



The journal of
**THE ORDER OF BARDS,
OVATES & DRUIDS**

January 2026 | Issue 341

This Issue

- ✿ The Chosen Chief's
Review of the Year
- ✿ Balancing Polarities by
Caroline Sauve
- ✿ Celebrating Unity in
Diversity by Eik Hjarta
- ✿ Plus lots more!



Cover: "World Beneath the Tree" by nemie

Editorial

Welcome to 2026 and welcome to January's edition of *Touchstone*! This edition is filled to the brim with reflections and resolutions. There are five whole pages of Eimear's Review of the Year. It's been a busy year for the order and there is much to reflect upon in Eimear's article.

We begin the year in thoughtful mood, with Caroline Sauve's wonderful piece about *Balancing Polarities*. In a world which often seems very unbalanced, Caroline's article is a breath of fresh air. There is also Eik Hjarta's beautiful piece about *Celebrating Unity in Diversity*. Eik has become a regular contributor to *Touchstone* in recent months so I will be discussing this article and his other submissions with Eik in January's *Touchstone Unbound*, which will be on the Hearth at 7pm UK time on Friay 2nd January. The final article in this edition is a special piece by Elizabeth Butler on being a disabled Druid. She has some really practical suggestions for ways in which our Druid practice could be made more accessible for everyone.

There's also plenty of poetry and some wonderful visual pieces too. Thank you so much for nemie for sharing her painting *The World Beneath the Tree* which is on the front cover of this edition. Nemie told me about this painting during an edition of *Touchstone Unbound* and it's wonderful that it is finally on the cover.

Speaking of which, if you have articles, stories, poetry or pictures you'd like to share, please send them to touchstone@druidry.org. And don't forget to send in your contributions to the *Urban Druidry* issue coming in April. *Touchstone* is your magazine and it's my continuing honour as editor to share your wonderful work with the wider order. Here's to a happy and creative 2026!

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January by Jessica McGee

January's cape
reflects the starry heavens
lined with sleeping flowers.



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Opinions/statements by contributors are not necessarily those of the editor, Order or publishers. Submissions from members are welcomed, but it is not always possible to use everything offered for publication. Contributions must focus on Druidry or contributor's experience of Druidry and may be edited without consultation unless a request is made to the contrary. Poetry no more than 40 lines. Articles of 1,400 words or fewer. No AI generated content. Deadline for events inclusion is 5th of the month before publication. Submissions may be printed on the OBOD website unless requested otherwise.

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Chosen Chief's Bit

A chairde, Athbhliain faoi mhaise daoibh go léir!
Greetings everybody and a Happy New Year to you all!

I am writing this review a little later than usual, and so you will see an account of two Winter Gatherings.

In 2024, we began with two fringe events on the Friday: the Meet and Greet in the Avalon Club, for first-timers and those travelling alone, was facilitated by Carol and Terri. Our Open Mic was hosted by Marcus Bollonius and was well attended. The theme for our Winter Gathering 2024 was *Draíocht: Druidry & Magic*. There were wonderful presentations from Daniel McKenzie (*Conjuring Demons, Angels and Intelligences – a Druid's approach to Magic*) Michael Wall (*Stars and Stones: myth, legend and the magicians*) and Mhara Starling: (*Witchcraft and Druidry: Incompatible Pathways, or Harmonious Pair?*) These talks can be heard on *DruidCast*. The Mistletoe Ceremony, which is one of my favourite ceremonies, was beautifully held by Adrian and JJ. Sadly, after about 25 years of serving the Order so well, due to health problems this was their last time. Our magical Winter Ceremony began as we processed in daylight to the grounds outside Strode Theatre and returned in the dark. Gary Llewellyn was our master of Ceremonies for the Eisteddfod. He did a great job of combining humour, story and organisation.



We had two Druid Gorseddau in the UK this year, one in Cornwall in March and the other in Malvern in April. Druid Gorseddau were also held in Germany and the Netherlands. These were very well attended. Gorseddau will be held again in

2026. Dates for 2026 are: Kernow Druid Gorsedd – March 6-8; Malvern Druid Gorsedd – April 10-11. Contact druidgorsedd@obod.org for further information.

The Bardic Gorsedd was held in July in the wonderful Noddfa (meaning Sanctuary), Penmaenmawr in Wales. Dates for 2026: July 24-26. Contact email is bardicgorsedd@obod.org



The Druid Hearth and its capabilities continue to be developed. The phone app was launched this year, making the Hearth more accessible to members. We now have 90 circles, with a wide range of interests covering everything from Ancestors to Veganism, as well as 54 Circles for Seed Groups and Groves. Some Circles have regular meetings via Zoom for discussion, meditation, healing, storytelling and much more. There is a pdf list of all Circles which can be downloaded from the Circles Homepage (<http://hearth.druidry.org/circles/>)

I would like to introduce Inês Nobre our new Social Media Manager who started at Alban Elfed. The Order has accounts on Instagram, Facebook, Threads and X. There is a Member Contribution Portal where members can upload their photos and videos of their activities for SM. They are invited to write a short description about their photos and videos <https://hearth.druidry.org/member-contributions>. If they want to share a long text to be shared on SM, they can create a Google Doc and share a public link in the description box.

It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Marjolein Van Noordende. Marjolein was the co-ordinator of OBOD Netherlands. She will be greatly missed. Her role has been passed on to the capable hands of Carola van't Hof.



Although the Order does not have affiliations with other organisations, we do liaise with organisations with shared values. We were invited to attend an Interfaith gathering in May at the Asha Centre in Gloucester. Matt McCabe attended, representing Druidry. I later visited the centre with Adrian Rooke. There is a grove of trees which was planted several years ago by members of the Order. It is a beautiful venue in the Forest of Dean for retreats and workshops. <https://ashacentre.org>

Liz Cruise attended the National Emergency Briefing on Climate and Nature in November, hosted by Faith for the Climate (www.faithfortheclimate.org.uk) An account of the event will appear in a future edition of *Touchstone*.

Leonore Newsome was invited to represent the Pagan community at the Lord Mayor's Carol Service in Plymouth in December. *The Druid Network*, which has many OBOD members, is now represented, for the first time, on the board of Interfaith Scotland. An interesting fact from the Scottish census 2022 is that paganism is now the fourth largest religious group in Scotland.

Stephen Barnes has agreed to represent the Order following an invitation to attend a meeting of the Pagan Police Association, which wishes to liaise with community groups.



Image: Deer and Full Moon
by Cathy Johnson
The front cover of May's *Touchstone*

The Wheel of the Year online ceremonies were created during the pandemic to support our members; they continued beyond the pandemic to support solitary members and those who could not attend a physical ceremony. With the arrival of the Hearth and the potential there for members to connect, we decided to discontinue the online ceremonies. The Order has always fostered independence and agency among the members to create their own Seed groups and Groves. We now encourage our members to reach out to each other and create virtual Seed groups and Groves so that they can hold their own virtual ceremonies in private, as our members who are in physical Seed groups and Groves do.



Tea with a Druid continues on Monday nights at 8pm UK, and Philip also hosts *Biscuits with Druids* on the Hearth afterwards. From time to time, the *Teas* and *Biscuits* are hosted by Penny. *Fireside Chats with Eimear* are broadcast on Thursday nights at 8pm. *The Storytelling Around the Hearth* is held once a month. This is a space for members to tell stories and improve their skills in a safe environment. Listeners are also very welcome. *Druidcast* is now on episode 220. If you haven't been able to watch them live, recordings of the *Teas*, *Chats* and *DruidCast* can be found on the Order's OBOD YouTube channel and on the Hearth.



Andrew Anderson hosts *Touchstone Unbound* on the Hearth on the first Friday of the Month, where the latest editions of *Touchstone* are discussed, and he interviews a member about their contributions.

The Summer Gathering began with the Meet and Greet in the Avalon Club, hosted by Belinda Twigg and the Dartmoor and South Devon Grove. The Open Mic in the Assembly Rooms, facilitated by Marcu Bollonius, proved very popular with about thirty members offering to perform.

On Saturday, the Oak Ceremony was held by Adrian Rooke, Heather and Jim Ramsay. We held our main ceremonies simultaneously on the Tor and in the grounds of Strode Theatre, and each group chanted the Awen while facing the other. Daniel McKenzie presented the banner to honour members who have passed and we had an opportunity to write names on it. A big thanks to artist and member Josh Warren, who made this beautiful banner. As always, the Eisteddfod showcased the amazing talents of our members.

On Sunday morning, Damh announced that he was stepping down as Pendragon and that Matt McCabe was taking over the role. While I was sad that Damh stepped down as we have had a great working relationship for the last five years, at the same time, I am delighted to have Matt as my Pendragon. The theme of our Sunday morning session was *Exploring the Inner Landscape of the Soul*, where we had a meditation to bring the light of the sun down into the centre of our Groves, as the Altar of our Heart, followed by presentations by Tom Moxon, Marion Sibbons and Fi Ware. We had breakout groups where we explored and discussed what we discovered on the Altar of our Heart, and how we could symbolise this. Participants were invited to draw a representation of this symbol on paper. Each breakout group processed onto the stage in the auditorium and placed their symbol in a cauldron, which was blessed. We chanted Awen, honouring where we were and the Imbas to honour the land where those symbols would

be taken. I brought them back to Ireland with me, and I placed them to be ritually burned in my Solstice fire in my Grove. It was filmed, and the video is now on the Hearth.



I attended a number of Camps during the year. On the Bealtaine weekend, I went to Italian Camp Ca'Gitana, near Fabriana, hosted by member Diana Birch on her beautiful land. In June, I went to Canada, where I attended the OBOD camp, hosted by the Chinook Hills Grove, Calgary. This was my first visit to Canada. The camp, whose theme was 'Finding Your Story', was held on a small farm near Red Deer owned by members Janina & John, with Icelandic chickens, Soay sheep, trout in the lake, nearby beavers and coyotes. I got to visit Banff in the Rockies. The scenery was magnificent – snow-capped mountains, tall trees, beautiful blue-green lakes and rivers. My trip ended with the Calgary Stampede, which was an amazing experience to see the rodeo and to watch the skilled First Nations People racing horses bareback.

We were invited to take part and have an OBOD banner in the Bealtaine Festival at Uisneach, the sacred centre of Ireland. Adrian Rook, Matt McCabe, Arthur Billington, Pete Ball (Bodger) and JJ Middleway joined me from the UK. There were many OBOD members there. A big thanks to Marcella Dillon-Walshe for making the banner at such short notice. In October, I went to Italy for the OBOD camp in Molise. The theme was Awen/ Imbas and the Green Man. Adrian Rooke was to join me, but unfortunately, for health reasons, he could not travel. Thanks to Zoom, however, he was able to give an online presentation on the Green Man.



There were three camps held in the USA. The East Coast Gathering (ECG) is the oldest of Druid Camps in the USA. It was renamed back to its original name (it was DOOR for a few years) and returned to its old venue in the Poconos Mountains in Pennsylvania. Kristoffer Hughes was among the guest speakers. He spoke about Arianrhod and also about The Biology of Belief. The Gulf Coast Gathering was held in March in Baton Rouge, New Orleans. MAGUS Camp, which is run by OBOD and AODA members, was held in West Virginia. The theme was Astrology.

Welt der Linden are organising a large gathering: *The Weaving: a Gathering of Druid Magic* in Herbstein, Fulda, Germany, July 22-25, 2027. This will be the first European gathering of this scale, and members from all over the world are encouraged to attend. It will be held in various languages. For more information, contact weaving@obod.org



Members activities:

Our members remain very active, and we like to hear about innovations and new developments.

The group *Building Resilience for Hard Times* has had a name change. It is now the *Deep Listening Circle-Nurturing Compassion in Difficult Times*, and we meet on the first Wednesday of the Month. *The Death Café* continues to be hosted by John King and is held on the third Wednesday of the month. *The Mental Health Group* meets on the third Tuesday of the month. Each of these groups has a Circle on the Hearth, and the links for the meetings are to be found there.

OBOD *Inner Journeying and Ritual Weekends* with Penny, Matt & Gary will be held again in 2026. The dates are as follows: Level 1, April 25-26; Level 2, October 10-11; Level 3, February 29-March 1. To book, contact mattmccabe.1@outlook.com. Matt had been holding these weekends in Germany, and now he has handed them over to Anna Oakflower and Barnhard Höfer.

The Community Cloak is still travelling around the world, weaving its story, and it comes back to the Strode Theatre for the Summer and Winter Gatherings, where members are invited to add their own creative stitches.

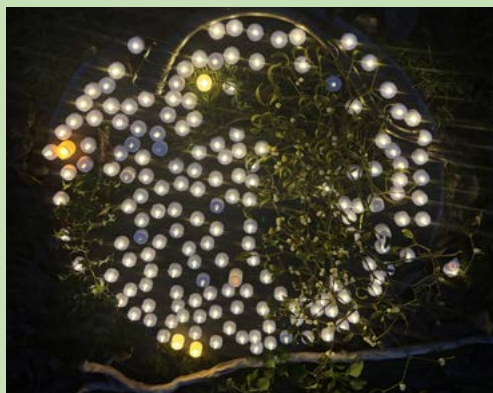
The theme for our Winter Gathering 2025 was Death and Dying Process within Druidry, where we had two presentations from Kristoffer Hughes: *To Come Back to the Trees: The Intersectionality of Death, Ecology & Western Mortuary Rituals*; and Jenny Uzzell: *Ancestors of the Past; Ancestors of the Future: Community, Relationality and Creativity in Druid Death Ways*. Recordings of these talks will be available on *Druidcast*.

We had our Ceremony Handing over of the Sword from Damh to Matt. All those present enthusiastically affirmed Matt as our new Pendragon. Matt performed his first role as Pendragon at the beginning of the Mistletoe Ceremony, which was held by Heather and Jim. It was very moving when Adrian and JJ came on at the end and led us in a beautiful Winter Solstice chant:

*Green of leaf and berry white,
Oak and thorn and apple branch.
Neath the moon on winter's night
With sickle blade the Druids dance.
All Heal, All Heal, All Heal, All Heal.*

Adrian and JJ have retired from holding the Mistletoe and Oak Ceremonies, and they were both conferred with the title of Honorary Bard of the Order in recognition of their creativity and service to the Order after over 25 years.

Our Winter ceremony was held in the grounds of Strode Theatre. It was so magical when we were invited to place tealights in the centre of the circle.



The Eisteddfod started off with a Pop-up Audience facilitated by Penny Billington & Blanche Rowan, where we sang a round:

*Hey ho darker grow the days,
And the wind blows rain across the land.
See the leaves a falling,
Hear the Spirits calling...*

Each year, members and friends contribute wonderful books on Druidry and related topics and this year is no exception. I hope I have not left anyone out. If I have, please let me know.

Arianrhod: Celtic Goddess of Fate, Fortune and Destiny by Kristoffer Hughes

The Green City Witch: Weaving a Magical Life in Urban Spaces by Lynn Shore

Ancestral Oak: Roots of the Past, Branches to the Future by Yannick Dubois

The Unseen Made Seen Poetry Collection by Barry Patterson

Psychopomps and the Soul: Traversing Death and Life for Healing and Wholeness by Tiffany Lazić

To Grief with Love: A Lyrical and Pictorial Voyage Through Loss by Zoe Strickland



The Weave of Stone and Light: Alchemy, Consciousness and the Sacred Landscape by Siri Lagerløv

Coming Back to my Trees: A Druid's Self-Healing Pilgrimage of Heritage and Homecoming by Deborah Rose Halani

Tarot Therapy Workbook by Steve Hounsom

Keeper of Stones by Ger Moane

Druidismo Oceanico: Il Canto Oceanico Il Soffio degli Abissi by Luana Sanvidotto

The Long Man & Friends: Sacred Sussex by Philip Carr-Gomm & David Bramwell

Inês, our new social media manager, held vox pops throughout the day where members spoke about what Druidry means to them. These clips will be shared on social media.

A big thanks to Jon Nash and Kaa for hosting the Meet and Greet and to Susan Paramour for hosting the Open Mic. On the Sunday morning, we had our Ceremony to Bless the Banner to Honour our Dead, which was held so beautifully by Daniel McKenzie, Marcella Dillon-Walsh and Kaa. We were invited to meditate on those members who have died, and as they were named, a candle of remembrance was lit for them. It was very moving when members stood in acknowledgement when the names were read out. What a wonderful way to honour our ancestors. We will continue to have this ceremony at our Winter Gatherings. During the ceremony, I was reflecting that our names will one day be on the Banner, and that we will be remembered by the living – a very comforting thought. There was a very strong feeling of connection, community and love after the Gathering and this was created by all who attended. May this connection continue to grow and evolve, bringing us closer, truly honouring diversity in all its forms, to listen to our words and to the words of others with open hearts and minds. Again, I would like to thank all our members who give so generously of their time, skills and commitment in service to the Order.

We had two Mt Haemus awards this year, and these went to Pat Booker: *The Fifth Province: Myth and Metaphor in Twentieth Century Ireland* and Dr. Rosalind Watts: *Participant Experience of Learning from Tree Teachers in the ACER Integration Community*. They can be found on our website www.druidry.org

As we head into 2026 amidst the growing chaos in the world, may our Druidic practices and



Image: The Order's Memorial Banner by Josh Warren

values keep us grounded and centred. May we feel the protection of the trees around us, and may we remain connected in community and in awareness of the interconnectedness of all beings.

Ní heart go cur le chéile – strength in unity!

Beannachtaí
agus Síocháin
(Blessings and
Peace)

Eimear



Birch Medicine by Fiona Beith

Start small, pinheads of possibility
Be generous, share your magic wide and free
Golden shards of hope, silken coverlet for
sleeping soil

Dig in, deep, root where you land
Be swift and sure, drink deep of water, sun and
earth
Sing them into sap and sinew, strengthening

In dark or light, moon or sun, shine
Glimmer, gleam, goddess white, graceful
Grow taller, root deeper, reach for sun's steadfast
blessings

Begin again, each season gifts a new grace
Bend with wind, dancing, sparkling,
Skin, twig and bark; Let go with ease, shed old
stories

Age with joy, bark cracking, skin wrinkling
Move as you can, in twilight or storm,
Fallen wood brings fresh soil,
richness, rebirth



Rain by Candy Matthews

Slow...large drops...slow and few, could almost
count them, the heavy succulence...

And it's stopped...

Less than a minute, a teaser, an aperitif, just a
short note to say Hi! remember me, well I'm
coming back, so be on notice to clean your
gutters...

No that's not the first thought...

The first thought is of standing there in this
still heat, standing in the open and feeling the
splash of the water drumming the vital wet-
ness...cool, cold onto bare skin, the top of the
head, the shoulder...

First one drop, then two, three, four...the count-
ing stops as they run down the arms and the
hair...

Hmmm reality...there are too few drops and the
mosquitoes dance in-between...

Rain now falling faster, counting drops not an
option...

Thoughts return to sacred ibis seen that morn-
ing close to a diminishing waterhole, the ground
baked hard, dry grass well and truly spent...

The rain here will bounce, ricochet until the
Earth gently softens and prepares a fitting
embrace...

The first kiss!

The Gift of Senses

by Neridah Rogers

Thank you, Mother Nature, for the senses that
we have.

To hear the wind, rain and ocean waves

To feel the coolness of the water on a hot

summer's day or the warmth of someone's skin

To see a baby smile or a dragonfly hover by

To taste summer wine or the sweetness of a kiss

To smell the perfume of a flower or of freshly
baked bread

These are just a few of
your many gifts

And I thank you very
much



Invitation by Haley Kynefin

A Path Covered With Leaves

Beckons You Toward

Losing Yourself in the Wild; In Dreams

Begins the Forging in the Fire

of the Lost Jewels that You Are

Worthy to Become

Life's Drum Calls You Forward, Solemn

Step Among the Whispers of the Trees

and Feel the Heart's Forest Thrum,

Thrum

with Cicadas and Grasshoppers, Coral-Winged

Deep Veins of Gold and Agate Run Beneath Your
Feet

Secluded from the Hunting Hand of Greed

But Shown to Those Who Faithfully Do Sound-
ness Seek

So Come, and Do

Not Be Afraid

Leave Fear Aside in Doubting Darkness' Face

If Crisis Come

What May,

Arise

Arise!

And Leave Behind Deceptive Worlds of Words
and Eyes

to Slip into a Realm That Truly Breathes

Where Rule Not Men of Arrogance, but Mysteries

And Where, by Woodsy Labyrinth and Molten

Sea

By Wandr'ing Lost and Wordless Blind,

Again, Perhaps, it May Be Possible to Find

Oneself at Home Among the Ranks of Strength's
Soundhearted

and At Last, Dance to a Sound Both Whole and
Free

A Jolly Fire by Essy Thorn

A jolly fire gives a glow to holly, pine, and mistletoe
While outside the wind and snow come frolic by the chimney smoke.
I'm at peace, reclining, slowly nodding while I drift and doze,
Silently delighting in the coffee I've been sipping slow.

In my bones, I can feel the heat of that ignite,
Beating back the night
kind of like my tree that's wrapped in bright
Gleaming candlelight.
I believe the heathens had it right...
This season's dark and freezing but we'll bring it back to life.

The solstice is close as the kings prepare to fight.
Everything's a pleasant scene. Evergreens are wearing white.
Not a rare delight, yet as we prepare to meet on buried streets
For caroling I'm fairly beaming.
See you there tonight!

But while I wait, I'll be hibernating by the fireplace,
Giant blankets I can hide away in with a smiling face.
I give thanks.
Though my eyes are glazing with a tired haze,
When I awake, I have faith my kind of wild night awaits.



Phenology Wheel: January by Alison Kirkham

Balancing Polarities by Caroline Sauve

In a world that is becoming increasingly polarized, we are each called in our own way to find balance. As an Integral Coach, this balancing is something that I work with daily. From the ebb and flow of power in a coaching conversation all the way to consciously navigating left and right wing politics - balancing is involved in how I engage with such polarities. From these experiences, a number of patterns have emerged that are resonant within a uniquely Druidic sense making lens.

In our day to day life we encounter polarities on a regular basis - both in a material external way and in a more subtle internalized way. Common examples of polarities include: Short term / Long term; Individual / Collective; Direction / Flexibility; and Feminine / Masculine. To be clear, these polarities are ongoing and unresolved in our work and lives. We race to produce short-term results, while long-term goals loom unaddressed. Individuals pursue personal goals, while collective goals stagnate. As a parent, I may direct too much and my ability to be flexible suffers. I may tap into a more feminine way of being and doing and lose touch with my masculine energy.

These are indeed very real dilemmas. And while our tendency might be to try to fix such dilemmas, they are actually not problems that can be solved. They are polarities that need to be balanced. Indeed, the problem with polarities occurs when we sense them as a tension of opposites. This tension then leads us to an either / or relationship between them: this VS that. When we are much better served to hold them in a both / and manner. That is to say, these polarities are seeming opposites and our work is to seek out the best of both. How do we do this? For this I would like to explore one specific polarity - that of daytime and nighttime - using the Wheel of the Year.

Perhaps the most obvious approach to balancing is to aim for equality. This is what we experience during Alben Elfed and Alban Eilir - the Autumn and Spring equinoxes. During the equinox, daytime and night-time - being equal - are in perfect balance. But if perfect balance is equality, then I would imagine that the entire world would be feeling REALLY good on these days. Yet, for many of us, there is a kind of anticipation that creeps in about the forthcoming shift and this is experienced either positively or negatively depending on how we feel about it. This is tied to our perceptions of the inevitable unequal state to come - "Oh dear... Winter is coming." Beyond this anticipation, if we assume balance to

mean equality, then we are faced with the reality that - of the 365 days in a year, only 2 are spent in this perfectly balanced state. The rest of the year, my dear Druids, we are effectively made to live in imbalance. If we accept that equality between daytime and nighttime is a temporary state, then the Wheel of the Year now invites us to be in balance with the steadily increasing dominance of one pole over the other - this is what happens as Samhain (nighttime increases) and Beltane (daytime increases) approach. How we experience this is very much connected to the degree that we can hold this dynamic consciously. Depending on your preference (day or night), you may notice either the diminishing pole OR the dominating pole more.



For instance, I notice the loss and gain of daytime more than the loss and gain of nighttime during these shifts. Instinctually, my approach to balancing the loss of daytime is to reach for more daylight. The hidden assumption in my approach is that light and dark are opposites and that to counteract the loss, I need to seek out more of the very thing I have lost - more light. But if balancing is really about seeking the best of both - how might I make different choices to maintain balance? For me, maintaining balance has meant embracing nighttime in new ways. Thanks to Druidry, I have started to take nighttime walks in my local grove and to connect with the critters who wake up at night like moths and owls. Connecting more deeply and on a more subtle level with the energy of nighttime and the gifts that it bestows have allowed me to sense into the best of this pole and to be in greater balance with it.

By now, you have surmised the inevitable next step. At one point, the increasing dominance of one pole will lead to its fullest expression at solstice - Alban Arthan and Alban Hefin. This time of year invites us to connect with our experience with abundance of either nighttime or daytime which (if not well balanced) can also lead us astray. For instance, when daylight is in full expression, I feel a strange sense of obligation to fill up my days with activities. The weekends during June and July are very precious indeed and time doesn't fly, it gallops! All this hustle means I may well over extend myself and lead to an inevitable crash and sad feelings when August and September arrive.

At the same time, the solstices also remind us that this full expression of a pole will invariably birth its apparent opposite. The philosophers call this phenomenon *enantiodromia* and for me

this signals another really important pattern - while polarities need each other to be whole, they cannot sustainably solve problems for one another. I believe this is the fundamental flaw of polarity in politics and why developing our collective ability to make sense of polarities is so very important at this time. It's also why the rise of the feminine (by itself) will never fully address the problems arising from an excess in masculinity in our world. These polarities invite us to seek best of each along with a willingness to engage in a dynamic quality of balance between them.

There's so much more that could be said about polarities, but perhaps this is enough to invite us

to be with them with a greater sense of ease and aliveness as Druids? The Wheel of the Year is a powerful way for us to sense this for ourselves and find new ways to embody and engage with the ever changing dynamic of apparent opposites. Before I go, I want to also acknowledge that this quality of balance will be unique for each of us and that the examples provided here were intended to illustrate the ideas presented. If you are inclined, I would love to hear about your experiences with balancing polarities. What polarities are you grappling with? How have you found the best in both? What new possibilities emerged for you as you found balance?

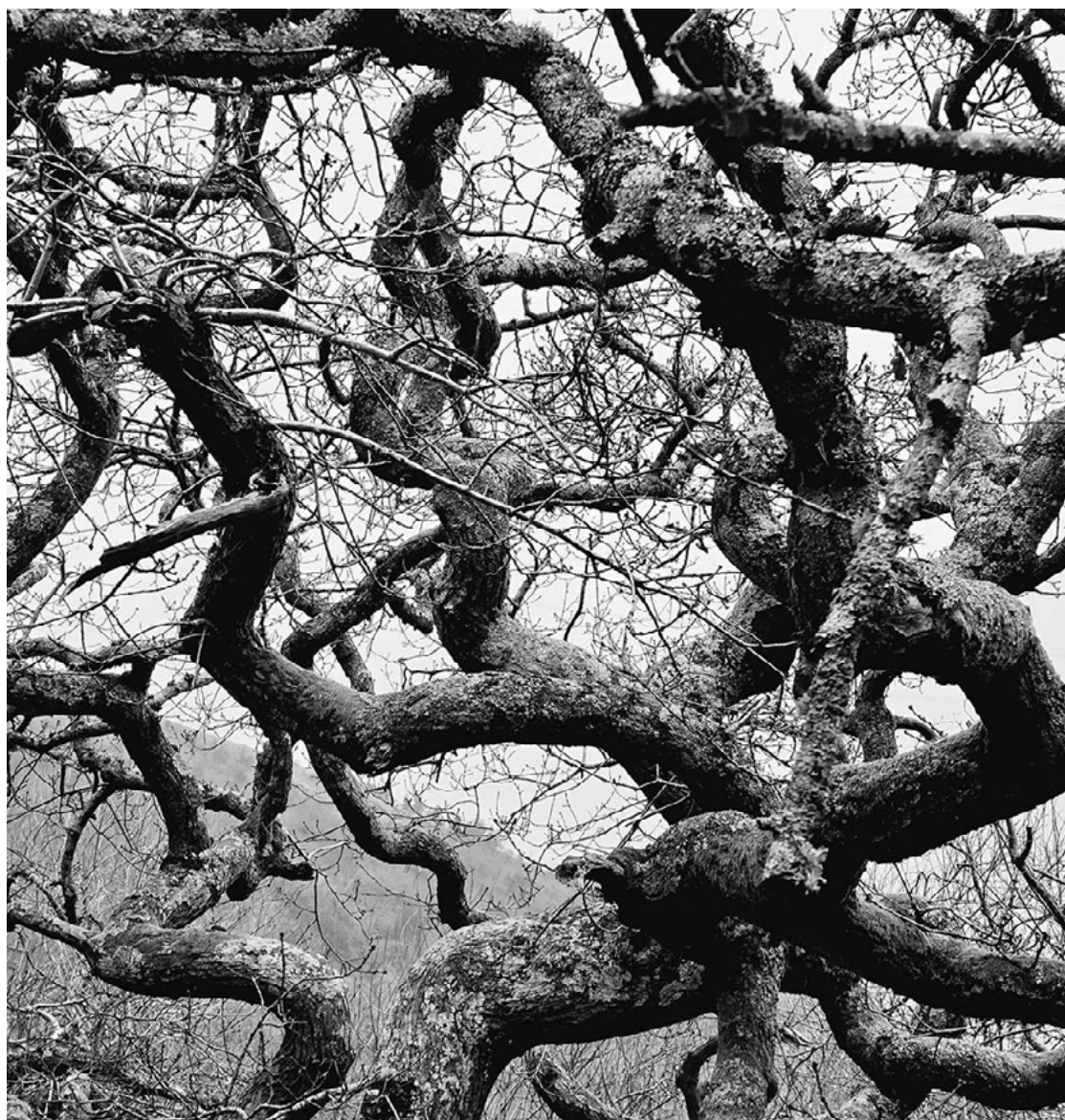


Image by Rhyannon Brightwater

Celebrating Unity in Diversity by Eik Hjarta

In the modern Pagan world, we often describe ourselves as non-dogmatic - seekers rather than followers, guided by experience, intuition, and reverence for nature rather than rigid doctrine. Yet even among Pagans, we sometimes find disagreement, infighting, and division. These differences can be subtle - a matter of ritual form, lineage, or interpretation - but at times they mirror the sectarian divides that many of us sought to leave behind when we stepped away from organized religion.

One example of this is the tension that sometimes arises between Reconstructionists - those who seek to revive ancient traditions as faithfully as possible to their historical and cultural origins - and those who follow more eclectic or revivalist paths, such as Wicca or modern Druidry, which blend historical inspiration with personal revelation and modern insight. Reconstructionists may value historical accuracy and cultural integrity, while others emphasize spiritual accessibility, creativity, and evolution. Both perspectives hold value, yet when either becomes rigid, the conversation can turn divisive.

This tension is not unique to Paganism - it reflects a broader human pattern: the desire for authenticity versus the freedom to evolve. For many of us who came to Paganism seeking liberation from dogma, it can be disheartening to see similar dynamics reappear under different names. The challenge, then, is to hold space for both - for the scholar and the mystic, the historian and the visionary - without diminishing the truth in either.

I won't dwell on this too much here, as others have spoken so eloquently on this topic, but rather I want to celebrate our unity in diversity.

Having come from a background where division was common - where belief systems were neatly categorized into denominations and sects, each claiming a clearer grasp of truth - I was deeply drawn to Paganism's promise of openness. But it was within Druidry, and especially here in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids (OBOD), that I found - like so many others - what felt like home.

What distinguishes modern Druidry, at its heart, is its inclusiveness. It is not bound by a single creed, text, or priesthood. It thrives in the meeting

place of diversity - poets and philosophers, scientists and mystics, theists, agnostics, polytheists, and atheists all walking together beneath the sacred oak. In this grove of shared learning, truth is not dictated; it is discovered, each seeker tracing their own spiral path inward toward wisdom.



This inclusiveness is not merely tolerance - it is celebration. It recognizes that no two paths through the forest are identical, and that each person's experience adds something vital to the whole. A Druid may honor Brigid, while another venerates the spirits of place or the ancestors, and yet others may find divinity immanent in Nature. Yet all are united by a reverence for life, the land, and the web of connection that binds all things.

Still, the temptation toward division can creep in - subtle judgments about who is "doing it right," or which tradition is "more authentic."

This mirrors a very human need for certainty, for belonging within clear boundaries. But Druidry at its best asks us to release those boundaries. It calls us to listen - to the land, to the stories of others, and to the still voice within - rather than to build walls of doctrine.

It is one thing to speak of unity in diversity, and another to live it. Each of us carries within a small grove - the sacred inner landscape of our own beliefs, experiences, and insights. Like any living ecosystem, it requires care and renewal. Over time, even the most open heart can grow tangled with vines of assumption or root too firmly in the soil of certainty.

To tend this inner grove, we might choose moments of pause - perhaps at the dark moon, a seasonal festival, or simply during a quiet evening - to reflect on where we are in our practice. Sitting quietly, whether beneath an actual tree or in the stillness of our own space, we might ask ourselves::

Where have I become too certain, too settled in my way of seeing?

What new perspective or practice might invite growth or renewal?

Have I truly listened to the voices of others - human, ancestral, and of the land?

Such questions act like pruning shears, clearing space for new shoots to emerge.

Sometimes, curiosity calls us to move beyond reflection into experience. We might explore a tradition or viewpoint different from our own - reading a text from another path, attending an open ritual, or sharing conversation with someone whose journey differs from ours. Rather than seeking to compare or correct, we can walk through these new groves as guests - listening, learning, and allowing whatever insights come to take root in their own time. Even a single new seed of understanding can enrich our soil

And when that inner voice arises - "That's not how I see it," or "That's not real Druidry" - it can help to pause and reflect. Often, such reactions protect something that once kept us safe, connected, or sure of our place. Beneath the surface, there may be a deeper longing: to belong, to be seen, to know that our way of walking has meaning. When we recognize that shared human need, we soften - and compassion takes root again

Each time we meet difference with openness and curiosity instead of judgment, we strengthen the living spirit of our Grove. Each act of humble listening becomes a quiet ritual of healing. Over time, this gentle tending of the inner grove shapes the outer one - nurturing communities that are resilient, compassionate, and alive with the vibrant harmony of many voices.

We might also weave this reflection into the rhythm of the year. At Imbolc, when inspiration stirs, we could try something new - a creative project, a poem, or a simple act of service that stretches us beyond our comfort. At Beltane, we might celebrate connection by inviting another voice into our circle or learning the songs and stories of our local land. And at Samhain, as the year turns inward, we could reflect on beliefs or habits we've outgrown and release them - perhaps with a small fire or written intention - allowing transformation to unfold. In this way, openness itself becomes part of our seasonal rhythm - not a task to complete, but a way of living in relationship with the wider web of life.

When we remember that the roots of Druidry stretch deep into the soil of shared experience rather than exclusive truth, we restore the essence of its magic. A grove thrives not because every tree is the same, but because each brings its own shape, strength, and song to the forest. The

same is true of our spiritual communities - and of the sacred groves we tend within.

In celebrating diversity - of belief, of practice, of perspective - we honor the living spirit of Druidry. We affirm that unity is not found in conformity, but in harmony. The great song of life is richer when many voices join the chorus.

Perhaps that is the true lesson of the Druid's path: that wisdom is not about knowing who is right, but about standing together beneath the same sky, within the same Grove, and recognizing ourselves - and each other - as part of one great, sacred whole.

Breathe with the forest. Feeling our roots entwine with others beneath the soil.

Each path a root, each soul a leaf, each story a song in the wind.

Whisper gratitude for the diversity that sustains the Grove.



Image: Barred Owl by Maryanne Mattson.
"Let your wild spirit soar through the night"

Disabled Druidry: A Strategy on Approaching Nature despite Difficulties by Elizabeth Butler

Much of our training in the grades of OBOD emphasize getting out into the forests, taking walks, participating in rituals in natural settings, walking hillsides and labyrinths, or simply talking to trees; but for a disabled Druid, these actions can be challenging, or even impossible depending on the disability one possesses.

I have such a disability. In my studies over the last six years, a significant part of my practice has been concentrated on working to develop strategies that meet the intentions of the Gwersi for my learning, while finding different ways to approach the knowledge and practicums. I don't view disability as a negative part of who I am. I view it as an added level of insight into the biological variation of nature. I want to share some strategies I developed to draw as close to nature as I can, while accepting my own personal differences faced in life.

First off, I celebrate my internal grove and use it to the fullest extent possible. In my inner grove I have no physical limitations. I can walk, climb mountainsides, delve deep into forested areas and even fly with the creatures and guides I meet. In my internal grove I can perform rituals that meet the intent of the lessons and practices without impediments. We have this wonderful ability to visualize and explore our inner-selves within the universe. This is something that gives me success in achieving the goals of the Gwersi, even if I have to do this from a park bench, or from my couch at home.

Secondly, I have chosen certain trees to befriend that are accessible to me. While this sometimes requires that I take 'the risk' of being seen with my back to a tree in a park, or talking to an oak along a roadside with cars whizzing by, I am still gifted with learning to approach and befriend local trees despite not being able to find a nice isolated

spot that insulates my intent to speak with and interact with them. Over the last months I have spent many hours with a roadside Oak tree. In the months I did this, only one car stopped to ask me if anything was amiss. To my surprise, when I simply said, "I am fine and just taking time to talk to this fine Oak tree," the man replied, "Oh that is lovely! I'm sorry to have disturbed your meditation." How wonderful to find acceptance of my practice from a random passer-by in a rather conservative part of the world not filled with "tree-huggers!"

Thirdly, I use my ability to keep a 'creature-feeder' outside the window where I sit. By watching the comings and goings I have gotten to know the local wildlife, including squirrels, chipmunks, turkeys, cranes, and flocks of eastern starlings in the winter who use my feeder year-round and show me their lives. They even get to know me, and request a refill or new peanuts by fluttering and pecking at my window. There's nothing like seeing the deep eyes of a crane peering into your window and wondering if you will come out with their favorite treat! Through this, I found I became so associated with their lives that I know their daily routines, each individual's status, and mourn their losses when they occur. I have learned much from this simple addition to my window.

There are other ways to practice Druidry creatively while disabled, or not! One can do a labyrinth with your fingers if you have the ability, or simply travel a pattern in your internal grove. However one chooses to learn and practice Druidry, disability is truly not an impediment, but an asset in learning how to be a part of nature and respect it while respecting your own given biological assets in life. I hope this short article has inspired others to respect their own assets and practices in Druidry as well.



Reviews

Merlin's Wheel by John Michael Greer

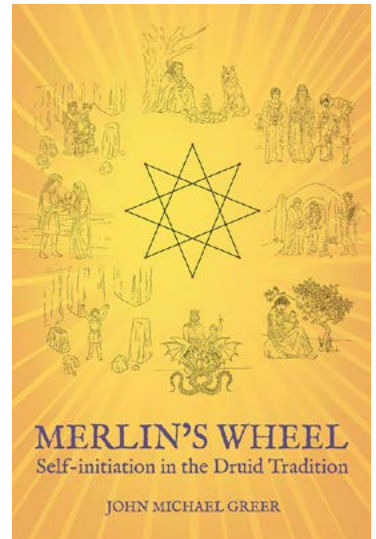
A new book by John Michael Greer is always a cause for celebration, and *Merlin's Wheel* is a wonderful addition to his catalogue. The sub-title of the book is "Self-initiation in the Druid Tradition," and Greer's process of self-initiation "is based on ancient Celtic polytheistic spirituality and the equally ancient Greco-Roman mystery traditions, but uses the tools of modern ceremonial magic." He goes further, stating that the system he presents "derives ultimately from traditions that were once enacted by thousands of people in elaborate temples."

Greer begins with an engaging chapter on different initiatory rites, but the real revelations come in Chapter 2, where he explores the legend of Merlin. He briefly deals with our modern conception of Merlin but quickly reels us back to a "more primal and magical version of Merlin" who can be found Geoffrey of Monmouth's work and other texts. What he presents is not a single, unified Merlin but four or five different figures who all use the same name, all of whom ultimately derived from an ancient god named Moridunos. Greer then turns his attention to self-initiation and the Druidry, ultimately settling on Dion Fortune's description of magic as "the art and science of causing changes in consciousness in accordance with will." The book then turns to the "Names and symbols" which will be used in the rituals, before outlining the rituals themselves. "If you come to this work as a beginner" Greer writes, it will take you three years of steady work before you can perform the full set of eight rituals in their complete form." One begins working through the rituals in a somewhat simplified form as an 'ovate,' building to the 'bardic' and 'druid' levels where the ceremonial magic becomes more

heightened and complex. The depth and detail given in the book means you will need plenty of time to read and prepare, but it really feels worthwhile.

I'm not going to delve to deeply into the rituals themselves, except to say that each station around the wheel of the year addresses a different event within Merlin's life. So, for example, the starting point at Alban Arthan focuses on Merlin's birth. At Imbolc, or Calan Myri, we focus on the story of Vortigern and the dragons beneath the hill, Alban Hefin sees Arthur pull the sword from the stone and so on. This approach unifies the diverse 'Merlins' Greer mentions in the introductory chapters.

Greer's down to earth approach is refreshing. "These rituals will not turn you into Merlin" he writes, "or make you a priest or priestess of the Moridunos, or give you any other special status you can parade in front of your friends. Their purpose is to attune you with the profound spiritual forces that are expressed through the traditional stories of Merlin, which 'never happened but always are'." This is a thoroughly engaging and magical book to begin the New Year with. I cannot wait to keep walking this wheel and see what magic it brings. It is highly recommended.



Our Next Themed Issue URBAN DRUIDRY - APRIL 2026

Do you live in a large town or city?
Do you connect with nature in the heart of the concrete jungle?
How do you observe the rhythms of light and darkness in a city that never sleeps?

Our next themed issue needs you!
The "Urban Druidry" edition of *Touchstone* is coming in April 2026 and we need your articles, stories, poetry and art work

Send your contributions to touchstone@druidry.org

DEADLINE: 28th February 2026



To find Events from OBOD members and friends throughout the year, check the events page on the Druid Hearth: <https://hearth.druidry.org/events>

Upcoming Events

Bardic Gorsedd: 24-26 July 2026, Noddfa Retreat Centre, Penmaenmawr. For more Information, email bardicgorsedds@obod.org

Druid Gorsedd: 10-12 April 2026, Malvern, Worcestershire. For more Information, email druidgorsedds@obod.org

Summer Gathering: 6-7 June 2026, Strode Theatre, Street (some introductory activities on 5 June)

Winter Gathering: 12 December 2026, Strode Theatre, Street (some introductory activities on 11 December)

*Wolf Moon slowly untangling itself
from the bare trees,
rising free of clinging clouds
moment by moment
into a dappled sky.*

*Hiding, one moment dark as pitch,
and then silvershine-on-snow
doubles and redoubles
the light
and then, wraithlike - gone.*



“Moonchanges” by Cathy Johnson