

TOUCHSTONE

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

March 2025 | Issue 331

This Issue

- ✿ In Search of Magic by Emily Gale
- ✿ The Stones Speak by Cathryn Bower.
- ✿ Reincarnation or Afterlife by Andrea Romanazzi
- ✿ Plus lots more!



COVER: "Spring Equinox" by Josh Warren

On the Cover by Josh Warren

"I've tried to display some recognisable plants, flowers and traditions that fit this busy time. Tulips, Daffodils and Lily of the Valley are some of my favourite spring flowers, accompanied by that particular shade of new leaf green sprouting from Oak and Birch along with catkins as they turn and release their pollen. All is bejewelled and dazzling with morning mist and dew. Wind-ing through the branches is a snail shell charm, for good luck and fecundity. Tasty fresh hot cross buns are presented as an offering along with silver, hewn to the first rays of sun to be bound in blue cloth and hung over a door, to welcome in luck and prosperity. Thinking about silver that would be present in a house, I chose a spoon rather than a simple mirror for its ties to hearth and home. Blackbirds are nesting and laying their eggs around the time of the equinox: what better symbol for the promise of new life than an egg? These have been 'painted' as a nod to Ostara celebrations and the Goddess Eostre. A beady eye gleams in the underbrush but it's no rabbit, it's a slender and swift hare. The best time of year to see them is during spring. May a little of their merriment and madness be present in your rites, rituals and magic of the season however you choose to celebrate it.

Should you wish to see more of my work please seek me out at joshwarrenartist.com



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Editorial

Welcome to March's edition of *Touchstone* - with another awesome cover by Josh Warren. Thank you, Josh! You will find a real balance between darkness and light in this issue. Eimear's Chosen Chief's Bit is on the importance of hope, a must read article in our turbulent world. Our Bards have been busy reflecting on spring (and the lingering effect of winter). There are some engaging articles, including the last of our eight seasonal recipes by Sue Wilson. In response to all of the wonderful stories I am receiving there is a brand new section called *Bardic Tales*, beginning with a magical piece by Emily Gale. And there's news on our next themed edition - Summer Magic - due in the heady days of July. They will be here before you know it.

Enjoy!

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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 a chairde, greetings everyone!
Beannachtaí an Earraigh daoibh uilig! Spring
blessings to you all!

Teacht an Earraigh – The Coming Of Spring Springtime

Oh you coarse Gaelic Cold!
I hate your sour expression!
The north wind blows:
Tough tormented trembling
Without vitality or verve
Without youth or use
Until the bright feast of Brigid
And the resurrection of joy



The wind comes from the south:
A promise of sun for my limbs
A fresh life exciting me
Awakening of the blood

Winter weather
You ancient season:
Twenty welcomes to you and more,
Oh Spring of the young!

Brendan Behan (Translation by Skull of Bard, Thigh of Chief)

As we welcome the Spring and the hope and joy that it brings, I am so aware of the turmoil that prevails on the earth at this time and how challenging it can be not to lose hope and to give in to fear and terror. I have been having conversations recently about Social Media and how we can navigate the fake news and the manipulation of our news feeds. The question came up as to whether we should leave the popular platforms so as not to collude with the agenda of the big players. This reminded me of conversations I had with some priest friends when the sexual abuse disclosures appeared within the Catholic Church. I asked them why they didn't leave the Church, and the reply was: 'I stay here to support the people'.

Despite all the negativity on these platforms, there are also good people out there with a lot of wisdom to share. So we have decided to stay on the platforms as an act of defiance, to stake our claim to uphold our values as Druids, to speak of peace, truth, justice and so on. I recently came across a story about a man called AJ Muste who, during the Vietnam War, stood outside the White House every night for years, holding a candle in solitary protest.

One night, a reporter finally approached him and asked, "Sir, do you really think you are going to change the policies of this country by standing out here alone every night with a candle?" "Oh,"

the man is said to have replied, "I don't do this to change the country. I do this so the country won't change me." What a powerful gesture of peaceful protest! Many of us choose to turn off the news and not allow the malevolence in the world to come inside. Wherever there is oppression there will be resistance.

We can light our own internal candle of hope, strength, courage and love so that we are not changed by the forces around us, and instead, we can prevail and endure. Remember, Níl tuille dá mhéad nach dtránn - there is no flood that does not recede' This too shall pass.

We are heading towards the Spring Equinox, and the Order's ritual of planting our seeds is one of my favourites. I love the physicality of working with the pot, the soil and the seed to set an intention, to sow a seed and to honour the transition from one phase to another and the challenge that comes with it.

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

*Keep on sowing your seed, for you never know which
will grow – perhaps it all will.* Albert Einstein

Beannachtaí Cónocht an Earraigh daoibhse!
Blessings of the Spring Equinox to you all!

Eimear

The Violets by Jessica McGee

Winter's icy face
has violets on her breath
soothing her wrath.





Ode to Persephone

by Rhyannon Brightwater

Though you held Thanatos in your thrall
And ruled the land of shades,
Queen of the Underworld,
Torn 'twixt love of your dark lord
And the sunlit lands of your sorrowing mother
You have compromised.
O Persephone, you shoot from your Stygian realm
To war against Boreas.
With your gladius
You shatter Winter's icy hold.

All Hell laments,
Lady, your deserted throne.
Hades holds your crown
And weeps alone.

For you she yearned;
Sito pulls you close.
O Kore, at your return
The world exults.

You Goddesses embrace
And 'round and 'round your dancing feet
o'erwhelm
All Nature with vernal fecundity.

Jubilate, O Earth, Primavera has returned!
Hail Persephone ascended from her tenebrous kingdom!
Hail Demeter who gives us grain for bread
And makes us merry with the fruit of the vine!

Fallen Leaf by Detaalisman

A leaf that left
Fallen from the branch, detached
Floating, carried by the wind
Never did it really leave
For the falling and letting go
It's all part of nature's way
Even detached, it's not astray
Merely started on a new path
For it will nurture, it will sow
From its perish, new life will grow



The Journey by Gabi Cavegn

The spring does not know about its destiny.
Nor does it care.
Bubbling happily, like children's laughter in the air.
Happy as a clam.

Long and winding is the way of the river.
It has no choice but to meet its fate.
Growing, getting stronger.
Each day a new adventure, each day a new struggle.

Heavy are the barks it carries.
And the stream dreams of the well
It once was and will be again.
When the time has come.

It meets the open arms of the ocean
Awaiting its tired waters.
Dissolving into foaming arms
Finally granting peace.

Seals doze lazily on sunny rocks.
Dolphins paint rainbows in the sky.
Fish glitter like liquid silver.
Waves make endless love to the shore.

Time is an illusion.
Eternity has just begun.

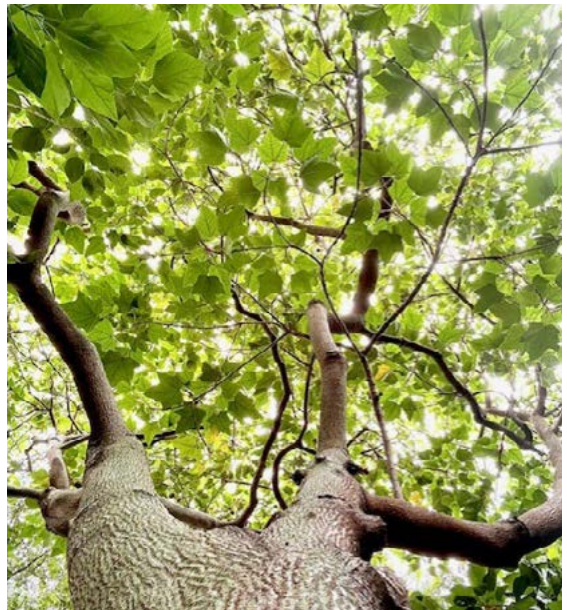


Image: Kukui Tree by Mead

See the back page for Mead's poem about this tree

Acorn by Ann Beer

So small a sound, that simple fall
Of one ripe acorn on the earth.
Its skin is smooth and forest-green,
Its crown gold-brown, to mark its worth.
The acorn lands deep in soft soil,
Beside the great oak's spreading roots.
Moist ferns and moss, and drops of rain,
Provide the bed for those green shoots
That soon will climb towards the sun,
Because the acorn's course is clear.
With nature's patience, time, and care
A young oak sapling will appear,
And while the ancient mother-tree
Begins to grow back to her core,
The new life in the acorn's heart
Will honour all that went before.
The land knows this, the people too,
Whose voices have been constant here.
Their healers bonded to the oak,
Each one a spell-worker and seer.
And in the mist-filled forests now
The acorns fall with quiet trust
So that the oaks will still endure
When cities have returned to dust.



Imbolc has Passed by Paul Hine

Morning has broken,
Imbolc has passed

The Oak King is growing in strength,
the Holly King's power is waning fast.

Winter's icy depths seemed eternal,
the darkness was gloomily long.

The trees of the grove were bare,
and the skies had no song.

But today, I felt it, I sensed it,
the awakening of spring.

On the forest floor, there were snowdrop
shoots
and the birds had begun to sing.

The cold north winds did cut deep,
but Cailleach's bite was never supposed to
last.

Morning has broken.
Imbolc has passed.



Image: Alban Eilir: The Hare and the Song Thrush Egg by Beth Amos

The Shadow by Logan Strait

The shadow is a hollow space,
a gap in which doth hide
the sole self-keeping secret never
which might one confide.
The cold, yae, the blackness: not dead,
but un-alive,
The pure nonbeing, Janus' air, the
enigmatic time.

The dark is darkness of the womb,
the water, and the seed.
Have you understood yet; or what more
(have you need)?
Nocturnal ancient memory: the twilight
of the gods.
Forever just beyond the sight in frozen
fields and woods.

Hark now; Brigid beckons for to bless
the seed and stone.
Come all ye witful husbandmen: the
dawn indeed doth come.



Image: Spring Magic by Brad Loafer

Bardic Tales

In Search of Magic by Emily Gale

When Anne was a child, she believed in magic. Tales of fairies danced through her mind, leaping off the pages of bedtime stories. She built a fairy village in the garden.

“Why have I never seen a fairy?” she asked her mother, who explained they were shy and only visited at night. Anne’s dreams were of colour and glitter, and she believed these to be true.

When Anne was ten, her mother gave her a magic set for her birthday. The black wand with its white tip and felt top hat became her treasures. “Abracadabra!” Tap three times, swirl, pick a card. Her mother smiled and nodded – yes, this was her card. At ten, Anne still believed in magic.

Somewhere in her teenage years, Anne forgot about magic. Perhaps it happened when her pursuits turned to boys and time with friends. But magic found new forms: in Chemistry class, she watched as the teacher mixed coloured liquids. With a bubble and pop, foam erupted like a snake across the desk. Students gasped, the teacher smiled, excited chatter filled the room, for it was now their turn to repeat the experiment. To a teenager, this seemed like magic of a different kind.

As an adult, her friends moved away, and Anne lost her purpose. Husband, job, house, good health, money – a checklist for the ideal life. Yet something was missing, perhaps it was magic.

She searched for miracles in religion, in viral videos of impossible things. Prayer, good deeds, church, more prayer. No miracle came. Perhaps magic existed only in movies, tricks, and children’s books. Anne had stopped believing.

Years went by, and as she lay in her bed for the final time, her thoughts drifted to childhood and its wonder. She realised she had misunderstood magic all along. It existed everywhere: in frosty mornings and dewdrops on spiderwebs, in sunlight glittering on waves like scattered diamonds. It lived in acorns becoming mighty oaks, in friendship, in love, in the vast array of human emotions. In the miraculous chance of existence itself.

As she closed her eyes for the final time, Anne thought to herself, in quiet contemplation, that perhaps magic had existed after all.



Seasonal Recipe

Alban Eilir - Sue Wilson

Alban Eilir marks the point of balance between Imbolc and Beltane, when day and night are equal. We should all be aware of the need to develop a balanced microbiome, our gut-brain interchange. For us as Druids this is the perfect pathway along which Nwyfre can flow.

In order to maintain a balanced, healthy gut we are advised to eat a grain, a green and a bean at our main meal of the day. This pasta dish is not only delicious, quick and simple to prepare, but also ticks every box for balanced, healthy eating. The spring greens give the dish a robust, earthy flavour. It is a shame they are often overlooked.

Pasta with Greens, Beans and Chillies - Serves 4

3 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for the pasta.
2 large onions, peeled and sliced
4 peeled and crushed garlic cloves
2 red chillies, deseeded and chopped
1 large head of spring greens/cabbage, washed and shredded
1 can or carton of cannellini beans, drained
300g wholewheat pasta shapes
2 tablespoons Nutritional Yeast
Salt and pepper to taste

1. Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan. Sprinkle the sliced onion with salt and saute for 10 minutes.
2. Add the garlic and chillies and cook for 2 more minutes.
3. Add the spring greens and cook for a further 2 minutes.
4. Add the beans and stir.
5. Continue to cook, with a lid on the pan for a further 10 minutes.
6. Meanwhile, bring a pan of water to the boil and cook some pasta shapes for 10 minutes.
7. Drain the pasta and return it to the pan.
8. Stir in some olive oil, and fresh basil if you have any available.
9. Add the greens, beans and all their juices to the pasta and stir.



The Stones Speak by Cathryn Bower

It was the third day of the Glastonbury portion of *"The Big Trip"*, and my friend Toni and I were scheduled for a guided tour of its environs. The tour guide, a white-haired gentleman, turned out to be a disaster. A few polite questions set him off on an endless personal narrative. As we sped along the A303, I shrank in the back seat, doing my best to shut out his loud, ratchety voice while Toni sat alongside him in the front.

Today's transport was not setting me up for receptivity to the sacred sites we were scheduled to tour. Who can take in Spirit's message and intentions with frayed nerves? This had never been possible for me, but perhaps working with this circumstance was the intended life lesson. Toni said later that she liked to hear how people in other countries lived. I had to admit that this was reasonable, but I still felt intruded upon, frazzled, and a bit used.

I stared at the low, green hills of Somerset as we whirled by them, travelling, I thought, much too fast. We sped by signage leading to towns and places of note whose names I knew from song and story: Bruton, Hungerford, Salisbury.

And soon enough, we found ourselves in front of the English Heritage sign for Stonehenge. He was still talking. It emerged that he knew a back way where the crowds would be fewer, though there would be some walking.

"Good idea," I said. The parking lot was packed, one bus or rental car after another. If we followed the signs, we might not even get near the enclosure. Our driver turned and led us to the west side of the lot. We stepped onto lush green grass. As we followed him, I silently marveled at the layers of artifacts that must be underneath our feet, remnants of much earlier times. I wondered at the sheer idiocy of any plan to tunnel under Stonehenge – a fight that we'd won – when pretty much every shovelful would reveal items that warranted a costly recess of the work. I thanked Spirit silently that it hadn't come to pass.

And we walked. I had forgotten how contained the stones were, a well-defined circle when seen from the outside. They appeared shieldlike, perhaps guarding a power source situated on the inside. The crowds at the fence around them seemed like a collection of miniatures alongside the tall stones.

The columns were whiter and cleaner than I remember. Had they always been so white? Or had they been scraped down, repainted? I knew

they had been sorely abused with graffiti and worse before they were shut behind the fence. Whatever was this mania to mar, to make a mark of one's own no matter how ugly, how jarring?

It was a place of simple colors: the stark white of the massive stones rising from the manicured green lawn, reaching up to the clouds whose own whiteness moved from shade to shade, now the color of sheep's wool, now the pure white of a cotton boll, now a scrim for the sun behind them. The stones themselves might well have grown up from the ground.

They ruled the landscape. Despite the barrier and the crowds, this broad green plain was theirs.

As I continued staring at the circle of pillars, shutting out the conversations around me, the word "HELP" was suddenly reverberating between my ears. The call was focused, silent, and completely unexpected. I started, my first thought being that someone was reaching out for assistance due to a medical emergency. Looking about, I saw none. I continued trying to locate the source of this voiceless exclamation. When I looked directly at the stone circle, about a quarter mile away from us, I felt mind and spirit lock into a connection. A heartbeat later, a great weariness flooded me, receding a second or two before it became overpowering. And the interior voice came again.

"We are tired, tired, tired. Our magic, our powers have been tapped for centuries. We see plenty of curiosity, plenty of wishing, but even we can deplete. And we're so close to that. It feels bad. We feel bad. You, at least, listen to us."

I silently projected back to them, "I am so sorry. What can I do to help?"

"Energy," the silent voice replied succinctly.

Yes, I could help, at least, with that. I gave myself one long, deep breath, fixing my gaze on the circle of stones. I imagined them centered in sparkling gold light, one set of rays beaming from the sky, another radiating upwards from the earth, another circling deosil. The light spread quickly, embracing the entire circle. In my mind's eye, I saw the light sinking deeply into the stones, permeating every cubic inch. The rich gold force penetrated and renewed itself, coating and immersing the stone columns.

"Is that helping?" I asked them silently.

"Yes. Yes, this is what we need."

I promised them that they would have more of it, much more, had this only occurred to me sooner.

The guide's grating voice broke into my thoughts. "We need to be on our way." I shook myself a bit and said a silent goodbye. There was no particular response from the stones, but I knew that I had heard them and that they had felt my concern.

As we walked back to the taxi, I was sad for the stones. They were alive, I thought, as alive as I was, though in a different way. Were they sentient? I knew what I had felt and received from them. Sentient in a way that could not, at least at present, be documented or measured? I resolved to make a daily practice of visualizing them surrounded by the gold light, perhaps a renewing green, as well. And so I have done.

The standing stones and other sacred sites that give to us need to receive from us, as well. They need our grateful thoughts, our visualizations, our love made tangible with ecologically safe offerings, with energy back. The simple act of removing litter from their vicinity is an offering. A small amount of water, herbs and flowers may also be used.

I am convinced that the stones

do not take our love and gratitude for granted. Neither should we dismiss the need to give back to these places that renew and heal us.



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS "Summer Magic" Issue

July's *Touchstone* is going to be themed around 'Summer Magic'. Do you have a specific piece of magical practise or a ritual you can share? Maybe you find a potent magic in the summer landscape. Whatever Summer Magic means to you, please do let us know!

Articles and stories (1,400 words or fewer) and poetry (no more than 40 lines) are all welcome. And a special call out to artists, photographers and illustrators for their responses to this theme too!

Send your submissions to touchstone@druidry.org by 30th May 2025

On Cogitosus' *The Life of Saint Brigit*, part 2: 'The whole of nature was subject to her power' by Mary Tidbury

Mary Tidbury continues her exploration of the presentation of Brigit in Cogitosus' book by discussing her qualities, her relationship with Druids and considers why she did not become Ireland's national saint.

Cogitosus delivers his praise of Brigit with no niggardly hand, he cites her ability to conjure bacon, butter, and honey, her power over rivers, over weather, over cattle, over foxes, birds and wolves. These are not the only elements that remind us of the Druids. She uses the power of words to carve out her will in the world, speaks in judgment in the assemblies of the people and uses her voice to bless. She works to bring balance into the lives of those who ask for her help; in the story of Lugaid, she helps him control his appetite and find peace in moderation.

She is an efficient administrator and a power in the land, she is kept up to date with affairs of the king. The sheer power of her meditation protects her from harm; when one of the horses yoked to her chariot is frightened and wrenches itself free the yoke remains suspended and she 'reached the assembly of the people unharmed after a pleasant ride'. (1)

Her voice is for the powerless and the disadvantaged - in the story of the silver brooch she is instrumental in freeing a young woman from the clutches of a man who seeks to enslave her 'to use her sexually as he pleased' (2). When confronted by Brigit with the evidence of his perfidy he confesses in front of the assembled people and submits to her authority. She wears a white veil, and a white cloak that is such a symbol of her integrity that even when it is used to carry half-cooked meat it remains unblemished.

On several occasions she restores balance by controlling how things appear. Wicked men set out to exact vengeance and the obvious thing would be to stop them. But the story requires a clever, a magical solution, and Brigit allows them to fight it out - with an apparition. They return with 'weapons stained with blood and gore', (3) honour satisfied, and no one harm to anyone. Under Brigit's dispensation the community enjoys abundance - the sure sign of the land's approval of her rule.

The word 'Druid' only appears once in the whole text, in story 31, *Of the Millstone*, which Cogitosus describes, slightly shiftily, as a 'hitherto unheard-of miracle'. In a post-mortem miracle, a millstone which had been transported miraculously down the mountain at the invocation of her name would refuse to grind the grain of the 'pagan'. Despite this single, rather last-minute disparagement of the Druids, the authority of Brigit, the power of her words, her white garments, her integrity, her adjudications of disputes before the people, and above all her service to her community, make her feel a very druidical presence. And indeed, in later versions of her life, the link was often

stressed - her father was described as a Druid, and writers such as Ian Wright have made the argument that she was one herself. Above all, her life is expressed in terms of her interactions with the material world and her senses. Nothing is lost with her - meat she consumes is replaced as the living calf, wood burnt for her is found whole again, missing sheep are returned. She stands for balance, order and restorative justice.

These feel like echoes from Ireland's past at this point, but Cogitosus was writing with other purposes in mind too. He was

concerned to emphasise parallels between the saint's life and the life of Christ. She shares his care for the poor, like him she turns water into alcohol - ale in this case - and in another parallel with Jesus she works her miracle for lepers. She can multiply butter, milk and meat as Jesus multiplied loaves and fishes for the ten thousand. Brigit's power is expressed through her interaction with the material world but at the very end of the text Cogitosus suddenly seems to feel the needs to stress the ecclesiastic element in her life. It's as if his superiors were reading over his shoulder and remarked that the stories were good, but that he had forgotten to describe how magnificent the church is.

So *Of the Church Door* (4), while purporting to be a miracle tale like the others, is actually a very wonderful description of the layout and decoration of the building. This is all about the great and the good who are buried in state here, the gold, silver, and precious stones, the carvings, the colours, the paintings. The layout



is described, with the entrances and the spaces allocated to women and men, stressing how the large congregation could worship together regardless of affiliation, class or gender – Brigit was Abbess of a double monastery, housing nuns and monks and a person of status and authority. She exercised her rule in Kildare with Conlaeth, a priest and former hermit she had persuaded to work with her, and the strength of this partnership is something Cogitosus writes of proudly in the *Preface*.

Perhaps this very successful alliance between the masculine and the feminine was perceived as a defect and might have been one of the reasons Armagh's foundation won out. Patrick's supporters had the advantage of their saint's own autobiographical writing to help them and this was a time when faith was perhaps moving away from the relationship between people, nature, and the divine to become a thing of hierarchised relationships, strict rules of behaviour, and a world of written texts.

Brigit's hagiography is as fascinating for what it leaves out as it is for what it includes – the stories don't show her at Mass, or in formal prayer, they don't show her suffering penance and mortification, they don't show her spending time with books or indeed writing anything. It's hard to remember that Christianity, so often a rigid code today, was still in flux in Brigit's time. Her birth date is given variously between 451 and 461, with her death date in or around 524 CE; Jerome's *Vulgate*, the first pulling together of Hebrew and Christian texts, dates from around 400 CE. Brigit would have been a spiritual pioneer.

Cogitosus is owed a debt of gratitude for the skill with which he 'skimmed in a tiny bark over the vast ocean of Saint Brigit's miracles' (5). The days were ending when a life of service and prayer, and of miracles worked through love of the natural world, were enough to ensure sainthood, but the miracles and their worker still live – it is as if, across time, Cogitosus has held her hand and stood her up greet us.

In an early story, Brigit refused the marriage planned for her by her parents and set off to devote herself to the divine. When she knelt before the bishop to be consecrated, she reached out and touched the wooden altar which, miraculously, came to life at her touch; 'this wood flourishes fresh and green to the present day as if it had not been cut down'. (6)

Through Cogitosus' words, Brigit lives to green the world again.

End notes

- 1 Story 17, *Of how one Horse stayed yoked as the other shied and jumped the traces*
- 2 Story 25, *Of the silver brooch thrown into the sea*
- 3 Story 22, *Of the nine very wicked men vowing bloodshed*
- 4 Story 32, *Of the Church Door*
- 5 *Epilogue*
- 6 Story 2, *Of the greenwood altar base*

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Open Forum

Notice of the second meeting for OBOD members in Belgium.

Saturday April 26, 2025, 10 am till 4 pm.
OBOD day for members and friends.
Houthulst (Diksmuide), Belgium.

Venue: food forest farm De Woudezel.
A get together to meet and connect with other members. We're offering a practical workshop on edible tree leaves, there will be meditations with the Land, ending with a Beltane ceremony.

For information and/or participation please contact Danny Dewulf / Jol Props at FriendsofArduina@gmail.com

Reincarnation or Afterlife? Exploring Celtic Beliefs

by Andrea Romanazzi

The Celts have long fascinated scholars and enthusiasts alike, their rich culture often shrouded in mystery due to the scarcity of direct written records. What we know about their beliefs, especially concerning life after death, largely comes from external sources like Roman and Greek writers. These accounts, while valuable, often reflect the perspectives and interpretations of outsiders trying to make sense of a culture markedly different from their own. This makes it difficult to pin down a single, unified Celtic belief system, particularly when it comes to what happens after death.

Julius Caesar, in his *Commentaries on the Gallic War*, provides one of the earliest insights into Celtic beliefs. He observed that the Druids, the priestly class among the Celts, taught that the soul was immortal and passed into another body after death—a concept that might sound familiar to those acquainted with the idea of reincarnation. Other Roman writers, like Pomponius Mela and Diodorus Siculus, echoed this view, noting that the Celts believed in the immortality of the soul and its eventual return to the living world in a new form.

However, the comparison between Celtic beliefs and the doctrine of reincarnation as understood by figures like Pythagoras is somewhat misleading. Pythagoras believed in metempsychosis, where the soul could be reborn in any living form, be it human, animal, or even plant. The Celts, on the other hand, seemed to have a more specific view: the soul transmigrated exclusively between human bodies. This distinction is subtle but important, suggesting that while the Celts believed in the soul's immortality, their focus was on its continuity within the human experience rather than a broader, more universal cycle of life.

The Celts' approach to death and the afterlife was complex and multifaceted. They practiced cremation, believing that fire had the power to release the soul from the physical body. Yet, alongside this, they also buried personal belongings, animals, and even slaves with the deceased. This practice raises an intriguing question: if the soul simply moved on to another body, why the need for these elaborate burial rites? The answer might lie in a dual belief system that combined the idea of soul transmigration with a more traditional afterlife.

According to Diodorus Siculus, the Celts believed

that the soul transmigrated only after a certain period. During this intermediate time, the souls resided in an Otherworld, a place remarkably similar to the Norse Valhalla, filled with feasts and eternal pleasures. This Otherworld was not a final destination but rather a temporary dwelling where souls awaited their eventual return to the human realm. The rich burial practices, therefore, might have been meant to provide for the soul during its stay in this otherworldly paradise, ensuring it had everything it needed until it was time to move on.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Celtic burial practices is the discovery of richly adorned graves, such as the one found in Hochdorf, Germany.

Here, archaeologists uncovered the tomb of a Celtic warrior, buried with an astonishing array of items: clothing, jewelry, and even a ceremonial headdress. Similar finds in Glauberg, another Celtic site in Germany, reveal that these burial traditions were widespread, emphasizing the importance of the afterlife in Celtic society.

These elaborate burials suggest that the Celts held a strong belief in an afterlife where the dead would need the same comforts they had enjoyed

in life. The inclusion of valuable items and the sacrifices of animals and slaves point to a view of the afterlife as a continuation of earthly existence, albeit in a more splendid and eternal form. This belief might explain the apparent contradiction between the idea of reincarnation and the practice of burying possessions with the dead: the Celts might have believed that while the soul would eventually return to the living world, it first had to spend time in the Otherworld, where it would need these earthly goods.

But not all Celts followed the same practices. The Celts were not a single, unified people but rather a collection of tribes with distinct cultures and beliefs. This diversity is reflected in their burial practices. In some regions, cremation was the norm, while in others, inhumation—burial in the ground—was more common. These differences suggest that while the belief in the soul's immortality was widespread, the specifics of what happened after death varied significantly from one tribe to another.

Some Celts believed that the soul resided in the head, which might explain the gruesome practice of ritual decapitation. Ancient writers like Strabo and Diodorus Siculus describe how the Celts would decapitate their enemies and keep their heads as trophies. This practice, known as 'têtes coupées', was not just a display of victory but also



a ritualistic act tied to the belief in the soul's power. The Celts might have believed that by capturing an enemy's head, they could also capture their soul, either to harness its strength or to prevent it from seeking revenge in the afterlife.

Archaeological findings from sites like Roquepertuse and Entremont in southern France support this idea. At Roquepertuse, for example, researchers discovered niches in the sanctuary walls that likely held human skulls. These skulls might have been part of a cult of ancestor worship or related to the belief in reincarnation. By keeping the skulls of their ancestors or enemies, the Celts might have believed they were maintaining a connection to the spiritual world, ensuring the soul's protection or its eventual rebirth.

These beliefs were not limited to the European mainland. In Irish mythology, the story of Cú Chulainn, who placed the skull of Bran the Blessed on the hills of London to protect the city, reflects a similar belief in the protective power of the head. This mythological connection underscores how deeply rooted these beliefs were in Celtic culture, influencing everything from burial practices to warfare.

What all this suggests is that Celtic beliefs about the afterlife were far from simple. They combined elements of reincarnation with a strong belief in an afterlife, creating a complex spiritual landscape that varied from one tribe to another. While some Celts might have focused more on the idea of the soul's eventual return to the living world, others placed greater emphasis on the afterlife, resulting in the diverse burial practices we see in the archaeological record.

Today, scholars recognize that there was never a single "Celtic" religion. Instead, what we see is a tapestry of beliefs and practices that reflected the diversity of the people who lived under the Celtic umbrella. Whether through the ritual of beheading, the practice of cremation, or the rich burial traditions, the Celts expressed their beliefs in ways that were deeply connected to their understanding of the soul and its journey after death.



The Ovate Gorsedd 2025

by Ali McConnell.

Calling all Ovates interested in exploring our relationship with the ancestors and the land! We are holding a Gorsedd in Ireland in early September and would love you to join us.

This gathering is an opportunity for Ovates to come together and share their knowledge, stories and experiences. Within the Grove we will learn from each other, seek to deepen our understanding of our paths and make new connections.

We'll be based in the Boyne Valley and will travel out each day to visit and hold rituals at some of Ireland's most sacred sites:

Uisneach - the sacred centre of Ireland, at the point where the ancient provinces met and tribes gathered to light the Beltane fires.

Loughcrew / Sliabh na Cailleach - home to dozens of cairns over a vast megalithic landscape - the location of an ancient kerbstone known as the Hag's Chair.

Tara - the ancient seat of the high kings of Ireland and home to the Lia Fáil - one of the legendary treasures of the Tuatha Dé Danann.

At all three we will seek to connect with the ancestors and the spirits of place, immersing ourselves in the landscape and its myths and stories.

With the blessings of Imbas we'll return to our hostel for warm meals, with time to chat and weave the threads of our insights and experiences - and to create mementos and records of our time together.

The accommodation at Slane Farm Hostel is dormitory style with bunk beds. We appreciate people might prefer individual rooms, but unfortunately it's not possible to offer this while trying to keep costs down. We have booked the entire building to allow us private space to explore our experiences. To facilitate a small and intimate group places are limited to 20 and are offered on a first come first served basis.

The cost is €460 and includes 4 nights accommodation, most meals and coach travel to and from the sacred sites

If this appeals then please join our gathering which will run from Thursday 4th to Monday 8th September 2025

If you'd like to join us please email Ovategorsedds@obod.org. We will need a €150 deposit and completed registration form by March 14th 2025 to secure your place and to ensure we can go ahead with the event.

Reviews

Just One Conscious Breath

by Michael Wood

The subtitle of this wonderful book is “The profoundly simple practice that moves you from Reaction to Response.” It’s actually quite a difficult book to summarise and convey in a short review. It’s not a book to be read but one to be experienced, taking the reader on a deep, guided journey into the power of their own breath.

This makes the process sound rather complex. It’s not. Wood states that “I want this to be simple. I trust simplicity”. This is such a warm and accessible book. You can feel Wood kneeling beside you on every step of the journey. He is there for you, with his experiences but, as he himself says, he is not our teacher, just another voyager on the path.

This book grew out of Wood’s own personal journey of connection: “I completed a course in awakening and I kind of got there ...but then I kind of didn’t. This was because the learning was all in my head. It wasn’t yet my experience, and it wasn’t fully embodied.” The answer to Wood’s need for experience was breathwork. It is this, he proposes, can help us awaken.

Part 1 of the book is called *Breathe* and is full of practical work for tuning into your breathing, including short exercises which ask “How are you breathing now? Check in with yourself.” Wood provides lots of anecdotes and evidence to illustrate the worth of these exercises. Some of these are anecdotal, while others are grounded in good science. For example, the chapter *Who is Driving* takes us to the work of Professor Steve Peters and *The Chimp Paradox*, which is particularly insightful in this case. After exploring how anger can be a motivator, Wood brings it back to us to encourage us to get *Into Our Flow*, a section which links beautifully to the Awen, although it is never directly mentioned.

Part 2 is called *Rest in Being* and is about the sign of surrender and the power of letting go, along with the benefits that can bring. Part 3 is called *Smile* and is about gratitude while part 4 is called *The Cosmic Breath* where “our journey comes full circle, and we return to ourselves in a new way.”

As I have said, it is really difficult to review this book - it has to be experienced. If you are looking for calm in these turbulent time then this is the book for you.

Sacred Bones, Magic Bones

by Ness Bosch



This is a fascinating and insightful book on an issue that will have resonance with many on the Druid path. Bosch has been a follower of the Path of the Bones for years and is an excellent guide through an area which is fraught with aspects which may offend modern social mores. Bosch deals with those issues confidently, stating “In a world full of barriers, ones

we have to jump to relate to one another, bones speak a universal language which connects us.”

Part 1 of the book begins with an overview of burial in early human history and how the veneration of the bones of the ancestors developed over time. This is followed by an intriguing section on bones in folklore, which also deals with usage of animal bones and shells where, of course, the divine Mari Llwyd makes an appearance! Then Bosch takes on one of those contentious issues – human and animal sacrifice. “Whether we like it or not,” she writes “human and animal sacrifices are part of the history and worship of man of our Gods ... it doesn’t help anyone to paint over the traces of our bloody past with unicorns and rainbows.” This approach is refreshingly honest, and potential revulsion at this perceived act of torture is also dealt with: “It is not the suffering of the animal that is offered to the Gods, to think that is a mistake.” This frankness is incredibly reassuring. Part 1 expands upon this deep understanding of the subject with a series of testimonies from modern practitioners who include bones in their practice.

Part 2 begins with a highly personal section called *The Path of the Bones*, where Bosch tells how she came to be a follower of path. The personal reflections here help the reader to engage more fully with the experiences outlined in the book and build trust with Bosch’s perspective. The final two sections, *Bone casting and Magic* and *Songs from the Bone Mother*, are highly practical with songs, stories and spells which the reader can use to deepen their practise.

This is a rich companion to a path many of us may not have fully trodden. It is highly recommended.

Andrew's Bit At The Back

It's time to follow THE HERDS!

I think have discovered one of the most inspiring artistic projects of the twenty-first century, one which is so drenched in Awen, its creators must have shining brows! It is called THE HERDS and is created by *The Walk Productions*, the same artistic team who created Little Amal.

Little Amal is a twelve-foot-high puppet of a ten-year-old Syrian refugee who has been travelling the world since 2021, to draw attention to the plight of displaced people. So far, she has visited 166 towns in 17 countries. While we are bombarded with facts and statistics about displaced people, there is a distinct lack of empathy among the general populace for people who are forced to flee their homes. Little Amal is an attempt to foster that empathy in all who see her.

While the creative team were working with Amal, they knew they wanted to do a follow-up project on the climate crisis. They realised that many people are displaced by climate change and began to consider ways they could get people to care more about the issue. Just as with displaced people, we know the facts about climate change. We see reports about it on our screens and read about it in newspapers and online. Yet we are failing to take the necessary steps to mitigate the situation.

As we have seen, facts simply do not change people's minds. Facts are cold. Facts are hard. And, for many in this post-truth world, facts are things we can quibble with and dismiss for the alternative facts we prefer.

Facts will not change the world. But emotions will. And that is what makes THE HERDS so potent.

Starting in April 2025, "herds of life-size puppet animals will rampage through city centres on a 20,000km route from the Congo Basin to the Arctic Circle, fleeing to escape climate disaster." The puppets are simply astonishing. They are beautifully lifelike and made of recyclable materials. When you see them, you cannot help but have an emotional response to them. They make you smile. They make you cry. You simply want to reach out and touch them.

The team are not humanising the animals in any way. The puppets will behave like animals. They won't be able to talk to us and

tell us how they feel. It is their sheer presence, in ever growing numbers, which will help the audience understand the urgency of the climate crisis. It will be a highly emotive, even visceral experience to witness.

The epic journey of THE HERDS will begin in Central Africa and make its way to the Arctic Circle, passing through a number of African and European cities enroute. They will be augmented with new puppets as they continue to flee, with more and more endangered species joining the march.

Alongside this astonishing piece of public art is an education programme called *Let the Wilderness in*, which will allow young people to follow the path of THE HERDS and focus on key species in different habitats. The programme does not encourage young people to study the animals but to become them. It does not intend to generate fear of the climate crisis, but create wonder at the beauty and resilience of the natural world. It is a programme led by feeling.

I was lucky enough to be at the lead session on the Congo Basin, where learning materials were distributed. Pangolins were the focus of that particular session. Not only did we meet the very cute pangolin puppet but we also met the inspirational Dr Mark Ofua who rescues pangolins from bushmeat markets. He described the first time he found a pangolin in a market, how their eyes had met, as if the pangolin was asking for his help. Since that day, rescuing pangolins has been his life's work. Dr Ofua had a baby pangolin, which he was rehabilitating, clinging onto his shirt. The emotional impact of the session was simply enormous.

There is something so moving, so urgent about THE HERDS. As Druids, many of us feel a deep connection to the Earth and those beings who live upon it. It is that same profound, emotional connection that this project seeks to foster in every citizen of every city through which the animals will rampage, in the knowledge that emotion leads to action.

To find out more about THE HERDS, visit www.theherds.org and prepare to be inspired.

Until
next time,

Andrew



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: 25-27 July 2025 at Penmaenmawr, Wales. For more information email bardicgorsedds@obod.org

Ovate Gorsedd: 4-8 September at Slane, Ireland. Email ovategorsedds@druidry.org for more information.

Druid Gorsedd: 7-9 March, Bude, Cornwall. For more information email bomcbuce@gmail.com
11-13 April 2025, Malvern. For more information, email druidgorsedds@obod.org

Summer Gathering: 7 & 8 June 2025, Strode Theatre, Street.

Winter Gathering: 6 December 2025, Strode Theatre, Street.

Lanikaula

Kukui Tree, Kukui Tree

Wielding moonlight bright

In softness silver leaves

Turn back the deepest night

Through ruddy rain drops flight

Luminous beacons of fire light

Prismic flowers milky white

Black oily seeds of candlelight

Ignite the blazing boars' might

Stars radiate in skies tonight

Thread of heaven

Golden sight

Poem and
photograph by Mead