

TOUCHSTONE

The journal of The Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids
January 2024

Issue 317



Tree of Life: Günter Nal

EDITORIAL

Greetings this frosty January, to an out-of-the ordinary edition. The contacts box, *p14*, shows (in tiny print) my big news: the Ed's email will now get you through to Andrew, as I've passed on the editorship. Phew! I've said it! In the past, I've resisted the urge to hog these pages, but this edition I'm taking a last opportunity to spread myself, with an article, *p8* and other odds and ends as I bow out, with copious thanks and not a few 'sorries'. My last edition has as always been a joy to produce: easier than most as it filled quickly with the Annual Review, old Ed, new Ed... and more difficult, as I took a trip down the long lane of memory... what a journey!

So, Cc's piece p4 takes us through a Druidic 2023: be inspired by the wealth of energy in the Order and wonder; what will you do this year?? We have a loving memory of a Druid colleague, *p8* and past, irreverent bardic contributions on *p10*: and editor-elect Andrew introduces himself with a cracking article, *p11*.

So, I'm signing off for the last time as editor. I wish all members creativity - and urge you to *keep sending* your contributions... the email address is the same, and Andrew, with official blue pencil, is awaiting your call!

With love & blessings,



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TREAD CAREFULLY (to remind myself)

Tread carefully

Queen of Pentacles,
Barefoot on the Earth
And bent in reverence,
Cut, drop and compost.
Cry into the soil as you plant,
Giving these gifts often
And with a generous heart
Leaving weeds to grow.

Speak carefully

Queen of Swords,
Sensing Winds of change.
Walk wild, head held high,
Collecting feathers for quills.
Cry into your own breath,
Ingest kindness, let fear go,
And with good grace,
Leave flight to birds.

Work carefully

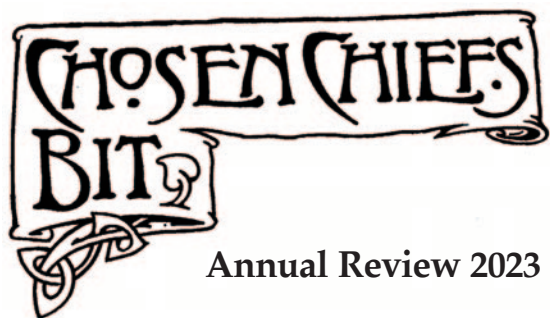
Queen of Wands,
Out of the midday Sun,
But lighting candles in the dark.
Stay up all night, reading,
Crying into dying embers
And forging passions
With fierce hope,
Leaving some.

Intuit carefully

Queen of Cups,
Watching the Waters rise.
Wash with morning dew,
And open armed dance in the rain.
Cry into puddles as you pass,
Collect water, fill bowls
And offering with gratitude
Leave only love behind.

Tread carefully....Leave only love behind.

Alison Kirkham



Annual Review 2023

For Peace

As the fever of day calms towards twilight,
May all that is strained in us come to ease.

We pray for all who suffered violence
today,

May an unexpected serenity surprise them.

For those who risk their lives each day for
peace,

May their hearts glimpse providence at the
heart of history.

That those who make riches from violence
and war,

Might hear in their dreams the cries of the
lost.

That we might see through our fear of each
other,

A new vision to heal our fatal attraction to
aggression.

That those who enjoy the privilege of peace,
Might not forget their tormented brothers
and sisters.

That the wolf might lie down with the
lamb,

That our swords be beaten into
ploughshares.

And no hurt or harm be done,
Anywhere along the holy mountain.

John O'Donohue

As I'm writing this it's Samhain and I'm looking out my window at a lake, as the river Nore, which has burst its banks, is no longer visible. While other parts of the world have been dealing with the destruction caused by wildfires and earthquakes, we in

Ireland are dealing with the destruction caused by excessive rain and flooding. I wrote my first annual review in 2020, with the uncertainty that came with the COVID pandemic. And each year since, this uncertainty has grown, with the challenges brought by climate change, war and conflict. With the recent conflict and humanitarian crisis in Gaza, it is difficult not to fall into a pit of hopelessness and despair. The challenge for us as Druids is to remain grounded and centred in these unstable times, to tap into that peace within the still centre of our beings so that we may radiate it outwards.

Meanwhile, the Order remains very active, with lots of new developments and innovations. Our Winter Gathering was held online with our theme: Diversity within the Order. We had some fascinating presentations from members outside of Ireland, Britain and Europe on how they practice and express their Druidry within their own landscapes: From Aotearoa, Moira, Joanna, who sadly passed in the autumn, Richard, & Nicola spoke about their Druidry in New Zealand. From the USA, Billy Stewart, a Bard, gave a wonderful presentation on the history of American music and the banjo and how he has made playing the banjo his spiritual practice. Malea Powell who comes from a very diverse ancestral background, including American Indian and European heritages and lives in Taos New Mexico, spoke about her relationship with her landscape. From Ohio, Srini Anand, who originally comes from India and has a Hindu background, and Loam Anand gave a really interesting talk entitled: Hindruidry: A Marriage of Awen and Ohm. We also had a Zoom meet-up which was a great success.

We held our Druid Gorsedd in February, in the New Forest. The

demand for places at the Gorsedd was so high it was decided to hold two Druid Gorsedd in 2024 in order to accommodate members. The European Druid Gorsedd took place in Germany in March and there will be another one in 2024.

Our first Bardic Gorsedd was held in Noddfa, a beautiful centre, run by Roman Catholic nuns, in Penmaenmawr in Wales in July, with Kristoffer Hughes as guest speaker. We had participants from North America, Europe, UK and Ireland. A big thanks to Lorraine Munn and Tom Moxon for holding the space so well. Together we created the Song of the Bard inspired by the Song of Amergin. After the Gorsedd I spent a few days with Kristoffer who showed me many magical places on Ynys Môn (Anglesey).

We held our last Summer Gathering in Glastonbury this year, as we have outgrown the capacity of the Townhall. Fortunately, we have found another venue in the Strode Theatre in Street which is only five minutes by car from Glastonbury. We had a 'Scéalaíocht' (storytelling) session in the Town Hall on the Sunday, where we showcased 4 different storytelling styles by Heidi McNie, Lorraine Munn, Dan Goodfellow and myself. This was followed by a workshop in break-out groups on storytelling. A fringe event was held by Pamela Meekings-Stewart and Philip: *Living Treefully: A workshop for Treefully Managing Change in your Life*.

For the past year, the Community Cloak has been travelling to Australia, UK, Ireland, and Europe to various members who have expressed their prayers and wishes through the most beautiful and creative embroidery, appliqué, and beadwork. It

arrived back in Glastonbury in time for the Summer Gathering, where Fleur Camille and Marcella Dillon-Walshe gave a very interesting presentation on the origins and process of the project. There was an opportunity for members at the Gathering to add their own prayer and creative stitching to the cloak. The Cloak continues to weave its story as it travels around the world to various members to add their creations. There is a Fb group: The OBOD Cloak Project where you can find updates.

As we headed up towards the Tor for our ceremony it was wonderful to see a newly-planted circle of 27 crab apple trees (*Malus Sylvestris*) which had been planted in January 2022 in the Fairfield at the foot of the Tor by the National Trust. This was thanks to the funds the Order raised at our 2022 Summer Gathering.

Philip, Stephanie, Adrian, JJ, Pamela and I attended the Dryade camp in the Netherlands in June where we celebrated 25 years of Dryade Magazine and its 100th edition. Many thanks to Peter van den Berg who is stepping down from his role as editor. His last edition 102 is Winter 2023. We enjoyed wonderful weather during the camp, which was held on the seabed, that is, on land that was reclaimed from the sea about seventy years ago. We stayed in a beautiful campsite in Vierhouten which means 'four woods' and has its own wolf, wild boar and deer populations. Unfortunately, we did not get to see any of these animals other than the soil dug up by the boar along the roadside.

Philip and Stephanie attended the OBOD Samhain Gathering in France, where one hundred members and friends met over five days in a wonderful location in Burgundy – holding a powerful 2.5 hours Samhain cere-

mony – perhaps the longest in the Order's history!

Our online ceremonies continue as we follow the Wheel of the Year, and I'd like to thank the following groves, and seed groups who have held the ceremonies so beautifully: Alban Arthan: The Well of Inspiration Grove; Imbolc: The Shining Mountains Grove of Montana; Alban Eilir: The Red Willow Grove; Bealtaine: Bärenwald Druiden Seed Group; Alban Hefin: The Well of Inspiration Grove; Lughnasadh: The Aether Grove; Alban Elfed: Nos Coryn and the Grove of the Aether; Samhain: Setantii Grove. A special thanks to Stephen Barnes for his wonderfully illustrated invitations and thanks.

Like the changing seasons, this year has seen several changes within the Order. Fi Ware is now Mentor Co-ordinator while Steve Hounscome is on sick leave. Very many thanks to Gayle Gray who has now retired from her many years of service as deputy Mentor Co-ordinator. After more than twenty years of dedicated service, Penny has retired as editor of Touchstone. Much gratitude to Penny for her enthusiasm, commitment and skills. The mantle has been handed over to Andrew Anderson. Damh has retired from organising the Gatherings and a great big thanks to him for his hard work to make them the enjoyable and wonderful events that they are. Thanks to Lorraine Munn, Tom Moxon and Marcella Dillon-Walsh who have agreed to take on the role of organising the Gatherings.

Philip continues to hold his Tea with a Druid on Monday nights at 8pm UK. The Fireside Chats with Eimear continue on Thursday nights at 8pm UK. If you cannot watch them live, the recordings are available

on the Order's OBOD YouTube channel. Druidcast is now on episode 199. I listened to all of the episodes over the summer. I found them so informative but also calming and healing. You can find them wherever you listen to your podcasts. David Bramwell has produced the second series of his podcast, Adventures in Nutopia which is sponsored by the Order. Here David covers a range of fascinating topics from how modern entertainment has its roots in ancient shamanic journeys of the soul, dreams for healing and divination, to the healing power of sound. Adventures in Nutopia has been nominated as one of the top five UK podcasts by the Guardian newspaper.

MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES:

Our online events continue to grow and develop, highlighting the value and importance our online community has for our members – hence our creation of the amazing new gathering place we have created, called The Druid Hearth which we hope to launch in the Spring. A huge amount of work over the last year and more has finally come to fruition with the creation of The Druid Hearth which going forward will be the communication hub for the Order. This is where members will be able to access their online courses, communicate with their mentors, access the Message Board and the Order magazines in different languages, and communicate with each other, join various special-interest groups called 'Circles', and much more. Many thanks to all members who have facilitated or initiated online events this past year, and to the team who created The Druid Hearth, which includes Matthew and Chris in the UK and Bogdan in Kyiv, Ukraine.

There have been other online innovations: the German Dutch, French, and

Italian Websites have all been updated. The Ouate (English) course is now available online, and soon the foreign language Bardic courses will be available online too.

On the first Wednesday of the month, we continue to have our Building Resilience for Hard Times listening circle, and these have highlighted the importance of having a space for members to speak and to be heard with attention and respect and how the experience of being listened to can be so healing. Note that the contact email has changed to: oboddeeplisteningcircle@gmail.com

The Online Healing Rituals were held in February and November by the Order's Healer's Group on Facebook. There will be more in the group's new home in the Healers' Circle in The Hearth in 2024.

We had our first online Death Café hosted by John King in November. As John says, "At a Death Café people, often strangers, gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss death. Our objective is to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives, A Death Café is a group-directed discussion of death, loss, and grief with no agenda, objectives or themes. It is a discussion group rather than a grief support or counselling session. The OBOD Death Café is offered in an accessible, respectful and confidential space, with no intention of leading people to any conclusion, product or course of action." These are held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 7pm UK time. You can also bring some tea and cake. To attend, contact John at oboddeathcafe@gmail.com

We have set up an online Mental Health Interest group. We had an initial meeting on Zoom which was attended by

members who are psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, counsellors, social workers, healers, and many more, who have a wish to be able to combine their Druidry with their work as Mental health professionals. Over 600 members have signed up. Going forward we hope to have monthly online meetings with various speakers, and discussion groups.

In the USA there were three camps held this year: Gulf Coast Gathering in Louisiana in March where Pat Booker was an invited speaker; MAGUS in Virginia in May; and DOOR in Pennsylvania in June/July.

The first physical Southern Hemisphere OBOD assembly since 2019 was held in Newcastle, NSW in November.

Éigse Spiorad Cheilteach, organised by Paul Corcoran, Anna Coote, and myself, was held in August in Ireland. We had some fascinating presentations: 'Tar anseo chugam / C'mere to me': on the use of the Irish language in Pagan practice by Deirdre Wadding; 'Lašūl a labērt – Exchange of Flowers': exploration of and making of Irish Mincéirí charms that captivate, create and cultivate' by Oein de Bhairdúin; 'The Divine Image of the Gaels' – Síle-na-Gigs by Jack Roberts.

Following a request for a talk on Druidry, Stefan Kaiser gave a presentation at a Student Interfaith Conference in Freiburg, Germany. He also held Peace Ritual - It is great to see such interest in Druidry.

Members from Australia and New Zealand have produced a section about Druidry and the seasonal festivals from a Southern Hemisphere perspective.

These will be accessible on The Druid Hearth once it has been launched.

The OBOD Inner Journeying and Ritual weekends with Penny Billington and Matt McCabe will be held again in 2024.

This year's Mt. Haemus Award went to Dr Paul M White: *Discovering Meaning in Ireland: Megalithic Spiritual Experience*. You can read it here: <https://druidry.org/resources/25th-mount-haemus-lecture-discovering-meaning-in-ireland-megalith-spiritual-experiences>

Each year members and friends contribute wonderful books on Druidry and related topics and this year is no exception. I hope I have not left anyone out. If I have, please let me know.

Gale Park: *Sacred circles: Wheels of Power and Connection*

Stefano Alessi: *La Ruota a dell'Anno*

Kristoffer Hughes: *The Book of Druidry: Yuletide Tarot*

Ben Stimpson: *Ancestral Whispers: A Guide to Building Ancestral Veneration Practices*.

Mara Ede-Weaving: *The Essential Book of Druidry*

Thea Prothero: *Pilgrimage*

Brenda Jean Rae: *"The Trees speak" Ogham/Oracle of New Zealand Native Trees*

Many authors: *Of Magic Fire and Fire Magic* (proceeds to environmental protection projects) only available in German

Oein de Bhairdúin: *Twiggy Woman: Weave: The Slug and the Snail*

Melanie Godfrey: *The Magic of the Seal: Ocean Messengers*

Evelyn Bonnard Myrdhin: *De la Source a l'Océan*

Ahriana Platten: *Rites and Rituals: Harnessing the Power of Sacred Ceremony*.

Stephen Blamires: *Celtic Tree Mysteries*

For the coming year, I leave you with the following quotation:

"Hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act.

When you recognize uncertainty, you recognize that you may be able to influence the outcomes—you alone or you in concert with a few dozen or several million others.

Hope is an embrace of the unknown and knowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists. Optimists think it will all be fine without our involvement; pessimists take the opposite position; both excuse themselves from acting.

It's the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know beforehand. We may not, in fact, know them afterwards either, but they matter all the same, and history is full of people whose influence was most powerful after they were gone."

Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark

Beannachtaí agus Síocháin
(Blessings and Peace)

Eimear

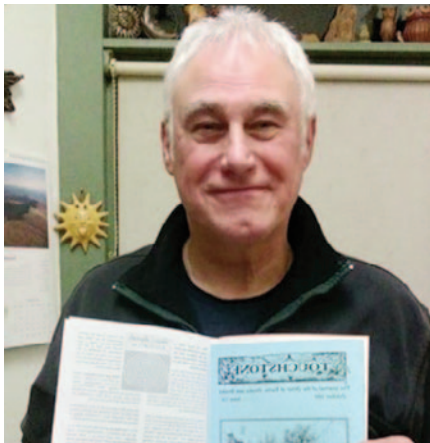


In Loving Memory

Ray Stirton (CorrieRaven)

Ray was one of my closest friends, we became friends after he started Ovate and I had acted as his Bardic tutor for 8 years. He had a gentle sense of humour delivered in a soft Scots accent and used to gently chide me when we had singing at gatherings as I cannot sing. He also had a good sense of hearing as I never sing loudly being aware of my abilities! We used to have our photo taken every year at Stonehenge and he was a regular contributor to Touchstone. You can see him in a fireside chat with Eimear. We started chemotherapy for cancer together at the start of this year but my lovely friend didn't make it, departing for the Summerlands at the end of October. One of his fondest wishes was to walk up the stairs to the Druid grove with me at a gathering but I said at the rate he was progressing he would have to carry me up the stairs. He finally made it to Druid grove 2 years ago and unfortunately there wasn't a separate Druid grove at that gathering. Anyway travel on my friend and I hope the Summerlands gives you much joy and laughter, you will be sorely missed.

Brendan Howlin



Moving on from Touchstone Penny Billington

It's been a magical sort of a year, for certain.

There have been fortuitous meetings, synchronicities, the joys of family and friends and treats galore. Then came the Autumnal Equinox, traditionally a chancy time.

To Edwardian occultists, equinoxes are potent and dangerous: the world is in flux as the cosmic gears shift from dark to light. Big things happen; changes are afoot; puny magicians in that era would hold off from inner work until, after a nifty bit of double declutching, nature settled into her new phase. Nowadays we're more likely to think in terms of swirling tides. They carry us all along, and we best attune by allowing ourselves to float on the tide, trusting that we will be brought safe to shore. Sometimes the tide is gentle; sometimes it's like riding the circumference of the whirling Corryvreckan.



Sometimes ideas, contacts or worries have been washed away with the season's turn; sometimes whispers from the great ocean reveal new possibilities...

So it was that, after 23 years of editing Touchstone, to the very month, I experienced a strong, powerful 'knowing' - a thought arising from a mysterious place. These experiences are accompanied by an overwhelming rightness and are often as surprising to ourselves as to anyone else. Mine was a certainty as I said, out loud, at two in the morning, 'Oh, that's it, then. I'm

giving up Touchstone.'

In the past, idly playing the game of consequences with this idea; 'If... What if? When...? Then what ...? Who...?' Had been an exercise. It had always come from that busy front-brain that thinks it's in charge, but wasn't quite clever enough to suggest a likely successor to the job. Talented, reliable, wordsmithing Druids are all too dam' busy! But the realignment of the new phase as we entered the dark half of 2023 didn't let me down.

Deep knowing was accompanied by deep timing. Within a week of sharing my decision, our new editor surfed in on the cosmic tide, perfectly equipped to take an in-house Druid magazine into the future. It was a synchronicity that validated my decision.

So, welcome, Andrew Anderson, Druid, contributor, published author & mentor, who will grace the editorial chair. I'm handing the metaphorical staff of office - blow! too late to make one now; I wish I'd thought of it - and email address. Welcome, good luck and may the job bring you joy and inspiration. I know you'll appreciate the privilege of receiving our members' bardic contributions as I always have. And a huge thank you to Philip, Stephanie, Damh, all at the office and the mentors who encourage shy bards to contribute: Touchstone is collaborative, and OBOD is a fractal organism, with the support I've always relied on replicating out worldwide to all of us. So, with every curlicue a font can manage, **THANKYOU!**

I'm confident that, whilst Touchstone will grow and change, it will stay true to its remit to connect us to each other and the OBODic ethos. I look forward to reading all the news, events and initiatives from CC, the office and

our active members. As it was from the first newsletter, autumn '92, it will remain a vehicle for a million individual threads of Druidic research and practice, generous gifts from you all, and bond us through the creativity that every Bard explores and share.

My urges now are to the moonlit birch grove, to spy on Dafydd ap Gwilym trysting with his Morfudd; to the shores of Wales, to recite an elegy at Bedd Branwen; to the Chapel in the Green and the mysterious hermit who dispenses wisdom to all Grail-Seekers. I may sail on Arthur's ship Prydwen to view the stars from Somerset's own 'Sea of Wonder' – but on a return ticket, so I can reconnect with the Order at our gatherings!



Hmm: how will that manifest in the everyday world, I wonder? Possibly as a big research trip during which I'll mooch coffee off many lovely Druid friends all around the British Isles. Magical and mundane, inextricably interwoven: that's my living Druidry.

Who can ever know what will happen in the uncertainty and wonder of life? But there will be other adventures, full of joy and delight, so please wish me well. And perhaps – in fact I can pretty well predict this - I'll be writing an article for Touchstone about them sometime soon!

*From the Fellowship of the creative magic
of the Order,*

Penny

A page of fun from the archive

Living lightly should apply also to our attitudes, lest we get mired in our own worthiness. Just because Druidry's important doesn't mean it always has to be serious. So here is an irreverent selection from past poetic/druidic challenges: all contributions were excellent, so these are chosen at random: enjoy!

THE LIMERICK

An ancient Welsh ruler called Math
Said, 'Not standing on earth is a laugh!
I've no need for shoes,
And unlike that lad Llew
I don't need to be scared of a bath!'

Lady Branwen was sent 'cross the water
So Matholwch could wed a royal daughter
But when stuck in the kitchen
With the roasted meat spittin'
The incident ended in slaughter. *Elen Pope*

THE CLERIHUE

A humorous pseudo-biographical quatrain rhymed as two couplets with lines of uneven length.

The lady of the lake
Submerged the blade Excalibur myth says for
Arthur's sake
And now in modern folly
We commit to her old boots old bikes and the
sacred sacred shopping trolley

Queen Maeve said next time I hunger I'll give
Fergus a reprieve
I'll find a man instead
Will cancel any cattle raids and eat big Macs in
bed *Cherry Carroll*

THE CAPTION COMPETITION



One mistletoe seed to another; 'Oo you calling a sucker?'

'Hide from the Druids! once you grow your leaves, you're symbolic & then your life's not your own.'

Only great spirits offered themselves for a caption competition - here's the only one I dare embarrass a second time around!



Film censor OK's the PG (Parental Guidance) version of the Taliesin tale for general release.

Ann Bart

New menace in Snowdonia: Welsh farmers on high alert in the lambing season...

Teacher: 'Impressive, Mr Smith, but the nativity play starts AFTER the angel Gabriel has departed, and is JUST FOR THE CHILDREN.'

Marianne Nunn

The good sport above is of course Arthur Billington (AKA Bluesman ZZ Birmingham) whom I'm delighted to thank, publically & hugely, for his fantastic contribution as in-house illustrator for over 20 years. Steadfast, talented, crotchety and with a fluid, idiosyncratic style, without fail he's delivered the goods - usually last moment: 'Arthur, a two inch square of Damh rolling down a hill'; 'Are you there? can I have an explosion of Awen from a cauldron, now-ish??' and, for the Druid robe edition, 'Does my bum look big in this?' - no request fazed him. Thank you, my ducks; it's meant the world to have you doing it alongside of me. Here are two of my favourites - a Druid in divinatory pose, and Arthur, before the sword slides out, smooth as silk. May your style always be as fluent!



I really could not believe it when I was asked if I would like to take over as the Editor of Touchstone – so writing my first piece of editorial is a very strange experience! Where on earth do I begin?

Not-quite but almost the editorial... Andrew Anderson

sent over the years demanding to know where my latest edition was (and replies explaining it was something I had omitted to do – such as pay!)

Touchstone, for me, is a cornerstone of OBOD.

Well, let us begin at the beginning, shall we, and go back to when I began receiving my gwersi. When those wonderful packets of Bardic inspiration began arriving through my letterbox, the first thing I sought out was the latest edition of Touchstone. Being a life-long lover of Shakespeare, I always thought the title of the magazine was rather appropriate. Touchstone is a character in Shakespeare's woodland comedy *As You Like It*. He is a fool, but a witty one and not afraid to speak his truth. He does not always agree with those around him, so extemporises and debates their ideas with eloquence and good humour (most of the time!). He is one of those characters that the audience cheer when they come on stage. As such, Touchstone always struck me as a wonderfully appropriate name for a magazine which is the heartbeat of the order, held in print.

As a new Bard, just starting with the order, Touchstone deepened and expanded the teachings of the gwersi with ideas and discussion from across the membership. It has retained that special place in my practice throughout my Druid journey. I am sure if you searched the order's servers, you would find emails I had

I remember that my aim as a Bard was to get something printed in Touchstone one day. So, imagine how thrilled I was when, in March 2016, I had my first article published. It was a story I had written in response to an article about the Oak and Holly Kings from the December 2016 edition. Not only was my story there in print but it had a wonderful illustration of the Holly King attacking the sapling Oak King drawn by Arthur Billington – reproduced below because I still love it! It was the first time anyone had ever illustrated anything I had written and it was such a special moment to see my work in the magazine alongside articles from other members. It was that story in Touchstone which ultimately led to me approaching publishers and beginning my career as a writer. In 2022, the story of the Holly King and the Oak Child was turned into a short online film by Moon Books which currently has over six and a half thousand views on YouTube**. All of that happened because I roused the courage one day to send a story to

the order's magazine. I have a lot to thank Touchstone for.

In fact, I think we all have a lot to thank Touchstone for – or more specifically, I think we have a lot to thank Penny for. For over two decades, she has gathered and



curated the Bardic expression of our Order and reflected it back to us. She has given us all an opportunity to contribute to that stream of expression and done so with such generosity. She has made sure that every edition has come out on time and that every contributor got an email which showed real engagement with what they had created. The dictionary definition of a touchstone is that by which something else is judged. With Penny as my touchstone, I have a lot to live up to.

So, what does the future of Touchstone hold?

Well, perhaps the biggest immediate change is that we will be phasing out the physical, paper copies of the magazine over the next year. That means, if you currently have a subscription to have a paper copy of Touchstone delivered, you will no longer be able to renew it. Instead, we would urge you to sign up for the electronic copy of Touchstone, which will be emailed to you at the start of each month. To help ease this transition, subscriptions to the electronic copy of Touchstone will be completely free.

Our decision to make this change has been motivated by sustainability. The numbers of physical Touchstones sent out every month has been decreasing over time as more and more members have chosen to receive the magazine electronically. Moving to 100% electronic subscription helps to remove the carbon footprint which printed copies carry with them. Of course, electronic copies also have a carbon footprint, as does everything in the virtual world, but we are working on a way which will help us to reduce that footprint even further. More news about that will be coming in due course.

If you are worried about the move to an electronic format because, for example, you are

unable to read the magazine on screen, please be reassured that you will be able to download and print off the magazine to read at your leisure.

Beyond that, Touchstone will not be changing too much soon. I am committed to keeping the 'magazine' feel to the piece, with articles which readers can dip into. As such, contributions should be limited to 1,500 words. If you have longer contributions, they may work better as a blog or a contribution to the OBOD library, but please do continue to send them in and I will be happy to help you find a home for your creation.

I also think that now is a wonderful opportunity to connect with the history of Touchstone. Penny has given me access to over 20 years' worth of editions of the magazine. So, new editions of Touchstone will contain a "From the Archives" section, where we can rediscover ideas mulled over by our OBOD 'ancestors' (I use the word lightly as many of those contributors are still very active members of the Order!). As we move forward, I think it is very important that we stay in touch with what has gone before.

For me, the touchstone for developing Touchstone is the word 'continuity.' Some things will be changing but a lot will be staying the same. Our move to a purely electronic format editions will offer up new ways of presenting and exploring the range of bardic expression within the Order and allows us to bring our shared past with us. Of course, the future of Touchstone is very much what you make it; it is the articles and commentaries, the poems and stories which you contribute that form the heart of the magazine. So, get ready to step into the Awen and send me the result!

It is going to be an exciting few months as we transition to Touchstone's next phase. I look forward to us taking this journey together.



**** Find Andrew's excellent Solstice film here:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEewqOmDGYk&t=302s>



A reminder of what we all shared in 23 years of Touchstone

Themed issues - on dragons, bees, fire, trees, the elements, thoughts on robes, the Gatherings and a whole year of green man/lady covers.

Poetry challenges - some scattered throughout this magazine.

Interviews with and articles from the notable Geoffrey Ashe, Arthurian scholar; Will Worthington, artist; Caitlin Matthews, Shamanic teacher, Ronald Hutton, historian/Pagan Cultural Hero (a real title; I was there when he was so elevated) Mara Freeman, Alan Richardson... the list goes on.

Modern Druidic history - In 2011 we were privileged to have a story of Stonehenge between the wars from Joan

Letchlade: *'Father belonged to an Order of Druids led by a man called Dr Watson McGregor Reid. He was a huge man... I never saw him without the long, white flowing robes and headdress...'* This story of cycling from London to Stonehenge and staying in a garden shed is a piece of early 20thC Druid history discovered by historian and researcher Adam Stout, so that Joan saw her story in print before she died.

I'm thrilled that the tech. now allows Andrew to access all these, so we can be treated to selected highlights throughout the coming years. The best of the past will then inform the future, in the most Druidic way.

The villanelle form was a past bardic challenge - here's one from 2020...

BIRDS

We shall no longer hear their empty words,
 statistics, platitudes and lies. Instead
 we trust unto the augury of birds.

We'll watch the sky. Divide it into thirds,
 observing where the swallow flies. Misled
 no longer by their empty words.

Their talk of zero carbon to the herds
 makes apathy and overuse widespread.
 But we will trust the augury of birds.

Seasons change, spring shifts forever forwards.
 Warm air brings floods, destroying river beds.
 No time is left to hear their empty words.

The swifts head south, much later than for years,
 while geese, in honking V's, plough overhead.
 This does not augur well for us, or birds.

The politicians shall fall upon their swords.
 They've wasted time. Now we must look ahead.
 We shall no longer hear their empty words.
 But trust instead the augury of birds.

Sue Wilson

This is my favourite form for dramatic tension. Play with the dastardly rhyme/line scheme - ABA ABA ABA ABA ABAA & send your villanelles into Andrew - I wonder what his favourite form is??



(C) Nigel Dailey 2010

The Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids
Calling the Awen
Glastonbury Tor June 2010

The meaning of the thousands of standing stones set in rows near Carnac in Brittany, France, may forever remain a mystery. On a recent visit I was struck by this fanciful possibility: might they be a depiction commemorating the original peoples migration from the Middle East? How happy they would have been to find their long search over and in such a beautiful place! It inspired this poem:

CARNAC STORY

Spirit stones align
Dancing their tale of passage
The haven dream met.

Jessica McGee



TOUCHSTONE is published by OBOD.

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MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES please contact the office address above.

TOUCHSTONE SUBMISSIONS to the editor, Andrew Anderson, at touchstone@druidry.org Opinions/statements by contributors are not necessarily those of the editor, Order or publishers.

Submissions from members are welcomed, but it is not always possible to use everything offered for publication. Contributions may be edited without consultation unless a request is made to the contrary. Deadline is the first week of the preceding month: for events, 10th of the month before publication. Submissions may be printed on the OBOD website unless requested otherwise.

OBOD MESSAGE BOARD: register at www.druidry.org/board/dhp

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Mentors@druidry.org is for members only.

LISTINGS OF GROVES, SEEDGROUPS :www.druidry.org/community/groves-groups

FIND BOOKS, gifts and jewellery online at OBOD's marketplace: store.druidry.org

OBOD WHEEL OF THE YEAR ONLINE RITUALS

On fb and youtube. Hosted by CC Eimear Burke Check druidry.org / facebook
Samhain: November 4th * Alban Arthan: December 16th *

REGULAR OBOD MEETINGS

Fireside chat with Eimear. Every Thursday, 8pm. Google You Tube + Fireside chat
Tea with a Druid: With Philip Carr Gomm/guests every Monday 8pm
Monthly OBOD Peace meditation: with your Grove or by yourself every full moon: 7pm
Building Resilience in Difficult Times A monthly OBOD Listening Circle. Online zoom gathering, 1st Wednesday of the month 7pm UTC. Contact oboddeeplisteningcircle@gmail.com for link.

WHITE HORSE CAMPS 2024

Imbolc Camp: Thurs 1/2 - Tues 6/2: Beltain Camp: Wed 1/5-Mon 6/5 both at Wildways, Shropshire:
Lughnasadh Cam : Mon 29/7 - Sat 3/8 at Ide Farm, Devon: Samhain Camp: Thurs 31/10 - Tues 5/11
at Wildways, Shropshire FFI please contact communications@whitehorsecamps.org.uk

Members' regular group meetings:

ARTIO SEEDGROUP, Zurich area, Switzerland. Open rituals for Beltane and Samhain, occasional meetings on other festivals. - New members welcome. Contact: britta.holden@sunrise.ch, +41 76 326 6963 or lily@wildwood.ch.
ARTURIAN GROVE Seasonal rituals near Otley. optimistichannah@outlook.com
ASH GROVE, GLASTONBURY meeting OBOD visitors for druidic chat. FFI jacki.woolmington@btinternet.com
BIG SKY GROVE, NORFOLK OBOD/BDO 8 festivals, walks, discussion/social. FFI: rebnikc@btinternet.com
BADGER & TOAD S.G., Folkstone area. Seasonal/meet ups FFI: Sian and Hazel obodbadgerandtoad@yahoo.com
CIRCLE OF COLL Seattle Seedgroup public rituals, workshops, tree walks monthly. circleofcoll@circleofcoll.org
CORNOVII GROVE. Seasonal rituals, Worcs. www.cornovii.org Email keith.southall@creativelandscapes.co.uk
DÓITEAN AGUS UISCE (Flame & Well Druid Grove). Seasonal rituals, moots and other gatherings. Colorado Front Range, USA. FFI: flameandwellgrove@gmail.com, <https://flameandwellgrove.org>
DRACAENA GROVE: Saltburn/Cleveland: N Yorks Celebrations/informal meetings. dracaenagrove@hotmail.com
DRUID PILGRIM GROVE: Pilgrimages, gatherings and rituals. Encouragement for pilgrims. Australia and NZ. Contact: danuta@adruid.com; FB: Druid Pilgrim group.
FELLOWSHIP OF THE FOUR DIRECTIONS, BRISTOL. Monthly local park meeting/ceremony FFI: fellowshipotfd@hotmail.com
BOREALIS CIRCLE SEED GROUP 3rd Saturday of the Month: Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada. Public rituals in local parks. FFI: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/lakeagassizdruids/> email: borealiscircle@gmail.com
LIGHT OF AWEN SEED GROUP in Bristol. Celebrating the wheel of the year, and healing. Email. Lightofawen8@gmail.com
MACADAMIA GROVE Seasonal/events, Brisbane Australia. Sandra.macademiagroove@hotmail.com
THE MELBOURNE GROVE Seasonal, Melbourne, Aus: Trudy Richards moondancer@outlook.com.au
PENDLE GROVE.Clitheroe/around Lancs. Sionnach on 0161 3432705 or email drvnon@hotmail.co.uk
SHINING MOUNTAINS GROVE W. Montana, USA, 8 rituals, hikes, zoom. FFI: Heather: roanrobbins@aol.com
SETANTII GROVE Seasonal Rituals in Manchester / S. Lancs. Always outdoors. groveofsetantii@yahoo.com.
THE SILVER BEAR GROVE SEED GROUP new driud group, Middlesbrough. OBOD members welcome.To take part in developing this new grouContact Paul:Txt: 07923575364 or Email: silverbeargrove@hotmail.com
SLIABH ANAM GROVE Rituals and monthly moots Durango, Colorado, USA. FFI: contact sliabhanam@gmail.com.
TAMESIS (LONDON SG) festivals/moots/workshops Contact Ferdiad tamesisgrove@gmail.com
www.tamesisgrove.com

EVENTS

OBOD members and friends are welcome to submit events they have organised for inclusion here. This section may also be posted on our website at www.druidry.org Please tell us if you don't want your event posted on the www.

9 & 10 March OBOD Inner Journeying and Ritual level 3 'Singer, Seer and Sage' in Glastonbury. With Penny Billington and Matt McCabe. For level 1&2 achievers - email mattmccabe.1@outlook.com for an invitation

15 - 16 June Inner Journeying and ritual level 1 with Penny Billington & Gary Llewellyn Glastonbury, non-residential. Email druidevents@yahoo.com for a flyer

28 June-2 July Bioróg Retreat - Discovering Mythic Landscape in Donegal, Ireland. Venue: Song House, Falcarragh. <https://thesonghouseireland.com/> Facilitators: Eimear Burke and Seán O'Gaoithin. FFI/bookings email seanogaoithin7@gmail.com

15 - 18 August Druid Camp in South-West Germany, in Waldhambach. The website is www.druidencamp.de

WHITE HORSE CAMPS 2024

Imbolc Camp: Thurs 1/2 - Tues 6/2: Beltain Camp: Wed 1/5-Mon 6/5 both at Wildways, Shropshire: Lughnasadh Cam : Mon 29/7 - Sat 3/8 at Ide Farm, Devon: Samhain Camp: Thurs 31/10 - Tues 5/11 at Wildways, Shropshire FFIcommunications@whitehorsecamps.org.uk

NEWS OF 2025

2025 OBOD Gathering in the American West. Have you a great location idea in the US NW?

Would you like to help? Do you have great advice? *"We work to spark an OBOD Druidic gathering in the Americas Western Mountains in 2025, seeking a centrally location, financially and physically accessible, embedded in nature, for our Druid retreat."* From Montana's Shining Mountains Grove with teammates from Nevada and Utah, we look forward to seeing you in 2025. **Heather** RR Hroanrobbins@gmail.com

LAST PHOTO...

Ed & illustrator Penny & Arthur as Pooh Bear & Christopher Robin - *'And somewhere, on a campsite in the 100 acre wood, an editor and her illustrator are always finishing ceremony and wandering off into the mythic land where the tea is always hot and the spirits play....'*

Dear Andrew, Have fun (I know I did) & be inspired (I still am...) Love & Blessings, Pen/\x

