

Oak Royal

A historical local legend from Aberfoyle, contributed by John Barrington

Many years ago there was a small kingdom on the edge of the Scottish Highlands. Here lived a pretty king called Eochaid [say *ee sha*], a grandson of the great Kenneth MacAlpine. The kin's wooden fortress stood on a hilltop of magic rock, known today as 'pudding stone' or conglomerate, overlooking the River Forth. A township stood by.

On mid-summer Eve AD 884 the whole place was filled with gaiety and music and no food or drink was denied as they caroused into the small hours. This was King Eochaid's wedding feast. The night was in full flow when the captain of the guard reported that strange sounds were coming from a grove of ancient oak trees, standing below the fortress walls.

The king was beside himself with fury. Who would dare intrude into the sanctity of his wedding night? Calling his men to arms, they stormed out into the summer dim where neither light nor dark holds sway. Swords drawn, Eochaid led his men into the dark and sacred grove, a place no sober man would ever go, deep into the trees. There in the centre clearing, lit by pale light, they found a great number of faery folk holding a ceilidh of their own. Eochaid ordered an instant and brutal attack.

His warriors plunged and floundered among the faeries, slashing and stabbing at the tiny figures without harming a single one. Eventually, frustrated and exhausted by their efforts, they stood panting in confused rage. The king of the faeries stepped from a shadow. More in sorrow than in anger, he explained that his people had gathered here to celebrate this day, and to bring all good fortune, prosperity and a long life to this mortal monarch. Now, because of this rash response, all things must change. Within one year Eochaid and all his

people would be gone from this place. Not a sign would be left to show that they were ever here. And in the blink of an eye, the faeries vanished.

Days grew into weeks and summer soon passed away. Autumn's glow became the hardness of winter. Eventually the sun returned and the days lengthened. Life followed the set pattern as it did every year. The run-rig land had been prepared and planted and now the crops were growing under the summer sky. The words of the faery king were all but forgotten. Until, that is, the morning of June 18th, Saint Cyrus' Day, when the sun failed to rise-and the wind began to blow.

Beneath the darkness people were very afraid. The storm seemed to rise from no particular quarter but came from every direction, as if all the winds were united against them. The king and his people fled into the unnatural night and made for the hills.

Trees bent...then broke...then became completely uprooted and hurled into the sky. At once, a great whirlwind descended from the heavens, bringing down a forest of trees. First the fortress was surrounded, bringing down the wooden walls. Then all the swellings of the township were buried, never to be seen again.

Time passed and the twisted trees and broken wood gradually destroyed, returning to the earth. However, one day long after, a seedling oak appeared, growing from the heart of the obliterated ancient fortress. Now standing proud, a large and aged tree, it goes by the name of 'Oak Royal'-a folk memory of King Eochaid and the faeries' retribution upon him.