

The Fairy Flag

Many years ago, the Chief of Clan MacLeod was a handsome, intelligent man, but none suited his fancy. One day, he met a fairy princess, a *bean sidhe*, one of the Shining Folk. They fell madly in love. When the princess appealed to the King of the Fairies, for permission to marry, he refused, saying that it would only break her heart, as humans soon age and die, and the Shining Folk live forever. She cried and the King relented, agreeing that she and the Chief could be hand-fastened for a year and a day. But after that she must return to the Fairie and leave behind the human world. She and young MacLeod married.

A strapping son was born to the happy couple. However, soon the 'year and a day' were gone. Remember, time moves differently in the Fairie Kingdom. The King led the Fairie Raide down the end of the great causeway of Dunvegan Castle, and there they waited for the Lady MacLeod to keep her promise.

Lady MacLeod knew that she had no choice and ran from the castle tower to return to the land of Fairie. However, she made her husband promise that her child would never be left alone, and never be allowed to cry, for she could not bear the sound of her son's cries.

The Chief was brokenhearted with the loss of his wife, but he kept his promise. The Clan decided that something must be done, and on his birthday, a great feast was proclaimed. The Laird had always been a grand dancer, and at long last he agreed to dance to the pipers' tunes. So

great was the celebration that the young maid assigned to watch the child left his nursery and crept to the top of the stairs to watch the folk dancing below. So enraptured was she that she did not hear the young Laird awaken and begin to cry.

His crying was heard in the Land of Fairie, and when his mother heard it, she immediately appeared, took him in her arms, and comforted him, wrapping him in her fairy shawl. She whispered magic words in his ears, laid her now-sleeping son in his crib, and was gone.

When the young lad grew older, he told his father of this late night visit, and that her shawl was a magic talisman. It was to be kept in a safe place, and if ever the Clan faced mortal danger, the Fairy Flag was to be waved three times, and the Knights of the Fairie Raide would ride to the defense of the Clan MacLeod. There were to be three such blessings, and only in the direst consequences should the Fairie magic be used. The Chief placed the Fairy Flag in a special locked box, and it was carried with the Chief wherever he went.

Hundreds of years later, the fierce Clan Donald besieged the MacLeods in battle, and the MacLeods were outnumbered three to one. Just before the Donalds last charge, the Chief opened the box, and placing the fairy flag on a pole, waved it once, twice, and three times. As the third wave was completed, the Fairy magic caused the MacLeods to appear to be ten times their number! Thinking that the MacLeods had been reinforced, the Donald forces fled.

On another occasion, a terrible plague had killed many of the MacLeod's cattle, and the Chief faced the prospect of a winter of starvation for all his people. With no alternatives, he fetched the Fairy Flag, and waved it once, twice, three times. The Hosts of Fairie rode down from the clouds, swords drawn, and rode like the wind over the dead and dying cattle. They touched each cow with their swords, and there stood healthy and well-fattened cattle, more than enough to feed the Clan for the winter to come.

There remains one more waving of the Fairy Flag and it is on display at Dunvegan Castle. During World War II, young men from the Clan MacLeod carried pictures or snippets of the Flag in their wallets while flying in the Battle of Britain, and reportedly not one of them was lost to the German flyers. In fact, the Chief of Clan MacLeod had agreed to bring the Fairy Flag to England and wave it from the Cliffs of Dover should the Germans attempt to invade Britain.

After discovering that the Flag had been damaged, it was placed behind glass to preserve this part of Clan history. It is on display inside the Castle. It has been dated to the times of the Crusades and the fabric is most likely of Middle Eastern construction as part of a treasure from Harald Hardrada, and was called "Land Ravager."

In Dame Flora's time, there was a great fire in the castle and it is said that as the folk carried the box wherein the Flag lies out to safety, as the box passed the flames, the fire was extinguished.

The Bull's Horn Cup

The MacLeod of MacLeod crest displays a bull's head and motto 'Hold Fast.' This originates from Malcolm, 3rd Chief (1296-1370) who, while returning from a clandestine visit to the wife of Fraser of Glenelg, was charged by a mad bull. Armed only with his dirk, he slew it and kept one of the bull's horns as a memento. The motto derives from those who accompanied him, exhorting him to "hold fast" in his battle with the bull.

The horn was later turned into a silver capped drinking horn. Custom has it that each male heir has to drain the horn filled with claret (over one and ¾ pints) "without setting (sic) down or falling down."

MacLeod's Tables

Alasdair, Chief of MacLeod and his men were at a dinner with King James V. A lowland lord snidely commented that the Highland Chief surely had not seen anything to compare to his Kings' castle and huge dining room with its' silver candle sconces and stone ceilings.

In response, Alasdair assured this lord that on Skye there was a nobler hall, a finer table and more costly candlesticks than those he saw before him. The journey home was long and his clansmen were wondering why Alasdair was so downcast. The Chief said that he wished that he had never gone to Edinburgh and made this boast. The King had accepted his offer of hospitality and was coming to dine at the MacLeod stronghold. Alasdair's foster brother assured him that he could entertain the King on a table

lordlier than any other in Scotland and explained his thoughts.

The following months hummed with activity, gathering clansman to the castle and preparing for the King's visit. The fine night came and the King was escorted to the mountains near the castle. The dinner was at sunset, with the surrounding guards holding torches aloft to light the tableau; God's panorama of stars above on the mountaintop now called MacLeod's Table.

He asked the king if he had made good on his boast, if indeed the strong arms of his clansmen were not more valuable than any silver, if the stars above were not more beautiful than any lofty ceiling and if his hall which encompassed the mountain-top was not grander than the hall in Edinburgh. The King's reply, "By my troth I have never seen such a hall, I have nothing to compare to this in Edinburgh" and asked the Chief to pardon his hasty words.

MacLeod's Maidens

A three stones are a rocky outcropping named as such for the wife and two daughters who, while hurrying via boat up the coastline to reach the Laird who had been mortally wounded in battle, were drowned at this spot when the boat overturned in the heavy waves.

The three stones are located off a promontory best viewed from the sea or the air. The land access is only available through privately held lands with a brisk walk to the ocean side.

MacLeod of MacLeod



An Cìrean Ceann Cinnidh

Motto: Hold Fast
Plant: Juniper

Septs (and all other spellings):
Beaton/Bethune, Harris, Harrold,
MacHarrold, MacAndie, Andie,
MacCaig, MacCaskill, MacClure,
MacCrimmon, Grimmond,
MacRaild, MacWilliam,
Williamson, Norman

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