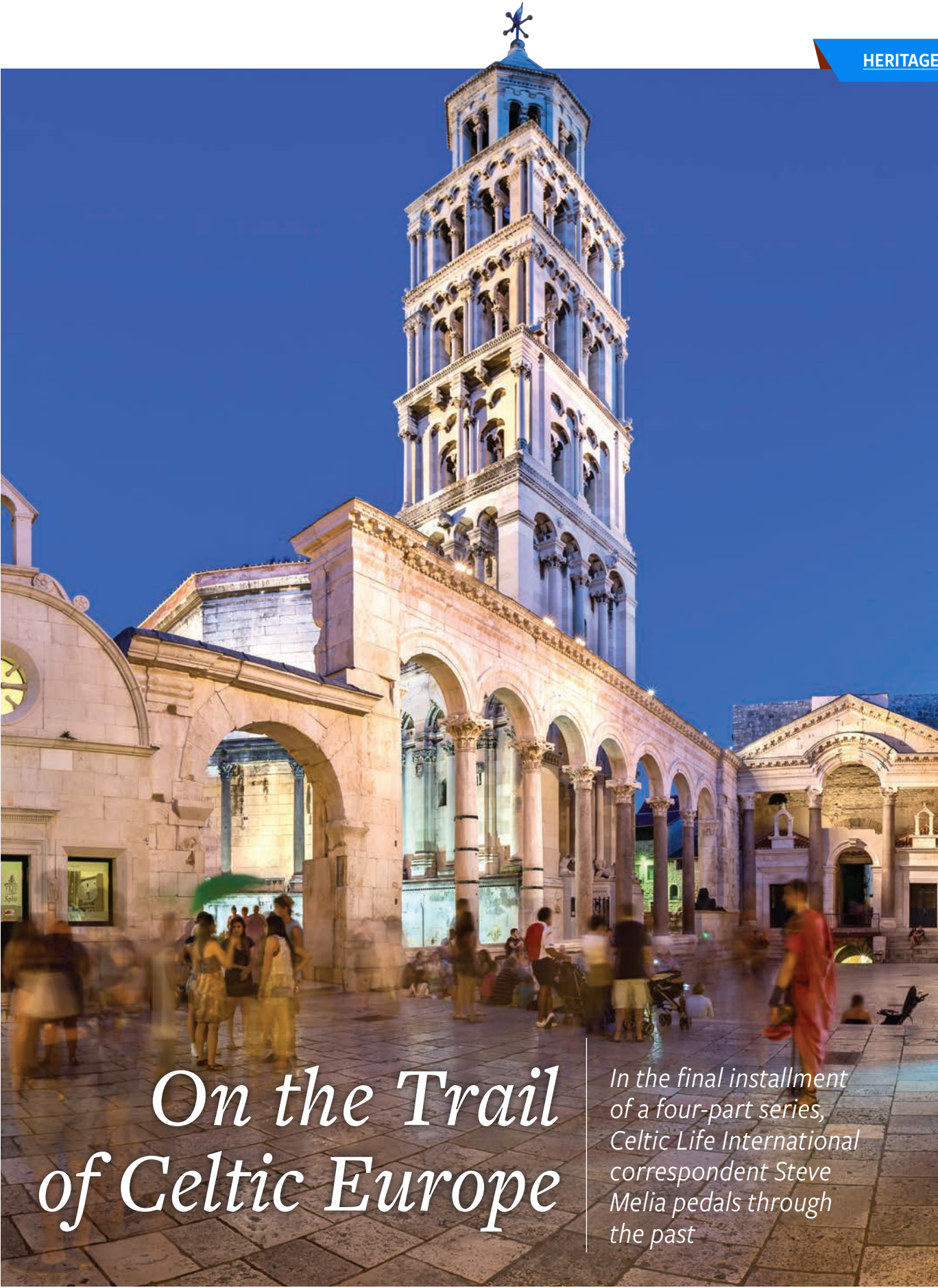


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On the Trail of Celtic Europe

*In the final installment
of a four-part series,
Celtic Life International
correspondent Steve
Melia pedals through
the past*

This is the fourth and final article about my cycle journey across Europe, visiting sites associated with the Celts of the Iron Age. The last article described Hallstatt and the Natural History Museum in Vienna. This one will cover my journey to the Croatian coast, and will try to answer the question I set out with: can the Celtic peoples really trace their ancestry and their culture back to Iron Age Europe, or is that a modern myth?

Amongst the many sources I read on my travels, two books were troubling me: *The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention?* by Simon James, and *Les Celtes: Histoire d'un Mythe* by Jean-Louis Brunaux. They are both “Celtosceptics,” but Brunaux goes furthest in attacking the whole idea of a Celtic people or even Celtic languages. James points out that no ancient writers ever described the people of Britain or Ireland as Celts. Brunaux describes the constant mixing and renaming of peoples in the ancient histories of Europe and says that there is no evidence that the languages we call Celtic “originated” in any one place. They might have developed gradually in different places. If they seem similar, that is because they were influenced by contact with their neighbours. This last leg of my trip would illustrate some of their arguments, but also a weakness in that last one.

From Vienna, I turned south towards the border with Slovenia, and along the River Mura to Croatia. The northern regions of Slovenia and Croatia have little of the affluence I saw in Germany and Austria. There were a few cycle routes, but their quality was poor by comparison. I found myself riding on busier roads and poorly surfaced farm tracks. However, food, drink, and accommodation were less expensive.

Much of my ride from France had been relatively flat. In Croatia, I would do a lot more climbing, often rewarded by long views over hills or mountains covered in forests. In the 3rd century BC these hills and mountains were invaded by Celts, according to several Greek and Roman writers.

Most modern historians believe their original homelands lay in Gaul (modern France), from where they moved south into Italy and southeast through the Balkans to Greece and Turkey, propelled by population growth and a need for more land. Some of them settled in the Balkan lands, mixing with the existing Illyrian population and “profoundly changing” their culture according to Jason Abdale, who tells a cracking story of what happened next.

Over the following centuries, the Romans conquered the Western Balkans,



starting along the Adriatic coast and gradually moving inland. In 6 AD, the Celtic-influenced Illyrians revolted, bravely resisting for three years until the siege of Solana, which lay later on my journey. The victorious Romans left few traces of the earlier settlements, so the sites I would visit in Croatia were mainly Roman.

Heading south towards the coast I was amused to see the village sign for Fučkovac. I shared a photograph with Facebook friends and then discovered a possible Celtic connection. According to a nineteenth century Austrian ethnographer Josef Stradner, the Fučki people were a fusion of incoming Celts with a local tribe, originally called the Secus-sen.

“They wear pants that remain open at the knees,” he wrote, unaware that this might return to fashion centuries later.

As I explained in my second article, I was running a month later than originally planned, and the temperatures were rising. As a heatwave swept across Europe, I began getting up and starting earlier, but by 10am I was already soaking in sweat and looking for somewhere to cool off. I asked my host in a house with no air conditioning: was this heat normal? He shook his head, replying in broken German. The climate, he said, was “kaput.”

My wife had arranged to meet me for a holiday in the port of Pula, where we visited the magnificent amphitheatre and the Temple of Augustus, which houses a small but impressive display of Roman artefacts. I was struck by a fragment of a statue: beside the huge leg of an emperor kneels the shrunken

figure of a slave with hands tied behind his back. He is wearing trousers, a sign of Celticity, and a torque, the open-ended gold necklace worn by Celtic leaders. His head is missing, but the scene is no less moving for that.

To avoid retracing my route, I took a ferry to Zadar, further down the coast. It is a beautiful city but crammed with tourists in July. I spent as long as I could in the air-conditioned archaeological museum, which has a big Iron Age section. Many of the artefacts were marked as “La Tène” culture, recalling my visit there in my second article. Some bronze axe heads were marked simply “Celts.” It was interesting to find Celtic influences this far south, so I decided to ask the experts for some explanation.

Danijel Džino, a Croatian archaeologist at Macquarie University in Australia, told me that “evidence for Celtic settlement in what is today Croatia is very slim.” There is evidence of influence, but mainly in the north of the country. Natalija Čondić, an advisor at the museum, said the ‘La Tène’ artefacts were probably made in that style by the local Liburnians, illustrating one of the points made by James and Brunaux.





Steve and Sara Melia

Just as eating pizzas and drinking espressos doesn't make you Italian, the styles of ancient artefacts cannot tell us the ethnicity of the people who made or used them.

As I waited for those replies I carried on riding through the heat. I was following the Eurovelo 8 cycle route, but much of it was on the main coast road, with its tourist traffic and heavy lorries. I was no longer enjoying the experience. I had wanted to finish in Greece, but a friend there told me it had reached 43°C, which made up my mind. I would go there at another time of year. For now, I would take the ferries and trains from Split back to England, where I had read about an important Celtic site not far off my route home.

Before I left Croatia, there were two more places I wanted to visit. The remains of Solana, the provincial capital where the Romans finally crushed the Illyrian Revolt, are hugely impressive, once you find your way through the allotments or the hotel car park which conceal its entrances. Next to the ferry port, the historic centre of Split is a unique example of a "living museum" - it is built in and around the Temple of Diocletian, the Roman emperor who persecuted the early Christians and martyred many of the early saints.

I boarded the overnight ferry to Ancona in Italy that evening. During the late Iron Age, that area was settled by a Celtic tribe, the Senones. They migrated from Gaul in the 4th century BC, leaving the rest of their kindred in the area southwest of Paris. As the Romans also conquered them, they have left few visible remains, but Ancona's archaeological museum has a major section about them. The only problem was, it was closed on Mondays, which is when I arrived. I found it on the side of a hill opposite a Roman mosaic. The back door was open, so I decided to try my luck. The caretaker spoke no English, so I typed a request into Google Translate. Was there any chance of a quick look at the Senones collection? She called another woman, who spoke some English and sounded hopeful. She went to see the director and came back with a bunch of keys, which got me excited, but she shook her head. In any

case, she said, much of that collection was on loan in China. If I emailed the director, he would send me some photographs (they never did). Oh well, it was worth a try.

While I was away, England had suffered a record-breaking heatwave but when I arrived in Poole there were fluffy clouds and temperatures in the mid-twenties. A gentle tailwind carried me west towards the county town of Dorchester. This was heaven.

Two kilometres southwest of Dorchester, the Iron Age hillfort of Maiden Castle appears on a long flat hilltop. The road finishes in a car park with a track climbing the last few hundred metres to the top. It is the largest British hillfort, though not as big as continental sites such as Gergovie in my first article. Like Gergovie it was more than a military structure - as conflict grew in Iron Age society much of the surrounding population moved inside it.

By the late Iron Age, it was occupied by the Durotriges, one of several Celtic peoples who settled in western Britain. In the 1930s a pioneering archaeologist, Mortimer Wheeler, astounded the nation with his findings of a bloody battle during the Roman invasion of 43 AD. They left a "war cemetery" at the eastern end of the site with the shocking remains of a skeleton pierced by a Roman arrowhead in the spine.

As in Gergovie, I walked around the earth ramparts and tried to imagine what it might have been like for defenders surrounded by a bigger, better-equipped army below. Only this time, the story has a different ending.

In the Dorset Museum, I met Kat Broomfield, Collections Manager and Barry Fitzgerald, a volunteer and former police officer whose job used to involve identifying human remains. They showed me their Iron Age collection, including the famous skeleton with the Roman arrowhead - or was it?

Barry explained: "Mortimer Wheeler was a great self-publicist. He wasn't beyond stretching the facts to tantalize the audience. His wife was more competent, archaeologically, but she died before their findings were published. From radiocarbon dating, we now know, the site was almost abandoned by the time the Romans arrived."

Despite growing counterevidence, the myth of the Roman siege of Maiden Castle persisted until a team from Bournemouth University fully debunked it in 2019. Barry told me they have some more "explosive findings" on the way. I asked Durotriges Project Co-director Paul Cheetham if he could tell me more, but he was staying tight-lipped on that for the moment. He agreed that the Durotriges were a Celtic people but added that "the overarching term Celtic is



extremely problematic when you try to tie it down in any practical sense."

For archaeologists, that conclusion is understandable. Archaeological finds cannot tell us what language people spoke unless they leave writings, which the early Celts did not. We now know that La Tène culture, with its swirling patterns and strange animals, spread widely amongst Celtic-speakers - and many others. The idea of an enduring Celtic culture, starting in Iron Age Europe and continuing to modern Ireland and Scotland is, unfortunately, a myth.

So, the only workable definition we are left with is linguistic - a Celt is someone who speaks, or whose recent ancestors spoke, a Celtic language.

There is no straightforward link between the Celts of today and the people called Keltoi in ancient times, but Brunaux goes too far in denying any ancestral links. Languages may spread organically on a continent but there is only one way that Celtic languages could possibly have reached Britain and Ireland: because the people who spoke them, or earlier versions, moved here. And we know that people did move in large numbers earlier than previously thought. The latest DNA evidence suggests large-scale migration from France to England in the late Bronze Age, and from Spain to Ireland even earlier. Those migrants probably brought the two branches of the Celtic languages, but we cannot be sure, not yet.

The Celtosceptics are right to warn against the delusion of ethnically pure ancestors. There is no purity in the story of the Celts. Instead, there has been migration and mixing, conquests, and resistance - and for those who search, a few tantalizing facts surrounded by uncertainty. That is what makes it so fascinating. For as long as that uncertainty remains, the search will continue.

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In Search of Darien: Part Two

In the second and final installment of a two-part series, Lesley Choyce has Georgia on his mind

As noted previously, my wife Linda and I were visiting Darien, Georgia to explore a bit of history regarding the settlement of this part of the state by Scottish Highlanders in the 18th century. The town was named in honour of the poorly conceived and tragically executed Darien Scheme, the brainchild of William Paterson of Dumfriesshire who proposed creating a trade route across the relatively narrow bit of land connecting the Atlantic to the Pacific in modern-day Panama. Unfortunately for Mr. Paterson, many of the initial British and Dutch investors pulled out early on, making the whole messy tropical business a financial boondoggle. But what was worse, of course, was that hundreds of optimistic naïve colonists died in this so-called “Scottish colony.” According to Historic UK, “It has been argued that the Darien Scheme crippled the country’s economy to such an extent that it triggered the dissolution of the Scottish Parliament and led to the 1707 Act of Union with England.” I made a mental note to never bring up the subject of Darien the next time I sit down for a pint of Innis and Gunn at an Edinburgh pub.

Before the Scots arrived in New Inverness/Darien, the British had already been having a rough time keeping their claim to coastal Georgia. Fort King George itself came into being to assert British claim to a large section of Georgia coastline and to fend off the equally land-greedy Spanish who were well established in St. Augustine, Florida, and other outposts to the south. According to the official park literature, “In 1721, Colonel John Barnwell brought a group of scouts,

skilled laborers, and enslaved people to this site to build Fort King George.” And, as previously noted, things did not go well.

Linda and I hastened our own retreat from Fort King George to downtown Darien but made a wrong turn and ended up at a McDonalds (not sure of local clan connections, if any) at the intersection with I95. We were in search of coffee and a McMuffin, as well as wash-room facilities, but only the drive-through was open due to COVID-19 and the unavailability of hired staff. A woman traveller, desperate for a washroom herself, banged at the glass door and I, taking pity on a fellow traveller, coached her to try the Waffle House on the other side of the Interstate. While sitting in the parking lot, I also noted what appeared to be a homeless man standing in line in the McDonalds drive-through line-up. This struck me as yet another oddity of pandemic life in America. Many fast-food establishments had closed their indoor eating areas and now only provided drive up windows, so what’s a pedestrian to do but stand flatfoot in the line-up of SUVs, minivans, and Ford F150s for a coffee? Now, I said he was a homeless man, but I really don’t know if that was the case. My wife tells me that around the house I often dress as a homeless man, so it could be he was fully employed but just liked to wear old flannel shirts missing buttons and ripped jeans like yours truly.

Once that excitement was over, we drove to downtown Darien and, on the way, discovered - purely by accident - a tourist bureau in what appeared to be a mostly abandoned shopping centre. A charm-



ing older woman greeted us like long lost cousins, and it was clear she hadn't seen many tourists in a while because she was more than happy to give me a free road map which had been unavailable in the previous twelve tourist bureaus which we had visited. She explained to me the important local Scottish connection - the proper founding of New Inverness/Darien - which had taken place on the banks of the Altamaha. Then she directed us on to a location right in the current downtown where we would find the Highlander Monument. We immediately went in search of the historical marker, only to discover that it had either been moved or taken down for some kind of repairs.

And, although Darien was almost completely flat and there were no "peaks of Darien" as in the Keats poem, at least we had found our way back to the fish and shrimp laden Altamaha River and the very spot where the Scottish immigrants had first arrived by way of Savannah on the good ship Prince of Wales under her captain George Dunbar. The date of this landmark event was January 10, 1736, and there was more than a little pleasant surprise for the 177 men, women, and children to discover the warm and sunny days of southern coastal Georgia to be in sharp contrast to the cold, damp winter weather of their former homes.

Anthony Parker points out that, "Under Hugh Mackay's direction, the Highlanders immediately set to work to secure the site." The outpost had been the pet project of none other than Governor James Oglethorpe, who was still trying to secure British control over as much territory in Georgia as he could. Oglethorpe was suitably im-



Fort King George

pressed by the industrious settlers, and he wrote that, upon his own arrival for inspection, he was greeted by men in a "most manly appearance with their Plaids, broadswords, targets, and firearms."

As it turned out, the farming was not without its setbacks, but the harvesting of tall trees and production of lumber made for good commerce. There were, alas, skirmishes and battles with the ever-troublesome Spanish from the south, not the least of which led to the so-called War of Jenkins Ear. This altercation was so named because a British smuggler, Robert Jenkins, was arrested by the Spanish (for being a smuggler presumably) and they cut off his ear as a warning. Jenkins kept the ear preserved somehow and displayed it to the British parliament. Outraged by the indignity, Britain declared war (again) on Spain and, as a result, the Darien Highlanders were much caught up in this and other conflicts with their long-time adversary until territorial rights among other things were eventually sorted out or forgotten.

According to n-georgia.com, "In 1739 eighteen of the most prominent members of the Darien colony signed the first petition against the introduction of slavery into Georgia. The Highlanders' petition was successful, and slavery was not introduced until ten years later in 1749." Although the document appears partly to be based on ethical grounds, it may have also been somewhat self-serving for economic reasons. Nonetheless, it remains one of the first anti-slavery documents from the southern colonies.

To be fair, the document included the following enlightened declaration: "It is shocking to human Nature, that any Race of Mankind and their Posterity should be sentenced to perpetual Slavery; nor in



Linda and Lesley Choyce



Justice can we think otherwise of it, that they are thrown amongst us to be our Scourge one Day or other for our Sins: And as Freedom must be as dear to them as it is to us, what a Scene of Horror must it bring about! And the longer it is unexecuted, the bloody Scene must be the greater."

But to avoid thinking these were truly enlightened community leaders, the nineteen prominent Darien signers also argued that they could not likely afford keeping slaves and that it was likely the slaves would try to run off and side with the Spanish. So, it wasn't all sweetness and light. Even these notions must have changed by 1749 as the institution of slavery continued to spread throughout the Georgia colony and throughout the South.

Descendants of the original Mackintosh clan were among the many soldiers who would eventually fight in the War Between the States that went as badly in the end for Darien as it did for Atlanta and other Georgia towns. In June of 1863, Union troops looted and burned the town even though it posed no military threat. A small impromptu defense brigade of 23 older men attempted to defend Darien but were easily defeated and captured.

According to ExploreSouthernHistory.com, "The burning of historic Darien, Georgia was one of the most controversial acts of the War Between the States."

Colonel Robert Gould Shaw was just another soldier following orders when he was directed to destroy the town, but he later regretted following his superior's orders to vandalize, loot and destroy the non-military town saying, "This makes me very much ashamed of myself," and referring to it as a "dirty business."

That seemed to be the last of the big calamities for little Darien and today the town strikes a visitor as a fairly comfortable community where one might travel to for a delicious shrimp dinner, a boat trip down the Altamaha River and some much-touted "tranquility" in the vast local marshes. And it is perhaps appropriate that modern New Inverness has its very own sea monster - a 30-foot-long creature known as Altamaha-ha or Alty, reported to have been seen "on a regular basis" since the 1920s. I considered paddling around the river on my surfboard to see if I could rouse the beast from his sleep as I recalled once swimming out into the middle of Loch Ness many years ago as a brazen and brash young man just to see if I might get a glimpse of the legendary monster. But I had my fill of adventure for one day and my wife reminded me that my life insurance had lapsed. Thus, yet again, discretion proved to be the better part of valour.

If anyone still doubts that Scottish traditions are not alive and well in this neck of the woods, then they should drop by the Darien Hogmanay celebration, "a Scottish-themed New Year's event at Fort King George Historic Site, with bonfire, refreshments, and cannon firing." Or better yet, drop down for the Scottish Heritage days in March, also at the fort, where you will find men in uniforms, music, and plenty more musket and cannon firing.

As a final note, I must say that back during our most meditative meanderings around the old fort, I had a chance to study replicas of those old muskets. Even though I have been a die-hard pacifist most of my life, I kept thinking that maybe if the only firepower available to the average citizen of any country today was an old fashioned musket, then the effort it would take to load, cock, and fire such a device would likely give a person more than a little time to have second thoughts about whether he really wanted to do a fellow human serious damage with a gun. And then, as one's anger began to quell, all one needed to do perhaps was open a book of poetry, possibly an old, dog-eared English anthology, and like the Keatsian fictional poetic version of old Cortez, stare off into an imagined ocean, "silent, upon a peak in Darien."

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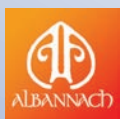
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Kate Davies

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I grew up in Lancashire, U.K, in an Irish Catholic community. I have always loved the hills, and as a student I spent my spare time walking in the Lake District, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. I felt a special affinity with Scotland, so I moved north of the border as soon as that became possible. Today, I live with my husband Tom and our three messy Labradors in a lovely spot near Loch Lomond.

I have always been interested in personal style, and the making of clothes as a powerful means of self-expression, rather than in fashion per se. I grew up in a small community where all the women sewed and knitted, and my grandma taught me to knit when I was a small child. Later, as a teenager, I loved making and adapting what I wore from outfits gleaned from jumble sales and thrift stores. It always seemed more interesting to me to create a look from scratch, and, if I

had made part of an outfit myself, I enjoyed the fact that I was wearing something truly unique.

My work began with - and has always remained connected to - Scotland's landscape and textile traditions, but I started out creating garments that I - a woman of fairly small proportions - wanted to wear. Within a couple of years, I began to consciously adapt my designs to suit a much wider range of bodies. It is important to me that women of all shapes and sizes feel comfortable and look great in the pieces that I design. I also believe that, as I approach 50, it is crucial that everyone gets to see examples of stylish older women enjoying what they wear.

I regard what I do as giving women (and knitters are mostly women) the tools to express their creativity and clothe themselves and their loved ones practically and stylishly through the work of their own hands. I love

all the different kinds of knowledge - both intellectual and embodied - that are involved in developing a hand-knitted garment. There are just so many nifty tricks, and so many beautiful ways of making fabric. I have found that I never stop learning, and that there is always something new to discover about my craft. And it is a craft that is definitively Scottish - in a place that regularly sees four seasons in one day, you are always going to need a good hat, and a decent, windproof gansey! I love that wool and knitting are things so deeply embedded in, and connected to, my landscape and its human story - and this story is something that I am continually exploring through my work.

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Celtic Christmas **Concerts**

*As Chris Muise explains, the sounds of the
Holiday Season connect the Celtic community*

Christmas With The Celts



As the end of the calendar year approaches and the nights start getting longer, we all have our own personal milestones for when autumn officially crosses over into 'the holiday season.' For some, it is immediately after other holidays conclude, like Halloween or Thanksgiving. For others, it might be as soon as a certain holiday special re-airs on television, or when shopping malls start to pump Christmas jingles into the aisles to grease the wheels of consumer spending, or when family gathers to put up decorations during a quiet night at home.

For Oisín Mac Diarmada, that delineation is very clear; it's when he starts talking to press about his upcoming tour of the seasonal show that he produces every year.

"You've got me thinking on it," shares Mac Diarmada enthusiastically from his home office in Sligo, Ireland. "I look forward to doing this tour - it brings light to a dark time of the year for myself, as well."

Mac Diarmada has spent about half of his life in Sligo, but he has called several communities across the Emerald Isle his home since childhood. Many of them were fertile grounds for fostering his life-long love of traditional Irish music.

"I came early to the genre," he says, noting that a childhood spent in Crusheen in Co. Clare is where his musical journey began

to bloom. "Clare was then, and still is, a wonderful place to hear traditional Irish music - they have such a great history of musicians from the area.

"Where I grew up, traditional music wasn't played by everybody by any means, but there were lots of people playing it, and it was very visible and integrated into daily life there."

Mac Diarmada has spent the last 21 years making traditional Irish music his career, as part of the band he formed, Téada ("strings" in Irish Gaelic). However, in 2005 he undertook a project that brings him and several other traditional Irish musicians to the United States each holiday season, Irish Christmas in America.

"The idea was to bring some sort of show that had a theme behind it. Sometimes the tunes we play have a story, but a lot of the time they don't. I thought it would be nice to develop a different kind of a project in which there would be more of a theme and narrative involved.

"We have this historic tradition here in Ireland that goes back many hundreds of years. When you talk about songs, songs always are telling a story, but tunes are not. And that can be a good thing, too, they can reach people, they are not necessarily having a message. Sometimes messages can

unite people, and sometimes they can divide people.

"Music lives in a different space. But music always has a role, and that is why this music has lasted. Sometimes, it can be social. Sometimes, it is to mourn. Sometimes, it is simply to celebrate."

Along with sharing the beauty of traditional Irish music with an American audience, Mac Diarmada's intent with Irish Christmas in America is also to share Irish holiday traditions.

"Attendees are interested to hear people from another country talk about Christmas," says Mac Diarmada, who explains that he also includes more contemporary numbers in the show either to highlight the similarities they might have with Irish carols, or even where they might have some cross-pollination. "Take something like Silent Night. In Ireland we call it - and we sing this in the show most years - Oíche Chiúin, which is like 'a quiet night.' The same melody, the same feeling, the same sort of sentiment, but in a different language.

"The Irish Christmas season is quite



extensive,” he adds. “If you take Christmas Day in Ireland, and the following day after - which is generally known as St. Stephens’ Day - Christmas Day is that insular day, generally spent at home with family. The following day is the biggest, busiest day in the pubs of the whole year, because everybody breaks out, and now it becomes a community thing. It is a busy social season. Anybody that is involved in entertainment kind of runs with that theme.”

That sense of community jubilation is what drew Ric Blair to Celtic music. Despite having Irish and Scottish heritage on both sides of his family, Blair’s musical interests were aimed in different directions until a friend urged him to take in an Irish band at a pub one night.

“Immediately, both sides of my ancestors began speaking to me; it was just immediately in my blood,” Blair tells Celtic Life International by phone from his home in Nashville, TN. “I grew up listening to what all Americans listened to - the Beatles, and rock and roll. But I ended up studying jazz and classical music. That night at the pub was just one of those moments in your life where you see your future change. People were literally dancing on top of the tables when we walked in. There wasn’t a care of any of the world’s problems at that moment.”

Blair tours a Celtic Christmas concert across the US, called Christmas With The Celts, where he sings, plays the guitar, piano, and bodhrán, and also produces. It started as a fundraising show for PBS, and unlike other shows of its ilk, which - according to Blair - tend to have a short lifespan, his show is going strong.

“We started seeing immediate effects. It was resonating with people, and it started growing and growing. A lot of times, the PBS shows - the concerts - will last maybe two years, and it’s run its life. We are now going into our 12th.”

In fact, the show is now at the stage where it needs two different teams on tour at the same time to meet demand.

Like Irish Christmas In America, Christmas With The Celts features a mix of ancient Celtic tunes and more modern favourites. However, Blair’s approach is to bring new musical techniques to old favourites.

“We will combine Christmas carols that everyone knows with Irish songs that people don’t know. We mix traditional, ancient Irish and Scottish Christmas music - it goes way back to the 1400s - but we combine it with drum loops and modern synth, and ancient instruments, including the uilleann pipes, the bodhrán, and the fiddle. One of my favourites is Balulalow - it is an incred-

ibly haunting old Scottish song, a mixture of Gaelic and English, and it tells the story of the angel Gabriel coming to Mother Mary.”

Blair says that Christmas concerts like his and Mac Diarmada’s aren’t just solemn affairs, like you might imagine of a holiday church choir. Much like the pubs on St. Stephen’s Day, part of the experience is the levity.

“If you have ever been to an Irish pub, you know that humour is a big part of the experience,” notes Blair. “Often, the band members are spontaneously cracking jokes and communicating with the audience. So, every night is a little different - you never know what is going to happen.”

“To be honest, our show is quite light-hearted,” echoes Mac Diarmada. “We try to have a good time on stage, that’s definitely our aim every night, for ourselves and for the audience.”

The same is true for world-famous Canadian fiddler Natalie MacMaster, who has, alongside her husband Donnell Leahy, made her annual holiday tour a family affair.

“I have done Christmas concerts myself, maybe 20 to 30 years ago,” shares the Cape Breton, Nova Scotia native who now resides in Ontario. “But the Celtic Family Christmas includes myself, my husband, and our children.”



Natalie MacMaster
and Donnell Leahy

MacMaster and Leahy have seven children, ranging from 4 to 16 years of age. As they all hail from a lineage of great Canadian folk artists, it should be no surprise that they are all part of the show, too.

“Our daughter Sadie, she’s eight, she has Down syndrome, and I swear, she is the centerpiece of it all. She is an absolute bright light when she gets on stage because she just enjoys it so much. And she is learning to play the fiddle - she can play Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.”

Even her youngest, Marie, became part of the tour last year. Marie happened to join her mother for part of our interview, and we asked her if she was excited to do it all again this Christmas.

“Nope,” Marie proclaimed. However, after a short silence and a big laugh from her mom, MacMaster informed us, “She just whispered in my ear, ‘I am!’”

MacMaster has been touring with the Celtic Family Christmas show since her oldest

was Sadie’s age, and there were only three kids to share the stage with. She says that the kids genuinely love the experience, but more for the touring and getting to perform at exciting new venues, and less the in-between drudgery of sound-checks and set up. But when a new member of the family sees the magic of the tour for the first time, the rest see it all again through new eyes.

For MacMaster, the biggest joy of the Celtic Family Christmas tour is getting to be with her family during the holidays - which, for a touring musician, can be harder than you might think.

“We can’t be together if we are not playing music together,” she explains. “Imagine if Donnell and I left four months of the year, raising kids. It just can’t happen. It is not my belief system, at all. The kids are musical, so it was as obvious as the nose on my face that they should come with us.”

For a lot of folks, like MacMaster and her family, the Christmas season is about time together with our loved ones, which many of us

have the privilege to do indoors, at home, next to a cozy fire on a quiet night in.

What, then, brings out crowds and crowds of people to shows like Blair’s, or Mac Diarmada’s, or MacMaster’s?

Blair answers this question with a detail about the end of each performance.

“One of the songs towards the end of the show, is John Lennon’s ‘So This is Christmas.’ The promoters bring in a local children’s choir, they come in at the end and sing that. What that also does is that brings the community in. It brings the parents in, and this becomes their show.

“Along with the Irish dancers, and the music, and the children’s choir, it is everybody, together - young and old. You can see others’ expressions and faces and sing together. It is a spiritual connection.”

“Christmas is like a ray of light - there is a warmth to it that helps people through those cold, dark winter nights,” adds Mac Diarmada. “There is nothing better than lively music, the social music that Irish tradition is. It really fits with that sense of people coming together to spend time with each other and be entertained. It is the time of the year when people come with families. You could have anything from younger children there, all the way up to grandparents. The social thing is a huge part. The connection is a very big aspect of it. That is one of the things that people enjoy from going to a concert, is that sense of being a part of something that’s a little bit outside themselves and their own lives.”

MacMaster, whose daughter Maria was only a year old when COVID-19 hit, describes seeing her flourish in a public setting like the Celtic Family Christmas for the first time.

“She was in the house for two years. She didn’t get to go out and about, she didn’t socialize. And I can see the effects of that. She is far shyer than any of the other kids ever were. So going on tour for the first time last year was massive. All our other children relived the excitement with fresh eyes.

“We have to stay connected to our fellow humans,” continues MacMaster. “It is just too easy to replace screens for people. If I let myself, I could stay in all Christmas - or any time of year - and get into TV or movies and stuff, because let’s face it, it can be awesome. But the thing about it is, we become disconnected. So, you must keep that in check and in balance.”

Blair agrees about screens.

“Humanity has never had more ways to communicate, but we have never been more isolated, because of social media. That is something, I think, that has been missing from our culture, in the west, for a long, long time. There are sociological consequences to not having that support, that community.”

All agree that is why Celtic Christmas concerts like these and so many others appeal to audiences - especially now. It is bringing a larger communal element to the holiday season that has been slipping away from us more and more each year.

“In order to keep this world going round, we have to stay connected with each other,” says MacMaster. “Otherwise, I think the world would be way worse. I think eventually, it leads to death - of soul, of mind, of spirit, of humanity. That is an extreme scenario and is obviously not happening. But I do think that we have to massage our desire to be social and to get out and see real, tangible things. That is what nourishes us without us realizing it. What withers us is isolation and screens, that kind of thing. That is why going



Oisín Mac Diarmada

out - whether it be to a Christmas show or any show or just hearing people play music - can be difficult. It is much easier not to. To fuel it requires a team effort so that it breathes rather than withers.”

If your milestone for the start of the holidays is something more insular, like your favourite Christmas movie playing on television, or when you have your annual holiday gathering at Grandma’s house, by all means, keep enjoying those things that make the holiday special for you. But you might want to consider getting out and seeing a show near you this year, too. It is good for the soul - and hey, you might just find a new milestone to

start the season off with.

“You have the familiarity of Christmas, and there is something so beautiful about the things that we do every year,” says Mac Diarmada. “Things that we go back to, and memories we carry sometimes from childhood right throughout our lives. But you also have the joy of finding something new.

“We really hope that you can join us. I would be honoured if you would invite us into your family tradition. And it already is an honour, every year.”

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Holiday Music Guide

Chris Muise sets up the soundtrack to your season...

If this month's cover story has put you in the mood for Celtic Christmas music, I don't blame you. After researching different genres of Celtic Christmas music, I was likewise hungry to see what else there was to listen to besides the same

holiday playlist I have worn out since the early 2000s.

Here are a few albums I came across that, I think, have something extra to offer this Christmas.



Winter Lore

The Selkie Girls

Winter Lore, the brand-new Christmas album by The Selkie Girls is a good place to start. The Texas-based group kicks off the album with something familiar - I Saw Three Ships - although it is a bit pluckier than the version you are likely to hear at Midnight Mass. Then, things take a quick left turn into less-trod territory, busting out the traditional Irish piece, The Wexford Carol. Other tracks on the album, like Imeanueil and Taladh Chriosda, take well-worn hymns and inject Scottish-Gaelic into the lyrics. Overall, this is a great record to pop on for a cozy, almost-ethereal evening listen.



Irish Rovers

Songs of Christmas

Looking to enjoy festive classics through the lens of a good old-school kitchen party? This holiday collection by The Irish Rovers won't steer you wrong. Even the more reverent tracks, like Silent Night and Away in a Manger, are a little more chipper than most renditions, but the real fun comes in the bouncier, toe-tapping tunes. Christmas in Killarney, in particular, will get everyone in the mood for some festive cheer with friends and kin, and the cheeky fun of Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer and (my new personal favourite) Miss Fogarty's Christmas Cake will give all a good laugh.



Reilly

Kick Ass Celtic Christmas

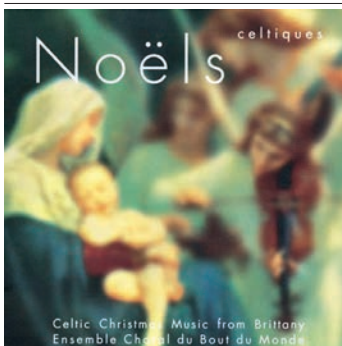
At some point this season, you will likely be full of wassail and feel a bit rowdy. Reilly's Kick Ass Celtic Christmas is a good album to rock all of that holiday revelry out of your system. A number of the tracks are typical Christmas fare, sifted through the rebellious sieve of the punk genre, but a few songs are original compositions, including the now-classic Dear Santa (I Can Explain) - a tune that attempts to justify all the singer's misdeeds over the year, and Father Christmas, a treatise for the poor kids of Christmas which asks Santa Claus to skip the toys and put some cold, hard cash under the tree. The holidays can be a stressful time, and Kick Ass Celtic Christmas is just aggressive enough to help work out those frustrated feelings, but not so aggressive as to ruin the holidays for the whole year, or forever.



Enya

And Winter Came...

It is hard to pigeonhole Irish singer Enya, even when she releases what is ostensibly a Christmas album. And she has released a few! Her new-age vibe is so exclusive and atmospheric that even renditions of classics like O Come All Ye Faithful won't likely elicit the exact sense of nostalgia you might be used to - there is something else there. But it is that uniqueness that makes Enya's And Winter Came...an album worth listening to. Her spectral vocal tones and captivating harmonies will have you hearing the familiar in fresh ways. Original pieces, including the album's title track, are no less transfixing, and listeners will be transported to an eerie winter realm.



Noëls Celtiques: Celtic Christmas Music from Brittany

L'Ensemble Choral du Bout du Monde

Brittany, the Celtic region of France, holds a strong cultural connection with Arthurian lore, and - as a result - the Celtic nation's music can often bely a certain fairytale sense, even a medieval mysticism. Performed entirely by L'Ensemble Choral du Bout du Monde ("World's End Choir"), this rich and robust recording showcases the cultural offerings of the French province through traditional compositions, alongside a new piece written by choir director Christian Desbordes (Nedeleg war ar mor - "Christmas at sea"). If you can get your hands on this one, it is certainly worth a listen.

Loreena McKennitt

A Midwinter Night's Dream

Picture this; a quiet lodge in the countryside, a roaring fireplace, a favourite pair of slippers, and a cuppa' hot tea in your hand as you stare out the window, marvelling at a Christmas snowstorm. Celtic-Canadian songstress Loreena McKennitt put this album together for moments exactly like these. Her soaring vocals, and the plethora of dulcet tones on display - particularly on the tracks *In the Bleak Midwinter* and *The Holly and the Ivy* - will bring even greater warmth to your hearth and your heart during the holiday season.



The Trojans

Celtic Ska

To be fair, this isn't an exclusively-Christmas album, but then again good luck finding a Celtic Ska album that fits that exact criterion. This early 1990s collection by Gaz Mayal does feature enough recognizable Yuletide beats to keep you interested, however, including hints of *Jingle Bells* and an upbeat version of *Auld Lang Syne* that gets faster and wilder as the song goes on. The rest of the tracks are a smooth, reggae-Celtic mix that will keep any Christmas gathering relaxed and happy enough that no one will notice the non-holiday bits - especially if there's a wee dram of the good stuff going around.



The Chieftains

The Bells of Dublin

This one comes up on a lot of "Best Celtic Christmas Albums" lists I came across, and - having listened to it repeatedly - I can hear why. With a strong sampling of different offerings, this is a pretty good smorgasbord to pick from; jaunty jigs about wren hunting at one end, and soulful choir renditions of *O Holy Night* and *O Come All Ye Faithful* at the other. Plus, this collection boasts some noteworthy guest performances from the likes of Elvis Costello and Jackson Browne, and also features a haunting spoken-word segment by the late, great Burgess Meredith! This record won't just put you in the spirit - it will spirit you away on an acoustic journey.



Do You Hear...

Heather, Cookie & Raylene Rankin

In terms of sheer variety of genres, this 1998 LP from Atlantic Canada's first family of Celtic pop, the Rankins, is definitely a contender. Between their renditions of classics and original compositions, Heather, Cookie and Raylene flex their impressive range; you've got a jazz tune right off the top in *Rocking Around the Christmas Tree*, some country (*The Christmas Star* and *Jesus Christ, The Tree of Life* - both original songs), a hint of new age (*Taladh Chríosa*), a dash of cabaret (*Let It Snow*), and of course the Rankin's bread and butter, Celtic Pop (*I Wonder as I Wander*). Take your time and soak this one in, and see how many different sonic styles you can pick out. Oh yeah, Christmas Cookie - right?



Celtic Woman

A Christmas Celebration

As much as it is a breath of fresh air to have some variety among our canon of holiday music to choose from, when you get right down to it, it is hard not to appreciate the classics. Irish super-group Celtic Woman's 2006 holiday album, *A Christmas Celebration*, is a perfect Yuletide palette-cleanser. Each one of the core tracks on this collection draws from traditional tunes, all rendered beautifully in choir. A perceptive ear can still hear the hints of Celtic acoustic trappings, with woodwinds, harps, and fiddles woven into the mix. There are some bonus tracks on the Japanese, Spanish and Canadian editions. A DVD performance of this album was also released in 2007, showcasing the show-stopping visuals of a Celtic Woman performance. This is a great way to close-out a night, and a season, of festive musical exploration.



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Learn more about our products at: www.heavenlyspirits.com





Our resident Celtic Chef Gary Maclean serves up some tasty tips on how to hold on during the holidays.

My thoughts on home entertaining during the holiday season have changed over the years. I once thought it was all about the food - showcasing skills and providing restaurant-style, quality meals. These days, however, it is all about the people in my life. Here are a few suggestions on surviving Christmas.

Plan, plan, and plan again. Plan what you are going to serve, plan when you are going to prepare it, and plan how you are going to deliver it.

Do not serve food on individual plates. Instead, serve it on platters, bowls, or large plates, which can be placed on the dining table. There are two reasons for this; first, if you serve in bulk, it is much easier to deliver food hot and in perfect condition. Secondly, your guests can simply help themselves to what they want and won't feel obliged to eat what you have doled out to them. Children eat more food this way. This style of serving food is fittingly called "Family Service."

Cook for your actual guests, and style the food accordingly. Think about the age group, the personalities, and the occasion, and then ask yourself what you would expect if you

were going to this gathering. An event with your family might be very different from a crowd of your closest friends.

Consider the equipment you have in your kitchen and take this into account when designing your menu. Try and have a good mix of food coming from every area of the kitchen - some things from the oven, some done in the pressure cooker, some from the stove, and some cold food from the fridge.

Recruit a few assistants, even if you are a kitchen maverick who always cooks alone. Sorting the table, setting cutlery and glasses, tidying up, etc., can be a real time saver while you prepare the meal.

Work within your capabilities and don't be over ambitious. Don't create a whole dinner entirely with new recipes - always have a couple of dishes that you know inside out. This will give you the time and headspace to try something different. It also ensures your guests have something to eat if the experiments don't work out.

Minimum work and maximum impact. Think of what you can serve up that involves very little work but provides a massive wow factor. The big flavours of smoked products

are real crowd pleasers - hot and cold smoked salmon, duck breast, or smoked chicken all take little work to make your own. Cured meats, pickled vegetables, and olives make impactful intermediate courses as well.

Practice if you can, especially if you want to try something different. Chefs always practice new dishes long before they attempt to serve them up to hungry family members and friends.

Taste, taste, and taste again. It is vital to taste food when you cook. For most chefs this is pure instinct. It is a little like driving a car - to change gears you press the clutch without any thought, but when you are learning you really need to focus on it each time. Seasoning is the same - the more you do it the more instinctive it becomes. And, when tasting, always remember the golden rule; don't double dip.

Chill out, relax, and enjoy the company. This is my most important tip. Remember, it is just a plate of food - the worst that can happen is that you end up ordering in.

Nollaig Chridheil! Gary
www.garymacchef.com



Turkey Tips

Everyone is looking for advice on how to cook their turkeys - from what size bird they need to how long they need to cook it. Follow these basic principles for a perfectly moist and tender turkey.

Use the best produce you can afford, so don't scrimp on the turkey - it is going to be the star of any Thanksgiving or Christmas meal. I would rather have less of something good than more of something that is poor.

I always buy as local as possible, and I always look for the country of origin. I prefer free range as it really makes a difference.

Do not stuff the turkey with stuffing! I know that may sound a bit strange, but due to the shape of the cavity, the stuffing may not cook evenly, and - except for the small amount that sticks out of the end - it does not get all browned and crusty. More importantly, by the time the center of the stuffing is cooked to a safe temperature, the breast meat on the turkey will be overcooked and dry. Make your stuffing separate. I roll it up tightly in foil and bake it in the oven, before allowing to cool and slice.

Season the turkey thoroughly. You need to be generous with the salt and pepper, and always season inside the cavity. I avoid seasoning the skin as it won't absorb salt, so it leaves a crust. However, I do mix the salt and pepper into room temperature butter and push it between the skin and the flesh, which helps keep the meat moist and well-seasoned. I then also rub the skin with the butter and cover it in streaky bacon to again help stop the meat from drying out.

Baste! Baste! Baste! It's the real key to getting a lovely and moist turkey, as fat helps protect the meat and stops it drying out in the cooking process.

Trussing, or tying the turkey is important as a) it plumps the breasts for carving, and b) it keeps the legs close to the rest of the carcass which stops the turkey from drying out. The legs protect the narrow part of the breast and helps it cook at the same time as thicker parts.

Bring the turkey out for an hour before roasting to take the chill off. Then take two carrots, two sticks of celery, and an onion, and cut into large chunks, before placing them on the bottom of a deep roasting

pan. Put the turkey breast side up on top of the vegetables. Add about a half-inch of water to the roasting pan and place in the preheat oven. This keeps the oven moist and helps to capture the juices that escape the turkey. This liquid can be used to baste the turkey while it cooks (along with all the natural juices and fats that are going to be released) and eventually turns into a golden rich gravy.

Remember to make sure that you can actually get your turkey in your oven! It sounds funny, but measure the capacity of your oven before you go turkey shopping and then measure the turkey in the shop to make sure you can cook it.

This little chart below will give you an idea on what size turkey to purchase. It is not an exact science, and some people eat more than others. And leftover turkey can be turned into loads of amazing dishes.

2.5kg – 3kg	5lb– 6lb	4-6 people
3.5kg – 4kg	7lb-9lb	7-9 people
4.5kg – 5kg	9lb-11lb	9-10 people
5.5kg – 6kg	12lb-13lb	10-12 people
6.5kg – 7kg	14lb-15lb	12-14 people
7.5kg – 8kg	16lb-17lb	15-17 people
8kg +	18lb +	18+ people

As a guide, if the bird is under 4kg/9lb I cook it for 20 minutes per kg and then I add 70 minutes onto that time. If the bird is over 4kg/9lb I still cook it for 20 minutes per kg, but I add 90 minutes onto that time. Use a preheated oven (fan assisted) at 190°C/375°F.

You must let the turkey rest for at least 20 minutes. When you remove it from the oven, turn the turkey upside down and rest it on its breasts, cover it very loosely with foil, and go about getting everything else ready. It won't get cold - a covered turkey will stay hot for over 40 minutes. Letting it rest not only gives you time to finish the gravy, and the rest of the meal, but also allows the juices in the turkey to redistribute, which is the secret to moist, tender meat.

Slàinte Mhath! Gary



THE CELTIC CHEF
with Gary Maclean

Camembert & Cranberry Bites

One of my favourite go-to appetizers, Camembert & Cranberry Bites are a simple and scrumptious way to please palates during the holidays.

Ingredients

3 sheets filo pastry
100g/3.5oz Camembert cheese
(or any soft cheese)
50g/2oz cranberry sauce
25g/1oz butter, melted
Pinch of chives, chopped

Instructions

The first job is to make the little filo baskets - this is very easy, especially if you have a small muffin tin. Take the 3 sheets of filo pastry and cut in half, then half again - keep cutting until you get a bundle of squares of pastry about 6cm/2inch wide. Each basket will use three squares of pastry - take one square of pastry and brush with the melted butter, then add another square on top, changing the angle slightly. Lastly, add the third square on top of that and - if you have your angles right - it should look like a star. Put the pastry into the muffin tin and repeat until all the pastry has been used. Bake in the oven at 175°C/350°F for 8 to 10 minutes until golden brown. Next, cut the cheese into small pieces and fill each of the cooked baskets with the cut cheese before topping with a little cranberry sauce. Pop back into the oven for 3 to 4 minutes or until the cheese starts to melt. Top with some chopped chives. Makes 6-8 portions.

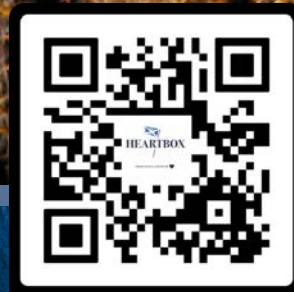
Biadh math! Gary • www.garymacchef.com



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Holiday Gift Guide!

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



Scot-Tee

4K Design Tees - www.4kDesign-Tees.com

Deck out your beautiful baby, grandchild, niece or nephew in a comfy, cozy onesie this Christmas season, with a nod to your family's heritage. The Scot-Tee, recognizing Scottish and Irish ancestry, are unique gifts for the well-dressed newborn or infant. As part of 4KDesigns' unique line of 100 per cent combed ring-spun cotton onesies for infants, they promise to keep baby happy and warm. There are lots of great designs to choose from, including a Dirt-Tee, and a Royal-Tee, all sure to bring smiles. All have double needle ribbed binding on the arms, neck, shoulders and bottom, as well as a three snap bottom closure for security, comfort and warmth. In addition to the onesies, which come in several soft shades as well as more colourful options, the company carries a myriad of quality products in adult sizes.



Eirelan: Saga of the Latter-Day Celts

Liam O'Shiel - www.amazon.com

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



Ingles Buchan Tartan Throw

Northern Watters Knitwear - www.nwknitwear.com

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



Balfour Of Ilk

Just Kilt Me - www.justkiltme.com

The Balfours were the most prominent family in Fife, eventually expanding to 30 clan branches across Scotland, Ireland, Wales, England, and continental Europe. Many clan members served Scottish Monarchs and held important positions in law and the Scottish Kirk. Originally designed by the Chief Elect of Clan Balfour, and worn by numerous associated families - including Bethunes, Beaton, and more - the Balfour Tartan is both bold and beautiful. With over 100 unique tartan designs on offer, Just Kilt Me showcases Scotland's historic tradition through a wide range of kilts, tweed Argyle Jackets, vests, sporrans, and many other accessories. All items are custom made to order, and free worldwide shipping is available with large purchases. E-gift cards are also available via the company's website and make for an ideal gift this holiday season.

Let Us “Chase” Your Ancestors

Old Friends Genealogy - www.oldfriendsgenealogy.com

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



Celtic Journals & Ancient Irish Maps

O'Brien Celtic Gifts - www.obriencelticgifts.com

Direct from our dedicated Celtic Craft Bindery in Dublin – we offer a range of top-quality Celtic/Irish Gifts including Deluxe Celtic Journals and Notebooks with classic Celtic embossed cover designs. Choose from 4 different editions; the Claddagh Journal, the Celtic Journal, the Glenoge, or the 1916 Centenary Journal, each designed and developed in Dublin to the highest standards. Adorn the living-room wall with an exquisite matted and framed Ancient Map of Ireland (circa. 1779), with special “raised” effect, and reproduced in fine detail. Other historic items from the company’s craft bindery include the 1847 Irish Emigrant Trail Map, a superb reproduction of The Historic 1916 Irish Proclamation - available in 3 different sizes - as well as stunning reproductions from the epic Book of Kells. All are matted and ready to frame. Take it a step further by personalizing your gift with the recipient’s name embossed on the front cover, or upon a nostalgic and framed Ancient Map of Ireland. Other classic Celtic/Irish notebooks and wall hangings are available via O’Brien’s website.



The Lewis Chess Set - ‘Scotland’s Hidden Secret’

Scottish Creations - www.scottishcreations.com

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



Luxury Tours in Ireland, Scotland and Beyond

Sheenco Travel - www.sheencotravel.com

Memories are a gift that last a lifetime, and what better gift to give this holiday season than a memorable travel experience? With vacation itineraries planned in Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales, Sheenco Travel offers an experience like no other. The company’s popular *Irish and Scottish Castle Tours* takes participants to a variety of incredible historical sites, combining classic Celtic culture with modern-day comforts. Unique and luxurious, the tours include teachings on history and heritage, along with showcasing local culinary delights and authentic castle accommodations. In Ireland these include Ashford Castle in Co. Mayo and Dromoland Castle in Co. Clare while in Scotland you will stay in Inverlochy Castle in the Highlands and Crossbasket Castle on the outskirts of Glasgow. Customized trips are also available, both independent or with your own private driver/guide.

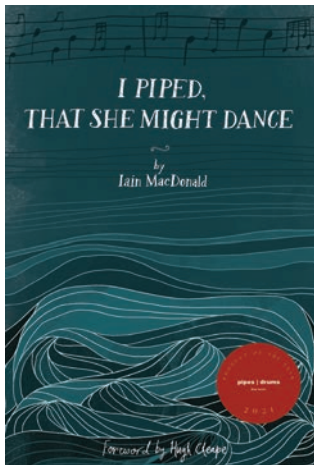




Peaky Justice

Celtic Crossroads NW - www.celticcrossroadsnw.com

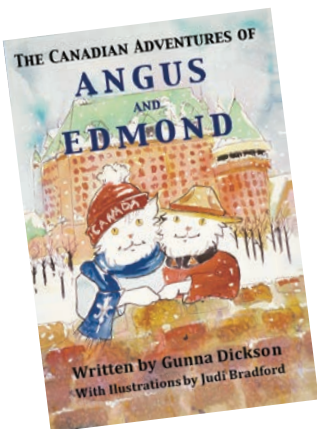
Peaky Blinders fans will love this comfortable, 100% cotton blend Peaky Justice t-shirt. It features a graphic print on the front designed in-house by Celtic Crossroads NW graphic designer Maxx Sonandre of MXX Designs. The Peaky Blinders were a street gang from Birmingham, England from the 1880s to the 1910s. They were known for their signature outfits featuring tailored jackets, buttoned waistcoats, lapeled overcoats, and most famously peaked caps under which gang members hid razor blades. Celtic Crossroads NW carries all these stylish pieces (razor blades not included) and more. These pre-shrunk Peaky Justice t-shirts run from size small to 3XL and can also be made to order in different sizes. Celtic Crossroads NW has a variety of other great Celtic designs created by Maxx Sonandre and printed by Joe Gallegos, making this truly a small family business. Peaky Justice is the perfect twist for those who know Peaky Blinders.



I Piped, That She Might Dance

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

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



The Canadian Adventures of Angus and Edmond

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

In their sixth adventure, NYC-based adopted Angora-mix brothers Angus and Edmond set off for a quick visit to their neighbor to the North - and find themselves in another world. The hospitality of enchanting pre-Christmas Montreal, the most European city in North America, envelops them as they visit the majestic 17th Century Notre Dame Basilica and go skating in the shadow of La Grande Roue in the historic Old Port. The dynamic duo succumbs to the wintry wonderland charms of glistening, snow-clad Quebec City, where they make memories with a leisurely calèche ride and a thrilling toboggan run on the banks of the ice-clogged St. Lawrence River. They sample poutine and maple sugar treats, frolic on the Plains of Abraham - a former battlefield - and eagerly look ahead to Carnival festivities. Angus is in his element in the French-speaking province of Quebec and Edmond finds his voice in a most unusual way. The brothers even contemplate a career with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Author Gunna Dickson is a New York-based writer and editor. Illustrator, fine artist, and milliner Judi Bradford lives and works in DeLand, Florida. The book is available from www.amazon.com and other online sites.



Celtic Net Stitch Cowl

The Herring Girl - www.herringgirlcollection.com

Cozy and colourful, the Celtic Net Stitch Cowl is hand-knitted on the beautiful Island of Barra in the stunning Western Isles of Scotland. Highlighting ancient knitting traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation, these modern designs are contemporary takes on the classic cowls that were used by herring girls whilst waiting on shore for the boats to lend the catch. The patterns represent the lifestyle of the herring workers, showcasing marine motifs such as nets, anchors, sails, and more. The cowl is available in three distinct colours - Oceans of Blue, Seas of Green, Colours of the Shore and colours of The Croft. Each garment comes gift-wrapped, with information on the individual patterns, as well as insight into the rich history of Scotland's herring industry.

Scottie Dog Pendant

Sheila Fleet - www.sheilafleet.com

From world-renowned Scottish designer Sheila Fleet, this Scottie Dog pendant in sterling silver is elegantly suspended from a silver chain and is hand-finished in our Orkney workshop. Originally known as the Aberdeen Terrier, the much-loved Scottish Terrier - or Scottie Dog - likely originated around the 17th-18th century, evolving over time into the popular breed we know today. Following a customer request, Sheila's skilled designer and modelmaker carved a selection of Scottie Dog jewellery to form this collection. Available in silver or gold, Scottie Dog pieces are hand-finished in Sheila's Orkney workshop.



Perfume Oils

SAOR - www.saorperfume.com

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



Iceni Queen

Scoti Creations - www.scoticcreations.com

Step back into the ancient world of Celts, Picts, and Vikings with Scoti Creation's extensive array of handcrafted artisan jewelry created to connect you with your heritage. Renowned metalsmith Marilyn Scott combines precious metals and ancient forming techniques to give each piece a unique, antiquated look. The Iceni Queen necklace showcases a beautiful blue labradorite stone set in bronze. The stylized pendant and individually formed links are hammered bronze. This piece opens a door to the Celtic past when a majestic Iceni Queen led her people in battle against the mighty Romans. Other timeless and beautifully crafted gift items are available via the company's website, just in time for the holiday season.



Tartan Christmas Stocking

ScotlandShop - www.scotlandshop.com

Online - and now with a store in Albany, NY - ScotlandShop is the one-stop shop for tartan wares and fares. This holiday season, the company is offering a unique and seasonal gift that can be used year after year - Tartan Christmas Stockings. These charming items are made to order, using a beautiful quality wool tartan fabric woven in Scotland. Available in over 500 clan and family tartans, they are fully customizable with both a choice of complementary lining colour and the option of having a name embroidered on the cuff. The stockings can be shipped anywhere in the world and gift wrapped if you choose. For those interested in bundling up with another gift this year, the company also carries a variety of custom-made tartan products, including fabric, clothing, upholstery, home décor accessories, and much more.



High Whistle in D with Presentation Box

Carbony Celtic Winds - www.carbony.com



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

Viking Sword Pendant

Keith Jack - www.keithjack.com



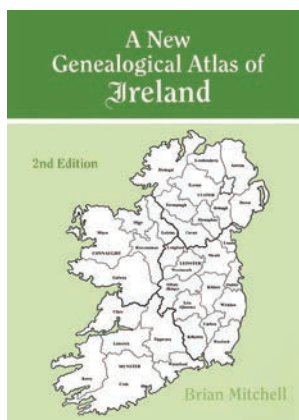
Scotland and Ireland are home to the Celtic legends and lore that, along with the birth of his two children, have inspired award-winning jewelry designer Keith Jack for years. Today, his breathtaking creations offer a unique and modern spin on traditional Celtic motifs. Crafted with attention to detail - in sterling silver or silver with gold or bronze accents - many of his collections are unisex, and include earrings, rings, bracelets, and more. This holiday season, he presents a stunning Viking Sword Pendant, available in oxidized silver and bronze or oxidized sterling silver on a 22" oxidized sterling silver chain. In keeping with Jack's mandate of "Modern Design - Ancient Meaning," the ornament is a symbol of strength and power for both elite and everyday warriors.

Folding Travel Board

O'Mara Sprung Floors - www.sprungfloors.com



With resilient wood panels that float on shock-absorbing foam, Celtic dancers can now safely practice their craft anywhere, anytime, on O'Mara Sprung Floors. With the Folding Travel Board, dancers will find everything they need in one folding dance floor. This floor is sprung to protect the joints (absorbing 70 percent of landing forces), wood to enhance the sound, a durable and slip-resistant finish, and handles for portability. This beautiful folding floor is available in three sizes; the smallest fits in most airplane overhead bins, while the larger models give taller dancers more space to move. An ideal Christmas gift for those who are looking to protect their body and extend their dancing careers.



A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland, 2nd edition

Genealogical.com - www.genealogical.com

A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland is a key resource in genealogical research on the Emerald Isle. With maps detailing the location of Roman Catholic parishes in all thirty-two counties of Ireland, and Presbyterian congregations in the nine counties of Northern Ireland, this updated 2nd edition is invaluable for locating your post-1864 ancestors via civil records, with detailed descriptions and locales of the parochial and civil administrative divisions to which all major Irish record sources are linked. Author Brian Mitchell has drawn at least four, and sometimes five, maps for every county. Three maps of Eire are also included to show the area covered by each county, diocese, and probate district. A great gift this Christmas for those looking to reconnect with their Celtic roots.

Bia Exfoliating Wash

CODEX - www.codexbeauty.com

While it might be true that the holidays can be stressful, it doesn't mean the gifts you select have to be. CODEX Labs, a Silicon Valley biotech company grounded in science, offers a wide selection of skincare products perfect for both day-to-day use and those special self-care nights. All of the company's products are plant-based, eco-certified, and have been verified as cruelty free by Leaping Bunny. Their Bia Collection, which provides ultra-hydration for dry and flaky skin, is home to one of their biggest bestsellers - the Bia Exfoliating Body Wash. Smoothing and softening, the Bia Exfoliating Body Wash is a creamy cleanser that gently exfoliates without stripping the skin of its natural moisture. It is also safe for those with sensitive skin. The Bia Collection also includes a hydrating eye gel, a restoring Skin Superfood cream, and a gentle cleansing oil. CODEX is currently offering shoppers 35% off this product from now through Christmas.



Heartbox Scotland Subscription

Heartbox - www.heartboxscotland.com

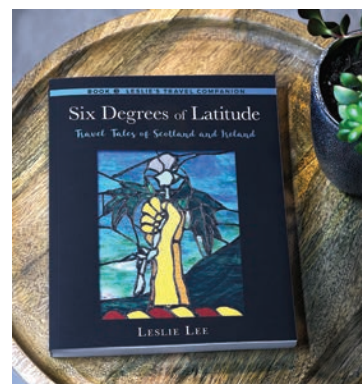
Wherever in the world you may be, Heartbox is committed to bringing you the very best in Scottish pride, culture, history, heritage, and heart. Each month, subscribers will receive a unique and bespoke assortment of Scottish treasures. Simply choose a plan and the Heartbox team will prepare and pack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



Six Degrees of Latitude

Lee Studio - www.leestudioc.com

In this third book of her Celtic Travel Trilogy, author Leslie Lee weaves insights on ancient Celtic history, clans, DNA, territories, and whisky distilleries with a visual feast of illustrations and hand-drawn maps from her charming and humorous travel book series Leslie's Travel Companions. If you can't go in person, then pack your bags vicariously. Whether you read this book to inform yourself before your journey, or simply for the pleasure from your armchair at home, it's sure to become a favorite in your travel book collection. "Leslie Lee's travel book Six Degrees of Latitude is both an intimate journal and an overview of Scottish and Irish lore... Both insightful and personal, the travel book is engaging as it salutes Leslie Lee's discovery of, and connection to, Scottish and Irish locales." - **Foreword Clarion Review**. Other gift options are available via the company's website.



Black Walnut Spurtles

Scott's Highland Services - www.scottshighland.com

Invented in Scotland - and lovingly re-imagined in North America - these spurtles are individually handcrafted in Ontario by skilled artisans. Each spurtle is made from Canadian Black Walnut with its own unique coloration and are easy to care for, only requiring a hand-wash in mild detergent. The spurtle is treated with a food-grade oil to prevent drying out, and regular application of cutting board oil is recommended to keep it looking like new. In addition, Scott's Highland Services carries just about everything Celtic - from bagpipes to tartan baby wear. A wide variety of products - including the very popular bread warmers, mugs, and other great kitchen items perfect for Christmas giving - are available via the company's website.





Celtic Abundance Pendant

Celtic Knot Works - www.celticknotworks.com

New this year from award-winning American jeweler Celtic Knotworks is their Celtic Abundance Pendant. Steeped in Celtic history and imagery, this 1.2 inch wide hand-cast pendant is detailed with a regal ring of oak leaves and acorns. Oak trees are a Celtic symbol of truth, courage, and wisdom, while the acorn is representative of limitless potential. At its center is a natural aventurine gemstone, a semi-precious stone known to bring its holders health and prosperity. The pendant's message is further solidified with the words "Abundance To This Person" inscribed on the back. The Celtic Abundance Pendant is part of Celtic Knotworks new Blessings for Everyone Collection, which also features gemstone pendants for new blessings, clarity, and protection. All pendants in the collection are made of American fine pewter and are attached to a 20" stainless steel snake chain.



Robert Burns Chess Set

Stirling 1314 - www.stirling1314.com

An inspired gift or a future family heirloom, the limited-edition Robert Burns Chess Set is the crown to any Christmas and will be a welcome addition for the first in-person Burns Season in three years. This stunning set is hand-cast in solid pewter, with 32 unique pieces, each one depicting a character or place from the Bard's life or works - including Robert Burns, Jean Armour, Tam O' Shanter, Souter Johnnie, Burns Cottage, Auld Nick, Nannie Dee, Holy Willie, Proud Edward, Kirk Alloway, and 22 more! The set rests on an equally stunning 20" x 20" metal-edged board, inlaid with pewter playing squares. All 32 light squares are etched with a different Burns quotation, in his own handwriting. The set comes complete in a leathercloth presentation box with a booklet, a Burns CD, and a framed limited-edition certificate. Whether to play or display, a wonderful Christmas gift that offers a lifetime of pleasure for today and for future generations. See page 12.



Battle of Bannockburn Chess Set

Stirling 1314 - www.stirling1314.com

The solid pewter, limited edition Battle of Bannockburn Chess Set has been thrilling chess players and families across America, Canada, Australia, China, Japan, Russia, Estonia, Europe, and the U.K. for over 25 years. Inspired by Scottish historic novelist Nigel Tranter's epic trilogy "The Bruce," each of these individually designed 32 playing pieces (chosen by Tranter himself) represents a character or place from the years leading up to 1314 and the battle itself. Strong in stature, these magnificent pieces sit atop an equally epic 21" x 21" metal-edged board, inlaid with pewter playing squares bearing the Thistle of Scotland, the Rose of England, and the two Kings' seals. The set comes complete in a leathercloth presentation box with booklet, CD, and framed limited-edition certificate. A wonderful Christmas gift that offers a lifetime of pleasure - for playing or displaying - today and for future generations. See page 12.



Christmas Crafts

Craft Council of Newfoundland & Labrador - www.craftcouncilnl.ca/products

Those looking for a small keepsake from Canada's easternmost province will be sure to find what they are looking for via the Craft Council of Newfoundland & Labrador, which celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2022. The organization's award-winning shop showcases the work of more than 150 juried craftspeople working in a variety of styles and mediums, while their gallery - the province's only gallery for fine craft - features up to 25 exhibitions each year. This holiday season, the group is highlighting several exciting homegrown gift opportunities, including a handwoven, 100 percent cotton Newfoundland & Labrador tartan tray cloth (Christina Benoit), and a sterling silver Celtic necklace on rubber cord and matching earrings (Allison Dancey). Be sure to check their website for more options.

Jamie Scented Candle

Book Scents Candles - www.bookscentscandles.com

There are few gifts better suited to a reader than a candle. The right candle can help literary lovers slip deeper into another world or transport them to a different time, just as the Craigh na Dun did for Claire in Diana Gabaldon's bestselling series Outlander. Book Scents Candles, a unique, hand-poured candle company based in Etters, Pennsylvania, has been crafting book-inspired candles since 2013. Among their many fine offerings - which include both book-specific candles and a "Storyteller's Collection" that features scents inspired by the reading experience - is their Jamie candle, inspired by Outlander's leading man Jamie Fraser (Scottish actor Sam Heughan). A bestseller since the company's inception, the Jamie candle combines musk, pine, and wood smoke creating an "outdoorsy" fragrance that appeals to men and women alike. Available in ten and eight ounce candles, as well as a six-ounce melt, the Jamie candle is the perfect book-themed gift for any and all Outlander fans.



Outlander Lambswool Tartan Scarf

Patrick King Woollen Company - www.patrickkingwoollencompany.com

From Highland battlefields to misty moors, and from timeless standing stones to Fraser's Ridge. Become part of the story by wrapping yourself in this warm, wonderful, and official Outlander Lambswool Tartan Scarf - the symbol of a love that travelled across time. Lambswool is considered the highest quality of sheep's wool on the market today. Taken from a sheep at its first shearing, the material is incredibly soft, smooth, resilient, and enjoys superior elasticity. The unique weaving process generates air pockets that retain heat while preventing moisture. Along with being all natural, breathable, and hypoallergenic, this lambswool can be worn comfortably against the skin. An ideal gift for fans of the hit Scottish series and for those looking to keep cozy in the coming months.



Irish Writers & Poets Hoodie

John Kennedy - www.johnkennedycartoons.com

Cozy and comfy, this Irish Writers & Poets Hoodie is soft and smooth on the skin, stylish, and is crafted with just the right amount of stretch. This unisex item is ideal for both men and women, comes in all sizes, and is available in eight different colours. 50 percent pre-shrunk cotton and 50 percent polyester, the hoodie's air-jet spun yarn reduces pilling. A double-needle stitched collar, shoulders, armholes, cuff, and hem - with a double-lined hood with matching drawcord, and a front pouch pocket - ensures a convenient and comfortable fit. Images on the front, back, and sleeves have been designed by renowned Irish cartoonist John Kennedy. A warm and wonderful gift for Christmas or any time of the year.



Skye Coorie Sheepskin Bundle

Skyeskyns - www.skyeskyns.co.uk

The Skye Coorie Sheepskin Bundle is coziness in a box. Coorie is the Scottish word for snuggling in, warm and cozy, surrounded by the beauty of nature. This bundle is the perfect gift for unwinding and appreciating the small moments in life. Made by Skyeskyns, tanners and suppliers of luxurious sheepskins on the Isle of Skye, this package contains a sheepskin, ceramic mug hand-thrown by a local potter and inspired by the colours of the Misty Isle, and a scented tumbler candle, made locally with 100 percent natural soya wax. Each set comes in a Skyeskyns jute bag with a gift card. The bundle can be shipped directly to the recipient with a personalized gift message. Settle into the comfort of warm natural wool, enjoy a hot drink beside a flickering candle, and be transported to the beautiful Highland shores with the Skye Coorie Sheepskin Bundle.





Handcrafted Needle Felting

Shari MacLeod - www.highlandvillagegiftshop.ca

Shari MacLeod lives and creates at her home studio in Sydney, Nova Scotia, on beautiful Cape Breton Island. She started needle felting as a way to incorporate a new element into the baskets she was creating, soon becoming enamoured with both the technique and beautiful fibres she was working with. Each piece is created with 100 percent wool, much of it sourced from Nova Scotia farms. Other natural fibres, including cotton and silk, are used for embellishments. The flora and fauna MacLeod creates are her way of expressing delight in the real and imaginary worlds that surround us. She is an avid gardener and loves to hike the coastlines and wilderness of Cape Breton Island - inspiration just footsteps away. Masterfully crafted, and affordable, her works will be welcome in homes this holiday season or any time of the year.



Custom Tours

Journey Through Ireland - www.journeythroughireland.com

With over 40 years' experience and expertise, Journey Through Ireland specializes in creating customized tours to Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales. Experts at crafting unique itineraries with authentic experiences, the company provides chauffeur driven, self-drive, and rail tours specifically designed to suit travelers' preferences. They also present very competitively priced car rentals. From historic castles to stately manor houses and friendly bed and breakfasts, Journey Through Ireland offer a range of accommodations to suit all needs and budgets. Most importantly, they provide an exceptional, hands-on travel experience that invites travelers to sit back, relax, and enjoy themselves, knowing that every detail has been taken care of. For those looking to rediscover the joys of travel - especially after two years of lockdown - and the memories with family and friends that come with it, Journey Through Ireland can help create experiences that are remembered for a lifetime. Gift vouchers are also available.



The Rhiannon Rose

Rhiannon - www.rhiannon.co.uk

This luxurious gold pendant is the perfect gift for someone special this Christmas. The Rhiannon Rose is a hand-crafted necklace made of 9ct Rhiannon Welsh Gold. This golden rose, artfully carved in three dimensions to catch the light, hangs on an 18-inch, 9ct Gold Spiga chain. The necklace is part of a limited series of 50 pieces created to celebrate half a century of operations for the Welsh family-run business. Rhiannon is one of only three licensed users of Welsh Gold, a rare and precious type of gold that has a rich history in the area. Celtic chieftains wore gold torcs and armbands and, later, the Romans developed large scale mining operations. Today it is customary for members of the Royal Family to have their wedding rings made from Welsh Gold. For those interested in traditional craftsmanship and Celtic heritage, the Rhiannon Rose is an ideal offering.



The Haggis

Stahly Haggis - www.thehaggis.com

For haggis lovers and the culinarily curious, Stahly's haggis will fill your plate with a dish that is as flavourful as it is nourishing. While there are different ways to make the Scottish national dish, one popular method, called Scotch Haggis, contains lamb offal, beef suet, oatmeal, onions, water, salt, and pepper. The Stahly family have been in the food business for 100 years, starting when Fred Stahly, Snr. opened his butcher shop on Kirkcaldy High Street in Fife, Scotland. And it has been twenty years since the first batch of Stahly Quality Canned Haggis was produced in the USA using the same family recipe from long ago. Ingredients include water, lamb hearts, oats, pork fat, lamb liver, pork, salt, dehydrated onion, malt extract, spices, and onion powder. Stahly's Haggis is free from artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives. For more information, contact them directly at 251-405-0032 or via email at info@camwrap.net



DRAM with Andrew Ferguson



In a way, it is surprising that I haven't previously written an article about the Glen Grant Distillery. Not because Glen Grant isn't an exciting brand - it isn't (although it is a unique and beautiful distillery that does produce some very fine spirit) - but because, until only recently, official bottlings of Glen Grant were all young and primarily only available in Italy. This has now changed, with the distillery having rolled out a proper age-stated range. What truly makes Glen Grant noteworthy, however, is its connection with another brand, Gordon & MacPhail, the preeminent independent bottler of Scotch whisky.

Gordon & MacPhail started as a grocer in 1892, but very early on began buying and selling whiskies from the Speyside region under their own label. For most of the 19th and 20th centuries, blended Scotch was king; distilleries did not produce malt whisky for sale as single malt, but rather as a component for blended whiskies. Over time, the company's bottlings, from dozens of distilleries, came to be seen as semi-official bottlings. Long before the distilleries saw fit to bottle their own whiskies, they were bottling single malt from the likes of Glenlivet, Longmorn, Macallan, Strathisla, and many others.

Gordon & MacPhail continues to bottle more than a dozen single malts under their 'Distillery Labels' range today, and none more prolifically than Glen Grant. At the start of my career, 40-50 something Glen Grants distilled in the 1940s and 1950s could be had for just a couple hundred dollars a bottle. They raised the bar in 2012 when they bottled a 60-year-old Glen Grant to mark the Queen's Diamond

Jubilee. In the decade since, they have bottled at least a dozen more Glen Grants at 60 years of age or more, all of which are among the oldest whiskies ever bottled.

*Glen Grant was founded
in Rothes in 1839 by a
pair of brothers from Elgin
- John and James Grant.*

It is rumored that John may have been involved in illicit distilling before going legit. The distillery was massive for its day, and the brothers were very well connected. James was Lord Provost of the City of Elgin, a position which certainly did not hinder the construction of a rail line connecting Elgin to the port at Lossiemouth.

They also personally funded the construction of the extension south from Elgin to Rothes. They named the distillery, and, by association, the small Glen it sits in, after themselves. This is surprisingly uncommon among the more than 120 active distilleries in Scotland. To this day, there is just one other distillery named after an actual person.

The distillery rose to greater prominence under John's nephew, James "The Major" Grant, who took over in 1872. He had spent some time in Africa, much of it hunting big game, and brought back a young orphan by the name of Biawa Makalaga - as one did at the time - whose own story has become a local legend. Like his uncle James, "The Major" was an engineer, and he made some design changes which set the distillery apart; notably,

tweaking the shape of the stills and installing a spirit purifier, both of which helped shape the light fruity spirit Glen Grant is famous for today. He also had electric lighting installed, powered by turbines at the distillery.

One of the distillery's features that can still be enjoyed today is the African themed botanical garden installed by 'The Major.' It is full of exotic plants and stylized African huts. One of these huts sits next to the burn in a small gorge at the back of the garden. A small safe is carved into the rock, in which a special bottle was kept for the Major and his guests. I visited the distillery back in the mid 2000s, and as a special treat, the safe was opened for me. I was mildly disappointed to find a young distillery-bottled Glen Grant, rather than a Gordon & MacPhail bottling with some age on it.

The Glen Grant Distillery is located in the town of Rothes, a picturesque 20-minute drive south of Elgin. It is open for distillery tours most of the year, which include access to its beautiful garden. The distillery's core range bottlings such as the 12 and 18-year-old are good and increasingly widely available, but if you want something truly exceptional, look for one of Gordon & MacPhail's older sherry matured Glen Grants. The firm recently released the Glen Grant 1952 Platinum Jubilee, a 70-year-old whisky celebrating Queen Elizabeth's seven decades on the throne. It is available from specialist shops around the world for \$35,000.00.

www.glengrant.com
www.kensingtonwinemarket.com

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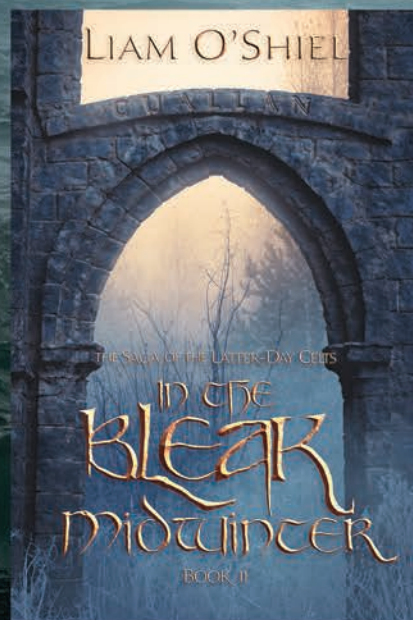
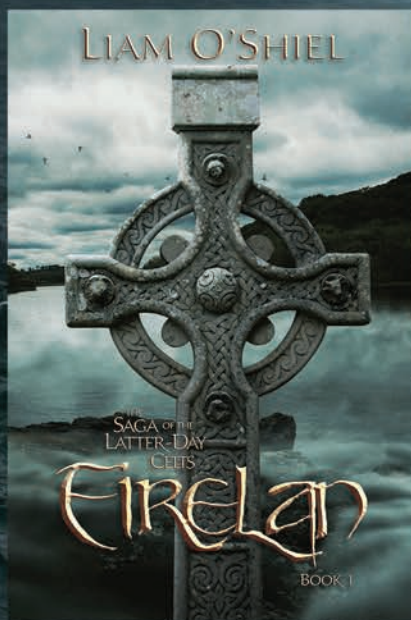
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www.themoherssoapco.com



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The KWM Whisky Calendar is back for the 9th straight year. This year's calendar includes 24 50ml premium whiskies, a custom logo Glencairn glass and a 100ml Scotch Malt Whisky Society whisky for Christmas Day. Participants can follow along on social media and the KWM Blog, as well as the five 5 Day Recap Virtual Tastings over the month of December. We like to call it 25 days of dram fine whisky! \$460+gst.



kensingtonwinemarket.com
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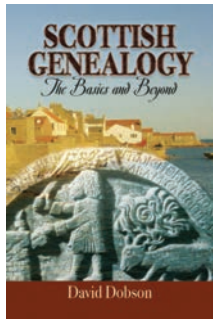
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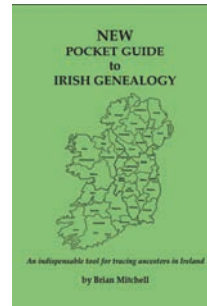
Scottish Genealogy: The Basics and Beyond

By David Dobson

While this publication identifies the major sources and repositories for those just getting started on their research, what makes this book stand out from all the rest is its focus on the other, less commonly used, sources that will allow researchers to advance their research.

For each research topic—including statutory registers, church records, tax records, sasines and land registers, court records, military and maritime sources, burgh and estate records, emigration records, and much more—Dr. Dobson has compiled an extensive list of the publications and archival records that most researchers have not heard of. It would take years for any other individual to compile such a far-reaching bibliography and compilation of relevant records in Scottish archives. David Dobson was born in 1940 in Carnoustie, Scotland. Most of his working life was spent at Madras College, St. Andrews. He has been an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Aberdeen, the University of Edinburgh, and at present, at the University of St. Andrews. He is the author of more than 200 books, including *Scottish Emigration to Colonial America, 1607-1785*, *Scottish Trade with Colonial Charleston, 1683-1783*, and numerous historical and genealogical source books. He now lives in Dundee and is working on further source books.

xiv, 158 pp., indexed (main index & surname index), illus., paper. 2021 ISBN 9780806321134. #1459. \$25.95



New Pocket Guide to Irish Genealogy

By Brian Mitchell

Pocket Guide is a bit of misnomer, for in fact this 7"x 10" publication is one of the most complete and informative books on genealogical research in Ireland ever written.

Brian Mitchell has completely updated the previous edition of his guide to direct readers to the most current websites and resources. His original premise, however, remains the same: that the examination of seven major records will throw detailed light on most peoples' Irish ancestry. By skillfully blending Irish history, record sources, case studies, maps, charts, and his own mastery of the subject, Mitchell has put together a masterful handbook to Irish genealogical research.

122 pp., paper. 2020. ISBN 9780806359083. 25.00 USD. 20 GBP. 22 EUR.

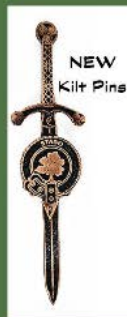


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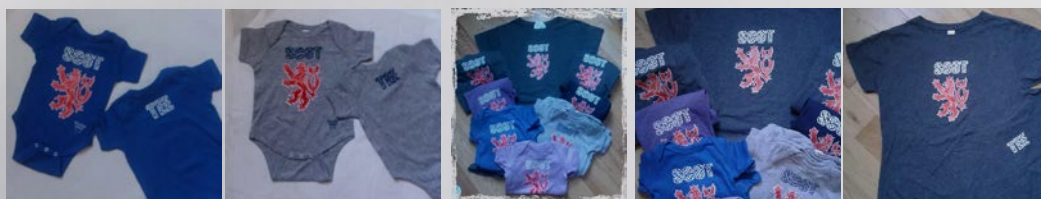
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Queen Elizabeth II; 1926 - 2022

It is almost impossible to fully reflect upon the life of a woman who lived for 96 years - and reigned as Queen of the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries for 70.

Queen Elizabeth II - the queen regnant of 32 sovereign states during most of her life (15 at the time of her death) - was a permanent fixture in the lives of millions; many books and articles are published each year about her and her family, and Netflix's award-winning drama *The Crown* is a fictionalized account of her life. In addition, her visage continues to adorn the currency of more than 15 countries. For more than seven decades, the world watched the queen, some as admirers and others as adversaries.

With her passing at Balmoral Castle in Scotland on September 8, she again became the focus of mainstream news publications. Despite the ongoing coverage, however, what remains unbeknownst to many are the ancestral and political connections that she had to the Celtic nations.

Queen Elizabeth II was a Celt, descend-

ed from the Royal House of Stuart (previously Stewart) on both sides of her family. Her parents also shared a common ancestor - Robert II, King of Scots - and, while her father's side of the family descended from James VI Scotland, her mother was a member of the Bowes-Lyon family whose ancestry traced through many generations of Scottish nobility reaching back to Sir John Lyn, Thane of Glamis. The Queen also had distant ancestry to Ireland, being a descendent of the Irish High King Brian Boru, who ruled in Ireland from 1002 to 1014

Her well-known love for Scotland began when she was a young girl during family trips to the Balmoral Castle and continued to grow for the rest of her life.

The admiration was mutual. Though the monarch has a complex history with Scotland, many there remember Queen Elizabeth II for her kindness. CBC reported that John Sinclair, owner of a popular butcher shop in Ballater that has a royal warrant, said, "She was a wonderful person for this area. And I think she will be sadly missed."

It was also during her reign that the 29-year-long conflict known as "The Troubles" took place in Northern Ireland. 3,600 people were killed over that period, with another 300,000 wounded. Although the conflict officially ended with the 1998 Easter Sunday Peace Accord, many believe that true "healing" began in 2012 when the Queen visited Northern Ireland and shook hands with Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, the then-commander of the Irish Republican Party. To this day, this small gesture is considered a monumental moment in Irish and British history. Although the relationship between the Queen and both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is undoubtedly complicated, both sides of the political line released statements of sympathy and praise following her death, noting "the important role she played in repairing relations between Britain and Ireland."

The Queen also enjoyed a strong connection to Wales, and she was seldom seen without her two trusty corgis, Muick and Sandy. It is said that the pair were by her side the day she died. Her relationship with Wales ran even deeper, as noted in an article released by the BBC on the day of her passing - "Queen Elizabeth II: How the monarch helped shape modern Wales" - detailed her devotion to the Welsh people through her love of their farming culture, her dry sense of humour, and her steadfast sense of duty. Wales is also the location of the Queen's biggest sadnesses during her reign - the 1966 Aberfan mining disaster when a colliery spoil tip collapsed, leaving 116 children and 28 adults dead. The Queen spoke about this tragedy, and her grief, a great deal throughout her life, leading to a close relationship between monarch and the town's residents.

While many Celts have polarized opinions about the Queen, there is no disputing her lasting and memorable relationship with the Celtic nations.

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