



TOUCHSTONE

— The journal of —



THE ORDER OF BARDS OVATES & DRUIDS

April 2026 | Issue 344

The Urban Druidry Edition

-  The Importance of Being an Urban Druid by Ricky Gellissen.
-  The Unofficial Ovale by Mark Newton
-  Urbanising the Wheel of the Year by Morgan Hollett
-  Urban Druidry in Venice by Katy Ashman
-  Twenty Years in the Inner-City by Penny Billington
-  Plus Lots More!

Cover Image by Ben Chatburn

Editorial

Welcome to April's edition of *Touchstone*, and the Urban Druidry edition.

Wow. Just ... wow. When I announced the theme of this special edition, I had no idea that the response would be so overwhelming and so wonderful. *Touchstone* has, for as long as I can remember, been a 16 page magazine - but not this month! This edition is 24 pages long - the biggest edition of *Touchstone* there has ever been and it's bursting at the seams with wonderful articles, pictures and poetry.

There's too much wonderful stuff to mention but, due to space constraints, I've only been able to list the main articles on the contents page below. That means you'll find lots of hidden treats as you walk the alleyways and thoroughfares of this edition, such as Stephen Lane's short piece about Birmingham's Green Man, stunning photos by Ben Chatburn, Kaz Leroux and Steve Harvey and poems by Jon Nash, Jon Wingrave and Beth Ballantyne. This edition is as bustling and diverse as any metropolis so thank you to each and every one of you who contributed.

This month's *Touchstone Unbound* will be on Friday 3rd April, at 7pm UK time, where we will be chatting to Morgan Hollett about her wonderful article *Urbanising the Wheel of the Year* and discussing how we each find magic in the city at different times of the year.

Enjoy!

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City Sunrise by Jessica McGee

The sunrise transforms
city spires to molten gold
hushing the night sounds



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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

Bandia daoibh go léir! Greetings everyone!
Beannachtaí Aibreáin daoibh, April blessings to you all! “

‘April is a moment of joy for those who have survived the winter’ Samuel Johnson

According to Irish folklore, the first three days of April are known as “Trí Lá na Riabhaighe” or “Laethanta na Bó Riabhaí” – the days of the Brindle Cow. They are also known as the “Borrowed Days”. They reflect the unpredictability of Irish weather. According to folklore, the old brindle cow wasn’t well and she was worried that she wouldn’t survive the cold, harsh and hungry month of March. Anyway, she did survive and at the end of the last day of March, she lowed out boastfully to the rest of the herd that she was alive and well, that the cold was now gone out of the ground, March had failed to kill her and she could live happily for the rest of the year. March heard her boasting and was none too pleased and took umbrage and decided to teach her a lesson. So she borrowed three days from April and filled them with the severest, coldest howling winds and rain that she could summon. Unfortunately, the brindle cow who could not withstand such weather finally succumbed and died. It is said that if the first three days of April are bitterly cold they are referred to as the “Days of the Brindle Cow.”

I hope your April beginning has been more clement.

I live in a rural area surrounded by trees, with a beautiful garden which overlooks a river. I have never had to go far to practice my Druidry – nature is all around me. I have a Grove in my garden where we have held the Wheel of the Year ceremonies for over 22 years. Why am I writing this given that this issue is about Urban Druidry? Let me explain: I joined the Order in 20023, having come across Cassandra Eason’s book *The Modern-Day Druidess*. I was blown away by how accessible and possible she made Druidry seem. Although I had known about Druids from our mythology I was not aware that there were still Druids practising today. Druids were not just men with long white beards but there were also women who are Druids. Although her book is not about Urban Druidry, she talks about how you can create your own Grove in your apartment with a

few pot plants. This to me was magic – although I didn’t live in a city at the time. This was the hook - what she did was open a door for me into another world – the world of modern Druidry which can be practised in any environment. It requires attention.

I was out in my garden this morning, enjoying the warmth of the sun and noticed a ladybird. I love how when I first spot something like a ladybird or the tiny red female flowers on the hazel tree, I then begin to see more of them. I get this same experience when walking along the street in a town or city – discovering the magical signs of nature – flowers peeping up from cracks in the pavement, buddleia trees growing in the gaps between buildings and of course the foxes. It’s interesting that I am more likely to see a fox in the city than where I live in the country. I love that even when walking on concrete, I can be aware of the earth beneath it and all the life that continues exist and to flourish there. I have that sense that nature is just waiting for an opportunity to return.

‘Nature is good for all of us. When we’re exposed to trees and other natural settings – even within the city, it fosters creativity.’

David Livermore.

Is tréimhse athnuachana agus fáis í mí Aibreáin. Go maire flúirse ann! April is a time of renewal and growth. May there be abundance!

Eimear 

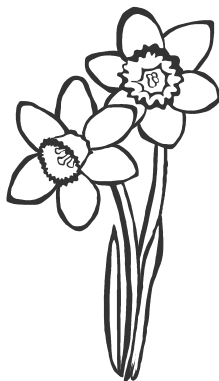


Image by Kaz Leroux



Image by Gabi Cavegn

The Seedling by Marcus Snell

The rain stopped falling,
 spent clouds rolling ever on
Sun, bright giver of life,
smiles down upon me
I shoot up
The ground is broken,
 splintered trees to the east
And the clay is cracking,
 bare earth to the west
I stretch out
Machines came with steel,
 removing that which was
Trucks beat upon spoiled soil,
 crushing stone and bone
I breathe in
But the building stopped,
 not from outcry or plead
Gold ran dry, but not ground,
humbled yet open
I breathe out
Rain rained upon me,
 I drank deep its sweet
 life
And sun shone down on me,
 I ate well its light
I shoot up.



A Special Relationship by Belinda Hodder

Whizzing, popping, blipping, whistling,
chuckling, beeping, cackling, clicking.
You're a siren, a dog barking, anything you want
to be.

An electric crackle, a hiss, a rattle, a fantastic
barrage of mimicry.

Purple, green, blue, white, black,
you wear a shimmering, shining cloak and hat.
A sea of stars in your glossy feathers.
One of nature's great spectacles when you're all
together.

A cloud, an elephant, a wave in the sky,

your murmurations easily grab my eye.
Quickly turning, round, then flat,
a colossal, magical, aerial acrobat.

And when you come to our gardens, imitate
our sounds,
roost under bridges, hang out in towns,
I see you, sweet Starling, we're connected, we
blend.

The human world, the
natural world, living in
harmony, friends.



City Snow by Brea Plum

White and glistening in the light, crust of crushed diamonds on dry powder.

Preternatural night glow when lights bounce off cloud cover down to snow cover up to cloud cover so bright you can read discarded receipts on the ground at 2 am.

Eerie still tomb quiet as all sound is absorbed by crystals. Burlap wrapped car tires and muffled airplane engines. Just snow squeaking crunching under feet.

It doesn't stay.

Sparkling glitter dust turns to coffee clay on the streets and parking lots. Compacted to skating rink by the weight of cars. Frozen into slate slabs as the air contracts frigid and sharp.

Temperature soars above freezing and iridescent sidewalks are ankle deep bilgewater slurpees. Slush slides down roofs that polar vortex forges into deathbringer stalactites.

Pavements crumble and macadam buckles as snow falls then freezes then melts then freezes then falls again. Streets and walkways gouged like elves are launching missiles and bombs. Active threat of canyons and sinkholes and fault lines on highways.

Dalmation spotted mountains and valleys of city plow discard eradicating parking space. First step into the crosswalk treacherous from unclearable snow. NASA precision timing to reach the bus stop exactly the moment the bus arrives.

Red-tailed hawk devouring pigeon in bare tree above you can't stop watching. Comforting caw of crows that never leave the city. Hundreds of tracks proving rabbits use sidewalks in winter. Leave stale bread out for the squirrel gods.

You tire...of cold, shoveling, salt, sliding, falling, layers, dry body, penguin walking, shoe logistics, clever names on snow plows, liquid metal in lungs, static shocks.

Yearn ahead for yard carpets of violets and squill and crabapple blossoms. Emergence of mud.

Canada geese terrorizing parks and mallards wandering down street gutters.

Days of beauty reverence peace among weeks of trudging sludging endurance. Just get through it. It doesn't stay.

The Urban Bard Remembers

by Jon Nash

I have been a dandelion growing from a crack in the pavement, searching for the sun.

I have been a solitary pigeon on a telegraph pole dreaming of branches.

I have been a road of tarmac wet with rain, where once there was a wide lake.

I have been the pathways of foxes and deer and on some days still hold up their wildness.

I have been a footprint, a train track, a bike burn and the rubber reflection of tyres.

I have been ragged rocks shaped into squares, circles turned to straight lines.

I have been moss on metal. I have been pollen on plastic.

I have been rain on raincoats. I have been sunshine on sunglasses.

I have been the shadow of a chimney on a rooftop, telling time to the seagulls.

I have been falling water and falling bombs and falling feathers.

I have been the street names of ancient ancestors and lost landmarks.

I have been the song of seeds on the breeze going garden to garden hoping for soil.

I have been the deep hum of engines and the bright fire light of bulbs.

I have been Taliesin texting at the bus stop and Merlin meandering at the edges of the park.

I have been the same aching sky above all these heads if roofs and lights would let you see.

I have been a boulder and a hillside, a farmstead and a station, houses and whatever comes next.

Urban Treasures by Jessica McGee

Clubs and cathedrals
confide their secret marvels
for those who will hear

Cycles of Meditation by Patricia Sgrignoli

As I leave our small bungalow at 209,
We climb our street of steep incline.
That is Marina, my Marin bike, & I,
At the top waiting for cars to whiz by.
Now it's safe to cross & we climb again,
One more busy road, & we're free then
To wander where Marina decides to go.
Nothing planned, easy to & fro.
There's the school, kids out for play.
Beautiful flower gardens along the way.
Here & there, a free library, a small book nook.
As whimsy strikes, I stop & take a look.
I always say Spirit has a sense of humor.
What messages await behind the little door.
Using titles to remind me how close they are,
Gentle taps on the shoulder saying, 'we're never far.'
Like the time I'd researched mom's Adams line,
I found John & John Quincy, distant cousins of mine.
That same day after final clues dropped in place,
I was out for a spin, as is so often the case.
There was a book nook I'd never seen before,
I stopped & stood perusing it's reading store.
A hardcover's spine proclaimed, 'The Adams Family'
About the 2 Presidents Adams, a compact history.
I laughed out loud & pedaled onward, book in tow,

Marveling how Spirit was again letting me know.
They are always present, watching & guiding me,
Left, then right, up here, down there, just to see
Where they & Marina want to go, past homes & parks,
Crossing paths with birds & cats, occasional dog barks.
Struck by the sheer variety of trees in the scenes,
I pause & study them, unique in shape, size, & greens.
Auras dance & pulse clouds of verdant color into the sky,
In brief meditations, we connect in a type of cellular high.
I often photograph them, my leafy green friends.
Then I head home again, round a few more bends.
Once back at casita 209, Google tells me their names.
In sacred grove journeys, they offer changing frames.
Chinese elm, gambel oak, piñon pine, juniper,
Sycamore, ash, ponderosa pine, mulberry, poplar,
Cottonwood, mesquite, olive, fig, desert willow,
Desert plants of pampas grass, prickly pear, ocotillo.
High desert landscapes, New Mexico's late spring & summer,
Til cold winds blow us south to Tucson for late fall & winter.

My City is a Forest by Ricky Gellissen

I've heard it said, with incredulity
That there's no such thing as Urban Druidry.
But I'd like to lay that myth to rest
The city I live in is also a forest.
A talk show broadcaster and journalist
Most argumentatively did once insist
That it was possible to grow concrete
And although with towers of glass and steel we are replete
Jack-in-the-Green has us in his sights
Laying down roots and scaling the heights.
The New Forest and Sherwood have stiff competition
Spreading foliage across London has been Jack's mission
With 9 million people and over 8.4 million trees
That's almost one for each Londoner, if you please!
The names we gave to the land fit the bill
With places like Norwood and Forest Hill.
Ancient Woodland thrives, as it should,

In Highgate or Queen's or Coldfall Wood.
There is nature in London, seen and unseen,
Despite what you think, the city is green.
Nearly half of it is surface vegetation
Or rivers, or still waters for irrigation.
London's natural spaces create valuable habitats
With badgers, Stag Beetle, parakeets and bats
It is a haven for Urban Druidry
A forest full of biodiversity!



Ekho Woods by Lorna Rose

It wasn't always this idyllic.
It was once full of litter,
old mattresses, abandoned tellies.
But it knows who it is, this land.
You can see the effort it takes
to drag the beauty of the dirt
out from under the plastic mess.

The spirits of women wheeling barrows full of
leaves.

It's about making mess and memories.
They have always come here, the women,
with their dreams, longings, loss,
dodging the badger potholes,
clearing the land and helping it breathe again.
Helping the waters flow.
They came here to begin anew and find friend-
ship.

A circle of seekers cementing their growth.
It takes time to trust again.
Sometimes it's hard to discern
the flowers from the weeds,
sometimes you have to rip it all up
to know it and replant it and wait.

Down the ancestral line,
their women have walked this land,
a hundred generations,
who got their wisdom from the woods.
Their aunts were chain makers,
anvil strikers, beer brewers,
witchy women, rebels.
I don't feel proud that I'm from the place
that made the machines that crushed mother
earth,
but I'm glad that I found this haven of green,
where women plant the future,
despite the barb wire of ignorance,
and the illusion of progress.
We don't dig here,
we grow and we breathe with the trees,
and when the robins come to visit,
we stop whatever we're doing and feel blessed.



Image by Kaz Leroux

Harbor Casino by Bryan Perrin



A painting that I never had a image of till now!
a portrait of place - of people - of a time.

I picked up a wood panel, I found, on the bank of
the Hudson River a quarter century ago,

working the subjects composition and structural
forms defined by the dark drawing,
pulled from a sketch on location.

With gesso and acrylic paint I built up on the
surface over a few weeks to try to capture the spirit
of the place,

or at least the way I remember a thing that I ap-
preciate,

collections of details highlighted, reflected, assem-
bled,

characters interacting in space, oriented with
directional reference,

attitude, obvious and subtle, explicit and implicit
atmospheric interior shapes symbols social and
cultural contained on a two dimensional plane.

A Real Place depicted by brushing wet paint from
a pointy hairy brush from My often trembling

hand to a solid hard surface.

A picture with meaning to others than myself,
with an unknown, unseen audience in space and
time.

Human company-environmental sensitivi-
ty-awareness of surroundings - community climate
shared comfort

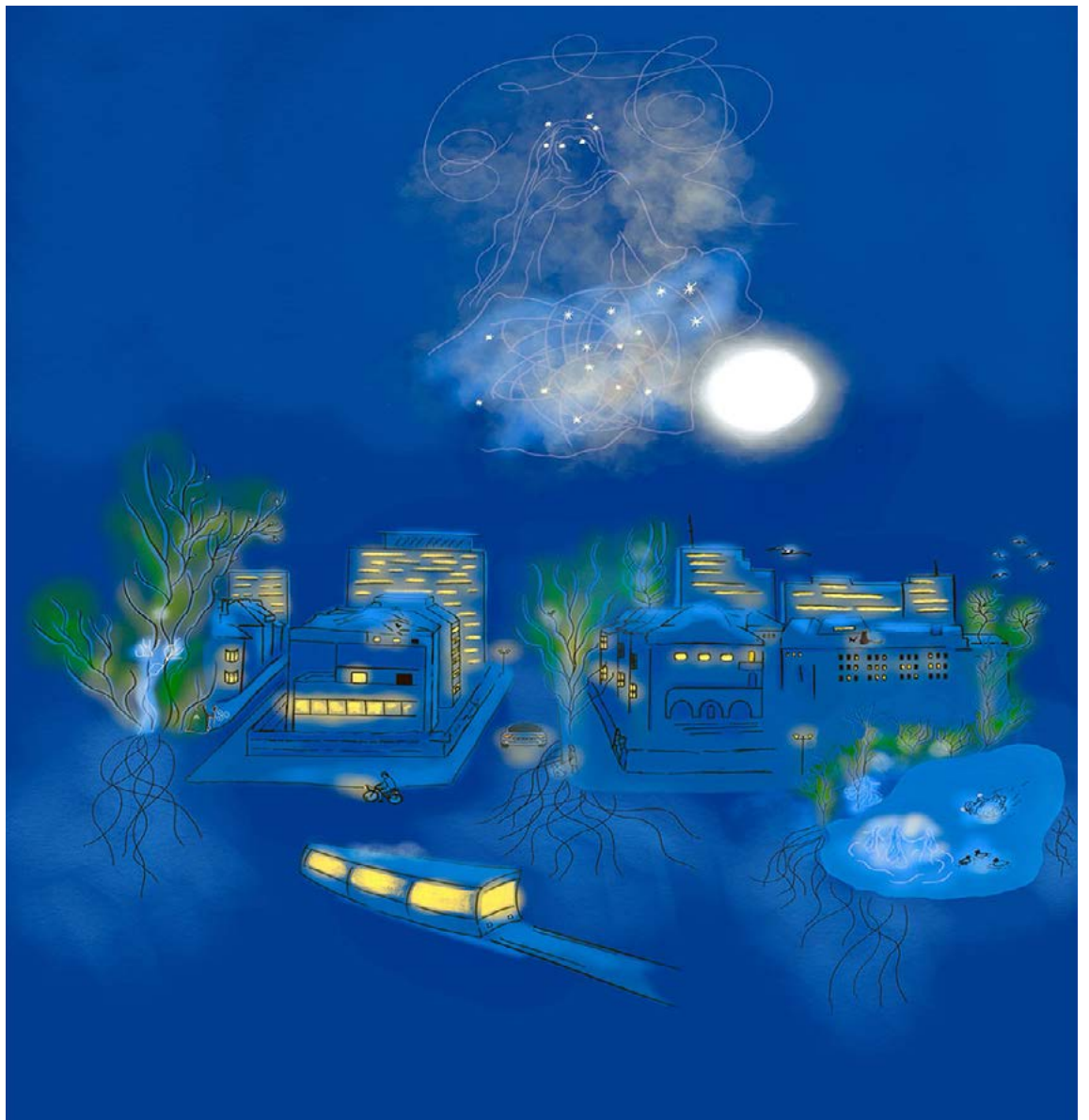
A reverence for what is honestly real, with a natu-
ral distaste for idealized mass produced fakes .

- Social realism - Metropolitan animism -
Locale spiritualism - Creative mysticism -

intersection of tug boats tunnels and trains - hang
out - hold out - hide away- that is no more.....

.....been found out, bought out, and built over,
but the spirit of the times in that place continue in
people now far from that busy place, Time travel-
ling refreshments, home made kielbasa served,
in another dimension, that I am fortunate enough
to rediscover.

remaining a real place full of real people repre-
sented in pigment on panel, and now pixel on
screen.



Druidry in the City by Leyawen

“I’ve created a small ecosystem that brings together the Seen and the Unseen present in a cityscape: the linear architecture, solid pavements, orderly street lights, cars bikes and buses, intersected with messy human lives - wonky rooftops, eerie homes, the cosy glow of windows, potential solitude (with its pros and cons), in which live fuzzy shadows, people, animals, creatures of the night, dryads, lake spirits, trees, deep roots thriving unbothered in the underground, each in their microworld or in the liminality between thresholds, all under the woven orchestration of the night sky with its bright stars and moon. The cityscape welcomes all life, with its fragmented, interconnected, diverse, multitude of all existences.

The composition functions on several planes to mirror the layered reality of a city, aiming to highlight the omnipresent and ethereal aspects of nature in a city landscape ecosystem: macro as in the atmospheric urban landscape, micro as in the fine details of each fragmented microworld, the vertical axis connecting the celestial-airy-terrestrial-underground, the existential axis balancing life across the Seen and Unseen.”

The Importance of Being an Urban Druid by Ricky Gellissen

I grew up in rural Kent, and later leafy Hampshire. I remember how foxes use to be a problem on the farm, especially with the free range chickens.

The urban sprawl of London has expanded, and a large part of the borough in which I live in South East London was annexed in the sixties from North West Kent. Now I see foxes more often than I ever did in “the country” – almost daily. Urban foxes have adapted to their environment. So too, can Urban Druids.

I can remember a discussion upon The Druid's Hearth where some were asserting that Urban Druids were a misnomer and could not exist. Quite the reverse I feel. Without Urban Druids, Modern Druidry would not exist.

At 23 Poland Street, just off Oxford Road in London, is the King's Arms pub. A plaque on the front of the house is inscribed 'In this Old King's Arms Tavern The Ancient Order of Druids was revived 28th November 1781. This commemorative plaque was placed here on the 150th anniversary by the A.O.D.'

One of the best views in London can be enjoyed from the top of Primrose Hill. This was the site where the first meeting of the Gorsedd of the Bards of the Isles of Britain, organised by Iolo Morganwg took place at Midsummer on 21st June 1792. The Royal Parks granted permission to commemorate that significant event in history with a memorial plaque, featuring Anglesey Stone, which was unveiled in 2009.

Even Ross Nichols, our Order's Founder, was effectively an Urban Druid as he resided in Baron's Court, London, during the 1970s.

London itself, which is where I live and work, is technically the world's largest urban forest.

London is 21% trees and, according to the United Nations definition, a forest is anywhere that's at least 20 percent trees. Paul Wood, author of *London is a Forest*, *London's Street Trees: A Field Guide to the Urban Forest* and *London Tree Walks*, goes on to highlight that the UN states a forest has 'land spanning more than 0.5 hectares with trees higher than 5 metres and a canopy cover of more than 10 percent, or trees able to reach these thresholds in situ'. Over 40 percent of public land in London is made up of green space on land of 14,164 hectares. Add in land that isn't publicly owned and that figure will be even higher.



I share a first floor flat with two cats and several houseplants. I have a flat roof with decking outside my bedroom where there are a few more plants and a small olive tree and a small Japanese Maple.

On my way to work I go out through the garden I share with my upstairs neighbour, with its lawn, shrubbery and tree. There is a magpie who regularly argues

with one of my cats over whose turn it is to perch on the higher branch of my next-door neighbour's tree. My two cats generally patrol to keep the foxes out of our garden.

On the road side of my flat I overlook Elmers End Green, a large gyratory that I cross on my morning commute, with a variety of trees from evergreen to cherry blossom. It is here that most mornings I stop to feed a pair of geese that stop by daily.

Less than ten minutes' walk from home is the bridge over the railway where I stop to feed a large murder of crows who gather by the train station and the Tesco carpark, foraging for food. Right next door to the train and tram station, with the other boundary being the main road, and then the crematory and cemetery, is South Norwood County Park located on a former

sewage farm. The nature of the soil has led to the creation of a large area of wet grassland and a sizeable lake. Two streams, tributaries of the River Ravensbourne, also cross the site. The rest of the habitats on the site are mainly meadowland, bramble scrub and hedges. This is where the crows actually belong.

I am a member of Tamesis Grove, and we hold rituals during the Wheel of the Year throughout parts of London, using Queen's Wood, Green Park, Crystal Palace Park, Richmond Park (a special sight at Autumn Equinox for the rutting of the deer), Primrose Hill, The Millenium Stone Circle at Hilly Fields in Ladywell, and even by the River Thames in Victoria Tower Gardens, with the Houses of Parliament as a backdrop. We are frequently joined by corvids, pigeons, parakeets and squirrels. We are immersed in nature. But then, as druids, we should recognise that we too are part of nature, not separate to it. Wildlife and

greenery can be found all around.

I am reminded of Talis Kimberley, the singer songwriter, and the opening verse of *Green Places*:

*"Kitchen sink herbery
Basil and rosemary grow
In between jam jars
And where the recycling goes
No room for more
On the seventeenth floor of the tower –
Still, the rosemary flowers;
That's all he needs
A few summoning seeds and he's home
In the clay and the loam!"*

Later in the song she also notes:

*"And there's still more green than there's grey
Perhaps it was we, not Jack who went away"*

Perhaps learning to spot those summoning seeds, and looking to urban foxes, crows and rodents for wildlife is what is needed to help embrace Urban Druidry.

London's Dreaming by Jon Wingrave

Nine million trees are dreaming,
their branches hold the city through centuries of
building and decay,
breathing through the fog of war, smoke, smog, and
brick dust.
Oak, elm, elder, beech and silver birch, flowering
thorns, and fruit trees,
twisted yews and towering London planes,
send roots down to drink from fens deep below the
Roman walls.
From the mighty Tamesis secret rivers flow, forgotten
beneath stone pavements.
The dark waters of Walbrook, Effra, Tyburn and
Fleet feed Holywell, Bridewell and Clerkenwell.
Lud's town is laid on a ritual landscape, every river,
hill, and grove is sacred.
Old gods and goddesses have shifted shape, but are
living still
in this liminal place, where land and water meet,
between sleeping and waking, between day and
nightlife,
between the old and the new.
Rooted in the past, built layer upon layer on the
bones of the dead,
it's the place to be, always dreaming of tomorrow.
People come to be themselves or find something
new,

and whoever they are and wherever they come from
all are magically transformed into a Londoner.

The trees are dreaming William Blake's vision,
a living London builded with imagination,
spirit and wonder, pulsating with creative life.
They exhale to clear the air and the traffic stills.
People leave their cars, touching the earth, strolling
along the tree-lined streets, where wildflowers and
grasses grow through the cracks.
Meeting in parks at the heart of the city,
in squares and green spaces, allotments and gardens.
They slow, stop, and turn to each other, humbly
listening, talking discreetly, sharing kindnesses,
stories, and songs,
smelling roses, lavender and herbs, hearing joy and
laughter amid the birdsong.
Urban foxes roam wild, tiny mice run the
Underground and proud pigeons perch on their
thrones of glass and steel.
Royal parks rewild, gardens
bloom on every patch of
earth and office roof,
where countless hives send
flights of bees to pollinate.



The Unofficial Ovate by Mark Newton

What is a nature-based spirituality without nature? Perhaps that is the immediate thought that comes to mind when considering druidry and built-up environments. But I'd propose that this is not the case. In my view, there is a different, more counter-cultural, more resilient form of nature to be found in our towns and cities.

Some 40 years ago, iconic British nature writer Richard Mabey wrote one of the most interesting books on the natural world ever produced. *The Unofficial Countryside* remains a cult book - not widely read, certainly not as much as his famous *Flora Britannica*. It was a somewhat punk rebellion within nature writing at the time, and even reading it some 20 years after publication, as a young student of environmental science, it left a deep impression on me. Later still the message remains vital - for perhaps more than any other book, it demonstrated that nature need not be confined to National Parks, perfect meadows, glorious vistas.

Back when Mabey wrote his book, British cities were still in the midst of regenerating from the bomb sites of WWII; it was a very industrial landscape. Now every inch of a city has been thrice rotavated by planning committees, leaving tidy space if somewhat lacking in creativity. Yet for the Urban Druid, specifically those who lean into Ovate energies, I believe it still remains a modern bible - because urban neglect is accidentally re-enchanting Britain.

Walk the lesser paths of any town or city - away from the more well-maintained redeveloped, overdeveloped, centres - there is a discernible green revolution in the air. Many will of course celebrate a city's parks, which have a beautiful and civic function quite unlike anything found in the countryside; or the resplendently ramshackle patches of land in the suburbs that are allotments - peculiarly British treasures of land rights.

But what I am talking about is not found in green spaces, but in the *grey* spaces, and particularly in places of decay.

We must no longer consider what might look *good* from an aesthetic, Instagrammable point of view - for nature has its own views on such matters

beyond what is *nice*. All you have to do is let your perspective adjust - and there are treasures that can be found by the modern Druid in the most unusual places.

Mugwort rejoices in disturbed land, on poor soil around the edges of supermarket slip roads or those weird, undeclared spaces between a hospital complex and the roads beyond, its underground rhizomes roaming unseen. Nettles! Exploding clouds of zingy green leaves, that life-force tonic, are unstoppable along the banks of a canal or parkland edges.

Only last summer I harvested elderberries from the car park of a community centre, climbing up on the back of a bottle bank recycling point to glean those shiny black clusters from the elder tree for a winter syrup - a tree that often grows around such derelict lots and thrives in disturbed zones, those disputed spaces between footpaths and fences.

When I drive to the office in the city centre, and spy old retail buildings that have closed down and fallen into disrepair - sadly a sight that is all too common these days - I have often seen an eruption of buddleja, which is sometimes used in Chinese medicine, but certainly here it is an urban gift for the butterflies and the bees, and somehow manages to provide a small vision of beauty amongst the modern day ruins. Hawthorn, too, brings a reminder of more ancient things to unmanaged roadsides; bramble leans languidly with its autumn temptations over the fences of a factory; plantain leaves ooze up out from between the cracks on a pavement, offering gifts for pollinators; rosebay willowherb famous for its purple explosions around London's WWII bomb sites now alight any industrial wasteland or housing site shuttered for redevelopment. These are all plants of some kind of practical use to the Druid, though even the most ardent forager would make sure to stay away from immediate roadside contaminants.

Ever the optimist, I am of the view that local government cut-backs, awful though they are for the human fabric of our world, open the door



for nature. Less money is being spent on “maintenance” – a code word for making things “look” neat. But wildflowers are suddenly allowed to leap for joy along the verges of roads or roundabouts come the spring; there are probably fewer costly chemicals being sprayed along street pavements in the UK at least, and certainly less chopping along the fringes by eager council strimmers.

Beyond the plant realm, city-dwellers may also see foxes silkily oozing down garden fences every other night with the best part of a Deliveroo takeaway bag in its teeth, whilst I – now these days a village dweller – empty a bag of pretty bland fox food in a dish by the bottom of my garden and hope my wildlife cam snaps it. In the skies above, Peregrine Falcons – once on the brink of disappearance in Britain – have relocated to the city, nesting in trendy apartment buildings or office blocks.

Bees benefit from a greater and more varied diet of flowers in cities, where flowers appear more continuously throughout the year, and controversially there are perhaps fewer applications of pesticides than on farmland. Indeed many studies point to greater survival rates and greater species richness for urban bees.

Given what’s sometimes applied to modern farmland – spaces that an old lecturer once described to me as “factories without walls” – it is through neglect, or an inevitable failure to “control” nature, that a degree of sacredness returns to us: the modern city is accidentally closer to ancient ecology than some parts of the modern countryside.

Richard Mabey states in *The Unofficial Countryside*: “Discovering that the natural world is indifferent to at least the clutter and ugliness (but not usually the poisons) of our urban environments does not mean that we should be also. We should instead be trying to make our built-up areas more fruitful and life-giving for all their inhabitants.”

In the city, nature has not retreated; instead it has recalibrated, gambled, succeeded in the most unlikely places – and there is a spiritual lesson in that – but for the keen-eyed druid or ovate who witnesses this fight back, surely it is time we choose sides. Put out a few more plant pots. Seed-bomb roundabouts. Let nature sprawl untidily in our gardens. For in these urban spaces we ought not be, like most others, a “controller” of nature. In my view, it is good for our spiritual souls to become its collaborators. Or, dare I say it, its co-conspirators.



Image by Steve Harvey

Cities in Cycle: Urbanising the Wheel of the Year by Morgan Hollett

The Wheel of the Year is one of the first concepts we learn about when dipping our toes into the world of druidry and can be a fantastic entry point for anyone looking to connect to the world around them. But for the urban druid, the Wheel of the Year as its often laid out in articles, books and podcasts can come with its own set of challenges. We're asked: what's going on in nature? What fruits and vegetables are in season? Which flowers are blooming? What are the trees up to? What about the animals?

For those who call the metropolis home, these questions can be hard to answer. We live miles and miles away from the nearest farm, forest or stretch of wilderness. Demand for certain food items mean fresh berries and salad essentials are available all year round, no matter the season. Sometimes, the only flowers we'll see during a particularly chaotic week are the opportunistic dandelions poking their way through a crack in the pavement. And when it comes to wildlife, we're lucky if we see more than our local scavenger population of pigeons, crows and weirdly beefy rats.

So what is the urban druid to do? It's very easy to fall into the trap of thinking that we can only live our druidry authentically when we finally move to a smaller town, a quaint little village, out in the sticks, or onto that remote island with zero inhabitants that's currently advertising for a new lighthouse keeper. But that's simply not true: living authentically as an urban druid is possible. It just requires us to reframe the concepts we come across in our studies and adapt them to the environment we find ourselves in.

As well as the Wheel of the Year, another basic principle of druidry that we learn early on is that we are not separate from nature. By extension, then, a big city can be seen as a manifestation of nature just doing its thing. Ants form colonies inside twisting tunnels and towering ant hills. Badgers dig complicated setts into the earth beneath our feet while birds of all sizes build nests overhead from twigs and branches. The human, meanwhile, is busy constructing their den from

the materials around them — limestone, clay, water, sand and gravel come together to form the concrete walls of apartment blocks, with wood lining the floors — and connecting them all up with a complex network of overland tunnels, i.e. streets.



It can be hard to notice amidst the honking horns and perpetual business of urban living but, if you take a peek beneath the hustle and bustle, you'll notice that the city, too, follows a seasonal rhythm. The 'man-made' markers that indicate the passage of time are there, waiting to be noticed, and they can form a uniquely urban Wheel of the Year.

It goes without saying that each city has its own personality, shaped as much by the people who live there as its geographic location and its history. As such, the Wheel of the Year in London will be very different from the Wheel of the Year

in Warsaw, Rome, Madrid or Helsinki. As urban druids, figuring out just what the wheel looks like in our local area is one of the challenges (and joys!) of pursuing this path.

As an example and to hopefully inspire you to adapt your own, here's what my Wheel of the Year looks like in Germany's capital, Berlin.

We've just celebrated **Alban Eilir/Ostara** and the city is beginning to emerge from hibernation. Winter coats are being retired in favour of what the Germans call an *Übergangsjacke*, which translates literally as 'transition jacket' and refers to a lightweight jacket for the days where it's too warm for a coat and too cold for a cardigan (this language has a word for everything). Parks and green spaces will become claustrophobic as the hordes try to catch their first doses of natural vitamin D. Golden bunnies take over the shelves of every shop and the first glimpses of blossom in the streets send the local human population into a frenzy for the perfect social media snap.

Before you know it, it'll be **Beltane**. The fabled strawberry huts and asparagus wizards will return to the mean streets of the city to flog their delicious wares. Although strawberries can be

purchased all year round, none will taste as good as these locally and seasonally grown delights. Elsewhere in the country, a new asparagus queen will take to the throne and declare Spargel season open: Berliners will watch the footage online and dream of a quiet country life as asparagus royalty. The city's black-and-white winter colour palette is swapped for full saturation.

As the sun reaches its height at **Alban Hefin/Litha**, so does Berlin's human population. The river Spree is full of party boats and its banks are spotted with picnickers and day drinkers, all out to soak up as much sunlight as they can. This is the season of stepping into the U-Bahn (Berlin's metro system) and finding yourself in a tin-can sauna, eau de armpit being the essential oil of choice. Litha season goes out in a bang of glitter galore, rainbow attire, cheesy tunes and the joy of being alive as the queer community, allies and anyone who just loves a good party take to the streets to celebrate Christopher Street Day.

As the glitter-dust settles, we enter the season of **Lughnasadh**. The dog days of summer where everything feels at a standstill have crept into the city, calming its chaos for a short while. With half the local population disappearing on summer jaunts elsewhere, the city becomes a slower, more bearable place for those that remain, with the long days taking on an almost dream-like quality.

Alban Elfed/Mabon arrives subtly. The party boats begin to dwindle, slowly replaced by steam boats. The riversides are still populated as people try to soak up the last rays of summer sun but it feels like a slow goodbye to the warmth. This is a liminal season where the weather fluctuates from day to day, and you can never dress quite right for it.

Pumpkins galore herald the arrival of **Samhain**: not even the city can resist a good old pumpkin for Halloween, it seems. Samhain in Berlin is a season of soft, artificial lighting that guides us gently into the deep dark depths of winter. The Festival of Lights opens the season and sees Berlin's landmarks lit up with artwork and video installations for a week-long period. The city lights up again with lantern parades to mark St Martin's day and the aroma of goose fills the air as restaurants serve up this feast day's special dish.

As Samhain fades into **Alban Arthan/Yule**, the city stays softly aglow with Christmas lights and

markets. The aromas of mulled wine, sausages and cinnamon linger in the air and warm you from the inside out. The markets close shortly after the solstice, dropping the city into a period of darkness. From now until Beltane, everything will be washed out and grey.

Finally, we reach **Imbolc**. If you live close to a park, you might be treated to some early flowers. If not, you'll at least notice the light sticking round a little bit longer. Venture into the city and you'll find red bears popping up all over the place as Berlinale-fever sets in. While most species are still in hibernation, one has emerged to brave the cold: the not-so-humble film snob can be found scurrying between cinemas or propping themselves up in the edgiest of coffee shops at this time of year while the rest of the city slumbers on.

Soon, the Wheel will turn and Alban Eilir will be back in the spotlight once more...

I hope this article inspires you to craft your own urban Wheel of the Year and share it on the Hearth's Urban Druidry circle. I'd love to hear what the different seasons look like in the cities you call home!

If You Look by Beth Ballantyne

There may not be the endless rolling hills,
Or the wide open green where animals fill,
But the spirit of nature will never lay still.

There may only be patches of what we once knew,
But the spirits of place will hold on through.
The silk of the web woven together,
We live under nature's wing wherever.

Though the path may be tarmac,
Where was once soft and green,
And your eyes capture roof tops,
As far as they can see,
If you look deep inside,
Through the depth of the storm,
You will see that we are nature.
In human form.



Held by Water and Wood: Urban Druidry in Venice by Katy Ashman

Frequently described as a city of stone and water, Venice has a surprising network of living spaces — trees, gardens, plants, and seasonal rhythms — persisting through careful human tending rather than natural abundance. Urban Druidry in Venice begins not with the recovery of wilderness, but with attention to what already lives here and within the constraints of an inhospitable lagoon environment.

Beneath this city of stone and water lies a less visible existence: Venice rests on an immense foundation of wood. Millions of timber piles driven deep into mud and clay, have supported the city for centuries, preserved by water rather than decay. For us Druids, this may spark powerful feelings — a city held not by stone alone, but by trees, transformed and

enduring beneath the tide. Urban Druidry here is therefore not metaphorical; it is grounded quite literally in wood, in the long afterlife of forests that continue to hold the city steady.

Species such as holly and yew, long associated with endurance and continuity, are not prevalent and need to be sought out, but they do appear in gardens and sacred precincts, their evergreen foliage marking seasonal persistence within a fragile environment shaped by flood, salt, and pressure. Plane trees and other shade-bearing plants structure public spaces such as communal gardens. Rosemary, laurel, and oleander grow close to both domestic buildings and ecclesiastical structures. These plants are not ornamental in a superficial sense; they help to regulate climate and offer different protections, depending on the seasons in the city.

The Green Man appears sparsely in Venetian stonework decorations and offers a useful interpretive lens. Here, he does not signify an opposition between nature and culture, but rather their entanglement: botanical forms emerge from

architectural order, life sustained within buildings of cold stone and salt-stained brick.

A Bard might first experience Venice through such symbols and stories, and sound — in the call of bells across water, the play of light on stone, and the Green Man emerging unexpectedly from carved surfaces. An Ovate may attune to subtler patterns: the tidal rhythms of the lagoon,

the medicinal and protective qualities of plants growing in sheltered places, and the city's long memory of health, illness, and recovery. And a Druid, grounded in relationship and responsibility, may focus on balance and maintenance — observing how Venice survives through restraint, cooperation, and the continual work of care, when so many consume, harm and



Image: San Trovaso Green Man
by Katy Ashman

exploit the city.

My visits to Venice are made with affection and frequency, but also with an awareness of their environmental cost, which I try to acknowledge and offset rather than ignore. To arrive by air is to encounter Venice firstly as a fragile island form set within water; to arrive by rail is to enter at ground level gradually and be carried into the city by crossing the lagoon waters by heavy infrastructure. Urban Druidry attends to these thresholds, recognising how modes of entry condition our relationship with place.

For Druids visiting Venice within the context of global tourism, such attentiveness carries ethical weight. To practise Druidry here is to resist consumption and checklists, and instead cultivate slower, place-responsive presence. Venice reminds us that Druid practice does not depend on remoteness, but on the quality of attention brought to the living systems we inhabit. And in these fog-bound mornings surrounding Imbolc (as I write), Venice wears its own mask — one that softens edges, slows movement, and blurs the

thresholds.

It also reminds us that life does not wait for ideal conditions: trees root themselves in brackish, fragile ground, and still the roses in the Royal Gardens bloom even now in February. The full moon has brought her high tides, with waters rising up through Piazza San Marco and flooding Rialto, a reminder that lunar rhythm remains an active force in the life of this city. A city that endures not by accident, but by balance — learned slowly and held together by trees still working below the tide.

These reflections arise from repeated visits to Venice, and I welcome correspondence via the Hearth from readers who are interested in thinking about how Druidry might inform their own encounters with the city. (Katy's name on the Hearth is @Katy, or she can be found here: <https://hearth.druidry.org/members/550a27fe/>).



**Image: Campiello Santa Maria
Nova Green Man by Katy Ashman**



**Birmingham's Green Man
by Stephen Lane**

In Birmingham, we have an area that has independent shops, artisans and small creative industries. The origins of the area was the re-generation of the original Birds Custard Factory. The green man sculpture has stood in this spot for over 30 years. The area has been built up and regenerated around him. A small group of people do gather at certain times of the wheel.

*Between brick and siren, moss remembers rhymes.
Oak ghosts hum beneath the subway's spine.
We bless the rain in puddled neon lights that glow.
Pigeons circle like runes above the city square.
The city breathes; WE listen, as leaf to stone.*



Images by Stephen Lane

Urban Druidry: Twenty Years in the Inner-City by Penny Billington

I am an urbanite - always have been, on the edge of the great outdoors, but with all the convenience of town and city. Urban Druidry is my bag.

I've never had an unimpeded view of the moon and sun from rising to setting. Roofs and chimneys, yes; vistas, no. But city restrictions focus the mind wonderfully on nature and the elements, the roots, stones and stars. The magic amid all the litter, low-level vandalism and noisy pubs. Derby, in the Midlands.

Our **EARTH** connection was strong. Our allotment was an elderly neighbour's garden: bless that generous soul. The disused railway line uncovered waste ground with herbs and weeds, and, running through the industrial centre, a long stretch of rolling parkland. Darley Park, the Avalon of Derby! It gave us elderflowers for 'elderflower nouveau', blackthorn for sloe gin; space to run, play and plant a Grove which still thrives today. (see pictures)

WATER energy came from the River Derwent. And Derby has several sacred wells - who knew? We collected St Alkmund's Well water for rituals, and attended well dressing ceremonies, a rural custom brought into the city, which perhaps originally honoured the Nymphs of the Wells. This echo of Arthurian story sent us exploring the region and discover 'Arthur' sites in the Peak. But that's the countryside: back to the city.

AIR: The air in the city is chock full of birds, flying, tweeting and leaving messages on the washing. Just once, the flick of a hawk disappeared as a dead pigeon thumped onto

the lawn. And, one magical day, a sparrowhawk landed on our road and just... communed... with my husband, for several minutes: he still occasionally eats meat, but hasn't eaten a bird since. My husband, I mean. The hawk continues to prey on its own species, and quite right too.

Now, still living in the city, but the smallest in England, we have the starling murmurations gathering in trees across the road; a greater spotted woodpecker has been known to visit; a kingfisher flies like an arrow down the stream; and in every car park we see pied wagtails. Swallows circle me in my local park, two feet above the ground; dozens of them, whilst children play unawares. The queens of the air are ever-present, though largely unseen.

FIRE: Our Derby garden was south-facing and drenched in sun. We made a firepit for ceremony, and a woodburning stove brought fire into the heart of our home. And there was the fire of living spirit: fox cubs tumbling in play down the garden path; the exhausted dog fox in the shade by the back door; the hedgehog we freed from a plastic bean net, and revived with Rescue Remedy. And once, a moment outside time, realising we'd almost stepped barefoot on an adder on our way to the Neolithic circle Barbrook I.

We made myth with our daughter - checking her foot over the years until it exactly fitted 'the stone of destiny' on a cobbled street; letting the scent of enchantment guide us to the huge lime (linden) tree by the central library; running with The Woodcraft Folk through the dark park, planting garlic on the longest night... Can cocoa



Image: Planting the Grove by Penny Billington

be part of a mythic scenario? Very much so, if drunk by a wide-eyed six year old in a moonlit garden by a fire pit.

It was a rich and vibrant time, but... it took energy. Life is just easier in the relaxed South West and in the twenty-first century. An occult bookshop is less likely to be picketed by placard-carrying Christians: and duplicated catalogues supplying all our occult needs in discreet brown envelopes, are a thing of the past. I rather regret those, having nostalgia for my reliance on such outlets at the Sorcerer's Apprentice (Any UK Pagans remember their tag line? 'We got bombed; we got better') and Helios Book Services.

It's a good time to be a Druid in the UK, but being an urban Druid still requires a special focus. Knowing how to spot the new moon in the gaps between the houses - we had a special circular walk; knowing over which nightclub the full moon would be likely to rise; knowing where to forage for hazelnuts; noting the fig tree tantalisingly overhanging the pavement for a future visit...As in rural Druidry, there's a lot of noticing and, as with the pied wagtails, a lot of delight in the spotting. Nature, the abundance of life and a sacred sense

of place is always there, wherever we put our attention. We go to the country for rest and refreshment, but life is for living in the grit and challenge of the built-up places. And maybe the Druidic rewards are all the sweeter for having to seek them out. After all, what is under the pavement? Our environment: Mother Earth. And, above the tallest skyscraper, the procession of the planets; the ancient harmony on which our



lives depend. And, poking from its roots in the deep earth through cracks in the pavement, reaching to the sun: a dandelion: the indomitable stuff of life.

Image: The Grove 25 Years Later
by Penny Billington

Urban Mistletoe by Faewren

I discovered in a small recreation ground in Sutton, Greater London! It's very Urban around there so I felt so incredibly lucky to find it. I took a moment to send a thank you to the tree for playing host to the mistletoe, to Mother Nature and to The Divine Force for allowing it to grow here!



Druidry for Urbanites by Scott Royle

When we think of Druidry, we think of the woodlands, the great outdoors and our connection with nature. Because Druids often became advisors, their travels took them to many places. They were found in suburban, and urban areas as well as rural settings.

There is a proverb 'Home is where the hearth is.' The esoteric message is that a home is defined as a place of warmth, and belonging rather than a physical or geographical location.

Indeed, many of the great thinkers were exiled, enslaved, or imprisoned to include Epictetus, Phaedo of Elis, Aesop, Diogenes of Sinope, Baruch Spinoza, and Mandela. Socrates, was a special case as he chose death over exile. Each of these men contributed to the betterment of civilization while under a forced curtailment of their freedoms. Marcus Aurelius was a Stoic philosopher-king, emperor of Rome. His duty bound him in a similar fashion. He was bound to the court as emperor and general to the Roman armies. Marcus was a reluctant ruler. He was chosen by his adopted grandfather Emperor Hadrian to be one of his successors. He reigned during the period called the Five Good Emperors, a period of stability during the Roman Empire. These men taught that even when enslaved, imprisoned, or exiled, they were still free. While the body may be entrapped, the mind and soul are free.

Sometimes the body itself can feel like an entrapment. The late Stephen Hawking was bound to a wheelchair due to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) which affected his motor skills and his speech. Even though some may see that his mind was "imprisoned" in his body, it did not stop him from his work on Black Hole Thermodynamics, Cosmology, and Quantum Gravity.

It is this same inner freedom that Druids carried with them. In today's world, slavery, exile and political imprisonment are rare. However, we maybe constrained to where we live. Our chosen professions or even our preferred lifestyles may bind us to urban living. Family connections may also dictate where we live. An example might be the care of an elderly parent or someone who needs medical care only found closer to cities. We

may feel trapped inside a body that is damaged or broken. In every case, it matters not where we are, but who we are.

Not all of us are blessed with a large tract of land complete with a grove surrounded by oak trees.

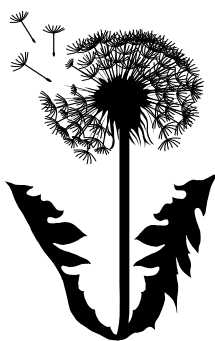
Not all of us have professions or lifestyles that allow us more time in and with nature. What we have is our own inner hearth (or heart) which travels with us wherever we go. If we adjust our thinking to home being a place where you belong and not a place you own then, wherever you go there you are. This last thought resonates with several different philosophical schools. Stoicism teaches that external influences do not matter, only one's reasoned choice and judgement. Buddhism advises

that suffering persist until the mind changes, and Existentialism advocates that you are responsible for yourself everywhere. Displacement does not dissolve identity.

I have always considered home is where my wife is. There was a time where our economic future was looking bleak and I quipped that all I needed was a large cardboard box from a big do-it-yourself store and a bridge to put it under - I also told her she could pick out the bridge. We were both good with living under a bridge in a box as long as we had each other.

Where to start? You may feel a little muddled and maybe a bit overwhelmed. A good place to start is to get your mind in order. Philosophy will help you answer the big questions like what is your worldview. I consider myself a practicing Stoic. I feel Stoicism blends nicely with Druidry; it is a form of philosophy that can be used in everyday living. Books by Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Ryan Holiday, and William Irvine are good places to start. One book that got me started was *A Guide to the Good Life* by Irvine. Another modern philosopher, Robert Greene is a good source for philosophy though he doesn't consider himself a Stoic. *The Daily Stoic* and *The Daily Laws*, by Holiday and Greene respectively, offer a page per day reading to help keep you centered. A page from either typically takes less than 5 minutes to read.

Get some books and start reading. Read and



reread. Study and internalize what you have read. Find your place within yourself and you will find your place in the world. As a Druid, you are tasked to be wise; wisdom can mean nothing more than the sum of your life's experiences. It also means that as a part of your life's experience, you should constantly be seeking ways to improve yourself.

An applicable proverb is "Physician, heal thyself", whose esoteric meaning is you must know yourself to include your limits and faults before you can judge or heal others. Wisdom and Druidry are lifelong, endless pursuits which brings peace and contentment to your being.

Is there any difference between an urban Druid vs. a more traditional (rural) Druid? The only difference is location and setting, and as we have seen, doesn't really matter. As a Druid, your training is guided toward wisdom. Your goal is to become a sage, to act as an advisor as well as be an example to others in your circle of influence. Your standards are high, your pursuit of knowledge, eternal.

Your path is clear, your destination is set, and your location irrelevant. There is nothing to stop you; not exile, not imprisonment, not enslavement, not even death. Embrace where you are with who you are.

We, Dwellers of the City by Liselotte Schellekens

We, of the City,
We hang up strings of starlight connecting and
illuminating our homes in winter's darkness.
We read the rain in puddles.
We nurture plants, flowers, trees in pots on our
doorstep and celebrate the flow of the seasons
and the wholeness of the Earth as day after
day they follow their path
and stay.
We admire a small greeny when it peeps
through a crack in the road.
We greet the moon who smiles high in our
neighbor's window across the road.
We tilt our head to drink in the sunlight when
finally it rises above the shadowing heights.
We applaud the brave birch growing on the
wall.
We place new pots with plants when we find
the old have been adopted by another nature-
loving dweller.
We catch the wind with our ears as it overrules
the peak hour bustle.
We open the bedroom window to let in the
fresh evening air and sleep in the chill of the
faraway woods.
We find the Jungle in our midst.

My Urban Ceremony Set Up by Denizen

Here's a photo of my urban ceremonial setup. There's a rug, which is aligned to the four quarters with the aid of the compass app on my phone. I used cards from the Animal Oracle deck on the four quarters: the Hawk, the Stag, the Salmon and the Bear. In the middle a little tea light candle. And in this example also some of my plants.

In the beginning I thought about how to make a practical setup like this, which objects to use to represent the four quarters. After giving it some thought I liked the idea of using cards from the oracle deck, and so I did.



Anima Mundi

by Liselotte Schellekens

I approach the open circle
Slowly, aware

Buildings rise up around me
Like ancient trees
Their presence breathes
They've seen it
felt it
know.
They reach to the skies

They weathered the storms
and the ages
Some rose in concrete
on those
Who went before
The Ancestors of the soil

Steady
they shelter
Gently pulsing with soul
From nature they came

I sense their kind eyes
As I arrive at the open circle

I am welcomed
by the fountain
Bursting with vigour and
sunlit sparks

While other beings flow around me
I touch the ground, thank you Earth
I feel the water, thank you Birth
I breathe the air, thank you Spirit

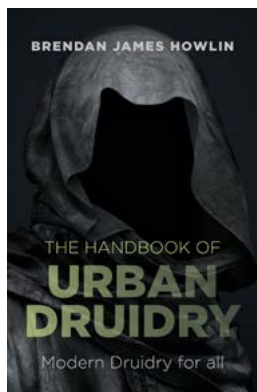
My gaze connects all those
in this sacred place
Risen from nature
Nature at heart

Thank you City
I
am
Here

Image by Ben Chatburn

Reviews

The Handbook of Urban Druidry and The Urban Ovale by Brendan Howlin



As soon as the idea of this Urban Druidry edition of *Touchstone* bubbled up from the cauldron of the order's bardic expression, I knew I wanted to include a review of these books on the final page. Although they have both been published for a while (*The Handbook of Urban*

Druidry was published in 2014 and *The Urban Ovale* followed two years later in 2016), this edition felt like a wonderful time to highlight them for readers who may not have discovered them yet.

Brendan Howlin was a much loved and respected member of the order who passed away in 2024. He was a very well-respected mentor for members in the bardic and ovatic grades, and the content of these two volumes was shaped by his interactions with those members. This gives both books the very real sense that the reader is being mentored in an open and friendly way.

At the very beginning of *The Handbook of Urban Druidry*, Howlin sets out the intention of his book, where he says readers will “learn about living Druidry in the heart of a modern city without a requirement for a single grove of oak trees.” He then begins a structured journey for the reader that applies Druidry into the urban setting. His first suggestion is that we “learn to see.” “Even the most urban of environments is teeming with life” he writes, although we may not realise it. “I have stood at the window of my flat and looked out at the car park. It was about 5.30 on an autumn afternoon and people were coming and going to their cars. Standing in the car park as bold as brass was a large fox and everyone walked by it as if it wasn't there.

The people were so wrapped up in their own thoughts and concerns that they just didn't see.” For Howlin, ‘seeing’ isn't just about seeing nature, but seeing in a different way, to recapture some of the magic that has gone out of the world. Once he has helped us to see, he helps us to relax by engaging more deeply with the world, not trying to escape from it.

The chapters that follow range from how to use the wheel of the year for personal development, to aspects of personal responsibility and “Living Lightly on the Land.” One of my favourite sections, on “Environmental Awareness,” has the simple instruction “Do something for someone else.” The book concludes with a section exploring the roles of Bard, Ovale and Druid more deeply.

The journey continued in *The Urban Ovale*, which begins by turning the reader inward, to explore “what makes you do the things you do.” The reader is asked to consider the influence of their culture, genetic inheritance, local environment, expectations and where they are in history to answer that question, and Howlin guides the reader through each step carefully and thoughtfully. There follow chapters asking the reader to consider how they feel about a range of different topics, including love, death and dreams. Longer sections on divination, gods and goddesses follow before Howlin helps the reader in “Putting it Together ... you can do it on your own whenever and wherever you like. Hence my concept of Urban Druidry, it is possible to do it anywhere, you are only limited by what your mind and imagination can do.”

It was such a joy to revisit Brendan's books again. His presence is much missed, but his warmth and openness resonate through his books and they are as relevant today as they were a decade ago. If you haven't read these books (or you haven't read them for a while) then can I strongly recommend that you do so. You won't be disappointed.



Both books are now available on the OBOD store:

- [The Handbook of Urban Druidry](#)
- [The Urban Ovale](#)



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 bardicgorsedd@obod.org

Druid Gorsedd: 10-12 April 2026, Malvern, Worcestershire. For more Information, email druidgorsedd@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)

Visualisation, Inner Journeying and the Art of Ritual level one - weekend workshop in Glastonbury. 25/26 April 2026. For specific questions or a booking form please email Matthew McCabe at mattmccabe.1@outlook.com or Penny Billington at pennybillington@gmail.com

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

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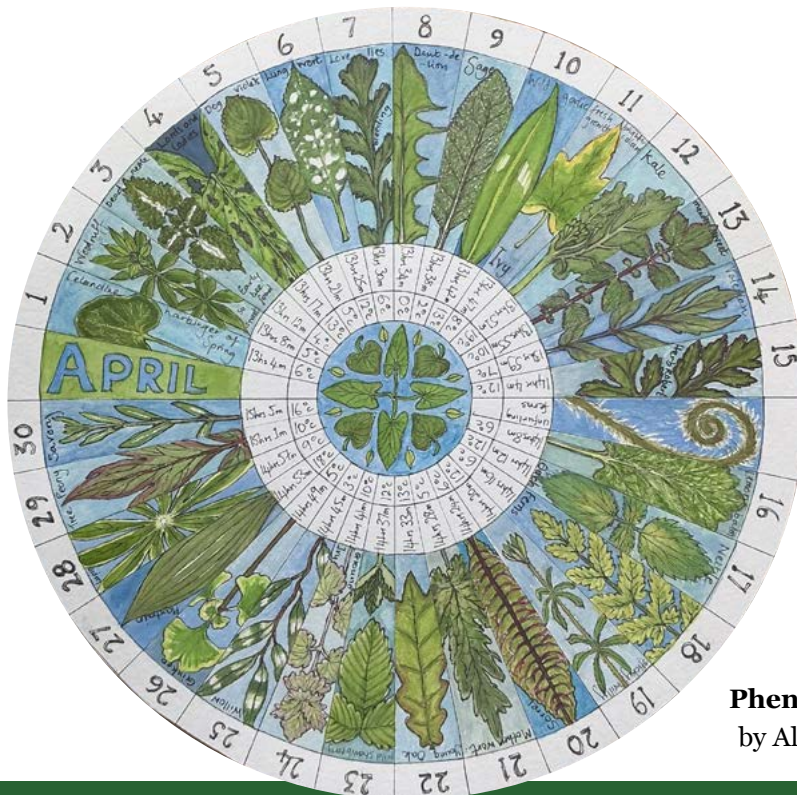
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Phenology Wheel
by Alison Kirkham