



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

April 2025 | Issue 332

This Issue

- ✿ Community Inside,
Community Outside
by Craig Smith
- ✿ The Flow of your
Personal River by
Karena Daneberg
- ✿ My Ogham by Ian
Cunningham
- ✿ Plus lots more!



Cover: "Early Bird" by Sue Wookey

Editorial

Welcome to April's Touchstone - and what a packed edition it is! There is some really fantastic content, including Craig's Smith's thought provoking piece on prison chaplaincy and the need for spiritual communities to support the excellent work they do. Ian Cunningham has written a wonderful piece on how and why he adapted some of the traditional ogham trees for his own personal ogham, and Kaa Fansen provides this month's *Bardic Tale*, an uncanny piece, spoken by a voice in the future. And there's the usual sparkling poetry and art work scattered throughout.

While we are discussing artwork, thank you to the ever-so talented Sue Wookey for sending me some gorgeous pictures to include in this issue, including on the cover. I adore Sue's art; it is so evocative and full of character. As soon as I saw *Early Bird*, I knew that it had to go on this month's cover!

And, don't forget to keep your articles, poems, stories and artwork coming in.

This month we also, sadly, share an obituary for Marjolein van 't Noordende, beautifully written by her friends Carola and Nicole. She was a valued member of OBOD Netherlands: "Marjolein has meant so much to so many people," her friends tell us. "She was a dear friend to many of us." OBOD has lost a beloved and dearly valued member. Our thoughts go out to all of those who are feeling her loss.



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The Greenwood by Daniela Dick

Come to the Greenwood
here you can find
a path to your center
of soul, heart and mind.



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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!

Hello everyone. I'm writing this as we head towards April and although officially Spring begins here in Ireland on the first of February, today feels like Spring has actually arrived temperature-wise. I like this quotation from Vita Sackville-West:

"Spring is April's way of saying, 'Let's bloom.'"

We have a Seanfhocail (literally means an old word) or proverb in Ireland which - describes April: Aibreán meidhreach, braonach, nua - April mirthful, misty and fresh.

The cuckoo comes to Ireland at the end of April. There are a lot of old sayings about her. If you have money in your pocket the first time you hear the cuckoo, you will have money for the year. If you are looking towards a graveyard the first time you hear the cuckoo, you will die before the year is out. If there is a rib of hair on your left foot the first time you hear, you will have luck for the year. It is said that when the cuckoo sees the first cock of hay, she flies away. It is said that the cuckoo changes into a hawk before she leaves the country. If the cuckoo crows on a leafless bush, the crops will be bad.

Last month, I announced that the online Wheel of the Year ceremonies were to be discontinued. Some members have expressed disappointment at this. While change can be difficult, I feel that this is a great opportunity for members to connect in a closer way. While the online ceremonies gave people a sense of community, there was no connection beyond the ceremony itself.

It is great to see that there are members who are joining existing virtual seedgroups and others who are setting up their own and holding their own private online ceremonies. I imagine the idea of setting up a virtual seed group might be daunting for some, but please don't let that stop you.

When I first joined the Order, I didn't know any other OBODies. It was just my husband Howard, myself and a friend. I had to start somewhere, and I was terrified. I remember the first Samhain ceremony I held: I had printed off my script, and we held the ceremony outside at night. The weather was wild, and the rain washed the ink off the script. I got confused about the directions and wondered what I was doing. I was full of

self-doubt: thoughts like 'What right did I have to hold such ceremonies?', 'Am I crazy to be doing this?' ran through my mind. Howard and my friend were very supportive, and I persisted with the ceremonies, gradually becoming less nervous. I am so glad that I did. Twenty-two years later, we have a wonderful eclectic community who attend the ceremonies here in Kilkenny.

For those of you who have never attended an OBOD gathering, Groves and Seed Groups bring along their banners to the Summer and Winter Gatherings, where they are hung in the theatre at Strode. It is wonderful to witness the creativity expressed in these banners. A few months ago, Daniel McKenzie approached me about creating a banner to honour members who have passed. I think this is a wonderful idea.

The design and creation of the banner is currently underway by our members. A Circle will be established on the Hearth for people to add the names of those who have passed. There will also be an opportunity to add names at the Summer Gathering. Please keep an eye out for further updates in the coming months.

"Let April's light guide you toward a season of hope and fulfillment."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Beannachtaí agus Síocháin,

Eimear 

Spring by Iain Marshall

Breath of new life
Touch the dead
Resurrect them
From their winter sleep

Awake!
You, dormant seeds of time
Tell us of your dreams

Did you dream
That life had ended
Blown away on autumns wing
Held captive
In the dark of winter
Yet born again
With the kiss
Of spring?



To Fall by Ian Coughlin Goldblatt

I wonder what it was like to watch Rome fall,
Perhaps in some detached pedestrian way?

Was it the precipice of a new world order whose
jutting
upward pierced the colosseum's
cracks?

An anthem to Gaiseric, King of the Vandals,
who smote down the olive crowned
conquerors, and delighted in the dominance?

Or maybe, was it something all the more
indeterminate?

Something so uncertain that I'd need to rely on
the faces of others to tell me how to feel?

Was it a tragedy over which the whole world
wept,
or something nuanced,
a perennial shade of gray?
The emergence of a fruit that had pickled
in a barrel for a forgotten number of years, to
be greeted with only the looks of an
uninvested glance.

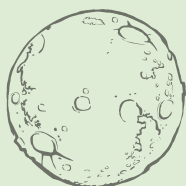
When the tapestry is painted ages hence, and
the feeling is long since prescribed, it is easy
to feel a feeling.

Yet in those moments, engraving themselves even
beneath the veneer of notice,
it may truly be thunder.

But did the bolt flash?
For we might have been turned away,
and it is such a silent thing to fall.

Triad by Amanda Gisby

Three Earthly manifestations
of the great circle:
the golden halo of inspiration;
the ripple of a kind deed;
the passage of time.



The Magician's Gift

by Nikki Equitz

Mages of thunder, wonder, and might
waving their wands whose tips align

Learning their magic from stories of old
leaving us clues to that untold

Teaching us words strong and true
making us see the world anew

Helping us build tomes of truth
that they learned alone in the candlelight of
their youth

Suffering wraths of hate and scorn
all for their world to be reborn

Thanks to the teachers of all the lore
we will be grateful forevermore



Image: Spring Hare by Sue Wookey



**< Illustration:
Druid Time Travel**
by John Jordan



Philosopher's Stone by Rhyannon Brightwater

I hold the stone
The Stone holds me
Her shifting colours --
phlash of glas-sy fire
and amber ice
--upon her skin or
dancing deep within
like rainbowed slick upon the waves
or opaled membrane of the seer's
much studied heart--
stuns my eyes
like birds shot from the sky
My hands and feet bound
My mouth a tomb

This philosopher's stone
enfolds me
in labyrinthic charms
She sifts and sorts my soul
through the portal
i am being le(a)d
to know myself
the auric being
I Am
a simple Mystery
deep and wide
a drop of water harboring the seas
a rock environing the earth
my being All Being

As i my fingers curl
around her mass palmed
i pray she call

We call
deep unto Depth
the blessed Awen
from Cerridwen's cauldron
be spilled
upon my sleeping brow
May bardic genius be roused
and from my heart
through lips and pen
this mystery be expounded --
Connection is the beginning
of wisdom

Springtime in Big Sur by Jessica McGee

The poppies are here!
Painting the hillside orange
Falling to the sea.





Image by Rhyannon Brightwater

In Loving Memory

Marjolein van 't Noordende

January 2, 1958 - February 2, 2025



On February 2, we received the incredibly sad news that Marjolein van 't Noordende passed away that day after a short illness. Marjolein was part of the OBOD community for 25 years and from 2017 she was the administrative support point of OBOD for the Netherlands, Belgium and France.



Marjolein was very special. She was there for everyone with advice, assistance and a kind word. You could talk to her endlessly about life, sacred places, her herbs, the love of nature and the mystery of life and death.

Marjolein has meant so much to so many people. She was a dear friend to many of us. She has been

part of many camps, meetings, retreats, Gorseddus and workshops. She was always there. She leaves a big void.

What remains are the countless beautiful memories and the untold gratitude that she was among us. Gratitude that she touched so many hearts and lives, and that she walked part of our path with us. She was involved and interested in everyone. She shared her wisdom and sincerity generously and without restraint. Her soft, sweet personality and unique authenticity will always stay with us. She had the talent to look on the bright side of everything, no matter what obstacles came her way, but also to firmly and resolutely guard her boundaries.

She led large ceremonies, moved effortlessly in the circle and had everything under control. Her powerful presence was inspiring. She was a natural leader and a deep source of inspiration, qualities that emerged from her great clarity, focus and vast spiritual knowledge. She gave countless workshops and performed many initiation rituals. An abiding memory of her is as the herald of a major ceremony, clad in Druid-Steampunk - complete with Steampunk top hat and her iconic staff.

It was always fun with Marjolein and every moment with her was special. It was an honor and a pleasure to have known her and we will miss her terribly. We have not only lost an enthusiastic OBOD colleague, a Modron from OBOD Netherlands, a Druid from the Lowlands, but above all a friend for life.

Thank you for who you were and everything you did. We wish you a soft landing in the Summerlands Marjolein. You know the way.

As above, so below. Heart to heart, hand in hand.

Carola & Nicole



Community Inside, Community Outside by Craig Smith

Prison Chaplaincy is a unique and rewarding place to work. No two days are ever the same.

As Chaplains it is our job to provide pastoral, spiritual and faith support in one of the most challenging and extreme environments we can ever face as human beings. There are currently about twenty Pagan Prison Chaplains covering around sixty-five prisons in England and Wales, meaning that about half of prisons currently do not have the support of a Pagan Chaplain.

I am fortunate to be the Managing Chaplain at HMP Birmingham. I manage a team of around twenty-five Chaplains and volunteers that cover a diverse mix of faith and belief traditions, including those of no faith.

One of the areas that I have always been passionate about is getting faith communities more involved in the work of prison chaplaincy. This is why our chaplaincies vision is "Community Inside, Community Outside."

I see this as having two parts.

The first, 'Community Inside' looks to encourage local faith groups to visit our prison and support those in custody, leading worship and facilitating courses or workshops. This works well with our Christian communities, where different local churches come in and lead worship on the 5th Sunday in the month, where there is one. It gives outside communities' opportunity to meet with prisoners and see that they are people who at some point in time have made a mistake or bad decision, and it reminds our prisoners that there is a community out there that cares about them and wants to welcome them back.

At HMP Birmingham we have been encouraging local Moots, Hearths, Groves and Covens to volunteer to join us to show support to our pagan community, joining in for festival celebrations and to provide contact with the vast diversity of experiences that make up contemporary paganism. Unfortunately we have not been very successful with this to date.

The second meaning is 'Community Outside', how we as a wider Pagan community support the reintegration of prisoners upon release. I have been working in my role as a Managing Chaplain for many years to encourage faith communities

to sign up to The Welcome Directory (<https://www.welcomedirectory.org.uk/>). TWD is an organisation that works with faith groups to support them in welcoming prisoners on release. TWD provides training on safeguarding and ongoing support for organisations. To date there have only been a handful of pagan groups that have signed up to the directory.

There are currently around 1200 Pagans in prisons across England and Wales. The only thing we can guarantee is that these people will one day be released. They may come to join your Moots, Hearths, Groves and Covens. I would ask

you to work with us and support prison leavers and help us make this transition as safe as possible. If we can provide support and safeguarding along with Probation, this can only be a positive thing, and lead to successful continuity of care and support for the prison leaver.

Recently I was able to attend a celebration event for Prison Chaplaincy held at Wormwood Scrubs, with guest speakers of Lord James Timpson, Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, and The Venerable James Ridge, Chaplain General. As

the Volunteer of the Year Awards were being presented, it was clear to the pagan chaplains in the room that we had no pagan volunteers supporting our inside communities.

Whilst it was joyful to hear the stories of the winners and celebrate their achievements, next year I'd like some of the awards to go to the recognition of pagan volunteers!

Things you can do next:

Things to Read:

Inside Time: pagans in jails: 1,000 Pagans in UK jails – insidetime & insideinformation

Things to Do:

Have a discussion within your Grove, Hearth, Moot or Coven members about the work of Pagan Chaplains in prisons. How do you feel about Pagans in prison, or those released from prison after completing their sentence? Keep in mind that you many already have prison leavers amongst your members.

Decide if you'd like your group to be listed in the



Welcome Directory as a safe and welcoming place for those released to attend. If so, contact the Directory and get yourself listed!

Contact your local prison's Managing Chaplain and ask about volunteering opportunities for yourself or your group. We'd love to host you for a festival or learning sessions. This could be a one-off visit, or a regular arrangement.

Keep an eye out for recruitment possibilities for contracted Pagan Chaplain posts. Directly employed Prison Chaplains that meet civil service criteria are currently paid around £36,000 -£43,700 pro rata, however many Pagan Chaplains work part time or are employed on a sessional basis.

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

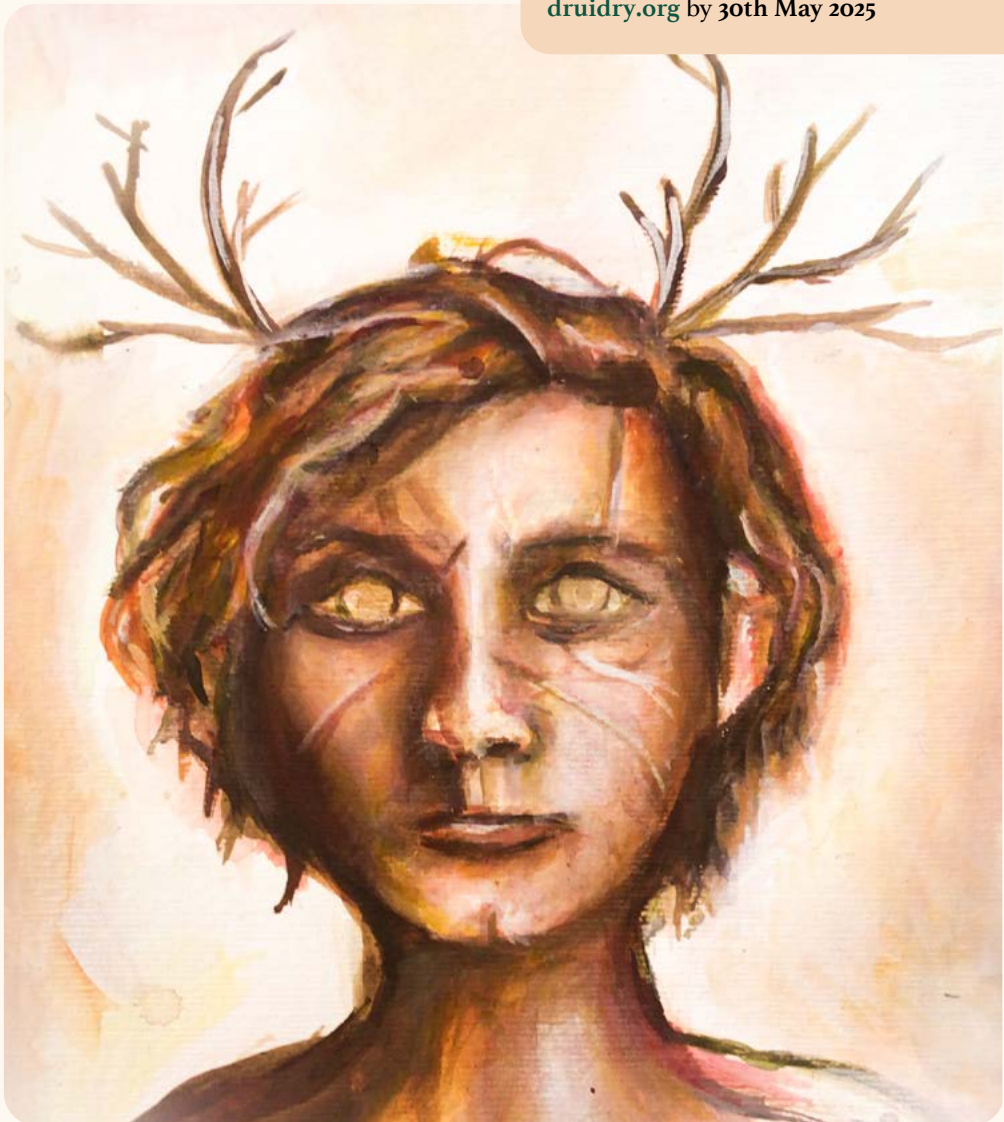


Image: Pan by Julianne Tyson

The Flow of Your Personal River by Karena Daneberg

Many of our ancestors believed that the River or Sea separated us from the Underworld and thus served as a transition point - a thinning of the veil and a passage between this world and the next.

In our modern world, we speak about “getting into the flow”, and “going with the current”. These are terms derived from our relationship with Nature that remind us of the importance of flowing with the powers around us rather than trying to move contrary to them. If we try to paddle upstream, our work is either ineffective (at worst), or requires a significantly greater effort to be successful (at best). When we try to force our desires, we are effectively paddling upstream in our own personal life-River. We aren't intuitively flowing with our personal current.

There are other ways to ignore the current and flow of our personal River. Sometimes, we do this out of fear.

Flowing blindly around unanticipated bends in the River of Life is scary, and we may try to hold on to branches along the river to effectively stop our flow. We can force stasis as our River flows around us, but we will find that we are only able to live a practical life, with none of the dynamic movement, adaptable awareness, and emotional satisfaction of flowing Water.

Sometimes we lose focus on our own River because we focus on the Rivers of others. When we view someone as highly successful, we often try to copy their flow. If we can just get into their River, we can copy that success. Right? Unfortunately, no. Their River is for them. Our River is for us. We can't get into someone else's River and expect to have the same flow, and the same success.

We can fight the River. We can avoid the River. We can try to enter someone else's River. But we can only take these routes at our own Soul's personal loss.

The first step in moving toward our best life and finding satisfaction, happiness, and joy is embracing and accepting our own River. We can't plan out our lives, and the bends and curves in our Rivers. We can try; but things will always happen that we don't expect. Losing our job, losing our partner, losing our health. In addition, forcing a plan onto our lives leaves no room for the Universe to weave its Magick in our lives. Any life plans we build are limited to what we can imagine and leave no room for what we cannot yet imagine. Our Soul's best journey occurs

when we let go, plunge into our River, and let the life-giving rush and flow of Universal water to carry us toward experiences that we couldn't have imagined when plotting out a life.

Right now, your mind is likely working as you weigh the thoughts presented above. However, let's move our awareness out of our minds for a moment.

Take a deep breath. Feel the air move past your nostrils. Feel your chest expand as the new air reaches it. Take a few more breaths just like that.

Can you feel your body letting go?

Can you feel your muscles relaxing?

Can you feel yourself start to release the rigid and to embrace the changeable?

Rather than holding on to ideas of what - what job, what partner, what commitments - can you feel yourself relax into the how? How are you living each day? How are you approaching a job, a partner, a commitment? This opens the door for the Magick of the Universe to enter. If we bring the how, the Universe will bring the what.

Whether you are a plumber or a teacher, it doesn't matter. You can bring the how - regardless of your job, you can do it mindfully and with high integrity.

Whether you are in a partnership or single, it doesn't matter. You can bring the how - you can approach every interaction with kindness, understanding, compassion, and love.

Whether you have a little money or a lot of money, it doesn't matter. You can bring the how - appreciating the work you have done for the money you have, and having gratitude for the home, food, and other things you can trade that money for.

What we do is almost irrelevant... how we do it is where the Magick happens.

For the next little while, I am going to ask you to close your eyes, and to look deep within yourself.

Take another breath. Actually, take several. Are there any areas of resistance you feel? Any areas where the breath doesn't seem to go easily? Any areas that are asking for more space than you have allotted to them? Are any thoughts coming up that bring a pain to your chest, or a heaviness to your heart? These are somatic indications that can tell us how closely we are following our River.



Being human is difficult. We are influenced in so many ways before we can even speak or understand the ways we are being influenced. Parents, churches, authority figures, teachers are pressing their will upon us. Often, this is even in the service of our best interests. We can't, and likely shouldn't, be raised with no societal guidelines whatsoever.

However, there is so much more impressed on our malleable minds and hearts than is required for basic social interactions, and many of these impressions can move us away from our personal Rivers. And if we consider the possibility of reincarnation and multiple lives, we may not even be limited to impressions from this life; we may be working through experiences and traumas and adaptations from other Times.

I want to reiterate: being human is difficult. But, my dear fellow Druids, we entered this Earth as humans rather than sunflowers or hedgehogs because our Souls desire growth in a way only a human experience can bring.

I have always been a seeker, as many of you likely are. This simple intention has brought me closer to my personal River, and I found Druidry, Astrology and Herbalism. I realized the Universe was speaking to me daily through messages in the stars and in the plants and in all of Nature.

Now, rather than feeling called to seek for "answers", I feel called to seek resonance. Each of us has our own personal River, charted by Higher Powers (God, the Universe, our Higher Selves, Universal Consciousness - whatever we choose to call that Power). To experience resonance, each of us has to literally spend time experiencing our own River. We have to feel the water of our River washing over our bodies, wetting our hair, and passing under and through us. We have to see the synchronicities that appear in our lives as we tune into the flow of our River. We have to feel the peace that comes from within, and can be found and felt even during very difficult life circumstances.

As I mentioned, I have used the word "River" to denote our life journey very intentionally. In addition to human mythology about rivers indicating transitional points, a river flows, changes shape and exhibits flexibility and adaptability as it moves over rocks, tree branches, and other obstacles. Over eons of time, it carves paths through solid stone. In this same way, following the path of our River will bring flexibility, change, and growth to our Souls. And over time, we will literally see our River carve paths through stone that seemed completely impassable.

One important resonant sliver of my River has been learning the Irish language. It is a difficult language to learn, but learning it and absorbing the history, culture, and community surrounding

it all bring me into alignment with part of my personal River. I will leave you with some words from this language that I love so much.

Leis an abhainn, tá saol saor.

Tá coradh in abhainn orm

Cá bhfuil mise ag dul?

Ag imtheacht leis an feacht

Ag déanamh leis an draíocht

Mar draoi, mar iomas gréine

With the river, life is free.

A bend in the river is upon me.

Where am I going?

Going with the flow.

Making the magic

Like a druid, like a sun-inspiration.

Snowdrops by Helen Cleary

Hooded cowl, dainty white,
Timid, new, in lengthening light.
Small to cluster,
They to stand,
The first announcement
Throughout the land.
"Spring is wakening"
See us rise,
Look upon us
And you'll know
That as the floral drops of snow
"Spring is coming"
We whisper it so.



My Ogham by Ian Cunningham

Ian sent in this fantastic article about his work with Ogham and his relationship with some of the trees which are included in the traditional line-up (and some of those which are not). His piece is an encouragement to us all to reflect on how our relationship with trees shapes this important part of Druidic practise.

While studying the Ogham and its traditional relationship with trees, I found a few trees that I didn't relate to as much, while there were others that I did relate to that weren't in the original set. So, like others have done, I substituted some of the trees I didn't relate to for ones I knew well.

The first tree I substituted was the willow, they don't grow in my area. So I used the Holm Oak instead. I live by the coast and there are a lot of Holm Oaks here, as they are very tolerant of sea spray and wind. Their scientific name is *Quercus ilex*, combining both the qualities of oak (*Quercus*) and holly (*Ilex*), so they are both evergreen and produce acorns. The eternal fight between the holly and oak kings at the solstices, is resolved in this tree. They are tolerant to shade and pollution, but not freezing temperatures. Their wood is hard and strong.

The next was vine, not a tree at all, so I used horse chestnut. A favourite of mine as a boy collecting conkers. It is a non-native, rarely found in woodlands. Conkers were used in horse medicines which could explain its name. The wood is smooth, soft pale cream with a fine texture, ideal for carving.

Next was Alder, again not common here, so I substituted Lime, also known as the Linden tree. They are native to UK, but these days, mainly found in parks. They have a strong, sweet, honey like fragrance, that comes from their small creamy yellow flowers in early summer. I like to go under the pendent branches of the two Limes in my local park and rest my back on their trunk. Lime wood is soft and light, pale yellow and finely textured, used for turning and carving.

Sycamore replaced Gorse. Sycamore is more a weed in my wood. There are hundreds of saplings, crowding out the other woodland plants so I try and thin them, along with some of the mature trees. They make excellent firewood. Sycamore was introduced here in the 17th century. A hard and strong wood used in furniture and kitchenware as it doesn't taint or stain the food. Traditional Welsh love spoons are made from it.

Heather substituted Blackberry. Blackberry is a shrub or cane called *Robus Rosaceae*, part of the rose family. I still go blackberrying in August/September as I have since childhood. It is another invasive plant in my wood, but very beneficial for birds, insects and spiders and protecting young trees from deer and squirrels, so I keep patches for

them and their tasty fruit.

Finally I changed Aspen to Hornbeam. There are some big Hornbeams in my wood, with one forming a clearing where I camp and where my ovate grove is. Similar to beech, strangely, neither are in the original Ogham trees alphabet. The wood is extremely hard. Horn in Old English means hard, while beam means tree.

To deepen my studies, I made my own Ogham set of staves. I've been walking through woods for years now and have many favourite trees. So, over a year or so, I visited each of these trees. Asked for and found a fallen stick, or if I couldn't find one, with permission from the tree, cut one off.

From these sticks I made my own Ogham set. I starting by washing the stick, then smoothing it down with sandpaper. I then sliced a piece off at one end and burned its Ogham symbol into it, using a soldering iron. I can now carry my whole woodland grove around in my pocket. Not only that but each stave can take me to the special place and tree that it came from. So my Yew stave takes me to the 2,000 year old Yew in the churchyard at Wilmington that I visit before I go to the Long Man for the Anderida rituals. Sadly my Ash is from a diseased tree that has been cut down, along with most of the others at Lancing Ring, a local nature reserve where I walk my dog. But I can still honour those trees by just picking up my Ash stave and I can be back with those wise old Ash trees or I can pick up the Apple stave and be in an orchard, ready for a journey.

The staves can also be used for divination. Historically four Yew wands would be employed. Only recently have individual staves been utilised in a similar way to the runes. Each tree has correspondences too; its stories, herbal uses, deities, constellations, the myths surrounding it, physical attributes, the seasons and the festival around that time. Yuri Leitch, in his excellent book, *The Ogham Grove*, has developed a system of combining all the traditional 20 trees with the solar wheel of the year, rather than the standard Robert Graves wheel of the year, with just 13 trees and the lunar year.

Leitch drew a diagram of this new wheel of the year. From this he noticed various patterns of 3, 4 and 5. Each pattern highlighting correspondences between the selected trees. It is clear that the Ogham Grove is encoded with patterns of sacred geometry.



Bardic Tales

The Great Letting Go by Kaa Fansen

We bow to you, ancestors from a distant past.

We are speaking to you from a healthy future and offer the story that our great grandparents passed on to us, so that you can re-Member:

Once upon a time there was great turmoil and despair on this beautiful bluegreen planet. Most of the human beings on earth had forgotten about the circular principles, which is odd, but it somehow happened. They had invented a very strange alchemic process, in which the “ultimate goal” was for a “single person” to “own” as much as possible. Imagine, they even had forgotten that we all are deeply woven into the fabric of all beings. What is “ultimate”? What is “a single person”?

The first part in this alchemical process was to take - plants, stones, rare earths, parts of animals and all sorts of natural elements from the earth. Instead of taking only what is needed and creating only what is healthy, they took more than what was sustainable and fought about it! Killing plants, animals, species. For thousands of years the bodies of the earth and all its peoples were destroyed and taken apart. The resulting trauma made it even more difficult to re-Member. It was dark times, my dear.

While life went into this alchemical process as a source, the outcome was fourfold: depleted soil and life on earth, sick and confused human beings, a lot of useless and unsustainable dead matter and incredible amounts of virtual “money” in virtual “bank accounts”, accumulated by only a couple of “individuals” (back then the word was not yet used to describe someone who could not re-Member).

The tragic thing about it was that there was no giving back. The disuniting algorithm they had created had spread like mycelium into every process and pattern. Humans had become blind towards it. Once they started to see it, they found themselves in all sorts of double binds, since what they were trying to get rid of seemed to be everywhere. Yes, they truly had forgotten about the circles and the soil. Life on this beautiful, miraculous planet was at dire stake.

But then, from many different directions, the ancient truths were being re-Membered. Slowly, they gathered in circles again, slowly they listened to all the voices again: first the silenced humans, then the trees, the animals, the mountains, the water. The song of life was once again being heard by the human peoples. Slowly they started to perceive the circular, interdependent reality again, the woven-in-ness into the fabric of all beings through the space in between.

The deep shifting became possible when more and more people pointed to the strange alchemical process as the basis for the destruction of aliveness. Then The Great Letting Go started. The beautiful souls that had “won” the old game of accumulation and that had more than enough, started to let go and poured their virtual hoardings into a pot, created so that humans could give back to land. This pot made it possible to nurture the ones that cared for land, soil and the more than human beings. Oh, the celebrations of the whole!

All of a sudden the gardeners, the farmers, the beekeepers, the foresters, the permaculturers, the regenerative agriculturists, the backyard vegetable growers, the organic matter specialists, the druids, the herbalists, the keepers of indigenous knowledge and practice had enough resources to care for earthworms and microbes, water retention and biodiversity. Money was given back to life, land was given back to itself, houses were given back to the commons - and the strange alchemical process shifted into something nurturing.

The human people understood that health cannot be individualized or fragmented, health is about the whole and the whole cannot be healthy if a part of it is suffering.”

So, this is why we are telling this story. You, dear ancestors, will have paved the way for the Great Letting Go Fund and for us all to become able to take care of the earth and our regional land and soil together again.

Dear ancestors, please re-Member!

The Kernow Druid Grade Gorsedd by Rebecca Garner

What happens if you gather a bunch of Druids in a huddle of luxury holiday cottages near Tintagel, feed them ambrosia and ask them to focus on symbols and sigils? The answer is an explosion of stars and spirals, atoms and galaxies, arrows, archetypes and ancestors, flora and fauna, and an intriguing spatter of sacred geometry.

Beautifully held and guided by Caryl, Sandie and Bo, a group of twenty or so Druids explored our innate connection to the symbolic world. Challenged to make our own symbols for words like 'creation' and 'intent', it was a revelation to discover that most of us described similar or identical themes and shapes. We learned that those universally shared drawings become symbols, whereas the outliers and one-offs can become sigils for our own personal magic.

On our first evening, we were guided on a journey through the Vesica Pisces – familiar to many as the symbol on the cover of the Chalice Well in Glastonbury. We walked into an ethereal soundscape where our feet trod the golden lemniscate and our spirits dived and soared around this symbol of unity, duality and infinity.

The next day, we worked with the elements, and created symbols and sigils to represent each one, bringing the Ogham in and the wisdom of the trees to our sacred mix. This was alchemized into a powerful ceremony surrounded by sea, sky, hill and wind-sculpted woodland. We shared our heartfelt blessings for healing, compassion, inclusivity and diversity – carried on the waters

from the place where salt meets sweet.

Of course, the Eisteddfod was a joy – emceed by Eimear, and bursting with instrumental enchantment, songs of sadness and brilliance, tales of mystery and madness, and poems of life and our lands.

Some of us squeezed in a quick trip to geological maelstrom that is Crackington Haven. A few swimmers and paddlers sampled the cool March waters, while others enjoyed the sun and the spectacle of massive cliffs with contorted rocks, and the jagged remains of a lovely syncline.

On our last day, we were invited to explore a labyrinthine portal and find our own personal symbols, to the sound of the heartbeat drums. Sylvan Grove shared their exquisite banners for peace, illustrating the secret power of the Magic squares, and how we can use this practically and effectively in our everyday world.

It was wonderful to gather a group of West Country Druids together – from Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Hampshire, plus France and Ireland too. Good to meet with friends new and old, nurtured physically with the most thoughtfully indulgent feasts (thank you Tash and Seren) and intellectually/emotionally/spiritually with a rich cornucopia of symbolic treats!

By popular demand, more Druid Grade Gorsedds, plus Bardic and Ovate gatherings are planned for this year. Please see the back page for more details.



Andrew's Bit At The Back

As many faithful readers of *Andrew's Bit at the Back* will know, outside of *Touchstone* I have a job which is filled with ... well, let's call them 'diverse experiences' shall we? This month, I had the honour, the absolute honour, of meeting several people who were under 24 hours old.

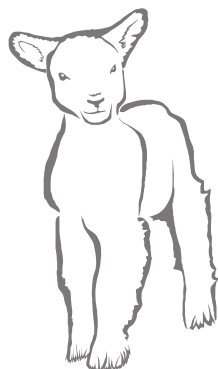
I'm using the word 'people' in a way which needs a little clarification. I, like many of you, am an animalist, so I use the word people to include non-human persons too. I am sure that a readership of Druids will be wholly accepting of that, but I just wanted to be clear!

I had gone to the farm on a totally different errand, when suddenly one of the people who work there picked up a baby goat and thrust it at me. I, rather tentatively, took the goat in my arms. I do not normally just pick animals up - I tend to wait until I have a relationship with them and sense that it is okay for me to do so - but if I hadn't taken that kid, she would just have hung there in the air between us, so I took her. Rather than just holding her by her chest, I used both hands so that she felt completely supported.

And, as I spoke to her, she slowly settled down and went to sleep. She totally relaxed in my arms. And I, after a stressful day, found myself calming down so that I did not disturb her. I did that thing I think so many of us do where, as we speak to animals in our human voices, we try and send out waves of love

and peace from our hearts, hoping they will understand. I don't know if she did, but I hope she knew what I was telling her.

I was told by the farmhand that she was only 24 hours old and was very special because, technically, her colour is blue. But, to me, she was special anyway. The



goat sleeping in my arms had only been with us in this world for such a short time. She was brand new here, with all that life, all that potential still within her. I did not want to give her back, so held on to her as we went around some other pens. She snoozed, safe in my arms. I must have held her for a good ten, possibly fifteen minutes and I did not want to let her go. Eventually though, I had to give her up and put her back with her mother.

I was then taken to see a twelve-hour old calf, who, obviously, I did not pick up! Their mother had not recovered well from the birth so they were a bit separate and isolated from her. I tried, again, to send out those waves of

love as I skritch'd her head. The lamb I was subsequently handed really did not want to be picked up and gave me surprisingly withering stares, so they went back down into the hay quite soon.

I've never been a great fan of human babies but that could just be that I've never really been around them. But baby animals rock my world. They are precious

sparks of life, eyes and ears experiencing our world for the first time. They are stories yet to be told, special purely for being who they are. For those of us who are world weary, they are connections to the sources of wonder, beauty, and magic. Those babies made my heart burst with unconditional love and hope. Through them, we can see the world anew.

Of course, for baby farm animals, many of them are not long for this world. Their stories will be short, far shorter than they should be, but, for those few, timeless minutes that I held the baby goat in my arms, I knew she was safe and that we shared the experience of being alive.

The world is imperfect. Try and change what you don't like about it. Grasp the moment, seek connection, and share the love of being alive.

Until
next time,

Andrew iii





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

Upcoming Events

Bardic Gorsedd: 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: 11-13 April 2025, Malvern. For more information, email druidgorsedds@obod.org
10-12 October 2025, Devizes, Wiltshire. For more information, email druidgorsedds@obod.org

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

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

*The Sidhe called the windhorse
To me
They danced in the sand
Whirling and twirling while my
Clumsy hands moved in rhythm
to their harmony
Our heart holds memories
My wind horse
Is a dark horse
Strange bedfellow to my heart's delight!
We are made of lighter imaginings here
Now
Going slower
Crimson and clover
The Bhagavad Gita
All spill now from the recesses of the
awakening mind!
Sat Nam
Awen!
Love!*



Photo and poem by
Tree Star Druid