

TOUCHSTONE

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

March 2024 | Issue 319

This Issue

- 🌿 News of the Bardic Gorsedd 2024
 - 🌿 A reflection on the Peace is Every Step walking meditation from Trafalgar Square by Ricky Gellissen
 - 🌿 A Ceremony to honour Farmed Animals by Jack Wolf
- And lots more!



COVER: "Day and Night" by Sue Wookey

Editorial

Welcome to March's Touchstone!

As we look forward to Alban Eilir, you'll find a blossoming of creativity and activity in the pages of this edition. Sue Wookey's wonderful picture "Day and Night", which adorns the cover, sums up this season perfectly. The hare dances in sun-bathed fields as the deep badgery darkness of old winter begins to recede. Thank you so much to Sue for letting me use this wonderful piece of art.

In terms of content this month, the Bard's Page has a distinctly watery feeling, which isn't surprising considering how wet this winter has been. There is a deluge of Bardic inspiration in the first few pages, including news of the 2024 Bardic Gorsedd and more thoughts on daily practice.

Ricky Gellissen reflects on his involvement in the Every Step is Peace walk which led to him saying the gorsedd prayer and the prayer for peace in Trafalgar Square at the end of January. There's also a wonderful ceremony you can perform to honour farmed animals and an ingenious way of dealing with difficult ancestors which has rather appropriately been brought out of the archive.

That's more than enough to put a spring in our step!

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An Spring Equinox Haiku by Janet Elvidge

Fertile Moon Goddess,
Hares leaping about in fields.
Nature's sap rising.



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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 must focus on Druidry or contributor's experience of Druidry and may be edited without consultation unless a request is made to the contrary. Poetry no more than 40 lines. Deadline for events inclusion is 5th of the month before publication. Submissions may be printed on the OBOD website unless requested otherwise.

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Chosen Chief's Bit

Bandia daoibh a chairde, greetings everyone!
Beannachtaí an Earraigh daoibh uilig! Spring
blessings to you all!

"When one flower blooms, spring awakens
everywhere" - John O'Donohue

Though as I am writing this it doesn't feel very
much like spring but I hope by the time you are
reading this spring will have made her presence
felt. In Ireland, we are obsessed by the weather.
It's a topic that connects people – two strangers
can meet and they can easily talk about it. As
Druids, we are also aware of the seasons. It helps
us deepen our connection with our landscape. I
thought I might share some more Irish weather
divination with you. I found this on
www.duchas.ie which is an amazing website. In
the 1930's the Irish Folklore Commission created
a National Folklore Collection whose aim was
to collect, preserve and disseminate the oral
tradition of Ireland. This included the Schools'
collection where children from 5000 primary
schools in the Free State were invited to go to their
elders and collect folklore and local traditions.
These were written down in copybooks. On
the duchas.ie website you can see the original
manuscripts and the transcriptions. It is well
worth exploring. When I typed in Spring Equinox
the following piece on Weather Divination
popped up:

"When there has been no storm before or after
the spring equinox the ensuing summer is
generally dry at least five times out of six.

When a storm happens from an easterly point,
either on March 19, 20 or 21 the succeeding
summer is generally dry four times out of five.
When a storm rises on March 25 26 or 27 and not
before, in any point, the succeeding summer is
generally dry four times in five.

If there is a storm at S.W. or W, S, W on March 12,
20, or 22 the succeeding summer is generally wet
five times in six."

I am fascinated by how precise these predictions
are. I wonder how climate change has affected
such weather patterns. I'd love to hear if you have
stories about weather divination from your own
traditions and landscapes.

Cónocht an Earraigh, Alban Eiler, Vernal Equinox

will soon be upon us. The Equinox comes from
the Latin meaning 'equal night' when day and
night are approximately of equal length. The
Equilux when day and night are of actual equal
length usually occurs on March 17th – St. Patrick's
Day. In Ireland, this was the traditional day to
plant potatoes and prune roses. I love the Order's
Spring Equinox ceremony where we sow our
seeds. It was the first ceremony of the Wheel of
the Year I did when I joined the Order over 20
years ago and the calendula seeds I planted then
have produced generations of calendula flowers
and seeds over the years since. It's wonderful how
a simple seed-planting ritual can provide such
continuity for us – a constant reminder of the
cycle of life.

While the balance of day and night is only with
us for a very short time I wish you harmony,
equilibrium and peace at this time.

Eimear 

References

1 <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/5073887/4878284/5074221?HighlightText=spring+equinox&Route=stories&SearchLanguage=ga>

Patience by Linda Davis

I sit in the patients waiting room
practicing patience.

I am a seed
hard shelled
wintering it out.

Clusters of leaf-made loam
cushion my warm safe space.

A sound-surround of microbial movement,
mycelium murmuring,
and above a dormouse's
hibernating breath
lull me.

Soon the cracking of earth
the trickle of snow-melt
a sliver of silver light
Will seep into my sleep.

My name is called,
I rise



In the Blue by John Nash

I. EVAPORATION.

Whenever I'm sad and lonely
I stand on the rocks at Devils Point and I call
out to The Sound
In sea sounds and witchy water words which
evaporate on my tongue and fill the misty
morning air.
Those words floss and froth around me, gurgle
and gulsh as they meet the blue
They foam and frish amongst the waves where
rivers kiss the sea and sensuously spiral.

These waters ran here when the ice melted and
split the rocks,
when Rhinoceroses watered themselves by the
Cattedown Roundabout
and when giants fought on the shore (like
Barbican drunks)
So they know a thing or two about heartbreak,
about separation, how things rise then fall, then
rise again.

And so I go to them, humble and small against
the aching azure and pour out my heart
and catch the rising stories that spray from the
surface in reply.

II. CONDENSATION

Some people say Plymouth is grey gently
scraping against grey
But I say – hey – turn your head a little this way,
love, and see
The bursts of green and swells of blue

We are water fastened here and I am so grateful
it might burst a dam
I pour sweet, thankful cider into the Tamar
Drop silver change into the Sundial, fishing out
the crisp packets as I do
Float a paper boat from a Barbican slip
swearing to protect it from sewage
Letting the waters run free as they in return
allow me
Watching the gentle waves I think of you
I'm sorry I haven't text you back yet

I've been planting sea grass meadows in my
darkest waters
They twist and breathe and clear the sediment
that settles there sometimes
And soon I'll message you, renewed, restored,
myself condensed again.

III. PRECIPITATION.

And I'll wish you the love of two queer boys
barely touching, dipping toes into soapy sundial
water and dreaming rainbow bubbled futures,
just the two of them
Wish you the joy of my wild eared dog dancing
in Ham Brook, the first running water he had
seen,
Thrilled at the cold splashes and pebbles
beneath his paws.
Wish you a sky opened, ceremonial soaking
the first time you go to watch Argyle or the
Fireworks or any event between January and
December
Wish you the soft release of rainfall after a
hot Hoe afternoon felt by a woman strong as
her ancestors who punted boats across the
Barbican,
Wish you misty mount batten mornings
drinking Burrator born water from a One
Plymouth coffee cup
Wish your boundaries Marine Park
preservation, your soul deep sea conservation
and your life bathing water status safe spaces
for friendship fuelled by fresh fish and a bag of
chips.
Because the thing is this...
Some days I am sad and yet...
Other days only the water is blue...



Celtic Threads by Bobbie Pell

Celtic threads
bind the body
to the land,
to the wind,
to the water,
bringing life.

Celtic threads
bind the heart
to courage,
to faith,
to belief
in steadfast Love.

Celtic threads
bind the soul
to mystery,
to passion,
to color-filled images
within us.

Feel the weaving.



The Voice of Water by Ann Beer

It rained again so hard last night
Like flooding from the sky.
And when I woke, in grey dawn-light,
The stream had risen high.
The flow had strengthened, climbing past
The willow-tree's strong base.
Each quiet pool had filled so fast,
Changed by the water's pace.
And now the stream's once-quiet tone
Had risen to a roar,
With twigs and branches rushing down,
Released from either shore.
My ears were opened; all my days
I'll hear that water's song,
An anthem made to share the praise
Of Earth, where we belong.
So I will celebrate the rain
And all the gifts it brings,
And make my pilgrimage again
The next time water sings.



Inner Beauty by Rosemary Gosden. Rosemary wrote that “the slow speed water image, combined with the reflection of the flowers symbolises intuition and the ability to perceive beauty in hidden and unexpected places.”

The 2023 Bardic Gorsedd by Tom Moxon

A Bardic Gorsedd began as an idea during the 2022 Druid Gorsedd. It was felt that there was a place missing for bards to come together on their newly found path and share in the journey they were on to have their own Gorsedd.

So, after discussion with Eimear, the Bardic Gorsedd was held at the end of July 2023, at Noddfa. Meaning sanctuary, Noddfa is run by Roman Catholic nuns that have created a beautiful place accommodating many events that are earth centred and spiritually nourishing, a space for those who seek to find similarities in what we believe rather than the dogma we can easily find ourselves entangled in. The sisters are wonderful hosts and the establishment they have created really rings true to the values and integrity of what being a “sanctuary” really is. There was love, peace and understanding at Noddfa as we went about our work.

Our theme was “The fiery spark of Awen” and what a theme it turned out to be. If there is one thing I love about Druidry, it is the capability of druids coming together to create space for the exploration of topics that involve everyone. Druids from all over the world, from Ireland, Australia, America, Canada, France, Italy and England came and held this space and explored this topic with open hearts and minds. We began by exploring the nature of Awen, how we cultivate it as druids, and whether we can truly become divinely inspired. The next day, we began by listening to Eimear read the Song of Amergin in Irish Gaelic and this led us to create our own version called the “Song of the Bards”(see the end of this article). Druid author Kristoffer Hughes inspired us with his in-depth knowledge about the origins of Cerridwen and the Awen. He gave a fantastic talk that cut right to the heart of what the fiery spark of Awen is. This culminated in a

ritual, held under the eye of a beautiful oak, that explored how the Awen manifests within the four elements.

On Saturday afternoon we were treated to the magical experience of standing on the beach at low tide, and with a beautiful sun above us and a clear sky, gazed across to Anglesey, remembering ancestor druids who stood their ground against the Roman army. We scattered incense on the beach in honour, and contemplated the present moment in our journey and the future of the path of druidry. By this time, Bards were popping with inspiration and something magical lit a deep fire within us all. By the evening, it was time for the eisteddfod, druids were reciting poetry that had come to them during the day, performing songs for the first time and telling stories.

After a night of hard eisteddfodding, about half of the bards stood in the grounds of Noddfa the next morning and heard a little bit of the secret lore of labyrinths, and then took our own journeys into the heart of Noddfa's grass labyrinth. Later that morning, we were led into the depths of Cerridwen's cauldron in meditation, where we met the separate elements of earth, air, fire and water and were blessed with the mystic mark of Awen shining within us.

The event shone with the love and companionship that has been fostered within the order. I would like to thank the sisters for allowing us to hold this event at their retreat centre and continuing to do so. I would like to thank Eimear for her support and participation in the event, Kristoffer Hughes for the inspiring talk he delivered, Fi Ware for being a supportive role as Mentor Coordinator, and to Sharon Smith for supporting the event and the Bards. The event would not have been possible without the



administrative skills of Lorraine Munn who also co-hosted.

We intended to run a Bardic Gorsedd each year with the next one on the 23rd–25th August 2024, when we shall explore the heart of ritual, with special guest speaker, Matthew McCabe. Matthew was one of the druids who wrote the bardic rituals that we all perform, so it will be a fascinating talk, as we explore the what, why and how of OBOD ritual. If you're currently a bard within the order and are interested, please email bardicgorsedd@obod.org to reserve your place. We're really looking forward to meeting you all and sharing more sacred space with you.

THE SONG OF THE BARDS

I am the wearer of wind
I am the feather in the wing of a hawk
I am the rustle of leaves
I am the wind in the trees

I am the green of a leaf
I am the soft fragrance of a rose
I am the smell of rain
I am the rain drop of a storm

I am the tip of a taproot
I am reflection upon waters
I am light cut through trees
I am the moment between light and day

I am an eagle on the breeze
I am the squirrel on a branch
I am the cry of a buzzard
I am the frost on a spider's web

I am words powered by the elements
I am a drop of paint on a paintbrush
I am ink upon my quill
I am a bridge between worlds

I am the colour in a stained glass window
I am a single blade of grass
I am the mycelial network
I am comfort in times of distress

I am a moonbeam on the sea
I am an infinite spiral
I am the wave in the ocean
I am the weaver of words

I am that I am and everything I'm
not
We are



The Void and the Mind

by Skye Cooley

Skye recently sent me her 'Book of Awen', "a series of short stories I have written as bedtime stories to my daughter and niece over the course of the latter part of my Bardic grade training this year." The stories retell both Celtic and Nordic myths. Skye is currently working on publishing her stories. Here is the opening tale:

"Before the sea, sky or land, there was only the Void - an infinite emptiness, dark and still. Yet within the silence stirred a thought, nameless and formless. For endless eons it gradually gained awareness, until it realized itself as Mind.

Filled with curiosity, Mind imagined - and a song of creation burst forth into being. First came a sea of chaotic energies, swirling and sparking like an ocean of tumultuous storm. Next Mind sang a song of the sky, bringing stabilizing forces to temper the raw magic of the waters below.

Delighted, Mind danced between sea and sky, weaving patterns from their synergy. Wherever its presence passed, the fabrics of existence grew firm and vibrant. Then Mind had a new inspiration - to create a gateway between realms.

As Mind danced and sang, strands of sea and sky trailed its movements, weaving as they flowed. A matrix formed - filigrees wrapping the void, threads rooting below and shooting above at intervals. These glistening lattices thickened into conduits linking the embryonic earth to watery abyss and celestial ethers.

Gradually the woven strands amassed - no longer a veil but a colossal tree embracing all creation. Its tangled root system delved through the domain of consorting sea gods, while soaring boughs crested the heavens where sky deities vied and mated.

There stood the first Oak tree, mighty Beh, binding earth to sky and sea. And along its mammoth trunk and limbs, the roads between realms were formed as channels linking the ever growing material and spiritual worlds. Mind settled in Beh's boughs, watching its awakened dreams slowly come to life. The great tree's slumbering acorn children would soon sprout to populate all corners of existence.

And Mind knew this was but the dawning, with endless new wonders to imagine into the weaving cosmic tapestry.



Daily Practice: Thoughts for new Bards by Selkie

Part 2: Practice, Practice, Practice: what does this mean? In Part 1, I discussed the importance of fully immersing oneself to successful journeying and meditation and in this second Part, I discuss why this is essential in our Spiritual Practice.

I thought I knew what 'Practice, Practice, Practice' meant. Regular Practice, regular engagement with the study materials, regular meditation, regular reflection on Practice. Yes... and no, I have discovered. What is regular? In today's world most of us have come across the idea of quality versus quantity as measure of what we do; it is often brought up in parenting discussions for example.

Now look at this idea regarding our Druid or Spiritual Practice. When life is full – work, family, friends, and all that modern living requires, when and how often are you able to 'fit in' your Bardic work? Are you 'religious' about it – a regular slot every week or month, the wheel of the year observed, formalised and formulaic? There's no doubt this may work for some. Do you 'binge' Gwersi – holidays, days off, imbibing as much as possible because you're not sure when the next opportunity may come? Again, some people may be happy with this arrangement or feel they have no other choice. Some Bards take a literal approach of 'do something, anything, but do it every day' – lighting a candle – reciting a chant/prayer – taking a walk and engaging with nature. Yes, this can be enough. I have done all of those – I have tried these approaches depending on where I have been in life generally. Previously, what I never was, at least not completely, was fully immersed in my Practice most of the time, not observing it, not recording it, simply inhabiting it 100%.

It could be argued that being a retiree I have the time to devote to my beliefs and be a 'proper Druid' (whatever that is...) but this is not what I think. It is thanks to mentoring Bards, and being a student again, that I have been able to understand what I needed to 'do', how I needed to 'be' and how I can reconcile this in my Practice. I have been researching elements of my Druid Daily Practice as a focus for my studies. This has necessitated recounting and analysing what is taking place. There I was, right back to the beginning, just as when I was a Bard, 'doing' the ceremonies,

'practising' the rituals, observing what I was doing so that I might record the effects and share my 'practice as research', as it is called at university, in the writing up of my thesis. Halfway into the research, I realised that what I was in fact doing was a kind of 'performance'. I was shocked. I'm a comparatively experienced Druid and mentor for OBOD, haven't I been doing this properly for years? This was one of the reasons why I started a support group for academics - PAPPs.²

It dawned on me, slowly as always, that every time I sat down to journey, an essential part of what my research was about, I would go through the motions - of seeking whatever it was I had decided I was seeking that day, but all the time, in the background, my brain, my left thinking one, was carefully taking note of what I was 'seeing, feeling, experiencing'. This was important – it was research – I must be honest, authentic, not 'make up the data'. Then I started to notice times when I'd 'come around', like waking from a dream, a feeling that I'd experienced more frequently in times past. I realised that this was something that I'd felt less of since wanting to 'remember it, record it, research it, share it, write it up for academia's sake. In my need to want to be true to what I was doing, to be able to understand and convey this to my supervisors and ultimately narrate it legitimately, I was falling foul of exactly what I warned against when guiding Bards. I needed to find ways of inhabiting my Practice without losing its sole purpose.

So how have I overcome this?

Find out in Part 3 how Devotional work with Deity can be vital for connections in the Otherworld.

Footnotes

¹ I am not talking about public and group ceremonies where we necessarily enact 'sacred theatre', a term shared with me by Penny Billington, I am only referring to private and personal practice.

² Pagan Academics Pagan PhDs (PAPPs) a group for academics who see their research through a Pagan lens.



Peace is Every Step by Ricky Gellissen

Recently, Harriet Sams' put a post on Facebook seeking a volunteer representative from OBOD to attend a Peace is Every Step walking meditation from Trafalgar Square. As a member of Tamesis, a London OBOD Seed group, I am used to travelling across the capital for different festivals so I volunteered to attend.

The organisers said it would be wonderful if we could wear attire reflecting our faith. I was reluctant to wear the ritual robes I use for order gatherings, and rarely wear "robes" otherwise. However, I appreciated that a better visual impact would be made with something that might resonate as Druid-ish. Since I'm a man with a long white beard and a staff, adding a winter fleece with an Awen and a hat with a triskele over my robe sufficed. It clearly created some shorthand impression as one of the bystanders shouted at me "You're a wizard, Harry" (not quite the franchise I would wish to be associated with, I am more used to declarations of "You Shall Not Pass!").

I have never spoken at an event at Trafalgar Square before, and although I have spoken publicly as a follower of Druidry, I had not done so to the wider public. Therefore, I decided on brevity and recited the Gorsedd Prayer and the prayer for Peace. I felt those words were well chosen and well received. I did not expect to find myself walking front and centre along the route. It was awesome to be walking alongside such a visible diversity

of faiths, whilst sharing a common intent. There was something about a sacred silence that made the march very profound. There was also a joyous moment when a toddler moved to the front and cycled on their bike ahead of all those gathered. It stopped me being too introspective and was the one part of the Meditation Walk where a smile radiated across my face.

It felt like a significant moment for a Druid to be invited to participate alongside members from a diverse range of faiths. It was inspiring to focus on what united us rather than what separates us. One of the reasons I attended was the involvement of Quakers in Britain. I have always seen them as pioneers of Social Justice for LGBTQ folk since the 1960's. "Towards a Quaker view of Sex" came out in the year I was born and I feel like I have grown up with their gentle support. I genuinely believe that their campaigning, support and societal influence helped us achieve the LGBTQ rights we have today. Learning about Thich Nhat Han and his legacy with Plum Village UK was the icing on the cake.

The feelings of unity and kindness extended beyond the meditation walk. When participants were finally able to speak with each other, we shared perspectives and reflections over tea in Café in The Crypt.



IMAGE: Quakers in Britain - By Michael Preston

A Ceremony to Honour Farmed Animals by Jack Wolf

During the daylight hours of the First New Moon of 2024, I will be making a pilgrimage to Bath City Farm, a 37-acre Eden of wood and pasture just below Whiteway that's been special to me ever since I moved here 10 years ago. This time, however, I won't be going for pleasure, but to spend time connecting with the farm's animals before performing a short Ceremony to Honour both them and all other animals that are kept in agricultural contexts.

The idea and structure of the Ceremony to Honour Farmed Animals initially came to me after hearing about Trebbe Jonson's work with Wounded Places, and it developed via various conversations about the strange invisibility of domestic animals in Druid Practise – but its essential meaning has both deeper, and deeply sacred, roots.

Unlike the majority of species on this planet, Human Beings are faced with a peculiar moral and spiritual dilemma: every time we eat, we are aware of the fact that we are consuming another Being, with a subjective experience and possibly some sense of self. Yet, as physical beings, we can't not eat – if we refuse to take part in this merry go round of souls we'll simply starve to death, which in most cultures then means becoming food for something else, whether worms or vultures. We should not, I think, be afraid of this reality. We can't just stop eating. What we can do is stop behaving as if the Beings we consume don't matter.

Our industrial agricultural culture has taught us to ignore the realities around food production, and even the language – 'food production' – has a distancing effect which pretends these further away. Modern industrial agriculture, of course, relies on this ignorance in order to continue practises that would not be tolerated in a world where an animist view of reality was commonplace – but the distancing effect has had other consequences too – and one of these, I think, is a curious sort of pained embarrassment towards farmed species that often results in their being overlooked, even in the most thoughtful contexts. In Druidry, for instance, we regularly call upon the Bear, Stag, Hawk

and Salmon; why do we never honour the Cow, Sheep, Pig, and Chicken? And what about the Swede, Maize, Beetroot, and Potato?

What can we do about this problem? How can we deal with the spiritual need to be conscious of, rather than pretend away, the Personhood of those whom we eat? Plainly, we can change the way we eat – we can be vegetarian or vegan, eat only organic free range meat, forage, hunt, or grow our own food on an allotment – and most of these actions will certainly go some way towards making the ravaged natural world a better place as well as improving the lot of some farmed animals and our own physical health. But what none of them will do is tackle the problem on a spiritual level by allowing us to address the gravity of what we are doing whenever we eat another living thing, and open up a space for apology and expressions of gratitude – two elements which, according to Graham Harvey, underpin all religious practise, and which quickly become spiritually necessary in any serious attempt at practical animism.

This Ceremony to Honour Farmed Animals is an attempt to plug the gap. At heart, it is a Ceremony that allows us to show gratitude and to offer an apology towards those whom we eat. As such, although the Ceremony is designed with animals in mind – because they have given so much and deserve much in return – it is also applicable to the plant and fungal kingdoms, and could be performed – with some adjustments – just as effectively in a vegetable patch as beside a pig pen. In an animist world view, a Being is no more



or less a Being for being a lettuce rather than a lamb, and vice versa. The Ceremony is short, easily performed, and can be carried out monthly or whenever you feel the need, with next to no equipment. Its only requirements are honesty and the genuine desire to make amends with all those Beings whose lives inescapably support yours, whoever and whatever they are.



The Ceremony

You will need: An 'Aurochs' sign of some kind – just a capital 'A' laid on its side, or as shown here:

A tray of sand, salt, or dirt, (if working indoors).

Water in a bottle, cup, or jug, for a small peace offering.

You can perform the Ceremony at home or on the land, on the New Moon of any month, in daylight or darkness.

The first thing to do is to emotionally and psychologically connect with the Beings you'll be honouring. You don't have to find living members of every species, but it is helpful to spend time watching film of farmed animals (The Secret Life of Farmed Animals is good for this) if you can't get to see any at all. Try to make your way to a field or shed, and find some animals to watch without disturbing them. In the Ceremony, these animals will symbolically stand in for all farmed animals: though you'll be acknowledging their individual Personhood later on, this will extend to all others of their kind.

When you've spent long enough doing this (take as long as you like), make your way to wherever you'll be doing the Ceremony and set up your Circle. Sit down in the centre, and make yourself comfortable. If you're still outside and able to see the animals you'll be honouring, so much the better – but otherwise hold them in your memory or bring photographs to look at. Now slowly direct your attention to whoever you are honouring, and offer a prayer or a blessing on them. It's fine to use the blessing below or your own words for this.

"Blessings on you all, Creatures of the Field, who have lived and died alongside us since before Humankind began to sow the red soils of the Earth."

Now think back to the animals you got to know earlier. Hold their faces in your imagination, and

really look at them. See each one as an individual – see the patterns on their skins or feathers, the shapes of their ears, and think about how some individuals behave differently from others. When you feel fully ready to acknowledge the Personhood in every one of them, challenging though this may be, repeat a version of the following:

"I/we offer my/our deepest thanks and gratitude for the gifts of your freedom and your bodies so that we might live. I/we acknowledge that these gifts have too often been taken for granted, and for this I am / we are deeply sorry. I/we admit that our civilised world could not exist as it does without your help and your presence. I/we beg you to forgive us for our ignorance and our wilfulness. I/we had stopped seeing you before, but I/we see you now, and I/we will not stop seeing you."

Having offered this apology, mark the Ceremony by drawing the sign of the A on the ground or making it in the tray of sand, salt or dirt if you are indoors. Make a Peace Offering of clear water as a gesture of good faith and gratitude by pouring it into the centre of the A. It does not matter if the sign is washed away by this.

Sit in silence for as long as it feels appropriate. Notice how you are feeling. Do not judge your responses, simply notice them. Some people have strong emotional reactions to this Ceremony – if you feel the need to cry, or even laugh, do so.

If it feels appropriate, now is the time to offer any vows, pledges or commitments – for instance to continue carrying out the Ceremony every month. But avoid making any vows you will be unable to keep. Assume that the God/dess / Spirit / Animals / Land / Sky / Ancestors/ All and Any of the Above are watching and listening to everything you say and do.

When it feels right to do so, close the Ceremony. Clear up any mess you've made, and leave quietly. Don't speak about the Ceremony until you feel ready, and even if you're bubbling with inspiration don't force any others to do so.

A review of Homecoming 2, edited by Jack Wolf can be found later in this issue. If you would like to send Jack your reflections on this ceremony, please contact
admin@aurochspress.co.uk



From the Archives

Ancestor work - Dealing with the difficult skeletons in the closet by Thea Prothero.

This month I have chosen another favourite article from the Touchstone archives which I found very useful. Thea Prothero's article was originally published in August 2017. It is a beautifully personal and insightful piece which shares a wonderful way for other readers to deal with troublesome ancestors ...

How many of my fellow OBODies have actually breezed through the ancestral work without any second thoughts? If that's you, then I hope that this article will still be of some interest. If you have struggled with these so called skeletons in the closet, then maybe this personal account will be helpful.

At the time, I was completely stuck, unable to move forward to complete the ancestral work within the course. The problem was within my maternal family specifically two skeletons, the first was my abusive cruel manipulating grandfather. I did not wish to acknowledge or accept him, because I did not want to hand him any further control over my life. Yet I could feel the restlessness this caused both to myself and his spirit. Something needed to happen, something needed to come to pass, otherwise I was aware that I would be stuck, living with this shadow over my life, forever. The second skeleton was the questionable origins and tormented life of my beloved grandmother.

At a loss on how to move forward, I appealed to members of my grove for some advice and possibly other experiences with difficult situations after our 2016 Alban Hefin ritual. One very sage member drew me aside after our meeting and told me about a recent retreat she had attended where everyone had used stones as representations of an ancestor. She described how difficult she found it to let go of the stone which had become a representation of her father. I found this idea resonated deeply within me - I work extensively with stones, communicating with their energies as the life force of the earth we stand on. Stone strength is something I draw on within meditation and as journey aids to primordial memory, the intrinsic umbilical cord uniting us to our most ancient ancestor, the earth. Stones offer healing

and wisdom far beyond human understanding.

I meditated on the idea of using a stone as a representation of this troubling ancestor, and was guided to consider finding a stone from his birthplace, (Somerset) working with it for a time, and then literally casting the-stone-who-is-my-grandfather away, symbolically clearing him out of my life, once and for all. In the summer I was visiting Eire, one of my ancestral homelands, to holiday, and work on my maternal grandmother's family questions, (more on this later). My grandfather's mother was Irish, which made the journey more poignant, and I decided that I would cast the-stone-who-is-my-grandfather into the wild Irish Sea, allowing the salty abrasiveness to cleanse me of my troubling ancestor once and for all.

The first task was to find a stone, and luckily I was visiting Glastonbury in July, so found a small grey palm sized stone from the garden at the Abbey. The stone itself was singularly unremarkable – dark grey/black and immediately I saw it I was reminded of coal – my grandfather started as a fireman on steam strains when he worked on the railway, so I could see a strong connection. Over the next month I imbued the stone with all the pain, anger and agony I had inside me, and all the injustice and fear from within my family, like a raging torrent. I carried the stone with me at all times, as a symbolic weight, taking it to see my mother to hear stories about my grandfather, I even showed it photos. Towards the end of the month, I found that I avoided directly looking at the stone, it made me incredibly uncomfortable, and holding it in my hand was nearly impossible, yet I was aware of the stone at all times. It was painful and heavy in a psychological sense. Nevertheless I knew I had to face these difficult emotions and fears in order to heal them, and deep down I knew I had the strength to do this.

My immediate family and I went to Eire in August. My intention was still sure - to cast the stone into the Irish sea before we arrived. But when it came to it, I did not throw the stone into the sea. I still carried it everywhere in my bag and it weighed on me, but something stopped me. I was somewhat at a loss what to do with it but had faith that I would be guided during mediations, to the correct solution. As it so happened the answer came within two days of our arrival. We had the opportunity to visit the impressive Bru Na



Boinne, and for those who have not yet visited, after you arrive at the visitor centre, you have to cross a bridge over the Boyne to gain access to Newgrange. I had an epiphany as I looked into the clear green waters of the Boyne. I experienced what I call a deep ancestor, or past life memory of the river as soon as I started to cross the bridge, this is hard to explain but I could sense the calm healing life force throughout every cell of my body and in every aspect of my life before that moment and after. I imagine it is something like Gwion Bach felt as he tasted the three drops. I immediately knew that I needed to place the stone in the cool healing waters below.

I understood then that casting the stone in the sea was like throwing all the hurt and pain away unacknowledged and I wanted to be better than that – simply throwing him out did not seem like a suitable ending, whereas giving him to the gentle beautiful green Boyne would bring healing and restoration to me and hopefully him as well. In my mind's eye, I have given my grandfather peace and therefore myself, and I have a physical connection to the Boyne, meaning I can return one day with a lighter and peaceful heart.

Wand Competition



Pete Rodda sent in this picture of his “doorway tree” which he happened across on a Yuletide walk in the hills of Northern California. “I came across this quite unexpectedly and, if I’m honest, quite magically”, he wrote. The wand competition is now closed. The final entries will be published next month.

Open Forum

White Horse Camps

by Sandie Coombes

As Druids we fully understand the circle of life, death and re-birth, that for something to be re-born, it must rest before it can begin a transformation.

As 2023 came to an end, White Horse Camps was laid to rest. After 20 years as OBOD camps and a further 10 years as White Horse Camps, it could no longer survive in its present form due to the organisation’s liability status.

White Horse Camps was run by volunteers in lead positions. That means volunteers would have been personally financially responsible for any accidents or incidents at the camps. We were also struggling to get volunteers to take on lead roles long term and many of the original volunteers are now retired or have moved on.

It became clear that White Horse Camps was simply unsustainable in its current form. The opportunity to have fresh ideas about a future project with firm foundations will be open to the former White Horse Camp community as Lughnasadh approaches. Emails will be sent to existing members with notifications on the website and Facebook page. If you’re new to OBOD and would like to be on this list please email details to

communications@whitehorsecamps.org.uk

Here at Touchstone, we know that White Horse Camps meant a lot to our readers, as have the European and American camps, which have also been run by dedicated volunteers. If you have a particular magical moment or memorable experience at any of these camps to share, please email touchstone@druidry.org and I will look to collate some of the pieces into a celebration of camps later this year.

The Mount Haemus lectures will take place across three separate events in 2024. Two will be online, the first on 14th May 2024 at 7pm UK time; the second will also be online on the 21st May 2024 at 7pm UK time. An email will go out inviting members to register nearer the time. The third series of lectures will be an in-person event to be held in Glastonbury on the 5th October 2024 - more details to come.

Reviews

Druid in the Greenhouse

by Des Lamb

This an interesting autobiography of Des Lamb's life. Beginning as a small boy, one seminal moment happens while visiting the Isle of Man on a scouting holiday. By chance the scouts visit the Witchcraft Museum (which, as you probably know, is now in Boscastle Cornwall). Outside is an elderly gentleman with white hair. "I confidently walked across the yard to the distinguished looking man, and on gazing from close quarters he appeared to be troubled. But without need for ceremony, and without further ado: 'Excuse me, sir. Are you a witch?' The smallish gentlemen turned to me, and with eyes showing signs of a soul of deep searching, simply replied, 'Yes, I am,' before offering me a wry smile...." (p.57) This chance meeting with Gerald Gardner is the turning point of the author's magical journey. Through church going, the hedonistic sixties music scene, and Buddhist writings, the author becomes a spiritual seeker. Surviving near death encounters, and travelling in the most hostile environments, the author comes to Glastonbury and finds Druidry.

This is a book of life experiences, and the reader will find the wisdom shared both insightful and engaging.

A life well lived and a book well written.

Brown Dog Books. ISBN 9781839527302

Reviewed by Thea Prothero



IMAGE: Cover Detail from "The Druid in the Greenhouse" drawn by Mark Hetherington

Homecoming 2: Kinship

edited by Jack Wolf

Homecoming 2, the second edition of the journal of new Animist writing, is a wonderfully diverse collection of articles, stories and poetry on the theme of kinship. Some approach the theme directly, for example, Gordon MacLellan, who also writes a keynote piece for the beginning of the collection, reflects on his kinship with toads, while Polly Paton-Brown and S.V. Wolfland movingly explore their kinship with specific companion animals. "I can't believe it, I never thought I'd fall in love with someone like you," Wolfland writes, "never guessed I could be so proud of things that in someone with two legs would be unacceptable".

The collection goes beyond this, however, as several writers explore their sense of kinship with the land or specific spaces. Susanne Mathies retells how visits to an allotment became central to her kinship with her grandfather while Gareth N. Jones explores what it is to live in another culture. Liv Torc finds a relationship with the "Moon doily, snot sponge" of her Family Bed in a typically astonishing poem.

The collection is illustrated with pictures of Boann Lambert's empty Grandmother's Shoes, a "dedication to our matriarchal line", but which also give the journal a sense of journeys taken and of the return to home and kinship. The Journal

finishes with a poem by editor Jack Wolf entitled "Everything is Connected to Everybody Else," which pulls the many disparate voices together. "Sea, car, dust, chance and you and me / and all of us entangled," Wolf writes. And that is the sense with which you put down this collection at the end of 80 wonderful pages, after it has helped you reinforce the kinship connections you knew you had and introduced you to some new ones you had no clue sat in your heart.



Both books are available to order by special request.
Email: store@druidry.org for more information



Regular Group Meetings

ANDION FELLOWSHIP: Small Seed Group based in Northern New Jersey offering regular face-to-face and online meetings. Visit us at <https://www.andionfellowship.org>

ARTIO SEEDGROUP, Zurich area. Open rituals for Beltane and Samhain, occasional meetings. 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: rebniikc@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://www.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.

BOREALIS CIRCLE SEED GROUP 3rd Saturday of the Month: Winnipeg, Manitoba. 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

NOS CORYN GROVE, Hindley, Wigan. Meeting on the night before the full moon closest to the festivals, Borsdane Woods. All welcome. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/240230606313005/>

OAKHEART: 8 Rituals, Druid Drinks, Gatherings. Portland OR USA. <https://www.oakheartdruids.com/>

PENDLE GROVE. Clitheroe/around Lancs. Sionnach on 0161 3432705 or email drvernon@hotmail.co.uk

THE PARISI SEED GROUP, Based in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, indoor rituals for the wheel of the year, with tree walks & meditations in between each ritual. Contact: Sue - thegingerbaker@icloud.com

RAVEN'S MOUNTAIN SEED GROUP, Berne & Thun area, Switzerland, open rituals, occasional meetings - New members welcome. Contact: guenternal@hotmail.com

SHINING MOUNTAINS GROVE W. Montana, USA, 8 rituals, community, hikes, zoom.
FFI: Heather: roanrob-bins@aol.com

SETANTII GROVE Seasonal Rituals in Manchester / S. Lancs. Always outdoors. groveofsetantii@yahoo.com

SILVER BEAR GROVE Middlesbrough, County Durham. TS3 9DD. Contact Paul 07923575364
Email: silverbear-grove@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 <https://druidry.org>
Please tell us if you don't want your event posted on the www.

OBOD Wheel Of The Year Online Rituals

On FB and YouTube. Hosted by CC Eimear Burke. Check: <https://www.facebook.com/druidry>

DATES FOR 2024:

Alban Eilir: March 23rd | Bealtaine: May 4th |
Alban Hefin: June 22nd | Lúghnasadh: August 3rd | Alban Elfed: September 21st |
Samhain: November 2nd | Alban Arthan: December 21st



Regular OBOD Meetings

Fireside chat with Eimear: Join CC every Thursday, 8pm. Google YouTube + [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 local time

Building Resilience in Difficult Times: A monthly OBOD Listening Circle. Online zoom gathering, 1st Wednesday of the month 7pm UTC. Contact oboddeeplisteningcircle@gmail.com

Upcoming Events

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.

5 to 7 April, Yorkshire Druid Gorsedd to be held at Parcevall Hall. Fully Booked.

18 & 19 May, Power animal shamanic journey weekend with Georgien Wybenga, The Barnes Institute, Whitburn. Contact Samantha 07482672580.

1 & 2 June, OBOD 60th Anniversary Summer Gathering, at Strode College, Church Road, Street, BA16 0AB nr Glastonbury. Fringe events on 3&4 June, to be announced.

15 - 16 June, Inner Journeying and ritual level 1 with Penny Billington, Matt McCabe & Gary Llewellyn in Glastonbury, non-residential. Cost £75.00. 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

23-15 August, OBOD Bardic Gorsedd, "The Heart of Ritual" with guest speaker Matthew McCabe. Noddfa, Penmaenmawr, Wales, LL34 6YF. Single room accommodation, Vegetarian or vegan catering. A deposit of £90 is required,. Please email bardicgorsedds@obod.org

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

30, 31 August, 1 September, Mercian Gatherings Pagan camp's 19th year. Held near Nuneaton, Warks. Talks, workshops and ritual, music and entertainment in honour of the Old Gods. Stalls, showers, café, free-trading Sunday market. ALL profits donated to charity To date, we have raised over £120,000. Ticket enquiries Sue on merciangatheringtickets@hotmail.com

14 December, OBOD Winter Gathering at Strode College, Church Road, Street, BA16 0AB nr Glastonbury