



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

November 2025 | Issue 339

This Issue



Make Friends with
your Feet Again by
Richard Marquiss



Primitive Saunas for
Modern Druids by
Silenos



Dream of the Ravelling
Thread by Erdewild
(Erin Bell)



Plus lots more!



Cover: "Season of the Elk" by Patricia Robin Woodruff

Editorial

Welcome to November's edition of *Touchstone*!

Sometimes, there is a little bit of magic involved in putting this magazine together. It's often something I don't understand until the edition is nearly complete, when everything seems to fall into place. That happened this month: I was scrolling backwards and forwards, putting the finishing touches together when I suddenly realised that there is a theme, a motif of healing which runs through the pages! I can tell you now, that wasn't purposeful but that's what manifested!

So we have the second part of Celayne Heaton-Shrestha's article on herbalism and storytelling, which is explored further by Erin Bell's magical Bardic Tale about the travelling thread. There is an insightful piece about the benefits of using a primitive sauna by Silenos and Richard Marquiss helps us to reengage with an old friend - our feet! Richard's article is a really interesting approach to an often overlooked part of the body, so I will be chatting to him about this on the next edition of *Touchstone Unbound*, which will be live on the Hearth at 7pm UK time on 7th November.

There is also a review of the last Bardic Gorsedd and information about upcoming Bardic and Druid Gorseddau on the back page. If you have never been to a Gorsedd, maybe 2026 is your year? If you are coming to the Winter Gathering, please see Penny Billington's piece on page 2 about some words you may need

Thank you, as ever, for your wonderful contributions.



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Pumpkin Spice by Ricky Gillesen

Some folk look for signs and reasons
That suggest a changing of the seasons
The falling of the leaves at this time of year
Is one thing that tells them that autumn is here
But times are strange with climate change
Omens and portents might disarrange
Instead I offer this sage advice
Look out for Lattes labelled Pumpkin Spice
Hordes of folk in sweaters and cardigans
Begging Baristas for nutmeg and cinnamon
And failing that, a different coffee
Something known as Bonfire Toffee
So consider this the modern custom
Spicy coffee heralds autumn.



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Chosen Chief's Bit



Bandia dhaoibh a chairde. Greetings to you all!

Here in Ireland, Samhain is the month of November when we remember our ancestors – those of our bloodline, milk-line and light-line. Of

course, cultures all over the world also honour their ancestors at this time. In some cultures, the tribe consists of those who are living in the apparent world, those who are about to be born and those who have passed on into the Otherworld. I lived in the Turkana Desert in Northern Kenya in the early eighties. The Turkana people believe that one is not dead as long as one is remembered by name and spoken of. This was a great consolation to me when my father died at that time.

What a lovely notion – they are still with us as long as we speak of them. At the Winter Gathering, we will have a ceremony to bless the Banner to honour our Dead members. This, for me, continues to weave the web of connection among all of our members.

Sadly, there seems to be no end to the oppression and torment of people around the world. It behoves us as Druids not to give in or give up. As we head into the dark half of the year, we can withdraw within and focus on peace, and from there, we can radiate it out to the world. A few months ago, I promised to share the Druid's Peace Prayer in Irish. I've included English phonetics.

Urnaí Síochána Draoi

(Ur-knee Shee-ock-awna on Dhree)

Druid's Peace Prayer

Go domhain laistigh de croí shocair mo bheithe go bhfaighidh mé síocháin.

(Guh dhow-an lash-tih deh kree hocker muh ve-he guh voy-hih may shee-ock-awn.)

Deep within the still centre of my being may I find peace

Go tostach laistigh de chiúnas an fheá go roinnfidh mé síocháin.

(Guh thus-thock lash-tih deh cue-nass on awe guh rhin-hee may shee-ock-awn.)

Silently within the quiet of the Grove may I share peace

Go mánla laistigh de chiorcal iontach na daonnachta go gathóidh mé síocháin.

(Guh mawn-lah lash-tih deh curkle een-thock na dayn-ock-thah guh gah-oh-ee may shee-ock-awn.)

Gently within the greater circle of humankind may I radiate peace

For me, the Druid's Peace Prayer is an anchor, a lifeline for activism. This can take many forms: meditation, prayer, protests, petitions, boycotts, passive resistance, warriorship. We can be both peaceful and active. However, we may express our activism, we need to begin from within the still centre of our being. It is not 'either/or', it is 'both/and'. Coming from a place of stillness can help us to stand up and be counted; it can help us not to let the malevolent ones inside our heads. What is in us, that is, peace, can be projected outwards and reflected back to us.

I wish you all peace, stillness and may the rich memories of those who have passed guide you and support you as you continue to walk your path in these challenging times.

Beannachtaí na Shamhna daoibh go léir! Samhain Blessings to you all!

Eimear

Unleash your Inner Bard

by Penny Billington
and Blanche Rowen

Join in the creativity at OBOD's Winter Gathering! There will be an opportunity to sing together and it may prove irresistible so, just in case, why not familiarise yourself with this ancient tune and a chant to sing in the Solstice.

'Hey ho, darker grow the days
And the wind sweeps rain across the land
See the leaves are falling, hear the spirits
calling...'

Druid disclaimer: we've tweaked the last line from this You Tube clip so the spirits are represented. Find it here:
<https://m.youtube.com/shorts/nuXkCXjrk4>

And if time, we might also try a well known classic as we sail into the Eisteddfod on the boat of the seasons...

We are all Druid Bards; we hope that you will join us in weaving a singing magic.





Stormy Dreams by nemie

Night slept,
From silent midnight blue
The melody of a storm began to brew,
Rippling wind fingertipped tree top leaves
Into shimmering songs,
Arcs of wind enticed tree limbs to swing and sway
And as the trunks began to rock and play,
The house slept.
Ancient wooden beams began to dream of when
They too were living trees,
And joined the wind tuned dance.
I slept
And through my dreams a gallop of shimmering storm purple horses thundered,
Rumbling a cloud blue chariot, on vast rainbow rimmed wheels.
When I awoke,
Morning light was silent, still and bright.
From the garden I gathered storm gifts scattered as it passed,
Dark velvet skinned peaches lay upon the grass.
Their juicy flesh within was sunrise sweet,
Dawn blushed red-gold, an unimagined treat.
I ate them carefully with a dish of thick salty cloud white yogurt,
With grateful thanks for these blessings from the stilled and silenced storm

The Driver by Iain Marshall

Our body
So greatly revered
Is nothing more than a sensual vehicle
For the exploration of the physical realm

Given proper care
This fleshy conveyance
Will last a lifetime

Neglected
It will be exchanged for utter bliss
Where material time
Ceases to exist

Until

Perhaps

We feel

The need

To sit

Once more

Behind the wheel



It Never Gets Old by Essy Thorn

I'll tell you what's odd to me—
How every autumn we've
The pleasure to watch the green
Melt into yellow and orange leaves.
Red into copper bleeds repetitively in clock-work schemes.
Yet, every Fall will bring incredible scenes I'm awed to see.

Amazed, it never gets old
As days undress for the cold.
Bathed in westering gold,
Moments that take your breath to behold.
Blankets resting below eventually make a bed for the snow.
Today their heavenly glow, gentle as rain, with levity floats pleasantly slow.

Taking a leisurely stroll,
I hear a crunch that's subtle and sweet.
My shoes are covered in rustling colors, it's like

I've got sunsets under my feet.
Summer's reluctant to want to retreat, but days have been fading away like the silver moon.
Winter is fixing to enter the picture
We're gonna be feeling the chill 'f her soon.

Lately I've been in the mood
For cider and donuts and cinnamon brooms,
Pies with aromas that fill up a room, and fires that smoke with a wicker perfume...
Not gonna lie I'm excited. My soul could just whistle a tune.
The time that's approaching is vibrant and cozy—a vibe that I'm totally getting into.



By the Stream by Eik Hjarta

Golden light spills upon the path,
each breath a doorway, each step a prayer.
The trees lean close with whispered songs,
butterflies scatter color through the air.

A ribbon of water, cool and alive,
welcomes my feet with tender embrace.
Its voice speaks softly of strength concealed,
of power that flows in quiet grace.

The doe appears, serene, unafraid -
a mirror of stillness, a guide in disguise.
And then the Goddesses take their place,
earth and underworld meeting in my eyes.

Demeter's presence, steady and fierce,
wraps me in roots of enduring stone.
Her voice, a truth I had always known:
"My child, your offerings reach my throne."

Persephone lingers with gentle gaze,
a bridge of shadow, of death, of bloom.
Her silence hums with the promise of change,
of seeds that wake in the darkest womb.

The elements stir - air kisses my skin,
the sun ignites me with radiant fire.
The water cleanses, the earth holds me fast,
all weaving the love that the Goddesses inspire.

When they depart, the world feels hushed,
yet their blessing lingers, warm and near.
I rise with gratitude deep in my bones,
renewed, reminded, held sincere.

For I have sat where the Goddesses dwell,
felt their embrace, their sacred breath.
And I carry their presence within my soul -
through every cycle of life and death.

Viriditas by Rachel McAdams

Green is my shroud that shoots anew,
Binding Nwyfre in its leaves,
The stream of the wind falls in rivulets over
my face,
And I am rooted deep.

Green is the grove that nourishes me,
I have filled my mouth with blossom,
The petals fall and snow-seed the ground,
And I am rooted deep.

Brown is my shell, scoured raw,
Waiting for the sun to warm,
Waiting for the greening time,
And my roots to drink deep.



Tintagel Dreams

by Barbara Cooper

Come now
to the inviting fields
and bloody battlefields,
the time is upon us
to say goodbye,
all will be well.
As we dance again
underneath the stars
of our glorious
shining souls.
I beg of you to come,
come with me now.

The wind is swirling
around us in
ferocious swirls.
I put my hand upon
my face
and I feel nothing.
All is gone.

The time has come,
we meet again.
I am lost in the tenderness of your soul's
embrace.
The longing, the emptiness.
The wilderness.
All laid upon here now.
For us to embrace.
And to say never again I will be lonely,
never again shall I be without you.



Bardic Tales

Dream of the Ravelling Thread by Erdewild (Erin Bell)

Once upon a time there was a wild woman in the woods. She was old as the trees, as the mountain, as the river flowing by below. Her dark, gray-streaked hair flew out in every direction. Sometimes, she emerged from her small hut to howl at the moon, full or new, day or night. Sometimes she went silently into the forest, on all fours like a wolf after prey, slipping through grasses and underbrush without disturbing the ground.

On this day, the student on the opposite hillside entered their grove. It was oddly dark, with seeming weeds filling every space among the trees. But on closer look, they were not weeds—they were mugwort for dreams, meadowsweet for grounded calm, alstroemeria for loving resilience. In the center of the grove, rather than the usual deep well, there was a cauldron. Above, the source of darkness was clear: the sun was oddly blackened. Nevertheless, the stars sparkled brightly behind it. The plants below glistened in reply. The strong scent of the mugwort made the student feel rather dreamy—but they knew they needed an answer.

Drawing nwyfre, the student packed up their crane bag and their druid egg and walked northeast out of the grove, seeking the wild woman.

Climbing the neighboring slope, the student saw the wild woman. She had tamed her hair, pulled it back tight in a twisted, braid-like tail down her back. It was on the edge of neat, as if wrestled into this condition and threatening to break free any moment. She was sitting at a wheel, trying to spin, staring at the work in deep concentration.

They walked up to her and asked what she was doing.

"I'm spinning the world," she said. "But the thread keeps breaking."

She looked only at the wheel and went on. "I need flax. If I had flax, I would be able to spin this thread. Go into the woods and find some."

The student looked up into the trees above the hut. Shouldering their crane bag determinedly and clasping the druid egg, they started the hike up into the trees.



After a short while of wandering, they came to a field filled with luminously golden plants, delicate leaves and blue flowers rising up slender stems. This was not like any flax the student had seen be-

fore. It was abundant in the field. The student laid themselves down to ask the plants for their spirit and their permission to harvest.

The flax said it was fine with being harvested, that it knew of the need to make the thread of the world. But the student should only take no more than half of what was there. With care and respect, it would grow back quickly, to be drawn on again as needed.

During the conversation, the student noticed small mushrooms among the flax. Small, brown, with slender stems and long, fluted caps, they drew the student's attention down, down, into the earth, where the roots of the flax and the mycelial network intertwined. The mushrooms spoke of the network's importance, telling the student not to fret about the meadow, and how it might come to harm. They said the network was there to connect all things and to regrow whatever might be destroyed. Those who wished harm wouldn't be able to destroy things as they intended, because shallowness of thought kept what was underground protected. After all, those who don't look under things don't even know the networks of the underground exist, let alone how deeply and broadly they spread.

After this lesson, the student sat up, now surrounded by a thick stand of trees. Deepening the dream, the student saw they were aspen trees, in a wide circle around the bright meadow. The tallest tree with a shining white trunk and gazing black eyes beckoned the student to them. The student sat, then kneeled, then laid down on the earth.

The tree drew the student down to meet the roots, which went down only a relatively short way before branching off to connect with the other aspens. The roots were a huge, connected circle. They hummed, echoing the mycelial network. All connected, the networks shared secret messages of strength. The bonds passed light messages around all who live and breathe and have their being, from Earth to root, from root to others. They bind all life together.

Again sitting up, the student noticed a crow in the tall tree's branches. The crow fluttered to the ground in front of the student and transformed into the Morrigan, shifting in her forms.

The student asked her about the breaking of the thread, and the Morrigan responded by showing many frightening visions of what could be in coming days. Visions of fighting, fleeing, capture, danger and chaos filled the student's mind. One vision included a large crowd rising and chant-

ing to forces unseen, “We say no! We say no! We say no!” The overwhelming visions brought the student to the brink of tears.

But then there arose a different vision, of pulsing messages traveling through underground networks of tangled roots and mycelia, and then through threads spinning out across the universe.

This hopeful vision faded, returning the student to the tree trunk stretching up toward the sky. They sat with their back to the trunk to hear its messages. Immediately, more trunks sprang up behind and around the others, showing how the underground connections create a community of tall, resilient trees—guardians, healers to help in times of struggle. The trunks bent as the wind rose, showing how the ability to pivot defies harsh winds. As the wind calmed, they showed how to stay still, to observe before acting, for insight. This is how aspens became the oldest trees in the world.

The crow nodded from above, cawing, watching, showing the Morrigan’s eye to reinforce spirit’s message.

Thanking the trunk, the student turned toward the branches, lulled by the gentle whisper of the leaves in the harsh wind. They said sometimes a whisper is more powerful than a shout. At the same time, they told the student to make noise, that the voice is power, and the heart is that power’s control and a place of refuge when control is lost. Lead with the heart and the voice, the heart-shaped leaves chorused on branches that stretched toward a sky where the sun shone brightly.

The student thanked them, gave a gift to the trees, and turned back to the flax in the meadow, gently taking no more than half of what was there. They also took, with permission, a few mushrooms and a small twig of fluttering aspen leaves that fell to the ground.



Connect, sometimes underground. Make community, be flexible, watch. Make noise, sometimes in whispers. Share. Lead with the heart and voice. The messages rang through the student’s head as they journeyed back to the wild woman’s hut. At their approach, the teacher turned from the spinning wheel and smiled. She gratefully accepted the flax—all but one small bundle—and immediately set to spinning. It slid easily into the wheel.

“Now the thread is strong,” the wild woman said. “Now it will not break. But we will need more, or the thread will weaken and the world will unravel again.”

The student took this teaching in, shouldered the crane bag again, and waved farewell.

Upon returning to their cool, darkened grove, the student reached into the crane bag and pulled out their small bundle of flax, mushrooms, and aspen leaves and tossed them into the cauldron, glancing up to the obscured sun. For a moment, there was nothing. Then, a glittering cloud of purple smoke with a sweet smell rose up to the sky. As the smoke touched it, the blackness obscuring the sun cleared... slightly.

More must be done. But the student now knows the path to follow. There is much to learn and to hear before the sun clears.

At the last, the student noticed the white rabbit, grove guardian. She looked around, seemingly content at work done. She winked one blue eye at the student as they faded from the grove, with the lingering scent of mugwort in their nostrils.

Druid Gorsedd 2026

The next Druid grade Gorsedd will be held between April 10th and 12th 2026 in Malvern in Worcestershire.

The theme of the weekend is:
“The Alchemical Landscape: Voices from the Vale and Songs from the Hills.”

Accommodation is single room with shared bathroom facilities. Breakfast, lunch and evening meals provided.

Malvern has good transport links to other parts of the UK and is close to Birmingham Airport.

Cost is £200 paid in two instalments by 14th February 2025.

If you would like more information, including how to reserve your place, email druidgorsedds@obod.org



Re-Enchanting Herbal Practice Through Storytelling, part 2

by Celayne Heaton-Shrestha

Welcome to this second part of a two-part essay on the idea of enchantment in relation to herbalism. Allow me to recapitulate what I covered in the first part.

In Part 1, I explained how, in search of a more soulful herbalism, I sought to deepen my understanding of the notion of enchantment. The concept of enchantment proved a little elusive, referring, all at once, to a process ('enchanting'), a space ('enchantment'), a worldview and a way of seeing the world ('enchanted').

Enchantment as a way of seeing has some key features, that I find helpful to summarise as: the ability to find the extraordinary in the commonplace; to see meaning in what seems insignificant and depth in what appears trivial; it also presupposes a 'negative capability' that is, comfort in uncertainty or what has not yet come to pass; as well as a sense of connection to a wider-than-human-world and a tendency to 'both/and' thinking.

Beauty, delight, wonder, mystery, magic, are frequently associated with the idea of enchantment. There is a solid amount of research that shows that the experiences associated with an enchanted way of seeing are beneficial for human wellbeing, and, beyond this, the wellbeing of the wider community of life.

We saw, in the first part, that writers from various backgrounds have made suggestions on how to cultivate an enchanted perspective. These have strongly emphasised the body (for example, developing the physical senses); building relationships with the other-than-human world; as well as artwork, and storytelling.

Let me now zoom in on herbalism and herbalists specifically, and how they have drawn on these strategies of enchantment. It turns out, first of all, that quite a few herbalists have written about and used the strategies of enchantment I described in part 1. They have often done so in the context of teaching herbalism. An example is the late Christopher Hedley, an influential and much-loved British herbalist, who valued the use of stories in teaching and learning herbalism.

Another example are the Seed Sistas, Fiona Heckles and Karen Lawton, founders of Sensory Herbalism, who also recognise the importance of stories in developing an intimate knowledge of plants, as well as other art forms such as observational drawing or poetry. They go a step further and encourage students on their innovative foundation course to become 'storytellers'.

I was not fortunate to know Christopher nor have I studied with the Seed Sistas, but I can share one example from my own herbal training: the reason that I will never forget one notable action of Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*): its ability to protect the liver.

You may be familiar with the figure of Prometheus from ancient Greek mythology, a Titan who defied the Olympian gods to bring fire to humankind. As punishment for this transgression, Prometheus was chained to a rock and an eagle was sent everyday to eat his liver; during the night,

Prometheus' liver would regenerate, only for the eagle to return again the following day. What I had not known, and was told by our herbal teacher, was that a plant had played a crucial role in this story: indeed, it was in the hollow stem of a fennel plant that Prometheus had secreted fire out of Olympus to share it or, in some stories, to restore it, to humankind. Not only have I not forgotten the link between fennel and the liver, this story has given me a greater appreciation of this plant, a plant that was complicit in the 'theft of fire', and the profound transformations this brought about for humankind.

Knowing this, I can no longer think of fennel in a dis-enchanted way, that is, simply as a chemical factory, mechanically churning out compounds beneficial to human health.

My search for information on how herbalists have drawn on practices or strategies of enchantment in their work with patients was not quite so fruitful. In fact, I found very little written material. Asking around informally, I learnt that herbalists on occasion will hold plant walks for patients and they might encourage patients to grow a given herb, one prescribed by the herbalist as part of their treatment, with the intention of creating a closer connection between patients and plants, in addition to the practical benefit of having the plant close at hand.



Just as my search was running dry, one article caught my attention: I was thrilled to come across a contribution by herbalist Phyllis Light in *Plant Healer Quarterly* magazine, in which she describes working with a patient who wanted a herbal blend 'in the spirit of the hero's journey'. Light recounts how she not only created a herbal blend for her patient, but also gifted her patient a story: a story of a meeting in a forest with a woman who gives the patient a magical potion in a sturdy jar to help her on her way. But we are not told, in the space of her article, what the outcome was for the patient. Light comments simply that stories are '...an under-utilised aspect of herbalism'.

To me, storytelling and herbalism seem wonderfully well-matched. Already, stories and storytelling are part and parcel of herbal apprenticeships, herbalist-storytellers are plentiful (for example, Kym Murden or Doug Elliott) and books on herbal lore are common fare.

More than this, I believe that storytelling and herbalism are an ideal meeting of medicines, and that their combination, in working with patients, is potentially soul-nourishing. We know that stories can enchant, in the way that we defined enchantment in part 1. Myth, in particular, is known to have this ability to create a sense of wonder, of belonging to a wider community of life, and of participating in the great mystery of this universe. We also know these experiences to be deeply beneficial.

What's more, there are precedents for the use of storytelling in healing – not within herbalism specifically, but within the broader field of healing, and notably, within the Native American Wisdom Tradition.

In the Native American Wisdom tradition, the story itself is medicine, and it heals by helping to restore relationships that link the individual to family, community, ancestors, spirits and the natural world, as well as teaching how to behave and the consequences of not respecting the laws of nature. Stories are also used in what is called narrative medicine, where they become a method for the physician or therapist to understand patients and improve relationships with them, or to lead them to a specific outcome such as managing anxiety or stress.

I have no doubt this is highly valuable, but in such use of story, the element of wonder and mystery is absent, since the outcome of the storytelling is already predetermined and in the control of the physician or therapist. Not all storytelling, in other words, is likely to be enchanting; not all stories will nourish the soul,

even if they support medicinal treatment and restore physical or mental health.

I feel like I have almost come full circle in my search for clues on how to practise an enchanted, soulful herbalism; I have gained many insights from practising herbalists but I have also encountered silences.

At this point I must acknowledge the limits of my knowledge as trainee herbalist, and recognise that to craft a herbal practice that heals both the soul and the body (as well as the mind), will require more explicit guidance from herbalists – from any tradition – already practising in this way. I intend to continue this exploration, with herbalists themselves, and to share what emerges with the wider community of herbalists, lay and professional, community and medical. But for now, I must bring this article to a close, with the hope that you enjoyed this brief journey with me and gained something, too.



Further Reading

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Make Friends with your Feet Again! by Richard Marquiss

How many of us consider our feet to be our friends? Not too many I would guess. Most of us take care of basic hygiene and then tuck them away with no further thought!

We strap them in to tight enclosures, with thick cushioning on the bottom, elevated heels and arch support. This is what our feet need we are told. Technology will take care of everything. No movement is best!

The higher the tech, the better the shoe, so they say. We are conditioned and told we must conform, after all, try them! Don't they feel comfortable? Don't they look good too? Who would want to see bare feet anyway – they're ugly! Besides, how can I walk around barefoot or in minimalist shoes or sandals? My feet are soft, it will hurt and they will get injured, cold, dirty, infected! I will look silly!

Those of us who consider our feet to be our friends and have taken the time to explore, to re-live the childhood memory of running or walking barefoot and feeling the contact of the earth beneath our feet will see a very different world. Sure, it takes time to adapt and it is important to take this time to avoid unnecessary injury or discomfort. The benefits though, extend far beyond 'getting your friends back'.

Without going into the biomechanics of the human foot, I would like to focus on the wonderful effect working with your feet and movement can have on your health, both spiritual and physical.

Working with Druidry, most of us will at some point have taken our shoes and socks off and spent some time barefoot, connecting with the land. How many though, would have actively incorporated this practice into any movement meditations?

Working barefoot not only increases the flow of Nwyfre, but strengthens the foot tendons, muscles and re-energises the nerves. The connection through your legs and spine is reinforced, brought back to life. You will feel 'more alive', your balance will improve, a magic will start to happen. The movement becomes a dance on the land. You will feel how Nwyfre can be 'swept up' from the ground as you move and dance. New movements will unfold and develop. Awareness of one's Chakras will improve.

Life will return to your feet, you just have to work at it.

Of course we need to use common sense, but not too much of it! You will be pushing the boundaries of conformity and conditioning, but don't be afraid to try things – remember the child within!

In the early days of moving into minimalist shoes and spending time barefoot, I found myself faced with a problem. I am a keen long distance trail runner, not so much long distance these days, as a lifetime of bending, wear and tear has brought on early stage Osteoarthritis. (Running, especially barefoot, I am convinced has worked wonders in keeping my joint flexible). The problem I was faced with was that I was itching to get out for a run, but it was winter and very cold.

I had some months previously put my running shoes away for good and was determined to stick with the minimalist footwear.

I decided to go for it.

When I describe my footwear as minimalist I mean it. They look like a pair of gloves for your feet, but instead of fingers going in the 'tubes', in go your toes. The sole, if you can call it that, is a few millimeters thick, just enough for some grip and protection and there is no insole to speak of.

Anyone would say, a sure way of getting cold feet or frostbite! Never-the-less, I put on a pair of thin socks, same thing with 'tubes' for your toes to go in and on went the 'foot gloves'.

Suitably attired to protect my body from the cold, I set out, pushing such thoughts to one side as; "I must be mad! What if my feet start to go numb and frostbite sets in? How will I get home?"

It was cold. Usually after a mile or so, you settle in and warm up. I settled in, but didn't warm up much. I put my hood up and pushed on. The hood helped a lot with the cold northerly wind.

Up until now, I hadn't dared to think of my feet, but when I did, they weren't cold. How is this? Ah, give it time, just keep going.

I hit the country lanes at about 2 miles and thought of my 'friends', still not cold.

It then came to me. When running in shoes in



the winter, I had noticed that my feet didn't really get cold and wondered why. The answer I came up with, was that the cushioning and high tech insulation was keeping the cold out. Now though, without the cushioning and high tech insulation, I realised it was the flexing and movement which was keeping my feet warm and also of course, the fresh supply of warm blood being pumped around at a faster rate. At least that was my explanation for it, as I continued and completed a good few miles in very cold conditions with warm feet.

My point is this, if I had stuck with just common sense, then I would never have found this out and would never have run in the cold weather. Now I go out regularly in the winter months and enjoy the countryside and winter season.

The same is true for taking your shoes off and just walking on different types of terrain. Don't be put off by things which may never happen, by conditioned fears. Explore it! Just do it with mindfulness - that lovely expression which we as Druids, know we should incorporate more often into all of our actions, but never seem to do so as much as we would like.

So, there we have it. Just treat your old lost friends as you would treat any old lost friend. Give it time to get to know them again. Show them understanding and patience. Listen to their complaints and what they tell you and if need be, take action on it. Show them kindness and understanding and of course love, but above all, enjoy their company and the happiness they can bring!

The Ovate's Journey

by Jennifer Miller

Now you have come to the place
where a tree might call your name—
not the appellation your parents gave you,
but the soul name you have answered to
since the foundation of the world.

This life and all lives converge,
spiraling to infinity,
and you see the filaments of the Great Web,
connecting you to all that has been, all that is,
and all that shall ever be.

Out beyond the peace of the Grove,
there are many paths to healing,
and some will beckon louder than the rest.

Staff in hand, you journey through
high mountains and vast deserts,
shedding old skins
until a truer self emerges.

You see your reflection in a holy well,
and your hands cup the same waters
your ancestors prayed over,
performing an ablution with the blessing of
the gods.

No longer just an observer of nature,
now you feel Her in your blood and bones.
You are the hawk's vision,
the stag's virility, the bear's strength,
the salmon's wisdom.



Image: Awaken, Transform, Renew by Maryanne Mattson

“Just as the trees show each season, so we travel in our own journeys, always going in and out of the seasons.”.

Primitive Saunas for Modern Druids by Silenos



On a pleasant August day, in a mountain glade, I tied together the wooden frame of my primitive sauna with hemp twine. Looking over at the mountain pond to the west, I thought that my hemispherical bentwood frame might be a coracle if I wove some more withes into the structure. A coracle is a round boat made from bull hide and bent wood frame. Originally primitive saunas were covered with bullhide, just like coracles which means that, undeniably, a coracle resembles a primitive sauna.

Sitting inside the warm steamy primitive sauna, my aching body began to feel better; the heat eased my sore muscles and bones and the moisture refreshed my skin. Smoldering mugwort smoke cleared my sinuses up and I smelled the sweet, mossy, forest-sweet floor embracing me. It felt primal. Looking at the red hot glowing rocks I began to ponder that the cramped, primitive sauna could represent the womb and emerging from the primitive sauna symbolized rebirth.

Staring deeper into the glowing rocks and steam I remembered that, in some versions of Taliesin's Journey from Ceridwen to Elffin at the fish weir, Taliesin is in a little coracle, a bull hide boat, instead of a leather bag. I wondered if the Ancients had sent me a riddle right there. Was a coracle also a primitive sauna? Perhaps ancient Druids also used the primitive sauna as a ritual of renewal and rebirth.

Certainly, others have pondered whether or not the Ancient Druids practiced some kind of whole body thermotherapy to cultivate Nwfre. In 2010 Archaeologists Jim Leary and Dan Field, working at the Hatfield Earthworks, found a neolithic

sauna built into the ritual landscape of Marden Henge, near the River Avon which was part of the broader ritual landscape of Stonehenge. So it appears our Druid ancestors did have a form of whole body thermotherapy, almost identical to the Native American sweat lodge. They purpose built a small rectangular structure and dragged hot rocks inside from a nearby fire to create a sauna like hydrotherapy building. Putting such a structure in the area of the henge suggests that thermotherapy was for spiritual reasons.

So it seems the neolithic ancestors of the Druids used primitive saunas. Contemporary Druids can reap all the benefits of hydrotherapy for cultivating Nwfre by visiting a modern sauna or banya. Thermotherapy has many health benefits for people suffering from cardiovascular-related and rheumatological conditions. Many people pursue thermotherapy just for the physiologically beneficial experience of feeling more relaxed. However, it is best to check with a doctor before trying thermotherapy as saunas can exacerbate certain health conditions.

I have been building primitive saunas for several years now and hope to build many more.

Sources

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The Bardic Gorsedd, July 2025 by Jon Nash

Cauldron of Warming

I can hear the sea when I get off the train and start to walk up the hill, which winds past houses and trees until I arrive at Noddfa retreat centre in Penmaenmawr. I can see the waves now, the nearby mountain and the cloudy sky above. It's been a long journey but I've made it to the Bardic Gorsedd weekend.

Bardic grade members of the order are gathering from far and wide (the furthest from the United States!) to share ritual, meditation, discussion and more. We're greeted by Fi, Lorraine and Tom who are holding the weekend, and also meet the nuns who run the centre (and who seem very relaxed to be entertaining druids). I drop my bags off in my room and explore the gardens which boast a fountain and two labyrinths as well as a suitably Druidic variety of trees.

We begin with a ritual to open our time together. The theme for the weekend is The Three Cauldrons of Inspiration as described in the Irish mystical text 'The Cauldron of Posey'. Fortunately we have our Chosen Chief Eimear Burke on hand to share the text in Irish (and English) alongside her insights. Reflections and meditation led by Tom awake our cauldrons ready for the next few days of working together. After that it is early to bed because...

Cauldron of Vocation

At 6am the next morning we gather in white robes

to greet the sun together, which is a truly magical way to start the day, drawing down and praising that solar energy.

After breakfast we reconnect with the cauldrons considering their relationship to the three realms of land, sea and sky and then are joined by our guest speaker. The wonderful Mhara Starling guides us through the symbolism of the cauldron in Welsh history, myth and legend. From archaeological finds at nearby Anglesey to the Dagda's cauldron of plenty via Cerridwen's cauldron and the Cauldron of Rebirth it's clear there are deep and complex themes that can guide us, and Mhara leaves us with a challenge about the bravery needed for cauldron work to be effective.

Then it is time to get practical as we co-create the group ritual for the afternoon. In three groups we take a cauldron each and plan a section of the ritual to honour and connect with its energy. The groups combine poetry, meditation, ritual gifts, offerings and actions. It is powerful and joyous and you can tell the energy is really flowing as one of the Noddfa cats arrives and settles right amongst the cauldrons at the middle of our circle- there's no higher praise than that!

Some of us then head down to the beach which looks out to the Isle of Anglesey, stronghold of the ancient Druids and site of their last stand before being slaughtered by the Romans. Feet on the wet sand, wind chopping around us we form a semi circle and make offerings to remember the



Druids of the past, to honour our global Druid community in the present and to make prayers for future Druids and the world to come. I found this ritual really moving and a reminder of the incredible community we have.

That evening we gather for our Eisteddfod. It's inevitable when you get a group of bards together that the Awen will flow and it does. People tell stories, share poems, play instruments, sing songs and we even learn link arms for a little Dutch group dancing! The creativity and talent of everyone involved is clear and as I settle back in my chair I'm reminded how this is spiritual work too as someone shares a line that brings murmurs of recognition or tells a joke that gets us howling.

Cauldron of knowledge

And before we know it, 7am Sunday morning arrives and we gather at the labyrinth in the lawn by the house. Silently we begin to one at a time walk the twists and turns with a personal question and let the rhythms and patterns of the walking bring answers. It is a gentle yet powerful start to the day and leaves me with a grounding that is still with me as I write this.

Then we dive into a Cauldron meditation and each receive three glass beads in blue and green and white. I hold these tight as Fi gives a talk on the powerful properties of the number three in mathematics and magick. Lorraine then guides us towards the end of the weekend with a tale of beginnings-an original Celtic creation myth with three cauldrons at the three points of a starry triskele. All of our shared poetry, meditation and ritual comes together and it is clear that this work with three cauldrons is just the start with so much to take into our practice as bards once the weekend is done.

It has been a beautiful weekend and I'm struck by how collaborative it was. The three hosts have created a cauldron to hold our exploration, they've lit the fire with rituals and meditations and talks and we have each added our own offerings and energies to the mix as well. I'm so grateful to everyone who shared the weekend and for the friendships forged. I'm fired up (perhaps in my lower cauldron) as I head for the train. My heart (perhaps my middle cauldron) is full as I watch the Welsh land, sky and sea pass by. My head (perhaps my upper cauldron) is running wild with ideas and memories as the world outside the Gorsedd welcomes me back.

I cannot recommend the Bardic Gorsedd enough, if you can get there, please do. You won't regret it! *See the back page for information about the 2026 gorsedd.*



Reviews

Pantheon: The Irish

by Morgan Daimler

If you want to find out more about Irish spirituality and deities, then this book is a great starting place. Morgan Daimler, who has written extensively in this field, feels like a safe pair of hands for the topic, although the reader is offered more than recycled ideas from her previous works. "I am striving ... to offer readers a fresh look at things..." Daimler begins.

This book does feel like a breath of fresh air.

Daimler begins by laying out some ground rules: "Irish paganism is often conflated with Celtic paganism to a degree that some people treat the two as interchangeable," she writes, "although they are not." Chapter 1 explores the difference between "Irish" and "Celtic" spirituality thoroughly and has some interesting things to say on cultural appropriation and ancestry. Once terms have been clearly defined, Daimler focuses on Irish Cosmology. I was really interested to read about the lack of Creation and End of the World Mythology in Irish texts and how modern writers such as Ella Young and Peter Berresford Ellis have tried to fill this gap with stories of their own.

There is a really enlightening chapter on Celebrations and Prayers, focusing primarily the four fire festivals of Samhain, Imbolc, Bealtaine, and Lúnasa. This is followed by an interesting consideration of Rites of Passage ceremonies, such as namings and funerals, and there is a helpful chapter on Irish magic and Ogham. Part 2 of the book brings us to the Irish Pantheon itself, focussing on the Tuatha Dé Danann and other spirits. This section is packed full of information, with Daimler even finding new things to say about the big hitters such as Lugh, Morrigan and Manannán mac Lir.

Daimler finishes by welcoming the reader to explore the Irish pantheon further on their own, whilst remaining true to the heart of Irish paganism: "The land has stories for those who listen ... The Tuatha Dé Danann and the Aos Sidhe are still there, waiting." This excellent book makes you want to find out more.

Find the book in the OBOD store - <https://store.druidry.org/products/pantheon-the-irish>



Andrew's Bit At The Back

November is one of those beautiful transitional months. It begins with the hangover from Samhain and, if you live in the UK, the smoky wonders of Bonfire Night. The month seems to embody everything that autumn has to offer, culminating in the festival of Thanksgiving in the USA later in the month. However, by the final few days of the month, our attention shifts away from autumn and focuses on the approach of midwinter. Most notable of the midwinter festivals, whether celebrated as a Christian or secular holiday, is Christmas.

Oh, I love Christmas. I always have. Even though I am no longer a Christian, I love opening my advent calendars and going to candle-filled carol services. I went to a Church of England School and our Christmas services at St Albans Cathedral always felt particularly profound and mystical. There is a holiness, a stillness which occurs in the deepest, darkest part of the year, which chimes with the Christmas story's sense of peace on that "silent night". This has led to me incorporating a few elements of the Christmas story into my pagan practice.

One of my favourite ways of doing this happens on 19th November every year, exactly 6 weeks before Christmas Eve. On that day, I sit down in front of a roaring television and relive part of my childhood. It's always a special night in this house because, on 19th November, we watch the first episode of *The Box of Delights*.

The Box of Delights was a BBC children's drama, first shown in the run up to Christmas 1984. It is based on a novel of the same name by John Masefield, which was published in 1935. Masefield, a devout Christian, based the book on a question which had perplexed him from childhood – if all the clergy in Britain were kidnapped, would there still be Christmas? Masefield sets this dilemma at the feet of his protagonist, Kay Harker, a public schoolboy who arrives home from boarding school for the Christmas holidays. While at the train station, Kay encounters a kindly old Punch and Judy man called Cole Hawlings, who asks Kay to look after his magical Box of Delights. "The Wolves are Running," Hawlings warns Kay, shortly before being 'scrobbled,' or kidnapped, by a bunch of melodramatic villains dressed up as parish vicars.

However, while Masefield put Christianity at the very centre of his story, there is plenty of magic and even a couple of pagan gods who come along for the ride. There is a character called the Lady of the Oak Tree, referred to in the TV series simply as the Old Lady, who is clearly a manifestation of the Cailleach, while Kay is tutored in a sacred grove by Herne the Hunter. There is also a heap of magical happenings, such as flying cars, pirate rats, and even some terrifying demons, conjured by arch villain Abner Brown.

When the BBC adapted *The Box of Delights* back in 1984, it was the most expensive children's TV drama ever produced and it was a real must-see TV moment for my generation. Of course, that was 40 years ago and so elements of the series have dated quite badly, most notably the special

effects. If you can look beyond, or even accept, the effects, then the TV series starts to deliver on its title, and a whole world of *Delights* will be yours. The central performance by Devin Standfield as Kay Harker is simply enchanting. Patrick Troughton has a twinkle in his eye as the time-travelling Cole Hawlings and Robert Stephens delivers a bravura performance as the unhinged, wicked Abner Brown.

So, on the 19th November, we will settle in and watch the first episode, and then watch one episode a week

every week until Christmas, with the final episode being watched on Christmas Eve. If you can get hold of the series and fancy some magic and nostalgia, I encourage you to watch along. There is a whole community of us, known as *Boxers*, who do this and we love the series even more now that we did back in 1984!

So, does Kay manage to save Christmas? Well, I don't think it is too much of a spoiler to say that he probably does, although his success rests on a last-minute intervention by the Pagan Gods, stepping up to save the followers of the new religion. Believe me, you will never again search the skies for Santa's reindeer-drawn sleigh on Christmas Eve after watching the final episode. You will be looking for lions, unicorns and a figure with a magnificent pair of antlers.

Although, when the Wolves are running, one can never be quite sure of anything.

Until
next time,

Andrew iii





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

Upcoming Events

Bardic Gorsedd: 24-26 July 2026, Noddfa Retreat Centre, Penmaenmawr. For more Information, email bardicgorsedds@obod.org

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

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

*The hill is hunched and bear-heavy,
hunkered against the winter night.*

*The path crackles through gorsey scrub,
unwinds itself at the cave's kiss.*

*Go in: let the earth be womb-wise,
a home for your dying and birth.*

*Your breath will liquefy the frost:
air, fire and water in the bones*

*of the body of your Mother,
the giving ground that soils your skin.*

*Stand at the entrance of the cave:
soon, the shell of the day will break.*

**The Fourfold: Elemental Words -
Earth by Steve Shakespeare**