

Celtic Guide

Volume 3, Issue 1 • January 2014

THE
ISLANDS



From the Editor

Happy New Year to the whole dang Celtic World. We intend to make 2014 count! And we're kicking it off with a great issue on "The Islands" - Celtic islands that is.

Much of the history of the Celt takes place on islands or at least near the sea, unless we harken all the way back to the Celts of the Alps, or of inland Europe. Many a tale takes place on the oceans or in castles overlooking a vast sea. In fact, the western Scots pretty much lived in what is known as their Sea Kingdom, which included hundreds of small islands located between Scotland and Ireland. Throw in the Isle of Man, and immigration to places like Cape Breton, New Zealand and Australia, to the Caribbean, and to oceanic sites across the world, and you have a sea-going race, to a very large degree. Even the Great Lakes of North America were rife with Irish, Scottish and Welsh seamen who knew how to handle a ship when a gale rose up unexpectedly. Our cover art, by Larry Andrews, depicts the sea life of so many Celts.

So at least for this issue, the first of our third year of publication, we are going to leave the safety of the Highlands, glens and landlocked cities for the edge of the water, in whatever ways we may find it. As usual, these ways will be varied – as varied as the imaginations of our authors.

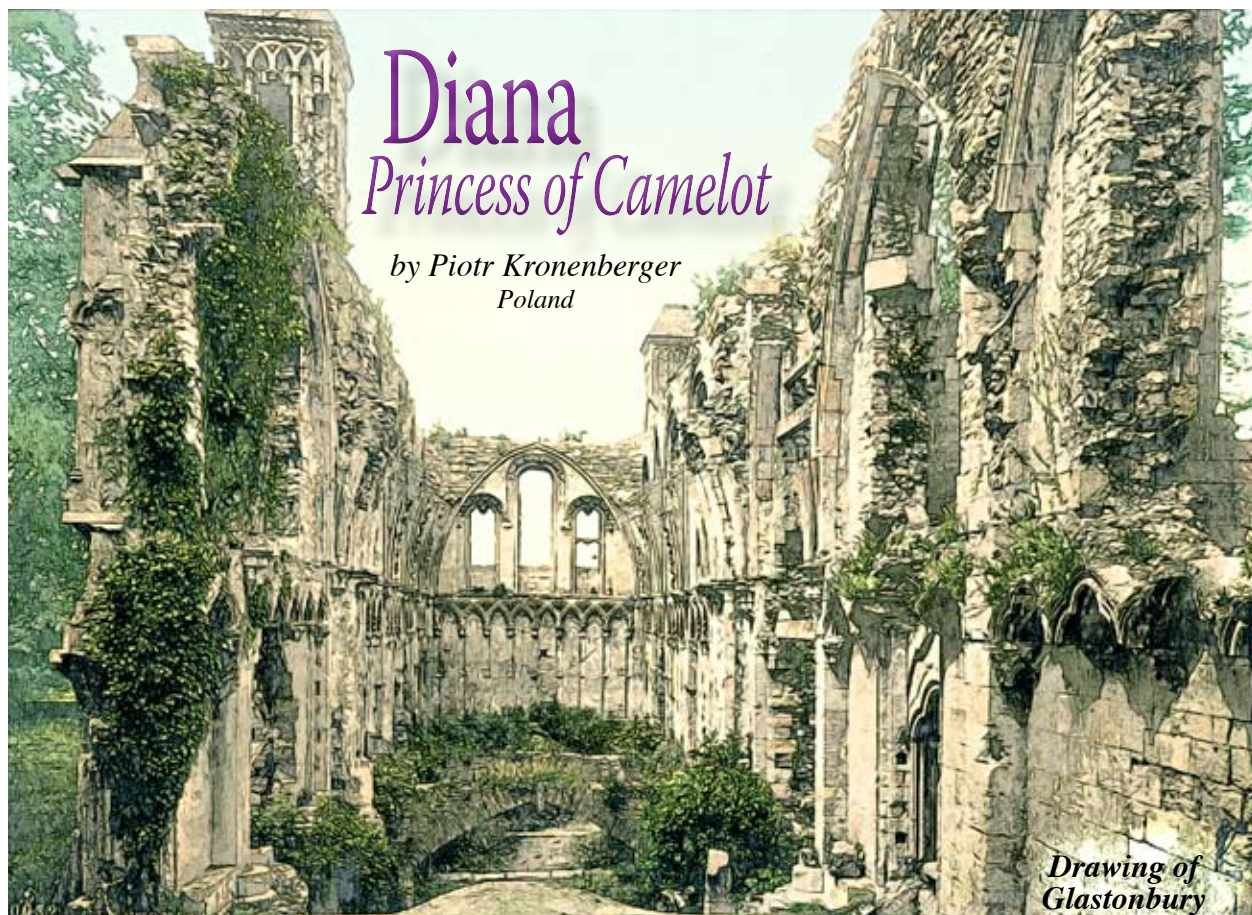
Great views of the water were not lost on Celtic nobility. Traveling throughout the old Celtic lands one will find many a castle ruin perched on an island or on a huge rock overlooking the sea. My theory as to why so many of these places are in ruin (in addition to just the passage of time) is that, when they were built, they were built to withstand spears and arrows. Once the ship's cannon came along, their fate was written in the many cannonballs lobbed their way. It is known, for a fact, that the ships of kings took down the walls of lords in many instances. Of course, erosion no doubt played its role, too.

To stand at one of these sites and to look out over the water, perhaps even at a sunset, is one of the greatest joys in life for a Celtic history lover. And so, with this issue, we will look out over the water at tale after Celtic tale of those who loved the sea so dearly.

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Table of Contents

<i>Page 3</i>	Diana - Princess of Camelot	<i>by Piotr Kronenberger, Poland</i>
<i>Page 5</i>	A Celtic Island	<i>by Jim McQuiston, USA</i>
<i>Page 7</i>	Postcards from Obie	<i>by Liam O Shea, Ireland</i>
<i>Page 8</i>	Belgium - part 'deux'	<i>by Victoria Roberts, USA</i>
<i>Page 11</i>	Staffa and Fingal's Cave	<i>by Jim McQuiston, USA</i>
<i>Page 13</i>	Donald Cam and Cow Ban	<i>by Larry Andrews, USA</i>
<i>Page 18</i>	The Isles of Scilly	<i>by Pollyanna Jones, England</i>
<i>Page 22</i>	Henceforth Tales	<i>by Deborah and Cass Wright, USA</i>
<i>Page 27</i>	What's an Ex-Pat Scot to do?	<i>by Alison MacRae, Canada</i>
<i>Page 31</i>	Hy Brasil	<i>by Hugo da Nóbrega Dias, Portugal</i>
<i>Page 35</i>	The Isle of Iona	<i>by Sharron Gunn, Canada</i>
<i>Page 41</i>	Archivist's Corner	<i>by Carolyn Emerick, USA</i>
<i>Page 43</i>	Fairy Lore of the Isle of Skye	<i>by Carolyn Emerick, USA</i>
<i>Page 47</i>	The Land 'Down Under'	<i>by Jim McQuiston, USA</i>



Arthur, King of Camelot, defied the Saxons at Baddon Hill. Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales, defied the strict etiquette of the monarchy. Both are firmly tied with (Great) Britain, both met violent ends, both became contemporarily iconic.

And both are buried on islands.

According to studies conducted in 2007, these two figures have much more in common than one might expect.

One of the most prominent and mystical places in Arthurian legend is the blessed Isle of Avalon, where the king was supposedly taken after suffering fatal wounds in his final battle.

The most likely real-life candidate for this island is Glastonbury Abbey, located in Somerset, South-West England. The abbey stands upon a rise resembling an island and Avalon was once known as the Isle of Apples. This delicious fruit is still harvested in Somerset today. Avalon is said to be like an island because it is entirely

hemmed in by swamps. In the old British tongue it has been called *Inis Avallon*, that is, *insula pomifera* [Latin: “The Island of Apples”]. This is because the apple, which is called *aval* in the British tongue, has been abundant in that place.

Moreover, the island had once been called, in British, *Inis Gutrin*, that is, *insula vitrea* [Latin: “The Island of Glass”]; from this name, the invading Saxons afterwards called this place *Glastingeburi*, for *glas* in their language means *vitrum* [Latin: “glass”], and *buri* stands for *castrum* [Latin: “castle”] or *civitas* [Latin: “city”].

In 1191, Glastonbury was ravaged by a great fire. During reconstruction, the monks made a startling discovery... Buried on their holy ground was a plain, wooden coffin, with complete skeletons of a male and a female inside. The man was well-built, whilst the female was frail. The man’s head bore a large crack above the brow.

Beside the bodies was found a cross with a Latin inscription reading: “*Artorus Rex Britannorum*”.

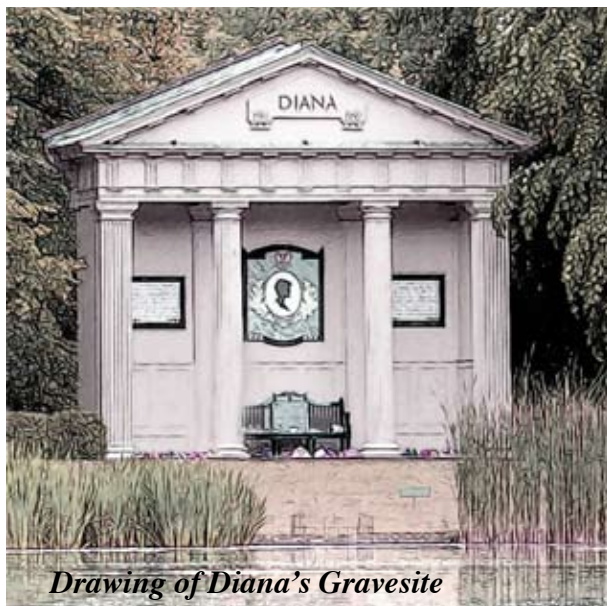
Sadly, the original cross and that coffin, with the bodies of (presumably) King Arthur and his wife Guinevere, are now lost to history. Both disappeared shortly after the exhumation. That leaves us at a “dead end” as far as the validity of that part of our legend is concerned.

As a consolation prize of sorts, we have many theories on this subject, one of which I find especially fascinating –

Arthur and Guinevere had a son, then a grandson. The King’s grandson, at some point, left the British Isles, seeking adventure on the Continent. During one of his travels, he fell in love with the heiress of an influential Burgundy family. Members of the aristocratic House of Spencer, from which Lady Diana hailed, are thought to be direct descendants of that wealthy family, which King Arthur’s grandson became a part of.

Thus, calling Diana “Princess of Camelot” is no flight of fantasy.

Diana’s own grave is on an island set within the grounds of Althorp Park, the Spencer family home for centuries.



Drawing of Diana’s Gravesite

If there ever was an historic King Arthur, he is long since dead. Lady Diana’s life, too, came to a premature end in 1997. But if that theory is true, the lineage of Arthurian legend lives on, in Princes William and Harry, and now in William’s little son, George. I wonder if he’ll find out about that theory someday?

One life ends, but another continues on, and in time, brings forth into the world a new life of its own. A comforting thought, don’t you think?

Let’s go!

So, you’ve gotten through the holidays and are gearing up for a bright New Year. So are we. We are very happy to report over 42,000 hits since we started this adventure, with over 11,000 likes on Facebook. But we are looking ahead . . . for new ideas, new offerings, and new Celtic Guide family members. We are already read across the world based on the emails we receive, on the web stats that tell how we’re doing, and by the breadth of countries from where our authors originate. Who knows what tomorrow brings but we are so sure it is going to be great. We urge all of our readers and contributors to reach beyond the past and grab every chance they can find to grow, accomplish, and share with us their successes. Let’s go!

<http://www.celticguide.com>

by James McQuiston
USA

A Celtic island

... of a different sort!

We think of islands as being bits of land surrounded by water, but there are other types of islands – in this case an island of Celtic-ness in a melting pot of ethnic diversity.

I was born in 1950. Both World Wars had already been fought and the Korean War was underway. Most talk was about a military showdown with Russia, maybe even China.

Closer to home, my mother was Polish, with many Polish friends constantly visiting us, and we lived in a neighborhood that included many Italian families with whom I gladly hung out – a lot. I must have even picked up on some of their culture, accent, and mannerisms, as I was asked, more than once, if I was Italian.

It has taken me this long to realize the Celtic island that I was privy to, in spite of all of the world cultures that permeated my youth.

We attended an Irish Catholic church even though my father had been a Scottish-Irish Presbyterian; he changed religions to marry my Polish-Catholic mother.

The earliest pastor of our church, that I remember, was Father Graves, who spoke with an Irish accent. In our apartment house lived my parents' friends, Ronnie and Joyce Dahler. Ronnie was an English motorcycle racer with a heavy British accent. But "Auntie Joyce" had the sweetest Irish accent. Between her and Father Graves I learned to love the Irish lilt.

I've often attributed my air of independence and frugality to being Scottish (and I'm sure some of that is true), but now, in thinking back, I believe I must give some credit to Auntie Joyce. You see, there was a small corner store a half block away from where we all lived, and she would send me there with a nickel – by myself at the age of five – and let me buy candy.



Thinking back, I'm sure she was secretly watching me from the neighbor's yard, especially when I crossed the street.

When I returned from the store, Auntie Joyce would have me account for what I was able to purchase with my nickel. Back then candy was much cheaper and one could actually come back with a fair amount of it for five cents.

We'd sit on the porch swing and go through my purchases while her brogue filled my ears – and my spirit. Having no other children around, my age, Auntie Joyce was my best friend.

The Dahlers eventually moved away and I received my next best friend as a gift. Her name was Junie, because she became mine in June.

I wish I could take credit for the drawing above. It reminds me so much of me and Junie, yet is simply a redrawing of a 1937 print.

Once I began attending our Irish-Catholic parochial school, I was surrounded by names like McMichael, McCaslin, Maloney, Downey, Donahue, Dominessy, Walsh, Craig, Carnegie, Mackenzie, and more. Even our only non-nun teacher was named Miss McGinty.

Not having anyone point all this out to me, I developed an unspoken, and really unrealized love for the Irish lilt and Celtic music. And my father's McQuiston family (Co Antrim and Co Londonderry) and McGonnell family (Co Tyrone) provided plenty of music, mostly led by many family fiddlers.

As a teen, folk music was just coming into fashion and Tommy Makem and the Clancy Brothers led the pack for me, introduced to me, of course, by my Scottish-Irish buddy who was probably no more aware of his roots than I was.

It took awhile to realize this was the very same music my own family had played for all my born years. One of my uncles had started music sessions the same year I was born, which lasted until I was twenty-one.

When I did finally jump ship to rock and roll it was to the Beatles and other UK rock groups.

After being introduced to a book which told of 10,000 family members, and my link to the Lords of the Isles, Scotland and Ireland, I began studying my family's history over the next few decades, and wound up writing on the web, for Highlander magazine, and for the Scotch-Irish Society of the USA newsletter.

I eventually traded in my rock n' roll shoes to join first one and then another Celtic band, performing at many Highland Games and Irish Fests over the last decade. I spent my spare time researching and writing about the Celts, which, of course, led to the Celtic Guide.

Gradually, I came to realize that it was my little island of Celtic culture, during my youth, that kept alive, in my soul, the seed for a final realization that I was in fact part of a vast Celtic world – a sea kingdom spanning all the seas of the world.

I've traveled to Scotland three times, covering most of the country except the Aberdeen area, plus most of the out islands and the borders – all places I hope to someday see. I even conducted a tour for five family members back in 2005 as we raced across our 'homeland' like eager little children running for the Christmas tree.

I've been to Northern Ireland where my Scottish family had taken root and established the largest Presbyterian congregation in all of Irish history, the McQuiston Church of Belfast.

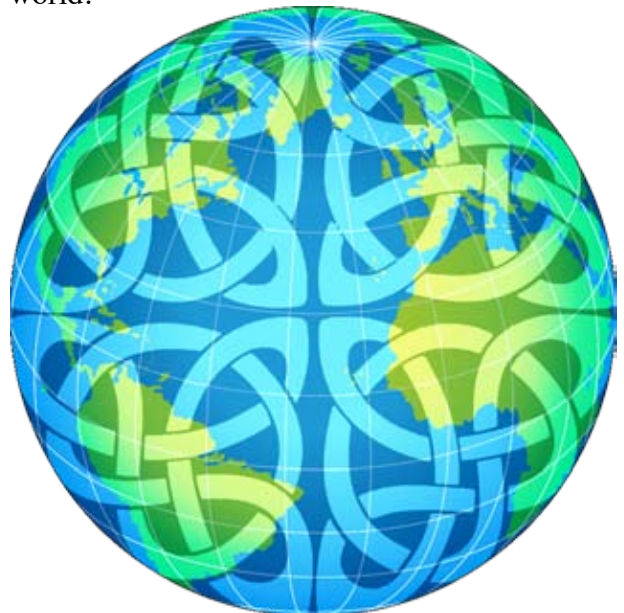
I've visited Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, so incredibly Celtic, and with music everywhere . . . beautiful music, beautiful land.

I've visited the Zurich museum, which features a vast collection of ancient Alpine-Celtic artifacts, and made side trips to Celtic-founded cities like Munich and Milan.

Wales, and perhaps the Isle of Man, Brittany and Cornwall still await my eager visits.

Not meaning to sound self-serving, my point is that I simply did not know what I was a part of, and never could have dreamed where I'd take it. Through my writings, my music, and my travels, I've met so many fans of Celtic culture, and of so many persuasions.

No longer part of a small island, I am happy to say I now feel truly part of one big Celtic world.



Special announcement!

We recently asked our canine friend, Obie, if he would consider becoming the official mascot of the Celtic Guide, and he said “Yes.”

Obie began his journey to super-stardom as a cover model for an earlier Guide. Once he began showing up as a regular Facebook feature, he gained fans from around the world.

It is likely no other dog has visited as many Celtic ruins as this Deerhound.

Obie lives in Ballincollig, Co. Cork, Ireland, with his agent and photographer, Liam O Shea.

We never thought we’d grow to the point of having, or needing a mascot, but we just

couldn’t resist asking. Last month, we ran our first “Postcards from Obie” feature, followed by another this month (shown below). This will be a regular feature, now, for Celtic Guide visitors to look forward to, as they wonder -

“Where in the world is Obie?”

Obie has his own pin-up calendar now, and who knows what’s next? . . . T-shirts, movie contracts, dinner with the Taoiseach?

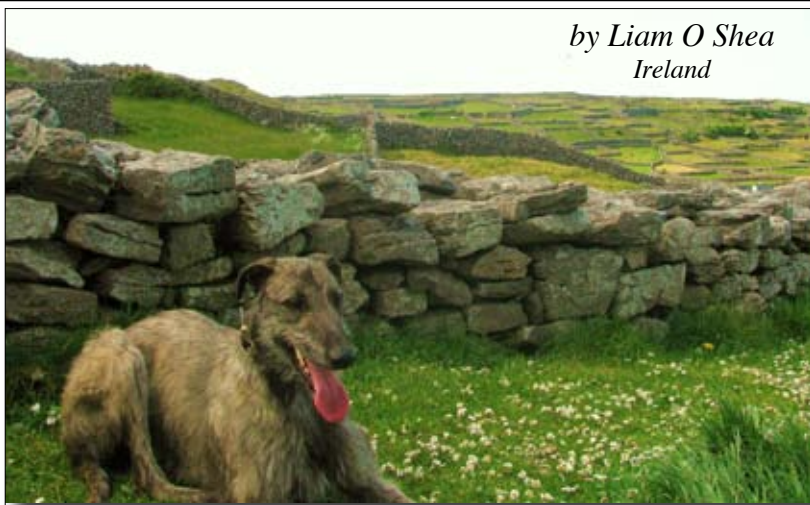
Check out the Celtic Guide Facebook site for more information on purchasing an Obie Calendar, and stay tuned to the Guide for more exciting adventures of this popular pooch.

POSTCARDS FROM OBIE

Here's Obie on Inisheer or Inis Oirr (in Irish), the smallest of the three islands that make up the Aran Islands off the coast from Co Galway. We accessed the islands from Co Clare via Doolin (famous for its Irish traditional music) on board

Doolin-to-Aran ferries, which was a short 30-min journey, taking in stunning sea views of the Cliffs of Moher. We chose Inis Oirr because it was the closest island and we were not sure how Obie would take to the water, but he was great; just another adventure.

The inhabitants mainly speak Gaelic but are also fluent in English, like myself. The islands are like stepping back in time with maze-like ancient walls covering them. You will also find Bronze Age and Iron Age forts on the islands, which are some of the oldest known archaeological remains in Ireland. You can hire bikes once you arrive, to tour about, but we chose to stroll. The island are also known for their diverse plant and animal life due to the unusual temperature there. The Aran Islands have the longest growing season in Ireland and the UK. Whichever island you choose to visit, you will not be disappointed. I highly recommend you take in the boat tour of the Cliffs of Moher on your return trip to the mainland.



*by Liam O Shea
Ireland*

Belgium!

... part deux

by Victoria Roberts
USA



Gravensteen Castle

EDITOR’S NOTE: According to Wikipedia “The general consensus among linguists is that the ethnic name Belgae comes from the Proto-Celtic root **belg-* or **bolg-* meaning “to swell (particularly with anger/battle fury).” Victoria presents part “deux” of her trip to the ancient country of Belgium, and to the city of Ghent. Located at the confluence of the River Lys and the River Escaut, Ghent is criss-crossed by canals and waterways, giving it very much the feel of being an island.

In last month’s issue of the Celtic Guide, I shared my adventures to Antwerp, Belgium. This month, I’m proud to share my exciting trip to Ghent, Belgium.

Most tourists travel to northwest Belgium to visit Brugge (Venice of the North,) a city known for its canals and beauty, but when my sister found out Ghent had a castle built in 1100—we were so there.

You can’t have a sister who’s a historical romance author and not visit a castle. Seriously.

The mere thought of passing up such an opportunity was simply unfathomable.

We hopped on board the train from Antwerp and headed to Ghent. The architecture of the Antwerp train station was remarkable. I felt like I was in an episode of Harry Potter. All that was missing was the Hogwarts Express and snow. *“Anything from the trolley, dear?”*

My sister and I were lucky enough to sit with two elderly women on the way to Ghent. I’ve said this many times before, but my words are worth repeating. Our older generation holds so much knowledge and experience that I never pass up an opportunity to speak with them.

Both women were natives of Belgium and were just returning from a shopping spree in Antwerp. Remember from last month’s post, Antwerp was all about the fashion, the chocolate and the diamonds.

Even in their seventies, both women cycled everywhere, when they weren’t riding the train. That was another great perk about Belgium. The country was entirely flat.



Inside Gravensteen Castle

The women further explained they were retired but had made their livelihood from manufacturing. English was not a problem for either of the ladies, as they spoke the language fluently. Because Belgium is such a small country, the women indicated they spoke their native Flemish but also had to speak English and French or they'd never survive in their little corner of the world.

As soon as we departed the train and the lovely company, we took a taxi straight to Gravensteen Castle. Why play around, right? We knew where we wanted to go.

When we arrived at the castle, my jaw dropped. Formidable Gravensteen overlooked the entire city of Ghent. The castle was built in 1180 by Philip of Alsace and served as a seat to the counts of Flanders. From the battlements, you could feel history oozing through your veins.

The stone structure screamed nothing but wealth and power. Some may say the gray imposing castle looked grim, but I say

Gravensteen held inner secrets that I was dying to uncover.

I learned a lot about the castle from a canal boat tour that my sister and I took. Surprisingly, the biggest enemy of the counts of Flanders was the people of Ghent. I was a little caught off-guard by that statement because I had assumed that the power of the castle protected the people, but the citizens of Ghent had something else in mind. They viewed their town as an independent city and not under the direction of someone's particular realm. As a result, the people of Ghent often raised arms against the authority in the castle, even though they were invariably defeated.

That could be another reason for the battlements, turrets and the dreaded torture chamber that lay deep within the stone walls of Gravensteen. Oh, yes. There was a small guillotine, spiked iron collars, racks, branding irons and thumb screws.

I can't even begin to imagine what the prisoners went through—well, I can, but I



Gravensteen Castle view of Ghent

choose not to think about it. The dungeon was just as pleasant.

My sister and I eventually escaped unscathed, and I was glad to see she didn't want to throttle me because I took my time exploring the castle. Needless to say, I was intrigued, and apparently so was Hollywood. If you've been watching

"The White Queen" on STARZ, you might recognize the castle as one of the backdrops.

I hope you enjoyed my stories of historic Antwerp and Ghent. Belgium was definitely the trip of a lifetime. If given another opportunity, I'd definitely go back, but I hear Scotland calling my name. I think I need to answer soon.

VICTORIA ROBERTS
Author of Scottish Historical Romance

"One of the most exciting Highland romances I have read. Definitely worthy of five stars!"
—Night Owl Reviews TOP PICK

"This book captivates the reader immediately"
—RT Book Reviews

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STAFFA

AND FINGAL'S CAVE

by James McQuiston
USA

I like to tell how I once visited the Giant's Causeway, on the rugged Antrim coast of Northern Ireland, and how there were 40,000 six-sided stones piled atop each other, there, in varying degrees of height, though I didn't actually count them all; I just read the brochure.

The legend is that these stones were caused by volcanic activity, but we all know the 'truth' is that two giants, one from Scotland, named Fingal, and another from Ireland, named Finn MacCool, used to walk across the causeway of stones to fight with each other.

I stood at the 'Irish' end of the causeway but always wondered where the other end came up in Scotland. Then, just recently, I put two-and-two together and figured that a similar natural phenomenon is apparent on the island of Staffa and also located there is a cave named Fingal's Cave. So I must be on the right track!

There are actually three islands off the coast of Scotland that have similar volcanic . . . err, I mean gigantic stones. But Staffa is the one with Fingal's Cave, so I'm focusing on that one, especially since it's very name comes from the Norse word for stave or pillar.

About six miles west of the Isle of Mull, Staffa's highest point is 138 feet above sea level. However, this hasn't, in any way, protected it from major winter sea storms, and so no one lives on the barren island.

The isle was gifted to the National Trust for Scotland, in 1986, by Jock Elliot, Jr. in honor of his wife. The trust then bestowed on her the honorary title of "Steward of Staffa."

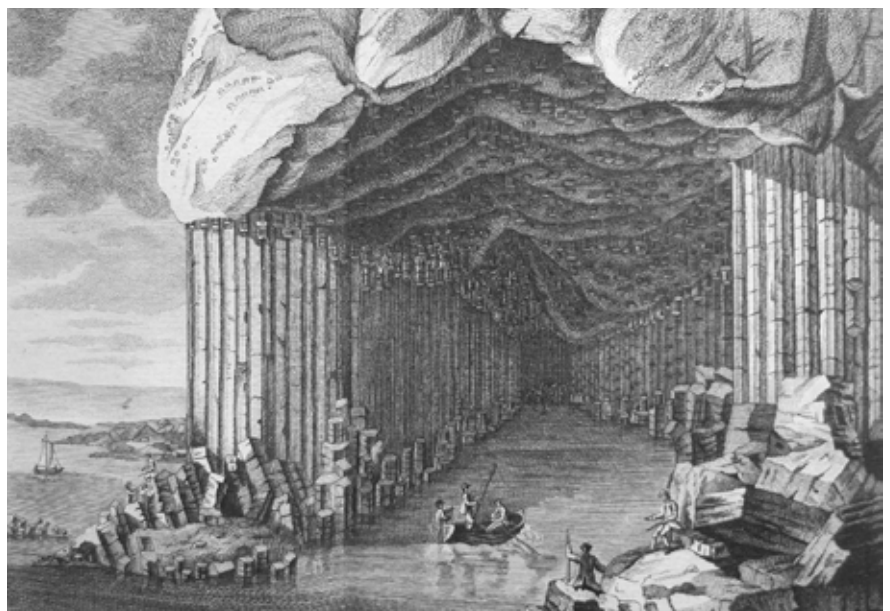
Previous to this, Staffa was often in the hands of members of the MacDonald Clan. It has been called the 8th greatest natural wonder of Britain. This is partly due to Fingal's Cave, a wonder

that has brought many an illustrious visitor to Staffa's shores, and which helped cause Felix Mendelssohn to write his 'Hebrides Overture' inspired by the sound of the waves hitting the large cliff walls and caves of the island.

Before and after Mendelssohn's visit, many a well-known writer or member of royalty made the trip to Staffa. This includes Sir Walter Scott, John Keats, Jules Verne, William Wordsworth, David Livingstone, Robert Louis Stevenson, Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and Sir Joseph Banks, who coined the name 'Fingal's Cave'.

Banks named the cave after the hero of an epic poem by 18th-century Scots poet-historian James Macpherson. Sir Joseph Banks was a famous botanist and naturalist who had accompanied Captain James Cook on his first voyage for the Royal Navy, which took him around the Horn of Africa to Tahiti, New Zealand and Australia. So Banks' naming of the cave was taken seriously by folks of the day and it has stuck for a couple hundred years.

In past centuries, Scots have tried to populate the island but the winter storms make that a treacherous undertaking, and so Staffa remains an exciting and enigmatic destination for adventurers interested in witnessing, firsthand, a natural scene not to be matched.



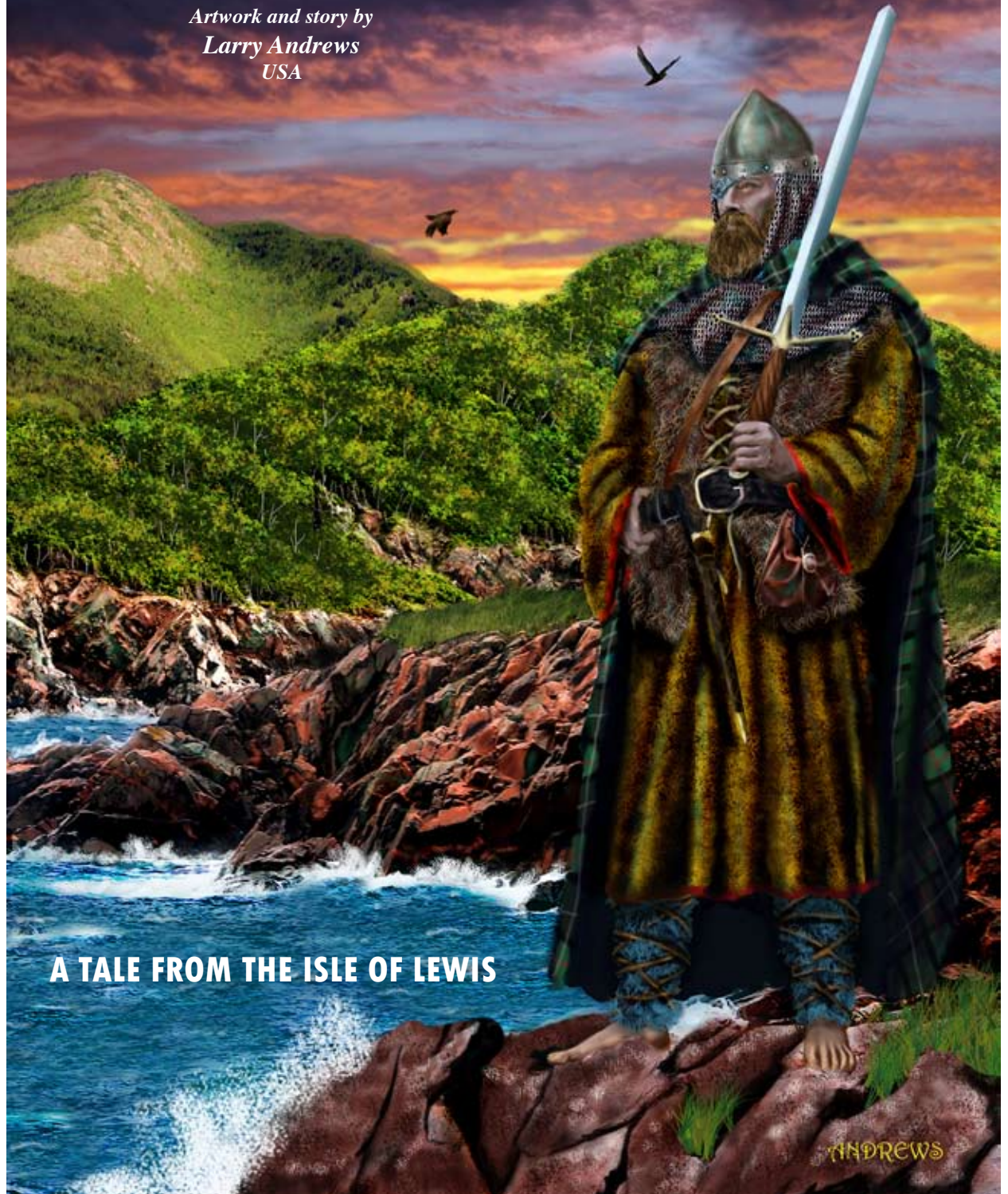
1772 engraving of a visit to Fingal's Cave on Staffa

DONALD CAM AND GOW BAN

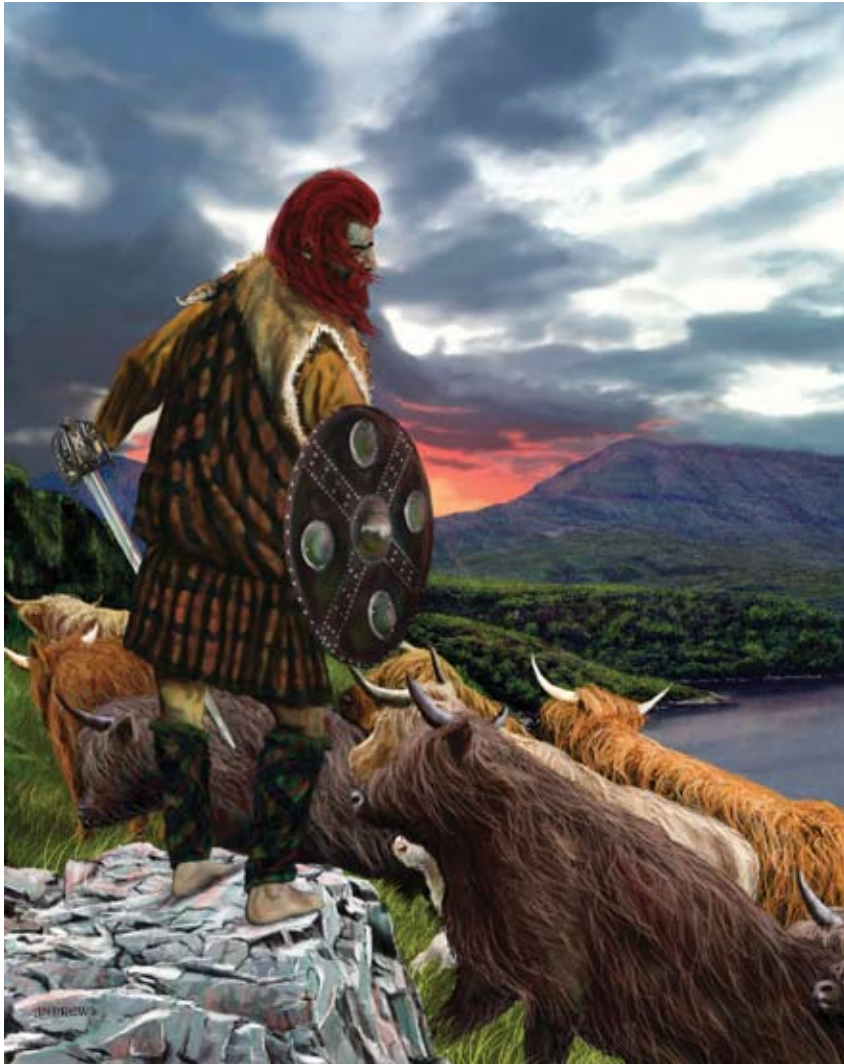
THE FAIR HAired SMITH OF KNEEP

Circa 1560-1640

*Artwork and story by
Larry Andrews
USA*



A TALE FROM THE ISLE OF LEWIS



years running, those terms had not been met by the temperamental Donald, who seemed always to fail to pay the smith's price. One day, an unfortunate horse of Donald Cam's took a deadly fall from a cliff. The MacAulay, thinking he was clever, had the dead horse's head boiled, skinned, and delivered to the smith.

Gow Ban was very big in build but not so much a fool as to match his size. He set that head aside, having it dried, cured and kept. A little later, Donald sent his servants with several pieces of iron to Gow Ban for fixing. Still fuming from his poor pay, the blacksmith lumped all the iron bits together, binding them into one clump. He then told the servants to take that heavy lump of iron back to their leader and tell him the smith would not fix as much

Far famed among the long isles of Lewis was the wild warrior Donald Cam MacAulay. A first rate reiver and rogue, long lived in Lewis lore as the strong arm of Clan MacAulay. Noted for his need of another eye, Donald was nicknamed Cam, which is ever known to mean squint or single-eyed. Now in height, Donald had always been the least of his daunting brothers, but the swordsman well made up for that slight with a dangerous temper. "*Cha robh cam nach robh crosda*" is a good old Gaelic proverb that states, "Whoever is blind of one eye is often ill natured."

Donald Cam had a smith called Gow Ban, or the 'fair smith,' from Kneep. Gow Ban was always to be paid the beast's head whenever a beef cow was slain for cooking. For seven

as a fitting until the due for seven years was delivered.

Knowing full well the famous, terrible temper of Donald Cam, Gow Ban prepared for battle. Now it is true the giant smith was far famed for his great strength, as well as a fearsome warrior; however, he knew that no clansman had come out the better when matched against Donald Cam's sword song. So the smith, as a precaution, set to heating and hammering out a hot, hard six-foot iron pole to poke with. As sure as great sinners greet Satan, to the smith's house came brave Donald Cam, fitted for battle.

Gow Ban went out to face the furious swordsman and put his long poker to good use. He pressed hard in on proud Donald's defense, poking fast with that hot-ended iron prod.

The MacAulay swordsman many times put by this poking piece of heated iron only to find it facing him yet again. It was well and good for the bold Gow Ban that his strength did not fail him, for dauntless was the deadly swordsman at that play. Donald fought with wild fire flaming his hard heart but could find no pace to close in on that menacing metal pole. In due time, the hard-headed clansman came to some calm, and disappointed, he turned and walked home.

During the next day, Donald returned to the smith's house and paid Gow Ban's price which had been long past due. Delighted, the fair smith invited Donald Cam to dinner on the morrow. He then had a big kettle of beef and mutton brewed, and next to that bowl, he bravely had that horse head boiled. Donald came to dine and was served whole heaps of mutton and beef for the feasting. The tempestuous MacAulay gobbled down good gulps of the meal then called to his new found friend, "This beef and mutton is far too fatty for me, good friend, heap some of that cow's head here."

Gow Ban, glowing in his clever game, gave his hot-tempered friend the horse head instead. Donald gobbled down the horse meat, wholeheartedly helping himself to seconds. The fair smith asked his guest how he liked the head. Thinking it was the cow heads he had recently given his host, Donald happily replied, "Salty and savory, it is delicious to dine on." Gow Ban grinned and told his guest, "Well, I am proud that you would like it for that is the fine head you sent me from a few days past." Upon hearing this, hot-tempered Donald Cam headed home for his cold steel. Gow Ban knew well what was coming and so put his poker back to hot coals to ready for the coming fray.

Dauntless in his wild temper, Donald came yet another time to the smith's home, hardhearted, with sword in hand. Those two titans took to blows and things quickly went from rough to worse. Donald proved smart on his feet and faster with his sword, but Gow Ban's hot poker again put MacAulay to his paces. Fearlessly proud,

Donald fought with the fair smith, trying to pass that heated poker and nearly flying into flames from the hot touch of Gow Ban's sword tester. With good reason, the stiff-necked Donald came to a new point of view.

The epic fight ended and the bold MacAulay, bearing no grudge to the big man for bettering him not once but twice, instead chose to admire the smith's adventurous nature. From that time forward Donald found the big smith's help whenever ferocious fighting was foretold. At any rate, these two clansmen became fine friends after their famously fought conflict

These two deliverers of fatal fates frequently found business on the Islands of Flannan. On one occasion, when those lions had left Lewis, some short-sighted Morrison clansmen made a dangerous decision to lift Donald's cattle. Blue blades ready, Morrison raiders in broad-bottomed birlinns arrived at Uig Mor. That site was Donald's good grazing ground and not too long a row from Ness.

DONALD CAM AND THE MORRISON RAIDERS

The Morrison reivers had planted a secret peeper to discover when Donald and Gow Ban would be gone for a spell. When word was sent back, many Morrison sea raiders came in force to Uig Mor; one and all well ready for slaughter. However, there were not enough herdsman guarding MacAulay's Highland cows and boldly the beasts were taken without a bow being bent. They drove his cattle, bellwether and all, back to the green grounds by Dun Carloway with not a hand raised to hinder them.

Now these Morrison raiders, pleased with their prize, returned to a keep high on a west Lewis hill called Dun Carloway. Then the proud Ness clansmen, wild with victory, safe in their strong stone tower, and making the most of that loot, began to feast. With doom far from their thoughts, many Morrison men drank in glory and gobbled good wine well past midnight. Outside that Dun, Donald Cam's fine shaggy

cows, indifferent to the new grazing grounds, noiselessly ate their fill. While that day's light dimmed, those Morrison cattle collectors brazenly drank deep and dined well on the devil's beef.

Donald Cam and the mightily-muscled Gow Ban returned to the sandy shores of Uig Mor. There, the bold clansmen were met by wild wailing wives who excitedly gave evidence regarding the Morrison reivers raid and Donald Cam's cattle lost. At once, the temperamental Highland hero rallied his clansmen and made to counter raid. War-ready raiders rose to that clansman's call. Freebooters, unaccustomed to feathery beds, bent backs and rowed across Loch Roag with revenge high in their hearts.

Like stalking stags, the MacAulays moved steadily and stealthily over glen and green hill until those clansmen had come in sight of Dun Carloway. There, the Highlanders found Donald Cam's shaggy herd, grazing on the grounds round that keep. They also heard their eternal enemies hooting and howling, wild with strong wine.

Perhaps feeling too secure, those plunderers left but one wretched Morrison warrior on watch. The avenging MacAulay Highlanders decided to hold up for the night out on a distant hill. They would wait to strike the next dawning day, after their sottish enemies were wine nourished and weary from a full night's drunk fest.

Early the next misty morning, Donald Cam and Gow Ban again stealthily scouted the grounds of that Morrison stronghold. Near their enemies keep they found a fire on which bubbled and boiled a large cast-iron kettle. Within that huge hot pot was a whole half cow's carcass cooking. The breakfast brew was being watched by a single hung-over Highlander who also guarded the only doorway into that Morrison Dun.

Silent as wolves following a stag in the forest, Donald and Gow Ban closed in on that lone clansman. Soft footed and fast to their target, the two quickly overwhelmed the Morrison guard. Gow Ban gave the knave a good knock on the

noggin which left that watchmen locked limp in the iron grip of the smith.

A wicked plan then came clear to the pondering Donald Cam. He asked his big friend to drown the watchman in that boiling kettle once the cooked cow was removed. The MacAulay took that cooking carcass from the broad bubbling bowl while the mighty smith spun that limp watchman round as easily as turning a peat shovel from head to handle. Perhaps too soon, the poor fellow recovered from his head hammering. That unlucky plunderer found himself right side down and fixed fast in the powerful grip of Gow Ban.

The blurry-eyed reiver, more than a little too late, remembered that excessive wine while on watch was an unwise way to tend to your task. Before the dazed guard could cry out, Gow Ban gave him a deadly dip deep into that boiling brew. Silent, yet wildly twitching like a fish tossed from sea to shore, the hapless Highlander boiled alive head first in that bubbling basin. The cooked beef taken from the killing kettle was fitted into a folded plaid and brought back to the MacAulay war band for breakfast.

When his men were well fed, MacAulay made fast for the sleeping rogues kept in that keep. Gow Ban was tasked with taking the Dun door and wedging it closed tight. Then Donald Cam took the two dirks he always went about with and fixed them, one after the other, like steps into the turf wrapped round Dun Carloway. In this manner the malevolent MacAulay climbed to the top of that circular tower. While the bold Donald was making a steel stairway, his Islanders were put to picking and bundling dried heather from a nearby hill.

Still inside the silently sieged keep, Morrison clansmen slept balmy in their beds. Donald climbed close to the top of Dun Carloway and pulled away the final top rock from that roof. The wily MacAulay then had the heather tossed up to him. He dropped those bundles in a pile through that hole to the top floor of the Dun. Next, a burning stick, taken from beneath

the watchman's kettle, was also tossed to him. Donald Cam put fire to the heather he placed in that keep and quickly it went to flickering. Dun Carloway's roof filled fast with flames, and soon after, the top of the keep was burning bright.

Stored in the Dun were dried hides, grass, and grains, all of which quickly caught fire, burning and bellowing black smoke. Then, blazing bits began dropping down between the floors. When the decks and wood beams went to flame, red flickering ruin fully filled that doomed Dun. Like a great chimney, hell's heat and choking smoke came pouring from the top of that keep.

The hungover Highlanders within those Dun walls woke, gagging and gulping for good air. Many Morrisons made for the Dun door, but try as they might, the wedged way to life would not be moved. Men fell fast to the floor desperately sucking at the ground, seeking even a little air for their lacking lungs. Some sorrowful clansmen, who were moments before roaring with wild

rage, now screamed as they started cooking in that stone cauldron.

Many bold men fell, unable to fill their lungs with anything but thick fumes. Friends, resolved to their fiery fate, drove long dirks deep into their eye sockets rather than roast alive. Others, already burning, clawed the nails from their fingers trying to find a way out. Not a man made it from that burning Dun of doom. The Carloway keep became a ready-made cairn, a final hellish home for those hapless clansmen.

Donald Cam and his crew left those fear-filled clansmen of Dun Carloway to face their fiery fate. He calmly took his herd toward home, glad in his glory that there were fewer Morrisons today than yesterday. The bright burning Dun fell, utterly wrecked and in ruin. Those avenging MacAulays, happy with the fate of their foes, collected Donald's cattle and crossed Loch Roag, returning most of the shaggy beasts back to Uig Mor.



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The Isles of Scilly

by Pollyanna Jones
England

Lost Peaks of Lyonesse?

Twenty-eight miles off the coast of Cornwall, the Scilly Isles rise above the waves of the Atlantic. Lying southwest from the tip of Land's End, they are counted as part of the county of Cornwall, one of the Celtic realms of Britain. The isles are steeped in history, having been inhabited since the Stone Age. Myth tells of a lost kingdom beneath the waves off Cornwall's coast; could the Scilly Isles be the remains of the legendary kingdom of Lyonesse?

The Scilly Isles consist of around 140 islands, including five larger ones which are inhabited; St Mary's, Tresco, St Agnes, Bryher, and St Martin's. The islands benefit from a mild climate with palms and tropical plants featuring in many gardens. From time to time though, the islands suffer from great Atlantic gales. However these same sea winds mean that it is rare for frost and snow to appear, and this makes it possible for the islanders to grow crops that would be sown much later in the year on the mainland. The islands are famed for their wildlife and are a haven for birdwatchers, as well as being one of the last places in Europe to see an elm forest after Dutch Elm disease caused mass destruction of this tree in the 1970s on the mainland and on the continent. The islands can be reached by ferry in a two hour crossing from Penzance on mainland Cornwall.

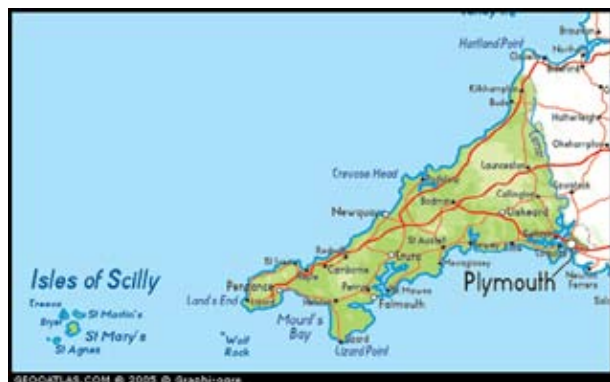


Image showing the Isles of Scilly, and Cornwall, the most south-westerly point of the British Isles. [1]

But what of Lyonesse?

Lord Tennyson famously wrote about this mysterious land in his Arthurian epic, *Idylls of the King*, describing the land of Lyonesse as the site of Arthur's final battle with his rival Mordred;

Then rose the King
And moved his host by night
And ever pushed Sir Mordred
League by league,
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse--
A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of
Forgotten peoples dwelt,
And the long mountains ended in a coast
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea."

Mythology tells of this land being positioned off the coast of Cornwall, with many placing this as being lands lost between the mainland and the Isles of Scilly. Some even speculate that these islands and Seven Stones Rock are all that remains of Lyonesse, being the hilltops of a long drowned world.

William of Worcester wrote an itinerary in the fifteenth-century *Itinerary* and described "foods and fields and 140 parochial churches, all now submerged, between the Mount and the Isles of Scilly".

In 1584, the topographer John Norden, named this undersea realm in his *Description of Cornwall*: "It is left vnto this age by tradition, that a great parte of this Promontorie is swallowed vp of the deuowring sea, namelye the Countrey of Lioness and other Lande sometime lying between the present Landes end and the Iles of Scillye."

The sea levels of the Scilly Isles certainly have changed over the years, with tantalising

remains beneath the waters visible around the coast. Neolithic burial mounds decorate the landscape, and evidence of ancient peoples can be seen when the tide is low. The Romans wrote as late as the fourth century, how the Scilly Isles consisted of one main island, and during the strong tides of the spring and autumn equinoxes, it is still possible to walk from isle to isle over the flats revealed at low tide.



Chambered Cairn on Sampson Isle [2]

The antiquary William Borlase, studied remains on the Scilly Islands, in particular lines of stones running from the shore in Samson Flats of the Isle of Samson. He wrote, in 1753, that he believed they were manmade. Later studies of the site, in the 1920s concluded that these were field boundaries from the Bronze Age, and this evidence added to the belief that land once stretched out much further than it does today.



*An aerial photograph of the underwater archaeological features of the Samson Flats.
Image courtesy of CISMAS [3]*

Modern oceanographers have suggested that the sea level must have risen more than 4m in the last 3,000 years and suggest that the remains off the shore of Samson were instead fish traps, as these changes in sea level do not match with more widely-known sea level changes in the British Isles. Yet another factor that comes into play is submergence. As the glaciers of the last Ice Age melted, the southern coast of Britain started to sink, a phenomenon that is still happening today.[4]



Image shows European Land Mass, up to 15,000 years ago. The lands off the coast of Cornwall would have been above sea level at this point. Image courtesy of Wikipedia [5]

We need stronger evidence to pinpoint this lost land of Lyonesse on the map, and prove indeed that it did exist. Richard Carew wrote in detail in 1586 [6] about a geographical location for this lost land: "... that such a Lioness there was, these proofs are yet remaining. The space between the Land's End and the Isles of Scilly, being about thirty miles, to this day retaineth that name, in Cornish Lethowsow, and carreith continually an equal depth of forty or sixty fathom (a thing not usual in the sea's proper dominion), save that about the midway there lieth a rock, which at low water discloseth his head... (named) by the English, Seven-Stones."

This account of Lethowsow seemed attestable by the accounts of local fishermen.

Around Seven-Stones Rock was an area which the Cornish named Tregva, which means in their native tongue, “Dwelling”. Stories were told of how fishermen would catch pieces of doors or windows in their nets and on their fishing hooks, proof surely of a civilisation gone beneath the waves.

More evidence of changes in sea level appear in Mount’s Bay, near Penzance, where the remains of a submerged forest can be seen at low tide. The Cornish name for St Michael’s Mount which rises sharply up from the bay suggests a different view to the one which greets the modern visitor. “Carrack Looz en Cooz” translates as “the grey rock in the wood”.

There is also an account from the 1860s by Robert Hunt who described how as a schoolboy, he would wander out into the bay during low tide with his school friends to see the petrified forest in Mount’s Bay, and gather leaves and beechnuts embedded in the sand. Whether nuts and leaves remained by the nineteenth-century or not, to this day, pieces of wood and tree stumps can still be seen at the site now known as Longrock Foreshore.

It is in legend however, that we hit a problem. Lethowsow and Lyonesse may have been brought over by the Benedictine monks that settled in a monastery on St Michael’s Mount. These monks had strong links with their French mother-house, Mont-St-Michele, in Finistère, Brittany. Breton myth tells of a drowned city in the Bay of Douarnenez, named Ker-Îs.

The Breton tale describes how the city was destroyed by a great flood, with only one survivor, King Gradlon, escaping the deluge on his horse. The Cornish tale describes how a man named Trevilian escaped the flooding of Lethowsow by galloping on a white horse ahead of the waves. One should note that “Finistère” means “Land’s End”.

The Breton tale describes how Ker-Îs would one day return. The first person to see the cathedral spire emerge from beneath the waves and hear the bells ringing, would become king

of the city. Lyonesse too, is said to one day reappear, and there are accounts in its mythology of how the church bells of the lost land can be heard ringing from beneath the waves.

It seems that these are both regional variations of the same story.



Trevillion flees the Flood [7]

A final factor to consider is that medievalists believe that the identification of Lethowsow as Lyonesse, sprang from a mistake. In Arthurian romance, the hero Tristan was the nephew of King Mark, and the lover of his uncle’s younger wife, Iseult. The earliest versions of *Tristan and Iseult* call his native land “Leonois”, the Old French name for Lothian, Scotland. Tristan himself bears a Pictish royal name. He was perhaps a Pictish prince of the eighth-century, whose story was drawn south when Loenois was confused with Leonois in Brittany; the Breton district of Cornouaille was then assumed to be Cornwall.

Another reason for locating Tristan in Cornwall may have been the Drustan Stone, a listed ancient monument presently standing beside the A3082 leading into Fowey. According to its Latin inscription, it originally marked the grave of “Drustanus, son of Cunomorus”. “Cunomorus” might be Cynfawr, the sixth-century British ruler of Dumnonia (which

included Cornwall). Though sometimes regarded as the grave of the legendary Tristan, the conflict with the Scottish evidence has not been satisfactorily explained.[8]

Whilst there is unmistakable evidence that there was once a land between mainland Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, it is highly unlikely that it was swallowed by a sudden flood.

Geological and archaeological evidence have given weight to the tales told by fishermen, and are likely to have influenced further elaboration in the legends written to explain their existence. In the future, we are likely to see further exploration of the underwater sites between the Isles of Scilly, and the prospect of finding remains of sites unspoiled by the plough or the hands of looters is quite exciting.

It is unlikely that the Scilly Isles are the hills of the lost land of Lyonesse. However, it gives the area beneath the waters notoriety in Celtic

mythology, and illustrates how through folk memory, geographical changes have been noted by local people throughout the ages.

[1]<http://geoatlas.com>

[2]<http://www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=7617>

[3]<http://www.cismas.org.uk/samson-flats-survey.php>

[4]University of Durham, & <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/earthnews/6226537/England-is-sinking-while-Scotland-rises-above-sea-levels-according-to-new-study.html>

[5]<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Weichsel-W%C3%BCrm-Glaciation.png>

[6]Camden's Latin "*Britannia*"

[7]*Legend Land*, Vol. 2 (1922) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20249/20249-h/20249-h.htm>

[8]*The Lore of the Land* by Westwood & Simpson



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Henceforth Tales

by Cass and Deborah Wright
Bellows Falls, VT, USA

MacLeod

Anyone who has attended any Scottish Festivals or Highland Games regularly, or frequently, knows that at the center of the thrilling spiral of piping and pageantry, song and dance, heavy athletics and heady swirl of pomp and color, lies the beating heart of all such events, the trusty Clan Village - that intriguing encampment where surnames get translated, Gaelic and Latin deciphered, tartan spoken, heraldry unfurled, and the tapestried-lives of legendary forbearers are merrily loomed anew, weaving modern generations into the promise of legacies woven in blood.

We who've enjoyed hours of enlightenment over the years in these Villages have doubtless noted the often fraternal, usually humorous, sometimes competitive interaction between the hosts of all those different Clan tents, and how this banter and badinage between these neighbors predictably forms a latticework of ribald humor and rough camaraderie.

One can expect to hear the Murrays referred to as Clan Money, while the MacGregors are queried about Peter Rabbit sightings; the Scotts and the Elliots chide each other about who were better cattle thieves, the Grahams get scolded for ruining that nice wall the Romans built, and someone will always ask the Kennedys for their roasted bishop recipe.

The MacNeills listen to bad pirate impressions, the Sinclairs get heckled about Knight Templar financing, the MacIntyres are kidded about septs like Dunlop and Goodyear, and everybody

will poke their tongues at the mighty but maligned Campbells.

Yet there's one clan tent that is always the cherished target of neighbors and visitors alike, yet shows a surplus of good humor and tolerance and hospitality to all - and they are the MacLeods.

Want to call their most popular tartan the "Loud MacLeod"? Go ahead, they've heard that a lot, and they might even remark that they call it the Proud MacLeod.

Want to quiz them about the strange pronunciation of their name? They'll guide you through that, even smile and nod when you mention the spelling of that old TV series with Dennis Weaver.

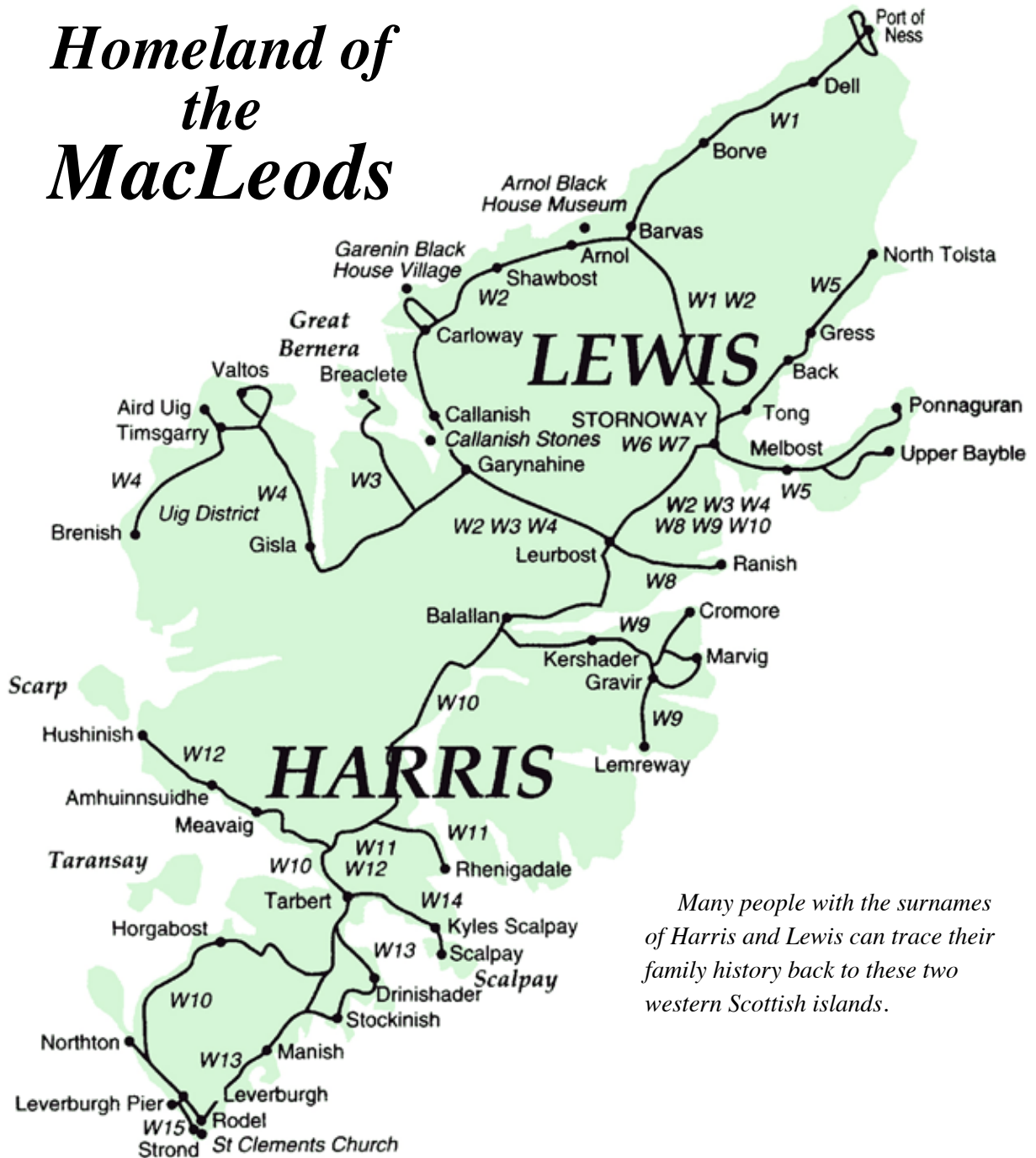
Can't resist quoting some French-accented dialogue from the original "Highlander" movie? They will probably just laugh politely, then tell you about some real 16th-century warriors with truer accents.

Insist on razzing them with a silly Mick Jagger lyric, and they'll join in and sing along. After all, they can afford to be assertively



MacLeod Tartan and Shield

Homeland of the MacLeods



Many people with the surnames of Harris and Lewis can trace their family history back to these two western Scottish islands.

pleasant and well-mannered, for their heritage was writ large in fire, steel and gold across the breadth of the Hebrides, and their family saga is the history of the Isles themselves.

Looking back to their origins, one word thunders forth, bristling in chainmail: VIKINGS! But with that word comes a little mystery, borne along with those fearsome dragon ships,

namely, from Norway or from Sweden? Many rush to designate Norway as the obvious choice, as most of the MacLeods' earliest occupation of the Isles were on the Outer Hebrides islands of Harris and Lewis, destinations certainly a shorter sail from southeastern Norway than anywhere on the Swedish coast . . . but records show immediate schemes to occupy those isles

with permanent settlements, and early plans drafted for the building sites of castles, cultural hallmark more of Swedes in that era than of the Western Norse.

True, also, were factors like the rapidity with which the Scandinavian dialect of the Outer Islesmen began to meld with the neighboring language of the Dalriadan Scots, whose original tongue was a branch of Ulster Gaelic, and the immediate efforts of the northmen of Lewis to breed and increase their flocks and herds of sheep, goats and cattle, rather than simply slaughter them for provender, or barter them for cloth or iron ore.

Still, balancing out the Norwegian side of the scale, beyond mere proximity, were the Islesmen's predilection for arming and armoring every adult male in their society, their devotion to inter-island raiding, and the continual presence among them of unique canine companions, a compact, fiercely loyal breed of dog known as Norwegian Elkhounds, though in reality they aren't hounds at all, but rather a spitz type, like Samoyeds and Malamutes. Often referenced as "100 pounds of fight in a fifty pound sack", they were popular multi-purpose dogs throughout Scandinavia in the past 800 years, though seldom if ever in great numbers outside of medieval settlements in Norway, originally having been bred to track and challenge bears, and culled for a body size perfect for lying between rowing benches.

So, we've established that the MacLeod's Viking genesis is likely Norwegian, but from whence came it - Norway, or from olden times on the Isle of Man?

Popular belief maintains that their progenitor was a warrior named either Loyd or Leod (similar to the Norse suffix "led", indicating an adventurer, or wayfarer, as in the name of the warlord Somerled), and that he was a son or nephew of Olave the Black, the Last Norse King of Man. This person appears nowhere in the scrupulously kept annals of the Manx kings, but exists so solidly amidst the tales of the Clan that he receives nearly universal credence, being

accepted even by Scotland's premiere heraldry authority, the Lord Lyon, King of Arms.

However his name was spelt or pronounced, at some time in the mid 1200's Leod brought followers and kinsmen to the Isles of Lewis and Harris, deeding the larger isle, Lewis, to his younger son, Torquil, and the smaller (but arguably more strategic) isle, Harris, to his elder son and heir, Tormod, who would also inherit Leod's personal holdings at Glenelg, on the Kyle of Rhea straits, and most significantly, Dunvegan Castle at Dunvegan on the Isle of Skye, through his father's marriage to the daughter of the Steward of Skye.

In light of this division of land, it is easy to see how the kin of Tormod became the MacLeods of MacLeod and Harris, and how the kin of Torquil would distinguish themselves forever after as the MacLeods of Lewes (archaic sp.). It is also simple to appreciate how many Celts had infiltrated those bloodlines, as they not only legitimized their surname as "*mac Leod*", but also adopted the family nomens of *Siol Tormod* and *Siol Torcuil* ("*siol*", pronounced like shoal, being Gaelic for seed, was used popularly to denote large family groups).

Purportedly, a coin toss once prompted Tormod and his fighters to join the campaign of Robert the Bruce after Bannockburn, while Torquil remained on Lewis to hold the Outer Hebrides for his clan and the Lords of the Isles.

Despite these critical distinctions, the Clan has always been content to share a common heraldry, with one coat of arms, one war cry, and one battle standard, with their plant badge of juniper eternally green on their bunnets.

Interestingly, the central element on their clan crest is the head of a great black bull, framed by flags to the right and left, in tribute to Leod's alleged slaying of a wild black bull during his earliest adventures. The flags symbolize the separate houses of his two sons, and are surrounded by the motto HOLD FAST, doubtless alluding to their tenacious grip of their island homelands, a grip that was only

ever threatened to any great extent by one other clan, the dynastic MacDonalds.

Ever an ambitious people, the MacDonalds had decided since the days of Somerled that their Napoleonic zeal could only be gratified by the independent governance of the Isles of the Hebrides by a figure whom they were quick to lionize as the Lord of the Isles, properly viewed, during any particular era, as a peer of the King of the Scots, but never a subject thereto.

Initially, all of this was well within an acceptable, if not always favorable, adherence for the MacLeods, liking little of mainland politics, whether they sat their seats of baronial chieftainship at Assynt, or Glenelg, or Stornoway. But often it rankled them that the MacDonalds, those sons of Siol Cuinn who ruled from Isla and Kintyre, should treat the Lordship as though a familial legacy all their own, and after the blood-drenched fiasco of the Hebridean involvement at the Battle of Harlaw in 1411, the majority of the MacLeods began refusing to pledge any allegiance to the MacDonald Lordship. Unfortunately, this also put them on a new path of independent resistance to the Stewart Kings, who were perpetually sworn to break the defiance of the Hebridean chiefs, as well as initiating huge, new thundering feuds with the maritime MacDonald chieftains.

Over the next two centuries, what the MacLeods didn't have wrested away from them by brute force, they spent precious blood of clan, kith and kin to defend and hold. Still, they could arm almost as many fighters as could their rivals, and launch near as many birlinns and galleys just as swiftly, and best of all they had the virtually unassailable stronghold of Dunvegan, a true juggernaut among castles, perched like a crown of pure might on a windswept cliff where the northwesternmost Cuillins shoulder the North Atlantic.

Old Leod's last wife might have gifted him no sons, but she secured for his descendants an iron lock on the sea routes to Lewis! Even the vast holdings of Clan Donald through Sleat

and Armadale, on the eastern and southern portions of Skye, claiming as they did the swords of the warlike MacHughs and Uisdeans, failed to broach the invulnerability of "Dread Dunvegan".

To augment its immense worth, Alaisdair Crottach (Alaisdair the Hunchbacked), the 8th MacLeod chief, built the celebrated addition known as the Faerie Tower, assumably to house the Clan treasure known as the Faerie Flag, a device of mysterious origin, surviving into modern times as a carefully preserved remnant of tattered silk.



Photo of Faerie Flag from early 1920s.

Lore abounds among the seannachies about the origins and acquisition of this allegedly magical square of textile, but all kin agree that its presence on certain battlefields helped win key battles for the MacLeod forces, and that its value to their clan, and their nation, is beyond measure. Also housed at Dunvegan are Crottach's great broadsword, and "auld Rory Mor's cup," a giant drinking horn crafted

for Sir Rory Mor MacLeod of MacLeod, 16th chief, which birthed a ceremony still observed today, wherein each new Clan chief must drain its capacity of claret (over 3 pints) in one go, “without setting down or falling down”.



Another photo of the Faerie Flag from early 1920s along with Rory Mor's Horn, and Dunvegan Cup.

As for the river of blood spilt between the MacLeods and the MacDonalds, that continued as a ragged war of inter-island violence, sometimes involving forces clashing to wrest a keep or fortress from one clan to the other, sometimes involving putting entire communities to sword and torch, in order to avenge some wholesale slaughter elsewhere. Over a matter of decades, the MacLeods learned to entreat other like-minded clans who also opposed the MacDonalds, leading to temporary alliances with the Morrisons, MacKenzies, MacLeans, even the Campbells. These strategies of cooperation in warfare ultimately led to the master stroke of the aforementioned chief Alaisdair Crottach entering a covenant with no less than James V, a tactic that aided in the eventual success of breaking the power of the Lords of the Isles for good and all.

The rapport that grew between Crottach and James V leads to one of the Clan's fondest anecdotes; while dining together at the royal board one evening, the King pointed out to the chief an immense gold and crystal candelabra

glimmering away in the center of a long, polished mahogany table, and inquired if he possessed anything to match it. Crottach replied that he could put such splendor to shame, were His Majesty but to come visit at Dunvegan.

James took the challenge, and as a guest of the Chief was led after nightfall from the castle courtyard up through steep, narrow trails to a remote, flat-topped hill; guiding the King to the center of the pinnacle, Crottach gave a signal, and one hundred clansmen, surrounding them on the summit's edges and dressed in all their high Celtic finery, lit a torch apiece and held it aloft. “Now,” asked the Chief softly, as he turned his monarch about in a slow, gentle circle, “what think ye of MY table?”, and James V, eyes bright with awe, readily conceded that, for all his wealth, he'd nothing to match it.

So remember, when next you stroll through the fun and festivity of a clan village, keep sharp your eyes for that cheeriest of tartans, the one with the big, open sett on the sunny yellow background, and when you spot it, follow it right along to the tent it calls home . . . for as surely as the sun yields to starry nights over the shining strands of the Hebrides, those smiling MacLeods will make you feel at home, there, too!

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

What's an ex-pat Scot to do?

*Story and photos
by Alison MacRae
Canada*

I was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and moved to Canada when I was a teenager, in the 1960s. About six years ago my husband and I moved to his birth place, Hope Town, in the Gaspé Peninsula, which is the N.E. Province of Quebec.

The countryside here on the Gaspé Peninsula is breathtaking and living by the sea reminds me more and more of my homeland of Scotland – both lands bounded on three sides by the sea.

We have whales, seals, lobsters, shrimp and plenty of fish in the Bay of Chaleur. Fishing is a big part of life here, as it has been for centuries in Scotland, along with small time farming – all very similar to the Scots crofters of old.

Hope Town was established in 1775 by Duncan McRae and his wife Margaret Agnes McIntosh along with a friend, John Ross. The two men were soldiers from Scotland who had fought in the Battle of Quebec under General James Wolfe's army.

On my husband's side we have many Duncan MacRaes. Also, Margaret Agnes McIntosh could well have been an ancestor of mine, too, (I am still searching on this) as my grandmother, who was from Rockfield Village, Portmahomack, was a McIntosh. I feel like, now that I've started uncovering our Scots families in Canada, I could write a book. Instead, for now I will let my photographs of my new 'homeland' – Gaspé Peninsula – speak for themselves.



We start with a photo of a Red Squirrel, found in abundance across North America. A similar animal is on the endangered list in Scotland.



The Scottish Standard Flag flies above my house. It is supposed to be flown only when royalty is in residence. I fly it because I love it.



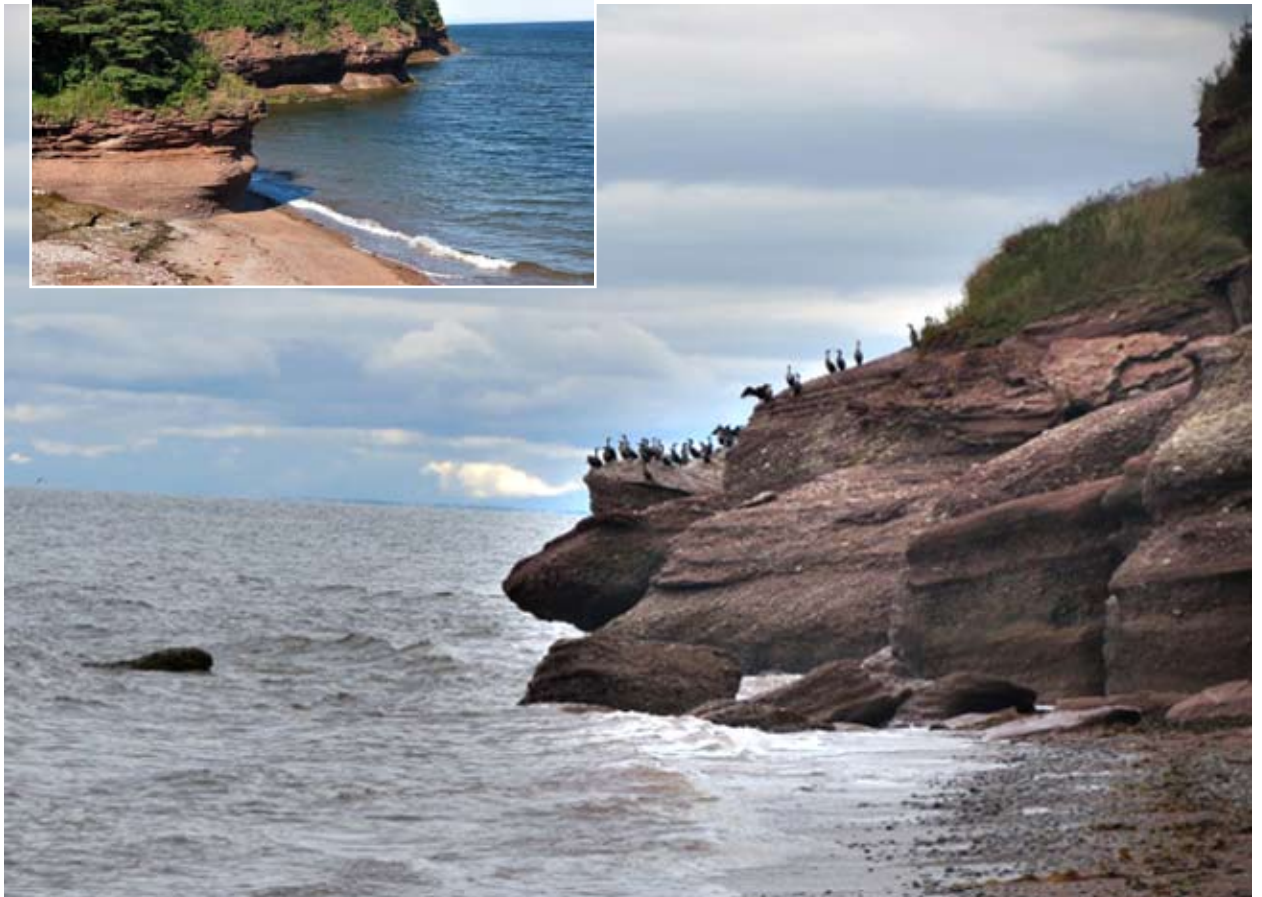
What could remind one more of the Scottish countryside than sheep?!



Here are two more reminders of Scotland photographed on the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec. Seals are as common here as they might be at John o' Groats, when looking over to the Orkneys, and here we have our own abundant purple flower, the Lupinus flower, which reminds me of purple Scottish heather.



More shots of the Gaspé shoreline. The birds on the rocks below are called Cormorants and are known as Shags in Scotland.



Hy Brasil

by Hugo da Nóbrega Dias
Portugal and England

The Island of Paradise

By the 14th century it could be found on maps, and cartographers kept noting it over the following centuries. Its position varied but it was always placed in the North Atlantic and, very often, west of Ireland. It is Hy Brasil, the island of Brasil (also Hy Breasil, Hy Breasail, Hy Breasal, Hy Brazil or Brazir) – a circular shaped island that was part of a group of islands that remained in the imagination of Europeans as far back as at least 1315.

In Irish folklore, Hy Brasil was an island engulfed in mist that could only be seen every seven years and disappeared suddenly when someone tried to reach it. In Galician-Portuguese folklore, much akin to the Irish lore, there is no recorded tale about it, but it was present in the mind of sailors and populations next to

the sea, as both Galician-Portuguese and Irish populations share a very similar imagination, which was very rich in phantom islands.

The Portuguese ‘Age of Discovery’ is full of allusions to those islands, to the myth of Saint Brendan and to the island said to be found by Saint Brendan himself. Among those islands were Bacalao (the island of the codfish, later found to be continental land), Satanazes (plural form of Satanaz, the Devil himself, i.e. Island of the Devils – later to be placed in a smaller form and in a different place by English and French cartographers), St. Matthew Island, and Vera Cruz (True Cross), thought to be an island first seen by Portuguese explorers, later called Terra de Santa Cruz (land of the Holy Cross) and finally called Brasil or Brazil.



This 1588 map by Sebastian Munster clearly shows the island of Brasil just off the coast of Ireland, see arrow.

At this moment our curiosity booms and the similarity of names makes us wonder about the link between them and about a possible influence of St. Brendan's myth on the permanency of the name Brasil, brought from east to west, from the mythological island west of Ireland to the new found land of Santa Cruz, the country of Brazil in South America.

The existence as a family name in Ireland (O' Brasil or O' Breasil, from *Uí Breasail*) only increases our curiosity.

The new found land of Brazil was named *Ilha de Vera Cruz* (Island of the True Cross) - as may be seen in the letter that Pero Vaz de Caminha wrote to the king announcing his finding. Later it was called *Terra de Santa Cruz* (land of the Holy Cross).

Because Santa Cruz/Brazil was first assumed to be an island brings us to the myth of St. Brendan and to the island he found, where he spent 15 days in the company of 14 monks. It was the 'promised island', the 'blessed island', which is found in some Irish 'immrama' (a class of Old Irish tales concerning a hero's sea journey to the Otherworld).

When sighting this South American land for the first time, did the explorers believe they were before the mythological island of Brasil, which they knew from ancient tales?

The truth is that the imaginary island known as Brasil appeared already in a Catalan map from 1375, in another one from Mecia de Vila Destes, from 1413, and in the maps of Andreia Bianco and Fre Mauro, respectively from 1436 and 1457.

When first discovered, Brazil was thought to be an island and although the official name of Santa Cruz was the Christian one, the name that kept in the people's mind and gained popularity was the name of Brasil.

Indeed, dispute related to names and myths always existed between the Church and the people. Against the people's will and belief, the Church always tried to Christianize places, names and myths, as a way of cloaking pagan roots. Something similar may have happened



Hy Brasil shown on a 1489 map.

here where the Church perhaps made an effort to Christianize the name of Brasil, in an attempt to avoid it becoming popular. And although we know how powerful these actions of the Church were, they were often in vain.

Even writings from influential people were published, like "*Historia da Província de Santa Cruz, a que vulgarmente chamamos Brasil*" (History of the Province of the Holy Cross, the one we vulgarly call Brasil), of Pero Magalhães Gandavo, from 1576. In his work, the author uses, insistently, the name Santa Cruz in order to "torment the Devil, who has worked, and continues to work, so much to extinguish the memory of the Holy Cross from the hearts of men."

In an evident endeavour to attach a negative connotation to the use of Hy Brasil, this writing shows a worry and an attempt to marginalize the popularity of the name, by divine blackmail – very popular in those times.

But the mist around this name spread a long way and remained for a long time amongst sailors and explorers. The idea of a promised island, a blessed one, a paradisaical place far away in the sea, behind the red curtain of clouds and sky, where other dangers were believed to exist in its way, was so embedded that when Portuguese found the Azores, one of the islands was named Brasil.



This map from 1632 clearly shows Brasil just off the western coast of Ireland.

Before Brazil, itself, and long after the mythological island placed on maps centuries before, there was another Brasil! It is now the island of Terceira but the name prevails in the name of the highest peak of the island: Mount Brasil.

It seems that there was a continuity of the idea, and a belief in the existence of this island, in times when mythology played an important role in human life. From the 16th century the name of Brasil was used next to the official name of the country of Santa Cruz, in various documents.

It also became a widespread idea that the name Brasil derives from the colour of an abundant wood typical of this land: brazilwood, or *pau-brasil* in Portuguese. In fact, this was the first product to be explored by merchants on a great scale and European markets aspired for it. There are reports of clandestine trips made by Bretons

and Normans to get this product of great demand, which had the peculiarity of making clothing turn red. Hence the name, it is said: the suffix **il* denotes a condition related to *brasa*, which is Portuguese for burning coal.

Let's have a look to its origin: in French there is *braise* (live coals) and in Old Franconian we can find *braseld* (sparkling fire). In Middle French we have *bresze* and in Old French *breze* (burning coal). Like in Galician-Portuguese, we may find in Swedish and in Norse the word *brasa*, as a verb (to roast), but also as a noun, meaning a small, controlled fire used for warmth. In Icelandic the

same word appears, again, and also in Gothic, as glowing coal. All these forms have origin in Proto-Germanic **brasō* (gleed, crackling coal) and in Proto-Indo-European **b^hres-* (to crack, break, burst).

The question is – If the name existed long before the discovery of Brazil, i.e. a long time before the trading of brazilwood, then where does it come from?

Looking at the Irish family name *Uí Breasail*, it says to us that those are the descendants of *Breasail*, which is not a great help. Could the name have come from a volcanic island that emerged from the sea after an earthquake, like the ones that recently emerged in Iran and Japan? Could it have disappeared right afterwards, as in many known cases, feeding the idea and the myth of an island that could only be seen every seven years? Could its volcanic name origin be in its relation with *brasa*, with fire and with red?



One last ancient map showing Brasil just off the southwest corner of Ireland.

What we have, for sure, is Brasil's link with Ireland, as it is testified to in the map of Fra Mauro, from 1459, where an inscription can be read, right next to the island of Brasil: "*Quest isole de Hibernia son dite fortunate*" – "These islands of Hibernia, of Ireland, are said to be blessed, of good fortune."

This shows its link with Ireland but also with an old mythological tradition present in Ireland, Portugal, Galiza, Spain, Genoa and Venice –

the old belief that behind the sunset there was a paradisaical island that was kept and passed from generation to generation – and from island to island – until its final destination, in the land that we know today as Brazil.

This is one more link between Irish and Galician-Portuguese folklore, culture and mythology, a link that gives us a shared heritage exalted by a true highway of the ancient times, – the sea – which provided communications between the nations of the Celtic fringe.

The *Lebor Gabála Érenn* tells us about the trip made by Breogan, after sighting Ireland from a tower in Brigantia (Corunha, Galiza, now in Spain), and it shows how quickly people could travel in ancient times (the Portuguese visited Canada a long time before the English and French did and they named Labrador and Terra Nova, now Newfoundland), and the way in which they could communicate and interact culturally. Only this can explain the prevalence of a name that is registered as far back as 1315 in one of the biggest nations of the world.

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by Sharron Gunn
Canada

An t-Eilean I – the Isle of Iona

The tiny island of Iona, only 3 ½ miles long by 1 ½ miles wide, has been inhabited for thousands of years. The word *I* or *Idhe* may mean yew tree, sacred to the pre-Christian peoples of the north. Certain customs observed until the late eighteenth century were survivals of the religion of the druids: the ‘cavalcade round the Fairy Mound, the Well of Youth on Dùn I and the singing of the sea chant’. (Semple 1973: 5) The following ‘prophecy’ suggests the Isle of Iona has been an especially holy place for millennia and will be so until the approach of the day of judgement.

Seachd bliadhna roimh ‘n bhràth
Thig muir air Eirinn rè aon tràth
‘S thar Ile ghuirm ghlais
Ach snàthaidh I Choluim Chlèirich.

(MacArthur 1995: 3)

Seven years before the day of judgement
The sea will flood Ireland for a time
And Islay of the green grass
But the Isle of Columba the Cleric will float.

St Columba (c.521-597)

The name of Columba is inextricably linked not only to the island, but to Scotland as a whole. From Iona Columba and his disciples converted or reinvigorated Christianity among the Scots (Gaels) and Picts. In Latin Columba means ‘dove’, a symbol of peace; in Scottish Gaelic Columba became *Calum Cille* (Dove of the Church) and in Irish *Colm Cille*. The saint is well-remembered in Gaelic tradition to this day; the *Laoidh Chaluim Chille* (St Columba’s Hymn) is a beautiful hymn to him in modern Gaelic.

Unlike many biographers of saints, Adomnán wrote his *Vita Sancti Columbae* (Life

of St Columba) less than a hundred years after Columba’s death. He included traditions, which said the saint was a member of the royal house of Tír Conaill, the son of Fedelmid mac Fergusa and Ethne, and grandson of Conal Gulban, a semi-legendary figure, who gave his name to the Cenél Conaill. Columba was also the great-great-grandson of Neil of the Nine Hostages (Niall Noígiallach), the eponymous ancestor of the O’ Neills (Uí Néill). According to legend Niall raided Roman Britain. In one traditional tale, his mother had a vision, which foretold the greatness of her son.

St Columba’s Pilgrimage

Columba left Bangor in Ireland at age 41 as a *peregrinus* (pilgrim, foreigner). *The Life of St Columba* says that Columba was wrongly excommunicated at a synod at Teltown in Meath. He was exonerated at another synod. Adomnán does not mention what he did, but he described the saint’s offences as ‘trivial and pardonable’.

Columba was likely eager to go on pilgrimage to get away from the controversy; pilgrimages were undertaken as a sacrifice to God.

A later *Life* says that Columba was obliged to go into exile for copying a book without permission. Doubtful. In 561 the battle of Cúil Dreimnene was a victory for Columba’s family, the northern Uí Néill, who defeated the high king Diarmait mac Cerbaill, ruler of the southern Uí Néill. *The Annals of Ulster* recorded that Diarmait had engaged the services of a druid to erect a magic fence round his army (MacAirt & MacNiocaill 1983: 80-1) while the northern Uí Néill depended on the prayers of Columba. One year later he left for Iona.

If Columba had taken part in the slaughter as

an ordained priest, that may have been considered a great enough offense for excommunication. (Smyth 1984: 94-5)

The Monastery on Iona

Columba founded the motherhouse of his church on the Isle of Iona. The island was difficult to reach in the winter half of the year; although only a few miles from the larger island of Mull, frequent storms made the crossing dangerous. In the saint's time Iona became known as a place of refuge for outlaws and exiles, and those seeking redemption through penance.

Adomnán says that he wrote 200 papers, of which perhaps two survive. He may have written a psalter now known as the *Cathach* (Battler). The book was later enclosed in a reliquary (*cumdach*) and used as a talisman by the O' Donnells who had carried it clockwise (*deiseil*) round their army before battle.

One of the oldest songs in Gaelic is the *Amra Choluimb Chille* (Song of Columba of the Church) written by Dallán Forgaill, a poet and clergyman, to memorialise the saint. The *Amra* is a eulogy, possibly the oldest poetry in a European language other than Latin or Greek. The *Amra* praises Columba as the guardian of a hundred churches, a bit of an exaggeration. Dallan describes him as 'a pillar of learning', one 'who would explain the true word', who 'made glosses clear by his wisdom' and who 'read mysteries and distributed the scriptures among the schools'. (Fraser 2009: 73) Poets, pillars of the Gaelic elite, helped to adapt Gaelic society to Christianity.

Many of Columba's reputed miracles might not pass inspection for sainthood today. The saint reportedly 'saw' distant events take place. While the saint was in Iona, he helped people in Ireland: a woman in childbirth, a man who was falling off a roof and people threatened with plague. He also made prophecies about battles and kings.

Western Christianity

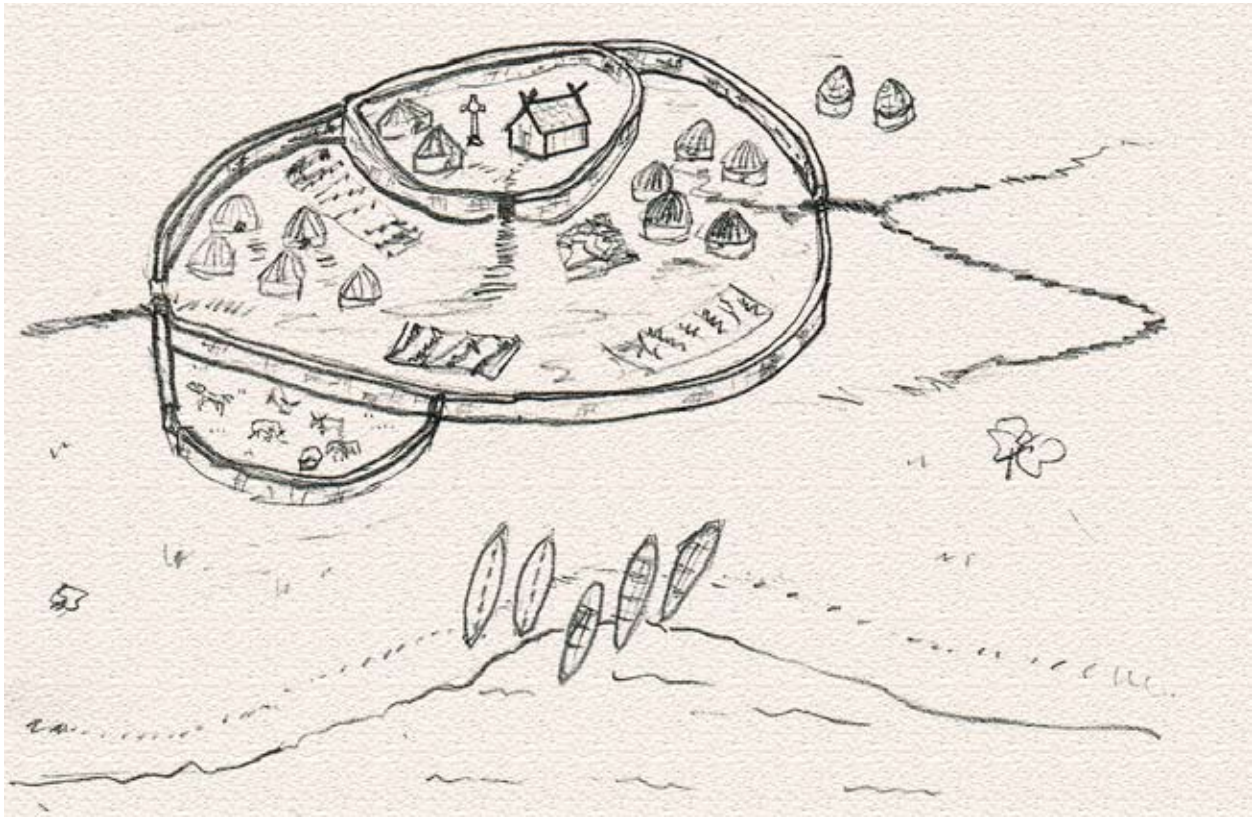
'Popular' writers believe that the Celtic

Church was independent of the 'Roman Catholic Church', but this term is an anachronism in the Early Middle Ages. In Columba's time Western Christianity was divided into many churches based on nation and language: the English Church, the Gaulish Church, the British Church (Welsh), Coptic Church (Egyptian), and the 'Celtic' Church (Gaelic). Columba wrote two songs, *Altus Prosator* (High Creator) and *Adiutor Laborantium* (Helper of Labourers). 'These hymns show a writer with profound biblical knowledge as well as Greek. *Altus Prosator* incites familiarity with the monastic theology of John Cassian of Lérins, who died in 433, and Basil of Caesarea, who died in 379, fathers of the early Christian church. (Fraser 2009: 73)

A Celtic Monastery

Monasteries founded by Gaels in this period look quite different from the monasteries founded in the former Roman Empire. They had round or ovoid enclosures of varying sanctity. The churches before 800 were built of oaken planks; however, none survive. The early cells or huts of the monks were built of wattle and daub in regions where trees were rare; wattle is a lattice of branches and daub is the sticky 'mud' made of straw, wet earth, sand, clay and animal dung applied to the wood.

The outlines of the Celtic monastery on Iona have been obscured by the Benedictine foundation of the 12th century although some of the early wall remains. Some evidence of wooden buildings has been found in the south-east part of the monastic enclosure. The excavation of Tor Abb, (abbot's hill) revealed a floor of beach pebbles, a rock-cut bed and stone supports for a seat. (Mackie 1975: 156-7) This may have been Columba's cell. St Oran's Chapel (*Relig Odhráin*), probably built in the mid-ninth century for Kenneth MacAlpine, is the oldest stone building still standing; it was extensively renovated in the eleventh century. Iona was the burial place of Scottish kings until the end of the eleventh century.



I've drawn a generic Celtic monastery. The rectangular building in the small enclosure is the church; the finials on the gable ends of the roof hold the ridgepole, the walls were of oak, the shingles of yew.



The Monymusk reliquary (shown above) is likely shaped like one of these early churches.

Oak and yew were sacred to the druids and it may be that the Gaels used this structure as it was the construction expected in a holy place.

It was not unusual for Christians to take over the places and adopt the architecture of earlier religions.

As Iona did not have oak trees, the wood was brought from the mainland. The founder or the abbot lived in a round house in the church enclosure, and the other house could be a scriptorium (library) and nearby is a high cross. In the larger enclosure are other round huts, the living quarters of the monks, as well as their gardens. Animals are kept in a third enclosure to keep them away from the crops. There are curiaichean (skin-covered boats) on the beach. Outside the walls of the monastery are two huts for anchorites (hermits).

High Crosses

High Crosses are stone monuments unique in early medieval Europe, the only free-standing stone sculptures in a period of migration and war. They are found in Ireland, Scotland, Cornwall and Wales, wherever Gaels settled in great numbers. The monumental ring crosses may have developed at Iona; most were built

between the 7th and 12th centuries. In the lands of the Lordship of the Isles of western Scotland there is a tradition of high cross sculpture which ended only with the forfeiture of the Lordship in the late 15th century. Crosses are often much older than the surviving church nearby. The Benedictine abbey at Iona dates to the twelfth century, for example, whereas most of the crosses are much older. Several crosses dedicated to different saints were set up at a monastery, some within the wall of the most sacred precinct and some without. They were used as gathering places for teaching; some of the crosses have figures from the Bible on them for that purpose.

The height of the crosses varies from 3 to 6 metres (10 to 20 ft.) and consist of a base, a shaft with arms, a ring, and a capstone. Some shafts are composed of several pieces, joined to each other by mortice and tenon joints, a technique likely borrowed from woodworking.



St. Martin's Cross on Iona

Carved panels with interlacing ribbons were painted and made the crosses look like the illuminated Gospel books made about the same time.

The base is often stepped to represent the ascent of the hill of Golgotha, part of the final passion (suffering) of Christ. The capstone stands for Sion, the Heavenly City and the New Jerusalem. (Richard & Scarry 1990: 26) The capstone sometimes looks like the roof of a wooden church with yew finials.

St John's cross (8th century) was the widest Celtic cross ever made, but the arms were too long and heavy; they broke not long after construction. The ring did not give sufficient support to the arms. St John's cross has flat circular spaces for bosses, a decorative item which shows that some of these crosses were inspired by metal processional crosses. St Martin's cross at Iona is another of the earliest crosses. The stone arms are stubby and there are slots for adding wooden extensions. Perhaps the lesson learned from St John's cross was to return to the partial use of wood for the arms so that they wouldn't break off.

The Book of Kells

The Book of Kells, written between 780 and 804, was an altar Gospel book to be displayed open during mass where the illuminations would awe the communicants. The book is one of the most beautiful manuscripts produced in this period. But there are many errors in the text as if the decoration and not the text were most important. The beginning of the book consists of canon tables, summaries of the Gospels and lists of Hebrew names. The Gospels follow: St Matthew symbolised by an angel, Mark symbolised by a winged lion, Luke by a winged bull, and John by an eagle. (Henry 1976: 153)

The Vikings

The Vikings are mentioned in Christian annals from the late eighth century. They wanted slaves and other portable wealth, and plundered Iona in 795, 802, 806 and 825.

They did not hesitate to attack Christian churches because of the actions of Charlemagne and his allies who forced Christianity on Saxons and other Germanic peoples as a pretext for conquest. According to the Carolingian Chronicles, in the year 795:

The king came ... to Mainz, and there he held his assembly. When he heard that the Saxons had, as usual, broken their promise to accept Christianity and keep faith with the king, he entered Saxony with an army... Once the Saxons had been soundly beaten, their country laid waste, and their hostages received, the king returned to Gaul... (Sholz & Rogers 1970: 74)

The Gospel Book, the Cathach (a psalter) and the Chronicle of Iona (an annal) were probably written in Iona, the motherhouse of the Columban Church, and taken to Ireland to save them from the Norsemen sometime after 807, after the start of construction of a new daughter house at Kells. Others believe that the Gospel Book was written at Kells. Some say that it was written in Lindisfarne in the north of England, but again Lindisfarne was a daughter house of Iona and the Lindisfarne Gospels are still extant. If the book of Kells were written at Lindisfarne, another Gospel book wouldn't be necessary. The grandest book, you would think, would have to be written at Iona. Still others believe the book was written in the north-east of Scotland because of the similarities of the artwork to Pictish sculpture. A very controversial topic!

The Book of Kells suffered damage in 1006. The Annals of Ulster record that the gospel book of Colum Cille (St Columba) was stolen and found months later:

Soiscelae mor Coluim Cille do dubgait isind aidhci asind airdom iatharach i ndaim iac moir Cheanannsa; primh-mind iarthair domain ar ai in comdaigh doendai. In soscela sin do fghbail dia fichet adaig ar dib misaib iar ngait de a oir 7 fot tairis.

The Great Gospel of Colum Cille [St Columba] was wickedly stolen by night from

the western sacristy in the great stone church of Cenannas [Kells]. It was the most precious object of the western world on account of the human ornamentation... This Gospel was recovered after two months and twenty nights, its gold having been taken off it and with a sod over it.

(Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983: 438-9)

Queen Margaret (1045-93)

Queen Margaret repaired the fabric of the monastery at Iona for its Gaelic-speaking monks in the 11th century. But according to her biographer Turgot, she considered some Scottish religious practices barbaric:

The church included Sundays in the computation of Lent; the people refrained from communion at Easter because of unworthiness; in certain districts of the Scots, mass was celebrated contrary to the custom of the [Norman] church with 'I know not what barbaric rite'; work was done upon a Sundays; marriage was permitted with a stepmother and a deceased brother's wife; there were 'many other matters which had arisen contrary to the rule of faith and statutes of ecclesiastical observances.

(Duncan 1975: 122-3)

The very appearance of Celtic (Gaelic) monasteries, with their round walls, simple rectangular church and small huts for the monks, probably did not appeal to Margaret who was accustomed to Norman monasteries. The Normans got their inspiration for church architecture from the public buildings of classical Rome.

Queen Margaret encouraged some of the Benedictines to come from Durham in England to Scotland. She introduced the Benedictine conventual discipline at Dumfermline where she had been married. Her son David I had the Benedictine abbey built on Iona. The Normanised kings considered the Columban Church lacking in spirituality.

A change of patron saint is a indication of political change. Columba had been the pre-eminent saint of Scotland, but St Andrew,

a foreign saint and the favourite of Queen Margaret, became the patron saint of Scotland about 1250. The new saint represented the new Anglo-Norman aristocracy; a foreign saint could help people accept the idea of foreign laws and landowners. Columba's relics were removed from Iona to Dunkeld Cathedral, controlled by the newcomers. Columba, Brigid and Michael remained the favourite saints of the Gaels, and Iona the holiest place in Scotland.

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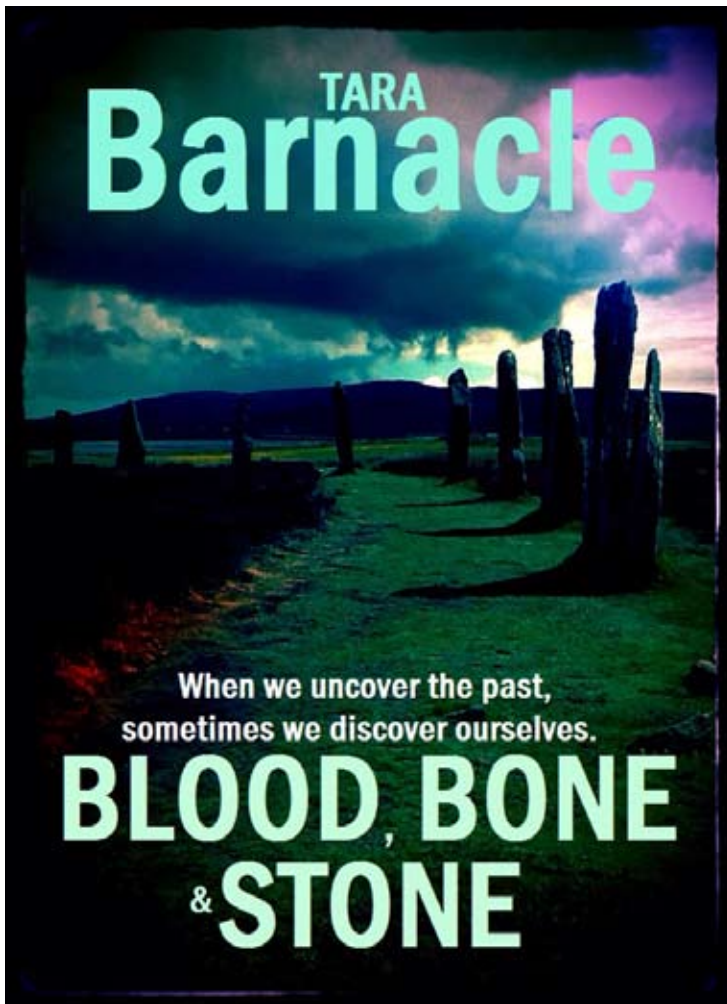
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Blood, Bone and Stone weaves together modern archaeology and ancient history, cutting edge DNA research and reincarnation, and the threads of life and death in a tale that spans the millennia from Bronze Age Orkney to modern Oxford and mysterious Glastonbury.

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Carolyn Emerick is a regular contributor to Celtic Guide. She also serves as an assistant to the editor fulfilling some of the behind the scenes tasks for our magazine. Carolyn is currently completing a master's degree in library science with a concentration in archives. This column will feature interesting tidbits from the past that Carolyn comes across in her research, and that our readers may enjoy as well. For more like this, follow her on Facebook: www.facebook.com/carolynemerickwriter

To kick off the first edition of The Archivist's Corner for 2014, I wanted to bring you something really special. Since the theme of this month's issue is "Islands," I have brought you a photo spread telling the story of the Isle of Skye's most precious treasure: The Fairy Flag of Clan MacLeod.

The Fairy Flag is an heirloom passed down in the MacLeods of Dunvegan family for generations. It is held in the Clan's ancestral home, Dunvegan Castle. This castle has been in the possession of Clan MacLeod for over 800 years, making it Scotland's oldest castle continuously inhabited by the same family.



Photo credit- Dunvegan Castle, via Wikipedia

It is said that there are many stories of how the Fairy Flag came into the possession of the MacLeods of Dunvegan. Otta F. Swire, in her book *Skye: The Island and its Legends* shares one of them. According to lore, marriage between human and fae folk was not terribly unheard of during the early Middle Ages. And so, as befitting a strong clan chief, it was either the third or fourth MacLeod chieftain who married an ethereally beautiful fairy maid.



*'Take the fair face of Woman
by Sophie Anderson (1823-1903)*

As is common in human/fae marriages, one of the stipulations to their betrothal was that MacLeod must promise to allow his beloved to return to her own folk at such time as they deemed appropriate to beckon her. And so it came to pass that the young couple was very happy, and very much in love. But, when their first child was born, the young fairy mother heard the fae pipers calling her home. She had no choice but to obey. Her husband was able to walk his bride part of the way, but they must say their goodbyes at Fairy Bridge.



*The actual Fairy Bridge, Dunvegan, Skye
- photo by Graeme Smith*

After the two lovers parted, MacLeod returned to Dunvegan Castle to begin preparations for the customary celebratory feast that accompanies the birth of every new heir. The festivities were so merry that the guest of honor, the babe himself, was completely forgotten. His nurse had been enticed to join in the revelries and lost track of time. The bairn was therefore unattended when the wee thing wriggled his way out of his coverings. Feeling the bite of the cold northerly air, the child began to cry. The merriment in the castle was so great that not one person heard his cry. Not one human, that is. With the strength of love only a mother can possess, enhanced by her fairy senses, the fairy Queen of Dunvegan heard the cry of her child from all the way in Fairy Land. Though her hands may have been unseen, she reached out to cradle her young lad, and draped his cold body with the softest cloth of the fairies. A choir of otherworldly voices filled the chamber, singing the softest and most angelic lullaby. Soon the sweet child drifted gently back to sleep. The blanket draping the MacLeod bairn's wee body would be known forever as the Fairy Flag.

The Flag's true origins are actually unknown. It is said that Sir Reginald MacLeod, the Clan's 27th chief, took the flag to a museum expert for analysis. The curator hypothesized that the cloth was brought back to Scotland by knights on crusade during the Middle Ages, stating that the silk appeared to be of Eastern origin. Sir Reginald replied "You believe it to be a relic

of the Crusades. I know it was given to my ancestor by the fairies."

Whatever the case, the cloth has been in the MacLeod family for centuries, recorded as having been observed by numerous people over the years.

The Flag was said to be a sort of beacon to be able to summon the fairies to the aid of the MacLeods during times of great need. At least two uses are recorded when the MacLeods required the aid of their allies and fairy kin during battle. In both instances the Flag was not used until absolutely necessary. And, in both cases, when the MacLeods were on the verge of defeat, the wave of the Flag summoned legions of otherworldly soldiers to the battlefield. Needless to say, these battles ended in favor of the MacLeods. It was said that as recently as World War I, members of the MacLeod Clan carried photographs of their beloved Fairy Flag on their person to give them nerve and luck in battle.



*'A Fairy Mother and Child'
by Arthur Rackham*



*Dunvegan cup, Fairy Flag, Rory Mor's Horn
(engraving created sometime before 1890
by Lancelot Speed (1860-1931))*

Fairy Lore of the Isle of Skye

by Carolyn Emerick
USA



'Fairies' by Edwin Austin Abbey (1852-1911)

For many hundreds of years Skye remained an island isolated from the rest of Scotland. It did not exist in a complete vacuum, as it was settled by both Celts and Norse, and probably by the Picts before them. There were always comings and goings by way of ships and boats from the mainland and abroad. Due to this sea access, Skye became a Viking hot spot, like so many of the other Scottish Isles. Its isolation became more pronounced toward the Industrial Revolution. As mechanized farming equipment, railroads, and eventually motorways became the norm across mainland Britain, residents of Skye continued using traditional farming methods and modes of transport. It is no wonder, then, that fairy lore lingered on after it had begun to erode elsewhere.

Life moved at a slower pace in Skye, and stories of fairies continued to be passed on orally. Storytelling is, after all, a form of entertainment

that comes with no technology necessary. Author Mary Julia MacCulloch recorded some folklore during her time in Skye, which was published in the journal *Folklore* in 1922. She says that nearly all of her stories were collected in and around the village of Portree. Yet, when it comes to Skye, the location of her interviews made little difference. She explains that the island was a tight knit community, and the inhabitants were a hardy breed of folk. It was not uncommon to see an elderly woman walking twenty-six miles just to attend mass. Many inhabitants belonged to parishes at distances quite far from where they lived. So, it seems that these people, who were so used to hard work, thought nothing of traversing their island on foot. As such, stories would have travelled throughout the island with ease.

It is quite humorous to note that Ms. MacCulloch laments the fact that the youths of the island read nothing but newspapers and novellas. She blames their lack of knowledge of local lore and legend on their reading habits. Today we might dance a jig if we caught our teenagers reading the newspaper!

MacCulloch gives further background on Skye island life when she explains that most inhabitants spoke only Gaelic, so she had difficulty communicating with them. Regular Celtic Guide readers may remember that I wrote several articles on Orkney for our Summer, 2013 issues, as well as an article regarding Scotland's forgotten Germanic heritage for our June, 2013 issue. In those articles I explored the use of Germanic languages such as Norn and Scots, derivatives of Old Norse and Old English respectively, on the eastern Scottish Isles. Skye has an element of Norse heritage, just as Orkney and Shetland do. But, as explained in the aforementioned article, the Scottish Isles in the North Sea retained greater Norse influence, while the isles to the west retained a greater Celtic influence.



'The Fairy Ring' by William Homes Sullivan

Mary Julia MacCulloch mentions that themes in fairy lore tend to be universal regardless of location. This is true in many of the stories she shares. We see many of the usual stories such as a beautiful human child taken by the fairies and replaced by a sickly, ugly changeling. Also mentioned are stories of people being taken into the mounds for what seems like a few hours, but days or years have passed when they re-emerge. Another motif recognizable from such stories as Rumpelstiltskin is the fairies doing manual labor for their human counterparts. This is also

seen in another famous German fairy tale, The Shoemaker and the Elves. The lowland Scots equivalents to such helpful creatures are the brownies.

As we would have it, the fairies on the island of Skye have a penchant for helping make tweed. Our editor, Jim, discussed Harris Tweed as a local company manufacturing traditional fabrics on Skye in our November, 2013 issue. Well, tweed making by hand on Skye pre-dates the industrial age and, according to lore, may have been aided by the fairies. MacCulloch's interviews reveal that some Skye crofters desired to spin and weave the very tweed that their island became so famous for, but they became too tired. Under the influence of exhaustion, the would-be tweeders made the mistake of wishing aloud, so that the fairies could hear them, that the tweed would just be finished. Overhearing this wish, the fairies appeared and demanded the necessary tools to finish the deed.

Industrious were these fairies, indeed, for they would not leave when the task was completed. The crofters were forced to seek the help of a wise man. He advised them to direct the fairies to build a roof, but that the roof must

be made of a special kind of wood. There only existed one tree on the entire island that grew the kind of wood needed.

When the fairies began their building, they were unable to complete it. And so, they had no choice but to leave the crofters to their own devices, as they were before.

At times, a human could be called to do a favor for the fairies. One such person was a midwife of Skye.



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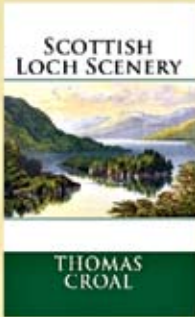
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This midwife also tended her own small herd of cows. One night she went out to call the cows home, when she was approached by a fairy man. He bid her to follow him. She refused, saying she had to tend to her cows. The fairy man insisted that if she helped him, her cows would be well looked after. When she arrived in his fairy home, she found that his wife was having difficulties in childbirth. The situation was so dire that the delivery and subsequent health concerns of mother and child took several days. By the time her services were no longer needed, eight full days had gone by! When the midwife returned to her own home, however, she found that the fairy man had been true to his word. Her cattle never could have been better cared for.

Another fairy story from Skye comes to us from K.M. Briggs who published a few decades later, also in Folklore magazine. She received the story from the wife of a minister from the Isle of Skye. As the story goes, a little boy and his sister had been left to stay with their grandmother while their mother went to nurse an ailing friend some distance away. A neighbor boy joined the pair to play. After a pleasant afternoon of playing in the sunshine, the children began to feel tired and a little ornery. An elderly woman happened to call on the children's grandmother. Now, this woman was known to be a "wise woman," and had an idea about how to cheer them up.

As an aside, the etymology of the word "witch" comes from the Anglo-Saxon *wicca* or *wicce* (pronounced 'witch-uh', unlike the neo-pagan religion of Wicca) meaning wise person. These people were also called "cunning folk" up through the Early Modern Era. They were known for their knowledge of herbs and healing abilities, and cunning women were often the victims of witch hunts. But, I digress.

Now, this wise woman took a liking to the children and asked if they would like to see something special. They replied that yes, they would, so she beckoned them to follow her. What happened next is reminiscent of Irish poet William Allingham's most famous poem, 'The Fairies'—

*Up the airy mountain,
Down the rushy glen,
We daren't go a-hunting
For fear of little men;
Wee folk, good folk,
Trooping all together;
Green jacket, red cap,
And white owl's feather!*

The children followed the old woman down a winding path through a glen and over to a little burn. Following her instructions, the children held hands, the first with the wise woman and so on so that all four were connected. Then, they sat down beside the stream. Suddenly, on the other side of the brook the children beheld an iridescent fire burning in twilight of the early evening. They couldn't believe their eyes when fairies appeared around the fire! The fairies were bedecked all in green and danced merrily about the flames. When the children arrived by the very same burn the next day to show their friends, the fairies were nowhere to be seen.

K.M. Briggs reveals that the little boy was the husband of the woman who told her this story. According to his wife, the minister reckoned it was the presence of the wise woman that allowed the children to see the fairies. By holding the hand of the witch, and all children connecting together in a line, the minister thought each child was able to tap into the energy or extra sense that the wise woman carried. For it was said among the villagers that this woman possessed the famous Celtic "second sight."

The fairies of Skye turn up in the island's beautiful landscape as well as its lore. There are many landmarks that are associated with tales or stories. And some that seem to have earned their association for their otherworldly appearance rather than any legend. The fairy pools of Skye are one such example. These are naturally occurring pools typically under waterfalls, usually with very clear water, unique rock formations, and surrounded in vivid color. Since these pools have been an Internet sensation, I did make an earnest attempt to find lore associated with them.

Sadly, I was unable to. This in no way insinuates that none exists, simply that I could not locate it. However, these pools are often graced with an abundance of minerals and decorated with beautiful blue-green algae which give them a reputation as places of healing.

This phenomenon is also seen with the holy wells all over Britain, Ireland, and Europe. These were typically fresh water springs with similar properties. In most cases, these wells and springs were sacred to pagans long before the Christianization of Europe. After conversion, however, the Church adopted them as holy wells. A similar instance is seen in Bath. The famous hot springs of Bath are thought to have been a holy site to British pagans. The Romans, always one with a keen eye for opportunity, harnessed the natural heated mineral water when they built a traditional Roman bath around it.

In any case, the fairy pools at Skye have become famous through the magic of the Internet. If you haven't heard of them, I urge you to look it up on YouTube where there are some wonderful videos of them.

There are many more fairy stories from Skye, and I will be sure to share them with you in the future. Please visit my writer's page on Facebook to read more on the folklore of yester yore – www.facebook.com/carolynemerickwriter.

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'Fairy Pool' by Vasilios Markousis

‘I Come From The Land Under Down’

OK. What do these Men At Work lyrics and a picture of a kangaroo have to do with the Celtic Guide?

Well, we are about to make another special announcement – Tara Barnacle, a novelist from Australia, with a special fondness for the Orkney Islands of Scotland, has agreed to provide us with tales from Australia and New Zealand. This area was the last area of considerable Celtic-ness in which the Guide did not have representaton.

With the addition of Tara to our group of authors we will have coverage in ALL of the Celtic world.

Celts made it to these southern hemisphere lands through immigration (see our very first issue of the Celtic Guide from January 2012), or

as laborers in gold mines and other ventures, or sometimes as prisoners.

Botany Bay, in New South Wales, Australia, was once home to a penal colony where many Irish and Scots found themselves. It has been immortalized in such Irish classics as ‘The Fields of Athenry’ and in ‘The Shores of Botany Bay’ by the Wolfetones.

However it was that Celts arrived in these countries, they played, and continue to play a significant role. Think the ‘Hobbit’ movies, filmed mostly in New Zealand, and rife with Celtic accents and culture.

We’ve received several emails from this area and now we finally have a representative there. Watch for some Tara Tales to come, soon.



‘Three Girls and a Kangaroo’ (1900-1910). The girls pose in a garden with kangaroo in hand. Source item is held by John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Australia –Wikipedia.

So, what's next?

Our little “So What’s Next?” ending to each Celtic Guide has been there from the first issue. On the surface, it is a chance to tell about upcoming themes and other adventures we might have planned. Psychologically, it is our acknowledgment that the Guide will continue into the next month . . . and the next. From the very beginning we weren’t sure how we would progress but so many people have come out of the woodwork, either as regular contributors, or one-time contributors of some fascinating bit of information. We’ve had great volunteerism on Facebook, and with free music, and free proofreading. Often, even if a story isn’t submitted, an idea is. The point is, people are paying attention, they are molding the Guide to their liking, they are contributing tales they feel need told, they are writing for help with their own “Celtic” projects, they are correcting us if they feel we are wrong, and mostly they are encouraging us to continue.

What started as a small pipe dream has now lasted two full years, and grown into a viable source of Celtic information and entertainment. For February, in honor of Valentine’s Day, we will feature “Romance” as our theme. There are undoubtedly many more stories on that subject than we’ll be able to fit in one issue. In March, since we’ve already covered St. Patrick in two past March issues, we decided to go with the theme of “Magic.” Still, there will no doubt be some new mention made of old St. Paddy. This month’s theme of “The Islands” may need repeating as there are, again, so many tales yet to tell in this area. We’ll also likely have another “Muse” issue during the year, as there are just so many creative people out there wishing to share their talent.

We look forward to a fruitful 2014 for the Celtic Guide and are glad to have you aboard.



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