

HEATHER BELL

NEWSLETTER OF THE CALEDONIAN & ST. ANDREWS SOCIETY OF SEATTLE

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NEXT GATHERING

Members of Caledonian & St. Andrew's Society will continue to gather using the electronic app Zoom for the next several months, due to the current health crisis and prohibitions on large gatherings of people.

Our next gathering is Sunday, October 11th, at 2:00pm. An e-mailed link will be sent to everyone who has computer access a few days in advance of this date. For those of you with a computer, but no camera, you can watch by copying and pasting this address into your browser:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/713418301?pwd=K1ZUQnBOSE53YURUYjE4SW4ySjlxQT09>

You can also listen by phone by calling 1-253-215-8782 and entering the meeting ID: 713 418 301 and then the passcode: 004905. For those without a camera on your computer, you can do both, letting you see everyone on the computer and hear the program on your phone.

OCTOBER PROGRAM



For the October gathering we have booked folk singers Colleen Raney and Hanz Araki for our entertainment. She is a traditional Irish and folk singer who had been widely enjoyed at Seattle's Folk Life Festival for ten years or so. Together they

perform traditional and contemporary folk music. If you would like to get a preview of her music, her website is

<http://www.colleenraney.com/>. She even has our gathering under the "Upcoming Performances" heading on her website!

FUTURE PROGRAMS

Plan ahead to join us each month for Caledonian gatherings on Zoom. The one silver lining to the coronavirus pandemic is that we can book entertainment from across the USA and Scotland that we might not otherwise be able to see and hear!

November 8: Susan McLain, harpist. Susan has performed at a Caledonian Burns Dinner with a group called Greensleeves Trio that included flute and cello. Susan will perform alone, although another member of that group may join her in 2 for 1 solo performances.

December 13: Ryan McKasson, fiddle. Ryan performed for Caledonian meetings with his sister, Cali, several times in the past. Cali passed away recently, but Ryan is bringing his children up in the fiddling tradition and likely will include them in his performance. You can preview his music on his website: <http://www.ryanmckasson.com/>

Thanks to Diana Smith, Diane and Harry McAlister, and Victoria Johnson for suggesting performers we would enjoy hearing. We have some great programs in store for the months after this as well!

FACEBOOK

The Caledonians have a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/seattlecaledonians/?ref=bookmarks>

Diana Smith frequently posts interesting articles and notices, so check back often.

SUNSHINE REPORT

Bonnie reports that she sent a “thinking of you” card to Phillip Junkins when his mother moved to a care facility, but has not heard about any other Caledonians with health issues over the summer.

Bonnie reminds people that she does not have e-mail, so please call her when you have information about Caledonians who are ill or passed away. Her phone is 425-806-3734.

Calendar of Seattle Area Scottish Events

At this time, we do not know of any Scottish events scheduled for our area, except our own online ones. Many groups and Scottish Highland Games that cancelled last summer are hopeful for 2021.

Recap of the Summer Caledonian Gatherings

Normally, there would be no Caledonian gatherings from July through September because members often were involved in and attending Scottish highland games. Given that all our familiar and beloved festivals and games were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic, there was no need to take a summer break. So we continued on, and had a wonderful summer enjoying excellent programs.

In July, we were entertained by **Colin Grant-Adams**, who sings both traditional songs and



ballads as well as ones he has written himself. He joined us from his home in Glasgow, KY.

In August, we were treated to an excellent program about Celtic crosses, their symbolism and historical presence in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, by Caledonian member **Tom Lamb**. Tom prepared a slide show illustrating his considerable research. You know he had been a teacher and professor, because he even sent out an educational handout in advance.



In September, we were thrilled to see and listen to Celtic balladeer, **Charlie Zahm**. Charlie lives in Pennsylvania and performs at Celtic and Scottish events along the Atlantic seaboard. He recounted the historic background for many of the ballads he sang.

Caledonians Helping Others

Kathy Bowie has renewed her offer this fall to make cloth face masks for any Caledonians who would like one or more. She can be reached by phone at 206-940-9973. She will deliver if you are unable to get out yourself.

Interesting Website

Rampant Scotland is a useful website for anyone looking for links to all things Scottish, whether you are looking for accommodations or information about clans, castles, history, genealogy, tartans, or tourism. Check it out at <http://www.rampantscotland.com/>.

Articles and Topics About Scotland and Things Scottish

From *The Scottish Banner* and VisitScotland.org. Additional information came from Wikipedia.

Highland Cows



Did you know?

Highland cows have been around for centuries, and were first mentioned in the 6th century. They are the oldest registered breed of cattle in the world with the first Highland Cattle Society formed in 1884.

Despite their large horns and hefty size, Highland cows are friendly in nature. Studies have found that they have a clear hierarchy of social standing that reduces aggression.

Their long, double-layered, shaggy coats were bred to help them withstand winter conditions where they originated in the Scottish Highlands and Outer Hebrides. Their meat tends to be lean since their heavy coats insulate them and they don't need subcutaneous fat for this purpose. A hardy breed, they can live up to 20 years. Females average 12 calves in their lifetimes.



The ginger color that most people believe is the norm for Highland cows today is a relatively new development. The first herd-book of 1885

registered a smaller island type, usually black, and a larger mainland type, usually red or dun-colored. The two types were crossbred until they effectively became one breed. Although they could be a variety of colors, including red, black, brown, yellow, white, and grey, in Victorian times the ginger color became favored. Victorians engaged in widespread selective breeding to the point that ginger has become the standard color for Highland cows today.

A group of Highland cattle is called a "fold," not a herd. This is because they originally were kept as house cows to produce milk and meat for families. In winter, the cattle were protected at night in open shelters made of stone called folds.

John O'Groats

Long known as part of the expression "Land's End to John O'Groats" to describe the length of Great Britain from the tip of southern England to the very northern tip of Scotland, this term has an interesting back story.

Sometime in the 16th century, three Dutch brothers with the last name of de Groot arrived in Caithness with a letter from King James IV. They were given or bought a Royal Charter that gave them lands on the shores of Pentland Firth. Each brother owned a share of the land, and as time passed, their families increased in number until there were eight families of that name living in the area. The family name had been changed to Groats by the locals.

Every year, a reunion celebration was held to mark the arrival of the brothers to the area. As with many families, arguments grew as to which branch of the family was to have precedence over the others. The question each year became, who would sit at the head of the table as the chief of the clan?

One year was particularly acrimonious, so an elderly relative named John de Groot calmed things down by promising to have a solution to the problem by the following reunion.

The resolution was both simple and effective. John built an eight-sided house, with eight doors and eight windows. In the center of the house he built an eight-sided oak table. When the families returned for the next anniversary feast, each was able to enter from their own door, and thus each sat at the "head of the table."



The house was called John O'Groats' House by the locals from then on. As it was at a

particularly northern location, the house's name

became the symbol for the northern-most end of the length of contiguous land from southern England (Land's End) to northern Scotland.

The house no longer exists, but its location is marked by a mound and a flagstaff in the modern town of John O'Groats.

Scything at King's Knot, Stirling

As historic sites across Scotland begin to open again after months of closures due to restrictions from COVID-19, landscape managers are looking to traditional methods for catching up on long-deferred land maintenance in an environmentally sound method that is less disruptive and damaging to wildlife than using mechanical methods.

One obvious place to start was using scything, a traditional method of grass cutting, to cut the extremely overgrown grass at the Stirling landmark of the King's Knot. A scythe is an agricultural hand tool for mowing grass and reaping crops. It consists of a long curved blade fastened at the end of a long, slightly curved pole that has one or two short handles attached to it.



While long substituted by mechanical mowers, it is still useful in cutting back very long grasses or long-stemmed crops. It is a greener alternative for HES where historic sites need to balance protection of their cultural and archaeological significance with a responsibility for promoting biodiversity. Many historic sites are also habitat for important species of plants and wildlife. Mechanical mowers can be disruptive to the site and these plants and wildlife.

The trial of scything grass at King's Knot will both allow the overgrown grass to be tackled where mechanical mowers won't work properly with such tall grass and be a valuable exercise for trying out alternative methods for landscape management. While scything is definitely labor intensive, it is hoped that it will be a beneficial tool for preserving the site.

Celtic Roots of Hallowe'en

Many ancient festivals around the world have roots in pre-Christian culture. For the Scots, one such was the celebration of Samhain, a harvest festival. Communities came together to mark the end of summer and the coming of winter.

From carved lanterns to scary costumes and sweet treats, almost all of today's Hallowe'en traditions can be traced back to Scotland. Immigrants from Scotland brought these traditions with them to the New World.

In pagan times, Samhain was an occasion for revelry and the serious business of rituals to cleanse people and animals and making offerings to *aos sí* (fairies or nature spirits) to protect cattle and crops over the coming winter.



The delightful practice of people enjoying ghost stories around October bonfires originated with Sandhaim, where fire was an

important part of its rituals. People sometimes walked between two bonfires set fairly closely together, often with their cattle, to become cleansed of evil spirits. A similar cleansing fire ritual in some parts of Scotland was carrying torches around homes and fields to rid them of evil and protect them for the future. Another old custom involving fire was for families to extinguish the hearth fire on Samhain night, then solemnly re-light it with a brand brought from the communal bonfire.

Communal eating was a common theme, if not an actual ritual. Communities would come together to share a meal and mark the dying of the light and the coming of the dark. This theme evolved into the more recent custom of the Scottish Hallowe'en cake. Trinkets baked into the cake were symbolic: finding a ring in one's slice of cake meant the person would be the first to wed, but a button signified that the person would never wed. Lucky the person finding a coin as it meant riches would soon be theirs!

Many people believed that during the Samhain celebration the souls of their dead ancestors were set free to roam. Anticipating that their ancestors might come into their houses and eat at their tables,

in many parts of Scotland it was customary to make them welcome by leaving an empty chair and a plate of food out for these invisible guests.



Scotland has a long tradition of believing in witches and warlocks. Historically, more witches

were executed in Scotland than in England or any other part of the world. Samhain was believed to be a time when witches and warlocks were more often engaging in wicked practices. Of course, there were those who conflated the spiritual with tradition, providing plenty of opportunities for playing pranks. So, to no one's surprise, the night also became known as "mischief night."

The traditions of Samhain continued despite the coming of Christianity. The terms merely changed. 1 November became All Saints Day, while the night before, 31 October, was Eve of All Saints' Day, or All Hallow's Eve. The term morphed over time into what is known around the world as Hallowe'en.

Today, the custom of going door-to-door collecting food for Samhain feasts, fuel for Samhain bonfires, and offerings for the *aos sí* has evolved into costumed children seeking candy and treats.

Spooky stories abound in Scotland. Even Robert Burns enjoyed them as he twisted stories of witchcraft and the devil with the Hallowe'en traditions kept alive during his lifetime. His 1785 poem "Hallowe'en" detailed many of the national customs and legends surrounding Hallowe'en at the time. One of his spookiest tales of witches, warlocks, and the devil was conveyed in the lengthy poem "Tam O'Shanter".

What is remarkable is that so much of the pagan past persists to this day. Bonfires, intended to scare away the undead, are still burned in October. Lanterns, which in Scotland were always carved out of a turnip, not a pumpkin, are fashioned for the same purpose. While "trick or treating" is an American concept, Scotland's original version was that children would dress up in old clothes (a disguise) and go "guising." This involved performing songs, jokes, stories, and tricks in return for gifts of fruit or nuts. Nowadays the

American notion of "trick or treating" has completely superseded this charming practice.

Six Scottish Hallowe'en Traditions

From the "Stories" tab on the website for The National Trust For Scotland



1. Neep lanterns -- In the past, communities would light huge bonfires to keep evil spirits at bay. In true Scottish tradition, scary faces were

carved into neeps (turnips) to create lanterns lit by candles that would scare off any wandering ghouls. Thanks to America's influence, pumpkins are now as common as turnips for lanterns in Scotland – and are considerably easier to carve.

2. Apple Dookin' – An ancient Celtic tradition, this game requires players to grab an apple floating in a basin of water without using their hands.
3. Treacle Scones – This is another activity that bans players from using hands. They must take bites out of sticky treacle-covered scones dangling from string.
4. Nut Burning – A Halloween tradition once common among recently engaged couples involved each person putting a nut in a fire. If the nuts burned quietly, the union would be a happy one. However, if they hissed and crackled, a turbulent future lay ahead.



5. Guising – Scottish children traditionally donned costumes and pretended to be malicious spirits. It was believed that, by disguising themselves, they would blend in with any wandering spirits and remain safe from harm. After performing tricks or songs, guisers were given gifts to help ward off evil.



6. Kale Pulling – Once upon a time, kale stalks were used to predict your romantic future.

People pulled stalks from the ground after dark with their eyes closed. The length and shape of the stalk was said to represent one's future lover's height and figure, and the amount of soil around the roots represented wealth.

Experience Scotland From Home

An app (application you can download onto your computer, tablet, or smart phone) from Google offers people still stuck at home and yet longing to travel a unique way to explore museums, see the world in 360° views, and discover art. Find out more about this app on its webpage at: <https://artsandculture.google.com/> It is available through both Google Play and the Apple App Store.

Some of Scotland's most renowned cultural landmarks are offering online visitors virtual access to their spectacular spaces and treasures through this app. You can select areas of the National Museum of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland, the Palace of Holyroodhouse, the esplanade of Edinburgh Castle, or take a tour of Roslin Chapel.

Here are some other ways you can stay connected with Scotland's arts and culture:

- Catch some of the best comedians in the business during Gilded Balloon's Sofa Set List, a weekly online variety show. <https://gildedballoon.co.uk/>
- Marjolein Robertson, a comedian and storyteller, livestreams Shetland folktales and shares hilarious stories. <http://www.marjoleinrobertson.com/>
- Listen to the musical mastery of the Scottish Symphony Orchestra on YouTube. <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Youtube%2fScottish+symphony&qpv=Youtube%2fScottish+symphony&FORM=VDRE>
- Enjoy digital performances of the Pitlochry Festival Theatre. They also have activities for young people. <https://pitlochryfestivaltheatre.com/>
- The Tartan Noir Show is a literary podcast hosted by Theresa Talbot, celebrating the world's best crime writing and storytelling. <https://play.acast.com/s/unspeakablescotland>

- The Nevis Ensemble is calling to musicians. They are putting together Musical Postcards, two-minute long works for solo instruments that are inspired and influenced by photographs of Scotland's coast and waters sent in by viewers. <https://nevisensemble.org/>
- Well known distilleries are offering 360° tours online. Check out the websites for The Glenturret, Talisker, and Laphroaig for these tours.
- VisitScotland has many visual experiences, whether you'd like to climb a mountain, visit a castle, go to a ceilidh, or simply enjoy the sounds of Scottish landscapes. <https://www.visitscotland.com/>



A fellowship founded in Seattle in 1902 to foster a love of Scotland, her people, and her heritage.

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