

# SCULPTURE OF DANÚ

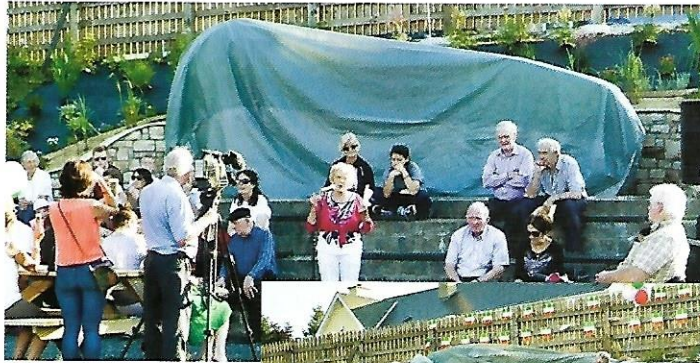
## GODDESS OF THE TUATHA DE DANNAN

RIVERSIDE PARK, DRUMSHANBO—SCULPTURE BY JACKIE MCKENNA

*Nancy Woods*

IT WAS A Monday evening in July 2017 and Drumshanbo was basking in glorious sunshine. There was a great buzz around town--everyone on the move seemed to be carrying a musical instrument or two! Several open air sessions were in full swing on High Street--the Annual Joe Mooney Summer School had begun. Brightly coloured bunting, flags and colourful balloons were adorning Riverside Park. People were thronging in from all entrances. The big attraction was the much anticipated unveiling of the newly erected sculpture of DANÚ- Mother Goddess of the Tuatha de Danann, renowned in Irish mythology. This truly amazing stone Sculpture, representing the arrival of the ancient tribe of Danú on Sliabh an Iarainn more than 4,000 years ago, was created by Leitrim's well known sculptor and Manorhamilton native, Jackie McKenna.

This sculpture was commissioned and funded by the Joe Mooney Summer School Committee and the unveiling was performed by local singer/songwriter, Charlie Mc Gettigan which followed the inspiring interpretation by actress Sorcha Fox, of the oldest poem from that era "The Song of Amergin". Then the lovely summer evening was filled with the music of the harp. Aoife Ní Argáin and Éadaoinn Ní Mhaicín gave a haunting recital, joined later by button accordionists Anne Conroy-Burke and Nuala Hehir and also by brilliant Leitrim Uilleann Piper, Pádraig Mc Govern. Together they entertained the gathering with a selection of lively tunes, finally brining this enjoyable historic event in the Park to a



The unveiling of the Jackie McKenna's sculpture—Danú. Charlie McGettigan and ??? are in the bottom photo showing the completed sculpture

close. Needless to say, the music sessions continued throughout the town into the small hours.

The arrival of the tribe of Danú on Sliabh an Iarainn or Conmhaicne, as it was known in ancient times, was first recorded in An Leabhar Gabhála (The Book of Invasions), and later in a very important manuscript called "The Annals of the Four Masters"- which was an account of earlier historical events com-

plied by the four scribes in a Franciscan Monastery near Kinlough this being the principal source of our local ancient history. One of these four important scribes was a Leitrim man called Peregrine Duignan. These Annals also recorded that the Tuatha de Danann overcame the Fir Bolg in battle and ruled Ireland from Teamhair (Tara), from 1897 BC to 1700 BC.

Danú, this magnificent sculpture was hand-crafted over the winter months

from an 8 ton boulder of Kilkenny Limestone by Jackie Mc Kenna at her home-  
stead in Killargue. Inspired by the  
contours of Sliabh an Iarainn and by her  
knowledge of the Tuatha, she worked on  
the head, face and flowing hair of Danú in  
great detail and added the triple spiral—  
a beautiful artistic feature deep-rooted in  
Irish Mythology. The laminated green  
glass panel, running down through the  
sculpture signifies the impact of light and  
darkness in those bygone days. Many  
believe that the Tuatha still reside un-  
derground as the Sidhe or Fairy-folk having  
been banished there when they were  
defeated by the Formorian's.

Many stories or legends have come  
down to us from the mythical era of the  
Tuatha de Danann telling of their skills in  
music, healing and magic. It is told that  
the Dagda, or chief druid, had a magic  
harp. The music of the Dagda's harp was  
so enchanting that it was capable of  
sending his enemies into a deep sleep  
making it possible for the men of the  
Tuatha to gain victory in battle. Other



stories handed down still stir the imagi-  
nation, such as, the Children of Lir, when  
the wicked step-mother cast a spell on  
Lir's children turning them into swans or  
the story of Óisín in Tír na nÓg that tells  
of the beautiful Niamh Chinn Óir riding  
on her white steed and taking Óisín, son  
of Fionn Mac Cumhail, to a magical land  
where nobody grew old. Another fantas-  
tic story relates how Labhraidh  
Loinnseach, who was born with "horse's  
ears", told his secret to an oak tree which

was later chopped down to make a harp.  
The harp, when played at a banquet, kept  
chanting his secret "Labhraidh Loinnseach  
has horses ears". All those mythical sto-  
ries and more are part of our ancient his-  
tory.

The impressive sculpture of Danú in  
Riverside Park, Drumshanbo, portrays a  
historic reminder of the amazing tribe  
that inhabited our county and country  
before the coming of Christianity and are  
still remembered in music and legend.

