

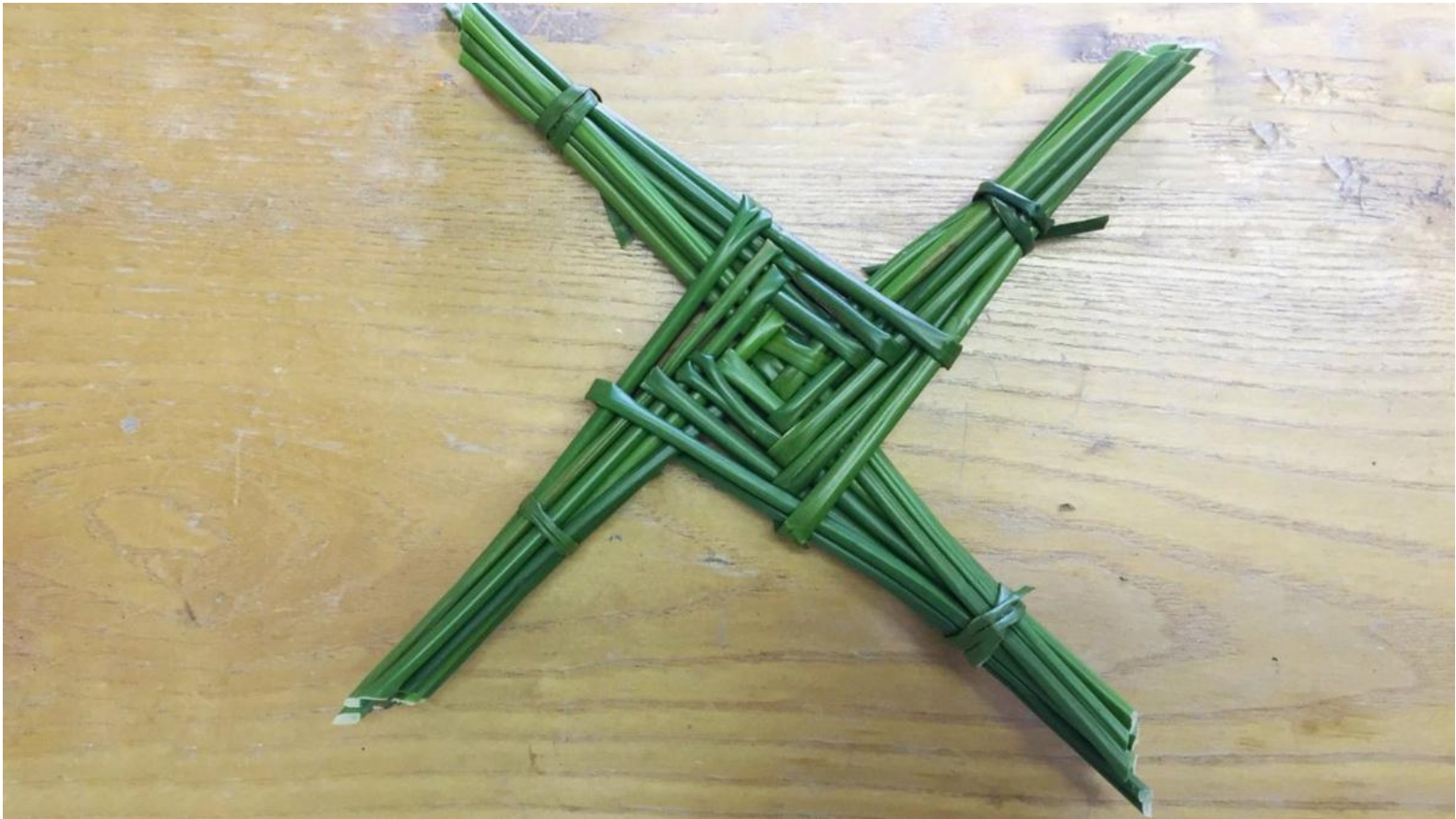


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February at the Museum!



Imbolc and St. Brigid's Day

St. Brigid's Day - Lá Fhéile Bríde - celebrates Ireland's only female patron saint on February 1st and most people will be familiar with the popular tradition of making crosses in St Brigid's honour.

What many people may not know is that the feast day of this 5th century saint was one of the most important days of the year for our rural ancestors.

With its origins in the Celtic festival of Imbolc, St Brigid's Day was the festival of fertility and marked the beginning of spring in Ireland. It signaled an end to the darkness of winter and ushered in a new season of hope and growth. As such, our rural ancestors celebrated the day with a festive meal and a host of customs, all aimed at securing St Brigid's protection and promise of new life and abundance for the year ahead.

Here are ten customs and traditions associated with St Brigid from the National Museum of Ireland.

1. Marking the Quarter Day

St Brigid's Day was one of the 'quarter days' celebrated by our ancestors. These days marked a transition from one season to the next. St Brigid's Day/Imbolc (February 1) signalled the beginning of spring; Bealtaine (May 1) was the start of summer; Lúnasa (August 1) brought in the harvest season and Samhain (November 1) was the beginning of the dark season. Irish festivals were always celebrated on the eve of the day itself because this was considered a very liminal time – a time when the otherworld was very close so appeals for protection and blessing were extra effective.

2. A festival of fertility

St Brigid's Day has its origins in the ancient Celtic festival of Imbolc and it is the festival of new life and fertility. It was a time to look forward to brighter days, warmer weather, new growth on the land and the birth of farm animals. It was very important to seek protection and blessings for the family, home, crops and animals at this time.

3. The festive meal

No celebration would be complete without a festive meal. The traditional meal at St Brigid's Day was a supper of potatoes and freshly churned butter. Often, Colcannon was made by adding chopped cabbage. Apple cakes or barm brack followed with tea. The family would eat this meal together and make their St Brigid's crosses.

4. St Brigid's Crosses

People believed St Brigid crossed through the land on the eve of her feast day and gave blessings and protection to homes and farms where crosses were hung in her honour.

There were many regional styles and variations throughout Ireland with different materials used. Families would recite prayers, bless the rushes or straw with holy water and then each make the crosses. They would hang them over the door and around the home to welcome St Brigid. Many households kept the cross each year in the under-thatch of the house and you could tell how old a house was or how long the family had lived there by the number of crosses in the roof!

5. Protecting crops and livestock

Leftover material from making crosses might be sprinkled on the land or incorporated into spencels and bedding for animals. Crops were often incorporated into the crosses themselves such as a potato or a sheaf of ripe corn. Last year's dried crosses might also be crushed and sprinkled on the land. Crosses were hung in the byre as well as the home, so St Brigid would provide protection for animals as she passed.

6. A gift for newlyweds

It was common to give a St Brigid's Cross as a gift to those with a new home, and to newlyweds, to offer protection and to wish the couple well in starting a family.

7. The Brat Bríde

Some households would leave out a small piece of cloth or a ribbon on the windowsill, called a Brat Bríde or Ribín Bríde. As St Brigid crossed through the country on the eve of her feast, she would touch the Brat Bríde, endowing it with special curative properties to ward off illness and pain in both humans and animals. It was kept safe throughout the year and used for healing or incorporated into clothing to offer protection to the wearer.

8. Biddy Boys

Bands of men or children dressed in straw would often go from house to house with 'Biddy', an effigy of St Brigid, collecting for a party in her honour while reciting a rhyme.

'Here is Brigid dressed in white. Give here a penny for this dark night. She is deaf, she is dumb. For God's sake, give her some.'

The Biddy Boys were especially popular in Kerry and elaborate processions also took place.

9. St Brigid's Girdle

In the west of Ireland, the biddy boys would carry a large straw belt called a Crios Bríde or St Brigid's Girdle. People would step through the girdle and pass it over their bodies while saying a prayer to St Brigid in the hope of gaining her protection from illness for the year ahead.

10. St Brigid's Well

There are many holy wells throughout Ireland dedicated to St Brigid and people visited these wells on the eve or on the feast day itself. Often they left a ribbon or a votive offering at the well so that their intention would be remembered. Water collected from a holy well at this time was believed to be particularly blessed.

Galway was the European Capital of Culture in 2020 and the city commissioned poet Moya Cannon to mark the beginning of spring at St Bridget's Day. Here is her poem:

Now at spring's awakening, short days are lengthening
and after St. Bridget's Day, I'll set my sail.
A blind man, on a stone bridge in Galway
or the road to Loughrea, felt the sun's rays
in his bones again and praised the sycamore and oak,
crops still drowsy in the seed, wheat, flax and oats.
His song rising, he praised Achill's eagle, Erne's hawk
and in beloved Mayo, young lambs, kids, foals,

and little babies turning towards birth

and little babies turning towards birth.
Blind Raftery invoked Bridget, Ceres of the North,
born into slavery at Faughart, near Dundalk
to an Irish chieftain and a foreign slave.

Why, of all small girls in so distant a century born
is she honoured still, in place-names, constant wells,
new rushes plaited to protect hearth, home, and herd?

Bridget, goddess, druidess of oak, or saint - a girl
who gifted her father's sword to a beggar for bread,
we, who have wounded the engendering seas and earth,
beg you to teach us again, before it grows too late,
your neglected, painstaking arts of nature and of care.

Imbolc and St. Brigid's Concert with Triskele on Zoom Saturday February 6th 7pm. Tickets \$10.

Saturday February 6th, 7pm



Join Triskele at
the Museum
for a special
Imbolc/St.
Brigid Concert



Join the women of Triskele at the Museum as we celebrate Imbolc and St. Brigid. We will mark Ireland's Matron Saint's feast day with Triskele's unique blend of craic agus ceol (fun and music) as their energetic and entertaining performance will help us dust off the cobwebs and usher in Spring!

As with all Celtic festivals, Imbolc involved a host of unique customs and rituals to welcome the spring, say farewell to the winter, ward against evil, and promote health and well being. Music with Triskele is a very fitting way to honor Ireland's Celtic goddess and matron saint!

Join us on Zoom for this craic-filled celebration of Irish women and culture.

Tickets cost \$10. You can go to our website www.irish-us.org to buy tickets through PayPal or call the museum at 518 427 1916 to purchase the Zoom Link.

War of Independence Lecture Series: February 1921.

Elizabeth Stack PhD.

Monday February 8th, 7pm on Zoom.

February saw a steady escalation in violence and reprisals, and the IRA made several daring raids on British forces. There were costly ambushes resulting in multiple IRA deaths and both sides made summary assassinations. IRA executions of suspected spies and informers also increased, while Ernie O' Malley and two others had a daring escape from Kilmainham Gaol. Dail Eireann meanwhile stepped up its diplomatic endeavors, appointing an Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs and concentrating heavily on publicity.

This is the ninth lecture in our Centenary Series about the War of Independence. Please email the museum at info@irish-us.org to get the Zoom link, without which you will not see the lecture.

The War of Independence

February 1921



Brexit: Where Are We Now?! with Peter Maloney, PhD

Thursday February 11th, 6.30pm (Zoom)



Dr. Peter Maloney is back with us to bring us up to date on the Brexit situation.

On December 24, 2020, the U.K. and the EU struck a provisional free-trade agreement that ensures the two sides can trade goods without tariffs or quotas. However, key details of the future relationship remain uncertain, such as trade in services. The deal was approved by the U.K. parliament, but still needs to be approved by the EU Parliament. With the temporary deal in place, and no hard border as yet on the island of Ireland, some pundits posit that reunification is on the agenda for the island. The Scottish government has also criticized the British government's perceived bungling of COVID-19 policy, and now, with the post-Brexit trade deal, another surge in separatist fervor is anticipated. Peter will answer all your questions regarding "deal or no deal," fishing rights, and the border.

**Mother and Babies Homes: A Personal Story with Clodagh Finn
Wednesday February 17th, 6.00pm on Zoom**



On January 12th, 2021, The Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation, established in 2015 by the Irish government to investigate mother and baby homes, published its report. Eighteen homes were investigated, even though some 182 institutions, individuals and agencies were involved in adoption, informal ‘adoption’ and other forced family separation. Just 549 people – 304 mothers and 229 children – gave testimony to the commission’s confidential committee. Even with those extremely limited numbers, it found that between 1922 and 1998, some 56,000 women and 57,000 children resided in those 18 homes, and around 9,000 or roughly 15 per cent of the children died.

Clodagh Finn, an author and journalist, will share her personal story and discuss the Commission and Report with us. Email the museum for the Zoom link. **Please note this lecture is at the earlier time of 6pm.**

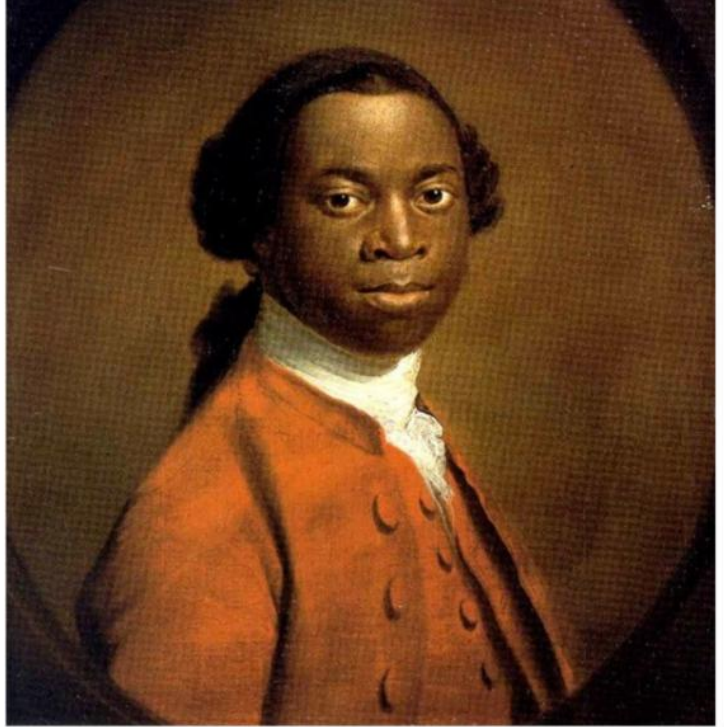
The History of Black People in Ireland Thursday February 18th, 7.00pm on Zoom

Black people have lived in Ireland since the 18th century, and of course many of the famous Black orators and artists of the 19th century visited Ireland. To mark Black History Month, the museum will host an exhibit about Frederick Douglass in Ireland and two online lectures. This lecture is a general overview of the experience of Black people in Ireland - from slaves and servants in the British Empire to today's diverse communities.

creed, and country.

The American citizen proudly points to the National Declaration of Independence, which declares that all mankind are born free and equal, and are alike entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. - Aïll him to carry out this noble declaration, by obtaining freedom for the slave.

Irishmen and Irishwomen! treat the colored people as your equals, as brethren. By all your memories of Ireland, continue to love liberty—hate slavery—CLING BY THE ABOLITIONISTS—and in America you will do honor to the name of Ireland.



The History of Black People in Ireland

**A Conversation with "Black and Irish" Femi Bankole & Boni Odoemene
Monday February 22nd, 7.00pm on Zoom**



Celebrate Black History Month with the Irish American Heritage Museum.

"We are one island with many voices!"

February 22nd 7pm on Zoom.

Black and Irish is an organization that works to highlight and celebrate the identity of black and mixed-race Irish people. They aim to spread awareness around the world of their experiences, to cheer their successes, and to

promote a more diverse Ireland. Founders of the project, Femi Bankole and Boni Odoemene, will discuss their work with us to mark Black History Month.

The Secret Role of Martin Glynn in the Anglo-Irish Treaty with Margaret Lasch-Carroll PhD

Wednesday February 24th, 7.00pm on Zoom



The Secret Role of Martin Glynn in the Anglo-Irish Treaty

Albany's Martin Glynn was well known in New York State politics and journalism in the first quarter of the 20th century. The son of Irish immigrants, he had a lifelong interest in Ireland that led him to play a small role in the truce that resulted in the treaty that ended the Irish War of Independence. Glynn's story nonetheless involves an international cast of characters and intrigue right out of a James Bond movie.

Irish American Heritage Museum

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