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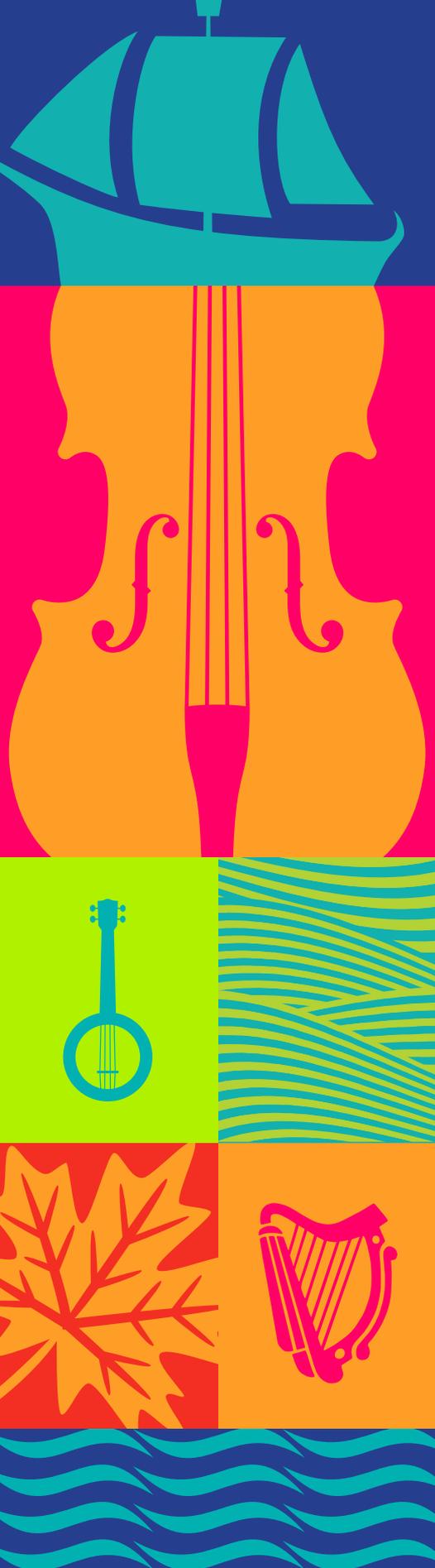
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Fáilte

On Genealogy

With the planet's population now tipping 8 billion inhabitants, it is interesting to consider that recent mathematical modeling and computer simulations have confirmed that we are, in fact, all related. We can now trace all the way back to the same set of individuals. In fact, we are more closely connected in terms of genealogy than genetics. As such, many of us continue to try to understand more about what makes us who we are.

That journey often starts with tracing our family roots, trying to learn more about previous generations; What did they do for a living? Where did they reside? Did they struggle? What were their accomplishments?

I recently had the wonderful experience of working with Kate and Mike Lancor of Old Friends Genealogy to begin the process of delving a bit deeper into my family roots in Ireland. We started with my great-grandfather - as he was a public figure, I had some information about him already. However, it turned out that the more compelling story was that of my maternal great-grandmother, Lizzie. It is not difficult to imagine that Lizzie, a wife and mother of eight, was the foundation of her family. Hers would not have been an easy life, losing one child within a year of its birth before passing away herself at the young age of 47.

Interestingly, studies have suggested that we are strongly connected through multigenerational relationships - where grandchildren can inherit emotional and behavioural traits from their grandmother. Socioeconomic stressors pass from mothers to their unborn children and can be manifested in their grandchildren - essentially bridging three generations. This has the effect of actually changing our DNA on a molecular level, as it has been proven that we can harbour emotional material from at least as far back as a grandparent. To learn that we are linked in a way that transcends our genetic makeup should give us reason to pause. I do know that Lizzie created future generations of women, like herself, with fortitude and resilience.

Our January/February edition will spark a desire to start your own genealogical adventure. If you decide to use a service such as Old Friends Genealogy, Kate and Mike will gather a wealth of details, compile it into a concise binder complete with maps, registry entries, and census records. It will then provide an excellent resource for your continued research.

Happy Searching!

Siobhán L. Covington, Publisher

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A new vision for the global Celtic community



The potential of the global Celtic diaspora has attracted me for many years. The richness of its many cultures, its shared values - respect, kindness, compassion, openness, fortitude, gratitude, rights with responsibilities, and its internationalist outlook with heartfelt warmth - is both powerful and filled with possibilities for the modern world.

As for my own Celtic heritage, I was born and bred in Edinburgh, and lived for a short while in Dunfermline. My maternal grandfather resided at the top of Edinburgh's Royal Mile when he met and married my grandmother. In recent years, a few relatives on my mother's side have investigated our family tree and found a strong Scottish background with an early Irish connection. Interestingly, my father's mom was Jamaican. The Scots have quite a history in Jamaica - in fact, the Jamaican telephone directory contains many Scottish family names!

My upbringing in Scotland deeply shaped my life by way of the sea, land, air, music, language, food, religion, the arts and sciences, and the hearts and minds of its people. These natural and cultural influences have greatly influenced who I am today.

After a six-year stint in Her Majesty's Royal Air Force, followed by a lengthy period working in event management, I began my studies in world religions at the University of Edinburgh's New College Faculty of Divinity. This was followed by an active and professional interest in Indian and Far Eastern healing arts and

philosophy, leading to a vocation in the world of interfaith dialogue and relations building.

Having learned of the deeply interconnected, interdependent, and interrelated nature of everything in our world and the universe we live in I began to see my life from new perspectives.

My newfound calling led me to inviting and hosting His Holiness The Dalai Lama in Scotland for three multi-city visit programs over a fourteen year period. This simultaneously included my ten-year period as the International Representative of Arun Gandhi (Mahatma's Gandhi's grandson). These roles have all been a phenomenal blessing and a deep privilege. During those same years, I developed a significant interest in Celtic culture, which inspired me to initiate the World Peace Tartan (WPT).

After the WPT was launched with The Dalai Lama in Scotland, I set my sights on New York's Tartan Week festivities. Arun Gandhi wore the first WPT kilt in North America at NYC's Dressed to Kilt fashion show. A year later, a Canadian launch took place in Vancouver with a formal presentation for the International Space Station Commander, astronaut Col. Chris Hadfield.

Since then, the WPT has been presented to

a number of newly appointed 'ambassadors' - including several Nobel Peace Laureates. Other highlights include The Ayrshire Fiddle Orchestra delivering a memorable and moving launch in Japan where they presented the Mayor of Hiroshima and the Secretary General of Mayors for Peace with specially made WPT scarves in a formal ceremony at the Hiroshima Memorial Garden.

Over time, these threads began to weave into a wonderful global mosaic for peace.

Starting in 2023, I invite readers of Celtic Life International to contribute their own colourful threads with the Celtic Life for Peace campaign. My hope is to continue to create a purposeful, inspiring international community for peace, harmony, prosperity, sustainability, and the greater good.

Be the change you wish to see in the Celtic Diaspora by sharing your news, notes, stories, ideas, vision, hopes, dreams, and more to peace@celticlifeintl.com

Peace be with you! Victor Spence

Victor Spence is the founder of the World Peace Tartan Initiative, a non-profit organisation that invests in educational projects that both build a culture of peace and nonviolence and address child poverty.

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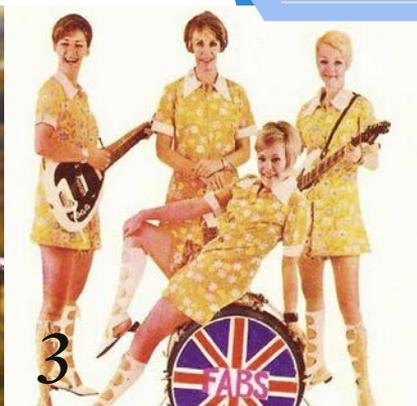
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one

Manx Women's Cricket Debut

The Isle of Man's first women's international cricket team recently made their competitive debut in Spain. The team, led by captain Clare Crowe, faced Italy, Spain, Sweden, and Norway at the T20i multi-nation tournament at Desert Springs. Speaking with Manx Radio, Crowe was proud of her team for representing the island at this high level, especially given their impressive growth in just two short years. The competition resulted in many positives for the Isle of Man squad, including the first T20i international win against Norway. Looking ahead, Crowe is excited for the future of women's cricket, as "more matches are televised so there are opportunities now for young females to see that cricket is a possibility for them."

two

World's First Octopus Farm

In Galicia, Spain, the world's first octopus farm is set to be built, pending the meeting of environmental requirements from local authorities. Nueva Pescanova is the Spanish company behind the prospective farm. The company's aquaculture director, Roberto Romero, has labelled the project as "a global milestone." Given that the value of the global octopus trade grew from \$1.30bn to \$2.72bn between 2010 and 2019, and that the farm will create hundreds of jobs on the island of Gran Canaria, there is commercial incentive for the company. However, despite the economic gains, scientists and animal rights activists are concerned that the farm will negatively impact the animal's wellbeing. A London School of Economics review of 300 scientific papers concluded that octopuses are intelligent, sentient creatures, capable of feeling happiness and distress and, as such, that high-welfare farming might still be challenging.

three

The Fabs

In an age when the music industry was run entirely by men and pop bands were consistently male, the Fabs were a novelty. Formed in 1964, the Welsh all-female band featured Sarah Wrigley on lead guitar, Linda Maze on drums, Margaret Lewis on bass guitar, and Maria Kitsom on rhythm guitar. The Fabs played a combination of cover songs and original tunes all across Europe, Mexico, and the United States from 1964 to 1972. The band's later years saw them playing in Mexico City and San Francisco before returning home to Wales. Wrigley still plays music to this day and wrote her memoir "Twenty Pairs of Pants and a Passport" about her time in the Fabs during Covid lockdown.

four

Cornwall Welcomes Tall Ships

This summer, the town of Falmouth, Cornwall will welcome back the Tall Ships to its historic sailing waters for the start of the international Tall Ships Races Magellan-Elcano from August 15-18. The race will begin in Falmouth and continue to A Coruña, Spain, Lisbon, Portugal, before ending in Cádiz, Spain. Established in 1956, the Tall Ships Races is an annual event that sees Tall Ships from around the world set sail in European waters during the summer months. The event offers over 4000 young people aged 15-25 the opportunity to set sail and receive specialized training from professional crews. Beyond giving people the chance to experience sailing, the event will invite local residents and international visitors to Falmouth's port to explore the historic ships and partake in shoreside festivities.

five

Tiny Homes of the Future

Tom Morgan and his partner Amie Simons recently moved to Wales to live off-grid in a "tiny home". Whether you are thinking about saving money due to the increased cost of living or concerned about your carbon footprint, the tiny home may offer a bold solution. While only a few hundred people live in tiny homes in the U.K., the movement to live in smaller spaces is larger elsewhere, with 10,000 people living in tiny homes in the U.S. in recent years. The decision for Morgan and Simons to build a small home out of a trailer stemmed from rising mortgage payments and a desire to live more environmentally friendly. The couple spent £18,000 building their tiny home which is approximately the same price people would spend on a down payment for a house. In an interview with the BBC, Morgan explained how their decision came from "us deciding what was important in our life and those values consisted of giving time to nature, prioritizing the environment, and giving time to the things we love."

six

Pilgrims Help Galicia's Villages Survive

The Camino de Santiago is an 800-kilometre pilgrimage route across Spain that sees tens of thousands of pilgrims visiting each year. Many of the rural villages along the route were built to host medieval pilgrims. But the growth of mechanization put a strain on the local villages as farmers and young people moved away because of job shortages. However, starting in the 1990s, the Camino regained popularity and the influx of modern pilgrims revitalized the villages. Pilgrims are vital to the villages' livelihoods as they support local business such as bars, cafes, and hotels. Beyond supporting businesses, pilgrims also keep the local heritage alive by allowing churches to stay open with their valuable medieval and renaissance artworks. While Covid greatly reduced the number of pilgrims along the route, this year saw the number of travelers reach pre-pandemic times much to the joy of local residents.

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

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Fénelon Students

In Brest, Bretagne, students from the technical program of family and social intervention at Fénelon school hand-made 70 pillows for women who have undergone breast cancer treatment. The students, who are in the first year of their program, embarked on this project as part of their studies to bring comfort to the women in their community undergoing treatment. In order to make this project a reality, the students reached out to the sewing department of Leroy Merlin, a major French retailer specializing in home improvement and gardening. The store put a call out to its customers asking them to volunteer just 15 minutes of their time to help craft these cushions. The response to this call was positive and resulted in the fabrication of 100 cushions for the students' project. The store also invited the students in to learn how to use the sewing machines so that they could craft these pillows with the proper attention and care. In addition to the 100 pillows made by the store's volunteers, the students crafted 70 cushions, bringing the total to 170. In an interview with Ouest France, Manon Guyot, who was involved in the project, reflected, "The idea was to contribute to an important cause not by asking for money but by devoting our time."



Lynn Counter

Lynn Counter, from St Newlyn East, Cornwall, won silver for Mental Health Social Worker of the Year at this year's Social Worker of the Year awards in England. Counter has worked as a social worker at Cornwall Council for 38 years where she currently holds the position of Senior Practitioner in the council's Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and Approved Mental Health team. She was thanked personally by Ruth Allen, Chief Executive at British Association of Social Workers, for her dedication not only to supporting people in crisis, but also supporting and guiding her colleagues. The Social Worker of the Year Awards were established in 2006 by Beverley Williams, an independent social worker who felt that social workers should be recognized for the difficult work that they do and the profound impact that they have on at-risk communities. The Awards became a registered charity in England in 2011 and continue to recognize and celebrate the important work that social workers carry out each day. In an interview with The Falmouth Packet, Cornwall Council cabinet member for adults and wellbeing Andy Virr expressed his admiration and respect for Counter's work, "It's right and just that she be given this award. She has made Cornwall proud."



The Groves

In rural west Wales, a family of Ukrainian refugees has found peace and safety thanks to the kindness and generosity of the Groves family. For the past five months, Valeriya, her husband Emad, and their two sons Milan and Adam Sloz, have been living with Jane, Nick and their 16-year-old son Tristan Grove in their Pembrokeshire home. While the Sloz family have enjoyed their stay with the Groves, they felt that after five months it was time for them to find their own home in the U.K. But once they started the process of finding a place to live, they faced a real challenge. Ukrainian refugee families across the U.K. are finding it very difficult to secure a place to rent, due to the fact that their applications are not able to be expedited and the fact that there is already a high demand in social housing. The U.K. government asked hosts to house Ukrainian refugees for six months but gave little to no support for what happens once that time period expires. The only way that the Sloz family was able to finally secure a home in Cardiff was by the Groves acting as their legal guarantors for their rent. Valeriya Sloz expressed her feelings towards the Groves to the BBC, "I give them the name of my second family."

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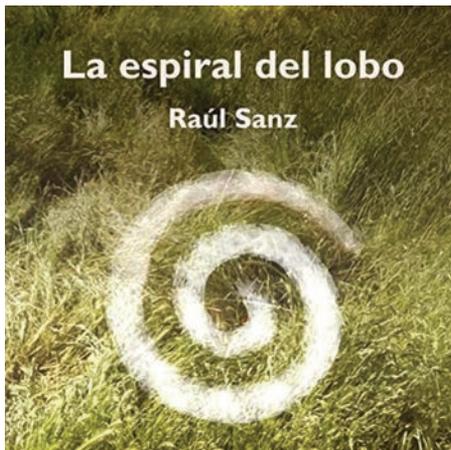
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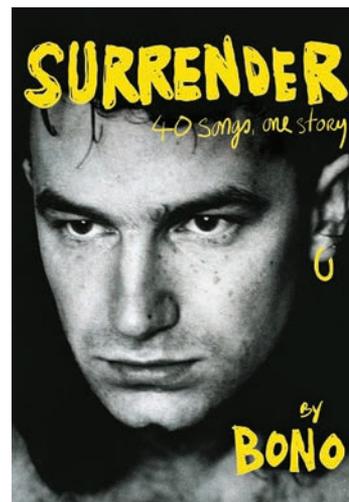
MUSIC

La espiral del lobo
Raúl Sanz

From the heart of Galicia, Raúl Sanz has released one of the better Celtic albums in the past year. *La espiral del lobo* (The Spirit of the Wolf) showcases 14 terrific tracks of acoustic-based music featuring guitars, fiddle, the flute, and other traditional instruments. Although there are no vocals, melody lines are more than emotive. Highlights include the rollicking *Jiga del dinosaurio* (Dinosaur's Jig), the rolling *Tinta invisible* (Invisible Link), and the gentle lilts of *Los mares del norte* (The Northern Seas) and *Estrella solitaria* (Lonely Star). And while the recording is firmly rooted in Spanish soil, it could easily be at home in Scotland, Ireland, or Nova Scotia - further proof that the Celtic Diaspora, despite the distance, is culturally closer than we know. -SPC

LITERATURE

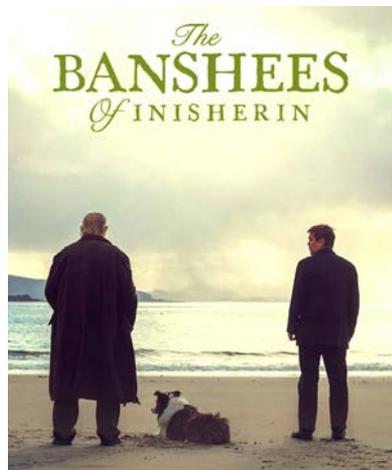
Surrender; 40 Songs, One Story
By Bono



Love him or hate him, there is no denying Bono's impact on both the world of music and the world of philanthropy. Each are covered in depth in this telling tale of one man's spiritual sojourn into the soul. From U2's early days in Dublin to his current station as one of rock's senior statesmen, the flamboyant frontman (born Paul David Hewson) has lived - for better or for worse - in the public eye for more than 40 years. Thankfully, he does well to handle both the bouquets and brickbats with an Irish sense of self-deprecating humour. En route, the singer explores his relationships with his parents, his wife Ali, his children, and his bandmates, with hard-won, heartfelt - and perhaps surprising - humility. -SPC

CINEMA

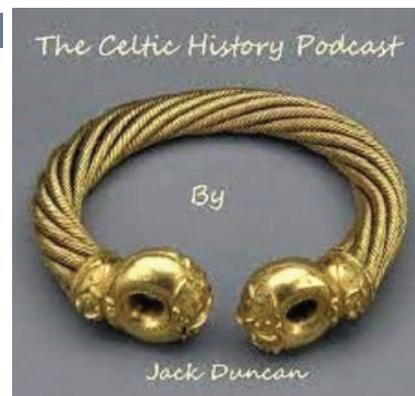
The Banshees of Inisherin



Ireland has been punching well above its cinematic weight for almost a half-century; minor masterpieces, including *Cal* (1984), *My Left Foot* (1989), *The Commitments* (1990), *Waking Ned Devine* (1998), and many more, have laid the groundwork for the multi-award winning *The Banshees of Inisherin*. Starring Colin Farrell and Brendan Gleeson and written and directed by Martin McDonagh (the same trio from the 2008 movie *In Bruges*), the new film follows two friends as they navigate life and death in post-Civil War Ireland. Powerful and poignant, the two-hour film succeeds at capturing and conveying a time, a place, and people that have endured the fallout of political and military division - themes that far too many Irish are familiar with. A major masterwork, and highly recommended. -SPC

PODCAST

The Celtic History Podcast
Jack Duncan



You have no idea how helpful this series was as I was piecing together the cover story for this edition. Although short (each episode runs 20-25 minutes), and somewhat scattered (episodes are posted months apart), the podcast is both informative and insightful as an introduction to Celtic culture. Covering origins - and tracing the routes and the rapid development of the Celtic peoples as they expanded their empire during the Bronze and Iron ages - host Jack Duncan is clear and concise, keeping things simple and easy for listeners to follow along. Tidbits of trivia, fascinating facts, and contemporary cultural references keep it all fresh, as does the host's subtle Irish sense of humour. An ideal resource for those new (or old!) to Celtic history. -SPC

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Heavenly Spirits

One husband-and-wife team brings French spirits to North American

The ages-old adage that you should never go into business with your spouse couldn't be further from the truth for Daniel and Christine Cooney, the co-owners of Heavenly Spirits - a French Spirits import and wholesaler in West Wareham, Massachusetts.

Despite living on different hemispheres for most of their lives, Daniel (an American with Irish and Scottish ancestry) and Christine (who is French) met during a trip to Iceland in the 1980s. By 1989, the two had married and settled in San Francisco. In 2008, they founded Heavenly Spirits, a name that refers to "the angel's share" - the portion of the distillation lost to evaporation while aging in oak barrels.

The seed to open a business was planted in the hearts and minds of Daniel and Christine long before 2008, however; the idea reaches as far back as 1987, when Christine moved from the Cognac region of France to San Francisco to work as a Cognac Ambassador.

Over the years their interest in importing and distributing French spirits continued to grow. In 1999, the couple moved to France to restore a family farm in the area Christine grew up. It was then and there that they learned about the major spirit producers in France - including Cognac, Armagnac and Calvados, among others. It was also during this time that they became familiar with smaller, family-owned distilleries across the country.

The company has evolved significantly over the past decade-and-a-half.

"Heavenly Spirits has grown a minimum of 15 percent each year," says Daniel. "From a small husband-and-wife start-up working out of our back room, we have grown into one of the leading importers of French spirits in the United States. We now distribute in 41 states and employ a dozen people."

Daniel operates as both co-owner and as Director of Communications and Marketing. Along with overseeing all aspects of the business, he builds the brand for each of the spirit producers the company works with, and for the Heavenly Spirits itself.

Although, admittedly, the job does come with its fair share of trials, Daniel notes that it is nonetheless a labour of love.

"As an importer that specializes in offering exceptional spirits, the challenge is to maintain our high standards while continuing to build our portfolio. Another challenge is maintaining a balance of both time and resources that we invest in each product and line. But I truly love my job, including the people, the products, and the industry as a whole. I love that Christine and I get to work together, representing mostly small to medium-sized, multigenerational, family-owned distilleries who we consider to be true artisans of the industry."

Heavenly Spirits represents some of the finest spirits available from Western Europe, including Whisky, Armagnac, Calvados, Co-

gnac, Gin, Rhum Agricole, Vodka, cider, and various liqueurs and aperitifs.

"Forty percent of all Armagnac imported to the USA comes through us," shares Daniel. "We are also the leading importer of Celtic French whisky, and organic Cognac. We are extremely selective in who we represent as we consider most of our suppliers to be good friends and/or like family. We do not represent what are often referred to as the 'industrial brands,' or the giant Goliaths of the spirits world."

"We also consider ourselves to be educators and ambassadors, representing the history, culture, and unique traditions of French spirits."

Quality and excellent customer service, he notes, are hallmarks of the couple's business.

"Many of the distributors in the USA who we currently work with originally reached out to Heavenly Spirits after reading about one of the many awards our products have earned. When they find our website and see the amazing line of products we represent, they often ask if they can represent us in their state."

Heavenly Spirits plans to continue bringing award-winning craft spirits to the North American marketplace, including all the best from the Celtic national of Bretagne, for both 2023 and well into the future.

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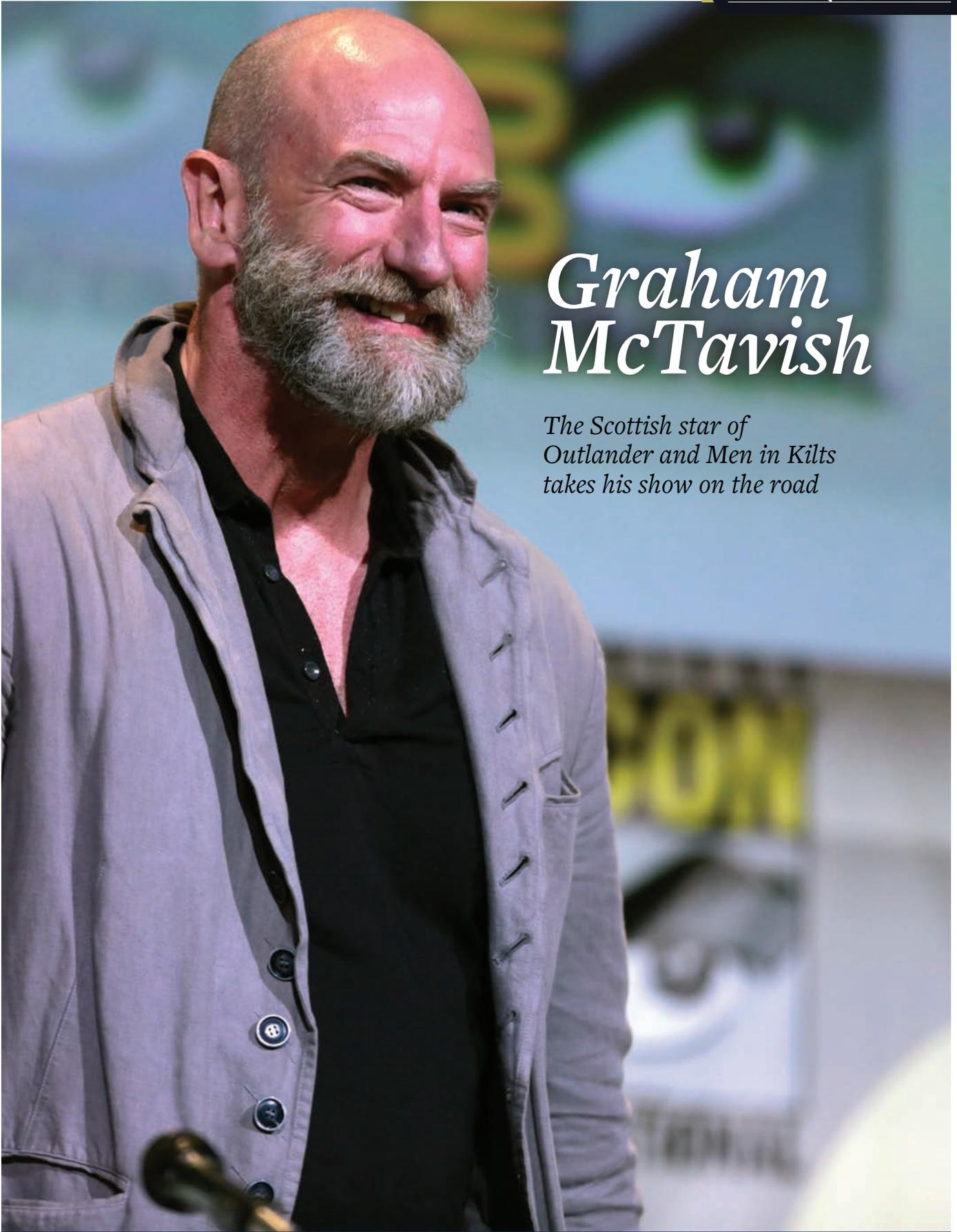
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Graham McTavish

*The Scottish star of
Outlander and Men in Kilts
takes his show on the road*



After a few years where events were either reduced in scope or outright cancelled due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Halifax's local pop culture convention - Hal-Con - recently returned to full form. Organizers pulled out all the stops, gathering big names to meet their Nova Scotian fans, including *Outlander*/Men in Kilts actor Graham McTavish. Chris Muise recently availed himself of the event to sit down with the Scottish thespian McTavish for an exclusive, in-person chat.

What do you think of the Hal-Con convention so far?

It is a great convention - really well done, nice and busy. It is lovely to see people all together again - you know, human connections and all that stuff. The costumes have been quite impressive, and there seems to be a lot of people putting a lot of effort into it.

How did you end up coming to Halifax for Hal-Con?

I was invited to Halifax, and I have always wanted to visit, so I jumped at the opportunity to come here. I have never been to this part of Canada. I grew up for three years in Vancouver, but we never made it over this far. And I am surprised at the number of people that live on this side of the country who have never been to British Columbia.

Do you do a lot of conventions like this?

I started years ago when we were doing *The Hobbit*, and I have since attended quite a few in a variety of places. I did one very recently in North Carolina, which was an *Outlander* event, and that was fantastic. And they vary hugely; some are small and quite intimate, some are in beautiful exotic locations, some are in not-so-beautiful exotic

locations, and some are really huge. However, they are all interesting, because the one thing that unites all of those experiences is that everyone who attends wants to be there - all the fans, all the people that come and spend their hard-earned money to go to these places. I never see an unhappy person at a convention. I see tired people, of course - especially children - but I never see unhappy people.

Tell us more about this *Outlander* convention in North Carolina.

That event took place near the location of where Fraser's Ridge is set in the *Outlander* books and the series. They call it the Fraser's Ridge Homecoming, and this year there was about 200 people there. It's great - there is a bit of a dance, there are bands, and I do autographs and photos and all the rest of it. And it was a lovely, contained environment, and very beautiful.



The fan response to Outlander has been simply incredible.

Yes, it has. It is very popular. I mean, more popular than I think any of us could have imagined, really, especially when we were making it, as we live in a bit of a bubble when we are making TV shows. It was the same with House of the Dragon, and The Hobbit, and The Witcher. We just live in those worlds, surrounded by the people that we work with. We don't really have a feeling of what it is going to be like. So, the Outlander phenomenon has had enormous benefits for the Scottish tourist trade - which is up some gigantic figure, thanks to Outlander. It's great that we are bringing Scotland to people and reconnecting them with their Scottish roots. The number of people I have spoken to who have never been to Scotland before, and have gone purely because of Outlander, is amazing.

Do you think Celtic culture is permeating into popular culture more?

Yes, I believe it is, and I think that sometimes people don't necessarily recognize the influence of Celtic culture in all those shows. I mean, Sam (Heughan) and I did Men in Kilts, which was a celebration of Scottish culture. We have just done another one set in New Zealand, which is an exploration of the Scottish influence there. It's definitely becoming more and more mainstream. And the kind of things that influence those television programs - those sorts of semi-mythic

worlds that are created - have their roots in Celtic mythology and legend. All the descriptions of dragons and all the rest, you can discover all of those within the mythology of the Celts. Sometimes deliberate, I think; sometimes, by accident.

And can fantasy and fiction be a good gateway to learn about Celtic culture?

Yes, that is what happens. People watch a show like Outlander and get caught up in a somewhat romantic view of Scotland. But that leads them to explore not just their own Scottish roots, but the history of that country and the truth about the country, which in-and-of-itself is fascinating. I mean, a lot of people have started learning Gaelic because of Outlander. And it has regenerated all sorts of cottage industries in Scotland. You know, there is a woollen mill down in Selkirk, I think, who make the plaids for Outlander that are doing great guns. So yes, it has been a kind of a gateway.

Do you feel like that helps people discover their own diaspora?

It really does. You know, I am really interested in Nova Scotia, for instance. How these people came here, and why they came here. And there might be a very simplistic version of all those things - just you start to dig away at the truth and really look at the desperation some of these people would have had to have taken that journey. Because now, of course, we think of Nova Scotia as a beauti-

ful destination to go and visit as a tourist. But the original settlers weren't tourists - this was frontier land, and they had to say goodbye to their homeland forever. We look at it with a modern sensibility of travel, which is such a recent thing, the idea of traveling for pleasure. People never travelled for pleasure in the past. They only traveled if they had to. And so, the idea of traveling across an ocean to set up an entirely new life would have been terrifying. That is something that I like to explore personally - the why and the how and what those people and their experiences were really like. It is difficult to get into their minds - you know, like a family of eight people sailing on a boat for days or weeks, going through all sorts of danger. I've been researching stuff about immigration to New Zealand. I mean, that was gigantic. It just went on and on and on. And if you were travelling in steerage on one of these boats, you were basically soaking wet the entire time. Your mattress, everything, would be soaking wet. That level of discomfort and struggle is something that I find terribly interesting. And anybody who is a descendant of those people owes their life to those that went through that.

Have you had any time to explore Nova Scotia?

Not at all, I'm afraid. I mean, the plus side of doing a convention like this is you get to meet the people; however, the downside is that you often don't get out to see the place. So, I will have to come back separately to explore. I mean, Canadians are lovely people, and this area has its own particular character which I like - people that live on the edge of a country are always unique and interesting.

Can you tell us about the upcoming season of Men in Kilts in New Zealand?

Well, Sam and I wanted to do the next season of Men in Kilts, and we didn't want to set it in Scotland itself, but rather places that had come under the influence of Scotland. New Zealand was a really obvious candidate, partly because I have spent significant time there. We were able to go the length and breadth of the country. Sam seems determined to terrorize me at every opportunity, and I am beginning to think that it is less about Scottish culture and more about "let's frighten Graham." So we did some pretty crazy things in New Zealand, which you will certainly see in the show.



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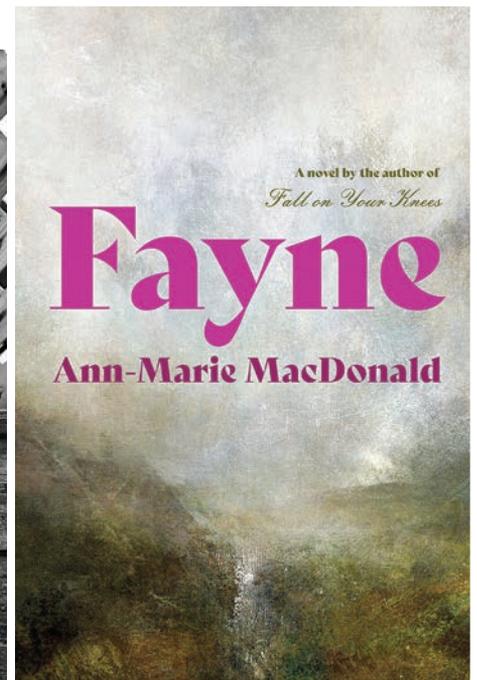
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Ann-Marie MacDonald

Ann-Marie MacDonald has become a household name in Canadian literature. Recently, Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns spoke with the scribe about the power of storytelling, the importance of nature, and her latest literary effort.



It is evening. A mother and father are nestled with their daughter - a young Ann-Marie MacDonald - and tell her the tale of Mary and Mac. It is a story that the youngster has heard many times, one she often requests as it is one that she holds dear. It is her parents' love story.

The narrative begins with both characters' birth on Cape Breton Island. It highlights their ancestral backgrounds - Mac's being Scottish and Irish, and Mary's being Lebanese - and follows them as they meet, fall in love, have children, and experience loss.

"I would always wait until that scintillating moment of my arrival because I was entering the story myself," remembers MacDonald, now 64.

"But the story of why they met was very interesting," she continues. "It goes into the history of Cape Breton. My mother, coming from a Lebanese family, was not permitted to train as a nurse in her hometown of Sydney, Nova Scotia. She went nine miles down the road to New Waterford, where she was considered 'white enough' to train. And that happened to be my father's hometown."

MacDonald credits this story - and others like it - as a seed that would soon sprout into her own love for spinning yarns.

"Part of why stories became so very important to me and my family was that we moved around a lot," she says, noting both her father's career in the Air Force and Cape Breton's economic exodus as reasons for their frequent relocation. "They had deep roots in Cape Breton Island, and I grew up with kind of roots by association. But I never put down roots in any one particular place, because we were always moving around."

"When you don't have physical roots, what you have are narrative roots."

MacDonald initially took interest in comedy and theatre. She attended the National Theatre School of Canada (NTS), graduating from the school's acting program in 1980, and began her career as an actor soon after. During this time, she contributed to several collective creations - including the 1983 play *This is For You, Anna* - where she both performed and assisted in the writing process.

"Then I started writing," she chuckles.

Her first piece of theatrical writing - *Goodnight, Desdemona* (*Good Morning Juliet*) - debuted in 1988 and remains a career

highlight.

"I was on the outside of it," she explains. "I would be the writer, not the actor. And I would take responsibility for the arcs of all the roles and the narrative arc of the whole. And, you know, all the roles would be of equal importance to me as a writer."

She was still working as a playwright when one of her projects began to take shape as something else entirely - a novel.

That narrative eventually became *Fall on Your Knees*, MacDonald's debut, full-length work which won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize in 1997. She has continued to contribute to the arts in an array of ways over the years, and has penned three other books: *The Way the Crow Flies* (2003), *Adult Onset* (2014), and her newest novel - the recently released *Fayne*.

The inspiration for *Fayne*, she notes, began with a simple drawing.

"I often draw a picture before I start working on the book. I drew the surface of what looked like the Atlantic Ocean, with a gentle, regular swell on it. But then, on the horizon, I drew this crumbling sort of stone mansion. So, I thought, 'Oh, that's not water, that's land.' But there was still this sense that the sea was there, and that the land, at any moment, could turn liquid again. And then



I drew a figure in the foreground. It was a young person, a kid. I couldn't tell whether it was a girl or a boy. But this figure had long flowing hair, and kind of romantic masculine garb, late 19th century garb, and then I wrote a caption. And the caption was, 'I had heard something out on the fen.' So, then I thought, 'Who are you?'"

Enter Charlotte Bell, the ever-curious protagonist at the centre of *Fayne*.

Sitting at 736 pages, *Fayne* is MacDonald's largest literary effort to date. Set in the late 19th century, on a large and lonely estate (the titular *Fayne*) that straddles the border of England and Scotland, the story follows Charlotte, a child kept hidden from society by her father, Lord Henry Bell, because of a mysterious physical condition.

Awash in themes of love, science, magic, nature, and identity, *Fayne* is an impressive homage to the Gothic literature of the era, employing many common tropes of the genre: large and mysterious houses, curious and thoughtful protagonists, and dark family secrets.

The scribe shares that Victorian literature such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jayne Eyre* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* were large literary inspirations for *Fayne*.

"I love Victorian literature, and I love any tinge of the Gothic. For me, there is nothing more joyful than having a toy box full of literary devices - which is, ultimately, what the Victorian novel is. It is a marvellous genre, and a wardrobe full of dress-up that I get to play with - all the devices of mystery and secrets and true identities revealed, of skeletons in closets...all of that good stuff.

"And I knew I could also tell a story that is very contemporary in its passions, and its urgency."

Fayne is not only MacDonald's largest book - it is also her "queerest novel" yet.

In addition to being a writer, she is also a passionate activist of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and was made an officer of the Board of Canada in 2019, both in recognition of her as a writer and also as an activist.

"It is really amazing to be honoured by your country for something that was considered so dishonourable for so long."

While her other books have included 2SLGBTQIA+ themes, *Fayne* takes it one step further, and gender identity and sexuality at the center of the conversations. In the

story, Charlotte embarks upon a journey to discover her own gender identity and sexuality. *Fayne* also includes representation of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community of the 19th century.

MacDonald says that she dubbed this particular book as her queerest for both literal and metaphorical reasons. On a metaphorical level, *Fayne* puts emphasis on the importance and "queerness" of nature and our Earth. She describes nature as "promiscuous," never conforming to the rigid rules and categorization we, as humans, have created, and is instead always turning one thing into another - something, she says, that should also apply to humans.

"We are Earth. Just like everything, and everyone, just like a pebble on the ground. We are all made of the same thing - all parts of one another, and of everything else."

On a more literal level, she says *Fayne* brings attention to queerness that people often forget.

"We queer people have always been here."

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Old Friends Genealogy provides a Family Genealogy Notebook for each ancestral line searched.

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Kate and Mike Lancor

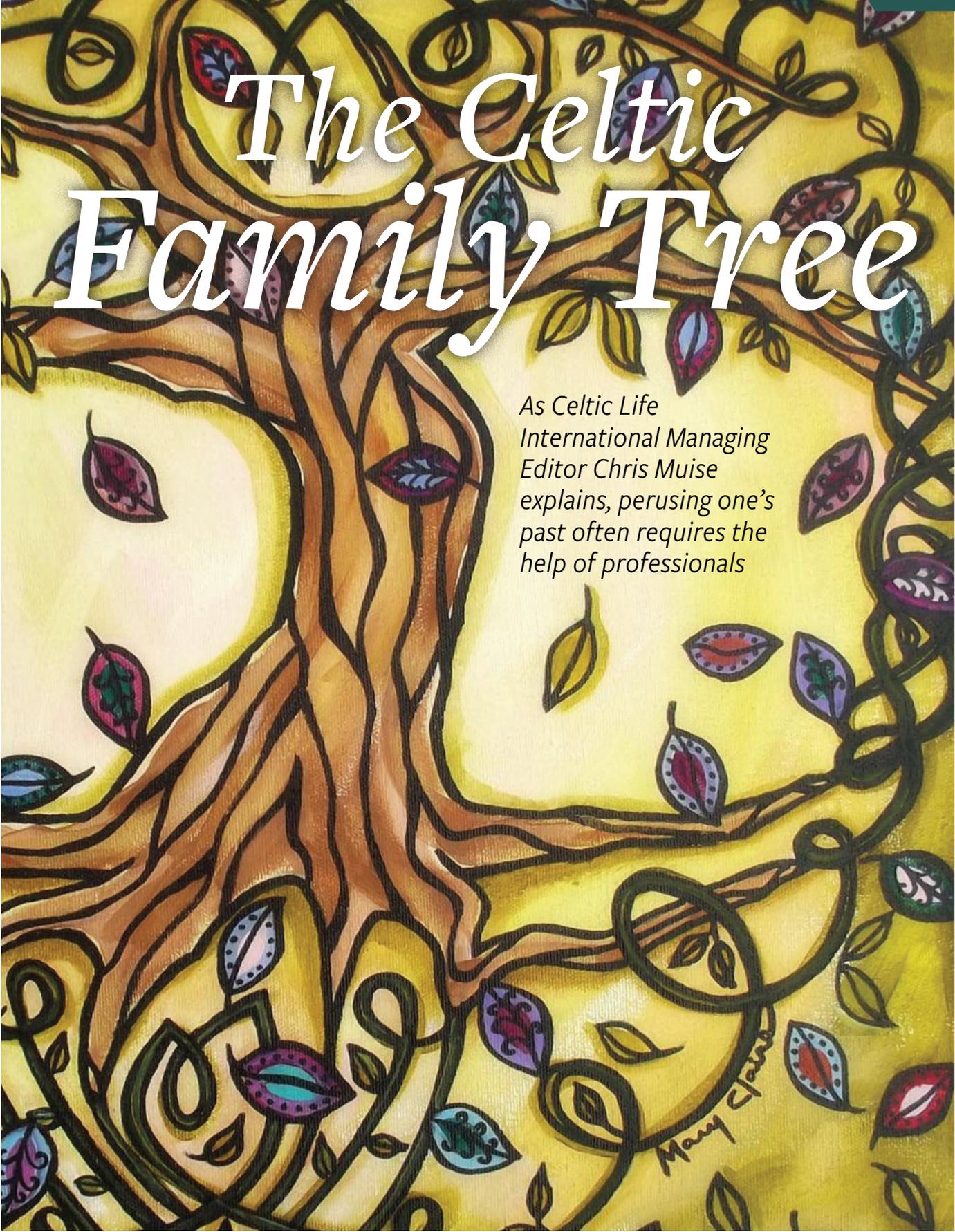
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The Celtic Family Tree

*As Celtic Life
International Managing
Editor Chris Muise
explains, perusing one's
past often requires the
help of professionals*



With the holidays having just passed, many of our readers may have received the gift of exploring their Celtic ancestry for Christmas. With personal genealogy services on the rise in popularity in the past decade or so, services like 23 & Me, Ancestry.com, and others make for great gifts to give a friend or loved one interested in learning more about where they come from.

Those services do great work, but they rarely provide a complete picture. You may receive genetic or archival information back in the mail, giving you an idea of what ethnic groups you are made up from, or the name of the city where, say, your great grandfather was born and raised. And you might be feeling a bit lost with just those results thinking, “well, what next?”

What’s next is the specialty of Michael and Kathleen Lancor.

The Lancors were genealogy hobbyists for many years before deciding to make their

services official and open up Old Friends Genealogy in July of 2015. They have no employees or even an intern - the whole business is just the two of them.

“We had both been doing our own ancestry searches for a total of 70+ years, between the two of us,” Mike explains in a Zoom interview with Celtic Life International from the couple’s home in Moultonborough, New Hampshire. “After chasing our own ancestors, and the ancestors of numerous friends, we decided to go into business ourselves. Kate said to me, ‘We can’t get back to Adam and Eve, so it’s time we went into business to help others find out where their ancestors lived.’”

“And it was fun,” Kate interjects enthusiastically. “We would stay up until midnight or later, trying to solve our friends’ ancestry dilemmas. It was something we both really enjoyed.”

Technology had also helpfully caught up to the Lancors’ research vigour by the time

they opened their doors professionally, making it easier for them to use their skills to help others.

“We currently have 10 subscription websites that we use,” Mike explains. “Several of them are for searches for records in Ireland and the U.K., which includes Scotland, Wales, and England. We’re covering the Celts. But when it gets down to the nitty-gritty of trying to identify where one’s Celtic ancestors come from, you really need to be able to access some of these subscription websites. That’s where the records are held.”

Mike describes himself as the “left-brained” member of the company, excelling at scouring records for the small details - birth dates, marriage licenses, death certificates, and all the myriad paperwork one accumulates through life in between. Which, logically, makes Kate the right half of their cerebrum.

“Kate’s focus is much more on the history of the times. Chasing your ancestors isn’t all about records - it is also about learning as much as you can about the history,” Mike says, before Kate adds, “and the person.”

Kate tells just one story of her own ancestor, her great grandmother Mary Waters Fitzpatrick, to elaborate on how much these anecdotal accounts can fill in the gaps between dates and locations.

“We found this record where my great-great-grandmother was arrested with her brothers, for stealing a cow,” Kate recalls. “I’m thinking, ‘Why would she ever steal a cow?’ So, we went to that town, and we found out that they were dying of starvation at that time. They stole the cow from someone who had 300 cattle. And I mean, it just smacks you right in the gut.”

The Lancors have, and continue to make numerous trips around the world for their research, which is another way they enhance the results they can offer their clients. For one, older records are often not or not-yet digitized online, so the only real way to study them is to go where they physically reside.

But, as another one of Kate’s personal heritage journeys to Ireland reveals, standing in your ancestors’ footsteps adds a whole other dimension to one’s ability to connect with them.

“I wanted to know, why didn’t my ancestors ever go back,” Kate ponders, referring again to her great grandmother Mary, who



left Ireland for greener pastures. “But when I started looking in their footsteps - I can’t even talk about it, it’s so emotional - when I saw this tenement where Mary had once lived...just seeing that, that was not my vision of where my great-grandmother came from.

“I didn’t realize until I was there, walking in her footsteps, how difficult her life had been...”

“That’s what happens to our clients,” Kate continues. “So many times, they are so excited going to Ireland, but when they really get the history smacked in their heads - that they had to leave, they were really forced out or would starve. For my Mary Waters, that was actually the case. I could see why she never wanted to go back.”



Mike and Kate Lancor

One of the Lancors’ most recent clients is Siobhán Covington - the publisher of Celtic Life International.

“Mike and Kate are partners with Celtic Life International,” Siobhán explains over Zoom from her home office in Ontario, stating how she wanted to work with the two on her own ancestry journey. “We just thought this would be a very interesting editorial, and that we could start having a conversation with many of our readers who might be interested in the same thing. With a lot of the ancestry sites, it is very easy to get started, but you might not know how to get the complete story.”

Siobhán knows far more about her paternal ancestry than her maternal side, besides memories her mother and grandmothers might have shared with her.

“I knew my family name, and I knew some of the history directly from my mum - she spent quite a lot of time with her Irish relatives. But past that, we really didn’t have too many details.”

One thing she did know was that her great-grandfather was the mayor of Cork in Ireland for a spell. Armed with his Wikipedia page and scarcely more than that, she sent the Lancors on their mission.

“I knew that much, and I had my mum’s stories, so I was able to provide them with some information. They came back very quickly with some additional info - my great-grandfather’s parents, and his wife’s parents, where they were born, and so forth.”

It didn’t take the Lancors long to unearth more results.

“Siobhán had several very strong women in her ancestral line,” Mike recounts. “One of the ones that we really had focused on

was her maternal great-grandmother, Elizabeth ‘Lizzie’ Powell. The reason we looked at Lizzie as having such an interesting life is because she was born in 1878 in Co. Cork, and unfortunately, Lizzie died in 1924. She was only 47 years old at the time. She had given birth to at least seven children that we can find and had lost one of those children. When she died, she had four children who were still minors - less than 18 years old. So, she was a mainstay in that family.

“One of the things we found very interesting about Siobhán’s Irish ancestry was, for one, it’s deeply connected to the county of Cork,” Mike adds. “Going back as far as 1846, and earlier than that time period as well, in her case - and as is always the case - the women were often overlooked as to their role and impact on family genealogy. But all those women we just mentioned, just when you look at historical records, turned out to be the anchors in many ways for their families.”

Siobhán has travelled to England to visit with her father’s side of the family, but as she puts it, all of those visits involved returning to a place that represents living memory. She’s eager to make a sojourn to see where her great grandmother lived, in order to make a connection that transcends lifetimes.

“I think it’s fascinating, how we could be connected through generations.”

“It’s a nice way to connect with people that, perhaps, you have heard about from somebody’s living memory, but you have never met that person,” adds Siobhan. “I remember both my grandmothers very fondly, but people who had already passed away by the time I was born or was old enough to know who they were, you only have the memories of somebody else.

“You do have that connection, regardless of whether you met the person or not. I think knowing where they came from, where they lived, their surroundings, really informs you knowing them. Until you stand there, it’s not as personal an experience.”

For Kate, helping people like Siobhán have those personal experiences with loved ones long passed is the only reason they went into business at all.

“We want more people to get in touch with their ancestors,” says Kate. “That’s the most important thing for us. We’re not in it for the job, really. It’s trying to connect people living today with their past. It’s important to see what they came from.”

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Chloe Fitzpatrick

As our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands explains, one Scottish woman draws inspiration from the microscopic



The oldest known example of jewelry dates back 150,000 years; a set of pierced snail-shell beads found in a cave in Morocco. Other ancient examples from around the world include fish and animal bone amulets believed to confer good luck or supernatural powers to the wearer.

As with all art, the nature of jewelry evolves across the millennia as new materials are discovered and fashion trends - often driven by political, cultural, and spiritual influences - inspire artists and designers to explore new directions.

For one recent Scottish arts graduate, that journey of exploration - in a world where we are encouraged to consider the impact of exploiting the planet's finite resources - has led to the creation of jewelry using bacteria found naturally on the human body.

When I arranged to meet Chloe Fitzpatrick in her hometown studio in Bo'ness on the southern shoreline of the Firth of Forth, I wasn't sure if I should wear a hazmat suit or a mask. As it happened it was neither. The door was opened by a fresh-faced, young woman

in her early twenties in casual attire with a denim apron bearing only the light markings from her latest work in progress. My query about the safety of the environment I was about to enter brought nothing more infectious than a burst of laughter. It seems it is a comment she is getting used to these days. The first thing that struck me about the studio was its curious hybrid appearance. By the window was a workbench with all the paraphernalia and associated clutter I would expect to find in the workplace of a creative jewelry artist - hot-flame torches, vice, soldering iron, pliers, magnifying glass, scraps of pewter and strangely shaped pieces of coloured resin. The other side of the room was reminiscent of a modern science laboratory - pristine white desk, high-powered microscope, agar dishes sealed in resin containing amorphous blobs of differing colour, and a rack of shelves with liquid-filled glass jars, in which strange tendril-shaped objects were suspended. On a side wall was a bookcase housing a collection of volumes on fashion, biology, and art.

The room hosted several small plants that I would come to realize were all part of her foray into the world of what has become known as BioArt.

Fitzpatrick traces the origins of her journey into the world of BioArt to her experiences in secondary school.

"The syllabus was taught in a rigid way that inhibited imagination and free-thinking," she explains. "I was an avid drawer ever since I first held a pencil, and I knew that the best way to express myself was through the world of art. Although I never got the opportunity to explore it beyond the confines of structured coursework, I became fascinated with the unseen world made visible through the lenses of a microscope. That is where it all began."

Leaving school, she was offered a place at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, Dundee. During her first year as a



student, she experimented with different types of art but found her work influenced continually by science and specifically the micro-world of bacteria. In her second year she elected to study jewelry design, which she carried forward into third year where again she found her creations influenced by things she had observed through a microscope. By the time she reached her fourth and final year she knew that her new-found field of jewelry and her love of nature and the hidden world of bacteria had become inseparable. With the help and expertise of Dundee University's School of Life Sciences, and the James Hutton Institute she began taking swabs from different parts of her body and growing colonies of the gathered bacteria on nutrient-rich plates of agar-filled Petri dishes. As the colonies of different bacteria grew, she discovered they each had their own unique, signature colour. By extracting larger samples of individual colours she was then able to encourage further controlled growth of any specific bacterium. This provided even larger colonies of bacteria that could be cut or molded into different shapes. These were then encased in UV resin, sealed into a rubber mold or embedded in glass and set into a pewter or silver frame. Other options included dissolving the bacteria with acid to create bacterial-coloured pigments that could then be used to colour glass beads, dye threads and fabrics, or stain other materials. She has used similar processes to cultivate algae from the plants in her studio, embedding the results in her creations. Arguably, these approaches

are a more sustainable and environmentally friendly method of obtaining colour than some of the heavily chemical-based and potentially toxic alternatives.

Fitzpatrick is interested in Buddhism through which she senses a deep spirituality that helps her connect with the natural world - even at the most microscopic of levels.

This has led her to question why we continue to exploit the planet's diminishing resources by adorning our bodies with potentially harmful metals and scarce, precious minerals.

Holding a Petri dish to the window, she observes the light passing through a translucent colony of yellow bacteria.

"We have the ability to adorn our bodies with the beautiful things that are found growing naturally on it. Some people may think that weird, but it requires only a mindset shift in the way we look at the world of micro-organisms to see things differently."

Taking a book from a shelf she flicks through the pages pausing to show me examples of BioArt. I am intrigued to note mention of Sir Alexander Fleming as one of the earliest proponents of 'germ paintings.' Credited with the discovery of penicillin, he was a lifelong member of Chelsea Arts Club where he painted amateurish watercolours. Less well-known is that he created Petri dish

'paintings' using coloured bacteria to delineate stick figures, soldiers, ballerinas and houses. Although the art produced is regarded as unremarkable, it represents one of the earliest examples of biologically engineered art. Fitzpatrick belongs to an expanding list of bio-artists following in Fleming's footsteps. These are the creative individuals who blur the boundaries between art (emotive, evocative, and 'free') and design (subject to rules, research, and purpose).

She is quick to acknowledge that turning her early-day experiments into pieces of commercially viable jewelry has still some way to go but it is a journey that she is keen to continue. Jewelry empowers the wearer. It creates a sense of belonging and identity, invoking feelings of elevated self-esteem. These are important attributes. Fitzpatrick understands that jewelry is not just a decorative frill. Her work endeavours to tap into those feelings of identity and self-worth. What better way to display jewelry with confidence than have it created from the unseen things that are part of you - it becomes a manifest statement of who you are.

Fitzpatrick's work gained her a BDes Jewelry and Metal Design degree and the prestigious Sir James Black Award for outstanding research and achievement in her field. She has been commissioned to produce a piece of art for the University of Dundee School of Life Sciences' Medical Garden. This work in progress will be a dyed, bio-resin, pill-shaped sculpture representing the medically important *Streptomyces* bacterium - used to produce a wide range of essential antibiotics. As an avid contributor to the TikTok video-sharing platform - where she posts short clips of her work and the processes involved - she can boast over 110,000 followers and more than 86 million views. Clearly, there is significant interest in what she does. She admits, "Some people find it gross, while others are simply curious and then there are those who find it interesting and inspiring." Through her TikTok outreach she came to the attention of the organizers of the first central Asian BioArts Exhibition in Astana, Kazakhstan where her work was displayed recently in the Kulanshi Contemporary Art Centre.

It is Fitzpatrick's wish that the jewelry of tomorrow will not be made from gold and diamonds but from the signature bacteria that defines us.

www.chloefitzpatrick.co.uk
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*Photos by Chloe Fitzpatrick
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Ruby Slevin

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I grew up in Dublin, but my family originally comes from Donegal, so I have a huge connection to the Irish countryside which definitely inspires my work.

I come from a family who are all passionate about fashion - particularly Donegal tweed, which we all share a love for. In fact, we still meet at family gatherings all wearing our Donegal tweed jackets. I used to borrow my mother's clothes as a youngster, which gave me my initial interest in fashion. That interest became a desire to work in fashion, so I went back to college to study at the Grafton Academy in Dublin and then apprenticed on Savile Row in London.

Today, we create bespoke tailoring for

women as we realized that women lacked the same opportunities as men to have well-made and fitted clothing in beautiful fabrics. We take traditional Savile Row methods and push them into a modern context for women through bold fabric choices or boundary-pushing silhouettes, whilst still creating pieces that are timeless and don't go out of fashion.

A good piece of clothing should fit beautifully, be made in a fabric that works with a skin tone and is carefully crafted. And good clothing should work with an existing wardrobe to get the maximum wear out of it.

Our work has become more confident over the years as we make bolder design

choices. This comes from knowing what we do and doing it with precision and excellence that can only come through years of experience.

I love the current change of attitude towards sustainability and quality. People are becoming more and more aware of the environmental damage that comes with fast fashion and are consuming less, by building up to better wardrobes of key pieces, such as a beautiful tweed coat. This supports an environmentally conscious segment of the industry that is focussed on integrity, quality, and craftsmanship from the weavers to the makers and supports the next generation of artisans.





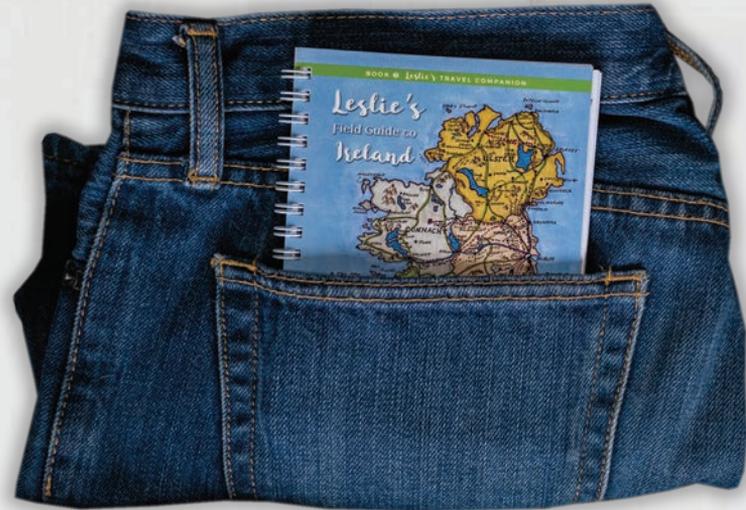
Leslie's

FIELD GUIDE TO IRELAND

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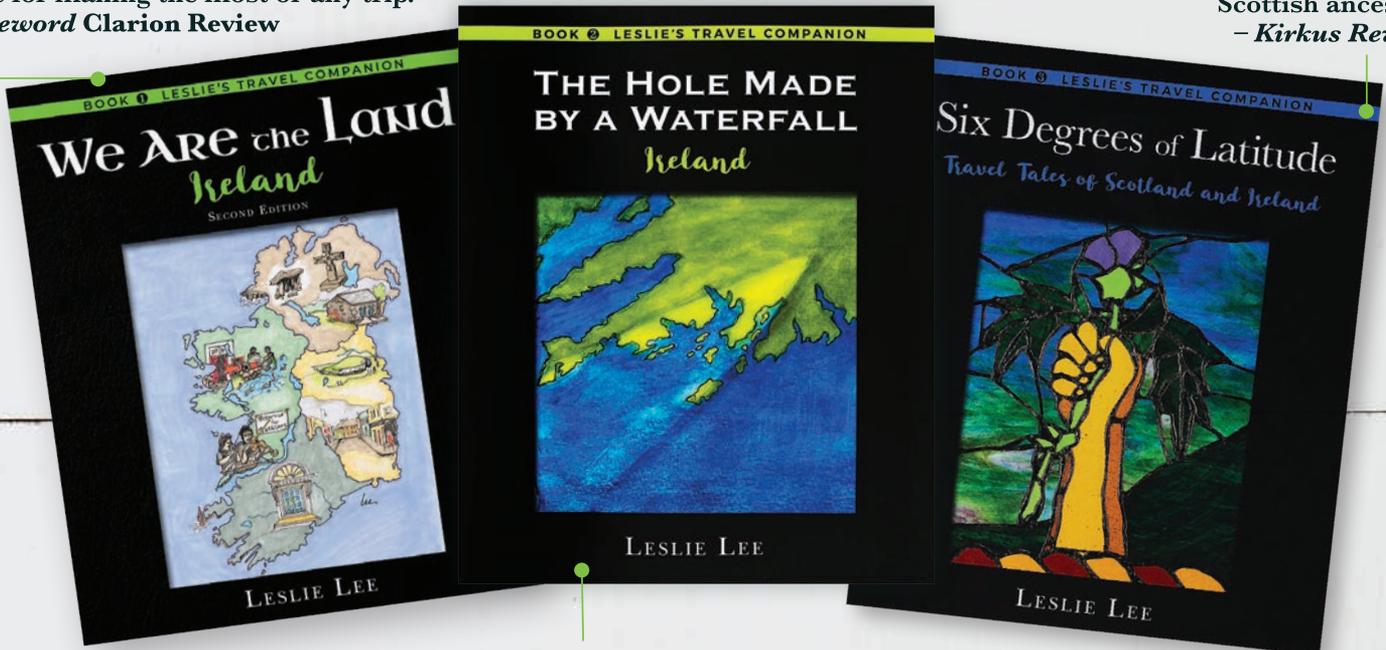
CELTIC TRAVEL TRILOGY

“*We Are the Land* is a unique and evocative Irish travelogue. It’s an inspiring guide for making the most of any trip.”

– *Foreword Clarion Review*

“More than merely a travelogue, this is a meditation on belonging and on Scottish ancestry.”

– *Kirkus Reviews*



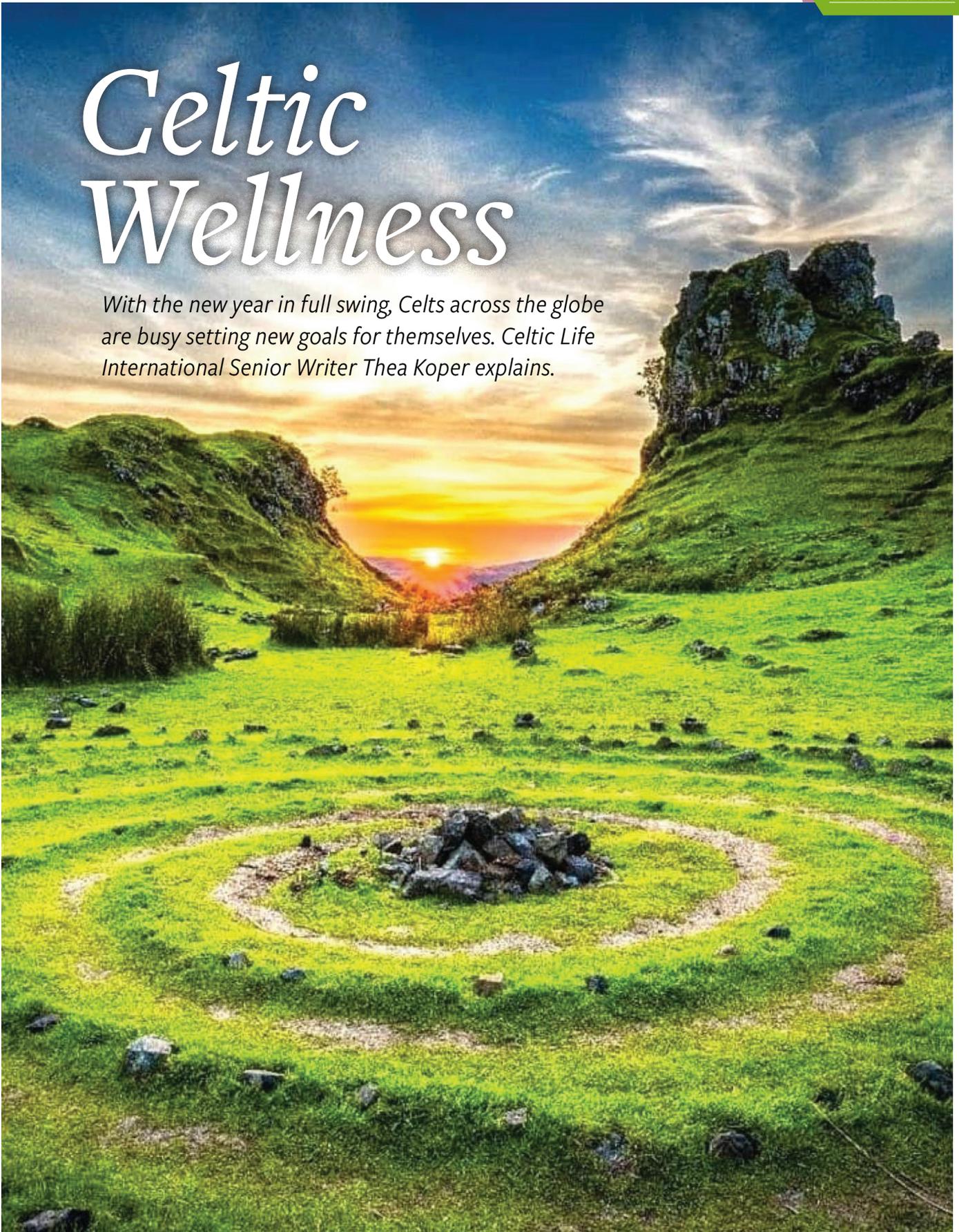
“Abundant sketches are used to depict both large and small details of the trips, from maps of visited locations to crumbling castles, pub musicians, and regional dishes. These illustrations are whimsical complements to Lee’s enchanting descriptions of dramatic landscapes, simple and extravagant meals, and spontaneous interactions with local people.”

– *Foreword Clarion Review*

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Celtic Wellness

With the new year in full swing, Celts across the globe are busy setting new goals for themselves. Celtic Life International Senior Writer Thea Koper explains.





Dr. Kirk Webb



Lyn Ray

New Year's resolutions, while often well-intentioned, are usually unlikely to stick around and lead to real change. This is because many of us have a hard time making realistic, clearly defined goals. Besides struggling to set clear goals, we often find it difficult to even begin the process of understanding the root causes of the habits we would like to change. Often, it is our mindset and overall sense of wellbeing that affects how we carry out our New Year's resolutions. Whether we've committed to exercising more or having a better work-life balance, a strong sense of wellbeing (be that physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual) can help build the solid foundation needed to achieve these goals and live a meaningful life.

For Finlay Wilson, the message rings clear. A yoga teacher living in Dundee, Scotland, he has been practicing the discipline for over 10 years. "I owe my current mobility to my yoga practice. Beyond the physical, the breath work and meditative aspects of my practice help in almost every daily situation."

As it is with many others, the benefits of yoga are more than just physical for Wilson. Healthy yoga practice also contributes to mental and emotional wellbeing. One of his greatest joys is witnessing his students evolve. "Along with physical capabilities, I get to see comfort in them, a softening of the walls where they are practicing acceptance of themselves."

Wilson's journey to becoming a yoga teacher began 17 years ago during university. "I needed surgery on both of my legs. I lived slightly out of town and the walk was too

much, so I went to the gym next door and started yoga classes once a week. I wasn't met with a very welcoming attitude as I couldn't stand for any period of time, and this seemed to flummox the instructor. But, as it was pre-YouTube days, I didn't have the same access to resources I would have now, so I stuck with it. Over time I noticed a shift in how I felt, and I began a daily 20-minute practice. This became something that saw me through my remaining years at university and the full recovery of my legs."

Wilson is mindful that, for some, the thought of starting a new fitness routine can be daunting. In response, Wilson ensures that everyone feels comfortable in his studio. "Both my husband Alan and I work in a way that there is always something you can do. Regardless of mobility, age, or ability, there is a part of each pose that can do something.

"Exploring that with grace, patience and persistence brings many of the philosophical elements of yoga into practice."

Given that yoga is accessible in some form to anyone wishing to practice, Wilson admits that he finds it challenging when he encounters someone who lacks motivation.

"Willpower is something I have never lacked. So, one of the biggest challenges is when teaching someone who doesn't have the drive to practice, or seemingly doesn't want to do anything. Even though you shouldn't, you begin to feel like you have failed that person."

Lacking motivation is a big reason why

many people fail to see their New Year's resolutions through. But, just like the muscles in your body, willpower can be strengthened over time, and investing in our emotional and mental wellbeing is essential.

Scottish life coach Lyn Ray, who is currently based in Edinburgh, recognizes the power of investing in our mental and emotional wellbeing. Through her coaching practice, Ray supports people to "live and work in a way that works for them. When we are happy, energized and fulfilled in our lives, this ripples out positively to everyone around us."

Ray first came to life coaching after experiencing burnout in the wake of a difficult time for her family's business. "By the end, I was mentally and physically exhausted. One Saturday, I met my cousin. She looked at me and asked how I was. I replied, the standard Scottish reply, 'I'm fine.' I was far from fine. I was struggling to hold it together and knew something had to change. She asked if I had tried meditating, sent me a link to the Headspace App and shared "The Miracle Morning" by Hal Elrod with me on Audible. That conversation changed my life.

"Over time I felt calmer and better able to concentrate. I listened to one personal development book after another, making small changes to my life as I went. My social media feed reflected this interest and one day in 2019 an advert came up for a free taster day for a Diploma in Transformational Coaching. I went along and that was the start of my adventure into coaching. I then retrained as a coach and set up my own practice."

Ray's first-hand experience with major life changes makes her work as a life coach



Finlay Wilson

unique. Whether it is “perfectionism, procrastination, not feeling good enough, being anxious, experiencing imposter syndrome, or feeling stuck, I understand the impact of these first-hand, so it’s rewarding to me when clients tell me the positive impact our work has had on their life.”

Key to Ray’s successful practice is the emphasis she places on actions. “I work with clients to agree to the actions they want to take and to hold them accountable to take them. We will never think our way to a better life, and a miracle is not coming, it takes commitment and action to change your life.”

In addition to strengthening our physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing through healthy practices like yoga and life coaching, we can also improve our spiritual wellbeing.

For just as we are minds and bodies, we are also souls. And, in the Celtic world especially, spiritual wellbeing is key to a meaningful life.

Celtic Spiritual Director Dr. Kirk Webb identifies the ways in which we can cultivate a healthy spiritual practice. “Some of those practices are prayer and meditation, study, ‘sitting’ in and with nature, use of imagination and creativity, reading and writing of poetry and prayers, and engagement in rituals that note natural events such as the cycles of nature.”

Webb, who has both Scottish and Irish roots, grew up in the southeastern Appalachian Mountains of the United States. He

now lives north of Seattle in the “soul-awakening landscape” of the Salish Sea shore. Webb turned to Celtic spirituality after growing disillusioned with some of the elements of his previous religion. As a young adult, he adopted a conservative Christian American version of faith. Some years later, however, “the fear-based anxiety and the divisive energy of that perspective ceased to hold my attention.”

The real change came after Webb travelled to Ireland and Scotland. “I felt a compelling soul-stirring by stepping onto those lands. Something of the land was quite tangibly holding me. The Celtic teachers, landscape, myths, practices, ruins, and people woke me back up to awareness of the closeness and power of love, divine presence through all of nature, and the dignity of each person. The ancient Celtic perspective saved me.”

The spiritual transformation that he experienced led him to launch the Celtic Center, an organization that supports those “who have lost their moorings and are searching to find new light in the old ways.” Through teaching, gathering, writing, and pilgrimages to Ireland, Webb joins others as they journey on their spiritual paths.

Rather than a top-down approach, his style of spiritual direction is best understood by the ancient Celtic tradition of Anam Cara, which translates to ‘Soul Friend’ in English. This concept lies at the heart of Celtic spirituality. “The ancient Celts believed that a life lived in utter solitude with no spiritual mentor or friend is a life that would inevitably collapse and bear little fruit. They encouraged every person to have a Soul Friend that provided regular and skilled listening so that each person’s story can be shared, held, and encouraged. A Soul Friend is not a spiritual authority, but instead guides by entering meaningful conversation and finding inspiration together.”

Webb places a strong emphasis on this relational aspect of spirituality. “These practices are never about me alone. They must propel us into acts of compassion, love, care, and justice. Care is a responsibility toward self, others, and nature in a myriad of ways.”

While his spiritual direction brings him great joy and purpose, Webb maintains that he must take care “not to be arrogant in the work. It is easy to slip out of humility and into arrogant thinking that I know the way instead of joining another follower as we humbly say that we discover the way together as we walk the way.”

Our society still has a lot of work to do in terms of investing in our collective and individual spiritual wellbeing, and Webb be-

lieves that our moment in time is critical.

“We are at a threshold point. Nationalistic political movements around the globe are threatening to destroy any progress regarding caring for others who are different than ourselves. Conversation and solution-building regarding climate change and care of the environment is stalled, mocked, and disbanded on many fronts. And we are encouraged to bow down to the great consumerist and money gods at all turns. The moment is not just bad, it is desperate. I can speak of this regarding the United States, but I suspect that it is also at least partially true in the Celtic lands and across the globe. We have lost our collective soul.”

When it comes to the current state of our mental and emotional wellbeing, Ray shares a similar perspective. “According to statistics from the Scottish Government around 1 in 4 people are estimated to be affected by mental health problems in Scotland at some point in their lifetime. When I look globally, other countries are facing similar challenges. People are stressed and unhappy.”

While issues surrounding wellbeing are complex, a shift in mindset can help us begin the journey towards self-healing - perhaps looking to another time in history.

“The ancient Celtic way stands ready to shed light on the path,” says Webb. “Obviously, we can’t go back to all of those ancient traditions, but those ancient mindsets and ways of joining our human development with the natural rhythms of nature in a respectful and symbiotic relationship are ready to inspire us toward new behaviours, beliefs, change, and redemptive engagement.”

This New Year, even though we may still commit ourselves to well-intentioned but perhaps overly ambitious goals, let us not forget to take the time to be gentle with ourselves. To care for our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. Maybe that will involve going on a simple walk every day with a loved one, or picking up the phone to check in with an old friend, or attending a spiritual gathering in communion with others.

“The old is becoming new again,” Webb reflects. “And it is an honour to be part of that rebirth.”

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Celtic. Continental

As Celtic Life International Executive Editor Stephen Patrick Clare explains, the Celtic heartbeat remains the pulse of mainland continental Europe.



Diana Lourenço is holding court against the backdrop of Porto's pristine and popular waterfront district. The sky is blue and clear and the temperature is moderate as flocks of visitors cross the Luís I Bridge - a double-deck metal arch viaduct - transporting them over the River Douro to Porto's sister city, Vila Nova de Gaia.

Despite Lourenço's petite frame, the 30-something Portuguese art historian and tour guide - who grew up 3 hours to the south - is both wiry and fiery as she acts-out anecdotes of her country's antiquity to an array of attentive attendees.

"Like a lot of countries in western Europe, Portugal has been occupied by many invaders over the centuries," she shares. "Romans, Spanish, Moors, Germanic peoples...it wasn't until 1974 - with what we call the 'Carnation Revolution' - that we developed a true sense of our own identity. When we joined the European Union in 1986, our economy began to flourish, and today we are enjoying a boom in several sectors, especially in tourism.

"We have a different kind of invaders

here now, however," she smiles slyly. "We call them tourists."

Edgy, animated, and quick-witted, Lourenço is fiercely proud of her roots and her country's newfound sense of self.

"When travellers visit from other parts of the world, they are often surprised by how different we are as a people. Our culture - our food, fashion, music, literature, theatre, sports, and everything else - is unlike any other on the European continent."

And while modern Portugal has established itself as a unique society and distinct destination over the past half-century, the presence of its past cannot be simply painted over with a fresh coat of patriotism.

"For better or for worse, our diverse history is everywhere," acknowledges Lourenço, pointing across the river to the city's wine markets. "Even the popularity of our national drink, Port, can be attributed to the reach of the British Empire after the English 'discovered' the richness of our Douro Valley in the north."

Like the country's capital city of Lisbon, Porto - and all of Portugal - was a crossroads of sorts for Europeans coming and going to

the new world. That influence is felt most profoundly by the town's waterfront, where remnants of the region's robust sailing heritage highlight its cross-cultural roots. That includes the area's architecture, which reflects the plenitude of foreign peoples that have called Porto home over the years.

"This is quite fascinating," shares Lourenço as we enter the bustling São Bento train station, where traditional blue and white ceramic tiles ornament the walls.

"These larger mosaics recount some of our history," she explains. "However, one must examine each individual tile to better understand the bigger picture of who we are."

Sure enough, a closer inspection of the massive motifs reveals hidden-in-plain-sight symbols from Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Greece, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Interestingly, spaced sporadically in the tiled tales, is the Triskele - a longstanding icon of Celtic culture.

"Yes, the Celts were here," explains Lourenço. "At one time, they had settlements all across this country."



Diana Lourenço

Portugal

A quick Wikipedia search confirms Lourenço's claims.

Early in the first millennium BC, several waves of Celts invaded Portugal from Central Europe and intermarried with the local populations to form several different ethnic groups, with many tribes. The Celtic presence in Portugal is traceable, in broad out-

line, through archaeological and linguistic evidence.

Along with advances in agricultural and livestock management, the Celts - later identified as Lusitanians - planted their cultural flag firmly on the Iberian Peninsula.

Today, dozens of place names across Portugal are attributed to the Celts. The remains of Celtic settlements (Castros) can still be found in Citania de Briterios, in the northern province of Minho. More empirical evidence is on display at the Matins Sarmento Museum in the nearby city of Guimarães. Elsewhere across the country, the Museu Convento dos Lóios in Santa Maria da Feira houses many Celtic artifacts, while statues of Celtic warriors appear in the region of Terras de Basto, sculptures of pigs and boars dot the landscape of the Tras-os-Montes province, and ruins of circular stone huts remain mostly intact in the town of Viana do Castelo. In addition, traditional bagpipes - known as gaita-de-foles transmontane - are honoured during annual festivals in Miranda do Douro.

"The Celtic presence in Portugal," continues Lourenço, "is strongest in the north, near Galicia."



Bras Rodrigo

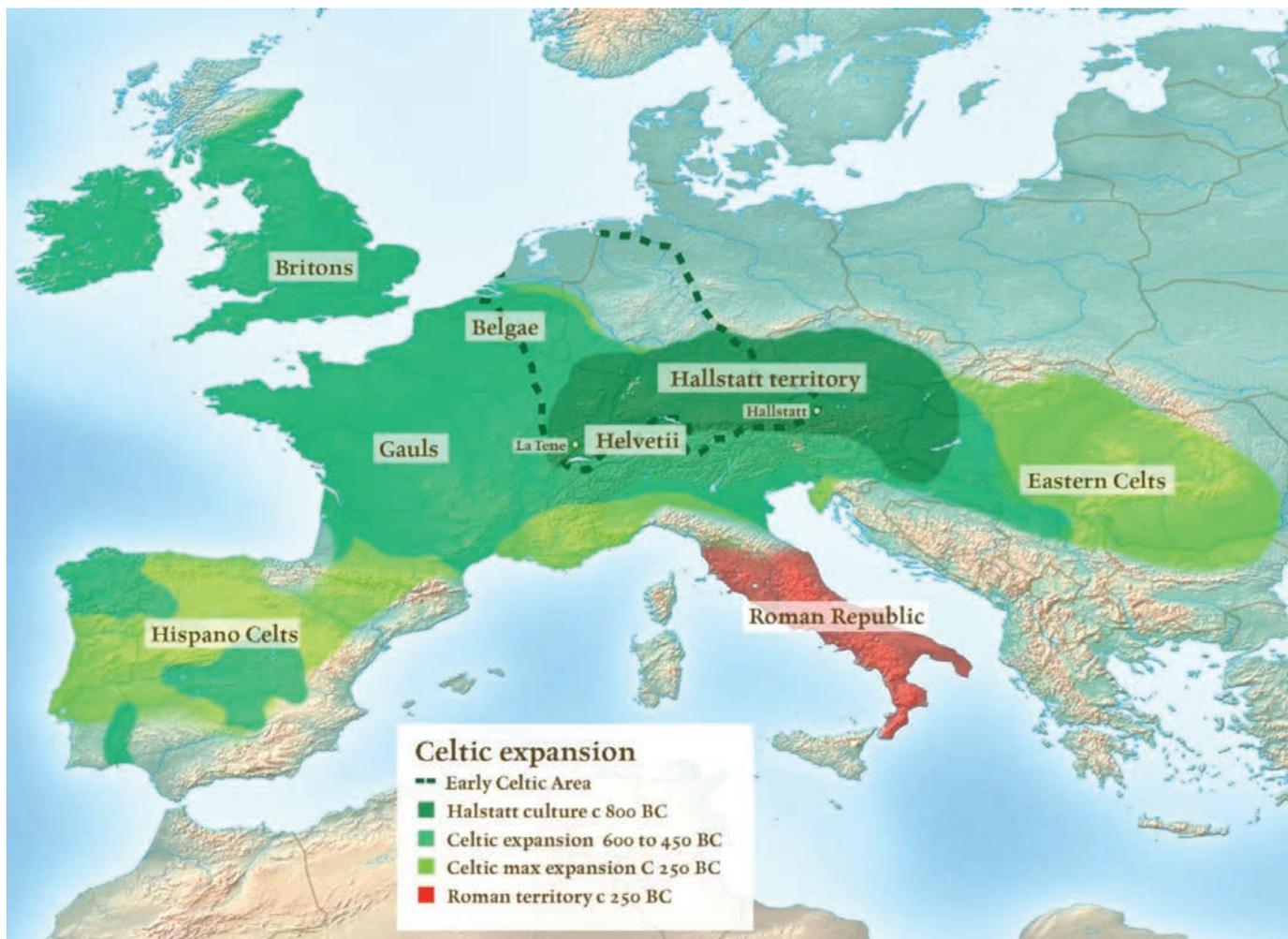
Spain

Spain's Celtic roots have been well-documented in Celtic Life International over the years.

Today, it is believed some Celtic tribes migrated to, not invaded, the Iberian Peninsula from about 1000 - 300 BC in two migratory waves: 900 BC and 700 - 600 BC. The first wave of Celts established themselves in Catalonia, the eastern coastal area of the Iberian Peninsula, and entered by way of the Pyrenees Mountains. The later groups



Porto



of Celts traveled west through the Pyrenees to inhabit the northern coast of the Iberian Peninsula and south beyond the Ebro and Duero River basins and as far as the Tagus River valley. These tribes are known today as Celtiberians, a name given to them by the Romans who invaded around 45 BC and encountered them living there. Celtiberians spoke a definite Celtiberian language, as attested by the ancient Celtic text, Botorrita Inscription, found on the Iberian Peninsula. Original Celtic sites of some settlements today in Spain are identified by a “-briga” suffix to the name of the town or village. What does remain today of Celtic ruins is mostly in the northwestern peninsula, especially in Galicia and Asturias.

The name Galicia, specifically, means “Land of the Gaelic People,” and many of the region’s residents speak Galician, a hybrid of Spanish and Gaelic/Scottish languages.

However, the neighbouring province of Asturias also has a strong, although often overlooked, Celtic history - so strong, in fact, that many have called for it to be officially recognized as the 8th Celtic nation. Several

Celtic settlements - including the Towers of Capa, which remained a Celtic stronghold for almost 800 years, and Campa Torres, which was inhabited for centuries by the Celtic people of the Cylurni - testify to the area’s ancestry.

The Celtic peoples, known as the Asturias, were comprised of numerous tribes, including the Luggones, the Pesicos, and others. Today, many villages in Asturias are called Belenos (after the Celtic God Belenus) and, despite centuries of decline, about 1,000 Celtic words remain a part of the territory’s dialect.

The most obvious vestige, however, is the Asturian bagpipe, or gaita, which has much in common with the traditional bagpipes of other Celtic nations.

“I am Celtic, and I play the Asturian bagpipes,” says Bras Rodrigo, who was born and bred in Asturias. “I also play the Scottish and Galician bagpipes as well.”

The gaita asturiana is not unlike the more familiar Scottish pipes, though its dimensions are longer than other regional cousins of the same key, and it is character-

ized by different finger hole placements that allow it to hit various octaves via a technique called requintar.

“I was inspired by its sound,” shares the 40-something musician. “Below my house, they taught bagpipes. One day, as a youngster, I was walking with my grandfather and heard something special. Without having even seen the instrument, I told him that I wanted to play what I was hearing. It turns out it was a bagpipe.”

Over three decades later, Rodrigo plays the pipes professionally in concert, records albums, and teaches younger pipers.

“For me, the challenge is in helping new generations better understand the ancient history of the bagpipe. I want my students to appreciate that tradition, while at the same time being innovative and adapting the sound and music to popular culture.

“It is important that we have an idea of both where we come from and where we are going.”

Fernán Morán, President of the Asturias Celtic League, believes that his culture needs to be nurtured and celebrated both at home and abroad.

“Asturias has occupied the same territory for more than 2,800 years,” he explains. “All the parameters of Asturian culture are Celtic: folklore, mythology, archaeology, history, crafts, etc.”

Today, Asturians hold an array of annual Celtic events to showcase the strength of that culture.

“In the capital of Oviedo, every Saturday and Sunday from May through October, there are parades of bagpipe bands in the city centre,” shares Morán. “There is food, beer, cider, and literary events. There are also Celtic crafts and gold and silver markets.

“In fact, the very name Asturias comes from the Celtic root *Stour*, which means river - a name that is often seen elsewhere in Europe.”

Italy

While both the origins and the emigration patterns of the Celtic people and culture remain up for debate amongst both academ-

ics and everyday scholars, there is evidence to suggest that they first rose to prominence during Europe’s Bronze Age (3200 BC – 600 BC). It is believed that by 700 BC - 500 BC, hundreds of loosely bound tribes - united by a similar language and pagan practices - came together in the Hallstatt region of Austria. From there, they moved westward through Germany, Switzerland, and France, eventually settling in what we now know as the British Isles - England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, and the Isle of Man.

However, some tribes broke off, heading east to the area now called Eastern Europe - Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovenia. Today, these people are known as the Balkan Celts. A few even made it as far as Turkey and the Middle East.

Still others went south to scour the coastlines along the Mediterranean Sea, establishing outposts in Greece (who coined the moniker, *Keltoi*, meaning barbarians), and Italy.

Warriors by nature, the Celts (specifically, the Gallic tribe, or Gauls from France and northwestern Spain) captured Rome in 390 BC after the Battle of the Allia. The Romans

rallied in 225 BC, retaking the city, and re-establishing the base of their expansive empire. A century later, Julius Caesar erected a fortress around the capital with a circumference of 20 kilometers. His 8-year, 30-battle confrontation with Celts destroyed over 800 villages and wiped-out over a million people across the region, including an estimated 250,000 of the Helvetii tribe alone.

While the majority of Celts were either slaughtered or driven out by their aggressors, and there are little traces of the Celtic language remaining in Italy today, remnants of their culture continue to linger across the country.

Just southwest of Venice, the annual Bungan Celtic Festival has drawn over 30,000 people to the Rocca di Stellata on the River Po for the past 16 years. According to the event’s website, the point of “organizing a historical re-enactment of the Celtic period in the Po delta area is because few know that the Celts were among the first and most important inhabitants of our lands that the Romans called Gallia Cisalpina and whose people called themselves Gallic until the late Middle Ages.”



Montelago Celtic Festival

A few hours south by car, near Perugia, the Montelago Celtic Festival brings tens of thousands of Celts together each August for three days of celebration.

Organizers Maurizio Serafini and Luciano Monceri founded the event in 2002. “We are from the Marche region of central Italy,” says Serafini, “which, before the expansion of the Roman Empire, was a territory inhabited by Celtic tribes called Gauls. There are many archaeological remains that bear witness to their presence - from the discovery of jewelry at Sassoferrato, in the central province of Ancona, to fortification ruins on the hilltops around Montelago and Colfiorito, where the festival is held. It is therefore quite appropriate for a Celtic festival to take place in the Marche on the Colfiorito plateau.

“The festival began as a one-night show under the administration of the Province of Macerata,” Monceri pipes in. “It immediately drew a crowd of 5,000 and later became an annual, autonomous initiative. That first Celtic Night has become a bona fide festival, offering the opportunity to spend the whole weekend in campers and tents on an alpine plateau 800 meters above sea level. In addition to the concerts, festivalgoers can enjoy a Celtic craft market, thematic conferences, music, dance and traditional craft workshops, Celtic games, a rugby tournament, the art of divination, Celtic weddings, paragliding, horse-riding, and battle re-enactments. In addition, through the internet and social forums, a genuine Montelago community has emerged, constantly participating in discussions on programs and services.”

Monceri adds that, in addition to the main event, their Celtic community produces year-round Celtic-themed events.

“In the winter, theaters, auditoriums, and schools are used for music festivals, courses in violin making, dance, music, literary meetings and conferences, and television and radio broadcasts.

Today, the Montelago Celtic Festival remains the biggest Celtic cultural event in Italy. And while its numbers continue to grow, they still pale in comparison to the world’s largest Celtic festival 1800 kilometers to the northwest.

France

He may be one of the busiest men in Bretagne, but Lisardo Lombardia is happy to



Lisardo Lombardia

take a few moments to wax philosophically on his favourite topic.

“Everyone always takes note of the melodic qualities of Celtic music,” muses the former Executive Director of Bretagne’s Festival Interceltique de Lorient, who retired from his position in 2021 but remains involved with the annual gathering. “And that is understandable - the voice, fiddle, and especially the pipes, are so prominent.

“Me, though - I always hear the pulse of a song first. The rhythmic instruments, especially the drums and the bodhran, are the foundation of the music, sitting below the melody lines, keeping the tempo like a heartbeat.”

As the longstanding heart and soul of the world’s biggest Celtic festival - which attracts nearly one million visitors to Bretagne’s beautiful southwest coast each year - Lombardia is more than qualified to speak to the subject of its soundtrack.

“We have had some of the biggest names of the genre perform at the gathering over the last 52 years,” he continues. “Alan Stivell, the Chieftains, Natalie MacMaster, the Dubliners - too many to recall. And one thing I noticed about those great musicians, and some of the very good new artists, is they all have very tight rhythm sections. If the pacing - that heartbeat - is sound and strong, then everything else falls into place.”

Things are falling into place nicely for this year’s festival, which takes place from August 4 to 13. Along with another star-studded line-up of performers - including Clannad, Altan, Talisk, Danu, Suzanne Vega, and others from the seven Celtic nations and beyond - the event will again showcase a wealth of local and regional talent.

And if all that music wasn’t enough, the ten-day gathering brings a mélange of other Celtic cultural components into the mix, including parades, dancing, theatre, literature, cinema, cuisine, competitions, and more.

Lombardia explains that, since its inception, Interceltique has always strived to integrate an array of influences.

“At the heart of it is the idea that what it means to be Celtic today is up for negotiation. How do we define ourselves as a people? And how do we redefine ourselves for the modern world? Are we cross-Celtic? Pan-Celtic? That concept has become a bit of a moving target.”

He adds that, as the classification of Celtic has evolved, so has the festival.

“It has opened the door to greater opportunities for us; today we have acts from all over the world, playing styles of music that you perhaps wouldn’t have heard just a generation ago - Euro-Celt, Afric-Celt, Celt-Asian, etc. This ongoing, organic cross-pollination of cultures will continue to present all sorts of exciting possibilities for us in the future.”

While Lombardia’s enthusiasm for fresh sounds keeps the festival going forward, he is careful to keep one foot firmly in the past.

“We know where we come from. Our roots are deeply embedded in Celtic Europe, and everything that has sprouted and grown here in Lorient over the last 52 years has come from that rich soil.”

Digging in the dirt

Recent archaeological surveys across the northern belt of mainland Europe have confirmed that the Celts inhabited large areas of land there from the 8th to 1st centuries BC.

In Germany, sites at Duensberg, Glaumberg and Altkoenig/Heidtraenk-Oppidum in Germany have revealed the remains of



Celtic artifact found at La Tène

large residences and fortresses dating back to 200 BC - 100 BC. And, in 2010, researchers found the opulent grave of a Celtic princess close to an early Celtic settlement near Heuneburg dated to the same period.

In Hallstatt, Austria - a lakeside village southeast of Salzburg - a Celtic burial site containing 1300 graves, dating back to the 8th century BC, was discovered in 1846.

Switzerland's La Tène culture is named after a Celtic site located on the north side of Lake Neuchâtel that developed and flourished during the late Iron Age (450 BC). Thousands of Celtic artifacts were found in the lake after the water level dropped unexpectedly in 1857.

Belgium takes its name from the Belgae, an early Celtic tribe that were later displaced by both the Romans (1st century BC) and Germanic warriors (5th century AD).

In Luxembourg, newly found sites at Titelberg and in the Moselle Valley suggest that the Celts were highly organized and industrious as master metalworkers. In addition, tombs found at Niederanven, Grosbous, Flaxweiler, and Altrier - which date back to between 450 BC and 250 BC - indicate elaborate death ceremonies.

As with Luxembourg, scholars have been arguing about the Celtic presence in the Netherlands for decades. However, silver, gold, and copper Celtic coins found in Echt, Zutphen, and in the Amby area of Maastricht (dating from around 50 BC to 20 AD) seem to have put an end to those debates. As far as we know, this is as far north as the Celts travelled in Western Europe.

And while the Celtic peoples - along with their language - have long since vacated these places, their culture lives on in the hundreds of Celtic-themed events, societies, dance schools, and more that can be found across the region.

Coda

Back on the Porto waterfront, Diana Lourenço speaks as we begin the steep climb back up to the city center.

"Near here, we have the Sanfins de Ferreira. There are fortress walls and about 100 shelters, all of which can be traced back to the Celtic peoples."

The city's residents honour that heritage each spring with the Porto Interceltic Festival. Established in 1986, the 10-day gathering brings together traditional artists and artisans from around the world for a unique celebration of Celtic culture.

"All the Irish pubs here are packed day and night during the festival. It does sort



of align with St. Patrick's Day, and our local Irish dance school even puts on a few public performances, so everyone parties like a Celt here for a week or so."

I ask her what it means to be Celtic.

"My studies in Western European art and history did cover the Celtic eras. As you can imagine, with hundreds of different tribes travelling around the European mainland for hundreds of years, there is a significant amount of material, and researchers continue to uncover more each year.

"From what I understand, the Celts were originally nomadic warrior tribes that, once united, evolved into a peaceful and progressive people."

"For example, it is mind-blowing to think that Celtic women enjoyed the same rights as men and that they flourished in their roles as political, business, and military leaders, especially given the violent and oppressive nature of the times.

"And the Celts practiced an early form of inclusivity; when foreign tribes appeared on their doorsteps they were welcomed into the Celtic community. The Celts were also very respectful of other lifestyle choices - religion, sexuality, etc. - which was a far-cry from what other cultures were like then."

I point out that the symbols used to comprise the Celtic Cross represent an amalgamation of two belief systems: the Christian cross and the Celtic (Pagan) sun.

"Absolutely," nods Lourenço. "I have seen that sense of openness in much of their art - mostly in images and sculptures that re-

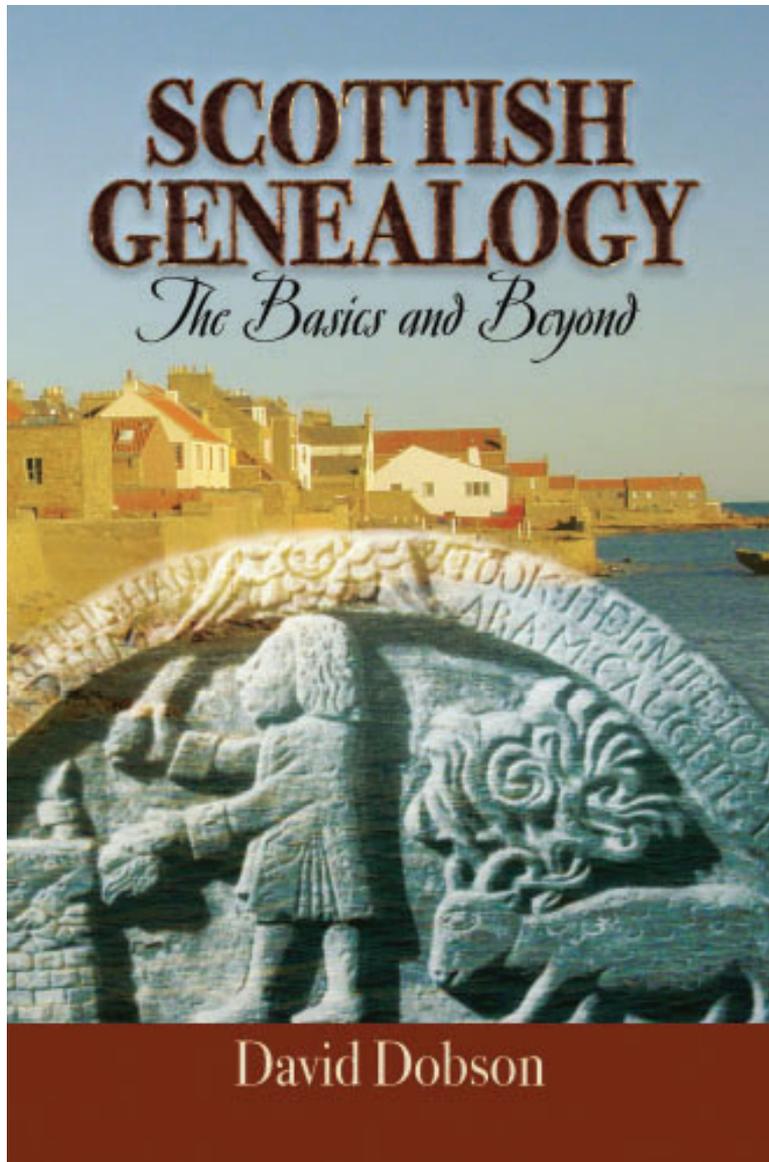
fect their closeness to the cycles of the natural world. They were, by all accounts, ahead of their time."

Over the ensuing 2500 years, those peaceful principles have quietly trickled down through much of Western Europe. I note that the modern world could use a few of those spiritual stars by which to steer its ship.

"Oh yes," agrees Lourenço. "Thankfully, that Celtic influence is still with us - their music, dance, dress, food, and, perhaps most importantly, their ideas. The rhythms of their lifestyle have remained like a heartbeat over the millennia, pumping the blood of life into people on the European continent."



SCOTTISH ROOTS



Scottish Genealogy: The Basics and Beyond

By David Dobson

While this publication identifies the major sources and repositories for those just getting started on their research, what makes this book stand out from all the rest is its focus on the other, less commonly used, sources that will allow researchers to advance their research. For each research topic—including statutory registers, church records, tax records, sasines and land registers, court records, military and maritime sources, burgh and estate records, emigration records, and much more—Dr. Dobson has compiled an extensive list of the publications and archival records that most researchers have not heard of. It would take years for any other individual to compile such a far-reaching bibliography and compilation of relevant records in Scottish archives. David Dobson was born in 1940 in Carnoustie, Scotland. Most of his working life was spent at Madras College, St. Andrews. He has been an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Aberdeen, the University of Edinburgh, and at present, at the University of St. Andrews. He is the author of more than 200 books, including *Scottish Emigration to Colonial America, 1607-1785*, *Scottish Trade with Colonial Charleston, 1683-1783*, and numerous historical and genealogical source books. He now lives in Dundee and is working on further source books.

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the Seven Celtic Nations



Scotland

Population: 5,313,600

Capital: Edinburgh

Official Languages: English, Scots and Gaelic

Currency: Pound Sterling

Getting There:

By Air: Fly into international airports in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow Prestwick.

By Ferry: Regular direct ferry service between Northern Ireland and Scotland, between Belfast and Cairnryan, between Larne and Troon or between Larne and Cairnryan.

On Land: There are numerous train options from England and bus/coach options from both England and Wales. If you are driving, take the A1 from London to Edinburgh (for some gorgeous scenic views branch off onto the A68). Alternatively, take the M6 from Rugby to Carlisle.

Travel Documents:

Tourist visa and other document requirements vary by traveler. Visit the UK Border Agency website for more information: www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk

Noteworthy Attractions:

- Edinburgh
- The Royal Mile
- Walking route from Edinburgh Castle to the Palace of Holyrood House

- Scotland's Malt Whisky Trail
- Speyside
- Seven operational and historic distilleries, and the only working cooperage in the UK
- St. Andrews Links
- St. Andrews, Fife
- St. Andrews boasts one nine-hole course and six 18-hole courses. Its Old Course is dubbed the "home of golf" with play dating back to 1400AD.

Travel Tidbits:

For authentic cuisine, take advantage of Scotland's many farmers' markets and pubs - and don't forget to order mince 'n' tatties. Scotland is also home to a number of Michelin-star restaurants.

Globally, approximately 50 million people have ancestral ties to Scotland. While in Scotland, you can conduct genealogical research at Scotland's People Centre, the Scottish Genealogy Society in Edinburgh or at The Mitchell Library in Glasgow.



Ireland

Population: 1.8 million (Northern Ireland), 4.6 million (Republic of Ireland)
 Capital: Belfast (Northern Ireland), Dublin (Republic of Ireland)
 Official Languages: Northern Ireland: English, Gaelic and Ulster Scots, Republic of Ireland: English and Irish (Gaelic)
 Currency: Pound Sterling (Northern Ireland), Euros (Republic of Ireland)

Getting There:

By Air: Book flights arriving at airports in Shannon, Dublin or Belfast.

By Ferry: Take a ferry (either as a foot passenger or by vehicle) to various ports around Ireland from the Isle of Man, Scotland, Wales and England.

Travel Documents:

Visa and passport requirements vary by nationality. Contact your local Irish Embassy (for the Republic of Ireland) or British Embassy (for Northern Ireland) for more information.

Noteworthy Attractions:

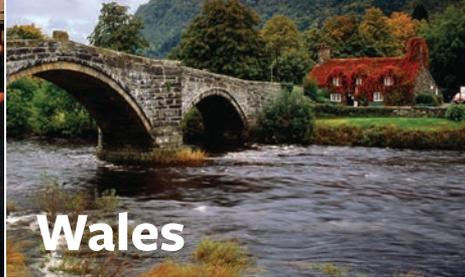
- Giant's Causeway
- County Antrim
- UNESCO World Heritage Site and Northern Ireland's most popular visitors' attraction
- Boyne Valley
- County Meath
- Some of the most historical sites in all of Europe including The Hill of Slane, Loughcrew Cairns and the Newgrange Passage Tomb.
- Dublin
- O'Connell Street
- Known as Europe's widest urban street, it is perhaps Dublin's most vibrant thoroughfare. Intriguing architecture, monuments (including the tallest sculpture in the world) and business centre make a great walking tour.

Travel Tidbits:

It is estimated that more than 80 million people around the world are connected to the Irish Diaspora.

For authentic Irish cuisine, visit the coast and countryside for fresh seafood. Local farmers' markets and small pubs are good bets also.

The best way to explore Ireland is by car.



Wales

Population: 3,074,067
 Capital: Cardiff
 Official Languages: Welsh and English
 Currency: Pound Sterling

Getting There:

By Air: Fly direct to Cardiff International Airport or fly to England and drive/take the train into Wales. In the summertime, flights from Belfast and the Isle of Man arrive at Wales' Anglesey Airport.

By Ferry: Regular direct ferry service between Ireland and Wales.

On Land: There are several regular train and bus/coach options between England and Wales. If you are driving, there are numerous motor routes from England. Note that both the M4 and M48 have pay-tolls for crossing the Severn Bridges.

Travel Documents: Tourist visa and other document requirements vary by traveler. Visit the UK Border Agency website for more information: www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk

Noteworthy Attractions:

- King Edward's Castles and Town Walls
- Gwynedd principle area
- A World Heritage Site featuring four castles and two fortified towns built during the late 13th century and early 14th century
- Snowdonia National Park
- North Wales
- The largest national park in Wales and home to Wales' highest mountain
- Cardiff Bay hosts many attractions including the Wales Millenium Centre (home to the Welsh National Opera), the Doctor Who Experience, the Craft in the Bay gallery and the Goleulong 2000 Lightship.

Travel Tidbits:

Enjoy free admission to all National Museums. The best way to see Wales, including its most remote areas, is by car or motorcycle. For adrenaline seekers, try 'coasteering,' a seaside adventure activity that was invented in Pembrokeshire.



Isle of Man

Population: 84,497
 Capital: Douglas
 Official Languages: English, Manx Gaelic
 Currency: Manx Pounds

Getting There:

By Air: Most flights arrive at the Isle of Man Airport (Ronaldsway Airport) from England, Ireland, Wales, Scotland and the Channel Islands.

By Ferry: Regular ferry service is available between the Isle of Man and five different ports in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

Travel Documents: The Isle of Man is part of the British Isles Common Travel Area. Passport and visa requirements vary by traveler's nationality and in some cases requirements may vary from travel into other British Isle destinations. The UK administers travel visas and such on the Isle of Man's behalf. Visit the UK Border Agency website for more information: www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk

Noteworthy Attractions:

- Manx Stone Cross Collection
- Located in churches/churchyard all around the Isle
- The Isle of Man features a collection of about 200 headstones and crosses; the oldest ones feature Celtic designs or inscriptions.
- Peel Castle
- St. Patrick's Isle, Peel
- Cregneash Village
- Mull Hill
- An interpretive village highlighting the Manx way of life (language, trade, farming, homes and craft) during the 19th and early 20th centuries

Travel Tidbits:

In 1990, UNESCO declared the Manx Gaelic language was extinct. However, it has rebounded and is now taught in schools and appears on everything from road signs to mobile apps.



Cornwall

Population: 532,300
Capital: Truro
Languages: English and Cornish
Currency: Pound Sterling

Getting There:

By Air: Fly into Newquay Cornwall Airport from major UK airports and some international locales.

By Ferry: There are more than 25 ferries (for foot passengers and cars) that service Cornwall.

On Land: Many people choose to drive to Cornwall as it is the most convenient way to explore the region, but you can also take the bus or train. Within Cornwall, there is an extensive bus network and a train line that connects many of the region's towns.

Travel Documents: Tourist visas and other document requirements vary by traveler. Visit the UK Border Agency website for more information:

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk

Noteworthy Attractions:

- One of the most famous Celtic crosses in the region located next to the Penlee House Gallery and Museum
- Penzance, It boasts approximately 400 historical Celtic sites
- Penwith Peninsula
- Near St. Austell
- The Eden Project
- The world's largest indoor rainforest

Travel Tidbits:

The Cornish language has experienced a resurgence since the early 1900s. Today, more than 500 residents speak Cornish as their first language.

Carshare Cornwall, a free travel service, is now available to travelers.

Be sure to try Cornish pasties and cream teas.



Bretagne

Population: 3,199,066
Capital: Rennes
Official Language: French
Currency: Euros

Getting There:

By Air: Fly to regional airports in Bretagne (Brest, Dinard and Rennes) from Ireland, the UK and elsewhere in France.

By Ferry: Arrive at St-Malo or Roscoff via ferry (either with your vehicle or as a foot passenger) from Ireland or the UK.

On Land: You can easily drive to Bretagne from elsewhere in France or via the Channel Ports from England. Bretagne also has an excellent train network to explore the region and which extends to elsewhere in France.

Travel Documents: France, and thus Bretagne, is a part of the Schengen Agreement (which dictates required visa/documents depending on nationality). www.schengenvisa.cc

Noteworthy Attractions:

- Saint-Malo
- Ille-et-Vilaine
- A walled city since medieval times, as well as a Channel Port, oozing with historic charm, a lively hotel/restaurant/shopping scene, a beautiful beach and more!
- Dinan
- Côtes-d'Armor
- One of Bretagne's most popular historic towns, with fortified towers and ramparts still intact, cobbled alleyways and creperies, the Jacobins Theatre, Château de Dinan, quaint boutiques and more.

Travel Tidbits

Approximately one-quarter of Bretagne's population can speak its Celtic language called Breton. Celtic culture is most preserved in the westerly part of Bretagne and in the capital Rennes. Culinary specialties include cider, crepes, seafood and Kouign-amann cake.

A wonderful way to explore Bretagne is by bicycle. The region boasts 1,000 km or more of bicycle paths (known as voie vertes or green ways).



Galicia

Population: 2,778,913
Capital: Santiago de Compostela
Official Languages: Galician and Spanish
Currency: Euros

Getting There:

By Air: Fly into one of Galicia's three international airports (Santiago, La Coruna and Vigo).

By Ferry: There are regular ferry services to Galicia from Santander or Bilbao in Spain and Portsmouth or Plymouth in England.

On Land: Drive or take the train or bus to Galicia from elsewhere in Spain, Portugal and beyond. The railway network offers high speed train service between Galician cities and on to Madrid. Within Galicia, you can hire a car or use the widespread taxi and bus services.

Travel Documents: Spain, and thus Galicia, is a part of the Schengen Agreement (which dictates required visa/documents depending on nationality). www.schengenvisa.cc

Noteworthy Attractions:

- Stretching more than two kilometers around Lugo's historic centre, the Roman Walls were built during the third century and are designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Santiago de Compostela
- Galicia's capital is the endpoint of the famous pilgrimage route (Way of Saint James) where it is possible to marvel at the city's architecture, monuments, palaces, churches (including the renowned Santiago de Compostela Cathedral) and historic alleyways and squares.
- Castro de Barona
- A Coruña
- This archeological site, overlooking the gorgeous Ria de Muros and Noya, boasts famous Celtic ruins more than 2,000 years old.

Travel Tidbits: Galicia is characterized by a very low crime rate.

Galicia offers some true gems for beach vacations, as well as a number of awe-inspiring miradores (lookouts).

Increasingly, Galicians are reconnecting with their Celtic roots that date back 2,000 years or more. One example is the storytelling practice over a bowl of queimada that still takes place in traditional restaurants and hotels today.

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Off the Beaten Track

You won't find these spots on any list of "top 10 attractions," but these lesser-known hidden gems should be on your agenda as you journey through the Seven Celtic Nations.





Rathlin Island

(Northern Ireland)

About eight kilometres from Ballycastle, off the Causeway Coastal Route, is Northern Ireland's only island inhabited by humans. Rathlin Island, home to about 100 people and Ulster's largest seasonal colony of seabirds, offers an intriguing experience with its dramatic land and seascapes, historic ruins and pillars and welcoming "Island family." While summer tourism to the island continues to flourish—the island now boasts a number of accommodations, activities and places to eat and drink—Rathlin still offers that ultimate sense of retreat Robert the Bruce found nearly 700 years ago. Ferry service from Ballycastle is offered year round.



Gaeltacht Mhúscraí

(County Cork, Ireland)

In Ireland, Gaeltacht refers to a region where Irish is, or was until recently, the main language spoken. County Cork's Irish speaking region is Gaeltacht Mhúscraí, an area characterized by a rich literary, mythological, art, dance and music—includ-

ing Sean-nós singing—tradition. The region boasts more than 220 archaeological sites dating as far back as 4,000BC, states the Visitor Guide to Gaeltacht Mhúscraí. "The valleys of the Gaeltacht are surrounded by the Sheehy Mountains and the Cahah Mountains to the west and is often compared to the Lake District in England," adds Coiste Sli Gaeltacht Mhúscraí. Another highlight is the sixth century St. Finbarr's Oratory, also known as "Small Church out in the Lake on the little island all on its own" inside Gougane Barra National Forest Park.



Montgomery

(Powys, Wales)

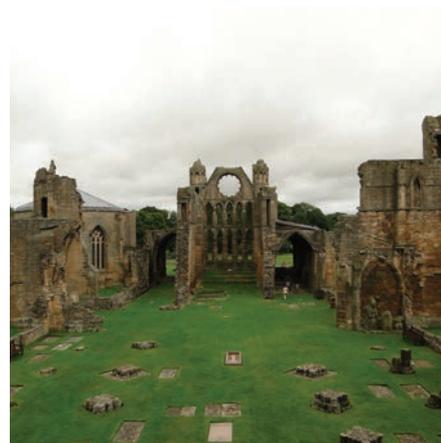
A small historic market town in Wales, Montgomery is located close to the English-Welsh border. Peter Long, author of *The Hidden Places of Wales*, described the north Powys region in which the town is located as having "some of the best preserved sections of Offa's Dyke," as quoted by Sally Williams of WalesOnline. Montgomery itself entices visitors to explore and engage in fun cultural activities—for example, they had their first town crier competition in the summer of 2014. From the 13th century St. Nicholas Church with Lord Richard Herbert's elaborate tomb, to Montgomery Castle, the County War Memorial overlooking the town, summer theatre and scenic cycling routes, there is plenty to keep a visitor's attention.



Castell-y-Bere

(Snowdonia National Park, Wales)

You've probably heard of Snowdonia National Park, but you may not know Castell-y-Bere. Wales is known for its density of castles but the impressive ruins of this one are sometimes forgotten. Castell-y-Bere, located close to Llanfihangel-y-Pennant, was built by Prince Llywelyn the Great circa 1221. Numerous parts of the castle are still intact, including its D-shaped towers; visitors can walk "room-to-room" letting their imaginations run wild.



Clava Cairns

(near Inverness, Scotland)

Less than three kilometres from the Culloden Battlefield lies the lesser known Clava Cairns, also known as Balnuaran of Clava. The three remaining cairns set inside a picturesque wood are examples of Scotland's best preserved burial chambers from the Bronze Age, and especially magical to visit at sunrise or sunset. You can manoeuvre through the passageways of two of the cairns. Prehistoric cup and ring-marked stones are also featured.



**Sharmanka
Kinetic Theatre**
(Glasgow, Scotland)

While Glasgow is not off the beaten track, its Sharmanka Kinetic Theatre is far from conventional. Russian sculptor Eduard Bersudsky, who moved to Scotland in the early '90s, is the mastermind behind the Gothic-esque workshop of hundreds of mechanical contraptions. Together the sculpted characters, lights and sounds tell Russian and Scottish folk stories that delight and stir thought among audiences of all ages. The Herald's Mary Brennan described the experience: "It's grotesque, it's stunning, it's spiritual, it's dark, it's mystical and it's very, very human."



Saint Nectan's Glen
(Cornwall)

For some, it is a sacred site; for others it's magical. Saint Nectan's Glen in Trethevy, Cornwall, rumoured to be within King Arthur territory, is classified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to the rarity of some of its plant species, and is home to not only wildlife, but also apparently piskies (pixies) and fairies. The site allows for an enchanting wooded walk along the river to the 60-foot waterfall—said to have healing properties—and the hermitage, which has a café serving up characteristic Cornish fare, a gallery and a meditation room.



Béchereel
(Bretagne France)

Brittany's small town of Bretagne France has been compared to Hay-on-Wye, the Welsh town for bibliophiles. France Today's Ellen Karel described the French equivalent: "Bienvenue à Béchereel, Brittany's book-town, with 750 residents, one bakery and 15 booksellers. Some say magic transformed this rural Breton village into France's premier booktown." In addition to Béchereel's bookshops, annual Fête du Livre and old world charm, the town and environs has impressive historic buildings like Château de Caradeuc, and ample choices for walking, cycling and horseback riding.



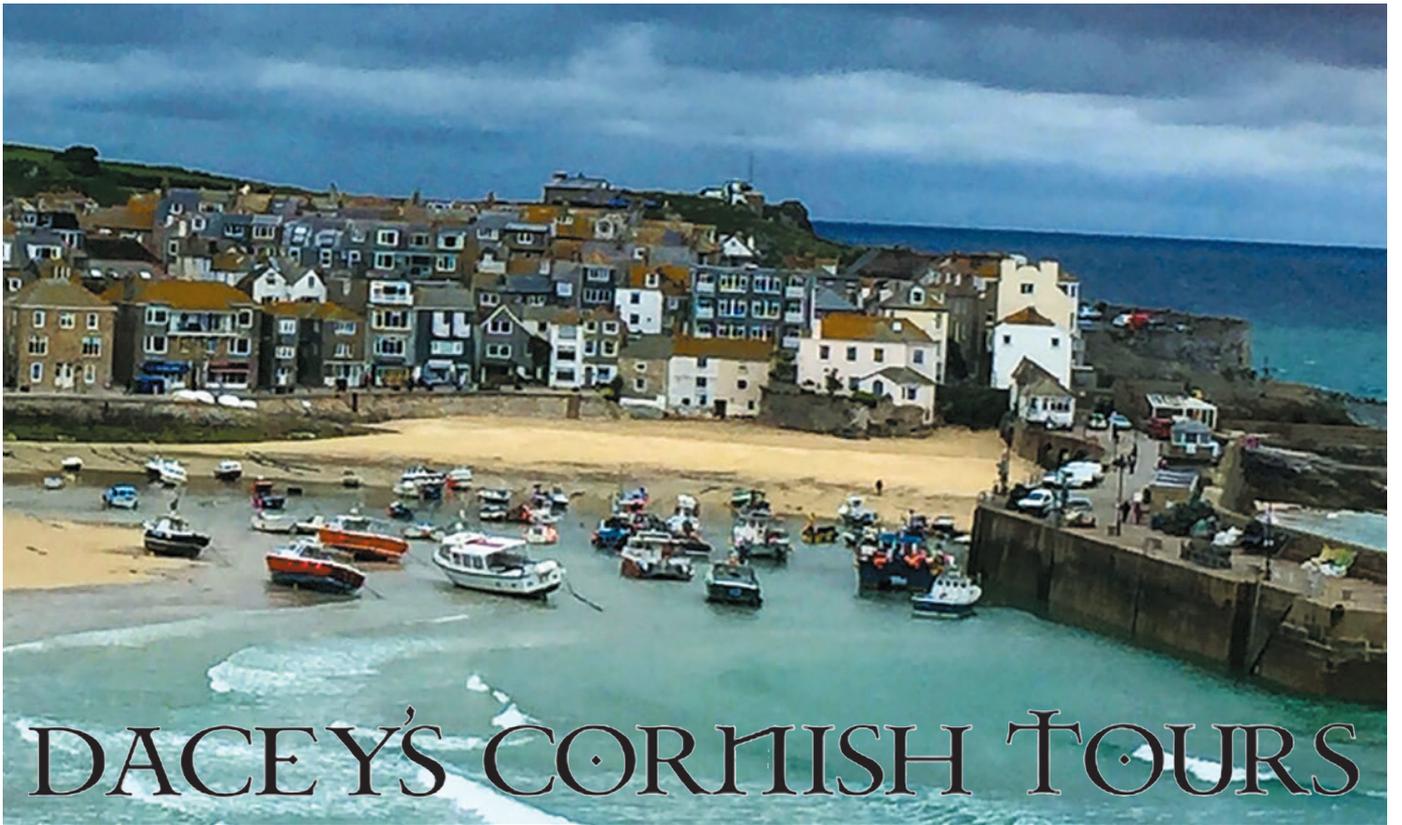
**Adventures Around
the Isle of Man**

Walking and driving are just fine to see the island Finn MacCooill "threw into place." But if you want to intimately explore the Isle of Man, why not try something completely different? The island offers a number of adventurous opportunities to do just that, from horseback riding throughout the countryside to gorge scrambling and sea kayaking. You can also take a Segway Safari tour on the beach or in a forest. Or go coasteering—scaling, jumping off and swimming along the coastal shores. One company leads such tours near Maughold, a village named after a Celtic saint; and the Kirk Maughold parish church has quite a selection of Celtic and Viking crosses.



Ribeiro
(Galicia, Spain)

Ribeiro is a comarca or district in Galicia's province of Ourense. The hills and vineyards—the area has been winemaking for centuries—the monasteries, the hórreos—traditional stone structures for storing grain—and walking paths alongside the Avia and Miño rivers, make for an enticing area to explore. Ribadavia, the Kingdom of Galicia's ancient capital, is now commonly known as Ribeiro's capital. With a medieval quarter - named an Artistic-Historical site in 1947 - old churches and a castle, a Jewish quarter, festivals, museums, and a chance to relax and socialize in the Plaza Mayor while enjoying some local wine, there is plenty to experience in Ribadavia without feeling like a tourist.



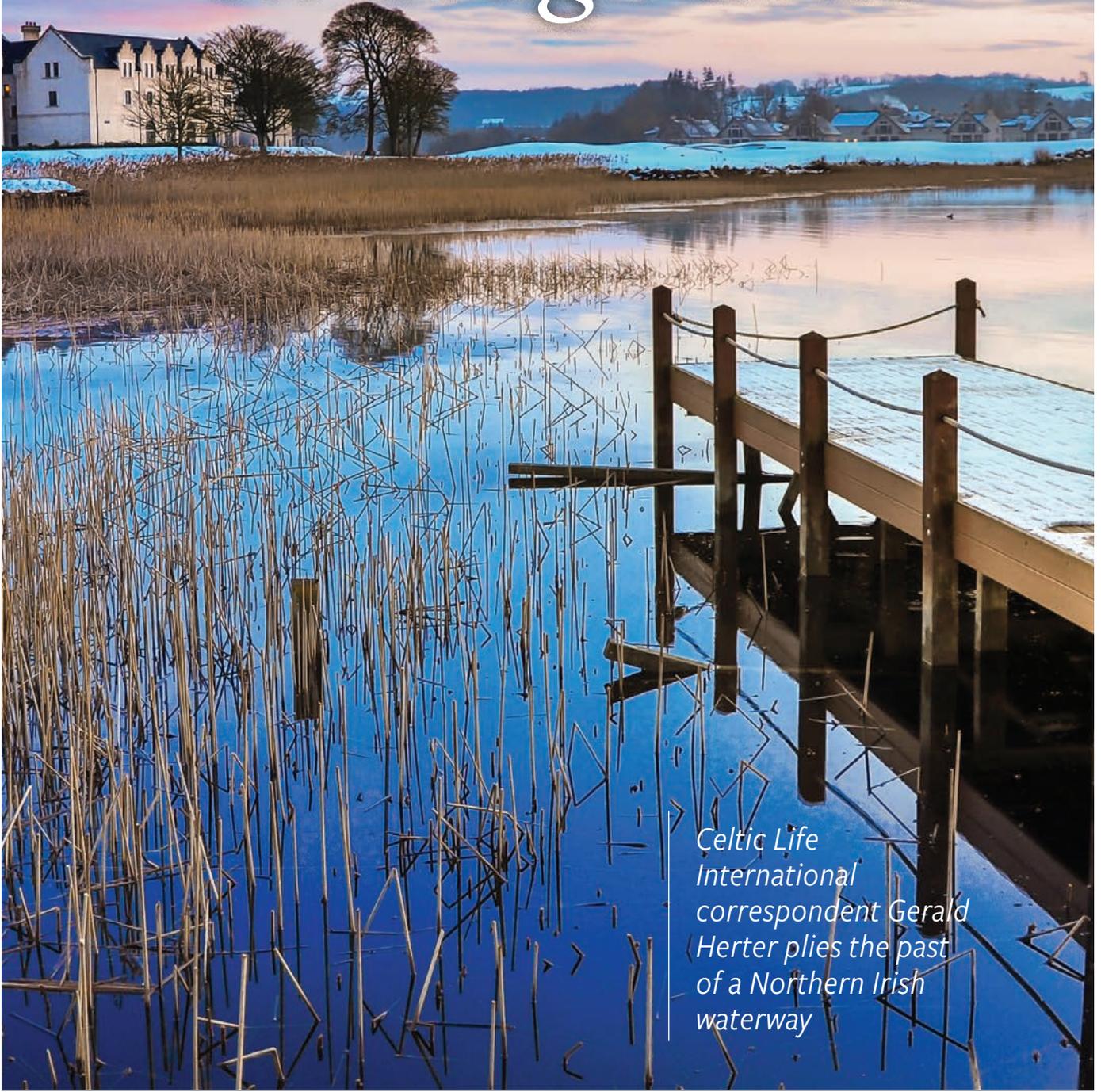
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Choppy Waters on Lough Erne



*Celtic Life
International
correspondent Gerald
Herter plies the past
of a Northern Irish
waterway*



Lough Erne Resort

Standing beneath the eaves of the Manor House Country Hotel Marina in the steady morning rain, my wife, Lori, and I wondered if our wait had been in vain. Several months back, we arranged online for a private journey by motor craft across Northern Ireland’s Lower Lough Erne. Now as we gazed forlornly out across the frothy waters of the lough, I questioned aloud, “Will anyone even show up in this nasty looking weather?” Lori just kept looking over the broad expanse.

Lough Erne Water Taxi had offered a three-hour survey of the lough’s ancient sites that spread along the meandering shores and islands of the 70-mile-long waterway. We had driven the scenic shores before and accessed sacred sights on a couple of the islands by bridge and ferry, but one had eluded us. Even so, a key focus this day was to get a better sense for how warring forces, for good or evil, employed these waterways to accomplish their missions, righteous or nefarious. Over the millennia, both color the rich history of Lower Loch Erne

Like clockwork as the appointed hour approached, we spotted a tiny dot far off amid the choppy waves of the sea-like channel. Within minutes the blip grew to a recognizable vessel speeding our way. Right on schedule, the ten-passenger boat pulled up at our dock and a smiling Barry Flanagan hopped off, greeting us.

“Don’t let the rain bother you. We’ll get around just fine. There’s only one spot that will be out of reach. The high waves make the dock at White Island impossible to ne-

gotiate.”

Lori and I looked at each other with pained expressions but tried to keep Barry from noticing. “That will be fine,” I remarked. “We’re ready to go.” White Island was the one we had missed on previous visits, so it had been a priority on this trip. Even so, we weren’t about to question the boat captain about avoiding what sounded like a dangerous landing attempt.

Lough Erne’s dark past is a mix of legend and reality.

One myth has the lough named after a goddess, Érann, or even Ériu (Éire), who gave early Ireland its name. Folklore describes the origin of the lough arising from the tragic death of Queen Maebh’s lady in waiting, Erne. Fleeing a giant that emerged from the Oweynagat, Erne drowned, with her body dissolving to form Lough Erne.

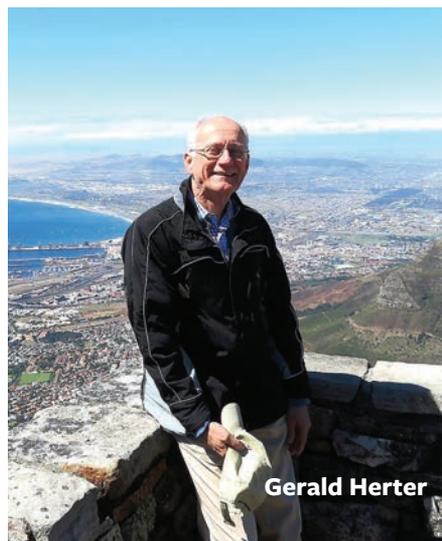
Boa Island, famous for the enigmatic pagan Janus Stone perched in a Christian graveyard, has an even more sinister name, Badhbh. A war goddess, Badhbh took the form of a crow, wreaking confusion and carnage while flying over a battlefield to gain her desired result.

Donning life preservers and taking seats in the enclosed section of the boat, we were ready for an adventure. Barry maneuvered slowly out from the dock and then revved up the motor to speed toward our first destination, Tully Castle. A repetitive loud “bang” accompanied the ride as the boat plowed

through wave after wave in the turgid surf. Amazed that we didn’t get seasick, Lori and I peered out the windows, enjoying the vigorous motion amid the brisk air.

In no time, we were closing in on Tully Castle the way earlier residents and marauders did, by water. Back then, the land was covered with thick forests, making travel by the clear waterways much quicker and easier. Nowadays there is also road access from the shore, which is the modern approach.

Stepping off on the dock, Barry led us up the short, wooded path to the castle ruins. At first glance, the jagged gray walls, reaching up in places to second floor level and higher, must have looked pretty much the same as they did after that fateful day in 1641 when



Gerald Herter



Lough Erne

the castle's life, as well as many of her residents' lives, came to an end. The ruins have been sitting here empty since then, spruced up only by restoration during recent decades.

The short, tragic life of Tully Castle began in 1613. Sir John Hume, an Englishman, built the castle, having been granted the land during the Plantation period, after the English defeated the Irish at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Previously, the whole of County Fermanagh had belonged to the Maguire clan for several hundred years.

By 1641, the Irish rebelled, seeking to take back their land. Rory Maguire took aim at Tully Castle. On Christmas Eve, he and his men came ashore, attacking the castle, which fell easily, since most of the men were gone. Promising to spare the occupants' lives, they led Lady Hume and her family out of the castle to a nearby location. However, on Christmas day, Maguire returned and massacred all those remaining in the castle, while setting it on fire.

Maguire was part of the Irish Confederacy that temporarily took back control of some areas. He met his own demise in 1648, the year before Oliver Cromwell's troops invaded, ultimately putting down the uprising.

In modern times, the only conflict disturbing the peaceful setting of Tully Castle involves the grounds within the bawn remains (defensive walls). The attractive ornamental garden and hedges constructed to enhance the historic site have been uprooted and replaced with grassy turf, an apparently more authentic look.

Retracing our steps along the pathway to the boat, raindrops began to fall. Like a favorable omen, the shower had abated during the castle visit. To our pleasant surprise, this phenomenon continued throughout our trip, providing the good fortune of keeping us dry for most stops along the way.



FERMANAGH CASTLE ARCHDALE N. IRELAND

Soon our boat was speeding on an easterly course across the wide watery expanse to the next stop, Castle Archdale. Here our perspective moved several centuries forward. Though the castle was also built by a plantation owner and succumbed to a similar fate from attack by Rory Maguire as did Tully Castle, the property's claim to fame is

more recent.

The surrounding confines now form a country and caravan park with a marina but served a more secretive and deadly role during World War II. From this dock, we walked across a wide expanse of concrete to modern buildings constructed for war service. As part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland was an allied country, and supportive of the war effort. The nearby Republic of Ireland remained neutral during the war.

The Americans, in a joint effort with the British to protect the Atlantic Sea lanes during the Battle of the Atlantic, saw a strategic role for the broad waters of Lower Lough Erne. German U-boats were successfully attacking allied ships, especially in an area known as the Black Gap, which lay beyond the range of land-based aircraft. The location of the lough was closer to the Atlantic, which could make the difference for allied defensive forces to reach the treacherous U-boats.

The Royal Air Force (RAF) built a base on the shore at Castle Archdale. The Americans shipped over a fleet of "flying boats," using the expansive lough for takeoffs and landings. However, one obstacle remained - between Northern Ireland's Lough Erne and the Atlantic Ocean was a strip of Republic of Ireland territory. In a super-secret enclave, the neutral Republic was convinced to grant permission for flights over its airspace, unbeknownst to the enemy.

The key seven mile stretch of County Donegal separating the allies from the Atlantic became known as the Donegal Corridor. The ensuing flights to the Black Gap served



Lough Erne

to substantially reduce allied casualties in the area. The most notable mission was when a “Catalina” seaplane with an American crewman was credited with spotting the notorious German Battleship, Bismarck, which subsequently led to its sinking.

A museum housed in one of the World War II buildings told the story. I could feel my chest swelling out a little further than usual as I viewed the exhibits and read with pride the role my American ancestors played with their British comrades in this crucial, but little-told episode. I have always harbored a special place in my heart for my uniformed countrymen, since learning that my parents named me after an American soldier, a family friend, who gave his life in battle during WWII.

“Good news,” Barry exclaimed, guiding us back to the boat. “The waves have calmed. I think we can land at White Island after all.” We were thrilled, having long since given up on the prospect. Just a short ride along the lough’s northeastern sector across Castle Archdale Bay brought us to the small island.

As we approached the landing, my perception adjusted once again, this time to many centuries earlier. Christian monks had arrived here as well as to Devenish Island, our next destination, founding monasteries around the sixth century. They made inroads for several centuries until the Vikings discovered the richness of the land, invading and destroying. The Annals of Ulster, written on nearby Belle Island, describes one such invasion in 837 that may have finished off the island monasteries.

There is little left of the monastery on White Island. The minimal ruins of a 13th century church contain what may be remnants.

Built into the wall are seven carved statues that represent the sole unique feature that set the site apart. The statues are thought to be components of the original monastery that were subsequently left in the rubble after Viking attacks, until retrieved

centuries later.

Stepping through the archway within the stone walls, we peered at the figures while Barry did his best to describe what each depicted. They were carved in a style similar to pre-Christian images. In fact, one appears to be a Sheela-na-gig, fertility goddess, similar to the two-thousand-year-old Janus Stone on nearby Boa Island. The others are thought to portray St. Patrick, the biblical David, and Jesus.

More ruins and historical facts were available for Devenish Island, at the far south end of the Lough, where we headed for the final stop. Even from a distance, the



Flying Boat



Tully Castle



White Island

island's landmark round tower stood out marking the spot. Though a more recent addition, only dating from the 12th century, the 80-foot-high stone tower offered a striking visage. All of the visible ruins, including several church structures and a high cross are from this era. Earlier formations are evident in the earthworks, including a prior tower.

Saint Molaise is known to have founded the monastery on Devenish Island in the mid-sixth century. Known as one of the "12 apostles of Ireland," his reputation spread, and the monastery flourished for many centuries. Molaise was known to have counseled St. Columba to leave Ireland after Columba caused a battle where several thousand soldiers were killed, the result of a dispute over Columba's copying a manuscript without permission. Columba exiled himself to the Scottish island of Iona, building a successful ministry there.

The Viking raids came about three hundred years after Saint Molaise's death. The Vikings were merciless, slaughtering and plundering all in their sight. Nevertheless, the monastery was rebuilt and even survived burnings several centuries later. The Maguires of Tully Castle continued to hold family burials at Devenish into the nineteenth century.

With our tour coming to an end, Barry turned the boat back toward the Manor House Country Hotel near Killadeas. On the way, he pointed out from a distance the sumptuous Lough Erne Resort on the western shore, where several years earlier the then venerable Group of Eight (G8) country leaders met, seeking mutual peaceful goals. Once back at the Manor House, we bid a gracious farewell to our well-versed guide and captain. From the marina, we walked up to the Manor House Dining Room for lunch, where we could look out over the majestic lough, contemplating the rich, colored history that it held.

Lori noticed with curiosity an American flag flying from the hotel roof. She wondered why it was there. As it turns out, the Manor House itself had a part in the region's history. Captain John Irvine acquired the estate where the hotel now stands in 1660, not that long after the rebellion of 1641. The mansion has been rebuilt several times over the centuries. According to the Hotel website, during World War II, the Government requisitioned the mansion for use by the American forces and operated the headquarters there for the seaplane base described earlier in this article.

After lunch, Lori and I made a pilgrimage to Boa Island, completing the day's sojourn in Irish history. A number of years ago, Lori's

novel, *The Thin Place*, was set at Caldragh Graveyard on the island, with the Janus Stone playing a key role. Each time we return to Ireland, we visit the Graveyard again. The cleft at the top of the Janus Stone was still filled with rainwater, and coins left for good luck. The Whitethorn tree still thrived nearby, as the legendary "thin place" where the fairy creatures could pass between our world and the "other" world.

With our departure, we placed a coin on the Janus Stone by the others, to commemorate the many lives lost in conflicts over the centuries on this history-rich lough, and to express gratitude for the peace that reigns today and hopefully for centuries to come.



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My Love Affair with Nova Scotia: Beginnings

Lesley Choyce arrived in Atlantic Canada more than 50 years ago and has lived to tell the tale





Halifax

Well, I think the first hints of my love affair with Nova Scotia began somewhere back in seventh grade in Cinnaminson, New Jersey. As unlikely as it sounds, one of my teachers asked us to pick a Canadian province and give an “oral report” to the class even though we all hated the very idea of an oral report. It meant standing in front of the class, nervous as hell, and me with sweaty palms, reading out our research from 3 x 5-inch note cards.

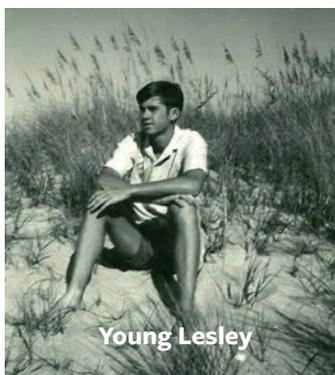
Foolishly, perhaps, I chose to do my report on Saskatchewan because the name sounded funny, and I was attracted to the yellow colour of that large oblong province on the classroom wall map. Now, I don’t mean to belittle Saskatchewan, and I am sure it is a wonderful place to live, but my research led me to believe that it was a fairly boring place, known mostly for growing wheat. Nonetheless, I dutifully presented my findings to a captive but bored audience and took my seat only to be upstaged by my classmate Lance presenting a truly

impassioned speech about - you guessed it - Nova Scotia.

While I never really liked Lance himself - a blowhard teacher’s pet who raised his hands often with great enthusiasm to answer math problems on the blackboard - he blew me away with the information he delivered. For here was a Canadian province with a gloriously rugged rocky coastline, lacerated with a seemingly infinite number of coves and inlets, where some residents still spoke a foreign and nearly forgotten language (Gaelic) and that was once its own nation (well, colony, really). Fishermen sat on old wharves smoking hand-carved pipes retelling yarns of yesteryear to each other. Off the shores of this magical place, those same fishermen or their sons could catch lobsters the size of Volkswagen bugs. And, of course, the province was once the home of what Lance called “bloodthirsty pirates.”

In short, this Maritime province was the land of my dreams.

I went home and devoured all there was to find in our family WorldBook Encyclopedia which made contemporary Nova Scotia sound like it was a half century behind the rest of North America with its quaint fishing villages, pet oxen, church suppers, and unpaved roads. I assumed that most towns looked just like Peggy’s Cove and that all the children there dressed like little street urchins from a Charles Dickens novel. At this tender junior-high age, I had convinced myself that I had been born into the wrong century and lived in the wrong part of the world. So, I guess you could say that I cultivated my yearning for this sacred place from afar as so many love affairs begin.



Young Lesley



Older Lesley



Lawrencetown Beach

During high school, however, I decided that Nova Scotia was unattainable, at least for now and, besides, I had grown to rather like my own home turf and my contemporary corner of the twentieth century due to my growing interest in South Jersey girls, cars, and everything related to the surfing craze that had swept the American nation. And, oddly enough, all these three things were attainable right where I lived. I won't say categorically that surfing was number one on that hit parade list, but it was pretty far up there.

But then, one humid summer night in a Presbyterian church auditorium on Long Beach Island at the Jersey Shore, I attended the viewing of a 16 millimeter surf movie and in the final six minutes of the film, the narrator said something like, "And far to the north on the East Coast of North America is a place virtually untouched by the surfing world where frigid crystal blue North Atlantic waves wrap around pristine headlands for some of the best point breaks to be found anywhere." And, sure enough, there were images of two surfers in black wetsuits surfing head-high waves peeling perfectly right to left as if from a goofy-footers dream come true.

I don't know why I didn't drop everything - girlfriends, plans for university, Vietnam war protests, summer job, and financial ambition - and drive my '57 Chevy north to the promised land. But I didn't. I dutifully went to my first year of university in North Carolina and then back to New Jersey even as those images of immaculate northern surf continued to burn in my memory vault.

And then, near the end of the summer of 1971, my surf buddy and bass player from my teenage rock band, the Wipeouts, Jack, reminded me we had some free time before fall classes started. So, we did it - we drove north through New England in his Volkswagen Kombi, crossed the border into my first foreign country and headed "down east" to

the shores of my beloved province.

Our first stop was Crystal Crescent beach, not far from downtown Halifax. Today this beach is known for its water being crystal clear, but also because part of it is a nude beach which I urge you to steer clear of if you are taking your kids there for an outing to the sea.

Sadly, for Jack and I, there were no waves this fine day of our arrival, but we did come across a pair of those young Dickensian boys that were dressed like little old men and spoke in a funny accent. They were scouring the headland for something called pigeon berries, which turned out to be small hard black berries that tasted bitter and sour and were notably perhaps only truly fit for the pigeons to eat.

*Nonetheless, we hiked the shorelines
and admired the granite outcroppings, the ragged
spruce trees shaped by winter gales, and we were
mesmerized by the swaying coppery-coloured seaweed
dancing in the unpolluted ocean.*

All that coastal beauty soon created a tremendous thirst which sent us two wandering pilgrims to downtown Halifax where we ambled into a nondescript tavern where thin bald men in flannel shirts and wearing white aprons walked among the patrons hefting extra-large trays of overflowing beer glasses at shoulder height. We seated ourselves at an empty table and surveyed our surroundings. In the dim light, amidst the smell of stale beer and stale urine, we noted that the floor was actually covered with sawdust, the tables were as sticky as kindergarten mucilage, and that there were no women in



Peggy's Cove

the place, only men. I would later learn that, for the most part, at that time in Nova Scotia, most bars were just for men. Some would have a separate section where women could imbibe, or most were happier to just associate with other women at such establishments as The LBR or Ladies' Beverage Room.

When asked by the server what we'd like, I assumed he wanted to know what kind of beer. That one, I said, pointing to a particularly seductive glass on his tray. "Ten Penny, then," he said. "How many?" "Two each," Jack piped up, not wanting us to look like wimps in front of the rowdy though cheerful room full of rough and ready Nova Scotian men.

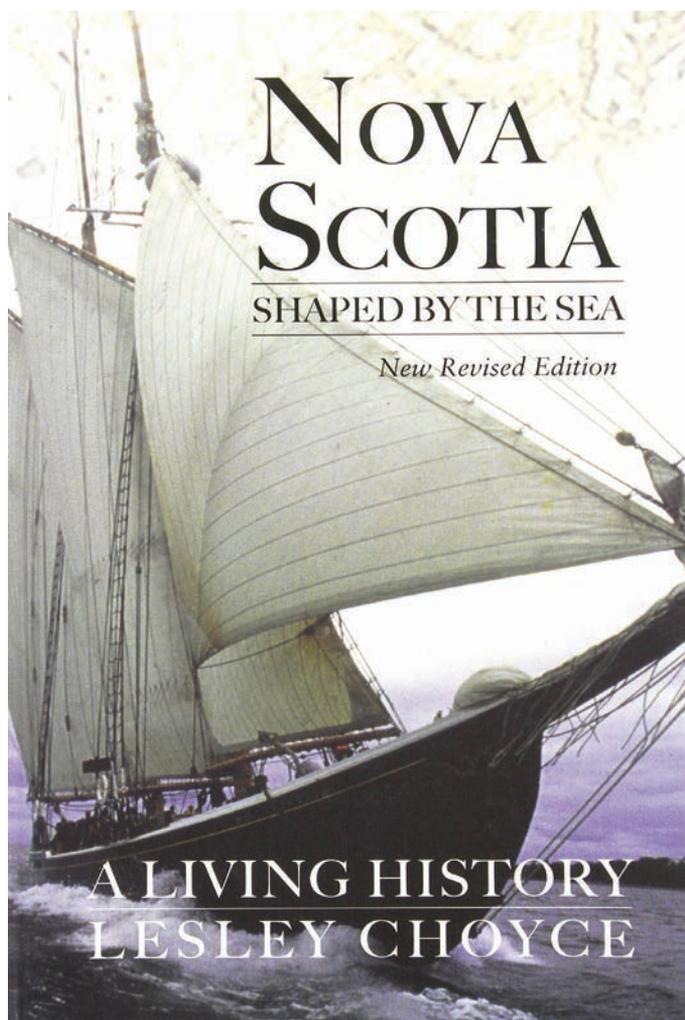
The beer tasted funny to us, having been accustomed to the American varieties of Pabst Blue Ribbon, Ballantine, and Iron City. It was also higher in alcohol leading us to believe that Nova Scotians, possibly even all Canadians, were more robust and harder than our fellow countrymen. Ten Penny suited us just fine, as it turned out. And so did Schooner beer, Alpine ale, and a strange thick black liquid known as stout.

Not long after our nocturnal Haligonian adventures, we were back on our search for waves and, at long last, we did our first paddle out on the west side of the Lawrencetown Headland, about 20 minutes

east of Halifax by car. The water was colder than we were used to and clear with more swaying kelp that - to a sandy beach break surfer from New Jersey - seemed like a crowd of exotic dancers.

I suppose I should be reporting things here about the culture, the people, or the politics of the province although it was our interest in surf, girls, and beer that dominated our attention. Somewhere while driving down Highway Seven on the seemingly forgotten, remote Eastern Shore, we saw a sign for a store that called itself New Scotland. It had not occurred to me, odd as that may sound, that this had anything to do with the name of the mystical land we were exploring. (And both the WorldBook and Lance had failed to report this important bit of knowledge.) Jack, being a better student of dead languages than myself, said, "Of course, you didn't know that? Get it? Nova means new. Scotia means Scotland. It is Latin."

And so began my personal and professional interest in the culture and history of my beloved province that eventually led to me writing a complete history of the place called Nova Scotia: Shaped by the Sea which Penguin books would publish and distribute around the world. Given my poor grades in high school history, the fact I took no history courses at all in university, and that I was a lowly immigrant from New Jersey, such a scenario seems unlikely. But suffice to say that



one's passion for a parcel of coastal geography can do that to a writer. Or at least it fired me up to eventually learn everything I could about Nova Scotia.

So, there we were, two rambling surf lads driving down gravel roads to empty beaches and even emptier surfable waves with me dreaming about someday living here.

It felt like home to me, and I grew to believe, or at least fantasize, that I had almost certainly lived here before in another life.

If that is true, I am sure I was a sailor of some sort and that I had once stood on the deck of a heaving ship looking shoreward singing, "Farewell to Nova Scotia, the sea bound coast. Let your mountains dark and dreary be."

I tried explaining this to Jack and he just shook his head and said I should focus more on finding the next point break and maybe lay off the Ten Penny Old Stock Ale.

Ignoring the latter bit of advice, we found ourselves at a very rural tavern somewhere along the wilds of the Eastern Shore where watering holes were very few and far between. I realized that we were doing a poor job of getting to know the locals or learning anything much about the people and the lifestyle, so I struck up a conversation with an old fella in a John Deere ball cap. My father had always told me not

to strike up conversations with strangers about politics, but I often did. I started the conversation, however, asking the man some silly generic question like "What's it like living here?"

He, of course looked at me like I had just arrived from Mars or one of the more distant outer planets and answered succinctly with as little effort as possible, "It's quiet." From there I moved on to asking him about his job, only to learn he was unemployed and that it was due to "the government." He was referring to both the federal and provincial government and that all politicians, he claimed, were corrupt.

Jack offered up the universally accepted notion that it was the same where we came from.

"Which is where?" Mr. Deere asked.

I explained that we were from New Jersey, and he couldn't understand why we had wanted to come to Nova Scotia. When we told him we came here to surf he stated flatly, "But there's no surfing in Nova Scotia," a statement I would hear for many years after I'd been surfing here.

I moved the conversation back to politics and asked about local elections and how one got elected. He explained that whoever promised to pave the most roads got elected, but I thought he was joking. "Well, in some places here about, they still get elected the old way."

"Which is?" I asked.

"Well, buddy comes around to your house or stands outside the community hall on election day and hands out a mickey of rum to the men or a box of chocolates to the women. Whoever has the best goods tends to win."

"Isn't that illegal?" Jack asked.

"Not that I know of," he answered as he took his last slug of foamy brew and announced that it was great chatting with us foreigners but that he had to get home to "the wife."

Somewhere along the way on our continuing journey, we encountered excellent fiddle music, which also enhanced my emotional ties to Nova Scotia. Before long, I could tell the difference between a lament and a strathspey.

For unknown reasons, Jack and I had come to the conclusion that since there were so few people on the Eastern Shore, and those few we encountered were so friendly, that there must logically be no crime here at all. Thus, we left the van unlocked and with windows open as we paddled out at a delightfully remote place called Clam Bay Beach where the seaweed was so thick it slowed the waves as they approached and made surfing there seem like we were cruising across walls of the most wonderful mush.

Why I had left my wallet sitting right on the dash absorbing summer sunlight, I can't recall, but when we returned to the van, dripping heavenly saltwater from every square inch of us, someone had stolen money from my wallet.

Not all my money, mind you.

I am sure I had a total of \$50 in my wallet and whoever was the thief took exactly half. Yep. Just half and left the rest. And, as strange as that may sound, it made me love Nova Scotia that much more.

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The William Wallace Stirling, Scotland

Located just 250 yards from its namesake monument, The William Wallace pub is steeped in Scotland's rich history and tradition. And while the food menu might be limited, there is no shortage of excellent Scotch whisky and regional ales available at the bar. The inn has built its reputation, however, upon the warmth, wit, wisdom and welcome of both its staff and clientele - you won't find a friendlier or more helpful bunch in the U.K., even during football season when patrons are glued to the facility's big screen TVs.

Ty Coch Inn Porthdinllaen, Wales

Quietly situated in the tiny fishing village of Porthdinllaen on the lush north coast of the Lley peninsula, and with spectacular views across the Irish Sea, the Ty Coch Inn has consistently punched well above its weight since the 1820s. Enjoy traditional Welsh fare either in a cozy pub setting or outside along the waterfront, before working off your meal with a swim on the beautiful beach at the tavern's doorstep. And don't dare leave without sampling their superb home crafted cider.



St. Tudy Inn Bodmin, Cornwall

You simply will not find a finer dining experience in the seven Celtic nations than at the St. Tudy Inn in Bodmin; the fare is first class - with simple and seasonal seafood, lamb, quail and puddings to whet the appetite - and the bar is beyond stocked with a sensational selection of excellent wines and creative cocktails alongside local and regional beers. Both the pub and restaurant décor and ambience are exceptional and inviting, with an open fireplace to keep the cockles warm on cooler Cornish evenings.

The Thirsty Pigeon Douglas, Isle of Man

While this petite, one room pub might not be the biggest on the Isle of Man it may very well be the most interesting. Aged 18-80, area patrons squeeze in to enjoy regional meals, including traditional pies and Manx cider. If you are lucky enough to find a spot, you will likely learn more about local lore and legend in a few hours than you could imagine in a lifetime. Along with its reputation for excellent service, the inn is renowned for drawing a quirky cast of characters.

Fox and Friends Pub Rennes, France

No visit to Bretagne would be replete without a visit to Rennes and a quick stop at its best watering hole, the Fox and Friends Pub. More than a hub for the region's proud and passionate Celtic community, the two-tiered, post-trad tavern attracts young sporting types who are more apt to throw their support behind Irish and Scottish football clubs than their own national team. Live music and an array of themed events throughout the year keep things lively at all hours.

Borriquita de Belém Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Like Galicia itself, Borriquita de Belém is a crossroads of culture. Though primarily a jazz venue, the pub hosts a myriad of melodies through the week, including flamenco, folk, reggae, rock, blues and traditional Celtic music. With the best stocked bar in northwest Spain - including wines, whiskies, ciders, stouts, and the strongest sangria you will ever savour - you won't mind the miniscule menu offerings. In fact, when the joint is jumping, as it is most nights, all you will want to sample are the spirits.

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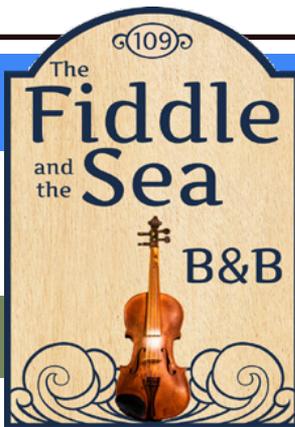


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THE CELTIC CHEF
with Gary Maclean

Homemade Haggis

This has to be the most well-known Scottish dish - it even has the grand title of being Scotland's National Dish. Many countries have similar dishes using up the offal of sheep and lambs, but Haggis has stood the test of time. It was first mentioned in 1615 in an English cookbook by writer and poet Gervase Markham. The dish was developed out of necessity, as nothing went to waste on an animal. I have travelled the world showcasing Haggis. However, before I continue, I have a confession; I had never made the meal in my life up until a couple of years ago while filming a segment of the BBC series *Landward*. With the help of my friend Jeanette Cutlack (The Haggis Lady of Mull), I have prepared this recipe - suitable for Burns' Suppers on January 25, or at any time of the year.

Ingredients

1 lamb's/sheep's pluck (liver, lungs, and heart)
1 sheep's stomach
3 white onion (chopped)
100g / 3 ½ oz oatmeal
200g / 7oz rolled oats
200g / 7oz suet
25g / 1 oz butter
1tsp salt
4tsp ground black pepper
4tsp all spice
String

Instructions

Sort and wash the lamb stomach, leave in a bowl of salted water and pop in the fridge overnight. A butcher can help with the casing (or order an artificial casing online). Prepare the pluck; rinse in cold running water, place in a large pot and cover with cold water. Bring to a boil on the stove, then reduce the heat and let simmer for 2 hours. Toast the oatmeal in the oven for 10 minutes. In a separate pan slowly cook and soften the chopped onions with butter. Once the oats have cooled, mix with the spices, salt, and suet. Remove the pluck from the cooking liquor (but make sure to keep the cooking liquor for later use). Cut the cooked heart, liver, and lung up into smaller pieces, making sure to remove the windpipe fat and gristle. Pop all the cooked meat into a food processor with the onions, but don't break it down too much as you want to keep some of the texture. Add the suet and oatmeal mix, as well as the cooking liquor - make the mix a little runny, with a lava type consistency. Tie one end of the stomach, before carefully adding the mix. Next, bunch the stomach up into a ball of Haggis. Starting at the bottom, tie some string around to make smaller Haggis balls and make sure to get out as much air as possible, but don't fill too much as this mix will expand during cooking. Then, boil them in the same cooking liquor used to cook the pluck - top up with more water if necessary. Finally, add the Haggis, bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer for 3 hours.

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DRAM
with Andrew Ferguson

The Bowmore Distillery lies at the heart of the town with which it shares its name, situated roughly in the center of the Isle of Islay. The distillery was opened in 1779, making it one of Scotland's oldest distilleries, established only 9 years after the town itself. Bowmore was purpose-built in an unusual gridiron pattern with an unusually wide main street which travels 4 blocks uphill to the town's famous round church, Kilarrow Parish.

The church was built in the round, in Celtic Christian fashion, so that there were no corners in which the devil could hide.

The reason the town was built in 1770 is a story worth pausing on for a moment, as it offers a better sense of what life was like for common people in Scotland at that time. The town which preceded Bowmore, known as Kilarrow, was located just across Loch Indaal from where Bowmore is situated now, near the present town of Bridgend. If we are going to be very precise, the town was located between the shore of Loch Indaal and Islay House, the seat of the Laird (Lord) of Islay. It seems the Laird didn't love the view from his windows, so he did as you could at that time - he had the town moved.

Bowmore's No.1 Vaults warehouse is believed to be the oldest continuously used building in the Scotch whisky industry. This legendary warehouse with its thick stone walls is something like holy ground to whisky connoisseurs. It has matured many of Bowmore's most famous whiskies, like the various releases of Black Bowmore, filled in 1964, as well the White and Gold releases which formed part of a trilogy. The warehouse is

at high tide, slightly below sea level. During winter storms, it is not unusual for the water to seep in.

Bowmore has had a half dozen owners in its near quarter of a millennia of operations. Today it is a part of the private Japanese drinks giant Beam Suntory, which owns whisky distilleries in Scotland, the United States, Ireland, Japan, and Canada. Bowmore is one of Beam Suntory's four Scottish distilleries, two of which, including Laphroaig, happen to be on Islay.

Bowmore is one of barely more than a handful of distilleries to continue to malt some of its barley on traditional malting floors. And true to the Islay style, the distillery produces a peated single malt, though by the island's standards it is only moderately peated. At mature ages the peat fades almost completely, making way for tropical notes in refill casks and rich dark fruits in sherry. The modern profile of Bowmore marries soft smoke with sea salt, and a distinct prominent floral lavender top note. Not everyone is a fan of the lavender, especially when it is dominant, but I happen to love it!

The distillery was way ahead of the curve when it came to sustainability, being one of the pioneering distilleries for energy efficiency and conservation.

The air used to dry the malt in its kilns after the peat run is heated with waste heat from



the stills, recovered through heat exchangers. The distillery even converted one of its warehouses to a pool for the town, which it heats with still more recovered energy.

Any trip to Islay is incomplete without a visit to Bowmore Distillery. In fact, it is almost impossible to visit the island without driving right past it at least once. The distillery offers a number of tours, but given the effort required to get to the island, you will want to make sure you are doing one of the experiences which include a cask tasting in the No.1 Vaults Warehouse.

Bowmore's whiskies are widely available, especially in Canada, which has been one of its biggest markets for more than a decade. The 12- and 15-year-olds are both fine drams, but it is with the 18-year that Bowmore really starts to shine for me. And if you ever get to sample something from 1964, and you can afford it, do it....it will be an experience you will never forget!

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FAE

In the first part of a six-part series on Celtic folklore, Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns explores one of the most prolific creatures in Irish mythology

Look closely. You might see them hiding amid the trees, roaming about the rolling hills, or swimming deep beneath the rippling waves. Listen carefully, and you might hear the sickening sweetness of their song. If you're not careful, your feet might betray you and begin dancing, a response to their beautiful and terrifying enchantments.

They are the Fair Folk, the Little People, the *aes sídhe* (the people of the mounds), and they have lived in the nooks and crannies of Ireland (and surrounding areas) for as long as anyone can remember.

Over the years, many have adopted a wholly incorrect image of the *sídhe*, one complete with sparkling wings and a height of about three to four inches.

The truth is, the *sídhe* look just like humans, albeit a terrifyingly beautiful or sometimes horrifyingly grotesque version of a human. But they don't have wings, and they certainly don't sparkle.

They also live life similarly to humans, enjoying music and dance, and often partaking in game playing - an activity that is often assisted by humans.

It is an oversimplification to say they are just like us, however.

The *sídhe* have been compared to many other mythical creatures, including fairies and elves, but there are two origin tales that storytellers in Ireland have subscribed to over the years: mythological origins and historical origins.

From a mythological perspective - which is steeped in Christian influence - it is believed the *sídhe* are fallen angels, expelled



from Heaven following a loss of their own divinity. This interpretation does not make clear what they did to be cast out - only documenting that their wrongdoings were not vile or misguided enough to justify casting them into Hell.

The more traditional origin story, and the one most used by Celts, states that the *sídhe* are descendants of the Tuatha Dé Danann (the People of Goddess Danu). This version claims that the Tuatha Dé Danann existed on the Irish landscape before the Celts laid their claim upon it, eventually forced to the magical Otherworld - hidden from human dwellers - that, many believe, remains the home for the *sídhe* today.

*Despite living in different realms, the *sídhe* and humans have frequently crossed paths over the years - something that has been well documented through Celtic poems and folk stories.*

It is said that during dusk and dawn, the world of the *sídhe* and the human world begin to merge. The *sídhe* leave their dwellings at nightfall, roaming the Earth until dawn, when they retreat back to their world and hide.

These interactions have caused some to

question the moral intentions of the *sídhe*, with many wondering if, at their core, they are either good or bad. The answer: neither and/or both. Most believe the *sídhe* to be benevolent or morally neutral tricksters who enjoy toying with and having mostly harmless fun at the humans' expense. But there is some evidence to suggest they can be quite wicked.

There is the changeling - a deformed offspring of the *sídhe* - best known for kidnapping and trading places with human children as an offering to the devil, or as a way to strengthen the *sídhe* bloodline. There is also the *Leanan Sidhe*, an evil fairy vampire and cousin of the hugely popular *Leprechaun* (himself a shifty trickster); the *Bean Sidhe*, or banshee, which is considered the harbinger of death; the *Dullahan*, the infamous headless horseman. And one cannot forget the *Pooka*, considered by many to be one of the most feared of the *sídhe* due to its proclivity towards mischief and its ability to shapeshift into a number of scary forms.

Despite it all, the Celts have maintained a deep respect for the *sídhe* - whether from fear or adoration remains unclear - for generations and have made a habit of leaving small offerings to them as a way to demonstrate this reverence.

And so, should you find yourself entwined with the *sídhe*, small trinkets, baked sweets, or virtually anything dairy-based, is sure to keep them happy and on your side.

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