

## CELTIC WEDDING.

An early supporter of the Kilt Society and advocate of national dress Brendan Rohan masterminded a wedding to remember for his new bride. Many kilt club society members took part in the celebrations that commenced with rehearsals on Wednesday and continued until Sunday. Brendan tells the story in his own words.

*Somewhere in the mists of time, people created rituals to mark important celebrations or initiatory events. Sometimes we forget the origins and purposes of these old rituals, and we even forget the significance of the ritual site. In our forgetting we often lose some of the gifts associated with the occasion and the venue, and the whole ceremony is enacted in a mechanical, impersonal, and unimaginative way.*



*Having been down the marriage ceremony route once before, many years ago, I decided to re-examine the old rituals in an effort to reclaim a flavour of what it used to be all about. I was able to do this because of the belief my bride-to-be, Angelique, has in me, and because of the genuine love, friendship and support she, and so many friends, colleagues and acquaintances, old and new, have invested in my efforts.*

*I originally come from Clones, Co Monaghan, and, after 20 years service in the Irish Army, I retired with the rank of Comdt in 1992. I was stranded here in bad weather a couple of years before, while sailing round Ireland, and got captured by the place and the people. I have devoted 15 years to the restoration of the Corcreggan Mill property near Dunfanaghy, and the establishment of, among other things, a tourism and workshop venue.*

*After failing to sell the property last Summer, in the hope of pursuing a grand adventure in world travel, I arrived home on my motor cycle one day to find that a beautiful, German, fellow motor-biker and fellow Scorpio had arrived. I persuaded her to come with me to an island paradise for the day. The uniquely beautiful setting of Inisbofin Island, its people and surrounds proved irresistible, and we stayed four days in beautiful sunshine. When we left the island, the winds howled and the rain poured for days. Just like my story, Angelique was captured. She returned to Aachen briefly to settle her affairs and came back for a trial period in Donegal soon after. She stayed.*

*We chose the **23 June** as the date for our marriage because it is the third day of the Mid Summer Solstice, and has been celebrated with bonfires, feasting and merry-making for thousands of years, and, I was assured that it would be an auspicious date for a wedding ceremony.*



We chose the **Grianan of Aileach**, because it has been a place of ritual and ceremony for at least 5,500 years; because it has been described as having an ancient connection to my home and venue for the Feasta Mor and Mid Summer celebration, Corcreggan Mill, Dunfanaghy; and, because our new home at Corcreggan is to be built as an exact replica of the Grianan, with an octagonal central hall to replicate the Cathedral at Aachen.

We chose the **ancient Saffron kilt** as appropriate attire for **Groom and Best Man**, not



just because I have worn it sailing round Ireland, motor-cycling to Assisi, and flying round New Zealand; not just because the Best Man wore it at his wedding 6 years ago; not just because Padraig Pearce regarded it as being the only authentic national dress; not just because it is worn with pride in the Irish Defence Forces and in the Irish Regiments of the British Army by Catholic and Protestant alike; not just because it unites the Irish and Scottish traditions, as does so much of the history, music and language of Donegal, Northern Ireland and Scotland; and not even because it was once described to me by an elderly lady as “a very manly thing to wear”, but because of all of these things. Day wear, (jacket and tie), was the stated order of dress

for gentlemen at the Grianan.

We chose a **Middle Ages dress for the Bride**, designed and made by experts in such costumes in Germany, in four shades of green, as appropriate attire for the Bride because it compliments all of the above and reflects the culture, history and traditions of the Bride-to be. Angelique is from Aachen in Germany, which was the site of an ancient Roman Spa; is the site of Charlemange’s throne and famous octagonal Cathedral; and was selected by Napoleon to be the centre and capital of his new Europe.

We chose **rings made from old iron hand-made nails** that I took from an old wrecked wooden boat on our





*beloved Inisbofin Island, just off the northwest coast of Donegal. The prototype ring was forged together from two such nails by our local Blacksmith, John McCausland, which also reflects the ancient custom whereby such a man once performed marriage ceremonies to ensure a forging together of two lives. The final product was fashioned by a well-known Letterkenny silversmith, Peter Dalton.*

***The wedding cake** was made by Bethna Mc Nair from Manorcunningham. It was an exact scale model of the circular stone fort that is the Grianan of Aileach. At its centre it bears the cosmogramme designed in 1992 by the Slovenian sculptor, mystic and earth healer, Marko Pogacnic. It depicts the pre-Celtic site that has become the Corcreggan Mill property, at the centre of three energy spirals joining together there, from Errigal (masculine) and Muckish (feminine) Mountains, and Tory Island (masculine and feminine joined as one).*

*The **day's events** started with the Irish Contingent being led into the Grianan fort by a saffron-kilted piper, Pascal Gillen, and a black-kilted lambeg drummer, Roy Arbuckle. Roy, from Derry city, who was the originator of the peace-building "Different Drum" project, led the assembly in acknowledging, and asking for the  **blessings of the spirits of the ancient site and fort**. He then called on everyone present to face and pay homage to the four directions in turn. He sounded a salute with a bronze horn. This large horn is an exact cast reproduction from a Bronze Age horn in the National Museum, which originated in Co. Antrim. As each direction was acknowledged, a representative from Ulster (Deirdre Brennan), Munster (Charlie Roche), Leinster (Neil Mc Cann) and Connaught (Ellen O'Malley-Dunlop) spoke for their respective provinces, and hang the appropriate shields on the inner walls.*



***The fifth province** (Cuige) is that which we are calling in, and about to create in the marriage ceremony. An acknowledgement was made of the representatives, and in some cases direct descendents, of the four families associated with the first 1000 years of the Grianan fort. They then hung their family shields on the walls. They are Maura O'Neill,*

*Seamus O'Donnell, Valerie McLaughlin and Murtagh O'Brien.*



*The entrance arch had simple local flora attached as adornment and there were two large, but equally simple **flower displays**, arranged and installed by the Dublin Florist Clare Power, either side of a very simple table placed centrally to hold the priest's sacred oils, and blessed water taken from the St Patricks Well, which adjoins the fort. The backdrop was a ships canvas sail emblazoned with a Celtic cross bearing the joined initial of the Bride and Groom.*

*The approach of the **Bride-to-be's party, on foot**, was made obvious by the sound of bagpipes and drum in the distance. A green-kilted piper, Francis Feeley from Sheffield,*



*and his cloaked, bodhran player wife, Diz, led the German Contingent. From the fort walls, the assembled Irish Contingent could see the entourage, with their Aachen banner, preceded by the Bride with her Weimeraner hunting dog (her Valentine's Day present), and her two young flower girls, Hanna Brennan and Daire Power. On her arrival at the gate, she was met and saluted by a sword-carrying reception party comprising a highly decorated French Colonel (soon to be General), Jean-Philippe Ganascia, (who recently commanded of one the world-famous Foreign Legion Regiments), and, the tartan-kilted John Macdonald (of the Isles). Their salute was accompanied by the sounding of the ceremonial bronze horn from the fort. The green-kilted piper then joined with a saffron-kilted piper to lead the entourage to the fort, while the Bride-to-be was*

*flanked and protected by her two escorting swordsmen.*



When all were inside the fort, and the dog, "Spook", handed over into the keeping of Angelique's son, Janek, the Bride-to be was escorted up the centre of the Grianan by her brother Gregor, representing their father Johann, who is, sadly, too ill to travel. At this point the Best Man, Trevor Curran, "from Banbridge town in the County Down", announced **the beginning of the proceedings**. Sandy Dunlop, a noted author, business mentor and mythologist, accompanied by his wife, Ellen O'Malley-Dunlop, a folklorist, direct descendent of Grace O'Malley (The Pirate Queen), and present Chieftain of the O'Malley clan, gave a brief history of the Tuatha de Dannan, the Celts, and Mid Summer Festivals. Roy Arbuckle gave a brief history of the Grianan of Aileach.

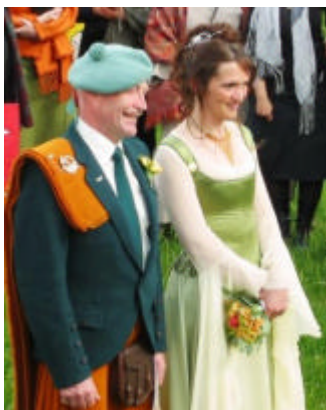


**The priest** who conducted the ceremony, Fr Dara Molloy from Inis Mor, Aran Islands, will then give a brief introduction to Celtic weddings.

The Best Man described the rings, and the Groom's brother Eamonn was called forward to take possession of their Great Grandfathers signet ring, being now handed on to the, as yet, un-married brother. The wedding ceremony involved, the lighting of ceremonial candles and the making of specially selected prayers, and marriage vows.

A **Gaelic hymn** was sung by the acclaimed Oireachtas singer, Comdt Noel O'Grady, with harmony provided by Deirdre Brennan of Clannad fame. A **poem** was recited by the writer and poet Cathal O'Searcaigh, and a further dedication read by Roy Arbuckle. Dr Kay Mullen, an American Psychologist and writer, now resident in Creeslough, played a full sized concert harp, accompanied by her friend Danielle, on concert flute.

**The Exchange of Rings** ritual was followed by a traditional Hand Fastening rite.



Then, after the formal blessing of the Bride and Groom, and of their new relationship, Ellen O'Malley-Dunlop explained the **Acceptance ceremony**. My son, Louis, brought forward a Saffron brat (cloak), which had attached "something old" (an antique, naval, sweetheart broach), "something new" (a modern silver broach in the shape of the Corcreggan cosmogramme, made by Sinead Mc Laughlin, Ballybofey). (In case anyone is wondering about the rest of the adage, a Child of Prague was the "something borrowed", to be put under a bush facing south, the night before the wedding, to

ensure “something blue”...the resulting skies). The Groom then placed the brat on the Bride’s shoulder to signify her acceptance into the Celtic fold.

After the blessing of all present, the combined assembly then left the Grianan, under **the traditional sword arch**, provided by serving **Irish Army Officers** who are former colleagues of the Groom.



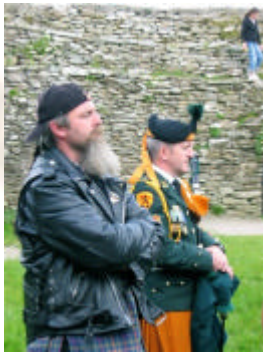
The large group was led away from the Grianan by the combined pipes and drums, invoking the old adage that **“When the Bodhran and Lambeg play together, Ireland will finally be at peace”**.

The Bride and Groom were driven to Dunfanaghy, by a friend of the Groom, Mr Frank Storrs, in his **1937, Lagonda Open Tourer**. At Dunfanaghy, a friend of the bride, local farmer Mr John Steward drove the couple the last two miles to the Mill in his **horse and trap**.

**The Feasta Mor** was designated a formal dress buffet. The faire simple but authentic. The wild venison, and rabbit







were from the local hills and dunes, and were taken, in season, by local hunters John Murray and James Hayes. The salmon and crab were fished from the Atlantic waters about Inisbofin, in the nick of time, by the O'Brien Brothers, John and Michael. A wide range of cheeses was provided by many of the attending guests from home and abroad. The venison was cooked to an old French recipe by a well known annual visitor and fisherman, Reginald Pinet, who hails from the Beaujolais region, and who provided a large quantity of quality wine from his own Chateau's vineyard. The Principal Chef, Liam Curran, is a Chef tutor, and is Senior Lecturer for Hospitality and Business Studies at Omagh College of Further and Higher

Education.

When the feasting concluded, and the **wedding cake ceremonially cut**, using Colonel Ganascia's 1833 French Cavalry sabre, the speeches followed. **The speeches** were like the gentlemen's kilts; long enough to cover the point, short enough to be interesting, colourful enough to catch the attention, and funny enough to be remembered.



Then party time in earnest! Wedding guests were joined at 11pm by a host of local people who arrived to join in the **Mid Summer celebrations**. At dusk a German dance artist, Sybilla Bund, enacted a specially devised piece celebrating the Tuatha de Danann. **The traditional bonfire** was lit, and the pig, which had been roasting on its spit for hours before, was served up. The accomplished pig roaster, Jamie Dunlavey, flew in from Washington, especially for the wedding and this role. He was one of the first Firemen into the Pentagon

Building, 6 minutes after the "9/11" plane attack. He wore his Dunlavey kilt at the Grianan, and his Grade A Dress Blues for the Feasta Mor.

Anyone can leave things to the eleventh hour but "Donegal time" pushes all boundaries. Just before the stroke of the twelfth hour a cake with candles and sparklers was brought on, to celebrate the birthday of a man, is not only one of Nature's gentlemen but, who is an inspiration to all who know him. The 23<sup>rd</sup> of June is Frank Storrs **Birthday**, which he gave up without a



*word of it when he knew his attendance, and that of his wonderful Lagonda, were requested.*

*The bonfire, merry making, wild music, song and dance delighted all present well into the dawn of the rest of Summer.*

***Thanks be to God,** and to all who gave of their all in love and friendship to make this event so wonderful; for the day itself; and for the new voyage.*

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