



CANADIAN CELTIC ARTS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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Table of Contents

President's Message

News from Celtic Studies
p. 2

Weaving Event p. 3

Robert Burns Event p.4

FEATURE: The Soda Bread
Tradition p. 5

FEATURE: Soda Bread recipe
(Kildare) p. 8

Calendar of Events p. 8

Smaointean / Smaointe**

Janice Chan, President

If soda bread is a comfort food synonymous with Ireland, then maybe the same can be said of oatcakes and Scotland. Despite Samuel Johnson's disdain ("a grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland, appears to support the people"), oats and oatcakes have sustained both Scotland's population and armies for centuries.

They may have suspected what medical science is telling us now - oats are good for you, playing a role in lowering cholesterol and blood pressure as well as helping to regulate blood sugar.

If you've tried traditional oatcakes, and been less than impressed, don't despair. Just as there are many kinds of soda bread, there are infinite variations on the basic recipe. Although I do enjoy the traditional oatcake made with only pinhead oats, a bit of water and some fat to cook them on the griddle (delicious with cheese or a bit of smoked salmon), I've been singularly unsuccessful in making them myself. I always end up with a crumbly mess that finds a new life as a sort of granola topping for fruit or ice cream, and then go to the shop to buy a package of Nairn's.

My children grew up eating a sweeter version made with rolled oats and baked in the oven, thinking they were oatmeal cookies. On our numerous family vacations to Nova Scotia we were delighted to discover at some point, that in addition to serving up double doubles, many Tim Horton's sold oatcakes. Each area seemed to have their own variation on the treat, with some being sweeter or slightly more oaten. Interestingly, one of the tastiest versions I've had came from Aucoin's Bakery in Petit Etang, just north of Cheticamp, in Acadian Cape Breton.

The version of oatcakes that I make most often now is from a recipe I was given at the Gaelic College of Arts and Crafts in Cape Breton. They are called "Ronnie's Oatcakes", after the lovely lady that used to make them for the students attending the college's many music and language courses.



These are the same oatcakes that we would serve at our CCAA events in the past, and I've received many requests for that recipe. Here it is again for those of you who haven't enjoyed this treat. Enjoy, with a good cup of strong tea!



Ronnie's Oatcakes

3 cups of all purpose flour
3 cups of rolled oats
1 cup of shortening
1 cup of butter, softened
3 / 4 cup brown sugar
1 / 4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 / 4 cup cold water

Mix the flour, oats, brown sugar, salt and baking soda together in a large bowl. Cut in the shortening and the butter. Mix together until the dough is crumbly. Add enough of the water so that the dough holds together and can be rolled.

Put the dough on a floured board and roll out to a thickness of about 4 mm. Cut into squares or rounds of about 7 cm. Place on greased cookie sheets and bake at 350 degrees F. for about 12 minutes or until brown.

Cool on a wire rack and store in an airtight container. Enjoy with cheese, marmalade or smoked salmon.

** Smaointean/Smaointe is translated as "Thoughts" from Scottish and Irish Gaelic respectively

News from Celtic Studies

Jean Talman/David Wilson

Our biggest news is the retirement of Ann Dooley, who has done so much to give the Program its distinctive character and international reputation. Ann was sent off in style with a farewell party in December, but she can still be found in her office most days - students continue to come by to visit her, so to our delight, we don't really feel that she has left us.

Sean Conway joins us this term to teach our fourth-year seminar on The Irish and Scots in Canada. The course has already broken all records for our fourth-year seminars, with thirty students enrolled. Sean took his M.A. in History at Queen's University Kingston, served as M.P.P. for North Renfrew for twenty-eight years, and was Minister of Education, Minister of Colleges and Universities, and Minister of Mines and Government House Leader. Sean is an enthusiastic supporter of the Program, and with his deep roots in the Irish of the Ottawa Valley, his wide knowledge of the field, and his entertaining anecdotes, he will give his students an unforgettable learning experience.

Other courses beginning this term are Intermediate Irish Language II taught by Daithí Ó Ceallacháin, our visiting instructor provided by the Ireland Canada University Foundation. Daithí also organizes conversation groups for students to practice their language skills, and in March he is planning some events for a Seachtain Gaeilge. We also welcome Dan Brielmaier from the Centre for Medieval Studies who is teaching Celtic Spirituality, and Sarah O'Connor, this year's Armstrong Visiting Scholar, has a large and enthusiastic class for Contemporary Celtic Cinema.

We are happy to have signed a five-year agreement with the St. Andrew's Society of Toronto, enabling us to invite a speaker from Scotland each year, and provide a student



Scholarship for summer study in Scotland. On March 29, our first Scottish speaker will be Professor Cairns Craig, head of the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen, and one of Scotland's leading literary scholars.

We are equally happy to have three distinguished Irish speakers this term – Gavin Foster, the recently-appointed historian at Concordia's Canadian Irish Studies program, will discuss the Irish Civil War, February 7; Ray Bassett, Irish Ambassador to Canada, will speak on the Northern Irish Peace Process Thursday February 16; and Fiona Ross, Director of the National Library of Ireland, talks March 22.

Stay tuned for details on our conference on the Home Rule Crisis of 1912, which will be held in Alumni Hall on Saturday May 26.

EVENTS

Scottish Weaver John Campbell: Life and Loom in Ontario

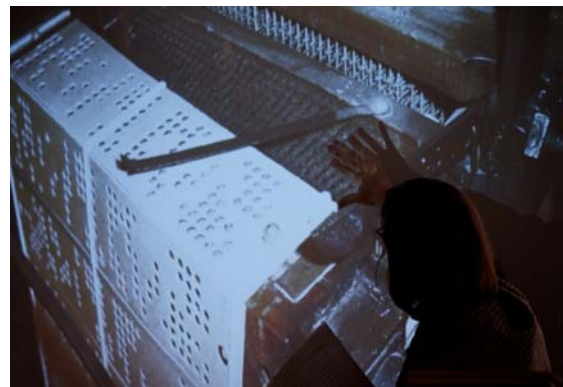
Presented by Celtic Studies, St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, and the Canadian Celtic Arts Association, November 12, 2011.

Scottish-born professional weaver, John Campbell, immigrated to North America in the 1830s. He wove products that include the most complex of Ontario hand-woven textiles. His figured or Jacquard head loom was found intact in the 1950s in his London, Ontario home and is currently on display at the Ontario Science Centre where volunteers demonstrate how it works.

Photos by Michael Holly, 2011



Presenter, Deborah Livingston-Lowe, MA student in History, University of Guelph, displays a coverlet woven on Campbell's loom.



The loom was found intact, just as he had left it, in the weaving shed. It operates by "reading" instructions from a set of cards with the design punched out on them.



EVENTS

Burns Night 2012

On January 27, CCAA once again hosted an evening in celebration of the life and work of Scottish poet, Robert Burns. Charbonnel Lounge at St. Michael's College was filled with the sound of the pipes as the "chieftain of the puddin' race" was addressed by Celtic Studies lecturer, David Livingston-Lowe. After a fine dinner, guests entertained themselves by reciting poetry, telling stories and playing a tune or two!



David Livingston-Lowe, Shawn Chirrey and MC Dave Murphy.

Address To A Haggis

Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face,
Great chieftain o' the puddin'-race!
Aboon them a' ye tak your place,
Painch, tripe, or thairm:
Weel are ye wordy o' a grace
As lang's my arm.

- Robert Burns



David Livingston-Lowe gives the Address, while haggis bearer Shawn Chirrey and piper Michael MacDonald look on.



Plenty of haggis for all – yum!



David Wilson and Bronwen give a set of tunes.

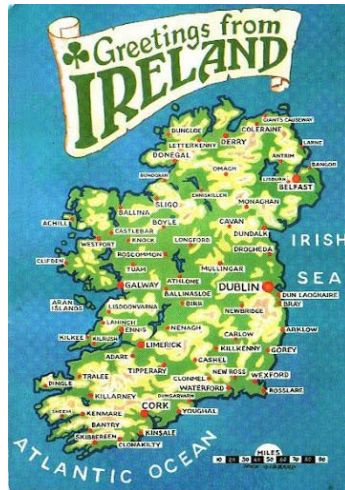


FEATURE

The Soda Bread Tradition

By Leah Morrigan

Soda bread, a staple of the Irish diet since the early 1800s, has a long and really interesting history. The basic ingredients of soda bread are flour, salt, bread soda (baking soda), and



buttermilk, and every county will have its own adaptation based on what resources were available. "A pinch of this, pinch of that," as one recent Irish immigrant explained to me.

As a member of the Irish community in Toronto, I have baked my Dublin grandmother's soda breads for Irish social events. By talking to people from different Irish counties and cities, I realized that though it's thought of as a "national bread", every county's soda bread recipe is slightly different than every other county's recipe and there are even differences within cities. The funny thing is that few Irish are aware of this! It sent me on a mission.

During research, I was lucky enough to meet Fidelma Dermody who got her Home Economics degree at St. Catherine's College Of Education and Trinity College Dublin. She helped me see the historical and practical aspects of soda bread and how it relates to the economic conditions of each family.

History

The common people of the 19th century Ireland were poor, wasted little, and used various

natural resources available to them. Yeast was not commonly used in breads in Ireland at any time and it is likely that until the discovery of bicarbonate of soda, the chemical responsible for soda bread, starch in the Irish diet would have come in the form of potato cakes: mashed potatoes, salt, butter, and flour.

Upon the discovery of bicarbonate of soda at the turn of the 19th century, the earliest mention of using soda in bread appeared in the Irish newspaper, *Newry Telegraph*, from county Down in 1837. Bread soda was in common use by the 1840s and over the next 100 years became an Irish staple food.

Baking Soda

Bread soda is an alkali that reacts to acids - buttermilk in the case of soda bread - and produces carbon dioxide gas gives rising action to quick breads. Were it not for this chemical reaction, soda bread could not be. Fidelma explained that the heat from our hands speeds up the chemical process of the soda and buttermilk, causing the carbon dioxide bubbles to release more quickly, so the dough must be handled gently and lightly kneaded, as it easily toughens.

Flour

One of the distinctions we have to make with soda breads is if it's made with white flour, whole wheat flour, or a combination of both. From my Dublin-influenced soda bread perspective, there is a white soda bread, made with only white flour, and a heartier brown bread, made with more whole wheat flour than white, known simply as "brown bread".

To me, the two breads are distinct, but not to everyone, as I learned when I brought a slightly sweet white soda bread to an Irish event. Many of the people thanked me for the "brown bread" which was confusing to me because I didn't use whole wheat flour. I learned that one's idea of what soda bread is depends on where you come from and what was around to make it, even if there is an equal amount of



white flour in the “brown bread” - and you wouldn’t necessarily know how anyone else did it.

Butter

The action of the soda and buttermilk combination gives rise to the soda bread, and the bread bulks to its finished size within the first 10 minutes of baking. I find that adding butter to a soda bread recipe gives it moisture and loft somehow.

I am not sure why butter is added to my Granny’s recipes or the recipes I’ve seen from Galway and Clare, but there is one thing I do know - Irish people don’t like Canadian butter. When I hear members of the Irish community complain about how terrible Canadian butter is, I tell them about the difference in bovine diets - Irish cows eat grass, Canadian cows eat grain, and this affects the flavour and fat content of the milk. A young woman from Dublin once explained her horror and confusion seeing “salted” butter. “Who puts *salt* in their butter?” she demanded.

Raisins

The addition of raisins to soda bread is not traditional, but as Fidelma says, bakers would add in whatever they had on hand, so if raisins were around, they would be tossed into the bread dough.



This practice of adding raisins eventually became a recipe of its own in some counties but not others: I’ve seen it in a recipe from

County Clare and I’ve also learned that raisins are popular in the brown soda breads of Roscommon, though not in Galway.

Some know soda bread with raisins as “Railway Cake” or “Spotted Dog”, an alternate name for Spotted Dick, a British pudding made with beef fat and currants and raisins. There is no argument that “spotted” indicates raisins and/or currants, but it is unclear how Spotted Dog became associated with soda bread made with raisins.

Cake or Bread?

Technically, the inclusion of raisins, sugar, and eggs would constitute a cake, and sometimes people call soda bread made with these ingredients “soda cake”. Though these “cake” ingredients would have been expensive to buy, Fidelma says that houses that had hens “used eggs in their soda bread, making the bread richer.”

Every time I think I see a pattern in the soda bread research, I find out something that throws me off track again - I discussed the egg thing with a friend from Kerry who explained that her grandmother had chickens but didn’t use the eggs in her soda bread. Another theory out the window!

When I looked at my Granny Murphy’s white soda bread and brown bread recipes, I thought it odd to see butter, sugar, baking powder, and sometimes raisins in her recipes because I was always told how poor she was. How could she have been able to afford these luxuries during a time when “feeding six kids in Dublin was a struggle”?

I talked to my Mum and my aunt about the “luxury” items in Granny’s soda bread recipes, and it turns out that she created the recipes on her own after she got to Canada, where ingredients were cheaper and more plentiful. So Granny Murphy waited until she could get her hands on the good stuff and created her own – talk about resourcefulness!

“The women of that generation were very inventive with their recipes, great talents!” Fidelma says.



Crossing the bread

We know that soda bread is lightly handled, made into a round, flattened a bit with the hands, and then crossed, that is, two cross cuts are made into the dough before it goes into the oven. All stand-alone soda breads from southern Ireland are cut into with a sharp knife, and the Northern Irish soda farls begin as a rolled out circle, separated into quarters with cross cuts before cooking.

Soda breads are cut for different reasons, some say that cross-cutting lets the devil or the fairies out so they won't ruin your soda bread; others say that it brings the blessings of the Holy Trinity. The following Kildare recipe calls to "put a cross in it (this blesses the bread) then poke a hole in the middle of all 4 quarters (helps with rising)."

Irish chef, Rory O'Connell says that the cross in the soda bread serves several purposes:

"It's scientific, primarily, because it allows the heat to penetrate into the thickest part of the bread, so it assists cooking. And obviously, the cross is a cruciform shape, so in a Catholic country that had a resonance—it had the symbolic note of crossing the breads and giving thanks."

Method of Baking

Before people had ovens, food was sometimes cooked in a hole in the ground, Fidelma tells me, with hot embers added to the hole and a cast iron pot placed on top. Rory O'Connell explains that "they cooked the bread in a *bastible* - a big cast-iron pot with a lid that would have been put right onto the coals or the turf fire."

Depending on where you're from, you might cook your soda bread in a bastible or other cast iron pan, in the oven on a baking sheet, or if you're from Northern Ireland, you would cook your bread on a stove top griddle.



The Northern Irish eat "soda farls" made of the same basic recipe as the soda bread but rolled into a circle about 3/4" thick and cut into four triangles. Farls are moister than soda breads and are spilt in half, toasted or grilled before eating, then slathered with butter, and devoured. They say that the best way to start your day with is an "Ulster Fry" - bacon, eggs, and sausages alongside potato bread, soda farls, and a big mug of tea. As my Belfast friends say, "Soda farls complete the fry!"

Any way you slice it, soda bread has kept the Irish fed for generations and is a fascinating subject of research because each house is different with different resources, producing different recipes. One might say that each soda bread recipe is specific to individual Irish families and tells the story of each family's history - I know it does mine!

Thanks to:

Molly Murphy

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Sandra McEoghain

Mark Byrne

Jean Talman

Lisa Murphy

Sarah Mangan

Irish Association of Toronto



FEATURE

Irish Soda Bread (Kildare)

Contributed by Sarah Manghan



2 cups of white flour
2 cups of whole wheat flour
1 teaspoon of bread soda (baking soda)
½ teaspoon salt
2 cups buttermilk

Pre-heat the oven to 190 C/375 F.

Mix the dry ingredients using your fingers to lift the mixture to let in plenty of air. Once the dry ingredients are thoroughly mixed, use a knife and make a hole in the middle - pour one cup of the butter milk in and stir with the knife. Once mixed, make a hole again and pour the second cup of buttermilk in.

When it is all stuck together, flour your hands and take the mix onto a floured surface and shape into a ball removing cracks! (Use flour as required so that it is not sticky.) Try to get it into shape with as little handling as possible.

Flour the baking tray - place the ball of dough on it and flatten slightly, put a cross in it (this blesses the bread) then poke a hole in the middle of all 4 quarters (helps with rising).

Bake for 35 minutes. Turn the bread upside down and bake for another 10 minutes. Cool on a rack for several minutes.

Note

The Spring 2007 Newsletter of the Canadian Celtic Arts Association included a review by Donald Gillies of *Taking You Home: Poems and Conversations*, a compilation of poems and discussion of the work of Derick Thomson and Iain Crichton Smith by Andrew Mitchell.

We recently heard from Andrew as follows: "I now have a new web site, which has me reading on the Solway two of the 'Taking You Home' poems with harpist Wendy Stewart. The 'Farewell' poem was my tribute to Iain Crichton Smith on his death, a good friend, and I'm delighted that without advertising, it is finding an internet audience. The other poem to harp, 'Rodel' is set in the place which has the oldest stone church in the Outer Hebrides. The web site is: www.wordworthy.com The poems are also linked through to You Tube: www.youtube.com/wordworthywriting.

Canadian Celtic Arts Association Events Calendar

Tuesday February 7, 2012

Celtic Studies Speakers Series, Robert Madden Hall, Carr Hall, St. Michael's College, 100 St. Joseph Street, Toronto, 6 pm Free admission. All welcome. No registration required.

Dr. Gavin Foster will speak on "The Bitter End of Revolution: Varieties of Animosity in the Irish Civil War." For more information, see <http://stmikes.utoronto.ca/celticstudies>.

Thursday, February 16, 2012

Celtic Studies Speakers Series, Alumni Hall, Room 400, St. Michael's College, 81 St. Mary Street
6 pm. Free admission. All welcome. No registration required.



His Excellency Ray Bassett, Irish Ambassador to Canada will speak on "Recollections on the Good Friday Agreement." For more information, see <http://stmikes.utoronto.ca/celticstudies>.

Saturday February 18, 2012

The Toronto Scottish Country Dance Association's 49th Annual Tartan Ball, Fairmont Royal York Hotel, 100 Front St. W., Toronto.

Reception: 6:00pm, Dinner & Dance to follow. Music by The Scottish Accent. For information & tickets email janer1@sympatico.ca.

Wednesday February 22, 2012

Tony McManus, Hugh's Room, 2261 Dundas St. W., Toronto (just south of Dundas W. subway station).

8:30 pm, Tickets: \$ 20 advance / \$22.50 at the door

Saturday March 3, 2012

Amadeus Choir Annual Celtic Celebration, Jubilee United Church, 40 Underhill Drive, Toronto

2:00 pm and 7:30 pm Tickets \$35 adults, \$30 seniors / students. Group rates are available. All proceeds support the artistic initiatives of the Amadeus Choir. For more information or to purchase tickets please contact the choir office at 416.446.0188 or email amachoir@idirect.com

Saturday March 10, 2012

Toronto Scottish Country Dance Association Beginners' Night Dance, Crescent School, 2365 Bayview Ave. (N of Lawrence Ave E., Opposite the Granite Club). Free parking on Crescent School site

8 pm - 10:30 pm, Music by The Scottish Accent. For information on all events, classes etc, see <http://www.rscdstoronto.org>.

Thursday March 22, 2012

Celtic Studies Speakers Series, Charbonnel Lounge, St. Michael's College, 81 St. Mary Street, Toronto, 6 pm. Free admission. All welcome. No registration required.

Fiona Ross, Director of The National Library of Ireland, Topic TBA For more information see <http://stmikes.utoronto.ca/celticstudies>.

Thursday March 29, 2012

The St. Andrew's Society of Toronto Lecture, Charbonnel Lounge, St. Michael's College, 81 St. Mary Street, Toronto, 6 pm. Free admission. All welcome. No registration required.

Professor Cairns Craig, University of Aberdeen will speak on "Scotland, Empire and Enlightenment: Gardeners, Physicians and Philosophers" For more information see <http://stmikes.utoronto.ca/celticstudies>.

Saturday April 14, 2012

Toronto Scottish Country Dance Association April Dance, Crescent School, 2365 Bayview Ave. (N of Lawrence Ave E., opposite the Granite Club). Free parking on Crescent School site.

8 pm – 10:30 pm. Music by The Scottish Accent. For information on all events, classes etc, see <http://www.rscdstoronto.org>.

Saturday April 21, 2012

Toronto Scottish Country Dance Association Youth Ball, Newtonbrook United Church, Cummer & Yonge, Willowdale ON

For young dancers aged 10 - 20-ish. Reception 5:00 pm. Dinner & Dance to follow. For information on all events, classes etc, see <http://www.rscdstoronto.org>.

Saturday April 28, 2012

Toronto Scottish Country Dance Association Annual General Meeting and Dance, Crescent School, 2365 Bayview Ave. (N of Lawrence Ave



E., opposite the Granite Club). Free parking on Crescent School site.

7:30 pm - 10:30 pm, Music by Don Bartlett & The Scottish Heirs. For information on all events, classes etc, see

<http://www.rscdstoronto.org>.

Celtic Studies Conference May 26, 2012 & Canadian Association for Irish Studies conference June 20-23. Details at

<http://stmikes.utoronto.ca/celticstudies>.

Friday June 8 - Sunday June 10, 2012

Mòd Chanada 2012, Ottawa ON (exact venue TBA). For complete information see

<http://www.gaidhligottawa.ca> or email comunngaidhligottawa@rogers.com.

* All events and dates are subject to change. Please call the number provided to confirm any event listed.

For more information about events, please see the CCAA webpage at

<http://www.canadiancelticarts.ca/2012.htm>

To list your Celtic-themed event, email ruadh@idirect.com or webmaster@canadiancelticarts.ca with the following information:

- date and time
- location with address
- admission cost, if applicable
- contact telephone number or email address

For further information, please visit

<http://www.canadiancelticarts.ca/>

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