



# Gylden Magick

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## Nov. 2021

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.

The **Gylden Community** is one of the most extensive pagan libraries in southern England. Its website, [www.gyldenfellowship.co.uk](http://www.gyldenfellowship.co.uk), is growing too and we welcome new members constantly.

First things first though – we've decided to expand the magazine a little in our 4<sup>th</sup> year of publication, from September. So, this issue comes in at **26** pages, with some new authors and lots of different topics. There are some longer pieces, to give authors more space. Most of our contributors come from the Gylden area, providing a mix of magick, wisdom and stories. Past

editions of **GYLDEN MAGICK** can be accessed on our website and on Facebook too.

This issue has a **druidic or Celtic flavour to it**. Earlier in the year, a dear friend gave me a book for my solar return. It was full of Celtic prayers and blessings: **Anam Ćara** by John O'Donoghue – and I've been reading it gradually. The title is Gaelic and means "soul friend". It crossed my mind that the Gylden Community has lost several soul friends in the past month or so, including Alan Williams, Terry Dobney and Smurf (from Seasons of the Albion moot).

So, this edition features **Celtic Druidry**, including text from Desiree Marie (founder of the FB group, Celtic Druidry), Celtic art, Celtic tree

astrology and the druidic Wheel of the Year, among others.

Anything else? Oh yes, the title – we never forget that our faith is based upon Nature and that our strength comes from earth magick, regardless of the diversity of pagan pathways.

Many of our annual festivals are based upon the light, e.g. the solstices and the equinoxes, as significant to us today as to our ancestors. Talking of festivals, it's great that several are starting up again – we have pictures from Ghostly Tales 2021.

For more info, why not join **Gylden River LRC or Gylden Fellowship** groups on Facebook today and catch up on our news?

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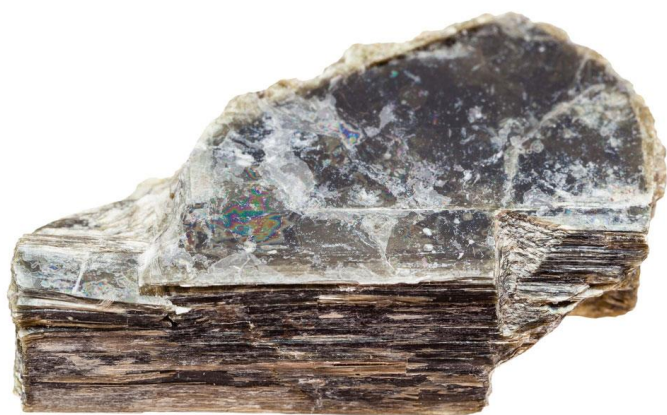


# Crystal clear: mica

By Charlie Foreverdark

Time to welcome another regular author to **GYLDEN MAGICK** – Charlie Foreverdark. Charlie has kindly offered to write occasional pieces for us on crystals, just as she does for other organisations, such as the crystal company, **Salt Shack**.

The term, *mica*, covers a group of rock-forming minerals whose outstanding physical characteristic is that individual crystals can easily be split into extremely thin separate plates/leaves. This is described in geology as *perfect basal cleavage*. Mica is common in igneous and metamorphic rock and is occasionally found as small flakes in sedimentary rock too. It is particularly prominent in granites and schists, and large individual crystals (called *books*) of mica several feet across have been found in some pegmatites..



There are 37 different chemically distinct mica minerals, with considerable variance in geologic occurrence; however, they each crystallize in a common sheet structure, with the sheets being held together by relatively weak potassium bonds. The **most common types of mica** include:

- purple lepidolite (lithium mica)
- black biotite (magnesium-iron mica)
- brown phlogopite (magnesium mica)
- green fuchsite (chrome mica)
- clear muscovite (potassium mica).

The different mica-minerals form under differing geological conditions. While muscovite mica occurs in pegmatites of an acidic nature, phlogopite mica is

restricted to basic pegmatite. Lepidolite mica occurs in pegmatites associated specifically with topaz, and biotite mica is found to occur mostly in schists. The different mica types vary in hardness between 2 and 4 on the Mohs scale, despite all having essentially the same crystal structure.

The largest documented single crystal of mica was a phlogopite specimen found in the Lacey Mine in Canada, measuring 33ft x 14ft and weighing 330 tonnes. Similar-sized crystals have also been found in Karelia, Russia. Jharkhand state in India has large mica deposits and supplies about 80% of the world requirements of block-mica, China is another top producer with a considerable percentage of the global share.

The word, *mica*, is derived from the Latin for crumb, and was probably also influenced by the Latin term, *micare*, meaning to glitter or twinkle.

The economic value of mica is based on its unique properties. It forms layers that can be split into thin sheets which do not react with liquids. The layers are relatively flexible, and electrically insulative. They are translucent or even transparent and do not break down under heat. Thin transparent sheets of mica were subsequently used for peepholes in boilers, lanterns, stoves, and kerosene heaters because they were less likely to shatter than glass when exposed to extreme temperature gradients.

The ability of mica to split into remarkably thin laminae (which are often highly elastic and sometimes found up to several feet across) gave clear varieties an early use as window panes in Moscow, Russia in the 1700s. These panes were called **muscovy glass** and that term is thought to have inspired the mineral name, *muscovite*.

Today, the mica mining industry can be divided into two distinct, but interdependent groups: those which produce sheet mica, and those which produce flake mica. Each industry produces different end products. Most of the useful mica is mined from places near where magma chambers used to be located.

Historically, the earliest use of mica was discovered in the cave paintings of the Upper Palaeolithic period (40,000 BCE to 10,000 BCE) and mica is still utilised in the cosmetic and art industries today, as a pearlescent and sparkling lustre in eyeshadows, body creams, paints and even on wallpaper.

When muscovite occurs with a significant percentage of lithium impurities within the mica crystal structure, it is known as **lepidolite mica**. Sometimes in the jewellery industry, it is wrongly called Purple Jade. Lepidolite was first discovered in 1861 by Robert Bunsen and Gustav Kirchhoff. It is an igneous mineral and was originally named *lilalite* by German chemist Nicolaus Poda von Neuhaus because of its lavender colour. However, it was later renamed lepidolite from the Greek, *lepidos* (meaning scale), due to its scaly flaky appearance caused by the flakes of lithium.

It is a fairly rare crystal, growing in deposits of igneous rock (in layman's terms: cooled magma or lava). In order for lepidolite crystals to be able to form, the magma or lava needs to have cooled at a slow rate, with the presence of water vapour.

Some of the best examples of lepidolite come from the gem-bearing pegmatites of Brazil. In the USA, the gem pegmatites of California have yielded some of the best-known lepidolite. Significant lepidolite specimens have been found in Afghanistan, and there are two important African occurrences in Madagascar and Mozambique. In Europe, very good lepidolite comes mainly from Sweden and Portugal.

Lepidolite is the most abundant lithium-bearing mineral. Lithium, being the lightest metal in the world, is used in rechargeable batteries, aircraft parts and also within domestic appliances such as toasters and microwave ovens. Lithium compounds are also used in mobile phones, air purifiers, high temperature lubricants and, perhaps more famously, in the mood-stabilizing drug that featured in songs by the likes of Evanescence and Nirvana.

For a long time it was wrongly assumed that lithium was the cause of the characteristic and unique pale pink hues of lepidolite. However, lithium rarely serves

as a chromophore in minerals, and it is trace amounts of manganese that cause the pink and lilac hues.

Lepidolite specimens range from translucent to opaque varieties making it a suitable choice for more artistic jewellery pieces. It is rarely faceted as it is prone to breaking along the fracture lines between sheets and flakes, and its low score on the hardness scale mean that it can be easily damaged or scratched.

Flakes of lepidolite are sometimes responsible for the colour of pink, peach and red aventurine. Aventurine is a variety of quartz that is coloured by tiny lustrous flakes of mica. Light entering the quartzite strikes these inclusions and reflects from them, producing the sparkly appearance known as *aventurescence*.

Green aventurine, in contrast, is quartzite coloured by flakes and inclusions of natural fuchsite mica. Fuchsite, being rich in chromium (like emerald), features a beautiful green colour, and was named after the German mineralogist, Johann Fuchs. It is found in phyllites and schists in metamorphic rocks. In most instances, it occurs as tiny grains scattered through the rock mass, but occasionally rocks composed almost entirely of fuchsite are found which are known as *verdite*.

Sometimes mistaken for jade, verdite was originally found in the North Kaap River in South Africa. Native South Africans saw value in the softness of the stone and were able to carve the stone for use in ornamental creations, cabochons and amulets. Due to verdite's softness, it was and is used less often in bracelet and ring designs since these types of jewellery are more likely to accidentally incur impact. Necklaces and earrings are the safest bet for verdite jewellery creations. Historically, the founders of verdite in Zimbabwe believed the stone had an innate ability to promote fertility and it was also used to amplify fidelity, making the stone ideally marketed towards lovers.

Today, verdite is still valued for its softness and ability to be carved. It is used in inlay. Raw and polished specimens of the crystal feature prominently in many collections.

# The Druid Wheel of the Year

By Gylden Fellowship

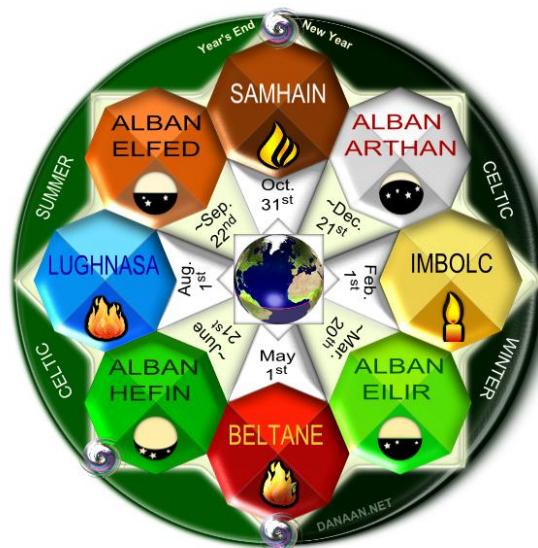
Samhain (pronounced **sow-wen**) is a Celtic fire festival, at the mid-point between the autumn equinox and the winter solstice. It is both the end of one year and the start of the next - this year, it ran from the evening of 31 October to the evening of 1 November, but the Celtic festival lasted 3-6 days. And this is the point really – the druid seasonal cycle had 4 fire festivals and 4 light-related feasts.

Most were community events for all in the Celtic settlements, both farmers and druids with ritual bonfires and feasting. Samhain marked the end of the harvest season (end of summer) and the beginning of winter – in fact, the Saxons described it as the Feast of Winter. However, the names of the festivals are different for those following a druidic path. (**Editor's note: our website, [www.gyldenfellowship.co.uk](http://www.gyldenfellowship.co.uk) contains regular blogs of sabbat info with lots of detail and the FB group, Gylden River LRC, has a festival guide too.**)

What we've done here is to give a list of the druid festivals, with the common names in brackets.

- Samhuinne (Samhain) – translates as summer's end.
- Alban Arthan (Yule) - translates as the light of winter for the mid-winter solstice.
- Oimelc (Imbolc) – translates as ewes' milk, because of the start of the lambing season.
- Alban Eilir (Ostara) - translates as the light of the earth for the spring equinox.
- Bealtainne (Beltane) - translates as bright or brilliant fire for the start of summer.
- Alban Hefin (Litha) - translates as the light of the shore for the mid-summer solstice.
- Lunasa (Lughnasadh) - translates as the celebration of Lugh, who was symbolic of the grain harvest.
- Alban Elfed (Mabon) - translates as the light of the water for the autumn equinox.

It is worth remembering that the druids recognised three realms of earth, sea and sky. At the time of the equinoxes, these realms became almost as one. It's also worth remembering that there are several paths of Druidry – more about this later, but there is a difference between the druid revival in Wales by people like Iolo Morganwg in the 1800s and the older Celtic path. Much of the Welsh revival underpins modern neo-druidry and organisations like the British Druid Order (BDO) or the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD). The Celtic path encapsulates historical texts, archaeology, artwork and oral history from Ireland, where Druidry continued up to the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

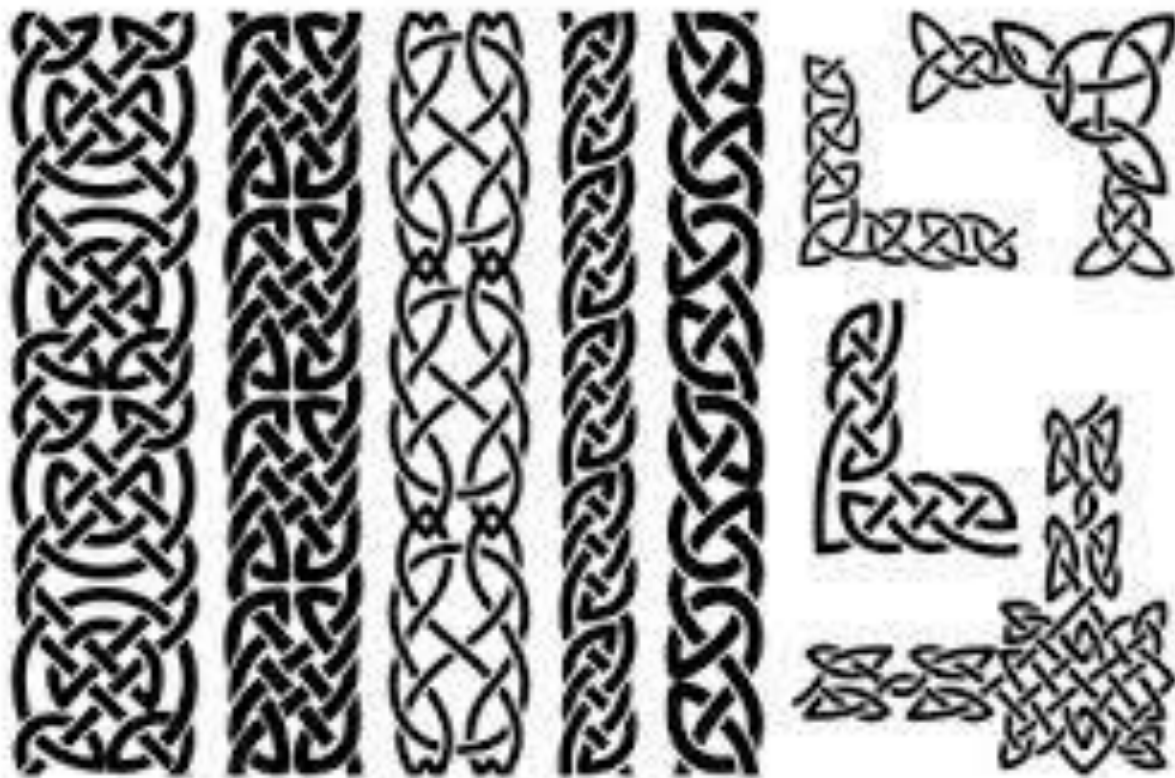


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## Celtic knotwork art

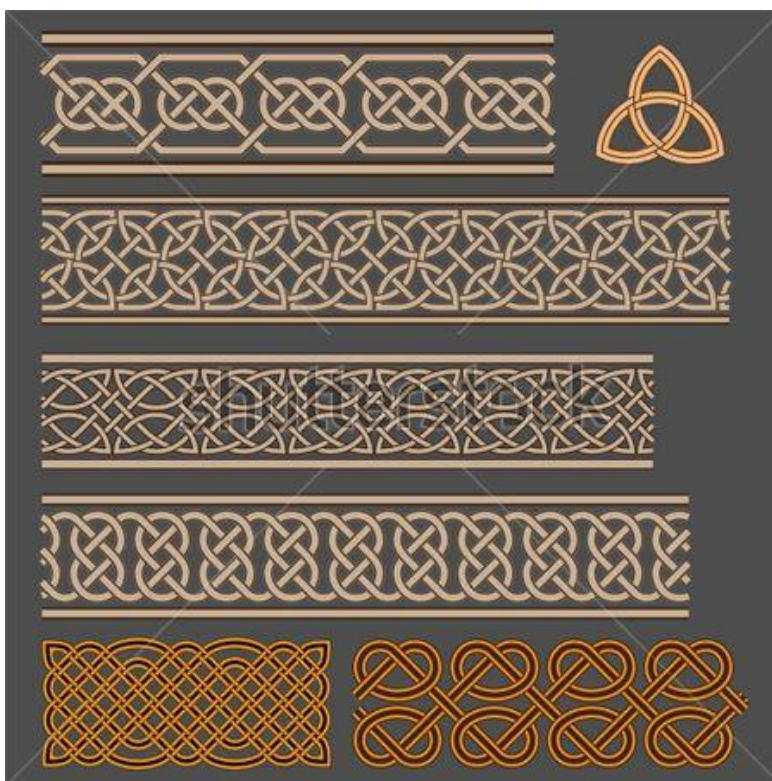
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# Seasonal magick for November

By Nick the Witch

As we leave Samhain behind and look forward to Yule, we're going to look at some magickal activities that we can do in November. *Lunantshees* falls on 11-12 November, celebrating the fæ or the sidhe in Irish folklore. While we're celebrating, please spare a thought for all those who are less fortunate than ourselves – the hungry, those in poverty, the sick or disabled and the homeless. As we remember the ancestors in our own families and those who fell in war, can we (in **Gylden Fellowship**) urge you to light a candle and remember the forgotten dead?

## FOR THE FORGOTTEN DEAD

This candle is for the people out there, some in our community and others around the country who are buried with no headstones or markers, eg:

- Old people in care homes or hospitals with no families.
- Homeless people who greeted us to or from work, from whom we bought the Big Issue.
- Lost children who ran from home and died who knows where.
- Those who wandered our streets with mental health issues and who died unknown and ignored.
- All those who died from violence or neglect and now lie in unremembered or untended graves.
- And all those too numerous to mention.

These are the **Forgotten Dead**, whose spirits we pay tribute to, even though we do not know your names. Accept my candle tonight for you – the unknown, the unwanted, the unloved of our community and be at peace for a while.

**Martinmas** falls on 11 November and marks the feast day of Martin of Tours. St Martin was known for his conversion of pagans, but what actually happened was that many pagan traditions were absorbed into the Martinmas feast, eg the slaughter of fattened cattle, poultry or pigs. Any farm animals that could not be put into winter barns, were killed and salted to provide meat over the winter. In Ireland, it was the custom to sacrifice such stock on St. Martin's Eve and then sprinkle drops of its blood on the threshold, as well as in the four corners of the house, to drive off any evil spirits and also to ensure prosperity for the coming year. This is where the custom of the Martinmas pig came from, cooked for the feast with an apple in its mouth.

# Celestial notes

By Joanna Bristow-Watkins, Harmony Healing

We are very pleased to feature **Joanna Bristow-Watkins** as one of our regular contributors for **GYLDEN MAGICK** in 2021 and, here, we're including a few details about her expertise – many thanks to Rebecca Granshaw for suggesting Joanna. Joanna runs **Harmony Healing**, which may be accessed at [www.harmonyhealing.co.uk](http://www.harmonyhealing.co.uk). It should be noted that some of the training events are online at present – all details on Joanna's website.

## Forest Bathing+ Sessions with Joanna & Katie

We have *Harmony in Nature* forest bathing sessions at Cannon Hill Common, London SW20 (Saturday 27) and Harry Edwards Healing Sanctuary, Shere (Sunday 14). **Important News about Newlands Corner:** Newlands Corner, our beautiful site in Guildford Surrey, have put up our site rental price so much that we don't know if we will be able to continue working there.

## Monthly Virtual Full Moon & Unity Consciousness Meditations

All you need to take part via Zoom is a computer with a webcam and microphone. It's very easy to download and use. If you do not have Zoom, visit <https://zoom.us> and sign up for free. RSE 1 interactive virtual training module **Violet Flame of Amenti** (£88 including an attunement into the Violet Flame) starting Tuesday 21st September. Anyone who has studied RSE with me in the past can have a special price to re-attend please contact me for details.

Sarah Jane's **Women's Circle Moon Lodge** is meeting on Friday 19th. Aligning with the moon cycle is very therapeutic, and our New Moon New Vision: Moon Alignment Course runs for a full lunar cycle from New Moon on 6 October to New Moon on 4 November. Aligning with the moon cycle is very therapeutic, and our current Lunar Alignment Programme concludes with the New Moon on 4th November, the next one will be in 2022. Our **Full Moon Meditation** takes place **7.30-9.30pm (UK time) on Thursday 18th**, with the Beaver Moon peaking the following morning at 08:58. We also have the **Leonid Meteor Shower** peaking 17th/18th.

## Other Harmony Healing Services

Harmony Healing activities are aimed at bringing harmony and wellbeing into your life. Currently, events are virtual, except for Forest Bathing+, hence distant readings and healings are proving popular and we have low cost **meditations** available as well as **distant 1-2-1 healings**. Joanna is a Reyad Sekh Em® Egyptian Alchemy Healer and Teaching Mentor. We also have **meditations** available and a number of virtual courses including **Reyad Sekh Em (RSE) Egyptian Alchemy Healing Level 1** (which is now fully available as interactive training modules) and a **monthly virtual healing circle** - details on [Harmony Healing Virtual Events](#). Joanna also offers **distant intuitive readings (past life and/or aura readings)** and **distant 1-2-1 healings** and runs various **Meet-up groups in London and Surrey** and the **London & Surrey Alchemists Facebook Group** and posts regularly on [Instagram](#) and [Linked-In](#). **Harmony Healing Gift Vouchers** are available.

## Timings given are UK time



*November in Britain, with the clocks having gone back, features more dark colder nights, but peppered with the explosive lights (and smells) of bonfires and fireworks as Guy Fawkes Night and Diwali are celebrated.*

*This year, autumn colours linger with purple, brown, red and golden yellow, with most of the green having gone as the trees continue shed their leaves. Some remaining colours cling on and seed heads from old man's beard in the hedgerows look magical as they catch the low sunlight. Seasonal in the kitchen this month, we have Jerusalem artichokes, leeks, carrots, beetroots, parsnips, Brussels sprouts, kale, potatoes and winter squashes. It remains good for harvesting chestnuts, hazelnuts and walnuts plus late-fruiting apples and pears, with a plethora of fungi for those who know the edible from ones best avoided.*

*The month of November was named after **novem**, meaning 9th in Latin, as November was the 9th month when the year started in March. To the Anglo-Saxons, November was called **Blotmoneth**, meaning blood month as this was traditionally the month of slaughtering and preserving meat to last through the winter. It was also a month of feasting as all the meat cuts which couldn't be preserved were cooked up, making it a bountiful month and helping folks to keep warm.*

*During November, as well as **Guy Fawkes Night** and **Diwali**, we have international festivals including **World Vegan Day** (1st) and **Armistice Day** (11th) and **Thanksgiving** in USA (25th) and, this year Hanukkah (Chanukah), which often falls in December, commences 28 November. We can also look forward to the British Celtic Festival Samonios (Celtic New Year = 1 November) which is also the Christian Festivals of **All Saints Day** (1st) and **All Souls Day** (2nd), St Andrew's Day to commemorate the Patron Saint of Scotland (30th).*

*There are three annual Egyptian Festivals **Hilaria** (3rd), **Khoiak** (23rd) and **Nehebkau** (29th), to celebrate we have a new series of **Khemitology** online module starting 10 November*

**Monday 1 November starts the first month of the Celtic Year, called Samonios** -Seed Fall. Again, this mirrors the death/rebirth cycle of Asar (Osiris). It is thought that two Roman festivals became incorporated with Samhain - **Feralia**, when the Romans commemorated the passing of the dead and **Pomona**, when the Roman goddess of fruit and trees was honoured. The Halloween tradition of bobbing for apples is thought to derive from the ancient links with the Roman fruit goddess, Pomona, and a druidic rite associated with water.

This is also **All Saints Day in the Christian calendar**.

The text below, by Helen Benigni, was kindly taken with permission from the [angelfire.com](http://angelfire.com) website, which may no longer be available.

*"The month of SAMONIOS is a month of miraculous births beginning with the appearance of the twin stars of Castor and Pollux on the Eastern Horizon. These miraculously born twins, from an egg containing both mortal and immortal potential, bridge the gap between this world and the Otherworld.*

*Literally translated as "seed fall," SAMONIOS is the month when the light of the Dagda, the seed of his loins, penetrates the womb of the earth and creates life. This light is symbolized by the sunrise of the Winter Solstice penetrating the inner chambers of the sacred mounds of the Neolithic peoples. At Newgrange, the sacred mound of the Bru na Boinne, the light of the Winter Solstice shines through a roof-box of white quartz for seventeen minutes to dramatically illuminate the cruciform chamber of the passage tomb. Here, the stone-carved geometric motifs common to trance states of shamanic ecstasy amplify the light in order that the observer may experience the light of life bestowed by the solar deity.*

*This solar alignment initiates the light half of the year. Mistletoe is hung as a symbol of the immortal love that the good father, Dagda brought to Boand, the goddess of the Bru na Boinne. Oengus, the son of their union and the Lord of the Sid mound, guards the entrance to the Otherworld and immortal life."*

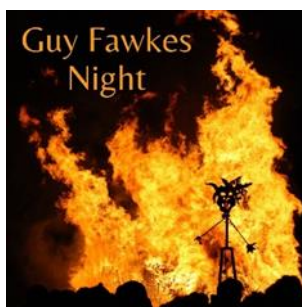
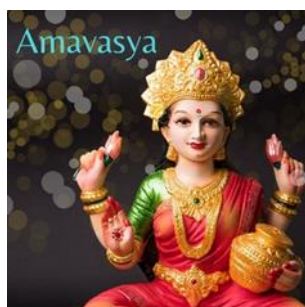
**Monday 1 November is also World Vegan Day.** In 1994, the event was established by Louise Wallis, then Chair of The Vegan Society, UK, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of coining the terms "vegan" and "veganism" and the founding of the organisation.

**Tuesday 2 November is All Souls Day in the Christian calendar**, commemorating the faithful departed.

**Wednesday 3 November is Hilaria**, the culmination of the Egyptian Festival of Isia, when Isis (Aset) resurrected Osiris (Asar) by re-membering him; no doubt contributing to the definition of our word remember meaning to recall someone from memory.

### Thursday 4 November @ 21:15 is the New Moon & 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. There are video instructions on my **You Tube Page**.



**Thursday 4 November is Amavasya**, part of the Hindu, Sikh and Jain Celebration of Diwali, Festival of the Lights, celebrating the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil. Themes, such as joy, forgiveness and knowledge over ignorance, are included as well as rituals to Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth and the legend of Rama and Sita is recited. The full festival runs for five days, this year Tuesday 2-Saturday 6 November, with the main event, Amavasya, being on the third day. However, each day has its own significance. Image from Canva.

**Friday 5 November is Guy Fawkes Night in the UK.** Some sources indicate that this replaced the Samhain Fire Festival, which was transferred in Britain to the night after Guy Fawkes's attempt to blow up parliament in 1605. The ritual burning certainly resembles the pagan sacrifice of the corn king!

**Wednesday 10 November** is the start of Harmony Healing Virtual Module: ***Khemitology (£88)***, 7.15pm - 9.30pm (UK time/GMT = UK & USA friendly evening hours), 2¼ hours for 3 consecutive weeks ending 24 November, worth 1 unit towards ***RSE Level 1***. Held remotely on Zoom. *Khemitology* is for anyone fascinated by Egypt, outlining the lesser-known Ancient Egyptian philosophies and demonstrating how they can be applied in everyday life.

This will be immediately followed by the ***Mindful Chakra Alignment and Unity Consciousness*** running 1-15 December (½ unit, costing £66).

**Thursday 11 November is Armistice Day** to commemorate all those who died in World War 1 and 2. Poppies are traditionally used for this occasion.

We also have the annual 11:11 Energy Portal. With many people worldwide recognising the 11 November as a powerful date, this, in itself, will create a heightened energy on the day. The effect of a high number of people all having positive expectations on the same date, due to the impact of quantum physics, will make it significant. This year it falls in the abundance part of the lunar cycle, meaning it will be a powerful day for manifestation.

**Sunday 14 November**, 11.00am-1pm, 2 hours Forest Bathing+ session with Joanna at Harry Edwards Healing Sanctuary (Shere, near Guildford, Surrey), £25. This Winter Forest Bathing+ session will take place in all weathers except 30+mph winds or electrical storm. Immerse yourself in the healing elements of nature and connect deeply with all your senses. We will take you on a 2½ hour journey through the beautiful landscaped park, nestled in this little-known oasis of calm.

Through a selection of simple sensory activities, you will learn how to enhance your perceptions and slow down to focus on what could easily be missed. We end with 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.

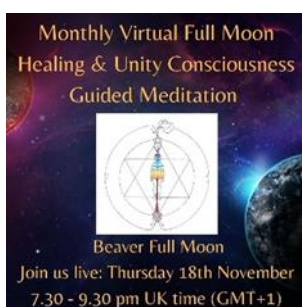
Book via our the ***Harmony Healing shop***. Email ***katieandjo@harmonyinnature.uk*** to go on our forest bathing mailing list.



**Tuesday 16 & Wednesday 17 November is the Leonid meteors;** one of the most prolific meteor showers, also known as shooting stars. The shower peaks this year the night of 16/17 November and 17/18 November, but you may see some meteors from 6-30 November. The Waxing Gibbous Moon leading to the Full Moon on 19 will hinder viewing this year. See [Time & Date website](#) or [EarthSky Website](#) for more details.

The Leonids have had occasional periods when hundreds of meteors can be seen, roughly every 33 years, and were especially stunning in 1799, 1833, 1866, 1966 and 1998. This shower has produced amazing meteor storms in the past, but a Leonid storm is not expected this year. The Leonids are usually modest, with typical peak rates of about 10 to 15 meteors per hour, in the darkness before dawn: look for the shower radiating from the constellation Leo after midnight.

This meteor stream is associated with Comet Tempel-Tuttle. As the meteors in the stream are thought to be dust particles released from the comet, it is thought likely that there is a dense stream of such particles in the path of the comet and located close to it. The Earth's orbit passes close to the comet's orbit each year in November and the Earth collides with these particles of cometary debris following the comet's orbit. According to the [EarthSky Website](#), it is a myth that we need focus only on the radiant point to see meteors. In fact, it seems they often don't become visible until they are 30 degrees or so from their radiant point, so they are streaking out from the radiant in all directions. Thus, the Leonid meteors – like meteors in all annual showers – will appear in all parts of the sky.



**Thursday 18 November** is our [Full Moon Unity Consciousness Meditation](#), 7.30-9.30pm UK time (GMT/UT). This is the night before Full Moon takes place at 08:58 on the 19th. During this session, we connect with other like-minded people and together we work through a mindful chakra balancing process using colours and etheric crystals, with the aim that all participants will experience a degree of unity consciousness. Participants all receive a deeply healing experience. Cost to participate is £20 by online BACS payment (small admin fee added for PayPal). This activity serves as a good taster of Joanna's work in general. For more details and to book, see [Harmony Shop](#).

**Friday 19 November @ 08:58 (Beaver Micro Full Moon and Partial Lunar Eclipse).** The partial eclipse will be visible in parts of Europe, North & South America, Asia and Australia. It will be visible in London from 07.18 when the eclipse begins, but will then disappear below the horizon. However, penumbral eclipses are not always easy to discern at all, but they do have an impact on us energetically. See more about the November eclipse on [timeanddate.com](#).

Click here for [Angela McGerr's Full Moon Meditation with Gabriel](#).

Between this date and the next New Moon is considered as a good time energetically for detoxing the body. A brilliant time for oil pulling. Image of Gabriel by Richard Rockwood from Angela McGerr's Harmony Angel Cards, available from the [Harmony Shop](#) (signed by Angela).

**Friday 19 November** is the [Moon Lodge Healing Women's Circle](#), 7-8.30pm GMT, £15 + Eventbrite fee = £16.76. Run by Harmony Healing collaborator Sarah Jane Dennis, this is a sacred circle for women in the community to come together as we once did, to connect in a safe and loving space to the energies of the moon and our own cycles. It is being held in person by Sarah in the TW13 postcode area, full address will be given on receipt of payment. Talk, support, heal, celebrate, and hold each other. Book at [Eventbrite](#). Contact Sarah-Jane via [crystalhealingbysarahjane.co.uk](mailto:crystalhealingbysarahjane.co.uk) or email [apriestesspath@gmail.com](mailto:apriestesspath@gmail.com).



**Tuesday 23 November is the Egyptian celebration of Khoiak and Nehebkau on Monday 29 November.** The Egyptian Year was split into three seasons (divided into 4 months of 30 days), commencing with Akhet in early August, then Peret from late November to early April and Shomu from early April until mid-July. Khoiak was a sombre celebration to complete the first season; later associated with the death of Asar (Osiris). However, it was followed closely by Nehebkau - marking the start of the next season Peret - and was seen as a kind of rebirth process.

**Thursday 25 November is Thanksgiving in the US calendar.** Thanksgiving is the fourth Thursday in November (different in Canada, which is the 2nd Monday in October) and is a family day and public holiday to express gratitude for one's material and spiritual possessions.

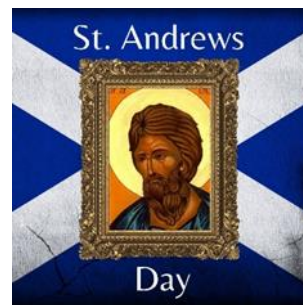
**Saturday 27 November, 11am -1.30pm, Forest Bathing+ with Joanna & Katie at our London location in Cannon Hill Park, £35 (+ Paypal fee = £36.75).** Immerse yourself in the healing elements of nature and connect deeply with all your senses. We will take you on a 2½ hour journey through the beautiful landscaped park, nestled in this little-known oasis of calm within Greater London. Through a selection of simple sensory activities, you will learn how to enhance your perceptions and slow down to focus on what could easily be missed. We end with 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 25+mph winds or electrical storms. Book via our the [Harmony Healing shop](#) or our [London Meetup](#). Email [katieandjo@harmonyinnature.uk](mailto:katieandjo@harmonyinnature.uk) to go on our forest bathing mailing list.

**Sunday 28 November** is the start of Hanukkah (also known as Chanukah) in Jewish tradition. This year, it commences after nightfall on 28 November and continues until nightfall on 6 December and is the Jewish eight-day, wintertime festival of lights, celebrated with special prayers, a nightly menorah lighting, and fried foods.

**Monday 29 November is the Egyptian celebration of Nehebkau**, which literally meant **he who unites the Kas**; the Ka being the body double which we might interpret as spirit or soul. Nehebkau was depicted in the form of a snake with arms and legs and occasionally wings! He was yet another deity associated with protection and magic.

**Tuesday 30 November is St Andrew's Day in Scotland.** Saint Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland, and St. Andrew's Day is celebrated by Scots around the world on the 30th November. The flag of Scotland is the blue Cross of St. Andrew, and this is widely displayed as a symbol of national identity.



The *Celestial Forecast* is compiled by Joanna Bristow-Watkins of Harmony Healing; the original is published at Joanna's [Monthly Celestial Forecasts](#). It is created using many sources but notably the [Moonwise Calendar](#) and Lia Leendertz's *2021 Almanac*. Whilst considerable effort is made to ensure accuracy, this is not an exact science and sources are sometimes contradictory!

These monthly Celestial Forecasts (CF) are generally uploaded to the Harmony Healing website a fortnight ahead and can be accessed via the drop-down box on the right. They are sent out to the main mailing list and CF subscribers a few days before the month starts.

Extracts also appear in Jovi Hoonjan's [Alchemical Voice](#) magazine, an initiative to support small businesses in the UK. Jovi is a Shamanic Healer & Reiki Master, do visit her [lovezmeditate.com](#) website. Try Jovi's [free online shamanic drumming guided meditation](#), the levels of consciousness for all her meditations have been calibrated as equal to Enlightenment.



**Joanna Bristow-Watkins**

Reyad Sekh Em® (Egyptian Alchemy Healing) Practitioner & Teacher

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# Tales for autumn evenings: King Herla

## By the Storyteller

Herla was the King of the Britons in the Dark Ages: this story dates from pre-Saxon times, but later variations are common. One afternoon, after a hard day's riding, King Herla rested for a while in an ancient glade, part of the great forest that had stood in his kingdom for millennia. As he was dozing, he was awoken by the rustling of something in the trees.

He readied his sword, but was greeted by a strange sight. Into the glade came a large well-groomed goat, upon which sat a tiny old man no bigger than a child. He had a stocky upper body, red-face and sported a huge shaggy beard. He smiled at King Herla and said, "I have heard of your wisdom as king, I am king of my own realm and I would strike a bargain with you. If you give me the pleasure of attending your wedding day, you can attend mine." With that he offered the king a bronze horn of intricate workmanship and asked him to drink. The king hesitated for a moment, but grasped the horn and drank deep of its contents. With that the dwarf nodded to him and promptly disappeared.

Within a year, the king had decided to marry. On their wedding day, all the guests were assembled in the king's great hall, ready for the feast, when there was a knock at the great oak doors. In came a host of dwarfs bearing precious gifts, such as golden cups of exquisite workmanship and carved wooden chairs with intricate patterns. The feast was tremendous: the food and wine the dwarf host brought never ran dry. At the end of the night, the dwarfs left and the dwarf king reminded Herla of the bargain.

After another year, King Herla received a summons from his dwarf friend, so he gathered his best men and a host of wedding gifts. They set off into a wild country where few men ventured and travelled for days, through twisting forest paths until reaching a solid sandstone cliff. Suddenly, there was a sound like the peal of a bell and a doorway opened in the cliff face; the company rode through the opening and found themselves in a large cavern, lit by flaming brands hung at intervals on the sandy walls. There was a passage, which led from the cavern into the depths of the earth.

They followed the passage, until they could hear the sound of laughter and merrymaking. At the end of the tunnel, they found themselves in a gigantic cavern lit by thousands of torches, which seemed to burn without fuel. In the centre of this cavern stood a huge oak table, and a great gathering of dwarfs. The king offered his wedding gifts to the dwarf king and the feast commenced.

Time seemed to pass in an instant and the feast continued for three whole days. At last, King Herla and his men were ready to leave and the dwarf king gave many precious gifts. One of these was a small bloodhound. He took King Herla aside and explained that he was no longer safe in his kingdom and begged him to stay. He explained that neither Herla nor his men should dismount until the bloodhound jumps to the ground.

The king thanked him for his advice and continued on his way. When the king and his men rode out of the doorway in the cliff, they saw that the countryside had changed. Fields had replaced the great forests and small villages stood in the valleys, where before there had only been trees. Soon they met an old shepherd who stood watching over his flock of sheep: King Herla asked if he knew where the Kingdom of Herla lay – there was a long pause as the old man stared at them.

Eventually, he answered in a broken form of their language. He explained that the kingdom of Herla was part of ancient legend, because it was over 300 years ago and the Saxons had now taken over the lands. The legend described how a king had disappeared and how his wife had died from her lost love. Some of the king's men tried to dismount, but on touching the earth they crumbled to dust. King Herla ordered the rest to stay in the saddle until the bloodhound jumped onto the ground. It is said that they still ride the countryside to this day, awaiting the time when the bloodhound will jump to the floor and restore them to their lands.



# Celtic druidry - an overview

By Desiree Marie, admin and founder of Celtic Druidry (FB group)

Céad míle fáilte and Beannachtaí 🌿 (Editor's note: translates as a hundred thousand welcomes and blessings)

Many people that are curious about Celtic paganism or modern Druidry as a spiritual or lifestyle framework often wonder what sets it apart, and the similarities and differences between other paths and this one. This piece will give you a little bit of an explanation in that regard.

For beginners, our best advice is read in the order of:

- #1 history and factual evidence of the ancient Celts and Druids.
- #2 surviving myths, legends and folktales.
- #3 modern Druidry interpretations.
- #4 course material from any number of the courses available.
- #5 last, niche topic interests such as herbalism, Ogham or any number of related topics.

Settle in, keep a journal of your thoughts and inspirations and give yourself space and freedom to absorb the information at your own pace. This often takes years to fully absorb and memorise various information - so there's no need to feel rushed. Keep in mind, there are many variations in beliefs and practices, but reading in this way and order allows you to make your opinion from a clean slate and allow yourself to be drawn to that which truly resonates with you. This is only a suggestion and, ultimately, it's good to do that which calls to you and in what order you wish to receive the information. There are **different facets of Celticity** in regards to educational studies, with lots of overlapping topics, namely the surviving Celtic nations with a cultural fabric uniquely their own, Celtic language studies and Celtic indigenous culture from where modern Druidry beliefs stem, that once spanned nearly the entirety of Europe from Germany to Turkey, Spain to Ireland. There is going to be lots of cultural crossover, but it's important to at least recognise this, respect, value and contribute to the living cultures. Celtic has become a modern catch-all cultural phrase but when we discuss educational topics, we generally try to reference who and what specific literature, countries, groups or places we're talking about in an effort to give credit where credit is due.

Druids chose not to write much down or it has been destroyed or lost in the sands of time. The idealisms we generally support to be true are those that can be corroborated by multiple sources in archaeology, quotes, mythology, folklore and traditions passed down through generations. That's not to say one biased quote or romantic sentiment from the revival period isn't interesting to ponder. It's just important to keep in mind the validity of the source. Modern druidry was heavily influenced by the Celtic Romantic period and revival.

1. **Druidry is not an exact recreation of ancient times.** The social role of the Druid has somewhat been replaced by the modern judge, teacher or doctor. We are simply using old knowledge, inspiration and a personal calling to formulate our own modern path. The traditional role was likely first and foremost a community support role.
2. There are **variances** in how people use the term, Druid. For example, some people prefer to say they are a Celtic pagan or follower of Druidry instead of a Druid. That is, at least until they have studied at length or completed an official course and initiation ceremony of sorts which can be done solitary just as well as with a group. This is completely a matter of personal choice and preference on what we call ourselves. The Druids of old were famed for studying for 20 years and the Irish *Fili* memorised countless poems and songs. It's a life's work. We support doing some sort of training and initiation and studying deeply for many years.

3. Druidry is **still a cultural practice**. The various Celtic cultures and related Druid and spiritual framework was again once indigenous throughout Ireland, Britain and a good portion of Europe. These various people across the landscape had somewhat of a shared culture and language, but were also considered separate nations and entities. Undoubtedly, there were quarrels between them, but they also had to be somewhat peaceful as there is archaeological proof of vast trade networks between them. The remnants of the Druids were best preserved in Ireland, where a Celtic Christianity evolved from both traditions embedded in the folk practices, historical references, mythology as well as the Brehon Law code. The role of Bard and the Irish *Fili*, a historically Druid (or more aptly called *Druid*) type role was maintained in Ireland at least through the 1800s but was deeply affected by colonisation.
4. The ancient Druids were pantheists, animists or polytheists as well as likely believed in reincarnation and an Otherworld after death. **Druidry today is generally free of dogma**. That is, there are no absolutes in regards to Otherworldly belief and we recognise the growth that occurs when our knowledge about our world and ourselves, advances.
5. The **four Celtic fire festivals** are celebrated that tied into the natural ebb and flow of the year that relate to the weather and agricultural changes. Within these festivals, certain gods and goddesses are recognised, for some literally (inspirational spiritual manifestations and beings with a purpose to guide us) and for others allegorically (characters in mythology designed to teach lessons). Many also celebrate the solstice and equinoxes as well as recognise the moon cycles and take their studying the movement of the stars and general reverence of the moon as evidence enough they would have recognised these events.
6. The idea that the **Druids were connected to the standing stones or other neolithic and mesolithic structures** is debated although historian and writer, Barry Cunliffe, deducing from genetic and language studies, believes there has been a somewhat stable population in Ireland, Scotland and Britain alluding to a continuity for at least the last 6000 years and that the ancestors of Celts, in essence, built the structures. This also falls in line with the claim of the Druids studying of the movement of the stars, moon and astrological bodies and the structures being aligned to these or rare celestial events. Many scholars call these people Proto-Druids or Proto-Celts. This is all still a matter of debate. One of the most recently built burial mounds dubbed the Black Forest Stonehenge in Germany was only completed in 600 BCE. The purpose of the stones is also debated with a wide range of beliefs based around local folklore. The largest held belief is that the stones were ancestors, giants, turned to stone by magic and the circles and other structures served as some sort of ritual burial ground and symbols for rebirth as bodies or ashes have often been found buried in or among the structures. They may have been ritual places to commune with ancestors in general for inspiration, guidance and as stone oracles. Of course, this is all speculation. What we do have that was definitely Celtic and possibly Druidic are the numerous carvings, iconography and structures dated to the time period between approx. 300 BCE and 600 CE, give or take a couple hundred years in each direction.
7. Another contested idea is whether the **ancient Druids participated in human sacrifice or not**. The only sources they did are firstly, the classical Roman and Greek sources, particularly Caesar, who was well known to manipulate the truth to make himself sound more heroic or justify war on an otherwise mostly innocent people. Additionally, many classical quotes were second-hand and without cultural context. The next source is an early Christian poem in Ireland regarding sacrifices to *Crom Cruach*, a Christianised version of Balor who also asked for sacrifices in mythology. Bodies (bog bodies etc) have been discovered that seemed to be ritualistically murdered or placed under homes. However, ritualistic burials were common throughout the entirety of ancient Europe. Oftentimes, it's unknown if children or people buried under homes died of natural causes, a rare occurrence in any case and a practice also unanimous throughout ancient Europe and Asia. Any odd death or burial may have been the result of an individual or individual group. Criminals may have been executed and sacrificed but this was also not a unique practice in the ancient world.

Some other modern generalisations that we usually have in common are having a connection to nature, respect for the earth as well as animals and living things, tolerance and non-judgement, equal male and female presence, having a celebratory and loving nature, living simply and sustainably as well as cultivating knowledge and creativity. In essence, living our best lives and most importantly, passing on what we learn to the next generation.

Endeavouring to have a meaningful path, we can look to the corroboration of multiple historical sources (quotes, archaeology, literature, traditions passed down) to give us a relatively accurate look into the past and emulate what may have been practised. Modern Druids typically do love nature (that they're popularly known for) but there is also a lot more to it as well. Here are [some typical characteristics](#).

- Personally developing the arts, such as poetry, musical abilities and writing or telling stories.
- Using Ogham.
- Acquiring knowledge on naturally healing herbs, plants and trees and how to use them. Collecting them on the 6th day of the moon's cycle was considered favourable.
- Venerating trees in general. Using various sacred wood for ritual purposes. The seven chieftain trees in Irish Brehon Law were the oak, hazel, holly, ash, yew, pine and apple.
- *Saining* or using sacred smoke to heal and otherwise rid ourselves or someone of malevolent forces that were causing an ailment.
- Studying the Celtic language.
- Chanting and ritualistic practices, eg moving clockwise during rituals. To do otherwise was considered bad luck. Many patterns found in nature move clockwise in the northern hemisphere and counter-clockwise in the southern hemisphere.
- Revering the three realms of earth, sea and sky and the four directions.
- Revering the triple nature of things in general; working with 3, 9, 27 parts of everything.
- Believing in the power of symbolism, especially through ritual. Revering the symbols of the well, the sword, the spear, the stone and the cauldron.
- Believing in the powers of water to heal and fire to cleanse.
- Believing in the Otherworld in general as well as liminal places and times, and having an interconnection with this world. Journeying to the Otherworld through an induced trance or asking ancestors/ gods/ goddesses for answers and guidance.
- Believing in the spirits and consciousness of the land, waterways, trees, animals and all that is, an overall oneness that is also manifested in various unique place and form.
- Valuing and recognising the reciprocity between nature/ gods/ goddesses/ the land - you can only get something if you give something.
- Valuing justice, fairness, honour, courage and truth in regards to personal as well as law issues.
- Respecting or venerating animals and their unique attributes. The horse, cow, deer, birds, salmon, wolf/dog and rabbits were particularly significant.
- Revering the sun and moon. Reading the signs of the sun, moon, stars, seasons, clouds, thunder, animal migration, plant growth etc.
- Teaching the youth and passing on knowledge and traditions to the next generation.
- Valuing elders and learning from our elders and ancestors.
- Supporting our local community in the best way we know how, giving our time and energy to the people and ecology directly around us. Supporting the wider world or charitable organisations when we're able, in order to improve our world.

# Environment: the Wainwright Prize 2021

By Gylden Fellowship

The Wainwright Prize is named after **Alfred Wainwright**, the author of the famous fell walking series, the *Pictorial Guides to the Lakeland Fells*. Created to celebrate nature-writing and encourage exploration of the outdoors, the Wainwright Prize was initiated in 2014 by Frances Lincoln, publishers of the Guides. It has been administered ever since by the independent Literary Marketing Agency; AGILE.

The prizes are awarded to the works which best reflect Wainwright's core values and includes a celebration of nature and our natural environment, or a warning of the dangers to it across the globe. Still in the midst of recovering from the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic and with our landscapes under threat, nature writing has flourished. Now in its eighth year, the prize is awarded annually to the books which most successfully inspire readers to explore the outdoors and to nurture a respect for the natural world.

The prizes are co-owned by AGILE, The Wainwright Estate and the Quarto Group (that now own Frances Lincoln). There are different sponsors each year and the event is managed by AGILE in association with The National Trust - with promotional support from BBC Countryfile Live, The Outdoor Guide, The Wainwright Society and many others. In 2019, the Wainwright Prize was won by *Underland* by Robert Macfarlane.

The winners of the Wainwright Prize for UK Nature Writing and for Global Conservation Writing were announced at a live award ceremony on Tuesday 7 September, at the London Wetland Centre. The award winners are *English Pastoral* by James Rebanks and *Entangled Life* by Merlin Sheldrake. The two shortlists reflect the breadth and range of contemporary nature writing both in the UK and around the world. The titles selected showcase a diverse group of writers and celebrate the wonder and awe of green spaces and nature's creatures through the prism of the authors' lives.

Rebanks' *English Pastoral* is the story of an inheritance. It tells of how rural landscapes around the world have been brought close to collapse, and the age-old rhythms of work, weather, community and wild things are being lost. This is a book about what it means to have love and pride in a place, and how, against all the odds, it may still be possible to build a new pastoral: not a utopia, but somewhere for us all. It comes at a fitting time, as we navigate a post-pandemic landscape. With the past year causing so much turmoil and uncertainty, many of us took to residing in family homes and nature. Perhaps this meant rebuilding and finding serenity.

Sheldrakes' *Entangled Life* is a radical and hopeful book. He engages us in the hidden world of fungi, a miraculous web of connections, interactions and communication that changes the way we need to look at life, the planet and ourselves. The more we learn about fungi, the less makes sense without them. Sheldrake reveals how these extraordinary organisms – and our relationships with them – are changing our understanding of how life works.



# Ghostly Tales 2021

Photos by Andrew Merritt Photography Ltd

Contact: <http://andrewmerritt.zenfolio.com>





# Celtic tree astrology

## By Gylden Fellowship

The following article is an extract from a longer text on our website. To some extent, the historical debate about the Celts as tree-worshippers and the values ascribed to different trees and the corresponding Ogham runes can be decided according to whether you are inspired by Robert Graves or whether you run with the archaeologists. So, what I've done here is to arrange the article into the popular view, the influence of Robert Graves and the findings of historians, such as Professor Robert MacAlister and Peter Berrisford-Ellis.

Let's start with the [Celtic calendar](#), which has 13 lunar months and 13 tree signs for each month. This tree zodiac is readily available to view online and the list below gives some examples.

- a) Birch: 24 December-20 January: Ogham is Beithe, colour is white, the crystal is clear quartz and the associated animals are the golden eagle and a white stag. People born under the birch have a fresh and unusual outlook on life.
- b) Rowan: 21 January-17 February: Ogham is Luis, colour is grey, the crystal is peridot and the associated animals are the crane and the green dragon. People born under the rowan have insight, taste and discernment.
- c) Ash: 18 February-17 March: Ogham is Nuin, colour is green, the crystal is coral and the associated animals are the seal, the seahorse and the seagull. People born under the ash have peace and tranquil solitude.
- d) Alder: 18 March-14 April: Ogham is Fearn, colour is red, the crystal is ruby and the associated animals are the bear, the fox and the hawk. People born under the alder are brave, mentally and physically.

OK, those are some examples and the full list includes willow, hawthorn, oak, holly, hazel, vine, ivy, reed and elder: 13 trees and 13 signs. Each tree has its own ascribed crystals, associated animals, colours and virtues – almost poetic really – which is the problem, because it could be claimed that this particular world view was, in fact, devised by a poet.

The tree zodiac that underpins the popular Celtic calendar was actually the work of Robert Graves in his work, *The White Goddess*, in 1946. Where did Robert Graves obtain his findings? Well there were three main sources for the Celtic astrology described by Robert Graves and none of them were historians or archaeologists.

1. Source No. 1 was [Iolo Morganwg](#) (a Welsh poet, 1747-1826, whose real name was Edward Williams). Iolo Morganwg was a talented bard and storyteller, who romanticised the idea of Welsh druidry as part of Welsh history. Some of his flights of fancy were shown up when the Department of Celtic Studies was established at Jesus College, Oxford in 1877 and the study of Celtic history was placed on an academic level.
2. Source No. 2 was another Welsh poet and dramatist, [Edward Davies](#) (1756-1831), who was also a great believer in the revival of Welsh druidry. Robert Graves used much of the work of Edward Davies in *The White Goddess*, but again this work tended to be poetic rather than historical.
3. Source No. 3 was an Irish writer, [Roderick O'Flaherty](#) (1629-1718) (this is the English form of his name), born in Galway and notable for his book, *A Chronological Account of Irish Events* – in other words, a history of Ireland. The book was written in Latin and published in 1685; the English translation was published in 1793.

It could be said that O'Flaherty was the main source for Robert Graves, because O'Flaherty's book listed the Ogham characters and stated that each character was supposedly named after a tree. This was a popular concept in 17<sup>th</sup> century Ireland and owed its lineage to a 14<sup>th</sup> century work, the *Book of Ballymote* (by Maghnus Ó Duibhgeánáin of Sligo).

Using O'Flaherty's work, Robert Graves saw that the Ogham letters/tree names had been cited as 13 consonants and 5 vowels. He disregarded the fact that the *Book of Ballymote* (as published by the Royal Irish Academy in 1887) quoted 25 Ogham letters: 15 consonants, 5 vowels and 5 extra letters that were not present in early Ogham (forfeda). The problem then was that 15 consonants did not match Robert Graves's belief that the Celtic calendar was calculated by lunar months and he also correlated the fact that there were 13 constellations in the zodiac. You might be able to see where this is going – Robert Graves concluded that O'Flaherty's 13 Ogham consonants were the same as the 13 lunar months and the 13 constellations.

In *The White Goddess*, the reader is told that the tree names must, logically, be the ancient Celtic names for the months and constellations. The only obstacle was that Robert Graves had to decide which trees were chosen and the seasonal order of this placing and he did so – his tree calendar was complete. In his own words, "I noticed almost at once, that the consonants of the alphabet form a calendar of seasonal tree magic" (*The White Goddess*, p.165). Quite a lot of pagans today have been inspired by the work of Robert Graves, which underpins much of what has been termed the neo-druid revival. The main problem for scholars is that logic and historical accuracy did not play an important part in *The White Goddess*.

The first reaction to Robert Graves came from Professor Robert MacAlister in Dublin, who was then the greatest living authority on the Ogham alphabet. Graves noted that Professor MacAlister's reply was far from complimentary, who warned him against "taking O'Flaherty's alphabets seriously on the grounds of artificiality". Robert Graves was not deterred – his conclusion was thus, "My argument depends on O' Flaherty's alphabet... I feel justified in supposing that O'Flaherty was recording a genuine tradition at least as old as the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD".

OK then, so much for Professor MacAlister. Graves went on to publish his work and was surprised to find that, "Since the first edition appeared in 1946, no expert in ancient Irish or Welsh has offered me the least help in refining my arguments, or pointed out any of the errors which are bound to have crept into the text or even acknowledged my letters".

Logic was the key, because if Robert Graves was confident that his work was accurate back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, how could he claim that his work was actually a mystical druidic calendar from pre-Christian times? The truth about the Celts is more interesting, but we have to turn away from poets and look at the historians and archaeologists for guidance.

There is a wealth of information about Celtic settlements from both early writings and modern excavations. However, there is very little evidence about Celtic religion – one of the key commentators on Celtic religion was Julius Caesar, who recorded that, "There is a very well-developed religious system among the Gauls and the British Islands are the authoritative centre of this system". He identified three main groupings in Gaul:

- The Belgae (Celts of the mountains)
- The Celtae (Celts of the plains)
- The Aquitani (Megalithic people).

The key points are that the Celts did not have a single religion and that there were these different groups of Celtic peoples – the ancient Megalithic people (who built dolmens, cromlechs and chambered tumuli), the Celts of the plains and the Celts of the mountains.

**Archaeology** has discovered a lot about the customs, settlements and rites of these different Celtic races and this article is not intended to go into great detail. However, the list below gives an idea of some of the religious or ceremonial customs.



1. According to Herodotus, the Celts of the plains originated near the upper Danube and gradually spread into Gaul.
2. They blended peacefully with the Megalithic People among whom they settled and contributed powerfully to the development of the druid system of religion and to the bardic poetry.
3. The Celts of the plains did not bury, but burned their dead. At their great settlement of Golasecca (in Gaul), 6000 interments were found. In each case, the body had been burned; there was not a single burial without previous burning. The Celts of the mountains buried their dead without any burning.
4. The Celts of the mountains originated in the Balkans and spread westwards – these were a warlike people who fought as mercenaries for Rome and despised agriculture (according to Julius Caesar). Their influence did not spread as far west as Ireland, but certainly their traces can be found in Gaul from about 100 BCE.
5. Yet even in this third group, the Roman writer, Posidonius, noted that they loved poetry, music and philosophy.



So, there were three different types of Celt – all with slightly different languages and different social customs. However, many Roman writers noted that the common denominator between all the Celtic groups was the formal priesthood, the druids. The druids governed religious practice, history, laws and science and gave guidance to every tribal chief. Thus, they settled disputes and could stop wars by mediation or in courts (according to Julius Caesar in 55 BCE). The types of knowledge taught to students included the following:

- a) Astronomy
- b) Size of the Earth and the universe
- c) Theology – powers of the gods
- d) Immortality of the soul
- e) Reincarnation
- f) Myths and heroic legends.

It is important to see that, although druidic shrines were often holy wells or natural springs, trees did not appear as part of the religion. Also, as the Romans conquered most of Western Europe, so the Celtic world converted to Roman astrology and this is borne out by ancient writings that were around some 1500 years before the tree alphabet was imagined. The earliest surviving Welsh writing on astrology has been dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century – the zodiac is discussed, but without trees.

Likewise, the earliest surviving Irish astrological text dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, but Celts in Gaul were writing about astrology much earlier than that and examples can be found in Trinity College in Dublin. Trees did not figure at all in the Celtic astrology, until many centuries later, with O'Flaherty's interpretation.

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