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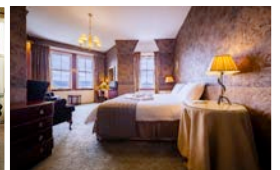
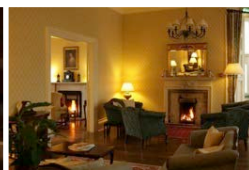
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Fáilte!

*"Here we stand before your door, As we stood the year before;
Give us whiskey; give us gin, Open the door and let us in..."*

My earliest recollection of the holiday season and its traditions was not the Christmas tree or the toys underneath it, but rather what today may be considered a snapshot, or even a postcard, of days gone by.

As a child, Midnight Mass was a big tradition for everyone in our small Nova Scotia community. One year, old Jack Frost hit us with deep snow drifts that closed our rural highway. An old family sleigh, put to rest many years earlier, was brought to life for one final call of duty, as were many others on that festive eve. The night was cold with a clear full moon. Still etched in my mind, some 60 plus years later, is the line-up of horses and sleighs following the church service, all hitched and waiting anxiously in the brisk air for the trip home. A delightful Christmas would follow, but the ride back in the stillness of the snowy night routinely comes to mind as a lasting memory.

In this issue, Rebecca Dingwell takes a look at the origins of some Celtic Christmas traditions, including songs such as The First Noel, which comes from Cornwall, and Deck the Halls, which finds its roots in Wales. In Ireland, "mumming" is an ancient tradition that continues today. It arrived in the "New World" with the Irish, and remains popular in rural Newfoundland.

A contemporary Christmas tradition goes back to the Halifax Explosion of December 6, 1917, which destroyed much of the city. Boston authorities learned of the disaster and quickly dispatched a relief train north. In 1918, Halifax gifted a Christmas tree to the City of Boston in thanks and remembrance for the help. Today, the Nova Scotia government continues to send a fir tree to Boston each holiday season in recognition of the assistance provided during the disaster.

But Christmas is for children. Every child should be able to look forward to Christmas and its traditions with excitement and anticipation. Christmas is a time of giving. Unfortunately, not all receive.

According to UNICEF, 22,000 children around the world die each day due to poverty - invisible deaths far removed from the consciousness and scrutiny of society. Yet, less than 1 per cent of what the world spends every year on weapons could put every child in school. In the U.K., consumers will spend £4.74 billion during the 5 days before Christmas. In the USA, the expenditure on Christmas gifts alone is more than \$830 billion. Keep in mind here that only \$60 billion is needed to end world poverty.

In the meantime, our Christmas volunteers continue their humble efforts to make a difference in the lives of the less fortunate. The Black Santa Appeal in Belfast, Ireland; Bob Currie's Pipes of Christmas concerts in New York and New Jersey; and Santa's Angels in Prince Edward Island - all will raise funds for the benefit of others. Bob and Sandra Pattison will continue to hand out turkey dinners and Christmas Gift Bags in Nova Scotia, as they have been doing for more than 20 years. We all have a hand in reducing poverty, however, and there is no better time than Christmas to begin.

There are many ways to give year-round, including through the OXFAM Unwrapped program. It is an on-line alternative giving program that offers a selection of gifts for any occasion - birthdays, anniversaries or weddings. Check it out at www.oxfam.ca

From the management and staff of Celtic Life International, have a wonderful, generous Christmas and a Happy New Year...

Enjoy, and may God bless

Angus (Marcie) Macquarrie, Publisher



INSIDE

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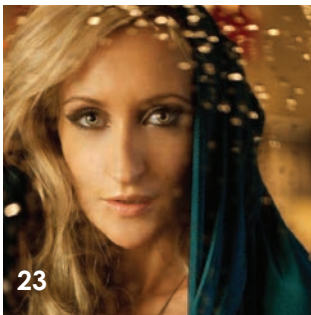
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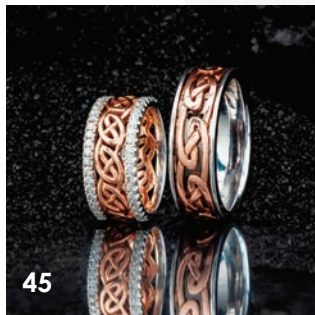
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DEthadOL



Visitors asked not to swim seaside with seals in Cornwall

Seals may be cute, but you ought to think twice before jumping in the water with them. According to the BBC, the number of people swimming with seals in St Ives, Cornwall has risen over the past few years. Folks from the Marine Conservation Society, as well as the harbourmaster, are concerned for the safety of tourists who try to befriend the animals. While males can be territorial, females can also become aggressive if they feel someone is a threat to their babies. Not to mention that they also have powerful jaws. Even a small bite can be a problem, as seals carry diseases. As a result, signs were put up in the area over the summer, asking visitors and prospective swimmers not to feed or approach the seals.

Galicia hosts annual festival remembering Viking invasion

Every August, the village of Catoira, Galicia travels back in time. The Romeria Viking festival has taken place there annually since 1960. During the week, various theatrical and musical performances are held around the Towers of the West. On Saturday, a Viking feast takes place, during which the dress code is medieval costume. On Sunday, the main event sees participants simulate an eleventh century attack on the village, complete with a Viking boat replica. The mock battle that follows is far from quiet: weapons clash while horns and drums are played. While the real attack must have been scary for natives at the time, the modern re-enactment is all in good fun. Thousands of people attend each year.



Couple spots ostrich outside their South Wales home

Imagine looking out your window only to see a giant bird staring back at you. For Lynne Evans, it recently happened in Rhondda Valley, South Wales. The 58-year-old reportedly opened her blinds and saw an ostrich just a foot away from her window. Her first reaction was to scream so, naturally, her husband hurried downstairs to see what the problem was. After the initial shock wore off, the couple saw the humour in the situation – even stepping outside to snap some photos. Then, as quickly as it appeared, the bird turned a corner and was nowhere to be seen. Where it came from remains a mystery. Oddly enough, an ostrich was also spotted on the loose in Patna, Ayrshire, Scotland just weeks before.

Number of Irish passport applications rises by 50,000

Thousands more folks have applied for Irish passports this year, according to numbers from Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs. In the first seven months of 2016, there were 503,596 applications for Irish passports compared to 454,931 in the same period in 2015. This increase could be partially due to the recent Brexit results. Specifically, applications from people living in Great Britain surged by more than 70 percent in July alone, on the heels of the UK's decision to leave the EU in June. Last year there were 4,242 applications compared to 7,321 this past July. Applicants from residents of Northern Ireland also went up for that month. However, Brexit isn't the only factor - Euro 2016, as well as the comeback of international tourism, can also be credited for the increases.



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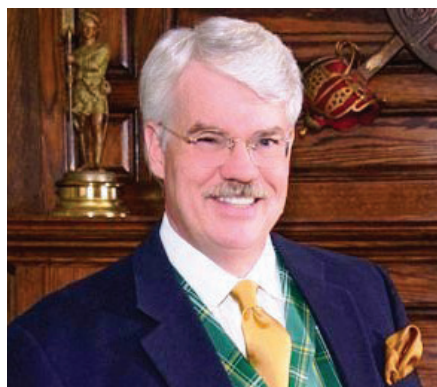
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Celts in the Community



Marc Hundleby

Marc Hundleby had no ocean sailing experience when he began training for the Clipper Round The World Yacht Race. A resident of Sydney, Australia, Hundleby is originally from the Isle of Man. Recently, he became the first Manxman to complete the world's longest ocean race. The event trains amateur sailors to become experienced ocean racers. It's divided into eight "legs" and is made up of a dozen individual races. Hundleby began his journey at St. Katharine Docks in London before winding his way to places such as Brazil, Cape Town, Australia, China, Seattle and through the Panama Canal. It added up to 48,430 miles of sailing and almost a year at sea with his crew. The team won their division in the Sydney to Hobart race. When the trek came to an end, Hundleby told Isle of Man Today, "It was an extremely emotional time knowing my family and friends were waiting to greet me, and I could see a number of Manx flags being waved from balconies and the dockside." In addition, he raised at least £1,350 for the Isle of Man Live at Home Schemes: a non-profit organization focused on providing services for elderly people on the island.



Bob Currie

Bob Currie is at the helm of the team that puts together The Pipes of Christmas concerts in New York City and New Jersey each holiday season. The Clan Currie Society has been hosting the event since 1999. The idea was sparked by Currie and piper Kevin Blandford, who wondered what a live version of Blandford's Christmas CD might sound like. The first Pipes of Christmas concert took place in New Jersey, with 800 people packed into a 700-seat venue. The event expanded into NYC in 2006. A couple of years ago, Currie spoke to Celtic Life International about how the show is focused on the true origins of Christmas. "We celebrate the birth of Jesus," he said. "There's no dancing snowmen or men in red suits. We wanted to honour the spirit and meaning of Christmas as our ancestors did. And this includes the singing of Gaelic hymns as well." Beyond the show, the Pipes of Christmas also participates in community outreach, raising money for dozens of organizations, including the American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, and the Gaelic Arts Agency. In addition, it offers five scholarships in partnership with educational institutions for studies in Celtic music and the Gaelic arts.



The Barrett Brothers

Two Welsh brothers are looking to shine the spotlight on their country's cuisine with a new Brooklyn-based restaurant. Dominic and Illtyd Barrett, who are originally from Milford Haven in Pembrokeshire, Wales, recently opened Sunken Hundred. The new locale takes its name from the Welsh myth of a kingdom that was engulfed by the sea hundreds of years ago. Illtyd has been living in New York for over two decades. He felt that, despite the variety of food in the city, something was lacking: a taste of Wales. The Barrett brothers began working to make the eatery a reality in 2008. "It's going really well so far," Illtyd told Wales Online in September. "Now that it's happened, it's quite overwhelming really...the reaction has been fantastic." Welsh-inspired fare is heavily featured on the menu, some complete with seaweed imported from Wales. The cuisine of Brittany and Northern Spain is also part of the selection. Lamb pasty, sautéed squid and pear pie are just a few examples of dishes to choose from. Beer from Spain and the U.K., as well as house cocktails, are also available to sip on. Appropriately, one of Sunken Hundred's drinks is named The Seithennin – meaning "lost to the sea." If Welsh cuisine becomes popular in the Big Apple, we'll know who to thank.





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first word



Silver Donald Cameron

With his latest book and a documentary film, Nova Scotia's Silver Donald Cameron makes the case for environmental rights

Silver Donald Cameron makes no bones about his bloodlines.

"I am five parts Scottish, two parts Irish, and one part French," says the best-selling author and founder of TheGreenInterview.com.

With that kind of ancestry, storytelling came naturally to the scribe.

"As a kid, I loved reading. I thought the world of books was magical. Many years later, when I was about 20, it occurred to me that I might be able to make magic myself. And that's still what I try to do."

Now 80, the pro-activist enjoys the benefits of hindsight, looking back on a long and prolific career.

"I've been shaped by my time and place more than I expected - I set out to be a novelist, and I like to think I've become steadily better at the craft. I've also had the privilege of living in a very small community where I could see at close range many lives that were different from my own, an experience which broadened my understanding of human experience and human possibility."

Facing forward, those experiences helped shape his latest effort, *Warrior Lawyers*, a series of interviews and essays promoting environmental activism.

"Chris Beckett and I have been doing TheGreenInterview.com since 2010, doing in-depth interviews with great environmental leaders from around the world, and in 2012 we interviewed David Boyd, a wonderful legal scholar. By then we were suffering a bit from issue fatigue - there are so many environmental issues besetting us on every front - but David talked about the citizen's legal right to a healthy environment, which is acknowledged in 181 of the UN's 193 member nations, and gives every citizen a tool to use when the citizen's environment is being degraded. Environmental rights are like the universal solvent, the unified field theory of environmentalism, the instrument that can be used on all the issues. And citizens around the world, particularly lawyers, are making fabulous use of those rights. But Canada and the U.S. are among the handful of nations that don't have them. So we went out to find the

stories from around the world that would show those here at home what we're missing, and what it would mean to us if we had those rights. Along the way we picked up some fabulous stories."

Piecing the book together proved more than rewarding.

"Meeting all these inspiring people, and getting to see parts of the world I'd never seen before, including Ecuador, Peru and Argentina, which are leading the world in terms of environmental rights. I also revisited European countries like Britain and the Netherlands. But mainly it's the people; I made very good friends in places like South Africa and the Philippines, which is a huge gift."

The process had a large learning curve.

"One thing that surprised me was that we're really seeing the rise of a global citizenship to match - and resist - the globalization of the economy."

"We've been at this almost full-time for four years, doing several movies, posting

about 24 full-length Green Interviews, and doing the book as well. It's been an obsession and also a runaway freight train. I self-published *Warrior Lawyers*, because there just wasn't enough time to involve a publisher and still get the book out fast enough to release it in tandem with the film, *Green Rights: The Human Right to a Healthy World*."

Both the book and the documentary film highlight the biggest issue facing humanity today.

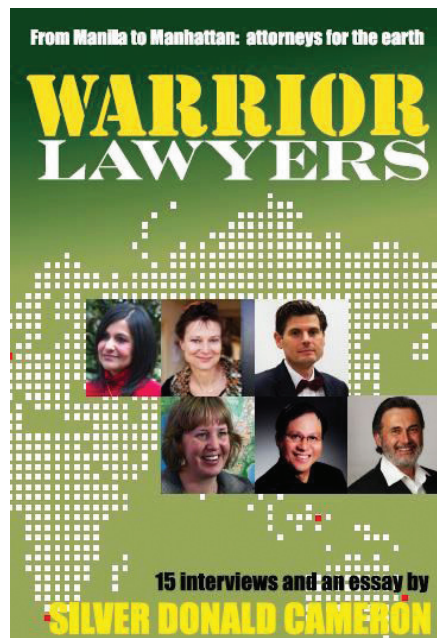
"Extinction," explains Cameron, "our own - and that of other creatures. That's the ultimate destination of what Ecuador's former energy minister, Alberto Acosta, calls 'the economy of death' that currently rules the world."

The solutions, he notes, "will require clear-eyed analysis and understanding, and a willingness to take absolutely uncompromising action."

"In Canada and the USA, that understanding has to involve genuinely linking up with the First Nations, who understand in their bones that the world is sacred, and that we are all part of that sacred reality. A superb and dramatic example, which the film talks about, is the successful anti-fracking campaign in Elsipogtog, New Brunswick, in 2013, when English-speaking and Acadian settlers joined hands with the First Nations to defend Mother Earth against depredations promoted by government, industry and the police. And they won. That has to happen again and again and again."

Cameron adds that, despite discerning belief, the average, everyday person can make a difference.

"Support the resistance to the economy of death at every level, and in every way that's open to you. I do books and films and interviews, but others do protests, boycotts, critical research, political action, art and music and much else. Everyone has gifts, and this is a struggle so profound and fundamental that it requires each of us to give our own special gifts to Mother Earth in whatever way we can."



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UP FRONT

With warmth, wit and gentle wisdom, Ellen Redmond welcomes world-weary travellers to Ireland with a twinkle in her eye

Ellen Redmond might be Dublin's Grande Dame; smart and stylish, she is quick with the craic, a kind word, good advice - and even quicker with the wine bottle.

"I'm the very best of Irish," she smiles, "Dublin born and bred!"

"Redmond is an anglicized version of Raymond le Gros, who arrived with the Normans," she explains. "However, as with many of the Irish who were subjects and often took the name of the masters, only a DNA test will prove if I am Celt or Norman. Or even something else..."

Her love of Eire's history and heritage, and a natural affinity for people, made a career in her country's thriving tourism industry an easy choice. After a trial run with Bord Fáilte (the Irish Tourist Board), Redmond found her fit.

"Clearly we liked each other!" she laughs. "Today I am the International Media Executive responsible for North America, and my responsibilities include drawing up itineraries for, and meeting with, visiting media. My goal is to make each one exciting and different, with something new for the readers or viewers."

The role, she admits, is not without its challenges.

"Trying to fit everything into the day can be difficult. It's a busy office with deadlines and complex itineraries that quite often need to be changed at the drop of a hat. Getting on top of, and staying on top of, all new social media outlets is interesting too!"

The rewards, however, are well worth the efforts.

"Reading a print piece or seeing a broadcast is very satisfying, but it is probably the reaction to those who find something unexpected here that's great. One example is the astonishment at how good the food is. There is an expectation of first time visitors here that it is all bacon and cabbage, but what you get is highly sophisticated cuisine (as well as bacon and cabbage!) that beats any destination I have visited hands down. The surprise and delight of our guests always gives me a kick. And being with someone who is telling the tale of visiting an ancestral homestead or perhaps meeting up with new found cousins is always moving."

And while the Emerald Isle continues to be a massively popular destination ("I can't argue with all polls who say it's our people!" smiles Redmond), the tourism sector is not without its issues.

"The challenges are probably the same facing all destinations. An expanded marketplace for one; Europe hugely in-

creased in size - and competition - with the fall of the Iron Curtain. Currency fluctuations are always a concern.

Brexit - Britain is a big market for us and there is a concern that the British market might soften. However we are a resilient company in a resilient industry and will overcome whatever challenges come our way."

The solutions, she believes, are to be both consistent and persistent.

"Continue feeding the markets with compelling reasons to visit Ireland. We have big idea brands such as the very successful Wild

Atlantic Way - the longest defined coastal driving route in the world - and Ireland's Ancient East, which holds some of the world's finest examples of prehistoric ingenuity, including a wealth of early Christian monasteries, massive medieval castles and sprawling abbeys, and great landed estates. And we are always future-proofing the industry by investing in new attractions."

Naturally, Redmond has her own preferred places.

"Well of course I would say Dublin, God's own country - I love rambling the city streets and seeing where I end up. I adore Kerry, particularly Valentia Island, and Connemara with the sun shining after rain stuns me with its kaleidoscope of colours. The rainbows around Horn Head in County Donegal are jaw-dropping. And Wicklow, with the gorse and heather blooming, is always a treat to take in. Any small island pub at night will transport you back centuries with music and singing, stories and dance. And any, and every, oyster bar. I could go on and on..."

Going forward, Redmond says that her organization will keep investing in Ireland's many brands - particularly the country's great capital city.

"The hope is to continue to sustain growth in Dublin by expanding to include the greater Dublin area. In Dublin city centre you are within an ass' roar of an empty beach or a mountain walk."

For now, she is busy preparing for a gaggle of visiting Canadian journalists.

"Time to break out the wine," she smiles with a twinkle in her eye.

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James Franklin is the Online and Educational Resources Officer for Culture Vannin on the Isle of Man. Recently, he answered our Seven Celtic Questions.



SEVEN CELTIC QUESTIONS

What are your Celtic Roots?

I am Manx, born and bred in the Isle of Man, in the centre of the Celtic nations. The strongest sense of my own Celtic roots lie in my youth and upbringing in the centre of a strong and traditional community in Maughold. It normalized a way of life and attitude to the past and the world around me, which set me up for my life now dedicated to the distinct culture of the Isle of Man.

Why are those roots important to you?

My understanding of where I come from and the land in which I belong is important to me as an inheritance from previous generations. I see it as a responsibility of mine to remain true to - and to make the most of - these roots. But to me this is not just a case of staying true to the past, but also of projecting that same heritage and culture into our own day and looking forward. It is not just the activities and traditions of the past, but how we live them today.

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

Being of Celtic heritage is an invitation to belong. Whether you take up that invitation is up to you. Celtic can be just location and lifestyle, but actively and positively taking part in that heritage is something that we must all try to achieve in our own individual way. I am thankful to be able to do this in my professional as well as my personal life.

How are you involved in Celtic culture?

I have the privilege of working for Culture Vannin, an organization which exists to promote, support and take forward the culture of the Isle of Man. In my particular role as Online and Educational Resources Officer, I discover ways to reach out to and engage new audiences in Manx culture in meaningful ways. I am tasked to inform, inspire and even challenge people into thinking about the ways in which they have Manxness as a part of their identity, and what that might mean, to them and to the wider world. Whether working with children in Manx schools or with adults across the globe through digital media, the task is thrilling.

Why is it important to keep Celtic culture alive?

The sense of being a part of a distinct, vibrant and living culture is something which enriches our lives, both as individuals and as a community. We are better people for it, and our community is stronger and more resilient also. If we can pass on what we have inherited of Celtic culture, that would be a great thing; if we can inspire those who follow us to not only pass on the inherited culture but to take it forward and add to it in new and exciting ways, that is a far greater thing indeed.

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

I will never fail to be amazed at how keen, full of energy and brimming with ideas so many people are in the cause of Celtic culture. The great amount of time and dedication given by an enormous body of people is truly staggering to behold. I feel that if there were only more organizations ready there to nurture, harness and direct that energy and ability then so much more could be achieved. The limits of the activities undertaken, the people reached and attitudes changed could be pushed back in entirely new ways.

What can we be doing better?

Celtic identity can be perceived by some to be the domain of enthusiasts only; not something for them. It is because of this that it can be seen as a niche "interest" set apart from popular norms, even at the same time as people display great regional and national pride and carry on many of the activities and beliefs which set us apart as a Celtic nation. We need to break down that barrier and strive to find new ways to reach out to and connect these people with the culture which we all share. Online media, new technology and different types of digital offerings must all be a part of this today. Celtic culture should be the domain of many, in many ways, not that of only the few. We at Culture Vannin intend to do something about this.

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My Ireland Family Heritage

If you have ever been curious about your Irish ancestry, Sean Quinn might well be your go-to-guy



As the founder of My Ireland Family Heritage, Sean Quinn promises to “personally guide you on a journey into your past.”

Quinn has more than 40 years in the tourism industry under his belt, first becoming interested in genealogy about two decades ago while researching his own family history.

“I am Irish and very proud of the fact that my Quinn name goes back to the High Kings of Ireland: Art McCuinn from the fourth century,” he tells Celtic Life International via e-mail. “This inspired me to search deeper to the coming of the Celts and the Tuatha Dé Danann (the Celtic people of the goddess Danu).”

That research inspired him to become a qualified Irish genealogist and start up My Ireland Family Heritage, which today offers personalized genealogy research, vacation tours as well as heritage trips to Ireland.

A genealogy research package may contain everything from a written report on your ancestral Irish family, copies and

transcripts of any relevant documents found, and copies of maps showing where the family continues to live.

The heritage trips also involve full genealogical research of the family, which can shape a suggested itinerary of the Irish excursion. In other words, clients will have a chance to walk where their ancestors once did. Guided tours and self-drive options are both available. Quinn explains that all the research is done in advance, thus saving time when someone actually arrives for their vacation.

“Our specialty is finding your ancestor and taking you there,” he explains. “Prior to a client visiting on their vacation, our exploration team will visit your ancestral townland - your family’s original settlement or home - to research local archives, churches and graveyards, and speak to locals who have prior knowledge of your ancestors.”

The idea is that a tour will be tailored to the client, with the client. Often, they will be able to visit their ancestors’ graveyard or family church. There’s also a chance they could meet some living, long-lost relatives. Additional historic sites can also be incorporated into the tour, which might possibly include ancient hill forts, Viking sites, and Norman settlements.

Such trips give My Ireland Family Heritage an advantage over the competition, according to Quinn, as they offer more than genealogy research itself. Most of the team’s clientele come from the United States, Canada and Australia.

“Our core clients are middle to late-aged, with a genuine interest in where their ancestors once lived in Ireland, the history of the local area, and a keen interest in learning about the island of Ireland.”

The team’s goal is to find the exact location for each client’s family, which can often prove to be difficult. That said, it boasts a 95 percent success rate.

“The records in Ireland have been badly destroyed. Even through my own family research I found my own great-great-grandfather was not registered at the time of the Great Famine,” says Quinn. He also had to piece together what he calls “missing years”, which were destroyed during the Irish Civil War in 1922. This time period, he suggests, is vital to finding a client’s roots.

“We pride ourselves and take delight when we can find our clients their ancestor and bring them home to their exact townland in Ireland.”

The “townland” he refers to is a geographical division of land used in Ireland. As the My Ireland Family Heritage website states, the system is of Gaelic origin. “A townland can be anything from a half an acre to 2,000 acres.”

For Quinn, each family history is a challenge as well as a profound experience.

“It often brings our clients to tears in many cases as it is a search done from the heart and a willingness to learn and discover where you are from and is indeed very special. We are very passionate about embarking on this journey with our clients. The research and tours are all rewarding.”

Looking ahead, he says the hope is to develop and grow the business further.

“When people emigrated from Ireland, particularly in the famine years – 1845-1850 – it was to seek a better life for their future generations. It is wonderful to take people back to where their ancestors first came from.”

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Kate Dowman

*Celtic and classical soprano
Kate Dowman says the Manx
hills are calling her home*

Though vocalist Kate Dowman was born and raised on the tiny Isle of Man, it never stopped her from dreaming big. Her youthful aspirations have led to performances all around the world, including a private recital for Madonna and friends.

Now she is returning to her roots, recording a Manx Gaelic album.

"It is incredibly exciting as I will be going back to the Isle of Man shortly to do some more research and finalize everything," the 30-something songstress tells Celtic Life International from her current home in London. "The songs of the Isle of Man are so beautiful and rarely heard now."

Dowman describes her own heritage as mixed: her mother's family was Manx and Irish, while her father's was English and French.

"My father, a doctor on the Isle of Man, was a great linguist. He spoke Russian, French, Italian, German, Arabic and Spanish. Perhaps there is a link there, as he had a wonderful ear and often took me to classical music concerts as a youngster."

Along with vocals, she learned to play flute, piano and harp. Singing, however, was her first and foremost passion.

"I started performing at a very early age on the Isle of Man, at school, at church, and in the local Eisteddfods - or Young Singer of Mann - music competitions. I have a recording of me singing one of the Manx Gaelic songs when I was about eight years old."

Dowman believes that she was born with a natural love of music.

"It is part of my soul; not only the traditional folk songs that started my journey, but also sacred music such as Oratorio and Handel."

After leaving school she studied music at university in the United Kingdom

before completing her opera training in Sydney, Australia.

Despite the formal education, Dowman always felt the pull of her Celtic roots.

"I had a wonderful Celtic harp teacher who was very involved in the Manx Heritage Society and was a great musical inspiration. I always thought the Celtic harp was like listening to angels."

Performing, she insists, is when she is most focused and most honest.

"I find it a huge honour to be able to deliver beautiful music to my audiences," she shares, "whether it is a big Mozart opera, an early music concert work, an intimate evening of Celtic songs, or a mixture of all at a fabulous gala ball where guests sip champagne."

Dowman explains that she has "two voices": one is her trained operatic voice that must project to the back of a concert hall or opera house.

"The other is the more natural voice I use when I sing Celtic songs; softer and gentler, less vibrato, more breath. Maybe if Enya and Sarah Brightman merged you might find someone a bit like me."

She credits well-known English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams with assembling and arranging many Celtic folk songs that might otherwise not have been written down. His collections have allowed artists to bring new life to the traditional songs.

"There seems to have been a real revival of Celtic music in the past few years which is wonderful."

A career musician, she suggests, is forever learning and evolving, practicing discipline and perseverance, all the while accepting the occasional rejection and discovering new direction. For Dowman, a constant inspiration is the wealth of music

at her disposal.

"There is the magical 12th century plainchant to church music to opera and of course, Celtic folk songs. I think what I love about these is the freedom of interpretation. Unlike opera, they have been passed down traditionally by mouth rather than being written.

"There essentially isn't a right or a wrong way to sing them, so I have greater freedom than with having every aspect of notation being set by the composer and then highly directed by the conductor."

It was during a period of illness and a life-threatening operation that Dowman began writing her own songs.

"They sit somewhere between folk and classical and are still very much evolving."

She continues to listen to a wide range of music for inspiration.

"My iPod goes from Puccini to Bob Dylan, from Enya to Gluck, from Edith Piaf to Debussy via The Carpenters and Vaughan Williams. Maria Callas is probably the greatest vocal actress I have ever heard, and Nana Mouskouri sang folk-songs very beautifully."

In addition to Madonna's private recital - which was attended by Gwyneth Paltrow, Chris Martin, Stella McCartney and Tracey Emin - Dowman cites singing in the Sydney Opera House and at a charity concert in Tiananmen Square as career highlights.

"This is not a vocation that has very much routine," she smiles. "Some months I will have a lot of operatic work, while others will see a lot of corporate work, auditions, practicing, time to write my own songs, and - of course - to look after my lovely husband! It is a bit like juggling, but I wouldn't change it for the world."

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Cassie & Maggie

From festivals to folk clubs and cruise ships to concert halls, Celtic musicians Cassie and Maggie MacDonald happily go wherever their music takes them



“We have had a crazy few months but no complaints from us,” laughs Cassie MacDonald, shortly after a hurricane stranded them at sea for five days. “We were too far out to swim, with no e-mail and no phone service.”

The sisters - who grew up in Halifax and Antigonish, Nova Scotia, - are a lively fiddle and piano-playing, step-dancing duo with lovely singing voices. As Live Ireland Radio puts it, “the train is just gathering steam and leaving the station on these new stars.”

Maggie was catching up on banking when Cassie took a break between cruise ship performances and a video shoot to talk about their new album and an autumn tour that will take them to Austria, England, Italy, the northeastern United States, and home to Canada.

“The new album, *The Willow Connection*, has nine songs and two instrumental pieces so that’s a shift toward vocals for us,” she shares. “It features a lot of tunes from the English/Scottish/Irish tradition; for example, *Down in the Willow Garden* is a beautiful Irish song that was adapted to bluegrass.”

They chose the willow theme, believing the tree is a powerful symbol, sometimes of strength and comfort and sometimes of sadness.

“Maggie did all our research, going through a lot of old archives and field recordings, including the Helen Creighton collection in Nova Scotia, the Max Hunter (Ozark folk) collection, and the Appalachian archives.”

Maggie, who sings in fluent Gaelic, wanted to include a song of that genre, but could not find anything to fit the album.

“We decided to include something kind of upbeat,” explains Cassie, “so we wrote a melody and asked (fellow Antigonish musician and Nova Scotia’s executive



director of Gaelic Affairs) Lewis MacKinnon to write the lyrics.”

In addition to including more vocals than on previous albums, Cassie acknowledges the album goes beyond traditional Celtic music.

“We will always be Celtic musicians, no matter what we play.”

“But there is more folk in this album. It is something we can take to American folk audiences, something a bit more diverse - something we have added to our traditional Celtic base.”

Both girls were Highland dancers and got an early grounding in classical music. However, genetics may have dictated that they would become Celtic musicians.

“Our grandfather, Hugh A. MacDonald of Antigonish, was an amazing fiddler. He went to Montreal by train in 1935 to record six 78 LPs that are still in the family, along with little cassettes of him playing at house parties. He passed away before we could meet him but we certainly knew his music from an early age.”

Growing up, Cassie became glued to a pink portable CD player that played six recordings - all fiddle tunes. When she was

nine, her cousin Kendra MacGillivray, a well-known fiddler, taught her to play.

“The tunes were already in my head so I just had to learn to play them. Soon I was off to the races with my built-in repertoire.”

Maggie also started with fiddle, but was more taken by piano.

“We grew up surrounded by live music and with an aunt who is a great piano player. I had the head start on the fiddle and I suppose Maggie, who was a natural musician, wanted to find her own way.”

Cassie suspects she and her sister grew up like most other Celtic musicians in Nova Scotia.

“We played for years in kitchens before we ever played for money, so it has always been for the joy of it.”

“By the time we went off to university we were getting gigs and seeing that there might be a future in music.”

After leaving university four years ago - Cassie was studying political science and Maggie neuroscience - the pair went into music full time.

“The future is an uncertain thing so we make the most of our days. We love to play and not many people our age can travel like we do.”

And though they are still learning the business side of music, the sonic siblings have found a split in responsibilities that suits their personalities.

“We know each others’ strengths - and we know what buttons not to push - so we are having a blast.”

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Anne Emery



Music, history, politics and religion - the constants in any Anne Emery novel - converge again in her most recent thriller, Lament for Bonnie

With nine Collins-Burke novels in ten years - three of them award-winners - Nova Scotia author Anne Emery has established herself as a powerful mystery writer, spinning intricate plots with a distinguished cast of characters. To date her work has been set primarily in Halifax, New York and Ireland, but the newly published *Lament for Bonnie* is a Cape Breton story.

A litigation lawyer who spends most of her time doing research, Emery's penchant for Celtic tales stems from her own heritage.

"My background is Irish-Canadian and that was very much in evidence growing up in New Brunswick, with a large Irish contingent among my relatives and the circles my parents travelled in," she recalls. "Going back into the past, I have ancestors in Counties Fermanagh, Wexford, Donegal, Cork, Tipperary and others."

Having complemented her Celtic ties by marrying a criminal lawyer from Antigonish, NS, whose ancestors fought on Culloden Moor, Emery works that Highland heritage, complete with the Gaelic gift of *an da shealladh* - or second sight - into the backdrop of the new narrative.

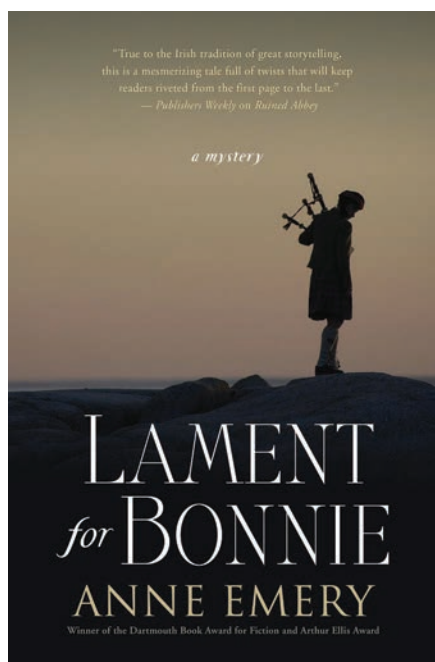
"I love novels set in a place with a rich culture, and what is richer than Celtic culture?"

"Cape Breton has it all: the Scots and Irish settlements, the Gaelic language, wit, traditional music and the beautiful scenery that is astonishingly similar to that in Scotland."

The series' main characters are Halifax lawyer Monty Collins, Irish - American Roman Catholic priest Brennan Burke, and social worker Maura MacNeil. Emery acknowledges the acerbic Burke tends to evoke the strongest reaction from readers. The relationships between the three - and those who come into their lives through family ties or happenstance - add the spice.

Lament for Bonnie is fashioned around

the daughter of a musical family. Music is central to Emery's work: song lyrics or literary quotes introduce each of her chapters, and she agrees with French writer Victor Hugo's contention that "music expresses what cannot be said." A walk while listening to music is also her antidote for characters that resist her direction or plot incongruities.



Speaking from Belfast, the setting for her next novel, Emery explains she is sculpting her characters through research.

"I've spent the last two days hearing gobsmacking tales about The Troubles, from a lawyer here and from a fellow who served time in prison during that era. I consider myself fairly well-versed in that history, but you haven't heard anything until you've heard it from the horse's mouth."

Her initial inspiration came from a particular Irish building.

"As soon as I saw it, I said, 'There's a book in that,'" she notes, adding her char-

acters become entangled in the justice system that prevailed in Northern Ireland. "In the 'Diplock courts' the right to trial by jury and other rights we take for granted in Anglo-Canadian-American courts were eliminated for certain offences."

Emery, who wrote her first mystery in Grade 3 - one that remains unsolved to this day - has been driven since childhood by a vivid imagination and a love of telling stories.

"I am interested in people, their motivations, their wit and conversation."

"Certain themes or historical events set me off, so I suppose I have expanded on my initial reasons for writing. And I do solve the mysteries at the end now."

The most challenging aspect of writing, she says, is working out complicated plot elements and avoiding logical errors.

"I may require one character to know a particular fact early on and it may be difficult to justify why another character does not learn of it until later. Or I want the police to drop the most serious charge against a defendant when in real life he would still face prosecution for included or less serious offences. I want him to go free and I have to justify that - without writing a legal brief on the subject."

For Emery it was a book on the oral history of Dublin's pubs that triggered the idea for an earlier Irish mystery, *Death at Christy Burke's*.

"The other inspiration for that one, and for several of my books, is the old and more recent Troubles in Ireland. I get caught up in the lives of real-life participants only to experience shock and grief when I turn the next page of the book and the person has disappeared - has been killed. I wanted to convey a sense of that conflict and loss in my novels."

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Galway-based Crannóg showcases the best in new Irish and International literature

The mandate of the thrice-yearly magazine, as it has been since its inception 14 years ago, is to create a world audience for Irish writers and to bring work of an international standard to their attention.

Since 1982, members of the Galway Writers' Workshop had gathered on Saturday afternoons in the upstairs of the town's Bridge Mills Building. After two decades together, the group decided to launch a formal publication.

As poet Tony O'Dwyer recalls, a number of names were floated before a member of the group pointed to a window, observed that they were surrounded by water, and wondered if they should call it Crannóg - a term used to describe an ancient Irish lake dwelling.

"The first issue of the magazine was launched in what was then the Atlanta Hotel on Dominick Street, a favourite haunt of the arts community in Galway at the time. That issue contained poetry and fiction by the 16 members of the workshop."

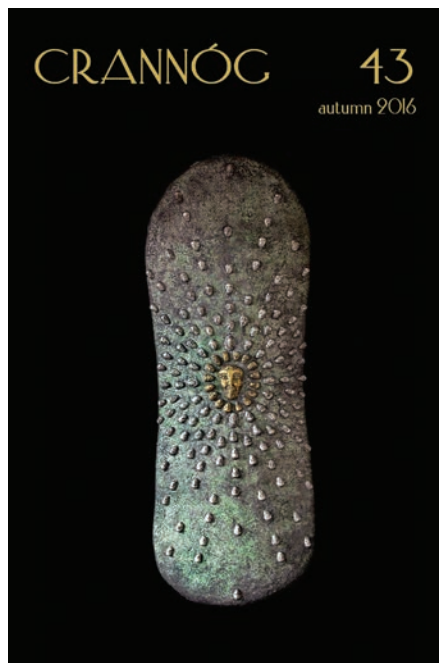
The second edition included work from other Galway writers, and by the third issue, submissions from writers all over Ireland were accepted. A year later the magazine had an online presence and international offerings poured in.

"Today, Crannóg is read all over the world," notes O'Dwyer. "Many Crannóg authors have been included in the Forward Book of Poetry and nominated for a Pushcart Prize, highlighting the quality and reach of the magazine."

Alongside O'Dwyer, the four-member editorial board is made up of novelist and short story writer Ger Burke, actor and poet Jarlath Fahy, and Montreal writer and visual artist Sandra Bunting. O'Dwyer and Burke recently put their heads together to discuss how far they have come and the challenges ahead.

"Money is always an issue for a literary magazine," says Burke.

She notes that Crannóg is lucky to be supported by the Arts Council of Ireland and the Galway City Arts Office.



"In the early days, prior to getting funding, it was very challenging to produce the magazine while keeping costs to a minimum. Distribution is another problem for literary magazines in print. We rely on the postal service rather than incur the costs of a representative to call on retail outlets, but the postal service is becoming more costly."

Another challenge, notes Burke, is the sheer volume of labour that is done on a voluntary basis.

"For each of the three issues we receive in the region of 800 submissions. The four editorial board members read every poem and short story. That entails a lot of work as we don't use readers or filter the submissions."

At the end of each reading period, an editorial meeting is held to discuss submissions with each member listing favourites and possibilities.

"We are continually surprised by the level of unanimity. Where our preferences don't coincide, a process of debating, defending and advocating ensues."

The satisfaction, they agree, comes in providing an outlet for writers' work. Each issue is formally launched with contributors given the opportunity to read their work to an audience and socialize with other writers.

Their online presence, which includes YouTube videos of magazine launches and readings, gives them a world-wide audience - "a shop window to the world" that garners hits from every continent. One goal is to further develop their website as a resource for readers and writers as a place to display author interviews and excerpts of work.

"In addition to launches, we also organize a number of readings at festivals throughout Ireland," adds Burke. "Our aim is to extend these readings to include other countries such as the United Kingdom and Canada."

Burke is concerned the arts are less accessible in Ireland today than they should be.

"Poetry, in particular, is seen as a minority and elitist pursuit. We believe there is an untapped audience for poetry if those perceived barriers could be broken down."

Erasing that sense of elitism, whether real or perceived, continues to be a challenge.

"We do make an effort to make our launches and readings relaxed and unpretentious. Though the content of the magazine is of a high literary standard, our readings are enjoyed as a social as well as a literary event."

Crannóg's newsletter, Word on the Street, is circulated to over 3,000 contacts worldwide - something that helps with subscriptions. The magazine is available in many brick-and-mortar bookshops, and can also be purchased online in both print and e-book formats.

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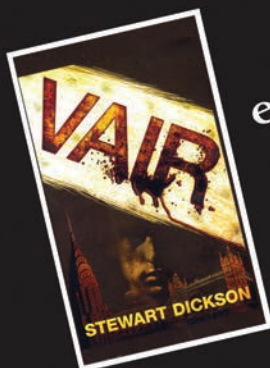
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Author Gunna Dickson is a New York based writer, editor and translator. Illustrator and fine artist Jon McIntosh lives and works in Key West.

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Father Shay



More than forty years after establishing a foundation to rescue oppressed children in the Philippines, Father Shay Cullen returns to his roots for recognition



Father Shay Cullen, 72, is the 2016 Hugh O'Flaherty International Humanitarian Award winner.

Named for a fellow priest and Irish countryman who saved thousands during the Second World War, the prize will be awarded at a ceremony in Killarney this November. It is the ninth commemoration of the work of Monsignor O'Flaherty who, with colleagues along the Rome Escape Line, saved 6,500 people from the Nazis during the occupation of Rome.

"On behalf of those children we have rescued and those human rights workers who, like Monsignor Hugh, continue to work for the unjustly imprisoned, the refugees trying to escape from ISIS and war, and those risking their lives to help them escape, I gladly accept the award," said Cullen on learning of the honour.

In 1974, Cullen established the PREDA Foundation in Olongapo City, Philippines, to promote human rights, justice and peace. Since then, he and the foundation have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times. The organization rescues boys from jail and provides them with a safe haven, including therapy and education. It also offers a home, therapy and education for abused girls rescued from sex bars, pimps and abusers. The group's third mandate is a public education campaign to prevent human trafficking and the sex-slavery of children.

"Believing that poverty, violence and child abuse are barriers to peace and give rise to extremism, he strives to eliminate

child abuse and promotes respect for children's rights," states the award announcement. "He works for peace by working to change the unjust economic, political and social structures and attitudes that allow such abuse."

Cullen, also an author and newspaper columnist, says the award will raise long-overdue awareness for the cause.

"It is just a great way to advance the advocacy of human rights of the abused and unjustly jailed and exploited people, especially children. Awards are vehicles of understanding and knowledge and advocacy."

Born in Dun Laoghaire, near Dublin, Cullen finished school in 1962 with neither the money nor the grades to go to university and saw "no options but to work in English factories."

"I was interested in helping people and so, as a young person, the adventurous life of going abroad and working among the poor appealed to me."

Though he was not heavily involved with the Roman Catholic Church, his social activism soon found an outlet within the ranks of the clergy.

"I thought of doing some good in this world and making my life meaningful so I joined the Missionary Society of St. Columba in Dalgan, Navan, County Meath, and I just about made it through the studies and graduation when ordained in 1969."

He was assigned by the Columbans to a parish in Olongapo City, then home to a large U.S. naval base on Subic Bay.

"The sex industry in the town brought many social problems," recalls Cullen: "broken homes, abandoned kids, children in the sex bars, hundreds of brothels and unemployment."

He adds that the perils for young people in the Philippines continue to this day.

"President Ferdinand Marcos had death squads and was shooting a lot of these youth - just as is still going on in the Philippines under the shoot-to-kill orders of President Duterte. The police and vigilante assassins are killing street youth drug users, all suspects with motor bike riding gangs."

While the recognition is important, Cullen believes that the real rewards come from knowing he is making lives better and more meaningful.

"In Olongapo I saw the social conditions, and many youth branded as drug addicts and criminals. Some were dissidents against martial law, but killed by the death squads. Some former students of mine were jailed. I thought the best way to help them was to open a shelter for them so they could be safe and start a new life."

In spite of threats against PREDA, Cullen went public in his fight in 1983, challenging both the local government and the U.S. military.

"I exposed the child prostitution ring selling nine to 14-year-old girls to Navy pedophiles and sex tourists. I was sued and was to be deported, but I survived."

The military's leases on Subic Bay and in Angeles City were not renewed and today the areas are economic zones, providing employment for as many as 120,000.

PREDA has a volunteer and internship program for local and international volunteers and students, as well as a website and social media channels. It also works with the country's indigenous people and small mango growers to market dried fruit in Ireland. The earnings help the farmers and fund the child protection projects.

As always, he urges others to get involved.

"It's as easy as writing emails to European Union politicians to get political pressure on the Philippines government to stop killing their young people."

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Today's *King Arthur*



Historians may argue that King Arthur never really existed. However, as Celtic Life International correspondent Steve Andrews explains, that hasn't stopped one man from claiming that he is the reincarnation of the legendary Celtic hero

In 1986, John Timothy Rothwell officially changed his name by deed poll to Arthur Uther Pendragon, and has lived ever since doing what he can to uphold the “ancient virtues of Truth, Honour and Justice” in Britain’s “hour of greatest need.”

As a druid leader, an eco-warrior and political activist, he has become famous as a modern King Arthur, and until a “bigger, badder and bolder” version comes along, he has no intention of relinquishing the role.

A self-confessed “media tart,” Pendragon has been featured on many TV shows, has made the headlines of national newspapers, had a book published about him, and has been the subject of a documentary film. He once had his own column in the Esher News & Mail newspaper too. Not bad for someone who left school in his mid-teens with no qualifications.

As John Rothwell, he once had a steady job and was in charge of a construction company. However, he gave up his “normal” life - replete with a house, a car and a relationship - to ride off on his motorbike to live as King Arthur.

Not King John

You are probably wondering how all this happened, and why anyone would make such dramatic changes in their life? Pendragon has explained that he once wrote all his nicknames on a plank of wood. He had been the leader of a motorbike gang at that time and had many aliases, including Bacardi, Geronimo and King John. A friend looked at all the names and said:

“You’re not King John; you are King Arthur, the once and future king.” Now Arthur had had dreams in what he thinks were ancient Celtic languages and had always felt that he was different. That he could be the reincarnation of King Arthur made some sort of sense to him, but he wanted a sign to confirm it - something he received when he visited Stonehenge where a bird flew out of the stones right at him. He interpreted this as the sign he was seeking.

The Loyal Arthurian Warband

Soon after accepting that he was King Arthur, he founded the Druid Order known as the Loyal Arthurian Warband. Members are sworn to uphold the “Ancient Virtues of Truth, Honour and Justice,” with Knights taking an oath on Excalibur - the “Sword of Britain” (which originally came from an antiques dealer, but had been made for and used in the movie Excalibur) - and Ladies swearing on the scabbard. A number of celebrities, including punk-rock star John Lydon (a.k.a. Johnny Rotten), have been knighted by King Arthur. Heavy metal star Ozzy Osbourne and son Jack are also knights of the Arthurian Warband.

Stonehenge Campaigns

Many of Pendragon’s campaigns have been focused around Stonehenge. Back in the 1990s, he was arrested year after year for breaking the so-called “exclusion zone” at Summer Solstice, in which the authorities tried to prevent the public from going

to the stone circle. Eventually the rules were changed and free public access at solstice was allowed. However, earlier this year new regulations were introduced, which have since resulted in a new protest by the druid leader. English Heritage, the organization that manages Stonehenge, has started a car-park charge, as well as an alcohol ban, and Pendragon has been very vocal in opposing both changes. He has often called Stonehenge a “Druid cathedral” and argues that charging to park vehicles is forcing pagans to “pay to pray.”

In recent years, Pendragon has been campaigning for the “bones of the ancient dead” to be returned to their resting places around Stonehenge. The bones were removed by archaeologists in 2008 with the assurance they would be returned after they had been studied. This was never done, however. Pendragon has no argument with scientists studying these human remains, but maintains they should be put back where they were originally laid to rest. He says it is a “matter of common decency,” and he has collected many petition signatures from the general public to support his belief. This is an example of how Pendragon sees himself as a king of the people who accept him, and whose views he represents. There is no one else doing a better job of being the Celtic chieftain returned, and for those who believe in him, he is indeed a King amongst men.

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The Birthplace of **Peter Pan**



Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands ignites his imagination with a visit to Scotland's magical Moat Brae, the birthplace of Peter Pan



Standing behind the red sandstone, Georgian villa - once known as Number One Dumfries - the lawn was spread out in front of me, passing between several large trees before sloping down to the gentle, flowing waters of the River Nith. A sudden gust of wind sent a column of leaves spiraling upwards, and the tall trees whispered in the breeze. Nearby, I heard the tinkling of a bell followed by the sound of children escaping the clutches of school. Filled with excitement, I trod cautiously for this was a very special place - I was in the garden where Peter Pan was born.

Ever since J. M. Barrie's Peter Pan - or, The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up - debuted on stage in London in December of 1904, various film and pantomime adaptations of the original story have ensured its place as a Christmas favourite. In 1911, Barrie published the novel Peter and Wendy, and the boy who could fly soon winged his way around the world. But few people are aware that the story that has gripped the imagination of children and adults alike began in the garden of Number One Dumfries, now known as Moat Brae.

James Matthew Barrie was born on May 9, 1860, in the small Scottish town of Kirriemuir. He was the ninth of ten children born to David Barrie and Margaret Ogilvy. When Barrie was six years old his elder brother David died in a skating accident. The young Barrie did everything he could to comfort his distraught mother - even wearing his brother's clothes and emulating his whistling. But her greatest comfort, and one that made a lasting impact on Barrie, was her belief that because her son had died young he would never grow up and leave her.

In 1873, at the age of 13, Barrie was living in Dumfries with his older brother Alexander and his sister Mary Ann. The house they occupied was next to Dumfries



J.M. Barrie

Academy, where Barrie was enrolled as a pupil, and only a short walk from the impressive Moat Brae, home of his school friends Stuart and Hal Gordon. Together the three boys would let their imaginations run wild in the grounds of Moat Brae and they would enact swashbuckling pirate adventures along the river. Many years later, Barrie acknowledged that, "When I came to the Academy I intended to work hard - and I would have probably worked hard - had it not been for another boy who led me astray. It was Stuart Gordon. But that wasn't the name he was known by at school. He came up to me and asked my name. I told him. That didn't seem to please him. He said, 'I'll call you Sixteen String Jack. I asked his name and he said it was Dare Devil Dick. He asked me if I would join his pirate crew. I did. That was fatal to my prize giving.'"

"Barrie spent many happy hours playing in Moat Brae, its garden and the adjacent banks of the River Nith leading him to note, 'I was more in that house than any other in Dumfries.'"

During Barrie's five years in Dumfries, the town's Theatre Royal, one of the oldest working theatres in Scotland, underwent a major renovation by renowned theatre architect C. J. Phipps. As a regular visitor to the theatre, the new state of the art facilities - and the exciting, visiting productions that the theatre attracted - must have made an impression upon him. Also, at that time Dumfries was able to boast one of only two camera obscuras in Scotland. It is almost certain that the inquisitive Barrie and his two friends would have visited such an unusual and exciting attraction to experience the wonderment of seeing an aerial view of Dumfries projected on the circular surface before them - one that created a sense of flying! Barrie must have been impressed by the amazing experience of a camera obscura, for years later he gifted a cricket pavilion complete with camera obscura to his hometown of Kirriemuir.

Adding all of these influences together, it is not difficult to see how they fuelled the imagination of a young boy playing in the enchanted garden of Moat Brae. In 1906 the Gordons sold the house to a knitwear manufacturer, and from 1914 until 1997 it was a nursing home. It was then purchased by a businessman, who planned to create a themed hotel, but the project never materialized and it was sold to a local Housing Association. A lack of funds and maintenance over the years took their toll, and by 2009 the house was in a perilous condition. With the roof in danger of imminent collapse, the Housing Association decided to demolish the building and clear



the site. To lose such an important part of the town's - and nation's - history was anathema to some of the local townsfolk, and so they formed the Peter Pan Action Group. With only three days left until the bulldozers moved in they obtained a court injunction to prevent the demolition of the inspirational property. The Peter Pan Moat Brae Trust was then formed and was granted three years to accrue the £75,000 necessary to buy the property from the Housing Association, or it would again face demolition. Just in time, the necessary funds were raised. Having saved the property, however, the dilemma was now what to do with it.

The first priority was to halt the ongoing decay of the building, and sufficient funds were raised for essential building works to render it wind and watertight. Inside its spacious interior, fragments of the original décor remain. Remnants of ornate, crumbling cornices, mosaic floors, and huge windows overlooking the garden provide a glimpse of the world that Barrie frequented as a boy. It was a world of imagination, and it is imagination that is the key to the future of Moat Brae.



In March 2011, Cathy Agnew, project director for PPMBT, was delivering a paper on Moat Brae to the International Conference, 'A Hundred Years of Peter Pan and Wendy' hosted by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain. She recalls, "I was talking with the other delegates and became aware of their immense interest and enthusiasm for the place that nurtured Barrie's imagination."

"In an instant I realized that what was special about Moat Brae House and its garden was that it was a place of inspiration and should continue to inspire future generations."

From this epiphany emerged a clear direction for the restoration of Moat Brae.

Back in Dumfries, and with the assistance of renowned actress Joanna Lumley as patron, the plan was launched for Moat Brae to become the National Centre for Children's Literature and Storytelling, in-

spiring future generations of children and adults alike to harness the power of imagination. Since then, over £5M has been raised.

When Christmas is over and the curtains fall on this season's Peter Pan pantomimes, a new curtain will rise at Moat Brae, Dumfries, as construction work will commence on site. The National Centre for Children's Literature and Storytelling will accommodate writers and artists in residence, with new spaces for all types of creative arts including writing, drawing, acting, filming and playing, with a family reading room, an education suite, a café, a bookshop and more. And, of course, it will have its own enchanted Neverland Garden with adventure trails, art installations, performance spaces and places to explore - all overlooking the river where Barrie and the Gordon brothers acted out their pirate adventures. In Barrie's words it would seem that, "Dreams do come true if only we wish hard enough."

There is still much work to do to complete the designs and raise the funds for the interior installations that will follow once the main construction works are complete. Unfazed, the Peter Pan Moat Brae Trust has already shown the true power and magic of imagination - the same power of imagination that Barrie noted in a 1924 speech when he was granted the Freedom of Dumfries: "When shades of light began to fall, certain young mathematicians shed their triangles and crept up trees and down walls in an odyssey which would long after become the play of Peter Pan. For our escapades in a certain Dumfries garden, which is enchanted land to me, were certainly the genesis of that nefarious work."

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County Sligo: The Old & the New

*Bestselling author, poet, publisher, professor, musician and surfer
Lesley Choyce takes in the best of western Ireland*

Driving from Dublin to Sligo last year, my wife Linda and I kept noticing signs with slogans we didn't quite understand. "Children deserve both a mother and a father. Vote No." "Surrogacy - she needs her mother for life, not just 9 months." Whatever the question about to be voted on, it was clear it was about parenthood, children and yet another issue that was deeply dividing the Irish.

It wasn't until a while later that we realized the crux of the matter was not really babies but same sex marriage. Later that May, a referendum was held across Ireland and 62% of the population voted in favour of a change to the Irish constitution that reads as follows: "Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex." Even though Linda and I had travelled to Ireland previously to explore things old - and even ancient - here we were confronted with the new Ireland, moving deeper into the twenty-first century despite those billboards urging voters to stick to the old ways.

As we arrived in Sligo town, it was raining and jammed with traffic, so we pushed on to Drumcliff on the N15 for our first glimpse of Benbulbin and the turnoff that would take us to our rented home in the tiny village of Raghly on Sligo Bay. Falling

asleep that night, I pondered again exactly what was it that kept drawing me back to the western coast of Ireland.

It was the ocean, of course, and the craggy land. And the people. But it always seemed to be more than that; something deeper - as if I was being called back to a place that had been home to me in another lifetime. Alas, as a fiction writer, such a notion has great appeal to me, but there are probably simpler explanations. I like rural, rugged places and am jealous of the Irish men I meet who can spin a most captivating tale in a mellifluous tone when asked even the most simple tourist questions like, "Where is the closest store where I can buy a few cans of Murphy's?"

The answer to that burning question was provided by an old gent standing by the side of the road in Cloughboley. It was a Sunday morning and he was propped up by a pitchfork and minding his own business and clearly in no hurry for anything. A true cynic might have thought he had been hired by Tourism Ireland to position himself there looking like a character from Ryan's Daughter, waiting for travellers like us to come along. When I made my enquiry he immediately complimented me on my choice of Murphy's over Guinness and told me that the Supervalu up ahead in Grange would do the trick.

"But I'm sad to say there is a problem," he added, looking at his watch.

"A problem?" I asked.

Indeed," he answered. "Tis Sunday, and they can't sell alcohol until 12:30.

"Ah," I said. A longish explanation followed, and I could well understand the issue involved men choosing pints over piousness on any given Sunday morning here in the West, but I was afraid to ask why 12:30 instead of noon or even 1 pm. A compromise, I suppose, and no doubt a political one at that since it is hard to come up with a subject of any sort in Ireland that does not have a political tinge.

college days.

As always, my goal was to get us away from the must-see Fodor's travel high points, and that took us north to Streedagh with one of the finest beaches I'd seen in Ireland. (Please, no one tell Donald Trump about this one, lest he want to ruin it with a golf course.) There were horses running free and clean blue waves breaking on the shore. We would return here later that week for a glorious morning of boogie-boarding and a signature sunburn to show off when we arrived back home.

Later I would use Streedagh Beach as a setting for a novel I was writing called

the most skilled of the world's watermen.

While Mullagamore town has plenty of the salty charm of an old Irish village, Bundoran has given itself over to "family fun" seaside resort facades and crowded streets. I'm sure the heart and soul of the place is alive beneath the fresh paint, however, and had I more time I would have poked around the docks and backstreets looking for old geezers with grand sea stories of years gone by.

But I had those broody mountains and empty beaches on my mind. On the drive back to Raghly we passed Malarkey's Farm and I recalled my father often poo-



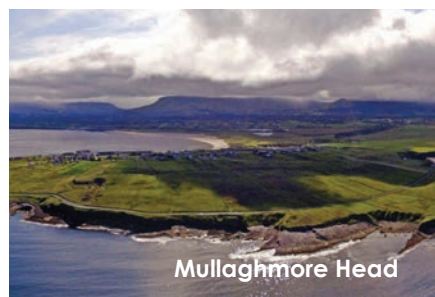
Benbulbin



Knocknarea



Strandhill



Mullaghmore Head

Our meanderings for the week involved mostly mountains and beaches. An early foray took us to Strandhill, world famous as a surfing mecca in these parts. There we discovered warning signs of dangerous currents and a number of touristy shops, but a short hike from the parking lot put us into a wilderness of white massive sand dunes where we could hike to the heavens and then bound down to sea level again in giant airy strides. We had lunch at a café called Shells in the town, run by a kind of hippie-surfer management that had pulled together a best-selling cookbook and attracted a bit too many tourists for my liking. Nonetheless, the food was good and there was a fine supply of incense in the attached gift shop that reminded me of my

Thin Places about a North American boy who hears voices in his head - those of a remarkable selkie who had come ashore in Ireland many years ago and lived through several generations, longing to fall in love one more time before returning to the sea.

In recent years, Ireland has become a true surf mecca and nowhere in the country is that more apparent than Mullaghmore and Bundoran, just north of Streedagh.

Mullaghmore Head on a big swell produces some of the most powerful and challenging waves in the world as the North Atlantic pounds all its stormy fury onto a slab ledge just off the coast. It's a true do-or-die wave that taunts the Red Bull crowd, but should remain the playground of only

pooing some of my brightest off-the-wall ideas by saying, "That's a lot of malarkey." I pulled the car over by Malarkey's to pay homage to what was left of last year's crop of Brussel sprouts and cabbage. How an Irish family name came to become a popular North American expression used to describe many a political candidate's speech is uncertain. I wanted to drive up to the farmhouse and ask the proprietors if they could delineate the origin and evolution of this wonderful word, but my wife thought it a bad idea and reminded me we had friends waiting for us back in Drumcliff at the Yeats Tavern.

The tavern was indeed a friendly place where I was introduced to some local brews including White Hag IPA and some-

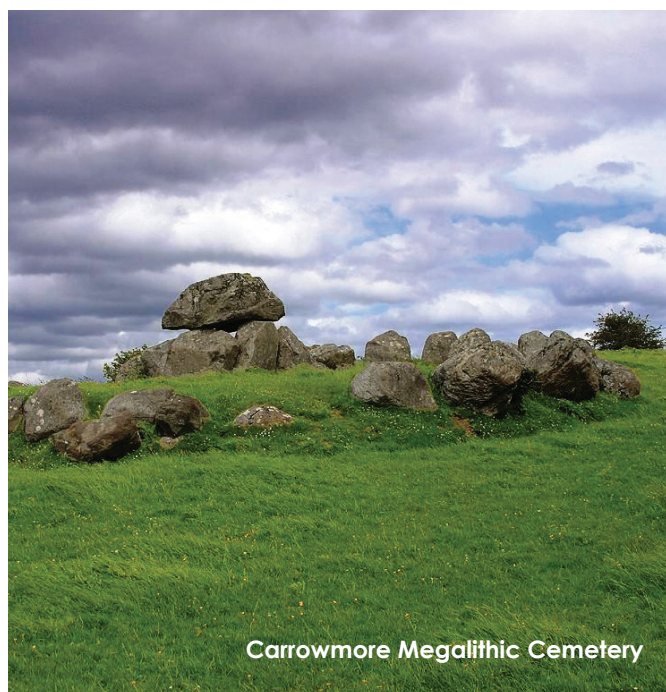
thing called “bog beer” which is purported to be “an imperial red ale, deeply malty with hints of honey, caramel, and peat, and full-bodied with a chewy mouthfeel, and a slight alcoholic warmth.” At 8.2% alcohol, the word “slight” is perhaps an understatement, but it did create a festive mood on a damp afternoon as the sun slipped across the Atlantic and away from these shores.

Linda and I tried to find a path to the top of legendary mountain, Benbulbin, but my guidebook failed me in that regard, and we only got as far as a great green pasture at its base where we encountered a friendly and inspiring horse that followed us around

the dead poet with some nice artwork and home-baked goods for those who had come to pay their respects.

As the week was drawing to a close, I was worried that I’d missed something important hereabouts so we trucked off to Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery. Some of the tombs and monuments date as far back as 3700 BC, and that’s about as megalithic as you can get. It’s a tidy, grassy place today where children climb the boulders that once were part of “passage tombs” where one’s soul passed from this world into the next. It was one of those places that you feel the actual “weight of history” as you crouch down

5000 years ago, commemorating an Irish leader named Maeve. Queen Maeve, as she was referred to, was an ancient noblewoman or perhaps a goddess who was very rich and very sexual. She famously stole a powerful bull from Ulster for reasons that may elude us today. She was not particularly well liked by her people, however, and it is said they buried her at this elevated, remote mountaintop where her lingering spirit could do no harm. Whatever the truth, a horde of dedicated citizens must have felt there was good reason to undertake the transport of thousands of heavy stones into these windy heights to form the grave.



and claimed to have been a unicorn in a previous life.

Beneath the great flat-top mountain of Benbulbin, we paid our respects to the grave of one of Ireland’s most famous poets, W.B. Yeats, with this mysterious inscription on the headstone; “cast a cold eye on life, on death, horseman, pass by.” It was the poet’s wish that the words on his headstone be “no conventional phrase” and he certainly succeeded at that. At my request, my wife took a photo of me beside the famous grave to add to my collection of me posing at the graves of famous dead poets that so far included Yeats, Eliot, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Jim Morrison, to name a few.

A gift shop was only a few footsteps from

beneath a stone roof held up by pedestal rocks that were placed here over 2500 years before the birth of Christ.

Not far down the road from Carrowmore was the mountain I had been hoping for: Knocknarea, a one thousand foot high limestone hill also of great ancient significance. It was windy and wild as we tromped through the sheep fields and upward into the heavens for a sweeping view in all directions. Strandhill and the sea were to the west, bays to the north and south, and green valleys and lakes stretching inland to Sligo town and beyond to Lough Gill. My heart was beating loudly as we trudged the steep path approaching the summit.

At the windy mountain top was a gigantic pile of hand-delivered rocks, a cairn created

We watched a squall approaching from Sligo Bay and as the freshening wind whipped our light jackets and screeched in our ears, we began our climb back down. Thanks to Knocknarea, the new Ireland of craft beer and necessary referendums of gender politics had given way to the spirit of the oldest of the old Celtic culture. The word “sacred” seemed perfectly suitable here, and there was a feeling of mystery all around. We would descend back into the ordinary world, driven by the sea wind like sailors from days gone by, heading home to a warm fire in a stone house far from the madding crowds of cities.

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The Aran Sweater





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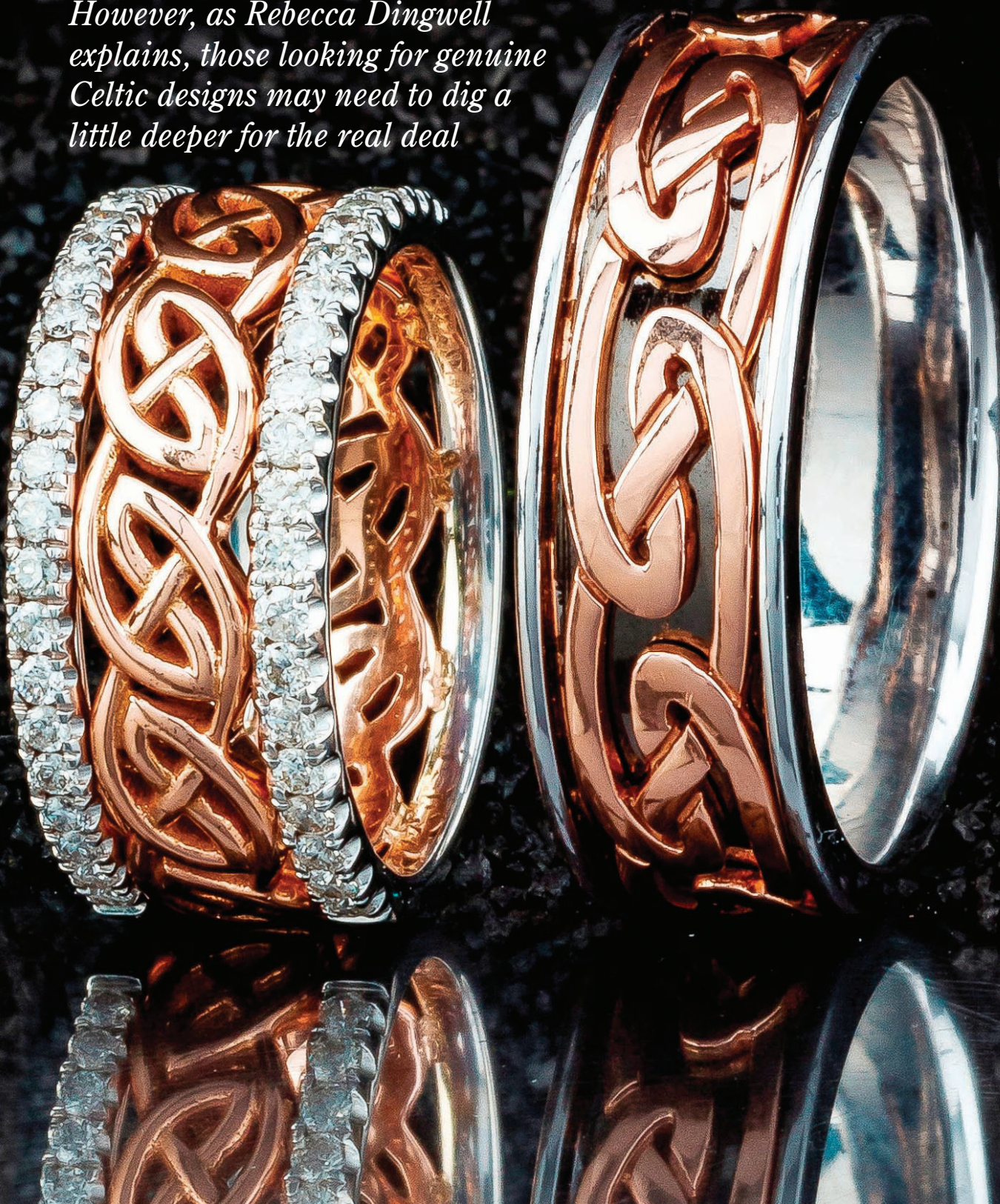
CHARM

DIAMOND CENTRES

Celtic Jewelry

Feature Story

The Celtic jewelry business is booming. However, as Rebecca Dingwell explains, those looking for genuine Celtic designs may need to dig a little deeper for the real deal





Sarah Nagle



Keith Jack



Annie Wealleans

Sarah Nagle believes there's a significant difference between incorporating the trinity knot into a jewelry line and really being focused on Celtic jewelry.

Her California-based casting company - Nagle Forge & Foundry - grew out of a family history of metalwork. Nagle grew up in the business, which has been putting its emphasis on Celtic designs for almost 20 years.

"The market was there," she explains over the phone from Novato. "We responded to requests, basically. People wanted a better, bigger plaid brooch."

The company produced its first plaid brooch (or kilt pin) in 1993. These days, they make brooches in more than two-hundred styles.

"If a man goes out and orders a kilt, he usually has the option of about 600 different tartans," notes Nagle. "Most companies that make accessories for the kilts have four belt buckle options, and maybe six plaid brooch options."

There is a demand for more choices and better quality, even if it comes with a larger price tag.

"Our pieces - they may not be the cheapest plaid brooch you ever buy, but they might be the last plaid brooch you purchase," says Nagle, adding that the items come with a lifetime guarantee.

The company makes more than brooches, however: earrings, cufflinks and rings are also part of the spread, with many of the styles inspired by historic designs.

The process of creating the pieces can vary depending on the metals involved. A mould must be created first. Then, the piece is cast - and it often has to be put together as well, as brooches can be fabricated from as many as seven components.

Nagle muses that working in the shop allows for a better perspective on the possibilities and limitations of design.

"A lot of people, they come up with a design and they put it on paper and then they figure out a way to make it."

For Keith Jack, the ideas always come out on paper.

"I see it first three-dimensionally, in my head, and then I draw it," says the Scottish jeweler, whose business is based in Vancouver. "Once I've got the dimensions right, then we will go to wax modelling after that."

Jack has been designing jewelry for over 15 years, and he currently has dozens of different collections on his website: tree of life, labyrinth and Norse forge are just a few of the themes on display. However, as someone who sets out to make "art that you can wear," he is picky about which pieces make the final cut.

"Personally, if I am looking at something, I've got to really love it before I release it and put it into my line. If I don't love it, it doesn't even go there. It sits in my many drawers of stuff that doesn't make it."

Like Nagle, Jack saw a demand for high-end products within the niche market of Celtic jewelry. His work is made from silver, gold, or both, but he doesn't use gold plating.

"We tend to use separate castings," he explains. "We will cast a piece of silver and then we'll cast a separate piece of gold - or maybe several pieces of gold - and attach that to the silver as solid gold pieces."

Over in Wales, Annie Wealleans of Black Dragon Crafts approaches her jewelry a little differently. She considers herself more of a "beadsmith" than a jeweler.

"The first versions were made of partly recycled plastic, plated with a layer of silver," she shares via e-mail. "They've come a long way since the early days."

Wealleans eventually found a man to cast her bead designs in pewter, but once he retired, he sold her the equipment and

taught her to use it.

"There is never a dull moment," she laughs. "I cast about 60,000 beads last year."

There are two aspects to Wealleans' business: selling the jewelry made from the beads, and selling the beads themselves. She reflects on "the challenge of creating the perfect Celtic knot," adding that no one else seemed to be putting that kind of design on beads when she first began.

"For me, the knots are some kind of symbol of eternity and illustrate the grand interconnectedness of all things. Like the wheel of life, it goes around and comes around."

Symbols are a large aspect of Celtic jewelry - whether it's a trinity charm or something more intricate.

Keith Jack notes that precise meanings of ancient Celtic symbols have largely been lost.

"Any real meaning that people give is only an opinion," he says, "so we have to make up a lot of our own stories."

As for a trinity knot, or triskele, it could be representative of the three stages of life.

"In a woman, that would be maiden, mother and wise-woman," says Jack, noting that these stories help a consumer identify with a piece of jewelry.

On the other hand, we do know the meaning of the Claddagh symbol, as it is only a few centuries old. Its namesake is a place called Claddagh in the city of Galway, Ireland.

"It's a very Irish symbol, but people all over the world know what it is and they really like it," says Jack. "The hands represent friendship, the heart represents love and the crown represents loyalty."

While crosses, knots and the Claddagh are staple Celtic symbols, many jewelers are branching out.



Mhairi Killin

Aosdàna, for instance, offers pieces largely inspired by Iona, an island off the coast of Scotland. Creative director Mhairi Killin has family roots there, and it's where she now lives and works. Alexander and Euphemia Ritchie owned the Iona Celtic Art shop almost 100 years ago. Killin's relative, silversmith Iain MacCormick, became the Ritchies' successor and, later, passed his knowledge of Celtic patterns to Killin. She started Aosdàna in 2003.

"All the traditional designs are from the original Ritchie patterns," she shares. "Their inspiration came from The Book of Kells - the complex patterns of interlacements and foliage and animals."

The Ritchies were also inspired by the medieval stone carvings on Iona, and other aspects of the small island itself.

Although the internet marketplace is difficult at times, Killin feels the cultural heritage behind the work gives it authenticity. In addition, people are drawn to its story. These ancient designs, Killin says, attract just about anyone.

"The traditional pieces will sell to all age groups."

However, Killin emphasized that Aosdàna is "not just churning out the past." Cufflinks or charms made from beach stones - collected from the shores of St. Columba's Bay - allow people to take a piece of the island with them. A bespoke bangle depicts a pattern by Hannah Louise Lamb, reflecting the shape of Iona's coastline.

"We're very much keeping the tradition alive and working with designers to create new designs that reflect Iona today," she says. "In that way, we are supporting Scottish designers as well."

Killin also feels the appeal of Celtic jewelry is "enduring."

"It is almost beyond fashion."



For Her

Luckenbooth Pin by Nagle Forge & Foundry - \$37.00+ (USA)

According to Sarah Nagle, the Luckenbooth is known as "the sweetheart brooch of Scotland" - and it has been for about three centuries. Scottish pins like this one are thoughtful and useful without being extravagant. It's a possible addition to a scarf, lapel or hat. The Luckenbooth pin is also available in gold plate for 10 dollars more.



For Him

Iona Beach Stone Cufflink, silver, by Aosdàna - £158.00 (UK)

These cufflinks are made from a local treasure on the island of Iona, Scotland. Stones that have been weathered by the ocean around St. Columba's Bay are cut and polished by human hands in order to make these unique pieces. The cufflinks add a personal touch to your button-up shirt of choice.



For Them

Claddagh Band by Keith Jack - \$360.00+ (USA)

A pair of Claddagh bands is ideal for a couple; the ring represents love, friendship and loyalty. This particular ring is part of Keith Jack's Claddagh Collection and can be found in other styles. Prices vary. The ring is worn with the heart facing towards the wearer if their heart is "taken."



For the Kids

Boy-o Bangles by Black Dragon Crafts - £7.50 (UK)

Pewter beads featuring a Celtic knot design on a black rubber band, these bangles are branded for men and boys, but suitable for anyone. Available in four sizes, the pieces can be rolled onto the wrist without any clasps to worry about - simple and easy. Chokers are also up for grabs in a similar design, fastened with a stainless steel magnetic clasp.



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Celebrating *Celtic Christmas* Customs

Music, community and spirituality have long been part of winter festivities in Celtic countries, and many of these traditions were brought over by settlers. So, how does Celtic culture continue to influence the Christmas season in North America? Rebecca Dingwell explains.



Colette Orioux

When Colette Orioux was going through changes in her spiritual life, she and her husband came across the Unitarian church in Edmonton, Alberta. That was almost 16 years ago. One of the celebrations in that church is the Winter Solstice: the shortest day of the year.

"I was really attracted to this Celtic-based approach to the change of the seasons," Orioux tells Celtic Life International over the phone.

While Winter Solstice is celebrated in different ways around the world, the pagan

and druidic forms of the festival are linked to the Celts. Some popular Christmas traditions, such as decorated trees, also have roots in paganism – a belief system said to have been followed by the ancient Celtic people. In this way, many North American Christmas celebrations could be called "Celtic Christmas."

"There are so many things that are similar about the two celebrations," continues Orioux, "so many things that were borrowed from the Earth-based celebration by the Christmas one. It wasn't a very difficult transition."

Orioux found the solstice tradition felt "more authentic" for her family as her beliefs shifted to a more "environmental view of the world."

"We are honouring that we are a part of nature – that we rely on the generosity of Mother Earth. We recognize that we're part of the cycle of life."

Orioux is French-Canadian – her husband is the one with Celtic roots. However, she's been interested in Celtic music, history and tradition for a long time.

"There's something there that resonates for me that I recognize that just feels right; it is purely emotional – not necessarily logical."

Logical or not, Orioux and her family fell into the solstice traditions smoothly. Even her four children were receptive to the shift.

"We were celebrating on a different day," she explains, "but there were still the same kind of symbols floating around, and they were still getting presents. They really enjoyed the solstice celebration at church."

For the Unitarian Church of Edmonton, a Winter Solstice service first involves a ritual called "casting the circle," performed by the individual leading the service that night. Usually, readings, music and a meditation are also included in the service. This takes place at night, around 11 p.m. Lights are dim, and candles are lit one by one to symbolize the rising of the sun.

"Really magical, from a child's point of view," says Orioux.

Depending on where a participant is in the circle, they may be asked to wear a particular colour or bring something for the altar. The person starting on the east side of the circle, for example, is typically



Angharad Wynne

expected to wear green and bring a feather: a representation of air.

"It varies a little bit depending on who the leader is and what they want to emphasize," notes Orioux. "But it's always a celebration of the passing year, and a looking forward to spring."

In Edmonton, this Winter Solstice service has increased in popularity so much that it's now held at city hall – where there is more space – rather than at the church. Aspects of it have had to change as a result – no fire allowed, for one – but people who aren't normally part of the congregation have a chance to join in.

Since Orioux prefers an intimate service, she follows the city hall celebration with a smaller ritual at home, among her family members.

"There's some fluidity to it depending on where we are as a family."

Later, Orioux's French heritage is brought out and a Réveillon dinner takes place. Even Réveillon is more connected to the Celts than one might expect.

Julie LeBlanc, who teaches Celtic Studies classes at the University of Ottawa, notes that feasting is a recurring theme in Celtic mythology.

"Chiefs or kings invite their people to celebrate the riches and abundance of their land and, in turn, the people of the land acknowledge these rightful rulers who bring them wealth, abundance and protection," she shares via email.

"The 'Réveillon' is a perfect depiction of these ancient Celtic feasting celebrations where food is abundant, from meat pies to ragoût de pattes de cochons (pig's feet stew) to fruitcakes. The community partakes in celebrating what was reaped in the year, what is to be hoped as abundant in the new year, and share stories that challenge the valor of their folk."

After the dinner takes place in Orioux's



home, everyone opens their presents.

"It's a tradition that works for us," says Orioux.

Indeed, Orioux is not alone in celebrating the holidays through a mosaic of cultural influences. Ellen MacIsaac, the director of the Ottawa Celtic Choir, can relate.

"Who is a purebred here in North America, you know?" she muses.

MacIsaac's background is Scottish and Irish. Her husband is of Icelandic and English descent.

"Once we got married, there were these other traditions that came into the celebration," says MacIsaac, noting the vinarterta Christmas cake by way of example.

"But then, we get together with my family – and any time we get together, we push the kitchen tables away and the fiddles come out."

As a teacher of Celtic music at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University, MacIsaac can list off multiple Christmas carols of Celtic origin. The First Noel comes from Cornwall, for instance, and Deck the Halls is Welsh.

"In Wales, it's actually a New Year's song," she explains. "We sing it as a Christmas song, but the original words in Welsh are about how wonderful Wales is."

In addition, the Holly Bears a Berry (or the Sans Day Carol) was originally written in Cornish. On a more obvious note, the New Year's song Auld Lang Syne started off as a Scots poem.

"These things we sing almost as a matter of course in Christmastime are actually from Celtic countries."

Aside from song, some common symbols many North Americans may not think twice about came from the Celtic nations as well.

"There is all sorts of stuff like that, where we don't realize there is a connection, but there is."

Holly is often seen as one of the "classic symbols of Christmas" in North America, even though it's not abundant here in Canada. But it's all over the Celtic countries, as well as England.

"It was, in pagan times, thought of as one of the few things that stayed green over the winter when everything else turned brown and the leaves fell off," says MacIsaac, noting that holly became relevant in Christianity as well. She recalls her four years living in Ireland, drawing on one particular Christmas in which holly played a role.

"I didn't have a lot of money to decorate, so I went out with a knife and cut

a bunch of switches of holly out of the hedgerows, and went back and decorated the house with them.”

Later on, MacIsaac realized part of the reason why holly was so widely used as decoration in Europe.

“It’s cheap,” she says. “People didn’t have a huge amount of money, and they wanted the house to look green and vibrant and full of life during the winter months.”

However, some symbols and customs have faded more than others. MacIsaac points out that “door-to-door” traditions, such as Christmas caroling, don’t seem to be as common here as they once were. Although she recalls caroling as a child in Canada, she hasn’t seen it much in recent years.

In the Celtic nations, typically you’d be either collecting money for something while caroling, or you’d be going door to door collecting snacks and drinks. It’d be almost a social call as much as anything else.

St. Stephen’s Day – or Wren Day – is a celebration that takes place on what most North Americans know as Boxing Day. In Ireland and Wales, a wren would be hunted and carried aloft by “wrenboys” (now referred to by modern folklorists as “mummers”). The wrenboys would carry the wren around the boundaries of fields, homes and farms to bring blessings of fertility.

According to Angharad Wynne, a writer and expert on Welsh-Celtic traditions, wrens are no longer harmed. In places where Wren Day is still observed, including the Welsh community of Pembroke-shire, the bird in question is usually a stuffed toy.

But why a wren? Wynne says the emphasis on the small bird has to do with the whole idea of “turning things upside down.”

“There’s a tradition of misrule. It comes from Saturnalia, the Roman festival,” she explains. “Also, the turning around of the year at Winter Solstice. And so, the king becomes the pauper and the smallest becomes the greatest.”

The Mari Lwyd (Grey Mare) is a Welsh custom with a principle similar to Wren Day. Instead of a wren, it was a skeletal hobby horse covered in a white blanket that was carried around by a man.

“There was a tradition that the local lads would beg and borrow laces, bits of ribbon and things like that from the women to decorate the Mari,” says Wynne.



Often, the man dressed as the Mari would be accompanied by other men carrying a wassail – an elaborate-looking pot. The idea was to go to houses singing “banter songs” with the home owners until the Mari Lwyd was allowed entrance. People believed the Mari would bring fertility and good cheer – and the attendants would get some “good cheer” of their own: alcohol. The wassail would be filled with liquor at each house.

As Wynne puts it, the origins of the Mari Lwyd are not totally clear. One thing that is known, however, is that a white mare is the ancient symbol of the British Isles. As well, a Celtic goddess brought over by mainland Europe was Epona – a goddess of fertility. She may be connected to Rhiannon, a Welsh figure on a white horse who represents sovereignty of the land.

“It’s very possible that the Mari Lwyd is somehow the winter form of Rhiannon – a skeletal form.”

Wherever the Mari Lwyd came from, there are a couple explanations for the decrease in her appearance, as well as the diminishing of Wren Day. Since men

were usually the ones going from house to house, the two world wars had a big impact on customs of that nature.

“The war, of course, jeopardized a lot of things,” explains Wynne. “A lot of traditions across the British Isles disappeared at that time.”

Not only were the young men gone away, but there was also “not enough joy in the community” to carry on with these celebratory practices. This, she believes, was a significant part of why certain traditions have dwindled or died out altogether. However, some places are doing their part to resurrect what has been lost.

“A lot of what’s happened in Wales since the 1960s has been a part of a general folk revival.”

These days, these traditions tend to remain in Welsh farming communities, as well as in certain industrial regions.

“The urban areas don’t tend to keep them going – it is more in the smaller communities that they survive.”

While the Mari Lwyd hasn’t exactly carried over to North America, hobby horses have been part of a house-visiting custom that still persists in some parts of Newfoundland and Labrador on Canada’s easternmost coast. That tradition is known simply as “mumming” or “janneying.”

Dale Jarvis, an author and folklorist based in Newfoundland, describes mumming as “part of a wider tradition of year-end costuming and disguise that stretches all across Northern Europe.”

“Costumed revellers go door to door,” he explains via email. “Guests try to guess who is under the mask in return for drink, music, a bite to eat, or a dance.”

Many of the mummer traditions that





Dale Jarvis

became popular in Newfoundland were drawn from the south coast of Ireland or western England. St. Stephen's Day has also been observed in the province.

"The house to house tradition of mummering has persisted in many rural communities," continues Jarvis, "though it has faded out in many of the larger towns and cities."

The ebb and flow of the practice could be contributed to a number of factors, but the most obvious may be the combination of drinking and disguise turning lethal. As Jarvis wrote in his book – Any Mummery 'Lowed In? – "fighting, fear, beatings, vandalism and the settling of old scores" was often part of a mummer's life in the 1800s. This meant the courts had their hands full following the 12 Days of Christmas. In December 1860, a fisherman named Isaac Mercer was killed (allegedly) by mummery in the town of Bay Roberts. The case was never solved, and mummering was made illegal.

"This led to a decline in the tradition," says Jarvis, "particularly in more urban areas, and the law stayed on the books for over 100 years. Today, Christmas mummering is legal, but many people think, erroneously, that the old law banning mummery is still in effect."

Although there is no longer a legal reason for folks to refrain from mummering, many people aren't as friendly with their neighbours as they once were. Young people often didn't learn the tradition from their elders. In addition, Jarvis says several people have told him "modern carpets" were a factor – "No one wanted muddy-footed mummery dancing on their new carpets!"

That said, he has his own suspicions

about its decline.

"The nature of community has changed, with less people willing to let strangers into their house."

The nostalgia for the tradition, however, has stayed strong. The Mummery Festival and Parade in St. John's - Newfoundland's capital city - has introduced mummering to a new generation.

"One intriguing thing about the tradition is that it is always adapting and changing to local situations."

"It has seen periods of decline and revival since the early 20th century, with revivals in the '70s and '80s. It still continues to grow and change today, and you might even see the odd 'summer mummer' at summertime festivals and events across the province."

The Inuit custom of Nalujuk Night, which Jarvis calls a "mummer-like" tradition, also seems to be increasing in popularity in some parts of Labrador. According to an article in the St. John's Telegram from 2015, Nalujuk Night is a scary, albeit fun and festive event on January 6. Teenagers and adults dress up as figures called nalujuit. They chase the local children wandering outside, who can escape them by running into neighbours' homes.

Mummering events take place in other parts of North America also, including the largest mummer-inspired occasion – the Philadelphia Mummery New Year's Day Parade.

"Mummering season is a time to let loose, to have fun, to let off some of the steam that has built up over the year, to see family and friends, and it's a very good excuse to act far more foolishly than you would the rest of the year," says Jarvis, adding that "mummering is not going anywhere anytime soon!"

Ellen MacIsaac isn't so sure. "Here in Ottawa, you wouldn't dream of doing anything like that."

MacIsaac feels that, for the most part, the idea of going from house to house no longer works. In addition, some customs are particularly linked to the places they come from.

"Either there's a really, really specific reason why the tradition started up and continued, or circumstances are such that we don't need that mechanism anymore," she says, noting that the Wren Day practice is a case in point. "That's very strongly associated with Irish nationalism, and the



Ellen MacIsaac

whole centuries-long fight for freedom that the Irish engaged in."

Whether or not certain traditions are relevant to the lifestyles we lead in the present, many still find value in holding on to them. Angharad Wynne says there is a deep thirst for something that connects us to our spiritual roots without necessarily being religious. The connection to nature in the early Celtic church and the "pagan traditions of old" is one example, as we see reflected in Colette Orieux's story. In addition, Wynne believes that losing your culture means losing a sense of identity.

"I imagine that in some places in America, people think it a risk to get lots of people together," she speculates. "But here, it's still a joy to put on your woollies and go out. Near here, in Llantrisant, the Mari Lwyd comes out. It's a great spectacle. Everybody kind of turns out, everybody ends up at the pub afterwards."

From Wynne's perspective, the things that have survived have done so because they provide grounding to culture, land and place in a way that is timeless.

"Most of these customs are about marking the passage of the time of year and gathering people together."

Further, there aren't many occasions that note the passage of the year, outside the deadlines of demands in our careers.

"We really need to have these ceremonies and traditions that bring us together."





The Bells Of Bagenalstown

When I was a little girl growing up in Bagenalstown, County Carlow, Ireland, I loved the hustle and bustle of Christmas Eve and the frantic last minute shopping.

Men who worked in Brown and Crosthwaite's Flour Mill were paid when they arrived at work on Christmas Eve morning. To their delight, each envelope had a cash bonus in it as well.

"I've more good news.," said Mr. Stevenson, the miller. "You can leave at noon today. I hear you are going to deliver food hampers."

The hampers were for the old men and women living alone, and poor families on hard times. Their faces lit up when a man arrived at their door singing Christmas is coming...and the geese are getting fat...please put a penny in the old man's hat...as he carried the hamper into the house and put it on the kitchen table. Local merchants put a card in that said, "Compliments of the Joyce family!"

When the men had delivered the hampers, they went to Dooley's Hotel and ate a big plate of colcannon, a dish made with mashed potatoes, parsley, scallions and a big dollop of country butter. The colcannon dish was a present to the men to thank them for delivering the hampers. They stayed at Dooley's for the afternoon, practicing carols and Latin for midnight Mass.

The four major streets of Bagenalstown - a medium-sized market town on the Barrow River - were crowded with shoppers buying exotic foreign foods and toys. People rushed from shop-to-shop picking out grapefruits, oranges, and lemonade - the kind we have only at Christmas. Some shoppers carried a plucked goose or a turkey under their arms. The trains whistled and steamed into the railway station. The young people coming home from England for the holidays were animated and friendly. Men shook the hands of other men and tipped their hats to women. Their warm breaths collided with the hard frost as they called out "Season's Greetings, Merry Christmas! Happy New Year!"

Children old enough to be out by themselves pressed their noses against the glass windows. There was always a cluster of parents with children outside Cleary's window. They wanted to listen to the little man with the furrowed brow playing Christmas songs.

He looked smashing dressed in a black coat, white shirt and a wide red tie. He had kind, sea-blue eyes under a barley-stack of silver hair. When he turned the handle of the organ "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" and "Jolly Old Saint Nicholas" could be heard outside in the street. He also played "White Christmas." My best friend, Ann Farrell, and I would love to see real snow. We wondered what it felt like. Ann said she would give anything to be able to make a snowman.

As Christmas Eve went on, holiday items, clothes and perfumes with French names disappeared from the shop windows.

Melodies drifted through the frosty air from the tin whistles of the tinker boys. They were part of a large family and had parked their horse-driven caravan down by the river. Their pie-bald pony swished his tail and grazed along the side of the road. The jingle of coins landing in the boys' caps at their feet kept them playing Christmas carols all night.

"In the homes, children with rosy cheeks waited wide-eyed, and tried hard to be good. Tonight, Father Christmas will come down the chimney and leave toys in our stockings. I could always count on finding an orange in the toe."

The coal fire was banked high in the kitchen grate, and its glow reflected upon the polished red tile floor. A fat candle was lit and placed in the window to signal that there was "room at the inn." Our goose hung on a big nail in the scullery, ready to be crammed with seasoned potato stuffing early on Christmas morning.

For weeks, women deep-cleaned their houses, washed and ironed the lace curtains, wiped down the windows, baked the fruit cake, washed and starched the white linen table cloth, and set the table with the blue willow china.

Dad went out with the clippers and cut a few armfuls of red-berry holly. He and Mom put sprigs over the framed photos on the wall, mantelpiece and oil lamps. I arranged the Christmas cards, many with robins or other birds, around the window ledges. Now our house looked jolly and festive. Everything was ready.

As the day turned to dark, the bell from St. Andrews Roman Catholic Church rang out, calling parishioners to midnight mass. Hundreds of feet clad in leather-soled shoes could be heard walking towards the church. Inside, the smell of incense and candles spiraled up and were trapped in the dome of the high ceiling. The priest and mill workers sang the mass in Latin. We joined them in singing the Christmas hymns. The young people home on holidays were dressed in black drainpipe trousers and black leather jackets, mini-skirts and stiletto shoes with points - perfect for women with only three toes. The scents of different perfumes made their way into every pew in the church.

On the way back to our house, the bells of Saint Mary's Church of Ireland joined St. Andrew's Roman Catholic Church in ringing out a welcome to the new born babe. The echo of the Bells carried for miles along the Barrow River. Today, the memory of them still echo in a little room at the back of my heart.

By Veronica Breen Hogle



A Christmas Tale

When Deirdre O'Malley looked out the window she saw chimney pots, roofs, cars and sidewalks bandaged in white fluffy snow. She was in bits trying to find a way to tell her three young children there will be no presents from Santa Claus this Christmas. She and their father had been separated for over a year. The court-ordered child support was always late or short. Because it was Christmas, Deirdre thought he'd give her some money so their children would have a happy Christmas. Instead, he left a message on her answering machine saying he was in Florida to celebrate Christmas and to play golf.

Here it was Christmas Eve in Buffalo, New York. Deirdre was 34 years old, and the only money she had was about 50 dollars in change. She was glad she got a turkey and all the trimmings for tomorrow's dinner. She could hear the sounds and the aromas of Christmas in every house, except hers. There was no cleaning done or fruitcakes being baked. She had no Christmas spirit at all.

"Can we get a Christmas tree, one like Charlie Brown's Christmas tree?" asked Kevin, Deirdre's eight-year-old son,

"I want to make Christmas cookies," said six-year-old Fiona.

"I'll put the cookies on Santa's plate," her twin sister, Caitlin, chimed in.

"Yes, we'll go and get our tree this morning," Deirdre said, fixing her face into a huge smile.

When they drove into the YWCA's parking lot, they saw that most of the good-looking trees were gone. They searched through skimpy trees with broken branches. Finally they agreed on a small, tubby fir tree that could grow tall and slim or stay short and fat.

"How much is this one?" Deirdre asked the man selling the trees.

"All the trees are now 50 per cent off the price tag. You can have the one you're holding for five bucks."

"We'll take it," she said, handing him the money.

The man helped Deirdre get the tree into the trunk of her old station wagon.

Back at home, the children began to pull the branches into shape. Deirdre watched them playing together and a feeling of contentment came over her.



Barbara, a tenant who lived upstairs, said she would show Deirdre how to make the American Christmas cookies. About four o'clock, Deirdre had a strong urge to go to the mall. She knew she'd get the Christmas spirit there if she mingled with crowds of last-minute shoppers. Barbara said she'd take care of the children while Deirdre went out again.

Back home in Ireland, many workers got paid on Christmas Eve and did their Christmas shopping that same day. The hustle and bustle created happy, friendly feelings as men and women rushed through the streets carrying parcels or calling out "Merry Christmas! Happy New Year!" Some shoppers would also carry a turkey or a goose under their arms.

While driving to the Boulevard Mall, Deirdre asked her guardian angel for help.

“At least we now have a turkey, a tree and we'll make Christmas cookies.”

When she entered the mall, a store with the name Sattler's caught her eye. She went over to where there was a cluster of people filling out forms. Then the public address system went on and a man's voice said:

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen. To make your Christmas the best ever, Sattler's is inviting shoppers who don't have a Sattler's credit card to open one today. Yes...! You can get up to 300 dollars in instant credit. Just fill out an application. Show your driver's license. We'll give you a temporary card."

Deirdre could hardly believe her ears. Three hundred dollars! She could charge

"Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents..."

~ Little Women

up to 300 dollars! That's 100 dollars for each child!

With her temporary card, she raced to the toy department and got trains and trucks for Kevin, a telescope and a doll that could talk for Fiona, and for Caitlin, she got a toy camera and puzzles. She bought several games and books. She rushed to the children's clothing section and bought jeans, sweaters and socks. The PA system came on often, encouraging shoppers to get the instant credit.

"Sattler's will close at 6 p.m. sharp tonight. Our staff can go home and prepare for their own family's Christmas."

With 15 minutes to go before closing, Deirdre walked fast to the women's department and saw a beautiful red shirtwaist dress. With her blond hair and blue eyes, she looked great in red. It was not on sale, but she bought it anyway. She also treated herself to a small bottle of Chanel Number 5 French perfume. She spent a total of \$295 on toys and clothes.

While driving home, Deirdre turned the radio up high and sang all the words of the Christmas carols along with the singers. When she arrived back home, Barbara had the dough ready to make the cookies. They finished putting the lights on the tree. It did look like a Charlie Brown Christmas tree, and its pine scent seeped out into the living room.

When the children were asleep, Deirdre got the toys and clothes out of her car and she spent over an hour wrapping presents.

About five o'clock Christmas morning, Deirdre heard Kevin's door squeak open. He went into his sisters' room and woke them up.

"Santa Claus was here! He left bunches of toys outside our bedroom doors!" Kevin whispered.

Deirdre listened to her children's happy sounds of animated whispering, wrapping paper being ripped and crinkled. After a while each sleepy child took one new toy from Santa's stash and brought it back into bed. The family slept late on Christmas morning. When they awoke, all of them had the Christmas spirit and it was in every corner of the house.

~ Veronica Breen Hogle



Hiraeth trilogy *Liz Riley Jones*

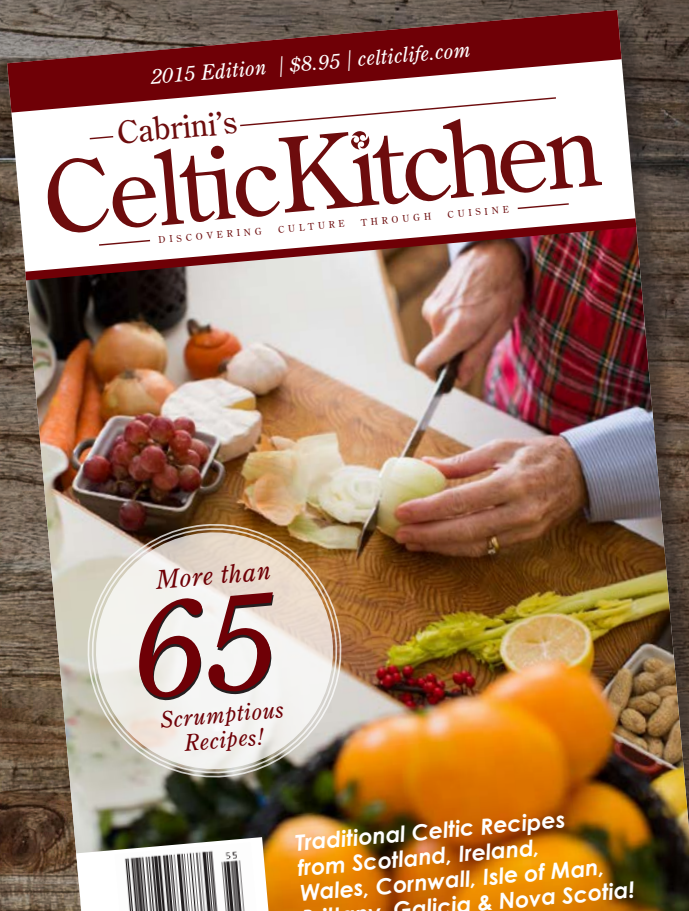


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Christmas Ginger Cookies

Christmas baking is steeped in tradition, and from this comes the homey and heartfelt feeling of nostalgia. As a child, ginger cookies were always present during the holiday season, and they still are. I have added a twist of merriment to this time-honoured recipe, hoping to forge my own family traditions. Many people confuse

gingersnaps with gingerbread cookies. Unlike gingersnaps - which are formed into small balls, rolled in coarse sugar, and baked into a sparkling golden brown circle - gingerbread cookies are rolled out and cut with cookie cutters into various shapes, the most popular being the traditional gingerbread men made for yuletide. I often

wonder where the name ginger 'snap' comes from; is it the sound they make when you bite into them? Maybe it is how easy they are to make? Or perhaps it is how they look once decorated? Whatever the case, have fun with this recipe, and be creative. Did I mention that they are Santa's all-time favourite?

INGREDIENTS

3 cups all-purpose flour
 1 ½ teaspoons baking powder
 ¾ teaspoon baking soda
 ¼ teaspoon salt
 1 tablespoon ground ginger
 1 ¾ teaspoons ground cinnamon
 ¼ teaspoon ground cloves
 6 tablespoons unsalted butter
 ¾ cup dark brown sugar
 1 large egg
 ½ cup molasses
 2 teaspoons vanilla

Ith do shàth! Cabrini

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

INSTRUCTIONS

In a small bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, ginger, cinnamon, and cloves until well blended. In a large bowl beat butter, brown sugar, and egg on medium speed until well blended. Add molasses and vanilla, and continue to mix until well blended. Gradually stir in dry ingredients until blended and smooth. Divide dough in half and wrap each half in plastic and let stand at room temperature for at least 2 hours or up to 8 hours. (Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Prepare baking sheets by lining with parchment paper. Dough can be stored for up to 4 days, but in this case it should be refrigerated. Return to room temperature before using.)

Place one portion of the dough on a lightly floured surface. Sprinkle flour over dough and rolling pin. Roll dough to a scant 1/4-inch thickness. Use additional flour to avoid sticking. Cut out cookies with gingerbread cutter. Space cookies 1 ½-inches apart. Bake one sheet at a time for 7-10 minutes (the lower time will give you softer cookies!). Remove cookie sheet from oven and allow the cookies to stand until the cookies are firm enough to move to a wire rack. After cookies are cool you may decorate them any way you like. Makes 24 5-inch cookies.



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Celtic *Christmas* *Recipes*

Cooked by Celts, for Celts, these five Christmas recipes are sure to serve up the sweetness this holiday season!

Ith do shàth!





Bretagne bûche de Noël

Christmas dinners were magical for our family in Lorient. My brothers and sisters and I would each get a piece of The bûche de Noël for dessert, but my father would set aside one last piece and we'd have to guess his Christmas wish to get seconds. Today, I still play this little game with my four children. I guess my father's wishes did come true. ~ Francois Letourneau, Lorient, Bretagne

Ingredients

For the Roulade Cake and Filling

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

For the Chocolate Ganache Icing and Decoration

12 oz. semisweet chocolate
8 tbsp. unsalted butter
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup heavy cream
Meringue mushrooms
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup confectioners' sugar

Instructions

For the Cake: Preheat oven to 375°. Line a 16½" x 12" heavy baking pan with buttered parchment paper, cut large enough to hang over sides of the pan by about 1". Put bittersweet chocolate in a large mixing bowl and set aside. Bring cream just to a boil in a saucepan over medium heat, then pour over bittersweet chocolate and whisk until smooth. Set aside to cool. Beat egg whites in the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with a whisk on medium speed until frothy; increase speed to medium-high and gradually add 2 tbsp. sugar, beating constantly. Then increase speed to high and beat until stiff, glossy peaks form, about 30-40 seconds more. (Don't over-beat.) Mix

one-third of the whites into chocolate using a rubber spatula, then gently fold in remaining whites in two batches, taking care not to deflate batter. Spread in prepared pan and bake until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean 10-12 minutes. Set aside to cool in the pan.

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

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

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

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



Christmas Cornish Hens

As a youngster, I remember St Ives being a special place at Christmas time, though the weather could be difficult. We were not wealthy, but we had each other, a roaring fire to keep us warm and dry, carols to fill the air, and my mother and grandmother fussing over the Cornish hens. Though both passed long ago, their spirit remains with us during the holidays, as does this recipe. ~ Carolyn Boyd, St Ives, Cornwall

Ingredients

4 Cornish hens
2 onions, coarsely chopped
2 tbsp honey
12 slices of bacon or pancetta
6 leeks, trimmed, chopped into 2-inch pieces
1 tbsp olive oil
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt
Freshly ground pepper

Instructions

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



Irish Roast Goose

As a youngster, I remember walking through the snow and cold to my great-grandmother's home on Christmas day. The scent of roast goose wafting from her kitchen was warm and welcoming. Our family, originally from Connemara, brought many recipes from the old country when we settled on Canada's east coast in 1852. I still use this recipe each holiday season for my own grandchildren. ~ Deborah Docherty, St. John's, Newfoundland

The Goose

Prepare the stuffing first (see below). Allow at least 1 lb (450g) uncooked weight per diner. Assuming the goose is already gutted, you just need to wash and dry it and cut away any excess fat around the neck cavity. Prick the skin all over and rub it with lemon and seasoning. Season the main cavity with salt and freshly ground pepper and fill it with the cooled stuffing. Place the goose in a roasting tin and roast in a very hot oven 240C (475F, gas 9) for ten minutes. Reduce the heat to 180C (350F, gas 4) and cook for 2 – 2½ hours, but remove the bird from the oven three or four times to pour off excess fat. If you don't do this, your goose will taste very greasy. To test whether cooked, prick the bird at the thickest part. When the juices run clear, Christmas dinner's centrepiece is ready.

Apple & Potato Stuffing

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

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



Scottish Christmas Clapshot

My mother had one basic rule of thumb in the kitchen: keep it simple - especially during the holiday season, when friends and family would drop in from all over Scotland. She had eleven brothers and sisters, so you can imagine how crowded our kitchen could get with aunts, uncles and cousins. Dad simply sipped his scotch and smiled as mom made it all happen. She loved this simple side dish, and so do I. ~ Susan MacNeish, Glasgow, Scotland.

Ingredients

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

Instructions

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



Welsh Plum Pudding

I never really appreciated our Welsh Christmas traditions until we moved to Pennsylvania in the mid-1970s, when I got homesick with nostalgia; the snow lightly falling, skating in the park, my father reading Dylan Thomas by the fire, and my mother fixing a fine feast for family and friends on the 25th. ~ Derek Evans, Cambria County, Pennsylvania

Ingredients

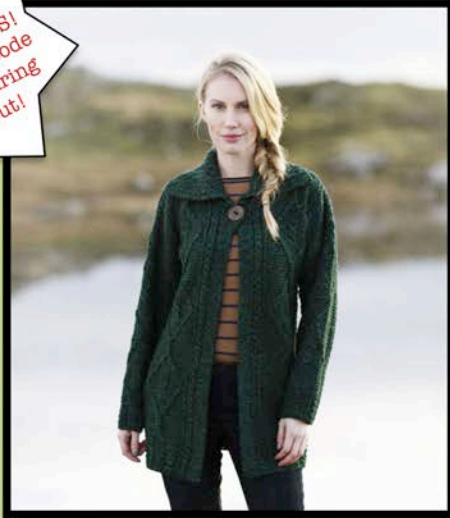
1 ½ lb of raisins
½ lb of currants
½ lb of mixed peel
¾ lb of bread crumbs
¾ lb of suet
8 eggs
1 wineglassful of brandy

Instructions

Stone and cut the raisins in halves, but do not chop them; wash, pick, and dry the currants, and mince the suet finely; cut the candied peel into thin slices, and grate down the bread into fine crumbs. When all these dry ingredients are prepared, mix them well together; then moisten the mixture with the eggs, which should be well beaten, and the brandy; stir well, that everything may be very thoroughly blended, and press the pudding into a buttered mould; tie it down tightly with a floured cloth, and boil for 5 or 6 hours. It may be boiled in a cloth without a mould, and will require the same time allowed for cooking. As Christmas puddings are usually made a few days before they are required for table, when the pudding is taken out of the pot, hang it up immediately, and put a plate or saucer underneath to catch the water that may drain from it. The day it is to be eaten, plunge it into boiling water, and keep it boiling for at least 2 hours; then turn it out of the mould, and serve with brandy-sauce. On Christmas day a sprig of holly is usually placed in the middle of the pudding, and about a wineglassful of brandy poured round it, which, at the moment of serving, is lighted, and the pudding thus brought to table encircled in flame. Time: 5 or 6 hours the first time of boiling; 2 hours the day it is to be served. Serves 8 persons.

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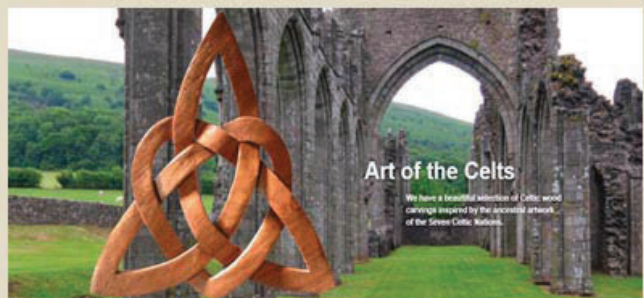
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Lion Rampant Bracelet

Metals & Pieces

www.metalsandpieces.etsy.com

Let your heart roar this holiday season with this signature piece of stylish jewelry. Part of the all new Winter Royalty Collection by Metals & Pieces – a company committed to making chainmaille and bullet jewelry to empower women – the Lion Rampant Bracelet is sleek and striking, making it an ideal Christmas gift for someone who appreciates a strong, distinctive design.

The bracelet borrows from the red lion rampant, an iconic Scottish symbol, and comes with an invitation to craft your own legend. Dramatically and meticulously handcrafted ring by ring to combine both antique and historic armor and modern design, it is sure to awaken the adventure-lover in your family or circle of friends – something special and unique that will last forever.

Designed using aluminum, Czech glass, and nickel-free elements, it is both beautiful and sensitive to delicate skin. Use the website for sizing advice, and for free shipping. The company also has an extensive collection of earrings, dog tags, necklaces and bracelets, including bullet cuff and handcuff styles, as well as chainmaille scale woven gloves.



Skyran Pendant

Scottish Treasures Celtic Corner

www.CelticCorner.net

This Christmas, think something old, something new, and something that combines the two with creativity and charm. ‘Skyran’ was inspired by the first known text discovered in Orkney on the northern isles of Scotland. The ancient Ogham writing that circles the pendant carries a warm wish for the bearer and reads, ‘a Blessing on the Soul.’ Between the heartfelt message and the masterful craftsmanship, it is a piece destined to become a treasured accessory or a pleasing gift to mark the season. The pendant is crafted in twilight enamel, capturing the rich blue-grey of the night sky in the northern reaches of bonny Scotland. All hand made in Orkney, it is sure to attract both quizzical attention and great admiration. Distributed by Scottish Treasures Celtic Corner of Coronado, California, it comes from an extensive inventory of Celtic accessories, jewelry and giftware. A family-owned business, the proprietors began attending Scottish events in 1989, and after almost a decade of enjoying the festivities and assessing the wide range of merchandise available, a decision was made to carve out a niche for a selective import business in 1998. They now offer an array of Scottish kilts as well as kilt rentals, including kilts for children, alongside their wide range of Celtic products.



Carbon Fiber Whistle

Carbony Celtic Winds

www.carbony.com

Christmas comes to us in all its glory – the sights, the scents, the sounds. And it sounds even more glorious with a High D carbon fiber whistle, beautifully packaged in a presentation gift box. The whistle’s tapered design allows for close finger spacing for rapid passage articulation and volume balance in all registers. Now with an anodized, serialized laser-engraved fipple body with ebonite tip, it comes with a lifetime warranty. The box is approximately 14” x 3 ½” x 3”, made of Bloodwood and fumed oak, and features a brass latch and corner protectors with velveteen lining. This is a \$368 value, but is available as a special holiday combo package for \$299. This quality instrument comes from a company that takes instrument-making seriously, as founder Rob Gándara has been playing dozens of different instruments for more than 30 years. He started his career in the computer industry, but redirected his engineering and music skills to innovation in instrument-making. Carbony™ composite is an innovative carbon fiber material for use in the fabrication of musical wind instruments.

By adjusting components of the carbon fiber “recipe” Carbony™ composite has been optimized for this application, thus creating a superior whistle in an elegant package.





Fiona One Button Aran Cardigan

Blarney Woollen Mills

www.blarney.com

Blarney Woollen Mills' gorgeous woollen sweaters are an inspired gift for someone who wants to be warm and comfortable when the winter winds blow yet turned out in style and noticed in any crowd. The Blarney Aran Originals are known for their complex stitch patterns, soft natural chunky Merino wool and traditional heritage look. While staying true to their Aran Islands origin, the collection manages to have a contemporary new twist. Typical of this blend of heritage and contemporary times is the wide-collared Fiona One Button sweater, which calls to mind the hard-working but richly talented women of Ireland's wind and rain swept Aran Islands who were known for their own intricate patterns and myriad of beautiful and original stitches. A classic and timeless cardigan, it brings style to a casual gathering and warmth wherever it goes. As with the rest of the collection, this piece will always be in style, and sure to be a treasured part of any fall, winter and spring wardrobe for years to come. Priced at \$139 USD, the sweater comes in four colours: the natural so often associated with the Aran Islands, emerald green, navy and purple. It ships internationally.



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Sassenach & the Highlander Tour

Triple M Tours

www.triplemtours.ca

A Calgary-based tour company is giving fans of Diana Gabaldon's Outlander series a chance to travel through time, sharing in the adventures of her popular characters, Claire and Jamie. Following the Frasers through Time, the 'Sassenach and the Highlander' tour begins in France, before winding its way to Edinburgh and Glasgow. En route, travelers will visit 15 locations from Gabaldon's first two books, including Place Royale, Versailles, Culloden Moor and Blackness Castle. Many other great local and regional attractions are also visited along the way. The 12-13 day tour, with welcome and farewell dinners, kicks off with a Seine River boat cruise, visiting areas where Claire worked as a wartime nurse. The Scottish component features three themed dinners and nights in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Fort William. Visits to Outlander locations include Culross, Pollock Park, Midhope Castle and Preston Mill, where participants will stay in four star hotels. Flights to France are via New York City or Toronto. So take all the guesswork out of gift-giving by registering your intention to take your loved one on two tours scheduled for June of 2017.

Kilt Apron

3 Celts & Company

www.3Celts.com

For the well-dressed kilt wearer a high-quality kilt apron can be a most welcome addition to the wardrobe. Do your shopping at 3 Celts & Company of Minnesota, where you will find a full selection of tartan wool kilt aprons priced at \$85 USD.

With modern belt-line loop stays, and traditional fringe fold detailing, they are appropriate for all the company's kilts. It is a style that immediately commands respect, as many Scottish units wore the kilt in combat in the Great War - when the ferocious tactics of the Black Watch led to their acquiring the nickname "Ladies from Hell" from the German troops that faced them in the trenches. The kilt apron, in your choice of over 50 tartans, goes expertly with the company's black Steam-Gear® KILTS of bottom weight fabric, priced at \$225 USD. There are also some store options for customizing your Celtic soldier kit through mixing and matching. Do not be surprised if the selection of aprons and kilts prompts you to scan the full catalog with family members in mind. Constructed of 10-13 ounce 100 per cent wool, there are eye-catching ladies' kilts in dancing and hostess styles. All are hand-made and custom-sewn to fit the buyer.



Earth Squared Fabulous & Fairtrade Products

Earth Squared

www.earthsquared.com

Nestled in the foothills of the Lammermuir mountains in the south of Scotland, close to the hustle and bustle of Edinburgh, lies the quiet East Lothian market town of Haddington, home to fair trade ambassadors and producers of fabulous textile bags and accessories, Earth Squared. Taking inspiration from the beautiful Scottish surroundings and rich textile heritage, Earth Squared products are designed and manufactured to the highest standards, maintaining the brand's core values, to produce a range of ethically minded accessories which are at once beautiful and fashionable, as well as being of exceptional quality at an affordable price.

With a large selection of wonderful tweeds available, from fun and funky to classic and traditional, in a broad range of styles including tote bags and back packs plus smaller items such as purses and jewelry rolls, there really is something for everyone. Earth Squared also offers a superb range of oil cloth products plus carefully selected scarves, velvet products and plain wools.

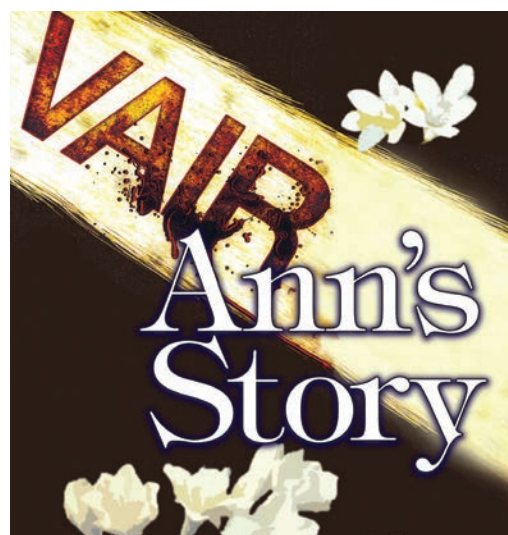


VAIR - Ann's Story

Gunna Dickson

www.virtualbookworm.com
www.amazon.com

A gift of a good book, especially a multi-layered international thriller with a riveting cast of characters, carries the promise of superb entertainment when the festivities begin to wind down and all that's needed is a comfy chair by a warm fire and a drink in hand. VAIR - Ann's Story is the follow-up to VAIR by Gunna Dickson's late husband, Scottish-born foreign correspondent - and internationally-renowned journalist - Stewart Dickson. In his taut thriller, fact blurred with fiction as a trail of brutal murders, each with the hallmark of medieval weaponry, followed a modern-day visit of America by a British royal. With its time shifts and variety of geographic locales, the Vatican, the FBI and the public were forced to grapple with the terrifying question of whether the killer was a madman or a human vehicle possessed by the spirit of one of history's most terrible tyrants. In Ann's Story, Gunna Dickson deftly picks up when the reign of terror is over and moves the story in a new direction, painstakingly spinning out a tale of love, loss and political subterfuge. Against the dramatic backdrop of past events, actress Ann Powell, jaded FBI agent John Taylor, beautiful Cuban special agent Emelina Calderon, and other characters who peopled VAIR - along with some new ones - continue their journey.





Hiraeth Trilogy

Liz Riley Jones

www.hiraeth.me

If you are giving the gift of literature this Christmas, consider the Hiraeth trilogy; a brutal, sexy and fast-paced Celtic fantasy. Authored by Liz Riley Jones, the works borrow from Celtic mythology and history. The tale takes place in Wales and Ireland, where a hidden pagan community fights a civil war against the backdrop of failing magic. These druidic communities battle each other while their very existence is threatened by the erosion of culture and language through advancements in technology. A fast-moving, contemporary action story, Hiraeth - the title is a Welsh word which does not translate into English but means something about longing for home - is inspired by the ancient Celtic texts of the Welsh Mabinogion and the Irish Ulster Cycle. The story has been woven into an epic power struggle, which straddles myth, Celtic language, identity and adventure. When Mona Jones and Cai Owens meet, they set into motion an irrevocable series of events. Their paths twist and turn, with and against each other, as they journey across the Celtic lands of the West, and through the turbulent waters around the British Isles and Ireland. The Welsh and Irish druids must decide if Mona is their saviour or their destroyer and so it begins. The trilogy includes Hiraeth A Mark-Marc, Hiraeth A Burden-Baich and Hiraeth A Loss-Colled.



Quotagraph

Mundo Images

www.theirishcardshop.com

An Irish Quotagraph could be the perfectly unique and long-lasting gift to delight someone on your Christmas list. Brilliantly creative, a Quotagraph combines a gorgeous photograph, such as the shadow cast by an ancient tree, with a traditional Irish blessing or a few words of wisdom. Other photos include window boxes in Kinsale, sheep on craggy hills, bicycles leaning against a pub door, castles, thatched cottages, beer kegs outside the pub, boats tied up in Dingle Harbour, children on a beach or popular attractions such as the majestic Cliffs of Moher. The messages are wise and witty, wishing happiness, health and prosperity, often in the form of a traditional toast. Photographer-designer Ann Peterson of Mundo Images and the Irish Card Shop pairs more than 130 Irish greetings with her own award-winning photographs, offering framed pieces or traditional greeting cards for all occasions. Peterson's cards are printed locally on FSC certified paper that is free of elemental chlorine and acid. The 10 x 12 Quotagraphs feature a custom-printed and signed photo version of the card design and are framed in reclaimed wood with your choice of frame colour. Having lived as a child in Ireland, Peterson, a teacher, fell into a habit of collecting blessings and toasts and masterfully matches them to photographs.



The Tree of Life

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An elegant Tree of Life wood carving is a thoughtful and inspired gift that pays homage to generations past, while professing great hope for the future. Inspired by the traditions of the seven Celtic nations, this graceful hand carving is also a universal symbol of many spiritual and mythological practices in various cultures world-wide, whether known as the Tree of Knowledge, the World Tree or the Sacred Tree. With its intricate, interwoven pattern, its painstaking design speaks of wisdom, protection, strength, beauty, bounty and redemption. In Nordic tradition the tree is believed to connect the three worlds: Asgard - the realm of the gods; Midgard - the world of man, and Hel and Niflheim - the kingdom of the frost giant. In other traditions it represents life everlasting, without beginning or end. Specializing in Celtic and Viking carvings, which strive to capture ancestral traditions, Blue Frogs Company of Aspen, Colorado, carves its pieces one at a time, each beginning with an original hand drawing. Great attention to detail carries through to the hand carving, painting and finishing right down to the French paste wax which brings a rich luster to the wood grain.

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4KDesigns

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 and St. Pat-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 ringspun 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, a Sweat-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. New England's Heather King, a wife, mother and personal trainer, understands the comfort, ease and simplicity of casual, practical clothing. Inspired by a dream, she came up with a line of classic, good-looking Tees that, she says, never take themselves too seriously. 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 youth and adult sizes.



Salmon Gift of Knowledge Pendant

The Counties of Ireland

www.thecountiesofireland.com

Part of the renowned Irish Legends Jewelry collection, the Salmon Gift of Knowledge pendant is sure to charm anyone who finds it in a Christmas stocking or tastefully wrapped beneath a Christmas tree. This stunning sterling silver and gold-plated necklace is manufactured by JMH in Dublin, and then handcrafted and hallmarked in the Assay Office in Dublin Castle. Depicted as leaping out of the River of Boyne, the salmon has gold plated scales and a blue topaz eye making it a very striking accessory. It is linked to an 18 inch chain, 34 mm in height and 27 mm in width, and arrives gift boxed and with a story card conveying the significance of its design. The story of the salmon dates back to when the great Irish leader Fionn Mac Cumhaill was sent as a boy to learn from a poet who lived beside a salmon pool. The legends jewelry collection is available from The Counties of Ireland in Troy, NY, a gift store designed to bring a little bit of Ireland to North America onsite and online. Its exclusive Irish clothing, jewelry and giftware is handpicked and imported from Ireland to offer customers a wide range of unique and authentic items.



Stonewashed Embossed Hoodies

Celtic Fashions

www.celticfashions.com

Wear your inner Celt this holiday season with Celtic Fashions' signature line of unique Stonewashed Embossed Hooded Sweatshirts. These 50/50 Heavyweight Hoodies are first embossed, which fuses the design with heat and pressure to a fabric backing, and then washed in a potassium solution that antiques and softens the fabric. The hoodies are ultra soft and warm, yet durable, and the image will last the life of the garment. Each symbol is offered in one color: Circle of Life in Brown-Gold, Tree of Life in Green-Gold, Scotland Lion in Royal Blue, Triskel in Purple, and Trinity Knot in Charcoal. Available sizes are unisex standard, S - 3XL.



The Haggis

Stahly Haggis

www.thehaggis.com

No longer just a delicacy featured on Burns Night, haggis is becoming a dish eaten year round. Stahly Quality Foods of Glenrothes, Fife, Scotland, produces several styles of award-winning haggis. Their Scotch Haggis, for example, is a blend of the finest lamb, oatmeal and spices. Another choice, the Royal Haggis, replaces the lamb with Scottish venison, giving it a distinctive, richly flavourful taste. Stahly also produces a Drambuie and Whisky Haggis as well as a vegetarian version. Because of customs' regulations prior to 2002, haggis lovers in the U.S. had to travel to Scotland to find Stahly's haggis. But since then - when Ken Stahly first arranged for two of the company's award-winning haggises to be produced in the U.S.A. - the demand for canned haggis has grown enormously. Fortunately so has the availability! The Stahly family name has been associated with fine food since 1923 when Fred Stahly Senior and his wife first opened a butcher shop on Kirkcaldy High Street in Fife.

Thistle Heart Collection

The Irish Jewelry Company

www.theirishjewelrycompany.com

The heart and soul of Scotland are captured in a Thistle Heart pendant, a Luckenbooth Thistle Heart brooch, and pair of matching earrings – all of which make up a new collection for those with a passion for Celtic pieces. A gift to last, likely to be treasured by generations, the Thistle Heart Collection honours times past, cherishes the present, and gains new meaning for the future. The stunning pendant shows two purple thistles, the national flower of Scotland, forming a beautiful heart shape, symbolizing an enduring love of Scotland. The thistle is a sturdy plant thriving in harsh conditions and - according to Scottish tradition - once saved the country from an invasion. Legend has it that a Norse soldier who was stealthily advancing on a Scottish army encampment, lost his army's advantage when he stepped barefoot onto a thistle and screamed in pain.

Thus, the thistle has become a symbol of pride and protection, two sentiments often echoed in romance or family attachment. The Irish Jewelry Company, who succeeded in their dream of promoting their own Celtic heritage in fine jewelry, contend this collection calls to mind the words of Scottish bard Robert Burns: "My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here."



Tweed Bag

Sound of Iona

www.ionatartan.com

Christmas is a perfect time for gifting people with classic accessories that will add the perfect accent at occasions or events throughout the year. Recently woven and designed in Scotland, the Sound of Iona tartan is inspired by the colours of the sand, sea and rocks on the island of Iona, which has the mighty Atlantic on its western shore and the shallow waters of the Sound of Iona separating it from its near neighbour, the Isle of Mull. An array of scarves, stoles, pashminas, wraps, ties, wallets, coffee mugs, egg cups and hip flasks are now available in the gorgeous tartan. One of the newest items is a small tartan purse, measuring 16cms by 23cms, perfect for holding those few essentials at a formal event or for more adventurous casual wear. The tartan's colours truly reflect Iona's amazing seascapes, which continue to draw artists as they did in the early 20th century, including Scottish colourists F.C.B. Cadell, Samuel Peploe and J.D. Fergusson. The across-the-body bag, with its matching hand-crafted ceramic button was only introduced a few months ago, but has quickly become a bestseller.



"Home from the Sea" Plaid Brooch

Nagle Forge and Foundry

www.nagleforge.com

The stylishly detailed "Home from the Sea" plaid brooch may well be the ultimate gift for the kilt wearer in your family or circle of friends. It is an equally attractive piece for someone who chooses to add a Celtic bent to a less conventional look, as it is sure to catch the eye. Inspired by the traditional thistle motifs of Highland art, the decorative and imposing Home from the Sea brooch is 98mm across. A highly sculpted piece, the outer ring features four stags, points barely touching, wreathed in thistles. The centerpiece features a traditional sailor's breastplate supported by a ghostly St. Andrew's Cross. Every Nagle Forge & Foundry plaid brooch is handcrafted with pride in northern California from high quality lead-free pewter, and features a sturdy hand-fabricated nickel pin back fully guaranteed to withstand the rigors of daily use. Each brooch comes in a sturdy gift box and includes a guarantee card and gift enclosure. Nagle's line of jewelry and clothing fasteners is limited edition, and its designs appear on a rotation basis - making it unlikely you will encounter the same pieces at functions and events. Mention Celtic Life when ordering the "Home from the Sea" plaid brooch before Jan. 25th and receive free shipping to the U.S. or Canada.





Claddagh Ring

Celtic Wedding Rings

www.celtic-weddingrings.com

Love, loyalty, friendship – the Claddagh ring says it all, making it the perfect gift for anyone who is dear to your heart. A widely-recognized symbol of heart and history that weaves its way through tales of pirates, politics and passion, the Claddagh is one of the most enduring emblems from Ireland's past. For many it is more than an exquisitely designed piece of jewelry. This elegant sterling silver woman's Claddagh ring, with its heart in real 10k gold, exudes romance and signals the peal of wedding bells. There is a wide selection of gold, white gold and sterling silver rings, including birthstone rings, for the sharp shopper to consider. So popular are these gold and silver bands that the particular way of wearing the ring has come to carry a message. According to tradition, if you are single, you wear the ring on the right hand with the heart facing outwards. If you are in a relationship, you wear it on your right hand but the heart faces inward. Engaged persons should wear the ring on the left hand with the heart facing outwards, and for those already married, the ring goes on the left hand with the heart facing inward.

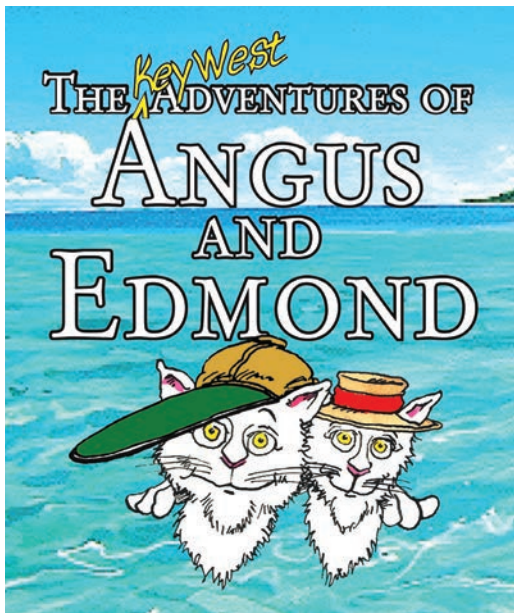


Scottish Holiday

Scotland Made Easy

www.scotlandmadeeasy.co.uk

This Christmas, consider giving Mom and Dad or someone special a seven-night stay in Scotland in the new year. Imagine the surprise when they discover a wonderful travel package that can be custom-designed to take away stress and give maximum delight. Instead of a blanket plan of one night in Edinburgh, one night in Inverness and two nights in Loch Lomond, professional travel planners will come up with a package that suits each client's interests and the time they have available. If you are a castle buff, you'll be directed toward an array of castles but if your taste runs more to battlefields and monuments, or distilleries or rugged scenery and hiking trails, a tour will be designed specifically for you. If you aren't quite sure where you want to go and what you want to see, three or four itineraries based on interests will be offered and discussed in detail. Once a plan is settled on, let the pros book the accommodations and other arrangements. If Mom and Dad are already working on a trip to Scotland, consider a travel voucher to cover some trip enhancements such as an overnight stay in a castle, a four-night gourmet tour taking in some of Edinburgh and Glasgow's finest restaurants, or a few rounds of golf at historic courses.



The Key West Adventures of Angus and Edmond

Gunna Dickson & Jon McIntosh
www.virtualbookworm.com
www.amazon.com

Last year we told you about the rollicking escapades of Angus and Edmond, a rascally couple of cats adopted from the New York City Humane Society and hell-bent on daring and new experiences. The fun continues as the tam-sporting littermates return in *The Key West Adventures of Angus and Edmond*. It is the second in a series written by Gunna Dickson and illustrated by Jon McIntosh, who first had them discovering a Scottish connection and tracing their roots back to the hills and dales of the Old Country. Just home from the Highlands of Scotland, Angus and Edmond receive a surprise invitation to visit Key West in sunny Florida. No sooner have the fashion-conscious, Angora mix brothers packed up their tartan gear, than they find themselves looking for sporty beachwear. They excitedly set off on a road trip from their home in New York City, planning stops to see the Liberty Bell and Rocky Balboa in Philadelphia, patriotic sites in Washington D.C., a Civil War battlefield in Maryland, and a theme park in Florida. This lively book of hilarious cat tales is a feast of fun for animal lovers and children of all ages.



KENSINGTON WINE MARKET

This is our 3rd **Kensington Wine Market Whisky Advent Calendar** designed and produced by the team at KWM!
It includes a Glencairn Whisky Glass, 24 50ml premium whiskies and as a special treat for Christmas Day a 100ml Scotch Malt Whisky Society Bottling.

More than 60% sold!



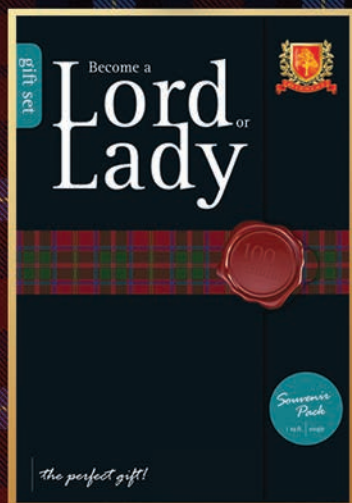
Kensingtonwinemarket.com



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On the Road

Part Two

In the second instalment of an exclusive two-part feature article, whisky expert Andrew Ferguson explores Scotland's established and emerging distilleries

In my last column, I wrote about an exciting - albeit arduous - trek to the new Ardnamurchan Distillery, one of the most remote in Scotland. Ardnamurchan is one of more than a dozen new whisky distilleries to open in Scotland over the last decade, and there are as many more currently under construction or in the planning stages. While the big whisky companies have been behind some of them, most have been initiated by independent firms or small groups of investors. The demand for single malt Scotch whisky has never been higher, and many entrepreneurs are looking to ride that wave of profit. Ardnamurchan was just the first of five new distilleries I would be visiting over the course of four days. The drive to Wolfburn Distillery and back would be no easier, but it no doubt would be as rewarding, passing through beautiful and dramatic country.

Setting out from Inverness, I headed across the Black Isle (actually a peninsula) before turning north to drive the coast of Caithness and Sutherland. My destination was at the end of Scotland's longest highway (the A9) - the town of Thurso. Thurso is the gateway to the Orkneys, an archipelago of islands that is one of my favourite destinations. The two-and-a-half hour drive up the coast covers just 175 kilometres on a windy, winding road, and is one the most beautiful drives in Scotland, crossing over scenic estuaries, with the mountains of the Northern Highlands to the left and the North Sea to the right. But there is a spiritual connection for me here also; my mother's ancestors, Clan Gunn, hail from south of Thurso, along the coast. Before being cleared off the land to make way for sheep, they farmed the area's cliffs and starkly-beautiful moors.

Planning permission for the Wolfburn Distillery was granted to a private consortium in 2012. The group wanted to bring distilling back to Thurso for the first time in over 150 years. Another distillery - also called Wolfburn - had previously existed on the same site in the town from the 1820s to the 1850s. While it is alleged to have been the largest distillery in Caithness at the time, it was in ruins by the 1870s. The current distillery was built in almost record time - 8 months - with the first spirit flowing off the stills on Robbie Burns Day, January 25, 2013. Wanting to launch a first release as early as possible, much of the whisky was filled in 125L quarter casks fashioned of both European and American oak.

While wolves are no longer native to



Scotland, they once roamed the mountains, hills and moors of the Highlands, at least until the late 17th century. The mythical sea-wolf, the Wolfburn Distillery's emblem, comes from a 16th century drawing by Konrad Gesner in "The History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents." It is said that the sea-wolf "liveth both on sea and land," and could magically walk on water. It was so rare it was also believed to bring good fortune to anyone lucky enough to spot one.

To legally be considered Scotch whisky, spirits must rest in casks for at least

three years before bottling. Most of Scotland's new distilleries have yet to reach this milestone, or they have chosen to hold the whisky back until it has reached a more mature age.

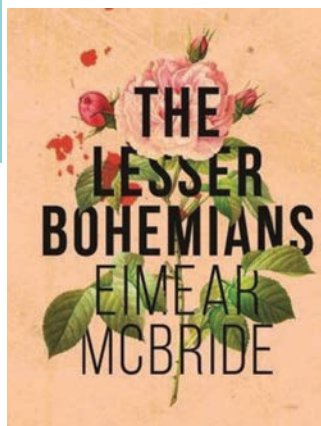
Wolfburn's first releases came out early in 2016 at just three years of age, but with more maturity than would normally be expected owing to the use of small casks; the smaller the barrel means that the ratio of wood to liquid is higher, producing more rapid maturation. There is a downside to the process, however, as smaller barrels have a higher "angel's share" - or rate of evaporation.

Two bottlings of Wolfburn were released in early 2016; the inaugural release was limited to just 1825 bottles, selling for £200 each. The other bottling - the first general release, called Northland - has been bottled at 46%. The whisky has been matured in ex-Islay quarter casks of both American and European oak. The palate shows lots of vanilla, honey and cream, with a gentle backbone of briny-ashy-peat smoke and juicy malt. It is a lovely malt for just three years of age, and a sign of great things to come from the new, northernmost distillery on the Scottish mainland.

Wolfburn is by no means outwardly glamorous; the distillery and warehouses are easy to miss, aluminum sheds built for purpose and efficiency, not aesthetics. Even the interior, though well laid out, is not glitzy or pretentious. The distillery was built to serve one purpose - make whisky - and it is doing a marvellous job of that. What impressed me most was the company's attention to the craft of whisky making. In the years ahead, as further bottlings of Wolfburn trickle out and its reputation grows, whisky pilgrims will start knocking on its door to pay homage. They best call ahead, the distillery isn't open to the public without an appointment, and it is a five hour round trip drive from Inverness!

www.fergusonwhiskytours.com



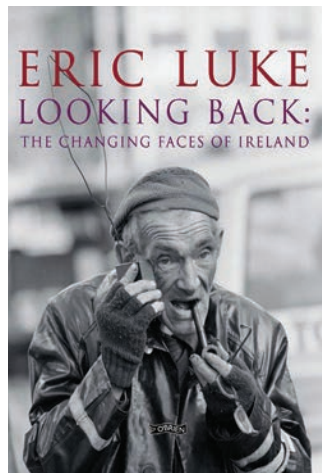


The Lesser Bohemians
Eimear McBride
McClelland & Stewart
310 pp / \$29.95

After all the critical and popular acclaim following her 2014 debut novel - the bestselling and multi award-winning *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* - it would have been easy for author Eimear McBride to follow formula and rest on her laurels. Instead, the Irish scribe tackles new territory with a gentle treatise on the power of love. More than the story of a relationship between 18-year-old Eily and 38-year-old Stephen, *The Lesser Bohemians* details the lovers' inner landscapes, capturing and conveying the symbiotic synergies that exist between a man and a woman. As the characters come of age, the oldest of Irish sins - sex, shame and guilt - bring out the best, and worst, in one another. A well written sophomore effort. ~ SPC

Kings of the Boyne
Nicola Pierce
O'Brien Press
336 pp / €8.99

Two kings, three young soldiers, one battle to end all battles. The first in what is sure to be a series of action-packed adventure books for young readers, *Kings of the Boyne* draws upon the defining event in Irish history to tell a terrific tale of friendship and courage. Think *Star Wars* meets *Harry Potter*, with a little King Arthur thrown in for good measure. That said, in the hands of talented Irish author Nicola Pierce, whose past works include *City of Fate* and *Behind the Walls*, the book digs a little deeper than the average kid fare. And given the public's present fixation with historical fiction - *Game of Thrones*, *Outlander*, etc - it won't be long before this becomes a staple series on Netflix. ~ SPC

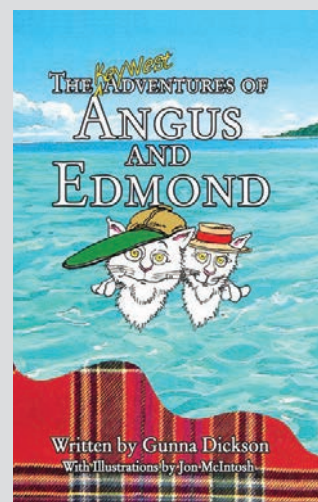


Looking Back: The Changing Faces of Ireland
Eric Luke
O'Brien Press
144 pp / €24.99

Dublin-based photojournalist Eric Luke draws upon his 40+ years in the business for this stirring selection of personal and professional images. A long-time contributor to the *Irish Press* and the *Irish Times*, Luke covered major events both at home and abroad, including two World Cups, and five Olympic Games. His focus here, however, is home; specifically, the people and places that personified the Emerald Isle's personality through the 1970s, 80s, 90s and into the new millennium. From celebrities to everyday citizens, from the sporting life to politics and pubs, this 144 page table-top tome gives greater meaning to the ages-old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words. Though accompanied by tidbits of text, Luke is wise to let the photos do the talking. ~ SPC

The Key West Adventure of Angus and Edmond
Gunnel Dickson & Jon McIntosh
Virtual Bookworm
76 pp / \$10.95

They're baaaaack! After adventure and escapades in the Scottish Highlands, our two favourite madcap mousers Angus and Edmond find themselves on the road to the sunny southern states. Along the way, the furry felines get heartfelt, homespun history lessons at stops in Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and Maryland. As always, food and good humour abound as the clawed cohorts eventually put their paws in the sand. Accolades go to author and award-winning journalist Gunnel Dickson for bringing the story to life with warm and witty dialogue over a swift narrative arc. Jon McIntosh's inspiring illustrations leave just enough for young imaginations to fill in the blanks. A great tale for children of all ages that will leave readers wondering where the pair will end up next. ~ SPC





Van Morrison

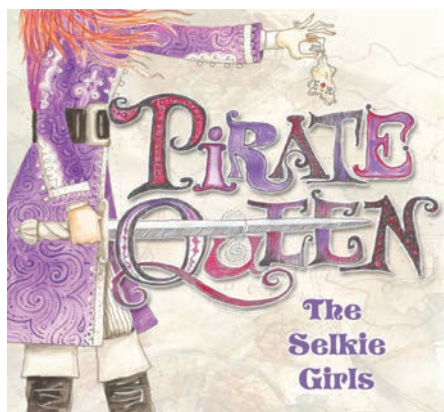
Keep Me Singing

The Belfast Bard is back with his first collection of all original material in over four years. *Keep Me Singing*, his 38th studio release, was well worth the wait, however, as the 71-year-old, multi award-winning singer-songwriter shows no signs of letting up or slowing down. All the smooth staples are in place here: soul, gospel, R&B, jazz – all textured with touches of trad, country and real rock ‘n’ roll. Unlike many artists his age, Morrison doesn’t do old-school “dad-rock” for baby-boomers with the need for nostalgia. Instead, the notoriously hard-ass songsmith has no issue with making easy listening music that is masterfully crafted. Instantly infectious, listeners will be humming these tunes in the car, at work, and around the house, long after the first listen. ~ SPC

KT Tunstall

KIN

True fans of music keep quiet about Scottish singer-songwriter KT Tunstall - she is their little secret, much in the same way that those-in-the-know were once over-protective of Elvis Costello, Paul Westerberg and Nick Cave. Those comparisons are even more complete with *KIN*, twelve tracks that showcase a super songsmith at the very peak of her creative prowess. Poppy, perky, quirky, alt-country, tender, tough – call it what you will, Tunstall knows how to turn out a tune with a tale. Check out *Maybe it's a Good Thing*, *Everything Has its Shape*, or *Love is an Ocean* - each a happy and hearty marriage of lyric and music. On *My Star* might be the prettiest lil' ditty you'll hear this year. Now you're in the know. ~ SPC



The Selkie Girls

Pirate Queen

Who knew that North Texas was a hotbed of Celtic culture? Classic and contemporary converge on *Pirate Queen*, with 13 heartfelt and homespun tracks chock full of guitars, mandolins, piano, harp, fiddles, whistles, percussion and sweet, soaring vocals. Harmonies and melodies merge seamlessly, recalling great musical renaissance artists of the 1970s. The album is so folky at times, in fact, that listeners will call to mind the early work of Donegal supergroup Clannad. Never too far from home, however, the band tweaks several of the tunes with a touch of torch and twang. Highlights here include *Shepard Lad*, *Witch of the Westmoreland*, *Last of the Great Whales*, as well as terrific takes on The Waterboys' *Bang on the Ear* and U2's *With or Without You*. ~ SPC

Peter Gillis

My Island Too

Those with a craving for classic crooning will want to wrap their ears around *My Island Too*, the latest release from renowned Nova Scotia singer Peter Gillis. The ‘Cape Breton Tenor’ stays close to home on the title track, *Home I'll Be* and *Goin' Home*, each reflecting his Atlantic Canadian roots. Both *Don Cuthaig* and *Mull of Kintyre* are noted nods to his ancestors, as is the powerful and poignant *Caledonia*. *Parlez Moi* is included en homage to the region's Acadian influence, and the stirring cover of Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* is a fitting finale to a fine album. Credit goes to producer Mike Shepherd for placing the myriad of musical instruments just below the surface, allowing the full force of Gillis' vibrant voice to shine. ~ SPC



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Photography by Mairi Helena Photography



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the Scottish Rejects

Once upon a time there were three lovely young ladies who embarked on a grand musical adventure...



The Scottish Rejects will tell you that audiences were a wee bit slow to embrace a trio of female pipers: women, they were told, do not play the pipes seriously. However, they will also note that they are now St. Patrick's Day favourites where they live in southern California, and that they play on the acclaimed Outlander television series.

Band manager and piper Tress Maksimuk grew up in a family of seven, five of them boys.

"I had to be tough - rarely would they let me just be a girl," she recalls. "When my younger brother challenged me by saying I could never play the pipes, I naturally had to prove him wrong. His was the extra push I needed."

Maksimuk never looked back, and she has been playing for the last 14 years. Her current bandmates - Valerie Byrnes and Lela Perriello - began 15 and 9 years ago, respectively. For each of them, there was a moment when the pipes kindled an irresistible longing deep within.

Maksimuk was in a dance rehearsal when she heard pipes in the distance.

"It was as if the sound went straight to my heart. It was the moment I knew I had to do this. I call that moment magical."

Byrnes first heard the ancient instrument when she was a 10-year-old in elementary school, pledging then and there that she would one day join the high school pipe band.

"Something stirred inside me and I couldn't shake it off," she shares. "There are times when this instrument really speaks to me."

Perriello, who - unlike her California born and bred bandmates - hails from

northern Michigan, studied the clarinet before taking up the pipes. She was in graduate school in Scotland when she first heard the drones at a memorial ceremony for Scottish hero William Wallace.

"A lone piper was playing at the base of the monument," she remembers. "The setting and the sound were so magical I knew immediately that I wanted to learn how to play."

The girls formed the band eight years ago, while Perriello was taking lessons from Maksimuk, who was already playing with Byrnes.

"We loved the idea of having three lady pipers in one small group," explains Byrnes, "especially since we all seem to have an affinity for doing unconventional things. Our official debut was St. Paddy's Day in 2008."

Maksimuk plays pipes, Irish bodhrán, Irish tin whistle and Jambí drum. Byrnes, in addition to pipes, plays Jambí drum and Irish tin whistle. Perriello plays the traditional pipes, the small pipes and Jambí drum. Maksimuk and Byrnes are the band's vocalists, and all are competitive pipers.

The trio prides itself on having sounds and styles for any occasion.

"Dress-wise, we like to mix it up," says Maksimuk. "If it is a party or non-conventional type event we'd rather wear tartan corsets or mini-kilts. Musically, we like to ramp up the energy with more modern tunes written by pipers. Jigs and reels are great fun, old and new. Mixing that with something like rock music is always interesting and amazing."

Maksimuk grew up heavily influenced by the harmonies and melodies of Irish singer/songwriter Enya.

"Now that we are writing our own compositions, I find myself creating tunes that are traditional, but then adding my own

harmony to create a deeper emotion to the sound."

All three embraced a traditional style of play before they branched out.

"I strive to get a great sound and specific movements or embellishments in a traditional way because I think it is part of the unique aspect of pipe music," says Perriello. "But there are times when adding a bit of flare really spices things up."

San Diego's Comic-Con and the Outlander series have given the group great exposure, but they also list playing at the funerals of family and friends as being among their most memorable moments.

Maksimuk muses that the Scottish Rejects continue to be touched by the music of their forbearers.

"At times when I play I feel a connection to my ancestors that brings me a sense of peace and wholeness."

It is all about the friendships the trio has formed, the supportive fans, the road trips and the good memories, adds Byrnes.

"The emotions the pipes can stir are quite impressive and I am glad I can bring that to people," agrees Perriello.

www.scottishrejects.com



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After hearing world-renowned fiddler Aly Bain perform on the BBC Hogmanay show more than a decade ago, Ryan Young hasn't looked back

“I was very inspired by the way he seemed to ‘speak,’ through an instrument,” fiddler Ryan Young shares from his home in Scotland. “I was a fairly quiet child and loved the idea that something could speak for you.”

Though he was only 10-years-old at that time, that first impression continues to be a lasting one.

“I would still choose the fiddle over other instruments,” smiles the twenty-something. “I feel it is the best instrument for imitating the human voice. I’m also still fairly quiet.”

These days, Young isn’t overly concerned with holding the fiddle and bow the “right way” - something he struggled to do as a youngster. Good technique, he suggests, is often over-shadowed by something much deeper - emotional impact.

“I want to play in a way that allows the music to flow through me, where I am just an outlet for the music, and it is the music that is heard rather than any technical or lack of technical ability. A person’s technique is their technique, and as long as there is an emotional connection with the music, it doesn’t matter if they are holding the fiddle in an unconventional way. I look for lyricism in fiddle playing, and constantly try to replicate how a voice and singer might sound.”

Though he is a Scotsman who mainly plays traditional Scottish music, Young has found influence from Ireland’s County Clare. He admires the “lonesome, lyrical” lilts of the region’s top fiddlers, including Martin Hayes, P. Joe Hayes, Paddy Canny and Bobby Casey.

Last year, he performed alongside one of his musical idols - American guitarist Dennis Cahill - at the Feakle International Traditional Music Festival in Clare.

“It was a surreal experience to be sitting next to someone who inspires you every day,” he recalls, adding that many of the Clare fiddlers he listens to were also in the audience. “I wasn’t aware of this at the time, thankfully.”

Back in 2008, Young performed with another one of his musical influences: Scottish singer-songwriter Paolo Nutini. They graced the main stage together at T in the Park, a major music festival in his home country.

“I had just picked up Paolo’s latest album and had been listening to it over and over. I couldn’t believe that I would be performing some of it with him only a few weeks later.”

And while he can list a dozen musicians who motivate him, Young is happy to have developed a style all his own.

“Players with Irish music backgrounds tend to think I sound very Scottish, whereas players with Scottish music backgrounds tend to think I sound very Irish.”

He even went so far as to research the matter during his Master of Music degree, doing recitals and handing questionnaires to the audience.

“Although I have been largely focused on traditional Scottish tunes, I suppose my sound is a hybrid of Scottish and Irish styles. I have always had the confidence to say which tunes and stylistic features I like, and I simply play those.”

Perhaps ironically, Young finds that traditional tunes are the easiest ones to get creative with - or “mess around with” - as he puts it. The recipe for a good fiddle piece, he believes, lies with music that can keep its integrity, even if it is altered.

“Even when changing the key or removing a note, for instance, the tune is still apparent to the listener.”

While he would love nothing more than to spend more time on creative projects and concerts, he acknowledges that bills still have to be paid.

“At this point in my life, at the end of the day, I simply can’t turn down paying gigs.”

And while playing in loud wedding bands isn’t always an ideal scenario, at least he “earns money doing what I love.”

Currently, Young is finishing up his first full-length album with Boston-based, Grammy award-winning producer Jesse Lewis. A finalist in the BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year contest in 2015, he will also be recording a CD with the rest of the contestants before heading off on a tour of Scotland. He was a finalist again this year, and is excited to be both in the studio and on the road again in 2017.

“In the end, I think that playing in a heart-felt way is all that should matter.”

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Rachel Franzen

An ambassador for the Irish art of toe 'n' heel dancing, Rachel Franzen carries on the customs of Eire's cultural traditions in Qatar

Like many who were born and raised in Australia, dancer Rachel Franzen describes her family as “a bit of a mixed bag.”

“My father comes from New Zealand, but his ancestry is Welsh, Irish and French,” she tells Celtic Life International. “My mother was born in Australia, but her parents were Ten Pound Poms who emigrated from England. My great-grandfather was Scottish, and the rest is lost in history. I am now married to a Swiss and my children were born in Dubai.”

As her husband works for an international hotel chain, Franzen has spent the last 17 years on the move, back and forth between such places as Dubai, Muscat and Moscow. She settled in Doha, the capital of Qatar, in 2013, where she established her dance school, Irish Dance Arabia.

She and her twin sister were five years of age when their mother enrolled them in an Irish dance class.

“We had been taking modern dance, but then we moved house and Mum was looking for a class that was closer to our new home. Her friend's daughter took Irish dance lessons, and the classes were held in our suburb, so off we went.”

Over three decades later, Franzen remains passionate about Irish dance, both as a dancer and an instructor.

“My Mum never had to drag me along. I was hooked from the first lesson. I love teaching and I love Irish dance, so this is the perfect job for me.”

Dance was something easily carried with her as she travelled and settled in unfamiliar places.

“When I first moved to Dubai in 2000, Irish dancing was a link with home and a way of making me feel less homesick. I didn't have much time for it as I was working long hours, but I was determined to squeeze it in.”

Franzen qualified for world competition every year from age 10 to 17, but the costly travel from Australia to compete in Ireland was more than her family could afford. When her younger brother won the Australian nationals a second time, the family booked tickets to Ireland. Franzen, who had stopped dancing competitively while attending university, went to cheer him on.

“On the way back from the Worlds in Belfast I had a stopover in Dubai, and I never returned to live in Australia after that.”

Given her current locale, it is not surprising that her pupils come from many different backgrounds.

“I have many students of Irish heritage, but I also have Serbian, Czech, Lebanese, New Zealander, Australian, Dutch, American, South African, Canadian, English, Scottish, Greek, Indian, Qatari, Spanish, Turkish, German, Malaysian, French and Belgian students.”

Interestingly, she has noticed that Irish people who are away from home develop a greater interest in their tradition and culture. In turn, they pass that along to their children, who appreciate the connection that dancing gives them to their heritage.

“There is a very strong Irish society here in Qatar, and this has also been the case in the United Arab Emirates and Oman where I lived previously. These societies of volunteers are doing a fantastic job. They organize Irish language classes and music sessions and events to celebrate Irish heritage, and are strong supporters of the Irish dancing clubs and Irish sports clubs.”

An array of different teachers with unique styles over the years helped Franzen keep things fresh in her own classroom.

“I try to stay in touch with current steps and styles by travelling to Feiseanna, and following Irish dance accounts on social media.”

While she is true to tradition, she also delights in putting the old steps to modern music - something that gets a great response from her students.

“Every year the Qatar Irish Society holds a gala ball on or around St. Patrick's Day. My students are always invited to perform and I try to choreograph a routine that includes some traditional numbers, such as the St. Patrick's Day traditional set dance, along with something modern and unexpected also.”

Franzen's students have done several cappella numbers at these events, as well as a full routine to Pharrell Williams' recent chart-topper “Happy.”

“Last year I made a mash-up of dance-themed songs and choreographed a routine to that. We like to have fun with it.”

www.facebook.com/IrishDanceArabia





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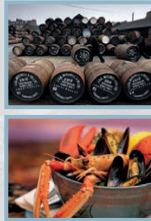


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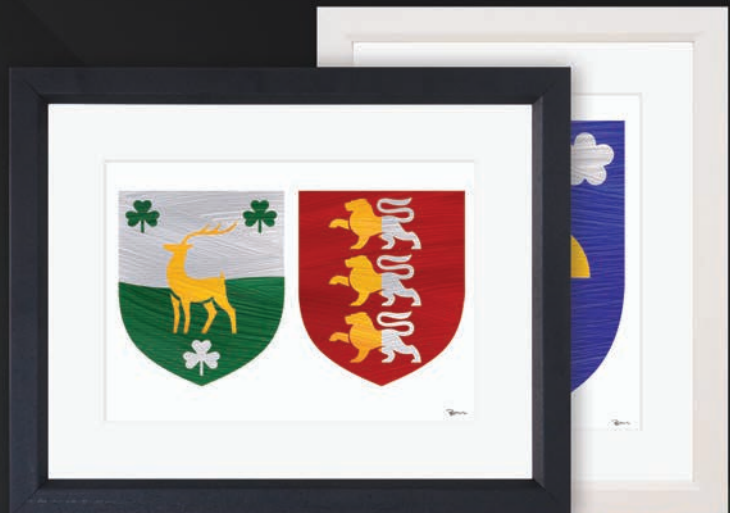
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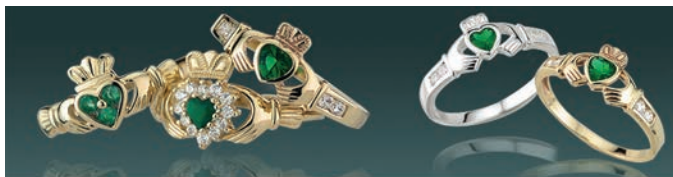
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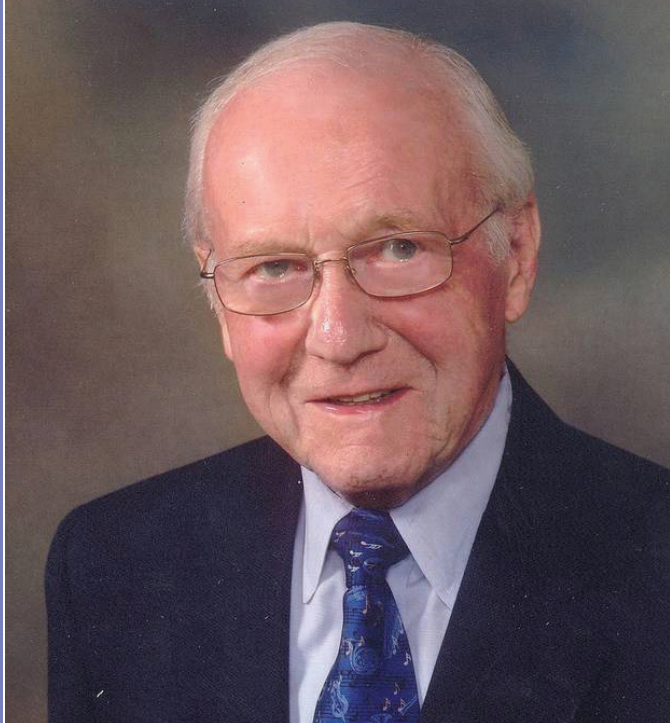


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Bob Dunfey: 1928-2016

Dunfey and his brother Jack accompanied Mitchell on a fact-finding mission when former President Bill Clinton appointed him economic advisor on Northern Ireland. They visited the Shankill and the Falls districts to learn the stories of deprivation behind The Troubles.

"The Shankill visit was to cement a relationship with the Dunfeys," recalled Redpath, "which ensured that the voice of what was described as 'working class unionism' was heard in the United States as the peace process developed."

It will be up to historians to determine the Dunfeys' role in the peace building, he added.

"Suffice to say that their connections and friendships included Gerry Adams, John Hume, David Trimble, May Blood, Monica McWilliams, Gary McMichael, Billy Hutchinson and David Ervine, as well as a number of front-line community workers, at a key period of the peace process."

Rick Sobey, a reporter with The Lowell Sun, wrote that Dunfey's sister Eleanor once entered his office to find him on the phone, relaying between both sides of the peace process.

"He was speaking with a peace activist from a Protestant side of Belfast, Northern Ireland, who needed to communicate with a fellow activist on the Catholic side. However, it was extremely dangerous for them to communicate directly."

Reflecting on her brother's death, Eleanor Dunfey told the Lowell paper that phone call symbolized what her brother was about.

"He's playing such a key role in this and nobody will ever know it. You would never see it in the headlines. He was only in it for peace. He always had his eye on the prize and that was peace."

On the Dingle Peninsula, where Dunfey built a home in the village of Ballyferriter - where he still had family - he was remembered as a bridge-builder and philanthropist. Radio Kerry credited him and his family with contributing to the preservation and development of the culture and economy of the Corca Dhuibhne region. One of the projects in which the Dunfeys figured prominently was the construction of an interpretive centre.

IrishCentral.com noted Dunfey had a gift for understanding "the politics of people."

"Dunfey's involvement in Ireland was strongly felt through his second home in Ballyferriter and his family's leadership in the American Ireland Fund," adding that his participation was driven by philanthropy.

Dunfey travelled with the leaders of Northern Ireland to Oslo, Norway in 1988 for the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize, which recognized the efforts to restore harmony to Northern Ireland. He was also the founding treasurer and director of the New England Circle/Global Citizens Circle, a nonprofit forum that brings leaders and activists together for dialogue on important issues.

He passed away recently at the age 88 after a long struggle with Parkinson's disease, and will be buried in Ballyferriter, Ireland.



Whether it was a restaurant acquired, a hotel purchased, a mall built or a peace accord forged, Robert Dunfey Sr. was a man who got the job done.

A quintessential Irish-American success story, Dunfey co-founded a family-owned chain of hotels in the United States, Mexico and the Far East. However, he will also be remembered for his behind-the-scenes efforts to bring peace to Northern Ireland.

Dunfey's passions for business and politics were ignited while growing up in a large Catholic family in Lowell, Massachusetts. His first lessons in business were learned in the family's variety store and luncheonette, while his initial exposure to politics came later when his father campaigned for public office.

Writing in the Belfast Telegraph, Jackie Redpath, a Shankill community worker, called Dunfey "an unsung American hero of Northern Ireland's journey to reconciliation." Redpath pointed out that Dunfey grew up in the midst of the Democratic Party, learning early that what went on in backrooms was just as important as on the front lines, and later taking that knowledge back across the Atlantic to the land of his forefathers.

"His reach was Kerry to Derry and Ballyferriter to Belfast," wrote Redpath, "right into the heart of Loyalism and Republicanism in the Shankill and the Falls."

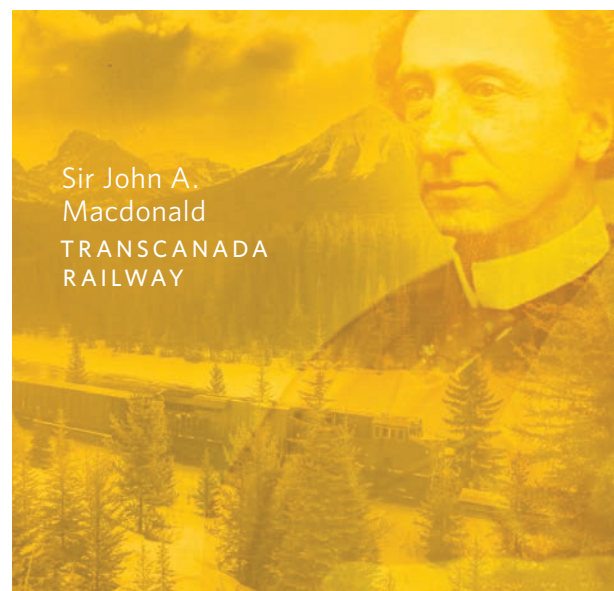
At a young age Dunfey and his brothers bought a fried clam shack in Hampton Beach, New Hampshire, a summer refuge for city millworkers. When a second restaurant became available the owner insisted the Dunfeys take a 32-room hotel with it, thus launching them, almost by accident, into the hotel business. By 1954 the brothers and their widowed mother launched the Omni Dunfey Group.

Business and politics combined lured him to Maine where he was instrumental in Bobby Kennedy's presidential campaign. Years later, he convinced George Mitchell to run for Ed Muskie's vacant senate seat, eventually catapulting Mitchell into the positions of Senate Majority Leader and special envoy to Northern Ireland.

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