



TOUCHSTONE

— The journal of —



THE ORDER OF BARDS OVATES & DRUIDS

March 2026 | Issue 343

This Issue



Afaggdu's Story
by Liz Hills



Sacred Spaces & Places
by Katja Bouwens



Afon Dyfi
by Kate Seren



Plus Lots More!



Cover: "Elen of the Ways" by Fiona Graham

Editorial

Welcome to March's edition of *Touchstone* - an edition bursting with colour and creativity. The arrival of Alban Eilir felt like the perfect time to launch our new logo, which you'll see on the cover. It combines the font of our previous header with some lovely new graphics. Thank you to Lisa Joanes for creating such a wonderful logo.

As so often happens when I'm picking articles for an edition, I've found there's an interesting progression from one article to the next. So, we begin with Andrea Romanazzi's article about how Druidry helps address the troubled human / nature relationship. Katja Bouwens's article takes that a step further, by looking at how we create both sacred spaces and places, before Kate Seren's article focuses us in on the place where she lives, close to the river Dyfi, and how she honours the natural world. Together, these three articles make for a really interesting exploration of humans interacting with the natural world.

We also have a wonderful Bardic Tale from Liz Hills, who explored the character of Afagddu. I will be talking to Liz about her story on March's edition of *Touchstone Unbound* on Friday March 6th at 7pm UK time.

And don't forget, next month is our special *Urban Druidry* edition, which is packed full of wonderful articles, poetry and artwork from Druids in cities across the world. You are in for a real metropolitan treat!

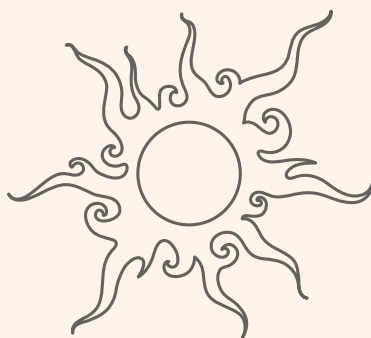


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Alban Eilir by Jessica McGee

Ostara's rising
melts all our cares and burdens
in the waxing sun.



TOUCHSTONE is published by OBOD.

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Chosen Chief's Bit

Bandia a chairde! Greetings everyone! Spring started here in Ireland in February as it always does. Whether it feels like it or not is beside the point. Since December 29 2025, we have had 52 consecutive days of rain here, and I'm sure it will continue for a lot longer. Anyway, Beannachtaí an Earraigh daoibh go léir. Spring blessings to you all.

Although for me, Spring is usually a harbinger of hope, I'm finding it difficult at this time of world lawlessness, which seems to be getting worse, with genocides, land occupation, human rights abuses, war, etc. Since the pandemic, so many of our once-trusted global institutions, for example, the UN, ICJ, ICC, EU, and WHO, sadly have either lost credibility or are being ignored by nations in the interest of bigger players.

In early Ireland, we had a legal system called the Brehon Laws. This system was in place until it was replaced by the Penal Laws forced upon us by Britain in the 1600s. The Brehon Laws covered a wide range of issues, such as marriage, divorce, bees, trees, property, person, etc. Given the current situation, I recently had a look at Fergus Kelly's book *A Guide to Early Irish Law* to see if I could find anything relevant to today. In the chapter on Offences, there is a section on Onlookers and Accessories where Kelly refers to 'Cin Súló', an Old Irish term meaning 'Crime of the Eye'. A person who witnesses an offence without attempting to prevent it may be guilty of 'Cin Súló'. *Aircsiu*, another word for this crime, is one of the things which debase a Lord and his family, on the grounds that everyone who looks on at an offence consents to it. Kelly describes three levels of *Aircsiu*, 1) a *Sellach* (onlooker) even if he doesn't commit a crime but instigates it, and accompanies the person who commits the crime, and exults in it when it is done pays the full penalty; 2) a *Sellach* who accompanies the doer of the crime and exults but does not instigate it pays half the penalty; 3) a *Sellach* who looks on but makes no attempt to stop the crime, pays a quarter of the penalty.

I am horrified at the number of countries, states, and corporations that would be found guilty of *Aircsiu* if the Brehon Laws still prevailed today. I'm mystified as to why so many countries are complicit in allowing mad kings and emperors to wreak havoc all over the world, who will not stand up to bullies. I was interested in Mark Carney, Canada's Prime Minister, at Davos recently, referring to Vaclav Havel's famous shopkeeper

analogy. (Havel was the first and last president of the former Czechoslovakia after the fall of the USSR.) In this analogy, the shopkeeper puts a sign in his window every day which says 'Workers of the World Unite'. Although he does not believe this, he feels the need to comply with the system. Havel refers to 'Living within a lie' and how the system prevails until someone stops complying, no longer puts the sign in their shop window, and the illusion begins to crack. This, he says, is what started the decline of the USSR. Carney, in his talk, called on states, countries and corporations to no longer put their signs in the window, their sign being 'American Hegemony'. Quoting Havel, "You cannot 'live within the lie' of mutual benefit, through integration when integration itself becomes the source of your subordination".



Sadly, it seems that it is just ordinary individuals who are standing up to world bullies, through protests, petitions, etc., calling them out, and so often at great risk to themselves. They have not been afraid to say that the 'emperor has no clothes'. It seems change will only come from the bottom, but not with individuals alone, but through solidarity. As Druids, we can stand in circle, as equals, supporting each other in ritual, protest, and speaking out. So many of our members are engaged in solidarity for change. What is important is that we can stand together 'heart to heart and hand in hand'. It may take a long time to make the world a better place, but we must not give up. We have a proverb in Irish: "Filleán an feall ar an bhfeallaire", meaning treachery turns back on the treacherous one.

May we continue to stand tall as trees with our roots held deeply within the dark earth, with the flexibility to move and sway with the winds. As the earth holds us, may we too hold each other in strength, harmony and solidarity.

But hope has an astonishing resilience and strength. Its very persistence in our hearts indicates that it is not a tonic for wishful thinkers but the ground on which realists stand. (Kathleen Norris)

Beannachtaí agus
Síocháin (Blessings & Peace)

Eimear

AWeN Gathering 2026

Thursday, July 9 - Sunday, July 12, 2026,
Ronan, Montana.

<https://www.awengathering.org/>





Myth by Eline Kieft

Myth is born from the place
between sleeping and waking
let it surface unhindered
and it irrigates the depths
from which it wells

The symbolic language of soul
quenches our thirst for
transformation and a touch of magic
while a flow of colourful archetypes
carries us into the day



Image: Hare by Kaz Leroux

Conversation with a Frog by Belinda Hirons

I wandered through a twilight bog
Where green moss grew on every log
And there I met a talking frog
Who greeted me with "Peep"

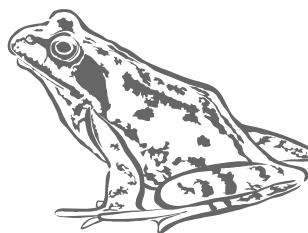
I said "Good sir, what brings you here
Beneath the stars that now appear?"
He blinked and grinned from ear to ear
Before he uttered "Peep"

"Do you possess some ancient lore
Or river wisdom, tales of your
adventures from the marshy floor?"
He pondered, then said "Peep"

"Do lilies dance when no-one's near?
Do dragonflies bring frogs their cheer?"
He tipped his head, his eyes sincere
and wise, and he said "Peep"

"Is love found in the bulrush bed?
Can water dropwort make you dead?"
He chuckled, and I think he said
a most resounding "Peep"

And there we sat as friends oft do
The willows and the pond in view
'Neath velvet sky of midnight blue
I smiled and whispered "Peep"



Alban Eilir by Susan Knox

Wi a loup heigh in the air, the maukin pro-
claims the Spring.
The weans play find the goggie, searchin,
runnin, lauchin.
The Godess stirs and seeks the God.
Waukened, the land brings
Houpe. We draw fresch breath and step oot
wi smeddum.

Nine Elements by John Wingrave

I breathed in deep and when I breathed out, I
asked the air what I'm made of.
Staring into the flames, I asked the fire to tell me
who I was.
Why am I here? I called to the moon, in the dark
of the night.
Walking through the woods I asked the trees,
what shall I do with my life?
All the answers came in the falling rain and the
rush of the waves on the shore.
A southerly wind whispered words in my ear,
and I knew who I was.
I felt the life of the earth beneath my feet,
and the strength of a stone in my fist.
I am made from flowers, and why I am here,
is to live and to breathe, and to love and be loved.
And what I shall do is to find my own path
through the mist.

Derwen by Jayne McKenzie

I see, I feel, I am,
I am not I, I am us.
I am we, we are one.
I have seen five hundred and fifty five orbits,
I see them, I see history,
I see their story,
I see them now, the maiden and her fellow,
I see them dance the forest floor,
I feel their warmth, I feel their love,
I feel their fervour, I feel their rapture,
I feel them fall into my old roots,
I feel their passion, I feel their pulse,
I feel these souls cradled in my source,
I feel them sigh with blissful breath,
I feel the new soul borne of love,
I see the child deep within,
I see the child they will call Derwen.



Phenology Wheel: March by Alison Kirkham

Bardic Tales

Afagddu's Story: the beginning by Liz Hills

Something was going on; Afagddu just didn't know what. Mother seemed particularly moody lately, spending her days pacing around the castle completely lost in thought. Afagddu didn't mind exactly; he just wished he could prepare somehow for whatever was to come next.

Then one morning he woke up to discover that Mother had left during the night. Inwardly, he breathed a sigh of relief. Nurse didn't know when Mother would be back, only that she had been ordered to care for Afagddu and his sister Creirwy until Mother's return. Father, as always, was out and about, either hunting or else visiting one of the neighboring Lords. Nurse didn't know when he'd be home either, not that anybody would. So Afagddu decided to put all troubling thoughts out of his mind for now. The Summer Solstice was approaching. The grass was green, the flowers were all in bloom, and the water of Lake Bala was crystal clear.

Nurse always treated the children kindly, though she, like almost everyone else, refused to look Afagddu in the eye. If she looked in his direction at all, her eyes, like everyone else's, always seemed to glide over his face, as if she hadn't even seen him at all. He learned from eavesdropping on Mother and Father when they were entertaining that everyone thought that there was something wrong with his face. What exactly, he could not tell, but when it came up in conversation, it seemed to be a source of great disappointment for Mother and Father and polite commiseration from the Lords and Ladies they entertained. Afagddu always looked at his reflection whenever he could but never could see what the problem was. Besides, it was the only face he had.

Creirwy was the only one who never flinched

when looking at him. When he asked her about it, she too seemed puzzled as to what the problem with his face might be. She was sitting on the blanket with Nurse now, watching Afagddu with rapt attention as he idly traced the boundary where the water touched the shore. One of the horses of Garanhir whinnied from the other side of the lake, bringing Afagddu back to the present. Suddenly he spotted a butterfly alighting on a stone in front of him. He was fascinated by insects of all kinds and constantly searched for

ones he had never seen before. Creirwy loved them too, and together they would marvel at all the different shapes and sizes and colors. Slowly, he laid down his stick and walked over to the stone. With a little coaxing, the butterfly agreed to perch on his finger.

Creirwy squealed with delight and jumped up from the blanket. She would have run down to where Afagddu was if Nurse hadn't gently chided her that it wouldn't be ladylike. Mother wanted Creirwy to always be ladylike,

Nurse reminded her. As Afagddu slowly made his way towards the blanket, careful not to disturb the butterfly on his finger, he recalled the last time Father was home. Creirwy had shown him the needlework she had been working on under Nurse's careful instruction. Father smiled with pride and gave her a warm hug, telling her that she was going to make a great wife and mother someday, a Lady of her own land. Creirwy had smiled and nodded in response. It was the way of things, of course, but Afagddu was never quite sure if that was actually what she really wanted.

Creirwy and Afagddu put their heads together and marveled at the butterfly, soaking in every detail of its soft wings and tiny legs and antennae until at last, it flew away. The days passed like that and turned into weeks. Then one night,



just as Afagddu was dropping off to sleep, he heard familiar footsteps approaching the door. Afagddu's breath caught in his throat. Creirwy was already sleeping peacefully in her own bed next to his. Afagddu tried to imitate her by laying as still as he could. Of course, his efforts were immediately thwarted by an itch on his foot, then on his back, and then in his ear. Luckily, Mother didn't linger long enough to notice, and as the door closed behind her, Afagddu managed to drop off to sleep in earnest.

After that, Mother was busy. She came and went and was apparently preparing something very important at the old cottage down by the lake shore. Afagddu stayed out of her way as much as possible in order to avoid provoking her. This turned out to be easier than he expected, for one day Father brought home a tutor for Afagddu. Afagddu would one day be a man, Father explained, so it was time he started learning the art of war. Afagddu liked Tutor and enjoyed his lessons. He especially enjoyed how, when he was wearing his helmet and had a mock sword and shield at hand, Tutor appeared to actually see him, see him the way Creirwy did. Over time, the lessons progressed, and Afagddu found he was developing muscles he never knew he had.

Then suddenly, Mother's hustle and bustle just... stopped. She was waiting, as tense as an arrow about to be loosed from the bow. She stayed that way for months and after a while, Afagddu honestly couldn't tell whether this was better or worse than the Dark Cloud.

That winter was particularly harsh, and Father spent more time at home than he normally did. Once when they were alone, Afagddu brought up the subject of Mother's strange moods but was sharply rebuffed. All Father would say was to be nicer to Mother. So Afagddu said nothing more and continued to learn from Tutor. Father likewise passed the time by sparring with his men. As Afagddu thought he was developing real skills, one day he asked if he could spar with Father, but Father told him he wasn't big enough. So Afagddu crawled into his favorite hiding spot and watched the sparring, trying to memorize everything he saw so he could reenact it later.

When the cold of winter finally broke, Father rode off again. Spring followed, lovely as ever, and then it was summer once again. One evening, Mother announced that she and Afagddu would be going down to the cottage after they had finished their meal. Afagddu looked quizzically at her, but she offered no explanation. Sure enough, when they were done, Mother stood up in her regal way, and Afagddu hastily followed, bumping the table and dropping his knife on the floor in the process. Mother glared, and Afagddu sighed. Creirwy looked sympathetic. Father, who had arrived home again the day before, rubbed his forehead.

Afagddu followed Mother down to the cottage, struggling to keep up with her determined strides. Afagddu did have to admit that he was excited to finally learn what Mother had been up to all this time. Inside, the cottage was dominated by a giant cauldron, set over a roaring fire. It was filled with some kind of potion maybe? Afagddu knew from listening to the servants' gossip that Mother had a reputation for doing magic. The cauldron though had apparently been tended to all this time by a blind old man named Morda and his companion, a young boy named Gwion Bach. Mother pulled up a chair by the fire and indicated that Afagddu was to do the same. So he sat and lazily stared into the fire, watching for what shapes he could see in the flames. Before too long he was fast asleep...

The full story can be found on the Hearth in the Bard Circle forum "Gwers 2: Afagddu's Story" (<https://hearth.druidry.org/circles/bards/forum/topic/gwers-2-afagddus-story/>), the Healers Circle forum "Who Heals the Healers? Or Afagddu's Story" (<https://hearth.druidry.org/circles/obod-healers-circle/forum/topic/who-heals-the-healers-or-afagddus-story-2/>), and the Mental Health Professionals Circle forum "Who Heals the Healers? Or Afagddu's Story" (<https://hearth.druidry.org/circles/mhg/forum/topic/who-heals-the-healers-or-afagddus-story/>)

Thanks to Kimberly Israel and Jembru for beta reading.

Druidry, Modernity and the Crisis of the Human - Nature Relationship by Andrea Romanazzi

One of the most evident features of modernity is the profound transformation of the relationship between human beings and the natural world. This is not merely a change in attitude, sensitivity, or opinions about how life should be approached, but something far more radical: the very way in which Nature is conceived in its essence has changed. For many centuries, in traditional European cosmologies and in numerous other cultures around the world, the natural world was perceived as sacred. The forest, the river, the mountain and the spring were considered places dense with presence, traversed by invisible forces, memories, deities, spirits, and ancestors. Nature was not something external to the human being, nor an inferior or inert reality to be dominated, but part of an Order in which humanity was not the absolute center, but occupied a precise position, defined by limits, roles, and relationships.

This does not mean that the relationship with Nature was ideally harmonious or free of conflict, nor that our ancestors lived in a sort of Golden Age. Human beings have always made use of Nature: they hunted, cultivated, deforested, raised animals, extracted resources, and transformed the environment. Imagining a past in which Nature was seen as purely sacred is largely a romantic projection of the modern mind. And yet, something has undeniably changed. In traditional cultures, the use of Nature was embedded within a complex network of rules, rituals, taboos, fears, and obligations. Hunting, for example, did not consist simply in killing an animal for sustenance. It was often preceded or followed by rituals intended to acknowledge the gravity of the act and to restore a disrupted balance. The animal was not a “thing,” but a life taken away, and this demanded some form of compensation, gratitude, or expiation.

Agricultural labour followed the same logic. The land could be cultivated, but not fully owned. Agricultural cycles, seasonal festivals, and ritual practices served precisely to remind people that

fertility did not depend solely on human action, but on a broader order that had to be respected. The idea of “exploiting Nature” certainly existed, but it was constrained by rules and taboos whose function was not to block human action, but to prevent it from becoming unlimited. It is this fragile balance that modernity breaks. With the advent of technical, scientific, and industrial thinking, the human relationship with Nature was freed from every sacred and symbolic counterweight. “Use” becomes the dominant principle and the only legitimate criterion in a techno-anthropocentric society. In this shift, the question “what is it for?” no longer accompanies the relationship with the natural world, but replaces it entirely.

Even contemporary ecology struggles to escape the logic it seeks to correct. While denouncing the damage produced by the industrial system, the inhumanity of food production, and more generally the impact of human activities on global climate change, Nature continues to be thought of in functional terms. Nature must be protected because without it humanity cannot survive. Forests are important because they regulate the climate, oceans because they regulate temperature, biodiversity because it guarantees the stability of ecosystems. The implicit question is: “what happens to humanity if Nature is damaged?” Rarely does the question become: “what is Nature, independently of us?” The value of the natural world thus remains derived from its usefulness for human survival.

A particularly clear example of this orientation emerges in the public discourse of Greta Thunberg. At the center of her message there is neither the intrinsic sacredness of the natural world, nor the idea that Nature possesses a value independent of human beings. The fundamental argument is rather temporal and generational: present societies are accused of having compromised the material conditions of possibility for the existence of future generations. In this perspective, Nature is evoked primarily as the necessary support for a future life that is



still livable and dignified. Forests, oceans, climate, and biodiversity acquire value insofar as they guarantee the continuity of human experience over time. Environmental damage is serious because it endangers the future of humanity itself. Even in this case, the ultimate point of reference remains the human being. In general, human beings no longer inhabit the world, but move through it as a field of opportunities.

It is within this scenario that modern Druidry must become conscious of its role. In an era in which alienation is no longer only industrial but also digital and algorithmic, the risk is that Druidry itself may be absorbed as one of the many spiritual offerings available on the market, becoming a reassuring aesthetic rather than a radical critique. There is the risk that it may gradually turn into yet another generic ecological spirituality which, instead of opposing the reduction of the world to a system, becomes its emotional complement, ultimately reinforcing rather than questioning the anthropocentric paradigm.

It is no coincidence that modern Druidry re-emerged historically as a response to the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment. In that time, the first major fracture occurred: Nature was progressively stripped of every symbolic and relational quality and reduced to object, resource, and function. Technical and productive rationality did not merely organize the world, but redefined its essence, transforming it into a measurable, predictable and exploitable system. Modern Druidry was born at that time, as an attempt to suture this wound. Today, this role becomes even more decisive in light of the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution. Advanced automation, artificial intelligence, the datafication of experience, and the pervasiveness of algorithms represent not merely a technical evolution, but a new anthropological threshold. For the first time, the world is conceived and governed as a set of continuously optimizable and exploitable processes, and even the human being is progressively reduced to a flow of data, predictable behavior, a measurable profile.

For the first time, we speak of the Anthropocene not merely as a scientific label, but as a cultural diagnosis. For the first time, human action is recognized as a force capable of irreversibly altering the Earth's cycles. This fact marks a definitive and radical rupture.

For this reason, today more than ever, Druidry must configure itself as an eco-spiritual path that preserves its identity of rupture and does not offer an escape route, but a point of friction. Its fidelity is not to the past; its aim is not to promise solutions or to offer a reassuring mythology. To be truly contemporary means to make the fracture visible, not to mask it, and to renounce the promise of an easy reconciliation. Modern Druidry makes visible what every idea of harmony tends to erase: every attempt at control, manage or use of nature. In this scenario, the modern Druid is neither a repository of recipes nor a master of instructions. They educate toward a form of knowledge that does not coincide with domination or efficiency. They do not teach "what to do," but how to be: how to dwell before what is, without immediately reducing it to a purpose. They show that another path can exist, in which the fundamental question is no longer "what is it for?" but "what is it that stands before our gaze?" It is a knowledge that does not conquer, but exposes; that does not possess, but recognizes; that does not promise salvation, but restores depth to the experience of limit and presence.

Be a Tree by Rachel Holmes

We could stand to be more like trees,
Adapting to, not fighting our surroundings.
Sharing our resources, not gathering with
greed.

We could take a leaf out of a tree's book,
Practising patience, not over-efficiency.

Learning from our elders, and reaping their
support.

Quenching our thirst for knowledge with
ancient wisdom, not tech.

Being true to our roots, steadfast and grateful
for our strength.

Not comparing to those who we think look
better, or worse, than ourselves.

So next time you find yourself battling with
the wind,

In a low season of life or speaking cruel
words.

Slow down, find your roots and stand tall.
What do you see?

Life is a little easier, if you just be a tree.

Sacred Places and Spaces by Katja Bouwens (ShadowCat)

Sacred places: As readers will be students of the druidic ways, there will be no need to explain that there can be places in nature that invoke a natural feeling of sanctity. Most of us model our inner grove on such places, either inspired by real places we visited or given a form inspired by art or fiction.

Unspoiled nature, be it a grand forest grove or a tiny spot of perfect moss sprinkled with dew, invokes a feeling of connection that is deeply consoling and comforting. That is especially important in a disconnected world. The sacredness of such places lies, beyond the definitions implemented by religions and traditions, in the ability of certain energies to give us the feeling of being safe, whole, accepted as we are and deeply connected to life itself.

The first sacred place we know when coming into our life, is the womb of our mother: nurturing us, keeping us warm, safe, enabling us to grow. After birth the circle expands and the lucky among us continue to find the sacredness of wholeness in our parents arms and in the circle of the family. Later we find friends, go to school, work: we continue to expand our circles. Sometimes we pull it back a bit, only to expand it once more to encompass what we cherish in life. This process continues into old age, when at some point the circle starts to shrink again, until we finally leave this world.

The search for natural sacred places could be considered a search for healing the parts of us that are somehow hurt or starved of the base-values like safety, wholeness, connection, acceptance and inspiration. We have been seeking, as a race from the dawn of humanity, safety, wholeness and nurturing in the world around us: its sanctity sings to the most primal of our instincts.

The concept of superior sanctity of unspoiled nature might well be a remnant from 19th century romanticism. Yet, as soon as people set foot

in a natural sacred space, they inevitably start to interact with it. Even an offering of flowers or rocks will change the place from purely natural to - at least in part - manmade. Every footprint changes something. Food offerings attract wildlife, footsteps may track in seeds that change the flora. This is not a bad thing in itself: nature is constantly changing by interacting with itself and the human animal is just as natural part of the world as everything else. The paradox lies in

the fact that by seeking unspoiled nature, the seeker will be spoiling it. So, instead, I would rather encourage a search for harmonious nature: natural places that are balanced and healthy, while in open interaction with the world around it.

If you want to find sacred places in the world around you, look for a sense of harmony, of safety, of belonging there. Most students of the druidic ways will search for these places primarily in their

gardens or in nature. From playfully raking a circle of autumn leaves to a pebbly stone circle in a backyard, to long hikes to visit a remote grove in the wild, we seek out and often enhance natural places that feel sacred to us, in order to create a physical, more or less permanent, druidic sacred place.

The epitome of contemporary manmade sacred places on the other side of the spectrum invokes images of grand godhouses created (mostly) by dogmatic religions. Cathedrals, temples, mosques, synagogues, all are stone giants of manmade sacred space. Interestingly, their sacredness is often dual: dowsers find influences by the energetic lay of the land (crossing ley lines before an altar for instance) and historians discover that these large godhouses are built on older places of reverence, displacing older sacred places. Yet, in most religions it is mandatory that the godhouse can only be "sacred" when it is ritually consecrated, often with complex ceremonies that can only be performed by a few able holy men. Whenever an old godhouse is





taken out of service the “sacredness” is taken away with another ritual, leaving only a huge empty shell. That marks a significant difference to more nature-centric practices: while we might dismantle a personal altar as a part of “leave no trace”, we would not think to de-sanctify a natural place. To us, its sanctity is its own.

Sacred spaces: We’ve so far talked about examples of more or less permanent places: places that have a natural sanctity: a sacred spot that is recognized, honored, enhanced or even claimed, but in general always present regardless of our interaction with it.

Pagans especially are familiar with a different kind of sacred space: that of the temporary ritual circle. It is possible to create an ad-hoc sacred space through ritual and visualization, at almost any given location. This space can be used for healing, magical workings, worship or whatever seems appropriate. Views on how to create sacred space differ: from simple visualization to elaborate ritual with swords, wands, water, flour, salt, incense, quarter-calls and all the trimmings. Different ways of creating might appeal to different pagans and different circumstances might call for different techniques.

Yet this kind of sacred space is different from a sacred place in an essential way: where natural and manmade permanent sacred places are open to the world and accessible for the seeker, looking to reconnect, temporary sacred space is designed to close off the people and energies in the circle to the world around it. Within the circle, people often consider themselves “between the worlds”, a way of expressing that, by drawing the circle, a new space is created, separate from the mundane space that the circle might happen to be drawn in. Within this separate space, energy is raised, cleansed, contained, connected or otherwise manipulated. These circles are a technique that allows something more than could be accomplished in the mundane world.

Is there unsacred space? It is my personal opinion, nothing more, that there is no such thing as unsacred space or unsacred places. Some space might be more in tune, more in harmony, more

pleasing to our human aesthetics, but since all spaces in this physical plane or otherwise are somehow connected and they exist only because of the wholeness of the universe, they are a part of it, and therefore sacred. That does include physical places of contamination or low energy.

A beautiful example is the region around Chernobyl: uninhabitable for humanity due to a horrific nuclear accident, yet as a direct consequence of that awful incident it has become a wildlife sanctuary that is sorely needed in this world. As such it has its place in the world, and as such, it should be considered sacred.

And since humans differ in spiritual and cultural sense around the world and even within societies, different places will be sacred to different people. To a catholic, the Vatican will be sacred, yet, to a pagan, the pageantry and wealth might feel oppressive and negative. The same places can even be sacred for different reasons to different beliefs: the wailing wall or, closer to home, the holy places of Glastonbury, are examples of this.

When interacting with places sacred to others, be a good guest: respect the rules even if you don’t agree and see if you can sense the sacredness the place holds for others.

In this article, I set out to put forward my idea that sacredness of space is much more than a ritual circle, a place with ancient standing stones or holy wells. Sacredness is an essential part of everything around us.

And don’t forget your own body and soul in this. Though the sentence “my body is a temple” might feel overused, it’s a fact that even without a ritual circle, even when disconnected from your sacred places, your body is with you until the end. Allowing it to become a sacred space for yourself will change your lived experience and radiate outward to the world around you. Learning to find solace, wholeness and connection within is a part of druidic work and for good reason: it creates a sacredness that brings you in contact with life itself, regardless of the circumstances.

Afon Dyfi by Kate Seren

I am blessed to live within the embrace of the UNESCO Dyfi Biosphere, where mid Wales meets the north, and the boundary between them is drawn not by lines on a map but by the flowing body of the Afon Dyfi. This Biosphere holds the whole Dyfi river catchment and follows the curve of Cardigan Bay from Tywyn in the north to Aberystwyth in the south.

It is a landscape shaped by quiet labours and the ebb and flow of visitors — and held sacred by the nature reserves that gather around the estuary. Here, Welsh legend, bilingual culture, renewable energy and sustainable farming weave together into a living tapestry.

I live four miles from the Dyfi, in a small village resting beside one of her tributaries, the Afon Dulas. Since the day I arrived, I have been in relationship with the Spirit of the Dyfi. You'll often find me at her estuary at Aberdyfi, where sea and river meet and mingle twice each day, with the breath of the tides.

I have bathed in her warm summer waters, unsure at times whether I floated in river or sea, until the cold breath of salt swept in and told me where I was. I have felt her chill waves lap at my feet as I walked her shores in spring and autumn. And I have watched winter sunsets cast their darkening hues across her body, a quiet blessing of fading light. I have called upon her Spirit in ritual and ceremony, offering blessings and gifts in gratitude, drawn sigils in the sand or Ogham staves onto slate pebbles which she collects at high tide. I felt moved to give something deeper in return. I'd been reading about the power and mythology regarding hazelnuts, how legend tells they carry the Awen.

This autumn has seen an abundance of hazelnuts and, as I walked amongst them, inspiration came with clarity: to create a ritual of blessing and magical potency using hazelnuts — and then to offer nine to each tributary of the Dyfi. The Dyfi has thirteen tributaries, and I have been called to make a pilgrimage to every one of them over the coming year, releasing these charged hazelnuts into their waters, so each stream receives a conscious infusion of ancient, mythic wisdom.

My hope is that each tributary carries its blessing back into the Dyfi from every direction, and that the Dyfi herself bears it onward to the sea — to nourish the Spirit of the Salmon of Wisdom and the great Spirit of Water itself. A gift of blessing, healing, cleansing, and remembrance — a thread of spiritual tending for the river, for the sea, and for all who live within and between them.

Why Hazelnuts? In the old Celtic world, where every root and river had a spirit, the hazel grew as the Tree of Knowledge—the Poet's Tree—its branches shimmering with the quiet brightness of understanding. Those who wandered beneath its canopy felt the world thin around them, as though

the tree itself were a doorway. For hazel is a bridge: between life and death, between this world and the next, between the voice spoken and the truth beneath it.

It is said that wisdom gathers in its leaves like morning dew, and that clarity runs through its

branches like sap. The tree breathes eloquence. It speaks in symbols. It gathers dreams. And those who seek healing, protection or the courage to listen deeply have long placed their faith in hazel's gentle power. Its stories wind through time like roots searching for water. In the Dindsenchas it is told that at the Well of Segais—Connla's Well—the waters of life rise beneath nine ancient hazel trees. These trees bloom and fruit at the same moment, as though time itself bends to their enchantment. Their nuts, filled with awen, the spark of all inspiration, fall into the well's clear pool.

There, in the quiet deep, swims the Salmon of Wisdom.

Oldest of beings.

Bright-spotted with all it has learned.

It eats the hazelnuts and becomes a living vessel of knowledge, carrying the gleam of understanding between the well and the wide sea. Every salmon that follows the old currents tastes a drop of this knowing, for the first salmon—the father of all—left its wisdom in the water so that the world would never be without truth. To taste the hazelnut, or the salmon who fed upon it, was once the highest longing of druids and poets. In that taste was fire. In that fire, vision.



In the Ogham script, hazel is Coll, the ninth letter—its shape a simple mark for a deep truth. Coll is wisdom. Coll is nourishment. Coll is the wellspring from which creativity rises like water from hidden stone. The poets knew this. They walked the hazel groves to catch a whisper of the sacred spark.

For in truth, to follow the hazel is to seek.
To seek is to remember.

And to remember is to return to the source—
the place where the first nut fell,
the first salmon shimmered,
and the first poem rose like dawn through the
human mind.

The hazel stands still, offering its quiet gifts:
knowledge that nourishes,
insight that heals,
and the soft, persistent invitation
to listen for the wisdom that has always been
waiting inside us.

The Ritual

It's late Autumn, Calend Gaeaf (Samhain) approaches. I wander along the path, gathering fallen hazelnuts as I make my way to the Afon Dulas. I carry no plan to perform any sacred ritual today; still, my mind turns in circles, fumbling over the words I hope to speak when the time comes. I have been thinking, wondering, searching for the right syllables, and yet they elude me, like whispers lost on the wind. I have imagined a grand ceremony to bless and consecrate the hazelnuts—calling upon Deities, soaking them in flower essences, tracing Ogham upon their skins.

And yet, today, none of that is needed. Words come easily as I stand at the banks of the Dulas. I hold nine nuts in my hand and let a simple blessing flow through me, letting the river itself carry it onward.

I cast each of the nine nuts into the river in turn with a prayer and invocation for each one, letting the words, the intentions, the blessings drift into the current, trusting the river to carry it far beyond me. In this quiet, nothing more is needed. The ritual is simple, the blessing complete, and the world hums softly around me.



A River of Blessings

*A blessing from the Soul of the Earth,
The Soul that gives all beings their bodies,
Their physical form, their nourishment, their life,
Their passing, their return.*

*A blessing from the Soul of the Earth,
From where all beings first came.*

*A blessing from the Soul of the Sun,
Who causes all things to grow,
Who causes all things to thrive,
Who causes all things simply to be.*

*A blessing from the Soul of the Sun.
I call upon Cerridwen, Bestower of Awen,
To grace these hazelnuts with your wisdom.*

*As I place them in the river's embrace,
May they carry the knowledge of the Hazel,
Through the ages of the Celts,*

*From then until now,
The eternal gift of Awen,*

*Flowing into water,
Blessing, healing, giving thanks as it returns to the sea.
May these hazelnuts nourish the Salmon of Wisdom,
And may every manifestation of water on this Earth
Be blessed and held in sacred grace.*

*I call upon the Goddess Brigid, Keeper of the Sun,
Manifestation of light and healing,
Brigid, shine upon these hazelnuts with your radiant
touch.*

*I call upon the Goddess Cerridwen,
Bestower of Awen,
Bless these hazelnuts with the wisdom of ages,
The knowledge of all that has been and all that will be.*

*I call upon the Goddess Arianrhod,
Weaver of Fates, Maker of Time,
Goddess before time,*

*Bless these hazelnuts with faith,
With healing, with hope,
With the power of return to health.*

One by one, I cast these hazelnuts into the river,

-With the healing of Brigid,

-With the wisdom of Cerridwen,

-The blessing of Arianrhod,

-The blessing of the Soul of the Earth,

-The blessing of the Soul of the Sun,

-The collective wisdom of the hazelnuts,

-The knowledge of the Salmon of Wisdom,

-The blessing of the Spirit of Water,

-And the pure essence of hope.

And so it is.

The Weaving: A Gathering of Druid Magic by Anna Bluhm and Birgit Paehler

The story goes that for years an idea of a large European gathering was whispered around OBOD campfire circles. The idea didn't vanish. It spoke of a conference, a confluence, a druid gathering of practices and myths, magic and lore. Of rituals with hundreds and hundreds of colourful, fantastic bards, ovates and druids. It sang of personal, embodied conversations across borders and oceans. Of ancient land practice, tree lore, arts and crafts brought together in days of celebrations, ritual practice and global knowledge exchange. Of creating and deepening kinship around the fireplaces. And in 2024 two German druids were surprised to find themselves called to start making it happen.

So Anna and Birgit, of the German Welt der Linden tribe got together and started dreaming, weaving, thinking, conspiring and spreading the word. A date was found. Everyone who heard of the idea felt this sweet tingle and promise of something unheard yet known and familiar. Bones awakening. Around Birgit and Anna formed a team, a place was found. By the time you read these words the place and the land where we will meet in 2027 has been visited, greeted and whispered to that we are coming. The place knows.

So save the dates in case you haven't yet - 22nd to 25th of July 2027. Dream with us of what to sing and bring. In these times of difficult global transformations we call upon the magic of druids to weave their part into the fabric of emerging new realities. How can our Druid Magic consciously contribute to desirable futures for all beings? We want to gather and learn with and from each other, to commune around the sacred fires and open a portal into the worlds we want to live in - a sudden village of druidic practice. Listen from within to the stories and spells yet untold and unwoven.

We officially invite OBOD members worldwide to the gathering of Druid Magic in Herbstein, Germany. We will be thrilled to have you all!



Reviews

Irish Fairies of the Flower Realm by Elena Danaan and Finnoula O'Gorman

Author Elena Danaan and horticulturalist Finnoula O'Gorman have collaborated on a fantastic full-colour illustrated book, published by Electric Publications.

The book opens with a very personal exploration of Danaan's connection to the fairy world before the flowers and seeds are explored in detail. Each fairy is given a single page, explored in engaging short bursts of text by O'Gorman. We are given the English, Latin and Irish name for each fairy along with a basic description of the plant, as well as the kind of soil and landscape it can be found in. O'Gorman then details the folklore and myth surrounding each flower. When dealing with non-flower fairies, such as Bumble Bee, the focus is on their role in folklore and how humans interact with them.

The description of each fairy is accompanied by one of Danaan's charming illustrations. Using elements of the flowers' leaves and blooms, Danaan creates fashionable outfits for each being, helping them to stick in one's mind. There is a real mix of styles, from Ragged Robin, who is presented somewhat traditionally, to Cow Slip and Arum Lily who look like they are ready to strut down the catwalk.

This is a charming book. Its structure means it is perfect to dip into now and again, rather than reading through in one go. By personifying each fairy in such a striking way, this will be a particularly useful book for those with strong visual learning preferences, meaning they will be able to spot the plants 'in the wild' more easily. It's a fun, engaging and useful text to have on your bookshelf.



Andrew's Bit At The Back

Way back in the September 2024 issue of *Touchstone*, I confessed to you all that I loved the autumn. Although I did not explicitly state it there, my implication was I disliked the Spring – a strange confession for a Druid to make! I always use to find Spring would stretch out in front of me without any really engaging seasonal markers to break it up. This changed when I came to Druidry, but I still found the season tended to roll past me while I was waiting to get to the Summer Solstice.

As someone who loves the cosy nights of autumn, who thrills as the evenings draw in, Spring is the very antithesis of the days I spend most of the year craving.

This year, however, is different. This winter has been particularly dark and gloomy in many ways – meteorologically as well as spiritually. The UK has endured one of its dullest and rainiest winters: it's been miserable and wet with flood alerts seemingly a new fact of life as the climate changes around us. The world feels like it is spiralling out of control, with every news report bringing a new troubling announcement. And everyone seems to be really on edge, as if they are only just holding things together.

In a world of such deep insecurity, one of the things we can rely on is the return of the light.

I'm writing this on the first sunny day some parts of the UK have had in 2026. There is a palpable difference in everyone's behaviour today. Yes, it's still cold but people have got a bit of a smile on their face. The snowdrops are finally out in abundance and the daffodils are following hard on their heels. The birds are sitting on the tops of the trees, singing their songs to pale, forget-me-not skies and the local cats are basking on warm shed roofs. It's as if the whole of nature is giving a collective sigh. And I love it.

So, this Spring, I'm embracing the light and



Image: Spring Equinox
by Patricia Robin Woodruff

ditching the darkness. I'm noting down in my diary the time of sunrise and sunset, so that I'm much more aware of the expanding hours of light. I'm greeting the sun in the morning and saying farewell in the evening, which means I'm actively noticing the hours of light expanding. The other day I even caught myself enthusiastically noting "It's five o'clock and it isn't dark yet!"

Spring hasn't always been my favourite season but this year I am going to celebrate every shoot and every bud, every bird call and every additional minute of light. I'm sure the world will still feel chaotic but noticing those simple things will help keep me grounded in the centre of the storm.

And a big thank you to Patricia Robin Woodruff, whose light and colourful Spring Equinox picture cheered me up on a very dull day.

*Until
next time,* Andrew iii



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)

Weaving the Web: 22.-25. July 2027, Herbstein/Fulda, Germany. for more Information, email weaving@obod.org or www.weltderlinden.de/weaving

Social Media



Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/druidry>



TikTok:
<https://www.tiktok.com/@oboddruidry>



Instagram:
<https://www.instagram.com/oboddruidry>



Threads:
<https://www.threads.com/@oboddruidry>

*And here it is, the glimpse of green, emerging from the deep.
The sign of life awakening, from earth's cold winter's sleep*

*And here it is, dawn's radiant hue, a whispering of light.
Softly chasing dark away, stealing from the night.*

*A petal born, a leaf unfurled, the sun starts climbing high.
A beautiful awakening of life beneath our sky*

*And here it is, the start of Spring, my favourite time of year.
There's magic all around us.
Life begins right here.*

Poem by Siemona