From the Editor

When we think of the word harvest we are most likely thinking of food products, but as this issue of Celtic Guide will illustrate, there are many other types of harvests. Our cover, related to a story inside this issue by Toni-Maree Rowe, shows a harvesting of fish. It is taken from a painting by Percy Robert Craft, from 1897, entitled Tucking A School Of Pilchards. While it may not be what we’d think of as a typical image of harvesting, it does capture that all-too-critical moment when the prize we have waited for, planned for, worked for, finally appears before our eyes, usually with a small window of opportunity to reap its rewards. And so we take a look at all kinds of harvesting, some related to crops, some not.

Among dictionary definitions of harvest we find “to gather, catch or hunt for human use or consumption,” and “to win by achievement.” Not to wax sentimental, but after 33 issues of this e-magazine, we have certainly acquired a fine crop of friends and allies. Many who got their start with the Guide are now branching out with their own websites, their photography businesses, and their books. Others were there already and gracefully shared their skills and imagination with us.

If we have won by achievement, it is only because of all these talented, generous souls who have participated in this venture in an all-volunteer fashion. If we have gathered, caught or hunted down many a great tale for our readers’ consumption, it is out of pure luck on our part, and a lot of goodwill from the Celtic world. And when I say, “Celtic world,” I really mean that. We have had authors from the U.S., Canada, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, England, Australia, New Zealand, Poland, Germany and Portugal – all from regions where Celtic-ness still prevails.

Of course, after each harvest comes preparation for the next season, or in our case, the next issue. It is the cycle of life and the cycle of this tome to always begin again. And like most new seasons, the beginning of each issue is often filled with apprehension as to the final content, and yet always we are happy once again to post our newest crop of sustenance for your Celtic soul.

celticguide@gmail.com

Table of Contents

Page 3  Hevva, Hevva  by Toni-Maree Rowe, New Zealand
Page 8  Heirs, Fame, Souls and Spuds  by Jim McQuiston, USA
Page 13  Archivists’ Corner  by Carolyn Emerick, USA
Page 20  Postcards from Obie  by Liam O Shea, Ireland
Page 21  Celtic Tractors?  by Jim McQuiston, USA
Page 23  Guldize – A Cornish Harvest  by Pollyanna Jones, England
Page 26  People Of The Wheat  by Ron Henderson, Scotland
Page 28  Æecerbot and Wassail  by Carolyn Emerick, USA
Page 35  Henceforth Tales  by Deb and Cass Wright, USA
“Hevva! Hevva!”
by Toni-Maree Rowe
New Zealand

The Huer’s Hut, Newquay, Cornwall - This small building perched high above the sea at Towan Head is of uncertain age. Some estimates put its origins as early as the 14th century however the current building is probably mid 19th century. It is named after the huer, an important figure in the pilchard fishing industry that once thrived in Newquay. The huer would watch out from his high vantage point for the shoals of fish to arrive in the bay and then call out to the town by shouting “Hevva, Hevva.” The boats with their long nets would be launched at once but then had to rely upon the huer for directions. Holding “furze bushes” (evergreen shrubs) in his hands, the huer would direct the boats so they could first locate and then surround the fish.

“Hevva! Hevva!,” cry the huers as they spy the pilchard shoals swimming just off the coast. A call to action, boats which had sat floating lazily on the tide would suddenly burst into life. The huers arms now an extension of their voice, semaphore flags held firmly in their hands, signalling directions to the waiting boats, the snap of the flags competing with the raucous screams of the ever greedy gulls and the slap of oars on the water - men and gull hunting the fishy gold.

Farming, mining and fishing – these have been the backbone of the Cornish economy for centuries, if not longer. So as part of this month’s theme this article will take a look at the harvest from the sea, more particularly, the once plentiful pilchard harvest. These small but plentiful fish were a seasonal catch, providing a much needed boost to local economies. The large shoals would appear mid July just off Land’s End and slowly moving eastwards, hugging the coast as part of their life cycle. Their arrival eagerly anticipated.

History
The earliest recorded fishery in Cornwall can be dated back to King John but it was under Elizabeth I in 1582 the industry was regulated. At this time some 2,000 mariners were recorded in Cornwall. Records show that between 1747 and 1756 the season ran from July to December with pilchards being shipped out of the harbours
of Falmouth, Fowey, Penzance and St Ives with an average of 30,000 barrels or approximately 900 million fish. Interestingly, the majority of the fish were not consumed locally or even within England but were instead destined for the dinner tables of Italy.

By the nineteenth century the pilchard season was shortened, now running from August to October, although this did not seem to affect the numbers being caught. Records from 1847 show almost 41,000 barrels being exported (122 million fish). After 1880 the number of fish caught declined until today when it is something of a niche market. In recent times the pilchard has made a bit of a comeback, a rebranding now means the humble pilchard is no more. Instead we have the “Cornish Sardine” and according to sources it is a very popular item on menus in the eateries of London. In order to preserve this fragile harvest, a smaller sustainable fishery is encouraged. The two main harbours are Mevagissy during the summer months and Newlyn from August to February.

The Harbours
There would hardly be a coastal village which did not have a boat or two for fishing. On the north coast the most important harbours were St Ives, Padstow with the addition of St Agnes and Newquay in the early nineteenth century. A huers hut can still be seen in Newquay just above the harbour. The huers hut is a tangible reminder of the pilchard harvest. In the smaller fishing harbour of Portreath, here the huers hut sat on the cliff edge overlooking the harbour but the recent winter storms have severely damaged it.

On the south coast the most important harbour was that of Newlyn (still an important fishing harbour), it was first recorded by the Bishop of Exeter in 1435. The name Newlyn is said to derive from the Cornish “a pool for a fleet of boats” which refers to the area known as Gwavas Lake – a shallow area of seawater which made a good landing site prior to the building of the harbour walls and wharfs. Many old photos of Newlyn show the numbers of pilchards which came into this harbour and it was not until the 1960s did the fishery go into decline.
Porthleven had eighty pilchard boats in 1885 as well as crabbiers and mackerel drivers (these were larger boats which went as far afield as Scotland and Ireland fishing for herring). Fishing here was regarded the most important industry, the town was heavily reliant on the success of its fishermen. A good personal account of Porthleven's fishing past (with some great old photos) can be found online at: freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~helstonhistory/porthlevenfishingboatspage.htm

Polperro was also an important harbour, even having its very own type of fishing boat named after it – the Polperro gaffer. It too was a principal fishing and processing port up until the 1960s and also like Newlyn there are still a handful of commercial vessels operating out of the harbour, although the catch is very different.

The picturesque coves of today's Cornwall were often a hive of activity during the pilchard season. In the beginning the boats would have been owned and operated by individual families but later as the boats got bigger and the nets longer, families would group together forming a company. The crews worked on a share basis, after the owners had taken their share.

Cadgwith Cove on the Lizard Peninsula dates from the medieval period, originally it was simply a collection of fishing cellars, used by the local farming communities to subsidise their farming livelihoods. It was not until the sixteenth century did the village become inhabited with pilchard fishing as the principal industry right up until the 1950s. Now the few fishermen that still operate out of Cadgwith (and other harbours) have diversified. Now the catch consists of crab, lobster, monkfish, cod, ray, pollock and many other species.

**Catching and Processing**

For many fishermen they would have been part of a “Pilchard Palace”. These were a collective of three boats, the seine boat and two smaller boats, two nets and cellars. The seine boat would hold the large seine net; some were as long as a quarter mile and sixty feet deep. The net would have cork floats along the top and lead sinkers along the bottom, once in the sea it would hang like a large curtain until ready to be pulled shut. The seine boat would have at least six to eight rowers and a steersman.

Once a shoal of pilchards had been spotted and the boat rowed into position the seine net would be deployed and the shoal slowly encircled by the net. The open end would be closed using a stop net which was carried by one of the following boats. In some cases the whole lot would slowly be dragged towards shallower water where the seine boat would drop anchor and from here the two other boats would remove the pilchards using smaller nets or wicker baskets, taking them to shore to be processed.

Above is super painting entitled “Tucking A School Of Pilchards” from 1897, painted by Percy Robert Craft, which shows fishermen at sea dealing with a large catch of pilchards. In
the image the men are actually in the seine net scooping up the fish to load onto the waiting smaller boats. Sometimes these smaller boats would be called ‘tuck boats’ because the nets from them was used to tuck around the smaller numbers of pilchards in the seine net. If the catch was substantial this whole process could take several days, so it was important for the fish to remain alive until they could be properly processed.

Waiting on shore would be the fish jousters or hawkers, these men would buy a certain amount of the catch to sell onto to local folk. Loading their pony and trap to travel inland and selling to villages and farms.

The processing was a two phase operation. The first phase involved gutting and spreading the fish onto the floor of the cellar in layers with generous amounts of salt (usually imported from France and Portugal) until it was roughly four feet high. This was called the bulk. The fish would be left for thirty to forty days while the blood and oil seeped away. The second phase saw the bulks being broken up carefully (so as not to damage the fish) and the pilchards washed in troughs of seawater. Then the fish were placed in circular layers in hogshead barrels (these were straight sided barrels designed to leak).

Once full, a lid was placed on top of the barrel and it was weighted down, squeezing the pilchards flat. A by product of this was the oil that leaked out of the barrels. As much as forty-five litres could be had from one barrel and it was sold as lamp oil. Often the money from the sale of the oil would cover the cost of the actual fishing and thus the sale of the pilchards themselves was pure profit.

Up until 2005 the Newlyn Pilchard Works was the only place in Cornwall where the pilchards were processed using these methods, unfortunately it is now closed. However, their website is still up and running and there are some lovely audios from elderly folk who remember the days of the pilchard fishing.

Apart from the actual act of fishing, there were many others who were reliant on the industry. From barking, basket making, cooper (barrel makers), net makers, boat builders and the women who processed the fish. The nets and baskets were often made by the women by hand using cotton or hemp soaked in coal tar mixtures or a solution called ‘Catechu’, this process was called barking, which made them strong but also preserved them. It was also the women who would process the pilchards ready for export.

**Traditions**

Some of the earliest traditions associated with pilchard fishing can be connected to the “Bucca”, which in local folklore is a spirit who inhabited mines and coastal communities. Not dissimilar to the Puca of Irish and Welsh folklore. Up until the mid twentieth century there was an old stone cross above Newlyn harbour on the road to Paul Church. The field it was found in is called ‘Park an Grouse’ or the field of the cross. It is common belief that here was one site of veneration of the deity Bucca, which may date back much, much further and be associated with the fecundity of the area. Even today offerings can found at the field edge, even though no cross survives.

A Cornish language book of 1611 briefly mentions the *Book of Bucca* and in 1890 William Botrell was told by local people of *Bucka Gwidden* (good spirit) and *Bucka Dhu* (bad
spirit) also known as Bucka Boo. He was also told of the practice of Mousehole and Newlyn fishermen who would leave a portion of their catch on the beach each night. In Penzance older residents still refer to the storms that come from a south westerly direction as “Bucca calling.”

On December 23rd of each and every year the residents of Mousehole celebrate the festival of Tom Bawcocks Eve. The story goes that during one particularly hard winter there was the real threat of starvation for the whole village but during a nasty storm the aforementioned Tom Bawcock braved the elements to bring back enough fish to feed the entire village. It is said that the whole catch was baked into a dish, called stargazey pie. It is made with baked pilchards, eggs and potatoes and covered with a pastry crust. The unique feature of the pie is the fish heads which poke from the crust, gazing skyward.

The stargazey pie has been featured in numerous television shows and movies (James and the Giant Peach, Ladies in Lavender and Poldark). The Mousehole Cat, by Antonia Barber is a great read for youngsters and tells the story of Tom Bawdock but with a feline twist. In some Cornish traditions, it is said that the devil would never come to Cornwall, because he heard that the Cornish would put anything in a pie and so left vowing to never return in case they got a taste for “devilly pie.”

There is an older and less famous festival which is held towards the end of December by the fishermen, here a pie is also cooked but it includes all the fish the men wish to catch in the coming season. It has been suggested that Tom Bawcocks Festival is an evolution of this one which may actually have its origins back in pre-Christian times. The following is a traditional song sang on Tom Bawcocks Eve (written in local dialect for authenticity):

“Merry place you may believe, Tiz Mouzel ‘pon Tom Bawcock’s eve To be there then who wouldn’t wesh, To sup o’ sibm soorts o’ fish When morgy brath had cleared the path, Comed lances for a fry And then us had a bit o’ scad An’ Starry-gazie pie As aich we’d clunk, E’s health we drunk, In bumpers bremmen high, And when up caame Tom Bawcock’s name, We’d prais’d ‘un to the sky.”

It was also traditional at the end of every pilchard season for the “Pilchard Palaces” to have a celebration at the cellar. Called a ‘troil’ or ‘troyl’ it was in essence a barn dance or ceilidh with music, food and games. Each cellar would have its own troil.

A much more modern festival which celebrates all things fishy is the Newlyn Fish Festival held on the Monday of the August Bank Holiday. In addition, there are other smaller more local fish festivals held throughout August in celebration of this industry.

“The work should appeal to both the casually interested visitor to the subject as well as the more knowledgeable student.”

www.tmrowe.com for details on where to buy

www.smashwords.com/profiles/view/tonimaree

The second novel in the Sarah Tremayne series.

Available to download or in print
When we think of the word “harvest,” our mind generally goes immediately to food products derived from Mother Earth. There are all types of harvests, of course, and I will explore four of them in this multi-faceted tale.

**HEIRS** – We begin with an attempt by a Scottish king to produce an heir. Most of us have heard the expression, “A fine crop of children.” In this case, King James V of Scotland tried desperately to raise even one.

James was the fruit of a marriage between Margaret Tudor and her first husband, James IV of Scotland, who died in 1513. The queen remarried to the Douglas Earl of Angus. Margaret was the elder sister of the notorious King Henry VIII of England and it seems that she brought a new level of intrigue to the Scottish throne, though it had not been previously lacking on its own account.

James V, much like his uncle Henry VIII, at first seemed to have an insatiable appetite for the ladies. But, as the years wore on, he came to realize he must have a legitimate heir if his legacy was to continue.

Uncle Henry had offered James the hand of his own daughter, Mary Tudor, in a veiled attempt to increase his sway in Scotland. James realized the ploy and also may not have been anxious to marry his own first cousin. He chose instead to look to France, both for an unrelated bride and also to strengthen the “auld alliance” with that country.

He finally took the hand of Madeline, daughter of the French King Francis I. Sixteen-year-old Madeline, brought up in the fair weather of France, arrived in Scotland in May 1537 and was dead by July!

This sad tragedy created an obvious obstacle to James in having his seed produce a successor to the throne. He turned his attention to Mary of Guise, a widow at 22, who was in France raising her son, Francis. It is thought that James may have met Mary in France at the time of his first marriage. It is also thought that his interests lay more in receiving a substantial dowry provided by King Francis I of France. The dowry, however, was slow in arriving, as it was used to support Mary’s son, Francis, who had been left behind.

Still, James hoped for, at the very least, the harvest of an heir through Mary, which became a reality in May 1540, when she gave birth to James, Prince of Scotland. By December of that year, Mary was pregnant with a second son and in April 1541, she gave birth to Robert, Duke of Albany, who died only two days later. Sadly, within a few days the prince, himself, had also died at Holyrood.

The devastation for both parents must have been extreme – to lose two sons in only a few days. Through her own grief, Mary explained to King James V that they were still young enough to have another child. And that they did.

Scotland was in upheaval and James was being verbally and psychologically attacked from four quarters – first, the loss of his heirs; second, military advances from England; third, the new religion of John Knox challenging the...
age-old Scottish way of life; and finally, pressure from Cardinal Beaton, leader of the Catholics of Scotland, for James to remain true to his faith.

Add to this a prophecy by the king himself that he would be dead by Christmas, and James finally found himself in the middle of a complete nervous collapse, confined to his bed.

On December 8th (some say it was actually December 7th) James’s long-awaited heir came in the form of Mary, Queen of Scots. By December 14th, James was dead.

Mary Guise and her daughter, Mary, Queen of Scots, found themselves embroiled in a tumult far beyond their own ability to control, as Catholics and Presbyterians began the battle that became known as “the killing times.”

Mary, Queen of Scots, was also heir to the French throne, and the heir apparent to the English throne, since Henry VIII’s daughter, Queen Elizabeth, never bore a child. Fate, however, dictated a different end. After years of intrigue, marital confusion, military battles and deception from all sides, Mary took refuge with her cousin, Queen Elizabeth, who had her imprisoned, and eventually beheaded.

Luckily for all concerned, Mary had given birth to a new King James, one who would find himself as both James VI and I. He was James VI of Scotland from June 19, 1566 until his death on March 27, 1625. From July 24, 1567 until his death, he was James I, King of England and Ireland due to the union of the Scottish and English crowns on March 24, 1603. His grandfather, James V, could only have dreamed that his heir would achieve such a high honor, far eclipsing his own role as King of Scotland.

FAME – Next we jump a little further into the future to an entirely different continent to understand how one Scot opened up an entire new land in his quest for fame.

The man we speak of is Alexander Mackenzie, who opened up northwestern Canada, and even the Yukon River Valley into Alaska. There still existed, as of the late 20th century, a rock on which this explorer wrote the words, “Alex Mackenzie from Canada by land, 22nd July 1793.”

Alex was born at Stornoway, on the Isle of Lewis, in the Hebrides of Scotland, in 1764, and grew up in America, where his father brought him after his mother passed away.

Despite his assertion that he came “by land” to the west, he actually canoed the majority of the way, assuming that the rivers flowing northward must eventually lead to the Pacific Ocean, thus providing the yet undiscovered Northwest Passage.

On June 3, 1789, with 13 companions in canoes, he set out on his great quest to harvest the fame that would come with finding this long-sought-after waterway. He was wrong in his assumption, as the river he chose emptied instead into the Arctic Ocean. However, the waterway named for this man (the Mackenzie River) provided the best Canadian access into the Northwest as well as the Yukon River Valley.

Despite the discovery of the vast Mackenzie River system, a disappointed Alexander traveled to London, Canada, where he studied geography and navigation. In the fall of 1792, he rejoined his men at an outpost that they built on the Peace River. There they wintered.

By the following May, Mackenzie was able to continue his search, floating gently down the Peace River until coming to furious water at the Peace River canyon. The 25-foot birch bark canoe, with its 3,000 pounds of gear and 10 passengers, took substantial damage and had to be poled or portaged along the canyon walls for the next several miles. After numerous trials, the group ran into a party of Sekani First Nations members who told him that another river flowing south reached the “stinking waters.”
Mackenzie knew this meant he was finally on his way to the salt water of the Pacific Ocean. The group pushed on up a small river until they reached its headwaters. They portaged across a low rise, actually crossing the Continental Divide. The explorers continued west on the Fraser River until they were told that the ocean could be reached more quickly by a land route, which would take them to the Bella Coola River. However, the land route involved a 13-day climb over snow-packed mountains.

Finally the group found the new river and paddled their canoe through waterways that led to an area north of Vancouver Island . . . and into the history books. Two days later Mackenzie scrawled his message on the rock and headed back east. He had beheld both the Arctic and Pacific oceans, traveling mostly by water, found a potential Northwest Passage, and made his name famous to every fur trapper and gold hunter who entered the rich Northwest in the years to come via the Mackenzie River.

SOULS – Moving a bit further in time, we come to a man born in Blantyre, Scotland, in 1813. This man would become famous through the expression, “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?” and, in the opinion of some, because he opened up more of the world’s surface than any other man in history.

The Livingstone name had already made its mark on Scotland. One of the “Four Marys” who attended to Mary Queen of Scots was named Mary Livingstone. She was the daughter of Alexander Livingstone, 5th Lord Livingstone of Callandar, who was the guardian of Mary, Queen of Scots, during her childhood.

David Livingstone had studied medicine in Glasgow with the intent to become a missionary in China. Due to the Opium Wars he changed his focus to Africa. In the 19th century, most of Africa’s 11.7 million square miles remained totally unknown to the western world. It took relentless travel and exploration by the good doctor to discover it.

In 1840, at the age of 27, he headed off to the Dark Continent, a place of impenetrable, disease-ridden jungle inhabited by savages and ferocious animals.

When he first went to Africa he had no desire to explore but was in the search of souls to harvest for his faith. On foot, by canoe, and on oxen he traveled thousands of miles, carrying with him his Bible, his medicine bag, and a crude projector to illustrate his lectures.

Livingstone sent news and scientific reports back to the Royal Geographical Society, making note of strange diseases and dangerous mosquito-borne sicknesses.

In 1851, David discovered the Zambezi River. He had married the daughter of a fellow missionary in 1844, by whom he had several children. After the discovery of the river, he traveled to Cape Town and sent his entire family off to England for safe-keeping.

Alone, he became the first white man to travel all the way across Africa from Angola to Mozambique. Sailing back to London in 1856, he was received as a hero and his first book, Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa, became an instant best-seller.

Not content to rest on his laurels, Livingstone returned to Africa to search for the source of the Nile River. Through many tough situations Livingstone eventually ended up on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. His letters to the outside world ceased.

In February 1871, Henry Stanley, a New York Herald reporter, set out for Africa to find the missing missionary. After nearly nine months of travel, Stanley finally came upon an emaciated explorer, walked up to him and uttered the famous words, “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?”

Livingstone answered with a simple, “Yes.”
SPUDS – Finally, we travel to Ireland for our last tale. Most people familiar with Irish history will claim to know about the “potato famine.”

However, there are those who believe there was no famine at all and that the entire tragic event was an attempt by England to eradicate the Irish race.

This seems to be too extreme to be plausible and yet we have three quotes that show this to perhaps not be the case.

Back in that time most European countries would pass laws preventing foodstuff from being exported during a blight as long as there was anyone within the country who was going hungry. This had been the case with Ireland until England’s complete takeover in 1801.

In August 1845, the blight hit the potato crops of Ireland. By September, most Irish peasants were eating their seed potatoes, which were needed for the following year. But England refused to put a ban on selling food crops outside of Ireland because it needed the food to feed its many factory workers. And so a blight, survived many times in the past, became a disaster.

Our first quote comes from none other than former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who stated on May 31, 1997, “Those who governed in London at the time failed their people though standing by while crop failure turned into a massive human tragedy. We must not forget such a dreadful event.”

Still, these facts do not yet prove an attempt at annihilation of the Irish, but perhaps this next quote will.

In the London Times of September 2, 1846, a headline roared “Total Annihilation.” In the story that followed were the startling words, “We do not doubt that, by the inscrutable but invariable laws of nature, the Celt is less energetic, less independent, less industrious than the Saxon. This is the archaic condition of his race. But, after all, these genetic distinctions of blood, though not caused, are yet modified by laws and institutions. Had the Englishmen been, like the Irish, alternately goaded by oppression and stupified by neglect, they would have sunk to the same lethargy that has deadened the Irish soul. But Heaven has blessed them with a nobler fate and more auspicious laws; they can, therefore afford to look with contemptuous pity on the Celtic cottier suckled in poverty which he is too callous to feel, or too stupid to mend.”

Not hard to see why so many Irish speak ill of England!

It has been said that after the Great Fire of London, in 1666, the Irish contributed 20,000 cattle whose value far exceeded any aid given to Ireland during the Potato Famine.

In 1849, an 1849 depiction of Bridget O’Donnell and her two children during the famine.

The British claimed the famine was due to the Pope asking the Irish to have too many children, However, in 1841, the population of Ireland, according to the English census, was just over eight million, whereas England had a population of 18.5 million with arable land less than twice that of Ireland.
England was in far greater need of Irish foodstuff than the inhabitants of Ireland as both countries entered into the time of the so-called famine.

There is no doubt that many Irish went hungry and even died during these times. However, a Captain Larcom reported to the British government that the agriculture produced in Ireland, in 1847, was worth nearly 45 million English pounds, enough to feed not only the eight million people of Ireland, but another eight million.

So where did all the food go? The answer is that it went to England.

In 1847, more than 4,000 ships carrying a variety of food products left Ireland for England. Almost 10,000 Irish cattle were exported to England. Forty to 70 shiploads sailed out each day guarded by 200,000 soldiers. Local newspapers in England and Ireland regularly published shipping news and so there is a great deal of evidence of the amount of food leaving Ireland for England during this manufactured famine.

On one day alone (November 14, 1848), records exist of 147 bales of bacon, 120 casks and 135 barrels of pork, 5 casks of ham, and 149 casks of miscellaneous foodstuff leaving for England on one ship.

Another carried 863 quarter-barrels of butter, 1,198 casks and 200 kegs of lard, 87 casks of ham, 267 bales of bacon, 52 barrels of pork, 45 tons and 628 barrels of flour, 4,975 barrels of oats and 1,000 barrels of barley.

Still another, on this same day in history, carried to England 550 tons of oats and 15 tons of barley. Another ship carried 711 tons of oats and 118 tons of barley.

Finally, another ship carried 60 sacks of flour, 30 sacks and 292 tons of oatmeal, 294 tons of oats and 140 tons of miscellaneous provisions.

All of this foodstuff left Ireland on one single day in the dead middle of the potato famine, supposedly from a country that could not feed itself, and all bound for England where the real food shortage existed.

There were food riots, indeed, for the purpose of stopping this flow of food to England. In one case, on September 29, 1846, a riot broke out to prevent a ship from leaving the port of Dungarvan. In the violence that followed, the Royal Dragoons killed two Irishmen and wounded many others. Fifty-one rioters were hauled off to court. A farmer on the court refused to prosecute the starving men and was, himself, jailed.

Aid poured into Ireland from across the world and even England was finally shamed into setting aside money to rebuild the country it had ravaged.

On October 4, 1848, the *London Times* once again took a swing at the Irish, stating, “The people there have always been listless, improvident, and wretched, under whatever rulers . . . These people have remained the same and their present misfortune is that they are simply what they have always been . . . We do pity them because they have yet to be civilized.”

During the induced famine many cottiers were forced from their land, in a style reminiscent of the Highland Clearances.

Many Irish people died, and many fled to America where they were greeted with Civil War uniforms or signs reading “No Irish.” The misery caused by this manufactured famine caused untold suffering for hundreds of thousands of otherwise hard-working Celts. Over one million people died from the fiasco and a proud country was brought to its knees by the greed and unfairness of its more powerful neighbor.

Our third quote? In 2011, Queen Elizabeth of England came to the Republic of Ireland for an historic visit. The Queen acknowledged “sad and regrettable” mistakes of Britain’s troubled relationship with Ireland.

Although she stopped short of an outright apology for the “heartache, turbulence and loss” caused to Ireland by English interference, she did say, “We can all see things which we would wish had been done differently or not at all.”

No S_ _ _, Shakespeare!
“Autumn,” a painting by Giuseppe Arcimboldo, from 1573, both humorously and artistically ties mankind to the annual harvest of food.
Archivist’s Corner by Carolyn Emerick

Since the theme for this issue is “The Harvest,” I thought it would be fitting to highlight some poems by writers of the British Romantic movement.

The Romantic Era had its origins in the early 19th century, but it reached its peak between 1850-1900. It was largely considered to be a reaction to, and to some extent a rejection of, the preceding Enlightenment Era.

The Enlightenment brought with it the Scientific Revolution and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution.

In a recent article about the discipline of folklore (Celtic Guide, June 2014), I mentioned that one detriment of these movements was the backlash against folk customs. Because the emphasis was on science and progress, country customs were often seen as backward.

The Romantic Movement coincided with the birth of folklore as an academic discipline. Both folklorists and Romantic Era writers sought to press the pause button on this fast-paced rush into the future.

While the Romantic Movement was widespread across both Europe and America, there were differences in how it manifested.

Gothic literature proliferated during this period. Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, published in 1818, is one such example. While it is considered by many to be a horror story, in actuality it was a piece of social commentary about the advancements in science and medicine.

Just as we see science fiction exploring our fears about cloning, or about androids with artificial intelligence taking over humanity, Frankenstein expressed the fears of the rapid advancement of science in the 19th century.

This modern-day image, by photographer Jean-Pol Grandmont, shows the autumn leaves and their ever-present reminder that the best days of the harvest season are here for us to enjoy.
Another major theme of Romantic writers was the celebration of nature. This was especially true of the British Romantics, such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Blake, and John Clare.

Industrialization brought changes that were worrisome. Advancements in farming made agriculture more effective, requiring less manpower, so country folk moved to the cities in droves looking for work. Nature and wildlife took a back seat to profit-making ventures. The rise in scientific thought had taken away the element of the wonder and magic of nature, as it was viewed in a rational and clinical way.

Just as folklorists took society by the shoulders and reminded it to see the value in the stories and customs of its people, the Romantics reminded the world to see the value in the land where these stories and customs were birthed.

So while this issue celebrates autumn, and the harvest season, let us enjoy the poetry of some of history’s greatest bards.

---

**All Nature Has a Feeling**

*by John Clare, 1845*

All nature has a feeling: woods, fields, brooks
Are life eternal: and in silence they
Speak happiness beyond the reach of books;
There’s nothing mortal in them; their decay
Is the green life of change; to pass away
And come again in blooms revivified.
Its birth was heaven, eternal is its stay,
And with the sun and moon shall still abide
Beneath their day and night and heaven wide.
**On the Grasshopper and Cricket**  
*by John Keats, 1816*

The Poetry of earth is never dead:  
When all the birds are faint  
with the hot sun,  
And hide in cooling trees,  
a voice will run  
From hedge to hedge  
about the new-mown mead;  
That is the Grasshopper’s  
—he takes the lead  
In summer luxury,  
—he has never done  
With his delights;  
for when tired out with fun  
He rests at ease  
beneath some pleasant weed.  
The poetry of earth is ceasing never:  
On a lone winter evening,  
when the frost  
Has wrought a silence,  
from the stove there shrills  
The Cricket’s song,  
in warmth increasing ever,  
And seems to one in drowsiness  
half lost,  
The Grasshopper’s among some  
grassy hills.

---

**To Autumn**  
*by John Keats, 1819*

**Verse 1**

Season of mists  
and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend  
of the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him  
how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines  
that round the thatch-eves run;  
To bend with apples  
the moss’d cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit  
with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd,  
and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel;  
to set budding more,  
And still more,  
later flowers for the bees,  
Until they think warm days  
will never cease,  
For Summer has o’er-brimm’d  
their clammy cells.

**Verse 2**

Who hath not seen thee oft  
amid thy store?  
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad  
may find  
Thee sitting careless  
on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted
  by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap’d furrow
  sound asleep,
Drows’d with the fume of poppies,
  while thy hook
Spare the next swath and all
  its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner
  thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head
  across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press,
  with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings
  hours by hours.

Verse 3
Where are the songs of Spring?
  Ay, where are they?
Think not of them,
  thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloom
  the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble plains
  with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir
  the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows,
  borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind
  lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat
  from hilly bourn;
Hedge-cricket sing;
  and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles
  from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows
  twitter in the skies.

At left: A harvest-time
  illustration by
William T. Van Dresser,
  created in 1908.
Behold her, single in the field,  
Yon solitary Highland Lass!  
Reaping and singing by herself;  
Stop here, or gently pass!  
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,  
And sings a melancholy strain;  
O listen! for the Vale profound  
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt  
More welcome notes to weary bands  
Of travellers in some shady haunt,  
Among Arabian sands:  
A voice so thrilling ne’er was heard  
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?—  
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago:  
Or is it some more humble lay,  
Familiar matter of to-day?  
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,  
That has been, and may be again?

Whate’er the theme, the Maiden sang  
As if her song could have no ending;  
I saw her singing at her work,  
And o’er the sickle bending;—  
I listened, motionless and still;  
And, as I mounted up the hill,  
The music in my heart I bore,  
Long after it was heard no more.

Harvest time in Scotland – from the book “The Romance of the Reaper” by Herbert N. Casson, 1908
To Autumn
by William Blake, 1769

O Autumn, laden with fruit,
and stainèd
With the blood of the grape,
pass not, but sit
Beneath my shady roof;
there thou may’st rest,
And tune thy jolly voice
to my fresh pipe,
And all the daughters of the year
shall dance!
Sing now the lusty song
of fruits and flowers.
The narrow bud
opens her beauties to
The sun, and love runs in
her thrilling veins;
Blossoms hang round
the brows of Morning, and
Flourish down the bright cheek
of modest Eve,
Till clust’ring Summer breaks forth
into singing,
And feather’d clouds
strew flowers round her head.

`The spirits of the air
live on the smells
Of fruit; and Joy,
with pinions light, roves round
The gardens, or
sits singing in the trees.

Thus sang the jolly Autumn
as he sat;
Then rose, girded himself,
and o’er the bleak
Hills fled from our sight;
but left his golden load.

To Autumn
by William Blake, 1769

O Autumn, laden with fruit,
and stainèd
With the blood of the grape,
pass not, but sit
Beneath my shady roof;
there thou may’st rest,
And tune thy jolly voice
to my fresh pipe,
And all the daughters of the year
shall dance!
Sing now the lusty song
of fruits and flowers.
The narrow bud
opens her beauties to
The sun, and love runs in
her thrilling veins;
Blossoms hang round
the brows of Morning, and
Flourish down the bright cheek
of modest Eve,
Till clust’ring Summer breaks forth
into singing,
And feather’d clouds
strew flowers round her head.

`The spirits of the air
live on the smells
Of fruit; and Joy,
with pinions light, roves round
The gardens, or
sits singing in the trees.
Here is our Celtic Guide mascot, Obie, on a recent hike just before the harvest of the rapeseed oil crop, which is known as the "golden crop" for the Irish farmer and which has breathed new life into farming in Ireland. This photo was taken near Crosshaven, Co. Cork.

Also known as "canola" in North America, rapeseed oil is increasingly popular as an oil for cooking. In recent years it had been grown as a biofuel, however, the shift to culinary usage has offered a new lease on life to what was an out-of-fashion crop harvest.

In culinary terms, it is especially popular in salad dressings and mayonnaise, where its distinctive nutty taste adds depth, texture and complexity. Obie seems to enjoy its essence!
James Watt was born on January 19, 1736, in Greenock, Renfrewshire, Scotland, a seaport on the Firth of Clyde. He is widely accepted as the perfecter of the steam engine. The very first tractors were steam-powered, until the more modern gas-powered and diesel-powered tractors came along. Without Watt, what would we do?

I had the good fortune of operating both an old gas-powered and a newer diesel-powered tractor, many, many years ago on my Scotch-Irish Uncle Joe McGonnell’s grape farm. What I didn’t know then, and only really learned recently, for a full appreciation of the facts, is that my own family, along with other “Celts,” were involved in the early development of tractors and harvesting equipment.

Located in Hamilton, Ontario, the ironworks “McQuesten & Co.” was literally a one-horse-power operation, with an actual horse turning a wheel in the basement of the foundry, operating a bellows to help melt scrap iron and pig iron to fill sand moulds in order to make the various metal products the foundry produced.

As the business increased, the company was expanded and, in 1853, Dr. Calvin McQuesten sold a portion of his interest in the firm to his two nephews, Luther & Payson Sawyer, and a cousin William McQuesten. Another nephew, Samuel Sawyer, was an engineer with the firm.

In 1857, Dr. Calvin retired from active ownership of the company, putting the three Sawyer brothers in charge as active partners. They operated the company under the name of L. D. Sawyer and Company.

In 1889, Hart Almerrin Massey, of Massey-Harris Co. Ltd., became a part of the company, and by the turn of the 19th century, the old McQuesten firm became known as the Sawyer-Massey Company.
Additional mergers took place until the modern firm of Massey-Ferguson was established in 1953 – a firm which has become one of the biggest names in farm equipment throughout the entire world.

Calvin McQuesten’s grandfather, William, came to America from Scotland, via Northern Ireland. Alanson Harris had links to Scotland, and Henry “Harry” Ferguson was from Ireland.

So at least three of the principals from the history of the famous Massey-Ferguson company had Irish or Scottish blood.

Around the same time, Cyrus McCormick, another Scots-blooded inventor, was busy creating a mechanical reaper or harvester.

As the years rolled by, the company known as “Cyrus H. McCormick and Brothers” was changed to “McCormick Harvesting Machine Company,” and eventually became International Harvester Company, another important name in mechanical harvesting equipment and farming equipment.

One more great producer of tractors was the giant Ford Corp., founded by Henry Ford. Henry’s father, William, was born in County Cork, Ireland. He immigrated to Michigan where his son established the first mass-production assembly line, in 1910. It was a handshake deal between Henry Ford and Henry Ferguson, in 1939, that led to the production of the very first Ford tractor.

Finally, we come to one of the most well-known of all tractor names – the John Deere.

Ancestry.com provides the meaning of the Deere family name as a “variant spelling of dear. Irish: reduced anglicized form of the Gaelic Ó Duibhidhir.” Another website explains the Deere name as, “the Anglicized version of the Gaelic name O’Duibhidhir, composed of the Gaelic prefix “Ó” (male descendant of) and an unknown personal name containing the Gaelic element dubh (black). This was the name of a well known Tirconnell sept, where it was anglicized as O’Deere, Deere and Diver.”

So we have at least some evidence that the Deere family may have also come to America from Ireland.

The original John Deere was born in Rutland, Vermont, on February 7, 1804, the third son of William Rinold Deere and Sarah Yates Deere. Yates is, of course, another well-established Irish name, more famously spelled Yeats.

While folks from Scotland and Ireland can claim a great deal of the credit for perfecting tractors and harvesting equipment, other companies were started by individuals of differing nationalities. Still, with the inventiveness of the Scots and the long-standing farming experience of the Irish, it is easy to see why these two countries would have sprouted so many leaders in this field.

Above, a McCormick Twine Binder from 1884
On the most southwesterly point of England can be found the Duchy of Cornwall. Like Brittany in France, Cornwall retains and promotes its identity as a Celtic Nation. It boasts its own Brythonic language, Cornish, known as Kernowek in the native tongue. Kernowek nearly became extinct, but in recent times was preserved and restored. It is now spoken by many inhabitants of the region.

Cornwall features many festivals that are unique to the region, and in this article, we will be exploring the harvest festival known as Guldize.

Most of you will be familiar with the festival of Lughnasadh. Named after the god Lugh, the month of August is honoured with this name in the Gaelic tongue and was celebrated in Ireland, Scotland, and the Isle of Man on the 1st of August. Folk revivalists and Neo-Pagans celebrate the festival at the start of the month, and it is seen as a festival to honour the grain and soft fruit crops that are harvested at this time.

The Cornish festival of Guldize takes place a little later, towards the end of September. It is not known whether this is a traditional date, but it has been adopted by the Old Cornwall Society and other revivalist groups.

Guldize is sometimes called Gooldize or Goel dheys which translates as “Festival of the Rick”. A rick is a stack of hay, corn, or straw, which would include the better-known example of a haystack. The festival is sometimes also called Dicklydize or Nickly Thize.

The year 2008 marked the first festival to be held in Penzance, and the festival has spread through the region from 2010 onwards. It should be noted that the festival seems to have died out by the 19th century and was replaced by the wider Harvest Festival held in churches around the region at the end of August and beginning of September.
last head of corn is cut. This is done with great
ceremony, and like the tradition seen around
some parts of Britain, this last sheaf is treated
with honour and is made into a “shock” or corn
dolly to preserve the spirit of the wheat crop.

Each town has its own design, but unlike the
Anglo-Saxon tradition of burying the dolly back
into the field at the start of ploughing season in
February, the Cornish burn the corn dolly at
Christmas, or feed it to their best cattle to bring
good luck.

*Guldize* was first recorded by Richard Carew
in 1602 in his *Survey of Cornwall*. It is also
mentioned by A. K. Hamilton Jenkin in 1933 in
his book *Cornish Homes and Customs*, where
he writes:

> On the evening of the day on which the
neck was cut the harvesters would repair
to the farmhouse kitchen. Here numerous
company in addition to farmers own family
would sit down to a substantial meal of
broiled pork and potatoes, the second
course consisted of Apple pie, cream and
‘fuggans’ the whole being washed down
with cider and spirits.

A fuggan is a type of pastry cake made with
lard. Hamilton Jenkin also recorded the words
spoken at the cutting of the head in his 1933
book *Cornwall and the Cornish*:

> In those days the whole of the reaping
had to be done either with the hook or
scythe. The harvest, in consequence, often
lasted for many weeks. When the time
came to cut the last handful of standing
corn, one of the reapers would lift up the
bunch high above his head and call out in a
loud voice,

> “We have it! We have it! We have it!
The rest would then shout,
> ‘ave ‘ee?”
> and the reply would be,
> “A neck! A neck! A neck!”

Everyone then joined in shouting,
> “Hurrah! Hurrah for the neck!
> Hurrah for Mr. So-and-So”

The farmer would then be called by name. We
see here that the neck is given the name,
“Mr. So-and-So” which suggests that at one time
it may have been named something that was
frowned upon by later Christian celebrations.

Like many festivals around the British Isles,
rituals and practices were often adopted by the
Christian church and re-invented to hide their
Pagan roots. Old gods and deities either became
saints or devils, or simply became nameless. We
see this in Cornwall with the lore around *Piskies*,
who are described as being the old gods that
have shrunk because they are not worshipped
any more. As Christianity spread, they would
shrink until they disappeared completely. It is
not known who “Mr. So-and-So” is, but it is
likely that he represents a deity associated with
the harvest or fertility, or the spirit of the crop
itself.

The harvest feast in the farm would go on
well into the night. Members of the community
would play music and sing songs such as
> “Here’s a Health to the Barley Mow,” “Harvest
Home,” and “Green Brooms.” With the revival
of *Guldize*, this practice continues and festival
attendees will hold a night of singing and
storytelling. Use of *Kernowek* is encouraged by
attendees in order to strengthen the bond with
the Cornish culture. Simon Reed, in his 2009
publication, *The Cornish Traditional Year*,
mentions another custom:

> A number of customs were associated
with the feast, a man would have been
chosen to rush to the site of the feast with
the corn neck and enter the building by
stealth avoiding an appointed lady who
would have soaked the carrier of the neck
if discovered. If this game was successful
then the carrier of the neck would have
been entitled to take a kiss from the female
“guard” of the property.
We see that *Guldize* is part of the Cornish ritual year, which breaks it up into key points around the calendar. Like many rural cultures, these festivals are set around an event to do with the harvest. Hard work is followed by celebration, and *Guldize* marks the time when thanks are given for the grain harvest and steps are taken to bring luck for the following year.

Rural communities were dependent on the success of their crops. In times when the wheat was cut by hand, one could not simply pop off to a supermarket if they ran out of flour for baking their bread. Starvation was a very real threat, so the crop was honoured and rightful thanks given – something that, sadly, we as a modern society seem to have forgotten. These old festivals help us to remember that we must not take our good fortune for granted.

Sources:
(With thanks to Simon Reed for his assistance)
A. K. Hamilton Jenkin, *Cornish Homes and Customs*
A. K. Hamilton Jenkin, *Cornwall and the Cornish*
Simon Reed, *The Cornish Traditional Year*
Simon Reed, http://www.cornishculture.co.uk/

see more of Pollyanna’s work at:
https://www.facebook.com/Pollysfolly?ref=hl
Transcribed from oral traditions in the 10th century, the earliest of the Pictish Chronicles (there are seven) begins with Cruithne and his seven sons, all of whom, along with Cruithne himself, are most likely mythical. They are probably the names of the seven provinces into which Alba, the land of the Picts, was divided at a very early stage in the nation’s history. They may also be the ancient clan names of the tribes who inhabited those areas. Cruithne, son of Cinge, according to an old legend recorded in the Irish Book of Lecain, was the first king of the Picts, and is supposed to have ruled for 100 years. The middle-eastern origins given to Cinge, and by their logical extension to the Picts, may not be mere fancy as we shall see later on.

The name Cruithne itself may have come from the early Irish word ‘Cruth’, meaning ‘shape’ or ‘design’. This could possibly refer to the Picts’ supposed habit of tattooing themselves (Pict-painted), or from their unique stone carvings that are likely to have been painted and highly coloured. Some scholars believe it to mean “people of the wheat.” Cruithne is described in the legends as having seven sons whose names were Cait, Ce, Cirig, Fib, Fidach, Fotla and Fortrenn. These sons (probably clans) had Pictland divided up between them, and had territories named after them. Some of these can still be identified in our modern place names.

Sadly we have no documents at all that were written by the Picts themselves. They were destroyed along with many of Scotland’s other ancient documents and relics during the course of one invasion after another. The Vikings are reported to have thrown hundreds and hundreds of manuscripts that they had plundered from our abbeys into the sea from their longships. Hundreds more were looted by King Edward I of England in the 13th century when he sought to rob Scotland of her identity by extirpating her history and sense of self. This so-called “Hammer of the Scots” behaved, according to a contemporary writer, “like a common thief.” A total of 65 boxes of Scottish documents were robbed from Scone Abbey and Edinburgh Castle alone. We have no idea of the true scale of the loss. More yet was lost during the Reformation and religious wars of the 17th century. Any final scraps that remained surrendered their fate to Scotland’s damp climate and disintegrated from the effects of mildew and rot.
Almost all that we have of our own ancient
history has come to us from the hands of
Irish clerics who spent so much of their lives
recording all that was going on around them.
We have so much for which to thank those Irish
scribes. Were it not for them, we should know
practically nothing about the Picts and about
Scotland’s past . . . and we would all have been
so much the poorer for it.

An independent scholar of comparative
religion and mythology, D.M. Murdock, also
known as “Acharya S,” has written extensively
on the Middle East “wheat” legend.

We are told:

Jerusalem in the Egyptian mythos is
“Arru-Salaam,” or Salam, Shiloam, Siloam.
Arru is the garden or fields where the
wheat or barley is sown and harvested, the
Elysian fields, where Osiris, the sun, takes
his rest. It was said that in order to “reap”
the Egyptian paradise or Arru-Salaam,
one’s “sowing” had to be in proportion to
the reward; hence, “As you sow, so shall
you reap.”

The debate as to the origins of Western
culture does not end with Egypt and India,
but extends to the mysterious Druidic
brotherhood, composed of ancient priests
of the sun who inhabited the British Isles.

Like many others, A. Churchward
averred that the Druids were an “exodus of
Solar Cult people from Egypt.” As Pike also
says: The first Druids were the true children
of the Magi, and their initiation came from
Egypt and Chaldea, that is to say, from the
pure sources of the primitive Kabalah. They
adored the Trinity under the names of Isis
or Hesus, the Supreme Harmony; of Belen
or Bel, which in Assyrian means Lord, a
name corresponding to that of Adonai . . .
The Druids, in fact, shared the same ancient
“Chaldee” culture with the Egyptians,
Indians and Phoenicians, including the
proto-Hebraic sacred language.

If Murdock, Churchward and Pike are correct
in their research, then early Druidic practices
were tied to the sacred harvest of wheat, and
thus the possible naming of the Picts as the
“people of the wheat.”

This very month of September 2014, Scotland
faces another potential harvest – one of freedom
from domination by its neighbor, England.

Feelings are very mixed on this move but
the thought of a free Scotland, a land so fertile
with the blood of freedom fighters, is a stirring
thought, indeed. Shall the Scots finally reap the
rewards of their own toil and tribulation?

Shall the wheat stand tall again?
During the autumn season when imagery of the harvest is all around, it can be easy to forget that the cornucopia of produce yielded is the product of year round effort. Though we, most of whom are removed from the production of our own sustenance, may not be consciously aware of the agricultural calendar, it is something that our ancestors were very much aware of. Until very recently in the grand timeline of human history, the vast majority of human beings participated in agriculture, in one way or another, as well as the age old customs and rituals that went along with it.

We know that ancient spirituality was unequivocally bound with agriculture and the turning of the year. It is thought that one main reason the ancients built Neolithic monuments which monitored movements of the sky (ex. the chamber at Newgrange which is flooded with light at sunrise at the Winter Solstice) was to keep track of the passage of time which mark key agricultural dates of the year. Because spirituality was so inextricably linked to agriculture, it is not difficult to understand how and why ritual became associated with the sowing of seeds and reaping of the harvest.

The examples we’re going to explore here are from the Anglo-Saxon culture. But, as this is a Celtic themed magazine, I just want to point out that Celtic and Germanic cultures shared very much in common. Both language groups are branches in the Indo-European language family. Many scholars have noted similarity in customs and in ancient religion between the two groups. Some academics have stated that it appears that the two cultures were nearly identical at one point in time, and then diverged. Not to mention that the two cultures were not only neighbors, but modern Celtic nations carry much Germanic heritage from not only the Anglo-Saxons, but the Norse as well.

Because the Celts converted so very early, in fact the Irish were the first Europeans to convert to Christianity outside of the Mediterranean, often less is known about ancient Celtic religious practice. The great Celtic historian

**Æcerbot and Wassail: Blessing the Fields and Orchards**

*by Carolyn Emerick*

*USA*
J. A. MacCulloch, who penned the popular *Religion of the Ancient Celts*, also thought that there was enough similarity between Celtic and Germanic culture to author an excellent book titled *The Celtic and Scandinavian Religions*.

So, what we’re going to explore here likely had a counterpart with some similarity among the Celts. I would venture to say that the Balts and Slavs share in this legacy as well. Indeed, many of us in the English-speaking world don’t realize that while Halloween (Samhain) comes from the Celts, Yule comes from the Germanics. Yet, both cultures also had their own counterparts to each holiday, as did the other afore mentioned Indo-European peoples. These were simply holidays marking the turning of the year that virtually all of humanity marked, and there was strong similarity in how it was marked by various Indo-European cultures.

There are a great many folk customs all around Europe which appear to hearken to ancient pagan origins. However, due to the nature of the history of conversion, oppression of native spirituality by the Church (both Catholic and Protestant, and in many cases even more so by the Protestants), and targeted eradication of ethnic folk practices during Europe’s assimilation to Christianity, there isn’t always a clear verifiable line of progression to trace modern folk practices to their ancient roots. This is in large extent due to the fact that pre-Christian European cultures were illiterate. That is, in fact, a poor term to use, as it implies a lack of culture. The Germanic people used runes, and the Celts had their ogham. But, they were not used as prolifically as the Latin alphabet was in the Mediterranean.

![A political map of Britain in 650AD with names transcribed as they appear in modern English. Image by Wikimedia Commons user Hel-hama.](image)

![This Anglo Saxon high cross in Cumbria, England, bears a striking similarity with the Celtic crosses seen across Ireland.](image)

Northern Europeans were primarily an oral culture, relying on patronymic names (sometimes matronymic, though rarely) to demonstrate relationships and lineage, and
memorization of epic poems, tales, charms, and so forth. Theirs was a living religion that evolved with the culture. Their rites and rituals were lived in practice, so there was no need to write them down.

The Catholic Church moved upward through Europe from the Mediterranean, bringing with it their Latin alphabet and penchant for writing. It is mainly through Church writings, and ancient Roman writers such as Tacitus, that we know anything about the practices of our own ancestors. Sadly though, these writings are sharply skewed by bias, and written during campaigns to oppress these ancient folk customs.

Amongst all the calendar customs which popular folklore enthusiasts have claimed as remnants of luck-bringing rituals, wassailing is the only one that has a relatively clean and undisputed claim to this lineage (Simpson & Roud, 380).

In my estimation, this does not mean that other folk customs are not derived from ancient ritual necessarily, but rather that it is often difficult to prove that they are (for more on this, please see my article “The Hidden History of Christmas Carols” in Celtic Guide, December 2013). As I often say, history is murky. It is murky for all the reasons mentioned above and then some. Many ancient rituals were altered during the conversion period, and so all we have evidence of is the Christianized version (again, see my article on Christmas Carols), yet we can often speculate with confidence of a pre-Christian origin due to the presence of known pagan elements such as fertility symbols.
An example of one such ritual is the old Anglo-Saxon Æcerbot, also known as “field remedy.” It is an early medieval, through probably with roots that go back much further, “luck-bringing” agricultural ritual that is now extinct. In her short book on Anglo-Saxon spiritual culture, Looking for the Lost Gods of England, scholar Kathleen Herbert explains that historical documents only record the Christianized version of this custom. Although at the time the account was written this ritual was being practiced with the cooperation of the local parish priests, it contained many pagan elements. The gist of the ritual was the notion that the fields were of Mother Earth, and she may be barren and in need of virile fertilization. So Father God up above (inserted as a replacement for a previous male sky god) was invoked to impregnate the fields. Herbert describes the ritual thusly:

Mother Earth, in this particular field, was weak and sick, unable to bear. Perhaps she had been deliberately injured by hostile magic.

The healer cut a turf from each of the four quarters: east, south, west, and north, noting carefully exactly where each had lain. These turfs for the time being represented – were the whole field. A mixture was made of vegetable matter from every tree and shrub that grew locally… and all known herbs… These were blended with oil, honey, holy water and milk from all the cattle on the farm. This mixture was dropped three time on the underside of the turfs. Mother Earth was being given healing herbs, mixed with a nourishing porridge to strengthen her. (Herbert, 13-14)

Herbert goes on to explain the rest of the ritual involving the turfs being blessed in the parish church before being re-deposited in their original locations with yet more ritual and ceremony. The entire ordeal took the better part of a day to complete. Herbert speculates that the church building replaced an earlier site which may have been a sacred grove. Part of the Christianized version was to mark the turfs with the cross. Again, Herbert says this may have replaced an earlier Indo-European symbol such as the sun-wheel (swastika), or a Germanic runic symbol (Herbert, 14).

Karen Louise Jolly actually uses the Æcerbot ritual transcribed word for word to open the first chapter of her book Popular Religion in Late Saxon England. She uses it as an illustration of the fusion between Anglo-Saxon native religion and Christianity. I would argue that her observations can also be applied to Celts and other Indo-European groups as well, as their own early versions of Christianity accommodated local folk practices of the common people. She says:

In order to understand popular religious practices of this period [900-1050 A.D], we need to place them in the context of this gradual process of cultural conversion, in which Germanic folklore and Christian belief bled into each other as much or more than they sought to destroy each other (Jolly, 10).

Jolly reaffirms that the early Catholic Church was often accommodating of local beliefs. People were allowed to keep their customs providing the old switcheroo took place, whereby indigenous deities were replaced by the Christian pantheon of the God Head and Saints. In the case of the Anglo-Saxons, Jolly says it is:

… evidence of the dynamic interaction that takes place between a native culture and an introduced religion. This is Christianity succeeding by way of acculturation and Germanic culture triumphing in transformation. Neither is the passive victim of the other (Jolly, 11).

It should be emphasized, however, that this tolerance applied much more so to the early medieval Church. The Anglo-Saxons
in England shared another similarity with the Celts of Ireland in that they were both converted in this gradual and organic way, as opposed to the later conversion campaigns which ravaged the Germanic people on the continent and Scandinavia, as well as the Balts and Slavs (look up the Saxon Wars, Wendish Crusades, and Northern Crusades). The Church simply did not have that type of muscle in the very early days in the non-Romanized parts of Europe.

The temperament of the Church in England would change sharply with the Norman Conquest of 1066, marking an end of Anglo-Saxon England, and the beginning of the oppressive Norman regime which brought with it a stricter interpretation of Christianity; along with their castles and fortresses which sprung up all over Britain and Ireland to keep the native people under the new iron grip of feudalism.

Yet, it seems in many cases of the cultures mentioned above, the initial conversions of each group incorporated their native folkways into their new Christian practices, and then subsequent waves of religious reform in later generations took issue with customs containing clear pagan connotations.

Historian and historical fiction author Carol McGrath uses the Æcerbot to illustrate this point in her novel set in England in 1066, The Handfasted Wife. She opens chapter four with a quote by the afore mentioned Karen Louise Jolly, and proceeds to describe a scene wherein King Harold’s first wife, Edith Swan-neck, is asked by local villagers to perform the customary Field Remedy ritual. McGrath highlights that this was a time of abrupt cultural change for the people of England. There was a strong “Normanization” of the English Church prior to the Conquest. The author depicts this period as the cusp when the afore mentioned leniency of the Church began to wither as it grew in strength and began to exert political pressure on European ruling classes.

This is demonstrated in McGrath’s telling of the historical story of Harold’s first wife who had to be “set aside” so that he could take a new wife that was approved by the Church. The reason given was that they were married under the old Anglo-Saxon marriage custom of “hand-fasting,” which had its roots in pre-Christian practice.

The Church insisted that this was unacceptable for a King of England, so when he inherited the crown he was pressured to make a new political marriage with a suitable woman, and the ceremony would be conducted under the new Church protocol. McGrath drives home this cultural shift by depicting a scene of tension between an old local parish priest, who was intended to carry out the Æcerbot ritual with Edith, and a new, younger priest, who is adamantly against it. In her story, he is later revealed to be in league with the Normans.

With this historical backdrop, it is no wonder that most of these practices died out. And, it is more astonishing still that any have survived into modern times. And so, now we circle back to wassailing.

The word “wassail” comes from the Anglo-Saxon was hæl, which means “be healthy” or “good health to you.” It was initially used as a greeting or toast, but came to be associated with other meanings as well. The meanings most known by modern readers are the alcoholic beverage and the custom of going door to door “a-wassailing,” which was basically caroling while imbibing wassail, the beverage (again, more on this in my article on Christmas Carols). However, there is a third meaning which is lesser known among audiences outside of England: wassailing the apple trees.

Like the other versions of wassail and wassailing, this custom was primarily associated with the Yuletide season. It is speculated that wassailing the orchards occurred widely in Britain, but dwindled until it survived mainly in the cider-making regions of southwest England; and it seems that this custom varied by location. Tristram P. Coffin, in his The Book of Christmas Folklore, says that wassailing was
mainly focused on apple orchards (p34). But, Simpson and Roud explain in their “dictionary” entry that this particular “field-visiting custom” was performed to “usually fruit trees, but also sometimes to other farm crops, animals, and so on” (Simpson & Roud, 380). The general gist of the ritual goes as follows:

In some cases it is performed by the farmer who owns the orchard, along with his wife, family, and others (presumably neighbors or field hands), and in other cases it was performed by a large number of villagers in a day-long procession guided by the local priest who lead them around the major orchards of the parish – not unlike the Field Remedy ritual.

In any case, the group of people performing the ceremony would enter the orchard and circle about a favored tree. Usually songs were sung, which seems to hearken back to the notion of charms which would be spoken or sung often in old Anglo-Saxon tradition. There was a strong element of magic in the spoken word in Anglo-Saxon culture.

The group brings with them cider, or a related alcoholic beverage such as wassail made with cider, or ale infused with apples. They bring also bread or cakes, shotguns, sticks, and lanterns, as this is usually performed at nightfall. The trees are whacked with sticks to awaken the good spirits of the trees, while shotguns are fired through the branches to scare off the malicious spirits that would interfere with the upcoming crop. Songs are sung to request the aid of the good spirits and beseech them to do their best to ensure a good crop. In return for their help, offerings are given to the spirits. The beverage is poured about the tree roots, and the bread is soaked in the alcoholic drink and left in the branches. The unnamed author/editor of the website PIEreligion.org (PIE standing for Proto-Indo-European), which I have found to be scholarly and very well researched, has this to say about this practice:

There are parallels among all the northern Europeans, described as a group in the Golden Bough which gives examples in Germany, Scandinavia and the Slavic countries, and with many additional descriptions in folk lore literature in various countries. The performance of apple tree wassails is perfectly in accord with the Indo-European ritual of offering to a Goddess, in a symbolic way, a small portion of what she has given as an acknowledgment of her gifts and as thanks. Offering cakes and ale, or in this case, cake dipped in cider, for thanks and for future prosperity is exactly typical of the Indo-European ritual of offering (http://piereligion.org).
So, it seems that we can definitely see parallels between the Field Remedy and Wassailing the Orchards. Both contain elements of pre-Christian origin that continued on into the Christian era. Both have connections to the fertility and spirituality of the Earth. Both hearken back to an Anglo-Saxon heritage, as well as to a broader Indo-European origin that connects with neighboring cultures as well.

Bear in mind that when scholars discuss Celts, Germanics, and so forth, what they are actually referring to is language speakers more than any other affiliation. So, I would argue that if English is your native tongue, you are an heir of Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage, regardless of other ethnic identifiers. There really is a unity among all people, and especially so among interrelated cultures. As we in the West have learned to embrace foreign cultures, it may be time that we look to our own cultural heritage and find unity in our shared past. Indeed, Christianity was a foreign belief system that replaced our indigenous spirituality. But, there is a fervent renewal of interest in our ancestral folkways today. Perhaps we can look to our past to inspire our present and pave the way toward our future.

Works referenced:
Unnamed author. Apple Tree Wassails. PIEReligion.org:http://piereligion.org/applewassail.html
Historically, harvests come in all shapes and forms and kinds - beyond the harvest of crops and grains for the sustenance of man and beast, the ambitious among men might also seek to harvest favor among those in power, or riches from those one holds power over, or tribute from those who are known to be in your debt. If you are surrounded by larger, stronger neighbors, you might seek to harvest relations of wedlock from them, so that you might shield yourself from their harvestings, perforce by the ties of family bloodline alliances.

Beyond that practice of agrarian harvests, though, perhaps the most appealing form of “creative harvesting” in Medieval Scotland was that of the plotting of land acquisition, a goal so central to bettering one’s clan that it was practiced, with one method, or another, by virtually every great House in the Highlands. And should those boundaries between clans, and nobility, and towns, and the Church, be complicated by expanses of seawater, as they have always been in the Inner Hebrides, then all the factors become concentrated, deeply embroiled, and all the tactics made use of tend to boom like thunder across the surge of the tides!

In the midst of such a hot and grinding vice of swords and ship and hostile seagoing men, we find the MacKinnons, a clan of the Siol Alpin. A poetic derivation of the name has been suggested from Maclonmhuinn, the Son of Love; a Pictish king, from 645 AD, was named Mac’innon.

But tradition attributes the name, and the clan’s origin, to Fingon, grandson of Gregor, son of Alpin, King of Scots, beheaded by the Picts on Dundee Law, in the year 834AD. This account is supported by the earliest clan badges being the same as others descended from Gregor and Alpin.

It is believed that the original Fingon brought his followers from the mainland to Mull, and that he also built MacKinnon’s Castle in Skye; Gribun, in Mull, appears to have been their original seat, Strathardle, in Skye, which later became the Chief’s seat, was gotten through a time-honored custom among Island chiefs, that of fosterage. A MacKinnon heir was sent to Skye to be raised in the house of Gillies; having lost his own heirs by internecine bloodshed, Laird Gillies became quite fond of young MacKinnon, and left him the whole of his estate. In this way, MacKinnon also claimed the islands of Pabay and Scalpa.

Early on, the Clan was powerful enough to worry the MacDougalls, Lords of Lorn. Under the Lords of the Isles, the MacKinnons were...
hereditary custodians of the standards of weights and measures, and the enforcers of the laws, and collectors of all the taxes and fees derived from them. This set not at all well with the mighty MacDougalls whose wealth and power and influence was spread entirely too thin across their holdings, which at that time stretched from the uppermost tip of the Loch Awe country all the way down to the lands just north of Kintyre, a peninsula that they never could completely seize and hold, especially since their disastrous decision to back John Comyn’s bid for the throne of the Scots.

Though it cannot be truthfully said that Clan Dougall was ever at full feud with the MacKinnons (the Lords of Lorn had bigger fish to fry with the encroaching Camerons and Campbells), the islanders were yet a thorn in their side, and one which no MacDougall chief could ever quite reach to extract, festering them most especially when the MacKinnons of Arran chose to give refuge to Robert the Bruce, when that liberator prince was on the run with a rich reward on his head. After the victory at Bannockburn, an enthroned Bruce remembered that sanctuary, and awarded lands on the Isle of Skye to those same MacKinnon clansmen.

During those early years of the 14th century, an event took place that the Clan would immortalize; while hunting with followers along the shores of Loch Scavaig, on Mull, the Chief spotted a deer grazing on the slope (or “brae”) of a nearby hill, and swiftly gave pursuit. Caught up in the fervor of the chase, he never noticed how thoroughly he had outdistanced the rest of his party, and upon overtaking and slaying the doe, suddenly realized that he had left his men far behind him, and was quite alone.

With night falling rapidly, he shouldered his yet-warm prize, and trudged off through a forested hollow to find shelter. Locating a dry, narrow cave, he crawled gratefully inside, but soon thereafter, while butchering his quarry for a makeshift supper, a wild boar suddenly charged into the cave, trying to attack him over the fresh bounty of the deer carcass (swine, after all, are gluttonous omnivores, and all island pickings are slim). Thinking swiftly, and sensing no time to rise and fight, the Chief seized one of the deer’s leg bones, and thrust it into the boar’s gaping maw, jamming its jaws open and giving him an extra moment to scramble to his feet, and slay his assailant with his skinning knife. Henceforth, in proud commemoration of this unique event, ever since the mid 1300’s, the clan crest for MacKinnon has shown an heraldic depiction of a boar’s head in whose open mouth is wedged a deer’s bare femur.

The first great misfortune the family endured was from an act of the MacKinnon chief himself. On the death in 1380 of John, Lord of the Isles, MacKinnon rallied arms to secure succession for his younger son, Ian Mor. MacKinnon’s bid was joined by the MacLeans of Duart, and the MacLeods, but their united forces failed against John’s elder son, Donald, who vindicated himself as the Lord of the Isles. Ian Mor, known as “the Tanister,” was driven into exile in Ireland, but was later pardoned. MacKinnon was less lucky: as leader of the insurrection, he was put to death.

Meanwhile, the MacLeans had increased in Mull, and inevitably came into lethal rivalry with the MacKinnons. Lachlan Lubanach, first of the MacLeans of Duart, became Steward to the MacDonald, Lord of the Isles, and received charters for Duart and Brolas, creating bad blood between the elder MacLean brothers and MacKinnon. This murderous brew came to a vicious head in 1400, when the Lord of the Isles, who had been hunting on Mull, set out for Ardtornish Castle. As MacKinnon was stepping into his galley to follow, Lachlan and Hector MacLean attacked and slew him, afterward disarming his men. They hastened after the Lord of the Isles, seized his galley and forced him to grant them indemnity for the killing.

During the feud with the MacLeans, a young chief of the MacKinnons was forced to seek refuge in Ireland; there, the Earl of Antrim
gave him 40 men to support him in arms. The party returned to Scotland, landing at Camus na fola, “the Bloody Bay”, near Tobermory, in Mull. Seeking the whereabouts of his foes, MacKinnon visited an old kinswoman of his, who lived alone in a hidden glen. She was widely rumored to have acquaintance with the Elder World, and to have been gifted, over the course of her long life, with the knowledge to read omens and auguries, and to perceive the images known as the Second Sight, or the “auld kenning”. At his urgent bequest, she advised the young Chief: “Slumber now yer drunken foes, neath the roof o’ Ledaig; an’ shall ye do as saith I, ye will ha’e grasp an’ hold o’ your lands come the sun’s nigh rising, wi’ nae blood be spilt o’ need.”

Heeding her counsel, MacKinnon listened to her whispered strategy, and gathering his followers, ranged into the surrounding woods, where each of them axed and fell and stripped a caber (a young, upright tree trunk). Skulking with their hoisted burdens through the dark, misty night, they approached, and silently surrounded, the walls of Ledaig House, where Duart, Lochbuie, and their men-at-arms slept. Urgently, MacKinnon’s men excavated a circling ring of holes about the keep, and thereby posted each of the cabers into the ground, the Chief lastly erecting his stout pole before the door, with his own naked sword hung upon it. Come morning, the MacLeans beheld the encircling cabers, and were in particular aghast at the sight of the Chief’s blade hung menacingly upon the trunk which shadowed the very doorway.

Deducing the identity of the nocturnal visitors, and how simply they might have slain them all as they slept, the MacLeans sent for the young Chief. Under a smoke of truce, the opponents met; the breaking of bread, and sharing of salt
followed between the parties, and Duart agreed to restore the MacKinnon’s rightful lands.

Just as colorful is the slightly younger legend of how Clan MacKinnon acquired the “secret formula” for the popular liqueur known as “Drambuie”: Purportedly, Prince Charlie, as the most celebrated fugitive from the massacre at Culloden Moor, was given refuge and safe escort by Clan MacKinnon, at some time after he had been smuggled through the higher hill country by Cluny MacPherson and his brigands. Eventually, after being secreted by the Chief’s family through the vales of Mull, and on and off various islets off the Argyll coast by MacKinnon supporters, and being fed, clothed, and sheltered every step of the way, he was smuggled for passage onto the galley of Iain Og, the eldest of all the MacKinnon chiefs at over seventy years of age. Ancient though he was, Iain Og was still as canny as a fox, and managed to elude at least two of the Government warships prowling those Hebridean waters, delivering the last of the Stuart princes in cloaked safety to the Isle of Mallaig. In gratitude for such great and valiant risks, Charlie gifted to Iain Og the secret formula for his cherished royal personal beverage. Poor old Iain’s luck ran out on his voyage back to Mull, and he became a prisoner of the Hanoverian despots for over three years. But he never forgot the details of the Prince’s secret recipe, sharing it with his relations when he was released from Tilbury and repatriated to Mull, in 1750 . . . and soon the golden nectar of Jacobite royalty was being raised again by candlelight.

In the 21st century, the distillers of Drambuie promote this legend on their label, and confide that among its special ingredients are whisky, honey and saffron, along with others which are kept judiciously secret . . . one wonders, though, if perhaps the MacKinnon’s choice of St. Johnswort for their clan’s plant badge might just provide a good, solid clue!

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

Henceforth Tales

by Cass and Deborah Wright

Follow future issues of Celtic Guide for further information about 2014 publication . . . and thank you for joining us at the hearth! - DW
A Celtic Harvest Prayer

We see signs of summer’s passing in golden leaves,
Shortening days, misty mornings, autumn glow.
We sense its passing in rain that dampens,
Winds that chill, Harvest’s bounty placed on show.
Creator God, who brings forth
Both green shoot and hoar frost,
Sunrise and sunset,
We bring our thanks
For seeds that have grown,
Harvests gathered,
Storehouses filled,
Mouths fed.
And, as your good earth rests
Through winter’s cold embrace,
We look forward to its re-awakening
When kissed by spring’s first touch.
So, what’s next?

Our September theme of “The Harvest” seems to have filled up well and provides many variations on that theme, as is often the case. Next month we return with our ever-popular “Halloween” issue! Oooooeeeeeeooooouuu! . . . and bugga, bugga too!

And though the Samhain celebration ends on November 1st, we will continue to look at Celtic festivals, ceremonies and celebrations from throughout the years. The actual November theme will be “Celebration.” We expect to have tales of Samhain in the October issue, which is fine, but there are many other celebrations to write about for November, that are currently being held, or were held in past mythology or history as a regular part of Celtic tradition. This can include annual Celtic Festivals, Highland Games and traditional celebrations.

For December, we will have another free-for-all, where authors can provide their gifts of prose, poetry, photography, paintings – you name it – for our readers’ pleasure. The theme? “Our Gift.”

We never seem to have a lack of articles to match a theme, which is a good thing. We expect this to continue and we hope to continue to build this online resources for all things Celtic into 2015.

If you have an idea for a theme, or a tale that should be told, feel free to drop us a line at celticguide@gmail.com. We have always been very open to ideas and we have helped Celts across the world. Our goal is simply to provide an enjoyable departure from your daily routine, and to preserve and coordinate bits and pieces of Celtic culture. We also stray to other cultures where it serves the purpose or explains the story better, but my core intent, as I said last month, is to be the old “guide” who directs you beyond the mountains of misplaced punctuation marks and past the 26 stumbling blocks of the philosopher, to that magic place where the digits hit the screen in an explosion of Celtic culture. I surely hope you enjoy the trip.