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FÁILTE

Mon Montréal

After more than two decades living on Canada's east coast, I returned to my hometown of Montréal a little over three years ago. Never one for nostalgia, I was excited to create new memories for myself and my wife and children. Still, the past is always present here, and that is true for me also. As we say in Quebec, Je Me Souviens.

As a young man coming of age in "the 514" during its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, there were always three topics on the table at local brasseries and outdoor terraces; la sexe, du sang, et le sport - sex, blood, and sports.

While Montréal is famous (or infamous) for both its redlight district and its ties to the Mafia, it is sports that has long held the heart of locals in its hands. The city hosted the 1976 Summer Olympics; the Expos had a great run here from 1969-2004; the Alouettes football team still sell-out their home games at McGill Stadium; our MLS team is a huge draw; and this year's Formula 1 Grand Prix attracted more than 350,000 racing fans to the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve.

However, as the Mecca

of the hockey world, our passion and pride was on full display each Saturday night at the old Montréal Forum, especially when busloads of Bostonians would make the trek north to watch their beloved Bruins get spanked by our Montreal Canadiens hockey team (the "Habs"). A bitter rivalry from the 1940s that still stands today, there was (and are!) often more scuffles in the stands than on the ice as the Beantown Irish joined their Québécois Irish, Scottish, and Franco counterparts in heckling and harassing a common foe, the city's longstanding English residents.

During the province's problematic political period (in 1980 and 1995, under the governing separatist Parti Québécois, Quebec held two referendums on leaving Canada) Montréal shrank to a shell of its former self, as corporations and residents sought stabler economic conditions elsewhere.

“While it has taken a generation to recover, the city has surpassed its former glory, evolving into one of the world's premier destinations.

A large part of that appeal comes from Montréal's diverse cultural mosaic; founded by generations of immigrants from the Old World, the city's quirky and quaint quarters allow both locals and guests to sample a savoury smorgasbord of flavours, colours, textures, sights, scents, sounds, and more. Pop into one of the city's bustling Irish or Scottish pubs on any given night - Hurleys, the Old Dublin Pub, McLeans, Alexanders, Cunninghams, the Old Orchard, McKibbons, etc. - and you will find patrons of all backgrounds raising a pint without raising a ruckus. After all, what could be more "joie de vivre" than a 3am last call?

Much of the credit for that conviviality comes from the city's strong Celtic community, whose core principle of inclusivity is closely aligned with the French philosophy of "liberté, égalité, fraternité." That "laissez-faire" lifestyle - one which translates to "let it be" or "live and let live" - is a welcome reprieve from the divisiveness so prevalent across the planet today.

À la prochain!
Stephen Patrick Clare
Summer 2025



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The Celt *and the* Colonial



Montreal's Griffintown neighbourhood glistens at night with micro-breweries, boutique hotels, funky restaurants and nouveau apartment/condominium complexes that have been converted from 19th century warehouses and dockworker housing. At the area's heart, however - located at the intersection of Rue des Bassins and Rue de Montagne - is a shadowed stand of trees under which a cruciform stone foundation marks where the church of St. Ann once stood. Built at the end of the Irish Potato Famine, it served the growing Irish community that formed a significant part of the labor force there until its demolition in 1970.

The image of the mid-19th century Irish immigrant, staunchly Catholic, hard working and fiercely loyal, is one of several Celtic icons that continues to inform the Celtic identity. The highlander swaddled in the filleadh mòr, the woad-bedecked Pict of the Roman period, and even less-heroic figures like W.B. Yeats' rural seanchai - languishing in a Romantic yearning for eternal beauties anathema to modern industry - are all similar, albeit profoundly different points in a constellation of Celtic identity. The popularity of the series *Outlander* stands almost as a study of the role Celtic identity plays in the modern, popular imagination: heroism, individuality, personal honour, fierce loyalty, and the resilience to adapt to the harshest circumstances are all involved but are not unique to the Celt in this context. What is unique is the role that Celts played in the colonial movement between the 16th and the 18th centuries.

The story begins with Elizabeth I and the first plantations in Ireland, but it was James I of England that must bear the responsibility for planting the proper seeds of diaspora. It is a bitter irony that the Highlanders should hold such ferocious loyalty to Bonnie Prince Charlie in the 18th century when it was his ancestor, the first Stuart monarch of England, that initiated such damage to Highland culture. James I established policies specifically designed to dismantle Gaelic culture in Ireland and Scotland, aggressively pursuing the plantations of Ireland and issuing the Statutes of Iona that undermined traditions of hospitality, outlawed traditional Gaelic language and literature, and required Highland nobles to be educated in the lowlands and, eventually, London.

These "policies" would lead directly to the Highland Clearances.

Naturally we cannot lay all the blame on James Stuart, as those policies were welcomed and pursued with relish by the English elite who saw not only social progress but great profit in his systematic dismantling of traditional culture in favour of a new economic basis for controlling land and, by extension, people. This new basis formed the backbone of colonialism as it emphasized "the bottom line" over human benefit. As the Old Woman of Beare observed in 8th-century Ireland:

*It is riches
you love, and not people;
as for us, when we lived,
it was people we loved.*

Those words exemplify that the urge for monetary gain over societal well-being is not distinctively modern, but the colonial moment took systemic greed to a whole new level. Echoes of this can still be heard in references to "human resources" and children as "our greatest resource." People are no longer 'customers' or 'clients,' both words that have strong Celtic resonance, but 'consumers.'

Tragically, aspects of Celtic identity were often harnessed to this colonial movement, which is why we find the Frasers not only on the Field of Culloden in 1746 fighting against the crown but on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec in 1759 fighting for it against the French alongside their native allies. General James Wolfe, who led the British forces, famously refused to execute the Frasers after Culloden at the behest of his commander, William "the Butcher" Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, and yet wrote to his wife before the Battle of the Plains of Abraham that the Frasers would be put in the front because they were the best fighters and if they were killed it were "no great mischief."

Soldiers, fugitives, slaves, and criminals; few peoples have been so central to the colonial movement, both as the colonized and the colonizer as the Celts. Politicians, industrialists, and scientists; those of Celtic heritage have been equally central to these roles, but we instinctively do not think of them as Celtic, perhaps because the icons of the Highlander, the Pict, the Irish Immigrant and the rest suggest something more central to what it means to be Celtic than simple blood. The old roles of bard and clansman, chieftain and hero, speak to us now perhaps even stronger than they did three or four generations ago because they offer an antidote to the bitter fruit still being borne out by the systemic greed at the heart of colonialism.

James Acken is a philosopher, professor, and the Creative Director at Acken Studios. He lives in British Columbia.
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De Tha Dol



1 Witches of Scotland Tartan

A new tartan design memorializes those who were persecuted under the Scottish Witchcraft Act from 1563-1736. This venture was spearheaded by Claire Mitchell and Zoe Venditozzi, who founded the Witches of Scotland organization in 2020. The pair of advocates - and their supporters - aim to acknowledge and honour the country's witch trial victims, most of whom were women. The Witches of Scotland tartan, officially registered in February 2025, is their most recent success. Clare Campbell of Prickly Thistle Scotland created the black, pink and red design. The first batch of physical tartan was successfully funded by a Kickstarter campaign.

2 Welsh Gin

The United Kingdom has granted Pollination Dovey Native Botanical Gin geographical indication (GI) status. According to a government website, "GI protection guarantees a product's characteristics or reputation, authenticity and origin." This particular gin is distilled in the Dyfi Valley in Wales (much of which is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve) and it is the first-ever gin to qualify for UKGI. The Dyfi Distillery creates the spirit in small batches, as it is made from locally foraged botanicals such as wildflowers, fruit and conifer tips.

3 Mini Highland Cow

Coastal Black Estate Winery recently revealed a new attraction that has nothing to do with libations: a micro mini-Highland cow named Strawberry. The winery is in Comox Valley on Vancouver Island, B.C., and specializes in fruit wines. Additionally, though, the estate is home to a picturesque tulip field. Usually, the field is the main attraction of the Coastal Black Tulip Festival but this past spring, Strawberry may have upstaged the blooms. Although this year's festival has come to an end, Coastal Black is slated to host a summer market this season.

4 Welsh Education

A student from Hong Kong has gained attention online for his videos about Wales and the Welsh language. Israel Lai, a student at Manchester University, speaks several languages and started learning Welsh in 2022. He recently took his parents on a trip to north Wales, which he documented on his YouTube channel, Rhapsody in Lingo. Lai is especially passionate about Welsh and other "minority languages," as Cantonese is his mother tongue. In 2023, he gave a talk in Edinburgh titled "Echoes of Oppression: Drawing Parallels between Welsh and the State of Sinitic Languages."

5 The Ship Hector

A replica of the Ship Hector is expected to make its return to Pictou Harbour, Nova Scotia in July. The original Ship Hector brought some of the first Scottish immigrants to the province in 1773, and the replica was first launched in 2000. For the last few years, the Ship Hector Society has been working on a massive restoration project for the replica through the Charting Our Course campaign. But the work isn't over yet. The next leg of the project will see the ship transformed into an operational sailing vessel, offering tours around the harbour.

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Celts in Culture



• **The Guild of Cornish Hedgers**

While the word “hedge” typically brings shrubs and plants to mind, Cornish hedges are a little different from what one might expect. Usually around five feet tall, these structures are mainly made of earth and stone, with greenery growing along the top. They are unique to Cornwall and go back about 4,000 years, their total length stretching an estimated 30,000 miles across the nation. The hedges are more than boundaries or décor, however - they also provide habitat to birds and insects. Unfortunately, Cornish hedging is a dwindling art, but the Guild of Cornish Hedgers aims to keep it alive. Founded by the late Robin Menneer in 2002, the Guild of Cornish Hedgers is a non-profit with the goal of maintaining traditional hedger craftsmanship and raising public awareness. In 2013, Menneer was made a Bard of the Cornish Gorsedd in recognition of his efforts. Although he passed away in 2018, the guild continues to provide a wealth of information, including the online Cornish Hedges Library, with resources on the history of Cornish hedges as well as how to build and repair them. They also offer courses for those interested in becoming accredited hedgers themselves. “By supporting the next generation of Cornish hedgers with suitable, quality training schemes, this ancient Cornish craft will continue into the future, with new trainees coming forward to look after Cornwall’s unique and amazing heritage of hedges,” reads the guild’s website.

www.cornishhedgers.org.uk



• **Adam Mack Wood Sculptures**

Adam McNamara creates art inspired by the Wabanaki-Acadian Forest ecoregion. Spanning most of Canada’s Maritime provinces, the Acadian Forest has a blend of the characteristics found in the Northern Hardwood and Boreal forests. McNamara started experimenting with art at a young age and kept it as a hobby while he pursued an education in natural sciences. This scholastic background greatly influenced his approach to art, as evidenced by the wooden sculptures he creates today. McNamara rediscovered his passion over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and hasn’t looked back since. Based in Upper LaHave, Nova Scotia, he mostly creates pieces depicting flora and fauna close to home. His self-taught woodworking techniques and love of the natural world come to life in his pieces. He prioritizes sustainable materials, such as maple wood burl, driftwood and timber from trees felled by storms. He also purchases leftover wood scraps from other woodworkers. “I tell stories about creatures, about places and about moments in time. Using the perfectly imperfect quality of nature, I seek to reflect this organized chaos within my subject matter, and within my medium,” McNamara shared in an artist statement on the Visual Arts Nova Scotia website. “The wood is always an integral part of the story I am telling. Using a lens of interpretive realism, I play with the use of my medium to display the meaning behind my pieces. I hope to bring my own unique perspective to the world of craft.”

www.admack.ca



• **Anna Liebmann**

Anna Liebmann harvests Scottish-grown willow for her traditional baskets and décor. Originally from Bristol, she moved to Scotland at age 19 and weaved her first basket in her late 20s, inspired by toy baskets she saw at a market. With small children in tow, Liebmann felt her passion for metalworking was no longer practical and she craved something new. Part of the reason basketmaking appeals to her is its lack of carbon footprint. “I could make something with just the secateurs in my hand and a walk to the field,” she said in an interview with Homes and Interiors Scotland. “I lived in a sustainability-focused community in south-west Scotland, and we planted lots of native trees, along with willow for wildlife habitat creation, shelter belts and a dedicated basketry willow patch.” Liebmann started by taking a single-day course and practised on her own once she learned the basics. Since then, she has taken many courses and even passes the art along to others. She now lives in Edinburgh with her two children, continuing the craft as well as teaching it and accepting commissions. As basketweaving isn’t a common practice in the city, Liebmann has found her skills and work in higher demand since the move. Much of the willow she uses is grown in her own patch in Lanarkshire, as well as on Lauriston Farm in Edinburgh. She grows several types of willow that vary in colour, shape and elasticity.

www.annaliebmann.net



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PluSidhe

Creatures of the forest come to life through one woman's plushies

Artist Brett Manning derives inspiration from nature, taking in the fields and woods around her home.

"For as long as I can even remember, I have been creating art," she shares with Celtic Life International. "It's just what I do."

Her latest project, PluSidhe, is a collection of plush toys with designs based on folklore. While Manning has wanted to create plushies for a long time, it was only recently that she was able to sit down and plan the venture. While her plush creations are creatures of fantasy, their origin is founded on a very real, personal story.

"When I was younger, my parents divorced. I remember having to move to a new house and pack up all of my toys. I never saw those toys again. They were all either lost or destroyed. I have almost no pieces of my childhood, and I think that has actually been a catalyst to help me move forward with this project. I see the importance and comfort and creativity that toys provide, and I wanted to give that feeling to other people."

The specifics of the PluSidhe designs came about due to Manning's love for fairy lore. "Sidhe" is an old Irish language word for the "fairy folk" - inhabitants of the Otherworld. The Bean Sidhe (in English, "fairy woman") is one such being, often referred to today as the banshee.

Popular depictions of fairies are often rather one-note, from Disney's Tinkerbell to the stereotypical fairy godmother.

"I was actually quite tired of seeing tiny, winged fairy ladies predominantly in the world of fae toys and ephemera," she explains. "There is nothing wrong with them, of course, but I personally never identified too much with that kind of fairy. I wanted to explore the world of elves and goblins and imps and all those silly little guys who live in the woods or in your closet."

Take Richard Cat-Sith, for example. That design is based on both a past feline companion of Manning's (also named Richard) and the legend of the Cat-Sith. Found in both Scottish and Irish mythology, the Cat-Sith was said to be a creature resembling



a large, bipedal cat. This creature (perhaps a fairy, perhaps a witch in disguise) lurked the Scottish Highlands in search of souls. Fortunately, Richard is friendlier than the Cat-Sith of lore.

Another of Manning's PluSidhe designs is inspired by her rural Indiana home. Zed the Indiana Beast is a peaceful forest guardian with the head of a deer, wearing a velvety robe adorned with autumn colours.

"A lot of images will come to me while I'm in that liminal state of not being asleep, but not really awake either. I try to take notes upon waking the next day, or I will break out of that state as it is happening and scribble something down as reference for later."

"Sometimes though, they seem to sketch themselves when I'm doodling, or they'll burst into my brain like a loud silly cat who has burst through a door, saloon-style!"

Manning tries to keep sketching supplies handy for when such spontaneous ideas strike. Once the initial sketch is complete, she tidies it up and scans it to add colour digitally. She then creates a list of specifics for the manufacturer, such as size and fabric type.

"They will create a sample, and I will offer my input as to what needs tweaking."

Once the design has been finalized, the manufacturer sends Manning the finished piece so she can take "glamour shots" and list the plushie for pre-order. When she receives the pre-ordered batches, she attaches her own tags and ships them out to customers.

It's a tough job - one that requires a balance of productivity and rest.

"Being a working artist comes with its hurdles. I am solely responsible for me, which is both freeing and horrific. I have a handful of health challenges that can derail me: scoliosis, ADHD, chronic pain - so learning to work with that and not push myself too hard in times of struggle is important."

That said, Manning remains excited about the PluSidhe project and hopes to continue for as long as possible. "I pretty much just hope to continue designing them for as long as I am inspired to do so. I will always be creating art; that is something I could not stop if I wanted to - it's just who I am - and I will be toiling away in my studio, forevermore."

@pluSidhe
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Conor Grant



He's young, fast, and Irish. Recently we spoke with F4 racing car driver Conor Grant about his past, present, and future.

What are your own roots?

I was born and raised in Ireland, and I am proud to represent my country both on and off the track. My mum recently took a DNA test and came back 99.6 per cent Irish, no surprises there! My dad, on the other hand, was born in Zimbabwe, so I am a bit of mix. Ireland has always been my home and where my heart is, but the exciting thing is with my sport I get to see the world.

When and why did you first become interested in racing?

It all kicked off from driving up and down the beach on a quad bike that my grandparents gave me. Then I stumbled upon the 2017 Hungarian Grand Prix on YouTube and everything changed, I went down to dinner that night and told my parents I wanted to be an F1 driver. Shortly after my Dad took me to the track to watch a kart race and petrol has been in my veins ever since.

Are they the same reasons that you continue to do it?

Partly, yes. I still love the speed and adrenaline, but now it's also about the challenge. Racing in Formula 4, especially in the U.S., has opened up so many new experiences. Every race is a new opportunity to grow and prove myself. The core love for it is still the same, but now there is even more driving me forward and it's truly what I want to do with my life.

How have you evolved as a driver over time?

I have matured massively over the last seven years. Racing has taught me life lessons I wouldn't have picked up anywhere else - how to win, how to lose, and how to bounce back. I've become smarter behind the wheel and more focused overall. I am constantly working to improve both mentally and physically - it's all part of becoming a better athlete and a better person.

What are the challenges of the vocation?

Racing demands you to be at your best physically and mentally, so I train hard outside the car. One of the biggest challenges is funding, and getting sponsorship is a constant battle. On top of that, Logistics are tough too, especially balancing my school in Ireland and racing in the U.S.

What are the rewards?

Winning is the ultimate reward, and that feeling when all your hard work pays off is like nothing else. But even the tough days are valuable because they push you to come back stronger. Racing keeps me mentally sharp, physically fit, and constantly chasing improvement. And the buzz you get from a great result is addictive.

What have been some career highlights to date?

My first big win was the Cadet Rookie O Plate in 2019. Then in 2022, I won the TKC Junior X30 Championship. But the big one came in 2023, I became one of the youngest drivers to win the Motorsport Ireland Senior X30 Championship. Another major highlight was making my F4 debut at the legendary Circuit of the Americas in Texas in 2024.

Who are your favourite drivers in F1, F2, F3?

In F1, it's Max Verstappen, he was just breaking through when I started watching and really inspired me. In F2, I have to say Alex Dunne, not just because he's Irish, but because he's seriously talented, and his family have supported us on our journey. In F3, I've followed Ugo Ugochukwu for years since karting - he's another standout talent.

Where is your favourite track?

Definitely the Circuit of the Americas in Austin, Texas. It's a world-class track with an amazing flow, especially through the fast first sector. I raced there in 2024 and the whole experience was unforgettable, just being on the same circuit as some of my idols was surreal. It's a weekend I will always remember.

What is the level of interest in racing like in Ireland?

Ireland has a strong motorsport scene, especially in rally. But formula racing is growing fast and - thanks to guys like Alex Dunne - more young drivers are pushing into karting and single-seaters. The talent is definitely there. It's competitive, on the rise, and the momentum is building.

How can that be improved?

More support, visibility, and opportunities for young drivers in disciplines other than rally would help massively. I'm one of only three Irish drivers racing in FIA Formula series in the world and hopefully this will show other Irish kids that it can be done. I see this all the time in my work with all the great youngsters in the Wexford Motor Club Youth Academy as their Lead Driver Mentor. For a small island, we punch above our weight, and we're only just getting started.

What's on your racing agenda for the rest of 2025?

I'm finishing out the season in the U.S. F4 Championship with my fantastic team Scuderia Buell and we have races coming up at New Jersey Motorsports Park, Canadian Tire Motorsport Park, VIR, and the iconic Barber Motorsports Park. I'm especially excited for the Canadian round, we'll be racing alongside NASCAR that weekend, which will be an incredible experience and atmosphere.

What are your long-term goals for your career?

I want to become a successful professional racing driver. Ideally, I'd love to go the Formula route, and the possibility of driving in the U.S. IndyCar also really excites me. The path I'm on now allows me to also consider endurance racing like IMSA or WEC. Whatever the route, my goal is to keep progressing and competing at the highest level I can reach. Right now I just want to drive - all day, every day - for the rest of my life.

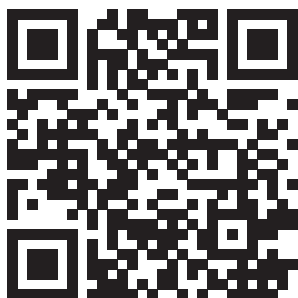
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Sheena Smith

Scotland for the Soul

Promoting Scotland is more than a job for Sheena Smith – it is a heartfelt calling rooted in generations of Scottish heritage.

“I am a Macrae by birth, born and brought up in Edinburgh,” she shares with Celtic Life International via email. “Now I live in West Lothian with my husband and daughter. Funnily enough, we’ve ended up in the same town where my grandad on my mother’s side grew up.”

From the Scottish Borders to the Isle of Cumbrae, Smith’s family tree stretches across the land she now promotes with passion and purpose.

After joining VisitScotland in 2012 during the Year of Creative Scotland – an initiative celebrating the nation’s culture and creativity – her work evolved from writing web content to leading marketing for Scotland’s southern regions and key tourism sectors.

“My role is busy and varied, and I get to work alongside amazing colleagues. One minute we could be running a campaign with Expedia or Tripadvisor; the next, launching a radio partnership with a local broadcaster or building an ancestral itinerary.”

As Senior South Regions & Sectors Marketing Manager, Smith collaborates across content, multimedia, PR, events, and business development to bring Scotland’s magic to life. “I’m compelled to show just why Scotland is a must-visit destination and make sure visitors have the very best experience when they come here.”

With commitment and care, Smith helps smooth out potential snags for would-be travellers. “Some places are naturally busier than others during peak seasons. We have to balance our messaging and encourage visitors to explore lesser-known areas while promoting responsible travel year-round.”

Her integrity pays off in more ways than professional pride.

“My work is exciting, interesting and varied. I’m really lucky to promote such a beautiful and vibrant country while working with great people. When I tell people I work for VisitScotland, they often smile and share their own tips or favourite places. That pride really shines through.”

Asked about her own favourite spots, Smith lights up. “Scotland has a place to suit every mood. I love being by the water, whether lochs, waterfalls, or the sea. The area around South Queensferry, on the outskirts of Edinburgh, will always be one of my favourites. There’s something about the great expanse of the Firth of Forth and the three bridges spanning the water that stops you in your tracks.” UNESCO agrees, naming the Forth Bridge a World Heritage Site in 2015. Scotland’s natural wonders are matched only by its rich cultural and culinary heritage.

“Food and drink are a big part of the Scottish experience,” Smith explains. “From whisky distillery tours to farmers markets, they enrich every visit. There’s nothing quite like fresh seafood in Fife or Stornoway Black Pudding on the Isle of Lewis.”

VisitScotland is expanding this appeal with initiatives that blend inspiration and innovation. This year, the organization is focused on well-being, sustainability, and meaningful travel.

“A visit to Scotland can positively impact your well-being. We have a packed schedule of diverse events all year round and looking to bring those experiences to life for visitors from both home and abroad.”



Highlights for 2025 include the grand reopening of Inverness Castle, iconic events like the highland games and the Edinburgh festivals, and ever-popular whisky trails. The team is also deepening connections with Scotland’s global diaspora, helping those with ancestral ties to plan deeply personal journeys.

VisitScotland’s reach is global, targeting visitors from the U.S., U.K., Germany, and France, while cultivating potential visitors in places such as Canada, Australia, China and the Nordic regions. “We use a lot of research and insights to tailor our message – whether through digital content, trade partnerships, or travel shows, we want to inspire people not just to dream of Scotland, but to book a trip.

“Scotland is good for the soul,” she continues. “It is a place you will never forget. The coastlines, rugged mountains, and ancient castles create unforgettable memories. You’ll get one of the warmest welcomes, and enjoy amazing food, drink, as well as world-class events.”

Scotland’s tourism sector still faces real challenges, however, from global competition to climate change and rising operational costs. Despite those issues, visitors spent more than £10.8 billion in Scotland in 2023, with sustainable tourism now the country’s second-largest growth sector.

For Smith, it is a testament to strategic adaptation and resilience. “From tourism and business to global trends and world events, we use the latest data to shape our direction. Scotland continues to grow as a leading destination, not just to visit, but to live and work as well. Sláinte!”

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Kieren Windsor wanders the wonders of Wales

Wales may be a land of misty mountains, medieval castles and mysterious legends, but it has become a heartfelt mission for Kieren Windsor. Born and raised in Mid Wales, Windsor is the force behind Wales Guidebook, a rapidly growing independent travel platform receiving favourable attention in the U.K. and beyond.

"I'm a Welshman born and bred," Windsor notes proudly by email. "I've lived in Mid Wales, South Wales, and North Wales, so I've had a taste of every region. But it wasn't until 2022 that I decided to pursue my passion full time."

That passionate pursuit has since transformed into a powerful digital presence.

Launched just three years ago, Wales Guidebook now boasts more than 300 travel guides, a mobile app, and an increasingly popular newsletter. "In August 2023, during our peak travel season, Wales Guidebook had more readers than any other independent blog dedicated to Wales," he notes.

Unlike travel brands with full marketing teams and big budgets, Wales Guidebook is largely a solo operation. "I do almost everything myself, from forming a strategy and planning, to writing and photography," explains Windsor. "But for certain subjects, I do collaborate. I work with a Welsh chef on food features and a Welsh teacher on articles about the language and music."

This hand-crafted approach gives the site an authentic voice that resonates with readers - from remote routes to hidden hiking trails, every post is rooted in lived experience.

Despite handling all the hard work, travelling for a living is a dream life for Windsor.

“The reward speaks for itself. I get to experience the best activities in my country as my full-time job.”

However, covering a country from coast to castle, the work never ends. "Keeping the content updated while adding new material is the biggest challenge. Wales is a huge and diverse country with new activities, accommodations, and restaurants always opening or closing. As a result, existing articles must be kept up to date whilst simultaneously discovering new parts. I plan to double the number of guides, but that will take years."

While he notes that Wales is a country best visited during summer, Windsor emphasizes that winter also has its charm. "We have holiday cottages with log fires and hot tubs, and three international dark sky parks for stargazing, which offer stunning night skies during winter. There's even a reindeer safari in North Wales during the holidays, and our waterfalls are actually better in winter, after heavy rain. There's something wild and cathartic about seeing them at full force."

Wales, he adds, is gaining ground overall as a tourist spot. "Wales has established itself as a key visitor destination among the British, aided by the pandemic-fuelled interest in the country due to international travel restrictions."

Despite the growth, Windsor admits that Wales is still behind in its fair share of visitors from abroad. One of the biggest issues is that Wales is often viewed as a day-trip destination. "This means that visitors aren't spending a lot of money on accommodation and food."

He suggests looking north for solutions. "I think we should look hard at Scotland as an example of how to market ourselves. There are many similarities between the two Celtic countries, each with its own national identity and known for outdoor activities. We can follow Scotland's lead in creating some bucket-list-worthy activities and locations."

Developing the country's myths and legends can also improve its allure. "There is a big opportunity to market the legend of King Arthur, particularly, and other Welsh myths around dragons."

To this end, Windsor has invested in new tools to reach more travellers. "Recently, I launched the Wales Guidebook app for Android and iPhone. It's user-friendly and ad-free and gives people a way to access information about the best things to do and places to stay."

He has also started a mailing list with updated information on events and activities, including travel tips and exclusive deals. "Our subscribers are a mixed audience, split equally between those who live in Wales, those who regularly visit, and those planning their first trip here."

"Ultimately, my goal is to visit every tourist attraction in Wales and continue to provide free information to those visiting and those living here."

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Shane Shanahan's Language of the Heart

“No one in my family was really a strong keeper of the family tree,” shares world-renowned American percussionist Shane Shanahan from his home in Brooklyn, NY. “So, I did a little bit of digging and discovered that my great-great-grandfather on my dad’s side was born in County Kerry, Ireland around 1859. His name was Thomas Shanahan, and he emigrated to the United States a few years later, and settling in the Pittsburgh area of Pennsylvania. He had several children, including my great-grandfather, Laurence Shanahan, who then had my grandfather Carl Shanahan, and my dad - also Carl Shanahan - would follow.”

Ironically, even with roots on the Emerald Isle, music was far from the forefront during Shanahan’s formative years.

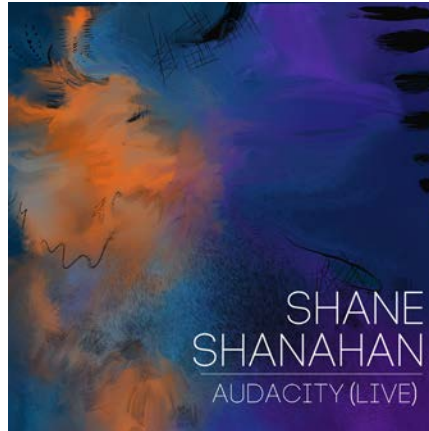
“My mom took up violin when she was a child but hated it and gave it up pretty quickly. My dad wasn’t musical at all. My grandmother on my mother’s side played some piano and sang - not always in tune, mind you, but I didn’t know the difference at that age, it was just beautiful to me. She had a baby grand piano in her living room, and I remember crawling under it when I was very little and enjoying the vibration from the strings - I found it comforting. And my grandfather had an organ and would spontaneously make up songs and sounds - he had no idea what he was doing, but his improvisations had a profound influence on me.”

True enough, that sense of invention would inform Shanahan’s intention.

“I was always banging on stuff around the house and playing on Tupperware containers and the like. Actually, I would put pennies inside Tupperware containers to give them a special kind of sound. When I got older, my parents got me a practice pad. Then in school I played the recorder and, later, the trumpet - both of which exposed me to melody and taught me how to read music.”

His passion for percussion, however, remained.

“Finally, for my 13th birthday, my parents - against their better judgment - gave me



a drum set and from that moment on I was all-in.”

The timing couldn’t have been better for an angst-ridden teenager.

“Because the drums were so physical, they gave me a real, concrete outlet for all my pent-up feelings. I would crank the Led Zeppelin and play along and just give it everything I had. There was a strong and immediate emotional connection there, and it felt like I had found my own language, my own voice.”

Shanahan continues to play the drums today for the same reasons, save perhaps one.

“Well, I don’t have the teen angst anymore - at least I hope not - but those rhythmic roots run deep, and I still get that sense of emotional release that comes from playing.”

After years of formal training in both jazz and classical music, Shanahan co-founded the Grammy Award-winning Silkroad Ensemble, performing around the world with famed violinist Yo-Yo Ma, and later serving as the group’s Co-Artistic Director.

“Those experiences were invaluable...travel really expanded my world-view, opening my eyes to other cultures and opening my ears to the sound of those cultures.”

That international influence is evident on Shanahan’s latest full-length recording, *Audacity (Live)*.

Featuring accomplished musicians from around the globe - including vocalist Roopa Mahadevan, composer and instrumentalist Kaoru Watanabe, violinist Megan Gould, guitarist Brad Shepik, and bassist Edward Perez - the new album is a “celebration of the distinct power of cross-cultural collaboration and the transcendent beauty of collective creation,” and a dynamic display “of Indian, Middle Eastern, Japanese, jazz, rock, and minimalist traditions.”

“Audacity is a conversation,” notes Shanahan, “between the musicians on stage, between the musicians and the audience...all unique voices exchanging ideas and emotions.”

One of those voices, he notes, is percussive.

“Some people might say that there is no melody in the drums. I disagree completely; drums talk, they have their own language, they speak to people, and they have the power to tap into our DNA, our collective spirit, and communicate with us on a tribal, almost primal level. Just look out into the audience on any given night; you see people clicking along, tapping their feet, grooving, vibing to the beat. Whether it sits underneath or atop the melodies and harmonies or the arrangement, the language of rhythm is at the heart of those conversations.”

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Martin Dillon

The Sorrow and the Loss gives voice to the women of The Troubles

Longtime writer Martin Dillon says that out of all his books, his latest was the most “emotionally difficult” to write. In *The Sorrow and the Loss*, the Belfast native sheds light on the untold stories of The Troubles by focusing on the women who were affected.

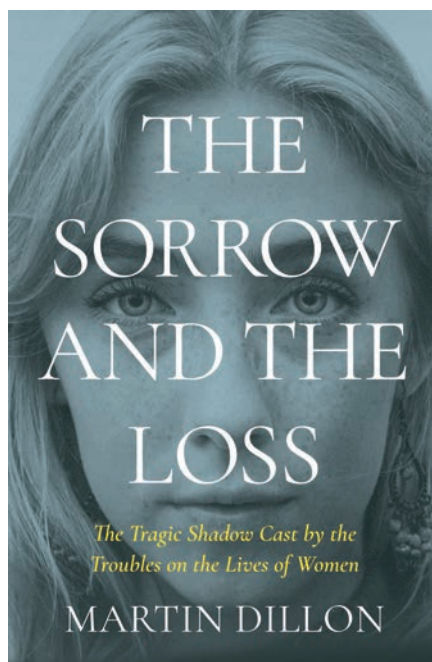
“I wanted to look at all these women and find out, how did the conflict impact them? How did they find themselves in the middle of it?”

Dillon is a renowned expert on the decades-long conflict in Northern Ireland colloquially known as “The Troubles” or “The Long War.” In the late 1960s, long-held tensions spilled over into years of violence between Protestant unionists and Roman Catholic nationalists. Thousands were killed, from paramilitary fighters to civilians caught in the crossfire. The signing of the Good Friday agreement saw the end of the war in 1998. However, the ramifications of the conflict continued to reverberate, especially for the families of the dead.

The real depth of these people’s stories, shares the scribe, went under the radar for a few reasons - not the least of which was the fast-paced nature of news reporting during the war. “You’re chasing every event,” he recalls. “You don’t have time to be reflective.”

When Dillon finally did reflect, he realized those stories ought to be investigated further. “I thought that was one of the failures within journalism itself. It was being overwhelmed by the character of the events that were taking place.”

The author addressed this with his first book, *Political Murder in Northern Ireland*, which he wrote with Denis Lehane. Although he ultimately left his country for his own safety, Dillon continued to write about The Troubles as well as other topics, mainly related to war and crime. Then, even after many years of journalism under his belt and with a dozen books to his name, he realized that he had still been missing something.



“I had never reflected on the impact the violence had on women - the kind of trauma that they had been through and how many of them suffered PTSD...”

Dillon notes that most of the people writing about the conflict at its height were, like him, men. The stories usually focused on men as a result. “We tended to write about killers. Well-known terrorists,” he recalls. By neglecting women’s stories, he says, “I think journalism did fail them, in many respects.”

Many of the women depicted in *The Sorrow and The Loss* grieved partners, children, siblings or parents who died in the conflict. “A lot of them have never had answers, either. A lot of them don’t know who actually killed their loved ones, because so many of the killers, in many ways, were agents of the state.”

Bridget Kane was 24 years old when her husband, Edward, was killed in a pub bombing. As Bridget was never able to view Edward’s remains, she struggled to accept his death. “She went through terrible mental trauma. She didn’t want to believe - she

thought, maybe he’s lost somewhere.” Meanwhile, her children had to pass the site of the bombing daily as they walked to school.

Tragically, the Kane family’s experience is far from unique. Many women sought the truth about the death of a family member and never received it. “That was the loss - apart from the loss of life, obviously.”

Other women, however, were involved in the violence itself. Mairéad Farrell was one such woman.

Once a student of Irish language and Irish dance, Farrell became a student of the IRA (the Provisional Irish Republican Army) as a teenager. During a stint in Armagh Prison, Farrell led a “dirty protest” and a hunger strike in solidarity with male IRA members in HM Prison Maze. Neither the media nor the IRA leaders took much notice of Farrell’s hunger strike, even though it almost killed her. Two years after her release from prison, Farrell met her end on the island of Gibraltar at the hands of British authorities.

“I wanted to know, what happened? How did that young girl find herself in the midst of a conflict and drawn into it, as others were?”

Then, there are the women whose stories will never be told. Some spoke to Dillon but, ultimately, did not want to see their words published. One source feared it would worsen her PTSD.

Almost 30 years since the Good Friday agreement, the pain still lingers. But Dillon believes that knowing the history, as bloody and unpleasant as it can be, is as crucial as ever.

“If you don’t understand the past, the danger is it that it will be repeated...”



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Rory Duffy's *fragile peace*

In the film *A Fragile Peace: Brexit and Northern Ireland*, Rory Duffy offers a compelling, clear-eyed look at the delicate balance still present in Northern Ireland decades after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which ended decades of conflict in the region. With his background as both a filmmaker and historian, Duffy approaches the subject not just as an observer but as someone with a deep respect for the past and the human stories within it. The result is a documentary that has captivated audiences, notching numerous film festival wins and nominations for best feature documentary.

"I am a proud New Yorker of Irish heritage," Duffy shares with Celtic Life International in an email exchange, noting that his roots trace back to both Killybegs in Co. Donegal and Ballyhaunis in Co. Mayo. "I have been interested in film since I was a youngster. I watched the movie *Jaws* all the time as a kid - it was just so magical and adventurous. In fact, the last shot of *A Fragile Peace* is my homage to the last shot in *Jaws*."

While the early days of Duffy's career were spent in front of the camera (he appeared in off-Broadway plays and on iconic TV shows like *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*), he ultimately found more creative fulfillment behind it. "I was able to paint the entire canvas rather than just be one colour in someone else's painting."

That shift led to a career that combines diligent research, intuitive storytelling, and a blue-collar approach to production.

"My process is very workman-like: I wake up, pack my lunch, go to work and solve the problems of the day. If a subject strikes a chord, I go to the library, read, watch related documentaries, and if something's there, I keep digging."

In the case of *A Fragile Peace*, what struck a chord was Brexit. "The potential for a return of violence to the North of Ireland due to Brexit was what compelled me to start developing a documentary film. We started following events as they unfolded, hoping the Good Friday Agreement stayed intact. And thankfully, it has."



Making the film, however, was not without its challenges. "Access to people, funding, and time were the biggest hurdles. And then COVID-19 hit, and we could not get over to the North to film. Still, the amazing thing is, when you do show up, you're usually rewarded with something cinematic."

The result is a profoundly moving film that follows three compelling individuals: Damian, a political activist and father; Martina, a peaceful grassroots leader; and Aron, a young activist determined to shape his future.

"They are incredibly likable people, and that connection is what makes you care. And that's what makes the film work."

Indeed, care and connection are threads woven throughout *A Fragile Peace*, both within its storyline and in the international response that it has received.

“The response has been unreal. Audiences around the world have connected with the film and the characters.”

The film's resonance stems in part from the relevance of its message. "Conflict and conflict resolution are universal stories. There are practical applications from the

Good Friday Agreement that could be used to resolve conflicts that plague the world today."

It is also no surprise that history plays a large part in his work. Duffy teaches history at City College of New York, and that academic lens inspires his storytelling in subtle but significant ways. "What makes my work unique is the fact that I'm a historian and I bring that historical perspective to film."

Though a seasoned and serious filmmaker, he is lighthearted about what makes a good film. "If I knew exactly what that was, I would be a millionaire."

Even with all the accolades and acclaim, Duffy stays grounded and busy. He and his producing partner (and wife), Hyun Joo Lee, are currently enjoying the festival ride for *A Fragile Peace* while diving into pre-production for several new projects. "One is on urban planning, another on 9/11 and one on the loneliness epidemic as a health crisis in the United States."

Ultimately, Duffy returns to the camera for the real rewards.

"Nothing beats watching people watch your movie on a big screen. It is magical. And getting the thumbs up from people impacted by the story and, in this case, people from the North of Ireland, there is just nothing like that."

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Emma Donoghue

Born in Dublin in 1969, Emma Donoghue is a novelist, screenwriter and playwright. Room sold more than two million copies and won the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Canada and the Caribbean), as well as being shortlisted for the Man Booker and Orange Prizes. Donoghue scripted the Canadian-Irish film adaptation, which was nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Picture. The Wonder was shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize, and Donoghue co-wrote the 2022 screen adaptation for Netflix. The Pull of the Stars was a finalist for the Trillium Book Award and was longlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize. Donoghue's fiction ranges from the contemporary (Stir-Fry, Hood, Landing, Touchy Subjects, Akin) to the historical (Haven, Slammerkin, The Sealed Letter, Astray, Frog Music) and includes two books for young readers, The Lottery's Plus One and The Lottery's More or Less. Recently, Chris Muise spoke with her about her latest literary work, The Paris Express.

Let's talk a bit about your background, your early life, and how you got interested in writing.

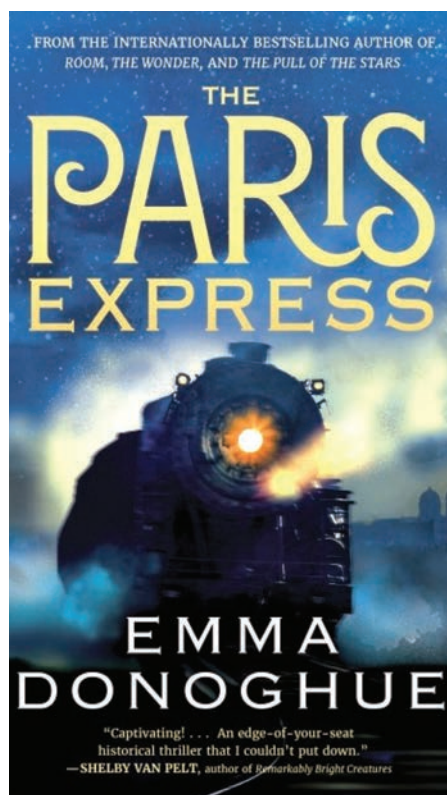
I'm an Irish immigrant, twice over. I spent my first 20 years in Dublin, and then I went to England to do a PhD at Cambridge for eight years. By that time, I'd fallen in love with a Canadian, so I followed her to Ontario. I've been in London, Ontario, ever since. From London to London! Around age seven, I tried writing a poem, and I remember thinking, 'whoa, this is the single-most exciting thing I ever did.' The thrill of putting together words that had never been put together before just blew my mind. It still feels just as much fun. I've always written a lot, and I've always redrafted a lot, so I always jump into that first draft in a spirit of play. It doesn't matter how bad it is. I've heard it described as 'fill the sandbox first, then you can build the castles.'

One of your biggest successes was *Room*. You wrote both the book and the screenplay. What was the difference, especially when it's the same story?

It's the same storytelling process, but you're using totally different techniques. It's all about faces and visuals and having a very kind of clean, clear storyline to pull you through those scenes, so there are way fewer words. But I love both, and I particularly enjoy the adaptation process. I like seeing how a story will work again in different forms. I've had the opportunity to make *Room* a film first, and then a play. It's just fascinating to study how different forms bring out different aspects of the same story.

Your new novel, *The Paris Express*, is rooted in reality.

Yes, it's based on the true story of a train disaster in France in 1895, which was recorded in an amazingly surreal photograph of a train dangling out the side of a building. I spotted this photograph as we were about to go to live in France for a year because my partner is a French professor – she gets sabbaticals. I Googled the area we were moving to, saw that photograph, and thought, 'that's my next novel.' Writing a story of an accident on public



transit is a great way to bring together lots of different characters and have their fates all bound together. Some may be rich, sitting in the swanky first-class carriage, while others are poor and crammed into third class, but they're all risking the same thing. I realized that the story of a technology gone wrong would be very interesting because, nowadays, we're so often grabbed by the latest technology. We never think about it. It's just going to lead to the robot overlords taking my job or crashing my plane; I saw a similarity with steam travel in the 19th century. I love finding examples of things that are very real and important in our lives, but from centuries ago, because it makes history rhyme with the present, and it gives a really fresh angle on something like the question of technology or economic growth. I knew that the story of a train hurtling through the Paris countryside would be a great way to make a little parable about society and how we tend to leap on something and pursue it headlong and without stopping to think what might happen. It captures the politics, fears, and chaos at the end of the 19th century; what a prescient time to be doing this story. We have social media as the speeding train leading us into the current morass that's going

on politically in the world right now, as I'm sure you're aware. Some of my characters are political radicals on the left, or the anarchist side of things, and they're saying, 'we have a tyrannical government! What should we do in response?' Do you keep trying to tinker away, making things just slightly better in your own neighbourhood? Or do you turn to violence? The book asks those big political questions. I love when a book has what seems like a fluffy vibe like, oh, this will be enjoyably exotic, but actually it turns out to be about really substantial and gripping things.

How long did it take to complete this book, and how much research did it involve?

I think it took me about two years of just bottomless levels of research because almost all the people on my fictional train are real people. I knew a handful of real passengers who'd been on the train that day that I gleaned from about 40 newspaper articles, which were my main source. And I knew the crew of the train. I knew their names and details about them, but I didn't know who the rest of the people were, so I decided to use real people at the time who could have been on the train. It meant having to research about 20 people. But I so enjoyed it. I just did a deep dive on 1890s France; the clothes of the time, the food, the tech. They'd have been carrying things like portable typewriters or a movie camera. I just absolutely loved bringing that period to life. It's probably the most enjoyable period I've set a novel in.

Have you done something with this kind of extensive research into real people and events before this?

Yeah, this is probably my trademark. I do this every time. It's also true of modern novels like *Room*, which is set nowadays; I researched every case I could find of feral children – children growing up hidden or locked away or a stunted kind of situation. My background is academic in that I did a PhD, so that's just the approach I take to any project. There's never been a better time to research historical fiction because you can find out anything you need through online resources –

databases of newspapers, genealogy sites. You can track down anything with a good library and the internet, and so I feel I can turn to writing whatever I like because I know that my research skills will get me there, for sure.

Speaking of writing what you like, what is next on your horizon?

I've got a play coming up on an Irish theme for the Blythe Festival in Blythe, Ontario. They've commissioned a play – a musical – from me, about the Irish settling in Canada in the 1840s during the Great Famine. It's about a real family who came from Antrim in Northern Ireland and settled in the southwestern Ontario area, and it's a tragic love story. It's all based on the real letters, and I use traditional Irish songs to tell the story. It's my first musical, which is quite exciting. The main woman in my story, I found her actual blanket in a local museum; the blanket she knitted. I've even touched it – very carefully, because it's got a few holes in it. But I was so moved to touch her blanket. The show is called *The Wind Coming Over the Sea*, and it's all about emigration then and now because, again, when you write about the past, it always echoes today. And as someone who has emigrated twice, obviously I feel really strongly about how immigrants are such a wealth to a country. They may need a bit of help when they first arrive their children will be the foundation of your economy. Things that we take for granted and cherish in our culture today came from people who were ostracized and vilified when they arrived as immigrants generations ago. We're seen as germ-spreading beggars and, to be fair, the Irish in the 1840s were beggars. But they were also going to be a huge contribution to the economy. If you take the long historical view, you realize that every group, no matter how alien they seem at first, will join in and add to the party. The Blythe Festival is the biggest commissioner of new Canadian plays, by the way, having premiered over 150 new Canadian plays. It's in a small town, but it's a big theatre and they do nothing but brand-new Canadian plays, which is so rare; usually, summer theatres or rural theatres would play it a bit safe. But Blythe does nothing but new



stuff. They often have a kind of a rural element to the stories, which, again, is unusual. Plays tend to be a city thing. Blythe is remarkable that way. Gotta love patrons of the arts!

Lastly, in terms of Irish and – more broadly – Celtic culture, do you think it's represented enough in today's media, literature, etc.? If not, how do you think that can be improved?

I don't know. In southwestern Ontario, I feel it's all around me. It's been a very easy place for me to immigrate to. Irish bands come here; I meet people of Irish origins all the time. I feel there's a really warm welcome for even my accent, and in doing a show like this one, it shows the kind of global reach of Celtic culture, and I think a lot of people can relate. People here tend to be very proud of their element of Irish ancestry. And you know what's nice? Going back to Ireland all the time, as I do, to find Ireland becoming more delightfully mixed, too. When I was growing up, everybody looked like me. But now, now there's people from all

over the world in Ireland.

You hear people these days saying we're mixing too much, saying stuff like 'why can't we have a place for these people, and a place for those people?' But mixing, moving around, and being in places doesn't mean you're not being proud of your heritage, or that you're not sharing or showing it.

Absolutely. In a city like Toronto, if I'm in Little India, it just seems the best of both worlds. People get to keep their flavour, their traditions, and yet enthusiastically take part in Canadian culture. I've never felt so proud of being in Canada. Because people aren't saying Canada is one thing. They're saying we are multicultural and that's a distinct asset.

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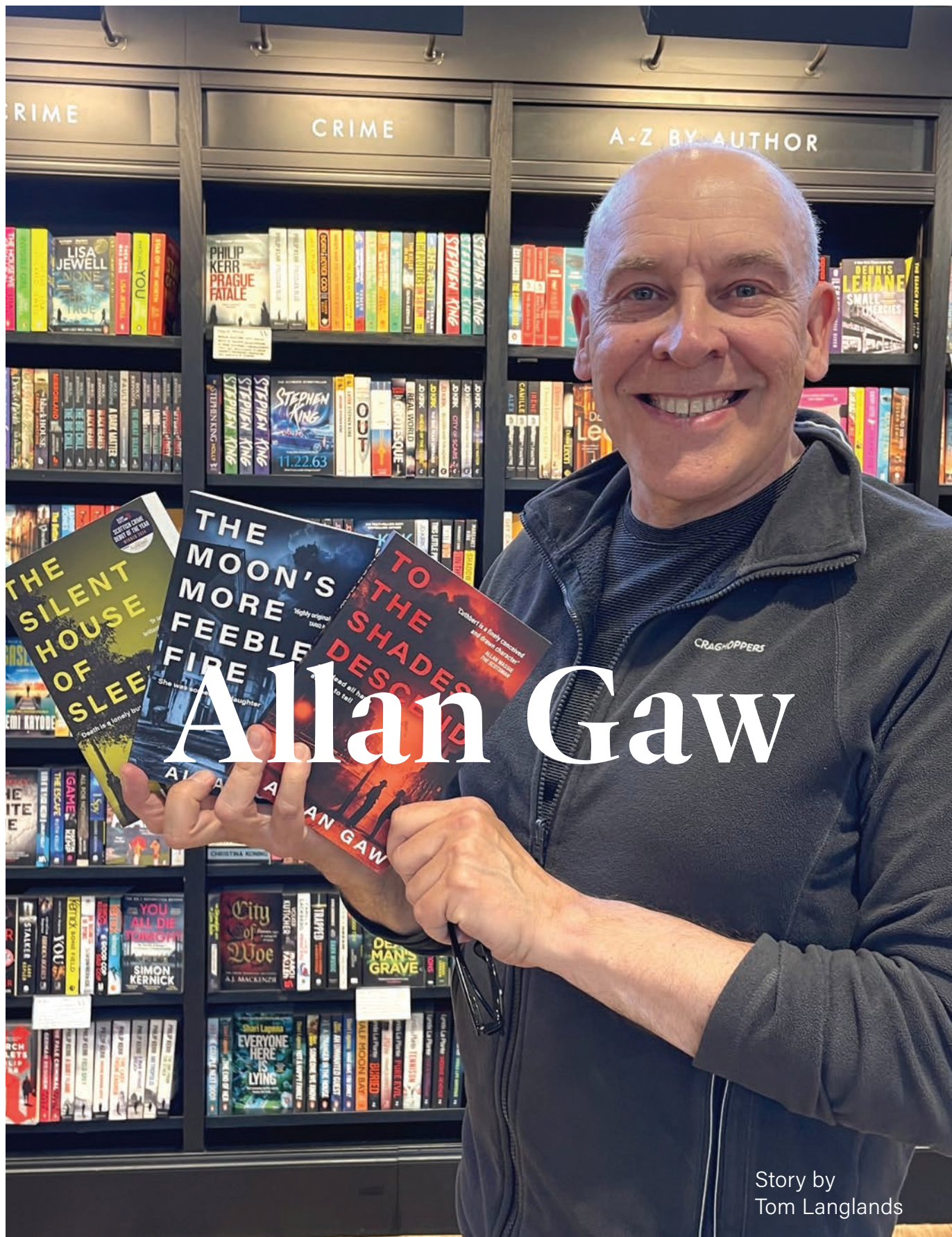


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Story by
Tom Langlands

I first met Allan Gaw at a spoken word, open-mic event in the small lounge of a country pub not far from the shores of Loch Lomond. He was reading a selection of poems and a passage from his self-published novel, *The Silent House of Sleep*. During an evening where many of the readers narrated tales of scenery, gardens, tapestries and paintings, Gaw's writing stood out as fresh, evocative and powerful, and he read with a strong voice of certainty.

Since that autumn evening, I have grown to enjoy Gaw's writing all the more. He has a demonstrable understanding of people, and it is his ability to create believable characters and to portray complex emotions in minimal words that captivate readers and listeners alike.

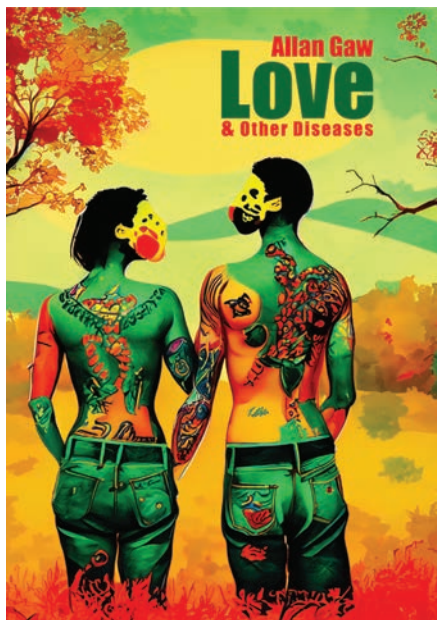
'Some think I specialize in poets. But although I've had some notable successes there, you should know I also do artists, musicians and the occasional opera singer. But they're all really the icing on the cake. My real bread and butter are the miners, the dockers and the poor, huddling in their freezing overcrowded tenements. And of course, the children.'

These opening lines from Gaw's poem *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* contrast starkly with this stanza from his poem *Miracle*:

*I turned, we reached, we touched by chance,
I apologised, you smiled, I smiled too. I spoke,
you
gazed, I longed,
and in that moment my fate was sealed
Because I could see the smallest of miracles in
you,
I could see my forever in your eyes.*

Disparate in content as they may seem, both extracts - found in his first collection of poetry, *Love and Other Diseases* - are linked by more than the title of a collection. Gaw is a powerful writer who eruditely exposes the emotions, connectedness, and vulnerabilities of the human condition. He is also a former pathologist and clinical researcher.

In 2022, Gaw's *The Silent House of Sleep* won the Scottish Association of Writers



Dragon's Pen Award for best book pitch. That year also saw him win the U.K. Classical Association's Creative Writing Competition for his short story *The Mother of Heroes*, the International Alpine Fellowship Writing Prize for the short story *Excision* and the international Globe Soup Challenge #7 for his short story *Dead Famous*. He followed this with a 2023 season that saw him as runner-up in the International Crime Short Story competition, run by The Glencairn Glass in collaboration with *Bloody Scotland* and *Scottish Field* magazine. After self-publishing *The Silent House of Sleep* in 2023, the book earned the *Bloody Scotland* debut Crime Novel Prize. His short stories and poetry have appeared in numerous anthologies and other publications.

Born in Glasgow, Gaw studied chemical pathology at Victoria Infirmary, Glasgow, and at Glasgow Royal Infirmary. Beginning his career in the field of clinical medicine, he transferred to the scientific field of laboratory medicine where his work on human metabolism and cholesterol-lowering drugs earned him a PhD. His post-doctoral studies took him to the laboratories of distinguished Nobel laureates Joseph Goldstein and Michael Brown in Dallas, Texas. On returning to Glasgow, there ensued a series of high-profile roles including responsibility for leading the clinical trials unit at Glasgow Royal Infirmary, and professor and director of the clinical research facility at Queen's University, Belfast. His academic writings amount to more than 150 papers, reviews, and book contributions, along

with 20 textbooks he has authored or edited.

It is a formidable contribution to his field of expertise. As Gaw explains, the transition to creative writing came naturally.

'I have always enjoyed writing and reading. Throughout my career I have written many academic papers, technical reports, and magazine articles. The skills of research and presentation, of how to use language to engage the reader, and hold their interest, are not so far away from what is required to write fiction. It is a matter of transferring the skills I have learned over a lifetime to a new type of writing.'

Although I first connected with Gaw through his poetry, his foray into creative writing began in 2018 with short stories. 'The poetry came later,' he notes, adding,

“I now split my time between prose and poetry. I often write one before the other and find that each can inform the other by presenting different ways of seeing things.”

'Poetry is such a powerful medium in the way it uses minimal words to convey often complex ideas or emotions.'

In late 2021 Gaw joined the Strathkelvin Writers' Group, a step he regards as significant in his new writing career, giving him the opportunity to engage with a group of serious and talented authors. He made his mark on the group instantly, winning several of its competitions and later being called upon to judge others' work. He read one of his poems in public for the first time in 2022 and published *The Silent House of Sleep* a year later. It was to be the first of a three-book series introducing the protagonist Dr. Jack Cuthbert, a Scottish doctor working with Scotland Yard in London. In modern-day terms he would be referred to as a forensic pathologist, but the story is set in the late 1920s, several decades before that term was coined.

Gaw has always been drawn to interesting characters, whether they be in real life or works of fiction. Cuthbert is such a character. In his early 30s, tall, striking and officious, yet char-



As a former pathologist himself, it is perhaps unsurprising that Gaw's novel is centered around a character in this line of work. Creative writers are often encouraged to write about what they know. Since publishing *The Silent House of Sleep*, Cuthbert's forensic abilities and further revelations about his own character have been developed in the second and third books of the current series, *The Moon's More Feeble Fire* and *To the Shades Descend*. The series is now published by Polygon.

Gaw's productivity is as impressive as the quality of what he writes. His latest poetry collection, *The Sounds Men Make*, launched earlier this year by Seahorse Publications, offers some 45 poems that explore what it is to be male in the modern world. The poems cover everything from what women expect of men to adolescent shaving and the discovery of deodorant, love, homosexuality and, tragically, suicide, to name but a few. It is nothing short of a masterful collection of emotive works that will captivate men and women alike. Once again, it is Gaw's skill at getting under the surface of the skin to reveal hidden thoughts and depths of character that make this collection so unique. In his own words from the preface:

'I am a man, and I have my own individual experiences to share of what that means. But this collection is not about me; it is about the plurality of the male experience in the 21st century. As such, when writing these poems, I have chosen to walk in the shoes of many other men – young and old, gay and straight, loud and quiet, abused and abusing, whole and broken. It is their diverse voices you hear in these poems, not mine.'

Gaw's great skill is enabling us to hear the voices of others.

Story by Tom Langlands
Photos supplied by Allan Gaw

ismatic and extremely good at his job. He not only bears the mental scars of his experiences in the trenches of WWI, but he harbours a dark secret; he is homosexual. At a time when homosexuality was illegal, this Achilles' heel ren-

ders him vulnerable. His first case involves the discovery of not one but two bodies and presents him with one of the most baffling and disturbing cases of his career. Solving it will bring a tsunami of memories to bear upon the doctor.

the cottages Ireland



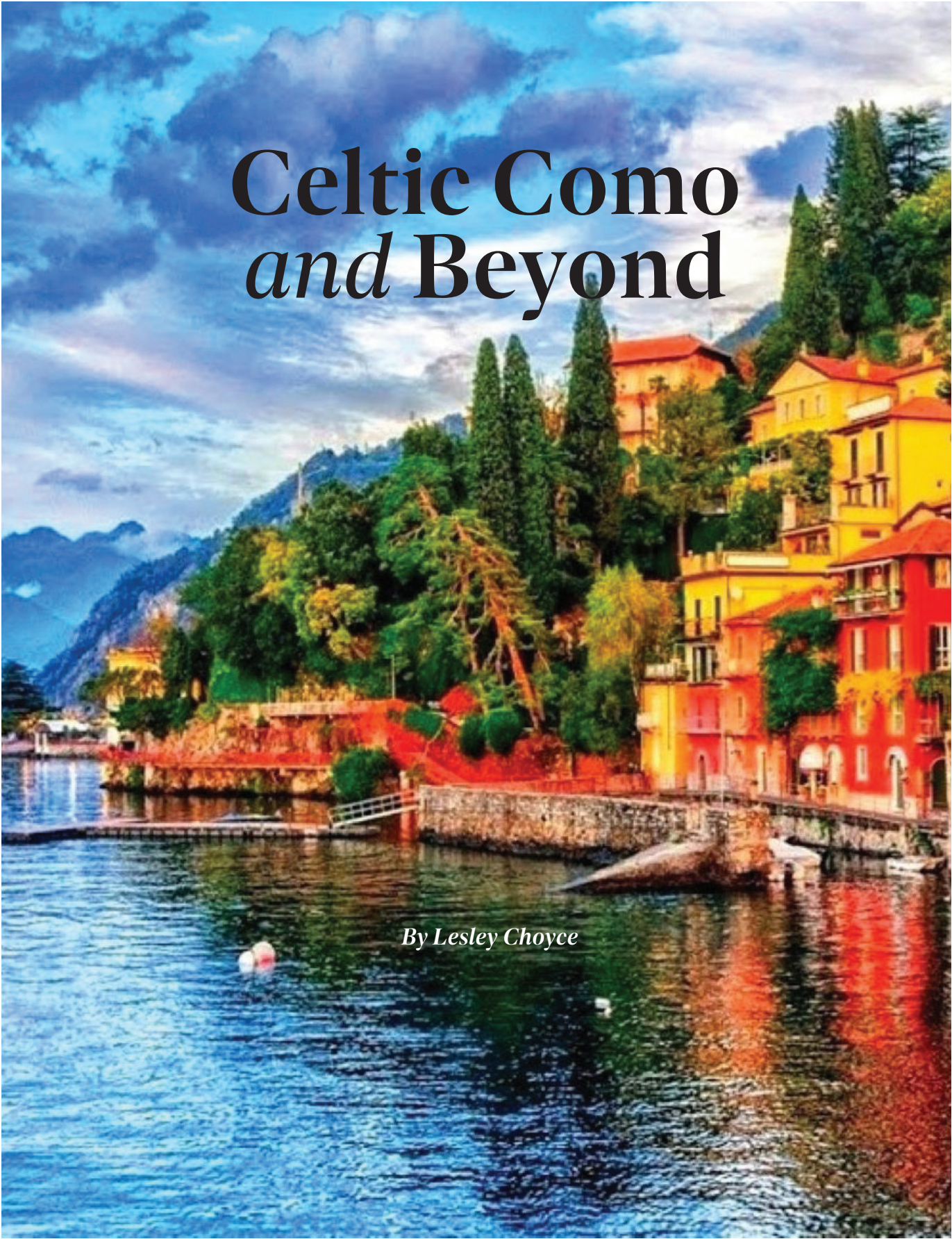
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A scenic view of a lakeside town, likely Como, Italy. The foreground shows the calm blue water of the lake, reflecting the sky and the colorful buildings. A small white and red buoy floats in the water. The middle ground features a stone wall and a small dock. The background is dominated by steep, forested hills with tall, slender trees, and distant mountains under a dramatic, cloudy sky. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and picturesque.

Celtic Como *and Beyond*

By Lesley Choyce

TRAVEL

The first time I heard the word “Como” was when my mother introduced me to a very popular song in 1960 called Delaware by the then ultra-successful American singer Perry Como. My mother played the 45-rpm record for me over and over because my nine-year-old brain thought the lyrics were very clever. The singer queried, “what did Delaware, boy?” and answered himself with the line, “she wore a brand New Jersey.” Perry had a smooth-as-silk voice and wooed the women of his day with his kind of watered down, pop pseudo-Italian musical whimsy. I didn’t know at the time that his last name was the name of a famous Italian lake that would one day capture my attention.

By the time I was in high school, I was fascinated by geography – everything from local topographic maps to monster library atlases heavy enough to crush your toes. I pored over every inch of the world and memorized names of faraway exotic-sounding cities, rivers, mountains, and lakes. And sure enough, there was that curious-looking long finger of a glacially formed body of water in the northern border of Italy named Lake Como.

When I first spied images of this mountain-rimmed lake, I hoped that someday I would go there and see what it had to offer. Down through the decades, I did travel to various parts of Italy and found joyous moments in places like Cinque Terre, Montepulciano and Lucca, but grew jaded with the touristy limoncello sweetness of the towns along the Amalfi Coast and the insanely crowded piazzas of Naples, Rome, and Venice. I had almost given up on Italy when Linda suggested we had not yet explored Lombardy in northern Italy, and she assured me it would be much nicer, more rugged and adventurous than the dingy streets of Napoli.

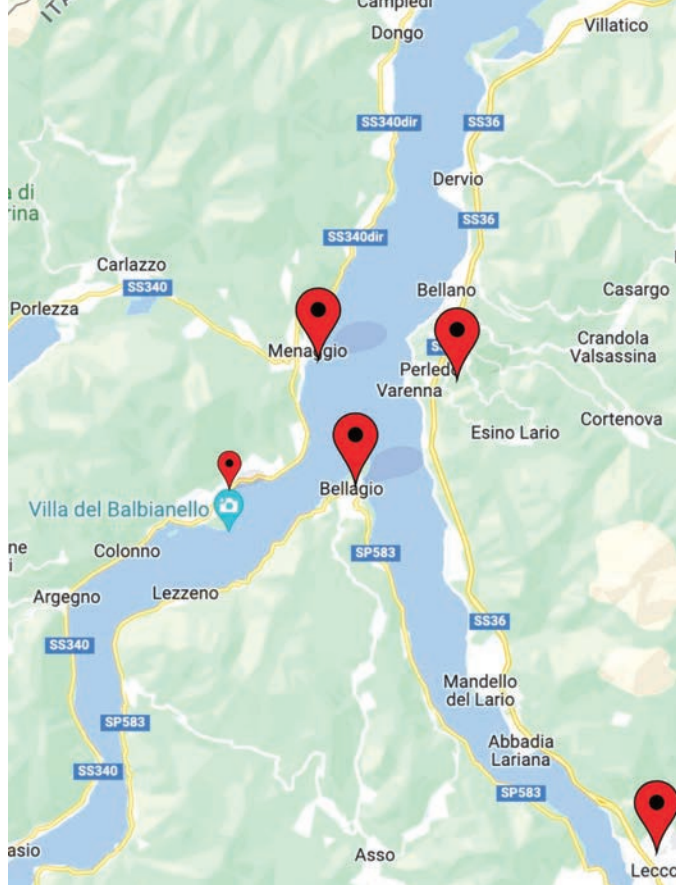
A hasty internet search enhanced my knowledge of currently famous people who lived along Lake Como or at least had multi-million-euro pied-a-terre dwellings on its shores. This list included George Clooney, Madonna, Richard Branson, Sylvester Stallone, and Brad Pitt. Other stars and even the Obamas apparently made sustained visits there as well.

This made me wonder, however - did I really want to visit the haunts of the rich and famous? No, not really. But I was also reminded that Lake Como was the setting - both real and idealized - of my favourite Robin Williams film, *What Dreams May Come*. That film knocked me out and immortalized Lake Como as a kind of paradisiacal afterlife destination in a way that made me want to see it for myself.

When I took a quick dip into the history of the region, I was floored yet again to discover that once upon a time, long ago, ancient peoples had this idyllic valley mostly all to themselves. And oddly enough, those people were Celts. They were known as the Orobii and they lived (happily, one might reckon) along the shores and in the hills around Lake Como and other locations in northern Italy during the Iron Age.

“Now, to be honest, it’s not like I sit around thinking, where is the next Celtic destination that Linda and I should travel to?”

It’s just that so many times I come up with a nagging notion to go somewhere, and it turns out that, long ago, the Celts were there first. Ireland, Scotland, Cornwall, Wales, for sure. But also, northern Portu-



gal, Bretagne, Croatia, Switzerland, etc., etc. And now Lombardy and its famous lake of the stars.

So, we flew to Milan where we were pleasantly shocked to discover you could rent a car in Italy without a lot of fussing and arguing. That was a good omen. Of course, driving to Como took us through various industrial wastelands that reminded me of my birth state of New Jersey. But, as we began to drive the snaky road along the perimeter of the lake, the magic began to present itself.

You should know that Lago di Como, also known as Lario, is the third-largest lake in Italy, in case you are ever asked this question on a quiz show. It’s 46 kilometers long, has a unique shape like the letter Y, and was carved out by glaciers 10,000 years ago. Our destination was the town of Perledo, perched high above the shore town of Varenna.

Perledo was once a popular retreat for aristocratic Romans, replete with incredible panoramic views of the lake and nicely maintained Old-World charm. And it had a moderately priced short-term rental home waiting for us at the end of our long slog to get there. A steep, narrow switchback road took us up from the lake to our destination, which had a magnificent view across the water to Menaggio on the other side. Our side of the lake was said to be a bit quieter than the towns of Como, Menaggio or Bellagio, and we were happy about that. Nearby, there were hiking trails through lush forests that were once trade routes and pilgrim tracks dating back to the time of the Orobii, and we were anxious to trek along them and explore what we could.

Our base for travel was Varenna. We could hike down there on a handy but precipitously steep local footpath and catch ferries to various destinations, thus avoiding driving for most of the time we were there. On our first trip down to Varenna, we promenaded along the shoreline on “Lovers’ Walk” - a delightful perambulate with wisteria hanging down from the rock walls - and tiny wavelets lapping

at the shoreline. It was a bit crowded, which is no surprise, and we had to dodge endless couples taking selfies at arm's length. ExploreLakeComo.com notes that "Lovers' Walk is a short pedestrian path cantilevered over water in Varenna. It affords romantic views of Lake Como, the mountains, and the small village...The red-fenced promenade in Varenna, with its steep alleys and quaint corners, attracts lovers from all around the world." And I guess that included Linda and me, but I wondered if in fact somewhere out there in the world were couples who, upon discovering they were deeply in love, felt an immediate urge to travel to Varenna just to walk arm-in-arm along the shore here.

Our first ferry ride took us to Menaggio, where we hiked as many back streets and alleys as we could find, soaking in the old city. Any trace of the Celts was long gone, and even the remnants of the wall that once surrounded the town were hard to locate. But once you removed yourself from the hustle of the main arteries, it was delightful to travel back in time mentally, a small reminder that in some of the most tourist-laden towns of Europe, a few steps beyond the binge of souvenir shops and street vendors can take you to places that are at least reasonably authentic.

Back in Varenna, I quickly learned that hiking back up to Perledo involved a lot of huffing and puffing for a flat-land coastal lad like me, but Linda veritably sprinted on up the mountain to our abode while I lagged behind, occasionally relying on the help of a dependable ancient stone wall to keep me upright to catch my breath.

We quickly learned to get out early in the morning to avoid the influx of visitors coming into the train station at the bottom of our path, where throngs of people would disembark from Milan trains and race to the ferries. We were here in April, so the crowds were tolerable, but I soon learned that even the local tourist office had issued a decree saying, "don't come here in the summer," another indication of just how overcrowded some well-known travel destinations have become.

Our second voyage across the water took us south to Bellagio, another shore town of about 4,000 souls, considered by many to be the most beautiful of the lake towns. Salita Serbelloni is "the most photographed street"

in Bellagio and one writer described going there "like stepping into an Italian dream." I would learn later that there is a hotel/casino in Las Vegas named The Bellagio with a fancy fountain that does funny things and itself is considered "the most photographed fountain in the world." Leave it to the Americans to try to upstage even the Trevi Fountain in Rome. Bellagio is known as "The Pearl of Lake Como," and it is indeed picturesque, boasting as a host town to any number of Hollywood celebrities.

Linda and I, mere mortals, were nonetheless happy to wander around the city and waltz through the greenery of the parks but balked at paying large euros to visit some of the fancier gardens in the old estates. Turismo Como reports that, "we know from Titus Livius that in 520 B.C., groups of Celts (coming from Gaul under the command of Bellovesus) invaded the region of the lake. In fact, a legend suggests the name of Bellagio derives from the name of this barbaric chieftain." Reading this, I had to reimagine my vision of these particular Celtic folks that I had always thought were rather civilized, peace-loving tribes until the dastardly Romans came along and bullied them out of their happy homes.

***“The truth of the matter, however, is that each time I dip into historical tidbits about the ancient Celts anywhere, I find conflicting information and end up realizing that true Celtic history for me will remain forever mysterious, elusive and somewhat confounding.*”**

Cruising back and forth across the fine lake was always a grand way to travel, and the fresh Lake Como air and jaw-dropping scenery never disappointed. Back in our digs at Perledo, I discovered a small black scorpion in our dining room. When I captured him in a cup, I ran with him outside to deposit him in the bushes but ended up dropping him down into our neighbour's patio. Fortunately, the apartment there seemed to be closed for the season, and I soon learned that even if someone were bitten by one of these small Italian cousins to the larger, meaner ones, the result would be no worse than a serious bee sting.

We ping-ponged across that historic

lake a number of times, mostly able to avoid the train crowds of urbanites who seemed to swarm the Como towns on a daily basis. Considering the crowds, we almost missed going to Bellano, which was just up the shore from us. But upon discovering the town had a gorgeous downtown gorge, Linda convinced me we better get down into that grand gully before we tottered off to more distant regions.

Bellano likes to call itself the "town of artists" due to the concentration of painters and poets cloistered there, and it has been noted that the architecture has Celtic influences. I didn't detect any overt hints of either of those, but we were blown away by Orrido di Bellano, which is a wondrous narrow canyon, deep and dramatic, that snakes its way right into the heart of the city. Parking was an issue, and I don't have praise for the impatient drivers clogging the city streets, but must admit they were considerably less erratic, dangerous, and nasty than the maniacs who harassed us on the narrow byways of the Napoli Coast farther south.

Once we got to our destination, however, everyone was cordial and polite as we wended our way along the gorge's boardwalk with the cascading water drowning out any sounds from the nearby city streets. According to Discovering Bellano, the gorge was "created 15 million years ago by the erosion of the River Pioverna and the Adda glacier which, over the centuries, have shaped the rock into gigantic potholes, dark ravines and suggestive caves." We have our share of gigantic potholes in Nova Scotia and even a couple of dark ravines for sure, but these were my first "suggestive" caves, and I couldn't help but wonder what that suggested.

To be continued...



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CLT MTL Je Me Souviens

Story by Candice Marie Sage, PhD

COVER STORY

The City of Montreal is situated on the Island of Montreal, surrounded by a suburban sprawl to the north, south, east, and west. Both the City and the Island take their names from its centrepiece - a long-dormant volcano, first called Mont Royal by French explorer Jacques Cartier in 1535.

A traditional place of convergence and confluence where the mighty St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers meet, the land was originally inhabited by Indigenous Peoples. Today, Montreal is part of the unceded Indigenous territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation (pronounced Gah-nyen-gé-ha-ga), better known as the Mohawk Nation, part of the Haudenosaunee Iroquois Confederacy of Six Nations. In the Mohawk language, the Island of Montreal is called Tiohtià:ke (jo-jah-gay) which means "where the currents meet." The name is apt, as waterways across the region served as trade routes for Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years.

It is also a fitting moniker for the millions of Old-World immigrants who put their first foot down in the New World here after the city was founded in 1642. Their stories, as of those of subsequent generations, is also my story; as a native Montrealer, I am a melange of DNA, including Irish, French, and German.

As with the city's other ethnicities, Montreal's Celtic culture is neither a collection of distinct customs, nor a nostalgic echo. It is a living, layered - and often contested - identity, shaped by centuries of colonialism, migration, memory, resistance, and reinvention. Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and Breton communities have all contributed distinct cultural threads which come together - but never fully combine - within Montreal's complex, multilingual tapestry.

However, those diverse Celtic traditions of storytelling, music, and dance have evolved together. Whether it's the soothing sound of the uilleann pipes at Hurley's Pub on Crescent St. or grim ghost stories passed down through neighbourhood walks of Griffintown, cultural expression is a matter of survival; a way to anchor a community.

There is also a genuine time of gathering and kinship to herald the coming of Spring after the long Canadian winter: the St. Patrick's Day Parade, where - at least for one day - all of Montreal's peoples, regardless of their ancestry, gather to march, play music, dance, and celebrate a culture that is uniquely Celtic Montreal.

Celtic Montreal

Musician Dave Barton is a founder of the Montreal-based punk band The Peelers. With roots in Fermanagh, Northern Ireland,

his family settled in North Glengarry, Ontario, an area rich in Irish and Scottish Gaelic heritage just over the western border of Quebec. He reflects on Hugh MacLennan's classic Canadian novel *Two Solitudes*, which is set in Montreal; "the Ottawa river flows out of Protestant Ontario into Catholic Quebec - and that is where my story starts."

For others, it begins even earlier. "I'm Irish down to the ground," says Antoine Maloney, a founding member of Ciné Gael Montréal, a long-running film series showcasing Irish cinema. "Single root and stem. That family tree is Irish." His Irish father's people were from Constable, New York. He notes his mother "did her Master's in French in Quebec City and spoke French fluently" - hence his Francophone given name.

Professional story-teller Mike Burns carries his stories like family heirlooms. "My mother's people are called the 'wine' O'Connells - we've been called that for 600 years." A piece of family lore, Burns tells the tale of two brothers, a castle, and a supper cooked in wine instead of water. The siblings shipped hides and wool to Spain and brought in brandy and wine - "a great trade in exporting the stuff that would keep you warm on the outside and importing the stuff that would keep you warm on the inside." Burns grew up in a "rambling house" where people "brought music and stories and songs and a fiddler and the Guardian," adding, "You don't know when you are that age that that's not everywhere."

Author and Montreal historian Matthew Barlow currently works and lives in Massachusetts. He returns to Montreal with a sense of reclaiming an Irishness long submerged through the oppression that took place in the city's Lachine Canal district. "I am an Irish

Montrealer. My grandfather, who was the most important person in my life, introduced me to Irish Montreal." Barlow's journey crosses cities - Vancouver, Toronto, Boston - but finds its tether in Griffintown. "One of my ancestors died in an industrial accident in 1882 there, so I started working on the history of the area."

“The French influence on Celtic culture in Montreal is nuanced and structural. Rather than erasing Celtic identities, it shapes how those identities are expressed, preserved, and adapted.”

The relationship between Indigenous (particularly Mohawk) and Celtic cultures is marked less by visible cultural exchange and more by parallel experiences around colonialism, shared values about the importance of community, the lands which one inhabits, and emerging ethical awareness about social and environmental inequities. Instead of convergence, it reflects mutual recognition within a colonial landscape.

Montreal's Celtic identity is stitched with contradiction - memory and resistance, celebration and grief. The idea of a "Celtic convergence" sounds poetic - Celts mingling with the French, Indigenous, and the immigrant world, however, Montreal's saga is something more dynamic, where displacement and belonging go hand in hand, layered beneath class, politics, and history.

The Colonial Past

Montreal's history is rife with oppressors, the oppressed, and accomplices. First colonized by the French, the land was never



legally ceded or sold by the Mohawk Nation to colonial authorities. As such, Montreal exists on land taken without treaty. New France (including Montreal) was ceded to the British with the Treaty of Paris in 1763, after the Seven Years' War. The new Province of Quebec, or Lower Canada, was primarily Francophone, Catholic, and rural. The British brought Protestant institutions, English laws, and mercantile capitalism, and Montreal soon became the political and economic centre for a small elite of anglophone industrialists, bankers, fur traders, and merchants. The French population was excluded from political and economic power, leading to a wave of rebellions in 1837-1838 and violent suppression by the British. When the British merged the Provinces of Upper (Ontario) and Lower Canada, French Canadians were further marginalized as English became the dominant language of politics and commerce. Though the Mohawk Nation had supported the British as allies in war against the French, the British colonial system refused to treat the Mohawks as sovereign equals. The colonizers eventually implemented the Indian Act of 1867 to impose governance structures like band councils that weakened traditional Indigenous leadership across the country.

People from the Celtic nations came to Upper and Lower Canada also - primarily the Irish, Scottish, and Welsh. The French Bretons settled mostly in Quebec. Colonial legacies shaped community dynamics, playing out in the divides between Anglo-Protestant elites versus working-class Catholics, settlers versus Indigenous people, and "Lace Curtain" versus "Shanty" Irish.

In his first book, *Griffintown: Identity and Memory in an Irish Diaspora Neighbourhood* (UBC Press, 2017), Matthew Barlow provides a rich, deeply personal and academic exploration of Irish Montreal identity, postcolonial culture, and diasporic belonging. It serves as a cultural anchor for the "Griff" Famine Irish as a narrative of struggle, migration, and working-class identity. The neighbourhood emerges as a symbolic "origin myth" for Irish Montrealers, who lived and worked there alongside their Catholic French-Canadian neighbours. Barlow challenges the myth of Irishness, describing the term "Lace Curtain Irish" that bourgeois Irish used to distinguish themselves from the working classes, reflecting internal class divisions and identity. He reflects on the differences between Irish and Scottish immigrants. "There were Irish mayors and Irish premiers, but I still don't think they had the same kind of power base the Scottish Montreal-

ers would have had. Even the wealthy Irish folk in Montreal wouldn't have had access to those corridors of power."

Bruce Bolton, Past President of the St. Andrew's Society of Montreal, notes that the Scottish arrived before the British Conquest and developed an early alliance with the French. They soon began building modern institutional foundations, like McGill University, banks, churches, and hospitals. The city's "Golden Square Mile" was the heart of the elite - many Scottish, English-speaking industrialists, including their architecturally impressive mansions. Not all Scots who immigrated were wealthy. From 1750 to 1860, Scottish aristocracy and clan chiefs unleashed the Highland Clearances, which saw the forced eviction of Gaelic-speaking tenant farmers from their homelands. Gaelic culture in Scotland was decimated, leading to mass immigration to Canada. Bolton explains that the Scots intermingled with the Montreal population, leading to "intermarried families...where the priest would bury the French wife in the Catholic cemetery and the Protestant husband in another just on the other side of the fence." At first, it was only the Scots and French. The Scots were considered modest, humble, quiet, and very generous, "and then the Irish arrived in the 19th century," notes Bolton, "and they were much more vivacious, open - partying, having fun."

“However, Montreal Irish identity was layered with moral tension, ancestral reverence, and the struggle to remember the dead, including the thousands of Famine Irish buried in mass unmarked graves.

Twice a year, local company Montreal Haunted Walks offers a guided tour of areas important to Montreal's Irish experience along the Lachine Canal, including the neighbourhoods of Griffintown, Pointe St. Charles, and St. Henri. Guide Donovan King provides a brief Irish history lesson; in the 17th century, the English colonized Ireland, confiscating land and forcing Irish Catholics into serfdom and subsistence farming, severely restricting their rights. Food grown by Irish Catholics was exported to England and Scotland while the serfs were to live only on potatoes. The Great Famine (1845-1852) that devastated the Irish population was less about the potato blight than a campaign of genocide carried out by Anglo-Protestant landowners. In 1847, one million people died in Ireland and another million left. It is esti-



Montreal Flag

The flag of Montreal is white with a red Saint George's Cross and a red circle in the center, which also features five symbolic elements representing the city's founding peoples. These are the white pine for Indigenous peoples, the fleur-de-lys for French settlers, the rose for English settlers, the thistle for Scottish settlers, and the shamrock for Irish settlers.

mated that 70,000 Irish arrived in Montreal, which had a population of a mere 50,000 at the time. These Irish were often relegated as human ballast on lumber ships (deemed "Coffin Ships") returning to Canada. Hygiene was horrible, and passengers were already weakened by starvation. Typhus was rampant, and people arrived in Montreal looking like "grey zombies." Many died on route and were tossed overboard. A quarantine was set up at Grosse Île, an island in the middle of the St. Lawrence River, 280 kilometres northeast of Montreal. Five thousand Irish immigrants are buried there. In Montreal, then-Mayor John Mills had twenty "fever sheds" set up near the piers but there wasn't enough capacity to handle the sick and dying. Remarkably, the clergy, the Grey Nuns, and citizens of all kinds came to help in any way they could. Many families took in orphaned children.

Dealing with the number of dead proved very difficult. Mike Burns recounts how "they were just chunked into mass graves. No stones to mark them. Nothing." Eventually, a commemorative stone called the Black Rock was erected in 1859 by Irish workers who discovered the mass grave while building the Victoria Bridge. The massive boulder is located in Pointe St. Charles, between railway tracks and roads. It is estimated that 6,000 victims of typhus, mostly Irish, are buried there.

Sacred Sites

Sacred sites like Black Rock and Grosse Île serve as focal points of collective mourning and remembrance. Victor Boyle of the



Montreal Coat of Arms

The first coat of arms of Montreal was designed by Jacques Viger, the first mayor of Montreal, and adopted in 1833 by the city councillors. Modifications were made in March of 1938, and again in September of 2017, resulting in the version currently in use. The coat of arms was the only city emblem representing Montreal until 1981, when a stylized logo was developed for common daily use, reserving the coat of arms for ceremonial occasions. The first coat of arms was displayed on a white shield, which had a red saltire with four different charges between the arms, representative of the four main components of the population as viewed by Mayor Jacques Viger and the city council in 1833, when the arms were designed and adopted. To the top, a rose was for the English heritage of the population, a thistle for the Scots, a sprig of clover for the Irish heritage of the city, and a beaver for the French who originally settled the territory and traded in furs.

Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) recounts how his organization fought to return the Irish Commemorative Stone to sacred ground, and how they are still fighting to commemorate the forgotten dead beneath the Wellington Basin. "Unquiet graves," he calls them. The annual Walk to the Black Rock is a commemorative event held on the last Sunday of May organized by the AOH and Montreal's Irish community. Gathering at St. Gabriel's Church in Pointe St. Charles before marching about two kilometres to the Black Rock monument on Bridge Street, community members, clergy, and municipal officials speak, poems are read, and wreaths laid to honour both the Irish victims and the Montrealers who aided them - crossing cultural, linguistic, and religious lines.

A sixth-generation Irish-Montrealer, Scott Phelan serves as a Director on the Board of the Montreal Irish Monument Park

Foundation. He discusses the Irish Monument Park Project, a plan to build a major memorial and cultural park at the site of the Black Rock. Phelan frames the project as one of justice and reconciliation: a sacred duty to honour the dead, a tribute to the humanitarian response of Montrealers in 1847, and a long-overdue revamp of the burial site. The project includes key partnerships with Hydro-Québec (who purchased and re-zoned the land, becoming a major sponsor), the City of Montreal (committing \$15-20 million), the Anglican Church (which donated the land for the rock), along with stakeholders like Parks Canada and 22 Irish community groups. "It feels sometimes like 6,000 little hands holding arms and moving us forward. Montreal's Irish identity - rooted in the tragedy of 1847's Coffin Ships and fever sheds - serves as both a trauma and a badge of survival.

Black Rock beats with the unmistakable pulse of memory and, with it, an ache. Some Celtic stories here are shaped by exile, families uprooted by famine, clearances, or poverty. Others made their fortunes in Montreal and established themselves and their families as community leaders. Regardless, all of this exists within the broader shadow of colonialism. Those stories are not just about what was lost, but about what was taken - language, land, autonomy, and identity. Colonial histories aren't abstract here; they still play out through the politics of language.

Language

The British colonial project in Quebec, with Montreal as the political and economic centre for a small anglophone elite, served as a common enemy to Celtic, French, and Mohawk cultures. Language became the battleground, and its suppression has left deep wounds. G. Scott MacLeod is a multi-media artist, musician, and educator of Highlander and Irish heritage who sees the St. Lawrence River as a metaphor for the meeting of cultural and linguistic streams. "Language is the portal to culture. Without the language, you will never fully understand the culture." He explains how the reclamation, preservation, and revival of Celtic languages is both anti-colonial resistance as well as personal identity work, conveyed through artistic expression, education, and community events. Music and storytelling serve as vital community spaces for intergenerational transmission, meaning that places like Hurley's Pub are ground-zero for Celtic cultural survival and celebration.

Montreal is also home to Concordia University's School of Canadian Irish Studies, North America's only program offering a full

suite of academic credentials at undergraduate and graduate levels. Along with publishing the Canadian Journal of Irish Studies, the institution offers courses in Irish history, literature, mythology, folklore, music, theatre, film, diaspora studies, Celtic Christianity, and language.

In light of British political and economic domination, MacLeod speaks of learning French or Irish as an act of cultural continuity or resistance. Bernadette Short, an Irish dance teacher, says that when she travels to rural parts of Quebec, she feels a kinship with that community - a kind of shared cultural memory with the French-speaking residents. "They also know what it means to have had your language, your traditions, pushed to the side. There is a resonance there - an unspoken solidarity."

French in Quebec plays a dual role - as both a barrier and a bridge - shaping access to education, institutions, and cultural legitimacy.

In the fight to preserve Celtic languages, controversial language Bill 101 is a structural socio-political challenge. Scott Phelan puts it plainly: "the language laws have changed things. Of course, there is respect for why the French language needed protecting - but also a sense of loss. Some institutions suffered. Some opportunities disappeared. Yet, people adapted. They learned French. They wove their traditions into new contexts." Matthew Barlow adds that Quebec French nationalism had a way of uniting all English-speaking cultures against a common threat. Interestingly, today non-English speaking immigrants are getting their children involved in Celtic cultural expression like bagpiping and Highland dance as it affords them the chance to learn and practice English.

Identity, Community, and Belonging

Being Celtic in Montreal involves negotiating multiple, often conflicting identities: Celtic/French/Anglo, Catholic/Protestant, elite/working-class, bilingual Quebecer. Belonging isn't automatic - it must be proven, reclaimed, or reimagined, particularly among younger generations and mixed-heritage in-



dividuals. For example, Catholic schools and churches historically taught Irish identity. Today, younger generations seek new ways to connect. Samara O’Gorman, a young Celtic artist, activist, and St. Patrick’s Day Queen remarks “You can’t plan the future without knowing where you came from.”

Danny Doyle, President of the Erin Sports Association, emphasizes the role of community and family in preserving Irish identity, especially in neighborhoods like Griffintown and Point St. Charles. “Catholic schools were very stringent on our Irish heritage.” Their role in teaching Irish culture through concerts and events has faded, however, so Doyle advises that “if you don’t get involved, you can sort of lose it.”

Donovan King highlights how forty per cent of Quebecers have some sort of Irish lineage, due in large part to the mass immigration of Famine Irish and the number of orphans adopted by French families. He speaks of “being Irishais” as a “passport between cultures.”

Antoine Maloney explains that for some, it’s blood, while for others, it is a case of cultural adoption. He is of Irish and Welsh lineage, describing it as a woven identity - sometimes romantic, sometimes anti-colonial, sometimes both. He highlights the gentrification and fading landmarks of Griffintown where he lives as “a complete transformation” of the Lachine Canal area. It was “a pretty beaten-down neighborhood.” And though the city has changed, belonging still finds a way. “I’m not pure Irish, but I got involved.”

Matthew Barlow notes that belonging in Celtic Montreal is often found despite formal institutions, not always through them. He says “identity here is never simple...to be Irish in Montreal is to negotiate belonging constantly - to ‘prove your bona fides’ to a community that sometimes forgets its own. And yet, people keep trying. Because belonging isn’t about ease. It’s about roots that run deep enough to hold, even when the soil shifts.”

Mike Burns followed the call of storytell-

ing from Ireland’s western edge to Quebec’s “blue, blue skies.” He explains how the Celtic community exists in pubs and dance halls, in stories passed from fiddle to footstep. “Our house was a kind of rambling house...they’d bring music and stories and songs.”

Dave Barton emphasizes those links through music, listing off the city’s Celtic artists, including “Solstice, Switchigger, the Swindlers, Pat Lesyk, Dave Gossage...that’s Celtic Montreal.”

Morgane Filleau is the president of the Association of Bretons of Quebec. Breton culture in Montreal is unique. Bretagne in northwestern France is one of the seven Celtic nations. Because Breton culture is so linguistically and historically tied to France, it can sometimes be overshadowed by Quebec’s dominant French identity. She notes, however, that Breton culture in Montreal shares music, dance, and traditional dress with broader Celtic traditions like bagpipes, knotwork, “trad” tunes, and mythology.

“The idea of Celtic convergence comes alive in these networks of societies, sports clubs, music sessions, parades, and storytelling - not just preserving culture but passing it along for next generations.”

As such, Montreal’s tapestry of Celtic cultures aren’t just museum pieces - they breathe, they argue, they show up, they play music, they bury their dead, and they show up again. People give their time, their kitchens, their Sunday mornings.

Celtic Montreal is supported by several key institutions. The St. Andrews Society preserves Scottish traditions through events, highland games, and music. The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada is one of the oldest highland infantry regiments, serving both ceremonial and regimental purposes.

In the Irish community, what was once divided along class lines - “white collar St. Pat’s” versus “blue collar Point” - is now increasingly cooperative. “We all support each other,” explains Scott Phelan. “We all show up to each other’s events.” The Irish Protestant Benevolent Society preserves Protestant Irish memory. The United Irish Societies (who organize the annual St. Patrick’s Day Parade), the Erin Sports Association, and the St. Patrick’s Society support both cultural continuity and grassroots charity. The Montreal Irish GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) promotes Irish Gaelic games and culture in the city. Hurley’s Pub is a cultural perfor-



Montreal 1642 Tartan

In May of 2016, Council approved the creation of the Montreal 1642 Tartan. Less than a year later the St. Andrew’s Society unveiled the tartan and gifted it to the City and the citizens of Montreal at a reception at City Hall, inviting all Montrealers from every background to join together as one clan. In May of 2017, the St. Andrew’s office received the tartan registry certificate from the Scottish Register of Tartans.

mance hub for live bands, music sessions, and storytelling nights. The Ancient Order of Hibernians works on cultural and political advocacy. The Montreal Irish Monument Park Foundation is uniting community to commemorate those lost to the Famine. These institutions reflect both class and religious diversity, coalescing to preserve and promote a shared heritage.

The cultural cornerstone of Celtic Montreal is the annual St. Patrick’s Day Parade. First held in 1824, it is one of the oldest and most significant cultural events in North America. Started by Irish immigrants as an expression of identity, Catholic religious pride, and political solidarity, the yearly celebration evolved into a symbol of integration, resilience, and visibility for Irish Montrealers in a city once dominated by British and French elites. Today, the gathering keeps Irish traditions alive by promoting music, dance, Gaelic games, and the Irish language. It’s an opportunity for people to publicly fete their Irish roots, and for others to simply be Irish for a day. As Bruce Bolton quips, “the successor of an imperial British regiment - the Black Watch pipes and drums - leads the St. Patrick’s Day parade! That wouldn’t happen anywhere else in the world.” In that regard, the parade is very much a celebration of the tapestry that is Celtic Montreal.

Celtic Montrealers are finding new ways to negotiate numerous identities linked to mixed heritage, multiple languages, religions, and social classes. They bring Celtic culture to life through both art and sport.





Concordia Salus

The motto of Montreal is Concordia Salus, which is Latin for "well-being through harmony" or "salvation through harmony". This motto has been part of the city's coat of arms since 1833. It reflects the values of co-existence, diversity, openness, and inclusion that are important to Montrealers.

Art and Sport

It is human nature for people to reclaim a sense of belonging through something old and rooted. Celtic Montrealers hold a kind of quiet reverence for where they came from. It's not nostalgia – it is more like stewardship; a responsibility to carry the flame of their culture forward through art, music, stories and more. As Mike Burns notes, "it's in the ghost stories, in the tin whistle, in the way a session is passed down, not just played."

Montreal Ghost Walk has professional actors that take guests on tours of areas that are reportedly haunted, and the city even has its own haunted pub walk. The Bloomsday Festival is a literary and cultural celebration held annually that is centred around the life and works of James Joyce. It is part of a global tradition that marks June 16, 1904, when the events of Ulysses take place in Dublin with protagonist Leopold Bloom. Storytelling through film has emerged as a key medium for preserving and promoting Celtic culture in Montreal through organizations like Ciné Gael Montréal, along with local filmmakers like Scott MacLeod. As he puts it, artistic expression captures "the Celtic lyrical tapestries of lived resistance, not passive memory."

Ultimately, culture is carried through doing: the act of dancing, piping, storytell-

ing, and more.

Celtic music is both a cultural anchor as well as a source of adaptation and innovation, a historical record and present-day expression. It enables Irish, Scottish, Breton and Welsh Montrealers to connect with ancestral roots while evolving with local context. Montreal bands like The Peelers blend traditional music with punk, reflecting the diasporic North American Celtic experience – further proof that tradition isn't frozen, it's flexible. Band founder Dave Barton says, "The Peelers were born out of Scots Gaelic and Irish culture of Glengarry County. It's trad and punk rock, head-on." He further explains that it isn't a culture that is stuck in Ireland or Scotland – it has been transposed. He writes songs not about Ireland itself, but about Irish life in Montreal. "These stories – the blacksmiths and farmers, the storm masons and dock workers – are told in punk songs and fiddle tunes. They are a part of a modern mythology, grounded in Montreal's Celtic rhythm."

“Celtic and Québécois musical traditions share a structural and emotional DNA.”

Rhythmic patterns, podorythmie (foot-tapping), and fiddle styles reveal mutual influence, often rooted in common rural experiences. Bruce Bolton notes, "A lot of traditional French-Canadian music is based on Scottishness. When they hear it on the bagpipe, they say, 'I've heard that before.'" Some musical projects also bridge Celtic and Indigenous histories, especially in places like Griffintown.

Music in Celtic Montreal is imbued with intergenerational learning and community. Hurley's Pub music sessions and storytelling nights started back in the 1990s. Institutions like the Montreal Piping and Drumming School and the Siamsa School of Irish Music support musical mentorship and open participation across generations. Jeremy Tetrault-Ferber, a music educator with Montreal Piping and Drumming, says that older people are taking up piping as a retirement project. Siamsa teaches traditional instruments like the flute, fiddle, whistle, banjo, mandolin, and harp, as well as choir and dance, with weekly sessions for all skill levels, as well as pub sessions. Denis Martin, Director of the Siamsa Board and a music teacher, says "sessions at Siamsa are open, with no stress. We're about making people feel comfortable and helping them get over the first hurdles of playing with others, which can be intimidating." Music acts as a gateway for younger generations,

who engage with heritage through creativity and community. Those multi-generational sessions provide opportunities for storytelling too.

Dance in Celtic Montreal embodies heritage and cultural continuity, teaching identity without words, and encoding stories, rituals, and relationships through rhythmic precision and embodied performance. The city's Irish step dance scene is highly visible and intergenerational, with competitive schools and feiseanna (competitions) shaping cultural connection. The emergence of Riverdance in 1994 brought the dance form to the world stage and it remains popular, even with non-Celts. The Bernadette Short School of Irish Dance in Montreal provides one such example; a student by the name of Kahentisa (Brenna) Alfred, a young Mohawk woman whose paternal grandfather is Irish. She grew up on the First Nation's Reserve of Kahnawake Mohawk Territory and began Irish dance at the age of four. She has always felt that the "Irish were very welcoming."

Scottish dance (e.g., Highland or Scottish Country Dance) is more ceremonial and communal, tied to regiments and society events. Heather McNabb, a Highland Dance teacher, shares that some of her former students are coming back to it in their 30s.

Collaborations with French-Canadian groups (e.g., Les Pas Léger) reflect shared rhythm and communal storytelling. Irish melodies and footwork blend naturally with Québécois folk forms. Dance connects young people to culture, even when language or memory is distant. Teachers like Bernadette Short now instruct the grandchildren of their first students, highlighting dance's longevity as a cultural pipeline.

Sport in Montreal doesn't just preserve Celtic culture – it activates it, bringing together Irish, Scottish, and Welsh identities on the field, in the bleachers, and across generations. Sport is movement, memory, and belonging, without the need for a family tree or a history book. Increasingly, it's also a space where Celtic and Indigenous traditions find common ground through the Irish sport of Hurling – which is similar to Canada's national sport, Lacrosse (no, it's not Hockey!). Some pan-Celtic events in Montreal (e.g., Festival Celtique de Québec, or select Highland Games events) may include or recognize Breton participation.

Founded in 1948, the Montreal Shamrocks are a longstanding Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) club in the city, and one of the founding organizations of the Gaelic Athletic League Association of Montreal (GALA). Their mission is to promote Irish



The Peelers

sports and culture here and connect the Irish diaspora and wider community through healthy competition, including Gaelic football, hurling, and camogie. Jake Ouellette is the first ever Canadian President of the club. His father is Italian Canadian and his mother Irish Italian. Previous Presidents were Irish. He believes that sports provide a healthy and social “clan” for young people to engage with.

Beyond sports, these organizations help maintain Irish heritage and identity in events that involve music, language, dance, and traditional Irish community values. They participate in the annual St. Patrick’s Day parade and collaborate with other groups involved in Irish culture and education. Sports engage young people with Celtic culture and generate more opportunities for intergenerational exchange.



Reclamation

The engagement of young people with Celtic culture is evolving - they are learning the bagpipes, playing Gaelic sports, editing heritage videos, writing poetry, studying the Irish language, remixing traditional Celtic music with punk and other musical genres, and - all the while - developing a sense of clan. Samara O’Gorman started at 18 years old as a St. Patrick’s Day Parade Princess. She is now a Montreal Irish poet, musician, filmmaker, and sought-after public speaker for youth engagement. Her immersion in cultural preservation occurred through Irish Studies at Concordia and she is now involved with the Canadian Irish Migration Preservation Network.

As she says, “with reverence to the ancestors, I felt my heart change, something illuminated, and now I am on fire, I won’t stop, I can’t...”

“For some younger people, Celtic identity is about cultural curiosity rather than ancestry, and less about lineage and more about belonging, creativity, and meaning making.”

Kahentisa (Brenna) Alfred says, “young people are looking for community, where you belong, even if you might look like an outsider,” citing her role in the St. Patrick’s Day Parade, “they made me feel like the most Irish person there, a part of the family!”

It seems that some institutional heritage groups are beginning to intentionally engage youth, though tensions remain over how to reach them (e.g., social media over more formal engagement) and competition with other life responsibilities like school and raising a family. Also, younger generations are asking hard questions of organizations that require critical thinking: how does this culture relate to Indigenous reconciliation, or can Celtic culture be feminist, anti-racist, and relevant?

Some institutional leaders express concern over their capacity to continue their work and, perhaps more pertinently, how to get young people reengaged. “We’re shrinking as a community,” admits Danny Doyle. “It’s always the same people participating. If we could somehow unite the groups under a brand...there’s a lot of potential.”

Sadly, the short-lived Montreal Celtic Festival (2015) was perhaps an idea ahead of its time.

The Canadian Irish Migration Preservation Network (CIMPN) is a not for profit organization based in Quebec, dedicated to researching, commemorating, and celebrating the history and contributions of Irish immigrants across Canada. CIMPN is working on a digital directory that will provide public access to a wealth of resources related to Irish Canadian ancestry. Katherine Diamond is a graduate student researcher coordinating the website portal project. She says, “Montreal is emerging as an Irish destination, a part of an Irish cultural Renaissance.” CIMPN’s Montreal website project is closely tied to the Montreal Irish Monument Park Foundation. With both a digital gathering space and a physical one, it could very well serve as a launch pad for branding and promoting all that is Celtic Montreal.

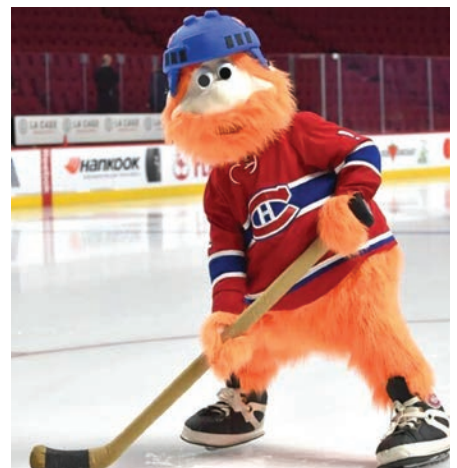
Je Me Souviens

Celtic Montreal isn’t just a convergence. It’s a collision - of cultures, histories, and futures, and what survives is what is shared, what is told, sung, and fought for. There are concerns over the loss of cultural transmission due to the decline of churches, schools, and large families. Intergenerational transfer remains the glue, but it’s less about purity of lineages and more about preservation of cultures through adaptation, coexistence, and meaning making. It confronts displacement, engages with colonial histories, and



"Je me souviens" is a French phrase that translates to "I remember" in English. It is the official motto of the province of Quebec.

celebrates survival through voice, music, and memory. The future of Celtic Montreal lies in youth engagement, cross-cultural solidarity, and continued storytelling because this culture is not inherited - it is made, in the telling. Few oral histories survive anymore, so it is vital to keep the stories alive; in the pubs, on film, in the music, and the poetry. Over time, the political divides have softened. Today, the Irish Monument Park Foundation is a major bridge institution uniting both Protestant and Catholic Irish traditions. In Montreal, Celtic music and dance are not just traditions - they are evolving, participatory rituals that hold memory, forge identity, and create bridges between generations, between cultures, and between the past and the future. They are not merely preserved - they are practiced, questioned, and reimagined. And that is what keeps the cultures alive - Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and Breton, distinct and yet part of a Celtic mosaic that is ever-evolving. As such, Celtic Montreal remains exactly what it has always been: a community in the act of remembering, a people in motion, rooted and reaching at once - a yearning...to return and a refusal to forget.





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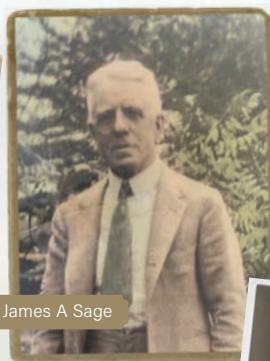
Love in Montreal, Genealogy *and the* Way Home



Susan Boyce



Liette Dufour & Harry M Sage



James A Sage



Elaine & Fred



Candice Marie Sage



By Candice Marie Sage, PhD.

My maternal grandparents fell in love in Montreal. Harry Sage, my grandfather, was a first-generation Irish Canadian with a charming smile who did not speak French. My grandmother, Liette Dufour, was a beautiful, leggy Québécoise who didn't speak English. They met at a roller-rink and Harry was smitten. They went to Catholic Church together. Liette learned English. They married and settled in Lachine, a suburb of Montreal Island. He sold advertising for Reader's Digest International, and she was a homemaker for three daughters. Their middle child, my mother Elaine, would meet my German immigrant father, Fred, at Expo '67 in Montreal, and your author took earthly form soon after.

Harry had been to Ireland and discovered that the Sages hailed from Rathcool Townland in County Cork. His father, James Aloysius Sage, was born there in 1870 to Constable John Sage and Eliza (nee Walsh). His family, including brother Alfred and sister Theresa, immigrated to Montreal in 1884 and lived in St. Laurent Ward. However, there was rumour that our family tree branched out to County Donegal on my great-grandmother's side. She was a Boyce. And while I was unable to conduct the County Donegal search during my homecoming to Ireland in the summer of 2024 I have since, quite serendipitously, had the opportunity to work with professional genealogists to unravel the mystery of my Donegal connection.

Enter Kate and Mike Lancor of Old Friends Genealogy, both with Celtic heritage and links to the French in Quebec. Both have Irish American great-grandparents. Kate's ancestral lines include Fitzpatrick and Waters (Templemore, Co. Tipperary), McGuirk, Byrne and McDermott (Co. Wicklow), and Regan, Walsh and Harney (Co. Waterford). Mike's ancestral lines are Doyle, Redmond, Whelan and Kennedy (Co. Wexford), and Laide and Sullivan (Co. Kerry). Interestingly, Mike's maternal grandfather's Lesperance line, his maternal grandmother's Labarge line, and his paternal grandfather's Lancor (Lincourt) line all emigrated from France to Quebec and then to northern New York State. In 1851, his Lincourt and Lesperance ancestors lived in St. Ours and Valleyfield, Quebec just outside of Montreal. His Labarge ancestors were originally in Saquenay, Quebec and his Lincourt line was in Quebec City in the 1650s. The couple have travelled to Quebec City and toured Grosse-Île, which served as a quarantine station for ships from Ireland arriving during the Irish Famine (circa 1845-1849).

Old Friends Genealogy is a two-person operation. The couple went into business ten years ago after spending 70+ combined years tracing their ancestors and those of their friends. They recently returned from their 13th trip to Ireland, during which they searched for my Irish lineage. Deeming this their "ancestral trip," they visited their confirmed DNA cousins in Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow, Dunganstown, Co. Wexford, Ballydurn, Co. Waterford, and Glenanore, Co. Waterford.

DNA is now a valuable tool for determining one's roots, especially for periods prior to emigration. The interest is certainly there; over 25 million individuals have submitted DNA samples to Ancestry.com alone in recent years.



“By exploring the family trees of one’s DNA matches, “long-lost cousins” can now be identified and contacted.

A genealogist, well-versed in understanding how to sort through those numerous DNA matches, can be extremely helpful to “break through brick walls” and dead-end streets.

Mike and Kate have developed family trees for 180 clients, often following multiple lines to ancestral roots in Ireland, Scotland, Canada, Australia and most European countries. Lately, they have been focusing on Irish and, frequently, French-Canadian ancestry. Genealogists have subscriptions to multiple ancestry websites, and - most importantly - the expertise to know what records to look for, where to find those records, and how to use one record to determine where to look next. Family trees are complex, and the biggest danger is descending “down the rabbit hole” and following the wrong person back in time. Genealogists ensure they discover at least one confirming record for a given ancestor before going back to the previous generation.

They can spend thousands of dollars on different subscription websites used to conduct their research. Knowing when to leapfrog from one website to another comes from knowing which records are housed on each website. As Mike and Kate note, “There really isn't any substitute for that other than years of doing it. It's fun because it's like a jigsaw puzzle in a lot of ways - if you find the right piece in the puzzle, then things start falling together pretty quickly.” Historic newspaper clippings and obituaries are also important documents that can reveal personal insights about the deceased.

In terms of hiring a reputable genealogist, most have their own websites. Check out their reviews, determine their areas of expertise, and touch base with them to see if they can meet your research needs. Kate and Mike typically spend an hour working with a new client to determine whether what they are looking for can be achieved.

My search involved three family lines: the Sages, the Kellys and the Boyces.

Though they had considered retiring, the duo is going to continue to ply their passion. As Kate says, “It's always exciting to help

someone walk in the footsteps of their ancestors in Ireland, Scotland, Canada or elsewhere.

“It isn’t all about records, it’s about learning about a person - which is a whole other dimension to connecting with one’s ancestors...”

So, back to my great-grandfather James Aloysius Sage, who was born in County Cork and emigrated to Canada during the 1880s with his parents John and Elizabeth Walsh Sage. In the 1891 Census, James (aged 21) was living with his parents in Montreal. There, he was a fur trader, eventually Vice-President of the Waldren-Druin Company, and one of the oldest active members of the Dominion Commercial Travellers Association that shaped Canadian business and trade practices in the late-19th and early-20th centuries.

As for his wife to be, Susan Boyce was born in Quebec City. In the 1871 Census, she was six months old living with her parents Edward Boyce and Mary Kelly in Montcalm, Quebec. Ten years later, she was living with her widowed mother Mary Kelly Boyce (aged 34) and her six-year-old brother Edward. Susan met travelling salesman James Sage - likely on one of his many business trips - in Quebec City where they married August 14th, 1894. They would later move to Montreal to raise their family.

The Sages purchased a brand new rowhouse on Hutchison Avenue at Fairmount, where they would raise ten children (six boys and four girls), my grandfather being the youngest. The eldest child, Muriel, stayed in that house until her death at age 99! James was warden for St. Michael’s Parish - the “forgotten ward” - where he used his business acumen to develop the community. He was also a trustee of the Federation of Catholic Charities and served on the executive of St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Still employed in the fur trade at 80, James Sage was struck by a motorbus while crossing the street in Chicoutimi, Quebec, and died of his wounds. He and his family, including my mother, are interred at Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery, less than a kilometre from where I live in Montreal.

Both the Boyces of Quebec City and the Sages were “White Lace Irish” - families of modest affluence. The Boyces immigrated before the Famine years and the Sages after. Their stories are very different from the refugee “Griff Irish” who came to Montreal under extreme duress during the Great Famine via the Grosse-Île quarantine.

An endearing quality of Mike and Kate is their particular delight in being able to allow clients to “walk in the footsteps” of their Irish immigrant ancestors. They produce historic maps that allow their clients to visit the specific townland(s) where their ancestors lived before departing the beautiful Emerald Isle. We reflected on what might have been the conditions to tear our ancestors away from the incredible place of the faeries that is Ireland: religious prejudice, economic necessity, or plain starvation that would move human beings into a ship to cross the Atlantic Ocean with little knowledge of what awaited on the other side. I look forward to my next visit to Ireland, knowing with certainty where I came from. From Montreal to County Cork to Donegal, I have found my way home. My ancestors are waiting. As Kate and Mike told me, “They wanted to be found.”



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Montreal's Celtic Complexion





Chris Nilan

The National Hockey League has had its fair share of gutsy Irishmen through the years, including Red Kelly, Joe Malone, King Clancy and Terry O'Reilly. Perhaps no one was grittier than Chris "Knuckles" Nilan, however, who recorded more than 3,000 penalty minutes over 15 seasons with the Montreal Canadiens, New York Rangers and Boston Bruins. Nilan's 688-game career as an on-ice enforcer found its roots in his younger years. "I live in Montreal now, but I grew up a Bruins fan in West Roxbury, Boston – a very Irish section of the city. That part of town was pretty tough back in the day, and I learned how to use my fists as a kid to get by. Growing up there definitely had an influence on the way I played hockey." Like many Bostonians, the 67-year-old is fiercely proud of his Celtic heritage. "My brother and I researched our ancestry, and we can trace our father's family history back several generations to Cork, Kilkenny and the west coast. "I'm typically Irish; loud, opinionated and emotional. And I've always had a real blue-collar work ethic, like a lot of those hardnosed Irish immigrants."



Jennifer Stephenson

Montreal native Jennifer Stephenson began highland dancing at the tender age of six. "I enjoyed the competition. This is one of the few sports where boys and girls compete against each other on a level playing field – there is no gender division. And choreography is also an important aspect, which provides a much-needed creative outlet." She remains active in the sport for the physical benefits, as highland dance improves both cardiovascular health and strength conditioning. In addition to her work in performance and competition, she opened the Stephenson School of Dance in 1977. She has represented Quebec at the Canadian Inter-Provincial Highland Dancing Championships, has become fellow of the Scottish Dance Teachers' Alliance, and has chaired ScotsDance Canada Championship Series several times over the past two decades. "I am passionate about passing on the traditions of highland dance, and I am proud of the network of dancers and teachers that I have trained who will go on to keep our traditions alive in the province of Quebec."



Kevin Reason

Kevin Reason relishes his roots. "I grew up in the Verdun district of Montreal," shares the father of four. "There were a couple of strong communities there at that time – the French and the Irish. Both communities are still there, and both are very proud, family-oriented peoples who are happy to help their neighbours out in difficult times. My own family was always involved in parades, sports associations and other Irish expat activities. We celebrated St. Patrick's Day for, like, a month every year." Like many of his heritage, Reason has visited the land of his ancestors. "I have been over a few times; 2015 was the last time we were there. We toured Ireland and Northern Ireland. My wife has roots in the Dublin area and also has some Scottish heritage." When he isn't tracing his roots, Reason heads-up The Liam Foundation, named for his son, who was diagnosed with Mitochondrial Disease in 2019.



Olivier Craig-Dupont

It was a rainy afternoon in an old, Irish pub when Montreal native Olivier Craig-Dupont first heard the soulful sounds of Irish bagpipes. “I started to learn Irish music on the whistle, and it was while listening to some of the old players, that the pipes revealed themselves to me.” Craig-Dupont – who is of Irish descent on his mother’s side – has been playing the pipes for more than a dozen years now. “Irish music can be linked with the old harp, and the bardic tradition. This music connects us with the deep roots of nature and some lost sense of enchantment.” His best musical moments, he shares with a smile, are when he busks in the Montreal metro. “Playing alone to whomever wants to listen kind of puts you in a right mood for this music. You practise your stuff at your pace. People like it or not; you don’t know, and you don’t care.”



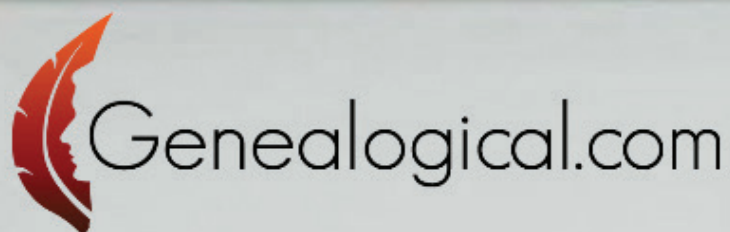
Heather O'Neill

Award-winning Montreal author Heather O'Neill (*The Capital of Dreams*, *Lullabies for Little Criminals*) stays close to home. “I was born here and have lived the majority of my life here. I left a couple of times but kept returning. Being here in the 1990s and early 2000s was the perfect place for a young artist – it was cheap, safe, and bubbling with creativity. I lived in the Plateau district then, and it was standard to go out at 3 a.m., stumble out of a pub, and get creative with somebody. I currently live in Outremont, so I’m still close to that neighbourhood.” Over time, she became more of an artisan. “My sense of creating stories has become stronger. When I started writing, I felt like I was a poet, and I had these imagery and visceral moments. With experience, I developed confidence in building worlds through structure, and it has been interesting to see my technique evolve and to have a sense of the ending and all the twists and turns it takes to get there. I can now see the bigger picture as I am creating it.”



Jason Lang

Montreal musician Jason Lang remains true to his roots. “My grandfather left Scotland with his family in 1928 or 1929. He was from Edinburgh. On my grandmother’s side, the McVicar’s left Scotland earlier and went to Ontario before making their way to Quebec. My mother (renowned folk singer) Penny Lang – the first-born Canadian of our family – had a little thing in her late 20s with American folk singer Dave Van Ronk, and I am the bastard child of that affair.” The acoustic apple didn’t fall too far from the tree, it would appear, and – like his musical mother – Lang understands and appreciates the power and beauty of bringing melodies and lyrics together. “A good song is one that captures something – a moment, a feeling, essentially the truth. Something that, ultimately, we as humans can connect with and relate to and feel like we are not alone.”



Genealogy often feels like a treasure hunt, piecing together the stories of those who came before us. Unfortunately, many sleuths give up when they believe they've come to a dead end. They fail to realize that reversing direction by looking for *living relatives* can fill in the gaps in our family stories.

Learning how to *find* living relatives opens up an entirely new bank of sources for finding the departed. And this new book, written by Cheri Hudson Passey, an expert on finding next of kin, aims to help genealogists at every level learn to trace descendants of ancestors, both direct line and collateral. This process, known as *reverse genealogy*, involves creating a detailed family tree, identifying relatives, and using modern tools to track them down.

Cheri Hudson Passey is a professional genealogist, instructor, writer, speaker, and owner of Carolina Girl Genealogy, LLC. She uses her skills to identify and locate the next of kin for the families of World War II soldiers who are listed as missing in action. The goal is to use DNA to positively identify remains and, with the permission of next of kin, bring our war heroes home.

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Genealogy in Reverse: Finding the Living
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By
Cheri Hudson Passey



Padraic X. Scanlan

Montreal-born author and academic Padraic X. Scanlan, PhD recently released his latest work, *Rot: An Imperial History of the Irish Famine*.

Scanlan's father's lineage is part of the Irish Catholic diaspora that emigrated to Quebec in the 1850s just after the Great Famine. *Rot* examines how the Irish Potato Famine (1845-1852) resulted from the unsustainable socio-economic policies and practices of British colonialism at the roots of early capitalism.

Currently, he teaches labour history at the University of Toronto, is a fellow of St. Michael's College, and is a research associate at both Harvard University and the University of Cambridge. His studies on the British empire explore the transition from colonial slavery to free labour, and the antislavery movement that led to emancipation.

The Great Famine of 1845 that resulted from a potato blight in agriculture across Europe was a new topic for the academic. He discovered many comparisons between the poorest Irish agricultural labourers and formerly enslaved workers of the British Empire. Ireland became a research focus, and the book *Rot* was conceived. While "unsentimental and a little skeptical" about his long-lost Irish roots, he says the death of both his parents over a short few years fueled his inquiry. It helped to process feelings about what he describes as a "kind of mythical Irish identity."

“When the British conquered Ireland, the Irish were forced into subsistence farming and were paid some of the lowest wages in the Empire.

As livestock and other more expensive crops were used to pay taxes to the Empire, the Irish became completely dependent on potatoes as a food source. Prior to the famine, the Irish were vulnerable to precarious employment and rent-gouging associated with the emerging free market system under capitalism.

Scanlan was not an expert in Irish history, but there were many resources available. One of the most challenging aspects of the project was getting started, with “a mountain of material to read, and no real roadmap through it.” He states that the ‘Irish Question’ was a “very big deal for the Victorians, so there was a lot to go through...government records, census data...the ‘Schools Collec-

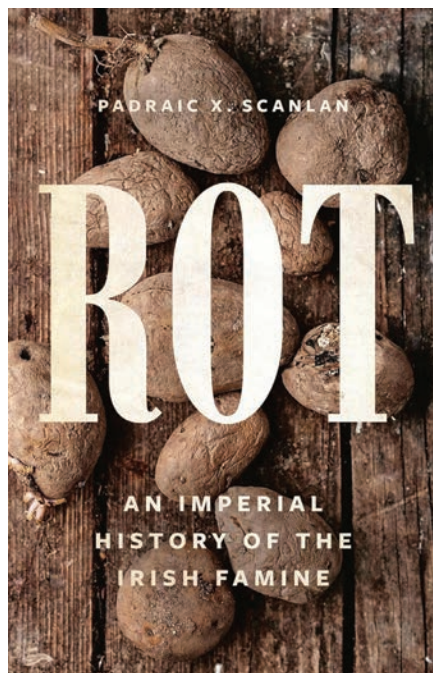
lize a larger argument.” His writing style has benefited from better editing and keeping an eye out for details that will resonate with a broader audience of readers. A rewarding part of the project, he says, was when someone’s testimonial in the records gave voice to “exactly the point I hoped to make. Finding those anecdotes and utterances amid reams of quotidian details or figures is an electric thrill for me.”

Seeing this type of project to fruition doesn’t stop when the writing is complete.

Scanlan reflects that it is “something of an anticlimax to finish a book - it is satisfying to save a final draft and send it in, but it takes a long time from that moment to see a finished product.”

His experience with publishers at both Robinson Books and Basic Books was “terrific.” The first few book reviews have been published and have been “very encouraging,” and the audiences Scanlan has talked to have been “enthusiastic.” He is curious to see how responses may differ between audiences in North America, the U.K. and Ireland, “to see what resonates and what doesn’t for readers,” as each may have a different perspective on the ‘Irish Question.’

Scanlan’s next project is a book about industrialization and labour in Britain and the Empire. He is “deep in the research now, and excited to see what emerges,” as will be readers interested in the evolution of capitalism.



tion’ of folklore recorded by Irish schoolchildren in the 1930s.”

There were also troves of manuscripts and excellent works by other historians. Beyond the socio-political literature, Scanlan delved into works on botany, ecology, and agricultural science to better understand the conditions that made the spread of the potato blight possible.

Scanlan notes he gets “a lot of pleasure and satisfaction from the process of digging through piles of scholarship and primary sources, synthesizing, finding anecdotes and characters and moments that crystal-





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Gráinne

Songs of Seál and Sisterhood

Within Montreal's Irish cultural scene, one band is redefining what it means to carry tradition forward. Gráinne, an evocative all-female folk group composed of Daragh Mondoux, Esmé Cavanaugh, Lily MacLean, and recent addition Ella Partington, isn't just a band; they are a feminine force shaping the future of folk music.

Rooted in a shared passion for Irish folklore and resistance ballads, the women of Gráinne represent a tapestry of cultural backgrounds. Drawing from Irish-Canadian, Trinidadian-Dutch, Venezuelan, and Scottish roots, each member brings depth and diversity to the group's sound and purpose. As Mondoux puts it, "we all identify as Irish culturally, wrestling with what it means to be 'Canadian,' and the various ethnicities that go with it."

The group's journey began humbly in 2022 at Concordia University's Irish Studies program. Originally meant to be a one-time performance for a Bealtaine Ball, the musical experiment soon blossomed into something more enduring. "It became a summer of harmonizing and arranging, reinterpreting and rehearsing," recalls Mondoux. "Three years later, we're still proud of our place in the Irish Montreal and folk music communities."

In time, Gráinne would evolve from music into something more meaningful. "The folk songs we play are imbued with resistance, romance, rebellion, and revelry," Mondoux explains. "We're very drawn to rebel songs and historical narratives. That's where some of our 'Canadiana' folk fall into our repertoire. Old work songs like 'Wellerman' that exploded during lockdowns inspired us deeply."

For Partington, who recently immigrated from Galway, Ireland, joining Gráinne

was a revelation. "The Irish music scene back home is very male-dominated," she reflects. "Playing here with women my age lets me reimagine songs like 'Whiskey in the Jar' through the different perspectives that women can bring to songs like these."

MacLean echoes this sentiment with poetic clarity: "It's a fulfillment of my cultural legacy, but also of a childhood fantasy of being a culturally-informed, musical woman. I remember walking along Ste. Catherine Street and seeing a woman playing 'Star of the County Down' on a harp. I was dazzled. There seems to be a surge of all-women Celtic bands popping up all over the world."

Their recent debut EP, *Óró Sé Do Bheatha Bhaile*, is tied to Gráinne O'Malley, the pirate queen and namesake of the band. "It's a song about exile, rebellion, and femininity," MacLean explains. Recorded "live off the floor," the EP captures the raw energy of their pub gigs and community performances.

Beyond the music itself, Gráinne shines through their theatrical storytelling. In 2024, they staged *Thinning the Veil: An Irish Halloween Experience*, an hour-long showcase of musical lore. "An Irish legacy of Halloween was always inevitable," says Mondoux. MacLean adds, "my master's thesis was on the sean-nós tradition, which is all about storytelling."

“Though men often dominate recordings, women, mothers, and grandmothers carried on the oral tradition. It is very powerful to bring that forward on the stage and in the studio.”

The power of that cultural reclamation reached a peak when the group sang an an-

cient song of death in Irish during the *Thinning of the Veil* performance. "There was stillness, with grown men crying," MacLean recalls. "But the best part was that we were being diligently supported by three male musicians who believed in our vision."

Still, not every venue embraces their blend of shanties and rebel songs. "We have to read the room," Mondoux admits. "Friends of Sinn Féin are all in, but Bloomsday Montreal had to be coaxed into letting us perform a Pogues tune."

Yet, just like the tradition itself, their audiences are evolving. "Trad is cool again," says Partington. "Post-COVID, people dusted off the tin whistle and remembered where they came from. But that identity is changing, especially for women. All-women groups like Biird are breaking from the airy-fairy and delicate representations of Irish femininity."

Gráinne brings their rawness to the stage with intention. "A good live show is visual as well as sonic," Cavanaugh insists. "We coordinate outfits. We have chemistry. We're friends, and we can share that with any room."

For Mondoux, the stories behind the music matter just as much as the songs themselves. "History is the story that keeps going," she says. "Irish ballads of romance are also expressions of colonization, emigration, and resistance."

For now, Gráinne stands at a crossroads that bridges ancient melodies with modern conviction. "In the sean-nós tradition, there is an aspect of 'saying' the songs, called the *scéal*, which means 'the story,'" adds Mondoux. "These songs are about expressing a feeling so that the listener can feel it too."

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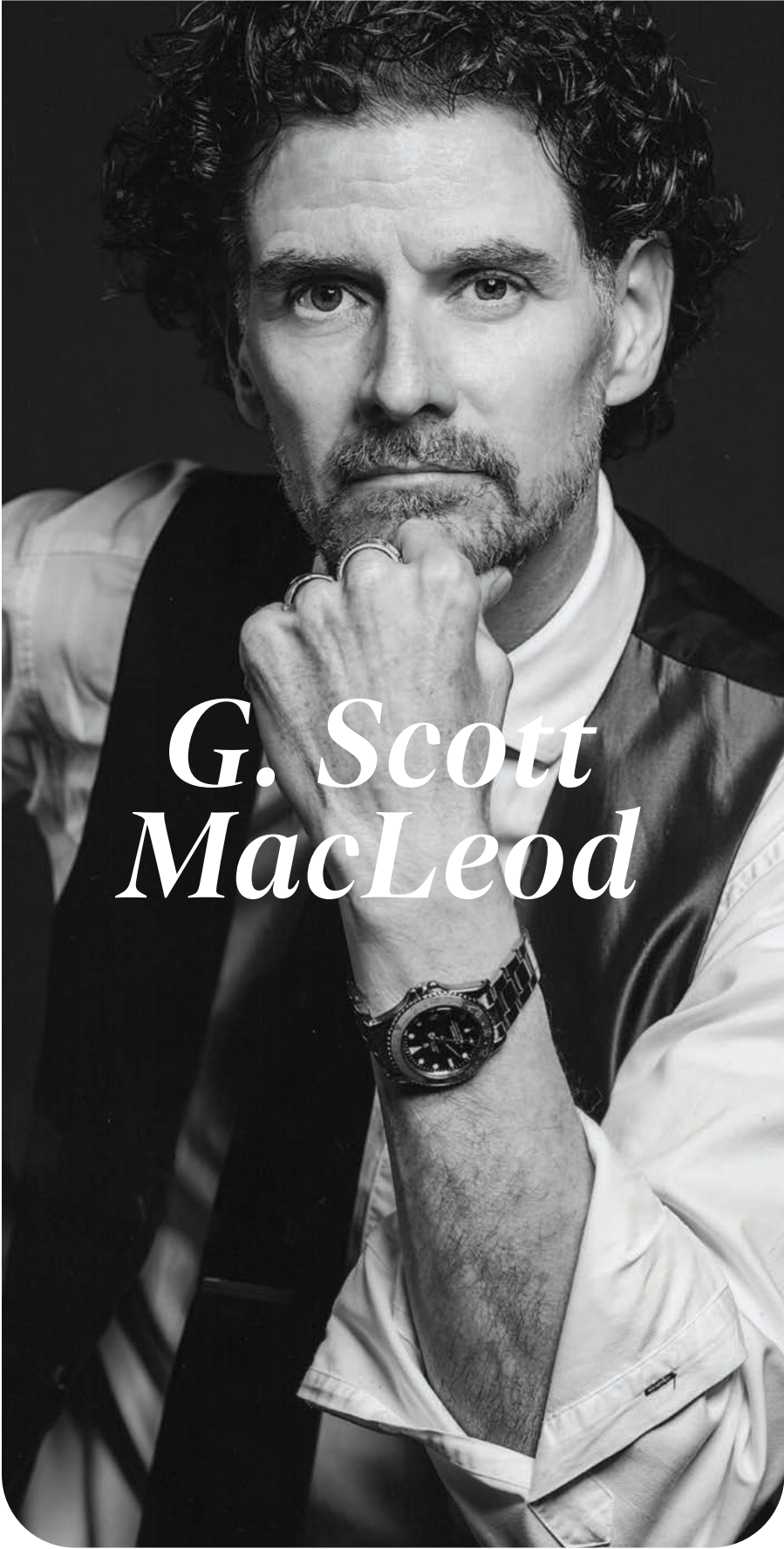
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A black and white portrait of G. Scott MacLeod. He is a man with dark, curly hair and a beard, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. He is wearing a light-colored shirt under a dark vest. His right hand is raised to his chin, with several rings visible on his fingers. A watch is on his left wrist. The text "G. Scott MacLeod" is overlaid in a large, white, serif font on the lower left side of the image.

G. Scott MacLeod

G. Scott MacLeod is Montreal-based painter, photographer and musician who has a myriad of creative projects on the go at any given time.

My Celtic family names are MacLeod, MacIver, Gillespie and Watson. My father's lineage is from the Isle of Lewis in the Hebrides of Scotland. The MacLeods and the MacIvers came to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and settled in Baddeck in the 1830s. The Gillespies came to the United States and Canada during the late 1800s, early 1900s. My mother's people, the Watsons, were originally from Fife and crossed the Atlantic on a steamer in the mid 1800s.

I have perhaps been more interested in my roots than some, and I have explored these themes in the Celtic stories, songs, and myths.

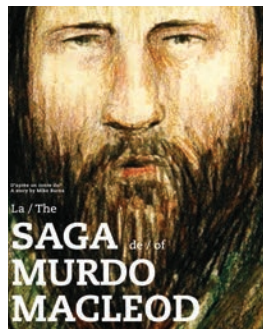
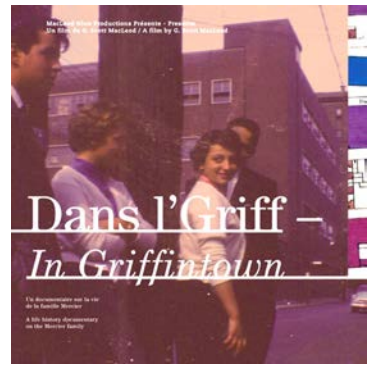
I see the value of holding onto the positive attributes of my Scottish roots. I am comfortable with maintaining that identity as long as I feel it is a part of the collective whole, amongst those who are willing to share and enjoy our differences.

Montreal is a fusion or 'métissage' of many cultures, and because of that our Celtic consciousness as our ancestors knew it has changed. I believe that this is a good thing, however, as many Celts left their homelands because of religious, linguistic, and social divides. While Canada is certainly not perfect, and we have a difficult colonial past to reconcile, our new construct is a positive attempt at something that we have never seen before.

Like many cultures, our Celtic histories were maintained through the oral tradition, long before the written word, and it was customary for the bards to commit our stories to memory. Today, we are lucky to still have people in our communities and cultures, committing part of their lives to being master storytellers and relating our cultural Celtic wealth. Our western cultures should take more time to appreciate and honour our elders and artists, as history has proven this to be a worthwhile exercise. Wisdom, knowledge, and experience are among us, but it's up to us to cultivate, celebrate, and share this wealth.

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Lochie Bisaillion's *Highland Heart*

saillion, though his grandfather, an American, didn't speak French. His grandmother, however, came from the Hebrides, while his mother's side boasts Belfast roots through her father, William Charles Sloan.

With decades of piping under his belt, Bisaillion acknowledges the challenges as well as the changes within the craft.

“It is a fairly niche instrument, which in years past didn't have a great deal of support in the broader musical community. But with the internet and globalization, that has changed a lot.”

What hasn't changed, however, is the journey itself, which has been rich with unexpected privileges. “Being a piper grants you access to all kinds of prestigious occasions, meeting dignitaries and interesting people from so many backgrounds.”

And some of those dignitaries are quite literally royalty. “I have had the honour of playing for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on three occasions, as well as Prince Philip and other royals.”

Another standout moment was attending a piping course at the prestigious Army School of Bagpipe Music and Highland Drumming, located at Inchdrewer House in Edinburgh.

When it comes to the instruments themselves, he leans toward tradition but is open to innovation. “I play the Great Highland Bagpipe for ceremonial occasions and parades. In my own time, I play Scottish smallpipes, especially in more social settings. I certainly enjoy the freedom of experimenting with alternate expressions of music.”

Bisaillion's involvement in Montreal's Scottish and Celtic community runs deep.

He currently serves as a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Pipes and Drums - one of just eight RCMP pipe bands across Canada. He is also an instructor at the Montreal Piping and Drumming School, helping to foster the next generation of pipers.

But are young people still interested in piping? “Yes,” he says, “but not to the extent of other places. It's not a large part of Quebec culture.”

He remains hopeful for change, however. “Continued expansion of the Montreal Piping and Drumming School would help, as would promoting interest within cadet programs.”

Bisaillion also believes that there is work to be done on a broader cultural level. “The St. Andrew's Society is doing its best to promote Scottish culture in Montreal, but losing the Montreal Highland Games this year due to a lack of sponsorship is a huge loss.”

Adding to this, he acknowledges that the contributions of Scottish immigrants and their descendants in Quebec's history are often, unfortunately, overlooked. “I believe we should recognize the extensive Scottish contribution to the development of Montreal and Quebec as a whole.”

Bisaillion is happy to play his part in that process: his 2025 piping plans include attending the annual C  irdeas smallpipes gathering in Vermont, competing at Ontario highland games in Maxville and Almonte, and joining the “usual host of local pipe band parades and events.”

“Many years later, I'm still having fun,” he notes, “and I am always thankful that my dad persuaded me to learn the pipes - they have been rewarding in so many ways.”

At 61 years of age, Lochie Bisaillion's life is anything but quiet. While most people might reach for the remote to relax, Bisaillion reaches for his bagpipes and the deeply rooted tradition that is, for him, a living heritage.

Now living in Montreal's largely English-speaking west end after spending most of his life in Ottawa, Bisaillion has been involved with the instrument for an astonishing 49 years. “I've been piping since I was 12,” he shares matter-of-factly with Celtic Life International. “My father was my main inspiration. He was a piper and had a profound love of all things Scottish, likely inspired by his mother.”

As it turns out, his father was more than just an enthusiast.

“He was the regimental sergeant major of the Montreal Highland Cadet Battalion during World War II,” explains Bisaillion. “After that, he joined the RCMP.”

Inheriting that duty and tradition, piping was a significant part of Bisaillion's identity early on. That sense of direction and purpose hasn't faded with time.

“I continue to pipe today because, essentially, it becomes a way of life, especially being ex-military and ex-police. There were lifelong opportunities to play.”

Adding to these layers, Bisaillion's lineage is a tapestry of cultural threads. His paternal side bears the French surname Bi-

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Kate Bevan-Baker



"The fiddle is more than an instrument - it's a voice passed down."

-Liz Carroll, Irish American fiddler and composer

From the hills of Scotland to the coastlines of Newfoundland and Labrador, the roots of Kate Bevan-Baker's musical life run deep. A powerhouse fiddler, professor, and scholar based in Montreal, Bevan-Baker's story is one of rich musical inheritance and creative evolution.

"My dad's from Scotland and my mom is from Newfoundland, where I was born," she explains to Celtic Life International via email. "I had no shortage of traditional music growing up - two of my aunts are professional fiddlers, so it didn't take long for me to fall in love with the instrument."

By the age of four, Bevan-Baker had her first fiddle, taking classical lessons while soaking up old-school tunes from her family. "I grew up with both traditions hand-in-hand, and I am just as comfortable reading sheet music or learning by ear. I love being able to switch between styles depending on the setting."

This versatility would define her musical path as she seamlessly bridged the worlds of classical precision and folk spirit. But more than technical skill, it is the essence of fiddling and a sense of connection that keep her committed.

"Fiddling is such a communal thing. You can sit down with someone from a different background, and even if we don't speak the same language, we can start playing tunes together. There's always something new to learn."

That love for learning is one of her hallmarks. Whether it's Irish jigs, Québécois

reels or a compelling Scottish tune, Bevan-Baker approaches each tradition with reverence and skill. "I like to learn directly from the source. I always aim to be true to the style that I am playing."

Bevan-Baker's own fiddle is a handcrafted piece of living history. Made in 1985 by François Gagnon, a retired Montreal luthier, the instrument is a patchwork of cultures and locations: maple from Montreal's Olympic Stadium, wood from Germany and timber from the Gaspé Peninsula.

"It is a very special fiddle. François still does the occasional adjustment and even comes to my concerts. I've never known the maker of any of my previous instruments, so this one feels like it has a personal story."

While her classical training lends a refined touch to her tone, Bevan-Baker's heart beats with tradition. "These days I play mostly Irish and Québécois music, so those are my strongest influences. Some folks can pick up on my classical background. I've gotten good at breaking down the stylistic details of different fiddle styles, which makes switching between them a lot easier."

As she notes, Bevan-Baker is very much a product of influences that span traditions and time periods. "I was a huge Natalie MacMaster fan as a kid, and I was lucky enough to take lessons with Jerry Holland in Cape Breton during my teens. I also love the legendary Irish bands of the 1970s and 1980s;

Bothy Band and Planxty are still on heavy rotation for me. More recently, I've been enjoying artists like Fergal Scahill and Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh."

She defines a good tune as "one that sticks in your head in the best way. Bonus points if it uses more than just two strings!"

To date, highlights of her career include performing at Ireland's famed Willie Clancy Summer School and representing Canada at the World Expo in China. "I love when musical adventures double as cultural ones."

At home in Montreal, she is optimistic about a rising interest in fiddling among young people. "I've seen a growing number of young folks getting into fiddle music, especially across Quebec - sessions, workshops, programs like Siamsa; it's amazing to see so many ways for them to get involved."

Still, she sees room for growth. "It would be amazing to see more fiddle programs in elementary schools. Even one-off workshops could open doors. That's where the next generation of fiddlers starts."

The coming months will be busy ones for Bevan-Baker, who will be performing at festivals across Quebec, including Chants de Vieilles, Mémoire et Racines, Festival Ripon trad and La Virée trad, and making her debut at the Aqpiq Jam in Kuujuaq. She'll also be touring Montreal with her Celtic trio, Gairloch, as part of the Montreal Arts Council's "CAM en tournée" series, alongside long-time collaborators Seán Dagher and David Gossage.

"I still get so much joy from playing, and I feel lucky to live this life through music."

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Lucas Lawton's Leap into Legacy

When Lucas Lawton first laced up his soft shoes as a kid in suburban Montreal, he didn't believe he would become the lead in one of the most iconic dance productions in the world. Yet, from a chance encounter with Irish dance in Montreal's West Island to stepping into the title role in *Lord of the Dance*, his journey has been anything but ordinary.

"I started dancing when I was seven," Lawton recalls. "My parents were really big on physical activity, so I tried a lot of different things like hockey and soccer. I quit most of them. But one day, we went to a friend's house and her daughter did a little Irish dance performance. I started mimicking her, and my mom said, 'let's try this.'"

Lawton began with one class a week at Montreal's renowned Bernadette Short School of Irish Dance.

"It was just for fun at first. I liked the social aspect. I wasn't super competitive. Around the age of 13 or 14, teachers kept telling me I was talented, that I could go far. I started to take it more seriously, added a second class, and once I put energy into it, I started to rise quickly through the competition levels."

He danced competitively until his early 20s before moving into the professional realm. "I started professionally dancing around 23 or 24 years of age, and I have been doing productions and touring for about eight years now."

But the path to the coveted role in the production that first captured his imagination was anything but direct. "I remember watching the VHS of *Lord of the Dance*. That was

my version of a superstar. I couldn't even imagine how anyone from Canada could get there. It really captured my attention."

Ironically, it was during the lockdowns of COVID that his big break arrived. "They were putting on *Feet of Flames* in Taiwan, which was a spin-off version of *Lord of the Dance*. They needed to cast 60 dancers but couldn't do in-person auditions, so they were done over Zoom. I studied some choreography and submitted videos. I knew that was my shot."

Lawton was selected and traveled to Taiwan, where he danced under strict protocols. "I knew I had to make a good impression. I worked really hard in the lead-up, and during the show I was put in a lot of extra numbers, which was what I was hoping for."

That hope did eventually evolve into a dream come true. When *Lord of the Dance* resumed with its 25th Anniversary Tour, Lawton was one of the dancers chosen. But he wasn't quite prepared for what was to come.

"They started having me train for the lead role. I didn't expect that. But they saw something in me."

That final step came in 2024. "I auditioned for Michael Flatley himself. He's amazing at giving people opportunities. I auditioned at 3 p.m., and I was performing the lead role the next day at the matinee. It was surreal."

Even now, the weight of the moment hasn't entirely settled in. "Every time I get to do that role, I'm still blown away. The fact that I get to put my own stamp on a performance that's been so iconic for almost 30

years is crazy and special."

Lawton's story is not just about personal triumph. It's also a reflection of a living tradition.

"Irish dance is always evolving - the roots may be traditional and celebratory, but the form itself is contemporary, athletic, and dramatic."

As a teacher now himself, Lawton sees the next generation starting to bloom.

"There's still a steady interest. Maybe not like the boom years of Riverdance, but kids are finding new ways to engage with it. TikTok and Instagram Irish dance videos are going viral and that is exciting."

He also sees new creative horizons ahead. "We have only had professional Irish dance for 30 years. That's nothing compared to ballet or classical art forms, so we are very much at the beginning. I would love to see Irish dance in musicals, in film, or even a Broadway show. There is so much we haven't explored."

After a well-earned break at home in Montreal, Lawton will head back on tour later this year, with performances scheduled in South Africa, Australia, Taiwan, and across Europe. But he's not just riding the wave of past dreams fulfilled; he's imagining new ones.

"It still hasn't sunk in that this is my story. But I love telling it and I'm excited to see where it goes next."

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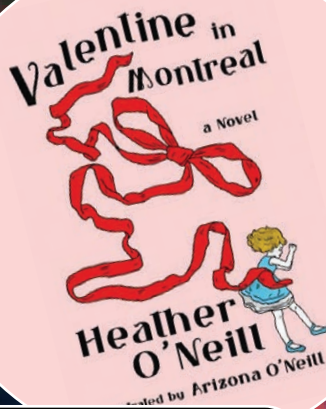
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The Ranks of Green

by Samara O'Gorman

A late winter day brought many
new melodies to our town – so serene.
Folk all united to chant,
and join the ranks of green.
I've let my gowns out to dry –
the craving for vitality
runs to the pit of my stomach,
and she is not shy.
The days are growing longer,
the bands are coming out to play –
a great transformation from slumber, to parade.

I declare all of you monumental,
regardless of your role.
My past is tied to a cannon and lit –
exile me to a land of gold,
for I will no longer sit.
Oh, and how I cherish this warm wind – let my locks cover my face!
I strive to be foolish, tired, and all over the place.

For we slept for too long now,
my brothers and sisters.
Our mother land is calling us –
and I know where I march,
will you follow at my side?
Listen to the pipes howl,
latch onto the drums that roar,
to me there is no brighter sound than the Irish:
behold how we soar.

The Ranks of Green was composed for The Irish Embassy's Community Reception at the Ambassador of Ireland to Canada's official residence in Ottawa. It was later requested by the St. Patrick's Society of Montreal to be performed at their annual charity luncheon, and also at Concordia University for their St. Patrick's Day reception. The poem was written in anticipation of the 198th St. Patrick's Day Parade in Montreal that returned in full force in March 2023 after a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The inspiration comes from the undeniable vibrancy and joy that define Montreal's Irish community and our green season.

Portrait by Stefan Morisset



Montreal Haggis Poutine

Montreal and Scotland enjoy a number of deep culinary connections, including this melange magnifique!

Ingredients

1 kg potatoes
 2 tbsp olive oil
 Sea salt & pepper to taste
 225 g haggis
 1/2 cup hard cheese,
 broken into small chunks
 1 cup gravy, homemade
 or store-bought

Topping options:

Spring onions
 Fresh chillis
 Red onion
 Fresh parsley
 Cracked black pepper
 Chilli flakes

Instructions

Preheat oven to 200 degrees celsius. Rinse and julienne potatoes. Leave the skin on or peel, as you prefer. In a large bowl, toss with olive oil and a generous sprinkle of salt and pepper to season. Spread potatoes onto a large baking tray lined with parchment paper or foil and bake for 45-55 minutes until golden and crispy, turning once or twice throughout. While the chips are baking, crumble half a haggis into a non-stick pan and sauté at medium heat until cooked throughout and starting to crisp up a little. Prepare your gravy and set aside. Break cheese into small chunks and prepare the rest of your chosen toppings – slice spring onions, slice or dice fresh chillis and red onion, chop parsley, etc. Once the fries are cooked, transfer them to a large platter and top with half the haggis crumble and cheese chunks. Pour gravy on top and add the rest of the haggis and cheese. Sprinkle on your choice of toppings and dig in.

Bon appétit!

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State of the Clans 2025

*Despite the challenges facing contemporary clans, hope and help are on the way.
Chris Muise tells us more...*

The township of Fergus, Ontario has a rich history of Scottish heritage, and for the last 80 years of that history, citizens turned to the Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games to celebrate that heritage with gusto.

“The Fergus Scottish Festival is a humongous event in our community,” says Elizabeth Bender, executive director of the annual gathering. “It really is a flagstone event for all of Centre Wellington, which is our larger municipality. Fergus is a Scottish town, and the mission of the Fergus Scottish Festival is to honour the athletic, musical, and storytelling heritage of Upper Canada and Scottish communities just like ours.”

Founded by area resident Alex Robertson in 1946, the festival began as a humble one-day event, but over eight decades has grown to a three-day happening that hosts upwards of 25,000 attendees.

Having missed the chance to celebrate their 75th annual event due to the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, Bender promises that they are pulling out all the stops for this year's August affair.

“We even have an 80th anniversary tartan that has been designed for us,” she beams.

Even with all the great music, good food and drink, feats of athleticism, and Scottish swag that will be on-site to entice, Bender expects one of the most popular spots to be the heritage village.

“Our heritage village is where we host all of our clans who attend the festival.”

David Radley, past president and cur-

rent Clan lead for the Fergus Scottish Festival, pipes in with a similar sentiment.

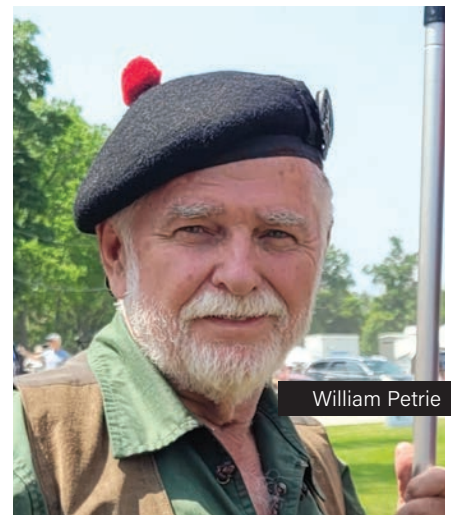
“Frankly, it's a very important part of the festival, not only to the people that host the tents, but the people that visit the tents, who are often very passionate about their Scottish roots.

“It's one of the ways that they can identify with those roots. If you've been at the festival, you'll know it can be very difficult to get around the clan area because there are so many people wanting to come and identify with their clans. We talk of the four pillars that hold up this festival; Highland dance, pipes and drums, heavy athletics, and clans. The clans is one of those four major focuses for the festival.”

“Clans have been a part of Scottish life going back centuries, initially forming as a circumstance of geography and familial bonds.

“You can look at clans as being lineage-based, and that's typically how it works,” explains William Petrie, chair of Scots of Canada. “But also remember, clans are tribal organizations. If you move into an area or you marry into that area, you become part of it. It's not because of genealogy - it's because of community. You'd swear allegiance to the clan chief if there is one, but a good number of them didn't have one. When you moved into a MacGregor area, you became a MacGregor, that's it.”

Of course, as times changed, so too did



William Petrie

the function that Scottish clans performed in society. The modern concept of the Scottish clan system is more heraldry than hamlet, with an official system regulated by the Court of the Lord Lyon in Edinburgh. Historically, one needed to prove lineage to a clan in order to join.

And while Scottish culture remains very popular in North America, Petrie paints a grim portrait of the clan system as recently as 2019, which was when he stepped into a leadership role with Scots of Canada.

“I took over as chair, and I started solving problems by first finding out what the real problem was. In the case of clans and Scottish societies of Canada, membership was down to about 49 members, from a high of about 75-80 in the heyday. People were leaving, saying they don't see any value in it, that it was not doing anything. And if you don't do anything, nothing happens. If you're not out there in front of people or doing things, then you're going to reap the rewards of that, which is nothing.”

Clans have never formed in a vacuum; they exist to serve a communal need, whether it be operating as a community under a sovereign, aiding people displaced by the clearances to stay connected with their kin, or helping ex-pats feel like they have a piece of home across the Diaspora. If that purpose is lost, it can mean an existential crisis for that clan.

“I delved a little bit deeper into that, and what I discovered was that there were a lot of organizations that were initially formed because of that need for community, for helping each other,” Petrie elaborates. “For instance,



the Clan Gregor Society was the second or third clan organization that was formed in Scotland, and it was formed to actually help young Clan Gregor members - young MacGregors - because they were still being extremely impoverished and discriminated against back in the early 1800s.

“Some of those had lasted quite some time, but the reasons for them to exist in terms of helping each other faded away, and as a result so did they. When they lost the reasons why their clans were formed, it poses a little bit of problem for them, since that need is not 100% there anymore.”

“If the problem facing modern Scottish clans is a loss of purpose, the solution is easy - find a new purpose.”

According to Petrie, it is better to change than die trying nothing, even if it means opening doors to people who might not have met the old criteria for clan membership.

“The reality is that, in Scotland, more than half of the population are not in clans or families,” says Petrie, noting the global pro-

liferation of people around the world. “That is the bottom line; the number one names in Scotland are Smith and Brown.

“That fell into part of what the problem was; we didn't have a large reservoir of people to draw from, in terms of volunteers, or providing a good revenue base. The solution was to open up what we call individual memberships.

“There are two types of membership with Scots of Canada: organizational memberships and individual household memberships. My insane goal is to have 40,000 households. I don't think that's impossible; as of the last census, we had 6.6 million people in Canada who are of Scottish descent, and half of them at least are not in clans or families. So, 3.3 million, that's a good pool.”

Petrie sees household memberships as the way to keep clans an active part of peoples' lives, and to achieve that goal which every long-lived cultural collective seeks to conquer - getting young people involved.

“You have to think pipeline, succession. We want people to get engaged as kids and be part of it, to be there even as they go through the part of their life where they're busy with

the career and the kids. But then they will come back and bring their kids with them.

“It is a microcosm in terms of what the criteria is for membership in Scots of Canada as an individual household; you're aligned with our organization and agree with our objective to promote Scottish culture and history, and you're Scottish by birth, descent, or by inclination.”

The simplest thing Petrie has done to revive Scots of Canada membership - which is now up to 116 clans - is just reminding people that the organization exists, and what it has to offer.

“This is human nature; people need to belong, to feel loved and useful, and to have hope. Any cultural society has to fulfill certain portions of that...”

“The worst thing for any clan organization is to just say you get to belong, and then not let people know what's coming or what they are going to be doing. The number one reason you're going to lose clan members is they forget about you, or they don't see value in what you are doing. That value just has to apply to that sense of belonging, to a sense of hope.”

Perhaps that is why the clan tent is such a vital pillar to the Fergus Scottish Festival, and why it is such a hit with attendees.

“It's becoming easier for a number of reasons,” shares Radley. “So many people come with idle curiosity, it's amazing how many of them get involved and engrossed with their Scottish background. I think that's where the festivals come in; at the festivals, it used to be people wanted to go to collect things. They wanted to come away with little trinkets, as if to say, ‘I've been here and I've got a badge.’ Now they want to go for experience. It's really neat to see these people who have come Saturday morning, met with their clan, went off and got themselves outfitted, and they're out there in The Parade of Clans that afternoon.

“We've now got 52 clans registered this year, which is close to our record,” Radley adds, admitting to at least one problem, but one that's nice to have. “The biggest challenge right now is finding space to get all the clans into our area this year. We need a bigger footprint.”





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JULY 2025

Embro Highland Games July 1	Michigan Celtic Festival July 11 - 12	Feis An Eilein Gaelic Concert Series July 15 - August 12	Manawatū Scottish Pipe Band – 100 Year Concert (New Zealand) July 20
Gathering of the Clans July 1	Payson Scottish Festival July 11 - 12	Hebridean Celtic Festival July 16 - 19	Scottish Festival of Motoring July 20
Kenmore Highland Games July 2	Angelbachtal Castle Park Highland Games July 11 - 13	Fiddler's Green Festival July 16 - 20	Stonehaven Highland Games July 20
Clan Leslie Society International Gathering 2025 July 3 - 6	Newton Stewart Traditional Music and Dance Festival July 11 - 13	Canada's Irish Festival on the Miramichi July 17 - 20	Ulster Fleadh July 20 - 27
Penticton Scottish Festival July 4 - 5	Tiree Music Festival July 11 - 13	Highland Storm July 17 - August 14	Burntisland Highland Games July 21
Almonte Celtfest July 4 - 6	Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival July 11 - 20	Cambridge Scottish Festival July 18 - 19	Meitheal Summer School July 21 - 25 / July 22 - 26
Kincardine Scottish Festival & Highland Games July 4 - 6	Alva Highland Games July 12	Cleveland Irish Cultural Festival July 18 - 20	Yn Chruinnaght Celtic Gathering July 21 - 27
Newcastleton Traditional Music Festival July 4 - 6	Athena Caledonian Games July 12	Maine Celtic Celebration July 18 - 20	Inveraray Highland Games July 22
Aberdeen Highland Games AU July 5	Inverness Highland Games July 12	Orilla Scottish Festival July 18 - 20	Mull Highland Games July 24
Bodmin Heritage Riding Festival July 5	Jersey Shore Drumming & Piping Classic July 12	Glasgow Lands Scottish Festival July 19	Festival Le Cornouaille July 24 - 27
Forres Highland Games July 5	Kamloops Highland Games July 12	Lochcarron Highland Games July 19	Durness Highland Gathering July 25
Luss Highland Games July 5	Robert Burns Commemorative Supper July 12	Minnesota Scottish Highland Games July 19	Eilean Dorcha Festival July 25 - 26
Willie Clancy Summer School July 5 - 13	Skagit Valley Highland Games July 12 - 13	Tomintoul Highland Games July 19	ButeFest July 25 - 27
Sterling Renaissance Festival July 5 - August 17	Earagail Arts Festival July 12 - 26	Arizona Highland Celtic Festival July 19 - 20	CCE MAD Week July 25 - 27
Grandfather Mountain Song and Language Week July 6 - 11	The Perth Highland Games July 13	Elizabeth Celtic Festival July 19 - 20	Dayton Celtic Festival July 25 - 27
Antigonish Highland Games July 6 - 13	Catskills Irish Arts Week July 13 - 19	Fête des Remparts July 19 - 20	Forest Fest - Forest Fleadh July 25 - 27
International Festival of the Celtic World July 9 - 13	South Sligo Summer School July 13 - 19	Sherwood Park Highland Gathering July 19 - 20	2025 International Clan Sinclair Gathering July 25 - 29
The Grandfather Mountain Highland Games July 10 - 13	The Swannanoa Gathering Celtic Week July 13 - 19	The Tall Ships Races Aberdeen 2025 July 19 - 22	New Brunswick Highland Games July 25 - 27
Stonehaven Folk Festival July 10 - 13	The Chris Nilan Golf Classic in support of The Liam Foundation July 14	Helena Valley Highland Gathering July 19 - 26	Pacific Northwest Scottish Highland Games & Clan Gathering July 25 - 27
	Ceol na Coille Summer School of Irish Traditional Music July 14 - 18	Joe Mooney Summer School July 19 - 26	Speyfest July 25 - 27

Airth Highland Games July 26	Iowa Irish Fest August 1 - 3	Sparta Celtic Festival August 8 - 9	Stirling Highland Games August 16
Balquhiddy, Lochearnhead & Strathgryre Highland Games July 26	James Morrison Traditional Music Festival August 1 - 4	An Ri Ra Montana Irish Festival August 8 - 10	Albany Scottish Festival and Highland Games August 16 - 17
Dufftown Highland Games July 26	Edinburgh Military Tattoo August 1 - 23	Fergus Scottish Festival & Highland Games August 8 - 10	Bitterroot Celtic Games & Gathering August 16 - 17
Halkirk Highland Games July 26	Aberlour Strathspey Highland Games August 2	Goderich Celtic Roots Festival August 8 - 10	Maine Highland Games & Scottish Festival August 16 - 17
Loch Lomond Wee Beastie Novice Triathlon July 26	Aboyne Highland Games August 2	Irish Fair of Minnesota August 8 - 10	National Heritage Week August 16 - 24
Mackay Scottish Bluewater Fling AU July 26	Dundonald Highland Games August 2	IrishFest La Crosse August 8 - 10	Crieff Highland Gathering August 17
Uxbridge Scottish Festival July 26	Inverkeithing Highland Games August 2	Assynt Highland Games August 8	Kiltwalk Dundee August 17
St. Andrews Highland Games July 27	Mey Highland Games August 2	Central New York Scottish Games & Festival August 9	Sydney Mines Highland Games August 17
Scoil Acla Summer School July 27 - August 2	Newtonmore Highland Games August 2	Strathpeffer Highland Gathering August 9	Feis An Eilein Week August 19 - 23
Belfast TradFest July 27 - August 3	Spokane Scottish Highland Games August 2	Cortachy Highland Games August 10	Masters of Tradition August 20 - 24
O'Carolan Harp Festival July 28 - August 4	Bridge Of Allan Highland Games August 3	Tain Highland Gathering August 10	Mull of Kintyre Music and Arts Festival August 20 - 24
Arisaig Highland Games July 30	Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann August 3 - 10	Piping Live! August 11 - 17	Jamestown Regional Celtic Festival and Gathering of the Clans August 22 - 23
Belladrum Tartan Heart Festival July 31 - August 2	Highland Village Day August 5	Ballater Highland Games August 14	North Lanark Highland Games August 23
Ballyshannon Folk & Traditional Music Festival July 31 - August 3	Isle Of Skye Highland Games August 6	Rock The Fiddle August 14 - 16	Quechee Scottish Games & Festival August 23
Féile an Phobail July 31 - August 10	Montelago Celtic Festival August 6 - 9	Milwaukee Irish Fest August 14 - 17	Tønder Festival August 27 - 30
AUGUST 2025	Feakle International Traditional Music Festival August 6 - 11	Festival Celtes et Cie de Saint-Malachie August 15 - 16	Canmore Highland Games August 30 - 31
Dornoch Highland Gathering August 1	Killin Highland Games August 7	World Pipe Band Championships August 15 - 16	Virginia Scottish Games August 30 - 31
Dublin Irish Festival August 1 - 3	Fairport's Cropredy Convention August 7 - 9	Philadelphia Folk Festival August 15 - 17	
Glengarry Highland Games August 1 - 2	Lunenburg Folk Harbour Festival August 7 - 10	Berea Celtic Festival August 15 - 18	
St. Andrews Society of Detroit Highland Games August 1 - 2	Aberfeldy Show & Games August 8 - 9	The Pipers' Gathering August 15 - 18	
		Helmsdale Highland Games August 16	



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Festival Focus



Féis an Eilein

**Summer 2025
Christmas Island, NS**

www.feisaneilein.ca



Share the living legacy of Nova Scotia's Gaelic heartland this summer as Féis an Eilein in Christmas Island celebrates 35 years of Gaelic language and music. Founded by settlers from the Isle of Barra in 1802, this historical hub has long been at the forefront of Gaelic cultural preservation. Each year, the Society-Comunn Féis an Eilein hosts youth music and language camps, a celebrated Gaelic concert series and the much-loved annual Féis an Eilein itself. Rooted in traditional values of family, integrity and foresight, the annual gathering welcomes guests from across Canada, the U.S. and beyond. Whether you are a fluent Gaelic speaker or just curious, you will find culture, connection and community woven through every event.

Grandfather Mountain Gaelic Song and Language Week

**July 6 - 11, 2025
Banner Elk, NC**

www.acgamerica.org/grandfather-mountain



Set amidst the stunning mountains of North Carolina, the annual Gaelic Song and Language Week - An Comunn Gàidhealach Ameireaganach (ACGA) - offers attendees a unique opportunity to sing, learn and connect to Scottish Gaelic culture. Whether beginner or advanced, participants will immerse themselves in daily classes in both language and traditional song, including waulking and milling songs, mouth music and more. This year's celebrated instructors include Dr. Alasdair C. Whyte, Joy Dunlop and Mary Traywick. Participants will also enjoy an evening ceilidh, a silent auction and hikes through the surrounding landscape, before wrapping up the week just in time for the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, where ACGA hosts a lively Gaelic tent. Guests won't want to miss the North Carolina Mòd on Saturday for a celebration of Gaelic song in competition and camaraderie.

Highland Storm

**July 17 - August 14, 2025
Summerside, PEI**

www.smpac.ca



A powerful celebration of the Celtic spirit, Highland Storm is an electrifying fusion of music, dance and storytelling. Transporting audiences back more than 250 years to a defining moment in Canadian history, the story is set to the pulse of pipes, drums and the fiery fiddle, tracing the voyages of three ships - the Annabella, the Edinburgh and the Falmouth - that carried families from Scotland to a new land. Told through spectacular highland dance, step dancing, traditional vocals and a stirring historical narrative, the tale details the courage and grit of Scottish settlers who faced many challenges in an unforgiving land. The College of Piping's instructors and students, joined by fiddler Gilbert Arsenault, vocalist Christine Gallant and director Peter Gallant, bring this legacy to life in an unforgettable evening of culture and sentiment.

30th Annual Glasgow Lands Scottish Festival

July 19, 2025
Northampton, MA
www.glasgowlands.org



Experience the spirit of Scotland at the only Scottish festival in Massachusetts, and the second-largest in all of New England. Visitors will enjoy a day jam-packed with Celtic culture, exciting competitions and engaging entertainment, including more than 38 pipe bands and the inaugural EUSPBA Northeast Branch Amateur Drumming Championships. Athletic games, Celtic dancing, a clan area, genealogy info, fencing demos, kids' games, a spray park and more are also on the day's agenda. Guests are invited to sample traditional Scottish fare, shop distinctive artisan wares, sip beer, wine, mead in the Celtic Pub, and enjoy a whisky tasting with "The Whisky Pirate." Musical headliners include Albannach, The Devil's Brigade and Waking Finnegan. Have a blast for a good cause, with festival profits supporting worthy local non-profit organizations.

New Brunswick Highland Games Festival

July 25 - 27, 2025
Fredericton, NB
www.highlandgames.ca



The New Brunswick Highland Games Festival transforms Fredericton into Atlantic Canada's premier Scottish celebration. Set along the stunning Saint John River, this three-day riverside festival blends highland tradition with East Coast spirit, attracting Scots and enthusiasts of all ages and backgrounds. The festival offers a full-scale cultural experience featuring high-energy pipe and drum competitions, toe-tapping highland dancing, traditional athletics and late-night ceilidhs. Visitors can explore a bustling marketplace of local artisans, cultural exhibits and traditional fare with Maritime flair. Saturday night's headline performance will be by Canadian icon Alan Doyle of Great Big Sea, whose mix of Celtic rock and storytelling promises an unforgettable celebration under the stars. Come for the tradition, stay for the party at this can't-miss summer event where Scottish culture meets Maritime hospitality.

Pacific Northwest Scottish Highland Games & Clan Gathering

July 26 & 27, 2025
Enumclaw, WA
www.sshga.org



The Pacific Northwest Scottish Highland Games & Clan Gathering has served up a spirited celebration of Scottish culture for over 75 years. From its humble origins as the Seattle Scottish Highland Games in 1947, the event has evolved into a full weekend of music, competition and community. This year, visitors will enjoy lively Scottish athletics, piping and drumming, highland dancing and pipe band competitions. The annual gathering will also host rich and rousing musical performances across four stages from the likes of Tempest, the Katie Jane Band, Men of Worth and more. Guests are also invited to explore clan tents, heritage talks, a Celtic kennel, and a lively marketplace filled with traditional Scottish fare and artisanal goods. Both Scots and non-Scots are welcome to attend!

Glengarry Highland Games

August 1 & 2, 2025
Maxville, ON

www.glengarryhighlandgames.com



Step into the heart of Celtic celebrations at the 2025 Glengarry Highland Games, held August 1 & 2 in Maxville, Ontario, for two unforgettable days of highland dancing; heavy events; Scottish fiddling, piping and drumming; and breathtaking massed bands. This year's festivities include a kilt run, a highland regiments tug of war, scotch tastings, a harp workshop and more. Friday night's tattoo and concert under the stars features the award-winning Derina Harvey Band, while Saturday's events include the popular Clan Parade with guest of honour Colin Patrick MacDonell of Glengarry - *the 24th hereditary Chief of Glengarry* - to open the games. Home to the North American Pipe Band Championships, the Glengarry Games are the ultimate Celtic summer experience.

Iowa Irish Fest

August 1 - 3, 2025
Waterloo, IA

www.iowairishfest.com



Sláinte! Raise a glass to Celtic spirit at the Iowa Irish Fest in downtown Waterloo. Now in its 19th year, this highly anticipated event transforms Lincoln Park into a lively hub of music, culture and community. With performances from international Celtic bands like Skerryvore and Doolin, the weekend promises high energy and spirits with activities for the whole family. Guests are invited to explore Irish heritage through dance, music and language workshops; cheer on competitors during highland games; and savour hearty fare from local vendors. In addition, a designated "hero's area" will honour the military and first responders. Presented by the Cedar Valley Irish Cultural Association, the Iowa Irish Fest celebrates fellowship and fosters community and connection through a dynamic lineup of cultural programs and traditions.

Lunenburg Folk Harbour Festival

August 7 - 10, 2025
Lunenburg, NS

www.folkharbour.com



Set amidst a storybook setting of a UNESCO World Heritage town, the Lunenburg Folk Harbour Festival celebrates 40 years of music, community, and coastal magic in 2025. As Nova Scotia's longest-running music festival, the annual gathering offers an all-ages experience of intimate performances, historical charm, and East Coast hospitality. With a mix of indoor and outdoor venues, audiences will enjoy world-class folk acts along the province's gorgeous and gentle southern coast. Between sets, guests are invited to explore Lunenburg's galleries, museums, pubs, and restaurants (lobster is a must!), or savour a sweet, locally-made homemade ice cream. Music lovers of all ages are welcome.

Montana Gaelic Cultural Society An Rí Rá Montana Irish Festival

August 8 - 10, 2025
Butte, MT
www.MTGaelic.org



Since 1997, the Montana Gaelic Cultural Society (MGCS) has celebrated Irish culture and heritage through sponsorship and the promotion of language, music, theatre and dance. The organization's flagship event, An Rí Rá Montana Irish Festival, returns this summer at the historic Old Mine Yard in Butte, Montana. Set against a dramatic landscape rich in mining and history, this lively gathering offers a full slate of festivities, including world-class Irish music, exhilarating Irish dance performances, traditional food and drink, artisan crafts displays, and engaging workshops, lectures and presentations by acclaimed Irish authors and personalities. Whether you are Irish by blood or simply in spirit, An Rí Rá is a joyful immersion into Celtic culture the entire family will enjoy.

Fergus Scottish Festival

August 8 - 10, 2025
Fergus, ON
www.fergusscottishfestival.com



Join the fun and festivities in Fergus, Ontario, this summer for a lively weekend steeped in Scottish spirit, culture, history and heritage. Celebrating its 80th year in 2025, the Fergus Scottish Festival delivers three unforgettable days of Celtic music, thrilling competitions, and Celtic wares and fares. Visitors will enjoy world-class highland dancers, powerful heavy event athletes, stirring pipe and drum bands, a clans and heritage area, highland cows, and the Whisky Village. The wee ones will have their hands full with craft activities at McKiddies, while the big kids kick back at the onsite Highland Pub. Saturday's Kilt-Tilting Concert features musical artists Albannach, the Red Hot Chilli Pipers and the legendary Bay City Rollers. As a bonus, Outlander fans will cherish the chance to meet actor Charles Vandervort.

The Bitterroot Celtic Games

August 16 & 17, 2025
Hamilton, MT
www.bcg.org



The Bitterroot Celtic Games & Gathering returns for its 16th year in August, bringing Montana's largest celebration of Celtic culture back to the historic Daly Mansion in Hamilton. This two-day festival offers a rich lineup of music, dance, athletics and heritage. Enjoy main stage performances by Celtica Nova, The Harp Twins, Blaggards, Seamus Kennedy and The Byrne Brothers. Explore the clan tent village, cheer on pipe and drum competitions, and take in highland and Irish dance performances. Highlights include the grand parade of clans, highland games, whisky and mead tastings, and live music on Saturday until 9 p.m. Sunday features junior highland games, a Celtic tea, a bonnie knees contest and more. With vendors, food and self-guided mansion tours, it's a family-friendly celebration for all ages.

Sydney Mines Highland Games

August 17, 2025
Sydney Mines, NS
www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100090749198689



Celebrate Cape Breton's spirit at the third annual Sydney Mines Highland Games, where tradition meets modern festivity. Held at the walking track on Pitt Street, this free family event blends heritage, history and community. Heavyweight events officially kick off at 11 a.m., followed by a full day of highland dancing, piping, local musicians, vendors, and historical displays on Scottish roots and coal mining heritage. The highlights include Cape Breton's Strongest Farmer competition, a tug-of-war, arm wrestling with champion Mark MacPhail and boxing demos by Tri-Town Boxing Club. Kids and adults alike can join in races and games, with the day wrapping up with a rousing performance at 6:30 p.m. from Men of the Deepes. Come rain or shine with camp chairs for camaraderie and culture.

Jamestown Regional Celtic Festival

August 22 & 23, 2025
Mayville, NY
www.96thhighlanders.com/festival.php



A stunning lakeside locale sets the scene for the 18th annual Jamestown Regional Celtic Festival, held in August at Mayville Lakeside Park in Mayville, New York. Organized by the 96th Highlanders Pipes and Drums, the festival brings together seven pipe bands from Canada, New York and Ohio, alongside 30 Scottish heavy athletes in thrilling traditional competitions. Visitors will also enjoy lively performances by a variety of Celtic musical acts, including Tuatha Dea from Tennessee, as well as fiddle sessions, dancers, a bustling vendor village and a splendid Gathering O' the Clans. Kids can join the fun with scaled-down athletic events, face painting and games. Whether you are tracing your roots or simply soaking up the sounds and sights, Jamestown celebrates Celtic heritage with heart this summer.

Canmore Highland Games

August 30 & 31, 2025
Canmore, AB
www.canmorehighlandgames.ca



Spend Labour Day weekend in the heart of the Rockies at the Canmore Highland Games this August 30th & 31st. One of the first Highland Games known was organized by King Malcolm III Canmore in the 11th Century and the tradition continues in the Canadian Rocky Mountains with the 34th Annual Canmore Highland Games. Celebrate Celtic culture and tradition with two full days of high-energy competitions, music, dance, and family-friendly fun. The gathering showcases piping and drumming, highland dance, and heavy sports, alongside unique events like sheepdog demonstrations, a British car and motorcycle show, and the ever so popular tug-of-wars. Meet & find your clan in the Clan Village and shop the Celtic Market. There's a Taste of the Highlands party, Scotch Tastings and Ceilidh, too! See all the details and get your advance tickets via the event website.

Virginia Scottish Games

August 30 & 31, 2025
The Plains, VA

www.vascottishgames.org



Acherished Labor Day weekend tradition, the Virginia Scottish Games will return to Great Meadow in The Plains to celebrate rich Scottish heritage with spirited fun and flair. This year's festivities include a packed schedule with heavy athletics, fiddling, highland dancing, and piping and drumming competitions. Visitors can wander along "Clan Row," watch border collies in action, and browse the British car show. The weekend's entertainment features performances by Seven Nations, Jil Chambless & Scooter Muse, Sean Heely Celtic Band, Tinsmith and more. Whisky and gin tastings, traditional fare like haggis and meat pies, a bustling vendor village and, new this year, a veterans' pavilion, all round out the experience. With activities for all ages, including kids' games and cultural exhibits, this event offers a vibrant tribute to Scotland's enduring legacy in Virginia.

Edinboro Highland Games & Scottish Festival

September 4 - 6, 2025
Edinboro, PA

www.pennwest.edu/campuses/edinboro/highland-games/index.php



Scotland comes to life in Pennsylvania this September as PennWest Edinboro celebrates its 31st Highland Games & Scottish Festival. Visitors will enjoy a high-energy weekend of Scottish music, dance, culture and sport. The festivities begin on Thursday with an outdoor showing of Disney's Brave, followed by a public fiddle workshop and regional competition on Friday. Saturday offers a jam-packed agenda that includes opening ceremonies featuring massed bands in full regalia, the National Scottish Fiddle and Harp Championships, highland dance, clan gatherings, heavy athletics, kids' activities, archery and more. Attendees are invited to browse artisan vendors, sample Scottish fare, and sip in the beer garden to live Celtic music. Admission, parking and all events are free excluding the Saturday, 5 p.m. Ceilidh dinner, which requires online reservations as seating is limited.

50th Annual New Hampshire Highland Games & Festival

September 19 - 21, 2025
Lincoln, NH

www.nhscot.org/highland-games-nh



This year, the New Hampshire Highland Games & Festival celebrates its 50th birthday at Loon Mountain Resort in Lincoln, N.H. One of North America's largest and most spirited highland games, the three-day gathering brings the bold heart of Scotland to the region's stunning White Mountains. Visitors are invited to cheer on the competitors in the Caledonian Clash, dance to Celtic tunes, behold the pageantry of massed bands, watch sheep dog trials and snap photos with the highland cows. Attendees can also browse Scottish wares, join a lively ceilidh, trace their roots in Clan Village, or try curling and stone lifting. With piping, dancing, athletics, and plenty of food and drink, there's something for everyone looking to celebrate the history and culture of Scotland.

Michigan Irish Music Festival

September 11 - 14, 2025
Muskegon, MI
www.michiganirish.org



This September, experience the heart of Irish culture on the scenic shores of Muskegon Lake at the Michigan Irish Music Festival, where more than 25 celebrated artists bring the spirit of Ireland to life with music, dance, storytelling and more. Visitors are invited to savour traditional fare at the Celtic Kitchen, sip a pint at the pub and browse artisan goods in the Irish market. As grownups enjoy a variety of adult options, children will love the “Wee Ones” area. Run entirely by volunteers, the all-ages festival proudly supports local charities by fighting food insecurity, having donated more than \$450,000 and 20,500 pounds of food to date. More than a gathering, the event is a world-class festival that supports the community and Irish culture with music, entertainment, education and generosity.

Celtic Classic Highland Games & Festival

September 26 - 28, 2025
Bethlehem, PA
www.celticfest.org



Now in its 38th year, the Celtic Classic Highland Games & Festival returns to historic Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, as the largest free Celtic festival in North America. The weekend gathering will again host the U.S. National Highland Games Championship, where the top 10 professional athletes compete for the title. Five stages of live Celtic music, including performances by Kilmaine Saints, Runa, The Prodigals, and Cassie and Maggie MacDonald, keep the weekend vibrant and lively. Explore the bustling clan village, interesting lectures and cultural demos in Celtic Heritage Hollow. The Showing of the Tartan Parade winds through historic downtown Bethlehem to open the ceremonies, while pipe band competitions and more than 30 food vendors round out the celebration. From pasties to poutine, this vibrant gathering blends tradition and revelry in a uniquely spirited setting.

Montreal Highland Games

Looking ahead to 2026
www.montrealhighlandgames.com



After a challenging year, the Montreal Highland Games will pause in 2025 to regroup and plan for a stronger future. Rising costs, reduced sponsorship and the absence of government subsidies led to this difficult but necessary decision. While 2023 broke even, 2024 proved financially harder, prompting organizers to step back and focus on long-term sustainability. Founded in 1855, the Montreal Highland Games are Quebec’s oldest Scottish festival and a beloved city tradition. Planning is already underway for a 2026 return, with renewed energy, fresh funding strategies and broad community support. Performers, athletes, vendors and fans have voiced enthusiasm for their comeback. President Bruno Plourde thanks all for their continued support and looks forward to welcoming everyone back next year, stronger and more inclusive than ever.



Millionaires Shortbread

the CELTIC CHEF

with Gary Maclean

Don't you just love the name Millionaire's Shortbread? It always sounded so decadent to me, as if this was a treat reserved for the rich and famous. Growing up in Scotland, I always saw it as a rare indulgence, a step up from our beloved everyday shortbread. I remember thinking the name must have come from the fact that it was so lavish that the buttery base, thick layer of caramel, and glossy chocolate topping surely meant you'd need to be a millionaire to afford it! I learned that the reason Millionaire's Shortbread carries that name is less about price and more about richness. It's not about how much money is in your wallet, it's about how luxurious and indulgent each bite is. For many Scots - and now for countless bakers and fans across the world - Millionaire's Shortbread is a perfect example of how a simple, humble base can be transformed into something truly special with just a few additions. Though shortbread itself dates back centuries and is deeply woven into Scotland's culinary heritage, Millionaire's Shortbread is a relatively modern creation. Its roots are thought to lie in the 19th-century Scottish love of "tray bakes" - layered sweet treats you could make at home and cut into squares. The addition of caramel and chocolate came about in the mid-20th century, as home bakers experimented with new ingredients and flavours. By the 1970s, this rich and irresistible version had earned its cheeky name and become a staple in Scottish tearooms and home kitchens alike.

Ingredients

Shortbread

250g / 9oz plain flour (all purpose)

175g / 6oz butter, unsalted, softened

75g / 3oz caster sugar (super fine)

Instructions

Heat the oven to 180°C/350°F. Lightly grease and line a 20 x 20 cm (8 x 8 inch) square baking tin with a lip of at least 3cm. To make the shortbread, mix the flour and caster sugar in a bowl. Rub in the softened butter until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. Knead the mixture together until it forms a dough, then press into the base of the prepared tin. Prick the shortbread lightly with a fork and bake for 20 minutes or until firm to the touch and very lightly browned. Leave to cool in the tin.

Ingredients

Chocolate Topping

200g / 7oz dark or milk chocolate

Instructions

Melt the plain or milk chocolate slowly in a bowl over a pan of hot water. Pour over the cold caramel and leave to set. Cut into squares or bars with a hot knife.

Ingredients

Caramel

2 x 397g / 14oz tin condensed milk

Instructions

The caramel couldn't be simpler; take a large pot, fill it with water, place the unopened cans into the water and boil for 3 hours. I would also advise the removal of the paper label. You can also buy the condensed milk pre-caramelized. Once cooked, cool and then spread over the shortbread and leave to cool. Be careful that you don't allow the water to boil away as the tin can explode.

Slàinte Mhath! - Gary

www.garymacchef.com

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DRAM
with Andrew Ferguson

NKOTB 3



In my last column I wrote of the three boom-and-bust cycles faced by the Scotch whisky industry over the last two centuries, noting that we may be nearing the tail end of a fourth. Over the last 20 years the Scotch industry has dramatically increased production at existing distilleries, while more than 50 new ones have opened. Can the market support all of them? Time will tell.

When the Ardnahoe Distillery opened in 2017, it became the 9th active distillery on the west coast island of Islay (this tally, now at 10, is set to pass a dozen in the next couple of years). Ardnahoe is sandwiched between Bunnahabhain and Caol Ila Distilleries on the island's north-east corner, with sweeping view of the Sound of Islay, and 'The Paps' of the Isle of Jura beyond.

The distillery was built by Hunter Laing & Co., an independent, family-run bottler famous for its First Editions, Old Malt Cask, and Old & Rare single malt ranges. The distillery's spirit, as with most whisky produced on Islay, is made with peated malt, which gives the spirit and earthy-smoky profile. One of the advantages of using peated malt is that the whisky is often more interesting and drinkable at a younger age, meaning it can be sold sooner.

The other advantage relates to the cult-like following that smoky whiskies have among "peat heads." For 10 days at the end of May each year "Feis Ile" - the Islay Whisky Festival - draws thousands of whisky pilgrims, tripling the island's population. The Ardnahoe Inaugural Release, the distillery's first ever whisky, debuted during The Feis last year. A second release, Infinite Loch, a reference to the lake of unknown depth from which it draws its water, is now available around the world.

Up the west coast from Islay is the Nc'nean Distillery on the remote Morvern Peninsula. The distillery was founded by Annabel Thomas in 2017 in the village of Drimnin, which has a view of To-

bermory on the Isle of Mull. Nc'nean [nook-knee-anne] takes its inspiration from the Gaelic goddess Neachneohain, the "Queen of Spirits."

The distillery's focus is on sustainability - using only 100 per cent organic Scottish barley, it is powered by renewable energy. Nc'nean was the first distillery in the U.K. to be verified as 'net zero' for carbon emissions, and 99.7 per cent of its waste is diverted from landfills.

Production is small, at just 100,000 litres per a year, and the distillery experiments with yeast varieties. Fermentation times range from 65-115 hours with the distillery producing two distinct spirit styles: a fruitier "new style" geared for whiskies to be bottled young, and an "old style" for longer maturation made with lower cut points. Nc'Neen has a wide range of Organic Single Malts, which can be found at specialist retailers around the world.

Staying on Scotland's west coast, the Isle of Raasay Distillery - also founded in 2017 - saw Alasdair Day and his business partner Bill Dobbie originally looking at the Scottish borders to build a distillery to supply their Tweeddale Blended Whisky. However, that changed after a friend suggested they take a look at the Isle of Raasay just off the east coast of Skye. They purchased the Victorian Borodale House in 2015 and set about converting it into a distillery and visitor center with luxury accommodation. The distillery has magnificent views of the famous Cuillin Mountains on Skye.

Isle of Raasay is the small island's first ever legal distillery. Production is small, a little over 200,000 liters annually, with fermentation times of between 67 and 118 hours, using both peated and unpeated malts. The first whisky was released in numerous single casks in 2020, with many other offerings bottled in the years since. Raasay has a bespoke glass bottle with modeled ammonites which are a nod to the distillery's rugged coast and geologic history. Its whiskies can be found in specialist shops around the world.

“Ardnahoe, Nc'nean, and Raasay are all open to the public, and make for picturesque stops on a Scottish west coast road trip.

It is too early to tell if they will all survive the vagaries of the current business cycle, but I hope they do. All three are interesting businesses, with a unique approach, and - most importantly - they are all putting out good whiskies. If they can weather the storms, their futures will be bright.

www.ardnahoe-distillery.com
www.ncnean.com
www.raasay-distillery.com

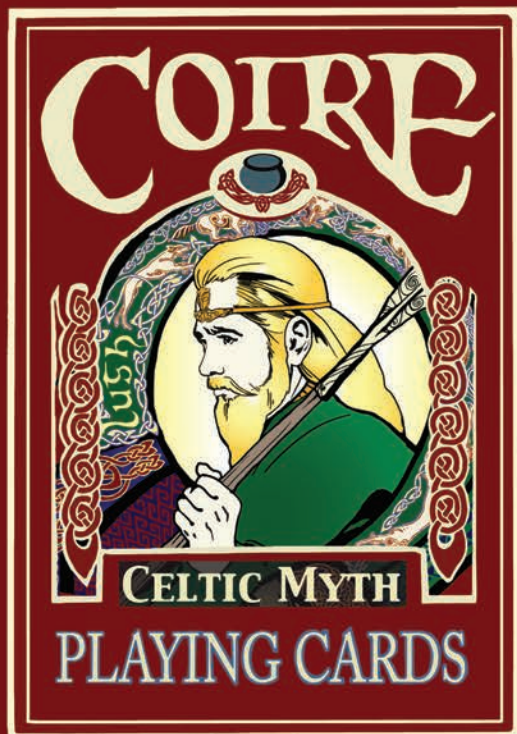
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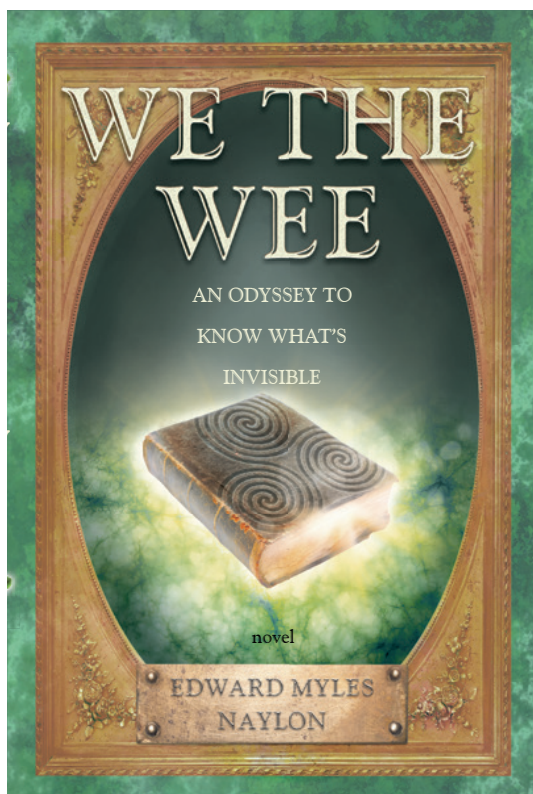
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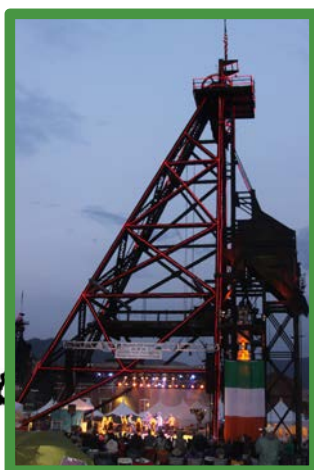




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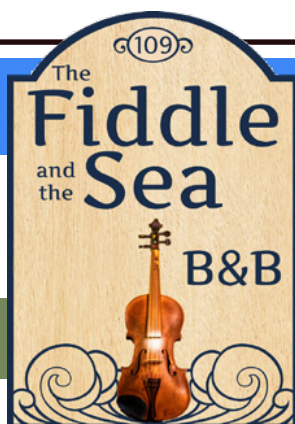


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Sage's CIRCLE

with Candice Marie Sage, PhD

Bóinn and Destiny - A Story of the Summer Solstice

In the last Sage's Circle, we learned about Áine, the Sovereignty Goddess, associated with the Summer Solstice Litha [LEE-thah] celebrated on or about June 20/21.

Sometimes represented by a red mare, her ancient ceremonial site is at the Hill of Áine, Cnoc Áine (also known as Knockainy) in Co. Limerick, Ireland. The pagan fire celebration of Litha is also associated with the Oak King, when the power of the sun zeniths on the longest day of the year.

As Spring is a time for planting, summer represents patience as seeds grow. Solstice is a time to look inward and expand our ideas and desires by connecting with our highest selves, nourishing our light and amplifying our intentions. As I write this, I am reminded that it was one year ago that I travelled from Canada on my first homecoming to my Irish roots. A pivotal life journey, I attended a retreat exploring ancient County Meath, the Boyne Valley and its Goddess lore. I sought to discover my "dán" - my life gift, art, and purpose.

My homecoming story is deeply tied to Boann (Bóinn), the mythical goddess and creator of the River Boyne. According to legend, she was married to King Nechtan who jealously guarded and controlled the magical Well of Segais, the well of knowledge. Though forbidden by her husband, Boann visited the well to test its powers. It is noteworthy that Boann was having an affair with Daghdha, chief god of the Tuatha Dé Danann and of life and death. Next edition I will speak more of their relationship and the birth of their son Aengus as celebrated by the festival of Lughnasa.

It is unknown why Boann went to the Well of Segais but I speculate it was a story of emancipation: she likely presided over the well before her husband the King so that no



man - including her husband - should have control over knowledge, and that it should be available to all. Boann, in her human form, sought to unwind the power of the well by walking around it widdershins (counter-clockwise) three times. The waters surged violently from their containment and rushed north-east to the Irish Sea. Boann and her dog Dabilla were swept away in what would become the River Boyne. Dabilla was lost, and Boann lost an arm, a leg, and an eye in the flood.

The dismemberment and annihilation of her female form transformed her into the Goddess who then returned knowledge to the people of Ireland. In Gaelic, Boann means "shining cow." She is associated with The River of Stars (the Milky Way). At night, the

constellations of King Daghdha/Nuedha (Orion) and Dabilla (Sirius the Dog) shine with Bóann (Taurus, a bovine) in the River Boyne.

On Summer Solstice 2024, I visited Newgrange World Heritage Site, the birthplace and home of Aengus and the gods of the Tuatha Dé Danann. This Neolithic period (3200 B.C) tomb features a large stone entrance covered with triskele, a symbol of three interlocked spirals radiating from a common centre. This ancient symbol relates to the Tri-goddess of Maiden, Mother, and Crone, but also birth, death, and resurrection. Later that evening, I bathed in the river Boyne and felt her power.

“It is believed that certain sacrifices must be made to allow space for gifts from beyond the Veil.

To the river I lost a piece of jewellery I held dear - my Galiano watch - a symbol I associated with a new love and life. That relationship would come crashing down two months later, leaving me heartbroken, but also with important lessons. I would mourn the living, for what was but cannot be anymore, including both my lost love and my father who succumbed to vascular dementia. As with Boann, grief alchemized the pain into learning, and the losses would lead to learning and sharing with others.

As I have since discovered, my "dán" is to write about the old ways that were lost and reanimate them in ways that people might be inspired to discover their roots and values through mythology and archetypes.



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