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Claire MacKay is an ethnobotanist and medical herbalist, based in the Scottish Highlands and consultant to the Outlander TV series. Also a writer, her work was included in Diana Gabaldon's bestselling; Outlandish Companion, and she is about to publish her own book Outlander Herbal, a guide to the herbal remedies of the series.

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Fáilte!

Travel Tales

Some of my fondest memories as a young lad are of sitting around the kitchen table listening to neighbours delight us with embellished tales of the supernatural – forerunners, ghost stories and superstitions. Fact didn't matter; imaginations soared and some of the tales were very scary. Celtic folklore soon became a subject of keen interest for me.

My curiosity piqued some years later when I first heard of a local apparition, the appearance of the legendary *Cù Glas Mheòbail* - the Grey Dog of Meoble. Often noted to be a sign of impending death, it was said that a MacDonald from Long Stretch Road in Cape Breton had seen a vision of the grey dog of Meoble from Scotland.

Many years later, while researching my Gillis ancestors in Scotland, I was again introduced to the Grey Dog of Meoble. It was mid-day as I was leaving the community of Bracara, near Morar in the West Highlands of Scotland, that I met Paul Galbraith, author of *Blessed Morar*, at his home overlooking Loch Morar and the village of Meoble. Steeped in local folklore, and a wonderful story-teller, he regaled us with an abundance of West Highland mythology. Several hours later, over a bottle of Glenfiddich, I had a most memorable travel experience; a history lesson on the West Highlands, including Meoble, where the legend of the *Cù Glas* began.

The legend dates back to the early 1800s and a young Highlander named Dugald MacDonald and his large deerhound. Like many young men of the day, he was called to war. On his return he learned that his dog, missing her master, had located to a small island where she had given birth to pups. Upon his return from battle, Dugald sought out his cherished companion. Arriving on the island, he was met by the grown pups, and not being recognized, soon mauled him to death. Legend has it that when the deerhound saw what happened, she began to howl in agony during her long, lonely vigil at his graveside.

Some time later, a brother of Dugald became seriously ill. One night the ghost of the deerhound appeared at his bedside for several minutes, gave a terrible wail and disappeared. The next day, the brother died.

It is believed that the apparition followed the descendants of the MacDonald family to Canada and Australia. Since then, there have been many sightings by relatives of Dugald - including the apparition at Long Stretch Road in Cape Breton.

Celtic culture is filled with such fables, and the best way to learn of them is to visit their points of origin. Modern myth making is also alive and well within our community, and in this issue we explore some of the sites that are currently redefining who we are as a people. Of particular interest is Northern Ireland, whose boundaries and borders - physical, spiritual, and cultural - are being reshaped as we speak.

Enjoy, and May God Bless in 2018!

Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher

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Celts For Cancer

In the first of a six-part series to raise funding and awareness for cancer research, prevention, treatment and services, Celtic Life International shines the spotlight on Cancer Focus Northern Ireland.



Founded almost 50 years ago, Cancer Focus Northern Ireland was developed to diminish the impact of the traumatic disease on people's lives.

"The charity provides care and support services for cancer patients and their families," says Family Support Service Coordinator Rachel Smith.

"We also offer a range of cancer prevention projects in schools, workplaces and community venues to help people lower their risk of getting cancer, we fund scientific research into the causes and treatment of the disease, and campaign for better health policy to protect the community and its future."

A qualified drama therapist, Rachel left her position with the Princess Royal Trust in Bristol almost a decade ago to take on her current role with Cancer Focus NI. She was inspired to make a difference after a much-loved family member was diagnosed with a brain tumor.

"My job here is to support children who have a significant adult with cancer - perhaps a mum, a dad, or a grandparent. I help them to understand the illness, and offer them support when the outlook is not good, or through the loss of a loved one."

She does this in an array of creative ways.

"I help children understand cancer through the use of art, craft and play. We talk about their fears, or maybe meet other children in the same situation, and give parents and caretakers a much-needed break. I also provide support in the family's home, or at the charity's service centre in Belfast, and offer over-the-phone support as well. I have also developed a family bereavement service, which supports the whole family."

Rachel also leads a 'Writing for the Future' service, the first of its kind in the U.K.

"If a parent's prognosis is less than positive, I support them to record hopes, dreams and wishes to create lasting memories for the family they are leaving behind."

The challenges of the position can be

overwhelming at times.

"Over the past nine years, I have experienced so many losses in my work," she shares. "I try to remain emotionally separate, but I am human - a compassionate human - and it hurts every time. Often, I check my work phone just before doing the school run. I drive my two young children to school and then cry as I go on to work. It is not the same gut-wrenching loss as that of a personal loved one, but silent tears in the knowledge that a family's world has shattered."

The rewards, however, make it all the more worthwhile.

"During the process of end-of-life care, the level of intimacy with someone changes completely. Time becomes the most precious commodity, and communication with them becomes very real and honest. To help someone convey their dreams is an honour."

Reaching out to the local community is an essential element of Cancer Focus NI's mandate.

"We want as many people as possible to know about our work so that more people will come forward and benefit from what we have to offer."

Along with word of mouth, advertising and social media have helped to spread the word.

"I have given a TEDx talk, and I have spoken about my work at many fundraising and health awareness events and on TV and radio," says Rachel. "And we have many outreach programs in the community. For example, our 'stop smoking' clinics are held in workplaces, dental and GP surgeries, and at schools and colleges."

In 2016, 5,690 people used CFNI's care services.

"Our Nurse Line handled 1,034 calls, our art therapist saw 781 people, our Sing for Life

choir has 163 members and held 20 public performances across Northern Ireland. The driving service did almost 900 round-trip journeys, taking patients to hospital for their treatment; cancer prevention services reached 103,878 people; family support referrals increased by 65 per cent, and one full-time member of staff, and two part-timers, saw 339 children.

"Our Keeping Well vans go to community venues, workplaces, shopping centers, sports venues, etc, to provide health checks to local people. We also have a special Well Aware project offering health checks and information to older people."

Looking ahead to its 50th anniversary in 2019, the organization hopes to expand the services that are in most demand - counseling and family support - and continue to campaign for better health policies and fund important research in local universities.

However, even with a staff of 108 full-time and part-time workers and volunteers - and 12 charity shops - Cancer Focus NI needs support.

"Funding cuts in the National Health Service are putting more pressure on some of our key services, counseling and family support," notes Rachel. "There is also a lot of competition from other worthwhile causes for public donations. And the Northern Ireland Assembly needs to get up and running again; we need a new national cancer strategy - the current one is ten years old."

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Is Northern Ireland considered a Celtic nation?

~ Steven Grant, Austin, Texas

Hi Steven - an excellent question, and one that has been on my mind since revisiting the region both in 2014 and 2017. I suppose the answer depends on how one defines the term 'nation.' Like the seven Celtic nations of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Man, Galicia and Bretagne, Northern Ireland is still considered a 'province' or 'territory' of another country (U.K). That said, should nationhood merely be classified by geography or political structure? Certainly, by our criteria, Northern Ireland qualifies as Celtic. The Celtic tribes that settled in what we know as Northern Ireland today were the Ulaid (Old Irish) or the Ulaidh (Modern Irish). They were a people of early Ireland who gave their name to the modern province of Ulster, which means "land" or "territory." Other Celtic inhabitants that settled the area were the Erdini, the Robogdii, and the Dal Riada, whose most famous citizen was St. Columba. Remnants of that culture still exist across the six counties today, mostly in language, music, dance and the visual arts. In fact, despite the political instability brought on by Brexit - or perhaps because of it - there has been a heightening of interest in Celtic culture.

Where did the bagpipes come from?

~ Miriam Perez, Mexico City, Mexico

Miriam - thanks for the note. A quick visit to Wikipedia will answer your query in fine detail. Here is my condensed, 'Reader's Digest' version; first evidence of the bagpipes is found in the Middle East, specifically Egypt and Greece, circa 1000 BC. The instrument later appears in art works in Western Europe, specifically Northwest Spain and Portugal, around 1200 AD. In the British Isles, the pipes make an appearance in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, written in 1380 AD. History tells us that the Scottish Highland pipes were used at the Battle of Pinkie Cleugh in Scotland in 1547. In Eire, the instrument shows up in John Derrick's 1851 painting *The Image of Irelande*. With the expansion of the British Empire in the 19th and 20th centuries, the pipes made their way to the New Worlds of Canada, Australia, the United States, and elsewhere. Today, an estimated 1 million people play the bagpipes. Excellent collections of



traditional bagpipes can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the International Bagpipe Museum in Gijón, Spain, the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, England, the Morpeth Chantry Bagpipe Museum in Northumberland, and the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix, Arizona.

What is the difference between whisky and whiskey?

~ Michel Paré, Lachute, Quebec

Salut Michel! This is a quandary that has been debated for centuries, and perhaps would best be discussed over a drink... or two...or more. The word 'whisky' itself finds its roots in the Gaelic 'uisge beatha,' or 'usquebaugh,' meaning 'water of life.' Traditionally, Scottish bottlers have used 'whisky' to describe their blended and single-malt products, which are distilled twice before being sent off to markets. The Irish distill their produce three times, producing a lighter, smoother spirit. There are a number of other differences between the two as well, including in the use of malted barleys,



type of grains, and levels of peat. Some say that the 'e' was added to the Irish spelling in the 18th century to help distinguish it from its Scottish counterpart on liquor store shelves. The reality is more likely that the small difference in spelling is a result of the differing translations of the original word in Scottish Gaelic and Irish Gaelic respectively. Interestingly, when Irish immigrants first arrived in the United States in the 1700s, they brought the 'e' with them, which is still found on most American whiskey labels today. Whatever the case, it has long been a bone of contention amongst connoisseurs.

Got a question for Celtic Life? Drop us a note at info@celticlife.com

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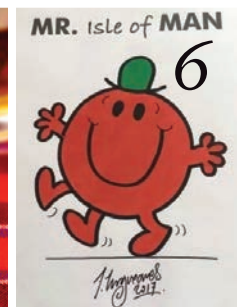
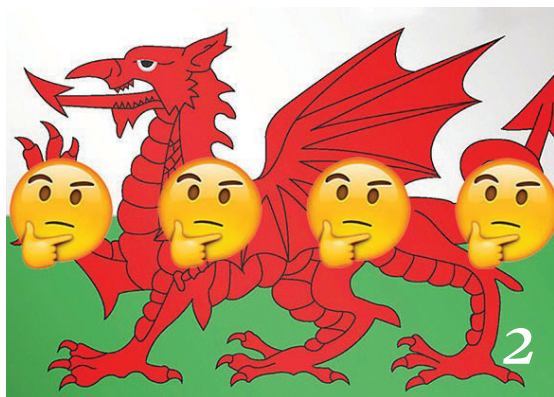


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one

Kilt -mono

A Scottish-Japanese woman is embracing both sides of her heritage through a creative fashion project. Maya Caulfield, a Colorado-based artist, thrifted plaid shirts and boxer shorts to create a kimono with a tartan-like design. Caulfield is primarily a painter and doesn't consider herself a textile artist, but she is no stranger to sewing her own clothes. This piece has garnered plenty of attention - particularly after photos made the rounds on the social media site Reddit. "As the proud dad of two beautiful half Scottish - half Japanese daughters, I'll be sharing this photo with them," reads one comment.

two

Welsh emoji

It's been a long time coming. Thanks to Apple's recent iPhone update, the Welsh flag is now part of the slew of flag emojis available on the Apple keyboard. The Welsh flag was previously only available through different software or add-ons. However, it will now be at the fingertips of any user after they install the iOS 11.1 update. The flag is among 70 new emojis, also including a woman in a headscarf, in an effort to make the characters more inclusive. With the other Celtic nations getting their due, could Galicia, Brittany or Cornwall be next?

three

Irish film

For the first time, an Irish language film has been longlisted for an Academy Award. Rocky Ros Muc, a documentary directed by Michael Fanning, tells the story of the Galway-born boxer Sean Mannion. The film follows Mannion's journey from the village of Ros Muc to his boxing career in the United States. As Mannion hails from a Gaeltacht village (meaning Irish Gaelic is the predominant language), it's appropriate that the story is being told through the Irish tongue. Rocky Ros Muc is one of 170 contenders for the Documentary Feature category. The shortlist is expected to be announced on January 23.

four

Manx Gaelic

In 2009, UNESCO declared Manx Gaelic an extinct language, but some Isle of Man residents have been trying to revive it. According to a 2016 Isle of Man census, 1,800 people out of 83,314 said they could read, speak or write Manx Gaelic. Artist Gráinne Sheard (aka; Yarny Gráinne) teamed up with the Manx Heritage Foundation to create animations which help teach phrases relating to weather. Sheard, who is a Manx language speaker, crocheted the pieces which were later digitally animated. The Manx Gaelic terms for words such as snow, rainbow, and lightning are all depicted.

five

Free the haggis

Have you been craving haggis? Probably not, but if you're a curious Canadian you are in luck. After 46 years, the Scottish delicacy may once again be legally exported to Canada. For the past few decades, a ban on red meat from Europe prevented the dish from making its way across the pond. In 2015, that ban was lifted - but animal entrails and organs remained excluded. This led to chefs experimenting with alternative recipes sans one of haggis' most iconic ingredients: sheep lung. While it won't be 100 percent traditional, it will have to tide North Americans over for now.

six

Mr. Isle of Man

Do you remember the likes of Mr. Messy, Mr. Mischief and Little Miss Chatterbox? The Mr. Men and Little Miss children's book series were created by English author and illustrator Roger Hargreaves. After Hargreaves' death in 1988, his son Adam took up the mantle and started depicting new characters. Adam's latest creation? Mr. Isle of Man. Adam drew the character - who has three legs, reflecting the island's flag - to be put on display at the annual Manx Lifest. The illustration was slated to be auctioned off, with proceeds going towards a local library.

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

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Esmé Page & Cornwall Hugs Grenfell

What started as a speculative Facebook post turned into something much bigger: “Imagine if we could put a Cornish holiday on the horizon of every Grenfell resident and firefighter family: a time to rest, a time to let our beautiful county bless these people and work its gentle magic.” In June 2017, a fire at the 24-storey Grenfell Tower in West London killed an estimated 80 people and displaced many other public housing residents. Cornwall Hugs Grenfell (CHG) was founded by Esmé Page to collect pledges in order to organize “well-crafted holidays for Grenfell survivors and firefighters.” More than 130 guests have taken holiday in Cornwall. “It was a very welcome break for us all. My son who is four, has been very affected by the Grenfell tragedy as several children he knew died,” Lucy, one of the Grenfell survivors, said in a press release. “He was only playing with five of his buddies on the Tuesday and then the fire happened in the early hours of Wednesday.” As of October’s end, CHG is looking to give more than 400 additional people vacations. The project is set to run until 2019.



Liam Coleman

A community police officer in Edinburgh has launched an initiative to donate socks that would normally go to waste. Liam Coleman, who works as a cop in Edinburgh’s west end, came up with the idea after he returned a kilt he’d been renting. Coleman was told that the kilt socks, which were included in the rental, would be thrown away if he didn’t keep them. As someone who has seen the effects of poverty and homelessness around his community, Coleman knew the socks could be used by a person in need, so he asked that the socks be donated instead. Coleman’s request catalyzed a collaboration between the local Kilt Hire Company and The Salvation Army. “We do a lot of work with the Salvation Army. They do their best but are often short of key items and socks are a well-sought after piece of clothing for those sleeping rough,” Coleman told The Scottish Sun in October. “Socks can deteriorate quite rapidly when living out of doors permanently so a decent pair is a very important thing.” According to The Kilt Hire Co., the community has been 100 per cent behind the idea, and those who bring back their rentals are happy to give them to a good cause.



Melissa Kirk & Newport Mind

A 27-year-old mother launched a Christmas charity and awareness campaign in memory of her own mom, who passed away last Mother’s Day. Melissa Kirk of Newport, Wales, told South Wales Argus that her mother Joanne Beaumont “fought a daily battle that nobody saw. Her day-to-day life was difficult.” Tragically, Beaumont died by suicide after struggling with depression and bipolar disorder. Kirk became determined to raise awareness about mental illness and began raising money for a Christmas charity event that would provide donations to Newport Mind. “The reason I am doing this is because, although I could not save my mum, I hope I may be able to help or save someone else,” said Kirk. Newport Mind is a mental health association which provides a range of services. Activity groups allow people to learn new skills and build a support network, self-management courses help people manage their anxiety or anger, and mental health first aid training teaches both professionals and other individuals. Counselling is also available through the organization. Kirk aimed to raise £1,500 during their first fundraising event, and plans to hold more events in the future.

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Jennie King plays her part to preserve and promote Celtic tradition in Nova Scotia



In 2010, the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo recognized a greater need to educate and engage young people about their Celtic roots. The result was the creation of the Youth Pipes and Drums initiative.

"It was initiated some time ago," says Jennie King, Managing Director of the Tattoo. "Its sole purpose was, and remains, to preserve and promote Celtic music as an art form. So, we started this program as a hands-on way to teach young people to learn and play traditional instruments."

King joined the Tattoo team in 2016 after a six-year-stint at Neptune Theatre in Halifax. She now oversees all projects within the annual event, including Youth Pipes and Drums - a free program, supported entirely by donations from the community. It is open to young people, aged 7 - 17, in four locations across the province; Halifax, the Annapolis Valley, Sydney, and in the Chester Basin.

"It may have begun as something quite small, but this year we have upwards of 60 kids involved. This is the first year that we will have our Youth Pipes and Drums actually performing in the Tattoo. About a dozen of them will be taking the stage. They range in ages and skill level, and the group's director, Wayne Moug, will be responsible for preparing them for those debut performances. We are excited to get them out on the floor, and we intend on making a special introduction to our audiences. These kids have worked really hard, and they deserve the applause.

"We are always evolving, and with that growth comes a lot of blood, sweat, and tears."

"Over the past twelve months, we added instructors in the Valley and in Chester. The program in Sydney is taking more kids all of the time. And in Halifax, if you cruise by the Armoury site on any given Thursday night, you can enjoy a sweet serenade of the music of our forbearers."

Along with cultural preservation, King notes that building self-esteem and learning to work in a team environment are among the biggest benefits of being involved.

"Anything that builds their confidence, and gets them interacting with like-minded people is extremely important. These kids get together once a week and create music together, and make life-long friendships and memories. It is our hope that they stick with it for the rest of their lives. The thought that we played a little role in that is really rewarding."

While the return might be obvious, the program is not without challenges.

"It is financed strictly through the Tattoo, but we rely on the support of our donors. This year is particularly challenging; we have all of these kids who are ready to play, but to get them kilted and in uniform can be quite costly. We don't receive any government funding or

grants, so that is an expense that we have to deal with each year. If we can get more people excited about the program, however, the money will surely come."

King believes programs like Youth Pipes and Drums are instrumental in keeping Celtic culture alive and well, both at home and abroad.

"Within the Tattoo itself we recognize that we have more work to do. Every year we conduct an annual survey - and the Celtic connection is certainly alive and well - but as we trickle down through the generations, it is important that we continue to celebrate our shared history and heritage. More than ever, our role is to get out in front of kids when they are young, and give them a little taste of that culture, so that it becomes something that they will better appreciate as they grow older.

"These are the people who will keep these traditions alive. If we do this for them, hopefully they will do it for their kids, and so forth, passing it along to the future generations. Our mission is to reinvigorate the pipes and drums - the music and instruments of our ancestors - to ensure their longevity, and to guarantee that they remain an important component of our culture for years to come."

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The New York Caledonian Club

*Originally founded in 1856,
The New York Caledonian Club
continues to preserve and promote
the region's Scottish heritage*

New York City evokes the image of immigrants greeted by Lady Liberty, sailing up to Ellis Island at the turn of the last century, on their way to becoming Americans. And though many were of Italian, Jewish, and Irish descent, the Scots had their exodus to the new world as well, and the community has a long history in the area.

"A lot of Scots immigrated here earlier than the Irish," says Sue Ann McDevitt, the 83rd and current chief of the New York Caledonian Club. "The bulk of Irish immigration occurred after the potato famine. Most Scottish immigration was following Culloden in 1746."

Many Scots came to New York at that time in indentured servitude. Most were Protestant or Presbyterian, and were firmly settled by the time the largely Catholic Irish immigrants flocked to the Big Apple.

"The Scots were much more established as the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, whereas the Irish were seen as the Papists, the Catholics," continues McDevitt. "The cadre of the men formed the 79th Regiment of the Union Army, and they were the only kilted regiment in the history of the United States military."

She adds that the club has ties with much of both the city and the state's history. "At one point, Andrew Carnegie was involved with the organization."

While its mandate has changed over the last 161 years, the group's goal is to keep Scottish heritage alive - and more importantly, accessible - in modern Manhattan.

"Our main purpose, besides friendship and enjoying one another's company, is that we promote Scottish culture," explains McDevitt. "There are other organizations that are Scottish-aligned, but we offer Gaelic language classes - whether it's beginning speech, conversational, or reading - and we sponsor fiddling workshops, and Highland dance and ceilidh dancing workshops as well. And, in January, we are going to be hosting a course on tracing your roots in conjunction with the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society."

Speaking of genealogy, that is another way that the organization is unique; you need not prove your heritage to become a member, which can be of huge importance for those whose lineage is not as neatly mapped out as others. The open-door policy has the added benefit of making the New York Caledonian Club available to anyone interested in Scottish heritage, regardless of their own background.

*One of the group's core mottos is
"we are open to the world."*

Perhaps nowhere is that philosophy more evident than at the club's annual Burns Night Supper, where Scottish poet Robert Burns



is remembered over an evening of dinner, dancing, and a hugely popular silent auction that's open to members and non-members alike.

"It's one of our bigger fundraising opportunities," says Kyle Dawson, the club's treasurer, who estimates that the January event can account for 25 per cent of the organization's yearly intake. "It even helps us hold the Burns Night Supper itself; the ticket prices don't come close to covering what it costs us to host the soiree. We are more interested in people coming and having a good time than us making top dollar."

New York is an expensive city to live in, especially for young people, and Dawson and his peers are acutely aware of that.

"The youth in New York City - and when I say youth I mean Millennials, men and women in their 20s and 30s - they are always working," he notes. "When they do get out and do something, they don't want to spend a lot of money, as the sheer cost of living in New York City is very high. Keeping our prices down definitely encourages them to come out and have a good time."

Catching the interest of that particular audience is of vital importance to McDevitt.

"My mandate is to increase the younger member cohort. We need younger people to participate in order to guarantee - especially with the New York Caledonian Club - that this 161-year-old organization is around for another 160 years, and that the passion for Scottish culture is passed down to the next generation."

Tickets for the Burns Night Supper are available through the club's website. There is also a donation form for those wishing to support the club, either monetarily or with items to stock the silent auction.

"No donation is too small, and no donation is too big," says Dawson.

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Foley's Shed

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Fogo Island, Newfoundland, once a very isolated outlet at the edge of the Earth, has been enjoying greater attention in recent years, due in large part to a particularly striking contemporary piece of architecture – the Fogo Island Inn.

While the Inn reflects the four hundred-year-old vernacular architecture and design aesthetics found on the island, another perhaps lesser-known structure, located in the National Historic District of Tilting, has also hosted travelers from around the world looking to experience the Island's distinct Irish culture and hospitality. The Shed, known colloquially as "Phil's shed," belongs to Fogo Island-born Maureen Foley and her husband Phil Foley.

Most days, Foley's facility functions as an everyday workshop. However, it is also set up to entertain company when the opportunity suits, with ample seating and various knick-knacks and gewgaws hanging from the walls.

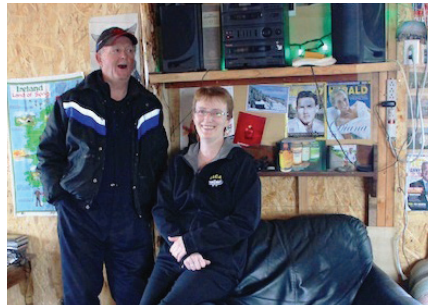
"This may sound funny, but our little shed has kind of become popular," says Foley, who also serves as school secretary for the community on the island. "Most sheds start off as a place where the husband works outside with his tools, but ours just took off in a different direction."

Most have heard of the renowned Fogo Island Inn, the spectacular hotel at the core of the island's appeal as a travel destination. Foley's structure, and the shed parties hosted there, have also become an integral part of the island experience.

So, what exactly is a 'shed party'?

"It's the same as a house party, only it's in a shed," laughs Foley, who has catered to a number of noteworthy guests over the years, including dignitaries from Ireland and a Mayor of Toronto.

"The greatest challenge, for any destination, is to be able to express the specific local ecology and materials and the ways



of thinking and doing that are of a place," notes Melanie Coates, Director of Business Development for Fogo Island Inn. "That is something that simply cannot be packaged for consumption. The Inn belongs to the community and when visitors come to Fogo Island, they are hosted by the entire community."

As such, the Inn has turned to Community Hosts to welcome guests into their lives and orient them to the island.

"We have created a loose organization of Community Hosts - a subset of our community - who are key to this," continues Coates. "They are not employees of the Inn - they are fishers, teachers, fish plant workers, nurses and others who live on the island. It's a bit like getting connected with a friend-of-a-friend."

Maureen Foley has spent most of her life in Tilting, and cherishes her role as a Community Host. She and her husband have been welcoming people to shed parties on Saturday nights for years.

"About five years ago, when the hotel was nearing completion, my husband Phil was working on its exterior," she shares. "The contractor was from Toronto, and all of his workers were young lads from Ireland. Winter days are full of adventure here, but in the evening, there's not much to do socially for young people. During the winter nights, you kind of make your own fun. So, they spent their Saturday nights at our shed."

Soon after the Inn opened its doors, guests found their way over to the small shed.

"They just kind of wander in," chuckles Foley.

The hospitality comes naturally to the 200-some residents of Tilting, one of ten communities on Fogo Island; the region was largely settled by pre-famine Irish immigrants.

"We are very proud of our Irish heritage..."

"Up until the 1960s, our community was much more isolated than it is today. That is likely why we have maintained our Irish heritage and culture."

Growing up in Tilting as a child, Foley recalls that life was slower; her parents never even owned a car.

"The warmth, welcome and overall openness of the people of Tilting, and Fogo Island, is second nature to all of us here," she continues. "It really is a 'win-win' situation; visitors explore and learn about the local area and culture, and we make many new friends."

Tilting will be the focus of Fogo Island Inn's St. Patrick's Day festivities this March, which will include a traditional Irish supper, explorations of the hiking trails used by the first Irish settlers to the island, and a visit to the community itself.

Although Foley's shed is closed to visitors during the winter season, she is confident that guests will receive a hearty Irish welcome.

"There's sure to be a get-together at the St. Patrick's club, and there will likely be lots of music and dancing."

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Wayne Johnston

Newfoundland novelist Wayne Johnston ties up loose ends in his newest narrative



Award-winning author Wayne Johnston was born in the small town of Goulds, Newfoundland, and - like so many from Atlantic Canada - has tracked his heritage to both Scotland and Ireland.

"I have traced myself back to the people sent from Scotland to Ireland after the clearances," explains the mild-mannered writer over the phone. "We were then sent to County Antrim. So, my people would have started out Scottish and then intermingled with the Northern Irish."

Although, today, Johnston is a household name in Canadian literature, writing was not always on his agenda.

"I started out - as was suggested to me by both my parents and our parish priest where I grew up - on the path of priesthood," he says. "In high school I realized that was not what I wanted, so I cooked up the idea of being a doctor instead.

"Then it became time to start medical school, and I realized I didn't want to do that either. I had to break the news to my parents that I wasn't going to be in the priesthood or in medicine. I told them I was going to be a writer - because I always wanted to be one - and they didn't really know quite what to make of that. There was no such thing as a 'writer' in our world; there were books, but we didn't know anyone who wrote them."

After graduating with degrees in English Literature, Physics, and Chemistry from Newfoundland's esteemed Memorial University, Johnston began working as a reporter for the Daily News in the province's capital city of St. John's before making the move to fiction writing.

"I wanted to get a broadcasting job, instead of a print job. I got accepted into Carleton's School of Journalism in Ottawa. Then I thought, if you get a comfortable job with a nice, stable income, what are the chances you will ever become a writer? So I got off the bus, called admissions at Carleton and told them I didn't want the position they were holding for me and that they should give it to someone else. Then I used the money from my student loans to buy me some free time to write a book."

Ten works of fiction later, Johnston has just released *First Snow, Last Light*, the third instalment in his 'Newfoundland' trilogy, which includes the brilliant *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* and its equally stirring sequel *The Custodian of Paradise*. It is a family mystery that brings back one of the scribe's most beloved characters, Sheilagh Fielding.

"In the first and second books, many aspects of Sheilagh's life were not resolved. An example is the question of whether or not Sheilagh will eventually find what she has been looking for - personal happiness. She has always been the sidekick of a man, but not a wife. Not that you need that to be hap-

py, but she lives a lonely life. Even the idea of having a close friend appeals to her, but she doesn't have any.

"My goal was simply to tie up some loose ends with this work."

The story also follows Ned Vatcher, a 13-year-old boy who comes home from school to find his parents missing. The character required Johnston to do some serious research.

"Ned is based on the guy who built a TV empire in Newfoundland, Canada, and parts of the United States. Television was the quintessential invention in the 20th century, so the challenge was to convey that, and his impact on people's lives, in the most literary way I could."

First Snow, Last Light is already being lauded by both critics and readers as one of the scribe's finest efforts.

"It has been very well-received. It has been on the Bestsellers list ever since its release, and it still is. It is also number five in Hardcover Fiction in Canada right now. It's my best selling book since *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*."

Next year will be equally productive, as Johnston has nearly finished yet another narrative.

"This new book is a bit of a departure for me. It starts out in Newfoundland, but it moves to South Africa, Amsterdam, and several parts of Germany. My wife is from South Africa, so I have been there a few times. It took me years to feel comfortable about setting a book there. It is not set there in the sense that I am writing from the point of view of South Africans; I am writing from the perspective of someone visiting from Canada."

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The High Kings

Irish supergroup The High Kings celebrate ten years of making music



When The High Kings came together in late 2007, none of the band members would have guessed that they would be releasing their best-of album - the aptly titled *Decade* - a decade later.

The Dublin-based band, comprised of four tried-and-true Irish performers - including pub scene mainstays Finbarr Clancy and Martin Furey, and Riverdance alums Brian Dunphy and Darren Holden - was brought together by Dave Kavanagh, the manager of Celtic Woman, in an effort to rekindle the spirit of 1960s folk and traditional music.

"He wanted four very strong vocalists, and four guys with a bit of charisma, personality and presence," says Holden over the phone. "As soon as we started singing together we knew we had something quite special going on. It really felt right. And it still does."

Though the band was cautious that their contemporary brand of Irish folk could breakthrough in a very competitive music scene, they recorded a (self-titled) debut album anyway.

"We were told to expect a bit of a slog, but it went directly to number two on the charts after its release," recalls the multi-instrumentalist, sounding still somewhat surprised.

The timing, it appears, was right, as artists like Mumford and Sons and The Avett Brothers signalled a folk revival of sorts across the music industry.

The High Kings, notes Holden, fit that bill, having cut their teeth on traditional Irish tunes.

"If you walked into any old Irish bar or pub back in the 1950s, 1960s, or 1970s, you were absolutely guaranteed to have a ballad session going on - a bunch of guys sitting

around a little table with banjos and guitars and bouzoukis and whatnot, with pints of Guinness all over the place. We wanted to take all of that, that quaintness, and our whole 'old Irish charm' and bring it to arena-sized stages."

With the success of that first recording, and subsequent tours and media support, the quartet achieved that goal, and more; over the last ten years the band has released over a half-dozen albums and 2 concert DVDs, played to sold out audiences all over the world, and performed for the likes of U.S. President Barack Obama and Irish Taoiseach Enda Kenny.



Along with celebratory tour dates both at home and abroad, Holden and his mates have marked their tenth anniversary with the release of *Decade*. Currently sitting at number one on the Irish iTunes charts, the 18-track collection is a thank-you to the fans that have been with the band since the beginning.

"These are the most popular tracks from all the previous studio albums," explains Holden. "There are also a couple of new versions of songs that we have been performing for years, a few stories on how the band started, and a selection of really great photographs. It makes for a great little keepsake, both for us and for our followers."

"And this is also a fantastic introduction for anybody who wasn't aware of us before now. You pick up this and you've got the best of everything, really, in one package."

Not all of the Kings have made it to this milestone, however; founding member Martin Furey retired from the group during their last tour.

"Martin wanted to do his own thing," shares Holden. "He is a fantastic musician and a great talent, and he will be sorely missed by all of us. I have absolutely no doubt that he will achieve brilliant things going forward, and we wish him the very best."

In his place, George Murphy has taken over on guitar and banjo. Also a native of Eire's capital city, Murphy made a name for himself on RTE's popular 'You're A Star' television program.

Holden believes that the newest King brings a raw energy to the band.

"He's a bit more 'streetwise' than we are - he has a little more of that Dublin style and swagger to his voice. The band sounds different, certainly, and I would even dare to say refreshed. And in time, I have no doubt that people will fall in love with our sound all over again - we're hoping for another ten years at least..."

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The Irish **Rovers**

George Millar and the Irish Rovers reclaim an old classic with a new album and tour



A full 50 years after the Irish Rovers' break-out hit song about green alligators, long-necked geese, humpty-backed camels and chimpanzees caught everyone's ear, band founder George Millar is holding out hope for the loveliest of all, the unicorns.

Until now, the jaunty unicorn song - with its story book imagery of Brother Noah building an ark and marching the animals in, two by two, while the unicorns hid and played silly games - seemed to spell the certain death of the mythical creatures.

And while, at 70 - and with more than 50 years in the music business - Millar has a thicker skin, a half-century of seeing the shocked dismay on the faces of generations of children as he sang about the rain pouring down and floating the unicorns away finally got to him.

"We have decided to put a stop to all those tears by re-releasing the original recording and adding one more song, a sequel to The Unicorn. We are calling it The Unicorn, the Continuing Story, and it is a part of our 50th anniversary celebrations," says Millar from his home in Victoria, BC, as the band prepares to tour the new album across the United States.

Truth be told, the youthful, Irish-born Millar never expected to hear a word about The Unicorn, a last-minute addition to their 1967 album of the same name. It is a record-

ing that Millar now views as staggeringly low-tech and short on instrumentation - even with the fancy fretwork of a young Glen Campbell on lead guitar.

"We thought we were done, but the producer asked for one more song. He wanted something a wee bit different, actually a complete contrast to the other songs on the record."

Band members looked at each other and immediately agreed that The Unicorn, written and released a few years earlier by Shel Silverstein, qualified as different. They'd already been playing it in bars and coffee houses, so quickly recorded it in one take, without drums or piano, to complete the album.

"We'd noticed that when we sang it the beer glasses would be set down on the tables and the conversation would fade away as everyone listened."

The add-on song became the album's title track and climbed to the top of the charts, though it took the band a while to catch up with it. The minute the recording was done they took off for Colorado where they were booked to play in Aspen and Vale for several months.

"It might be impossible for young peo-



ple today to appreciate, but we had very little contact with anyone back then - limited radio, no television, no internet, no cell phones, you didn't even make a long distance call unless you absolutely had to. We had no idea what was going on with the album while we were playing and partying in Colorado."

No idea at all until they were back on the road, nearing California early one morning. It was 3 a.m. and the car radio was on, though most of the Rovers were asleep until somebody yelled, "Oh my God, it's us!"

"We woke in a terrible hurry and heard a radio host, who happened to be an Irish lad, talking about a hit song and playing The Unicorn. We pulled over, jumped out of the car and raced around on the side of the highway, screaming and hugging each other, hardly believing our ears."

It was, Millar now knows, a pivotal moment for the Irish Rovers who went on to tour internationally to packed houses. At the

time, however, it was just a few minutes of unadulterated joy for aspiring musicians who had been only earning just enough for smokes, beer, and gas to their next gig.

The Unicorn reached No. 2 on US adult contemporary charts and sold 8 million copies, with versions eventually recorded in French and German. It also led former band member Will Millar, George's brother, to open a chain of pubs called The Unicorn.

"When we were recording the album, our second, we were hopeful we'd sell 7,000 or 8,000 copies and that would give us a hell of a pay day, by our standards."

With the 50th anniversary album and tour Millar, who immigrated to Canada with his family as a teenager, introduces a hopeful, new possibility for the adventurous unicorns.

"I got to thinking about our cold northern waters, about old Inuit tales and the mysterious narwhal. I imagined there might be a connection, a happier ending with the unicorns transformed, but still frolicking."

Other songs being re-released on the new album include The Black Velvet Band, Come In, The Man from Mullingar, Muirsheen Durkin, The Orange and the Green, Kellswater, The Wind that Shakes the Corn, Little Bridget Flynn, The First Love in Life, and Brady of Strabane.

Millar is joined on the new album by original Rovers members Wilcil McDowell, from Lame, Sean O'Driscoll from Cork on banjo, Ian Millar from Ballymena on vocals and guitar, Morris Crum of Carlough on accordion and keyboard, Scottish-born Canadian Geoffrey Kelly on flute and whistles, fiddler Gerry O'Connor from Dundalk, and Fred Graham, originally from Belfast, on drums.

Millar, who saw 15 other Rovers' songs make it onto the charts, including Wasn't That a Party, marvels at the differences in making music today from 50 years ago, when all musicians and equipment were brought together in a studio.

"Now we start out with me on Canada's west coast, just my voice and a guitar. We then send those tracks to Ireland where Wilcil will add on his accordion, and then down to Cork for more additions. The music goes north to south and back and forth across the Atlantic before we take off the first voice and put on the final voices."

Reflecting on the original band, he noted they were a fun-loving Catholic-Protestant mix, the sons of folks who got away from religious and political tensions in Ireland, thinking they could do better for their families in Canada.

"As a band we left politics out except maybe the odd song that went back to the 1798 Rebellion. We left the rebel songs to the Clancys and The Wolfe Tones and stayed away from religion, too, except for a funny song, The Orange and the Green. As far as the current band goes, I suppose we are still Catholic and Protestant - with maybe a few atheists thrown in - but we still prefer to sing about fun, whiskey, horses and pretty Colleens."

A half-century later, Millar still isn't sure what made The Unicorn such a massive hit.

"It is iconic, in a category with Puff the Magic Dragon and a few Beatles songs. We thought it was a silly little song, but it turned out that the joke was on us. It brought us great luck."

Back in 2013 the Rovers announced their farewell tour, but Millar notes that new dates keep popping up.

"I guess we'd have to say it is an extended tour. It is still going on, and before you know it we're apt to be working on another recording. At this point, I'm thinking we'll call it No End in Sight."

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The Chieftains

Irish musical legends The Chieftains mark their 55th anniversary with a string of international shows



Paddy Moloney shows no sign of slowing down anytime soon.

Even at the age of 79, the irrepressible founder of the world's most influential and successful Irish traditional band - which has six Grammy Awards and an Oscar to its credit - just wants to party on. He is already planning show details and booking performances into 2019.

"It'll be a boots-on job for me," says Moloney during a telephone interview from Japan, as the band wraps up its 2017 tour schedule. "That's the way I'd prefer to go out and, God willing, I will - but not for a while yet."

The only active original member of The Chieftains, which formed in Dublin in 1962, the renowned musician, composer and producer has always been the beating and bleeding musical heart of the band.

With 52 recordings to date, The Chieftains have a deeply loyal fan base for their traditional Irish music. Over time, they have broadened their audience by collaborating with the likes of the Rolling Stones, Van Morrison, Sinéad O'Connor, and countless others. More importantly, notes Moloney, the band has helped launch the careers of many young performers, among them dancer Michael Flatley, the brainchild behind the globally acclaimed Irish dance spectacular Riverdance.

"Once I did, indeed, worry about the future of traditional Irish music, but with the caliber of young musicians coming on, I have no worries today."

Sipping on roasted green tea a scant hour after sunrise in Tokyo, Moloney is multitasking; prepping the band's February and March



2018 tour of the United States, while still reveling in the joy of the previous day's workshop for 129 Japanese musicians.

"Think of it - 25 flute players, 7 pipers, 19 Irish harpists, and a whole lot of people playing the bodhran. Could anyone imagine 30 years ago that the Japanese would go berserk over our traditional music? It was glorious."

Noting Japan is the only country in the world where The Chieftains have an actual fan club, as well as a group of female musicians who call themselves The Lady Chieftains, Moloney marvels at the blending of Japanese and traditional Irish music.

"When you mix in Japanese instruments - percussion, in particular - it is extraordinary. It is really quite something to hear Japanese drummers playing O'Neill's March."

His focus soon shifts to that evening's concert, also in Tokyo.

"We are honoured that the 83-year-old Empress of Japan is coming. As a young woman she came to Ireland to study music,

and do you know she plays the Irish harp herself?"

At the age of six, Moloney was entranced by a tin whistle given to him by his mother and, by nine, he was learning to play the uilleann pipes. While he enjoys classical and jazz music, and has fond memories of playing the ukulele during his school years, traditional music was his first and truest love. As a teenager, however, his friends were more inclined towards American rock 'n' roll - specifically Bill Haley and the Comets, and Elvis Presley.

"I'd sometimes get a slagging from some of the lads as I went down the street carrying my pipes, but it wasn't so many years before those slaggers were after me for concert tickets."

Moloney's earliest musical memories go back to summers spent at his grandparents' home in hilly, landlocked County Laois.

"In the evenings the neighbours would come in and start to play. The windows would all be open with the music pouring out into the countryside. It was a time of grand house dances and hooleys that went on until we had to get ready for Mass in the morning."

Moloney played in a number of acclaimed bands, including the Sean O'Riada's Ceoltoiri Chualann, before he brought folk musicians Sean Potts, Mick Tubridy and Sean Keane together for The Chieftains' first concerts and debut recording.

By day, he earned his bread and butter as an accountant, until he began managing Claddagh Records for then-Guinness heir - and loyal arts patron - Garech Browne.

"He provided the financial backing and I provided the shoe leather and got a good education in the process," recalls Moloney, who produced more than 40 albums for the company.

The pair maintains their friendship, and today Moloney has a home in the Wicklow Mountains not far from Brown's iconic Luggala estate.

It wasn't long, however, before the band took flight.

In 1975, The Chieftains found themselves booked into Royal Albert Hall in London for a St. Patrick's Day concert. Moloney took a bet that if the promoter could sell out the 6,000 seat venue, the previously part-time band would go professional.

As it turned out, there was not an empty seat - nor a dry eye - in the house. At evening's end the crowd roared for an encore, and the critics followed up with rave reviews.

"It was selling out there that launched us internationally. We gave up our day jobs and from that point on we sold out Carnegie Hall and were ready to play anywhere."

Since then, and with the official blessing of the Irish government, The Chieftains have roamed the world as cultural ambassadors, often receiving official welcomes at Irish embassies all over the globe. Not surprisingly, musicians have come and gone through the decades, and the scope of the once exclusively instrumental band has broadened to include vocalists and an array of dancers.

"Through the years we've always experimented, always tried to put together new sounds so that each show and each recording had something new to offer."

The band marked its 50th anniversary in 2012 with *Voice of Ages*, an album of collaborations featuring aspiring young musicians, most

of them not yet born when The Chieftains first assembled.

"I didn't want to release a 'Best Of' album," recalls Maloney, "but instead something live and fresh, to prove that we were still alive and kicking."

The critically acclaimed recording featured The Pistol Annies performing a Scots-Irish love song, and The Decemberists' terrific take on *When the Ship Comes In* - a Bob Dylan classic favoured by the legendary Irish singer Tommy Makem.

The Chieftains were the first western group to perform at China's Great Wall, and were also part of 1990s 'Live at The Wall' spectacular in Berlin. They were also first to give a concert at the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., and Moloney had the honour of performing at a Ground Zero memorial service in the U.S. The band even sent a flute and tin whistle to the International Space Station with American astronaut Cady Coleman.

Reflecting on the longevity of the band, Moloney pauses briefly to remember past members - such as his longtime friend, the eccentric harpist Derek (Ding Dong) Bell, who played keyboards, oboe and hammered dulcimer. He is also quick to praise his current band mates. The Dublin-born, bodhran-playing Kevin Conneff - with his old-style sean nos singing - became the band's first vocalist when he joined in 1976. Matt Molloy from Roscommon, was raised on flute, tin whistle and drums, and played with Planxty before joining Moloney's troupe in 1979.

"We will have a grand cast of musicians, singers and dancers when we hit the road next year, and I am looking forward to every minute of it. I don't expect to be slowing down anytime soon."

www.thechieftains.com

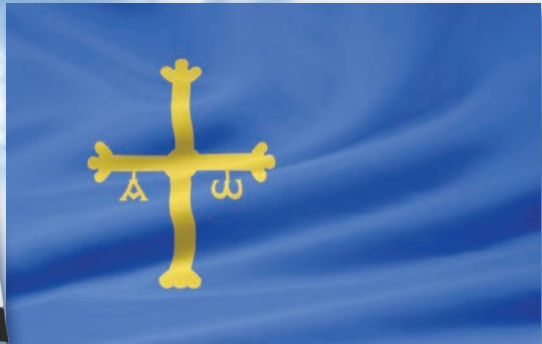


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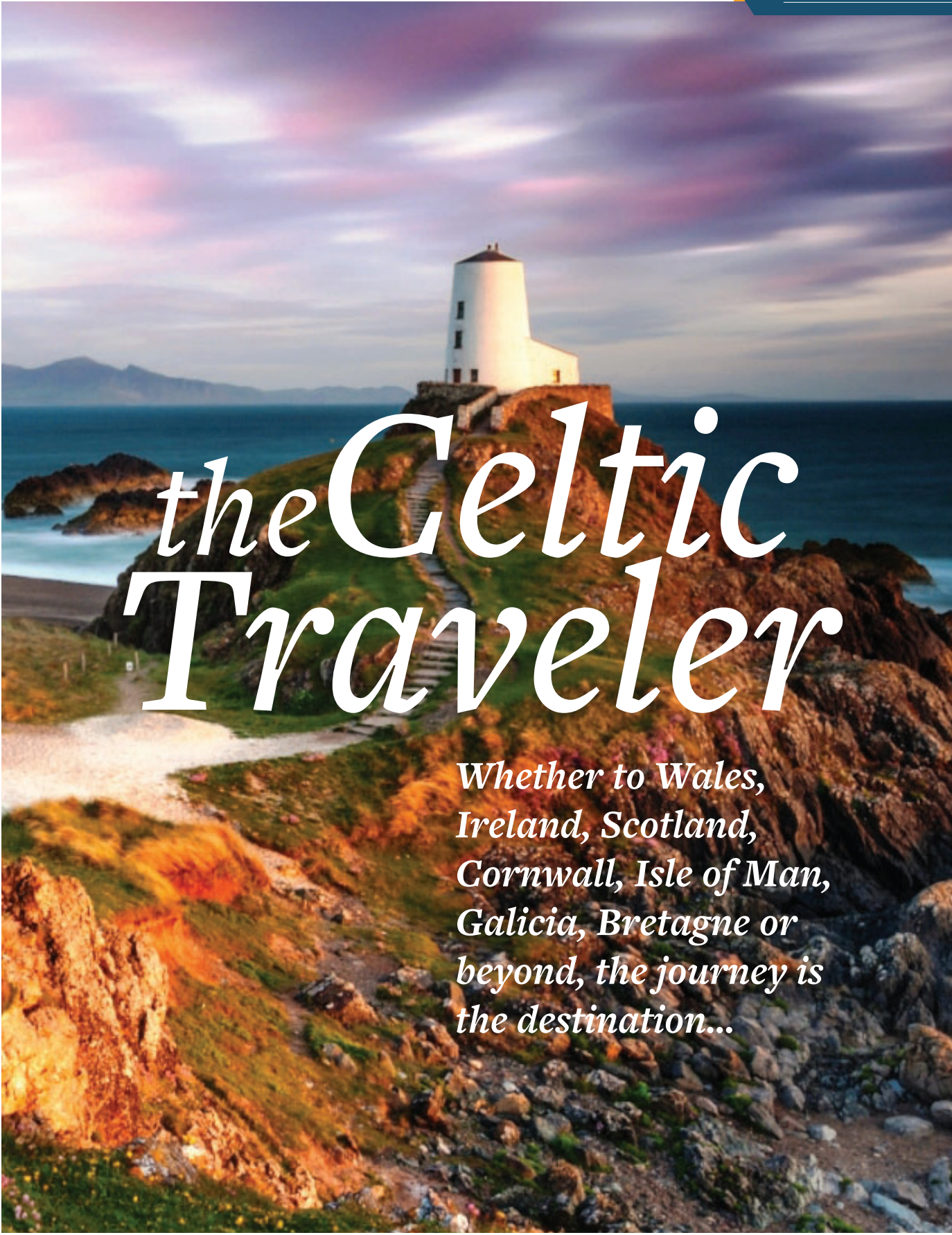
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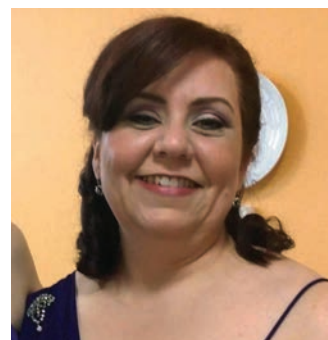
Bryan Lewis
www.tenontours.com



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www.sheencotravel.com



David Warner
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Debra Curle
www.triplemtours.ca



Ivor Kilmartin
www.vorscottours.co.uk



Judy Lowstuter
www.celticjourneys.us



Steve McLeish
www.scotiaroots.com



William Wallace
www.whisky-tours-scotland.com

What one piece of advice would you offer someone looking to travel over the coming year?

“Before visiting, read a book about the country or place you are visiting. Travel takes on a new level with an understanding of how the culture of the place developed to where it is today. Also, after arrival, try to read a local newspaper to understand what is affecting the locals at that moment.” - **David Warner**

“I would be careful not to try to do too much in a short timeframe. We have many clients who hope to see an entire country in 7 or 10 nights, when really, it is much more realistic and enjoyable to slow the pace and choose 3 or 4 towns or areas to explore. You can always return to see the rest.” - **Bryan Lewis**

“2018 is looking busier than ever, especially for popular destinations such as Ireland and Scotland. With massive growth in these areas accommodations are limited, so the sooner you book the more choice you will have. The larger the group the further in advance you should consider booking. Festivals and events increase the need to book early and should be avoided if they are not of interest, as hotel prices usually increase when a large event is taking place, not to mention you may not want to deal with large crowds while on vacation. Try to keep your dates flexible if at all possible as again this will offer more options in different locations.” - **Genevieve Sheehan**

“Get organized early for certain destination countries and contact companies as much in advance of travel as possible, especially for larger group tours.” - **Ivor Kilmartin**

“People should always plan ahead as much as possible. It sounds simple, but proper preparation can take weeks, and even months. Often, how one prepares can make or break a travel experience.” - **Judy Lowstuter**

“Book accommodation as soon as you can, to provide you with maximum choice and to avoid disappointment.” - **Steve McLeish**

“Unless you have a lot of time, concentrate on one country - each has so much to experience and see.” - **William Wallace**

“Take your vacation days. Use them. Unplug. Explore. Learn. Grow. Come back a better you.” - **Debra Curle**



What's the single biggest mistake people make when travelling?

“Trying to see and do everything in a short space of time. Allow time to lose yourself in the place you are visiting.” - **David Warner**

“Lack of preparation, and not allowing enough time at locations to obtain the most from your visit.” - **Ivor Kilmartin**

“Taking too much stuff. No one ever returned home saying ‘I wish I had taken more luggage with me.’ Go there with carry on only! It is so liberating not having to wait for your luggage to be unloaded at the airport or stand in line at the check-in counter. Consider not packing for every eventuality under the sun. Really, unless you are in fact going to the back reaches of the Amazon jungle, you will likely be able to find toothpaste if you run out, or something for a head cold. If it rains, there is always some little shop nearby that will put out their rack of umbrellas. Pick a pretty one and call it a souvenir.” - **Debra Curle**

“Not booking accommodations in advance. Once upon a time, in the dim distant past, it was fairly easy to seek out bed and breakfasts and hotel rooms as you travelled. Today, however - even in what we used to call the ‘off-season’ - it is nearly impossible to find space without pre-booking now. It doesn't take long to book in advance and it is usually possible and easy to do on the internet, but the security it offers is priceless! A lot of the fun of vacations can be in the planning, so why spoil your hard-earned break by sleeping in the car?” - **William Wallace**

“One of the biggest misconceptions that my tour guests - especially from North America and Australia - always share with me, is their surprise at how long it can take to travel around Scotland, especially in the Highlands. This is very understandable when one compares the geographical size of our respective countries, but many of our distances cannot be thought of in terms of ‘as the crow flies,’ so don't underestimate travel times.” - **Steve McLeish**



Aside from the obvious (passport, wallet, phone), what is the one 'must-have' item that every traveler should carry with them?

"Traveling with a private driver or guide has so many advantages - it removes all the stress of a self-drive vacation, while retaining the freedom of movement that is lost with a scheduled coach tour. By the end of a vacation you will have made a new friend and will in fact wish you could put him in your pocket and bring him home with you!" - **Genevieve Sheehan**

"When traveling internationally, or any place that is foreign to you, I don't believe there's anything you actually need except for an open mind and positive attitude. If you travel overseas expecting the same comforts you are accustomed to at home, whether it be accommodations, food, human interaction, or culture in general, you aren't really experiencing travel. To travel is to experience something completely new and different to you." - **Bryan Lewis**

"Be sure to bring a good credit card that has no overseas charges, and don't forget to notify your credit card company that you are traveling." - **David Warner**

"An external power bank for your phone. There's nothing worse than trying to read a map on your smart phone and having the battery die!" - **Debra Curle**

"I recommend a flexible approach and reasonable expectations." - **Ivor Kilmartin**

"Lightweight luggage can make all the difference in the world." - **Judy Lowstuter**

"Plenty of battery power, and/or storage for cameras and phones...and the realization that internet connections can be sporadic. But the goal is to get away from it all anyway right?!" - **Steve McLeish**



How has the travel sector changed in recent years?

"People's expectations have been raised by the knowledge and experience they can gain from the internet. With research, some travelers know exactly what they want to see and feel before they arrive at a destination." - **David Warner**

"The advent of booking sights for hotels, restaurants and other service providers has changed the way most travelers approach their trips. When people are travelling independently they now tend to scour sites like TripAdvisor to find out how a hotel or restaurant is ranked before they commit. On one hand that's good. It hopefully lessens any unpleasant surprises and encourages hotel and restaurant owners to address any areas of concern. On the other hand, however, it's scary. There are people out there who feel those websites give them the power and right to hold a hotel or restaurant (or any other service provider) hostage by demanding preferential treatment or discounts in exchange for not getting "crucified online" with a bad (and often untrue) review. Back in the good old days (5-10 years ago!) the only power a consumer had was to write a letter or email to an owner or a hotel chain's head office. Now consumers have the power to destroy people's businesses and lives, in the case of small businesses, and I really find that horrifying." - **Debra Curle**

"One of the biggest changes has been the way travel is priced. From airline tickets to hotel rooms you can almost guarantee you are going to have extra costs added on at every step of the way, from luggage fees to breakfast, not to mention good ole taxes, making a truly all inclusive price hard to find." - **Genevieve Sheehan**

What types of travel trends are we seeing for 2018?

"We are seeing an immense amount of interest in experiential and theme-based travel; tours that highlight the filming locations of popular movies or TV shows, hands-on cooking classes, food & drink tours, and adventure/activity-based travel is extremely popular. While this may appeal to a somewhat younger demographic in general, it's certainly not limited to any age group." - **Bryan Lewis**

"In Scotland, we will see a continued interest in film and TV-related tourism, especially around 'Outlander' and the much-anticipated 'Outlaw King' series which revolves around the life of King Robert the Bruce." - **Steve McLeish**

"Multi-generational trips are continuing to grow in popularity as families with busy lives combine travel with spending time with their extended family to maximize their vacation time. Train travel is also seeing a huge upward trend." - **Genevieve Sheehan**

"I expect that we will see more of the same types of trips that we have been seeing over the last few years; experiential and adventure travel, and personal enrichment journeys." - **Judy Lowstuter**





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Torridon

*Our award-winning photojournalist
Tom Langlands takes in the terrific
terrain of Torridon*



The village of Torridon - with its backdrop of towering mountains - lays at the foot of Glen Torridon, running from Kinlochewe to Upper Loch Torridon in Scotland's Wester Ross. The village derives its name from the 16,000-acre Torridon Estate within which it lies. In more general terms, the name Torridon applies to the area around Upper Loch Torridon, stretching east to Kinlochewe and west to Loch Shieldaig, and still further to Loch Torridon. It is one of the most dramatic landscapes in the whole of the United Kingdom. The mountain ranges of Beinn Eighe, Liathach, and Beinn Alligin to the north of Glen Torridon - along with the mountains of the Coulin Estate to the south - are among the oldest rock formations in Europe, and boast no fewer than nine Munros. These peaks - and their majestic mountain slopes with gorges and waterfalls plunging into the valleys, rivers and lochs below - render this place wild, rugged and dramatic. Torridon may be off the beaten track, but it is this remoteness - along with its geological grandeur - that renders it one of the most impressive, unspoiled and stunningly beautiful places in the Scottish Highlands.

In summer the climate is milder, roads get busy, and somehow the edges of wild places get smoothed. I wanted to experience Torridon in winter, and so it was on a dark December afternoon that I ventured into Glen Torridon, skirting the National Nature Reserve of Beinn Eighe at Kinlochewe. After ten miles (16km), the single-track road discharged me along the southern side of the loch towards the village of Shieldaig on the Applecross peninsula. Tigh en Leigh - a self-catering house on the edge of Loch Shieldaig - was to be my home for the next few days.

The location was picturesque, and the views stunning.

The following morning I walked the length of the village as it wrapped its way along the shoreline. Shieldaig's name is derived from the Old Norse 'Sild-vik' - meaning 'herring bay' - but the village owes its existence to more recent times; in the early 1800s, Admiralty-assisted families willing to move to the area to pursue fishing for a living were given grants for boat and house building. There was, however, an

ulterior motive; the Admiralty saw an opportunity to establish a community of strong, skilled sailors that could be used if necessary during the Napoleonic Wars. Fortunately, Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo meant that these settlers were never called to arms, and Shieldaig continued to develop as a fishing community. Commercial herring fishing in these waters has long gone, though creel fishing for langoustines still supports a small number of remaining fishermen. The catches are sold mostly to Spain to satisfy the Spanish demand for quality seafood. It is an important source of income for a fragile Highland economy.

Creel fishing from small boats is a hard and often lonely existence. The waters here can be cruel, and there was sadness in the air during my visit as a local fisherman had been lost at sea the previous week.

Located just a few hundred metres offshore lay Shieldaig Island - owned by the National Trust for Scotland. Its covering of Scots Pine trees is believed to have been imported from Speyside over a century ago to provide a source of wood for the poles used to support fishing nets. The island is a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and has become an important wildlife haven. Over several days I saw seals, otters, heron, kestrels, and mergansers. Even more exciting were the white-tailed eagles that have set up home on the island, and I observed three of these magnificent birds soaring above the trees. One even swooped on the shoreline grabbing its lunch no more than 75 yards (70m) from me!

Loch Shieldaig is the starting point for Torridon's annual Celtman event, the Extreme Scottish Triathlon. And extreme it is! Celtman attracts over 1,000 competitors, representing over 50 nations. The race begins with a 2.1-mile (3.4km) swim in the open waters of the loch. It used to be 2.4 miles (3.8km) but it was shortened after competitors struggled with water temperatures of 50 - 55 degrees Fahrenheit (10 - 13 degrees Celsius)! The second stage of the race is a 125-mile (202km)



cycle on Highland roads, with ascents of over 6,550 feet (2000m). The final stage of the event is a 26-mile (42km) run, encompassing two Munros above Glen Torridon, before heading down to the finish line in the village of Torridon. As if all of that wasn't hard enough you have to factor in the vagaries of Scottish weather and the impact of the dreaded midge! As a disclaimer in the race manual states - "Celtman isn't for Softies!"

Torridon may be a paradise for those who love the wild outdoors, but you don't have to take it to the extreme.

There are many leisurely walking routes, and I took one of these to explore the shores of the loch away from the village. This area was affected badly by the Highland Clearances, and many of the bays around the loch contain the remains of old stone cottages and the crumbling ruins of long-forgotten communities. I scrambled down a steep embankment to sit on the stone windowsill of an old ruin. The water was choppy and the wind cold. When these houses were occupied there were no roads over this rugged landscape; the sole means of travel were small fishing boats plying the waters for food. This is a harsh environment, and I became all too aware of the fragility of life on the edge.

I called in at The Torridon Hotel and met with Ross Aitchison, the facility's Operations Manager. Originally constructed as a Victorian shooting lodge, The Torridon first opened its doors in 1887. Sitting in the drawing room with the ornate, ribbed ceiling - adorned with symbols of the zodiac looking down on us - Aitchison gazed out over the loch towards the village of Torridon and the mountains beyond. "The location and scenery are stunning," he noted. "At The Torridon we aim to cater for a broad spectrum of visitors and their needs. In the main hotel we provide a luxury experience with 18 bedrooms and fine dining including a whisky bar stocked with over 350 malts."

The hotel also operates the adjacent Torridon Inn, offering quality pub food and a further 12 bedrooms. There is also a self-catering boathouse on the edge of the loch, and plans for further expansion are in the pipeline. The downside to such a remote location is that trade is largely condensed into 7 months of the year but, as Aitchison notes, things are changing. "Inverness airport is now running regular flights to and from Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport. As Schiphol is a large hub for the wider world, we are experiencing an increase in foreign visitors coming to the Highlands by air."

As well, the hotel participates in the annual Torridon Mountain and Sea Festival. This festival showcases everything that is unique about this place, providing visitors ample opportunity to explore mountains, sail the seas, watch the wildlife, photograph the landscape, and sample locally-sourced food and fine ales.

Other visitors to The Torridon include competitors and their support crews during the Celtman event, as well as motoring enthusiasts driving Scotland's North Coast 500. This 500-mile (805km) route - dubbed Scotland's Route 66 - starts in Inverness, heads west to the coast before turning north to follow the coastline around the top of Scotland and back to Inverness. It encompasses some of the most stunning scenery the country has to offer, along with a plethora of historic sites and interesting places. The Applecross peninsula and Glen Torridon form part of the westerly section of the route, and contribute in no small way to that experience.

With the weather closing in I headed back to Shieldaig, tuning in to the forecast en-route. Storm Caroline was headed for the west coast, bringing in 70mph winds, followed by heavy snow and a hard freeze. I would have loved to stay and photograph this landscape in the depths of winter, but discretion being the better part of valour, I headed back through Glen Torridon as the first flurries of snow drifted across the landscape. This was Scotland at its best; dramatic, beautiful and wild.

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Sweet Dreams at Doc Martin's Schoolhouse

*Celtic Life International correspondent
Gerald Herter peruses Cornwall's Port
Isaac and the world of Doc Martin*



Shaken from my slumber while dozing in the schoolhouse featured on the popular British comedy-drama series, *Doc Martin*, I half expected to see Martin's estranged wife - teacher Louisa Ellingham - peering sternly over me as I cleared the cobwebs from my eyes. But no, it was my not-so-estranged wife, Lori, urging me awake to take in the beautifully sunlit Port Isaac harbor from our second floor bedroom window.

The *Doc Martin* schoolhouse in fictional Port Wenn had been converted to the twelve room Old Schoolhouse Hotel & Restaurant. With rooms named after various school subjects, we were lodged in the spacious English bedroom, with glorious views of the Port Isaac village and seafront, which serves as the setting for the long-running TV show.

The *Doc Martin* series, of which we are avid fans, had given us a glimpse - albeit with a bit of fantasy - of daily life in this idyllic, picturesque fishing village along the northern coast of Cornwall. Even so, spending a few nights here, including frequent extended gazes across the harbour from our unique perch, over to Fern Cottage - the two story brick house used for *Doc Martin*'s surgery - gave the experience a whole new meaning.

Approaching Port Isaac the day before, we kept an eye out for the castle in Tintagel, a few miles to the north. Legend has it that King Arthur was born, or at least conceived, there. Spotting a likely structure high on a prominent bluff overlooking the sea, we parked in town and walked the half mile to the entrance, only to discover that the stately building was not the ancient castle, but the Camelot Castle Hotel. Nonetheless, with the unobstructed 360-degree views from the hotel looking down over Barras Head, we were able to observe the ancient Tintagel Castle ruins down below.

Winded from the uphill climb to the hotel, we opted for a relaxing afternoon tea in the lounge, while contemplating the far-reaching view from the window. The visit proved fortuitous as it turns out, since the hotel itself had been featured in the opening episode of *Doc Martin*, where the Doc first interviewed for the post as Port Wenn's sole general practitioner.

Fans will recall that Martin had been a successful surgeon in London, but was forced to give that up when he developed a severe fear of blood. Though possessing extraordinary medical acumen, Martin was remarkably lacking in social skills, leading to some heroic, yet painfully hilarious situations. Hence, the first episode was titled *Going Bodmin*, implying a person who is somewhere between wandering adrift and going a bit mad. (Bodmin was a Cornish asylum in the nineteenth century).

The Camelot Castle Hotel appeared several times again, most notably in the fifth season, when *Doc Martin*'s baby son was kidnapped by the quirky pharmacist, Mrs. Tishell, who had a not so secret unrequited romantic obsession for Martin. The Doc and Louisa frantically searched the hotel, disrupting a wedding reception in the process, before discovering that Mrs. Tishell had fled to a different "castle."

Chuckling over these show memories, we looked the hotel over one more time and then proceeded on to Port Isaac and the Old Schoolhouse. I was glad the route brought us in by the backside of the village, since navigating the narrow and congested lane through the tiny seafront center of town appeared doable only for a seasoned villager.

The compact feel of the village took on inescapable immediacy for us anyway, as we drove into the Hotel's minuscule parking lot. Seen as a playground on the TV program, the lot's few densely jammed-in parking spaces were all occupied on this sunny afternoon.

While I contemplated the prospect of the nearest public parking a half mile outside of the village, Lori noticed a small sign on the side of the Hotel: more parking in rear. Our spirits were lifted momentarily. That is, until we pulled close to the driveway that led to the back. Though our rental car was fairly compact to start with, the clearance on each side, between the Hotel wall and the opposite stone-wall fence, was mere inches. Not much room for error. Nonetheless, I inched along the tight passage, grimacing at the thought of the inevitable scrapes on the car's sides that were sure to come.

Just then, a hotel guest, enjoying a drink on the patio with her com-



panion, observed our plight and jumped up to direct us through the narrows. After an agonizingly slow movement we thought would never end, we finally reached the back unscathed, and were rewarded with several available parking spaces. Not everyone had been so lucky.

The car next to ours displayed a freshly incurred gash along its midsection.

Promising the helpful guest a drink, Lori and I proceeded to reception, in dire need of a drink ourselves. A few minutes later, check-in complete and Guinness pint in hand, we retreated to the comfy sofa in the English bedroom, content to absorb the peaceful ambiance of the picture-postcard panorama before us.

Later, refreshed by the serene surroundings, we ventured out on foot to explore the village. As expected, the walk from the school house through the village and up to Fern Cottage took but a few short minutes. The effectiveness of the filming technique achieved in the show was apparent. Before long, a feeling grew within us that we were no longer in Port Isaac, but had stepped into Port Wenn.

That intimacy with the Port Wenn spirit was put in perspective the next day by the contemporary realities of Port Isaac. Eager to experience what living in this captivating village was really like, we joined life-long native, John Brown, for a walking tour.

John and his brother Jeremy come from a long line of local fishermen. Jeremy still goes out fishing for lobster and crab, which are sold in the family business, Just Shellfish, on the waterfront. After the tour, we stopped for some delicious fresh crab sandwiches at The Mote, a friendly restaurant just down the street.

John spent over an hour showing us all the Doc Martin filming locations in the village. Our fantasy was initially broken to learn that Doc Martin's Surgery (Fern Cottage), and Bert Large's restaurant, a large white edifice dramatically perched on a ledge above the beach, were actually vacation homes or rentals. However, the most surprising discovery was that Mrs. Tishell's pharmacy is actually a candy store. A complete makeover and rearranging of furnishings transformed the cute little storefront. Show aficionados will enjoy a subtle clue to Mrs. Tishell, even in the real life rendition of the shop. Up on the storefront facade is a wooden ship figurehead of Lord Nelson wearing a neck-support. On the show, Mrs. Tishell wears a neck-support to protect her torticollis (twisted neck syndrome).

During the walk, we queried John about the current state of the fishing business, including the Brexit matter. John had plenty to say about that. For his family and fellow fishermen, the European Union had been devastating. The extensive breadth of the English coastline had given fishermen a wealth of fishing rights prior to Britain's joining the EU. Once part of the EU, the rights allocated to England were a small fraction of the original extent. Consequently, much of the fishing industry dried up for the British. Therefore, John and his family were in favour of leaving the EU.

Upon completing the Port Isaac walking tour and lunch, we spent the afternoon exploring the village's back alleyways and harbour on our own. At the waterfront, Doc Martin had been seen on occasion racing across the sandy beach to administer emergency treatment to a local suffering from some unfortunate mishap. Now, with the tide at its lowest ebb, the few fishing boats that had not gone to sea that day sat high and dry on the exposed seabed. Walking out along the rocky edge, we even came upon a spooky-looking sea cave that no doubt was used by smugglers in earlier times.

On our final morning, we lingered over breakfast in the hotel dining room, most likely a converted classroom. The meals here had been delicious, including this day's full Cornish breakfast of eggs, bacon, sausage, mushrooms, stewed tomatoes, toast, and of course, a generous helping of baked beans.

John Brown had mentioned that he actually attended school here when he was a boy. But now, though exterior shots for the TV show are taken here, the interior schoolroom scenes are filmed in a similar, currently-active school a few miles away in Delabole. As a matter of fact, interior settings of the Doc's surgery, as well as many others are taped in a converted barn up above the village at Roscarrock Farm, whose manor house coincidentally served as Nampara, the home of Ross Poldark from the Poldark TV series.

We reluctantly bid farewell to Port Isaac and the world of Doc Martin. Back home watching reruns, while anxiously anticipating the new upcoming season of the show, our viewing took on a new meaning. We forevermore felt like we were walking the very streets and backroads of Port Wenn beside the Doc, as he skilfully, and with a scowl on his face, served his lovable, accident-prone, villagers.



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My first visit to Dublin was some time in the 1980s. I had embarked on a ten-day driving tour of the U.K. and Ireland that involved travelling from Heathrow to Cornwall, the coast of Wales, a circumferential foray of Ireland and Northern Ireland, a ferry to Cairnryan, Scotland, and back down to London. It seemed like the thing to do at the time, but it was far too much driving and too little time getting to know the places I visited.

Dublin was on that grand tour, and I recall the ferry docking in Dun Laoghaire and motoring into the capital city with great enthusiasm. My knowledge of Dublin was limited to having been required to read *The Dubliners* in university, an essay I had written about Jonathan Swift's time in the city, and the fact that Guinness beer came from here. Eschewing literary pilgrimages because of limited time, I sought out the Guinness brewery, expecting to be welcomed with open arms as a North American fan of the dark Irish brew.

I quickly got lost (as I would many times in Dublin), and discovered I was in a part of town that, in those days, I referred to as "down and out." As one does on such occasions, I pulled up to a gentleman who was either pondering the sky or loitering to ask directions to the famed brewery. I believe it was the first time I had truly come face to face with a genuine born-and-raised Dubliner.

He was an older man with the traditional Irish tweed cap and somewhat unshaven

(but so was I). He walked directly to my car, gripped the halfway-rolled-down window with two hands and gave me a good look over. I asked if he could direct me to the home of Guinness.

"I could," he said. "But it will do you no good." He did not explain at first why it would do me no good.

"So, you're from America?" he queried.

"Canada," I corrected, as I would many times again before leaving the Emerald Isle.

"Do you have people here?"

"Not that I know of."

"Sad, that." Pause.

He asked a number of questions after that and I answered them as best I could. Then he proceeded to give me what I shall refer to as marital advice. Once he had gotten that off his chest, I asked again about the brewery.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, but it is currently not open to the public."

"Why would that be?" I wondered.

He gave me a deeply puzzled look as if I'd asked him for the meaning of life and answered, "I cannot answer that one for you, lad. I'm sorry."

I bid him good day and he reluctantly let go his grip on the rolled down window of my rental car.

A short drive up the street revealed that I had indeed been circling the Guinness brewery. It was to my memory, an industrial building in a part of town known as St. James Gate. It was rather fortress-like as well, surrounded by a high stone wall with barbed wire on top.

Undaunted, I eventually found an entrance and drove into a loading area where I observed mountains of gleaming kegs.

I asked a workman if there was a brewery tour to be had and he shook his head no and told me I was on private property. And that was the end of that.

I assume much has changed at Guinness since those days since there are now tours and gift shops with beer glasses and t-shirts and keychains for those who make pilgrimages to St. James Gate.

A second visit to Dublin went somewhat differently. In the spring - a very wet one, I might add - of 1994 I met up with a friend in the waiting lounge of Heathrow Airport. Mike Clugston was a former MacLean's writer and currently a newspaper editor living in Tokyo. We were to have a kind of reunion by flying on to Dublin and touring about the island. It was a cheerful catch-up of two old chums on the short Aer Lingus flight before we found our rental car and began driving many miles through persistent rain.

Mike, as it turned out, enjoyed walking around old cemeteries in a downpour, but I had less passion for such things. I recall he and I having pointless literary and philosophical arguments in pubs throughout the land. It's safe to say that we were getting on each other's nerves as sometimes happens with two intellectuals on longish rainy car trips.

We finally ended up back in Dublin as

the rain stopped. Both of us were literary types and so we stayed our first night in a hotel where W.B. Yeats had once taken lodging. I recall parking the car in the basement in a parking space the size of a small refrigerator, jammed up against dozens of other much smaller and much more dented vehicles. Our car was dented as well - street damage from parking at the curb in Lahinch, but I had found a branch in the woods somewhere and jammed it in the trunk in a clever way as to keep the dent pushed out.

The hotel was comfortable enough except that our second story room reeked of car exhaust from the traffic on the busy route below, which I later learned was O'Connell Street, named after the man responsible for "Catholic emancipation" in Ireland.

In the morning we went in search of the James Joyce Museum. I think the sun poked through once or twice and the walking was grand. The museum itself was impressive if you like that sort of thing...and, actually, I do. Here in one glass case was a handwritten page from Ulysses and I reminded myself, I really should try to read that book again.

Over there were other manuscripts. In another case were Mr. Joyce's glasses, and over in the corner were his pipe and slippers. Old black and white and sepia photographs adorned the walls, but no one looked particularly happy in any of them as if it had been the photographer's job to say, "Stand over there all together and give us a really sour face, if you would."

I left there with a classic writer's fantasy that someday there would be a Lesley Choyce Museum and literary pilgrims would come visit to see a pair of my old sandals, running shoes, perhaps an old surfboard or the pen I used to write my first poem in grade six. Alas.



I wanted to find the pub where James Joyce retired each day after penning really long sentences, but Mike had his sights set on the Book of Kells, so we trotted off to Trinity College. There was a long line-up at the appropriately-named Old Library to see the exhibit. The entry fee seemed rather exorbitant to me at the time, so I went wandering around the lovely campus - all green and sparkling as the rain let up and a renegade shaft of sunlight or two graced my amble.

I knew that Jonathan Swift had attended Trinity in 1682. Later in life he had been appointed dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in 1713, presumably sent there by higher authorities to get him out of England where he had become a political pest with a high-caliber writing ability. As I walked and gazed upon delightful architecture, I thought about Swift's brilliant novel, Gulliver's Travels and his "Modest Proposal" - a most scathing indictment of the British treatment of the





Irish in the eighteenth century. I wondered if there was a monument or grave somewhere in Dublin and would later find his remains in the logical location: St. Patrick's Cathedral.

I had been invited by a creative writing group at University College Dublin to give a reading from my work and was thrilled to have the opportunity to connect with a young Irish audience. So, later that day, Mike and I checked into a bed and breakfast near the university in a rather tame looking suburban community. Later, I read some of my poems, chatted with the lively group and started to fancy myself as a highly respected author - a kind of straight twentieth century Canadian version of Oscar Wilde (another most famous Irish writer) out on a world tour reading from his work and displaying his intellect to the masses. The thought lingered for at least ten minutes beyond my presentation before it began to fade.

However, one of the organizers of the event had arranged a late-night dinner on my behalf at her parents' home nearby. Soon, Mike and I found ourselves seated at a large table in a cozy home surrounded by a most lively bunch of older folks from the arts community. There were painters and theatre types, an older actress who I recognized from Irish movies and a few fellow writers. I was told that a neighbour, Maeve Binchy to be exact, had been invited but was out of town on a book tour and sent her apologies. Pity.

Nonetheless, it was a delightful evening, straight out of one of those charming independent Irish Film Board movies that I loved so much, and I soon realized Oscar Wilde had nothing on me. At one point, I noticed that the table was littered with copious empty bottles of wine and I had a hard time convincing Mike we should relent on the witty chatter and make our exit.

The only problem was we didn't have a clue as to how to find our way back to our accommodation. We discovered that there were far too many cul-de-sacs in this part of town and that somebody should do something about it. It was by sheer perseverance and luck that we found our temporary home and fell asleep after a grand day.

Flash forward if you will to May of 2015 when my wife Linda and I flew into Dublin International to experience our own Irish spring.

To bolster ourselves for urban adventures we first retreated to the Wicklow Mountains to breathe some fresh air and get some rural rest.



We found ourselves hiking around the exotic barren terrain of Wicklow Gap, the unlikely location of the filming of *Braveheart*. It felt odd to be walking around in the footsteps of Mel Gibson, an Australian actor portraying a Scots warrior here in the Irish countryside.

Once our lungs had been cleansed and prepped for the city, we drove to the River Liffey and found our rented condo high above Sir John Rogersons Quay not far from the Samuel Beckett Bridge. The digs were a bit swanky for my tastes, but had a great view.

Knowing that the Irish had a penchant for naming things after famous writers, I thought perhaps that Sir John Rogerson was a poet or playwright I had not heard of. However, looking him up on Wikipedia I discovered he was a politician and a wealthy man who made his money as a property developer in the eighteenth century. He was busy getting rich by booting poor Irish families out of tenements and building commercial properties right about the time that Swift was writing *Gulliver's Travels*. Bully for him.

The view from the condo prompted me to write a poem that now appears in a book called *Climbing Knocknarea*. In part the poem reads:

*Turn left beyond the Samuel Beckett Bridge
and rise into a glass palace
above the incarcerated Liffey River
looking down at the words "Pig Trap"
spray-painted on the asphalt.
One blue barrel bobbing
on the green-brown tide
as the sun glints off all the polished windows,
the flinty eyes
of this city.*

Perhaps I was a bit hard on ole Dublin. A rural lad at heart, I still don't fully trust cities even though they fascinate me. And Dublin,



indeed, is a fascinating place. We walked across the delightfully-named Ha'penny Bridge to get a better view of the city. This footbridge was built in 1816 to replace some aging ferries by the ferryman himself, William Walsh, who was granted the privilege of charging pedestrians a half penny to cross for the next 100 years. I don't know what the modern equivalent of that would be, but if I held an 1816 ha'penny in my hand today I could sell it to a coin dealer for \$75. The citizens of the day found the price "objectionable" but it remained so, even rising to a penny and a half, making it the penny-ha'penny bridge for a while, until the price was lowered to the original in 1919. Readers will be pleased to know that today it's free.

We made our way to St. Patrick's Cathedral to pay our respects to Dean Swift and other notable dead folks, and then spent a good hour wandering around St. Stephen's Green. I couldn't find anyone who could explain to me who St. Stephen was or why this grand park was named for him. Later, I would learn that he had been appointed by the Apostles to spread Christianity and had given a long speech that angered many listeners which led to him being stoned to death. As a result, he is shown in images down through the centuries with a pile of



rocks on his head. And, lo and behold, he is the patron saint of headaches, coffin makers, masons and horses. Who would have guessed?

The park dates back to 1664, and before that it was a marshy area used for grazing sheep. It is finely landscaped and, much to my delight, truly green and bountiful with trees and flowers - all 22 acres of it. It reminded me much of The Public Gardens in Halifax, Nova Scotia making me feel right at home.

There were pubs to be assessed, of course. I can't say we got to properly know the pubs of Temple Bar or any other section of the fair city, but the names alone tell you that Dublin has a sense of humour. A small sampling of drinking establishments include the following: The Morgue, The Hairy Lemon, The Bleeding Horse, Oil Can Harry's, Gravediggers, Copper Faced Jacks and, inevitably, the rather British-sounding Cock Tavern. My hope is to make further study of these venerable taverns in a future trip.

I recall getting lost quite often while walking around Dublin, which is a wonderful dilemma.

It seemed that most streets downtown only go a few blocks and then give up, leaving us to weave this way and that trying to find the river which would lead us back to our condo. It doesn't help that if you do find a street, it changes names every few blocks. Hence, Woody Essex Quay turns to Wellington Quay, then Aston Quay, then Burgh Quay, Georges Quay, City Quay and, finally, the familiar Sir John R. Quay.

After we checked out of our apartment, I discovered that a rubber door stop had somehow found its way into my suitcase. I assure you this was an accident and not theft.

Nonetheless, it led to us getting a bad review as renters posted on the Airbnb site, which, as things go on the internet, will most likely remain posted until the end of time, probably barring us from renting accommodations hereafter in many parts of the English-speaking world.

As we were departing the city to head off to Sligo, we encountered a detour on Dame Street soon after it had changed from being College Green Street. The orange detour signs took us hither and yon. Eventually, it seemed, the detour sign people had given up - gone off for a drink at the Hairy Lemon, perhaps - and there were no more signs, leaving us to ping pong around parts of town we were not much interested in. Curiously enough, we eventually came upon the Guinness brewery, which is now a world tourist destination called The Guinness Storehouse charging as much as 55 Euros (about \$75) for a 1½ hour-tour with a couple of pints thrown in, I would imagine.

But for us, the West Coast of Ireland awaited.





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Northern Ireland

As Celtic Life International's Managing Editor Stephen Patrick Clare explains, young people are changing the taste, face and headspace of Northern Ireland



Through the Dark Hedges

As Northern Ireland transitions from past to present, there is a sense of cautious optimism about its future.

Despite its post-Brexit uncertainty and its post-Troubles struggle for identity - one that bares and blurs the lines of Irish history (and the History of Ireland) - the region and its 1.8 million residents are confident that their darkest days are behind them.

"Young people here who were born in 1998, or after, have no immediate memories of The Troubles," notes journalist and author Eimear O'Callaghan over steamed mussels at Harry's Shack in Port Stewart. "For many of them, it was as if it simply never happened."

O'Callaghan, whose bestselling memoir *Belfast Days* recounts her tempestuous teenage years in the city's Catholic, west-end enclave of Andersonstown, believes that letting go of Ulster's immediate past is both a blessing and a burden.

"On the one hand, it is very important that we continue to discuss the conflict, so that we may heal and learn from those tragedies. On the other hand, it is quite understandable that the next generation just wants to move on from it..."

While the area's biggest export has traditionally been its people - and specifically young people looking to build better lives for themselves in Europe, North America and Australia - there is a growing sense of hope and trust amongst millennials that two decades of peace has brought about an enduring prosperity, and perhaps, a reason to stay.

The numbers appear to support that belief. Northern Ireland's unemployment rate remains low at just 4.7 per cent. The capital city of Belfast is booming with huge growth in both the IT and financial sectors, and continues to cement its reputation as an entrepreneurial hot-spot. Most significantly, perhaps, the region's tourism sector is expanding at an exponential rate; in 2016, visitors spent over £860

million (1.128 billion USD) in Northern Ireland, with 4.6 million overnight stays sold, and close to 100 cruise ships calling into port. As well, business tourism has seen a 25 per cent spike since 2015.

With a host of natural and man-made attractions across the area - and as trust in a lasting peace continues to develop - those numbers are expected to soar even higher in the coming years.

A game-changer, of course, has been Game of Thrones.

The massively successful HBO television series has been shot on location across the six counties for seven seasons, bringing big bucks into Northern Ireland's burgeoning film sector and inspiring fans from around the world to explore the region's raw and rugged landscapes.

"Thronies, we call them affectionately," chuckles Tourism Northern Ireland representative Billy Scott, referring to the series' huge throng of followers. "They are mad for the show, and we are happy to have them here."

Scott is quick to note that while the region has always been a popular destination for those-in-the-know travelers, *Game of Thrones* has pushed Northern Ireland's uniqueness into the global spotlight.

"The show is what has gotten visitors through the door. Once they are here, many of them are quite surprised to discover who we are and how much we have to offer. And word has spread like wildfire, especially through social media."

That's good news for a place renowned for decades of difficulties.

"Things are still a little shaky," cautions Scott. "And yes, it will take some time to rebuild broken bridges, but we are heading in the right direction. There is a sense of hope here now, one that I have not felt for some time, that there is some light at the end of those 'Dark Hedges' - especially, and most importantly, amongst our young people."

Together at the Table

If a culture is characterized by its cuisine, then a group of young culinary artisans are redefining Northern Ireland's identity.

"Twenty years ago, you would be hard-pressed to describe Northern Irish cuisine," admits Adrian Morrow, the youthful manager of Glenarm Estate in County Antrim.

"Unlike Italy, France, Japan and elsewhere, where the food is instantly recognizable, we are only now making a name for ourselves in the culinary sector."

Along with homegrown dairy, poultry and vegetable produce, Morrow lists meat and seafood as staples of the region's diet.

"Here, at the estate, we specialize in locally-sourced smoked salmon and Short-horn beef. We offer our product on-site, and sell it at area markets on weekends. We have picked up a few awards over the last year or two, and that has helped to shine a spotlight on the 'real food' industry in Northern Ireland."

Just a few miles west, Ursa Minor Bakehouse in Ballycastle serves up the very best in 'real' bread.

"We have taken things back to basics," says 28-year-old master baker Dara O'hArtghaile, who - along with his wife Ciara - founded the facility in 2014. "Our bread has only three core ingredients; flour, water and salt. We use no preservatives, nor additives of any sort. It tastes as it should, as it traditionally did for our ancestors."

The result is a hearty, wholesome - though never heavy - sourdough base that is both delicious and nutritious. Along with fresh, daily-baked loaves, the couple and their 10-person team produce a number of other delights, including an assortment of organic, artisan coffees, cakes, and pastries.



"We also work with several local and area food producers to help educate people on the benefits of healthy eating," says Dara.

"It is a shift in the lifestyle paradigm here, and it will take time, but there are many of us now moving in the same direction."

Sandy Cole agrees.

"Our motto is Forward Thinking Farming," says the 26-year-old co-manager of the family-run Broughgammon Farm in Ballycastle.

Along with his parents and siblings, Cole is committed to environmentally-sustainable food production.

"We work with a farm-to-fork philosophy," he explains. "Our main product is cabrito (goat) and free-range rose veal. We raise the animals in the most humane and ethical manner possible, and they are always properly groomed and well-fed with natural grass and hay."

The business' biggest challenge to date, he notes, has been the backlash against the consumption of meat products.

"One of our aims here is to provide proper information on the nutritional benefits of a balanced diet. We do that through a variety of in-house events, including our 'Goatober' festival, our annual 'open-farm' weekend, themed dinners, and workshops, where we emphasize food quality over quantity."

"People are always amazed to learn that there are so many great ways to properly prepare and enjoy meat - as we say here, whatever floats your goat."

Options are a hallmark of Northern Ireland's progressive palate, and you won't find more anywhere than at the Walled City Brewery in Derry-Londonderry.



"Right now, we have 10 craft beers on tap," notes the site's twentysomething brewmaster Josh Kyle, adding that many of the ales are monikered to reflect the area's personality, including 'Stitch' (linen industry), 'Wit' (Irish humour), and 'Cherry-London-cherry'.

"While the art of craft-brewing isn't new, it is relatively new to our part of the world. Guinness and the other major producers have had a monopoly on the marketplace for a long time here, so we have our challenges to be sure, but so far so good."

Founded by James Huey and his wife Lou in 2015, the brewery - which also serves up artful appetizers, main plates and tapas - rests its head upon the four pillars of FLAQ; flavour, local, authenticity, and quality.

"We really do have something for everybody," continues Kyle. "If someone says that they don't like beer, we reply that it is only that they haven't found their favourite flavour yet."

The trend towards artisan food is a major step towards better physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health for the region's residents, says holistic nutritionist Debbie Caskey.

"We have seen a major shift in the way that we think about food and eating in Northern Ireland over the last two decades," says Caskey, who also runs the Stradeen Luxury Boutique Bed & Breakfast in the stunning seaside town of Port Stewart.

"A food revolution by any other name is still a revolution...and this one leaves a much better taste in our mouths. And what's great is that the movement is all being driven by young people - young people who are working together, often across once-divided communities, with a simple and common vision for the betterment of Northern Ireland. There is room for everyone at that table."



For the love of learning

A myriad of multi-media museums and exhibits are engaging, educating, and entertaining students across Northern Ireland.

Learning in Northern Ireland has been a hot-potato issue for generations; the 1923 Education Act, granting free primary and secondary level institutional learning for all, was embraced by some communities and rejected by others. In 1947, the Act was revised to include university-level schooling. By 2000, the Act had been semi-repealed, with small annual tuitions imposed. Since that time, schooling costs, both in 'State' (Protestant) and 'Maintained' (Catholic) schools have soared.

"It is one of our foremost challenges," explains Derry-Londonderry Deputy Mayor John Boyle, a long-time area resident and councillor. "Not only do we need to invest in attracting students to our schools, but we need to find new ways and means to keep them here once they have graduated."

A former schoolteacher, Boyle believes that education is the key to the region's future growth.

"The love of learning, and of ideas, will ensure a peaceful and prosperous tomorrow for our young people. Ideas inspire communication which, in turn, creates connections. As we have seen, the worst thing we can possibly do as a community is to stop talking with one another."

And while enrolment at all levels has been steady over the past two decades, other public institutions have taken a lead in learning.

The Siege Museum and Exhibition in downtown Derry-Londonderry hosts a permanent display of the history of the Siege of Londonderry (1689) and of the Associated Clubs of the Apprentice Boys of Derry. Included in the museum are artifacts, video, audio, and other interactive forms of media. Visitors can also experience one of the finest collections of meeting rooms used by the Loyal Orders; the Apprentice Boys of Derry, the Orange Order, the Women's Orange, and The Royal Black Institution.

"We just love seeing young people walk through these doors," shares manager Billy Moore. "And they love seeing the period costumes, the replica ships, cannons and swords - it makes it all very real for them. This isn't a boring old history book or lesson - it is our heritage, here and now, brought to life through an engaging experience."

Moore adds that museum staff members are also involved in many outreach and community initiatives, including sharing infor-

mation, resources, and best practices with other local institutions.

"It helps to generate greater dialogue and understanding between our communities."

One of those likeminded facilities is the newly-expanded Free Derry Museum, located outside Butcher Gate - one of four arched entryways along the city centre's 17th century Derry Walls - just a few blocks down the hill from the Siege Museum.

Located at ground-zero of the 'Bloody Sunday' massacre in the Bogside district, the one-floor exhibit honours those who perished or were wounded during a peaceful civil rights demonstration on January 30, 1972.

"It is said that if we are unwilling to learn from our history, then we are doomed to repeat it," states site director John Kelly, whose brother Michael was among the 13 murdered by British paramilitary that day. "That is one of the core messages we teach visiting school children, whether they are from here or away."

"The wee young ones are certainly the most inquisitive. They aren't afraid to ask the tough questions, some of which might seem quite obvious, but - for whatever reason - rarely seem to be asked by adults."

Kelly says that older students marvel at the centre's multi-media displays.

"Along with authentic articles - such as handwritten notes, imagery, art, posters, banners, clothing, and even weaponry - the audio and visual elements give the kids a modern, present perspective on the past. We also offer an in-house app for their mobile devices, and many of them enjoy greater engagement with the exhibit via that method."

Similarly, in Bellaghy - less than an hour's drive southeast of Derry-Londonderry - the Seamus Heaney HomePlace uses a myriad of mediums to edify audiences of all ages about the life and work of the region's finest scribe.

"I like to think that Seamus himself would have approved of what we are doing here," smiles manager Brian McCormick, who also happens to be Heaney's nephew. "Like the man himself, and his writing, HomePlace is deceptively simple and modest."

Sure enough, behind the bright and spacious two-floor veneer are a maze of playful and interactive displays that include touch screens, video reels, audio recordings, photographs, block and sliding puzzles, jigsaws,

hats and helmets, objects to see and touch, and a special creative zone where visitors can dress up, write, draw, colour, craft, or simply sit down and read.

"We work with many schools across the region," notes McCormick, "and the students are always engaged, educated and entertained. The hope is that most of them will leave here with a greater appreciation of Seamus, his poetry and prose, and the arts in general."

"Perhaps the most important thing, however, is to get our young people thinking and talking together, and thus inspire a life-long love of learning."





Creating Culture

St George's Market is the last surviving Victorian covered bazaar in Belfast. Located close to the River Lagan and the city's Waterfront Hall, the facility was refurbished in the 1980s and now hosts over 300 vendors each weekend, including food sellers, gift retailers, and crafters of all sorts.

"I have been making and selling bespoke jewelry here for about six years," shares local artisan Dawn Newberry, who fashioned her business - A Thousand Kisses - after a Leonard Cohen song.

"There has been a real resurgence in arts and craft here over the last two decades, especially amongst younger people. These days, it is not unusual for students of our local art schools to start up their own businesses right after graduation."

Efficient online merchandizing, and cost-effective social media, means that young people can now afford to set up shop regularly at area agoras.

"I need to be here each week," continues Newberry. "Customers need to see my work in person, feel it, and try it on. And it is important for me to meet people face-to-face in this milieu, chat with them, and get to know them."

"There is something very special about this space; look around you - there are lots of teens and tots about, and no one is staring at a screen."

"Our young people are talking with one another, laughing aloud, experiencing this together as one community."

Outside the bustling market, about two dozen men and women, some from away but most from home, have gathered for a guided food excursion.

"I am impressed that we are seeing more and more area residents join us each week," says Taste & Tour guide Caroline Wilson. "I think that many of them, especially the younger ones, are pleasantly surprised to learn what we've got cooking in our very own backyard."

Over four hours, Wilson and her troupe tramp around the city centre, sampling an assortment of locally-produced artisan goodies, including organic breads, meats, fish, sweets, and more.

"Most of the spots we stop along the tour are run by men and women in their 20s," notes the thirtysomething. "They hold high ideals about their craft, and they are true wizards at what they do - mixing and matching natural ingredients into something scrumptious and nutritious."

That culinary alchemy is on display just down the road, in the city's creative Cathedral Quarter where, each day, the youthful Master Chef Gareth McCaughey and his team at The Muddlers Club spin basic and whole dietary elements into gastronomic gold.

"We are always dreaming up new and inventive ways to prepare and present our meals," smiles the lightly-bearded and heavily-tattooed hipster, pointing to his eatery's multi-course menu. "With nouveau cuisine, things can get quite imaginative in the kitchen - sometimes, maybe a little too imaginative."

"When we get it right, our patrons let us know, because their plates are clear, they pay their bill, and they come back. When we get it wrong, however, we usually know right away by the small explosion on the grill followed by a big poof of smoke arising from one of our pots or pans. I suppose it is a little like chemistry class used to be in school. But sooner or later we figure out the right formula, and the final results are delicious."

Belfast's changing tastes are accompanied by its changing face; the city's Cathedral Quarter is also peppered with dynamic and diverse street art.

"The city is awash with works from both established and emerging artists," says Adam Turkington of Seedhead Arts, who - among his many roles in 'Alternative Ulster' - organizes Belfast's annual, autumn 'Hit The North' street art festival.

"The majority of the murals are done with spray paint, but some of the pieces are so good and so complex that you would swear that they had been done with oils and brushes."

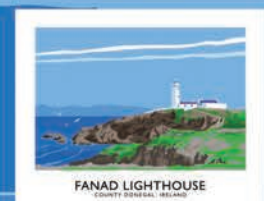
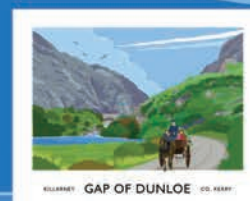
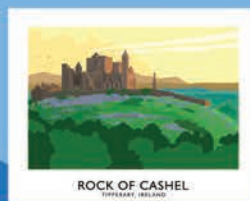
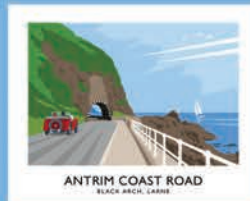
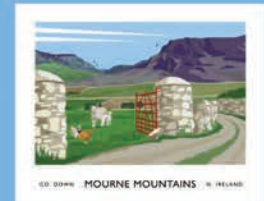
Colourful collages from the likes of Nomad Clan, AKA Cbloxx, Aylo, Dan Kitchener and Irony have given a new voice - and look - to local and area residents.

"Belfast has always been covered in graffiti," notes Turkington. "However, most of it was of a divisive nature. Some of that stuff is still there, for sure, but almost all of it has now been painted over by the next generation."

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Chloe Dougan

I am from the small town of Crumlin in Co. Antrim, but moved to Belfast when I started university. I graduated three years ago and now live close to my design studio, which is in the gorgeous Duncairn Centre for Culture and Arts.

I have always had my own style, whether what I wore was in trend or not. I have never wanted to look like anyone else, and I firmly believe that style is individual. Growing up I had always loved making things for myself, and bought a sewing machine when I was in school. This is when my love of fabrics and textures began.

As my confidence has grown over the years so has my work. I rarely draw

or illustrate my ideas - I work directly from the ideas in my head, and start pinning and tacking fabrics on a mannequin.

I source the fabric, design and make everything myself, and I work directly with people with my dressmaking service.

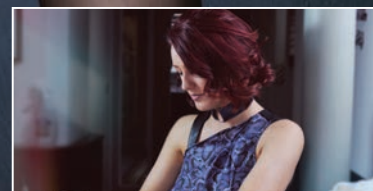
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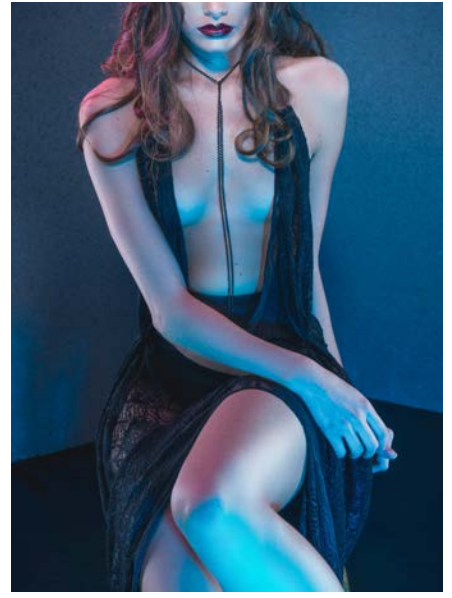
dence in their own style, and some flair and creativity when putting their wardrobe together.

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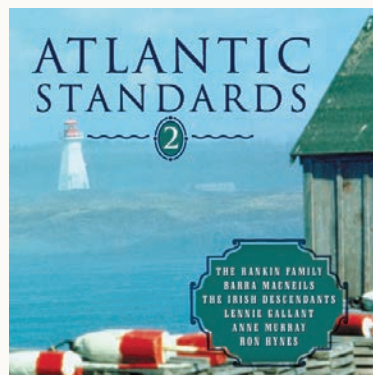
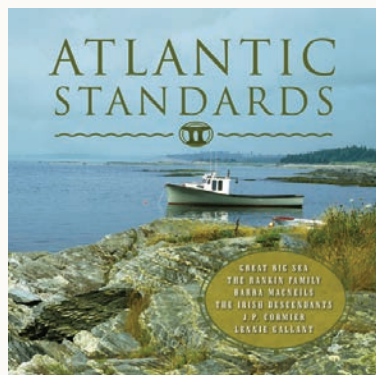






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“We have an incredible musical tradition in Northern Ireland,” says Luke McCloskey, guitarist for the five-piece band Lore. “We get a little overshadowed at times by artists down south - U2, Damian Rice, Clannad, etc - but we can hold our own with the biggest and best of them.”

McCloskey, along with his band-mates - Carolann Carlile (vocals), Raymond O’Kane (piano), Cliodhna McAteer (cello), and Rebecca Hall (violin/fiddle) - has every right to make that claim.

Since its inception, Lore has been racking up critical and popular acclaim both at home and abroad. In 2015, the group was nominated for ‘Best Irish Band’ and ‘Best EP’ by the Pure M Awards for their self-titled, debut recording. They took that success to the next level in 2016 with the release of their sophomore EP, Believe.

“Three of us are from Dungiven, Co. Derry,” explains McCloskey. “Rebecca is from Ballymena, and Cliodhna is from Camlough...so organizing rehearsals can be pretty interesting sometimes!”

The rewards of making music together, he notes, are well worth the demands of distance.

“Having the opportunity to perform our songs to appreciative audiences is the best part of it. And, make no mistake - this requires months of hard work and deliberation; songwriting, rehearsing, recording - and then taking it to new and different places in a live milieu - is a craft of sorts. And no craft comes together without some blood, sweat and a few tears.”

McCloskey says that the quintet, its sound, and its creative process, are all works in progress.

“We came together in stages; we started as a three-piece band, released an EP, and then added Rebecca and Cliodhna. For bigger shows, we bring in double bass and percussion. Obviously, our sound has evolved dramatically over time, with stronger vocal harmonies and a more dynamic live sound. It has allowed the group to get more creative in the studio as well.

“Songwriting is definitely more of an inspirational thing for us; we enjoy that sense of uncertainty when composing. We start with a simple idea; a melody, a musical hook, or even a concept. The fun part is not knowing how it is going to end up.”

A good song, he continues, is a balanced blend of lyrics, melody and music.

“It sounds simple, but it is quite difficult to get all three to align perfectly. We want listeners to relate to the story behind the song, and hopefully the melody and music will be the perfect platform.”

Like Northern Ireland, the band’s identity is vibrant, complex, and even elusive.

“People always ask us what genre we fit into, but it’s a question that we still can’t answer...”

“We don’t aim to write one particular style. However, Michael Bradley (bassist from The Undertones) once described our sound as “sophisticated pop.” There are obvious folk and indie influences in what we do, and each band member brings their own unique voice and vibe to the table.”

McCloskey believes that Northern Ireland’s music scene is better than ever.

“There are some brilliant bands and singer-songwriters here who should be on the biggest stages. We have had the good fortune of performing with some amazing artists, with voices to match the very best out there.

“There is great work being done at the local level to support homegrown music; the radio stations are playing the songs, the venues are receptive to emerging bands, and area festivals like Stendhal have been great at showcasing our artists.”

Despite all the good vibes, McCloskey believes that there is still more that can be done.

“As we are a much smaller country, opportunities may be greater further afield. Greater funding and support for Northern Ireland artists trying to break into other markets, including Europe and the U.S., would make a huge difference. This would allow our musicians more opportunities to extend their fan base, making our music and ambitions more sustainable.”

For now, Lore is content to build upon their success going into 2018.

“We are planning more theatre shows, and we are also set to release some new music which we have been working on for the past few months; new songs which are quite different to what we have recorded before.

“The band has taken significant steps forward each year, and our hope is to carry on - in some small way - the great musical traditions of Northern Ireland.”

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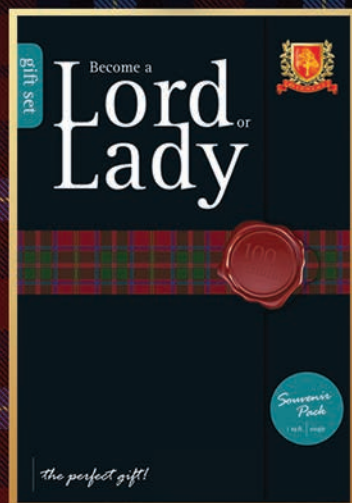


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Emmett McCourt

Like many chefs, Emmett McCourt's interest in the culinary arts goes back to his childhood

"I was always cooking when I was younger," recalls Derry-born chef Emmett McCourt over the phone.

"And my favourite memories, I suppose, are of me and my grandmother walking past a street in Windsor Terrace, Derry. In those times, there used to be bread vans; bread was made by hand and then delivered to all the shops in the area. One of my first memories was of the smell of freshly-baked bread. I was about four years old at the time, and that scent still always brings me back home."

That time travel has proven useful to McCourt, who has traversed the world during his culinary studies, sampling flavours - and the cultures that served them up - along the way.

"Anywhere I have visited, wherever I am introduced to a new people or place, the first gift given is always one of food. In fact, I was once told that 'the greatest gift you can give is food.' It is an extension of the human spirit and, whenever possible, I have tried to extend the spirit of Northern Ireland.

"As a chef, you have to be adaptable," he continues. "Open-mindedness is essential in this industry, even simply to sample any sort of ingredients. There is always some sort of story behind those ingredients."

One tale that McCourt feels hasn't been told enough is that of the food and flavours of Northern Ireland. To remedy that, he is currently working on his Irish Food Heritage Project, the first component of which is his

award-winning book, *Feast or Famine*.

"The book tries to bring to life all of those stories, and maps the journey of generations of Irish immigrants. I was fascinated to see what fuelled our people during the process of immigration. Much has been written about the Irish building our nations, but very little about what they ate in the process."

The book, which won the title of Best Culinary Travel Book in the World in 2015 at the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards, chronicles the origins behind many of Northern Ireland's favourite dishes.

"For example, corned beef," notes McCourt. "You might not see corned beef that much back home, but you will find a lot of it in the new world. I had always wondered about that, so I went ahead and did the research. As it turns out, there is quite a story there; Ireland was the biggest exporter of corned beef in the world in the 1600s, and it fed the Napoleonic Wars - literally."

Other Northern Irish favourites documented in *Feast or Famine* include Boxty - and specifically its relationship to the Jewish Latke; the regional variants of colcannon and its cousin, champ (aka "poundies," a dish of potatoes and scallions); pig's trotters, and more.

McCourt notes that it has only been in the last decade that Irish cuisine has really been noticed on the global foodie stage. To that end, he is proud to do his part to help Northern Irish cuisine come of age.

"We are really excited about our food culture now, realizing that we have an incredible history, and that these stories have been brought to life with our food. We can really connect with it."

He is still interested in the local flavours of wherever his travels take him, as his Irish Food Heritage Project is far from complete - *Feast or Famine* was just the first chapter.

"Book two, if you like, would be a follow-on to that, and what happened to the Irish after they travelled to the likes of Canada, Newfoundland, the U.S.A., etc...and how they became a success," says McCourt, who plans to explore the evolution of Irish cuisine as it travelled the globe with its people, evolving as it clashed and conjoined with new cultures.

For that reason, he isn't wasting much time sampling new flavours and, as he puts it, adding more strings to his culinary bow.

"There's a Native Canadian restaurant that just opened up in Toronto," says McCourt, on a recent visit to Canada's largest metropolis. "I'd be quite interested to see what sort of cuisine that would be."

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Naomi Waite

A small place can deliver a big punch. So says Naomi Waite, Director of Marketing for Tourism Northern Ireland...



When and why did you get involved with the tourism sector?

I got involved in the NI tourism industry in April 2013 when I took up my current position. There can be nothing more special from a marketing perspective than getting the opportunity to promote the place you grew up.

Are they the same reasons you continue to be involved today?

Tourism in Northern Ireland is at a really exciting stage of its development. We have the World's Leading Visitor Attraction, Lonely Planet has named Belfast and the Causeway Coastal Route as the number one region in the world to visit in 2018, and we are looking forward to welcoming The Open in 2019. Working on tourism gives you a terrific opportunity to get involved in many different types of projects, from bespoke intimate visitor experiences to global events,

and everything in between. It is this terrific variety and creative environment that I love and that continues to mean that I think I have the best job in the world!

How has tourism in Northern Ireland evolved in recent years?

Tourism has evolved quite dramatically, particularly since 2012 when Titanic Belfast opened its doors and became a catalyst for investment in new products and events across the country. Northern Ireland is now a 'must see' destination for visitors across Europe, North America and closer to home from Britain and other parts of Ireland. The fact that Games of Thrones is largely filmed in Northern Ireland has also helped to put us on the map and opened Northern Ireland up to further afield markets such as China and Australia.

What are the biggest current challenges facing the sector?

Tourism is a fiercely competitive, global industry and we have hot competition from our nearest markets – the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. As with all public sector bodies, we are also faced with a squeeze on budgets.

What are some solutions to those issues?

The investment that has been made in Northern Ireland's tourism industry is starting to pay off. What we need to see is

continued investment in product and in marketing to ensure that we remain relevant, visible and attractive. Digital marketing platforms also now help us to better identify potential visitors and understand what they want from a destination.

What does Northern Ireland have to offer that other destinations do not?

We describe Northern Ireland as like an espresso – it is small but delivers a big punch. Northern Ireland has many incredible tourist offerings: the Causeway Coastal Route, Titanic, world-class golf and Game of Thrones filming locations, and they are all within a very compact area which is easy for the visitor to get around.

What does Tourism NI have on tap for 2018?

The Lonely Planet 'Best Region' accolade gets us off to a hugely positive start for 2018. The Host Global conference comes to Belfast in June, bringing 200 international buyers with a collective buying power of \$2 billion. And we will be stepping up our plans to capitalise on The Open 2019 at Royal Portrush Golf Club. The event will be the biggest sporting event ever held in Northern Ireland in terms of spectator levels, economic impact and destination marketing benefit.

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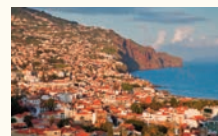
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Perspectives

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John Boyle



Age: 51

Residence: Derry

Occupation: Mayor of Derry

What are the biggest changes that you have seen in Northern Ireland in recent years?

The most obvious changes in Northern Ireland in recent years have undoubtedly been related to developments since the signing of the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998. Peace has come slowly but, by comparison to when I was growing up during the 1970s and 80s, we do have a relatively peaceful society. Regrettably, I also believe that our society still has a considerable way to go in relation to an improvement in trust and understanding between communities. There still remains a significant element of political polarization where people still vote along "tribal" lines. I would very much like to see that narrative change significantly. However, life in Derry in particular, has improved even though we still face many of the historical challenges of previous decades in relation to areas of high unemployment and socio and economic deprivation. Our leisure, tourism hospitality sector has been identified by the City & District Council as a significant and important key economic driver for future prosperity. Visitor numbers to the city are increasing year on year and hotel occupancy sees record increases year on year. It is not unusual to see record numbers of visitors during high season.

From your perspective how are young people changing the identity there?

I believe that younger people are perhaps becoming much more progressive and more liberal and tolerant of human differences in their views than previous generations - whether that be religious, racial, sexual etc. They are much less "set in their ways" than their parents' and grandparents' generations. Generally our young people are progressive and much more tolerant. In Derry there is an improving cross-religion integration of communities of young people today which would not have been as pronounced in previous generations.

What are the biggest challenges facing young people there?

The answer to this question regrettably is that many of the challenges facing young people here are similar, if not the same, to those faced by previous generations. We have a well-educated and skilled workforce. Our city and district has the highest percentage of people under the age of 25 years old (34%) compared to anywhere else in Northern Ireland. Lack of employment opportunity has always been an issue and remains so. As a result many of our best educated and skilled continue to emigrate.

What are possible solutions to these issues?

Derry had for decades been a peripheral city on the island of Ireland and in its relationship to the UK. Years of underinvestment in key transport infrastructure was a major contributor to finding it difficult to meet the challenge of combating our geographic isolation. Improvement in road and rail infrastructure connecting the city by motorway/dual carriageway to the rest of the island will be a key to addressing the economic imbalance. Work has recently begun on these projects. I also see the expansion of our University campus to somewhere in the region of 10,000 students as a real opportunity to become an economic game-changer for the city and the North West region of Ireland - developing opportunities for our young people by creating a "honeypot" effect for foreign direct investment. Continued investment in the tourism industry will also be vital. Derry and the North West of Ireland is one of the most scenically beautiful places in these islands and our history is thousands of years in the making. Many thousands of their forebears of the Irish Diaspora in North America will have originally emigrated through the port at Derry. In many hundreds of thousands of cases it will have been the last time they were to set foot on Irish soil.

John Kelly



Age: 69

Residence: Derry

Occupation: Education and Outreach Officer, Free Derry Museum

When and why did you get involved with the Free Derry Museum?

My brother Michael was murdered on Bloody Sunday. Through my involvement with the Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign as Chairman, I then progressed to working for the Bloody Sunday Trust as a family liaison officer, working with the various families during the Bloody Sunday Inquiry. When the Inquiry ended, the Trust set up the Museum of Free Derry, and I was appointed its Education and Outreach Officer. I've been here since.

Are they the same reasons you continue to be involved today?

I feel I am still on that same journey to achieve truth and justice for the innocent people who were murdered and injured on Bloody Sunday. Now it's all about education, and being employed by the Bloody Sunday Trust puts me in a position where I am still involved on a daily basis and overseeing any remnants of the campaign and speaking to people about what happened here.

How has the facility evolved over time?

The museum has steadily evolved over time. During the Inquiry, the Trust set up a centre in the city to accommodate families. There, families could follow proceedings on a live-stream from the Guildhall, as well as access counselling facilities and the family solicitors. It was at this time that the Trust decided to include a small exhibition of photographs, TV footage and slide show reels which was open to the public. From this initial small exhibition, the Museum of Free Derry was born.

Who visits the museum, and what can they expect to experience there?

Nowadays, the museum attracts visitors from all over the world. They can experience a complete and truthful account of the conflict as told by those most affected by it - the people. The museum spans the era from the beginning of the civil rights movement, Battle of the Bogside, internment, Bloody Sunday and Operation Motorman, culminating in the day the Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry was published on 15 June 2010.

What is the response like after their visit, particularly from young people?

Visitors have many different types of reactions, but mostly they are emotionally overcome by the story we tell here. Hopefully, young people feel educated by what they read and see here at the Museum of Free Derry and it helps alter or improve their perceptions.

Why is it important to keep the memory of Bloody Sunday alive?

It's important to educate others on the brutality frequently meted out by the British Army to our people, as well as the cover-up of the truth and the subsequent fight for truth and justice. Finally, it's important that the wider world will hear and learn from our story here in Derry so that it never happens again.

How has Derry itself evolved in recent years?

Derry is at peace nowadays. The conflict has ended, and young people can look forward to a better future. I'm delighted that Derry now attracts so many visitors from all over the world and that they see this as a beautiful, modern city filled with friendly people.

In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges currently facing Northern Ireland today?

The usual challenges are faced by the people of Derry; we need jobs, more housing and a better standard of living. This can only be achieved through more investment and a better government.

What does the museum have on tap for 2018?

Our newly redeveloped Museum of Free Derry has been open for just nine months and in that time we have already welcomed a staggering 32,000 visitors through our doors. In the coming year and beyond, the Bloody Sunday Trust are hopeful that the new facilities will be used by anyone who requires them, with schools and community groups being our main priorities.

Ricky O'Rawe



Age: 64

Residence: Belfast

Occupation: Author

What are your own roots?

I am an Irish republican. I was interned without trial twice in the early 1970s, and sentenced to eight years for an IRA bank robbery. I spent nearly four years on the Blanket protest, during which we republican prisoners were locked in our cells 24 hours a day for refusing to wear prison uniforms. Ten of our comrades died on hunger strike at that time. My family have a historical connection with the republican movement; my father and his brothers had all been interned for republican activities in the 1940s and 1950s.

What inspired you to write In The Name of the Son?

Gerry Conlon and I grew up together in the Lower Falls area of Belfast. Gerry and I used to go for breakfast, usually once a week. About eight months before he died, we were out for breakfast in Belfast city centre and he asked me to write his biography, from his release from the Old Bailey in 1989. I agreed to do so and reaffirmed that commitment when he sent for me to visit him in hospital after he had just found out that he had three weeks to live.

What was the most challenging aspect of the process?

Probably the most challenging aspect of writing this book was the emotional journey it took me on. I thought I knew Gerry but through interviews and papers that he left for me, I discovered another Gerry, someone who was indelibly scarred by the experience of prison and the death of his father Giuseppe in prison. I cried for him, for what he had gone through.

What was the most rewarding part of the experience?

The most rewarding aspect of the experience was discovering new material/evidence in the National Archives at Kew in London, which demonstrated beyond doubt, that the Crown (i.e. the British judiciary) had perverted the course of justice in order to both convict the Guildford Four and to uphold those convictions at the subsequent appeal. Consequently, I brought my findings to Ann Conlon McKernan and, with her consent, to a solicitor, Kevin Winters of KRW Law. As a result, there is a real chance that the inquest into the deaths of those who died in the Guildford bombings will be reopened and that all matters concerning the Guildford pub bombings will be examined, including the role of the British police and judiciary. I think also that that book gave a lot of people who loved Gerry a degree of closure. Gerry always said that the Guildford Four had been framed but he couldn't prove it because there was no paper trail. Following the discoveries at Kew, I learned that, with malice of forethought, the British Establishment, framed the Guildford Four and the Maguire Seven. I always knew from my own experiences that the British Establishment could be vindictive, but the cruelty and wickedness which they meted out to the Guildford Four and Maguire Seven shocked even me.

How much research was involved?

There was extensive research. I had to interview dozens of people in Plymouth, London, Glasgow, Dublin, Tipperary, Derry, and Belfast. I had to trawl

through public records and also through the Gerry Conlon papers. It was an exhausting work.

How did Johnny Depp get involved?

In 2015, I was interviewing Siobhan MacGowan (Shane's sister) in Tipperary and she mentioned that Gerry had been a good friend of Johnny Depp. She suggested that I ask him to write the foreword and gave me a contact email address. I sent off the email and two weeks later I got one back from Johnny's PA saying that Johnny deemed it 'an honour' to be asked to write Gerry's foreword. He kept his word and he has said that he is 'very proud' of the book - his foreword is a masterpiece; this guy can really write!

What makes a good book?

A good book needs three things: a strong plot; vivid, lively characters, and to be well-written. If any of these three things are missing, the book will fail to impress.

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

My creative process is both 'inspirational' and 'perspirational.' Even if you are writing a novel rather than a factual book, you have to give the plot 110% and that means almost perpetual mental perspiration and, the dreaded re-writes. You have to listen to the voice in your head that says, you haven't got it right, you need to delete. This is not always easy because writers tend to believe that what they have written is great, when sometimes it is far from it.

What are your thoughts on Northern Irish literature today?

Northern Ireland literature is broadly defined in two categories: books about the troubles/historically-related accounts and biographies, and a burgeoning market in novels. Both are in a healthy state.

What's next on your creative agenda?

I'm writing a novel called Greed that is loosely based on the Northern Bank robbery in 2005.



CATS AND CLUES

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Other books by
Gunna Dickson and
Jon McIntosh.

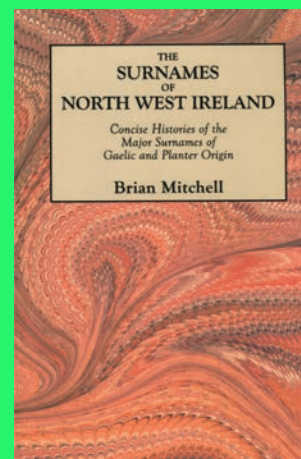
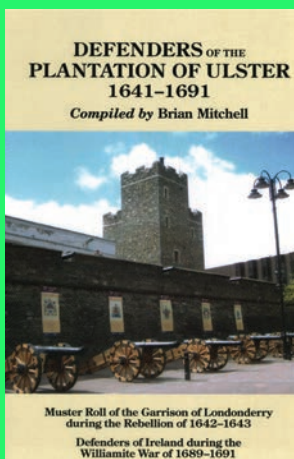
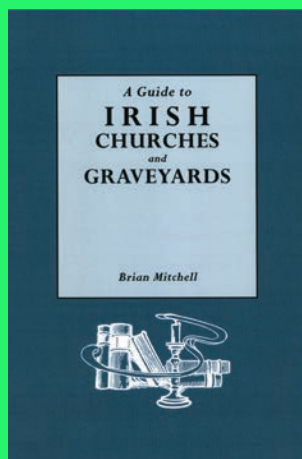
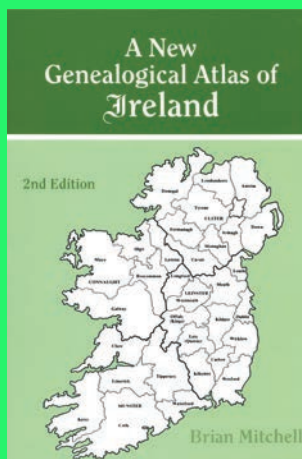
Animal lovers and children of all ages will enjoy this third book of lively cat tales.

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

"The Italian Mystery Adventures of Angus and Edmond" is published by Virtualbookworm.com. Available in hardcover at Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk and numerous other online sites.



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The Celtic Questionnaire

Eugene Kielt and his wife Gerardine own and operate Laurel Villa Boutique Guest House, a Victorian townhouse in Magherafelt, about midway between Belfast and Derry - Londonderry. The couple also runs Tours of Heaney Country, a 5-star stroll through the life, landscape and literature of Northern Ireland's greatest scribe, Seamus Heaney. Recently Eugene answered our Celtic Questionnaire.



What are your own roots?

I was brought up on a small farm in County Derry in Northern Ireland. In Irish my name is O'Caoilte, one of the oldest family names in Ireland.

When and why did your interest in Seamus Heaney begin?

I started to take an interest in Seamus Heaney in the 1970s. I went to hear him at an event in 1977. He was the first poet I ever heard in person, and he was local; he was born in a thatched farmhouse called Mossbawn about three miles from here. Castledawson was his home village, and Magherafelt was his home town. A lot of his poems were about things that were very familiar to me; the local blacksmith, churning, the flax dam, digging potatoes on the family farm, and so on.

Are they the same reasons why you remain passionate about Heaney and his work today?

Over the years, as I got to know more of Heaney's work, I began to realize that his writing touched on many aspects of life that I value - love, family, a sense of place, personal loss. I also got to know and admire Seamus Heaney the man. He was a man of

compassion, fairness and sense of community. The Irish novelist Bernard MacLaverty said, "He had a certain rooted loftiness, a down-to-earth brilliance. Everything he did brimmed with humanity."

What motivated you to start the Tours of Heaney Country?

I took a Blue Badge tour guide course at Queens University back in 1993, and then took visiting coach groups around Belfast, Derry, and the Antrim Coast. Before long, I began to realize that what I really wanted to do was to show people around my own district, and to tell them about Seamus Heaney and the people and place that inspired him, Heaney Country.

What are the challenges involved?

Most individuals and groups have a certain amount of time to spend on a tour. This can vary from one hour to one day. One of the real challenges for me is to ensure that participants enjoy the fullest possible experience within the allocated time. Another challenge is to pitch each tour at a level which suits the individual or group, bearing in mind that some guests - for example, academics - will know a lot

about Seamus Heaney, while others may know very little. The tour has to engage all, whatever their level of interest or ability.

What are the rewards?

I get great satisfaction from knowing that I have made a difference to a person's understanding of Seamus Heaney and the place where he came from, the place he loved. I would put it like this: participants do not remember all the information I have given them, but they seem to remember how the tour made them feel.

What has the reception been like?

Brilliant. A month or so ago I received the news that the tour had retained its 5-Star award from Tourism Northern Ireland. That means it is officially accredited as 'An outstanding visitor experience.' Many people find the tour quite emotional because they get the opportunity to identify up close and personal with Heaney's life and poems, many of which deal with highly emotional experiences like childhood memories, family, the death of loved ones, and so on.



How do young people respond?

I find that younger people respond to the tour just as enthusiastically as older people. Heaney seems to appeal to people right across the board, irrespective of age, nationality or social class. Nowadays, Seamus Heaney's work is firmly established in the curriculum in Ireland, Britain, and further afield. As a result, parents, schools and colleges contact me, as they want their students to experience the different settings and get an understanding of the context of the poems. Leaving academic interests aside, it's not hard for young people to identify with something like Heaney's poem *Markings*:
'Youngsters shouting their heads off in a field
As the light died and they kept on playing
Because by then they were playing in their heads'

What are your plans for the tour going forward?

People have told me that doing the tour is very useful in terms of preparation for a visit to the fantastic exhibition at the Seamus Heaney HomePlace centre in Bellaghy. It opened in late 2016, and is therefore relatively new on the tourism radar. I would like to see more people come to the centre from abroad, and also see more people take the tour.

Seamus Heaney was very well-known and critically acclaimed in North America, and I would like to see South Derry on the itinerary for more visitors from Canada and the U.S. My wife Gerardine and I run a boutique guesthouse devoted to Seamus Heaney, so there is an ideal opportunity for visitors to get the full, authentic visitor experience.

Why is it important to keep Heaney's life and work at the forefront of Northern Ireland's cultural canon?

I have been a follower of Seamus Heaney and his work for many decades. I get immense enjoyment and inspiration from his work and am guided by the example that he showed. I am delighted to be playing my part in sharing my passion with others. It is right and fitting that our finest scribe should be at the forefront of cultural life in Northern Ireland. Though he was a Nobel Laureate with universal appeal, I feel he was very much a Northern Irish writer who understood and articulated a Northern perspective. No other artist personifies this place better or more authentically.

What are the biggest changes that you have seen in Northern Ireland in recent years?

Greater political stability here has encouraged more visitors to come from outside Northern Ireland. Twenty years ago we had trouble even attracting people from the southern part of this island. The absence of violence has changed all that and this is now regarded as one of the safest of places for tourists. In addition, the tourism infrastructure has developed immensely over recent years so there are now world class visitor attractions, an excellent choice of places to stay and a range of things to do, like guided tours. Gerardine and I have been involved in tourism for many years, and we can see a greater awareness in the industry that what visitors want is a local experience which is high quality and authentic; something that appeals to their emotions as well as their pocketbooks.

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Jenny's Apple Pie



My mother-in-law, Jenny Macquarrie, was one of the kindest people I have ever met in my life. Sadly, she passed away last July. Every fall, she would make 5 pies for each of her daughters and daughters-in-law, including myself. She would deliver this to my house unbaked and frozen so I could take one out of the freezer whenever

I liked. Later in life, the number was reduced to two, still just as delicious and just as welcome. Later still, the number was reduced to one and then there were none...I often think of her and her kindnesses, of which, there were many. As another year is upon us, I honour her memory by sharing her warm and wonderful recipe for Apple Pie.



Ingredients

Pie Crust

5 cups flour
1 lb. shortening
1 large egg
1 tbsp. salt
1 tbsp. sugar

Apple Pie

8 medium size apples
1 cup white sugar
1/4 tsp. nutmeg
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
1 tbsp. cornstarch
1 tsp. lemon juice
3 tbsp. butter

Instructions

Pie Crust

Sift dry ingredients into large mixing bowl. Cut in shortening. Break egg into a 2-cup measuring cup and beat with fork. Add water to the level of the 1 cup mark. Beat again with fork. Make a well in the center of the flour mixture, pour in liquid, mixing lightly with a fork and tossing flour in from the sides until all is moistened. Knead. Wrap and keep in refrigerator until required. Makes two pies.

Apple Pie

Pare apples and slice thin. Place apples in a bowl with sugar, nutmeg, cinnamon, cornstarch, lemon juice and butter. Toss apples until covered with ingredients. Place in pie plate which has been lined with unbaked pastry. Wet the edge of the crust with cold water. Place top crust. Seal and flute the edge. Cut slits in the top crust. Bake at 450°F for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 375°F. Bake until browned and apples are tender, 45-60 minutes.

Bliadhna mhath ùr! ~ Cabrini



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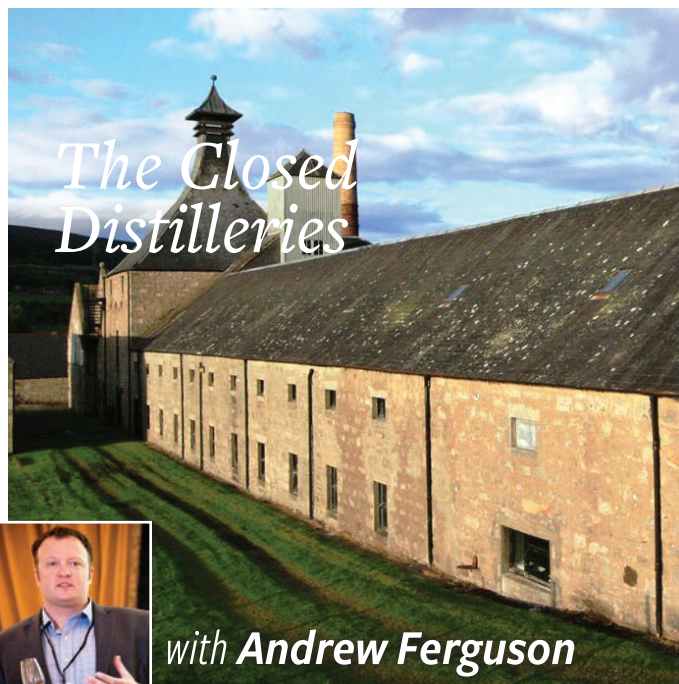
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with **Andrew Ferguson**



In October of 2017, seemingly out of the blue, it was announced that the closed distilleries of Port Ellen, Brora and Rosebank would reopen. The timing was curious to say the least; Brora and Port Ellen had been shut down since 1983, and Rosebank since 1993. The 1980s and 1990s were a turbulent time for the Scotch Whisky industry. When the whisky bubble of the 1960s and 1970s burst, the effects were disastrous. A huge proportion of Scotland's distilleries were taken out of production, many closed (seemingly forever), and those still standing saw their production cut back dramatically.

It wasn't until the early 2000s that Scotch Whisky began to catch its stride again. The boom of the 1960s and 1970s was fueled by Blended Scotch whisky. The present boom, which began in the mid-2000s, has been focused on surging global demand for single malts. Demand for whiskies from closed distilleries like Port Ellen took off during this time. In the mid-2000s, a distillery-bottled Port Ellen could be had for about \$300, with independent bottlings selling for as little as \$150. By 2010 those prices had doubled, and were heading north. Today you will be hard pressed to find an independent bottling of Port Ellen for less than \$2000, and a distillery bottling for less than \$5000. Which begs the question, if they were going to reopen the distillery, why on earth did they wait so long to do it?

As it stands Brora and Port Ellen aren't set to reopen until 2020, by which time they

will both have been closed for nearly 40 years. In the case of Brora at least, the distillery's single pair of stills and its buildings remain relatively intact. They will likely be able to recreate a spirit profile close to that which has brought it such fame over the last few decades. The promise of recreating Port Ellen is far more nebulous. The distillery will be housed in a new building kitted out with all new equipment replicated from "detailed records." Only time will tell whether either spirit will resemble that of its forbearer. Still, I ask why reopen them, and why now?

The cynic in me sees two motives; envy and greed. Envy on the part of Scotland's largest drinks company, jealously coveting some of the attention and excitement being lavished on the nearly two dozen new distilleries which have opened in Scotland over the last few years. Many of these are selling futures of their new make spirit, and/or will be bottling inaugural releases at inflated (collectible) prices. I also see an element of greed, as they must surely be getting close to running out of casks of Brora and Port Ellen to bottle of these rare malts, and that will entail a loss revenue.

I want to give them the benefit of the doubt; I want to believe the new whiskies will be good and live up to the enormous reputation of the originals. And I want to believe that they are doing it for the right reasons. Their press release says the decision was influenced in part by "demands from existing enthusiasts, but it also reflects the strong growth in the single malt Scotch

market and the opportunity to create new generations of whisky consumers."

But again, the cynic in me suspects it is because they think there is a gold rush of new distillery whisky releases coming, and they want their share of that pie too. Can we expect to see \$200 inaugural release 3 year olds in 2023? I wouldn't be surprised!

Independent bottlings of Brora and Port Ellen are getting rarer, but they offer considerably better value than the distillery bottlings.

Gordon Macphail Rare Old Port Ellen 1980; *The best priced whisky from this closed distillery we can find, with candied fruits, liquorice, and buttery-oily peat. A bargain at \$1900.*

Port Ellen 37 Year 18th Release; *A very well reviewed, classic Port Ellen, at a big price-point. Oily, with bbq, spicy peat, and white fruits. \$5250*

Gordon Macphail Rare Old Brora; *The only Broras we have seen in recent years, other than the official bottlings, have been from Gordon Macphail. Tropical and waxy, with clean peat, smoke. \$1200*

Brora 34 Year 2017; *Like this year's official release of Port Ellen, the Brora has been well reviewed. Layers of fruit, classic waxy tones, and gentle peat. \$2200*

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In the Name of the Son; the Gerry Conlon Story

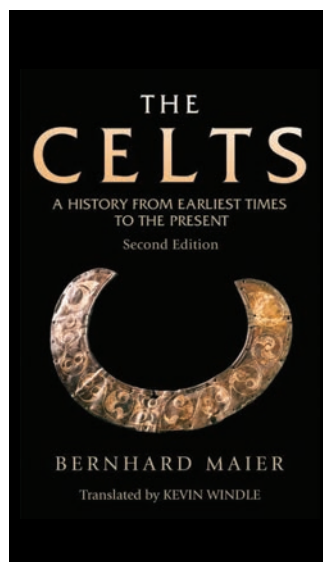
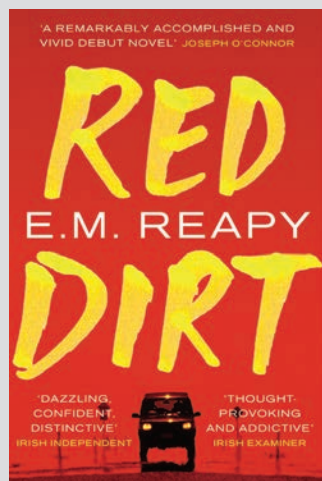
By Richard O'Rawe
Merrion Press / 252 pp / €13.99

After fifteen years of wrongful imprisonment for the 1974 bombing of the Guildford Pub, Gerry Conlon blew almost €1 million of British government compensation money in just five years. Broke, broken, addicted, alcoholic, and suicidal, the former Falls Road resident hit rock bottom. Before dying of lung cancer in 2014, Conlon rebuilt his life, becoming a leading civil rights activist both at home and abroad. Though his legal struggle was masterfully told in the 1993 film *In the Name of the Father*, Conlon's childhood friend Richard O'Rawe gives us a stirring glimpse of the man behind the myth. More than a rags-to-riches-to-rags-to-riches story, and forwarded by Johnny Depp, the book paints a powerful portrait of a people and place during Northern Ireland's most troubled times. ~ SPC

Red Dirt

By E.M. Reapy
Trafalgar Square Publishing
364 pp / \$22.95

First published in 2016 to great critical and popular acclaim, and recently released in North America, Elizabeth Reapy's first full length novel follows the trials and tribulations of three Irish ex-pats in Australia as they drift from job to job, and from place to place, in search of identity and belonging. The Mayo-born, Belfast-educated author does well to capture and convey both ideas and emotions, as the trio comes to terms with a horrific act of cruelty in the arid outback down-under, leaving them shattered and longing for the comforts and familiarity of the Emerald Isle. Despite the wild ride, this isn't a comely Celtic version of *On The Road*; instead, the award-winning, coming-of-age narrative explores the seedy underbelly of transience, vice, guilt, and shame. ~ SPC



The Celts

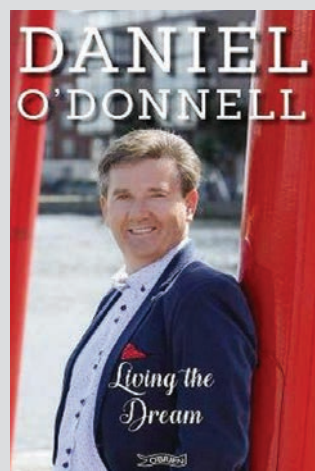
By Bernhard Maier
Edinburgh University Press
392 pp / €19.99

A professor of Religious Studies and the European History of Religions at the University of Tübingen, and former professor in Celtic at the University of Aberdeen, Bernhard Maier is the world's foremost authority on Celtic history. Originally published in 2000, and newly available as an updated second edition, the voluminous tome remains the definitive document on the subject. Divided into three parts, and accentuated with maps, sketches, photos, chronologies, footnotes, and more, the author draws on archaeological, historical, literary and linguistic evidence to offer readers a comprehensive overview, from past to present. Though not for the faint of head or heart, the work is an essential read for anyone wishing to better understand the Celtic people's profound impact and their place in the world today. ~ SPC

Living the Dream

By Daniel O'Donnell
O'Brien Press / 256 pp / €19.99

Although younger listeners likely have no time, nor appreciation, for Irish crooner Daniel O'Donnell, there is no denying his immense vocal talent - nor, apparently, his writing skills. While many musical autobiographies are chock full of ego and self-promotion, *Living the Dream* is - like the man himself - humble, honest, heartfelt and humorous. From modest roots to the biggest stages, O'Donnell focuses less upon himself, and more upon the people and places that have had a profound impact on his profession. When he does share his thoughts and feelings, it is fashioned in the most Irish of ways; with warmth, wisdom and wit. Hardcore fans will welcome the work, and young readers will develop a new appreciation for both the man and his music. ~ SPC





VERSATILE VAN MORRISON

Van Morrison

Versatile

It has been a banner year for the Belfast bard; in September, the 72-year-old released *Roll With the Punches*, rocketing to the top of the charts. His 38th studio recording, *Versatile*, is sure to do the same, as the ageless crooner scoots and scats his way through 16 terrific and timeless tracks of smooth standards and old-school soul. Backed by a super show-tune band, Van the Man hits all the high notes on *Broken Record*, *Take it Easy Baby*, and *I Get a Kick Out of You*. Fresh takes on *Bye Bye Blackbird*, *Makin' Whoopee*, and *Unchained Melody* get straight to the heart of the music, reminding listeners just how... well... versatile Morrison is as both an arranger and performer. Here's hoping he keeps hopping and bopping. ~ SPC

U2

Songs of Experience

The much-delayed follow-up to 2014's *Songs of Innocence*, U2's 14th studio album comes of age with all the aches and pains of middle age. While the Irish supergroup retains its signature sound, aided by the stellar sonic workings of no less than nine producers, the band soars off into new thematic directions; at their lyrical core, *Love is All We Have Left*, *Lights of Home*, *The Little Things That Give You Away*, and *13 (There is a Light)*, bring mortality into focus, as if front-man Bono - perhaps inspired by recent, undisclosed health issues - can see the end.

Thankfully, the smart-pop sensibilities of *American Soul*, *Red Flag Day*, and the first single,

You're the Best Thing About Me, keep the heaviness in check. ~ SPC



Various Artists

Celtic Colours Volume 5

The world's biggest and best Celtic music gathering takes place each October in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. For those who have yet to take in the sights and sounds of the Celtic Colours International Festival, not to worry; organizers compile stand-out tracks from the previous year's event into musical mementos that will surely inspire you to attend down the road. Volume 5 in the annual series is simply exceptional, with outstanding sound production, and powerful performances from the likes of Còig, Dwayne Côté, Ímar, Sarah MacInnis, Talisk, Daoirí Farrell, Allan MacDonald and more. While the individual pieces succeed at showcasing the sonic diversity of Celtic music, it is the thread of common cultural customs that weave this work into another warm and welcoming musical mosaic.

~ SPC

Hibernia

Wide Waters

Those with a penchant for purity will take pride and pleasure in this debut offering from Ottawa-based duo Hibernia. Both vocalist Ellen MacIsaac and harpist Susan Toman have rich and robust roots in all things Celtic, and the 14 traditional tunes of *Wide Waters* capture and convey the spirit of the living, breathing cultures of Ireland and Scotland with fine and tender melodies drifting gently over the subtle plucks of single notes. More than a collection of songs, however, the recording serves as a soundtrack, or a dreamscape, for either a soft summer's day or a cold, shimmering winter's eve. At the forefront of the pair's musical philosophy is the drive and desire to preserve and promote Celtic customs. As such, very well done ladies! ~ SPC





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Matt Willis

Matt Willis of Texas may not be Celtic, but his passion for the pipes suggests otherwise

Matt Willis describes his heritage as “Northern European mutt.”

While his mother may claim that there is Irish blood in his lineage, the 39-year-old instrumentalist is skeptical, having identified mainly English, Dutch and German roots.

“One of these days I will get around to doing one of those DNA/ancestry tests to find the real answer,” he shares via email. “I’d love to be proven wrong and to find a real link to a Celtic nation.”

The seeming lack of Celtic ancestry appears not to have held Willis back, as he currently plies his trade as pipe major of the Metroplex United Pipe Band of Dallas, as a founding member of the Celtic rock band Rathmore, and as a busy piping instructor.

“Rathmore allows me to play in a freer and more open style, which works wonderfully with the fiddle and guitar. I also love the opportunity to show how the pipes can be incorporated into modern rock, not just traditional music.”

After competing successfully at the World Pipe Band Championships in Glasgow - a career highlight - he was contacted by now-defunct Dallas band, The Kildares, who asked him to join them at the State Fair of Texas in 2004.

“It was a grueling 168 shows over a 24-day period, but there I was playing the pipes with a rock band.”

He stayed with The Kildares until the band broke up in 2016, immediately co-founding Rathmore in the aftermath.

“Former Kildares’ guitarist Mike Urness, bass player Gary Thorne, and I decided we weren’t done making the music we love, so we went to work forming our new band. Our good friend, the amazing drummer Matt Thompson, and a truly gifted fiddler, Kat Kratzer, round out the rest of the group.”

He concedes that his biggest challenges are those shared by anyone who is self-employed - no paid sick days and no paid holidays among them - but he is grateful for the opportunity to make music, make friends, and visit new places.

“Most days my commute is a flight of stairs. But I also get to perform at some of the most important moments in people’s lives, including weddings and memorials.”

Willis’ interest in the pipes goes back to his early childhood, and he insists no other instrument has given him the challenges or the joy of the pipes.

“My first exposure to the pipes was, funnily enough, in the film *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. I was about six years old when it aired on TV, and after seeing Scotty play Amazing Grace on the pipes at Spock’s funeral I started asking for bagpipes. It sort of became a running joke around the house, as I would ask for a set every chance I got, be it a good grade, Christmas or birthday. My interest was rekindled in my teenage years going to Renaissance Faires and seeing groups like The Rogues and Clandestine.”

With a stable full of equipment, it can be challenging to keep six or so sets of pipes in optimum condition. His main set is a modern P. Henderson bagpipe which is dear to his heart.

“It is a brilliant instrument and the thistle engraving on the metalwork is gorgeous. I also have a set of ‘The Robbies’ by MacGillivray/Dunbar.”

For live shows he favours two different sets of electronic pipes made by Redpipes; their classic model, and their Redpipes Caledonia.

“I love the flexibility to easily change keys as well as not having tuning issues. I also have a set of Fred Morrison reelpipes, a set of Tidy Cottage Scottish small pipes, a set of R. G. Hardie & Co twist trap practice pipes, and a Seth Gallagher set of uilleann pipes for when I branch out into other sounds.”

Willis believes that bands such as Rathmore, which will soon record its debut album, do their part to preserve and promote Celtic tradition by marrying it with modern music.

“I have been attending Scottish and Irish festivals for nearly 20 years now, and attendance continues to grow and new festivals continue to be created. From my perspective, more and more people are getting in touch with their heritage or, in my case, with a heritage that calls out to them even if they aren’t of Celtic descent.”

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Musician, teacher, composer and fiddle-maker ~ Don Roy does it all

When asked about his biggest musical influences, fiddler Don Roy points to home; his uncle Norman placed a guitar in his hands when he was just six years old. Nine years later, it was his uncle Lucien who gave him his first fiddle, taught him to play, and helped him to get involved in regional contests.

"The love of the music is what got me started and continues to inspire me today," shares Roy, who currently acts as music director of Fiddle-icious: Maine's largest fiddle orchestra. "That, and the desire to pass it on - to keep fiddle music a living thing."

Outside of his own family, Roy - who has been described as the dean of Franco-American fiddling - has drawn inspiration from the likes of Graham Townsend, Jean Carrignan, and Paul Cormier (AKA Monsieur Pointu).

"I would stack six or seven albums on the record player every night and let it go as I went to sleep," he recalls. "Sometimes I would put the device on sixteen speed to figure out the tune. Today I listen and continue to be influenced by many of the same players that initially caught my attention decades ago. There are many young players now who perk up my ears too."

Over the years, Roy has played with a bevy of bands, including the Maine French Fiddlers (earning him a place onstage at Carnegie Hall), as well as the Don Roy trio, in which he is joined by his wife Cindy on piano, and bassist Jay Young.

He received Individual Artist Fellowship Awards from the Maine Arts Commission in 1994, 2001, and 2008, and has also received the Harold Carter Memorial award for country fiddling.

Roy's largest project, Fiddle-icious, is heading into its 15th season.

"We accept all levels of musicians," he explains of the 140-member troupe. "Our aim is to preserve the cultural heritage of Maine's traditional fiddle music. At our bi-monthly meetings, we join together to learn

traditional tunes, dances and songs passed down from our Scottish, Irish, Quebecois, and Acadian ancestors."

As an open, community-based orchestra, people can drop in to sessions and learn a few tunes without committing to any performances. Roy even writes simpler harmony lines so beginners can easily find a place in the group.

"Some folks travel over an hour or more to come to rehearsals. People find out about us from seeing a concert, or by visiting our website or our Facebook page, and also by word-of-mouth. Many of our members pitch in with the tasks of running our organization and, over time, almost everyone picks up a volunteer job at some point."

Every year, Fiddle-icious plays four concerts at the end of October. Performances are typically concentrated in southern Maine, in such locales as Bethel, Farmington and Biddeford. This past year, the group made its way to Topsham, South Portland, Gorham, and Lewiston.

"Our audiences are very enthusiastic. You see a lot of smiles and toes tapping. The music brings back good memories for many older people. I get 80-year-olds talking to me about their grandparents playing the fiddle. I like it when people tell me it's happy music."

Along with being a musician, instructor and composer, Roy also plies his passion into woodworking. His love of music and crafting came together when he crafted his first fiddle in 2001.

"I play instruments that I have made myself. If I owned a better instrument built by someone else, I would play it."

Roy makes instruments for others as well, and sells to people all over the U.S. He believes that the fiddle has been experiencing a revival of sorts - largely thanks to the internet, and particularly, YouTube.

"In the last 10 or 15 years, young fiddlers are able to experience and learn from other young fiddlers online. That's made a world of difference keeping the heritage alive. I see it here at home."

"Celtic culture is very active here in Maine. There are festivals, and workshops, and camps, and lots of teachers. Contra dancing is really big across the state, and many young people find their way into the music through that avenue also."

Roy admits that there is still work to be done, however. "Having places for people to play together is key to having them pick up an instrument. I mean, that is how Fiddle-icious got started. The members enjoy being part of a community that brings joy and purpose to all who participate - all while keeping the musical tradition alive and thriving."

www.fiddleicious.com





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Paula Roberts

Paula Roberts has her feet on the ground and her eyes to the skies

It was the Spanish style of flamenco that first captured the heart of Prince Edward Island-based dancer Paula Roberts. However, she eventually tapped into her Irish roots as well.

"I grew up with a French-speaking mother and an English-speaking father," shares Roberts via email. "Interestingly, though, both of my grandmothers had parents who were born in Ireland, and perhaps that is why I have always been drawn to Celtic history. My grandmother on my mother's side told me that her father, Thomas Galy, came to Canada from Northern Ireland and worked on the railway in the 1930s. He and his French wife had four children. When my grandmother was four years old, both her parents left for Ireland and abandoned their children. All four children were adopted by French families. Although I was born in New Brunswick, I spent the majority of my childhood and adulthood living on Prince Edward Island, a place that is steeped in Celtic traditions."

Roberts' love of dance began at age six, after seeing the 1983 short Canadian documentary film *Flamenco* at 5:15.

"I remember feeling the passion, like a moving musician," she recalls. "Later in life, I picked up the art of choreography when I was doing gymnastics in school. My coach would laugh at how much detail I would incorporate into the choreography of my gymnastic routines. I always knew that dance was in me. I used to get together with friends and have dance-offs, and they tried to prompt me to do solos for their friends and family members. Even though I was flattered, I never took it seriously."

"There was a singular moment, however, where I recognized the dancer in me ~ one that set me on a path that gave me a reason for being, and let me live an inspired life."

That awakening came in 1997, when Roberts was staying with her grandmother in New Brunswick, working at a convent. After watching Michael Flatley's televised performance of *Lord of the Dance* at that year's Academy Awards, there was simply no turning back.

Soon after, she rented a *Lord of the Dance* tape and began to seek out Irish dance instructors. And while she couldn't find anyone proficient in that particular discipline, she did find a flamenco teacher and a ballet teacher. Roberts' own determination - and a friend who shared her interest - eventually allowed her to learn the Irish style.

"I studied the *Lord of the Dance* tapes for hours and hours. I got a pair of tap shoes, and then a pair of Irish shoes. Even though the Irish shoes were clunky, and it took some time to figure out how to use them, the possibilities excited me."

A couple of months later, while working at an Inn in Stanley Bridge, PEI, fate intervened.

"Once again, synchronicity - even perhaps divinity - would reveal itself to me," remembers Roberts. "A girl I was working

with at the time just so happened to be a very experienced step dancer and teacher. We became friends, due in large part to our shared love of both *Lord of the Dance* and *Riverdance*. For us, these shows were like the biggest thing in the world."

Since those early days, Roberts' hard work has brought her to places she only once dreamed of, including New York, Las Vegas, and Toronto. She even landed a private audition for *Riverdance*. She's had multiple solo shows on PEI, sharing her own brand of creative choreography with captivated audiences. One of her most memorable experiences took place in Dublin, Ireland, where she performed at a private conference for the FBI.

"That was the first time anyone had ever asked for my autograph."

Although she notes that "any opportunity I have to share dance on stage is a career highlight for me," she is still in hot pursuit of her biggest dream - "to create and choreograph a world-touring dance show."

"It has been a long journey, but I feel as excited about the prospect of fulfilling that vision now as I did when I first started - perhaps that is the bit of Irish in me that stubbornly doesn't give up!"

www.paularobertsofficial.com



Winnie MacDonald; 1917 - 2017



Sadly, Celtic Life International recently lost its oldest subscriber; 100 year-old Winnie MacDonald.

Affectionately known as the Queen of Lanark, a tiny rural community outside Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Winnie was an enthusiastic supporter of Celtic music in her home province, and renowned for her Highland hospitality. For more than 50 years she accompanied her fiddler husband Hugh A. MacDonald at dances, weddings, picnics, and the ordination of priests. Years after her husband's death, fearing the loss of traditional fiddle-playing, she and her daughter, the late Janice MacGillivray, took up fiddle lessons.

"It is entirely thanks to them that we learned to play the fiddle and carry on the tradition," said granddaughter Kendra MacGillivray, who has toured internationally and now teaches in Halifax.

Grandson Troy MacGillivray, who - like his sister Kendra - is an award-winning fiddler, kept in close touch with his grandmother during a recent tour of Canada and the United States. Their conversations always included music.

"She taught me many tunes and made sure I heard various players on old tapes," he recalls. "She would teach either by fiddle, piano, or by lilting the tunes or singing the melodies. She always had music rolling around in her head."

Winnie, who died just days after her milestone birthday, was a proud descendant of the Bogainn MacDonalds of the Isle of Eigg, who settled in Nova Scotia in the 1780s.

Her childhood was marked by hardship and poverty; her father died young, and her mother, with too many mouths to feed, sent her to New York City at age 12 to help at her aunt's boarding house. Her only happy memories of that time were of learning to play her aunt's piano to accompany a couple of Cape Breton fiddlers.

Upon returning to Antigonish, she was asked to play for a fiddler at an outdoor show, soon becoming a musical mainstay at concerts, house parties and dances, often walking long distances or travelling by horse and wagon or by rowboat.

Hugh A. MacDonald, known locally as Hughie No. 11 - for the lot his ancestors secured at Lanark - was an accomplished fiddler who had recorded in Montreal. Winnie began to accompany him at his performances, and though he was 30 years her senior, agreed to marry him at the age of 21.

Their son, John Hugh - one of seven siblings, whose own daughters Cassie Anne and Maggie Jane MacDonald are currently touring Europe with fiddles, guitars and a piano - was surprised to learn that it may have been his mother who first considered the matrimonial match.

"Just recently she told me that she had seen my father dancing in a set one night and decided that he was the man for her. Her own mother was against the marriage because of the difference in age, but

my mother was determined. She remained a very determined woman throughout her life."

Another son, Dennis, suggests that Winnie's life could be divided into two 50-year segments.

"The first half involved a lot of very hard work, first as a child and then as a young woman raising a family on a farm. The second half was made a little easier by modern conveniences. Both, however, were enriched by music."

John Hugh remembers nights of sitting with a brother at the top of the farmhouse stairs, listening in the shadows, while his parents and neighbours played in the parlour below.

"She might be milking cows in the morning, then going to a nearby pond to wash the clothes, and then cooking the rest of the day, but she was full of energy for the music in the evening."

For many years, Winnie cared for elderly in-laws, and then for aging members of her own family. As Dennis recalls, she did everything with good humour.

"No matter what she was doing, she'd drop it if someone came to the door. She would go where she was needed or she'd put the tea pot on. Nobody left without a lunch and they often got a tune, too. Nobody was a better cook or baker, and she could sew, knit or quilt with the best of them."

Granddaughter Kendra recalls that her grandmother, who made much of her own clothing, including hats, always had a sense of style and stage presence.

"She'd be quick to tell you when you needed a splash of colour or something to catch the eye at a performance. She had real style, and she tried to pass that on to us, as well as the music and the faith."

In later years, Winnie used an iPad, and did lexicons regularly to keep her mind sharp. Her excellent memory was valued by genealogists, and her wit and humour made her a natural storyteller.

"It is a great loss in terms of knowledge," continues John Hugh. "She knew the family history, but also the history of the community in detail. She knew the stories told to her by my father so she was able to go back way beyond her 100 years and a lot of that history related to music."

Her long life was governed by the Celtic triangle of music, family and faith. Recently honoured for more than 80 years of service to the Catholic Women's League, her days began and ended with the rosary.

As family gathered for her 100th birthday in November, Winnie's great-granddaughter - four-year-old Ruby Janice MacDonald - was competing on a dance stage in Antigonish. Soon after, with two medals in hand, she was photographed with her great-grandmother.

"My grandmother was so pleased to see those medals, to see the music and dance carrying on in her great-grandchildren," remembers granddaughter Sabra MacGillivray, a Highland dancer of international acclaim who now choreographs and teaches Highland and step dancing. "She was so much a part of our lives, taking us to lessons and practices, and never missing a competition or a show."

Grandson Troy, who titled one of his albums *Eleven* in honour of his musical family, notes Winnie's all-time favourite tunes were clogs and hornpipes.

"She particularly liked them in the key of B-flat and F, but mostly B-flat. Any of those tunes will always remind me of her."

Fittingly, many of her close relatives played and sang at her funeral.

"Myself and my sisters, Kendra and Sabra, along with our father Tony, and our cousins Cassie and Maggie MacDonald, played 'My Home' with Margaret MacDonald McGregor on the organ. For the recessional, on the way out of mass, we were joined by fiddlers Glenn Graham, Stan Chapman, and John Pellerine for 'McDonaugh's Clog' - a lovely and fitting last tune."

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