From the Editor

With Valentine’s Day falling mid-month, February is said to be the “month for lovers.” Certainly Celtic lore is filled with romantic tales, whether they be of love affairs, or of heroic deeds. In fact, romance is one of the key elements that make Celtic tales so interesting. How many kingdoms were lost through ill-fated marital unions, how many heroes risked their lives and sometimes even sacrificed their families for the greater cause - usually the cause of freedom, how many broken hearts were left behind, and how many couples lived “happily ever after”?

And so we’ve chosen “Celtic Romance” as our theme for this issue. The cover image is that of a painting from 1902, by Edmund Blair Leighton, entitled “Tristan and Isolde.” Inside, you will find an article concerning Tristan. You will also find some of the best-known tales from Celtic myth, legend and history, and some not so well-known, along with more modern tales of romance.

Romance is defined in two ways: 1) a feeling of excitement and mystery associated with love, and 2) a quality or feeling of mystery, excitement, and remoteness from everyday life.

Certainly, some of the greatest romance writers of the last few centuries were from Scotland and Ireland, people like Scotland’s Robert Louis Stevenson, Sir Walter Scott, Robbie Burns, Lord Byron (author of Don Juan); Ireland’s James Joyce, William Yeats, and Oscar Wilde; and even America’s Jack London who many believe was fathered by William Chaney (Cheyne in all its forms being a very old Scottish family). For everyone mentioned here, there are a hundred or more romance authors from these and other Celtic countries.

We are lucky, at the Celtic Guide, to have modern day Celtic romance authors writing for us on a fairly regular basis, especially Victoria Roberts, who has been with us monthly, almost from the start, along with others who join in peridiodically.

To be Celtic perhaps means to be romantic at our very core, and there is nothing wrong with that! So dig in and enjoy another great issue of Celtic Guide.

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During the 16th century, as the power of the Highland and Island clans was beginning to diminish, the once-powerful MacDonald clan split into two friendly but separate factions.

On the Isle of Skye sat Clan Donald North, led by the descendants of Uisdean MacDonald, First Chief of Sleat. On Islay and Kintyre, and over in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, sat Clan Donald South, generally known as, and differentiated by the spelling of MacDonnell. Clan Donald had gained a foothold in Ireland over a century earlier, when John Mor, brother to the second official Lord of the Isles (Donald of Harlaw), married into the Bisset family, who had held great lands and sway in Antrim.

It would be in Antrim where Clan Donald made many of its last efforts to survive. In fact, ‘Chief of Sleat’ eventually became a title not seated on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, as one would expect, but rather a title in the Peerage of Ireland, County Antrim.

One James MacDonnell, born about 1515, in Antrim, ruled over the southern branch of the clan, sometimes from Antrim, Ireland, sometimes from Islay and Kintyre, Scotland. His brother, the celebrated Sorley Boy MacDonnell, was Captain of the Route, or the fertile land along the Bann River, in Antrim, from where so many Scottish-Irish first immigrated to North America, nearly 200 years later.

As the typical Highland clans diminished, so rose the power of Clan Campbell, choosing to support the Scottish king rather than defend the Gaelic way of life. This clan held particular power throughout Argyll, and its leaders were fashioned the Earls of Argyll. Colin Campbell, Third Earl of Argyll, married Janet or Jean Gordon from that powerful Aberdeen family. Their daughter was Agnes, who was married to James MacDonnell sometime before 1554.

Meanwhile, over in Ireland, the O’Neill clan held considerable sway, especially under Shane O’Neill, who at one point made a face-to-face agreement with Queen Elizabeth of England to support her control over that nation, in return for his being considered its titular leader. Part of this agreement was that he would drive the Scots out of Antrim, and this meant going up against James and Sorley Boy, and their very large contingent of Scottish-Irish followers.
In addition to the Scottish MacDonnells, their Irish cousins, the O’Donnell’s, were also at odds with O’Neill. Catherine, the wife of Calvagh O’Donnell, King of Tyrconnell, was captured by Shane and made to be his own wife after Calvagh was tortured and tormented.

Clan Donald North joined forces with its southern branch of the clan and, in the spring of 1565, a large group of Scottish warriors sailed for the Irish shore. At the Battle of Glentasie, according to Shane O’Neill’s own secretary of war, Gerrot Flemming -

“We advanced upon them drawen up in battle array, and the fight was furiously maintained on both sides, but God, best and greatest of his mere grace, gave us victory against them. James and Somerlaid (Sorley Boy) were taken prisoners.”

James MacDonnell died in prison either from his wounds, or as some have said, due to poisoning. The purpose of the poisoning may have been so that Shane could take Agnes Campbell MacDonnell as his mistress, which he did. This enraged both the Campbell Clan and the MacDonnell Clan. Still, the Campbells stood back waiting to see what would happen with Shane now gaining such control of Ulster. For their part, the MacDonnells quietly hunkered down, waiting for the right moment.

For two years Sorley Boy was dragged around in chains, following Shane on his great adventure to control Ireland. Feeling quite full of himself, O’Neill began to think that he no longer needed English support and, before long, found himself at odds with his benefactor, Queen Elizabeth.

As English troops, who had allied with his enemies, the O’Donnell’s, closed in on Shane, he appeared to have a desperate change of heart concerning the MacDonnells.
Arrangements were made for Shane to return Sorley Boy MacDonnell to his people. A grand party was planned at which the whiskey and wine flowed freely. Shane was welcomed with open arms into the MacDonnell camp, and Sorley even more so. However, the festivities didn’t last long before a dagger was drawn, some say by a member of Clan Donald North, and Shane and his men were quickly dispatched.

Legend says his head was pickled and sent to the English representative at Dublin.

Alexander MacDonnell, son of James and Agnes, was killed in battle by the O’Neills. A Scots-born daughter of this couple was Una Ineen Dubh McDonnell, sometimes given as Fionnuala, but most often simply referred to as Iníon Dubh – the Dark Daughter! Iníon came to Ireland in 1570 as the wife-to-be of Hugh O’Donnell, one of Shane’s bitterest enemies and she bore Hugh several children.

Along with the bride came a dowry of some say over 1,000 Scottish warriors bent on defeating the O’Neill’s and anyone else who would stand in the way of the McDonnell/O’Donnell alliance. Others say it was a force of 100 men, 80 being from Clan Crawford. Regardless of the number, the intent was the same, to defeat the forces who had killed her father and brother, and stolen her mother away.

By 1573, Queen Elizabeth issued a manifesto which referred to all of these allied forces as “Sorley Boy and others who are of the Scotch-Irish race.” This is the oldest-known use of this exact phrase, though other similar terms were used earlier. This proves that the so-called Scotch-Irish (or as I like to call them - the Scottish-Irish) did not originate with the later Plantation of Ulster as is often claimed.

For years, the Scotch-Irish Society of the United States of America refused to accept this history. However, in their most recent Journal they have a considerable article on the reality of these earlier Scots in Ireland as being “Scotch-Irish”. I, personally, had a considerable email exchange with this society to help them see their errant ways. In one email I was not supposed to be included on, I read the words “. . . if I hear one more word about Sorley Boy . . .”

Fortunately, the truth could not be hidden.

As mentioned, Alexander, brother of Iníon, was killed in battle by the O’Neills. One of the men involved, Hugh O’Gallagher, happened past Iníon’s castle at Mongavlin, one day.

Quickly, the Dark Daughter gathered her forces around her and raced to O’Gallagher’s side, summarily dispatching him.

With her husband’s health deteriorating, the O’Donnells came under further threat, and the Dark Daughter went on to lead even greater forces for the clan. No doubt the love she had for her father, mother and brother, all victims in one way or another of the O’Neills, burned in her heart as she led her men into battle.

Iníon is described in the Annals of the Four Masters as “like the mother of Machabees who joined a man’s heart to a woman’s thought.”

Eventually, her son, Hugh, was freed, and in 1592 she saw him crowned King of Tyrconnell.

Politics make strange bedfellows and the younger Hugh O’Donnell found himself joining with the leader of the O’Neills, also named Hugh, against Queen Elizabeth’s forces. But alas, the outcome became known as “The Flight of the Earls,” when many an Irish chief fled for the Continent to escape England’s wrath, followed closely by the Plantation of Ulster.

Iníon MacDonnell/O’Donnell outlived all her sons. She retired to obscurity, and her last known action was to arrange a suitable fate for Niall Garve O’Donnell, who not only had challenged her son, but who attempted (unsuccessfully) to take her castle of Mongavlin for his own. In an ironic twist, she framed him for treason and had him taken to the Tower of London, where he was imprisoned until his death. This 1608 event shows the power she held until her own death.

The Dark Daughter from Across the Water (part Scots MacDonnell, part Scots Campbell) was the last “Irish” Queen of Tyrconnell, and, though all her plots for her sons came to nothing, still she left an impression on history that few women of the day could claim.
Above is reputed to be the tomb of Cooey-na-Gall O'Cahan, who died in 1385. However, the style and the details of the work suggest that it dates from the late fifteenth century. It may possibly be the grave of Aibhne O'Cahan, who was murdered in 1492.

Located inside the impressive chapel of Dungiven Priory, this magnificent tomb features a sculpture of an armed man lying under a canopy of open work tracery. The body is covered by a sword. Below him are six niches containing the small figures of armed warriors wearing kilts. They are dressed like gallowglass, which is a name for Scottish mercenary warriors, who were known to be in the employ of the O'Cahan chiefs, particularly those of Clan Donald – Sorley Boy McDonnell’s family.

The tune for the most requested song of all time – “Oh, Danny Boy” – was originally written as “O’Cahan’s Lament” in Dungiven, Northern Ireland. Legend says the clan harpist went into a cave for a couple of days to write a fitting song lamenting the loss of O’Cahan land and power. He emerged with this tune, which later became known as “Londonderry Air”. The melody was then borrowed for the song “Oh, Danny Boy.” If Danny Boy was based on an historical figure, it is possible that person’s name was Dohmnall Buidhe in Gaelic, meaning “Donald of the yellow hair”. Some have speculated that the inspiration for the song was actually the Ulster hero Sorley Boy (Buidhe) McDonnell, an ally and relative of the O’Cahans.

Oh, Danny Boy
words by Frederic Weatherly

Oh, Danny Boy,
the pipes, the pipes are calling
From glen to glen,
and down the mountain side,
The summer’s gone,
and all the roses falling,
It’s you, it’s you must go
and I must bide.
But come ye back
when summer’s in the meadow,
Or when the valley’s hushed
and white with snow,
It’s I’ll be here
in sunshine or in shadow,
Oh, Danny Boy, oh Danny Boy,
I love you so!
But when ye come,
and all the flowers are dying,
If I am dead,
as dead I well may be,
Ye’ll come and find
the place where I am lying,
And kneel and say
an Ave there for me;
And I shall hear,
though soft you tread above me,
And all my grave
will warmer, sweeter be,
For you will bend
and tell me that you love me,
And I shall sleep in peace
until you come to me!
For this edition, being the month of February, I’d like to share some old Scottish love ballads with you. However, these are not the epitome of what we would consider romantic today! Yet they depict true emotion, and maybe a strong dose of heartache, while also giving a glimpse of a world gone by.

The first one I’d like to share is called “Barbara Allen.” The song originates as far back as the mid-17th century, and possibly much earlier. Its earliest known reference is from the diary of one Samuel Pepys, dated 1666. It was later published in London in 1690 under the name “Barbara Allen’s Cruelty.”

Apparently, both the Scots and the English claimed ownership of the song, or at least of different versions of it. However, since the earliest reference calls it a “little Scotch song,” that is good enough for me.

**Barbara Allen**

In Scarlet town where I was born  
There was a fair maid dwelling  
And every youth cried well away  
For her name was Barbara Allen

Twas in the merry month of May  
The green buds were a swelling  
Sweet William on his deathbed lay  
For the love of Barbara Allen

He sent a servant unto her  
To the place she was dwelling  
Saying you must come to his deathbed now  
If your name be Barbara Allen

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Slowly slowly she got up  
Slowly slowly she came nigh him  
And the only words to him she said  
Young man I think you’re dying

As she was walking oer the fields  
She heard the death bell knelling  
And every stroke it seemed to say  
Hardhearted Barbara Allen

Oh mother mother make my bed  
Make it long and make it narrow  
Sweet William died for me today  
I’ll die for him tomorrow

They buried her in the old churchyard  
They buried him in the choir  
And from his grave grew a red red rose  
From her grave a green briar

They grew and grew to the steeple top  
Till they could grow no higher  
And there they twined in a true love’s knot  
Red rose around green briar
This next ballad comes from the Orkney Islands. It was recorded during the great age of folklore in the 19th century, but again is likely far older.

There are many variations on this song, and one mentions that the woman in the story is from Norway. It’s about a young Orcadian lass who falls for a Selkie man and bears him a son, only to see the father of her child disappear back into the sea. He later returns as a grey seal and takes her son back to the water with him. The woman later marries a man who happens to be a hunter… of seals. You see where this is going…

**The Great Selchie of Sule Skerry**

I heard a mother lull her bairn,  
and aye she rocked, and aye she sang.  
She took so hard upon the verse that the heart within her body rang.

“Our, cradle row, and cradle go,  
and aye sleep well, my bairn within;  
I ken not who thy father is,  
nor yet the land that he dwells in.”

And up then spake a grey selchie  
as aye he woke her from her sleep,  
“'I'll tell where thy bairn’s father is:  
he’s sittin’ close by thy bed feet.”

“I am a man upon the land;  
I am a selchie on the sea,  
and when I’m far frae ev’ry strand,  
my dwelling is in Sule Skerry.

“And foster well my wee young son,  
aye for a twal’month and a day,  
and when that twal’month’s fairly done,  
I’ll come and pay the nourice fee.”

And when that weary twal’month gaed,  
he’s come tae pay the nourice fee;  
he had ae coffer fu’ o’ gowd,  
and anither fu’ o’the white money.

“Upon the skerry is thy son;  
upon the skerry lieth he.  
Sin thou would see thine ain young son,  
now is the time tae speak wi’ he.”

“But how shall I my young son know  
when thou ha’ ta’en him far frae me?”  
“The one who wears the chain o’ gowd,  
‘mang a’ the selchies shall be he.

“And thou will get a hunter good,  
and a richt fine hunter I’m sure he’ll be;  
and the first ae shot that e’er he shoots  
will kill baith my young son and me.”

**Fair Annie**

This last ballad is called “Fair Annie.” The synopsis is that a lord tells Annie that he will be traveling abroad and returning with his bride, so she should prepare herself and look like a fair maiden to impress his young wife. Annie replies that how can she look like a maiden when she has born him seven sons? After much ado, and a fair amount of melodrama, it is revealed that the new lady of the house is Annie’s younger sister who was only a child when Annie ran off with the, then, dashing young knight. The young woman, it turns out, brings wealth and many ships with her and promises to gift them to Annie and her oldest son so that she may return home to their family.

**Selkie stamps issued on the Faroe Islands**

“ fair Annie” The

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Wi her I will get gowd and gear;  
Wi you I neer got nane.
“But wha will bake my bridal bread,  
Or brew my bridal ale?
And wha will welcome my brisk bride,  
That I bring oer the dale?”
“It’s I will bake your bridal bread,  
And brew your bridal ale,  
And I will welcome your brisk bride,  
That you bring oer the dale.”
“But she that welcomes my brisk bride  
Maun gang like maiden fair;  
She maun lace on her robe sae jimp,  
And braid her yellow hair.”
“But how can I gang maiden-like,  
When maiden I am nane?  
Have I not born seven sons to thee,  
And am with child again?”
She’s taen her young son in her arms,  
Another in her hand,  
And she’s up to the highest tower,  
To see him come to land.
“Come up, come up, my eldest son,  
And look oer yon sea-strand,  
And see your father’s new-come bride,  
Before she come to land.”
“Come down, come down, my mother dear,  
Come frae the castle wa!  
I fear, if langer ye stand there,  
Ye’ll let yoursell down fa.”
And she gaed down, and farther down,  
Her love’s ship for to see,  
And the topmast and the mainmast  
Shone like the silver free.
And she’s gane down, and farther down,  
The bride’s ship to behold,  
And the topmast and the mainmast  
They shone just like the gold.
She’s taen her seven sons in her hand,  
I wot she didna fail;  
She met Lord Thomas and his bride,  
As they came oer the dale.
“You’re welcome to your house, Lord Thomas,  
You’re welcome to your land;  
You’re welcome with your fair ladye,  
That you lead by the hand.
“You’re welcome to your ha’s, ladye,  
You’re welcome to your bowers;  
You’re welcome to your hame, ladye,  
For a’ that’s here is yours.”
“I thank thee, Annie; I thank thee, Annie,  
Sae dearly as I thank thee;  
You’re the likest to my sister Annie  
That ever I did see.
“There came a knight out oer the sea,  
And steald my sister away;  
The shame scoup in his company,  
And land whereer he gae!”
She hang ae napkin at the door,  
Another in the ha,  
And a’ to wipe the trickling tears,  
Sae fast as they did fa.
And aye she served the lang tables,
With white bread and with wine,
And aye she drank the wan water,
To had her colour fine.
And he’s taen down the silk napkin,
Hung on a silver pin,
And aye he wipes the tear trickling
A’ down her cheik and chin.
And aye he turn’d him round about,
And smil’d amang his men;
Says, “Like ye best the old ladye,
Or her that’s new come hame?”
When bells were rung, and mass was sung,
And a’ men bound to bed,
Lord Thomas and his new-come bride
To their chamber they were gaed.
Annie made her bed a little forbye,
To hear what they might say;
“And ever alas!” Fair Annie cried,
“That I should see this day!
“Gin my seven sons were seven young rats,
Running on the castle wa,
And I were a grey cat mysell,
I soon would worry them a’.
“Gin my seven sons were seven young hares,
Running oer yon lilly lee,
And I were a grew hound mysell,
Soon worried they a’ should be.”
And wae and sad Fair Annie sat
And drearie was her sang,
And ever, as she sobbd and grat,
“Wae to the man that did the wrang!”
“My gown is on,” said the new-come bride,
“My shoes are on my feet,
And I will to Fair Annie’s chamber,
And see what gars her greet.
“What ails ye, what ails ye, Fair Annie,
That ye make sic a moan?
Has your wine barrels cast the girds,
Or is your white bread gone?
“O wha was’t was your father, Annie,
Or wha was’t was your mother?
And had ye ony sister, Annie,
Or had ye ony brother?”
“The Earl of Wemyss was my father,
The Countess of Wemyss my mother;
And a’ the folk about the house
To me were sister and brother.
“If the Earl of Wemyss was your father,
I wot sae was he mine;
And it shall not be for lack o gowd
That ye your love sall tine.
“For I have seven ships o mine ain,
A’ loaded to the brim,
And I will gie them a’ to thee,
Wi four to thine eldest son:
But thanks to a’ the powers in heaven
That I gae maiden hame!”
How do you celebrate Valentine’s Day with your loved one? Remote cabin for two? Candlelight dinner? Roses? Chocolate? It’s all about the romance. And who doesn’t like to be wooed?

In Scotland, there are very few men and women who do not know the saying “When poverty comes to the door love flies oot the windae.”

Couples are still reminded that “not everything will be a bed of roses,” and there is also an old Gaelic saying Tha am pòsadh coltach ri seillean – tha mil ann ‘s tha gath ann which means marriage is like a bee – it contains both honey and a sting. Who can relate to that? But before the wedding bells ring, courtship comes a knocking.

The darkened hours of the night were a time for lovers and romance. Wrapped in his plaid, many a determined man braved the elements to see his intended. In many instances, men who had worked all day in the fields walked several times a week fifteen miles or more to see their sweethearts, returning in time to continue working in the fields in the morning. But a man did not visit empty handed.

In the Western Isles in the late 1600s, it was common for single men to pluck the fattest fowl and carry it to their loved one as a token of his love. Some other gifts of courtship were: silk gloves, ribbons, belts, knives, shoes and beads.

If the man was lucky enough, there would be a bundling. A woman’s mother and/or other female relatives securely tied the woman’s legs...
or tied a bag around them. Her parents allowed the male suitor to stay the night in her bed because this was a time where the man and woman were meant to talk and sort things out. If they got along, they proceeded to the next stage in the relationship. When courtship was advanced, the man usually remained in his sweetheart’s home a day or two. This was occasionally repeated and was considered his open intention in order to ask for the woman’s hand in marriage.

As with a number of cultures, there were many superstitions that some people learned from an early age in how to foretell their future spouse. For instance, by apple paring so that the skin comes off in one swoop. When the clock struck midnight, the skin was swung around the head and thrown over the left shoulder. When it landed on the floor, the skin supposedly formed the first letter of the name of the future spouse. I can remember doing something similar as a child, but the stem of the apple would be twisted as you said aloud A, B, C, D, etc. When the stem broke off, that was the first letter of the name of your future spouse. Did it work? No, especially since my husband’s first name starts with R.

Whatever you do this month to celebrate your loved one, please remember that livestock is not the gift that keeps on giving!

And now, a poem from one of the most romantic Celts to ever live, Robert Burns:

O My Luve’s Like a Red, Red Rose

O My Luve’s like a red, red rose,
That’s newly sprung in June:
O my Luve’s like the melodie,
That’s sweetly play’d in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonie lass,
So deep in luve am I;
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
Till a’ the seas gang dry.

Till a’ the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi’ the sun;
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
While the sands o’ life shall run.

And fare-thee-weel, my only Luve!
And fare-thee-weel, a while!
And I will come again, my Luve,
Tho’ ’twere ten thousand mile!

Robert – ‘Robbie’ or ‘Rabbie’ – Burns 1759-1796
Ireland is nothing if not romantic. Here is Obie up the Galtee Mountains on a hike. The Galtees are located on the Co Tipperary/Co Limerick mountain border range. There are several ways to access them but, since I was a child, I have always approached them from the Tipperary side.

The highest peak is Galtymore which rises to 917 m (3,009 ft). Walkers and hikers of all levels can enjoy the Galtees. You will take in some stunning views of the Limerick and Tipperary countryside even if you don’t feel up to climbing the peaks.

If you plan to take your four-legged friends with you, be sure that they are stock-broken and steady around sheep as there are signs everywhere warning of the consequences of dogs’ sheep worrying.

If you set off early enough you can be up and down by lunch time with plenty of time to see other attractions close by like The Rock Of Cashel, Hore Abbey or Cahir Castle.
Raglan Road is a road in the city of Dublin, Ireland, and it is also one of the best loved Irish poems and songs ever written. The poem was first published in The Irish Press on October 3, 1946, under the title of “Dark Haired Miriam Ran Away,” by Patrick Kavanagh.

Peter Kavanagh, Patrick’s brother, said that it was written about Patrick’s girlfriend, Hilda, but to avoid embarrassment he used the name of Peter’s girlfriend in the title. The real name of Patrick’s lost love was Dr. Hilda Moriarty who later married Donogh O’Malley, the Irish Minister for Health. Her son is the actor Daragh O’Malley, who starred in American-made films The Magnificent Seven, Texas, Vendetta, and Cleopatra, as well as many Irish films.

In 1987, Hilda Moriarty was interviewed by the Irish broadcaster RTÉ for a documentary about Kavanagh called “Gentle Tiger.” In the interview, she said one of the main reasons for the failure of their relationship was that there was a wide age gap between them. She was only 22, whereas he was 40. Dr. Moriarty also described how “Raglan Road” came to be written. Kavanagh had described himself as the peasant poet but she was not impressed and teased him for writing about mundane things such as vegetables. She said he should write about something else so he agreed to do so. According to Dr. Moriarty, he then went away and wrote “Raglan Road”.

On Raglan Road
by Patrick Kavanagh

On Raglan Road on an autumn day
I met her first and knew
That her dark hair would weave a snare
that I might one day rue;
I saw the danger, yet I walked
along the enchanted way,
And I said, let grief be a fallen leaf
at the dawning of the day.

On Grafton Street in November
we tripped lightly along the ledge
Of the deep ravine where can be seen
the worth of passion’s pledge,
The Queen of Hearts still making tarts
and I not making hay -
O I loved too much and by such and such
is happiness thrown away.

I gave her gifts of the mind
I gave her the secret sign that’s known
To the artists who have known
the true gods of sound and stone
And word and tint, I did not stint
for I gave her poems to say.

With her own name there and her own dark hair
like clouds over fields of May

On a quiet street where old ghosts meet
I see her walking now
Away from me so hurriedly
my reason must allow
That I had wooed not as I should
a creature made of clay -
When the angel woos the clay he’d lose
his wings at the dawn of day.
Battles between various factions, during the Pictish era of Scotland, took place at sea as well as on land, and were often massive in scale. We can get some idea of their size from this extract taken from the *Annals of Tighernac*.

“Kl. 729. Tri. L. long Piccardach do brisidh irrois Cuissine sa bliadhna cetna”.

“One hundred and fifty ships! Can it really have been so many? Remember that in the 8th century roads were practically non-existent and the easiest way of getting around Scotland was by sea and river. Neither should the reader make the mistake of believing these ships to have been small hide-covered currags, similar to the one in which St. Columba with his twelve attendants arrived on Iona in 563 A.D.

The vessels mentioned in these war stories, similar to Viking longships, were of sturdy wooden construction, fitted with tall masts and

Pictish carving thought to be of a king, a lord and monk, from about the time of King Nechtan of the Picts.
wide, spreading, canvas sails. Hulls were held together with strong iron bolts.

Scotland was covered in huge swathes of forest in the 8th century and wood was in plentiful supply. Again in the Annals of Tigernach we are told (in an odd mixture of Latin and Gaelic in the original), that:

“In the year 737 A.D. Failbhe MacGuaire, the successor of Maelrubha (the Red Priest) in Apurcrosan (Applecross) was drowned in the open sea with all his sailors, to the number of twenty-two.”

This ship had at least 23 persons on board, and 22 of them were sailors, possibly oarsmen. It is to be presumed that Failbhe MacGuaire had brought several of his belongings with him, as we are told that they were all drowned in the “open sea” – that is, he was on mission duty, so this must have been a craft of substantial size.

And once again, this time in the Historia Britonum, we are informed that one Pictish fleet of nine ships carried 309 persons – in other words, about 35 men per ship. So it’s probably fair to suggest that, as mentioned above, the 150 ships sunk on the Ross of Cuissine (an ancient place-name which, unfortunately, has never been identified) had a total complement of between three thousand and four thousand men!

This was likely the entire army/navy of whatever Pictish king led them into battle.

It’s hard to imagine the bursting timbers and the screams and yells of the sailors as they struggled to stay alive. It must have been awful.

We aren’t informed as to which king, or kings, these ships belonged, but 729 A.D. was the same year that Nechtan, King of the Picts, was forced to capitulate to Oengus, son of Uurguist, so it’s a fair bet that it was Nechtan’s fleet that was sunk: Nechtan had been leading a campaign to bring his people into the Roman Church. After his capitulation, Nechtan retired to the church and died peacefully in 732 A.D., probably a very saddened man.

It has been suggested that the ‘St. Andrews Sarcophagus’ was commissioned by Oengus to hold King Nechtan’s remains, although it is more generally supposed that the sarcophagus was for Oengus himself.

Why did Nechtan lean so much towards England and its Roman orthodoxy? Did he believe the Scots of Dalriada were more of a threat to Pictland than were the English?

Remember, it was only around thirty years since the battle of Dunnichen Hill, when Ecgfrith and his Roman religion had been so firmly rejected. Now, barely a generation later, Nechtan was asking for advice from an English abbot on Roman church habit and customs.

Had he been promised a cushy after-life by the Church of Rome if he agreed to the expulsion of the Celtic Church? Was money at the back of it?

Or was a woman involved?

An unusual and ancient tale called “The Legend of Triduana”, properly Tri di h-Aoine, which means ‘the three days fasting’, informs us that Nechtan had a lover by this name who is believed to have been an abbess attached to the group of advisors dispatched to Pictland by Ceolfrid. Perhaps it was as simple as that, for it wouldn’t be the first time that an ancient kingdom had been torn asunder over a king’s infatuation with a beautiful woman.

Forthcoming centuries would also show that neither would it be the last time.
Saint Triduana (also known as Trodline, Tredwell, and in Norse as Trøllhaena), was an early Christian woman, associated with various places in Scotland, and with Nechtan.

According to the 16th-century Aberdeen Breviary, Triduana was born in the Greek city of Colosse, and traveled from Constantinople with Saint Rule, who brought the bones of Saint Andrew to Scotland in the 4th century A.D.

A pious woman, Triduana settled at Rescobie near Forfar in Angus, but her beauty is said to have attracted the attention of the King of the Picts, the aforementioned Nechtan.

To stave these “unholy” feelings of love, Triduana is said to have torn out her own eyes and to have given them to Nechtan. Afterwards, she was associated with curing eye disorders.

Triduana spent her later years in Restalrig, Lothian, and healed the blind who came to her. She was buried at Restalrig when she died.

In the 12th century, the Norse Earl of Orkney Harald Maddadsson punished bishop John of Caithness by having him blinded. According to the 13th-century Orkneyinga Saga, John prayed to “Trøllhaena”, and later regained his sight when brought to her “resting place,” possibly referring to a local northern shrine rather than Restalrig.

The principal center of devotion to Triduana was at Restalrig, now part of Edinburgh, where the parish church is dedicated to her. The parish church has been rebuilt, but the associated 15th-century St Triduana’s Aisle (originally two-storeyed) survives. This partly subterranean structure often flooded in the past and was at one time assumed to be an unusually large and elaborate holy well (St Triduana’s Well). The exterior of the aisle was heavily restored by the architect Thomas Ross in 1907, though its interior (which has a remarkable echo) retains its original rib-vault and is a refined example of Scottish 15th-century architecture. Other dedications to Triduana include chapels at Ballachly (Caithness), Loth (Sutherland), and on Papa Westray in Orkney.

It is doubtful if we will ever know why King Nechtan behaved as he did, for he took his reasons with him to the grave, though the truth is probably a combination of all of these mentioned above, including his love for Triduana. How ironic it would be if he ended up in a Celtic heaven instead of a Roman one.

The building in front of the kirk dates back to the 1460s-70s when James III founded a collegiate chapel whose priests were to say masses for him. Only the lower of two storeys survived the kirk falling victim to the Reformation ordinance that any ‘monument to idolatrie’ should be ‘raysit and utterlei castin downe and destroyed’. The surviving chamber continued in use as a burial vault. During later restoration its propensity to flood led to the realization that this was St. Triduana’s Well, famed as a place of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages. Before the Reformation the Chapel had housed an altar dedicated to the obscure Pictish female saint who was credited with the ability to cure the blind. Pilgrims came here to bathe their eyes in the hope of a miraculous cure. The chapel was extensively restored in 1836 and 1906, when the present roof was added. This image was taken from the Geograph project collection. See this photograph’s page on the Geograph website for the photographer’s contact details. The copyright on this image is owned by Kim Traynor and is licensed for reuse under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 license.
Cú Chulainn riding his chariot into battle
Illustration by Joseph Leyendecker 1911
We have, in ancient Irish mythology (dating back to the 7th century, and repeated many times since), the story of the love between the Irish hero Cú Chulainn, and his chosen Emer. As was the case in those days, men who were looked upon as leaders or heroes often had their choice of many women. Such seems to be the case with Cú Chulainn, and yet he could not keep himself from ultimately loving Emer.

He was said to have been a small, dark-haired, somewhat somber, but very handsome man – so handsome that fellow Ulstermen feared he would steal their wives or daughters away.

Most reports say he had black hair, though one describes him in this way – “And certainly the youth Cúchulainn mac Sualdaim was handsome as he came to show his form to the armies. You would think he had three distinct heads of hair—brown at the base, blood-red in the middle, and a crown of golden yellow.”

This may be easily explained by the Celtic habit of putting white or yellow grease in their hair, before battle – mentioned in the journals of Romans who battled with them many times.

It is my theory that the greasing of the hair into a “butched” position was meant to make Celtic warriors appear taller and to distract the enemy. Many “tricks” were used in Celtic armies over the centuries, from loud noises (drums, bagpipes, and other noise makers, plus war cries), to colorful banners and clan flags, to sending out stark-naked warriors to challenge the best the other side had to offer. Simply looking fierce and unafraid could change the whole tide of a battle.

This would explain why Cú Chulainn was usually said to have dark hair, and yet, in this one particular battle scene, he has tri-colored hair. Whatever the color of his locks, he had his choice of many women in Ireland and yet his heart was set on the beautiful Emer, daughter of Forgall Monach, who opposed any marriage between her daughter and Cú Chulainn, and instead, promised Emer to Lugaid mac Nóis, the king of Munster. When mac Nóis heard how much Emer loved Cú Chulainn, he refused to take her as his wife.

Meanwhile, however, Forgall had talked Cú Chulainn into going to Scotland (then Alba) to learn the art of war under the tutelage of Scáthach, a great female warrior whose home was Dunscaith Castle (originally Dun Scáthach, or ‘fort of Scáthach’) on the Isle of Skye.

Scáthach’s rival, also said to be her sister, and sometimes even her twin sister, was a woman named Aífe, who was said to be extremely beautiful and also a very skilled warrior.

According to an ancient Celtic legend called “The Courting of Emer”, the warrior Cú Chulainn, on approaching the castle – “leaped upon the end of the bridge and made the hero’s salmon leap, so that he landed on the middle of it, and he reached the other end of the bridge before it could raise itself fully up, and then threw himself from it, and was on the ground of the island where Scáthach’s sunny house was, and it having seven great doors, and seven great windows between every two doors, and three times fifty couches between every two windows.”

An artist’s rendition of Dunscaith Castle based on historical and archeological data. The drawbridge underpinnings are still apparent at the ruins, as is the narrow entrance, which allowed for defeating the enemy one warrior at a time.
Scáthach gladly taught Cú Chulainn the art of war, but when she was set to do battle with her rival, Aífe, she was so concerned for her student that she gave Cú Chulainn a drug to make him sleep until the battle was over. However, she did not give him enough and he eventually joined in the fray. He fought Aífe in single combat, and the two were evenly matched. Cú Chulainn distracted Aífe by calling out that her horses and chariot, the things she valued most, had fallen off a cliff, and then he seized her. He spared her life on the condition that she call off her war with Scáthach, and, assuming his chances with Emer were over, asked Aífe to bear him a son.

Leaving Aífe behind and pregnant, Cú Chulainn returned to Ireland to find that Emer was not yet married to another. Several years later, his son by Aífe came to Ireland to find his father but Cú Chulainn mistakenly slayed him, thinking him to be an enemy.

Cú Chulainn eventually married Emer and yet, later, he still had a tryst with another woman. Emer forgave the past but could not accept the affair he had with a fairy woman named Fand.

Fand had been left by her husband and Cú Chulainn offered to help defend her against her enemies. They fell in love but Fand knew their relationship was doomed because Cú Chulainn was mortal and she was a fairy. In order to gain his help she agreed to the marriage anyway.

Emer, meanwhile, planned to kill her rival, but when she saw the apparent strength of Fand’s love for Cú Chulainn she decided to give him up to her. Fand, touched by Emer’s generosity, and knowing any marriage with Cú Chulainn would be ill-fated, decided against marrying her defender. Once Fand was out of the picture, Cú Chulainn and Emer drank a potion to wipe the whole event from their memories and lived on, happily ever after . . . in Celtic legend, at least.
Robert Tannahill (1774-1810) is an often overlooked romantic Scots poet. He published many of his poems and songs in a booklet entitled *The Pocket Songster; or Caledonian Warbler* (1823).

Several of his songs also appeared in the book *The Songs of Scotland Chronologically Arranged: With Introduction and Notes*, published in 1871.

In 2006, Brechin All Records released *The Complete Songs of Robert Tannahill Volume 1*. *Volume 2* was released in 2010, two centuries after Robert Tannahill’s death.

As has happened with many a great artist, Tannahill died by his own hand after a disappointing rejection of his work by a publisher. He was born and died in Paisley, Scotland.

His most notable song is perhaps “The Braes of Balquhidder” – the basis for the ballad “Wild Mountain Thyme,” which has the chorus “Will Ye Go Lassie, Go.” But among his more popular works is a song that has been recorded recently by The Tannahill Weavers, Dougie Maclean, and Aoife Clancy! The song is named “Are You Sleeping Maggie?,” and tells the story of a Highlander braving a storm and the terrors of the night to be with his lover. He appears to be not just any Highlander, but perhaps a convict or enemy soldier still wearing the chains of imprisonment for he says, “Loud the iron yett does clank.”

### Are Ye Sleepin Maggie?
by Robert Tannahill

Dark and rainy is the night,  
There’s no a star in a’ the carry;  
Lightnings gleam athwart the lift,  
And the cauld winds drive wi’ winter’s fury.

O! are ye sleepin’, Maggie?  
O! are ye sleepin’, Maggie?  
Let me in, for loud the linn  
Is roarin’ o’er the warlock craigie!

Fearfu’ sourgis the boortree bank,  
The rifted wood roars wild and drearie,  
Loud the iron yett does clank,  
And the cry o’ howlets makes me eerie.

Aboon my breath I daurna speak  
For fear I rouse your waukrife daddie;  
Cauld’s the blast upon my cheek, -  
Arise, arise, my bonnie lady!

She op’d the door, she let him in;  
He coost aside his dreepin’ plaidie;  
Blaw your warst, ye rain and win’,  
Since, Maggie, now I’m in aside ye.

Now since ye’re waukin’, Maggie,  
Now since ye’re waukin’, Maggie,  
What care I for howlet’s cry,  
For boortree bank, or warlock craigie?
Dark and dreary though February might be, it does bring us that ultimate celebration of Love, St. Valentine’s Day, and in the spirit of such celebration, we’re often asked, aesthetically, what we wouldn’t do for Love; in modern times, songsters from Motown have even suggested that neither “river deep” nor “mountain high” should deter us from pursuing those all-consuming passions. But in ages past, what would the brave o’ heart have risked for the Great Loves of their times, those dire challenges and lofty standards they pledged their lives and fortunes to defend? When the chopping block, or an enemy’s sword, an invader’s torch or siegemen’s cannon, or the lethal wrath of an angered royal might loom from an unlucky choice of pure nerve, how much would any man dare for what he held most dear? Few Scottish clans could give better chapter and verse on that topic than the heroes of the Ogilvies, as ages past have found their hearts worn on their proverbial sleeves as often as not.

Whence came this clan of old? There’s a division of thought about that, even among those still claiming the bloodline; many traditionally felt that Ogilvie (or Ogilvy as it’s often seen) had risen as a corruption of Gilbert, as that had been worn by many of the ancients as either a first name or surname, and from the 1200s on, had inspired the recurrent family names of Gilbride and Gilchrist as well.

However, many purists in the last two centuries, including the Lord Lyon, King of Arms, have cited the more specific origin of Ogilvie being an evolution of the iron-age Brythonic describer ‘Ocel fa’, translating as “from the high plain”.

But if the name’s origin can be debated, their place of origin is indisputable, for throughout Scottish history the Ogilvies have ever been hand in glove with their homelands in the district of Angus, where they neighbored, mostly in peace, with the houses of Guthrie and Keith. In the case of the Ogilvies, that ancestry might reflect a nearly vertical path of time in that geography, as their lines appear to go directly back to the Pictish office of the Mormaers, which centuries later, under Norman influence, developed into the long tradition of the Earls of Angus.

In 1163, William the Lion granted a barony to Gilbert Ogilvie, one of the earlier Earls himself, and in 1296, his great grandson Patrick de Ogilvy, then a clan chief, stood in a queue of fellow nobles to sign the infamous Ragman’s Roll. But as the English tyrant Edward Longshanks would soon discover, rebellion was brewing, and the majority of those signatures guaranteed not one iota of true loyalty, so while

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**Ogilvie Tartan and Shield**
Patrick’s right hand was scrawling his name upon that length of parchment, likely the fingers of his left hand were held firmly crossed behind his back.

Earldoms and baronetcies, for all their resource and responsibility, still provided not enough service for the duty-oriented Ogilvie men, and after standing staunch by their hero, Robert the Bruce, in battle and in exile, they began to aspire to the offices of the sheriffs for Angus, which, upon attaining, soon became an hereditary position for numerous generations. Unsatisfied by even those opportunities, Sir Patrick Ogilvy followed his love for righteous truth to France in the early 1400s to fight for the crusade of Joan of Arc, in short order rising to command her Scottish forces, and becoming known thereby as the Viscomte d’Angus. Although many of the Scots ‘redshanks’ remained in France thereafter as warriors and retainers of high renown, Sir Patrick returned dutifully home to his beloved fields and hills of Angus, narrowly missing the slaughter at the Battle of Red Harlaw, which tallied his father and elder brother among its vast charnelhouse, dying there for love of king and country, in a valiant attempt to stop Donald, Lord of the Isles, from usurping the northwestern Lowlands.

From about this era emerged a folk tale which survived in pieces as a popular taproom ballad; according to that old rhyme, an Ogilvie kinsman was returning from a formal church service one Sabbath midday, along the rolling bluffs above the Firth of Tay, when he came across a lost lamb caught in a bramble shrub, which he charitably freed, and bore up the trail to find its shepherd. Soon after, he was accosted by a known ruffian called Sween (or sometimes, “MacSweyn”), who accused him of thieving from the flocks of Clan Grant, and drew his dirk to put him under arrest. Allegedly, the Ogilvie samaritan then sat down with the lamb on his lap, and to excuse his actions, attempted to relate to his aggressor Christ’s Parable of the Lost Lamb, which he had just heard sermonized at morning mass. Sween refused this explanation, but also failed to notice the kinsman palming a hefty little chunk of granite, which he then hurled mightily to bounce neatly off Sween’s pate, dropping the rogue dazed and groaning to the track, blood trickling from his scalp. Ogilvie then sprang to his feet, confiscated the dirk, dropped the lamb into the hunkered Sween’s arms, rebuking him as he left: “Peace or war, I find ye wanting!”

As for the Ogilvies in recorded history, few ever found them wanting in either peace or war; not only did their neighbors and superiors know them to be ever reluctant to mix themselves into armed hostility, but also swift in their attempts to calm or delay such aggression between others whenever they could, either as sheriffs, or landholding nobles, such as their involvement in the crusade to halt the ravenous Stewart outlaw known as the Wolf of Badenoch. No doubt, that reputation engendered the sort of trust which led to Sir Walter Ogilvy being appointed Lord High Treasurer of Scotland in 1425, and in 1430, an ambassador to England.

Despite their many lofty political alliances, the Clan found themselves in competition with the neighboring Lindsays for the commissioned protection of Arbroath Abbey in 1445; an attempt to resolve the issue under truce was accidentally mishandled, and resulted in the Tiger Earl of Crawford and his retainers attacking and slaying dozens of the finest young Ogilvie men at arms.

Happier circumstances occurred four decades later, when the family’s emerging devotion to diplomatic assignment would see another ambassador in Walter’s grandson, Sir James, this time for Scotland to Denmark, in 1491, during the same year in which he would advance to peerage as the first Lord Ogilvy of Airlie. When he was received by the dashing young James IV, at Edinburgh Castle, some eight years later, James Ogilvy shocked all in attendance by inquiring of King James if the rumors of His Majesty wearing a chain of repentance about his waist were true.
Nodding gravely, the monarch replied that, yes indeed, they were, whereupon the ambassador Sir James further distinguished himself by remarking that His Grace might consider releasing such fetters, as the English had plenty of chains for every man in Scotland. That he departed the Court still in his Royal Highness’ good graces after so bold a statement underscores just how fine a diplomat the Lord Sir James truly was.

One hundred years later, the 1600s were aborning with a sixth King James poised to straddle the thrones of both Scotland and England, cementing the hotly contested vision of One Great Britain, and bringing with his dual monarchy the dread mandate of a Protestant Island Nation. The stench of impending religious wars, and potential pogroms, drifted on serpentine British winds, and of a sudden, every mercat cross was a pulpit, every crossroad a preaching forum, as the state religion of England, the Episcopal Anglican faith, sought to solidify its dream of forging a mighty new Church of Scotland as its appendant sister. But louder still throughout the glens and straths of Alba were the rousing, fiery words of men like Knox and Calvin, and birthing the critical designation of Presbyterianism only helped consecrate the notion that if the workaday Scot must turn his back on Rome, at least he could do

Sir James Ogilvie, in 1491, advanced to peerage as the first Lord Ogilvy of Airlie. Located here is Airlie Castle, built in c. 1432 by Walter Ogilvie/Ogilvy of Lintrathen, Lord High Treasurer of Scotland.

Airlie Castle is not currently open to the public, however it is remembered in the song ‘The Bonnie Hoose o’ Airlie’ which is mentioned in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel ‘Kidnapped’. (Drawing from 1896)
so without the guidance of the English. But in
the face of that frying-pan-or-fire choice, there
were those who still dared stand and speak for
the Catholic Church, and for Scotland’s 800
years of loving commitment to Papal devotion,
under the shepherding of their beloved St.
Andrew. Prominent among them were John
Ogilvie, who graduated from the Jesuit college
in Olmutz, Bavaria in 1598, and returned home
to preach first in Scotland’s northeast parishes,
beginning in 1613.

Months later, having gained a strong
following among the harassed and belittled
Catholics of Edinburgh, Dundee and environs,
Father John took his ecumenical zeal on an
impassioned pilgrimage westward, engendering
admiration and condemnation in equal measure
as he traveled and preached, until reaching the
seething crucible of Glasgow in 1614, a city
already torn precariously between the fervor of
eyearly Covenanters and the cold-steel resistance
of Anglican Royalists.

Viewing Ogilvie as the perfect scapegoat
to redirect everyone’s focus, the City Guard
arrested him for incitement of riot, and the
courts proceeded to find him guilty of treason,
for which he was hanged at Glasgow Cross a
year later. Evidently, this did little to quench the
ardor of his quest, as he was beatified by the
Vatican in 1929, and canonized in 1976.

Still, the Ogilvies’ love of worshipful
patriotism would not unshackle them from the
ringing anvil of the Wars of the Covenant;
having accepted conversion to the Anglican
faith, largely due to their unwavering service to
the Stewart monarchs of either nation, the Clan
found themselves mounting for battle against
the thundering incursions of the ferocious
Covenanter armies. The seventh Lord Ogilvy,
newly created the first Earl of Airlie, rode for
the great general Montrose with his sons and his
followers, and fought with great distinction in
the victory at Kilsyth; unfortunately, that same
force was routed by Covenanters at Inverlochy,
and to safeguard Montrose’s retreat, the Earl’s
eldest son used his troops to delay the Covenant
vanguard, resulting in the slaughter of most,
and the capture and imprisonment of the newest
Lord Ogilvy. But, blood is thicker than water,
love is sweeter than wine, and together they can
spring the stoutest of locks; the day before he
was slated for execution, the young Lord was
visited by his tearful eldest sister, clad in a dour,
voluminous mourning cassock. After praying
together in his dank, shadowy cell for over
an hour, the lady requested to leave, and was
escorted from the dungeons . . . though in truth,
she did not leave that cell for another several
hours, after summoning the turn-key to confess
that it was actually her brother who had sadly
skulked away, face hidden inside the hooded
cloak, after switching clothes with her, and
leaving her behind in his place. A dicey move
certainly, putting both siblings at great risk, but
as the authorities chose to neither detain the
Lady Ogilvy, nor pursue her brother, a gamble
well rewarded. Indeed, they would both live to
see a Stuart king come again to power during
the Restoration.

But the wars of church and chapel would
strike one more challenging blow against this
noble house, when the most ruthless of all
celtophobes, Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector
of Britain and the English Parliament’s Pet
Butcher, grew weary of galloping the breadth
of Scotland with his immense army, smashing
resistance as he went, and decided that to break
the Caledonian appetite for religious freedom
for good of all, he must seize and remove the
Honours of Scotland (those being the Scottish
crown, the royal scepter of Scotland, the Great
Sword of State, and the ambiguously arcane
King’s papers).

Catching wind of the strategy, the Earl
Marischal, being the official guardian of the
Honours, ordered them relocated from Scone
Palace to Dunnottar Castle, for safekeeping;
unfortunately, this news reached Cromwell
immediately and the race was on to intercept the
treasure. Cromwell’s forces reached Dunnottar
first, but thanks to the wiles of noblewoman Katherine Drummond, the Honours were smuggled into the keep concealed in bags of wool. Undeterred by this trickery, Cromwell laid siege to Dunnottar, knowing that his vast army could leverage a surrender without fail; what he didn’t factor in to his plan, was that the Castle’s governor was Sir George Ogilvie of Barras, a veteran knight well versed in military strategy and brinkmanship.

During the blockade of the castle which followed, the removal of the Honours of Scotland was planned by the Governor, Elizabeth Douglas (Ogilvie’s wife), and one Christian Fletcher, the wife of James Granger, minister of the Kinneff Parish Church, who held right of passage. The King’s Papers were first removed from the castle by Anne Lindsay, a kinswoman of Lady Ogilvie (wouldn’t the Tiger Earl be surprised!), who actually walked through the besiegers with the papers sewn into the undersides of her skirts, in a ploy reminiscent of the ‘sisterly rescue’. The crown, scepter and sword were hidden in wicker baskets, then lowered down from a seaside window to the strand below, at low tide, where they were gathered and hidden in creels of seaweed by the Fletchers’ servants disguised as beachcombers. After retrieving them, the Fletchers secreted them to the Old Kirk at Kinneff, and buried them beneath the floorboards. Winter came and went with the Castle still under siege, but by the spring of 1652 the commander of the blockade had found the cannons necessary to destroy Dunnottar, so Ogilvie surrendered on May 24, on condition that his garrison would be freed. Finding the Honours gone, Cromwell imprisoned Ogilvie and his wife in the castle for nearly a year, until a deliberate false story about the Honours being taken overseas evaporated his remaining interest in Dunnottar, and for him, its bitter disappointments.

Two hundred and thirty-six years later, Scots Canadian explorer William Ogilvie journeyed fearlessly into the high, foreboding interior of the untamed Yukon Territory, discovering, mapping and surveying as he went, and chose to name the most majestic mountain range he found after his own Clan; one has to wonder if old Bill ever watched the glowing, shimmering magnificence of the Northern Lights ripple over those snowy peaks, and remembered that tale of those grand and shining Honours of Scotland, protected with such heartful devotion by an ancestor named George.

We can never know, but I bet if he ever did, he found himself smiling proudly.

**William Ogilvie, for whom the Ogilvie Mountains of the Yukon are named.**

This material is just a sampling of one of the 60 Clan names and legends appearing in the Spring 2014 upcoming book; 

**Henceforth Tales**

by Cass and Deborah Wright

Follow future issues of Celtic Guide for further information about 2014 publication. . . . and thank you for joining us at the hearth! - DW
Within each culture there are many customs that are observed and practiced for every occasion. Whether that be the celebration of the changing of the seasons, the birth of a newborn, the funeral rites of a loved one, or the marriage of a couple, the individual is bound by traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation.

History and traditions of medieval Europe have fascinated and have been romanticized for centuries. Britain in particular is rife with many different traditions that were introduced and adopted from different European influences.

The marriage custom in medieval Scotland was romanticized by writers and scrutinized by historians. Unlike most European countries, the custom of marriage in Scotland was not so much a religious celebration but of mutual consent. While at times it followed the rules dictated by the Church, very rarely was it enforced.

In the medieval period, the Church had strict regulations on marriage through canon law. Canon law in Scotland was interpreted and applied differently from other European countries. Marriage laws were barely enforced as the Scots paid little heed to the Church’s limits on marriage.1 In Scotland there were two kinds of marriages that took place, “regular” and “irregular”. Both “regular” and “irregular” marriages were both recognized by the law.2

“Regular” marriages followed the rules of canon law. According to canon law, it was required that before a marriage took place, the banns would be read in church three Sundays in a row. This was used to prevent any obstacle to the marriage.3 Later on the Church would use this to prevent clandestine marriages from taking place.4 Regular marriages did not always take place within a church. Marriages could also take place in the home.5

Irregular” marriages were much more secular than the traditional marriage ceremony. Irregular marriages could be done in three ways. The first being that the couple could declare themselves married in front of witnesses, regardless of whether there was sexual contact. This was considered legal but would be a lot harder to prove in court unless there was additional evidence to prove the legitimacy of the marriage.

The second was the promise of marriage followed by a consumated marital union. This, however, had to be backed up by written proof or an oath sworn in front of witnesses.

The third was “by habit and repute” if the couple presented themselves as husband and wife regardless of whether there was any declaration of marriage made.6

Irregular marriages were often frowned upon and those who admitted to irregular marriages were fined, but they were tolerated because the
Church feared that if the law did not recognize irregular marriages, the couples would live in sin. The church wanted to protect women from men who would seduce them with fake promises of marriage.7

To the Scots, marriage was based on the principals of mutual consent rather than religious ceremony.8 After the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, banns were essential for a marriage to be legal. The wedding vow was a crucial part in making the marriage legal, according to Heather Parker. In Parker’s thesis, “couples took vows per verba presenti, or in the present tense, or per verba de futuro, which was a type of betrothal. The latter type of marriage was still binding if the couple had agreed to be betrothed and had then consummated the union.” (Parker, 76) Heather Parker goes on to say that was occasionally referred to as “handfasting”. Handfasting became something of a phenomenon in Scottish culture. According to Parker, it was this aspect that made historians begin to question Scotland’s traditional historiography of marriage. Historical works in the late eighteen and early nineteenth century proved to be little help to modern day scholars, as historians of that period only provided romantic visions of Scotland’s history.

In 1771, Scottish historian Thomas Pennet was one of the first historians to record the custom of handfasting. He wrote that Scots practiced trial unions, called “handfast marriages”. Pennet explained that after a year and a day, the couple could choose to end their marriage. These ideas would later be adopted in Sir Walter Scott’s novel, The Monastery.9

It was not until 1958 when A.E. Alton had begun to investigate the truth behind handfasting. In Anton’s article, “‘Handfasting’ In Scotland”, he argued that handfasting was a Germanic custom for sealing a marriage contract rather than a Celtic “trial marriage,” as romantics of the eighteen and nineteenth centuries had led to believe. According to A.E. Anton, handfasting, known in Anglo Saxon as handfaestung, was the Saxon tradition of shaking hands after the future husband provided sureties to the woman’s family during the betrothal ceremony. By doing this, the families became bound to the agreement that they had made. A.E. Anton goes on to say that this joining of hands became a feature for betrothals in both medieval Scotland and England.10

Footnotes
1 Heather Parker, “‘In All Gudly Haste’: The Formation of Marriage In Scotland, c. 1350-1600”(Ph.D diss., University of Guelph, 2012), 68.
5 Kandi Phillips
6 University of Glasgow, “Scottish Way of Birth and Death”, Marriage
7 University of Glasgow, “Scottish Way of Birth and Death”, Marriage
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid. 29,30
10 A.E. Anton. 90,92

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Their Heart Was in the Highlands.

Tha mo cridhe as na Gaidhealtachd.
Translated from Gaelic, this reads: Their heart was in the Highlands.

That saying definitely referred to my Great Uncle Angus Lewis MacIver and his wife Marion MacIver nee Graham.

On the MacIver side, my Grandpa Daniel was the oldest, then Angus, Annabella, Kenneth – all were born at the croft/homestead, Lochganvich on the Isle of Lewis. This croft was built sometime in the 1700s or before, not sure exactly. The Isle of Lewis is the largest and most populous of the Outer Hebridean Islands. The total area of Lewis is 683 square miles and the average temperature for December and January is 8 °C (46 °F), with a high of 16 °C (61 °F) in the peak of summer, which typically happened during July.

Life was not easy in the late 1800s and early 1900s, with lots of work to be done, and all the children being expected to help with the chores. The family grew hay and corn for the animals, and planted potatoes. They also had to cut the peat to heat the croft daily. They looked after animals: hens, sheep and cows.

Washing the clothes was no easy task. They had to be taken to a nearby lake, or boil the water in a large pot, then lay them on the grass to dry. The women made socks for the men by using their bobbins, and everyone had a spinning wheel to spin their wool.

Upon reaching a certain age each one of the MacIver children took a different journey. Daniel left to go to Glasgow. Angus left to go to Glasgow first then on to Malaya. Annabella stayed on the island for a while then moved to Vatersay. And Kenneth left to go to Pennsylvania.
Angus met Marion in Glasgow while she was engaged to someone else. She broke off her engagement after she met Angus, as she knew he was the one for her. Angus felt the same way about Marion... he was smitten.

Marion was born in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis. Both being from the same island, it was likely they would eventually meet, especially since, as islanders moved to a city, they would usually all stay in the same district, and continue to speak Gaelic. This would have made things more comfortable for them.

They would also have reason to both be attending the Free Church of Scotland, as that was the church they would have been brought up with. The church in Partick is likely where they would have been attending services, as Angus would have been staying with his brother Daniel, in that town, and Marion also went to the Free Church there.

Marion was a very independent young lady working in an office. The family remembers her telling them about when she got her first pay packet and changed it into pennies so it would look like more money to her Mum and Dad. Pennies back then were large and heavy.

The couple only had a short time together in Glasgow, as Angus was already committed to going to Malaya to oversee a rubber plantation. He left by ship with a promise from Marion that she would follow him later.

Marion traveled to London and sailed to Penang, then on to Malaya in 1916. This was quite a journey to undertake by herself and it shows what a feisty young lady Marion was – and with her she brought the wedding dress that she bought in Scotland, along with a touch of heather which was a must for good luck as part of the wedding bouquet. The couple was married 17 April 1916 in Negri Sembilan with the blessings of both families who could not travel out for the wedding.

*The day of the wedding being celebrated by those able to attend.*
The life in Malaya was definitely something they were not used to. They had house servants and a nanny for the two oldest children. Christine and Mora were born while they were living at the rubber plantation. The weather was also a drastic change for them. The average temperature on the island in November and January being the coldest months is 26.1 °C (around 80 °F). The island was also much larger at 2,581 square miles.

While living such a different way of life I am sure they would have sought other Scottish people also living there. And missing their homeland so much, they would have written almost weekly to their parents perhaps asking for news updates and even Scottish trinkets and biscuits to be sent to them. For anyone that has lived abroad it is so important to keep in touch, as you do not want to miss anything. I believe you become more Scottish than when you lived in Scotland. I cannot explain this, but I know it is true. Your heart yearns for the homeland.

In 1920, it was decided that Marion should return to Lochganvich instead of going back to Glasgow where she was raised, as the couple had decided that they both wanted to live in the Highlands. Her parents had also decided to return to the Isle of Lewis. Angus returned, on leave, for a number of years and then returned for good. It must have been a turbulent time, as he never got all his possessions out of the country. I am still looking into this for my book that I will be writing.

Upon his return to Lochganvich, Angus worked at one of the shooting and fishing estates. The Outer Hebrides have a reputation for being treeless, not quite accurate, as there are woods in the Western Isles. Stornoway woodlands offer wildlife spotting opportunities as well as a great place to go for nature walks.

Angus died at the age of 65. Marion died at age 94. In all they had six children –
• Christine wed a married a member of the Polish Air Force, part of the Polish Armed Forces.
• Mora married and moved to Hertfordshire.
• Ian died at a very young age.
• Donald served in the Royal Navy and his ship HMT Ganilly was sunk by a U-390 torpedo.
• Annabella married and stayed on the island.
• Cecil moved to Glasgow and married.

And thus another generation was born from the surviving children.

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Yes, we are proud . . .

Two years ago, when we started the Celtic Guide, we had no idea who would even want to participate, or how many readers we would get. We were even chided by an obviously (hmmm, what word should I use here?) ‘person’ who said – “That’s all well and good until you run out of things to write about.” Boy, were they ever wrong!

Themes seem to come out of nowhere and they are twisted and manipulated by writers all over the Celtic-loving world to produce tale after interesting tale. And who knew artists and photographers, scientists and archeologists, musicians and historians would join in?

And read, the readers have! Nearly 44,000 web page hits, over 11,000 Facebook likes, and a Facebook reach of upwards of 40,000 per week.

Yes, we are proud.

http://www.celticguide.com
Arthurian legend is filled with epic tales of tragic romance. The *ménage à trois* of Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot is the story most focused on in contemporary film and literature. Merlin and Vivienne have had their fair share of air time, albeit often as a subplot to the Arthur and Guinevere saga. But, aside from a poorly received 2006 film, recent media has largely ignored the story of Tristan and Isolde. Since it is a legend that the reader may be unfamiliar with, we shall begin with a re-telling of the story, followed by historical analysis. It should be noted that this tale, like all of the legends in Arthuriana, has many variations.

**The Legend**

In the days of the old Celtic kingdoms, King Anguish of Ireland has attempted to subjugate Cornwall by demanding the country pay tribute or risk invasion. Mark, King of Cornwall, who

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*Our cover image is repeated here in its entirety as it shows Mark, King of Cornwall, peaking around the corner at the lovers Tristan and Isolde. Mark plays a significant role in this story. The painting is named ‘The End Song’ and was created by Edmund Leighton, in 1902.*
possesses as much Celtic pride as any Irishman, cannot accept this. Mark challenges Anguish to a duel of champions. If the Irish champion wins, Cornwall must pay the tribute. But if the Cornish champion wins, Ireland must withdraw their demands. Anguish sends his brother-in-law, Morholt, to do battle with Mark’s champion; his nephew, Tristan.

When the dust of the duel has settled, Tristan is the victor, killing Morholt. However, our hero has sustained an injury that will be fatal if it doesn’t heal. Ireland is renowned as having the best healers in the land, so Tristan assumes a false identity to travel into enemy territory for treatment. As fate would have it, Tristan is nursed by the daughter of King Anguish, the beautiful Isolde. Not realizing his true identity as the man who slew her kinsman, the two young people strike up a friendship. During his convalescence Tristan returns Isolde’s kindness by teaching her to play the harp.

When Tristan has recovered, he learns that a fearsome dragon has been tormenting local villages. Anguish offers his beautiful daughter’s hand in marriage to any knight who can slay this beast. Tristan accepts the challenge. But, hoping for a treaty through marriage to end the feuding between the two kingdoms forever, Tristan secretly accepts the challenge not for himself, but for King Mark. And this is where all the trouble begins.

Being the hero that he is, Tristan could naught but slay the beast. And so the hand of Isolde was won for Tristan’s much elder uncle. When the truth is revealed, Isolde is furious and declares her hatred for Tristan. She begs her father not to send her to Cornwall. Being a man with a strong sense of honor, Anguish will not go back on his word. Isolde must accept her fate and begin preparations for the voyage immediately.

The marriage of young maidens to much older men was common during this time. But, that did not make the situation any more palatable for women in Isolde’s position. In an attempt to remedy her fear and the revulsion she might feel on her wedding night, Isolde asks a witch to brew a love potion for herself and her future husband. The witch obliges and mixes an elixir possessed by a very powerful magic. Isolde is told that in order for the spell to be complete, the mixture must be drunk by the intended lovers together.

It is now time for Isolde’s voyage to meet her new lord and king. Mark will allow no one but his trusted nephew, the greatest champion in the land, to escort his young bride. And so, the two board the vessel that will transport them over the sea to Cornwall.

By this time, Isolde’s hatred of Tristan has become overshadowed by the dread of her new circumstance. While at sea, Tristan attempts to comfort her, and Isolde is reminded of why she and Tristan had once been fast friends. As girls do, Isolde discussed this with her friend and servant, Branwen, and the two hatched a scheme. Isolde would trick Tristan into drinking the liquid with her. Meanwhile, Branwen, who bore a striking resemblance to Isolde, didn’t...
half mind the idea of receiving the treatment of a queen, so she would assume Isolde’s place in the marriage bed.

Their plan went off without a hitch, and the threesome managed to fool King Mark for some time. But, like any deception, the lovers were discovered in their trickery. Being a man of great pride, Mark could not let this treachery go unpunished. He challenged his nephew to a duel. This time, Tristan is not victorious. It may be that he could not bring himself to raise a hand against his beloved uncle, who had been like a father to him. Likewise, Mark’s great love for his nephew trumped his wounded pride. But treason cannot go unpunished. So, Tristan is sentenced to banishment, rather than death. Tristan must depart Cornwall forthwith, and he travels to the nearest Celtic kingdom, Brittany, across the sea.

Tristan begins a new life in a new land, but remains faithful to Isolde for some time. Traveling through Brittany, Tristan performs many heroic feats. After a time, he meets a beautiful woman who also bears the name Isolde. She is known as Isolde of the White Hands. Because her beauty reminds him of his own Isolde, Tristan marries this woman. He is happy for a time, but never forgets his true love over the sea.

One day while riding through the Breton forest, Tristan comes across a fair maiden being encircled by six brutes about to do her harm. Tristan charges to her rescue and singlehandedly defeats the men six to one. However, he is mortally wounded, and the maiden manages to help him onto his horse, who knows the way home.

Upon reaching the castle, Tristan tells his friend, Sir Kahedin, who is his wife’s brother, that he can be cured only by Isolde, the former, if he can get a message to her. Kahedin, loyal as any knight can be, vows to retrieve Isolde from Cornwall. Impatient to receive the news as soon as possible, Tristan asks Kahedin to use

Another painting entitled ‘Tristan and Isolde’ and created by Herbert James Draper (1863-1920)
white sails upon his return if King Mark agrees to release Isolde for this voyage, and black sails if he does not. Kahedin agrees and sets sail immediately.

Despite everything that had occurred between them, King Mark’s affection for Tristan is so great that he allows his wife to journey to the aid of her former lover to once again nurse him back to health. Thus, Sir Kahedin returns to Brittany with white sails raised. However, Isolde of the White Hands has heard whispers of this other Isolde and her liaisons with Tristan. Not willing to risk losing her husband to his long lost love, Isolde, the latter, lies to Tristan, saying that black sails bedeck Kahedin’s ship.

Hearing this terrible news, Tristan’s desperation was overwhelming. Believing that he will never see his love again, the only one who can cure him, he has no will to live. Our brave hero dies of a broken heart just before Isolde the former is able to reach him. Isolde’s heart is crushed to have arrived too late. She collapses in tears over the lifeless body of the love of her life. Isolde, too, dies of her grief. And thus ends a tragic tale of two young lovers who were wrenched apart by family obligations, and reunited only when it was too late.

Historical Background

Although the story of Tristan and Isolde is not often considered as inspiration for William Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet,” we can see some obvious similarities. A pair of young lovers who were never supposed to be together, dying young while one waits for the other, falsely thinking all is lost, and the female character collapsing over the body of her dead love. We cannot know if Shakespeare had Tristan and Isolde in mind when he wrote his masterpiece. But, we can be sure that he would have been well aware of this story.

The romance of Tristan and Isolde is speculated to pre-date Shakespeare by approximately one thousand years, and may be based on an historical person. In fact, there is more evidence for an historical Tristan than there is for a real Arthur. There exists in Cornwall a megalith known as “the Tristan Stone.” The stone is thought to date from the 6th century A.D. Inscribed upon it are the words (in translation) “Here lies Drustan, son of Cynvawr.” This stone is placed close to Castle Dore, which is thought to have been occupied by local chieftains between the 5th and 7th centuries. Cynvawr is strongly considered to be one of these chieftains. Furthermore, a monk named Wrmonoc recorded in the 9th century that Cynvawr was the same person as King Mark.

Another early source are the Welsh Triads which discuss “Drystan, son of Tallwch.” There was a Pictish king known as “Drust, son of Tallorcan” who is known to have lived in the late 8th century, giving another plausible historical origin to the figure of Tristan. Triad 71 mentions “Drystan, son of Tallwch, for Essylt, the wife of his uncle March.” Though the details of this early version of the story differ from the version described above, the names are clearly variations of eachother.

Like the other Arthurian legends, Tristan and Isolde’s story is probably an amalgam of many influences. Very similar plots are found in the medieval Irish tales, “Diarmaid and Grainne” and “The Wooing of Emer.” It is said that despite many differences in the various versions of this story, the fact that Isolde is always depicted as an Irish princess may point to an Irish origin, or at least a strong Irish influence.

Whatever its true origins are, it seems likely that legends of Tristan began independently

‘Tristan and Isolde’ by Rogelio de Egusquiza, 1915
of those about Arthur. Perhaps the Irish tales mentioned above were grafted onto legends of a true Cornish prince. Eventually, this tale was merged with Arthurian legend, and Tristan became a knight of the round table.

By the high middle ages, Tristan and Isolde’s love story had become extremely popular. The story first circulated among the Celtic lands mentioned above, as well as in Celtic Brittany. From there it traveled outward among the Anglo-Normans and over to audiences in France and Germany. As Arthurian legend evolved over the centuries, tales of Tristan as a knight of the round table continued to be told, as well as his and Isolde’s own independent love story. Their last medieval mention is in Thomas Malory’s famous fifteenth-century masterpiece, “Le Morte d’Arthur.” Afterwards, the story falls off the radar, apart from two minor exceptions, until the 19th century.

Scottish poet Sir Walter Scot reignited interest in our two lovers in a poem about them which was included in his “Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border,” published in 1802. Subsequent writers and poets who found inspiration from Tristan and Isolde include Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Thomas Hardy, John Updike, and Diana Paxson. Perhaps the most famous is Richard Wagner, who featured them in his German language opera of the same name.

Most recently, Tristan and Isolde appeared as the main characters in a 2006 film produced by Ridley Scott. Starring James Franco and Sophia Myles, the film sadly received poor reviews by both critics and movie-goers. It may be high time to bring this romance into the 21st century. Perhaps, if he isn’t busy filming another medieval epic, Peter Jackson would be up for the challenge. It doesn’t hurt to ask!

Bibliography:
The Camelot Project by University of Rochester: http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot-project
EDITOR’S NOTE: Allen Hartley presents a two-part tale, partly romantic, for February and partly magical for our March theme of “Magic”. This historical fiction is based on real legends of the Selkie.

The Council of the Gods was in an uproar over the tide of the new religion spreading across the lands. It was sweeping aside the old ways in an attempt to extinguish them. Their followers were being forced to convert or die. Their legends, history, magick, and knowledge were being polluted, stolen, and corrupted. Using a program of torture, intimidation, and bribery, the weak were embracing the new religion and the strong were being trampled.

“Albion! Step forward!” commanded the Head of the Council.

“We’re charging you with the task of finding a strong follower that can be entrusted with our powers, knowledge, and treasures. It is our conclusion that we’re in the nigredo aspect of our existence. As with all the cycles, we will transition with this one, too. We need fertile ground to winter the seeds of our ways until they can emerge in the spring of a new era.”

Albion responded, “It’s my honor to serve the Council of the Gods!”

The Council Head motioned to his assistant – “We place in your trust, our two most prized items, the gold and silver adder stone and the sword, Fragarach. Bestow these upon a strong and worthy follower as well as the gifts of our magick and knowledge.”

“I already have a candidate in mind.” Albion assured them.

“Go with our blessings and fulfill your charge,” the Head of the Council admonished.

Albion returned to his undersea home and enlisted the aid of his daughter, Muireann. He had foreseen the approaching diminishment and elimination of his people under the new religion. Shortly before his meeting with the Council of the Gods, he had watched a young mother place her newborn son in a basket on the seashore. The incoming tide swept the infant into the sea. Her lover and the boy’s father, was a Selkie. He had returned to the sea before the child was born. It didn’t escape the notice of the new religious leaders that the mother was without a husband. Under the old ways, it was acceptable and an honor to have a Selkie child. Many times, the call of the sea was so great, the child would join the Selkie parent.

Selkies sent by Albion guided the basket to a remote northern island. Albion named the boy Muirios. The basket came to rest on the rocky beach of the island. A fisherman and his young daughter, Keeley were its only inhabitants.

Early each morning, Keeley would stroll the rocky beach in search of useful items that had washed up during the night. The storm from the previous night had washed up large clumps of kelp and wood. As she returned for her third load, Keeley noticed the basket. She rushed to it, eager to investigate the contents. To her surprise, the smiling face of a baby boy greeted her. Excited, Keeley snatched up the basket and raced home. She placed the basket next to the tiny stove to warm the infant. After a while, she lifted him from the basket to change his damp clothes. To her surprise, the basket, blankets, and baby were warm and dry.

The babe started to fuss and squirm. Keeley guessed the infant was hungry, but she had no milk. She filled a pot of boiling water with pieces of kelp and fish. After the mixture had boiled down, she placed the pot outside to cool. Using a piece of rolled kelp as a funnel, she fed the warm meal to the infant. As she held him in her arms, the satiated child drifted off to sleep.

Later that afternoon, her father returned empty handed after a day of fishing. When Keeley presented the baby, her father was furious.
“Take the basket and baby back to where you found it! I can’t feed another mouth. I can barely feed us. Since your mother died, we’ve had a tough go of it! Look at us! What will we eat tonight? Kelp and bark I suppose.”

Keeley knew her father was right. Fighting back the tears, she placed the infant in the basket and slowly made her way to the flat rocks near the water. She placed the babe on the rocks and said her goodbyes. As she turned to leave, she heard a woman’s voice. Turning quickly in the direction of the voice, she saw a smiling seal bobbing in the water.

The seal spoke again, “Please take Muirios and care for him.”

“You can speak!” The excited Keeley squeaked.

The seal disappeared. After a few minutes, she returned and deposited five large fish on the flat rock next to the infant.

“Take Muirios and the fish back to your father. The sea god, Albion has a plan for the young boy. Care for him and we will protect and provide for you. Return here each afternoon just before sunset and collect the fish from the rock.”

“But…how can you speak?” Keeley asked.

“I’m a Selkie,” the seal replied.

“Yes. Now take the fish and infant back home and explain to your father what we have discussed.”

Keeley hurried back. The fish and baby filled her arms.

“Where did you get all those fish? Why do you still have that baby?” Her father scolded.

Keeley gave him one of her looks that softened his tone and allowed her to explain.

“You know I’ve always believed what you’ve told me, but…a Selkie? I’ve never seen one, but I’ve never seen a water dragon either,” her father retorted.

Relenting, her father declared, “I’ll trust you on this, but it will be your responsibility to raise the child. I will help all that I can, but you know I’m at sea most of the time.”

Keeley gave her tough father a kiss on the cheek and a big hug that melted him in his seat. Afterwards, she took her new brother into her room and tucked him in bed.

Years flowed by and the boy grew to be a young man of 12. One afternoon Keeley went to the rock to collect the fish and was greeted by a new Selkie with 17 fish. The new Selkie instructed her to take the young man to the local village. In the village lived a Druid who would become Muirios’ mentor.

Keeley, her father, and Muirios made the three day journey to the village and located the Druid. He agreed to take Muirios as his apprentice. After a tearful parting, Keeley and her father left the village. Not far from the village, the soldiers of the new religion detained the pair and accused them of conspiring with the Druids. The inquisitors declared them to be heretics and the soldiers executed them.

The soldiers and inquisitors entered the village, forcing everyone into the main square. Using his magick, Muirios’ master made the pair invisible allowing them to escape. The villagers weren’t so fortunate.

“We must travel far to the north, beyond the outer islands if we hope to complete your training. We have 17 years of work before you’re prepared,” his master revealed.

“Prepared for what?” Muirios asked.

“For the rite of Aisling.”

“Rite of Aisling?”

“Your rite of Enlightenment. You will spend 17 years preparing and then it is up to the Gods to decide if one or more of them will accept you as their vassal. You’ll speak for them and they’ll speak through you. They’ll bestow knowledge, powers, and magick IF you’re worthy and ready,” his master answered.

“And if I’m not ready?” Muirios questioned.

“You’ll either go mad or will be struck down.”

Over the next seventeen years, Muirios progressed steadily through his training. He did struggle with maintaining focus, as visions and fantasies of his Selkie lover flooded his mind. Finally, he completed the program to his master’s satisfaction.

After the evening meal, his master revealed, “Tomorrow we journey to the Eye of the Water Dragon. There, we’ll prepare you for the rite of Aisling. Alban Heruin, the Light of the Shore is the day appointed for your Enlightenment.”

“Midsummer?” Muirios queried.

“Of course. As you know, it is one of the three days in the cycle that the Otherworld is the closest. Now rest. We have a long journey ahead,” his master admonished.

Muirios tossed and turned all night. In the pink light of the early dawn, his master led him to the beach and a waiting boat. The small craft glided swiftly over the glassy waters. Overhead, the gulls “laughed” at the seafarers. Muirios’ thoughts turned
to the sea and its mysteries. Much to his master’s displeasure, he had displayed an intense infatuation with the stories about Selkies. The apprentice couldn’t resist. He didn’t understand why he was so drawn to them. One Selkie in particular filled his dreams and fantasies. She was tall with auburn hair that fell below her waist. Her soft, pale skin heightened the color of her steel blue eyes. Her curvaceous body filled a tight, form fitting dress made from sealskin, her sealskin! Often she would speak to him in his dreams. Her voice sounded like the gentle flowing waters of an inland stream rushing out to embrace the sea.

“Your mind should be focused on more serious matters than the Seal People! ESPECIALLY that one! There is nothing but sorrow for those who embrace a Selkie lover,” his master chastised.

Nothing more was said for the remainder of the journey. Each was left to his own thoughts.

As the tiny vessel maneuvered to a beach in the deep inlet, Muirios questioned, “What is this place? I feel very powerful magick here.”

His master replied, “It is a place of power. The joining of the sea, sky, and land make it a powerful place between our world and the Otherworld. That power is magnified by the water dragon that lives here.”

Muirios became uneasy at the mention of a water dragon. They were very dangerous and ill tempered.

Seeing his apprentice’s uneasiness, his master soothed, “The water dragon I speak of was slain eons ago when the hero, Assipattle rammed the dragon with his boat and set his liver on fire. As the dragon died, his teeth fell out and made the islands to the north near the Danes. His tongue made the sea of the Danes and we have entered his eye. His head makes the land you see before you. His left leg made the island we passed a short while ago.”

His master informed him, ”This place is called Eriboll.”

He commanded, “Come. We must prepare you for your Aisling. Gather wood and make two large piles in front of that cave. We will make wild fire to purify your body and soul. Afterwards, I will leave with the boat and you can begin your meditation. Tomorrow is Alban Heruin and will be the day of your enlightenment.”

After starting the wild fires using only specially prepared sticks and bark, his master tossed herbs and prepared powders into them. Giving Muirios a warm potion, he instructed him to jump over the fires to purify his body and soul. While he was focused on jumping over the fires, his master and the sun left him.

Even though he was alone and hungry, Muirios continued to jump over the fires through the night and into the predawn of the morning. The exertion overwhelmed him. He collapsed on the soft sands of the beach. The incoming tide washed over his body waking him from his dreams. Dreams about Selkies. The purification fires were reduced to smoldering mounds and the warm morning sun climbed high into the sky as Muirios tried to meditate. His mind continued to wander amongst the images and stories of Selkies. Especially, his fantasy Selkie with long auburn hair. He could almost hear her whispers and feel her touch. Her lips pressed lightly on his. Soon their passions climaxed and they wrestled in love’s embrace.

A flash of light and the crash of thunder jolted Muirios from his dreams. It was dark and the rain pounded the beach with its projectiles. Muirios sought shelter in the cave. His mind drifted back into the world of his Selkie lover. Her gentle touch caused his fires within to ignite. He raced off with her in the heat of passion.

He awoke to the silence of the new morning, realizing his failure. He had squandered his time for
enlightenment with dreams of his Selkie lover. His master would be furious! Seventeen years of training had been wasted. He would return disgraced to face his disappointed master.

At first, his master just sank down in his chair. After a few minutes, he jumped to his feet and ordered Muirios out of his home.

“You were the last hope we had against the wave of the new religion! I can’t believe you’ve wasted the opportunity with fantasies of Selkies! The old ways and our Gods will surely perish. Be gone with you!” his master ordered.

Reluctantly, Muirios left, walking aimlessly down the street and out of the village. For days he wandered the countryside until familiar landmarks began to appear. He was near his home and family! After visiting with the fishermen at the pier, he convinced one of them to take him to the island that was his boyhood home.

“Not many a one goes out here. A crazy witch that talks to Selkies lives there. Some say she even has a Selkie lover. Not good to be accused of these things with the inquisitors running about the countryside. I heard a boat was hired to take some of the soldiers of the new religion and inquisitors to pay her a visit. Half way across, the Selkies attacked the boat and killed everyone in it,” the old fisherman continued his ramblings.

Muirios questioned, “Do the Selkies attack your boat?”

“Naw! I’m just an old fisherman who don’t bother anybody. Besides, I feed the baby seals and help the injured ones.”

The old boat bumped against the rocky shore and Muirios disembarked.

“Thank you again for the ride.”

“No problem. It’s on the way to my favorite fishing spot.”

Muirios made his way to the weather battered house of rock and moss. Memories flooded his mind of his early childhood with his sister and father. He found the front door ajar. Pushing it open, he saw his beautiful sister sitting by the fire in an old rocking chair.

“Welcome home brother. I’ve missed you so,” she greeted.

“I have missed you and our home, too. Where is father?” he replied.

“Out fishing.”

Muirios was uneasy when he realized the old fisherman that had given him passage to his home was his father. He hadn’t recognized him!

“When will he return?”

His sister hesitated, “After we left you in the village, we were detained by the soldiers of the new religion. The inquisitors accused us of conspiring with the Druids and condemned us as heretics. We were executed by the soldiers.”

Stunned, he replied, “Then the old fisherman is…”

“The Otherworld spirit of your father. He wanted to visit with you one more time when you were a man and Druid.” She revealed.

“And you?”

“I was reborn again into the cycle of life. As a young woman I took a Selkie lover. He was torn between two women, the sea and myself. I chose to remain with my lover and became a Selkie, a part of the Otherworld.”

Shocked, her brother sat down.

After a period of silence, he hung his head and confessed, “I didn’t complete my Aisling…I was to distracted with fantasies of Selkies. I have failed in my apprenticeship as a Druid.”

His sister rose and glided to him. Gently stroking his head with her hand, she comforted, “Albion has a great path for you. It’s in your Wyrd that you and a companion will preserve the seeds of the old ways. The new religion has corrupted, stolen, and destroyed the traditions of our ancestors and those who preserve and honor it. A great wave of darkness is washing across this land and our people. Like the snows of winter and floodwaters of early spring, this darkness will recede. The new growth of spring will emerge and blossom into summer’s bounty. The new religion will wither and decay as all things do in the wheel of the year.”

Allowing him to comprehend her words, she instructed, “Go to the inlet and take the boat to the Eye of the Water Dragon. Remain there and prepare yourself for the next Alban Heruin. Albion will bestow his gifts upon you. This will be your Aisling and Wyrd.”

“What of yourself?” He asked.

“I return to my lover and children,” she replied.

Muirios watched as she walked to the waters edge and transformed into a seal. Gracefully, she plunged into the sea and disappeared beneath the waves.

Looking at the table, Muirios noticed a large plate of fish. Ravaged with hunger, he consumed the meal.
Searching through the house, he found supplies for his journey. In the pantry he found 17 smoked fish and loaves of bread.

By the soft light of a rising moon he rowed the small boat into the calm seas. Navigating the currents, Muirios found a westward flow that would carry him to the Eye of the Water Dragon.

During the months that followed, Muirios spent his time preparing for the Alban Heruin in meditation and reflection. He furnished his cave comfortably with treasures and resources of the land and sea. As the time of midsummer approached, he made the final preparation for the cleansing fires on the beach. Using his knowledge of astronomy, he had calculated the position of the high point of the sun. A rock was positioned to cast its shadow between the fires when the sun reached its apex.

On the eve of Alban Heruin, he lit the fires and began his ritual of purification. After spending hours of jumping over the fires, Muirios collapsed on the beach to rest. Once again he drifted off into dreams about his Selkie lover.

An abrupt smack from the flat of a boat oar woke him from his dreams. Dragon boats covered the beach and the inlet. His fires had attracted the attention of a Viking raiding party.

"What are you doing on our sacred ground?" demanded the leader.

"Your ground? I didn’t know it had been claimed," Muirios responded.

The second in command pulled him up and slapped him with the back of his hand.

"Our ancestors have claimed this land since the beginning of time!" The leader barked.

"I apologize for trespassing, I came here for my enlightenment," Muirios defended.

One of the raiders returned from his search of Muirios’ boat and cave. After a hushed discussion with the leader, he nodded and sprinted off.

"It appears that you have no value. We have journeyed far from our homes in search of wealth, women, and any other treasures we can find. It is obvious you’re not a woman and you don’t have any wealth. What can you provide in exchange for your life?" the leader challenged.

One of the raiders suggested, “What about entertainment!”

The others cheered as they drug Muirios to the stakes that had been driven into the rocks and sand. They tied him to the stakes and took turns punching and kicking him until he bled. One of the party attempted to cut him with a knife, but the firm grasp of the leader prevented it.

"If you kill him now you won’t get to see him wiggle about when the sharks come to feast," the leader admonished.

Turning to Muirios, the leader informed him, “Boy! Let this be a lesson to you and any others that dare enter our sacred cove, they will meet death from the sea! It’s low tide now, but that will change when the sun reaches its midpoint on the midsummer’s day. Notice you’re on an incline. Your shoulders and lower parts of your body should be in deep enough water for the sharks to feast on while you watch.”

The raiders’ laughter followed in their wake as they turned to enjoy their mead on the beach, waiting for the tide to return.

As the tide crept inward, the leader ordered some of his men to chum the water with pieces of fish and blood to attract the sharks. Some of the drunken men almost fell overboard while chumming. Muirios felt the first shark brush against his leg. It didn’t bite him, but its rough, sandpaper hide peeled skin from his leg, causing it to bleed. The salt water on the wound burned him like fire. The raiders cheered. Many were betting when the first bite and limb would be taken.

Just when Muirios had given up hope, the sky began to darken with clouds and the sea became absolutely still. The seafaring raiders knew this was a bad omen. Suddenly the boats exploded and the men were expelled into the sea. The only thing marking their watery grave was the turbulent, boiling waters that contained parts of the sharks and their companions. The raiders on the beach began to realize it was not the sharks consuming their companions, something was consuming both of them.

As they watched, a seal emerged from the waters beside their captive. Slowly, the seal stood as it transformed into a beautiful woman. She had long, flowing auburn hair. Her covering was a sealskin garment. Releasing their captive, the Selkie escorted him to the beach. The petrified raiders watched the final stages of her transformation into human form. They had heard of the Otherworld people, the seal people, but they were supposed to be legends! With one mind, the raiders abandoned their equipment and provisions and fled in terror.

“You’re a Selkie! The one I’ve seen in my dreams!” Muirios exclaimed.

To Be Continued in March
So, what’s next?

Being our third year of publication, we have already spent two March issues on Ireland’s great saint, St. Patrick. Though we may still touch a bit on his life, the theme for March is going to be “Magic.” We are working on future themes as of this writing, but for now the magic of the moment is, in fact, magic, as it pertained to the Celtic world.

Throughout Celtic literature there are oodles of mentions of magic performed by Druids, leprechauns, wizards, mermaids, shamans, Celtic heroes, witches, fairies, oak and rowan trees, special stones, sacred wells . . . the list goes on and on. And so we expect the have a long list of magical tales for the March issue, some perhaps based on true events, some perhaps conjured up to explain the unexplainable.

There is no doubt that simply visiting Celtic lands can be magical, with ancient sites, forest groves, ocean views, castle ruins, and awe-inspiring glens to spark the imagination. Even songs, ancient tales and Celtic artwork can provide a sense of wonder in us. To some, magic is simply fakery, to others it is an escape from reality, and to some it is as real as the noses on our faces. Whatever your opinion, magic was an integral part of the life of Celts and we would be remiss in not offering stories on it.

One last thought on magic – the synergy that has come together over nearly two and a half years, to make the Celtic Guide what it is, has been magical in itself. Who knew so many people would have so many tricks up their sleeves to make each issue as good if not better than the last?