



Gylden Magick

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Dec. 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.

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

First things first though – we've decided to continue with the longer version of our magazine in our 7th year of publication, from September. So, our **Oak Moon** issue comes in at 30 pages, with 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 **seasonal flavour** to it with both articles and some lollipops too. In the concert music sense, lollipops are shorter, entertaining pieces.

So, this issue of **GYLDEN MAGICK** includes Ley lines, lighter pieces from Mark on coffee and extreme weather cold drops. There is a text on a medieval crown from Namur, Winter Solstice photos for 21 December, flooding in Sussex, ghostly folklore, Kwanzaa, Earthshot 2024, celestial forecasts, seasonal and knot magick.

The photo above is indicative of the season – the druid feast of Alban

Arthan (Winter Solstice) falls on 21 December. **The meaning of Alban Arthan is the light of winter.**

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.

For more info, why not join the **Gylden Fellowship** community on Facebook today and catch up on our news?

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Yule magick

By Gylden Fellowship

Alban Arthan, also known as Yule, celebrates the winter solstice, the shortest day and longest night, after which the days lengthen and the march of the sun towards spring is begun. For some druids, **Alban Arthan** means the light of winter (Welsh), while others believe it means the light of Arthur – this could be King Arthur Pendragon, who was seen as the sun god, reborn at the Winter Solstice. **This year, Yule falls on Saturday 21 December (09.19am).**

The word, **Yule**, comes from an ancient Norse word, Hjól (yoh-l) meaning wheel, i.e. when the wheel of the year was at its lowest point awaiting the sun's return. At Yule, we celebrate the turning of the year towards the light and warmth of summer. This is the night on which the hope of life and the promise of spring is given, to give us courage in the coming cold.

I was wondering about a spell for Yule, when I was tempted by some of the essential oils in-house, perhaps tangerine or frankincense. So, here's a few things you could do for Yule to make your home smell wonderful.

1. Take some large oranges and stud them with cloves – leave them around.
2. Slice some apples, pears or oranges into thin pieces and cook them in the oven on a low heat for most of the day until they are dried. Add the dried fruit to pine cones or yew branches for a table decoration.
3. For an instant good atmosphere, stew some plums or apples for tea with cloves or cinnamon.
4. The traditional Yule plants are bayberry, cinnamon, spruce, pine and frankincense.
5. Put out a bowl of pine cones, holly leaves, yew and ivy and spray them with orange essential oil.

While we're thinking about **Yule aromas and incense**, it isn't that difficult to make your own incense for this season – here's one suggestion – mix the ingredients together and let them dry out.

- 1 part cinnamon
- 1 part bayberry
- 3 parts cedar
- 3 parts pine needles.

It is true that aromas can re-create the ambience of past Yuletides and any incense will help this process. You have to decide whether your incense will be loose ingredients for burning on a flame, incense sticks or cones. Any coniferous trees can contribute to a good incense via needles, resins, cones or bark. Do not forget to add a blessing as you mix the incense, just as you would when making herbal remedies or meals...it's the focus and intent that count, as with any magickal activity. So, here's another suggestion for a **Yuletide incense**.

- 2 parts juniper berries
- 2 parts mugwort
- 1 part cedar
- 1 part dried mistletoe
- 1 part dried pine needles (or pine resin)
- 1 part laurel leaves
- 1/2 part cinnamon
- 1/2 part rosemary.

Add your ingredients to your mixing bowl one at a time. Measure carefully and, if the leaves or blossoms need to be crushed, use your mortar and pestle to do so. As you blend the herbs together, state your intent. You may find it helpful to charge your incense with a blessing or incantation. Store your incense in a tightly sealed jar. Make sure you label it with its name and date. Use within three months, so that it remains charged and fresh.



Apart from incense, you could create a **Yuletide potpourri** in a decorative bowl or basket using these ingredients and a small teacup. Once in the bowl, mix the ingredients together gently and add a scent or oil, if required.

- A cup of dried orange peel
- 1/2 a cup of dried lemon zest
- 1/3 of a cup of whole cloves
- 4 cinnamon sticks, broken into smaller pieces
- A handful of pine needles
- A sprig or two of seasonal berries
- A pinch of allspice or ginger.

A **Yule tree blessing** is an important task for this season. If you're thinking about altar or home decorations for Yule and a tree is in your mind, here is a blessing to use. Light some incense or scented candles, perhaps add music or have a drink of herbal tea and make the whole thing into a mini-ritual. For the blessing, **you'll need a candle, some water, salt and incense** - as you say the blessing, sprinkle the salt around the tree in a circle (not on the tree, just around it), smudging with the incense, passing the candle over it and adding water to the pot at the bottom.

By the powers of earth, I bless this tree - as it remains a symbol of life - stable and strong in my home throughout Yule.

By the powers of air, I bless this tree - as the cold winter winds blow away the burden of the old year and I welcome renewed energy into heart and home.

By the powers of fire, I bless this tree - as the warmth of the sun returns - bringing the end of dark days and life for next year.

By the powers of water, I bless this tree - so it may stay bright and green for longer and all can enjoy the harmony and peace of Yule.

A **Yule log** can be decorated in-house by finding a log (about 15 inches long), tying cloth or paper ribbons on it and putting mistletoe, ivy, holly or yew under the ribbons. If you wish, the log can be decorated further by gluing on some seasonal berries or pine cones.

For **decorated fir cones or holly sprigs** that can hang on the Yule tree, take some pieces of holly or fir cones and add some glitter glue to them, to give sparkle and shine. If using holly, tie a few sprigs together using ribbon, making a loop at the top so you can hang it for decoration. If using fir cones, tie some string or ribbon around the base of each one, making a loop so you can hang the decoration. You can add some bells and pagan symbols to the ribbon tie too.

What would Yuletide be if there wasn't **a spell to find lost presents or to wish for something magickal?**

Set-up: Waxing moon, a small star charm, 12 small blue or white crystals, white or silver pouch and a slip of paper.

1. Put all the items on a moonlit window-sill for cleansing.
2. Write your wish on the paper and anchor it with the star charm.
3. Surround the wish/charm with crystals.
4. For next 11 nights, add 1 crystal per night to the pouch.
5. Each time you add a crystal, say:

*"Samhain has gone and Yule is near,
With frost and ice and air so clear.
Bring peaceful nights with shining stars,
Grant my wish as winter's here.
So mote it be."*

6. On the final night, put everything remaining into the pouch.
7. Carry the pouch with you.

Note: any crystals are OK – I keep a little bag of aquamarine, quartz shards, howlite, etc.

A Yuletide message from **Gylden Fellowship** – we wish all our readers a happy Yule and look forward to celebrating the Winter Solstice with some of them. However, we'd like to say special thanks to our **guest authors** in 2024.

Charlie Foreverdark

Joanna Bristow- Watkins

Members of the Gemmological Association

Erica Zann

Mark Sharpen

Dr Pat Morris & the British Hedgehog Preservation Society

Sussex Wildlife Trust

The Mammal Society

The Woodland Trust

And we look forward to welcoming a slew of new contributors in 2025.

Gylden
Magick
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Kwanzaa

Collated by Gylden Fellowship







**THE 7 PRINCIPLES OF
KWANZAA
(Nguzo Saba)**

**HAPPY
KWANZAA!**

Day 1: Umoja - Unity

Day 2: Kujichagulia - Self Determination


Day 3: Ujima - Collective Work & Responsibility

Day 4: Ujamaa - Collective Economics

Day 5: Nia - Purpose

Day 6: Kuumba - Creativity

Day 7: Imani - Faith



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Gemmology: Reliquary crown of Namur

By Yannick Bruni et al

This text is a summary of the gemmological study of the reliquary crown of Namur, Belgium by Yannick Bruni and several other learned authors from 2021. Namur is located in Belgium.

The reliquary crown, hosted in the diocesan museum of Namur, was produced during the beginning of the 13th century to shelter a fragment of the holy crown of thorns. This beautiful piece of goldsmithery is made of eight gold plates, topped by round lobes and connected to each other by hinges blocked with a pin decorated by a pearl. The crown is decorated by filigrees, flowers and, approximately 400 pearls and coloured stones (green, reddish pink, turquoise, red, blue), showing simple cutting with various sizes and shapes.

Raman and portable X-ray fluorescence spectrometer (pXRF) techniques have been used to determine the nature and sources of all samples, as well as the composition of filigrees. Analyses have identified emeralds from Pakistan, reddish pink spinels from Tajikistan, red almandine garnets from India, turquoise from Iran, blue sapphires from Sri Lanka or Myanmar and European pearls. The filigrees contain approximately 86 wt % Au (gold), 7 wt % Ag (silver), and 7 wt % Cu (copper), thus confirming a gold-rich composition. The gemstones, contemporary with the crown, probably arrived in Europe by the silk trade road.



Since the beginning of the 20th century, a reliquary containing a fragment of the holy crown of thorns has been displayed in the diocesan museum of Namur, inside the Saint Aubin cathedral. The reliquary crown is comprised of eight gold plates measuring approximately 7cm in height, topped by round lobes, and connected to each other by hinges locked with a pin decorated by a pearl (figure A). This structure allows the crown to be easily and quickly dismantled for transportation, restoration or in case of an emergency event.

The eight articulated plates are decorated by gold filigrees, metal flowers, pearls, blue, turquoise, red, green, and pink gemstones with different sizes and shapes. The internal part of the crown is garnished by red velvet (figure B) (*Gaborit-Chopin, 1975; Collet, 2013*). The reliquary is classified among the exceptional historic religious items of Wallonia. The crown from Namur is dated to the beginning of the 13th century. Around 1206, Henri de Flandre-Hainaut, emperor of Constantinople (1206–1212), sent to his brother, Philippe le Noble, count of Namur, two thorns from the original crown of Christ (*Salet, 1967; Van Tricht, 2000; Collet, 2013*). To shelter them, Philippe ordered the manufacture of a reliquary crown on which were attached, until 1889, two small capsules

containing the holy thorns, as well as of its octagonal protective wooden box, decorated with enamelled medallions from the Limousin region (Collet, 2013; Vanrillaer, 2017).

The past decades have seen an increasing interest in the analysis of ancient goldsmith's items by modern archaeometric techniques. Several examples of these studies occur in the literature, such as the Raman and portable X-ray fluorescence spectrometer (pXRF) investigations of the reliquary from Lierneux (Bruni *et al.*, 2020), of the cross from Liège Cathedral (Demaude *et al.*, 2016, 2017), and of the reliquary bust of Saint Lambert (Bruni *et al.*, 2019). To date, the reliquary crown of Namur had never been investigated by these modern archaeometric techniques.

The aim of the study is consequently to characterise the gemstones decorating the crown by using portable Raman and X-ray fluorescence spectrometric methods. The chemical data obtained from the samples will help us to determine the mineralogical nature of gems and to give some hypothesis concerning their original deposits and the commercial roads used during the 13th century.

The reliquary crown is a precious item that should not be moved lest it be damaged. Numerous pearls and 169 stones, showing different colours, various shapes, and often simple cuttings, decorate its entire surface. The best methods for these archaeometric analyses are, therefore, Raman and portable X-ray fluorescence spectrometries, since they are handheld and non-destructive.



The gemstones decorating the crown of Namur are sapphire, emerald, spinel, almandine garnet, turquoise, and pearls. During the Middle Ages, the best-quality samples of these gemstones were mainly imported from the Middle East, particularly from India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar (Calligaro *et al.*, 2007; Aurisicchio *et al.*, 2018). Between the 10th and 13th centuries, two major trade roads existed between Europe and Asia. The first one, named the **silk road**, started in China, transited through Central Asia or North India, and generally reached European countries via Italy (Rome) or Turkey (Constantinople/Istanbul). Spinel from Tajikistan, as well as emeralds from Pakistan, were imported along this famous road (Sevillano-López and González, 2011; Pardieu and Farkhodova, 2019).

The second road used the **Indian Ocean** to link India and Sri Lanka to the Mediterranean Basin, passing through Egypt (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Sevillano-López and González, 2011; Lucas *et al.*, 2014). According to Collet (2013), the gemstones decorating the reliquary crown of Namur would be contemporaneous with the two holy thorns and originate from Constantinople or they would be recovered from various ancient Namur goldsmithery items. The first hypothesis seems the most likely because, for each kind of gem, the pXRF analyses indicate a unique source. This hypothesis is further confirmed by the fact that Constantinople was a famous gem trade centre on the silk road during the Middle Ages.

Environment: Earthshot 2024

By Gylden Fellowship

The Earthshot Prize was launched by Prince William in 2020 to celebrate and support people and companies working to provide innovative solutions for climate and environmental issues. There are five Earthshot Prizes or goals:

- Protect and Restore Nature
- Clean Our Air
- Revive Our Oceans
- Build a Waste-free World
- Fix Our Climate.

For the first time ever, The Earthshot Prize was brought to Africa. Taking place across five days of landmark events, **Earthshot Week 2024** spotlighted ground-breaking environmental solutions. It brought together world-leading innovators, investors and philanthropists to drive forward the restoration and protection of our planet.

Earthshot Week centred around **The Earthshot Prize Awards** in Cape Town on 6 November where it celebrated the work of this year's 15 extraordinary finalists and unveiled the winners. The finalists, from countries including France, Ghana, Indonesia and Nepal, were competing for a £1 million prize pot awarded to each winner of five categories to develop their ideas.

Hosted by Billy Porter and Bonang Matheba, and featuring incredible performances from Lebo M, the Ndolvu Choir, and more, the fourth annual Awards show spotlighted climate innovators working on game-changing solutions across Africa. Their stories were heard by millions across the planet. It was inspired by former US President, John F Kennedy's Moonshot project. This set scientists the challenge of placing an astronaut on the Moon and returning him safely - and in the process helped advance technology. Since Earthshot started, the organisation has built up a network of over 500 organisations and partners who are finding and supporting solutions. Examples include **Notpla**, a company which produces seaweed-based food packaging, whilst **Enso** is a start-up which makes a more efficient, low emission tyres for electric vehicles. Here are the winners for 2024 Earthshot Prizes.

1. In the *build a waste-free world* category is **Keep It Cool**, a Kenyan-based company using solar powered refrigeration to help cut harvest waste for farmers.
2. The *fix our climate* category features American company, **Advanced Thermovoltaic Systems**, who convert excess heat produced during the making of steel or cement into electricity.
3. UK company **NatureMetrics** was in the *protect and restore nature*. It is using environmental DNA technology to identify and monitor species populations.
4. In the *clean our air* category was **MYCL**, which looks at the problem of palm oil that's created when leftover shells are burned, sending chemicals and carbon into the air. MYCL is buying crop waste before it's burned and creating an alternative to leather.
5. Demand for seaweed is growing as an alternative to plastic. In the *revive our oceans* area, **Coast 4C** helps to generate sustainable seaweed products. They do this by helping communities get seaweed growing areas and by teaching farmers regenerative methods to protect the environment.

All about coffee

By Mark Sharpen



OK then, I must confess to drinking far too much coffee, but it seems that this might be a good habit...let's start with some stats. A research study, published in the journal *Circulation*, found that coffee can reduce the risk of stroke by 20%. A meta-analysis of over 125 studies listed in the *Annual Review of Nutrition*, found that coffee can reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes by 30%, the risk of Parkinson's disease by 30% and the risk of cancer by up to 20%.

1. Coffee supports **weight management**. Please note that experts recommend limiting caffeine if you're pregnant or nursing. A study in the *Journal of Functional Foods* indicates caffeine can slow the weight gain from an **obesogenic** diet (obesogenic means likely to make you gain weight) by reducing the storage of lipids in fat cells and the production of triglycerides. Coffee can even help counteract some of the negative health consequences of sitting all day, according to a recent study in *BMC Journal*.
1. Coffee can also make you **happier**. A study of over 260,000 people (*Annals of Internal Medicine*) who drank four or more cups of coffee a day were nearly 10% less likely to become depressed than those who drank one cup or none. According to one review of seven studies, each cup of coffee people consumed per day was linked to an 8% lower risk of depression. And, one study in more than 200,000 people showed that drinking coffee was linked to a lower risk of death by suicide.
2. Coffee contains caffeine, a central nervous system stimulant that is known for its ability to fight **fatigue**. This is because caffeine blocks the receptors of a neurotransmitter called adenosine and increases levels of other neurotransmitters in your brain that regulate your energy levels, including dopamine. The caffeine in your first cup of coffee attaches to the part of your neurons that attracts adenosine, the hormone that makes you sleepy. Caffeine also causes those neurons to fire more rapidly. Combine adenosine-blocked receptors with heightened neuron stimulation and boom: you're feeling much better. One small study found that consuming caffeine increased time to exhaustion during a cycling exercise by 12% and significantly reduced subjective levels of fatigue in participants. Another study had similar findings, reporting that consuming caffeine before and during a round of golf improved performance, increased subjective energy levels, and reduced feelings of fatigue.
3. A few daily cups of coffee may lower your risk of **Type 2 diabetes**. In fact, one review of 30 studies found that each cup of coffee people consumed per day was linked to a 6% lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes. This is thought to be due to coffee's ability to preserve the function of the beta cells in your pancreas, which are responsible for producing insulin to regulate blood sugar levels. Also, it's rich in antioxidants and may affect insulin sensitivity, inflammation, and metabolism — all of which are involved in the development of Type 2 diabetes.

4. Some research suggests that drinking coffee could help protect against **Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and cognitive decline**. Although studies have turned up mixed results, one review of 13 studies showed that people who regularly consumed caffeine had a significantly lower risk of developing Parkinson's disease...caffeine consumption also slowed the progression of Parkinson's disease over time. Another review of 11 observational studies in more than 29,000 people also found that the more coffee people consumed, the lower their risk of Alzheimer's disease. In addition, several studies have demonstrated that moderate coffee consumption could be associated with lower risks of dementia and cognitive decline.
5. Several studies suggest that coffee could support **liver health** and protect against disease. One study found that drinking more than two cups of coffee per day was linked to lower rates of liver scarring and liver cancer in people with liver disease. Other research shows that the more coffee people drank, the lower their risk of death from chronic liver disease. Drinking one cup of coffee per day was tied to a 15% lower risk, while drinking four cups per day was linked to a 71% lower risk. Another recent study found that coffee consumption was associated with decreased liver stiffness, which is a measure used by healthcare professionals to assess fibrosis, the formation of scar tissue in the liver.
6. Some research shows that drinking coffee may benefit **heart health**. Actually, one review found that drinking three to five cups of coffee per day was tied to a 15% reduced risk of heart disease. Another review of 21 studies showed that drinking three to four cups of coffee daily was associated with a 21% lower risk of stroke. Looking good for my daily caffeine intake! One study of more than 21,000 people found that increased coffee intake was associated with a significantly decreased risk of heart failure. But, and there's always a but, caffeine can affect blood pressure.
7. Hard to believe that coffee helps you live longer, but some research suggests that coffee could help **extend longevity**, thanks to its multitude of potential health benefits. For example, one review of 40 studies concluded that drinking two to four cups of coffee daily was associated with a lower risk of death, regardless of factors like age, weight status, and alcohol consumption. Similarly, another study in 1567 people found that drinking caffeinated coffee was linked to a lower risk of death after 12 and 18 years of follow-up. Further, drinking at least one cup of coffee per day was also associated with a lower risk of death from cancer.
8. Caffeine is known to improve **athletic performance and increase energy levels**. One review of nine studies reported that drinking coffee before exercise improved people's endurance and decreased their perceived exertion, compared with a control group. A study in 126 older adults found that drinking coffee was associated with improved physical performance and faster gait speed, even after the researchers adjusted for factors like age, belly fat, and physical activity levels.



Geoscience: Ley lines

By Nic the Witch

Ley lines are similar to lines of latitude and longitude – they're not lines that can be seen, as such. But the concept is clear enough: that monuments like Stonehenge and the Pyramids of Giza are all running on a kind of energy highway that connects them. This idea took hold in the 1920s when **Alfred Watkins**, a photographer and amateur archaeologist, noticed straight lines that connected ancient sites in certain areas of the United Kingdom. On the one hand, it made sense, because a road might connect an ancient place of worship and a fort. Watkins believed these lines weren't random. He thought ancestors seemed to have constructed important sites in a deliberate linear pattern across the British landscape for navigational purposes. In 1925, Watkins published this idea in *The Old Straight Track*.

At some point, other interested parties hijacked the simple idea and embellished the story. Some claim that ley lines are energy lines that carry a powerful magnetic field, while others say they hold a psychic power. Still, others are pretty sure the lines are somehow associated with UFO landings or that there are healing properties found in the vortex of ley lines.

Of course, no one has ever found any evidence for energies of any kind on the lines and there doesn't seem to be a lot of objective basis for believing that UFOs landed there. But that doesn't stop anyone from noting that you can connect lots of important points with straight lines on a map. However, it's not exactly science to get a few important points to connect or to imbue significance on places that do fall on a parallel. Indeed, there might be some compelling reasons to connect local sites, but it doesn't mean these lines have any mystic purpose.

Back to Alfred Watkins for a moment. He realised that in his local area of Herefordshire, many ancient features, such as standing stones, wayside crosses, hill forts, ditches and churches were arranged in a straight line. So, he began looking at maps and, with a pencil and ruler, joined many sites together. He concluded that these were ancient tracks or prehistoric trade routes that would have carried items such as salt, flint and pottery.

Since they had no settlements or roads to guide them, Neolithic people navigated the more forested lands by climbing to their highest local viewpoint and looking for a natural distant feature on their intended route. These would then be marked with large stones or piles of smaller stones, known as cairns, reflective water features, ditches, or earth mounds. Watkins believed that they may have used two tall sticks as surveying tools, to help with these alignments, which he suggested was depicted by the 240 ft chalk carving of The Long Man at Wilmington. He referred to the carving as *The Dod Man*, after the Welsh word, *Dodi*, meaning to lay, place or set.

The straight lines that Watkins found appeared to pass through a number of villages, farms and hamlets that had **ley** in their name, a Saxon word meaning *forest clearing or glade*. He named his new-found tracks after them and published *The Ley Hunters Manual* in 1927 with instructions about how to find ley lines. He said that at least four good mark points needed to align to prove a ley line.

In the 1950s and 60s, many accounts were recorded about strange visitations which tapped into different line theories. A French ufologist, Aime Michel, claimed that UFO sightings, when plotted on a map, fell into straight lines called *orthotemies*; Buck Nelson, an early alien abductee, believed that UFO pilots tapped into lines of magnetic force in the earth to power and navigate their ships. In the late 1960s, ex-RAF pilot (Tony Wedd) put these two ideas together, in conjunction with Watkins' theory and stated that ley lines were established by prehistoric communities to guide alien spacecraft.

In 1969, *John Mitchell* published a book called *The View Over Atlantis* which suggested that ley lines were not wayfinding tracks at all. Instead, Mitchell believed that they marked the course of a force of energy used in prehistoric times to connect divinity to humanity. These magnetic energy forces were subsequently linked to the lines that Watkins discovered and the name (Ley) became the term used to describe energetic currents, whether or not they followed Watkins' original criteria.

Many other cultures have similar theories or beliefs about paths or lines in the landscape. Some of these lines are linked to the astral movement of bodies such as the sun, moon, stars or planets, while others link to geomancy and earth energies, underground water streams or magnetic currents. In Nasca, Peru, dozens of straight lines, stone heaps and mounds are laid across the desert; the ancient Inca city of Cuzco is said to have had invisible lines called *ceques* radiating out from it. In the Americas, there are ancient road systems which link holy or sacred places.

Elsewhere, Aborigines believe in *The Dreaming*, an event in which the gods emerged from a featureless earth and began to wander, leaving features where they stopped. The lines of their wandering were sung as songs between tribes which, when drawn, represent a mythical map of Australia. And, in China, the science of Feng Shui was originally used to find the best locations for tombs, combining the manipulation of natural forces that course through veins in the earth. These forces manifest themselves as *lung mei*, or *dragon lines*.

Many people believe that energy lines can be detected by **dowsing**; a technique used for centuries to find water sources or minerals. It is thought that the use of rods or pendulums can aid a latent sixth sense to detect and even measure the energies emanating from the earth. Those that dowse earth energies, whether electro-magnetic or geophysical anomalies, say that they feel strong forces from sacred sites and certain ley lines. Some even think that these forces can be controlled and redirected along rows of stones, avenues and other earth features. They say that this could help amplify and utilise the current, possibly trapping and concentrating it in tombs or caves.

Within the UK there are said to be two powerful ley lines, the **Michael and Mary lines**. The Michael line, which was first mapped by John Mitchell, crosses England, from east to west, starting near Great Yarmouth (on the Norfolk coast) and ending at St Michael's Mount, on the western tip of Cornwall. The Michael line is in close alignment to the May Day sunrise. These sunrises were marked by Beltane. It's been suggested that the rising of the sun on Beltane could have coincided with beacons lit along the Michael line to celebrate it. Others say that the line follows the direction of sunrise on the 8 May, the spring festival of St Michael.

The Mary line is thought to be more meandering and entwines around the Michael line, meeting at certain points. Dowsers say that the energies they feel for each line are different. The Michael line is solar and masculine while the Mary line is lunar and feminine. Dowsers Paul Broadhurst and Hamish Miller decided to follow these two lines in their entirety and their account can be read in *The Sun and the Serpent*. They followed each line, passing through sacred sites such as Glastonbury Tor, Avebury and Royston Cave.

Royston Cave is one of a few sites that both the Michael and Mary lines are thought to cross over, which makes it a very special place for ley line believers. Interestingly, from Royston Cave, the Michael line follows a path to Baldock, where the Knights Templar were located and the Mary line leads to the site of a Templar priory at Little Wymondley and another at Temple Dinsley. For this reason, Royston Cave is linked to the Knights Templar; some believe that the Templars were skilled in the art of dowsing, and could redirect the energy lines.

Folklore: Sandford Orcas Manor

By the Storyteller

Editor's note: this is a piece from the Storyteller's forthcoming work, *Winter Chills - 2*. It will be published on our website, during December.

Sandford Orcas Manor can be found in Dorset, near to Sherborne. It lays claim to being the most haunted house in England with the 14 ghosts that have been reported to live there.

Only two families, the Knoyles and the Medlycotts, have actually occupied Sandford Orcas Manor since it was built in the early 1530s. Sandford Orcas takes its name from the Norman *Orescuilz* family, who came to own the village in the century after the Battle of Hastings in 1066. The village was known as Sanford in 1086 (in the Domesday Book), Sandford in 1243, Sandford Horscoys in 1372 and Samford Orescoys in 1427. It is an eerie looking building with grey stone walls, which give the appearance of being every inch the haunted house of tradition.

Colonel Francis Claridge, who leased the manor between 1965 and 1979, grew used to sharing his home with the ghosts of numerous former residents, but since his family motto was *Fear naught but God*, he was more than happy to let the spirits be undisturbed. One evening, when he was closing the house to visitors, he caught sight of **an unkempt looking lady** who proceeded to walk through the gate and onto the grass. She seemed oblivious to his presence and so the Colonel went over to confront. No sooner than he had walked onto the grass himself, the woman suddenly melted away into thin air.

In the 18th century (1740s) a **farmer** (James Davidge) is said to have committed suicide by hanging himself from a trapdoor inside the house. He had fallen prey to financial problems - the trapdoor has long since been boarded up, but it doesn't seem to have deterred his ghost from haunting the kitchen dressed in a white milking smock. His ghost is one of the more frequently witnessed manifestations and has been reported by staff and Claridge family members many times.

During filming in 1966, one member of the BBC film crew claimed to have seen his ghost walking past the kitchen window. Similarly, another member of the BBC production team caught a glimpse of him dressed in what she described as being an old-fashioned farmer's hat and smock. The witness became ill with fright when it was explained to her that she had, in fact, seen the ghostly farmer. Later, the BBC reported that "***the manor has a strong reputation of being haunted and has earned its name as being the most haunted manor house in Britain***".

Even more disturbing is the ghost of a **former footman** who, in life, used to while away his spare time molesting the maids of the manor. He would take great delight in scaring them at every opportunity. It was his obsessive, sexual deviance that was to lead to his eventual undoing. He accosted a young girl from the village whom he beat and raped. He was arrested, tried and sent to prison where he eventually died. His ghostly presence returned to the Manor where it is preceded by a foul smell.

His presence endures, as Colonel Claridge's daughter found out, shortly after the family took up residence at the house. Determined to see for herself whether there was any substance in the rumours of mysterious tapping being heard in one particular room, she opted to spend a night there. No sooner had she fallen asleep than she was rudely awoken by a ghostly force which threw her to the floor. Suddenly, she was grabbed round the throat by icy, invisible, fingers. Fortunately she was able to fight her way free and flee the room. She refused point blank to enter the house again after nightfall.

Other ghosts that have been reported at Sandford Orcas Manor, include the following.

- A lady in a beautiful red silk, Georgian dress
- A little girl in black who is seen at the foot of the stairs
- A wicked priest whom guests have awoken to find bending over their beds holding a black cape with which he appears to be about to smother them
- A sinister man who walks from the gatehouse to the staff quarters leaving the stench of decaying flesh in his wake
- The ghost of a male servant, said to have murdered a former employer, walks the upper floors slamming doors
- A lady dressed in green, seen in the grounds.

And there is always the **ghost of the young man** who, having grown up in the house, set off to join the navy. But when he had enrolled at Dartmouth College, he killed another cadet, was judged insane and was sent back to Sandford Orcas Manor where he was locked in a room at the back of the house and was never allowed to leave. He is said to have died at the age of 27 years and to have been buried in a secret passageway behind the Great Chamber. On certain nights, when the moon is full, his ghostly cries are said to echo throughout the property and he is heard banging on the door of the room screaming to be released.

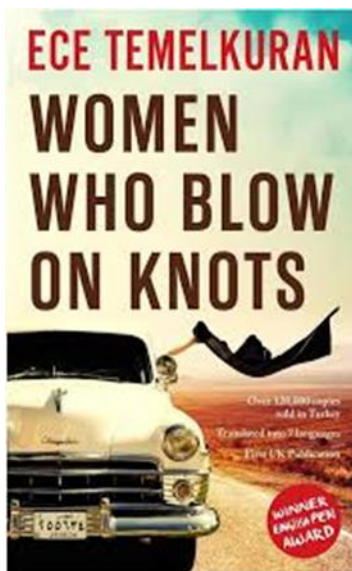
Perhaps the last word on this most haunted of haunted houses should go to the group of Society of Psychical Research investigators from the **Paraphysical Laboratory at Downton** who, having carried out a detailed investigation of the house's ghosts, concluded that, "a reasonable *prima facie* case had been made out for the hauntings and five ghosts had been verified".



Magick: blowing on knots

By Nic the Witch

Women Who Blow on Knots is a novel by **Ece Temelkuran** about four women traveling from Tunisia to Lebanon during the Arab Spring. The novel's title comes from a Koran sura that warns of women who blow on knots because they practise witchcraft. It is said by Muslim scholars that *there is some witchcraft tradition associated with knot blowing*.



Witchcraft can be traced back to ancient times with depictions of witches found in various mythologies and folklore from pre-Roman to Celtic deities. In Europe, witchcraft was associated with the devil during the Middle Ages, particularly influenced by the spread of Christianity and the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1487. As Christianity gained prominence, pagan practices were condemned and individuals accused of practising witchcraft were seen as aligning themselves with evil forces.

So, belief in witchcraft predates Christianity. It is thought that the earliest beliefs were centred on animism and shamanic practices. In ancient civilizations, namely China, Mesopotamia, Greece and Egypt, there were references to individuals who possessed magical powers and could communicate with spirits or deities. These individuals were often revered as wise or feared as dangerous. The concept of witchcraft was also deeply connected to nature and the spiritual world. Witches were believed to have the ability to harness natural forces and manipulate them for their own purposes. In many cultures, witches were associated with healing, divination or protective magic. They were seen as intermediaries between humans and the spiritual realm.

In *the Quran in Surah Al-Falaq 113:4*, the act of witchcraft is described as **to blow onto the knots**. But there is no further information about how this technique is actually performed. But the verse doesn't even say from magick or those performing magick. It says from those whom blow on knots - superstitious women are inferred. It should be noted that this technique of blowing on knots is unique to Arab culture, although several cultures attributed witches with the power to control storms.

And another thing is that the verse didn't say only those performing magick, but refers to all those whom blow on knots. That means it's putting a negative power in blowing knots in itself. The exact nature of blowing on knots is unknown. **However, we do know that Muhammad taught the use of blowing to cure bites, stings, blisters, and the effects of the evil eye.**

Maududi states: “[T]he incident of the Holy Prophet’s being affected by magic is absolutely confirmed, and if it can be refuted by scientific criticism, then no historical event of the world can be proved right and genuine. It has been related by Bukhari, Muslim, Nasai, Ibn Majah, Imam Ahmad, Abdur Razzaq, Humaidi, Baihaqi, Tabarani, Ibn Sad, Ibn Mardayah, Ibn Abi Shaibah, Hakim, Abd bin Humaid and other traditionists on the authority of Hadrat Aishah, Hadrat Zaid bin Arqam and Hadrat Abdullah bin Abbas, through so many different and numerous channels that forgery is out of the question. . . .”

Ibn Abbas also has related a tradition to the effect: “The Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace) used to recite this invocation over Hadrat Hasan and Husain: U’idhu kuma bi-kalimat Allahit-tamati min kulli shaitan-in wa hammati-wa min kulli ayt-in-lam nati: ‘I give you in the refuge of Allah’s blameless words, from every devil and troublesome thing, and from every evil look.’” (Bukhari, Musnad Ahmad, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah) . . . Musnad Ahmad and Tahavi contain this tradition from Talq bin Ali: “I was stung by a scorpion in the presence of the Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace). The Holy Prophet recited something and blew over me and rubbed his hand on the affected place.” . . .”

Imam Ahmad in his Musnad has related this tradition from Hafsa, mother of the Faithful: “One day the Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace) visited me in the house and a woman, named Shifa, was sitting with me. She used to blow on the people to cure them of blisters. The Holy Prophet said to her: ‘Teach Hafsa also the formula.’” Imam Ahmad, Abu Daud and Nasai have related this tradition from Shifa bint Abdullah herself, saying: “The Holy Prophet said to me: Just as you have taught Hafsa reading and writing, so teach her blowing to cure blisters as well.”

In Islam, there is a tradition from Auf bin Malik al-Ashjal to the effect: “We used to practice blowing to cure diseases. We asked the Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace) for his opinion in this regard. He said: Let me know the words with which you blow over the people. There is no harm in blowing unless it smacks of polytheism.” . . .

This is also supported by the tradition from Hadrat Aishah, which is contained in Muslim, Musnad Ahmad, and Ibn Majah: “The Holy Prophet granted permission to a family of the Ansar for blowing to cure the evils effects of biting by every poisonous creature.” Traditions resembling these have been related from Hadrat Anas also in Musnad Ahmad, Tirmidhi, Muslim and Ibn Majah, saying that the Holy Prophet gave permission for blowing to cure the bite by poisonous creatures, the disease of blisters and the effects of the evil look.”

Musnad Ahmad, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah and Hakim have related this tradition on the authority of Hadrat Umair, freed slave of Abi al-Laham: “In the pre-Islamic days I had a formula with which I used to blow over the people. I recited it before the Holy Prophet, whereupon he told me to drop out such and such words from it and permitted me to blow with the rest of it.”

According to Muwatta, Hadrat Abu Bakr went to the house of his daughter, Hadrat Aishah, and found that she was unwell and a Jewish woman was blowing over her. Thereupon he said to her: “Blow over her by means of the Book of Allah.” This shows that if the people of the Book practise blowing by means of the verses of the Torah and the Gospel, it is also permitted.

Extreme weather cold drops

By Mark Sharpen

A **cold drop** is a term used in Spain and France to describe *a high-impact rainfall event that occurs in the autumn*. The flood in Valencia this year killed over 200 people and “the images show the power of water at its most furious,” says Dr Linda Speight, lecturer at the University of Oxford’s School of Geography and the Environment (SoGE). “Unfortunately, these are no longer rare events. Climate change is changing the structure of our weather systems creating conditions where intense thunderstorms stall over a region leading to record-breaking rainfall – a pattern that we are seeing time and time again.”



Climate scientists and meteorologists have blamed the flooding on something called *a cut-off low pressure storm system* (I had to look up this term too!) that had migrated from an unusually wavy, stalled jet stream. This system then got stuck over the region, pouring down a year’s worth of rain in eight hours. It is a natural weather event that usually hits Spain in autumn and winter. This phenomenon is so common that it has its own acronym: **a DANA or Depresion Aislada en Niveles Altos**.

Unusually warm sea surface temperatures, made much more likely by human-caused climate change and our warming atmosphere, directly impact how much rain these storms can hold. The ground in many parts of eastern and southern Spain had been left less able to effectively absorb rainwater following severe drought.



A few years ago, **Valerie Trouet**, a tree scientist (dendrochronologist) from Belgium, began to notice something curious. When her summer holidays at home were marred by cold rainy days, countries like Greece and Italy in the Eastern Mediterranean appeared to be battling unseasonal droughts and heatwaves. The reverse seemed to also be true: hot dry summers in Belgium and the British Isles coincided with cool wet weather in southeast Europe. Trouet started to wonder if the **jet stream**, that narrow current of air that encircles the globe, had anything to do with it. Jet streams are concentrated bands of wind in the upper atmosphere that form at different latitudes at the boundaries of global air masses.

The most powerful streams travel around the polar fronts, where warmer air meets colder air from the Arctic and Antarctic regions. In the north, the position and shape of the jet stream is determined by the intensity of high- and low-pressure weather systems that form seasonally over the European continent. Most of the time, the jet stream flows in more or less a straight line, keeping colder pressure systems to the north and warmer pressure systems to the south. But in some years, the shape can slacken or elongate into waves, forcing cold and wet conditions southeast into the Mediterranean and pushing warm weather to northwest.

Trouet learned that many climate models suggest this northern continental jet stream contains more waves with ongoing climate change, a trend that can increase the frequency of simultaneous extreme weather events at opposite ends of the continent, namely heatwaves, droughts, floods and wildfires. To get a better sense of long-term jet stream and climate patterns, Trouet decided to team up with historians and climate scientists. In a recent edition of *Nature*, she and her team unveiled a model for jet stream variability that extends the record by 700 years.

By studying tree rings, Trouet and a team of paleoclimate experts produced a reconstruction of summer weather extremes for the period from 1300-2004 CE. They then examined historical records to see how these weather patterns were reflected in records of storms, plagues, and harvests dating back to the Middle Ages. The researchers believe that what they found suggests a causal link between jet stream anomalies and such seemingly disconnected events such as wildfires in Greece and Turkey, the spread of plagues in Ireland and increases on wine taxes in Medieval Hungary.

To reconstruct historical jet stream patterns, Trouet and her colleagues relied on trees from three locations: the Scottish Highlands in the northwest, the European alps and Bosnian pine growing in the south-eastern Mediterranean. Tree cores were studied for their maximum late wood density, which shows up as a dark line that separates tree rings. The colour, shape, and chemical composition of this dark edge depends on late summer weather. Years heavy in drought and heatwaves result in darker and more irregular lines. The research team also looked at fire scars, where they could count on which years there was a wildfire. With the help of historians, they were able to uncover data about the frequency of plagues, storms, and fluctuations in crop prices within their regions of interest in the south-eastern and north-western corners of Europe.

In Medieval Britain, they found that plagues spread faster when summers were, according to their models, unseasonably warm, when both fleas and humans were on the move. In those same years, vine crop failures and higher prices on wine were recorded in the Balkans, likely due to colder temperatures. Historic records of grain prices from the Netherlands, Belgium, and the British Isles for barley and wheat also suggested rates of crop failure were higher during years when tree ring reconstructions indicated unusually cool weather.

Winter Solstice: 21 December 2024

Collated by Gylden Fellowship



winter solstice (December 21)





Celestial forecasts: December 2024

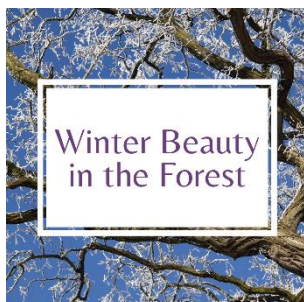
By Joanna Bristow-Watkins

December in Britain is the month with the least hours of daylight, but sunlight hours increase from 21st onwards, after the Winter Solstice. The increased daylight - promising optimism - is celebrated as **Yule**, and here in the UK, **Christmas Day** on the 25th, which pre-Christianity, in Roman times, was celebrated as the birth date of **Sol Invictus** (Roman Solar Deity).

Landscapes and gardens are skeletal now, except for the evergreens, looking charming when snow-covered and laced with spider's webs kissed by frost. Keep the shivers at bay with seasonal soups using Jerusalem artichokes, leeks, carrots, beetroot, parsnips, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, kale, potatoes and winter squash. Enjoy nutty snacks from chestnuts, hazelnuts and walnuts. Late fruiting apples, pears and quince also remain plentiful together with mushrooms and black truffles.

The month of December was named after **decem** meaning 10th in Latin, as November was the 10th month when the year started in March. To the Anglo-Saxons, December was called **Ærra Gēola** meaning "before Yule" or "First Yule". During December, we can also look forward to the British Celtic Festival of Yule (Winter Solstice = 21 December), followed by the Christian Festival of **Christmas** (25th) which is also the Zoroastrian Celebration of **Zartosht-no Diso** and **St Stephens Day/ Boxing Day** (26th) plus two annual Roman Festivals **Bona Dea** (3rd) and **Saturnalia** (17th), **Hannukah** (25 Dec-2 January) and the month culminates with **New Year's Eve** (31st), celebrated as a two-day festival called **Hogmanay** in Scotland.

We have a Forest Bathing event on **Sunday 1st** (11am-1.30pm at Harry Edwards, Shere). Our **Full Moon Meditation takes place 7.30-9.30pm (UK time)** on Saturday 14th, with the **Cold Full Moon** peaking earlier that morning at 09:02. Aligning with the moon cycle is very therapeutic, and our next Lunar Alignment Programme commences with the New Moon in January 2025. We also have the **Geminid Meteor Shower** peaking 13th/14th.



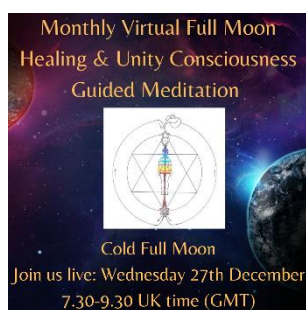
Sunday 1 December, 11.00am - 1.30pm, 2½-hours Forest Therapy session with Joanna & Katie in the beautiful private grounds of the Harry Edwards Foundation (Shere, near Guildford, Surrey), £37.77 (+ admin fee by PayPal). This Winter Forest Bathing session will take place in all weathers except 30+mph winds. This is 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 **Harmony Healing shop**.

Sunday 1 December @ 06:21 is the Elder New Moon.

Tuesday 3 December is the Roman Festival of Bona Dea, this being a smaller festival than the one celebrated on 1 May but similarly for women only. In Roman mythology, Bona Dea (literally **the good goddess**) was the goddess of fertility, healing, virginity and women. She was the daughter of the god, Faunus, and was associated with supplying medicinal healing herbs in her temple garden. Bona Dea was also invoked for freedom from slavery; many of her worshippers were freed slaves and plebeians and many were women seeking aid in sickness or for fertility

Friday 13-Saturday 14 December is the peak of the Geminid Meteor Shower. The Geminids are considered by many to be the best annual meteor shower and are known for producing multi-coloured meteors: 65% being white, 26% yellow and the remaining ones are 9% blue, red and green.

Rates typically peak at 100-120/hour; this high activity lasts for several hours. It is certainly possible to see 80-100 Geminids in a single hour, but only from a dark site! The Geminid Meteor Shower is expected to peak in activity on the night of 13-14 December, although some meteors should be visible from 7-21 December. The radiant point for this shower will be in the constellation of Gemini. Best viewing is usually to the east after midnight. The Full Moon early on 15 December will hamper viewing due to light pollution. Go to timeanddate.com for further information.



Saturday 14 December is our **Full Moon Unity Consciousness Meditation**, 7.30-9.30pm UK time (GMT/UT). This is the night before Full Moon takes place, with it peaking at 09:01 on Sunday 15 December. 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](#).

Sunday 15 December is the Cold Full Moon at 09:01. Between this date and the next New Moon is considered as a good time energetically for detoxing the body and a brilliant time for oil pulling.

Tuesday 17 December is the Roman Festival of Saturnalia. This was a popular banquet marking the dedication of the temple of the god Saturn. It was marked by tomfoolery and reversal of social roles, in which slaves and masters ostensibly switched places. The holiday was celebrated with a sacrifice at the Temple of Saturn in the Roman Forum, a public feast, continual partying with private gift-giving, gambling and a celebratory atmosphere that reversed the usual Roman social norms with masters providing table service for their slaves. The poet, Catullus, referred to it as "the best of days." Saturn was an agricultural deity who was associated with the Golden Age, when humans enjoyed the spontaneous bounty of the earth without labour in a state of innocence.



Saturday 21 December is the Pagan Solstice @ 09:21. It's the Winter Solstice here in the UK - the shortest day of the year with just 7 hours and 49 minutes daylight. The solstice itself is the moment the sun is shining farthest to the south, directly over the Tropic of Capricorn, so the time varies every year, between 20-23 December.

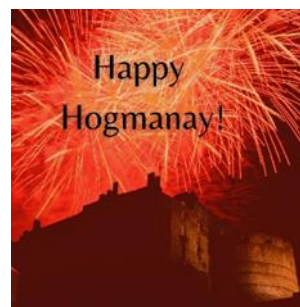
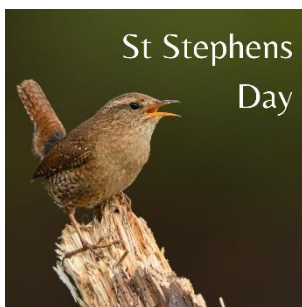
The solstice marks the moment the sun shines at its most southern point and has been celebrated as a major Pagan festival, with rituals of rebirth, for thousands of years. Revellers gather at Stonehenge to watch the sunrise on the shortest day. Then, in the Northern Hemisphere, our days will gradually get longer until the summer solstice on Saturday 21 June 2025 at 03:41.

Many of the traditions now associated with Christmas had their roots in Pagan Winter Solstice celebrations; including Yule logs, mistletoe and Christmas trees. The Druids, an ancient Celtic order of priests, teachers, diviners and magicians who gleaned knowledge and enlightenment from sacred landscapes and ancient trees (such as Tutorial Oaks) used evergreen trees, holly and mistletoe to represent everlasting life. Druids would consider the cutting of trees as an offence against nature, but would decorate them with colourful rags tied on the branches.

Wednesday 25 December is the Christian Festival of *Christmas*, commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ.

In the Fasli Zoroastrian Calendar this date is *Zartosht-no Diso*, commemorating the anniversary of the death of the prophet Zarathustra.

Wednesday 25 December-Thursday 2 January is the eight-day Jewish celebration of Hanukkah (or Chanukah). Hanukkah is the wintertime festival of lights, celebrated with a nightly menorah lighting, fried foods and special prayers.



Thursday 26 December is St Stephen's Day in the Christian Calendar, also known as Boxing Day. Boxing Day is so named because, traditionally, it was a day off for servants, when they received a special Christmas box from their masters and would also go home on Boxing Day to give Christmas boxes to their families.

Monday 30 December @ 22:26 is the New Moon. 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. The New Moon is great time to create Vision Boards.

Tuesday 31 December is New Year's Eve and Hogmanay in Scottish tradition. Many Scots had to work over Christmas, because celebrations were virtually banned in Scotland for around 400 years, from the end of the 17th century to the 1950s. The Protestant Reformation led to the Presbyterian outlook, branding Christmas as a Popish or Catholic feast which was therefore prohibited. As a result, their winter solstice celebrations took place at New Year when family and friends gathered for a party and exchange presents, especially for the children, which came to be called Hogmanay. (*Image of fireworks over Edinburgh Castle by Chris Flexen.*)

There is no definitive view on the origins of the word *Hogmanay*. Many Scottish words have derived from Flemish, so one popular view is that *Hogmanay* came from *hoog min dag* which means *great love day*, whereas the Scandinavian word, *Hoggo-nott*, described the feast preceding Yule (itself a Scandinavian word commonly used in Shetland where the Scandinavian influence was strongest). Alternatively, *Hogmanay* could source from the Anglo-Saxon, *Haleg monath*, Holy Month, or the Gaelic for new morning, *oge maidne*. Phonetically, a good candidate might be the similar sounding French expression, *Homme est né*, which means Man is born. Also, in France the last day of the year when gifts were exchanged was *aguillaneuf*, though specifically in Normandy presents given at the year-end were *hoguignetes*.

In Scotland a similar practice to that in Normandy was noted, rather disapprovingly, by the Church. "*It is ordinary among some Plebians in the South of Scotland, to go about from door to door upon New Year's Eve, crying Hagmane*", *Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence, 1693*. Common Scottish practices on 31 December, before midnight, involve a thorough cleaning of the house (including taking out the ashes from the coal fire) plus the superstition to clear all your debts. Immediately after midnight, the long-held tradition to sing Robert Burns's *For Auld Lang Syne* has now evolved into a popular international custom.

Many areas of Scotland developed their own local *Hogmanay* rituals such as the fireball swinging rituals in Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire, in north-east Scotland. Chicken wire structures - filled with old newspaper, sticks, rags, and other dry flammable material are attached to lengths of wire, chain or non-flammable rope. When the Old Town House bell marks the New Year, the balls are set alight and the celebrants set off along a heritage route, swinging the burning balls around their heads as they go. At the end of the ceremony, any fireballs that are still burning are cast into the harbour.

Wednesday 1 January is New Year's Day and is a Bank Holiday in the UK and time for New Year's Resolutions!

Wednesday 1–Monday 5 January (peaking on the 3/4 January) is the Quadrantids Meteor Shower; visible from 1-5 January after midnight. With the approaching New Moon on 30 December, there could be good viewing opportunities. Typically, 40 or so bright, blue and fast (25.5 miles per second) meteors will radiate from the constellation, Bootes, blazing more than halfway across the sky. A small percentage of them leave persistent dust trains. This shower usually has a very sharp peak, usually lasting only about an hour.

The particles that cause the Quadrantid meteor show originate from the asteroid 2003 EH1 an asteroid that is probably a piece broken off from an obsolete comet. Since the orbit of 2003 EH1 is highly inclined to the orbit of the Earth, the Earth passes through it very quickly. Thus, the Quadrantid meteor shower is an extremely short one, lasting only a few hours.

Flooding in Sussex

By Sussex Wildlife Trust

Flooding happens when rainwater can no longer be absorbed by the earth's surface. Natural or man-made underground storage reservoirs can also overflow, causing flooding to bubble up from the ground through sewers and natural springs. Flooding can also happen when heavy rainfall and runoff can't escape from a river into the sea because the tide is high. Sometimes, people have placed barriers such as bridges in the path of a river, which are too small to accommodate the floodwater flowing through and, so, the water backs up behind it.

In general, unless water comes across an impenetrable barrier such as concrete, it will follow the line of least resistance, being carried by gravity down slopes and moving around objects (such as rocks) and areas where it comes up against resistance (such as impermeable clay soils or man-made embankments). Where natural surfaces such as soils and trees are present, they can absorb large amounts of water. Increasingly the damaging floods we see are being caused by high rainfall running fast off hard surfaces in towns and cities – something we call **surface water flash flooding**.

Floodplains serve a vital function, helping to store the seasonal floodwaters that come with heavy rain downpours. A floodplain is the flat area of land surrounding a river or stream, which is periodically flooded during and after periods of heavy rain. During a flood, a river will naturally spill over into its floodplain, where the water will sit until it's gradually absorbed by the landscape.

A naturally functioning river landscape can absorb huge amounts of rainfall and surface water runoff, whilst also giving the water a chance to release any mud, silt and pollutants it may be carrying. In this way, wetland habitats can help store, slow down and purify floodwater, which can then filter down through the ground and into underground aquifers to provide us with clean drinking water.

Problems occur when rivers are disconnected from their floodplains, perhaps by engineering or when development has been (inappropriately) located on a floodplain. A flood is water in the wrong place - usually when it comes into contact with humans and their infrastructure - and it can cause death, destruction and very costly damage to property. A flood in the right place, however, can create fantastic wildlife habitats, and provide people with valuable nutrient-rich soils for agriculture and other natural services, such as drinking water.

Sussex Wildlife Trust works to help restore natural flood storage areas and landscapes which store more flood water, protecting people from floods whilst also enhancing wildlife. Here are some ways that you can help stop flooding in Sussex.

1. Create more natural habitats such as hedgerows, woodlands and meadows which slow down and absorb rain and flood water.
2. Have more ponds...the more ponds we have storing surface water, the better it is for people and for wildlife.
3. Create more urban greenspace and use it as urban flood gardens to store urban runoff.
4. Keep household rainwater by collecting it in water butts and filtering it into ponds and gardens – imagine how much rain runs off the collective rooftops and driveways of Sussex?
5. Divert road runoff into urban storage ponds and swales. Hundreds of miles of impermeable tarmac and concrete roads and pavements contribute huge amounts of water to floods.

6. Re-use greywater from your home instead of releasing it into drains and sewers. Some of the worst flood damage comes from sewers and drains, which are so full they burst into rivers and homes.
7. Use **Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems** (SUDS instead of impermeable concrete and tarmac surfaces.
8. Stop building houses in active river floodplains. With climate and land-use change, floodplains are increasingly risky for people to live in, and insurance companies will no longer insure people whose house is found in a designated floodplain. For more information download our leaflet on [How you can help with flood management.](#)

Many people call for **dredging as a way to stop flooding**. However, situations dredging can make flooding worse as well as negatively impacting fish stocks and wildlife and causing shortages of water in drier months. If you think that dredging is the way to stop flooding then we would suggest reading the *Floods and Dredging - a reality check* leaflet prior to making important decisions.

Have you consulted the Environment Agency? They are the experts and you will need legal consent to dredge a river.

Key things to think about if you are considering dredging or de-silting your rivers and streams are the following factors.

1. By dredging your river, will you just be moving water downstream faster to flood someone else?
2. Is any part of the river influenced by the tide or in an area of land which is under sea level? If so, then twice a day all water will be stuck in the river and no amount of dredging will move it.
3. Where will you put any soil or silt that you dredge? It is illegal to store it in floodplains (and would add to the flood problems) and you will need a waste licence to transport silt and dredged material off your land.
4. Have you considered the alternatives, namely using green spaces to help store floods away from houses?
5. Can you manage surrounding land better so that less soil and rubbish is dumped into the river?
6. If you dredge your river, will it undermine and cause more erosion of your riverbanks?
7. Does the flood water bubble up from the ground? If so, dredging is not the solution for you.
8. If you dredge your river now, will there be any water left in it in summer?
9. Sometimes, there is just too much water falling from the sky and no amount of dredging or flood defences will stop a flood of this size. In such cases, we simply have to pull together as communities and help people to clear up after the floods or help people to adapt where and how they live so that their houses are not in the middle of the flood path.

Sussex Wildlife Trust promotes a sustainable approach to flooding at a river catchment scale. Flooding is a complicated issue and there is no 'fix all' solution. We need intelligent, area based, long term solutions to current flood problems which can benefit both people and the environment.



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