



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

December 2025 | Issue 340

This Issue

- ✿ Children's Forest:
Planting a Brighter
Future by Erica Shorter
- ✿ Druidry in Lost Places
by Morgan Hollett
- ✿ Resonance by Scott
Royle
- ✿ Plus lots more!



Cover: "Candle" by Kaz Leroux

Editorial

Welcome to December's edition of *Touchstone*! There's plenty here to light the long, dark winter evenings.

Being the final *Touchstone* of the year, this edition has one eye on the past and one on the future. For example, our wonderful lead article is about Children's Forest, whom OBOD partnered with in 2024, helping to raise funds through the sales of Ogham Tree Cards. This article will help you find out about the work of the charity and their ethos for building a brighter future. Morgan Hollett's excellent article on Druidry in Lost Places is a refreshing take on those often overlooked spaces in towns and cities and how they can enrich our practice. The article also acts as a launch pad for our next themed edition on Urban Druidry, due in April 2026.

In the discordant world, Scott Royle has written a beautiful piece on resonance. I'll be talking to Scott about this and the other articles he has published in *Touchstone* on this month's *Touchstone Unbound*, which will be streamed on the Hearth at 7pm UK time on 12th December.

One of my favourite pieces in this month's edition is Alison Kirkham's article about Phenology Wheels. Alison sent me the first set of wheels a few months ago and we've been working on a way to get them to you. So, over the next 12 months, I will be sharing a wheel a month with you, as an example of how noticing the small things can create a wonderful bigger picture. You are in for a real treat!

May you have a peaceful Alban Arthan and all best wishes for a creative 2026!



TOUCHSTONE (December '25 - Issue 340)

- 2 Chosen Chief's Bit
- 3 Bard's Page
- 6 Phenology Wheel: a year long project -
Alison Kirkham
- 7 Children's Forest; Planting a Brighter
Future - *Erica Shorter*
- 9 Druidry in Lost Places: Spreepark Berlin
- *Morgan Hollett*
- 11 Resonance - *Scott Royle (Maven)*
- 13 Open Forum
- 14 Andrew's Bit at the Back
- 15 Upcoming Events

Alban Arthan by Jessica McGee

On this darkest night
we toast what was and what will
and all our bright dreams.



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Chosen Chief's Bit

Bandia a chairde! Greetings everyone!

"Deep winter is the blackest of seasons, a storm of waves is raised against the border of the earth's lands. Every bird of the plain is sorrowful at the roar of rude winter except the red and bloody raven. Winter, black, dark and smoky! Bone-chewing dogs are arrogant; the iron pot is put on the fire at the end of the dark, black day!"

From the Four Seasons (12th-century manuscript in Ériu, VII)

As I am writing this, we are well into Samhain, which means 'the end of Summer', (Samhain is also the Irish for November), the time when the veil is thin between this world and the Otherworld. The above is a fairly grim description of how our ancestors would have experienced winter. I am grateful to live in these times with light and heating in my house.

In the Irish manuscripts, there are accounts of three Immramma, meaning Wonder Voyages. The first two, Bran and Máel Dúin journeyed to the Otherworld. The third, St. Brendan, it is said, travelled as far as America.

Here is a beautiful extract from the 'Voyage of Bran', written by Bláthmacc, an early Irish monk (7th or 8th Century). Although written by a Christian, it is very Druidic in its descriptions. I think it captures the magic between the two worlds, the mystery of what is seen and unseen. As it is the season to draw within (a big challenge for us, I know, in the modern world of winter busyness) into the dark stillness of winter, you might like to meditate on this piece:

The Two Worlds

"It seems to Bran a marvel of delight in his curragh on a clear sea. To me in my own curragh it is a flowery plain that I ride about.

It is the clear sea to the beaked ship in which Bran is. In my two-wheeled chariot it is Mag Meall with many blossoms.

Bran sees a mass of waves that break over the clear sea. In Mag Mon I see crimson-headed flowers without blemish.

Sea-horses shine in summer as far as Bran's eye stretches. Flowers – streams of honey gush forth in the land of Manannán son of Ler.

The glittering of the sea on which you are, the brightness of the sea on which you row, has poured forth yellow and blue – it is solid land.

Salmon leap from the womb of the white sea you look on; they are calves, they are lambs of good colour, in peace without slaughter.

Though you see but one charioteer in Mag Meall with its multitude of flowers, there are many horses on its breast, besides, which you do not see.

The size of the plain and number of the host shine triumphantly, a white stream of silver, a stair of gold, cause joy at every feast.

A noble arrangement, they play pleasant games in innocent conflict, men and gentle women, under the boughs, without blame, without original sin.

It is along the top of a wood that your little boat has sailed across the ridges – a beautiful wood under its harvest beneath the prow of your small boat.

A wood with blossom and fruit with the true smell of the vine on it; a wood without decay or death and with leaves of golden colour.

From the beginning of creation we are without age, without corruption of the earth; we expect no loss of strength from decay for original sin has not touched us."

(Mag Meall and Mag Mon are names for the Otherworld)

*From A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry
AD 600 – 1200, edited & translated by
Greene & O'Connor.*

Wishing you all a joyous Solstice! Wishing you a magical Immramm!

Beannachtaí, Síocháin, Solas 'is Grá,

Blessings,
Peace, Light
and Love.

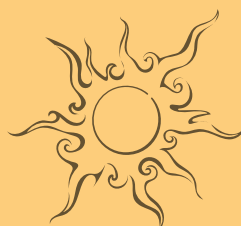
Eimear 



Triad by Rachel Holmes

The three foundations of the circle of life:

The light of the day and summer,
the darkness of the night and winter,
and the magic of the in between





Alban Arthan by Susan Knox

Daurk wind reeshlin through the hollin.
Pu'd free, tummlin, fallin,
A leaf glisters.
A herald tae the gowden yin.
An the wheel birls on.

Ioho by Rae O'Reilly

Ee-yo-ho and the death tree sings,
Down to the otherworld wrapped in wings.
Ee-yo-ho say the Ovate tongue,
The fate of the soul has just begun.

Ee-yo-ho and we dance around,
Spiralling down through the dark dark ground.
Ee-yo-ho whisper lips tainted green,
The path of our ancestors soon will be seen.

Ee-yo-ho as the branches bend,
Down to the otherworld we descend.
Ee-yo-ho with the poison feet,
Eat the seeds and death ye shall meet.



Alban Arthan by Tree Star Druid

"Cambrian shields with foxes emblazoned!
swords drawn
the festival of Alban Arthan begins the pow wow!
my heart shines outward to all now!
the festival begins within our hearts
the return of the light
as in all things
is a mirrored reflection of our self
our dear dear dear self
who we have been punishing through the ages
for every sin imaginable!
imagine here is no sin
what does the earth look like when there is no sin?
when we are no longer holding guilt
when we are no longer holding hate?
when we are no longer holding resentment
when we no longer carry shame.
silence!
i see the light now
flickering into flame!
Holy holly rolls over to kindness oak
they sleep together now
the hooting and hollering bows down
i can see the light now
i be the light now
flame to forest
forest in flame
freedom of the soul
to shine
once again!"

Buzzard by Maaike Lammers

Dead still he sits at the side of the road, as if he is
waiting for me.
A hidden part of the landscape, colours of dark
grass and mud.
Of the grey sky, that threatens snow.
I almost don't see him, almost, but I know he is
there.

I stop the car, open the window. My breath
steams clouds in the still air.
He sees me, for a moment we connect. Then he
slowly spreads his wings.
A palette of bright white and striped golden
brown.
Two slow strokes and he glides close above the
ploughed field.
Away from me.

Wait for me, teach me how to fly with you, be
you! So I can feel what it is like to float and hunt
in this cold wintertime that leads to the return of
the sun.

He turns a circle. The light trapped in the white
under his wings.
Black-brown patterns undulating to the rhythm of
his flight.

In slow motion he lands in the darkness of the
field, sits.
A statue on the black ploughed earth.
Too far to see him properly, but he knows I am
still there.

High in the air, a second one glides.
In a brown-white dive she streaks down, lands
next to him.
Sits motionless, lost in the colours of the land and
winter sky.

I start the car, richer
than I was, drive on.
Wishing I had wings.



To Moon and to Mountain

by Ann Beer

Moon

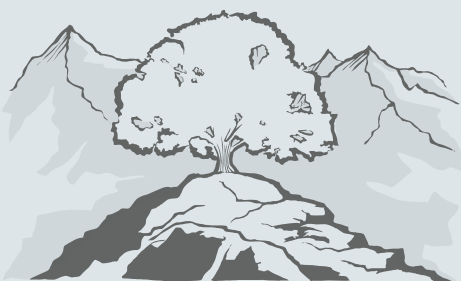
To you, we seem as brief as drops of dew
That form in early dawn, but flee the sun,
Their small domes disappearing with the light.
So how can we presume to honour you,
Your gift eternal, on the path you run,
Your shining and your changing a great rite
That interweaves the heavens and the earth,
Immeasurable in time, a steady dance
Of brightness flooding all the seas and land.

Mountain

We try but fail to understand your birth,
Your growth, the crags that rose as if by trance,
And formed, and cooled, to settle where you stand,
Creating continents and jagged peaks
That seem to touch the sky, yet, rooted deep
Confirm the contours of the oceans wide
As gulfs of memory where darkness speaks.

Moon and Mountain

Through time you, ancient mountain, do not sleep,
But watch the rising moon, her glowing pride,
As she casts light upon your fissured slopes,
Her brilliance familiar as the skies.
The two of you, old partners, loyal friends,
Are never led by foolish fears or hopes,
For neither of you seeks rebirth or dies.
We spark and fade. Your witness never ends.



Burn the Old to let it Rise Anew

by Ana Simoes

Burn the old, let the world renew.
Dance through the chaos,
Shed what no longer serves,
And find your truth within you.

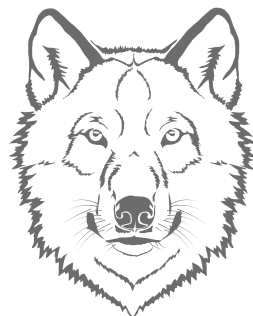
Burn the old, let the world be reborn.
Follow the frenzied rhythm of your heart's drum.
Let go of all rhyme and reason,
May all thoughts from your mind be torn.

Burn the old to let it rise anew.
The old world and your old self alike.
Old and new are different, yet the same.
Though apart, both are one and true.

A Mother's Passing

by Neridah Rogers

When the flowers cease to have a scent
And the birds cease to sing
Only the wolf makes a sound a mournful cry of death



Echoes of the Great Song

by The Vagabond Poet

We are the ones who dream the dreams,
We are the music makers,
The romantics,
The wanderers,
The ones who put the spirit back in the Earth,
Soul back in the land.

We are the ones,
Who hear the whispers on the wind,
Who enjoy the rain on our faces,
And every sensation of every day,
Drenches our heart in song.
And peace is our constant companion.

We hear the great song of life,
We weave the great song of life,
We live the great song of life,
We are the great song of life.

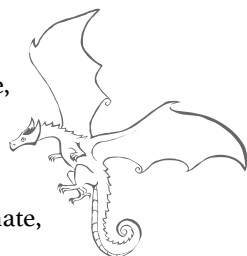
The Dragon by Hannah Maslowski

The dragon hides away,
In the darkest of caves,
Away from bustling life,

It curls up,
Beneath its powerful wings,
Scared to frighten the people,

But within the pitch black cave,
Lies the world's wisdom,
The bringer of truth,

Don't be scared,
The magical creature doesn't hate,
It loves with every inch,
It wishes to nurture you,
Only if you embrace it.



Yule Magic by Susan Le Van

Deep in December,
the ancient stars shimmer above,
Snow falls as soft as a feather,
as white as the wings of a dove.
Can you feel the magic of winter?
That dark, quiet time of the year.
Curl up and dream by the fire,
or gather with those you hold dear.

Asleep is the garden,
patiently waiting for spring,
Frost has silvered the branches,

and glitters on everything.
Do you see the beauty of winter?
Mysterious evergreen trees,
Red holly berries and bright mistletoe,
the skating pond starting to freeze!

Keep your heart open.
Honor traditions of old.
Spend time with the ones
that you cherish,
For love is more precious
Than gold.

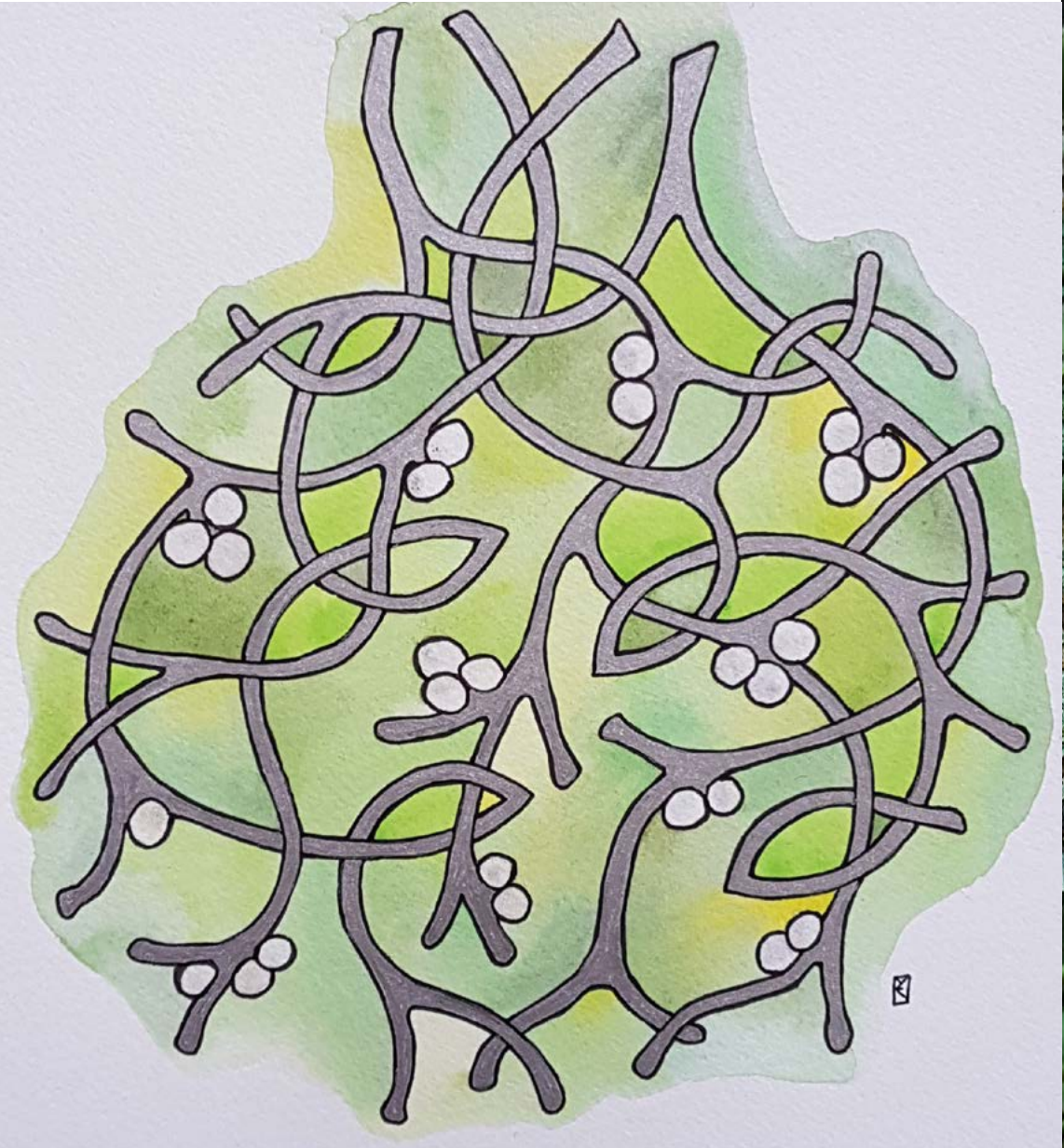
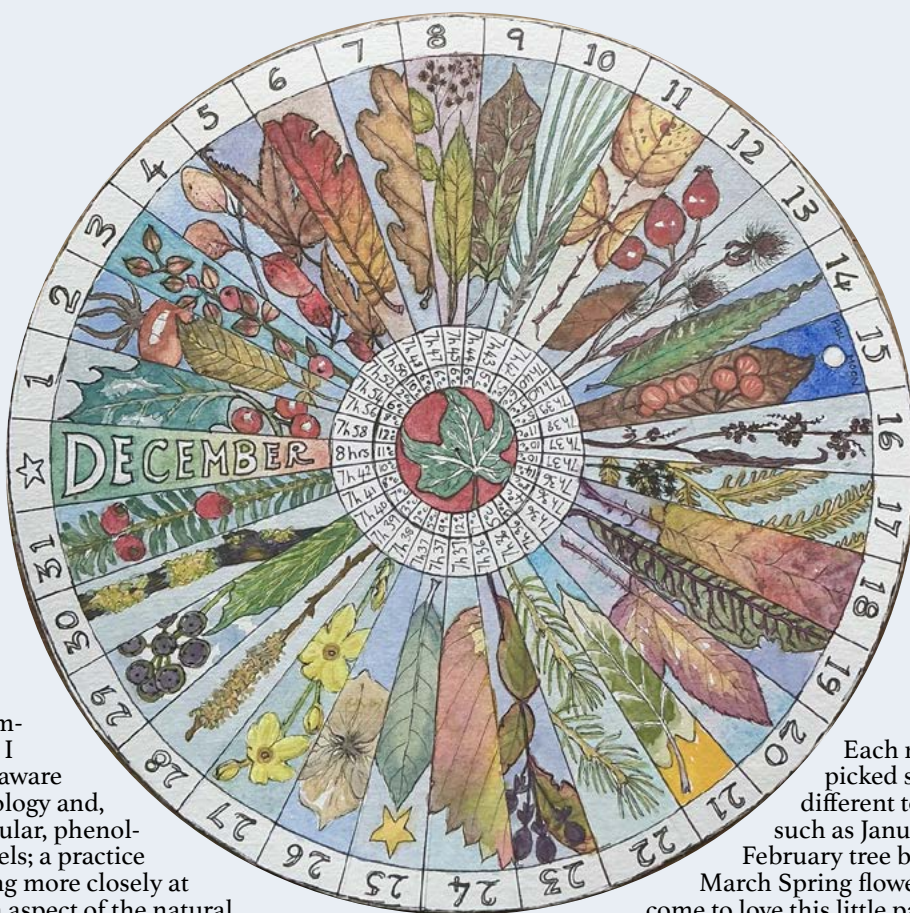


Image: Mistletoe by Kaz Leroux

Phenology Wheel: a year long project by Alison Kirkham



In November 2024 I became aware of phenology and, in particular, phenology wheels; a practice of looking more closely at a chosen aspect of the natural world. Finding this creative ritual fitted in with my then Ovate goals; to look more closely at the natural world, to understand more about plants in particular, to improve my painting skills and to produce a body of work to honour the turning of the seasons. I wanted to see what I could find in my local environment to paint, to think about the daylight, length and temperatures. So, I began with the month of December that year and it was way before I painted the last segment of the last wheel on 30th November 2025 that I realised how much I was learning from this.

Phenology is the study of seasonal phenomena, exploring the cycles found in plant and animal behaviour, as well as elements of the climate. As I understand it, it doesn't have to be done in this format, it's just that I felt the wheel to be both beautiful and very Druidic. So without putting myself under too much pressure, I resolved to spend 10 - 20 minutes every morning painting whatever I found in my locality, the colours of my December garden and a little beyond. I enjoyed it so much that I carried on into January and in the blink of an eye there was 12 wheels and 365 teeny paintings!

Each month I picked something different to focus on, such as January skies, February tree buds, and March Spring flowers. I have come to love this little painting space in my morning and I hope as the months go on and *Touchstone* prints the wheels one by one, you will agree that my painting did indeed get a little bit better. My confidence certainly has and these days I find myself looking at something beautiful in the natural world and instead of thinking 'I'm never going to be able to paint that', I'm working out how I might tackle it in a painterly way.

A powerful aspect has been looking at and recording day length. However, the main message for me has concerned 'the parts of the whole'. There were days early on in the practice that I'd do a painting I was not pleased with, (see December 9th, 14th and 20th, above!), days when I wanted to scrap the whole thing and 'start again next month' but I literally could not do that. These little paintings could not be rubbed out and I just had to carry on and learn that generally the effect of the whole wheel outdid any mistakes I made along the way..... just like life! Our lives and the wheels within them are made up of good paintings and bad, but hopefully for most of us, despite the parts that will always jar, the whole picture can still be beautiful. The analogy works for me anyway!

Children's Forest; Planting a Brighter Future by Erica Shorter

Imagine standing in an ancient, thriving forest, feeling damp moss and leaves beneath your feet, the warm dappled sunlight shining through the canopy far above you, you hear bird song and the sound of a stream gently flowing. You see a flash of movement and know that you share this forest with many creatures. You smell wood smoke, and along a path you see the fire within a circle of Oaks. You know that this circle, this forest, was planted long ago by ancestors who loved you, who dreamed this life of health and happiness for you, and planted that dream with these trees in the ground. They tended the forest as it grew, becoming at home once again amongst the trees, receiving their food and medicine and remembering how to share their human gifts as generous members of the family of nature once again.

As we plant Children's Forests we hold this vision of a bright and healthy future for all, knowing that as humans we have enormous capacity for connection and so much to bring when we live in balanced and respectful relationship with the wider family of nature. We are incredibly supported on our human journey by the trees, they offer deep generosity in so many ways. Trees breathe with us cleaning the air, they create and hold rich healthy soil so that clear waters may flow and that plants may grow, they give us wood for our fires and homes, they provide food and shelter, stability and wisdom. The wisdom and guidance of the trees has been passed to us by our ancestors through the Ogham, an ancient alphabet drawn from the gifts of the trees.

In 2024 Children's Forest shared a crowdfunder selling Ogham Tree Cards which had been created in a collaboration between Children's Forest, Yanik Dubois at Forestheart and Oak Tree Press, to raise money to plant and grow trees with children. It feels so right that the ancestral wisdom of the Ogham is supporting a connected and healthy world for the future generations via those of us

who are taking our turn tending the earth right now.

We send our heartfelt thanks to the OBOD community for your incredible support, and share our delight and gratitude to be alongside an organisation with so many shared values; reverence for trees, ancestors and the myriad gifts of the world around us, seen and unseen.

We would love to share a little more about Children's Forest and some of the planting projects that have been funded directly by the sale of the Ogham cards.

Children's Forest is an organisation supporting children and their communities to connect with nature and to plant and tend forests for the future generations. Our vision is for a vibrant and healthy future where trees planted now can one day become ancient forests to benefit the children of all species. The trees are planted around a Children's Fire which is an ancient pledge to place the well being of the future generations at the center of all decisions made around the fire.

As we plant trees with the children we also plant connection and care, a sense of the trees as our lifelong companions and our belonging in nature as our birthright. As the forests grow, communities gather regularly to tend the young trees creating thriving habitats, and strengthening connections with the human community and wider ecosystem.

Born from the Forest School movement, we recognise the huge importance of creativity and connection to the natural world, to know we are part of nature, and to recognise that as humans we have a beneficial role to play in our ecosystems. Right now it is more important than ever to hear positive stories of the future to orientate to and be inspired by. It's vital for us to be able to take practical action to care for the earth, recognising that we have a rich history of connection, reciprocity



and wisdom to draw upon and be supported by as we move forward in meaningful connection with the world around us.

A Children's Forest is planted in a 4 Step Process:

Step 1 - Connection: we take time to connect with a mature woodland, playing games, foraging, singing, making fire and shelters, and experiencing ourselves as part of nature. Our human instinct to care for and love the world around us is enlivened with this deep sense of belonging.

Step 2 - Imagination: Our human gift of imagination is precious and powerful. Everything that is created is imagined first, and it benefits us all to imagine a healthy bright future. Through storytelling, painting, group poetry, and many other creative mediums we imagine a bright future for those to come. When we remember the ancestors and engage in future generational thinking we re-align ourselves with indigenous ways of tending the earth with foresight and responsibility and guidance.

Step 3 - Planting: We plant the trees first in a sacred grove around the Children's Fire with 8 trees marking the 8 directions. Each child writes a wish for the forest on a scroll of birch bark which is placed with the roots of the first tree they plant. When the trees have been planted, we play music and dance, welcoming the trees roots to the earth and celebrating the new forest before singing the Tree Blessing Song.

Step 4 - Tending: The children and wider community meet at least 3 times a year. They tend the trees and create habitat for the creatures who will live in the forest. The growing community share ancestral skills such as fire making or foraging. They sing to the trees, light the Children's fire, play games and perhaps share a potluck, building intergenerational and interspecies communities.

Supported by the Ogham crowdfunder we have already planted 616 trees in 5 new Children's Forest Projects with 231 people!

We have begun a Forest From Seed at School project which is an exciting and innovative way for children to engage with Children's Forest while at school. At Danehill School the young children have begun to gather seeds, plant them, and grow young trees in their tree nursery, ready to be planted in a Children's Forest.

We planted the first Medicinal Children's Forest at Wowo Campsite in Sussex, encircled by a Medicine Hedge. These two projects were planted with 6 groups of children and their parents with Sacred Seeds Herbal Home Ed. The trees were chosen for their medicinal properties and planted by families who gather throughout the year to learn to forage and make food and medicine together. As we plant-

ed the young trees we gave gratitude for their gifts and the children imagined the future generations harvesting the berries and fruits to make medicines in the years to come. This medicine forest was planted with wild cherry, bird cherry, lime, juniper, sea buckthorn, wild rose, hawthorn, elder, guelder rose, wild apple, pine, rowan, holly, oak and hazel.

A Children's Forest was planted at Willingstone Farm in Devon with the Stone Age Club Forest School. The land is thought to have been a special place of pilgrimage for thousands of years, due to a magnificent granite rock formation on the land and its attributed sacred meanings. The Willingstone Rock is in the centre of an ancient landscape surrounded in all directions by bronze and iron age hillforts, burial sites and sacred sites including a large stone circle. We took the children up onto a central promontory where we could see for many miles in every direction, and together we envisioned the new woodland. They planted Oak, Birch, Hawthorn, Hazel, Guelder Rose, Walnut, Small Leaved Lime, Wild Cherry, Elder, Rowan, Sweet Chestnut and Juniper.

Hartfield Field Community Orchard was planted in the spring and is the first Children's Forest community orchard project. The children from the local primary school were excited to plant fruit trees that they could harvest in the coming years. They planted Pear, Plum, Wild Apple, Damson, Strawberry Tree, Wild Service, Small Leaved Lime amongst many others.

It is an honour and pleasure to plant future forests with children, with the ancestors and future generations in our hearts. We are very grateful for your support.

With Special thanks to River Jones and Philip Carr-Gomm who run the School of Celebrancy and have supported this work in many hearty ways over the years, including with regular donations.

If you are interested in planting a Children's Forest on your land or supporting this work please get in touch at connect@childrensforest.earth and visit our website www.childrensforest.earth.

The beautiful cards were created by Yannik Dubois at www.forestheart.co.uk

With gratitude and love from Erica Shorter and the Heartwood Team.

How to connect with us:

Website: <https://childrensforest.earth/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/childrensforest.earth/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/childrensforests>

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/@childrensforest>

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Druidry in Lost Places: Spreepark Berlin by Morgan Hollett

If I asked all of you to close your eyes and think of your Top 5 Druid Spots, I imagine “abandoned Soviet amusement park” wouldn’t feature on many — if any — of those lists. And I can understand why: with rusted old rides lying neglected under layers of graffiti, red-and-white “do not enter!” signs pinned to every fence, and shiny new construction vehicles littering the site, Berlin’s Spreepark doesn’t exactly scream nature hotspot. But peel back the layers, and you’ll find a wealth of critters and plant life thriving amidst the decay.

Spreepark has quickly become one of my favourite spots to connect to nature on a deeper level within the busy urban environment of Berlin. I’ve visited the site three times in recent years on guided tours (the only way to safely and legally enter the site at present): once to learn about the park’s fraught history and twice to attend hands-on sessions that take a closer look at some of the critters that now call the park home.

Nestled deep inside Plänterwald, a 220 acre forest in former East Berlin, Spreepark first opened its doors in 1969 and served as East Germany’s only permanent amusement park until German Reunification in October 1990. In 1991, the park was denationalised, snapped up by private investors and gradually remodelled in a more westernised fashion. However, between the shiny new offerings of the formerly inaccessible west, the turbulent economic situation of the post-communist transition and the park’s hard to reach location in the middle of the woods, visitor numbers began to fall through the mid-to-late 90s. The park clung on until the turn of the millennium before declaring bankruptcy and closing its doors for good in early 2002.

Over the last two decades, the park has truly become a ‘lost place’. Roller coaster tracks skirt through wildflower meadows, leading into the waiting mouth of a blue and rainbow-striped cat,

peeking out from the weeds. Climbing plants weave their way around tea cups that haven’t spun in decades. A *tyrannosaurus rex*, scribbled with spray paint, lies abandoned in the long grass. Chipped and peeling swan boats are parked next to mounds of disturbed earth and there’s even a fake steam train — now tagged with ‘A’ for anarchy — tucked away in the bushes.

It’s not just the local flora that’s moved in since the humans moved out. The trees, abandoned buildings and disused rides make the perfect nesting spot for creatures big and small, whether that’s foxes, raccoons, bats, owls, woodpeckers, magpies, nightingales, bees, wasps, butterflies, ground beetles, spiders, newts or toads. In short, the site has become an ecological hotspot amidst the hustle and bustle of the city. And thanks to projects such as Stadt Campus Natur (City Campus Nature), that ecology is now accessible for nature nerds and curious druids alike, albeit under strict supervision. To date, I’ve been on two of their tours and thoroughly enjoyed every minute of them. The first one saw me getting up close and personal with spiders, while the second one took me on a sunset walk around the park, bat detector in hand to ‘listen’ in on the nocturnal hunt.

A small confession before we continue: I’ve always been squeamish when it comes to certain insects, with spiders ranking highly on the list of offenders. Yes, I know, that’s incredibly un-druidic of me. But I’ve also come to realise that it’s hard to get away from them when you’re following a nature-based spiritual path. As lovely as it’d be to pick and choose our favourites, every insect has its place in the ecosystem and, if we can’t learn to love them, we can at least learn to live with them. So what better way to do that than by signing myself up for a spider tour?

The evening started with a lecture on our eight-legged friends. We learned that over 500 species of



spider call Berlin home, and that the number and variety of species has begun to fluctuate in recent years due to climate change. Fascinatingly, spiders migrate on the wind — and many of them are coming up from the south to find a more suitable home due to rising temperatures. We were also reassured that they're mostly harmless. There's only a few species of spider that are capable of biting humans, none of which will cause much more than a bit of skin irritation. And they'll only bite when feeling threatened. For the most part, they're already long gone by the time we arrive, having already detected us through the vibrations our movement causes.

Nerves slightly calmed, we ventured out to track down some of the species we'd learned about, armed with a handful of empty petri dishes and an umbrella. Yes, you read that right — an umbrella! We popped the umbrellas up, turned them upside down, and shook branches and bushes until a few critters fell into the broly. The spiders were scooped up into the petri dishes; anyone else was gently returned to the wild.

Once we'd each gathered a few spiders, we headed back to the lecture room to take a closer look at them under the microscope. Among our samples were leaf curling sac spiders, wasp spiders, orb-weaver spiders and wolf spiders. Seeing them up close allowed me to appreciate just how diverse these tiny creatures are. While they all had eight legs, some of those were thick and stocky, while others sported long, thin pins. Their colours also covered a diverse spectrum, including muted browns, translucent reds, and black-and-yellow stripes. Afterwards, we released the spiders back into the park and I returned home feeling a little less intimidated. While I still need to call in someone braver than me to move them outside when needed, I'm now mostly content to let them roam free if I spot them lurking in the nooks and crannies of my apartment.

Next up was the bat tour and one of the most magical evenings I've ever experienced. During a sunset workshop, we discovered that Berlin is the bat capital of Europe, with 18 of the country's 25 species lurking in the city's old buildings, cemeteries and green spaces. Of those 18, the common pipistrelle, the common noctule and Daubenton's bat are the three you're most likely to find in Spreepark. We also learned about bats that wear masks (lovingly named wrinkle-faced bats), bats that fly up high and dive-bomb their prey, and bats that like to feast on cows (contrary to popular belief, only three species of the world's 1,300+ like to drink blood!).

The workshop also explained how bats use echolocation to "see". Essentially, each click the bat sends out generates an "image" when the sound bounces off an object and returns to the bat. The clicks go out at a steady rate until prey is spotted, at which point they rapidly speed up and give the bat an

extremely precise location until it moves in for capture. As these clicks are well above human hearing range, we need to use specialised bat detectors to convert them into lower frequencies, making it possible for us to "hear" the bats. Different bat species use different frequencies, so we're not just able to "hear" them, we can also identify them.

As dusk descended, we were handed a bat detector and led out into the park. Once or twice, we saw dark shapes swooping overhead — but the real magic happened when we pointed our bat detectors upwards. All of a sudden, we could hear bursts of rapid clicking, a brief silence, and then slow, steady clicks. We'd heard a bat closing in on its prey, catching it and moving on! Our guide directed us to the spectrogram on screen and encouraged us to identify each bat based on the call.

The first bats we picked up were the common pipistrelle: they use a 45 kHz call that looks like a vertical hockey stick. A few minutes later, we found some common noctule, which emit a lower frequency call of 27 kHz, shaped like a sideways hockey stick. Unfortunately, we didn't find any Daubenton's bats, but learned that their frequency is between 45 and 50 kHz and looks like an S-shaped curve on the spectrogram.

Science aside, hearing the bat detector burst into life and seeing the calls on screen filled me with so much joy. It felt as though I was witnessing something truly magical, something that's normally hidden away from human senses, and I walked home with a head full of knowledge and a heart full of childlike wonder. Since then, I've spent several evenings sat outside on my balcony; while I can no longer "hear" the bats that hunt over the river, I love watching them dart through the incoming darkness on their nocturnal hunts. So, if you ever find yourself in the midst of a concrete jungle, wondering how on earth you can connect to the natural world, why not seek out your local 'lost places' and see who's lurking there?

Our Next Themed Issue URBAN DRUIDRY - APRIL 2026

Do you live in a large town or city? Then our next themed issue needs you!
The "Urban Druidry" edition of *Touchstone* in April 2026 aims to explore how we find natural and magical connection in the concrete jungle.

Send in your articles, poetry and art work to
touchstone@druidry.org

DEADLINE: 28th February 2026

Resonance by Scott Royle (Maven)

Resonance. In music when two tones are the same pitch, they seem to amplify. Not only can we hear this, we can feel it in our bones. In a similar fashion when we are talking to someone and strongly agree with what they are saying, we get that same feeling, we resonate with them. When we are in love, we feel euphoria, or a “oneness” with the object of our affection, we are on the same page, the same frequency, we are singing the same song. As human beings, we are naturally attracted to resonance. We can feel the amplification. It stirs a power within us.

It allows “us” to think and act as “one”.

Everything around us vibrates: trees, plants, flowers, other animals, water, and the Earth. The fundamental frequency is 7.83 Hertz (Hz). This phenomenon is called the Schumann Resonances and was discovered by Winfried Otto Shumann in 1952. It is caused by lightning discharges between the Earth’s surface and the ionosphere. Even though the resonance was only quantified in 1952, humans have known about Shumann’s Resonance for millennia.

In many religions and philosophical disciplines there is a belief that everything is connected to everything. In my first paragraph I mentioned that, when we sing on key, strongly agree with a speaker, or fall in love, we feel a profound connectiveness. The tribal sense of belonging, the oneness we feel when we are in love, it is what we were made for.

Today’s world has broken those bonds. People no longer connect in the physical realm. They text, chat, Instagram, X, FaceTime, and YouTube; all electronically. While we are connected digitally, it is not what we are designed to do. It has harmed us, disassociated us. We have become dissonant and separate. The world has become more chaotic, less compassionate — less human.

The question becomes, how do we get back to being human again? Abstaining from digital communication is not the answer. In proper context it is a valuable tool. In excess, it is like any other addiction, it can be destructive. We as humans need to channel some of our energies as in times past, to have a better future. We need to resonate with the world and reestablish that connectiveness.

How do we reconnect? The ability to connect to the world around us is an innate human ability. It is also an innate ability to be attracted to things shiny which include things that bring us instant pleasure. The digital world is one of those attractions. It’s easy and convenient. We can do it anywhere, anytime. Too much of it and it supplants our natural connectiveness. To break this cycle, we need to dedicate time and energy to reconnect with Mother Earth. All we have to do, is what we naturally do: Let the earth forces flow through us.

Get outside, turn off/leave behind electronic devices, sit still, close your eyes and clear your mind. Meditate, feel, smell, hear, become a part of what is around you. Blend in, feel the earth, feel the force and power within you; feel the wind on your face, through your hair - through you.

As you relax, allow yourself to become a part of the world around you, feel yourself sink into the earth. You cannot force this. You must be willing

and submissive. As you become more attuned, you will fall into the natural rhythm of nature.

You may notice that the digitally connected may lose sight of you; you become invisible to them. What you gain is a connectiveness to this world and the other-worlds. The veil between worlds thins as you get closer to resonance. You see and hear things that others do not. Concepts and ideas are more clear to you. You tap into the wisdom of the universe. Similar to singing in key, your thoughts are amplified.

Druids in ancient times were philosophers and advisors to kings. I believe that in addition to their scholastic training, they were able to tap into the resources of Mother Earth which allowed them to advise wisely.

To use a whimsical metaphor from fiction, I believe that Terry Pratchett’s witches in his Tiffany Aching series of books may be a good representation of what Druids did: advised, helped in their communities, and helped each other. Good old fashion work and common sense. In his books, there is a leader of the clan Nac Mac Feegles called a Kelda. She had special powers called hiddlin’s (secrets), one of which was to connect with Keldas past, present and future. She had the combined wisdom of them all. Could this be similar to tapping into the life force of Mother Earth? Can we connect with Druids past, present,



and to come? Is this the magic of the Druid's world?

Today's world is dissociative and dissonant. We have grown apart from one another. Today, more than ever, we need Druids like Terry Pratchett's witches to hold things together. We need to help others and help each other.

I am not saying shun modern convenience such as cell phones, I am saying that it should be used in moderation and wisely; it is not a replacement for human contact. Go to your groves - outside, seek balance and equilibrium. Ask for guidance. Become the Druid, become the Witch; your acts of service will be added to the whole. If we all act in accordance to what we are tasked to do, the world will become a better place.

May you walk the path chosen for you. May your eye be opened to see and your ears opened to hear. May you have peace throughout your days and may you share that peace with others. May you be content with who you are and what you do.

We are Stardust by Mekre Crowsong

We are made of stardust
The cosmos in our souls
All of us connected
With an umbilical cord to the divine
Galaxies rise before us
Singing with the wind
Cleansed by the ocean tides
The earth strengthening our bones
A menagerie of the living
Wading in the memories of the dead
We are made of stardust
And to the stars we return

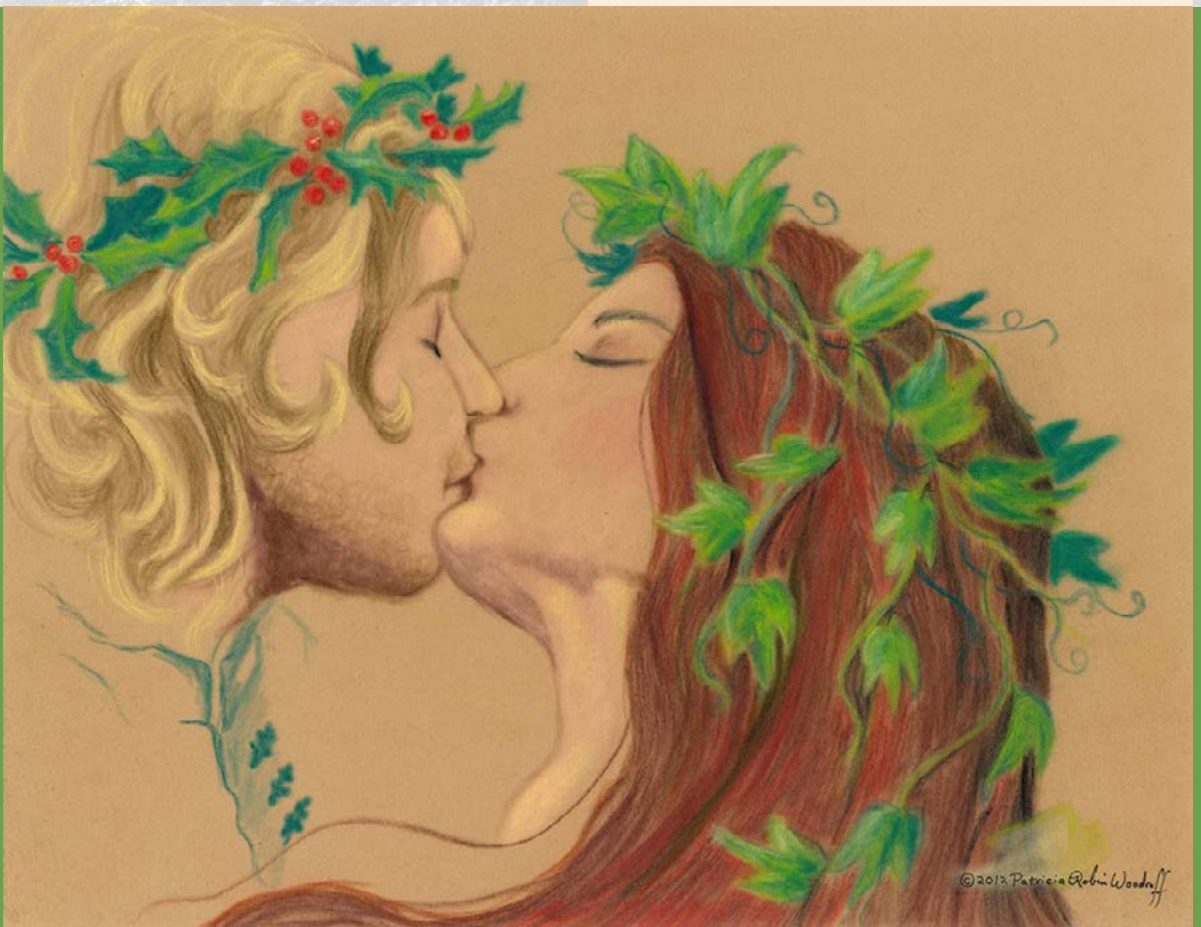
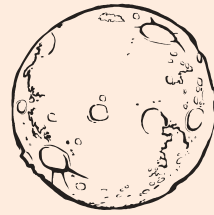


Image: Yule Kiss by Patricia Robin Woodruff

Open Forum

Do you Feel the Dragon's Gaze by Birgit Paehler



A few years ago, we were wondering, what could we do, to help nature. One question was, what skills do we have that we could use so that anyone who wanted to help could get involved? That led us to the question: What can the Bard offer? The answer was simple: Creativity!

The idea of a book, an anthology, was born. Anyone who wanted was invited to participate. The first book was about trees and was filled with stories, poems and pictures of trees. The proceeds were used to sponsor a primeval beech forest in Germany. It was such a great experience, that we wanted to continue, so a year later we put out a call for submissions for our second book, this time about the element of water. It turned out to be an amazing book, and with the proceeds we supported a seal rescue center on the North Sea and renaturation projects on the Baltic Sea. And of course, air and fire had to follow. The book about the element of air supports a bird sanctuary.

Finding a suitable project for the book about the element of fire was difficult, but found something: we support a nature conservation fund that aims to preserve the Vulkan-Eifel (a volcanic region in Germany)

After a year's break, another idea came along and we asked the community what they 'knew' about dragons. The result was a truly wonderful collection. The proceeds of this book – probably

our last in this series – will go to a bat sponsorship. The dragon edition includes a story by Eimear Burke, our Chosen Chief, in English. What a wonderful conclusion to this wonderful journey of ours

As the books are in German, we understand, that these books are mainly sold to a German-speaking audience, but we wanted to share our journey and our idea with you. As long as we continue to sell the five books, we will donate the proceeds to the different projects. Editions of all our books can be found here: <https://custos-verlag.de/html/anthologie-reihe.html>



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 YouTube clip so the spirits are represented. Find it here: <https://m.youtube.com/shorts/nuXkCXjrkd4>

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.



Andrew's Bit At The Back

While I love Christmas, I'm not a particularly big fan of when we have come to celebrate it. That may sound a bit strange, but stick with me! It seems that Christmas in the Twenty First century starts on November 1st, with the whole of the month becoming some kind of strange commercial advent haunted by the acrobatic larynx of Mariah Carey. These days, Christmas lasts until December 25th, perhaps December 26th if you are lucky enough to live somewhere that celebrates Boxing Day, and then we are onto New Year, with its sales and focus on dieting and getting fit. I know people who take their decorations down on 26th, so they can start the New Year without the clutter of the festive season. For me, those people are missing the biggest gift of Christmas.

I believe that the days in between Christmas and New Year, otherwise known as Twixmas, are some of the most magical days of year. They are days which many people forget exist; after all the planning and preparation for Christmas itself, these days are left dangling in our social calendars and no one quite knows what to do with them. We all complain that there is nothing on TV and frequently ask each other "what day is it today?" or "when do they collect the bins?" There is a real sense of disorientation, that, somehow, we have stepped out of usual time and are living in liminality and uncertainty. I think this is why so many people dislike them.

And yet it is that very sense of disorientation, of liminality and uncertainty that I have grown to adore. For me, those days ARE Christmas, because I believe we have got our calendar completely the wrong way around. Christmas doesn't start in November and it certainly doesn't finish on 26th December – it's only just getting started! Just listen to the words of that well known song, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, which celebrates the period from Christmas Day onwards. That partridge in its pear tree turns up on 25th (or, at least, the first one does, depending on how you read the song). Why would you take down your decorations when someone is hammering on your front door with two turtle doves?!

We only have to look back a few hundred years to see how our near ancestors used to celebrate the

twelve days of Christmas to find that the sense of liminality and uncertainty which so many of us dislike was the very heart of the season. Basically, Christmas used to be all about disorientation.

In Medieval and Tudor Britain, wealthier citizens would appoint a Lord of Misrule to arrange the entertainments during the Twelve Days of Christmas. Many of the entertainments held during this time would be rowdy and riotous and involve the subverting of the social order. There was a similar tradition in the church where a boy bishop was appointed. Usually a lowly chorister, the boy took on the ceremonial role of a bishop for a day, even leading some sermons and ceremonies. These traditions show our ancestors embracing the disorientation we find at this time of year, not shunning it and trying to move on.

And, personally, I think that's what we need to do. We should not try to pack away these spare few days at the end of the year with our Christmas decorations. I think we should embrace them, stop asking what day it is and when we should put the bins out. Put on a warm coat and some appropriate footwear, step outside and tune in to a world turned upside down.

Now, I know that life goes on. Many of you will be back at work immediately after Christmas Day – I've been in jobs where I've been back in on 26th and haven't had another day off until January. But even then you can sense that disorientation. Those few days still feel different and strange and you can still embrace the spirit of misrule which governs them.

Speaking of which, you may find it interesting to know that I took over the editorship of *Touchstone* in the days after Christmas 2023. I spent that Twixmas getting acquainted with the *Touchstone* inbox and InDesign, the programme we use to put the magazine together, shouting at the screen and wondering if there would be an edition ready for February 2024! I know just how those Boy Bishops must have felt, standing there in shoes that were too big and hoping that they didn't muck anything up. They were disorientating and uncertain times for me, which I now look back on with a sense of magic and wonder.

And so, in the spirit of the season, of disorientation and misrule, I wish you a Merry Twixmas!

Until
next time, Andrew!!!





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.

*Peace of the quiet stars to you
deep peace of the holly tree*

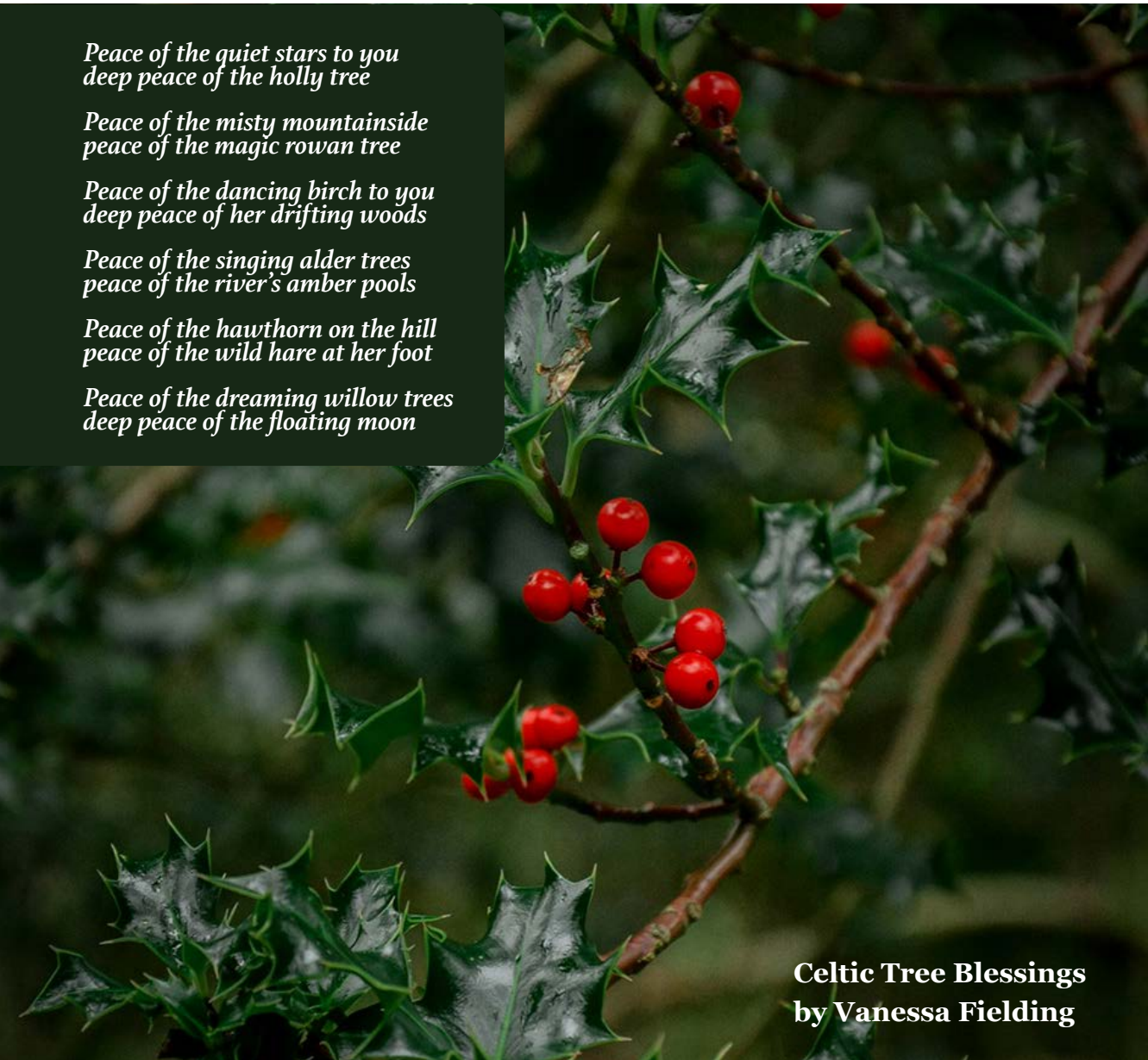
*Peace of the misty mountainside
peace of the magic rowan tree*

*Peace of the dancing birch to you
deep peace of her drifting woods*

*Peace of the singing alder trees
peace of the river's amber pools*

*Peace of the hawthorn on the hill
peace of the wild hare at her foot*

*Peace of the dreaming willow trees
deep peace of the floating moon*



**Celtic Tree Blessings
by Vanessa Fielding**