



YOUR IRISH ROOTS ARE SHOWING

Website celebrates the Emerald isle

Mora na maidine dhuit!" That's Gaelic for "Top of the morning to you!" The proper response is "Agus cuid eile an lae dhuit fein," meaning "And the rest of the day to yourself."

Although today is not St. Patrick's Day, it is parade day. That means thousands of area residents, as well as visitors from near and far, will be celebrating the Irish today. Expect all kinds of shenanigans 'til the wee hours of tomorrow morning.

For those of you who have the Auld Sod flowing through your veins, or if you're just curious about Irish heritage, the website www.ireland-information.com is a good source of interesting information. The site covers a variety of topics concerning the Emerald Isle and its sons and daughters.

Genealogy

This section covers several aspects of Irish genealogy. Since I work with a bunch of Murphys, Kellys, Mullens, O'Malleys, McAuliffes and the like, the section on the meaning of surnames was popular. Jack Gallagher was pleased to learn that his name means "lover of foreigners." He immediately started planning a trip around the world.

There are histories of names, including the locations where the clans were dominant. Crests, or coats of arms, also are displayed and explained. Flags, jewelry and other knickknacks with your family crest can be purchased. Tools for researching your family tree also are available, some free and some for a price.

Research

If you're planning a trip to Ireland, there are some useful links in this section. Information is posted regarding the history, politics and economy of the island. There are maps and pictures to help you plan an itinerary. Common phrases are translated from Gaelic to English, although most of the people you'll meet there speak English. Articles, recipes and traditions are posted to help you learn more about the local culture. A message board is available to let you ask questions related to traveling there.

Freebies

Almost every page on the site presents you with an opportunity to buy something with an Irish theme. There's jewelry, plaques, prints, books and more with enough variety to satisfy most tastes.

Not everything on the site requires you to lay out cash. Numerous digital freebies are available. Screensavers featuring your coat of arms, pictures of the land and more are a click away. You can download Celtic fonts or clipart for your computer or correspondence. If you want to read some world-famous Irish literature, you can download e-books.

There's also plenty of malarkey to be found on the site. For fun, you can play games or take a quiz. There are some fine examples of Irish jokes and blessings, as well as lists of baby names and music.

A grand effort falls short

The site is run by Michael Green out of County Dublin, Ireland. Along with his contributors, his stated aim is to provide as much family-friendly, free information about Ireland as possible. I question if this is blarney, since there are pitches to sell Irish

merchandise sprinkled liberally throughout the site. There's nothing wrong with making a buck, but be up front about it.

While there is lots of interesting and informative content contained in the site, the design and functionality need work. The overly bright green, and the 3D, hovering celtic font used in the name plate don't do justice to the artistic traditions of the people the site is supposed to be celebrating.

The navigation is akin to driving down a one way street. Once you leave the home page there are no navigation buttons to let you get back there, or to any other sections of the site. Consequently, if you want to spend any length of time on the site you have to either open every link in a separate tab, or use your back button a lot.

The sections of the site are organized enough that you can find your way around, but it's not pretty. Inconsistent font sizes, haphazard placement of elements and color palettes that change from page to page are just a few of the visual problems that make the page appear as if it was designed by amateurs.

Despite the need for a design makeover, the site is entertaining for those of us who can't get enough of all things Irish. So before you grab your shillelagh and head downtown, spend a little time on this site learning why you're celebrating.

If I see you out and about today during the festivities, I'll be sure to raise my glass and wish you sláinte, but don't get so bulloxed on Guinness that you end up on your arse. And may you be in heaven a half-hour before the devil knows you're dead.

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