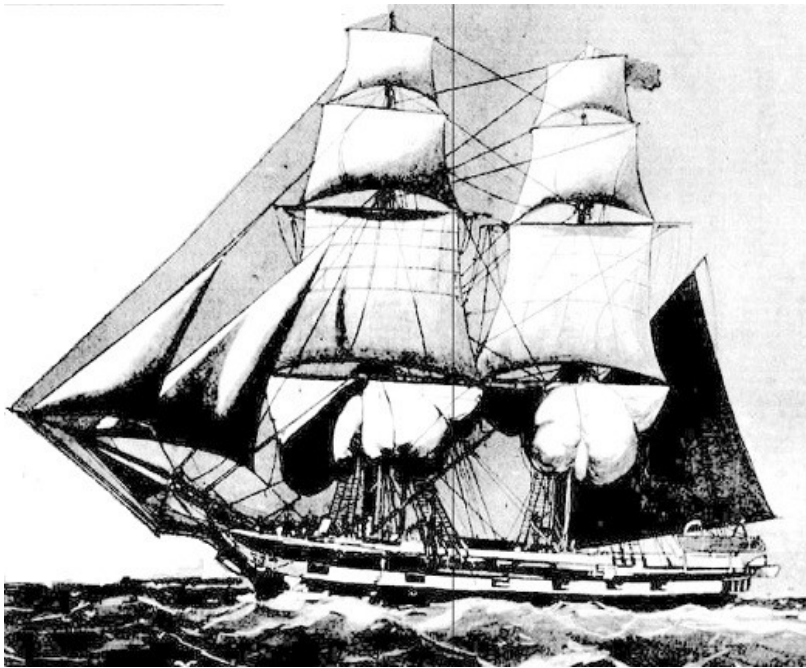


## Chapter 7 - Memories of Myth and Mystery

In 1869 a few years before I turned thirty I was swept off my feet by Ann Heagney a tiny, very Irish lass with beautiful long black hair and coal black eyes. Firstborn of five, her Parents Pat and Mary, were graziers on a property in the upper Hunter near Muswellbrook. Ann was all of 20 years, and me a strapping 27. Our romance was love at first sight, and our passion peaked with no priest within cooee to bless our union. Faith we had aplenty towards the God whose creation we enjoyed so profusely. Living as we did then, surrounded by bountiful nature, we experienced in our daily round, moment by moment, the wondrous hand of God in every instant of our living. Immersed in God's world and handiwork, we lived each moment in the mind of God.

Twelve years before, when Mum died along with daughter Catherine, faith itself was sorely tested as I plunged into an abyss of misery and despair. But time so gently heals all wounds. My mourning self I lost amidst the majesty of mountains, fields and streams. My life revived as I trekked the bush, by bridle trail. It was God's own country, my journey from Clarence Mouth to Armidale, the land leg of mail to and from Sydney and the world.<sup>1</sup> The sea leg had already sped mail north to me skirting rivers, regularly and often swollen brown with muddied flood.

'Practise the presence of God!' These words of my dear departed mother, echoed in my soul and etched into my being as I rode the mountain trail by canyon, gorge and stream, from coastal field and plain up into our eastern tableland. From out deep gloom, I grew to love this land of promise. Mum's voice wafted to me on the balmy summer breeze. 'Life has many ups and downs. Through all, to God be true. Grateful for his daily care, gratitude for all that is, for God is everywhere'.



Such simple truth, learned at my mother's knee, gradually shone through, dispersing a mist of gloom to enrich my life. For aeons God has been creating a myriad of creatures, mobilising the sun, the moon, our earth, all in perfect order. The single origin of all I found to be the mind of God. Faith, a mind inclined to believe in God, rekindled in my heart. From out of the ashes of despair, memories of Mum emerged to enrich my life. Ma's words swept back into my life. 'True Faith is not belief in humans thinking'.

Now understand a little my attraction, in later life, to the motto of the Glen Innes Examiner. 'Sworn to no Master, of no Sect am I.'<sup>2</sup> This saw, a byword of some unbelievers, stridently declared independence from an old world of warring fighting faiths. Such religious faith, built not on Divine wisdom, but founded on some human's revelation, is better left beyond the seas surrounding our new home. No longer, in this land so new and yet so old, need we to live a life sworn to any faith 'revering the prattling of humans, standing arrogantly along our path,'<sup>3</sup> be they king or queen, parson, priest or pope. Sadly some unbelievers require not just that one have no belief in God but demand a world without a God at all. Sadly some believers placed their belief not in God at all but in such human institutions that claim they speak with wisdom. Rule by divine right was claimed by

Pope and King and Parliament which finally decapitated this very notion.

British justice formed the faith of many in this outpost of empire. But with our fellow Irish pioneers we happily lived beyond the pale outside its clammy caul. We Irish, had been blighted by colonial conquest committed by our easterly island neighbours over many centuries. Imbued with mother's milk was Erin's history of injustice perpetrated by those strangers who kept arriving in our emerald isle down through the ages. They came and tried to teach us their ways. They mandated we abandon our Celtic faith in favour of English Pope or Norman King, or Protestant Tudor, or Parliamentary terror. They might as well gone chasing after rainbows or lighting penny candles from a star.



# Glen Innes Examiner

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" Sworn to no Master, of no Sect am I. "

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For centuries, the living core of Erin's pagan love of nature was illumined by light from our golden sun.<sup>4</sup> Spellbound, we kid's listened to Mum's telling<sup>5</sup> of the tales of Eriu, goddess of the isle to which she gave her name. Erin's shore now left behind, so far across the sea. Husband to Eriu, Mac Greine, was son of the Sun and last triumvirate king of the mythical Tuatha De Danann. The lot of these people of Danu, their mother goddess, was defeat at the hands of Gaulish invaders. After the battles of Sliab Mis and Tailtie, the people of the goddess Danu surrendered to the Iberian Milesian invaders. The terms of surrender divided the isle in two, half to each. But it soon became clear who was confined to the half below the surface of the land. Forced to retreat underground and dwell in the many sidhe mounds that dot the islands landscape, these people of Danu became the little people.



Oh! What tales Mum told, emerging from the mist of memories of her childhood in the Emerald Isle. Mum maintained our ancient oral tradition was based on records such as the Book of Invasions.<sup>6</sup> We relived fabulous fables of our mystic ancestry as we snuggled for warmth around a flickering fire in our old bark hut. Excitement it was, that kept us warm and fired our imagination, for in the outside darkness, southerly gales howled across the wintry tableland, winds a wailing like the keening call of Banshee. On such nights we feared the sound of any knocking at our door. Would we be visited by such a 'Woman of the Sidhe'.<sup>7</sup> A ghostly arrival from our ancestors, searching out a soul whose time on earth was up, to guide it to a family reunion in the spirit world. What indeed went on inside those mystery mounds where fairy folk and

leprechauns, the little people, were thought to dwell. Tales of enigmatic ancient burial piles shrouded in mystery nurtured and sustained our racial memory of ancestral pre-Celtic occupants of the emerald isle.

We learnt of Bealtaine, a festival of light when fires flared on hilltops across Éireann to signal the start of summer; ('It was the month o' May back home' Mum ruefully remembered). On the hill of Slane, Patrick challenged both King and Druid with the Easter fire he lit. High King Laoire banned any other fires while his fire raged on Tara. From that Summer in 433, the lineage of Celtic kings (Ard Rí na hÉireann) became dependent on the belief that the Christian God would bring them good fortune. While Rome was being sacked and Europe was plunging into ages dark, Hibernia, so named by Romans who never battled us Scotti, grew its own magnificent Celtic Church.

Thus bloomed the 'island of saints and scholars' ready to rejuvenate Europe when its darkest days were done. In the process, Erin's primal connection, via nature, with divinity was eclipsed. God's golden gift of real sunlight was overshadowed by the symbolic light of Christ that brought little change to the warlike ways of Irish kings even through several centuries of Celtic Christianity. As the millennium approached, faith in kings and their



arrogant prattle still lead armies to the madness of mutual destruction. Believers following the Ua Briain were regularly locked in mutual massacre with believers in the Ui Neill, fighting over the Kingship of Ireland. Faith in this king or that king, Irish, then Norman, then English, has despatched multitudes down the generations to face their Maker. 'Surprised they be', declared Mum, 'to be dead and find God to be on neither side. God creates his children to be happy, to be living happily here on earth in a harmony reflecting heavens'.

Lought by name, Selina, our Mum filled us Quinn's with pride that transcended the simplicity of our house and home. Our name itself had meaning. 'O Conn' boasted a lineage descended from a legendary High King of Ireland, Conn<sup>8</sup> of the Hundred Battles.<sup>9</sup> Of course, we never met or even knew her Lought Ma and Pa, Mary and James, both Dubliners. Their daughter, our mother, was born in 1819 just three years after a cast iron footbridge replaced Walsh

ferries for crossing the Liffey. Mum referred to it always as the 'ha'penny bridge' a toll she, as a minor, never had to pay. Now reduced to nothing; both Mum and our newly born sister, Catherine, tragically taken from life.<sup>10</sup>

Through a mist of memories Mum still inhabited my dreams. Oh! The yarns that Mum had spun. She brought to life the vanished culture of her oppressed nation. Mum also led us to see inside the sorry story of conquest in our colony with its destruction of the local people. Aboriginals too were being turfed off their land as though they were a blight on progress. A conspiracy of silence covered up foul deeds and eluded Empire's rule of justice. Nothing need be said save they were godless heathens and we could save their souls. In the name of Christian God our Creator God could be ignored at will to suit the will of men of murder who, as ever had their way.

The death of undefeated Brian Boru most surely was a blow to belief itself. Killed in prayer was he after victory over invading Vikings at Clontarf on the bay just north of Mum's beloved Liffey. Both father, son and grandson perished in that battle Brian won.<sup>11</sup> What devastating loss was such a victory? Dublin Vikings may have been the winners of the

peace by only looking on. That 1014 Good Friday battle confirmed Brian as King not even for a day. The Irish Peace that followed, ever only a partial peace, was peppered with war within, as Kings of counties across the island vied for whatever, but never victory. 'Slaughter has its own reward; repayment in like kind'. On and on spoke Mum about the futility of war. 'Slaughtered souls return a haunting in a spirit of revenge'.

Niall O Cuinn, the first of the Dalcassian sept to call his name Quinn, departed this life and the field of battle at one and the same time. Of Thomond in County Clare, this originator of the Quinn name was killed in a battle to which his belief had brought him. He joined thousands who believed in Brian. And yet he died before Boru in that battle in the field of bulls. The Quinns of this sept claim descent from Ifearnan, the son of Corc, who was 15th in the ancestral line from Cormac Cas, the son of Oillio Olum.<sup>12</sup> As King of Munster and Leath Moga. He was more generally associated, in a tale so often told, with the summer goddess,<sup>13</sup> Áine of the Tuatha Dé Danann.<sup>14</sup> In just such a manner we learned at our mother's knee, the high points of our ancient history. A tale it was, some say a taradiddle, begun in the mythic mists of time. Endures it does despite the decline of our Celtic bardic tradition, so often passed on from the past, through hedge schools of an era closer to our time.

Mum enchanted us with yarns of her beloved county Louth. The very first High King, Slaine son of Dela of the Fir Bolg ruled but one year only. Munster in the south was then shared by two of his brothers while Connacht and Ulster went to two other brothers, Genann and Rudraige respectively. The four elected Sláine as ruler over them.<sup>15</sup> Kingship in Ireland seemed a very collaborative affair with opposition from contenders an elemental condition. Buried was the Ard Ri at Slane, some thousand years or more before the Christian era.



Selina Louth, so proud of the county whose name she bore, told of great stone temple tombs, covered with mounds of earth built on hilltops to emphasise their size. More than just burial mounds, these enormous grave tombs,<sup>16</sup> constructed over five thousand years ago, were sacred to the memory of Erin's Divine mythic ancestors. 'Probably sacred to the earth goddess, their positioning shows how the dead could look down on the living while the living looked up to the ancestors who provided protection for the tribe'.<sup>17</sup> Many mounds, completed even before Stonehenge or Egypt's pyramids, are precisely aligned to mark the seasons when the sun stands still.<sup>18</sup> Ancient boulders<sup>19</sup> used in their construction were rafted<sup>20</sup> from the rocky headland<sup>21</sup> at Clougherhead,<sup>22</sup> up through Louth Meath to the Bend in the Boyne. Three millennia pass before that same river sheltered Viking raiders.<sup>23</sup>

Tara Hill remained the seat of the Ard Ri of Ireland<sup>24</sup> through the time of the mythical pre-Celtic Tuatha Dé Danann. The harp that once thrilled Tara's hill had soothed the souls of many at the court of the High King of Ireland. Children of Danu, the Gaelic Mother Goddess were legendary victors over the Fir Bolg. So impressed with their opponents nobility, the defeated Fir Bolg were offered one-quarter of the Island as their own.<sup>25</sup> They choose Connacht. That first Battle of Mag Tuired<sup>26</sup> near Cong on the isthmus connecting Loch Corrib and Loch Mask was won by Nuada, who lost an arm in battle requiring his resignation as High King.

Mum's tale most loved by all us kids, told of the reinstatement of Nuada as Aid Ri after his silver replacement arm turned to flesh and blood.<sup>27</sup> His great sword was only one of the four treasures of these deities. No one ever escaped this sword once drawn from its sheath, and none could resist its thrust. These Demigods flaunt three more magical treasures: the spear of Lug, against which no battle could be sustained; the cauldron of Dagda, their father God, from which no company ever left unsatisfied; and the stone of Fal, located on the Hill of Tara. Her story of the stone was my personal pick, for this stone of destiny would cry out beneath a real Ard Ri when he stepped to it at his coronation.<sup>28</sup> And that's not all, his sword was also magical while Enbarr his horse could travel over water as well as over land, Wave-Sweeper was his magic currach, a coracle boat extraordinaire. And of course, his hound, Salinnis, was the envy of every bog-eyed boy ever to hear his tale.



Around 500 BC according to Mum and Irish mythology, Milesians, the last wave of Erin's mythic invaders arrived, probably from Hispania. Myth gave way to history when the Goidels infiltrated Ireland in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.<sup>29</sup> In 433 CE as High King Loegaoire celebrated Bealtane with Baal's bonfire at Tara,<sup>30</sup> he was perturbed by Patrick's prior fire to the north across the Boyne, on the Hill of Slane. This Paschal fire, lit by a saintly man in defiance of Druidic tradition and High King, heralded the advent of the Light of Christ, shining to rival the Sun worship of our Celtic tradition. This Celtic Christianity prospered for over seven centuries that saw Vikings invade and then assimilate. Then a Papal initiative to regularise the Irish sent Normans into Ireland.

In 1154 Adrian authorised Henry II to proceed to Ireland 'in order 'to check the torrent of wickedness, to reform evil manners, to sow the seeds of virtue'.<sup>31</sup> Celtic Christian culture, later ridiculed as 'rude and ignorant' was under threat. Even the Kingship of Ireland terminated when the Normans 'invaded'. More exactly their invasion was at the invitation of a deposed King of Leinster seeking help for his cause. In 1171, Norman King Henry II of England declared himself Lord of Ireland,<sup>32</sup> effectively nullifying the centuries old Irish traditional squabble for kingship. But still for centuries, the Irish squabbled over which foreign reagent to support. And in the ensuing centuries, as the Papacy lost control over much of Christendom through the Reformation, Ireland was set for yet another thousand years of even more destructive divisions along so-called religious lines. Of course, Mum burdened and enriched us with her lists of dates and times. But sadly she had burdened herself with a deep and dreary melancholic sadness as she pondered on the sorry repetition of historical mistakes she saw in our treatment of the locals. 'Not to learn from our mistakes is the biggest mistake of all.'

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