

TOUCHSTONE

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

October 2025 | Issue 338

This Issue

- ✿ Did You Feel That by Scott Royle (Maven)
- ✿ Re-Enchanting Herbal Practice Through Storytelling, pt 1 by Celayne Heaton-Shrestha
- ✿ How Real is Magic? by Nancie Erhard
- ✿ Plus lots more!



Cover: "Samhain" by Josh Warren

Editorial

Welcome to October's edition of *Touchstone*, which is packed full of tricks and treats!

There is a wonderful article by Scott Royle (Maven) about the history and significance of Samhain, which ties in neatly with our evocative cover by Josh Warren. We will be discussing the history of Samhain with Scott at this month's *Touchstone Unbound*, which will be on *The Hearth* at 7pm UK time on Friday 3rd October. We will also be talking to River Jones about her brand new quarterly article *Ask me anything about celebrancy*, which is your opportunity to find out more about what it is like to be a celebrant.

There is a lot of good content in this edition, particularly the poetry. On page 5 are two particularly interesting verses about churches and church yards. Jon Wingrave's *St Dunstan's in the East* is about a bombed out London church, while Ciaran McDermott's piece uses the form of an elegy to mourn the cutting down of a yew tree. They make wonderful companion pieces. There are two beautiful and magical pieces about death and dying on page 12 - please be aware that some readers may find this content upsetting. There are also some tricky tree riddles, sent in by Barri Ray, to exercise the old grey matter. There really is something for everyone!

As always, please keep sending your wonderful content to me at touchstone@druidry.org. I love including pieces from as many of you as I can, so no piece of writing is too small to submit!

TOUCHSTONE (October '25 - Issue 338)

- 2 Chosen Chief's Bit
- 2 On the Cover - *Josh Warren*
- 3 Bard's Page
- 6 Ask me anything about celebrancy - *River Jones*
- 7 Did You Feel That - *Scott Royle (Maven)*
- 8 Tree Riddles - *Barri Ray*
- 9 Re-Enchanting Herbal Practice Through Storytelling, part 1 - *Celayne Heaton-Shrestha*
- 12 How Real is Magic? - *Nancie Erhard*
- 12 Bardic Tales: The Ink Pot - *Amy Walker*
- 13 Reviews
- 14 Andrew's Bit at the Back
- 15 Upcoming Events

Samhuinn by Jessica McGee

Colors sharpening
The trees are dressed for farewell
Leaves fall like kisses



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Chosen Chief's Bit

Bandia a Chairde!

As I write this, I can really feel that we are heading into the dark half of the year as the nights draw in. Samhain is getting closer.

Samhain is the Irish word for the month of November, though Oíche Shamhna (Halloween) is on October 31st. There are other names for the night also: Oíche na Sprideanna (Night of Spirits); and Oíche an Phúca (Night of the Pooka). When I was a child we went out on the Pookies on Oíche Shamhna, going from house to house collecting nuts and sweets. In those days, we had to earn the treat by singing or reciting poetry.

The Púca takes many shapes, usually an animal, though most commonly, he appears as a horse with sleek dark fur and golden eyes. Although the Púca has a reputation for terrifying or confusing humans, in many of the stories, he is rather benevolent and has the gift of human speech. There are stories where a human finds him or herself on the back of the Púca who takes them for a wild ride, often far from their home, but no real harm comes to them.

A number of years ago, some friends and I went to Inis Mór, one of the Aran Islands, to attend Féile na bPucaí (Halloween Festival). The tradition

there is that people dress up in disguise in such a way that they cannot be recognised. They go to the pub; they do not speak to each other and drink using straws through their masks. They try to recognise each other and there is a prize for the person who remains undiscovered. There is even a silent Céilí – not like a silent disco where people wear headphones – but they dance to the music in silence. One reason given for this silence is that in ancient times, as people rambled about the island at Samhain mixing with their dead ancestors as they came through the veil, it was best not to know if one was walking amongst the living or the dead.

In Ireland and Scotland, there is a long tradition of having Jack O' Lanterns at Samhain time. People carved scary faces on turnips and placed a burning candle in them. When the people migrated to the USA, they brought their Samhain traditions with them. The turnips were replaced by pumpkins, which are much easier to carve. Pumpkins have since crossed the Atlantic and are what most people use today. A few years ago I started to carve turnips as I had done when I was a child

May you find the light of love and peace to guide you as you walk your path at this time.

Beannachtaí na Shamhna daoibhse go léir! Blessings of Samhain to you all!

Eimear 



On the Cover

"October has always been a time of great change; it's the last harvest, the breath before the dark of winter, a time of frantic energy both mundane and otherworldly. Spirits, faeries, goblins and long legged beasts are abroad and about. Today many label this as Halloween, but this festival is ancient and has had many names and traditions, from very specific regional practices to global customs. It's a time for reflection and remembering that, while the dark closes in, there is also the promise of renewal in spring.

The mist around the border of my cover picture represents the dramatic weather and liminal quality of the month. The bordering plants include oak leaves in their autumn colours, hops ready to be plucked to make beer and ale, blackberries in tart ripeness (remember to harvest before the devil wees on them on the 31st!), sloe berries full and ripe on blackthorn branches and rowan with its evocative and protective bright red berries. Hanging from branches and in the Druids hand are Corn

Dollies. These are woven from the corn/wheat/barley to house the crops' spirit and are given shelter indoors for the winter before being returned to the earth with new seed to ensure the bounty continues. People can be seen gathering in the last of the big harvest as well as taking a coal from the bonfire home. Similar to the Corn Dolly, the light and heat from the central fire, the community, is continued in their homes.

October's is a fun harvest festival but also a festival of light, to strengthen and protect against the dark of winter. Tables are laid but are still and silent, a silent supper for the spirits of the dead. Spirits linger at crossroads and faeries emerge from underhill. Mari Lywd, closely associated with later festivals, is featured here being woken up at Nos Calan Gaeaf (31st October), the last night of summer and the start of winter here in Wales. Pumpkins had to be included of course, but the more traditional Jack O'Lanterns carved from turnips are also here.

This design was so much fun! If you would like to see more of my art you can find me online at <https://www.joshwarrenartist.com/>

By Josh Warren



Samhuinn by Susan Knox

Craw, this is your time.
Ahint the Cailleach ye come and a'thin fa's apairt.
Gin we hae foresight and dinna fear
An' allo the daurk tae draw us near,
We'll sit, knittin oor next steps thegither by the
bright bleeze o th winter fires.



Image: September Green Man
by Patricia Robin Woodruff

Fire by Ann Beer

Did you make us, you, our Sun,
Our founding spark, our chance to live?
Warmth and light, and sure protection -
Can we measure what you give?
Every prayer and every greeting,
Festivals and dances too,
Hearth-fire, bonfire, shape our meetings.
Cooking, cleansing, all we do
Is formed and transformed by your heat.
Our spirit-strength and passions rise.
The flame of love is seen as sweet,
Though when we're young it's rarely wise.
And though we know you can destroy
A town, a forest, life, or art,
We see you still as bringing joy —
The energy that fuels each heart.

The Battle of Mag Turied

by Emily Petersen

The old ones sang the Earth to life,
The ancient ones were bardic stars.
In the days when the blessed Tuatha deDannan,
Glittered like beacons from afar.

When Nuada basked in victorious praise,
And Fintan soared as hawk above the dome.
The Dadga's cauldron boiled with wisdom,
And Mannannam rode the ninth waves foam.

It's sung the Firbolg hung their heads in shame,
As they fled the battle of Mag Turied,
And Babdh and Macha cawed like ravens,
As the Morrigan raised the dead.

So came the children of lost Atlantis
To the blessed Isle of Dreams.
And the prophecy of Armagain,
Still echoes in the seas.

The Tuatha ruled in god-like splendour,
Their beauteous forms more fair than gold.
The elements of Earth at their command,
Their wisdom their stronghold.

Their praises spread to far off lands,
And reached the Sons of Mil.
They vowed they'd conquer fair Eiru,
And crush the Tuatha with their will.

And so, in sorrow, a treaty was reached,
The island split in half.
The Tuatha fled to the Underworld,
Taking the glory of their past.

But still in barrows and faery hills,
If one searches long and hard.
They'll hear the music of the lost Tuatha,
And learn the mysteries of the Bard.

Now Fintan circles
his salmon pool,
Although the
barrows house his
soul.
And he'll tell the
tales of the fair
Tuatha,
When the hills
shone bright with
gold.



Soul Voices by Cathy Johnson

I am the fire
and the scent of
rosemary and sage.

I am the water
that falls from the sky
and wells up bubbling from the earth.

I am the wings of birds
and the wind
that lifts them.

I am the tree
that stands outside my window
rooted in the earth.

And they are me.



Autumn by Jessica McGee

As shadows lengthen
the light begins to shatter
leaves into rainbows

A Life Unremembered by Eik Hjarta

What of a life unremembered, untold?
Six feet in the ground, dead and cold.
Yet there in the shadows, she softly descends,
The goddess of death, where all journeys end.

Her touch a whisper, her presence a song,
A lullaby cradling the weary and wrong.
No mortal can speak of the grace she bestows,
For her secrets are hers, where no memory goes.

In her embrace, no fear takes hold,
She weaves the forgotten in strands of gold.
Threads of their essence she carefully lays,
Into the fabric of time, through infinite days.

No name remains, no tale is traced,
Yet none are lost in her boundless grace.
For even the unremembered find their place,
In the arms of the goddess, the end's soft face.

Fireside Dreams by Jackie Innes

Fireside dreams with forest themes
Of ancient camps beneath the trees,
The darkness lit by firelight
A golden circle in the night
When fire kept the wolves at bay
And lit the night with merry tales,
Stories told around the hearth
And then to sleep beneath the stars
While crackling twigs continued glowing,
Whispering fire's ancient knowing

Now it's chuckling in my hearth
And offers warmth and company,
Singing in hypnotic language
Dancing its own mystery.
Mesmerizing with its magic
Drawing eyes into its depths,
I look into its changing landscapes
Seeking wisdom in the red.
Ancient campers did the same thing
As their eyes began to close,
Reaching for the fire's comfort
While they slept upon the earth

Fire that formed the earth we stand on
In the cauldron of her core
Keeps the sun continually burning,
Source of life and nature's force,
Now is conjured in my fireplace
Comes to visit, warms my life.
I gaze into its depths for visions,
Stories told in tongues of fire

Everyone who through the ages
Crouched by fire to warm their hands
Has looked into its depths and heard
Its ancient voice, it's mystic sounds.
Long gone campers in the forest
Knew the comfort of fire's light.
Always drawn to its protection,
Guarded by it through the night



Image by Catherine Lavender

St Dunstan's in the East

by Jon Wingrave

Sacred grove at the heart of the City,
wrapped within the walls of Wren's church,
a hidden secret, waiting to be found.
The joys of such discovery are easy to share,
but never lost or lessened in sharing.

Five minutes walk from the White Hill,
where the head of Bran the Blessed is buried.
He and his ravens, protecting the Tower, Lud's
town and all of our land.

Here lies the church of Saint Dunstan, a
stone's throw from the river, open to the sun
and rain.

Wind blows through the arches of stained
glass-less windows
and ivy grows down stone walls to touch the
earth,
An oak tree stands in the centre, not ancient
but powerful still,
besides a circle of cobbles around a holy well,
where water bubbles up to drink and lave and
bless.

Lunch time crowds bring offerings of
sandwiches, fruit and crisps,
and Saint Dunstan gives sanctuary from the
city banks, offices and shops.
Somewhere to meet and talk, sketch and
photograph and sit in quiet contemplation.

All those who come to enjoy the tranquility,
and find inspiration and wonder,
would not be here if the bombs hadn't fallen.
Otherwise Saint Dunstan's in the East would
be one more empty
church,
cold, damp and
lonely on the tourist
map,
but now she
welcomes all
elements in.



Note:

The Church of St Dunstan was originally built around 1100 and was severely damaged in 1666 by the Great Fire of London. Like many other churches including St Paul's Cathedral it was rebuilt by Christopher Wren.

The Church was again severely damaged in the Blitz of 1941. Wren's tower and steeple survived the bombing. During the re-organisation of the Anglican Church after World War II it was decided not to rebuild St Dunstan's and in 1967 the City of London decided to turn it into a public garden, which opened in 1970.

Elegy for a Churchyard

Yew by Ciaran McDermott

I met you every morning and evening.
Even through January's black noon you kept
May's fire burning within your green crown,
Relentlessly fixed in fierce gales as if roped

Umbilical to some inner core
Deeper than the first graves, and heard every
Bird's confession with saint's patience to
spare,
Stoic as catholic mortar, your stony

Eye watched the Victorians drain the marshes
Of the Forth valley dry, the blood of Christ
Watered down in endless rain, the old
orphanage
Bulldozed for private flats,
tending to your priests

Through it all with the
mute mercy of your shade,
Your bole a ladder
between them and the sky.
Solstice eve they closed
the churchyard gate.
You yielded your ghost without so much as a
cry.

A Sunday and two hired saws was all it took.
Your centuries lie scattered in wood-shard
Flowerbeds now. In a flatbed truck's
Open coffin the big logs of your heartwood

Rot, but nothing will prevent the sun's heat
From painting the summer stained-glass
angelic.

Funny how a wish to hold the light
Can fill the hands of men with devil's work.

Note:

I live next to a Catholic church and walk through its churchyard every day on my way to and from work. I have always found this a calm, pleasant experience, as it is filled with flowers and beautiful trees. A couple of weeks ago I couldn't go through the churchyard as the gate was closed. It was filled with people and the sound of electric trimmers. Several days later the gate was open again, but to my horror I discovered that a huge, iconic Yew tree that stood near the front door of the church had been clear cut from near the base of the stump. It felt like quite a loss to me, as I have established a familiarity with that tree through passing it many times.

The poem is a druidic response to the felling of the tree. It riffs on the traditional form of elegy in English poetry, which are usually Christian in tone and written exclusively for people. It was also an important part of my personal journey through the Bardic grade.



Ask me anything about celebrancy

by River Jones

When Andrew - himself a graduate of our School of Celebrancy courses - offered me the opportunity to write a quarterly column, I was immediately inspired to make it an interactive one - hence the title!

As I write, here in the Northern hemisphere, we're approaching the Autumn Equinox - a good moment to measure my harvest at this point in my celebrancy journey. I guess it began in 1996 when I first started leading women's full moon ceremonies. These evolved into Moon Group - a collective who co-created our monthly rituals, and hosted open ceremonies for the cross quarter festivals. Around the fire after one of our Beltaine ceremonies, a couple who'd taken part asked me to lead their handfasting. Luckily they didn't mind that I'd never heard of a handfasting before, let alone conducted one. From the day of that first ceremony, I knew that this was my calling.

That was in 1999. Since then, I've conducted weddings and relationship celebrations for at least seventy couples: from a pagan handfasting in a stone circle to a surprise wedding at a festival 50th birthday party - the couple decided just two weeks before and only they and their children knew before it happened! I've led namings and

welcomings for around thirty children, from babes in arms to seven year olds.

My first two funerals were for beloved friends; and since going into celebrancy full time, I've lost count of the hundreds I've conducted: from tiny babies to centenarians and every age between. Fortunately, the majority have been celebrations of long lives well lived; but I've also served families experiencing tragic loss of many different kinds.

All of this is not to suggest that I know all there is to know about celebrancy - far from it! Over the last decade it's been a special privilege to share my experience with a growing number of School of Celebrancy students - at least six hundred, in sixteen different countries - who are a constant source of inspiration and learning for me.

So I'd love to invite your questions on any kind of ceremony: from baby namings, weddings and handfastings to funerals and memorials; from age-related rites of passage to seasonal celebrations; from intimate healing rituals to open public events; from the personally crafted to the collaboratively created - ask me anything about celebrancy and I'll do my best to answer!

Please email your questions to river@schoolofcelebrancy.org

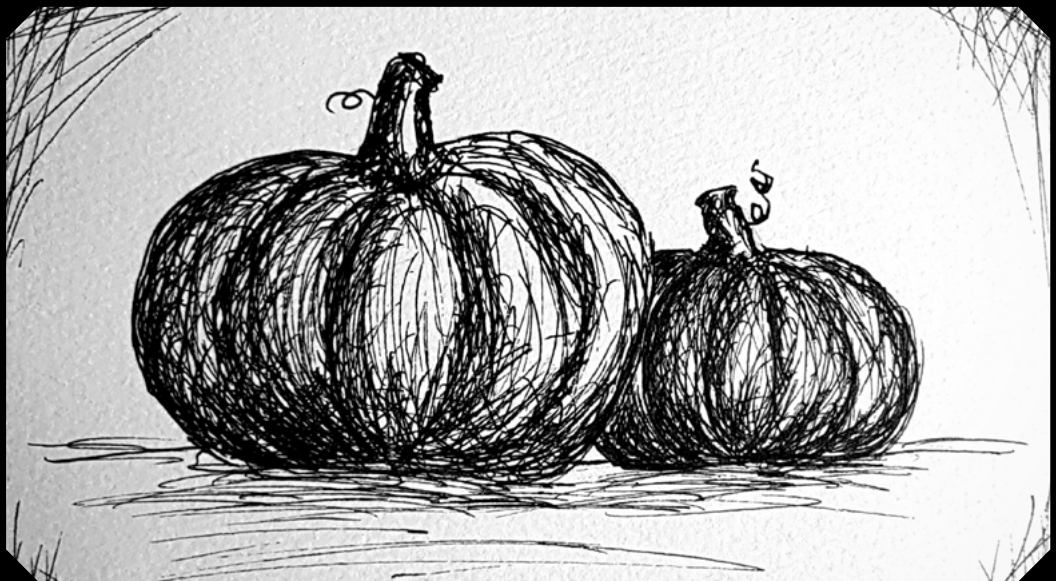


Image: Pumpkins by Kaz Leroux

Did You Feel That? by Scott Royle (Maven)

DID YOU FEEL THAT? In the States that is often asked after a temblor hits. But did you feel that? A slight spatial disorientation, a shift in time or a shift in reality. Were you suddenly someplace else for a few seconds?

DID YOU HEAR THAT? Voices speaking in strange tongues, coming from nowhere. Did they call you by name, did they laugh or giggle? Did you hear music that you never heard before? “And if the band you’re in starts playing different tunes” (Pink Floyd)... You turn your head to the sound and there’s nothing there.

DID YOU SEE THAT? A glimpse of a person, place or thing. A shadow that moves against the light, that takes an independent form.

*“When I was a child, I caught
a fleeting glimpse*

Out of the corner of my eye

I turned to look, but it was gone

I cannot put my finger on it now...” (Pink Floyd)

Did the world around you warp a little, did the hue of the colors change?

DID YOU FEEL THAT? A breeze when there was no wind. A drop of rain that left no water. The touch of a hand on your shoulder — that wasn’t there.

Oh aye laddie. It was just the Fey folk having a bit of fun with you. They’re a mischievous bunch, the lot of them. In general they mean no harm, but don’t forget to set your fires this evening — just in case.

This is the time of Samhain, also known as All Hallows Eve, All Saints Eve, or Halloween. In the modern world it is associated with spirits, magic, and the macabre. It is a time when the world is switching from the light of day to the dark of night. The sun’s path has dipped below the equator and for those of us in the

northern hemisphere, the days grow shorter. It is a liminal time, a time where the veil between worlds is thinnest, a time to see things, hear things and feel things. This is a time to remember the dead, our ancestors. This is a time for divination. This is a time of providence.

Samhain falls at the end of October, beginning of November. It is a time of the third and final harvest of the year. During this time food is stored for the winter, the starving time. The herds are culled and butchered. In ancient times, some of the animals were sacrificed and there may have been human sacrifice as well. These practices may have led to the macabre nature of present day Halloween.

Samhain is considered the festival of the dead where families pay respect to their ancestors. Food offerings were made and places were

set at the dinner table for the dead. This is also a time for mischief. During this time the Fey Folk could cross over into our world and play tricks. Of course pranks and trickery were not reserved for the Fey alone. It was a time for all to have a good laugh. Because of the closeness between worlds, this is a time for magic. Divination, blessings and charms, especially where love and marriage are concerned, are common.

Trick or Treat. Revellers would dress up as representatives of the dead and go house to house and receive food and drink on their behalf. A trick was not a performance but rather a threat of magical mischief if a treat was not rendered. A similar Christian tradition was Souling, where children and the poor would disguise themselves as witches, ghosts and skeletons, then go door-to-door to receive soul-cakes. These cakes also called soul mass-cakes, were small sweetened cakes with a cross cut into the top before being baked.

Fire has enthralled us since time immemorial.





There is magic in fire. We stare at it as it warms. It can mesmerize us, entrance us. We stare into its depths, searching for truth or a vision. There is nothing like a good bonfire on a chill fall night. So it was during Samhain. Bonfires were lit not only for warmth but for the cleansing and protective powers it provides during an otherworldly night. Torches lit from the bonfire were carried sunwise around homes for protection, and to keep evil spirits at bay.

Samhain, like many Celtic/Pagan festivals has been christianized. Samhain becomes All Saints Eve, or Halloween. Like many modern holidays, tradition becomes lost to commercialization. Thankfully, there are those who preserve the origins of Samhain, the magic is there and it is real. It is there for those who can see and hear. Samhain is a time to remember those who passed before us. They maybe gone, but they want to be remembered. This is a time where we maybe able to see, hear, or feel them. Samhain is also a time for preparation. Even though we have supermarkets and year round food, that could stop in an instant. Samhain reminds us of the true meaning of “the dead of winter”, the cold dark times when food is scarce, and the unprepared may perish.

Samhain is a time when worlds collide, it is a time of life to death, light to dark. The world goes to sleep for a season. When I think of Samhain, I think of the change of season. For me it is a time for inner reflection, a time to gather around family and friends both here and beyond. It is a time to remember the joys of spring and summer. It is a time to prepare the homestead for winter. Food preserved, wood cut, split and stacked, and tools and machinery properly stored. It is a time for peace, a time to take a breath.

May your larder be full and your well never run dry. May your firewood be cut, stacked, and dried. May your hearth be warm, and your family safe. May you remember your forebears and friends past and present. Most of all may you be at peace, and may you be content.

Tree Riddles by Barri Ray

Each of these poems is about a tree or shrub that grows in Chicago, USA. Some have to be intentionally planted, but most grow naturally - or at least as naturally as anything can grow in the preserved wild spaces in the big city. Some are common everywhere, some might be less common outside the USA or even the Midwest. See how many you can guess!

- 1) Your seed borne on a pair of wings the wind afar relays,
Your Autumn leaves bright oranges reds and yellows set ablaze
- 2) Your harvest if you're planted well abundant in the fall,
Your fruit fit for the goddess who's the fairest of them all.
- 3) Your lustrous lobed leaves distinguish you in every town,
Your hatted seeds are ours to eat when shelled leeches and ground down
- 4) Your first few summers fallow you teach patience as an art,
Your blossoms bless the springtime air your fruits plump red and tart
- 5) Your life is long and evergreen as tree or shrub you grow,
Your poison leaves and berries send us to our graves below
- 6) Your seed pods send their fluffy contents blowing far and wide,
Your twigs contain the perfect place for little stars to hide.
- 7) Your ripeness known when giant spots of indigo are found,
Your unpicked fruits announce you when they splatter on the ground
- 8) Your silvery leaves send tear drops down the river swept away,
Your slender branches bow before the moon and star to pray
- 9) Your blooms dear olive's cousin flavor mead or tea made warm,
- 10) Your yellow blooms at winter's end adorn my garden gate,
Your heralding of springtime tells us three more snows to wait

Answers on page 14

Re-Enchanting Herbal Practice Through Storytelling, part 1

by Celayne Heaton-Shrestha

In this two-part article, I would like to share some thoughts with you on the idea of enchantment in relation to herbalism. More specifically, I will focus on what it means to practise a re-enchanted herbalism, not just for ourselves, but for others. In part 1, I will write about the meaning of enchantment and some of the ways in which enchantment may be cultivated. For this, I have drawn from authors in different fields and I will list these resources at the end of both articles. In part 2, I will get into the strategies of enchantment used by practising herbalists. The first spoiler is that there is not much written on how to work with herbal patients in an enchanted way. And the second spoiler: among strategies of enchantment, storytelling seems particularly well suited to herbal work with patients – but what type of storytelling, with whom and when, is unclear.

There is a personal angle to this article: I am a trainee medical herbalist in the U.K., and alongside my studies, I have been searching for a way of practising herbalism that can address not only the body and the mind, but also the soul. By 'soul', here I mean that part of the self that longs for meaning, depth, and beauty – all of which are recognised as important human needs, and find their way into some approaches to therapy (I am thinking of author and psychotherapist Thomas Moore's work, in this instance). The idea of an enchanted herbalism, or practising herbalism in an enchanted way, chimes beautifully with this longing for soul in herbalism. I also feel that it resonates deeply with the values of contemporary Druidry, notably in foregrounding our connection with the natural world and honoring the body and its wisdom. And so I am offering my thoughts here, in the hope that these will be of some interest to you, too.

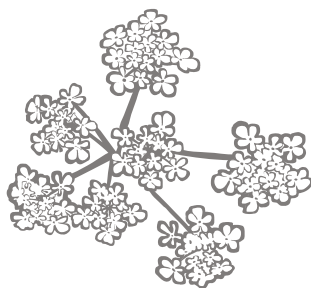
But what exactly is meant by 'enchantment'? As you'd expect, there are many definitions: I have seen enchantment described as a 'space', as a 'process', a 'comportment', a 'world-view'. There are also some core features that we find

over and again in writings on enchantment, and I will try to outline these here. Also, just to be clear, I am mainly writing here about enchantment as a way of seeing the world, and the qualities that characterise this way of seeing.

The word 'enchantment' is derived from the Latin *in cantare*, 'to chant a spell upon'. As such, it makes sense that 'enchantment' is generally associated with the terms 'magic', 'wonder', and 'great delight'. In writings on enchantment, we also find that authors frequently link 'enchantment' to a sense of connection and relationship with the other-than-human world; an ability to notice the extraordinary in what seems commonplace; to see significance and meaning in what is usually overlooked or undervalued; and to regard highly the experience of beauty, of delight, and of

wonder. These experiences are often perceived as trivial, but we know intuitively – and this intuition has been borne out by scientific research – that they are immensely beneficial to human wellbeing; and also, they can benefit our green and other kin, as they encourage humans to care more deeply for the natural world. I will add two more characteristics of an enchanted way of seeing. The first is the ability to live with the unknown or Mystery – this is the 'negative capability' described by poet John Keats as being able to live with uncertainty, and to resist the urge to reach a fixed conclusion. And the second characteristic is the ability to embrace ideas and realities that seem opposed, respecting their distinctness and giving them equal weight – what has been called a 'both/and' orientation to the world. An example of this orientation from my own life would be my strong belief in both science and magic - I see both as equally valid ways of engaging with the world around us.

One final point. This has been said before, but I do think it is worth repeating: 'enchantment' is not the same as 'escapism'. Enchantment is not a means to divert our mind from boring



or challenging thoughts and emotions; nor is it a defense against a reality that has become intolerable. Enchantment is not even a positive form of escapism, in which the self is nurtured, enriched and expanded. The main difference is this: there is no sense, in enchantment, that we are avoiding or suppressing any aspect of our experience as human beings; nor is there any notion that enchantment creates an unreal, fictional world. When we see the world in an enchanted way, it may appear differently – mythical, poetic, perhaps – but this does not make that world illusory. In fact, as an example, we have plenty of evidence from our own past and peoples elsewhere on our beautiful Earth, that recognising kinship with other-than-human beings is no less real – and possibly more real – than perceiving nature as inanimate. The point I am trying to make is that, far from being a distraction from real concerns, enchantment is serious work.

We are fortunate in that suggestions on how to cultivate within ourselves an enchanted way of seeing the world are widely available. Here, I will mention a few writers that I came across while I was researching this topic: philosopher Jane Bennett; psychologist Sharon Blackie; Druid Dana O'Driscoll; herbalist Nathaniel Hughes and artist Fiona Owen. Jane Bennett suggests: rejecting within ourselves the story of dis-enchantment – that is, the idea that we live in a mechanistic, inanimate world; developing our physical senses and our capacity to notice the world around us in the smallest detail; and approaching life more playfully. For Sharon Blackie, the keys to enchantment are: slowing down, generally; embracing mystery; cherishing differences and developing a sense of community; engaging in ceremony; and building relationships with trees, stones and birds; being fully in our physical body; cultivating our mythic imagination; treasuring change and appreciating the transitory nature of our lives. Within contemporary Druidry, Dana O'Driscoll proposes several practices based on a seven-elemental framework. One of these is the technique called 'body radar' – which involves going to a natural place, asking a question and feeling where our body is being pulled. Another technique involves embodying an animal on the land, taking time to feel the energy and strength of the chosen animal. O'Driscoll also suggests building relationships with plants and trees by making offerings or sharing gratitude. Nathaniel Hughes and Fiona Owen suggest the following,

to develop closer relationships with plants: sketching or painting the plants; experimenting with simple rhythms and melodies, and noticing which musical styles resonate with particular plants; creating stories around a plant, drawing on our own life experience or myths that resonate with us. Another simple suggestion is to sit with a plant and feel into what the plant touches in us, while also spending time discovering its beauty, scent, colour, form, and its ecology.

These are only a few of the practical ways to develop an enchanted way of seeing (and inhabiting) our beautiful world. There is much more to learn from these authors, some of which are listed below.

In the next part, I will focus on herbal practice, and how herbalists have used some of the strategies of enchantment we just covered, both with their students and also in their work with patients.

Further Reading

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Image: The Grove by Isobel Terrell

How Real is Magic? by Nancie Erhard

My brother was dying. It was not unexpected. Although we lived over 1500 kilometers apart, I had spent as much time as I could with him in the previous six months. We'd said everything we had to say to each other before our last "goodbye." But this would be the third such death in my family within a year. The grief is cumulative, with each loss hitting me harder than the one before.

At such times, I turn for relief to movies. They must be engaging enough to pull me in and allow me to forget—for a while—my circumstances, but they must also be familiar, with dialogue and plot points I know by heart. I want no surprises. I'm not the only one who does this. My sister-in-law soothes herself with *Mulan*.

Knowing my brother was dying when I could not be there, I chose a series of films that has attained the status of contemporary myth, with magic at its core. I've owned the DVDs since they came out. While the closing credits of the final film rolled, I wondered—how real is magic? The question was not frivolous. I am still early on my journey in the Bardic course, so I am not clear yet what magic means within Druidry, only that it is there.

I looked down at the tabletop next to me.

Now, I had recently begun a modest makeover of our living space, so I was familiar with what was—and was not—on that surface when I sat down.

Those two coins had not been there before.

They were not common coins, either.

One was a 1902 US "Indian head" penny. I had never owned one, never even seen one. I had to do an image search to confirm what it was.

The other coin was roughly the circumference of a nickel but octagonal rather than round, thinner, and copper. It had no country or numbers on it, no writing at all. One side showed the image of a building with onion-domed towers, like the Taj Mahal. On the other side I saw a strange symbol, resembling a severely deformed wheel, or perhaps a spider's web. From the center rose a chalice, and above that, a tiny peace symbol. But I had no idea if I was even holding it right-side-up.

Another image search revealed that this was a token for a 1980s mall arcade chain called *Aladdin's Castle*. I don't think I've ever been to an arcade and certainly not that one.

Somebody described it on ebay as a "magic token."

There was no miraculous reprieve for my brother. Within a few hours, he left his burdened body behind. Although I would not have wished him to suffer a moment longer, I will miss his physical presence for the rest of my life. Nothing will change that.

Yet somehow, I have this, a token I hold in my hand. Magic.

Bardic Tales

The Ink Pot by Amy Walker

"Because I've run out of ink, my dear," he said with a glint of side-twinkle. "And I must return to the pot for a refill." He knew that his granddaughter knew nothing of ink pots and the nibs that rely upon their juice to fulfill their perfectly blotchy purpose. Just as he knew that her glass-smoothened fingers would find a way to convey his textured metaphor, all the same.

Her delicate little hands traced the lines on his brow, and he had the distinct feeling that his life's imprint was as simple as bumps of Braille upon these white linen sheets. A story to be read by those who came after; for he would no longer be around to embellish it. He would have to trust new storytellers. Trust that the grooves he'd carved upon this soft world were enough for a good story or two.

A little shiver trilled up his spine, and as it did, he saw so clearly the old cobweb of fears that could have caught that shiver and bound it to his sense of self. But he chose to watch it blow past; and let the shiver become excitement for the Great Unknown.

A little chuckle rippled forth instead. A reassuring bequeathment for little Ellie.

"Grandpa," she whispered, conspiratorially, "You're not going anywhere. Just look at the state of you! Mum would never allow it." His eyes carried his smile the full distance, since his lips would now only partially cooperate. "Good point."

The two grands let their breathing converse for awhile. "...I'm going everywhere."



Reviews

Y Mabinogi by Mhara Starling

Pretty much every Druid I know loves the tales of *The Mabinogi*, but Mhara Starling proves to be an excellent guide through these stories of magic and mystery. Starling describes the stories as “part of the very foundation of my youth,” and her affinity with the tales is obvious from the Introduction.

Starling states that the book is not an academic investigation but an exploration of her emotional and spiritual connection to the stories. However, the book has an expansive reading list and is well referenced throughout so that you can follow up more academic routes if you wish. Starling does not summarise the tales for us, but jumps right in with insightful thematic considerations of the stories.

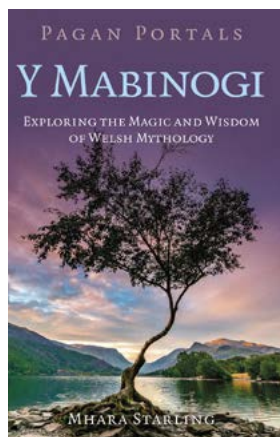
There is real depth to Starling’s writing. For example, her exploration of liminality in the First Branch goes beyond the intersection of the apparent and other worlds to consider that a key piece of the action takes place “on the border between Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire,” as well as a discussion of Nos Galan Mai, or May Eve, in Welsh Culture.

I particularly enjoyed the section on Blodeuedd’s role in the Fourth Branch. Starling begins by noting that “It is easy to frame this story as one of a wicked adulterous wife” before considering that “Blodeuedd was more than simply a woman forced into a role placed upon her by men. She [is]... a metaphor for how, try as we might, we cannot conquer the natural world.”

The consideration of the tales is bookended by a textual history, which considers the reception and creation of the stories, and by a helpful guide to Welsh pronunciation and a glossary of names.

Reading this book felt like a real treat. It was wonderful to spend time engaging with these ancient tales with such a knowledgeable and engaging guide as Mhara Starling. It is highly recommended.

Find *Y Mabinogi* on the OBOD store here: <https://store.druidry.org/products/pagan-portals-y-mabinogi>



Arianrhod by Kristoffer Hughes

You can tell, from the opening sentence of this book that the reader is in for a magical time. “To engage with Arianrhod” writes Kristoffer Hughes, “is to step into a mystery that was old when the world was new.” Hughes’ connection with the goddess, his love of her and his understanding of her multifaceted history, is at the core of this book, which provides more than just a simple introduction to the goddess. “My aim ... is to introduce you to aspects of Arianrhod that you may not have considered” Hughes writes, “not to change your relationship entirely, but to offer you windows of inspiration and wisdom that will transform the nature of that relationship.”

Hughes addresses the question of whether Arianrhod is a goddess early in the book, stating that “Whilst no evidence exists to suggest that Arianrhod was revered or worshipped in the past,” she “has become a valued and valid goddess for the new world and the new age.” He then tackles the central question – is her name Arianrhod, Aranrhod or even Aranrot? “In Welsh culture names are powerful things” we are told before Hughes begins his careful “dissection” of each name in search of meaning.

Hughes then leads us into the Fourth Branch of *The Mabinogi*, analysing the tale in seemingly minute detail. Hughes is a master storyteller and peels back the layers of myth and story in a way which thrills the reader with each new revelation. This section concludes with a consideration of the roles that gender and ecology play in the tale of the Fourth Branch. Here it is the connection of the tale to the natural world, which “can be seen as [exploring] the corruption within the human condition that has led to the ongoing defilement of the earth and her resources” which I found particularly interesting. But, if I’m honest, there is not a page of this book that is not interesting!

The final pages consider ways one can connect to Arianrhod and a useful guide to Welsh pronunciation. While this may be a small volume, it is big in terms of content. Trying to cover it all in a 400 word review is impossible. All I can do is recommend you get this book and read it as soon as you can.

Find *Arianrhod* on the OBOD store here: <https://store.druidry.org/products/arianrhod>



Andrew's Bit At The Back

I've always loved Halloween – not that we really used to mark it when I was a child. I do have a distant memory of watching *Willo the Wisp* on TV and asking Mum if she would let me dress up as a ghost and knock on my best friend's front door to give them a scare. I got half my wish – I was allowed to go and visit my friend but Mum wouldn't let me cut out eyeholes in my bed sheet, so I had to go sans costume. I remember running through the foggy darkness, worried that a witch or something equally terrifying would get me.

While some of my friends had Halloween gatherings when I was in secondary school and, since the turn of the century, I've had friends round most years for a Halloween bash, I've long felt that the English don't 'get' Halloween at all. There often isn't anything scary on the TV on Halloween night, (unless you count the 10 o'clock news).

The two best Halloweens I have had were spent in America, more specifically Boston and Salem, Massachusetts. Halloween in New England is off the charts, filled with pumpkin spice and spooky movies from dusk til dawn. I was taken Trick or Treating with two small children and ended up getting twice as much candy as they did after my friend explained that we didn't really celebrate Halloween in England. I ate twice my own body weight in Candy Corn and never regretted a single mouthful.

I now live in an area where Trick or Treating seems to have become a tradition. Last year I went a bit mad with spooky neon signs and a sinister cawing crow at the front of the house. All the visiting parents agreed ours was the best house on the street, so I have even bigger plans for this October 31st!

But, while I've got Halloween sorted these days, I sometimes feel that I am missing out on Samhain. For me, Samhain is a much more reflective, thoughtful, spiritual affair. It is a time to remember those who have passed, but that's difficult to do that when you're running backwards and forwards to the front door with a bowl of sweets or watching Dr Frankenstein scream "It's Alive" for the umpteenth time. What I tend to do, is to celebrate Halloween and

Samhain on separate days – that way I get to enjoy them both. I usually celebrate Samhain on 30th October. On that day, I will do something focussed around my ancestors, like visit a place with a familial connection or do some more research into my family tree. I will also celebrate friends and loved ones who have passed on 30th and that is normally when I will undertake my Samhain ritual.

My Samhain ritual is very simple but has real meaning for me. From Lammas through to Samhain I collect grains, nuts, seeds and berries from the hedgerows and fields near my home – not many, because I do not want to take away the sustenance of the local wildlife. The harvest sits in a small wooden bowl on my altar until Samhain, when I dig a hole and return it to the earth. It's a moment for me to reflect on the year that has gone, and to begin thinking about what lays ahead. The wheat grains I plant will grow into the crop I will harvest the following Lammas, and cycle continues.

By doing that on 30th, there is time for Halloween hijinks on 31st, before a day of reflection (and a viewing of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*) on 1st November. Even then it feels as if I am trying to cram everything in too quickly, like I did in Boston with all that Candy Corn. However, as someone very wise once told me, October has 31 days so there is plenty of time to celebrate both Halloween and Samhain.

Now, pass me the popcorn, this spooky movie isn't going to watch itself ...

Until
next time,

Andrew!!!



Answers to the Tree Riddles on Page 8

- 1) Helicopter-seeded Maple
- 2) Apple, fruit of many stories
- 3) Mighty Oak, and its acorns
- 4) Sweet or sour Cherry
- 5) Yew, adorning of graves
- 6) Aptly named Cottonwood
- 7) Mulberry, delicious if messy
- 8) White Willow on the water
- 9) Lilac, fragrant and fair
- 10) Forsythia, first to bloom



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

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

10-12 April 2026, Malvern, Worcestershire. For more Information, email druidgorsedds@obod.org

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

*I am lying by the soft water's edge
while, far out to sea, metal bends and breaks
and blackens the incoming flow.*

*A couple laugh like children at a fair
as a sudden squall seeks out their faces,
draws the lines of their shivering.*

*The waves carry the oil like a proverb,
the soap scum we will never drain away.
A tern's feathers clag and saturate.*

*Deeper than this, darker than all saying,
is the water of the world, its pulsing.
I can only echo its tide.*

*The sea pulls its fingers down the shingle,
a sign, a semaphore, of its wisdom:
we must learn to breathe in water.*



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