



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

May 2025 | Issue 333

This Issue

-  The Green Man by
Kaz Leroux
-  The Battle of the Trees
by Frank Olding
-  The Hero's Journey: A
Tarot Perspective by
Robert Barnett
-  Plus lots more!



Cover: "Deer and Full Moon" by Cathy Johnson

Editorial

Welcome to May's edition of *Touchstone*! There's a right old Beltane knees-up contained within these pages with an abundance of articles, poetry, stories and art work.

This edition is full of Green Men, not only with Kaz Leroux's invitation for you to help her in her quest to find more of the leafy little blighters in the south-west, but also in the beautiful artwork of Cathy Johnson, which graces many of the pages. Cathy is such an accomplished artist and it's wonderful to be able to celebrate her work in many forms throughout this edition. As soon as I saw that beautiful stag with the moon in his antlers, I knew he had to be on the cover to mark the first of our summer festivals. Thank you, as always, Cathy for allowing me to share your work with others.

Elsewhere you will find Frank Olding's fabulous article on *The Battle of the Trees*. Frank actually gave me permission to reproduce the whole of his translation of this poem but I couldn't fit it all in one magazine! It's a joy to be able to publish one section of it and there's a link at the end of the article to where you can find out more.

There's a wonderful article on the Tarot, a magical new story by Serina Ice and two reviews of newly released books.

This month also has the final call for submissions for our "Summer Magic" issue in July. So often magic is associated with the dark and stormy nights of autumn and winter, so this is a great opportunity to explore the magic of the light half of the year. As ever, all contributions, whether they be poetry, prose or pictures are greatly welcomed.

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Beltane by Jessica McGee

May's joyous spirit
unites our celebration.
Such songs come to life!



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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 a Chairde. Beannachtaí na Bealtaine daoibhse! Bealtaine blessings to you all!

'O that every season might be Bealtaine that we might see Your Light plainly. But no. For in each time and season we learn patience, prudence, temperance, and wisdom. If all seasons were the same, we would miss You in Your fullness... for every season has its purpose, and every time its lessons.' L.B. Ó Ceallaigh

I'm writing this at Easter time on a cold and wet day, and yet I can feel Summer is coming. I saw my first swallows only a few days ago, although they arrived at my friend's place at the end of March. When I first came to Kilkenny 29 years ago, we had so many swallows each year. They built their nests wherever they could in our garden. One year, they built their nest in our guest bathroom, and because we did not disturb them, they had two broods in two different nests that summer. It was such a joy and blessing to know they were in our house, and now, sadly, only a few come to visit each year.

Each month, as I sit to write my 'Bit', I'm aware of yet another tragedy that has hit the world. The pain and turmoil seem endless, and the sensitive ones among us can feel the impact of this.

It's so easy to be paralysed by fear, helplessness and hopelessness. I like this quotation from Barack Obama: *'The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don't wait for good things to happen to you. If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, you will fill yourself with hope.'*

Fortunately, our training within the Order does offer us resources to manage this in some way. I heard someone speak, a number of years ago, who had experienced trauma as an infant and spent his childhood in both physical and emotional pain and terror. When he was twelve years old, he discovered heroin, and all his pain and terror disappeared. This was short-lived, however and eventually the heroin almost destroyed him. After he lost everything, his family, relationships, his job and was close to dying, he came to the realisation that the only person who could help him was himself. So he went into rehab. He came through it, returned to school and then went to university. What interests me about his story is how he maintains his well-being now. He talked about three simple things: Practising gratitude, focusing on his breath and having meaning. What gives him meaning is being of service to others.

Service is one of the pillars of Druidry within OBOD. I'm blown away by the number of members who offer so much to the Order – their time, skills and knowledge. I cannot count the number of times a member has said to me, 'The Order has given so much to me and I now want to give something back'.

Going back to the above quotation, at times we can be overwhelmed at the magnitude of the world's problems, but if we can do even one small thing, then that can make a difference. It can be smiling at someone, greeting them, or texting them.

'The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.' Mahatma Gandhi.

That's what can give purpose and meaning to our lives. To paraphrase another USA president: 'Ask not what your Order can do for you but rather what you can do for your Order.' One example of this is the number of members who have recently set up virtual seed groups to support those

who cannot attend physical groups or Groves.

A community is only as good as the members within it, and it is a joy as Chosen Chief to experience such support and commitment to the Order from our members. Míle Buíochas!

May your lives be filled with the vitality, generativity and fruitfulness of Bealtaine!

Beannachtaí &
Síocháin,

Eimear 

The First of May by Justine Bryant

Scenes of merriment and cheer
Vibrancy, joy...
For May is here!
Towns come alive
The crowds come in
Instruments playing
Let the celebrations begin!
Adornments of flowers and foliate crowns
Painted faces with exquisite gowns
Circling the Maypole
Bright ribbons entwine
Young and old revel
An enchanting time!





Dance the Mapole

by Audrey Graham

Sweet cherry blossom laced with dew
The sky so blue, the season true,
A humming in the gentle breeze
The first bee of the summer.
The Flower Maiden beckons you
By early light, a sacred right,
To walk with her through meadows green
Now that the sap is rising.

Come, take a ribbon in your hand
Come join us dance the Maypole,
In celebration of the land
On this blessed Beltaine morning!
Virility, fertility
The Green Man and the May Queen,
Round and round, let joy be the sound
As golden sun is dawning.

The village folk, they dance with glee
They meet below the hawthorn tree,
Then frolic in the woods that night
Lovemakin' till the morrow.
The Lord and Lady raise a glass
To lovers new, to lovers past,
Handfasted, may we taste true love
Let's jump the Beltaine fire!
So, take a ribbon in your hand

Come join us dance the Maypole,
In celebration of the land
On this blessed Beltaine morning!
Virility, fertility
The Green Man and the May Queen,
Round and round, let joy be the sound
As golden sun is dawning.

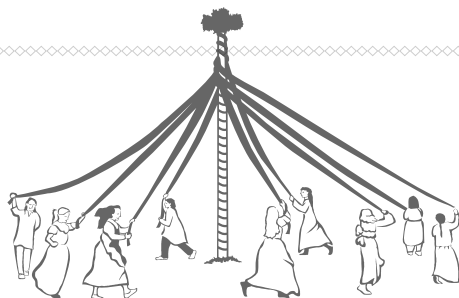


Image: Green Man Owl

by Cathy Johnson

Beltane Spirit by Ricky Gellissen

Hawthorn blossom seems to say:
"Goodbye April, Hello May."
But something in the pollen dust
Turns my thoughts to primal lust.
I do not know if you have seen
The Maypole on the Village Green?
There seems to be something suspect
About the way it stands, all erect.
It's not that I have an objection
To its tumescent representation,
But it is not easy being poetic
When everything I see is phallic.
It seems that I have been possessed
By Beltane spirit; sex obsessed.
I'm thinking of fertility,
Of the green man and virility.
Trying to think of what rhymes with Puck?
Yet seemingly I'm out of luck...



Spring Rain by Susan LeVan

The blessing of the rain, touches Mother Earth;
Caressing of the rain, bringing us rebirth.
Slowly stretching, spring cautiously awakes,
While the water swells the rivers, seas and lakes.

Cascading of the rain, pouring down the hills;
past the shy, young crocus, and bolder daffodils.
Tulips parting to kiss her tender brow,
Whispering, "Come, Spring. Come with us now."

The singing of the trees, yellow, green and white;
The winging of the birds in carefree, joyous flight.
Their sweet song soars upon the rain-washed air.
Spring dances in the meadow, flowers in her hair.

The Oak by Philip Corless

Beneath the ochre dawn, the oak stands tall,
Winter fades, as the last snow falls.
Gnarled, rough branches, like arms open wide,
He welcomes the spring, with the warmth and the tides.

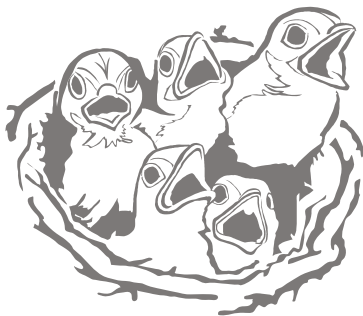
The sun's golden rays kiss his weathered bark,
Awakening life from the depths of the dark.
With blooms in the breeze, soft petals take flight,
Dancing around the oak in the gentle sunlight.

A declaration of growth, as buds start to swell,
Promising a future, sweet, fragrant smell
The oak, stands strong, in the refreshing cool air,
Embracing the season, a moment so rare.

For years he has stood, through the storm and the strife,

A guardian of time, a witness to life.

With spring all around, he'll continue to thrive,
An emblem of strength, forever alive.



A Woodland Farewell by Iain Marshall

A chainsaw rasps into life
And the silent woodland wakes
Such, intrusive, screams
Bring fear and dread
Causing every leaf to shake

Distress permeates throughout the glade
Sad trees are standing near
To bid farewell
To a friend they love
And hold forever dear

A tree leans
And gives a sigh
Rustling branches
Crack and cry
The, grieving, woodland, says:
Goodbye



Image: Green Man
by Cathy Johnson

Spring has Sprung by Essy Thorn

My spirit's soaring as I greet the sun...
She's informing me that spring has sprung.
The eve and morning meet as equals. Some
People say the King of Oak is seated and his kingdom's come.
The days of green and sunlight have finally begun.
Recent weeks have seen the young seeds creeping from
their deepest slumber.
Now their sleep is done and they're seeking fun,
Peeping from
underneath the peat. All they need's a drink.
Vernal showers feed em til they seep and now
they're reaching up.
Pretty soon we'll see the flowers blossoming in bloom
Bees will be buzzing while the mama robins sing
a tune.
Trees will be budding in lovely colors and gleaming hues.
Scenic views. I like watching way more than the evening news.
Indeed it's true the pollen got me with a sneeze or two
Like all the seasons do.
To be honest, if I speak the truth
I'm kinda tired of freezing so the heat that Brighid
is bringing through
I'm feeling, ooh.
Blessings of the equinox from me to you.



Summer Green Man by Cathy Johnson

The Green Man by Kaz Leroux

On Beltane 2023, I joined the Jack-in-the-Green procession as it meandered through Bristol. It inspired me to make a new photographic series on the Green Man in churches.

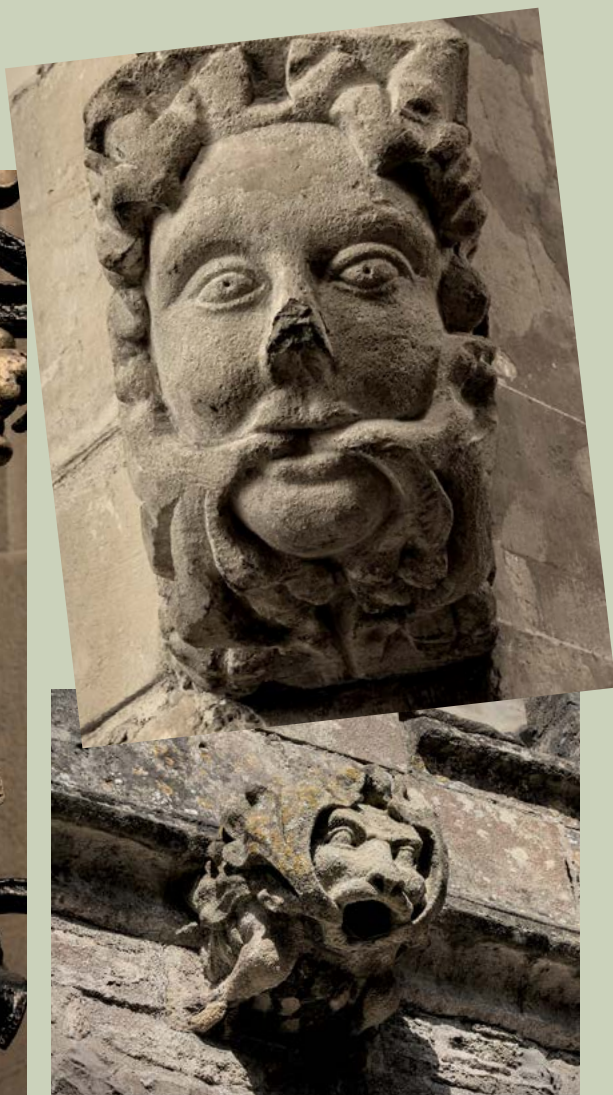
I started combing through the details of a few major churches in Bristol, and after hours of online research, went further afield into North Somerset with my camera and tripod in tow. I found many gems hidden in plain sight: in the naves, porches and crypts, as roof bosses, corbels, capitals, poppyheads, on bench ends and under misericords, in the stained-glass windows and outside as gargoyles. The Green Man is everywhere!

Talking to the wonderful volunteers who sometimes helped me to find the mysterious leafy face or get access to their church on days when it was closed, many had never noticed the Green Man in their church even after years of attending, and they stared at the figure in amazement, sometimes looking at me and asking, "What is the Green Man doing in here?" – well, that's the mystery... In Cheddar, in a small church where there are about a dozen Green Men, a parishioner asserted that

the Green Man was a Christian symbol – "Well, they wouldn't have put him in here if he wasn't, would they!" – but could not say what he represented in Christianity.

It is interesting, and not a little ironic, that, if it was not for these Christian monuments, we would have very little trace of the green god. While trying to eradicate paganism by adopting some of its key symbolisms, with an attempt to reinterpret their meaning, and vilifying some of them, the Church has inadvertently immortalised them. And so it is that we are blessed with many representations of the Green Man.

My quest for the Green Man continues. If anyone knows of any church within a reasonable distance of Bristol, please do send me some information via the Hearth (KazL) or my website (kazl.uk). With many thanks in advance!



The Battle of the Trees by Frank Olding

The 16th century folk-tale of the transformation of the lowly pot-stirrer Gwion Bach into the radiant-browed Taliesin by the power of Ceridwen's cauldron of awen plays a central role in the spiritual lives of modern Druids. But the story is based on poetry by or about Taliesin preserved in a medieval Welsh manuscript known as the Book of Taliesin, which dates to the period 1300-1336.

Individual poems from the manuscript such as *Preideu Annwfn* (*The Spoils of Annwfn*) and *Kat Godeu* (*The Battle of the Trees*) feed into many people's sense of belonging in the Pagan tradition. However, *The Battle of the Trees* is one of the most misunderstood and mis-quoted poems in the whole Welsh bardic tradition, largely because of its treatment by Robert Graves in his "poetic history" *The White Goddess*. The poem is dense, allusive and complex. It is also rich, fascinating and inspiring and its short, rhyming lines give the poem enormous energy and drive. It can be divided into nine sections:

- 1, Taliesin's transformations,
- 2, Taliesin battles with monstrous creatures,
- 3, The creation of an army of trees in Caer Nefenhyr,
- 4, The great list of the trees and their feats in battle,
- 5, Taliesin's essential nature and his creation by Math, Gwydion and others,
- 6, Taliesin boasts of his poetic abilities and his Otherworldly journeys,
- 7, More transformations,
- 8, Taliesin boasts of his weapons and his martial feats and mentions a prophecy to (or about) Arthur,
- 9, Taliesin's final boast claiming the prophetic powers of Virgil.

In the first section, Taliesin sets great store by his past existences as liquids of various kinds, perhaps reflecting the spirit of awen, ebbing and flowing. Then Taliesin's feats as a warrior are pre-eminent. He fights and overcomes a great beast with a hundred heads, a black-forked toad and a crested serpent.

The main action of the poem takes place in sections 3 and 4. Gwydion, the powerful warrior-magician of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, conjures up trees to take part in a great battle. The identity of the enemy and the exact cause of the conflict are left rather vague in the poem. However, in Triad 84 of *Triodd Ynys Prydain* (*The Triads of the Island of Britain*), it is listed as one of the "Three Futile Battles" of the Island of Britain: "One of them was the Battle of Goddau: it was brought about because of the bitch, the roebuck and the plover..."

The heart of the poem is the famous tree-list which names the trees called to battle by Gwydion and

describes their warlike deeds. In the ancient law-books of Wales and Ireland, plants and trees were listed according to their value and usefulness and this may have influenced the poem. The tree-list also echoes the old heroic poetry of the 'historical' Taliesin of the 6th century, e.g. alder "in the vanguard, strikes first", elm slashes "the centre, flank and rear of the enemy".

Alder in the vanguard	75
struck first;	
Willow and Rowan	
were late to the army.	
Spiky blackthorn	
Eager for slaughter.	80
The skilful Medlar	
anticipator of battle.	
Rose advanced	
against an angry host.	
Raspberry took action:	85
he built no defensive palisade	
to protect his life.	
Privet and Honeysuckle	
and Ivy, despite the look of him,	
how fiercely they went into the fray!	90
Cherry taunted.	
Birch, despite best intentions,	
was slow to don armour,	
not from cowardice,	
but rather because of his largeness.	95
Golden Rod kept his resolve –	
foreigners over foreign torrents.	
Pine, in the place of honour,	
contended for the chair.	
Ash performed fine deeds	100
before princes.	
Elm, despite his wealth,	
did not veer by so much as a foot:	
he slashed the centre,	
flank and rear of the enemy.	105
Hazel adjudged	

the weapons for the conflict.
 Dogwood, of blessed life,
 the bull of battle, lord of the fray.
 A great host brings salvation. 110
 Beech flourished,
 Holly grew green;
 he was in the valorous combat.
 Skilfull, splendid, renowned Whitethorn:
 his hand dealt pestilence. 115
 Vine the destroyer
 hewed in battle.
 Bracken, the despoiler;
 Broom in the van of the war-band
 was wounded in the rucked-up ground. 120
 Gorse was not fortunate:
 despite that, he marshalled forces.
 Heather, renowned pillager,
 was conjured into the army.
 Black Cherry the harrier. 125
 Oak of the swift battle-cry:
 before him Heaven and Earth trembled.
 Woad, a valiant warrior,
 his name is worthy of record on wax tablets.
 The sickly tree's onslaught [elm?] 130
 caused terror:
 he would, he did repulse
 others and stabbed them.
 Pear caused oppression
 on the field of battle. 135
 A terrifying array
 was surging Clover.
 Shy Chestnut,
 a fierce adversary among the mighty trees.
 Jet is black, 140
 Mountain rounded,
 the trees are armed,
 the great oceans are swifter
 since I heard the battle-cry.
 The crown of the Birch grows leaves for us, 145

its vigour strengthened us;
 The crown of the Oak ensnared us
 with Maeldderw's Song.
 The laughing sea-wave that covers the rock,
 a lord who disdains the shoal. 150

At this point (section 5) Taliesin explains how he was created by Math and Gwydion, who also create the maiden Blodeuedd from flowers in the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*. Here, though, they are joined by others – Eurwys and Euron, Modron the Celtic mother-goddess, and two hundred and fifty “learned ones”. They conjure Taliesin from a unique combination of nine earthly elements, including the blossoms of trees and shrubs, primroses and flowers, and the water of the ninth wave. In another medieval poem, Taliesin is made from seven elements – the familiar ones of earth, air, fire and water but also, wonderfully, from mist, flowers and the south wind.

In section 6, Taliesin again connects himself with the characters and actions of the Fourth Branch, this time with Dylan, the twin brother of Lleu Llaw Gyffes. We are also told of the dual source of his awen – it comes both from Heaven and from “the silver stream of Annwfn”. In section 7, one of Taliesin's previous incarnations is as a weapon wielded by “dog-headed warriors” who also appear fighting against Arthur and his warriors in a poem *What Man is the Gatekeeper?* which dates to the period around 1100. In section 8, the wise men and druids are called upon to declaim their prophecies to or about Arthur and the poem ends with Taliesin likening himself to the Roman poet Virgil.

So, how old is *The Battle of the Trees*? Some scholars think that the poem had reached its written form by the period 750-800 CE. We know that through the centuries, Welsh bards adopted the persona of Taliesin or perhaps felt themselves possessed by his spirit in performing their poetry. One of these poets was a man called Llywarch ap Llywelyn, whose nickname was Prydydd y Moch (the poet of the pigs)! The eminent Welsh scholar Prof. Marged Haycock has argued that *The Battle of the Trees* is largely his work dating to the period 1210-1220. Taliesin is a mediator between worlds and epochs, combining the wisdom of the ancient, pagan world with medieval learning. He was an inspiring figure for the creative poets and story-tellers of medieval Wales and still is for us today.

Note: For more detailed information, please see my 2024 book *The Taliesin Sourcebook* (Green Magic Publications). Find the book in the OBOD Store: <https://store.druidry.org/products/the-taliesin-sourcebook-by-frank-olding>

The Hero's Journey: A Tarot Perspective by Robert Barnett

The Hero's Journey, which was first introduced by Joseph Campbell in his seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, has been further developed and applied by numerous Tarot scholars to deepen our understanding of the evolutionary trajectory portrayed in the Tarot's imagery. By recognizing the universal themes of the Hero's Journey within the Tarot, we can unlock its wisdom and guidance on our personal paths of growth and transformation.

The Hero's Journey resonates profoundly with the sequence of the Tarot, particularly the Major Arcana. These 22 cards are more than symbolic images; they represent stages of human experience and archetypal forces encountered on the transformative journey of the soul. Campbell's framework, divided into three primary phases—The Departure, The Initiation, and The Return—aligns seamlessly with the Tarot, offering a psychological and spiritual map of life's cycles.

The Departure: The Call to Adventure

The Departure represents the beginning of the journey, a leap into the unknown. The Fool (0) perfectly embodies this phase with its sense of innocence, spontaneity, and unbridled potential. The Fool steps forward into the adventure, unburdened by fear or experience, marking the start of transformation.

Following The Fool, The Magician (1) and The High Priestess (2) appear as initial guides. The Magician represents action, mastery, and the ability to manifest dreams, while The High Priestess holds the key to hidden knowledge, intuition, and the mysteries of the unconscious. Together, they prepare the hero for the trials ahead by offering tools and inner wisdom.

The Empress (3) and The Emperor (4) provide maternal and paternal archetypes, symbolizing care, nurturing, structure, and authority. These figures ground the hero in the support systems needed for success. The Hierophant (5) introduces the hero to a spiritual tradition or higher knowledge, offering access to a sacred framework through which the hero can better understand their role in the cosmic order. With this foundation laid, the hero is ready to embark on their journey.

The Initiation: Trials and Transformation

The Initiation phase is marked by challenges that test the hero's strength, resolve, and identity. The Lovers (6) represent a critical decision or crossroads, where the hero must choose between diverging paths or priorities, balancing personal desires with higher callings. This is the first major test of values and relationships.

The Chariot (7) symbolizes the hero's determination and the willpower required to overcome obstacles, steering their path forward with focus and control. Strength (8), however, takes the journey inward, demanding mastery over inner fears, doubts, and primal urges. It is not brute force but compassion and inner fortitude that allow the hero to progress.

As the journey deepens, The Hermit (9) signals a period of introspection. The hero must step away from external distractions and look inward, seeking clarity and wisdom. This solitary retreat marks a moment of profound self-discovery and prepares the hero for the greater trials yet to come.

The Return: Completion and Enlightenment

Having faced and endured the trials of the journey, the hero emerges transformed. Temperance (14) signifies the integration of these experiences into a balanced and harmonious whole, where opposites are reconciled and the hero achieves a state of inner equilibrium.

However, the journey is not without final challenges. The Devil (15) represents the temptations of materialism, fear, and illusion that threaten to derail progress, while The Tower (16) symbolizes the collapse of false structures and egoic attachments. These moments of crisis and catharsis are necessary for true growth and awakening.

Emerging from the storm, the hero is guided by celestial light. The Star (17) offers hope and renewal, while The Moon (18) invites the hero to explore the deeper, shadowy realms of the psyche. Finally, The Sun (19) heralds the arrival of enlightenment, joy, and clarity—a moment of radiant self-realization.

The journey reaches its culmination with Judgment (20), a card of higher calling and ultimate accountability. Here, the hero transcends



past limitations, embracing a renewed sense of purpose and connection to the divine. The World (21), the final card of the Major Arcana, represents the completion of the cycle. The hero achieves a sense of wholeness and unity, prepared to begin a new journey as a guide or mentor for others.

The Tarot as a Map for Personal Growth

The Hero's Journey, as depicted through the Tarot, is more than a story—it is a universal template that reflects the cycles of psychological and spiritual development. Each of us, in our own way, embarks on this journey, encountering the archetypes and stages represented by the Tarot's Major Arcana.

Through its symbolic imagery, the Tarot serves as a mirror to our inner world and a guide through life's challenges and triumphs. By exploring its connection to the Hero's Journey, we can better understand our own transformative paths and draw upon the Tarot's insights to navigate our quest for meaning and fulfillment.

Whether you are a novice or a seasoned practitioner, the Tarot invites you to engage with the Hero's Journey and discover its relevance to your own life. Each reading becomes a chapter in your personal odyssey, offering wisdom and inspiration as you walk the path of the hero.

Robert's e-book, *The Major Arcana of the Tarot*, can be found on his website www.contemplation.info/

** FINAL CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS **

“Summer Magic” Issue

This is the final call for submissions for July's 'Summer Magic' issue of *Touchstone*.

The solstice has passed - the days of sunshine and heat are (hopefully) here!

How does your magic manifest during the summer?

Do you have a specific piece of magical practise, a ritual or meditation you can share? Maybe you find a potent magic in the summer landscape, or the crash of the ocean, or the flight of a swallow. 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 Thursday
5th June 2025

The Adirondacks in Late May

by Keith Schubert

As I walk along the way
Through the Adirondacks in late May

I'm reminded on days like these
To search for solace among the trees

The Cottonwoods spread their snowy seed
The falling fluff of Spring indeed

The Apple blossoms of pink and white
Are for me, an intoxicating sight

The wisdom of the White Oaks offers
serenity
The Eastern Hemlock helps us admire
adaptability

The Black Locusts long for the sky, stretch-
ing strenuously into the air
But the White Pine peers above all others,
with pride and purpose beyond compare
The Red Pines have bark as burly as brick

While the Maples make sweet syrup which
I love, dark and thick

And this poem would not be worthwhile
without weighing-in on the White Birch
Who admirably adorns the Adirondacks, to
me - Mother Earth's church

All these trees around me, they offer me
quiet calm
In their protective presence I find for my
soul a balm

Generously they give, happily they heal
In their sanctuary my soul is stirring, the
feeling is surreal

All of this, as I walk along the way
Through the Adirondacks in late May



Bardic Tales

The Story of the Birds by Serina Ice

Long ago and far away, there lived a child in a village.

Every day, she went into the forest to play. There she met a green bird. It was as green as maple leaves in May, and its song was like a laugh. She asked the green bird if it would play with her, and it agreed.

For years together they played, until the child could sing the green bird's song.

The next day, the girl went deeper into the forest. There she met a blue bird. It was as blue as the sky on a cloudless day, and its song was like a whistle. She asked the blue bird if it would teach her the lore of the forest and it agreed.

For years the girl learned, until she could sing the blue bird's song.

Now a young woman, she met a lover. The next day, the young woman went deeper into the forest. There she met a red bird. It was as red as fresh blood, and its song was like a sigh. She asked the red bird if it would teach her love, and it agreed.

For years the young woman loved, until she could sing the red bird's song.

The next day, as she walked through the village, she saw a black bird beside the smithy sitting on a sword. The bird was as black as festering rot, and its song was like a croak. She asked the black bird if it would teach her to be a warrior, and it agreed.

For years the young woman trained, until she could sing the black bird's song. It was then that her village went to battle, and she took up her sword and went with them.

The battle was bloody and fierce, and in the end many lives were lost. Their bodies lay strewn across the field, bloodied and torn. The warrior looked out at the carnage. She saw the black bird tearing at the dead. Rage and sorrow overcame her, and she cut off the black bird's head. Its body fell to the dirt. Its head, however, did not. The head of the bird asked, "Why have you slain us?"

She looked down, and saw - under the black feathers, there were red and blue and green. The warrior wept. "How can I save you?" The bird's head pecked her three times, drawing

three drops of blood. "Bury me beneath that elder tree. Then you must climb to the top of that tree, where my nest is. There you will find an egg. Keep it safe and warm until it hatches, and raise my nestling. This is what I ask of you."

And so she did. Though her soul ached, the warrior laid the bird to rest beneath the roots of the elder tree. With a heavy heart, she set hand and foot to branch and began to climb. As she climbed higher and higher, the leaves became thicker and thicker. She climbed and climbed, with no end in sight. Her limbs were weary, but she kept going.

The air felt thin when she spotted a break in the leaves. Carefully, she climbed even higher, and there she saw a nest.

In the nest was a large egg, gleaming with a strange sheen. She took the egg and held it to her breast as she climbed down the tree. The sight of the battle's aftermath and the ruined village met her gaze. Grief swamped her and the woman fled into the heart of the forest.

Gradually she built a stout place for herself, with a good fireplace. As the moon waned and waxed, she tended the egg. It lay against her skin whether she slept or woke. After three moons, the egg hatched. The chick inside was as yellow as the sun at noon, and its song was like a mournful cry.

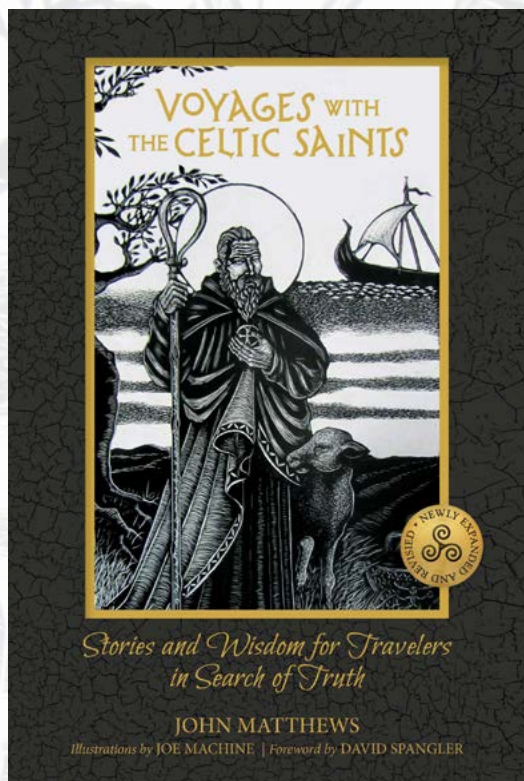
The woman labored day and night to keep the chick alive. She fed it every time it cried, let it nest in her bed, and sang its own song to lull it to sleep. Eventually its downy feathers were replaced by shining gold and it learned to fly on its own. The golden bird stayed with the wise woman, perching on her shoulder.

It is said that if you are lost in life, to walk into a forest. Walk just a little farther than you are comfortable with. If you hear strange birdsong, the wise woman is telling you what path to walk.



Reviews

Voyages with the Celtic Saints by John Matthews



Voyages of the Celtic Saints was originally published back in 1998 but has been expanded and refreshed by John Matthews for 2025. And it is a beautiful, inspiring book.

Some of this is due to the new illustrations by Joe Machine which grace every chapter. The illustrations are striking and atmospheric, bringing a deep sense of authenticity to the work. As you leaf through the pages of the book you really do feel as if you are engaging with an ancient text which holds great wisdom.

But, of course, the real beauty of the book lies in the content. Matthews opens the book with an authoritative introduction where he sets out some very clear aims. “The shift from “pagan” to Christian” was for the Celts the smallest of steps; no wrenching of the soul from the extreme of one path to the extreme of another. For almost eight hundred years, from the fifth to the twelfth century, the Celtic church did much to keep alive the traditions of native people, while at the same time promoting the idea of classical learning ...I hope [this book] may serve, in a very different age ... to bring together the pagan and Christian foundations upon which these stories are

founded.” That is a bold aim and yet Matthews certainly achieves it.

The lives of the Celtic Saints in the book, Matthews tells us, “were written as exemplars, teaching aids ... The lives of these remarkable men and women were seen to hold up a mirror to people everywhere.” And so, one of the main aims of this collection of stories is for them to act as points of personal reflection. Each story, which is broken down into easy to read sections, finishes with a list of Meditation Points for readers to consider. Sometimes these are relatively straightforward, but they build into more complex reflections as they progress. For example, the chapter on Gobnait of Ballyvourney, known as the Lady of the Bees, concludes with reflections which begins with “What do you feel when you watch bees at work” but progresses to “What is your personal approach to community?”

All the Saints you would expect are here - St Brigid of Kildare, St Columba of Iona, St David of Wales – and there are others that may come as a bit of a revelation to readers new to this area, such as Ciaran of Clonmacnoise and St Maedoc, the Son of the Stars.

My personal favourite is St Kevin of Glendalough, for whom “creatures themselves became guides and helpers, just as they had been in the older, shamanic tradition.” Kevin forms a close bond with an otter, who brings back his book when he drops it in the water and also delivers the occasional tasty fish for him to eat, and a blackbird, who ultimately stands on his grave and sings its lamentations upon his death. Matthews warns us that, sometimes, he has had to change the stories “to find wonder, the expression of spiritual truth, and poetry” and to “go to a place where all spiritual paths meet and reflect each other.” These changes add to the cohesion of the book and really do imbue it with a balance between the Pagan and Christian paths.

“The central theme of this book is voyaging” Matthews tells us. While some of these paths may be well-trodden and others will be fresh and new, this book holds voyages you will want to take again and again. It is a profound and deeply beautiful read that will surely leave readers spiritually enriched. The lives of these saints, who bridge the world of Paganism and Christianity have lessons for us all. Grab a copy, sit yourself under a tree and go on a voyage with them. You won’t regret it.

Voyages with the Celtic Saints is available for pre-order in the OBOD store >

Reviews

Scotia: Lost Sister of Tutankhamun by Luke Eastwood

Luke Eastwood has previously published many books, including *The Druid Primer*, *Dingle Folk Tales* and *Kerry Folk Tales*, *Where the Hazel Falls*, *How to Save the Planet* amongst other titles. He is an OBOD Mentor and has given radio interviews and talks in Ireland for a number of years. This book is his latest work, with an introduction by Lorraine Evans, who is an archaeologist and author. Her work is based around the study of death as a Mortuary Archaeologist and historical expert. Her works include *Burying the Dead*, and *Life of a Medical Officer in World War One*.

This book follows the journey and life line of Meritaten, later called Scotia, from her place within the royal family of Tutankhamen, following her migration to Spain, through Europe before finally settling in Scotland and then Ireland. It is a journey of dynastic importance, of changing identities and perilous travel, set around 1356 BCE. Born into the Royal family, the daughter of Nefertiti and Akhenaten, sister to the famous Tutankhamen, Meritaten's early life was one of opulence and plenty. Her life was influenced by political strategy which led to her journey far from the land of her birth.

The twisting, vine-like family tree is vividly brought to life by Eastwood and the confusing name changes of the main characters explained. The magical narrative places the reader within smelling distance of the Nile and the surrounding sands. You can almost feel the heat and breeze of the desert pushing Scotia and her entourage North on her journey.

Scotia did not marry into either political influence nor a kingdom's royal lineage outside Egypt, but within the land of her birth she was married to Smenkhkare, who was co-regent to Akhenaten. This placed her at the heart of the royal dynasty. After the death of her husband, records of Scotia's life come to an abrupt end.

By piecing together the written and archaeological histories from Egypt, Spain, Scotland and Ireland, Eastwood makes the fragmented, twisting time-line of Scotia's life becomes a fascinating and engaging piece of prose, based on ancient historical evidence.

The written accounts from a Scottish Abbot track her lengthy and hazardous journey with her husband and entourage fleeing Egypt to escape plagues and unrest at the end of a dynastic reign. After settling for a time, they then fled to Ireland, a very different land to the one in which they were born. The story picks up again much later where the Egyptian-Greek historian Manetho tells the

story of their flight through Spain to settle further North.

These fragments of history, knowledge of the trade routes and evidence of travel by our ancestors allows links to be made in a logical and believable way. A careful unpicking of history and pseudo-history leaves the reader wondering what can have happened to these ancient Egyptian royals, their entourage and where ultimately their resting place may be in Ireland. The hope of further excavation and archaeological finds leaves us wanting to know how Scotia's story really ends.

A need to honour the ancestry of those born in our lands, both those who can trace their heritage back through the mists of time to the green and moist landscapes of Ireland and Scotland, and those who harken back to the hot, dry and alien landscape of Egypt, calls to the Druid within all of us as this tale unfolds. This book is well worth reading.

Review written by Maxine Warren, co-leader of the Dee Waters Grove

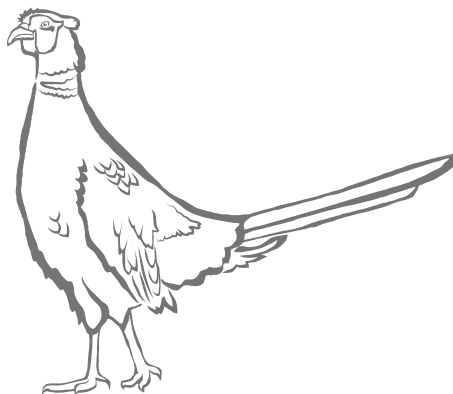


Andrew's Bit At The Back

At last year's Summer Gathering I secretly confessed, to around 300 people, that I struggle with Beltane. I discovered this quite early in my Druid journey where I was trying to write stories which expressed the heart of each of the eight festivals. My Beltane story was awful so I took myself off to the woods to try and work out why I found Beltane so jarring. The following poem, which I read out at the Gathering, was the result - and writing it helped me love the season! Over the last year, I've had several people ask for copies, so it feels like the perfect *Bit at the Back* for this month. Enjoy. It's called:

Pandemonium

While we politely stand
on village greens
And watch be-ginghamed boy and girls
Puppetting their straight-laced steps and
Wrapping ribbons round a white-washed
pole,
A crime is being committed.
The landscape which, just weeks ago, politely
introduced itself
And asked if it could start now, thank you,
please,
Now riots in the once tamed spaces.
Uncivil unrest is unleashed upon the winter-
sick.
The chaos of creation is at hand and -
May day! May day! – It's going to get wild!
The hedgerow is an anarchy of greens of every
hue,
Fresh and new, a jolt of protest and revolt.
The upstarts, birch and hazel, lead the crew,
both
swagger with the confidence of youth.
On the ground, the bluebells stand around in
gangs,
Hoods pulled up, face down,
Intimidation through pollination.



The dandy dandelions and the piss-eyed
vulgar primrose

Lounge beneath clouds of opium sweet
blossoms

While rapeseed raves in high-viz in the fields.

The green woodpecker, its punky snot green
coat

Headbangs, starts to hammer, while

The clatter and clamour of the Chiff Chaff
and the stammer

Of the Teddy boy pheasant calling for his
dowdy Missus

Crackles through the copse.

Goth black spiders scrawl
beneath the grass line

While flutter-by peacocks bat
mascaraed eyes,

Crushed velvet wings,

The new-romantics of this
Beltane blitz.

Orgies of rabbits stagger
from their burrows.

Squirrels, sick of earth rotted
fayre,

Now smash and grab, now

loot the whatever's there,

Because Beltane is an action,

An act and not an outcome.

We shouldn't call it Beltane but
Pandemonium!

All of nature rises up and riots all around,

It squares right up to us and spits onto the
ground at our feet

In all its gender-bending, winter-ending,
summer-pending frenzy.

While we politely stand on Village Greens

A crime is being committed.

The chaos of creation is at hand and -

May day! May day! – it's going to get wild!

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. Email bardicgorsedds@obod.org for more information.

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

Druid Gorsedd: 10-12 October 2025, Devizes, Wiltshire. Email druidgorsedds@obod.org for more information.

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

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

*it took me a lifetime to see
how the air made things visible
how it lifted the light
how it held the hawk's wings*

*it has its peaks and valleys
its streams that slip below
touching the earth's skin
mining diamonds from the sea*

*it breathes us, all my kin,
makes us sky-wide and alive
it shifts horizons on its tides
carves mountains to catch the
sun*

*it is age-long and new-born
speaks in ripple and goosebump
dancing leaf and lifting sand
the shuttered breath of the dying*

*it is terrible, gentle,
wildmother strong
it finds me resting my head
on the shoulder of the wind*

**The Fourfold:
Elemental Words - Air**
by Steven Shakespeare