



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

August 2025 | Issue 336

*This Issue*

- ✿ Blackbird Summer  
by Jon Nash.
- ✿ "Glory be to God for  
dappled things..." by  
Penny Billington.
- ✿ Analemma by  
Scott Royle.
- ✿ Plus lots more!



**Cover: "Lughnasadh Fox" by Fiona Graham**

# Editorial

Welcome to August's *Touchstone* - and what a bumper harvest it is this month! Our Bards have been busy musing on the meaning of Lughnasadh, we have a getting-to-know you session with our new Pendragon, Matt McCabe, a farewell to the inspirational Jdith Stone and wrap up by diving into the cooling waters of the River Severn!

In between all of that we have some astonishing articles this month. Jon Nash's piece, *Blackbird Summer*, explores the myth and folklore of Blackbirds but also reminds us of the need to support our wildlife in this long, hot summer. Penny Billington's wonderful article puts our Bardic work in the context of some overtly Christian nineteenth century poetry and finds more that unifies us than divides us. And Scott Royle's article on the analemma, "a graphical representation of the sun's path across the Earth," transports us, magically, around the wheel of the year.

I want to send an enormous thank you to Fiona Graham for sharing her beautiful image of a fox which is on the cover of this issue. Fiona is an astonishing artist. As soon as I saw her picture, it transported me to the golden wheat fields of Lughnasadh (which seem to have ripened at the start of July this year). Fiona's image perfectly captures that sense of high summer and the start of autumn we find in Lughnasadh.

There is no *Bit at the Back* from me again this month, because there's just so much great content from you - which as it should be! Thank you all for continuing to send in pieces which make editing this magazine such a joy.



## TOUCHSTONE (August '25 - Issue 336)

- 2 Chosen Chief's Bit
- 3 Bard's Page
- 6 Our new Pendragon: Matt who? - *Matt McCabe*
- 7 Blackbird Summer - *Jon Nash*
- 9 Visiting Brigit's Green Well - *Silenos*
- 10 "Glory be to God for dappled things ..." - *Penny Billington*
- 11 Bardic Tales: The Singing Meadow - *Emily Gale*
- 11 Analemma - *Scott Royle*
- 13 Obituary: Jdith Stone - *Blake Octavian Blair, Catriona McDonald, and Sarah Fuhro*
- 14 Reviews
- 15 Upcoming Events

## Lughnasadh by Jessica McGee

When fields turn to gold  
we celebrate their promise.  
Lugh's song is calling.



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OBOD OFFICE ADDRESS: Unit 1, Highlands Farm, London Rd, Bolney. RH17 5PX  
Email: [office@druidry.org](mailto:office@druidry.org)  
Phone UK: +44 1273 470888  
Phone US: +1 (857) 293-6468

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES: Please contact Lena and Jo at the office address above.

#### TOUCHSTONE SUBMISSIONS:

To the editor: Andrew Anderson.

Email: [touchstone@druidry.org](mailto:touchstone@druidry.org)

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# Chosen Chief's Bit

Bandia daoibh a chairde! Greetings everyone!

*"Although he hates me, if I do not hate him, enmity will soon be at an end."* Chinese Proverb

Storytelling is one of the ways I can relax and find peace. Here is a story I like to tell. I first heard it from Breezy Kelly, a woman from Donegal, Ireland, who travels the country telling stories and baking bread for Peace. It's an Ndebele tale from Zimbabwe.

## A Blind Man Catches a Bird

*A young man had just married a beautiful woman. He was so in love with her he did everything he could to please her. His wife had a brother who was blind with whom she was very close. The young man was eager to get to know his brother-in-law and so he asked him if he would go hunting with him. "I cannot see", said the blind man, "but if you help me to see, then we can go hunting together."*

*So the young man led the blind man off into the forest. At first, they followed a path that was familiar to him and it was easy for the blind man to tag on behind his brother-in-law. After a while, as they went deeper into the forest where the trees grew more closely together and there were many places for the animals to hide. The blind man now held on to the arm of his sighted brother-in-law and as they walked along the forest path he told him many things about the sounds they could hear around him. Because he was blind his other senses were more developed and he could feel the earth's energy beneath his feet; he could hear the songs of the trees around him; he could point to where the mushrooms were growing from their smell; he could interpret the sounds of animals in the forest - "I can hear a fox over there, with her cubs" or "That bird is about to fly off. I can hear its wing unfolding". To the sighted man, these sounds were meaningless and he was most impressed at his brother-in-law's ability to understand the forest when he assumed that all he could know was darkness. They had walked until they came to a clearing in the forest where there was a stream. This was a good place to set traps. The blind man followed the advice of the sighted one and put his trap in a place where the birds might come for water. The other man put his trap a little way further off and disguised it so that no bird could know that it was there.*

*He did not disguise the blind man's trap as he was eager to get home to his new wife. The blind man thought that he had disguised his trap, but he didn't see that he had failed to do so and any bird would recognise what it was. They returned the next day to the clearing in the forest. The blind man was very excited at the thought of having caught something and even before they reached their traps he could sense that they had caught something, "I can hear birds", he*

*said, "There are birds in the traps". When he reached his trap the young man saw that he had caught a small brown bird. He took it out of the trap and put it in his hunting bag. Then the two men went over to where the blind man had put his trap. The sighted man said, "There's a bird in your trap too". But as he spoke, he felt envy rising up, because he could see that the blind man had caught a beautiful coloured bird - all the colours of the rainbow. He thought that the feathers would make a very fine hat for his new wife. But the blind man had a wife and she would want the feathers too so the young man bent down and took the coloured bird out of the blind man's trap and quickly substituted his own bird. He handed it to the blind man and placed the coloured bird in his own hunting bag. "Here is your bird," he said, you can put it in your hunting bag. The blind man reached out for the bird, felt it, and rubbed his hands along its feathers. its wings and breast. Without saying anything he put it in his bag. They then headed back home and on the way they stopped to rest under an*

*oak tree. As they sat there, they talked about many things. The young man was most impressed with the knowledge and wisdom of the blind man who knew so much and yet could not see. The young man asked him a question that had long bothered him, "Why do people fight with each other?" The blind man said nothing for a few moments as he pondered the question. Then he raised his*

*head and faced the young man directly, it seemed as if he was looking directly into his soul "People fight because they do to each other what you have just done to me." The words shocked the young man and made him ashamed. He tried to think of a response, but one never came. Rising to his feet, he fetched his hunting bag, took out the brightly coloured bird and gave it back to the blind man who felt it, and rubbed his hands along its feathers. its wings and breast. "Do you have any other questions for me?" he asked. "Yes," he replied, "How do people become friends after they have fought?" The blind man smiled, "They do what you have just done!" he said, "That's how they become friends again."*

Our Storytelling around the Hearth has been running over the past number of months. The sessions have been recorded and can be viewed in the Storytelling Circle on the Hearth. It's a safe place to try out your storytelling skills and your stories. We welcome tellers and listeners alike, for without listeners there are no tellers. They are held once a month on Thursday at 20:00 UK. We are taking a break for the summer and will resume again in the autumn. I look forward to seeing you there. Keep an eye out for the notice on the Hearth.

Wishing you much peace and serenity!  
Síocháin agus  
Suaimhneas!

Eimear 





## Lughnasadh by Susan Knox

Luk in bye, doon the run rig  
Whaur the bere hings his heid,  
Heavy aneath the simmer sun.  
Gowden. A blate God  
He turns his heid tae the scythe  
An' his ain death forbye.

## Windermere by John Davis

I stood there gazing to a far-distant shore  
Over Windermere lake, to fell and to moor.  
If these waters could speak, O what would  
they say  
To visitors and residents alike today.  
*O white horse, O white horse I pledge what is due,  
Honour and respect, I give unto you.*

"Over two hundred feet to my deepest depths,  
My water is chilly, it'll freeze you to death  
If you forget to respect my quiet dignity.  
I'll swallow you up and feel no pity".  
*O white horse, O white horse I pledge what is due,  
Honour and respect, I give unto you.*

In the June of '30, Sir Henry Seagrave  
Raced fast down these waters, they thought  
he was brave.  
The engines were roaring, the echoes were  
shrill;  
Then suddenly silence...and the waters fell  
still  
*O white horse, O white horse I pledge what is due,  
Honour and respect, I give unto you.*

When the boat capsized, his mechanic was  
drowned;  
Sir Henry died later, no hope for him found.  
The world record stood, but such was the  
cost;  
His memory remains but two lives were lost.  
*O white horse, O white horse I pledge what is due,  
Honour and respect, I give unto you.*

The speed limit today is only twelve knots,  
No faster than the ghostly white horse can  
trot.  
So please take heed when you come here  
today  
Lest the white horse should appear and take  
you away.  
*O white horse, O white horse I pledge what is due,  
Honour and respect, I give unto you.*



## The Harvest by Essy Thorn

Lughnasadh is coming soon. It's the  
time of the harvest.  
I've got my gardening tools and I'm excited. This  
yard isn't  
a farm full of food, but by the  
light of the largest  
moon, the summer's coming through for supper  
prior to dark. This

celebration with a banquet is my kind of debauch.  
This bread I made is smelling amazing. The pie's  
looking gorgeous.  
I'm just playing.  
You can thank my favorite lady for all this.  
Not to brag, but my baby's baking is flawless.

Anyways. I've been waiting on this party to start  
so I can go and eat my weight in all the starches  
and carbs.  
Tomorrow I'll be moving like a car that's in park.  
Tonight, I'll dance around a fire till I'm worn out  
and parched.

Somebody grab the spiced wine and fill a horn to  
the top!  
Tonight we're sacrificing Johnny Barley corn to the  
gods.  
While we wait to nap on tryptophan,  
Let's gather round the wicker man.  
The sky is dimming down, but we're about to have  
it lit again!



## Triad (Good Friends) by Jon Wingrave

The touch of three good friends:  
the sun on your face,  
the wind in your hair,  
the earth beneath your feet.

## A Bard's Blessing: The Cauldron Stirs

by Scott Seivwright

I was a drop in the belly of time,  
Curled like a question, quiet as rhyme.  
Fire kissed me in Cerridwen's womb,  
Where silence sang and stories bloomed.

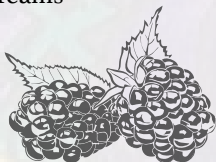
I was a hawk in the heat of noon,  
Feathered with flame and shadowed moon.  
I was a salmon, wisdom-fed,  
In sacred pool where poets tread.

Now I return with ink and breath,  
With tales of life, and love, and death.  
My voice is raw, my roots are deep,  
I've woken things I swore asleep.

So let me stand where hill meets sky,  
And speak of things that never die.  
The Bard is not a mask I wear —  
But soul remembered, laid out bare.

## Summer Fruits by nemie

Drying heat of full-blown sun,  
Descending into blazing autumn  
Golds of swelling, ripening grain,  
Turning leaves fade acid greens of spring  
Reflecting sun yellows.  
Dishevelled Autumn turns a defiant gilded face  
Towards a burnished waning Moon  
And whispers:  
I am grown,  
I am whole now.  
New Seed grows within me.  
Golden strands fall from my shoulders,  
Shriveled sundried petals drift  
from my sunbleached hair.  
I was the Virgin Bride,  
Taken inside my bridegrooms halls.  
Now I stand poised, separate, alone.  
Body swelling ripely  
Hands spreading over my belly  
As it grows.  
And I am made whole.  
From kiss of unwrapping bud,  
To bursting fruit,  
Splitting with juices  
Dripping with sweet life blood.  
Quickening seeds within,  
Hold their own daughter germs  
Sealed within their ivory dreams  
Eyelids, lips, palms,  
Pages pressed closed.  
Falling  
Tumbling  
Seeding  
Birthing



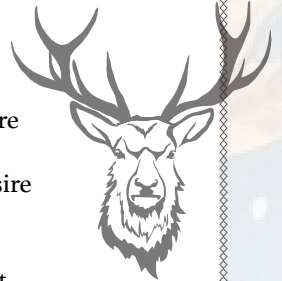
## Call to Cernunnos

by Keith Schubert

We call to you Cernunnos  
Wild god of the forest, free  
We call to you Cernunnos  
Green Man of bush & tree

We call to you Cernunnos  
Antlered god of shaman fire  
We call to you Cernunnos  
Wildness is our heart's desire

We call to you Cernunnos  
Re-wild our lives this night  
We call to you Cernunnos  
We invoke you in this sacred rite



## Image: Crescent Gratitude

by Maryanne Mattson.

Maryanne wrote: "Although the full moon is quite captivating, the crescent moon is so creative and inspiring. There is appreciation for things that are "full".

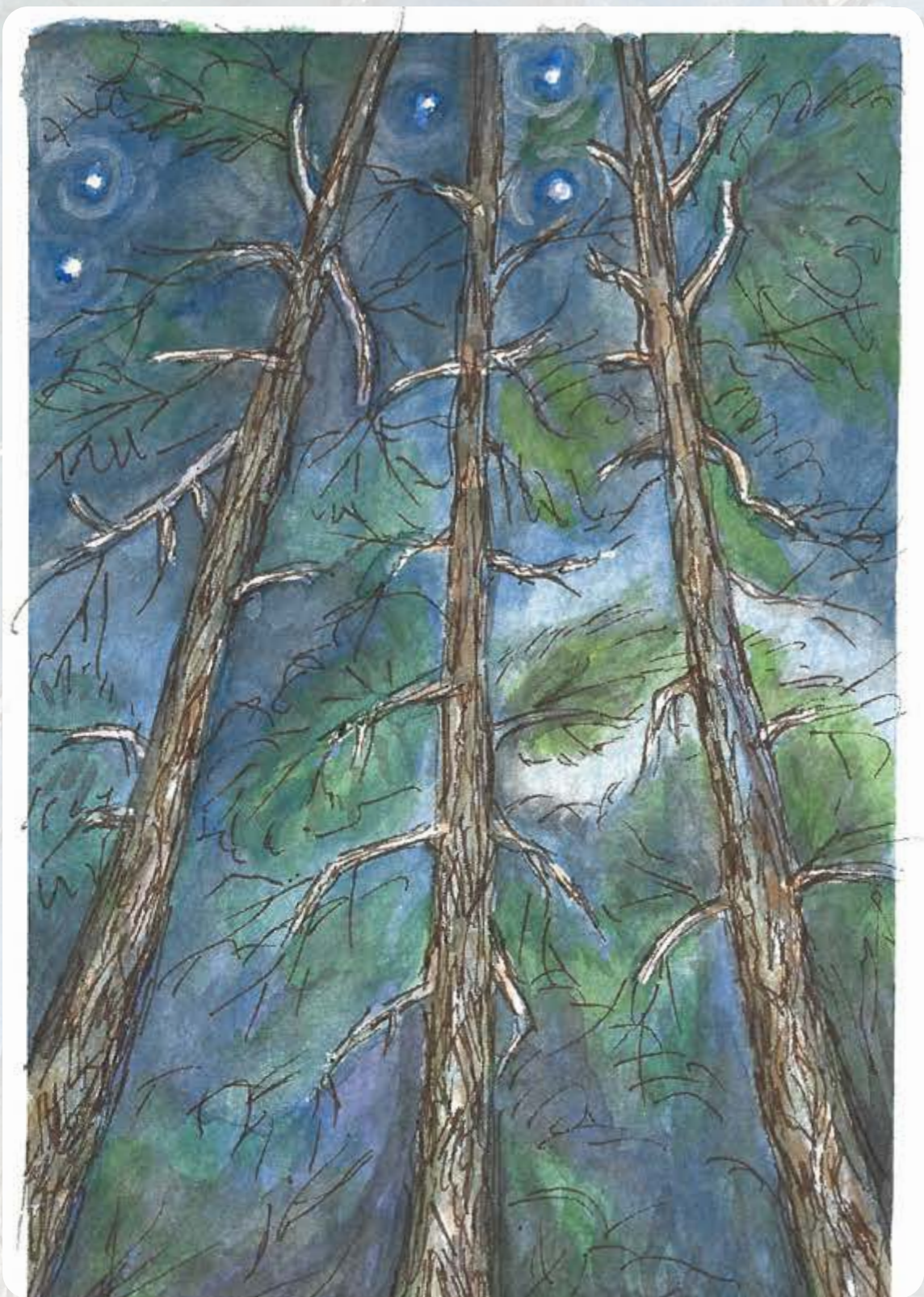


**Image: Forest Awen** by Rhyannon Brightwater

## Our new Pendragon: Matt who? by Matt McCabe

“Originally from Brighton, I graduated in Film and Animation in 1986. Having then wandered around in the New Age jungle, I was desperate for some structured learning. That’s when I discovered OBOD. Somewhere around the end of 1989, I came home! At the same time, my TV career then took me to the North East, and so much of my Druid learning took place amidst the landscapes of the old kingdom of Northumbria. My first Druid home was with the wonderful Northumbrian Grove, with occasional visits to the Northern Grove for some ‘hardcore Druiding!’”

By 1994, I took on new roles within the Order as an Ovate tutor and also as the Media Contact. Initially I was advising Philip Carr-Gomm, but I soon took on more media engagements myself, aiming to represent both the Order and Druidry more broadly. It was during this time I coined the phrase, “Druidry is about exploring your faith within the natural world”, a useful response to the typical journalist’s opening question of ‘So Matt, sacrificed any virgins recently?’ I managed to weave my studies into working life and while at Tyne Tees Television, I had the incredible opportunity to make a documentary on Celtic Christianity called *The ABC of Christian Heritage*. This project, amongst many other tangents, became a significant part of my Druid Grade studies.

By 2000, personal circumstances brought me back to London where I met my wife, Louise. I was fortunate enough to be able to work with Lilian Fredericks of the London Grove. We were involved in the editing of the OBOD seasonal ceremonies. I found I was constantly asking why we did things that way and at that point in the ceremonies. So Lilian felt it was essential that OBOD should offer Ritual Workshops to explain what we do.

On 9/11, my best friend Rob was killed in the North Tower. This prompted a period of change, and by 2004 I had stepped back from tutoring, handed over my role as Media Rep to Adrian Rooke, and also decided to leave my career in TV. Instead my focus became ‘Community Druidry’, working with Spirit of Place, focusing on projects and activities that benefitted my local community in Tottenham, London.

Then in 2010, circumstances allowed Louise and I to move to the beautiful city of Bath in Somerset with our two children. I set up a smallholding and planted a heritage apple orchard, whilst looking after the kids. I also joined the Parish Council and got involved once more in the local community. Luckily Louise had a job that paid the bills! During this time, Penny Billington (then Editor of Touchstone) got in touch to invite me to join her facilitating the OBOD Ritual Workshops – Lilian had passed the baton to Kate and Barry Reilly, who were now handing over to us. Over the past 15 years the Ritual Workshops have given me an incredible amount of joy. It is incredibly rewarding bringing new OBODies together, sharing experiences and watching ritual skills emerge and blossom. It has been a real blessing to be able to work mostly in Glastonbury with Penny and more recently with Gary Llewellyn. I have met so very many lovely people from across the world, and a big *vielen dank* to the German OBODies!

In 2017, because of Brexit, I joined the Liberal Democrats, and in 2019 became the Councillor for the villages to the south of Bath. Six years on, I am the Cabinet Member for Housing, Heritage and Planning. I am responsible for the World Heritage City, for the Local Plan, for homelessness and for the hot springs. Yes, a Druid is responsible for Aquae Sulis, the Waters of Sul.

So here I am then, a Druid of Sul, running what is now the Sulis Grove and somehow inheriting the title of Chief Druid of the Gorsedd of Bards of Caer Badon – which is the fancy version of ‘organises the Bard of Bath Competition’. I sit on a number of Boards locally, including the Bath Interfaith Group. So Community Druidry is still how I express myself, and I really am incredibly honoured to once again be asked to serve my Druid community, alongside Eimear and Stephanie, our Chief and Scribe. It feels like coming home all over again. I hope I will continue to meet lots more of you, my fellow OBODies, in my new role, and if we should meet and you need an ice-breaker you can always ask ‘why is it not called Mabon?’ (Editor: if you fancy finding out Matt’s views on ‘Mabon’, see issue 327 of Touchstone, November 2024!)”



**Image: Matt being interviewed by Anna Oakflower  
(at the Baltic Sea Camp, 2025) by Andreas Trampenau**

## Blackbird Summer by Jon Nash

Join me here beneath this gently sighing Ash tree on a warm summer's evening. The air is still, like the land is holding its breath. The light is slowly slipping from the sky as the sun heads closer to the horizon and the earth lifts to meet it. And there...can you hear...a fluted and carefree song strikes up. Part inviting, part territorial claim, the black bird is singing a summer song and asking you remember his name...

The blackbird has strong associations with us druids, the name in Gaelic is Druid Dhubh -the Black Druid and has long had magical associations in folklore.

That magical song is one of my strongest associations with the arrival of summer, most often heard at dawn or dusk when the acoustics help the songs travel far and wide. They sing to attract a mate or to ward off rivals or perhaps to celebrate the longer days with the space for more feeding and song. March to July marks their breeding season when these songs are most important for survival.

With the jet-black feathers and bright yellow beaks and eye rings in the males and brown mottled feathers and brown yellow beaks of the females they are a striking sight in woods, parks, fields and gardens.

Although they generally live for three years some have even been known to last into double figures, with the RSPB recording one at twenty-one years of age.

Before they began their journey to the white tower of London, the seven survivors of the battles against the Irish, last loyal subjects of Bran The Blessed, arrived at Harlech to feast and drink. And as they filled their bellies, there was a flutter of wings, and three blackbirds landed at the table. Bobbing amongst the meats and wine. Bright black eyes fixed on the men from within yellow circles bright as the sun. And then opened their beaks and sang. Such songs that made all other music they had ever heard seem harsh and discordant. For these were the birds of Rhiannon. Agents of the other world. And as the humans sought to return the birds gaze, sometimes it



seemed as if the birds were right there at the table with them and sometimes it seemed as if they were very far away across a great and shifting sea so that they had to squint to see them clearly. And seconds

turned to minutes turned to hours turned to days turned to months turned to years and they found they had feasted there seven years.

Blackbirds have long been associated with the otherworld and their songs ascribed deep magical power. They appear as Rhiannon's three birds in the second branch of the Mabinogion and in the tale of Culhwch and Olwen the fourteenth impossible task is to capture them to sing at a wedding and when they search for the Mabon one of the oldest creatures they meet is the blackbird of Gwri who has lived so long she has pecked an anvil into nothing (blackbirds are also known as the blacksmith's bird). In the story of the Lady of the Fountain, blackbirds arrive to call in the spring with their magical song.

We share the land of Albion with around six million breeding pairs of blackbirds. But despite remaining a common sight these numbers are down eighteen per cent nationally since the 1970s and have lowered by 30-50 per cent in areas like London. It is thought that this drop in population is in part caused by the rise of the Usutu virus, a mosquito born disease which is fatal to blackbirds. It was first detected in 2020. The spread across much of southeast England may be caused by mosquitos expanding their range and the diseases they spread in the warmer, longer summers, paired with heavy rainfall as the climate changes.

Black feather

Dark feather

Deep feather

Shining eye

Black feather

Dark feather

Deep feather

Shining beak

The British Trust for Ornithology has called for volunteers to monitor local blackbird populations between April and the end of September in 2025. If you sign up it is suggested that you monitor your garden or local park for at least fifteen minutes a week (though you could do more) and count the number of birds seen and the behaviour they demonstrate.

And I propose that we druids here in the United Kingdom sign up to aid the black druid in this hour of need and add a little magic to our operations and data collection.

Decide how often you will go to observe and choose a sit-spot in your garden or park to devote to the practice of looking out for the birds (like

the knights in the Mabinogion). Create a yellow blackbird eye circle around your sit spot (perhaps with a friendly food source like flaked maize or oats) and enjoy some still time surveying the area quietly and peacefully to let the local blackbirds reveal themselves to you. You might like to supplement your observation time with other sit outs in your circle visiting blackbirds in your sacred grove and undertaking meditations, prayers, songs and storytelling to honour their presence. Perhaps create a sigil for blackbird protection and place it in your garden. Make offerings of suitable birdfeed in your garden throughout the monitoring process. And share your observations and experiences. You might like to sketch or write or compose a piece of art inspired by the time you spend in the company of these magical creatures.

And together we can combine a scientific survey with a magical working and usher in a more secure future for wildlife. Please do share your experiences with us.

I am the oldest of birds. Doorway to the otherworld. Song of enchantment. Blacksmith and Bard. Dinosaur and Druid. Cast your eye out across the land to search for me. Sing my songs and spread my stories.

Other ways to help blackbirds thrive:

\*BIRD FEED: meal worms, oats, flaked maize and seeds.

\*REDUCE STANDING WATER in your garden where mosquitos could breed.

\*CLEAN bird baths and bird feeders regularly and sweep the surrounding area.

\*Keep an eye out for unusual behaviour or deceased blackbirds. You can report these to Garden Wildlife Health.

To sign up to the BTO project: <https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/blackbirds-gardens>

## Earth by Clodagh Connaughton

I know thee well  
in all your guises -  
shape-shifter supreme,

you who hold me  
in all my states of being,  
giving me life  
and love.

I feel you intensely -  
your breath on my face,  
your fire in my belly.

I drink of your waters;  
your elements flow  
through my veins.

Your layers reflect  
my levels  
of consciousness;

your moods echo  
my emotions,  
in calm and turmoil.

Your soil sustains  
my body's functions  
and my aesthetic sensitivities.

I am  
of you -  
Earth.



Image: Aine by Tatty

## Visiting Brigit's Green Well by Silenos

Whilst visiting the UK for the first time to attend the Summer Gathering, I had the opportunity to explore the neighborhood of Beckery, the Avalon Marshes and the River Brue, on the southern border of Glastonbury, near Street. I decided to venture out and look for Brigit's Green Well, which I had read about, but had no idea how to find.

The Green Well was part of an ancient tradition of three sacred wells at Glastonbury; the Red Well at the foot of Glastonbury Tor, inside the popular Chalice Well Gardens, the Blue Well at the Lady Chapel in the Glastonbury Abbey and Saint Brigid's Green Well in Beckery. Today, the Green Well is in pasture close to an Industrial zone around the old Moorlands factory.

On the ground with the busy A39 buzzing with traffic, I left the Premier Inn and headed towards Street. I began exploring the area around the old Moorlands Factory and quickly found the most direct route to the Green Well in the Avalon Marshes was blocked by a large traveller encampment, so I decided to check out Pomparles Bridge.

Right past the old canal I spotted Pomparles Bridge. Local legends say Excalibur was thrown into the River Brue here, as a dying Aurther was moved to Avalon Isle. However, Pomparles Bridge is pretty modest and the River Brue has really shrunk in size since Excalibur was thrown in.

I noticed a small sign reading *Public Access*, so set off along the track. Hidden by tall grass and bushes was an access gate, which I walked right by on my first approach. A path follows the

River Brue west through thick grass and nettles. A sign welcomed me to the Avalon Marshes and warned of a Badger sett mid-trail. As I walked down the easy path, after 5 or so minutes, the Badger sett appeared and made for a few feet of rough trail. The Badger sett is about halfway to the Green Well.

Then, just as my better instincts told me to turn around. I saw an official looking sign near a small clump of Willows and another gate. I had found Brigit's Green Well and it was very humble and real. The sign said that a Bronze Age Settlement was found near the Well, and the area had been inhabited ever since. The Well was a popular spot for Medieval Tourists who often spent their first night in Glastonbury at a small monastery dedicated to Saint Brigid, which has since become the Moorlands Factory site.

I left drops of mead and a pinch of tobacco as offerings for the faeries. Walking back I found a sweets wrapper left for trash, which I tidied up. With offerings of mead and tobacco, and by cleaning up after another human, surely the Faeries of Brigit's Green Well were charmed.

Brigit's Green Well is a great site to add to your itinerary in Glastonbury if you would like some real, free nature instead of admission fees and gift shops. It is a flat easy walk, although the Badgers. might be an issue at sunrise or sunset.

A local group called the Friends of Bride's Mound is active in preserving and promoting the site. More information can be found at: <https://friendsofbridesmound.com/>

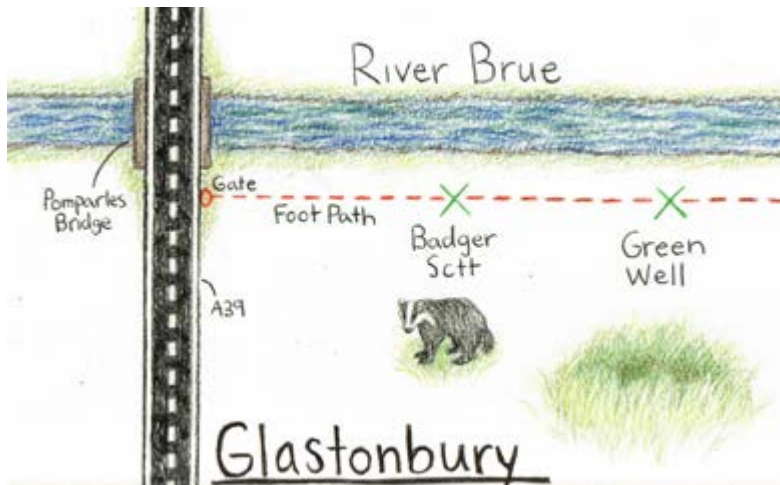


**Image: Green Well Map** by Matilda C Turck

## “Glory be to God for dappled things ...” by Penny Billington

*Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings  
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and  
plough;  
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.*

*All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise him.*

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844—1889)

Druids are very shy of the G word: it seems inextricably linked to gender and as we make our story with the creative expression of the universe, that’s not helpful. But substituting ‘Spirit’ for ‘God’ in this poem is all it takes to reveal how Druidic it is.

Gerard Manley Hopkins was, like the earlier Thomas Traherne (c. 1636) a mystical Christian and in tune with a Druidic world view. That statement would probably have horrified him, but the incontrovertible fact is that we share a way of perceiving living spirit in everything through observation of, and fascination with, the natural world. This poem speaks to me – and I suspect, most Druids – as it celebrates the mystery, changeability, mutability of life forms. I too love all things - ‘counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)’ – for when does the camouflage of the badgers’ stripes emerge from dappled shadow of the night time forest into a separate living creature? When do bats over the water morph from moving black mist into tiny leathery dinosaurs? And that’s when we’re quite calm and open to nature’s wonder. Crank up the tension and our imaginations really take flight – ‘How easy is a bush supposed a bear?’ sums it up perfectly (trust Shakespeare!) in the fairy-led midnight forest caperings of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Thinking of the ancient Druids’ heyday around the Iron Age is for me inextricably linked with their artistic culture and the metamorphoses implicit in that era’s fabulous metal work – animals shift fluidly into each other in belt buckles and horse artefacts; horses evolve into dragons, men’s heads are held in the mouths of snakes: why are the eyebrow terminals on a helmet actually boars? Is this a man’s face or a bird or dragon in flight? Taliesin himself has three births – from a woman, a Goddess and a Salmon weir so it’s not suprising that he says ‘And it is not known whether my body is flesh or fish’.

Moving forward to the mediaeval texts of the *Mabinogi* there are numerous examples of magical metamorphoses, perhaps from ancient oral tradition: punishment transformations of species and gender from men into deer, swine and wolves resulting in hybrid progeny: a man defeated by the threat of a badger metamorphosis; a solar hero transmuted into an eagle; a woman changed into a mouse. I find echoes of all this fluidity in my love of dappled things. How can we not look at the infinite mutability, diversity and changing design of the most prosaic of creatures and not see evidence of a creative energy present in such beauty? Who could look at a chrysalis and imagine the butterfly, or the acorn and see the mature oak?

As a Christian relative said of that cloud pattern resembling fish skin, ‘The mackerel’s back proclaims the mackerel sky; it is irrefutable evidence of God.’

One literary device we have inherited from the earliest poems written in the UK that I like to continue is the Praise Poem. *Pied Beauty* is a wonderful example, though ancient Celts and modern Druids are likely to express their praise in a less hierarchical context than Hopkins did. When I make spontaneous poems to the terrain as I walk, I’m not praising a creator God, for that implies an intelligence that I can understand and therefore is on a par with my own. The creative impulse of the universe that I hold in awe is far too great for me to understand; it’s beyond my wildest imaginings. So I simply praise the thing that I see in all its tender exquisite beauty; and the spirit behind it. My poem is its witness, and maybe that is justification enough for my existence. I’ll end with a most ancient example. One day a poet, dead well over one thousand years ago, walked in liminal space and found their inspiration in the beauty of the sea shore. It’s simplicity and direct relational nature transports us into a timeless space.

*Beautiful to me is the rolling wave  
White whisper on the wet shingle  
Of the shore, shell crushed to sand  
By sweep of gleaming glassy curve  
Creaming and curling, endlessly breaking  
On the beach..*

And now, over to us. We are inheritors of a living tradition, and if we feel we have no bardic skills, it behoves us to carry forward the impetus of love and gratitude for beauty in our noticing. It’s the discipline that enriches both us and the world we praise. It often leads to a whispered phrase, a thank you to life, and the breath of a response from the sentient world.

I think it’s wonderful.



# Bardic Tales

## Singing Meadow by Emily Gale

As I stood there, looking across the meadow,  
I realised I had never really known the world  
at all, until now.

The quiet, silent places were no longer so -  
the earth was singing to me.

I could sense the worms in the soil, their slow  
movements building a network of tunnels by  
which insects could commute. Tiny beetles in  
their dark corridors, following paths carved  
through centuries of persistent labour.

The grass, rattling as it swayed in the subtle  
breeze, maracas in this growing percussion.

The wind in my face howling, joined by the  
chorus of birds and the chirping of crickets as  
they blended their parts.

The gnarled, twisted oak creaked as the wind  
rushed through its tired, aged branches,  
creating the rhythm. Its leaves danced  
overhead, casting shifting shadows on the  
ground below.

Butterflies and bees formed the audience,  
passing through as they continued their daily  
tasks.

I stood there, listening, and couldn't help  
but smile. It was as if this magical song was  
meant only for me.

The earth and her eternal song, always  
playing for those who tune in.



## Analemma by Scott Royle (Maven)

Summertime, and the livin' is easy as the song  
goes. The trees and gardens are in full bloom  
and my Grove has become a shady retreat from  
the summer's heat. Just over a month ago the  
sun kissed the Tropic of Cancer and is retreating  
sunwise to the south. The warm days of summer  
bring activity, the bees are busy in my field of  
white clover, gathering pollen to store away for  
winter. Their buzzing is so loud that the field  
vibrates and with it my soul reverberates with the  
fullness of life.

I am in the midst of the  
Dog Days of Summer. It  
was thought that Sirius  
(the dog star) which  
would rise during mid  
to late summer, added  
heat to the day. During  
this time the festival of  
Lughnasadh or Lammas  
is celebrated. Lammas takes place on August first  
in the northern hemisphere, though the ancient  
Celts would celebrate on the nearest full moon.  
For 2025 that would be August 9th. Lammas  
means loaf mass, a time when the first loaf of  
bread is consecrated. Lammas is a celebration  
of the first harvest and a celebration of life.  
Lammas also marks the shortening of days and  
is a harbinger of winter and hard times. While  
summer is often represented as life, winter is  
represented as death.



Each year, John Barleycorn, the Green Man, and  
god of the harvest, would sacrifice himself for the  
sake of humankind. Some communities would  
mourn his death with wreaths. At this time, when  
the Earth Goddess whose womb is full from the  
spring and summer growing seasons, gives birth  
to the harvest and we gather her crops and her  
fruits. She then becomes the Earth Mother.

After Lammas comes the Autumnal Equinox  
with its Harvest Moon. This becomes a time of  
preparation as winter approaches; families and  
communities lay up for the starving times in the  
cold dead of winter. Food is harvested and stored,  
firewood is cut and stacked, and herds culled as  
the focus shifts from food production to food  
preservation. These are the gifts of Mother Earth,  
and as stewards of the land, we ensure all of the  
resources are used wisely.

Today's celebration will be one of quiet reflection.  
I go and sit in my grove. It is a wild place, barely  
cleared, with little or no structure. The trees  
are where God put them. In this grove there is  
ancient magic. It is a place where worlds mesh:  
times past, times present, and times to come. It  
is a place to seek wisdom from the ancestors  
who have passed from the Here to the There. It  
is a place where my eyes are opened to see and

my ears are opened to hear. In this place I can see the Here and the There. I am a person who often lives between worlds. I live on the fringes with the shadow dancers, the outside looking in. In the grove I have focus, I have power. The veil between worlds is thinner here. The flow of energy flies through the trees like birds in the air. It is wild, untamed, yet with purpose. It is here in the cacophony of sight and sound, the seen and the unseen, the wildness, the uncontrolledness, I find peace and harmony. I meditate. This is a time to listen, to hear what others have to say. It is also a time to see, to see what others see. In order to hear, I have to listen. In order to see, I have to close my eyes. Peace, be still. Sometimes, during my waking times, I hear a thought that isn't mine, or I see an image that I didn't see. Often, it's a glimpse, a passing moment. I am often left with a "where did that come from" feeling. The There occasionally pokes through to the Here.

The Analemma? It is a graphical representation of the sun's path across the earth. It is a figure eight, two circles (actually oblongs) joined at the equator. The sun travels north from the equator in a clockwise fashion until it reaches the Tropic of Cancer. Continuing, it travels back south until it reaches the equator again. When the sun is aligned with the earth's equator, it is at equinox. Night and day are equal. The sun then travels south in an anti-clockwise direction until it reaches the Tropic of Capricorn. When the sun touches either Tropic, it is a Solstice. Depending on where you live determines which solstice it is. In June, Alban Hefin is the summer solstice in the northern hemisphere and Alban Elfed or winter solstice in the southern hemisphere. In December, the solstice for the northern hemisphere is Alban Elfed and in the southern hemisphere, Alban Hefin. To move Sunwise, is following the direction of the sun's path through the seasons. Sunwise in the northern hemisphere is clockwise and in the southern hemisphere it is anti-clockwise.

The natural world moves in circles. We as humans tend to live in a linear world. It is sometimes hard to change your perspective from linear to curvilinear or circular. Linear

thinking leads us from a beginning to an end. Nature teaches us that life is not linear, it is without beginning, without end. We live in a continuum in the form of a circle or möbius. Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer. Day-Night-Day. Life, Death, Life. Summer Solstice, Autumnal Equinox, Winter Solstice, Vernal Equinox, Summer Solstice. As we travel on this great adventure, what we see and hear, will depend on how we see and hear. The sun's path on the earth, is called the analemma, and when turned sideways becomes a lemniscate; the sign for infinity. Once we shift our paradigm and align ourselves to the ways of nature. Then, eyes will be opened to see and ears will be opened to hear.

May your hearth be warm, and your larders full. May your eyes be opened to see and your ears opened to hear. May your heart be pure, and your soul be at rest. Most of all, may you be at peace and may you be content.



**Image: Thoughts** by Patricia Robin Woodruff

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# In Loving Memory

## Jdth Stone

Jdth (Judith) Stone transitioned to the next realm of existence on Monday January 6th, 2025. Jdth was one of the founding members of the still flourishing Mystic River Grove in Boston, Massachusetts, USA in 1992. The grove would go on to grow to serve the entire New England region. She remained an active member right up until the time of her passing. She wrote many of the rituals used during our many turns of the wheel of the year and sang her songs to carry us into the next season! Jdth made many trips across the pond for Order gatherings. Here they met many of the wonderful members who continue as friends and companions. And there were visits from those friends to the United States and the newly formed Grove.

Jdth was an incredible poet, musician, and inspiration to all who knew her. Her own musical and poetic creations grace the pages of the Gwersi



and are featured on a previous musical collection published by the Order titled *Barddas 2*. Notably, she nurtured the inner Bard in everyone she met, unflinching in her praise of each and every Eisteddfod performance she witnessed. She recognized the inherent worth of each soul she met and nurtured a long succession of rescue dogs.

Jdth entered every room, circle, and forest grove with a jubilation that was both reverent and an energetic fanfare to all life and life itself. Her sense of mischief and humor found her naturally filling the role of the sacred clown. Jdth's everyday approach to life was a celebration of life, and her ability to roll with its ups and downs and still find the joy and beauty was a lesson for each of us. For those who knew Jdth, she left a fond memory of the gift of poetic song. Jdth said, while she loved poetry, her way of relating to it herself was not to recite it but to sing it. That was her approach to life – don't recite it.... Sing it!

Jdth truly had the heart of a Druid – filled with a sense of creativity inspired by all life and life itself, with great integrity of action, she worked to bring good and joy to all beings. Justice and kindness were her guides. Jdth led by example. Without a doubt, her inspiration will continue to live on within our hearts.

*By Blake Octavian Blair, Catriona McDonald, and Sarah Fuhro*



# Reviews

## In Search of Sacred Earth

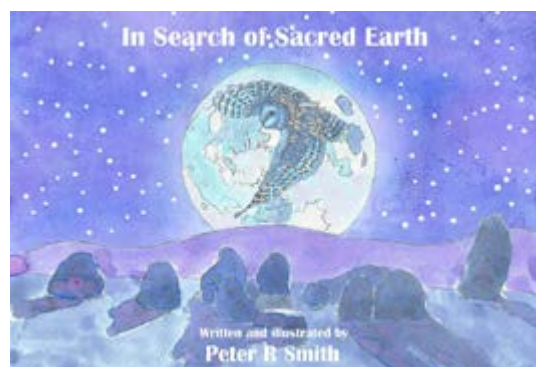
by Peter R Smith

At first glance, you could be forgiven for thinking that *In Search of Sacred Earth* is a children's book – but, be warned, this **IS NOT** a children's book! Some of the language and themes means this book is squarely aimed at adult readers. That's not particularly a problem, once you embrace what Smith is doing here.

Smith describes his work as “a collection of poems, a few long enough to be short stories.” The poems are predominantly focused around animals and are based on Smith's shamanic journey into the animals' lives. As such, there are poems about swifts, squirrels, and foxes. Two personal favourites are *Horsetime*, with the horses enthuse “For then we live / The age-old dream, / Feel the star force / exploding in our beings,” and *The Death of a Honey Bee*, where Smith describes a flower bed as “heavenly factories” among which the bee spends her life. Other poems take on late stage capitalism and our abuses of the natural world. *Cherry Ade and Atom Bombs* is a particularly potent example of this, where an exhausted office worker imagines himself discarding his 9 to 5 for “walking the land, / With Buzzard as guide and staff in hand.”

Lavishly illustrated throughout with Smith's own artwork, this is a book to take your time over. You need to take this a poem at a time, and let the words and images settle into your subconscious before you move on to the next. Each poem, each story, is a whole journey in itself. So, if you fancy indulging in a book which will absorb you on these long hot afternoons and take you on numerous journeys through time and space, this could be the book you are looking for.

Email: [p.roystonsmith@virginmedia.com](mailto:p.roystonsmith@virginmedia.com) for your copy



## Sabrina by Brett Hollyhead



If you are getting a bit bored of the summer heat and need a refreshing dip, you would do well to dive into Brett Hollyhead's book about *Sabrina*, the goddess of the River Severn.

Now, to be honest with you, I knew I was going to love this book before I began to read it. I live next to the Avon, which flows into the Severn,

and have long been intrigued by the spirit of that river. So, to find that there is a river goddess just downstream was a wonderful thing.

Hollyhead's book comes from his deeply personal connection from the river and you can sense that connection flowing through every part of this book. The text is packed with rich historical and cultural detail. For example, the book begins by exploring the different springs from which Sabrina herself was born. Was she the drowned daughter of Locrinus, Brutus eldest son, or was she one of the tears of the giant Pumlumon? Of course, she is both these and more, with her name, Sabrina Fluvius, first appearing in Ptolemy's *Geographica Hyphegesis*. Hollyhead even asks us to consider whether Sabrina was originally a masculine god, possibly called Nodens.

However, Hollyhead does not just stick to the past: “It's important to me” he writes, “that this is not to prove the belief in the Goddess in antiquity but to reveal Sabrina's presence ... today.” As such, the later chapters of the book focus on working magically with Sabrina today and help us navigate ways that we can all work together to support the life in our rivers in this time of ecological crisis. What better way to honour Sabrina, or any river goddess, than litter picking on their banks, using river friendly products and reducing our water consumption. As someone who uses animal energy in their practice, it was also pleasing to explore the chapters on Sabrina's sacred animals and the wonderful section about the dragons that stalk the Severn's banks.

This really is a gem of a book, well researched and engagingly written. It is well worth reading, even if you live far from the banks of the River Severn. It is highly recommended.

You can now buy the book in the OBOD store: <https://store.druidry.org/products/pagan-portals-sabrina>



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

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## Upcoming Events

**Druid Gorsedd:** 10-12 October 2025, Devizes, Wiltshire. For more information, email [druidgorsedds@obod.org](mailto:druidgorsedds@obod.org)

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

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*I sat on top of a mountain today  
And listened...*

*While the wind rolled like a wave through the gulleys and brushed the trees,  
breathing soft whispers among their branches.*

*I sat on top of a mountain today  
And listened...*

*While the birds sang to each other & as they flew by the feathery beat of their  
wings shimmered in the air.*

*I sat on top of a mountain today  
And listened...*

*As the butterflies, bees, and bugs flitted and buzzed from flower to tree to flower.*

*I sat on top of a mountain today  
And listened...*

*As crickets gleefully chirruped, while basking in the warming sun.*

*I sat on top of a mountain today  
And listened...*



Image and Poem  
by Shilah the Bard