

TOUCHSTONE

The journal of The Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids
September 2023

Issue 313



‘There in my Nemeton my Spirit Guide appeared’
NICK BALDWIN

TREES AS ELDERS

Is it that trees are elders looking out for us
when we least know, tall and stretching
with the sun? Some days, today, it is
good
to listen to the patter of rain on the
leaves
of trees for there is an alphabet of
becoming
rooted in the generosity of the Earth.

Keith MacNider



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EDITORIAL

Over the summer I've been thinking of the
ancestral connection we make every time
we meet friends and family and share time
and space. So I was glad to place a friendly
invitation into G&S. We don't have to offer
huge, organised events for visitors (though
top marks to those who can and do) often a
friendly coffee and half an hour's Druid
chat will be a highpoint of a journey.

Part of Druidry is losing a human-centric
viewpoint and seeing that whether commu-
nicating with people, trees or the whole sen-
tient world, similar guidelines may apply:
see *p4* - the case of the recalcitrant yew - and
p5, acknowledging the privilege of observ-
ing nature, red in tooth and claw. And
another part might be gaining wisdom from
mythic creatures, see *p7*. 'Growing' into the
land ends on *p11*; it's been wonderful to
accompany this journey of discovery; and
read about a journey into the 'third age' on
p9, with its message: celebrate life. I don't
think I can better that advice as a sign-off
line!

Blessings of the harvest,

September '23 TOUCHSTONE Issue 313

- 3 Bards' page
- 4 I met a yew Nicki Wisbey
- 5 Killer in my garden P. Douglas Hammond
- 7 The Moon and the Dragon... Gunter Nal
- 9 Celebrating the next stage... George Kestell
- 11 Growing into Brighid's field Pt 2 Jo Hayes
- 13 Groves & Seedgroups/Open Forum
- 14 Reviews
- 15 Regular meetings
- 16 Events

RISEN

Have you ever made a loaf of bread
That didn't rise?
Taken it from the oven
Heavy as lead and sunken topped,
Only to find the inside sticky,
And on investigation the bag full of weevils!
A mutual deflation!

But then have you ever made
A wholemeal loaf that did?
The smell of the fresh stoneground grain,
Its powder dusting the air
Transporting itself into the loaf,
Only to eat it in one sitting.
With the help of butter!

Have you ever made a dough
With real ale?
Warm, frothy, fruity beer,
The leftover slugs from the night before
Imparting a bitter maltiness,
Only to make Sunday rolls
To complement the hair of the dog!

And have you ever sprinkled the flour
With dry pink sea salt,
A pinch is too little,
A tablespoon, too much,
Just enough to bring out the flavours,
Only to feel your tongue leaking at the sides
In anticipation of a second slice!

Have you ever crafted a loaf of bread
With your own leaven?
Taken it from the cool to feed with flour
And left to bubble up eagerly,
Only to realise this slow process
Is alchemy and self sufficiency
In your own hands!

Have you ever kneaded the bouncy dough
With those warm hands?

And felt the fermenting spring of the yeasts.
And knowing intuitively when to knock back
And when to stop,
Only to lie the dough in the proving tin
And watch as it starts to rise again.

Have you ever given thanks for a loaf of
homemade bread?
As the oven door opens
To see the golden crust bulging,
And wait as the smell wafts and draws a
crowd.
As the prize slips out onto the cooking rack,
Only aware that it will never get cool!
And you and the loaf have risen to new
heights.

Alison Kirkham

A TREE'S WISDOM

My fingers trailed over the bark of a beautiful
birch.
He stood firm, while I was unmoored,
So I asked him, "Oh, Birch, you are slender,
How do you weather the storms?"
He shook his milky branches and laughed,
And he said to me, "My dear, my roots run
wide!"



Pia Tiwari

LATE SUMMER

Two spotted fawns play careless at the
woods' edge
their mother goddess standing sentry
to their oblivion
The Great Stag has retreated
following his Master Sun
leaving her to oversee their ruggedness
as the trees grow tearful in bronze, gold
and red

Tracy Rupp

I met a Yew tree. It wasn't the Yew I had gone to meet.

I met a Yew Nicki Wisbey

I wonder if meeting Trees is a bit like meeting people, it doesn't always go as you expect it will. Some you connect with and some you don't.

There's a yew tree in a churchyard near to where I live. Some of my ancestors had used this particular church for various ceremonies throughout their lives. I wanted to, perhaps nostalgically, meet the Yew who may have known my family, who may have witnessed some of these ceremonies.

I'm always drawn to the Yew trees in church yards, their magnificent presence, their solidity and comfort. Some are so old that they have become hollow inside and you can stand beside them, sometimes in them and look up to the skies through their branches.

I did some reading about the Yew as a species, there is much folklore around them for those interested, they are fascinating trees. I wanted to know a bit about the tree I was about to meet, I craved that connection with the tree. I couldn't find an exact age, only that it was named as ancient in the early 1800s, so I'm assuming it's a few 100 years old.

I arrived at the churchyard and there stood the tree, its branches spilling out providing a canopy of shade across the gravestones. Its roots lifting the tarmac path that ran beside it. It was beautiful. Majestic. Of that I was aware.



I approached, greeted the tree and asked that I could spend some time with it and share my coffee. I rested my cup in a hol-

low beginning to develop where a branch grew from the trunk and I waited, I waited for that connection. Waited to be inspired. Waited to be interested. My attention was drawn to the patterns of the bark around the branch and I picked away a small piece, trying to find that connection.

I was distracted by the birds, the swifts darting around, calling to each other. The wood pigeons in the nearby oaks, competing to be heard. I wandered to a nearby seat to sit and stare at the tree. It was indeed beautiful and dominated the space and yet I could not connect with it. Maybe today wasn't my day, maybe it was too contrived, I would try again another day.

On the way home I decided to pop into another church looking for church windows to drool over, knowing there was another Yew tree that is thought to be around 1300 years old. As I walked down the lane away from the road, I could feel my excitement building, not knowing what I might see when I reached the church, which is where my attention was directed.

As I crossed a small bridge and entered the churchyard my breath was taken, as the immensity of the Yew before me became apparent. It was huge. Its girth was too big to even gauge, I wanted to wrap my arms around just a small part of its trunk, so

great was its size and the colours. The redness of the browns, the flaking of the bark and the ripples created where new trees grew alongside the original tree, joining each other.

This Yew, I want to know, I want to hear its history, I want to hear its experiences, I want to hear what it has witnessed, this Yew is exciting, interesting. I spent quite some time with this Yew, wanting to be in its presence and it has been in my mind since I left. I wonder about its life, I wonder about the passage of time that it has experienced, I cannot even begin to imagine what life was like 1300 years ago or the changes it has witnessed. It's funny how connecting with others is so personal. I hadn't considered that would be the same with trees. Some we can while away hours with and with others we just don't connect.

For those in the S. Hemisphere preparing for Beltane:

BELTANE CHANT

*"Above us the skies where the sun swells
Below us the earth where our love dwells"*

Dancing the Maypole this past Beltane was a fabulous time, but there was a bit of awkwardness as we struggled to keep a rhythm and remember which way to weave when passing another dancer.

A simple chant is a powerful tool to involve all attendees in participation. I envision everyone creating the rhythm together encouraging the dancers with their voices, bodies and any instruments they may bring to enhance the rhythm. A ritual is always more powerful when everyone is fully engaged in mind, body, voice and spirit.

May this chant add to the magic and the joy of your Beltane ritual this year.

May love encircle you as you dance and chant.

May you encircle others with the love you embody.

May the warmth of the love you share radiate in your heart as the Wheel of the Year encircles the sun.

Mo Snow

A killer in my garden

The Killer In My Grove

P Douglas Hammond

There's a killer in my garden.

A merciless, skilful hunter, that stalks its prey in my sacred grove.

"No." you might say, "This is no slayer; its cute; its lovely."

During these last weeks though, I have witnessed it with my own eyes. I have seen it in action; it knows where to wait, and it knows when to strike – and it does so with deadly precision time after time. With pin-point accuracy it takes its prey, and without a second thought devours it whole.

Its appetite is voracious; it is never satisfied. Once one victim is devoured, the hunter returns to hunting – and yet again with each peck, one more victim falls prey. Not that anybody will know; who cares about the quarry? There are plenty of them, and they won't be missed – not like that which I call slaughterer, blood-letter, doom-bringer, dispatcher – and that which you call pretty, sweet, cute, and lovely.

But this is life: what's food for one is family for another. I'm only glad that I'm not on the menu. Fate has dealt me size; in all of history there were few creatures of that kind large enough to have carried me off as a living meal, and to my knowledge creatures of my kind put paid to them a long centuries ago. No; this feathered harvester is tiny, compared to me. I could hold one in my hand, if I was fast enough to catch one – but they are wary.

Hang on – this hunter is not alone. It has a companion. The companion doesn't look quite the same, but they are a pair; a couple.

She doesn't have his red breast, but she is every bit as skilled as he. They don't hunt together, but take it in turns. And they don't devour everything at once, but return to... yes...to a nest – there are more of them; there are babies. Something in me wants to say “Ah, cute”, but the words don't roll easily off my tongue. My babies were cute at that age, but I'm sure these parents would argue the point.

I have been watching the parents. I have been watching them take woodlice and flies from my compost bin. I have watched them seemingly snatch gnats from mid air. They sometimes visit the feeder that I thought they would rely upon – with its mixed seed and mealworms. In a nook right outside my bike shed I find their loose collection of dried leaves and spider webs, and know that there-in nestles their brood.

I wanted to look, but theirs is a world of privacy; of secrecy; of safety. If I stick my big nose in their nest, who knows what harm I will do? I will leave them in peace, and when I work in my shed, I will do so with respect and care.

Yesterday I went to my shed and there, sitting on my old Triumph, was a fledgling robin. I didn't have long to see it, but I noticed that the feathers on its head were still emerging from their protective sheaths. I didn't want to scare the bird, but realised that I was standing between it and its only route of escape – so I quickly turned to leave. But as I did so, the bird flew up and settled on my head. The bird sat there for what seemed a long time – and I feared it would tangle in my hair, but eventually it flew off.



What a gift it was to have been the young bird's launching pad in to the world. All the same, I quickly checked to see if it had left me another – less welcome gift. Happily, it hadn't. The baby came back later in the day. It sat momentarily near the nest; hoping to be fed – then flew off to learn its own skills as a hunter, and one-day provider of food.

Today I was sitting at my bench, fixing something or other, when, with a quite loud fluttering of wings, the bird landed on the bench beside me. It sat a inches from me, watching me, but before I could reach my phone it went back to its own world. This evening, it returned, and I saw it in the birch tree, just outside my shed door. Then it was on the ground, foraging among the leaf litter of my grove; hunting among the twigs and plants. Quietly I took my phone, and inched my way out of the shed. The bird saw me, but took little notice, as I moved around, filming and photographing it. It even came close to me and posed a few times. I would like to think that it had watched me from its nest, while I had worked in my shed, and saw me as a friend. I know, however, that the bird had the courage and cheek of a robin, and the naivety of one who has not lived long.

I left the youngster to its quest for food, and noted that its parents were not far away. I left it also with some concern; knowing that other “cute” predators frequent my grove, and I asked the trees of my grove to watch over the bird.

I don't know if the trees can hear me, or if they give a fig for my fears. All I know is that I have shared a moment or two with a wild creature, and I feel more human for the experience; more a part of nature myself.

As the wind brushed the olive trees, the silvery shimmering leaves moving, the old branches creaking, the moon rose.

The moon and the dragon in the fire magic Günter Nal

greed, a flight of sparks in the midst of the heart, crackling, crashing and transforming to fire, to ash to dust. What form

Sunk in, I sat by the crackling fire in a clearing surrounded by a few tamarisk and pine trees just above the beach. Softly one heard the steady wave impact and sea murmur.

Hardly noticeably the horizon was first lightened, and as a glittering light road led up to me, - all the long way from the moon over the sea, this had something very peaceful, joyful yet solemn, and an effect on my perception and feeling unknown until then. "So vastness disperses narrowness," I thought.

How simple. Moreover, the stars twinkled, especially since the light of the crescent moon increasing was not particularly bright, rather auspicious. I've always liked the increasing moon rather than the the decreasing, perhaps because it symbolised something like growth in my soul spaces? The increasing moon had always something promising for me, - and if it was then just the full moon it would make the night so bright that one could read newspaper. But then why should I read the newspaper? Besides, I couldn't help calling, "So Moon, rise up because Mother Earth is dancing and spinning to the rhythm of the cosmic, pour out your light and let this golden shimmering path shine from the horizon deep into my heart's depths," I thought, or so it spoke from me.

I looked into the fire and out of sparks, smoke and embers formed an image that resembled a phoenix rising from the shores of volcanic mountains that must be far out in the sea, out of red haze, hot and fiery and dancing on the flames. A dance on behalf of the flames of joy, anger, love and happiness, action, drive and

did Phoenix conjure now, shining and bright from the flame of light? Was it the figure of Bridgid, patron goddess and ruler of fire, of clairvoyance, divination, blacksmithing, healer and poet, of women and women in childbed, - sent by the moon? Whom did he take by the hand?

It was the figure of a dragon of considerable size, who wriggled with pleasure around the embers inside the fire, and began to look at me defiantly. "Now pilgrim," he began in a low voice, "what brings you to meet me in this ancient sacred place of sacrifice of ages past? As a messenger between men and gods, I greet you. I can deliver your offerings, blessings and inner light if you show no fear".

"Who are you - and where are you from?" I asked hesitantly. "I suppose you already know my name".

"As a fire form of the Divine, I have many names," replied the dragon being. "Names come and go, but among you humans some call me Agni, Gabija or Vesta. I exist both in heavenly, invisible and in earthly form since the beginning of times. My manifestations are found as the sun in the sky, then I am Surya, as lightning in the element of air, then I am called Indra, in wood and stone and my prey are the marks of the dead. Some of you mean to cleanse them of their sins and thus guide them to immortality."

He paused and silence spread, interrupted only by the crackling sparks of new logs that I carefully placed on the fire. The image of the dragon blurred for a while, then reappeared orange-red.

Regardless of the mighty dragon's well-chosen and thoughtful words, I felt fear rising, as did many peoples and cultures in this world who sought to defeat dragons. As if my thoughts could be heard, he continued: "I symbolize the male power. It is peculiar to the people to fear me because I stand for changes, transformation and just transformation, and this happens just by destruction of all what is, what was and may come. I am so to speak the anti-pole to the creative power and nevertheless its precondition. Can you understand this, my friend? My parents, people in the East say, are heaven and earth. So I am also a component of the creative, without me nothing new can arise. Your wondrous planet Earth was created from my cosmic fire ages ago, and then in the distant future it will return to the fire of the sun. You must let go of everything that hinders you on your spiritual pilgrimage, and yet hold it as long as it serves you." Slowly he turned his head to the right and insistently examined me with his left eye, in which the flames of the fire were reflected.

"But we humans also need security," I replied. "Our lives are often so fragile. We are vulnerable and grieve for our departed friends, lost loved ones, companions and loved ones. Even our pets we miss so sorely when they slip away into the Otherworld. From the ground up, we are 'attachment beings', and we know that one day, for each of us, this earth life will be gone."

"Well," said the dragon after a long pause of compassion. "That may be so, but nothing really dies, - only the forms take millions of times," the dragon muttered. "So, depending on the level of knowledge and personal

development level. In this respect sacrifice your fear, your greed for more and more, your desires, your inclination for self-optimization, if they oppose other qualities and values of your being. Then I will be able to show you riches of which you have not dared to dream".

"But ... surely only if I do not seek to possess these treasures? I answered hesitantly.

"That's right," smirked the dragon. "Since I know that, you have as good as passed this test, and my fire leaves you unmolested. From this you can formulate one of your blessings. It is like meditation, let it happen and trust it. This quality can truly pave the way and empower you to enter into self-effective power without becoming greedy. But also, beware of abusing power, because then my firepower appears in a less friendly form than here!" He added "My advice applies to all inhabitants of this special life world called 'humanity', if you really care about your wonderful blue planet Earth. There are not many of this kind of spheres in the vastness of the cosmos."

My sleepiness made the images and voices of the fire slowly fade away. Smoke, crackling fire and the distant sound of waves melted together into a kind of dream. What blessing would rise from my soul and find a garment in words to work into this world? I woke up when it was almost dawn and the first bird calls could be heard. The glow had gone out.

Surya would soon show herself in the form of the sun and warm me. My blessing wish would pass my lips and come true.



Fire Dragon, OBOD camp
Jo Philips, Belgium

Modern society celebrates some occasions elaborately like Christmas and weddings yet other festivals and life events, less so. As

Druids, celebrating the seasons of the year is important and increasingly we are marking life events not just birth, marriage, and death.

Having worked 43 years in a physical occupation and approaching 60, I'm aware of physical and mental changes. Also, I question why I work 40–45 hours a week, albeit doing what I enjoy in beautiful surroundings. It's time to change the emphasis from work to making memories. This is easier said than done, so involving friends and their support would encourage changes in lifestyle. My mate wrote herself a poem about entering the third stage of life, becoming the Crone, which resonated with me; so I explored the male equivalent of becoming a Sage. There's no set style of ritual and some feel this is the "crowning glory" and follow a coronation approach. I felt a "Rite of Passage" mirrored my needs. In writing the ritual I developed this theme and outline the sequence of events as follows.

After some enquiries I was offered Carnglaze Caverns in Cornwall on a day it was closed to the public. Eighteen of us gathered in this ancient, underground, disused slate quarry, a womb-like space within Mother Earth. We had the H&S advice, and I discussed plans. The group was diverse with a mix of Druid, Wicca (a few "not-sures") and three who'd not been to any pagan style ritual, so we explained what was happening as we progressed. I'd asked people to write their own words for various parts or say what came into their heads to increase spontaneity. For example, during the peace we were asked to imagine flying across a map of the world toward the four directions and exploring the concept

Celebrating the next stage of life George Kestell

of Peace. The group divided, the females into the cavern to the underground lake to prepare the altar after putting on their essential "hard hats."

The males stayed and carried out a ceremonial washing with water that had flowed under the house where I was born. Added to it was Meadow Sweet I'd preserved in oil and dried Vervain: this was splashed over my body with a bunch of Ivy, Rosemary, and sage. A smudge stick was wafted around me before I dressed in robes I made myself. The man who'd prepared me had made and threaded over my belt a string of beads representing the elements. Standing naked in front of 6 friends, splashing me, smudging and reading poems, was something I'd not experienced before and gave a scene of solemn commitment, focusing my mind. It was important in giving me time to calm down and forget the outside world.

One of the Wicca men led us to find the females and a Druid to officiate my "Saging". Being taken on this journey felt like a tribal rite of passage, I felt nervous, butterflies. As we approached the Druid leader stopped us, asked who we were and what we required. The Wicca leader said, "We have a Druid who wishes to be a Sage. Is there a Druid here to undertake this?" She said she was able to perform that Rite and asked who they'd brought. His reply was "George, a Cornishman by birth, a gardener by trade and spiritually he follows the Druid path." We were invited to join the circle. Later one female mentioned the sense of empowerment she felt that we couldn't join them until invited.

In making the place sacred we welcomed the four directions, the spirits of the place and the ancestors. Each caller had a different theme which they said without reading. The circle

was explained and cast. We repeated the Druids prayer after the Druid, for those unfamiliar with it. Being many feet below ground I felt far away from the apparent world.

Now is the time to prove if I am worthy of the title Sage. I am asked about my youth, adult life, and about plans for my future. First, we chanted the Awen 3 times for inspiration and it reverberated around the caverns. through discussion I gave a description of my childhood with a college friend. The adult years were outlined, with three people. It was humbling and surprising to someone who seldom considers what I've achieved; it was delivered with love and humour. Plans for my future involve less physical work, encouraging everyone to consider celebrating life's milestones and helping them celebrate. My closing comment was "I want to die on Cornish soil, under a Cornish sky... but not yet for a while." I was asked to leave the group and contemplate by a smaller lake while they made their decisions, and to leave my pouch. If my request was rejected, I would wait a year and a day before asking again, so I was nervous as I was led away. While staring into the blue water, I noticed few tiny ferns growing in a rocky crevice where the electric light shone. I mentioned it to the Male leader when he returned for me. He said "Life has a way of surviving."

Returning, the Druid greeted me as a Sage, offering various gifts: threaded on a lace with beads, a cuff with Sage in Ogham letters embroidered on it, a jewel, a hazel talisman with an ogham letter, an awen, and a golden figure of my power animal and many other tokens. My pouch contained messages for later, which are now in my journal. I feel I've achieved something worthwhile.

The ritual closed in the usual way, photos

taken, and hard hats replaced for the journey back to the entrance and the apparent world. As I changed my clothes, I felt humbled that people considered this was worth their time to join me. I felt obliged to write this to encourage others to try something similar. Adapt this or do something different, but do celebrate life.

Growing into Brighid's Field Pt 2 Jo Hayes

The Grove and the field are taking shape.. it's a labour of love that will not be rushed. Now read on.

Meanwhile the Willow Circle without the Oak became a conundrum, as it yomped upwards. Everyone had ideas, it could be trained over to become a green sanctuary, or we could bend it backwards to have a circular tunnel with a green space in the middle.

One lady on a workshop knew exactly what it wanted...Yet for some reason it felt like it needed to be left alone without a set purpose. I was quite protective over this harmonious shady spot and wasn't ready for it to be transformed at all. In the centre we created green mandalas and that was enough, as we had plenty to do elsewhere and it was one of those places that provided a quiet space to ponder. The answer came a few years later during a boiling hot druid camp. One by one chairs were taken across and all the group sat in circle, feeling cooled in the shade and listening to each other, learning about archaeology and old bones. It became our green teaching space, where the moon shone through, our Willow Moon Circle.

I became aware of an awesome Celtic goddess. I can't remember how she came into my life, perhaps we were naturally interested in

the things she represented. We joined a healing clinic becoming healers, often visited lovely St Clether Holy Well, with its healing waters, where the ravens soar in poetic flight. I had a love of silver and bending bright metal. The rolling cycle of the triple goddess, life death rebirth, Maid Mother Crone, life death rebirth, a triskele of emotions, led me to finding Brighid. Mum had gone into labour at 11 pm whilst making sandwiches and I came into the world around 1.30am on 2nd February, my arrival starting one day and crossing the threshold into the next. I guess I was always meant to find her. It was later that I found out about 'The Keening' of Brighid's call and the deeper beauty of the Imbolc ceremony.

Trees grow, new babes are born and people die and that's just the way of it. In my case lots of people died; many family and some friends passed, old and young. In the middle of this tumult, I reached 50 years, a time of reflection. I was feeling lucky to be alive and pounded by grief at the same time. I can't say close people stopped dying, but there was a pause. I decided to have a party to celebrate the positive, needing laughter and along with it emerged a theme. We decorated the hall with all things Bridie, including a small trickling healing well. As the hilarity of the party faded (There were comical Mer-people and everything) the tender roots of a new idea settled in, I wondered if there was ever a well on our land...

I was in Hackney helping to take care of my niece who sadly passed away. I hadn't lived in the East End for 42 years, yet I quickly adapted and also noticed the differences to my life in Devon.



Was I so out of touch? The workshops we held at home were relevant to people living in our roomy county, but didn't seem to have any relevance in London.

I felt privileged to have a lot of green space, but how could we reach into the experience of lots of people living inner city lives? On sunny days people would flock to grassy areas, sitting, chatting, close to each other, until you could hardly see any blades of grass between them; they wanted to be as close to nature as they could get.

A while later after returning home, I felt that the hazel grove was calling for something. Growing close to the Ancestor tree, it had a distinct feeling, a definite healing buzz as you walked in. As Nick is wonderfully creative, repairing and landscaping decorative pools, I wondered if he might build me a small faux well in the centre of his favourite grove.... The word tolerant seems to pop in here, as all who know me will recognise the word picky, once I have an idea in mind. ...

Brighid's Well was a quiet healing space that appeared after one of Nick's mysterious absences. There were flat stones with moss attached, falling away like a cape around the well head. A short while after we placed a stone planter with Brighid's face, at the centre. Later Birds' Nest ferns and shady ground

cover entwined around the stones. Now, in the right light, reflected in the shadows, you can sometimes see the salmon of wisdom seeming to swim in the pool, magically highlighted by a shaft of sunlight breaking through the tree canopy and

hazel nuts really do fall into the well.

Soon after this a friend and I decided to hold a weekend Bridie workshop. We had a special place on the field we called Brighid's Temple. This particular spot hadn't been used for groups, it was a little gem tucked away, yet for this occasion it seemed just right for a bit of calm and reflection. At the start of August, it seemed reasonable to expect temperate weather. How wrong were we! When you evoke the energies of a goddess, famed for flaming red hair, healing waters, air spun poetry, passion and the alchemy of fire, you get sun, gale force winds and heavy showers in rotation for three days. Plus of course a lot of laughter and learning. Our temple was tested and challenged, yet it remained upright. Not one to be put off by a bit of wind, the old feeling of wanting to reach out to people further distant, resurfaced.

How to create a communal building that was open to everyone from everywhere, no matter what race, culture or spiritual belief? A place to host children's green workshops and a whole range of ceremonies with the main focus being, to re-connect people to the land?

Our buffeted Bridie temple was the decider, we would use local resources and recycled materials. It's not like we were reinventing the wheel, but slowly, with a lot of thrown away drawings, an 8-sided building with a low reciframed roof emerged. Eventually an octagonal skeleton with a spider web roof and no central pole arrived. Nick's dad is a carpenter and spent a lot of time,

head scratching, wondering how it would hold up, but it did. The side poles are larch and have been dipped in tar to stop ground rot. We have the liner for our green sedum roof... let's just say it's an on-going project that lots of people have helped with, including our smallest Druid Amba, who bizarrely had the job of holding the 8-foot posts straight and elfin Alec, who tamped down lots of soil, with huge enthusiasm with the energy of someone a third of his years. Brighid's House is forming slowly as we get the time and willing hands to build it into the place, we know it can be.

The field has evolved, with many new wild plants flourishing. Beech and hornbeam hedges grow tall, framing our garden and allotment. The ash and oak are tall for their age, we've had wonderful camps and beautiful rites amongst them. The Druid Grove on our land has seen 14 years of an 'unbroken history of celebrations' as our great friend Polly, remarked. We have Bards, Ovates and Druids amongst us and whilst an ever-changing set of Druid friends has passed through, a steady Grove core has remained, some from the original seed group that started in 2002. All of us have been part of Brighid's Field, helping to maintain it and watching it change. Winding paths flow through under the tree

canopy, with primroses, daffodils and bluebells dotted about in spring. It took 20 years to grow into Brighid's Field....and it's still growing.

Indeed, Brighid's Field is still evolving and since writing the above, our dear and great friend Polly has passed to the Otherworld after 16 years



of celebrations...and including very sadly her memorial celebration. This has lead us to dedicate the original magical grove to her, a place of reflection and pause. How she loved to remark on the birds singing above and laugh at our sometimes-comical ceremonies. The simple fact is that we will miss the bones of our lovely, inciteful friend.

We decided to move the new Grove behind Brighid's House: perhaps after our great loss we need to re-group and start a new phase of Alban Nymet...Luckily during the pandemic at times we were able to celebrate at a distance under Brighid's House roof, and Polly was part of that. We have memories of her there, so in a way it feels like we have brought her with us as an Elder, with the Spirit of her laughter echoing in the wind... ready for the next incarnation of our life on this land.

OPEN FORUM

Hi Penny,

What an intriguing challenge for JJ Middleway, and much respect for the response. (A Druid Oath: Aug Open Forum)

You ask for other suggestions, so here is mine. I have tried to keep it brief, to retain some of what a Court might recognise but to set it in what I would find compatible with Druid integrity.

"The evidence I shall give shall be the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth. I do solemnly so swear, by the great Life Force which gives form to All Creation, be it mineral, plant or animal, and through whose Mystery our existences are all journeying."

Mark

GROVE & SEED GROUP NOTICEBOARD

Kernow calling:

OBOD members in Cornwall, if you would like to have a Grove, a gathering or just a greeting please contact Caryl on 07929761135 or caryl-dailey@gmail.com A welcome awaits.

South West Wales (Deheubarth) Seed Group

We aim to serve any like-minded folk interested in Druidry, but aimed particularly to OBOD members and will use OBOD ritual. Monthly meeting at our Grove on a member's farm - members are encouraged to car share to travel there. Appropriate ritual near the eight festivals. Meetings: pm, first Sat of each month.

leigh.jones@ntlworld.com
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100093140599156>

Hello,

I am starting a new seed group in Rayleigh in Essex, as an informal and relaxed way to give people the opportunity to meet, spend time in nature, heal and grow together. We will meet at least once a month to celebrate the seasonal festivals either outside, in Hockley woods, Cherry Orchard Country Park or somewhere else near by. If the weather is too bad we could also meet in a house or garden.

There might be story-telling, drumming, music, food sharing, meditation, healing, but definitely a nice sociable and friendly atmosphere. danielrayleigh@icloud.com

Please feel free to send me a message.

Blessings, Daniel





The Voyage of Eagna-MacDarach the Wanderer Walter William Melnyk'

From the opening words, A red sun hung over the far promontory of the rocky coast...Will paints a lyrical picture of a land he himself has walked and knows well. Walter's newest book is not only a story of a spiritual seeker looking for answers, but a journey, an imm-ran, for the reader. Based on the Irish Druidic alphabet, known as Ogham and the Celtic tree alphabet, Will takes us through the mystical alphabet, on a journey in a large coracle as it leaves the west coast of Ireland with a small group of specially trained friends, to journey past a series of islands.

Each island is named for an Ogham letter. This story follows adventures, joys and fears, loneliness, near death at times, hopefully to arrive at the last isle in the West, Inis Bán, to meet Ogma Grianainech, the Lord of the Isle. Along with stories of Wales and Avalon, Will treats each island and its trees, and plants as characters personifying each unique letter. Written by an OBOD Druid, this book will become a classic, not just for what it teaches, but how it also deeply touches the reader.

This is not a dry academic tome. I wish I had this book as I was going through Ovate. I had a horrible time understanding Ogham, and some of the books I read made me snooze. But I love this, I'm totally into Ogham now, and understand it so much better. This book teaches and explains the alphabet within the story, providing an insight other books miss. It's hard to put this book down. Will Melnyk knows his stuff! I can't recommend this

enough, and as a teacher, feel it should be put on the list of every OBOD student interested in Ogham, and especially everyone in Ovate studies. Brilliant! *Lexi Erickson*

SACRED ANIMALS: *Reconnecting with the Natural World* **Written & illustrated with line drawings by Gordon MacIennan**
pp.169 www.greenmagicpublishing.com
Author's note: "1st edition '97. Contains original material revised & updated, and new sections."

If you're not familiar with Gordon the Toad, he's a Pagan Cultural Hero, the nearest thing to a genuine Shaman I've ever met.

He tells us, comprehensively & with compelling candour, what he does, how he does it & why. At the heart of it is a spiritual adventure into contact & friendship with the animal world. He says: *"Rewilding is one of the big initiatives at the moment....often we're not rewilding, we're planting trees again, sowing seeds. Good things to do, but that is not letting the wild restore itself.....we're not trusting the world..."* Gordon maintains that what we need to do is *"remember we are part of it all. We need to rewild our souls."* And a good way to do this is *working with animals.*

He divides working with animals into three cycles of activity:
First cycle: Identification – meeting for the first time, developing skills, building connections. Second cycle: Connection – exploring friendships, working with power objects. Third cycle: Transformation – deeper levels of connection with masks and dance work, fusion with the totem.

This is an essential book, full of remarkable notions shared with commendable frankness. A wonderful blueprint for magical work guaranteed to enrich your practice. **AB**

EVENTS

OBOD WHEEL OF THE YEAR ONLINE RITUALS

On fb and youtube. Hosted by CC Eimear Burke Check druidry.org/ facebook
Lughnasadh: August 5th * Alban Elfed: September 23rd * Samhain: November 4th *
Alban Arthan: December 16th *

REGULAR OBOD MEETINGS

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

Members' regular group meetings:

APPLESEED GROVE Glastonbury FFI: theappleseedgrove@googlemail.com
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 and BDO members 8 festivals, walks, discussion/ social. FFI: rebni@btinternet.com
BADGER & TOAD SEED GROUP, Folkstone area. Seasonal/ meet ups FFI: Sian and Hazel obodbadgerandtoad@yahoo.com
CIRCLE OF COLL Seattle Seedgroup public rituals, workshops, tree walks &... every month. circleofcoll@circleofcoll.org
CORN OVII GROVE. Seasonal rituals in Worcs. www.cornovii.org or email via keith.southall@creativelandscapes.co.uk
DÓITEAN AGUS UISCE (Flame & Well Druid Grove). Seasonal rituals, moots and other gatherings. Colorado Front Range, USA. FFI: flameandwellgrove@gmail.com, <https://flameandwellgrove.org>
DRACAENA GROVE: Saltburn/ Cleveland: N Yorks Celebrations/informal meetings. dracaenagrove@hotmail.com
DRUID PILGRIM GROVE: Pilgrimages, gatherings and rituals. Encouragement for pilgrims. Australia and NZ. Contact: danuta@adruid.com; FB: Druid Pilgrim group.
FELLOWSHIP OF THE FOUR DIRECTIONS, BRISTOL. Monthly local park meeting/ceremony FFI: fellowshipotfd@hotmail.com
BOREALIS CIRCLE SEED GROUP 3rd Saturday of the Month: Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada. Public rituals in local parks. FFI: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/lakeagassizdruids/> email: borealiscircle@gmail.com
LIGHT OF AWEN SEED GROUP in Bristol. Celebrating the wheel of the year, and healing. Email. Lightofawen8@gmail.com
MACADAMIA GROVE Seasonal/events, Brisbane Australia. Sandra macademiagroove@hotmail.com
THE MELBOURNE GROVE Seasonal celebrations, Melbourne, Aus: Trudy Richards moondancer@outlook.com.au
OVERTON PAGAN MOOT- 2nd Thurs The Red Lion, Overton, Nr Basingstoke, Hampshire. 8pm. FFI alex@alexrigg.com
PENDLE GROVE. Clitheroe/ around Lancs. Sionnach on 0161 3432705 or email drvernon@hotmail.co.uk
SHINING MOUNTAINS GROVE W. Montana, USA, 8 rituals, community, hikes, zoom. FFI: Heather: roanrobbins@aol.com
SETANTII GROVE Seasonal Rituals in Manchester / S. Lancs. Always outdoors. groveofsetantii@yahoo.com.
SLIABH ANAM GROVE Rituals and monthly moots Durango, Colorado, USA. FFI: contact sliabhanam@gmail.com.
TAMESIS (LONDON SG) festivals/moots/workshops Contact Ferdiad tamesisgrove@gmail.com
www.tamesisgrove.com

EVENTS

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

7-10 Sept BAM Druid Gather: Fire ~ Igniting Community. Join us for our fourth year in beautiful Ashby, MA! Adults \$190, children (12 and under) \$60, includes meals and cabin/ tenting space. Immerse yourself in a thriving community experience, learning new skills and deepening your connections to the land and fellow Druids. There will be songs, dance, and feasting around the sacred flames; workshops, meditations, Makers' Market, children's activities, Bardic & Ovate initiations, Eisteddfod... and lots of Fire! FFI: <https://bamdruidgather.org>

30 Sept & 1 Oct Inner Journeying and OBOD ritual Level 1 Non-res weekend workshop in Glastonbury with Penny Billington and Matt McCabe. 'What we do in OBOD and why we do it.' FFI/booking form Email mattmccabe.1@outlook.com

26 - 31st Oct Thurs - Tues White Horse Camps Samhain Camp: at Wildways, Shropshire - for more info please contact communications@whitehorsecamps.org.uk

2 December OBOD Winter Gathering at Strode, nr Glastonbury. 'Animism and Nature Connection' speakers Gordon MacLellan, Lucy Jones and Graham Harvey. Ceremony, eisteddfod. Booking details from Mid-Sept

2024

June 28-July 2nd 2024 Bioróg Retreat - Discovering Mythic Landscape in Donegal, Ireland. Venue: Song House, Falcarragh. <https://thesonghouseireland.com/> Facilitators: Eimear Burke and Seán O'Gaoithin. FFI/bookings email seanogaoithin7@gmail.com
15 - 18 August Druid Camp in South-West Germany, in Waldhambach. The website is www.druidencamp.de

More on 2024 next month...



Spirit of Autumn: Pauline Franks