

## Heritage Week 2014

Sunday August 24<sup>th</sup> 2014

Nano Nagle Centre for Spirituality and Ecology, Ballygriffin, Killavullen, Mallow, Co. Cork



‘Recalling the Uprooting and Destruction in 982AD by Malachi, King of Ireland, of the Sacred Inaugural Oak of the McKennedy Clan of the Dalcassian Race.’

For the third consecutive year the Presentation Sisters have invited a Heritage Week Event at their convent demesne – Birthplace of their order’s foundress, Nano Nagle. Much has been broadcast during 2014 via our print and electronic media concerning the death in 1014 AD of Brian McKennedy (Boru) High King of Ireland. Little, if any, reference has been made to the seminal act at Maigh Adair in 982AD. Our presentation sought to gain retro-millennial insights into the forest culture of Ireland’s 10<sup>th</sup> century – in particular the cult of *Doire na Phoball* (Tree of Assembly).

In his chapter “Primeval Forest and Early Man” (*History of Irish Forestry*) Eoin Neeson refers to such inaugural trees as *Crann Bile* – believed to be imbued with the mystic qualities of *fidnemed* (*fid* - tree; *nemed* – noble). *Fidnemed* translates as sanctuary. A papal decree (Council of Nantes, 895AD) ordered all Christians to destroy all venerated trees and their memory. Such sacred trees, allowing for different customs of different Scottish and Irish tribes, normally were the centre piece of an ancestral cairn atop a hill or mound. Royal power was invested in the clan’s newly appointed *Taoiseach* beneath the over spreading canopy of what was a solitary tree.

Fr Martin Ryan writing in Volume 1 “The Other Clare” claims that trees that canopied inauguration were held in ‘great veneration’ by the people – that ‘the greatest triumphs a tribe could achieve over its enemies was to cut down their *crann bile*. In the townland of Carns, Co Roscommon, can still be observed the hill of Carnfree, where the O’Connors, Kings of Connaught, were inaugurated.



Near Dungannon, Co Tyrone the O'Neill inauguration mount at Tullahoge (*Telec Oc*) remains intact – its centre-piece oak was cut down 1111AD by the Midians. Brehon Law demanded a fine of 3,000 cows. In Scotland their then Chief of the Kingdom, was 'married to Ann, Earth Goddess' (inauguration) at Dunadd, Argyllshire.

Readers familiar with Carnahalla (Doon, Cappamore) will recall its large amphitheatre with its central mound and flat top surrounded by a fosse and bank c.20 feet high. Maigh Adair today resembles this description. Due to Eirinn's isolation before the Celtic Iron Age and because the Romans were hesitant about "Hibernia" also called Ierne, Iverna and Iuverna that translates "winter", the Ireland of the 10<sup>th</sup> century was socially and economically a woodland culture. (Read O'hEogain *Sacred Isle*/Kelly *Ancient Irish Farming/ Early Irish Laws/ Burleith's Twilight of the Lords*). Early Christian records describe the inauguration witnessed by the hereditary historian. A "white rod" or hazel was handed to the future chieftain or king. The Hazel (Coll) to a forest people was known as the tree of hidden wisdom – possession of this wand ensured a sound rule and soil fertility/ good harvests as well as protecting against corrosive elitism. The *crann bile* would stand witness and hold the chieftain or king to his sacred duty throughout its long life and in the very furniture or timber that eventually yielded in the bile's 'passing over.'

We have description of the sacred groves of Gaul by Caesar himself. Was this the route whereby our Crann/Fednemed Cult reached Iuverne? Or were our forebears – the last of Western Europe's forest dwellers, honouring a practice from Erin's youthful days – the Bronze age? Is it important to us, a forest people without their forest to recall an advanced civilization that honoured their tree-centric culture – can we restore that relationship between communities and their native woodlands? Might our aboriginal genetic memory of nature be awakened? The alternative route offers dangerously unnatural homogenisation – the ultimate depravity of consciousness.

After the talk those present took part in a tree planting ceremony on the grounds of the Nano Nagle Centre. The tree planted is a grafted scion from the celebrated Brian Boru Oak at Tuamgraney, Co Clare. All participants added a handful of earth to the newly planted tree and prayers were said for the wellbeing of all present.





Then Ted Cook read the following verse from a poem by Alice Milligan:

*Fallen in Erin are all those leafy forests  
The Oaks lie buried under bogland mould  
Only in legends dim are they remembered  
Only in ancient books their fame is told*

Author: Ted Cook

Transcribed by Lonán Ní DDhúbháin | Photos by Conor Nelligan, Stuart MacMurdo and James Feeney