



Gylden Magick

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March 2024

PRACTICAL MAGICK & UNIVERSAL ENERGY FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

Editor's notes

by Gylden Fellowship

Welcome to **GYLDEN MAGICK** – the spiritual magazine from [Gylden Fellowship](#) that spans both traditional and newer pagan beliefs and practice.

Dear readers of **GYLDEN MAGICK**,

It's March (the [Worm Moon](#)) – I've been reflecting on seeds and new projects. At Ostara (Alban Eilir), **20 March**, day and night are equal across the world. As we look around, all of nature is growing after the winter sleep: buds are on the trees, seeds start to germinate and spring flowers appear. The power of the sun increases each day as the nights get shorter.

Ostara offers the opportunity for planning new projects. We can use the potential and fertility of Ostara

to create opportunities for positive change in our lives and in the world.

At the spring equinox, we are poised between opposite forces – light and dark, receptive and active, inner and outer. We should try to unite these opposites in each of us so that we are whole and balanced.

This edition has a definite emphasis on spring - the altar colours for this period are pale blue, pink and lavender. But no ads – after all, we're like a pagan public library and all the information is free.

We continue with our regular series of celestial forecasts, sacred art from Japan, medieval murder, vapes, Alban Eilir, species recovery, St Patrick's Day and stangs. Our crystal expert, Charlie, turns her attention

to March crystals and our science writer, Mark, looks at the phenomenon of Einstein rings.

In past years, we would be frantic with preparations for the Wandering Witches' Fayre, but not so in 2024. We will go along to the event, to catch-up with friends. We look forward to visiting more old friends as the nights are lighter.

Thank you for all your feedback and many blessings.

Gylden Fellowship admins

For more info, why not join [Gylden River LRC](#) or [Gylden Fellowship](#) groups on Facebook today and see our archives or new briefings?

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Looking towards Alban Eilir

By Nic the Witch

Alban Eilir (meaning *the light of the earth*) is known by several other names, such as Ostara, the Festival of the Trees, the Rite of Eostre, Eostar or Earrach, depending upon which path or culture you follow. No, that wasn't earache! Earrach is the Irish-Gaelic word for Spring; so, an t-earrach means the season of Spring. But most people refer to this festival as the spring equinox and, this year, it falls on **Wednesday, 20 March**. It should be noted that the actual feast or celebration of the equinox lasts from 19-23 March each year.

At Ostara, day and night are equal across the world. As we look around, all of nature is growing after the winter sleep: buds are on the trees, seeds start to germinate and spring flowers appear, such as daffodils, grape hyacinths and bluebells. Both plants and animals can sense the return of life to the soil as the power of the sun increases each day and the nights get shorter.

Many pagan groups across the Gylden area have Ostara moots or ceremonies arranged – examples include Basingstoke Pagan Circle and Colours of the Oak Moot.

In Saxon times, the Earth goddess, Eostre, was honoured at this time for new life and growth. Apart from the end of Winter, Alban Eilir celebrates balance and fertility, both new life and rebirth, symbolised by the egg and by the hares that look for mates at this time of year. Yet we are aware that the first buds have appeared on the trees and spring bulbs are starting to grow.

Now is the time to express our own growth through art, craft, poetry and songs, remembering ancestral wisdom and preparing for future changes. This is also a time for healing, for reclaiming what has been lost and working with our intuition. Be open to inner wishes, beliefs and feelings and communicate with others. Follow what feels right to you.

Here are some ideas for celebrating Ostara, either at home or in a moot.

- Springtime wand-making.
- Going out for a group or moot walk to see the new spring energy.
- Planting out new herbs.
- Making a well dressing.
- Making a spring picture of natural materials.
- Baking bread or cakes for Ostara.
- Hard-boil some eggs and paint them in bright colours.
- Take the painted eggs and create an egg tree.
- Raise some money for a local rabbit rescue charity.

As we're just approaching Ostara (20 March 2024), perhaps it would be a nice idea to have some **altar incense**, regardless of whether it's just for you or for a small group ritual. You can make your own quite easily, using a blend of herbs, flowers, fruit, resins, etc. The first step is to gather your ingredients, together with jars, lids, mortar, pestle, mixing and measuring spoons. Any guide to incense lists the parts and a part is simply 1 unit of measurement, namely a cup or 1tsp.

Start with the essential oils or resins, mashing them up with the mortar and pestle. Or, you could use a blender or coffee grinder. Then add fruit, flowers, dry herbs last. The Ostara incense could consist of:

- 1 teaspoon sandalwood to awaken your spirit
- 1-part vervain for cleansing your chakras
- 1/2 teaspoon rose petals for love
- 1/2 teaspoon orange peel for abundance
- 1/2 teaspoon marigold (calendula) for inner harmony
- 1/2 teaspoon milk thistle for protection.

Add all the ingredients into the mortar or a mixing bowl. As you add the herbs and flowers, consider their uses and focus on the blend of attributes. Blend and decant into the jars.

Ostara prayer

So, here we are, gathered in a moot,
Giving our praise – that is the truth.
Last week was Ostara and it's the day
To put the clocks forward – it'll soon be May.
But first it's the god and the goddess who reign –
As young lovers, handfast the twain.
Keridwen is here, Queen of the Spring,
Giving fertility to every living thing.
And Cernunnos too, with antlers and horn,
Showing his power with every new dawn.
Fertile gods, you bring the seeds,
Of light and life for all our needs.
Blessed be.



One might expect eggs or seeds for the celebration of Ostara, but traditional foods go a lot further than that, perhaps fish, cheese, biscuits and foods made of seeds. We've opted for a honey cakes recipe here. It makes small single cakes, but could be combined for one sponge – your call.

Ingredients for cake

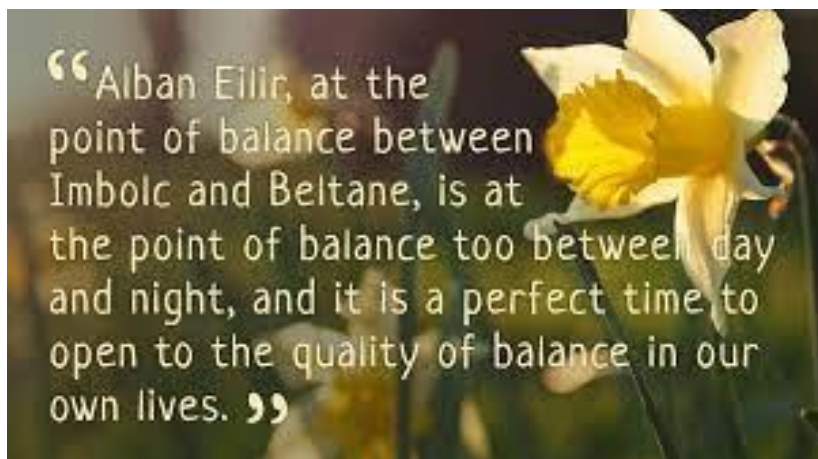
- 125g soft salted butter
- 75g light brown sugar
- 140g runny honey
- 2 beaten eggs
- 225g sifted self-raising flour
- 1tbsp lemon juice
- 1tsp ground ginger

Ingredients for glaze

- 100g soft salted butter
- 70g runny honey
- 125g sifted icing sugar

Method

1. Heat the oven to 180°C and grease the cake tin(s).
2. Blend the soft butter and sugar until light, add the honey and beat for 2-3 minutes.
3. Beat in the eggs; then fold in the flour, lemon juice and ginger.
4. Divide the mixture between the greased tins and bake until golden and risen (15-20 minutes) – allow to cool for about 15 minutes.
5. OK, time to make the glaze. Melt the butter in a pan and whisk in the icing sugar and the honey.
6. Spoon the warm glaze over the honey cakes, as thick as you wish.
7. Leave the cakes to set on a wire rack, glaze-side up and try not to eat them all at once.



(Picture from OBOD)

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Sacred art: Hinamatsuri: 3 March 2024

Collated by Gylden Fellowship - clay dolls representing the Emperor and Empress, are displayed in the home and offerings of peach blossom, rice-wine and rice-cakes are placed before them. The dolls carry away any illness which is afflicting the daughters of the house, for whom prayers are offered.







Environment: Vapes

By Greenpeace UK

E-cigarettes, also called **vapes**, work by heating a solution including water, flavouring and nicotine to create a vapour that the user inhales. Disposable vape pens come ready-filled with around 600 puffs of e-liquid and nicotine - and cannot be recharged. In Britain, about 1.3 million disposable vapes are thrown away in a single week, according to non-profit group, *Material Focus*.

Anna Diski, plastics campaigner at Greenpeace UK, called vapes a "clear environmental menace", because they are "near impossible to recycle". Ms Diski said, "They're one of the new defining images of single-use, throwaway culture, often ending up as waste that litters our streets, parks, and our beaches."

A 2022 study, published in the peer-reviewed *Lancet* journal, warned of the rising environmental threat of vapes. As with cigarette butts, disposable e-cigarettes tend to be thrown away carelessly rather than disposed of in dedicated facilities like smartphones are, the study said. As they degrade, they leach plastic, toxic compounds and nicotine into the environment.

While litter is a problem, vapes shouldn't be thrown in the bin either, experts say, because they can start fires. The *Local Government Association* (LGA), which supports a ban, says single-use vapes are a hazard for waste and litter collection and cause fires in bin lorries. The *Lancet* study also warned of the fire risk - that's because the lithium batteries inside the plastic "can sharply increase in temperature if crushed and can become flammable", according to the LGA.

Having said that, vapes are made using plastic and critical minerals that are in demand for green technologies that will help tackle climate change. It is hard to separate the lithium battery from the plastic and other parts that make up a vape. Each single-use vape contains about 0.15g of lithium. With more than a million thrown away every week, this adds up to 10 tonnes of lithium a year, equivalent to the lithium in batteries inside 1200 electric vehicles, according to *Material Focus*.

Vapes also contain copper, which is vital for a lot of infrastructure, such as rail and EV charging, said the thinktank *Green Alliance*. Over the next 20 years, demand for lithium is expected to grow 40 times higher than it was in 2020, according to the *International Energy Agency*. The price of lithium carbonate is rising, jumping 150% in one year in 2021. *Green Alliance* has said that the world will soon need every ounce of lithium it can get its hands on and disposable vapes, which are hardly ever recycled, are a waste of this valuable resource.

According to the *Lancet* article, vape waste is a preventable environmental disaster; it recommended that flavours other than tobacco and menthol should be banned. Vaping advocates call this misguided, as the flavours and convenience help people switch from cigarette smoking. The LGA said the design of vapes makes them inherently unsustainable, so a ban would be more effective than recycling at limiting the environmental damage.

Pro-vaping lobbyists are fighting back against UK plans to ban vaping, warning black market sales would surge, but even they say the waste problem is undeniable. Lobby group, the *World Vapers' Alliance*, says the self-evident waste problem generated by disposable vapes would be solved by better regulation and innovation.

Celestial notes

By Joanna Bristow-Watkins, Harmony Healing

During March, we can look forward to extended daylight and the awakening of nature, especially in the forest. As well as new green buds and sprouts on the trees, we start to see new growth at ground level, with a plethora of camelias, hellebores (also known as Lenten Roses), daffodils, narcissi, hyacinths and daphnes; some have a lovely subtle fragrance. And even where trees have fallen recently, following three successive violent storms here in the UK, it will be amazing to observe the speed with which new saplings will appear to fill the spaces.

*The Roman Calendar originally started in March and the month was named after **Mars**, the Roman God of War. To the Anglo-Saxons, March was called '**Hrēðmonath**', named after a pagan fertility Goddess called 'Hreða' (also known as Rheda).*

Some writers have suggested that the Celts called this Ash Moon month, Nion (pronounced knee-un). One of Odin's names in Norse is Ygg, which means Ash. The world tree, Yggdrasil, is an ash, which provided the wood for Odin's spear. Trees were venerated, but three of the most sacred trees to them were the ash, oak and blackthorn. The ash tree features a great deal in Irish and Scottish folklore (the latter also including the rowan, the unrelated mountain ash with similar leaves). In the 12th Century, Marie de France wrote one of her famous lays (lays or poems) about the ash. The ash is associated with rituals (especially ocean rituals) of magick and prophesy, making it a perfect choice for divining, prophetic dreams and spiritual journeying, for focussing on the inner self. Traditionally, more tools were made from ash than any other wood, due to its strength and resistance to shock (better than other hard woods such as oak or beech), making it an ideal choice for tool handles. Ash berries were placed inside a baby's cradle to prevent the child being replaced with a changeling.

March can also be called the Alder Moon month - Fearn (pronounced Faerin), associated with Faerie Magick. At this time of year, the alder is prominent and flourishing on the river banks, with its roots dipping in the water, offering itself up as a magical bridge between heaven and earth. It is an ideal time for spiritual decision-making relating to divination and prophesy, as well as for honing our intuitive skills. Alder twigs and flowers are well known charms in Faerie Lore, with alder shoots being used to make whistles and flutes to commune with the air elementals.

New Moon is Sunday 10 March @ 09:00, Full Moon is Monday 24 March at 07:00. There are no annual meteorite showers in March.

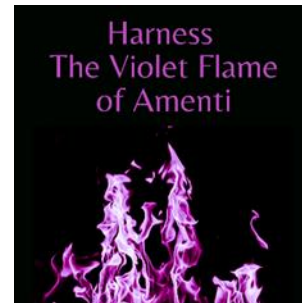
Spring Equinox is Wednesday 20 March at 03:06. At the Equinox, light and dark are equal across the whole world: some traditions like to mark the moment of the Equinox with silence and stillness or some other ritual. Representing a balance of opposites, it's a good time to set the intention to bring more balance into our lives.

March begins with the Welsh celebration of St David's Day as well as the Roman Festival of Matronalia. March was a busy month in the Roman calendar, indeed, there's even a festival for Roman Matrons (older married women) to celebrate by turning the household hierarchy of their day on its head. March is also a month for celebrating women in the modern calendar, with International Women's Day (8th), Mothering Sunday (26th) and the celebration of numerous goddesses, Egyptian (5th & 20th) and Roman (1st, 15th, 17th & 19th). The Irish celebrate on 17 March with St Patrick's Day. This year, we have Easter 29 March - 1 April (different for Orthodox Easter)

We have Nature Connection Forest Bathing events scheduled this month on 17 March at Harry Edwards, (Shere, Surrey).

The [Reyad Sekh Em \(RSE\) Egyptian Alchemy Healing](#) online evening study Introduction programme continues this month with week two of the [Violet Flame of Amenti \(Level 1\)](#) module, which can still be joined with recordings available for missed sessions.

There's no [Full Moon Guided Meditation](#) this month, because Joanna will be at the site of Stalag Luft III WWII POW camp (now in Poland) for the 80th Anniversary of the Great Escape. Joanna is giving two addresses to an assembly of RAF Officers relating to her father's POW experiences at the camp.



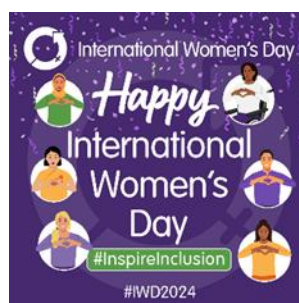
Friday 1 March is St David's Day. **St. David, Dewi Sant**, is the patron saint of the Welsh and 1 March, his feast day, is celebrated as a patriotic and cultural festival in Wales.

Saint David, grandson of the King of Ceredigion, was said to have been born on a clifftop during a fierce storm. He died on this day during the year 500CE. He grew up to be a celebrated Bishop and founder of monastic settlements and churches. Glastonbury Abbey may have been founded by St David. So why is David associated with a dragon? There is a myth that when David was asked by villagers to slay a dragon, he instead went to visit the dragon and listen to its sad tale.

Friday 1 March is also *Matronalia*, according to Roman tradition, which was the topsy-turvy feast sacred to Juno, the birth goddess. It was also a celebration of marriage and the peace that these unions could usher in between Romans and Sabini, tribes from the mountain region near the Tibor. The Roman mistress of the house waited on her servants for the day and presents were given to other people's partners! The wives of the house also gave a feast for their female slaves.

Thursdays 2 & 9 March is Week Two of Harmony Healing Virtual Workshop: [Violet Flame of Amenti \(Level 1\)](#), 7.15pm - 9.30pm (UK time/GMT = UK & America friendly hours), £88. Comprising three x 2.25-hour evening course, held remotely on Zoom. Recordings are kept of the missed sessions, so it is possible to catch up.

This course features instructions on the ancient alchemical properties of the Violet Flame and how to use it in your daily life. See [Violet Flame of Amenti](#) page for further details and to book. Worth 1 unit towards the [RSE Level 1](#), available at a special package rate of £266, which includes a personal angelic attunement, worth £33, created around your date of birth.



Tuesday 5 March is Ploiaphesia, Egyptian Festival of Navigation. This was when one of the most important festivals of the Egyptian Goddess Isis was celebrated, the Ploiaphesia or Navigium Isidis (Ship of Isis). The festival marked the opening of the safe sailing season after the stormy weather of winter had passed. A statue of Isis was carried in procession from her temple down to the harbour, where a specially-built ship was moored. The ship would then be loaded with offerings and dedicated to the Goddess, before being launched and carried out to sea by the wind. The festival is described by Apuleius in his *Metamorphoses* (also known as the Golden Ass). To mark the day, one can celebrate with processions, lights, mirrors, music and flowers, enjoying the energy of water.

Friday 8 March is International Women's Day, a day designated to celebrate the empowerment of women worldwide. *The theme for International Women's Day 2024 is Inspire Inclusion...when we inspire others to understand and value women's inclusion, we forge a better world. And when women themselves are inspired to be included, there's a sense of belonging, relevance, and empowerment. Collectively, let's forge a more inclusive world for women.* See the [International Women's Day website](#) for more. *Or for other inspiring ideas, see womenforwomen.org.*

Sunday 10 March @ 09:00 is New Moon. It's also a Supermoon. *The [New Moon Abundance Ritual](#) should be carried out within 24 hours after the New Moon. It needs to be after the New Moon because the moon should be waxing (getting bigger again) to carry the manifestation energy. Image by Harmony Healing. There are video instructions on my [Facebook Page](#) or [You Tube Page](#). It is a good day for creating a personal or corporate Vision Board for 2024. Harmony Healing provides a [Vision Board template](#) and, periodically, we offer a lunar cycle mentoring programme.*



Sunday 10 March is also *Mothering Sunday* in the UK, now viewed as a chance to recognise the positive role of mothers in our lives. Often, posies of daffodils are presented. This day is celebrated by Christians in the UK & Ireland and some other English-speaking countries. It takes place on the fourth Sunday in *Lent*, which is exactly three weeks before *Easter Day*.

It was once observed as a day when people visited their *mother* church, but has become a day for honouring mothers and exchanging presents with them. Increasingly, it's being referred to as *Mother's Day*, although that name originated as an American secular holiday, celebrated on a different date and quite distinct from the initial UK-based *Mothering Sunday*.

Friday 15 March was the Ides of March in Roman tradition and a Festival to Jupiter. William Shakespeare had a soothsayer warn Julius Caesar to "Beware the Ides of March". Indeed he was reputedly assassinated on 15 March 44BCE.

In Ancient Rome, **15 March was also the celebration of Anna Perenna.** Offerings were made to the Spirit of the Year, so that the circle could be completed.

Sunday 17 March, 11am - 2pm, Forest Bathing in the grounds of Harry Edward's Healing Sanctuary, £39.77. Usually at this time of the year, the site is carpeted with daffodils. Immerse yourself in the healing elements of nature and connect deeply with all your senses. Spend three hours in the woods mindfully connecting to your surroundings and living fully in the present moment, guided by me in simple sensory exercises and a treelaxation. A deeply relaxing and rejuvenating experience and which, despite the title forest bathing, does not involve any swimming!

Some of the scientifically proven benefits of spending time in woodland include reduced stress levels, stronger immune system response, and a stabilised cortisol cycle. This session will take place in all weathers except very strong winds or electrical storms. Book via our the [Harmony Healing shop](#). Email katieandjo@harmonyinnature.uk to go on our forest bathing mailing list.



Sunday 17 March is St Patrick's Day in Ireland. St Patrick is credited with converting the Irish back to Christianity which had been abandoned under Roman rule. Saint Patrick is said to have used the shamrock (three-leaved clover) as a metaphor for the Christian Trinity. The name, shamrock, comes from the Irish word *seamróg*, which is derived from the Irish word for clover (seamair) and means simply *little clover or young clover*.

Sunday 17 March was also the Roman Festival of Liberalia, this was the feast to celebrate the male coming of age! In view of the date coinciding with St Patrick's Day, having abandoned Christianity under Roman rule, I wonder if there is a connection that when Eire re-converted to Christianity, they chose the Roman Festival for males coming of age as their date of celebration.

Tuesday 19 March is the Roman Festival of Quinquatrus, so named because it was the fifth day after the Ides of March. This was a Festival in honour of Minerva; it seems that women were accustomed to consult fortune-tellers and diviners upon this day.

At one time, celebrations took place at 19-23 March, originally an Etruscan festival to celebrate spring, rites of women, rebirthing and the Spring Equinox. Considering the theme of rebirthing and the Spring Equinox, I can't help wondering if it was a development from the Egyptian Pelusia Festival, (see 20 March entry).



Wednesday 20 March is Spring Equinox at 03:06. On the equinox, light and dark are equal over the whole world: mark the moment of the equinox with silence and stillness. Representing balance of opposites; it's a good time to bring balance into your life.

Monday 20 March is the Egyptian Festival of *Pelusia*, with the Goddess Isis working her spring magic to ensure the flooding of the Nile later in the year, thereby guaranteeing a fruitful harvest. *We have informative Egyptian Deity Posters available for sale from the [Harmony Shop](#).*

Thursday 21 March is International Day of Forests, sponsored by the United Nations. The theme for 2024 is Forests and Innovation. Forests are home to over 60,000 tree species, comprising about 80% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity.

In fact, 1.6 billion people are directly dependent on forests for their shelter, food, medicines, income and energy. Alarming, we are losing around 10 million hectares of global forest annually (the size of Iceland) and this is said to account for 12-20% of greenhouse gas emissions thought to contribute to our climate change. As a qualified Forest Bathing guide, I am delighted to see forests being recognised for their well-being benefits and valuable biodiversity and efforts being made to protect dwindling international woodlands.



Sunday 24 March, 80 years ago, during the night of 24 March 1944, 76 airmen escaped out of the prisoner of war (PoW) camp Stalag Luft III. The event was immortalised by the 1963 Hollywood blockbuster, *The Great Escape*, which was partly fictional, but a surprising number of astounding activities, depicted in the film, were based on fact. Of the 76 escapees, only three made it home and, of the remainder, 50 were murdered on Hitler's orders, in direct contravention of the Geneva Convention. Joanna's father, Alec Bristow, was a WWII Mosquito Pilot, imprisoned in the camp at the time, and Joanna offers a popular talk on his memoirs of the occasion. She will be giving two addresses to RAF officers, at the museum located at original location of the camp (now in Poland) as part of the 80th Anniversary Commemoration Ceremony.

Monday 25 March @ 07:00 is Worm Full Moon and a Penumbral Lunar Eclipse. The start of the eclipse will be visible in London (from about 05:00) until the Moon dips below the horizon, see [Time and Date](#) for details. The period between full moon and the next new moon is a good time energetically for detoxing the body.

For details of Full Moon timings for the year, as well as instructions for an Angela McGerr Angelic Meditation with Gabriel, see [Harmony Healing Full Moon](#) link. This year, since Joanna will be giving presentations in Poland at this time, there will be no live meditation, but you can purchase Joanna's pre-recorded any month Full Moon meditation. Cost to participate is £20 by online BACS payment (£1 admin fee added for PayPal, concessions to RSE/VFoA graduates), book at the [Harmony Shop](#).

Saturday 30 March, in the UK this year, is also when the clocks go forward. At 01.00 on **Sunday 31 March is the start of British Summer Time**, although we often have a while to wait until summer arrives in the UK.

March crystals

By Charlie Foreverdark and Nic the Witch

Charlie Foreverdark is still coping with her new addition to the family! Many congratulations to Charlie and Rob on the arrival of their baby, River Castiel. So, we're looking at the correspondence crystals for February and their healing properties, using some of Charlie's notes from previous years – the key one is blue topaz.

Blue topaz is one of the correspondence crystals for March, though topaz itself is found in all sorts of colours and often used as a gemstone in jewellery. I saw a lovely London Blue topaz ring in a crystal sale last month – after a bit of dithering, I've ordered a similar item when it next comes in! Yet it can be bought as an unfaceted crystal – it's actually a silicate mix of fluorine and aluminium, commonly sourced from the USA, Mexico or Australia. The name of the crystal itself is a mystery, with some people pointing out the Middle Eastern verb, *topazos* (to seek), whilst others refer to a Sanskrit word, *tapaz* (fire).

The **main healing properties** of topaz vary according to the colour of each stone, but key attributes of blue topaz in general include:

- An aid to digestion and anorexia.
- Boost to the metabolism.
- Help with nervous anxiety or stress.
- Blue topaz helps to build peacefulness and tranquility.

From a spiritual stance, topaz is a very positive stone for calmness, clarity, and communication.

- Topaz is aligned with the solar plexus chakra, but blue topaz is for the third eye chakra, while clear or white topaz aligns with the crown chakra.
- Regardless of the colour, topaz helps to recharge one's energy.
- Blue topaz is believed to channel inner wisdom and to find the perfect pathways to successful opportunities.
- It is good for meditation and trance, enhancing psychic abilities.



Environment: Species recovery

By Matt Phelps, Sussex Wildlife Trust

Species recovery is a broad term, akin to *rewilding*, which can mean different things to different people. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, a species is fully recovered if it is present in all parts of its range (even those that are no longer occupied, but were occupied prior to major human impacts/disruption) and is performing all its ecological functions across that range.

In simple terms, it essentially involves identifying which species have been lost or are on the brink of being lost from a given region and putting in place the appropriate management to restore populations to healthy and sustainable levels. Such actions might include sensitive habitat improvement work or total reintroduction of that species through captive breeding or translocation, if necessary.

"What does this mean in a Sussex context where there are potentially hundreds of species which fit into the category of lost or in steep decline? How does one decide which are the most in need of saving or recovery? Ornithologists will be keen to focus on birds, lepidopterists will fly the flag for butterflies and moths and so on."

A better way to approach this rather challenging dilemma, perhaps, is to look at how we might help to drive the restoration of natural processes on a landscape scale rather than singling out individual species in need help. Are there overlaps between species X and species Y, in terms of what they are lacking in terms of habitat and/or food sources? Could it be that the return of a species Z may unlock the conditions required for both species X and Y to flourish?



Beaver © Nick Upton/Cornwall Wildlife Trust

A good example for a species Z would be the **Eurasian Beaver**. Beavers are what is known as a *keystone species*, meaning they positively impact and reinvigorate landscapes simply through their natural behaviour; the landscapes in question being wetlands when it comes to beavers. In turn, these restored wetland habitats then become much richer for a host of other native plants and animals, including fish, birds and insects. Put simply, restoring beavers to depleted wetland environments can produce knock-on benefits to a host of other species which, otherwise, may have required specific management techniques to recover their own populations.

There are species interactions which we understand, like the larvae of various blue butterfly species being offered protection in ant nests owing to the butterfly larva's sweet secretions. This relationship, from the butterfly's point of view, is known as *myrmecophily or ant love*.

Then there are trophic relationships we have only more recently begun to appreciate, such as the rootling effects of pigs inadvertently producing feeding opportunities for turtle doves via the propagation of arable weeds. There are likely many, many more such species interactions, driven by complex natural processes which we still need to realise and research, which will further inform how we restore fully functioning ecosystems on a broader scale.

The end goal is more wildlife flourishing in healthier and more joined-up landscapes, with a host of reinvigorated natural processes driving the recovery of lost or declining native species. A key part of my role at Sussex Wildlife Trust is to determine which natural processes, whereabouts and which species could be the drivers for change.



Adonis Blue ©Graeme Lyons

Einstein rings

By Mark Sharpen

Last year, a Yale University astrophysicist, Pieter van Dokkum, was invited to have a look at new images of the universe no one has ever seen. Within a few days, van Dokkum, and his former student, Gabriel Brammer, an astrophysicist at the University of Copenhagen spotted, in a mosaic image taken by the James Webb Space Telescope, one of the rarest of space oddities: a complete Einstein ring. This is a shining halo of light: a trick of gravity that occurs when two galaxies line up perfectly, one behind the other, in our sky. A massive galaxy can curve spacetime enough to bend light toward us that would otherwise pass us by, allowing us to see a faraway galaxy from directly behind a closer one, but smeared out into what Einstein called a luminous circle surrounding the galaxy closer to us.

This is one of the wonderful things about Einstein rings. “There’s actually nothing there, where you see the ring,” van Dokkum says. If you were traveling in a spaceship toward it, the Einstein ring would seem to get larger at first, but then it would slowly disappear. “That’s the mind-bending aspect,” he says. So mind-bending that Einstein himself once referred to the idea of a complete observable ring as a science-fiction effect. They only exist from a certain point of view. By analysing their size, researchers can decipher clues about some of the more vexing questions in the universe, such as when giant galaxies began forming and the mysterious nature of dark matter.

If Einstein rings are rare, complete ones like the one that van Dokkum and colleagues (detailed in *Nature Astronomy* in October 2023) are almost unheard of. Tony Stark, an astronomer and cosmologist at the Harvard Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics, explains that it’s “unusual for the chance alignment to be so good that a nice, round Einstein Ring is produced.” Einstein rings are *the most elegant manifestation*, as NASA puts it, of an astrophysical phenomenon called **gravitational lensing**.



The massive galaxy closer to us - the dot in the ring acts like a giant lens. A lens, like a magnifying glass, can alter how an object appears by affecting the path light takes to our eyes or instruments. Magnifying glasses focus light rays together, which make an object appear larger or closer, than it really is. Van Dokkum says what happens with gravitational lenses is that a lot of light rays that would otherwise pass by the Earth (or, in the case of a magnifying glass, not fall on your retina), get bent toward us. “That magnifies the total amount of light that we get from these objects. Gravitational lenses do exactly what an optical lens does—they magnify,” van Dokkum says. “You can get these images of distant galaxies with much higher resolution and intensity than we otherwise would be able to get, even with James Webb.” The galaxy acting like a lens at the centre of the

Einstein ring van Dokkum found is the most distant lens yet discovered. Its light had been traveling for 10 billion years, appearing as a dot within the ring. The light from the ring itself had been travelling for 11.5 billion years.

Van Dokkum says the complete Einstein ring offers “further evidence that massive galaxies started forming very early in the history of the universe.” This has been a question on the minds of many cosmologists since early 2023 when Webb Telescope images showed unexpectedly large galaxies hanging around soon after the Big Bang. According to current cosmological models, van Dokkum says, the massive galaxies shouldn’t have had time to form that early. Now, the big question of those concerns their mass or weight. He says, “this galaxy inside the ring is a descendant of those very early galaxies. But instead of finding that we overestimated the masses, it looks like we may have underestimated the masses - so, exacerbating the problems, if you will, in understanding how so much mass could form so early” in the history of the universe.

Claudia de Rham, a theoretical physicist at Imperial College London and author of the forthcoming memoir *The Beauty of Falling: A Life in Pursuit of Gravity*, says this complete Einstein ring offers a new cosmic tool. “It allows us to infer the mass of the objects between the source and us and get a much more precise mapping of the matter distribution in the universe,” she explained in an email. And some of that matter seems to be behaving differently than expected. “In this case, it is remarkable that the observed level of lensing seems to suggest a higher than standard dark matter density at that scale.”

Dark matter is the stuff that holds galaxies together. Without it, they’d disintegrate by the force of their rotation. Something, some amount of mass, has to be keeping them whole, something other than the mass scientists can observe, because the amount of matter they can see doesn’t exert enough gravity to counterbalance galaxies’ spin. This something-else is dark and hard to study, because it doesn’t seem to interact with light in any way. Scientists don’t yet know how to directly detect the stuff, but they can estimate how much dark matter a galaxy *should* have, given the amount of mass that’s visible in stars.

That is where Einstein rings come in. They offer scientists another way to estimate the mass of a galaxy by measuring how dramatically it is lensing a galaxy behind it. Rare, complete rings give researchers the opportunity to make a clean measurement of the ring’s diameter and how massive the lensing galaxy must be to produce that effect. The bigger the ring, the more mass, some of it coming in the form of dark matter, the lensing foreground galaxy must have. And that can usefully differ from the mass estimate scientists might make from a galaxy’s visible stars plus the amount of dark matter the galaxy *should* have. Researchers have even used Einstein rings to assess what sort of material dark matter might be, based on how different material might look after getting distorted by a gravitational lens.

If Einstein rings are rare, complete ones are almost unheard of. From a stargazer’s perspective, the ring van Dokkum and his team found is absolutely minuscule. You wouldn’t even be able to see the ring with the most powerful ground-based telescope, because Earth’s atmosphere would distort the image. Yet the ring was bigger than he expected.

“Even if you account for dark matter, we can’t quite explain the large diameter of this ring,” van Dokkum says. He suggests that, judging by the ring’s size, the galaxy in the middle of it (the bright dot in the image) has to have something like 10 times the mass of our own galaxy, the Milky Way. “It’s partly dark matter, partly stars that we see. But there must be something else.” The size of the Einstein ring suggests the lensing galaxy has more mass than the number of visible stars in the galaxy could add up to. “They’re different by a factor of about six. That’s weird,” says Chiara Mingarelli, an astrophysicist at Yale University.

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Events

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The Wood Demons

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Shrooms

By Erica Zann

Hi, welcome to more witterings from an elderly resident of a small English village. Living in a village does have some drawbacks, one of which is the lack of banks. We used to have lots of banks and building societies, but they've all dwindled. Instead, I can walk up to the post office for cash or balance checks. A banking hub has been opened at the other end of town, but it's worse than useless. I went up there to transfer some money to a crystal company, but the hub staff said they couldn't do it, that I should use online or telephone banking instead. Do they know how scary online stuff is for some older folk?

Thinking about crystals, I'm not sure that there's any room in the study for more crystals, but I must admit to being tempted by jewellery. Some of us prefer gold, but I've always loved silver; most of my pendants and rings are 925 sterling silver. The Editor says that I can tell you where I go for crystals, although **Gylden Fellowship** is not endorsing their stocks. Both sources are on Facebook – the Crystal Horse and Rose Cottage Crystals. This latter one is the source of my latest adjustable rings, featuring black onyx and labradorite.

Hasn't it been cold? Also, it's very wet and blustery – so much rain that it's good for ducks. Lovely for early daffs, crocuses, grape hyacinths and primulas. The inclement weather makes me sad for those who are forced to sleep on the street. All I can do is support local food banks and charities where possible, ignoring all the tosh from the government about benefit scroungers and homelessness being a lifestyle choice (**Editor's note: this is the opinion of the author**).

What's due in March? Well, our sheltered housing company is planning to introduce some regular afternoons for whist drives, dominoes or other board games. We had a games afternoon last week which was very popular, including tea and cakes. I remember spending a lot of time in team dominoes, but tri-ominoes and shove-ha'-penny were also around. Of course, there's not that many half-pennies left now, but we used 2p pieces instead. I still remember using the old money in shops. For those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, old money included farthings, half-pennies, pennies, three-penny bits, sixpences (tanners), shillings, florins and half-crowns. Also, we had pound notes and people whom we considered odd were described as strange as a three-pound note!

I heard on the radio that NHS dentists are in short supply. Luckily, I only go along now and again for check-ups – I have so few teeth remaining that I'm gumming things to death. Also, of interest is that it's a friend's birthday soon – he's 100 years old and still very sprightly for his age.

Spring blessings to you all.

Erica

Murder in the Middle Ages

By Cambridge Institute of Criminology

On Friday, 3 May 1337, Chaplain John Ford was strolling down the bustling market street of Cheapside during golden hour—when three men attacked him. As one man stabbed Ford in the throat with an 11-inch-long dagger, the other two slashed his stomach open. Ford was left to die in a puddle of blood under the arches of what was Greyfriars Church as the assailants escaped. Among the crowds, a hatter, a rosary-maker and a third man called for help. When local officers filed a report about the murder, a mysterious long-standing dispute was mentioned alongside one name: the rich and famous Ela FitzPayne. What could the churchman possibly have done for the noblewoman to order the man's murder in broad daylight on a crowded London street?

These are the kinds of questions that Professor Manuel Eisner, Director of the Wolfson Institute of Criminology and Director of the Violence Research Centre at the University of Cambridge, asks himself daily. In 2018, Eisner founded the [Medieval Murder Maps](#): an interactive map that shows the sudden deaths of thousands across the medieval towns of London, York and Oxford. For Eisner, cracking 700-year-old cold cases, like the murder of John Ford, can provide an invaluable snapshot into medieval life, helping us understand the origins of the modern criminal justice system, what life was like for everyday people in the past and how crime patterns have or haven't, changed.

"I call it a distant mirror," says Eisner. "You don't just read it as violence. You have these little stories that are taking you on a time travel adventure." Eisner, whose work has primarily focused on the when and where of contemporary crimes, started looking into mapping crimes in the Middle Ages in 2012. For fun, he and his wife would stand at the kitchen table - while she read out stories of 14th-century murders, he planted pins into an antique map of London of where they would have taken place.

For London-based crimes, the Eisners could refer to transcriptions and translations of the Coroners' Roll, some of the earliest legal records. The rolls date back to the 14th century when a newly-appointed royal official, the coroner (or crowner) would investigate any sudden or unnatural deaths: think murders, suicides, or accidents. The coroner would interview a group of 12 to 50 people from the neighbourhood about when and where the death happened, who died, what (if any) weapons were used - writing down their responses in the roll.

Few Coroners' Rolls are complete and even fewer have been studied and translated into something useful today. Cambridge historian, Stephanie Brown, who studies medieval crimes in Yorkshire soon joined Eisner to help expand his maps, formalise the project and add records from lesser-researched cities.

Stephanie Brown is a skilled palaeographer and has helped the team decipher the mysterious, medieval penmanship of the Coroners' Rolls, unlocking centuries of secrets. "You have these huge bits of parchment. Each page is probably about a metre long and half a metre wide, written on vellum, animal skin, and you need to be able to read this 14th-century handwriting," says Brown of the Coroners' Rolls. Brown, who often visits the National Archives in London to touch the documents and "connect closer to the medieval people who would have been putting these documents together," first transcribes the rolls, jotting down a legible version of the original Latin text. Then, she translates the Latin into modern English.



Even armed with a translation, the rolls still hold mysteries for Eisner and Brown. Coroners often referenced places that no longer exist. Medieval England didn't have postcodes or street numbers and, sometimes, coroners just noted details such as "where widow Severless was living." So, the historians often have to cross-reference their findings with ancient financial records or housing documents too.

Thanks to these maps, it's easier to spot trends in crime throughout history. Eisner and Brown produced statistics, detailing how Oxford can be described as a medieval murder capital due to its population of rowdy youths. In the 14th century, the per capita homicide rate in Oxford was up to five times higher than in major cities such as London or York and 75% of the perpetrators were students between the ages of 14-21 years. Within the university, students were often split into individual colleges according to their nationality, so a lot of this crime represents rivalries between those different groups.

This is just one way that Eisner's murder maps help scholars understand the social, political, economic, and legal realities of the medieval world. It was a time of transition, especially for law enforcement. Before the 14th century, many violent crimes were dealt with privately, without a formal trial, says Eisner. After 1330, the state started to regularly intervene in towns' justice. New laws mandated that all prisoners were tried and the jails emptied three times a year (to dole out justice consistently).

Convicted murderers were to be sentenced to death. Still, most criminals fled the realm and sought sanctuary elsewhere and records show that only 5-10% of people who were finally tried for homicide were hanged. Most were either acquitted, transferred indefinitely to a church prison, granted a royal pardon or died before trial because of the poor conditions of medieval prisons.

"I'm fascinated by the way people at the time tried to find the truth," says Eisner. During the 14th century, "there are certain rules about what to do and how to do things. All of this is being invented in that period." The Coroners' Rolls, for instance, marked one of the first times in history that government officials were making formal investigations into everyday murders and sudden deaths. "The medieval criminal justice system was imperfect, but you can see it developing throughout the 14th century" said Eisner.

Crucially, the Coroners' Rolls and other criminal records tell the stories of ordinary people. "These are people like you and me: ordinary, run of the mill; not the great and the good, not the elite, not the rich," says Brown. For many people mentioned in the rolls, it's the only time, throughout all of history, that their name was ever written down. Such was probably the case for Hugh Colne, John Strong and John Tindale - three of the men enrolled for the hit job on John Ford that Friday at sunset. "So it's about understanding *our* history and *our* heritage," says Brown.



Eisner's maps also shed light on violent crime patterns, some of which haven't changed much in 700 years. For instance, the percentage of female suspects charged or convicted of murder in medieval London and York is broadly in line with statistics from the 21st century, says Brown: only around a quarter of crimes. When women were suspected of a crime, they often, at least according to surviving records, didn't act alone. They'd be charged alongside a male relative or their husband as an accomplice or a behind-the-scenes orchestrator.

When sleuthing for more information on noblewoman Ela FitzPayne, the team came across a mention of her in a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Simon Metham, to the Bishop of Winchester dated 29 January 1332. The letter described how FitzPayne was convicted of adultery (having slept "with knights and others, single and married, and even with clerics in holy orders," the letter read). As part of her punishment for committing adultery, Ela FitzPayne, the likely orchestrator of Chaplain John Ford's murder, was forced to walk barefoot up and down Salisbury Cathedral for seven years as a punishment. She had to walk barefoot from the western entrance of the cathedral to the high altar, carrying a large, lighted candle as an offering every day for seven years. She was also prohibited from wearing gems, silver, gold or any makeup. Needless to say, she had held a grudge.

Only one other person was mentioned by name in the letter: a former lover who'd go unpunished for their relationship, a man who maybe even told the Archbishop about FitzPayne's acts of adultery. Back then, just like today, humiliation and revenge can be strong motives for murdering somebody in broad daylight, says Eisner.

Indeed, this person's name was John Ford.

Stangs

By Nic the Witch

I'll deal with stangs in a while, but I'll start with other tools, namely divining rods, blasting stocks and talking sticks.

Divining or dowsing rods have been used from about the 1500s to find ley lines, underground springs, buried metals, wells, etc. As early as 1518, Martin Luther listed dowsing for metals as an act that broke the first commandment. But it still continues today. In 2023, it was reported that a few water utility companies use the services of dowsers to find leaks and burst pipes underground, including Thames Water and Severn Trent Water. The traditional forms of divining rods are either Y-shaped pieces of wood or two L-shaped twigs or copper rods. Occasionally, they are called vining or witching rods.

With a Y-shaped rod, it should be balanced so that the user can hold the V part in each hand. Most dowsers use forked sticks of willow, peach or witch hazel. Tradition suggests that the most effective dowsing rods are those that have been cut fresh from fruit-producing trees. The principle is to walk slowly with the divining rod, holding it parallel until the rod vibrates or the I part of the Y-shape points either up or down. According to the UK Groundwater Forum, there is no scientific explanation as to why dowsing should work and, when it has been tested impartially, it has been no more successful than would be expected by chance.

However, the Forum does not completely discard the subject of water dowsing. Some people seem to be able to locate buried pipes with the aid of rods or twigs. One theory for this is that the muscles in the body react to some electromagnetic effect caused by the presence of the metal or the water flowing through the pipe; the rods then amplify this effect so that the searcher becomes aware of them. Another theory is that some diviners know from their experience and local knowledge where groundwater is likely to be located and subconsciously cause the reaction.

The idea of a **blasting stick** is as a tool for rituals and ceremonies, often cut from a blackthorn tree. The principle is that the blasting spirit was used to summon spirits to the ritual, perhaps at the casting of the circle, for them to obey the commands of the witch or the summoner. In this context, the blasting stick was like a threat to the summoned spirit.

Talking sticks are often seen in rituals. In my experience, they're most common in druidic rituals. For example, the open rituals held by Basingstoke Pagan Circle, almost always include a talking stick, which is passed from one person to another in the circle. Each person has the chance to say a blessing, offer a story or a poem to add to the ritual, while holding the talking stick.

OK then, so what is a stang? It is not the same as a staff, which may be decorated with crystals, animal carvings or wooden symbols and used to cast a circle in the absence of a broom. I have an eagle staff or two that double as walking aids, storytelling props and as sources of energy for magick. A stang is a type of staff that is usually forked, about six feet long and owes its origin to the wooden pitchfork. The name comes from a Norse word, *stong*, and the Middle English, *stange*, meaning *pole*. Many stangs are made from the following woods:

- Oak, to symbolise Herne.
- Ash, to symbolise the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.
- Yew, to symbolise immortality.
- Blackthorn, to symbolise ill-fortune or death, perhaps in a dark magick rite.

Sometimes the forks are capped with metal, for strength during rituals. The staff part of the stang is shod with iron too, so that the stang is preserved when placed in the earth for a ritual. And this is one of the main purposes – for the stang to act as an altar during outside ceremonies. For example, the following may be placed on a stang during a ritual:

- The mask of a totem animal.
- The skull of an animal, namely a sheep, horse or deer.
- A carving of Cernunnos.
- Ribbons, flowers, candles or crops.

The **actual decorations** depend upon the sabbat, as listed below.

- Samhain – yew leaves or berries.
- Alban Arthan/Yule – red ribbons, ivy and/ or holly leaves or berries.
- Imbolg – snowdrops.
- Alban Eilir/Ostara – daffodils or primroses.
- Beltane – yellow ribbons, hawthorn blossom and twigs.
- Alban Hefin/Litha – oak leaves.
- Lughnasadh – corn ears and poppies.
- Alban Elfed/Mabon – forest fruits, pine cones or acorns.

Much of this bit depends upon which pagan pathway you follow. For Robert Cochrane, the stang was very much a symbol for ritual magick, but others see the stang as an actual tool. Let's have some examples here.

1. For those of a shamanic persuasion, the stang/ staff is a representation of the world tree that connects heaven and earth – the upper, middle and lower realms. During trance work, a shaman uses the tree to travel between realms.
2. Some eclectics do not use altars at all, but prefer to work outside in nature, using their stangs instead.
3. Others, Rae Beth included, wrote that they put a small symbol of the world tree on their indoor altars.
4. For some, a stang is symbolic of the Horned God, which is why their stangs are ash poles with goat horns or deer antlers at the top, decorated with skulls or crossed arrows.
5. There is a traditionalist point of view that says a stang replaces most of the common altar tools used in Wiccan ceremonies. It is a wand, athame, staff, sword and altar, all at once.
6. If the stang has an iron base for protection, it shows a union of fire and earth when placed in the soil. The fork is a symbol of the union of God and Goddess and can be seen as the sign of the cup (water).
7. For more formal covens, a stang is almost like a symbol of office for the person who is the coven magister.
8. The stang can also be seen as symbolic of the Lord of the Dead. Standing at the northern edge of the circle, it is the portal into the unseen world and the guardian of the spirit ways.
9. And some see the stang as representing a universal pivot, with its base at the deepest part of the underworld, its trunk passing through the centre of this world and the fork or antlers reaching up to the heavens. The stang unites all the worlds and this view is similar to the shamanic one.

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