



Leafy Lane / Bóithrín faoi dhuilliúr (David Ruffles)



Seanadh Mhóinín Woods / Coill Sheanadh Mhóinín

CRAINN SAN AM ATÁ CAITE

STAIR NA COILLEARNAÍ I NGAILLIMH

Go luath tar éis dheireadh na hoighearaoise deireanaí, tuairim is 10,000 bliain ó shin, bhí Éire faoi chumhdach foraoise ó chósta go cósta. D'fhorbair na coillearnacha cianaosta sin thar na mílte bliain agus bhí siad comhdhéanta de mheascán crann, an dair, an leamhán, an fhuinseog, an péine Albanach, an bheith, an coll, an cuileann agus fiú an t-iúr ina measc. Thosaigh an cumhdach foraoise ag meath tuairim is 6000 bliain ó shin, tar éis theacht na céad fheirmeoirí, a leag na coillte chun féarach a chruthú agus an talamh a shaothrú. Tháinig borradh faoi leagan na gcoillte i ndeireadh an 16ú haois agus i dtús an 17ú haois, mar go raibh adhmaid ag teastáil le haghaidh thionscail an iarainn, na gloine, na cúipéireachta, agus na longthógála. Chomh maith leis sin tháinig meath ar na coillearnacha nuair a tháinig éileamh níos mó ar thalamh talmhaíochta agus ar bhreosla mar thoradh ar mhéadú sa daonra. Lean an meath sa chumhdach coillearnaí go dtí na céadta deireanacha nuair a thit an cumhdach coillearnaí faoi 2% faoi dheireadh na 1800idí.

Ó lár an 18ú haois ar aghaidh, spreagadh úinéirí móra talaimh, go háirithe iad sin ar dhiméinte agus ar eastáit, chun a dtailte a fheabhsú trí chrainn a chur. Is crainn leathanduilleacha a bhí i gceist den chuid is mó sa chur sin, go háirithe crainn darach, ach níos deireanaí sa chéad cuireadh tuilleadh crann buaircíneach de réir a chéile.

Bhí an chuid ba mhó de Chontae na Gaillimhe faoi chumhdach coillearnaí sular tosaíodh ar an bhfeirmeoireacht; fiú fásach Chonamara agus Oileáin Árann. Tháinig meath seasta i gcumhdach na gcrann le linn stair fhada agus shuibhir na gníomhaíochta daonna i nGaillimh, ach tá corrcheantar tábhachtach den tseanchoillearnach dhúchasach fós inniu ann, mar shampla i nDoire Chraige gar don Ghráig, i Seanadh Mhóinín gar don Spidéal i gConamara agus i nGort an Charnáin gar don Ghort. Bhí leathadh bratphortaigh i gceantair ina bhfuil buncharraig aigéadach, leithéidí Chonamara agus Shliabh Eachtaí, ina thoradh ar an meath sa chumhdach coillearnaí. I gceantair ina bhfuil ithir éadomhain ar aolchloch, mar atá in Oileáin Árann agus i gcuid d'oidheisceart na Gaillimhe, creimeadh an ithir agus nochtadh an bhuncharraig aolchloiche faoi de bharr leagan na coillearnaí.



DUG-OUT CANOES

An ancient canoe was discovered in 2002 on a beach near Bearna by a local man (Brian Ó Carra) and his son. It is conserved in an underwater display in the Galway Atlantiquaria in Salthill. The vessel, carved out of pine, is one of 350 dug-out canoes found in the country to date. The 'Lurgan Logboat' found in Addergoole Bog near Milltown in north Galway is displayed in the National Museum. At over 15 m long and over 1 m wide it was a huge craft and is currently the oldest intact logboat ever found in Western Europe (radiocarbon dated to 2200 BC). This logboat must have been carved out of a giant oak tree, the like of which we no longer have today.

TREE LORE

Since earliest times, trees played a central role in people's lives in Ireland as reflected in our early alphabet, spiritual beliefs, legal system and folklore. Trees were highly valued by our ancestors because of their huge importance as a basic commodity used for building, fuel and as a food source. Niall Mac Coitir's beautiful book 'Irish Trees: Myths, Legends and Folklore' describes in great detail this vast and fascinating legacy.

Under the system of Brehon Law in ancient Ireland, trees were classified into various categories, with a series of laws governing their use and fines for damaging or cutting trees without the permission of the landowner. 'Nobles' of the woods were considered to have the highest value. These included: Oak (acorns and dignity), Hazel (nuts and rods), Holly, Yew (noble artefacts), Ash, Pine (resin) and Apple (fruit and bark). 'Commoners' of the wood were thought to be of lesser value e.g. Hawthorn, Rowan and Alder. Many characters of the Ogham alphabet, an early medieval alphabet used for writing in Irish, were named after trees. For example, the word for the letter B was Beith (Birch), while C was Coll (Hazel).



BÁID SCAOBTHA

Fuair fear áitiúil (Brian Ó Carra) agus a mhac bád scaobtha ársa ar thrá gar do Bhearna sa bhliain 2002. Tá sé caomhnaithe faoi uisce agus ar taispeáint in Uisceadán Náisiúnta na hÉireann i mBóthar na Trá i nGaillimh. Tá an soitheach, atá snoite as péine, ar cheann de 350 bád scaobtha a fuarthas sa tír go dtí seo. Tá Bád Scaobtha na Lorgan, a fuarthas i bPortach Eadargúla gar do Bhaile an Mhuilinn i dtuaisceart na Gaillimhe, ar taispeáint san Ard-Mhúsaem. Agus é níos faide ná 15 m agus níos leithne ná 1 m, is soitheach ollmhór a bhí ann agus tá sé fós ar an mbád scaobtha slán is sine a fuarthas riamh in iarthar na hEorpa (radacarbóin-dátaithe go 2200 RCh). Ní foláir nó gur snoíodh as crann darach ollmhór an bád scaobtha sin, agus níl a leithéid de chrann inniu againn.

SEANCHAS NA GCRANN

Ó thosach aimsire, bhí ról lárnach ag crainn i saol na ndaoine in Éirinn, mar a léirítear inár n-aibítir luath, inár gcreidimh spioradálta, inár gcóras dlí agus inár seanchas. Bhí ardmheas ag ár sinsear ar chrainn mar gheall ar an tábhacht mhór a bhí acu mar bhunearra le húsáid sa tógáil, mar bhreosla agus mar fhoinsé bia. Déantar cur síos mion ar an oidhreacht leathan an-spéisiúil seo i leabhar álainn Néill Mhic Coitir 'Irish Trees: Myths, Legends and Folklore'.

Faoi chóras an Fhéineachais in Éirinn fadó, rangáíodh crainn i ranganna éagsúla, le sraith dlíthe ag rialú a n-úsáid agus fíneálacha ann as dochar a dhéanamh do chrainn nó iad a ghearradh gan chead an úinéara talún. Measadh go raibh an luach is airde ag 'uaisle' na gcoillte. Ina measc bhí: an dair (dearcáin agus dínit), an coll (cnónna agus slata), an cuileann, an t-iúr (déantáin uaisle), an fhuinseog, an péine (roisín) agus an t-úll (toradh agus coirt). Measadh go raibh luach níos ísle ag 'ísle' na coille, e.g. an sreach gheal, an crann caorthainn agus an fhearnóg. Ainmníodh roinnt mhaith de litreacha na haibítire oghaim, aibítir Ghaeilge na meánaoise luaithe, as crainn. Mar shampla, ba í an bheith an litir B agus an coll an litir C.



Hawthorn/ Sceach

Holy trees, rag trees and fairy trees are still found throughout the Galway countryside, and many more have slipped into legend. Fairy trees or 'lone trees' were thought to be where fairies live and/or led to the underworld. Either way, they were to be approached with caution! Fairy trees are usually isolated Hawthorn bushes but sometimes they are Oak, Ash or Crab Apple. There are many stories about people who deliberately or inadvertently damaged a fairy tree and subsequently came to harm as the fairies took their revenge!

Holy trees or rag trees are special trees that are considered to have spiritual properties. Rags, religious icons and items, and other paraphernalia are sometimes tied or hung on the tree by people to help resolve problems and/or cure illness. Sometimes the offering represents a wish or aspiration which will come to pass. In some cases coins are pressed into the bark of the tree. Holy trees are often associated with holy wells. There were also many folk customs and superstitions associated with trees, some of which were considered to have magical powers.

Hazel was considered by our ancestors to be the 'tree of knowledge'. It was a symbol of fertility, wisdom and knowledge. The Salmon of Knowledge, unwittingly tasted by Fionn mac Cumhaill, fed on hazelnuts which had dropped into the Well of Segais. Hazel has been used for centuries for water divining and still is today.

Hawthorn was a symbol of fertility and protection, and strongly associated with the fairies. It was regarded with a mixture of fear and respect, especially the 'fairy trees' or 'lone bushes'. Many people still think bringing hawthorn into the house will bring bad luck. Hawthorn is associated with the Ogham letter 'Uath', which means fear.

One of our few native conifers, Yew was also considered sacred and therefore it was very unlucky to cut a Yew tree down or to damage it. It was also thought to have magical power and druids made their wands and staffs from Yew.

Faightear fós crainn bheannaithe, crainn cheirteacha agus crainn sí ar fud na tuaithe i nGaillimh, agus tá go leor eile sna finscéalta. Ceapadh gur i gcrainn sí nó crainn scoite a mhair na síoga agus/nó a raibh an bealach go dtí na hamhais tríothu. Pé scéal é, bhíothas le teacht i ngiorracht dóibh go cúramach! Is iondúil gur toim scoite na sceiche gile a bhíonn sna crainn sí ach uaireanta is dair, fuinseog nó fia-úll a bhíonn iontu. Tá scéalta go leor ann faoi dhaoine a rinne dochar trí thimpiste nó d'aonturas do chrann sí agus a ndearnadh díobháil dóibh nuair a bhain na síoga díoltas amach!

Is crainn speisialta, a gceaptar fúthu go bhfuil tréithe spioradálta iontu, iad na crainn bheannaithe nó na crainn cheirteacha. Uaireanta ceanglaíonn nó crochann daoine ceirteacha, samhla agus nithe diaganta agus giúirléidí eile ar an gcrann chun deacrachtaí a réiteach nó tinneas a leigheas. Amanna léiríonn an tairiscint toil nó mian a thiocfaidh sa saol. I gcásanna áirithe brúitear boinn isteach i gcoirt an chrainn. Is minic a luaitear crainn bheannaithe le toibreacha beannaithe. Bhí go leor nósanna agus piseoga ag na daoine a bhí ceangailte le crainn, agus creideadh go raibh draíocht ag baint le cuid de na crainn.

Mheas ár sinsear gur 'crann feasa' a bhí sa choll. Ba shiombail na torthúlachta, na gaoise agus an fheasa a bhí ann. D'ith an 'Bradán Feasa', a bhlaís Fionn Mac Cumhaill de thaisme, collchnónna a thit i dTobar Seaghais. D'úsáidí an coll ar feadh na gcéadta le haghaidh collóireachta agus úsáidtear fós inniu é.

Ba shiombail na torthúlachta agus na cosanta a bhí sa sceach gheal, agus bhí baint mhór aige leis na síoga. Is idir eagla agus urraim an dearcadh a bhí ag daoine air, go háirithe ar na crainn sí nó na toim scoite. Tá go leor daoine a chreideann fós go leanfaidh an mí-ádh an sceach gheal a thabhairt isteach sa teach. Tá an sceach gheal bainteach leis an litir oghaim Uath, a chiallaíonn eagla.

Measadh gur bheannaithe an t-iúr, ceann dár mbeagán crann buaircíneach dúchasach, agus dá bhrí sin leanadh an mí-ádh dá ngearrtaí an crann nó dá ndéantaí damáiste dó. Ceapadh, freisin, go raibh cumhacht draíochtúil aige agus is as an iúr a dhéanadh draoithe a slata agus a lorgaí.



Rag tree in Clonfert
Crann ceirteacha i gCluain Fearta





Yew / An tIúr

A Blackthorn stick was thought to provide protection against harm and was thought to be a good thing to carry at night. It was also thought by many to be an unlucky tree. In Maigh Cuilinn, it was customary to drink sloe wine at Halloween. In Ireland, Holly was classified as a 'crann uasal' a 'gentle' or 'noble' tree. It was a symbol of strength, magical power and protection.

There are many stories about trees in folklore from Galway. St. Colman mac Duach is said to have been born under the sacred Ash at the well in Kiltartan, Gort in AD 810 (known as St. Colman's well). This tree apparently grew from a stake or staff, which was driven into the ground and miraculously began to grow. St. Colman mac Duach founded the monastery at Kilmacduagh near Gort. Apparently the saint had an extraordinary tree there, Cuaille Mhic Duach or Mac Duach's Stake, which had the reputation for saving people from an untimely death.

There is a macabre story of an ancient Hawthorn growing along the road between Clifden and Cashel, which marks a spot where lone travellers were supposedly murdered by the proprietor of an isolated inn! It is thought locally that the tree is haunted as an old man has been seen sitting there despite the fact that there are no inhabited houses nearby. Bodies of victims were said to have been dumped in a nearby lake. There are a number of Holly trees growing between the 'haunted tree' and the lake and these are believed to be the reincarnated bodies of the murder victims!



Blackthorn / An Draighean

Síleadh gur thug bata draighin cosaint in aghaidh dochair agus gur mhaith an ní a bhí ann le hiompar san oíche. Cheap go leor daoine, freisin, gur chrann mí-ámharach a bhí ann. I Maigh Cuilinn, bhí sé de nós ag daoine fíon airne a ól faoi Shamhain. In Éirinn rangaíodh an cuileann mar chrann uasal. Ba chomhartha nirt, cumhachta draíochta agus cosanta a bhí ann.

Ta go leor scéalta faoi chrainn i mbéaloideas na Gaillimhe. Deirtear gur rugadh Naomh Colmán Mac Duach faoin fhuinseog bheannaithe gar don tobar i gCill Tartan sa Ghort sa bhliain AD 810 (a aithnítear mar thobar Cholmáin). Is cosúil gur fhás an crann seo as cuaille nó bachall a sádh sa talamh agus a thosaigh ag fás go míorúilteach. Bhunaigh Naomh Colmán Mac Duach an mhainistir i gCill Mhic Dhuach gar don Ghort. Is cosúil go raibh crann neamhghnách ag an naomh ansin, Cuaille Mhic Dhuach, a raibh an cháil air gur shábháil sé daoine ó bhás anabáí.

Tá scéal adhfhuafar ann faoi dhraighean ársa ag fás ar an mbóthar idir An Clochán agus An Caiseal, agus a léiríonn an áit ar dhúnmharaigh úinéir tí ósta iargúlta daoine a bhí ag taisteal ina n-aonair, más fíor. Ceaptar go háitiúil go bhfuil taibhse faoin gcrann mar go bhfacthas seanfhear ina shuí ann, cé nach bhfuil aon chónaí sna tithe máguaird. Deirtear gur caitheadh coirp na n-íobartach i loch gar don láthair. Tá roinnt crann cuilinn ag fás idir an 'crann mallaithe' agus an loch agus creidtear gurb iad sin coirp athionchollaithe na n-íobartach dúnmharaithe.





Majestic beech tree in Runnymede / Crann Beiche mórga i Runnymede (Michael Burke)

A large Ash in "The Lawn" at Eyrecourt Castle had a holy well in its bough. The well was reputed to cure warts! The tree had fourteen large roots that were regarded as representing Stations of the Cross by pilgrims. Sadly the tree no longer stands. Seven groves of beech trees were planted in Eyrecourt on the eastern crest of Redmount Hill in honour of the seven daughters of John and Eleanor Eyre. The trees form what became known locally as 'The Seven Sisters'.

Trees were also important as meeting points and as landscape features in the past. The great Ash tree at Duniry, Loughrea, is said to have housed a hedge school and been an important site for gatherings in times past.



Bhí tobar beannaithe i gcrabhb fuinseoige móire ar an bhfaiche i gCaisleán Dhún an Uchta. Bhí an cháil ar an tobar gur leigheas sé faithní! Bhí ceithre fhréamh déag mhóra ar an gcrann agus ba é dearcadh na n-oilithreach gur léirigh siad Turas na Croise. Faraor, níl an crann ina sheasamh níos mó. Cuireadh seacht ndoire feá i nDún an Uchta ar cholbha thoir Chnoc Redmount in onóir seachtar iníonacha John agus Eleanor Eyre. Déanann na crainn an rud a dtugtar 'An Seachtar Iníonacha' go háitiúil orthu.

Bhí crainn tábhachtach mar áiteanna cruinnithe agus mar ghnéithe tírdhreacha san am atá caite. Deirtear gur tugadh dídean do scoil scairte faoin bhfuinseog mhór i nDún Doighre agus gur láthair thábhachtach cruinnithe a bhíodh ann san am atá caite.

