



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

Issue 298



Shapeshifter by Rosie Gosden

GROVE & SEED GROUP NOTICEBOARD

Greetings: My name is Cecilie and I come from Norway. I get in touch here to ask if anyone would like to chat occasionally as I do not know anyone else studying Druidry. I'm not on Facebook, but email; cecilieahavik@gmail.com

Warm wishes, Cecilie

Hi, My name is Alwina, I have recently joined OBOD and I am working with the Bardic material. I live in Canterbury, Kent, UK. I was wondering if there is anyone out there, locally, who I could meet up with to share ideas. My email is: alwina93@btinternet.com

Love, light and blessings, Alwina

TOUCHSTONE is published by OBOD.

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EDITORIAL

Hello to all members once again! There is a music in poetry and in the natural world in this month's Touchstone... the song of the river, p3, thuds in the mysterious forest, p14, and the deep sensory experience of learning from the greenwood p3; of loving oneself in nature, p 6, and integrating the sacred in the city, p 4. Enjoy a sensual wallow with Touchstone! And following the Chaucer, ancient poetry is represented this month by Sappho: why not send in your favourite (short!) ancient text to continue this strain?

P 8 provides an *antidote* to that insidious default position - that our experience is the experience: 'Can autistics be Druids?' It's rhetorical, of course but examining the question provides a great learning journey. Then part 2 of The mythological Badger, p 11, explains why we should all put lumps of coal in our boots... it's all going on in here!

Open Forum is, unusually, a book extract, and a real treat. So if you need an update on our very own Druidic 'rattleskull genius' enjoy p. 13. Truly he was a Bard of Liberty: here's hoping at least some of us also will earn that as our memorial.



June '22 TOUCHSTONE Issue 298

- 2 G&S noticeboard
- 3 Bards' Page
- 4 The sacred in the city *Steven Shakespeare*
- 6 Falling in Love with myself *John King*
- 8 Autistic Druids? *Samantha Bodwell*
- 11 The mythological Badger Pt 2 *Even Tømte*
- 13 Open Forum - Iolo Morganwg
- 15 Regular Events

COME HERE TO ME FROM CRETE

Come here to me from Crete, to your temple,
Where stands your lovely grove of apple
trees,
Where holy altars smoke with frankincense;
Here cold water sounds through apple
branches,
The ground is all carpeted with roses,
Enchanted sleep falls from shimmering
leaves;
Here the field that's grazed by horses is lush
With spring flowers, here the winds sweetly
blow [...]
Here, O goddess, so gracefully you grasp
The golden cup, freely pouring like wine
The nectar all-mixed with our rejoicing.

Sappho, trans. Peter Saint-Andre
Public domain

JUNE 24

My soul is hidden in the greenwood
dappled, shadowed, sunstruck
I speak to the oak to learn its patient strength
learn the art of aging gracefully,
enduring, resolute, powerful
I learn the trick of hanging on from the wild
grapevine—
reaching, seeking, finding, growing...
So many lessons in the forest—each tree find-
ing its way,
Finding what it needs to survive, to thrive
Each beautiful in its way, in its determina-
tion,
in its wisdom.
Generous, profligate, patient, that slow intel-
ligence
timeless, trusting, a heartbeat much slower
thank my own, breath more measured,
alien but the same, nonetheless...

Cathy Johnson

Cover art: www.rosiegosdenart.co.uk

MATTERING

You made it here
to the page
to the age-old wager
of which matter matters
of which words flatter that matter
into this flatter existence
-than the fatter facts of forms past
forms passed on through the long song
we string together
to tether Now's Forever
into hilarious lines
we call Time.

So what will you will into mattering matter?
more mindless chatter?

Or clarity's cup
for collecting reflections
from Now's pool of wholeness?
The whole mess of Truth
defined line by line

refined into gold
once told in Love's rhyme.

Amy Walker

THE RIVER SPEAKS

Oh the times waiting by the river
to hear a hint, a direction, a clue
straining to make words
out of splashes and burps
until finally recognizing the arrogance
of believing that humanity
holds the only key to language

Tracy Rupp



In the Druidcast episode 178, I was interested to hear Damh's interview with Dan Nelson.

Finding the Sacred in the City: Black Wood, Liverpool **STEVEN SHAKESPEARE**

From the park, the aptly named Druids Cross Road leads up to Black Wood. This has been a place of

Dan was talking about various sites of sacred significance in Brighton. One, the Goldstone, is sited in Hove Park near a busy road and a retail park (including an outlet for Toys'R'Us!). Dan pointed out that most druids do not live in a cottage surrounded by trees in the countryside: we have to find those pockets of intensity in an urban setting. I live in Liverpool, which rejoices in two amazing Christian cathedrals (not to mention two cathedrals of football!). But apart from these and other celebrated buildings, I'm also drawn to the places where city, nature and deep memory lock together: there, something special happens.

Near where I live is Calderstones Park. The Calder Stones themselves were part of a Neolithic tomb, probably a mound such as we find in Anglesey at Bryn Celli Ddu. Moved and rearranged a number of times over the centuries, they are now much better displayed in Calderstones mansion, under the care of the Reader Organisation. Their mysterious cup and spiral motifs offer a fascinating glimpse into our ancestors' burial traditions and cosmology.

Meanwhile, the park itself shelters many beautiful trees, including a particular yew whose canopy includes a set of three entrances into its intimate shade – good for Ovate work. Walking through the park, I especially like those paths which diverge from the main ones: earth tracks through gateways of trees into a marginal space of magic.

special importance for me over the years. Along with Childwall Woods and Fields over the road, it was once part of the grounds of Childwall Hall, but is now publicly owned.

Black Wood itself is a small enclave, which maps show was planted with trees at least three hundred years ago. Some of the great, smooth beeches and wonderfully twisted sweet chestnuts in the wood may date from around that time. There are also masses of birches, as well as lime, rowan, oak and cherry.

It is a small space, bounded by roads and houses. But enter it, and you are treading the threshold of the Otherworld. There is an atmosphere created by the structure of the towering giants and the spindly trunks of the saplings; by the loops and trills of birdsong, and the weaving tracks through the mulch. In recent storms, a number of big trees have come down and changed the geography of the place. But this is nothing new: in the deep time of the trees, sudden and gradual events shift the landscape. The trees that fall (or, though dead, still stand) form whole ecosystems for fungi and insects to help re-fertilise the life of the wood. In death and decay, they reveal an evolving beauty of dignity and form.

I go to Black Wood at least once a week, sometimes with family, sometimes alone. It is not so much a place of escape, as of encounter: a touching point to the webs of life which are more than us, in which we are grounded, by which we are inspired. The fact that it is surrounded by suburbs in some ways deepens its attraction. It is like a hidden

well, where the often overlooked currents of spirit and nature's time gather.

Of course, not everyone in a town will have easy access to a woodland, however small. But if we look and listen, we may well find other waiting shards of the Otherworld nestled in our own. They may be in parks and gardens, places of transition and trade, street names and memorials, canals and culverts, back alley weeds and nests in gutter - and in all the countless niches our cities provide for the humming life that always surrounds us.

BLACK WOOD

Pass the gate: the world awaits,
the deep time of your growing.
I am drawn to your heartwood,
the shadowed centre of love.

Black, you are, and beautiful;
a constellation of leaves,
a prophecy of branches,
a body for the green God.

Leaves fall and drift, a smooored hearth
guarding the spirit's embers;
I have wanted this new fire
wanted so much to be born.

Our fingers touch, flesh to bark,
feather and fur and fungi
all weaving with the same light
all singing with the same breath.



IN HAZEL'S GARDEN

The reclusive hedgehog of Gloucester
Road
Hides in the fern garden pond every night
With the water plants and the croaking
toad;

The forget-me-not and the marigold
Give him cover in the quarter-moon
light—
This reclusive hedgehog of Gloucester
Road;

The gardener sees the edge might erode,
Trapping our friend, this lumpy water
sprite,
With the water plants and the croaking
toad;

She lays two logs inside his abode
So the creature can crawl out alright,
For this pudgy hedgehog of Gloucester
Road;

So this mammal has gone, gone it is told,
Gone from his abode, scurried out-of-site,
From the water plants and the croaking
toad;

Now free to roam wild, unhurt, uncon-
trolled
Hunting worms and crickets until day-
light—
We sing to the hedgehog of Gloucester
Road
With the water plants and the croaking
toad.

Ruth Oskolkoff

From "*The Bones of the Poor*," available to special order from your favorite indie bookstore or online at Amazon. Please contact the author at ruth.oskolkoff@gmail.com for inquiries.

It is mid
December, just
before solstice and
the rain has been
falling from the

Falling in love with myself: continuing my personal journey JOHN KING

grey skies all day but by early afternoon
there is a glimmer of brightness and the rain
has began to ease just leaving a light drizzle
in the air.

I step outside and immediately the smell of
the cold air assails me. Stepping onto the
grass my bare feet feel the coldness of the
earth and the muddy water oozes
up between my toes or is it the
earth reaching up to welcome me
by embracing my feet? Similarly
the cold damp air wraps itself
around my naked body, fitting me
perfectly. There is a familiarity
with these sensations and I am
able to relax and allow the experience of life
to embrace me fully.

Taking the path by the river, the water from
the heavy rains surges past in a brown tor-
rent. The path is muddy and steep and it
begins to rise up over the rocks, leading
through the top gate onto the track towards
the woods. My bare feet adjusting and being
welcomed continually by the twigs, small
stones, gravel, grass and puddles. Except for
my movement the air is still but my passing
raises tiny swirls and eddies that the skin
delights in.

There are many favourite trees in the woods
hereabouts. The large oak tree that appears
to have grown from a chambered cairn,
cracking the capstone in the process. As I
approach I sense the reduction in energy as
this old friend slumbers through the winter.
Another Oak nearby is surrounded by
mossy boulders, like courtiers paying

homage to the
King, I always
come here when I
require guidance a
bit like chatting to

my grandfather. Then there is the tree that I
know as Goat Oak, because the wild goats
often birth their young nearby. This particu-
lar tree always has a natural warmth that I
can sense when I am beneath it.

Whilst I greet these giants as I pass by none of
these are my destination today, I am heading
for what I call Pan's Mound; a
rocky knoll covered in slender
elegant younger oak trees.



Approaching, I pause and then
make for one particular spot that
calls to me. Sitting down close to
the tree, feeling the wet moss
beneath me and then connecting directly into
the earth. Putting my back against the tree
that had invited me, the spirit of the tree inte-
grates itself with my aura, then I close my
eyes and sink into silence. As if in response a
watery sun appears so that I am in a faint
warm glow, enveloped once more in the
stillness, vanishing as a separate entity, just
merging with the earth, air and sky with the
sounds of the burn running below where I
am sitting.

Back at the small off grid hut I open the door
and feel the warmth of the fire that I lit earli-
er. Going inside sitting on my meditation
mat and picking up my drum. Within
minutes I am flying
high in the sky with
crow, spiralling ever
higher, seeking,
watching, knowing.



As *the light* of the day fades my focus changes and I play my flute, honouring the coming of the night and the mystery of sleep. I awake in the small hours to the moonbeams flickering through the large window below which I sleep. Stepping outside into the cool moonlight that is strong enough to cast shadows and greeting the chilly air, then I wander again through the silent woods, not a thing stirs. Slipping back into my bed I turn over and fall into the mysterious stillness of sleep once again

Waking just before dawn, looking from the window, the dark tracery of the branches against the night sky are just visible. In the predawn light, objects begin to assume tones of grey and when the colour has finally begun enter the world I slip out of my small bed and leaving the hut wander down the slope to enter the water that flows through the land.

As the cold embrace of the river welcomes me, I sing my songs of gratitude and joy to the world. Drying, then wandering back towards the house, opening the door, another day begins.

I first wrote about my experience of meeting with nature on nature's terms back in 2019. This was subsequently printed in Touchstone 226 (August 2019) with the title "Muddy Feet". It is quite remote here and as I fell under the spell of the place I began to realise that if I wanted to engage fully with the spirit of this land then I would have to meet nature on nature's terms. This culminated in me being prepared to walk naked and barefoot in the woods and bathe in the burn that forms my eastern boundary in all seasons.

It's *now the spring of 2022* and having con-

tinued this practice for a number of years I have come to realise that as I have engaged closer and closer with the world in all its glory I have fallen under its magical spell and developed a deep and abiding love. During the autumn of 2021 I started to try and express this relationship in film and photographs and in the process became aware that not only was I truly part of this wonderful earth but....

If I am in love with the world, then how can I not be in love with myself?

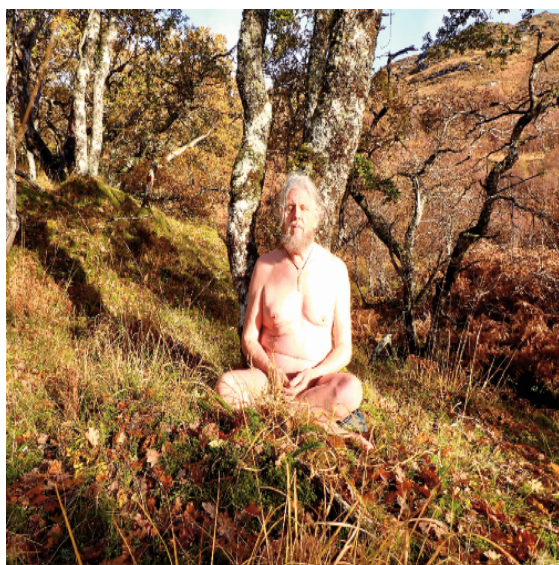
As druids we all see ourselves intimately connected to the natural world.

As druids we have that deep love and affection for the natural world.

So may I pose a question to you dear reader?

As druids do we have that same deep love and affection for ourselves?

If any members of the order wish to contact me to explore this idea of engaging with nature on nature's terms they are invited to contact me at fsgadhbeag@gmail.com to further the conversation. Many blessings...



When it comes to the discussion of religion and Autism, one is still met with a mixed bag of ideas for there are some non-Autistic people who are ableist and hold tight to the belief that if someone is Autistic, whether they be speaking or nonspeaking that they, due to their Autism, will not be able to fully engage with any sort of religious or spiritual thinking. In fact this preconception is wholly false. To help counteract such false narratives, faith communities have been starting to work more with Autistic self-advocates to aid in adding our voices to the conversation, listening to us, and fully taking our Autistic life experiences into account which in turn furthers the cause for Autism Acceptance. There was a time when no one cared about including us, it is promising that more and more faith traditions are now listening to self-advocates and working hard to include us.

WE ARE EVERYWHERE, MAYBE EVEN CLOSER THAN YOU THINK.

I am acquainted with Autistics both speaking and nonspeaking across many religious paths who are deeply involved in their faiths from rabbis to Catholic priests to Buddhists to fellow pagans of varied stripes to etc. I believe that it is because of our Autism that we are able to fully delve into our chosen practices and that our Autism helps to further our connections to said paths. Like with communicating thought, some Autistics will thrive when introduced to Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) whether that be an iPad, a letter board, etc. to help them to engage with others, especially when they are nonspeaking or partially nonspeaking; working with us to accommodate our needs helps us to better engage in our

chosen faith communities and society as a whole. Speech and language are two different

things, one may not have the ability of verbal speech, but that does not mean that one also lacks the understanding and use of language; just because someone does not use verbal speech does not mean that they have nothing to say. In its simplest terms we humans crave communication. When it comes to interacting with us, one does not need to be an "Autism expert", but instead just be someone who is ready to listen to us on our own terms however we communicate.

LIVING IN A NON-AUTISTIC WORLD SOMETIMES INVOLVES A BIT OF CREATIVITY

We Autistics live in a world not designed for us; we therefore, when help isn't readily available, must sometimes figure out things for ourselves. Some of us have become quite adept at discovering workarounds that help us to take part in society whether that be a nonspeaking Autistic adding cuss words to their AAC because they wish to fully express themselves or a nonspeaking Autistic pagan adding pagan terms to their AAC in order to fully engage with others when taking part in rituals because most AAC apps are designed by Christians and don't include pagan terms or me (a speaking Autistic Druid) doing outside research to replace included course material that proved to be overstimulating.

Overstimulation can be caused by too much visual, auditory, etc. input that an Autistic brain due to its inability to filter things finds wholly overwhelming and leads to meltdowns; in short we Autistics do what we need to, to engage on our terms in our own way, in order to take part in our chosen communities.

ABLEISM EXISTS AND IS EVEN INTERNALIZED,

WHAT IS ABLEISM?

Shortly after I began my OBOD studies a fellow Autistic on social media posed the question, could someone be Autistic and a Druid, in short Can Autistics be Druids?; a definite sign of internalized ableism. Ableism is a type of prejudice and discrimination, in short it is the belief that a disabled person due to their disability cannot do what “able-bodied” people can; which in turn may cause a disabled person to second-guess themselves. This query has stuck with me, resurfacing now and again ever begging to be addressed.

As I have already stated we Autistics can truly be members of any faith community if we are able to engage on our terms in whatever capacity we are able, we may need accommodations; like for example having things verbally expressed to us also put down in writing which in turn aids in our comprehension due to our inability to mentally filter things like verbal instructions, etc.; having our needs both recognized and accommodated is invaluable. In short my answer to their query was a resounding YES. I believe that due to our Autism we Autistics can definitely be Druids.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE VISUALS, MAGIC WITHIN

Most Autistics are visual thinkers, as in we tend to see images in our minds more than we see words, this is an asset in Druidry, for such things as guided meditations and the like become multi-layered technicolor experiences for me; I have seen, felt, tasted, and even smelled things described in meditations; these same sorts of tangible experiences also occur whenever I go on my own meditative journeys. For me these encounters are second nature, not something I have

had to practice, they just are. I have connected deeply with trees, the seasons, etc. within the inner world and have received and sent healing to others and to the world itself during meditation.

WHY NOT BRIDGE THE GAP, FRIENDSHIPS CAN ALSO BE FOUND BEYOND HUMANKIND

We Autistics tend to connect more easily with animals, plants, etc. than we do with people; I have longtime tree friends and plant friends, as well as animal friends. I am not saying that we do not connect with human friends, but many of us find that animals and other living things outside of our own species are much easier to connect with because they bear no subtext and their affection, etc. is easily seen; to be a human friend of an Autistic person is a special connection. Throughout my life I have struggled to make human friends, but the ones that I have made and have lasted are the most treasured. It is truly not about the quantity of friends one has, but instead all about the quality of the friendship. To be a friend of the animal, the plant, and the tree realms is a sacred and life-changing thing, it is special and something that others strive for that comes easily to me. To be a Druid is to make deep connections with beings of the other realms and to work alongside them to make a better world, so to already have made such bonds is definitely an asset. Through my studies my various friendships have only grown deeper and I am richer for it.

GROUNDING IS ESSENTIAL BEST NOT TO BE SET ADRIFT

Autistics thrive best with routines, when our routines are disrupted we flounder, our world becomes uncontrollable, etc. Routines help us to find grounding in the



otherwise chaotic non-Autistic world in which we live, therefore it is no surprise that my Druidry is part of my daily life with time specifically allotted for study, meditation, etc. which sometimes, ok more often than not, turns into longer sessions as I persevere; persevering can have both good and bad outcomes; when it comes to a favorite subject one can delve deeper and delight in new discoveries, but if it is instead a worry it can be bad and prove quite awful leading to catastrophizing, etc.; thankfully when it comes to my Druidry it is indeed a positive delight.

Being Autistic and also ADHD I find such daily structure to be invaluable and therefore have further deepened my understanding of myself, the world around me, etc. There is great importance in having a daily practice, it helps one to remember that the spiritual and the everyday are interconnected. My Druidry is a lived embodied faith practice that like my Autism colors my world.

WHEN IT COMES TO MOVEMENT ANYTHING GOES Autistics are definitely known for our movement; we flap, rock, stroke things, etc. you get the idea. When it comes to movement in Druidry it is quite natural for me, although due to my physical disabilities movements can vary day to day, I have therefore made adaptations to prescribed poses, etc. and in turn I have put my own spin, sometimes a literal spin, on things. I do not always walk my circle, but instead gesticulate my peace to each quarter from a seated place in its center and that is ok, there is no shame in not being able to do something just exactly as an exercise prescribes, it is Awen, inspiration, that helps me to find alternatives to movements and I feel just as enriched as ever. There are times when I am having a great leg day and I move and dance magic into being, other

times I do so while seated, but both are just as enriching. Whilst out for a walk an ogham may surface in my mind and I chant its name as my feet beat out the rhythm.

MUSIC AND SONG CAN BE FOUND EVERYWHERE

In terms of vocalizing and music, we Autistics all make noise and sing whether it be considered speech or not. In Druidry even the simplest of tones has power for in each plant, tree, rock, mountain, etc. there is vibration and energy, this energy, Nwyfre, flows through all things and enriches us all. Within the inner world I have heard phrases and tones that have added to my chanting and personal healing practice and have even used the same music to send healing to others and to the world. As we know, chanting is a repetitive form of vocalizing, it is something that I find very spiritual and aids in the deepening of my connections. Chanting is for me akin to stimming, to stim is to move in a repetitive way, to repeat a phrase/song/tone over and over, etc. Stimming comes in many forms, it is a way that we Autistics show how we are feeling whether it be joy, distress, etc. it is a natural part of who we are and how we interact with the world.

AUTISTICS ARE ONLY ONE THREAD IN DRUIDRY'S MAGICAL TAPESTRY

I close by reiterating that we Autistics, whether we be speaking or nonspeaking, can definitely be Druids if we have curiosity, an eagerness to deepen our connections, and a desire to reverently make a better world. To be a Druid is to live in interconnectedness with Nature and She with us, a partnership for the good of all, we Autistics might not connect with others in what non-Autistic people may dub "normal interactions", etc. but our connections are not any less important. Thank you. :)

The hunt for the mythological Badger Pt 2 EVEN TØMTE

Pt 1 concluded: The story of St. Ciarán's helpful badger can be seen as a foreshadowing of the

many badgers appearing in literature in the modern age. There are numerous literary badgers, and now they are presented in a very different light.

Now read on...

These badgers are for the most part friendly creatures, if slightly gruff, offering help and wisdom to the protagonists. Consider, for example, the badger in *The Sword in the Stone* by T. H. White (here the protagonist himself is also turned into a badger for a while), in *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame, in *Fantastic Mr. Fox* by Roald Dahl, *Watership Down* by Richard Adams or *the Narnia stories* by C. S. Lewis.

This list alone is enough to declare the 20th century as the literary golden age of the badgers. This change of attitude is probably no coincidence. The old mythical tales hail from an age where most people lived in the countryside, and probably saw the badger either as a pest ruining their fields, as game to be hunted, or both. The 19th century romantics and 20th century fantasy writers, on the other hand, tended to see nature through a lens of nostalgia. We can understand this as a counter-cultural reaction to a society in rapid and often violent transformation. These writers lived in a society where former commons had been privatized and people had been driven into the rapidly growing cities to serve as industry workers.

Through a process described as entzauberung (dis-enchantment) by the sociologist Max Weber, the mystery and tradition of old times was replaced by rational modernity. The bond with nature was being broken.

In this age of urbanization and modernity, the badger became an ambassador of the old

society that was on the verge of disappearing. The friendly badgers we encounter in these books are often guardians of knowledge, traditions, and order. We can forgive them, then, for being a little gruff.

TWO POETIC BADGERS

The 19th century poet John Clare also presents a nostalgic view of the badger. While his poem *Badger* describes a hunt, he grants the badger a great deal of respect for its stubbornness and strength. This badger can fight and win against an entire pack of dogs. When badgers fight, then everyone's a foe. The dogs are clapped and urged to join the fray; The badger turns and drives them all away. Though scarcely half as big, demure and small, He fights with dogs for bones and beats them all. The badger also appears in a poetic story by J. R. R. Tolkien, in the woods of Middle-Earth's very own Jar Jar Binks - Tom Bombadil. In *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, Tom is captured by "Badger-brock with his snowy forehead / and his dark blinking eyes" and his relatives. They grab Tom by his coat, pulling him down into their subterranean home. But when Tom gruffly (and possibly by means of a spell) asks to be released, they apologize and show him the way out. Later, when Tom 'captures' his wife-to-be, Goldberry, the badgers appear as guests at the wedding, dancing "in the bright honeymoon".

...AND A VILLAIN

We also meet a couple of dastardly badgers. The most memorable of them is probably Tommy Brock, from Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Mr. Tod*. Interestingly enough, Potter her-

self led a largely rural lifestyle. This badger is described as "a short bristly fat waddling person with a grin; he grinned all over his face. He was not nice in his habits. He ate wasp nests and frogs and worms; and he waddled about by moonlight, digging things up". He would occasionally eat rabbit-pie, "but it was only very little young ones occasionally, when other food was really scarce".

In the beginning of the story, Tommy Brock is on good terms with the rabbits, and is invited in for seed-cake and cowslip wind and cabbage leaf cigars. But when the old rabbit grandfather falls asleep, Tommy is tempted to run off with the bunnies to eat them. Before he comes that far he gets into a quarrel with Mr. Tod, the fox, and the bunnies manage to run off.

FOLKLORE

A collection of folklore and beliefs about badgers have also been preserved, and some of them are still living folklore. In Britain and Ireland, badgers were sometimes seen as descendants of pigs brought by the Vikings. They were able to travel quickly downhill by rolling up into a ball. They had longer legs on one side of the body, allowing them to walk upright in steep slopes. There are also stories about lost children being raised by badgers. In my own Scandinavian homeland, there is a persistent belief that when a badger bites, it will not let go until it hears the crunching of bone.



One way to protect yourself against this is to wear eggshells or lumps of coal in your boots to trick the badger. Several people I know have expressed this belief, usually followed by a slightly uncertain, "but that's not really true, is it?"

The badger is connected to earth and thus also to the underworld. In a few verses from the 19th century it is therefore seen as a harbinger of death: 'Should one hear a badger call, And then an ullot cry, Make thy peace with God, good soul, For thou shalt shortly die'. A badger crossing the road could bring good or bad fortune, much like a black cat: 'Should a badger cross the path Which thou hast taken, then Good luck is thine, so it be said Beyond the luck of men. But if it cross in front of thee, Beyond where thou shalt tread, And if by chance doth turn the mould, Thou art numbered with the dead'.

We can imagine that a great number of stories like these could have existed without being written down. And, as we mentioned, perhaps this is exactly how this nocturnal shadow-walker likes it. Nevertheless, if you know where to look, the paw-prints of the badger can be found in stories and mythology from ancient times to the pre-sent age. To find a really rich tradition of badger stories, however, we need to look overseas — to Japan, and to America...

Casal, U. A. *The Goblin Fox and Badger and Other Witch Animals of Japan*. Folklore Studies 18 (1959): Frøstrup, Johan Christian: Dyr i tro og overtro (Grøndahl, 1989. Mac an Bhaird, Alan. *Varia II. Tadhg Mac Céin and the Badgers*. Ériu 31 (1980) www.jstor.org/stable/30008220. Mac Coitir, Niall: *Ireland's Animals* (Collins, 2010) Sullivan, Charles William: *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays* (Psychology Press, 1996) Thos. J. Westropp. *A Folklore Survey of County Clare (Continued)*.»Folklore 21, no. 4 (1910): 476-87. www.jstor.org/stable/1255388

OPEN FORUM

Some contributors to FB really hit the button with useful, incisive opinion and cogent comment every time they post, and the member who posted this is one such. Thanks to them for this recent extract about a hugely influential, extraordinary and seminal figure in Druidry. Enjoy!

Notes on Iolo Morganwg

Iolo, as he is known among Welsh people still, was as clever a man as ever lived, and wonderfully gifted, but he was also perhaps a little touched, if only by the laudanum he took all his life to counteract his arthritis. He was hypochondriac and conceited, but he made friends and enemies with equal facility and satisfaction. A fiery radical in the age of revolution, he despised the existing order of things, and moved from trade to trade, place to place, with an ostentatious disregard of all precedents or convention. He was a pacifist, a passionate opponent of slavery, a Welsh nationalist and one of the founders of the Unitarian faith in Wales. In a London bookshop once Iolo encountered Dr Johnson, and plucked up courage to ask which of several books on display it would be best for him to buy. The insufferable sage so snubbed him that in a characteristic gesture of infuriated or humiliated hwyl Iolo bought the lot.

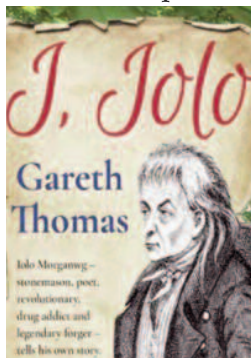
Iolo earned his living variously, and precariously, as mason, as farmer, as journalist, as a businessman of sorts: he owned a grocery store for a time, a lending library, even a trading schooner in the Bristol Channel, and he spent a useful year in the debtors' gaol at Cardiff, reading, copying

manuscripts and playing the flute. He became however the most learned Welsh scholar of his time, devoting himself to the glorification of the Welsh culture in general, and in particular the culture of his own beloved Morgannwg, Glamorgan, to which he attributed all possible splendour and achievement. Wandering around the countryside on long journeys of discovery, visiting libraries, calling on scholars, he transcribed and annotated a vast body of the old Welsh poetry, half of it then forgotten. He was one of the great personalities of eighteenth-century Wales: a peaked and shabby little man, in a tall black hat, slung about with canvas bags of books and writing materials, spectacles on the end of his nose, refusing to ride or travel by coach out of respect, he said, for his fellow-creature the horse.

Iolo recognized, long before most of his countrymen, that the continuity of Wales lay above all in its literary traditions. But over the years this wonderfully percipient man, himself as talented a poet as he was imaginative a scholar, began to confuse fact with reality, even in himself. For one thing he convinced himself, in that age of fanciful antiquarianism, that the ancient order of the Druids had miraculously survived through all the centuries in his particular corner of Glamorgan, and that he was its last surviving master. He accordingly set out to re-establish it all over Wales, founding his peripatetic Gorsedd, awarding bardic degrees

and freely inventing rituals. He did not work in any spirit of pastiche: he truly believed that the message of God's utterance had been mystically passed down to him from the oak-crowned priests of Ynys Môn.

This cracked vision of the Welsh heritage he translated into literary



1871-1940 terms too, and he began to augment the body of Welsh literature with fictions of his own. Since he knew more about Welsh classical literature than any man alive, he could do this with impunity, and over the years he invented so many medieval poems that the chief task of Welsh literary scholarship in the twentieth century has been the disentanglement of Iolo's forgeries from the real thing. Some of his poems are of an exquisite beauty: others are such brilliant copies of a style that they really do seem to show some mystical immersion of one personality in another – literary shape-changing. The motto Iolo chose for his bardic order was *Y Gwir yn erbyn y byd*, 'The Truth against the world', and in his queer drugged way no doubt he was honouring truths of his own conception.

For a time, when these misdemeanours were discovered, the name of Iolo Morgannwg was not popular. He had become a cultural hero of Wales – in the 1880s there was even a tramp steamer named for him – and the truth about his forgeries and inventions seemed a public betrayal. Opinions presently changed though, the nation was mollified, his Gorsedd remains today the presiding body of the Eisteddfod Genedlaethol and his hymns are sung in chapels all over Wales. Even the scholars have been reluctantly reconciled. His chief unmasker G. J. Williams, who spent a lifetime exposing Iolo's forgeries, came in the end to admire him: and when in 1962 Dr Thomas Parry, the greatest living authority on the poems of Dafydd ap Gwilym, edited *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse*, he included one exquisite piece attributed for years to that master, but now published under the name of its true creator, Edward Williams of Flemingston.

Extract from "Wales, Epic Views of a Small Country" by Jan Morris

THUD, THUD, THUD.

Thud, Thud, Thud...

Or is it ?

Tap, tap, tap ?

It may even be,

Clickity, Clickity, Clack.

It's the sound I hear,

In a nearby tree,

As I make my way to my allotted place to be.

Thud, Thud, Thud.

Tap, Tap, Tap.

Clickity, Clickity, Clack.

I search for the sound,

High above in the canopy.

And between spring leaves,

I hear the echo of beak and bark.

Thud, Thud, Thud.

Tap, Tap, Tap.

Clickity, Clickity, Clack.

I search, I look, as I take all in to see,

A small creature is present,

With sound of drum,

Looking for it's place, a place to call home.

Thud, Thud, Thud....

Tap, Tap, Tap...

Clickity, Clickity, Clack...

Talahm Stuart

ALL IN JUNE (Extract)

'Today the fields are rich in grass,

And buttercups in thousands grow;

I'll show the world where I have been –

With gold-dust seen on either shoe.'

W. H. Davies 1871 - 1940

Hi, Touchstone,

I thought I would offer this for submission. I have been reading Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Palces* and he was musing about limestone pavements and how "quickly" animal can change into mineral. To me this represents animal, vegetable, mineral (or any other three realms) Constantly changing and always the same.

Sarah Hopkins

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)c wc

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. brigantes.group@gmail.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: rebnikc@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 macademiagrove@hotmail.com FB "OBOD Macadamia Grove"

THE MELBOURNE GROVE Seasonal celebrations, Melbourne, Aus: TrudyRichards.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 Check druidry.org/facebook Alban Hefin, June 18th; Lughnasadh, July 30th; Alban Elfed, Sept 17th; Samhain, Nov 5th; Alban Arthan Dec 17th

REGULAR MONTHLY OBOD MEETINGS

OBOD PEACE MEDITATION: *with your Grove or by yourself every full moon: 7pm local time*
BUILDING RESILIENCE IN DIFFICULT TIMES An OBOD Listening Circle. FREE monthly online ZOOM gathering, 1st Wednesday of the month 7pm UTC. Contact harrietlock@gmail.com for the link.

EVENTS 2022

24 - 27 June Midsummer Magic at The Awen Center. Join OBOD members to celebrate the magic of summer in the Catskill Mountains of New York, USA. www.theawencenter.org for more information.

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) Cáit Branigan & Caitlín Matthews. Find the path that leads us back to our true nature & home to support us. Shamanic journey, song, & movement; the ancestral paths laid down by our wise ancestors Some experience of shamanic journeying 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.

5 - 7 August Lughnasadh at The Awen Center Join OBOD members to celebrate the first harvest in the Catskill Mountains of New York, USA. www.theawencenter.org for more information.

2-14 August Éigse Spiorad Cheilteach Annual Gathering for Celtic Spirituality Clara, Co. Offaly, Ireland Druids, Shamans, Pagans, and all with an interest in Celtic Spirituality are invited to a wonderful weekend of talks, workshops, fireside music, storytelling, and more. Organised by OBOD members Paul Corcoran, Anna Coote & Eimear Burke For details contact pauljcorcoran@gmail.com; Website: <http://eigse.net>

8 - 11 Sept 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>

1-2 Oct Walkers between the worlds Part 2 32nd Foundation Course in Celtic & Ancestral Shamanism (Oxon) with John Matthews & Margot Harrison. Non-residential. FFI: janedmay@btinternet.com 01865 407680.

15 & 16 Oct Inner Journeying and OBOD ritual Level 1 with Penny Billington and Matt McCabe, in Glastonbury. Experiential workshop exploring what OBOD Druids do, and why we do it that way, in a supportive, stimulating Druidic setting. FFI or to register, email mattmccabe.1@outlook.com

2023

3-5 March 2023 Druid Grade Gorsedd in the New Forest National Park, Hampshire, England.

Email druidry.sylvangrove@gmail.com for further details

1&2 April Inner Journeying and OBOD ritual Level 2. For previous level 1 participants.

Email FFI: mattmccabe.1@outlook.com

Touchstone June 2022