From The Editor . . .

Our cover photo, this month, shows the Irish-built Titanic at Southampton docks, just prior to departure. You can imagine the excitement of this voyage – the largest ship in the world crossing the great ocean to America. This is one of three stories we have in this issue of large boating disasters. In one case the crew was saved through their own devices (see our interview on page six).

Not all voyages end so unhappily, thank goodness, and we have many other takes on the theme of “The Voyage” for this February issue of Celtic Guide.

We are all on our own personal voyage through life and, looking back, there are many lessons to be learned from the mishaps of “unsinkable” ships. I guess there’s nothing like a boating disaster (and the dead of winter) to get one thinking philosophically.

One lesson might be to not rush when we are building our boat (or establishing the foundation for our dreams). Another might be to not ignore obviously bad choices or the advice of the experts. As Ben Franklin said, “Experience is a dear teacher, but a fool will learn from no other.”

Another lesson might be to expect the unexpected, and still another – when something is going wrong it may be more than one issue at fault. Seems to be true that a lot of machinery, people, or situations can adjust to one thing going wrong, but two simultaneous things can be the breaking point, which is exactly what happened to the Titanic. And so we need to look for more trouble under the surface. Hey! It could be an iceberg!

Of course, there is the happier side to these maxims – “When things seem like they are going bad, they might just be going better,” and the latest I’ve heard - “Everything works out in the end. If it hasn’t worked out yet, it’s not the end yet.” ... Enuf’ with the platitudes, already!

We have some new writers this issue plus many returnees. It’s a great issue to snuggle up with on your own voyage through this cold winter. Enjoy!

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It was dawn, the sky was clear, but laced with trepidation. Very soon the sun would rise, and the possibility of an attack lingered.

In the summer of 57 B.C., the campaigning season of Julius Caesar was in motion. A small army headed by one of Caesar’s consuls, P. Crassus, was sent into Western France. He had been given an objective to coerce a number of tribes, including the Atlantic seafaring tribe, the Veneti, to submit to Caesar’s authority as governor. The tribes were compelled to sign treaties and yield hostages, as a token of good will. The Veneti surrendered to the army without a fight, but this encounter became a catalyst for a subsequent revolt.

The Veneti of Gaul, a seafaring Celtic tribe, was notably the most powerful and wealthiest naval tribe of Gaul, who dominated the northwest coast trade between Gaul and Britain. Excelling in the knowledge and experience of navigation, they were also known to own a fleet of ocean-going ships, built of oak planks and held together by nails as thick as a man’s thumb. Each plank caulked with moss and seaweed, they were strong and perfectly suited to the Atlantic Ocean’s rough tidal conditions. The Veneti owned a number of naval ports scattered around this coastal area which demanded toll from all navigators requiring passage through their waters.

The Veneti’s impressive cliff-top castles, were scattered around the Brittany peninsula (France), and in an area called Armorica, which was along the Morbihan bay. The bay was triangular in shape, open to the south with the Gulf of Morbihan to the northeast and the narrow peninsula of Presqu’île de Quiberon, which provided protection from the Atlantic Ocean to the west. Their coastal fortresses were sited for the most part on prominences and peninsula; which were islands as the tide was in, peninsulas when the tide was out, and profoundly difficult to reach by land. Their most prominent city and possibly their capital, was
Darioritum (now known as Gwened in Breton, or Vannes in French) – this is mentioned in Ptolemy’s *Geography*. In winter, after Crassus had concluded Caesar’s orders, he was consigned into winter quarters with the Andes tribe on the Atlantic coast. Crassus and his men soon depleted their food supplies, leaving Crassus little choice but to send out two ambassadors (Q. Velaius and T. Silius) to appeal for grain from the neighbouring settlements. These same settlements were in the district where hostages had previously been seized by Crassus.

The Veneti’s brave warriors felt moved to assert their freedom. They apprehended the ambassadors, with the objective to use them as a bartering power, to secure the release of the hostages previously seized. They convinced the neighbouring settlements to do the same, and so nearby Esubii and Curiosolitae followed suit. Other motives put forward by ancient authors suggest that they may have believed that Caesar wanted to steal trade.

Caesar, currently situated in Italy, now faced a revolt, and the maritime tribes of northwest Gaul soon dominated most of the coast. Infuriated by what he considered a contravention of the law, Caesar prepared for war and would subject the Celtic tribe to a brutal battle for their defiance. He sent a message to Crassus with orders to build a fleet of ships in the Loire. Once the weather was favourable, Caesar made a swift journey from Italy to rejoin his army and to engage the Veneti.

A disappointing battle followed; Caesar spread out his forces to stop the rebellion of the Veneti from moving further into neighbouring towns and cities. Due to the resilient defence systems of the Veneti strongholds, land attacks were hampered by the incoming tide, and naval forces were left trapped on the rocks, until the tide eventually subsided. It was thought that the Veneti enlisted the help of the Ambilati, Diablintes, Lexovii, Menapii, Morini, Namnetes and Osismii tribes, to aid them in battle.

The Romans knew that in order to surmount these setbacks, a plan must be devised. They engineered huge earthwork ramps in order to approach the town walls. Raised siege works were constructed, which sanctioned the legions a base from which to run operations. Coastal strongholds were attacked one by one. Caesar apprehended a number of Veneti towns, however, as each fortress threatened to fall to the Romans, the Veneti brought up their ships and evacuated the population to surrounding strongholds, giving the Romans no other choice but to move and re-build their structures. This rendered the Romans’ seizure of the strongholds fruitless and disheartening. It became evident that the battle was exceptionally ill-matched. Caesar soon recognised that the maritime tribe could not be vanquished on land alone, that his fleet must advance and force victory.

Once the fleet was prepared, Caesar’s legate Decimus Junius Brutus Albinus was given the command of the Roman warships. He was instructed to bring them to the coast of Brittany, where a decisive battle would commence. However, his fleet was at a solemn disadvantage compared to the fleet of the Veneti. According to Caesar, the ships were superior in everything but speed and skill of oarsmen. The sheer thickness of the oak meant that they were resistant to ramming tactics, whilst their greater height meant that they could shower the Roman ships with projectiles, and even dominate the wooden turrets which Caesar had integrated to his bulwarks.

Each Veneti ship was built with immense transoms fixed by iron nails of a thumb thickness and were powered through the use of immensely-colossal leather mainsails. The Veneti manoeuvred skillfully by sail and boarding their ships was deemed infeasible. They could survive being beached by tides, had superior seaworthiness, and could safely sail in Atlantic storms. Additionally, they held in-depth knowledge of the coast and tides, giving the Romans a difficult battle.

The ships that the Romans built were essentially Mediterranean war galleys, the
kind of ships they were acclimated with, well accustomed to Mediterranean conditions. These ships were not well-suited to the huge waves and extreme tides of the Atlantic Ocean, and were frequently delayed by the weather. All had sails used in favourable winds, but brute human strength was always the key method of propulsion.

The day of the battle had arrived in the Morbihan bay. It is said that the battle lasted from around 10 a.m. until nightfall. Caesar watched over operations from the cliff tops. The Roman ships were outnumbered 220 to 100, by the fleet of fully-equipped and superior warships. The Veneti now concentrated all of their power on this battle, however, these advantages would not obstruct Roman perseverance and initiative, and so they devised an ingenious strategy.

Caesar’s account describes certain ropes being cut, which later brought the sails to the decks. The device used for cutting the rigging of the Gallic vessels must have been long billhooks. The Romans struck at the enemy’s halyards as they swept past, thus having the effect of dropping the leather mainsails to the deck, hopelessly crippling the ships, leaving them dead in the water, immobilized and easy prey. Other surrounding Veneti ships endeavoured escape, relying heavily on the wind to move them, but at that moment the wind died down, leaving them helpless.

...Suddenly a dead calm fell, and they were unable to sail away.

With no wind to give motive to the ships, the Romans were at last able to board them, where the Veneti tribe was easily overcome. Other recorded accounts state that the Romans set fire to the ships by using fire pots. Caesar showed no mercy to the Veneti tribe and wanted revenge for the revolt. In his own account he wanted to ascertain that the rights of ambassadors were respected by others. With their fleet eradicated, the Veneti people had no other choice but to surrender.

A small number of the Veneti tribe were said to escape, as night fell, a breeze picked up, giving them power to their sails. It is said that they may have fled west to the Channel Islands and north to the southwest peninsula of Britain for safety.

The strongholds on the coast were now stormed and the entire population was either slaughtered or sold into slavery. Their children were mutilated by the Romans. This served as a lesson to the rest of the Celtic coalition, of the fate in store for those who dared to challenge Rome.

This brave Celtic tribe was legendary; they stood together and proved mighty, even until the very last minute of the battle against the Romans, fighting with a will to defend their people, no matter how fierce the battle was – the protection of the tribe was paramount.

The lesson that we may take from these great Celtic voyagers, would be to protect family, look after your homeland, and be proud of the decisions you make. Celtic courage and bravery may one day inspire us all to face our fears, with less worry and more determination to carry on.

You can read Julius Caesar’s firsthand account of the battle in his book, The Gallic Wars, written to expound and justify his own actions.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Michelle Morgan is our newest Celtic Guide author and hails from Malvern, United Kingdom. We are happy to have her along for 2015, and hope to hear from her often. More of her creations can be found at – http://loversoftheland.wordpress.com/
Fishing the open seas has always been a part of life in Ireland. Totally surrounded by water teeming with a wide variety of sea life made the Irish coastline the perfect place to build towns, castles and ports. Many Irish families produced generation after generation of seagoing-men looking for food to feed family and friends, and looking for a commodity to sell that could raise their own standard of living. Many simply fell in love with the sea, and fishing gave them a reason to be out on its waters.

In this issue, we interview an Irishman by the name of Liam Kelly. Kelly is a fifth-generation fisherman – we’re talking a “real” fisherman who left school at the age of 12 to take up his father’s occupation. He was born near Dungarvin, Co. Waterford, and from there he saw much of the world, working on fishing boats of all sizes. His is a great story so let’s get started.

CG: Liam, welcome to the pages of Celtic Guide. We understand you were born in Ireland where you began fishing at the age of 12, and that you now work for a seafood company in the United States. How many years were you at sea as a fisherman and how did you end up here in Northwestern Pennsylvania?

LK: I spent 27 years as a fisherman, fishing all over the world, although I first spent many years fishing off the coast of Ireland. I was born at the small harbor town of Helvick Head, a Viking settlement dating back to the 1200s, and I was raised in County Waterford, Ireland.

CG: You say “all over the world.” Can you give us some idea of the places you’ve been?

LK: The fishing business in Ireland has gotten pretty tough in recent years. For one thing, the government has sold off fishing rights to some foreign fishermen to raise income. This limited our fishing grounds substantially. I moved on, and have since fished off the coasts of Australia, Mexico, Panama, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Norway, Iceland, Africa, Nova Scotia, and most recently, along the seaboards of the United States. Basically, I’ve fished for all types of seafood. There’s really nothing in the ocean I haven’t caught.
CG: That is pretty impressive! It sounds like you know your fish.

LK: I’m still a fisherman at heart. I look at Curtze as being my extended family. I told them, “Please don’t put a tie on me.” (They didn’t). I haven’t changed.

CG: You must know a lot about people’s likes and dislikes when it comes to fish, then?

LK: Every palate is different. I think it depends a lot on the people...where they are from. A good chef can’t make lousy fish taste good. But, no matter where you are, the best fish is fresh fish. So ask the wait staff or the counter person at the fish store if the fish has ever been frozen and if they have tried it. If the wait staff hasn’t, you shouldn’t either.

CG: So, how did you end up a “landlubber”? 

LK: I have kids. While fishing not far from another boat, called the Johnny Ruth, Hurricane Charley hit us. I had twelve very-close friends on that 110-foot fishing vessel who were swallowed up by the ocean. The ocean can be beautiful but it can be very mean.

CG: So is that when you decided to leave the seas behind?

LK: No. My most dangerous episode, the one that convinced me to change my principal occupation, happened about five or six years ago. I was fishing on a freezer boat for Huntress, out of Rhode Island... a boat over 100 feet long. We were working off the coast of North Carolina, near Cape Hatteras, when we heard that a hurricane was on its way. We headed home immediately, but were lashed by an 80-mile-an-hour gale soon after leaving Hatteras. We knew we couldn’t stay on the open seas in a storm like that so we made for the Delaware River near Cape May, NJ, hoping to take shelter in an inlet until the weather got better.

As we turned to port we got hit by a wave estimated at 60 to 70 feet tall. The rogue wave rolled us 360 degrees and we came right back up. It rolled the boat and knocked our rigging out. It sounded like a locomotive ringing in your ears.

CG: What did you do next?

LK: After we realized what happened and found a safe harbor, we contacted the owner and the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard verified that we had rolled completely over. We made what repairs we could and, after the storm, we made our way to Rhode Island under our own power.

CK: Wasn’t it difficult to maneuver with your rigging lost?

LK: Yes, the lost rigging affected the way the boat handled, but we still made it in. You make things happen when you’re at sea. You jury-rig stuff and make it hold.

CK: That is quite the story! What did you do after that harrowing voyage?

LK: I decided my children and family were too important to me to continue risking my life. I moved first to South Boston, which was a lot like being home in Ireland. I followed a friend to Erie, PA where we set up a fish retail outlet. Eventually, I signed up with Curtze Foods’ North Shore Seafood.

CG: What else would you like our Celtic Guide readers to know about you?

LK: I actually fell in love with fresh fish as a young kid when my grandfather cooked a whole herring on an open fire on hot ashes! So I left school at a young age and worked hard my whole life. I am a hands-on type of person and I love fish, and I love the ocean. My love for the fishing industry? To me, it’s not just a job, it’s a passion!
EDITOR’S NOTE: Jeanine Lebsack, of snowy Alberta, Canada, is another new author for the Celtic Guide. Here she gives us a wee bit o’ whimsical prose as to what drives so many people to Celtic culture, and to write about it late into the night –

What could I place here except my words upon this page? Of love, lust, romance, in the pages that I read. Or of how I like to write in the still of the night while listening to the sounds of slumber. Of dreams I’ve had, thoughts I created, and books I wish to write.

I’m am just a mere vessel giving birth to the language of my heart. To read, to write, to feel the passion inside bursting forth from me. Where does it come from, how did it come to be, this deep raw emotion inside of me? It came from my birth, as I yearn for a time before me. Of castles, royalty, peasants, and the like. The call of my ancestors haunts me and I wish to walk in their footsteps. To feel what they felt, and hear what they heard, and wrap myself up in their majestic memories.

Of Celtic tales of long ago cradling me in their mossy, lovely, presence, as the ghosts of the past come back to life and I live vicariously through them. My Celtic blood runs strong in my veins and I long to be free to explore these dreams and visions that come to me.

Of a little girl with a head of strawberry curls, and she beckons to me in the ethers. Shall I follow her and if I did where would we go? Would I end up on the lost island of Hye Brazil, lost long ago within the shroud of mystery. I hear the call of my homeland to a place I only know in my dreams. Where fields of green greet me and I feel a chill in the air as the waves crash against the craggy cliffs. And I’m transported in time and space as I take the hand of the little girl with the strawberry curls, and she giggles and dances with glee, as I sit down to rest.

“Where are we going dear one?” I ask.
“To the land that you love the best.”
“Where do you come from my sweet one, and why is it me you seek?”
“I come from the land, the same as you, the beauty of the north, the strong and true. I come to the homelands of my parent’s birth; as you can see, it’s the most beautiful place on earth. I did not seek you, I just came as you called. I’ve answered your heart’s yearning and have calmed your fears,” she answered.

As I see beauty all around me, I must dry my tears. The waves pound against the shore and I find myself craving more. The Irish sea rises up to greet me as I tiptoe across the sand, and I know, in all sincerity, this is my homeland.
It started out as a voyage of happiness and joy. All the Christmas presents were wrapped and with the passengers, on their journey home, to be given to their loved ones and family. The men had not been home since they enlisted at the beginning of World War I, back in 1914.

These passengers were sailors on leave, some coming home for good, and all excited as it was Hogmanay, 1918, when they started this journey, and it would be New Year’s Day 1919 when it ended.

The voyage they were taking was on the yacht Iolaire (pronounced I-olair), which was built in 1881. It weighed 634 tons and was a luxury yacht before it was requisitioned by the Navy in anti-submarine and patrol work.

This yacht also had quite a few names. It started off as Iolanthen, then it was renamed Mione, then Amalthea, before the final Gaelic name of Iolaire was chosen. Translated, Iolaire means “Eagle”, and it was named after that majestic bird of prey. Unfortunately, the name Eagle, to me, means “soaring high,” and this it did not do, for the trip ended in disaster.

Formerly entered in error as a troopship, and later reclassified as a steam yacht, the Iolaire evidently was stranded on that fateful day, rather than foundered as had been stated on occasion.

Leading up to this disaster, it was arranged that home leave would be granted to thousands of Naval Ratings (enlisted members of the
country’s navy) over the Christmas and New Year period. The English sailors were given priority for Christmas and the Scottish sailors were given leave for the New Year celebration.

For those who lived up north and on the Western Isles, going home was to be a long journey. All these men had to make the trip to London first to get on the special trains that left there for Glasgow, Stirling and Perth, and onwards from Perth to Inverness. At Inverness the Highland Railway took the men bound for the Isles of Lewis, Harris, Tolsta and Skye to the railhead at Kyle of Lochalsh, where there were two ships ready to take them to the end of their journey – the MacBraye mail steamer S.S. Sheila and the HM Yacht Iolaire.

The men were separated into two groups – Lewis men and Tolsta men were bound for Stornoway, and Harris men, along with Tarbet and Skye men, were bound for Portree. Some of the Harris sailors were so excited to get home fast that they slipped into the Lewis men’s line, as they knew when they arrived on the island they could easily make their way home.

Sixty sailors were ordered aboard the mail boat S.S. Sheila and the rest boarded the Iolaire. Unfortunately the Iolaire was overcrowded. It was officially reported to have 284 on board, with a crew of 27.

There were discussions before she set sail, as the Iolaire had never docked at Stornoway Harbour, and it was known the captain wasn’t happy with the amount of men he had on board. The actual space onboard was meant for 100, with 80 life jackets and two lifeboats. The ship was ill-prepared to carry 284 men – well overloaded. It was 9:00 p.m., December 31, 1918, when she set sail from Kyle of Lochalsh. It was a bitter cold night and crossing the Minch would take five hours. About to happen was one of the worst maritime disasters in the U.K. waters during the 20th century.

On January 1, 1919, about 2:00 a.m., the Iolaire was sailing too far east. The reason for this has never been established. There were lots of theories why, one being the crew had never been in these waters before.

To this day, the entrance to Stornoway Harbour is not the most straightforward of navigations, so it is possible that navigational error was to blame. This appears to be supported by a fishing vessel whose crew noted that the Iolaire was not navigating the correct course for entering the harbour to where the armed drifter Budding Rose awaited her presence and was to lead her in. The Budding Rose was a pilot boat.

The “Beasts of Holm” is a rocky outcrop just short of the harbour entrance. A small light attached to a rock warns mariners of the approaching danger. Unfortunately, with the Iolaire being off course, by the time they saw the beam of light, they were doomed.

The vessel struck the rocks and slid off the rock ledge, listing to starboard and settling stern-first. Flare guns were fired off to call for assistance. As she settled, the wind blew the stern around towards the shore, at one point no more than six to seven yards from a rock ledge on the shore. The sailors were all in their full uniforms; thick coats and big boots would not be easy to remove.

All this time families and friends were watching in horror from the harbour as the disaster unfolded in front of them. It was the bravery of one John F. MacLeod who succeeded in getting to shore with a line to which a hawser (a thick rope or cable for mooring or towing a ship) was attached and secured on shore. About 40 men pulled themselves to safety along this rope until the stricken vessel heeled and pulled the rope away.

In the early hours of that morning, Donald Morrison, the last survivor, was rescued. He was clinging to the ship’s mast, which was the only part above water. Although this shipwreck took place within 50 yards of the shore, and at one point the stern was no more than 20 feet from land, such was the roughness of the sea that very few survived.

Recovery of the bodies from the sea around the wreck was devastating for the rescuers, as many of the passengers were known personally, and in some cases related. While looking for the bodies that were being washed ashore on
the beach, the rescuers got dressed up in their “Sunday best,” out of respect.

Not all bodies were found, as some must have been taken out to sea with the tide. The bodies they did find were buried, and a lot of them were buried in the Scarista Graveyard. The possessions that were found from the wreckage were given to the rightful families which was another burden to bear for them.

The islanders were and still are a close-knit community, and everyone was affected directly or indirectly by this tragedy.

There were two investigations held regarding the tragic loss of the *Iolaire*. The official Naval investigation was downgraded immediately from a Court Martial to a Court of Inquiry, due to the Navy’s fear that the findings of a Court Martial might imply blame was being accepted by them.

The Naval inquiry was held in private on January 8, 1919 – the findings not released into the public domain until 1970. The ruling had been that, due to the non-survival of any of the officers on board the *Iolaire*, “no opinion can be given as to whether blame is attributable to anyone in the matter.”

After this disaster, measures were put in place by the government that better lifesaving equipment, such as lifeboats, were to be mandatory. That speaks volumes.

A public inquiry started in Stornoway from February 10, 1919, and the local community provided seven men for the jury. When the jury reached their verdict at least theirs was made available to the public, unlike the Naval inquiry.

The verdict? The cause was a navigation error, but they also identified neglect on the part of the crew. The Navy was held responsible.

The Admiralty put the wreck up for sale just 15 days after the disaster. This action appalled the local community, especially as there were still over 80 bodies unaccounted for and still missing.
The Isle of Lewis suffered a lot during the war. More than 6,000 men had served their country and over a thousand of these had died. This was from a population of 30,000, so a fifth of the population had been killed already. The Iolaire disaster was very hard on the survivors and no one liked to talk about that night, as each was feeling guilty for having survived, while 205 men perished.

A memorial was erected in 1958 at Holm, outside Stornoway. A stone pillar sticks out of the water at the site of the wreck. On the memorial is a plaque bearing these words: “Erected by the people of Lewis and friends in grateful memory of the men of the Royal Navy who lost their lives in the Iolaire disaster at the Beasts of Holm on January 1, 1919. Of the 205 persons lost, 175 were natives of the island and for them and their comrades Lewis still mourns, with gratitude for their service and in sorrow for their loss.”

The population of Tolsta also suffered. Sixteen of their sons were on the Iolaire, eleven drowned and five survived. Their population as of the most recent census from that time was 853. This was from 1914-1918 (400 males and 453 females). The number of Tolsta men in active service was 231, which was 58% of the male population.

From Harris, seven sailors died from this disaster.

What is left of the wreckage lies in 40 feet of water just below the memorial on the shore. Some of the artifacts that were found in the wreckage have been given to the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Stornoway Museum). Right now the museum is closed, as it has been moved to the Lewis Castle and renovations are being done where it will be officially opened in the summer of 2015.

It is very sad that this tragedy happened nearly 100 years ago. Seventy years after the event some of the survivors opened up and said they just couldn’t forget it. I think of it every day of the week.

What a horror to have lived with this memory, if after that length of time, you could not get it out of your mind.

EDITOR’S NOTE: In addition to writing, Alison also takes nature photography of the beautiful seaside region surrounding her home. Follow her work at: https://www.facebook.com/photographicgalleryofthegaspearea
Voyages! The power, the promise, the peril of voyages, to leave the secure sanctity of the solid strand, to cleave the waves in galleys of wood and tar, to seek out the fortunes that a passage of brine and brawn might grant one, such was the soul song of the Scots of auld who dwelt among the Isles of the Hebrides. To stay ashore amongst those isles meant greater safety from the ocean’s wrath, but starvation, deprivation and predation could as surely end one’s days, and few were the chances to rise above for those too timid of salt-spray!

From time immemorial, the island of Ulva was the home of the MacQuarries. Like the MacGregors of the central Highlands, those chiefs could make the proud boast: *Is Rìoghal mo dhream,* “my race is royal,” for both traced their descent from Gregor, son of Alpin, king of Scots, who was beheaded by the Picts, in sight of his own army, on Dundee Law in 837 A.D. The second son of Gregor was named Cor, or Gorbred, deriving the common modern forms of MacQuarrie in Scotland, and McGuaran, and McCorry, in Ireland. Or was the name perhaps pulled down across those years from the source of Guaire, from the Medieval Gaelic for “noble”? In point of fact, was there not also an historical figure of antiquity named Guaire, he being the brother of the fabled Fingon, who was himself the ancestor of the MacKinnons, a clan closely neighboring the MacQuarries? Whatever the exact lines of their origin, the MacQuarries, like the MacKinnons, were amongst the select body of clans known as the Siol Alpin, who contested with the Siol Cuinn, and the Siol Tormod, for control of the lands within the Hebrides, from about the time of the 10th century.

The great early man of this line appears to have been Cormac Mor, the Chief in the reign of Alexander II. When the King was endeavoring, in the 13th century, to overthrow the Norwegian power in the Western Isles, he was joined by Cormac with a force of three galleys of sixteen oars each. This loyalty to the King brought disaster upon the MacQuarrie chief, for Alexander II died on Kerrera, and the clan was left to answer for their loyalties as they faced the Norse warlords without the might of the throne behind them.

After King Alexander’s death in 1249, his great expedition to “plant his standard on the walls of Thurso” was abandoned, and the Islesmen who had taken his side were left to the vengeance of their neighbors who supported
Norway. The MacQuarrie chief was attacked and slain, and his island domain ravaged. Fleeing the slaughter, the chief’s two sons, Alan and Gregor, found refuge in Ireland. The latter settled in that country, and the Irish branch, under the Earls of Enniskillen, became exceedingly powerful.

Back in Scotland, the tables had turned with the defeat of the Norwegian King by the forces of Alexander III, at the Battle of Largs in 1263, and the MacQuarrie chief was able to return home. In the wars of the Bruce for the independence of Scotland, Hector, the next MacQuarrie chief, took the patriots’ side, and led his clan far and away south and east to join the Bruce’s army at the Battle of Bannockburn. The same cannot be said, however, of the later chiefs of the 16th century. Eachuin, who was the MacKinnon’s chief in the days of James IV, was among the turbulent Islesmen whom that King needed to discipline by attrition, requiring several Royal expeditions to the Hebrides.

Between the times of Hector and Eachuin, falls the chieftaincy of John MacQuarrie of Ulva, whose name appears on several charters dating back to the mid 1400s.

In 1517, four years after the battle of Flodden, and the death of Good King James, the Flower of Scotland, when the country was occupied by the political quarrels of the Black Douglases, and assailed by the machinations of the Tudors, Lachlan MacLean of Duart took occasion to secure a remission for his misdeeds, and also stipulated for a similar favor to his friend, the MacQuarrie Chief of Ulva. This chief then married a daughter of MacNeill of Tainish, and the bride’s dowry reflected a curious light on the social circumstances of the time: it consisted of a piebald horse, with two men and two women, attending. Being descended of voyaging clans, the couple would likely have found the more typical wedding gift of a galley to have been of better use.

In contrast, in this same period belongs the story of a famous pirate of the Island seas, Alan a Sop. Alan was the natural son of MacLean of Duart by a young woman of the MacQuarrie clan, who afterwards wed MacLean of Torloisk on the west coast of Mull. Torloisk treated his stepson badly, beating him and maligning him at every opportunity, on one occasion thrusting into his hands a blistering-hot cake which his mother was baking for him, so that he fled from the house, both his palms badly burnt, leaving his hands, and his memories, deeply scarred.

After coming of age, Alan became a mariner, and soon joined a coterie of Danish pirates who were scouring all the Western Isles, and the Shetlands and Orkneys. By his courage, and his cleverness, he soon achieved the command of his own galley. Soaring like a sea-eagle through the Hebrides, and raiding even the trade routes of the North Sea, his predatory successes soon led to his securing an entire flotilla, making his name both feared and famous. Of him, the bards and seannachies often chanted:

He scoured the sea for many a day,  
While winds filled his sail fro’ far-away,  
And now, grown rich with plunder’d store,  
He steers his way for Scotland’s shore.

Years afterwards, having become the master of a great pirate fleet, Alan, now commonly known as the Dread Rover, received word that his mother had died, and being thus released from
his concern for her safety, decided the time was nigh to avenge himself on his cruel stepfather. Arriving home to Mull, however, Alan found himself welcomed by the crafty Torloisk, who received him quite fondly. Having so gained his goodwill, his stepfather then counseled Alan that he should instead attack a rival, the MacQuarrie of Ulva, and seize that island, hoping thereby to rid himself of MacQuarrie, against whom he had long held a dire grudge.

The Chief of Ulva, however, also greeted Alan hospitably, and when the latter, an accepted guest, confessed to his host what his errand had been, MacQuarrie reminded Alan of the cruel incident of the burning cake, and suggested that with Alan’s mother (herself a MacQuarrie of Ulva) being deceased, it was his privilege by blood and bond to claim a vengeance. Thereupon the pirate returned to Mull, and declared to Torloisk: “You hoary old villain, you instigated me to murder a better man than yourself! Have you forgotten how you scorched my fingers that morning, twenty years ago, with a burning cake? The day has come when that breakfast must be paid for!”.

Those words still hanging hot in the air, Alan, with one stroke of his battle-axe, cut down his old tormentor, whom he had called his stepfather, and then the man who had grown from that frightened, sobbing boy, walked forth at last to take rightful possession of his castle and his land.

Half a century later, the MacQuarries still held their old seats of power and autonomy on Mull and Ulva, but alas, not for much longer. Summoned with great pomp by James VI in 1609 to attend a royal service of “reconciliation” on Iona, the chiefs of the Inner Hebrides, representing clans like the MacKinnons, the MacLeans, the MacNeills, and the ever-resourceful MacQuarries, found themselves good and truly foxed by the young Stuart king. After beaching their galleys (commonly known as “birlinns”) they were summarily seized and held by Crown forces, at the order of James; the chiefs were thus compelled to sign the decree later known as the Statutes of Iona, which effectively ended, finally and forever, the last pretensions to power of the Lord of the Isles. Regardless of that stealthy blow of suppression, the Clan took one last great voyage in 1651, sailing to the mainland, from whence they bravely rode in defense of king and country, only to suffer the destruction of most of their fighting men in the Cromwellian bloodbath remembered as the Battle of Inverkeithing.

The last of the line to inherit Ulva was Lachlan, the sixteenth chief. In 1778, finding his financial embarrassments overpowering, he sold his estates to pay his debts, and though sixty-three years of age, entered the army. He died in 1818 at the great age of 103.

Still though, in even this age of digital communication, the MacQuarrie name is known throughout the Isles, and the Western Highlands, and it would not be difficult, by the merry lights of a winter ceilidh, to spot those who wear the bold and happy tartan of simple red and green, and the crest of the the dagger and gauntlet, and hear them cry out - *Alba Gu Brath!, An t’Arm Breac Dearg!: “Scotland Forever! The Red Tartaned Army!”*
In contrast to ancient ocean voyages, the thought of traveling by canoe could seem quite mild unless, of course, you factor in deadly rapids, warring Indians, dastardly business competition, portages with 90 pounds or more on your back, frostbite, and the occasional enraged bear or moose attack - not to mention potential starvation in the stark wilderness. Such was the life of the so-called “voyageurs” who plied the lakes, rivers and streams of northwestern Canada in the name of the fur trade.

Principally made up of Frenchmen, there were still a large number of Scotsmen and Irishmen in their ranks. Many location-names in this region, in fact, carry Celtic names - like Forts Selkirk, Douglas and Macpherson, the Stewart, Fraser, Mackenzie and McQuesten Rivers, the towns of Harper, Mayo, McQuesten, McGrath and Dawson, the Ogilvie Mountains, Mount McKinley and the Muir Glacier. Let’s not even get started with all the prominent surnames of Great White North explorers that stem from Ireland and Scotland.

One significant leader of the voyageurs was Colin Roberston, born in Perth, Scotland in 1783. He originally apprenticed in Scotland as a hand weaver but later traveled to New York City where he found work in a grocery store. By 1803, he had joined the North West Company, leaving it in 1809 for England. In 1814, he returned to Canada in the employ of the Hudson’s Bay Company, leading an expedition to reestablish the company in the area around Lake Athabasca. His expedition expenses were guaranteed by Thomas Douglas, 5th Lord Selkirk, born in Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland.

Robertson stopped in Manitoba to rebuild Fort Douglas, which had been burned down by the North West Company. In the meantime, John Clarke continued on to the Athabasca region with the remainder of the expedition, but was eventually taken prisoner by the North West Company! In 1821, the Hudson’s Bay Company and North West Company were united and Colin Robertson became a “chief factor” in the new company.

Reportedly, in 1825, a voyageur stated the following to Scotsman Alexander Ross:

“I could carry, paddle, walk and sing with any man I ever saw. I have been twenty-four years a canoe man, and forty-one years in service; no portage was ever too long for me, fifty songs could I sing. I have saved the lives of ten voyageurs, have had twelve wives and six running dogs. I spent all of my money in pleasure. Were I young again, I would spend my life the same way over. There is no life so happy as a voyageur’s life!”

For an eye-opening view of life on the Yukon River before the great Klondike River Gold Rush, read about the only man ever to be called Father of Alaska, Father of the Yukon. Available on Amazon.com
Lucky for many folks, not all ocean travel ends in disaster. But of all ocean disasters, none stands out like the wreck of the *Titanic* cruiseliner.

What some don’t realize is that the ship was built at the Belfast docks in Northern Ireland, and was designed and overseen by two illustrious Irishmen.

The first was William James Pirrie, 1st Viscount Pirrie, a Knight of St. Patrick and a member of the Privy Council of Ireland. Pirrie was born in Canada of Irish parents and was taken back to that country at the age of two. He spent his childhood in County Down, which includes the city of Belfast.

Pirrie served as Lord Mayor of Belfast from 1896 to 1898, and was chairman of Harland and Wolff shipbuilders from 1895 to 1924. He was named Baron Pirrie in 1906, was made a Knight of St. Patrick in 1908, and was made Viscount Pirrie in 1921. Pirrie oversaw the world’s largest shipyard at Belfast, where the *Titanic* was built by Harland and Wolff.

Joining Pirrie in the construction of the largest ship in the world, at that time, was Thomas Andrews, born in County Down, and a nephew to Pirrie. Andrews served as the managing director and also head of the drafting department for Harland and Wolff.

Both men were well-versed in shipbuilding and the vast majority of their creations floated the oceans for many years.

Not so with the *Titanic*.

For years there has been speculation about the true cause of the sinking of this great ship. Even the nature of its sinking has been in question – did it break in half with part of it rearing up into the night sky before thunderously sinking, or did it simply sink in a horizontal position with barely a whimper.

Since the wreckage has now been thoroughly inspected, the knowledge gained has been
compared to the written records of the disaster to paint at least a credible picture of what may have happened that fateful day of April 15, 1912.

Pirrie had intended to be on the maiden voyage, but a last-minute change in plans saved his life. Unfortunately, his nephew Thomas went down with the ship he had spent so long building.

The ship was fitted with luxurious appointments, including much hand-carved woodwork provided by Irish craftsmen. It was nearly 900 feet in length and was said to be unsinkable due to special features designed to thwart the dangers of the Atlantic crossing.

So, how then did it sink?

The shipbuilders were given nearly unlimited funds to build the Titanic, but not unlimited time. One theory has it that inferior rivets were used, not because better ones weren’t affordable, but because there was not sufficient time to properly produce the three million rivets needed to build the craft. The weaker rivets were made mostly of iron, with a fairly high concentration of slag, whereas the better rivets were made of steel.

It was proven that at least some of the steel from the Titanic’s hull became brittle in the icy waters, but this is not thought to be the main reason for the disaster. Generally, the steel used was of sufficient quality, as long as its rivets could hold it together. Most evidence points to rivets popping out of the hull as the giant vessel scraped along an iceberg about 375 miles south of Newfoundland, after crossing the majority of the ocean. Supporting this theory, the flooding seems to have stopped at the point in the hull where the better steel rivets began.

There was also a dearth of lifeboats on the ship. While the boat was designed to carry 32 lifeboats, and could easily have carried 64, there were only 20, enough to save only one third of the passengers and crew. More than 1,500 souls out of 2,200 onboard were sent to the bottom of the icy ocean.

Evidence seems to indicate that the ship did not split apart as depicted in many cases. At least one survivor said it simply slipped under the water in nearly a horizontal position, and study of the wreck seems to confirm this.

But how could a crew who knew well the dangers of icebergs in the path of the Titanic ever let their guard down to allow one large enough to sink the ship get that close?

There is a new theory on this, too.

We are all familiar with the term “mirage.”

Typically, we think of a mirage as something you see in a desert or on a hot road, where images appear to be reflected into the air above them, or appear to be something they are not.

The same thing happens in cold weather. When a cold-weather front collides with warmer air, it sometimes causes light passing between the boundary of the two to be bent dramatically, distorting how an object appears. Horizons, land masses, and buildings on distant shores will often appear to be much taller and sometimes closer than they actually are. In some cases, distant buildings or shorelines may not even be visible on a normal day, but seem to appear out of nowhere when conditions are right.

This writer knows this to be true from personal experience. Living directly on Lake Erie, with Canada just 30-some miles across the water, I have seen this phenomenon many times, where buildings across the way, that are not visible at all in normal weather, look like they are just across a small bay.

It is now thought that a cold-weather mirage caused the lookout men on the Titanic to see the horizon much higher in the sky, thus blocking out the tip of the iceberg that lay just ahead. The iceberg would only be visible at night because it would be blocking out the stars. If there were no stars showing, due to the mirage, then no iceberg would have been seen until it was too late.

Once ice began scraping along the side of the great oceanliner, the weaker rivets began to pop, allowing water to flow into the holds of the ship. Once that happened, there was no going back, and this voyage came to an abrupt end.
Sixteenth-century Scotland was a tempestuous place. The Protestant Reformation was fresh, and it appeared to be under constant threat. Religion and monarchy were intertwined. Mary, Queen of Scots had returned to her homeland to find the government had initiated the Reform without her consent. She worked out a compromise which allowed her and her retinue to practice the Catholic Mass, while it remained illegal in the rest of Scotland. Most of us know her eventual sad fate, to be captured and imprisoned by her own people, only to escape to the realm of her cousin, Elizabeth I in England, where she was imprisoned again.

Due to these circumstances, Queen Mary was forced to abdicate her throne to her son, James VI, who was just thirteen months of age. Mary had hoped that her separation from her son would be temporary and that Elizabeth would come to her aid to restore her to her throne. Young King James VI of Scotland, later to become James I of England, was left essentially orphaned. His father, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, had been killed in a plot that Queen Mary may or may not have been involved in prior to her imprisonment. He was raised by people hungry for both secular and religious control in a strict Protestant mindset.

A series of regents ruled Scotland until James came of age. Many of these men were killed or died under dubious circumstances. Protestants had plotted against his own Catholic mother. And Catholic plotters would eventually plan the famous Gunpowder Plot against himself, which infamously brought Guy Fawkes into the history books. An attempt on his own life in his young adulthood got so close that he himself wrestled the would-be assassin in his royal chamber, pinning him down while calling for the guards. Under these circumstances, fearing plots on your life is not paranoia – it’s reality.

It is also important to note that the Protestant Reformation brought about a change in the way witchcraft was viewed in Europe. The Catholic Church wasn’t in the business of rooting out witches. In fact, the official stance of the Catholic Church was to deny that witchcraft existed. Not that people weren’t practicing it, but the Church viewed it as a silly superstition and insisted that there was no power in it. The Roman Catholic Church did punish heresy against the Church during the Inquisition, and heresy could be...
construed with witchcraft, but not always. And, the Catholic Church had been tolerant of local festivals and allowed local deities to be modified into the Cult of the Saints, which enabled folk customs and beliefs to continue to some degree. The Reformation ushered in a new brand of severe and intolerant thinking. The Catholic Church was labeled as idolatrous and pagan. A new dichotomy of viewing the world through a dualistic lens of good and evil was preached. Satan and his demons were everywhere, and their mission was to take down the good Christians through the work of his soldiers, namely the witches.

So, here we have a king separated from his mother at a very young age, raised in the midst of plots, murder, and subterfuge, in this tense religious climate. What else do we know about James VI? He was considered an intellectual. He had a sharp mind and took a keen interest in many subjects. It seems that his interest could often border on obsession. For example, it was said at one point that he loved hunting and would become obsessed with taking down certain stags, to the point of neglecting important business of the crown.

He was eventually betrothed to Anne of Denmark, which was a political arrangement, Anne being the King of Denmark’s sister.

Although most royal marriages were arranged for political reasons, in the best case scenario the couple would grow fond of each other, perhaps even fall in love with each other. But history tells us that this was not the case for James VI of Scotland and Anne of Denmark. Apparently, their relationship was to remain aloof. James seemed to prefer the company of men. Indeed, he was known for enjoying time spent in what we might call today a “man cave,” playing cards and bantering with his male friends. There have been suggestions that his affections for men went beyond the platonic.

How much these attributes and influences affected James’s beliefs and actions regarding witchcraft, we can only guess. The Reformation and severe Protestant preachers like John Knox most certainly influenced his world view. Did his lack of an immediate family make it difficult for him to be emotionally available to his wife, or make him into a hard person lacking in humane compassion? Did his lack of a strong female presence cause him to mistrust women? Did his obsessive personality trigger from psychological issues? These are questions we can never know the answer to. But we do know precisely when his obsession with witchcraft began.

James VI of Scotland, aged 20, in 1586, three years before he sailed to Denmark for his bride

In 1589, King James VI sailed to Denmark to retrieve his betrothed. Anne was supposed to sail to Scotland alone, but her ship was forced to turn back due to storms, so James made the gallant effort of setting sail to fetch her.

The Germanic countries were another Reformation hotbed, and witch-hunting was in full swing in Denmark. Both Protestantism and witch-hunting were adopted with gusto in this region. It is known that King James met
with Niels Hemmingsen, a Danish Lutheran theologian and expert on demonology. Hemmingsen had written a book on the topic in 1575. So while we can’t say for certain what the two discussed, it has been speculated that James adopted the notion of “the satanic pact” from Hemmingsen. This is the idea that witches make a deal with a devil in return for power, a key belief of witch-hunters at the time (but one that is not believed by modern scholars to have had any reality in the actual practices of the accused). James was fascinated by what he learned in Denmark. He must have felt that his eyes were opened to a whole new world of evil existing right under his nose all along. Always eager to learn new subjects, James apparently absorbed this knowledge hungrily.

Upon the return voyage to Scotland, the King’s entourage was beset by a terrible storm. The tempest caused the ship to turn back and dock in Norway to wait it out. Because the company carried royal personages, they were escorted by the Danish royal navy. It seemed to those involved that the ship carrying the King was jostled more so than the others. The admiral in charge of the Dutch fleet was insistent that witchcraft was the cause. And, due to James’s recent education about the dangers of witchcraft, he suspected it to be true. Witches in both Scotland and Denmark were suspected, and witch hunts were launched in both countries.

Coincidentally, a peasant woman by the name of Geillis Duncan had just been accused of witchcraft by her employer, David Seton, when it became known that she had been curing illness with seemingly magical methods. Seton was sure the devil was at work. Her interrogation elicited the names of other witches supposedly in cohort with Ms. Duncan, who were also interrogated. The confessions became more and more grandiose until they finally revealed that this supposed coven had conspired to poison and murder the King. This confession combined with the King’s Denmark disaster culminated in the launch of the North Berwick Witch Trials.

Being a man with a strong curiosity, James was personally involved with the witch trials, which was unusual for a monarch. More than one hundred people were arrested and accused. King James took part in some of the interrogations. Many of the accused confessed under torture to such deeds as what is called “the obscene kiss,” the act of kissing Satan on his posterior when swearing allegiance to him. (See old woodcut, top of page 19, from *Malleus Maleficarum*.)
As an aside, acts like this in the confessions are one way that some scholars are now differentiating between people who were accused willy-nilly versus people who were actually using ancient pre-Christian shamanistic practices. Those who really were engaging in real pagan sorcery were a tiny minority, and it is only recently that scholars such as Emma Wilby and Carlo Ginzburg have brought validity to this theory. But those confessions bear little resemblance to the vast majority, which seem clearly built around the expectations of the witch interrogators. In other words, the interrogators asked leading questions involving the information found in witch-hunting manuals, like the *Malleus Maleficarum*, first published in 1487, such as “when did you first make a pact with the devil?” Eventually, the accused would answer whatever the accusers wanted to hear to make the torture stop. Acts such as kissing the devil on his derrière are found nowhere in the few records which do seem to demonstrate true shamanic practice (more on this in future articles).

The North Berwick confessions fit squarely within the parameters of what the witch manuals outlined, indicating that the confessions were led by the accusers under the duress of torture, or sometimes methods that were not considered torture such as sleep deprivation (which can produce hallucinations). The trials revealed a massive plot whereby large numbers of witches traveled to North Berwick to meet at night inside a church. Their meetings were presided over by the Devil himself, and King James VI was described as the Devil’s greatest enemy in all the world.

The witches supposedly began their plot with the use of weather magic, first to stall Anne’s departure, then to disrupt James’s return. Ms. Duncan confessed to meeting with a Danish witch to form their plot. It is telling that witch hunts had already been underway in Denmark by this time. And, the Scots did not initially blame the storms on witchcraft until they realized that the Danes did. The accused also confessed to using “image magic” and plotting to use toad poison on the King. Image magic was the act of causing harm to someone by manipulating a small image of them, similar to what we know of today as “voodoo dolls.” And toad poison was retrieved by hanging toads upside down to collect the poison from their skin.

These confessions seemed so fantastical that James did not initially believe them. That is, until one of the accused, Agnes Sampson, was placed before him. When he professed skepticism, apparently Ms. Sampson asked James to come close so she could whisper something in his ear. She revealed private details about James’s and Anne’s wedding night that should have been impossible for her to know. That tipped the scales and from that point on, James was an avid believer in witchcraft.

It should be noted that royal wedding nights were not private events during this period. The
consummation of the royal marriage bed was, in fact, a public event observed by important personages at court. Because so much hinged on a royal union, witnesses were important. And in an age before media celebrity, who did people gossip about? The royals. So it is not outside the realm of possibility that peasants would have heard some salacious gossip about the King’s wedding night. But, why Sampson would use this information against herself is very perplexing. Perhaps it was just another example of giving them what they want to end the ordeal once and for all.

In any case, this experience left James an affirmed believer in the dark forces of the occult, which in turn had a profound impact on his nation. Scotland would become one of the worst perpetrators of witch-hunting, accusing and killing a higher proportion per capita of its own population than most of its European neighbors. The North Berwick Witch trials affected James so personally, that he would write his own treatise on the dark arts not long after. His book, *Daemonologie*, was written in 1597, and it was the first exposé on witchcraft penned in the English language. Just as the *Malleus Maleficarum* before it, James’s *Daemonologie* became a key tool in the witch-hunter’s kit, and was used extensively in both Scottish and English witch trials to follow.

Bibliography:
The Celtic race has always had its share of wanderers, typically moving west across Europe and to the outer reaches of the known world, to the fringes of Scotland, Ireland, England, Spain and France. Scots who settled in Ireland and became the Scotch-Irish or, as I like to call them, the Scottish-Irish, were extremely instrumental in the exploration of North America and in the fight for freedom in the United States. The Scots, Scottish-Irish and Irish made up the main entourage of trappers and goldminers exploring always west, even to Alaska and the Yukon.

Many a voyage, by ocean, by lake, by river, was made by these hardy folks, always seeking new opportunities and adventures. Scotsman Alexander Mackenzie was the man who came closest to finding a Northwest Passage. It was his correspondence with American President Thomas Jefferson that led, in part, to the famous Lewis and Clark Expedition. Lewis was part Welsh, Clark, part Scottish.

Many Scots found themselves as chiefs of American Indian tribes when they either married the chief’s daughter, or were the son of the chief’s daughter by a Scotsman.

Examples abound of Celtic exploration on the frontier. It has been said that the new frontier is Outer Space and there has been no lack of Celtic, and especially Scots, participation in voyages to Space.

Above is a photo of Neil Armstrong. The Armstrongs were a border clan in Scotland and the name was also the chosen anglicization of at least two Gaelic clan names from Ulster: Mac Thréinfhir (meaning “son of the strong man”) and Ó Labhradha Tréan (meaning “strong O’Lavery”).

And what could be more Celtic-sounding than the first name of Neil?

Neil Armstrong was the very first man to walk on the moon. However, at least six of the 12 men who have done so were also Scottish.
But first we need to back up a minute to the first word said on the moon, “Houston.” This was because ground control was in Houston, Texas, named for the Scots-blooded Sam Houston.

Joining Armstrong on the lunar surface was the second man to step foot there, Buzz Aldrin, who also had Scottish blood in his veins.

Alan Bean was the fourth man on the moon and also of Scottish descent, as were numbers six, seven and eight, Edgar Mitchell, David Scott and James Irwin, in that order.

There is the possibility that three more moonwalkers may have had some Scottish blood, these being Alan Shepard, John Young and Charles Duke. But we know at least half of those stepping foot on the moon were in fact of Scottish blood.

James McDivitt was the commander of the first orbital test flight of the Apollo Lunar Module. He also commanded the Gemini 4 craft during the first American space walk. He went on to become Manager of the entire Apollo Spacecraft Program.

And we certainly can’t forget John Glenn, the first American to orbit the earth, with a surname first found in Peebleshire, Scotland.

THE VOYAGE TO MARS

Doug McCuistion (a Scottish name if I’ve ever heard one!) was the Director of NASA’s Mars Exploration Program. McCuistion was NASA’s third and longest-running “Mars Czar”, leading the NASA Mars Exploration Program from NASA Headquarters for over eight years. Under his leadership, the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO), the Phoenix Lander, and the Mars Science Laboratory/Curiosity Rover were completed and launched, and the MAVEN mission made nearly ready for its 2013 launch.

THE VOYAGE TO TV AND MOVIES

The Scotty being referred to in the sentence, “Beam me up, Scotty,” was the crew member of the fictional Starship Enterprise. The phrase comes from the command Captain Kirk (another Scots name) gives his chief engineer, Montgomery “Scotty” Scott, who in real life was James Montgomery Doohan. Doohan’s mother was of the Montgomery clan, and his father was of the Irish clan Doohan.

Doohan’s characterization of the Scottish Chief Engineer of the Starship Enterprise is one of the most recognizable elements in the Star Trek franchise. Many of the characterizations, mannerisms, and expressions that he established for Scotty and other Star Trek characters have become entrenched in popular culture.

Finally, two major B films of the 1950s were set in the Scottish Highlands, The Man From Planet X and Devil Girl From Mars - though they were filmed in black and white and shot on small budgets in the US.
Tales of standing stones and stone circles have been told since the beginning of time. In Diana Gabaldon’s *Outlander* series, the fictional *Craig na Dun* stone circle comes to life when Claire takes a magical voyage back through time to 18th-century Scotland. I didn’t think that I needed to mention “into the arms of Jamie Fraser.”

But who really knows what secrets these mysterious stones hold?

The majority of stone circles can be found in the British Isles and were erected sometime during the Megalithic Age. “Megalithic” is a term used to describe structures made of large stones that were placed without the use of mortar or concrete. My bricklayer husband calls the technique “dry stacking.”

If we were to take a trip to Scotland to find these stones, where would we go? We’d certainly have many places to choose from.

These magnificent sights can be found all over Scotland in places such as Aberdeenshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Orkney, the Western Isles, and the Scottish borders. Fellow *Celtic Guide* author Piotr Kronenberger even has a stone circle in Odry, Poland.

One of the most famous stone circles is the 5,000-year-old Callanish Stones that are located on the Isle of Lewis. They’re situated above the waters of Loch Roag and have the hills of Great Bernera as a backdrop. The structure is thought to even pre-date the infamous Stonehenge. The Callanish Stones are visible for several miles and form a circle. In the center of the ring, there is a single stone that stands about 16 feet high. The largest side of the stone almost completely aligns to the north and to the south.

Traveling north, Orkney is home to the Ring of Brodgar, one of the finest stone circles in the world. The ring of stones stands on a small strip of land between Loch Stenness and Loch Harray. Originally, the stone structure had sixty megaliths, but there are only twenty-seven remaining today. Not a fan of the isles? The
lands of Argyll hold one of the most concentrated areas of prehistoric remains with hundreds of monuments, standing stones, cairns and stone circles.

There is no doubt that Scotland’s dramatic landscapes have witnessed thousands of years of human history. Whether or not you believe the standing stones and stone circles are positioned for astrological reasons or as burial markers, etc., that is only something modern day archaeologists can speculate. Maybe that’s what makes these structures so intriguing.

When I traveled to Belgium a few years ago, I remember how excited I was to tour the castles. I’ll never forget sitting at a café across from a looming castle and the waitress telling me the castle was no big deal because she sees it all the time. I imagine the natives of Callanish, Orkney and Argyll feel the same way. Many people continue to hold different beliefs about the purpose of these structures.

What do you believe?
Obie and his buddy Tadhg, the Irish wolfhound, on a trip to Connemara, Co Galway.

Here they are pictured in Connemara National Park.

Connemara National Park covers some 2,957 hectares of scenic mountains, expanses of bogs, heaths, grasslands, and woodlands. Some of the park’s mountains, namely Benbaun, Bencullagh, Benbrack and Muckanaght, are part of the famous Twelve Bens or Beanna Beola range.

Much of the present park lands formed part of the Kylemore Abbey Estate and the Letterfrack Industrial School, the remainder having been owned by private individuals. The southern part of the park was at one time owned by Richard (Humanity Dick) Martin who helped to form the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals during the early 19th century. The park lands are now wholly owned by the State and managed solely for National Park purposes.
Celtic mythology is full of stories detailing daring voyages into the spirit realm, undertaken by human or demi-god heroes, so much so that the ever-original Irish even invented their own definition for those kinds of legends.

The *immram* is a literary genre in medieval Irish literature, specifically referring to supernatural sea voyages. The term itself (plural form: *immrama*) probably comes from Middle Irish, and literally translates as “rowing out.”

However, a distinction must be drawn between the *echtrae* (an “ordinary” journey to the Otherworld) and an *immram* – a supernatural voyage. For while one is pagan in aspect, the other is Christian.

It would seem that the confusion is caused by the text *Immram Brain*, in which the hero visits the Otherworld of the sea god, *Manannán mac Lir* (also known under the Welsh spelling of *Manawyddan ap Llyr*).

The likely explanation is that the title is a mistake, or a confusion with the similar Christian story of Saint Brendan, who is thought to have made a voyage to the Blessed Isles.

Oddly enough, while the Latin name for Brendan’s voyage is: *Nauigatio sancti Brendani abbatis*, the Irish one *Betha Bréannain* means: “The Life of Brendan”– not the “Voyage of Brendan.”

Otherwise, the *immrama* have heavily Christian overtones. Three Irish examples of this have survived to modern times:

**Immram curaig Maíle Dúin:** Máel Dúin sails to various islands, seeking his father’s murderer. After seeing 40 supernatural islands, he heeds the words of a priest and forgives the murderer instead of enacting the typical Irish revenge motif.

**Immram Snédgusa ocus Meic Riagla:** The kinsmen of Colm Cille (Saint Columba) visit various fantastic islands and preach the gospel.

**Immram curaig Ua Chorra:** Three pirates, heathens whose father worshipped the devil, convert to Christianity after experiencing a mystical vision of Saint Michael the Archangel. Next, the siblings undergo baptism and repent for their sins by repairing all the churches they had previously destroyed. After fixing the last one, the bandits set out on a supernatural, Atlantic Ocean voyage. During their travels, they see the usual talking birds and magical islands – in this context all representing certain Christian virtues.

And so, while some have incorrectly described an *immram* as a voyage to the Otherworld, it is not. Instead, it borrows certain elements of the Otherworld to work as a challenge of the faith for the voyager – not as a pagan description of the home of the gods. There is even some speculation that the *immrama* may have some “real” places mentioned in them, such as the Faroe Islands or the Sargasso Sea, for instance.
Brandon Creek, and the wild Atlantic of the Dingle Peninsula – the point where Saint Brendan’s voyage is said to have begun.
One of Ireland’s most sacred peaks, Mount Brandon (shown above), rises majestically from the waters of Dingle Bay to cast its holy shadow across the far west of the peninsula. Known in Gaelic as *Cnoc Bréanainn*, meaning Brendan’s Hill, the name of this saint has been anglicised to Brandon.

The saint after which this peak was named, is said to have retreated to the mountain to seek divine inspiration before setting out on a legendary seven-year voyage, to what some people believe to be America.

Mount Brandon is popular with pilgrims who brave the climb to follow a trail of white crosses that mark the steps of the saint himself to the top of Ireland’s ninth-highest mountain. The area is scattered with the intriguing stone beehive huts, or *clocháns*. Corbelled from dry stone, they are thought to be built to house the local early Christian community, or pilgrims to the area, although they may also have been built by the local population who fled to more remote parts of the Dingle Peninsula to escape the Normans in the 11th century. [1]

Whilst there are several days throughout the year that are noted as being suitable to carry out a devotional climb to the peak of Mount Brandon, the most popular and holy is the last weekend in July. This pilgrimage is widely believed to be pre-Christian in origin, and is considered to be part of the Lughnasa festival where a local god of the harvest named Crom Dubh was honoured. [2]

Whilst Lugh himself is seen as the principal deity of this festival, it is not unusual for local deities to be included in the festivities. Crom Dubh is said to have dwelt near Cloghane, a small town near the base of the mountain. Another explanation is that the festival honours Lugh’s victory over Crom Dubh (meaning the “dark twisted one”) on the peak of the mountain on July 31st or August 1st. [3]

Once Christianity became the widespread faith in Ireland, these old gods needed to be gotten rid of. And so the legends told how a local chieftain who dwelt in the valley of Lough A’Duin, named Crom Dubh, was converted to the new faith by Saint Brendan.

Born in 484 A.D. in Tralee, Saint Brendan is the patron saint of the Diocese of Kerry. Known as Saint Brendan the Navigator, or Saint Brendan the Voyager, this early monastic saint certainly had some adventures. Tutored by some of Ireland’s early Christians, he was ordered by Saint Erc to become a priest and spread the word of God. He travelled around the coast of Ireland, then further afield to Scotland, Wales, and even Brittany in France. Monasteries appeared wherever he landed, to spread the Gospel. These lands were not the only places that he sailed to.
According to legend, the saint built a traditional currach from wood covered in hides, and set sail for Paradise. He travelled with fourteen monks from Brandon’s Creek near the foot of Mount Brandon, to take the word of the Lord to an unknown continent in the west, referred to as “The Island of the Blessed”. He prepared for his voyage by fasting and praying for forty days and nights on the mountain, and then set forth in 535 A.D. to venture into the unknown.

From *The Voyage of Saint Brendan: The Navigator*, we read: “Having received the blessing of this holy father and all his monks, he proceeded to the remotest part of his own country, where his parents abode. However, he willed not to visit them, but went up to the summit of the mountain there, which extends far into the ocean, on which is ‘St Brendan’s Seat;’ and there he fitted up a tent, near a narrow creek, where a boat could enter. Then St Brendan and his companions, using iron implements, prepared a light vessel, with wicker sides and ribs, such as is usually made in that country, and covered it with cow-hide, tanned in oak-bark, tarring the joints thereof, and put on board provisions for forty days, with butter enough to dress hides for covering the boat and all utensils needed for the use of the crew. He then ordered the monks to embark, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” [4]

After sailing for seven years across uncharted waters, it is the local belief that he and his monks arrived on the shores of America. Amazingly, Saint Brendan returned to Ireland safely, and died in 578 A.D. It is not known what happened to his voyaging companions.

His adventure is recorded in the medieval manuscript, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*. There are many versions of the story describing

*Shrine at Slea Head, Dingle Peninsula, with Blasket Isles in the background.*
the voyage of Saint Brendan. Some of these describe a different number of monks travelling with him, others describe how they are pilgrims. One version describes how Saint Malo was aboard his vessel.

In the tale of Brendan’s voyage, several locations are described that have left people guessing. Were they real islands, or just fiction? One such place is an island of sheep, where the saint and his companions stay for a week during the pre-Easter period. From here, they travel to an island which is named Jasconius, where they hold Easter Mass. Brendan and the crew hunt whales and fish whilst here. After leaving this place, they find an island filled with seabirds, which is referred to as a Paradise of Birds. They also find a volcano, and visit a land of grapes where they stay for forty days. These references could certainly be interpreted as being locations such as Vinland, Iceland, Greenland, and the isles in between.

An attempt in 1976 was made to see whether or not the saint could have actually travelled to America and back in such a small and flimsy vessel. Determined to find out, Tim Severin, writer and historian, built a traditional Irish currach. Naming the boat Brendan, he set off to see if it would make it to North America. [5]

Amazingly, the vessel made it, and Severin wrote about his adventures upon his return in 1977, adding weight to the argument that the Irish might have discovered America before the Vikings! The voyage was as fraught with danger as Brendan’s, except Severin did not encounter any sea monsters; instead, he suffered a puncture in the ship’s side whilst passing through icy seas.

Tim Severin built the ship from Irish ash and oak using traditional tools. It was lashed together with two miles of leather thong, and was wrapped in forty-nine tanned ox hides sealed with wool grease. The two-masted boat set sail from Ireland, via the Hebrides and Iceland, until they reached Peckford Island in Newfoundland. Many of the sights seen along the voyage convinced Severin that the descriptions of Brendan’s islands could indeed have been real places.

If the records of Saint Brendan’s voyage were true, then it would re-write history. But things don’t just stop with Brendan. Many consider his tale to be a Christian re-telling of the famous legend of the Voyage of Bran. Written down between 600 and 700 A.D, this Irish legend pre-dates the Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbati and is believed to have inspired Brendan’s story.

In this tale, the hero Bran mac Feabhail set forth to find the Otherworld, land of peace and plenty. Here, none grow old or sick, nobody thirsts or hungrys, and it is always summertime.

A woman of the Otherworld tells Bran to set sail for the Land of Women across the sea, and so he gathers a company of men and does just that. [6]
There are even more similarities between Brendan’s voyage and the Voyage of Máel Dúin [7], a tale of a young man who discovers his true identity and sets forth on a journey of vengeance against raiders who wronged his kin. It is quite likely that the villains of this tale were the Vikings. This story was recorded towards the end of the first millennium A.D. and can be compared almost scene by scene with Brendan’s voyage. However, the reader will find an interesting blend of pre-Christian life blended with the new faith, with God featuring alongside druids.

We can see with the three texts that there has been a tradition of story-telling around a great voyage to a far-away land, with islands that might even be Iceland, Greenland, and a paradise that some believe to be the New World of the Americas. With each version, the story becomes more Christian, yet the core elements remain. The Irish were sailing far and wide, long before Columbus reached America. They might just have even beaten him to it.


NAME: Pollyanna Jones
TALENT: Author/Illustrator
RESIDENCE: England
INTERESTS: Northern Traditions
Celtic, Nordic, Germanic and Anglo Saxon
When we hear of “down-sizing” or even the “harvesting” of established businesses in the United States, and elsewhere, our thoughts go immediately to the accountants, economists and lawyers who marginalize people’s dedication and experience with phrases like “maximizing profits,” or “dropping the bottom ten percent,” as if these are actually well-thought-out practices. This is almost always for short-term gain, while the legacy and future of the business is at risk, if not destroyed, not to mention those disaffected.

Above, we see a hapless group of Highlanders who suffered the same fate, surprisingly at the hands of the same type of thoughtless people.

The Highland Clearances have been variously associated with the extension of an empire through the creation of a northern colony within the British Isles, or with the integration of the marginal Highland economy into industrial capitalism, and with the longer-term trend of rural depopulation and urbanization – the anglicization of the Highlands and attempts to “civilize” a backward society (Macinnes, 1988).

Or, as Mathieson says, the eradication of Scottish Gaeldom: “a cultural take-over of a region by peoples of a supposedly superior civilization.” (Mathieson, 2000).

So far as they were manifested in the clearances, each of these transitions was attended by human suffering and an assault on the conventions of Gaelic society and culture. On September 27, 2000, the Scottish legislature debated the following motion: “That the Parliament expresses its deepest regret for the occurrence of the Highland Clearances and extends its hand in friendship and welcome to the descendants of the cleared people who reside outwith our shores.” (Scottish Parliament. Official Report, Vol. 8 No. 7, col. 639).

The short and disappointing debate which followed was testament to the continuing strong emotions aroused by the clearances. An SNP member suggested that the motion was significant because: “In other countries, the genocide and ethnic cleansing that has taken place, against the Indians in America and the
Aborigines in Australia, was acknowledged long ago. Today, the time to acknowledge what happened to those who were cleared from the Highlands has come. We can now acknowledge and regret what happened and perhaps then move on.”

Contributors to the debate referred to how the clearances had changed the Highland landscape and altered the course of Scottish history. They lamented the “wickedness” of the clearances, their role in the destruction of the Highlands, the “terrible atrocities that were perpetrated on a vulnerable, fragile and defenceless community,” “the suffering caused to so many innocents,” “the cruel and savage evictions and shattered lives.”

Monumental symbols of the events were also discussed, from the erection of memorials to victims, the opening of a Highland Clearances Visitor Centre, to the ongoing dispute over the possible demolition of the statue of the Duke of Sutherland, one of the worst evicting landowners.

Other MSPs alluded to how the memory of the clearances continues to be handed down from generation to generation, and that it should be featured in school curriculum. Reference was also made to the existence of clearance-denial journalists and the need to recognize that it was not only large landowners who were responsible for the eviction of Highland Scots.

This study explored the role of one set of men, not situated in the landlord class, but servants of it, who were also involved in the clearances at their peak during the mid-nineteenth century (Smout, 1986): professional accountants in Edinburgh. But the accountants were not working alone. The ranks of the cold-hearted included lawyers and economists, too. We take a look at perhaps the worst in each category.

We would not usually equate the eviction of rural communities with the professions of this type. In order to ascertain how such notions can be arrived at, we quote historians of the clearances. Richards opens his comprehensive and authoritative account of *The Highland Clearances* by relating the testimony of a witness to an eviction on the Isle of Skye in 1854. Archibald Geikie (later an eminent geologist) recalled that while walking in the district of Suishnish:

“A strange wailing sound reached my ears at intervals on the breeze from the west. On gaining the top of one of the hills on the south side of the valley, I could see a long and motley procession winding along the road that led north from Suishnish. It halted at the point of the road opposite Kilbride, and there the lamentation became long and loud. As I drew nearer, I could see that the minister with his wife and daughters had come out to meet the people to bid them farewell. It was a miscellaneous gathering of at least three generations of crofters. There were old men and women, too feeble to walk, who were placed in carts; the younger members of the community on foot were carrying their bundles of clothes and household effects, while the children, with looks of alarm, walked alongside. There was a pause in the notes of woe as the last words were exchanged with the family of Kilbride. Everyone was in tears, each wished to clasp the hands that had so often befriended them, and it seemed as if they could not tear themselves away. When they set forth once more, a cry of grief went up to heaven, the long plaintive wail, like a funeral coronach, was resumed, and after the last of the emigrants had disappeared behind the hill, the sound seemed to re-echo through the whole wide valley of Strath in one prolonged note of desolation. The people were on their way to be shipped to Canada (Richards, 1904).

For Richards the episode at Suishnish “encapsulated the pathos of the clearances, the tragic end of a simple community.” Geikie’s recollection is quoted in other seminal histories such as Hunter’s *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Hunter, 1976).
Christopher Smout, in *A Century of the Scottish People, 1830-1950*, considered that the events on Skye exemplified the “cruelty and anguish” of the clearances. Richards later elaborates on the sad account. He illustrates how the vitriol of contemporaries at the eviction of the crofting families of Suishnish was directed not at the proprietor of the estate, Lord Macdonald, but at a “Mr. Brown of Edinburgh.”

Mr. Brown of Edinburgh has remained a rather anonymous figure in histories of the Highland Clearances. He is, however, very well known to students of accounting history. For this was James Brown, the inaugural President of the Institute (later Society) of Accountants in Edinburgh, the first modern organization of professional accountants.

In ordering the clearance of Suishnish, Brown was acting in his capacity as trustee for the insolvent estates of Lord Macdonald. He and other eminent accountants were involved in the clearances on the estate of at least two of the dozen major landowners in the Highlands and Islands during the 1840s and 50s (Devine, 1988).

Not to be outdone, Brown was joined in his treachery by James Loch, an economist, lawyer and estate manager. Loch made it his lifelong ambition “to so mould and control the lives of ‘the ignorant and credulous people’ that at one time the young among them had to go to his agents for permission to marry.” (Prebble, 1963). He was responsible for much of the policy respecting the agricultural laborers and the improvement of agriculture pursued over tens of thousands of acres both in England and Scotland. The “Sutherlandshire clearances” of George, Marquis of Stafford, by which, between 1811 and 1820, fifteen-thousand crofters were removed from the inland to the seacoast districts, were carried out under his supervision.

Finally, joining the team of infamous clearance kings was Patrick Sellar, born into a wealthy family in Moray in 1780 and trained
as a lawyer. He was hired as the Duke of Sutherland’s factor in 1809 to assist with the “improvement” of the Duke’s lands.

“Improvement” was the term used by landlords to describe the introduction of new farming systems to their property, which usually resulted in the eviction of existing tenants. Sellar’s tactics led to him standing trial at Inverness for culpable homicide when he presided over the burning of a croft in Strathnaver which still contained Margaret Mackay, an old woman who refused to leave. He was acquitted after there was found to be little evidence of his direct involvement. He was most prolific in the area of Strathnaver and presided over the improvements of much of the Highlands, becoming a successful sheep farmer and one of the largest landowners in the area around the lands he had “cleared” for the duke.

These three were not alone in the number of “professional” men who had no regard for the legacies and lives of the Highlanders and Islanders, those sadly forced to voyage to new lands like Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.


Celtic folklore is rife with tales of the Fae. According to the lore, to avoid angering the fairies you should always refer to them by a euphemism, such as “the Good People.” The fairies can be friend or foe, though in Celtic folklore they are more often known for their trickery than in neighboring Germanic lore, where elves are quite helpful. Germanic lore did make its way to Lowland Scotland with the Anglo-Saxons. The stories of helpful Scottish brownies, who do chores around the house are analogous with other Germanic domestic elves such as the German kobold and Scandinavian Tomte. Fairies could travel in groups, known as trooping fairies, or be solitary figures, such as the leprechaun.

A common theme found in Celtic fairy lore includes being kidnapped by the fairies. This could happen to infants, typically in changeling stories. Adults could be “taken into the mounds” with the fairies, such as in Orkney’s trow tales, get caught up in a procession of trooping fairies, or stuck in a fairy dance for years.

Another way in which Celtic fairies are more sinister than their Germanic counterparts is in the gifts they give.

In Germanic lore, we see many examples of elfin spirits giving gifts that seem worthless, such as a pile of dead leaves, but if the person has a good heart and values the gift, it will turn into something of great value. Celtic fairies tend to do the opposite, as we will see in the first story below.

Here I have for you two stories of fairy travels from Celtic folklore. This first story comes from The Irish Fairy Book, a collection of tales by various authors, edited by Alfred Perceval Graves. The book is undated, but it appears to be late 19th or early 20th century.
The Fairies’ Passage
By James Clarence Magnon

Tap, tap, rap, rap! “Get up, gaffer Ferryman.”
“Eh! Who is there?” The clock strikes three.
“Get up, do, gaffer! You are the very man
We have been long, long, longing to see.”
The ferryman rises, growling and grumbling,
And goes fum-fumbling,
and stumbling, and tumbling
Over the wares on his way to the door.
But he sees no more
Than he saw before,
Till a voice is heard: “O Ferryman, dear!
Here we are waiting, all of us, here.
We are a wee, wee colony, we;
Some two hundred in all, or three.
Ferry us over the River Lee
Ere dawn of day,
And we will pay
The most we may
In our own wee way!”

“Well, well, you may come,”
said the ferryman affably;
“Patrick, turn out, and get ready the barge.”
Then again to the little folk:
“Tho’ you seem laughably
Small, I don’t mind, if your coppers be large.”
Oh, dear! what a rushing,
what pushing, what crushing
(The watermen making vain efforts at hushing
The hubbub the while),
there followed these words!
What clapping of boards,
What strapping of cords,
What stowing away of children and wives,
And platters, and mugs,
and spoons, and knives!
Till all had safely got into the boat,
And the ferryman, clad in his tip-top coat,
And his wee little fairies were safely afloat;
Then ding, ding, ding,
And kling, kling, kling,
How the coppers did ring
In the tin pitcherling!

Off, then, went the boat, at first very pleasantly,
Smoothly, and so forth; but after a while
It swayed and it swagged this and that way,
and presently
Chest after chest, and pile after pile
Of the little folk’s goods
began tossing and rolling,
And pitching like fun, beyond fairy controlling.
O Mab! if the hubbub were great before,
It was now some two or three
million times more.
Crash! went the wee crocks and the clocks;
and the locks
Of each little wee box
were stoved in by hard knocks;
And then there were oaths, and prayers, and cries:
“Take care!”—“See there!”—
“Oh, dear, my eyes!”—
“I am killed!”—“I am drowned!”
—with groans and sighs,
Till to land they drew.
“Yeo-ho! Pull to!
Tiller-rope, thro’ and thro’!”
And all’s right anew.
“Now jump upon shore, ye queer little oddities.
(Eh, what is this?... Where are they, at all?
Where are they,
and where are their tiny commodities?
Well, as I live!”....) He looks blank as a wall,
Poor ferryman!
Round him and round him he gazes,
But only gets deeplier lost in the mazes
Of utter bewilderment. All, all are gone,
And he stands alone,
Like a statue of stone,
In a doldrum of wonder. He turns to steer,
And a tinkling laugh salutes his ear,
With other odd sounds: “Ha, ha, ha, ha!
Fol lol! zidzizzle! quee, quee! bah, bah!
Fizzigigiggidy! pshee! sha, sha!”
“O ye thieves, ye thieves, ye rascally thieves!”
The good man cries. He turns to his pitcher,
And there, alas, to his horror perceives
That the little folk’s mode
of making him richer
Has been to pay him with withered leaves!

There were other reasons that humans might travel to the fairy world. Sometimes human wet-nurses were needed to nurse orphaned fairy babes. Fairies might travel to the human world for the love of a mortal, and likewise, humans might be lured to the lands of the fae for the same reason. In Celtic folklore it is possible for human/fairy romantic unions to not only occur, but to produce offspring. There are many tales from the Highlands and Islands of families who trace their lineage to a fairy maiden, a selkie, or a mermaid.

Our second tale is of a mortal man who falls in love with a fairy maiden and is beckoned to join her in Fairy Land. This story comes from another undated book called *Celtic Folk and Fairy Tales*, edited by Joseph Jacobs.

*Connla and the Fairy Maiden*

Connla of the Fiery Hair was son of Conn of the Hundred Fights. One day as he stood by the side of his father on the height of Usna, he saw a maiden clad in strange attire towards him coming.
"Whence comest thou, maiden?" said Connla.

"I come from the Plains of the Ever Living," she said, "there where is neither death nor sin. There we keep holiday alway, nor need we help from any in our joy. And in all our pleasure we have no strife. And because we have our homes in the round green hills, men call us the Hill Folk."

The king and all with him wondered much to hear a voice when they saw no one. For save Connla alone, none saw the Fairy Maiden.

"To whom art thou talking, my son?" said Conn the king.

Then the maiden answered, "Connla speaks to a young, fair maid, whom neither death nor old age awaits. I love Connla, and now I call him away to the Plain of Pleasure, Moy Mell, where Boadag is king for aye, nor has there been sorrow or complaint in that land since he held the kingship. Oh, come with me, Connla of the Fiery Hair, ruddy as the dawn, with thy tawny skin. A fairy crown awaits thee to grace thy comely face and royal form. Come, and never shall thy comeliness fade, nor thy youth, till the last awful day of judgment."

The king in fear at what the maiden said, which he heard though he could not see her, called aloud to his Druid, Coran by name.

"O Coran of the many spells," he said, "and of the cunning magic, I call upon thy aid. A task is upon me too great for all my skill and wit, greater than any laid upon me since I seized the kingship. A maiden unseen has met us, and by her power would take from me my dear, my comely son. If thou help not, he will be taken from thy king by woman's wiles and witchery."

Then Coran the Druid stood forth and chanted his spells towards the spot where the maiden's voice had been heard. And none heard her voice again, nor could Connla see her longer. Only as she vanished before the Druid's mighty spell, she threw an apple to Connla.

For a whole month from that day Connla would take nothing, either to eat or to drink, save only from that apple. But as he ate it grew again and always kept whole. And all the while there grew within him a mighty yearning and longing after the maiden he had seen.

But when the last day of the month of waiting came, Connla stood by the side of the king his father on the Plain of Arcomin, and again he saw the maiden come towards him, and again she spoke to him.

"'Tis a glorious place, forsooth, that Connla holds among shortlived mortals awaiting the day of death. But now the folk of life, the ever-living ones, beg and bid thee come to Moy Mell, the Plain of Pleasure, for they have learnt to know thee, seeing thee in thy home among thy dear ones."
When Conn the king heard the maiden’s voice he called to his men aloud and said:

“ Summon swift my Druid Coran, for I see she has again this day the power of speech.”

Then the maiden said: “O mighty Conn, Fighter of a Hundred Fights, the Druid’s power is little loved; it has little honour in the mighty land, peopled with so many of the upright. When the Law comes, it will do away with the Druid’s magic spells that issue from the lips of the false black demon.”

Then Conn the king observed that since the coming of the maiden Connla his son spoke to none that spake to him. So Conn of the Hundred Fights said to him, “Is it to thy mind what the woman says, my son?”

“ ’Tis hard upon me,” said Connla; “I love my own folk above all things; but yet a longing seizing me for the maiden.”

When the maiden heard this, she answered and said: “The ocean is not so strong as the waves of thy longing. Come with me in my curragh, the gleaming, straight-gliding crystal canoe. Soon can we reach Boadag’s realm. I see the bright sun sink, yet far as it is, we can reach it before dark. There is, too, another land worthy of thy journey, a land joyous to all that seek it. Only wives and maidens dwell there. If thou wilt, we can seek it and live there alone together in joy.”

When the maiden ceased to speak, Connla of the Fiery Hair rushed away from his kinsmen and sprang into the curragh, the gleaming, straight-gliding crystal canoe. And then they all, king and court, saw it glide away over the bright sea towards the setting sun, away and away, till eye could see it no longer. So Connla and the Fairy Maiden went forth on the sea, and were no more seen, nor did any know whither they came.

I hope you enjoyed our journeys into Fairy Land. See past editions of this column on my website: www.CarolynEmerick.com

You can download both of these books from Project Gutenberg:

The Irish Fairy Book - http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/32202
Celtic Folk and Fairy Tales - http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/35862

Celtic Music by SEM

• Website – www.sandraelizabethmae.jimdo.com
• Facebook – www.facebook.com/singersem

You can purchase her latest album Hero at:
https://itunes.apple.com/album/hero/id908305156?affId=1662869 and
http://www.amazon.com/ Hero-SEM-Sandra-Elizabeth-Mae/dp/B00MMJAU2
As we leave our last port of call on this “Voyage,” we’d like to announce that we have established all remaining themes for the year 2015. This is in an effort to allow more time for our authors and creative contributors to prepare, and also to get a bird’s-eye view of the year right up front.

So here is the entire year, theme-wise:

January (published) - Unexplained Mysteries
February (published) - The Voyage
March - Spirituality (includes old St. Patrick, of course)
April - Superstitions (lots of these where the Celts are concerned!)
May - Castles and Cathedrals (nothing like stonework to say “Celtic.”)
June - The Innovators (the inventors, the explorers, the first to try something new)
July - Legends and Lore (stories galore)
August - The Animals (we’ve left these poor creatures out, all along)
September - Wee Folk and Monsters (From Fae to Nessie, and everything in between)
October - Halloween (including the festival known as Samhain in Scottish Gaelic or Samhain in Irish, and other Celtic celebrations)
November - Seasons and Cycles (reoccurring themes from Celtic culture and history)
December - Gifts (our free-for-all, anything-goes, Christmas gift issue)

We will cover a lot of ground with this list of themes, so get those pencils sharpened!!