



CELTIC HOLIDAY TRADITIONS
DICK SANNER



IRISH HOMECOMING TREASURE
BRIAN P. MOLLOY



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Celtic Holiday Traditions

Dick Sanner

Many early Christian practices were adaptations of non-Christian practices based on naturalistic religious traditions. For instance, the Celtic cross has a circle, a druidical symbol, at the junction of the vertical and horizontal pieces because early

Christian missionaries wanted to include the Druids and their followers into the church. Incorporating the circle into the cross facilitated that process. Mistletoe, gathered at Winter Solstice, was widely believed by the druids to have magical and medicinal attributes because it grew on oak trees without roots and which Romans considered a symbol of hope and peace. Similarly, the holly and ivy were said to keep evil away. The yule log was

adopted into druidical practices from the Norse as part of a Winter Solstice Festival of Alban Arthan held at the darkest part of Winter with a large Yule Log to bring light to the darkness and give hope for the coming end of Winter. Alban Arthan is a seasonal festival at the Winter solstice. The name derives from the writings of Iolo Morganwg, the 19th-century radical poet and forger. Alban Arthan translates to The Light of Arthur the legendary King. An alternative respelling is Alban Arthuan.

It's amazing how many of our Christmas carols include these ancient traditions.

An Irish Homecoming Treasure

Brian P. Molloy

In August, 2003, my former wife, Elisabeth, and my two sons, Patrick and Conall and I visited my paternal grandfather's birthplace in County Donegal, Ireland. During the course of our 8 days there, we became intoxicated with Maramelan, our small corner of Donegal. The location was as attractive as one could wish: isolated on the end of a one-lane road, amid small farms on the shores of Travenagh Bay. We took the ferry to Arainn Mhor (Arranmore) and spent a day hiking through the villages, over the hills and meadows, and along the magnificent cliffs on that windswept and hilly island. The regions of the Rosses and Gweedore are Gaelteachts or Irish-speaking districts, and we heard Irish spoken in shops, pubs, on the street as well as on the island. During our visit, we attended a traditional music session at the Folklife Center in Dunlewy, hiked around the fields, braes and cliffs near our "home", biked down Atlantic-bound

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roads, visited cemeteries and churches, castles and towers, and a nearby megalithic ruin. We popped in pubs and - best of all - found substantial remains of the ancestral Molloy/McAuley cottages hidden under blackberry brambles in the townland of Roshin South. Throughout our visit, we met and socialized with several McAuley cousins who were generous with their time and knowledge of the area.

The ruins of the Neal Molloy/Owen and Bridget McAuley cottage and the Neal McAuley cottage can still be seen in the rear of a field located at the junction of the Maghery/Dungloe Road and the Cleendra Road. In the summer, they are well hidden from the road by a thick overgrowth of brambles, vines and shrubbery, but can be found in the northeastern most corner of the field under the hill or "brae". It took a little bush-whacking to find our way to them. Both cottages were located on the same parcel of land, although these were distinguished for tax purposes.

My great-grandfather, Neal Molloy, was a well known fiddler in the region. Another McAuley cousin informed me that when he visited the area as a boy, the cottage closest to the road was referred to as "Fiddler Molloy's" by the locals. In our e-mail exchanges, we were able to confirm the exact location of the cottages.



The cottages are small, consisting of one or two rooms apiece. There is also one outbuilding adjacent to the Molloy cottage. The remains of

the the hearths and chimneys, partial walls, some doorways and some window frames remain from each cottage. When we discovered them in August, 2003, we found a thatch tie-down stone from the tops of each of the cottage's walls. These irregular stones jutted out at intervals from the top layer of masonry and were used to tie down the thatch roofs.



Touching the remaining stones of my grandfather's birthplace was a profoundly spiritual moment for me, and I will always treasure the memory. There was a sense of belonging, of returning to one's roots, however distant. Coupled with my cousins' generous hospitality, the wild Atlantic seaboard, the experience of hearing Irish used in everyday life and the ubiquity of traditional music in the region made this Irish journey a true homecoming.

Celtic Christmas Music

Everyone has their favorite Christmas music albums. Here are some of ours:

- ❖ Sounds of the Season, Enya 2006. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBLXKdpSVYI>
- ❖ On Christmas night, 2004, A Star in the East, 2009, Christmas in Ireland, 2015 Cherish the Ladies
- ❖ Bells of Dublin, The Chieftains
- ❖ Christmas Carols, Don Stiffe <https://youtu.be/XAemrS7JFTw>
- ❖ Christmas by the Lee, Marie O'Dwyer
- ❖ Christmas Star, the Outside Track <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mNKDd2wmDk>
- ❖ Christmas by the Heart, Sean Keane
- ❖ Soundscape, Seamus Begley, Oisín MacDiarmuida
- ❖ Winter's Crossing and the Best of Celtic Christmas Double CD, James Galway and Phil Coulter

Book Nook

The O'Sullivan clan of County Cork, Ireland, are back to investigate another case of murder--this time at Christmas! Garda Siobhan O'Sullivan's holiday plans hit a sour note when murder rearranges the yuletide carols into unexpected eulogies... This December in Kilbane, if you're planning to warm up with a cuppa tea at Naomi's

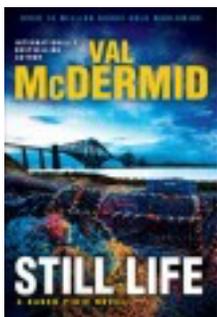
Bistro, you may have a bit of a wait--the entire O'Sullivan brood has gone off to West Cork to spend the holidays with brother James's fiancée Elise's family, including her grandfather, the famous orchestral conductor Enda Elliot. Siobhan is so happy for James and Elise but also quietly

<http://ursus.maine.edu/record=b8565786~S8>

Still Life by Val McDermid.

"The UK's "Queen of Crime" Val McDermid returns to her propulsive series featuring cold case detective Karen Pirie, who finds herself investigating the shadowy world of forgery, where things are never what they seem. *Still Life* is intensely gripping from the first page and further proof that McDermid is writing at the top of her game. When a lobster

fisherman on an early morning run pulls in his traps, he finds something he wasn't expecting to catch--a body. Turns out the dead man was the brother of a senior Scottish government official who vanished without a trace, and Detective Chief Inspector Karen Pirie is asked to take over the investigation. At the same time, a woman in the wealthy enclave of Perth is clearing out her sister's



Murder at an Irish Christmas by Carlene O'Connor.

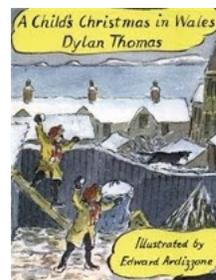
disappointed that she must put her own wedding to fellow garda Macdara Flannery on hold. Mac will have to join them later, so he can spend part of the holidays with his mam. When the O'Sullivans learn everyone will choose a name from a hat to buy a music-related Christmas gift for someone else at the gathering, it seems like their greatest concern--until the cantankerous conductor is discovered crushed under a ninety-pound harp in a local concert hall. With the extended family--including Enda's much-younger new wife Leah, a virtuoso violinist--suspected in his murder, it's up to Siobhan to ensure the guilty party faces the music. But as a snowstorm strands both families in a lavish farmhouse on a cliff, Siobhan had better pick up the tempo--before the killer orchestrates another untimely demise. home after a fatal road accident and finds a mysterious camper van in the garage containing a skeletonized body. But who is it? And how long has it been there? The two cases will draw Karen into the world of imposters, identity theft, and art forgery"

-- Provided by publisher

<http://ursus.maine.edu/record=b8517106~S8>

A Child's Christmas in Wales by Dylan Thomas; illustrated by Edward Ardizzone.

A Welsh poet recalls the celebration of Christmas in Wales and the feelings it evoked in him as a child.



<http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/704545776>

-Candice Joyce, Bangor Public Library.

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