



TOUCHSTONE

— The journal of —



THE ORDER OF BARDS OVATES & DRUIDS

June 2026 | Issue 346

This Issue



Local Labyrinths and
How to Find Them by
Elizabeth Butler



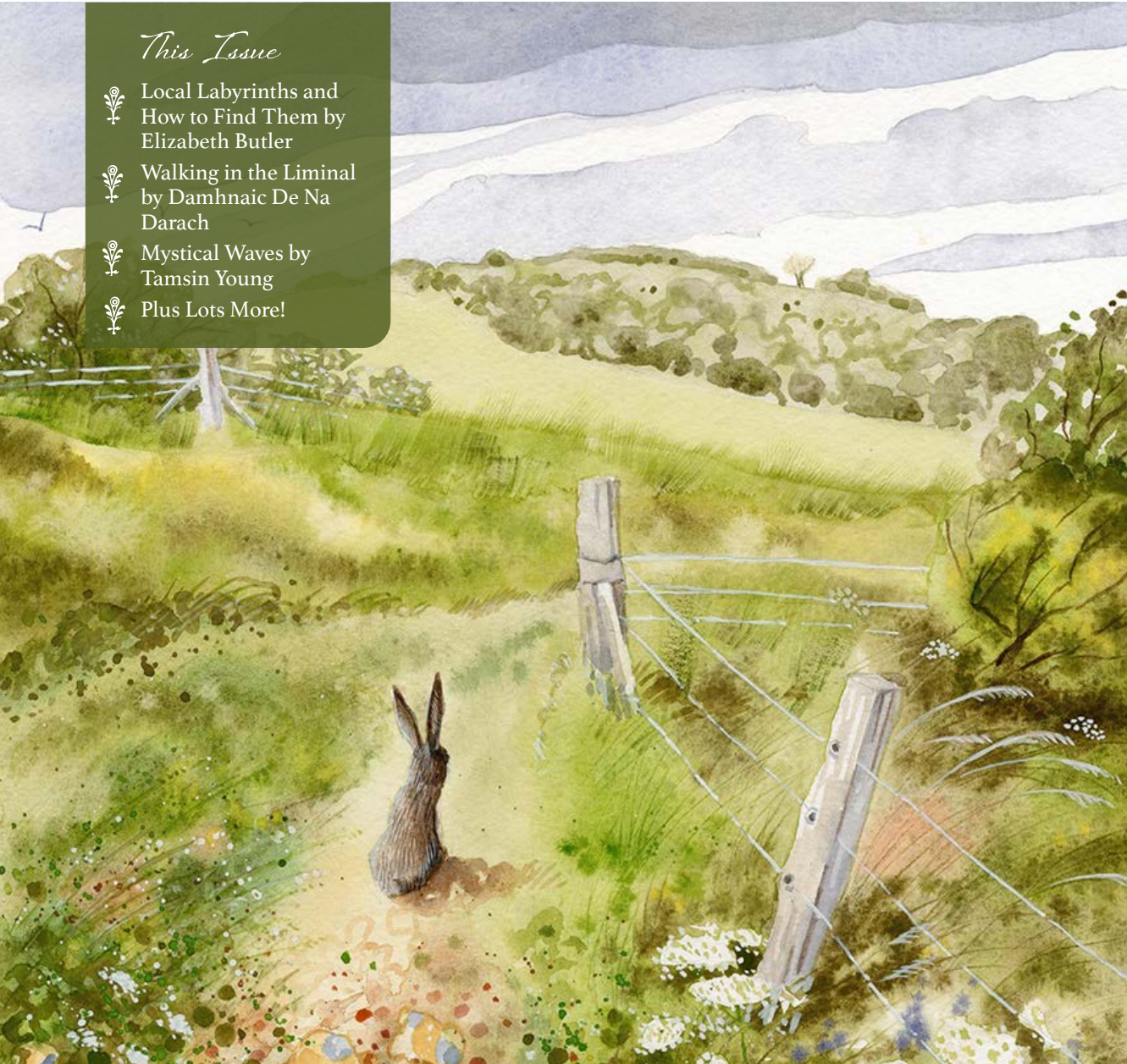
Walking in the Liminal
by Damhnaic De Na
Darach



Mystical Waves by
Tamsin Young



Plus Lots More!



Cover: "Galley Hill From the East" by Sue Wookey

Editorial

Welcome to June's edition of *Touchstone* - one which comes with a little sprinkling of magic.

When I started putting this edition together, I found this beautiful sentence in Michael Wilson's review of the Druid gorsedd in Malvern: "*Journeys, thresholds, and crossings often bring us to in-between places, edgelands, where, if we are lucky, something of Mystery enters our lives.*"

As I was musing on this, I realised that many of the articles I was thinking of including in this edition spoke to this idea. And so there are pieces about life-changing encounters on the shoreline, pilgrimages to misty burial mounds and the home of tarot, and smaller journeys into the liminal spaces inside labyrinths. And make sure you don't miss Rhyannon Brightwater's beautiful poem about an encounter on a liminal June morning towards the end of this edition.

Michael's words also informed my choice of cover art, a beautiful piece by Sue Wookey which, in its original form, is surrounded by Sue's words: "*The Old Way and the Winding Way, the Overgrown Way that the Hare Loves, Between the White Chalk and the White Elder and the Quiet Hill Rising.*"

So, grab a cup of tea and come with us as *Touchstone* takes the winding way through a labyrinth of liminal spaces to discover the magic of connection

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A Midsummer's Day by Essy Thorn

There's no comparing to a Midsummer's day.
On which, some would say, the eye of heaven
sits in its place
As if it finds it pleasant to witness our mischievous ways,
And even if it gets late, decides it wishes to stay.

The barren winter and gray are distant today.
For now the heat and bountiful greens are given
their sway.

We'll carouse, eat, and careen in the midst of
the fey.

I hope nobody told our parents that their kids
are at play!

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OBOD OFFICE ADDRESS: Unit 1, Highlands Farm, London Rd, Bolney. RH17 5PX
Email: office@druidry.org
Phone UK: +44 1273 470888
Phone US: +1 (857) 293-6468

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

TOUCHSTONE SUBMISSIONS:

To the editor: Andrew Anderson.
Email: touchstone@druidry.org
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Chosen Chief's Bit

Bandia daoibh a chairde! Greetings to you all!

Although this is the June edition, I'm writing this during Bealtaine, which lasts a whole month in Ireland. Bealtaine is the Gaelic word for the month of May.

The Order had a good presence at the Bealtaine Fire Festival at Uisneach, a monument dating back to 5000-6000 years ago, which is the Sacred Centre of Ireland. Matt, our Pendragon, Adrian Rook, Jim Ramsey and Pete Wall, among others, came over from the UK to join me in the festivities. They carried the OBOD banner in the procession up to the Fire. Many thanks to our host, order member and guide, Seán Clancy for sharing the interesting history of Uisneach. Many of you will have heard of Tara, which was the seat of the High Kings of Ireland. Fionntáin Mac Bochra declared "For thus are Tara and Uisneach in Ireland as its two kidneys are in a beast".

It is said that the ceremonial flame of Ireland was kept burning on Uisneach. On Bealtaine Eve, all domestic fires were extinguished. When the two fires were lit on the Hill of Uisneach, the fire was taken to light the beacon fires which circled out from the hill, and the people were able to collect coals from their local fire and take them back to their own hearths. They would tend that fire for a whole year, and then the cycle would be repeated again. At Bealtaine, the provincial and tribal kings gathered on Uisneach to proclaim the High King, while the Druids of Ireland lived, taught, judged, and practised their sacred arts upon the hill. According to tradition, the great ceremonial ringfort known as "The Palace" on the Hill of Uisneach was once the sacred seat of the High Kings and Druids of Ireland. Legend holds that the High King would reside at Uisneach from Bealtaine until Samhain – the light half of the year, and at Tara from Samhain until Bealtaine – the dark half, following ancient yearly cycles.

Folklore tells that the monument we see today — a conjoined bivallate ringfort, formed from two overlapping enclosures surrounded by double defensive ditches — was constructed around 2,000 years ago by the High King Túathal Teachtmhar. Túathal is regarded as one of Ireland's first truly "historical" High Kings, in the sense that Roman writers appear to reference him. A very interesting story is that he expanded and strengthened the fortifications of his palace at the urging of na Breathnaigh Bhán — "the white-robed Welshmen." Within the enclosure stands a structure

known as "The Druids' House," containing the only known Iron Age souterrain in Ireland with an emergency escape passage leading directly into the outer defensive ditch. Given the era and unusually defensive design, some historians have suggested that Druids fleeing the Roman massacre on Anglesey may once have sought refuge among their Irish counterparts at Uisneach, something which mirrors the local folklore.

Among the discoveries was a massive slab of wax mixed with animal fat, strongly suggesting the maintenance of a perpetual ceremonial flame, echoing the old traditions of the hill. The defensive ditches and distinctive overlapping design also point toward a site of royal and sacred power, a form associated only with Ireland's most important ceremonial centres.

The entire monument appears to encode sacred geometry into the landscape itself. Its overlapping form mirrors the ancient symbol known as the Vesica Piscis, long associated with spiritual union, creation, and divine kingship. Some believe this may once have been the palace of the mythical Tuath De Danann kings of Ireland. The site is overlooked by the resting place of Lugh, the great solar deity who, according to legend, bestowed kingship upon many of Túathal's descendants, including the famed Conn of the Hundred Battles.

In recent decades, small groups within the Irish Pagan community have continued the tradition of lighting the Bealtaine fire at Uisneach using only the power of the sun. We were very fortunate and privileged to be invited by Seán to hold an intimate but deeply significant OBOD ceremony within the very centre of the Palace — in the overlapping heart of the Vesica Piscis. According to Seán, this may have marked the first formal Druidic rite performed at this sacred site since the Norman invasion, or perhaps even since the conversion of the ruling O'Neill Clann Cholmáin dynasties to Christianity between the 6th and 8th centuries. If so, it was the first Druidic ritual there in more than 1,200 years — carried out on sacred ground whose story stretches back millennia.

For those of us who were present, it did not feel like something new. It felt like coming home, a reconnection to our ancestors, to our roots, to the land. For me, it was a ceremony of healing and peace, uniting Druids from these islands.

May our hearts be filled with peace! Beannachtaí agus
Síocháin

Eimear 



Bard's Page

Glastonbury Summer Gathering 2025 by Ruth Harte

Rain spitting on the Glastonbury streets couldn't
drench the rainbow people laughing crazily.
Strange faces becoming familiar as the days
hugged.
Costumes, cloaks, masked faces, drummers,
singers, coffee drinkers, shoppers rumble along a
crazy interlacing of togetherness.
People smiled.
And the rain kept spitting at us.
Water Air Fire Earth drew our eager souls to listen
to our bardic comrades.
Dancing squirkles made us trip and grin.
Swords and popcorn filled imaginative minds,
Ah yes...a broken soul shared, choking tears of
years back, into raw throat, but they were heard,

Oh, Tor you're sore, stumbling up to the tunnel
of breath, hearts pounding in breathless chests,
aching calves pushing to celebrate.

Breathe in slowly... breathe out... ascend... breathe
in slowly...ascends...

Oh, Glorious Tor so ancient and embracing with
a cold breath. Howling through your arch and
sheep munched grass so neat so rural.
And Awen sung.
Eventide sprinkled us with prose and dance, a
poet left a trance as Dave the Bard let loose our
laughing freeing childlike joy.

The last beat of hearts enraptured once again on
Sunday and Awen rose to heights before farewells
sang from filled and lonely spirits from round the
globe.



Beach Flowers by Jessica McGee

Living on sea air
the beach morning glory thrives
crowning the dune brows

Grandmother Oak by Ann Beer

Her massive trunk lies on its side,
With broken branches all around.
But let no witness say she died;
Her life still occupies this ground.
One small bough never stops or grieves,
Refusing to give in to death.
Its spring renewal crowned with leaves,
An ancient tree's brave final breath.
To see her now is to admire
The massiveness of what has been,
The great, strong base, though marked by fire,
Still gains respect, asks to be seen.
In summer, acorns, scattered wide,
Still swell and push down with their roots,
Each living cell complete inside,
To form the green and growing shoots.
So as the Grandmother begins
To fall back into quiet grace,
A sapling, well-loved Grandchild, wins
The right to take her honoured place.



Image: Summer by Sue Wookey

The Song of the Wheel

by Anthony Burns

There's an ancient wooden cartwheel,
Very large and painted green.
It ever keeps to its own true course,
Never slowing, never veering;
But seldom is it ever seen.

Tell me, was it ever seen?

It rolls across the landscape
Through the fields and o'er the hill.
It ever keeps to its own true course,
Never slowing, never veering;
To this day, it rolls on still.

Tell me that, if you will.

It brings forgotten memories
Of ancient times beyond our ken.
It ever keeps to its own true course,
Never slowing, never veering;
And cares not for the schemes of men.

Tell me, what are the schemes of men?

It visits every country,
Both near and far, and those unknown.
It ever keeps to its own true course,
Never slowing, never veering;
But it travels all alone.

Tell me, where has it gone?

We know not whence it came from
Why it's here, or where it goes.
It ever keeps to its own true course,
Never slowing, never veering,
And divides the times as it goes.

Tell me what anyone knows.

This ancient wooden cartwheel,
Very large and painted green
Forever keeps to its own true course,
Never slowing, never veering.

Tell me all; tell me all;
Tell me all you have ever seen.

Taken from Anthony's "Boloney's Kingdom" trilogy

A Full Moon Day

by Clodagh Connaughton

This morning
as I enter
the grove fresh with dew,
in amongst the saplings -
there you are again.

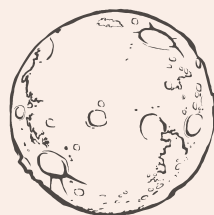
Little fawn, still, nimble,
fleetingly appearing
in the early morning light.

Stillness all around,
sounds of the forest
slowly awakening,
the mist rising
on a new day.

We await
the arrival
of the Strawberry Moon.

As she is weighted
at her zenith -
low in the sky,

Tonight,
your silhouette
will shine
in the glimmer
of her low-slung
presence.



The Free Mind (Stoned Ape Theory) by Hayden Wild

In the wild jungle, an ape swung carefree,
Till he found mushrooms, that set his mind
free.

Psychedelic flight, his senses intensified,
His simple life now, he no longer abides.
He gained consciousness, unlike any other ape,
Questions and ideas, he began to shape.
His kin couldn't grasp, his newfound wisdom,
But the tribe flourished under his guidance.
He became the shaman, the wise one of the
tribe,

Guiding them with his knowledge, they thrived.
Thanks to the sacred mushrooms, his mind was
set free,
And his journey of enlightenment, remains a
mystery.

Mystical Waves by Tamsin Young

A few years ago, I had a strange and wonderful experience in the sea. A giant wave, far bigger than all that preceded or followed it knocked me out and witnesses saw me dragged upside down to the shore with my legs sticking out of the top (dignified!).

In the moments of realization this wave was going to get me, I had a thought the best thing was to dive into it. I felt no impact when it hit me, no rushing water in my ears, no struggle to right myself or fight to the surface (no sound at all), no aches, pains or physical sensations. However, I was still 100% present with a dawning awareness that I had left my body and was in another space.

This was followed by the deepest most profound sense of peace. Time seemed to open and expand and it felt like I was there far longer than the time it took for me to arrive at the shore, washed up gently and, amazingly, unscathed. It may seem irrational to some but it felt like I had been placed in a bubble and the wave had looked after me.

As is common with near death experiences, this washed away my fear of death and affirmed my beliefs in our continuation after the death of the physical body, which has been a great comfort. Reflecting on what happened, I searched for information about mystical experiences in the sea and came across the stories of the ninth wave from Irish mythology. The ninth wave was described as a powerful wave, more powerful than the preceding eight, which was capable of destroying a person or transporting them to an otherworld realm of peace and beauty. It was seen as a barrier or gateway and imbued with magical qualities. I've wondered about the experiences of our seafaring ancestors that may have fed into these stories and found a meeting point of personal experience, story and mystery.

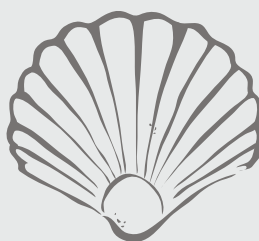
Years later, I read the work of Masaru Emoto and learned about his experiments with influencing the formation of ice crystals; beautiful

symmetrical, crystals which form as a result of being given words such as love and peace and disordered crystals forming as a result of receiving words such as hate or disharmonious sounds. I also discovered Veda Austin, who is working at the frontier of our understanding of water with her experiments, discoveries and hydroglyphs. Work such as this points to some of the truly amazing qualities of water, which I believe we may only begin to understand.

I've long been drawn to animism and whilst our individual experiences are unique there is shared knowledge and lore. For example, what are the properties of trees such as the oak or hawthorn and how we might experience and interact with them sometimes as individuated, sentient beings? I've wondered if that type of experience could be possible for something as temporary and ephemeral as a wave? I don't have a secure answer to this but my experience leads me to playfully consider this possibility.

I believe there is something about water and consciousness which laps away at the edges of my mind, trying to be understood. After all, our physical forms are ultimately temporary and ephemeral, a wave more than a mountain. All could be imbued with or be a conduit for spirit or consciousness, that could be both individual and shared, part of the mysteries of life. It was, perhaps, easier for our ancestors to feel and accept than it is in our time, dominated by a materialistic world view.

It was an experience that I feel ever blessed and grateful to have had, one which has given me comfort from the fear of death, gratitude for my life and an expanded appreciation of and curiosity about the mysteries of our world and love and awe of the sea.



The Calling by Blanche Rowen

A small girl stomps through the wet field in her wellies. Her mother holds one hand, her teenage sister the other. For reasons known only to her, Big Sis wants to visit a local ancient site: Tinkinswood Neolithic burial chamber in the Vale of Glamorgan. Only a bus-ride away, but as they tramp along the path through the long grass they pass backwards in time, some 6,000 years, to the resting place of the ancestors – if not actually theirs, then someone's. To the small girl, aged five or six, it's just an outing. But the day is foggy and louring and full of mystery as they approach the gate. Out of the mist a shape looms suddenly and they make out a huge capstone. A low wall runs around the structure, its stones laid in a herringbone pattern and the girl squeals with the excitement of discovery as she follows the curved shape disappearing into the mist, sure in that moment that no-one has ever seen it before...

The small girl was me, of course, and that moment changed my life. Fast forward many decades and my Neolithic encounter led me, eventually, to an honours degree in Prehistory and Archaeology and (circuitously) to a desire to share with you my local ancestral sacred site. Tinkinswood is an hour's walk or ten minutes' drive from where I live and its magic pulls me still.

When Tinkinswood was excavated in 1914, the bones of some fifty people, men, women and children, were found, placed there over a period of two to five generations. The huge capstone is over 24ft/7m long by 15ft/4.5m wide and is estimated to weigh over 40 tons, the largest capstone in Wales and probably in mainland Britain. The curved (reconstructed) wall, which I 'discovered' in the mist, encloses a forecourt area in front of the original entrance, where evidence of ritual feasting was found. Behind this is the burial chamber, now open at one side. Beyond that, the rest of the structure reaches back in a trapezoidal shape, surrounded by a grove of trees. It was recorded in the 19th

century as being called Castell Carreg (the Stone Castle) and the folklorist Marie Trevelyan offers the inevitable warnings against visiting on the three 'spirit nights' of May Eve, Midsummer's Eve and Hallowe'en, for, to spend the night there, "the person who did so would die, or go raving mad, or become a poet". An initiatory site, then, but only for the brave. Did local hero and druid forebear Iolo Morganwg come here? Surely he did.

Tinkinswood is still in use as a sacred place for local pagans, particularly at the festivals, as witnessed by the offerings of flowers (fine) and tealights (not fine). Others of us visit regularly to take care of the site, clearing up any non-bio-degradable offerings or litter we may find. As an ancestral resting-place it feels particularly relevant as a Samhain site but it is impressive to visit at any time. In the care of Cadw, Wales' ancient monument body, it's free to access and is less than half an hour from our capital city, Cardiff. It lies in a rural landscape strewn with ancient stones, virtually unmapped, and is only a few fields from the impressive cromlech of Gwal-y-Filiast (the she-greyhound's

lair), aka St Lythan's. (Side-note – who was the she-greyhound? And why did she have so many lairs in ancient sites all over Wales?). It's also just up the lane from the National Trust's magnificent Dyffryn Gardens, should you be inclined to visit.

What strikes me, though, is the effect that an encounter like this can have at an impressionable age. Meeting an ancestral place of power in such dramatic circumstances, as it loomed out of the fog, blew my little five-year-old mind. In such ways are we shaped – and called.

With thanks to my dear friend Dr Karen Pierce for sharing notes from her as yet unpublished book on ancient sites, used here with her permission. For more on visiting Tinkinswood go to <https://cadw.gov.wales/visit/places-to-visit/tinkinswood-chambered-tomb>



Image by Blanche Rowen

Local Labyrinths and How to Find Them by Elizabeth Butler

Labyrinths are intricate pathways or designs with a single entry point and exit. They appear around the globe in many cultures, extending back in history for thousands of years. The word 'labyrinth' itself is considered by linguists to be of pre-Greek in origin, showing its time-depth in human culture. However, interpretation of how labyrinths developed or were used seems masked by the fog of time.

As an Anthropologist Druid, I was curious, so I spent some time researching labyrinths and their history online. I learned that examples seem to date back to ancient Celtic, Minoan, Cretan, Greek, Roman and Indian societies. There are even examples from the Americas. In medieval times, the Christian church developed labyrinthian patterns which appeared in cathedrals and some outdoor settings. However, scholars continue to debate the origin and meaning of labyrinths found in archaeological sites or those found in historical texts.

Labyrinth designs are not well documented in historical sources, nor are their actual purpose or use. Based on what is known, scholars interpret them as a way a person undertook a spiritual journey or the equivalence of a pilgrimage. Sometimes historical practice that is 'obvious' to the people of a certain time or culture, simply isn't seen as something requiring a description or definition by those who wrote of them. That leaves those of us who follow them with the challenge of interpretation. Over time,

the concept of labyrinths, however they were understood and used in the past, developed into several branches. Labyrinths are now used by religious groups, spiritual practitioners and medical/healing practitioners. Their uses are as active meditative pathways towards greater inner peace, self-awareness, spiritual awareness or to foster better health. Today it is not uncommon to find labyrinths located in churches and hospitals as well as city parks and playgrounds. They reflect several design traditions within these purposes.

There are several traditional patterns of labyrinths that can be found. The Labyrinth Society has classified five distinctive types of labyrinth and group their sites as Classical, Roman, Medieval, Contemporary, or Mazes (patterns with multiple entry/exit points rather than just a single point). The LabyrinthLocator.org website has an excellent discussion on the various forms and their history.

The use of labyrinths for meditative walking is popular with many Druids today. Walking a labyrinth can represent a journey of the soul or act as an active meditation. With their twists and turns, labyrinths have been used and written of as imagery for the continuous process of life in its path through growth, transformation and rebirth. I even play a game online named Foundation that includes a 'Druid temple' expressed as a labyrinth with animated characters walking the circles within it. I giggle every time I view it and enjoy placing it in my little cities.



Image by Elizabeth Butler

If you'd like to use labyrinths in your own spiritual practice, how do you go about finding one? The internet has an answer for this. Searching for "labyrinth locators" produces two main websites that have registered various labyrinth locations on a global scale. I investigated these two websites to find and use labyrinths located in my City and, to my surprise, found 10 locations. While labyrinths are easier to find in an urban environment, I was surprised to find labyrinths in some rural locations that are only a short drive from my home. The various locations are registered in the online databases with notations on whether you need to arrange with the owner for access to use them or if they have open access not needing an appointment.

LabyrinthLocator.org is a global database boasting of 6,651 locations. It contains a powerful search tool. The locator database allows a targeted keyword search or use of a global map with points of interest noted on it. A description, picture and contact are supplied for each entry. Search options include disability accessibility, labyrinth pattern, indoor/outdoor locations, public/private land notations or even use of a postal code to find a nearby labyrinth.

LabyrinthMaps.org hosts a world map with pointers on most continents, plus specific regional maps. Regional maps include the US, Canada, and Mexico, with outside links to a UK guide by **LabyrinthsInBritain.uk**. A strength of this guide is that it takes you to Google Maps or YouTube to find the location, get directions, or see an overhead view of the labyrinth prior to visiting.

I set out to discover local labyrinths in Wisconsin, US, on a day in January when it is normal to have snow covering the ground, sometimes deeply, and it is often quite cold, with -17C not unusual. Due to winter conditions, I was discouraged from choosing a few locations, but others in the urban environment were shovelled or were inside a heated building. I visited three locations that expressed three different types of labyrinth design. One was in the outside grounds of a local church school, one inside a downtown church and one in a hospital courtyard. I quickly learned how important prior booking can be, even when the labyrinth is listed as "no appointment

necessary." A beautiful medieval five-circuit labyrinth produced in carpeting at the downtown church was covered in chairs for a meeting at the time of my appointment. I was denied access to the local hospital's Roman five-circuit meander location altogether, although a chaplain took me to a window where I could view it as a courtesy. I had good luck on the third visit to a local schoolyard, where I found and walked a frozen-ground classical three-circuit outdoor labyrinth peppered in snow. The day's quest was illuminating. Despite the cold frozen ground, I found pleasure in the discovery and the walk.



While I was writing this article, I found a picture of beautiful contemporary-design labyrinths constructed onto a Bandon, Oregon beach by the Pacific Ocean in my social media feed. It turned out my longtime social media friend and her group had been creating beach labyrinths for 20 years there. The simple post and long-time existence of the organization Circles in the Sand in Bandon speaks to the popularity of labyrinths. The incredible artwork in the sand, while fleeting, is a moving, beautiful, experience to add to the variations of labyrinth walking and human artistic expression.

For those who find the actual walking of a labyrinth a difficult task, there are printable and carved labyrinths that can be explored or traced with your fingers or eyes. For a disabled Druid, these alternative forms may give an extra option to explore meditative practices without the difficulty of getting to a location and actually walking the path. You can find some printable labyrinths on the LabyrinthSociety.org website. Beautifully-crafted hand labyrinths in multiple formats and materials can be found at artistry outlets such as Etsy.com.

Whatever path you choose to explore, in whatever format you need it to be, labyrinths can be found and experienced to add to your meditative and Druidic practice. I hope this article helps you find some of the hidden labyrinth gems in your own local area.

I will be talking to Elizabeth about this article on this month's Touchstone Unbound, Friday June 12th at 7pm UK time.

Walking in the Liminal: An Ovate's Notes from a Tarot Pilgrimage to Milan by Damhnaic De Na Darach.

I've just returned from a short pilgrimage to Milan, the birthplace of tarot as we know it, and the entire journey unfolded with the unmistakable feel of a liminal passage. It was as though the city itself existed in a thin place, where the past presses close and the symbolic world steps forward to meet you. For those on the druid path, especially those who listen for the quiet voices of lineage, intuition, and place, I wanted to share some reflections from that threshold.

My days there wove together several encounters: the largest tarot exhibition ever held at the Accademia Carrara, the once-in-a-century reunion of the Colleoni deck, a visit to Il Meneghello - the last surviving artisan workshop still making tarot entirely by hand - and a contemplative walk through the Sforza Castle, where some of the earliest card games that evolved into tarot were possibly first played. Each place felt like a doorway, a moment where the veil thinned and the tradition revealed another layer of itself.

The Accademia Carrara: A Grove of Ancestral Images: The Carrara's short-term exhibition brought together an unprecedented gathering of early decks, artworks, and historical materials. It was the largest tarot exhibition ever staged, and stepping into those rooms felt like entering a grove of ancestral images - each one carrying a thread of the symbolic language that shaped tarot's earliest forms.

What struck me most was how the Renaissance visual grammar still breathes beneath the surface of modern decks. The gestures, the drapery, the architectural framing, the subtle interplay of posture and gaze - these are not simply artistic conventions but the bones of the archetypes we work with today. Standing before those paintings, I found myself attending to them with the same receptive stillness I bring to sacred places in nature: not analysing, but listening. They held that same quiet invitation to step inward.

There was a sense that the images were not simply historical artefacts but living presences, still capable of speaking if approached with the right kind of attention.

The Colleoni Deck: A Constellation Re-Formed: One of the most moving moments of the

entire pilgrimage was seeing the Colleoni deck assembled in full. Normally it is divided between three different owners, and this exhibition marks the first time in over a century that the entire deck has stood together.

To witness it reunited felt like watching a constellation re-form after generations apart. The cards—scattered, surviving, each carrying its own journey—were momentarily whole again. There was a palpable sense of return, of something remembering itself. It felt less like a display and more like a ritual moment: a lineage gathering its fragments and breathing as one.

For an Ovate who is becoming attuned to cycles of dispersal and return, it was a powerful reminder that traditions do not survive through perfection or preservation alone. They survive through continuity, through the willingness of people and places to hold fragments until the time is right for them to come together again.



Image: The Page of Coins from the Colleoni Deck by Damhnaic De Na Darach

Sforza Castle: At the Threshold of Origin: I also visited the Sforza Castle, a place woven into the earliest history of card games in northern Italy. Some of the first games that evolved into tarot may have been played within those walls. Walking its courtyards, I felt the quiet thrill of standing at an origin point - not a fixed beginning, but a seedbed. A place where something we now recognise as tarot was still in the process of becoming.

The castle has that unmistakable quality of a threshold site: heavy with history, yet strangely open, as though the past is not sealed but still unfolding. Standing there, I felt the same sensation I sometimes feel at ancient sites - the sense that time is layered rather than linear, and that certain places hold the memory of what they have witnessed.

Il Meneghello: The Last Living Workshop of the Lineage: From the museum's grandeur, I stepped into the intimate world of Il Meneghello - the last remaining workshop still producing tarot decks entirely by hand. It is a place where lineage is not a concept but a craft, shaped daily in ink, paper, and human touch.

Il Meneghello creates a wide range of historical and artistic decks, each one crafted with a devotion that feels almost ceremonial. The shelves are lined with living history: Visconti recreations, regional Italian decks, artistic interpretations, and rare editions that carry the unmistakable warmth of handmade work. It is a sanctuary of the tradition, a place where tarot is still born through the hands of artisans rather than machines.

And yet, among all the decks on display, it was the Soprafino that called to me. Not loudly, but with that quiet Ovate tug of recognition - the sense of "this is the one that belongs to your path." Meeting it in its birthplace felt like encountering an ancestor in person. The deck's refinement - its clarity, its warmth, its human touch - spoke directly to something in me.

Holding my own Soprafino afterwards, it felt less like acquiring a deck and more like accepting a responsibility. A continuation of a thread that had reached out to me long before I arrived.

The Soprafino and the Liminal Path: Since returning home, I've been working with the

Soprafino and finding a deep resonance with the Ovate current. Its imagery invites contemplation; its lines open space; its warmth softens the archetypes without diminishing their depth. There is a gentleness to it that feels like a doorway rather than a declaration.

For me, the deck has become a bridge:

- between Renaissance craft and modern practice
- between historical lineage and the living breath of divination
- between the artisan's hand and the reader's intuition

The whole pilgrimage felt like walking in a thin place - where history, symbol, and spirit overlap. Milan revealed itself not just as a city of origins, but as a living threshold where the tradition still breathes. It reminded me that tarot, like druidry, is carried forward through relationship: with place,

with people, with the stories that survive, and with the quiet moments when the past steps close enough to be felt.

In the end, the journey was not simply about seeing artefacts or visiting historical sites. It was about entering a liminal space where the lineage of tarot could speak, and allowing myself to listen. And in that listening, something in my practice shifted, as though the tradition itself had expanded and invited me to step closer.



Image: The Soprafino Deck
by Damhnaic De Na Darach

The Druid Gorsedd in Magical Cornwall by Adrian Rooke



The excitement of the impending trip to Cornwall for the annual Gorsedd, had been gradually building up for the previous couple of weeks. After a tough year of various treatments for Lymphoma cancer, my physical and spiritual batteries were somewhat depleted. I had deep need to connect with the love and healing energy of being both in the company of my fellow Druids, and mystery and magical vibrations I always feel whenever I cross from the Devon border into Kernow. I was blessed with both of these needs being not only fulfilled but surpassed beyond any expectations I had.

It all started with the usual panic about what to take (far too much as is my process). All that remained was to await JJ Howell's arrival from Stroud, load the car and head for Bristol airport to pick up Eimear from her flight from Ireland, literally bundling her into the car, and we were off.

We had a lovely journey, chatting and catching up all the way. We decided to head straight to Tintagel to collect the compulsory Cornish pasty, only to find the shop had closed minutes before we arrived. We did not dwell on the disappointment and had a lovely walk up the High Street, whilst acutely aware of the bitter wind coming in from the sea, cold but full of that salty mystery that stirs the mind and body.

Defeated on the pasty front, we headed for Treworgie Barton Cottages, the venue for our weekend: beautiful accommodation, comfy beds and delicious food prepared with so much love by Caryl's wonderful daughter and granddaughter, Tash and Seren. We settled in and enjoyed meeting up with old friends and made some new ones, shared food together, and were beguiled by a wonderful puppet show, exploring three of Cornwall's old

myths, based around Giants and Mermaids. A fantastic start to the weekend! Off to bed to dream of meetings with Mermaids and other beings and creatures from ancient times.

The weekend continued to be both moving and exhilarating in the energy and information we were given and the powerful sharing from all of us. The afternoon was blessed with a trip to the sea. Crackington Haven did not disappoint, though I foolishly turned my back to the sea and was rewarded by being engulfed by a rogue wave - a blessing from Manannán MacLir, methinks! It was fun to watch Becky and Belinda (very courageously) plunge into a very cold and wild sea.

Refreshed and inspired, we returned to base for a very emotional and poignant ritual. Some of us who were there are dealing with very challenging issues. The love and holding, care and support were immense/ The evening ended with a beautiful Eisteddfod full of storytelling, poetry and song. Returning to bed after tea and conversation, I mulled over a deep feeling of gratitude. I was able to contemplate the gifts the Gods have bestowed upon me, for my life and the people the goddess has placed in it. Also to spend quality time with my soul brother JJ, showing so much love, light and inspiration as well as radiating courage at this pivotal part of his soul's journey in this incarnation.

I honestly could have stayed for a month. Much gratitude to Caryl, Sandy, and Alison. For their love and service in once again providing this opportunity to immerse ourselves in community, Myth and Magic.

If the Goddess keeps me alive long enough, I will certainly be back next year.

The 'Alchemical Landscape' Druid Gorsedd in Great Malvern by Michael Wilson

Journeys, thresholds, and crossings often bring us to in-between places, edgelands, where, if we are lucky, something of Mystery enters our lives. Sometimes this is a gift for our path, an insight, inspiration, joy.

Of course, everyone's experience of a Gorsedd is unique. This reflection of the Druid Gorsedd 2026 is mine, but will hopefully resonate with many of the thirty-four fellow Druids including Chosen Chief, Eimear Burke, who gathered together for a weekend on the theme, 'The Alchemical Landscape: Voices from the Vale and Songs from the Hills'. The venue, in Great Malvern, with its ancient wells and hills, was a perfect setting for an immersive experience on this theme. The 'voices' of this place included the Malvern Hills, the influences of David Rudkin, William Shakespeare, Edward Elgar, and J. R. R. Tolkien.

Then there was the ancient beech who is a tree of old knowledge, whose rings tell of passing time, and who stood there in front of the space where we held our Gorsedd, with spring leaves unfurling. In some way the beech and the land held us in our gathering, too. With this as the context and setting, Andrew Anderson and Frances Kelsey facilitated the most exquisite, creative, transformative Gorsedd.

To give you a taste of this, in the centre of the circle was an Ordnance Survey map of Worcestershire with the Malvern Hills. The four directions were set to receive the 'voices' we brought from our own localities: perhaps a book, poem, an item from nature. I brought a poem by the Northumberland born poet, Robert Story (1795 to 1860) about the River Till, the only tributary of the Tweed in Northumberland where I live. Of course,

I placed his riverine writing in the watery West, and likewise all of our voices found their place in one of the four directions.

After watching Rudkin's intriguing *Play for Today: Penda's Fen* (1974) we were left to think and maybe even dream of answers to the question: 'what is the film about?' Responses and reflections began the following morning (Saturday). Then we learnt about Penda, one of the last pagan kings of Britain, before a symbolic portrait of King Penda, created by Josh Warren, against the Malvern Hills and starlit sky was placed on the map – in the North (Earth). Then came William Shakespeare and Ariel (air) from *The Tempest*, through weaving music (from drums, rattles, fiddle, whistles, rain maker, and so on) with the words of this bard.

Next, we engaged in a guided visualisation with the music of Edward Elgar, whose *The Dream of Gerontius* formed most of the soundtrack of *Penda's Fen*, and we reflected on Sabrina, goddess of the River Severn (water). Then we thought about J. R. R. Tolkien's relationship with the Malvern Hills and Great Malvern which inspired his imagining of Middle Earth, and of the wizard Gandalf (Fire). Symbolic representations of these took their place with King Penda on the map.

The Eisteddfod on the Saturday evening brought together poetry, storytelling, song, and laughter. I think that when these and other voices are brought to life to mingle with the living, something rememberable unfolds within and between us. This came together on the Sunday morning in a remarkable ritual, like the wafts and wefts of myth-making and of a sacred dance. The whole is always far greater than the sum of its parts, as they say. If this was not generous and inspiring enough,



we were also given gifts from the Four Elements. Mine were a gleaming white feather, a blue tapered candle, a pebble, a vial of well water, and a strip of plantable seeds. Outside, the beech stood under a daylight ghost crescent moon as we later ribboned hand-in-hand to connect to this tree.

Ritual is alive, it moves through us, to our deepest innerness, long after we return to our everyday lives.

On my way back to Northumberland, my train was twice delayed as darkness fell. This gave me time to download and dip into a book on Kindle about the Northumbrians, and about Edwin who was the last pagan king of Northumbria, until his conversion to Christianity a few years before he was killed by Penda. I want to learn more about those pagan folk, I thought. Those who lived with the gods and goddesses of nature, and who lie under my feet on the holy island of Lindisfarne, and at other places. Those folk who knew that the sun arose from below the waterline. Those folk who may have begun their days with moonrise, and with dreams.

Journeys, thresholds, and crossings often bring us to in-between places, edgelands, where, if we are lucky, something of Mystery enters our lives, to alter us in subtle ways that is often difficult to talk about.



Phenology Wheel: June
by Alison Kirkham

June Morning Meditation
by Rhyannon Brightwater

Morning is only a finger-width old
over the mountains
as Raven screams above
the adobe's door.
I deadhead larkspur and daisies
to prolong their blooming,
but daisies and larkspur will give way
to high summer's blooms.

June reminds me of the seasons' swift flight--
three months 'til autumn ...and then winter--.
but I will not dwell.
Raven rasps an exhortation from the roof--
Nevermore....



Selah....

I set my shears aside
and sit.

I am bathed in the radiance of our star—
its sacred luminescence a communion of all
things.

I am something more in this moment---
I am of that Circle...
I am of that Unity.

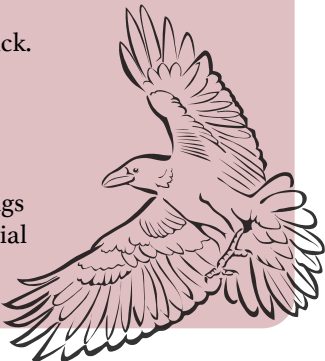
Selah...

I smell --and almost hear --the peaches
becoming fat and ripe.
I feel the vibrato busyness of bees in lavender;
my mouth yearns for the promise of honey.
Sheen of sacred moon flower still enchants---
unfurled last night
---now limp.
Beauty in all.

Raven screams from the wall.

I hear you, I whisper back.

She lifts off.
For a moment
I hear only the fwump
fwump of her sable wings
and then a last primordial
croak.



Reviews

Black Paths and Green Cathedrals by Sian Sibley

Every so often you find a book which feels perfect for the time. Every so often you find a book which, as a writer, you wish you had written! Sian Sibley's *Black Paths and Green Cathedrals* is that book.

For a long time now, there have been things about modern Paganism which have bothered me – that we say we honour the Earth but regularly do things which harm her. For example, I would say I do a lot for the planet – I am vegan, don't fly, changed my job to be an environmental manager and undertake conservation work – and yet I'm still the person who forgets to bring a bag to the supermarket and has to buy a new one. I'm the same with reusable coffee cups, of which I have a cupboardful. And if that isn't bad enough, give me half an hour on Glastonbury High Street and I'll have bags full of pagan merchandise I don't really need.

Sibley's book was just the wake-up call I needed before I visit Glasto for the Summer Gathering. The preface to the second edition begins with an invitation, to "step out of the anthropocentric disaster" which will only happen if we stop "importing endangered herbs, throwing ritual waste into rivers and buying spirituality in plastic packets."

The first part of the book is not a comfortable read. "...this isn't a feel-good handbook for lighting candles and whispering to your Gods. It's a call to look at your practice and your life, square in the eye. It's about asking hard questions, digging into uncomfortable truths, and being willing to shift, to change, to grow. Real magic isn't always sweet. Sometimes it bites."

Sibley begins by looking at the history of the problem, how we, as a species, moved from working with the Earth to 'othering' her, before shifting to look at the oxymoron at the heart of current paganism: that much of what we do in the name of spirituality "isn't magic" but "consumerism dressed in mystical robes." Why, for example, do we buy crystals and stones, which are mined from

the Earth, often in far off places, when there are plenty of stones beneath our feet? They may not be as pretty but, if you are seeking connection, surely working with the stones in your locality is better.

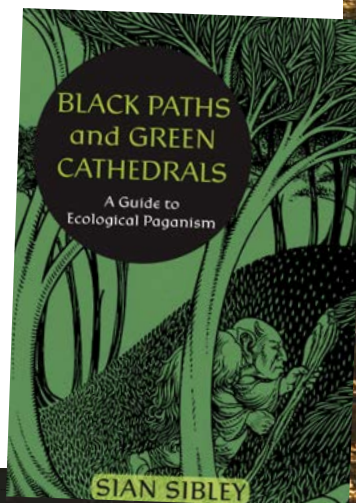
The same goes for plants. Why, Sibley asks, do we buy sage to smudge our homes in Britain when there are plentiful verges of mugwort which will do just as well. "This is not about austerity" Sibley tells us, "It is about integrity." Sibley's book is not just a telling-off, but a call to action in a "time when the green agenda is faltering." Alongside the wake-up call to examine your practice, you will find plenty of examples of things you can do instead, like "making a pact with the land" and honouring the "black path" of soil beneath your feet: "The soil is the first altar" Sibley reminds us.

The second half of the book is devoted to the "green cathedrals" and will lift the heart of any Druid, as Sibley undertakes a thorough investigation of the trees of the British Isles, drawing on folklore and mythology alongside the medicinal work of Culpepper and Charubel.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough. In a time when anything can be ordered online and delivered the same day, this is a reminder that spirituality cannot be bought. Do we need to buy that crystal? Do we need to take that flight? And this book works. I went to a Pagan festival recently and didn't buy anything that was mass produced or in a plastic bag. The things I bought I needed and were hand made. At the same festival, I also met Sian Sibley and told her how great her book is.

It is required reading for every twenty-first century Pagan.

Find Sian Sibley's book here on the [OBOD store](#) >





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

Upcoming Events

Bardic Gorsedd: 24-26 July 2026, Noddfa Retreat Centre, Penmaenmawr. For more Information, email bardicgorsedds@obod.org

Druid Gorsedd: 5-7 March 2027, Cornwall. For more information email druidgorsedds@obod.org

Summer Gathering: 6-7 June 2026, Strode Theatre, Street (some introductory activities on 5 June)

Winter Gathering: 12 December 2026, Strode Theatre, Street (some introductory activities on 11 December)

SHOBOD Assembly: April 29th - May 2nd 2027, Adelaide, Australia

Weaving the Web: 22.-25. July 2027, Herbstein/Fulda, Germany. for more Information, email weaving@obod.org or www.weltderlinden.de/weaving

Social Media



Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/druidry>



TikTok:

<https://www.tiktok.com/@oboddruidry>



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Threads:

<https://www.threads.com/@oboddruidry>

*Hail Cernunnos! Spirit of the Woodland
Blessed Soul of wild places not seen or heard
Bright champion of green spaces, you stand
Let not your power and might be obscured*

*Hail Cernunnos! Shepherd of the Wildwood
Gentle whisperer to seedlings, grow now
Green shoots and leaves spring forth where 'ere you would
Gather and bask in your warm afterglow*

*Hail Cernunnos! Guardian of the Forestlands
Wise hermit of the house beneath the hill
Keeper of laws, truths right action demands
Inspirer of good deed and strength of will*

*Sing us all back to the meaning of life
Where we are connected in joy and strife*



Poem by Natalie Brewster