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# Celtic Life

A L

## *Fall for Fashion*

**INSIDE!**

*Autumn Style Guide, Argyll, Barra MacNeils  
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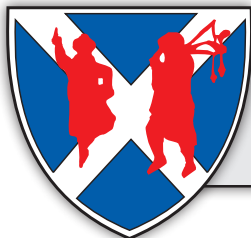
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# Fáilte!

*"O the light grey breeches  
Cast a gloom on us this year!  
'Tis a thing not seen on us before  
One we dislike to keep on us"*

These are the opening words of Òran don Bhriogais (Song to the Breeches) by Scottish-Gaelic poet Duncan Ban MacIntyre. They were written in response to the 'Disclathing Act' of 1746, which saw the outlawing of tartan and traditional Highland dress following the Jacobites defeat at the Battle of Culloden.

Although the Act was repealed in 1782, kilts and tartans were no longer considered Highland wear. When exiled Highlanders came to the New World following Culloden, very few - if any - would arrive in traditional dress.

Tartan has a long and distinct history, however; while trends have come and gone over the years, tartan has remained *en vogue*.

Tartan has been found in Asia dating to 3000 BC. The Hallstatt culture of Central Europe, linked with ancient Celtic tribes, produced tartan-like textiles. The earliest known tartan in Scotland, known as the "Falkirk" tartan, dated to the third century AD.

Although tartan is most widely known through its association with clans, it has been used to represent families, provinces, states, and even countries. A clan tartan is a relatively new tradition, and some designs look quite different from those worn by our ancestors hundreds of years ago. Today, tartans might simply identify an interest, cultural heritage or social cause as with the World Peace Tartan. Currently, suppliers produce approximately 600 different tartan designs, with about 7,000 variations on record.

My earliest recollection of tartan came as a child, watching my father sport the heavy woven Black Watch tartan worn by the Antigonish Legion Pipe Band here at home in Nova Scotia.

And while our own Clan Macquarrie tartan hasn't changed, many tartans evolved over time as new colours and designs began to emerge.

Years ago, Highland dancers typically wore their family or clan tartan in competition. Some dance schools wore their school tartan - often that of their instructor. With the founding of the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing in 1950 came a change in dress code; the sporran, plaid and bonnet were considered unsuitable for female dancers, so a simple, yet traditional, outfit was designed for girls.

Since then, both male and female dancers have worn brighter tartans to better stand out on stage. In recent years, many new colors have been introduced to the sport, including blue, red, green, purple, fuchsia, lime green, turquoise, orange and gold. When dancers purchase a kilt, the question is often not what tartan, but what color!

Globally, tartan is now a mainstay of haute couture. Designers like Alexander McQueen, Vivienne Westwood, Michael Kaye, Veronica MacIsaac, Chanel, and others have brought tartan to both Wall Street and Main Street. Tartan has become bigger, bolder, and more rebellious than ever, popularized by the likes of Rod Stewart, Rihanna, Kanye West and, of course, Sir Sean Connery.

In this issue we explore tartan, along with the many other Celtic threads that comprise the always-fashionable fabric of our identity. Suffice to say, we wear it well...

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





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Tartan is symbolic of determination and bravery with the colours of the fabrics representing or identifying their roots. The threads woven in the Colours of Hope tartan represent roots of strength and a *celebration of life!*

Blue: the colour of strength.

Yellow: the colour of the daffodil-symbol of Cancer Societies worldwide as well as of optimism and energy.

White: is associated with hope and faith.

Red: represents love, courage and determination.

Green: being the colour of life is associated with healing.

Black: the thin black lines running through the weave represents dignity and Consideration for all individuals and Families whose lives have been impacted by Cancer.

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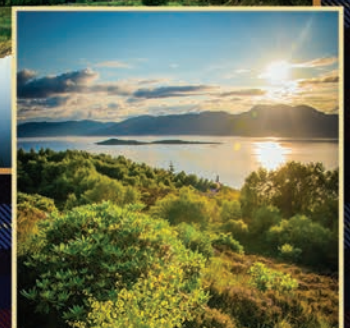
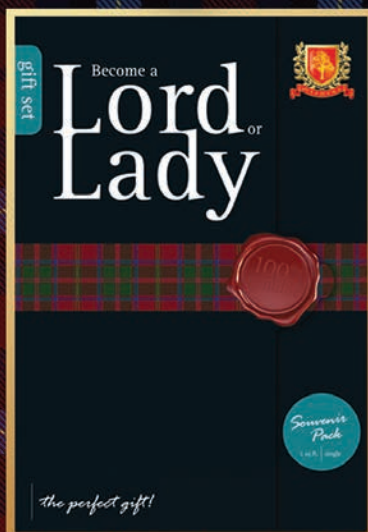
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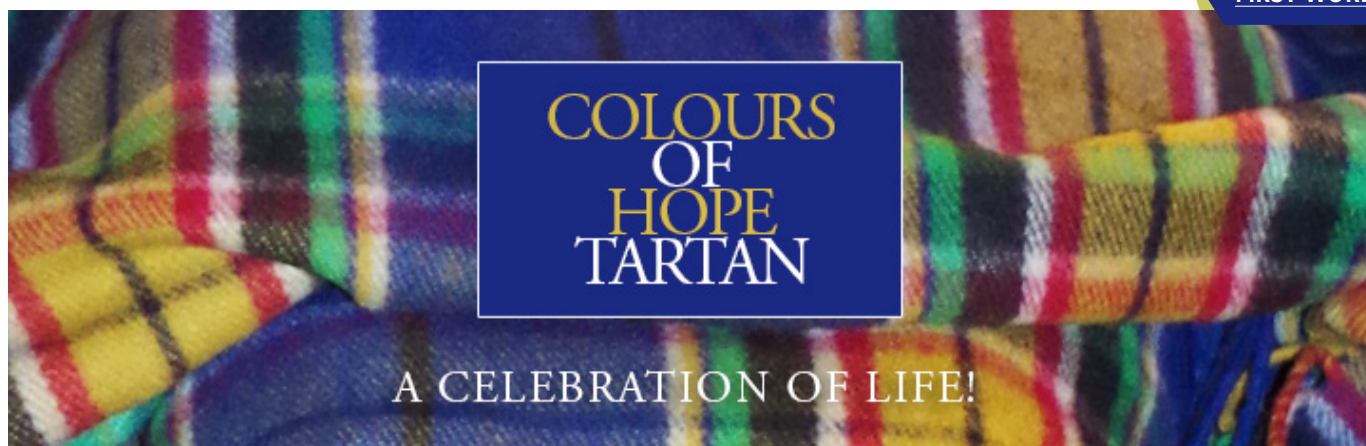
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# Celts For Cancer

*In the fifth installment of a six-part series to raise funding and awareness for cancer research, prevention, treatment and services, Celtic Life International marvels at the Colours of Hope Tartan...*



**F**or Robert Paterson, it's personal. "I have twelve family members who have passed from some form of cancer," shares the 53-year-old resident of Port Hope, Ontario via email. "Currently, my father is battling terminal lung cancer."

Paterson - who was born and raised in Glasgow, Scotland before immigrating with his family to Canada in 1972 - is the brainchild behind the Colours of Hope Tartan, an initiative he created to raise funds and awareness for cancer research both in Canada and abroad.

As his website details, "The Colours of Hope Tartan was designed with the goal of offering encouragement, acknowledgement and hope to the Warriors and Warrior supporters in their battle against cancers of all types."

"While researching terms associated with cancer the word 'warrior' kept appearing," he explains. "I came to learn that 'a warrior can

be a powerful affirmation which gives you a sense of meaning and identity when coping with a cancer treatment.' As tartan is symbolic of determination and bravery - with the colours of the fabric representing or identifying a family's heritage - my wife Keri and I went about designing a tartan that would reflect the fighting spirit of those affected by cancer."

*As such, the threads woven in the Colours of Hope tartan represent roots of strength and a celebration of life.*

"Blue is the colour of strength; yellow is the colour of the daffodil-symbol of cancer societies worldwide, as well as of optimism and energy; white is associated with hope and faith; red represents love, courage and determination; green, being the colour of life, is associated with healing; the thin black lines running thru the weave represent dignity and consideration for all individuals and families whose lives have been impacted by cancer."

The scarf, which retails for \$39.99 (CDN), measures approximately 12" wide, 56" long (with a 3" fringe on either end) and is made of 100 per cent lambswool.

The blanket, which measures 69" x 62" - also with a 3" fringe - is priced at \$79.99 (CDN).

"We use a shutterless loom for the blanket," notes Paterson, who also owns and operates ScottishLands.com. "That produces higher quality wool, giving it both a much softer feel and detailing more vibrant colours."

"We wholesale tartans throughout North America, and have set up a program with the

Canadian Cancer Society that has us donating \$2.50 for every scarf and \$5 for every blanket that our retail partners purchase through our company. We are encouraging our retail customers to do the same.

"If the tartan is purchased directly via the website we donate \$10 for every scarf and \$20 for every blanket to cancer research."

Along with the dedicated website, Paterson also exhibits Colours of Hope Tartan products at seven wholesale trade shows each year, as well as at various annual Highland games within Canada.

"Moving forward, our hope is to produce other products associated with our initiative. We have been really inspired by everyone's responses and good wishes, and that creates more dialogue which, in turn, helps to continue with important and groundbreaking research."

Paterson notes that cancer research has already saved millions of lives by discovering new ways to prevent, diagnose and treat the disease. Over the past century, researchers have made consistent progress, and survival rates have doubled in the past 40 years alone.

"This has been a very rewarding experience for me," he shares. "I have met so many people that have been affected by cancer, and when anyone purchases a scarf or a blanket, I see it as a memorial to a loved one and as a great way to support ongoing efforts to - eventually - eradicate the disease entirely."

"Whether one has been afflicted by cancer themselves, or has been touched by it via a family member, a friend, or a co-worker, it is an incredibly personal experience. I know that it has been for me"

[www.coloursofhopetartan.com](http://www.coloursofhopetartan.com)



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## one

### Mythic beverage

Have you ever had a druid as your bartender? Queimada - an alcoholic Galician punch - is accompanied by a magic ritual and is characterized by its blue flame. Although its origin is not definitively known, the beverage is believed to be an ancient Celtic tradition. Queimada is made from orujo (pomace brandy), lemon peel, coffee beans and cinnamon, and prepared in a hollowed-out pumpkin or a ceramic pot. As part of the spell, the drink is then set on fire. The spell is said to ward off evil spirits and is usually performed around the celebrations of Samhain or La Noche de San Juan.

## two

### Lady Hermit of the Cornish cliffs

If Jeannie Schmolivitz lived today, her strange and sad story would have almost certainly gone viral. Schmolivitz, a Russian expat, became known as the "Lady Hermit of the Cornish cliffs" in the early 1900s. She had been living in Philadelphia when her lover left her for another woman and subsequently died. It is said that Schmolivitz had a mental breakdown, and thereafter ended up in England. She was fined for "wandering without visible means of support" and sent to do hard labour at a workhouse near Penzance. She escaped three times to sleep in clefts of the Cornish cliffs, living off berries.

## three

### Celtic beer

Archaeological discoveries of the Celts' beer-making process are uncommon, but a 2,555-year-old Celtic settlement in Germany reveals possible answers. In early 2011, archaeobotanist Hans-Peter Stika reported his conclusions in an online paper published in Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences. Stika believed the charred barley found in six specially-constructed ditches were the result of malt making. He proposed that the barley was soaked in those ditches until it sprouted. The grain was dried by fire, before spices - including mugwort, carrot seeds and henbane - were incorporated. Fermentation was achieved by yeast-coated brewing equipment, or by adding honey or fruit. The result would have tasted much different than the beer that we are used to today.

## four

### Scottish swimming

For the first time, swimming lessons in Scotland have been offered in the Gaelic language. Eilidh McArthur, a student teacher at the Lochaber Leisure Centre's pool, came up with the idea after discovering that 11 of her fellow staff members were Gaelic speakers. As of the end of June, more than 30 young Gaelic speakers had signed up for the summer lessons. The hope is the classes will help improve linguistic skills along with swimming skills. Other sports in the area, such as football and shinty, are offered with Gaelic coaching as well.

## five

### Galician Robin Hood

A former bouncer at Nottingham's Lizard Lounge nightclub is now working his talents with a bow and arrow. Lee Ramsdale, 45, is currently a resident of Galicia with his girlfriend and son. Ramsdale started doing archery just three years ago but has already made impressive accomplishments: he finished fourth among 260 entrants in the Spanish national archery championships. The local newspaper dubbed him "Spanish Robin Hood," a nod to his former Nottingham home, as well as his archery skills. Next year, Ramsdale hopes to compete in the World 3D Championships in Canada.

## six

### Valley portrait

Overnight in early July, a portrait of Aneurin Bevan - Welsh Labour Party politician and the founder of the Welsh National Health Service (NHS) - appeared on a mountainside in Trefil, Blaenau Gwent. The timely tribute was created just shy of the 70th anniversary of NHS. Britain's Got Talent finalist Nathan Wyburn is the artist behind the work, having made the portrait out of soil and white stone dust. Wyburn's work is part of Love the Valleys campaign, which promotes the South Wales Valleys as a tourist destination.

*Have an interesting tidbit to share with our Celtic community? Drop us a line anytime at [info@celticlife.com](mailto:info@celticlife.com)*



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**Charlotte Danks**

**T**hough she was just 20 years old, Charlotte Danks opened the first Cornwall Affordable Foods shop in her hometown of Newquay in 2015. Her goal was to offer options to people on limited income, and help reduce food waste in the process. The items she sells aren't considered up-to-standard by the country's major supermarkets, whether it is due to damaged packaging or incorrect labelling. Most of the products she sells cost between 25p and one pound. And though many of those products are close to their "sell-by" date, they are still within their "use-by" date. "It's all from their surplus stock," she said at the time. "We sell them cheap because a lot of people in the area don't have money and are struggling. I want to help people in the community, people who are out of work, so they can eat as well." Since then, she has expanded the bargain food chain by opening up shops in Truro, Bude, Bodmin and St Austell. She has also opened a supermarket in Newquay. Unfortunately, Danks' ventures weren't welcomed by all - she dealt with harassment after opening up her Bodmin store in 2016. At the time, she considered closing, but the support she received from kind residents won out. Since then, she has been looking for franchisees in Cornwall's larger cities to expand her project even further.



**Deborah Lamont**

**D**uring the Grenfell Tower fire last year, Red Cross reached out to all staff and volunteers asking for help. Volunteer Deborah Lamont, who is from the Vale of Glamorgan in Wales, got on a train to London and was on site in a matter of hours. She was part of the emergency response team, coordinating with government and emergency services to establish rescue centres where those affected could find emotional and physical support. Not only were people in Grenfell Tower impacted, but some of the residents in surrounding buildings were traumatized from witnessing the fire, as well as seeing people fall or jump out of windows to their deaths. Lamont and other volunteers knocked on the doors of the surrounding apartments to check in on people. In her three years with Red Cross, the Grenfell fire was Lamont's first time responding to a major emergency. "Nothing can prepare you for what you face there. The atmosphere was heavy in the aftermath of the fire and a lot of the time the area was still dark with smoke," she later recalled. "It was emotionally challenging for me but I was grateful for the opportunity to help them and I am not likely to forget the scenes I saw but I would volunteer again in a heartbeat because that's the reason I joined up." For her efforts, Lamont was awarded The Henry Dunant Medal - the highest honour Red Cross can give its members.



**Steve and Sharon Cowburn**

**A**fter their son Ben died by suicide, Steve and Sharon Cowburn started The Invictus Trust. Ben had taken his life while staying at Longreach House, an adult mental health unit in Redruth. The Cowburns felt that teenagers and young adults would be much better off if they didn't have to be sent hundreds of miles from their families in order to be treated, so their small charity aims to support adolescent mental health in Cornwall. The Trust is named after a poem Ben loved: "Invictus" by William Ernest Henley. The piece is known for inspiring Nelson Mandela during his jail sentence on Robben Island. Thanks to several years campaigning from the Trust, Cornwall National Health Service was granted 5 million pounds to make a 14-bed mental health unit for youths aged 13 to 18. This way, young people struggling don't have to travel outside Cornwall or go to an adult mental health unit for help. Work on the building began in May and the hope is to welcome its first patient in May of 2019. "I am feeling very emotional today seeing the construction finally happening, seeing the diggers and seeing the ceremony of turf cutting and to know that the unit will be open at this time next year is an astonishing thing, so we're absolutely delighted by that," Steve told Cornwall Live. The Trust is also working towards establishing another facility in Cornwall, which will take patients up to age 25.





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## The Beach Celtic Festival

September 8-9, Toronto, Ontario  
[www.thecelticfestival.com](http://www.thecelticfestival.com)

The Beach Celtic Festival, which takes place in the beautiful, idyllic Key Gardens of Toronto, Ontario, is traditionally held the first weekend after Labour Day each year. The festival began in 2004, when first-generation Scottish-Canadian Sandy Graham created a day-long party to commemorate the loss of her mother, an Edinburgh-born Highland dancer and daughter of the Pipe Major of the Black Watch of Canada - a woman who wished to be remembered, not mourned. Today, 15 years later, the gathering has grown into a popular, two-day event, where hundreds of guests, performers and vendors gather along the Toronto shoreline to honor the brave Scottish, Irish and Welsh settlers who ventured to Canada in search of a new life. This year, visitors will enjoy world-class Celtic music and dance performances, including the sounds and style of Fiddlestix, Syd Simkins, Caledon County, the Bold Steps Dancers, Highland and Irish dancers, Pat Beaven, and more. Vendor booths will also be open along the beach front, highlighting a selection of traditional artisan jewelry, clothing, and stone carvings. As always, The Beach Celtic Festival is a family affair, with face painting and mini-games for the wee ones. The 2018 "Celt of the Year" will be crowned as well.



## Celtic Colours International Festival

October 5-13, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia  
[www.celtic-colours.com](http://www.celtic-colours.com)

Celtic Colours International Festival returns this fall for nine days of music, dance and culture. Since its inception in 1997, the multi award-winning event has become one of the largest annual celebrations of music and culture in Atlantic Canada. The Festival has stayed true to its roots for over 20 years, celebrating and nurturing the Gaelic-influenced culture and traditions of Cape Breton through a series of concerts and cultural events in communities all over the Island. Award-winning and celebrated artists from Ireland, Scotland, England, Denmark, Finland, the U.S., and across Canada will join some of Cape Breton's finest players, dancers, singers, and culture-bearers in 49 concerts set against the stunning backdrop of Cape Breton's brilliant fall foliage. This 22nd year of the Festival gets underway in Port Hawkesbury on October 5 and wraps up October 13 in Sydney with a concert featuring award-winning U.K. folk-singer Kate Rusby whose only performances in Canada this year will be at Celtic Colours.



## Indianapolis Scottish Highland Games and Festival

October 13, Indianapolis, Indiana  
[www.indyscotgamesandfest.com](http://www.indyscotgamesandfest.com)

The Indianapolis Scottish Highland Games and Festival is celebrating its ninth anniversary this fall. The one-day festival was created by the Scottish Society of Indianapolis and the Scottish Foundation of Indianapolis in 2010 with an aim towards preserving and promoting Celtic culture across the region. Each year the city's beautiful German Park hosts hundreds of guests, inviting them to enjoy musical and dance performances, athletics, theatre, as well as some good old-fashioned Scottish grub. This year, the weekend will kick-off with a performance of the national anthem, followed by the well-attended Clan Parade - a striking showcase for Scottish lineage - which will honour the Clan MacKenzie. From there, visitors can take in Scottish athletics, where upwards of 50 participants will compete in nine kilted heavy events, including Braemar and Open stone, Heavy and Light Weight for Distance, Heavy and Light Hammer, Weight Over Bar, Sheaf, and the ever-popular Caber Toss. As always, Celtic music is high on the agenda at the annual gathering, with headliners Highland Rain, Celtic Rain, the Indianapolis 500 Gordon Pipers, and the Indy Scottish Country Dancers taking the stage throughout the day.



## Cincinnati Celtic Festival

October 13-14, Cincinnati, Ohio  
[www.cincinnati-celticfest.com](http://www.cincinnati-celticfest.com)

The Cincinnati Celtic Festival - a two-day event organized and sponsored by the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick Foundation (FSSP) - returns to the Queen City region this fall. Since 2002, both the Cincinnati Celtic Festival and the FSSP have been instrumental in the preserving, promoting and celebrating of Irish-American culture - specifically, in the fields of arts and education. This year, the family-friendly gathering will welcome guests to beautiful Summit Park, a 130-acre venue located in the City of Blue Ash, for a myriad of music, dance, and some good old-fashioned Irish craic. Things kick off at noon on Saturday with a mass piped band and traditional Highland dancing. Visitors are then welcome to take a stroll around the vendors' area, where some of the best in local Irish food and wares are on display. The highlight of the weekend takes place on the main stage, which will host performances by the likes of traditional Irish groups Socks in the Frying Pan, Drowsy Lads, as well as Celt-Rock artists Roger Drawdy, the Firestarters, Mary's Lane, the Founding, the Pidgeon Kings, Dulahan, and the first-ever Cincinnati Drum Tattoo on Sunday!



## Re-Jigged

October 19-21, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia  
[www.rejiggedfestival.com](http://www.rejiggedfestival.com)

For three days every October, downtown Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, comes alive with the sights and sounds of Re-Jigged Festival. In concerts, workshops and sessions in neighbourhood halls, Re-Jigged encourages and nourishes tomorrow's traditions by showcasing the best emerging and established "new trad" Celtic talent from across Canada and beyond. This year's festival runs from October 19-21 and features performances from artists including uilleann piper Joey Abarta and Irish step dancer Jaclyn O'Riley - both from Boston - Gaelic singer Cathy Ann MacPhee, and renowned fiddler Ashley MacIsaac, who will headline the Saturday evening Gala Concert. Re-Jigged's 25+ interactive workshops in dance, music, language and song accommodate all levels of enthusiasts, from novice to advanced, while the Children's Gaelic Program introduces younger learners to the language through a range of fun activities.



## Stone Mountain Highland Games and Scottish Festival

October 19-21, Stone Mountain, Georgia  
[www.smhg.org](http://www.smhg.org)

Get your tartan on! This October, the Stone Mountain Highland Games and Scottish Festival is back to celebrate for its 46th year. Since its inception, the volunteer-run event has worked hard to promote and preserve the southern state's strong Scottish culture, welcoming thousands of visitors annually to the beautiful Stone Mountain Park for three days of celebrations. This year, athletic events, Highland dancing and Scottish music - including harp, pipes and drums - are all on the agenda. Things will kick off Friday evening at the Host Hotel for a night of lectures, dancing, and a Scottish-themed soiree. The following day, the park will host both "The Highland Heavies" - a series of athletic events, including The Hammer Throw, The Stone of Strength and the Caber Toss - as well as solo and band musical competitions. Atholl Highlander's Pipes and Drums - a popular pipe band native to the area - will take center stage all weekend, showcasing traditional Scottish sounds. In addition to music and athletics, the gathering will also include an array of cultural exhibits, such as a Tartan Forest, a Scottish Falconry exhibit, and a Scottish Tartan Museum.







## Central Virginia Celtic Festival and Highland Games

October 27-28, Richmond, Virginia  
[www.vacelticfestival.com](http://www.vacelticfestival.com)

Mark your calendars; the Central Virginia Celtic Festival and Highland Games - a volunteer run event, and one of the state's largest and most charitable cultural festivals - returns this fall for two days of fun and festivities. Each year, thousands of Celts gather at the region's Richmond Raceway Complex to celebrate their roots through music, dance, athletics and more. Each day starts in grand style, with piping, drumming, fiddling and Highland dance competitions. Once the blood is flowing, visitors are encouraged to take a walk through the gathering's Vendor Village, home to some of the very best in Celtic wares, including jewellery and pottery, as well as traditional Celtic garb and grub. Heavy athletic competitions will be active around the venue, and participants of all ages are welcome to try their hand at hurling and rugby, along with a series of amateur events. The festival also hosts an engaging "Wee Ones" area, featuring miniature games, face painting, and more. As always, the festival is home to the popular British Car show, several rugby games, a Clan Parade, and the always well-attended whisky tastings.



## Charleston Scottish Games & Highland Gathering

November 1-3, Charleston, South Carolina  
[www.charlestonscots.org](http://www.charlestonscots.org)

The Scottish Society of Charleston - a non-profit organization that works to preserve and promote South Carolina's Celtic culture - hosts its 47th annual Scottish Games & Highland Gathering this coming November. The three-day festival, which takes place at South Carolina's Mount Pleasant each year, aims to keep the region's strong Celtic customs alive and relevant for each new generation. The weekend begins with several pre-game events, including a Scotch whisky tasting and a traditional Tartan Ball, which will serve up traditional Scottish food and music. Saturday morning kick-starts with solo and band competitions in piping and drumming, with more contests held throughout the day, including Scottish Fiddling and Highland Dance. The heart of the games - the heavy athletics - will entertain and engage visitors with competitions in the Sheaf Toss, the Stone of Strength, and the always-popular Caber Toss. The gathering will also host a beer garden, a Scottish vendor show, and Border Collie demonstrations. The wee ones will love the Children's Activity Area, which will feature a series of crafts and games, along with a special appearance by Ronald McDonald.



## Panama City Beach Scottish Festival

March 9, 2019, Panama City, Florida  
[www.pcbeachscotfestival.com](http://www.pcbeachscotfestival.com)

The Panama City Beach Scottish Festival was first organized by the Grace Presbyterian Church in 1992. In 2014, the event was taken over and reorganized by the non-profit organization Celtic Heritage Alliance. And while the day-long event has evolved significantly over time, it has maintained its original mission statement: to celebrate Panama City's Scotch-Irish history and culture, while raising donations for local and area charities. This year will be filled to the brim with all things Scottish. Visitors will enjoy a series of competitive events in heavy athletics, including the Caber Toss, the Stone of Strength, the Scottish hammer, and more - along with a variety of Scottish and Irish dance performances. Guest are welcome to stroll the festival grounds all day, with opportunities to take in the Border Collie herding demonstrations, a British car show, and a tea room with traditional Scottish music. Vendors will be offering Celtic fare and wares across the venue as well, and be sure to stop in at the pub and dining tent for an assortment of beer and other spirits. Taking center stage will be an array of acts and artists, including comedian Bob Valentine, traditional Scottish musician Colin Grant Adams, Celtic rockers MacGilliossa, and Celtic folk duo The Blarney Girls. As always, the Panama City Beach Scottish Festival is a family-friendly event, with a number of children's activities - including a costume contest - to keep them engaged and entertained.





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# Whiskey Craft



***With record numbers of travellers sampling Ireland's distilleries each year, Whiskey Craft is making moves in the marketplace***

In 2017, there were over 10 million visitors to Ireland. Almost 10 per cent of those travellers visited a whiskey distillery during their stay.

And while there were only four Irish whiskey distilleries less than a decade ago, today there are nearly 30. That figure is higher than the 18 recorded by the country's Alcoholic Beverage Federation.

"The growth in distilleries has generated great interest for lovers of Irish whiskey worldwide," says John Daly, the founder and director of Whiskey Craft. "Many of them now visit Ireland to undertake a whiskey heritage holiday."

Daly's company sells Irish whiskey-related gifts and specialized hand-made gifts through its web-store. It also undertakes commissions to produce point-of-sale goods for Irish whiskey brands and distillery visitor centres.

The company's products range from whiskey-themed greeting cards and kitchen aprons to miniature copper stills and oak maturation barrels. It also designs most products and sources production and materials locally where possible.

Daly has been proactive in growing the business. And while finding production partners in Ireland and other European countries can take time, companies have been quite receptive so far. Irish whiskey brands and distilleries are also happy to discuss product innovation and undertake trial sales.

"We recently supplied the new visitor centre at The Echlinville Distillery with most of their point-of-sale stock, as well as the new Pearse Lyons Distillery in Dublin. We are also now working with some iconic Irish

whiskey brands, including Kilbeggan Irish Whiskey."

***Daly founded Whiskey Craft in County Wexford in 2016 after finding it hard to track down whiskey-themed products online.***

It was a big career change, although it drew upon his talent and training in the visual arts as chief public relations photographer for the Irish Defence Forces in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

"After retiring from the military, I undertook a Masters Degree in Photography at the London Metropolitan University and started my own commercial photography business, along with lecturing part-time at college.

"Some commercial photo shoots brought me into contact with various drink companies and, as I have always been an Irish whiskey fan, the idea for the Whiskey Craft business progressed from there."

Today, Daly's days are multi-faceted.

"I am pretty much everything, from product designer to bottle washer. My working day encompasses everything from designing new products, sourcing, marketing and business promotion, to dealing with specific client requests and meeting potential clients."

He shares that trying to divide time between the office and visiting clients at various distilleries around Ireland can be challenging, "considering what some of our road networks are like, and the location of some distilleries."

The firm uses different social media platforms to interest new clients. E-commerce

orders and sample products must be shipped to customers without haste. Corporate consumers are usually developed through business-to-business contacts.

"We are also pretty active on the Irish whiskey social scene, so we get to know the various brand ambassadors and marketing departments at Irish whiskey events throughout the year.

"And we are members of the Irish Whiskey Society, which is a great social outlet beyond the daily business grind. Dealing with Irish whiskey brands that have an amazing history and provenance is a huge plus for us as we are devoted Irish whiskey lovers at heart."

Daly notes that several major new distilleries are coming online in 2018 and in 2019. He hopes to work with them during what is proving to be an exciting time for Irish whiskey. The company is also in talks with some large tourist outlets. And it has had its first business inquiry from outside Ireland, from a Scottish whisky brand interested in product development.

"We are undertaking design work on some new exciting gifts to add to our product range and will be launching these at Whiskey Live Dublin in November."

He is not surprised by the growth of tourism in Ireland.

"Some people tend to dismiss locations with less than perfect weather, but most Celtic countries - particularly Ireland - make up for this with a very warm and welcoming population, amazing heritage and stunning scenery. Never being too far from a local pub doesn't hurt either."

[www.whiskeycraft.ie](http://www.whiskeycraft.ie)



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# Dark Tourism

*One woman's efforts are helping visitors get eerie in Eire*



If you have ever taken part in a ghostly graveyard tour or visited any haunted houses, you have engaged in a bit of “dark tourism.” And, according to Dr. Gillian O'Brien of Liverpool John Moores University, that's a tourism sector on the rise in Ireland.

“Dark tourism is tourism associated with death, suffering, incarceration and the macabre,” explains O'Brien. “The term ‘dark tourism’ is relatively new and mostly used by academics. Tourist bodies tend to prefer terms such as ‘contested heritage.’”

While the terminology may be new, dark tourism has been around for some time.

“For centuries, people have been visiting sites associated with death, suffering, incarceration and execution for their entertainment,” she notes.

“Thousands flocked to public executions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Madame Tussaud made a career out of grisly spectacles, opening her first Chamber of Horrors in London in 1802. In the United States, ‘dime museums’ were a mix of educational museum and freak show, and attracted customers by advertising exhibitions where the paraphernalia of torture could be seen.”

Nearly every city and township has a shadowy corner to explore, making dark tourism something one can experience the world over. But Ireland, in particular, has a treasure trove of hidden historic haunts that would appeal to the morose curiosity of the morbid traveller.

“Just behind the Four Courts in Dublin's city centre, the mummified bodies in the vaults in St. Michan's Church Dublin have been attracting visitors since the early nineteenth century. It is said that one such visitor was Bram Stoker, the creator of Dracula, and some even claim that the mummies inspired his writing.”

O'Brien is busy exploring the Emerald Isle's dark corners as part of her latest research project.

“At the moment I am in the middle of what I am calling my ‘shadow tour’ of Ireland, visiting ‘dark tourism’ sites - a huge range of locations, from former prisons to workhouses to famine ships, graveyards and battle sites. The first phase of this project is to visit spots that have a museum or heritage centre associated with them, but later I hope to be able to include options such as the Black Taxi tours in Belfast - which tour sites associated with The Troubles - or the ghost tour bus of Dublin.”

Not all dark tourism attractions are created equal, in O'Brien's estimation. She is concerned that, while most spots boast a legitimate educational and historic merit, the stewards of some sites try to draw in their visitors with shock value and little substance. That can pose an ethical problem.

*“There are many shades of ‘dark’ tourism...”*

“The darkest are sites of death and suffering which focus primarily on education and historic interpretation, while the lightest are sites with a greater focus on entertainment. Each type of site poses different opportunities and challenges.”

It is tempting to associate ‘dark tourism’ - with ghost stories and tales of crime and punishment - all in the name of fun. But sites like Auschwitz-Birkenau in Germany also count as dark tourism destinations, where people come to pay homage to the dead. Such sites demand a certain degree of respect, and O'Brien is concerned that that line between respect and fun can sometimes be blurry.

She takes no issue with travellers having fun when they visit Ireland's more macabre milestones, but she is worried that their historical value might be overshadowed by the glamorous (or gory) details, especially for destinations whose historical societies are volunteer-

based non-profits that cannot afford to advertise or produce eye-catching installations.

“I think there is much that is wonderful about the tourism sector and there are some excellent dark tourism sites across Ireland. But I also have concerns about the ‘dumbing down’ at some sites and, more broadly, there seems an over-emphasis on branding and marketing which is often at the expense of the museums and heritage sites themselves.”

O'Brien hopes that a balance can be struck between that sense of fun and encouraging a real interest in the actual history - ghoulish or not - of these landmarks, and handling that history in an ethical and respectful way.

“The key reward is when someone visits one of these sites and leaves having learned something new and with an enthusiasm to learn more about the past. Ghoulish interest might lure many tourists to sites, but most sites make significant efforts to contextualize their history. While websites may emphasize gruesome executions, daring escapes and famous prisoners, visitors will get a much more nuanced experience in most cases. After all, there are always other stories to tell.”

O'Brien will be documenting her eerie excursions around Ireland in book form, and via several podcast recordings.

[www.gillianmobrien.wordpress.com](http://www.gillianmobrien.wordpress.com)





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# *Livin' the Dream*

***Dundee-born  
Craig McNeil comes by his  
Celtic roots honestly.***



**“M**y grandfather was a Polish soldier who married my Granma in Dundee during the Second World War,” says the jovial 50-something from his home in London. “My father’s parents were from Clydebank in Glasgow - they were bombed in the Second World War during the Blitz and moved to Dundee in 1943.”

Like most of the U.K., Dundee became swept up in the sonic ‘new wave’ of the late 1970s, with bands like the Clash, the Sex Pistols and Stiff Little Fingers shaking up long-established musical foundations.

That wave swept McNeil off his feet at his first punk-rock concert.

“The crowd was spitting at the band, the band didn’t seem to mind, and it was so exciting,” he recalls. “I went with my big brother. We met the band afterwards and they were very nice. They gave us picks and safety-pins - that was the moment my life changed forever; it was then and there that my love affair with music started.”

A few years later, McNeil teamed up with friends to start an indie band, writing to newspapers and radio stations in an effort to publicize gigs.

“Surprisingly, it worked!” he laughs. “At the time I was driving a forklift in a factory, and someone said to me ‘you could get a job in the music industry doing publicity.’”

Taking those words to heart, McNeil quit his day job and signed-up for several college courses, including a class in Media Studies.

“My end-of-term project for that course was on the music paper NME (New Musical Express.) I plucked up the courage to call their office in London. A very nice man called James Brown answered the phone and kindly arranged for me to visit NME’s office to interview the entire staff. Everyone was so friendly and helpful that the project ended up being 16,000 words long.”

His foot was in the door.

“I sent it to James Brown, who passed it onto Ted Cummings, who was the Head of Press at Phonogram Records. Ted very kindly offered me a few days work experience in London - this really blew my mind - which made me even more determined to pursue my dream.”

Although McNeil’s brief stint at Phonogram didn’t lead to a full-time position, it further fuelled his dream of establishing a career in the music industry. In the meanwhile, he took a job in a record store, and continued to play with his Dundee band on the side. To improve

his office skills, he learned to type. Once he had saved up £1,000, he moved to London on nothing more than the promise of a place to stay for one night.

***“I saw a flicker of light at the end of the tunnel and followed it.”***

The few connections he had in the music industry helped land him a job at the bar in The Camden Underworld, one of London’s popular, cutting-edge music venues.

“After a few months behind the bar, some people I knew from Phonogram came to see a band in the Underworld. Apparently, an assistant’s position had become available at Polydor Records. I went for the job and - to my amazement - I got it. I was there for three years until I moved on to Beggars Group in 1995, where I have been since.”

McNeil has two jobs at Beggars: his main role is in TV promotions, and he also works on creative projects for The Arkive (catalogue department) “making films and suggesting ideas to bring a new focus to albums from the past,” he explains. “The challenges are coming up with creative and original plans that are both exciting and respectful to the artist.”

One such example is McNeil’s documentary film *About A Badly Drawn Boy*, titled after the stage name of musician Damon Gough, who McNeil worked with in the late 1990s. The film details Gough himself, with a special focus on his stunning debut album *The Hour of Bewilderbeast* (2000).

“Damon loves the film,” notes McNeil. “We have screened it a couple of times already in cinemas, and the response has been absolutely brilliant.”

Inspired by that success, he is now working on a short film about The Fall’s 1988 album *I Am Kurious Oranj*, which will be released in time to celebrate its 30th anniversary reissue on Beggars Banquet this October.

“All I think about is music. I am very lucky to work in the music industry. It really is a dream come true.”

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# Declan Henry

*Declan Henry investigates Islamic Ireland in his latest book*

**I**rish writer Declan Henry was born in the town of Ballymote, Co. Sligo, later moving with his parents and brothers to the rural Co. Mayo village of Derrykinlough.

"My father was a farmer," he tells Celtic Life International via email. "I enjoyed a very happy childhood during the 1970s and 1980s. My parents were devout Catholics, and during my youth I was an altar server in our local church, and later a lay reader."

Henry went on to study social work, education and community studies at Goldsmith's College and King's College in London, and has been a registered social worker since 1993.

His interest in creative non-fiction writing was born from both an innate curiosity and a keen desire to learn.

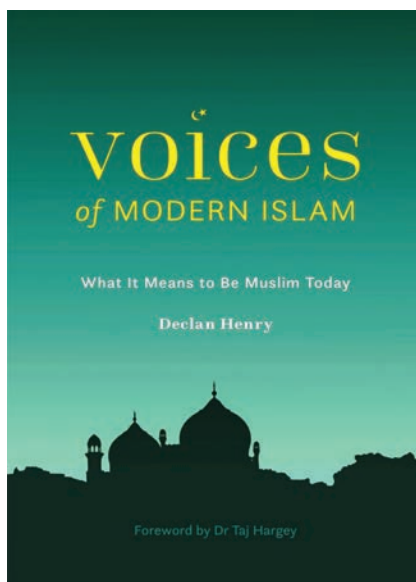
"I like dissecting topics that are complex to explain, or which have myths and misconceptions to overturn," he explains. "The challenge is to write about the subject in a clear and interesting manner for general readership. I like interviewing interesting people and telling their stories. This adds authenticity to the text, as the reader discovers more about the lived experiences of people that I am writing about."

Henry has authored a number of books, including *Why Bi-Polar?* (2013), and *Trans Voices* (2016).

His latest work, the recently-published *Voices of Modern Islam*, seemed like an ideal next step.

"I wanted to discover why some Muslims get drawn into extremism and radicalization and not others. I wanted to know more about the Prophet Muhammad. I was interested to discover if Islam is a violent religion or if the Qur'an is open to misinterpretation. I also wanted to know if women are treated poorly in Islam, or if there was another side to the story that is not portrayed in the press and media about Islam and Muslims."

*The book tackles a myriad of topics including Islamophobia, extremism, women and Islam, Sharia Law and homosexuality, and features interviews with over 100 Muslims from the British Isles.*

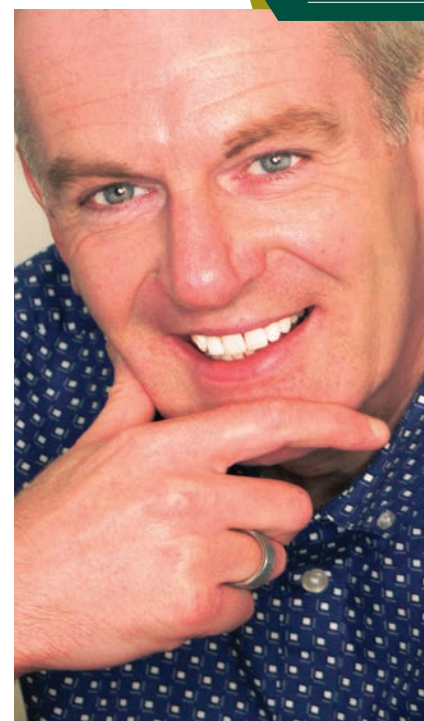


"It involved a lot of travel and organizing," he admits. "My interviewees were both men and women, and consisted of Islamic scholars, imams and ordinary worshippers. They were also of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds. Including their opinions on topics related to Islam added immense gravitas to the narrative because it was coming directly from the experiences of Muslims themselves - as opposed to me solely researching Islam and writing it exclusively, as a non-Muslim, from my own viewpoint."

Henry believes books like *Voices of Modern Islam* are vital in this day and age, especially in a place like Ireland, which has a growing Islamic population.

"The reputation of Islam is at a low ebb right now. It's important for books like mine to show the world that Islam is by its very nature a peaceful religion and that most Muslims are equally abhorred as non-Muslims by terrorist atrocities.

"The clear majority of Muslims are genuinely lovely, friendly, honest and hospitable people, including those who live in Ireland. They have a great sense of family and community, which are traits commonly associated with Irish people. Today, there are 63,000 Muslims living in Ireland out of a population of four million. It is the third largest religion in the country after Catholicism and the Church of Ireland."



Henry notes that the vast majority of Irish nationals have shown great understanding and kindness toward Islamic immigrants and refugees. Still, he believes there is more work to be done.

"During a recent visit to a mosque in Dublin, and from speaking to the imam, I noticed a balance still needs to be struck between integration and assimilation. The use of alcohol, and male and female segregation, can sometimes be barriers which prevent integration."

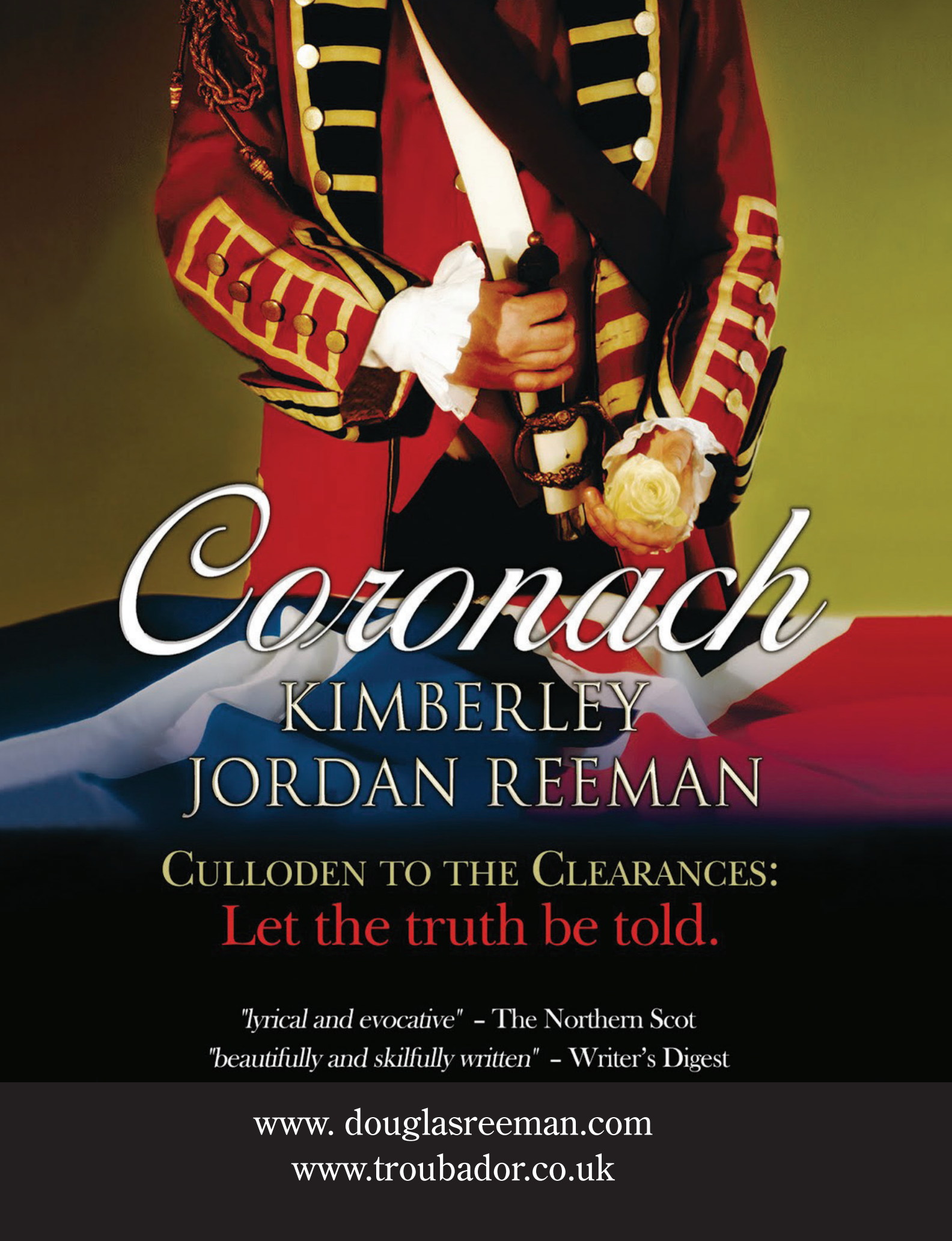
"However, both Muslims and non-Muslim groups need to be able to socialize together without compromising cultural, religious or moral values or personal integrity. Non-Muslims must become more knowledgeable about Islam. Hopefully this is where my book will be of use."

He is already working on his next book, this time shifting his focus toward priesthood.

"Ireland has changed rapidly over the past twenty-five years. Divorce, same-sex marriage and abortion are now permissible. Catholicism in Ireland has weakened because of secularism and clerical abuse scandals. Few men these days are drawn towards the priesthood. I am talking to priests about their experiences of the priesthood and what hopes and fears they have about the future of the religion in Ireland during these times of great change."

[www.declanhenry.co.uk](http://www.declanhenry.co.uk)



A person in a red and gold military uniform, likely a British Grenadier Guard, is shown from the waist up. They are holding a sword with a white scabbard and a white rose. The background is a solid yellow-green color.

# *Coronach*

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# Anne Emery

*Anne Emery tackles justice amidst **The Troubles** in her latest novel*



**N**ova Scotia litigation lawyer turned award-winning-author Anne Emery is no stranger to the world of suspense; over the last decade she has enjoyed great popular and critical acclaim for her Celtic-inspired Collins-Burke Mystery series.

Since her last release, 2016's *Lament for Bonnie*, the sedulous scribe has been racking-up the frequent flyer miles.

"I have been travelling a lot. I've gone to Ireland and other parts of Europe, and it is likely that some of those experiences will turn up in future books."

The ongoing adventures of Monty Collins and Father Brennan Burke continue this October with the publication of Emery's tenth narrative, *Though the Heavens Fall*, which follows her two sleuths to Northern Ireland.

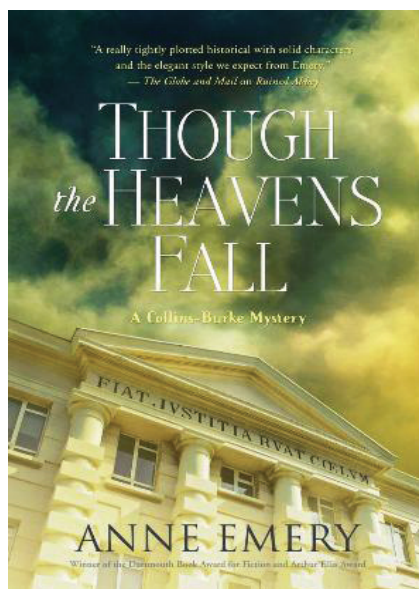
"The book's plot ranges from the bombings of Dublin and Monaghan in 1974 - for which no arrests have ever been made, despite 'what everybody knows' - to the peace process in the mid-1990s. My protagonists are in Belfast and, despite the IRA cease-fire, there is still more than enough trouble to go around.

"It is made worse by a serious breakdown in communication," she continues. "Brennan knows nothing about the secrets in a file on Monty's desk, and Monty has no idea what lies behind a late-night warning from the IRA. The two old friends are on a collision course, and will learn more than they ever wanted to know about what passes for justice in mid-1990s Belfast."

Inspiration for the book came to her suddenly - in the form of a stone-covered sign.

"I was standing before the Bridewell Garda Station in Dublin, gazing at the words inscribed on the pediment - *Fiat Justitia Ruat Caelum* - 'Let justice be done though the heavens fall.' And I thought to myself, 'There's my next book.' I knew there would be no shortage of material for a story about so-called justice in Belfast during *The Troubles*. As a lawyer, I am fascinated with justice and the systems that uphold or deny it.

"Another of my core interests is philosophy, and my characters agonize over what actions are justified or not justified in war. Coming from an Irish-Canadian background, I am bedevilled by these moral questions in the context of *The Troubles*, that is, the war,



in Northern Ireland."

Emery explains that the project took much time and research.

"I did a lot of reading about the law and procedure in Northern Ireland, and about the 'Diplock' courts. Amazingly, there are still non-jury Diplock trials taking place today, and there was one on when I was in Belfast last year. I met with a solicitor who has plenty of experience in the Belfast courts - he's had death threats, and his office was twice damaged by bombs. I spoke with former prisoners and with a few people in bars whose anonymous stories have found their way into the book."

As with many of her past projects, the biggest challenge was navigating among various political ideologies.

"My characters have a certain perspective, no question, but I try to acknowledge

the other points of view as well. It was funny - a few years ago, after *Ruined Abbey* (2015), I met a friend whose family comes from the Loyalist Portadown area of Ulster; not surprisingly, there were things he didn't agree with in the novel. Then I got a letter from a pro-Republican Irishman in Saint John, New Brunswick, who said he liked the book, but that I had been 'too kind to the Brits.' So I must have done something right!"

With that in mind, Emery believes the new novel signals growth for both her as a writer, and for her leading men.

*"It was amazing to watch my characters come to life during this perilous time in their history."*

*Though the Heavens Fall* is scheduled to hit bookshelves on October 16, but has already received some advanced notice.

"Friends who have read it were spooked! There were like 'How could you let this happen?!' My answer was, 'This is what happened to people over and over during *The Troubles*.'"

True to form, she is already hard at work on two new projects; the next adventure in the Collins-Burke series, as well as a historical fiction novel set in Ireland in the 14th Century.

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# Skerryvore

*Scotland's Skerryvore mixes it up on their latest recording*

Skerryvore has been bringing their unique brand of Celtic fusion to audiences for more than a decade.

Recently, the eight-piece group released its sixth studio album, *Evo*, which leapt to number 15 on the iTunes U.K. album chart - making it the highest new entry on the list.

The band was founded in 2005 by brothers Daniel (accordion) and Martin (Highland pipes) Gillespie, who were born to an Irish father and a Scottish mother on the Isle of Tiree - the most westerly island of Scotland's Inner Hebrides.

"My first accordion lesson was at the Tiree Feis when I was 8 years old," recalls Daniel, referring to the annual festival that promotes the isle's music and culture. "The Feisan movement has been a huge factor in the surge of young traditional musicians in Scotland over the past two decades. On Tiree, we were fortunate to have both Gordon Connell and Robert Beck, who gave hours of free time to teach accordion and bagpipes to the young people of the island. All they asked for in return was that you were committed to learn."

Daniel says that Skerryvore's early years were focused on traditional ceilidh music. But "even then, there was always a desire to approach and arrange these traditional tunes differently than other acts in that scene."

Today, the band incorporates folk, rock, Americana, and more into its traditional repertoire.

"The biggest step in developing our own

material and sound came with our self-titled album in 2010. That was, without doubt, the key moment in the band's evolution both musically and in terms of a career."

Another professional highlight came five years later, when the band played its 10th anniversary gig in the Scottish port town of Oban; over 6,000 people travelled from all over the world to see the performance.

Daniel admits that it isn't easy to pigeon-hole Skerryvore's style and sound.

*"There are so many influences within the group; from country to Celtic, folk to funk."*

"One element that has remained constant is our commitment to traditional music - our roots, where we started; be that with a full-on instrumental set, or just a simple hook within a song."

Along with the Gillespie brothers, the band is comprised of Alec Dalglish (lead vocals and guitar), Craig Espie (fiddle), Alan Scobie (keys), Jodie Breameson (bass), Fraser West (drums), and its newest member Scott Wood (pipes and whistles.)

"What we have found is that no single approach always works," explains Daniel of the ensemble's creative process. "When you have a group as big as ours there are different personalities and minds that work in different ways."

Similarly, producing *Evo* took a number

of twists and turns, with the album recorded in both Hartford, Connecticut and Scotland - where it was also mixed - before being mastered in New York City.

"There were also several personal events over the 18-month process that shaped some of the songs and tunes on the album and, in a way, made it far more powerful a recording."

For Daniel, *At the End of the Line* is a favourite track, as is a piece titled *Soraidh Slan*, meaning "farewell."

"These are very different-sounding songs, but both are full of emotion. Any song that can make a connection with listeners is good - that is the magic of music. From a band perspective, we always consider how the material will work in a concert setting, as our live show is so central to what we do."

So far, public and critical response to the album has been excellent, and Skerryvore has since been making the rounds on the U.S. and U.K. festival circuit, playing to packed audiences. The band's tour will also include appearances in the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Canada, and Australia.

"It is an extremely exciting time for us, and for the genre," says Daniel. "The quality of young players is simply incredible, and I can't remember a period when ticket sales were so strong. It is amazing to see such a wide range of people of all ages and backgrounds coming out to shows and enjoying traditional music."

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## *The Rowan Tree digs deep into its Cornish roots*

Of the seven Celtic nations, Ireland and Scotland likely have the greatest cultural influence on the global stage, particularly with regard to music.

A new quartet from Cornwall is hoping to get in on some of that sonic action, however.

The Rowan Tree - founded by siblings Tom Fosten (guitar) and Laura Garcia (flute/piano/accordion/vocals), along with Richard Trethewey (fiddle/vocals) and Neal Jolly (bass) - are quickly making big noise with music critics and fans.

Originally called The Grenaways, the band changed gears - and its name - prior to the 2017 Pan Celtic Festival in Ireland; as members experimented and jammed in preparation for the annual event, their style shifted from a contemporary vibe to classic Celtic melodies.

"Our sound is very much in a traditional folk style," explains Garcia, "although we like to combine the music we write with traditional Cornish tunes and songs, and those from around the world. A good example of this is a set of songs we play where the first is a traditional Cornish piece, which goes into a tune I wrote and ends with a snippet from a classical work written by an American composer."

"We have started to develop a really unique repertoire of material that represents all of the band members in different ways," adds Trethewey.

Things have progressed quickly for the fledgling foursome.

"It has been a whirlwind year for us," notes Garcia. "A few short months after we first decided to form the band we found ourselves playing on stage at the Festival Interceltique in Lorient. It was our very first gig, and our first rehearsal was on the ferry over to Brittany!"

"We then began working on new tunes. We recorded a self-titled EP, and one of the songs (Tresor) was entered into Kan Rag Kernow (the 'Song for Cornwall' contest), which - incredibly - we won. Then, we placed first at the Pan Celtic International Song Competition in Ireland, and went on to win the Liet International Song Contest in Leeuwarden, Netherlands."

"Winning the Liet has been the real highlight for us, as we dreamed of it but never really expected it to happen," shares Trethewey. "There were so many amazing artists competing, and it was one of those truly magical moments where the underdogs won!"

"Winning the Liet has to be the best thing to happen to us so far," Jolly concurs. "It really helped to validate what we are doing."

"It was the first time a band from Cornwall - singing in Cornish - had won, beating songs from 14 nations across Europe," continues Garcia. "It was such a privilege to even represent Cornwall, so to win felt like a dream come true!"

One of the band's core mandates is to promote traditional Cornish culture through their music - something, they believe, that is thriving at home.

"Traditional music has a much more visible place in the culture of Cornwall than in other places in England," says Fosten.

"It is a land full of brass bands, choirs, pub singing, and throughout history Cornwall has produced many world-famous singers," notes Trethewey.

*"Cornwall has always had a rich music scene and we are generally very musical people..."*

That thriving Cornish music scene could use some extra help branching out across the globe, however.

"Compared to other Celtic nations, we could do with more financial support for the younger generation of musicians coming up," admits Trethewey. "But the country continues to surprise and punch far above its weight."

"Cornwall is a small nation in relation to Ireland and Scotland, and it doesn't get a lot of funding to promote its culture," adds Garcia. "That said, there are people here who are working tirelessly to preserve and promote our customs and traditions."

"My hope is that, because of our success at events like the Pan Celtic in Ireland and Liet International in the Netherlands, people will learn more about Cornwall and Cornish music and culture, which will inspire more people to get involved," Trethewey adds.

With so much already accomplished in their first year, Fosten hints at a few things that their growing fan base can look forward to in the next while.

"It is an exciting time for us, and we have a very full agenda over the next while, including a fall U.K. tour, more recording, and the possibility of bringing in a fifth member..."

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# The Barra MacNeils

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# *Keeping it in the Family*



*Thirty years into their career, the Barra MacNeils are still doing what they do best*





**S**eamlessly blending classic and contemporary melodies, Cape Breton's first and finest musical family, the Barra MacNeils' adhere to the ages-old adage *if it ain't broke, don't fix it...*

That maxim is more than evident on their most recent recording, *On the Bright Side*, where older Celtic fiddle songs and Gaelic ballads easily mix with modern, up-tempo tunes.

It is precisely what listeners have come to expect from the multi-talented siblings, who take their band's name from the family's ancestral home off the west coast of the Scottish Highlands.

Born and bred in Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia, the east-coast quintet has held true to its regional roots; Cape Breton has long been a hotbed of Celtic culture, renowned for its kitchen parties, ceilidhs, music festivals, step-dancing, and more. And though classically trained, the 'Barras' are masters on the instruments of their ancestors, including fiddle, piano, guitar, mandolin, whistles and bodhran.

That talent shines with *On The Bright Side*, perhaps most notably on the first single, *Living the Dream*. Written by lead vocalist Stewart MacNeil, the song is as rich in imagery as it is in sound.

"It is a bit of a rap with a hypnotic groove and a big chorus," he shares over the phone from his Cape Breton home.

Lyrically, the tune is, by turns, light and dark.

*It's a sandy beach*

*It's a hole in one*

*Taking a stroll in the midnight sun*

*There's peace of mind*

*When you are jiggin' the line*

*You're feeling happy and you don't know why.*

Later verses tell a strikingly different story.

*But the word in the street*

*Is all that matters*

*Wave a gun in the air*

*And watch them scatter*

*Two bits to watch a high diving act*

*Too young to die*

*And all that crap*

"That's the disguise of it," notes Stewart. "There are different levels in the lyrics, as there are in many songs. It is about what it takes to be happy, but also about inequality and about violence overtaking society. Thematically, the song is about the simple things in life bringing happiness. The trouble, however, is that we are all trying to get ahead in our own minds, to move up the food chain, to never go back down so we are feeling chased."

*We're all on the take*

*We hunt and we gather*

*Shop 'til you drop*

*What does it matter*

*When the dole is spent*

*The landlady comes knock, knock, knockin'*

*For last month's rent*

People may have their "own little dream of livin' in the land of milk and honey" - but it is one that is too-often built at great expense.

*Everybody needs a place to call their own*

*A basic shelter that they call home*

*A satellite dish and a couple of cats*

*Security system and a welcome mat*



The new album, says Stewart, has been a long time coming.

"It was definitely in the works longer than most. We booked a studio for a month - four summers ago - and thought we would have it out in no time. However, our mother became sick and that changed everything. We postponed the recording sessions, cancelled tours...so we have had some catching up to do."

Comprised of four brothers - Stewart, Sheumas, Kyle and Boyd - and sister Lucy, the Barras find themselves in full family accord whether on stage or in the studio.

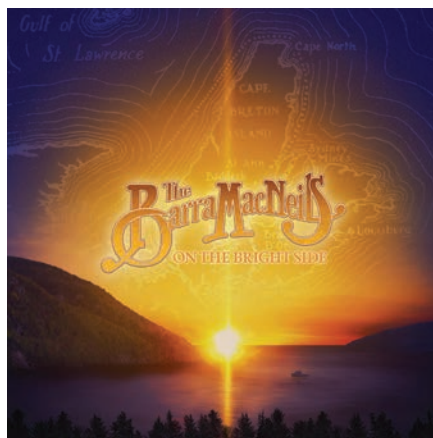
"We have the shared music that has been with us all our lives, at home and at our grandmother's home," reflects Stewart.

***"We have always been in it together and somewhere through the years we must have learned to get along."***

"It takes us less time to come to a consensus now than it might have in the early days. We all bring something to the table, and then we see how it will all work together. We usually have a surplus of good songs that we start with, so some may be put aside for a future album."

As far back as they can remember, music has been a source of joyful memories and good times for the family; various members performed across Cape Breton from an early age, and they began touring together during summers while still in school. In 1986, the band independently recorded and released their self-titled debut. National attention came in 1993, when they earned popular and critical acclaim - and gold album status - for *Closer to Paradise*.

The big single from that album, *Darling Be Home Soon*, helped bring Celtic music into the Canadian mainstream musical market.



"We have always been, first and foremost, a Celtic band," explains Stewart, "but we were never shy to try new things, new sounds that suited us, and we have kept with that formula ever since. One of the tracks on the new record, *Clouds Under My Feet*, is like that; maybe defying what people might expect of us."

Tradition, however, remains at the heart and soul of the band's identity.

On the Bright Side's opening cut, *Welcome to Boston*, recalls a warm, wintry welcome the band received during a tour a few years ago. *The Jug of Punch*, a song that commemorates the rites of an Irish wake, harkens back to legendary Irish singers such as The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem.

"It is a version done by Dermot O'Reilly and Fergus O'Byrne. We sometimes sing another version at parties but we chose this one, with Kyle on vocals, for the album."

***A grandson of fluent Gaelic speakers, Stewart has taken to studying the language in recent years.***

"I have been around the melodies for so long that I eventually became interested in learning the language. It is both very beauti-

ful and emotional, and you can hear that on the new recording when Lucy sings *Ribhinn Donn* (Brown Haired Girl)."

His sister also shines with *Daisy*, a heart-warming melody by Scottish songwriter Karine Palwart, in which an older woman attempts to warn someone younger about the pitfalls of adulthood.

"Every time I hear it, I can see Lucy singing to her young daughters who are growing up very quickly."

Another track, *Mademoiselle Gallant*, brings together old world elements.

"It is a waltz - almost Viennese or gypsy - that moves to jig time at the end. You can't help but be carried along by all the changing gears."

The album also features the Abba hit, *The Way Old Friends Do*.

"A fan in Chicago actually sent us a tape of some cover songs he thought matched our style of family vocals, including this song. He was certainly spot on with *The Way Old Friends Do*."

During 2015's Celtic Colours International Festival in Cape Breton, the MacNeil brothers performed Stewart's *The Underachiever* a capella. It went over so well with the audience that it was a must for the new recording.

"It is a song for everyman, for everyone who has fallen short of what they set out to do from time to time."

***Well I'm turning in my uniform  
My membership expired  
I've been slow to meet the image  
that's required***

Stewart sings of "pulling on the push door" and Kyle, Sheumas and Boyd join in on the chorus.

***Well it's a shame I've been sinning  
It's a testament of living  
I'm no perfect resurrection from the dead  
So please keep your distance  
I'll be of no assistance  
I'm just someone who couldn't get ahead.***

Unlike those lyrics, the Barras keep moving forward; currently on the road in support of *On the Bright Side*, the band will break in November to begin their annual cross-country Christmas extravaganza.

"So far, the tour has been very well received, but we never take anything for granted. We still have lots of songs and stories to share."

[www.barramacneils.com](http://www.barramacneils.com)

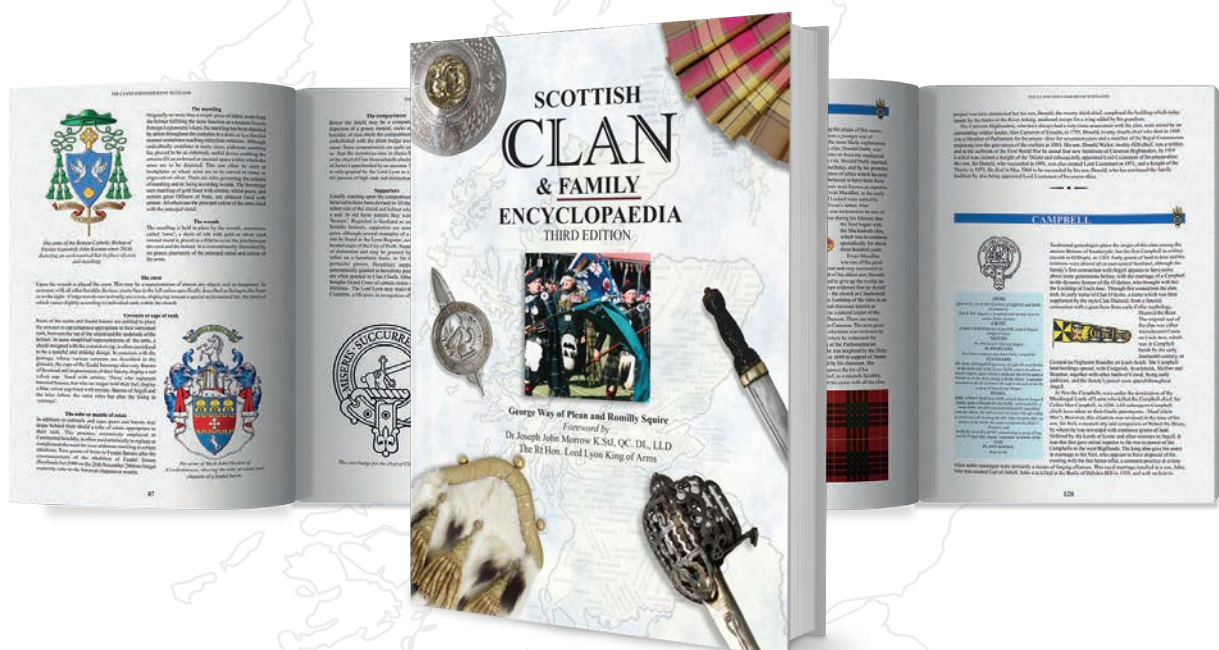






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# *Scotalian*



Our award-winning photo journalist Tom Langlands  
tours the town of Barga, Tuscany...





**B**efore visiting any foreign country, it is customary and polite to learn a few words of the local language such as ‘good morning,’ ‘please’ and ‘thank you.’ In the historic Tuscan hill-top village of Barga overlooking Italy’s stunning Serchio Valley, however, my efforts at Italian were met not only with replies in English, but often with a distinctly Scottish accent. My curiosity was further piqued by a plaque on a wall proclaiming Barga as “The Most Scottish Town in Italy.”

In order to unravel the mystery behind the claim I took a walk through the old streets, accompanied by local resident Sonia Ercolini and local historian Virginia Fabbri.

Barga is beautiful and unspoiled; a place of narrow lanes, hidden piazzas, steep stone staircases, ornate wooden doors, and shuttered windows bedecked with geraniums. Winding our way through the stone-paved streets I saw several flags hanging limp in the heat of the day - Italian, Brazilian (the Brazilian Expeditionary Force fought alongside the Allied forces on the Gothic Line around Barga in WWII), and the Scottish Saltire.

There are various legends linking Barga and Scotland; some sources claim that during the 1890s the Duke of Argyll took ill while staying in nearby Lucca and was taken to Barga to recuperate in the clean air of a landscape not dissimilar to his homeland. In thanks he offered to employ local foresters on his estate in Scotland, thus establishing a link that exists to this day. My preferred tale is that a group of Barghigiani were en-route to America via Scotland, but spent so much

time enjoying the hospitality of a Scottish pub that they missed the boat and ended up staying!

For Fabbri the answer is more pragmatic.

“The latter part of the 19th century saw great political change and economic disruption in Italy, and the people of Barga found themselves struggling to make a living from the poor quality of the area’s agricultural land. Many sought a better life elsewhere.”

*It isn’t clear why some emigrants chose Scotland, but it is possible that they were headed for the Americas and found work and opportunities on the way.*

Such events can trigger ‘chain-migrations’ - where migrants from a particular town follow others from the same town to a new location.

Chain-migration is familiar to Ercolini, “My great-grandfather Pietro emigrated to Scotland at the beginning of the 20th century. My grandfather Raffaello followed him and my father Peter was born there, although he spent most of his childhood in Barga before returning to Glasgow in his teens to work in the family fish and chip shop.” Similarly, Ercolini’s mother Silvana was born in Ghivizzano, near Barga, but after WWII was forced to go to Glasgow and work in her aunt’s fish and chip shop. It was in Glasgow that Ercolini’s parents met, got married, and set up their own fish and chip shop. Ercolini and her brother Ralph were educated in

Glasgow, but returned to Barga where they have lived since.

We called in at the hostel of Scottish born Adele Pierotti, who explained her family’s connection with Scotland.

“In 1886, my great-grandfather left to work in the coal mines of Wishaw. In turn, he sent for my grandfather and soon the family established a fish and chip shop in Cathcart where my father and his brother became fish-friers.” Her husband, Riccardo Orsucci, worked as a chef in Glasgow and, having run several restaurants over the years, has just opened a new fish restaurant - Giro di Boa - in Barga.

Back in the streets of the old town we climbed to the crest of the hill and rested by the impressive Duomo di San Cristoforo (Cathedral of St. Christopher.)

*St. Christopher is the patron saint of Barga, although no one is certain why.*

The views across the valley to the Apuan Alps are stunning, and the strategic importance of Barga’s location is self-evident. Constructed with local limestone, and sparkling under the Tuscan sun, the cathedral is the best example of Romanesque architecture in the Serchio valley.

Exiting the city walls through the Porta Reale, we called in at Il Bar del Paologas to meet the owner Paolo Marchetti. Apart from his obvious Scottish-Italian accent the first thing I noticed were the green and white





hoops of a Celtic Football Club shirt hanging from the ceiling along with a photograph of the former Celtic striker Henrik Larsson on a green and white wall aside a host of other Celtic memorabilia. The bar boasted a decent selection of Scottish whiskies and a sign that said 'Proud to serve Scotland'. Over a drink, Marchetti reiterated a now-familiar story.

"My father moved to Scotland in the early 1900s because my aunt was already there. I was born in Barga, but grew up in Scotland where my parents had a fish and chip shop in Byres Road in Glasgow." Marchetti spent his summer holidays in Barga, and by the time he returned permanently at the age of nineteen he was an avid Celtic supporter. His Italian friends soon shared his passion and they formed the local football team, Gatti Randagi (Stray Cats) in 1991. Gatti Randagi was welcomed at Celtic Park in Glasgow last year. As for their football strip – well, naturally it is green and white hoops! Marchetti is also ranked second in the Italian 250CC 2-stroke Motorcycle Championships, and Il Bar del Paologas is also home to a sizeable collection of trophies that he has won on his self-built Benelli. As the rest of the world knows, Italians love football and motorcycles!

*It is estimated that 70 per cent of Barga's population of 10,000 has connections with Scotland.*

When their ancestors first arrived as poor migrants they found work wherever they could; in the coalmines, shipyards, textile and catering industries amongst others.

With an indomitable spirit, they worked long, hard hours making enough money to bring other family members over. They learned to use the skills they brought with them, including their ability to make wonderful ice cream, and an inventiveness when using local produce such as fish and potatoes to create new dishes (disclaimer; fish and chips is not a traditional Italian dish!). The new tastes appealed to their Scottish hosts and it wasn't long before the Barghigiani migrants opened coffee shops, ice cream parlours, and fish and chip restaurants. The prosperity that came with their hard work and endeavour over the years enabled many to return to Barga and build sizeable villas in Il Giardino (The Garden), the new section of Barga that is located below the old town.

By the Via Giovanni Pascoli - the road linking the old and new parts of Barga - Ercolini pointed out 'the smallest library in Italy' - a red, U.K. telephone box filled with books for the community to share. It was shipped from Scotland to Barga by former fish and chip shop owner Mauro Cecchini, whose family originally hailed from Barga. We called into Ercolini's brother's shop - La Bottega del Pane. As well as local produce, he caters for a community still seeking things they became familiar with in Scotland. On the shelves I noticed Im-Bru, porridge oats, oatcakes, shortbread and tea!

*For a small town Barga punches well above its weight culturally.*



The Scottish painter John Bellany, who depicted Barga in many of his paintings, is commemorated on a plaque in Piazza Anglio. As well, the great Italian poet Giovanni Pascoli settled here, and the composer Puccini was a regular visitor. The town theatre, Teatro Dei Differenti has been established for two hundred years, and there is an annual international Opera Barga Festival and Barga Jazz Festival. Barga's impressive program of summer events includes a Scottish Week, with a special school dedicated to teaching traditional Scottish and Gaelic songs, music and dance. Organized by Scottish musician and bagpipe maker Hamish Moore, the course features world-renowned tutors from Scotland and Cape Breton and culminates in an outdoor public performance in one of Barga's main piazzas. Of course no summer festival program in Barga would be complete without an event to mark the very thing that brought so many Barghigiani the good fortune that they sought when emigrating all those years ago – a three-week long Fish and Chip Festival!

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# *Knoydart*

In the second of a three-part series on Scotland, Ken McGoogan routes through the roots of history





On day four out of Oban, sailing with Adventure Canada, my wife and I awoke to find ourselves anchored at Isleornsay Harbour off the Isle of Skye. This was not a planned stop. Overnight, faced with south-westerly winds gusting to 60 and 65 knots, the captain had taken the Ocean Endeavour north into the Sound of Sleat that runs between Skye and the mainland. Here he had found shelter in one of the most protected harbours on the east coast of Skye. To me, this proved revelatory.

I had been working on a book about Scottish Highlanders who emigrated to Canada in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some made the move of their own volition, but many were refugee victims of forced evictions called the Highland Clearances. During one of the most ferocious, a ship called the Sillery anchored at Isleornsay early in August of 1853. It had arrived to carry mainland crofters evicted from Knoydart in Glengarry. They lived and farmed along the north shore of Loch Hourn, a broad inlet that lies across the sound due east of Isleornsay.

I had wondered why the Sillery had not proceeded into that inlet to reduce transport time. Hence the revelation - one of those serendipities that can arise with surprising

frequency on these voyages. Onboard experts explained that strong westerly winds - not unusual in these parts - would have made it difficult for any 19th-century sailing vessel to emerge out of that inlet. So the Sillery, like our own vessel, had anchored in this sheltered harbour.

Just over a century before, farmers from Knoydart had been among the 600 Highlanders who had followed the chief of Glengarry into the 1746 Battle of Culloden. In the decades following that catastrophe, some had emigrated to Upper Canada, where after the American Revolutionary War, Scottish Loyalists had established a foothold.

*Knoydart had been bleeding people to those environs ever since.*

But in 1847, more than 600 people remained in the coastal settlements. The Great Famine reduced their numbers by a third, but those still resident, according to activist-lawyer Donald Ross, could have thrived as farmers with a little encouragement. In 1852, however, the newly-widowed Josephine Macdonell gained control of the Knoydart estate. A Lowland industrialist named James Baird - a Tory Member of Parliament - had expressed interest in her lands, but only if they were unencumbered by paupers for







whom he would legally become responsible.

Ignoring the people's offers to pay arrears caused by the recent famine, the widow Macdonell issued warnings of removal. "Those who imagine they will be allowed to remain after this," she wrote, "are indulging in a vain hope as the most strident measures will be taken to effect their removal."

In April 1853, she informed her tenants that they would be going to Australia, sailing courtesy of the landlord-sponsored Highland and Island Emigration Society. In June, she amended that: they would travel instead to Canada, their passage paid as far as Montreal. On debarkation, they would each be given ten pounds of oatmeal. Beyond that, they were on their own.

On August 2, 1853, with the Sillery anchored at Isleornsay, men with axes, crowbars, and hammers rowed across the inlet and began clearing farmers from their homes. The factor in charge, one Alexander Grant, ordered that after removing the tenants, his men were immediately to destroy "not only the houses of those who had left," Donald Ross wrote, "but also of those who had refused to go."

Gangs of men ripped off thatched roofs, slammed picks into walls and foundations, and chopped down any supporting trees. Eventually, Ross noted, "roof, rafters, and walls fell with a crash. Clouds of dust rose to the skies, while men, women and children stood at a distance, completely dismayed."

*"The wail of the poor women and children as they were torn away from their homes would have melted a heart of stone."*

The factor and his men proceeded methodically through one settlement after another, destroying everything but a few huts that belonged to declared paupers who remained protected by law. He warned these impoverished people that if they gave anyone else shelter, "for one moment by day or night," he would level their homes as well.

The marauders hauled everyone else out of their houses, threw their furniture and possessions after them, then set about the work of destruction. Ross writes that a few able-bodied men could have seized the factor and his men, bound them hand and foot, and sent them out of the district. But they "stood aside as dumb spectators," he wrote, because they knew any such resistance would end with themselves in jail and their wives and children left to fend for themselves. And so "no hand was lifted, no stone cast, no angry word was spoken."

The initial destruction went on for a week. On August 9, the Sillery departed for Montreal carrying 332 newly created refugees. In Knoy-

dart, when the gangs departed, about sixty people emerged from the rocks and the ridges, most of them old and decrepit, but among them a few children. They set about creating what shelter they could. They were still working in the wreckage when, on August 22, the marauders returned and launched a new wave of demolition. Over the next weeks, the destroyers returned again and again.

In November 1853, when Donald Ross arrived from Glasgow carrying tents and supplies, he found sixteen families subsisting among the ruins. He told their stories in a 31-page pamphlet, a howl of protest entitled *Glengarry Evictions or Scenes at Knoydart in Inverness-shire*. Ross was a vivid writer and in 2018, as I gazed out across the water from the *Ocean Endeavour*, I could not help recalling some of the scenes he recreated.

Within six months, the widow Macdonell's factor had removed almost all of those who - "for motives of charity" - had been allowed to remain through the winter. This time, they were removed with a medical officer in attendance. Soon enough, protected by a provision in his lease prohibiting him from sheltering any of those evicted, industrialist James Baird planted sheep in the surrounding hills. In 1857, with all the people dispersed, Baird purchased the Knoydart estate. He built a grand house and used it from time to time as a country retreat.

*Ken McGoogan's books include **How the Scots Invented Canada and Celtic Lightning: How the Scots and the Irish Created a Canadian Nation**. Ken sails every year with [adventurecanada.com](http://adventurecanada.com)*





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Lesley Choyce steps into Scotland's  
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*‘Oot & Aboot  
in Argyll & Bute’*





**W**ho knows exactly what takes travellers to destinations off the beaten track? For me, it is often a matter of just looking at a map and becoming fascinated with the image of a chunk of land intersecting with the sea in an unusual shape. Thus it was that my wife Linda and I found ourselves headed to the Cowal Peninsula in the Argyll region of Scotland - a spot that one travel writer described as “like a three-taloned claw with the Isle of Bute clutched in its grip.”

The flight from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Glasgow was as benign as an overnight flight can be, yet I felt foggy-headed as we tried to make the proper turns to find the Erskine Bridge over the Clyde River. Heading north, we saw crowds of picnickers scurrying along the shores of Loch Lomond and it looked just a tad too civilized on this day for a man longing for some Scottish wilderness. We turned off the A83 at Cairndow to head south on the peninsula and saw the Stage Coach Inn where Dorothy and William Wordsworth had lodged in 1803 and ate fresh herring. They, of course, had done some serious hiking thereabouts and while “doubling and doubling with laborious walk” had found a plaque on the path that instructed them to “Rest and be Thankful” where apparently they did just that.

Linda and I didn’t have an opportunity to do the same until we drove on southward along Loch Fyne to the tiny village of Uig (not to be confused with Uig, the ferry port to the Outer Hebrides on the Isle of Skye.) Here we had rented a small house next door to Benmore Gardens, just down the road from Puck’s Glen. From the look of the map, there was adventure aplenty nearby along Loch Eck and Loch Long, Glen Lean, and the aforementioned Isle of Bute. Rowan Cottage was a bit cool and damp (No, really? In Scotland?) but it had an amazing sun room in the back with a view of a mountain named Sgorach Mor, which apparently means “the large hill rising out of the mountain” - a curious double-whammy of a name that puzzled us both.

Our first restaurant meal was in a tea room in nearby Dunoon, which was supposedly serving “home-cooked meals.” Alas, the fish on my plate and the chicken in the chicken burger were straight out

of a box in the freezer. We did better stocking up on some fresh fish and garden goods at the Morrison’s, and found Dunoon to be a busy and lively place once we got the hang of the one-way streets and tight corners.

Dunoon is a port city of about 13,000 souls with a famous Victorian pier. Oddly enough, it was the home for U.S. submarines carrying nuclear weapons during the Cold War. The subs bobbed in harbour until 1992, when Mikhail Gorbachev almost single-handedly called off the dangerous stalemate and allowed Ronald Reagan to take all the credit for it.

*Mary Campbell - often referred to as “Highland Mary” - was born in Dunoon and there is a statue of her hereabouts.*

Visitscotland.com has this to say about the effigy; “Erected in 1896, the statue of Robert Burns’ ‘Highland Mary’ Campbell gazes wistfully southwards to her lover’s Ayrshire home.” She had been a lover of dear Robbie and he had written several poems about her, as well as for her, and the couple had hatched plans to leave Scotland for Jamaica of all places. Unfortunately, she died as a result of illness at the age of 23, yet she is revered and remembered by many in Scotland today.

Dunoon Castle sits nearby on a hill and dates back to the twelfth century, a mighty long time ago by my reckoning. It was the scene of a most nasty massacre in 1646 when the Marquis of Argyll (a bit of a bastard, apparently) hanged “scores of prisoners.”

Across Holy Loch from Dunoon is the somewhat posh suburb of Kilmun, a village founded by St. Mun in 620 AD, although people have been living around there since 3500 BC - again, a mind-boggling long time ago to us ramblers in the twenty-first century. St. Mun was an Irish monk, contemporary to the more famous St. Columba, who had at one time, it was said, been “assisted” by two wolves while guarding his sheep. A hike through the graveyard behind the famous church



there gave me pause as I ran my hands over the old tombstones where time and weather had erased the names of several centuries of mothers, fathers, sons and daughters.

Kilmun is on the shores of Holy Loch, which is said to be holy because soil from the Holy Land that was being transported to a cathedral in Glasgow fell into the waters here when the ship carrying the soil foundered and sank to the bottom.

The next morning, I turned on the radio to the BBC and was reminded that today was the Royal Wedding Day of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. I don't listen to much news, so this came as a bit of a surprise and I wondered if this day was of much importance to the good folks of this region of Scotland.

We headed off on the delightful single-track road leading across the Cowal Peninsula through Glen Lean and discovered there was absolutely no one to ask. The scenery was both stark and glorious, and we did come across one gent fishing near the dam at Loch Tarsan. He proved to have absolutely no interest whatsoever in celebrating Royal weddings, but instead grieved deeply that the fish were not biting.

We arrived in Colintraive at a narrow spot where cattle were once coerced to swim across the water to the Isle of Bute - a place which some tourist board has cleverly labelled, "the most accessible of the Westerly Isles." For £16.50, an open-air ferry will float you, your lover, and your car to the island - a crossing that takes all of four minutes. It probably took the poor cows a bit longer and, in my imagination, I could still see them today, cow-paddling themselves at the urging of their masters across the chilly strait, wondering what the hell this was all about.

It was early in the day when we landed ashore so we decided to circumnavigate the Isle, heading south past Rothesay around Bogany Point, beyond Ascog and Kerrycoy and on to breezy Ardschalpsie Bay. The fields were ripe with barley and the sun was shining brightly as it should on any Royal Wedding Day on our small planet.

Later, while eating carbonara pasta at Harry Haw's restaurant in Rothesay, I was soundly chastised by a fellow diner, a local florid man

with a noisy family in tow, that we should have stopped off at Mount Stuart, a famous estate we had driven right past. I had noticed the sign, but was pleased that my wife had not - she being considerably fond of paying large sums of money to the National Trust and other heritage organizations to allow us to wander through the drawing rooms of old, dead rich people. The man's wife told me that they had held the wedding of their daughter there and it had been magnificent. The man added that Mount Stuart House had the first-ever indoor heated swimming pool in any private home and I pretended to be impressed. Then he insisted that I turn around and drive back there at once, but I was more interested in finishing up the pasta and bacon bits on my plate and doing otherwise.

While paying for lunch, I asked the friendly waiter if the name of the restaurant was that of someone famous hereabouts, but he wasn't certain. A quick bit of research led to no easy answer, but I did discover that Harry Haw's opened for business in 2013. The owner claimed, "Our goal was to give Bute a fresh, relaxed, funky restaurant that serves a tasty menu cooked from scratch. No pre-charred chicken pieces in here!" So I give them a few stars for that alone.

We had come to Rothesay because I had read about the fame of the Victorian Toilets along the shoreline.

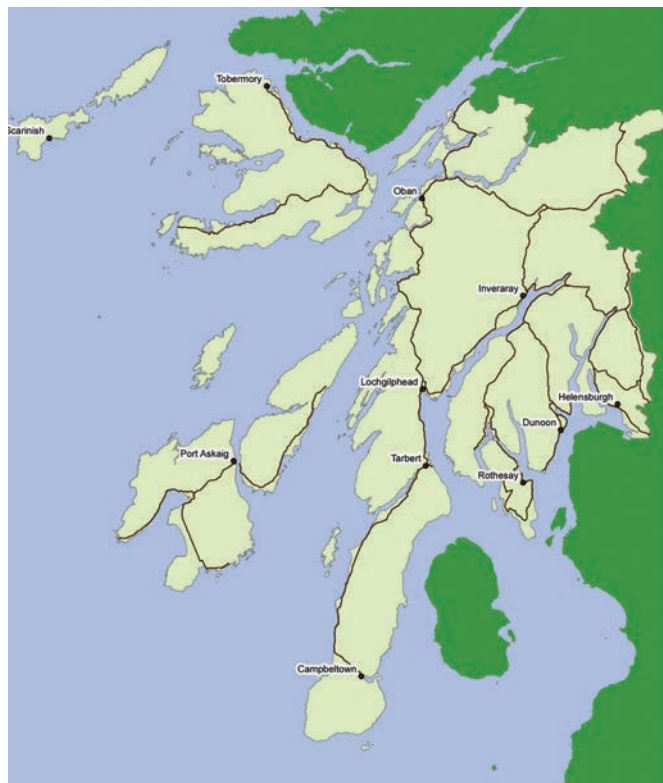
Here, tourists like me could pay 40p to pee and gawk at the glorious architecture of a bathroom of a long gone era. Historian Lucinda Lambton once described the upscale pissoir as "jewels in the sanitarian's crown." It was built for the hordes of mainland tourists in 1899, and the water has continued to flush ever since.

The famed website NothingToSeeHere.net tells us more; "Fourteen fantastic porcelain urinals stand erect along one wall, with another six in a circular centrepiece." Based on my own research, I can confirm this to be true. Apparently the place has won many awards, including multiple "Loo of the Year" designations. "Even Prince Charles has nipped in to admire a throne of a different kind."

It turns out that Prince Charles, the man whose son was being married this fine day, was the Duke of Rothesay (among other things)







and, although I could not find any information about what he actually did in that role for the citizens of Rothesay, I did come across a fine photo of him unveiling a massive statue of an Aberdeen Angus bull at a distant location. This led me to ponder, if you were just a duke and didn't wear any other hats, what exactly would your duties be except undertaking a royal flush once in a while?

A quick pit-stop at the Bute Brew Company revealed some intriguing-sounding pints, with names like Straad Ass, Scalpsie Blonde, Jinty Red, and even one called Cock Up Your Beaver - intended to celebrate (what else?) Robbie Burns, with a term that they insist means to "put a spring in your step." The funky indoor-outdoor pub area was filled with lovely locals, and not one person berated me for passing up on Mount Stuart House.

Back at our rental home we discovered that the owners had a drawer full of games, including one called "Pass the Pigs" whereby you roll pig-shaped dice to gain points. If you roll a "razorback" you get 5 points, but a "leaning jowler" will win you 15. However, a devastating "oinker" will set you all the way back to zero. Pass the Pigs, I believe, would be just the ticket to lure kids back to board games and away from violent video games.

The following day dawned grey, wet and blustery. We retraced our route through Glen Lean and then snaked our way down to Portavadie for a longer ferry crossing that would take us to Tarbert on the Kintyre Peninsula (as in "Mull of Kintyre.")

Standing on the deck of the ferry, we were blasted by cold, salty waves once in the middle of Loch Fyne. Up front on the boat were

about twenty drenched bicyclists who didn't seem the slightest bit deterred by the nasty weather. Staring at them, as I received my second salty shower near the rail, I considered these middle-aged, rain-shiny adults most brave. I envisioned them as the modern day versions of their ancestral Scots who once proved their mettle through bloody battle and brutality. I soon realized that I was thankful that all that courage and fortitude of the past was now being funnelled into these modern day bicyclists willing to ride through the most heinous weather on some of the most treacherous narrow roads possible.

On this day, we had left the Cowal Peninsula in search of the ancestral home of our dog Kelty. I had determined we should make a pilgrimage to the nearly non-existent village of Poltalloch, not far from the Sound of Jura. It was here that the sixteenth Laird of Poltalloch, Edward Donald Malcolm, was said to have bred the first West Highland White Terriers, originally known as Poltalloch Terriers.

Despite having a good map and the aid of satellite navigation, we had a hell of a time finding Poltalloch. We knew the estate was in ruins, but thought we may be able to walk around it or at least to see it from the road. According to Navigon, we arrived, drove through it, and didn't see a village or a dog monument or anything of note. So we drove back and forth a few times and still nothing was to be seen. The rain was steady, the road was pot-holed and muddy, and we tried several dead-end lanes before ending up at Poltalloch Farms, a dairy farm with one of the muddiest grazing fields I had ever encountered. I did see a couple of cows - and a few soaked, sorry-looking chickens - but not a sign of a dog or any indication that this was where Westies first came into being.

The funny thing about pilgrimages like this that we have undertaken - quests in search of little known places that have meaning to me but not many others - is that we usually do not find what we are looking for.

However, having selected a destination and remaining open to whatever adventure comes our way, interesting and sometimes dra-



matic things happen - even extraordinary things. That just wasn't the case today; we found, rain, mud, and dead-end roads.

However, Kilmartin was just up the track from here. Kilmartin Glen is home to burial cairns, stone circles, and manmade structures that are as old as 5,000 years. We braved the rain to walk into one soggy pasture, entering one of the Temple Wood Stone Circles.

We also eventually found one of the Nether Largie South Cairns where I tucked myself down inside, beneath the flat stone roof, and waited for voices from ancient days to whisper in my ears. They respectfully told me in their ancient dialect to stop acting like an idiot and get back into the car and out of the downpour. There is a castle and museum in Kilmartin worthy of visitors' attention as well but, alas, my foray into the tomb had left me wet and without interest.

In our retreat back to the Cowal Peninsula, we stopped for lunch at the warm and inviting Argyll Inn, the only open pub we could find, in Lochgilphead. I asked the waitress what the town was famous for and she drew a blank, although later research revealed that it is an important transportation hub, being located at the head of Lochgilphead after all. The pub had a big screen TV which introduced me to my first viewing of Ninja Warrior U.K. The food service was slow, which gave me a chance to watch the show where "everyday heroes take on the world's toughest obstacle course." I admit I was totally entranced. While eating my fish and chips I observed overly-confident jocks tripping, falling down, bumping into obstacles, falling down some more, bouncing off both soft and hard objects and otherwise making British fools of themselves. I will definitely want the barkeep to tune it in again should I ever find myself in Lochgilphead.

Back in our Uig home we dried off and, as the rain ended, walked through nearby Benmore Gardens - green and lush and magnificent with blooming rhododendrons exploding with colour, towering Sequoia trees planted in 1863, and a delightfully chattering brook. I tried to ignore the fact that the various Dukes of Argyll (none of which I liked very much) once used this as their hunting grounds, and that the not-always-benevolent Campbells owned it in the past as well. But, in my opinion, it is a damn fine example of what man can do when he cooperates with nature in extraordinary measure.

The next day, filling up with petrol at a station in nearby Rashfield, I found myself in conversation with the proprietor concerning what he referred to as "the lack of ethics these days." I couldn't quite extract from him what prompted these concerns, since everyone we had met in Scotland treated us quite ethically. I think he was referring to kids stealing candy from his shelves - apparently something that would have never happened when he was a boy.

Soon after the discourse on contemporary ethics, Linda and I went hiking up nearby Puck's Glen, which the Forestry Commission calls "one of the most magical forests in Scotland, with a delightful trail along a rocky gorge." And it most certainly is. The puck in the name has nothing to do with hockey, I learned, but refers to the legendary woodland spirit, Puck, who can be friendly or mean and likes to play tricks on whomever he meets. Also known sometimes as Robin Goodfellow, he appears in literature, most famously in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which you may have been forced to read against your will in high school. Puck was most kind to us on our visit this day, however, and provided only the best kind of magic in the form of dappled sunlight, multiple chuckling waterfalls, and an amazing jungle-like trail up and down a narrow ravine.

On our last day in the area, we returned to Dunoon where I toyed with the idea of buying one of those flat-topped caps (a flat cap?) - the kind that aging Scotsmen like to wear. It was an old-style, downtown clothing store where young children begged their mothers to buy them things the mothers did not want them to have. By five o'clock all the shops were closing and we searched for what some like to call

"authentic food," but gave up after peeking into several unappealing pubs. We settled instead on a restaurant calling itself the "51st State" that had "Mexican food in an American-style restaurant." I knew that the U.S. had only fifty states and wondered at this nomenclature. Many in America thought Puerto Rico would become the 51st state but, looking at the menu, it seemed more likely it could be Mexico. Nonetheless, the meal was most excellent - the best Mexican food we had in Scotland.

There were sheep on the road the following morning on our way to catch the ferry from Hunter's Quay to Gourock. It was an easy drive onto the boat and I seemed to pull my car up to the front of the ferry just perfectly so that the ferry attendant complimented me on the task, rating it as "just smashing" - a term I could well apply to most of our exploration of the Cowal Peninsula and places beyond.







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## *Ewan McGregor*

Ewan McGregor is no stranger to Celtic Life International readers; along with gracing our Spring 2013 cover, the 47-year-old Scottish actor has appeared on multiple occasions both in our print publication and on our website. Recently, correspondent Jessica Young spoke with the esteemed thespian about his latest film *Christopher Robin*.





**E**wan McGregor is living an extremely charmed life. So much so, in fact, that he has been romping around with some of the most-beloved characters in the history of children's literature; Winnie the Pooh and his friends from the Hundred Acre Wood.

Just released to theatres around the world, "Christopher Robin" explores the life of the little boy from the Winnie the Pooh stories - now grown-up, and settled down with a wife and children. In this heart-warming, live-action adventure, Pooh and his friends re-enter Christopher's life to help him recapture the magic of childhood.

**CL:** *Why did you choose to get involved with this film?*

**EM:** In terms of just what appealed to me, Marc Forster (director) approached me. I had worked with Marc on a film that we made, called *Stay*, which was this weird and wonderful movie with Ryan Gosling and Naomi Watts. I always bump into Marc and have stayed somewhat in touch with him over the years. We had spoken about some other projects, in the meantime, that hadn't worked out, for one reason or another, and then he spoke to me about this.





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**CL:** *Was it love at first sight?*

**EM:** Well, I loved the way he talked about it. I loved the way he described it. It didn't sound to me like a Disney remake. The way he talked about it; it really just sounded like what you see in the movie. There is a real artfulness to it, and there is almost a darkness of sorts to it as well, which is surprising.

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**CL:** *Do share.*

**EM:** As it advanced, I was quite charmed by the script and loved that they made Christopher Robin a man my age, and that Winnie the Pooh comes back to him at a difficult time in his life. I found that really moving.

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**CL:** *Christopher Robin is no longer the little boy we loved; he is a family man.*

**EM:** Exactly. He is the father of a daughter who he is not very close to, and he recognizes that, and would like to be closer to her. Certainly, you get the feeling that she would like to be closer to her dad as well,

and there is something about this coming together of a father and his daughter that really appealed to me as an actual father of girls.

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**CL:** *Your character of Christopher Robin is having trouble connecting with his family.*

**EM:** I think, thematically, the film could be about coming back to anything, really just prioritizing your life. I also think there is an interesting thing, as a dad, about Christopher Robin being a man, at that time. It would be unusual for him, or any father, to sense that he wasn't close enough to his children, but he's not close enough to his daughter and he feels that; which is what is so beautiful about the film, really. By the end of the film, he's done something about it and he is closer to her. But for men, at that time, there was no expectation to be close to your kids.

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**CL:** *You identified with Christopher as a man as well – right?*

**EM:** True. He is the efficiency manager of a luggage company following the war when

most people can't afford to go on holiday, let alone purchase luggage for the trip, so the pressure to keep the company afloat and protect everybody's jobs rests on his shoulders. He works very hard and probably works too much, and his relationship with his family is strained as a result.

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**CL:** *What were the challenges involved with making the film?*

**EM:** Nobody knows what Christopher Robin is like as a 47-year-old man, except me. I have done that before, in plays and stuff, where you play a character who's been played many times before, and that is quite scary. We know Christopher Robin as a small seven-year-old from A. A. Milne's books and from Disney's animations, but we don't know who he is as an adult. It was very much in the writing. That was his story. Winnie the Pooh helps him to find the child in him again - who he was when we first see him, at the beginning of the movie. Life happens to him and he has lost that, and Pooh helps him back to that. I suppose it was quite hard, in some of the earlier scenes, to hold back.





**CL:** Tell me about acting opposite characters who aren't really there?

**EM:** Well, I have lots of experience with that from the old Galaxy Far, Far Away days. What Marc did beautifully was cast each character. There was a real actor for every character. He mainly cast young actors who had just come out of drama school, and they were very enthusiastic and talented. They would play the first takes with us, many times actually in the shot, just holding the teddy bear. There was a real version of each character. I've also got a Pooh of my own. I got a Pooh out the back door. Marc got all of them, but Disney charged him for them. I secretly got my own Pooh. There was a real version of each one, and we got to play the first takes with that.

**CL:** That sounds like good fun.

**EM:** There was an actor, called David, who played Pooh, and he would hold the bear and move him. If we were walking, he had him on this little harness with a pole, and he would be able to walk him along with me, but so slowly. I would say to David, 'can we just get him movin?' And he said, 'no.'

**CL:** Why is that?

**EM:** He had been taught exactly how long it would take Pooh to make a step, so it was so slow, but it became real. We would do the first takes with the real bear, or Tigger, or Eeyore, or whatever, and then they would step the actors out, sometimes leaving the bear there, if it was just static in the scene, and if not you just had to pretend you were looking at him. There were also various other ones. There was a gray one, and one with no head. There was one that was just a body. There was one with Pooh's torso and no head, legs, or arms, which was the horror version. Those scenes with us in the house, at the beginning, set that up beautifully, I think. When he comes back home, or when he's going to work, you can see his daughter's frustration, but you can see that they really love each other very deeply. It is very important that we understand that, or else you won't root for them.

**CL:** What does this movie remind you of?

**EM:** I have always loved the films of Jimmy Stewart, and I could imagine him playing this role back in his day. Reading the script made me feel like this might be my Jimmy Stewart sort of role.

**CL:** What do you love most about being with your own four daughters?

**EM:** I love nothing more than being at home with my family, so I yearn for them when I am away for extended periods making films, and even more so for the extended periods when I am doing publicity for my films.

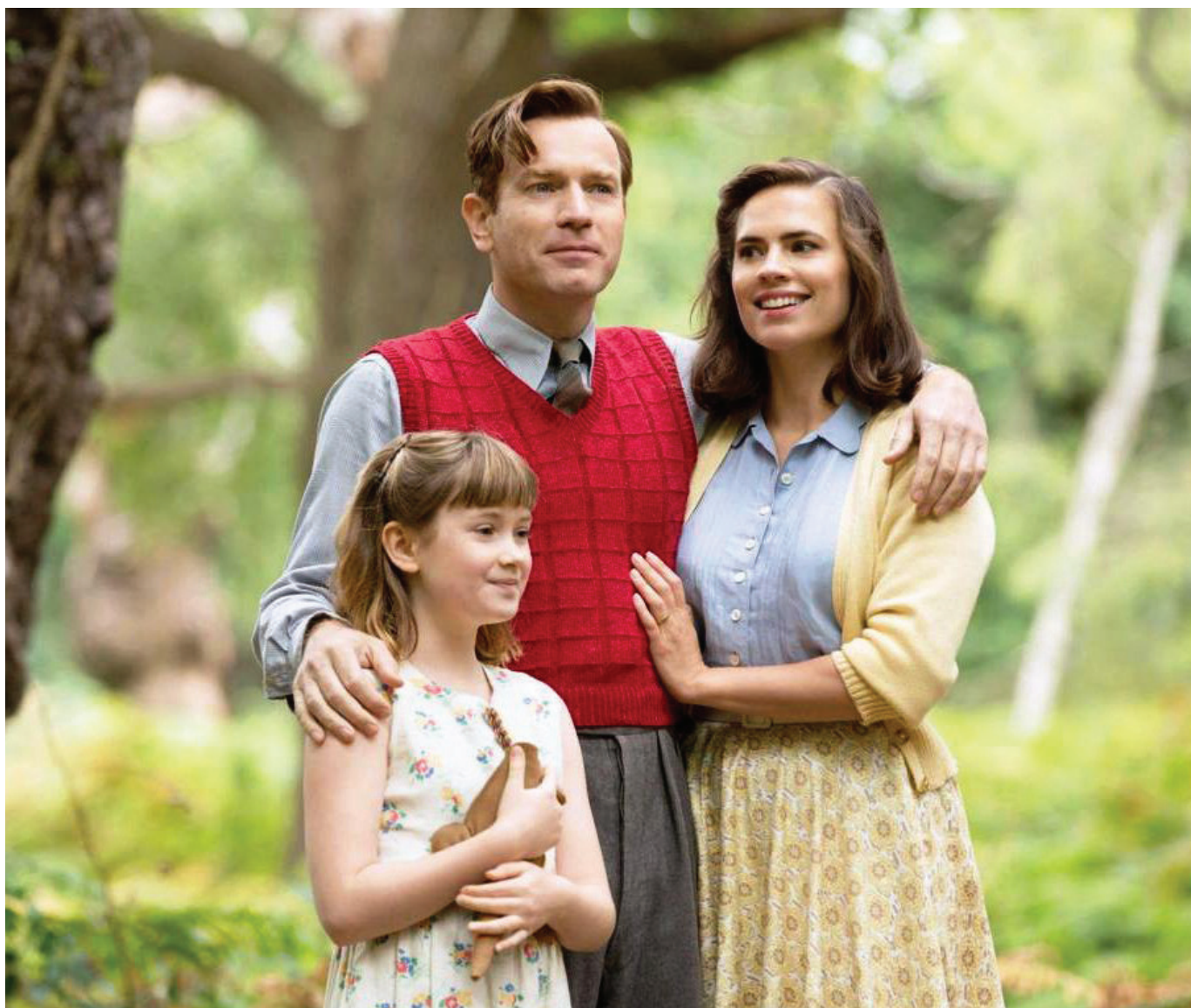
**CL:** You have played a huge cross-section of characters in your movies. Are there some that you have been more attracted to than others?

**EM:** Well, every character you read in a script is a new kind of character. Everything you read is a new person in that story. And therefore it should all be very different.

**CM:** Has your accent ever been a problem as an actor?

**EM:** My Scottish accent was never a problem. I don't know about a Glasgow accent, or an Aberdeen accent or Edinburgh accent. But even in Scotland, there are a hundred different regional accents. And mine was always like this. But it has probably toned down a little bit, because I don't live there anymore. But I also think the other thing is that we come from a country with a great deal of training. There's a real path to go on in Britain to become an actor that really isn't available here, in a way. So the actors end up having to be very good, very quickly - straight out of the block, especially if they start in movies.





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**CL:** I loved your film *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* (2011). How did you learn fly fishing for that role?

**EM:** Emily Blunt and I were taught by a very good fly fishing teacher in London. In a stately home in London, though I can't remember what it was called. And he taught me and Robert, and Amr who plays the sheikh. The three of us had to learn to cast the fly rod which, technically, is not easy. The good thing about that is you can do it anywhere. You can learn it in a parking lot, or a field. You don't have to be on a river to learn how to cast the rod. And then, we had a fishing adviser when we were on the set in Scotland - a guy called Billy The Gilly! And he was a lovely man.

---

**CL:** Did you continue to fly fish after that film?

**EM:** No. I don't have either the desire to catch a fish, nor the kind of sporting mentality that is required to do so. However, I quite like the tranquil nature of standing in nature and the lovely sound of the river.

**CL:** Do you have a dream project?

**EM:** I'd like to shoot a film in my back garden!

---

**CL:** Oh? Why is that?

**EM:** So I don't have to go anywhere. As an actor, you do spend a lot of time away from home. And that's something that isn't always easy to do. So when I fantasize about doing something else, it is always things that I could do at home.

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**CL:** How do you see yourself that way?

**EM:** I could see being a writer, or a sculptor, and having a workshop next to my house. I would just lock myself away, and be quite solitary sometimes. And create something that people might be interested in looking at, while wearing my overalls. Or be able to hang around to have breakfast with the kids, take them to school, and go shoot in the backyard. I would enjoy that quite a bit!





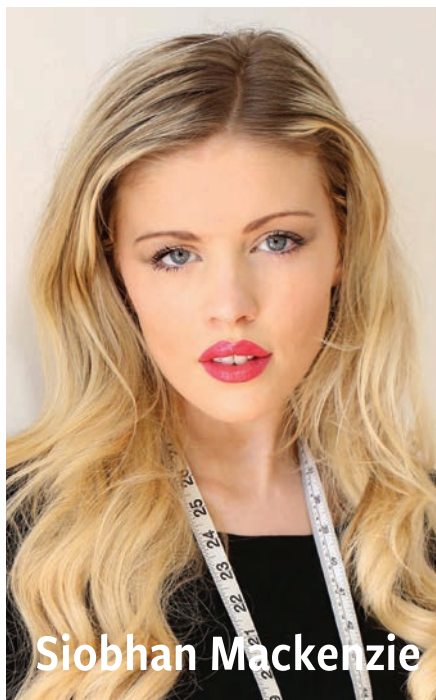
*The Celtic*



# *Thread*

Across the Celtic nations, fashion designers weave colourful threads into a rich and robust tapestry of culture, history and heritage. Celtic Life International Managing Editor Stephen Patrick Clare stitches it all together.





**Siobhan Mackenzie**



**Jane Skovgaard and Charlotte Cargin**

**T**ake a quick stroll through any of the many Highland games and Celtic festivals found around the world each year and there is a good chance that you will catch some colourful Celtic costumes; Scottish tartans of all shapes and styles, Irish sweaters and peaked caps, and traditional tall hats worn by the Welsh and Bretons. If you are lucky, you might see the rich garb of Galician Gaitas, classic Cornish dance outfits, and even marvelous Manx headdresses.

And while many Celtic peoples still wear their ancestral identity on their sleeves, their clothing - and their identity - is being redesigned.

That dynamic - the process of defining, redefining, and refining what it means to be Celtic today - can be seen via the shift in styles.

Call it Celtic couture, Celtic chic, cross-Celtic, pan-Celtic...whatever the moniker, it reflects the evolution of a people and its culture.

"It is the combination of old world Celtic and contemporary design," says Regina Tierney of Celtic Fusion from her home near Ennis, Co. Clare, along Ireland's plush west coast.

Raised amidst that lush landscape, Tierney was exposed to a myriad of ancient Celtic traditions; embracing and expressing those customs through design is how she chooses to celebrate her heritage.

"Celtic Fusion has become an outward expression of my own taste and my connection to my ancestors. I am a woman of the world; I travel a lot, I seek new ideas and trends, and I combine the new with the old to create something that allows me, and my clients, a chance to reconnect with our roots in a way that is both fashionable and wearable."

Although contemporary Celtic attire might not always resemble the traditional wear worn by your forebears, threads of that legacy remain, passed down through generations.

*For many of today's top Celtic designers,  
the passion for fashion began at home.*

"My great grandmother was a professional seamstress and her father was a tailor," shares Scottish stylist Siobhan MacKenzie. "I used

to watch her sew the most beautiful sequin patterns onto the plainest of sweaters and transform them into statement pieces - her style was iconic. As a child I would always sketch clothes, and I decided at ten years of age that I would be a fashion designer."

Aideen Bodkin of Dublin had a similar experience.

"My mum and grandmother showed me how to knit, crochet, embroider and sew. I enjoyed being creative. I got my first sewing machine at 13. I loved it, and I knew right away what I wanted to do with my life."

Deirdre Duffy of Co. Mayo, Ireland, was first introduced to design by her grandmother as well.

"She was an Aran hand-knitter in Ballinahown. At the time, a lot of housewives would knit Aran sweaters for Irish companies to send to the U.S.A. Granny was a super-knitter; her hands knew the stitch more than her brain did. I never remember actually learning to knit - I was just surrounded by it all the time as a child and it seeped in by osmosis."

Some took that family crafting to imaginative places.

"I was fortunate to have two very stylish grandmothers," shares Jane Skovgaard of Kinsale-based Charlotte & Jane, near Cork. "Each had beautiful clothes made for them, which they would help to design with their dress-makers. I found this fascinating, and loved that they would involve me. As a child, the first thing I would do when visiting them was head straight to their wardrobe and browse through their clothes, bags, gloves, jewelry, and try on all their shoes. I would lay out outfits for myself, and often put on fashion shows with my cousins and sisters as the models. I always had my own ideas about how I wanted to dress, and started making and customizing my own clothes at the age of eleven."

Nova Scotia designer Veronica MacIsaac, whose parents Mac and Rosemary are world-renowned kilt-makers, is carrying on her family's tradition.

"I have been in the tartan world all of my life, and I can't remember a time I wasn't interested in fashion. My mother taught me to sew when I was four, and I was always welcome to be creative with bits of fabric. I remember my mother and I made tartan sheath dresses





Chloe Duggan



Claire Christian

for a festival and people were constantly commenting on them. That's the first time it ever occurred to me there could be a demand for tartan clothing."

From homespun roots, the pattern towards professional success varied; some undertook formal training, studying at art schools or design institutes, while others mentored under established labels. Many simply made their own way, learning from their daily, hands-on experiences.

*And while ways and means may have differed, the goal for each has been the same; to produce the best item of clothing possible.*

"I like quality and timeless beauty," shares Nova Scotia stylist Katherine Feiel. "I want to know that a garment is so well-made that it will stand the test of time, and that it won't be so trendy that I cannot wear it for a number of years."

Across the Atlantic Ocean, Belfast-based couturier Chloe Duggan agrees.

"Quality is everything; it affects how long-lasting your garment is, how it fits and drapes on the body, and how it feels to wear it."

She adds that the idea of timelessness runs contrary to modern society's penchant for disposable - or "throwaway" - culture.

"I want my clients to fall in love with my pieces and have them as staples in their wardrobes for years to come. Good quality doesn't always cost a fortune either, which is commonly misconstrued with higher-end clothing."

South of the border in Dublin, designer

Niall Tyrrell believes it is all about how one wears it.

"A good item of clothing should always feel just perfect when you put it on; it should make you feel great, give you confidence and - above all - it should feel like a great friend that you can rely on. This, I believe, is the secret language of good clothes."

Down the street from Tyrrell, Katie O'Riordan of Theo & George shares the sentiment.

"You need to look and feel good in the piece. There is nothing that makes someone look better than confidence - and a beautiful garment will do this."

"A good item of clothing comes back to the threads and the fibers that it was created with," adds Regina Tierney. "When something is real you can feel it with your fingers and your heart."

As such, notes Scotalian fashionista Silvia Pellegrino, a fine piece is born from the love and intention that has been put into it.

"Every detail must be cured; from the choice of the fabrics, the color combination and the tailoring, to the font type used on your swing tags. I believe in offering not just a design, but a whole experience."

Bringing that experience to life is not without its challenges, however.

*Ask any fashion designer and they will tell you that, while truly a labour of love, piecing it all together is hard work.*

"It is always a challenge to come up with something new and fresh every season," ex-

plains Fiona Heaney of Dublin-based Fee-G. "And with commercial deadlines there is a time constraint on the creative process. Also, some elements are simply outside of my control, including fabric quality, trims, construction, patterns, etc - there are many aspects involved in the process."

Staying ahead of the curve is essential, says Paul Sullivan of Ireland's Eye Knitwear.

"Like any business, you need to continually innovate. We are always looking to improve in every aspect of what we do. In addition, you have the constant change that is a feature of the fashion and clothing industry, with several new knitwear collections needed every year - and that means changes in trends, colours, shapes, etc, so you are constantly developing new products."

For some, balancing business and family life can be stressful.

"Time management is the key," shares Irish hat-maker Suzie Mahoney. "Both areas of my life are very important, and it is imperative that I don't miss out on family demands. That is a non-negotiable."

"Learning new IT and social media skills is also a necessary part of maintaining a visual presence in the marketplace. Having experience on computers, and having support available to me, allows me to learn and to adapt my business to these challenges."

Manx designer Claire Christian concurs.

"Consumers today are more demanding, quality-savvy, and have unpredictable purchase power. We need to work harder to keep up with smarter shoppers, reaching customers in new, but personal ways through technology."

Siobhan MacKenzie agrees that generating visibility in the marketplace is a must.





**Natalie B Coleman**



**Niall Tyrrell**



**Fiona Heaney**

"It is challenging as a small brand with a unique product; you are a small fish in a very big pond, and you don't have the same type of marketing budget as a large brand so you have to be innovative in the ways you try to reach your customers."

Others see troubling trends in the marketplace.

"The retail industry as a whole is challenged at the moment," admits Katie O'Riordan.

"Consumers are demanding instant product availability and access, and the fast-fashion movement has trends starting and disappearing overnight. This is making it more challenging for independent designers to compete with major retailers. Independent boutiques are closing at a rapid rate, and consumers are spending their clothing budgets on disposable, inexpensive clothing."

"It is a competitive industry," adds Natalie B Coleman of Dublin. "High Street has taken over from independent designers, so it is particularly important to not try to compete, but to offer an alternative in something that is uniquely-crafted."

As Charlotte Cargin of Charlotte & Jane believes, however, where there is a will, there is a way.

"Starting and running a business is an enormous challenge. We had to begin at the very bottom and slowly, through hard work and sheer determination, work our way up. That first year we sewed every garment ourselves, working day and night, and living on little else but rice! But we laughed our way through the hardships, as we knew in our hearts that it would all work out in the end. Thankfully, we had enormous support from the media and encouragement from our clients. When we reached the point that we had so many dresses to make we could no longer do it alone, finding suitably-trained dress makers was a huge challenge. So, for a year we taught a dress-making course alongside running the business, and we are now blessed to have four wonderful local dress-makers working with us."

*Long hours, hard work, high costs, strong competition, an erratic marketplace, labour issues, balancing family life, keeping creative - it is a wonder that so many designers continue to do what they do.*

"I consider myself an entrepreneur and really enjoy being my own boss," says Katherine Feiel. "I can work when and how I choose and benefit personally from my hard work. I love the creative aspects, being finicky and making a piece as absolutely beautiful as possible, coming up with new ideas and solutions to design challenges. I think my absolute favorite reward is the reaction I get from satisfied clients."

It is a common sentiment.

"The biggest reward for me is a happy customer," says Siobhan MacKenzie. "It makes everything worthwhile."

"Seeing my designs being worn by ladies all over the country is the greatest reward of doing what I do," agrees Fiona Heaney.

"I wake up happy, knowing that so many people can feel inspired and more confident in their daily life experiences because of my designs," adds Silvia Pellegrino.

"Doing something I love and having people appreciate the effort that has gone into the design and craftsmanship is beyond fulfilling," notes Natalie B Coleman.

"The greatest reward is meeting someone who really connects with my designs," shares Regina Tierney. "Many times, a person has discovered my work and has dreamt about





**Regina Tierney**



**Silvia Pellegrino**

the clothing I have created. This kind of connection is beyond words."

Multi award-winning Irish designer Marion Murphy-Cooney can relate.

"I take great pride in designing for the special occasions in people's lives. This is what motivates me, and it is my favourite part of the job. Those experiences also make me realize the power of clothing, and that it is a language all its own."

"I cherish creating quality, sustainable clothes that are ethically made and fashion forward," says Katie O'Riordan. "Ultimately, I love the process of design; from concept to production, to seeing my garments being worn on the street."

*To that end, for many designers, the journey is the destination.*

"I really enjoy the time that I set aside simply to design," notes Niall Tyrrell. "The ultimate

creative reward is having an inspired concept in my head and watching it come to life through a sketch, which then leads to the creation of a pattern, leading to the finished garment - all of that began with an idea."

Jane Skovgaard sums up success succinctly.

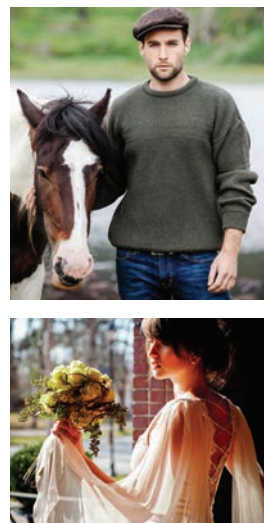
"The rewards are plentiful. The satisfaction of having set up our own successful business is enormous, and the perks of being self-employed are amazing - we are now able to take time out when we need to feed ourselves with new inspiration.

"And we absolutely love working directly with each client and seeing how joyful they are to have beautiful custom-made outfits. We meet wonderful people all the time and help them to look their best for significant occasions in their lives. There is simply nothing better than receiving messages of thanks from satisfied clients, along with photographs of them wearing our designs."

While most reap a bevy of both personal and professional rewards, there is also the deeper satisfaction of knowing that they are a piece of something bigger than themselves - something that continues to grow over time. As such, like their businesses and their creative crop, Celtic couture is a work in progress.

"Celtic culture is evolving," says Regina Tierney. "Our language, our arts and customs - all of the elements that comprise who we are as a community - are being redefined and redesigned. Our sense of style is a vital - and very beautiful - part of that refashioning.

"Still," she adds, "there is simply no denying where we come from. Our heritage is deeply woven into our DNA, and what we wear is the outward expression of who we are. These are the threads that preserve and promote our cultural identity."







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# forhim

COVER STORY

## Aran Zip Sweater €190

[www.blarney.com](http://www.blarney.com)

Hand knit with 100 per cent Merino wool, this traditional Aran Zip Sweater features many time-honoured Aran stitches, as well as a high-ribbed collar and full length zip. Two ample front patch pockets offer a cozy place to warm your hands on colder days.

## Retro Wales Rugby Jacket €62

[www.sloganite.com](http://www.sloganite.com)

This Retro Wales Rugby Jacket is crafted with canvas and features a brushed tartan lining, a scalloped back shoulder seam, button down side pockets, and elastic cuffs and waistband. The jacket comes in 5 colours and sizes, and is machine washable.



## Vintage Patchwork Tweed Cap €77

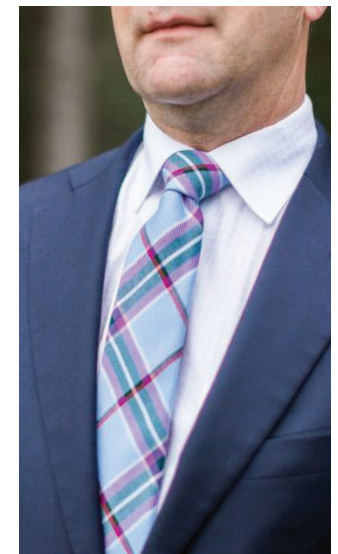
[www.hannahats.com](http://www.hannahats.com)

Designed and created in the 1960s, this classic patchwork cap is a timeless piece, worn for generations and treasured by many. Multi-coloured tweed patches are sewn together using the age-old tradition of quilting, ensuring that the cap is one-of-a-kind.

## World Peace Tartan Tie €28

[www.celticlfe.com](http://www.celticlfe.com)

The World Peace Tartan was created to promote harmony amongst all nations; the light blue signifies hope, the white line is symbolic of peace and light, and the red and black represent the realities of war and the call for a new culture of non-violence. The purple and green of the Scottish thistle reflect the pattern's origins. 100 per cent lambswool.



## Harris Tweed Hip Flask €27

[www.tweedwithatwist.com](http://www.tweedwithatwist.com)

Hand woven in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, this traditional 6 oz. hip flask is covered with a luxurious Harris Tweed grey and black herringbone weave in a traditional plaid pattern, with high quality trained real leather trim top and bottom.



## Celtic Cufflinks €95

[www.tainsilver.com](http://www.tainsilver.com)

Handmade in the Scottish Highlands, these Meigle Celtic Cufflinks are quite striking, particularly when placed against darker shirts. Crafted in .925 Sterling silver, with a dimension of 17mm diameters, they are also available in gold.







Available at your local Celtic Giftware store





## Traditional Aran Wool Sweater €85

[www.aransweatermarket.com](http://www.aransweatermarket.com)

This traditional design is made with 3 ends of wool for extra thickness and warmth, making it the perfect garment for outdoor activities or just cozying up at home.



## Ladies Tweed Flapper Cap €32.50

[www.shannonirishdesignstore.com](http://www.shannonirishdesignstore.com)

A throwback to the roaring 1920s, this classic cap is woven from 100 per cent yarns, warm, durable and lined, with a draw string inside the brim to adjust to any head size.



## Lambswool Scarves €25

[www.lohcarron.co.uk](http://www.lohcarron.co.uk)

Handcrafted at the Lochcarron Mill in the beautiful Scottish Borders these 100% brushed lambswool plain and tartan scarves are made from the finest yarn, with Scottish water creating the super soft feel - an essential accessory for any winter wardrobe.



## The 1834 Royal Stewart €135

[www.nixeyonline.com](http://www.nixeyonline.com)

Inspired by the classic Celtic sporran, the 1834 Royal Stewart is crafted with passion, precision, and the same fine attention to detail that has hallmarked artisan leather making for centuries.



## Gold Llangyfelach Cross Pendant €995

[www.rhiannon.co.uk](http://www.rhiannon.co.uk)

Based on a cross-decorated slab found at Llangyfelach Church in South Wales, dated to the 9th century. The knotwork of the centre cross motif is based on the 'Trinity' knot, a favourite motif of Christian Celtic art. The circle is made up of double-beaded single twists.

## Knittens €10

[www.celticliflife.com](http://www.celticliflife.com)

Environmentally friendly, these cozy and comfy mittens are made from recycled wool garnered from sweaters that have been washed in hot water, and then dried in a hot dryer so that the wool 'felts'. Knittens are lined and reversible, and are available in a variety of styles and colours.





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# accessories



## Celtic Mandala-Triskele Luggage €163 [www.zazzle.com](http://www.zazzle.com)

Sporting a royal red Mandala, with a black and gold Celtic Triskele - or Triple Spiral - at the center, this black suitcase with red trim is lightweight and durable. The Triskele is one of the oldest symbols of Celtic Mysticism, and represents the "three realms" of Land, Sea and Sky. Available in multiple colours and styles.



## Tartan Wool Knee Blanket €28 [www.tartanblanketco.com](http://www.tartanblanketco.com)

These recycled wool knee blankets are cut to a smaller size along the width. Durable and warm, they are perfect for wrapping around the shoulders or, as the name suggests, over the knees. Available in a variety of tartans, you will be sure to find the perfect one to match your mood or style.

## Welsh Love Spoon €36 [www.welsh-lovespoons.co.uk](http://www.welsh-lovespoons.co.uk)

This traditional Welsh Love Spoon features the Celtic country's famed Red Dragon, a powerful symbol of protection and perseverance. At home in the kitchen, or anywhere in the house, the item is a reminder of Wales' deep roots and customs. Names, or family mottos, can be engraved on the heart.

## Call of Ireland Kilt Pin €74 [www.nagleforge.com](http://www.nagleforge.com)

A beautiful piece of stylized Celtic art, this design is based on the looping dot and curl patterns that decorate the gold rims of the great Calling Horns of ancient Ireland. The detachable handmade nickel pin limits the strain on the cast front piece and makes it possible to wear as a pendant as well as a brooch.



## Haggis, Neeps & Tatties €8 [www.thehaggis.com](http://www.thehaggis.com)

Enjoy Scotland's national dish anywhere, anytime. This attractive pack contains all you need for a traditional meal, or a classic Burns Supper, including a unique 'whole' Scotch haggis in a tin, a can of 'bashed neeps' and a pack of 'chappit tatties'.

## MacRuff Tartan Dog Collar €10 [www.plaidplace.com](http://www.plaidplace.com)

Your dog will look FUNderful in this MacRuff's tartan collar. A rugged, webbed collar with plastic adjustable buckle and strong metal D-ring, it is available in four attractive tartans: Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Black Watch, and Royal Stewart. Matching tartan leashes are also available!





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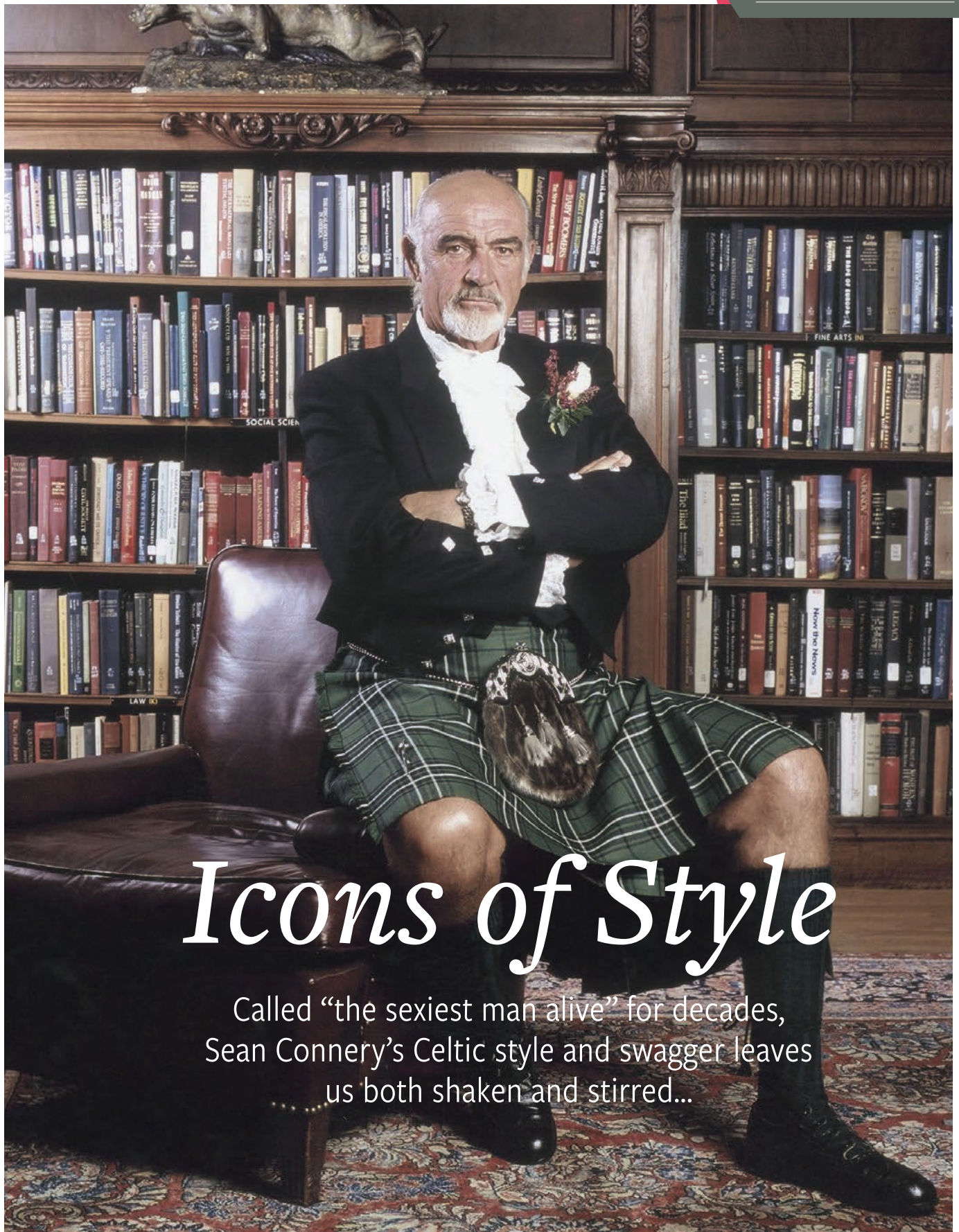
GlenWyvis is the world's first 100% community-owned, fully sustainable distillery producing single Highland malt whisky and craft Scottish gin. Established as a community benefit society, GlenWyvis now has over 3,400 members from 32 countries. You can still join us! We will invest our future profits into worthwhile projects both locally and beyond to create a legacy that will inspire the world. This is the spirit of dreams.

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# Icons of Style

Called “the sexiest man alive” for decades, Sean Connery’s Celtic style and swagger leaves us both shaken and stirred...





### **Bono**

Along with his U2 cohorts, the devilish Dubliner has made a career out of reinventing himself...



### **Nolwenn Leroy**

The sultry Bretagne chanteuse has been seducing audiences around the world since 2002...



### **Diana, Princess of Wales**

Gone too soon, the “People’s Princess” defined style, grace and dignity for a generation...



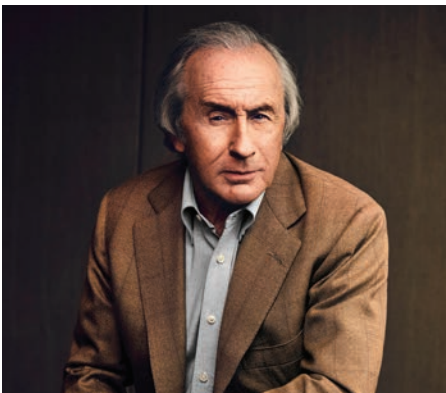
### **Catherine Zeta-Jones**

Approaching her 50s, the Swansea-born actress remains the most beautiful woman to arise from the British Isles...



### **Justin Trudeau ~ Canada**

Often seen sporting his kilt, the Canadian Prime Minister is proud of his family’s Scottish-Irish heritage...



### **Sir Jackie Stewart**

Even at the age of 78, the stylish “Flying Scot” shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon...



### **Enrique Iglesias**

Like his famous father Julio, the Spanish singer/songwriter wears his deep Celtic-Galician roots well...



### **Aphex Twin**

The Irish-born, Cornish-raised DJ is one of the finest artists in contemporary electronic music...





### **Bee Gees**

The Manx-born Brothers Gibb brought fashion to a feverish pitch in the late 1970s...



### **Natalie MacMaster**

Down-home or all done up, Nova Scotia's finest fiddler hits all the right notes...



### **Sir Rod Stewart**

The sounds may have changed, but Rod the Mod has stayed stylish...



### **George Best**

Belfast's most famous footballer was renowned for his play both on and off the field...



### **Sir Tom Jones**

It's not unusual to find the dapper Welshman dressed his best...



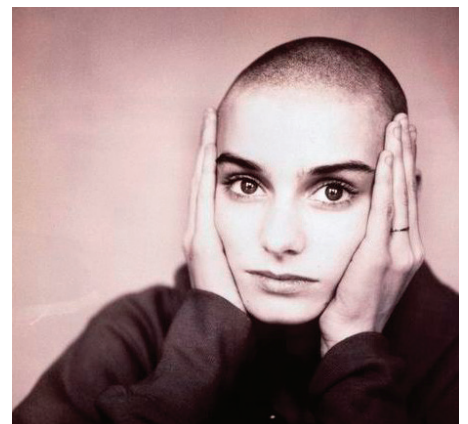
### **Laiqah Omar**

The Welsh-Somali model is turning heads in today's competitive fashion industry...



### **Sam Heughan**

The often-outlandish Scottish star of Outlander shines in or out of tartan...



### **Sinead O'Connor**

On stage or off, nothing compares to O'Connor's uniqueness...



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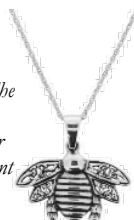
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A woman with long, wavy brown hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark, patterned herringbone coat over a black turtleneck. She is looking slightly to the right with a soft expression. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with water and rocks.

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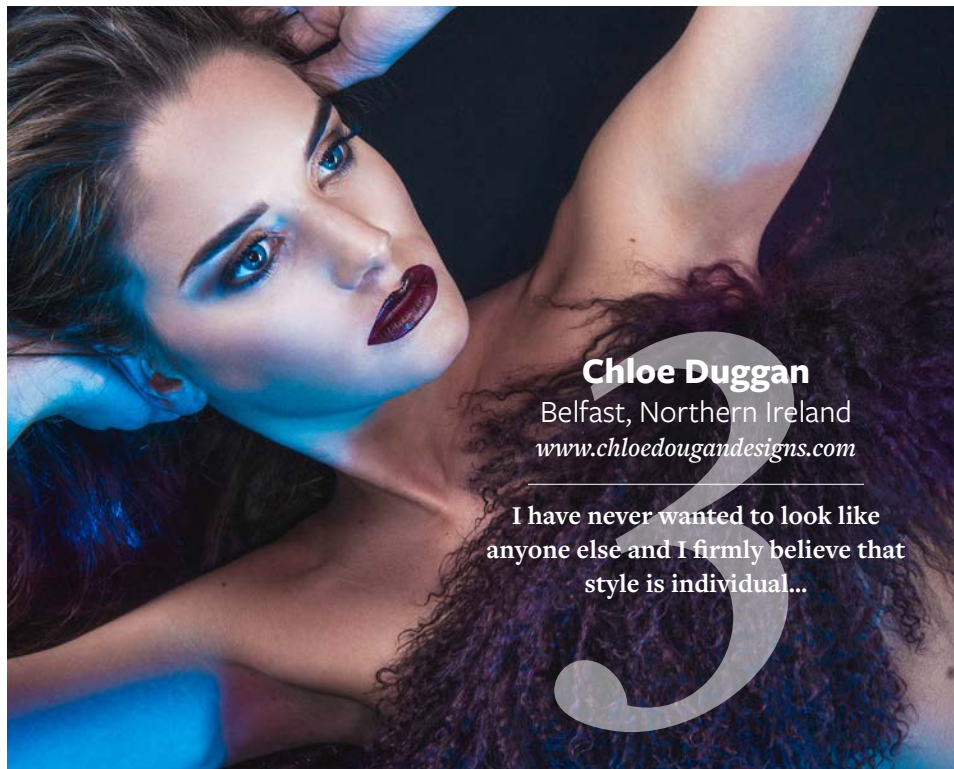
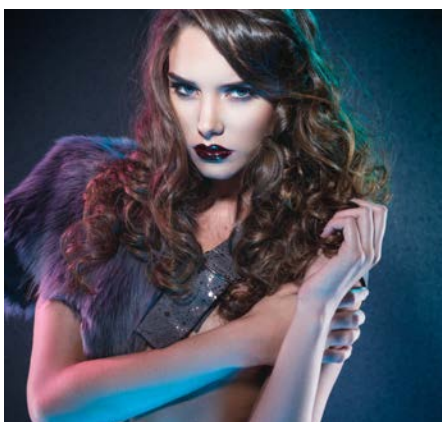
I am inspired by nature and mysticism as well as contemporary and alternative art...











**Chloe Duggan**

Belfast, Northern Ireland  
[www.chloedougandesigns.com](http://www.chloedougandesigns.com)

I have never wanted to look like  
 anyone else and I firmly believe that  
 style is individual...



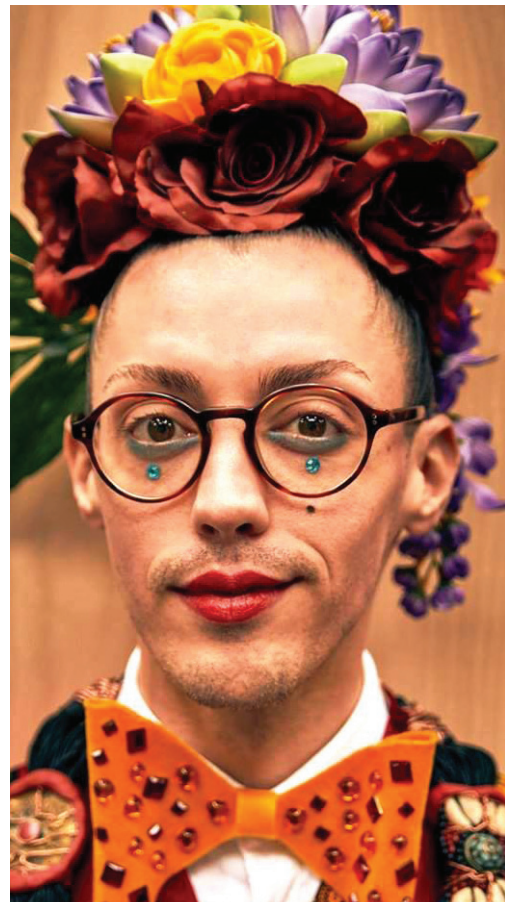


**Kato**

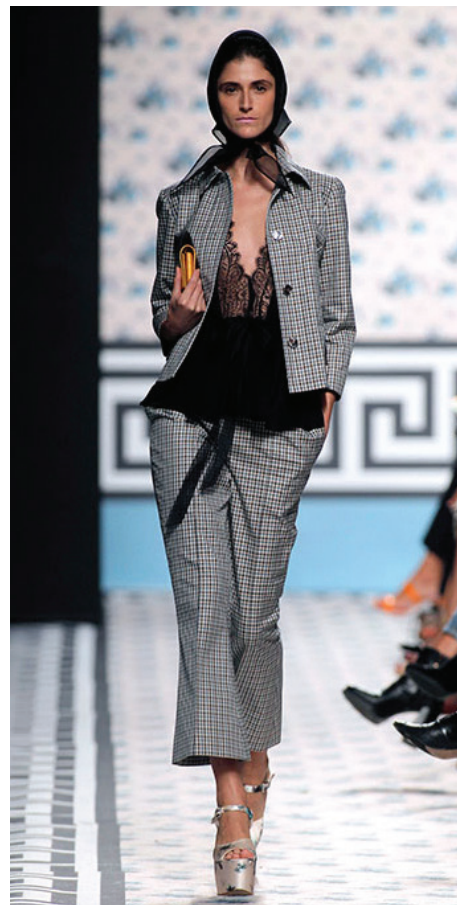
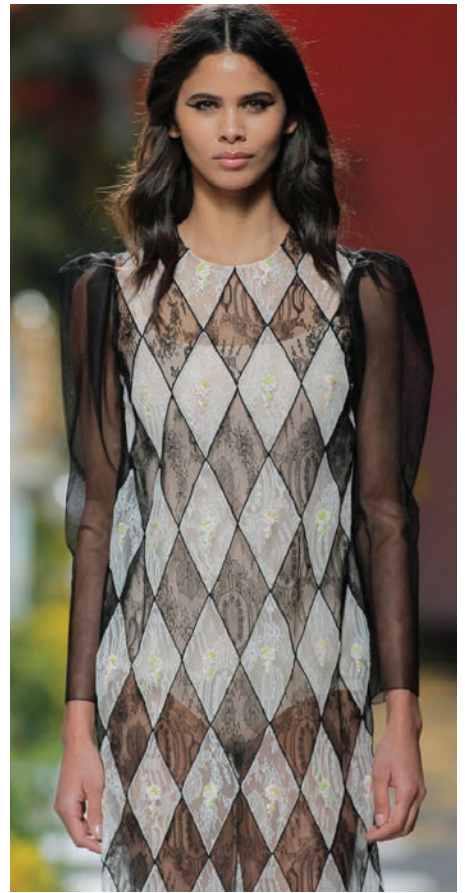
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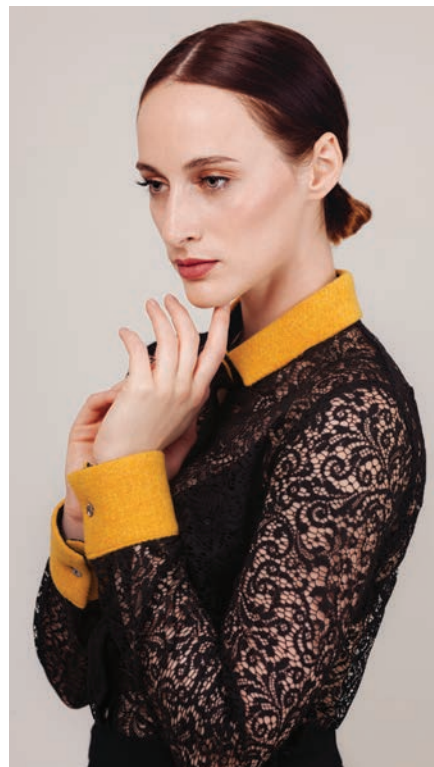


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# Crowdie Stuffed Mushrooms

*“Under a toadstool crept a wee elf, out of the rain to shelter himself...”*

**T**hese two lines - taken from the fanciful poem entitled *The Elf and The Dormouse* by Oliver Herford - conjure up the image of pixies and elves in a fairytale-like setting. Since they are not a vegetable, but rather a delectable fungus, mushrooms have a mysterious aura all their own. Mushroom farmers in Japan have an entirely different take on fungi; it is all business! They recognize the appetite for mushrooms all over the world and have a unique way of increasing their yield. They have always welcomed lightning bolts striking their mushroom crops, claiming it meant a bigger and more abundant harvest. Scientists ran

tests to check this phenomenon out and, sure enough, it was true in most cases. Scientists seeded logs with mushroom spores and bombarded them with jolts of electricity. The jolts could not be too strong (they would have fried the mushrooms), so low-voltage strikes were used. Amazingly, most types of mushrooms doubled in size and abundance - the hyphae cells of the mushrooms were excited by the electricity, producing proteins and enzymes that made the fungus grow. Some scientists believe that the mushroom feels threatened and increases its reproductive efforts. I think the Japanese are in the money.



## Ingredients

- 4 field mushrooms
- 1 small clove of garlic, crushed
- 1 tbsp. chopped parsley
- 2 tbsp. breadcrumbs
- 3 heaped tbsp. Crowdie  
(or cream cheese if Crowdie  
is not available)
- Olive oil

## Instructions

Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a small bowl, mix together the crowdie, parsley, garlic, and most of the breadcrumbs. Season to taste. Cut the stalks out of the mushrooms and add a dollop of cheese mixture to the centre of each mushroom. Sprinkle with remaining breadcrumbs and brush or spray very lightly with olive oil. Bake in the oven for 12-15 minutes until the mushrooms are soft and the breadcrumbs are golden. Serves 2.

*Ith do shàth! ~ Cabrini*





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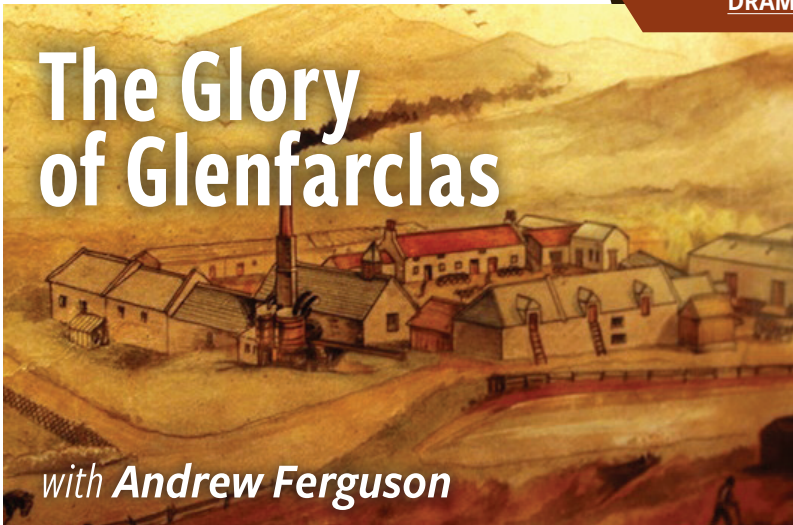
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# The Glory of Glenfarclas

with Andrew Ferguson



Like most of the Scottish distilleries to open in the 18th and 19th centuries, Glenfarclas was a farm before becoming a distillery. Whisky-making requires both barley and a good supply of clean water, so it is not surprising that most of Scotland's distilleries are found in rolling barley fields at the foot of the country's wild mountains.

The connection between whisky and agriculture is vital; barley was an important feed stock for cattle, but it is very hard for them to digest it in its raw form. However, when it is malted, milled and mashed (to remove the sugars for fermentation into beer), what results is a slightly sweet, protein-rich cattle food. What farmers discovered over time, though, was that whisky making was far more profitable than farming or cattle rearing.

Although owner Robert Hay took out a license to distill at Glenfarclas in 1836, no one knows exactly when his farm started producing whisky. As with many distilleries at that time, the founding date does not always indicate when the facilities first started producing whisky, but rather when they were caught distilling illicitly and forced to apply for a license. One clue to the distillery's origins is a watercolour painting from 1791, which still hangs in the location today. In the painting, the farm has a smokestack, vessels that look a lot like wormtubs (for condensation), and barrels strewn all over the yard. It also sits clearly at the foot of Ben Rinnes, the tallest mountain in the area. Most tellingly the words "Glenfarclas Disty" are scrawled in the bottom right hand corner.

The story of Glenfarclas starts to get interesting in 1865, when the distillery was acquired by the Grant family following the death of Robert Hay, for the sum of £511.90. For the next 152 years, six generations of the Grant family have run and managed the dis-

tillery. Curiously, since the purchase, all five of the chairmen have been named either John or George. The current chairman is John L.S. Grant, and his son - and successor - is named George. This unbroken chain of Johns and Georges may have run its course though, as George has two daughters, and to the best of my knowledge neither is named John or George.

*Glenfarclas is a stubbornly independent firm, and not without reason.*

They were early partners with Pattison Elder & Co., a firm run by a pair of "reckless" and flashy brothers from Leith. Pattison Elder & Co. was the whisky industry's 'Enron' of their day, building an empire on promises, lies, cheap credit, and IOUs. When they spectacularly collapsed in 1898 they took most of the industry with them, including - very nearly - the Glenfarclas Distillery. The Grants barely held on to their distillery, and it would take 15 years of hard work to recover their position. Thus, a "Spirit of Independence" was born.

The second half of the 20th century saw the distillery transition from producing whisky for blends to focusing on single malts. Glenfarclas pioneered the concept of Cask Strength whisky in 1968, with the release of their 105° Cask Strength which is bottled at 60 per cent (105° British proof). The whisky is still available today, and is created by marrying casks until they hit the magic number of 60 per cent abv. Most distilleries lose 1 to 2.5 per cent of their maturing whisky to evaporation each year - what we call "the angels' share." Glenfarclas loses less, only 0.5 per cent, owing to both a local microclimate and

a focus on the use of larger Sherry Butts for maturation. The distillery also fills its barrels at a higher proof than their peers, as it is not reliant on trading casks for blends at a standardized strength. As the fourth Grant to own Glenfarclas, the late George S. Grant was allegedly fond of saying, "we are not in the business of maturing water."

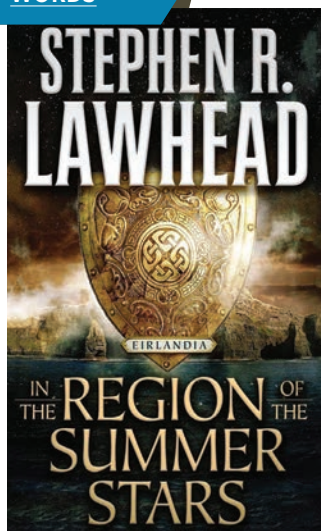
Glenfarclas has a depth of maturing whisky stocks which is the envy of the entire Scotch whisky industry. They have released single casks under their "Family Cask" range for every year up to, and including, 1952. The company's business plan has always been to lay down as much whisky as they can, even when times are tight. Business will eventually pick up again, and if there is no stock then there won't be anything to sell.

Glenfarclas has survived 22 recessions, the Great Depression, and the Pattison Whisky Crash. They will also likely survive the day when someone other than a John or George takes the helm as chairman.

The distillery is located just off the A95, about 5 minutes' drive from the town of Aberlour, in Scotland's stunning Speyside region. The facility offers tours daily, including a 'Five Decades' tour for £100, which includes the tasting of a whisky from every decade between 1960 and the 2000s. If you can't make it to Glenfarclas you should be able to find their whisky. The 105° Cask Strength is excellent value at \$84. Try it neat before you add any water to it, as it is rich, fruity and spicy, though not rough. The 15 Year, \$90, is their benchmark sherried whisky and flagship single malt. If you really want to treat yourself, find a bottle of the 40 Year - at \$1,100 it might seem dear, but it is lovely, layered, very fruity, and great value for its vintage.

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## In The Region of the Summer Stars

By Stephen R. Lawhead  
Tor Books / 336 pp / \$25.99

Fans of Lawhead's previous series of historical fiction have been waiting with bated breath for his much-anticipated Celtic fantasy chronicles, Eirlandia.

Readers will be thrilled to know that Book 1 in the new series doesn't disappoint. All of the elements of epic storytelling are in place here; hero/protagonist, attacks from invading armies, curses, the supernatural, suspense, drama, etc - think Game of Thrones on steroids. Some critics may complain that the soaring narrative arc and vividly descriptive characterizations and passages might be a bit over-the-top, but as most readers will agree - with fantasy literature of any sort, obviousness is an asset.

This is a quick and fun read, with real possibilities for spectacular sequels.

Hopefully, this will one day make it into movie theatres.

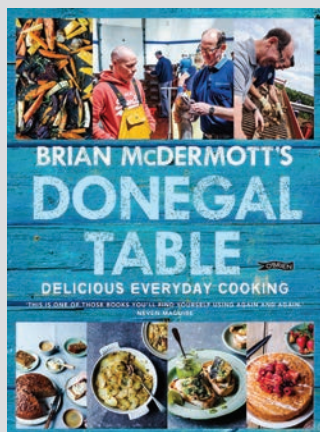
~ SPC

## Brian McDermott's Donegal Table

By Brian McDermott  
O'Brien Press / 192 pp / €19.99

If I could live anywhere in the world, it would be Donegal on Ireland's stunning northwest coast; lush landscape, warm and wonderful people, and the finest and freshest food on the planet. Chef McDermott does well to capture all of the above - abetted with a wry Irish smile and sense of humour - with this terrific table-top tome. As one of twelve children, McDermott knows his way around the kitchen, and the lessons imparted from his mother have served his career well; local produce, combined with simple and traditional homespun recipes, equals meals that are both tasty and healthy. More than 'food porn' or pseudo-hipster cuisine, however, the book is a profound portrait of a people that have mastered fare from both sea and land.

~ SPC



## TESTIMONIES OF TRANSITION

Twentieth Century Migrants, Settlers and Returners

MARJORY HARPER

## Testimonies of Transition

By Marjory Harper  
Luath Press / 224 pp / £16.95

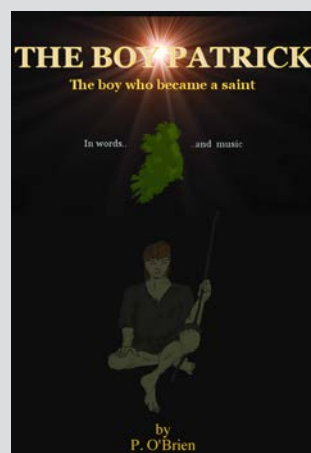
Those with an interest in roots, routes and resettlement will enjoy Dr. Marjory Harper's latest look at migratory patterns. Subtitled Voices from the Scottish Diaspora, the author goes beyond academia to explore the all-too-human side of emigration in the 20th century. While the facts and figures are in place - indeed, they are essential - it is Harper's recounting of the stories of men, women and children who have left 'ye' old country' that leave the greatest impression; and though those tales of transition might differ from person to person, the emotional impact of their displacement sounds very similar. The book is filled with beauty, joy and hope, however, especially amongst 'returners' who have successfully navigated their way home after years of longing and lament. ~ SPC

## The Boy Patrick

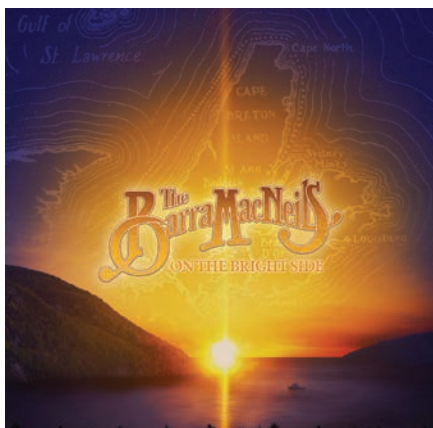
By Patrick O'Brien  
Celtic Collective / \$20

A unique multi-media project from multi-disciplinary artist Patrick O'Brien and The Celtic Collective, The Boy Patrick shares the story of the young saint in a variety of formats; the short graphic novel features 10 chapters that capture and convey major events in the child's life, while the companion, 10-song CD features a who's-who of Irish musicians - many of whom have performed with Riverdance - playing a myriad of traditional instruments.

The result is a 'holistic' experience that would serve as a wonderful learning tool for educational institutions, or parents, looking to bring their young ones up to speed on a vital figure in Eire's rich history. To that end, the project opens the door for further interesting and interactive studies of the country's rich past. ~ SPC







## The Barra MacNeils

### *On the Bright Side*

Three decades into their career, and with close to two dozen live and studio recordings to their credit, Cape Breton's finest musical family returns with their first album in almost five years. Fans of the sonic siblings won't be disappointed; with everything from bouncy jigs to beautiful ballads, and a cappella to full-on medleys, the Barras flex their musical muscle with finesse and form. The opening track, Welcome to Boston, is a barn-burner, while the gentle Gaelic lilt of Ribhinn Donn (Brown Haired Girl) will bring you home to the Scottish Highlands. The album's playful first single, Living the Dream, will satisfy both long-time fans and those just discovering the band, hopefully opening the door for new listeners to their massive and marvelous back catalogue. ~ SPC

## The Ennis Sisters

### *Keeping Time*

What do you get when you put three musical siblings from Newfoundland together into a recording studio? Good times, for sure. However, you also get strong songwriting, soaring melodies, and the sweetest of harmonies. Masterfully produced by Alan Doyle (Great Big Sea), and featuring a host of talent from both home and away - including Cherish the Ladies - Keeping Time is another beautiful collection of ten terrific tunes from sisters Maureen, Karen and Teresa Ennis. With too many highlights to mention, suffice to say there isn't one filler track on the album. Already with an array of accolades and awards, this carefully-crafted mix of Celtic, country, trad and pop is sure to receive more nods and nominations from both fans and industry insiders. ~ SPC



## Old Man Flanagan's Ghost

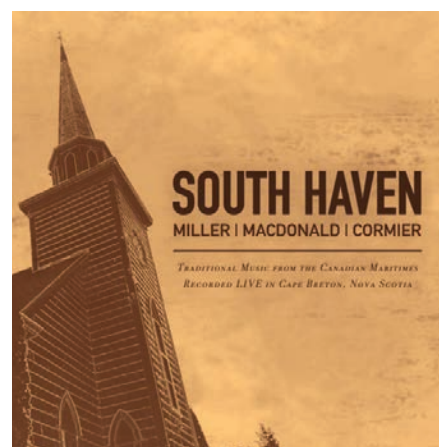
### *Far From Shore*

As a native Montrealer, I abhor anything and everything about Toronto (it's a hockey thing.) I will make an exception here, however, with Far From Shore, the third full-length release from Old Man Flanagan's Ghost (OMFG.) Ripe and robust with guitars, fiddles, whistles, bass, bodhran and more, these twelve excellent tracks showcase "stories of drinking, roving, sailing, longing, fear, fun, imagination, nature, courage, cruelty, sadness, and of course, love." The quintet's vocalist and frontman Steve Lamb is the real deal, inviting and inspiring listeners to explore their rich musical and lyrical heritage with a voice that is both homespun and heartfelt. Fans of the Clancy Brothers, the Dubliners, the Irish Rovers and the Kingston Trio will want to wrap their ears around this one. ~ SPC

## Miller/MacDonald/Cormier

### *South Haven*

Following up on the success of their debut recording, A Day at the Lake, piper Ben Miller and fiddler Anita MacDonald stay true to form with their sophomore effort. With this eight-song selection of instrumental medleys, marches, jigs and waltzes, the talented, dynamic duo dig even deeper into their Celtic roots - aided by the addition of Acadian multi-instrumentalist Zakk Cormier - to capture the soul and spirit of a people and its rich culture. In particular, The High Bass Set, Gur Milis Mòrag, and Bonnie Mary are sure to stir up listeners' cellular memory, bringing a tap to the foot and a tear to the eye. As such, South Haven will work both at a Saturday night ceilidh and on a lazy Sunday afternoon. ~ SPC







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# Josh Hogg

*Josh Hogg is proof that piping is alive and well in South Africa*

Josh Hogg recalls the very day that he was inspired to pick up the bagpipes.

"The Benoi High Pipe Band visited my elementary school here in Johannesburg," recalls the 28-year-old via email. "They put on a short performance and gave a talk about what they do. I thought it would be cool to learn to play, especially because of my Scottish ancestry. I went to one of their practices and it all took off from there."

That was 16 years ago. Hogg joined the Benoi band soon after and has been a tutor with the troupe since 2008. He has also been playing with the popular Benoi Mactalla band since 2005, and has been a part of that group's leadership program for more than a decade.

"One side of my family is Afrikaan, while the other side shares a Scottish heritage. I identify more with my Scottish ancestry because of piping and the experiences that it has led me to."

Those experiences, and his own learning curve, have been swift and satisfying; in 2009, he was part of the ensemble that won the World Pipe Band Championships (Grade 3B).

"Historically, it was very important for our country as the band was, and remains, the first and only from South Africa to win a World Championship in any grading."

A personal highlight was winning the 100 Guineas - South Africa's premier solo piping competition - during his first year playing in the senior division. He followed up that victory with four more titles in the years that followed.

"The greatest two rewards of piping, though, are that it is both food for the soul and it finds you a place within a group of like-minded men and women. Being a piper automatically gives you access to a worldwide network of people who share the same passion.

"And piping has allowed me to travel to



Scotland on many occasions and to New Zealand. I have no doubt I will see more of the world in time."

Hogg currently plays a set of Henderson pipes made of cocus wood, circa 1910-1920. He considers himself a traditional player who mixes in modern influences.

"My sound and style ranges from the oldest music written for the pipes, to more recent compositions, as well as to music from other parts of the world, such as piping music from Brittany in France. I like my scope of music to be broad, as it keeps me challenged when moving from one style of expression to another.

*"I truly enjoy piping and all the challenges it brings. While I have had to make many sacrifices for the art, it has also enriched my life greatly."*

He concedes that playing the instrument is not without its challenges.

"From a purely practical perspective, finding a suitable place to practice is an issue, given the sheer volume of the instrument. And, in this day and age when time is always short, the pipes require great dedication and commitment. You have to be very self-disciplined to keep your playing skills up."

In addition, modern-day piping puts a great deal of emphasis on the "perfect performance."

"This means that one has to have an intimate knowledge of the music one plays, as well as making sure to be well-rehearsed in what one is playing. However, when you get it right, the pipes are both amazing to play and very rewarding."

He notes that, while relatively small, the South African piping community is close-knit.

"We all know each other, and the same hard-core group of people is seen at almost every event. Our core mandate is to keep the art of piping and pipe bands alive and strong. We strive to constantly develop pipers and build a fraternity that will carry piping into the future."

And while rugby and cricket are understandably more popular pastimes for young South Africans, Hogg is encouraged by the steady supply of piping hopefuls signing up for instruction.

"It can certainly be improved by hosting more events within the public realm, with a real concerted effort made to push Celtic culture into the mainstream through exposure and education. There are many people here with Celtic heritage, and showcasing the arts of Highland dancing and piping would be a real step in the right direction."

[www.piperhogg.co.za](http://www.piperhogg.co.za)



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# Gillian Head

*Cape Breton fiddler  
Gillian Head takes the  
next steps*



**F**our years after the release of her first recording, *Spirit*, Cape Breton fiddler Gillian Head has launched her follow-up album, *Tidal*.

"I think my playing has matured a bit," she tells Celtic Life International. "I am always working on improving my fiddling technique and style. Setting little goals for myself helps keep me focused."

Born and raised in New Waterford, Nova Scotia, Head initially connected with her Irish roots at the age of seven when she started step-dancing. Inspired by the jigs and reels of Ashley MacIsaac's classic album *Close to the Floor*, she picked up the fiddle two years later, thriving under the guidance of local legend Jerry Holland.

By 2014, Head had already recorded and released *Spirit*. The album was well-received, earning a nomination for Traditional/Roots Recording of the Year from Music Nova Scotia the following year.

With *Tidal*, Head took the first steps towards composing her own music.

"It is all about the vibe," she says of song-writing. "Strong accompaniment can definitely make or break a set of tunes. Thankfully, I have some of the best players around in Jason Roach and Mary Beth Carty - we complement each other well, and it is a lot easier to bring out the best in a tune when the players both sound good on their own and make each other sound as good as possible also."

The opening track on the new album, *The Elusive Bear Cat*, highlights the fiddler's fresh, creative edge.

"It was the first song we tackled in the studio, and you can hear how excited I was to get started on the recording as I count-off

'one, two, three, four' at the top of the track. It's a lively tune that truly captures what we sound like when we play together live."

Head made a conscious effort to keep her original compositions rooted in the sonic traditions of her home turf.

*"I was able to mix modern tunes with classic Cape Breton music."*

"We also made sure to tie in some songs from other fiddling traditions that work well alongside the Cape Breton style."

The band recorded *Tidal* at Soundpark Studios in Sydney, Nova Scotia this past January and February.

"We would go in for a couple days at a time. There were a few track and arrangement changes made while we were in the studio, but it went pretty much as planned. With everyone trying to give their best performances, you have to work at it a bit. The studio is a very expensive place to practice, so there has to be some serious effort and prep-work done prior to going in to make sure everyone is on the same page. But we were quite comfortable knowing what we wanted to do in terms of sound and style, so we were able to simply sit back, close our eyes, and play from the heart."

Although *The Elusive Bear Cat* is Head's personal favourite tune on the new album, *Gamma Ray* - written by Roach - has proven to be a fan favourite. The song is named for Head's canine companion who has since passed away.

"Gamma Ray gave us the chance to be a little dramatic by layering a lot of fiddle lines, and even put a bass solo on the track. Colin Grant (fiddler) plays the majority of

the harmonies and did an amazing job of filling in the space and building up the intensity. Donnie Calabrese's bass playing added some bottom-end depth to the piece, making it really stand out. As it is Jason's tune, he obviously kills it and plays it beautifully. Then, Jamie Foulds - who did the recording, mixing, and mastering - took all those individual pieces and put them all together into something special."

Head has a busy few months ahead of her, with no shortage of gigs lined up in and around Nova Scotia. She is also setting her sights on performing farther from home; having recently toured throughout the United States as a back-up fiddler with a Vancouver-based band she is itching to take her own show on the road.

"I really made an effort to get out of my comfort zone with the new album, and taking those steps has given me the confidence to get out on the road and play for new and different audiences."

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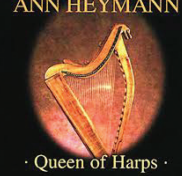




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# Rachel Mclagan

*For Scottish dancer Rachel Mclagan, choreography is as rewarding as competition*

**L**ike her parents and grandparents, Rachel Mclagan grew up in Blairgowrie, Perthshire - one of those iconic, small Scottish towns much-visited by tourists looking to experience authentic Celtic culture.

Amidst that milieu, Mclagan developed an early appreciation for history, music and dance.

Although she began with ballet, Mclagan followed her mother's footsteps into Highland dance by the age of five.

"My mom learned Highland dancing when she was a youngster, and she always wanted me to pick it up as she felt it was important to our culture. She also wanted me to enjoy the same friendships and experiences that she had gained from performing with the local dance school."

Now 32, and based in Glasgow city centre, Mclagan believes that her mother was right on both counts. However, she took her passion for dance to new levels over time, winning more than 100 titles, including Scottish, British, Commonwealth, United Kingdom, Australasian, North American and Northern Canadian championships.

"I placed in the Top 5 at the World Championships seven times, but winning the Junior World Championships and placing third in the Adult World Championships are undoubtedly career highlights."

After retiring from competitive dance, she started a series of creative ventures, including the founding of her performance group, Flings & Things.

"I have been very fortunate to work with some incredible musicians and performers in the Scottish traditional music world, and some of my closest friendships are the girls I dance with. It is great to be able to continue working and performing together even though we have left our competitive days behind."

In 2010 Mclagan teamed up with friend and fellow champion dancer Gemma Baillie to produce a show called Assemble and Leap, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the world governing body of Highland dance. With a dozen choreographers and a cast of 38 dancers, they raised £8,000 for charity. Mclagan calls the sell-out performance one of the proudest moments of her life.

***"Normally, as a competitor, you are out there on the stage alone, performing only for yourself to come out as a winner."***

"On that night, however, we were all celebrating together, recognizing the work of those who had dedicated their lives to our art form and acknowledging their success."

Following the success of that show, Mclagan and Baillie appeared at both the Beijing International Tourism Festival, where they performed at the Great Wall of China, and at New York's Tartan Week. Mclagan has since brought her own troupe to the Big Apple for the annual celebration of all things Scottish.

"We also performed at Milwaukee Irish Fest and at Monte Carlo Casino Square with the Red Hot Chilli Pipers and joined them on stage to open T in the Park - something I never thought I'd come close to achieving as a dancer."

Travelling with the ceilidh band Whisky Kiss, she has danced her



way both across Scotland and as far afield as Dubai and Shanghai.

Mclagan credits her coach and mentor Shendl Russell with encouraging her to follow her passion. During her competitive years, she was greatly inspired by former champion dancer Jacqueline Smith of Ontario, calling her "an absolutely stunning dancer."

"For me, she embodied the perfect combination of technique, strength and elegance. She is the dancer I would picture when envisaging the optimum and ideal competitive performance."

As a choreographer, she has studied several veterans in the field, but points to Michael Flatly of Riverdance fame as her greatest inspiration.

"He taught us that there is really no such thing as boundaries when it comes to dance; if you embrace your imagination and are brave enough to put your ideas out there for the world to see, the possibilities are endless."

She has great respect for old-school forms of dance.

"If it is a very traditional Scottish cultural event, where we are looking to showcase our heritage in its purest form, then our choreography will be more traditional, and we will most likely be dressed in full kilt outfits."

"On the other hand, if there is an opportunity to highlight a more modern side of Highland dancing, then there are no limits to where the choreography can take us."

Even with all of her personal success, and the growth in popularity of Highland dance, Mclagan believes there is still work to be done.

"We can improve the way we market our sport to the rest of the world. We need to take every possible opportunity to shine a light on Highland dancing, be it traditional or in its choreographed form, through every avenue available to us."

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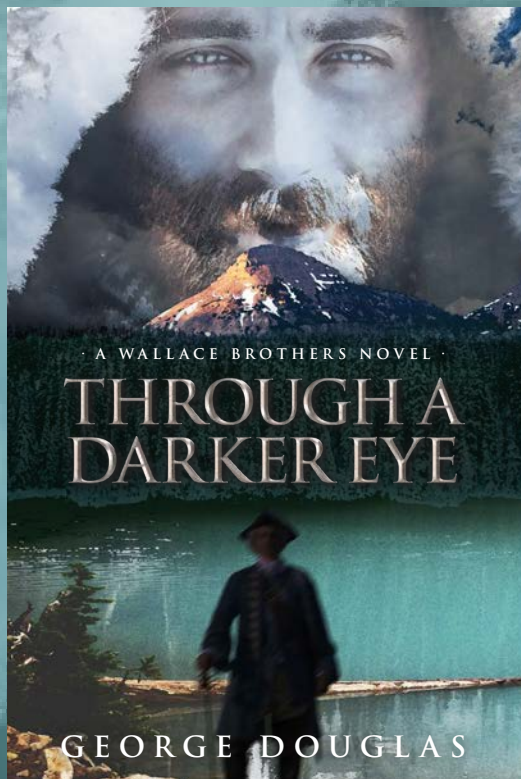
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# Sean Davies; 1972-2018



Whether plying his trade as an academic researcher or weaving words as a sports journalist, Dr. Sean Davies was driven by a deep yearning to learn.

Davies, a BBC sports journalist, editor, and author of historical non-fiction, passed away recently at the age of 46 after a brief illness. He was laid to rest in Llangors, Brecon, Wales, and his life celebrated at a reception in a nearby pub.

Medieval Welsh history was Davies' great passion - a life-long love that began while he was still a teenager.

"I began studying it at the age of 16 and went on to complete a degree, an MA and a PhD," Davies told Celtic Life International in 2016 prior to the publication of one of his books.

In 2012, Davies and his brother Dr. Mike Davies co-wrote *The Last King of Wales: Gruffudd ap Llywelyn*. In short order, he followed up with *The First Prince of Wales? Bleddyn ap Cynfyn*.

"It seems simply incredible that no one had written on either Gruffudd or Bleddyn in any detail before," Davies said at the time. "Gruffudd was the only native king of all the lands of modern Wales, but he is so little-known."

A voracious reader from his youth, Davies published five books on Welsh history between 2004 and 2017. He described his first publication, *Welsh Military Institutions*, as a natural evolution from student to author.

"Having studied for a PhD in medieval Welsh history, it seemed logical to try to get a book published using the rather obscure knowledge that I had."

Reflecting on later publications, he acknowledged finding a wealth of sources, though not always reliable and often contradictory. Each book seemed to whet his appetite for the next.

"There is an obvious sense of satisfaction (in completing a book) but, in all honesty, I already had the deadline ticking on the delivery date for my next book, so it was pretty much straight into the research for that."

In recent months he completed the first draft of another book - one that had already received provisional acceptance from the University of Wales Press - which his brother has pledged to finish.

Davies' historical research and writing was squeezed in during his non-working hours as a journalist and editor. Crediting journalism with paying the bills, giving him the discipline to write with clarity

and allowing him to find the entertaining angle, he approached it with the same need for detailed understanding that characterized his academic work. As co-workers attest, his interest was in the history and culture of the game, the opponents, the strategies, and whatever else captured his innate curiosity.

Fellow BBC Wales Sport journalist Bruce Pope says Davies combined an eye for detail with a flair for words, making him equally at home writing his own piece or editing the work of someone else.

"While straight news stories were taken in his stride, Sean was really in his element when given space to display his sporting knowledge and indulge his subtle humour."

It was, he adds, always a pleasure to come on shift and find he would be working with Davies.

"Given Sean's parallel career as a historian, it is not surprising that his pieces on Welsh rugby and boxing history are not just good reading, but remain an essential source of background information for those without his depth of knowledge."

Davies also took on the role of editor of *Bocsio* magazine, reporting on the grassroots boxing scene in Wales while keeping abreast of the rest of the fighting world - all the while managing a disparate stable of contributors on a shoestring budget.

"Most importantly, though, in and out of the office, Sean would keep you amused with his good company and dry humour," notes Pope. "And he never shirked his turn getting the teas or beers."

Simon Davies, a broadcaster with BBC Wales Sport, admired Davies' intellect and quickly learned never to guess stats or dates in Davies' presence.

"When it came to Welsh international rugby it was sometimes faster to turn my head in Sean's direction rather than Google what I wanted."

Memories of shared pints and watching big games at the pub, accented by Davies' hilarious one-liners, are among his fondest memories.

"In his final weeks and months he showed astonishing bravery and class. I choose to remember Dr. Sean Davies. Historian. Journalist. Comedian. Friend."

For his brother Mike, the love of sports and Welsh history are only part of Davies' story.

"He was the best brother in the world."





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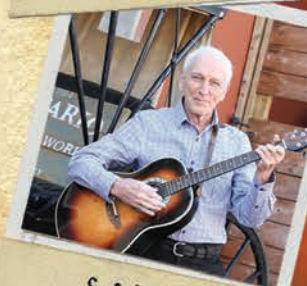
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