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INSIDE!

*Celtic Reading Guide, Angus Macfayden
Selkie Girls, Solway Firth, Séan McCann*



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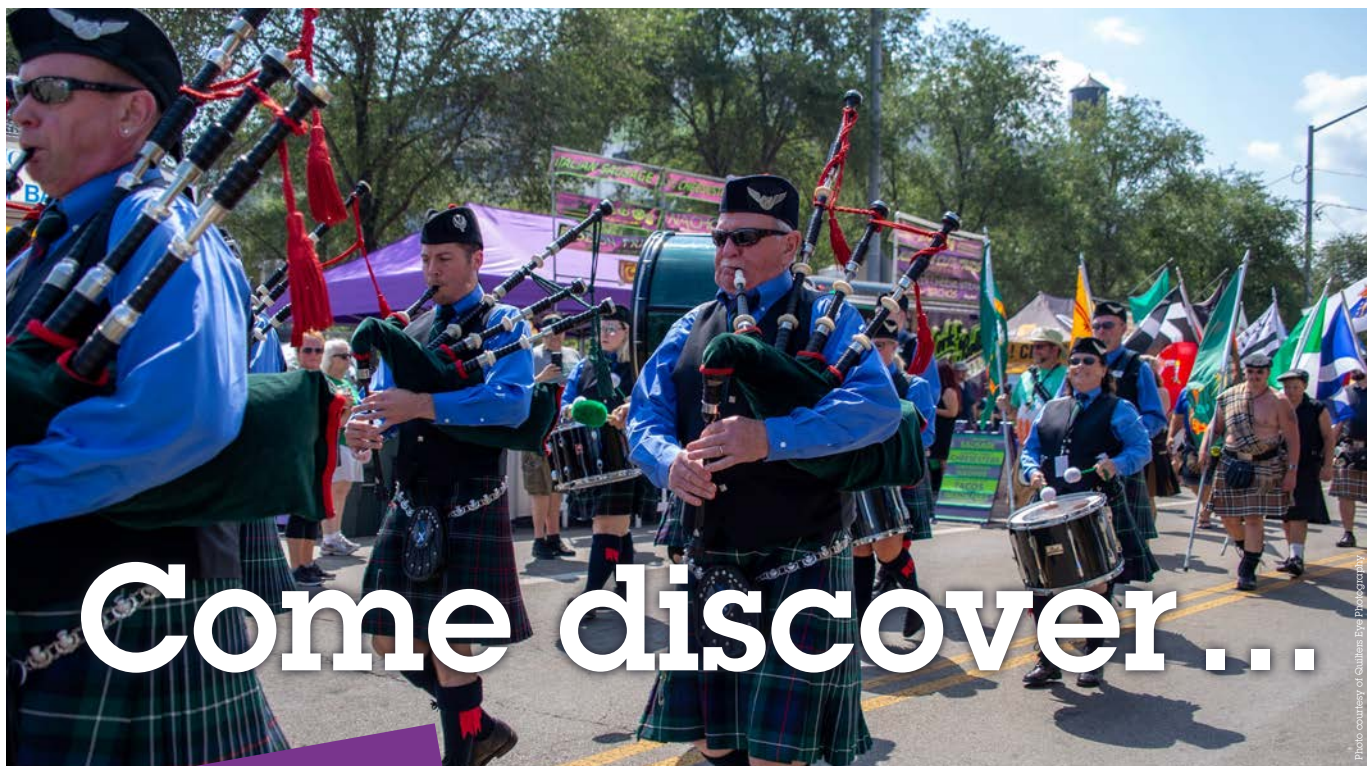


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Stephen Patrick Clare, CEO & Editor-in-Chief
Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns, Associate Editor
Chris Muise, Associate Editor
Rebecca Dingwell, Senior Writer
Carol Moreira, Senior Copy Editor

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

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

Advertising:
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Contributors
Lesley Choyce
Andrew Ferguson
Tom Langlands
Cabrini Macquarrie
Rose Poirier

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Fáilte!

We Will Rise Again

One of my all-time favorite songs is Rise Again, popularized by Cape Breton's The Rankin Family. As their signature song, Rise Again recounts the struggles of everyday people overcoming hardship with the hope of a better tomorrow: resilience in the face of despair, rebirth, and the strength found with family, friends and music.

Composed by Leon Dubinsky, a Jewish Cape Breton actor, director and songwriter, Rise Again is often sung by church choirs and - perhaps in homage to Dubinsky's faith - by Jewish groups commemorating the Holocaust. It is a stirring song that, in times of darkness and uncertainty, encourages hope for a better life "in the faces of our children."

As the world wrestles with the invisible enemy that is COVID-19, it was uplifting to recently hear a group of women physicians from Toronto - Voices of Rock Medicine - perform Rise Again. They are our front-line soldiers in this deadly battle, and we owe an undeniable debt to all physicians and other health care workers for their heroics during these dark days.

There are many musical artists who are using their music to help: after Nova Scotia Premier Stephen MacNeil made an impassioned plea for people to "stay the flames home," local band The Stanfields penned a tune with that title to raise funds and supplies for area foodbanks. Cape Breton fiddler Ashley MacIsaac was one of the first to organize an online concert - "Quarantine Ceilidh" - stating that "if people can't come to our shows, we're bringing them to your living room." Alan Doyle of Newfoundland and Labrador raised \$100K for Kids Help Phone through live-streaming sing-alongs. Other Cape Breton artists organized a series of online performances called "Concerts in Quarantine." Similarly, artists across the globe, from Willie Nelson and Neil Diamond to Andrea Bocelli in Milan, have all played their part to raise our spirits during this pandemic.

And it is not only established performers who are participating: Each morning, Barbara Gillis - a schoolteacher in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia - and her two children entertain thousands of viewers on Facebook with her song of the day.

Music is vital in times of turmoil. Ohio State University professor Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick notes that "music is an effective way of distracting ourselves against stress in turbulent times. It prompts pleasant memories, allows us to feel connected and reinforces the reminder that we are not alone. It is an expression of gratitude and a means to regain control."

Over the past while, we have witnessed music mobilizing communities around the world - a universal language that is bringing hope and harmony to humanity.

Our sincerest condolences go out to all who have lost loved ones to this deadly virus. We need to stay safe and stay healthy, follow the basic protective measures and come out of this nightmare with a new resolve. It will end...and we will Rise Again.

Enjoy and May God Bless!

Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher

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Amultitalented storyteller, G. Scott MacLeod has been using a myriad of mediums - including film, music and visual arts - for decades. Born in Alberta, he was raised in Montreal, Quebec, where he currently resides.

MacLeod first became acquainted with fellow storyteller Mike Burns when he heard Burns speak at an event at Hurley's Irish Pub in downtown Montreal.

"I was captivated by Mike's presentation of the storytelling art form and his Co. Kerry accent," MacLeod says of his friend and co-creator, who was born in Ireland but now resides in Wilton, Maine.

"As I got to know him, I discovered that he had learned the ancient art of the seanachie (storyteller/historian) tradition of Ireland as a child from his grandmother. Mike has maintained the custom by performing extensively for more than 40 years in Canada, the U.S. and Europe. Through this work, he has committed hundreds of traditional Irish stories to memory."

MacLeod himself has explored the topic of the Irish diaspora during the Great Famine through his own paintings: his 1995 exhibition *The Starving Can't Eat Stone* and, in 1999, *The Great Hunger*. As he developed a friendship with Burns, a collaboration became inevitable, and MacLeod aimed to adapt Burns' stories to the screen.

"I got the opportunity to produce, direct and animate his untold histories of Canada when we received support from the Filmmakers Assistant Program at the National Film Board of Canada from 2012 to 2015," explains MacLeod. "This funding enabled us to produce four short animated films based on his 2009 book of stories entitled *The Water of Life* (Chemin des Cantons). When we recorded Mike telling his stories from *The Water of Life* series, he was able to give us the stories in two flawless takes, one in English and one in French, with no script."

Burns and MacLeod have teamed up on graphic novels as well, the second of which is

the recently-released *The Irishman - Child of the Gael*. MacLeod's illustrations have been adapted from the animated film of the same story for the graphic novel. In *The Irishman* (not to be confused with the Martin Scorsese film of the same name), protagonist Sean recounts the tale of how his ancestors immigrated to Canada and continued to struggle settling into their new home.

"It has been an interesting journey because usually I tell traditional stories," says Burns. "But as an immigrant myself, and seeing the huge movements of people driven by war or need of recent times, the parallels are striking. Scott is taking up of the challenge of animating them, and now to recreate them again in another medium has been a true gift."

From MacLeod's perspective, Canadians know very little about the Irish contribution to the country's history. He believes Burns' stories could help change that.

"Specifically, they may help the public understand the impact that forced evictions and mass immigration have on people, their countries and economies."

"The *Irishman - Child of the Gael* is somewhat foreboding, especially given the current COVID-19 pandemic, as the story touches on the Irish suffering from ship fever on their crossing, and the quarantine station and mass gravesite on Grosse Île in the St. Lawrence River."

During the Great Famine, Irish people were crammed into ships for the 3,000-mile trip to Canada. According to Library and Archives Canada, many of these ships arrived in Quebec. They were made to stop at Grosse Île, where



passengers were quarantined. Almost 5,000 Irish people died of "ship fever" (epidemic typhus) while in quarantine and many Irish orphans were adopted by French-Canadian families. Grosse Île remains the largest known Irish burial ground outside of Ireland itself.

"For the graphic novel, I had the privilege in December of 2019 to photograph and film the mass Irish grave site beside the Irish Commemorative Stone (Black Rock) and Victoria Bridge that the Irish help build," notes MacLeod. "Both are featured in the film and graphic novel."

"Despite the brutal forced immigration and ship fever on the coffin ships, against all odds the Irish flowered into the fabric of Montreal, Quebec, Canada and further," he continues. "The graphic novel is a testament to our Irish ancestors' resilience and their place in the Canadian experience. It was a privilege and honour to do this work and I am grateful for the opportunity."

The *Irishman - Child of the Gael* graphic novel was published in March, but the launch was postponed due to COVID-19. A launch will take place at Hurley's Irish Pub in Montreal at a later date. In the meantime, the adaptation of the fifth story in *The Water of Life* series is in development.

"It is essential that future generations know this story," says MacLeod.

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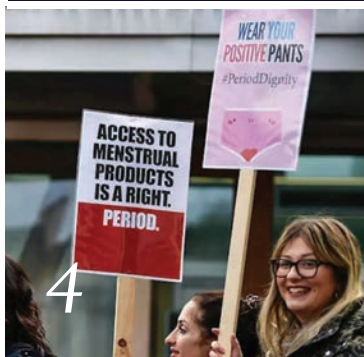


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one

African American Irish Network

Recently, the African American Irish Diaspora Network held its first meeting in New York. As reported by Irish Central, Irish Consul General Ciaran Madden called together leaders in the Irish and African American communities to forge the new organization. Up to an estimated 35 percent of African Americans have Irish ethnicity, much of which is unfortunately due to slavery. However, the African American Irish Diaspora Network was created to celebrate the kinship in shared Irish heritage. One of the first projects announced by the new group was a tour of abolitionist Frederick Douglass' visit to Ireland.

two

Manx Bats

Lesser Horseshoe bats - one of the smallest species of bat on the British Isles - have recently been found on the Isle of Man. According to Manx Radio, the Lesser Horseshoe bat had not been previously recorded on the island, and the discovery of the total number of types of bat has now gone from eight to nine. The population of this particular species has recovered in recent decades after a dramatic decline over the last century. Manx Bat Group will continue its fieldwork to determine if these mammals are indeed making their homes on the Isle, or simply passing through.

three

Welsh Suffragette

Thanks in part to the Monumental Welsh Women campaign, Newport may soon be home to a statue of Welsh suffragette Margaret Haig Thomas, AKA Lady Rhondda. If fundraising efforts are fruitful, it will be the first statue of a named woman to be built in the city. Thomas was a successful businesswoman, sitting on the boards of mining, shipping and newspaper companies. After the First World War, she fought for the rights of female workers and pushed for women to get the vote.

four

Fighting Period Poverty

Scotland is set to become the first country to offer free menstrual products to its citizens. "A Bill for an Act of the Scottish Parliament to secure the provision throughout Scotland of free period products" was introduced in April 2019 and passed the first of three stages in February this year. In the second stage, members of Parliament may propose amendments to the bill. If passed, this would be the second time Scotland has taken a major step in alleviating period poverty: since 2018, menstrual products have been freely available in schools, colleges and universities across the country.

five

Welsh Government HQ

The government headquarters in Cathays Park, Cardiff has been a popular film set in the last decade. Cast members of *Casualty*, a medical drama, filmed inside Cathays Park for a day in December 2012. More recently, *His Dark Materials* spent a total of six days filming inside the HQ: three days in June 2018 and three days in September 2018. In July 2018, part of the first episode of *Jodie Whittaker's* incarnation of *Doctor Who* was filmed there. According to an article by the BBC, productions are charged a £1 fee by the Welsh Government for a licence to film on its premises.

six

Galician Bible

More than five centuries after the Jewish people were expelled from Spain, the Kenicott Bible finally returned home to Galicia. In 1492, Scribe Moses Ibn Zabarah fled the country with his family - and the Hebrew Bible that had taken him 10 months to complete. The book eventually ended up in Oxford's Bodleian Library. Last, the bible was loaned to the regional government of Galicia and was on display in Santiago de Compostela until April. The region has no plans to ask for the book's permanent return.

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



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May good and faithful friends be yours
wherever you may roam."*

~ Irish Blessing

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as you begin to
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Sue Olds

Imagine being one of just 110 people in the world with an incredibly rare blood type. Sue Olds doesn't have to – it's her reality. The 52-year-old from Penzance, Cornwall, has the blood type -D- (pronounced dash D dash) and is the only donor of her kind registered with England's National Health Service (NHS). In fact, the majority of people with the -D- blood type reportedly live in Japan. Olds, an NHS support worker herself, has been donating blood since 1994. But she didn't know she had a rare type of blood until 2004. Then, in 2019, NHS called her to explain exactly how rare it was. As of last August, Olds had made a total of 46 blood donations, which she typically does through the Penzance Leisure Centre. "Some of my blood has gone on to save a baby's life. It's overwhelming, it's very emotional," Olds told CornwallLive. "Life is very precious. I think whether it's saving a baby's life or a pensioner's, it makes no difference. It's such a small thing that you can do but it's massive for the family of the person you save." For patients with the same type, no other blood can be used. This means Olds' donations are crucial. Women are typically able to donate blood every 16 weeks, and although she can't always donate due to travel and the like, Olds now donates as often as possible. NHS even has her donations stored at the national frozen blood bank in Liverpool.



Jesse Lewis

Jesse Lewis' son, Jac, died after struggling with his mental health for five years. Although Jac was popular in his hometown of Ammanford (particularly when it came to the Ammanford Association Football Club), he was quietly in pain. He had tried various treatments and therapies available through the Welsh NHS and, later, treatment his parents had to pay for privately. Unfortunately, however, Jac died in February 2019 when he was just 27 years old. Although it was extremely difficult, Jesse and the rest of Jac's family wanted to prevent what happened to Jac from happening to others. According to ITV Wales, numbers from a Freedom of Information request found there are almost 4,000 people currently waiting for mental health treatment in Wales as of February 2020. To combat the issue, Jesse founded the Jac Lewis Foundation with the help of the Ammanford sporting community. The charity aims to provide support for mental health, especially for young men. According to the foundation's website, the hope is "to decrease mental health difficulties and increase the well-being and resilience of the community" through services such as a telephone support service, one-on-one counselling services, well-being workshops and mentor training for community members. "I adore the fact that the community has come together to try and achieve this," Jesse told ITV Wales. "If it wasn't for Ammanford AFC then it wouldn't have happened. They've united, not just the footballers, but other local clubs as well. They've all come on board, contributed and raised money."



Emma Wright

When Emma Wright read about the bush fires in Australia, she took it upon herself to help. Wright, who lives in Newquay, Cornwall, sponsored an injured koala named Anwen via the Koala Hospital in New South Wales. Anwen had burns on her hands, feet, and 90 percent of her body. "I think of seeing such a huge problem and wondering what I could do about it on the other side of the world," Wright told Pirate FM. "I always think if you've got a really big problem you break it down into small bits, and I can't fix the big issue here, but maybe I can do something to help somebody." Still, Wright wanted to do more. When she reviewed the New South Wales hospital website again, she noticed it was accepting donations to help plant trees. Not only would this help regrow some of the vegetation Australia had lost, it would also provide food for the koalas. Wright started a fundraising page on the crowdfunding site JustGiving and originally hoped to raise £800 to plant 100 trees. To her surprise, she raised more than £2,000 in the first 48 hours. Since then, a total of more than £9,200 has been raised by 440 supporters. The abundance in donations have also allowed Wright to send money to the Koala Gardens in Tuckurimba, which helps provide a secure habitat for koalas and grows eucalyptus trees in other areas as well.

Ceud Mile Failte, Y'all

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During these uncertain times, the health and safety of our clans, athletes, vendors, volunteers and guests is of ultimate importance to the Blairsville Scottish Festival and Highland Games. So it is with a heavy heart we have decided to cancel our 2020 games. Many thanks for your understanding and looking forward to seeing you 2021.

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Please watch for updates.

The situation is difficult but we are all standing together in global solidarity.

Be well and be good to one another.

Slainte, Sandy Bunch, President

SEPT 5 - Taste of the Highlands | SEPT 6 - The Highland Games and The Canmore Ceilidh

www.canmorehighlandgames.ca



Smoky Mountain Highland Games and Festival

www.smokymountaingames.org

Since 1981, the Smoky Mountain Highland Games and Festival (then called the Gatlinburg Scottish Festival and Games) has welcomed thousands of guests each year to celebrate their Celtic pride through music, athletics and culture. One of the oldest Celtic events in the United States, the annual gathering found its permanent home in 2010 at the historic Maryville College in Maryville, Tennessee. Each Spring, the festival offers up a fine array of traditional Scottish attractions, including sheepdog demonstrations, pipe and drum performances, geological workshops, children's games, vendors and more. Although this year's festival was originally slotted for May, the organization's Board of Directors has decided that - due to health regulations surrounding Covid-19 - the Smoky Mountain Highland Games and Festival must be cancelled. "Our 2019 festival was our most successful year ever," says board member Vandy Kemp. "Although this decision is made with great disappointment, we are confident that we will come back strong in 2021." Kemp adds that plans for the 2021 festival are already in progress.



The Blairsville Scottish Festival and Highland Games

www.blairsvillescottishfestival.com

The Blairsville Scottish Festival and Highland Games has celebrated Scottish culture through arts and athletics for over 17 years. Situated in Meet Parks along Georgia's Highway 515, the annual gathering is the perfect event for those who want to honour their Scottish heritage, and an ideal opportunity for those with no Scottish background to better understand and appreciate the country's vibrant history. Taking place over two days, the Blairsville Scottish Festival and Highland Games hosts a variety of activities, including music performances, cultural demonstrations and, of course, the annual Scottish Highland Games - a showcase of Scottish athleticism you won't want to miss. Recently the festival's team released a statement on their website regarding the upcoming festival, planned for June of this year. "During these uncertain times the health and safety of our (participants) and guests are of ultimate importance. It is with a heavy heart that we have decided to cancel our 2020 games." The festival's team encourages visitors to return for next year's festival, scheduled for June 12 and 13, 2021.



Reno Celtic Festival

www.renoceltic.org

Originally hosted by the Fitzgerald Casino and Hotel as a Samhain celebration each autumn, the Northern Nevada Celtic Celebration has been bringing thousands of locals and visitors together to celebrate Celtic culture annually for almost 30 years. First held in downtown Reno under the Reno Arch, the gathering later moved to the Reno Livestock Events Center, before settling into its current location at the beautiful Bartley Ranch Regional Park. Today the festival is one of Nevada's most prominent and authentic Celtic experiences, offering up an amazing assortment of activities each spring, including traditional Celtic music and dance, Scottish athletics, living history and British cars. The day-long celebration was slated for May 16 of this year - however, organizers recently released a statement noting that the event will be suspended for 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "We join other Scottish Games and Celtic Festivals in our region in having to make this unfortunate decision and look forward to presenting our festival tentatively in May 2021." During the interim, patrons are encouraged to continue supporting the region's other Celtic organizations, the Nevada Society of Scottish Clans (nvssc.org) and the Sons & Daughters of Erin (irishnevada.org).

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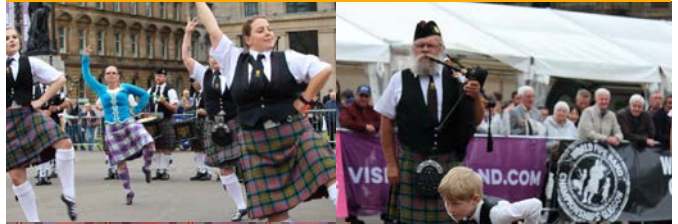
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The Greater Moncton Highland Games and Scottish Festival

www.monctonhighlandgames.com

Organized by the Greater Moncton Scottish Association, the Greater Moncton Highland Games and Scottish Festival is an annual event that celebrates Moncton's rich Scottish ties. Taking place in June of each year, the gathering welcomes thousands of guests to the Hal Betts Sportsplex in Moncton, New Brunswick, for a weekend of art, culture, education and music. The weekend hosts a variety of activities, including athletic competitions, musical performances, cultural vendors, and the annual 5k Tartan Run. The festival was set to take place on the weekend of June 20 this year but has been cancelled due to the effects of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Stephen Tweedie, the Games co-chair, explains: "While we are hopeful our community will be able to gather again soon, the health and safety of all our competitors, vendors, participants, family and friends is our top priority." Tweedie adds that the decision was a difficult one, as The Greater Moncton Highland Games was scheduled to host the men's and women's World Lightweight Heavy Athletics Championships this year - a first for the festival. Still, he and his team remain positive, assuring guests that they will come back stronger than ever in 2021, as they host the Masters Heavy Athletics World Championships.



Kamloops Highland Games

www.kamloopshighlandgames.ca

Organized by the Kamloops Highland Games Society, the Kamloops Highland Games is a one-day celebration of Celtic culture that takes place in British Columbia each summer. Hosted in beautiful Albert McGowan Park, the annual gathering is a uniquely Scottish experience that welcomes thousands of guests annually. The festival kicks off with one of the grandest displays the Celts have to offer: a massed pipe and drum band. Visitors will enjoy a variety of high-energy activities through the day, including musical and dance performances, Scottish Heavy Athletics, and children's games. The festival also hosts several educational corners that explore the country's rich history and heritage. Recently, organizers released a statement informing guests that the forthcoming festival would be cancelled for 2020. "We would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who have supported our games in the past and would like to assure everyone that we are working hard to plan an outstanding event for next year." Plans for the 2021 year - scheduled to take place on July 10 - are already well underway.



Embro Highland Games

www.embrohighlandgames.ca

One of the oldest and most notable Celtic festivals in Canada, 1856 saw the inauguration of the 1st Embro Highland Games. The Zorra Caledonian Society established in 1937 has run & organized the event on July 1st for the last 83 years. The festival celebrates the area's strong ties to Scotland, honouring its first Scottish settlers such as William McKay, who arrived in Embro in 1820. Over the years, the event has welcomed thousands of guests for a myriad of family-friendly activities, including musical performances, Highland dance, pipe bands, heavy athletic events, cultural vendors and more. This year, organizers are sad to announce that - for the first time since World War II - the festival has been put on a one-year hiatus. In a statement released last month, Zorra Caledonia Society President Kevin Fraser stated, "It was a very difficult decision but a necessary decision. Our priority is the health and safety of all those involved in organizing, participating and volunteering at the games." Plans for the 2021 festival are already underway.



SCOTTISH FESTIVAL & HIGHLAND GAMES CANCELLED

I regret to announce the cancellation of the 34th annual Scottish Festival and Highland Games. Disappointing though this news is, I'm sure you'll agree that, given the rapid spread of COVID-19, it is the right and responsible thing to do.

During these extraordinarily challenging times, I hope you'll consider this appeal for donations in support of our principal charity, Caledonia Senior Living and Memory Care. Because seniors are the most vulnerable among us, senior living is the front line of the battle against COVID-19. Our campus, which includes the Scottish Home and MacLean House, is in an advanced state of lockdown. We are taking extreme precautions to safeguard the people who live and work in our community. If you choose to support our COVID-19 prevention programming, your donation – in any amount you're able to give – will be fully tax-deductible. And MUCH appreciated.

Once we are through this crisis – and we WILL get through this – we look forward to once again hosting the Highland Games in its' full, proud glory.

On behalf of the Chicago Scots and everyone at Caledonia Senior Living, I wish you and your loved ones, now, and in the time ahead, health. Be well.

To donate please visit CaledoniaSeniorLiving.org

Please direct questions to Jack Sanders, T: 708-426-7111 • E: jacksanders@chicagoscots.org

With friendship, Aye. Gus Noble - President



Even though ScotlandShop's wares reach all across the globe, the location of their headquarters belies its international standing. However, that sits just fine with the company's Marketing Manager Emily Redman.

"I currently live in a small town called Duns in the Scottish Borders - this is where our headquarters are based," shares Redman via email. "Despite being a small town, it has a beautiful castle which is linked to Clan Hay, a museum dedicated to Scottish racing legend Jim Clark, and celebrates an annual festival known as Reiver's Week, which commemorates the historic tradition of riding on horseback to check on the town's boundaries."

ScotlandShop first opened its digital doors in 2002 and remained an exclusive online retailer for many years. Redman joined the company as a shipper/receiver, but her talent for tartans quickly had her climbing the company ladder.

"It is an honour to lead our fantastic team, all of whom are full of enthusiasm and great ideas on how best to celebrate our Scottish roots. My background in woven textile design was a great starting point, and I have since expanded my tartan knowledge."

"Although I was primarily based within our customer service team, I always had additional design projects on the go, the largest of these being the creation of Doddie's tartan, created alongside our favourite former Scottish rugby star, Doddie Weir. The tartan features the colours of all the rugby clubs he played for, and a percentage of every sale of Doddie's goes to the My Name's Doddie Foundation, supporting Doddie's quest to raise funds to aid research into Motor Neurone Disease."



"As the business has grown, I have steadily taken on more design and marketing projects and, in the process, set up our own marketing department."

In something of a reversal of the way many small businesses have grown, ScotlandShop's online presence has been recently supplemented with the opening of several brick-and-mortar shops.

"We opened our first retail store in the West End of Edinburgh in 2017," says Redman. "This gave us the opportunity to meet our customers in person for the first time, and to offer clan consultations, as well as measuring appointments which are all now a key part of the service we offer. Our hope is to expand on this by opening an international store within the next few years. As a step towards this, we currently host regular pop-up stores in London, New York, and Chicago and, as well, attending many Highland Games in both Scotland and North America."

Between these pop-ups, web development, and burning the candles at both ends designing new tartan collections, Redman admits her schedule is often hectic. However, helping people connect with their culture and their lineage through tartans every day

more than makes up for the time challenges.

"We always had customers who told us that they were disappointed when they couldn't find a product in their clan tartan when visiting Edinburgh, so we set out to change that."

"We are all about celebrating Scottish heritage..."

"We are thrilled to help our customers do this, whether that be helping them identify a tartan, discovering which clan they are part of, or creating their dream tartan outfit. We want people to join the Tartan clan, and to have fun while wearing quality Scottish products that they can be proud of."

ScotlandShop is currently deciding on where to open their next storefront, as they need to accommodate a growing consumer base. And while heritage might be a bit of a bull market these days, Redman believes that the best way to keep sales strong for Celtic goods is to continue to promote the work of world-class artisans, including those in her hometown.

"I believe that much more can be done to help support and celebrate local, independent companies who promote quality Scottish products, both in Scotland and overseas. We are dedicated to playing our part in this and are proud to work with local craft experts who make products - such as our tartan brooches - from their home workshops. We are truly spoiled for choice, with all the beautiful fabrics woven right here on our doorstep."

www.scotlandshop.com

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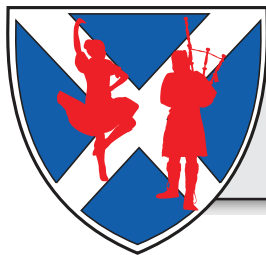
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Lost Children of the Carricks

One man's persistence pays off with a powerful documentary film



There was an old Irish tradition, most common in the western part of the Emerald Isle, when one was preparing to leave home. Fire, lit in the hearth of that home, would be brought to the hearth of a neighbour in the hopes that the departing would return someday to reclaim it and bring it back from whence it ignited.

Many fires were left in neighbouring fireplaces that would never be recovered when thousands of families fled Ireland during the Great Famine of the 1840s. Professor Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin's new documentary film, *Lost Children of the Carricks*, tells the tale of one family's effort to return for that long-lost flame.

Born in Ennis, County Clare, Ó hAllmhuráin has spent the last 30 years teaching Celtic Studies and related topics across North America. He currently sits in residence as the inaugural holder of the bilingual Johnson Chair in Québec and Canadian Irish Studies at Concordia University in Montréal.

"It is currently the largest Irish Studies program in North America," says Ó hAllmhuráin.

The documentary's origins arose from Ó hAllmhuráin's acquaintance with the descendant of one of those families that left Ireland for the greener pastures of Canada.

"I met Francophone historian, Georges Kavanagh in the Gaspé in 2013," Ó hAllmhuráin explains. "The Kavanagh family had insisted for generations that there was a mass grave along the shore with the bones of 87 passengers from the Carricks of Whitehaven that wrecked off the coast of Cap-des-Rosiers in late spring 1847."

As it turns out, Kavanagh's forefathers were on that ill-fated ferry.

"Our film weaves Georges' French narrative into the pre-famine Gaelic-speaking world of his ancestors in County Sligo in the West of Ireland, their Atlantic crossing and

tragic loss of life on the Carricks, their long integration into Québécois society following their arrival in Canada and, finally, their reunion with Irish cousins."

The Kavanagh name, and the similar Kavaney, Ó hAllmhuráin explains, is likely a corruption of the family name Ó Gébheann-aigh, and ancestors from Sligo would have been entirely Irish-speaking in the 1840s. Their Irish descendants speak English now, but language was still a huge barrier for Kavanagh.

"As a Francophone, Georges was anxious to make the journey to Ireland to walk the land of his ancestors. He had visited Sligo in 2011 with his son Bernard, but they did not visit the townland, nor see the original homestead. He was hesitant to return without a translator.

"In 2015, we organized a trip to Ireland, bringing Georges, his wife Agathe, and his children, Bernard and Renée, to retrace the footsteps of his ancestors and, hopefully, reunite with Irish cousins."

A tight budget was one of the challenges of completing the film, although several Canadian and Irish historians and musicians lent their expertise and/or talents to the cause. However, while the language barrier between the Kavanaghs and their distant cousins was present, it didn't present as much of a challenge as feared.

"You can imagine the fun between them - a few pints of Guinness, laughter, and songs made everything much easier."

Left to smoulder for far too long on the embers of history, Kavanagh was finally able to reclaim the fire his forefathers had left with neighbours so long ago.

"When news of the wreck of the Carricks reached Ireland, loved ones left behind assumed there were no survivors and that part of their family tree was severed forever," shares Ó hAllmhuráin. "This heartbreak passed from generation to generation for 168 years until, finally, our French-speaking Québécois family returned to Ireland looking for their roots and for healing."

Now that this story has been told, Ó hAllmhuráin says he is hearing from other distant relatives as far afield as Australia and New Zealand.

"We have been contacted by descendants on both sides of the French-English Kavaney family tree, and we have been able to create several exciting connections among Irish famine descendants looking for their roots all over the world."

The documentary is set to make the rounds on the film festival circuit this year.

"As the film gets ready to tour North America and prepares for its European premiere at the International Ethnografilm Festival in Paris, there is a great sense of enthusiasm and excitement among the production team. All the hard work of the past five years has finally come to fruition. Quebec's voice within the Irish famine diaspora has finally been heard."

www.lostchildrenofthecarricks.com



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• Renovation of Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Hill House, Helensburgh	\$20,000*
• Highland Echoes "Scotland in the Class"	\$16,900
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Eisenhower Suite, Culzean Castle



The Hill House, Helensburgh

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The Selkie Girls have been producing folky covers and hauntingly beautiful original tunes since 2013. The band's name is a bit of a misnomer, as its members aren't all women. Comprised of Dave Ervin, Jaycie Skidmore, Joel Black, Martin McCall, Linda Mudd and Alli Johnson, the group recently released their latest musical effort, *Running with the Morrigan*.

"My mother is a songwriter, singer and instrumentalist," shares Johnson, the group's lead vocalist and rhythm guitar player. "She provided my first musical education. Later on, I grew to love music on my own terms: pop, rock, folk, and musical theatre. I sang in choir and performed in musicals. Then I took up piano and, in high school, the guitar. When I played music, the world went away, and I discovered a joy and a truth that was unparalleled. I also played because people loved it, and that felt good."

The youngest of four siblings, Johnson's love of music grew quickly: as a teen, she began performing professionally in venues around her hometown of Dallas, Texas, before forming the Selkie Girls. In 2015, the group won a Celtic Radio Music Award for their version of "The Gaelic Song." These days, with five recordings under their belt, they have made a solid name for themselves performing the Texas Celtic festival circuit. Although some band members have come and gone, the original core group of six has remained consistent since the start.

"The music has evolved, also," says Johnson. "We began with a simpler sound in some ways: hand drums, bodhran, a guitar and minimal bass. Some of our best tracks

from the first albums were the simpler ones like 'Parting Glass,' which has a very sweet acoustic sound. The harmonies, which we consider one of our best components, have always been strong."

The band became more ambitious and adventurous over time, she shares, with greater emphasis placed upon composing original material.

"Our current sound is a bit moodier...a bit more complex."

"We have experimented with more mandolin, bigger drums and more obscure songs. I have loved every incarnation of our songs and one of the things we take pride in is the huge variety on each of our albums. The new album is no exception - lots of musical diversity, but entirely the Selkie Girls sound."

Running with the Morrigan features 13 tunes, including the dance-worthy *Gods and Guinness*, the harmonious *All is Found*, and the instrumental title track. As with the band's previous albums, *Running with the Morrigan* was produced by vocalist and instrumentalist Dave Ervin.

"His blood, sweat, and tears went into this recording, and we are immensely thankful for that passion. We wanted to take our time with this one and really explore our sound. So that's what we did - it was about two years in the making. We still ended up rushing final production to release it in time, but we made it."



For Johnson, *Smeorach Chlann Domhnaill* (the lead-off track on the album) is a personal favourite. "I struggled with the vocals on that, and it took a while to get the exact tone I was going for," she notes. "I had to find a way through that song that I could be proud of. And, by the end, I think I achieved it."

"Another reason I love that piece is that it showcases everything that is wickedly cool about Scottish Gaelic music: it is intense, percussive, and it speaks to the deep pride that one can feel for one's homeland."

She also loves their cover version of Archie Fisher's *The Final Trawl*, where Ervin takes the lead. "He really crafted an original arrangement of this beloved song,"

Lawdy - which caps off the recording - is a traditional American folk song where "everyone came up with really melodic and moving parts."

Whether the Selkie Girls will be able to keep touring their album this year remains to be seen, due to the COVID-19 crisis. However, the hope is that the band will continue playing their music, one way or another.

"Maybe that means internet concerts. Eventually, we do hope the show goes on in a familiar form."

www.theselkiegirls.com

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Aoife Mc Namara

www.aoifeireland.com

I was born and raised in Ireland, and I am currently based in Limerick.

When I was in my fourth year of school my mum brought me to a fashion show at my local art college and I remember just being mesmerized by the clothes on the runway and the idea that a human could create them. From that day I knew that being involved in the fashion industry was exactly what I wanted to do.

The idea of the finished garment is still what I love, but the journey of a garment - from sketching the design up to picking and creating my own materials - would have to be my favourite part of the process.

My company was founded in 2019, with a mission to empower women through what our beautiful

country has to offer. Having grown up in Ireland, an island full of breathtaking landscapes and creatives, the desire to protect and highlight our natural world became one of the core values in my design process.

My hope is to portray Ireland through fun colours and shapes, creating garments that empower women - influencers, business women, and conscious consumers - without costing the earth.

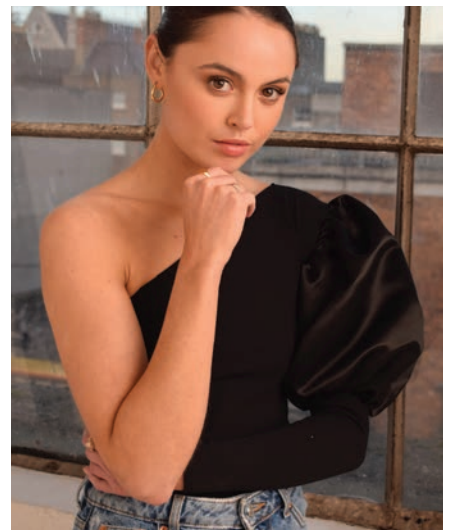
I am inspired by different walks of life and my personal style is constantly evolving and changing every year. Each season varies; one season could be inspired by architecture, the next perhaps inspired by something particular in my life that I am going through.

This year, my focus is upon growing my knowledge in the area of sustainable design.

Design is definitely on the rise here in Ireland, with many creatives staying after college. We have amazing talent coming out of this country and there is a lot to look forward to in the coming years. We need to create more jobs in the industry here so that our people stay close to home.







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RobertTheBruceFilm.com

Angus Macfadyen

*A quarter-century after Braveheart,
Robert the Bruce returns to the silver screen.*

*Story by Celtic Life International
Associate Editor Chris Muise*



Any actor would give their eye teeth to play the part of a renowned historical figure on the big screen. Angus Macfadyen got his big break in Hollywood portraying the conflicted Robert the Bruce in *Braveheart*, opposite Mel Gibson, in 1995. The Scottish thespian has taken many other roles since then, but this year, he returns to star in *Robert the Bruce*. Recently, Macfadyen answered our Celtic Questionnaire.

What are your own roots?

I am from Scotland, born just outside of Edinburgh. But my dad was a World Health Organization doctor, so he traveled a lot when I was a kid, and I moved around for many years - as Celts do - and ended up at Edinburgh University eventually. I would have stayed, but job prospects in Scotland in the arts were pretty bleak back then - and remain so even to this day. So, I once again found myself, as a Celt, packing my bags and heading for wherever the gold was, in the hills somewhere - which just happened to be the Hollywood Hills. I have enjoyed my career for 25 years or so now. These days, I live in Panama on an island. I am not a big fan of cities, and I have sort of isolated myself here for several years. However, it is not that very different from Scotland in some ways.



How did you first get into acting?

I was studying to be a politician or a diplomat and, one day, a voice just stopped me in my tracks and said, "don't keep walking down that path." And so, I listened to it and changed my field of study from international relations and politics to English and French. More importantly, I started doing the other thing I loved, which was theatre. I suppose it is sort of the same thing, as politicians basically lie, and actors basically lie. But one of those professions is only about the lining of one's pockets, and the other is about entertaining people. So, I think I made the right choice.

Filming *Braveheart* must have been an incredible experience.

It was extraordinary for me, as a young actor. That was my first Hollywood movie; it was awe-inspiring to see film-



making on that level, with gigantic tents, and thousands of people walking in and out the other end dressed as soldiers. There was another tent with thousands of shields and swords, and yet another tent with thousands of tables for people to eat. It was like a mini city. And then the film, of course, did very well, and inspired the Scottish people. We were in the cinema and we were shouting "Freedom!" And the SNP, the Scottish Nationalist Party, were very clever; they were handing out leaflets afterwards, saying we should get independence now. It reignited the independence movement, and within two years we had a Scottish parliament. It might be one of those rare moments where a film actually had a huge impact on the political landscape of a country. And that was part of my reason for making Robert the Bruce now - because we have faltered in some ways. I felt like if that could happen once, it could happen again, and I wanted to be part of that push towards independence.

You co-wrote the new film.

Yes, I had a story I wanted to tell - the rest of the story. What happens after William Wallace? It is kind of important; Robert the Bruce becomes the King of Scotland and makes Scotland free. But I couldn't get the

money together to get the actual film made for over a decade. I think the first version was written in 2006. By 2017, we were finally making it.

What story do you tell in this film?

This is the lost period of Robert Bruce's life, when his grasp exceeded his ambition: he lost battle after battle, and his army became smaller and smaller - like a guerrilla force, hitting and running in the hills of Scotland, and eventually hiding out in the caves of the Western Isles. Although we don't really know much about that time, it is the mythical section which interested me; where he goes into a cave as a defeated man and self-isolates, and comes out ready to face his destiny and become the king. I didn't think he would be able to do it himself. I imagined that he might have been wounded. And certainly, with the bitter cold, how would he survive? He probably would have been helped by some very poor Scottish farming community - maybe a family. And thus, I created this family of three children who had all lost their fathers in war, fighting for William Wallace and Robert the Bruce. They probably would hate this man - after all, he was the reason they lost their fathers. They can either choose to protect this man, or hand him in - there is a price on his head, so they can become rich. Or they could shield their king. That is the dilemma of the story, which was a bit of a poetic license. It has a "high noon" quality to it, because he is a wanted man.

Is this an actual sequel to Braveheart?

I don't like that s-word. I think it is entirely different from Braveheart. It is much more about the consequences of violence, more than about war itself. People who come looking for giant battle sequences will be disappointed, because that is not what the film is about. It is about Scots being turned against Scots. They are in strife - civil war. Mother Nature, and the despair of the Scottish people turning against each other, those are the real enemies in this movie.

What was it like, playing Robert the Bruce again, after 25 years away from the role? And how did your approach to the character change for this film?

Age actually helped me, as it has been a long time. I was a young man of 30 then, with all



of the arrogance and the bluster - that was very much what Robert the Bruce was back then. However, time kind of knocks the stuffing out of you. That happened to Robert, and it also happened to me in the sense of trying to get this film made for so long, after so many years. I went through the same kind of ordeal as Robert the Bruce; being despairing and practically giving up. And then, the film just came together out of the blue, and the time was right. It really reflected my own journey in that sense, and so it was almost like I didn't have to act, quite frankly. It was like getting into a pair of old shoes.

What do you hope viewers take away from the movie?

Well, I think it is really an anti-war film. It is about the consequences of violence. It is also about this family - people who are ravaged and destroyed by war, and how tragic that really is. You fear for the family, and you fear for them in this particular situation. The movie really brings the war home in that regard.

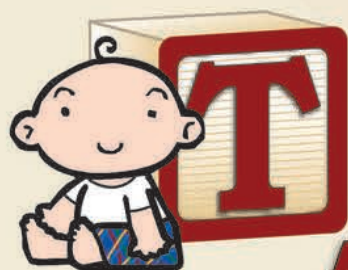
What is next on your creative agenda?

I have two Shakespeare films: Henry IV, in which I play Falstaff, and the other - which is just about to be released - is Macbeth Unhinged, my version of Macbeth, which has also taken an unusually long time to make - about six years.

Where can people see Robert the Bruce?

Currently it is on iTunes, Apple TV, and P.O.D. It will be available on DVD in June, I believe.

www.robertthebrucefilm.com



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Celtic Music Interpretive Centre

Keeping the rhythm - past and present - in Cape Breton.
Story by Rose Poirier.



Anytime you are on a road signposted by the silhouette of a bagpiper, music beckons an elegant finger. Don your Scottish tam and seek this treasure: The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre (CMIC) in Judique, on Cape Breton's Ceilidh Trail.

Once you pass the waves caressing the rocks below Creignish Mountain on Route 19, watch for the steeple of a brown stone church. Across the road, you will hear the soul of a ceilidh.

The license plates tell me who is there today - Rhode Island, Maine, Ontario, South Carolina, Maryland and, of course, Nova Scotia locals. The last time I was there, I was a "home from away" - my current residence in Halifax being just a bit away. As soon as I got out of the car, I heard my childhood nickname called out from a trim fellow in sunglasses sitting on the patio eating a quesadilla and an oatcake for lunch.

Here, when that happens, reply by asking them how they are in Gaelic - Caimar a tha thu? - and that will give you enough time to realize who it is that you haven't seen in 10 years. That will take care of the rest of your afternoon as everyone (and their dog) has shown up to hear the season's daily piano and fiddles, ready to dance a square set.

Befitting a place that is almost next door to the home of fiddling great Buddy MacMaster, its exhibit and archives extoll the man himself along with those who came before him and those that followed in his footsteps.

It is this sense of tradition that continues to fuel the facility and its patrons.

"In terms of continuing Celtic culture, you have to remember or understand what came before you," says Alan Dewar, CMIC Music Director. "It is important to understand the appeal, the approach, what people played and how they did it - the etiquette.

"This music was played in a social setting, not for material or commercial gain."

"We are trying to educate, at a grassroots level, those who may not have memories of Buddy MacMaster, or know what a house ceilidh is, or never had the chance to experience this music and culture organically."

The spirits of Winston Scotty Fitzgerald, John Allan Cameron, and Brenda Stubbart drift deeply through the space. Echoes of Natalie MacMaster and Ashley MacIsaac are found here too. They spent school days just a minute down the road, where our school used to be.

"We are here if someone wants to get a feel for who these musicians were," continues Dewar. "Maybe they want to know how Theresa Maclellan or Donald Angus Beaton would have played a particular tune."

Music becomes visceral at the CMIC; I hold a vinyl record that could have belonged to my grandparents, who would have put it on the gramophone with the crank handle on the side. Gliding a hand along the sleek wood of a 1940s Marconi radio and turning

the knobs evokes fiddle strains, ones that soothed the longing of displaced Gaelic ears for a hundred years or more. In my own head, I still hear the deep voice of 1970s CJFX's Joe Chesal and CIGO's Bob MacEachern with the Highland Fling show, marking years of evenings by the radio.

February 2020 saw a recharge for the CMIC. Like so many young Cape Bretoners, Patti (MacDonald) David left the island to study and seek work abroad. She is now back home as a new Executive Director, working with Dewar and a Board of Directors and volunteers.

"To date, we had been focusing on visitors and entertainment and economic sustainability," she notes. "Like many not-for-profit organizations, it has been a challenge fulfilling our vision. We are designated as the Official Celtic Music Centre of Nova Scotia, and as the Official Cultural Archives for Inverness County.

"Our mandate is to collect, preserve and promote the traditional Celtic music of Cape Breton through education, research and performance."





Part of that mandate will see the CMIC tighten partnerships with archival and museum groups around the province and the world. “The music, the history, and the culture of the people of Cape Breton have an inherent value all on their own,” she adds. “I want to ensure that’s the focus - accessible and promoted.”

“We have over 350 videos of live concerts from all over the island,” Dewar explains. “Broad Cove concerts, Mabou ceilidh - our vault is full of gems.” The archives continue to grow and evolve into digitizing, so booking an appointment is encouraged.

Dewar says that the rest of the world is tuning in as well.

“Celtic music - the Cape Breton sound, specifically - catches the ear of a lot of people, whether they are from Scotland, the U.S., or Denmark. When they hear this style of music with their own ears, they are hooked.”

Close ties to Scotland’s South Uist are maintained with visits to the Ceòlas Festival, which celebrates 25 years in 2020. “Our style of music is close to home for them,” Dewar says. “They bring people from Cape Breton to the festival to teach this style of fiddle. John Pellerin, Stan Chapman, and Troy MacGillivray are going this year. There

is always that strong bond, back and forth.”

If your companions are keen, or at least tolerant, pick up a fiddle yourself and try the bow. Rumour has it that if you are really, really good, they will recruit you to hop on the stage in the room next door. Apparently, it is soundproof, as planners must have been among those who couldn’t stand an ill-timed squawk interrupting their own melodies.

We are not all virtuosos though. Management here knows that and have prepped a spot. The best of the Island, and often beyond, are around to offer lessons in fiddle, piano, highland piping, stepdance, and beginner Gaelic - all ages, all skill levels - and yes, they are all very patient.

I leave my son looking at a fiddle tune book in the gift shop, and my husband flipping through some Cape Breton Christmas short stories, so I can delve deep into the archives. It leads me into the intertwining of family and music from four cultures that mark Cape Breton fiddle; Scottish, Irish, Acadian and Mi’kmaq. I get deep into an article from Am Braighe, the magazine about Gaelic culture that local Frances MacEachern edited from the ’90s, and I realize I could spend days in here. I also can’t help but think of the late Leo A. MacDonnell, the pointing finger that keeps me writing, who was a huge influence on the CMIC. Send thanks to him in heaven for that.

Like so much of Scotland, music is tied to the shore and the hardships and joys the Gaels brought with them when they arrived in their boats.

At the end of the CMIC parking lot, there’s a bridge over a brook that looks like it was taken from a fairy tale. Check for the ogre. A wide gravel path winds to the left of the graveyard and takes you to the shore with a beach that I hesitate to write about because I want it all to myself. Discarded

fishing buoys hang from the trees, and swirls of mushrooms mix with berries and moss along the way. A side loop will take you to the old St Michael’s pioneer graveyard, only discovered and reclaimed from the tree roots a few years ago by community volunteers. Further along is the site of Judique’s first church, likely built soon after Michael MacDonald brought the first group of Scot settlers to the region in the late 1770s.

If you want a guide, ask for a Celtic Culture Musical Walking Tour or brave the complete Ocean Ceilidh and Seafood Adventure that starts at the CMIC. They’ll give you a little wine or craft beer and send you with area fiddler Chrissie Crowley. She will infuse you with music and culture and Gaelic before a trip on a lobster boat. A square set may break out on the bridge over the brook, part of the Trans Canada Trail. Then you dine and dance with your single malt whiskey before wandering home.

I opt for my own walk, past my MacDonnell and MacDonald ancestors in the graveyard, straight to where I hear the waves curling onto the sand and stones. With salt spray in my hair, and curls blown into a Medusa ‘do, I get a burning thirst, so I head back to the CMIC bar for a little deoch. Siobhan is there, the girl I held in my arms as a newborn, now two decades old. She manages to dance a step and serve a sweet dram almost at the same time. In a minute, she brings out a bowl of lobster chowder and a biscuit, proper Taste of Nova Scotia style. I wish I could have it all year, but I have to go back to Halifax. I will leave it to my aunt Sally to warm the seats of the CMIC. Go to the Sunday Ceilidh any week from 2-4pm and ask her for a dance. You will find her - she’s under five feet tall - but she will take you for a delightful twirl.

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Haaf Netting

Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands explores the ancient custom of Haaf Netting



One thing that is shared by all the modern Celtic nations is a relationship with the sea. In times past the sea was the easiest - and sometimes the only - highway to other lands and it afforded opportunities to explore, communicate, share and trade. Each land developed its own unique links with the ocean that, in turn, shaped its identity.

From the legends and myths of antiquity to the songs, poems and prose that permeate each nation's history, art and culture the omnipresent pull of the sea can be found. Boat design was tailored to suit specific coastal conditions giving rise to vessels such as the Irish currach, the Galician dorna and the Manx nobby. Likewise, fishing methods evolved around different shoreline environments. Some of these methods were brought by foreign invaders centuries ago and assimilated into the Celtic landscape where they can still be found in localized regions to this day. The ancient skill of haaf netting is one such example.

Practiced in the inner reaches of the Solway Firth, the art of haaf netting was brought to Scottish shores by the Vikings over a thousand years ago and is kept alive

to this day by a small but dwindling group of enthusiasts. Haaf is an Old Norse word meaning channel or sea. Today, the term describes the wooden frame that is used to support a large net. It is comprised of a 16-foot-long crossbeam which, according to folklore, is the length of a Viking longboat oar. At each end is affixed a five-foot-tall vertical post - known as an end-stick - and in the center a six and-a-half-foot mid-stick. The net is then tied to this frame with enough slack to form a pocket on either side of the mid-stick into which fish will swim. It is a difficult and dangerous method of fishing that requires the fisher to wade into a deep channel of tidal water and hold the haaf net against the current. Once positioned the haafnetter can rest one or both hands on the beam with fingers grasping the top of the net so that the pull of a fish swimming into the trap can be felt. The entire frame can then be lifted and the fish either gathered in the net and dispatched or flipped over the beam and quickly released without handling.

Haafnetters can choose to work alone or in teams.

When working in teams they position their haafs end-to-end forming a line or "back" of haafnetters that can cover a wider stretch of the channel. With this arrangement the chances of catching fish may be increased, but depending on the depth and flow of the water and the run of the fish a haafnetter may have a more-or-less advantageous position or "haul" within the line. In the interests of fairness a draw is held on the shore before heading into the water. This is a complicated procedure known as "casting the mells" and determines each haafnetter's position within the line. Working as part of a team also lessens the risk when working in difficult conditions. The Solway has the second fastest bore of any estuary in the United Kingdom - the fastest being the Severn. Each tide shifts thousands of tons of sand and the positions of channels are always changing. Over the years animals and people have had to be rescued from quick-sands on these shores and, sadly, a few have been lost. Haafnetters use the wooden frame to continuously prod the sand on which they are standing for it can move around their feet, opening up new holes and soft spots while they fish.

Although haaf netting can be used to catch sea bass, grey mullet, flounders, plaice and sea trout, it is salmon that is the prized quarry. As with most fishing methods, haaf netting wasn't developed for sport but as a means to provide essential food. Once in plentiful supply, salmon was an important source of nutrition for coastal communities. As such, permission to fish was granted by kings in exchange for loyalty to the crown. In the case of the Royal Burgh of Annan on the Scottish side of the Solway Firth, it is known that haaf netting was a recognized way of fishing during the Middle Ages. Referencing an earlier Royal Charter lost during the wars with the English, King James VI of Scotland (James I of England) reaffirmed Annan's



Royal Burgh status in 1612 and, specifically, the ongoing fishing rights of the townsfolk including a reference to the use of haaf nets. There are many other references to haaf nets over the subsequent centuries, all indicating that this unique method of fishing has been in continuous use in the inner reaches of the Solway since the time of the Vikings to the present day.

Historically, haaf netting wasn't the only method of fishing on the Solway. Stake nets and poke nets - known as "fixed engines" - were also employed. These involved lines of posts - timber for stake nets and metal for poke nets - driven into the sand between which nets were stretched.

Today, haaf netting is the only method still in use on the Solway.

Salmon numbers in Scotland have been declining for many years. This once abundant fish is already all but absent from southern European rivers. There appears to be no single cause for this collapse in numbers and it is likely that a combination of many factors is involved: parasites and pollution around fish farms that migrating wild salmon have to pass, climate change, habitat destruction associated with deforestation, fertilizers and pollutants from agricultural operations and increasing numbers of natural predators. In an effort to combat the dwindling numbers, the killing of salmon has been banned on many Scottish rivers. In 2016, the Scottish government introduced The Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations prohibiting the retention of any salmon caught in coastal waters. This resulted in the overnight demise of fixed engine methods of fishing. Now, the Solway shoreline is littered with decaying timber posts and rusting metal poles from the era of stake and poke nets. They serve as a reminder of the days when



fishing was an essential part of coastal living. When the 2016 regulations came into force, the haafnetters on the Scottish side of the Solway were granted an exemption for three years on the understanding that only three salmon per fisher could be taken in any season. They also had to agree to participate in a scientific study whereby samples would be taken from all fish caught before the fish were returned to the haafnetters. The three-year study period ended in 2018 and there are no longer exemptions for haafnetters. Anyone choosing to continue haaf netting for salmon in the Solway now must practice catch and release.

Tony Turner is a haafnetter from the Royal Burgh of Annan and has witnessed the decline of haaf netting.

"I can recall the days when we had 46 haafnetters in the Burgh and I watched that fall to 30 and now there are only 15 active haafnetters left," he shares. "There are no youngsters following in our footsteps. Unless

we can take the occasional salmon home it isn't worth the effort, expense and risk that is involved and that in turn will result in the end of part of our heritage that dates back over a 1,000 years."

Last year, I took the opportunity to follow a group of haafnetters across the Solway sands to fish the channel a mile or so offshore. It was not something I would have contemplated without expert local knowledge. It was a beautiful summer evening but being so far from land made me aware of the exposed and isolated environment that these fishers operate in. As I watched them standing chest deep in the water I thought of the Vikings, the haafnetters of the Middle Ages and the centuries of tradition and skills now retained only by a few individuals. As the sun set I realized I was witnessing the tide ebbing on a thousand years of history.

www.annanhaafnets.org
www.tomlanglandsphotography.com





Dalriada Heritage Leather

Dear Friends in the Celtic Community

In the World of Covid-19, we must all remember to be thankful for the heroic efforts of front-line responders around the globe. We all feel the impact in our own lives daily.

We at Dalriada Heritage Leather ask that you also think of the impact on the Celtic Community of musicians, artists, and craftsmen: those who work so hard to bring us festivals, concerts, and highland games: the vendors that serve these events and the communities that benefit. Many of these events, and our favorite cultural heritage sites in Scotland are closed for now. For all of these, the economic impact is horrendous. So, as you enjoy this beautiful publication, as you wish and plan for future events and travel, please do what you can to support Celtic Music, Celtic Craftsmen, Scottish Clan Societies, and Cultural Heritage Sites.

If you have canceled plans and received your refunds, consider using part of those to support our beloved Celtic community. Let's make sure these things that we so miss, and look forward to seeing again will still be there when this is over.

We will get through this difficult time. We know our ancestors endured hardships for centuries. Perseverance is in our blood!

Please visit our facebook page where we will post links to specific fund raisers.

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Leicestershire and the Revellers of Ashby-de-la-Zouch

*In the final installment in a three-part series, Lesley Choyce
cruises the Celtic countryside of Leicestershire*



Ashby-de-la-Zouch Castle

Across the laneway from our above-the-garage apartment in Osgathorpe was an ivy-covered cottage where two sunburned and shirtless men were setting up a ping-pong table in the front yard. England, it often seems to me, is the Land that Sunscreen Forgot. However, it is really just that a lot of Brits forget that they are fair skinned, and when the outdoors call - or in this case, ping-pong in the yard - they forget all about solar protection.

We had a hole in our itinerary - our last four days in the U.K. - and my wife Linda was itching to nail down some final accommodations. We studied the map of England again to find a proper shire that we had not yet visited. We figured it should be something south of Wales and a bit east if possible - two locations perhaps - and somewhat on our way back to the Eurotunnel and the toll roads to Paris.

I had stayed in touch with the one writer who was willing to give me an interview on our journey - Tony Hawks (author of *Around Ireland with a Fridge*) - and he had told me he lived somewhere on the edge of the Dartmoor near the town of Moretonhampstead...so that sealed the deal. There was a big green splotch on the South Devon page of my AA Road Atlas that was Dartmoor National Park and it looked pleasantly unpopulated and enticing. The truth is that it wasn't really on our path back to Folkestone. Nonetheless, we would drive back to England after our next stop in Wales, then south past Bath and Cheddar again, and then further down into the boot, though we decided not to go all the way down to Cornwall where we had lived short term in homes before on several occasions.

Finding a rural house near Moretonhampstead for a four-day rental - and one that would accept dogs - proved to

be difficult, but Linda eventually discovered a house in the village of Manaton, not many miles south from there. I was sure that if we parked ourselves in that location for a few days, Tony would give me directions to his home, and I would have my interview. Without consulting him, we went ahead and booked our Manaton accommodation which appeared to be blessedly out in the middle of the moor with fields and forests aplenty.

Linda also decreed that we would spend our final night in England at an old estate, a fairly posh arrangement at Eastwell outside of Folkestone, where we could celebrate our travels with our dog on a back patio, and then hire a dog sitter again so we could enjoy a fancy meal in the dining room where the well-heeled once made small talk about the decline of the British Empire while sipping claret.

So, we had sorted out our final travel plans and fell into a kind of reverie there on the Osgathorpe Nirvana balcony.

*Despite the idyllic surroundings
and our fine adventures so far,
I expressed some doubts about
the book project that had
brought us here.*

It was the very title that was bothering the literal part of me: *Around England with a Dog*.

So far, our loop on this part of our journey had been Bexhill to Bath (and Beyond), Bradford-on-Avon to Saffron-Walden and Cambridge, with forays into the Thetford Forest and Brandon, a dash across those airfields north of Bedford and then north to Leicestershire and the land of ancestors, ghosts and McLarens.

Kelty was fast asleep on the balcony at Osgathorpe as we reminisced into the sunset about the great river of time that kept flowing. Tomorrow was another day and there was planning needed. I had wanted to drive into Atherstone, near Sibson, because they had named a street Choyce Close in honour of the nearly forgotten poet, Arthur Newberry Choyce.

The front yard ping-pong players were back for a last round of games at sunset and the steady staccato of the men hitting the ball was quite mesmerising as we all began to fade.

In the morning, Linda took to the roads and ran seven kilometres. She considered Osgathorpe one of her all-time favourite locales for a rural run. I preferred walking and took the dog back down the country lane, noting on this fine morning that Leicestershire may well have more birds per cubic foot of sky than anywhere on earth.



Lesley and Kelty

Lonely Planet suggests that “Leicestershire doesn’t yet have the strongest tourist gravity,” and that’s just fine by me. Me and Linda and Kelty and the birds. “Tourist gravity” is a wonderful way of describing places I would prefer to ignore. I prefer anti-gravity, you might say - like the birds above me who have a way of avoiding earthbound activity whenever they want. On our morning walk, I heard the most ambitious squealy sparrows, those guttural squawking crows, unidentified single-note chirpers, some bird that sounded exactly like my old fax machine, geese invisibly honking somewhere, and those large rock pigeons cooing up a storm as they flew past me at eye level. All the while up above were silent, swooping swallows.

In case that wasn’t enough, if you stopped your breath long enough, you could hear squadrons of bees at work in the clover and other wildflowers. Here, in the land of my ancestors, I wondered how it was they ever left. When they arrived in New Jersey in the eighteenth century, they would have found a veritable Garden of Eden as well, but it would change as industrialization crept over the green land, much as it had done in unluckier parts of the Midlands near here.

However, instead of constructing gargantuan sports stadiums, shopping malls and endless paved highways, places like Osgathorpe and Sibson still had vast green fields, ancient pubs, abandoned priories and birds and bees weighing in each morning with their melodic opinions about what a fine life it is in rural Leicestershire.

The next day - a perfectly fine Sunday morning - we headed into a small city with the unlikely and, I thought, highly comic name of Ashby-de-la-Zouch. No, really? I asked the sign welcoming us to town. I told Linda and Kelty that I thought the place was named after a Monty Python sketch, but they both thought otherwise. There was a famous castle there, possibly once owned by the Zouches (or the de la Zouches to be specific) and wasn’t that indicative that they were

French and, if so, how could that be the case here in the middle of the Midlands?

Ashby was bigger than I imagined and exceedingly livelier than one would expect on an otherwise quiet Sunday morning.

Once we parked and began to scope out the town, we discovered that most people were not piously singing hymns to Jesus in the Anglican church but, instead, throngs of rowdy lads and ladies were spilling out of the several pubs along our path at 10 a.m.

I suppose it was the young women dressed in flamboyant red outfits waving flags and blowing kazoos that made me realize it must have something to do with football or what we call it back on the other side of the pond, soccer. And I remembered reading in the newspaper, today was the day England was pitched against Panama in the FIFA World Cup. Boisterous revellers held aloft large steins of beer, the likes of which I had not seen since sitting in the Lowenbrau Beer Garden in Baden-Baden, Germany the day after Barack Obama had come to town there.

We had no inclination of joining the soccer fans, but instead, ducked down a side alley that would take us to the de la Zed castle. There we encountered an even rowdier mob of de la Zouchians wearing cut-off t-shirts and what is referred to these days as “distressed jeans” drinking yet more beer. There were no kazoo-playing women in this crowd which must have given the lads license to be even louder and raunchier in their beery discussions about the national qualities of Panamanians. I ushered my wife and dog along and tried to look like innocuous tourists who had no opinions about football or Central



View from Ashby Castle



Osgathorpe church

American nations that have been dominated by the U.S. for over a century.

Soon we were safely inside the gift shop of the castle paying the English Heritage folks admission money and studying the bottles of chili-flavoured mead for sale. When I was offered a free sample, I obliged, having never once in my 67 years tasted mead or especially mead with hot peppers. I agreed with the sales lady that the chili did offset the sweetness of the mead but decreed that I was not prepared to pay £20 for a full bottle of it. I associated mead with Beowulf and thought it should only be drunk in authentic mead halls in England or Scandinavia sometime well before the birth of Christ.

The castle is what I would label as well-preserved ruins. All but one tall tower had no roof. There were large, grassy grounds with sunken parts that were once gardens where aristocrats would have socialized and commented over winners and losers in jousting tournaments - or so I imagined.

According to English Heritage, the castle was “the purpose-built seat of one of the most powerful men in late 15th-century English politics, William, Lord Hastings. His adaptations to the relatively modest existing manor house at Ashby began in 1472-1473, but by the time of his sudden fall from grace and execution in 1483, only about half of his grand design had been realised.”

The Zouches were a Breton family who had been granted the land long before that and their name remained, but the family's ownership had slipped away. Sir Walter Scott had set a scene from *Ivanhoe* in

the castle here, I read somewhere, leading me to wonder if anyone actually read Sir Walter's novels anymore, especially *Ivanhoe*.

English Heritage had dozens of informational plaques scattered about and my favourite one informed me that I could walk up to a crumbling stone wall and study the indentations made by musket bullet and cannonballs in days gone by.

I also climbed up the turret on a steep circular stone staircase that reminded me of a model of DNA I once made for a science fair back in the sixth grade.

The higher I went, the grander the view and there is something about the smell of damp stone stairs where feet have trod for hundreds of years that triggers a feeling of awe that I can't quite explain.

At one of the highest narrow windows along the staircase I came across a pure white pigeon and, as I paused to catch my breath, she looked me in the eye and, through what I can only suggest is telepathy, told me that she was once a beautiful woman who had thrived here several centuries ago and now that she was reincarnated as a bird, she remained here in the turret so she could soar above the ruins each day and keep an eye on things. And then she flew off to survey the site of her former home from great heights.



Back at ground level, the three of us (yes, dogs are allowed on the grounds of ruins) walked through roofless halls with green grass growing where aristocrats once danced and argued and drank claret in great quantities.

On our way back to the car park, the revellers had not relented one bit and, viewing a snatch of a barroom TV, it appeared the game had only just begun.

On one of her morning runs, Linda had come upon a pub called the Queen's Head in Belton, just down the lane from Osgathorpe. I couldn't quite nail down the history except that it was once a

"coaching inn" that turned into a public house. I kept wondering what the various queens of England thought about having pubs named after their heads. But this pub advertised that they "love dogs, and furry friends are welcome both in our bar area and overnight." So, we liked it no matter what its history might be. Linda had seen an announcement on her run that the pub offered a Sunday Roast. And today was Sunday, so we made our way out of rowdy Ashby and drove to the sleepy little burgh of Belton.

In one room of the Queen's Head, there was a massive TV and the football fans were shouting at it enthusiastically, so we found a quiet table outside where we could sit with our dog and enjoy the excellent food. We had roast beef, of course, pan fried potatoes, string beans, carrots and a piece of Yorkshire pudding as big as a baseball catcher's mitt. Even though it was early afternoon (but a bit later wherever the game was being staged) the match was ending. England won 3-1, apparently raising national aspirations of actually winning the World Cup only to be dashed a few days later when overly ambitious Italians whipped the Brits handily.

A side trip to the east finished off our afternoon. First, we drove to Shepshed and then it was on to Loughborough. Eventually, we grew weary of driving around and we retired to our second floor dwelling above the McLaren to sit on the little balcony again, play Canasta, and watch the horses graze on the clover covered fields as the sun went down over the green barley fields of Leicestershire just out our back door.

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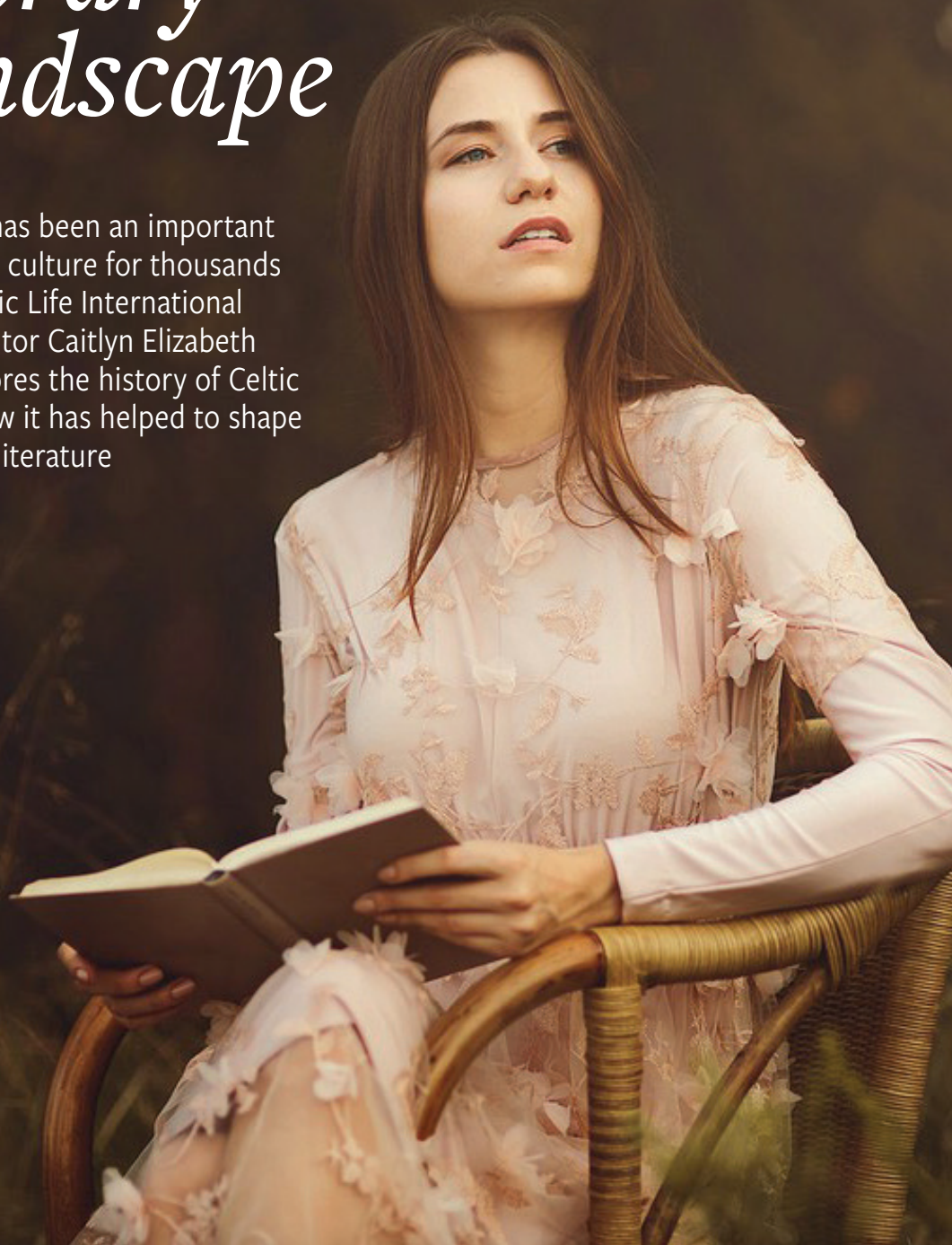


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The Celtic Literary Landscape

Storytelling has been an important part of Celtic culture for thousands of years. Celtic Life International Associate Editor Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns explores the history of Celtic story and how it has helped to shape modern-day literature





There are a bevy of building blocks that comprise a culture. It starts with location, later evolving with language, dialect, and a series of social mores and norms. Then, tiptoeing quietly between society's hierarchies and laws, emerges the presence of art and story.

One could argue that stories are the most crucial component of any given society. Some of the first stories, known today as fairy tales and myths, were created to celebrate and preserve an endangered culture. The Grimm brothers - Germany's scholarly, story collectors - were urged to publish their collection of tales after the French occupied Germany in the early 19th century. Similarly, contemporary authors like Angela Carter and Welshman Philip Pullman have used their craft to remind readers of these mythical anecdotes and, in the process, have shaped and reshaped culture.

Like their Anglo and Germanic neighbours, the seven Celtic nations have a tremendous tradition of tale telling.

THE PAST

Pinpointing the dawn of the Celtic story - and documenting it in 2500 words - would be next to impossible. For thousands of years, long before the printing press or even the invention of a written language, stories were shared orally, passed fluidly from community to community.

Storytellers of ancient Celtic times were considered important pillars of society. In

their travels they shared, collected, and often reworked tales, both old and new. And while it is possible that many of these stories would have picked up themes and elements from their neighbouring countries, the heart of the Celtic story remained distinct. One need only turn to the Book of Kells at Trinity College Library in Dublin, Ireland, as an example of cross-Celtic literary pollination; the work was produced between the 6th and 9th centuries in monasteries in Scotland and Ireland.



Dr. Ranke de Vries



James Joyce

“What makes Celtic literature and storytelling special is the amount of interaction with the supernatural,” explains Dr. Ranke de Vries, an Associate Professor of Celtic Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. “White animals with red ears that come from the Otherworld, or severed heads that burst out singing, women who live under water, that kind of thing.”

Although Dr. de Vries was born in the Netherlands and is mostly of Dutch heritage, it was the compelling nature of Celtic storytelling that became her passion.

“I have absolutely no Celtic heritage at all - but that doesn’t impact my love for Celtic languages and cultures in any way. I was always interested in the Middle Ages, and I have always loved languages and stories - I would devour collections of myths and fairy tales, especially tales of King Arthur (whose legend finds its roots in Celtic stories). In high school, I read a Dutch retelling of an Irish tale, Deirdre and the Sons of Uisneach, reading it over and over again, along with a book of translated medieval Irish saga texts by Maartje Draak, a Dutch Celtic Studies scholar, called *Van helden, elfen, en dichters* (‘Of heroes, elves, and poets’). Then, in my final year of high school, I discovered that Utrecht University in the Netherlands offered courses in medieval Celtic languages, literatures and cultures, particularly Old and Middle Irish and Middle Welsh, and so that is where I went.”

“I loved the beauty of the languages, the challenges in learning them, and the strangeness of the stories.”

Specializing in Medieval Celtic storytelling, Dr. de Vries notes that narrative was crucial to the Celts.

“Stories were intimately connected with history - the boundary between mythology

and history that we draw in the present day was not as clear-cut back then.

“Medieval Irish authors also tell us that the stories were meant as *gairdiugud* - something that both entertains and instructs. We find evidence of the importance of stories from medieval literature itself as well. At the beginning of the *Acallam na Senórach*, ‘The conversation of the Old Men,’ a text from the late 12th or early 13th century, St. Patrick is worried that he might be enjoying the stories he is told about the warrior Finn Mac Cumail (Finn MacCool) a little too much. But then angels come down from heaven who instruct him explicitly to have the tales written down for the sake of posterity.”

She believes the power of a story is only as strong as its storyteller.

“Historically, there were professional and amateur storytellers. The professional storyteller was called a *fili*. The *fili* composed poetry and satire and was supposed to know a certain number of stories, depending on his poetic grade. The word for an amateur poet was *bard* (in contrast, in medieval Wales, *bardd* was the term for a professional poet).

“Poems themselves were incredibly important,” she continues. “Honour and status were of the utmost importance in medieval Irish society as it is depicted in the texts, and so losing your honour or status

was a terrible thing. A poet could destroy a king by writing a satire against him - and it could be restored with praise poetry. This, as one might imagine, is part of what made poets rather powerful, in addition to the fact that they were the keepers of lore and history. Jim Henson’s *The Storyteller*, one of my favourite TV series from the late 1980s, summed it all up quite nicely in the opening: ‘When people told themselves their past with stories, explained their present with stories, foretold the future with stories, the best place by the fire was kept for the storyteller.’”

THE PRESENT

Some of the biggest names in classic and contemporary classic literature - Robbie Burns, Dylan Thomas, William Butler Yeats and Oscar Wilde, to name a few - are of Celtic descent, and were known to share stories of their experiences growing up in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and beyond.

In particular, Dublin-native James Joyce dedicated a number of his works - most famously his short story collection *Dubliners*, and his semi-autobiographical novel *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* - to detailing the daily life of a middle-class creative on the Emerald Isle. Joyce was a prime example of how intrinsically linked Celtic authors are to their homelands and history. As he once said, “When I die, Dublin will be written on my heart.”

The popularity of Celtic literature has not waned in the modern era. Diana Gabaldon’s hit STARZ series *Outlander* has renewed interest in Scottish history and, two years ago, Irish author Anna Burns won the esteemed Man Booker Prize for her novel *Milkman*, a coming-of-age story set during the Irish Troubles.

Award-winning author Colm Toibin also shares Celtic heritage. Born in Enniscorthy, a small town in southeast Ireland, he began writing poems as a teenager before



Kirsty Logan



Colm Toibin

transitioning to prose in his early 20s. By the age of 25, the scribe was already working on his debut narrative, *The South*, the first in a long line of literary triumphs. His 2009 book, *Brooklyn*, later became a feature film starring Irish actress Saoirse Ronan.

Toibin believes that the concept of Celtic literature has grown much more nuanced in the modern world.

"In Ireland, when I was growing up, we read a great deal of English, American and European fiction and poetry. It was only through reading Yeats that I came to Celtic literature. I love some of those stories now, especially 'The Tain' and 'The Children of Lir.' But I think writers go their own way, and some Irish writers are not influenced by Celtic literature at all. In others - for example Flann O'Brien, Patrick McCabe, Kevin Barry - you can see a comic tradition at work.

"Stories have a way of striking inspiration for new stories."

"From about the year 1900, new translations began to appear of the old stories that had moved from a purely oral tradition to the written form courtesy of the early Christian monks. These translations were made by figures like Lady Gregory and Douglas Hyde, and then later by poets such as Thomas Kinsella and Ciaran Carson. They are vivid and alive, and exciting and fresh."

Kirsty Logan - a Scotland-born author of two novels and three short story collections rooted in Celtic folklore and mythology - shares that her home country has had a huge influence on her writing.

"So much of Scottish culture is water-based," she explains. "Glasgow isn't by the sea, but it has a strong history of shipbuilding - the U.S. still buys old ships that were built on the Clyde river by Glasgow's shipbuilders, because they are so good. I love Scottish mythology and folktales, and many of those stories - selkies, kelpies, mermaids - are

based on the sea. On a map, Scotland is a very craggy country, with many small islands off its north and west coasts, so there is a great connection to the sea. To give you a sense of it, England has over 5,000 miles of coastline - but mainland Scotland, despite being much smaller, has over 6,000 miles, or over 10,000 miles if you include the islands. And that's not even mentioning all the lochs. As Angela Carter put it, 'I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the bottles explode.' That's what I want to do with my stories too. And in Scotland, you can't help being influenced by the sea. Scottish writers are connected to our mythology and our landscape in a way that can be difficult to understand if you haven't grown up with it."

THE FUTURE

It isn't just scholars and authors who take interest in Celtic literature and story - readers are asking for it too. Some of the



most popular books and literary franchises in the world today have distinct connection to stories from ancient Celtic times. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* spin-off, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, includes a beast-like creature that is not unlike the Scottish Kelpie; and many fantasy narratives - from the popular *Young Adult* series *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Sarah J. Maas to Holly Black's slightly more sophisticated *The Folk of the Air Series* - include faerie-like characters, which were made popular in Ireland. Even Australian author Hannah Kent has tried her hand at Celtic storytelling with her 2016 release *Good People*, which documented the real-life murder of a young boy in the 19th century who was said to be a changeling.

Dr. de Vries believes that every bit helps to preserve the past.

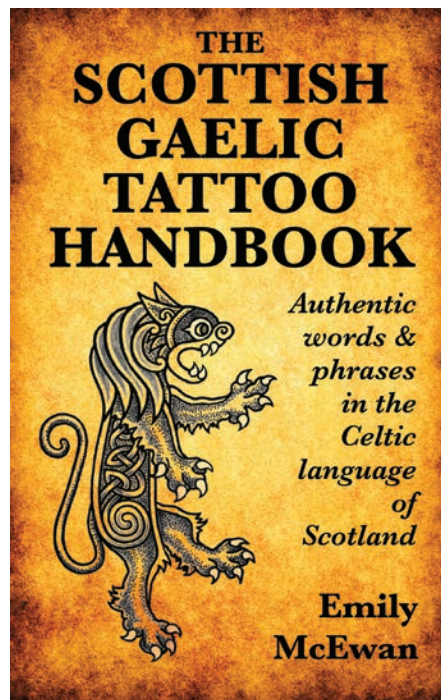
"While the practice of storytelling has changed over time, it has continued up to the present day in many Celtic speaking countries."

Beyond books and TV series, festivals and government-funded organizations work to support the perpetuation of Celtic culture and story.

"Here in Nova Scotia, there is a lot being done; stories - learning them, understanding them, and telling them - form an important part of Gaelic (or Gàidhlig) language instruction, and we are very lucky to have the Gaelic Affairs Office, which works tirelessly to promote the Gaelic language and culture. They have a number of mentoring programs, including a program for youth called *Na Gaisgich Òga* that runs in conjunction with the Gaelic College in St. Ann's, Cape Breton. There are also language immersion programs and weekends, and several popular festivals in Cape Breton in the summer and autumn, including *Kitchenfest* and *Celtic Colours*. Locally, there is a lot of music, and people hold impromptu *cèilidhs* and take informal language courses. Most crucially, children here can choose to learn Gaelic as a language in school, which also includes studying cultural customs and tales.

"We have Dr. Heather Sparling at Cape Breton University leading the *Language in Lyrics* project, which aims to create a database of Gaelic songs in Nova Scotia. And then of course various universities in Nova Scotia offer Celtic content; at St. Francis Xavier University, the Celtic Studies Department offers a variety of courses on both medieval and modern Gaelic language,

literature, and culture to undergraduate and graduate students, and there are Celtic-related courses at Cape Breton University, while there are courses in Irish language,



history and culture offered at St. Mary's University."

Dr. de Vries also notes that there are several educational websites that contain recordings of stories and songs, like Gael

Stream (Sruth nan Gàidheal) at St. Francis Xavier University, An Drochaid Eadarainn and Caint mo Mhàthar, which was initiated by the Nova Scotia Highland Village Society and is in collaboration with other organizations like Comhairle na Gàidhlig (The Gaelic Council of Nova Scotia). While Dr. de Vries is impressed with the efforts of the province's education system, she admits that there is more work to be done.

"It would be great if governments learn to see the value of fostering the various cultures present in their countries to stimulate these cultures," continues Ranke. "One example of that might be the establishment of immersion schools here, like you have in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, as in my opinion, knowledge of the language is necessary to truly understand the culture. The languages are beautiful, and they deserve to be studied. The other thing is that people need to want to learn the languages and use them in everyday life. If they don't, the languages will die, and that would be devastating to the culture. Last summer, I was in Bangor in Wales for a conference. It was really heartening to hear teenagers casually chatting in Welsh and using it daily."

Being that future of Celtic literature is dependant on the existence of a traditional language - Gaelic, Irish, Welsh, and so on - Dr. de Vries does have concerns.

"Some of the Celtic languages are in danger of disappearing, and that would be a disaster. But then you see popular books or TV series that use Celtic languages to an

extent, like Outlander, and that might give the field a boost again and encourage people to find out more. While I am not worried that the various Celtic peoples - and people who identify as Irish or Scottish, etc. - will stop celebrating their respective cultures, I am very worried about the languages themselves."



For Colm Toibin, however, the future is clear.

"Good books find good readers," he says. "The best thing is not to force these texts on anyone. They have lasted for thousands of years, and so it will go on."



“A VERY IMPORTANT AND POWERFUL READ FULL OF HOPE AND LOVE AND MUSIC.”

–Sheldon Kennedy, CM, AOE, OM, sexual abuse awareness advocate and former NHL hockey player



“For Séan McCann celebrity was, for decades, a disguise, the rock-star lifestyle a performance, all crafted to conceal a shocking secret. His story is a cautionary “backstage pass” into the reality of self-destruction but, maybe more important, the healing power of honesty.”

–Linden MacIntyre, Giller Prize-winning author of *The Bishop’s Man* and *The Wake*

“I read this book in one sitting. Getting two perspectives on the trauma of abuse, the challenges of addiction, and the journey of recovery is both riveting and valuable. This story is harrowing and honest with touches of humour, but ultimately, it’s hopeful.”

–Joel Plaskett, songwriter

ONE GOOD REASON [\$29.95] is a powerful memoir co-written by the founder of Great Big Sea and his wife, exploring alcoholism, childhood abuse, and the fight to save their marriage, family, and themselves

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One Good Reason

*Singer/Songwriter Séan McCann
shines with his best work yet*

Originally known as “The Shanty Man” of the Newfoundland-based musical trio Great Big Sea, singer/songwriter Séan McCann left the band in 2015 to pursue a solo career, later releasing four full-length albums, including his most recent effort *There’s a Place*. McCann also became an advocate for addictions and mental health issues after opening up about his own history with alcoholism and sexual assault. Recently, the 52-year-old, alongside his wife Andrea Aragon, caught up with Celtic Life International Associate Editor Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns from their home in Ottawa to discuss their upcoming memoir, *One Good Reason: A Memoir of Addition and Recovery, Love and Music*.

What are your roots?

Séan McCann: I am a McCann from County Armagh, Northern Ireland, so I am pretty much a potato - Irish-Catholic, all through and through. Though, I suppose it could be argued that, on my mother's side, before they converted to Catholicism about 100 years ago, they were English-Irish.

Andrea Aragon: I was born in Ogden, Utah. I am American, but my heritage is Italian on my mom's side and English, American Indian, Mexican, and Spanish on my dad's side. So definitely not Celtic, ha!

What inspired you to become involved in music and mental health advocacy?

SM: I grew up in Newfoundland, in an area where music was very prominent. I was singing before I could talk, really. And then of course, when I got through high school and went to university, I went to St. John's - and St. John's is the party capital of Canada with more pubs per capita than anywhere else in North America. The great thing about those pubs is that they have such a high calibre of talent, and it was cheap to see them. I had a job as a busboy but decided that I would make more money if I was in a band.

AA: I am an advocate for my family, and anything I have done within mental health has truly been because of Séan. Not only through the journey of his addiction, but everything that he has done since leaving Great Big Sea. I remember during that time - a tenuous time in our life - thinking that we were about to do his best work yet. I knew that he had done a lot of great work with Great Big Sea, and that it had touched a lot of people, but I knew that whatever he did after that was going to be the most important work that he had ever done in his life, and that it was going to be his true legacy.

Tell me about your time with Great Big Sea.

SM: Great Big Sea was a great place to hide as an alcoholic. It allowed me to not face my truth and live in denial. And I was living the lifestyle for 20-plus years. I was the "Shanty Man" in Great Big Sea, I was the screamer. It was a lifestyle, a character, but it didn't really represent who I was. But people wanted to drink all night with the lads

from Newfoundland - they wanted to drink with the Shanty Man! We went to work everyday and there was always drinking around, both before and after work. But for me, it wasn't just an act: I was really trying to be that person, and it almost killed me.

You continued to work as a musician after leaving the band.

SM: Music stayed a friend to me. I had lost a lot of friends after making the decision to leave. I had my family, of course, but I was very much alone during that time and music was there for me. It helped me in my recovery, and it gave me a new language, showed me true voice. It led me to the advocacy I do now. Music, for me, was always about facing your truth, and bringing it to people who are in crisis and need help. People drink and use drugs for a reason, and music is a great way to get to those reasons.

What inspired One Good Reason?

SM: When I sobered up and started on a recovery path, I was invited to speak about where I was, and why I did what I did, at a lot of conferences and conventions. I always brought my guitar with me and played songs. But people started to come up to me and disclose their secrets, or tell me that they, too, were trying to recover. They were very emotional and meaningful exchanges. On top of that, they were always asking me to write a book, which I was reluctant to do. I have always taken big stories and turned them into songs, and so it took me a long time to write my sections of the book. When I read it after first completing it, I found it kind of one-sided. Then Andrea noted that she had been keeping journals her entire life, and that she had the same stories I was telling in my book but with her own perspective. Once she showed me them, I was blown away. I was a victim of alcoholism, but this was her own victim statement of living with an alcoholic.

AA: What happened to Séan while he wasn't sober didn't happen in a vacuum. It happened to me and, as a result, our family. I think that is a universal story with families who are living with an addict, or someone in recovery. It was important for me to show the pain and heartache, but also show the other side of that - to show what can be, if one puts in the work and energy and keeps at it. I wanted to detail how hard it was when we were in the weeds of all, but that getting to the other side was so very

worth it. And I wanted to show people that they were not alone, and that somebody understands. I wanted it to be accessible to everyone. In the book I say, "I know you have a story - everyone has a story."

That must have been very challenging.

SM: I knew during writing my side of the book that I was not painting myself in the best light as an alcoholic and an addict. The big decision I had to make was did I want to share how big of an asshole I was to the entire world? I chose to do that. It was true. I don't remember a lot of it, but I believe Andrea. I believe it was a true. I didn't get to cherry-pick what bits of me I showed, and when we opened the door to Andrea's voice, we really got to do that. That is the point of the book.

AA: When I was reading my side of the story, there were parts I wrote about that I knew Séan wouldn't remember. There would be no way he could have because of how drunk he was. To hear how those moments would hurt me, I felt would probably be hurtful for him. That was very difficult.

What were the rewards?

SM: During this whole process, there has been a lot of pressure. But we are nearly at the end, and recently I sat down and read the whole thing and I found it powerful. I have been in the arts for a long time, and I think I have a real eye and an ear for this stuff. I am always listening for impact, for something that moves me on an emotional level. When it comes to art, you only really remember that which affected you - and I believe that this book will have a great emotional impact on people. It was a lot of work, but I know we will be successful in this. Our hope is that this book could change lives, and I believe it has the potential to do that. That makes me feel good, like it was all worth it.

AA: Writing the book brought us very close. In our daily lives, we are busy: we have two boys, 14 and 11, and things are just go, go, go all the time. Writing this book forced us to communicate - sometimes difficult communication - but it was more than we had connected with each other in our entire lives. I like my husband! Of course, I love him, but I like him as a person. I like hanging out with him. I have grown to become good friends with Séan, and I think that was the biggest take away for me.

How much research was involved?

AA: There was so much research! I had to talk to my parents about my family's history. I really did a deep dive into their background. I wanted to dig in and make sure all the facts were correct. I, of course, had the journals, but I had to make sure that everything was in line and not just how I, at 14 years old, had experienced it. There was a lot of research for me on my family's side, which was not really something I wanted to do, but I knew that I had to.

SM: I had the same experience. I had to dig back and discover more about the story of my great-great uncle, who was the Bishop of the church. A big part of the book is about the intergenerational trauma that can be caused by religious indoctrination. I believe that is a big reason why what happened to me happened. It was several hundred years of conditioning of the Catholic church. I learned several interesting things that I wanted to bring to light, especially about the Bishop, but I found that many people didn't want to talk about what went on - and they still don't. There are a lot of secrets in my family that will remain secrets. I believe my parents had many of the same experiences as me in the church, but they are not ready to talk about it. My hope is that the book speaks to that and opens people's eyes to what those dangers really are.

Why is it an important book, especially right now?

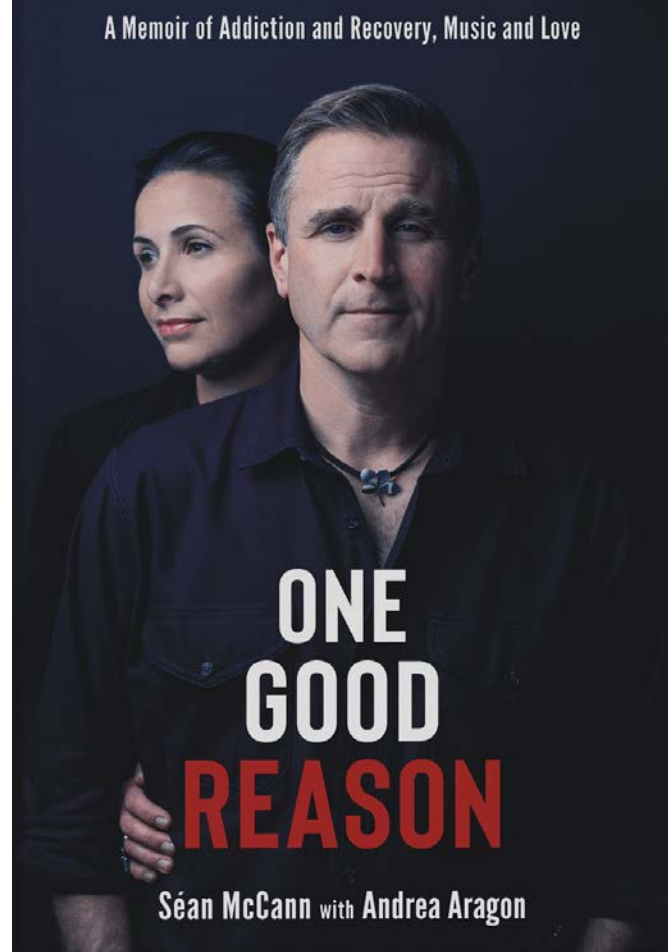
SM: We have made some great strides in the world with the #MeToo movement, and we are more open to discussing mental health issues and emotional trauma than ever before. There has been a massive campaign to destigmatize conversations around sexual violence. We are simply reminding people that it is okay to go somewhere to talk about what they are going through. Of course, this presumes that there is some place for them to go to. The reality is that the hospitals are overwhelmed, because we don't have enough places. Hopefully this book will help provide people with a bit of a blueprint to help them in the interim, while they are awaiting professional help - "Here's what I did; maybe it will work for you!" And even though we have made these great strides, we shouldn't take any of it for granted - especially with religion. Indoctrination is subtle and slow-moving, but it is effective, and we need to be careful.

AA: The reason of "why now?" is, for me, because we live in an age of loneliness and social media. Social media is supposed to pull us together, but for many of us, it makes us feel so alone. People need to have others around them who understand how they are feeling and what they are going through, even if it is just to tell them that they are not alone.

How did it feel when the book was finished?

SM: Just like with life, the work is never done. But we do have our families out there, who will be personally affected by this story. We can't tell the story without them. They were at the table. My parents are not happy about this book, they would have preferred I never wrote it - which is hurtful. It is a form of non-support that is difficult to deal with. Ultimately it is not my right to tell them how to feel, but it is my right to share my story.

AA: At first it was like, "Oh, good, we're done!" But then it was like, "Oh, crap! What did I just do?" I am about to see my father to have



a real, honest conversation about some of the things I discuss in the book. My father is an alcoholic, but he has never heard me call him that before reading this book. And similarly, for Séan, he had never heard how his behaviours affected me. I told him that if I was going to do this, I needed to tell my whole truth. So, while the process was cathartic, I am still having moments of trepidation. Then, of course, there are just all kinds of self-doubt that comes along with writing a book.

Who else has read the book?

SM: I have only given the book to one person and that was (Nova Scotia musician) Joel Plaskett, who really loved it. He is a good friend of mine, and I have trusted him with my records and with my story. His opinions really count, and I knew he would tell me the truth. And he read it right away in one sitting. He said, "I couldn't put it down. This book is powerful." That is the only review I have outside of my parents, who were not so effusive.

What's next on your agenda?

SM: That is yet to be seen. If the book resonates, the two of us will be on stage, hopefully, doing readings or whatever happens with authors. We will do our best to promote this message and spread information about the book. I don't really want to get into a tour bus with 10 dudes anymore, but I love speaking to people about my story. I always bring my guitar and sing and share music with people. It is like a musical keynote speech. That is all I really want to do now. I just want to help people because it helps me.

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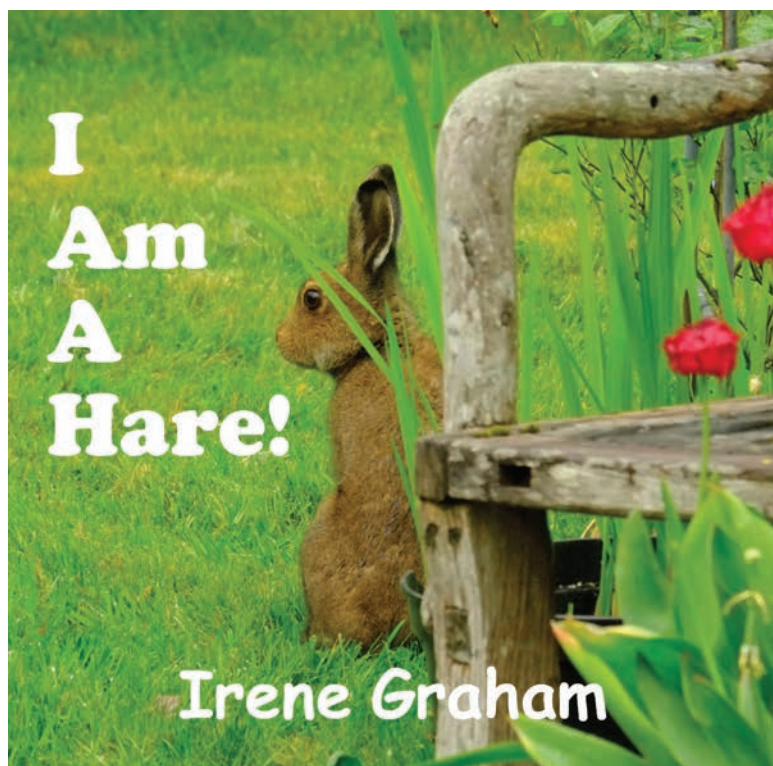
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Creative Writer's Workshop

*One Irish writer
Irene Graham
shares her wonder
for words*

In 1991, after graduating from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and returning to her home in Ireland, writer Irene Graham launched the Creative Writer's Workshop, a series of seminars designed to support the creative flow of both established and emerging scribes using "right-brain/left-brain" learning techniques.

"Initially the workshop was an after-school program for 11 to 13-year-olds," she explains via email from her home in Kinvara, Co. Galway. "It was held over a six-week period. The children loved it so much that the program continued for three years. During that time, I also taught a Fiction Writing Workshop to 16-year-olds in schools, and another workshop for adults."

"While the teaching of creative writing was a common part of English degrees in the U.S., this was not the case in Ireland at that time."

In 2005, workshoping turned from a part-time side gig into Graham's full-time profession.

"I am also a professional photographer, but when that career slowed down due to the introduction of digital photography, I shifted my focus to the workshop. I decided to branch out and see if it could become a full-time career, and I started teaching it as a week-long residential class on Inis Mór Island, the largest of the Aran Islands, off the coast of Galway."

Since its inception, Graham's core mandate has remained the same: "To facilitate the understanding of the creation of story, using right-brain/left-brain learning techniques, for new, emerging and advanced

writers, from all walks of life."

The Creative Writer's Workshop currently offers a variety of programs both in-person and online, including writing workshops and retreats, private writing and coaching sessions, creative writing and marketing courses, and more.

Her approach, she explains, is unique compared to other courses currently on the market.

"My workshops are based on the creation of story. I come from the principle that if someone cannot create story, they will never be able to complete a novel or a memoir. Understanding story is key to writing creatively. I don't run a huge organization. I prefer to keep a personal touch, so that each writer receives the input they need to gain a deeper perspective on their story."

In addition to fiction writing, Graham has recently added workshops and classes on memoir writing.

"I realized that memoir writing was quickly becoming a genre in its own right. Up until recently it was mostly celebrities and political figures that composed autobiographies. However, this new genre of memoir encouraged people on the street to write their life experiences. I soon set about developing a memoir writing workshop, based on the same techniques I had used over the previous 14 years of fiction workshops. Over the following two years my residential memoir writing retreats were filled with a new genre of writers."

Although Graham admits that a vocation of this kind is filled with many challenges - most notably, time management - she be-

lieves the rewards make it all worthwhile.

"It is the satisfaction of helping people turn the experiences of their lives, either through imagination or truth, into story."

*"My passion is to help people
leave at least a small part of their
lives in print to ensure their stories
not be lost."*

In 2007, Graham released *The Memoir Writing Workbook*, a 200-page text that works in tandem with her online, 12-week courses and workshops.

"The book focuses on my writing techniques and on how to write memoir. The President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, kindly launched it in the National Library of Ireland. Thirty years on from the seeds of my original workshop, I am honoured that so many writers, from all over the world, find me, attend my workshops and online courses, share their stories with me, and complete their books."

Graham has since released her second publication *I am A Hare!* Hanna and The Hop Family, a children's book which launched in February 2020.

"Now, I just want to continue doing what I do - go deeper each day into the creation of story. What is so wonderful about writing, is that, as Hemingway said, 'We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.' I agree. That is writing. That is story."

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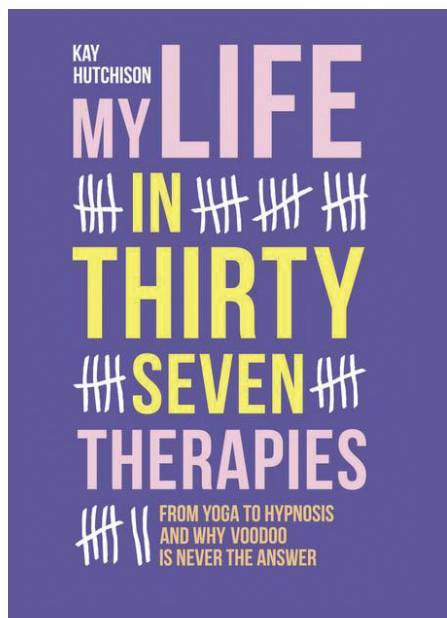
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*Kay Hutchison
connects with her
debut memoir*

Scottish author Kay Hutchison was born and raised in Greenock, a small town located along the beautiful River Clyde in the west of Scotland.

"That river was important in my upbringing," she tells Celtic Life International via email from her current residence in Tunbridge Wells, Kent. "My father was a captain - 'Hurricane Hutch.' Originally, he was 'deep sea,' meaning he sailed all around the world, but he came back to work as the main ferry operator on the West Coast after I was born. He spent most of his time on the ships and ferries, and I spent quite a lot of my childhood on boats visiting towns across the water in the Clyde Estuary and on holiday on islands in the Outer Hebrides."

After working for several years as a radio producer for BBC World Service and for various TV programs, Hutchison opted to pursue a literary career.

"I founded my own small independent publishing company, Belle Kids, which mainly publishes children's books, games and audiobooks. It was after launching that business that I began thinking about writing my own book."

Soon after, the budding novelist joined Arvon, a writing retreat run by acclaimed author Mavis Cheek.

"I felt inspired to get cracking and not waste any more time just thinking about it."

Her first book, *My Life in 37 Therapies*, was recently published by Red Door in October. Likened to Elizabeth Gilbert's award-winning debut *Eat, Pray, Love*, the work details her personal journey through - as the title suggests - 37 alternative forms of therapy.

"The book was inspired by three things: a mid-life crisis when everything suddenly fell apart; a love and fascination with therapies and how they can help one through difficult times and, most importantly, my vivid memories of childhood, growing up in Scotland and how my Scottish Presbyterian upbringing affected my outlook, my choices, indeed my whole direction in life."

She notes that writing a good book is all about creating a connection.

"A writer needs to express something that makes the reader recall or compare their own experiences or makes them laugh or cry. That's what matters."

Although the project dealt mostly with her own experiences and memories, Hutchison admits the process was more challenging, and required more research, than she originally anticipated.

"When I started working with my editor, she asked some straightforward questions and I realized I had forgotten much of the detail. Re-telling profoundly personal stories about losing my mother, my husband being diagnosed and treated for cancer, and the difficulties my father experienced living alone after an amazing working life as a captain, was incredibly difficult. However, I was soon able to fill in the missing pieces and, as the story came together, I rediscovered all that I had learned about therapies and therapists during a period of some six years.

The story does have a light side - I inherited this from my parents and I am so grateful. People tell me the story is sad, but also joyful and funny."

The process was extremely rewarding, and the book has received both critical and popular acclaim.

"There are many people who have posted positive reviews, and some contacted me personally with their comments. The story seems to resonate with many people, mostly, but not exclusively, women. I am still receiving feedback about parts in the book, often about my childhood, that remind readers of their own childhood. This makes me feel that all the effort was worthwhile."

Hutchison is currently working on her second book, an untitled follow-up to *My Life in 37 Therapies*, which will focus more on her learnings over the last few years. Her hope is that both books help their readers.

"If it is an important work, it will be because it resonates with people, especially women, or those who were brought up in the same culture, with the same norms, in the same era. Of course, it is just my experience and what happened to me, but so many friends and readers far and wide, young as well as middle-aged say they felt the same as girls growing up. It is quite a different world now but, at the end of the day, it is all about making a connection."

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The Celtic Bookshop

Celtic Life International Associate Editor Caitlyn Mearns lists some legendary literary locales



Quirky, quaint and (usually) quiet, bookshops are a welcome respite from the busy hustle and bustle of everyday life. If you are cruising any of the Celtic nations, be sure to pop into these spots and peruse the shelves.



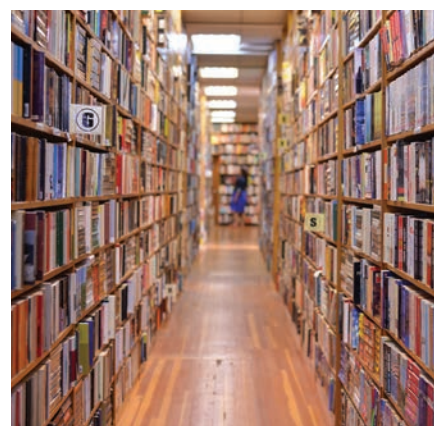
The Edinburgh Bookshop
Bruntsfield, Edinburgh, Scotland
www.edinburghbookshop.com

While there is no shortage of great bookshops in Scotland, one store you won't want to miss is the Edinburgh Bookshop. Described by *The Guardian* as “the kind of bookshop we'd all like to have in our neighbourhood,” the literary locale has been serving both the residents and visitors of Bruntsfield, Edinburgh for over 13 years. Complete with a dedicated staff of four, the cozy, independent book retailer is home to a variety of genres and stories, including both classic novels and contemporary works. Their vast selection of titles and hands-on help from staff won them the Scottish Independent Bookshop of the year award in 2018. The store also operates as a venue for bookish events, including story time sessions for children under five, writer's workshops, book clubs, and author signings with some of the biggest names in the business.



Charlie Byrne's Bookshop
Galway, Ireland
www.charliebyrne.ie

Charlie Byrne's Bookshop is a literal “book-lover's dream,” with its winding aisles and books stacked right to the ceiling. First opened in 1989 as a market stall on Galway's Munster Avenue, its popularity forced a relocation to a permanent location in the Corner Store Mall in 1996. Today, the beloved space is home to a wide variety of titles, both new and used, and hosts a huge selection of antiquarian titles and children's books. Considered one of Ireland's “culture centers,” the bookshop serves up several services to their customers, including events and launches, discounts for select donated books, book curation, and more. In addition to their regular storefront, staff also operates from a pop-up location that supports Galway's Cúirt International Festival of Literature each Spring.



An Ceathrú Póilí
Belfast, Northern Ireland
www.anceathrupoili.com

The An Ceathrú Póilí (The Four Policemen) bookshop has one core mandate: to preserve and promote Irish culture and language. Established nearly 35 years ago, the independent bookshop carries a fine variety of new and used Irish language and Irish-interest books, including everything from children's classics and novels to teaching resources and texts on local history. Located in Belfast's Gaeltacht Quarter, the locale is considered more than a bookshop, and is described on their website as a “welcoming hub” for readers, craftspeople, and music lovers alike. In addition to their strong selection of books, the shop also carries CDs and DVDs, as well as art and decorations. In addition to their brick-and-mortar store, An Ceathrú Póilí also maintains a strong online presence with their e-store and blog, where they share a variety of content, from book event promotion to book launch celebrations and public education.



Cover to Cover

Mumbles, Swansea, Wales

www.cover-to-cover.co.uk

As Swansea's sole independent bookshop, Cover to Cover is a must for those traversing the breathtaking coasts of Wales. Established in 1999, this small, quaint literary outpost offers visitors a broad selection of hand-picked titles, with sections dedicated to contemporary literature, children's classics, general nonfiction, and more. A specialty shop at heart, the business prides itself on its local interest section, which houses a variety of titles relating to Welsh history and music. Between the hustle and bustle of being a busy retailer, the shop also organizes community events, including book signings, author talks, themed book groups, and other happenings. To top it all off, Cover to Cover was unsurprisingly the recipient of the 2019 Wales Regional Independent Bookshop Award at the annual British Book Awards.



The Edge of the World Bookshop

Penzance, Cornwall

www.edgeoftheworldbookshop.co.uk

The best adjective to describe The Edge of the World Bookshop is 'quirky.' Located in Penzance, Cornwall (literally the edge of Britain), the beloved literary locale is a one-stop bookish shop. Calling in customers with its clever name and bright blue storefront, the facility carries everything from classic texts to more contemporary works. Staff works diligently with local creatives to

carry both a variety of titles native to Cornwall, as well as a selection of consignment titles from self-published authors. The fun doesn't end there, though; in addition to the books, The Edge of the World Bookshop also carries novelty items such as t-shirts and book-themed mugs. As the official bookseller for the Penzance Litfest, the shop is no stranger to event planning, and welcomes customers to community events and author signings throughout the year.



Lexicon Books

Douglas, Isle of Man

www.lexiconbookshop.co.im

Founded in 1936, Lexicon Books is Isle of Man's oldest independent bookseller, known for its friendly staff and relaxing environment. A proud staple of Douglas's downtown core, the shop carries a wide assortment of titles, with sections in biography, culture and folklore, classic and contemporary fiction, children's favorites, and more. They even have a corner dedicated to some of the IOM's favorite pastimes - road racing and motorsport. Book lovers and tourists will find a common ground here, as the shop not only carries a litany of literary items, but an entire inventory of souvenirs as well. Stock rotates throughout the year - much of which has been handcrafted on location - and includes everything from puzzles and coins to home décor and Celtic giftware.



L'Encre de Bretagne

Rennes, Brittany

www.encredebretagne.bzh

Although located in Brittany, L'Encre de Bretagne (roughly translated to English as

The Ink of Brittany) specializes in more than just books from Bretagne. Established in 2003 in Rennes's beautiful downtown, the independent retailer carries titles from all over the world, with a special emphasis on titles from the Celtic countries, including Asturia. Housing both new and used texts, the shop shelves books in archeology, art, literature, social sciences and more. The site is also a musical hot spot and is home to hundreds of CDs - both new and used - from popular Celtic musical artists. When not selling books, the store's dedicated team opens their doors to the public for community events such as author signings and group readings, often inviting in a rotation of popular Celtic authors and musicians.



Libreria Follas Novas

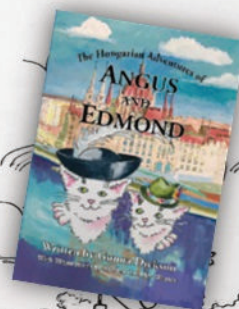
Santiago de Compostela, Galicia

www.follasnovas.com/es/quienes-somos

The Libreria Follas Novas (The New Sheet Bookshop) is a store with a story. Founded by three priests in the winter of 1971, the bookstore originally operated out of a university. However, after a few years in business, one of the owners shifted his focus away from his religious responsibilities to help grow the bookstore, eventually leaving the shop to his brother. Today, Libreria Follas Novas is one of Santiago's largest bookstores, growing from its original 95-square-meter space to 750 square meters in the city's downtown. The shop carries all the usual subjects - books on art, history, literature and language - as well as sections on economics and business, sociology, self-help and well being, and more. The pinnacle of the store, however, is its large selection of titles related to the Camino de Santiago, the popular pilgrimage that welcomes thousands of people each year.

CULTURED CATS

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—Katie Walsh, *Los Angeles Times*

"The film has energy and spirit, thanks to
Cox's bright, charming performance."

—Rex Reed, *Observer*

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cover-to-cover with
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literature

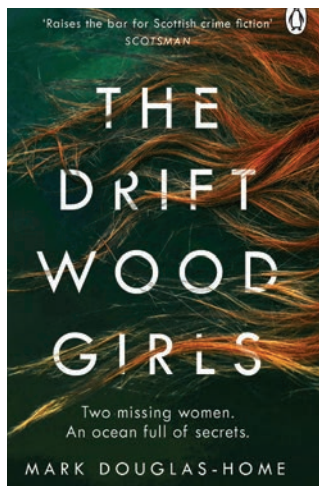
The Celts are renowned for their telling of tall tales, and the ancient art of storytelling is alive and well across the seven Celtic nations in the 21st century. Here are a few recent titles that will engage, entertain and educate readers of all ages.



The Ninth Child

Sally Magnusson / Two Roads Publishing / 336 pages

Two years after the release of her debut novel *The Sealwoman's Gift*, Scottish author and broadcaster Sally Magnusson returns to fiction with her sophomore effort, *The Ninth Child*. Set in 1856 against the wilds of Loch Katrine, the narrative follows young Isabel Aid who, after suffering a series of traumatic miscarriages and conceding to a childless life, finds comfort in the Scottish Highlands while searching for renewed meaning. As the world around her begins to crumble amidst the advent of the 19th-century industrial revolution - a vocation that keeps her husband away for most of the day - Isabel begins to feel that someone might be watching her. Described as "spellbinding" and "heart-pounding," *The Ninth Child* weaves and winds its way through Scotland's history and folklore, shining a much-needed light on the gender inequalities of Victorian-era Scotland.



The Driftwood Girls

Mark Douglas-Home
Penguin / 334 pages

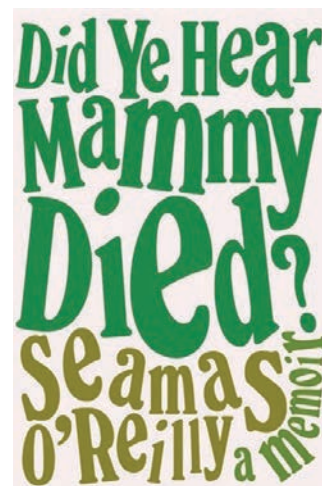
Scottish journalist-turned-author Mark Douglas-Home returns with the fourth installment of *The Sea Detective* book series, which follows Cal McGill, the titular "Sea Detective" known for his ability to find things - and, more importantly, people - lost in the torrid tides of the Northern Sea. In this edition of the beloved series, Cal investigates the disappearance of mother and daughter, Christina and Flora Tolmie, who went missing 23 years apart. Contacted by Christina's other daughter Kate, Cal is pulled head-first into a dark, spiralling family mystery that hits "closer to home" than he ever imagined. Heralded as one of Scotland's leading authors in crime fiction, Douglas-Home offers up another terrific tale filled with twists and turns - one that has already received over 50 five-star reviews on Good Reads and a shoutout from British-Irish TV presenter Dermot O'Leary.



The Island Child

Molly Aitken
Canongate Books Ltd
320 pages

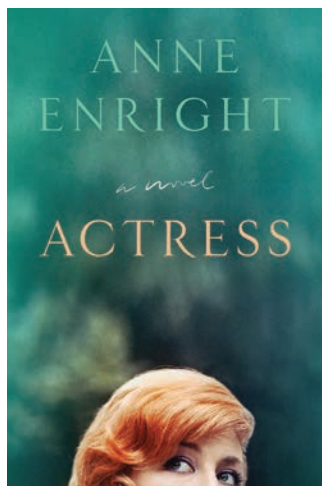
Author Molly Aitken starts her career off with a splash with the release of *The Island Child*, her debut narrative that has *The Bookseller* calling her one of Ireland's most "hotly tipped" new authors for 2020. Set on the isle of Inis in a remote fishing village, the novel breaks into two storylines: first, a harrowing look at a young girl living on the island with all its darkly-antiquated stories and traditions and, secondly, the tale of a woman named Ona and her efforts to escape the life she left behind. Described as a story about the "blood in marriage and motherhood" and the price paid for disingenuous love, Aitken reimagines some of the oldest stories in Irish folklore, while breathing new life into discussions of identity, freedom, and the power of plot.



Did Ye Hear Mammy Died? A Memoir

Seamas O'Reilly / Hatchett Book Group / 304 pages

Although columnist Seamas O'Reilly's memoir *Did Ye Hear Mammy Died?* deals with some heavy subject matter, it is both heartwarming and humorous. With honesty and homespun wit, O'Reilly documents the years following the sudden death of his mother when he, then just five years old, was left to live with his 10 siblings under the parentage of an unstable father. Set in Northern Ireland near the end of the Troubles, the memoir details the everyday happenings of the O'Reilly clan as they learn to cook, clean and care for themselves. O'Reilly also highlights the reality of living as a child during the region's tumultuous times, sharing difficult memories, including one incident where the windows of his family home were blown out by an IRA bomb. Inspired and intriguing, the work is an important look at the Northern Irish experience.



Actress

Anne Enright / W. W. Norton Company / 265 pages

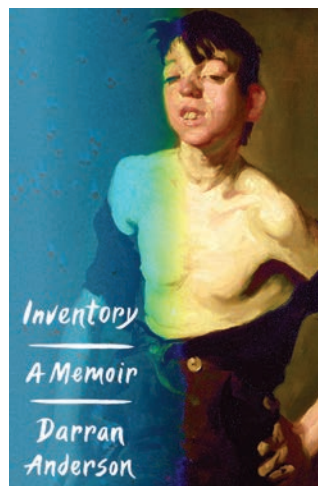
If there is one book on this list that is generating tons of buzz, it is Anne Enright's latest effort, *Actress*. No stranger to the world of literary fiction, the award-winning Irish novelist returns with another tragic tale, this time following Eire actress Katherine O'Dell and her daughter Nora. Told through the eyes of Nora, the story dives deep in the eccentric and carefree life of an artist, showcasing the emotional impact that the lifestyle has upon those around them. Jumping seamlessly from past to present, the narrative recounts Katherine's early days in Ireland, following her all the way to Hollywood, where the harsh realities of stardom - drugs, alcohol and, eventually, a terrible crime - take hold. Already shortlisted for the 2020 Women's Prize for Fiction, Enright's newest novel is sure to impress readers.



Exciting Times

Naoise Dolan / Ecco Press 256 pages

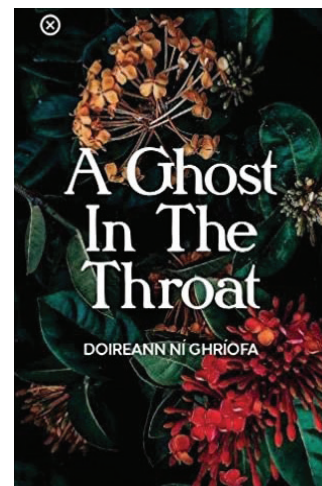
Another debut author getting a lot of attention this year is Irish writer Naoise Dolan, whose novel, *Exciting Times*, has received shout-outs from several notable publications, including *Cosmopolitan* and *The Irish Examiner*. Covering culture, sexuality, and other timely topics, *Exciting Times* follows Ava, a young Irish expat living in Hong Kong. Employed as an English grammar teacher, Ava searches for both happiness and love, eventually meeting Julian, a handsome English banker. The two are soon swept up in a steamy romance before he is called home to London for work. It is then that Ava meets Edith, a young and attractive lawyer who catches Ava's curious eye. Playing with the love-triangle trope, and written with wit and intention, *Exciting Times* is a stirring work that is "attuned to great freedoms and greater uncertainties of modern love."



Inventory: A Memoir

Darran Anderson / Straus and Giroux / 416 pages

Irish essayist Darran Anderson returns with a powerful and poignant look into the past. *Inventory: A Memoir* details the scribe's painful family saga, exploring the emotional intricacies of the men in his life. The work examines his grandfather's call to duty during WWII, and the author's own experiences during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, including an incident that almost took his father's life. Having distanced himself from his home in Derry as a young man, Anderson is pulled back to Northern Ireland when his cousin goes missing. Searching desperately along the deep, dark Foyle River - also the location of his grandparents' untimely demise - Anderson shares both his personal memories, as well as the truths he uncovers along the winding waters. By turns tender and tough, *Inventory* is a gripping and raw look into Northern Ireland's moral and cultural landscape.



A Ghost in the Throat

Doireann Ní Ghriofa Tramp Press / 224 pages

Poet Doireann Ní Ghriofa tries her hand at prose with her latest release, *A Ghost in the Throat*, a collection of essays and autofiction that explores the connection between two women who live hundreds of years apart. Although Ní Ghriofa has published several individual essays in the past, *A Ghost in the Throat* is her first full-length, non-poetry work. Divided into two storylines, the author first focuses on an 18th-century Irish noblewoman who, after the murder of her husband, drinks handfuls of his blood while writing a poem. The other storyline, perhaps autobiographical, follows a young mother as she becomes both inspired and transfixed by the poem's content. Unique in style, *A Ghost in the Throat* has been called a "devastating and timeless tale about finding your voice by freeing another's."

A MESSAGE FROM



NEW BRUNSWICK

HIGHLAND GAMES FESTIVAL LE FESTIVAL DES JEUX ÉCOSSAIS DU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK

Following some lengthy discussions and after exhausting every avenue possible, the NB Highland Games Planning Committee have come to the conclusion that given the ongoing seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a ban on group gatherings for the foreseeable future, **we are unable to go ahead with the 2020 New Brunswick Highland Games Festival.**

We are deeply disheartened to have to make this difficult decision, but it is the only responsible action to take during this time.

That said, in **2021 we are set to celebrate our 40th Anniversary July 23-25** and we are looking forward to an even bigger and better event!

We hope everyone stays healthy and are doing their best to maintain mentally strong during these unprecedented times. Thank you for your past support and we look forward to celebrating with you in 2021.

July 23-25, 2021

   @NBHIGHLANDGAMES
www.highlandgames.ca



Flan Quarantine



Plagues and quarantines are not new to the world; in 1666, the bubonic plague struck the village of Eyam in Northern England. Its 750 residents held a meeting and devised a plan for containment of the disease. They decided to voluntarily quarantine themselves with no one leaving or entering the village until the plague had ceased. This took 14 months and cost the village dearly with one third of the population succumbing to the plague. However, it eliminated the spread to other villages and towns. A quarantine cor-

don was established with a one-mile radius marked by a ring of stones. Food was left at the boundary stones by nearby farmers in exchange for gold coins submerged in vinegar. The vinegar was thought to cleanse the currency. Though we have been caught up in this pandemic, the seasons are oblivious to it. Spring is here and summer approaches. It is time that we prepared a flan together and topped it with our favorite berry sauce. I have opted for Haskap as it is regarded as a super berry because of its high nutritional value.

Ingredients

2/3 cup white sugar
1 (14 ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
2 cups heavy cream
1 cup milk
5 eggs
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Haskap Berry Sauce

1/3 cup of fresh Haskap berries
1 tbsp of raw honey
1/8 tsp of cinnamon

In a food processor combine all ingredients until smooth.

Instructions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). In a small nonstick saucepan, heat the sugar over medium heat. Shake and swirl occasionally to distribute sugar until it is dissolved and begins to brown. Lift the pan over the heat source (4 to 6 inches) and continue to brown the sugar until it becomes a dark golden brown. You may slightly stir while cooking, but continually stirring causes the sugar to crystallize. Pour caramelized sugar into a 1 & 1/2-quart casserole dish or a large loaf pan, and swirl to coat the bottom of the pan evenly. In a blender, combine sweetened condensed milk, cream, milk, eggs and vanilla. Blend on high for one minute. Pour over the caramelized sugar. Place the filled casserole dish into a larger pan and add 1 inch of hot water to the outer pan. Bake in preheated oven for 50 to 60 minutes, or until set.

Salud! Cabrini - cabrini@celticlife.com



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Daftmill Distillery

with Andrew Ferguson

On the surface, Two Brewers seems like a strange name for a whisky brand. One of my pet peeves (which, in “the customer is always right” world of retail I am usually loathe to correct) is hearing someone talk about brewing whisky, or a whisky brewery. You brew beer in a brewery and distill whisky (technically spirit) in a distillery. But - and there are a couple of buts here - on peeling back the layers there are two very appropriate explanations for the whisky’s name.

First, there is that awkward little fact that before you can distill barley (or any other grain for that matter) into spirit, you must first make a beer. Just as when making brandy, you have to start by first fermenting grape juice into wine. The fermented grain liquid produced by distillers is called wort and is not the sort of brew most would willingly ingest in copious, let alone modest, quantities. However, for all intents and purposes, it is a type of beer.

Secondly, and most importantly, Two Brewers Whisky is made by Alan Hansen and Bob Baxter, the pair who founded Yukon Brewing in 1997. Twelve years after starting out as brewers in Whitehorse, Yukon, Bob and Allan decided to try their hand at whisky making. The Ontario natives were well ahead of the craft brewing curve in Canada, and they would soon prove to be at the head of the craft whisky making curve as well. In recent years, dozens of new Canadian distilleries have launched craft whiskies, mainly Scottish-style single malts, and there are many more still to come. While Two Brewers were not the first to do so, they were certainly among the leaders of the pack, and they have also been one of the most successful.

Most distilleries strive for consistency and efficiency, selecting yeast strains for speed as well as to maximize the conversion of sugar into alcohol (yield). Breweries, on the other hand - especially smaller ones - are more willing to experiment with different yeast strains and different mashbills (types of grains and ratios thereof) to create different flavours and distinct styles. Yield is still important, but flavour is key. While brewers have to rely on the flavours created in fermentation, most large commercial distilleries believe fermentation plays a much less significant role than distillation and maturation in oak. I think they are wrong on that count, but that argument would be a whole other article.

I have been in the drinks business for more than 16 years: I have had the opportunity to sample tens of thousands of different whiskies and I have made hundreds of visits to distilleries all over the world. Over time, I have concluded that fermentation is just as important, if not more so, than distillation and maturation. The quality of the alcohol and flavour congeners created during fermentation set the stage for what the stills and barrels do thereafter.

Whether intentionally or not, the chaps at Two Brewers are on the right path.

Hansen and Baxter have only been making whisky for a little over a decade, taking a brewer’s approach to producing primarily single malt whisky. The whiskies have been released in very small batches, rarely over 1,000 bottles, and usually much less. Each

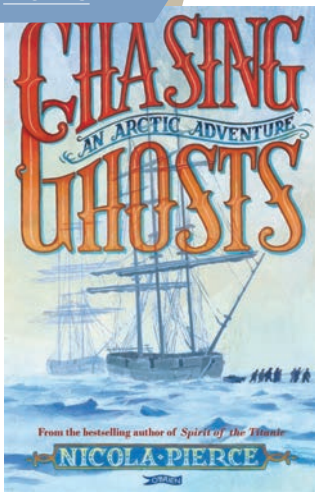
release corresponds to one of four different styles: classic (unpeated single malt), peated (made with peated barley), special finishes (finishing maturation in different cask types) and innovative (a catch all for different grain types and unusual production methods).

At the time of writing, Two Brewers have just bottled Releases 19 and 20. Release 19 is a peated single malt, made with barley, and malted and peated in Scotland. When barley is dried over a peat fire or smoked by peat in a modern malting plant, the smoke leaves behind phenols on the grain. These phenols can give the whisky a smoky, earthy and sometimes medicinal profile. Two Brewers Release 19 does not have the maritime profile associated with most Islay distilleries, but it does have a backbone of crisp but elegant smoke.

Two Brewers Release 20 is perhaps the most unusual to have come out of the distillery yet. It was matured in maple syrup barrels. This is not something which would ever be allowed under Scottish whisky regulations, but the rules in Canada are more relaxed. It is a sweet and very spicy whisky, perfect for those with a sweet tooth.

The production of Two Brewers Single Malt by Yukon Brewing & Distilling is limited, as is its availability. The brand is currently available in the Yukon, Alberta, BC and occasionally in Quebec. If you were looking for a good excuse to visit the Yukon, this might just be it. They are currently closed due to Covid-19, but they will reopen in due time. Their beer is nothing to sniff at either... their Midnight Sun Espresso Stout has been a staple on the Canadian Craft Beer scene for decades!

www.twobrewerswhisky.com
www.kensingtonwinemarket.com



Chasing Ghosts: An Arctic Adventure

By Nicola Pierce
O'Brien Press
320 pp / €8.99

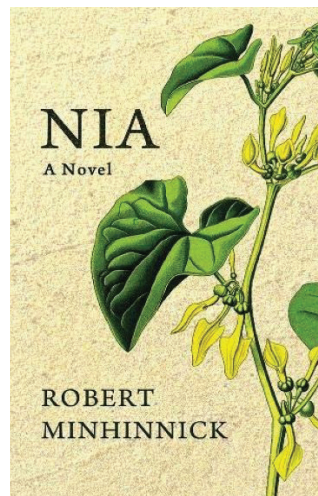
One has to admire Northern Irish author Nicola Pierce; along with diving deep into the region's battle-weary history with past works - *Kings of the Boyne*, *Behind the Walls*, *City of Fate*, and *The Spirit of the Titanic* - the scribe's latest literary effort takes on the real-life tale of two Arctic-bound ships, intertwined with the story of tragedy and intrigue for a Derry-based family. Set in the mid-1800s, the fictional narrative is driven by solid characters, strong dialogue and a swift narrative arc, weaving plotlines back and forth, and inviting readers on an emotional journey through hope and darkness - two subjects that the author knows something about, having recently battled cancer with two operations, chemotherapy and radiation treatments, working all the while. Admirable indeed.

~ SPC

One Good Reason

By Séan McCann
& Andrea Aragon
Nimbus Publishing
222 pp / \$29.95

Although there are many good tell-all books on the market about recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction, husband and wife Séan McCann & Andrea Aragon share both sides of the story of the ex-Great Big Sea singer/guitarist's descent into personal hell and his subsequent rise from the ashes. More than a confessional, or a self-help guide of sorts, the couple share their experience, strength and hope with readers, perhaps paving a path for those struggling with substance abuse issues. And while McCann's story might sound familiar to some, it is Aragon's account of the highs and lows of living aside an alcoholic that will tug the heartstrings. Speaking with great courage, poise, and purpose, she is a comforting voice for the silent and still-suffering majority. ~ SPC



Nia

By Robert Minihinnick
Seren Books
180 pp / €9.99

The third - and final - offering in Robert Minihinnick's stirring *Sea Holly* trilogy, *Nia*, has only been on bookstore shelves for a short while, but it has already enjoyed strong critical reviews and has been longlisted for the RSL Ondaatje Prize. With over a dozen works to his name, the prolific Welsh author and poet is no stranger to the art of storytelling. Here, the scribe succeeds at fleshing-out the voice of a young mother and her colourful inner life. After she and two friends explore a local cave system, *Nia* experiences a series of surreal dreams that open the door to her past, revealing truths that the likes of psychoanalyst Carl Jung would feast upon. A powerful work for readers of all ages.

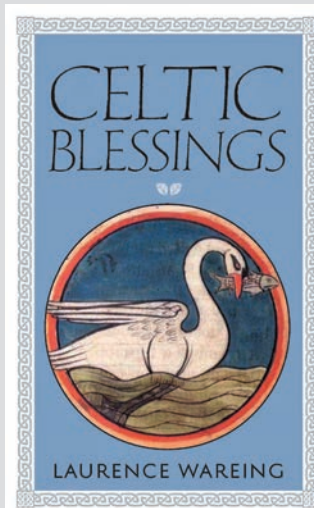
~ SPC

Celtic Blessings

By Laurence Wareing
Birlinn Publishing
96 pp / £7.99

This little gem by Scottish freelance writer and editor Laurence Wareing almost slipped through the cracks. Let me explain; usually I abhor digital review copies, as I spend enough time in front of a computer screen each day. Call me old-fashioned, but I like the sensation and scent of real books. I do, however, understand and appreciate the convenience of the digital format. After all, reading is reading, no matter the medium. Thus, *Celtic Blessings* - a small selection of 1,000-year-old proverbs and maxims from Celtic saints and their disciples - has been open on my tablet since receiving it. The ancient wisdom is apt, given the current state of global affairs, and will keep readers on an even spiritual keel during these tumultuous times.

~ SPC





Niall Horan

Heartbreak Weather

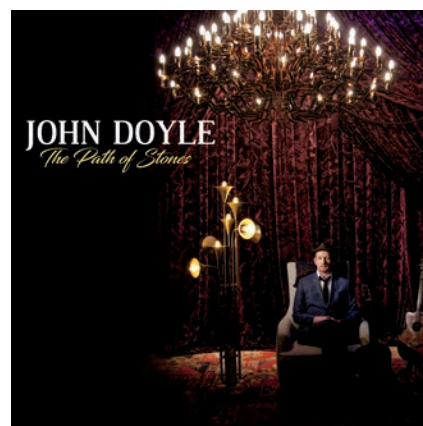
The former frontman for super-boyband One Direction may not be a media darling like his past bandmate Harry Styles. However, the Mullingar, Co. Westmeath native makes the case for mega-stardom with his sophomore release, *Heartbreak Weather*. Chock full o' catchy pop hooks, bouncy beats, and beautiful ballads, any of these 14 tracks could be slated for mass streaming. And while the singer/songwriter never dives deeper than old-school lyrics on love and love lost, his Irish roots are showing every step of the way; along with the accent, whispers of traditional jigs and reels simmer just below the surface of the melodies. As such, you can take the boy out of the Emerald Isle, but you can never take the Emerald Isle out of the boy. ~ SPC

John Doyle

The Path of Stones

One of Ireland's finest troubadours, John Doyle, returns to full form with his latest effort, *The Path of Stones*, a terrific ten-track collection of masterly-crafted melodies. Minimalist in tone - the minstrel is only accompanied by gentle guitars, fiddle, bodhran, cello, bouzouki, harmonium, and keyboards - the album's stripped-down, bare-bones approach allows the flesh of narrative to rise and shine. What emerges are wonders of sonic architecture; simple and sure structures, sprinkled with Eire soul and spirit, standing tall atop solid musical foundations. The best compositions, it has been noted, require little or no ornamentation.

Alas, think Leonard O'Cohen, Tom O'Waits or Townes O'Van Zant. In days of yore, Doyle might have wandered the Irish countryside, sharing stories of the joys and sorrows of simple life. ~ SPC



2002

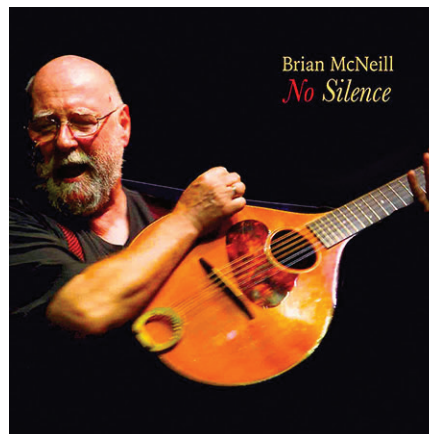
Celtic Fairy Dream

Celtic Fairy Dream, the latest release from multi award-winning, Texas-based trio 2002, sounds exactly as one might expect with that title. After 27 years, and with a dozen albums already having graced the Billboard charts, the 'first-family' of new-age music - Pamela and Randy Copus - have been joined by their daughter Sarah on these ten tracks, raising their musical game to new heights. Melodic and moody, poetic and poignant, the group taps into the genre's longstanding traditions, crafting both classic and contemporary compositions that are sure to soothe listener's souls. As stated aptly in the band's media release for the new recording, "Fans of Enya, Loreena McKennitt and Clannad will find a lot to like in the magical music of 2002." Thus, 'nuff said. ~ SPC

Brian McNeill

No Silence

After 50 years of writing, rehearsing, recording, and performing music, Scottish singer/songwriter Brian McNeill deserves some sort of award for simple endurance. More so, he deserves full credit for releasing an album of new material to mark the half-century. In addition, he should be lauded for producing *No Silence* at his home-based state of the art studio, playing almost all of the instruments on the ten tracks, and designing the cover artwork. As for the songs themselves - with guitar, baritone guitar, fiddle, octave fiddle, mandocello, bouzouki and concertina set to traditional jigs, reels, ballads and more - there is ample evidence than you can teach an old dog new tricks. And so, raise a glass to the musical master, and cheers to 50 more magical years. ~ SPC



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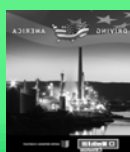


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It was love at first sound for piper Bras Rodrigo

Some fall in love at first sight, but Bras Rodrigo didn't even have to lay eyes on the bagpipes before he fell head over heels.

"I was inspired by its sound," shares the 41-year-old via email from his home in Spain. "Below my house, they taught bagpipes. I was walking with my grandfather, who I was very close to, and heard something special. Without having seen the instrument, I told my grandfather that I wanted to play what I was hearing. It turns out it was a bagpipe."

Thirty-five years later, he now plays the pipes professionally in concert, records albums, and teaches bagpipng to younger generations.

"I play Asturian bagpipes mainly, although I can also play the Scottish and Galician bagpipes," says Rodrigo, who was born and bred in Asturias.

"It is a small and beautiful Celtic country nestled in the Atlantic Arc, in Northern Spain. I am Celtic, like all the inhabitants of the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula of Spain and Portugal. According to the latest research by the prestigious geneticist Bryan Sykes at Oxford University, the original Celts were from Asturias. Study of the DNA of the inhabitants of Great Britain attests to this in his book *The Blood of Isles*. Irish legends say that Saint Patrick arrived in Ireland from Spain and that King Breogán conquered the Emerald Island from the tribe of the Danu."

Celtic Life International readers are

more than familiar with Galicia, the best known of Spain's Celtic regions. Rodrigo is quick to provide a cultural primer on the Celtic-ness of his homeland, however.

"Our national instrument is the bagpipe and our national dance is the prima dance - which is very similar to the Andro Bretons. We speak Asturian, and our colours are green - for our meadows and tall mountains - and blue, for our sea.

"We have fabulous food; the main dishes are the Fabada, the Asturian Pote stew, rice pudding, and casadielles. And we are the largest cheese capital in Europe, with great variety.

"Our landscape is a true paradise and our people are cheerful and hospitable."

The Asturian bagpipe, also known as *gaita asturiana*, is not unlike the more familiar Scottish pipes, though its dimensions are longer than other regional cousins of the same key and it is characterized by different finger hole placements. This allows it to hit various octaves, via a technique called *requintar*.

"I am still in love with the Asturian bagpipe; its tradition, its sound, its history, its aesthetics...for all of those reasons, I have dedicated my life to it."

Rodrigo has taken that passion to new places in recent years.

"I like to innovate and experiment. This year, I launched a new invention - the LED Bagpipe. It is a bagpipe with LED lights, creating the sensation that the player plays on a beam of light. The lights change colour, intensity, and speed to the rhythm of the melody that the piper is playing."

He has become equally innovative with his style of playing.

"I don't really have one defined style - some people say that I have my own sound, the Bras sound. I like to experiment with and merge many styles, from the songs of Native American culture, to classical music, and even rock, and of course, folk and the most traditional sounds."

Evolution, he believes, is as important as tradition.

"For me, today, the challenge is all about helping new generations better understand that the bagpipe has quite an ancient history behind it. I want my students and to appreciate that tradition, while at the same time being innovative and adapting the sound and music to popular culture. It is important that we have an idea of both where we come from and where we are going."

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Colin Farrell

Colin Farrell isn't shy to share his song-writing secrets.

"Funny you should ask about that," smiles the Orlando, Florida-based fiddler and tin whistler who originally hails from Manchester, U.K. "I wrote most of my last album on the whistle in the bathtub.

"My dad is from Kilnaleck in Co. Cavan and my mum is from Menlough in County Galway," Farrell continues, adding that he has been playing the whistle since he was a wee tot of seven. "I have four brothers and sisters who all play music. We spent our summers in Ireland where we competed in the Fleadh Cheoil."

Farrell holds a degree in civil engineering from Leeds University, but realized along the way that fiddling was his future, later acquiring a Masters in Traditional Irish Music from the University of Limerick. However, his most important musical mentors were not his professors in college.

"My parents began taking us all to lessons at a young age, and it was the teachers that truly inspired me. My fiddle teacher was Paddy McMahon from Loughrea in Co. Galway, and Michael McGoldrick taught me the whistle. It was Michael that has probably been my biggest influence. He was always very encouraging and positive, and he has gone on to become one of the most revered musicians in Irish traditional music."

Since coming to the U.S. (and recently patriating!), Farrell has collaborated with many traditional Irish music artists, including touring with the Celtic band Lúnasa, and performing alongside some of his favourite artists, including Tim O'Brien, Natalie Merchant and Mary Chapin Carpenter. He also recently recorded the album *Music and Mischief* with flutist Kevin Crawford and guitarist Patrick Doocey.

As much as he appreciates the "trad" in "traditional Irish music," Farrell is not afraid of forging new ground, and has been working on some more novel projects.

"Growing up, I played in ceilidh bands with singer-songwriters, Celtic rock bands, and Irish country & western bands - all of



which has shaped my style and sound. I think I have my own approach to the music, but I also think there is less talk of regional styles nowadays, due to technology, and people doing a lot more traveling."

One of his more eclectic endeavours brings us back to his tub-thumping tunes.

"This year I have challenged myself to do an original tune every day for the year."

"You can follow my shenanigans on YouTube, or my Facebook music page: Colin Farrell Music. Luckily, I really enjoy writing music and melodies come to me fairly easily so hopefully I will complete the task.

"I am also part of an exciting new project called The Crannua Collective, featuring several incredible musicians. We have just released a new CD of all-original songs and tunes, so I am quite excited to see where this project goes."

Farrell has some ideas on how to get younger musicians into trad, and he is optimistic about the future of his craft in the hands of the next generation.

"I think it would be great if there were more outreach programs in the schools for

Irish traditional music. I have a good friend, Angela Usher, who goes into the schools in Manchester and teaches Irish music to the kids. As a result, there is now a huge group of kids learning Irish traditional music and it really helps promote the music to a new audience.

"I am always amazed when I go home to Manchester, or across to Ireland, that the standards among all the young musicians are so strong," he adds. "The same can be said for the young players in North America. I'm lucky enough to teach at numerous camps and festivals around the U.S., and the standard and enthusiasm of the young people is really encouraging for the future of the music.

"The numbers are very strong in terms of the amount of people playing Irish traditional music, and in Ireland there are a lot of cultural grants that are available to musicians which is a real help. In terms of the U.S., it can be a little bit more difficult to find funding depending on your area, but there are large communities of Irish musicians all over North America keeping Celtic and Irish music alive."

www.colinfarrellmusic.com

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We will stay in touch over the next year through our website and social media. Be sure to connect often and see what we have planned. **Until we meet in 2021, keep healthy and see you in Maxville on July 30th and 31st, 2021. Slàinte**

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Ír Tánc Akadémia

Unlike many of the dancers we feature in Celtic Life International, Gabor Zimborman was not inspired to get into step dancing because of Riverdance.

"It might be considered unusual now, but I saw Riverdance and Lord of the Dance only after I had started dancing," he shares via email. "My first glimpse into Irish step dance music was from Shania Twain's music video Don't Be Stupid, which featured Irish dancers."

Zimborman's colleague, Dorottya Zimboranne Jakubek's interest was piqued by Lord of the Dance, though in a roundabout way through the heart of Mordor.

"The Lord of the Rings films had come out in my early teens," she says, likewise via email. "One boring afternoon I was looking around home for something to watch, and came across a video tape - yes, a VHS tape - which had Lord of the Dance written on it in handwriting. I was curious what could that be, so I started watching and I quickly became obsessed with it."

Perhaps it isn't so shocking these two came by Irish dance through non-customary means; in their native Hungary, Celtic culture isn't exactly traditional. At least not in recent memory.

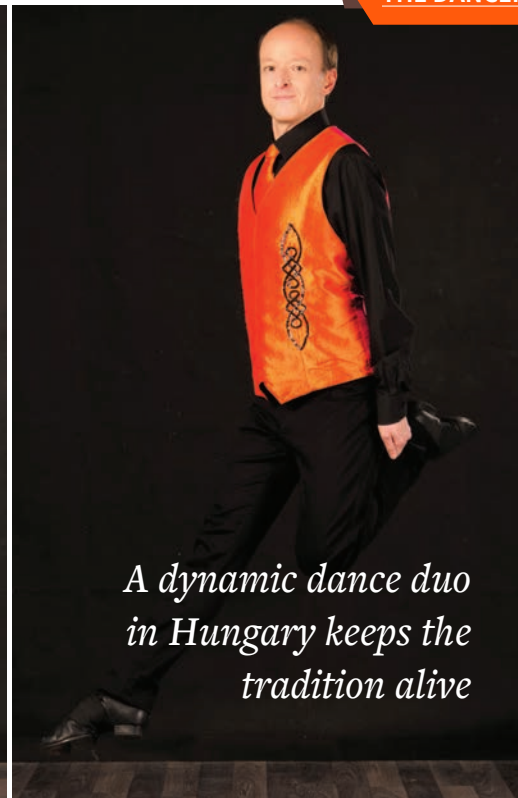
"I am not aware of any Irish or Celtic relatives," Zimborman admits, "but in Prehistoric times, in the Late Iron Age, a part of the Carpathian Basin was occupied by Celtic tribes."

"So, I might have some Celtic blood in my veins after all..."

Even with the region's ancient Celtic roots, Zimborman struggled to find dance classes in Hungary until the year 2000, when he enrolled in the first program he could find.

He would start teaching dance in 2007, which is how these two came to meet.

"I was in a smaller dance school before," says Zimboranne Jakubek. "People started



A dynamic dance duo in Hungary keeps the tradition alive

to drift away from dancing, and the teacher recommended Gabor's school to continue dancing. Before I joined the new school, I was watching a lot of videos on YouTube and started wondering about competitions. Gabor's school offered competitions as well, so that seemed to be my path."

Together, they started their own school of dance - Közép-európai Ír Tánc Akadémia - or the Central European Irish Dance Academy. Interestingly, the business grew organically rather than by design.

"Starting to teach Irish dance came naturally as part of my dancing career," explains Zimborman. "I did not dream of performing, competing, teaching or running my own school when I started dancing, I just wanted to learn the steps."

"I have this natural instinct in me that if I know something, I want to share," adds Zimboranne Jakubek. "So, when a teacher quit in Gábor's school to move abroad, Gábor asked me if I wanted to take on her classes. Naturally, I said yes."

Since 2012, the Academy has performed at some of the biggest events and on the most prestigious stages in Hungary, pleasing crowds and winning tournaments along the way. However, even with their success, the ancient art's status isn't soaring; the style is seen as lacking variety compared to other dance styles, mostly as Irish step dancing doesn't use the hands.

"Currently, it is not a very popular dance style in Hungary, so we are always struggling with the numbers," notes Zimboranne Jakubek. "Our performance group, Erin, has a mission to spread the word about the variety found in Irish dancing - in our performances we exhibit all the different dances within Irish dancing - solo vs. group, traditional hornpipe vs. treble reel, céili vs. solo reel, etc. We also perform séan nós and polka numbers too."

The pair are hoping that, just by being there for those who do want to learn, they can grow the popularity of Irish dancing in Hungary. They are currently exploring ways to expand their online reach, and remain optimistic about younger generations taking up the tap shoes.

"Even in countries that have no direct link to Celtic culture (like Hungary), those people who are interested in Celtic dances are interested in other aspects of Celtic culture: literature, history, music, etc.," says Zimborman, with Zimboranne Jakubek adding, "They are, if they meet with it. The problem is that they don't get in contact with it."

In the meantime, the rewards of seeing the joy on the faces of their pupils keeps them on their toes.

www.facebook.com/irtancakademia

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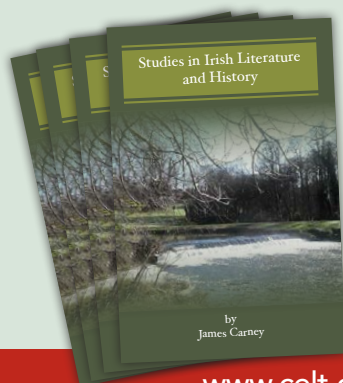
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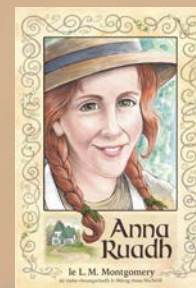
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Betty Williams;

1943 - 2020



Northern Irish activist and Peace Laureate Betty Williams passed away in March, perhaps fittingly on St. Patrick's Day.

Although Williams spent most of her 76 years caring for others, her journey to peace in Northern Ireland truly began in August 1976, after a woman named Anne Maguire and three of her four children were hit by an Irish Republican Army (IRA) vehicle that crashed onto a sidewalk. Two of the children were killed upon impact, while the other child died the following day. The mother, grief-stricken and severely wounded, would later take her own life.

Williams, who was working as a receptionist at a nearby office, was the first to arrive at the scene after hearing gunshots. While all-too-familiar with "The Troubles" - she had lost two of her own cousins in a violent partisan conflict - Williams still found herself deeply affected by the incident.

"There have been other tragic deaths," she told reporters at the time. "But the tragedy of the little Maguires was the moment when I felt we just could not take any more."

Soon after, Williams went door-to-door to petition for peace in Northern Ireland, quickly amassing more than 6,000 signatures.

Still haunted by the tragic events, she attended the family's funeral, where she met and spoke with Mairead Corrigan, the children's aunt. The two chatted in depth about the real need for change in the region. That conversation led to the formation of the

Peace People (originally called Peace Women), a mass protest movement.

Over the next several months, Williams and Corrigan, along with Ciaran McKeown - an Irish journalist who helped to co-launch Peace People - gathered people across Northern Ireland and Great Britain to petition and protest the ongoing violence, which would take over 3,500 lives before the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

Their efforts did not go unnoticed and, the following year, Williams and Corrigan were awarded with a joint Nobel Peace Prize for their tireless work.

"I am mentally prepared for death," Williams told the Telegraph at the time.

"I would love to get my private life back, but I care enough for the Irish people to say that if I have to give up my private life, I'll do it."

Despite the awards and accolades, however, Williams and her team were met with push-back, particularly by the IRA, who insisted that Peace People had been conspiring with politicians and military leaders in Great Britain. Similarly, Williams was criticized for keeping her share of the Peace Prize money, unlike Corrigan, who had donated her share to the cause. Williams assured critics that her intent was to use her share to promote peace on a global scale. In the end, due to disagreements and interpersonal relationship stress,

Williams left Peace People and moved to the United States, where she lectured for several years. Peace People continues to operate to this day, both within Northern Ireland and further afield.

In 2004, Williams returned to Northern Ireland and resumed her efforts with Corrigan. Two years later, the duo worked alongside two other female Nobel Peace Prize winners to form the Nobel Women's Initiative, promoting peace and pushing for women's rights. Williams also launched an additional organization - the non-profit World Centre of Compassion for Children (WCCC) - in Knock, Galway, with the aid of her daughter Debbie.

More recently, Williams struggled with a number of severe health conditions, eventually succumbing to pneumonia.

In a statement on the Peace People website, Corrigan celebrated and remembered her co-worker and friend.

"Betty was a woman of great courage, with loving compassion for all children. She, in her great spirit of generosity, reached out to many people globally. For myself and those who had the pleasure of knowing her as a friend and co-worker for peace, she will be sadly missed, but we will remember and celebrate a great life lived to the full and in service of the children for whom she had deep compassion and love. Thank you, Betty, from all your friends, and particularly the youth whom you inspired so much."



Albannach



Enter the Haggis

27TH ANNUAL GLASGOW LANDS SCOTTISH FESTIVAL CANCELLED

Given the uncertainty and the public health risks of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organizing committee for the Glasgow Lands Scottish Festival has regretfully decided to cancel the 2020 Festival scheduled for Saturday, July 18.

It is in gathering together to celebrate our Scottish heritage that we find joy, but gathering is too great a risk to take under the conditions of this pandemic. Yet we are Scots--danger and privation are nothing new for us. We have the long view down the centuries. We are patient and canny and we know how to survive. We WILL gather again!

**Please stay safe, stay home, check on loved ones
and haste ye back on July 17, 2021!**



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