

TOUCHSTONE

The journal of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids
May 2022

Issue 297



The Fairy Glen, Betws y Coed: Jem warren

FAIRY LORE

"...some evidence seems to exist that an idea prevailed that in the fairy sphere there is a reversal of the seasons, our winter being their summer. Some such belief seems to have been known to Robert Kirk, for he tells us that 'when we have plenty they [the fairies] have scarcity at their homes.' In respect of the Irish fairies they seem to have changed their residences twice a year: in May, when the ancient Irish "flitted" from their winter houses to summer pastures, and in November, when they quitted these temporary quarters."

Lewis Spence, British Fairy Origins

For wintery human recollections, see p. 12

TOUCHSTONE is published by OBOD.

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EDITORIAL

Hail to Beltane! It's the time of the Fair Folk, who thrive in beauty - see the cover, whose Welsh name, Ffos Noddyn, translates as the more prosaic 'deep ditch'! The smoky colours within are an impression of 'glas' - Proto-Brythonic and Cornish glas ("blue, green, grey"), with variants in Breton, Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx. It's otherworldly, as indescribable as the wine-dark sea - and maybe the substance of the mysterious 'Isle of Glass' of Celtic legend.

Treats: the first paper colour cover! And within, the quality remains uniformly high and a celebration of the little-seen, magical and liminal... We reinstate *the mythic badger*, p7, *the hare* p 5, and time travel through years and seasons to *re-inhabit childhood* on p12 and *unpack Chaucer*, pp 13/14. And what is more mysterious than our healing processes? See p 11 for the *wonder of the yew*, used medically. All this is underpinned by the essential *practices of love*, p 10 and *peace*, p 9.

The world is Cwic (see p14) and so are we! Let's celebrate joyously, with Love and Peace always in our hearts,

Pen

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BELTAINE MORN AT AVEBURY

Can you hear them, the singing Stones?
Mem'ries of their ancient glories
Rising in the mists of dawning
This Beltaine morn at Avebury

The mist it shimmers 'tween the Stones
Shifts and moves amongst the glories
Dragon Paths aflame 'ere dawning
This Beltaine morn at Avebury

In ancient times the rites were sung
The Earth, her bones returned the tones
Bright Sun ignites the power, singing
This Beltaine morn at Avebury

The Serpent mates within the Stones
Sacred light ablaze with glories
The Blessed Fire in the dawning
This Beltaine morn at Avebury

From Head and Tail the chants are sung
Dark welcomes Light with ringing tones
Old with new, their voices singing
This Beltaine morn at Avebury

Down countless years the silvery Stones
Guard the path of ageless glories
Blessings on a new age dawning
This Beltaine morn at Avebury
The ancient knowledge will be sung
Quartzite notes in granite tones
Rising hopeful with the singing
This Beltaine morn at Avebury

Spirits rise in living Stones
Their wondrous music joins my tones
Old Ones walk with me in dawning
This Avebury Beltaine morning

Nancy M Bell



BELTANE

White stars burst on the May bush hedge,
Dusting their rush of green like snow,
Moon-pure dew for girls out of bed,
Sailing on smiles to the swaying May pole.

Hold the hawthorn to your heart,
Let your soul catch fire as the flame leaps
up!

Before this Beltane sky's struck with stars,
We'll drink deep the well of dawn's hon-
eyed cup.

The robin makes song on the oak's broad
crown.

Ribbons coil and cascade green, red and
gold,

The horn clasps hands and seals each vow,
Mead-song drips in the fire's sacred glow.

Loose the swallow to the corn upon the
field,

Let summer kindle in your heart locked up,

Before this Beltane sky must yield,
We'll drain dry the dawn's honeyed cup.

Simon Hazelby

STRETCHING - A TREE'S BELTANE

spring the season feels good
fresh leaves unfurl and breathe the air
branches reach high up to the sun
warm the sap runs through our veins
with beltane we grow strong
every breath pulls water upward
every branch hosts new life
each day makes us stronger
we enjoy the clouds which bring us rain
we dance in the winds that blow our way
we revel in the world around us
while watching the creatures that admire us
up we grow higher and higher
tall we stand above the earth beneath us
guardians we are over all we see
lords of spring and all it offers

Brian Reasor

As we are approaching World Labyrinth Day, May 7th, 2022, I wanted to offer my Elemental Labyrinth Ritual for use by my fellow OBODies.

Elemental Labyrinth Ritual ASCENSCIA

CENTRE

Once you reach the centre of the labyrinth, seat yourself and meditate on the integration of these elements with each other in you.

How do all these elements blend and integrate in you?

How does spirit manifest in you?

WHAT YOU NEED:

A labyrinth with quarter markings – any design is fine

While this ritual is written for a walking labyrinth, you can also use a finger labyrinth or paper labyrinth.

Know which is East (air), South (fire), West (water), and North (earth).

If possible, enter with East as the first quarter or just assign the first quarter to air.

A candle and a way to light it

A seating option for the center for a walking labyrinth

BEGINNING

You may like to open with your prayer to deity or your Grove opening ritual. Light your candle at the appropriate moment in your opening, before entering the labyrinth.

ENTERING

Carry the candle with you and while walking into the labyrinth, focus on the internal aspects of each element as you pass through each elemental quarter.

How does air manifest in you?

How does fire manifest in you?

How does water manifest in you?

How does earth manifest in you?

LEAVING

Carry the candle with you and while working your way out of the labyrinth, focus on how you express each element as you pass through its elemental quarter.

How do you manifest air in the world?

How do you manifest fire in the world?

How do you manifest water in the world?

How do you manifest earth in the world?

ENDING

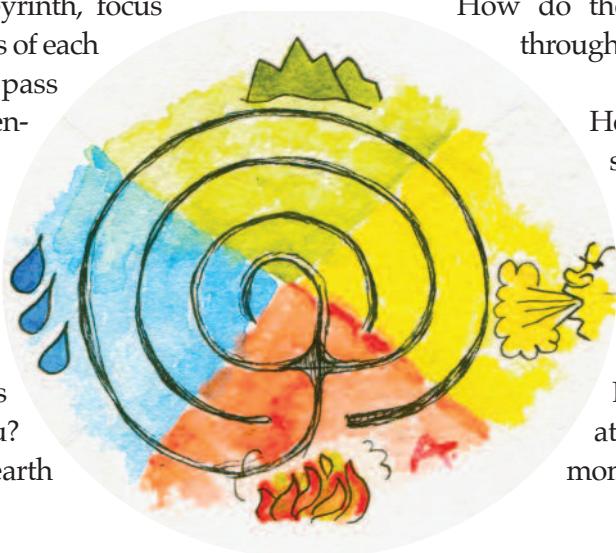
Pause outside the entrance of the labyrinth and contemplate how you integrate the elements as you work in the world.

How do the elements manifest through you into the world?

How do you manifest spirit in the world?

Close by thanking your deity or closing your Grove.

Extinguish the candle at the appropriate moment.



Deep within the Wildwood lies the Eternal Nemeton and at the centre of the nemeton is a deep pool from which, it is believed, all the knowledge of the world has flowed. In that pool lives a salmon who is said to be the oldest living creature in the Isle of Britain, just a little older than the Ancient Shaman who is the keeper of the Eternal Nemeton. He was here when the First People arrived after the last ice age and shall be here when the last people leave.

When the Isle of Britain was still young (and soon after it became an island) the Ancient Shaman summoned all the creatures to the Eternal Nemeton as he had an announcement to make. And so each creature arrived at the nemeton to hear the shaman. In the East the creatures of the air gathered, including Hawk, Eagle, Dragonfly and Bee. Seated in the South were hunters such as Wolf, Man, Stoat and Fox (Cat was invited but said he was busy). The creatures of water were represented by Beaver, Otter, Swan and Crane, among others, while in the North were the omnivores, Bear, Aurochs (it was a long time ago), Boar, Hare and more.

The shaman stood up and a hush came upon the nemeton. 'I have journeyed to the Upper World and met with Eastre*, the Goddess of the Dawn, the Glowing One, and she said she requires an assistant to help with the Spring Task; covering the land with flowers on the morning of the Equinox. Eastre wants one of you to dance the Spring in and has asked for my help with the selection'. Excitement and anticipation ran through the circle as all the creatures wanted to be the chosen one.

'In order for her to choose an

The Hare's Tale RED ALLEN

assistant I would like each of you to bring her a gift when she arrives at dawn on the Spring Equinox, which is tomorrow. The nature of the gift will help her to choose the right person, so come back with something before tomorrow's dawn'. Some felt that interviews would have been better, or submitting a CV, but none argues with the Eternal Shaman as she was so wise.

Everyone returned to their homes to choose a gift, but Hare was troubled by this as she had nothing in her home to give. It was fine for those who lived in caves, she thought, or nests, or holes in the ground, but not fine for hares. She lived in the long grass in a form, which was just a dip in the ground. The grass kept her out of sight, but not out of smell, and the dip kept the wind out a little, but not the rain. There was certainly nowhere to keep anything. But when she reached her form she remembered burying some hazelnuts a few days before. Quickly sniffing out where they were located she dug them up and saw they were fine. She would give those to Eastre. So Hare lay down and fell asleep.

She awoke a little later and in plenty of time to get to the nemeton. Once there she waited with all the others for dawn to arrive. Soon the eastern sky began to lighten and suddenly



ly Eastre stood amongst them glowing and filling the nemeton with her warm radiance. At the signal from the Ancient Shaman everyone began to hand their gifts to Eastre. Hare was taken aback at some of the beautiful and thoughtful gifts, although some, such as Magpie's, were a bit tacky and looked like they had come from a seaside gift shop. Hare was embarrassed at her

handful of nuts and when it was her turn, reluctantly stepped forward, head down and handed the nuts to Eastre.

When Easter had received all her gifts she thanked everyone and then told them who would assist her in dancing in the Spring. The nemeton fell silent as everyone listened, hoping it would be them. "Hare!" said Eastre "I would like you to be my helper for you have not only given me everything you have, you also thought it was not enough."

And that is how Hare became Eastre's companion and why hares dance the way they do every March. Not mad March hares at all.

* *The West Saxon spelling as, naturally, the Eternal Nemeton is in Wessex.*

MY SONG

It calls to me
ancestral memory
each cell
flowing toward
the hills
the valleys
the moon and stars
where lives my heart

Brigid, Danu, Cerridwen
Her names sing
come home
come home
come back
to your Spirit
your Celtic home

Danamar/Mary Sander

SUNRISE ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE WORLD

The sky is raw sienna, a soft golden glow
But soon brighter colors will begin to
show,

Deep yellow, vermilion, and now scarlet
red,

Then the sun slowly rises and lifts his
head.

Wispy clouds of purple and grey
Are soon by the wind, whisked away.

The sky is so blue, bright, and clear
We savor this moment with nothing to
fear.

But what about those experiencing war?
When they look at the sky it is hard to
ignore.

That glow in the sky is very concerning.
They know it is likely that something is
burning.

They see not soft white clouds of calm,
But black curling smoke of a detonated
bomb.

They don't hear the woodpeckers tapping
and tattooing'

But something more sinister they know is
brewing.

Not the sound of birds drumming and
tapping,

But the sound of machine guns attacking.
They can't stand in awe of nature's exis-
tence,

But instead must think about the resis-
tance.

Our hearts go out to these people of war.
I only wish that I could do more.

Donna Brown



«The Mole had long wanted to make the acquaintance of the Badger. He seemed, by all accounts, to be such an

important personage and, though rarely visible, to make his unseen influence felt by everybody about the place.» (Kenneth Grahame)

The hunt for the mythological Badger EVEN TØMTE

does the Druid Animal Oracle. The guardians of the elements are, as we know, the hawk, the stag, the salmon,

and the bear. Perhaps the badger likes it that way, this somewhat reclusive being who lives underground and prefers to come out under the cover of night.

There is, for some reason, a conspicuous lack of mythological stories about the badger. There are some, of course, but not many. Despite its iconic appearance and the fact that the badger is a rather common animal, it seems mostly to be lurking in the background. When researching this article, I leafed through a number of books with titles like *'Animals in Mythology and Folklore'*. They have chapters on the wolf, the fox, the lynx, the hare, the beaver, and so on, but not on the badger. Badgers are also noticeably absent in collections of fairy tales from Asbjørnsen and Moe or the Brothers Grimm.

There are badgers in literature, but most of them have appeared rather recently. The British Isles should be the badgers' home ground. A fourth of the world population of the Eurasian badger live there, and they have been there for approximately 250 000 years.

The relations between humans and badgers go far back as well. In Ireland badgers were eaten in ancient times. Badger bacon was seen as a delicacy fit for kings. Although badgers were probably not kept as house-hold animals, there were laws in pre-Christian times stating the penalty for your badger digging in your neighbours' field. But there are only a few surviving stories about badgers from that time. This seems to have carried over into neo-pagan spirituality. The articles about various animals on the OBOD website do not mention the badger, neither

Nevertheless, we will pull a few mythological badgers out into the limelight for a little while. Gwawl fab Clud, the badger in the bag. Gwawl is probably the most well-known mythological badger, and he isn't even a badger. Not quite. He is a man, but he can be seen as having a connection to badgers. Perhaps because he is a noble of Annfwn, the Welsh underworld, a connection shared with the badger due to its nocturnal and underground activity.

Gwawl appears in the first branch of the Mabinogi. He is the promised of Rhiannon, but she prefers Pwyll pen Annfwn. (Despite the name, Pwyll does not hail from Annfwn himself, but he subbed as a king there for a year, while the real king got himself some well-deserved time off.) When Pwyll and Rhiannon hold a wedding feast, the spurned Gwawl appears in disguise and asks for a boon. Pwyll carelessly promises anything that is within his power to give. Gwawl then asks to have Rhiannon for himself. Pwyll is bound to grant his wish, but with Rhiannon's help he manages so stall it for a year. The next year a feast is held for Gwawl and Rhiannon, and now it's Pwyll's turn to appear in disguise and ask for a boon. Gwawl is suspicious, but agrees when all he asks for is enough food to fill his bag. The bag, however, turns out to be bottomless. No matter how much is put in it, there is still room for more. As they keep stuffing the bag,

Gwawl is told that it will be filled when a man rich in hosts and lands steps in it. When he does, he is caught in the bag, of course. 'What is in the bag?', 'A badger', Pwyll and his men tell each other as he is punched and kicked around. Gwawl asks for mercy, saying that there is no honour in killing a man unable to defend himself. Pwyll agrees to let him go, on the condition that he will not seek retribution for what happened. This is said to be the origin of the game known as «the badger in the bag», which does not sound like fun for all the participants. Pwyll's actions are also shown to have consequences in later branches of the story.

TADHG MAC CÉIN'S FAILED PARTY

Moving on to Ireland, the story of Taghd was first told in the *Sanas Cor-maic*, a glossary ascribed to the bishop-king Cormac mac Cuilennáin, but multiple versions of the story exists. As the story goes, king Taghd's son wanted to hold a feast for his father, with meat from all kinds of animals. He tricked a number of badgers out of their sett (either five or a hundred, depending on which version of the story you are reading). He did this by swearing on his father's honour they would come to no harm. Despite his word, he killed the badgers and served them to his father. When Taghd saw what kind of meat he was served, he was furious and refused to eat. The son should probably have done his homework better — according to the story, Tadhg actually means badger. People with a *geis* (a magical prohibition) against eating the flesh of an animal with whom they share a special bond is a recurrent motif in Irish mythology.

The most well-known of them is probably Cú Chulainn. "The hound of Culann" had of course a *geis* against eating dog, and when he went ahead and did it anyway, things

went sideways from there. With a name meaning badger, it should come as no surprise that Tadhg has a *geis* against eating badgers. In one version of the story, the badgers are also his own, shape-changed relatives. Monsters and good helpers In both of these stories, the badgers are not really seen as endowed with mystical attributes. They appear primarily as victims. You might argue that Gwawl is more of an antagonist than a victim, but his badger-aspect is only mentioned when he is helplessly trapped in the bag. Perhaps badgers were most often encountered when people were hunting for them?

We encounter a more proactive badger in a slightly more recent Irish story involving St. MacCreahey of Clare. The badger in this story is a *broc sidh* or *bruckee*, a demonic creature terrorizing the countryside, capable of devouring an entire flock of cattle for one meal. The *bruckee* is said have resisted the prayers of six local saints before St. MacCreahey eventually succeeded in getting rid of it.

Another saint who encountered a badger is St. Ciarán, one of the twelve apostles of Ireland, who was said to have a way with animals. According to one story, a fox, a badger, and a wolf helped St. Ciarán with chopping wood and building huts for his cloister-brothers. One day the fox stole the saint's shoes, but the badger chased him and forced him to give them back and repent like a proper monk. The badgers' Golden Age: the story of St. Ciarán's helpful badger can perhaps be seen as a foreshadowing of the many badgers appearing in literature in the modern age. There are numerous literary badgers from this period, and now they are presented in a very different light.

End of Pt 1

"Divide et impera" meaning: divide and conquer. The phrase divide and conquer is an

*May there be peace
throughout the whole Order*
ABARIS

ancient strategy for politics and war. If you can divide your enemies and have them fight amongst themselves, it'll make it easier for you to conquer them. Attributed to Julius Caesar, who utilized it with great success against the Celtic world, it actually comes from Philip II of Macedon. Napoleon used the idea but modified the phrase by saying divide and rule.

I came to Druidy from Freemasonry. I learned that in lodge meetings there were two forbidden subjects: religion and politics. These were forbidden because they had the ability to divide brothers against themselves and sow enmity among the Lodge. Indeed, I have seen some lodges who, although not in a Lodge meeting, spoke about religion and politics on social media. I saw the immediate divisive results. And try as they might, the bad feelings outside of the Lodge came rushing into the heart of the Lodge and changed it forever. Sour faces and cold handshakes replaced brotherly love.

I have also seen and have heard of Groves and seed groups that are falling victim to the divide and conquer strategy. When Druids bring their political and voting records into ritual it can be quite disastrous. Here in America, we have two political parties, the right party and the wrong party. It all depends on your viewpoint! Election year saw a lot of disunity and unhappiness.

Diets and dietary restrictions seem to also be driving wedges into some of our Groves. Again, I can use my Lodge as an example where meals were always accessible to every

dietary need, be it vegetarians, vegans, keto, omnivores, and carnivores. This worked for a while

until some people objected to what other people were eating. As a student of nature, I look at the animal world for guidance. Some animals eat plants. Some animals eat other animals. Some animals eat plants and other animals.

As I write this, the pandemic is still in full force. Masks? Yes, or no? Vaccinated or not? Meet in person or not? I attended one ritual which had the refreshing invitation for all of us to refrain from talking about covid while we were gathered. It really was refreshing and a huge relief, even for a short while.

So, what am I saying? We as Druids have more in common with each other than what is different from each other. As the course-work invites our individuality and never commands, or tells, us what to do, let's extend that courtesy to our fellow Druids. I try to do that with my fellow Druids. At least eight times a year I just want to get together and celebrate the wheel of the year and for one or two hours leave divisive topics behind. So, if it means we don't share food or current events, so be it! Let us share the seasons, the elements, the gods and goddesses, and our common bond, Mother Nature.

Peace.



I have very recently completed my Bardic Grade and as I worked through the Gwersi a

A practice of love **TOBY KAAN**

*May I be held by the sun
during my days,
May I be held by the moon
during my nights,*

a nagging voice in the back of my mind started telling me that by the end of it I 'should' be a master story teller, an accomplished poet, an artist, be able to play umpteen instruments, and be a songwriter and performer. Of course, all this was only coming from me, and now I have completed the course I find I am no closer to playing lutes or harps! and that is okay as I found my own way as it unfurled.

It dawned on me, the Awen did flow and this emerged over a long period. I do not know whether this is a spell, a song, a poem, an incantation, a prayer or all of those things or none of them and something else entirely; it does not matter, but I go to a place of outer and inner peace and touch something deep inside when I recite it. I know for certain this is the Awen flowing, and I would not have created it had I not studied the course and accessed my guides and deep and hidden parts of me. I am sharing it to let the words flow into the world for others to use if they choose. It came into being during my studies and it has become a personal practice of gratitude, thanks, affirmation, strength, holding, love...so many things for me.

Every morning I go outside and face the sun and every evening I go outside and face moon and recite the words, it is my daily practice. I love to do this outside, no matter the weather, it helps me connect. In the morning I begin with 'may I be held by the sun' and the second line is 'may I be held by the moon' and in the evening I swap them around, so begin with 'may I be held by the moon' and then 'may I be held by the sun'.

BARDIC OFFERING: A PRACTICE OF LOVE

*May I be held by the earth always,
For I am the sun,
I am the moon,
I am the earth,
I am the beating rhythms of the seasons,
I am pure magic and love.*

And with magic and love,
I honour the land, the sky and the sea that surrounds this sacred earth, for without those I would not be here today.

And with magic and love I honour
Deity, Deity within and Deity all around, for without Deity I would not be here today.

And with magic and love I honour
Ancestor, for without ancestor I would not be here today.

And with magic and love I honour
Generations, may they be blessed with wisdom and insight to love and nourish the earth and each other.

And with magic and love,
I honour nature, of which I am a part of, for without nature I would not be here today.

And with magic and love,
I honour the elements earth, air, fire, water, spirit and all that they represent, for without those elements I would not be here today.

And with magic and love,
I honour magic and love and by doing so I complete the beautiful eternal cycle, from where I began may I come home and may I come round again.

*I offer my heartfelt thanks for the blessings that
are bestowed upon my life,*

*I am truly honoured, humbled and grateful,
And I ask that I am of service to that which is
greater than me.*

*I send out my healing love, life, light and peace
to this whole world.*

So may it be. Awen.

When I go on bike rides in Calgary, Alberta, Canada's river confluence area, that's my

Yew Infusions **BEATRICE AUCOIN UE**

infusions were somewhat easier to handle, but they still required a lot of rest for me to recover from them.

thinking time of no distractions. I've been using that time to meditate upon what it means that Yew is the tree of the Ovate Grade - the grade that includes studies about healing - and to be an Ovate who has received Yew infusions.

In Ogam, Yew - also known as Ioho - represents accepting the inevitable, reincarnation, destiny, death and rebirth, change in direction or attitude, and transformation. Yew is a serious, no-nonsense plant. It can be poisonous. It can also save lives.

In December 2014, at age 36 and a little more than five years before joining OBOD, I was diagnosed with stage 3a breast cancer. My chemo treatment ended with three infusions of a drug called taxol, which is derived from Yew trees. Taxol was originally made rather destructively from the bark of North American Pacific Yew trees, but since the 1990s, there have been more sustainable methods of taxol production involving European Yew leaves and synthetic compounds.

I am not dead right now in part because of taxol. Taxol disrupts some types of cancer cells from dividing, which it appears to have done successfully with my breast cancer. Taxol, like its Yew parent, is serious and no nonsense. It changed me on a cellular level because it helped stop my cancer from spreading. However, the first Yew infusion put me on near-constant bed rest for a week because of exhaustion and nausea. The second and third Yew

Yew has given my body both death and life.

It killed my breast cancer cells and some other cells like hair follicles, albeit temporarily in the latter case. Chemo wrecks your body for a while to try and kill the cancer that will definitely kill you unless it's stopped. Taxol helped keep me alive.

Taxol made my eyebrows and eyelashes, then my last remaining body hair, fall out. This hair loss was inevitable. My oncologist was able to tell me on precisely what day after my first taxol infusion all of the rest of my hair would fall out. I looked otherworldly being completely hairless. I felt close to the Otherworld at times too. Yew reminds us of other existences besides this one and that nothing lasts forever.

My hair grew back.

Yew is sometimes seen as a tree of death because it's often planted in British graveyards. But saying it's just a tree of death oversimplifies Yew's meaning. I often call my life after breast cancer treatment and being in remission my second life. Yew has literally been the tree of reincarnation for me.

I've discovered recently that there are Yew shrubs growing in a Calgary public garden, which is somewhat distant from my

home. As we move into warmer weather in the northern hemisphere, I plan to take my bike for a ride to visit these Yew shrubs and meditate there upon my gratitude for Yew's role in saving my life.



Winter was always the best season in the Grunewald. The lake and stream would freeze up, and I remember that cars

The Grunewald: a childhood memory

MARIA EDLIN

would drive along the stream, a road made by nature. I worried; I thought the ice couldn't be strong enough, I had seen ice cubes and ice lollies, but I couldn't imagine big, heavy cars driving along a stream and a lake. Then they told me that the ice was several feet thick, and that nothing could happen. I still distrusted this, because people sometimes put their foot through... It happened to me once, and I thought of the cars...

Dressed up to the teeth with warm clothes, scarves, mittens, and balaclavas, towing sledges, we would trudge along the narrow path through the snow until we reached the crest of the slope. I always held my breath because the slope was steep, and trees would crowd the narrow path on both sides. Once we started down, we couldn't stop until we reached the frozen stream, or perhaps worse. It was exhilarating, rushing down at great speed, leaving the silver birches behind, the cold wind beating on already chapped cheeks, and wondering if this time we would reach the bottom in one piece. When we reached the safe zone we had to stop abruptly, tumbling off onto the snow among the icy reeds of the stream. Then we would tow our sledges downstream, where the big dangerous slope was. Everybody used it, because it was very long and gave onto the lake. There were private competitions as to who could reach the furthest. The trouble was, that the lake would be scattered with people, skating, sliding on the ice, building snowmen, so we always had to shout our way down to warn people that we were coming. I never saw an accident, but there must have been because someone died once.

I remember people slipping and falling, especially on the slides scattered all over the lake. We would scrape layers

of snow from the ice in a line as long as we could, and then run towards it from several feet and slide along. Lots of people fell; we never broke anything, although we fell a lot, just got up and laughed, it was good to fall.

Winter was good in the Grunewald, I don't remember it being cold, but white and silent, the trees covered perpetually with snow and the silver birches looked dirty against it. Colour returned to the wood in the Spring when it thawed. It took a long time to thaw. It was fun to walk in the muddy slush, kicking with our wellingtons, sloshing and sliding through it. The lake was very dangerous. No cars drove up the stream to it. We would play "Dares". "I bet you don't dare cross that part", "Oh yes I do". Walking carefully, measuring every step, sometimes nothing happened but other times, the ice sank a bit and water would cover the boots. That's when we would hold back. We never fell in.

When the woods thawed, I remember loving the Grunewald. Tiny flowers were born everywhere. The ones I liked best were the snowdrops. I was always amazed and would catch my breath when I saw the carpets of flowers. I would sit down among them for a long time and watch them grow. I would tell them things that I never told anybody else. And they would listen to me, and they would understand.

At Easter arrived we would go into the woods, with baskets and look for Easter eggs. We would dash madly from tree to tree, eyes glued to the ground, looking for shiny reds, greens, blues, and golds. At first

it was easy, with lots of pushing and shoving, but the last were difficult to find, and we would watch each other out of the corners of our eyes, mistrusting every move. And the final wail, "You've got more than me". The grown ups always solved this by putting all the eggs together and dealing them out fairly - the best way, but I didn't understand why.

Summer was always hot and sultry in the woods. The gang would stalk imaginary enemies between the trees and bushes carrying pistols and swords made from sticks hanging from our belts. Our camp was a small clearing with a very old oak tree growing slightly tilted. We built a "sort-of-a-house" between the lower branches as headquarters, but only the leader was allowed into the house. This caused untold arguments and fights, and someone always went home crying, wounded by a sword or a fist.

We would fish with rods made of slim branches and a string. We would never catch anything, but we liked to feel that we were part of the grown-up world that seemed so far away then. Once, we had a battle; we were in undies swimming, laughing, shouting, and splashing. Someone threw socks, t-shirts, and shorts into the water. We dived down to the depths, puffing up for air, but it was murky and dark down there and for all our efforts not one sock was recovered. It was a long, silent walk home, barefoot, pushing our bikes along the small pathways, each thinking what the grown ups would say and do. We were all a little frightened. We all felt very small.

Berlin seems a long way away now. The Grunewald where I played for long hours in the snow, and amongst the trees and flowers, must still be there. It was a magical time and a magical wood, the Greenwood of my childhood.

OPEN FORUM

At Touchstone central 'Challenge a busy Druid' always bears fruit - thank you! The two translations of Chaucer below really demonstrate the art of the translator, to convey the essential feeling- whilst remaining true to the original words/rhythm. Hmm, maybe it's worth exploring other ancient poems for similar comparison... Meanwhile, back to Chaucer, with thanks to our correspondents.

Dear Touchstone, April's Chaucer challenge invoked shades of A level English circa 1972!! It This is my own version of the original though I have previously come across both the original and various 'translations'.

*When, In April, the soft showers fall
The drought of March is pierced, and all
The roots are bathed with such a power
As brings the pulse of life to stir the flower.*

*When Zephyrus in every wood and heath
On tender plants has exhaled his sweet breath*

*And in Aires the youthful Sun
Has half way through the Ram already run*

*And songbirds who make melodies
Sleep through the night with open eyes.*

By the by, with May coming up, and being a Beltane boy myself, (born May 1st) I recall this from somewhere in Chaucer's famous love poem epic 'Troilus and Criseyde'.

*'In May, that mothere is of the monthes
gladde, When fresshe floures blewe and whyte and
rede
Ben cwic again that Wyntere madde dede*

And fulle of baume is fleytinge every mede'

This is from memory but I think its pretty accurate. Cwic of course means alive, as in the phrase 'the quick and the dead', and baume is scent or perfume. **Peace and blessings, Mark**

Hello Touchstone, I am sure you have had responses to this challenge, but I have an ex-library Penguin book called *The Portable Chaucer*, a translation of *The Canterbury Tales* by Theodore Morrison:

*As soon as April pierces to the root
The drought of March, and bathes each bud and shoot
Through every vein of sap with gentle showers
From whose engendering liquor spring the flow-
ers;
When zephyrs have breathed softly all about
Inspiring every wood and field to sprout,
And in the zodiac the youthful sun
His journey half way through the Ram has run;
When little birds are busy with their song
Who sleep with their eyes open the whole night
long
Life stirs their hearts and tingles in them so,
Then people long on pilgrimage go,
And palmers to set out for distant strands
And foreign shrines renowned in sundry lands.
And especially in England people ride
To Canterbury from every countryside
To visit there the blessed martyred saint
Who gave them strength when they were sick and faint.* ... and it continues

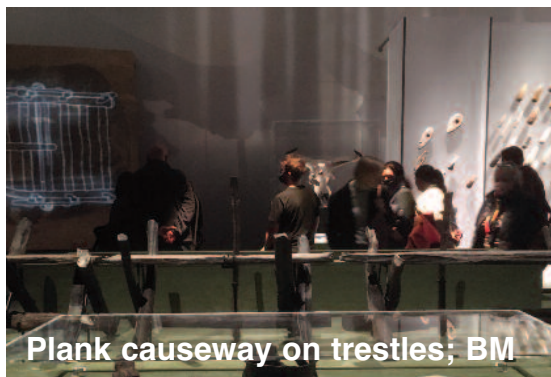
I am old enough to have looked at a bit of Chaucer for my 'O' Level English. Loved the language, but although I have both the Tales and the translation, have not spent any particular time with either since school suddenly ended and another life took over! It is beautiful to read in either form.

Blessings, Ella

OPEN FORUM

Stonehenge exhibition: walking with history
'This spring, the British Museum is hosting a landmark exhibition telling the story of prehistoric Europe. The focus is on the iconic Neolithic monument, and most famous stone circle in the world, Stonehenge.'

So the loose, occasional gathering known as 'Druids on a Bus' converged on the BM... it was thrilling, and especially for we few from the South West, Somerset, the Goddess' own



Plank causeway on trestles; BM
Summer Country. For on display was the Neolithic causeway/plank bridge, part of The Sweet Track which gave access through the marshes to our forebears. A few weeks before we had actually walked along the replica which is in situ, to meditate briefly. It was a surprisingly perilous undertaking for some and rather magical to see later a solitary, barefoot figure dancing along its length.

Druids from Norfolk, Yorkshire, Wales and all over Europe will have their own 'wow' experience of living heritage - and with the amount of gold on display, it will probably be more 'bling-y' than ours. But for us, 'the dynamic story of people's changing ideas, skills and beliefs throughout 3,000 years of prehistory' which really resonated was that ancient plank.

Penny Billington

THE CALL

I hear the call of the blackbird
I hear the call of the seal
I hear the call of the nightwind
All calling me to heal.

I hear the words of caution,
To go and not get lost,
To understand my limits,
To understand the cost.

To be both here and there, and true
To all that I hold dear –
To listen as I seek and swim
To both the joy and fear.

Karin Fendl

BLOOM

Winter rainstorms weave
A flowered Persian carpet
On a sandy loom
Jessica McGee San Diego, CA

FIRST STEP

I am a bard
Here to heal with stories and sound
Together with forward intention
Of balance with nature
I am song of birds
In wind through trees

Awen Moss Gnome

REGULAR GROUP MEETINGS:

ANDERIDA MOOT: 2ND MON The Ship, Southwick, nr Brighton. 8pm FFI: info@anderidagorsedd.org
ARTIO SEEDGROUP, Switzerland (Zurich) Meet/rituals/Gatherings/walks. Lily or Britta at Info@druidry.ch (+41 76 326 6963)

ARTURIAN GROVE Seasonal rituals near Otley/York. Optimistichannah@outlook.com

ASH GROVE, GLASTONBURY Seasonal rituals/meetings: OBOD visitors welcome. FFI jacki.woolmington@btinternet.com

BRIGANTES SEED GROUP, YORK, England. Gatherings on the full moon. highwaysupplies@btinternet.com

BIG SKY GROVE, NORFOLK Our name reflects the vista and big skies of our Norfolk landscape. Open to members/ former OBOD members. Meetings (zoom) for the 8 festivals & meetings, walks, discussion. FFI: rebnick@btinternet.com

CORNOVII 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>

DRUID PILGRIM GROVE: Pilgrimages, gatherings and rituals. Encouragement for pilgrims. Australia and NZ. Contact: danuta@adruid.com; FB: Druid Pilgrim group.

FAVERSHAM PAGAN MOOT 2nd Mon The Sun, West St Faversham Kent & events FFI www.favershampagans.org.uk

GOLDEN WATTLE SEED GROUP, ADELAIDE S. AUS. Regular meetings, rituals FFI: golden.wattle.seed.group@gmail.com

LAKE AGASSIZ SEEDGROUP 3rd Saturday of the Month: Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada. Public rituals in local parks. FFI: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/lakeagassizdruids/> email agassizseedgroup@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 QLD, Aus macademiagroove@hotmail.com FB "OBOD Macadamia Grove"

THE MELBOURNE GROVE Seasonal celebrations, Melbourne, Aus: Trudy Richards moondancer@outlook.com.au

MOUNTAINS OF BRAN-BEITHE SEED GROUP western Montana, USA, Eight festivals, for OBOD members roanrob-bins@aol.com

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

SOLAS AN IARTHAIR GROVE: public ceremonies for the eight festivals, full moon meetings. info@lukeeastwood.com

SETANTII SEASONAL RITUALS IN MANCHESTER / S. LANCs. Always outdoors. GROVEOFSETANTII@YAHOO.COM.

SEATTLE SEEDGROUP CIRCLE OF COLL - public rituals, workshops, tree walks &... every month. circleofcoll@circleofcoll.org

SLIABH ANAM GROVE Rituals and monthly moots Durango, Colorado, USA. FFI: contact.sliabhanam@gmail.com.

SONG OF THE EASTERN SEA SEEDGROUP Central Coast of NSW Aus, FFI: contact Chris at chris@druidryaustralia.org

TAMESIS (London Seedgroup) seasonal festivals/ moots/ workshops Contact Ricky: gelli3@me.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.

OBOD WHEEL OF THE YEAR ONLINE RITUALS, on fb and youtube. Hosted by CC Eimear Burke
Bealtaine April 30, 7pm UK time.; **Check** druidry.org/facebook
Alban Hefin June 18th; Lughnasadh July 30th; Alban Elfed September 17th; Samhain November 5th;
Alban Arthan December 17th

14-15 May and 1-2 Oct Walkers between the worlds 32nd Foundation Course in Celtic & Ancestral Shamanism (Oxon) with John Matthews and Margot Harrison. This two-part non-residential course is for shamanic beginners, teaching students to journey, heal, and quest along the ancient paths of wisdom, gathering spirit allies. Contact Jane May: janedmay@btinternet.com 01865 407680.

25th May Whisper of the Stones Brighton Spiegel tent Old Steine Gardens, BN1 1NH 8.30pm-midnight Ronald Hutton (Stone Henge), David Bramwell (Children of the Stones), Fiona Robertson (How to read a stone) Dr Matt Pope (Brighton's Sacred Stones), Lally Macbeth & Matthew Shaw (Living Stones) plus DJ Melanie Xulu £15 Celebrate the rich neolithic history and stories around our henges and monoliths, ending with a disco of stoned love! <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/dr-bramwell/t-egmnp>

2 June Sing-along-a-Wickerman! Glastonbury Assembly Rooms. Tickets for OBOD members: a special start to our few midsummer days together. A classic interactive film showing curated by OBOD speaker David Bramwell (Pagan hymn books, prizes & goody bags supplied. Tickets and information: <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/whats-on/glastonbury/assembly-rooms/singalong-a-wickerman/e-aygdoy>

4 & 5 June OBOD Special Summer Gathering, Glastonbury. <https://druidry.org/events/special-summer-gathering-4th-5th-june-2022>

7th to 10th July International OBOD-Camp 4 days of gathering, workshops, talks, groves, initiations with lovely like-minded-people in the triangle near Belgium/Netherlands/Germany. For more info and registration see www.oakwisdom.org

7-10 July The Path Leading Home. Healing Resources for Challenging Times, (Glos) With Cáit Branigan and Caitlín Matthews. This course helps us find the path that leads us back to our true nature, our true home so we can be supported in challenging times. With shamanic journey, song, and movement, we will find the ancestral paths laid down by our wise ancestors. Some experience of shamanic journeying is needed. Contact: Hawkwood College, Painswick Old Rd., Stroud, Glos GL6 7QW (01453 759034)

25 - 29 July Wild Women Retreats "Healing Heart" Summer Retreat Come feed your soul Springhead Trust | Fontmell Magna | Dorset Tickets: info@wildwomenretreats.co.uk www.wildwomenretreats.co.uk or find our group on Facebook.

8 - 11 September BAM Druid Gather: Air - Breathing Awen. Join us for our third year in beautiful Ashby, MA! Adults \$175, children (12 and under) \$50, includes meals and cabin space. We will continue to weave deep relationships with each other and the land, and focus on inspiring each other in our methods of self-care, community-care, and Earth-care. Workshops, meditations, market, Fairy Feast, children's activities, Bardic & Ovate initiations, fire circle, Eisteddfod & more. FFI: <https://bamdruidgather.org>

2023

3-5 March 2023 Druid Grade Gorsedd in the New Forest National Park, Hampshire, England.
Email druidry.sylvangrove@gmail.com for further details

Touchstone May 2022