

LEITRIM CHRONICLES

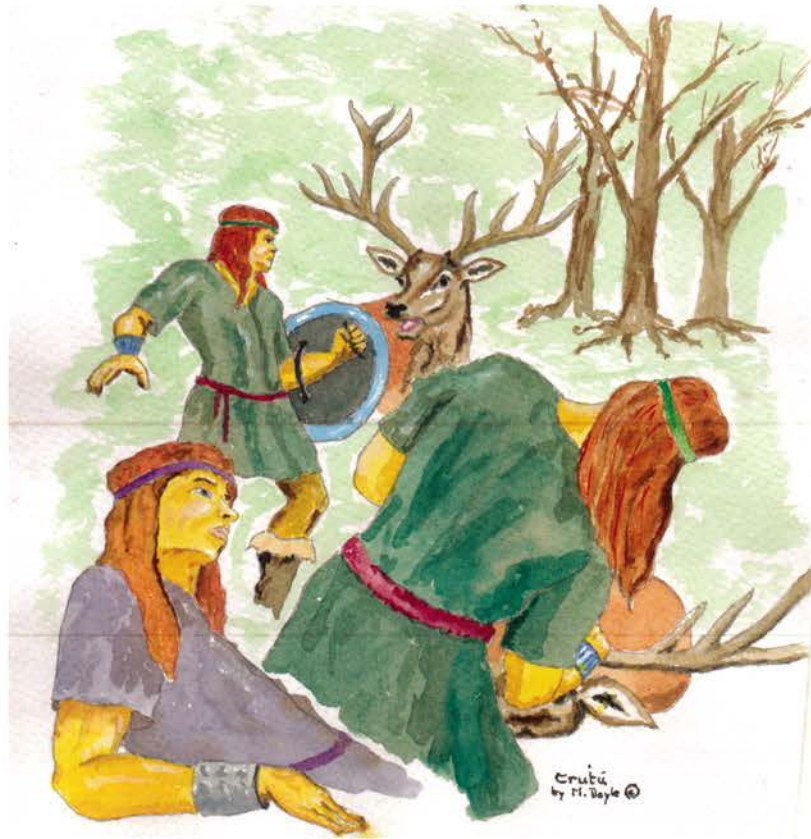
Martin Doyle

LEITRIM, a county of beauty with stunning views of lakes and dark forests, it has held onto its rugged and rolling landscape although to a lesser degree.

During the time of the Fianna and the great warriors, the area of Leitrim, was known as the neutral zone, also to be known as the enchanted lands, and was situated between the four provinces of Eire, the heroes and heroines that were part of this land were never spoken of, because of its neutrality and peace abiding ways, this area was used constantly to broker peace between the feuding tribes, it was a place of virtue, knowledge, and of course wizardry. Only the greatest sorcerers, bards, poets, and scholars of Eire lived within this land, so it also needed the finest of protectors and defenders to keep it safe from any influences of its neighbours.

Permission was granted for passage of supplies and livestock by the high council of the zone, through safe trails, and would be protected, by the guardians, and on occasions traders from far off lands would seek council there, with the high priests, on who or where they should trade. Seekers were sent to gather information from the four provinces, on tribal disputes, strange ships from the outer lands, and on the movements of the armies of the high kings, this information was vital to maintain peace and stability in Eire.

The enchanted lands, like most of Eire, had many lakes and forests, and some were so dense with trees that no light could penetrate, only the guardians knew the safe routes



through them as there were few marked trails and this was vital so as to keep the meetings of the high council secret.

The lands could be dangerous as many wild animals roamed within them, for there were, wolves, wild boar, bears and wild cats, the lakes were full, with salmon, trout and other fish as large as the wild pigs, the land also produced wild berries and chestnuts, it was a very fruitful zone, but it had to be guarded, as it was here disputes were settled, by talks or challenges or games.

One story from the chronicles, is of a hunt, that strayed into the neutral zone, and in that hunting party was a young warrior called Chucullain, now Chucullain was known for his strength and guile throughout Eire,

but the laws of the enchanted lands could show no fear or favour, for it was forbidden to cross onto these lands without permission from the high council, so on seeing this trespass, one of the guardians, by the name of Finbarr McRoss, had to issue a challenge, Finbarr was a tall broad shouldered man with a dark rugged complexion and long black hair, he was well versed in the arts of weaponry but always preferred negotiation, he had to stop any further incursion into the protected zone, a loud cry was heard to the hunting party from the darkness of the tree lined bank, to stop and identify themselves, as the party came to a halt, Finbarr rode up close and dismounted from his horse, he said to the riders, "do you know you have entered the neutral zone" the reply was swift from

one of the men, saying “and do you know to whom you speak” I am Conall Cearnach and this is Chucullain the champion of Ulster and the best warrior in all of Eire” Finbar replied quietly, “I am pleased to make the acquaintance of such a fine warrior, your reputation is well known to me and to others in this land and also of the rest of your hunting party” but I must ask you to turn about and go back from where you came, for I am Finbar Mc Ross one of the guardian of the enchanted land, and unless you have permission, you cannot enter here,

A loud cry was heard to the hunting party from the darkness of the tree-lined bank, for them to stop and identify themselves. As the party came to a halt, Finbar rode up close and dismounted. He said to the riders: “Do you know you have entered the neutral zone?” The reply was swift from one of the men: “And do you know to whom you speak?” I am Fergus MacRoth and this is Chucullain the champion of Ulster and the best warrior in all of Eire” Finbar replied quietly, “I am pleased to make the acquaintance of such a fine warrior, your reputation is well known to me and to others in this land and also of the rest of your hunting party but I must ask you to turn about and go back from where you came, for I am Finbar McRoss one of the guardian of the enchanted land, and unless you have permission, you cannot enter here”.

Chucullain was saying nothing for now, but was looking closely at Finbar, who had the nerve to ask them to turnabout now knowing to whom he spoke, Conall spoke again, saying that they were in pursuit of the king of stags the biggest they had seen and would not turn from

there quarry, Finbar once again in a quiet voice told them that they were in the protected zone, and the stag was now under his protection, Chucullain was by now getting agitated, and got down from his horse, he paced around Finbar looking him up and down, then spoke, he said you have been told who I am and you know of my reputation, yet you still ask us to turn around, you are just one man, are you a foolish soul that has no more use of life, or do you feel in some form of combat you can best me?

Finbars reply was calm, saying, yes you have told me who you are and I have great respect for your reputation, but I am chief guardian of these lands on the eastern zone, I would hope that you as a proud and honest guardian of Ulster would understand my position, but if you continue with your quest then I must challenge your decision to go on, Chucullain turned to his hunting party and bid them to wait for him further back on the trail, while he would talk with the guardian, when they had gone, Chucullain with curiosity, asked Finbar of his skill with a spear and challenged him in a throwing contest, Finbar agreed as he new this would calm this situation and all would be quiet, when from out of nowhere came a snorting sound, and Finbar with an almighty bang from his shield pushed Chucullain flat to the ground and stepped right in front of a charging stag, he was lifted off the ground, but when his feet touched down again, Finbar had a firm grip of the impressive king stag’s antlers and before Chucullain could get to his feet, Finbar had the beast thrown to the ground and with his great strength he twisted on the stag’s neck and aloud crack rang out and shook the forest, and the stag’s

body fell limp onto the ground,

Chucullain, now on his feet, looked at Finbar and held his hand out to him in gratitude and thank him for his gesture and his bravery, Chucullain “I taught this beast was under your protection,” Finbar replied, but so are you, champion of Ulster, the stag comes second, Chucullain “ you are indeed a skilled an honourable warrior, and you have my thanks for watching my back, and my friendship Finbar Mc Ross, and I shall not forget you” thank you Chucullain, it is an honour to have the champion of Ulster as a friend, and as you know being the guardian of the land does not come lightly, yes, agreed said Chucullain, I shall speak when I get back, so no one shall enter without the permission of the council of these lands. Chucullain take care to watch your own back, there are to many who would like to see Eire thrown into turmoil, we as trusted warriors have the task to keep it peaceful, may the gods of earth and sky be with you Chucullain, and with you also Finbar.



Tom Lynch, Mohill, who passed away on January 28th 2011. Des Flynn, also died the same day, in the same ward, in St Patrick’s Hospital, Carrick. Both were former winners of Leitrim Guardian Literary awards. Our condolences to their families