

**THE TOLEDO HIBERNIAN  
NEWSLETTER  
C/O MAURY COLLINS  
2847 NASH ROAD  
TOLEDO, OHIO 43613**



**BORDERLINE GENIUS, LLC**



IN GOD WE TRUST



- Dec. 6 ~ TIAC Presents Drowsy Lad's Christmas**
- Dec. 7 ~ Hibernian Christmas Party**
- Dec. 9 ~ Immaculate Conception Feast**
- Dec. 14 ~ Toraigh An Sonas session at The Blarney**
- Dec. 18 ~ Toraigh An Sonas session at Logan's**
- Dec. 22 ~ Winter Solstice**
- Dec. 25 ~ Merry Christmas**
- Dec. 26 ~ St. Stephen's Day (The wren..the wren)**
- Dec. 31 ~ Ardan Dancers at Toledo Art Museum 2**



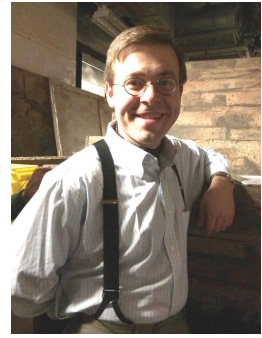
Mother McAuley Division

# HIBERNIANS OF TOLEDO NEWSLETTER

December, 2019



John P. Kelly Division



## A Message from AOH President Robert McMahon

Thank you to everyone who came out from both Men's and Ladies' groups to march in the Christmas Parade. The sun was shining and we all had a great time passing out hundreds of Irish flags! We will be adding the parade to our regular schedule of events for the future. As the darkness lengthens and we turn our thoughts to family and friends celebrating, let us not forget those who do not have so many blessings as we. The quarter day of Martinmas just passing reminds us there are those without a cloak. Through our Charity let our Friendship build Unity amongst all the brethren. Pray for all our deceased members at Mass often.

May God bless us and Nollaig Shona Duit!



## A Message from LAOH President Ann Dollman

We will be attempting to make Irish Short Bread at the **January** meeting or at least eating some already made short bread! We welcome all members to join us and bring a friend! **Please RSVP to Anndollman@yahoo.com** to make sure I have enough supplies on hand for all to enjoy!

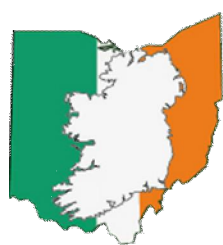
All are welcome to submit their favorite Short Bread recipe. We will have Irish tea & decaf tea to go with our Short Bread.

Congratulations and a Great big Thank You to our new officers  
Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year to All! God Bless!

Mother McAuley President Ann Dollman

# DECEMBER, 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6 Drowsy Lads Christmas Concert	7 <i>Hibernian Christmas party</i>
8 <i>Echo's of Ireland WCWA 1230 AM 11:30 AM ~ 1:30 PM</i>	9 <i>Immaculate Conception</i>	10	11	12	13	14 <i>Session at Blarney</i>
15 <i>Echo's of Ireland WCWA 1230 AM 11:30 AM ~ 1:30 PM</i>	16	17	18 <i>Session at Logan's</i>	19	20	21
22 <i>Winter Solstice</i>	23	24	25 	26 St. Stephen's Day	27	28
29 <i>Echo's of Ireland WCWA 1230 AM 11:30 AM ~ 1:30 PM</i>	30	31 Ardan Dancers @ Art Museum				



**OHIO IRISH  
AMERICAN NEWS**

## Toledo Irish Articles

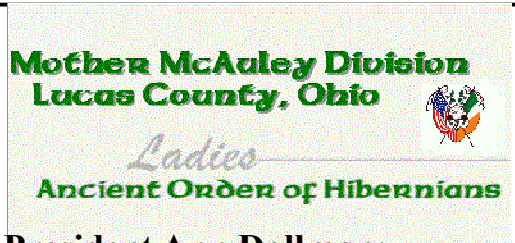
My two articles in the Ohio Irish American News magazine each month: Toledo Irish and When Irish eyes are smiling are available

free at various locations including The Blarney, Shawn's Irish Tavern 2-locations: Heatherdowns and Bancroft, St. Patrick's Historic Church and McCarthy's Port Clinton



The Ardan Academy Irish Dancers will perform in the Toledo Museum of Art Peristyle at 2 PM December 31  
Part of the Annual Great Escape  
Free admission Pay only for parking

**Come out to show support for the dancers and to visit the Toledo Museum of Art!!!! Seriously how long has it been????**



## OFFICERS FOR 2020-2021

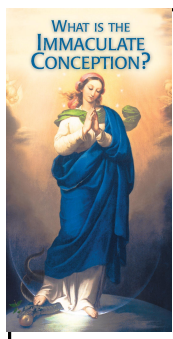
- President Ann Dollman;
- Vice President Linda Reitzel;
- Secretary Mary Pat Riker;
- Treasurer Sherri McNeill;
- Financial Secretary Tricia Cassidy;
- Historian Sarah Dollman;
- Missions & Charities Jeannie Dery;
- Catholic Action Charlene Blankenship;
- Sentinel/mistress at Arms Penny Collins;
- Sunshine Kathy Moeller;
- Chaplain Sr Ann McManus and Monsignor Vasco

**Show your appreciation by coming to the Christmas party, where they will be installed!!**

## HIBERNIAN CHRISTMAS PARTY



December 7, at the Family Center, St. Patrick's of Heatherdowns  
Six O'clock Mass By Msgr Vasko followed by  
installation of the LAOH officers for 2020-2022  
Please bring a dish to pass.  
Kathy Moeller will bring the ham



**Monday, December 9, 2019 ó Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary** Usually a Holy Day of Obligation but is not in 2019. Since December 8, 2019, is the Second Sunday of Advent, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is transferred to Monday, December 9, 2019. The obligation to attend Mass, however, does not transfer. The conception of the Virgin Mary free from original sin by virtue of the merits of her Son, Jesus. The Catholic Church teaches that God acted upon Mary in the first moment of her conception, keeping her "immaculate"

# 2019 Toledo Holiday Parade



## Toledo Irish American Club Presents: The Drowsy Lads Christmas Celebration

December 6 at St. Clement Hall 7:00 PM

Tickets are \$20.00 Tickets by Eventbrite



**The Lady Hibernians made Christmas ornaments at their November Meeting!!!**

**They will be making Short Bread at their January Meeting.  
Come to the Christmas Party to learn more about the fun things planned for 2020**



SANTA CLAUS,  
YOU KNOW OF COURSE  
IS ONE OF THE BOYS  
FROM HOME!!!

MERRY CHRISTMAS

From Your  
Hibernian Newsletter

**A**s I get older, I realise that we have not just "Christmas time" in Ireland, but a whole Christmas "season". Last year, we talked about some of the old traditions in Ireland at this time of year - and Carina shared some of her memories from her Grandparents farm in north Cork. Let's take that theme a little further today.

*I often get asked about Irish customs and traditions - and I'm sure you have a few in your own house. So, today I'd like us to take a journey through some of the main Irish traditions and customs here in County Cork.*

*See which ones you recognise and share!*

### **IT ALL STARTS ON DECEMBER 8TH.**

December 8th is the feast of the Immaculate Conception and marks the official start of Christmas in Ireland. It was the day when many farming families came to the towns and cities to spend their money in preparation for Christmas. From this time on it's ok to put a Christmas tree up in your house, or hear Christmas songs on the radio!

The few days before Christmas mark the first of many homecomings. We'll be up at the airport, welcoming our own son and daughter back for Christmas. It is striking just how many single young men and women come through arrivals from the cities across the UK and continental Europe. Emigration has a hard time leaving Ireland - it is still with us today.

We will be working on the Christmas dinner menu for some time before Christmas day. There'll be some smoked salmon on the table for the morning and dinner will be a roast Goose (traditional in Ireland), roast potatoes, brussel sprouts - along with spiced beef (a Cork tradition) and honey-glazed ham. Plenty of food to last into the lazy days after Christmas day.

### **INTO THE HEART OF CHRISTMAS.**

Many people finish work on Christmas Eve - or sometimes the day before. As it gets darker that evening, we will light a Christmas candle in the window and head off to visit extended family. This is when the "smallies" will open some of their gifts as they wait for Santa to come with the "real" presents later that night. This year, we might head off to midnight mass and sleep in a little later on Christmas morning.

Also, many of the "auld fellows" would be off the drink for the month of November (a shorter time sacrifice than Lent) and so many of the Christmas parties would start from this time on.



**The Christmas Tree Goes Up**



**The Christmas crib - Still a tradition in Ireland**



**Roast Goose for Christmas Dinner**

Christmas day feels like the stillest time of the year. It has a feel to it that we closely guard and preserve. It's a time for family, sharing around a table - telling a few stories and reminiscing. A few years back, it would be unusual to see cars on the road - except for visiting close relatives. The shops were all closed and there was a silence across the country. This has changed somewhat, but many Irish families try to preserve the preciousness of this most special day of the year.

The next day is known as Saint Stephen's day here in Ireland and it's a day of sport!

The Wren Boys (pronounced Ran Boys) are out and about visiting the houses. There is road bowling here locally in the morning as well as a hunt or two across the fields. We often have packs of Beagle dogs running across the land. In the afternoon there are many other sports fixtures.

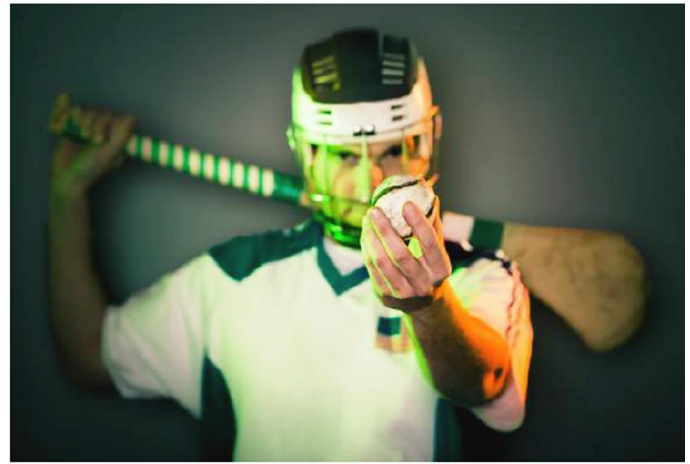
Although Christmas goes on until January 6th here in Ireland (sometimes known as women's little Christmas), people are usually back to work by that point and getting stuck in to a brand new year. This is the day when the decorations, lights and trees come down - and the house seems strangely bare.

However, there is a little more light in the evening sky and our attentions turns to springtime and the land waking up again. But Christmas is still precious - and I do hope that many of the Irish Christmas customs and traditions live for many years to come.

Do you have any Irish Christmas traditions in your house?

We wish you and your family a very Happy and peaceful Christmas.

Nollaig Shona Duit!



A Day of Sport on Stephen's Day



Goodbye to the tree for another year



If we have snow, 'twill be after Christmas



Nollaig  
Shona  
Duit!



## TRIM CASTLE BOYNE VALLEY, COUNTY MEATH



Trim Castle is the largest, best-preserved & most impressive Anglo-Norman castle in Ireland. Trim get its name from the Irish *Baile Átha Troim*, meaning 'Town of the Ford of the Elder Trees', indicating that this was an important fording point on the River Boyne. Such was the significance of this crossing point that by the fifth century a chieftain's dún (fort) and an early monastery were sited here. Trim Castle was built in 1172, shortly after the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland. King Henry II granted his baron Hugh de Lacy the Kingdom of Meath, along with custody of Dublin. The King feared that another of his barons Richard de Clare (also known as Strongbow) might set up a rival Anglo-Norman kingdom in Ireland, and gave de Lacy Meath as a counterbalance to Strongbow's powerbase in the south of Leinster.

For strategic reasons, de Lacy decided to make Trim, rather than Drogheda, the centre of his newly acquired lordship. De Lacy converted a ringfort into a wooden castle with a spiked stockade. This structure was seen as a threat by the Gaelic Irish and in 1174 Rory O'Connor, King of Connacht (and last High King of Ireland), attacked and it was destroyed. The following year work began on a more permanent stone replacement and over the following decades Hugh de Lacy (d. 1186) and his son Walter constructed the largest Anglo-Norman castle in Ireland. Initially a stone keep, or tower, replaced the wooden fortification. The keep was remodeled and then surrounded by curtain walls and a moat. The wall, punctuated by several towers and a gatehouse, fortified an area of about 3 acres. Most of the castle visible today was completed by 1220.

Trim Castle passed from the de Lacy family to Geoffrey de Geneville, an important French knight and crusader who had become a loyal supporter of Henry III of England and his son Edward I. Geoffrey built the great hall beside the keep and founded the Dominican Blackfriary in the north of the tow. From the de Geneville family it passed to the Mortimers (including the infamous Roger Mortimer who helped his lover Queen Isabella depose her husband Edward II). From the Mortimers it then passed to being a possession of the Duke of York until the War of the Roses, when it was finally seized as a royal property.



The unique twenty-sided cruciform design of the keep (with walls 3m thick) is an example of the experimental military architecture of the period. It served as both the domestic and administrative centre of the castle. By 1500 much of Ireland was back in the hands of Gaelic Chieftains and the territory under English control had been reduced to an area around Dublin, known as 'The Pale'. By this time Trim Castle was in decline; however, it remained an important outpost protecting the north-western frontier of The Pale.



Over the centuries Trim Castle was adapted to suit the domestic needs of its owners and the changing political climate. However, much of its fabric has remained unchanged since the height of Anglo-Norman power in Ireland. Even today when standing within the walls of the castle visitors can get the sense of security that would have been felt by the de Lacy family in a hostile landscape. Although, standing outside the walls you can sense the intimidation that must surely have been felt

# Important December Dates in Irish History

Dec. 5, 1921 - After lengthy negotiations, the British give the Irish a deadline to accept or reject the Anglo-Irish treaty. In the words of Lloyd George, rejection would mean "immediate and terrible war"

Dec. 5, 1976 - A rally of twelve to fifteen thousand Peace People from both north and south takes place at the new bridge over the Boyne at Drogheda

Dec. 6, 1679 - St. Oliver Plunkett, Archbishop of Armagh, is accused of instigating the "Irish Popish" Plot and arrested

Dec. 6, 1921 - Representatives of the Irish government appointed by President Eamon de Valera, and those negotiating for the Crown sign the Anglo-Irish Treaty, ending the Irish War of Independence against England. Michael Collins declares: "I have signed my own death warrant"

Dec. 6, 1922 - The Irish Free State, Saorstát Éireann, comes into being

Dec, 7, 521 - Birth of St. Columcille, Irish bard and monk honored in all the Celtic lands

Dec. 8, 1831 - Death of James Hoban, the Kilkenny architect who designed the White House

Dec.11, 1920 - Martial law is declared in Ireland. Black and Tans and Auxiliaries go on a rampage of burning and looting in Cork

Dec 12, 1960 - Birth of Donegal superstar Daniel O'Donnell

Dec, 18, 2000 - A boating accident in Mexico claims the life of singer Kirsty MacColl. She was best known for her vocals alongside The Pogues and Shane McGowan on the 1987 Christmas No 1, Fairytale of New York

Dec. 29, 2000 - The Guinness Book of World Records confirms that an eight-inch egg laid by "Queen Maeve", a Belclare duck owned by the Costello family of Galway, is the world's largest

Dec 21. 2001 - The pedestrian Ha'penny Bridge across Dublin's River Liffey is reopened after a multimillion pound restoration

Dec. 30, 2002 - To mark the 400th anniversary of the exodus of the O'Sullivan Beare clan from West Cork to Leitrim, a group of 40 people begins walking the entire 260-mile route which will take them through 11 counties and about two weeks to complete.

Dec. 31, 1602 - The O'Sullivan Beares are driven out of West Cork by the English who had defeated the combined Spanish and Irish forces at the Battle of Kinsale. Dónal Cam O'Sullivan, chieftain of the clan, begins the long march to Leitrim on this date, where he hopes to gain sanctuary with the O'Rourkes of Breffni. Accompanying him are 1,000 men, women and children representing the first large-scale exodus of people from the Castletownbere region

## The Battle of Kinsale and the Flight of the Earls



**The Flight of the Earls sculpture by John Behan, Rathmullan, Ireland**

The Battle of Kinsale is one of Ireland's most famous battles and begun in September 1601 when a large Spanish fleet landed at the harbor of Kinsale. This historic tale of deep loyalty and dedication to a small country began when two patriotic forces, in the names of Hugh O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell, united to drive the English invaders out of their land in 1601.

Both O'Neill and O'Donnell would eventually become head of their individual clans and both shared the same passion for ridding Ireland of the invaders.

O'Neill, surprisingly enough, was raised by a Protestant family and actually served as a soldier in the British Army however, he had a secret dislike to English occupation in Ireland. O'Donnell was much younger than O'Neill and had a very different ex-

perience of the British, he was imprisoned by the English at the age of fifteen and escaped four years later. His experience with the English during his imprisonment was to initiate a deep-rooted bitterness towards them.

O'Neill, along with O'Donnell, trained an army and before long they found a powerful ally, King Phillip III of Spain. King Phillip was more than keen to help the Irish for two reasons. Firstly, he wanted revenge for the famous defeat of his Spanish Armada in 1588 and secondly, Phillip saw Ireland as a terrific foundation from which he could invade England.

King Phillip agreed to the request of O'Neill and O'Donnell to send a large army in helping them defeat the English. However, the determined pair were making a name for themselves in Ulster after defeating the English in various ambushes and surprise attacks, which rattled the cages of the enemy.

King Phillip eventually sent his army of 4,800 men to Kinsale in County Cork. However, O'Neill and O'Donnell who were located in the northern county of Donegal so when the Spanish Army landed on the southern shores, they were surrounded by the English army. Lord Mountjoy and Carew, the President of Munster, led the English army and many historians agree that if the Spanish had have met with the Irish army in Donegal, then they would have been strong enough to defeat their enemy. To help their allies, who were now in the middle of being besieged by the English, O'Neill and O'Donnell marched their army 250 miles to Kinsale; a march which many say is one of the greatest marches to date in Irish History.

The events that occurred was to be described as ill-judged on O'Neill's part, as the battle lasted only an hour, 1200 Irish soldiers were lost whereas the English only lost 20. It can only be said that the Irish Army were ill-equipped, badly trained for open-field fighting and were no match against the experienced and heavy ammunition of the English Army. The Flight of the Earls

Afterwards, O'Donnell fled to Spain where he lived comfortably until he died a few months later, said to have been poisoned by a spy of Carew's named Blake.

Hugh O'Neill Surrendered to the English in 1603 and later returned to Ulster, where Lord Mountjoy treated him respectfully well; however, most of his lands and authority were non-existent. O'Neill was to later, in 1607, go to Spain with a number of family members and supporters, most of whom were lesser chieftains and this was to become famously known as the Flight of the Earls.

## The Long March Of O'Sullivan Beare



The long march of O'Sullivan Beare was a daring mission to flee invading English forces to seek refuge from Irish clans in the north of Ireland. The O'Sullivans had 400 soldiers to protect 600 women, children, and servants who faced certain death on this dangerous march.

The Beara Peninsula (Béarra) is a place of great natural beauty straddling the borders of West Cork and Kerry in the south-west of Ireland. It is also part of the ancestral homeland of the O'Sullivan clan who are able to trace their ancestry to the Eoghancht of Munster. The two main septs of the clan are the O'Sullivan Mór and they held the area now known as the Ring of Kerry. The baronies of Beare and Bantry were held by the O'Sullivan Beare who came to prominence during the 16th century.

In 1600 O'Sullivan joined with Hugh O'Neill and Hugh O'Donnell to fight against the English. They believed that Spain would be able to help but after a Spanish force capitulated at Kinsale in 1601 the Irish were left to their own devices. The English under Sir George Carew, well known for his ruthlessness, moved against the O'Sullivan castle at Dunboy in 1602. A fierce battle took place and Carew killed all 143 defenders. Daniell O'Sullivan was at the castle of Ardlea and realized what would now happen to him and his family. He decided that he would head north to O'Neill lands.

On the 31st, O'Sullivan began a march out of Glengarriff and with him he had 400 soldiers and 600 women, children, and servants. Their haste was so desperate that they had only one day's provisions. On the second day of the journey, the convoy was attacked from the rear as they crossed a ford near Liscarroll by a party of pro-English Barry's from Buttevant. Four O'Sullivans were killed before the ambushers were driven off.

The convoy continued north over the Galtee mountains and through Tipperary. They suffered frequent attacks from their enemies but were successful in driving them off. During this part of the march, O'Sullivan's wife had to give her 2-year-old son into the safe-keeping of a servant. This servant was able to escape and afterwards get the child safely to Spain. On the ninth day of their trek the convoy, closely pursued by their enemies, crossed the Shannon near Portland in north Tipperary. They used the skins of a dozen horses to make currachs and they carried the flesh for food. As they crossed the river they were attacked by Donough Mc Egan, the sheriff of Tipperary, who tried to throw some of the women and children into the river. O'Sullivan killed the sheriff himself and the pursuers fled leaving many dead.

Their journey now took them through O'Kelly lands and here they had to fight many skirmishes. They also raided the villages in the search for food. At Aughrim, the O'Sullivans were attacked by a large force of English. They managed to defeat them and killed their captain Henry Malby. After this, as they advanced northwards they were harried by MacDavid Burke who did not want them on his lands.

Escaping from Burke the ever-diminishing band came to the forest called Diamrach, or loneliness. Here the local people were friendly and supplied them with food. It must be remembered that this was the depth of winter and that by the time they reached the Curlew mountains the snow was falling heavily. Hunger and the cold, as well as their pursuers, were taking their toll on the diminishing band. They crossed the mountains on foot, those able to, had to carry the less able on their backs.

Fourteen days after he had led his convoy of 1,000 followers out of his own land, Daniell O'Sullivan reached the territory and protection of the O'Rourkes of Breffeny. Only 35 of them entered Leitrim Castle. Later a few more would drift in but the vast majority had fallen to their enemies, hunger and exposure. O'Rourke sheltered O'Sullivan Beare and his band until he was able to help them obtain passage to Spain. In that country, Daniel O'Sullivan was greeted by the King and who treated him as a royal prince.

## SMILE AND BE HAPPY!!!!

Patrick says to his mother: You can delete the train set from my Christmas wish list. Mother: Why is that?  
Patrick: Yesterday, I found one in the closet.

One particular Christmas season a long time ago Santa was ready for his Christmas run... but there were problems. Four of his elves got sick, and the trainee elves did not produce the toys as fast as the regular ones so Santa was beginning to feel the pressure of being behind schedule. Then Mrs. Claus told Santa that her Mother was coming to visit. This stressed Santa even more. When he went to harness the reindeer, he found that three of them were about to give birth and two had jumped the fence and were out, heaven knows where. More stress. Then when he began to load the sleigh one of the boards cracked and the toy bag fell to the ground and scattered the toys. So, frustrated, Santa went into the house for a cup of coffee and a shot of whisky. When he went to the cupboard, he discovered that the elves had hid the bottle and there was nothing to drink. In his frustration, he accidentally dropped the coffee pot and it broke into hundreds of little pieces all over the kitchen floor. He went to get the broom and found that mice had eaten the straw it was made from. Just then the doorbell rang and Santa cursed on his way to the door. He opened the door and there was a little angel with a great big Christmas tree. The angel said, very cheerfully, "Merry Christmas Santa. Isn't it just a lovely day? I have a beautiful tree for you. Isn't it just a lovely tree? Where would you like me to stick it?" Thus began the tradition of the little angel on top of the Christmas tree.

Four-year-old to her two-year-old sister: "Let's play Christmas. I'll be Santa Claus and you can be a present and I'll give you away."  
"

While I was working as a store Santa, a boy asked me for an electric train set. "If you get your train," I told him, "your dad is going to want to play with it too. Is that all right?"

The boy became very quiet.

So, moving the conversation along, I asked, "What else would you like Santa to bring you?"

He promptly replied, "Another train."

school bus driver stopped the vehicle to take little George out. The kid opened the door and saw his grandmother reaching her hands to grab him. The driver though, to make sure that that person is really a family member, asks the kid. "Is this really your grandmother?" "Yes. She visits every Christmas!" "Very good! And when she stays at he rest of the year?" the driver insists. "At the airport!," says the kid and continues, "Whenever we feel like, we go there and we take her home.."

Little Johnny: "Mom, can I get a dog at Christmas, please?"

Mother: "No, you'll be getting turkey, like every year!"

People who complain that my Christmas gifts are "stupid" and "thoughtless" clearly have no idea how hard it is to wrap a pineapple.

I note a certain irony as we celebrate the birth of Christ and I take his name in vain 67 times putting up Christmas lights.

What did Adam say on the day before Christmas?

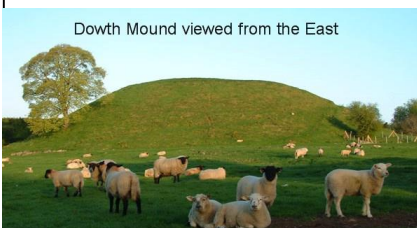
It's Christmas Eve

What's the most popular Christmas wine?

'I don't like Brussels sprouts!'

## The significance of Dowth and Newgrange at Winter Solstice

On winter solstice the sun alignment sets in Dowth chamber and rises in Newgrange chamber. Honoring these sacred alignments means letting go of the darkness at Dowth and waking up to the rebirth of the sun at Newgrange the following morning. It is a still period that is hugely transformative both for us as individuals and the world around us.



Dowth Mound viewed from the East

So what draws us to Newgrange & Dowth ? Connecting with the cycles of nature, letting go of the past at Dowth welcoming in the new at Newgrange celebrating the returning of the sun from winter's darkness We don't, however, give much thought to Dowth, a monument equivalent in size to the original Newgrange. At Dowth, the setting sun is in alignment with its chamber the evening before Winter Solstice morning. On any given winter solstice about 400 to 500 people brave the cold morning to honor the solstice for themselves. However, only a handful of people honor the sunset alignment the evening before at Dowth. If our ancient ancestors just wanted to honor the New Year rebirth of the sun, then Newgrange alone would have been enough. The very existence of Dowth gives us a clue as to how our ancestors viewed the changing of the seasons.

The word Dowth comes from the old Irish *ōDubhadhō* meaning *ōdarknessō*. It is clear from Dowth's equivalent size to Newgrange that the honoring of darkness held a significant place in our ancestors' consciousness. If one was to be objective it looks like they honored the darkness as much as the light and gave the darkness a special place in their folklore. It is in the rebirth of light that brings hopes, aspirations and our prayers giving vision for the year ahead. It is in the celebration of the darkness that honors the year past, the wisdom gained, the letting go of that which is no longer serving us. If we don't celebrate the darkness before the light on winter solstice we don't make space for the rebirthing energy, space for the new and the fresh.

The great wisdom in the Boyne Valley monuments are there for all people living on this land. To make conscious each year the very cycles of life that keep the world in balance. The monuments still stand in all their wisdom as an invitation to us from Ireland's ancient ancestors, to come home to wholeness, to healing and to bring the darkness to the light and the light to darkness.

In the words of the Lao Tzu the Taoist mystic *ōthere can be no dark without light, love without hate, man without womanō*. Lao Tzu also talked about the light of creation being born from the infinite darkness.

The Sufi mystic Rumi says *ōwhat hurts you, blesses you. Darkness is your candle.ō* So what can we learn from this and how does our society honor the darkness?



From the period of Samhain to Winter Solstice we energetically (both solar and personal) with nature go deeper into the darkness. The winter solstice offers us not only the opportunity to celebrate the rebirth of the light but also its transition from darkness.

## Christmas in Ireland

### Christmas Eve



This is the day for final household preparations and decorating the interior of the house. For our rural ancestors, the decorations were gathered by the children of the house from lanes and woods nearby. Dressing the fir tree on Christmas Eve is a mid-20th century development of this tradition. In practice, many, if not most, modern homes have had their tree in full celebration gear for a week or three and it is already the main focus of the family's living room. Wrapped presents collect beneath it.

If it hasn't already been done, lit candles are placed in windows as dark falls. Again, this is an old tradition, symbolic of lighting the way for Mary and Joseph. Welcoming refreshments are also left out for them. Traditionally this is a small seed cake and drink. Many Irish families still go through this little ritual, but many more leave out a mince pie, glass of whiskey and a carrot, intended for Santy and his reindeer who bring gifts for children (only those who've been well-behaved, of course) during the dead of night. Perhaps the most prevailing tradition of Christmas in Ireland is attendance at Midnight Mass; most churches are packed on Christmas Eve.

### Christmas Day



Lavish table arrangement for Christmas Children discover their gifts from Santy/Santa (rarely Father Christmas) at the foot of their beds or beneath the Christmas Tree (depending on family tradition) on this morning. Morning is also the time when most of the madcap swims take place around the freezing coast. Most of these are organized for charity and the individuals taking part are sponsored to take their chilly dips.

The rest of the day is spent exchanging gifts, eating an extravagant feast of traditional Irish Christmas recipes and generally indulging the palate.

Making merry usually involves drinking seasonal concoctions such as mulled wine, Irish cream, whiskey, sherry and champagne. Christmas Day in Ireland remains primarily a family occasion.

### The feast of St Stephen



The 26th December is known as St Stephen's Day in Ireland. In Northern Ireland it's also known as Boxing Day. In most homes it is a sociable day, when visitors may call in to share some seasonal foods or liquid (usually alcoholic) refreshments. Sport is also high on the menu throughout Christmas in Ireland and several horseracing meetings start on St Stephens. But there's no need to attend the track. People are sure to place a few bob on a St Stephens meet,

St Stephens is also the day when a purely Irish phenomenon can be witnessed: the tradition of Hunting the Wren. This is when the Wren Boys take to the streets in colorful costumes and masks, and noisily parade a dead wren on a decorated pole. It's a strange tradition and its origins are often debated. Some say it originated in Pagan times. Others from the Viking invasion. Most opt for a simplified religious reference: the betrayal by a wren of St Stephen who was hiding from the Romans who subsequently killed him for his Christian beliefs. This, then, gave the reason for hunting down the wren, and in olden days a bird was, indeed, captured and killed. The Wren Boys would then carry the dead bird on a pole from house to house and beg for money to bury the 'evil bird'.