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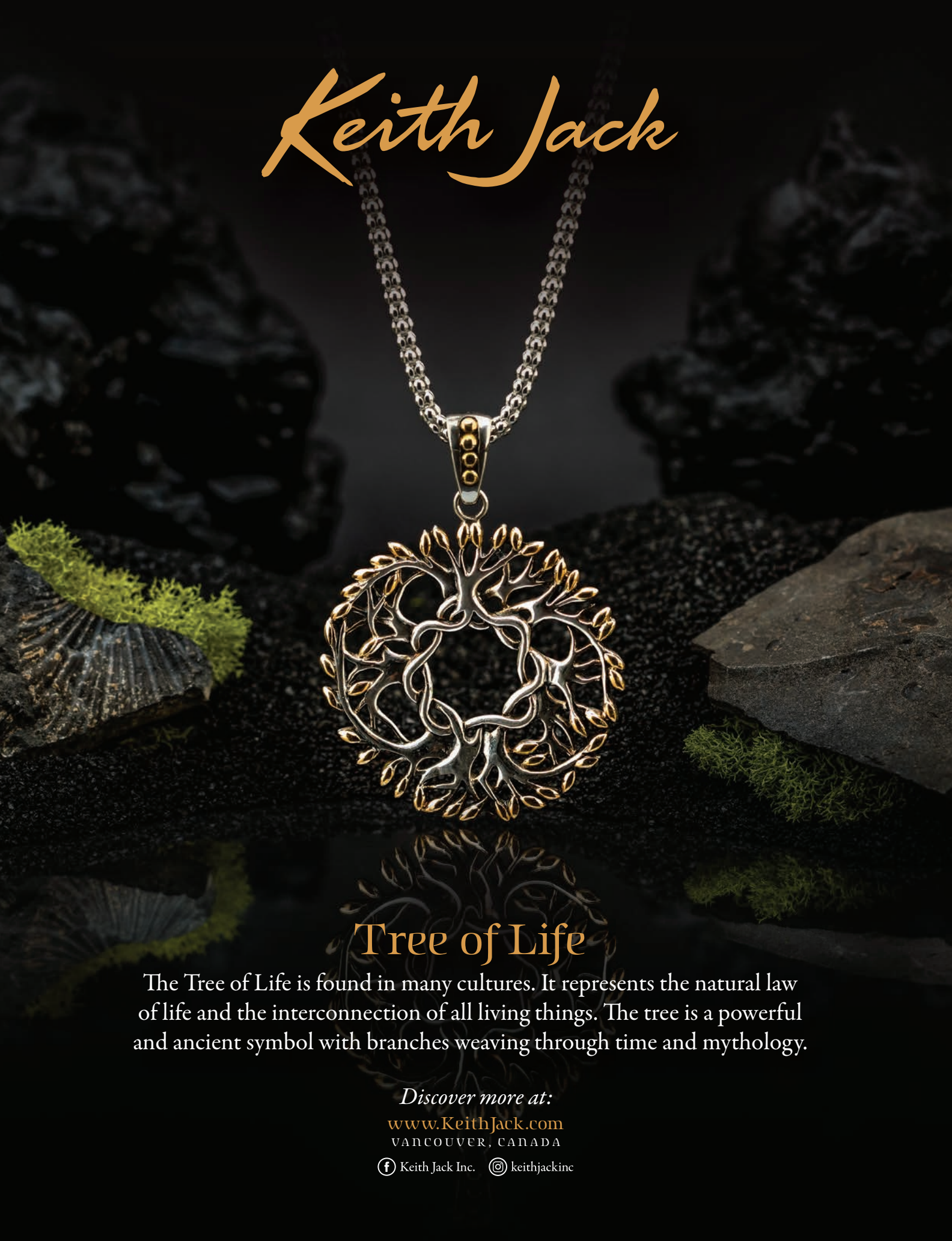
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Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher
Stephen Patrick Clare, CEO & Editor-in-Chief
Rebecca Dingwell, Senior Writer
Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns, Senior Writer
Chris Muise, Senior Writer
Carol Moreira, Senior Writer

Celtic Life International Office:
Phone: 902-835-CELT (2358)
Toll-Free: 888-215-6850
Email: info@celticlife.com
Website: www.celticlife.com

Subscriptions:
Phone: 902-835-CELT (2358)
Toll-Free: 888-215-6850
Email: subscribe@celticlife.ca

Advertising:
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Contributors
Lesley Choyce
Andrew Ferguson
Tom Langlands
Rae McKinlay
Cabrini Macquarrie
Ken McGoogan

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Fáilte!

The Celtic Market

"The Irish Goodbye" is a term used to describe someone who quietly steps out of a party, usually without a word to anyone. While its origins are up for debate, some say it arose out of the mass exodus from Ireland following the potato famine of the mid-1800s.

Whatever the case, another adieu of sorts will be taking place over the coming months, though not nearly as clandestine; after 58 years of writing, recording and performing traditional Irish music, The Chieftains bid a final and fond farewell with "The Irish Goodbye" world tour, which kicks off this February. Amazingly, the band's music remains as fresh and relevant today as when they began almost six decades ago! The group's founder and leader Paddy Moloney has said that he "had a dream, like Martin Luther King" to bring the gospel of Irish culture to the world.

As we welcome in 2020, the opportunity to share our Celtic heritage has never been better, and between our flagship magazine and our online channels we are proud to be reaching many thousands of Celts each month.

The worlds of print publishing and digital platforms were once thought to be incompatible. However, our efforts in recent years have shown that these distinct mediums can walk hand-in-hand, complementing one another and creating a more complete and wholistic experience for our readers.

To further enhance that experience, we are thrilled to announce the launch of our latest initiative, The Celtic Market, an online e-commerce site that addresses the unique needs and wants of our niche community with an amazing array of one-of-a-kind and hard-to-find items from across the Seven Celtic Nations and beyond.

Like our flagship publication that you now hold in your hands (or on your mobile device), The Celtic Market reflects the four pillars of our core mandate; specialization, expertise, quality and variety. And while "big-box" online stores like Amazon, eBay, and others do well to meet online shopping needs, studies show that niche markets like ours are best served by niche online shops. In short, we know our marketplace better than anyone.

The idea to develop and implement an international, online multi-vendor market is an extension of our commitment to better serve our Celtic community. Bringing buyers and sellers together is both exciting and rewarding. And while we might not be as creatively prolific as Paddy Moloney and his musical minstrels, we are doing our part - working with the likes of Harris Tweed, Guinness and Ancestry.com - to better preserve and promote our rich and robust culture.

As such, we invite you to visit us at www.celticlife.com

Enjoy and may God Bless!
Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher

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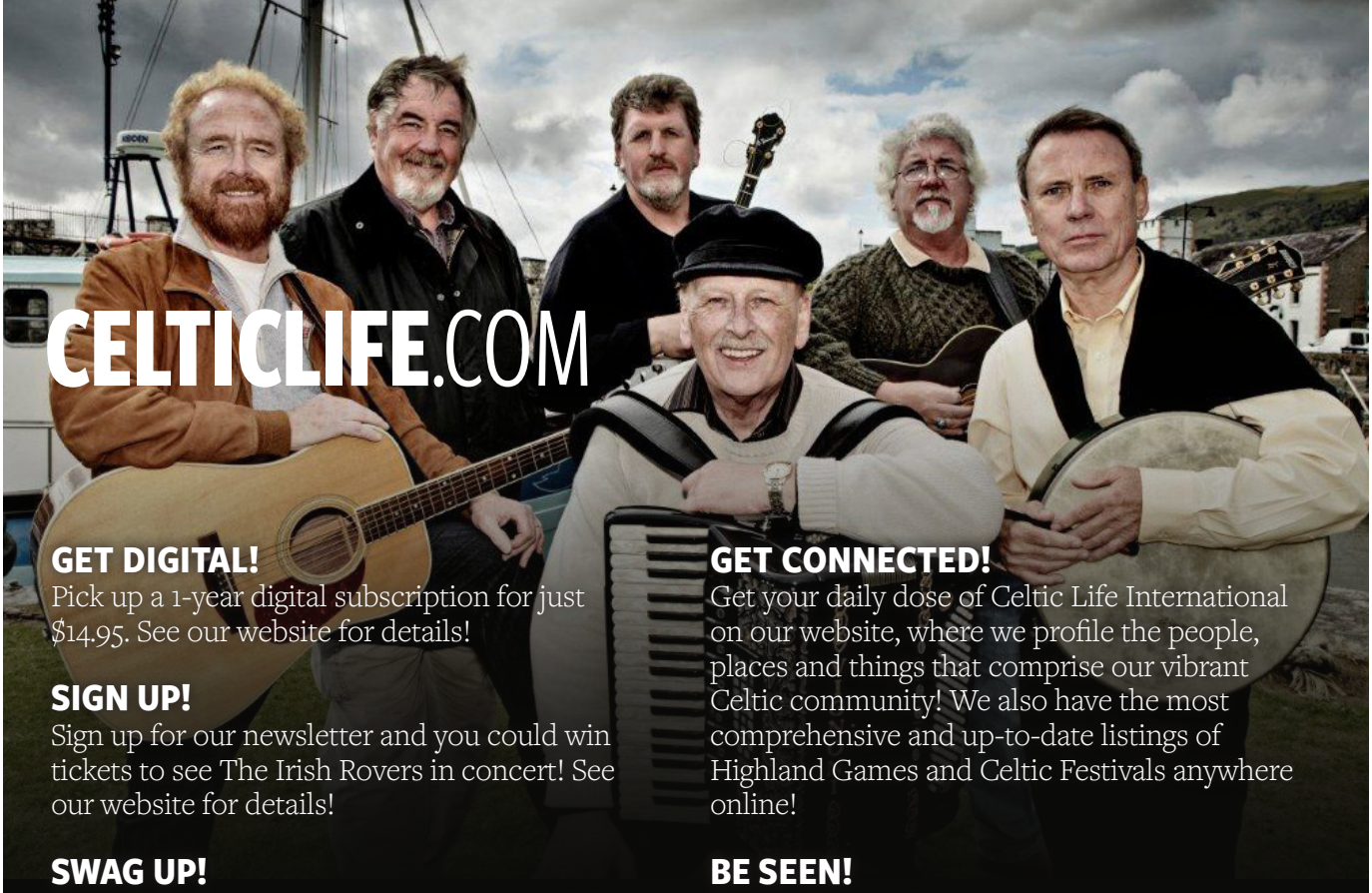
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Celtic storytelling

Celtic Life International correspondent Rae McKinlay explores the ancient art of Celtic storytelling

The open crackling fire greeted me when I walked into the pub on the night of the waxing moon. It offered both comfort and warmth, easing my apprehension. It was my second time at a storytelling gathering in Cork, but I sensed the welcoming ambience in the room as soon as I came through the door. The night flowed with stories, each of which wove its own particular magic over the hushed room.

Crack open a stone in Ireland and you will unearth a story. They are everywhere; in the rivers, in the mountains, and in our place names. The Emerald Isle is a place rooted in one of the richest and most oral folklore traditions in the world. Tales of epic voyages and transformations, of sorrow and loss, of Kings and Queens, and of quests for love, have been spun around the Irish hearth for centuries.

The storyteller - or seanchaí - was once a powerful and influential figure here, travelling from village to village, preserving the country's old lore and history. The storyteller was highly respected until the 17th Century and the advent of The Age of Reason and, thus, the written word. Before then, even Kings would be careful in their engagement with the seanchaí for fear of being cursed by him. Though storytellers were eventually removed from their high status, the custom continued. In time, however, they would wander penniless across the country, hoping for a bowl of broth for sustenance and an eager ear to hear accounts of old.

Cautionary tales which advised people of the foolishness of getting on the wrong side of the "little people" were voiced by the fire.

> *In parts of Ireland stories would only be told in the evening because many people held the belief that the fairy folk disliked a story being told before dark.*

In addition to sharing Irish myths and legends, the storyteller also served as the bearer of tradition, particularly with regard to the importance of home and family. Often, the tradition-bearer would be female, and her repertoire would include anecdotes of those who had heard the terrifying wail of the Bean Sidhe and had died as a result.

As I sat around the open fire that night I was enchanted by the power of story, propelled to destinations where time stood still, and characters and places long gone had come alive. A good storyteller does not view a story as something merely to be performed, but a treasure to be gifted on. Thus, the listener is an important element of storytelling. Storytelling is interactive, participatory and intimate. Without an audience of one or more, there would be no storytelling.

Whether fact or fiction, the importance of the narrative is in its perspective and, specifically, what truth lay within the tale itself and what can be harvested from it for personal growth.

The ancient custom remains popular in Ireland. There are now two storytelling groups in Cork alone, both of whose membership continues to grow, and there are many other groups around the country whose numbers are rising as well. The Cape Clear Storyteller Festival in Cork - which takes place each September - has proven very popular, welcoming visitors from across the country and around the world.

Thus, it would appear that - despite our newfound penchant for on-screen and technological lifestyles - people still enjoy a good story. Perhaps, as we rush headlong into our fast-paced lives, the art of storytelling offers something slower, simpler and connective. The appeal is understandable; anyone and everyone can participate, as there is something about the story's power to suggest, rather than dictate, that engages audiences. As booklovers know, a good tale can be a path for the adventurous mind to travel beyond the linear paradigm of the rational.

I am grateful for our nation's great oral storytelling tradition; both for the storytellers of the past and for the growing number of contemporary storytellers who are keeping the flame of imagination alive today and for future generations.

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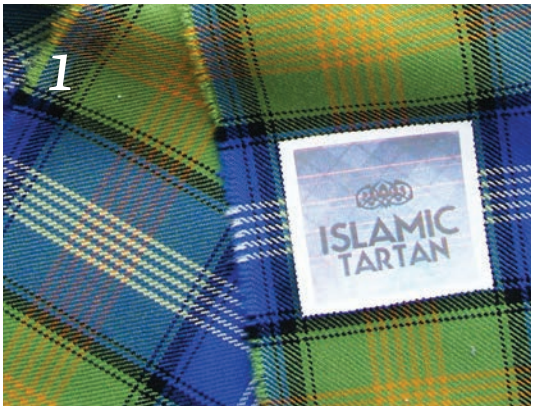
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one

Scottish Islamic Tartan

Although the Islamic tartan was created several years ago, it has been making waves on the internet more recently. The Scottish Islamic tartan was designed by Azeem Ibrahim in 2012, featuring blue (to represent Scotland's flag), Green (Islam), five white lines (the five pillars of Islam), six gold lines (the six articles of faith) and black squares (the Holy Kaaba). After Canadian human rights activist Laura Morlock recently tweeted about the design the tartan has been receiving overdue attention and praise.

two

Viking Necklace

A 1,000-year-old Viking necklace believed to once belong to a "pagan sorceress" went on display at Jorvik Viking Centre in York, England, as part of an exhibit on female Vikings. The piece of jewelry, which was uncovered during an archaeological dig on St. Patrick's Isle in 1984, was loaned to the center by Manx National Heritage. Given the nature of the woman's burial, experts say the necklace's once-owner must have been important in her community - possibly in a spiritual way. She is sometimes simply referred to as "the Pagan Lady."

three

Gaelic Filmmaker

A Halifax, Nova Scotia-based filmmaker is making a movie entirely in Gaelic. Iain MacLeod already has a successful Gaelic short film to his name, but now, he is going bigger. As recently reported by CBC Mainstreet, MacLeod's feature-length film is still in the writing stages. It's based on an early Irish literary tale called *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (or, in English, Cattle Raid of Cooley). The twist? This version of the story is set in modern day Glace Bay, Cape Breton. As of October, MacLeod has had some trouble securing the cash to bring the movie to screen, but he's continuing to look for funding.

four

Cornish Chef

Chef Jordan Bailey's restaurant was awarded two Michelin stars just four months after opening, setting a record for the Michelin Guide Great Britain and Ireland. Bailey, who was born in Cornwall, now heads the Aimsir restaurant kitchen while his wife, Majken Bech Bailey, manages the service team. The Aimsir is situated in the Cliff at Lyons hotel in County Kilgare, Ireland, which the Michelin Guide says is "worth the detour." Michelin currently publishes 28 annual titles in more than 25 countries around the world, awarding restaurants with rankings of one to three stars. Receiving even one star is considered an honour.

five

Celtic Language Skills

Duolingo, a popular language-learning website and app, now has Scottish Gaelic lessons in its repertoire. Although the app has had Irish Gaelic lessons available since 2014, the opportunity for English-speakers to learn Scottish Gaelic is a new one. Those lessons are now available for prospective learners online. Duolingo has more than 90 languages available to learn, including Welsh, French and even fictional languages like Klingon. Figures from National Records Scotland show, as of 2015, over 87,000 people in the country have at least some Gaelic skills.

six

Ancient Manx Crosses

Malew Church on the Isle of Man has been granted £16,000 towards making a collection of stone crosses more accessible to the public. The crosses, which are currently stored in the church's gallery, will instead be put on display in the north transept of the building. According to a recent BBC News article, the crosses "include two grave markers that date as far back as the 8th Century and a Viking-era standing stone decorated with images from Scandinavian mythology." The work is slated to be completed in September of 2020.

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

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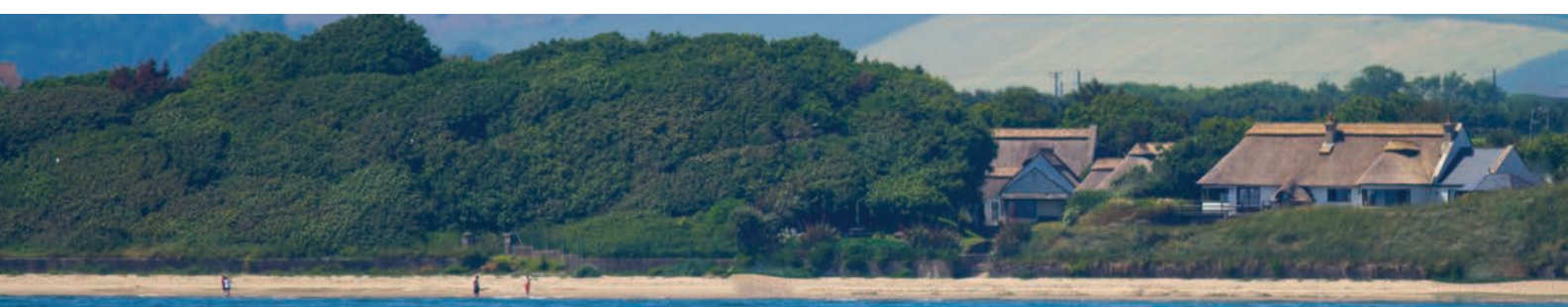



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Julia Furner

Julia Furner has created the Isle of Man's first dyslexia peer support group. Furner's daughter has dyslexia, and since she couldn't find many resources on the Isle after the diagnosis, she decided to create one. The group is aimed at both children and parents who want to learn more about the condition, raise awareness and exchange advice. "I think that has a big part to play - stigma. I've actually been asked by someone not to be very proactive in disclosing that (my daughter) has dyslexia," Furner recently told Manx Radio. "But I don't think that is helpful. It creates that - that there is something bad or wrong about having it." People with dyslexia learn differently than those without. It is often characterized by trouble with processing language, reading and writing. "There is nothing wrong with the dyslexic brain," notes the Manx Dyslexia Association (MDA) on its website. "And so there is nothing to 'fix' or to make better. Rather, the dyslexic individual needs to learn how to get around the barriers to learning that dyslexia creates." According to the MDA, "current research suggests that up to 20 percent of the population have a dyslexic brain." The Manx Dyslexia Association is aware of, and endorses, Furner's group, which meets in Douglas on a monthly basis.



Kate Bache

A Welsh entrepreneur has launched an online tool to help people going through menopause. Kate Bache has a history of helping others navigate their health, having perviously founded Kind Organic menstrual products. The Cardiff-based chemist is now focused on developing the "Health & Her" website and online shop, which she founded with Gervase Fay to address a gap she saw in the market across the United Kingdom. "Our aim is to create a single-stop resource where they can obtain advice and treatment that moves away from a 'catch all' approach, instead offering individualized solutions tailored to each woman," Bache recently told Wales247. "Our experts cover everything from the physical symptoms of the menopause, and how best to tackle them, to help understanding and addressing the psychological and social changes that the menopause can bring." Health & Her offers free advice from gynecologists, psychologists, career coaches and even make-up artists. People can also use the site to buy products intended to help deal with menopause symptoms, including books and vitamin supplements. According to Bache, there are more than 30 recognized symptoms of menopause - and a menopausal person will deal with an average of eight at varying degrees. Health & Her's online symptom tracking tool allows people to log their experience and compare their symptoms from day to day, which in turn helps users get advice and receive product recommendations specific to their needs.



Gemma Smale-Rowland

A Cornish dairy farmer is giving children the chance to see where milk comes from, while making the nutritious drink easily accessible to them. In addition, she is promoting the idea of "buying local" and keeping the environment in mind. Gemma Smale-Rowland, a fourth-generation farmer in North Cornwall, founded Cornish Moo in early 2019. Through Cornish Moo, she sells whole milk out of a vending machine at her farm gate on a daily basis. The machine dispenses milk into litre or half-litre bottles, which customers can return so that they may be re-used. This makes the venture both convenient and eco-friendly. "The purpose of Cornish Moo is to reconnect people with where their food comes from and get an understanding of what local, good produce should taste like," Smale-Rowland shared with Cornwall Live. "Customers come to the farm, see the cows and then buy the milk. If you come to us in the morning, it's just three hours from the cow to you, the customer." In addition to running her business, Smale-Rowland also leads the Launceston Young Farmers club and is the only woman to sit on the Dairy Board of the National Farmers Union. The most rewarding part of her job, she says, is having kids come by on their bicycles to buy milk after school.















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One woman works wonders with Welsh gold



Welsh creative Rhiannon Evans is a true Renaissance woman. After studying science and zoology - and later earning a PhD research degree in applied biology - she turned her attention to arts and crafts.

"I didn't want to end up in a laboratory in a major city, and there were no career paths for research scientists in rural Wales. At least, not in those days," explains Evans, who grew up in the historic county of Cardiganshire (now called Ceredigion).

After getting married, she returned to western Wales with the desire to stay.

"Tregaron at that time was a popular place for pony trekking holidays and attracted a fair number of visitors in summer," she recalls. "So, having acquired a derelict clothing store on the town square, I decided to open a shop selling the very best of craft products made in Wales."

Thus, Canolfan Cynllun Crefft Cymru (Craft Design Centre of Wales) opened its doors in 1971. For the first few years, it was a seasonal business for visitors, closing during the quieter winter months. The goal was, and remains, to preserve and promote Welsh traditions and culture through art and craft to those with little or no knowledge of its rich language and history.

"Products were selected for excellence of design and craftsmanship and I would work with the makers to ensure that most of the items on offer were representative of Wales in some way, be it nature and the countryside or the Welsh language and culture. We stocked a whole range, from quality souvenirs to collectors' pieces and future heirlooms."

It wasn't long before Evans became enamored with Celtic jewellery. She attended a Celtic art exhibition in London, inspiring her to try her hand at metalworking. Soon after, she taught herself to work with silver and gold, and jewellery quickly became a staple in the craft centre.

"The first designs were representations of tales from the Mabinogion - ancient legends of the island of Britain written in medieval Welsh. Each piece was presented along with a card explaining the story and inspiration of the design. This is a practice we have continued throughout the years and one of the things that makes Rhiannon Jewellery special."

Luckily, she notes, interest in Celtic art was growing internationally and she became part of a Celtic art revival. Luckier still, gold mining in Wales started up again in 1986, and she was commissioned to make presentation pieces for the owners of the Clogau and Gwynfynydd mines. Both mines were eventually sold to new owners, who "decided to restrict the sale of their gold to only three licensed goldsmiths." Evans was one of those three.

"While the others concentrated mainly on wedding and engagement rings, I was making a range of unique Celtic designs in Welsh Gold."

Through years of hard work, she established a reputation as a maker of genuine Welsh Gold jewellery. With the help of a small grant, she opened a showroom and demonstration workshop in her craft centre and hired two assistants.

"The Gwynfynydd gold supply ran out after a few years and, in 1990, the mine changed hands. Although it did produce small amounts of gold for a while, it was never as productive again and was eventually closed down. There has been no gold mined in Wales since then, but we have been fortunate enough to acquire the last available gold obtained in Wales under Crown License."

As Welsh gold became increasingly scarce - not to mention expensive - Evans developed Rhiannon Welsh Gold, which she describes as "a mix made to my own recipe containing 10 per cent gold mined in Wales."

After a major expansion in 2001, her business continued to grow. Today, The Rhiannon Centre encompasses the original craft design showroom, a large jewellery showroom with viewing workshops, art galleries, a coffee shop/tearoom and a small museum of ancient Celtic artifacts.

Evans lives just outside Tregaron on Mynydd Bach, where she has happily resided for more than 30 years.

"I am in the midst of wildlife and hill farms, where I can see the expanse of Cardigan Bay and the west coast of Wales and experience the dramatic seasonal and weather changes of our uplands - all of which is a constant inspiration for my work."

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Susie Wolff

Susie Wolff is driving the next generation of female motorsport talent

Susie Wolff began karting at a young age and was named British Woman Kart Racing Driver of the Year when she was only 13. She started competing professionally in 2001 and officially retired from the sport 14 years later. After hanging up her helmet, she felt it was time to pass the torch.

"I took a step back and decided that I wanted to do something really good with my experience in motorsport," shares the 37-year-old Scotswoman via email. "I recognized that whilst there were some good women in the industry, there were nowhere near enough of them."

To that end, Wolff co-founded Dare to be Different, a non-profit organization, created as a call to action to the motorsport industry.

"From my own personal experience, I felt that unless we founded a grassroots initiative specifically designed to educate, inspire and encourage young female talent, nothing would change in the long term. Doors needed to be opened."

Wolff has been advocating for women in motorsport for years. In 2013, she was awarded an honorary fellowship at the University of Edinburgh in recognition of her role as an ambassador for women in sport. In 2016, she became an ambassador for She's Mercedes, an initiative that aims to empower women by giving them a platform to share their experiences, among other things.

"For women in particular, I don't think the media and social media are always helpful; they often can project this impression of women as 'having it all'...and you can, but it comes at a cost, and you have to prioritize - and the media doesn't necessarily reflect that reality.

> *"The key comes in knowing what makes you happy, identify your priorities, and also realize that these factors can be different for everyone. No one size fits all, it is very personal."*

In February 2019, Dare to be Different announced that it would be uniting with the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA)'s Girls on Track program to create one initiative.

"Michèle Mouton (President of the FIA's Women in Motorsport Commission) and I have long been aligned when it comes to the need for (gender) parity in motor sport," says Wolff. "Uniting with the FIA in this way makes absolute sense. We are stronger together,"

Today, Dare to be Different targets girls and women aged eight to 18 who are interested in a motorsport career. Participants get the chance to meet women in different aspects of the industry, from racers to mechanics. Ambassadors include Maria Costello, Tatiana Calderon and Charlie Broughton.

"We strategically selected a wide range of enjoyable and engaging educational activities that provide a unique insight into what a potential career in the vibrant world of motorsport can offer. The next step is to reach an even wider audience and to offer our events in more locations around the globe. Our collaboration with the FIA Women in Motorsport will help us achieve this goal."

Dare to be Different has garnered a positive response from the motorsport industry as well as other businesses - particularly those involved in STEM (science, technology, engineering, math). Motorsport event promoters have allowed the group to hold events during Formula E and Formula 1 races, as well as during the Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters in Germany and the Supercars Championship in Australia. In addition, Dare to be Different has reached more than 700,000 students through school events.

"Now that we are a joint venture with the FIA, we are not focused on volume of events or trying to be the biggest. What we want to do is foster strong and lasting relationships with the ASNs (the local motorsport authorities) to ensure that the activation is strategic, meaningful and leaves a lasting impression on the young ladies who participate. The impact we have from an inspiration and education perspective is the most important thing to me."

While initiatives like Dare to be Different can help widen one's network, Wolff says the key is for young women to believe in themselves - and that applies to any field that they are working in.

"Find out what it is that you feel passionate about and go for it. Don't be scared to stand up for yourself and be seen and heard."

www.daretobedifferent.org

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M'ANAM

A multicultural supergroup gives new life to old tales and tunes



Irish-Icelandic octet M'ANAM (meaning "My Soul" in English) grew from the soul and soil of world-renowned, Eire vocal ensemble Anúna.

"The M'ANAM project came about in 2017," shares Dublin-based tenor Gavin Brennan, who is also a core member of Anúna. "There was a need and desire for the development of a new musical group with a different ethos; to create music inspired by often-overlooked cultural connections between Ireland and Iceland."

The music of M'ANAM – highlighted on their recently released, self-titled debut album - is a long way from what listeners might think of as traditional Celtic music; think more "Gregorian chants" than "Gaelic geantraí." But Brennan says projects like this are designed to expand the conception of what "Irish" music is.

"There is so much that can be done within Ireland across musical genres, and even other artforms. There is a large amount of music being created in Ireland that isn't necessarily or immediately thought of as Irish music. Irish music has much more to it than the rich traditional strand, and I believe that there is plenty of room for greater incorporation between those different genres."

He notes that many of the songs on the new recording aren't even sung in a Celtic tongue.

> *"The thread that ties the whole album together is the diversity of language, as well as the desire to perform music that tells often-forgotten stories."*

"Most of the songs are compositions based on ancient texts in languages, including Old Irish and Old Norse, along with some elements of Latin, Cajun French, English, Scots Gaelic, and contemporary Irish. On the face of it, it doesn't necessarily fit into any specific musical genre which, admittedly, might make it difficult in some ways upon first listening."

Much of the challenge came from trying to tap into the minds of those who would have originally composed the music and narrative.

"Attempting to somehow understand how a 9th-century Irish monk views the world forced us to explore a myriad of different soundscapes, as well as ways to best transmit the words through music. That dedication to forms of authenticity and empathy in the compositional stage really gives us, as musicians, the best chance of channelling the people found in these texts and their incredible stories."

While they may seem disparate, the cultural ties between Ireland and Iceland are actually quite strong and are showcased in both the narrative and the sonic textures of the album.

"Old Irish and Old Norse are two languages really connected to their respective islands at a fundamental, visceral, and cultural level," says Brennan. "Those bonds are evidenced in songs like 'Deyr Fe' - an elegy from a 10th-century Viking – and the 9th century tune 'Bitter Wind', which tells the tale of an Irishman reflecting on the stormy seas while preventing a Viking attack.

"Our album also steps outside of these languages and eras; 'Celeumae' is a piece that comes from the Roman Empire. While this song doesn't originate in either Ireland or Iceland, the ideals are connected through elements of landscape - specifically water - with the music capturing the rhythm of Roman soldiers rowing on the seas."

M'ANAM had the opportunity to undertake their first full tour this past fall, canvasing the Netherlands and Belgium. They will continue the roadwork across Europe in 2020.

So far, audiences have been both receptive and eclectic.

"What really surprised us was the diversity of listeners," says Brennan. "Traditional music fans, classical music fans, Celtic music fans, and even death metal fans."

Brennan hopes that the group's initial success suggests that music-lovers on the Emerald Isle might be more open to cross-cultural creations.

"There is a rich cultural tradition in Ireland and collaborating with other cultures will only enhance - and shine a new light - on those older customs. Establishing a common focus and mutual goal with other music genres is a crucial step, as is removing barriers to collaboration. Traditional and contemporary art forms shouldn't be segregated, but rather combined to strengthen and enhance Irish music as a whole."

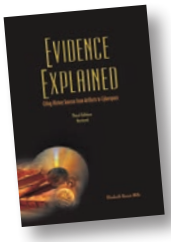
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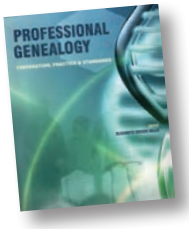
New!* HOW TO FIND YOUR FAMILY HISTORY IN U.S. CHURCH RECORDS: *A Genealogist's Guide.* With Specific Resources for Major Christian Denominations before 1900. *Sunny Jane Morton & Harold A. Henderson, CG. 8½" x 11". 154 pp., illustrated, indexed, paper. 2019. ISBN 9780806320953. **$29.95**

In these records, you may find ancestors' births, maiden or married names, marriage details, deaths, family relationships, other residences, and even immigrants' overseas birthplaces. This unique book takes you step-by-step through the process of identifying, locating, and gaining access to these genealogical gems; included are hundreds of links to church research resources, as well as chapters devoted to specific resources for the major Christian denominations before 1900.



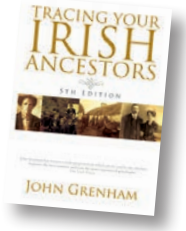
EVIDENCE EXPLAINED: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace. Third Edition Revised. *Elizabeth Shown Mills.* 892 pp., illus., indexed, hardcover. 2017. ISBN 9780806320403. **$59.95**

This is a substantial revision of the third edition, originally published in 2015. ***Evidence Explained*** is the definitive guide to the citation and analysis of historical sources. It explains citation principles for both traditional and non-traditional sources; includes more than 1,000 citation models for virtually every source type; and shows researchers where to go to find their sources and how to describe and evaluate them. Changes at major repositories and online information providers and the ever-evolving electronic world have generated new citation and analysis challenges for researchers, necessitating this updated revision. These revisions include alterations in citation methods for the DAR website and database, new citations for the National Archives (NARA) website and manner of identifying documents, immigration citations reflecting changed records at the Ellis Island website, and much more.



PROFESSIONAL GENEALOGY: Preparation, Practice & Standards. *Edited by Elizabeth Shown Mills.* 8½" x 11". 678 pp., indexed, hardcover. 2018. ISBN 9780806320724. **$59.95**

In 26 chapters, written by 22 experts and edited by Mrs. Mills, this work provides a complete course of instruction to prepare genealogists for a career in a complex field. ***ProGen PPS*** will ground you in the essential practices, standards, and language of genealogy—those expected by courts, government agencies, and others who commission research. For librarians and archivists who assist family historians, it provides a framework to coach them well. For family or local historians seeking to learn and preserve their heritage, it helps them avoid common pitfalls and guides them through the production of quality books.



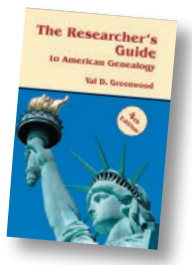
***New Fifth Edition!* TRACING YOUR IRISH ANCESTORS. Fifth Edition. John Grenham.** 672 pp., illus., indexed, paper. 2019. ISBN 9780806320946. **$49.95**

This new fifth edition combines a detailed guide for beginners with thorough descriptions of all the relevant sources and county-by-county reference lists. All the information has been expanded and updated, including an extensively expanded index. Genealogical research in Ireland has always depended on records that are more fragmented, localized, and difficult to access than anywhere else. The Internet is changing that. More and more of these records are coming online. This book is an indispensable guide to what these records are, where they are, and what they mean. It serves as a directory to online records, discussing their uses and outlining research strategies.



THE ROYAL DESCENTS OF 900 IMMIGRANTS to the American Colonies, Quebec, or the United States Who Were Themselves Notable or Left Descendants Notable in American History. Two Volumes. *Gary Boyd Roberts.* 926 & 878 pp. in all, index in Vol. 2, paper. 2018. ISBN 9780806320748. **$150.00/set**

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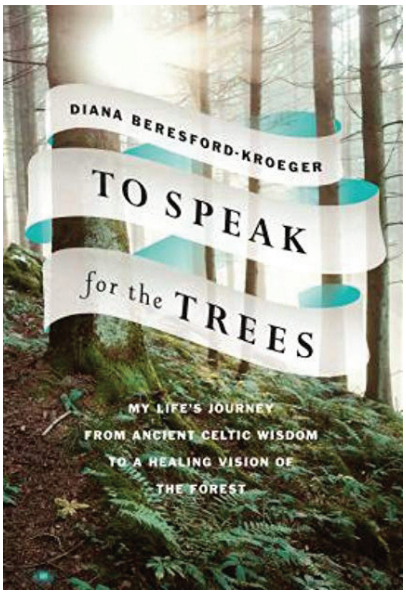


THE RESEARCHER'S GUIDE TO AMERICAN GENEALOGY. Fourth Edition. *Val D. Greenwood.* 778 pp., illus., indexed, paper. 2017. ISBN 9780806320663. **$49.95**

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Diana Beresford-Kroeger

Born in Islington, London to an Irish mother and English father, Diana Beresford-Kroeger was considered "tainted" by those around her.

"I call myself a mongrel because I have the two sides, which were always fighting," she shares over the phone from her home in Toronto. "My father's side of the family were Protestants and, indeed, my great-great-great grandfather was the head of the Church of Ireland. My mother's family were Catholics. They knocked heads over religion all my life. Additionally, my father was related to all the aristocracies in England and, consequently, I am too – quite unfortunately. My mother was also an Irish aristocrat. Her family home is the Castle of Ross in Killarney, which is around the southern lake of Killarney. My mother's family is probably one of the oldest families in Ireland, and I have a pedigree of lineage in Ireland that goes back about 3,000 years. I am the last one holding this lineage. So, you see, I am a bit weird."

It wasn't until the passing of her parents that Beresford-Kroeger first took interest in the natural world. Sent to live with her uncle - a decision unique for that time, as orphans were typically sent to the notorious Catholic institution the Magdalene Laundry - the 12-year-old was introduced to ancient Celtic culture and customs.

"In the wintertime, I was sent to a private school run by nuns, but in summer I was sent to my mother's family home, the Valley of Lisheens. In this valley there was the last bit of true Celtic culture because the English could not get up there. It was surrounded by slate mountains, and the horses' hooves would get cut to pieces trying to get up there. We had the old Irish laws, the Brehon Laws, and during my time there I was taught all of these things. I was taught about medicine and all of the ancient cures. I was taught everything. I was also taught about the triad, the Celtic focus on body, mind and soul. I had 22 people teaching me all the old ways. That was my inherited knowledge."

She went on to earn double degrees in Medical Biochemistry and Classical Botany, and later received a master's degree, a PhD and an Honorary Doctorate of Laws. She always paid mind to her early Celtic learnings, however.

"The Celts have a deep respect for nature; within nature there is a form of divinity, and everything is connected."

Beresford-Kroeger has since worked all across the world in support of the earth's fragile ecosystem; she has developed a highly effective environmental strategy called the Bio-plan, and she has worked on a number of creative projects, including a documentary film titled Call of the Forest.

Her latest literary effort - her seventh tome - is titled To Speak for the Trees; My Life's Journey from Ancient Celtic Wisdom to a Healing Vision for the Forest. Part memoir, part scientific study and part environmental plea, the work was written with traditional Irish warmth and wit.

'To be honest with you, I didn't want to write the book. My publishers said to me that my personal story was important, but I didn't believe them - I mean, who wants to know about the life of a stray Irish woman? I was reluctant, but they persuaded me to do it.

"It was very hard to write about my childhood," she continues. "I have always found it quite difficult to talk about myself, but they assured me that it would encourage people to do things about climate change. And well, of course, then they had me in their hand. So, I wrote the damn thing, and it looks as though it was sold out before it ever hit the market. There is an audiobook version available also."

Since launching, the book has received great critical and popular acclaim. And while she is thrilled with the accolades, her greater hope for the novel is the spreading of a single, simple idea.

"If I can do it, you can do it. We all need courage for climate change, the whole lot of us. We need to look after the forest."

That can-do attitude has working on both her second film and another book.

"It is called Scared Trees of the Celts. It is a foundational, peer-reviewed book. My hope is to have the money to publish this one more independently, all the while staying on message."

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Edinburgh fashion designer Vixy Rae spins a good yarn

Author Vixy Rae is likely best known for her work in textiles. The first female to take ownership of Edinburgh's popular bespoke tailoring company, Stewart Christie & Co., Rae has dedicated her life to bringing authentic, high-quality garments to the people of Scotland and beyond.

When she is not mastering creative design, however, Rae is a master of storytelling, known amongst her peers for her ability to spin a good yarn.

"The first stories I wrote were called the Wee Mice Tails," she tells Celtic Life International via email. "I worked on Victoria Street for 20 years and, in that time, met a few mice. I loved the idea that under the cobbled streets and shops - from the cheese shops to the whisky shops - they'd have a bloody brilliant time. The stories were made to read to my Goddaughter Stella. Their adventures started in the Old Town of Edinburgh, exploring the shops and the cellars, and by the end of the book they had progressed up to the Outer Hebrides. I don't sleep much at night, so they kept me entertained, transporting me off to another world."

Her latest literary effort, The Secret Life of Tartan: How a Cloth Shaped a Nation, is more personal.

"The new book was written as a record of my own journey, from my youth to my current position as an owner. In some ways it is a reference guide to tartan, something for me to go back to when I have forgotten things. The process had me looking at my own life and the actuality of where I have come from and where I am now.

> *"In that way, writing is a way of looking back to look forward – a sort of exercise in self-exploration."*

At just over 300 pages, The Secret Life of Tartan investigates the history of Scotland's most recognizable fabric, while exploring its modern influence upon Celtic culture.

And though the topic may be close to home, Rae admits that the project had its fair share of challenges.

"Time was perhaps the greatest issue. Working full-time and running two companies with my business partner is never easy. However, he allowed me the time and support to write the book, as he knew it was an important part of my personal development. I completed it all in only six months, which felt like a world record! But, after speaking to other writers like Alexander McCall Smith, I felt a little lazy!

"There was also a significant amount of research involved," she adds. "As I had asked several people - all of whom I respected very much in the world of tartan - to be in the book, it had to be correct and worthy. The history side I liked as it had a relevance to it, but I can never remember dates - except for 1822 and 1745, two huge years for tartan and Scotland."

Still, she notes, seeing the book in its final form - and receiving positive feedback - made it all worthwhile.

"Having the hard cover version of it in my hands, opening the cover and seeing my own face looking back at me was a bit of a surreal experience. The most rewarding part, though, has been hearing from people who are in the book or those that know me well. I am very respectful of other opinions, particularly of myself. To be quite honest, I have been a bit overwhelmed by the reaction."

Since its publication, the tome has received several celebrity endorsements, including one from Outlander's Sam Heughan.

"He has been an amazing support, says Rae. "Similarly, Alexander McCall Smith, who wrote me three personal stanzas, has been a huge help. I feel very lucky to work with the people I do, and that was what has essentially made the book; my career has always been driven by people."

With so much attention on cultural preservation these days, she acknowledges the importance and timeliness of the work.

"Looking back, perhaps in ten years time, it will give me a snapshot of how Scots create, weave, wear and design their national cloth. In that respect it is a good bit of modern social and cultural literature."

Although she has a number of projects lined up for the coming months, Rae says her future is never set in stone.

"I don't know what is next," she jests. "I guess one day maybe I will write The Secret life of Tweed!"

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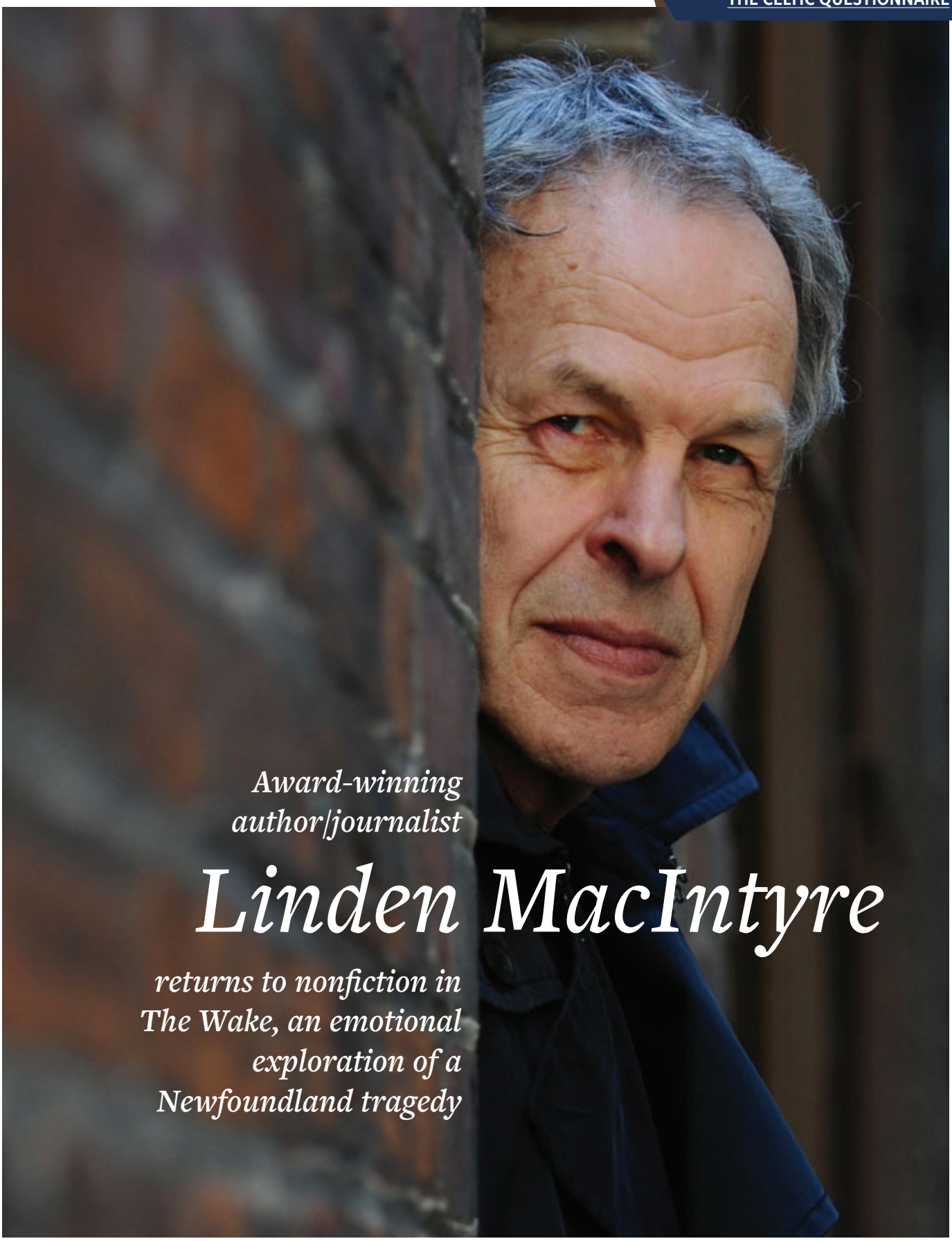
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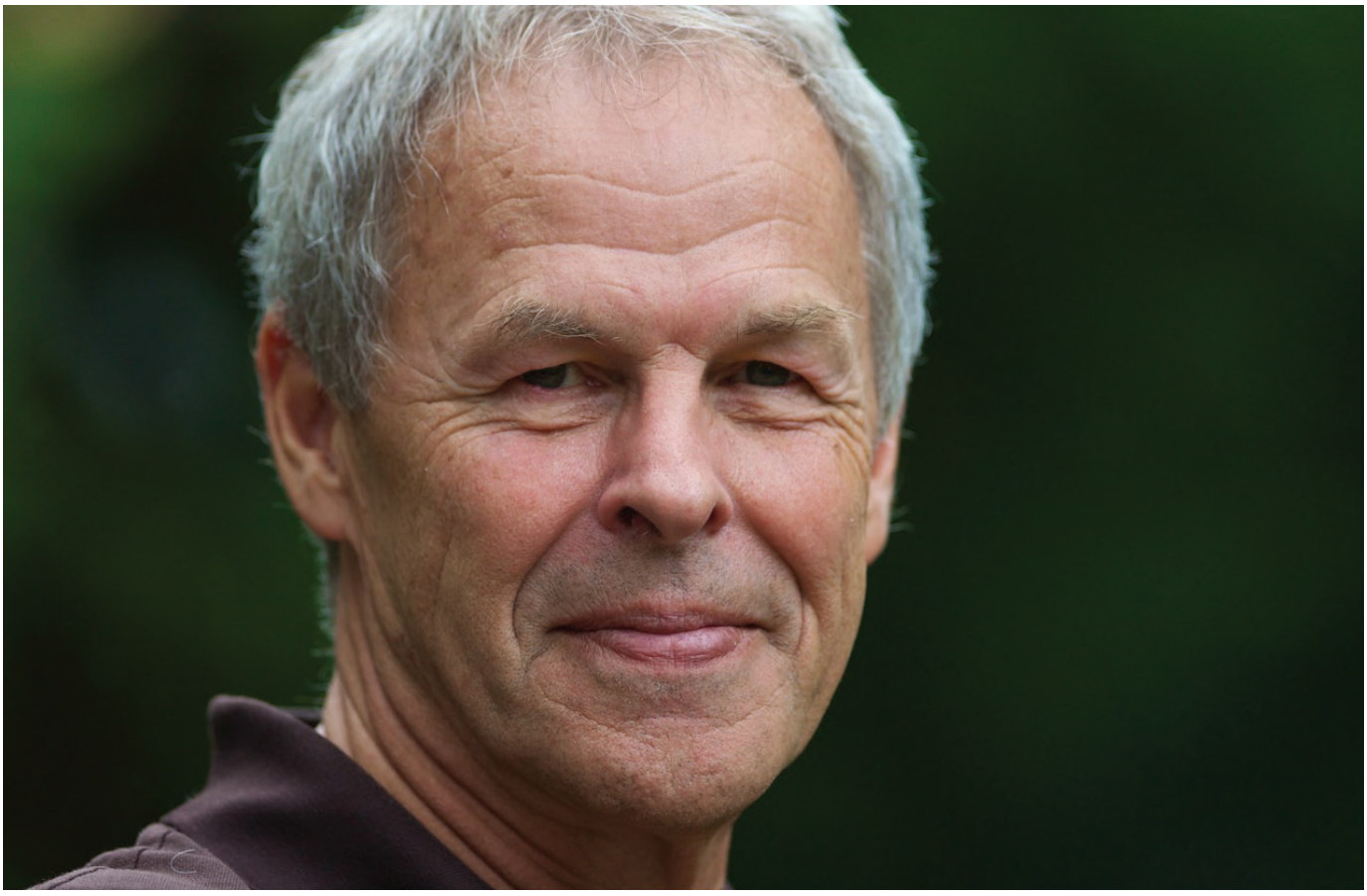
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Award-winning author/journalist

Linden MacIntyre

returns to nonfiction in The Wake, an emotional exploration of a Newfoundland tragedy



Linden MacIntyre is no stranger to the art of storytelling. The 76-year-old Canadian scribe plied his trade as a journalist and news broadcaster for over 50 years before settling into his current career as an author. In recent years, he has penned a number of bestselling novels - including the 2009 Scotiabank Giller Prize winner, The Bishop's Man. Recently, Celtic Life International Senior Writer Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns caught up with MacIntyre to discuss his latest literary effort, The Wake.

Let's start with your roots.

I am Irish and Scottish. I was actually born in St. Lawrence, Newfoundland, but my roots are in Cape Breton on my father's side for the past 200 years, and Irish on my mother's side. Her origins are a little vague as there wasn't much of a record of her leaving Ireland or arriving here. I believe it was somewhere in the 1840s that they arrived. The name was Donohue, originating somewhere in Cork. I grew up in a very Celtic environment, where a lot of people had Gaelic for a second language and used it regularly. The people were not quite as roots conscious and ethnically preoccupied as people tend to be now; it was just part of their being. They spoke and lived as their people, our people, had always lived - quite close to the earth and the sea. I currently live in Toronto, but I still have a house in Cape Breton, which is where I grew up and where I went to high school.

What first influenced you to pursue a career in writing?

The place I grew up in was very small. There weren't many kids around. I was born in the middle of World War II, and of course, the birthrate was quite depressed because everyone was away. I spent a lot of time by myself and became an avid reader. I read all of the usual suspects; Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. As I got older, I started thinking about more accessible things to do as a livelihood. Authoring books was beyond anything I could imagine at that point and eventually drifted toward journalism. The strange thing about journalism is that it puts you in the way of experience. I always believed that in order to be a competent journalist you had to understand the people you write about in a deep way. Eventually, the deeper you get into it, the orderly and thoughtful consideration of people's lives becomes a barrage of sensations.

That must be challenging.

Some of these things can be burdensome. Over time I learned that the limits of journalism have to do with superficiality. It doesn't matter if you write long think-pieces for a magazine or whatever, there is a need for superficiality or oversimplification in journalism that was leading me to a pile of unused material and experience. However, today - looking back at the whole of my career - I recognize that everything that I have ever done has been about storytelling; I don't think about the prizes I won, or the books I have written, as having the greatest impact on me, or anyone really. I think about particular stories that I wrote, or specific things that I was involved in, that made a difference.

Was that your approach with the new book?

I grew up with the story because my father worked in that mine for many years. From the very beginning I was aware that there was something dark and tragic about what had happened. My father died very suddenly at the age of 50. There was no autopsy, but we suspected the cause of death was related to the places he worked - a lot of old, dusty and miserable mines. When I was a TV reporter, I found myself in this back-mining town - where I was born, ironically - and I met with some people that my parents had known, including my godmother. Her brother had been my godfather and, when I asked about him, she told me that he and all of their other brothers had died in their 40s and 50s. She said that it was the "miner's disease." I did my research and soon realized that this was a big deal. This was all before I even considered writing the book, though I began thinking that it might make for a good book. I just kept putting it off, however. Then, about 12 years ago, I made a flippant comment to someone at Harper Collins (publisher) about my birth being precipitated by an earthquake, and he replied, "How's that?" So, I explained that an earthquake had taken place, followed by a tsunami that wiped out the fishery and livelihood of thousands of people, leaving them desperate and destitute at the beginning of the depression. Then I added that some guy had come along waving this magic offer and suggesting that he could make them all rich. These folks all agreed to work for nothing for a while as they were so desperate. Being fishermen, they had no idea what they were doing - and the lack of safety involved - and so they were terribly exploited. Years later, that same person at Harper Collins told me that he had never forgotten that story, and that it would make a great book. So, I did it. Then, when my mother died, my sister and I had to go and clean out the house and came across boxes of documents and other items that were totally relevant to my research. There were letters he had written to my mother while she was away on trips during that time, and letters that he had written to me. It all sort of just wrapped itself around me, and I begin exploring ways that I might piece it all together. And so, I came up with a concept of conversations with the dead. Every so often I would put a section into the storyline that wasn't really a chapter – a bit that stands on its own but is still relative to the content of the book. Those conversations are most often with my father or people who knew him, and they deal with the harsh reality of working in the mines, in general, and that mine in particular.



That sounds like a lot of research.

I would have been daunted going into the story if I had realized just how much I had to dig, and how often I had to go to Newfoundland. Everyone I was writing about, with very few exceptions, are dead. I was talking to families or people who knew them and going to archives and small museums. I even went through my own history. "Who was my father?" was at the center of the whole thing for me. Mercifully my mother - who has since passed - had a very clear memory of stuff and of people. There were a handful of folks who remembered my parents, and so they spoke with me more freely than they might have someone else.

Why is this story important now?

The more I thought about the story the more I realized that this is not simply a tale about a single event that took place long ago. It is also about the human condition; specifically, about how people become destitute and vulnerable, and how they can be exploited by single-minded individuals with visions of personal advancement, power and wealth. This continues to go on today with the treatment of temporary and foreign workers. There is a whole section of the workforce now that has no protection from anything - not unlike the experience of those miners 70-80 years ago. It happens all over the world too - the Congo, Indonesia, and further afield. There are people there who are poor and have no voice, who are living in countries with no democratic structures - places where there are no rules on how you are to treat the poor or working-class, and where there's a great deal of corruption. It is also vital to look at what we are doing - and how we are living – and what kind of an impact that is having upon our environment. If we continue the way we are going, we could be looking at tsunamis and other natural disaters on a yearly basis. It is important that we reflect upon things like what happened in Newfoundland and say, "Okay, what happened?"

What has the reception been like so far?

The book has been on the bestseller list for a few months, so that is a good sign. And I have been promoting it all across the country and the turnouts have been very strong. Amazingly, an astonishing number of Canadians had never heard of the tsunami or the mining tragedy. One of the inherent messages here is that our education system isn't doing a good job with regard to telling us our own stories. So, I have been getting a lot of feedback on that matter. Most important to me, however, is the response from the families and friends of the miners and the people in the area that were touched by the tragedy. They have all embraced the book.

What's next on your creative agenda?

I am currently writing a novel about dementia. It is a rather complicated story, so I won't go into details. Plus, I don't want to jinx the whole thing.

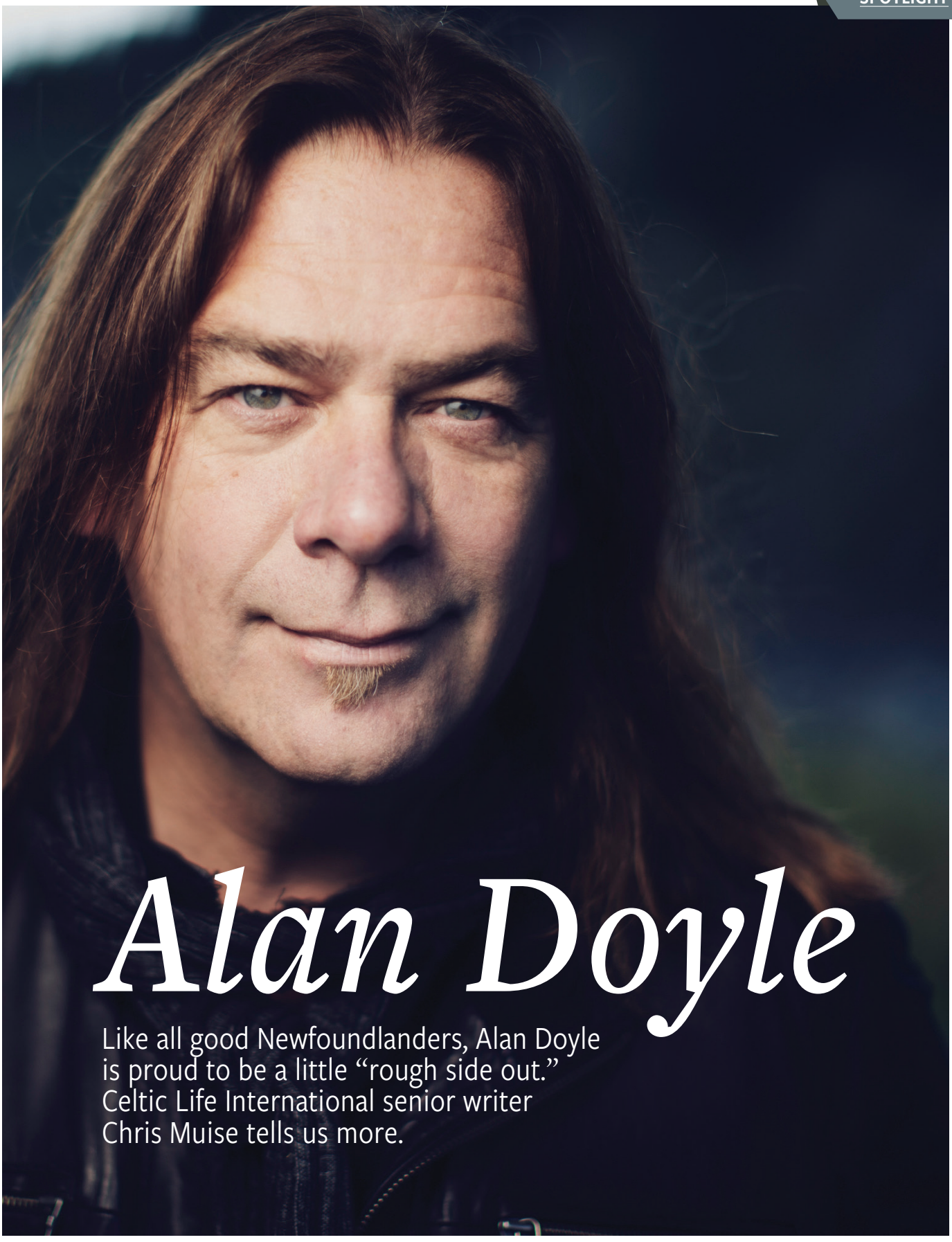


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Alan Doyle

Like all good Newfoundlanders, Alan Doyle is proud to be a little "rough side out." Celtic Life International senior writer Chris Muise tells us more.



If you have ever lamented the last call at the local pub, wishing the barkeep would keep the taps flowing just a little bit longer so you could enjoy some fine drink and good company just a little bit longer, Canadian singer/songwriter Alan Doyle knows how you feel.

Doyle, of Great Big Sea fame, has graced the pages of Celtic Life International a few times over the years, and we are always thrilled to catch up with him when he's got something interesting in the works. We recently reached him by phone as he strolled along Murphy St. in downtown Nashville, Tennessee.

"I am here for a couple more days, working on stuff for my new album," says Doyle, en route to a local recording studio.

You might have already seen the music video by the time you read this, but when we spoke with Doyle, his new single with Dean Brody, "We Don't Wanna Go Home," had just hit the world wide web. The song, he shares, is the summary of one night that every musician has experienced.

> *"I could call it one night, but I suppose it is a summary of many nights. Standing at an awesome pub somewhere and begging them not to close."*

The song is almost the antithesis of Semisonic's classic 90s anthem Closing Time, and the music video - shot in St. John's, NL - perfectly captures the moment that Doyle has experienced so often, where the crackling energy of family, friends and fun makes time stand still.

"It is sort of the bane of a band's existence because, most nights, we don't start our set until the wee hours. These places are awesome, but we are just getting going when they want to close. We usually have a variety of pleas ready to go, to try to convince them, at the very least, to give us one more round."





The single is part of an EP of country songs that Doyle plans to pair alongside old-school Atlantic Canadian tunes down the road. But it is just a taste of what he has on the go for 2020.

The marque attraction on his to-do list over the next 12 months is his Rough Side Out tour; a 34-date run starting in Moose Jaw, SK on February 19. From there, he plans to tour out west, circle back and take a breather, before touring east and then hitting the southwest United States.

It is a major undertaking, even for a seasoned artist like Doyle.

"This will probably be the biggest one that I have never tried. I mean, we have done four-or-five legs of a tour before, but that was over 15 or 16 months. But this one, by the time it all gets done, it will be a two-year project, really."

If you are not familiar with the term "Rough Side Out," then Doyle explains the meaning behind the everyday Newfoundland expression.

"Rough side out is what we call clapboard - the siding on a house. You know the famous jelly- bean houses in St. John's? That is wooden clapboard on those houses. When that stuff was first manufactured, years ago, it was made with a smooth side - which was made to face outwards - and the rough side was meant never to be seen. But of course, Newfoundlanders - being the geniuses that they are - figured it was way better the other way around; the paint stuck to it easier, and it was more suited for our crazy weather. It might not be the best-looking thing, some would argue - I happen to think differently - but of course, it is the strongest and most practical."

Doyle says the choice of the phrase goes deeper than just describing his latest jaunt.

"It is the story of my life! In my first book (Where I Belong, 2014) I described what my town looked with all the rough side out clapboard. My editor asked me, 'what's rough side out?' So, I explained it to her, and she said, 'Hmmm...I guess that Newfoundland clapboard, and thus Newfoundlanders themselves, are rough side out.'"

Doyle is also currently working on his third book, though he admits that - unlike his first two literary efforts - he is a bit stumped on what direction it will take.

"It is a little terrifying," he laughs. "With my first two books - one is about growing up in my little fishing town and making my way to St. John's with Great Big Sea and the lads, and the second one (A Newfoundlander in Canada) was really about our first trip across Canada - I knew what those would be about before I started writing them. This one...not so much."

He plans to use his daytime hours while on tour to start workshopping ideas. In particular, Doyle is curious to learn what his audience would like him to say.

"When you let people see things through your eyes, it is interesting to know what they look at."

"When I was writing about growing up and being a musician, I was so excited to get to hitchhike to St. John's and buy a distortion pedal. I wanted to get a distortion pedal - I mean, what guitar player doesn't? And I wrote that in a draft - about how I had saved up most of my money by cutting out cod tongues down by the wharf and bought the pedal. I went into great detail, and then my editor says to me 'can you tell me more about the cod tongues?'"

Between his music and his writing, Doyle will also continue to raise funds and visibility for the A Dollar A Day Foundation - a charitable initiative he helped to start in support of mental health and addiction services.

"I have given my time to lots of things over the years," says Doyle, explaining he felt that starting a foundation was the best way to ensure that his efforts went to something that would endure. "Like most musicians, we are called upon all the time, and I wanted to make sure I was focusing my time and effort where, I think, I could make the most difference."

The charity has been in operation for almost two years and Doyle estimates that they have already raised close to a quarter of a million dollars - all of it going to programs actively helping people in crisis.

"It is one way for all of us to be a part of change - not just the awareness about the need for mental health and addiction services, but also to directly help them do the hard work that they are already doing daily. And that is one of the things that we are most proud of; being a part of the solution can be something that is on your mind, and in your heart, every single day of the year."

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THE IRISH ROVERS

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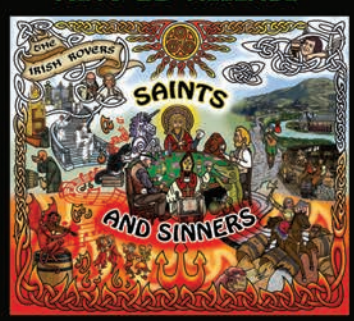


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the Irish Rovers

The Irish Rovers return to form with a new recording.

Story by Chris Muise.



After a brief stint away visiting with family in British Columbia, Irish Rovers frontman George Millar is back where he feels most at home - in a recording studio.

"We are just about to release our new CD," he tells Celtic Life International over the phone.

"We are calling it Saints and Sinners," he continues. "I think we probably fit into one of those two categories - the fans can decide which one we belong in. I just finished it, just before going to Vancouver. I have given it a couple of days off – I don't want to listen to it just yet. I will give it a few more listens to make sure there are no little glitches that need to be fixed, and then I'll send it off. It should be out early in the new year."

Millar says that long-time fans of the Rovers, whose career spans over five decades, will love the new album.

"There are some absolutely decadent Irish-type drinking songs. I mean, there's not an Irish or Celtic band in the world that doesn't have some good drinking songs like Whiskey in the Jar, and Whiskey You're the Devil, and all of those songs that everybody seems to know and do. And there are actually a few love songs here and there because, you know, there are saints out there as well."

That said, Millar admits there is at least one surprise he is looking forward to unleashing on the fans.

"We did a bonus track. We were having a bit of fun in the studio, and I wrote a very different kind of song for us."

Inspiration for the new tune came while on vacation in Hawaii.

"I was walking along the beach and somebody was playing some Bob Marley stuff, which I happen to really quite like - very popular in Hawaii. So, I thought, 'what a neat little song that was.' I think it was Buffalo Soldiers. I really liked the rhythm, so I put together a piece we call The Irish Reggae Band. We're going to post it on our website for our fans this Christmas. They can listen to it and decide, 'what the hell is going on with this?'"

The new recording is both a culmination of one year's work with the Irish Rovers and also, perhaps, a precursor to the next year's - and next decade's - adventures. The band will tour in support of the album, starting this February. It could be their last time out on the road, or it could be just the beginning of another busy decade - that is for the fans to decide.

"We are on a sort of a long farewell tour, and any time it gets near to the point where we think we will call it a day, I get a call from Bill - who takes care of these things for us - saying, 'okay, there's another tour - they really want you back. Like, Australia - they want us to go back to New Zealand and Australia. We said goodbye there two years ago, but Bill says, 'well, I know, but they want you back!'

"'If people want us back,' I replied, 'we'll end up like Cher, for God's sake! On our fifth farewell tour,' However, if we are all feeling good and healthy – and if the audience wants us - there is no reason to pack it in completely."

The Rovers have found a nice groove in recent years, with shorter tours across North America and a few dates in Ireland and elsewhere each year. By all accounts, it is a routine their fans are happy to settle into, so long as they get the chance to experience all their old favourites.

"I have learned over the years that I can write new songs, but it's not always what people want. They don't mind a couple of new songs now and again, but they still want the black velvet band. They want to hear The Orange and The Green, or Lily the Pink, or The Unicorn. Those are the ones they learned as children, and these are the songs they want to hear."

Millar doesn't begrudge people loving their old favourites - he acknowledges that everyone, from Gordon Lightfoot to Paul McCartney, are always asked to play the hits.



That is just the nature of the business. However, he still manages to slip in a few of the newer tunes in concert.

"Many of the songs that I write are written to sound like they fit our band, like they are 200 years old. That's the idea. So, the new songs fit the repertoire perfectly - so much so that people don't even know it is a new song. They think that maybe they have just never heard it before.

"And if somebody in the audience wants to hear a particular song, I will ask the band, 'do we remember it?' And if we half-remember it, we'll give it a go."

Admittedly, the Rovers have a lot of material to remember - especially Millar, who has been a member since he co-founded the group with Jimmy Ferguson back in 1963.

"My cousin George joined us from Ireland about three months later," Millar recalls. "We traveled to the west coast of Canada - to Calgary, Alberta - where my brother Will was living, and had a little TV show for children. He joined the band, and from there, we drove down to San Francisco and started our career at a place called The Purple Onion.

"It was great," he says, adding that he was thinking about the old days recently after working to digitize their older TV broadcasts. "Peter, Paul, and Mary were there. The Smothers Brothers were across the street. Even the Grateful Dead, in those days, were playing in there.

"Those were just great times. When I see those old TV shows I think, look at how young we were. We were boys."

And while the Rovers still sing many of their classic songs, the way they make music has changed drastically since they recorded The Unicorn at Universal Studios with Glen Campbell.

"There was my Ripley guitar, Glen Campbell, my cousin Joe played a harmonica, and they brought in a bass player. That's all it was on The Unicorn," Millar says, with a twinge of amazement. "Just the harmonica, two guitars, and a bass. And it became this huge hit all over the world.

"Those recording sessions were so much different than it is now. Today, I can do so much more in my own little house, here in my own little studio. Back then, we sat around in a semicircle. The sound of my guitar would leak into somebody else's mic, and the accordion would leak into everybody's mic, because it was so hard to control. But that was how it was done.

"Now, the process is incredible; I send tracks to our keyboard guy Morris (Crumb), who then sends them along to Cork, where Sean (O'Driscoll) records his banjo and mandolin. Then it's off to Gerry (O'Connor, fiddler), before it is all sent back to me, and then we have Geoffrey (Kelly) record his flute parts. It is all done piecemeal, but it works."

While he admits that some of this digital wizardry is still a bit mystifying at times, Millar is thrilled that new musicians today have the means to blaze their own trails, independent of corporate hit-makers.

"Record companies held everything over you in those days, and I'm not sorry to see a lot of them go to tell you the truth. Many of them had the upper hand over the artist. There's not an artist that I have ever met, from the Beatles to Sting, who have not had to either sue their record company, or at least promised to go to court over it and then get some sort of a requisition."

That freedom also allows bands like the Rovers to have more control of their own musical future – so long as the fans like it. But he seems happy to leave that up to them.

"Now that we have our own record company, we release whatever we want to, whenever we want, hope that our fans are going to like it. Again, it is all up to them; if they don't want to see us anymore, that's great. If they don't want to listen to us, that's fine, too. We have had a long and rewarding career, and I will never, ever run it down. No regrets. But so long as the fans keep asking, we will keep doing it."

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Riverdance Turns 25!

The Emerald Isle's epic spectacle combines classic and contemporary Celtic culture to celebrate its 25th anniversary. Caitlyn Mearns tells us more.



Everyone knows Riverdance. If you don't, then it is quite likely because you have been living under a rock somewhere for the last two-and-a-half decades. The renowned cultural extravaganza has become almost synonymous with Ireland, exploring the country's rich history - from its ancient lore and mythology to the more recent events of the Troubles. It is a story that runs deep and true, resonating with audiences of all ages, races, genders and creeds, all around the world.

The spectacle's success is evidenced by both its endurance and its enduring popularity.

"Riverdance gets an enormous amount of repeat business," says John McColgan, the show's director. "People will come to see it several times and they love it, and then they tell three or four friends or family members, who all come out the next time we are in that city."

McColgan, a native of Northern Ireland, explains that - after a quarter-century in production - there is much to look back on and be proud of.

"At the very start, it was actually Moya (Doherty), who was a producer in art and television at the time, who thought that we should do something special about the impact that Irish dancing and culture has had on the rest of the world. Very shortly thereafter, she was asked to produce the Eurovision song contest, which is a very big deal in Europe. The show is watched by about 500 million people annually, and every year the host-country presents an Interval Act, showcasing homegrown talent to the rest of Europe. So that year, Moya came up with the idea of bringing Irish dancers Michael Flatley and Jean Butler together and having Bill Whelan compose the music. And, with that, she singlehandedly changed the global perception of Irish dance."



John McColgan

Shedding the traditional embroidered costumes and elaborate wigs, Doherty opted to dress the dancers in sleek, black outfits and naturally-styled hair.

The costumes weren't the only thing to change, McColgan explains.

"The choreography evolved a lot also. Mavis Ascott, who I had worked with prior to that on television, and Michael Flatley created a whole new look for the seven minutes of the Interval Act. It came to life in the 3Arena Theatre, which was then called The Point Theatre. There were about 4,000 people in the audience, none of whom quite knew what to expect.

"But, as soon as the act finished, the audience jumped to their feet in a way that I had never seen before. Something extraordinary had happened."

Like McColgan, the show's Associate Director Padraic Moyles recalls his first moments with the production with warmth and wonder.

"I have been with Riverdance for the majority of my dancing career," shares the Dublin-native. "My teacher, Donny Golden,


Padraic Moyles

was also Jean Butler's teacher and he took me to see Riverdance, which I will never forget. It was at Radio City Musical Hall in New York City in 1996. Before the first step had even been danced, I had chills up and down my arms and the back of my neck, and I just knew then and there that I would be a part of it someday - I needed to be a part of it. And the whole experience really changed everything for me - I simply had to audition for the show.

"When my family was living in New York, an opportunity came up in Boston. I cut school and went. Within a couple of weeks, I received a letter telling me that I had passed the audition and I would be joining the troupe shortly. I remember my mom and dad asking, 'wait...how did you audition, and where did you audition?' And then I had to come clean with them about cutting classes to do it."

Luckily, Moyles wasn't punished for skipping school. Instead, he embarked upon a career that would change the course of his life. Starting as member of the ensemble, he eventually moved up to lead dancer, before settling into his current role as Associate Director.

"This new position is great. I am still working at what I love. My wife and I work in the same building and it's incredible that we get to come into this thing we call 'work' with smiles on our faces. We are blessed in many ways."

Although both McColgan and Moyles feel their time with Riverdance has been rich in rewards, they each admit that the production has had its fair share of challenges over the years.

"In the beginning, one of the biggest issues was persuading the performers that this production was something that they could fall in love with," recalls McColgan. "Back then, Irish dancers only performed at competitions, and then - all of a sudden - we were asking them to do eight shows a week. They often didn't warm up enough prior or didn't maintain a good diet, so there were a few injuries. They got tired so much quicker, and thus the show got tired a lot quicker. We now have young dancers, who were not even born when the show first started, and we do not put anyone on the stage who is not 100 per cent committed to the work that they do."

"For me the biggest issues have to do with how we can make something as grand and incredible as Riverdance even better," adds Moyles. "As we are so close to it, we sometimes need to step away from the show to get a better understanding of what we want and what the audience wants. That is an unbelievable challenge. It is finding that balance to change it as much as we feel it needs to be changed, while also holding onto the values and the vision that created it to begin with."

He adds that those challenges are bigger than ever these days.

"We have been off the road for a year and we have been prepping this 25th anniversary tour for two years. The set is brand new, from the lighting to the screens to the costumes. There are even new recordings of all the songs in the show, all with a new orchestra. Bill Whelan, our composer, has given it a fresh sound. We had an opportunity recently to sit down and listen to what he had done with the music. Although it is not vastly different, there are unique feels in different sections. He has done an unbelievable job holding onto what the core of the music is, while giving it a new excitement. From a choreographic standpoint, while listening I couldn't help thinking, 'oh, we can now do this,' or, 'oh, now this part will be more powerful because we can do that.'

"There is also new staging and set design," he continues. "Now, that said, one thing you simply don't do is touch Riverdance, in terms of that particular number itself. You leave that as it is. It is an iconic piece - it always has been, and it always will be. Visually it will look different, but choreographically and musically it will be the same. We have been working with a team of creatives between Dublin and Paris on the lighting and the visuals. It is a very large team, but amazingly there is a great number of original people involved, from our director and producer to our senior executive producer to the composer. We are all very excited."

McColgan agrees.

> *"There is certainly a lot of anticipation around this production - from the performers as well as from the audiences."*

Both men hope that those audiences will find the 25th anniversary show contemporary in style, size and scope, all the while remaining connected to Riverdance's classic roots. Most of all, however, they hope viewers are reminded of why the phenomenon still plays a pivotal part in preserving and promoting Eire's past and present.

"There was simply nothing like it before," McColgan states. "Prior to Riverdance, Irish dance was a small, folk, niche activity - not something that might translate to an international stage. After that first Eurovision performance, however, Irish music and Irish dance became acceptable as higher art forms."

Moyles echoes the sentiment.

"Irish culture is now regarded as stylish and sophisticated. Perhaps more importantly, however, Riverdance is a reminder of where we were, where we went, and where we are now; the impact of our Diaspora and our culture is a story that resonates with many people around the world who have had to leave their homes and relocate and rebuild their lives in other countries, renewing hope for themselves and their children."

The cast and crew of Riverdance will be bringing that hope to audiences across North American starting in January, before touring the U.K. later in the year.

McColgan, for one, cannot wait.

"Each show, I step in the back of a dark theatre and watch the audience get completely caught up by the performance; by show's end they are on their feet cheering and clapping and often in tears, many of whom are not even quite sure why it is happening. It is simply amazing to witness and to be a part of."

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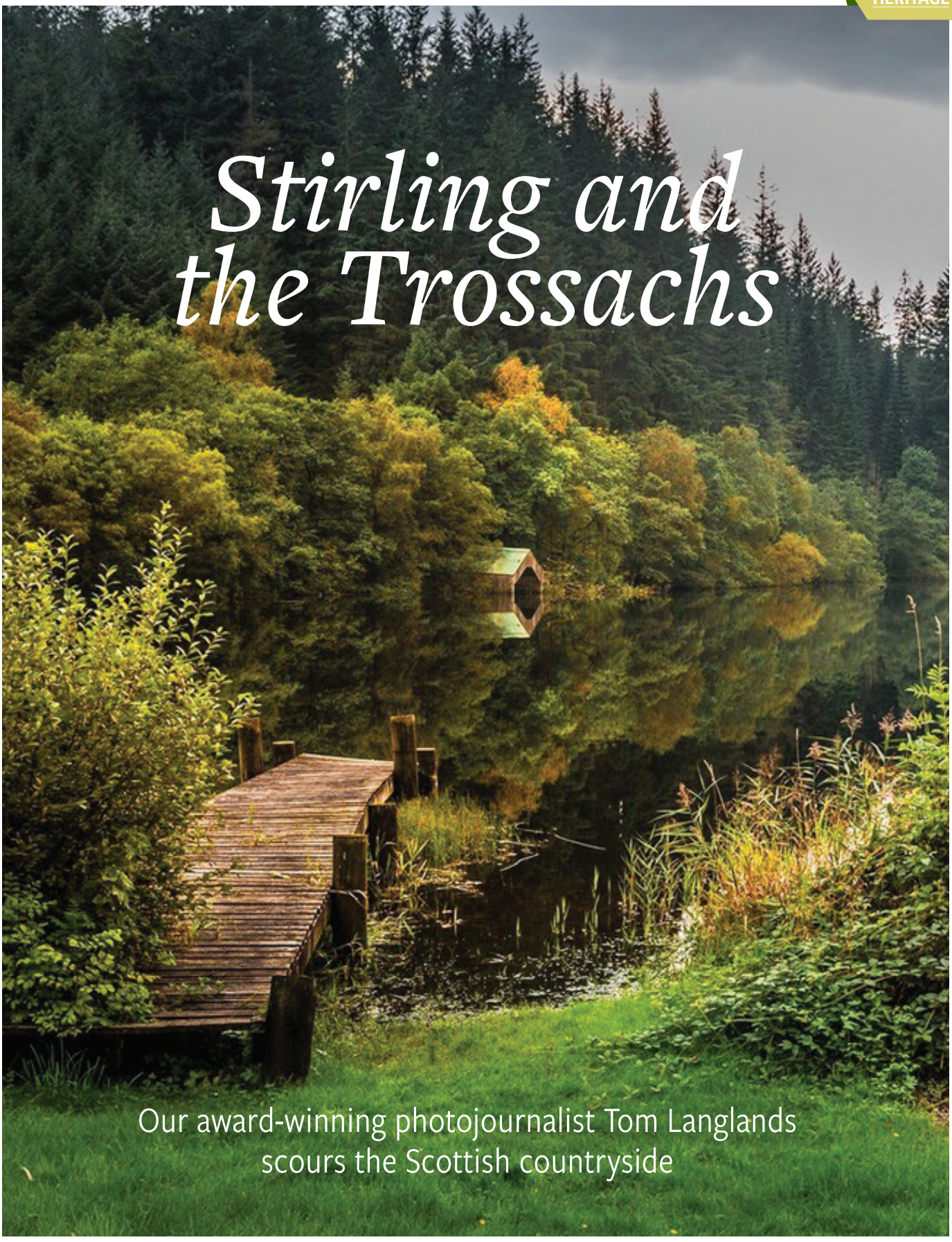
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Stirling and the Trossachs

Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands scours the Scottish countryside



Trossachs National park

The Trossachs is an area of Scotland often referred to as the "Highlands in miniature." Lying to the west of Stirling and to the east of Loch Lomond, its exceptional beauty - borne of rugged hills, densely-wooded glens and deep, dark lochs - is embodied with all the character, mystery and legends that one expects of the Scottish Highlands. The name stems from the beautiful, small Glen of Trossachs at the centre of the area. Thanks to writers such as Sir Walter Scott - who developed a great affinity with this corner of Scotland - the popularity of the area grew during the 19th century. As word spread, the name of the glen became synonymous with the wider region. Today, the Trossachs forms part of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park.

The city of Stirling lies 15 miles to the east of the Trossachs and is an excellent base to explore this unique and historically important part of the country. The source of the famous River Forth is Loch Ard in the Trossachs, and as the river winds its way to Scotland's east coast it meanders through wide-open plains overlooked by Stirling Castle, which stands strategically atop a 250-foot high, extinct volcano. Although it is likely that earlier fortifications existed on the hilltop it was during the Middle Ages that the current castle evolved with Stirling and the surrounding area becoming one of several battlegrounds in the Scottish Wars of Independence. The Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297 saw Andrew Moray and William Wallace rout the vastly superior English Army in clear sight of the battlements of Stirling Castle, while King Robert Bruce did likewise at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. Mary Queen of Scots was crowned at Stirling Castle and, although it is one of the most impressive castles in Scotland bestowed with a rich history, there are few edifices that rouse the Scottish spirit more than the iconic monument to William Wallace standing on nearby Abbey Craig. Constructed in 1861 to commemorate this national hero, the 220-foot tower, with its stone crown, rises above the woodland and dominates the skyline. If you climb the 246 steps to the top you are rewarded with views over a landscape that shaped Scotland's history. Face northwest and you are looking at the Trossachs - an area with its own tales to tell.

The towns of Aberfoyle and Callander serve as gateways to the Trossachs and beyond and both are stops on the Rob Roy Way - an approximate seven-day walking route across the Southern Highlands named after the legendary Scottish folk hero Rob Roy MacGregor who was born by the shores of Loch Katrine. Immortalized by Sir Walter Scott in his fictional novel Rob Roy - and often portrayed as Scotland's Robin Hood - he was, in reality, a rather contemptible villain. The MacGregor clan long had a reputation as cattle rustlers and racketeers and indeed the name MacGregor had been banned by the Crown. Although Rob Roy's early years involved buying and selling Highland cattle for the Duke of Montrose, he likely was connected to the clan's wider illegal activities. In 1712 there was a slump in the cattle trade,



and he lost £1,000 of the Duke of Montrose's money - a huge sum in those days! Although Rob Roy claimed his head drover had stolen the money and that he was taking steps to repay it, he soon found himself bankrupt and his family evicted from their home. He turned to cattle rustling and thieving - initially aimed at exacting revenge on the Duke of Montrose but soon including other landowners who wouldn't pay his protection demands. A further fall from grace occurred when he became connected with the Jacobite uprising supporting the Stewarts in their doomed attempts to overthrow William of Orange and the English Crown.

"Although occasionally he was credited with helping others in need - often using the proceeds of his illegal activities against the wealthy – he inevitably became a wanted man.

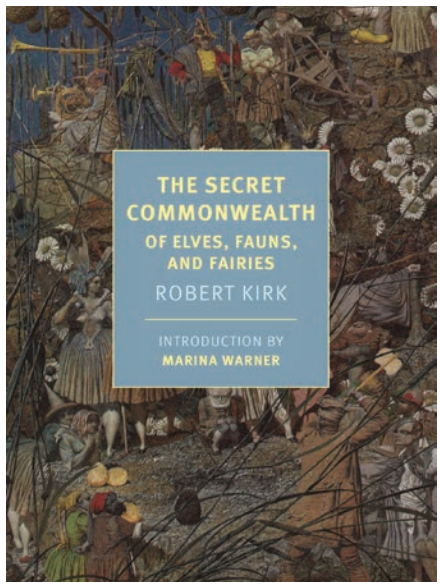
Despite being captured more than once he always managed to escape. Partly through public acclaim on the back of Daniel Defoe's romanticized Highland Rogue - which was published during his lifetime - Rob Roy was granted a Royal Pardon. He lived out his life in Balquhidder Glen to the north of Callander and was buried in Balquhidder churchyard on New Year's Day 1735. His grave lies beside the ruins of the old kirk, defiantly displaying the motto "MACGREGOR DESPITE THEM."

Balquhidder was a special place for the ancient Celts and alongside the ruins of the old kirk stands a 19th-century church, behind which rises a small hill. In ancient times it was on this hill that fires were set and the spirits invoked at Beltane and Samhain. Making sense of ancient beliefs and absorbing them within new faiths is a perennial challenge for the proponents of any new religion. It would have been no different for Saint Angus who introduced Christianity to Balquhidder, and it was certainly a dilemma that haunted the Reverend Robert Kirk, giving rise to one of the Trossachs' strangest tales.


Stirling Castle


Rob Roy MacGregor

Born in Aberfoyle, Kirk was the seventh son of James Kirk, the minister at Aberfoyle. He studied theology at St. Andrews University and subsequently graduated with a master's degree from the University of Edinburgh. In 1664 he was called to be minister at Balquhidder. While there he undertook the first complete translation of the Scottish metrical Psalms into Scottish Gaelic, and also travelled to London to oversee one of the first translations of the Bible into Scottish Gaelic. He was an educated man, and while he would have been familiar with the ancient practices associated with Beltane and Samhain, these were not the only supernatural things he encountered. When Kirk was alive Scotland was still hunting witches. Every town, village and glen in the country had its own superstitions. Fairies, changelings and all manner of spirit-world phenomena were commonplace beliefs that seemingly provided explanations for things that were otherwise inexplicable. Also, according to folklore, as the seventh son of the family, Kirk was bestowed with the gift of second sight. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that, after he became minister of Kirkton Church, Aberfoyle in 1685, he regularly took an evening stroll to nearby Doon Hill and communed with the fairies that were believed to live there. In his mind this was no fantasy. He studied them in great detail - trying to make sense of their society and how they lived. Unconsciously, what he was likely trying to do was make sense of the beliefs that surrounded him and how they related to his religious education. He wrote his findings in the manuscript The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies. Published after his death, this scholarly work provides some of the best insight into the folklore of his time. However, its importance has been diminished by the ensuing myths surrounding his death and burial.



Kirk's final walk to Doon Hill was on May 14, 1692. He never returned and his body was found on the hill. Most probably he had suffered a heart attack. Because of his fascination with the fairies it wasn't long before the rumours circulated that his revelations about their hidden kingdom had upset the fairies and they had spirited him away leaving a changeling in his place. Kirk was buried in the old Kirkton churchyard - or was he? Some accounts hold that the grave is empty, and that Kirk is forever a captive of the Fairy Queen. Today his grave and Doon Hill attract large numbers of curious visitors.

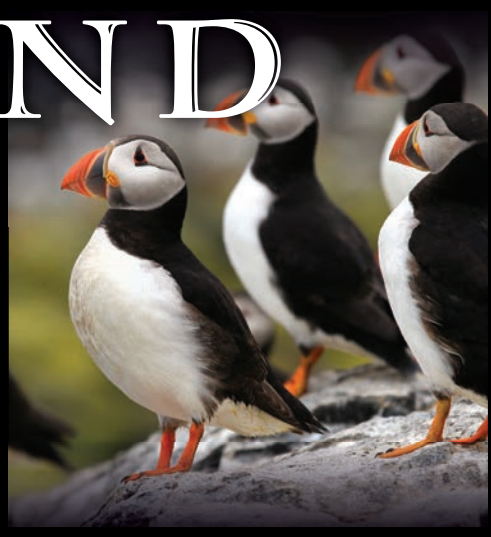
Whatever your view of the story of Kirk, it embodies the spirit of the Trossachs. This is an area steeped in a history rich with colourful characters, romanticized stories and nation-changing events all set against the stunningly beautiful landscape that is the Trossachs.

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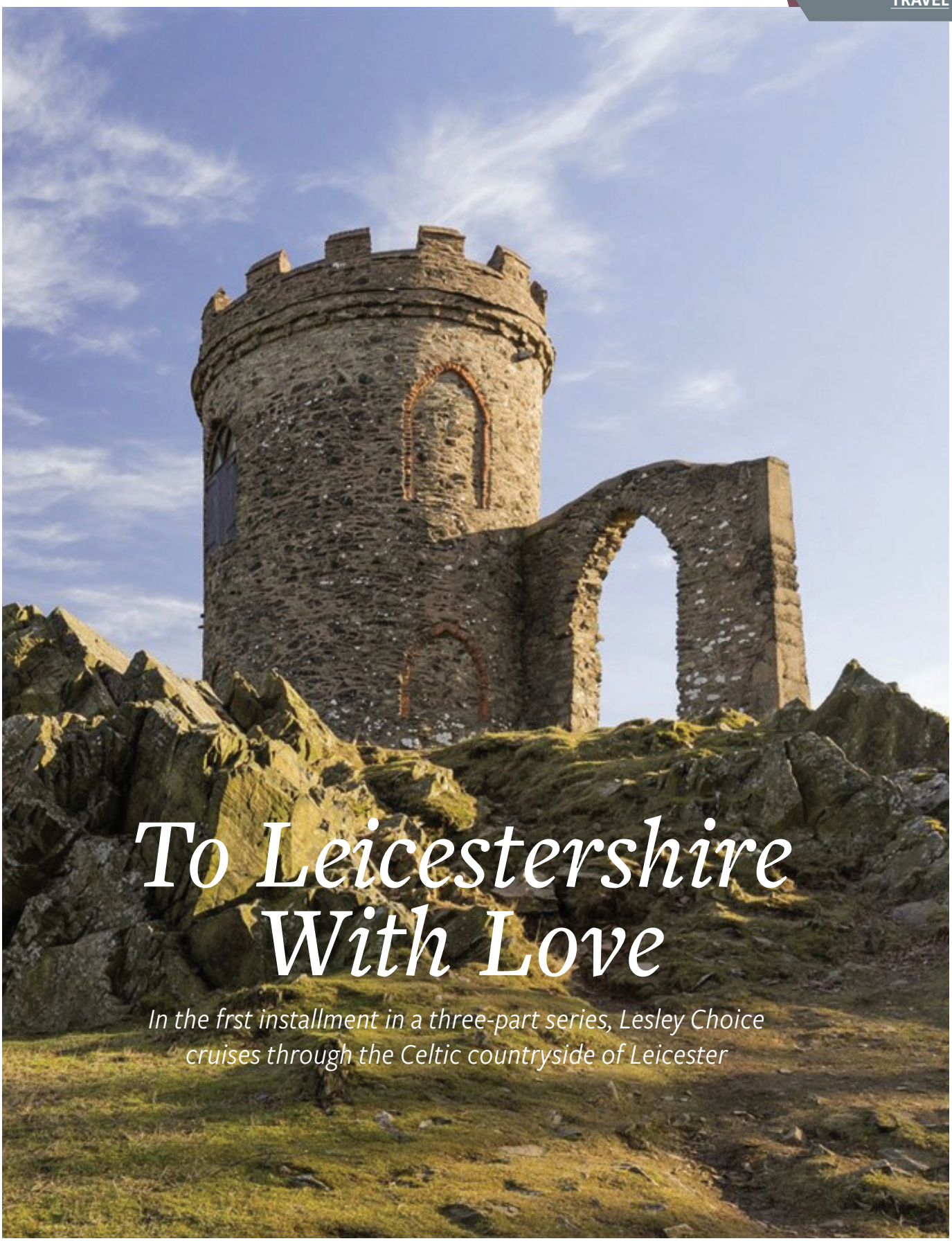
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To Leicestershire With Love

In the frst installment in a three-part series, Lesley Choice cruises through the Celtic countryside of Leicester


Linda and Kelty


Lesley and Kelty

My quest for connecting with as much of my personal past as possible had my wife Linda and I - and our West Highland Terrier, Kelty - traipsing around various parts of the U.K. looking for several military bases where my father, George "Sonny" Choyce, had been stationed during World War II. We hadn't had much luck finding them - many had been turned into industrial estates or we were simply turned away due to our mere civilian status. Our last hope was the air strip at Abbots Ripton, the American base with the notoriously bad food that had so disappointed my ravenous father.

We had miles to go before our sleep and Linda was getting a bit tired of our military quest. When we arrived in Abbots Ripton, I stopped at an ice cream shop and asked about the old American airfield. The young woman serving a customer a banana split had never heard of it. She asked an older colleague - a woman who looked quite a bit like actor Judy Dench - if she knew of such a place, but she shook her head no. Then they both gave me a look that suggested I was up to something no good. At least that's how I interpreted it. So, I left.

Outside, some men were drinking beer at a picnic table beside their motorcycles, making me realize the place was more than a mere ice cream parlour. I thought I might give it one more go so I walked over and asked if they knew of the airbase.

They laughed, as you would expect beer-drinking motorcycle men to laugh on such occasions. "No," a bearded fellow said. "We are not from here. We are German."

By this time, it was late afternoon; Linda was restless, and so was Kelty, and it was time to give up on the war and move on to Leicestershire. Which we did.

Driving north, I reflected on the Celtic heritage of Leicestershire, realizing most folks wouldn't peg the place as purely Celtic in any way, shape, or form.

Somewhere, I had read that the county was most famous for its cheeses (think Stilton, Red Leicester) and pork pies as its formidable contribution to the so-called "English cuisine." In the Middle Ages, you'd be bragging to your neighbours if you had a fine pair of woolen socks or breeches made from the Leicestershire sheep and knit by proud folks from there.

> *But well before all that, a Celtic tribe or tribes referred to as the Coreiltauvi had occupied the region.*

They had armed the rich land and had small organized groups with rulers whose names were sometimes inscribed on coins along with images of horses and wheat.

Recently, I had been trying to find out more about the Coreiltauvi for selfish reasons. That is, I was under the impression - or perhaps delusion - that these agrarian folks may well have been my ancestors as the Choyces came from this part of England. In my research, I read in The Guardian about the recent flurry of excitement concerning the discovery of a shield made out of bark that was 2,300 years old. Archeologists apparently went into a frenzy over this item found near the Soar River. They called it "phenomenal" as well as a "marvellous, internationally important find."



Julia Farley, of the British Museum, told The Guardian, "so often it is gold which grabs the headlines, but this bark shield is much rarer." Matt Beamish, who was on the expedition that found the object said, it was "like a whalebone corset of split hardwood" combined with other green wood and formed into something like a fat figure eight.

Apparently, it was the only bark shield found in this part of the world. And therein was reason for the excitement.

Thinking about such unlikely but baffling archeological wonders, it occurred to me that these distant relations of mine must have been fighters as well as farmers, although a bark shield didn't sound like much of a defense against someone trying to stick a sharpened metal pole into your abdomen. But I could be wrong because, quite honestly, what do I know about bark shields?

Returning to the automotive present from my speculation, I realized that perhaps I had done a bit too much Celtic reflection. I pride myself on my map reading abilities and never fully trusted Linda's Navigon, but as we continued to wend our way north I broke out of my reverie only to discover we were much farther from our destination than I thought since I had mixed up the A1 highway with the M1. I was convinced we were on the M1, but we were actually cruising its lesser cousin, the A road. Buggers.

So, I have little to report about anything of great interest occurring as we drove past Sawtry, Wittering, Tinwell, Woolsthorpe-by-Colsterworth and Long Bennington. And I won't bore you with details about the longish drive west along A47 through places like Tugby and Skeffington which no doubt are delightful towns to while away an afternoon if you had the inclination.

Not far from our destination, outside





establishment called Dogs Trust. It looked like a resort of some sort, so I asked Linda to look it up on her smartphone. We discovered that it was a national organization whose purpose is "to bring about the day when all dogs can enjoy a happy life, free from the threat of unnecessary destruction." Dating back to 1891, it is an enormous organization for helping dogs. It was originally called the National Canine Defense League (which I rather prefer), a name that sounds powerful and militant whose members campaigned against vivisection, muzzling and chaining and had a particular hate-on for railway companies that mistreated dogs.

Back in the early days of the space race, they railed against the Russians for sending dogs up into space and even held a special vigil for Laika, who died while orbiting the earth.

Dogs Trust claims that they never "put down" an animal, and that they sponsor Dogmobiles that "rehome" as many tail-waggers as possible. I had never heard of them before, but it is likely that almost everyone in the U.K. knows someone who supports them or received their family mutt from these dedicated dog devotees. Learning about them did my heart good. They don't like "docking" of tails either and do not have kind things to say about the fox hunting crowd. In 2016, they found proper homes for over 13,000 dogs. Way to go, Dogs Trust. Their slogan is "A Dog is for Life, not just for Christmas." Most recently, they have been campaigning against puppy smuggling, a crime I was heretofore unfamiliar with.

Clearly, the Dogs Trust members were our kind of folks. I gave them a silent but emphatic salute, patted our much-loved Westie, and drove on.

With great relief we pulled in the driveway of Number One, Church Close, Osgathorpe to find our no-name rental opulent-looking home sitting on a small parcel of land adjacent to a magnificent large pasture with roaming horses. Way back in 1871, John Marious Wilson wrote, "OSGATHORPE, a village and a parish in Ashby-de-la-Zouch district, Leicester. The village stands on an affluent of the river Soar, 2 miles NNE of Swannington r. station, and 5 ENE of Ashby-de-la-Zouch; and is a pleasant place." Perhaps that is more than you need to know, but I am pleased to report that it is still a pleasant place. After trying to track down old American airfields, pleasant was what the weary travellers needed. That and a spaghetti dinner.

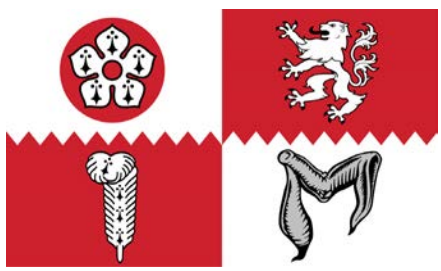
And, think of it, here we were, not far from the very river where the celebrated bark shield had been found.

I took Kelty for a long walk down a country road that led out of the village and into unpopulated rolling hills that had not changed for several centuries. The birds were singing, and I wanted to name them all but could only give names to the magpies and a large family of squabbling crows that ruled one tall gnarly oak tree by a stream that was undoubtedly a tributary of the Soar. Along with the birds, there were rabbits, cows, horses, green fields and blue skies straight out of a watercolour painting.

Later that evening, we watched a movie called Identity on our computer. The IMDB description of the film reads, "Stranded at a desolate Nevada motel during a nasty rain-storm, ten strangers become acquainted with each other when they realize that they're being killed off one by one." It was just the thing to counter our bucolic location in the lush English countryside.

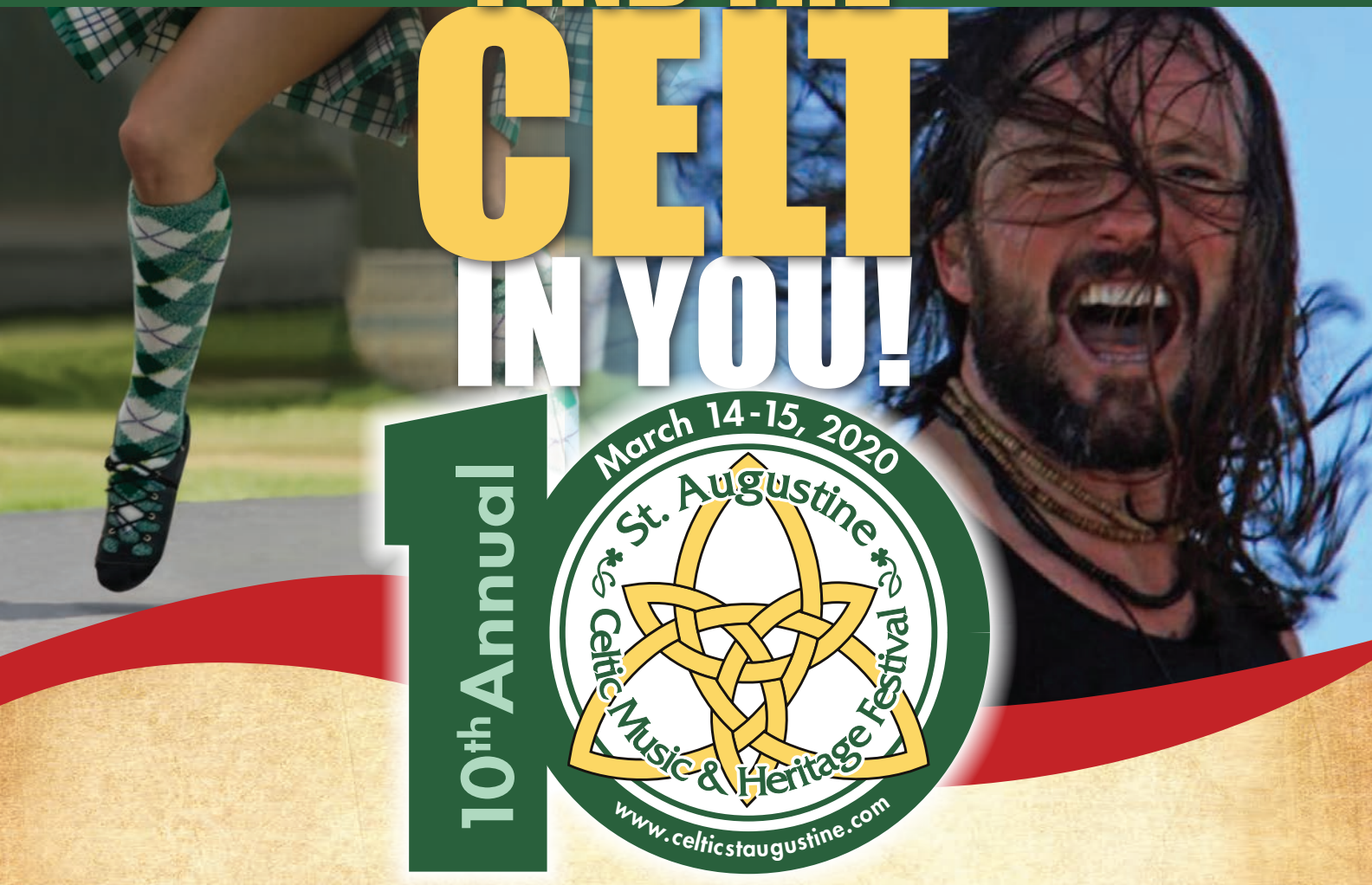
In the morning, we heard our host open up the garage door below and fire up what sounded like a fairly souped-up sports car with a modified Thrush muffler. When I peered out the window, I saw him and his wife driving out of Church Close in an impossibly swanky space-age vehicle. The car in question turned out to be a McLaren, a vehicle whose base price tag is $285,000 U.S., or £222,000. I had never heard of a I watched as the driver tooled off down the lovely country lane that I had walked with Kelty yesterday and thought it would be a fine thing to drive around in with the top down and your scalp warmed by the gentle sunlight. It is a two-seater - so you couldn't take the whole family - but Linda and I could probably squeeze the dog in, although I doubt I wouldd find any place in the U.K. where I could give the car a full workout as it is rated to go 196 mph if you push the pedal to the metal.

As we drove off in the morning in our humble Fiat, I kept wondering what prompted a person to buy such an expensive toy and, if you had so much money to burn, why would you be renting out your flat above the McLaren to a travellers like us? Petrol money, I supposed, or perhaps just good old Leicestershire hospitality.





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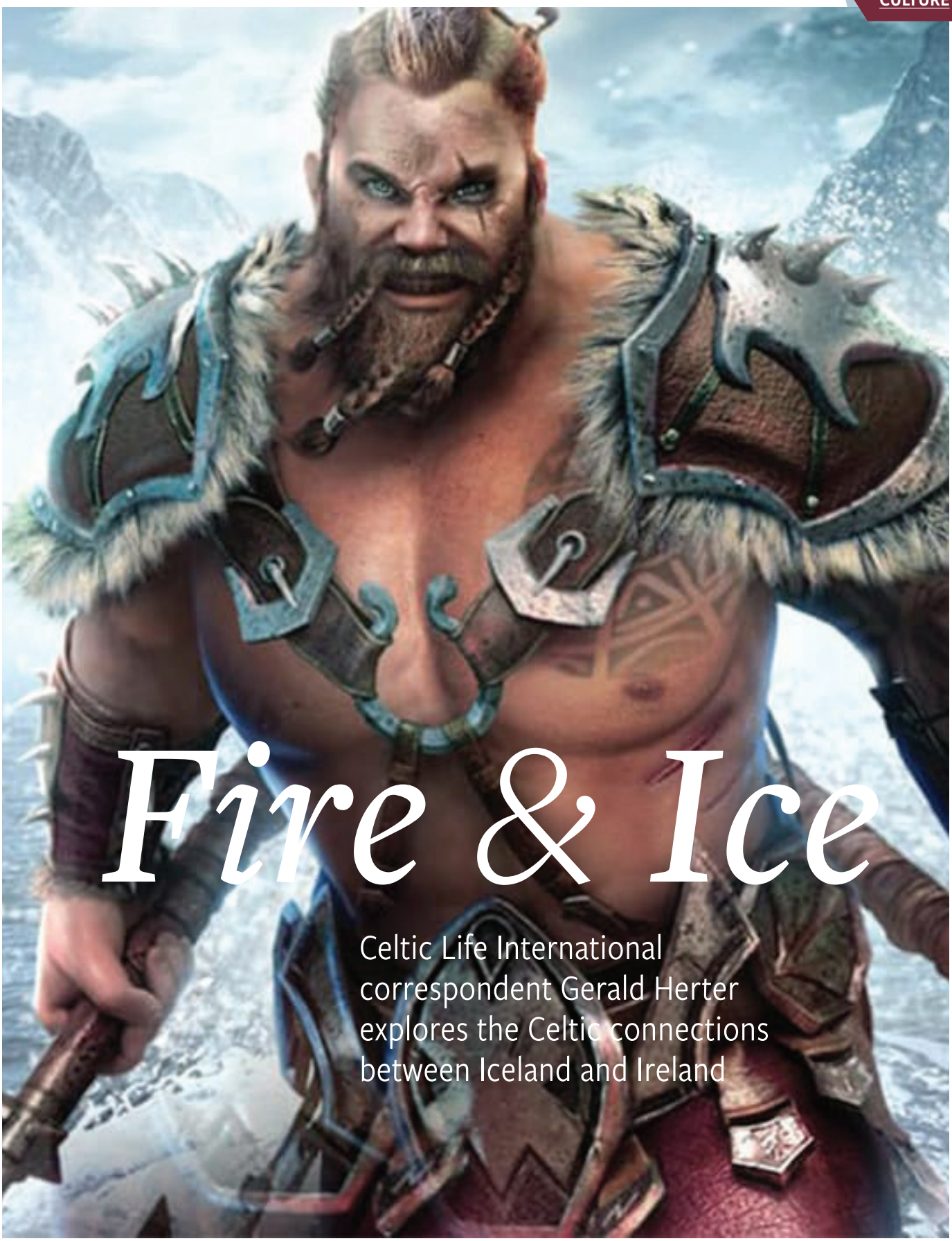
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Fire & Ice

Celtic Life International correspondent Gerald Herter explores the Celtic connections between Iceland and Ireland



Slieve League

It is likely that the Nordic Vikings that first come to mind when the origins of the Icelandic people are considered. The Viking discovered the remote, northerly location later than the British Isles, which were raided and plundered by the adventurous Scandinavians as early as 793 A.D. at Lindisfarne on the north coast of England, and 795 A.D. at the Isle of Iona off Scotland's coast.

The first Viking settlement in Iceland was established around 874 A.D. at a location that is now the capital, Reykjavik. The first Viking settlement of Ireland's capital, Dublin, dates to 841 AD. Curiously, DNA analysis reveals that Icelandic women are almost two-thirds Celtic in heritage. The men, however, are only about 20 per cent Celtic.

Those earlier conquests of Ireland and Scotland may hold the answer. Having settled the Celtic lands and founding cities, the Vikings ventured out again. The theory is that Irish women were taken as slaves, helping to populate the virgin land of fire and ice. Some male Celts may have been taken as well. Other theories, though sketchier, surmise that a few Irish monks may have landed in Iceland earlier, in their quest to spread the Christian gospel.

Beyond sharing Celtic DNA, Iceland and Ireland (as well as other Celtic countries) offer an array of both parallels and contrasts. The two islands are relatively similar in size and shape, with Iceland weighing in as the larger at 40,000 square miles compared to Ireland's 32,000 thousand. Each experiences moist, malleable weather that is tempered by the Gulf Stream. Still, lying some 900 miles to the northwest, Iceland exhibits a clearly colder climate.

My wife, Lori, and I recently experienced Iceland's subarctic climate while on a cruise. Landing on tiny Grimsey Island at the far north, passengers were excited to hike over to a small signed bridge that demarcated the location of the Arctic Circle. Certificates presented by the ship's staff commemorated the event.

All of two square miles, Grimsey has only about 60 residents, but thousands of birds dot the landscape, including Arctic Terns, and Puffins (in the summer.) After a short, cold and windy walk along the dramatic barren cliffs, we were content to settle for a hot cup of tea and a traditional specialty, Icelandic waffles covered with chocolate syrup, rhubarb jam and whipped cream.

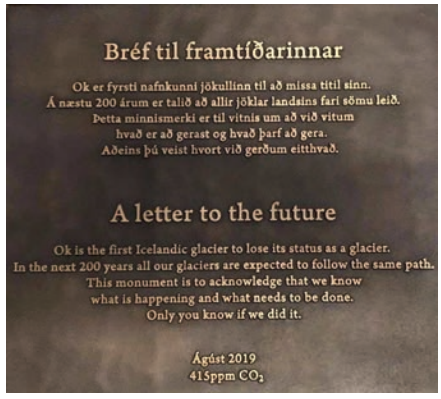
I asked our host at the Gullsól Guesthouse, one of two on the island, about her business. She tactfully replied "We love it when the ships come in."

As our ship pulled away from Grimsey, I spotted a coastal feature that conjured up an old Irish legend. Spanning the front of a sheer cliff, orderly basaltic columns rose from the water in a neat row. Visions from earlier sojourns recalled the Giant's Causeway on the tip of Northern Ireland, and the corresponding Isle of Staffa, off the Scottish Coast. Separated by a mere 82 miles of the North Channel, these two volcanic formations of hexagonal columns form the endpoints for the legend of Irish Finn McCool and the Scottish giant, Benandonnar. Folk lore has it that McCool built the causeway between the two points to dare the big Scot to cross over for a fight. Seeing the larger size of Benandonnar, McCool fled, and he was chased back over the causeway. McCool's wife covered him in bed, telling the arriving Benandonnar that McCool was her baby. Fearing that the father of such a large baby must be huge, Benandonnar retreated tearing up the causeway as he went. All that



Giant's Causeway


Hallgrimskirkja



is left are the two separated extremities.

While Irish folklore is rich with such stories and fantasy fairy creatures, like leprechauns, Iceland upholds its own mythical traditions centered on the 'hidden people' - elves and trolls.

In fact, of the several basaltic formations found in volcanic Iceland, one gives rise to a troll legend of its own. Near Vik on the southern coast of Iceland, three basaltic columns (called 'stacks') stand dramatically off the shore of the black sand beach, Reynisfjara. The columns are said to have been trolls trying to lure a ship aground one night. Before they could finish the job, however, the morning sun rose, turning them to stone for all eternity.

A more modern, scientific approach ties the origins of the hexagonal pillars of Iceland and Ireland together. A recent study by a group of volcanologists from the University of Liverpool ascertained that the columns were formed after the molten lava had solidified while still hot. Using a sample basaltic column from the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in southern Iceland, the scientists determined that the lava fractured into the geometric pattern at between 840°C and 890°C. Eyjafjallajökull is the volcano that erupted in 2010, disrupting air travel for several days.

An architectural expression of the symmetric columns rises up as the defining landmark on Reykjavik's skyline. Hallgrímskirkja, a Lutheran parish church, towers at 240 feet as the tallest building in the capital city. A statue of the most famous Icelander, explorer Leif Erickson, stands in front of the church, a gift from the United States to commemorate the 1000th anniversary of Iceland's parliament which, as the world's oldest, first convened in 930 AD.

The parliament met at another site of natural and volcanic beauty, Thingvellir, about 25 miles northeast of Reykjavik. Meaning 'assembly plains', Thingvellir was an outdoor setting for the meetings, situated on the crest of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge zone that spanned the geologic meeting place of the Eurasian and North American tectonic plates. Set beside a broad plain, a volcanic fissure formed a natural amphitheater and ravine, ideal for corralling the attendee's horses, and for giving speeches from a rocky outcrop, the Lögberg, or Law Rock. Nearby Thingvallavatn, the largest lake in Iceland, provided ample fish for the assemblage. Walking through the narrow fissure today gives an eerie feeling of the momentous energy that flowed through the area long ago.

Thingvellir shares the title of oldest parliament in the world with the Celtic Isle of Man's Tynwald, whose name has the same root and meaning. While the Icelandic assembly met at Thingvellir until 1798, before its relocation at Reykjavik in 1844, the Manx people claim the title of the oldest continuously meeting parliament for the High Court of Tynwald which still meets in the Manx capital of Douglas.

Fans of Game of Thrones, the fantasy epic television series, may recognize Reynisfjara and Thingvellir as two of several filming locations in Iceland. The wild and remote beauty of the Icelandic landscape harmonized well with the dramatic grandeur of the Game of Thrones storyline. Northern Ireland also offered settings for the ancient tale. On a prior trip, Lori and I almost inadvertently wandered onto a set while roaming in the area of the Giant's Causeway. Later that day, while sipping tea at nearby Whitepark House, another couple told of accidently driving onto the natural set before being hurriedly escorted away.


Akureyri



Godafoss

The leprechauns of Ireland and the elves of Iceland are thought to have similar origins far back in fairy lore.

They share some characteristics, such as being invisible to humans. The Icelandic elf legend goes back to the beginning of humankind. When God visited Adam and Eve, Eve hid some of her children from God's sight since she hadn't finished washing them. Consequently, God decided that these children should remain invisible to humans. Hence, they became known as the "hidden people," or elves.

A modern-day haven for Icelandic elves is Hafnarfjörður, the harbour and suburb just south of Reykjavik, from whence our ship embarked and returned. Known as the "Town in the Lava," Hafnarfjörður sits on an ancient lava field. Its unusual volcanic formations supply ideal habitats for elves, who are said to prefer rocky terrain for their dwelling places. Mischievous by nature, elves - even in modern times - have been blamed for broken machinery on construction sites that were considered to be elfin domains.

Another aspect of folklore draws a parallel between two scenic lakes, one more famous than the other. Most of us are familiar with the Loch Ness Monster, purported to ply the depths of the long, deep lake in the Scottish Highlands. But I had never heard of the Lagarfljótsormur. That is, not until passing by the long, narrow lake of that name on a trip out from the port of Seydisfjordur, our ship's stop on the east coast of Iceland. While tales of "Nessie" go all the way back to St. Columba in the sixth century, the "Lagarfljót Worm," as this ominous sea creature is known, is relatively recent, having a first mention in the mid-fourteenth century. The monster is large like Nessie and serpentine, but with humps. Legends claim that each will terrorize and kill those unfortunate enough to encounter them on their respective lakes. Reports of sightings continue even into recent times.

While Iceland, Ireland and Scotland all have volcanic origins, Iceland's location directly on the colliding boundaries of two rift zones gives rise to the more recent active volcanos and other features, such as the geyser basin just east of Reykjavik. Lakes, such as those mentioned above, relate to another common heritage: glacial action.

Iceland, from its northerly locale, is still home to active glaciers. Sadly, the start of our circumnavigation of the island coincided with a memorial tribute to the first death of an Icelandic glacier. The plaque commemorating the momentous event included a Letter to the future:

"Ok is the first Icelandic glacier to lose its status as a glacier. In the next 200 years all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path. The monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it."

Though Ireland's glaciers are long gone, another beautiful remnant from an earlier Ice Age is the valley of Glendalough, in County Wicklow, south of Dublin. After cruising around Iceland, our journey took us to Ireland where we drove through this picturesque setting. With a Gaelic name meaning "valley of two lakes," Glendalough is known for the well-preserved ruins of a monastic settlement established by St. Kevin in the sixth century.

As we walked among the vestiges of the ancient village, the solid granite structures - such as the hundred-foot-high Round Tower and St. Kevin's Church with its circular belfry - gave testament to the resolve of the monastery community over many centuries. Rising up after destructive Viking raids, Glendalough continued as a beacon of faith until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in the sixteenth century. In modern times, Glendalough is a titular diocese of the Roman Catholic Church. Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin served as Titular Bishop of Glendalough in the early days of the twenty-first century.

Leaving the valley of Glendalough, a pleasant drive winds through the scenic Wicklow Mountains and up over the pass of Sally Gap. Even driving slowly to absorb the natural essence, we almost missed one of Ireland's finest waterfalls, Glenmacnass. Cascading 250 feet down the glaciated slopes of the lush valley, the water displayed a yellowish hue from boggish sediment carried along on the rainy afternoon. Nearby, Ireland's highest waterfall at 400 feet, Powerscourt Waterfall flows over the Wicklow Mountain foothills in a horsetail fan.

Waterfalls are gems of Iceland as well. Gullfoss, in southwest Iceland, exhibits a uniquely intricate pattern as it first flows in curving cascades with water from the Langjökull glacier, then falls dramatically for a hundred feet over a narrow crevice of the Hvítá River canyon.

Our favorite was Goðafoss, just east of Akureyri in the north of Iceland. "It looks like Niagara Falls," Lori exclaimed, comparing it to the iconic waterfall in North America. Though only falling a quarter the distance that Niagara drops, Goðafoss, meaning "waterfall of the gods" in Icelandic, bears a striking resemblance to its more famous counterpart.

As islands, Iceland and Ireland have ample displays of dramatic sea cliffs.

Ireland's most celebrated are the Cliffs of Moher, on the western coastline. With over a million and a half annual visitors, the Cliffs are second only to the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin in popularity. My favorite is the more remote Slieve League, further north in County Donegal. At a height of almost 2,000 feet, Slieve League is three times as high as the Cliffs of Moher. Breathtaking as is the view from the top, when I first drove the final quarter mile to get there, before the route was paved, the one lane gravel track dropped off steeply on both sides for a truly heart-stopping experience. Thankfully the road was widened when paved, though I would still hate to have to maneuver around an oncoming vehicle on the narrowest stretch.

Iceland's cliffs stand out in the form of fjords. Having delighted in the splendor radiated by the fjords of Norway, New Zealand and Alaska on previous adventures, I found the Icelandic version to conjure up memories of the others, such as the sparse population of Alaska's Inside Passage, the quaint villages of Geiranger Fjord in Norway, and the remoteness of New Zealand's Milford Sound.

As for population, the whole of Iceland has only 360,000 residents, of which two-thirds are in the Reykjavik metropolitan area. The total is less than 10 per cent of the citizenry of Ireland or Norway. The scant Icelandic population has enabled the preservation of most of the pristine natural characteristics of the countryside. While Ireland has 57 cities exceeding 10,000 inhabitants, Iceland has but five.

One realm where both Iceland and Ireland have sacrificed native conservation is reflected in the lack of trees covering the landscape. Where once woodlands flourished, covering possibly as much as 40 per cent of the land, Iceland now has but 2 per cent forestation while Ireland's is little more than 10 per cent. The paucity of trees in Ireland often goes unnoticed, overshadowed by the "Forty Shades of Green," as the Johnny Cash song describes the color that is almost synonymous with the Emerald Isle's verdant scenery.

In the early days of settlement, lumber was in vast demand for construction of homes and buildings, grazing land for livestock, and for production of charcoal for heating. Today, similar issues have emerged, raising global concerns from the implications of these activities in the Amazon region of South America.

Iceland's harsh climate, volcanic activity, and resulting erosion make reforestation efforts more difficult than in Ireland. Nevertheless, an ambitious program is underway that has seen several million trees planted in the past couple of years alone. A hike near Egilsstaðir in East Iceland took us through Hallormsstaðaskógur, Iceland's largest national forest at 286 square miles, and one of over fifty such projects across the country. Started in 1905 to preserve native birch trees, this forest now boasts a diversity of over 85 different types of trees. Along the path we encountered an unusual sculpture of three slender tree trunks carved into totem-like poles, with curved designs and faces as if in tribute to the sacredness of the forest.

The reforestation effort was also evident to us when in port at Akureyri. On the dock by our ship we saw a sign asking for donations for a tree planting campaign. Lori and I now own a tree in Iceland, having made the requested €2 contribution.

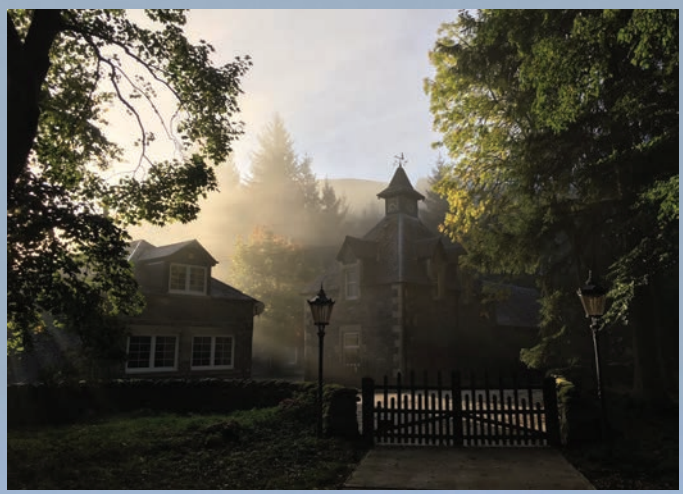
As our cruise around Iceland, and subsequent drive across Ireland, drew to a close, we took away new insights from these enchanting islands and their people. With such extensive shared DNA, the least that can be said is that Icelanders are literally Celtic at heart. But as this brief sojourn has shown, the natural and cultural parallels reflect a closer kinship between these hauntingly mystical and mesmerizing lands.



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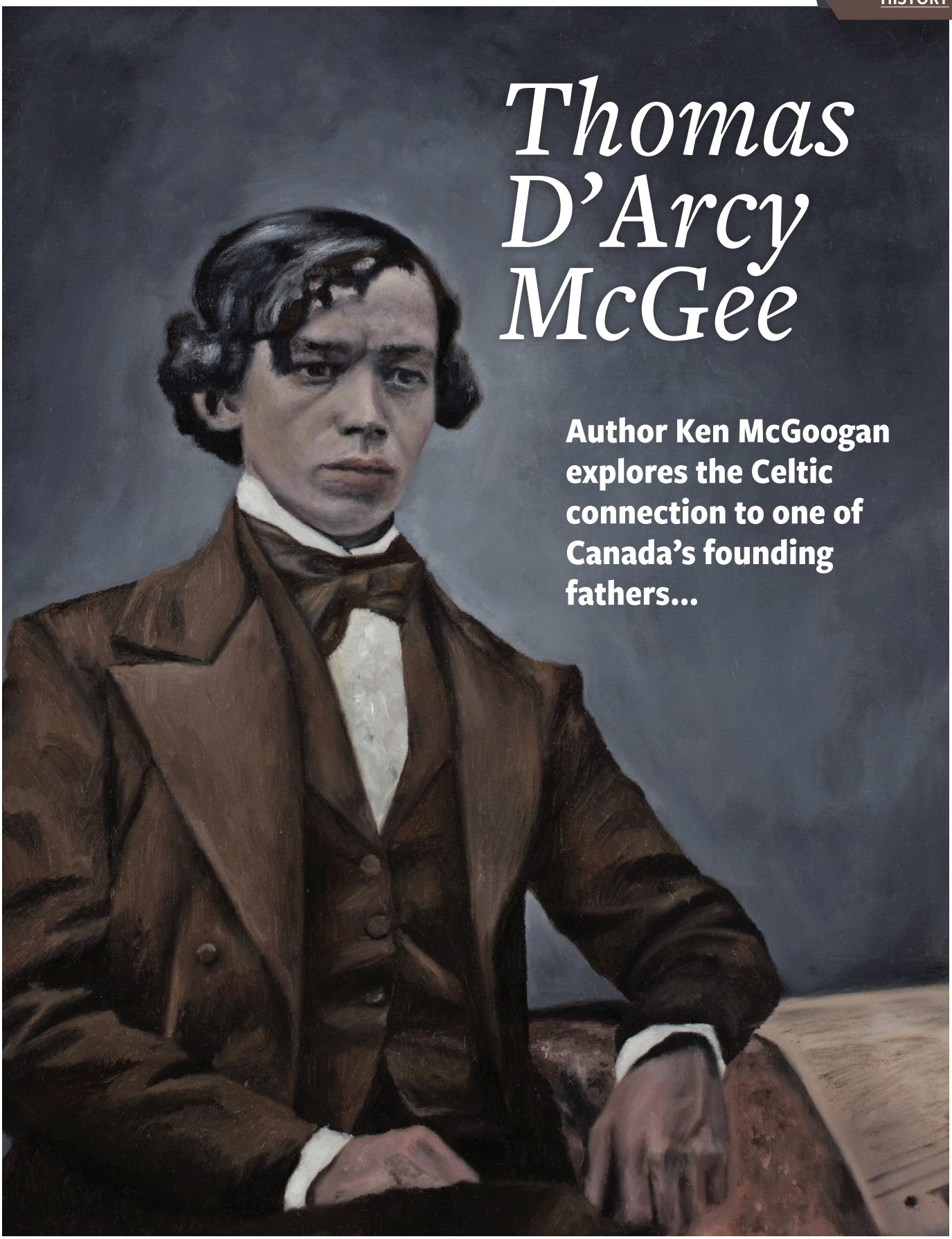
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Thomas D'Arcy McGee

Author Ken McGoogan explores the Celtic connection to one of Canada's founding fathers...



Fathers of Canadian Federation

On April 7, 1868, after participating in a late-running session in the Canadian House of Commons, the most eloquent democrat ever to emerge from the Irish diaspora was ambushed and murdered on the steps of his rooming house in Ottawa; Thomas D'Arcy McGee was shot dead by a killer who ran up behind him and fired a bullet point blank into his head.

Biographer David O. Wilson has called the killing "the greatest murder mystery in Canadian political history."

That cowardly assassination was arguably also the country's most tragic moment. In the 19th century, D'Arcy McGee was the foremost champion of marginalized and Indigenous people in Canada. He had outlined a plan to create a separate province for Indigenous peoples in the nation's northwest. Had he lived another decade, he would certainly have rejected - and might well have managed to overturn - the Indian Act of 1876, which aimed at assimilation and, today, remains a main obstacle to reconciliation.

Not only that, but as a staunch Roman Catholic who had long led the struggle against Orange Order intolerance, McGee would undoubtedly have opposed the 1885 judgment against Louis Riel and, given that he had the attention of then-Prime Minister John A. MacDonald, might well have prevented the hanging that haunts us still.

All this was on my mind while my wife Sheena and I were rambling around Wexford, Ireland, where D'Arcy McGee grew up. Today, that bustling county town of 20,000 shows almost no trace of his presence. In the graveyard at the now-ruined Selskar Abbey, a stone casket marks the early death of his mother. And I did locate the building where in 1865, McGee spoke to the Catholic Young Men's Society, giving a brilliant but unanticipated speech that turned him into a marked man. Today, that small, nondescript edifice houses a used-clothing store run by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Thomas D'Arcy McGee was born in Carlingford, CO. Louth, on April 13, 1825. His beloved mother was the daughter of a Dublin bookseller and taught him early to value history and literature. He spent his childhood at Cushendall on the north coast, where his father worked for the Coast Guard Service. When he was eight, his father secured a transfer to Wexford, where his mother's family had been active in the 1798 Rebellion. She died in a coach accident while relocating. The motherless McGee attended a "pay school" run by a nationalist teacher whose father had been hanged at nearby New Ross after one of the bloodiest battles of 1798.

At 14, inspired by a nation-wide temperance movement, McGee published two poems in the local newspaper, both paens to sobriety. Around this time, his father remarried. McGee and his siblings could not abide their stepmother, and when a sister of their late mother invited them to join her in America, he and one sister quickly accepted. In 1842, at the age of 17, McGee became one of almost 93,000 Irishmen to cross the Atlantic. He sailed from Wexford on a timber ship to Quebec, deposited his sister with his aunt in Rhode Island, and proceeded 50 miles north to Boston to find work.

On the Fourth of July, American Independence Day, the fiery teenager gave a rousing speech to the Boston Friends of Ireland, blaming "a heartless, bigoted, despotic government" for the sufferings of the Irish. Ireland's "people are born slaves," he declared, "and bred in slavery from the cradle; they know not what freedom is."



Fenians



Selskar Abbey

This bit of oratory won him a job at the weekly Boston Pilot, an Irish Catholic newspaper. For two years, he travelled around New England building circulation by giving speeches praising the efforts of Irish politician Daniel O'Connell and his movement to repeal the union of Ireland and Great Britain. Meanwhile, believing that Irish literature provided an argument for independence, he published profiles of forty Irish authors. In March 1844, McGee became editor of the Pilot.

Over the next year, he wrote editorials urging the Irish in America to support the independence movement in Ireland.

He led a campaign to establish evening schools for immigrants and wrote and published two books, one a novella about the United Irishmen of 1798, the other a celebration of O'Connell and his allies. Looking north, McGee initially backed the Anglo-Irish Canadian Robert Baldwin in his drive for responsible government. But according to Robin B. Burns in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography, the 1845 Oregon boundary dispute between the British and the Americans led him to support the doctrine of manifest destiny: "Either by purchase, conquest, or stipulation," McGee wrote, "Canada must be yielded by Great Britain to this Republic."

On this subject, he would reverse himself. But in May 1845, after a year at the helm of the Pilot, McGee sailed home to Dublin to work for the Freeman's Journal, which supported Daniel O'Connell. The following year, while covering parliamentary proceedings in London, he felt drawn to Young Ireland, a group of Irish intellectuals who were increasingly critical of O'Connell's gradualist approach to independence. He moved from the Freeman's Journal to their newspaper, The Nation, while also delving into Irish history and producing a book on Irish writers of the 17th century.

In the summer of 1846, when O'Connell announced an alliance with the British Whig government, McGee joined Young Ireland to help create the more confrontational Irish Confederation. A principal speaker at public meetings, he was elected secretary in June 1847. The following month he married Mary Caffrey, with whom he would have six children.

Meanwhile, increasingly alarmed about the worsening potato famine, McGee opposed mass emigration to Canada, arguing instead that the government should ban grain exports and spend money on improving the economy. He denounced wholesale emigration as a "swindling speculation" concocted by the landlords, who to save their own skins were ready to see "2,000,000 Irishmen...banished into the Canadian backwoods."

At one point, McGee declared that the towns of Ireland had "become one universal poorhouse and fever-shed, the country one great grave-yard." The survivors of famine and pestilence had "fled to the sea-coast and embarked for America . . . and the ships that bore them have become sailing coffins, and carried them to a new world, indeed; not to America, but to eternity." His allusion to "sailing coffins" gave rise to the term "coffin ships."

In February 1848, after the overthrow of monarchy in France, the Irish Confederation began advocating armed rebellion. In July, McGee was arrested for sedition but then released. The Confederation sent him to Scotland to gather sympathizers. While in Edinburgh, a local newspaper proclaimed that authorities considered him one of "the two most dangerous men now abroad." Then he learned that, after a skirmish with police at what is now called the Famine Warhouse, the Confederation had fallen apart.

The government was rounding up Young Irelanders, most of whom would soon be transported in chains to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). With the authorities in pursuit, bent on arresting him for treason, McGee made his way to the northern coast. On September 1, 1848, disguised as a priest - and after arranging for his wife to follow -he boarded the Shamrock, a timber ship bound for Philadelphia.

Now began his transformation from Irish revolutionary into Canadian democrat.

Even before he fled Ireland, as David Wilson shows in his magisterial, two-volume biography, McGee had been taken with the thinking of Scottish intellectual David Urquhart, who led a small pro-Repeal group in the House of Commons. From Urquhart, he gleaned a new appreciation of decentralized federalism as a form of government.

After reaching Philadelphia in 1848, McGee moved to New York City and launched his own newspaper, The Nation. In his editorials, he supported nationalist revolutions in Europe and advocated the annexation of Canada. But by the end of 1849, he had created enemies by supporting an Irish reform movement that called for working within the existing constitution. Two Irish republicans, who later became Fenian leaders, challenged McGee to a duel.

Early in 1850, McGee returned to Boston and started The American Celt and Adopted Citizen. He moved this newspaper to Buffalo and then, in 1853, back to New York. Meanwhile, in the six years that began in 1851, McGee published five books. He treated the history of Irish settlers, revolutionary liberalism, the Protestant Reformation in Ireland, Catholics in North America, and the priest Edward Maginn.

Also, and crucially, he became critical of the American state, seeing it as discriminating against Roman Catholics. By 1855, he was urging Irish Catholics to leave the cities of the east to establish a colony in the American west. When that idea failed to gain traction, McGee looked north with fresh eyes. He realized that in Canada East (Quebec), Roman Catholics constituted a majority and had enjoyed legal protection since 1774. Now, the united Province of Canada provided them far greater security than the United States.

McGee reconsidered "manifest destiny," the doctrine that the United States would one day govern all North America. This time, he judged it pernicious.

In the spring of 1857, in response to an invitation from leading Irish Catholics, he moved north to Montreal. He had already visited twice. And for two years, he had been urging Irish emigrants to choose Canada over the United States. McGee had barely got off the train from


Sir John A Macdonald

Boston in 1857, historian Christopher Moore writes, "when he began advocating federal union, westward expansion, and the nurturing of a national literature for Canada." In Montreal, while thinking to enter politics, he launched the New Era newspaper. From this editorial perch, he began articulating a program for "a new nationality" involving railway development, immigration, and "a federal compact" among provinces.

McGee spoke of developing a North American alternative to the United States - a sovereign "kingdom of the St. Lawrence" that would retain a connection with Great Britain. In December 1857, backed by the St. Patrick's Society of Montreal, McGee was elected to Canada's Legislative Assembly, and so began a decade of political wrangling. He organized Irish Catholics in Canada West (Ontario), and issued a manifesto endorsing a federal union of the two Canadas.

In 1863, he published letters and articles outlining his vision of a British North America, arguing that by retaining their links with the crown under a constitutional monarchy, Canadians had achieved a better balance between freedom and order than existed in the U.S. To advance Roman Catholicism within Canada, McGee embraced pragmatism and pluralism and, by the early 1860s, found himself increasingly aligned with Conservative leader John A. Macdonald.

This Celtic alliance, Irish Catholic and Scottish Protestant, augmented by the Quebec Roman Catholic George-Étienne Cartier, built on the democratic foundations inspired by earlier Scottish and Irish figures. Together, McGee and Macdonald would orchestrate Confederation into existence, unifying four separate British colonies into one country, Canada.

Nobody knew better how much the Irish shared with the Scots. He demonstrated as such in his Popular History of Ireland: From the Earliest Period to the Emancipation of the Catholics.

Most think of McGee as a politician who died a martyr to democratic principles, but he was - primarily perhaps - a towering intellectual.

Biographer David A. Wilson tells us that this Popular History "was the crowning achievement of McGee's literary career." It fulfilled a boyhood ambition, influenced subsequent histories of Ireland, and at times echoed "his oft-delivered lecture on the historical connection between the Irish and the Scots."

And now came the launching of Confederation. For years, Thomas D'Arcy McGee had been warning against the doctrine of manifest destiny then popular among Americans: "They coveted Florida, and seized it; they coveted Louisiana, and purchased it; they coveted Texas, and stole it, and then picked a quarrel with Mexico, which ended by their getting California...had we not had the strong arm of England over us, we should not now have had a separate existence."

At the same time, and as a corollary, he advocated that the projected intercolonial railway should extend not just from central Canada to the Pacific Ocean but also to the Atlantic - a position that won him friends in the east. In 1864, when the maritime colonies organized a conference in Charlottetown to discuss forming a political union among themselves, he led a Canadian delegation in successfully promoting a larger federation.

Maritime newspapers published paeans to the "brilliant D'Arcy," who could be "joyous and grave, comic and refined, all in the same sentence." Charles Tupper, soon to become premier of Nova Scotia, observed that "Mr. McGee has done more to promote the social, commercial and political union of British North America than any other public man in these provinces."

Having cleared the way, McGee relinquished the spotlight when the Charlottetown Conference began, allowing Macdonald to hammer out the details of a federal arrangement dividing powers between national and provincial governments. As Wil-





son writes, McGee's main contribution to the conference lay not in working out details but in the whirl of related social events.

At the Quebec Conference that followed Charlottetown, McGee intervened only to protect minority rights in education, moving an amendment to guarantee "the rights and privileges which the Protestant or Catholic minority in both Canadas may profess as to their denominational schools." On July 1, 1867, after a few further amendments, the British North America Act would create the Dominion of Canada.

Meanwhile, during an 1865 visit to Ireland, where former rebels like himself had been pardoned, Thomas D'Arcy McGee spoke in his hometown of Wexford and again urged emigrants to choose Canada over the United States. As a forty-year-old democrat who believed in the ballot box and constitutional change, he repudiated the American-based Fenian Brotherhood, which advocated attacking Canada as a way of pressuring Great Britain to vacate Ireland. And he disavowed his own revolutionary days as "the follies of one and twenty."

This speech, widely reported, created quite a backlash. In September 1867, denounced even in Canada, and having been expelled from the St. Patrick's Society, McGee nevertheless won election to the House of Commons. But as a politician, he had become a lightning rod for criticism. He decided to quit politics and devote himself to writing literature and history. Prime Minister Macdonald promised to give him a civil service position that would enable him to do so.

> *And then, in Ottawa in April, 1868, the eloquent democrat was ambushed on the steps of his rooming house - shot to death by a Fenian sympathizer.*

In Montreal, where McGee resided with his family, more than 80,000 people attended his funeral procession.

Today, one cannot help imagining how different Canada might be if D'Arcy McGee had escaped assassination. Historian Christopher Moore reminds us that McGee had outlined a plan "for a separate province to be set aside for the native nations on the plains of the far North West. He had begun to imagine a new country where none existed." McGee would surely have opposed the Indian Act of 1876 and, given that he had the ear of Macdonald, might well have succeeded in subverting it. And what of 1885? A staunch Roman Catholic, he could never have supported the hanging of Louis Riel. Given his force and eloquence, he might well have prevented it.

In Wexford, at Selskar Abbey, we stood a moment, Sheena and I, reading the inscription on the stone casket dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Dorcas Catherine McGee, who died on August 23, 1833 at the age of 41: "A woman perfect in every office of life, as a daughter, sister, wife and mother/ With talents unusual in either sex, she combined all the gentle and gracious gifts which are the peculiar endowment of her own." In those cadences I heard a familiar voice speaking as if from beyond the grave. And I shook my head at the terrible magnitude of Canada's loss - Thomas D'Arcy McGee, taken before he had finished his work.

Ken McGoogan recently published his 15th book: Flight of the Highlanders: The Making of Canada.





Ken and Sheena McGoogan



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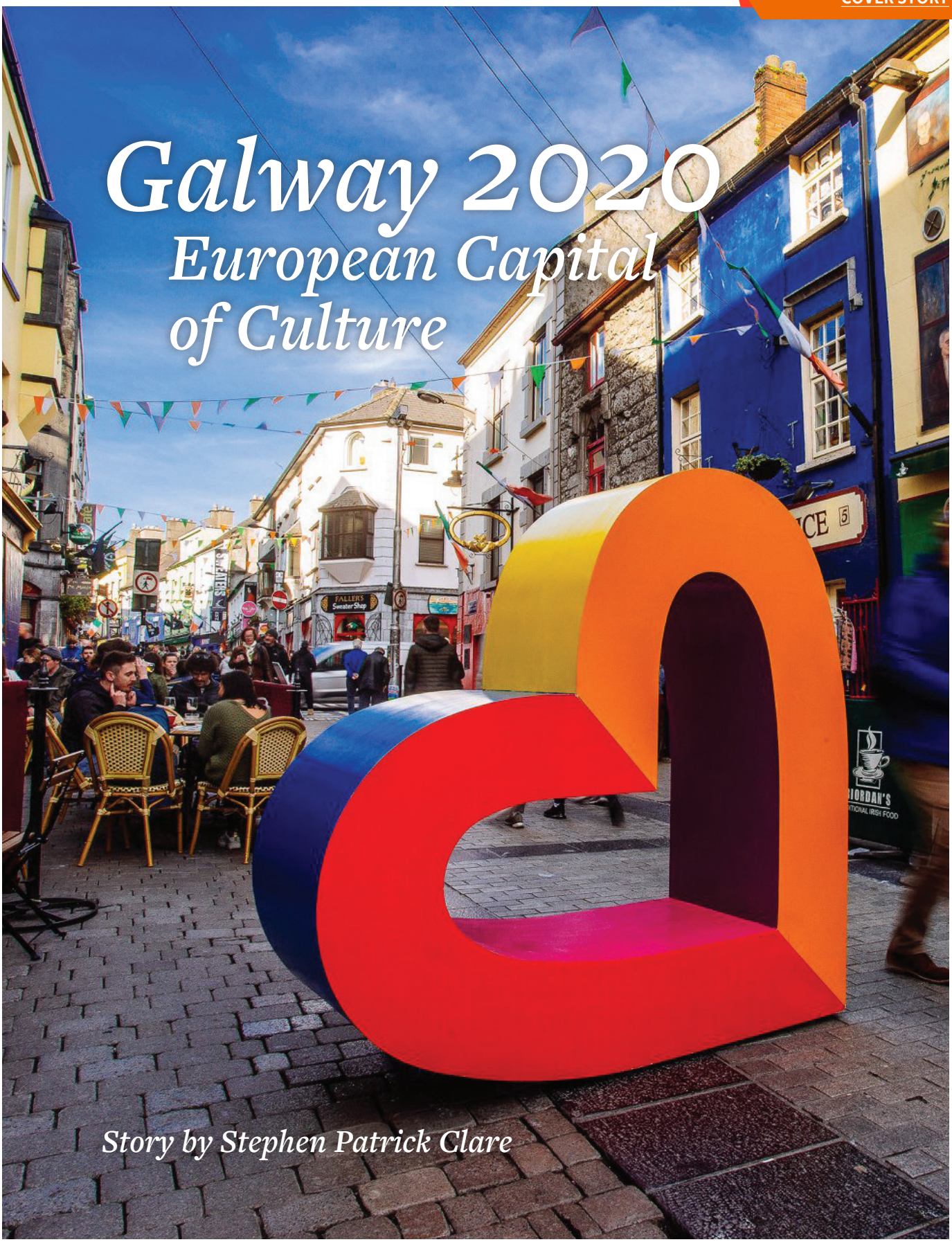
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Galway 2020
European Capital of Culture

Story by Stephen Patrick Clare



When Galway was named European Capital of Culture 2020 four years ago it was a no-brainer.

The city, and the entire county, has long been Ireland's creative hub, drawing artists of all sorts for hundreds of years. Today, on the verge of the year-long Galway 2020 celebrations, it remains a hotbed of music, theatre, dance, visual arts, cuisine and more - bustling with creative energy.

"Everyone here is beyond busy," says Bridgette Brew, Head of Tourism Engagement for Galway 2020.

"Right now, we are tidying up some last-minute decisions," she shares over a warm cuppa tea at the organization's head office on Merchants Row by the city's waterfront.

"As there will be events taking place right across the county, we are trying to incorporate images of inclusion into our marketing efforts. With five satellite cities and towns involved, we might use the symbols of the five rivers that flow from those particular places into the sea, or maybe the five distinct breeds of horses from each area."

Either would work well, as each represents the region's raw, rugged vibe.

"There's a bit of a wild west feeling out here, for sure. We are smack-dab in the middle of the Wild Atlantic Way, and there's a kind of savage beauty to this part of the world."

That scenic splendour was likely attractive to Celts who first settled here 2,500 years ago. Though driven to the western tip of Europe by other warring factions, the normally nomadic Celts found a home along Eire's stunning western coastline, replete with excellent agricultural and aquacultural resources. And though their culture was eventually diluted by the arrival of Christianity - as well as by Norse, Scottish and English invaders - remnants of Celtic customs remain prevalent today.

"Oh, it's still here," says Brew. "It's very much a part of our everyday lives and landscape. You can hear it in our language."

> *"One thing about the people here, and about the Irish in general, is we truly do have the gift of the gab...we just never stop talking, and we really have mastered the art of conversation."*

To prove her point, she cites an everyday expression that is common to Galwegians.

"When you run into someone you know on the street, or even someone you don't know, and you end up having a nice little chat, you always finish the conversation with 'talk to ya' - meaning that the discussion isn't over, it doesn't end there...that you will be picking up that thread at some point down the road when you bump into that person again."

It is an apt analogy for Galway, a city of almost 80,000 today. Threads of conversation have been woven together here since the town was first founded in the 13th century by English Baron Richard de Burgh. In the years to follow, that dialogue continued as the city was granted Charter, the county expanded to include the Aran Islands, and the area gave birth to its first notable families - Athy, Blake, Bodkin, Browne, Darcy, Deane, French, Font, Joyce, Kirwan, Lynch, Martin, Morris and Skerrett (best known as the "14 Tribes") - who ruled the regional roost for generations. Talk was also likely lively during the Middle Ages, when the port made its name importing fine wines from France, Italy, Spain and elsewhere.

Today, descendants of those European travelers are known as the "Black Irish" - a reflection of their darker features.

Similarly, that Mediterranean influence is still evident in the city's charming Latin Quarter, where cozy cafes and busy restaurants serve up an array of exquisite Euro-cuisine. In these eateries, as in the many fine pubs that dot the town's ancient architectural lines, it is not uncommon to hear a litany of languages and dialects.

The quaint cobblestone streets of the Latin Quarter are also renowned for globetrotting buskers seeking fame and fortune. On any given day, guitars, mandolins, fiddles, accordions, bodhrans, banjos and other instruments accompany voices from around the world - each a small stage accenting local, regional, national and international accents.

Nearby, the famed Spanish Arch - built in 1584 A.D. at the base of the port - remains a meeting place for both homegrowns and those "from away." Here, words



are whispered and spoken aloud, the conversations closed with smiles, selfies and a parting "talk to ya."

A few blocks over, on Middle Street, Charlie Byrne's Bookstore is a hive of activity as readers buzz over thousands of fiction and non-fiction works.

"Ah, Charlie Byrne's," grins Bridgette Brew. "There'll surely be no shortage of gab there. You'll get all types in that spot - townsfolk, transients, transplants - just blabbering on about anything and everything at all hours of the day."

Sure enough, the shop's aisles are packed with young and old, browsing new and used titles of all genres, and absolutely no one is in a hurry; teenagers take time to converse with retirees, mothers with prams chat in the children's section, and lineups at the checkout are long, as both customers and staff leisurely catch up on the latest literary releases and local gossip.



Again, as in the Latin Quarter, many of the accents are exotic, and unfamiliar words fall from lips like books falling from shelves.

"Well, that's Galway in a nutshell," continues Brew. "With four universities, and so many foreign students here most of the year, you are going to hear a lot of different languages. And, we also have a large number of people who have relocated here from other parts of Ireland and from around the world; Europeans, Asians, North and South Americans, Australians - that has been our story for centuries."

Indeed, Galway prospered as a destination for workers from 1500 A.D. to the early-1800s. As a port, and the most western gateway to the New World, the area was flush with jobs exporting wool, skins, leather, marble and other higher-end products. By 1840, the town's infrastructure included new roads, bridges, hospitals, colleges, courthouses and a railway, with suburbs springing up as the population soared to 5,000.

From 1845 - 1849, however, residential numbers dipped as many inhabitants died or left the area after poverty and squalor arrived in the form of the potato famine.

The city rebounded in the 20th century, and by 1950 the population reached 21,000. Industry was diverse, and included iron, milling, furniture production and hat making. These traditional businesses eventually gave way to the modern industries of IT, engineering and electronics, which continue to flourish today.

"Economic growth here has been pretty consistent over the years," notes Brew. "It is a big reason why the region remains so appealing to foreign workers, and why a surprising number of students stay after graduating."

Many are attracted to the area's quality of life.

"We really do have it all," continues Brew. "Great history, music, art, restaurants, pubs, sports...and, of course, the genuine, homespun hospitality of the people. And those 'from away' are an essential element of that equation. We wouldn't be the magnificent municipality that we are without the incredible diversity. In many ways, this city is a cultural crossroads, and that makes us the perfect place to host an initiative like Galway 2020."

According to Patricia Philpin, CEO of Galway 2020, the journey began in 2014 when the Irish Ministry announced a call for submissions from candidates to be considered for the title of European Capital of Culture 2020. The city received its official designation in 2016.

"Since then, it captured the imaginations of the people of Galway who were enthusiastically involved in the process, encouraging Galway to think big, define its uniqueness and emphasise its connectivity across the world," she shares. "The response throughout the journey has highlighted the desire of the Galway community to contribute to shaping the future of their city and county. This is an exciting time for cultural development in Galway and Ireland. Along with the coming to life of events and activities throughout next year, it also presents enormous opportunities to achieve a long-lasting legacy and a springboard towards a new collaborative and cooperative approach to cultural development."

Philbin says that being designated as European Capital of Culture means that the region, and its residents, are ramping up the repertoire.

"The year will see an extraordinary showcase of events highlighting the richness and diversity of Galway's culture and its people."

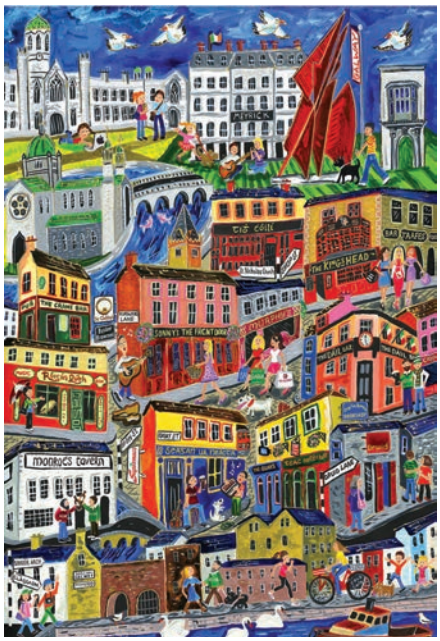
"Our ambitious program, most of which will be free, will be unleashed throughout villages and towns, the city and the islands, and in some of the most surprising and unexpected spaces and places. Galway 2020 represents the legacy of decades of artistic


Brian Nolan

endeavour and investment in the culture of this place. It is a climax of everything that has gone before and a stepping-stone to a future that will leave an improved cultural infrastructure and heightened awareness of the role of culture in society; a society that appreciates the role of its artists and the possibilities that they bring. This exciting year provides extraordinary opportunities for local people to create and participate in something beyond their wildest expectations. The program is a celebration of our city, our islands, our county, our language and our people, with the collective imagination of creative Galway on show for one magical year. It features the best of our local and national artists and cultural organizations, alongside incredible European and international artists who together will transform the city and landscape."

In recognition of the area's historic traditions, the program is based around the four fire festivals that mark the seasons of Ireland's ancient pre-Christian calendar.

"It begins in February 2020," explains Philbin, "as does the pagan festival Imbolc, which represents the start of spring with its promise of new life and new beginnings. Following a spectacular, outdoor opening ceremony, the program will unfold throughout the year according to the Celtic seasons of Bealtaine, Lughnasa and Samhain. The core themes that run through Galway 2020 are Migration, Landscape and Language and all three resonate within a broader European context. Migration celebrates Irish history as well as the diversity of cultures in Europe against the backdrop of Galway County and City - a city where 24 per cent of its population was born outside of Ireland. Landscape reflects Galway's position on the edge of Europe as it collaborates with European partners to delight, challenge and engage citizens across its rural and marine landscape. Language promotes the variety of languages spoken both in Galway and across Europe, celebrating their integral part of our unique cultures. There is a special emphasis on the Irish language in the Galway 2020 program, reinforcing Galway as the capital of the Gaeltacht, home to the only bi-lingual city in Ireland. Ireland stands as a nation that is proudly European. This is mirrored in our extensive engagement with over 100 partnerships, collaborations and artists from over 30 different countries. The program is designed to ensure that each individual project will have a long-term sustainable relevance to both city and county. Created by communities and cultural organizations alike, each project has multiple local partners as well as a mix of regional or European partners.



She adds that Galway 2020 will also focus on issues that are part of a wider discussion on European concerns.

"At a time of increasing political uncertainty both in Europe and around the world, we want to reflect on 21st Century Ireland, what culture means to us and what it means to be European. Leaving a lasting legacy, one that will change the social and infrastructural landscape of Galway, is key to Galway 2020's success. We want to address the big topics of the day – identity, our place on the planet, how we care for its resources, how we live in harmony with each other and with nature, and our history and future. We want to see a Galway where young artists flourish, where communities come together to celebrate life. We want to see a Galway where creativity is rewarded, where culture is at the heart of everything we do, where life is made better for everyone who lives and visits here. We plan to have all eyes in Ireland, in Europe and around the world to be turned towards Galway. There is an open invitation to join us in 2020."

"It promises to be one of the most exciting times in Galway's history, with the potential to change our cultural landscape forever."

Brian Nolan, who owns and operates the local tour company Galway Walks, agrees that Galway 2020 will keep visitation, and visibility, trending in the right direction.

"It has already opened many people's eyes to a city and region they had never heard of. I have seen huge numbers of visitors, especially Europeans, coming here over the past three years, and that has inspired us to provide better and more diverse food and entertainment options. In particular, we have seen an explosion of interest in our Irish music scene over that time. Long may that continue."

Likewise, Galway City's Mayor Michael Cubbard, 34, expects the initiative to have an enormous impact on both the city and the region as a whole.

"Galway 2020 will be an unbelievable cultural journey to be part of. My hope is that those not normally involved in arts, culture or community events become engrossed in the program and, as a legacy, continue to be involved in organizations thereafter. Our culture shines in the visual arts, music, poetry, sports, fashion, food, etc. I believe there will be something for everyone here this year."

He notes that, as Galway City hosts 122



festivals each year, local and area residents are experienced at showcasing their unique culture.

"Visitors can expect a warm welcome - a 'Céad Míle Fáilte' and an unforgettable experience. Galway City has been awarded the Purple Flag, a European designation which means that our night-time economy operates in a safe environment. We are a safe city with a vibe and ambience seen no place else.

"It will certainly leave a lasting legacy," continues Cubbard, whose family hails from the nearby community of Claddagh. "We have already made progress on an arts facility dedicated to children, and Fáilte Ireland has made their single biggest investment ever in a project with €6.64 million allocated to develop an Atlantic Museum at the Spanish Arch."

Most importantly, he adds, the program will help to preserve the area's rich Celtic heritage.

"Galway is Ireland's only bilingual city with both Irish and English spoken in many areas. We are very proud of this, and Oireachtas na Gaeilge (an ancient, annual Irish cultural festival) is scheduled as part of the program and will transform the community of Salthill into an Irish speaking village for an entire weekend. We must continue to promote and encourage young people to speak Irish daily - every day phrases are as important in the city as they are in the rural areas where folks still speak it fluently."

As such, and though the city and county have become linguistically and culturally diverse over the centuries, that original Celtic influence remains intact.

"It's the Gaelic," explains Bridgette Brew.

"Our language is the beating heart of our bloodline. It is everywhere here; in our schools, on our street signs, in our music and literature - everywhere."




Michael Cubbard

The numbers support her claim.

According to Wikipedia, as of the 2016 Census, "there were 84,249 people in County Galway who could speak Irish. According to the 2011 Census, the Galway city and county Gaeltacht has a population of 48,907, of which 30,978 say they can speak Irish, 23,788 can be classed as native Irish speakers while 7,190 speak Irish daily only within the classroom. There are 3,006 attending the ten Gaelscoil (Irish language primary schools) and three Gaelcholáiste (Irish language secondary schools) outside the Galway Gaeltacht. The 2016 Census also notes that there are 9,445 people in the county who identify themselves as being daily Irish speakers outside of the education system."

Interestingly, the name Galway itself is a derivative of the Gaelic word "gall" - meaning a stranger or foreigner.

"Fitting," Brew nods, adding that Galway 2020 will help bring strangers to Galway, and Galway to the world. "However, as Yeats reminded us, 'There are no strangers here - only friends you haven't met yet.'"

As we finish our tea and chat, Brew smiles and shakes my hand.

"Don't be a stranger. Come back and stay with us a while longer. Ok then, talk to ya."

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Photo Credit: Brian Murphy

We Banjo 3

Internationally beloved band We Banjo 3 takes centre stage for Galway 2020

Galway's We Banjo 3 - who are actually four, comprising two sets of brothers (Enda and Fergal Scahill, and Martin and David Howley) - will act as ambassadors for the city during a busy year of touring. The band will also host 100 of their most enthusiastic fans for a three-day sojourn along Eire's west coast - a region that nurtured their distinctive blend of Irish and bluegrass music known as "Celtgrass."

The quartet released their debut album Roots of the Banjo Tree in 2012. Since then, they have toured extensively, receiving critical and popular acclaim both at home and abroad.

The group grew up playing music in the city's many pubs and regularly performed a summer show for tourists called Siamsa na Gaillimhe - a celebration of the area's music, dance and song.

"It was wonderful to hear different languages and to meet people from so many different countries enjoying our culture," says Enda, who plays banjo, mandolin and tenor guitar.

> *"We have always been deeply invested in the success of Galway as a cultural place."*

Galway 2020 celebrations coincide with a big year on the road for the band. A U.S. tour will run from January through March. In addition, U.S. festival dates will take place over the summer months, and a fall tour is in the pipeline also.

Through it all, the band remains true to the sound they created when they started playing together as teens after childhoods steeped in Irish music.

Martin Howley, who plays banjo, mandolin and tenor guitar, explains that the four members were raised on Irish traditional and folk music, which they later melded with Americana, bluegrass, folk and more modern influences.

"It is a real mix, we try to listen intently to what we have the privilege of being exposed to, and all that informs the journey of We Banjo 3."

"I guess you could label us as Irish folk," adds his brother David, who plays banjo, guitar and handles vocals, "both the foot stompin' type and in the truth telling way,"

The band members love the roadwork but acknowledge that the heavy touring schedule can take a toll.

"There is a massive shift that has to happen every night once you walk off stage, get back in the van and end up in your room to the sounds of the deepest silence that you have ever heard," says David.

"We are very fortunate to be family - it eases the burden of being away from home and our own respective families. When someone gets sick or is just having a harder day than usual, we rally and find a way to prop them up, and that torch passes its way around the van a lot.

> *"We love what we do. It does take sacrifice, but that sacrifice is so worth it..."*

The band of brothers have been supporting each other for a long time, beginning around Enda's kitchen table in 2009 as an experiment in playing old-time American music on Irish banjos.

"It was only ever intended to be a hobby as we were all in university or with full-time employment," Enda said. "And, at the start, it was just three banjos."

It didn't take long for them to find an audience.

"People loved the concept, and before we knew it, we were selling out shows all over Ireland," Enda continues. "We also very quickly reached the limit of what we could achieve musically on just three banjos."

That changed when, in 2012, they were invited to play Milwaukee Irish Festival.

"We knew that the event was too big for us as a trio, so Fergal came for the weekend and played the fiddle," Enda recalls. "We had no idea of the impact that weekend would have on the rest of our lives. So here we are, seven years later, a four-piece band called We Banjo 3 with mostly one banjo, three Billboard #1 albums and playing to over 500,000 people live in the U.S. every year."

To Fergal, who also plays guitar and bodhrán, a good song makes the listener feel something. "It is the emotion that goes into the writing that makes the song."

"Our best songs and tunes are the ones we all guided to fruition," adds David.

Enda believes that Celtic music is currently as strong as it has ever been, but commercial pressures make it difficult for young bands to get a break. Bodies such as Culture Ireland play a vital role in supporting travelling groups and in promoting Celtic culture worldwide. Like We Banjo 3, Galway 2020 is bound to help spread the good word.

www.webanjo3.com

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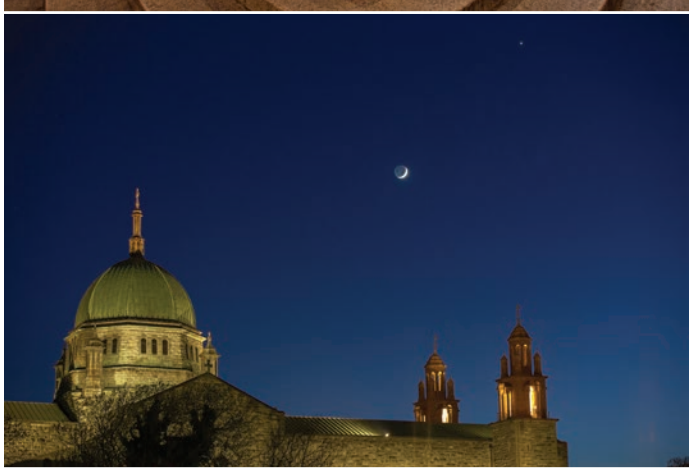
The combination of constantly changing light that sweeps across the West, and the uniquely rugged and beautiful landscape makes Galway one of the most interesting places in the world to photograph. There is a visual feast of incredible locations to visit, and there are hidden gems around every corner...







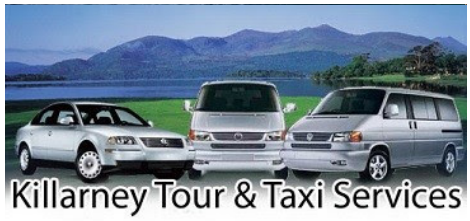








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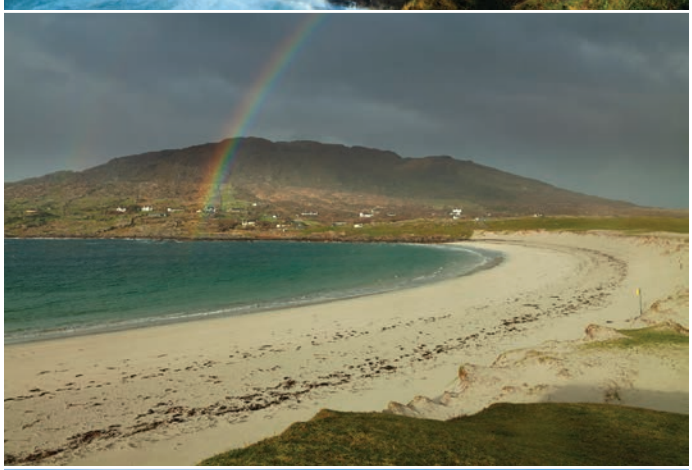
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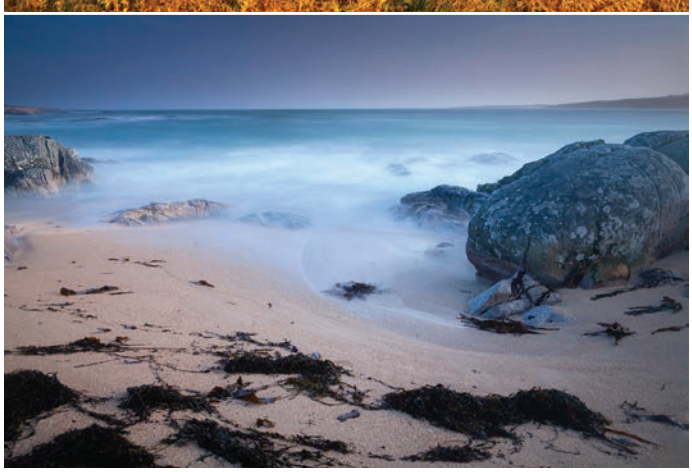
Irish weather allows for beautiful light conditions that really show off the textures of the rugged scenery. It is impossible to capture a scene in the same light twice. There is an overwhelming connection to the past written in the landscape. From our castle ruins to our Stone Age monuments, every inch of land tells a story. It is that combination of an ancient history and wild natural beauty that strikes a chord with me...

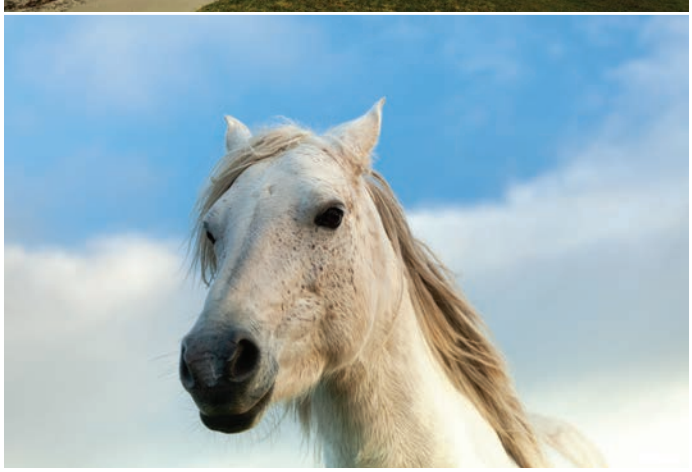












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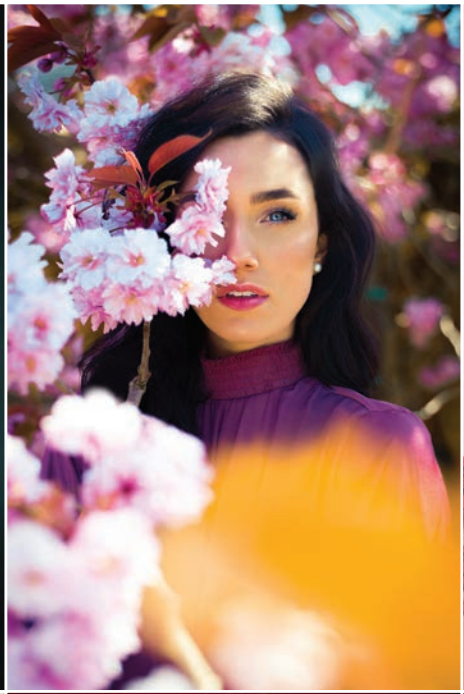


Julia Dunin

www.juliadunin.com

Galway has so much to offer; a vivid art scene with all sorts of festivals all year round and many artists that have made the West of Ireland their home. People are really friendly and there is a great community spirit. The food and nightlife scene are rich and lively, and it is a great place to study and work. And, just on our doorstep, we have the stunning Connemara National Park and Clare, famous for the Cliffs of Moher and the Burren...















EIRELAN

Book 1, Saga of the Latter-Day Celts

by Liam O'Shiel

Review, Welsh Country Magazine, July-Aug. 2012: "Don't be put off by the size ... it takes time to get to know people. By the time I got to the final great battles ... I was on the edge of my seat. A rattling good read."



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Book 2, Saga of the Latter-Day Celts

by Liam O'Shiel

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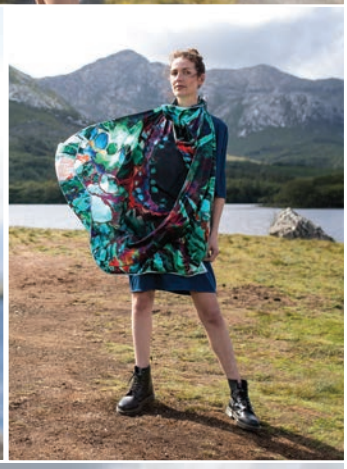
I was born and raised in Galway and I still live here by the sea. My scarves, pocket squares and kimonos are crafted from Italian silk and finished by hand. Like Galway, my works are for people who love art, and who have a sense of adventure and fun...













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Seared Scallops



Imbolc or the Festival of Lights is a pagan holiday celebrated on February 1 and/or 2 each year. Based on Celtic traditions, Imbolc marks the halfway point between winter solstice and the spring equinox, symbolizing hope to the ancient Celts. Candlemas - a Christian holiday celebrated February 2 - focuses on Jesus' early life and the promise that he would be a light for the world. Either way the candle represents light and hope. I am a candle lighter. I light them for special intentions. I light them if someone is sick, has an exam to write, or is preparing for an important interview. I like the stillness of the single flame, a silent communion of sorts with God. Somewhere in our being is the realization that there is more to life than this physical reality. A candle reminds us of what links us together and what makes us one - a light in the darkness of life. It is comforting to light a candle and focus on what is meaningful each day. Candlemas was the day that all the church's candles for the year were blessed. Christians brought their candles to the church to be blessed, and later, placed them in their window. These candles did not give off much light, perhaps just enough to look forward one step at a time, slowly and with great care. Like I said, I am a candle lighter.

Like the sun, which was the focus of the pre-Christian Celtic rituals, the scallop is round and whole and pure. I hope this recipe brings some light to your life.

Ingredients

12 large sea scallops,
1 ¼ to 1 ½ pounds
2 teaspoons all-purpose flour
Salt and fresh ground black pepper
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 ½ tablespoons butter
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 cup fresh basil leaves
3 to 4 lemon slices

Instructions

Use a paper towel to pat the scallops dry. Dust one side of the scallops with a small amount of flour, and then season with salt and pepper. Heat a wide skillet over medium-high heat. Add the oil to the pan. When the oil is hot and shimmery, carefully place the scallops, seasoned-side-down, into the pan. Cook, without moving them until browned, about 2 minutes. While the first side is browning, dust the unseasoned side of the scallops with a bit of flour and season them with salt and pepper. Flip the scallops — if any stick to the pan, wait a few more seconds then try again, gently wiggling them side to side to help release them. Add the butter and garlic to the pan, and then swirl the butter around the pan as it melts. Cook another minute or two then take the pan off the heat. Stir in the basil leaves and lemon slices. I like to serve this over creamy pasta with long green beans. You must have these prepared, as it takes only 5 minutes to make the scallops.

Ith do shàth! Cabrini - cabrini@celticlife.com



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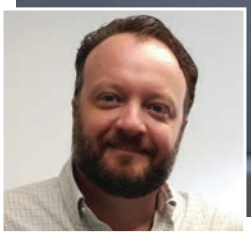
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The Ben Nevis distillery



with **Andrew Ferguson**

Ben Nevis distillery was established in Fort William in 1825 along the banks of the River Lochy at the foot of Scotland's tallest mountain, Ben Nevis. Though the distillery was founded by Angus McDonnell, it would be his kinsman - the literally larger-than-life "Long John" McDonald - who would make the distillery famous. As you might have guessed from his name, "Long John" was a giant; six-foot-four and built like a brickhouse.

At that time, the British Empire was obsessed with Queen Victoria, and Queen Victoria was equally smitten with Scotland. Her subjects often travelled north on the newly built railroads deep into the Highlands to see what all the fuss was about. The town of Fort William, as well as Ben Nevis, became a popular attraction. Many of the visitors were not prepared for the conditions of the high mountains in the Highlands, where weather can turn very quickly. When things went awry Macdonald, a well-known sportsman, was often sent off to find them.

Long John's fame spread across the United Kingdom, when in 1841, the Duchess of Buccleuch failed to return from a trek up the misty mountain. Having set off in the dark with a large bell, he returned later that evening with the young Lady and her party. Newspapers across the United Kingdom carried word of his heroics.

McDonald became a partner in the distillery in 1830, taking full control the following year. He was a savvy businessman with a flair for publicity. In 1841, stories in the press reported that the Duke of Sussex and King of Holland were among his customers. He sent a cask of Ben Nevis to Buckingham Palace to be opened on the 21st birthday of the newly born Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII. The Press ate the story up and his legend grew. In 1848, Queen Victoria paid his distillery a visit. Ben Nevis whisky was a hit, selling all over the U.K., but the ailing man had massive debts. With a downturn in the market for Scotch whisky, and the banks unwilling to extend his loans, Macdonald died bankrupt in 1856.

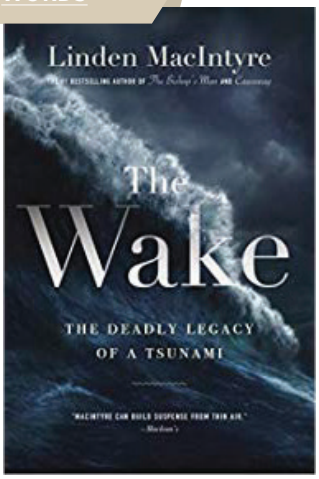
His son Donald then stepped in, purchased the distillery and revived its fortunes. He rebranded the whisky Long John's Dew of Ben Nevis, put an age statement on the bottle and sales soared. In 1878, with demand for whisky surging again, Donald expanded the distillery. By 1886, when the Victorian whisky writer Alfred Barnard called on the facility, it was distilling over 1 million liters a year, employing more than 230 men, and exporting Long John's Dew of Ben Nevis all over the English-speaking world.

The McDonald family retained control of the distillery until 1941. There would be a number of owners over the following fifty years, including Canadian booze baron Joseph Hobbs. But by 1986, surplus to demand, Ben Nevis Distillery was closed as a market correction wrought devastation on the Scotch whisky industry as a whole. The closure was short-lived, however, and the distillery's prospects revived when, in 1989, it was purchased by the Nikka Whisky Co. of Japan. Nikka's interest in Ben Nevis was primarily to support their own Japanese Blended Whisky. It may come as a shock to some, but Japanese whisky producers are not prohibited from using foreign whisky in their bottlings, and most do, although the rules governing that are set to change. Currently up to 75 per cent of Ben Nevis' production is sent to Japan every year.

Dire though this may sound, the takeover by the Japanese was not all bad. In 1991, the new owners opened a visitor center, and in 1996 they started bottling and selling Ben Nevis as a single malt. Distribution of official bottlings of the whisky is fairly limited, but independent bottlings can be found with a little effort. Ben Nevis distilled in the mid-1990s has developed a bit of a cult following. Count yourself lucky if you are able to track down a bottle of Ben Nevis 10 Year, or better yet the newly released first batch of cask strength whisky. The advert on the facing page features a stunning exclusive cask bottling of Ben Nevis that I was fortunate to source for my store. And this is to say nothing of the lovely and award-winning Nikka From the Barrel Blended Japanese whisky, in which there is almost certainly a healthy dollop of "Long John"s Dew of Ben Nevis too!

If you visit, there is plenty to do in the Fort William area, including mountain biking, hiking, water sports and, of course, climbing the famous Ben Nevis. A trek up the mountain takes 4-8 hours depending on your level of fitness. Don't get lost though, the mists hide dangerous cliffs, and Long John McDonald and his bell aren't around to rescue folk any longer!

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The Wake

By Linden MacIntyre
Harper Collins
384 pp / $32.99

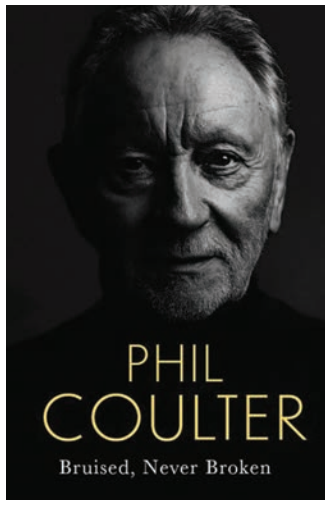
True to his Cape Breton roots, Canadian journalist and author Linden MacIntyre might be one of the finest storytellers that this country has ever produced. His latest effort, The Wake, certainly goes a long way towards cementing that legacy. After an earthquake shook Newfoundland in 1929, a massive tsunami swept over the shores of the province's Burin Peninsula leaving 28 people dead, with hundreds more dying in the years to follow. An economic and ecological disaster, the tragedy was made worse by the ensuing exploitation of area fisherman who were desperate to find work and feed their families. More than a mere portrait of people and place, The Wake serves as a timely, relevant reminder of the evil that lurks in the heart of humanity.
~ SPC

Wild Atlantic Way

By Giles Norman
O'Brien Press
160 pp / €35

For those who have traversed Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, the stirring hues of the country's plush western shores are obvious; the great greens of the land and the deep blues of the sea are a kaleidoscope of colour, rich in texture. Award-winning Irish photographer Giles Norman brings readers another perspective of the region, capturing the stunning scenery in shades with this bountiful barrage of black and white images. Peppered with notes and text - and covering 2500 kilometers of rugged coastline from Kinsale to Donegal - the table-top tome captures and conveys the sheer physical beauty of intimate inlets, towering cliffs and windswept beaches. Look close enough and you will see and feel the wild spirit of those who have inhabited the land for generations.
~ SPC





Bruised, Never Broken

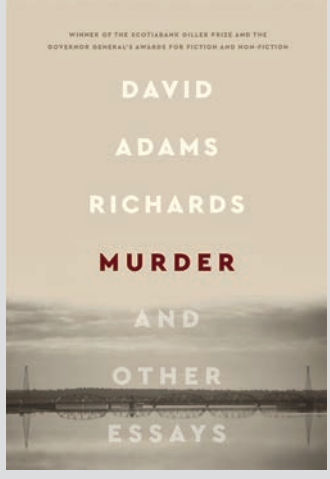
By Phil Coulter
Gill Books
304 pp / $22.99

A modern Renaissance man, legendary composer, arranger, producer and performer Phil Coulter can now add author to his resume. The native of Derry, Northern Ireland retraces his steps from a child growing up amidst the Troubles of a war-torn town to his early years plying his trade as a struggling musician. After writing a string of hits for the likes of Elvis Presley, Cliff Richard and the Bay City Rollers, Coulter hit full stride, firmly establishing himself as one of the finest artists of his times. Gratefully, and unlike so many other biographies, this memoir keeps a healthy distance from dirt and hearsay. Instead, the scribe simply shares his story, humbly downplaying the huge influence and impact he has had upon generations of younger musicians.
~ SPC

Murder and Other Essays

By David Adams Richards
Penguin
320 pp / $32.95

David Adams Richards is my favourite Canadian author, and with good reason; rich, robust, dark and dense, both his fiction and non-fiction works are thought-provoking and challenge readers' perspectives. Such is the case with his most recent release, Murder and Other Essays. Poignant and powerful, this collage of conceptual visages covers a number of topics, including (obviously) murder, marriage, traveling, nature and even his beloved sport of hockey. Though the pieces sit well independent of one another, the scribe masterfully weaves the thread of truth through the tome, tying seemingly loose ends to one another to create a complete read. As a bonus, the book includes a number of Richards' poems, offering further insight into the mind, heart and soul of a literary lion.
~ SPC





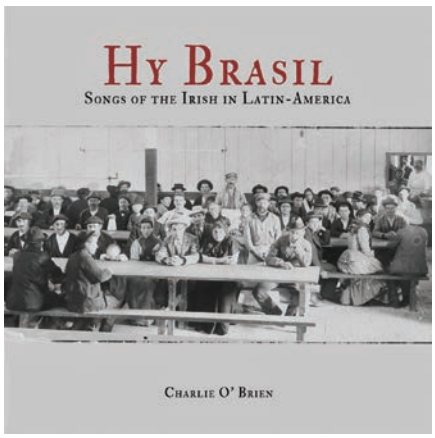
Helena Byrne
Saol Eile

Irish seanchaí and songstress Helena Byrne crosses over into the world of spirits with her spirited new album Saol Eile. Translated as 'Afterlife' - and dedicated to the memory of her late relative Martin Duggan - the 13-track recording transcends time with a series of spoken-word stories from the Emerald Isle's past and present. Accented by interviews with those who have been touched by supernatural experiences - and tinted with musical tidbits that stir just below the surface - Byrne makes the case for the mystical by tapping into visible links of the invisible world. The lone melody, Molly Malone, is both a bonus track and a reminder that this lovely lass is more than capable of raising the dead with her fine Irish lilt. ~ SPC

Celtic Colours: Volume Seven
Various Artists



Visitors to the Celtic Colours International Festival in Cape Breton often note the tremendous sense of community found across the region. With concerts, workshops and collective lunches on the agenda each fall, it is easy to see why. That sense of togetherness comes across in sonic splendour on the event's latest anthology, as artists share the spotlight on a number of live tunes. Two stellar bands, Beòlach and Breabach, kick the album off in high style, while The Chieftains team up with Scottish vocalist Alyth McCormack for a lively version of Red is the Rose. Guitarists J.P. Cormier and Tim Edey also bring the heat with a smokin' medley. With too many highlights to list, listeners will just have to come experience Maritime hospitality for themselves. ~ SPC



Charlie O'Brien
Hy Brasil

Those with a passion for Cross-Celtic culture will want to wrap their ears around Charlie O'Brien's latest release, Hy Brasil. Subtitled Songs of the Irish in Latin America - and inspired by both place and history - this terrific 15-track recording is exactly as the title suggests; traditional melodies from the Emerald Isle with some South American flair and flavour. This isn't Samba, however, as the artist goes old-school with gentle guitars, quiet piano and soft vocals to highlight the mellow melodies. The result is a hypnotic musical journey into the heart of two worlds and into the head of a true artisan; like JJ Cale, Van Morrison or Ry Cooder, O'Brien masterfully crafts each work with enough space that the stories simply tell themselves. ~ SPC

Graham Lindsey
Tradhead



I cannot begin to imagine the number of great recordings that fall through the cracks each year. Thankfully this one didn't. Recorded in Canada (Ontario, Nova Scotia, PEI) and Sweden, mixed in Montreal, and featuring a myriad of musical guests - including famed fiddler Chrissy Crowley - this super 13-song selection brings the past and present together with both style and substance. An accomplished composer, arranger and multi-instrumentalist, Lindsey weaves and winds his way across generations with his original takes on traditional tunes. Highlights here include From Away, East West, Wild Mountain Time, and the rollicking Whiskey Soup. It is rare that an instrumental album captures my attention for repeated listens, but this one has. And, I suppose, that officially makes me a certified "tradhead." ~ SPC

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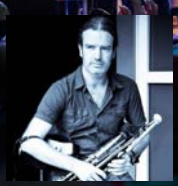
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Matthew Bartlett

Solo piper Matthew Bartlett blends the sounds of Scotland with the soul of Wales

Matthew Bartlett began playing music at the tender age of 13. "I started piping in a local Newport bagpipe and drum band," he recalls via email. "At that time, we were young and inexperienced musicians, but we were keen to learn and enjoyed bringing those unique sounds to South Wales where many people had never heard the skirl of the bagpipes before."

Over time, the band grew in both size and scope.

"I remember a quote from one of our practice books that stated 'To the make of a piper go seven years. At the end of his seven years one born to it will stand at the start of knowledge and learning a fond ear to the drone he may have parley with old folks of old affairs.' This quote remains with me today. I still have many things to learn about this honourable instrument."

As a young adult, Barlett opted to leave his budding music career behind. Then, in 2002, he again picked up the pipes when a friend asked him to play at a wedding.

"Reluctantly, I dusted the cobwebs off my pipes and blew life into them. I was incredibly surprised that, despite years of neglect, they still sounded strong. That's the thing with bagpipes - they do need a lot of care and attention to keep them sounding at their best. So, I piped at my friend's wedding and, despite many years without practice, received a wonderful reception. It was then and there that I decided to share the sound of the bagpipes by offering my services to pipe at weddings across South Wales."

Today, plying his trade with a set of Wallace bagpipes, Bartlett is known as "The Welsh Wedding Bagpiper." His distinct style of playing blends the sounds of Scottish music with the sonic soul of his home country.

"I tend to play many of the familiar and traditional Scottish bagpipe melodies at weddings, including Scotland the Brave, Mairi's Wedding, The Skye Boat Song, and so on. I also wanted to offer something unique as a piper based in Wales, and so I learned a few Welsh tunes, including Calon Lan and Myfanwy. This allows me to bring a varied Celtic flavour to all occasions."

"There are also times when I am asked to pipe as a mark of respect for Scottish or Celtic relatives who are no longer with us and were not able to be with relatives and friends at the wedding," he continues. "And the emotions that are evoked in others by the sound of the pipes during those moments are perhaps the most rewarding part of doing what I do.

"I remember, on one occasion, piping alone in the hillsides of Wales and I became aware of a gentleman in the distance who was motionless as he listened to the sound of the pipes. After a short while he plucked up the courage to walk over to me, his eyes wet with tears as he spoke, and told me that the tune I had played, Amazing Grace, reminded him of his late father and the emotions had just poured of him hearing this familiar tune once again.

> *"The bagpipes are certainly an instrument that do not like to be ignored - they demand an audience's full attention."*

Although he acknowledges that the vocation can be an expensive and emotional endeavour, Bartlett believes that the highlights are well worth the investment.

"Every year I am invited to pipe at new and exciting venues across South Wales and beyond. Over the years I have played at the Royal Albert Hall, many of Wales' historic locations, including Cardiff Castle, Manorbier Castle, Castell Coch and Caerphilly Castle. I have even piped in the middle of the Severn Bridge crossing over the Severn River on the border of England and Wales. There are so many highlights."

The final moments of 2019 were memorable for Barlett, who was honoured to perform the Auld Lang Syne at the 2019-2020 Hogmanay Party. With a number of appearances and shows scheduled for the coming months, he anticipates 2020 to be equally rewarding.

"I will be celebrating the life and poetry of Scotland's world-famous Robert Burns at several Burns Night events across South Wales early in the New Year, and I also have a full slate of weddings, birthday parties and anniversaries on the agenda."

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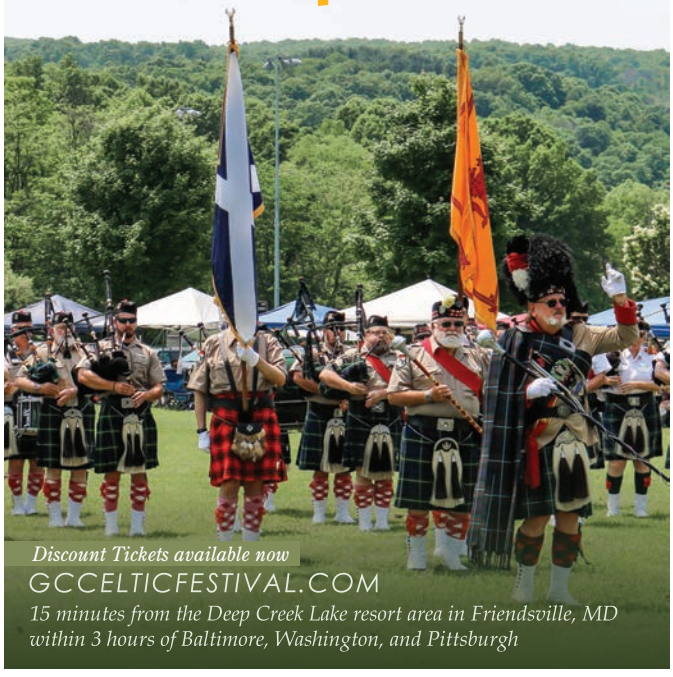
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Ellie Goud

Canadian fiddler Ellie Goud is nothing if not traditional

As with many from her hometown of Quispamsis, New Brunswick - a place "steeped in traditional Atlantic Canadian music" - fiddler Ellie Goud thanks the Maritimes for her love of music.

"Playing the fiddle was a normal thing for kids to do growing up in that part of the world," she explains via email from her current home in Ithaca, New York. "I don't actually remember ever deciding to learn the fiddle; the culture of playing traditional music from a young age was, and still is, completely ingrained and organic in many areas of Atlantic Canada."

Goud began her life-long love of the instrument at the tender age of 9.

"My parents signed me up for the fiddle program because I absolutely loved music and I had been playing the piano for a few years at that point. My grandmother played the violin when she was younger, and we had her violin in the house. I think my mom was hoping that I would also enjoy playing, and she was right - I loved it from day one."

In no time, the youngster began performing at local programs and farmers markets. Her early musical influences included Ivan Hicks and Don Messer, as well as the Acadian fiddler Eddy Arsenault and Cape Breton's Natalie MacMaster.

"I pored over the pages of their tune books when I was little," recalls Goud. "This was before the days of internet, mp3 players and cell phones, so the traditional music I heard was mostly from players in my town, at live concerts, and the on the radio. The very first CD I owned was Natalie MacMaster's 'No Boundaries' album, and I became obsessed with learning those tunes! I also listened to a lot of French-Canadian musicians, including two of my current favorite fiddle players André Brunet and Pascal Gemme, both from Quebec."

Today, the 34-year-old balances her musical career with her daytime job as a plant scientist and ecologist. Still wielding the same fiddle that she played as a youngster (a cross-tuned Jim Danson), she describes her sound as a classic Acadian-Celtic mix that is "uniquely New Brunswick."

> *"Playing traditional music is an expression of my culture, my personality, and how I relate to the world around me. It's a big part of how I express myself as a person. I am nothing if not traditional."*

In addition to performing as a solo artist, Goud is a core member of Celtic trad trio Arise and Go, alongside piper Michael Roddy and multi-instrumentalist Tim Ball. In 2017, the band released their debut, self-titled EP, and - more recently - they launched their first full-length album, Meeting Place. The 13-track recording has been well received by both fans and the media, with one critic calling it "raw and lively."

Arise and Go is currently preparing for an upcoming tour in support of Meeting Place.

"We have a really great lineup of concerts and festivals in 2020 that will let us share our music with new audiences."

And while she acknowledges that much is being done to preserve and promote Celtic and Acadian culture, Goud believes that there is always room for improvement.

"Preserving a culture for future generations depends on more than just going to concerts and festivals – it is a way of life that starts at home and radiates out. As a traditional musician, I feel like it is my responsibility to share Celtic culture not only with my audiences when I am performing on a stage, but with the people in my community by being involved in local dances, sessions, and other inter-generational events. Every time I have moved to a new town, the first thing I do is find a session that I can go to on a regular basis, because to me, a session is an important part of my community - a place for multiple generations to get together and have fun sharing traditional music with each other."

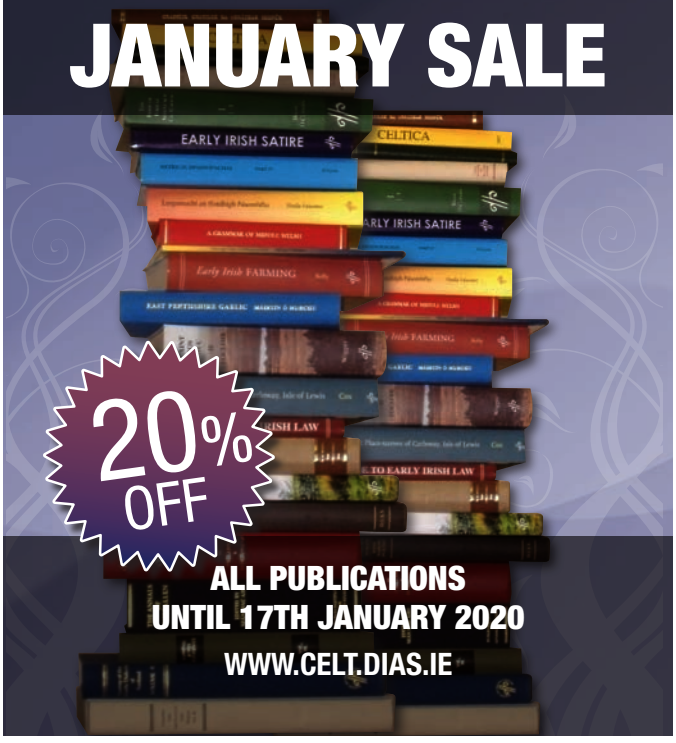
To that end, the next 12 months she will be busy doing her part.

"Even while we continue to promote our new album, Michael and Tim and I can't stop ourselves from working on new music. I will also be teaching fiddle workshops in New York and Maine in 2020. On a more personal note, I will be finishing my degree in New York and moving back to Canada to start a new job in Waterloo, Ontario. I can't wait to see what new opportunities and connections are in store for me there and I am really excited about making music closer to home."

www.ariseandgo.org

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Emma O'Sullivan

Irish dancer Emma O'Sullivan brings the 'Old Way' back to life



It is no surprise that Emma O'Sullivan found her way to Sean Nós, one of the most traditional styles of Irish dance.

"Growing up, my family would play jigs and reels for us in my grandmother's kitchen, while my cousins and I danced simple steps across the floor," she tells Celtic Life International via email. "My great grandfather's home was once the local Rambling House, where village people gathered to sing, dance, play music and tell old stories. The family kept this tradition alive by always encouraging the next generation to perform their 'party piece.' I learned steps watching relations and neighbors dance at family gatherings. This is how most people picked up the traditions of the area I grew up, which is Connemara."

Situated in County Galway, Connemara is a magical, mythical part of the Emerald Isle that O'Sullivan calls "the heartland of Sean Nós dancing."

"I was lucky to have been exposed to this beautiful and rare tradition over the years. I started listening to Irish music as a baby so I suppose it was only natural that I would become a dancer."

As she explains, Sean Nós translates to the "old way" in English.

"Generally, you will spot a Sean Nós dancer by their tidy footwork. It is close to the floor, battering movements paired with a loose upper body. We don't concern ourselves with the aesthetics. A lot of our focus is on sound when we dance. I just let the steps flow out as they come. When I dance, I am thinking about sharing an emotion and beating the notes of the tune."

Since taking her first steps, O'Sullivan has enjoyed an impressive career. Among her most notable achievements was winning the All-Ireland Sean Nós Dancing title at Oireachtas na Samhna in Letterkenny at the age of 24.

Now, just over 10 years later, she notes that her reasons for participating in Irish dance have changed.

> *"I now realize its power. It brings people to another world and helps them forget their problems for a little while."*

"Dance can be very therapeutic, and this is something of great interest to me. It informs my own dance practice and it is something I explore in my performances. Now, my dancing is all about connecting with the audience."

Although her career has been rich with rewards - travel and teaching being foremost - she admits that the vocation has not been without its challenges.

"You really have to be adaptable and resilient. You put yourself out there so much as a performer and that can make you vulnerable.

"Still, it is simply amazing to see an audience lift when you take the floor. And it is also wonderful to spend time doing what you love and knowing that you are promoting your heritage and culture."

In 2015, O'Sullivan helped to bring the "old way" back to life by releasing a dance tutorial DVD for beginners titled Step by Step. Set amongst the scenery of her hometown, and accompanied by music from John O'Holleran, the video breaks down 16 reel steps, ranging from beginner to more advanced. It also includes a short tour of western Ireland, highlighting the stunning scenery of Galway and - in particular - Connemara.

"I wanted something that a viewer could sit back and enjoy. Or, if they found the inspiration, something to get up and dance to. In the tour section I stop to perform dances with live music at scenic locations, recount the history of sean nós dance, and share a little of my own story and background as well. I wanted that part to be like a beautiful video postcard of home - a chance to showcase the region's stunning natural landscape. I can imagine all of these people around the world dancing along with the DVD, and that helps me to feel very connected to them."

O'Sullivan explains that she expects 2020 will to be a particularly busy year.

"Galway is the designated European Capital of Culture for 2020 and we are all so excited! We are expecting many new visitors to the region and I am looking forward to entertaining at events both in the city and across the county. I will be offering dance experiences to international visitors of Galway, while also continuing to provide workshops further abroad."

www.emmaosullivan.com



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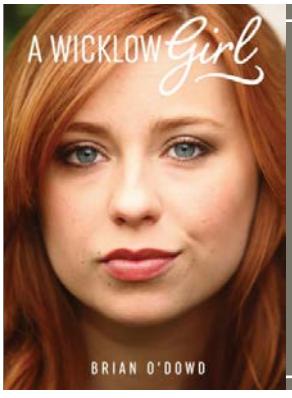
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Gay Byrne; 1934-2019

Colourful, influential and much-loved Irish broadcaster Gay Byrne, long known as Uncle Gaybo, is being mourned after passing away at home in Dublin aged 85.

Byrne died in November after battling cancer. His death was announced by Ireland's public service broadcaster RTE, for whom Byrne hosted one of the world's longest-running chat shows The Late Late Show, often known as The Late Late.

As host of the Late Late from 1962 to 1999, Byrne had a huge influence on Irish life. A broadcaster of wit, charm and emotional intelligence, he was able to get interviewees to open up and reveal the heart of a subject. Over the years, his wide-ranging interviews provided entertainment, connection and passionate discussions on subjects considered controversial in a conservative, largely Catholic, society.

Subjects that came under his microscope included divorce, homosexuality and pre-marital sex. In one episode, water-filled condoms were shown on screen.

"People are falling in a swoon all over Ireland looking at that," Byrne joked in his famously rich tones.

After his death, the BBC recalled an episode in the mid-60s. which became known as the Bishop and the Nightie scandal. Chatting to a married couple, Byrne discussed the nightdress the wife had worn on her wedding night.

Her husband said it was transparent, while the wife declared she'd worn nothing. The Bishop of Clonfert, Dr. Thomas Ryan, later condemned the episode. Many others chimed in to pronounce The Late Late "dirty" and "smutty."

In another show, The Meaning of Life, Byrne invited well-known guests to divulge their innermost thoughts and emotions. One episode saw author and actor Stephen Fry decrying childhood cancer and describing God as "monstrous" and deserving of no respect.

Byrne was also a popular radio host, presenting an eponymous show on RTE Radio 1 and the music show Sunday with Gay Byrne on Lyric FM.

He was opposed to the European Union and considered running for President on an anti-E.U. platform in 2011 before pulling out of the race.

Recently, he was quoted in the Irish Mirror as recommending that Ireland follow Britain in leaving the E.U.

"When I first started to give my anti-E.U. feelings, I was written off as a noodlehead," he said. "It is heartening to realize at least half the population of the country by now agrees with me and certainly over half the population of the U.K. agree with me."

At news of his death, many of Ireland's most prominent figures offered tributes to the man who'd stood at the heart of Irish broadcasting for six decades.

Writing on Twitter, Ireland's Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar said Byrne had changed Ireland for the better.

"I knew him when he was Chairman of @RSAIreland (Road Safety Authority Ireland) and saw the effectiveness of his campaign against the needless tragedy of road deaths," Varadkar tweeted. "Uncle Gaybo provided a voice for all those who had been silenced or were afraid to speak up, and helped us confront things that needed to be changed..."

Ireland's President Michael D. Higgins described Byrne as charismatic.

"Gay Byrne was someone who exuded warmth and presence, who was possessed of effortless wit, charm, and who had a flair for broadcasting. This was combined with an innate gentleness as a person, professionalism and humour. Through his work in radio and on television he challenged Irish society, and shone a light not only on the bright but also the dark sides of Irish life. In doing so, he became one of the most familiar and distinctive voices of our times, helping shape our conscience, our self-image, and our idea of who we might be. Beyond compassion, which he had in abundance, he had a sense of what was just."

RTÉ, the broadcaster with which Byrne enjoyed such a long relationship, posted numerous tributes, and popular musician Hozier said he was an important figure in modern Irish culture.

"Not only a lasting icon of Irish television," said the singer, "but a lasting presence in people's hearts and minds also."

On RTÉ Radio 1 show Liveline, host Joe Duffy described Byrne as a "broadcasting colossus" who enhanced the lives of thousands of Irish people every day through his radio show and weekly Late Late Show.

"He was the boldest, the bravest, the brightest," Duffy said. "We are all the better for his life, and are deeply, deeply saddened by his passing."

Byrne is survived by his wife, harpist and broadcaster Kathleen Watkins, and his daughters Crona and Suzy.

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