



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

May 2024 | Issue 321

This Issue

- ✿ Using the Druid's Prayer
Today by John Davis
- ✿ A Recipe for Beltane by
Sue Wilson
- ✿ The Evolution of Tarot
by Steve Hounsom
- ✿ And lots more!



COVER: "White Fire" by Ella Moonbridge

Editorial

Welcome to May's edition of *Touchstone* which is busting out all over (a month early!). In this edition there's more poetry than ever, including a reflection on the seemingly "Interminable Rain" which has fallen on many of us this spring. There's a wealth of articles including pieces on the Tarot, the Druid's Prayer, a centre for Druids in the Catskill mountains and reflections on twenty years following a Druid path. There are also news and reviews of recent OBOD happenings.

One piece to look out for is a short article by Sian Taylor on ways we can use our mobile phones to advance our Druid practice. It's a gem of an article and well worth a read - have we been too quick to denigrate this piece of technology?

You will also find the first of eight vegan recipes by Sue Wilson which encourage us to engage with each season through use of seasonal produce. I can promise you that we are in for a very tasty twelve months!

With all of this, there's still no room for a "From the Archives" article, but the feature will be making a comeback next month.

Right, let's get casting our clouts and get on with this edition!



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White Fire by Ella Moonbridge

"In the lush green velvet carpet
of late summer,
He announces his presence in silence.
A radiant improbability,
the white stag radiates
the power,
poise and grace
of White Fire."

Ella's picture of 'White Fire', which accompanies the poem, is on the front cover of *Touchstone* this month. It's an honour to share such a wonderful piece with our readers. Ella wrote "I hope he breathes his sacred creative fire out into the wider community".

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OBOD OFFICE ADDRESS: Unit 1, Highlands Farm, London Rd, Bolney. RH17 5PX

Email: office@druidry.org

Phone UK: +44 1273 470888

Phone US: +1 (857) 293-6468

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES: Please contact Lena and Jo at the office address above.

TOUCHSTONE SUBMISSIONS:

To the editor: Andrew Anderson.

Email: 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 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 go léir! Greetings everyone!
Beannachtaí na Bealtaine daoibh, May blessings
to you all! Here in Ireland, Bealtaine refers to the
month of May as well as to the festival.

*"The summer is come!- the summer is come!
With its flowers and its branches green,
Where the young birds chirp on the blossoming boughs,
And the sunlight struggles between:
And, like children, over the light clouds play;
But never before to my heart or eye
Came there ever so sweet a May
As this - Sweet May! Sweet May! ...*

*If the flowers delayed, or the beams were cold,
Or the blossoming trees were bare,
I had but to look in the poet's book,
For the summer is always there!
But the sunny page I now put by,
And the joy in the darkest day!
For never before, to my heart or eye,
Came there ever so sweet a May
As this - Sweet May! Sweet May!"*

By Denis Florence McCarthy, 1884

As I sit here writing I can hear the rain's relentless patter on the roof and it has been doing this all morning. Reading the above poem gives me some hope for dryer sunnier weather. I've been waiting for the past week or so to hear of the arrival of the swallows. Last year they arrived on March 30th, this year they arrived yesterday April 7th. Of course, as the saying goes, 'One swallow does not make a summer,' but the first swallows are its harbingers.



In Ireland, May 1 is regarded as the first day of Summer, according to an old calendar. There is much folklore concerning the weather in May and they highlight the idiosyncratic nature of Irish weather as they are often contradictory. Our ancient ancestors lived in close harmony with their landscape and the seasons and May time was known as the 'hunger time' of the year since there was little left of the stored winter food and seeds and crops were only being planted. In the South West of Ireland, there is the Scairbhín (Scaraveen). There are several explanations for this term: in the Irish tradition, every few years or so, the last two weeks in April and the first two weeks in May bring unseasonably cold weather called Scairbhín na gCuach. For example, the

Rising of May 1848 failed as a result of unexpected snow. There is an old Irish saying: 'Scairbhín na gCuach, garbh í agus fuar (the rough weather of the cuckoo, it is rough and cold)'. It was believed that the Scairbhín was nature's way of ensuring a good harvest by allowing warm weather initially to help the seeds germinate, followed by some frost to harden off the young seedlings and then strong winds to disperse the pollen. All of this happens with the arrival of the Cuckoo (An Cuach), a most mysterious bird that is rarely seen but often heard and regarded as a herald of better weather to come. To highlight the unpredictability of Irish weather, the Cuckoo also served as a reminder to people to pay close attention to the landscape and weather: 'Nuair a sheinneas an cuach ar chrann gan duilleog, díol do bhó is ceannaigh arán' - 'When the cuckoo sings from a tree without leaves, sell your cow and buy bread,' signifying that Summer is late, growth is delayed and there may not be sufficient fodder for the cattle, so better sell your cow and buy bread and other foodstuffs.

There is a wonderful folktale about the Hawk of Achill (the oldest animal) and how he nearly died of the cold on Old May Night (May 11th) thousands of years ago which was the coldest night ever in Ireland. Another saying about the weather in May: 'A wet and windy May fills the barns with fodder and hay,' and this I have observed myself over the years. When there has been a lot of rainfall during May we have had lovely long warm summers. One saying I hated as a child was 'Never change a clout until May is out' because it meant we could not get into our summer clothes until May was over even when the weather was warm and sunny. I tried to convince my mother that it meant when the Mayflower (Hawthorn blossom) was out. She didn't buy it.

May you be blessed
with the warmth and
abundance of this
Bealtaine season!

Eimear

A Beltane Haiku by Janet Elvidge

Sacred Fires Burning.
Jack-in-the-Green joins his Queen
Bringing in the May



Bard's Page

Interminable Rain by Daniel Fryer

Rain, rain interminable rain
And I can't hold out any longer
Will it ever be dry and warm again?

As I look across a flooded plain
How this weather makes me sombre
All this rain, rain, interminable rain

Droplets scatter my windowpane
An absence may make the heart grow fonder
But will it ever be dry and warm again?
I look to the heavens, and beseech in vain

"Come on sun, come and conquer"
But no, it's rain, rain interminable rain
Oh, to live by the coast in Spain
Somewhere wide and blue and yonder
A place to feel dry and warm again

Day after day, and it's a crying shame
From elevation to slope and contour to contour
Just rain, rain interminable rain
Will I ever feel dry and warm again?

Answering Clíodhna's Call by Rob Reass

On the banks I stood
The rush
Of a waterfall off to the right
Exciting, Enticing, Insisting
That I enter that
Welcoming pool before me

I dove in
Self-possessed, Eager, Undaunted

The cool waters
Felt familiar
And comforting
Surrounding my body

I moved out
Away from the land
With Strength
And the Confidence of the Young.

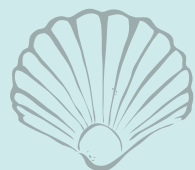
And then ...
In an instant
I went under

At the very slightest touch
Of the Undine's Will
I disappeared from the surface
I went below
There was no clarity in sight
Or familiarity of touch

But I felt
That unhaunted song
The Mersong Melody
Piercing the discordance about
The bubbling, the cracking, the churning,
In the water of the fall nearby.

I heard, I sensed, I experienced
Their Symphony
Circling, Echoing, Swirling
But unable to comprehend
And unable to understand
Then, just like that
They let go their grip
Into the hands of another
A mortal, like me
And I was dragged to
The rocks and "Safety".

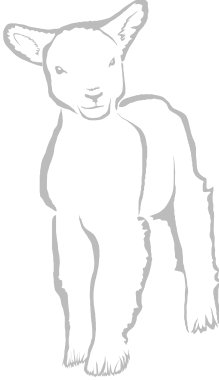
That Song echoed
Within me
Enchanted
Voice ever calling
Slowly
Teaching me their ways.



Maytime Image of Scotland

by Jessica McGee

The gamboling lambs
In a seaful of bluebells
Hemmed by ancient stones.



The Bright One Observes

by Tracy Rupp

In the spring when rutting rams mark their
conquests with blue chalk and slugs
dangle in ecstasy from a slime
trapeze young and old beings mount, dismount
and mount again in search of
the holy grail

Meditating with Pruned Hawthorn Boughs

by Karena Danenberg

I see the hawthorn branches
Hewn down before the frost
Laying silent by the path
Unrooted and somehow lost.

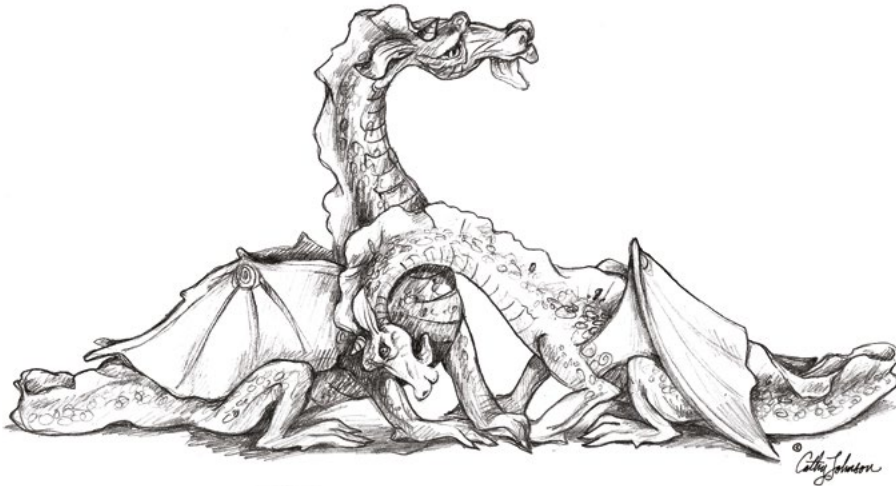
Your berries still so shiny
With the red blood of your life
Your leaves starting to wither -
You have not escaped the scythe.

I feel the heaviness of death,
Undeserv'd and unearned.
As I touch your quiet branches,
gentle acceptance my fingers learned.

Instead of rage against this act
You nestle deeper into earth -
Not your roots, but now your fruit,
Preparing for rebirth.

You'll drink no more refreshing rain,
Your roots will dig no more
But you and I will meet again
Where we have met before.

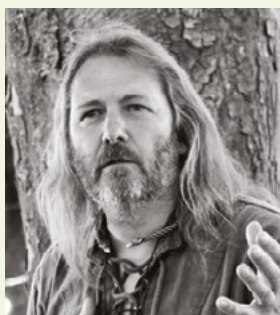
I see within your branches
The frailty of us all
And one day, I know, roles reversed,
You'll witness my next call.



Cathy's Dragons by Cathy Johnson

Gary Llewellyn joins Workshop Team by Matt McCabe

OBOD offers workshops to accompany the written material of the Gwersi, suitable for those new to Druidry or those running Groves and Seedgroups. Since 2010, the Meditation, Visualisation and Ritual Workshops have been run by Penny Billington and Matt McCabe. This year Gary Llewellyn is joining the team.



Matt and Penny said: "OBOD Druidry is an experiential tradition. We all share the journey through the Gwers but we each experience that journey in different ways. In these workshops we try and explain what OBOD Druids do, and why they do it in a particular way, by sharing our insights and practice. Into this mix Gary will bring his unique combination of storyteller and an environmental scientist. He has worked in every continent of the World, organises two, pagan-focused, annual camps, and has devised and orchestrated group rituals for over 25 years. Having spent many years as a solo ritualist, Gary is also a member of the Sylvan Grove. He maintains an interest in the dynamic role of ritual and the facilitation of versatile and adaptive approaches to accompany formal and informal ritual celebration. We love working with Gary and appreciate the extra perspective he brings to our tradition."

Gary said: "Between them, Penny and Matt have a combined experience of OBOD Druidry that amounts to over 65 years; I find it a huge honour and a privilege to be asked to join the team. Matt has worked with the Northumbrian and London Groves, and now runs the Bath Seed Group in 2000, he was involved in rewriting the Seasonal Ceremonies, as well as being the Media Rep for the Order. Penny was the Editor of Touchstone for 23 years, is an accomplished facilitator and author, with publisher Llewellyn Worldwide. Between the three of us we have a wealth of experience to share about our Druid Path."

The next Level 1 workshop is 15 & 16 June, with a Level 2 at the end of September. For further info email Matt - mattmccabe.i@outlook.com

Merlin the Mystic Mobile

by Sian Taylor

When I started out in my Druid practice I had very precise ideas about what made the "perfect" practitioner, However over time it became clear that real life does not work that way and so I would need to weave my Druidry into my imperfect, dyslexic, neuro-divergent, disabled life. I set out on a quest to find practical ways to incorporate my passion for knowledge into my daily life. The answer was a surprising one ... my mobile phone!

Like many people, I always have my phone on me. It allows me to get out and about more, knowing that I can call someone and be located should I take a tumble. For a long time I thought of social media and internet access on my mobile as a threat to my ability to concentrate, spending far too many a wasted hour mindlessly scrolling through content. This changed when I moved in to a village in Kent and found myself with gardens to maintain. For the first time in my adult life, overwhelmed and overjoyed, I wanted to learn all about how to care for the land I had been made guardian of - and quickly I found an app to help. Later I wanted to expand my knowledge of native trees and so another app entered my life. Then a moon phase calendar app, a bird song app. The list goes on. Almost without noticing, I was putting together a portable practitioners pack with all the widgets on my phone.

Then last year, as I lay in my single bed at the OBOD Bardic Gathering in Noddfa, Wales, with the windows open, soaking in the silence, I was interrupted by a very loud squawk of an unfamiliar bird. Excitedly I grabbed my phone in hopes recording the sound on the bird ID app - but the song stopped just as I hit the button.

Later that morning, I chatted with my peers and told them all about what had happened, only to find out that exactly the same thing had happened to a woman at my table! She too had been unable to find out which bird the music belonged to. I was humbled to find out I was not the only one

who regularly used the technology on their phone to connect with nature.

Just like that I made a conscious connection and Merlin the Mystic Mobile was born!



Using the Druid's Prayer Today by John Davis

There would seem to be no definitive proof of the origin of what we have come to call the Druid's Prayer. Some claim it to be from an ancient oral tradition, whilst others see it as dating from no earlier than the 19th century, and particularly associated with the name of Edward Williams, aka Iolo Morganwg. For some people this lack of clarity of origin affects the usefulness of the prayer. I would rather suggest that the usefulness of the Druid's Prayer comes with an acceptance that inspiration is not something that can be linked to some perceived golden age many centuries ago.

Some of our world's ancient religions can indeed trace their origins back to specific teachers in the past who left a body of teaching which became the starting point, and remains the point of reference, from which their religious path grew. However, as a former follower of such a path, I can attest to the danger that one can be always looking backwards for proof and precedents in antiquity rather than being open to inspirational awen in the now.

A few years ago, *Touchstone* carried an article from someone who said that they found the Druid's Prayer virtually unusable because they couldn't make a connection with its couplets and life as they themselves were experiencing it. That article began a process of reflection within myself that has only recently come to fruition and which has led to this article being written.

The prayer begins with the words: "Grant O Spirit/God(dess) thy protection". What does this mean? I have never doubted the presence of deity but my understanding of deity was changing. No longer could I acquiesce to a God who required propitiation or demanded an expiation for humanity's failings and dealt out punishment if this wasn't satisfied. My experience of being human was leading me away from this viewpoint. I have always admired the writings of Joanna van der Hoeven and her writing on deity resonated with me. Hence, I began to understand deity as channels of energy flowing through the cosmos and inviting our acknowledgement and participation but not exacting punishment if this wasn't forthcoming.

I had heard a Christian acquaintance say some years previously that she felt blessed by God because she hadn't been killed as she drove across a bridge which happened to be collapsing at the very moment that she drove over it. She recalled looking in her rear-view mirror and seeing the

car immediately behind her disappear into the river and the driver killed. I remember wondering at the time why God would decide to bless her but condemn the other party to an untimely death with all the ramifications for that person's family? I realized that I just couldn't accept that view of deity; accidents happen and, if we are unfortunate enough to be caught up in such a situation, is that an indication that we have lost deity's favour? So when I was introduced to the Druid's Prayer in the early stages of exploring Druidry I knew that I would have to give this opening much thought if I was to repeat this prayer, in private and in public, and maintain my integrity.

When I say this prayer today, I imagine myself asking to find my place within the creative energies that flow throughout the cosmos. I am then protected in the sense that I'm reaching out to my true home and, no matter what the particulars of my life or death might be (or indeed those of others) I cannot be separated from "all that is". I belong, I can trace my lineage back to the moment when everything existed as potentiality: "the universe has my back" so to speak. From the reassurance of this confident hope, the other phrases of the prayer follow on - strength builds resilience within me as I increasingly come to understand my place within "all that is". Initially I wondered why understanding was the necessary precursor of knowledge. Surely it ought to be the other way round? I think that I have some insight into this now. My sense of strength has led to a proper acknowledgement of my place within the vast scheme of things. In turn, I have been prepared to take knowledge on board in such a way that it will not inflate my sense of self but will lead to appreciation of and a quest for justice and loving concern for all creation. From the breadth and depth of such love I once again find myself expressing my commitment to Spirit and all that is good. I find a sense of reciprocity in these words. Spirit gives of itself and receives something back.

Arriving at this point has taken considerable time and effort and the insights that I offer here may only be of use to me but I offer them to fellow-OBODies in a spirit of fellowship as each of you explore your own particular path.



A Space Just for Druids by Beth Mowry

You may have seen postings on various Druid-themed social media groups about The Awen Center, and our programming. I thought that perhaps I'd share a little of how this dream of mine continues to grow into reality. I have always been connected with the natural world - from trips "to the woods" with my father to working at and then directing overnight camps for youth during my teenage and young adult years. Life took a turn, as it does, and I found myself living in New York City, teaching about climate change in a public high school. Being in the city was good for my career, but over the years, it grew more and more challenging to be my best self while living there.

I joined OBOD in 2018, started the gwersi and watched Tea with a Druid weekly. I connected with the NYC Three Rivers Grove and after about a year, was chosen as one of our two Chosen Chiefs. All the while, an idea was starting to form; I knew that I needed more time in nature. I knew that it was difficult to find places for Druids to gather. I knew that there were many others like me who needed a retreat from the intensity of city living. Then, though I cannot for the life of me find where I read or heard it, I remember Phillip saying something like "Build a life you don't need a retreat from." There it was; Awen struck and I knew where my path was leading.

In 2021, I was able to buy a house situated on just over 20 acres of land in the Catskill Mountains

of New York. It is a beautiful mixture of forest, fields, and old stone walls. Every season brings new discoveries with the land - blueberry bushes, owl pellets, new birds to befriend and new flowers to marvel over. The first project was to convert the metal barn into a group gathering place and remove LOTS of electric fencing. The barn is still a work in progress, but will soon have a small kitchenette with basic cooking facilities and refrigeration in addition to tables and chairs. The walls house my rock and fossil collection, along with items that correspond to the other three elements. There was already a perfect place for a sacred grove on the property and I added a fire pit with seating logs and built a special gathering space under a hemlock tree. I've hosted a "Raise the Stones" volunteer weekend in late May since 2021 and the first big project was building a three-circuit labyrinth, aligned with the four directions and surrounded by herb, vegetable and native plant gardens.

I hosted my first event for a small group for Lughnasadh 2021 and have had a seasonal gathering every festival since: potluck lunch or dinner, a group ritual in our sacred grove and then some relevant activity or craft project. I started a local Seed Group and have used social media and word of mouth to reach people with whom our mission resonates: At The Awen Center we strive to provide opportunities and environments which allow guests to tap into their own flowing



inspiration.

It hasn't been all smooth sailing, as there were some legal and zoning things I needed to work out with my local town about public use of the property and to allow camping on-site. And, as this is mostly a self-financed and solo effort, there are lots of things that I dream of doing, but don't have the time, money or capacity to complete yet. I do ask for donations at seasonal events and the women's circles, but don't feel right about charging for spirituality and community. But, after three years, I am finally able to offer limited camping on the site, too. So, this year, I am expanding to offer a few weekend events: an "Introduction to Druidry" event, a forest therapy weekend, a divination weekend and our first official Druid camp: Midsummer Magic.

I still have dreams of this space blossoming into a full-fledged retreat center with a main lodge with indoor classrooms, art studio spaces, commercial kitchen and dormitory-type housing. Wouldn't it be amazing to have a cabin for each of the elements? A star-gazing tower in the middle of the back field? A variety of camping facilities like yurts and tiny houses? Sacred spaces and art installations tucked throughout the landscape? We'll see where the path leads!

The Awen Center is located in Jefferson, NY, USA. You can learn more about us by visiting our website at www.TheAwenCenter.org

Beech Grove by Nikki Equitz

As I sit in this Beech Grove
Branches bare of leaves
Here I hear the whispers of
them calling out to me

Mother Earth has provided
a very sacred place
Which is more important
to me than any other space

With my body and
with my mind
Freedom to sit with
their greatness
Feeling welcome at any time



Seasonal Recipe

Bealtaine by Sue Wilson

Now is the time to enjoy the new season's asparagus and rhubarb, both vegetables appropriately phallic for the season. So for Bealtaine why not try:

Rhubarb and Strawberry Pots

200g new season's rhubarb
2 tablespoons apple juice
4 cardamom pods, crushed
1 star anise
75g brown sugar
1 packet silken tofu (the long life stuff)
200g strawberries
2 tablespoons maple syrup
Handfuls of Granola or muesli to layer
Coconut vegan yoghurt

1. Chop the rhubarb and put it in a casserole dish.
2. Add the apple juice, cardamom, star anise and brown sugar.
3. Poach gently for 10 minutes until soft.
4. Spoon the mixture into individual glasses or jars.
5. Wash and slice the strawberries. Keep a few back for decoration.
6. Put the remaining strawberries into a jug with the tofu and maple syrup.
7. Blitz with a stick blender until smooth.
8. Make layers in glass jars of rhubarb, muesli or granola, and the strawberry tofu.
9. Finish with a layer of coconut yoghurt and top with a slice of strawberry.



The Evolution of the Tarot by Steve Hounsome

My fascination with, or arguably addiction to the Tarot began when I was in my teens. In what is now my 60th year that fascination with all things Tarot remains and has only, if anything, increased. This is in part due to the veritable plethora of decks, books and all manner of ingenious and cash-attracting ways and means now proffered by all and sundry.

As someone who has always maintained a dislike for the mechanisms and philosophy of much that calls itself capitalism, my view has long been that when it comes to the Tarot, there is a grave danger that it becomes cheapened and lessened by such widespread exposure that it now gets. It is true to say that in recent times, the Tarot has become mainstream, with all that goes with this.

Yet, if one exercises some insight and not a little restraint, there are certainly gems to be had and offerings that stand out from the crowd and contribute in a positive way to the Tarot annals. Of course much that is Tarot is down to personal choice but quality will always set itself apart from the morass of mediocrity that can abound. In such works I find an unfolding and progression of what the Tarot is and how it can be used.

Along with the spread of popularity of Tarot has come something of an acceptance that the cards are used for fortune-telling, divination and the supposed psychic ability to predict futures. Oddly enough I have been a professional Tarot reader for over 40 years but have never seen the value of predicting a future. However, that debate is not the subject of this article. I mention this only because the earliest known Tarot cards were created as a game, just as we might use playing cards now. Their use for fortune-telling, and their connection with the esoteric and occult, came some 200 years later.

The earliest Tarot decks that we know of are rooted deep within the Renaissance period, a time when there was an expansion of consciousness, plus artistic and scientific developments in many areas and fields, along with the discovery of the so-called 'new world'.

The most well-known and widely used deck ever is the Waite-Coleman-Smith Tarot, which appeared just a few short years before the build-up and outbreak of the First World War, the 'war to end all wars' which of course it was not. The

much maligned Aleister Crowley with the artist Lady Freida Harris produced the Thoth Tarot deck around the conclusion of the Second World War. The publishing boom of the 1960's saw books and more Tarot decks begin to appear, along with the consciousness heightening aims of the hippie movement. In this 21st Century we are seeing decks that reflect what has become known as the 'woke' culture.

These are just some rather random examples to illustrate my idea and concept here, but needs much further exploration and research. My intention was to do this work and produce a book entitled 'The Evolution of Tarot'. However I have now been

diagnosed with terminal cancer and time left to me will not allow for the amount of work this would entail. This is why I have written this article, so that the idea is 'out there' at least in some form. Perhaps someone will pick up these particular reins and see what they can make of it.

When I first began exploring Tarot, at the tender age of 14 when I got my first deck – which I still have and treasure, beautifully dog-eared as it is – Tarot was still kept under the counter in bookshops and what became the

ubiquitous 'new-age' shop had not yet begun to appear. I still recall 'The Eye in the Pyramid' shop in The Lanes area of Brighton, UK, where I found that first beloved, 'Morgan-Greer' deck.

In those halcyon days people of my age could get Saturday jobs and happily for me, mine was in a bookshop. The few Tarot decks available were kept under the counter and always sealed, with a discreet sign telling people to ask at the counter for them, on display. It was still seen then as something of a 'risqué' thing and only ever seen openly in public at psychic fairs, which were beginning to spread and gain popularity. Since the early 1980's, those Fairs and their associated fortune-telling use of the Tarot grew and expanded until we had the much bigger 'Mind, Body, Spirit' type of event we still see now. Since then, and happily for me, it seems that the use of Tarot is now moving beyond the limitations of the psychic booth, seafront parlour and premium rate telephone lines of the 1990's and beyond.

Although more and more decks began to appear around this time, it was still the above-mentioned



'RWS' deck that dominated. Whilst its use of symbolism can arguably be considered the most complete, it is my view now that this deck has largely run its course. Technology has led to decks being produced with amazing effects depicting the movement and impact of an energetic realm that co-exists with our physical one, and this is where I suggest the future evolution of the Tarot, together with humanity's understanding and knowledge of it, will go.

In saying this I should mention that I have nothing whatsoever against the RWS deck and all in the Tarot community owe a huge debt of gratitude to its creators. It is simply that we need to move on and I think we are doing so with many decks appearing now, chief among these, for me anyway, being the Light Seer's Tarot by Chris-Anne. Decks such as this, and there are more examples, show us that Tarot is as modern now as when it was first depicted with hand-drawn images of the earliest decks, many of people known at the time.

The Tarot is now being put to use as an aid for counselling, psychological work and therapeutic methods in general, as many of my esteemed Tarot colleagues are doing. All this led me to think that the Tarot is, and always has been, evolving. Further, it is as if the Tarot and its unfoldment, progression or evolution, mirrors that of humanity, which can be seen when even a cursory look at its history reveals. It is as if there is a 'Spirit of the Tarot' that is guiding it along, whether we see this as a discarnate entity, energy being, form or state of consciousness. The late and much missed Rachel Pollack tells us in 'The Tarot of Perfection' that "the cards themselves are just cardboard and coloured ink, but a kind of spirit inhabits them".

Shortly after I published the first of my books on 'Tarot Therapy' (available on Amazon) in 1999 I created Courses at Introductory, Certificate and Diploma levels to train students in the therapeutic use of the deck. Throughout there are guided meditations and journeys to connect with such a spirit of the Tarot. At the time of creating these I did not realise how much they would go on to influence both myself and my own subsequent work with the Tarot, but also all those students it has been my fortunate honour to work with.

Above and beyond this though must come the interactions I have had with the Spirit of the Tarot and I am happy to be able to say that as we move deeper into the current Century, and despite so much that is in darkness, strife and turmoil across

the world, I am sure that new ways of working with the Tarot and what it represents will appear and flourish as we learn to adapt the new technologies to their best use.

RECOMMENDED SOURCE FOR TAROT HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

Dai Leon – Origins of the Tarot

Helen Farley – a Cultural History of Tarot

Ronald Decker and Michael Dummett - A History of the Occult Tarot

Patrick Maille – The Cards: The Evolution and Power of Tarot

Paul Huson – Mystical Origins of the Tarot

Robert M. Place – The Tarot, History, Symbolism and Divination

Cynthia Giles – The Tarot: History, Mystery and Lore



Finding the Light Within

by Vohl

This piece is about "facing the darkest part of the psyche" Vohl explained "unlocking one's full potential and the discovery of strength!"

Kernow Druid Gorsedd by Sandie Coombs

The planning for this Gorsedd began in 2023 following a conversation which highlighted a need for a 2nd Druid Gorsedd. Caryl Dailey asked myself and Bo McAllister to help organise the event. A month later suitable accommodation had been found, the theme and dates were agreed, and emails sent to those on the waiting list for the other Druid Gorsedd. We had a tsunami of bookings within a few days!

The theme for the weekend was Embracing Challenges using the magical world of the Ogham. Surrounded by land, sea, and sky we began our journey with an introductory welcome, casting a circle and chanting a few Awens! Folks were then divided into four elemental teams in readiness for a Druidic quiz composed by Caryl (she loves giving people a challenge in her unique playful style!). Everyone was given pointed hats to wear in different elemental colours.

Continuing with the theme of challenges and working through these with the assistance of the Ogham, everyone was gifted a small stave of wood which had been magically harvested and prepared over the previous months to incorporate the energies of Birch, Yew, and Oak. A brief explanation why we would be using these three trees was given. We entered into a meditation to meet our individual deity within the grove of Birch trees and asked to be given the Ogham symbol of Birch to be held within the solar plexus overnight. Bo gave a lovely gentle breathing and shaking down of the day and suggested participants rested their head against the trunk of the silver birch as they settled down to sleep.

Saturday morning began with everyone meeting to enjoy breakfast before taking a leisurely stroll to the cottage where we had met up the previous evening. Thoughts were exchanged on

resting with the Silver Birch as a gateway before we proceeded with our meditation journey into the grove of the Oak. Our Birch Ogham symbol was exchanged for the Ogham of the Oak and our journey continued. A brief discussion followed with some grounding refreshments.



We went back into our teams to begin the next challenge. The teams were asked to select an item from different pre-prepared bags. These were to be combined into a story for use in the elemental direction of the ceremony. The items consisted of characters and places that we had studied throughout the grades, and an Ogham stave. Awen began to flow. Unique scenes emerged for the ceremony, creating a story for each of the quarters. A lovely lunch followed by some free time to relax, before meeting up for afternoon tea and the ceremony. Saturday evening was the Eisteddfod. An eclectic mix of stories and poems. Various instruments were played. Songs were sung, and laughter flowed throughout the evening.

On Sunday, our journey with the Ogham took us through the groves of Birch and Oak before we journeyed to the island of the Yew where we could absorb the energies of Yew. This was a transformation journey which we could carry with us into the apparent world. We were magically given a single word to write and keep with our wooden stave. The post meditation journey discussion became focused on our role as peacekeepers in the light of modern conflict and how using the Ogham could assist us to work through challenges. The circle which had held us during the weekend was closed. We continued our journey back into the outside world with a tummy full of love, and lovingly prepared wholesome food.



A Journey That Takes a Lifetime by Luke Eastwood

This year is the 20th anniversary of me joining OBOD, which strangely I did some 9 years after buying and reading Ross Nichols' seminal work 'The Book of Druidry', (compiled by former Chosen Chief Philp Carr-Gomm), after I saw it in a bookshop window, in 1995, on the way to work. At the time I found the book both startling, a goldmine of information and also very challenging and difficult to read. I had barely started my private study of Druidry/Druidism and so it was tough to absorb all that was in this dense book. During my Bardic grade work I re-read Nichols' book, then almost 10 years older and having met some new mentors in county Wexford, Ireland, where I had moved to in 1999. At the time I had no plans to write a book, my main literary interest was writing poetry, but as with everything in life – things changed.

I had previously worked in journalism in London for a time, and so I began to write occasional articles for Irish esoteric magazines and, after a short while, for *Touchstone* as well, with the kind support of Penny Billington, the former Editor. By the time I had finished the Druid grade, I had written my first book on Druidry and it was published in the following year (2012). For a brief moment I was impressed with myself and my ego swelled somewhat, but before long I realised that I am not actually important and I also realised that I do not wish to be famous, or to be worshiped like a guru.

Of course, I have not become famous or a guru, but most importantly I realised what mattered here was the act of service and the work itself – not my ego or my sense of self-worth. I am not dismissing creativity, my own included, but I feel that it is wise not to be swayed by your own skills and the resulting 'marketing propaganda' that is necessary for any creative endeavours to get noticed in this commercially centred world. I've now written 10 books in total, but I am aware that it doesn't make me special or any better than anyone else – above all I am actually very lucky to have been given opportunities that many people will never be able to avail of. Maybe I was just 'at the right place at the right time'? My tenth book 'A Path Through the Forest' is out in late Spring of 2024, and unlike my other work, it is a collection of essays and also a handful of interviews I gave (including Damh The Bard).

This collection came together as I realised that I had spent nearly 2 decades writing on the subject

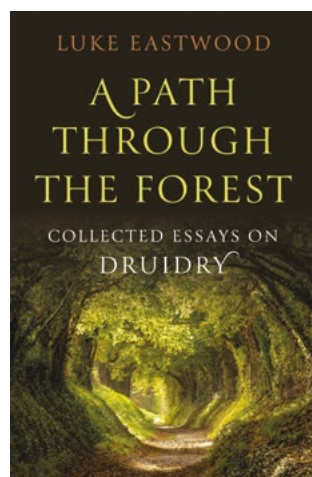
(19 years from the 1st to the last article) at the time it was completed. I had been through quite a lot of personal changes, moved house several times, got divorced, seen my daughter graduate and get a job, moved to the opposite side of the country to be with a new partner, 'finished' my Druid training, been unemployed, suffered depression and 3 years of severe insomnia, became a legal celebrant, changed career twice, released 3 albums of music, built a house myself, exhibited my paintings and digital art, made and lost friends, lost both family and friends who passed away, and planted several thousand trees.

No doubt, I am somewhat different from the person who wrote that first spirituality article for *Immrama* magazine in 2004, but I am also very much the same person, in many ways. I still love nature, I love a good laugh, I still love being on the Druid Path, just as much as when I first started in 1995, but of course, now it feels somewhat different.

I am older, more experienced, and hopefully somewhat wiser than before – from experiencing both good and bad, joy and pain. When I started out, I imagined how good it would be to be 'finished', to be a fully formed Druid, thinking how much better a person I would be. The truth is, knowledge does not make you a better person. Hell, it doesn't even make you wiser, necessarily. If anything, it is the experiences on the path that make you wiser and hopefully a better as a person. By that I don't mean better than others – if you think that and have become arrogant then you have failed, in my opinion.

By a better person, I mean a better version of myself, one that is hopefully more tolerant and more empathic due to the wide range of experiences, people and situations that I have encountered. Of course, I am not an impartial judge of whether or not becoming a Druid has done me any good – that would be better answered by other people!

What I have realised that the



journey of the Druid is one that never ends, at least if there is an end then it is death – the transition from this apparent realm into another. If we consider that we have no more to learn then either we have become lazy, tired, too jaded or too arrogant. I hope that I never think that my journey is completed, that to me would be a bad sign. I am convinced that after death I will continue to be a Druid, in the Otherworld, but what form that will take I simply don't know.

I realise that my knowledge and whatever wisdom I have is far from perfect. I still have plenty to learn about being a Druid, about being a human and about patience, frustration, desires, tolerance and life in general. What I have learned thus far, I have tried to share, not because I 'know it all' but as an act of service, an attempt to be of assistance to my fellow Druids, and to invite people to think about what I consider to be important issues, for Druids and often for humans in general. How good a job I have done is hard to guess, but I do my best, in the hope that some people will find what I have to say of use.

I would encourage anyone who is creative, who feels they have something good to offer the world, to try their hardest to make it happen and not be too self-conscious about offering their output. The worst that can happen is that not many people will enjoy your work, but even so, isn't it worth being creative for its own sake, as an act of expression, of spirituality and of service too? The Druid path is a long one, and not an easy one, but truly the journey itself is its own reward. Once we accept that being a Druid is not linear, then it's much easier to let go of (often ridiculous) expectations and just be immersed in the experience. Perhaps it's circular or even spiral in nature, with the same places being visited more than once, in different ways? Whatever it is, the Druid's journey is one that should be a long one, long enough to last a lifetime.

You can pre-order Luke Eastwood's **A Path Through The Forest** via the OBOD store: <https://store.druidry.org/products/a-path-through-the-forest>

Reviews

Energetic Herbalism for Beginners by Joanne Hedger

Self-Published. ISBN: 9798385617425. (Available through Amazon.)

This is Joanne Hedger's second book; both have been self-published to high acclaim on the internet. Joanne says in the introduction that she was led to write this book after growing up in rural Sussex, (England) and having regular contact with nature and plants. She began using herbal remedies to heal various health conditions; but wanted to understand the theories behind herbalism and therefore utilise the energies each plant possessed in order to work more holistically with her own body.

The book begins by explaining the basics of energetics. This is followed by chapters covering various different schools of medicine history - from Chinese and Ayurdic to vitalism and western herbalism. Included are other forms of holistic treatments, such as yoga and Qi Kung, which I practice myself. These can be used to compliment the herbal energy treatments.

There are detailed chapters on imbalances in the body, and practical suggestions on how to create harmony within. The book also covers applied usage, such as understanding how, for example, different herbal tastes may reflect imbalances and actions that can be taken to remedy this. There are many tables of common medicinal herbs and guides to how to integrate all this into a wellness and self-care routine.

There is a magnitude of information included in this book, and it would serve well as a hands-on reference book to be kept with a herbal medicine cabinet.

Reviewed by Thea Prothero





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>

APPLESEED GROVE, GLASTONBURY: Meeting (and sometimes hosting) OBODies and other Druids since 2002. theappleseedgrove@googlemail.com

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

CRANN NA CAILLI GROVE, seasonal & monthly peace ceremonies, moots and nature-based teachings. www.archwayadventures.org, archwayadventures123@gmail.com . 720-203- 6781. 24489 cr 54 Greeley Co. 80631 **USA 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:

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

OBOD Death Cafe meets online on the 3rd Wednesday of each month to discuss all matters relating to death and dying, loss and grief. If you wish to join the conversation then email me (John) at oboddeathcafe@gmail.com

Upcoming Events

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

14-16 June, OBOD Druid Gathering di Mezza Estate: "Intrecci e connessioni" a Cerro al Volturno, Molise (Italy). Contact: info@druidry.it o 0039 3286621163

14 to 16 June Wild Women 'Summer Village' Retreat - Bride Valley, near Dorchester, West Dorset. Ceremony, yoga, meditation, joyful coming together. Accommodation/camping nearby. contact@wildwomenretreats.co.uk
www.wildwomenretreats.co.uk

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 - 25 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 bardicgorsedd@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. Held near Nuneaton, Warks. Talks, workshops and ritual, music and entertainment. 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

9 to 13 September Wild Women 'Coming Home' Retreat - Selgars Mill near Tiverton, Mid Devon. Ceremony, meditation, yoga, deeper dive. contact@wildwomenretreats.co.uk | www.wildwomenretreats.co.uk

28th September, Meeting for OBOD members in Houthulst, Belgium. A get together ending with an Autumn Equinox Ceremony. For information: contact Danny Dewulf/Jol Props via FriendsofArduina@gmail.com

9/10 November Wild Women Winter Gathering with special guest Lisa Schneidau, Assembly Rooms, Glastonbury & Sun morning on the land. contact@wildwomenretreats.co.uk | www.wildwomenretreats.co.uk

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