

Background of folk tales that appear in the story

The Story of Brychan Brycheiniog

Brychan Brycheiniog was a king of Brycheiniog in the 5th Century. Born in Ireland, he was the son of a Prince Anlach, Son of Coronac, and Marchell, heiress of the Welsh kingdom of Brycheiniog, then called Garthmadrún. After Brychan had grown up, war broke out between Anlach and Banadl, the Irish King of Powys. Anlach was forced to send Brychan to Powys as a hostage in order to protect their land. However, Brychan fell madly in love with his host's daughter, and she bore him a son named Cynog. When his father passed away, he returned to Garthmadrún and renamed the kingdom Brycheiniog.



The Legend of St Melangell

Melangell, daughter of an Irish prince, lived in a Welsh, quiet valley. Melangell's father had told her that she would marry a great and generous Irishman so, under God's guidance, she left her hometown and ventured to Wales where she found her valley. One day, Prince Brochwel, Prince of Powys, was hunting a hare. Brochwel and his hunting dogs followed the hare to a bush of brambles where he found a young woman praying. The hare was seen hiding under her garment and, whilst the prince ordered his dogs to attack, the dogs simply retreated howling. Prince Brochwel knew that God must have sent the hare to the young woman in refuge and so he called off his dogs. After this, Brochwel gave Melangell all the surrounding areas as a place of sanctuary. She is now named the patron Saint of Hares.



The Roaring Bull of Bagbury

In Bagbury, near Hyssington, once lived an evil squire. It was said that when he passed away, his soul could not find rest and therefore came back in the form of a monstrous bull. With his flaming eyes and fearsome horns, he haunted the lanes and his loud roars caused shutters and tiles to fly off buildings. The parson of St. Etheldreda's church confronted the monster, reciting prayers and passages from the Bible, and the creature began to shrink. The parson continued until nightfall by which time the beast was no larger than a small dog. They moved the bull into St. Etheldreda's Church to continue the process. However, when the parson's candle burnt out and forced him to stop preaching, the bull began to grow bigger and bigger until St Etheldreda's walls began to start cracking. The following day, the parson repeated the process with the help of villagers, until the bull was so small that it was placed in one of the villager's boots and tied tightly to prevent its escape. The bull was then buried beneath the doorstep of St. Etheldreda's where the parson



made many prayers to bind it there.

Celtic Tree of Life

The Tree of Life is seen as a symbol of nature's immense forces coming together and intertwining to create balance and harmony in the world. It represents strength, protection, knowledge, and wisdom. The entwined branches and roots symbolise how all living things are forever interconnected, bound together and dependent on one another. It is depicted as an oak tree which is the largest, strongest, and longest living of all trees. It is also seen as representing the cycle of life and the gift of rebirth as it is symbolic of the connection between heaven and earth.



The history of the Celtic Tree of Life is rooted in magic and folklore. The Ancient Celts believed that the Tree of Life carried magical powers, and so many important gatherings and rituals would take place underneath a nominated tree. The Celts believed it could provide food, shelter, medicine, and even new life, and cutting down someone else's Tree of Life was considered a majorly serious crime.



Cad Goddeu (The Battle of the Trees) by Taliesin Welsh to English translation

Part of the story this year is inspired by the ancient Welsh poem of Cad Goddeu/The Battle of the Trees. This section of the poem below talks about how the trees readied themselves for battle:

The alder at the front line foraged first.
Then, late for the fray,
came the willow and the rowan-tree.
The prickly blackthorn with bubbling zest,
the blackberry, its royal equal,
taking the position of the heir-apparent

in the thick of the fray.
Rose bushes now ventured forth
with venom against a host.
The raspberry came forming a circle
for the defence of life.
Now privet and honeysuckle,
ivy in its prime,
then the surge of the giant gorse.
Cherry trees had sounded the alarm;
With great pomp was the birch-tree there
donning its armour, not out of cowardice
lingering there, but decking herself for the occasion.
Almond trees arose, exotic trees with foreign nature.
Pine trees took over the centre of the hall:
in the chair of honour did the oak-tree
cut a dash before kings.
Then the lime-tree in all its splendour,
not flinching one foot,
cutting them down left, right and centre.
Hazel trees were now deemed worthy for the fray.
Blessed be the privet, battle-bullock,
king of the world.
Beeches excelled on sea and estuary.
The holly has put forth leaves anew,
now at its best revelling in its battle-cry,
terror dealt from its hand