

Celtic Guide

Volume 5, Issue 1
February 2016

Seasons
&
Cycles

From The Editor . . .



Hello again and welcome to 2016! Nothing says Seasons and Cycles for Celts better than St. Patrick's Day, and no parade is there larger than the New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade, a photo of which is shown on our front cover. Every year we hear from these folks and get invited to their doings. We are pleased to mention them a wee bit in this issue.

Also, we have two really great articles on the roles of Seasons and Cycles in Ireland, as well as others from Celtic countries around the world.

A very exciting event for us is our interview with "The Barataria Project,"

out of Madrid, Spain. This makes the 16th country we've partnered with in some way or another to celebrate their Celtic ties. Just to recount them, one more time: Spain, Portugal, Germany, Poland, Austria, Romania, England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Chile, Canada and the good ol' USA. I'm as happy as a pig in . . . well let's just say a pig in mud. Who'd a thunk five years ago that we'd arrive here with this adventure. I always like to say, "Stay tuned, you ain't seen nothing yet," but I just can't imagine what's waiting around that next bend.

Anyway, there's plenty right here, right now, to pique your interest, so dig in.

But first - a good ol' Irish joke to get you on your way. Forgive me if you've heard it already.

Three gentlemen come out of the pub into a blistering winter storm.

The first says, "Jesus, Joseph and Mary, it's windy out here"

The second one hollers, in the face of a cold west wind, "It's na Wednesday, it's Thursday."

The third Irishman says, "I'm thirsty, too. Let's go back into the pub for another."

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FSA Scot

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It's That Time o' Year Again, Is It?

James McQuiston FSA Scot
USA

For 254 years the New York City Saint Patrick's Day Parade has brought generations of families together. Thanks to the generous support of many people they have been able for 254 years to continue what started on the streets of lower Manhattan in 1762.

And every year since the *Celtic Guide* started publication, we have heard from Hilary Beirne, the man behind much of the success of the parade, though he would likely decline that accolade.

Recently we received some of the latest news on the activities and appointments for the parade. To begin with, the 2016 Grand Marshal of the NYC St. Patrick's Day Parade will be Senator George J. Mitchell.

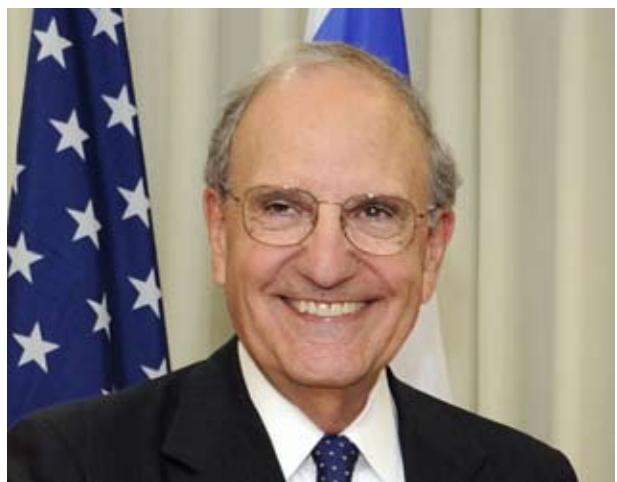
After 15 years in the U.S. Senate, ending his stint there as Majority Leader, Mitchell went on to serve as United States Special Envoy for Northern Ireland, from January 3, 1995 to January 20, 2001, under President Bill Clinton.

Next he served as Chancellor of the Queen's University, Belfast, from May 5, 1999 to March 29, 2009.

His father, George John Mitchell, Sr. (born Joseph Kilroy), was of Irish descent, and so Senator Mitchell brings a long history of interest in all things Irish to the table.

In 1995 Senator Mitchell was appointed United States Special Representative for Northern Ireland by President Clinton and he played a pivotal role in the negotiations for peace in Northern Ireland. He led a commission that established the principles of non-violence to which all parties in Northern Ireland had to adhere and he subsequently chaired the all-party negotiations which led to the Peace Agreement

signed on Good Friday 1998 (known since as the "Good Friday Agreement"). Mitchell's personal intervention was crucial to the success of the Northern Ireland peace agreement. For his involvement in the Northern Ireland peace negotiations, Mitchell was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Liberty Medal. In 1999 Mitchell was invested as an Honorary Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth for his services to the Northern Ireland peace process.



Senator George J. Mitchell

"I'm honored to serve as the Grand Marshal of the 2016 St. Patrick's Day Parade," Mitchell said.

"It is indeed fitting that the 2016 St. Patrick's Day Parade, celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Easter Rising which gave birth to Irish independence, has as its Grand Marshal Sen. George Mitchell, who played such an important role in our quest for freedom," said John Lahey, Chairman of the parade's Board of Directors.

Lahey stated, "In his many accomplishments in a lifetime of public service, perhaps Sen.

Mitchell's greatest achievement is the gift he gave the people of Ireland – peace."

The Board of Directors is as follows:

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On Wednesday, March 16th, the annual Gala will be held with special guests being the Irish American Leaders in the Northern Ireland Peace Process. Also, entertaining for the evening will be Moya Brennan, who is perhaps best-known as the lead singer of Clannad. She now records solo under a phonetic spelling of her name, Moya Brennan, and is often referred to as the First Lady of Celtic Music.

The parade itself kicks off at 11:00 a.m. every March 17th and begins at 44th Street

and proceeds up Fifth Avenue to 79th street in Manhattan.

The New York City St Patrick's Parade marched for the first time in 1762, fourteen Years before the Declaration of Independence was signed in Independence Hall, Philadelphia. The Parade is regarded as the most popular of the all the Parades in New York City. The New York Parade consists only of marchers and each year hosts some 250,000 marchers and two million spectators. The Parade has many outstanding marching bands, bagpipers in marching formations, high-school and college bands from throughout the United States and from all over the world.

The occasion is televised live to millions of households nationwide for four hours by host station WNBC Channel Four. The broadcast is webcast live via the internet through the Parade's web site at NYCStPatricksParade.Org and WNBC Channel Four web site at www.wnbc.com.

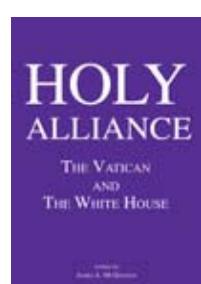
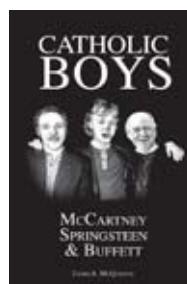
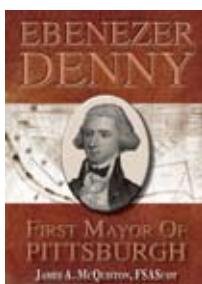
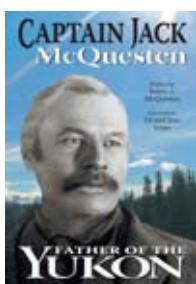
For additional information regarding the 2016 Grand Marshal and Parade events leading up to the Parade, contact Pat Smith / 212-843-8026 / psmith@rubenstein.com or Hilary Beirne at the Parade Office 718-231-4400/ HBeirne@NYCStPatricksParade.Org or visit the Parade web site at NYCStPatricksParade.Org.

The books of James McQuiston

I currently have four books for sale online –

- *Captain Jack: Father of the Yukon*
- *Ebenezer Denny: First Mayor of Pittsburgh*
- *Catholic Boys: McCartney, Springsteen and Buffett*
- *Holy Alliance: The Vatican and The White House*

Captain Jack is a longer in depth study. The remaining three, while still in depth, are quick reads. I invite you to look them up on Amazon or Create Space and just maybe you'll want to purchase one or more of them. I hope so.



The BARATARIA Project

James A. McQuiston FSA Scot
USA



EDITOR'S NOTE: This month we make contact with our 16th country (SPAIN!) since the *Celtic Guide* first began. We are truly an international e-magazine for Celtic culture and music lovers all over the world. Our interview is with the boys in the band called The Barataria Project, out of Madrid.

Let's get to it!

CG: Welcome to the pages of *Celtic Guide*. We are so happy to hear from another country, as well as another Celtic musical group. The obvious question is - How did your name The Barataria Project come about?

TBP: Thank you very much James for the interview. Greetings from Madrid to all readers of *Celtic Guide*.

The name comes from the Spanish novel *Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes. It is considered one of the most influential works of literature from the Spanish Golden Age, at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Barataria is the name of a fictional island promised as a reward by Don Quixote to Sancho Panza for his services. We liked the story and we thought it was a good name for a band that mixes up ancient melodies with current musical styles. And since this is a musical experiment, we included the word "Project."

CG: So are you involved in live performances or are you mostly a studio band?

TBP: The album is indeed a studio work. We did first a pre-recording, and later on we put ourselves in the hands of Javi Díez, our producer, for the main recording, mixing, and mastering. He gave to us a lot of ideas for the sounds and solos composition and he also programmed the drums - an awesome work we must say.

However, all the songs were composed so they could be played live by only four musicians: guitar, piano, winds and drums. The guitarist, Juan Martínez, uses a "loop station" machine, where a main loop is created and others are added as over-loops. If you listen carefully to the songs, you will notice the main loop and how the melodies and other rhythm parts are added to it. There is not a real bass; it is actually an octaved guitar. Actually, we are preparing our live show, with an incredible drummer, Luis Oeo.

CG: What were your greatest Celtic influences?

TBP: We are a fusion rock band which plays Celtic or European melodies. Every genre of music we listen to is an influence, from reggae to electronic or jazz, to metal; but talking just about Celtic influences there are several bands we can name such Gwendal, Luar Na Lubre,

Milladoiro, Altan, Clannad, Capercaillie, Allan Stivell, and Nightnoise. Also we are music fans of what it is called the “New Age” style.

CG: Do you have song downloads available, or performance dates coming up?

TBP: You can listen to our first album on YouTube, Bandcamp, Spotify, Google Music, or buy it on Amazon or iTunes. Just click “The Barataria Project” on Google and you will easily find us. We hope to be performing live this spring of 2016. Also, we are composing new songs for the second album we have in mind.

CG: How can your fans keep in touch with you online?

TBP: They can find us on Facebook or Twitter @baratariaband. Also subscribe to our YouTube channel or follow us on Spotify or Bandcamp.

CG: What do you think is the wildest thing you've done as a musical group, musically or otherwise?

TBP: Probably the wildest thing we have done as a musical group is the song “Cantigas.” The original melodies are included in a book of 420 poems, dedicated to the Virgin Maria, with musical notation, written in the Medieval Galician language during the reign of Alfonso X The Wise (1221–1284) and often attributed to him. It is really very old medieval music. We can't imagine the faces and feelings of the people of this time, if this song could travel in time and be listened to by the original composer, the monks who used to sing those melodies, or even the common people. For sure, they may recognize the melody, but the harmony and rhythm are something totally wild compared to the original song.

This is really the purpose of The Barataria Project - put together the ancient music of Europe with the current sounds, because both styles are

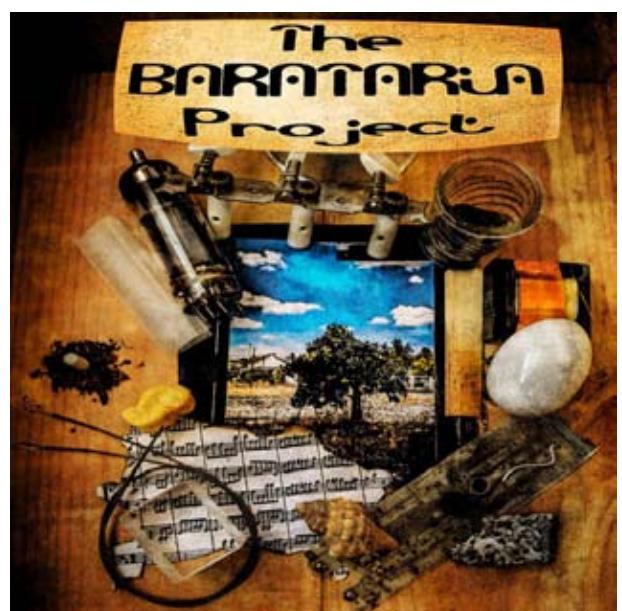
using the same system and it is possible to fuse both concepts. These melodies don't die with time. “Cantigas” is a melody from the thirteenth century that is used as a pretext, an excuse, for creating a new song from the twenty-first century. An experiment.

CG: What is the one thing you'd like our *Celtic Guide* readers to know about The Barataria Project?

TBP: The Barataria Project is a fusion band. Our soul is the European and Celtic melodies, like Spanish and Italian or traditional Irish and Scottish ones, but the body is funk, reggae, rock, jazz, folk. We approach the songs as if we were playing jazz standards. First, each instrument plays the melodies and then comes the solos and improvisation. We believe it is something new and fresh compared to the music industry, nowadays, and this is our little contribution to Celtic music in general. We are pleased for every single listener we get. Thank you all.

CG: Thank you so much for participating in this issue of the *Celtic Guide*.

TBP: Thank you very much, *Celtic Guide*. It was a pleasure.



SEASONS AND CYCLES IN IRISH MYTHOLOGY

James Slaven
USA



Autumn fairies dancing in the wind (Arthur Rackham) (public domain)

Irish mythology and lore is replete with instances of how important cycles were to the ancient Gaels of the Emerald Isle. As with most cultures, it governed their calendars and religious festivals, but it went much deeper than that, by governing most every aspect of their lives, including the supernatural and the martial.

A major duality of Irish lore is seen in how the people treat days, with a clear delineation between day and night. The daytime is the time for humans, where we are safer from supernatural interference. The nighttime, however, is sinister and foreboding. It is the time of the *Aos Sí*, the Shining Ones, those who you should not call fairies for fear of offending them. Once the sun sets, the Shining Ones emerge from their mounds in search of humans to play with. The Fae sense of humor and play is much different than ours, though. At its harshest end, it involves hunting the humans for sport or trading a human

infant for a changeling, which is a look-a-like mischief maker who takes the child's place while the real baby is taken back with the Fae. At the least worrisome end of "play," the Lords and Ladies may just take their "guest" back with them, until they tire of the mortal and send him or her back, where they find decades or centuries have passed and all their friends and family have passed on.

The night is also the time for the dead. Ghosts and those who have risen from their graves are active at this time of the day, and great care is needed to not offend these beings. The best way to keep these undead from harming you is to be in your house and asleep before it gets very late in the evening. All your chores should be done, so everything is tidy and ready for the next day.

To me, it sounds like it was a good way to make sure the children did their jobs without slacking off!

I would not want to chance it, though, if the penalty is an animated corpse carrying me away to its grave site.

One of the most feared nighttime visitors, even into modern times, are the Sluagh. These are the horrific souls of the unwanted dead, who cannot rest after death. They take the form of a flock of crows or just long, dark shadows. Waiting for someone to pass away, they would swoop in and steal the soul, causing that person to become one of the ever-roaming host (host, by the way, is the translation of the word *sluagh*). To stop this, all westward-facing windows and doors should be completely shut, to keep the vicious horde out and away from the dying human.

You can see why daytime was a much anticipated event!

For the ancient Irish, the year was also divided into two, with just a summer and a winter – not an uncommon practice for a pastoral culture that really took care of its livestock. Summer, which started at Beltane (the first of May), was much like the daylight division of the day. Here, things were safer and there was much more

activity. It was the time of year when the Fianna would roam the countryside, living off the land. The Fianna were bands of landless young men who would fight each other for their provincial kings, although it was also thought to be one band that would fight for the High King. The summer was the time of war and cattle raiding and openness.

As summer matched with the day, so did winter match with the night. Beginning at Samhain (the first of November), it was a time for stay indoors and for planning, whether these plans were for livestock and agriculture or for warfare and raiding.

Supernatural creatures held sway, not only because there was more night, but also because the natural world was in retreat. This was the time of the year for stories to be told around a fire, with a pint of ale and, in more modern times, a pipe of tobacco. The wise would stay indoors, as protection from not only the elements, but also from the creatures that roamed the countryside, be they alive, dead, or immortal.

Although there were only two seasons, there were four quarter days, each of which held



Beltane Dancing (public domain image)

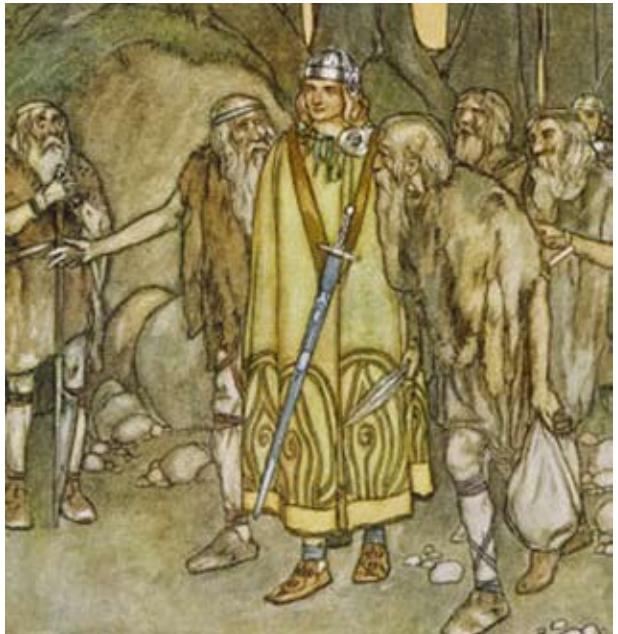
one of the main holidays for the Irish Gaels of antiquity. These special days figured in heavily with the mythology of ancient Ireland, and helps to emphasize the relationship of cycles with the Irish Gaels. (Note: All dates are also given for northern hemispheric celebrations – the southern hemisphere celebrates them on opposite dates, although some maintain the original northern dates. For the ancient Irish, days started at sundown, which is why modern Halloween starts on the evening of October 31st rather than during the day on November 1st.) To aid with pronunciation, I am using the modern spellings of the days.

The first of these to occur during the modern calendar is Imbolc, which comes halfway between the winter solstice and spring equinox, and is generally celebrated in modern times on the first of February. This was a time of divination and visiting holy wells, and is thought to be sacred to the Goddess Brigid. It is still associated with Saint Brigid, the Christianized version of the pagan Goddess.

Beltane is celebrated on the halfway between the spring equinox and the summer solstice, with the first of May being used as well. As mentioned above, this date marks the beginning of summer. Livestock would be driven between two bonfires to protect them from both natural and supernatural harm. The spirits and fairies were especially active on this date, as it was one of the two most liminal days of the year. As with Imbolc, holy wells were often visited. This is considered the day when the Tuatha Dé Danann, the Gods and Goddesses of ancient Ireland, arrived on the isle.

Lúnasa occurs halfway between the summer solstice and fall equinox, being generally celebrated in modern days on August the first. This is a harvest festival and is named after the God Lugh, one of the chieftains of the Tuatha Dé. Many sporting games were played on this date and matchmaking was performed. As with most of the holy days, bonfires were lit and holy wells visited.

Samhain is both the beginning of winter and the beginning of a new year. It takes place halfway between the fall equinox and the winter solstice, although generally is celebrated on November the first. Along with Beltane, It is one of the most liminal times of the year, where the fairies and the dead could most easily cross over from the Otheworld to our own. Divination was performed due to this liminality.



*Finn McCool comes to aid the Fianna
– Stephen Reid, 1932 (public domain image)*

In Irish lore, the Cattle Raid of Cooley began on Samhain. The Morrigan, one of the main Irish Goddesses, comes out of her cave at Cruachan every Samhain, with her red horse. Every year at Samhain, the God Áillen would burn down Tara until Fionn Mac Cumhaill slayed him, for which he was made leader of the Fianna. Oengus, son of The Dagda, was born on Samhain. This is also the date of the second battle of Maige Tuired, where the Tuatha Dé Danann defeated the Fomorians, part of which was ensured by the mating of The Morrigan and The Dagda at this time.

The Gods and Goddesses themselves also represent cyclical change. Before the Tuatha Dé Danann defeated the Fomor at Maige Tuired, they were expected to give the bulk of their

grain and cattle to the latter. Bres, the king of the Tuatha at the time, allowed this to happen until his leadership was taken over by Lugh. Bres represents the winter and times of dearth, while Lugh represents summer and abundance. The Morrigan herself understands the cyclical nature of the world. At the end of the battle, she recites a poem that is thankful for the outcome of the battle, but also acknowledges that times of want will return, as the world is always in cycle.

As a story that combines many of these concepts, one of my all-time personal favorite tales is *Echtrae Nerai*. In it, Nera, a member of Ailill and Medb's household, takes the challenge to wrap a branch around one of two corpses that are hanging at a gallows. It being nighttime at Samhain, as he is putting the wood around the ankle of one, the corpse leaps down upon Nera and hilarity ensues. Okay, perhaps it wasn't so much hilarity that ensued, but rather the corpse making Nera go through a lot of trouble and effort to rid himself of the dead thing and complete his quest. It is an interesting story that

includes The Morrigan and many pieces of lore, but it is much too long to give in its entirety here. I considered giving away the ending, but thought by teasing it, you might go out and read it in its entirety.

Or perhaps I'll keep working on my Irish and give my own translation in this year's Halloween special.

Further reading:

Cath Maige Tuired, the Second Battle of Mag Tuired, as translated by Lady Elizabeth A Gray.

Gods and Fighting Men, by Lady Augusta Gregory

The Celtic Twilight: Fairies and Folklore, by W.B. Yeats

Ancient Irish Tales, edited by Tom P. Cross and Clark Harris Slover

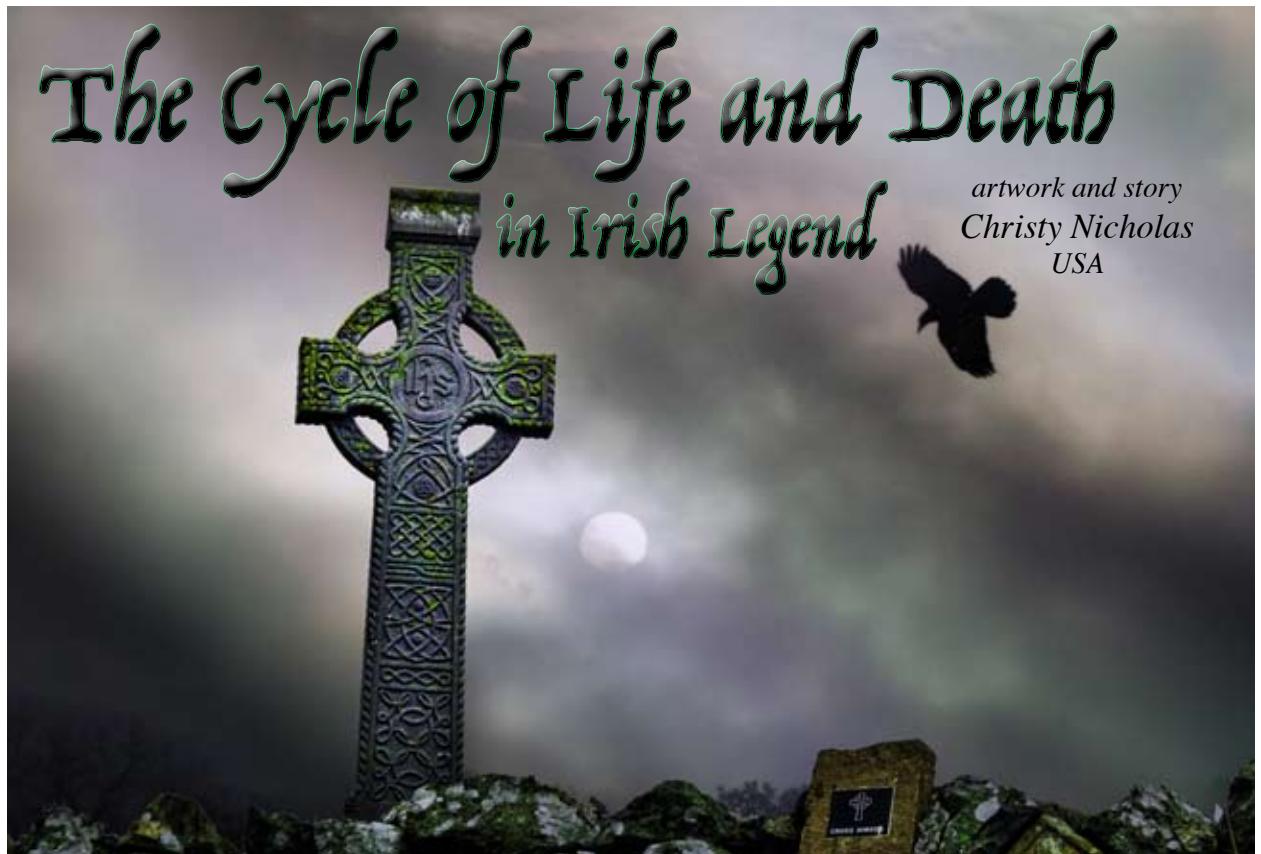
The Morrigan: Meeting the Great Queens, by Morgan Daimler

The Story Archaeology podcast and website – found at <http://storyarchaeology.com/>

Celtic Heritage, by Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees



The Fomorians, as depicted by John Duncan, 1912 (public domain image)



Christy Nicholas' art is available in many forms at: www.GreenDragonArtist.net

Irish legends and tales are one of the only clues we have to life before the arrival of Christian monks to the island. The people who lived there before “the Age of Saints and Scholars,” as this time was known, did not write down their tales. Instead, the stories were passed verbally from generation to generation. They took pride in precisely memorizing the tales as histories, perfect in their retelling. This was one of the sacred duties of the druid classes.

A recurring theme in these tales is the ongoing cycle of life and death. The Irish believed in an afterlife, sometimes called *Tír na mBeo* (Land of the Living), *Mag Mell* (Delightful Plain), or *Tír na nÓg* (Land of the Young). This was a country similar in description to the Elysian Fields of Greek myth, a place of no sickness or old age, where time stood still and happiness reigned.

Like Greek myths, some heroes do successfully travel to this afterlife or underworld,

and return, but not without consequences or *geas* (curse). The best known example of this journey is that of Oisín.

OISÍN AND NIAMH

Oisín is visited by a fairy woman, a woman of the Tuatha Dé Danann. Her name is Niamh Chinn Óir, Niamh of the Golden Hair, and is the daughter of the Sea God, Manannán mac Lir. They fall in love and she takes him home, to the land of the fairies, *Tír na nÓg*. They moved to this underworld after the Battle of Tailtin, in which the Sons of Mil (the Gauls from northern Spain) defeated the Tuatha Dé Danann, and it was agreed that the fairy folk were to move underground.

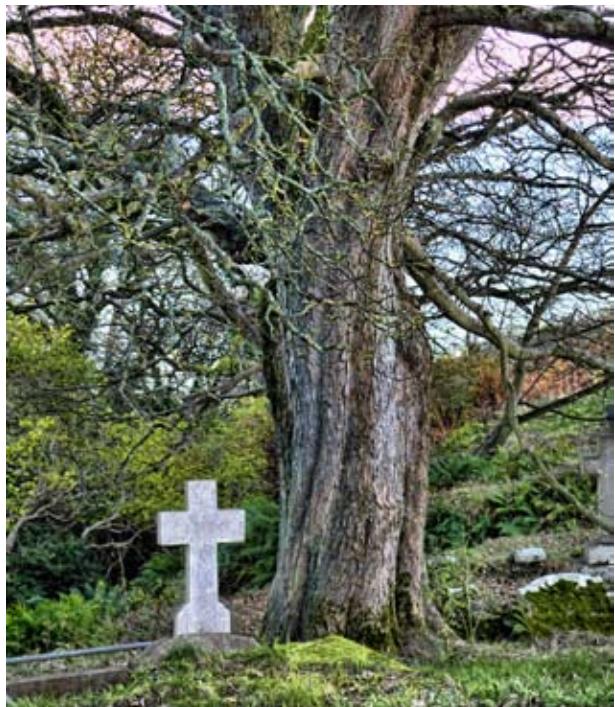
For three years, Oisín lived in *Tír na nÓg*, happy with his fairy wife. They produced a son and a daughter. When he decides he must return to the land of the living, three hundred years has passed. Niamh gives him a horse and reminds him to never touch the ground. Because it has

been three hundred years, touching the ground would catch up with him and he would die of old age. He comes across some men repairing a bridge, and the girth on his horse breaks, and so he falls to the ground. And his wife was correct – he turned three hundred years old, withered and died on the spot.

THE CHILDREN OF LIR

Another tale dear to the hearts of the Irish is that of the Children of Lir.

King Lir had been disappointed when another King was elected High King over him, after the aforementioned Battle of Tailtin. As sort of a consolation prize, to win back his loyalty, he was given a foster-daughter of the king as a wife. Aobh she was called, and they were deliriously happy. She gave him four children, but died in childbirth with the last, a set of twins. Lir fell into despair, until the king gave him another wife, Aobh's sister, Aoife.



The cross was used in pre-Christian societies around the world to represent the Tree of Life.

Aoife was a sorceress, and jealous of Lir's love for her dead sister and their children. She plotted to kill the children, but was unable to either bribe the servants to do so, or do it herself.

Instead, she turned them into swans, and cursed them to live for three hundred years in three different places around the island.

The children endured this servitude, and after nine hundred years, returned to human form. Of course, they were then nine hundred years old, and promptly turned to dust, but they were free to go to Tír na nÓg then, and join their beloved father.

I am currently writing a novelization of this tale, with the working title of *The Enchanted Swans*.

While this is often touted as a children's tale, it is full of despair, revenge and death – not a particularly happy tale. However, it is also representative of the Irish people, and they have adopted it as a symbol of their own survival and rebirth after nine hundred years of servitude under the English crown.

THE CHANGELING

On the other end of the cycle, that of birth, one finds the changeling. Traditionally, a changeling is a fairy child that has been substituted for a stolen human child. A mother knows it is a changeling because the child is sickly or weak. Because fairies seldom had children in their very long life, each life was precious. But they also loved beauty, so if the fairy child was less than perfect, they would switch it out for a human. The ballad of Tam Lin mentions that human children might be replacements for fairy children that were a tithe to hell.

Several charms were used to prevent such a switch, including an inverted coat or a piece of iron attached to the child's clothing. Looking at a baby in envy, or praising the child with admiration was dangerous, as it could attract the fairies' attention, unless a blessing was added to forestall such attention. One tale in both Ireland and Wales tells of a mother brewing eggshells to surprise the changeling into speech.

THE BANSHEE

Another harbinger of death is the Banshee, a well-known legend even today. The banshee, or Bean Sidhe (Fairy woman) was a female spirit

that wailed when someone was about to die. Some Irish families are said to have banshees attached to them. Accounts of banshees go back to the 14th century, and perhaps even earlier in oral tradition. Even without a true banshee, Irish women would sing a lament at a death, known as a *caoin* or keen. It is not known if the legend of the fairy banshee predates this human tradition or vice versa.

THE WILD HUNT

Perhaps the most powerful death myth in Irish legend is that of the Wild Hunt. It is actually not specific to Ireland, but all of Europe. The hunters may be fairies or shades of those who have died, but the leader is often associated with the Germanic god Wodan. Other figures, such as Welsh *Gwyn ap Nud* or the Christian Devil, have been associated with the leadership of the hunt, as well.

The Wild Hunt often presages catastrophe or war, and predicts the death of any who witness it. If you see the hunt, you either join the hunt or die. You then live in the underworld with the

fairies.

Death is an important part of life. Without death, there would be no cycle, no renewal. Life would become staid and stagnant. It is the rot in the forest from dead leaves and bracken that brings forth the new flowers in spring, after all. One only flouts this cycle with severe consequences, and in the end, it cannot be escaped.

Don't miss more information on Celtic myth and history, as well as practical travel planning tips and hidden places in Christy's travel books.

•*Stunning, Strange and Secret:*
A Guide to Hidden Scotland

•*Mythical, Magical, Mystical:*
A Guide to Hidden Ireland

•*Legacy of Hunger:*
A novel of 1846 Ireland

More info at www.GreenDragonArtist.net,
www.facebook.com/GreenDragonAuthor, and
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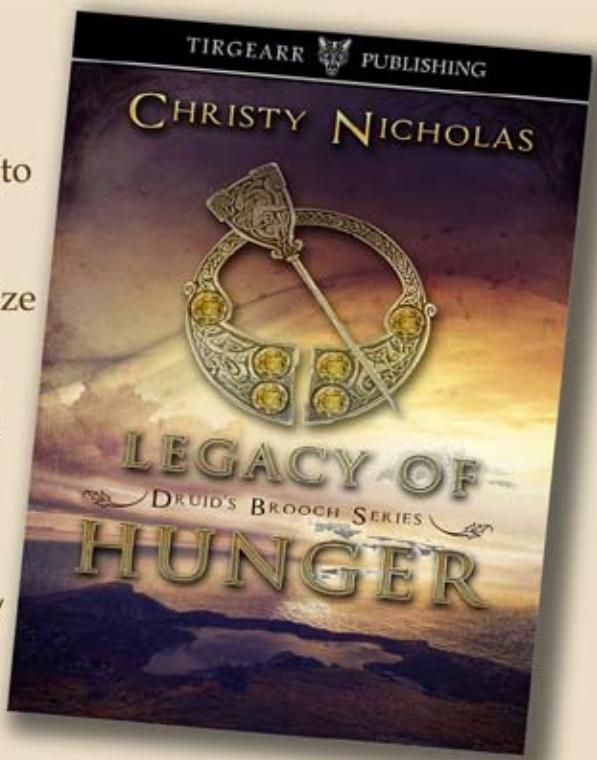
Ireland was no promised land
in 1846.

It was wracked by a crippling potato
blight, and people were dying

But Valentia McDowell didn't realize
that when she decided to travel
from her native Ohio to find her
grandmother's family, and a lost
family heirloom.

www.GreenDragonArtist.net
[www.TirgearrPublishing.com/authors/
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THE CAILLEACH

Carolyn Emerick

USA

GAElic GODDESS OF WINTER

In most polytheist traditions, individual deities often stand as symbols or patrons for all manner of things from professions, to seasons, to acts such as love or war, or life events like death or childbirth. However, in most circumstances a deity is a complex figure who can reign over many realms, or even share their role with other figures. Such is the Celtic figure known as the *Cailleach*.

The *Cailleach* is discussed in great detail by Eleanor Hull in her 1927 article for *Folklore Journal* called “Legends and Traditions of the *Cailleach Bheara* or Old Woman (Hag) of Beare.” Hull states that since the *Cailleach* is found frequently in lore and traditions of Ireland and Scotland, but not at all in Wales, she seems to be a strictly Gaelic figure as opposed to more broadly Celtic. But, although she is widely known among the Gaels, there are certain regional variations. Hull says that more stories of the *Cailleach* are found in Ireland, but more traditions relating to her are found in Scotland.

Wherever she is found, the *Cailleach* is mainly known for two things: her identity as a hag and her association with winter. However, like most deities, she is complex with multiple associations. In her book, *European Mythology*, Jacqueline Simpson describes the Scottish version, the *Cailleach Bheur*, as “a tall, blue-faced crone” who is “both a personification of winter and a protectress of wild animals.”

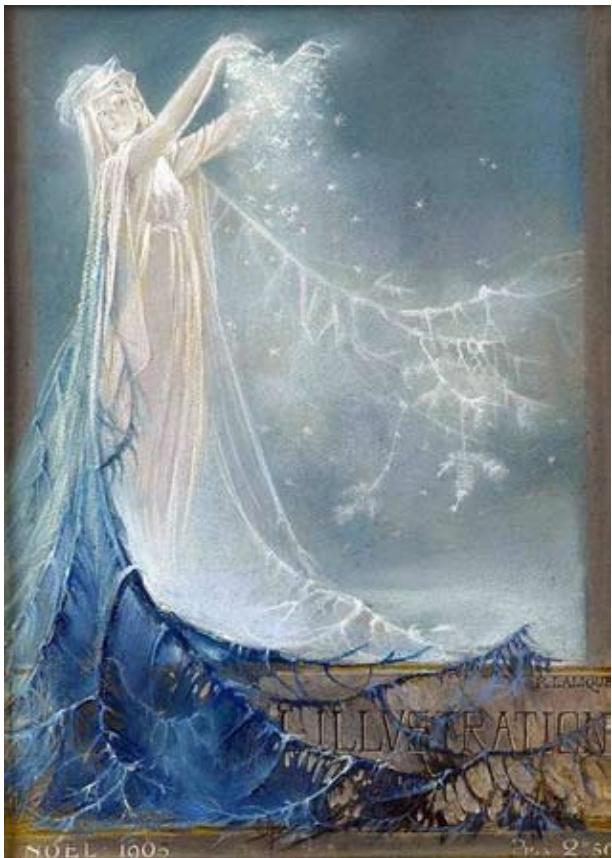
The *Cailleach* has several variants by regional location. As such, she is known by different names. *The Dictionary of Celtic Myth*, by Peter Berresford Ellis, says that the *Cailleach Beara* –

“...originally appeared as a triune goddess with Cailleach Bolus and Cailleach Corca Duidbne. She was said to have also been known as Cailleach Bui, wife of Lugh, the god of arts and crafts. The Book of Lecan mentions that she had seven youthful periods, married seven husbands, and had fifty foster children who founded many tribes and nations.” (p55).

Although generally known as a hag who represents winter, we can see that she has other incarnations as well. In addition to her roles as a foster mother of children who would found tribes, she is also associated with the fertility of the crops that her people depended on, most importantly grain.



Illustration of The Snow Queen by Edmund Dulac.



Noel, by René Jules Lalique, 1905

The last sheaf of the harvest held superstitious connotations for nearly all groups of agricultural people in Europe, and was typically associated with a corn spirit (corn meaning grain not American maize, obviously) who embodied the it.

In areas where the *Cailleach* was known, the corn or field spirit was often thought to be the *Cailleach* herself.

This is discussed in *Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*. They state that belief that the last sheaf of grain is imbued with a spirit is a worldwide notion and that many cultures save the last sheaf until planting season the following spring to ensure a successful crop (this topic has been discussed in previous *Celtic Guide* articles by both myself and Pollyanna Jones).

The Gaels associated the *Cailleach* with this spirit, which is reflected in the terms used for the sheaf in parts of Ireland and Scotland:

"In the neighborhood of Belfast, Ireland, the last sheaf is called the Granny and its personification is achieved not only by thus naming it, but by a special ceremony of cutting it. In certain sections of Scotland it is called the carlin (old woman). In the Scottish Isle of Lewis the old hag or cailleac is dressed up in clothes, her apron turned up and filled with bread, cheese, and a sickle. (p180).



This illustration by John Bauer reminds me of the Cailleach due to her association as a goddess with many incarnations. She was mainly known as a hag, but had periods of youth.

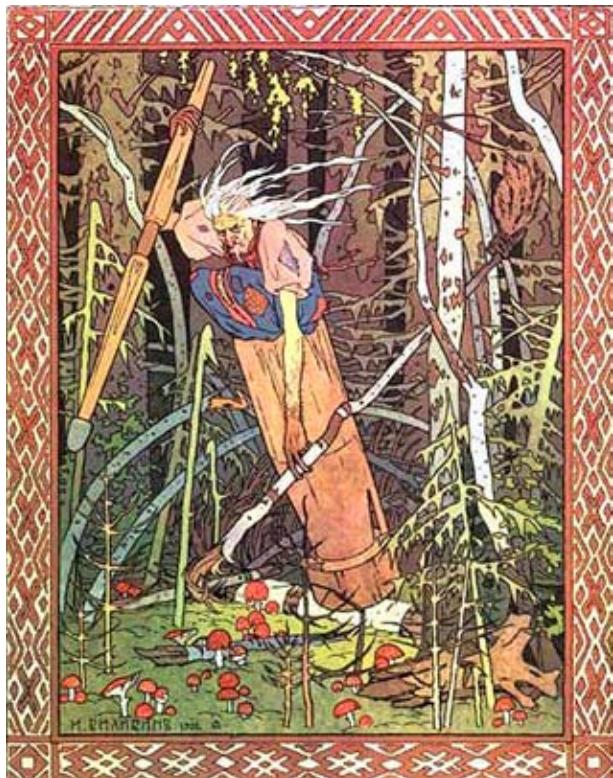
While reading about the *Cailleach*, I was struck by some similarities she shares with other European goddesses. I recently researched another Scottish folkloric figure called the Queen of Elphame for an article appearing in *Mythology Magazine*'s September 2015 issue. In that article I discussed that figure's similarities to some Germanic goddesses. The *Cailleach* differs in that she turns up primarily in Gaelic culture, whereas the Queen of Elphame existed primarily in the Scottish Lowlands and appears to have strong Anglo-Saxon influences.

However, in her book *European Mythology*, scholar Jacqueline Simpson emphasizes that folklore's "main features are pretty consistent throughout Europe, despite political and linguistic barriers." She also says that "there

are many cases where a point can equally well be illustrated by examples from Norway or Switzerland, Russia or France, and readers should not assume that a country named here is the only one where a particular story or belief occurs." (p8).

In my article on the Queen of Elphame, I discussed that figure as a possible Scottish version of some other goddesses that evolved over the years. I am not asserting that the *Cailleach* is a variation of a goddess found in other cultural pantheons, but rather that certain themes and similarities come up often in European mythical belief, even across boundaries.

In particular, the goddesses that stood out as sharing some similarities with the *Cailleach* are the German *Holle* and the Russian *Baba Yaga*.



Baba Yaga by Ivan Bilibin, 1900

Like the *Cailleach*, *Holle* is described as sometimes a beautiful young woman and sometimes an old woman. She is also associated with woodland animals and acts as their guardian. While she is not associated with agricultural fertility, she is associated with human fertility.

She also has a strong association with winter. *Holle* was a goddess associated with the Yuletide season. In Germany, *Holle* is considered the wife of *Wotan* (Odin), whereas in Norse tradition *Frigga* is Odin's wife.

The Wild Hunt is a mythological event that was known in many parts of Northwestern Europe, including both Celtic and Germanic cultures. It was a procession of spiritual beings that flew through the sky around the time of the Winter Solstice. In Germany, *Holle* was often the figure leading it. And, while *Holle* is not typically tied to agriculture, it was sometimes said that when she lead the Wild Hunt over a crop field, the harvest would be double in the coming year.

Likewise, *Baba Yaga* was often associated with winter and often depicted as a hag.

Celtic, Germanic, and Slavic cultures do relate to one another in that they are all Indo-European. While each culture has their own unique flavor, many similarities are also found. And, the great deities of pre-Christian Europe lingered on in the folktales and folk practices of all three cultures. The *Cailleach* is just one of many examples of a figure that has parallels in other European traditions, and who lived on in the belief systems of the peasants long after conversion to Christianity.



Portrait of an old woman, by Nikolaos Kounelakis, 19th century.



BLESSING OF THE NEW YEAR

*Victoria Roberts
USA*

This “Blessing of the New Year,” is commonly said throughout the Highlands and Islands.

*God, bless to me the new day,
Never vouchsafed to me before;
It is to bless Thine own presence
Thou hast given me this time, O God.*

*Bless Thou to me mine eye.
May mine eye bless all it sees;
I will bless my neighbour.
May my neighbour bless me.*

*God, give me a clean heart.
Let me not from sight of Thine eye;
Bless to me my children and my wife,
And bless to me my means and my cattle.*

—*Carmina Gadelica, Volume I*

For most of us, Christmas is more than a single day. The entire month is filled with festivities, including common and uncommon traditions. But the holiday merriments weren’t always this way.

During the Middle Ages, Scotland celebrated Christmas as the other Celtic countries by observing “Christ’s Mass” in the Catholic

tradition combined with Celtic customs. People performed comic skits (mumming,) homes were decorated with mistletoe and juniper, and families prepared a Yule log, a tradition the Scots still maintain today.

In the late 1700s, the holiday was virtually banned in Scotland for about 400 years.

This was due to the Protestant Reformation when Christmas was recognized as a Catholic practice. There are even records of charges being brought against people for keeping “Yule.” As a result, many Scots worked on Christmas day; therefore, they recognized the winter solstice holiday at New Year’s. And celebrate they did.

Hogmanay (New Year’s Eve) is the biggest party of the year.

There’s music, dancing, mischievous merry-making and whisky drinking all in abundance. I’m certain Cameron Morrison, my favorite Scottish photographer, kept it to a minimum. Right, Cam?

Does this sound familiar? I’m referring to the Hogmanay tradition, not Cam being knee deep in his cups.

There are hardly any elements in modern western life in which the Scots didn’t play a pivotal role. Consider how Scottish traditions influenced your own New Year’s Eve

celebrations. Did you sing “Auld Lang Syne”? In 1788, the Scots embraced the Robert Burns’ poem as their New Year’s Eve anthem. And the tradition stayed with them as they emigrated around the world, a custom that is probably in your life too.

Another Scots tradition was called “first footing” and consists of a handsome young man (tall, dark and kilted perhaps?) being the first to cross the threshold as soon as the “bells ring” at midnight. He bears gifts of bread or meat (food for the new year), coal (warmth for the new year), and whisky (drink for the new year).

Throughout Scotland today, firework displays and torchlight processions are enjoyed in many cities as reminders of the ancient pagan parties from those Viking days of long ago. Hogmanay is a two-day holiday (no work on January 1st or 2nd). The streets are filled

with all kinds of festivals, parties, bonfires and fireworks. Edinburgh’s Hogmanay Festival lasts for days and includes one of the most spectacular fireworks displays in the world.

There are many pagan traditions that are still followed throughout the world, especially for seasonal changes. The four seasons are known as Solar Festivals and the cross quarter days are marked as Fire Festivals, usually celebrated as significant agricultural events.

These festivals make up the Wheel of the Year in observance of the solar energies and equinoxes. From planting to reaping to winter to summer, the seasons were of great importance to our ancestors because their very existence depended upon good harvests, mild winters and enough rainfall.

Every year, cycles and celebrations continue. I wish all of you nothing but health and happiness for a bright 2016.

The image is a promotional graphic for Victoria Roberts' books. It features a landscape photograph of the Scottish Highlands with misty hills and purple heather in the foreground. Overlaid on the left side is text advertising her books:

Coming May 2016...

“A MASTER OF HIGHLAND ROMANCE.”

—Becky Condit of USA Today on *My Highland Spy*

“VISITING THE HIGHLANDS IS WORTH THE TRIP.”

—Publishers Weekly on *Kilts and Daggers*

At the bottom, the website **VICTORIAROBERTSAUTHOR.COM** is displayed in large yellow letters.

On the right side, there is a vertical book cover for "Kill or Be Kilt" by Victoria Roberts. The cover features a shirtless man with long hair and a sword, set against a sunset background. Text on the cover includes:

“THIS BOOK BEGS
TO BE
READ AND REREAD.”
—RT Book Reviews on
My Highland Spy

**KILL OR
BE KILT**

VICTORIA ROBERTS

Holy Water

Cameron Morrison
Scotland

EDITOR'S NOTE: Scotland's Cameron Morrison has provided dozens of photos for the *Celtic Guide* over the past four years, typically to enhance articles by Victoria Roberts. He submitted these great shots to show the changing of the season at this one particular spot in Scotland. Thank you, Cameron, for all the great views of your country that you have provided to our readers, free of charge, for so very long.

Shown here are photographs of the four seasons with nearly the exact same view of Castlelaw Hill in Glencorse, part of the Pentland Hills of Scotland.

The castle that the hill is named after is Logan Tower. It's completely gone now, but stood about half a mile behind me when I took these shots.

Just behind me was King's Hill, named for King Robert the Bruce. Legend has it that King Robert was out hunting with Sir William Sinclair and his two great stag hounds, Faith and Hope.

The dogs flushed out a white stag. As the dogs gave chase, King Robert suggested a wager – If the hounds could not catch the stag before it crossed the Kirk Burn (running into the view from the left in these photos), Sir William would forfeit his life. The dogs caught the stag and King Robert granted the lands of Glencorse to Sinclair, including the Parish of Rosslyn where a latter Sir William Sinclair built the world famous Chapel during the 15th century.

The original chapel, St Catherine's, lies in the reservoir near the center of this shot. Glencorse reservoir is one of the City of Edinburgh's main supplies of water, therefore all water in Edinburgh must be Holy Water by default. Haha!



SPRING



SUMMER



FALL



WINTER

Henceforth Tales

Cass and Deborah Wright
Bellows Falls, VT, USA

MacLachlan

Legends and lore, lore and legends . . like laughing children, all summer-wild and fearless, locked playfully in each other's arms and knees, barrel-rolling down the soft green hills of yesteryear . . sometimes, it comes down from ancient legend, or instead it owes more of that backward-reaching story to the remembrance of lore.

But always does light call to light, as folks think back to younger memories, scooping the old words like shining pebbles from the cool, sparkling streams of their consciousness. That single, gleaming thread, whether it glistens in the leopard-spots of sunlight poking through branches of sighing beech trees, or catches the glimmer of coals in winter embers, inches slyly forth, drawn off the spool where from it was wound, back in an elder time of youth.

Here is one which I will share with you now, come down to us from a distant age when only the occasional monk or friar had the gift of writing, and when all the most vital things known by real people were passed on in the powerful art of speaking from memory, and thereby sharing the truth of things . .

This is the story of a people called MacLachlan.

The MacLachlans were among the earliest settlers who came from a region of Ireland called Tirconnel, and with the renowned Fergus mac Earc and his two brothers, in the early years of the eighth century, helped colonize the Scottish kingdom of Dalriada

(oftimes rendered as Dál Riata), and bestowed upon that land which they settled the proud new name of Earrha Gael, or “Argyll, the Land of the Gael.” The MacLachlans were kin to no less than Niall of the Nine Hostages, the great High King of Ulster, and so belong to what native Scots would come to know as the Siol Cuinn, that group of ancient families including the MacNeills, MacDonalds, MacIntyres, and MacDougalls.

Indeed, over the next three-and-a-half centuries, this clan, known more widely then as “the Mac Lochlainn Mor,” travelled back and forth between the isles of the Inner Hebrides, and the coastline of Antrim, on behalf of the old High Kings of Ulster, as the chosen servitors of the Ulster crown and enforcers of law among the Dalriadans. This continued until 1241, and the usurpation of the Ulster throne by the kinship-rival, Brian O’Neil, the final pitched battle of which resulted in the death of the renowned war-chief, Donall Mac Lochlainn, and the banishment of his followers from all of Ulster, forever.



MacLachlan Tartan and Shield



The earliest permanent settlement of the MacLachlans was in Lochaber (that very place which the clan would ever afterward think of as their "home ground"), where for centuries the senior cadets of the clan, the MacLachlans of Coire-Uanan, held the hereditary office of standard-bearers to the Lairds of Locheil, those latter being the most powerful chieftains of Clan Cameron. The best provenance of this is the appearance of the name of Gilchrist MacLachlan appearing on a charter in 1230, evidently drawn by ancestors of the Lamonds of Cowal, and as well from the Camerons' own archives, which record a well-respected warrior known as Lachlan Mor, whose residence was on the shores of Loch Fyne throughout the latter years of the 1200s.

A legend from that same century tells of King Alexander II, being on trek through the Highlands in his campaign against the Norsemen, dispatching an order for the MacLachlan chief at Lochaber to send him his owed tribute by the “swiftest messenger” at his disposal.

Reluctant, as ever, to pay, but eager to twist the nose of his feudal liege, MacLachlan wittily complied to the exact detail of the edict, by tying the sacks brimming with his tribute to the back of a roebuck which he had captured for just that purpose. Summoning the king's courier to his foreyard, the chief confirmed the content of the sacks as being his committed tribute, collected for that very debt, and then reminding the courier of that royal demand for haste, he released the roebuck, directing the courier to escort the same

to the king in the name of Clan MacLachlan! Though this tale fails to tell us whether or not the courier overtook the roebuck and actually rescued those bulging sacks of tribute, it does impart that King Alexander was so impressed by the report of this drollery, he proclaimed that **Henceforth**, the chief of Clan MacLachlan would show a pair of roebucks as supporters on his coat of arms, and so do they show, to this very day.

According to tradition, the MacLachlan chiefs have possessed Strathlachlan since the 11th century. In 1292, Archibald MacLachlan helped erect the sheriffdom of Argyll, while the first evidence of their ownership also appears in 1292, when the lands belonging to Gilleskel MacLachlan were recorded as included within the sheriffdom of Argyll & Lorne, and chartered to the Clan, by King John Balliol. Gilleskel further received a charter later from Robert the Bruce, and appears on the roll of the Scottish magnates who sat in the first Parliament for the Bruce, at St. Andrews in 1308.

Prior to that signal honor, his cousin, Ewen MacLachlan, had sworn fealty to England's Edward I on the infamous Ragman Roll, a bond which doubtless mattered as little to him as it did to most of his Highland neighbors. In 1314, Gillespie (still known frequently as Gilleskel) granted a stipend to the friars at Glasgow from his lands of Kilbride.

The chief's name appears as well on one of the seal tags of the letter sent by the Scottish barons to King Philip of France. From Gilleskel, then, the direct line of the chiefs can be clearly traced to modern times, and their history has certainly shown its own strong tincture of adventure, heroism, and romance.

By the early 1400s, the chiefs of Clan MacLachlan were being commonly referred to as the Lords of Strathlachlan. This shows an interesting pretzel of demographic tradition, in which land acquires a pattern of naming from its dominant occupier, and then lends that designation back to the same in the form of a geographic title; one could almost draw

analogies to the shuttling of wool on a loom, which strengthens with each direction of the weave.

In 1436, Iain MacLachlan, Lord of Strathlachlan, granted to his cousin, Alan, a charter which created him the seneschal of the lands of Glassary in Argyll.

There were also long and treasured customs between the families of the various MacLachlan chieftains, one of which is believed to have begun during one of the crusades. While upon that crusade, it is said, the chiefs of Strathlachlan and of Strachur, who were not only kin to one another, but close friends as well, made a promise to each other that if one of them were slain in battle, the other would guarantee his body was carried back home, and duly laid to rest in his own family's burial ground.

It was around this decade that the MacLachlan clan in general took sharp notice of the rising, and strengthening of power held by the ever-ambitious Clan Campbell, who then owned nearly a dozen castles and keeps throughout the western and central Highlands, and whose influence at the royal court seemed to grow by leaps and bounds. Efforts were made by all the MacLachlan chiefs, chieftains, lords and lairds, to encourage alliances with the more powerful Campbell earls, which generally met with success.

In this same era, the MacLachlans also sought bonds of friendship with most of their other neighbors; Iain MacLachlan witnessed a bond by the Stewart of Appin in favor of the first Earl of Argyll (a Campbell, of course) in 1485, around the same time that his son, Archibald, married the Lamont chief's daughter. They raised a son named Lachlan, who through his friendship with the Earl of Argyll, journeyed to Paris as a wedding guest of the Scottish king, James V.

A later, darker tale, perhaps legend, perhaps lore, begins with a quarrel that arose between a MacLachlan, and one of the Camerons of Glen Nevis. After the dispute, the young Cameron passed by a fold where young women

were milking cattle, and was presented, as per Highland custom, with a draught of the milk. The MacLachlan clansman, who was lying in wait for him, let fly an arrow which split both the drinking vessel, and the skull of the quenching Cameron.

The archer fled, and was obliged to wander as a homeless outlaw through the wilderness for many years, in constant dread of being captured or slain by one of his victim's kinsmen. It became his practice to sleep in caves, always resting with his head on his naked dirk. When neither game nor fish could be readily gotten, he took to pilfering from the crofts and shielings he passed by on his travels. In time, he journeyed back to revisit his native hills, and one bright, quiet forenoon, passing by the cadet house of Glen Nevis, glimpsed through an open window a very fine gun, which he resolved to burgle.

Entering stealthily, the outlaw took the gun, and was attempting to retreat from out the same window when the laird of Glen Nevis himself entered the room. Pouncing on the thief, the master seized him by the arm with an iron grasp, exclaiming: "You are now in the talons of the mountain eagle, and death alone shall loose them!"

One must ever be careful, however, with sudden, dire oaths of that nature, for oftentimes the Old Gods hang close in their listening, and indeed, in that very moment, the fugitive MacLachlan, with sudden dexterity, managed to stab the irate Cameron laird with his dirk, and make good his escape, one assumes with that prized firearm firmly in hand.

In 1615, the MacLachlan chief, Lachlan Og (in Gaelic, wee, or young, Lachlan) joined a foray mounted by his mentor, another Campbell Earl of Argyll, leading his fellow clansmen against his Hebridean neighbor, the MacDonald of Islay. In recognition of that, and further, later political actions, Lachlan Og received an Act of Parliament in 1633, confirming him as Laird of Maclachlan. The chief known as Lachlan MacLachlan of that ilk, likely Og's son, accepted a commission from Lord Protector

Oliver Cromwell to be the duly-appointed Justice of the Peace for Argyllshire.

Archibald, the 15th chief, received a charter in 1680, which erected all his lands into the Barony of Strathlachlan, with Castle Lachlan as his seat. Despite such immense rewards from their support of the Cromwell proscriptions, and their long alliance with, and frequent servitude to, the Campbells, the Clan then emerged as passionate Jacobites, fighting for the Bonnie Dundee at Killiecrankie in 1689.

The Chief himself pledged support to the Old Pretender, James VIII, in 1715, boldly following the Earl of Mar to shed more blood on the field at Sheriffmuir. That chief, under severe harassment from the Campbells, died in 1719; but twenty-six years later, the Clan was “out” again, joining Bonnie Prince Charlie decisively at Prestonpans, which won their chief an appointment as the Prince’s commissary-general.

Leading nearly three-hundred MacLachlans, he fought and died with his men at Culloden, the valor of which evidently caught the notice of the Duke of Cumberland, as he afterward ordered the MacLachlan colours burnt in public by the Edinburgh hangman, and Castle Lachlan seized by English troops and destroyed.

Cumberland also sought to seize all the MacLachlan estates in forfeiture for treason, but as they had been conveyed prior to the uprising to non-Jacobite heirs, they escaped predation; a new mansion house was raised by the Clan in the 1800s, in sight of the ruins of old Castle Lachlan.



The ruins of old Castle Lachlan

Legend and lore, legend and lore . . . still room to make more now, for there shall be generations to come, with eyes all wide and their ears all perked, and their wee, valiant hearts hungry for adventure . . . so dinna ye count the MacLachlans out, laddies and lasses, they still populate the Highlands, and their proud clan crest still says “Fortis et Fidus”: Strength and Faith! - and indeed they do remember!

The Book is Coming...in 2016! The printing process has been slower to fruition than anticipated. A compilation of the first 2 years of Henceforth Tales should be available for sale at fairs, events, etc., some time in 2016. Thank you all for your patience and your readership.

H ENCEFORTH T ALES
by Cass & Deborah Wright

Follow future issues of the Celtic Guide for further information about 2016 publication . . . and thank you for joining us at the hearth!
- DW

Morris Dancers

a & a
y & y

Alison MacRae
Canada



EDITOR'S NOTE: Once again Alison has brought us a side of Celtic life seldom written about – the combination of May Day and the phenomenon of Morris Dancers, along with lots of other joyful thoughts of spring.

In the Northern hemisphere, the first of May is a spring festival and usually a public holiday, where singing and dancing is a big part of these celebrations.

May 1st is celebrated throughout Britain, in many different ways. In the school system, when I was growing up, we learned folk dancing. This was very important to us as when the May Day celebrations came around and we could participate in them with our dancing.

Dancing around the maypole with the ribbons was especially tricky as you did not want to be the one that went astray and got tangled up – now that would be hard to live down. Traditional May Day included dancing and the Morris Dancers, crowning of the May Queen, with lots of festivity and a big feast at the end.

Upon looking into this very old tradition, I found that it appears in pre-Christian times with the *floria* festival of Flora, who is the Roman goddess of flowers. This festival was usually held around the 27th of April during the Roman Republic era and during the Walpurgis night celebrations of the German countries. It is also associated with the Gaelic Beltane.

Now the Roman Republic was the period of ancient Roman civilization beginning with the overthrow of the old Roman “kingdom.”

Walpurgis night is the English translation of *Walpurgisnacht*, one of the German names for the night of April 30th, so called as it is the eve of the feast of St. Walpurga, an 8th century abbess in Germania. It is also believed to be the night of witches meeting on the Brocken, which is the highest range in the Hartz mountains.

Beltane is the anglicized name for the Gaelic May Day festival, most commonly held on the 1st of May, or about halfway between the spring and summer. Historically, it was observed throughout Ireland, Scotland, and the Isle of Man.

Part of these celebrations include special bonfires. Their flames and smoke, along with the ashes were deemed to have protective powers. People would also bring their cattle which would be adorned with May flowers. They would then walk around this bonfire and sometimes leap over the flames. In the households they would douse their fires and relight them with sticks from the Beltane bonfires. They also decorated their homes with May flowers.



Maypole dancing (from geograph.org.uk. wikipedia)

It is also mentioned in some of the earliest Irish literature as being associated with important events in Irish mythology.

These celebrations had largely died out by the mid-20th century, although some of the customs continue as a cultural event. Celtic Neopagans and Wiccans observe Beltane.

Beltane is one of the four Gaelic season festivals, along with Samhain, Imbolc and Lughnasadh, which is similar to the Welsh *Calan Mai*.

Imbolc, also called St. Brigid's Day, is a Gaelic festival marking the beginning of spring.

Lughnasadh is a Gaelic festival marking the beginning of the harvest season.

Samhain is a Gaelic festival marking the end of the harvest season and the beginning of winter, also known as Halloween.

The Welsh Calan Mai is the celebration of the time between summer and winter. This is the time when a staged mock fight between the two seasons takes place. The man representing winter carries a stick of blackthorn and a shield that has pieces of wood stuck on it to represent snow. The man representing summer will be decorated with garlands of flowers and ribbons, and carry a willow-wand which has spring flowers tied on it with ribbons. The mock battle takes place and eventually the forces of summer will win. A May King and Queen will be crowned. Dancing then starts. Also, singing and musical instruments such as fiddles and flutes are a big part of these celebrations. Then the feasting begins.

The feast of St. Michael and Furry Day is the celebration of the passing of winter and the arrival of spring; this is part of the May Day celebrations in Cornwall.

The Furry Dance is also known as the Flora. It is one of the oldest Celtic customs still practised today. Traditionally the dancers wear the Lily of the Valley flower, the gentlemen wearing it on the left side with the flowers pointing upwards and the ladies wearing it upside down on the right side. Morris Dancers are also a big part of this festival.

The Morris dancers date back to 1448. It is a form of folk dance usually accompanied by music. It is based on rhythmic stepping and the execution of choreographed figures by a group of dancers usually wearing bell pads on their shins, waving sticks, swords and handkerchiefs.

The black and white photos I have of the Morris Dancers were given to me by my friend, Lindsay. She is the one with the accordion in the photo at the top of the following page.

Lindsay also informed me that she understood that in the early days, the farm labourers were trying to supplement their meagre wages by dancing and collecting money. In order to keep their anonymity they would blacken their faces, as they would not want their bosses to know, as they would have disapproved.



The first Bucknell Morris dancers, 1987 (credit Lindsay J. Seagrim-Trinder, on accordion)

It is also interesting to note that it is mostly the dancers from the English-Welsh borders that do the blackening of the faces. The photo used to introduce this story is of the original Bucknell Morris Dancers, and is dated 1875. It is reckoned to be the oldest photograph of Morris Dancers in existence. The man in the photograph holding the instruments, which are a pipe and a taber, was Joseph Powell. These instruments disappeared throughout the years and nobody knew what happened to them, Lindsay tracked them down through his great-great-great-grandchildren and said it was such a huge thrill for her to hold these instruments in her hand.

So when May Day

comes around, I would encourage people to go enjoy Morris Dancers as a sign of spring celebrations in all the different parts of the country. It surely is a great sight to see and a wonderful custom, as unfortunately a lot of these old traditions are disappearing.



The “Widders” Morris Dancers at Rhayader

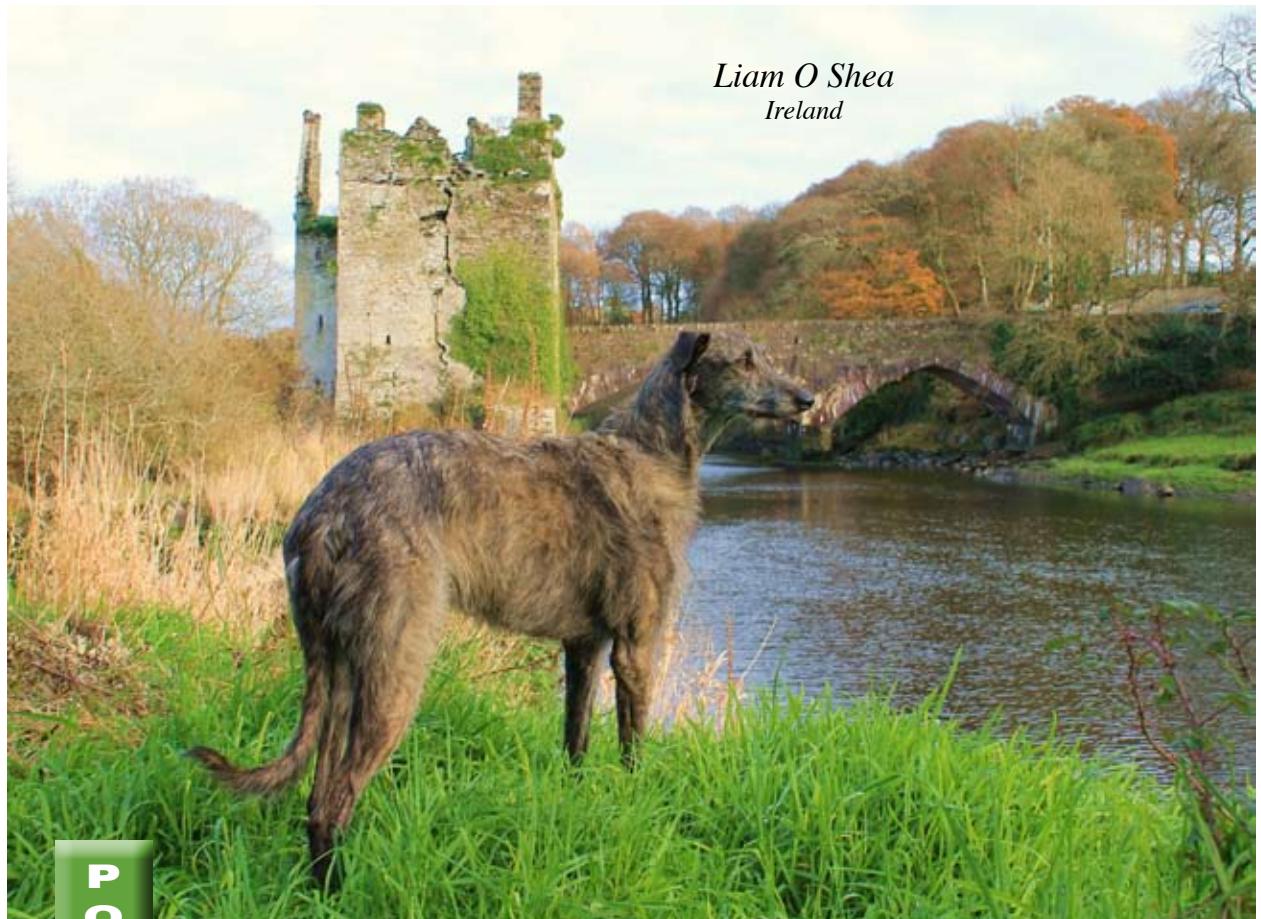
SAME PLACE, DIFFERENT SEASON

Ron Henderson
Scotland

These photos, though not taken by Ron Henderson, were passed on to the *Celtic Guide* by him. They are the work of photographers Martin Molcan, for the summer shot above, and Andrew Shaland, for the fall shot below. The location is the Glenfinnan Viaduct, Scotland. Located at the top of Loch Shiel in the West Highlands of Scotland, the viaduct overlooks the Glenfinnan Monument and the waters of Loch Shiel.



Liam O Shea
Ireland



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Obie enjoys one last warm day of Autumn before the Winter weather sets in over the River Lee in County Cork, Ireland. In the background stands Carrigadrohid castle, on a rock in the middle of the River Lee, adjacent to the bridge which gives the village its name. Carrigadrohid: (Carraig an Droichid - "The rock of the bridge") is a townland and village in the parish of Aghinagh, County Cork. It is situated on the north bank of the river, with the nearby village of Canovee to the south. The castle was erected in the 15th century by the MacCarthys of Muskerry, with an extension to the east and an annex to the north being added in subsequent centuries. It later came into the hands of the Bowen family. The castle has been in ruins since the late 18th century, however, in recent years a local group has been formed with the aim of preserving the castle.

FAIRY FROST

James A. McQuiston, FSAScot
USA

Much of the world is locked in the grip of winter weather right now. Even in this, the harshest season of them all, some joy can be found. My 93-year-old aunt passed away just before Christmas. I was named executor, and as I poured through her piles of papers I found a poem that her sister, my 97-year-old aunt, sent to her. Below is what my red-headed Scotch-Irish Aunt Anne sent to my guitar-playin,’ singer-songwriter Aunt Josephine. This poem is called “Fairy Frost,” and was written by Hazel Adell Jackson. I could only find a couple verses of this on all the Internet. Luckily Aunt Anne preserved the entire poem:

*Sometime between the dusk and dawn a mystic blanket fell,
And made the old earth like some place where only fairies dwell.
For each seemed dipped in festive frost, with glimmering jewels fraught,
And magic on each bare, plain twig, festoons of silver wrought.
Each bush was changed from dull, dead brown, to glistening, gleaming white,
As fair as Summer’s fresh fair green and blue and rose and white.
All through the air there seemed a mist of diamond dust so fine,
‘Till every bush and branch and limb, in radiance seemed to shine.
Each tinsel shrub and vine drooped down with fairy jewels bent;
Against the azure of the sky their shining brightness blent,
And slowly yielding to the rays that shone in brightness sun
The fairyland soon disappeared, the trees were bare and brown.*

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SO, WHAT'S NEXT?

Well, we're well into 2016.

Still writing 2015 on your checks? You'd think we'd get used to this.

Here are the rest of the themes for 2016!

April - War and Peace (great men and women, great events from Celtic history)

June - Kith and Kin (stories about family episodes, connections, mysteries)

August - Hearth and Home (stories of old buildings and living structures)

October - Our Halloween issue in whatever spooky form that decides to take next year

December - Gifts (our free-for-all, anything-goes, Christmas gift issue)

With Spain now onboard, we have cooperated with folks from 16 countries. This is just such an honor and I hope I don't repeat it too often, but I think I'll get used to writing 2016 long before I'll get used to the fact that we are so widespread across the Celtic world.

Hope you enjoy this issue and all we have to bring you this year.

The advertisement features a large Celtic knot triangle logo at the top left. To its right are three female performers in traditional blue and green tartan kilts and matching off-the-shoulder blouses. One performer stands behind the other two, who are seated and kneeling respectively. Below this image is a grid of five radio station logos:

- Highlander Radio**: Shows a landscape with a castle.
- Celtic Moon**: Shows a woman's face and a city skyline.
- CELT ROCK RADIO**: Shows two glasses.
- Ye O' Celtic Pub**: Shows three glasses.
- CELTIC DANCE**: Shows a woman's face and the flag of Ireland.

The website www.CELTICMUSICRADIO.COM is displayed below the radio logos.