



# the Scottish Banner



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*A' Bhratach Albannach*

Volume 49 Number 8 NEWS FOR GLOBAL SCOTS February 2026

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**Publisher**  
Scottish Banner Pty Ltd.

**Editor**  
Sean Cairney

**EDITORIAL STAFF**

Eric Bryan  
Brian Diamond  
Neil Drysdale  
Lady Fiona MacGregor  
David McVey  
The National Piping Centre  
Jim Stoddart  
Judy Vickers  
David C. Weinczok

**Contact:**  
**The Scottish Banner**  
PO Box 6202  
Marrickville South  
NSW, 2204  
Australia  
Tel: (02) 9559-6348  
info@scottishbanner.com

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The Banner Says...

# Scotland's City of Love



by Sean Cairney

Some look at February not only as the shortest month of the year, but also a month of love. However, most would not connect the notion of love with the Glasgow suburb of the Gorbals.

Glasgow's connection to Valentine's Day is one of those fantastic and unexpected pieces of history that gives Scotland's largest city a unique claim to romance. While Paris, Vienna and Venice may market themselves as capitals of love, Glasgow holds something far more tangible—some of the physical relics of Saint Valentine himself and it sits in one of the city's most infamous suburbs. In the Gorbals, at the Blessed John Duns Scotus Church, a casket is believed to contain part of the martyr's remains, specifically a forearm, making the city an unlikely pilgrimage site for lovers and the curious alike.

The story begins in 1868, when a wealthy French family donated a small wooden box, labelled 'Corpus Valentini Martyris' which translates to 'the body of Saint Valentine', to the Franciscan order in Glasgow. The relics were housed first in the early Franciscan chapel and later in the grander St Francis' Church in the Gorbals, where they remained until 1999. Those remains rest today in the Blessed John Duns Scotus Church, where each 14 February the casket is adorned with flowers and a special Mass is held to honour the saint's legacy.

Today couples from around the world visit the Glasgow relics of St Valentine, light candles, leave flowers, and take quiet moments to pray for their relationship or future together. Many also take photos beside the casket containing the saint's forearm, treating the church as a small but meaningful pilgrimage of love.

## Most would not connect the notion of love with the Glasgow suburb of the Gorbals.

### Patron saint of lovers

The Gorbals, on Glasgow's south bank, began as the small medieval settlement of Bridgend (named for a wooden bridge that linked the south to the city) and grew rapidly with industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to house the industrial workforce. It became known for dense housing, poverty, vibrant immigrant communities and was considered one of Europe's worst slums. The Gorbals was not a place synonymous with St Valentine and love and most certainly was a place where a 'Glasgow Kiss' was not the meeting of lips but more of a strike to the face or nose using the forehead!

This unusual connection has led some to affectionately call Glasgow a "City of Love," a playful counterpoint to its tougher reputation. Yet the presence of the relics of St Valentine has genuinely played its part in local tradition. Couples will no doubt again visit the church this month on Valentine's Day to again light candles, offer prayers, or simply enjoy the symbolism of standing before the patron saint of lovers and maybe giving a card to their special someone signed "from your Valentine".

There is some question of course if these remains are in fact those of St Valentine. Other locations also claim to have some of St Valentine's body

parts such as Rome and Venice, Italy; Birmingham, England; Roquemaure, France; Chelmno, Poland and Dublin in Ireland.

### In this issue

Keeping with our Valentine's theme this month we get the heart of some of Scotland's history with how both literal and symbolic hearts are part of Scotland's landscape and folklore today.

Scottish folklore is full of intriguing tales from across the country. The mysterious Fin Men in the Northern Isles are just one of these tales that has passed through generations of Scots. These sealskin-wearing, small boat-paddling travellers were occasionally spotted off Scottish shores, with many theories abounding on their origins and intentions. In Orkney and Shetland these Fin Men became mystical and magical creatures and part of local history and storytelling.

I remember as a teenager one of my first overseas trips with friends to Scotland. It was a huge adventure, and we purchased our BritRail pass to get around. Today rail travel links communities across Scotland and takes both locals and visitors to all parts of the country. Scotland is full of great rail journey's, including the less obvious ones which are highlighted this month, which still provide some adventure to those who are looking to ride the Scottish rails.

### A real historical quirk

I have a strong family connection to Glasgow, I have lived there and it is a city I love. Glasgow is a city of many layers and scratch under the surface a bit and you will find an incredible spirit, people and history.

Glasgow's link to Valentine's Day is not some marketing invention but a real historical quirk—one that blends faith, folklore, and is no doubt a source of pride to Glaswegians. It's a reminder that romance often appears in the most unexpected places, and that even a city famed for its grit can hold a tender secret at its heart. I wish your heart a wonderful month ahead. 🍀

**Do you have any comments from the content in this month's edition? Share your story with us by email, post, social media or: #ScottishBanner, #TheBanner.**

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**We appreciate your support and hope you enjoy this edition.**



Photo: Blessed John Duns Scotus Church.



Gracing our front cover: Exploring the natural beauty of the Isle of Arran with your special someone. Photo: VisitScotland/Allan Myles.

# BATTLE OF THE BAGPIPES

The best pipe bands in the region are coming to Western Australia this April to compete for the national titles. Be there to experience the thrilling spectacle of the massed bands, a drum major competition, highland games events, country dancing displays, medieval swordplay, cultural market stalls, and all things Scottish.

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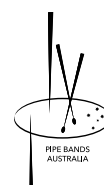
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# SCOT POURRI

Send us your inquiries on life's little question marks.

Ever wanted to know what happened to your old pal from home, how to make your favourite Scottish meal, or wondered about a certain bit of Scottish history?



## St Andrews

Thank you for your story on one of my favorite places in Scotland, St Andrews (*St Andrews-Not a City, the Scottish Banner*, November, 2025). Though I am not a golfer I love visiting this historic seaside town. St Andrews offers stunning coastal scenery with heritage, and friendly locals. It is so easy to get to from Edinburgh or Dundee and has so much on offer, it is a gold town, but also a university town, history town and a

great place to walk around. I love walking around the ruins of St Andrews Cathedral and trying the various restaurants around town. Though I have been to most places mentioned in the article, there are some I haven't and others I have now been reminded to return to.

I do encourage other readers to make time to also visit this gem of Scotland when they can.

**Greg Cassidy**  
Sacramento, California  
USA

Scots across the world, and it seems to still capture headlines today. I really look forward to my next visit to Scotland where I will make the pilgrimage to Perth to see the Stone myself. I am glad it is being properly housed in Scotland as the Stone represents much to many and if fragments have been dispersed across the UK and around the world that also represents how Scots have ventured beyond and made their mark on the world. Though I do wonder if those who may have them would look to return them?

I really enjoy reading about Scotland's past as it helps me understand more about Scotland when I am there and from where my ancestors come from.

Thank you for such a lively and informative read every month.

**Jane Wright**  
Hamilton, Ontario  
Canada

### Large silver cup

I am hoping to find a photo of a very large silver cup with the names of my aunties on Eileen Olsen and Inger Olsen, they were dancers in 1926? I have seen the cup back in 2011 when I came to the Games, a wonderful day. I am putting some family history together and I would appreciate any information about Eileen Olsen. I have photo of her with a lot medals, 20 or more, on her dress my mother was her sister. Many thanks if you can help,

**Janet Taylor**  
kaurinuid111@yahoo.com

### Tom Weir



David McVey's article *Tom Weir - One of Us* in the January 2026 issue, and his mention of Tom climbing Duncryne ("the Dumpling") every day, brought back happy memories of our holiday in the Gartocharn area in September 2012.

Staying at The Old School House B&B nearby, and lent plastic bags and rubber bands to serve at my "rubber boots", I climbed Duncryne to see the panoramic view of Loch Lomond from the summit. My Thomas ancestors lived nearby on Little Finny farm (1733-1790s). I had written to Tom Weir about 2006 and got a letter from his widow Rhona in January 2008 - she found the letter, unanswered, on his desk while she was going through his papers. Thanks, David, for an interesting article. (PS. I have McVey ancestry too!)

**Neil Thomas**  
Belair, South Australia

### Ionad Hiort, the St Kilda Centre



A charaid chòir.

I'm getting in touch because we're gathering supportive voices for Ionad Hiort | St Kilda Centre - a visionary new cultural and heritage visitor centre planned for Mangersta, Uig on the Isle of Lewis. It will be a world-class, community-rooted gateway to St Kilda, one of the most extraordinary and fragile places in the North Atlantic.

Given its isolation and protected status, St Kilda requires innovative approaches to storytelling and access. Ionad Hiort will create a powerful and immersive way for people to connect with its story - through landscape-inspired architecture, digital interpretation, Gaidhlig culture and community-led storytelling. Designed by Reulf Ramstad and Dualchas Architects, the project is deeply rooted in place and shaped by island voices. Our exhibition space has been created by Bright, a Scottish-based and award-winning company, specialising in creating innovative and unforgettable visitor experiences.

But Ionad Hiort is more than a visitor experience. It's a catalyst for regeneration in the Western Isles:

- creating local employment
- supporting Gaidhlig language and culture
- nurturing education and research
- strengthening communities facing depopulation

We're now entering a crucial phase of fundraising and awareness-building, and we're reaching out to people who care about Scotland's islands, heritage, landscapes, culture and communities.

Our website is [www.ionadhiort.org](http://www.ionadhiort.org) and you can find us over on Instagram and Facebook.

With kind regards,  
**Iain Buchanan**  
Chairman of Ionad Hiort  
Scotland

### The Stone of Destiny

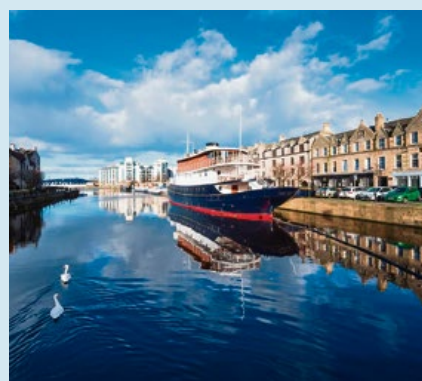


I thoroughly enjoyed the article on the Stone of Destiny (*The Christmas theft of the Stone of Destiny, the Scottish Banner*, December, 2025). This event was quite the moment in Scottish history and the story of Scottish nationalism. The Stone of Destiny evokes many emotions for many

## FROM OUR SOCIAL MEDIA

Sent to our Facebook, Twitter or Instagram accounts-send us your photos or letters via social media (#ScottishBanner or #TheBanner):

### Sunshine on Leith



Lovely day at Leith.  
Tom Duffin Photographer

### Glencoe



Lovely day at Blackrock cottage, Glencoe.  
Robert Gibb

### Buachaille Etive Mòr



Majestic Buachaille Etive Mòr, Glencoe.  
Fiona McNicol

### Scottish snow



Winter magic.  
Mik Coia

Pose your questions on Scottish related topics to our knowledgeable readership who just may be able to help. Please keep letters under 300 words and we reserve the right to edit content and length. Letters can be emailed to [info@scottishbanner.com](mailto:info@scottishbanner.com) or online at [www.scottishbanner.com/contact-us](http://www.scottishbanner.com/contact-us), alternatively you may post your letters to us (items posted to the Scottish Banner cannot be returned). Please ensure you include your full contact details should you require a reply. This page belongs to our readers so please feel free to take part!

# Your Burns Supper matters: Help shape the future of a global and living tradition



Left to right: Professor Pauline Mackay and Dr Cleo O'Callaghan Yeoman. Photo: Martin Shields.

Supper at 225 Years: Scottish Tradition, Global Reinvention. Building on nearly six years of pioneering research, the CRBS is calling on people worldwide to help create a crowdsourced archive of Burns Suppers events, viewable through an interactive global map to be launched in July on the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Burns Supper.

It is hoped the new archive will feature poems and songs performed at Burns Suppers around the world as well as videos, photographs, recipes and clothing worn. This new crowdsourced archive of global Burns celebrations will also form the basis of a submission to a UK wide search for traditions to be recognised as UK living heritage following ratification of the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage.

### A modern phenomenon

Professor Pauline Mackay, Director of the Centre for Robert Burns Studies (CRBS), said: "The Burns Supper is not just a historic ritual, it's a modern phenomenon and one of the most wide-reaching and impactful examples of Intangible Cultural Heritage to come out of Scotland and, indeed, the United Kingdom. This celebration is a living tradition that continues to evolve and we want to capture that and link people around the globe celebrating Scotland's national bard by finding out what foods they eat, what they drink and which Burns poems or songs feature in their celebrations. We are

not only interested in who celebrates the Burns Supper and how, but also the ways in which it has been adapted to incorporate different cultures."

From Ayrshire to Vancouver, from the Arctic Circle to the summit of Kilimanjaro, more than 9.5 million people now celebrate Burns Night each year on 25 January, the poet's birthday. The CRBS's interactive Burns Supper map, first launched in 2021, already features over 2500 events across five continents. Now, with the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Burns Supper approaching in July, the Centre has expanded its research to capture the full diversity of this remarkable tradition. The Burns Supper today has become a living and evolving tradition blending heritage, cultural expression and global voices in memory of Scotland's bard which can be seen in everything from haggis pakora in Scotland to Reggae-infused Burns celebrations in Jamaica.

### Scotland's national bard

Professor Murray Pittcock added: "Burns is not only Scotland's national bard, but he is also one of its greatest economic and cultural assets. His legacy drives tourism, festivals, food and drink and education. The Burns Supper is a key part of that legacy. Its global reach and adaptability show how heritage can be both rooted and responsive, traditional and transformative. Austria has long capitalised on the Mozart brand and

the country's capital Vienna today gains over €10bn earnings from cultural tourism. Compared to that, Burns and the Burns Supper remain an underleveraged resource - a sleeping giant in Scotland's culture, heritage as well as food and drink industries. This next phase of research will help us understand how Burns continues to shape Scotland's identity and economy in the modern world."

Angus Robertson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, said: "As we approach the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the very first gathering in honour of Robert Burns, this global tradition of Burns Suppers continues to evolve in remarkable ways. The Scottish Government welcomes the launch of pioneering research by leading academics from the University of Glasgow's Centre for Robert Burns Studies into how Burns Suppers are celebrated and reimagined around the world. The largest social gathering linked to a single writer in the world, the Burns Supper is a symbol of Scottish friendliness, humanitarianism and internationalism and forms a vital means of developing our Scottish Connections worldwide."

*The Centre for Robert Burns Studies is now inviting everyone from seasoned Burnsians to first-time hosts and/or guests to share their stories, images and insights on how they celebrate Burns Night around the globe at: [www.gla.ac.uk/schools/critical/research/researchcentresandnetworks/robertburnsstudies](http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/critical/research/researchcentresandnetworks/robertburnsstudies)*

The Centre for Robert Burns Studies is calling on people worldwide to help create a crowdsourced archive of Burns Night events, viewable through an interactive global map launching in July 2026 on the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Burns Supper. They could never have imagined the outcome of a small gathering of friends and admirers in July 1801 in memory of Scotland's national bard. That intimate memorial to mark the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Robert Burns has since grown into one of the world's most enduring cultural and literary rituals – the Burns Supper.

Now, the Centre for Robert Burns Studies (CRBS) at the University of Glasgow is launching a new campaign, The Burns



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# SCOTSPEAK

ScotSpeak is a selection of quotes which made headlines in Scotland last month on a variety of current Scottish affairs.



*"We were pleased to find that Mons Meg is still doing well, and that the system we put in place ten years ago is faring as expected. It's an honour to look after such an important part of Scotland's history."*

*"We carry out an annual condition check of Mons Meg but lifting the 6-tonne cannon is no easy task, so we're happy to see that she won't need another full 360° check of this kind for five years."*

Chloe Allan, Regional Collections Manager at Historic Environment Scotland, said Mons Meg passed her recent MOT, 550 years after her first battle. Mons Meg is one of the biggest cannons ever built and was gifted to James II in 1457. She retired from service around 100 years later, in 1550, and fired her last shot in 1680 to mark a visit to Edinburgh by James Duke of York. Visitors to Edinburgh Castle can view Mons Meg.

*"In 2026, Scotland stops selling itself as 'rugged' and starts selling itself as 'temperate'. We are seeing a massive shift of high-net-worth families moving their July/August bookings from Tuscany to the Trossachs."*

Chris Greenwood, a senior researcher at Glasgow Caledonian University, said that Scotland is set to receive more visitors from southern Europe and the Middle East on 'coolcations' as they escape extreme summer heat for Scotland's more bearable summer temperatures.

*"We opened those books and realised we were sitting on the very DNA of Scottish tweed. Hundreds of designs, all handwritten, all still usable. It was like the mill tapping us on the shoulder and saying, 'Well? What are you going to do with this?'"*

Lovat Mill managing director Alan Cumming said that the historic mill based in Hawick in the Scottish Borders has recreated Victorian designs for this year's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of tweed cloth.



*"The Saving Wildcats project has been truly groundbreaking, being the first in the UK to reintroduce a cat species. As such, we're constantly gathering data to better understand the effectiveness of our work and use that information to make the process even better for wildcats in future. We're now at the end of the third year of releases, but studies like this really help to illuminate just how big the challenge was in year one and how successful the project has been so far - against all odds. To ensure the survival of this species, it is vital that we continue further releases alongside managing the threats facing these amazing animals."*

Dr Helen Senn, Saving Wildcats project lead at the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, confirms that the first year of a project to reintroduce wildcats to Scotland was highly effective, with survival and reproduction rates exceeding expectations. In 2019 wildcats had been described as at the brink

of extinction in Britain, with the population too small, too hybridised and too fragmented to be viable. However, since then, 46 wildcats have been released through the Saving Wildcats project, with females in the wild successfully producing litters of kittens in 2024 and 2025.



*"Spring was exceptional, and many will remember the long spells of days with largely unbroken sunshine. It began with the third-sunniest March on record, followed by a record-breaking sunniest April and then the second-sunniest May. All three months of the summer also saw above-average sunshine hours."*

The Met Office senior scientist Mike Kendon said Scotland experienced its sunniest year since the 1950s over the last 12 months, according to new figures. During 2025 Scotland bathed in sunshine for 1,381.3 hours or about 57 days. The current Scottish record was set 70 years ago, when 1,444.5 hours or about 60 days of sunshine was recorded.

*"The west of Scotland is one of more active parts of the UK. Some of this activity can be attributed to well-known geological faults like the Great Glen Fault and the Highland Boundary Fault. By contrast, north-east Scotland experiences very few earthquakes. It is a reminder that small earthquakes happen all the time and it remains of critical importance that they are studied to help us understand the possible impact of the rare large earthquakes on major energy and infrastructure projects around the country"*

Seismologist at the British Geological Survey Dr Brian Baptie said 2025 has seen 309 earthquakes recorded across the UK. The most active regions included Perthshire and the western Highlands in Scotland, Lancashire and Yorkshire in England, and southern parts of Wales. Thirty-four of the earthquakes occurred near Loch Lyon in Perth and Kinross between October and December.

## Tartan of the Month

*Weave of Love  
(Le Tissage de l'Amour) Tartan*

The Scottish Banner is pleased to be offering the Tartan of the Month series highlighting a variety of different, unique and colourful tartans from around the world which are registered with the Scottish Register of Tartans in Edinburgh. The Scottish Register of Tartans was established by an act of the Scottish Parliament in November 2008 and promotes and preserves information about historic and contemporary tartans from Scotland and throughout the world. Text and image use are courtesy of the Scottish Register of Tartans (SRT).

designed to symbolise the unbreakable bond of love, interwoven with the spirit of the ancient Triquetra and Celtic Love Knot. The geometry is intended to represent two hearts: one of red and white, to embody passion and commitment; the other deep purple and navy, for quiet devotion and infinite depth. A bridge of purple threads unites them to symbolise two souls meeting, positioned to create balance between the two pivots. Rooted in Scottish heritage, its French name evokes romance, subtly nodding to the historic Auld Alliance.

Whether worn to honour new love or as a quiet tribute to love that lasts, it is intended for all who seek a tartan for pure love on this Valentine month. This tartan (reference: 14663) was designed by Steven Patrick Sim and registered in February, 2025.

The tartan, Weave of Love - also known as Le Tissage de l'Amour - intends to embody passion, devotion, and eternity. Inspired by Celtic knotwork, its structure was

## SCOTWORD

Here is a wee Scottish crossword for you to try! If you're stuck, answers can be found on page 22.

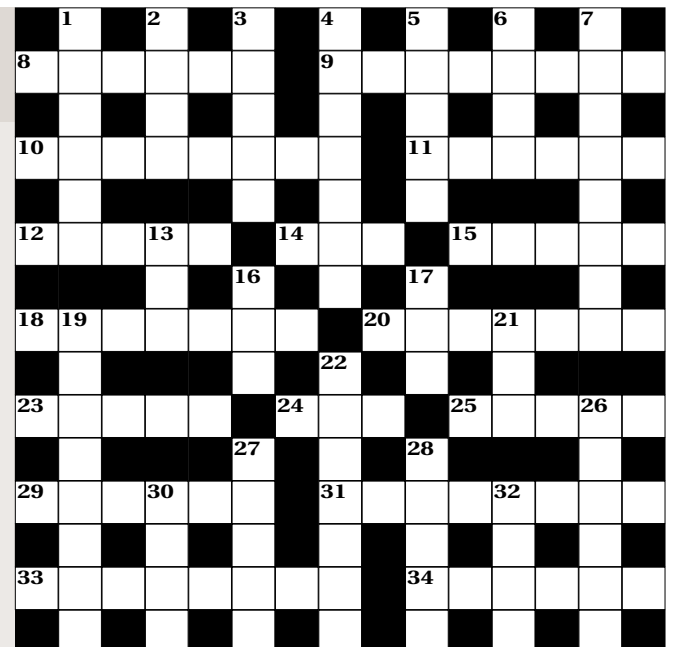
### CLUES ACROSS

- 8) Bonnet accessory (6)
- 9) Often called the mayflower (8)
- 10) With 11 Across, The North-east admin area (8)
- 11) See 10 Across (6)
- 12) Scots serving plate (5)
- 14) He'll know Scots! (3)
- 15) Scottish lakes (5)
- 18) Scots get-together (7)
- 20) Argyll peninsula (7)
- 23) Town near Elgin (5)
- 24) Of the same name (3)

- 25) Stagers through the dances (5)
- 29) The "Bridie" town (6)
- 31) A Scots commotion (8)
- 33) Theatrical pose (8)
- 34) Rangers rivals (6)

### CLUES DOWN

- 1) Town near mouth of River Findhorn (6)
- 2) Whisky measure (4)
- 3) Largest Outer Hebridean island (5)
- 4) Part of the Pipes (7)
- 5) A Highland dancer needs it! (5)
- 6) Scots name for Hugh (4)
- 7) Village at head of Long Loch (8)
- 13) Old Scots measure (3)
- 16) Bustling activity (3)
- 17) Another whisky measure (3)
- 19) Border fishing town (8)
- 21) Driving aid (3)
- 22) Highland hose accessories (7)
- 26) Town near Glenrothes (6)
- 27) Freshwater fish (5)
- 28) An amazing lass! (5)
- 30) Glasgow's annual summer holiday (4)
- 32) Its capital is Tobermory (4)



## Celtic Thunder announces new show: *An Intimate Evening with Celtic Thunder*



### A celebration of their greatest songs.

Fans of the internationally renowned Irish music phenomenon, Celtic Thunder, are in for a special treat as the group announces their brand-new show, *An Intimate Evening with Celtic Thunder* - touring Australia in March 2026. This unique production will bring audiences a heartfelt celebration of the group's most beloved songs while reuniting past and present members for an unforgettable evening of music, memories, and camaraderie.

*An Intimate Evening with Celtic Thunder* is more than just a concert—it's a journey through the group's incredible legacy. Featuring a carefully curated setlist of their greatest hits, this show will showcase the powerful harmonies, soaring

ballads, and electrifying performances that have made Celtic Thunder a household name. From classic Irish folk songs to contemporary favorites, audiences can expect to hear the anthems that have defined Celtic Thunder's illustrious career.

### An atmosphere of warmth and nostalgia

What makes this show even more special is the reunion of familiar faces. Over the years, Celtic Thunder has been home to some of the finest vocalists in the world, and *An Intimate Evening with Celtic Thunder* will see Emmet, Damian, Neil and Ronan perform some of Celtic Thunder's greatest songs. Longtime fans will be thrilled to see their favorite voices come together, blending their talents in an atmosphere of warmth and nostalgia.

Damian McGinty, longtime Celtic Thunder Principal said: "We wanted to create something truly special for our fans, something that feels personal and celebratory. This show is about reconnecting—with the music, with each other, and with the people who have supported us throughout the years. It's a chance to relive the magic of Celtic Thunder in a more intimate way, and we couldn't be more excited to share this experience with our audience."

**Tickets for *An Intimate Evening with Celtic Thunder* are now available and fans are encouraged to secure their seats early for this once-in-a-lifetime experience at: [www.davidroywilliams.com/tours/celticthunder2026](http://www.davidroywilliams.com/tours/celticthunder2026)**

## King Charles inspects the new banner of Clan Farquharson



On Tuesday, August 12, 2025, Chief Philip Farquharson, 17<sup>th</sup> of Invercauld and Monaltrie, Chief of Clan Farquharson and Chieftain of the Ballater Highland Games, welcomed His Majesty King Charles III to Station Square in Ballater. The King inspected the Laird's banner, which displayed his new Coat of Arms, with explanations provided by Gordon Casley of the Heraldry Society of Scotland. The Arms were presented on banners by Clan Farquharson UK committee members, Colonels of the Invercauld Highlanders, Gary Humphries and Randall Finlay.

His Majesty then received a royal salute from Captain Fraser (Honorary Vice President, Ballater Highland Games), before inspecting the Highlanders on parade, which included troops from Invercauld, Monaltrie, Atholl, Lonach, Duff, and the Balaklava Company, 5 SCOTS. Music was provided by Scots College, Sydney, Australia.

Following the formal proceedings, the Chief and His Majesty mingled with large groups of guests and members of the public, both outside in Station Square and inside at a reception hosted by Clan Farquharson UK in Victoria Hall. Just days before retreating to Balmoral for his annual summer holiday, King Charles III made a quiet but meaningful appearance in Ballater, Scotland — and most people nearly missed it. The monarch, 77, visited the village to inspect the new banner of Clan Farquharson, the family who originally sold Balmoral to the royals in 1852.

The King's visit came ahead of last summer's Ballater Highland Games, a beloved Scottish tradition featuring piping competitions, Highland dancing, and the famed Hill Race. While there, he also met members of the Invercauld Highlanders and the Pipes and Drums of the Scots College, Sydney. This stop wasn't just ceremonial — it tied directly to Balmoral's royal history and Charles's personal love for Scotland's heritage and conservation.



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# Your other Great Rail Journey



The Forth Bridge.

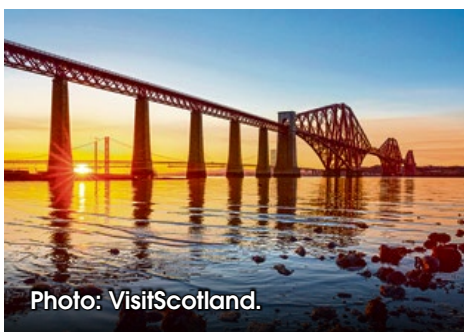


Photo: VisitScotland.

By: David McVey

Scotland offers some spectacular and dramatic railway journeys. It's especially true in the Highlands, where the journeys from Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh and Glasgow to Oban, Fort William and Mallaig are unforgettable - even if most of the trains are rather basic.

Then there's the coastal stretch of the East Coast Main Line (ECML) between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed, with its magnificent cliff scenery and much better trains. In the UK there has been a spate of TV series where a lucky celebrity gets to explore and praise these journeys. I wish I could get a job like that.

## Scotland's railway

I'm going to describe a less obvious rail journey that is uniquely sensational and exciting, and I'll also try to suggest how to enjoy it for maximum comfort. Now, if I offer Dundee to Edinburgh by the ECML as a lesser-known Great Railway Journey you might think it a bit odd. After all, thousands of commuters, business travellers, trippers and tourists use it every day. What's so special about it? Well, it combines two of the great features of Scotland's railway right at the beginning, and right at the end of the journey.

To help appreciate how remarkable the trip really is, imagine making the same journey in 1726, not 2026. As soon as you leave Dundee, you're faced with crossing the huge expanse of the Firth of Tay, over three kilometres, over to Fife. And even if you manage to procure a ferry - and you'll probably want a ferry big enough to take your horse with you - once you've crossed Fife there's another broad stretch of water, the Firth of Forth, to get over. Probably best to divert to the lowest bridging points of the Tay (Perth) and the Forth (Stirling),

making a long journey that will probably take several days. If you were rich, you'd just take ship from Dundee to Leith.

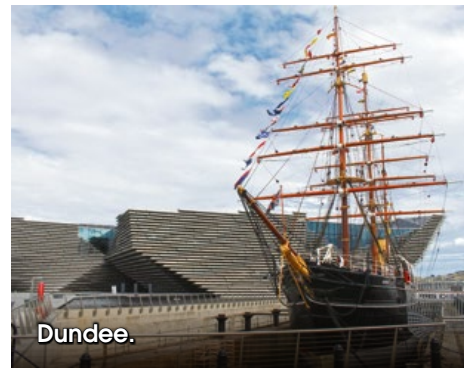
How different now. Shortly after you leave Dundee, your train starts to curve onto the Tay Bridge, which runs for 3.2km, and rumbles across the firth. The bridge feels quite low above the water. Downriver the 1965 road bridge rises gently towards the Fife coast while upstream the gleaming waters of the firth reach towards the distant Perthshire hills. On my most recent visit I'd arrived over the road bridge by bus, and so crossing southbound on the train squared matters nicely.

## Scotland offers some spectacular and dramatic railway journeys.

It's spectacular stuff but, of course, the history of rail crossings of the Firth of Tay includes tragedy. The first bridge, designed by Sir Thomas Bouch, was built between 1873 and 1878. When opened, it was then the longest bridge in the world. Queen Victoria crossed it on her way to Balmoral. But it didn't last long. On 28<sup>th</sup> December 1879, a night of gales and rain, part of the bridge collapsed and a train was lost in the Tay, killing all 75 passengers and crew.

A damning report said the bridge was 'badly designed, badly constructed and badly maintained'; Bouch had not fully considered the effects of wind. We all know William McGonagall's unintentionally hilarious verse in memory of the bridge, but it's important to remember the real tragedy it represented. Its replacement was opened in 1887 and, if the new bridge isn't the most imposing structure, it's still doing a grand job nearly 140 years on. It was substantially refurbished and strengthened in 2003.

After your train makes landfall again, you can enjoy an hour or so of pleasant, green Fife countryside, with the Firth of Forth coming into view at Kirkcaldy and the sandy beaches of Kinghorn, Burntisland and Aberdour looking tempting. Your train swings south through Inverkeithing and



Dundee.

North Queensferry before coming to the most spectacular two-and-a-half kilometres on the Scottish rail system.

## The Forth Bridge

In the 1870s, Sir Thomas Bouch was involved in work to create a rail crossing of the Firth of Forth. He was, naturally, dropped after the Tay Bridge Disaster and it was John Fowler and Benjamin Baker who came up with the concept of a cantilever bridge made of steel; it was the first major project in the UK to focus on steel. The Forth Bridge (and it is *the* Forth Bridge - the two neighbouring bridges, the 1964 Forth Road Bridge and the 2017 Queensferry Crossing are pretty much like many other road bridges) is famously over-engineered but as such it's utterly solid and of such spectacular design that it's one of the most recognisable of Scottish landmarks.

I've heard it described as Scotland's Eiffel Tower and I wouldn't argue. It was a target for the Luftwaffe in the Second World War, has featured on pound coins and banknotes,

became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2016 and was voted as Scotland most spectacular man-made structure. Scotland is proud of the Forth Bridge and so we should be.

Yet it has a dark side: it's estimated that more workers were killed during its construction than died in the Tay Bridge Disaster. In recent years historians have tried to identify those who died, tell their stories and memorialise them.

No matter how often I go across the Forth Bridge I never tire of it, peering out of the window like a 10-year-old seeing it for the first time. Oddly, I've been on trains where people are rather fazed by the bridge, perhaps by the height and the exposure. There's no need for that. If there's anything certain in Scotland, it's that you're safe on the Forth Bridge. Once you're over you'll be in Edinburgh in a quarter of an hour, but you'll have crossed two mighty firths that used to be enormous barriers to travel, and have done so effortlessly. ScotRail run two trains an hour for most of the day between Dundee and Edinburgh but I'd recommend checking timetables and trying to find a train operated by LNER.

They run four return journeys a day linking Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh with England on big, comfortable trains. If you book in advance, there may be good deals in First Class. So, you can sit in a comfy seat, be plied with food and drink, and speed across two giant firths in a way unimaginable to our distant ancestors.



Scotland's oldest inhabited castle. Photo: VisitScotland.

How well do you know Scotland? To test your knowledge, we have assembled ten fun questions on its geography, history and culture but if you get stumped, the solutions can be found underneath. Good luck!

- 1) What in Scotland was a Border reiver?
- 2) Where is Scotland's oldest inhabited castle?
- 3) Which Scottish regiment saw action at Mount Tumbledown in the Falklands?
- 4) Which pop star said she chose Scotland for her wedding because it was "dripping in atmosphere"?
- 5) How much did the sword wielded by Mel Gibson in *Braveheart* fetch in a charity auction?
- 6) When was the Bank of Scotland founded? a) 1695, b) 1697 or c) 1720?

- 7) Off which island would you find The Minch?
- 8) What is the largest stretch of fresh water in Britain?
- 9) What is the motto of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders?
- 10) How long is the Caledonian Canal? a) 50 miles, b) 60 miles or c) 68 miles?

## Answers

- 1) A cattle rustler.
- 2) Dunvegan Castle on the Isle of Skye and the ancestral home of Clan MacLeod.
- 3) The Scots Guards.
- 4) Madonna.
- 5) £116,000.
- 6) a) 1695.
- 7) The Isle of Lewis.
- 8) Loch Lomond.
- 9) Without Fear.
- 10) b) 60 miles (100km).

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IN SCOTLAND TODAY



## Entry fee introduced to protect 5,000 years of history at Calanais Standing Stones

Ministerial approval has been granted to introduce an entry fee at Calanais Standing Stones to help conserve the site, improve visitor experience and deliver community benefits, while retaining free access for local residents. Historic Environment Scotland (HES) has received ministerial approval to introduce an admission charge at Calanais Standing Stones on the Isle of Lewis. The introduction of an entry fee will support the long-term sustainable future of the monument, an enhanced visitor experience, and help care for heritage across the Outer Hebrides.

This new model unites the Calanais Standing Stones and Visitor Centre, creating a world-class experience that brings to life over 5,000 years of history. This model is possible through a collaboration between HES and Urras nan Tursachan (UnT). HES will continue to manage, conserve and care for the Stones while UnT, an independent not-for-profit charity, will operate the redeveloped Visitor Centre at the site. Plans to develop an integrated approach and improve the visitor experience have been in discussion over the past few years, leading to a public consultation in 2024. Feedback on proposals was used to further develop plans and final proposals were submitted to Scottish Government for approval in 2025.

Responses to the consultation also highlighted the need to provide access to the stones for a number of groups and individuals who visit for spiritual purposes. To address this, a process will be established to consider requests for cultural or spiritual visits. "We know how special Calanais is to the people of Lewis and to visitors from across the world," said Katey Boal, Head of North Region at HES. "Our plans will help enhance the visitor experience and allow us to invest in the wider cultural and economic future of the Outer Hebrides. Our approach balances the need to protect one of Europe's most significant prehistoric monuments while ensuring local residents can continue to enjoy free access to their local heritage. By working closely with Urras nan Tursachan, we can create a world-class visitor experience that supports conservation, the local community, and heritage projects across the Outer Hebrides."

In addition, Historic Environment Scotland has also applied for planning permission to reinstate a path around the Callanish Standing Stones, lower a section of boundary wall and relocate fencing at the Lewis site. A 2020 erosion survey commissioned by HES found that increased visitor numbers is already causing physical damage to the monument, with the bases of the standing stones and central cairn particularly impacted.

## More than 1 million to live alone by 2032

The number of people living alone in Scotland is projected to top one million for the first time by 2032, according to new figures from National Records of Scotland (NRS). NRS projects the number of households will increase by 6.7% from 2022 to 2032 to a total of 2.68 million. Within that total 1,018,000 (38%) will be a single person household. The increase is equivalent to 17,000 more households per year.

Sandy Taylor, head of household statistics at NRS said: "The number of households in Scotland is projected to grow at a faster rate than the population. This is because Scotland's population is ageing and people are more likely to live alone as they get older. By 2032 it is projected that just over one fifth of the population aged 16 and over will be living alone. This proportion increases with age. It's just over a third for those aged 65 and over and more than half for those aged 85 and over."

Men are more likely to be living alone than women in all age groups up to 64 years old. However, from this point onwards women are more likely to be living alone and this likelihood increases with age. This reflects greater life expectancy of females and also the tendency of women to have partners who are older than them.

Most areas of Scotland are seeing an increase in the number of households, with Midlothian being the highest at 17.4%. With a projected fall of 1% in the number of households, Inverclyde is the only local authority area projected to show a decrease. Relatively small increases are projected for West Dunbartonshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Na h-Eileanan Siar and North Ayrshire.

## World Cup Public Holiday



First Minister John Swinney will propose Monday 15 June 2026 is designated a national bank holiday to mark Scotland's participation in the World Cup for the first time since 1998. This will allow individuals, businesses and other organisations in Scotland to celebrate after the men's team play their opening game against Haiti in Boston.

The First Minister said: "Scotland qualifying for the men's World Cup was a remarkable achievement and a landmark moment, and the reaction to the dramatic win against Denmark reminded us all what football means to the country. This year, we want to make the most of this huge opportunity for Scotland and ensure as many people as possible have the opportunity to celebrate the team's success. Not only is this an historic sporting event, it's also a chance for Scotland to be on the world stage, to attract business development, create tourism interest within the country and to make cultural and sporting connections.

That is why I am taking steps to ensure the Monday after our opening game should be national bank holiday, so that - no matter the outcome of the match - we can all come together to share the occasion."

Bank holidays are set under the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971. The relevant powers were devolved by the Scotland Act 1998. A day can be appointed as a bank holiday in Scotland by Royal Proclamation. The First Minister advises the Privy Council on proclamations for Scotland that are then designated by Royal Proclamation by His Majesty the King.

## Beavers released in Glen Affric 400 years after extinction in Scotland



A family of five beavers and a beaver pair have been released at two sites on Loch Beinn a Mheadhoin in the Glen Affric National Nature Reserve in the northwest Highlands. The beavers were relocated under licence from agricultural land in Tayside to an area where their natural behaviours are expected to positively benefit the landscape and biodiversity. Steve Micklewright, Trees for Life's Chief Executive, said: "As we saw the beavers released into the loch, we were watching a moment of wildlife history - offering hope for tackling the nature and climate emergencies, and a better future for biodiversity and people."

Beavers create wetlands that benefit other wildlife, purify water and reduce flooding. The animals can bring economic benefits to communities through eco-tourism. Sometimes the species can also create localised problems. The Glen Affric project partners have put in place measures to address these quickly should they emerge. The translocation to Glen Affric was carried out by Dr Roisin Campbell-Palmer, Head of Restoration at Beaver Trust, who said: "Beavers are a powerful ally in turning the biodiversity crisis around, and we're delighted to have carried out this important reintroduction to one of Scotland's most famous glens. Each new catchment we restore beavers to brings Scotland closer to its 2045 goal of a nature-rich, resilient future. Responsible, well-considered translocations like this are helping re-establish a healthy, connected beaver population across the country."

The reintroduction helps to deliver Scotland's national beaver strategy, and a Scottish Government directive calling on public agencies to seek reintroductions of the species on state-owned land out of existing beaver range. Once widespread in Scotland, the Eurasian beaver was hunted to extinction for its pelt, meat and musk oil. Records indicate beavers may have survived in small numbers until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Beavers are a protected native species, first reintroduced to Scotland in 2009.

## Start date set for Star of Caledonia



Work on the ground breaking Star of Caledonia sculpture on the Scotland-England border will begin soon, it has been confirmed. Construction at the site near Gretna Green is due to commence in March, with around half of the cost of the project being covered by a local energy company. CWP Energy is the cornerstone investor for the project, contributing around £6 million of the estimated £12 million total cost for the landmark.

Once complete, the striking 33-metre illuminated structure will be the largest sculpture in Scotland, standing as a powerful symbol of national identity and innovation. Situated on the border between Scotland and England, the project will shortly move into the next stage of development after planning approval was given in August. Designed by internationally renowned artist and engineer Cecil Balmond OBE, the Star of Caledonia's LED lights will be powered by renewable energy.

The project, which is expected to open in spring 2027, will greet millions of travellers entering Scotland, celebrating the nation's creativity and its scientific legacy. The biodiverse and accessible 39-acre site will include a purpose-built visitor hub, landscaped grounds, and a viewing platform, creating a major cultural destination in Dumfries and Galloway.

Projected to attract over 200,000 visitors annually, the Star will provide a significant economic boost for the area, as well as supporting local employment. All revenue generated by the site will be reinvested through a community interest company, funding arts, education, and community initiatives across the region.

Rod Wood MBE, managing director of CWP Energy, said: "This is going to be a spectacle that embodies Scotland's legacy of innovation and its commitment to green energy. The Star of Caledonia symbolises the brilliance of James Clerk Maxwell, the 'Einstein of Scotland'. Einstein once said he stood on Maxwell's shoulders, and this sculpture reflects that legacy of light, energy, and progress. It is more than just a sculpture, it's a national statement."

Alan Walker, treasurer and former chair of the James Clerk Maxwell Foundation, added: "James Clerk Maxwell, who created the first colour image and revealed the theory of electromagnetism, laid the foundations of our modern world. The Star of Caledonia captures the very essence of his discoveries: light, energy, and innovation. As Stephen Hawking once said, Maxwell was 'Scotland's forgotten Einstein', and this sculpture is a fitting tribute as we approach the bicentenary of his birth in 2031."

# Chieftain of the Day announced for Bundanoon is Brigadoon



Fiona and Frank McGregor.



Clan Gregor at Bundanoon.

The President and Committee of the Bundanoon Highland Gathering Inc. are delighted to announce that Frank McGregor, High Commissioner and Chiefs Lieutenant for Clan Gregor Australia and the Honorary Consul for the United Kingdom in Tasmania has accepted their offer to be the Chieftain of the Day in 2026

## High Commissioner and Chiefs Lieutenant for Clan Gregor Australia

Frank is the High Commissioner and Chiefs Lieutenant for Clan Gregor Australia and the Honorary Consul for the United Kingdom in Tasmania. In 2015, Frank McGregor was elected on to the Council of the Clan Gregor Society in Scotland as the Overseas Representative for Australasia. The Clan Gregor Society SCIO is one of the oldest clan societies in the world being established in 1822. In 2016, Frank helped co-ordinate a documentary on the Clan Gregor Society with Charles Wooley from *Sixty Minutes* called *No Surrender*.

Also in 2016, Frank became the Honorary Consul for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Tasmania and continues in this role. He says it's an incredible honour to work for the British Consulate.

Then in 2018, Clan Chief Sir Malcolm MacGregor awarded Frank with the title of High Commissioner for Clan Gregor in the Commonwealth of Australia and Chiefs Lieutenant with the approval and official documentation from the Lord Lyon Court of Scotland enabling Frank to wear the feathers of the position.

In October 2025, Frank was appointed as the new Dean of the Consular Corps of Tasmania with the ceremony taking place at Government House. Frank is a passionate historian for the Clan Gregor Society and enjoys travelling around Australia representing the clan at various Scottish related gatherings. He is the Patron of the annual Tasmanian Highlands Gathering held in June each year. Frank is married to Fiona McGregor and has two sons, William and Angus McGregor and enjoys getting out in his classic cars when he gets time.

## Clan Gregor

Clan Gregor are one of the most ancient and famous of all the highland clans in Scotland. Historians believe Clan Gregor to be the purest branch of the ancient Gael of Scotland now in existence – true descendants in short, of the native stock of the country. Known as Clan Alpine or Race

of Alpine, they descended from the first known inhabitants of Scotland and were the first people to boil water and create smoke in their ancient lands of Glenorchy. The Clan claims descent from Griogar, son of King Alpin who was the first united King of Scotland. It was from this that derived the Clan Motto of "Royal is our Race"

In 1589, King James VI, issued an edict proclaiming the name MacGregor "altogidder abolished," meaning that those who bore the name must renounce it or suffer death. MacGregor's were ordered to take on different names or to continue using the name MacGregor openly was to invite an immediate execution. It was practically the genocide of a Scottish Clan. To hide from their persecutors, they became known as the Children of the Mist. Famous MacGregor's include Scottish rogue Rob Roy MacGregor, John McGregor the Piper at the Alamo and another John MacGregor was Bonnie Prince Charlies personal Piper during his campaign.

In Australia, the clan are proud of the fact that they have had representation at every Bundanoon Highland Gathering since its inception. Since Frank has been involved with the Society, the MacGregor's have outnumbered every other clan at Bundanoon, sometimes having as many as seventy MacGregor kinfolk in the march or in front of the clan tent for our annual photo. The current Clan Chief is Sir Malcolm MacGregor of MacGregor Bt.

**The Bundanoon Highland Gathering is being held in Bundanoon, NSW in the beautiful Southern Highlands on Saturday, April 18<sup>th</sup>. For more details visit: [www.brigadoon.org.au](http://www.brigadoon.org.au)**

## Scottish life expectancy increases

Life expectancy in Scotland has risen for both males and females according to new figures from National Records of Scotland. The average life expectancy for 2022-2024 was 77.12 years for males and 81.06 years for females. This is an increase of almost 18 weeks for males and almost 14 weeks for females, compared to the average for 2021-2023. After falling during the COVID-19 pandemic, life expectancy has since risen and is now at a similar level to in the years leading up to the pandemic.

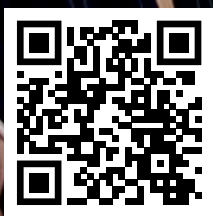
Life expectancy varies across Scotland's local authority areas and the gap between Scotland's most and least deprived areas remains stark – a difference of 13.2 years for males and 10.5 years for females. In 2022-2024, life expectancy was highest in East Renfrewshire (84.9 years for females and 81.5 years for males), and lowest in Glasgow City (78.7 years for females and 74.3 years for males).

Scotland continues to have the lowest life expectancy among UK countries. In 2022-2024, life expectancy in Scotland remained over two years lower compared to England for both females and males. The gap compared to Wales was smaller, although still over a year.

Phillipa Haxton, Head of Vital Events Statistics at NRS, said: "Life expectancy has risen since the COVID-19 pandemic and is now similar to the pre-pandemic figures. The gap between Scotland's most and least deprived areas remains significant, and large differences in life expectancy can be seen between local authorities."

Across Scotland, people living in the most rural areas can generally expect to live longer than those in the most urban areas.

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# S e Gàidheal a th' annam-I am a Gael

## The Scottish Banner speaks to Randy “Gil” Waugh

Author, musician and Gaelic scholar Randy ‘Gil’ Waugh is based in Ottawa, Canada and is closely linked to Scottish and Gaelic culture. Randy is an author, musician and Gaelic scholar who takes inspiration from Scotland’s history, music and culture. Randy ‘Gil’ Waugh took the time to speak to the Scottish Banner on his passion for Gaelic, his latest release and what it was like touring with a Celtic rock band.



Celtic band Fiùran.



Playing the pipes on Tartan Day.

**Randy you have been a private investigator, an IT architect and a commercial pilot. What drew you to writing, music and Gaelic teaching?**

**RW:** Writing and music have always been integral to who I am. I’ve been writing since I first learned how—it was my way of understanding and interpreting the world.

Looking back, not having a television in my early years was a blessing, not a curse. While many of my friends can still recite cartoon dialogue from memory, I spent that time writing plays, which my siblings and I would act out for our parents—or anyone willing to watch. I recently found one of those early scripts, titled *The Lost Flight*. It was horrendous, of course—but everyone was a good sport about it, and their encouragement meant the world.

Poetry was my first love. I wrote tomes of it—not because I was particularly good at it, but because it felt magical and cathartic. In fact, poetry was the first kind of writing I had published as a teenager, and to this day, each of my books includes an original theme poem. Music was always present in our home. My father performed on radio and television with his country band when I was young. After we moved to Ottawa, he continued to play—right up until the day before he passed in 2013. His passion left a lasting impact on me. I fell in love with the trumpet at a young age and lobbied relentlessly to learn it. Eventually, my parents gave in, and I took it up. After Fiùran folded in 2023, I returned to the trumpet



John Morrison, former CEO of the Royal National Mòd, and Randy Waugh.

and now play with the Concert Band of Kanata (CBoK), a wonderful local ensemble that brings me great joy.

I’m also a PDQB-certified tutor (Piping and Drumming Qualifications Board, Scotland) and have taught the Great Highland Bagpipe for many years. I had a particularly special group of young students about a decade ago and formed a band with them. We played gigs and competed regularly, and in 2018, we had the incredible honour of competing at the World Pipe Band Championships in Glasgow.

In 2014, I was invited by Pawl Birt, Chair of Celtic Studies at the University of Ottawa, to become a part-time professor of Scottish Gaelic language and culture. It felt like a dream come true. Eleven years later, I still feel the same way. I continue to teach with passion and love seeing our regular flow of students engaging with the language and the culture—proof that interest in Gaelic remains strong and vibrant. Gaelic has always been part of my heritage, though I only became consciously aware of it in adulthood. When my children were born, I began to explore our family’s roots. That’s when certain things about my maternal grandfather started to make sense—his lilting accent, his expressions, and certain behaviours.

I discovered that Scottish Gàidhlig was his first language, though he never passed it on. I used to think this was a rare story, but I’ve since learned it’s far more common than I imagined. Learning about the deliberate and long-standing efforts to suppress our language and culture—both in Scotland and here in Canada—lit a fire in me. I felt compelled to pick up the torch, to do what I could to help reverse the loss, or at the very least, to better understand who we were as a people.

So, to answer your question more succinctly: being a private investigator, IT architect, pilot, and all the other “left-brain” ventures I’ve pursued were primarily to earn a living and support my family. I’ve been fortunate to find success in multiple careers, but those roles, while creative in their own right, never nourished me the way the arts do. Now that I’m retired from working as an IT specialist, I’ve returned to where I began—completely immersed in the creative world. Ironically, those more traditional career paths now provide rich fodder for my writing.

**You are not only a Gaelic speaker but also a Professor of Scottish Gaelic Language and Culture, at the University of Ottawa. Can you tell us what drew you to the Gaelic language and any advice for those thinking about learning?**

**RW:** As I mentioned earlier, once I became aware that Scottish Gaelic was part of my family’s heritage—something that had been actively suppressed—it became a passion. I needed to understand why this had happened. What was our story? Where had we come from in Scotland? I’ve since found answers to many of those questions. While it saddens me that our language and culture weren’t deemed valuable enough to pass down, I now understand why that was the case. I’ve spent a great deal of time and energy trying to reclaim that part of our story—not only for myself, but for my children. When it comes to learning the language itself—it’s absolutely achievable. What’s needed is an open mind, a desire to learn, and the tenacity to figure out how *you* best absorb information—and then to keep going.

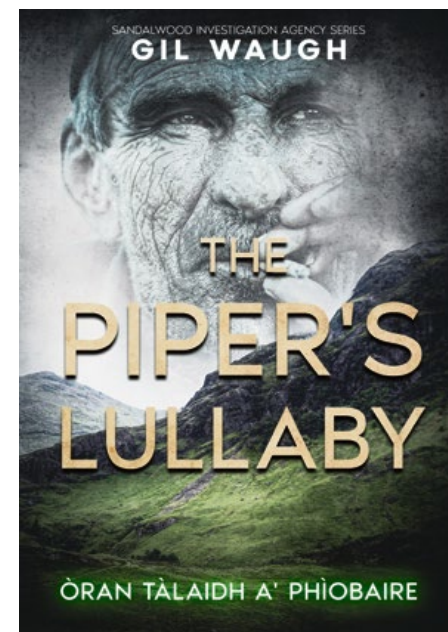
The second language I learned was French, which likely won’t surprise anyone from my generation. I was part of Pierre Trudeau Sr.’s era and believed in his dream that every Canadian should speak both official languages (Scottish Gaelic, by the way, almost became Canada’s third official language—but that’s a story for another day.) I didn’t truly learn French until I was immersed in it during stays in northern Québec. Full immersion is, without a doubt, the best way to learn any language.

That said, immersion is hard work—and not everyone has the opportunity to live in a Gaelic-speaking region of Scotland or Nova Scotia. Most learners have to find other pathways to the same goal.

For beginners, I often recommend starting with Duolingo. It’s a good introduction and helps users begin forming sentences. Its main drawback is that it doesn’t explain much about *why* the language works the way it does. I suggest supplementing it with more structured learning—such as courses offered by The Gaelic College in Cape Breton, or by Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on the Isle of Skye (my alma mater). If formal study isn’t possible, there are excellent online resources like LearnGaelic.scot and other organizations devoted to helping learners engage with the language.

Personally, I’m a big believer in a multi-media approach to language learning. Even if you can’t spend time in the Gàidhealtachd, you can still immerse yourself in the language and culture. Listen to Radio nan Gàidheal, watch programming from BBC Alba or MG Alba, read Gaelic books or periodicals (the Gaelic Books Council in Glasgow offers a wide selection), take online classes—and most importantly, practice speaking!

This last point can’t be emphasized enough. In every learning environment I’ve been part of, conversation has been a central focus.



I speak weekly with a fluent Gaelic conversation group based at Ionad Chalum Chille Ìle on Islay. Until recently, I also had weekly chats with my good friend John Morrison, the former CEO of the Royal National Mòd in Scotland. John sadly passed away this past July. I miss him dearly, and the profound connection we shared through our language and culture. Speaking Gaelic regularly—with a group or even a partner—encourages you to think in the language. It pushes you to discuss everyday topics, and gradually, it becomes second nature. That’s the essence of fluency. Yes, it can feel uncomfortable at first—but it’s a vital step on the path to mastering the language.

Should anyone be interested in getting started with their Gàidhlig language learning journey, I would encourage them to reach out. I would be happy to share my thoughts.

**Scottish Gaelic has enjoyed a revival in recent years with platforms such as Duolingo, as well as a number of initiatives being supported by the Scottish Government in Scotland. As an active member of the international Gaelic community what would like to see available to international Scots who are interested in the language?**

**RW:** There have been tremendous initiatives supported by the Scottish Government to promote the Gaelic language, including several that are accessible to the diaspora and learners around the world. One standout is LearnGaelic.net, launched in Stornoway at MG Alba in 2011—a fantastic resource for beginners and advanced learners alike. However, one of the greatest missed opportunities, in my view, is the lack of access to Scottish Gaelic programming on BBC Alba for those of us outside the UK. Due to licensing agreements and broadcasting rights, much of this rich content is geo-blocked. For learners, ex-pats, and members of the diaspora, this is a real frustration.

People are creative, of course—and many find workarounds. But rather

than relying on that, why not develop a mutually beneficial streaming agreement? BBC knows we're out here, and I would hazard a guess that most of us would gladly pay a subscription fee to access this content legally. Not only would that generate revenue, but it would also help expand the reach and impact of the language globally. This isn't just a matter of convenience—it's about connection. BBC Alba programming is a wonderful learning resource, and restricting access to it limits one of the most engaging and immersive tools available to language learners and cultural advocates abroad.

**Your latest book *The Piper's Lullaby: Òran Tàlaidh a' Phìobaire* involves murder and bagpipes and is set on the Isle of Islay. Can you tell us more and why you have chosen Islay as the setting for this historical thriller?**

**RW:** Well, let me tell you a story. Twenty-five years ago, when I wrote my second novel, *Evening Song – Òran Feasgair*, I did only light research before choosing Islay as the setting for the Gaelic portions of the story and the climax of the thriller—specifically, Rhinns Lighthouse on Orsay. At the time, I chose it almost at random. I had no idea that this was, in fact, the very place my ancestors had come from. The real twist? *Evening Song* is a story about genetic memory—about messages passed through generations via poetry, story, and song. So, you can imagine the shiver that ran up my spine when I later discovered that I had instinctively set the novel in the land of my forebears. I had, quite literally, lived the very theme I had written about.

Now I know that Islay was the primary origin of my maternal ancestors—the Gaels of Gartnatra and Corrary farm, who eventually emigrated to Canada near Burnstown, Ontario, under a crooked land scheme orchestrated by Alexander McNabb. Many from that line are now buried in Goshen Cemetery, just minutes from Burnstown. This discovery left me with an undeniable urge—to read more, to learn more, to write more about the land of my ancestors. It felt like a return to the origin, as if reconnecting to that place might somehow offer a kind of reset—a re-grounding of identity.

And of course, the kinds of twists and turns I write about would likely never happen on Islay—but maybe that's all the more reason to set them there. Perhaps it adds a little extra spice to go along with the island's legendary malt whisky.

**Are there any plans to release any of your books in a Scottish Gaelic edition?**

**RW:** In short—yes, absolutely. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I wrote a short story in Gaelic to entertain my online students. It centred around a mysterious pen and evolved into a creative twist on traditional Scottish folklore. I hadn't originally intended to publish it, but it soon became clear that it could stand alone—either as a resource for learners or, as it was recently released, in English for young adults. The Gaelic version is currently being edited and will be published in the near future. As for the *Sandalwood Investigation Agency* series—translating the books into Scottish Gaelic would be an absolute dream.

My late friend John Morrison and I spoke at length about this. He believed the series would make a valuable contribution to existing Gaelic literature and thought

it could be an excellent project for translation students at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig or through Bòrd na Gàidhlig. I agreed wholeheartedly and would still be willing to offer the books royalty-free for such an initiative—perhaps under a limited-time licensing agreement, with proceeds supporting a Gaelic organization in either Canada or Scotland, and rights reverting back to me later. My only stipulation would be the preservation of intellectual property and author credit. John and I also discussed the possibility of securing grants for translators. I'm not sure how to move that idea forward, but I remain very open to conversations with anyone who might help bring this to fruition. And once the translations are complete and edited, if any Gaelic publishers were interested, I would ensure they are published.

So yes—bringing *The Sandalwood Series* into Scottish Gaelic is more than a hope. It's a long-standing dream.

**You were also involved with the Celtic rock band Fiùran. How does it feel to have been able to create and share Celtic stories musically with audiences?**

**RW:** To understand how fulfilling Fiùran was, it's helpful to share a bit of the backstory. In 2009—roughly twelve years into my Gaelic learning journey—I founded Comunn Gàidhlig Ottawa (The Ottawa Gaelic Society) and organized and ran Mòd Chanada (A Scottish Gaelic event modelled after The Royal National Mòd in Scotland). To help raise awareness and support for our activities, I also formed and directed the award-winning Gaelic choir Ar n-Òran, as well as a children's choir, Na Cuileagan-lasrach (The Dragonflies). Both groups saw many successes, performing and competing across Canada, the United States, and Scotland. Ar n-Òran was especially popular and helped build a vibrant Gaelic cultural presence in Ottawa.

As Ar n-Òran began to wind down, I felt myself being drawn back to something I had done in my youth—writing and performing in a rock band. That pull became Fiùran, a Celtic rock project I hoped would be well received by fans. Krista, the lead tenor from Ar n-Òran, stepped in as our lead vocalist, and I reached out to former musical colleagues to round out the lineup. I never imagined we'd go on to record four studio albums, or that our music would eventually be heard around the world. Fiùran became a wonderful platform for sharing both original songs and reimagined Celtic stories through music. We started gaining momentum late in life, but the response was exciting—we won a fan favourite indie award in the heavy metal category in New York City and were lining up promising gigs and tours. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

A Japanese tour was in the works, but priority understandably went to more established acts whose tours had also been delayed. One by one, opportunities dried up. In 2023, after countless setbacks, Fiùran quietly folded—death by a thousand cuts. It was heartbreaking, and I mourned that loss deeply. Even so, I remain proud of what we achieved. Our music is still being played around the globe. I still hold onto the hope that the phone might ring someday, and we'll hit the road again—but if not, I have countless good memories, and a deep sense of gratitude for what we created.

Just recently, I watched Zach Stuckey—our youngest member and Fiùran's original guitarist—absolutely light up the stage on *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*. The band he's currently playing with is selling out arenas around the world. Maybe it's time for the next generation to take the torch. I believe Fiùran has left a formidable legacy that will stand the test of time.

**Your books have blended Scottish language, history and music within the characters and storylines. What is it about Scotland's setting and Scottish stories and themes that you feel make for such great reading?**

**RW:** It's certainly not a new idea to use the setting, history, language, and culture of Scotland as the backdrop for historical mysteries or thrillers. But it endures for a reason—Scotland is a land of breathtaking scenery and a rich, complex heritage shaped by thousands of years of folklore, legend, and lived experience. These elements offer storytellers an incredibly vivid and versatile palette to work with. If one takes a look at pop culture, music, art, and literature consumed around the world, it's clear there's an enduring global appetite for Scottish themes and settings. But for

me, it goes much deeper than trend or aesthetics.

Scotland is where my ancestors came from. On my mother's side—from the Isles of Islay and Tiree, and from Alloa in Clackmannanshire. On my father's side—from South Queensferry, Cramond and Linlithgow. Though I was born in Canada, am most definitely Canadian and can't call myself a Scot, I was raised with strong Scottish cultural mores and values. And over the years, one thing has become abundantly clear to me: I come from a long line of Gaels. I am a Gael.

For many years, I was a Gael with no Gaelic. But now, after much effort and discovery, I can say with conviction: 'S e Gàidheal a th' annam! *I am a Gael.*

For more information see: [www.gilwaugh.com](http://www.gilwaugh.com)



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# THIS MONTH IN SCOTTISH HISTORY

*Names & Places In The News From Today And The Past*

1 - Alexander Selkirk, a sailor from Lower Largo, Fife, rescued after four years on the island of Juan Fernandez, 400 miles off the coast of Chile; his story inspired Daniel Defoe to write *Robinson Crusoe*. 1708



1 - Loganair, the Scottish airline, is established. Loganair is today the UK's oldest and largest regional airline. 1962

2 - Feast and legal Quarter Day of Candlemass.

2 - James I married Lady Jane Beaufort, daughter of the Earl of Somerset, in London. 1424

2 - Battle of Inverlochy, one of the Duke of Montrose's victories over the Covenanters, killing 1,300. 1645

2 - Birth of James Chalmers in Arbroath - he devised the adhesive postage stamp. 1782

3 - General Monck's regiment entered London, having marched from Coldstream in the borders. The regiment kept order during the period of the restoration of Charles II. It continued as a standing regiment of the British Army, becoming known as the Coldstream Guards. 1660

4 - Charles II proclaimed King in Edinburgh - but not in England. 1649

4 - Prince James Francis Stuart, the Old Pretender, left Scotland after a stay of only three weeks, effectively bringing the first Jacobite Uprising to an end. 1716

4 - Honours of Scotland put on display in Edinburgh Castle after being rediscovered by Sir Walter Scott. The jewels consist of a sword, crown and sceptre. The three items were first used together during the coronation of Mary, Queen of Scots and last used for the coronation of Charles II in 1651. During the Second World War, they were hidden in different parts of Edinburgh Castle in case of German invasion. 1818

5 - John Witherspoon, clergyman, writer, President of Princeton University 1768-94, signatory to American Declaration of Independence 1776, born in Gifford, East Lothian. 1723

5 - John Boyd Dunlop, who patented the first practical pneumatic tyre, born Ayrshire. 1846

5 - SS *Politician* ran aground on Eriskay in the Outer Hebrides during gale worse winds, creating the basis for Sir Compton Mackenzie's novel *Whisky Galore*. 1941

6 - Queen Anne, last of the Stuart monarchs, born. 1665

6 - King Charles II, the "merry monarch" died. His last words to his brother James were "Don't let poor Nellie starve" - a reference to his favourite mistress, Nell Gwynne. 1685

6 - Representation of the people Act received Royal assent, granting votes to women over the age of 30. 1918

6 - King George VI dies and Queen Elizabeth II becomes the UK's longest serving monarch. 1952

7 - Battle at Glenfruin when the MacGregors slaughtered a number of Colquhoun's - the origins of the banning of the MacGregor name. 1603

7 - The Old Pretender's Jacobite army disbanded at Aberdeen, ending the 1715 uprising. Thirty years later his son, Charles, would try again to recapture the throne for the Stuarts. 1716

7 - 12,000 players and spectators descended on the frozen Lake of Menteith for Scotland's only outdoor curling tournament, known as the Bospiegel or the Grand Match. 1979



7 - Ness Viaduct at Inverness is washed away by floods, isolating the rail system to the far north for more than two years. The central parapet and two 73ft spans of the 127-year-old Ness Viaduct washed away into the River Ness. 1989

8 - A contingent of a thousand Scots, commanded by the brothers John and William Stuart, headed to the relief of the beleaguered French garrison at Orleans. The expedition ended in disaster when the force was defeated by the English at Rouvray Saint Denis and both Stuarts were killed. 1429

8 - Mary Queen of Scots beheaded at Fotheringay Castle after nearly 20 years of imprisonment. At the time of her death, Mary was 44 and had outlived three husbands. 1587

9 - Gordon McQueen, 25-year-old Scotland central defender, becomes Britain's first £500,000 footballer in a transfer from Leeds United to Manchester United. 1978

9 - John Noble, co-founder of Loch Fyne Oysters and Loch Fyne Restaurants died. It began as an umbrella and a trestle table and then transferred to a cowshed. Soon the venture became a restaurant, and then evolved into a chain of oyster bars. 2002

10 - Robert the Bruce murdered John 'Red' Comyn in Dumfries. Bruce met Red Comyn at the old Greyfriars Church and killed him at the high altar and Bruce began his bid for the throne. 1306

10 - Lord Darnley, husband of Mary Queen of Scots, assassinated. 1567

10 - Death of Lord Joseph Lister, pioneer of surgery and antiseptic at the University of Glasgow and Glasgow and Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. 1912

11 - Coldest temperature ever recorded in Scotland, -27.2 (-16.96F) at Braemar. 1895

11 - Author and politician John Buchan died in Canada. 1940

11 - Tolls are removed from the Erskine Bridge, the Tay Road Bridge, and the Forth Road Bridge. These bridges were the last three remaining toll bridges in Scotland. 2008

12 - George Heriot, goldsmith to King James VI and founder of Heriot's School, died. The school was originally founded as Heriot's Hospital, Edinburgh. He is thought to be the inspiration for the character, Georgie Heriot, in Sir Walter Scott's novel, *Fortunes of Nigel*. 1624

12 - Rev Henry Duncan, founder of the world-wide savings bank movement, died near Ruthwell. 1846

13 - Kenneth MacAlpin, King of Dalriada and the Picts, died at Forteviot. 858

13 - Massacre of 38 of the Clan Macdonald by government order at Glencoe. 1692

13 - Scottish Youth Hostel Association formed. Now rebranded to Hostelling Scotland, the not-for-profit charity, has today over 60 youth and affiliate hostels around Scotland. 1931

14 - Mary Queen of Scots meets Lord Darnley for the first time. They married in July 1565. 1565

14 - Alexander Graham Bell patented the telephone (Patent 174461). Two hours after it was lodged, his rival, Elisha Gray, applied for a similar patent. Bell's was granted. 1876



14 - Dolly the sheep died. Dolly was a female domestic sheep, and the first cloned mammal (at the Roslin Institute, University of Edinburgh) ever to be created from an adult cell, her birth was of huge excitement both to the scientific world and to the public. 2003

15 - The Caledonian Railway company opened. The Caledonian Railway ran trains from London to Glasgow and was in fierce competition with the Edinburgh based North British Railway. 1848

15 - Decimal currency introduced, abandoning 12 pennies to a shilling and 20 shillings to a pound. 1971

15 - Nicola Sturgeon announces her resignation as First Minister of Scotland and Leader of the Scottish National Party after eight years in the role. Sturgeon is Scotland's longest serving First Minister. 2023

16 - Government forces under Lord Loudon attempted to capture Prince Charles Edward Stewart at Moy Hall. 1746

16 - Scottish actor, author and artist John Cairney was born in Glasgow. Best known for his one-man shows on Robert Burns, Cairney also starred in BBC's *This Man Craig* and films *A Night to Remember*, *Cleopatra* and *Jason and the Argonauts*. John Cairney died in 2023 and was due to be honoured in the New Year Honours list for 2024. 1930

16 - Scottish crime and science fiction writer Iain Banks was born in Dunfermline, Fife. He was named one of The 50 greatest British writers since 1945 and sadly Banks died from cancer on June 9, 2013. 1954

17 - King James V passed a law which recognised Scotland's gipsies. 1540

17 - James Renwick, last Covenanter to be executed. 1688

17 - Release of Bill Forsyth's Scottish cult film *Local Hero*. The film is about an American oil company representative who is sent to the fictional village of Ferness on the west coast of Scotland to purchase the town and surrounding property for his company. 1983



18 - Glasgow's Queen Street train station opened. Originally called Glasgow Dundas Street the station was built by Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway to link the thriving city of Glasgow to the nation's capital. The station and line took four years to build. A £120m redevelopment recently took place to see the station into the future. 1842

19 - James Douglas retook Roxburgh Castle and razed it to the ground. The Black Douglas, as he was known, and sixty men gained access to the castle by climbing the castle walls using hooked scaling ladders. 1314

19 - Ronald Belford "Bon" Scott died in London. Born in Forfar in Angus, Scotland, Scott spent his early years in Kirriemuir before moving to Australia. Scott was the lead vocalist and lyricist of the hard rock band AC/DC from 1974 until his death in 1980. 1980

20 - King James I murdered in Perth by a group led by Sir Robert Graham. 1437

20 - Orkney and Shetland annexed from Norway. 1472

20 - Gordon Brown, former UK Prime Minister (2007-2010), born in Giffnock, Renfrewshire. 1951

21 - Intercity railway between Glasgow and Edinburgh opened by Queen Victoria. 1842

21 - Eric Liddell, *Chariots of Fire* athlete, winner of 1924 Olympics 400 metres, died in Japanese internment camp in China. 1945

22 - David II died at Edinburgh Castle. 1371

22 - King Robert II crowned. 1371

23 - Battle of Roslin in which a Scots army of 8,000, led by Sir Simon Fraser, Sinclair of Rosslyn and the Red Comyn, surprised an English army of 30,000 led by Sir John Seagrave and defeated them. 1303

23 - James Herriot (pen name of James Alfred Wight), author of *All Creatures Great and Small*, died aged 78. 1995



24 - Steam train, the *Flying Scotsman* went into service with London and North Eastern Railway (LNER), on the London (King's Cross) to Edinburgh route. The train was the first and the first to reach speeds of 100 mph. 1923

24 - Scottish footballer Denis Law who played for Manchester United and Scotland, born in Aberdeen. 1940

25 - Bishop Henry Wardlaw established St Andrews as a university although it was not officially inaugurated until 4 1414 when a Bull of Foundation was promulgated by Pope Benedict XIII. 1412

26 - Philip van der Straten, a Fleming, was granted Scots naturalisation and set up a factory in Kelso, thus starting the Border woollen industry. 1672

26 - Robert Watson Watt demonstrated radar for the first time. 1935

26 - Entertainer and singer/song writer Sir Harry Lauder died. Lauder had become the highest-paid performer in the world and was the first British artist to sell a million records. 1950

27 - Battle of Ancrum Moor in which Scottish forces, led by Earl of Douglas, defeated an English army twice their size. 1545

28 - Second National Covenant signed in Greyfriars Churchyard. The document was a direct response to Charles I's attempts to introduce a Book of Common Prayer across the whole of Britain, as Presbyterians were incensed that the General Assembly had not been consulted. 1638

29 - Patrick Hamilton was burned at St Andrews for the crime of heresy. Hamilton is regarded as the first Protestant martyr in Scotland. After studying in Europe, where he came into contact with the ideas of Martin Luther, Hamilton began to preach Protestant ideas in Scotland, leading to his arrest. Hamilton was sentenced to be burned at the stake but, horrifically, his inexperienced executioners underestimated how much kindling would be needed, and the fire petered out with Hamilton badly burned but alive. In all it took six hours for the flames to consume Hamilton. 1528



29 - The famous Glasgow theatre, The Pavilion, celebrated its opening performance. 1904

# Romantic Scotland - Valentine's Day in Scotland

Looking for some inspiration for Valentine's Day? Here are some great ideas for romantic Scottish getaways and days out for your next visit to Scotland.



The Pineapple.

Depending on where you're from, and how far back through history you look, you might enjoy all sorts of Valentine's Day traditions. In England it was once said that if you put bay leaves at each corner of your pillow, you would have sweet dreams and visions of your future spouse. In Wales, at the end of January, they also celebrate St Dwynwen's Day, when they give each other intricately carved wooden 'lovespoons'.

The most popular date for getting married in the Philippines is 14 February – every year mass weddings take place across the country, with hundreds of couples tying the knot simultaneously (and hopefully being careful where they throw the bouquet!). Scotland tends to celebrate Valentine's Day in a more traditional way, with flowers, cards and chocolates. Of course, people are always looking for new ways to celebrate the life romantic, and here are some great getaway ideas for your next visit to Scotland.

## Romantic places in Scotland



Beautiful Iona.



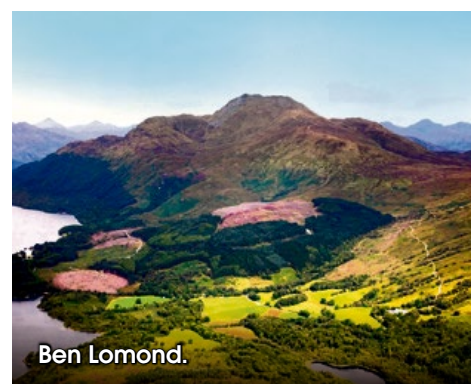
Craigievar Castle.

We're not short on romantic scenery here in Scotland, but what about those places you might not think of (and which might be a little less crowded than Edinburgh or Glasgow city centre)? Few places compare to Iona – an island

steeped in spiritual history – for a sense of tranquillity and romantic atmosphere, plus a trip here can include a quest to find the Well of Eternal Youth. Further south, in Dumfries & Galloway, Rockcliffe is part of a National Scenic Area. It has some of the prettiest coastal landscapes anywhere in Scotland, and we've even got a wonderful holiday cottage here too, so you can stay the night.

For anyone in Aberdeenshire, or for those who fancy venturing north from Edinburgh and Glasgow, Craigievar Castle feels like a magical fairytale tower, not just because of its pink hue but also because the interiors are free from artificial lighting. Then there's The Pineapple near Stirling, a unique historic building bringing a touch of the exotic to a chilly February day.

## Romantic walks



Ben Lomond.

To make your Valentine's Day a memorable one, why not bag a Munro? A short drive north from Glasgow will bring you to the foot of Ben Lomond, Scotland's most southerly Munro, and you can reach the peak with a 5-hour 'couple's climb' (we're going to make it a thing). From there you'll enjoy soaring, soul-stirring views over Loch Lomond and the Trossachs.

There are more Munros at Mar Lodge Estate National Nature Reserve – 15 of them, in fact – as well as a vast number of treks and hikes that take in the spectacular pinewoods and heather-clad moorland. Pack a picnic and stay out for the whole day, just like Queen Victoria used to do.

Of course, it's not only our countryside properties that are great for walks – our castles all come complete with beautiful grounds, each filled with loads of things to see and do. Among the woods, beaches and parkland of Culzean Castle

& Country Park you'll find hidden caves, glasshouses and the stunning Swan Pond, while at Kellie Castle you can meander your way through an exquisitely colourful and rose-scented Arts & Crafts garden.

## Scotland's snowdrops



Snowdrops.

Did you know that in Denmark people often send pressed snowdrops to their beloved instead of roses? We have lots of places where you can see snowdrops in bloom, with some of them taking part in the Scottish Snowdrop Festival: At Branklyn Garden near Perth you'll find some stunning snowdrops with unique heart markings, while at Threave Garden the spectacular snowdrop displays are accompanied by hellebores that provide an extra pop of complimentary colour. At House of Dun & Montrose Basin Nature Reserve the floor of the ancient woodlands are carpeted with snowdrops as far as the eye can see.

## Outlander spots



Royal Burgh of Culross.

Claire and Jamie's epic love story has had audiences all aflutter since 2014. You can spend Valentine's Day tracing their footsteps at one of the *Outlander* linked places and re-enacting their fiery time-travelling romance.

Keen fans of the show might recognise the Royal Burgh of Culross from certain scenes, and both the inside of Culross Palace and the palace garden were used in the series. The winding, cobbled streets of this authentic 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century burgh are wonderfully atmospheric, and it's one of the easiest places to get to for anyone staying in and around Edinburgh. You could even squeeze two *Outlander* sites into one day with a visit to tranquil Preston Mill in East Lothian, which was used both as a mill on the Fraser estate and as a court for a witchcraft trial.

*Text and images are courtesy of the National Trust for Scotland. For more information on the Trust or to help them protect Scotland's heritage see: [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk)*

## The Australian Pipe Band Championships - Pipe Bands go west



For the first time in 30 years, the Australian Pipe Band Championships will be held in Western Australia this April 11. Perth audiences will get to experience the incredible sounds and pageantry of hundreds of bagpipers and drummers performing on Subiaco Oval as the nation's best pipe bands assemble for a unique battle of the bands. The Championships will see bands travel from Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and even Singapore to pit their skills against six competitive Western Australian bands hoping to leverage their home ground advantage.

Pipe Bands Australia expects over 20 bands to compete across the various grades. There is also a Drum Majors Flourish competition element where each Drum Major displays their skill at marching while spinning and throwing a mace. This demonstration of precision and showmanship is enthralling for the audience. The event is also a Highland Gathering, with athletes competing in Highland Games such as tossing the caber,

putting the stone, hammer throws, and tug-o-war. There will also be demonstrations of Scottish Country Dancing and stall holders for Clan genealogical societies and Scottish arts and crafts.

## Sounds of bagpipes and drums

At the end of the afternoon, all competing bands will form a massed band that marches to the pavilion for the announcement of prize winners. The massed band is a goosebump moment, creating an exciting spectacle for the crowds.

Chair of Pipe Bands WA, Stuart Bradford, has been working for years to convince bands based on the east coast to make the journey west. The big sell is Perth's record for being the sunniest capital city in Australia, and the chance for traveling bands to holiday in WA. Another drawcard is the stunning venue. Subiaco Oval was once Perth's home of AFL Football in Western Australia, but the hallowed ground will now come alive to the sounds of bagpipes and drums rather than umpire whistles and final sirens! The old stadiums have been removed to transform the oval into a community events space for the City of Subiaco.

Subiaco is a vibrant precinct buzzing with bars, restaurants, entertainment and shopping. Visitors to the Championships can explore, dine and play their way around Perth's most charming inner-city destination.

*The 2026 Australian Pipe Bands Championships are on Saturday 11 April 2026 at Subiaco Oval. Visit: [www.pipebandsaustralia.com.au](http://www.pipebandsaustralia.com.au)*

After all the food and fun of the holiday's one would think February is a quiet month, however with Valentine's Day (Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>) and Pancake Day or Shrove Tuesday (Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>) it certainly is going to be a tasty month!



O my luve's like a red, red rose,  
That's newly sprung in June,  
My luve's like the melodie  
That's sweetly play'd in tune.  
As fair art thou, my bonie lass,  
So deep in luve am I,  
And I will luve thee still, my dear,  
Till a' the seas gang dry.  
From 'A Red, Red Rose' - Robert Burns [1794]

## IN THE SCOTTISH KITCHEN

to cover the base of the pan, swirling the pan so that it becomes evenly coated. Fry (sauté) for a few minutes until bubbles appear on the surface. Turn the pancakes over and cook the other side.

Then slide on to a tea towel (dish cloth) and keep warm. Make more pancakes in the same way until the batter is used up (there should be enough for about eight pancakes). Melt the butter (or margarine) in another frying pan (skillet), then stir in the sugar and cook for one minute. Add the grated rind and juice of the oranges and lemons and bring to the boil. Then add the Drambuie and simmer gently for three minutes. Fold the pancakes into quarters and place in the frying pan. Cook gently for three minutes, spooning the sauce over the top, until heated through. Serve immediately.

### Prince Charlie's pancakes

#### Ingredients:

- 125g/4oz or one cup plain (all-purpose) flour
- 2 beaten eggs
- Half pint (300ml or 1¼ cups) milk
- 25g/1oz. or 2 tablespoons lard (shortening)
- 85g/3oz. or ¾ stick butter or margarine
- 125g/4oz. or half cup caster (superfine) sugar
- 2 tablespoons (30ml) Drambuie
- Grated rind and juice from 3 large oranges
- Grated rind and juice from two large lemons
- Pinch of salt

#### Method:

Sift the flour and salt into a bowl and make a hollow in the centre. Stir in the beaten eggs and half the milk and beat until you have a smooth batter. Then slowly stir in the other half of the milk.

Melt a little lard in an 8 inch (20cm) frying pan (skillet). Pour in enough batter

### Macarons



#### Ingredients:

- 125g/4oz. ground almonds
- 200g/7oz. icing sugar
- 3 free-range egg whites
- 2 tbsp. caster sugar

- ½ tsp cream of tartar
- pinch red powdered food colouring
- For the chocolate filling
- 200g/7oz. dark chocolate, chopped
- 200ml/7fl oz. double cream
- 1 tsp brandy
- 15g/½oz. unsalted butter

#### Method:

Blend the ground almonds and icing sugar in a food processor until well combined. Set aside.

Using an electric whisk, slowly whisk the egg whites in a large bowl at a low speed until stiff peaks form when the whisk is removed. Slowly whisk in the cream of tartar and caster sugar until the mixture is smooth and glossy, increasing the speed of the whisk as the mixture stiffens.

Gently fold in the food colouring and blended ground almonds and icing sugar until the mixture resembles shaving foam.

Spoon the macaroon mixture into a piping bag fitted with a 1cm/½in round nozzle. Pipe 5cm/2in circles onto the baking tray lined with greaseproof paper. If a peak forms, wet your finger and smooth it down. Sharply tap the bottom of the tray to release any air bubbles from the macarons, then set aside for 60 minutes (the macaroon shells are ready to go in the oven when they are no longer sticky to the touch).

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 160C/315F/Gas 2½.

Bake the macarons in the oven for 10-15 minutes, or until cooked through. Remove from the oven and set aside to cool for 5 minutes. Carefully peel away the greaseproof paper and set aside to cool completely.

Meanwhile, for the chocolate filling, heat the double cream and chocolate in a saucepan over a low heat, stirring occasionally, until smooth and well combined. Add the brandy and butter and stir until smooth, then remove from the heat and set aside to cool completely.

Use the filling to sandwich the macarons together then chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.

### Rhubarb crumble



#### Ingredients:

- 10 sticks of rhubarb
- 4 tbsp. water
- 8 tbsp. caster sugar
- 1 tsp powdered ginger
- 110g/4oz. butter, softened
- 110g/4oz. demerara sugar
- 180-200g/6-7oz. flour

**To serve:**  
double cream

#### Method:

Preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas 4. Cut the rhubarb into 7½cm/3in long sticks and place on an oven tray, sprinkle with the water and caster sugar and roast in the oven for 10 minutes. Once cooked, remove from the oven, sprinkle over the ginger and mix well. Fill an ovenproof dish about 4cm/1½in deep with the rhubarb.

Rub the butter into the flour and sugar to make the crumble topping. Sprinkle over the rhubarb and bake in the oven for 35-45 minutes, or until the crumble topping is crisp and golden-brown and the rhubarb filling has softened and is bubbling. Remove and allow to cool slightly before serving with double cream.

### Valentine cupcakes

#### Ingredients:

##### For the cakes:

- 125g/4oz. unsalted butter, softened
- 125g/4oz. caster sugar
- 2 free-range eggs
- 125g/4oz. self-raising flour
- 150g/5oz. raspberries
- 6 passion fruit, sieved pulp only
- a little milk, to loosen the mixture as necessary

##### For the icing:

- 500g/1lb 1½oz. icing sugar
- 160g/5½oz. butter
- 1 vanilla pod, seeds only
- 2-3 drops pink liquid food colouring
- 50ml/1¾oz. milk
- hundreds and thousands

#### Method:

For the cakes, preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas 4. Sit 12 paper cases in a muffin tray. Beat the butter and sugar in a bowl until pale and creamy. Add the eggs, one at a time, and beat until well combined.

Fold the flour, raspberries and passion fruit pulp into the mixture until almost smooth. If the mixture looks too stiff, add a little milk, as necessary.

Divide the mixture among the paper cases then bake for 20 minutes. Remove from the oven and set aside to cool in the tin for 10 minutes. Turn the cakes out onto a wire rack and set aside until completely cooled.

For the icing, using an electric whisk, cream the icing sugar and butter together until light and fluffy. Whisk in the vanilla pod seeds and food colouring. Gradually whisk in enough milk to form a smooth paste.

Spoon the icing into a piping bag with a large star-shaped nozzle and pipe the icing over the cake. Sprinkle over the hundreds and thousands.

### Scottish raspberry romance

#### Ingredients:

- 1 shot scotch whisky
- 1 shot Chambord
- Rose Champagne

#### Method:

Pour whisky and Chambord into a flute glass, then add in rose champagne to fill. Delicious!



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## KINGS CASTLES AND “DURTY” WEE RASCALS

Australian Jim Stoddart was born in a Glasgow Tenement and raised in a Glasgow Housing Scheme 1943-1965. Jim will be taking readers on a trip down memory lane, of a time and place that will never be the same again and hopes even if only a few people in the Scot's Diaspora have a dormant folk memory awakened, then he shall be more than delighted.



Robert Tannahill, The Paisley Poet.

### A Paisley Poet

*The broom, the briar, the birken bush,  
bloom bonnie o'er thy flow'ry lea;*

*And a' the sweets that ane can wish,  
frae nature's hand are strewd on thee.*

*When winter blows in sleety showers  
frae off the Norlan hills sae hie,*

*He lightly skiffs thy bonnie bow'rs  
as laith to harm a flower in thee.*

*Thou bonnie wood O'Craigielea,  
thou bonnie wood O'Craigielea,*

*Near thee I pass'd life's early day and  
won my Mary's heart in thee.*

*Verses 1, 4 and chorus from Thou Bonnie  
Wood O' Craigielea by Robert Tannahill.*

Every present day Australian will tell you that nationalist and poet Andrew (Banjo) Paterson wrote the words to that wonderful and haunting tune *Waltzing Matilda*.

Many might even recall that Christina Macpherson is said to have penned the music for him. That event supposedly happened whilst she was playing on her zither on a property in Queensland in 1895. A very much smaller number of 'Aussies' will know that Christina adapted that tune from an old Scottish Ballad, *Thou Bonnie Wood O' Craigielea* written by the Paisley Poet, Robert Tannahill and his good friend James Barr. Both Christina MacPherson and Banjo Paterson were of Scots descent so it should not surprise us that they were already familiar with this very beautiful old tune.

With that said I was impressed a few years ago to discover that the American writer and raconteur, Bill Bryson, also knew where the tune had come from but he mentions it in his book *Downunder*. He was in fact taking a humorous swipe at Banjo's choice of words for the song but says "...on the other hand it has a lovely tune, it's borrowed from an old Scottish Air, *Thou Bonnie Wood O'Craigielea...*"

### The weaver poet

There has been much written about the Australian version of this song analysing Banjo Paterson's words, their intent and meaning especially for the non-Australian. And that includes Bill Bryson's take on the matter. But I shall leave all that aside to look at Robert Tannahill who never came to Australia, yet gave this land ten thousand miles away a much loved song that has become so associated with Australia and its people throughout the world.

Robert Tannahill was known locally as the 'weaver poet'. He was born in Castle Street, Paisley in June 1774, and fourth son of a family of seven. His father was James Tannahill from Kilmarnock and his mother Janet Pollock from Boghill Farm near Beith. Soon after Robert's birth his family moved to a cottage in Queen Street, Paisley. Robert apparently had a delicate constitution and a limp due to a deformity in his right leg. After leaving school aged twelve he was apprenticed to his father as a handloom weaver. During this apprenticeship Robert began to show his talent for writing poetry and that interest in poetry and music were to fully blossom in adulthood.

His writings began to appear in such publications as *The Scots Magazine* which co-incidentally is the oldest magazine in the world that is still in print today. His music and poetry was contemporaneous with that of fellow poet, Robert Burns, and for that reason he is today considered to have been undervalued in Scotland at that time simply because of the greater popularity of Burns.

### An important Scottish poet

My interest in Tannahill began when I realised some of his poetry mentioned places such as Crookston Castle, the castle that featured so much in my childhood as a place to visit and play in during the 1940s and 1950s together with the Glennifer Braes where I once camped with

my childhood friends. I was intrigued to realise that he was creating some of his poetic works upon seeing that same castle ruin in his own childhood as well as the slopes of the Glennifer Braes perhaps as early as 1780. Although the *Bonnie Woods O' Craigielea* lay at Ferguslie to the north west of Paisley I have to admit that I was not familiar with the song or the place back then even though my wife and I had grown up only a few miles from there.

And to some extent that is an indictment upon our otherwise very good schoolteachers at Crookston Castle Secondary who introduced us to Robert Burns and William Shakespeare among others but not Robert Tannahill, a poet and songwriter even closer to home.

### Robert Tannahill was known locally as the 'weaver poet'.

Robert Tannahill tragically took his own life in 1810 apparently following the rejection of his work by an Edinburgh publisher. His grave is situated in Castlehead cemetery on Canal Street in Paisley and there is a well named after him at Glen Burn in the Glennifer Braes. Tannahill knew and loved the green hills of the Glennifer Braes and his memorial

well is a place where ramblers and wildlife can quench their thirst. It's dedicated in deference to the immortality of his verse about the places he knew well and that I had also come to know and love in my childhood.

*"The Bonnie wee well on the breast o' the brae,  
Where the hare steals to drink in the gloamin'  
sae grey"*

That's not very much in memory of an important Scottish poet and song writer and the man who gifted to Australia its favourite song. And as far as I am aware there is nothing at all in Australia to remind us of who to thank for our tune. In 1973 Australian's were asked by plebiscite to decide upon a new national anthem for up until then it remained *God Save the Queen*. The main contenders for the honour of becoming Australia's National Anthem were *Waltzing Matilda*, *Advance Australia Fair* and the status quo choice of *God Save the Queen*.

There is little doubt that the ever popular tune of *Waltzing Matilda* would have won hands down if Banjo Paterson's words had been suitable for an anthem meant to unite and describe something to represent Australia to the world, as well as to ourselves. Banjo Paterson's words didn't do that. And of course, the words of *Thou Bonnie Wood O' Craigielea* were not suitable either. So, *Advance Australia Fair*, first performed in 1878 became the winner. It was written by the Scottish-born composer Peter Dodds McCormack. But that's another story.

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# Calling the Clans

Welcome to our "Clansified" listing of Scottish Clans, Societies and Clubs. If you would like to add your Clan please contact our office for full details. Our contacts are located on page 2. If you are contacting your Clan be sure to tell them you saw them in *the Scottish Banner* and please support these great community organisations.

## Clan Baird Society Worldwide



Membership is open to those descended from Baird, Barde, Bard, Beard, Beard, Brd, Bayard, Bardt, Barth and Biard or varied spellings of the name of Scottish origin.

In addition to the Society newsletter and the opportunity to associate with fellow clansman members may query the Society genealogist. **For information write:**

Clan Baird Commander

Richard Baird of Rickarton, Ury and Lochwood  
Rickarton House, Stonehaven, Scotland.

Hereditary President of Clan Baird Society Worldwide

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Clan Bell North America

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## National Clan Cameron Australia Inc.

Celebrates those who trace their ancestry to Clan Cameron or are connected to the Clan through marriage or partnership or are from families acknowledged as Septs of Clan Cameron.

**President:** Alistair Cameron

**Secretary:** Terry Cameron

[secy.nationalclancameronaus@gmail.com](mailto:secy.nationalclancameronaus@gmail.com)

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**For information and membership application, contact Richard Harvey, Secretary**  
**Email:** [Ih100@tpg.com.au](mailto:Ih100@tpg.com.au)



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Email: [clanfraseraustralia1@gmail.com](mailto:clanfraseraustralia1@gmail.com)  
Or you can contact our Commissioner Don Chitts on Ph: (03) 9754 5120  
For the latest Clan Fraser news and events go to our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064819413911>

## Family of Bruce International, Inc.



Family of Bruce International, Inc., the only such organization recognized by the hereditary chief of the Name of Bruce, The Rt. Hon. Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, is a non-profit organization established to create kinship amongst its family members and promote interest in the Family of Bruce and its history. Membership is open to persons who qualify by surname, by descent, or by recognized septs: Carlisle, Carruthers, Crosby, Randolph and Stenhouse.

**Membership inquiries should be directed to:**

Donald E. Bruce, President  
[bruce1051@comcast.net](mailto:bruce1051@comcast.net)  
1051 Eagle Ridge Trail  
Stillwater, Minnesota 55082

Rachel Bruce, Secretary  
[roebuce1@gmail.com](mailto:roebuce1@gmail.com)  
1652 Glencoe St.  
Denver, Colorado, 80220

[www.familyofbruceinternational.org](http://www.familyofbruceinternational.org)



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Contact: Kim Polley OAM

PO Box 84, Longford, Tasmania, 7301

**Email:** [kim.polley13@gmail.com](mailto:kim.polley13@gmail.com)

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Website: [www.donnachaidh.com](http://www.donnachaidh.com)

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Facebook: Official Clan Donnachaidh page (Robertsons, Reids, Duncans and others)



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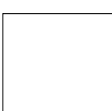
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E: [dhill1@bigpond.net.au](mailto:dhill1@bigpond.net.au), P: 0431 527 662



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Email: [marianne@mmelliott.com](mailto:marianne@mmelliott.com)

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[clanmaclarenau@gmail.com](mailto:clanmaclarenau@gmail.com)



## Clan Macpherson Association

Clan Macpherson welcomes enquiries from Macphersons and members of our Associated families. For information about local activities visit our web site [www.clan-macpherson.org/branches](http://www.clan-macpherson.org/branches)

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The **Clan Macpherson Museum** is located in Newtonmore, Inverness Shire PH20 1DE, at the junction of the A86 and B9150 It is open from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> October. Ph + 44 1540 673 332. See <http://www.clan-macpherson.org/museum/>



## Clan Hay

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## Clan MacLaren

MacLaren MacLaurin Lawrence  
Lawson Low[e]  
Low[e]ry Law[e] Patterson  
MacPatrick MacRory

Mark A. McLaren, President  
[President@clanmaclarenna.org](mailto:President@clanmaclarenna.org)



## The Clan MacRae Society of Australia and New Zealand

If your surname is MacRae, or you are descended from a person having the surname MacRae (any spelling) or that of a Sept of the Clan then you are eligible to join our Society.

**Australian Contact:** Roslyn MacRae 0412 291 054  
email: [clanmacraeausnz@gmail.com](mailto:clanmacraeausnz@gmail.com)

**NZ Contact:** Sue Tregoweth  
email: [sue.treg1@gmail.com](mailto:sue.treg1@gmail.com)



## CLAN HOPE of Craighall Society

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President & Commissioner: Stephen J. Hope  
[president@clanhope.org](mailto:president@clanhope.org)  
[www.clanhope.org](http://www.clanhope.org)

**UNITED STATES of AMERICA**  
High Commissioner: Richard Rex Hope  
[highcommissionerusa@clanhope.org](mailto:highcommissionerusa@clanhope.org)

**Membership Chair:** Cynthia Hope Henderson  
[membership@clanhope.org](mailto:membership@clanhope.org)  
[www.clanhope.org](http://www.clanhope.org)

**CANADA**  
Commissioner: Scott Hale  
[commissionercanada@clanhope.org](mailto:commissionercanada@clanhope.org)  
[www.clanhope.org](http://www.clanhope.org)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ClanHopeofCraighall>



## Macfie Clan Society of Australia

Invites anyone interested in our Clan and its ancestral heritage to contact us. Various Clan names include McPhee, MacFee, Macfie, McAfee, Fee, Phee, McDuffy, Duffy, McCathie and many more.

For more information please email: [colonsay@bigpond.net.au](mailto:colonsay@bigpond.net.au), visit us at [facebook.com/clanmacfieaustralia](http://facebook.com/clanmacfieaustralia) or our website: <https://clanmacfie.com.au>



## Clan MacLellan

Kevin S Gates  
Treasurer  
2610 Kuykendall Dr.  
Arlington, TX  
76001-6726

Email: [treasurer@clanmaclellan.net](mailto:treasurer@clanmaclellan.net)

Invites all MacLellans and their descendants regardless of surname spelling to join in preserving our heritage. Various family names are MacLellan(d), McClellan(d), McLellan(d) and Gilliland.

Visit our website: [www.clanmaclellan.net](http://www.clanmaclellan.net)



## Clan MacRae Society of North America

*Granted Arms in 2008*

We invite MacRaes of all spelling variations and their descendants to join our Clan MacRae Society. Learn your Scottish MacRae history and family lineage!

[www.macrae.org](http://www.macrae.org)  
Need more info? Contact:  
**Dean McCraw, President**  
912-596-8624  
[dean.mccraw1@gmail.com](mailto:dean.mccraw1@gmail.com)




## Clan Irving

Arms of the Chief  
**Rupert Irving of Bonshaw**  
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Int'l Assn. of Clan MacInnes (Aonghais)

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Scott McInnis, Member Services: [scott@macinnes.org](mailto:scott@macinnes.org) or visit [www.macinnes.org](http://www.macinnes.org)



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## Clan Maitland Society


Chief: Ian Maitland, The Earl of Lauderdale!  
We are all related! Contact your local society

**North America:** Rosemary Maitland Thom  
[rthomnvrprdcn@aol.com](mailto:rthomnvrprdcn@aol.com) [www.clanmaitlandna.org](http://www.clanmaitlandna.org)

**Australia:** Amanda Maitland  
[clanmaitlandaustralia@gmail.com](mailto:clanmaitlandaustralia@gmail.com)  
12 Settlers Way, Westleigh, NSW, 2120

**New Zealand:** Judette Maitland [judette@xtra.co.nz](mailto:judette@xtra.co.nz)  
33 Disley Street, Highbury, Wellington 6012. NZ

We welcome all with Maitland, Lauderdale, Maitlen and similar name spelling. See the entire list and your family history at: [www.clanmaitland.org.uk](http://www.clanmaitland.org.uk)



## Clan Irwin Association

**Chief and Patron**  
Alexander H.R Irvine of Drum,  
27th Baron and Laird of Drum, Chief of the Name

[www.clanirwin.org](http://www.clanirwin.org)  
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We welcome all: no matter the spelling.



## Clan Mackenzie Society in Australia

Inviting all Mackenzies to join us in celebrating our heritage.

Visit our website for further information  
[www.clanmackenzie.org.au](http://www.clanmackenzie.org.au)



## Clan MacLeod Societies of Australia

Membership is open to MacLeods and Septs (of any variant spelling) and descendants. **Septs:** Askey, Beaton, Bethune, Caskie, Harold, Lewis, MacAndie, MacAskill, MacAulay, MacCabe, MacCaig, MacCaskey, MacClure, MacCorkill, MacCrimmon, MacGillechallum, MacHaigh, MacRaild, MacWilliam, Norie, Norman, Tolmie, Williamson

- NSW, ACT & Qld - Peter MacLeod 02 4397 3161
- Victoria & Tas - Rhonda McLeod 0411 227 330
- South Australia - Alex McLeod 08 8327 0925
- Western Australia - Ruth MacLeod 08 9364 6334

• Email: [peter.macleod@exemail.com.au](mailto:peter.macleod@exemail.com.au)




## Clan Morrison Society of North America


Clann MhicGillemoire: Morrison + Gilmore + Brieve

Membership cordially invited from those who are connected with this great Clan, i.e., Morrison, Morison, Gilmour, Gilmer, Gilmore, Murrison or descendants of eligible name.

[www.clanmorrison.net](http://www.clanmorrison.net)

**Clan Muirhead Society**  
  
 A NON-PROF. CORP.  
 Muirhead, Muirhede, Morehead, Moorhead  
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[www.clanmuirhead.com](http://www.clanmuirhead.com)  
 Rev. Ret. Chev. Raymond L. Morehead, GOTT, FSA Scot,  
 Chief Officer Elect Clan Muirhead Society  
 Email: [raymondktj@msn.com](mailto:raymondktj@msn.com) or [raymond@clanmuirhead.com](mailto:raymond@clanmuirhead.com)

**Clan Ross America**  
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 Michael Ross, President  
 Nancy Ross-Anderson, VP Membership  
 18865 Cooper Street, Apple Valley, CA92308  
[membership@clanross.org](mailto:membership@clanross.org)  
[info@clanross.org](mailto:info@clanross.org)  
[www.clanross.org](http://www.clanross.org)


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[www.clanwardlaw.com](http://www.clanwardlaw.com)  
**Wardlaw Tartan and Ancestry Books**

**The Scottish Australian Heritage Council**  
  
 Membership is welcome from all of Scottish descent.  
 For information please contact [members@scottishaustralianheritagecouncil.com.au](mailto:members@scottishaustralianheritagecouncil.com.au)  
  
[www.scottishaustralianheritagecouncil.com.au](http://www.scottishaustralianheritagecouncil.com.au)

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[memberships@clanmunroassociation.org.au](mailto:memberships@clanmunroassociation.org.au)

**Clan Sinclair Australia**  
  
 Membership and inquiries from all Sinclairs, Sinclair Septs and Sinclair descendants.  
 For further info contact  
 President: El-Myrrh Sinclair-Drever 0477 426 587  
 Secretary : Liane Sinclair 0410 045 263  
 E: [info@clansinclairaustralia.com](mailto:info@clansinclairaustralia.com)  
[www.clansinclairaustralia.com](http://www.clansinclairaustralia.com)

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 Invites membership of all people of Scottish descent or association  
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[www.standrewsociety.com](http://www.standrewsociety.com)

**Discover Your Nesbitt/Nisbet Ancestry**  
  
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[nesbittnisbet.org.uk](http://nesbittnisbet.org.uk)

**Clan Sutherland Society in Australia Inc.**  
  
 Contact: M Williams, Secretary  
[clansutherlandsocietyaustralia@gmail.com](mailto:clansutherlandsocietyaustralia@gmail.com)  
<http://goldenvale.wixsite.com/clansutherlandaus>  
 Facebook: Clan Sutherland Society in Australia

**Caledonian Society of WA Inc.**  
  
 Promotes Scottish Culture and Traditions in Perth, Western Australia  
 For further details contact John: 0427 990 754  
 Email: [caledoniansocietyofwa@gmail.com](mailto:caledoniansocietyofwa@gmail.com)  
[www.caledoniansocietyofwainc.com](http://www.caledoniansocietyofwainc.com)


**Scots of Victoria Coordinating Group**  
 Supporting the Scottish Community in Victoria  
  
 Suite 87, 139 Cardigan St  
 Carlton Vic 3053  
 Email: [resource\\_centre@scotsofaustralia.org.au](mailto:resource_centre@scotsofaustralia.org.au)  
 Website: <https://scotsofaustralia.org.au>  
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[www.OliphantOfNorthAmerica.org](http://www.OliphantOfNorthAmerica.org)

**Clan Sutherland Society of North America Inc.**  
  
 The Society cordially invites membership of all Sutherlands (however the name is spelled) and historically associated families: Cheyne, Duffus, Gray, Frederith and Mowat.  
 Email: [Secretary@ClanSutherland.org](mailto:Secretary@ClanSutherland.org)  
 Website: [www.ClanSutherland.org](http://www.ClanSutherland.org)

**Hunter Valley Scots Club Inc**  
  
 Promotes and supports all forms of Scottish culture in Newcastle, Hunter Valley and surrounding areas.  
 Members and interested people are welcome to attend activities such as Burns Night, Caledonian Night, St Andrew's Day, and other social functions.  
 Web: [hvscots.org](http://hvscots.org) Email: [hunterscots@gmail.com](mailto:hunterscots@gmail.com)  
 P.O. Box 34, Kotara NSW 2289

**St Andrew Society of W.A.**  
  
 Promoting Scottish dancing, singing, literature & other cultural activities.  
 For further information contact:  
[secretary@saintandrew.org.au](mailto:secretary@saintandrew.org.au)  
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 e-mail: [apollockis@comcast.net](mailto:apollockis@comcast.net)

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 Youngs of Scotland in Australia  
  
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**The Robert Burns Club of Melbourne Inc.**  
  
 > Promotes interest in the works, life and milieu of the Scottish Poet Robert Burns  
 > Celebrates Scottish Culture  
 > Conducts Annual Burns Supper, Poetry Afternoon & Pleasant Sunday Afternoon  
 For Membership Information contact:  
 Secretary: [Melissa.Ventre - 0405 182 458](mailto:Melissa.Ventre@robertburnsclubmelbourne.org.au)  
 Email: [secretary@robertburnsclubmelbourne.org.au](mailto:secretary@robertburnsclubmelbourne.org.au)

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 website: <https://www.vshcf.com.au/>

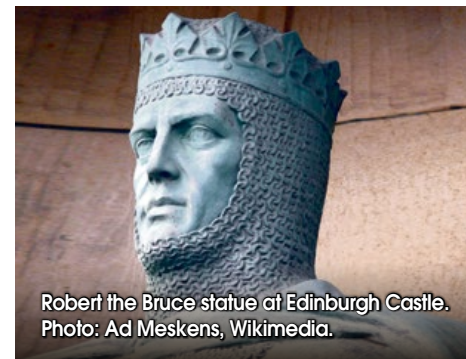
**Clan Ross in Australia**  
  
 for information contact Commander Des Ross  
 (By appointment David Ross Bt Chief of Clan Ross and Balnagowan)  
 We would be pleased to hear from anyone with Ross Clan heritage and interest.  
 Contact: Commander Des Ross at  
[lonepiper.ross@gmail.com](mailto:lonepiper.ross@gmail.com) M 0403 830 853

**YOUNGS OF SCOTLAND**  
  
 Membership inquiries:  
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 33 McKeen Street,  
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 Clans and Scottish Societies of Canada

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# The Heart of Scotland



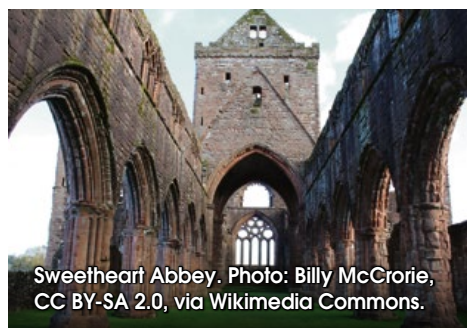
Robert the Bruce statue at Edinburgh Castle. Photo: Ad Meskens, Wikimedia.



Melrose Abbey. Photo: Holger Uwe Schmitt, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



The Heart of Midlothian. Photo: Rafael Tello, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



Sweetheart Abbey. Photo: Billy McCrorie, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

By: Judy Vickers

February is the month of love, marking as it does St Valentine's Day on the 14<sup>th</sup>. And Scotland has strong connections to the Italian patron saint of lovers – his forearm is kept at a church in Glasgow. The saint's relic arrived in Scotland in 1868 when a wealthy French family donated it to St Francis's Church in the Gorbals area of the city – in 1999 it moved to the nearby Blessed John Duns Scotus Catholic Church. However, his heart – after all the part of the body most associated with love – is in Ireland. But Scotland has claim to many other hearts, both real and symbolic.

## Robert the Bruce

The *Braveheart* of the Mel Gibson movie might have been William Wallace, but it was his sometime compatriot in arms, Robert the Bruce, whose actual physical heart has a story to tell well beyond the death of its owner. Bruce, the hero of Bannockburn and one of Scotland's most revered kings, died in 1329, his promise to go on Crusade unfulfilled. His loyal knight, Sir James Douglas – The Black Douglas – promised to carry out his dying wish and take his heart to the Holy Land.

As there was no Crusade to the Holy Land in the offing, Douglas and his men instead headed to Spain where Alfonso XI of Castile was battling against the Moorish kingdom of Granada. Sir James and most of his men were wiped out at the siege of

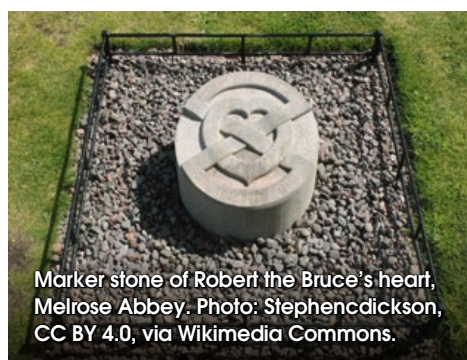
the castle of Teba in 1330 but amazingly the casket containing the Bruce's heart, which Douglas was wearing around his neck, was recovered.

The heart was taken to Melrose Abbey in the Scottish Borders where it was buried. But that is not the end of the story of Bruce's unquiet heart. In 1921, archaeologists found a casket within the abbey; it was opened, found to contain the remains of a human heart and reburied – but the location was again lost. In 1996, the casket was rediscovered and the presence of a "small, prune-like" shrivelled heart inside was confirmed by endoscope to prevent any further damage.

Donald Dewar, the Secretary of State for Scotland at the time, said the discovery was "one of great significance and symbolism for the people of Scotland" but archaeologists have warned that there is no way of knowing for certain that it is Bruce's heart. That said, the heart was reburied at the abbey as per the mighty king's final wishes. One of the reasons it's tricky to confirm the authenticity of the heart at Melrose is that hearts were often removed from bodies during the Middle Ages – when John Balliol died in 1268, his widow Lady Dervorguilla of Galloway had his embalmed heart put into an ivory casket which she carried with her. When she died in 1289, she was buried in the religious institution she had founded, holding her husband's heart. And the name of that religious institution? Sweetheart Abbey is located eight miles south of Dumfries.



The Old Tolbooth and St Giles' Cathedral by Henry Gibson Duguid. Photo Wikimedia.



Marker stone of Robert the Bruce's heart, Melrose Abbey. Photo: Stephendickson, CC BY 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Four hundred years later, James Graham, the Marquess of Montrose, the dashing Royalist commander, lost his heart shortly after losing his life in a public hanging at the Mercat Cross in Edinburgh in 1650. He had been condemned to death for treason and, flamboyant to the last, appeared on the scaffold in a bright red coat and fur hat. Denied the usual nobleman's privilege of the swifter death of a beheading, he was hanged and his body dismembered, with his head placed on a spike near the Tolbooth and one limb each sent to Inverness, St Andrews, Stirling and Aberdeen, to be displayed above their city gates. His torso was buried in consecrated ground at Burghmuir but his niece had managed to remove his heart beforehand which was placed in a box made from the blade of his sword and taken to France for safekeeping. Sadly, however, his heart was lost during the French Revolution whereas ironically most of his limbs, his head and his torso were reunited when political fortunes changed and Charles II came to the throne and entombed at St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh.

## Heart of Midlothian

Not all the hearts in Scotland with a tale behind them are physical hearts. The Tinker's Heart at Loch Fyne in Argyll is the only permanent memorial to Scotland's traveller community. Located at the junction of three roads, the memorial is made up of white quartz pebbles formed in the shape of a heart and is said to have

been first created to commemorate the travellers who died at Culloden. For years afterwards, travellers' weddings and christenings were celebrated there – now a scheduled monument, the heart has become a popular place for proposals.

The Heart of Midlothian is an 1818 novel by the famous Scots writer and nationalist Sir Walter Scott – the heart in question referring to the location of the Old Tolbooth in Edinburgh, which was then in the county of Midlothian. The Old Tolbooth was a prison, and the story revolves around a young woman, Effie Deans, locked up in the Tollbooth awaiting execution for the alleged murder of her baby and her sister's attempts to free her. The tollbooth was demolished in 1817 but a mosaic heart was set into the Royal Mile, just outside St Giles' Cathedral, marking the place where it stood. Locals often spit on it for good luck! And the name of Heart of Midlothian, one of the city's football teams formed in 1874, usually known as Hearts, derives from the novel and the mosaic.

And where is the heart of the whole of Scotland? Not including the islands, the Ordnance Survey shows it as being close to Schiehallion – with islands included it is above Loch Garry, near the Pass of Drumochter.

## Melbourne Highland Games and Celtic Festival returns to Croydon in March



The vibrant sights, sounds and traditions of Scotland and the wider Celtic world will come alive once again when the Melbourne Highland Games and Celtic Festival returns to Eastfield Park Reserve, Croydon, on Saturday, 29 March. This year's festival proudly hosts the Victorian Pipe Band Championships, a prestigious competition that will bring together pipe bands from across Victoria to compete for the State title.

Audiences will be treated not only to championship performances but also to the stirring spectacle of the Massed Bands Parade, where pipers and drummers unite in a powerful and unforgettable display of sound and pageantry.

### A celebration of history, culture and community

The day will also feature a rich program of Scottish and Irish dance, including traditional Highland dancing, Irish dance, and inclusive folk dancing, where members of the public are encouraged to join in and experience this welcoming, community-based form of dance. A major

highlight of the festival will be the return of the Heavy Games, with elite athletes competing in traditional events such as hammer throwing, stone lifting, and other feats of strength that have been part of Highland Games for centuries. Designed as a true family-friendly event, the Melbourne Highland Games and Celtic Festival offers something for all ages. Visitors are invited to relax, enjoy the atmosphere, wear their tartan colours with pride, and explore opportunities to learn more about their Scottish and Celtic heritage through cultural displays and community organisations.

The Melbourne Highland Games and Celtic Festival is a celebration of history, culture and community, delivered in a relaxed and welcoming setting and remains one of Victoria's premier cultural events.

*Melbourne Highland Games and Celtic Festival take place on Saturday, 29 March at Eastfield Park Reserve, Croydon, Victoria. For details see: [www.melbournehighlandgames.org.au](http://www.melbournehighlandgames.org.au) or [www.facebook.com/MelbourneHighlandGames](http://www.facebook.com/MelbourneHighlandGames). For tickets visit: [www.trybooking.com/DIBNJ](http://www.trybooking.com/DIBNJ)*

# WHAT'S ON - SCOTTISH EVENTS

Enjoy Australia & New Zealand's premier Scottish event listings in the Scottish Banner. Please check directly with event contacts for the most up to date information. You can also see our latest updates (including events listed across Scotland and North America) or add your event at: [www.scottishbanner.com/events](http://www.scottishbanner.com/events)

## Australia

### FEBRUARY 2026

#### Deacon Blue 40th Anniversary Australian Tour 1-10, Various venues

Celebrating 40 years of music - Scottish pop-rock icons Deacon Blue return to Australia with performances in Adelaide, Thirroul, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Info: [www.daltours.cc/deacon-blue](http://www.daltours.cc/deacon-blue)

#### Robert Burns Club of Melbourne Burns Supper 2026 7, Altona, VIC

Join the Robert Burns Club of Melbourne for the 76<sup>th</sup> Annual Burns Supper with an Address to the Haggis, entertainment, Scottish food and more at Altona Sports Club, 11 Altona Rd. Info: [www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1511708](http://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1511708)

#### Burns in the Ballroom 7, Townsville, QLD

A Scottish evening with the Townsville Scottish Community to celebrate the birthday of Robbie Burns at Townsville RSL, Charters Towers Rd. Info: Marie 0413 456 542 or [www.townsvilletickets.com.au](http://www.townsvilletickets.com.au)

#### The Warringah Scottish Society Burns Night 7, Collaroy, NSW, Australia

Come and celebrate Robbie Burns. There will be Scottish and old-time dancing, entertainment by the Warringah Pipe Band, the Address to the Haggis and a taste of Haggis. Info: [www.facebook.com/WarringahScottishSociety](http://www.facebook.com/WarringahScottishSociety)

#### The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo Brisbane 12-15, Brisbane, QLD

The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo marches exclusively into Brisbane in 2026. Suncorp Stadium will proudly host a full-scale production of the Tattoo's 75th anniversary Show, 'The Heroes Who Made Us', four performances February 12-15. Info: [www.edintattoobrisbane.com.au](http://www.edintattoobrisbane.com.au)

#### Danny Bhoys Australian Tour 2026 16-March 18, Various locations

Scottish comedian and globally-renowned funnyman Danny Bhoys returns to Australia. This is the sequel to his 2015 show 'Dear Epsom...' His favourite ever show at various venues. Info: [www.bohmpresents.com/current-events/show/danny-bhoys-8](http://www.bohmpresents.com/current-events/show/danny-bhoys-8)

#### Fringe Ceilidh 22, Adelaide, SA

Join the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society and dance Scottish Ceilidh dancing at the Irish Club, with live music by the Adelaide Ceilidh Band. Info: <https://adelaidefringe.com.au/fringetix/scottish-ceilidh-dancing-af2026>

#### Seachdain na Gàidhlig-World Gaelic Week 2026 23-March 1, Nationwide

The Gaelic language will be celebrated as the annual initiative reaches its milestone fifth year of highlighting Gaelic's vitality and enduring presence as a living language. Under the banner Use It or Lose It (Cleachd i no caill i) – and organisers are encouraging people across Scotland and the global diaspora to get behind the rallying cry. Info: [seachdainnagaidhlig.scot](http://seachdainnagaidhlig.scot)

#### Southern Fling and Fringe 2026 27-March 1, Canberra, ACT

A residential weekend of Scottish Country Dancing. Enjoy an engaging program of classes, dancing and live music in a welcoming, friendly and inclusive atmosphere with an intergenerational vibe. The weekend will feature Fling classes for dancers 40 years and under and Fringe classes for dancers 41 years and over. Info: [www.rscds-canberra.org/rscds-branch/southern-fling-and-fringe-2026](http://www.rscds-canberra.org/rscds-branch/southern-fling-and-fringe-2026)

#### Elephant Sessions Australian Tour 2026 27-March 21, Various locations

Multi-award winning indie folk quintet from the Highlands of Scotland tour select locations in Australia. Info: [www.elephantsessions.com](http://www.elephantsessions.com)

### MARCH 2026

#### Katoomba Weekend 2026 6-8, Katoomba, NSW

If you enjoy Scottish Country Dancing and like meeting other people then this residential weekend is for you, with dance workshops, events and fun at Blue Mountains YHA, 207 Katoomba St. Info: [www.rscds.org.au](http://www.rscds.org.au)

#### An Intimate Evening with Celtic Thunder-Australian Tour 12-24, Various locations

Fans of the internationally renowned Irish music phenomenon, Celtic Thunder, are in for a special treat as the group announces their brand-new show, An Intimate Evening with Celtic Thunder – touring Tweed Heads, Brisbane, Caloundra, Newcastle, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth in March and celebrating their greatest songs. Info: [www.davidroywilliams.com/tours/celtictunder2026](http://www.davidroywilliams.com/tours/celtictunder2026)

#### Chaotic Ceilidh 14, Sydney, NSW

Join Scots on the Rocks for a night of dancing and friendship. Featuring music by ARIA Award winning Chris Duncan & Catherine Strutt, it will be a night of energetic and popular dances. Includes supper (BYO alcohol) at Abraham Mott Hall, Argyle Street, The Rocks. Info: [www.sotr.org.au/chaos](http://www.sotr.org.au/chaos)

#### The Big Melbourne Kilt Run on The Tan 15, Melbourne, VIC

A fun run/jog/walk on the famous Tan running track. Join the Melbourne Tartan Festival for a fun Scottish themed event & wear a kilt or article of tartan clothing - a singlet, shorts, scarf, tartan face paint. Info: [www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1460583](http://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1460583)

#### Melbourne Celtic Festival 17, Melbourne, VIC

With its unique blend of world-class talent and a warm community vibe, the Festival transforms The Mission to Seafarers into a lively hub of music, dance and craic you won't want to miss at The Mission to Seafarers, 717 Flinders St, Docklands. Info: [www.melbournecelticfestival.com.au](http://www.melbournecelticfestival.com.au)

#### Melbourne Highland Games & Celtic Festival 2026 29, Croydon, VIC

Metropolitan Melbourne's only Scottish festival with pipe bands, Clans, entertainment, athletics, Celtic dancers and more at Eastfield Park. Info: [www.melbournehighlandgames.org.au](http://www.melbournehighlandgames.org.au)

## New Zealand

### FEBRUARY 2026

#### Danny Bhoys New Zealand Tour 2026 3-14, Various locations

Scottish comedian and globally-renowned funnyman Danny Bhoys returns to New Zealand. This is the sequel to his 2015 show 'Dear Epsom...' His favourite ever show at various venues. Info: [www.bohmpresents.com/current-events/show/danny-bhoys-8](http://www.bohmpresents.com/current-events/show/danny-bhoys-8)

#### Deacon Blue New Zealand Tour 12-15, Various locations

Deacon Blue announce their 2026 NZ Tour celebrating 40 years of music. Scottish pop-rock icons Deacon Blue is thrilled to announce their return to NZ celebrate the band's 40th anniversary and the release of their latest studio album, The Great Western Road. With their first Christchurch performance, and returning to Wellington and Auckland. Info: [livenation.co.nz](http://livenation.co.nz)

#### Paeroa Highland Games & Tattoo 14, Paeroa

A full day of Scottish competitions, entertainment and fun, including an evening Tattoo performance at Paeroa Domain. Info: [www.paeroahighlandgames.co.nz](http://www.paeroahighlandgames.co.nz)

#### Wellington Gaelic Club Ceilidh 14, Wellington

Wear some tartan and join the Wellington Gaelic Club at the City of Wellington Pipe Band Hall, corner of Stoke and Hansen Sts in Newtown for music and dancing to a live band. Info: [www.wellington-gaelic-club-communn-gaidhealach-wellington.weebly.com](http://www.wellington-gaelic-club-communn-gaidhealach-wellington.weebly.com)

#### The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo Auckland 19-21, Auckland

One of the world's most spectacular and iconic live events, The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, is set to dazzle New Zealand audiences in an unforgettable showcase when it comes exclusively, and for the first time ever, to Auckland, in celebration of its 75th anniversary. It will be one of its most ambitious international Stadium productions to date. Renowned for stirring music, military precision, cultural displays, and dramatic performances at Auckland's Eden Park. Info: [www.edintattooauckland.co.nz](http://www.edintattooauckland.co.nz)

#### Highland Pulse 21, Auckland

Auckland Live Summer in the Square-Enjoy the dynamic Papakura Pipe Band, proudly wearing the Gordon Tartan, alongside Auckland Live Morning Melodies favourites Base Auckland Brass and North Shore Brass Academy Community Band and other pipe bands of Auckland, delivering everything from ceremonial classics to contemporary tunes at Aotea Square, Queen St. Info: [www.aucklandlive.co.nz/show/highland-pulse](http://www.aucklandlive.co.nz/show/highland-pulse)

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### MARCH 2026

#### Pipes in the Park 2026 7, Wellington

Wellington's very own Highland Gathering with Highland and Irish dance performances, solo piping and drumming contests, ceilidh bands and the Pipes in the Park Pipe Band Competition at Waitangi Park. Info: [www.facebook.com/pipesintheparkWGTON](http://www.facebook.com/pipesintheparkWGTON)

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Wear some tartan and join the Wellington Gaelic Club at the City of Wellington Pipe Band Hall, corner of Stoke and Hansen Sts in Newtown for music and dancing to a live band. Info: [www.wellington-gaelic-club-communn-gaidhealach-wellington.weebly.com](http://www.wellington-gaelic-club-communn-gaidhealach-wellington.weebly.com)

#### Create Celtic Botanical Birds 15, Wellington

Wellington artist and illustrator Helen Casey draws her inspiration from the natural world around us. Her eye-catching intricately detailed art is influenced by her time as a scientific illustrator at Te Papa and her own Celtic culture. In this imaginative and creative workshop you will discover the relaxing process of drawing Celtic botanical bird art you can colour in later, while also learning about composition, balance and design. Located in the Treehouse seminar room, the Wellington Botanic Garden ki Paekākā. Info: [www.wellingtongardens.nz](http://www.wellingtongardens.nz)

#### New Zealand Pipe Band Championships 20-21, Taranaki, New Plymouth

Bands from across New Zealand and beyond compete. The event will be livestreamed and watched by a global audience. Info: [www.rnzpb.com](http://www.rnzpb.com)

## Scotland

### FEBRUARY 2026

#### SPECTRA 5-8, Aberdeen

Aberdeen's Festival of Light-an exciting mix of installations and artworks to iconic locations across the city — including Aberdeen Art Gallery, Union Terrace Gardens, Marischal College, and more. Info: [www.facebook.com/spectraaberdeen](http://www.facebook.com/spectraaberdeen)

#### Fèis Phàislig 10th Anniversary Concert 7, Paisley

Fèis Phàislig, Renfrewshire's celebrated traditional music and Gaelic arts charity, will present a major anniversary concert to mark ten years of providing cultural opportunities for young people. The showcase event will take place at the iconic Paisley Town Hall bringing together over 100 performers from the organisation's past and present. Info: [www.feisphaislig.com](http://www.feisphaislig.com)

#### Fort William Mountain Festival 12-15, Fort William

A programme of inspiring talks, workshops, films and guided outdoor events and adventure inspired workshops that celebrate the spirit of adventure and excellence in the outdoors. Info: [www.mountainfestival.co.uk](http://www.mountainfestival.co.uk)

#### Granite Noir 17-22, Aberdeen

Inspired by the incredible popularity of crime fiction in all its forms, by the fantastic contribution that Scottish writers make, by our love affair with Nordic Noir, on the page and on screen, and most of all inspired by Aberdeen, which is the perfect backdrop for the festival – steeped in history, atmospheric, quirky and with a strong sense of place. Info: [www.aberdeenperformingarts.com/granite-noir](http://www.aberdeenperformingarts.com/granite-noir)

#### National Piping Centre Junior Piping Championship 21, Glasgow

One of a host of fantastic contests for young pipers aged Under 18 across the country every year. It aims to encourage all young players to compete, with chanter competitions through to Piobaireachd events at the National Piping Centre. Info: [www.thepipingcentre.co.uk](http://www.thepipingcentre.co.uk)

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#### Glasgow Film Festival 25-March 8, Glasgow

Glasgow is home to one of the friendliest and vibrant film festivals in the world. Our wide-ranging programme celebrates the diversity of global filmmaking, offering a fantastic showcase for the best of Scottish cinema alongside films from every corner of the world. Info: [www.glasgowfilmfest.org](http://www.glasgowfilmfest.org)

#### Scottish Fiddle Orchestra Live in Perth 28, Perth

Come along and enjoy a gloriously unique programme of traditional Scottish music – reels, strathspeys, jigs, marches & slow airs at Perth Concert Hall. Info: [www.sfo.org.uk](http://www.sfo.org.uk)

### Scotword answers from page 6

<b>Across:</b>	<b>Down:</b>
8) Toorie	1) Forres
9) Hawthorne	2) Dram
10) Grampian	3) Lewis
11) Region	4) Chanter
12) Ashet	5) Sword
14) Ken	6) Shug
15) Lochs	7) Arrochar
18) Ceilidh	13) Ell
20) Kintyre	16) Ado
23) Keith	17) Nip
24) Ilk	19) Eyemouth
25) Reels	21) Tee
29) Forfar	22) Flashes
31) Stramash	26) Leslie
33) Attitude	27) Trout
34) Celtic	28) Grace
	30) Fair
	32) Mull

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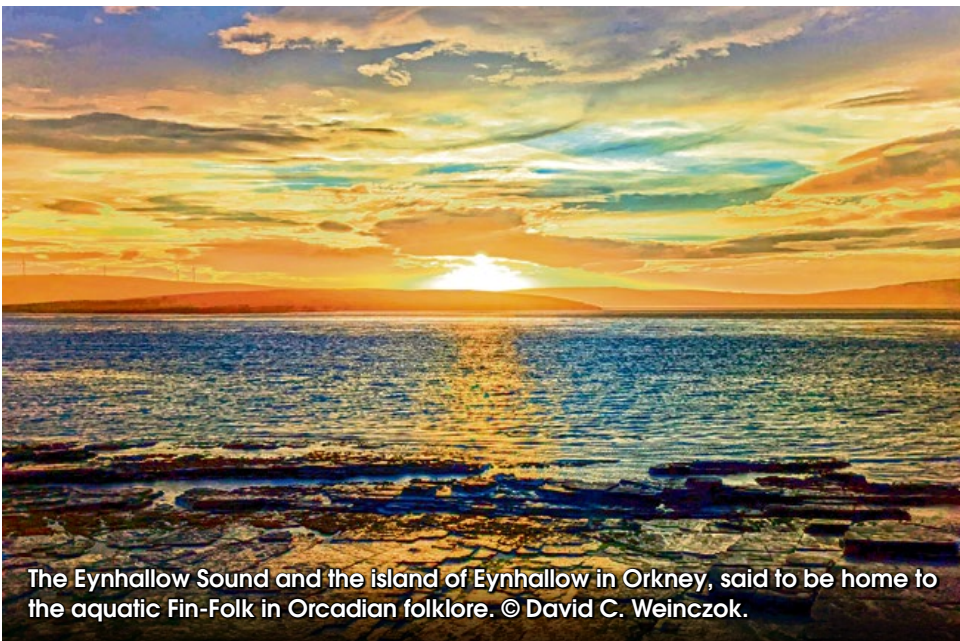
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By: David C. Weinczok



# Kayaking magicians of the north - *The mystery of the Fin-Men*



The Eynhallow Sound and the island of Eynhallow in Orkney, said to be home to the aquatic Fin-Folk in Orcadian folklore. © David C. Weinczok.



The Eynhallow Sound said to be home to the aquatic Fin-Folk. © David C. Weinczok

The shores of Orkney and Shetland are no strangers to odd sightings. Islands that vanish as you approach them, ghost ships floating above the waves, sea monsters thrashing and churning the waves — all and more have inspired peat-fire tales for centuries. Every now and then amid dramatic phenomenon worthy of the sagas, a quieter sort of visitor appears.

Clad in sealskins and cutting a low silhouette barely perceptible above the water line, their vessels appear fused to their bodies. Try to catch one and they will travel as far with one stroke of their oar as you can in a thousand. Let's meet these mysterious 'Fin-Men'.

## Fin-Men characteristics and sightings

In 1703, an account of Orkney, Shetland, and the Pentland Firth by John Brand was published containing geographical, agricultural, and cultural information on the Northern Isles. Alongside more verifiable facts, he reported many conversations with locals relating to the Fin-Men. Brand wrote of them in general, "His boat is made of seal skins, or some kind of leather, he also hath a coat of leather upon him, and he fitteth in the middle of his boat, with a little oar in his hand." These boats never had sails and could even be paddled when wholly submerged so as to get underneath dangerously breaking waves. A Fin-Man could cross from Norway to Orkney in just seven strokes of their oar, with the actual act of rowing being a total pretence — their vessels moved by magic, not muscle.

Furthermore, Brand reported, the Fin-Men are amphibious, dwelling in an underwater realm in wintertime and upon a hidden island in summertime. The Fin-Men could cast illusions, making their fins appear as human clothing and even being able to pass as humans for short periods when forced to go on land.

Their arrival drove all the fish away from an area, making them ill-received by local fishermen. Fin-Men also had a penchant for making holes in human boats and for breaking fishing lines. The 17<sup>th</sup> century seems to have been the most prolific for sightings across Orkney and Shetland.

One Fin-Man was sighted off Eday, Orkney, in 1682 but easily escaped when pursued. Another off Westray in 1684 also got away, but a sealskin boat later found ashore was allegedly kept in the Burray Kirk for decades afterwards. Fin-Men were also reported along the eastern shores of Moray and Aberdeenshire, though seemingly didn't ply Scotland's west coast. In all cases, they were only viewed from afar and no direct interaction with islanders is known of.

## Theories: Who were the Fin-Men?

People in the Northern Isles were well-primed by existing beliefs to be curious about these new interlopers. Seals were vital to island life, with islanders wearing sealskin shoes and harvesting seal meat and fat — though any unnecessary seal-hunting was seen as taboo, given their sympathetic nature and quirks like responding positively to human songs.

There was also a widespread belief that each creature on land, even people and all our social complexities, have aquatic equivalents, so the basic concept of human-like beings paddling over and beneath the waves would have raised no eyebrows. Still, the question remains — who, or what, could these Fin-Men have actually been?

The most common explanation takes a hint from the 17<sup>th</sup> century spelling of their name, 'Finn-Men'. The indigenous Sámi people of northern Norway, Sweden, and Finland have long been thought of — by southern peoples who exoticised them — as powerful sorcerers. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries many travellers' accounts claimed that the Sámi could control the weather, travel huge distances by magic, and shapeshift. The Sámi were, and are, masters of sealskin kayaks and can travel great distances in them. Could Sámi people have drifted south with errant tides, or even deliberately probed the shores of Scotland's Northern Isles?

The kayaks used by the Sámi certainly bear a striking resemblance to those of the semi-mythical Fin-Men. Made from greased skins stretched over a wood frame,

they were very low-lying in the water, long, and slender. An anorak, worn by the paddler to prevent water ingress, would give the impression from afar that the pilot and vessel were indeed one entity. When such sealskin boats became very waterlogged they became less buoyant and partially submerge. Indeed, Sámi paddlers could keep propelling them forward for a while even when the kayaks were wholly submerged, perhaps explaining sightings of mermaids and Fin-Men whose torsos alone stuck up from the water.

It is quite possible that some Sámi probed Scottish shores. It may also be that, during the Viking age, some Norse brought elements of Sámi lore with them which then fused with local tales about selkies and sunken kingdoms. The eminent 19<sup>th</sup> century Orcadian folklorist Walter Traill Dennison, however, doubted this simple Finnish connection. When asking older folk why they gave the name of Fin-Men to these rowers, the typical reply was, laconically, "Why surely, because they wear fins; onybody may ken that!"

Another flesh-and-blood theory relates to climactic changes. The 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe brought the 'Little Ice Age', a period when sea temperatures cooled to 5 degrees Celsius colder than they were by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Arctic ice pushed further south than previously typical. Many characteristics of the garments and vessels of the Fin-Men and Sámi also apply to those used by the indigenous Inuit of the Arctic Circle around Greenland and northern Canada. It is conceivable that small numbers of Inuit people may have followed the ice floes beyond their usual grounds, even as far as northern Britain.

## Magical beings

One more explanation is simply that the term 'Fin-Men' became inextricably confused with other magical beings. Orkney was already home to the Finfolk, a similarly-named type of aquatic shapeshifter, and of course the ubiquitous selkie who left its sealskin at the shore to temporarily walk among us in fair form. Even fallen angels who landed in the water after their expulsion from heaven are said to have become seals or selkies. Could these folkloric and cultural associations with seals and divine entities explain some of the traits conferred on the kayakers, especially their great command of magic?

Antiquarian Dr Hugh Marwick observed that in Orkney, the term 'Finn' was often applied to the above-mentioned Finfolk who lived in their underwater realm of

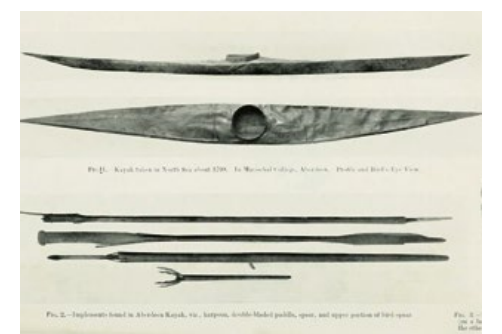
Finfolkaheem beneath the Eynhallow Sound, where Atlantic and North Sea tides crash together. The Finfolk are the ones most often blamed for snapping fishing lines, poking holes in boats, and having magic powers of illusion and weather-control — sound familiar? In Shetland, by contrast, Marwick says that 'Finns' exclusively applied to the very real Sámi people.

Even now, scholars have a very difficult time figuring out if historical references to Fin-Folk have any consistency. The term has been used to describe selkies, sea-trows, the Finfolk of Eynhallow, and the mysterious paddlers described above. Furthermore, the kayaking Fin-Folk are said to be turned away by the sign of the Christian cross, a common weakness of many other folkloric creatures in the Northern Isles. It could well be that strange vessels with lone occupants were indeed spotted off Orkney and Shetland, and that local terminology borrowed from existing archetypes to make sense of them and fit them into their existing legendarium.

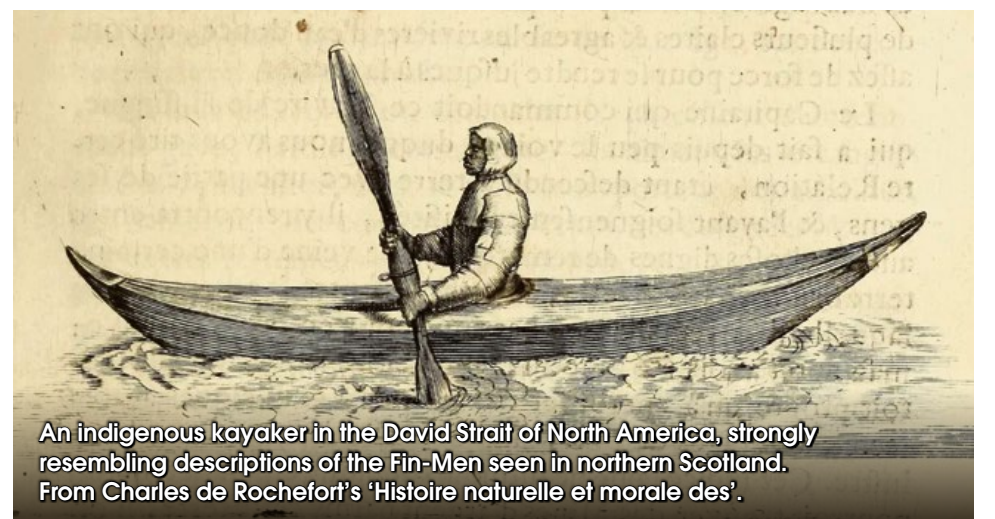
## An enduring mystery

There are no photographs of Fin-Men sightings, no confirmed face-to-face meetings, and no scientific or historical consensus one way or another. I do personally favour the theory that they were wandering Sámi or Inuit (or both), not least because of the fascinating anthropological implications and the prospect of Arctic kayakers having plied Scottish shores in secret potentially for centuries.

Even if we one day find definitive proof one way or another, I doubt we'll ever untangle the Fin-Men's alleged powers from those of other folkloric beings of the Northern Isles. That's the beauty of such stories — over time, keeping the details consistent doesn't really matter. It's the sense of wonder and the shared fascination with something on the brink of the known and the unknown that keeps us coming back for more.



Images of a kayak and implements allegedly washed up in northern Scotland, from David Ritchie's 1912 article 'Kayaks of the North Sea'.



An indigenous kayaker in the David Strait of North America, strongly resembling descriptions of the Fin-Men seen in northern Scotland. From Charles de Rochefort's 'Histoire naturelle et morale des'.



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