

# Celtic Guide



*CELEBRATIONS*



## From the Editor

We chose “Celebrations” as our November theme because it seems, this time of year, that so many celebrations are held - be it a harvest festival, Halloween, Samhain, even Thanksgiving and eventually Christmas and New Year’s Eve. It is the time of year when we begin to slow down a bit from the hectic summer, and often a time when we count our blessings. It is also the time of last minute Highland Games, craft fairs, Celtic festivals, a visit to the local pumpkin patch – a time to get outdoors and catch some of that brisk, cool air, the bright fall colors, and the wealth of the harvest – a chance to stock up on thankfulness and strength before the onset of Old Man Winter.

Where I live, we are subject to a new phenomenon, come winter, known as the Polar Vortex. Apparently, with the melting of the ice at the North Pole, cold winds that used to be held there in a spiraling wind current are now able to venture out further, which means across lower Canada and the upper U.S. In fact, last year they swung south as far as Phoenix and Houston. My sister in Houston had her water pipes freeze when the outside temperature reached zero for a short while. Water pipes freezing in Houtson, Texas? Unheard of . . . and yet that is our modern world.

And if it wasn’t enough that this and other disasters like Ebola, and war, and on and on weren’t bad enough on their own, we have to listen to it 24/7 on the news. I often think, what if there was CNN when Pompeii was covered with ash? Everyone would have thought it was the end of the world, and yet here we are nearly 2,000 years later still trying to progress as a species, still fighting Mother Nature, still hoping and working for success and happiness.

If there is one thing we’ve learned, and hopefully inherited from our Celtic ancestors, it is the ability to adapt. Think of the incredible adaptations that took place during the Highland Clearances, the changes in religious and political powers, the so-called Irish Potato Famine – one day, tending your field, the next day fighting in some Highland army, or fishing on the unforgiving seas.

A distant relative of mine wrote a book called *Always We Begin Again*. It is about the Benedictine Way, but regardless, the maxim is so true - We adapt, we carry on, we celebrate past successes, we look to the future, and always we begin again.

I say - “Let’s get started!”

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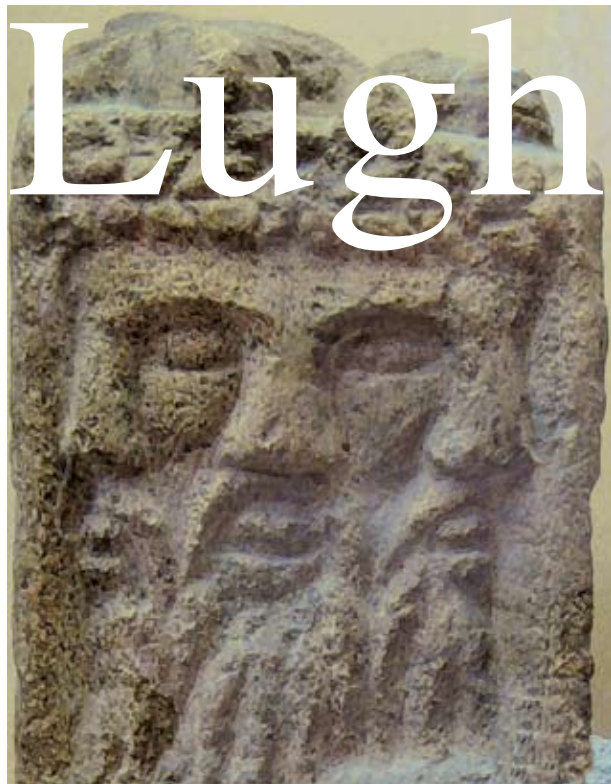
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# Lughnasadh

by Piotr Kronenberger  
Poland

## Feast of Year's End...



*An altar depicting a three-faced god identified as Lugh/Lugus; Musée Saint-Rémi, Reims, France*

For the ancient Celts, August 1st signified Lughnasadh – the last of the four great feasts (alongside Samhain, Imbolc, and Beltane) celebrated throughout the year by those intriguing people. That day marked the end of the Celtic year.

The day takes its name after the god, Lugh, and the Celtic word *nasadh*, meaning “feast.” It was dedicated to Lugh – a god of the Sun and the Arts in general, sometimes a patron of War.

For many tribes, Lughnasadh was a very joyous and festive time connected with the first harvest. It consisted mainly of elaborate feasts and lots of different games. The Celts had every right to be happy – no longer were they dependent upon their winter storage, now there was food and drink aplenty for everyone.

Part of the harvested grain was baked into wholesome bread while the rest was turned into beer. Grain and fruit were the most important foods of the day (the preparation of meat for winter began a bit later). And they had their Sun god to thank for this abundance.

One of the most important Celtic deities, Lugh lent his name to a number of European cities, including Lyon in France, Leyden in Holland, and Legnica in southwest Poland. Lugh’s sacred animals were crows. He even had them on his coat-of-arms.

Old Irish sagas depict him as a strong, athletically-built young man. He is pale-skinned, and usually clad in a white silken shirt, a flowing green cloak, golden chest plate, golden sandals and helmet. In his hand he holds either a spear or sling-shot. He was considered the epitome of a noble warrior – a warrior who, according to Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (4th century A.D.), highly valued personal hygiene.

Besides that, he loved to show off his physical prowess. That is why he accepted a challenge to a duel from his own grandfather – the one-eyed giant named Balor – and won.

Legend has it that our hero once entered into the service of a certain Irish king. Said monarch considered Lugh the greatest member of his court. Therefore, the king strictly forbade him participation in any battle or other potentially life-threatening situations, as he considered the god irreplaceable.

Lugh was, among other things, a master metalsmith.

When he wished to remain unnoticed, he walked among mortals in the guise of an old man, wearing a wide-rimmed hat which covered one of his eyes.

Lugh has a considerable similarity to the Scandinavian Odin, Father of the Norse Gods. Odin sacrificed one of his eyes to gain infinite knowledge, and was known to frequently interact with his worshippers in the form of an old, one-eyed human. These two legends may have some unknown interconnection.

# HIGHLAND GAMES

by Jim McQuiston  
USA

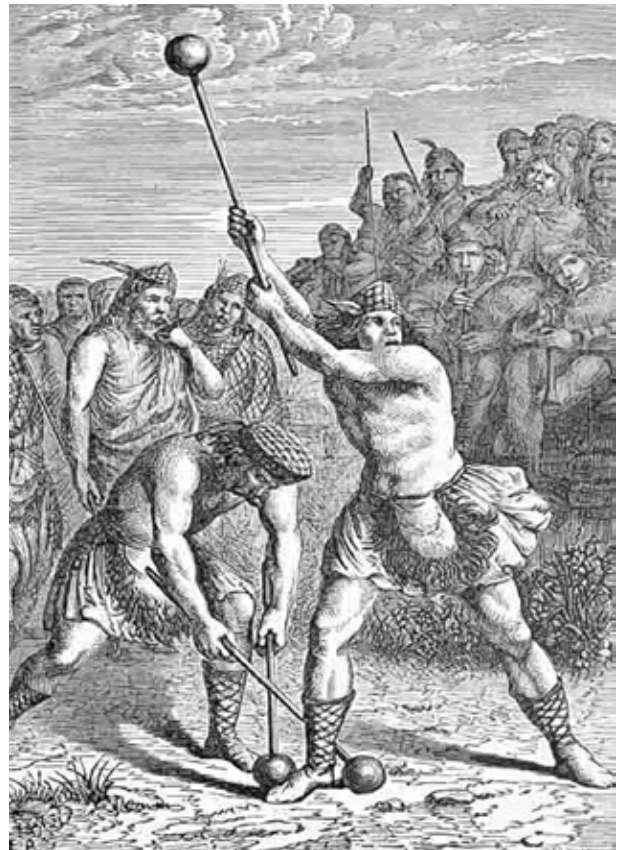
Many of Scottish descent, around the world, attend Highland Games as one remaining vestige of the bravery and courage that Scots portrayed, over so many centuries, in the name of freedom. September's vote of "No" would seem to indicate that the desire for freedom has been lost. However, the Yes vote organization swelled in rank, from 24,000 to over 64,000 within the first couple of weeks after the vote.

I said, early on, that I would not take sides, but this one is so emotional for me and so many others of Scottish descent around the world. And to see a peaceful, long-overdue release from the yoke of England fall by the wayside so easily just doesn't seem right. Of course, there are 70,000 or so English folks living in Scotland who did not want to see the breakup, most of whom voted No. I don't want to dwell on this, but rather I'd like to explore the celebration of Highland Games around the world.

Here are a few interesting stories.

The oldest games outside of Scotland are in Antigonish, Nova Scotia – 152 years old. Nova Scotia has the reputation of being more Scottish than Scotland. Populated predominantly due to the Highland clearances, the majority of names, especially on Cape Breton, would be easily recognized in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, with a bit of Irish and French Acadian names mixed in. I have been to the Antigonish Games, and the Celtic music and the tug-of-war competition were simply amazing, along with all else that made up the event.

I saw another tug-of-war, done more in fun, at the Isle of Skye Highland Games. The moment I'll never forget, from the Skye games, was when two strong Highland lads had battled to the point where neither could throw the weight over the bar at its new height. The aged announcer said, "Wait! We have a last-minute entry." Then he calmly walked over, picked up the weight, and threw it a foot or two over the



*Scottish hammer throw illustration from Frank R. Stockton's book "Round-about Rambles in Lands of Fact and Fancy," from 1910.*

bar. He returned to the microphone and said, "Next event." The crowd cheered!

Not all games have the tug-of-war. More typically, what's known as "heavy competition" predominates. An example is the throwing of the caber, a long, heavy pole, typically 19.6 feet in length. The primary objective is to toss the caber so that it turns end over end, falling away from the tosser. Ideally it should fall directly away from the contestant in the "12 o'clock" position. The distance thrown is not important.

Other events include the stone put, similar to what we might think of as the shot put; the sheaf throw, which involves throwing a burlap bag of straw over a bar; and, of course, the hammer throw as shown above.

The largest Highland Games in Scotland are the Cowal Games, also known as the Cowal Highland Gathering, held in Dunoon, Scotland, every August. Attracting around 3,500 competitors makes these the largest Highland Games in the world as far as competitors go. They also get about 23,000 spectators, each year, from around the globe.

Cowal is exceeded in the number of spectators by two gatherings in the United States – the estimated 30,000 that attend Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina, and the even larger Scottish Highland Gathering and Games that has taken place every year since 1866, and is hosted by the Caledonian Club of San Francisco. This event was just recently held on Labor Day weekend in Pleasanton, California.

By 1866, California's Gold Rush had attracted many a Scot to San Francisco, and so some seventeen Scots met in the recently-established Ale Vaults, on Summer Street, to plan San Francisco's first games. It was obviously a fruitful meeting as the inaugural games, complete with family picnics and athletic contests, were held in a field at 12th and Market Streets in San Francisco on Thanksgiving Day, 1866. They have been held every year since, and in 2015 they will celebrate their 150th year – just slightly behind Antigonish as the oldest games outside of Scotland.

Determining the oldest games in Scotland, itself, is a little bit more difficult. Athletic events were often a part of Scottish life. Scotland is considered the home of both golf and curling.

Way back in 1424, King James I outlawed the playing of "fut ball." The Football Act of May 26, 1424 stated, "the king forbiddes that na man play at the fut ball under the payne of iiij d, " meaning a fine of four pence. This act was not repealed until 1906! The king's intention was to get his Highlanders refocused on "sports" that had a military component to them, such as archery.

"Fut ball," from 1424, didn't resemble American football, of course, and only mildly resembled soccer. Its closest cousin would be rugby. One source reports that often two villages

would compete against each other and kick, carry, or throw a leather bag full of straw towards the opposite town with the goal being the doors of the local church. Apparently tackling and blocking were allowed. By the 1600s, newer versions of football were being recorded in Aberdeen, being played by schoolchildren.

Still, those events more associated with Highland Games go back even further. They are thought to have originated simply as entertainment or contests at local festivals, no doubt harvest festivals. They would have involved competitions similar to the heavy events, using everyday objects such as tree trunks, stones and bales of straw.

It is reported in numerous Highland Games programs that King Malcolm III of Scotland, in the 11th century, summoned contestants to a foot race to the summit of Craig Choinnich (overlooking Braemar). King Malcolm created this foot race in order to find the fastest runner in the land to be his royal messenger. Some have seen this apocryphal event to be the origin of today's modern Highland Games.

The 14th century Fetteresso Castle, located in Stonehaven, Scotland, shows evidence of a ring-ditch built at the north end of a cursus. A cursus is a prehistoric set of parallel linear structures of unknown purpose that were, somewhat fancifully, considered by antiquarians to have been used for some type of athletic competition, possibly related to hunting or archery. How old the ditch and cursus structures are or their actual use is still a mystery.

There is a document from 1703 summoning the clan of the Laird of Grant, Clan Grant to a special event. They were to arrive wearing Highland coats and "also with gun, sword, pistol and dirk." The competitions would have featured feats of skill using these weapons.

Scotland's propensity towards competitive events has not only helped perpetuate golf, curling, and various forms of "fut ball," but also established one of the most enjoyable celebrations for many – a visit to their favorite Highland Games!

# Henceforth Tales

by Cass and Deborah Wright  
Bellows Falls, VT, USA

## Colquhoun

Though rare when compared with those families who migrated north into Scotland from Ireland, and from Norman England, there survives unto this day a dozen or so clans and families who can track their descent from the Pictish tribes of the old Iron Age. Along with such neighbors as the proud members of the family Graeme, the progenitors of the Colquhouns were among those stalwart harriers of the Roman Legions stationed along what was then the patrolled and fortified length of the Wall of the Emperor Hadrian. Interestingly enough, the heraldic standard of the Colquhouns show the cornered inclusion of the renowned Blood Red Hand of the Kings of Ulster, suggesting early alliances and relationships to families of the Siol Cuinn, perhaps even the Clan MacNeill, though the particulars thereof have not so far been discovered.

What we do know from the early eras of Columba and Ninian, was that even in those distant days, the surname of this bloodline was pronounced as “kuh-HOON”, with only slight variations, the “q-u” always being silent, as well as the “l”, until the American migrants and settlers altered it into the evolved form of Calhoun, which would rise to its own fame in the history of the United States. But for now, let us swing our glass back to Scotland, where maps seldom lie calm for long.

The Colquhoun village of Luss, at the foot of its own beautiful glen,

remains one of the most unspoiled spots in all the Highlands. Curiously enough, the original seat of the Colquhouns was not on the Loch Lomond side at all. Dunglass Castle, just below Bowling on the opening Firth of Clyde (at the spot where the old Roman Wall is believed to have had its western end) was the early seat of the race, and the expanse down the western shore of the Firth to Dunbarton Rock formed the old barony of Colquhoun from which the family took its name. Centuries ago, though, the laird of Colquhoun married the heiress of the older lairds of Luss, and thus the seat of the family was removed to Loch Lomond.

In 1358, Sir Robert Colquhoun wed his first and only bride, the solitary heir of the powerful Lord of Luss, securing those lands by heritable right, and winning thereby, for his primary male descendants, the Lordship of Luss – no small achievement certainly in that part of the realm. Robert’s grandson, Sir John Colquhoun (the second of that name), rose to the lofty office of the Comptroller of the Royal Household



*Colquhoun Tartan and Shield*

of Scotland, allowing sufficient influence and resources over time to improve and extend the family's estates and holdings, culminating finally in a charter granted to him which served to incorporate all of the Colquhoun lands in a free barony. A year later, such was expanded to include the forests known as Rossdhu, Glenmachome, and Kilmardinny, all together forming what was then recognized as the Barony of Luss.

Sixteen years later, in 1474, Sir John was named an ambassador to the court of the English king, Edward IV, and then finally closed out an illustrious life while fighting to hold siege over Dunbar Castle for James IV, where the rebels successfully erased his mortality with a cannonball. Great men seldom die easily!

In 1582, Humphrey Colquhoun, the chief of that time, purchased the heritable coronership of

Dunbartonshire, to be held blench of the Crown for the annual fee of one penny; and it was this Sir Humphrey who, ten years later, first came into conflict with the chief of the MacGregors. Due to an assault by that clan from across the loch, Sir Humphrey was forced to take refuge in his stronghold of Bannochra, and there, it is said, he fell victim to the treachery of a servant. That footman, in lighting the way for the chief on the stair that night, while passing a window on the stair, positioned his torch so as to throw its light upon his master. It made a broad mark of Humphrey Colquhoun for the arrow of an archer who lurked in the black of night below. In such a manner was Humphrey slain.

According to most records of the era, it would appear that the MacGregors were instigated to attack the Colquhouns by Archibald, the Campbell Earl of Argyll, who had his own



*The lands of Luss and the Colquhouns*

ends to serve by bringing trouble on both clans. Because of constant raids by the MacGregors, Sir Alexander Colquhoun obtained license per a warrant from James VI to arm his clan for war.

The following February, the two clans, each some three hundred strong, clashed in battle in Glen Fruin. Alastair MacGregor divided his force into two parties, himself attacking the Colquhouns in front, while his brother fell upon them from the rear.

The Colquhouns were pursued to the gates of Rossdhu itself, and no less of them than one hundred and forty were slain, including a number of burgesses of Dunbarton who had taken arms in his support. Some forty students, along with other Dunbarton folk had come up to witness the battle. As a watch and guard, MacGregor had set one of his clansmen, Dugald Ciar Mhor, over these spectators. On the Colquhouns being overthrown, MacGregor noticed Dugald joined in the pursuit, and asked him what he had done with the young men, whereupon the clansman held up his bloody dirk, and answered, "Ask that!"

The MacGregors followed up the defeat of the Colquhouns by plundering and destroying the whole estate. They drove off six hundred cattle, eight hundred sheep, and "14 score of horse", and burned every house and barn, destroying the "Hail plenishing, guidis and gear of the four-score pound land of Luss," while the unfortunate chief, Sir Alexander Colquhoun, looked on helplessly from within the walls of the old castle of Rossdhu, the ruin of which still stands behind the modern mansion. The intense rivalry and slaughter betwixt the Colquhouns and the MacGregors eventually drew to a close by the end of the 1700s. Clan Colquhoun and Clan Gregor symbolized that peace by a handshake at Glen Fruin, lands both clans had formerly soaked with their blood.

Elsewhere, other Colquhouns were proving just as daring and bold; the eleventh Laird of

Luss, another Sir John, was made a baronet of Nova Scotia, but chose to wear those laurels askew, as he was accused of absconding with his wife's sister (the Graham Earl of Montrose's daughter, no less) just seven years later, in 1632. Furthermore, it was charged that he had utilized acts of witchcraft and "sorcerous intrigue" to accomplish these ends! Evidently, however, John found the publicity so damaging, and his sister-in-law's charms so compelling, that he sacrificed his marriage, his home, his title, his estates, and even his own Catholic salvation, to remain a fugitive with his hard-won paramour, exiled from his own lands and excommunicated by the Bishops of Scotland.

The male line of the Colquhouns came to an end with Sir John's grandson, Humphrey. This laird served in the last Scottish Parliament and in a minority headed by George Lockhart, opposed the Union with England. His only daughter, Anne, was married to James Grant, second son of that clan's chief. Adamant that his daughter should inherit his estates, instead of his nephew, he resigned his baronetcy and estates to the King of England, and in 1704 received a new charter securing the life-rent of these possessions to himself and entailing them afterwards upon his daughter and son-in-law.

In order that the name and the estate of Colquhoun should at no time become merged with those of the Grants, he provided that if at any time the Laird of Colquhoun should succeed to the lairdship of Grant, the Colquhoun estate should at once pass to the next most eligible Colquhoun heir.

Sir Humphrey was not long dead when his daughter's husband succeeded his elder brother as Laird of Grant. Thereupon the Colquhoun estates passed to Anne's second son, Ludovic Grant, who took the name of Sir Ludovic Colquhoun. However, Sir Ludovic's elder brother died, and he himself became Laird of Grant, and had to resign the Luss estates to his younger brother,



the third son of Anne Colquhoun. Then came a curious incident. A poacher was charged at Dunbarton Sheriff Court with trespass on the lands of Sir James Colquhoun. His lawyer pleaded that the indictment was irrelevant, as the accuser was not Sir James Colquhoun, Bart., and he won his case.

In arranging for the succession to the estates, Sir Humphrey Colquhoun had failed to provide for the simultaneous succession to the baronetcy, which now really belonged to the descendant of his nephew, John of Tillie-Colquhoun. The Laird of Luss, however, was made a baronet of Great Britain in 1786, and by the failure of the line of Tillie-Colquhoun, the original baronetcy afterwards returned to his descendant.

But, through high times and low, the motto of these proud Colquhouns has ever rung true:

“Si Je Puis” - Medieval French for “If I Can” . . . and certainly, this proud Caledonian family has always dared to try, and to strive for their aspirations, and often celebrated success!

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

## *Henceforth Tales*

by Cass and Deborah Wright

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

John C. Calhoun was an American vice-president who served for one term under Andrew Jackson. His family came from Luss, moving first to Northern Ireland. There they owned 1,000 acres and had a mansion house, which still stands today, known as the Crosh House. While some of the magnificent estate is in ruins, other parts have been nicely rebuilt.

Calhoun's grandfather, James Patrick Calhoun, came to America around 1730, landing most likely at New Castle, Delaware, with the first few waves of Scotch-Irish immigrants from the Bann Valley of Northern Ireland. He died and is buried at the Chestnut Level church cemetery, in Pennsylvania, which dates back to 1724. His headstone, a large, flat slab, is still visible in this old cemetery of which it is said holds the best Celtic art in early America on its tombstones.

After James's death, his wife Catherine, who descended directly from James Hamilton and Hugh Montgomery, the men who began the “Plantation of Ulster,” moved with her family first to the Waxhaws of North and South Carolina, where coincidentally Andrew Jackson was born. From there they moved to Abbeyville, South Carolina. Under threat of Indian attack, the villagers tried to make it to a nearby town where there was more manpower and safety. Their wagons got stuck in Long Cane Creek and nearly everyone was massacred.

Catherine told her children to run to the woods and hide, and not to worry about her. She had lived a long life and was willing to sacrifice it for her sons. Her son Patrick escaped and eventually became a powerful figure in South Carolina politics. He first married a daughter of the legendary Rev. Alexander Craighead, a fiery Revolutionary Presbyterian preacher. She died in childbirth. Next Patrick married the niece of another fiery Revolutionary Presbyterian preacher, Rev. David Caldwell. By her, Patrick had John C. Calhoun. The C. in his name stands for Caldwell.

John C. had many scraps with his own president, Andrew Jackson, over states' rights. Upon leaving the White House, Jackson said his only regret was that he didn't hang Calhoun. These two stubborn Celts each fought for what they thought was right and hung their entire reputations on it. In the end, Jackson held the Union together, and Calhoun became celebrated, by some at least, as the “Father of the American Civil War.”

by Christine Woodcock  
Canada



# Celtic Wedding Traditions

Celtic heritage is rife with traditions and customs. Hopefully we will continue to pass these along to future generations so that they won't be lost. Let's have a look at some of the traditions and customs associated with wedding celebrations and also a look at the meaning behind some of these rituals.

§

Primarily Welsh in origin is the **Lovespoon**. This is a carefully crafted spoon made of wood that a young man might give to his love interest when he is first seeking her courtship. The carving was a display of affection to the lady of interest, but was also to show her father that the suitor had the means of making a living and providing for his future wife from his woodworking skills.

§

The **Luckenbooth** brooch is a Scottish love token, often made of silver and sometimes engraved or encrusted with glass and crystals. The brooch was exchanged by a couple when they became engaged, symbolising their promise to marry. The brooch has two hearts intertwined with a crown on top and got its name from the luckenbooths near St Giles Church in Edinburgh where silversmiths and jewellers had their booths.

§

The **Wedding Sark** was the gift of a shirt

that the bride gave her groom. In return, the groom paid for the bride's wedding dress.

§

Many brides-to-be have what are known as **Hen Parties**, but did you know that the tradition behind this actually involved hens? All of the women in the village would gather together the day before the wedding and pluck enough hens to feed those gathered for the wedding the next day. Each woman would then take a plucked and gutted hen home to cook for the wedding meal.

§

A fun tradition that is sometimes still enjoyed on stag night is that of **Blackenings**. This involves the groom being captured by his friends, stripped of his shirt before being tied up, and "blackened" using ash, soot, treacle, flour and feathers! As if not bad enough, the groom is then subjected to further embarrassment and paraded around the town accompanied by his friends making as much noise as possible, to draw as much attention as possible to him!

§

And either the night before the wedding or the morning of, the bride would be seated on a chair while an older, married woman would **Wash and Dry** her feet. This was meant to symbolise a fresh start and to bring good fortune upon the couple.

There are also many traditions built into the wedding day itself. A **Sixpence** hidden in the brides shoe was meant to bring good luck and is a tradition that is still practiced today. In the Scottish borders, a sprig of **White Heather** in the brides bouquet also symbolised the same. My grandmother used to give all of the brides in the village white heather from her garden for their wedding bouquet. In Ireland, a sprig of shamrock was added to the bride's bouquet for luck.

§

As the bride and her father left for the church, the father of the bride would throw a handful of coins into the street for the children of the village to collect. This was known as a **Scramble**. In Ireland, the coins would be tossed in place of confetti as a wish of wealth and good fortune for the newly-married couple.

§

Another Celtic wedding custom is for a young child to hand the bride a **Horseshoe** as she enters the church. In some Celtic places, the horseshoe is incorporated into the bridal bouquet or even sewn into the bride's gown. This is to bring her good luck in her marriage. The horseshoe is to be kept in the upright position to keep the good luck in.

§

Much has been made of the revival of the custom of **Handfasting**. It is often said that this handfasting is for a year and a day. However, historically, handfasting tended to take place in outer regions, like the Scottish Highlands or Islands, where a minister might not be readily available. In this circumstance, handfasting was used as a means of temporary betrothal until a minister could make his way to the area to perform the actual religious ceremony. This may be a week, a month, a year or even longer!

The literary source for the "year and a day" originally comes from Sir Walter Scott. A year and a day was the period that a couple were to have been married in order for a spouse to have

any claim of inheritable property in the event of the death of the other spouse. If, prior to the year and a day, either party chose to leave the "marriage," the relationship was considered null as was any future claim to inheritance.

Any children who had been brought forth prior to the annulment were still considered lawful offspring of both parents. Further, neither partner could be prevented from seeking marriage to another person once the handfasting was dissolved.

In a handfasting ceremony, the hands of both the bride and the groom are joined just as we see in modern marriage ceremonies today. The person officiating at the ceremony would then wrap the clasped hands in the end of his stole to symbolize the trinity of marriage; man and woman joined by God. This symbolic binding together in marriage later evolved into the practice of wrapping the clasped hands with a cord or an embroidered cloth.

The couple were then considered to be officially bound together and could live as man and wife.

Once the minister made his way to the parish or area where the couple resided, then an official church ceremony would take place, sealing the marriage.

§

A little known tradition in Scottish history is that when a couple married near a stone, it was believed that their vows were more binding. It became customary, then, for the couple to each place a hand on the same stone as they pledged their oath, thereby setting their vows in stone. This stone was known as the **Oathing Stone**.

§

The wedding day ended with the **Lang Reel**. This was a dance where the wedding party and the villagers began dancing in the village, with dancers leaving the reel and retiring for the night as they passed their homes. The reel continued until the only couple left were the bride and groom, who had the last dance of the night.

by *Toni-Maree Rowe*  
*New Zealand*

# On the Darkest Night...

For those readers who live in the northern hemisphere some of the most important celebrations of the winter months are, of course, those surrounding Christmas and New Years.

For myself, here in the southern hemisphere, it is still important but rather confusingly, as it is a summer festival – *don't get me started . . .*

In addition, I am sure that readers of the *Celtic Guide* are all familiar with the discussions surrounding the dating of Christmas at this time, and the associations many make with pagan midwinter festivals. There are, throughout the United Kingdom and Europe, festivals being celebrated at this time which may (or may not) have precedents in the distant past. In Cornwall there are two such midwinter festivals currently celebrated – the Montol Festival and Mummers Day.

## **The Montol Festival**

This festival is a modern reinterpretation and amalgamation of numerous midwinter festivals enacted throughout Cornwall's past. Today the

festival is Penzance-based with Montol Eve being the 21st of December – the date of the winter solstice, and hence its name.



*Above is a photograph by Simon Reed of the 2007 Penzance, Cornwall, Montol Festival celebration held at the Iron Age hillfort, Lescudjack Castle.*

The word *monto* is Cornish and can be translated as either winter solstice or balance. Traditionally, it was celebrated as the Feast of St Thomas the Apostle, perhaps as an appeasement to the Church at the time, even if the celebrations themselves are more pagan than Christian.

At the heart of this midwinter festival, both today and in the past, is Guise Dancing, an important tradition in Cornish culture. There are three types of Guise Dancing – processional, visiting and dramatic. The one thing they all have in common is the art of disguise using costumes, masks, make-up and sound.

In the early nineteenth century Penzance had a rich tradition of Guise Dancing where men and women adopted very elaborate costumes. By the late 19th century there are accounts of national costumes being introduced such as Turkish, Egyptian, Chinese and Indian.

The organisers of today's Montol festival go to great lengths to point out that fancy dress this is not, and there are rules to follow when designing a costume or mask. Guise costumes are often formal, dark colours and top hats are almost a prerequisite. Cross dressing and fantastical beasts are often a feature within a Guild.

“...everyone including the rich and great come masked and disguised onto the streets” (AK Hamilton Jenkin, 1934, *Cornish Homes and Customs*).

The origins of guise dancing seem to be found in the medieval period, all over Europe there are traditions of groups visiting homes on special occasions to perform in disguise. The Montol Eve revel consists of numerous Guise Guild groups wandering around the town performing and playing games on unsuspecting spectators. A favourite past time was to enter a premise and turn all the furniture upside down and then swiftly leave.

“...a good Guise Dance performance causes in the observer an initial sense of unease and uncertainty followed by entertainment. All this is followed by a swift departure into the night leaving a sense of mystery and wonder”. (www.montol.info)

Today's festival begins with first the choosing of a Lord of Misrule (An Arluth Muscok in Cornish) who leads a large Guise procession in the early evening with music, dancing, costumes, masks and lanterns. The music and

dances performed are traditional to this part of Cornwall and were collected and preserved in the 1970s and 1980s by a dedicated group of enthusiasts. The procession is known as the 'Rivers of Fire' and culminates at Lescudjack hill fort, an ancient site dating back to the Iron Age and overlooking Mounts Bay. Here a beacon is lit amongst a great deal of noise, music and cheering.

The banner which is paraded at the head of the processions displays a sun resplendent to represent the return of the sun; the Cornish words 'Golow Tewlder' for Light and Darkness in English as well as the symbols associated with St Thomas the Apostle (the spear and square).

The procession then heads back into Penzance where a variety of events occur (this year there is even a dedicated family area for the younger members of the community who sometimes find Monto Eve a little overwhelming). The traditional Montol 'Oss makes several appearances around town and two of the main Guise Guilds (the Egyptian House and Cornmarket Guilds) perform their choosing of the Master.

“The ancient Guise Guilds of Cornish tradition will be perambulating the town Guizing in their highly decorated costumes performing where ever they go.” (www.montol.info)

The final event of the evening is the late night procession once more through town ending with the 'chalking of the mock'. The Mock is the Cornish version of a Yule log and on this occasion a random person from the crowd is chosen to draw a stickman on the Mock using chalk. The Mock is then burnt. The stickman is said to symbolise Old Father Time and the burning of the Mock is representative of the death of the year. The symbolism of death and rebirth are prevalent throughout this midwinter festival.

### **Mummers Day**

In Padstow, another midwinter festival occurs on Boxing Day and New Years Day. This particular event has been fraught with controversy

in the recent history, with accusations of racism running rampant throughout the media.



*Above is shown an ancient engraving of a Mummer's Day celebration in Cornwall.*

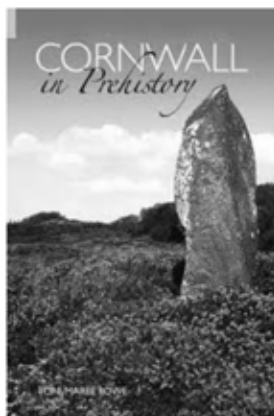
Traditionally, Mummers Day was known as 'Darkie Day' or 'Darking Day' – the name deriving from the blackened faces of the players. However, accusations of racism are unfounded. The name, the blackened faces and dark clothes are all said to be symbols of the winter solstice and the seemingly endless dark nights of winter. Even so, this particular festival is quite low key in comparison to Penzance's Montol Eve.

But as with the Penzance Montol Festival, guise dancing plays an integral part in the festivities however the principle event are the mummer's plays.

Whilst the term 'mummer' appears in mediaeval manuscripts there are no actual records of the type of performances these were but there is a common element of visiting people in disguise at Christmas (with some regional variations to the season ie sometimes it is Easter). It was often a way for people to raise some extra money for Christmas. The plays, for which there are records for, mostly come from the eighteenth century onwards.

Every play is made up of similar ingredients. There are four principle characters – the Hero, the Opponent, the Fool and the Quack Doctor. There is always a fight and always a death. The fight and the death are a means to an end, for the Doctor must use a magic potion to resuscitate the slain character. The Doctor's magic potion is blatant witchcraft and yet it is fully expected and accepted as the norm. The resurrection of the 'dead' individual can be said to symbolise the resuscitation of the sun, once more death and rebirth are the unifying idea behind the midwinter festival. The parallels with biblical stories are also obvious.

Cornwall has many celebrations, old and new, but perhaps the one thing which they all have in common is the desire to bring a community together, to strengthen those ties and to encourage a pride of place. To this extent, regardless of whether a person agrees or disagrees with the symbolism festivals such as Montol, Mummer's Day and the summer festivals of Golowan and the 'Obby 'Oss do precisely that. In the words of my mother-in-law, "Proper job me 'ansom!"



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by Jim McQuiston  
USA



*The Battle of Guilford Courthouse took place near present-day Greensboro, NC, on 15 March 1781. It was one of the most decisive battles of the American Revolution, as local Scottish-Irish militiamen helped put one-quarter of Lord Cornwallis's crack British troops out of commission in one afternoon.*

## A REVOLUTIONARY CELEBRATION

Two significant events happened in American history on March 15th, referred to since Roman times as the *Ides of March*, and best known as the date that Julius Caesar was assassinated, back in 44 B.C.

The term has come to be used as a metaphor for impending doom. On March 15, 1767, Andrew Jackson was born, and he certainly spelled doom to American aristocracy, to Spanish influence in Florida, to the British in the Revolution and again in the War of 1812, and to warring Indians on the American frontier.

Also, on March 15, 1781, the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, which was located near

present-day Greensboro, NC, took place, and spelled doom to Cornwallis's best troops, of which he lost one-quarter in this single battle. This was the last decisive Revolutionary War battle he fought before his surrender at Yorktown. The Guilford Courthouse Battlefield was the first to be recognized by the U.S. government as a National Military Park.

Lord Cornwallis wrote of the Guilford battle, "I never saw such fighting since God made me. The Americans fought like demons."

Only one biographer of Andrew Jackson, that I know of, has made the link between his birth date and the day of the fateful battle.

This fact is mentioned in Professor Rik Booraem's *Young Hickory*, when he tells the story of how Jackson celebrated his 21st birthday on the battlefield grounds, while also celebrating the 7th anniversary of the battle itself. A large party took place on March 15, 1788, and was paid for by Jackson. It included drinking and dancing, cockfighting, horse racing, and gambling. A few months after the party, Jackson left for Tennessee and the life for which he is much better known.

The National Park Service says of the battle, "The largest, most hotly-contested battle of the Revolutionary War's Southern Campaign was fought at the small North Carolina back county hamlet of Guilford Courthouse."

A look at a contemporary map of the houses surrounding the battlefield shows one Scottish-Irish family after another – Rankin, Denny, Dunn, Mitchell, Blair, Caldwell, Donnell, Finley, McKnight, McClintock, Black, Thompson, McNairy and, yes, even McQuiston. These were the families who "fought like demons."

Many books on Jackson say he was only 13 when he was orphaned, but this is untrue. He didn't return to the Waxhaws until after the Guilford Courthouse Battle, when he was imprisoned in the Waxhaws, in April 1781, according to his own writings. By then he was 14.

After his mother secured his release, she traveled to Charleston to help other prisoners, and died there long after the Guilford battle.

Jackson traveled to Charleston twice as a young lad, and I believe it was to find his mother's grave and perhaps even to bring her body back to be buried next to his father's grave. He made one of those trips in the company of his Uncle Crawford who had lost two sons in Charleston. What more likely object of a trip for these two grieving souls than to recover the bodies of their loved ones?

History does Jackson injustice to insinuate he went to Charlestown just to blow his inheritance on gambling and drinking. He loved his mother very much and says so in his writings.

With all of his immediate family gone, Jackson gravitated to his extended family in Guilford County. He writes that he worked at a store in Martinville, the forerunner to the town of Greensboro. His friend and fellow law student was John McNairy whose family farm sat next to the battlefield. Andrew Jackson, future president of the United States, celebrated the battle on March 15, 1788, in the middle of a once-bloody field near the McNairy home.

March 15, 1767 saw the birth of one of the greatest presidents this country has ever had, and he carried much Highland blood in his veins as he spelled doom to the enemies of America. His ancestors appear to include the Scottish-Irish families of Hutchinson, Jackson, McRandall, Moody and, yes, even McQuiston.

Andrew Jackson is the only president in history to leave office with no national debt. He took on the big powers and the big problems of the day, kept the Union together, and is credited with allowing the common people to assume the identity of being an "American."

Jackson is the only president to have an era named for him - the *Jacksonian Era*. Under Jackson the white male right to vote was greatly expanded. His insistence on keeping the Union together inspired Abraham Lincoln, who used much of Jackson's writings to establish his own policies.

While a slave holder himself, Jackson did much to lead to the abolishment of slavery. He fought against his own vice-president, John C. Calhoun, when Calhoun tried to establish the right by any state to nullify any federal law, which would have led to the perpetuation of slavery. This verbal and political battle between Jackson and Calhoun is thought, by many historians, to be the seed of the Civil War.

Jackson is criticized for the *Trail of Tears* episode involving the Cherokee Indians. One reality Jackson knew well is that both Whites and Indians had suffered terrible torture and death in wars along America's frontier borders. I have a book describing some of the extreme



methods of torture used and will not repeat them here; they are so distasteful. Jackson, his family and friends were many times attacked by roaming groups of painted warriors. In fact, he pretty much spent his entire life until his presidency dealing with Indian wars and frontier massacres.

No president before Jackson dared tackle the problem of these frontier massacres and torture. Without some action, the deaths, torturing, and scalping would have continued. He knew there was no way to stop the westward and southern flow of frontier families, and the horror would continue. He wrote a very long paper on the problem and his proposed solution. In it, he talks about how his own people were forced to leave their family homelands and grave sites behind to move on in a world always growing and modernizing. He offered land and compensation, and several tribes accepted the offer. Some did not.

The *Trail of Tears* was tragic, but the loss of lives and suffering prevented by his bold action were immeasurable, and for this he seldom gets any credit. Also, he had instigated the policy, but did not personally carry it out. It is very doubtful that, if present, he would have condoned any of the misery of the long marches. Jackson had an adopted Native American son, and he had treated defeated chiefs with honor during the height of the Indian wars. He was simply trying his best to deal with a problem no one else would.

During most of Jackson's youth and early adulthood, he saw so much killing and tragedy. His brothers and mother both died because of the Revolution. His friends in Tennessee were massacred in their sleep by warring Creek. He fought the Spanish, British, pirates, Indians, and secessionists in his attempt to protect our country. Perhaps no man has ever done more.

Andrew Jackson was almost certainly at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse delivering messages for his commanding officer, William Davie, his "ideal officer," and the Commissary General at the Guilford Courthouse Battle.

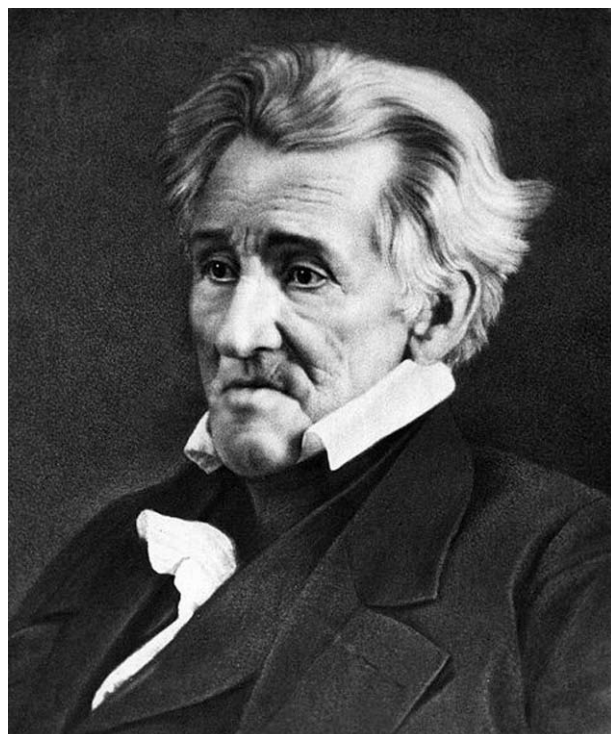
Jackson is reported to have gone to the homes of some of his Scottish-Irish relatives and friends near Guilford Courthouse, on March 12, to warn them of Cornwallis' approach.

The *Ides of March* was a double whammy for the British three days later, as Andy celebrated his 14th birthday, no doubt watching the British get soundly beaten by the "demon" Americans, including many of his own relatives.

Seven years later, based on Professor Rik Booraem's tale, Jackson and friends celebrated that battle and his own 21st birthday.

There have been so many lies and misguided histories written of Andrew Jackson, painting him as ignorant, unfeeling and cruel. The truth is, he risked his life many times over to protect America against many forces that would bring her down – the British, the Indians, the Spanish, pirates, big banking interests and aristocrats.

He was the most popular man in America upon his inauguration and had to sneak out a back window and stay in a hotel that evening as over 20,000 "Americans" took over the White House in celebration of the common man's win over oppressors of all sorts, epitomized by their hero - Andrew Jackson.



# Bagpipes in the Morn

by Victoria Roberts  
USA



*Pipers at the Ligonier Games, September 2014*

## *There is naught like the sound of bagpipes in the morn . . .*

Have you ever attended a Scottish festival or the Highland Games?

I recently attended the 56th annual Ligonier Highland Games in Ligonier, PA, which was generously sponsored by the Clan Donald Educational and Charitable Trust, and the St. Andrews Society of Pittsburgh.

The clan and I had a tent set up right smack dab in the middle of the bagpipers, before the field for the games, and a very short distance from the haggis. We definitely had a prime location for all-things Scottish. This was my first year attending this particular event, and it certainly won't be my last.

I've been to many Scottish festivals and there is always camaraderie among the clans. Everyone comes together for the purpose of friendly competition and kinship. To prove my point, I had the MacDonald tartan draped across my tables, and a lovely gentleman embraced me wholeheartedly. He had a very thick Scottish



brogue – “I see ye have the clan Donald tartan. Please do me the honor of coming to our clan tent for a wee bit of whisky or wine, your whole family. We'd be honored to have ye.”

Seriously. Who is that nice anywhere?

That's why I love the atmosphere. We sat under perfect, sunny skies, enjoying the athletes, Highland dancing, solo piping and drumming events, Gaelic Mod, Scottish breed dog exhibits, sheep herding, story-telling, and my favorite... Highland cows!

Och, aye, and of course, men in kilts!

I also lost count of how many times kilted men walked up to my table and said they were

going to sue me because of my books. They were especially surprised when I answered them.

“Yes, I know. I have your body on the cover of my books.”

“How did you know?”

“Lucky guess.”

Needless to say, I’ve heard that line a time or two.

My son has a field day at these festivals. When my first novel was published in 2012, my son was seven, and I was in the midst of planning my first book signing. My daughter said in a jesting manner, “Boy, it’s too bad you can’t get the cover model to come to your signing. He’d help you sell a lot of books.”

My son piped up without missing a beat, “I’ll do it. But... you have to buy me the whole outfit, ghillies and all, and it has to be from Scotland.”

From that moment on, my son was kilted up at all my book signings and events, willingly.

Do I force him?

Contrary to what you may think, umm...no.

He relishes every moment. I think he enjoys the attention he gets from the lasses. If you’ve never attended a Scottish festival or the Highland Games, I strongly encourage you to take your family for a fun-filled day of clans, food, games, bagpipes, and all-things kilted.

C’mon and get your tartan on!



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by Liam O Shea  
Ireland

**Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass,  
it's about learning to dance in the rain!**

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*Here's our wonderful mascot, Obie, tearing it up, and making the most of the stormy weather.*

*How often does it rain in Ireland?*

*The general impression is that it rains quite a lot of the time in Ireland, but two out of three hourly observations will not report any measurable rainfall. The average number of wet days ranges from about 150 days a year along the east and southeast coasts, to about 225 days a year in parts of the west. Compare this to the American cities of Seattle with an average of 158 days per year with rain, and others like New York City (119), Boston (127), and Nashville (119).*

*The wettest months, in almost all areas of Ireland, are December and January. April is the driest month, generally, across the country. However, in many southern parts, June is the driest.*

*We don't mind the rain . . . it keeps us GREEN!*

# An Eagla An Dearmaid

by Alison Macrae  
Canada



## Lest We Forget

*Simon Fraser, 15th Lord Lovat, at Newhaven after returning from the Dieppe Raid, August 1942.*

*Wiki photo by H22583, from the collections of the Imperial War Museum.*

*An eagla an dearmaid*, translated from Gaelic means, “Lest we forget.”

November is a special month; Remembrance Day is always on the 11th of November. The motto “Lest We Forget” comes to mind on that day as well. How lucky we are to live the way we do because of all the men and women who sacrificed so much in the wars, and we are celebrating by living in freedom today.

Another important celebration is writing about two of our very brave Scottish soldiers. One was born in Canada but was taken away at the age of three by his father who brought him up in his native Scotland.

His name was Bill Millin and he became Lord Lovat’s personal piper, piping British Commandos ashore on D-Day.

Who else is featured in my story?

We begin with Brigadier Simon Christopher Joseph Fraser. He was the 15th Lord Lovat and 4th Baron Lovat, and was born on July 9, 1911 in Beaufort Castle, Inverness, Scotland. He was the 25th Chief of the Clan Fraser of Lovat, and a prominent British commando during the Second World War. His friends always referred to him as Shimi Lovat, an Anglicized version of his name in the Scottish Gaelic language. His clan referred to him as *MacShimidh*, his Gaelic

patronymic meaning “Son of Simon.” He was in the Lovat Scouts, which was a British army commando unit. As the name suggests, the Lovat Scouts, a territorial army unit, were founded in Inverness, and the Frasers of Lovat have been their commander-in-chief throughout the years.

The unit was formed during the Second Boer War as a Scottish Highland Yeomanry regiment of the British army and is the first known military unit to wear a “Ghillie Suit.”

In 1916, the Scouts formally became the British army’s first sniper unit, then known as sharpshooters. Sharpshooter units were formed from gamekeepers or *gillies* of the highland estates and were used in an observation and sniping role on the western front until the end of the war.

The word *gillie* is a Scots term that refers to a man or a boy who acts as an attendant on a fishing or hunting expedition, primarily in the Highlands. The Scouts sometimes wore the Ghillie Suit, which is also known as a yowie suit or cameo tent, and which is a type of camouflage clothing designed to resemble heavy foliage. It consisted of loose strips of burlap, cloth or twine made to look like leaves and twigs, and optionally augmented with scraps of foliage from the area.

Brigadier Simon Fraser was from a clan that had dominated local politics and that has been active in every major military conflict involving Scotland. Clan Fraser can be traced back to the early 1100s with the reign of William the Lion. Their motto is “Je suis prest” or “I am ready.”

That motto holds so true for Brigadier Simon Fraser. During the Second World War he was given command of the No.4 Commando unit. He was also a temporary major, as he commanded 100 men of that unit and a 50-man detachment from the Canadian Carleton and York Regiment in a raid on the French coastal village of Hardelot in April 1942.

For this action he was awarded the Military Cross. He also led a successful raid at Dieppe, at Sword Beach, on the northern coast of France, August 19, 1942, and for this he was awarded

the Distinguished Service Order. He, along with some of his troops from his brigade at Sword Beach, advanced onward to Pegasus Bridge, which had been defiantly defended by men from the 6th Airborne Division who had landed in the early hours by glider.

His brigade arrived a little past 1:00 P.M. at Pegasus Bridge. The rendezvous time, as per the plan, was noon. Upon reaching this rendezvous, he apologized to Lt. Col. Geoffrey Pine-Coffin of 7th Parachute Battalion for being late. Yes, it seems he was a stickler for details and promises.

Now for Private Piper Bill Millin. He was born in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada on July 14, 1922 to a father of Scottish origin who returned the family to Glasgow. There, the father became a policeman when Bill was three years old.

Piper Bill joined the territorial army in Fort William, which is in the Inverness area where his family had moved to and where he learned to play the bagpipes. He played in the pipe bands of the Highland Light Infantry and the Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders before joining the commando unit to begin training with Brigadier Simon Fraser at Achnacarry. This was where the commando training depot was located for the Allied Forces from 1942 to 1945, and included French, Dutch, Belgian, Polish, Norwegian and Czechoslovakian troops. (Millen became Brigadier Simon Fraser’s personal piper.)

Private Bill, as he was commonly known, is best remembered for playing the bagpipes whilst under fire during the D-Day landing in Normandy, at Sword Beach. Scottish and Irish soldiers had long used pipers in battles, but the use of bagpipes was restricted to rear areas by the time of the Second World War by the British Army.

Piper Bill, who was only 21 when he landed during the D-Day landing in Normandy, along with his fellow commandos, came ashore wearing a kilt, and it was the same kilt his father had worn in Flanders during World War I – it was the Cameron tartan. He was armed

only with his pipes and the *sgian-dubh*, or dirk, sheathed inside his kilt-hose on the right side. The reason for the kilt and not trousers was that he was playing the bagpipes. His commander Simon Fraser had ordered Piper Bill to play, and no rifle was in his possession. When Piper Bill cited the regulations concerning rifles, he recalled that Brigadier Simon Fraser replied, “Ah, but that’s the English War Office. You and I are both Scottish, and that doesn’t apply.”

Among some of the tunes he played were *Hielan Laddie* and *The Road to the Isles*, as his comrades fell around him on Sword Beach. Later he stated that he talked to captured German snipers who claimed they did not shoot him, because they thought he was crazy.

The raid in Dieppe was horrendous in the loss of lives – over 4,000 casualties mostly Canadian troops. No.4 Commando executed its assault with most of the men returning safely back to Britain.



*Piper Bill Millin playing his bagpipes for fellow Scottish commando troops of the British army during the Second World War.*

Private Millin saw further action before being demobbed (demobilized) in 1946. He then went to work on Lord Lovat’s highland estate, and later became a registered psychiatric nurse.

Both Brigadier Simon Fraser and Piper Bill Millin were featured in the movie *The Longest Day*. The Brigadier was played by Peter Lawford and Pipe Major Leslie de Laspee, the official piper to the Queen Mother in 1961, played the role of Piper Bill.

Brigadier Simon Fraser died, March 16, 1995 at the age of 83, and Piper Bill Millin played the bagpipes at his funeral. Piper Bill died August 17, 2010, at the age of 88.

Two set of Piper Bill’s bagpipes are on display. One set is at the Memorial Museum of Pegasus Bridge in Ranville, France and the other set, along with his kilt, bonnet and dirk, is on displayed at Dawlish Museum, which is in Devon, England.

A bronze, life-sized statue of Piper Bill Millin was unveiled on June 8, 2013 at Colleville-Montgomery, near Sword Beach in France. More than 500 pipers from 21 countries took part in the unveiling of the statue, created by French sculptor Gaetan Ader, which took more than four years to complete, with fund raising done by the D-Day Piper Bill Millin Association.

This story only features two Scottish soldiers that helped in the Second World War. There were so many more who fought so gallantly to bring us freedom, and for this I, for one, will forever be grateful that we can live in and celebrate life in a free country.



*Piper Bill Millin statue at Sword Beach, Normandy*

# Lughnasa and Lammas: Summer Holidays Lost and Found Again

by Carolyn Emerick  
USA



John Linnell - The Harvest Cradle, 1859

For centuries, two holidays were celebrated by neighboring peoples on the same day. The people were the Celts and the Anglo-Saxons, and their holidays were Lughnasa and Lammas, respectively. Usually the date fell on August 1st, but there could be variations. The Celtic *Lughnasa*, also spelled *Lughnasadh*, was thus named because it was originally associated with the god Lugh, but the festival had other names in Celtic regions outside of Ireland. The Anglo-Saxon word *Lammas* evolved from the Old English *hlaf-mas*, meaning “loaf-mass” in honor of bread baked from the first grain harvest.

Over time, there has been a conflating of these two holidays that still occurs today. The Celtic Lughnasa was originally dedicated to Lugh. It was more of a religious festival probably facilitated by the Druids. It was also a time of games and sport, and has been referred to as a sort of ancient Irish Olympics. Whereas, the Anglo-Saxon Lammas was the first harvest festival of the year. Therefore, early Lammas celebrations would not have had a fixed date,

as it depended on how the crops fared that season.

As time moved forward and the regions became Christianized, both high days became disconnected from their original meanings. They became seasonal festivals, times for gatherings and celebrating, and holiday markets.

Like other festivals based on seasonal changes and crop cycles, which varied from year to year, Christianization altered the meaning, and Lammas was assigned the fixed date. It should be noted that the “mas” suffix in *hlaf-mas* is demonstrative of early Christianization of this festival. However, like other holidays ending in “mas” (such as Christmas, Candlemas, St. Michaelmas, etc), a pre-Christian origin is strongly believed.

Although these festivals were altered greatly over the passage of time, there are historical references to both of them which demonstrate their continued widespread presence in both cultures. We know a bit about ancient Lughnasa thanks to ancient Roman writers who described



the festival being celebrated in Gaul. Lugh was a multi-faceted deity featured in ancient myths who possessed many attributes. In this case, he seems to have had an association with agriculture and fertility, as Roman writers described a widespread harvest cult devoted to him. So, the harvest was probably also an element in the Lughnasa festival, although, as explained above, there was much more to it. Lugh's festival also gave its name to the month of August, which was called *Lúnasa* in the Irish language.

The celebration of Lughnasa was celebrated by Celts far and wide, although the festival had different names in different regions. For example, the Welsh corresponding festival was called *Gwyl Awst*. While there were local variations, there were also shared practices. It was common for Lughnasa gatherings to be held high upon a local hilltop in regions far and wide. Visitations to holy wells were also common in both Ireland and Scotland. As the festival moved forward into the Christian era, these places became sites of holy pilgrimages made on this day.



*Britain peoples circa 600. Image credit user Hel-hama on Wikimedia Commons.*

Another notable change in tradition between the pagan and Christian versions of Lughnasa was the incorporation of Saint Patrick to the holiday lore. Pagan lore told the tale of Lugh's victory over a magical rival, Balar of the Baleful Eye. When the rival was defeated, Lugh confiscated his possessions (consisting of corn and a bull) which he then distributed among his people. The Christian Lughnasa story replaced Lugh with Patrick as the hero. His opponent is *Crom Dubh*, representing the archetypal pagan who must be defeated.

Yet, in both cases, the festival appears to have been a time of great revelry. People travelled great distances to join in the festivities. In some areas, such as the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, food could be scarce in the period before August 1st. So, Lughnasa was a feast time of great happiness.

Certain areas appear to have had overlapping customs between Lughnasa and Lammas over the years. For instance, the Scottish Lowlands were a place of heavy Anglo-Saxon cultural influence from the very early Middle Ages. In fact, the Scots language (sometimes called Doric) is not Gaelic, but is descended from the Old English of the early Anglo-Saxons (for more on this see "Scotland's Other Heritage: The forgotten legacy of Germanic Scotland" in *Celtic Guide*, June 2013).

Lughnasa and Lammas were both celebrated in different parts of Scotland. In fact, in some old reports, people actually lamented that Lammas is no longer being celebrated in places like Aberdeenshire, implying that it once was. This August 1st festival was sometimes celebrated as Lammastide in parts of Wales as well. But, because these festivals were all celebrated on the same day, it is also possible that these two traditions merged into one another over the years, especially as English speakers simply referred to the Gaelic festivals by the English term Lammas.

Margaret Killip does this very thing when she makes mention of Lammas Day in her book *The*

*Folklore of the Isle of Man.* She quickly makes it clear that she is actually discussing the Manx festival called *Laa Luanyys*, which corresponds with Lughnasa. Killip states that:

*They observed it without realizing that they were doing so or that such a festival existed, since all that remained of its ritual was a general inclination to climb to the tops of mountains on the first Sunday in August and visit any wells that could be taken in on the way...*

*But very little is known of how the day was spent originally, as one of the few surviving accounts of its rites only tells how the inhabitants of Kirk Lonan climbed to the top of Snaefell, and behaved there 'very rudely and indecently.' The church disapproved strongly of the way the day was observed, and to give it holier associations the holiday was changed from the first of August to the first Sunday of the month. (Killip, p176).*



*A British stamp celebrating Lammastide*

The early roots of the true Lammas festival are even more difficult to trace, and the constant conflation of the two holidays does not help matters. We can assume that Lammas was widespread, as references to it turn up frequently in folklore accounts. As we have just seen, the word is often used to mean Lughnasa when describing Celtic regions. But, in areas with a strong Anglo-Saxon heritage, we can assume that the word Lammas does in fact refer

to the descendant of the Anglo-Saxon holiday Lammas.

Frustratingly, even a fairly recent scholarly work conflates these two holidays. *A History of Pagan Europe*, by Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, mentions Lammas in both their chapter on the Celts as well as their chapter on Germanic culture. They first describe Lammas in their chapter on the Celts discussing Lowland Scotland, which had strong Anglo-Saxon heritage, so it is likely that this region's festival did have roots to the Anglo-Saxon *hlaf-mas*. Then in the next paragraph they describe Lammas in Ireland, with no mention of Lughnasa whatsoever (p. 109). But, in the following chapter on the Germanic people they discuss the Anglo-Saxon festival taking place on August 1st and say that it was "later equated with Lammas" (p122). They have completely misconstrued the terms!

These authors have apparently read accounts wherein Lughnasa has been erroneously referred to as Lammas and misunderstood Lammas to be the name of the Irish holiday, and then assumed the English adopted the word when, in fact, it is the exact opposite, and the English word Lammas is often incorrectly used to refer to Lughnasa!

Well, to clear it up, Lughnasa is mentioned in some of the earliest Irish records and it was even observed by the Romans who also mention the festival. Likewise, Lammas is mentioned eight times in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronical* written in the 9th century. Unfortunately, Lammas is not described in detail in this document. It is simply mentioned in passing and used as a calendar reference. But, regardless, we do have early mentions of Lughnasa by the Irish and early mentions of Lammas by the Anglo-Saxons. So, their cultural identities are solidly documented.

But, that hasn't stopped them from being confused by the public over the years.

Moving forward into the new millennium, Lughnasa and Lammas have been reborn. These holidays are being revived with great vigor by

the Neo-Pagan and Pagan Reconstructionist movements. Unfortunately, the terms are still being conflated and confused even by adherents of faiths which celebrate them today!

It is still erroneously believed that Lammas is another word for Lughnasa, and vice versa. Yet, when we see that folklorists and academics have conflated the terms right along, it is no wonder there is such confusion among practitioners today.



*An Arch Druid in his judicial habit overseeing a Celtic celebration.*

Although the term “Neopaganism” is technically an umbrella term under which virtually all forms of modern European paganism fall, there is a distinction between religious groups such as Wicca, which was invented in the 1940s by a founder who was more interested in ceremonial magic and secret societies than historical ancient religion, and other forms which take a scholarly approach to reconstructing the ancient beliefs. The former appear to be more likely to misconstrue the two terms, whereas Anglo-Saxon and Celtic pagan reconstructionists literally do their homework

and tend to know more about these holidays than the scholars mentioned above. These groups are building new traditions associated with the August 1st holidays. Lugh is again being honored by Celtic pagans. And, Anglo-Saxon pagans remember the first wheat harvest by baking home-made bread. They look to the past to infuse new meaning as they revive these ancient high days.

Personally, I think that the loss of the holidays that previously occurred regularly throughout the year is one of the direct causes of what some might consider a sickness in Western society today. We used to have feast days, seasonal markets which were more like fairs, high days and holy days which often lasted for several days, and so forth, built into our calendar. Our current capitalist machine demands that we wear ourselves down to a breaking point, with two weeks of paid vacation per year, if we’re lucky. And now, because the West has become so self-conscious about how we have interacted with minority cultures in the past, we have allowed the few holidays we have left to come under attack to the point where we may lose them, too.

How short-sighted of people to be unable to see that you do not have to be a Christian to appreciate Christmas. How ignorant of history to not understand that not only was Christmas originally the pagan Yule in English speaking society (and other Solstice festivals in other cultures), but also that the religious implications of a holiday are not necessarily more important than the pragmatic things that come along with it, such as a break from work, time to decompress, time to spend with the family and friends, and time to share a pint and have some fun!

Should a religion be pushed upon others? Absolutely not. But should we lose all of our scheduled holidays because some people are too short-sighted to see the bigger picture?

Lughnasa and Lammas survived a drastic change in religious culture by the people who celebrated them. They continued to be celebrated

for hundreds of years. What stamped them out? – Modernity, puritanical work ethic, and the rise of industrialism and capitalism. Our holidays have been cherry-picked off one by one. For example, how many of us celebrate Michaelmas or Candlemas today? I think it is time that we, as a culture, stop to evaluate what we are doing.

Does being inclusive have to mean we allow the few holidays we have left to disappear? Do we continue to bow down to the capitalist machine as if that is our new religion, only to watch our remaining holidays be eaten alive by corporate greed?

I think the modern pagans have got the right idea. They, perhaps, are the only people putting their money where their mouth is and holding tight to the identity and culture of Olde Europe, while the rest of Western society is complacent to watch it slip away.

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# THE WEDDING GUEST



Ronald the Tacksman had taken fast to love with a bonnie young lass, the clan daughter to chief of the MacMartin Camerons from Letterfinlay called Eili na Leitreach. This same girl was also wildly in love with Ronald.

Bonnie and beautiful, that blithe lass had bright, pale green eyes which, gazed upon, could make a man's soul sing. Her long, shimmering, silky hair was red as a rising sun. Eili's voice sang soft like singing doves and her flesh was white as fresh falling snow. Young, bonnie, and blithe that girl quickly caught the eye of many an unwed man.

As such, there was another suitor who, though far from holding Eili's heart, had his own designs on the delightful young dove. Her unwanted suitor was the overly proud Lord of the MacIntosh, a much older goat of a man with great wealth and power. He held many a meeting with Eili's father, MacMartin, and was trying to work over the doubtful Cameron chieftain's way regarding his daughter.

To hold back Ronald's high heart for Eili, her father told the warrior she was yet far too young to wed. The tacksman did not take to heart the Highland chief's words for he wondered

at that man's true meaning. Ronald knew well that marrying MacMartin's young girl to the MacIntosh meant gaining more prosperity. So the tacksman bided his time to consider turning the tide of that dallying chieftain's decision.

Though Eili flatly refused to love the MacIntoch Laird, she had far less say in that matter than her heart would want. Back during those wild days of old, many a marriage had little to do with love. Lasses married who they were told to marry, not necessarily who their wily hearts wanted. So it seemed with Eili that this would also be the way of it.

Now Eili also held a strong hold on her da's dear heart, as bonnie daughters often do. MacMartin was well torn in taking action against his little lass, so tarrying to answer the MacIntosh, the troubled Cameron chief also bided his time.

The Lord of the MacIntosh was not one who liked to wait, and the great chief began to conspire against the girl. Making a plan with his kinsmen, MacIntosh no longer wanted to linger. Boldly kidnapping a bride was a common practice of the times. So the evil Lord set out to take by force the fair Eili.



On a cold, clouded winter day, Ronald with a few friends, undaunted by the weather, went out hunting deer. The Highland lads had stalked a great red stag high above Loch Lochy, nearly all the way up a mountain to its crispy, snow-covered caps. They had heard the bellowing honk of a big bull stag and so went soft foot for their prey. Other than a good and bloody fight there are few things a Highlander loves more than the hunt. A considerable amount of pride went into closing quietly in on the stalker's prize. There are many legends told of lofty hunters who would patiently climb and

crawl over glen and hill to pounce close on good game.

These Highland huntsmen had done just that. Late in the day, with bows drawn deep, they had finally closed in on a fine, strong stag. Ronald's bow was bent, well ready to let fly a deadly fletched dart at the run down deer, when suddenly, echoing across the snow-covered caps, came a shrill scream. The big deer darted quickly away, kicking crispy snow in its wake.

The lads each looked from one to the other, wondering where that horrible howl came from. "Tis a Banshee!" bellowed one hunter. "By God, tis a Banshee!" followed another. Ronald held his tongue not wanting to be too quick to talk. Then again, the screeching howl came across the wispy wind like a bellowing bear calling for her cub. "I say it is a Banshee, lads, let us leave this place while we still can!" came the chime of yet another hunter.

Fleet of foot, they took from that mountain top; all save Ronald who found that cry strangely familiar. He slung his bow then, with axe and targe in hand, headed toward the terrified call. Again came the scream, whirling on the winds, clearly closer now. It was then that the heart of that cry came to him. He felt sure it was the fair dove-like Eili calling in distress. Ronald, axe in hand, went hot foot toward the cries of that holder of his heart.

When he crested a crisp snow-covered hill and found the fair Eili, she was making a mighty struggle, hard by within the grip of two highland men. Not one to wait when his love was at stake, Ronald made long strides to free the fair Eili. Like stalking the deer, he came in close, hidden under Eili's hollering. Then, bold with his axe blade, he laid one of the Highlanders low. A deadly blow to that kidnapper's head dashed his brains down to the white-covered ground.

Eili, now having both hands free, pulled her wee dirk and willfully drove the Lord of the Macintosh away. Upon recognizing the

Macintosh suitor, Ronald rose, ready to tend with that man's tyranny. Macintosh had long lived the life of a Highland warrior and so readied his deadly weapon without delay. "Young Ronald, do not be dallying this bold Lord from his rightful bride," were his only warning words to the young warrior.

Eili slipped further away from the malicious Macintosh and in a tight-lipped tone spoke, "I am no his wife, Ronald. This too proud Macintosh wickedly plucked me from a happy home against my will." Ronald, wild with rage, could not utter a word. Instead he hefted his hand axe, tipped his targe, and made ready for a fight. The Lord, a seasoned snake, ripe with his own rage over the girl and a fallen friend, gripped his glory weapon and went for the MacDonald.

The bold Macintosh Highlander fought with a long-handled shield biter, a great glittering axe, far reaching and broad bladed. Many a mail-clad man had fallen, red and ruined, from its hard hitting. However, the young Highlander was undaunted and no dunce when it came to warfare's ways. That brave young clansman prepared to greet the proud Lord of the cats. Eili stood by, dirk held fast in her hand, and awaited the outcome.

For the briefest of moments those two men did not move. Each eyed the other, hardhearted and keen to kill, then quickly closed for the clash. The Macintosh came deadly fast crashing down from above, but Ronald closed fast, bringing his targe up and in to bind that big axe. The Lord's broad blade hit heavy and bit deep, driving Ronald's targe down. Ronald dodged, slipping laterally, and dashed in to deliver a harsh hit. The Macintosh was able to pass and parry part of Ronald's heavy hack. He counterattacked, swinging round his shaft, content to crush the young lad's knee.

Ronald, nimble as a stag darting fast through the forest, dipped his targe down, driving the shaft from its target. Simultaneously, he swung

his hand axe fast for the MacIntosh's fingers. Seasoned in his weapons craft, the Lord slipped his grip and saved those fingers, but the move caused a pause in his pole-axe play. Ronald, making the most that moment, punched the rim of his targe forward, crashing into the MacIntosh's crown. Knocked hard on the noggin, that Lord fell fast. Crimson came washing down from the top his crown to collect blood red in that old warrior's beard.

Ronald closed fast for the finishing, raising his hand axe high to bring the Macintosh face to face with his fate. Eili, well wise for her young years, knew if her lover killed the MacIntosh Lord, his clansmen would come and her love's life would not be long lasting. So the lass called out to stay Ronald's fate fulfilling hand axe. Fast and fearsome was Ronald's love for that fair lass, and so for her, he did not let his heavy hand fall. He put Eili on the proud MacIntosh's



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highland horse and they made for her father's home. The lovers tread fast, following that long, high mountain toward Eili's home. What the maiden did not know was that during the skirmish, Ronald received a good gash beneath his bonnet, and all the while crimson blood continued to soak his cap. In time, they put past that rough mountain trail and took to an easier path. That stout lad, seeking not to worry his fair woman, kept her behind on the horse while he bravely led the way holding its bridle.

When maid and savior finally reached her father's home safe, Ronald, weak from loss of blood, fell to that man's floor. The bold lad was quickly put to a rope bed, and when Eili lifted his blood-soaked bonnet, she found the terrible gash beneath. It turned out the blood had been blinding that brave lad at least half the trip home, yet he held his word the whole way to keep her free of fear. Eili quickly put healing herbs to work on his wicked wound. For several hard weeks in the Letterfinlay house, the lass tended

to that heroic highlander while he lay wrecked and in ruin.

When Ronald had healed whole again, Eili's father had to admit the hero had nobly earned her happy hand. They had a bonnie wedding with pipers playing and heaps of fine food for feasting. Afterward, Ronald took his blithe bride home to Inch. There, the proud pair lived and loved the life young lovers should. Before a year passed, the young couple had a dove-like daughter born to them. She was the pride of the lad's clan. A bonnie, bellowing bairn well loved by one and all.

On a dark low-clouded day, the MacDonald tacksman had to tend to some business south of his clan's lands. Ronald hated the thought of having to leave his happy home for any length of time; however, he consoled himself in that it would be a short trip from home. Eili was equally unsettled by the task taking her proud tacksman away, but ever ready with cheer, she reminded herself that he would promptly return.



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A clansman named Coll, a fine and trustworthy friend and relative, promised to pay proper attention to the welfare of Ronald's family while he was away. The young Coll, with the new born babe in his happy hands, gave a lengthy good bye to his fellow clansman. With a laughing heart, the tacksman asked his longtime friend. "Should I not return, will you wed my wife or marry my daughter?" Happily, Coll gave a great hoot and calling out to his kinsman replied, "Perhaps both will be delivered as my destiny."

As fate will fall, the time of Ronald's return came and went. Days dragged on and then months, many months. Snows fell, rivers rose, the time to plow and plant had passed. The glens grew green, cows grazed, and the need to gather crops came. Then cold rains dropped down and again rivers filled fast, cattle were brought to the barns, and sadly still no return of Ronald. First months dallied by then long years came and left, yet not a word of Ronald.

Faithful Coll kept close watch on the tacksman's family, protecting them in all possible matters of nourishment and needs. Eili remained long heartbroken for her lost lover. Their daughter grew to be a bonnie and blithe young lass, a soaring song in her mother's sad heart. Coll was ever a good friend to that family and bravely watched over them like a father and brother.

Now that wicked Lord of the MacIntosh, though sorely wounded, had, in reasonable time, fully recovered from his clash with the MacDonald clansman. One day, well past Ronald's disappearance, the prideful MacIntosh came to propose again. Eili refused him time and again, telling that chieftain that his terrible deeds were not dimly remembered. The fair lass flatly told that Lord, "Kidnapping and rough wooing is not the way to win my heart. Be gone from my husband's house, ye who are more cur than cat." In a hot huff, the MacIntosh turned and left the lofty lass.

Eili rightfully feared the return of MacIntoch

and his men. Her dove-like daughter had reached the fine age of fifteen and needed a strong father's protection from shady men like the MacIntosh. Coll had far past proven a fast friend and loved the little lass like she was his own dear daughter. Through all those trying years, that faithful friend never tarried in his task of caring for them.

To protect her family, the proud lass made up her mind. She would reward her family's faultless friend Coll by wedding him. The clan chief felt the wedding would be a wise decision and well over due. On the celebrated day, kin and clan came for a grand gathering to watch the close friends wed. Eili and Coll were married, pipes played, Highlanders danced the dash of the deer, and whisky horns went round from hand to hand.

At this time, a stranger, well worked over by the road, appeared at the house of Inch. Great heaps of Highland hospitality was handed to him and he ate his fill. Then the weird fellow said the following words, "Would the bonnie bride grant me a good gulp of whisky from her own graceful hand, then I will gladly give her my blessing." The message was given to Eili who happily handed him a horn filled full of whisky. Tears began to fall fast from the stranger's eyes while the still blithe and bonnie Eili stood over him. The elegant Eili did not know what to make of the odd man, but dove-like, she daubed the tears from the fellow's face.

The weird wanderer rose before the lass and removed his bonnet, bearing a long scar across his handsome head. At once Eili knew who the wanderer was that stood before her. "My Love! My Love!" she called aloud then clutched him in her arms and pulled the long lost clansman to her cheek. Their hot tears mingled fast to each others' faces. Hard held, neither lover seemed to get nourished enough in the other's grasp. Long they stood there, locked in love, letting loose so many sad years lost.

The wedding was nullified and no one was happier than the faithful friend and kinsmen

Coll. He whole heartedly hugged those two together, truly grateful to have his good friend back home. “My faithful friend,” said Ronald, “I have heard of your faithfulness to my family and for good duty, you may not have my wife but will ye not wed my bonnie daughter, Mariot?” Coll and Mariot gladly agreed to marry and the priest was put to the task that very day. Another well-kept secret was that Mariot had long ago fallen in love with Coll and secretly sorrowed at the thought of him marrying her mother.

Then that celebration rose to yet greater heights and great cheer was had by all who gathered there that day. Ronald and Coll gobbled down whisky meals till well after midnight. The long lost tacksman laughed aloud and said to the crowd, “I swear on my good garments, Coll’s prophesy came to pass.” All looked on Ronald as though he had lost what was left of his wits, all save Coll that is. Coll laughed along as Ronald explained to the crowd. “He told me the day I left that if I did not return, he might marry

both my wife and daughter.” Upon hearing this, the drunken clan roared with delight.

The tacksman never revealed the reason for his long leave to anyone but Eili, his eternal lover. He told her that MacIntosh sent mail-clad men to set upon him. In chains for fifteen years, they kept him caged in that Lord’s keep. Finally finding his day, he made good an escape and hid like a wild thing high in the hills. It was a long, food-free journey back to his home in Inch, and he had been well wearied when he arrived at the wedding.

Ronald asked Eili not to tell the tale of his woe at the hard hands of the MacIntosh, for he knew the fiery cross would then fly, fleet of foot, to raise the MacDonald warriors for war. Ronald wanted only to spend the rest of his days deep in peace and fully heaped in the love of his family. The great lovers lived long and had many more children who played round the Highland house of Inch with their nieces and nephews.

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Like

# The First McDonalds' Breakfast?

by Jim McQuiston  
USA

The McDonald Lord of the Isles and the Sinclair Earl of Orkney found themselves in Edinburgh, late one evening, celebrating with drink and a healthy supply of boasting.

Sinclair invited McDonald to breakfast the next morning to which McDonald replied he'd have breakfast ready first and Sinclair could join him, instead. They "discussed" this to the degree that they made a wager on who could be up earliest and have breakfast ready first.

As the celebration ended, the earl sent twelve men out to the countryside to make sure no one sold meat or provided firewood to McDonald so that Sinclair could win the wager.

Lauchlane MacLean, a follower (and possibly a brother-in-law) of McDonald, found some firewood, shot a Highland stag, and prepared breakfast very early in the morning. Word was sent to the Earl of Orkney that his "McDonald's" breakfast was ready, which upset him greatly.

When next he saw McDonald he said, "Do you think to equal or cope with me in power and authority?"

McDonald countered that he had a young son at home, who could in fact equal the Earl in power and would someday prove it.

Now several years passed until 1460, when McDonald's final boast came to fruition.

William Sinclair, 1st Earl of Caithness (1455–1476), 3rd Earl of Orkney (1455–1470), and Baron of Roslin was a Scottish nobleman and the builder of the famed Rosslyn Chapel, in Midlothian, with ties to the Knights Templar.

He was the grandson of Henry Sinclair, 1st Earl of Orkney and son of Henry Sinclair, 2nd Earl of Orkney, and was, for a time, protector of the young James Stewart, the later James I of Scotland. In addition, he was Lord High Admiral and Lord Chancellor of Scotland.



*Monarch of the Glen – oil painting from 1851 by the English painter Sir Edwin Landseer*

William was no one to play games with!

He became the first Lord St. Clair of Scotland in 1449, the same year his nemesis, Hugh McDonald, son of the Lord of the Isles, was given land on the Isle of Skye and made Chief of Sleaf.

In 1460, Hugh of Sleaf and several other "gentlemen of the Isles" descended upon the Orkneys. They landed opposite of where the earl had anticipated and were quickly able to claim a victory over his men. Some have wrongly reported that the earl was killed. He lived on, long after this event, though he lost his lands on Orkney in favor of lands on the nearby northeast coast of Scotland, in an area called Caithness (kateness).

King James III claimed Sinclair's rights to the Norwegian Earldom of Orkney for the Scottish Crown in 1470, against a promise of compensation. William Sinclair was thereafter Earl of Caithness, alone, until he resigned the Earldom in favour of his son William, in 1476.

# A Puck Fair Celebration

by Pollyanna Jones  
England



see <http://pollyannajoneshubpages.com/>  
for more great stories!

*A reveller acts the goat. Source: Puck Fair Online Gallery*

*Aonach an Phoic*, translated as “Fair of the he-goat” is better known as the Puck Fair. Taking place annually in Killorglin, County Kerry, Ireland, the festival draws in crowds from all over the kingdom and further afield. An important event in the agricultural calendar, the Fair is also a good excuse for a bit of fun.

The Puck Fair is reputed to be the longest running fair in Ireland. Running each year on August 10-12, it features horse and cattle fairs, parades and merry-making, and the crowning of a wild mountain goat.

The Puck Fair holds different events on days throughout the festival, which is a great social

highlight for the local community. In times past, it would have been very important to the local economy, and even today its importance is not to be dismissed. For the festival is also the setting for livestock auctions, and networking amongst the rural community.

The first day of the Fair is known as “The Gathering Day,” whereby the wild goat is crowned King Puck and is enthroned on his stand in the town square. A goat is captured each year from the nearby mountains and is treated like royalty. The Gathering Day is also the day of the horse fair, where animals are sold and bought. Contests for horses and ponies are

also held, with displays of fine horsemanship to enjoy.

The middle day of the festival is known as “Fair Day,” and is the day when a cattle fair is held.

The last day of the festival is called “The Scattering Day.” It is the day before King Puck is released back into the wilds, marking the end of the festival.

Throughout all three days of the Puck Fair, there are street acts and entertainment aplenty. Killorglin’s colourful streets are a riot of sights and sounds, with all sorts of wonderful things to entice the visitor.



*A carnival atmosphere fills the streets of Killorglin.  
Source: Puck Fair Online Gallery.*

### **17th Century Origins**

History tells us that the fair has been running from at least 1603. King James I issued a charter which granted legal status to the fair in Killorglin.

Local legend tells how the custom of crowning a mountain goat came about from a close call during Oliver Cromwell’s invasion of Ireland. His troops were advancing unseen towards the town, when they startled a herd of wild goats. A billy-goat ran with alarm all the way to Killorglin, alerting the town’s inhabitants that something was wrong with his unusual behaviour.

The townsfolk either hid or formed a militia to defend Killorglin, and the town’s inhabitants

were kept safe until Cromwell’s army had left.

This tale would indicate that the festival is held to honour that event, and make a mountain-goat king in thanks for saving the town.

But there is another theory, with much older origins...



*Statue of King Puck on the banks of the River Laune. Source: © Pollyanna Jones 2014.*

### **Puck and Lughnasadh**

Another theory around the Puck Fair is that it is a relic from Ireland’s pre-Christian times. If this is the case, then the Puck Fair truly is ancient in its origins.

The month of August is still known in Gaelic as *Lúnasa*. This is from Old Irish, *Lugnasad*, which is derived from Lug (the god Lugh) and *násad* (meaning an assembly). Otherwise known as Lughnasa or Lughnasadh, this Celtic festival has seen a rise in popularity of late with the reclamation of old traditions, and also Neo Paganism.

Celebrations around August would take place to mark the start of the harvest season. In more recent times, the 1st of August has been pinned out as the festival day.

Lugh was a god among the “Celtic” Pantheon. A king and a warrior, it is written that he began the tradition of this festival, which began as an athletic competition and funeral feast in honour of his mother Tailtiu [2]. This goddess had cleared the plains of Ireland and made its lands suitable for agriculture, but her gift came at a price. She died from exhaustion upon completion of her task.

The festival of the harvest and Tailtiu’s bounty continued, and it is speculated that the capture and crowning of the mountain-goat is a tradition that goes back hundreds of years as part of a much older Celtic festival.

It is thought that Puck could be a representation of fertility, with the captured goat originally being sacrificed and its flesh consumed at the feast of Lughnasadh.



*The Crowning of King Puck. Source: Plashing Vole.*

### **The Queen of Puck Fair**

The billy-goat is not the only one to find a crown on his brow.

Each year, a child is selected from the local school to become the Queen of Puck Fair. Typically the child is in the last year of primary school, and girls write to the festival committee to apply for the role, explaining why they would like to perform this task. Years ago, older ladies could be selected for the role. This role brings great excitement and a huge sense of pride to the girls involved in the festival.

The girl that has been selected to be Queen has a set of hand-maidens. These consist of a Lady-in-Waiting, and ten Assistants. Becoming the Queen of Puck Fair is an honour they will remember always, and hold with fond memories as they grow up.

On the Gathering Day which falls on August 10th, the Coronation Parade makes its way through the streets of Killorglin. Crowds stand shoulder-to-shoulder for the chance to see the wild goat heading to his place of coronation. He is fashionably late, and does not make his way through the town until about 5:00pm.

The role of the Queen of Puck Fair is very important. For it is she who crowns the goat, making him King for the duration of the festival. It is also her duty to remove the crown on the Scattering Day on August 12th, before the billy-goat is returned safely to his mountain home.

Whilst an authentic traditional Irish festival, the Puck Fair has moved with the times and boasts plenty to entertain all of the family. From the funfair to the street performers and vendors, there is plenty to see and do. Or if you are more interested in the craic, the pubs don’t shut until 3:00am.

A final note about the goat. Puck is captured from the mountains a few weeks before the festival. He is given a full health check and is kept in good conditions with plenty of food and water. Before he is released back into the wild, he is checked over once more, and is certainly more pampered than his brothers left up in the mountains. There is certainly a contented twinkle in his eye as the crown is placed upon his head. But why not go and see for yourself?

# SO, WHAT'S NEXT?

Our theme for December will be another free-for-all, where authors can provide their gifts of prose, poetry, photography, paintings, etc. for our readers' pleasure. The theme? "**Gifts.**" This theme includes music, of course.

In the past, we've written about a few Celtic musical groups and we have even featured Natalie MacMaster, possibly the world's greatest Celtic fiddler, and the Mudmen of Canada (posing with the Queen of England) on our front covers. Next month, we will feature one of Austria's (and the world's) best new Celtic talents on our cover, with a story inside.

If all goes well, we'll kick the issue off with an interview from a great Celtic singer-songwriter from Austria by the name of SEM (Sandra Elizabeth Mae). As a special gift from this recording artist, we will also be adding a few of her music videos and song files to the Free Music tab on our main website. Be sure to check them out, and be sure to check out her story in the December issue.

I am always so proud to list all the countries we have had contact with. Last month we added Romania to the list, which also includes the U.S., Canada, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, England, Portugal, Germany, Poland, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and Chile. Pretty impressive for a startup. In December we'll add Austria!

Look out Venus and Mars, we're heading your way . . .

And soon we will enter our **FOURTH YEAR!**

For January 2015 our theme will be "**Unexplained Mysteries!**" – stories of Celtic legends with no conclusion or explanation. That ought to be fun.

We hope you enjoy the last issue of this year, our 36th issue, our "DeSEMber" issue, with lots of gifts in store for you. And, as I always say . . . stay tuned!

## Here's where you can learn more about SEM –

- Her website is [www.sandraelizabethmae.jimdo.com](http://www.sandraelizabethmae.jimdo.com)
- Her Facebook page is [www.facebook.com/singersem](http://www.facebook.com/singersem)  
and you can purchase her latest album *Hero* at:

<https://itunes.apple.com/album/hero/id908305156?affid=1662869>

and

<http://www.amazon.com/Hero-SEM-Sandra-Elizabeth-Mae/dp/B00MMJUA2>

