

The **Omaha Pipes and Drums**
www.omahapipesanddrums.com
a Celtic tradition since 1970

10th Annual Concert
Omaha Pipes & Drums
7 PM Tuesday, March 6th
St. Andrew's Church
84th & Pacific Streets



St. Patrick's Day Parade
10 AM Saturday, March 10th
Downtown Old Market



Check the Band website at
www.omahapipesanddrums.com
for a list of performances on
St. Pat's Day



Leprechauns seem to magically appear in St. Patrick's Day festivities. The Gaelic word, lepreachan, refers to a small creature similar to a sprite. Historians link these little people to the ancient "mound dwellers", the Tuatha De Danann who were forced by their conquerors to live underground. Over the years, the leprechaun took the form of a mischievous old man who stored his gold coins in a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. If captured by a human, in order to gain his freedom, the leprechaun must grant his captor 3 wishes-what luck, indeed!

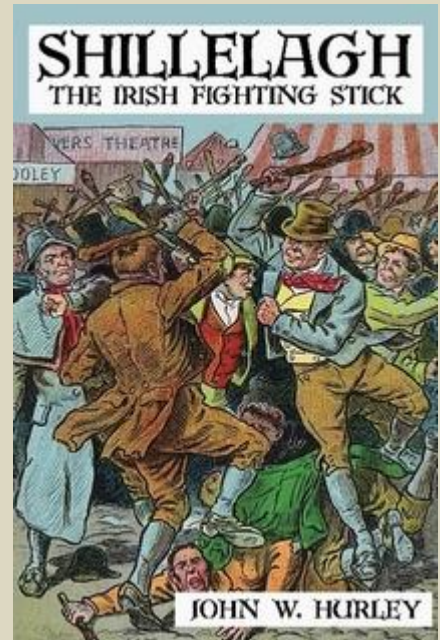


Shillelagh

A **shillelagh** (*shi-LAY-lee* or *shi-LAY-lə*) is a wooden walking stick and club or cudgel, typically made from a stout knotty stick with a large knob at the top that is associated with Ireland and Irish folklore. The name, an Anglophone corruption of the Irish *sail éille*, appears to have become convolved with that of the village and barony in County Wicklow.

Shillelagh is a very small village located in the heart of the Wicklow Mountains. This village was, until the 19th century, reputed for its great oak forest, one of the most famous of Europe. The head of those trees served to feed a nearby forge, the shillelagh forge, and the rest was exported everywhere notably to construct the roof of the Westminster abbey in London, several boats of the British navy in the 16th century and some buildings of Trinity college in Dublin. Today this forest has nearly disappeared, replaced by fields, and only a handful of centuries old oak trees still grow.

One of the hypotheses on the birth of the shillelagh comes directly from the prehistory of Ireland¹. The island was occupied before the arrival of the Celts around 500 B.C. (a date which is subject to debate), as early as 8000 B.C. The people living in those times were much smaller than those who succeeded them, as proven by several artifacts from the Bronze Age. Following the arrival of the Celts, they were driven to the center of the island. Many of their chiefs decided to follow the ways of the Celts, but some, united by the chief Ealach, refused and isolated themselves. They were known as Siol Eolaigh or followers of Ealach, a term which might have been the source of the word Shillelagh, as these people were often associated with the blackthorn sticks, which they would have used without removing the spikes. Their ability to disappear across the mazes created by the bushes of this plant, created myths around them and were soon nicknamed Leprechauns by the Norman occupants. They also had a reputation of being good shoe-makers and potters and so people would often leave their broken pots and shoes by their doors so they could be repaired by the small peoples. Their association with the blackthorn sticks also produced a lasting tradition. It was a belief that hanging a blackthorn branch outside your house would act as a lucky charm. This may be explained by the fact that the Leprechauns considered it as a weapon and lacking a sense of property like some Amerindian tribes, they would often steal objects. So people would hang blackthorn branches outside their house to indicate that the owner was armed with a *shillelagh* and knew how to use it.



The stick is one of, if not the oldest weapon of mankind. It was used by all layers of society and can be found on Egyptian hieroglyphs, on Greco-Roman representations of Hercules and on the notorious tapestry of Bayeux, in the hands of William the conqueror himself. And as we've seen, the use of the blackthorn stick could go back to the foundations of Ireland's history. But it isn't before the 14th century that the term *shillelagh* is used as we know it today. It would actually come from Richard II king of England from 1377 to 1400 AD. In 1399, Richard would mount an expedition against the rebellious Irishmen of Leinster. Richard pursued across the plains of Imal and Glenmalure the chief Art Mor McMurrough and his ally Domichadh Mac Brain Ruaigh O'Byrne. But rapidly the situation reversed, the Irish, much more familiar with the terrain and more mobile would make their enemies suffer a living hell. Richard would complain about the use of the sticks of Shillelagh against his men. Like guerrilla warfare, the Irish would attack and retreat quickly into the woods. The English survivors, strained and starving would rejoin the coast where supplies were waiting for them. This trip would be fatal for Richard II; his cousin Henry taking the opportunity of his absence and defeats to take power and have him imprisoned and assassinated on his return to England.

Until next month...

Beannachtai Na Feile Padraig Oraibh!

St. Patrick's Day Blessing Upon You!