“Saint Bridget herself, if she ever existed, appears to have taken over the functions of a Celtic goddess of the same name and comparable attributes.”
-Nora Chadwick, The Celts

Féile Bríde, Lá le Bríd, or Saint Bridget’s Day is the first of February in Ireland, the first day of spring and the Pan-Celtic festival of Imbolc. She was honored in our area in West Clare as a goddess who became a saint, and the rituals we performed in her honor were more pagan than Christian. Bridget the saint was said to have been the midwife of the Virgin Mary herself, and had a convent or nunnery in Kildare. Bríd the goddess had a holy well and sacred place near the Cliffs of Moher. She was a close friend of the brilliant god Lugh and Lá Lugh was held at her well on the last Saturday of July. It was called Dabhach Bhríde.

Bríd Bheannaithe is associated with the fertility of cattle and sheep with a focus on new born lambs. On the eve of her feast she travels the country blessing the animals and setting the new pastoral year in motion. We had several old rituals and customs associated with welcoming her.

Early on the eve of her feast, we youngsters went to the marsh ground near the river and pulled bundles of rushes. These were harvested by hand and not cut. The rushes were brought home and the oldest woman in the house spread them on the table. She selected two and began constructing an interlaced cross, going from left to right (east to west, following the sun.) These ancient symbols were supposed to protect the byres and their animals, the land, house and people. They were generally placed under the rafters of the house and, in our area, they were not replaced or discarded.

On the eve, fishermen and their families fastened little strips of cloth near gateposts or front doors so Bríd could touch them as she passed. We called these pieces of cloth brath Bhríde. They were pinned to the vests of seafarers to protect them from drowning.

The last thing done at night was to leave some bread and butter on the windowsill for Bríd, in case she was hungry as she passed. People believed Bríd increased the harvest in recognition of their kindness.

On Lá le Bríd, we went to Dabhach Bhríde—Bridget’s Well—in a grove near the Cliffs of Moher. The place has a sense of sacredness and timelessness and looks down on Liscannor Bay and the West Clare Coast all the way to Kerry. The place used to be thronged with people and there was a line to get into the Blessed Well. On the left hand wall of the entrance, a stone shelf was cluttered with sacred pictures, statues and symbols of Christianity; above the door were walking sticks, crutches and items left behind as evidences of cures at this holy place.

Pilgrims kneeled on the flag in front of the well, which is fed by spring water cascading from Moher Rock. They blessed themselves with the water, some said prayers and most filled a bottle to bring home. They filed out from the well and turned up a stone pathway that looped through an old graveyard. At the top of the path was a stone obelisk of maybe five-foot-high, standing in the center of a circular flag. The pilgrims went from left to right around the obelisk, rubbing their right hands against it. Then they proceeded down the stone steps towards the well and began the ritual again. These were known as ‘The Rounds’. After The Rounds, pilgrims tied pieces of garments to the fuchsia bushes which grew in the vicinity of the well. These were ‘intentions’ to Bríd to intercede in some problem or other.

West Clare people still go to Dabh Bhríde on February 1. The last time I was there it felt like Dia de los Muertos in the Mission. It was dusk and people had candles and there was lively banter—homage had been paid to Bríd. A few local musicians gathered by the wall and someone said, “D’you what? As we met, we might as well play a few tunes.”

We went down to Murphy’s pub, a quiet old place with a welcoming fire. Before the first drink was finished, pilgrims were stepping out to jigs and reels. Bríd was looking down on us with her gentle, broad smile.
A Scandi in Old Irish
by Brianna McElrath Panasenco

“Take Old Irish with me,” my friend said. “It’ll be fun.”

I, then the only Scandinavian major at Cal, was to take Old Irish with the Celtic majors in Spring 2015. And I’d never REALLY studied a case language before.

On the first day, words like ‘lenition’ and ‘u-infection’ were being bandied about, and I tried my hardest to comprehend what a nasalized ‘v’ sounded like. Two hours later I sat in the coffee shop upstairs with my friend, staring bewilderedly at the assignment scribbled in my notes.

“What’s a paradigm??” I asked. “It’s when you write out all the forms of the word,” she replied. “So the conjugations of fer [man]?” “Yeah, the inflections. ‘Conjugation’ is usually just verbs.” A minute later… “So what exactly is a dative?” Yeah, I was pretty much completely lost.

Once upon a time I studied Russian for one semester. We had just started the accusative case by the end of 4 months. By the second day of Old Irish, I knew all about its five cases.

And yet I didn’t. By spring break we’d learned plenty, but I realized for the second time in my life that I wouldn’t be able to simply memorize everything. Irish is incredibly multilayered and my brain just couldn’t comprehend it all. I have felt this way twice in my life. The first time was learning Linear Algebra and the other was Old Irish. Each time, I was faced with the grim realization that I probably wouldn’t be able to fully understand. Allowing myself to accept not understanding everything was surreal. Reading the constructed sentences out of Quin’s notorious grammar of Old Irish was often strange, but at least he was predictable. Soon I could even write cheeky sentences for my homework in Old Irish in order to amuse my professor the way my Quin homework ‘amused’ me. An example of one of my sentences was, “In ben marbas in lebor cosin chlaidiub at-tá sund!”, which means "The woman who kills the book with the sword is here!" However, I had no patience for medieval Irish authors. Their level of eloquence was far beyond my understanding. “That’s a verbal noun,” someone would explain. “It’s like a gerund in English. Literally it says ‘he is at the casting of the spears,’ but you can just say ‘he is casting the spears’.”

I wanted to screech, "But, why?"

As time went on, we learned more grammar and I was able to comprehend Thurneysen’s glossary’s reasoning. Life and Old Irish started to look up. Suddenly, I knew what was going on in our standardized Old Irish texts - or at least knew where to look. I hated the concept of subjunctives but now I knew how to recognize their form.

The Irish National Folklore Collection
by Andrea Eberle

“The Irish have long been known for their ability to spin a tale. So it should be of little surprise that Ireland is home to one of the largest collections of folklore in the world. The Irish National Folklore Collection, which is housed at University College Dublin, consists of a dizzying multitude of old manuscripts containing the work done by folklore collectors in the twentieth century. They traveled all over Ireland eliciting wonderful tales about supernatural entities and accumulating fascinating information about ordinary aspects of Irish life, such as roof thatching and butter churning. While this may seem trivial to some, these accounts, many of which were obtained and recorded in Irish encapsulate the minds and lives of people from over a hundred years ago. I can tell you that reading them was nothing short of awe-inspiring. As a study abroad student at UCD, I was able to access the Folklore Collection for several of my classes. Turning carefully through the manuscripts’ yellowed pages and gazing at page after page of hand-written responses to mailed out questionnaires reminded me how rich Irish folklore tradition is and what an important role the Irish language plays in its preservation.

The crown jewel of the Irish National Folklore Collection is the Schools’ Collection. This project ran from 1937 - 1938 and was carried out by school children who were assigned to obtain folkloric information from their parents. These children brought back all sorts of delightful tidbits of lore covering everything from herbal remedies and harvest practices to stories about old ruins...
and magical cows. Right now the Folklore Collection is undergoing the arduous process of digitalizing the Schools’ Collection. Some of this amazing work can already be accessed at www.duchas.ie, and I encourage you to do so. If you are particularly enthusiastic, you can even help transcribe the collection yourself. Even if you do not speak Irish, it is worth taking a look at the English sources to get a glimpse of Ireland’s spectacular store of folklore.

UC Berkeley Launches Inaugural Tele-course with NUIG

by Elizabeth Gipson

“The Celtic Studies program at Berkeley has a long and storied history, first granting a degree in Celtic Languages and Literatures in the 1911-1912 academic year. This tradition has been enriched immeasurably by its relationship to other Celtic programs, scholars, and writers worldwide, from Seamus Heaney’s position as guest lecturer at Berkeley in the 70s through to a thoroughly-21st century partnership with the National University of Ireland, Galway which has resulted in a new joint telecourse between NUIG and Cal.

The course, entitled ‘Writing Ireland: Emigration in Modern Writing in Irish’, is led by Dr. Louis DePaor. The director of the Centre for Irish Studies at NUIG, as well as a noted Irish-language poet, DePaor is no stranger to UC Berkeley. In 2014, he was the recipient of a Fulbright award which brought him to Cal to teach a course on Irish language poetry in the twentieth century – a course which received rave reviews from the students who enrolled.

This semester is a little bit different. Instead of meeting with DePaor face-to-face, students report to a specially equipped room in Dwinelle Hall to participate in a video link-up with the professor and students of NUIG. Readings are coordinated online and discussion and lectures are all completed via teleconference.

Despite this unorthodox approach to lectures, however, the course itself is grounded in the writings of the 20th century. DePaor curates a range of material which allows students to examine how the experience of migration is addressed in literature written in both Irish and English, and how that experience has created social, political, and cultural echoes that resonate through to the present day. Given the impact of Irish immigration on the Bay Area, it seems appropriate that this inaugural telecourse bridges both sides of that Atlantic in a discussion of the lingering fractures and continuities brought about by centuries of immigration.

The joint effort between Berkeley and NUIG is hopefully the first of many – a way to allow students and faculty at both schools to learn from each other – and all without settling into an eleven-hour plane trip.


by Elizabeth Creely

“On March 28, 1914, a story appeared in The Monitor, the newspaper and official organ of the San Francisco archdiocese, which alerted subscribers to the groundbreaking of the only Irish-themed concession, the Shamrock Isle, at the upcoming Panama Pacific International Exposition. The editors exclaimed, “The real Ireland is to be properly represented.” This was a big commitment: there had already been three Irish Villages at two previous world fairs that promised the same thing. Ireland, at that moment, was skirmishing internally over labor issues as well as against England in pursuit of independence. It wasn’t clear in Ireland what the "real" Ireland was—colonial dependent or contender for small nation status—and if it wasn’t clear there, how could the exposition organizers be so sure of themselves?

The Shamrock Isle was located on the Joy Zone, the 65-acre amusement section of the exposition, stood apart from the main exposition grounds by virtue of distance as well as programming. Where the baseball diamond in the Moscone Recreation Center now stands, a replica of St. Laurence Gate, the famed barbican gate which failed to prevent Cromwell’s soldiers from massacring the villagers of Drogheda, welcomed visitors into the concession. Directly across from the Irish Village stood the Chinese Village. This placement was both ironic and fitting, given the historical antagonism of the Irish
working class and their union leaders towards the Chinese, who were their unacknowledged confreres in the building and development of San Francisco. “There are many dignified reasons for having an amusement district,” wrote official PPIE historian Frank Morton Todd, somewhat defensively. One reason was the “exhibition of strange people and customs.” The other reason was simple. “People want to have fun.” Perhaps he was saying what the exposition board could not. Underlying the beauty of the exposition, with its acres of Beaux Arts palaces, romantic courtyards, and flower-lined avenues, was a tone of hectoring insistence on public education, self-improvement, and better living through unrestrained consumerism.

An index from June 22, 1915 lists the day’s programs, forty-five separate events, with lectures like “Dogs: Their Points and Purpose” and “Care and Treatment of the Insane.” After gaping at such novelties as the Large Electric Clock in the Palace of Manufacturers or being serenaded by the Anvil Choir (this was five “automatic blacksmiths” who hammered out the Westminster Chimes on their anvils), visitors were encouraged to bend their steps towards the Joy Zone and the long avenue of theatres, restaurants, rides, and exhibits.

The exposition was engrossing and memorable, certainly. But it may have been a bit exhausting as well. After the spectacle of the eleven palaces and the relentless whirl of activity throughout the main grounds, feeling joy might have been a stretch. I have a souvenir photo of my great-grandfather, San Francisco attorney James H. Creely, and his two daughters. James looks warily dazed. Perhaps he heard too many renditions of the Westminster Chimes.

For the extended essay please visit FoundSF.

Spring 2016 Courses

The course catalogue reveal is always an exciting moment for Celtic majors and enthusiasts alike. The 2015 academic year saw classes in Comparative Celtic Linguistics, Old Irish and Modern Irish, Medieval and Modern Welsh, Irish Folklore, and an assortment of Celtic Mythology and Literature classes. This semester the department is offering an impressive range of courses, including the previously mentioned collaboration with NUIG. All this, despite the severe cuts in our budget, shows how strongly Celtic Studies responds to the challenges posed by austerity.

In the spring term Dara Hellman and Tom Walsh continue to provide creative and enthusiastic versions of the R1B requirement. Since 1A-B used to be called the “English Requirement,” maybe we should rebrand our R1A-B course as the university’s “Celtic Requirement,” with Hellman’s “The Other and the Concept of the Celtic” alongside Walsh’s “Irish Drama in a Comparative Context” as examples of the way Celtic material can be used to teach writing. These courses provide UC freshmen with a fresh way to learn the writing and thinking skills that the university requires of them.

Dara Hellman continues her innovative approach to our discipline in this semester's Celtic Studies 139 (Irish Literature 1800 to the Present) “From Rackrent to Revolution: Slavery, Sufficiency, and Self in Irish Literature.” In her own words: “From the 17th century on, Ireland was a land of two primary spoken languages: Irish and English. Although Irish was the language spoken by most Irish people until the middle of the 19th century and had a flourishing, mainly poetic, literary tradition, there was little published in the language until the end of the 19th century. What sort of audiences existed for different kinds of literature? What was the Irish Literary Renaissance? What part did colonialism and nationalism play in the development of both language traditions in Ireland?”

Annalee Rejhn’s Celtic Christianity (Celtic Studies 173) addresses the early reception and development of Christianity in Ireland and Britain, with particular attention paid both to the role of insular pre-Christian Celtic religious systems and to the conversion to Christian belief. The primary readings include wisdom texts, secular and canon law texts, ecclesiastical legislation, penitentials and monastic rules, apocrypha, and lyric poetry. A selection of saints’ lives, both Irish and Welsh, with a French connection via St. Martin of Tours, rounds out the course. This course is one of the distinctive hallmarks of Celtic Studies at UCB.

Still more representative of our Celtic Studies Program are our Celtic language offerings. This year Modern Irish as well as Modern and Medieval Welsh
have pride of place in our curriculum, with Eddie Stack continuing to teach our largest class yet of intermediate Irish learners. We look forward to having some of these students participate in Irish language immersion programs this summer with NUIG or Fulbright support. If so they would follow in the footsteps of many of Eddie’s students. As usual, Eddie wonderfully guides our Irish learners to becoming fluent speakers of the language.

Welsh, both in its rich medieval and in its vibrant modern form, is a crucial part of UCB’s Celtic Studies Program. The medieval end of things is represented by Annalee Rejhon’s “Medieval Welsh Language and Literature: Middle Welsh Texts and Manuscripts.” Students are learning both the fascinating grammar of one of Europe’s outstanding medieval cultures and also the intricacies of manuscript studies from an expert in the field.

Our Welsh language students' luck holds out as Celtic Studies has brought Kathryn Klar back from retirement to teach a course in Welsh readings (CS 198) that takes on all levels of Welsh to stimulate beginners and to improve the capabilities of advanced students.

Finally, Annalee Rejhon’s Medieval Literature (Comparative Literature 152) is cross-listed in Celtic Studies. This course is a survey that includes texts important to all Celticists such as The Song of Roland, Beowulf, The Táin, several of the native tales and romances of the Middle Welsh Mabinogion, all accompanied by the Arthurian section of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s History of the Kings of Britain.

Invited presenters include Clodagh Downey (NUI Galway), Rob Dunbar (University of Edinburgh), Eric Falci (UC Berkeley), Aaron Griffith (Utrecht University), Séamus Mac Giolla Chomhaill (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, ROI), Aidan O’Sullivan (NUI Dublin), David Parsons (Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies), and Máirín Seoighe (Scannáin Dobharchú).

Stay tuned for our next issue, Beltaine 2016, for an account of this most anticipated weekend!

A Reading By Eddie Stack
The Maude Fife Room (315 Wheeler Hall)
Tuesday, March 15th, 6:00 p.m.

To celebrate Saint Patrick’s Day, the Irish Studies Program and the Celtic Studies Program will host a reading by Eddie Stack, who will read from his new book, Doolin: People, Place & Culture. A reception will follow, and all are invited.

Reflecting on the Rising: The 1916 Centenary
The Maude Fife Room (315 Wheeler Hall)
Friday, April 29th, 3:00 p.m.

This event, co-sponsored by the Celtic Studies Program, the Irish Studies Program, and the English Department, will feature a roundtable discussion of the 1916 Rising and its legacy by U.C. Berkeley faculty and invited guests. Please join us for conversation, music, and refreshments.

Upcoming Events
The 38th Annual University of California Celtic Studies Conference
UCLA, March 10-13

After hosting last year’s conference, the UC Berkeley Celts will be heading south to visit our friends at UCLA, where the 38th annual UC Celtic Studies Conference will be held. Every year for a weekend in March, the California Celts and Celtic scholars from around the world converge to share their latest research, newest findings, and a whole lot of craic. The weekend also isn’t complete with at least one showing of some classy Bollywood dance numbers.
Féach! The Treibh team meets Michael D. Higgins, the president of Ireland!

From left to right: Éilish Cullen, Andrea Eberle, Elizabeth Gipson, Michael D. Higgins, Eddie Stack, Dylan Cooper, and Heather Newton

UC Berkeley Celtic Studies Faculty

Dara Hellman
Gary Holland
Kathryn Klar
Daniel F. Melia

Annalee C. Rejhon
Eddie Stack
Eve Sweetser
Thomas Walsh
Treibh is an online journal published by students of the Celtic Studies Program, UC Berkeley. It will be published at Samhain, Imbolc and Bealtaine.

Treibh is an Irish word for tribe or race of people.

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Andrea Eberle
Elizabeth Gipson
Brianna McElrath Panasenco
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Submissions:

Treibh publishes features relating to Celtic culture, arts, language, history, and politics. We are interested in both the contemporary Celtic world and the ancient world.

At this time submissions should not be more than 500 words. Send us a query if you have a longer piece that you think will rock us. Submissions in any Celtic language are especially welcome.

We are also interested in flash fiction and poetry that has a distinct Celtic flavor.
Flash fiction: max 500 words. Poetry: max 16 lines. We encourage pieces in any Celtic language.

Submissions for the Bealtaine issue are open from March 1, 2016 to April 15, 2016. We are unable to pay for submissions at present.

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