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INTERNATIONAL

The Heart of Hearth

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*Holiday Gift Guide, Christmas Recipes
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Fáilte

Holiday Blessings

I enjoy my holidays and long weekends. Christmas and Easter are always special, but equally as important is Thanksgiving - a time to reflect on our blessings, reconnect with family, and treasure in the delight of children and grandchildren.

As we put our annual holiday issue to bed, we have celebrated Thanksgiving and await Samhain, often referred to the Celtic Halloween, which marks the end of the harvest season and beginning of winter.

Last year, I fondly recall looking forward to 2020, signalling the birth of another grandchild and family gatherings at our home in Nova Scotia. Our daughter Alison and her family, as well as our son Hector and his family, would be visiting from the USA, for another summer of concerts, festivals, lobster dinners, and festive family activities.

As it turned out, the world had other plans.

Like the Bubonic plague of the mid-1300s, which proliferated along trading routes of the day, the Coronavirus quickly spread along Intercontinental flight paths from Wuhan, China to the rest of the world. Soon, borders were closed, and travel was at a virtual standstill. Our world, as we knew it, was about to change, as entire countries went into lockdown.

While challenging to most sectors of society, the COVID-19 crisis also heralded the birth of a new energy - a common purpose, creativity, and the determination to improvise. Within days of the Canada-USA border being shut down, Ashley MacIsaac was promoting his online "Coronavirus Ceilidh" here at home.

The Fergus Scottish Festival was to celebrate their 75th anniversary this year but had to postpone in-person celebrations until 2021. Instead, they hosted their "Wee Digital Ceilidh" online over 3 days. Celtic Colours International Festival in Cape Breton refocused to online entertainment with "Celtic Colours International Festival at Home." Many other Celtic gatherings around the world held similar online activities.

In less than six months COVID-19 had impacted the lives of billions of people. A United Nations study shows that the pandemic has put an additional 150 million children into multi-dimensional poverty - deprived of education, health, housing, nutrition and sanitation and water. Since the poorest will be hardest hit with lockdowns - widening existing inequalities - disadvantaged children will pay the greatest price.

This year, we invite you to consider Unicef (unicef.org), who continue to work tirelessly towards eradicating child poverty.

And, from all of us at Celtic Life International, we wish you a happy and healthy holiday season, and all the best for 2021.

Enjoy and may God bless!

Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher

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Scot AnSgeulaiche

Scot AnSgeulaiche connects the past and present

Beginning his journey from his childhood home of Loch Lomondside in the western Scottish Highlands, Scot AnSgeulaiche spent the next two decades trekking across the Celtic Nations, including Ireland, Wales, and Cornwall - and then another five years travelling around Britain and Europe - before settling back in Scotland on the Highland Line in Perthshire.

During that time, he says that he more or less walked backwards into his career as a storyteller.

"As a folk musician, I was particularly interested in the epic Border Ballads from Lowland Scotland and northern England," explains AnSgeulaiche via email to Celtic Life International. "There is a great sense of place, time, and the human condition in these long, story-like songs, but their peak popularity was in the 18th century, so nowadays some of the language is quite archaic.

"When I would sing them to audiences, I would often begin with glossing some of the words and explaining the true story or the many versions that lay behind the ballad. The ballads are often long, taking ten minutes to sing, but soon the introduction I was giving was taking longer, so I realized that I was actually a storyteller."

AnSgeulaiche became a seanachaidh - meaning "a keeper of history" - tasked with keeping a record of everything from genealogy, agreements between parties, and of course, the tales folks told.

"I spent many years traveling in the Celtic countries, telling or hearing stories around campfires, kitchen tables, in chance

conversations on the street, and plumbing local archives for oral history, especially of the Scottish west coast and the clans thereon. I also 'hung around' with these stories because I felt a sense of spiritual expression when hearing and telling them. Many people will recognize the positive effect on their spirit or well-being achieved by a stroll in nature - I found that I had a similar experience by telling or practicing tales aloud as I walked the hills."

These days, he traipses around Scotland to tell these tales, often as an interpretive tour guide across the country, adding that stories are a great way for folks to better experience the region's rich history.

"I pretentiously call such storytelling 'landscape interpretation.' Standing, facing a pile of stones in a field, and being able to describe in colour the house that it used to be, the names of the inhabitants, and some stories in their lives really brings the pile of stones alive."

Much like the seanachaidhs of old, AnSgeulaiche spins yarns at the pleasure of a clan chief, one of only two who caters to such a traditional patron.

"Sir Lachlan Maclean of Duart Castle, chief of the Macleans, retains me in that role at the castle for visitors and clan gatherings several times a year."

Often, he notes, the tales he tells have a personal connection with someone listening.

"I once met a very humble farmer who had never left the Isle of Lewis, who told me how he came to marry a woman from the USA and convert to Judaism in the first Jewish wedding

on the island. I told the story at a wedding a few years later, only to find out that the man's former neighbours were the parents of the bride. It was a very touching moment when we all realized that this 'traditional tale' was in fact very much a personal one."

"Tales build a sense of human connection."

Despite these personal links to the past, AnSgeulaiche admits that some see storytelling as a dying art form.

"In some ways that is true, but if you agree with the author Terry Pratchett - that humans are not so much Homo Sapiens, but rather Pans Narrans, the 'Storytelling Chimp' - then there is always a need for us to both tell and to hear stories. I would like to see both storytellers and historians brought into political discourse. I would like to see the parliaments and houses with resident storytellers who are part of sculpting and challenging policy."

Looking ahead, he is working on putting some of these tales on paper.

"Having come across a great and under-sung Scottish hero of the seventeenth century, I spent many years collecting and writing his adventures into historical novel form. That is a new form of storytelling to me."

www.ansgeulaiche.co.uk



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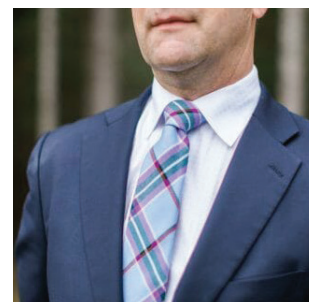
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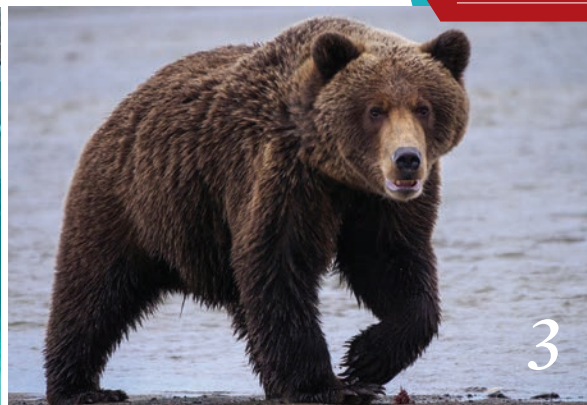
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one

Welsh Christmas

The village of Kunágota - which has been dubbed the "Welshest village" in Hungary - hosts a Welsh concert every Christmas to pay tribute to Welsh music and traditions. According to a WalesOnline article, classical Hungarian singer Elizabeth Sillo (who once resided in Cardiff) is the main organizer behind the event. She believes there are parallels between Welsh and Hungarian traditions, including music. Sillo also organizes annual Welsh-Hungarian concerts in the summer. During these shows, singers perform in Welsh, English and Hungarian.

two

Gordan Ramsay's Cornish Home

Recently, famed chef and television personality Gordon Ramsay put one of his secondary homes up for sale. Up to that point, he and his family had been staying in one of his Cornwall properties during lockdown (much to the chagrin of some local residents). Ramsay has multiple homes in Cornwall, but the property for sale is a four-bedroom home called Trevail House in the town of Fowey. The home was built over a 2,800 square-foot plot of land, including a waterside garden and bar facilities. Of course, such a property is pricey, with an asking price of £2.75 million.

three

Galician Brown Bear

For the first time in 150 years, a brown bear was spotted in a Spanish natural park. Recently, footage of the animal in the Natural Park O Invernadeiro in the city of Ourense, Galicia was released by production company Zeitun Films. Cameras were set up in the park more than two years ago to record wildlife for a film project called "Montaña ou Morte" (in English, Mountain or Death). Reportedly, the O Invernadeiro area may be able to support bear populations in the future. The brown bear has been a protected species in Spain since 1973.

four

Art Exhibition on the Isle

The largest-ever exhibition of work by designer Archibald Knox is currently being planned on the Isle of Man. Knox, who was born in the village of Tromode in 1864, had Scottish roots as well. He was famous for mainly creating work in "Art Nouveau" style, as well as his contributions to the Celtic Revival: a series of movements that saw renewed interest in Celtic arts and culture. The upcoming Archibald Knox Forum is slated to open in 2024 to coincide with Knox's 160th birthday. It will feature up to 200 pieces of Knox's art, including metal work, sketches, and paintings.

five

Rainbow Town

The Welsh town of Narberth is alight with rainbows, thanks in part to local artist and teacher Diana Brook, a.k.a "The Rainbow Fairy." According to a recent article from ITV Wales News, the movement started with a single rainbow on the window of Brook's home. Since then, close to 1,000 rainbows have popped up all over town, decorating shops and houses alike. It has been a welcome morale-boost for locals, as well as people in other parts of the world. Brook has also sent rainbow art to places such as New Zealand, South Africa, Portugal and more.

six

The Last Rifleman

Irish actor Pierce Brosnan will play Northern Irish World War II veteran Artie Crawford in an upcoming film by Kevin Fitzpatrick. The movie, titled *The Last Rifleman*, is inspired by the story of WWII veteran Bernard Jordan. In 2014, when the former naval officer was 89, he escaped his East Sussex nursing home to attend the 70th anniversary commemorations of the D-Day landings in Normandy. According to a 2014 story from BBC, Jordan's wife knew about his plans to escape and supported the venture. Sadly, Jordan passed away in January 2015 and so he never made it to the D-Day event the following June.

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

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Liz Brennan

At just 15 years of age, Welsh high school student Liz Brennan has aspirations of becoming a volunteer counsellor for Childline: a phone, chat and email service that provides support for children and youth. The United Kingdom's National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), which oversees the Childline service, recently made a callout for more Welsh volunteers to work at its Prestatyn base. Although Brennan can't formally volunteer until she turns 16, she has been helping in other ways in the meantime. She has participated in fundraising for NSPCC Cymru/Wales since she was only eight. "My family have been really supportive, and we have spent lots of time together at home and we started to go walking and cycling, which made those stressful moments less of a nightmare," says Brennan. "It's made me realize that this isn't the case for many children and young people, which is why I want to support the work of the NSPCC so they can still be there for children." Brennan has set a new fundraising challenge for herself, which began on September 1. Through a combination of walking, running, and cycling, she plans to cover a total of 870 miles (the length of the Wales coastal path) while raising money for Childline. Brennan has a monetary goal of £1,600, which is about as much funding required to train a Childline counsellor. She hopes to complete the challenge by Christmas.



Lauren Turner

In September, a woman from the city of Truro, Cornwall, undertook the challenge of swimming 24 beaches around the Cornish coast. The distance totals 24 kilometres - the equivalent of two and-a-half swimming marathons. Lauren Turner, who works as a training officer for the international disaster relief charity ShelterBox, decided to go the distance in order to raise money for the cause. The 37-year-old had originally planned on completing a 24-hour swim challenge at Bude Sea Pool. However, Turner's training was put on hold due to the lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March. "Initially I lost all motivation - the whole world was in turmoil and I didn't want to do anything. But now COVID and the impact of it all, especially on the communities that ShelterBox supports, has only increased my drive to fundraise and train," she shares. "My family is so important to me and I can't imagine losing everything through disaster and then also facing a global pandemic." Once beaches re-opened, Turner resorted to a back-up plan that would allow her to raise money without the need for a pool. After months of training, she began her swim early in the morning on September 5, setting off from Polkerris Beach. She completed the challenge at Gyllyngvase Beach in Falmouth, exceeding her fundraising goal of £2,000, raising a total of more than £6,000 for ShelterBox on her JustGiving webpage.



Charlotte Williams

Award-winning author and professor Charlotte Williams was subjected to slurs and casual racism while growing up in Wales. Recently, the academic of Welsh and Afro-Caribbean parentage was appointed by the Welsh government to help improve the teaching of Welsh BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) history in the country's schools. Williams is the chair of the "Communities, contributions and cynefin: BAME experiences and the new curriculum" working group. The working group will review the resources currently available to support teaching about BAME experiences, as well as professional learning opportunities and resources. This group was set up in response to the Black Lives Matter movement and protests in Wales. Its findings are expected to be released in the spring. "Welsh history is Black history. It should not be divided. Otherwise, what we have is stories about Black people disassociated from the rest of Wales and its involvement in imperialism and colonialism," says Williams. Back in 2007, she was awarded an OBE in the Queen's New Year's Honours List for services to ethnic minorities and equal opportunities in Wales. She was a professor of Social Work and Deputy Dean at RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) University in Australia up until her retirement last year and is an honorary professor at Bangor University. In 2002, she released her memoir, *Sugar and Slate*, which detailed her life growing up as a mixed-race person in Wales.



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Ciaran McNally makes beautiful music

When Ciaran McNally started playing the guitar as a teenager, he would tinker with and repair the six-stringed instruments. Thus, it was only natural that - in due time - he would begin constructing them himself.

"The natural progression from there was to try and make my own parts instead of buying them," McNally tells Celtic Life International over email from his home office in Armagh, Northern Ireland. "I started a guitar-making evening course in Belfast, with the intention of making a Les Paul-style electric. I ended up making an 'OOO'-style, acoustic and have not made an electric since."

After earning a diploma in Musical Instruments at London Metropolitan University, McNally began selling his handcrafted guitars - be it as an employee of another company, or on the side.

"I officially registered as an independent company in October 2019. My main aim is to make guitars that are inspiring, beautiful, and high quality. While I recognize the prices are premium, they are at the affordable end for boutique instruments. This is something I work hard to achieve, as I would like the guitars to be as accessible as possible, particularly to working musicians."

McNally's style of construction is unique; an order starts from one of five body shapes, with a list of options and upgrades the cus-

tomers can choose from to personalize it to their liking. Don't expect any wild flourishes, however, as he likes to keep it simple, eschewing fancy styles in favour of robust sounds.

"I am not particularly interested in some of the 'high-art' guitar-making trends of asymmetric rosettes, outlandish guitar design, etc.

"I am not trying to reinvent the wheel, but instead make high-quality instruments that people will hopefully love, be inspired by and feel a strong sense of value towards."

McNally explains that what sets his guitars apart from the competition is the unique combination of American and Celtic guitar-making styles that he employs. He doesn't delegate, either - a McNally Guitar is, quite literally, a guitar made by McNally.

"As things stand currently, I am the only person working on any part of a McNally guitar," he notes, adding that the primary factor for choosing between traditional or more modern guitar-making methods is whatever produces the best sound. "I also spray my own guitars in-house, which is something I believe in strongly, despite there being a growing trend to outsource this. For me, the finish aspect of the process is about 25 per cent of the build time. I wouldn't even entertain the thought of handing over control of such a large part of the build, quality, and character of the instrument to someone else."

Along with making them to custom specifications, the company's most popular

models - the "Foundation Series" - often find their way to premium guitar dealers around the world, eventually making their way into the hands of musicians.

"There is also the 'conversion' that takes place; someone goes into a music store not intending to buy one of my instruments, but tries one, and out they go with it."

McNally considers himself lucky that the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic hasn't affected his business - if anything, he has picked up more customers in recent months, as musically inclined people have been turning to their instruments to keep busy in isolation.

Of greater worry is the impact the pandemic is having on the live music scene.

"I am more concerned about the stall in the live music industry - partly because I just miss it, but also because it plays a big role in marketing guitars."

He believes that once the world returns to some sense of normalcy, the demand for guitars and those who play them beautifully will return with it.

"Guitars certainly aren't going away anytime soon, and I am encouraged by a noticeable uptake in people interested in buying from local makers. I am hoping to reach more guitar players in Ireland over the next few years by connecting with and supporting the music industry here.

"I have a few new models launching soon, and I will continue to work on fresh features and options that fit within my brand. Ultimately, the goal is to keep improving the guitars, connect more with music and musicians, and enjoy what I do."

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Pan Seared Breast of Duck



This is a fantastic alternative to your traditional festive fare, especially if you are cooking for smaller numbers. Everything can be done in advance so that on the big day all you need to do is cook the duck and heat everything else up. Good quality and high welfare duck breast is readily available in North America, and also available online. It is worth noting that frozen duck breast freezes very well. Many peo-

ple think that pan searing duck is a tricky skill to learn, however it is as easy to do as a steak. Simply remember to raise the temperature of the pan slowly (and not too high) so to render the fat to perfection to create a deep gold, crispy skin. Most of the cooking is done on the skin side down, and as the fat renders down, all the wonderful flavour is created and lifts the duck breast into something special.

Duck Ingredients

4 duck breasts
2 sprigs rosemary
2 sprigs thyme
1 bulb garlic
1fl oz/20ml vegetable oil
3 ½ oz/100g unsalted butter

Instructions - Trim the duck breasts ensuring a good coverage of fat. Marinade in a little of the oil and half the herbs. When needed, pan sear in a medium heat non-stick pan skin side down until you render and crisp the fat, then add the other half of the herbs and 2 slightly crushed garlic cloves. Once you have achieved the correct colour add the butter and baste. Remove from the pan and finish in the oven at 400 °F/ 180°C for 4 to 6 minutes depending on size.

Caramelized Cauliflower Ingredients

1 small cauliflower
2 sprigs rosemary
2 sprigs thyme
½ bulb garlic
3 ½ oz/100g unsalted butter
butter milk
1 sheet parchment paper cut to 1 inch larger than your pan

Instructions - Break the cauliflower into florets, cut each floret in half and place flat side down in a non-stick pan. Add the herbs, garlic and the butter. Cover with a circle of parchment paper and slowly cook the cauliflower on a low heat on the hob. The butter will melt and the butter milk will steam the cauliflower then will evaporate and the caramelization process will start. This can take up to 20 minutes.

Beetroot Ingredients

2 fresh beetroot
2 sprig thyme
2 sprig rosemary
2oz/50g unsalted butter

Instructions -

Cook the beetroot in salted boiling water for 40 minutes with the herbs until you can pass the tip of a knife to the centre easily. Once cool, cut and shape, then finish in a pan with a little butter.

Crispy Kale Ingredients

Small bunch kale
7fl oz/200ml vegetable oil
Salt

Instructions - Wash, dry and tear your kale into bite size pieces. Next slowly heat up the oil to about 300°F/ 150°C. Slowly dry out the kale. Do this in small batches at a time, remove once crisp and season with salt.

Baby Fondant Ingredients

1 rooster or maris piper potato
2 sprig thyme

2 sprig rosemary
1 ½ oz/35g unsalted butter
3fl oz/75ml stock
(chicken or vegetable - a good quality stock cube would work)

Instructions - Cut the potato into any shape you like. In a small pot add butter and melt it. Add the potato and begin to caramelize. Once golden, turn the potato over and caramelize this side. Add stock to cover the potato and place pan into an oven at 350°F/160°C for 10 to 15 minutes or until potato is cooked.

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The Celtic School of Yoga

For Jack Harrison, yoga is as intrinsic to the Celtic world as it is to anywhere else in the world

Jack Harrison has been practicing yoga for more than 40 years.

"The point of any effort in yoga is to realize that we are connected to everything and to each other," he explains via email from his studio on the limestone plains of the Burren in western Ireland.

Harrison's journey with yoga started in his early 20s, when he was a budding violinist.

"I read about the great violin teacher Yehudi Menuhin who brought his Indian yoga teacher, B.K.S. Iyengar, to London to teach his violin students. I discovered that there are many reasons why yoga might help violin players, from ease of movement to releasing tension to connecting with an internal source of musical inspiration."

Before long, he discovered that yoga had a place in other aspects of his life and work. While studying the subjects of folklore, ethnology, and psychology at University College Dublin, he became interested in how yoga philosophy might interact with Celtic culture and traditions. In 2015, he released his book - *The Celtic School of Yoga: An Aisling for the 21st Century* - which explores "some ideas on the parallels between Celtic wisdom and philosophy and the yoga tradition," he says. "They are much closer than is generally realized." By way of example, he notes that Celtic languages share similarities with the Sanskrit language.

Harrison has travelled around Ireland, writing about the stone circles, sacred wells, and monasteries, which allowed him to apply that knowledge to his study of yoga.

"My personal yoga practice of postures, breath and meditation continue to infuse my life with physical well-being, much of it inspired by Celtic spiritual and philosophical traditions of Ireland, particularly those of the Burren and on the Aran Islands. We use Celtic poetry, music, mythology and philosophy in our classes, workshops and teacher trainings - not because we believe these are any better than the Indian versions but because they derive from the culture, the worldview and the celebrations of the climate and seasons of this part of the world."

In addition to his book, Harrison established the Celtic School of Yoga with the help of fellow teacher Benita Wolfe Galvan.

"Our philosophy is simply to set up the school and share the ideas. Once the time has come for an idea, there is little that can stop it."

"Since the beginning of time, ideas, stories and culture have been passed from mouth to ear in every corner of the world. Through the lens of the Celtic School of Yoga, the sharing of music, poetry, stories, movement and practices will help pass Celtic wisdom to the next generation."

The school offers retreats, workshops, classes, and other events, and students come from all around the world and from many different backgrounds. Harrison has taught in Thailand, in Taiwan, the United States, Britain and other parts of Europe.

"As we know, the Celtic traditions hold a great attraction for people from many countries. Most students seem to find us themselves, but we do use social media, the internet and a monthly email to stay in touch with people and to advertise our various classes, retreats, trainings and newly added online courses."

As with most businesses, the online component of the Celtic School of Yoga is particularly important these days. In addition to yoga, the school is now offering online philosophy classes. That said, they also have a number of in-person yoga events planned that comply with the government's COVID-19 guidelines, and are also hoping to go forward with their next teacher training session beginning February 2021, which aligns to the Celtic cross-quarter celebration of Imbolc - an event which marks the beginning of spring in Gaelic tradition.

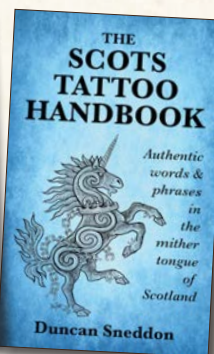
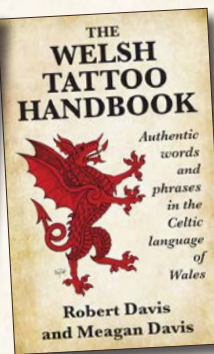
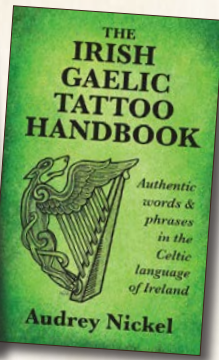
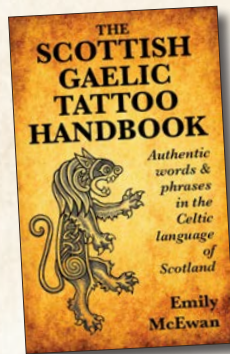
"The main difference in Celtic spirituality from many other practices could be said to be its emphasis on the natural world and the cyclical nature of existence. The celebration of seasonal festivals, the sun and the moon, the tides and our breath teach us to remember, moment to moment, their intrinsic connections. We celebrate our lives - and our yoga - within those cycles."

These cycles, Harrison says, are not recognized based on a book or dogma. Instead they are rooted in how the world turns, how we respond to what's happening in our lives, how that connects with others and the natural world.

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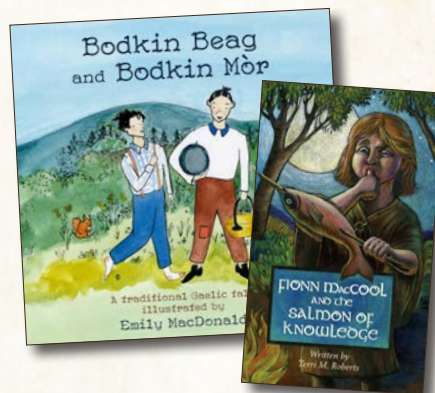
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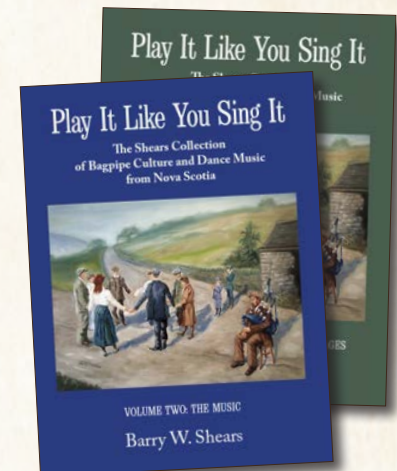
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Glasgow-based publication Belle Media recently revealed that its beloved children's series *The Adventures of Captain Bobo*, written by R. D. Dijkstra and Kay Hutchinson, is airing on the DAB Digital Radio station Fun Kids this fall.

Narrated by British actor John Sessions - and translated into Gaelic by Scottish actor and musician Gillebride MacMillan - the 10 part series will include adventures from the original books, *Bananas!* (2017) and *On the Rocks* (2018), as well as a few new escapades.

The story of Captain Bobo is one with a long and rich history.

"My father served as Captain on a ship called the Clyde for 40 years," shares Hutchinson, who is also the founder of Belle Media. "His tales of life on board sometimes



made me laugh, and I thought how wonderful it would be to share the fun and create a world for children based on his stories. The *Adventures of Captain Bobo* book series, to some extent, sprang out of that and, in turn, the new radio series."

Hutchinson explains that the titular character was loosely inspired by her father.

"The sailors originally called him Hurricane Hutch on account of the weather they sometimes experienced when he was in charge. But my father's other nickname - 'Captain Bobo' - inspired us to consider sharing his stories more widely."

Shortly after its original publication, Captain Bobo became popular among young readers. It wasn't until earlier this year, however, after Hutchinson's team received funding from a Government initiative called the Audio Content Fund (ACF), that developing a radio series became possible.

"The ACF was looking to help independent radio stations make innovative radio.



Belle Media brings one of its most beloved characters to life

We explained to the people at DAB and Fun Kids that we would like to produce a program based on our *The Adventures of Captain Bobo* series in English and in Gaelic. They really liked the idea and so, with their support, we pitched the idea. The ACF recognized in Bobo both a fun children's story about teamwork and a celebration of our coastal and island communities. More importantly, the ACF really liked the idea of us re-telling the series in Gaelic. It was also something we were keen on since many of my father's sailors on the Clyde were from the Western Isles. He had lots of friends on the islands that he kept in touch with and visited if he was up there on holiday."

Getting the project off the ground wasn't the only hurdle to jump.

"Getting the green light for production was a little slower than usual due to COVID-19. When they told us we had been successful, we had to double down on the task. To begin with, we only had the two print books and three draft texts. We wanted a minimum of 10 episodes, so we had to produce five more stories, record them and have them edited to specific radio timeslot lengths - and do it all again in Gaelic. The story and the character certainly had to be developed fast. But it has been a wonderful opportunity to see the themes and all the other characters now more firmly established through the completed set of ten different episodes."

The series has already received a strong response from early listeners, with many noting Sessions' strong use of character voices. While the positive feedback has been reassuring, Hutchinson says her main hope is for listeners to leave the show each week feeling uplifted.

"The stories are sweet, wholesome, life-affirming, and gently funny."

"They also show groups of people working together as a strong team - something we all need. And that whilst life can be quite challenging, especially these days, there are always positives to be found."

The show began broadcasting via the DAB Fun Kids' website on September 24.

As Hutchinson points out, this isn't the end for Captain Bobo and his crew; the third book of the series, titled *London*, is already in production. Beyond that, there are plans for the radio show to make its way across the pond.

"CKJM FM Radio in Nova Scotia has agreed to broadcast the series. It brings communities with a shared history that live thousands of miles apart together for 10 minutes each week. We also hope that we will be commissioned for a second series - there are certainly more Captain Bobo stories to tell."

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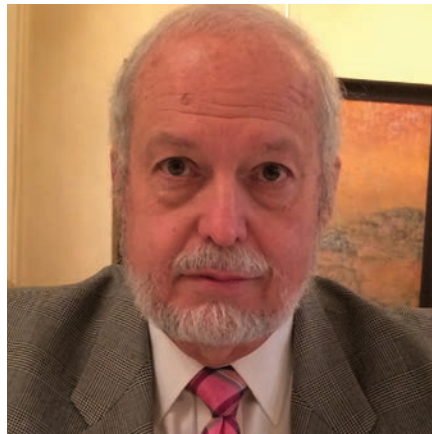
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The Scottish North American Community Conference

The SNACC brings Scots together online this December



2020 was already set to be a year of change for the Scottish North American Leadership Conference, even before anyone knew what “Coronavirus” was; it would be the first gathering in the event’s 17-year history under the new banner, the Scottish North American Community Conference.

According to John King Bellassai, president of the Council of Scottish Clans & Associations (COSCA) and one of the organizing partners of the convention, the new moniker is more apt.

“Some of the feedback we were getting from attendees was, ‘I have encouraged others in my clan societies to attend, but they say they are not in a leadership role, so it is not for them,’” he explains to Celtic Life International over the phone from Washington, D.C. “That is not what we meant by leadership; we were talking about opinion leaders.”

Camilla Hellman, president of the American Scottish Foundation - one of the SNACC conference’s founding bodies - says that the goal of SNACC is to share best practices and ideas, help the wider Scottish Diaspora community tackle pertinent issues, and support each other’s outreach efforts.

“We have a collaborative partnership, and we can reach a greater audience if we work closely together. For example, if an artist is coming in, could they tour three places? Can we help to share and make it a greater experience? We have done a lot of things together that way, and this is why we have renamed it a ‘community’ conference.”

The SNACC conference is the result of the combined efforts of the organizing committee, currently including the ASF, COSCA, the Detroit St. Andrews Society, Clans And Scottish Societies Of Canada (CASSOC), and the Centre for Scottish Studies at the University of Guelph.

A branding change like this would be big enough for an event that has been around as

long as SNACC, but the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic called for an even more novel approach in 2020.

Historically, the conference has been an in-person affair, often held at one of the cities where organizing members are located. The Chicago Scots have hosted the event several times, as has the Detroit St. Andrew’s Society. More recently, relative newcomers like the University of Guelph helped bring the conference to Canada.

Given that flights and accommodations can be costly, however, SNACC has been experimenting with virtual attendance since 2017.

“Our first real push was to have panelists on board from Scotland,” says Hellman. “They could join us remotely.”

Of course, the gulf between offering a virtual option and planning a wholly-virtual conference is wide, indeed. Even with experience broadcasting remotely, the organizing committee needed extra time to plan the event, which is why it is slated for the first week of December, rather than its usual slot in October.

“For us to really make this work, on this large a scale, we needed to prepare even more in advance than we normally would,” notes Hellman, explaining that the situation even affected the theme of this year’s event.

“We are calling it ‘How Can We Ensure the Enduring Bonds of Scottish North American Friendship,’ and ‘The Relevance of Scottish Identity in a Globalized World.’”

“This is the 700th anniversary of the Declaration of Arbroath, the Scottish Declaration of Independence, so we want to be able to celebrate,” shares Bellassai.

The annual gathering already has a full agenda: Friday features a keynote address on the topic of clans, families, and names by Andrew Morrison, Viscount Dunrossil; Saturday explores the Declaration of Arbroath with Lord Charles Bruce and Scotland’s influence on North America with former First Minister of Scotland, the Rt. Hon. Henry McLeish, and Sunday includes news from the Lyon Court with the Lord Lyon King of Arms himself, Rev. Dr. Joseph Morrow. Scottish art, music, literature, genealogy, history, and yet more is still being added to the menu also.

“With most people attending online, we should have a big burst in attendance,” says Bellassai.

Hellman has been keeping a close eye on the virtual Scottish games many clans have put on this year throughout North America and hopes that the SNACC can likewise provide some community and camaraderie for Scots in America and abroad.

“We felt it was important to give people a sense of belonging to something in this time. A lot of people, without being able to meet and do things, have felt very distant. So, these things really do help.”

She adds that the new name, the fresh focus on community, and the online portal to attendance won’t be going away once the virus does.

“We will embrace the virtual within these live events. Thus, you will see things like a virtual Burns night as well, which we would not have thought of before.”

Bellassai echoes the sentiment. “Even when the pandemic is gone, and people are able to get back out and congregate, there is always going to be a virtual/remote connection, so that more people can participate.”

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Maggie O'Farrell

Award-winning author Maggie O'Farrell publishes her first children's book



There are some authors who simply need no introduction - the ones whose books grace the shelves of bookshops for only seconds before they are swooped up by eager readers, many of whom have been patiently awaiting their release. Such is the fortune of award-winning author Maggie O'Farrell.

Born in Coleraine, Co. Derry, O'Farrell spent much of her childhood in Wales before settling in Scotland, where she currently resides. Her love of books and storytelling reaches back to her younger years.

"To be a writer you must first be a reader," shares the scribe. "I have been an avid reader since I was a child. I spent quite a bit of time in bed, ill, and reading was all that I did. It is hard to pinpoint why, but I have always had the urge to put words on paper, to create stories and narratives. I used to spend all of my pocket money on stationery."

Since those early days, O'Farrell has penned eleven books, including her debut novel *After You'd Gone* (2000), the Costa Book Awards winner *The Hand That First Held Mine* (2010), and her unforgettable memoir *I am, I am, I am: Seventeen Brushes with Death* (2017). Her latest novel - *Hamnet* - recently won the Women's Prize for Fiction, an achievement she calls "very surreal."

"It still hasn't sunk in," she says, noting that the digital set-up of the award show - a response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic - made the experience feel like one elaborate prank. "It is very nice to have the Bessie statue in your hand - I can't deny that."

O'Farrell admits that forging a career in writing has not been without its challenges but says that the "satisfaction of seeing a narrative to its end" makes it all worthwhile.

Earlier this year, she started her latest literary effort, a children's story titled *Where Snow Angels Go*, her first book written for young readers. She began writing the story for her own children while on a book tour.

"I wrote them a letter every day, with installments of the story. Then my youngest daughter said, 'I want this to be a proper book with pictures.'"

Published by Walker Books, and illustrated by Daniela Jaglenka Terrazzini, *Where Snow Angels Go* follows a young girl named Sylvie who wakes one night "to find someone standing beside her." The figure - a snow angel that Sylvie had made the previous winter - has journeyed to her for an important reason; to save her. Sitting at just over 70 pages, the story incorporates a variety of themes, including illness and miracles, and is being described as a "compelling modern fairy tale."

The process of writing *Where Snow Angels Go* proved to be quite different from her previous works.

"I knew the writing had to be very pared back, much more than writing for adults, but at the same time I don't believe in talking down to children."

"I found it quite interesting to construct a narrative with a shorter arc than I am used to. My books for adults are around 80,000 words whereas this is 6,000, so I had to learn a new sense of pace. I read it aloud to myself a fair amount, which I don't often do with longer novels, but I really needed to get a feel for the rhythm as children are very sensitive to auditory stimuli.

"I also had to read about the origins and characterization of angels," she continues. "There were questions from my children about this - do angels have a gender and why are they always referred to as male? Daniela and I went back and forth a few times on the subject of our favourite angels and how a snow angel should look. I went on holiday to Rome and walked across the Ponte Sant'Angelo. I very excitedly sent Daniela lots of photos of the angel sculptures, saying, 'Look at these!'"

Although the book is still in its early days, O'Farrell has already received a review from some of her most important critics.

"The only people who have read it so far are my children - and they are predisposed to like it!"

Where Snow Angels Go will be available starting November 10.

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Michaela Foster Marsh

*Seeking a star
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Michaela Foster Marsh is a woman of many passions. A talented singer and songwriter, she grew up in Glasgow and spent almost 18 years of her adulthood in Canada before returning home. Even as a child, Michaela thrived

I have coped and tried to find answers to the inexplicable.”

Another key component of her childhood was her adoptive brother, Frankie Marsh. The siblings were remarkably close in age, born just two weeks apart from one another. And though Michaela was white and Frankie was Black, they were raised like twins.

Sadly, Frankie passed away in a fire at just 26 years old. His untimely death eventually led Michaela on a journey to find his biological family. She did find them, in Uganda, 18 years after her brother’s death.

“The laws of probability were that I should never have found them, but I did.”

“It was an incredible journey, and I think it proves there is magic in the universe and that there is a continuous thread that connects us, even after death.”

Michaela was especially struck by the number of orphans she saw in Uganda during her time there. “I felt that I couldn’t return home and do nothing. I had a legitimate connection to Uganda and had found my brother’s family. We were linked to their mother and to a story that started in Scotland in the late 1960s.”

As a result, Michaela launched the Starchild charity in 2013. Her late partner, Rony Bridges, also had an important hand in the organization.

Starchild focuses on helping vulnerable

women and children in Uganda. They have already constructed a School for Creative Arts in the village of Vvumba, which teaches 110 children through a partnership with the local Grace Primary School. The charity is currently at work raising money to develop a holistic centre for children with autism and disabilities, as well as a sunflower sanctuary in Bridges’ memory.

“Rony believed in me so much. He believed I was a writer when I didn’t believe it myself. I miss him every second of the day.”

Michaela’s first novel *The Matoke Tree* tells the story of a Ugandan woman who comes to Scotland to study and is forced to give up a child for adoption and return to Uganda during the reign of Idi Amin - the cruel dictator who was president of the country in the 1970s. “What is strange about it is that some of the fictional book mirrors my brother’s biological mother’s life. I knew nothing about her when I wrote it. The adoption was all cloaked in secrecy - I was just using my imagination.”

When people heard the true story at Starchild charity talks, they encouraged Michaela to put it on paper as well. She ended up writing a memoir which shares the same title as the charity - *Starchild: A Memoir of Adoption, Race, and Family* - which was published this past spring.

During the writing process, Michaela says she was full of self-doubt. She wanted to do the story justice while, at the same time, respecting all the different people involved. The tale she was telling was deeply personal and, in some ways, painful as well.



on creative outlets. “I was always dancing, singing and making things,” she shares via email. “I was creating clothes from a very young age and went on to study dress design before getting into music and song writing. I can’t remember not creating.” Journaling is what eventually led her to writing songs and novels. “It is how I processed things. There is an element of loss in all my writing. It is how

“It is a very candid memoir. I didn’t hold back, and I didn’t see the point in writing it if I was going to gloss over some of the harsher realities of adoption.”

“I also had to be considerate of other people. In particular, Frankie’s mother and family. Janet, his mother, is no longer alive, but I wanted to honour her and tell her story as sensitively and accurately as I could. I also had to consider the brothers in Uganda, and of course, my parents. I talk very openly about some of the struggles my mum had with the adoption in particular. I also talk a bit about my ex-husband, his sister and my father, who were also adopted.”

While a struggle at times, Michaela pushed through. “All I could do was tell the truth through my own lens, how I saw it. Although the book is mainly about the journey of finding my brother’s family in Uganda and the impact that had on me, I do highlight some of the complexities of adoption and that primal wound which I felt my adopted family members each carried. As a daughter, sibling, and the wife of an adoptee, I started to see it clearly as I got older.”

Upon completion of the memoir, Michaela felt a deep sense of relief. “I needed to write the book. I had to get it out of me and onto paper. I am glad people encouraged me to write it.”

Although the COVID-19 lockdown prevented her from an official book launch and signing - something she wished she had been able to share with friends - the online feedback has warmed her heart. And, based on the response she has gotten thus far, the story has helped others. “The rewards are the letters, emails and reviews from people who have been moved by the book.

“The Starchild story is miraculous, but it is a story that almost never took place because I could have so easily given up. It took 18 years for me to go to Uganda, but it was worth the wait. I hope the book inspires people to take risks in life and take notice of the cosmic nudges which are always around us.”

Those cosmic nudges include the ways we communicate and co-create with our deceased loved ones: in Michaela’s case, her brother,



Frankie and Michaela

parents, and partner. It is perhaps appropriate, then, that her next project is a book about grief and death. “It won’t be as gloomy as it sounds, but it will be very raw and honest.

“Miracles happen when you propel yourself out of victim mode. Grief, as painful as it is, offers a call to a new life. You have to be prepared to rise to that challenge and push yourself out of your comfort zones. You are never the same person after a period of grief, so don’t try to hold on to that person or that life. Move forward in faith that God, the universe and your deceased are listening to you.”

www.starchildcharity.com





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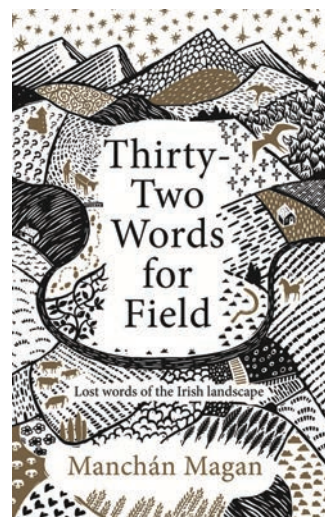
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A portrait of Manchán Magan, a man with brown hair and glasses, wearing a dark patterned shirt. He is smiling slightly and has his hands clasped in front of him. The background is a blurred landscape with a body of water and hills.

Manchán Magan

Manchán Magan is a writer and documentary filmmaker. He has written books on his travels in Africa, India and South America and two novels. He writes for The Irish Times, reports on travel for various radio programs, and has presented dozens of documentaries on issues of world culture. Recently we spoke with him about his passion, his profession, and his latest book *Thirty-Two Words for Field*.



What are your roots?

I was born and reared in the heart of Dublin but spent a quarter of each year in the West Kerry Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking area) of Corca Dhuibhne. My great-great-great-granduncle was Aodhagán Ó Rathaille, the last great poet of the ancient bardic schools, who was entitled to wear the sacred cloak of crimson bird feathers, and whose potent satires could raise a fearb (weal/welt) on the face of its target. My great granduncle, The O'Rahilly, was involved with the foundation of the Gaelic League and the revival of the Irish language in the 1910s. He was the only officer to die in combat during the 1916 Rising. His tabharthas (an offering or sacrifice that is regarded as a sacred gift from the gods) had a tangible impact on my Irish as it was my grandmother who taught me Irish, and she was inspired by seeing her uncle, The O'Rahilly, head out to near certain death on Easter Monday of 1916 during the Easter Rising. As a leader, on what he considered a futile mission, he knew he could not return from the battlefield alive, and so kissed his pregnant wife and four children farewell. For my grandmother this was the most pivotal moment of her life and she taught Irish to us grandchildren in honour and memory of him.

Where do you currently reside?

I live on 10 acres in the midlands of Ireland near Lough Lene in Co. Westmeath. I have planted six acres of oakwood, with a veg garden, an orchard, beehives, and hens.

When and why did you start writing?

I had travelled throughout Africa, India and South America for eight years from the age of 19, and when I finally returned to Ireland I

settled down on my 10 acres, built a house of bales of straw that I had learnt how to build from folks in the Kootenay Mountains near Nelson, British Columbia. I wanted to capture the experiences I had had with minority cultures all over the world and I taught myself how to write over many arduous years so that I could convey these stories. I have three travel books in English, and two in Irish, as well as a novel in English and one in Irish.

Are they the same reasons you do it today?

My writing has switched from conveying the richness and complexity and beauty of far-away cultures to doing the same for my own indigenous culture. I write Irish Times articles and television and radio documentaries that elucidate and celebrate the rich culture of Ireland in terms of landscape, language, heritage, history, culture, and art. I write and perform plays and performance installations that are about the Irish language, but that are in English.

How have you grown as a writer over that time?

In the three arduous years that I kept writing and writing my first travel books, honing my craft, I literally sweat blood and tears. It was a challenging time. I was determined to master the art of communicating through words, until finally I found a publisher in Brandon Books and a great agent. The benefit of writing feature articles so regularly for the Irish Times is that I get to practice and improve my craft daily. I want to constantly become clearer and more elegant as a writer. To find ways to convey subtle, complex ideas in simple, engaging prose.

What is the most challenging aspect of the vocation?

Writing is my absolute passion. The only challenge would be not being able to write. The power of the initial urge to learn how to write well enough to be recognized and financially supported through it was so overwhelming. I know I wanted to communicate to people through words. I recognized that there was so much in my heart and soul and mind that I wished to share, and I am thrilled at the opportunity to be able to do this each day. Of course, writing a book is a lot more challenging than putting together a single article. My new book (Thirty-Two Words for Field) took me six years and it was so lovely to be able to switch to writing articles or my theatre pieces/plays when I lacked that intense concentration required for a book - particularly a book in which I wished every complex idea to be conveyed in super short chapters.

What are the rewards?

To be able to convey one's heart's thoughts is a profound honour.

What have been some career highlights?

I performed my theatrical installation *Gaeilge Tamagotchi* at the Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts in Washington DC in 2016. In the piece I bestow endangered Irish words on members of the public who agree to foster them and cherish them. I was asked to write a piece in honour of the great writer, Tim Robinson and to perform it for him in the Druid Theatre in Galway, which was such a thrill as he was one of my true literary heroes, and a central inspiration for my current book.

What inspired you to write Thirty-Two Words for Field?

I believed there was so much to be said about the Irish language that is never said. The landscape and culture of Ireland has been explored in many wonderful works of literature that present the wildlife, literature, history, and heritage of this wet, windy and rocky Atlantic island. Yet one facet has been ignored, and that is the Irish language. No book has yet attempted to present the sublime beauty and profound oddness of this ancient tongue that has been spoken on the island for perhaps 2,500 to 3,000 years. I wanted to address this.

How much research was involved?

The task I set for myself was to trace the insights that the Irish language offers into the Irish psyche, its lore and landscape, flora & fauna, and the many layers and dimensions of reality that run parallel to the physical world. To do this required digging out old words and semi-forgotten terms, expressions and concepts that offer new ways of being in the world, of seeing nature & experiencing reality. I spent months rifling through old dictionaries and Gaelic texts, mostly online, trying to trace strands of psychological, spiritual, medicinal, and agricultural knowledge that still exist in old words & phrases. For example, my book lists 14 different words for salmon. 32 words for fields. 45 words for stones, 70,000 placenames. 4,300 words to describe people's character. The amount of them is irrelevant, what I was searching for were words that allow us to see our world in a richer or more engaging way.

What did you learn during the process?

That Old Languages offer a wider, more inter-connected and sustainable take on the world and that they all have many inter-related aspects that suggest a complex, but harmonious cultural ecosystem from which we all descend. I was particularly struck by how the Irish language is alive with references to other dimensions and spirit beings. *Púicín* means a supernatural covering that allows otherworldly beings to appear unseen in this reality - it can also mean a blindfold, a goat muzzle or a tin shade put over a thieving cow's eyes. Such concepts challenge the parameters of the rational mind, yet they synch well with the latest revelations in quantum physics, where electrons are forever materializing, then dematerializing and reappearing somewhere else. Words like *alltar* (netherworld, other place), which is the opposite to *ceantar* (district, locality) and *crithir* (the vulnerability and insubstantiality of solid objects) help us come to terms with this. What became clear to me was that words can be wedges that pull back the surface layer of thought and feeling, revealing a deeper truth beneath, like *diadhánach*, the lonesomeness of a cow bereft of her calf. Words like these can have unusual resonance patterns when sung inside tombs like Loughcrew. Their resonant frequency can change brain patterns and even one's physical surroundings.

Why is it an important work?

Old languages are more in danger than ever, and I hope that the book might highlight the richness that is still stored within these languages - particularly Irish. By rooting us back into the soil and to what matters most in life, it allows us to feel more grounded and at home in this increasingly chaotic world. Also, the insight into how the Irish mind was always open to the Otherworld and could drift so easily beyond the limitations of physical reality is really valuable to those of us seeking greater meaning. I hope that the book reveals the underlying connections between all things, from waves to hawks to fields and flowers, and that it makes clear how ancestral languages can steer us

back to what truly matters - allowing readers to make sense of an increasingly chaotic world by reintroducing us to the mysterious glories of the natural world and the subterranean existence to all things.

What makes a good book?

In this day and age a book should help people. All of us are craving more meaning in our lives, or more connection, or less alienation. Everything is so chaotic and tumultuous. The rate of change in the last generation has been dizzying. I believe a book should offer solace in whatever way it thinks is best.

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

I do a lot of research on which I can then base my ideas and even flights of fancy.

How and when did you get involved with filmmaking, theatre, and radio/television?

My passion in life is to convey ideas - mostly surrounding how humanity is more connected to a common global unity than mainstream media like us to believe. We are all rooted in the same past. And that past contained valuable knowledge in terms of engaging with nature, living healthily, and nourishing ourselves and the environment we live in. I believe humans are growing freer and more informed with each decade - we just need some guidance. And I have been stirred to write and perform plays, present television documentaries, write newspaper feature articles and produce and present radio programs all to share and explain ideas that I feel are nourishing and true.

What's next on your agenda?

I am currently doing a project called *Sea Tamagotchi*, where I am collecting endangered coastal words and maritime terms from along the coast of Donegal, Mayo, Sligo and Galway. It requires meeting up with old fishermen and folklorists and gathering their knowledge. In February and March 2021, the first ever IMAX movie about Ireland will be released by MacGillivray Freeman. I present the film. It is about a journey I made around the entire island of Ireland with four young people, showing them the rich culture and ancient heritage of Ireland and how it was expressing itself in today's modern Ireland.

www.manchan.com

Manchán's Favourite Words

Friothaire	Senior look-out fairy at fairy fort.
Bearradóir	Detective, cow that eats tail hair, person who probes for bogwood.
Bóithreán	Dried cow dung, dust on the road, languorous type of walking gait.
Turscar	Rotten seaweed & shellfish, spam email.
Bladhmhann	Steam rising from a fermented haystack; boasting, empty bragging, blaze.
Stocaire	Scrounger; trumpeter; one purposely left without a partner at a dance.
Tachrán	Weakling, ghost of an unbaptised child.
Gradhal	Thick lip from drunkenness.
Codam	Gum-swelling of furze-fed horses.
Dreag	A sling, or a light like a star following the course of a coffin would take, or the course of a body from sea to graveyard.
Airdeogaí	Under the spell of fairies (from drinking poteen) and convinced you can do anything, including flying.

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Róisín Gartland



I was born in Dublin, but research shows that my surname, which is an anglicized form of MacGartnáin, originated in the northern counties of Armagh, Tyrone, and Monaghan. It is ascribed to a Cenél nEoghain, a title given to families descended from Eóghan, son of King Niall of the Nine Hostages. Today, I live in Dún Laoghaire, close to the coastline.

My father was a craftsman who worked as a furrier, and my mother made all our clothes, so I had an awareness of the fashion business, particularly through the lens of the maker, from a young age. I was also very attracted to complex geometric puzzles growing up and loved to both create and solve problems. It was through these musings that I developed a love of design. In fact, my path could easily have veered towards architecture but a desire to leave school and an opening in a family business pulled me into fashion's web.

Not long after I set up my design studio, about 35 years ago, I began to study fine art and although my studio has evolved into an interdisciplinary creative hub, I am still driven by the same desire which is to create unique and interesting pieces that stand up to the test of time regardless whether they fall into fashion or art.

My training was very rigid and very precise - leather is precious and doesn't forgive, so there was never

room to make mistakes. This suited my engineering mind and sensibility back then and rather than see it as a drawback, I embraced the challenges and became a very highly skilled maker. And when I set up my own studio in 1987 I was also able to indulge my love of geometry and building and would spend many hours developing my patterns to suit the myriad body shapes. The skills I developed in those early years were a great foundation and still underpin my work today. As soon as I entered into the fine art world in the 1990s I began to play with my materials for the first time, to explore their possibilities and push at the boundaries, to destroy and rebuild in a new way. I also began to think less about the changing seasons in fashion and moved more toward making pieces with longevity in mind and eventually left the fast-moving pace of fashion behind. From 2004 onwards the work became much more expressive as a result and my style and sensibility changed completely. I began to withdraw from the rigidity of precision to allow the work to develop in a free-flowing manner.

A good piece of clothing is determined by the calibre of the design married with excellent materi-

als placed in the hands of a skilled maker.

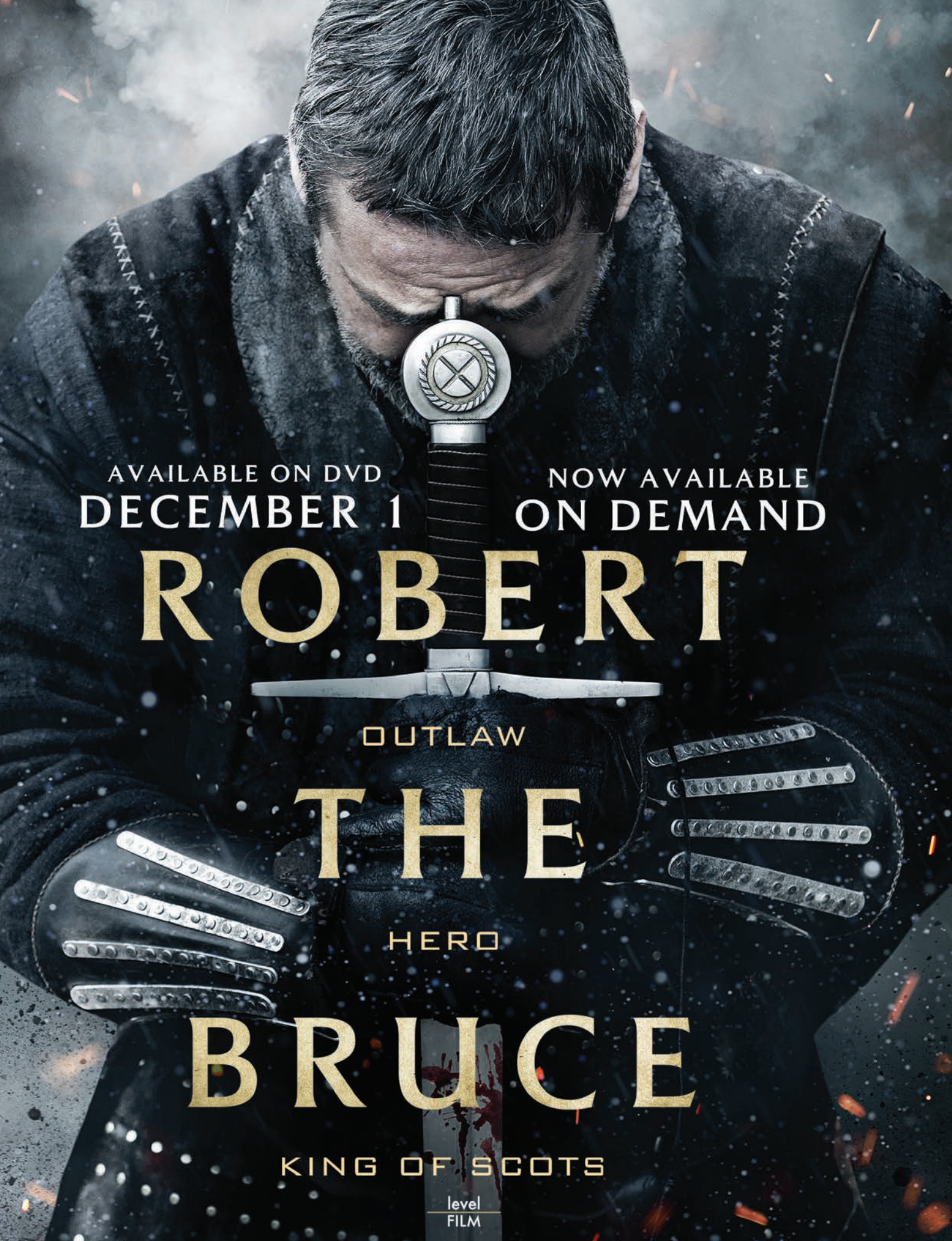
My clients have an appreciation of quality, they buy for investment purposes and they like to stand out from the crowd. I am proud to say that I am still making for patrons who have continued to support me since the early days; seeing them and the pieces I have made over the years keeps me in touch with how my work has not only evolved but also how it stands the test of time.

I am coming out of lockdown with a commission to create costumes for a six-part drama/documentary series called 'Mnámhallacht - The Persecuted', which explores six cases of women who were accused of practicing witchcraft in Ireland. I have the opportunity to take my leatherwork to a new level for this production and my hope is that an exhibition of the pieces I am creating will correspond with the series broadcast in November 2021.

Designers who are able to succeed in this most difficult time are showing much determination and strength of will in bringing their dreams and visions to life, so I applaud all of those who are able to keep going.







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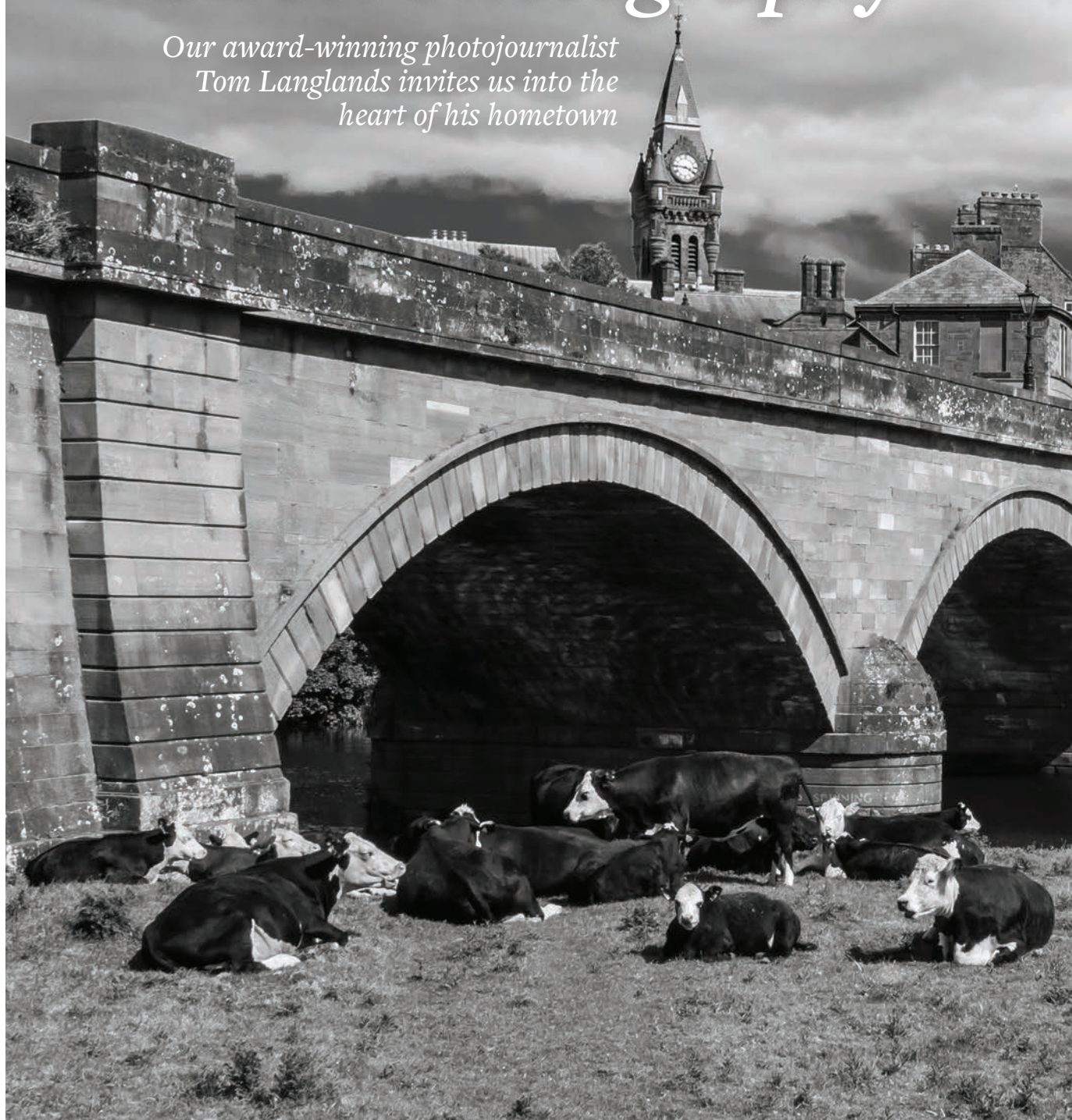
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Annan Street Photography

*Our award-winning photojournalist
Tom Langlands invites us into the
heart of his hometown*





My wife and I moved to Annan in southwest Scotland almost 40 years ago. It was never meant to be a permanent stay but rather a temporary pause on a return journey where the outbound leg had taken us from Dundee to London in search of work. After a year in Annan we realized how much this small market town had to offer and how its location was ideal for road connections to other parts of the U.K. When we wanted the bustle of city life, a little over an hour by car would take us to Glasgow or Edinburgh, and when we wanted scenery and solitude, the rural landscapes of Dumfries and Galloway or the English Lake District were on our doorstep. Wanting to better understand the town, I immersed myself in learning about its history and, in those early years, I teamed up with a local history teacher and together we gave guided walking tours of Annan for visitors and incomers like myself.

As coronavirus swept the world at the start of this year a strange and unexpected thing happened to me; I saw Annan in a different light. When lockdown came and the government encouraged us to take daily exercise, I often found myself wandering through the town. Devoid of vehicles and people, the empty streets came alive in a surprisingly different way. Free from the need to watch out for cars and pedestrians, and in the absence of the other sights and sounds that bombard us daily, I was able to

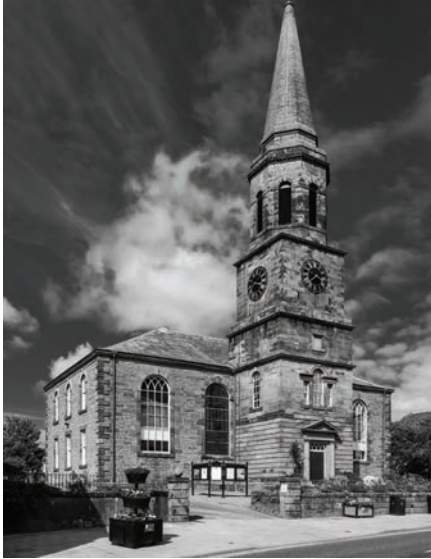
look around and let my mind roam free in the silence. I stood on the hill that once elevated the famed Bruce family's 12th century, motte-and-bailey castle and I swear I heard the toing and froing of horsemen crossing the river shallows below. Fast forwarding the centuries, I was jolted by the sound of gunfire accompanied by shouts and screams as yet another English raid razed the town. As the imaginary smoke and flames subsided I wandered the High Street and saw the people mingling around the open-air meat market and, further still, I was hit with the smell from Fish Cross where the local fishermen sold their catch. I passed Robert Burns making his way from the Provost's House to the Buck Inn clutching his freshly-penned 'The Deil's Awa Wi' the Exciseman'. Hans Christian Anderson stepped out of the Blue Bell Inn, Thomas Carlyle bade me "good-morning" as he headed to school, Hugh Clapperton stopped to inform me he had just returned from Canada and was visiting his hometown before heading off to explore the course of the River Niger and local preacher Edward Irving was being drummed out of town for heresy! Dorothy Wordsworth passed through noting, "The town of Annan made me think of France and Germany; many of the houses large and gloomy, the size of them outrunning the comforts. One thing which was like Germany pleased me: the shopkeepers express their calling by some device or painting; bread-bakers

have biscuits, loaves, cakes painted on their window-shutters; blacksmiths horses' shoes, iron tools, etc. etc.; and so on through all trades."

In this mishmash of time and people I heard the clattering of horses and carriages associated with the coaching inns and I witnessed the future Emperor of France - Prince Louis Napoleon - staying at the Queensberry Arms Hotel as he headed to the medieval re-enactment tournament at Eglinton in Ayrshire.

I stopped to watch the master stonemasons working on the prestigious buildings that still define the town today.





A young Ben Nicholson was building some of the world's largest tea-clippers at Annan harbour and Port Street was bustling with shipbuilders, joiners and sailmakers. These were the heydays before trains and cars changed the economic landscape and returned the town to more modest times. These were also the days captured by early photographers who left a legacy of images that provide an insight into Annan's past.

As a photographer I was fascinated with these old images, but it wasn't the recording of static moments in time that intrigued me. As I looked beyond the blurred figures in their flowing black dresses and dark suits, I could see faces that spoke of prosperity or misery, of wealth and of poverty. These photographs were not just a record of their day; they were a window into the soul of a town and its inhabitants. Walking Annan's empty streets I became conscious of the fact that while we exist in a given moment in time we are also part of a story that started long before our own chapter began and will continue to be read long after our chapter has ended. How it is read by future generations depends upon how it is recorded by the current one. That was when I knew that I had to use my camera to capture the spirit of the town and its people through this unique and difficult period in its history.

The lack of people and cars made the architecture more prominent and so I began by photographing the empty streets and buildings. It felt important to capture the

beauty of what previous generations had left us and, in doing so, show the current generation what was at risk of being lost through decay and lack of investment. As the days and weeks passed, I switched my attention to recording people returning in small, tentative numbers and then in greater numbers. I needed to show what it was like when the wearing of masks became compulsory and how some people found fun in personalizing them. I wanted also to capture the difficulties, the sadness and the hope and joy that shines through the masks. Having experienced the emotions evoked when viewing the photographs of previous generations, I knew my images needed to be more than just a record.

For me street photography is visual prose - the difference between recording a moment and creating a mystery. It has as much to do with what the image doesn't show as what it does.

For my street photography I prefer to work mostly in monochrome. In some instances, colour is effective but it can also distract as different colours draw the eye to different parts of the image. Monochrome photographs allow the viewer to concentrate on the subject matter and the story behind an image as well as creating a timeless qual-

ity that allows photographs to retain their impact through the ages.

There are, however, always exceptions and one of my favourite photographs from Annan is indeed a colour one. It was of a young woman standing outside a shop on a sunny day. As I went to press the shutter, she looked directly at me. Her red hair, purple mask and gold, reflective sunglasses expressed strength and beauty but with an air of mystery. To me her appearance suggested that she respected this coronavirus but that she would not be cowed by it. In many ways she embodied the Celtic spirit and the ancient Celts' fascination with gold. I gave this image the title Pure Gold.

As the Belgian surrealist René Magritte noted, "Each thing we see hides something else we want to see." I aim to create images that evoke feelings and in which the viewer not only sees the obvious but is drawn to interpret and imagine. I want viewers to look into my images - not at them - as I strive to capture the true spirit of the time. The spirit of Annan lives in its history, its architecture, the people of yesteryear and the people of today. Through my photographs I hope to show future generations what we have gone through in a small market town in southwest Scotland. We may be sharing the same coronavirus problem as the rest of the world, but Annan is unique, and so are its people.

www.tomlanglandsp photography.com

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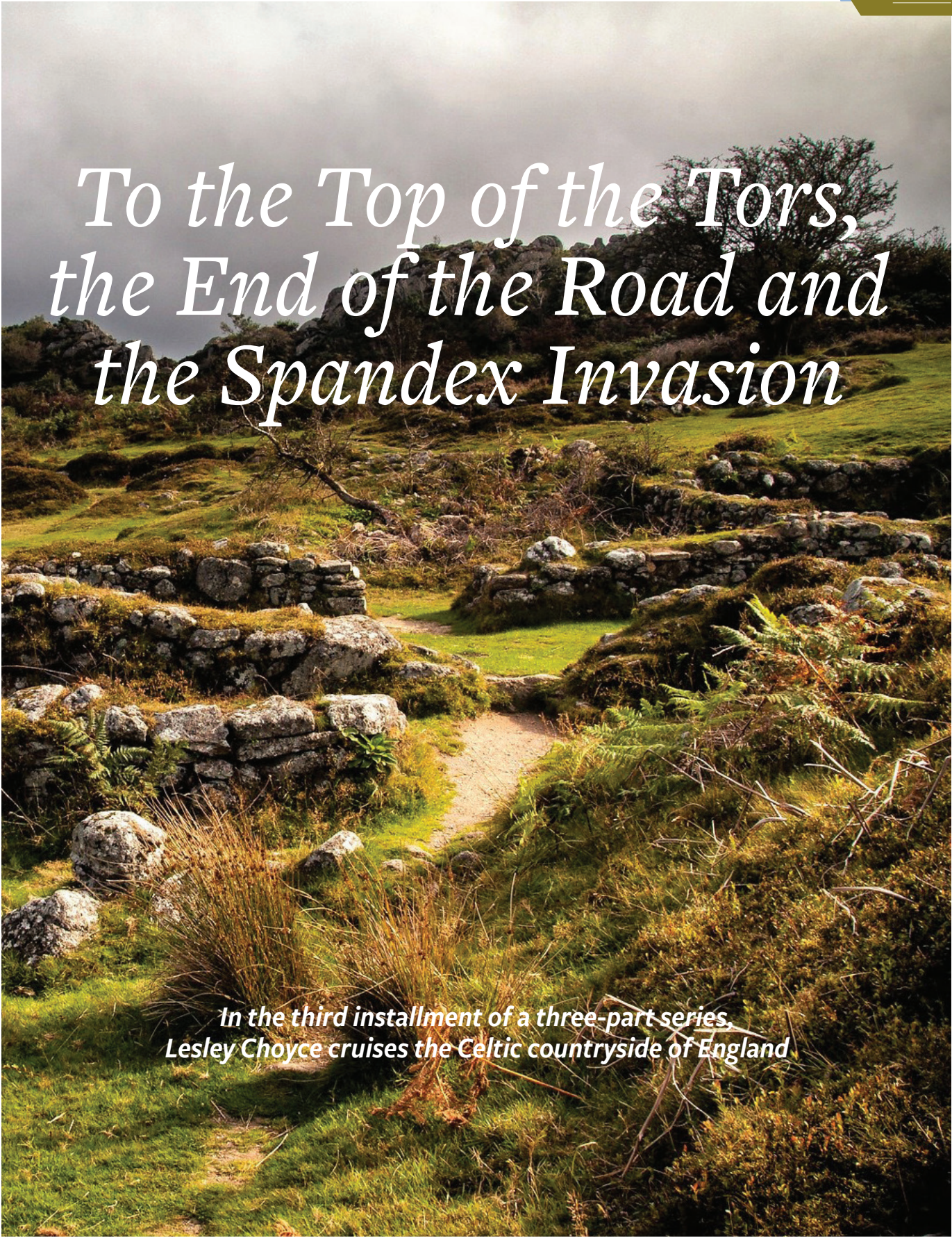
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To the Top of the Tors, the End of the Road and the Spandex Invasion

*In the third installment of a three-part series,
Lesley Choyce cruises the Celtic countryside of England*



The Old Inn

At the risk of sounding repetitious, I would like to say that if someone should inaugurate a special award for the most difficult roads in England, I would nominate the back roads of Dartmoor for that distinction. They are narrow, potholed, often walled on both sides with creeping blackberry vines as thick as your wrist sporting spikey thorns that will take an eye out if you or your dog decide to stick your head out the window and smell the sweet breeze.

The remains of the medieval village in Hound Tor is well documented in travel literature, and you might expect a signpost or two, but we found only one as we snaked through the backcountry. But one sign in Dartmoor will lead you only so far before you come to a dozen or so more obscure unposted intersections. We spent a better part of the morning lost, zigzagging

beneath one tor or another, backtracking, retracing, going north, south, east, and west, sometimes in the right direction, sometimes not. "Didn't we just pass this stone house with a tidy yard 10 minutes ago?" my wife Linda would ask.

Eventually, by sheer luck, we wound up at the parking lot at Hound Tor and were properly shocked to see that it was somewhat crowded. It turned out there was a well-marked and well-maintained road that approached from the south and once again we had selected the backroad route from the north, though I know not why. But it was becoming clear that adventure and stupidity went hand in hand, at least in my case as a Dartmoor lane navigator.

Tors are granite rock formations found throughout the region, each one with its own quirky charm and personality. The hike to the top of the Hound is fairly easy and dogs are appropriately welcomed, so we had a fine time of it and the view from the top, as is the view from most every tor in the area, is spectacular. Dartmoor is just a weird and wonderful landscape and it has fascinated visitors for centuries. Many an artist has captured Hound Tor on canvas, and it is said that it is the inspiration for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "Hound of the Baskervilles." Big Momma Thornton visited here once, it is also reported, and was inspired to write "You Ain't Nothing but a Hound Dog" which would eventually be a runaway hit for none other than Elvis Presley. Just kidding. It just occurred to me that a lot of "lore" about such places may or may not be true and I might as well be one of those writers to make something up and spread an unlikely but fascinating rumour.

But, no, I will do my best to be your loyal author and stick to the truth.

There is yet another legend (I didn't make it up) that suggests a pack of hounds was turned to stone and thus the name, but that's probably not true either, even though the moor is full of any number of things that were supposedly turned to stone in ancient times.

I kept wondering who it was that did all the handiwork of turning living things to granite? The devil or witches, it would appear.

From the look of the landscape from atop the Hound, it seemed that whoever it was, the transformational work kept them quite busy.

Whatever the truth about the craggy rocks, Kelty, Linda and I loved clambering over them. Hound Tor was considered to be



Lesley and Kelty

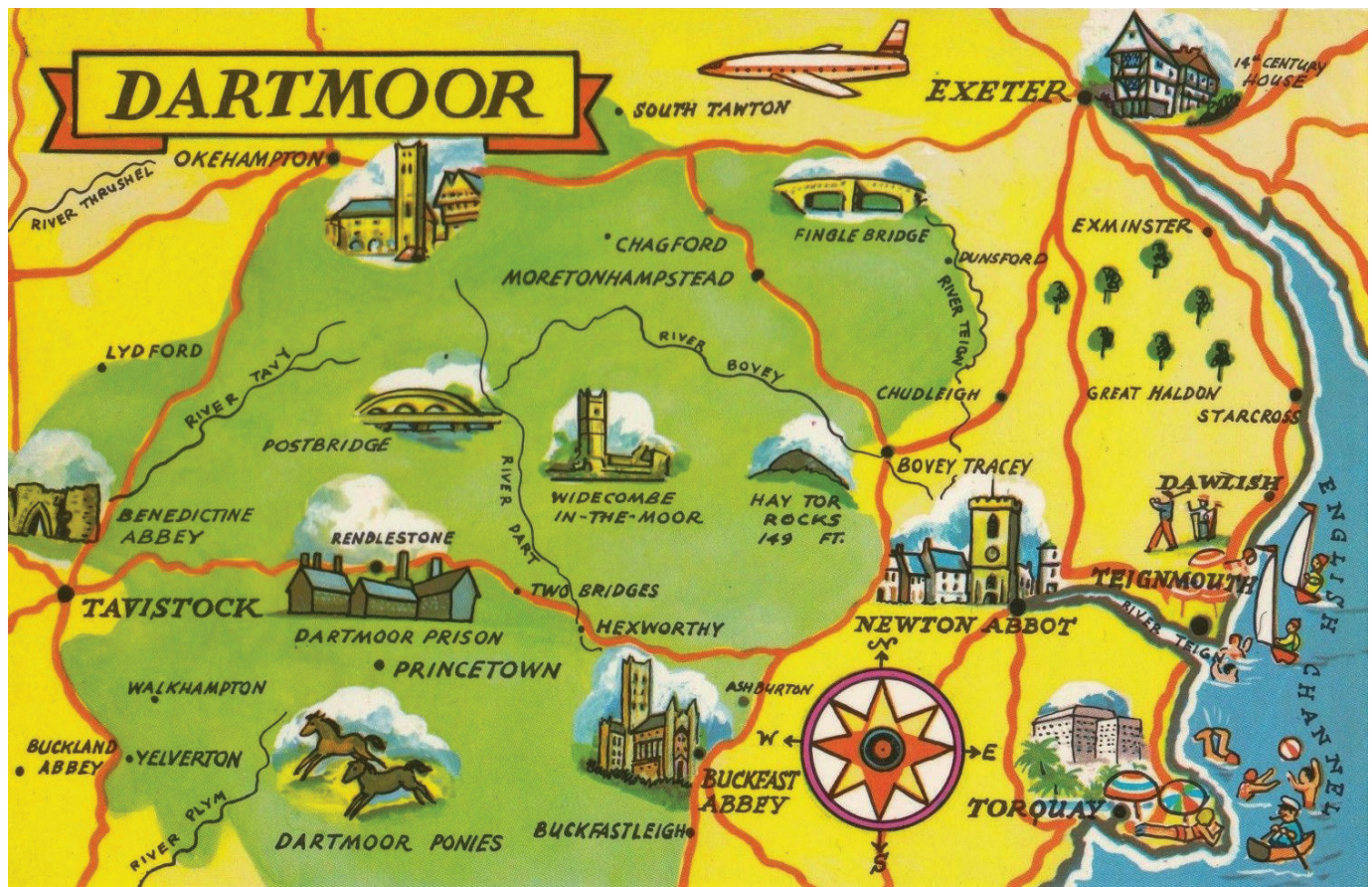


Linda

When we had enough of rock climbing, we ambled down to the parking lot and had a look at the remains of the medieval village. Here were the remnants of longhouses that date back to the 13th century and it is believed the village was abandoned when a plague swept the countryside. Or maybe part of the Hound had collapsed then as well, and they took it as an omen to leave. We will never know. But part of me wants to clearly imagine this isolated Bronze Age community with their animals and cultivated plants. Were they happy? Did they feel cut off from the world? Did they love their families and their dogs? My own answers are yes, no, yes. Yes, they were happy - as I imagine them at least. No, they didn't know they were isolated. They were connected to the world of the moor and drew sustenance from it. And yes, of course, they loved their families and the family dog. Even the large hairy dog that some still see racing across the hilltops during a full moon.

"I imagine the beer tastes better in Widecombe than in other parts of Dartmoor."

A traditional folk song from the 1800s called “Widcombe Fair” features the ghost of “Tom Pearce’s old mare in her rattling bones,”





Rugglestone-Inn

further endorsing the fact that Widecombe has a reputation for strangeness, yet everything seemed quite normal the day we visited.

Near Widecombe in the early part of this century stood a 20-foot-tall oak chair handcrafted by sculptor Henry Bruce. It drew so much tourist traffic that local citizens (many of them fun-loathing spirits, no doubt) complained. When the authorities made Bruce take down his chair monument, he told *The Telegraph*, “It is a shame that it is health and safety that cuts these things out of life when they bring such joy and inspiration.” Like Bruce, during our tenure in the U.K., we did notice that the British were a bit obsessive with certain “health and safety” issues that we are a bit more lax about in fun-loving North America. They have warnings in airports letting you know your pedway is about to end and, should you travel by train anywhere in the kingdom, you will be ever reminded to “mind the gap.”

In 2010 Stephen Spielberg and a fairly massive entourage found their way to Widecombe and the surrounding countryside to shoot the movie *War Horse*. Although his crew tried to keep locations a secret, invading flotillas of a 100 or more vehicles and an army of painters painting over an entire village’s window frames (so that they were not white) gave away whatever secrets they were trying to maintain.

Someone over in Yelverton on the edge of the moor told the press that the famous director had been spotted buying a carton of semi-skimmed milk and that got the tongues wagging. Spielberg’s film does justice to the haunting and beautiful landscape. *The Guardian* quoted him as saying, “I have never before, in my long, eclectic career, been gifted with such an abundance of natural beauty as I experienced filming *War Horse*.”

Such was the scenery around Haytor on our way back to Manaton. It was an easy hike up this hill and plenty of camera-toting tourists



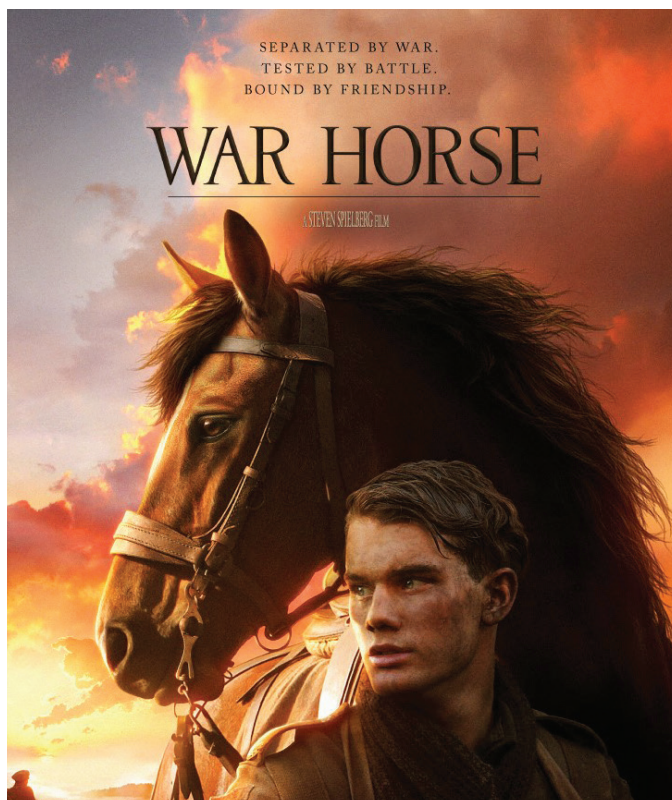
Haytor Pony

were about, especially the men with big lens cameras that bounce off their bellies as they stride up the hill. I had to keep a close watch on Keltly as there were ponies casually grazing about as we climbed the easy rock staircase while puffy blue clouds above kept prompting me to think this was all a dream.

A woman with a charming accent working in a food truck below in the parking lot told me she wanted to adopt Keltly and would I mind if I left him behind to keep her company. I politely declined and told her we were headed to France and flying home to Nova Scotia in a couple of days. From her expression, I got the notion that she believed I was making this up. And it suddenly occurred to me that this whole business of travelling from continent to continent with a small white dog was a bit unreal - fairy tale like even. At the very least, the stuff of minor legends.



Hound Tor





In nearby Bovey Tracey, Linda visited an art gallery and did some shopping while Kelty and I sniffed around town. We walked along the River Bovey and I studied the lichen growing in the grass. This may not seem a big deal to you - and Kelty could not have cared less - but ever since I had read about the longevity and resilience of lichen, I have had a special place in my heart for this clever but slow-witted living combination of fungus and algae that can thrive just about anywhere, sometimes for centuries at a time. Dog lichen, also known as dog's teeth, was believed to be a cure for rabies in the Middle Ages, so it was a pretty big deal but I could tell that not another soul in Bovey Tracy had any enthusiasm for the dog lichen so prolific here.

The ignored lichen before me was once noted in the ancient so-called Doctrine of Signatures. The shape of a plant or its leaf somehow was related to what it could cure. Hence, dog lichen or dog's teeth lichen correlates to the teeth of the rabid dog that bit you so, ipso facto, if you ate the lichen, it would cure your rabies. I am told that modern science has suppressed the notions found in the Doctrine of Signatures, but I did find that the dried flowers of lungwort helped me to breathe better during my I'm-more-organic-than-you period. And there is a slap-happy, feel-good notion to fostering well-being found in the doctrine. For example, walnuts are good for your brain because the nut inside looks like a human brain.

Want to fix your head? Just eat a bag of walnuts - it is much cheaper than a shrink and less invasive than electrotherapy.

Slice a carrot and it looks like a human eye. Mushrooms are good for the ears. Olives are good for your ovaries and kidney beans...guess what? They are good for your kidneys. Don't just take it from me. Go

read Paracelsus.

It was about then that I smelled the herbal sweet aroma of marijuana and saw a teenage boy and girl sharing a joint on a big boulder in the little river. I thought we should leave them be lest they think I was an undercover narc with a drug-sniffing Westie. I tugged at Kelty's leash and went to find Linda, since I knew we needed to get back to Little Hazelcote and start packing.

In our final night back in the cottage, with thoughts of home, babies and family swimming in my head, I realized that we had nearly concluded what we had set out to do - travel around England with a dog.

As noted, landlords who rent vacation homes have the most unusual assortment of reading material left on the shelves for their temporary tenants. Often, it is just a cheesy collection of romances or murder mysteries or large print thrillers. I had read a fair bit of "the best running book ever," *Born to Run* (no, not the Bruce Springsteen book), back in Wales. It was the story of a little-known tribe of Indigenous people in Mexico who ran faster and longer than most any humans. I now regretted not stealing it for the flight home and became tempted to pilfer something from the shelves here at Little Hazelcote, not the valuable hiking or tattered bird guides, but some obscure paperback that no one would miss. I couldn't quite find anything that spoke to me until I found a biography of Twiggy. I hadn't ever thought much about Twiggy. That is, she had not crossed my radar since sometime in the 1960s when Soho fashions were in vogue. Even then, I wasn't sure what Twiggy was famous for. I think it was just the fact she was skinny and wore currently trendy London fashions. (Or did I miss an important element of her fame?) In the end, I wasn't sure Linda would approve of me reading Twiggy's biography on the flight home, so I placed it back on the shelf.

In the morning, Linda insisted that she squeeze in a full 10-kilometre run and suggested she leave ahead of us, head to Becky Falls and on towards Bovey Tracy. Kelty and I would follow a half hour later and pick her up on the road. The plan worried the bejesus out of me. What if for some unexpected reason we couldn't find her? What if something happened? But she insisted and quickly bolted out the door before I had a chance to complete my protest.

Little did I know that today, July 1, was the day of Dartmoor Classic 2018 bicycle marathon that was taking place on the road where I was to meet up with Linda. As I left Little Hazelcote, with thunder clouds looming overhead, I had a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach and my gut knotted up. When Kelty and I encountered the first of several displays of spandex from several dozen overzealous bike riders, I knew something was up. Side roads were closed off to traffic, but I was permitted to pass, fearing all the while that there would be a roadblock ahead, I would be shunted off onto a side road and never see my wife again.

When I encountered a man on the side of the road who looked like my high school gym teacher with a clipboard in his hand, I asked him if he'd seen a lone woman running against the incoming tide of sweaty bicyclists. He nodded and said, "Yes. She went this way and said you would stop to ask. Keep on straight ahead, mate." And so, I did.

The clouds spilled several buckets of warm rain and I kept tightly tucked to my left to stay out of the way of the rolling spandex army. But then the sun came out and the hills were once alive with light. And there she was. Wet, slightly winded, and finally dropping herself into the shotgun seat of our Fiat. And with that we were on our way to Folkestone, finding our way onto the M highways by way of Exeter, Bristol, Slough, Clacket Lane and Ashford.

THE CHRISTMAS PARCEL



Noreen Walshe



Painter Noreen Walshe has recently launched the Living Ireland Collection, which is a departure for her into the world of textiles. The collection showcases Irish flora and fauna, the seasons and local Irish landmarks as her favourite paintings are translated into cushions, lampshades, lamps, table runners, napkins, tea towels and art bags. The collection also includes 100 per cent Irish wool throws and cashmere and merino lambswool scarves.

The Christmas series of products focuses on the Boyne Valley where the artist lives. Popular places such as Mrs O's pub on the Hill of Skryne, the Hill of Tara are highlighted in the prints along with seasonal robin.

Added to this collection of homeware and wearables is her newly published book 'The Christmas Parcel' a memoir in text and illustration of childhood in Limerick city in the late 50s.

Available at www.choicepublishing.ie & www.amazon.com

See all products, Paintings, Prints, Greeting Cards and Homeware in Noreen's website

www.noreenwalshe.com

email noreenwalshe@gmail.com

Mobile 00353863946565

Facebook [noreenwalsheartist](https://www.facebook.com/noreenwalsheartist)

Instagram @noreenwalshe



**Packaging and postage not included.*





The Heart of Hearth

While homesteads might be a bit quieter this holiday season due to COVID-19, Celtic customs continue. Celtic Life International Associate Editor Chris Muise explains.



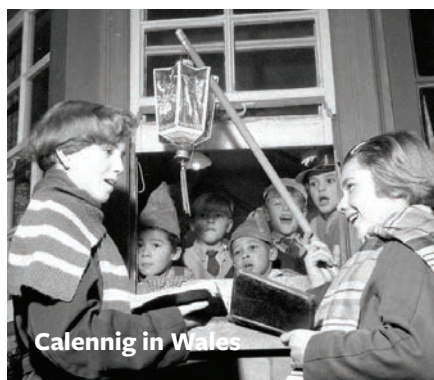
Since practically time immemorial, the holiday season - whether you celebrate Christmas, Chanukah, the Winter Solstice, Kwanzaa, or anything else - has been a time to come together with those you love and treasure.

Of course, many of the seasonal traditions that originated with - and often continue to be celebrated today by - the Celtic peoples, across the seven Celtic nations and the wider Diaspora, share that same focus on coming together to celebrate.

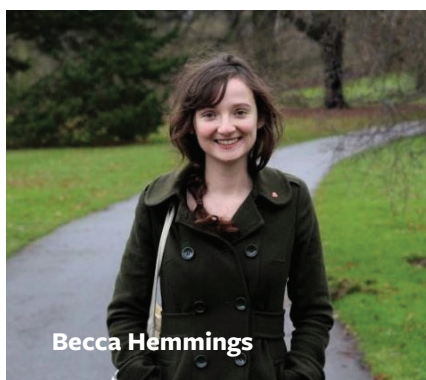
We have explored some of these customs in past issues of Celtic Life International, including Wren's Day in Ireland, where the community gathers to act out a wren hunt in colourful dress for local kids - a yearly ritual which is believed to have evolved from an ancient Celtic Samhain sacrificial tradition.

Around New Year's Day, there are several traditions of door-to-door gift-giving of Celtic origin; Calennig in Wales, where it is customary to give out cheese and bread, or some coins; in Scotland, Hogmanay starts at the stroke of midnight with 'first-footing' where the first person to cross the threshold of a friend or family member's house in the new year brings with them a symbolic gift of salt, bread, or a dram of whiskey; Handsel Monday is another opportunity to share gifts in Scotland, with money for children, serving staff, or as a general house-warming present.

Some of these traditions may sound archaic, however many people around the world still observe them.

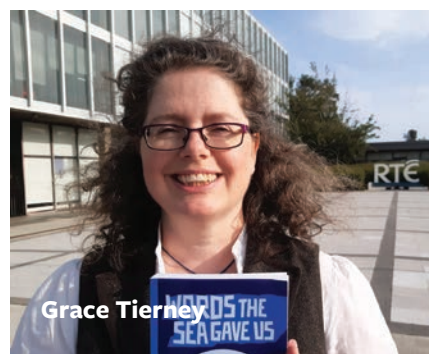


Calennig in Wales



Becca Hemmings

"My mam used to celebrate Calennig in her village of Ciliau Aeron by rushing around the houses collecting sweets and money," remembers Becca Hemmings, who owns The Welsh Gift Shop, an online outlet for wares and goods from Wales. "It sounded a bit like today's Halloween 'trick or treating' but without the tricks and costumes. It was



Grace Tierney

always exciting for her."

Irish writer Grace Tierney runs the Wordfoolery Blog, which explores the origins behind obscure words and traditions. While 'Handselling' might be unknown to most, she grew up with it - even if she didn't know it by name.

"Handselling a new purse, wallet, or bag with a coin before use has always been part of my life," she explains via email. "I was very young when my mother explained the custom to me. She knew it was vital for



Apalpador

somebody other than the new purse's owner to place a coin inside before its first use, to ensure the bag would never be empty of future wealth and good fortune."

Tierney rediscovered the tradition when she came upon the origins of the word "handsel" while researching for her blog. "It appears to have come to English from Danish/Old Norse sources and, as you might guess, it's related to something being given into the hand. Handsel Day was the day, celebrated from the 1800s, when tips and small gifts were expected by servants, postmen, etc.

"Handsel Day was supplanted by British Boxing Day traditions of the same sort over time, and the day itself doesn't appear to be celebrated anymore," she adds. "However, the idea of handselling a purse or wallet has spread far and wide from its source in England, Scotland, and Ireland. It has reached out to Australia, Sri Lanka, and Canada, perhaps along with emigration flows from the British Isles through the centuries. Interestingly, the custom is often handed from mother to daughter."

Some traditions are even more obscure, to the point of being at risk of fading away altogether.

One such observance is the myth of Apalpador, a Spanish gift-giving, Santa-like figure originating in Galicia.

"Apalpador is a charcoal merchant who lives in the forest and comes down to the villages on the night of Christmas Eve," explains José Cadaveira of the History Commission of Gentalha do Pichel in Galicia. "He checks to see if the children are well-fed, touching their belly when they are sleeping, saying 'I wish you well all year' and leaving charcoal and a handful of chestnuts in the house. This tradition had almost disappeared by 2006. It only remained in some remote zones in the mountains of eastern Galicia: Courel and Ancares. We do not know if, in the past, the tradition was more widely spread, but we suppose so."

Other traditions, like the festive costumes and pageantry of Wren Day, would

travel the world with the Celtic diaspora, and evolve into new, regional variations, like the practice of mumming in Newfoundland and Labrador.

"It is a festive practice where oddly-dressed characters visit homes throughout the evening," explains Lynn McShane, executive director of the Mummers Festival from the province's capital city of St. John's. "Back in the day it served as entertainment during the Christmas season. Considering the isolation of the small coastal communities here at that time, mumming was really a form of entertainment. People would literally grab whatever they could find out of their drawers or their grandmother's closet, put it on in any kind of shape and size that they could find, and went from house to house. An unwritten rule was, if they guessed who you were, you had to take your mask off and reveal yourself."

All of these traditions - as well as any that you are likely to observe in your own home - share one thing in common; the coming together to celebrate, ring in the new year, and spread cheer.



José Cadaveira

Of course, like everything else in 2020, gatherings like these are not really possible this holiday season, as the only thing they would be likely to spread is the COVID-19 virus.

That goes for everyone, no matter what you celebrate. From opening presents under the Christmas tree to lighting the menorah, all of our holiday traditions will likely look quite different this year. But none of those traditions are going anywhere anytime soon - customs like Hogmanay and Apalpador are celebrated today in no small part due to the dedicated revival efforts of people passionate about maintaining their Celtic culture. Losing a year to COVID has only interrupted their comeback momentum.

Apalpador had largely faded from public memory due to the popularity of the Christian traditions (Santa brings Apalpador's prized gift - coal - only to misbehaving children, after all). Thus, a concerted effort to improve his image began.

"A huge man disguised as the Apalpador - accompanied by people in traditional Galician costumes and the music of bagpipes - parades the old town of Compostela, distributing handfuls of chestnuts to the children, along with an explanatory leaflet for the grownups," Cadaveira shares.

"We kept on with the parade every

year, and soon schools, town councils, and cultural associations became interested in the Apalpador, and put him in their activities and Christmas plans. Some authors wrote and drew books for children about the character, and now the Apalpador is known all over Galicia."

Chances of a visit from the scruffy gift-giver are slim this year.

"We can't guess what the COVID-19 situation will be in December," says Cadaveira, "but it will probably be the same as now, in which case this year's Apalpador parade is in danger of cancelling."

Larger events are threatened as well. Edinburgh throws an annual Hogmanay Festival, but as was explained via their Twitter account, they threw in the towel in July.

And the Mummers Festival in Newfoundland, which has consistently drawn in thousands of participants in wild-looking garb every year since they began back in 2009, won't be having their famous parade live on the streets of St. John's this year either.

"Right now, we are fortunate in Newfoundland that we have no cases of COVID-19," muses McShane. "However, because of all the Coronavirus protocols and restrictions that the government of Newfoundland & Labrador has in place, the festival will work and look different this year. Unfortunately, even though mummers wear masks already, we are not going to be able to have our traditional cast of thousands like we usually do in the streets of old St. John's."

As with so many other aspects of our lives this year, the event is going digital.

The Mummers Festival is more than just the parade; it is two weeks jam-packed with activities and educational opportunities. There are numerous workshops dedicated to helping people master the craft of mummering, from costume construction, to building your own obnoxiously percussive instrument called an Ugly Stick, and building your own hobby horse prop, although likely not from a real horse skull as in days of yore. The festival also offers plenty of academic seminars surrounding the history of mummering, as well as art exhibits and musical performances inspired by mummers, with the help of The Rooms Museum, Archives, and Gallery.

With the availability of broadband Internet and teleconferencing software spreading wider than ever these days, all of these workshops and seminars are still a-go as live streams for the 12th-annual festival. Locals will be able to pre-arrange contactless pickup for mummer costume materials, and for those farther away, a materials list will be shared.



Ironically, the silver lining in this cloudy time is the ability to reach much farther afield than usual.

"We have all kinds of ways that people are going to be able to be involved," continues McShane. "Wherever they are in the world, not just here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We are envisioning a lot of expatriot Newfoundlanders and Labradorians joining in the fun and creating their own pieces of art right along with us."

Everything is still leading up to a grand finale, but rather than hosting a horde of hobby horses in person, the Mummers Festival is preparing a virtual parade, where people will record their madcap exploits on video and submit them.

"We are going to create a huge video montage, that we will stream on parade day. We think that is going to be fun, too. It makes us sad, but it makes us excited also - about new possibilities, new audiences, new participants from wherever. We are going to be exploring lots of ways to get the word out."



Lynn McShane

“Online shopping is a safe and nice way to show someone you are thinking of them, and we love to send a little part of Wales all over the world.”

Things will undoubtedly be different this year, for all of us. But this is hardly the first time these holiday traditions have been interrupted due to unfortunate happenstance. It is not even the first pandemic in living memory to do so, with the Spanish Flu keeping people in quarantine over the holidays in the early 20th century.

The difference is that we now have a bevy of tools at our disposal to maintain contact with our loved ones throughout the holidays, allowing us to keep them in our hearts, if not our hearths. And sometimes, wonderful new traditions are formed out of adversity.

McShane says that, since the founding of the Mummings Festival, she is aware of at least a dozen small communities around Newfoundland and Labrador that have revived their own local mummering activities, just like in the days of old, having been inspired by the festival.

And as self-isolation is now a part of everyone's reality, she figures that mummering is needed today as much as it was back in the days when tiny communities kept themselves entertained with pillowcase masks. Hopefully, by being available online around the world, they will help inspire new pockets of tradition for people in desperate need of a good laugh.

“Traditions are different everywhere, and that is the great thing about them; they evolve, they are dynamic. The ability to continue live-streaming, I think, is definitely something we will carry on.”

So whether you dress up and ride a hobby horse around your back yard, don a black beret and red beard to leave chestnuts and coal for your kids, or give a little contactless present for your mail carrier, don't be afraid to see the end of this year out in the traditional ways - just be sure to do so safely.

“I think it is important to keep traditions like this alive, as they part of our heritage,” says Hemmings. “We are hoping 2021 will be a better year than this one - so it will be worth celebrating!”

It is not just the large-scale events finding novel ways to celebrate their favourite Celtic Christmas customs during Coronavirus, either. Hemmings is exploring ways to usher in Calennig at home just inside her family bubble.

“Sadly, we probably won't be seeing as many family and friends this year as we had hoped, as rushing around to call on neighbours definitely won't be encouraged. We didn't celebrate it like my mam did when I was a child, perhaps as it is a bit different in a bigger city. And I won't be encouraging my children to do it this year either - not very pandemic-friendly!”

“But we did make ‘Calennig’ - a lovely-smelling orange, with cloves pushed into the skin,” she adds. “It is a nice, inexpensive activity for children, as they can make different patterns. When my children are a bit older, we will be making these, but this year I plan on giving them each a little gift to celebrate the New Year, perhaps a Welsh language storybook.”

And in the case of Handsel Monday, essential workers have had an exceptionally tasking year, and are the perfect people to surprise with a new purse and a handsome tip.

“This may be a thing of the past, as admittedly we all have fewer servants than we had in the 1800s,” Tierney chimes in. “But I am sure that the people who do help us in our daily lives like mailmen, hairdressers, delivery folk, and volunteers would all appreciate a small gift in January, when even carefully-handselled wallets are emptier than usual after the holiday season.

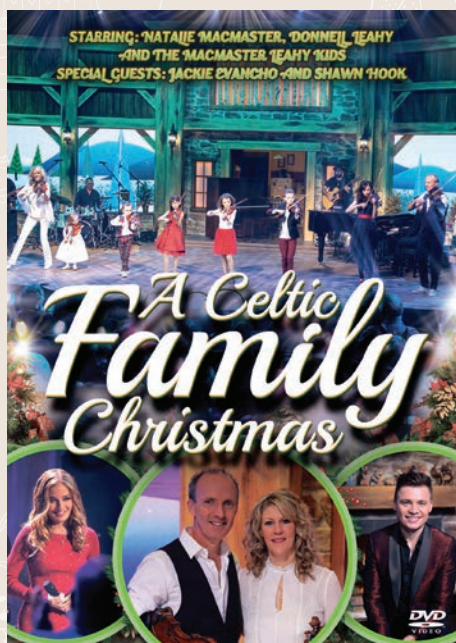
“I am more likely to handsel our mailman or garbageman before Christmas, not strictly on the January Monday. But this year, rather than handing my card and tip to them in person, I will adapt by leaving it waiting at the mail slot or on the garbage bin. I have no doubt that it will still be welcome.”

Gift-giving is another holiday custom that can, thankfully, be easily adapted to this unique situation, thanks to modern technology. Online stores like Hemmings' Welsh Gift Shop not only let you ship a present practically anywhere, but shops like hers even keep items in stock that embrace these Celtic festivities.

“We created these exclusive ‘Gaeaf’ (Winter) candles which are inspired by Calennig - they have a warm, spicy scent with woody accents.

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Celtic Life International's Favourite Holiday Recipes

From our home to yours, please enjoy these hearty and homespun Holiday recipes - along with very best wishes - from the staff of Celtic Life International.

Rabbit Pie

Cabrini Macquarrie ~ Cabrini's Celtic Kitchen



Rabbit Pie is the ultimate Christmas dish as far as I am concerned. Perhaps it is because it is steeped in family and tradition. Maybe it is because rabbit snares are set with the first skiff of snow - usually December - in keeping with the Yuletide. Perhaps it harkens back to earlier times when the ways of the land dictated how we lived. For as long as I can remember, my mother cooked rabbit pie on Christmas Eve with rabbits that were caught on Browns Mountain behind our house in Antigonish County, Nova Scotia. We would attend Midnight Mass and return to a veritable feast of this delicious and nutritious meat pie. Thanks to the increasing demand for wild and fresh ingredients, rabbit is enjoying a comeback. Although recipes vary, the basic ingredients are all the same: a buttery pastry shell, the top baked to a crisp golden brown with a soft underside. The shell is filled with spiced meat with lots of gravy, and encloses vegetables of your choice, usually onions, celery, and carrots. My mother's recipe calls for parsnip and turnip as well. She was a proud Newfoundlander, so I daresay it is a customary regional recipe. When traditional food is put in front of you, I hope you can think of a memory, an occasion or a person that brings a happy thought to mind. Happy holidays one and all!

Ingredients

Filling

2 rabbits
1/2 cup flour
1/2 cup diced salt pork or bacon
1/2 cup chopped celery
2 chopped onions
Salt and pepper to taste
3 cups water (approximate)
3 diced carrots
1 diced parsnip
1 cup diced turnip

Pastry

3 cups flour
2 tablespoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 cups butter
1/2 to 1 cup milk

Instructions

Filling: Heat oven to 325 F. Section rabbits into pieces. Rinse and dry them thoroughly. Toss rabbit pieces in flour. In a skillet heat pork or bacon until rendered and crisp. Brown rabbit pieces in the fat. Transfer meat to an ovenproof dish. Add celery, onion, salt, pepper, and enough water to just cover the rabbit. Cover and bake at 325 F for 1 1/2 hours, or until meat is tender. Take rabbit out of casserole and remove meat from bones. Cut into bite-sized pieces and return to oven dish. Stir in carrot, parsnip, and turnip and cook until vegetables are tender - about 30 minutes. If sauce is not thick enough, slowly stir in a little flour, mixed to a smooth paste in cold water. Cook until thickened. A few drops of gravy browning may be added. Cover casserole with pastry. Bake in 425 F oven for 20 to 30 minutes

or until golden brown. Pastry: Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. Work butter into flour with two knives, until mixture is crumbly. Mix in milk lightly with knife until dough forms a soft moist ball. Roll out on floured board until it fits baking tray.

Mom's Christmas Turkey Stuffing

Stephen Patrick Clare ~ CEO & Editor-in-Chief



Recently, my mother - Joan Smart-Baxter - sent me a series of old home movies, including footage from our family Yuletide celebrations in Montreal. Those were special times with special people. On Christmas Day, all of the gifts had been opened by noon and we readied ourselves for a fine meal around the table. My brother and sister and I often reached for a spoonful of Mom's scrumptious stuffing before the soup, vegetables, potatoes, or turkey. Like everything else she served up, it tasted better because it was made with love. These days, I make the same savoury stuffing for my own children on special occasions, though it is never quite as delicious as Mom's.

Ingredients

1/4 cup butter
2 cups finely chopped onions
1 1/2 cups finely chopped celery
2 tbsp dried sage
6 slices of bread to make 3 cups of soft breadcrumbs
3 cored and chopped apples
2 cups cranberries
2 tsp salt and generous sprinkling of pepper
2 tsp brown sugar

Instructions

Melt the butter in a large skillet and sauté the onions, celery, and sage on medium-low heat, covered, until tender but not brown, about 5-6 minutes. Remove from heat. Place the breadcrumbs and fruit in large mixing bowl and toss in the onion mixture. If stuffing seems dry, add 1-2 tsp of water until the consistency is moist but not soggy. Toss in the salt, pepper, and sugar. Chill if not using immediately. To prepare the turkey for the stuffing, wash out the cavity and dry it well with paper towel. Lightly press the stuffing into the neck cavity and the body cavity. Pull the loose skin over the stuffing or secure with a metal skewer. Roast turkey immediately, once stuffed. Makes 6 cups.

Easy Peppermint Hot Chocolate

Rebecca Dingwell ~ Associate Editor

I am a tea-lover, so a few years ago, a friend introduced me to the idea of steeping tea in hot chocolate. I am not sure why I never thought of it before! It is the perfect winter treat. To me, there is something festive about peppermint, so that's what I am suggesting in this recipe - but if you are not a fan of mint, you could try chai or Earl Grey instead.



Ingredients

2 tbsp unsweetened cocoa powder
1 tbsp sugar (more or less, depending on your sweet tooth)
A pinch of sea salt (optional)
1 cup of milk or half-and-half
1 peppermint teabag (or 1 tsp of loose leaf tea)

Instructions

Whisk together the cocoa, sugar, salt and a few tablespoons milk in a small saucepan over medium-low heat until cocoa, sugar and salt are dissolved. Whisk in the rest of the milk and heat it over medium heat, whisking occasionally, until it is as hot as you'd like. Pour into your favourite mug, then pop in a bag of peppermint tea and steep for two minutes or more, depending on how minty you would like it. Add more sugar to taste. If you are feeling lazy, the microwave is fine, too. In that case, I recommend filling up half of your mug, heating it up, then topping up with boiled water after stirring in the cocoa and sugar. (It is much easier to stir without making a mess when the cup is half full.)

Jo Co Christmas Egg Nog

Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns ~ Associate Editor



There is no shortage of Christmas recipes in my family. Between my late mother's famous Pumpkin Buckle or my father's Christmas morning Butteries (which, I recently learned, have Scottish roots), our holidays have always been filled with deliciously heartwarming foods. No recipe recalls the holidays more than the Egg Nog recipe created by my late grandfather – or, as I liked to call him, Grampy. Every Christmas Eve, my entire family squishes into my maternal grandparents' cozy home to exchange gifts, food, and memories. And while the menus and guest lists have both changed over the years, one thing has remained the same: we always enjoy several servings of Grampy's Christmas Egg Nog. Titled Jo Co Christmas Egg Nog for reasons I do not know, this recipe – as simple and no-nonsense as it is – is truly at the heart of the holidays for me and my family.

Ingredients

2 quarts of milk (or eight cups)
2 tbsp vanilla extract
Nutmeg, to taste
Dash of salt
4 eggs
½ white sugar
Optional: rum or coffee liqueur

Instructions

Place all ingredients into a standing mixer and mix at a low speed until thoroughly blended. Place mixture into a large bowl and serve with a ladle. That's it! No heating or chill time required. If you don't have a standing mixer, substitute with a large bowl and hand mixer or whisk. Hint: If you have visitors who don't drink, this recipe serves well without the alcohol as well!

Christmas Pudding with Hard Sauce

Chris Muise ~ Associate Editor



It is hard for me to pick just one holiday recipe to share with everyone. When it comes to enjoying Christmas dinner at my grandmother Eileen's home down Yarmouth (Nova Scotia) way, there is hardly a dish I don't love. Her turkey stuffing is the stuff of legend. Her mashed potatoes, creamy to perfection, topped with savoury gravy. Her corn scallop bake, a sweet and fluffy delicacy. And the best part: when it came to leftovers, she always made sure I had the lion's share – I was a growing boy, after all! However, if I have to pick just one, her scrumptious Christmas pudding takes the cake. This is no Mrs. Fogarty's Christmas Cake – it puts all the stereotypes about block-hard holiday fruit cakes to shame with its robust-yet-moist consistency, lightly sweet and nutty aroma, and its buttery hard sauce melting on top and soaking into a slice fresh out of the microwave. This pudding has been one of the highlights of my holidays for the last 20 years or so, with Grandma Eileen always making an extra one just for me. And now that I have shared the recipe with you, I hope it becomes a highlight at your holiday feasts as well.

Ingredients

Pudding

4 cups raisins
2 cups currants
1lb suet
¾ of a lbs brown sugar
1 qt breadcrumbs, packed well
1 cup flour

4 eggs
2 cups milk
1 tsp salt
2 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp cloves
1 small tsp baking powder
2 tart apples - grated

*(You can leave out currants and add figs, dates, and nuts in their place if desired. Top with red and green maraschino cherries)

Hard Sauce

1 & ½ cups icing sugar
½ cup butter

White of egg, beaten stiff
Vanilla & Nutmeg to taste

Instructions

Pudding: Combine ingredients, mixing well, and place them in a large pot. Cover top with tin foil and steam for 6 hours. Empty contents into a mold and let cool.

Hard sauce: Beat softened butter in a bowl, then add sugar and mix well. Add the remaining ingredients and mix again. Serve immediately, or cover and refrigerate.



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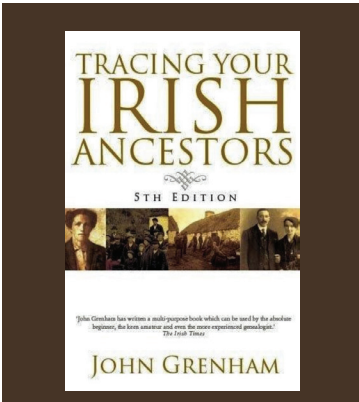
Looking for that special something for that special someone this holiday season? We've got you covered with our annual Holiday Gift Guide!



Walking Socks

Fia Clothing - www.fiaclothing.com

Take the high ground with Fia - a luxury apparel brand inspired by the rugged Irish landscape. In keeping with the Emerald Isle's rich and robust heritage, Killiney based Fia Clothing ethically sources natural textiles to create their signature line of tailored caps, sweaters, scarves, throws, and gifts – all crafted with the softest lambswool and finest tweeds and designed for those who value quality and individuality. A popular Holiday gift combining fun and function, Fia's walking socks - made from a soft merino wool blend and offered in an assortment of colours that reflect the stunning shades of traditional Irish bogs - are guaranteed to keep feet comfy and toasty on cold days. The tradition of gifting socks signifies warmth and harkens back to the days when they were made by hand.



Tracing Your Irish Ancestors

Genealogical.com - www.genealogical.com

Tracing Your Irish Ancestors, written by John Grenham and published by the American ancestry-based publisher Genealogical.com, is the perfect present for persons with a passion for the past. With a deep focus on Irish culture and heritage, the terrific tome provides a detailed step-by-step guide to exploring one's roots on the Emerald Isle, including helpful tips and tricks for the novice researcher. An indispensable roadmap to family history, Tracing Your Irish Ancestors is available via the company's website alongside a comprehensive treasure trove of other genealogy books on Celtic ancestry in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.



Daonnan

Keltic Nations - www.kelticnations.com

Daonnan (pronounced DAN-on) is the ancient Gaelic word for 'continually' or 'always'. This holiday season surprise your significant other with a gorgeous Daonnan ring from Canadian artisans Keltic Nations. The single strand of never-ending knotwork around the band represents eternal and everlasting love. Individually designed and handcrafted, these highly detailed rings are available in sterling silver, 14 karat yellow, white, or red gold, or any combination of silver and gold with raised borders - a unique and beautiful way to contrast the ring's ancient and powerful Celtic design.



Luxury Tours in Ireland, Scotland and Beyond

Sheenco Travel - www.sheencotravel.com

Memories are a gift that last a lifetime, and what better gift to give this holiday season than a memorable travel experience? With vacation itineraries planned in Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales, Sheenco Travel offers an experience like no other. The company's popular *Irish and Scottish Castle Tours* takes participants to a variety of incredible historical sites, combining classic Celtic culture with modern-day comforts. Unique and luxurious, the tours include teachings on history and heritage, along with showcasing local culinary delights and authentic castle accommodations. In Ireland these include Ashford Castle in Co. Mayo and Dromoland Castle in Co. Clare while in Scotland you will stay in Inverlochy Castle in the Highlands and Crossbasket Castle on the outskirts of Glasgow. Customized trips are also available, both independent or with your own private driver/guide. All bookings can be made with confidence thanks to the Sheenco Travel flexible Coronavirus Travel Policy.

A Celtic Family Christmas

The MacMaster-Leahy Family - www.linusentertainment.com

While Natalie MacMaster's solo career might have been on hiatus for the last few years, she has kept herself busy both on the professional and personal fronts. Here, alongside her husband Donnell Leahy and their seven (!) talented children, the master fiddler rings in the holidays by putting on a pulse-pounding yuletide concert extravaganza, filmed before a live studio audience, and featuring special guests Jackie Evencho and Shawn Hook. Much like a warm winter's gathering at the homes of family and friends - and not unlike a classic, old-school kitchen party like the ones found back home in Celtic Cape Breton - the MacMaster-Leahy family serve up a feast of engaging entertainment with this truly unforgettable evening of music, dance, and storytelling. Available in both CD and DVD formats, the concert is sure to become a Christmas tradition for audiences of all ages.



Celtic Birthstone Set

Hamilton & Young - www.hamiltonandyoung.co.uk

Make your Christmas present personal with this sterling silver Celtic birthstone set by Hamilton & Young. The gift set comes with matching pendant and earrings, both featuring a beautiful Celtic interlace design and cabochon stone. Available in every birth month colour, it makes a unique and special gift for someone you love. Both pieces are available separately, however - as a limited time offer - you can enjoy a discount when purchased together. Hamilton & Young is a family-owned jewellery company that carry one of Scotland's largest and best ranges of quality sterling silver jewellery. They present several different Celtic designs at affordable prices and specialize in other traditional Scottish offerings as well. In recent years, Hamilton & Young has become renowned for their popular Outlander Inspired Collection.



The Saga of the Latter-Day Celts

Liam O'Shiel - www.amazon.com

Books make wonderful gifts anytime of the year! This holiday season spoil the readers in your life with the Saga of the Latter-Day Celts series by Liam O'Shiel. At the dawn of the 30th Century, the Age of Machines sinks into ruin. Amongst the shattered remains in the British Isles, five Gaelic-speaking nations arise and band together, united by a common language and shared Celtic culture. These unique nations thrive in harmony for nine centuries...until a new Ice Age overspreads Europe, bringing on a Europe-wide struggle for food and arable land. In Eirelan, the Province of the Twenty Clans in Ireland celebrates its millennial year, joins Cornwall and Brittany in defeating Spanish sea pirates, and then mourns the death of thousands on the killing field of Mhisteala. In Bleak Midwinter, all five Celtic Nations unite to fight a new and dangerous Germanic enemy, a story to be concluded in The Blood Upon the Rose (2020). The Saga of the Latter-Day Celts is an epic tale of war and music, danger and poetry, combat on the high seas and quiet meals in pubs, and above all, of a noble people fighting for the right to live in harmony with the Earth.



Claddagh Ring

Celtic Wedding Rings - www.celtic-weddingrings.com

Love, loyalty, friendship - the Claddagh ring says it all, making it the perfect gift for anyone who is dear to your heart. A widely-recognized symbol of heart and history that weaves its way through tales of pirates, politics and passion, the Claddagh is one of the most enduring emblems from Ireland's past. For many it is more than an exquisitely designed piece of jewelry. This elegant sterling silver woman's Claddagh ring, with its heart in real 10k gold, exudes romance and signals the peal of wedding bells. There is a wide selection of gold, white gold and sterling silver rings, including birthstone rings, for the sharp shopper to consider. So popular are these gold and silver bands that the particular way of wearing the ring has come to carry a message. According to tradition, if you are single, you wear the ring on the right hand with the heart facing outwards. If you are in a relationship, you wear it on your right hand but the heart faces inward. Engaged persons should wear the ring on the left hand with the heart facing outwards, and for those already married, the ring goes on the left hand with the heart facing inward.





Window to the Soul Pendant

Keith Jack - www.keithjack.com

Scotland-born, Vancouver-based artist and designer Keith Jack remains world-renowned as a master craftsman of Celtic jewelry. After the birth of his children, Jack was inspired to create lasting, legacy pieces - of modern design and ancient meaning - which could be passed on for generations, creating new family traditions while retaining Celtic legend. One of those masterworks - the Window to the Soul Pendant - embodies that Celtic mythology, crossing the thin veils between the physical and faerie realms, and symbolizing the eternal soul. A contemporary take on a classic design, this stunning piece spins the stirring soul of Scotland into pure sterling silver, gilded in 22k yellow gold, and placed on a sturdy Italian Spiga chain. Transcending time, the talisman is a perfect and poignant gift for that special someone this holiday season.



Celtic Journals & Ancient Irish Maps

O'Brien Celtic Gifts - www.obriencelticgifts.com

Direct from our dedicated Celtic Craft Bindery in Dublin - we offer a range of top-quality Celtic/Irish Gifts including Deluxe Celtic Journals and Notebooks with classic Celtic embossed cover designs. Choose from 4 different editions; the Claddagh Journal, the Celtic Journal, the Glenoge, or the 1916 Centenary Journal, each designed and developed in Dublin to the highest standards. Adorn the living-room wall with an exquisite matted and framed Ancient Map of Ireland (circa. 1779), with special 'raised' effect, and reproduced in fine detail. Other historic items from the company's craft bindery include the 1847 Irish Emigrant Trail Map, a superb reproduction of The Historic 1916 Irish Proclamation - available in 3 different sizes - as well as stunning reproductions from the epic Book of Kells. All are matted and ready to frame. Take it a step further by personalizing your gift with the recipient's name embossed on the front cover, or upon a nostalgic and framed Ancient Map of Ireland. Other classic Celtic/Irish notebooks and wall hangings are available via O'Brien's website.



Highland Title

Scottish Lands - www.scottishlands.com

The ultimate gift for "the person who has everything": make them a Lord or Lady this Christmas! Scottish Lands offers a unique opportunity to purchase a plot of land in the Glencoe Wood in the Highlands of Scotland. Thanks to Scottish landowner laws, purchasing a Highland Estate gives you the legal right to call yourself a Laird, Lord or Lady. Scottish Lands offer estates of various sizes and prices. The document pack comes with a legal Certificate of Sale, information and directions to enable you to locate and visit your land, and a Master Title Deed to comply with the legalities of changing your name on your driving license and credit cards. The purchase also helps preserve the environment; as the company states on its website, "by splitting the woodland into the ownership of hundreds of different people it ensures that no developer can ever acquire it and use it for their own gain, to the detriment of the area...the woodland is home to many species of Scottish flora and fauna, and it can be enjoyed by people as an area of peace, quiet, and tranquillity."



Through A Darker Eye

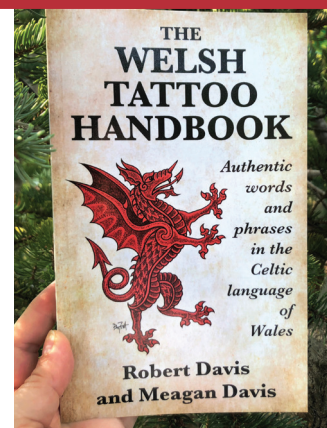
George Douglas - www.amazon.com

It is 1746 in Scotland; the Jacobite Rebellion is over, Charles Stewart (Bonny Prince Charlie) is a fugitive, and British soldiers are over-running the West Highlands. Seventeen-year-old John Wallace, son of a prominent cattle-dealer, kills a British officer in self-defence. He is captured by Captain Frederick Scott, the officer's uncle, and narrowly escapes death. Furious at the murder of his nephew, Captain Scott takes brutal revenge on John's family. John is swept up in the Highland clearances and exiled to the American colonies, where he is cast up on Ile Royale (Cape Breton) and imprisoned by the British until he escapes into the wilderness, seeking a new beginning in Canada. Blamed for the death of his nephew, Captain Scott faces a career in ruins; he is ordered to Boston in disgrace and then posted to Annapolis Royal, a remote outpost recently captured from the French. Bitter at the injustices perpetrated on him by his superiors, and estranged from his fellow officers, he vents his frustrations on the Indigenous population. John Wallace and Captain Scott will meet again and the blood feud that began in the hills of Scotland will play out its final act in the heart of the Canadian wilderness. Through a Darker Eye is a stunning novel, with a stirring perspective on history.

The Welsh Tattoo Handbook

Bradán Press - www.bradanpress.com

Bradán Press, Nova Scotia's leading Gaelic publisher, has published the perfect gift for the crafter or tattoo lover in your life. *The Welsh Tattoo Handbook*, the newest book in their Celtic Tattoo Handbook Series, offers 100 pages of inspiration for Welsh tattoos, crafts, and inscriptions. Complete with over 400 tattoo ideas, including Welsh words, phrases, symbols, and history, the book is the ultimate "think before you ink" guide to the Welsh language and culture. *The Welsh Tattoo Handbook* is ideal for anyone interested in Welsh language, culture and history. Available through your favourite online retailers, or by special order from your local bookstore.



High Whistle in D with Presentation Box

Carbony Celtic Winds - www.carbony.com

Music brings the Holidays to life. For the instrumentalist or music aficionado on your Christmas list, Carbony Celtic Winds is offering a limited-edition Celtic Winds High D carbon fiber whistle with presentation box - approximately 14" x 3 1/2" x 3", and beautifully detailed with a brass latch and velveteen lining designed by Quiltboxes. Described as a "tapered whistle that allows for close finger spacing," the instrument offers both "rapid passage articulation" and a balance in volume, and includes - for the very first time - an anodized, serialized, laser-engraved fipple body and ebonite tip. Made of Bloodwood and fumed oak, the High Whistle in D and Presentation Box is available via the company's website.



Custom Celtic Photos

Celticgirl Travels Photography - www.celticgirltravels.com

Cindy Reville, the brains behind the U.K.-based Celticgirl Travels Photography, has the ideal gift for 2020. With many of us "spending more time staring at the walls and dreaming about the freedom of a new or favorite destination," Reville is offering a "tour" of Ireland and Scotland through her newest collection of custom Celtic photos. Including everything from the most iconic locations to the many hidden gems, she describes her work as unaltered, unfiltered, and completely unretouched, highlighting the landscape's rich and raw beauty. Photos are fully customizable, are available in print, canvas, metal, or acrylic, and are the perfect gift to give to those looking for "reminders of a time where travel was embraced" without having to leave the safety of their home.



Tartan Christmas Stockings

Scotland Shop - www.scotlandshop.com

An online retailer that specializes in tartan, the Scotland Shop offers a unique and seasonal gift that can be used year after year - Tartan Christmas Stockings. A Scotland Shop staple, the stockings are completely handcrafted, using a 100 per cent lightweight wool tartan fabric. Available for order in over 500 clan and family tartans, they are fully customizable with both a choice of complementary lining colour and the option of having a name embroidered to the fabric. The stockings can be shipped in a beautiful Scotland Shop gift box. For those interested in bundling up with another gift this year, the company also carries a variety of fine products, including clothing, upholstery, home décor accessories and more.





Custom Tartan Designs

Patrick King Woollen Company - www.patrickkingwoollencompany.com

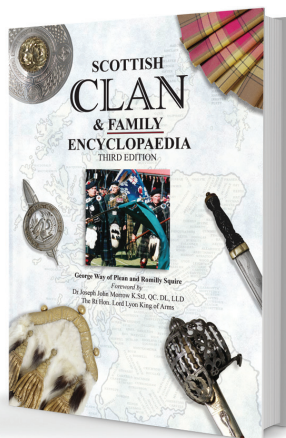
With offices in Port Hope, Ontario and Edinburgh, Scotland, Patrick King Woollen Company produces exceptional and unique Lambswool and Merino wool items both across North America and Europe. World renowned for its commitment to exceptional quality, the company designs exclusive tartans for weddings, graduations, and all other special occasions. Tartan is timeless, and complements any home, cottage, group and individual with style - be it scarves, stoles, capes, blankets, bags, purses and more. Patrick King Woollen Company is a member of the Scottish Tartan Authority and all of the company's tartans are registered with The Scottish Tartan Registry.



Runic Necklet in Sterling Silver with Enamel

Sheila Fleet Jewellery - www.sheilafleet.com

The Holidays are an ideal time to reflect upon the year that has passed and to look forward to the year to come. What better way to do both than with the Runic necklet, from Scottish jewellery designer Sheila Fleet? Designed and handcrafted in Orkney, Scotland, this exclusive sterling silver necklace, replete with Skaill enamel, reads "Reflecting times past and present" in Viking runes. The unique piece was inspired by inscriptions discovered inside Maeshowe, a Neolithic chambered cairn in Orkney, built around 2800 B.C. Around the 12th century, invading Vikings broke into the tomb and carved runes on the walls. Over thirty inscriptions survived, representing the largest single collection of such carvings in the world.



Scottish Clan & Family Encyclopaedia, 3rd Edition

St. Kilda Store Scotland - www.stkildastore.com

Beautifully illustrated, and featuring many specially commissioned illustrations, this is the most comprehensive and authoritative work yet published on the clans and kindreds of Scotland. Along with the histories and heraldic details of Scotland's best-known and most famous clans and families, the expanded edition includes highly informative essays on key elements of clan life and society to better reflect the many changes that have occurred over the twenty years since the publication of the second edition. The updated volume highlights the histories and badges for 346 Highland clans and Lowland kindreds with nearly 200 additional crest designs, and hundreds of new images. New scholarly articles join previous pieces, which have been refreshed by the original authors aided by leading academics in Scottish history. With over 500 pages, the revised layout contains three times the amount of text than that of the second edition.

Virtual Fundraising

The Norway Dakota Company - www.thenorwaydakotacompany.com



With in-person celebrations and fundraising events taking a backseat in 2020, The Norway Dakota Company has introduced "virtual fundraising" to help groups with limited opportunities. Vibrant enamel pins and keychains, embroidered patches, phone rings/stands, face masks and weatherproof stickers feature artful designs of the Irish flag. Of Norwegian American descent, the company's owner understands the importance of preserving and promoting cultural customs and traditions for generations to come. Fundraising is vital for members of a community to better explore their heritage through song, story, dance, language, athletics, art, costumes, and food. This is an ideal opportunity for non-profit groups or schools to raise funds virtually until in-person celebrations and fundraising events are open to the public again.

Kilted Jumper Dress

Heather Knight Clothing & Gifts - www.heatherknight.ca

Heather Knight has been handcrafting clothing in rural Nova Scotia since 1992. The influence of both Celtic and Atlantic Canadian culture is apparent in everything she makes. Follow her on social media, where she showcases custom pieces as they are created - bespoke items that are proving wildly popular with those who appreciate original clothing. Her children's line - including special occasion outfits, rough and tumble wear, baby gifts and more - feature unique designs that will keep the wee ones in style. Perennial favourite, Heather's Kilted Jumper Dress, with pewter Celtic buttons, looks like a kilt with its fringed apron and kilt pin but - instead of pleats - a gathered skirt makes it easy to wear and care for.



His and Hers Irish Tweed

Irish Traditions - www.IrishTraditionsOnline.com

The history of tweed goes back almost as far as the invention of weaving. This distinctive fabric isn't just a textile, it is a piece of Irish history. Traditional colors of the countryside - browns, pale greens and the blues and greys of heather - have been joined by brighter shades of fuschia, purple, and aquamarine, and work well in both classic and contemporary styles. A handsome tweed vest with a sport coat at a meeting is as comfortable as it is paired with jeans for a casual evening out. Complete the look with a matching tweed cap. Sophisticated chic is the very definition of the Irish tweed poncho. Equally at home with boots or stilettos, on a bicycle or in a board room, it is available in a range of colors to suit every fashionable lady on your gift list. A range of matching bags and hats create a unique style combination.



Eurasian Otter Tartan

Just Kilt Me - www.justkiltme.com

The Eurasian Otter Tartan (in Gaelic, Breacan Dobhran) was designed by the Baron Of Otter - a kilt and tartan expert and historian whose clan (Balfour) bears the Otter on their Arms. The Tartan pays deference to Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Breton, and Norse heraldry, myths and legends that include Otters, and the lochs, streams and sea where they lived and played in lore. The colours - black, brown, white, and blue - pay homage to the wee creatures, as well as to the whole kinship of the clans, septs, surnames associated with Otters. A special Heraldic Arms have been created for the tartan with the motto "vivat vita ad plenissimam" - meaning "live life to the fullest." Funds raised from the sale of the Kilt will benefit The International Otter Survival Fund conservation efforts.



Streaming Tours of Ireland

Trek Ireland - www.trekieland.com

With travel plans being compromised this year, now is an ideal time to explore Ireland's stunning scenery - right from the comfort of your own home. Dublin-based Trek Ireland films interactive guided walking videos around the Emerald Isle and is now offering a series of streaming videos highlighting the country's rich, rugged natural heritage and fascinating folklore. Each video has been tailored as a perfect tour for individuals, organizations, or groups, and includes activity-packed adventures with local and area guides. Immerse yourself in history and discover the Emerald Isle as you have never experienced it - right from the comfort of your own home.





Holiday Rentals

Hearthstanes Estate - www.hearthstanes.com

What could be better anytime of the year than an escape from the city or a relaxing stay away from the chaos of everyday life? Hearthstanes Estate is a working hill farm within the picturesque Tweedsmuir Hills, along both sides of the renowned River Tweed, and adjacent to the only Wild Land area of the Scottish Borders. The facility offers five excellent self-catering holiday cottages within the Hearthstanes Steading, a range of traditional stone farm buildings dating back to the 1600s. Guests are welcome to explore the surrounding area by hiking, biking, and fishing, followed by a relaxing dip in the hydro-spa. Deer hunting is also available. The site also hosts a continental 9-pin bowling lane at the Steading, and visitors are invited to learn about the land with 4-by-4 tours of the Estate.

Uilleann Bagpipes

Reelpipes - www.reelpipes.com



Fred Morrison is renowned worldwide as master musician, and he has designed a very special product line based on his own exceptional set of uilleann pipes. There are full sets, half sets and practice sets in full production. Fred wants all customers to receive a set of pipes which has the highest standards of tonal quality, tuning and stability and a set which has ease of playing – comfortable, air-efficient – and everything functioning really well. You can start with a practice set and add components as you develop your playing. Not only do we play these pipes, but we have been working with Fred and McCallum Bagpipes since 2005 on the full range of folk and traditional instruments.

Scottish Heritage Chess Set

Scottish Creations - www.scottishcreations.com



Scotland's past has been majestically captured in this beautiful chess set celebrating the country's rich heritage. Many of the key characters and symbols in Scotland's story are represented, including Robert The Bruce (King), Mary Queen of Scots (Queen), John Knox (Bishop), and Sir William Wallace (Knight). The exquisite detail of the design has been brought to life through careful development of a silicon mold and a unique staining and polishing technique, emphasizing the fine detail in the original design. Stained in Cardinal (a contemporary red), it has been further tinted to add an antique effect - making the set both attractive and unique. Pieces are balanced for weight, come with a protective base, and are presented in a beautiful and practical package. A fabulous gift for all those interested in Scotland's turbulent history.

The Haggis

Stahly Quality Food - www.thehaggis.com



Whether one is preparing a Burns' Night dinner for a hundred hungry haggis aficionados or preparing a simple Scottish supper at home for two, there is no finer or easier solution than Stahly's Haggis. For the past twenty years, Stahly Quality Foods of Glenrothes, Fife, Scotland has been producing Traditional Scottish and Vegetarian Haggis in North America using the same award-winning recipes and methods used in their own kitchens back home. Many Scottish restaurants rely on Stahly to satisfy their patrons craving for this delightful national dish. The family-run firm has maintained its commitment to excellence for generations, earning them the global reputation for being "A Big Name in Quality Haggis."

Scot-Tee

4K Design Tees - www.4kDesign-Tees.com

Deck out your beautiful baby, grandchild, niece or nephew in a comfy, cozy onesie this Christmas season, with a nod to your family's heritage. The Scot-Tee, recognizing Scottish and Irish ancestry, are unique gifts for the well-dressed newborn or infant. As part of 4KDesigns' unique line of 100 per cent combed ring-spun cotton onesies for infants, they promise to keep baby happy and warm. There are lots of great designs to choose from, including a Dirt-Tee, and a Royal-Tee, all sure to bring smiles. All have double needle ribbed binding on the arms, neck, shoulders and bottom, as well as a three snap bottom closure for security, comfort and warmth. In addition to the onesies, which come in several soft shades as well as more colourful options, the company carries a myriad of quality products in adult sizes.



Tours of Cornwall

Dacey's Cornish Tours - www.daceyscornishtours.com

Situated on the southwestern tip of the UK, Cornwall is a land steeped in history and myth, boasting beautiful beaches with pristine towns, ancient castles, and fine modern art. Looking back, the legendary King Arthur fought passionately for this rugged far-flung land and it certainly is not difficult to see why. From smugglers to surfers, cream teas to the delicious Cornish pasty, Cornwall casts a spell on every visitor, with its unique charm, unspoiled beauty and the sense of mystery often leaving those that visit feeling as though they have gone back in time. Tour this magical and mythical region - where enchantment awaits you at every turn - in a unique and relaxed way with Dacey's Cornish Tours.



Leather Bottle Tote

Dalriada Heritage Leather - www.dalriadaheritageleather.com

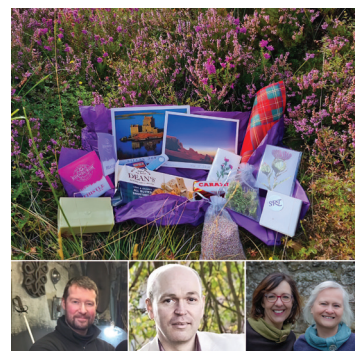
This season, reward yourself or someone you love with an elegant leather bottle tote. Fine scotch or choice wine deserves to arrive luxuriously attired in leather and quality workmanship. Available in three sizes tailored to fit your favorite bottle styles, these unique totes come in a variety of colors and Celtic themes. Each bag features an integrated leather carrying strap for convenient transport. Just as no two pieces of leather are identical, each bag has its own one-of-a-kind look and personality. Dalriada Leather specializes in handcrafted leather items and is owned and operated by a family of North Carolina artisans that have combined over 100 years of sewing and leather craft experience. Visit the company's website to see all available designs.



Scottish Road Trip Box

Scottish Road Trip - www.scottishroadtrip.com

This holiday season bring Scotland to your car wherever you are! Hosted and curated by Anne Daly and Emma Chalmers from Mary Meanders Tours, the Scottish Road Trip Box contains all you need to change your road trip into a memorable journey across the four corners of Scotland! Listen as Anne tells you all about her Scottish heritage and spending her summers on her family's traditional croft on The Isle of Harris. Emma details the Celtic similarities between her homeland of Ireland and her adopted home of Scotland. In addition, Maestro Paul MacDonald will regale you with his inimitable and well-loved stories of some of the country's heroes, while Outlander's Gillebride MacMillian - a world renowned Gaelic singer - shares some of his favourite traditional songs. Along with the engaging audio content, the box includes artisan Scottish mementos and classic Scottish tea and snacks for 2 people.





Cat Tales - Curtailed

Gunna Dickson & Jon McIntosh - www.gdicksonbooks.com

Angus and Edmond's capers this year, along with so many other things in this world, were cut short by the pandemic. The well-traveled Angora-mix brothers look forward to completing their newest adventure in Canada. However, the holidays are a good time to catch up with their previous escapades. *The Adventures of Angus and Edmond* (searching for their roots in Scotland via London and Paris); *The Key West Adventures of Angus and Edmond* (East Coast road trip -- driving from New York City to Philadelphia, Washington DC, and Florida); *The Italian Mystery Adventures of Angus and Edmond* (solving a mystery while enjoying opera in Milan and carnival in Venice); *The Catalonia Adventures of Angus and Edmond* (preparing for Animal Olympics, helping hurricane clean-up in Key West, and celebrating Barcelona's citizens and treasures), and *The Hungarian Adventures of Angus and Edmond* (soaking up history and culture in Budapest and Vienna). Curl up and enjoy! All books are available via Amazon and other online sites.



Oak Travel Runes in Stainless Steel Celtic Knot Case

Celtic Knot Works - www.celticknotworks.com

It is safe to say that there is considerable historic overlap between the Celts and Vikings. As award-winning artist and designer Bob Heiney explains, "The Celtic lands have been the world's crossroads for thousands of years, and no one loved travelling through more than the Vikings." Exploring this juncture, Bob has developed an outstanding collection of pieces for his company, Celtic Knot Works, that celebrates the relationship between these two distinct cultures. Among that collection is the Oak Travel Rune Set, which features 24 Elder Futhark Runes - a tradition used for wisdom-seeking - handcrafted in a warm oak and detailed with Celtic knots. Packaged inside a pocket-sized, stainless-steel travel case, the Oak Travel Rune Set is both beautifully crafted and uniquely stunning. Runes are 100% made in the USA and are also available in a hand-cast pewter finish.



Earth Squared Tweed Grace Bag

Earth Squared - www.earthsquared.com

Based in North Berwick, Scotland, Earth Squared creates unique pieces that are both "fabulous and fair trade." Inspired by the beautiful coast and countryside around them, Earth Squared designs a fantastic range of fashion accessories, including stylish plaids and oilcloths - all offering exceptional quality and value for money. Included in their inventory is the Tweed Grace Bag. Available in four unique Earth Squared plaids, the Tweed Grace Bag is the perfect companion for anyone on-the-go. Designed entirely in-house, it features ample inside space, zipped compartments, and a detachable shoulder strap. Contemporary, stylish, and very wearable, the Grace Bag (and a whole lot more!) can be purchased via the company's website.

Handcrafted Jewelry

The Celtic Jewelry Studio - www.TCJS.shop



Taking inspiration from her Celtic ancestry, designer Cynthia Meyers of The Celtic Jewelry Studio creates jewelry that is both remarkably unique and rich in Celtic symbolism. Working from her studio in rural Silverton, Oregon, Meyers has created handcrafted collections that detail the ancient traditions and folklore of the Celts. One of her pieces, the Celtic Symbols Sapphire bracelet from the Celtic Goddess of the Sea Collection (Clidna), combines artisan lamp-work beads, Celtic symbols and faceted Sapphire gemstones to create a piece that is as noteworthy as it is strikingly beautiful. Every item from The Celtic Jewelry Studio comes packaged with a story card outlining the meaning of the Celtic symbol and the mythology behind the chosen gemstone. Celtic Life International readers can enjoy free shipping and a 10% savings off their entire order until Dec. 25, 2020, using promo code: CelticLife2020GG at the checkout.

Armorik Single Malt Breton Whisky

Heavenly Spirits - www.heavenlyspirits.com

Steeped in barrels harvested from the Armorik forest in Bretagne, and then again in oloroso sherry casks, this magically rich, robust, and complex Single Malt Breton Whisky conjures up both compelling aromas, and layered taste sensations. Fruity and elegant, with notes of salted butter caramel, a touch of woodiness, grain, and iodized marine flavors, it is surely a fine Celtic dram that you will be proud to share with family and friends during the holidays, or any time of the year. Rated #6 - Top 20 Whiskies (Whisky Advocate, 2018), Best in Show - Double Gold (San Francisco Spirits Competition, 2014), Best European Single Malt (World Whiskies Awards, 2013).



Custom Tartan Masks

Slanj Kilts - www.slanjkilts.com

Just because people are in a state of lockdown doesn't mean that they can't look their best. Made in Scotland, these tartan face masks will help you show your true Celtic colours. Fully adjustable and reusable (hand wash only), these stylish coverings are made from 100 per cent wool and are backed with a breathable interlining fabric. Medium sizes will fit the majority of adults. XL sizes are suitable to contain a beard or for a large head, while children's sizes are designed for those 11 years of age and under. Ready made face masks are deliverable in a week, while custom "choose your own" face masks are available within three weeks for delivery.



We Are the Land, Ireland

Leslie Lee - www.leestudioc.com

After a lifetime of writing and painting in the margins of work and family, now semi-retired, Leslie Lee has made it a priority to share her experiences, strength, and hope. A growing collection from thirty years of travel journals and paintings have been dusted off, edited, excerpted, and are now available via her website in the form of books, fine art, folded note cards, postcards, and other gifts and products. First in the Leslie's Travel Companion journal series - *We Are the Land, Ireland* - is an essential exploration of the Emerald Isle; its ancient history, DNA, and culture, through the story of four sisters searching for their Irish ancestry. The second of Leslie's Travel Companion series - *Leslie's Field Guide to Ireland* - an informative, illustrated, pocket-sized travel reference for Eire, is now available also.



Robert the Bruce

levelFILM - <http://bit.ly/WatchRobertTheBruce>

Now available to watch on demand or on DVD December 1, 2020! Don't miss this action-packed historical drama, nominated for the Audience Award at the 2019 Edinburgh International Film Festival, and starring Angus Macfadyen, Jared Harris (HBO's Chernobyl), Patrick Fugit (Almost Famous), and Melora Walters (Magnolia). In this faithful recreation, King Robert the Bruce is injured and on the run from the English army. On the brink of defeat, a widow and her family nurse him back to health and join The Bruce as he sets out to claim the long-awaited freedom of his Scottish homeland.





Weekend Escape

Chanterelle Country Inn and Cottages - www.chanterelleinn.com

If there is one year that has left people needing a vacation, it is 2020. Chanterelle Country Inn and Cottages is offering visitors the perfect weekend escape. Located at the North River Bridge in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, the Chanterelle borders the famous Cabot Trail on a 100-acre estate that overlooks the estuary of the North River. Guests will enjoy a stay in either the rustic Inn or in one of the three cozy cottages. All accommodations are complete with a four-piece bathroom, and have beds available in sizes double, queen, or king. Visitors are also welcomed to the KM100 restaurant, which serves both breakfast and dinner, for a quality meal made of locally sourced ingredients. Guest health and safety is at the forefront of the facility's thinking, and all COVID-19 procedures recommended by Health Canada are in place.



Irish Designed Italian Silk Scarves

Clare O'Connor - www.clareoconnor.net

Irish artist and designer Clare O'Connor creates breath-taking works of art from her studio in Co. Meath. Combining vibrant colours with positive energy, her pieces are described as "wearable art" which are inspired by health and wellbeing. Drawing from her own paintings, O'Connor has developed a collection of luxury scarves that make for a beautiful and elegant gift for the fashion-lover on your list. Her collections include soft Italian silk, cashmere and modal blends - a natural fabric derived from birch trees. Her luxury scarves come in a myriad of sizes, including a stunning 90x90 design that is detailed with a striped, hand-rolled hem. Her Italian 100% silk range also includes a men's collection, as well as a recently added collection of tote-bags, cushions and masks made from organic bamboo and organic cotton which are handmade in Ireland.



Holiday Napkin Rings

Holy Heck USA - www.holyheckusa.com

A small family business in Southern Alabama that specializes in handmade leather products for the Celtic market Holy Heck knows what we all need this holiday season; with so many of us spending so much time around the house (or hearth), what could be a more inviting gift than a set of holiday napkin rings? Available via the company's website, the new Holiday Napkin Ring Set - a pack of four - comes in a variety of colours, including red, gold, green, bronze, and blue. Drawing inspiration from Celtic heritage, each piece is detailed with a specific pattern, with styles ranging from simple lines to a more complex Celtic Knot, combining classic elegance and rustic beauty. All napkin rings are made from 100% leather and are entirely handmade in the USA.



Ballina Cross

McHarp - <https://b164.mcharpceltic.com>

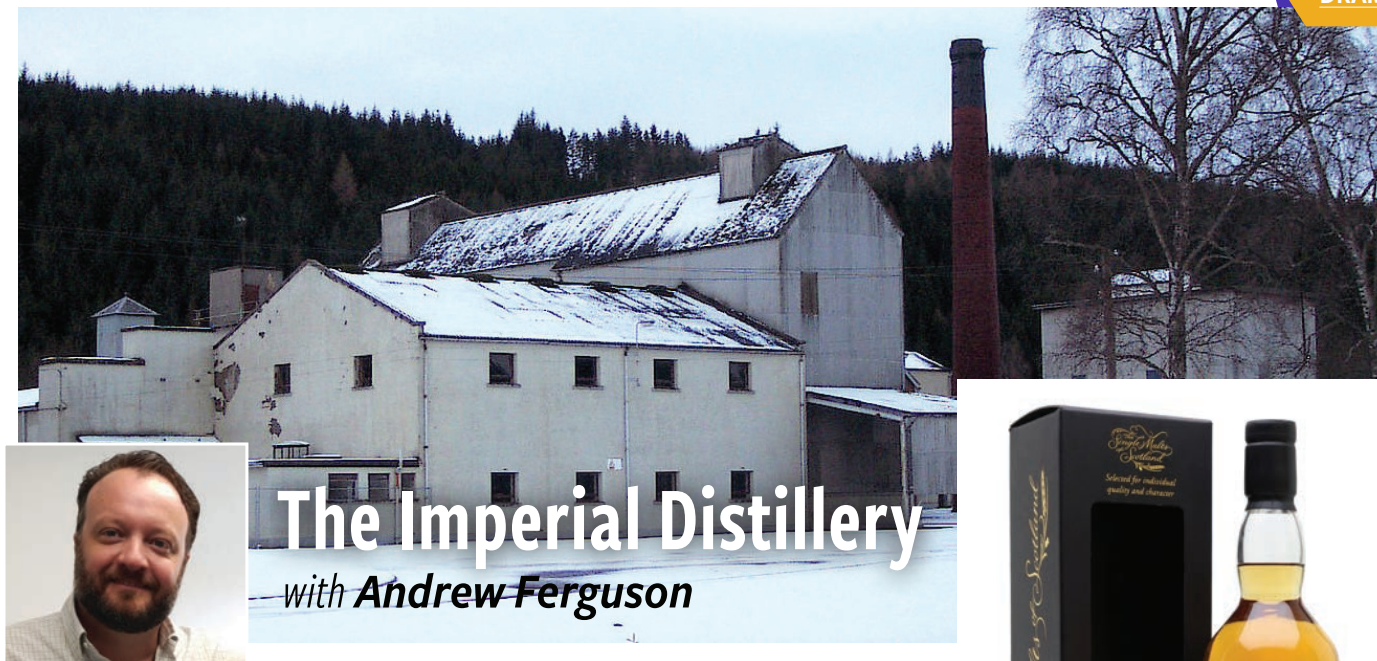
McHarp Crosses has been in business for more than two decades. Over that time, the family-run company has developed a unique handcrafted inventory, including crosses, kitchen accessories, ornaments, seasonal décor, and more. Their beautiful Ballina Cross is inspired by the Irish town of the same name - "where the Shannon River leaves Lough Derg and rushes toward the city of Limerick" - a breathtaking landscape that is steeped in history and wonder. Standing at 10" tall, the Ballina Cross celebrates that heritage with a dove descending above a valley of grapes, ivy, and lilies - alluding to the Bible verse Mark 1:10. The Ballina Cross is the perfect gift for those looking for hope, peace, love, or new beginnings.



Let Us "Chase" Your Ancestors

Old Friends Genealogy - www.oldfriendsgenealogy.com

Old Friends Genealogy was established in 2015 by Kate and Mike Lancor. With their 70 years of combined experience in "chasing ancestors", the duo created a genealogical experience unlike any other. Old Friends Genealogy focuses primarily on Irish and Celtic ancestry and, through DNA analysis and research techniques, creates detailed family trees that "bust through brick walls," bringing customers closer to their ancestors - or, as the Lancor's call them - "old friends." A great gift for anyone who wants to learn about their family history but hasn't the time to do the detailed research themselves.



The Imperial Distillery was founded in Speyside, Scotland in 1897 by Thomas Mackenzie, who also owned the nearby Dal-luaine Distillery. It was named in honour of Queen Victoria, who marked her Diamond Jubilee that year. This was at the height of a major whisky boom, which today we would call a bubble. The distillery was enormous for its day, and its maltings were topped with a giant crown made of cast iron. The following year, Thomas Mackenzie merged his two distilleries with another, Talisker, on the Isle of Skye.

The whisky boom of the late 19th century, once fueled by the global growth of Blended Scotch whisky, turned to bust in 1899. In the fallout, the Imperial Distillery was mothballed along with many dozens of other Scottish distilleries. A significant number of these would never reopen, but Imperial was one of the fortunate ones. By 1919 it was again in production as part of a new consortium of blending firms known as Distillers Company Ltd., or DCL. In 1925, under continued industry consolidation, Imperial was placed under DCL's distilling arm, Scottish Malt Distillers or SMD. This would prove perilous for Imperial, as it closed again for another 30 years.

In 1955, in the early days of a new boom for Scotch Whisky, Imperial was once more reopened. A decade later it added another pair of stills, doubling production.

Unfortunately, this boom, much like the one in the late 1800s, would also turn to bust.

In 1985 the distillery was once again mothballed. It was sold to Allied Distillers in 1989 who, after some refurbishment, operated the distillery intermittently from 1990 through 1998.

In 2005, Pernod Ricard bought the distillery property and put it under the control of a subsidiary, Chivas Brothers. The timing might have been fortuitous, as the start of yet another boom for Scotch whisky was soon to begin. But this boom would not revive the fortunes of Imperial. Despite years of persistent rumours of its imminent reopening, the distillery was put on the market in 2008 to be sold as residential flats. A few months later it was withdrawn, and this is where the story gets interesting. With demand for malt surging, Chivas Bros. finally took a serious look at reopening the distillery, but it seems they had left the site rather poorly guarded since the last closure, and some entrepreneurial locals had stripped the buildings of every conceivable material they could sell for scrap.

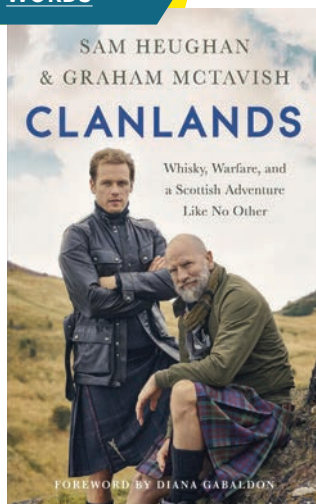
When Pernod/Chivas realized this, it was determined that it would cost more to rebuild and re-kit the old distillery than it would be to build an entirely new one. So, they demolished it and - in its place - built a brand new hyper-efficient distillery - Dalmonach - named for a pool in the River Spey on whose bank the distillery was built.

Many closed distilleries have developed a mythical following over the years, including Port Ellen (1983), Brora (1983), and Rosebank (1993). When I started in the industry 17 years ago, bottles of these whiskies could still be acquired for under \$200. Today you'd be hard pressed to find a bottle of Port Ellen

or Brora, especially a new release, for less than \$5k. Imperial has yet to earn this sort of cult following, but I expect it soon will. Only a handful of independent bottlers seem to still have casks of its whisky, mainly from the 1990s, and the prices are rising. This is a shame because the whisky is really starting to hit its stride.

We have been fortunate to bottle three casks of Imperial over the last year, at very reasonable prices. The whisky is light, elegant and packed with bright tropical fruit notes. The first two casks, a 24 Year (\$180) and 29 Year (\$400) sold out in two weeks and four days, respectively. The third cask, when it arrives, is not expected to last much longer. Those in the know have caught the Imperial bug. Sadly, by the time the rest of the whisky world catches on, the prices will be in the thousands of dollars per bottle. That is the rub about something which has not been made for more than two decades. With every passing year it is older, rarer, and more expensive. \$400 may not seem like a reasonable price for a 29-year-old whisky, but for those with a love of Imperial, it was a bargain!

www.kensingtonwinemarket.com



Clanlands

By Sam Heughan
and Graham McTavish
Quercus Press
352pp / \$32

Subtitled Whisky, Warfare and a Scottish Adventure Like No Other - and paired with the forthcoming STARZ television series of the same name - Clanlands features the fun and fascinating forays of Outlander's leading men as they make their way across their home country via camper van, boat, bicycle and motorcycle. With a moving forward by author Diana Gabaldon, the book chronicles Heughan's and McTavish's journey into the heart of Scottish history, exploring everything from the country's landscape and culture to its people and their rich heritage. Along the way, readers are treated to tasty tidbits of trivia, stunning scenery, a few heated discussions (they are Scots after all) and loads of laughs - a true testament to the joys of two friends traveling together.

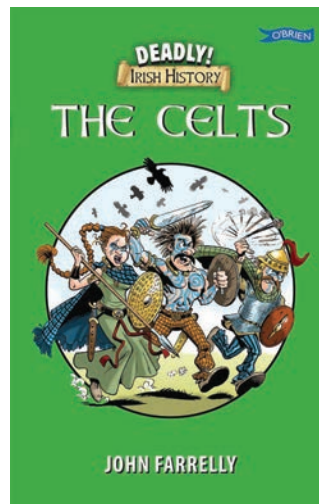
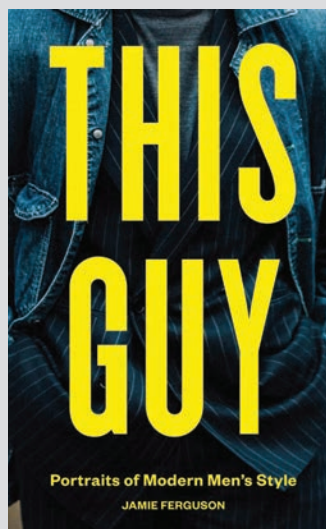
~ SPC

This Guy

By Jamie Ferguson
Hardie Grant - Chronicle Books
224pp / \$55

As a huge fan and follower of fashion, how this one slipped through my fingers when originally published late last year is beyond me. Still, better late than never to review and then, er, review. This Guy (Portraits of Modern Men's Style) features the inspired imagery of renowned Canadian-Scottish photographer Jamie Ferguson, whose work has adorned the pages of many magazines-au-couture and look books. Instead of presenting a singularized portrait of the modern male, however, the scribe succeeds at laying out a variety of vital and vibrant visages for the consideration of readers. While design trends come and go, Ferguson attests to the ages-old maxim that true style sense is never out of fashion. A bold and beautiful book that defines, redefines, and refines men.

~ SPC



The Celts

By John Farrelly
O'Brien Press
144pp / €8.99

As per this book's back cover, "Irish history isn't boring...it's deadly! Deadly Celtic heroes!

Deadly Celtic warfare! Deadly Celtic art!" As part of Dublin-based O'Brien Press' new "Deadly Irish History" series of chapter books for young readers, The Celts features the work of Co. Down freelance caricature artist John Farrelly. Inspired and insightful, and filled with down 'n' dirty details about the nomadic tribes that settled along the Emerald Isle's stunning west coast, the slender tome includes sections on storytelling, art and culture, architecture, weaponry, law, religion, food, and more. Presented with bullet points and animated illustrations, the series debut is designed to engage easily distracted audiences (i.e.: young readers). A companion book by the same author, titled The Vikings, is equally entertaining and educational.

~ SPC

The Little Village of Comely-on-the-Marsh

By Alan Simons
Baronel Books
58pp / \$12.95

This is exactly the kind of narrative my mother would love; set in southern France, The Little Village of Comely-on-the-Marsh tells the terrific tale of the daily comings and goings of a small and strange Welsh community. Chock full of irresistibly quaint and quirky characters, and touching on themes of love, diversity and inclusion, the tiny-but-mighty tome highlights the often-hilarious discrepancies between English and French cultures. Kudos should go out to the author for never hitting his audience over the head with the obvious. Instead, his sense of subtlety leaves room for readers to fill in the blanks with their own imagination. Awash in Welsh warmth, wit, and wisdom, the story would work well as a sitcom. My mom would love it, so would yours.

~ SPC





The Waterboys

Good Luck Seeker

After a string of disappointments (Modern Blues, 2015 / Out of All This Blue, 2017 / Where the Action Is, 2019), Mike Scott hits all the right notes with *Good Luck Seeker*, an inspired effort that sees the Scot-turned-Irish troubadour return to roots. Folksy and fun, these 14 tracks run the range from playful (Dennis Hooper) to poignant (My Wanderings in the Weary Land) to poetic (Postcards from the Celtic Dreamland) and profound (The Land of Sunset). Along the way, the bard tips his hat to his muses and musical forebearers Bob Dylan, Van Morrison and John Lennon. While some critics have been rather harsh with the album's musical meanderings, Scott should be applauded for rekindling the sparks and flames of his sonically adventurous spirit. ~ SPC

James Kennedy

Make Anger Great Again

Drawing on his punk and metal roots, Welsh rocker James Kennedy makes a compelling case for the revival of protest music. Spiritually aligned with Woody Guthrie and Joe Strummer, and sonically allied with Rage Against the Machine and Rise Against, Kennedy welds the weight of hard rock with mindful and thought-provoking lyricism. The resulting 11 songs are more than a musical mélange of idea and emotion, and more than a call to arms - instead, *Make Anger Great Again* is a call to individual action, inviting listeners to reevaluate their values, and consider their options. The album is a reminder that great art should not only reflect the times but betray them also. Similar sentiments take hold in his recently released companion autobiography *Noise Damage*. ~ SPC



The Celtic Kitchen Party

Lobster Tail and Beer

On their third full-length release, *Lobster Tail and Beer*, Canada's The Celtic Kitchen Party come exactly as advertised. A boisterous blend of traditional tunes and original compositions, the 11 songs highlight the band's devotion to good times during otherwise dark days. The new recording also showcases the quartet's tremendous talents on their respective instruments; voice, guitar, fiddle, pipes, and drums may never have sounded so good together. Highlights here include Farewell to Nova Scotia, Black Velvet Band, Legend of Brian Boru, and Johnny I Hardly Knew Ya. A stirring version of Sonny's Dream is a tender and touching tribute to renowned Newfoundland songwriter Ron Hynes. Listeners are invited to kick back with their feet up, crack open a cold one, and get their toes-a-tappin'. ~ SPC

Imelda May

Slip of the Tongue

One has to admire Imelda May for taking risks and reinventing herself repeatedly since her debut release in 2003. Over that time, the Dublin-born and bred singer/songwriter and multi-instrumentalist has dabbled in a myriad of musical genres - including rockabilly, rock, jazz, and pop - and has shared the stage with the likes of U2, Jeff Beck, and many other notable names. Released for 2020's Record Store Day, *Slip of the Tongue* is a limited-edition spoken word recording featuring nine original works of poetry set to moody melodies. Heartfelt, homespun, and often humorous, the album highlights both May's understanding of lyrical rhythm as well as her commitment to artistic evolution. A bold, daring and very cool creative endeavour from one of Eire's most enduring performers. ~ SPC





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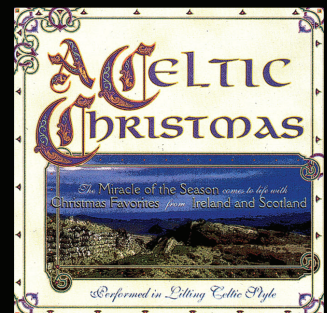
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www.bagpiping.org



Dan Kulhanek

Dan Kulhanek has been a musician for a quarter century, but only picked up the bagpipes a few years ago

“Music has always been a part of my life,” shares Dan Kulhanek via email. The 37-year-old resident of Ohio began his sonic journey in junior high playing the saxophone, before switching to the tuba in high school, where he also sang in the school choir. He taught himself to play guitar also.

Kulhanek, who is of German and Czechoslovakian descent, is married to a woman with Irish and Scottish heritage. “During the early part of our relationship, I was exposed to Celtic Festivals and Highland Games,” he recalls. “I was drawn to the allure of the history and folklore of Celtic culture as well as the music. I would listen to Celtic music while studying when I was in nursing school.”

Today, Kulhanek is a registered nurse with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. His foray into playing the bagpipes started while he was a member of a committee seeking ways to honour military veterans who had passed away in the medical centre.

“We came up with a ceremony called The Final Salute. When a veteran dies the body is transferred into a morgue cart and draped with the American flag and the service emblem of their military branch of service attached to the sides. An overhead page announcing ‘Final Salute’ with the location is broadcast across the medical centre. All available personnel line the hallways between the location where the veteran passed away and the morgue.”

Kulhanek was tasked with leading the

Honor Guard and escorting the veteran to the morgue while playing the pipes through the centre - a responsibility he still holds today.

Now a full-fledged member of the Capital City Pipes and Drums in Columbus, Ohio, he also has a “thriving business” playing bagpipes on the side. The challenge, he notes, is getting people to take the instrument seriously.

“I have been at events where I was told the nature of the occasion, only to find out that I was part of an elaborate joke. One such request was to play at a funeral, only to discover that the client was a college fraternity wanting a piper to play for their dead goldfish.”

That said, the feeling of bringing joy to others through music at special events makes it all worthwhile.

“Whether it is a wedding where I march the bride and groom in to an upbeat happy tune, or at a funeral and the haunting sounds of ‘Amazing Grace’ fading off as I leave a gravesite service, bringing closure to a grieving family...”

“Music has a powerful way of touching our souls. Being able to be a part of that is very cathartic.”

Kulhanek plays a set of McCallum Po Great Highland Bagpipes, but now that he

is sure that he will be “sticking with” piping he plans to upgrade in the near future. He is also trying his hand at a set of smaller Gibson Fireside Pipes that are ideal for indoor events.

“When I am in a parade, or performing solo, there is always a lot of interest from the young people. I get asked all the time if I offer lessons or where they can get involved in piping.”

He believes that in order to increase interest, exposure is key - after all, that is what got him into piping in the first place.

“I try to do my part by volunteering for community or school presentations. If a young person is intrigued, I will let them handle my pipes, take them apart, show them how they work and even let them try to play them. But you have to be able to connect on their level as well. Right now, with the upcoming generation, that is social media.”

He adds that social media presence is more important than ever given the COVID-19 pandemic. “This opens the door to all kinds of opportunities for organizations to offer virtual events, online concerts, etc.”

For his part, Kulhanek is taking a bit of a hiatus from piping as he earns his master’s degree. However, he hopes the pandemic recedes enough so he can get back to the competition scene during the 2021 pipe band season.

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Eisenhower Suite, Culzean Castle



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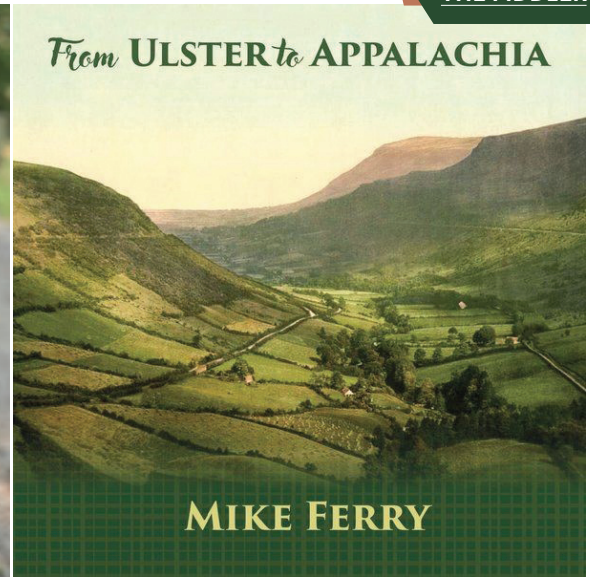
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It is no surprise that Mike Ferry found a home playing the fiddle.

"All four of my grandparents came from Ireland," he tells Celtic Life International via email. "Three of them were born in Donegal and the fourth came from Cork, and so I have been playing the instrument since I was four years old - 38 years now. While I started out playing in the classical style, I eventually gravitated towards different ways of playing the instrument, including Irish traditional, pop rock, country/bluegrass, and alt-country."

Regardless of style, the Richmond, VA resident always returns to his one true passion - perfecting the unique sound of the Donegal fiddling tradition.

"Donegal has had as much of an impact on me as any band or individual artist. I am blown away by both the quantity and quality of Donegal's traditional musicians, and I have worked very hard to develop the style and sound of their fiddling tradition. I would say that I am close, but we all have room to grow, right?"

He has also found inspiration from an eclectic group of musicians, including the Chieftains, the Beatles, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Buck Owens, and more.

Splitting his time between a German acoustic violin and an amplified electrical violin, Ferry has enjoyed a fruitful career.

"Music has allowed me to connect with so many fascinating people and places over the years."

"I have toured throughout the United States. Some of my musical works have

appeared on television shows like Dawson's Creek, The Real World, and Scrubs. My first book, Teaching Happiness and Innovation, was featured in the Washington Post, the Huffington Post, Newsmax, the Christian Science Monitor, and radio shows and podcasts around the world. I have even had the pleasure of doing a few interviews on Highland Radio in Letterkenny, Donegal."

Earlier this year, Ferry released his fourth studio album, *From Ulster to Appalachia*. A deep exploration of Celtic culture and music, the 14-track recording has been described as "techno-trad" and incorporates several musical styles.

"It is a collection of Irish, Scottish, and American fiddle tunes. The project started with my desire to record some of my favorite Donegal-style and American fiddle tunes. Along the way I learned a lot about the Scots-Irish, who were responsible for bringing a great deal of music from Ulster to the American colonies. There is a lot of diversity, and each song has its own unique feel and sound."

He adds that the possibilities are endless when it comes to blending Celtic traditional music with other styles.

"The Chieftains - probably the most important Celtic ensemble of our time - collaborated with artists of many genres and nationalities and expanded the reach of Irish music around the world. It has been exciting to follow in their footsteps, and I am looking forward to bringing together musical ideas that were previously separate."

From Ulster to Appalachia has already received great acclaim from listeners, including one review from Ferry's biggest critic of all - his wife.

"She likes it! At least, she says she does! I have also connected with someone who heard one of the tunes on the radio and thought it sounded like Brazilian music. I think that is pretty cool."

Ferry feels confident that interest in fiddling remains strong, especially in Ireland. Gweedore - the area of Donegal where his family originates - is home to An Crann Og (The Young Tree), an organization that encourages younger people to participate in Irish dance and music.

The scene in North America, however, is much different.

"Here, many young people start playing classical violin at an early age, but most will quit within a few years. Classical music is very rigid and rule-based, whereas fiddle playing is a bit more open-ended. I believe that young violinists would stick with the instrument if more of them started out playing traditional music instead of classical music."

With the COVID-19 pandemic still very much "in the driver's seat," Ferry admits that his plans for the coming months will look a bit different.

"Unfortunately, in-person performances will have to wait for a while. I will be setting up virtual concerts, though. My first band, Weekend Excursion, will also be releasing our cover version of 'The Devil Went Down to Georgia' and working on new material for an upcoming album. There is always a new musical mountain to be climbed, and for that I am grateful."

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Dawn Moss

Dawn Moss brings Celtic dance to Canada's west coast

Dawn Moss began dancing at the tender age of three after seeing an image of a Highland dancer posted on a grocery store wall.

"That was all it took to begin a lifetime love of dance," she explains via email from her home in Edmonton, Alberta.

Crediting both her mother and her Highland dance teacher Joan Brox for the "everlasting passion and commitment" that led her into a long and successful career, Moss describes her personal style as a fusion of traditional and modern.

"The basic nature of Highland and Irish dancing is traditional, but I love to venture out of the norm with choreography. My style quite often incorporates modern music and a fusion of various dance forms. I love to create exciting new choreography for performances and competitions."

Moss' career has seen many notable highlights, including her time with both the Provincial Tattoos and Disney - where she worked as a choreographer - and her live performances alongside Canadian fiddler Natalie MacMaser and Celtic rock band Celtic Fusion Illusion. However, her biggest accomplishment happened in 1995 - the year she founded the Celtic Ceilidh Dance Academy.

"It was a truly unexpected career! I had pretty much retired from dance when I was approached to take over an existing dance class that needed a new teacher. I accepted, and that turned out to be the beginning of a wonderful new journey. Since then, I have been encouraging young people to join the Celtic dance community and to experience all it has to offer."

"I have a passion to inspire youth and to pass on the traditions of Celtic dance. It has become a part of me, and a way of life."

Originally, the Celtic Ceilidh Dance Academy offered only Highland dance class-



es. Over time, it grew into a multidisciplinary facility and now offers classes in Irish, jazz, tap, lyrical and stretch.

"My students are people with a passion for Celtic dance and traditions; people who used to dance or those who wished they had. I have even had students register who have no idea what Highland dance is but quickly fall in love with the community and stay for life. I now teach their children - which is really amazing. They learn about dance technique and commitment and the meaning of hard work and teamwork. They experience failure and success and everything in between. They experience the rich traditions and culture in Scotland and Ireland, and they perform, compete, study, take exams, travel and make friends all over the world."

Moss feels very confident about the future of Celtic dance, noting that not even the COVID-19 pandemic was enough to slow it down.

"Surprisingly, the global pandemic has brought together thousands of dancers from all over the world in ways that we could only dream of a year ago. Dancers and teachers are sharing knowledge and experience with each other and we are all working together to preserve and promote our wonderful world of Celtic dance. It is all extremely exciting

and so full of energy - which is why, I believe, young people are mesmerized by it. Often, it is their parents who are drawn to Celtic dance because it is a family tradition in some way, but I do see a steady stream of young people loving both Highland and Irish dance. The world of Celtic dance is magnetic and one of community rich in tradition and pride."

While the ancient art has remained unaffected on a large scale, the ongoing pandemic has forced Moss and her team to cancel a number of future projects. But even amidst the uncertainty, she says the rewards of her vocation make it all worthwhile.

"The memories, the life-long friends, the excited smiles of thousands of dancers I have worked with over the years. There are shelves of dusty old trophies and medals, but the most treasured rewards are in the friendships and memorable experiences from travelling the world to dance. I believe dance is so much more than technical exercises in the studio and that the gifts include self-motivation, discipline, creativity, confidence, self expression, and the ability to critically analyze our own work and the work of others."

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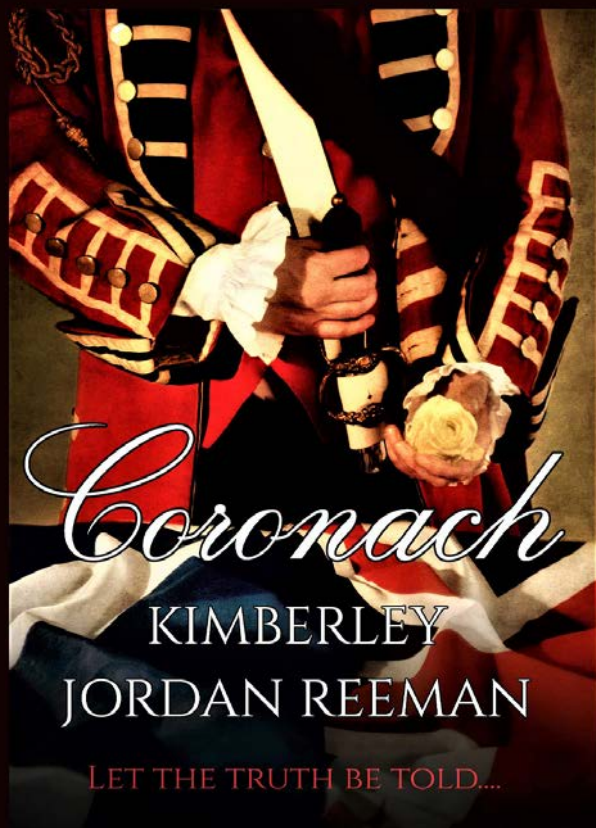


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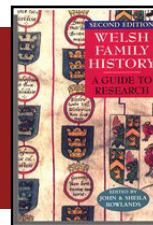
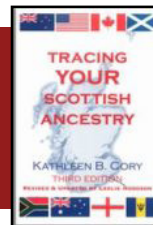
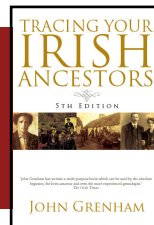
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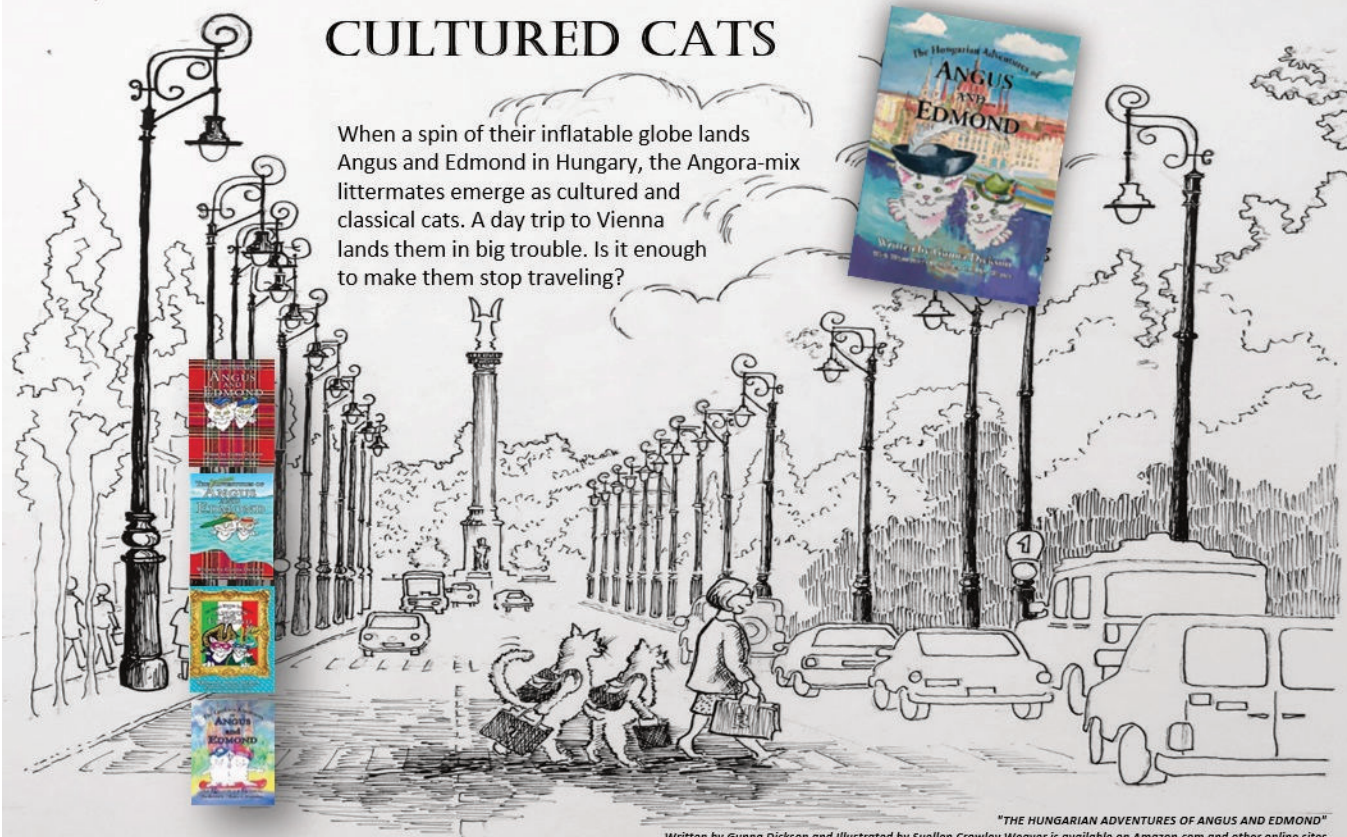
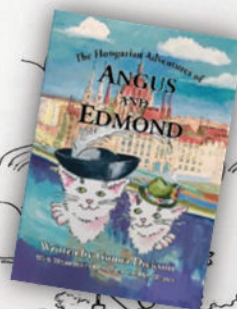
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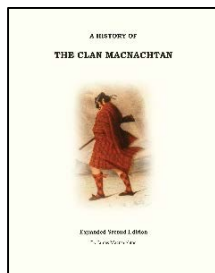
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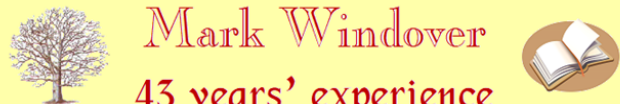
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Helen Reddy; 1941-2020

Helen Maxine Reddy was an Australian-American singer who found international recognition in the 1970s. Her 1972 single “I Am Woman” became an anthem for second-wave feminism and it is still recognized as an important piece of pop culture history today.

Reddy was pushed towards show business by her family since she was a child. Her mother, Stella Campbell, was a triple-threat actor, singer, and dancer. At the time of her birth, Reddy’s father Max was a sergeant in the Australian Army during World War II. His civilian aspirations were writing, producing, and acting. Although born in Melbourne, Reddy had Celtic roots: her paternal great-great-grandfather was from Ireland while her maternal great-grandfather hailed from Scotland.

At just four years old, Reddy was brought along to the Australian vaudeville circuit with her parents. It seemed that her stardom was a given. She rebelled against the idea of fame once she became a teenager but would eventually return to the performing arts. By the time she turned 24, Reddy was a single mother in need of a career to support her daughter. She delved back into singing and won a talent contest on Australian TV. The prize? A trip to New York and the chance to audition for a recording contract with Mercury Records.

Mercury Records didn’t end up awarding her the contract. Instead of using her return ticket to Australia, Reddy decided to stay in New York with her daughter and a mere 200 American dollars to her name. There, she continued to pursue her singing career. She met her future husband and manager, Jeff Wald, in 1968. The couple eventually relocated to Los Angeles, where Wald helped Reddy convince Capitol Records to let her record a single. The A-side - “I Believe in Music” - was a flop. However, Reddy’s cover of “I Don’t Know How to Love Him” (from the musical Jesus Christ Superstar) on the B-side made it to No. 13 on the Billboard charts in June 1971. For Reddy, the best of her career was yet to come.

After the success of “I Don’t Know How to Love Him,” she released what would prove to be a cultural phenomenon: “I Am Woman.” The song, Reddy noted, was largely inspired by Australian music critic and feminist Lillian Roxon. She wrote the lyrics: “I am woman/ Hear me roar/ In numbers too big to ignore.” Songwriter Ray Burton wrote the tune. Despite protestations from a Capitol Records execu-

tive, who insisted a feminist song would kill Reddy’s career, Wald brought the single to a small radio station outside of Washington, D.C. The song became popular at that station and, as Wald strategically promoted it within other small markets, its acclaim only grew. After almost a year, “I Am Woman” reached No. 1 on Billboard charts in December 1972. It was the right time for such an anthem: The Equal Rights Amendment had passed in the Senate earlier that year. The Supreme Court made the landmark Roe v. Wade decision the following January. At the 1973 Grammy Awards, Reddy once again showed she was not afraid to stir the pot.

Upon accepting her award for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance, Reddy thanked God, “because She makes everything possible.”

While “I Am Woman” remained her biggest hit, Reddy found herself high on the charts for other songs such as “Delta Dawn” and “Angie Baby.” She later found work on the Las Vegas Strip as well as Broadway and the West End. She even hit the big screen a couple of times. Her 15th and final full-length studio album (excluding compilation albums), *Feel So Young*, was released under her own record label in 1990. By that time, she had been divorced from Wald for several years.

In 2002, Reddy announced her retirement from performing. She released her memoir, *The Woman I Am*, in 2006. During her show biz retirement, Reddy went back to school before working as a motivational speaker and therapist. She briefly returned to singing in 2012, granting audiences several more concerts before slipping back into retirement. A biographical film aptly titled *I Am Woman* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2019 with Australian actor Tilda Cobham-Hervey starring as Reddy.

Reddy had lived with Addison’s disease for much of her life and was diagnosed with dementia in 2015. When she passed in late September, no statement of cause was given. She was 78 years old. Reddy is survived by her two children, Traci Wald Donat and Jordan Sommers, and - of course - her lasting impact on women in music.

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