

## Music and Clan Irwin Part III

The Clan Irwin Music Project is *humming* along in the 4th quarter of 2020 in a most *noteworthy* fashion. Musicians are showing up on *cue* and we are on the edge of having veritable *ensembles* of Clan Irwin members, professional musicians and others contributing scores and videos to this project. (*Too much?* 😊). But truly, leads for participants and contributors are coming in from all sorts of places such as our CIA Facebook page and our website. Despite the challenges this year has posed, the amazing current technology is enabling musicians to carry on and preserve their identities as well as participate in ventures such as ours. I feel confident in saying that this project is a brilliant addition to all the other information about our Irwin ancestry that we have available for our members and is also a great way to attract new members. As this project has developed, it has become clear that we needed a purpose statement and criteria for those who might be thinking of contributing.

The Purpose of the Clan Irwin Music Project includes: to inform members of music associated with the CIA; enable them to read the history of the tunes and hear them played by members and professional musicians; provide clean musical scores of the tunes and songs for those who want to learn them; and encourage members to contribute by voice, instrument, or dance. The categories include Scottish, Irish, other music from the Isles, especially songs of Robert Burns; original arrangements; and other tunes associated with specific events of the CIA. All contributions will be submitted to and approved by the Administrator before being put in the Our Music folder, making them accessible from our Members Website. If you have any questions, or need assistance in getting to the Music Folder in GSuites, please feel free to contact me at [susan.mcrae@clanirwin.org](mailto:susan.mcrae@clanirwin.org).

The song featured in this article is another traditional Scottish ballad known as *Kirkconnel Lea*, or *Fair Helen of Kirkconnel*. This romantic, albeit tragic, tale from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century was previously contributed to the Holly Leaf Chronicle (Vol IV, No.5) by the Editor of *The Bell Chimes*, a publication of the Bell Clan. The Bells are closely related to the Irvings of Bonshaw. When William Bell married Mary Irving, he assumed the name of Irving and it became known as Bell-Irving. James M. Irvine writes in his book, *The Irwin Surname* (p.205) that "John Bell Irving (1864-1916) was a descendant of the Gribton, Dumfries line and great-grandfather of the present Laird of Bonshaw..." and that "Fair Helen Irvine, daughter of the house of Kirkconnel may have been the granddaughter of Edward Irving, 4<sup>th</sup> Laird of Bonshaw" (p.6). (Don't you just LOVE the way the Irwin, Irvine, Irvings, etc. changed the spelling of their names at the drop of a hat?).

The story in this ballad was first told in Thomas Pennant's *Tour in Scotland, 1774*. It is also in Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* and was re-worked by Robert Burns. The tradition tells of Helen Irving, daughter of the Laird of Kirkconnel in Annandale, who was loved by two gentlemen, Adam Fleming of Kirkpatrick, whom she loved, and another, said to have been a Bell of Blacket House, who was favored by her family. As Helen and Adam walked one evening on the banks of the Kirtle, Helen could see that her rejected suiter had his gun pointed at her loved one. She threw herself before her lover, took the bullet in her own breast and died in his arms. As the ballad goes, Fleming avenged her immediately, *I hackit him in pieces sma'*. Later, upon returning from the wars in Spain, he visited the spot and, overcome by grief, died on her grave. There is a high stone cross marking the spot where Helen lies with her lover about 2 miles from Bonshaw Tower.

Colin Grant-Adams, our celebrated artist, has contributed a lovely video of Kirkconnel Lea to the Clan Irwin Association for Our Music Folder. Colin was born in Winchester, England to Scottish parents and later made his home in the lovely seaside town of Oban, on the west coast of Scotland. He later moved to America and settled in Glasgow, KY, a good place for a Scot, and is married to Julia

Schooler. He has had a highly successful career on the Scottish, Irish and Celtic Festival circuit with his captivating repertoire of songs delivered in his strong tenor voice and accompanied by his fiery quick guitar and fine fingerpicking, as evident in his video. Colin has become one of the most popular solo artists on the circuit with a loyal fan base of all ages, which includes many members of the Clan Irwin Association as he is often performing at Scottish Games where Irwins are convening tents. We always love it when Colin takes time out to come by our tents to have a dram and a wee visit. He has recorded nine CDs and runs travel tours to Scotland and Ireland, keeping a busy schedule in a normal year. He has been keeping up with his music during lockdown by posting songs on his Facebook page and you can visit him online at [www.colingrant-adams](http://www.colingrant-adams). A big THANK YOU to Colin for recording this piece for us!

Future articles will continue to explore and share more of the tunes written about or for Clan Irwin and feature other musicians, perhaps from the ranks of the Clan Irwin Association. HASTE YE BACK!

*By Susan Irvine McRae  
Mid-South Regional Commissioner*

*WHAT IS IN THE MUSIC FOLDER? Let's take a PEEK: (1) A musical score and video of an original arrangement of Planxty Irwin with variations composed by Susan Irvine McRae. (2) A video of Peter Irwin from Canada playing Planxty Irwin on Pipes. (3) A video of Colin Grant-Adams singing Fair Helen of Kirkconnel and a musical score for this tune. (4) A Lead Sheet for an original setting of The Laird of Drum, written especially for The Clan Irwin Association by Scottish Fiddler Jamie Laval, who will soon be contributing a video/recording of his arrangement as well. MORE TO COME!*