



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

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This Issue

- ✿ Robin Hood and the Monstone by James Wilde
- ✿ A Flower of Dew by LaKase Cousino
- ✿ Swans of the Loch by Lynn R S Genevieve
- ✿ Plus lots more!



COVER: "Folklore" by Gabrielle Cavegn

Editorial

Welcome to October's Folklore edition! It's an edition so full of Tricks and Treats that some Samhain features have been moved to November to make space for the wonderful content you have sent in. In fact, there was so much folkloric content that more will be appearing in our upcoming editions of *Touchstone*. Here you will find articles about boulders in Lancashire, sea stacks in Shetland and Choughs in Kent. We have retellings of folklore tales from Bodmin to Baldock, from Scotland to Switzerland and a beautiful piece from African-American culture by way of Germany. And with Kelpies, Sasquatches and Yarthkins stalking the pages in poetry and pictures, this really is a packed edition.

Two quick thank yous; firstly to Gabrielle Cavegn for the evocative photo on the front cover. Gabrielle has captured that liminal moment where the sun begins to set, where the apparent world darkens and stories begin to manifest. What a perfect photo to lead us into this special edition. Look out for Gabrielle's retelling of *The White Woman* on page 12.

Also, thanks to Luke Eastwood for his wonderful poem and photograph on the back page. The photo is of Skellig Michael which, Luke wrote, "was regarded as the home of Donn (the underworld god) and later a place associated with Manannán Mac Lir, who undertook the same role as psychopomp, escorting the souls of the dead towards the Otherworld realm beyond the sea." It's a perfect way of closing this very special issue.



TOUCHSTONE (October '24 - Issue 326)

- 2 Chosen Chief's Bit
- 3 Bard's Page
- 5 Robin Hood and the Monstone - *James Wilde*
- 7 Folklore and Ritual Traditions Parade - *Sian Harding*
- 8 Standing on the Shoulder of a Giant - *Thea Prothero*
- 9 A Flower of Dew - *LaKase Cousino*
- 10 Green Trackways and Myth - *Penny Billington*
- 11 Swans of the Loch - *Lynn R S Genevieve*
- 12 The White Lady - *Gabrielle Cavegn*
- 13 The Beast of Bodmin Moor - *Frances Gaudiano*
- 14 Thoughts on Water-Horses in Folklore - *Josh Warren*

Yarthkins by Neil Rhind

Yarthkins are East Anglians,
Tiddy ones, born of the land,
Who tend to growing plants by hand,
And stand no higher than a span.



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Chosen Chief's Bit

Bandia a Chairde! I hope you have all had a good summer or winter, depending on where you are on the planet.

In keeping with this month's theme of Folklore, I'd like to share some from Ireland. Samhain is the Irish word for the month of November, though Oíche Shamhna (Halloween) is on October 31st. There are other names for the night also: Oíche na Sprideanna (Night of Spirits); and Oíche an Phúca (Night of the Pooka). When I was a child we went out on the Pookies on Oíche Shamhna, going from house to house collecting nuts and sweets. In those days, we had to earn the treat by singing or reciting poetry.

The Púca takes many shapes, usually an animal, though most commonly, he appears as a horse with sleek dark fur and golden eyes. Although the Púca has a reputation for terrifying or confusing humans, in many of the stories, he is rather benevolent and has the gift of human speech. There are stories where a human finds him or herself on the back of the Púca who takes them for a wild ride, often far from their home, but no real harm comes to them. There is one story from Lady Wilde's (Oscar Wilde's mother) book *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland*, which I like.

One day, Padraig, a farmer's son was out in the field minding cattle when he felt something rush by him like the wind. He knew it was the Púca on his way to the mill where the Daoine Síde (Good people) meet. The boy called out to the Púca: "Púca, Púca! Show me what you are like, and I'll give you my coat to keep you warm."

Then a young bull came rushing towards him. Padraig threw his coat over the bull and he became calm. He told Padraig to come to the mill when the moon was up and he would have good luck. So Padraig went to the mill that night, but all he saw were sacks of corn all over the floor and the millers all fast asleep. No work was done. Soon Padraig fell fast asleep and when he woke up the next morning all the corn had been ground. He was amazed by this as the men were still fast asleep. The same thing happened for three nights so Padraig decided that he needed to keep watch to see what happened.

He found a hiding place in the mill from where he could observe what was happening. At midnight, six little fellows came in, each carrying a sack of corn, followed by an old man dressed in rags who told them to turn the mill. This they did until all the corn was ground.

The next morning, Padraig told his father what he had seen.

"Well," said his father, "as this is the work of the Púca, let him continue with his excellent work. I've no need

for these idle men." So he dismissed the men. Very quickly the farmer became very rich.

Padraig very often would go to the mill, hide and watch the Daoine Síde at work. He soon felt sorry for the Púca, who, in his tattered clothes worked so hard to make his father rich. So out of love and gratitude for the Púca, he bought a very fine suit of clothes, laid it out on the floor of the mill. When the Púca saw the magnificent clothes he asked:

"Are these for me? I shall be turned into a very fine gentleman indeed."

He put on the clothes and walked up and down admiring himself, when he remembered his work and continued to grind the corn. Then suddenly it occurred to him, "No, no more work for me. Fine gentlemen do not grind corn. I'll go out into the world in my fine clothes and see what there is to see."

He left the mill, never to be seen again. Padraig missed the Púca and he would go out into the fields at night and call out to him:

"Púca, Púca, come to me and show me your face!" But the Púca never came.

The farmer had made so much money he sold the mill and Padraig grew up to be a fine and educated gentleman. Years later on his wedding day, as they were drinking to the bride's health, a golden cup filled with wine suddenly appeared in Padraig's hand. He knew instantly that it was a gift from the Púca. He and his bride drank the wine without fear. They lived long, happy and prosperous lives and

kept the golden cup as a treasure. It is said that their descendants have it in their possession to this very day. Sin é!

Beannachtaí an tséasúr daoibh go léir! Blessings of the season to you all!

Eimear 



A Samhain Haiku by Janet Elvidge

Wind moans through tree boughs,
Skeletal Moon sits on high.
Cold seeps into bones.





Above: Mariyan by Cathy Johnson.
Right: Kelpie by Josh Warren.

The Blackberry by Michelle Hawkins-Collins

Pioneers of the unknown,
Black jewels upon prickly thrones,
Medicine chest of the wise crone.



Squatch by Tracy Rupp

today they held a festival for me in Logan, Ohio
a small Appalachian street fair
selling lawn cut-outs and t-shirts of my face
some with gorilla features
others resembling my distant cousin, Yeti
they seem to like me, these human animals
but they don't know me
they long to see me, hear me, smell me
not understanding that I am a lone poet
an ancient god
contemplating time
Nature
the science of the constellations
they fail to recognize
that my grunts in
the distance
are from acts of
self-satisfaction
and when I
howl, it is from
loneliness
as I seek only to
mate passionately
wildly
with the goddess
but their cameras
have frightened
her away...



Skryker by Neil Rhind

These isles abound with spectral hounds
Whose entrance portends death;
Word of bad luck brought by Black Shuck,
By Padfoot, or Barghest,
By coal-black Trash, or Tatterfoals.
Guytrash is what some fear,
And Skryker is the name that's claimed
By some in Lancashire.

So seldom seen, the Skryker's scream,
A piercing banshee shriek,
Is how it came to gain its name,
As with a Padfoot's feet.
To see, not hear, a Skryker near
May mean to see a hound
Or maybe cow, the shapes endowed
On Skrykers know no bounds.

Airmid by Sarah Watkins

Nuada's arm of silver was your making and your death

You saw the god's sorrow and anguish
Healed him over nine days
Returning his arm to flesh

Our sire despised your skill
Raged at the man you had become
Witnessed a son outshining his father
And was belittled, diminished

Four times he raised that sword
Twice you healed
Once you staggered
The final blow cleaved your skull

They laid you to rest
Without care or feeling
In dark, moist soil you were received
Welcomed by the Great Mother

I was left with my grief
Heart pain washed my face
You were my brother
My blood kin



As the sun broke the clouds
Green shoots arose from the loam
Magic stirred leaves and blooms
The scent of 365 herbs perfumed the air

I gathered your gift to me
Your final bequest
The gift of healing
Of life anew

Spread on my cloak
Joint to joint, sinew to sinew
A shadow body of miracle plants
But not the flesh I'd loved so dear

A dark shade fell
Father destroyed your gift
Screaming I must never know
Herbs meant to restore and heal

Face raised to the sun
I felt the Great Mother's caress
Knew he was wrong, too late
Your wisdom already flowed in my veins

Micha's gift engraved on my heart
To be shared with mortal minds
Long after his soul had departed
His last gift to the world

Right: Dryad of the Golden Oak by Patricia Robin Woodruff.

Long Meg by Peter Smith

Oh Mother Meg come dance with me
And your daughters bring along
Although it be the Sabbath day
Let your spirit heed my song

We will dance together, you and I
Beneath the silver moon
Her light will bathe your naked breast
Your soul will sup my tune

But should you dance when morning light
Plays softly o'er your skin
A tomb of stone for you awaits
The same for all your kin

You will dance forever, beneath the sky
Though never dance again
Your family cursed forever more
To hear no last refrain

But when, some day in ages hence
Your body is set free
My song still waits upon the breeze
Oh Mother Meg come dance with me

Seonaidh by Neil Rhind

The Shoney, spirit of the sea,
Ships gifts of seaweed to the shore
So Lewis' land, its goodness leeches
By farming man, might be restored.

The islanders all packed a peck
Of malt to bring to Mulway's church
To brew ale. Then the island picked
One gift-giver to wade the surf.



Robin Hood and the Monstone by James Wilde

On the lonely moorland of the South Pennines of Lancashire, near my hometown, there is a large gritstone boulder called the Monstone, or Manstone, or alternatively 'Robin Hood's Quoit'. I was told as a child that Robin Hood had once been visiting Lancashire, sleeping on a rocky outcrop in the escarpment called Blackstone Edge. The arrangement of rocks on which he is said to have slept are now known as 'Robin Hood's Bed'. One of the stones has a curious smooth hollow (about four feet by seven feet) on the top of it: this is where the famous outlaw rested. As the legend goes, Robin threw a boulder from Robin Hood's Bed and it landed in its current home about six miles away, becoming known as the Monstone.

The Monstone has an indentation on the top that somewhat resembles the imprints of a huge hand and fingers. Notably, the boulder is made of the same gritstone as found in Blackstone Edge: quite different to the stones found in the part of the moors where it now resides. This supports the idea that it was thrown there by some great hand, although the official explanation is the movement of glaciers.

In Rev G.R. Oakley's *Legends of Rochdale and its Neighbourhood* (1923) he tells a more elaborate version of the tale where invisible fairies help to carry the boulder in order for Robin to win a wager and save a man's life. This isn't a particularly surprising variant because fairylore is very prevalent around the area. A more recent collection called *Lancashire Folk Tales* by Jennie Bailey and David England (2014) includes a story where, after he spent the night on Blackstone Edge, Robin overheard a fairy meeting which warned him that enemies were close at hand.

Bailey and England also reference the legend of the Monstone but in its simplest version: thrown by Robin Hood, no fairies involved. A folk tale recorded by John Roby in *Traditions of Lancashire* (1829) tells another story about Robin Hood from the same area but this time located at the Fairies Chapel: a natural rock formation in nearby Healey Dell. Roby also mentions the simpler version of the Monstone legend in a footnote on this story, giving his own theory that these stones "if not Druidical, were landmarks" – suggesting that the story was used to help people remember the way around the moors by helping them to recognise particular features of the landscape.

Oakley's version of the legend preserves the more traditional image of a human Robin Hood by giving him fairy assistance. However in the version I grew up with, which is also the version that I've seen referenced most often, Robin is portrayed as

having superhuman strength. He is often very large, about as tall as Little John in the standard Robin Hood tales. After all, Robin Hood's Bed in Blackstone Edge is seven feet long and the finger indentations on the Monstone are bigger than most hands could leave!

I'm certainly not the first person to suggest that perhaps Robin Hood has replaced or been combined with an older figure in this legend, particularly since the boulder likely rested in its current position for centuries before the first known mention of Robin. There are multiple other stories of giants throwing or dropping stones to create landmarks – the Giant's Causeway springs to mind which is attributed to Fionn MacCumhaill, another legendary hero who



Illustration by James Wilde

is sometimes, but not always, portrayed as a giant. In fact, while researching, I discovered that there are actually multiple boulders across Lancashire, Yorkshire, and further afield, which are attributed to Robin Hood having tossed them into place. Many of these bear the name 'Robin Hood's Pennystone' (many thanks to John Billingsley's article *An Unlawful Game: Robin Hood and Pennystone* on northernearth.co.uk for this insight). It seems that Robin Hood really got around, and he loved a game of quoits!

Perhaps earlier versions of the tale had the Monstone being thrown by an unambiguously giant figure. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* (c. 1136) claimed that giants had roamed Albion for centuries but were overthrown, similarly to the Formorians in Irish myth and the Titans in Greek. Saxon giants such as Yorkshire's Wade and Bell have been adopted into our mythos and it seems likely that our stories of giants, particularly as the architects of ancient unknown structures as with Monmouth's explanation of the building of Stonehenge, are also influenced by Norse, Roman, Greek and Biblical tales. Many of these in turn may have drawn inspiration from even older works containing giants such as the Epic of Gilgamesh.

But was all of this imported or are there some cultural universals in play? Did our earlier ancestors, back in Mesolithic pre-Britain, also tell stories of gigantic primeval humanoids? Did they also use them to mythologise natural formations created before their own time? Sadly we are likely to never know, but I do believe that this phenomenon occurred long before we have a written record of it. I would also love to know how early the current Robin Hood the Rock Thrower legends were told— the earliest references I have been able to find are from the 1800s and I fear any earlier versions may have been entirely oral folklore, before it was considered important or useful to write down the stories of the common folk.

The seeming contradictions between the portrayal of Robin Hood in the Monstone legend as a superhuman or giant compared to the ballads and stories which, while varying on Robin's background and motivations, all portray him as a talented but mortal man, have fascinated me for some years. However, as a child, I accepted these contradictions without any issue. It seemed completely plausible to me that Robin Hood could be both a human hero living in a Nottingham forest with his Merry Men and a bored giant who visited the moorland near my house to throw a large rock from one town to another. Not exactly a shapeshifter but more in line with mythology that sometimes portrays figures as human in their struggles and sometimes divine in their capabilities, from Jesus to Lugh to Hercules. Does this make Robin Hood a deity to

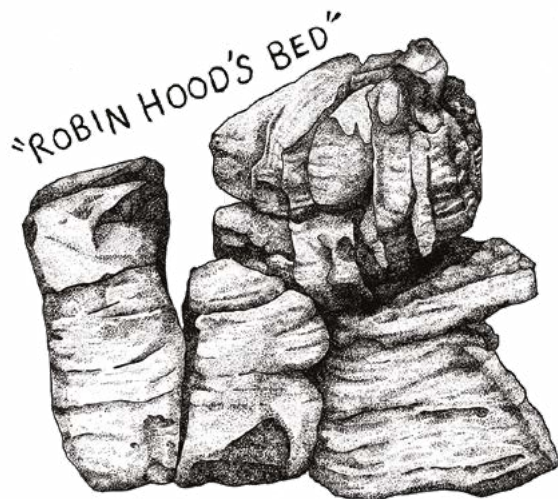


Illustration by James Wilde

me? Well, maybe a demigod.

Whether the Monstone itself was ever sacred to the Ancient Druids as folklorists such as Roby have wondered is debatable— and probably impossible for us to ever know. However, it has certainly been a cornerstone in my own druidic journey and a keystone in my personal sacred landscape. While I do not personally believe that the origin of the Robin Hood myth was the reframing of an ancient woodland deity (I tend to take the view that the ballads are too modern and too specifically Catholic), I do think that modern pagans and druids who fuse him with Herne the Hunter, Cernunnos and/or the Green Man are not necessarily wrong to do so! It would be a little hypocritical of me since, as I've hinted, I do regard Robin as a sacred figure. After all, the popularity of the songs and stories about Robin Hood became so immense that religious leaders of the time complained that the people would rather hear them than "messe or matyns" [Mass or matins] (from *Dives and Pauper*, unknown author, c. 1402) and "prefer Robin Hood to God's word" (*The Sixth Sermon Preached Before King Edward*, Bishop Latimer, 1549). I don't think it's a stretch to imagine him as a figure of worship. And as much as I enjoy and recognise the typical depiction of the forest-dwelling outlaw, my own mental image of Robin Hood is of a man at least seven feet tall striding across the moors of Lancashire and flinging huge rocks towards the horizon.



Folklore and Ritual Tradition Parade by Sian Harding



Each year in Folkestone, Strange Cargo, a local participatory arts organisation, hosts a parade through the streets called The Charivari. The parade is a celebration of cultural diversity through appreciation for arts and local heritage.

I have been volunteering with Kent Wildlife Trust on the reintroduction of a corvid that has been missing from the Kentish coastline for over two hundred years - the Chough. As part of this work, Jenny, a good friend and fellow OBODer who works in the field, commissioned a Hooden Chough to be part of the parade. It was to be made by a wonderful local puppeteer named James Frost. James makes props and animal disguises as well as performing in Mummers plays and traditional celebrations throughout the area, helping to keep East Kent traditions alive. Mummers plays are traditional folk performances which are performed on high days and holidays throughout the year and often use spectacular costumes to attract a crowd, so there is a good connection between the performance of the mummers, or guisers, and the parade.

This year the theme of the Charivari was British folklore and ritual tradition and we were invited to parade our wooden chough along with the other hooden beasts.

Hoodening, is a folk custom found in Kent. It can also be spelled hodening and oodening, and involves a hobby horse made of wood, also known as a Hooden Horse. It is attached to a pole to give it height while a person, hidden under the fabric, carries it along.

My job was to dress up, dance alongside the Chough and attempt to keep my friend from crashing into people as she tried to navigate

the street under the darkness of the hood of her animal guise. Trust me this was not as easy as it sounds!



Little did we know we were to be leading the parade with all the hooden beasts coming to life as we moved forward through the town, dancing, trying to raid the food stalls and, on occasion, avoiding collisions with each other by mere millimetres. A procession of over seven hundred people including dancers, fairies, morris men, beautifully made paper giants and multi-cultural bands, followed close behind.

The end point had stalls for food and magical gifts, a may pole and dancing around the bandstand, where the mayor said a few words. It was so impressive to see so many people from all backgrounds come together, hold space and honour the old - and new - ways of this land.

I felt as if I had been transported back in time while my feet remained in the present proving that a lot of our ritual tradition is still alive and thriving in our community today. So much laughter and celebration was had, mostly at how fast Jenny's legs could move when she took the form of a Chough.



Sian and Jenny as the Chough

In October, my book *A Guide to Pilgrimage* is published by Moon Books. I have always sought out places along the wild edges of nature, places that require me to push myself and climb out of my comfort zone. These places often leave you with more questions than answers and it is only then, in these sometimes unloved wild edges, that I see glimpses of delicate beauty and the divine. Recently I had an encounter with a giant and found myself at the end of the world.

Two giants, Herman and Saxi lived at the far end of the world, (The top of Unst in Shetland) relatively peacefully. It was said that if you sailed due north from this place, you would, after many weeks, get to the North Pole. That is, if you didn't freeze to death first. The two neighbours enjoyed terrorising the local population, who hid in fear every time they heard thundering footsteps and rocks being hurled as the giants hunted for food. One day Herman managed to catch a whale while fishing and asked Saxi for the loan of his giant fish kettle so he could cook it. Saxi demanded half of the whale in payment. Angry shouts were heard for miles around as the two fought, hurling mountainous boulders and rocks the size of houses everywhere, including the sea. Eventually these outpourings of fury in the sea became what is now Muckle Flugga and Out Stack.

Shetland is the most remote part of the UK – if you can really call it part of the UK, because the nearest country is Norway, and they were part of Scandinavia until the fifteenth century. In this land of empty places, sparkling white beaches and frontier like settlements, there are many folktales like this one. Tales of giants and trows, are everywhere. Trows are very similar to their cousins across the sea, trolls, and were undoubtedly brought over by the first Norse settlers in the eighth century.

Today Unst is the furthest inhabited island north in the UK and was the first place

Vikings set foot. The most northerly point on the island is Hermaness which is now a nature reserve, featuring breathtakingly high cliffs where many rare seabirds, including fulmars and puffins flock in their thousands to nest in the summer. In the centre of the reserve is a huge blanket bog, filled with important bog-loving plants like cotton grass and the odd blaeberry. Very much a place of endings, you begin to ascend as soon as you leave your car and it seemingly never stops until you almost stumble upon the abrupt edge of the cliffs, with the moaning wind and the call of gannets as your only company. Muckle Flugga and Out Stack can be seen, if you are lucky and if the day is clear, although it's impossible to set foot on either of these outcrops. The walk to see the islands is approximately seven miles and strenuous. Good boots and a raincoat are a must. NatureScot, who care for the reserve, have erected wooden trackways across the bogs to protect the landscape, making it far easier, and much safer to navigate.

When we visited, a layer of mist engulfed the cliff, with only the black, toothed sea distantly visible in what seemed like a void in reality. You are at the end of the world. One wrong step would send you into the abyss. Next, we began the scrambling to climb up onto the giant's shoulder, above the clouds and towards the malign cliff edge. The wind whistles around in a disorientating way, or maybe it's Herman's whistling, trying to trick us into falling from his bony shoulder. The path is sodden and hard to see, and every now and then a phantom sheep appears in the murk.

As we climb higher still, abruptly, as if by divine intervention, the mist is gone, and we are blinded by dazzling sunshine and the view we have been waiting for! Before us and below us are three rocky islands, if that's what you want to call them, one with a lighthouse Muckle Flugga and Out Stack – The end of the world.



A Flower of Dew by LaKase Cousino

I'd like to invite you to imagine warm hands, lightly calloused but welcoming, moving steadily over beloved remnants of clothes. The deft fingers pick over a bit of gingham, a sliver of a baby's shirt, a fold of a sleeve, arranging them into the perfect shape, one that traces the passing of seasons and moods over the course of generations. These hands held and soothed, they picked over land that didn't belong to them, not free to turn their skill to softer endeavors. There's a voice in the body these hands belong to, a honey-sweet song hummed while the hands work to create a map of love. In the end, the quilt will be all that remains. The quilt will hold the magic like a shield.

As an African American, our stories are like those patchwork quilts our matriarchs made to keep their houses warm on cold nights. They were an expression of care meant to fortify us through the inhumane struggle of enslavement. Each story can be traced to lands our feet never touched, to people we were taken from, to ideals we had to refocus to keep ourselves safe. The land was our ally and is featured as such in our stories. Every hero had a connection to the natural world, because the way to freedom was mapped by the stars, streams, bird calls, and migrations of the forest. Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and thousands of people charted their way to freedom with an understanding of nature as friend. We have tales of plant roots used as talismans, of talking rabbits and foxes, tales of streams come to life, of men and women who could fly if they remembered the old ways, and – my personal favorite – witches who could lead you off course with a wink.

One such story, *Flower of Dew*, was traced to Germany ("Jorinde and Joringel"), but is an interesting mixture of European and African American sensibilities. Nature is, again, an ally. The story relies on the pair's bond with the forest, their understanding of nature spirits, and trust in the power of love.

This is my interpretation of the tale.

There were once two sweethearts who loved to take their leisure in the forest, walking beside the cool waters of the stream where the woes of life could be forgotten for a time. The young man listened with a smile as his beloved sang alongside the bubbling waters, a song so bright and lofty it caused the birds to fall mute with envy. Her hair was as black as a raven's and her skin as warm and brown as the strong oak trees the birds perched in. No flower could ever rival the beauty of his sweetheart.

One day, they strayed from the stream into the darker part of the forest. The birds twittered a warning, but so enthralled they were with each

other, they did not heed the warning.

"Not that way," the birds tried to tell them. "She lives that way."

But, it was too late. In their joy and lofty singing, they had aroused the cruelty of a powerful witch. She was not a conjurer like the old granny in the village who imparted wisdom and shared tinctures, but a stealer of joy. With a dark grin and a flick of her wrist, she turned the young woman into a blackbird and put her in a cage, cackling all the way back to her cottage.

The young man ran in a fright. He ran so hard his legs ached and his lungs burned. He ran until he fell beside their stream, where the water bubbled and the sun shone as though it were merely

another day. Yet, the young man's heart broke into pieces at what had just occurred. There was no song in the forest that day, not while a woman languished in a cage, transformed, and her sweetheart cried alone in the forest.

"What ails you?"

The young man fell back from the stream in surprise. It had never before spoken to him, but there it was, plain as day, bubbling up and speaking plain.

"A witch has taken my beloved,"

the young man cried. "He turned her into a bird and keeps her locked up."

The water spirit bubbled high and angry at that. The waters loved the laughter of the pair, the singing and peace they brought to its shores.

"Come at dawn to my shores. Pick a crimson flower with three drops of dew in the center. Give it to the witch and you will have your beloved again."

The next morning, the young man left before the rooster called, he left before his mother and father woke, and even before the dogs cried to be let out. He went into the forest, down to the stream, and plucked a crimson flower with three drops of dew in the center. The drops chimed like bells as he walked back toward the darkest corner of the forest where the witch whistled a crooked tune.

The man knocked on her crooked door and held on tight to the crimson flower. When the witch opened the door the man said,

"I have for you a crimson flower with three drops of dew."

The witch had never before been able to collect a crimson flower with three drops of dew, for only the pure of heart could pick them. They were powerful, indeed, and she wanted it more than a blackbird girl who refused to sing. The witch reached for the flower, but the man stepped back. "Give her to me first, please." The young man pointed to his sweetheart, who sat in the cage with



no song on her lips. Her wings fluttered at the sound of his voice.
“Take her,” the witch grumbled with her crooked voice. “I have no use for her.”

The young man gave the crimson flower to the witch and ran into the hut to retrieve his beloved, relieved to have her in his arms again even if she remained a bird forever. He took her trembling bird form out of the hut without a look backwards, until he heard a wailing. The witch was encased in a silver, trembling glow that blotted out the darkness of the forest until all that remained was the hut. Suddenly, the bird transformed into his sweetheart once more.

Every day until the end of their days, they returned to the stream for a song and a walk, delighting in the bubbling of the waters and the rustling of the forest around them.



Samhain by Beth Amos

Green Trackways and Myth by Penny Billington

Ours was not a household for myth and legend, so my yearning for them was fed by the wonderful Alan Garner, in *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *The Moon of Gormath*. These were the first children’s fantasy books to place magical happenings in a real landscape; and, so potent is fiction, I believe these held the seeds of my Druidry. To my parents’ credit, we holidayed in the area so I could explore the sacred landscape when I was about eleven.

But, on our very own doorstep, we did have Jack! Between Weston and Baldock in Hertfordshire, Jack o’Legs was our giant, our own gigantic Robin Hood. He was a green man who flouted authority, and lived in a cave: a robber with one specific story. When inflated prices made bread unaffordable (all milling being controlled by the pesky Knights Templar over there in Stevenage with its mystical Six Hills) Jack stole loaves and re-distributed them to the poor. He was caught and blinded but, again with a resonance of Robin Hood, he strung a bow which only he could pull and shot three arrows to indicate his burial place.

And that is in Weston Churchyard, his grave markers are 14 foot apart, and that is the truth of it! Wonderfully, his name persisted, and, when the traveller – pre-motorway - relied on transport cafes, Jack o’Legs Cafe was a local and infamous stop for ton-up boys. What glamour, what danger; what warnings from worried parents! Reader, I never went. I really was far too young.

But deeper within me than any specific myth, I carry the presence of the ancient Icknield Way, ‘the oldest road in Britain’. It still paces quietly across the top of my home town, Letchworth, the first Garden City. The town was built around the beginning of the last century, but walk beyond the post-Art Deco town centre, the modern Grange Estate and wild Norton Common, and you will find waiting the Roman camp, the Icknield Way, and a vista that still retains the echoes and whispers of our Neolithic forebears. It embedded a love of land and trackway within me that can be stirred at a second.

It captured my imagination, and still does to this day



Swans of the Loch by Lynn R S Genevieve

The Chieftain's wife, who was also a powerful Sorceress, had given birth to a son. As was the custom, she sent him to a wet-nurse who had also given birth to a boy and they grew up strong. In their early years they were always together, playing, exploring, and fighting.

The day came when the Chieftain's son was to begin his studies and training as future Chief with the Druid. He spent the mornings learning his letters, philosophy, law and the stories of the land, and his people's history. The afternoons were for learning the ways of the warrior.

Years later, the boy joined the Chieftain's hunting party for the first time. After so long in isolated learning, his only companions the old Druid, Man at Arms and Huntsman, he would be with other boys and he did not want to let his father down. The hunt was going well when the Chieftain's son spotted a stag going into the wood. The young heir followed until the stag stopped in a glade. He crouched to draw his bow and let the arrow fly. It grazed the animal's neck. Startled, it made to escape but was immediately downed by a second arrow that whistled past the heir's head before finding its target. It struck true – a quick death. The Chieftain's son turned and was met with a smiling face.

"Hello. It's been a long time, hasn't it?"

Instantly, all loneliness was gone as he recognised his milk-brother. The embrace was long and they promised to never be separated again. They triumphantly carried their quarry to the camp. The Chieftain looked at the boys after inspecting the carcass and said,

"There are two wounds, a nick and a fatal shot. Who made the kill?" The Chief's son opened his mouth to speak but hesitated as the other boy spoke.

"It is the young prince's prize - his arrow shot true." Before he could even turn to his friend, the Chieftain had scooped up his son into a grand bear hug and the entire retinue cheered. As a reward, the Chieftain gifted his son a pair of

hunting hounds and as promised, the prince kept his friend and milk brother close, making him his hound master and attendant. Once more they were as twins, hunting, fighting and as boys did. They soon found their friendship, their brotherly love, transform into something else, something precious and intimate. It was confusing at first, fumbling, physical exploration but it felt so pure, so innocently true, how could it be wrong? They'd seen others cast out for less, so they kept their secret.

In his sixteenth year, the young heir had to prove his manhood and become a true warrior. The Rite of Passage was held once a year as winter took hold. The boys were sent out into the hills for three days and three nights fasting and dreaming, to discover their animal guide for life as warriors and hunters. They were to return on the Midwinter Solstice with their visions, which would be interpreted by the old Druid. To complete the Rite, the boys would have to find their guide in this world, so that they could dispatch it to the next where it could be at their side forever, in Spirit. The rule was that they should camp alone, so the prince and his milk brother parted once at the loch side.

"Good luck," they whispered to each other as they kissed their farewell.

Unbeknown to them his mother, the Sorceress had witnessed their passionate assignations in her scrying bowl and she was angry. Her son must do his duty and marry the daughter of their neighbouring Chieftain. Nothing could jeopardise this. She concocted a plan to avert this disaster.

The boys' visions were interpreted by the Druid individually so that no other would know each other's Spirit animal. The young heir emerged from the Druid's lodge smiling as he passed his milk brother, who was next to discover his soul's Spirit guide. The Sorceress peered into her scrying bowl eager to discover what her son's lover's guide was. The Druid spoke... it was a swan.

The last part of the Rite was a hunt and they each



left in different directions to complete their trial and become men. The Sorceress waited by the loch for her son's friend. He was startled when she spoke to him.

"Hello little warrior, this is the last test. It is not enough to simply hunt your guide, you must become it first, then it will submit to your arrow." The young man listened, this Rite had been full of surprises, so he was not suspicious. Closing his eyes as instructed, he suddenly felt himself to be flying. On opening them he found that he was looking down at his reflection in the loch, the white of the Whooper swan unmistakable. He soared ecstatically. He looked to the glen and saw the prince so promptly changed direction to share his joy with his lover. As he neared, to his horror, the prince pointed his bow and before the enchanted swan could retreat, it felt the arrow strike, plummeting to the ground into the thick heather. The prince rushed to claim his prey only to find the body of his friend.

Later that night the prince returned to the village but was inconsolable with grief. The only one who had not returned was the heir's attendant and they assumed that the prince was grieving for his friend.

The next day the prince visited the Druid keen to understand what had happened. The kindly old Druid listened as the new warrior poured out his sorry tale.

"What am I to do now?" After contemplating for a few minutes, the Druid spoke.

"It was foretold, that if ever two warriors shared the same Spirit animal in one year, it would be the end of the Chieftain's line. Both of you have the Whooper swan, a soul that can never be separated from its mate. They follow each other from lifetime to lifetime, always devoted. Do not feel guilty, your destiny was set at your birth. You may linger on this earth alone, or you may choose to leave this plane and join once again with Spirit. It is up to you."

The young warrior wandered along the shore of the loch, warring with his sense of duty to his father and fate. He looked up and saw a pair of Whooper swans courting, their long necks entwined, together, forever. He made his way to his lover's grave, took the knife from his belt and in one swift action thrust it into his heart. As he slumped over the stone topped mound, the swans below took flight and never returned to the dark loch again.

This is a reduced version of a short story I wrote in lockdown. It is a modern rendition of a tale associated with the loch where I live on the west coast of Scotland. It is a fable to explain why there are never any swans seen here. A more traditional rendition can be viewed here:

<https://folklorescotland.com/the-swan-of-loch-sunart/>

The White Lady by Gabrielle Cavegn

In Möriken, a small village in Switzerland, there used to be a brickyard long ago. Most people don't remember it though.

There once was a man who had been working there from time to time, burning bricks. For certain reasons this had to be done during the night. The oven stood in the cellar and often the shine of the flickering flames could be seen within the nearer surroundings. For the man, working by the fire, these nights, mostly the hours around midnight, must have been quite uncomfortable.

It happened on a night like this. The sound of the bells ringing from the old village church at midnight had just faded away, when the man, who had become a little sleepy by now, suddenly noticed something. Through a small alley of brickwork and woodwork he saw a slender and very tender young woman. A thin material was enveloping her fine boned body and seemed to be floating around her. Her beautiful and kind eyes were shining brightly, and her head was covered in a veil.

Slowly and very cautiously she turned around. Deliberately she walked towards the near open field. The man, who by now was wide awake again, stood up and took some careful footsteps in her direction. Truthfully, there she stood, barely two dozen steps away but in the open field already. In a gentle swing she lifted her arms as if for blessing, spread them wide apart and slowly turned towards the Chestenberg (chestnut mountain). For a long time, she was gazing steadily towards the Erlisbrunnen (Erli's fountain) first, then towards the Kühstelli (cow stables). Hesitantly the strange apparition then took some steps towards the western side of the heavily wooded mountain.

Suddenly, the man who had been staring transfixed at this beautiful, fragrant lady was asking himself if she maybe could have been the deer virgin, who was protecting and caring for the nimble but defenceless animals of the woods?

Indeed, he soon believed he was hearing strange and plaintive sounds from the far forests. The surprised brickmaker now clearly saw the translucent bright figure rising slowly up from the ground and floating away towards the woods and the hills as if in a dream.

Freely translated and recounted by Gabrielle Cavegn according to the book "Sagen und Spukgeschichten rund um das Schloss Lenzburg" from Edward Attenhofer



The Beast of Bodmin Moor by Frances Gaudiano

There was once a young woman, comely enough, though not beautiful by anyone's standards. Yet, she was a good girl. She worked hard on her family's holding, tending the animals, churning the butter, cooking and cleaning. She had all the skills that could be expected of a young one that grows up on a farm. Bennath, as her name was, would make a good wife. So her family thought and so did she herself. She wasn't the sort to tout her own wares, but she did know her worth.

Bennath's usefulness did not go unnoticed by the young men of the village as they went about looking for a wife. Bennath herself had her heart set on a young man by the name of Logan and hoped to catch his eye. He was a fine looking fellow and was tenant on a good piece of land where he grew crops and had sheep to graze. She smiled at him when they met at church and was more than happy to dance with him at festivals. She could see that he let his eye wander over the other young ladies of the parish, so was quite relieved when he finally settled on Bennath. With her father's approval, they agreed to be married. Bennath's future was secure with the one she had chosen herself. She was well satisfied.

It was three weeks before the wedding when a girl came to live with her uncle and aunt, the young woman's own family having met misfortune. This lass was a vision. Her skin was like cream and her blue eyes were the fluttering butterflies that one sees in the grasses. Her long, wheaten hair glowed in the sun, on the occasions when there was sun. She moved lithely down the road, running errands for her aunt, singing in a sweet voice that carried over the fields. All the men of the village would pause to watch her pass. She was that lovely.

Logan's head was well and truly turned. Only a few days after the girl's appearance, he forgot all about poor Bennath and pledged himself to the new one. Wenna she was called. Her aunt and uncle were anxious to be rid of an extra mouth to feed and gladly gave Wenna over to Logan's care, having them wed in no time at all.

Bennath could not bear it. Not only had she lost her love and her future, she was humiliated before all the village. She could not eat, could not sleep and she pined away to the very death of her. Her parents mourned her and had her buried in the

churchyard, with all solemnity.

But what of the inconstant suitor? It seems he began to be troubled by a visitation. He was out walking on the moors, looking for a lost sheep when a great, black beast, something between a wolf and bear appeared before him. Afraid for his life, he ran home, into his cottage, slamming the door behind him. He told his wife Wenna all about it, but she merely shook her head in disbelief, telling him he had been scared by

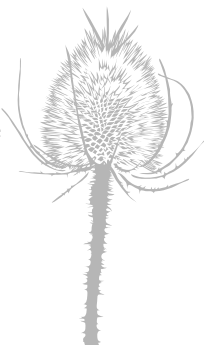
shadows. She scolded that he should go on back out and look for the sheep. It did not suit her plans to be losing valuable stock.

It wasn't just shadows though, for the beast appeared again to Logan. He was on the way home from market and when it reared up before him. He dropped his purse and lost all the coin he had just earned from

selling turnips. Oh, Wenna was cross about that for she had the money spent before it even came to them. She lashed her tongue at him until Logan was driven from the house and sought relief in the pub. But the beast leapt out of the hedgerow on his way home, late that night. It stood up on its hind legs, reaching out for him and growling till every hair on Logan's body stood on end. The man even soiled himself in his terror. Well, you can imagine what Wenna had to say about doing that bit of laundry.

The beast never let Logan alone after that, following him wherever he went to hide. There was no peace for the man - not out at his work or when he went home to his cottage, for Wenna had no sympathy for him. One day, driven to distraction, Logan climbed up to the top of Kilmar Tor and threw himself off. It was only then that he was freed from the beast but, being a suicide, his body was buried in unconsecrated ground and it is said that he suffers still.

Wenna, was a beautiful widow and her wily nature had all the men of the village vying to aid her in her solitude. With Logan's sheep and his farm, she was that much more of a catch as a wife and soon chose a second husband. Whether her new husband was happy or not is another tale altogether.



Thoughts on Water-Horses in Folklore by Josh Warren

I'm Josh, I've been a member of OBOD for a few years now, having been involved in ritual and ceremony with my local group, now a grove. It's only recently I have felt called and ready to begin my Bardic studies officially and start my journey with the Gwers. In starting my Bardic path I have been ruminating on folklore and stories as I suppose is only natural. One story, or rather one creature of myth and legend I am called to again and again is a strange one and by my understanding the same creature discussed in several different legends across different cultures. I am speaking of the aquatic equine terror and cautionary tale of the Scottish Kelpie, the Welsh Ceffyl Dwr (Water-Horse) and the Scandinavian Backahast (Brook-Horse). I dislike the homogenisation of disparate myths and legends across cultures, having said that I like the idea that these myths are indeed linked and may even have been traded/shared between cultures as stories so often are. I think this is because the similarities in the folklore are far too numerous to be discounted. As to being able to find out or say categorically which myth came first and inspired others I cannot say. Here I will simply point out these similarities I notice and allow you to decide for yourselves if the creature discussed is the same or not.



Water-Horses seem to be aquatic fae spirits, capable of shapeshifting or casting glamour and illusions to appear other than their true self. This is prevalent in the myths with them resembling or taking the form of a beautiful white mare, though in some legends they appear black. However I think these legends are better ascribed to the Phooka, an entirely different entity altogether. What I feel differentiates the Water-Horse and the Phooka is that the Phooka can take multiple forms including an approximate human one. The Water-Horse typically adopts the shape of a more beautiful and inviting horse but in regional folklore can take other forms, like a log in water, a boat or even a wisp of mist. Water-Horses are predators, they entice their prey onto their back and then promptly charge into the nearest deep water, drown them and eat them - a good cautionary tale to tell to keep the young, old and otherwise vulnerable members of your community away from dangerous deep water.

Water-Horses are often first spotted in banks of very thick mist or fog. As they are beings of both land and water, they are already liminal beings, but this particular common thread of story only serves, I feel, to highlight this aspect.

These common elements in the different narratives have been fixed in my mind for some time and resulted in me creating and illustrating my own version of a Water-Horse, inspired by the original legends but taken further with pseudo scientific 'explanations' to make my concept creature seem more real. I have included some illustrations of my vision of a Water-Horse that I'm sure differs in aspects from your own, but I hope you can see how I've tried to capture these common threads in my iteration.

If you want to read more about Water-Horses in their different guises, I suggest you have a look at the resources I've named below as I found them to be big sources of inspiration.

Albion: A Guide to Legendary Britain, Jennifer Westwood, 1985

'The Kelpies': ancient myth in modern art – <https://artuk.org/learn/learning-resources/the-kelpies-ancient-myth-in-modern-art>

Welsh Folklore: The Mythical Beasts of Llyn Cowlyd – <https://ztevetevans.wordpress.com/2019/11/06/welsh-folklore-the-mythical-beasts-of-llyn-cowlyd/#:~:text=Today%2C%20it%20has%20a%20bleak,and%20the%20Owl%20of%20Cowlyd.>





Events



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

OBOD Wheel Of The Year Online Rituals

Check the Tune In page on the Druid Hearth: <https://hearth.druidry.org/tune-in>

DATES FOR 2024:

Samhain: November 2nd | **Alban Arthan:** December 21st |

Departure

Once more, as he has
done

On innumerable times
in the past.

Manannán carries their
souls

Into the West.

The bombed out
remains of a life –

Shedding a solitary tear

Into the infinite Atlantic

For all the slain,

The fruitless slaughter

Of a thousand pointless
wars.

Endless, since the
coming of Cessair.

Too long, he has stood
upon this rock,

Like Donn did before
him.

Carrying the souls
forth,

Beyond the ninth wave,

Beyond this carnage,

To their final rest.

Poem & photo
by Luke Eastwood