

DROPS OF THE AWEN



NEWSLETTER OF THE PF SOUTH AND MID
WALES, AND BORDERS, REGION
NUMBER 16 MABON

EDITORIAL

Autumn Greetings to all,

Apologies for the lateness of this issue (this will not become a habit - I promise!), everything was going fine until the computer died with 'Drops' still on it. This meant we were pretty stuck until I got access to another computer and did more typing (there is more to it than that, as in the space of a week, the computer died, the TV blew up, and we had rain coming through the ceiling!), but suffice to say some of this has been resolved, and Drops is now sat in your hands!

Unfortunately, as some of you may be aware, this issue brings with it some very sad news; Doreen Valiente passed away at the beginning of September, at her home in Brighton. A great lady who will be missed by many. The words of some of those who have payed their respects are included on page 3.

The month of September also brought the death of Marion Zimmer Bradley, author of *The Mists of Avalon* (amongst other books), although professing not to be a pagan herself, her book(s) brought inspiration to many pagans, and were widely enjoyed. She, and her talent, will be sorely missed too.

Amidst much sadness the wheel continues to turn, and as we look back in this issue to the event of the eclipse, we can also look forward to a couple of events in the next few months. Firstly there is the P.F. National Conference, taking place on Saturday 20th November, 10am -11pm, at Fairfield Halls, Croydon. For more details see the current issue of Pagan Dawn or check out the webpage (details given at the end of Co-ordinators' Corner).

We also have a regional event taking place on Saturday ~~27 November~~ 27 November, in Swansea. A day of celebrating the Goddess and God through artwork and ritual, using meditations for inspiration. Basically a fun day out, and a good excuse for a regional get-together. For more details please send a SAE to the editorial address.

Last issue we welcomed the people of Hereford and Worcester to our region, so now let me reiterate that this is a magazine of the people, for the people - **by the people**. Please, please, please send me articles, pictures, jokes, snippets of information, poems, stories, etc etc. This region continues to grow - which is brilliant, and it would be nice to see this growth reflected in contributions to Drops from anyone and everyone! Deadline for the Yule issue is 25th November....

Finally I would like to make a few thank-yous that are probably long over due! A big thanks to Ken, who has helped me over the last few issues with typing and layout, and with the use of his computer (yes, sadly it is his computer which has broken down...), he has been a big help and support, and makes great chips!!! Thanks also go to Cwmni Creuddyn who have provided an excellent print service for us over the last four issues, (and will hopefully continue to do so), they are always friendly and helpful, have lovely smiles, and do a good job. Thanks as ever to everyone who contributes stuff to Drops, it is always appreciated - keep up the good work.

Until next time, have a great Samhain and spare a few thoughts for those who have passed over this year.

Bright Blessings,

Karen

CO-ORDINATORS' CORN...

Hail and welcome, and to yet more new members, in both South and Mid Wales, and Hereford and Worcester: yes the region is still growing!

Not so much news this time (sighs of relief all round...). One item of interest is the re-drafting of the application form for associate membership; not so much change as addition, giving would-be members more chance to state their experiences/interests - and therefore likely to help us all to help each other out, for instance organising moots or helping with transport. Of course, for existing members, any time you feel like getting in touch for any reason, or offering your services, please do - you know where we are!!!

One point that was raised on the new form - and to be honest, we would have put it forward ourselves had we not been beaten to it - was the 'contacts' section, and we quote:

"It has been suggested by some DMs/RCs that details of 'Members seeking contacts' should not be sent to those who are not prepared to have their own details passed on. This seemed acceptable as the situation has changed enormously since the format of the question on the current 'blue form' was devised. There are now so many events where people can meet fellow Pagans that we no longer need to cater for this particular sensibility."

As we intend to bring out a contacts list for these regions (which will of course be available to MEMBERS ONLY), it would make things much simpler - in fact, administratively possible - if everyone on it could receive it, and those not wishing to be on it would not. We would therefore appreciate if those who do not wish to be included could please let us know in writing by October 30th, as after that it will be available to all members, on request (with an S.A.E. please!).

On a different note (at last...) on a visit to West Kennet Long Barrow a couple of weeks ago, we found (and cleared up) the usual rubbish (our cynicism was not misplaced; we had taken along a large carrier bag expressively for this purpose). A non-pagan chap from Reading who was also visiting was under the impression, from all the soot marks and graffiti, that "unspeakable rites" had been performed here; when we explained that it was just the 'offerings' of the misguided, and that the sacredness of the site would be enhanced by removing it, he joined in with a will and even produced a carrier bag of his own, into which his wife put her tiny dog so that it wouldn't soil the tomb! A few 'posies' of flowers and corn, had actually produced seeds that were taking root in the very rearmost chamber - very symbolic, but imagine how the same roots could displace the stones if allowed to grow...or the fire/heat from the 32 night-lights could crack them on a frosty night...not to mention how ugly so many tin cups look, littered around. While we realise that none of you would be this irresponsible, we mention it to ask you all to please pass on the message, to anyone you think would benefit: PLEASE, leave nothing behind but your best wishes, and your footsteps...

By the time you read this, you will have *finally* received you 'Pagan Dawn' with details of, and booking forms for, the conference on November 20th. We very much hope to meet lots of you there - for those who are 'Conference Virgins' it's tremendous fun and well worth going! ('Cyberpagans' can visit the web-site for more details, and, nearer the event, a full programme of events) - please ask a friend with net access (as we will have to!) if you can - on:

<http://www.gippeswic.demon.co.uk/con99posterweb.htm>

(Panicking over your Membership number? It should be on the label on the envelope your PD came in, but if really stick, ring us on 07747 858086 and we can look it up for you...)

Many Blessings, and may this season bring equinox balance and a full harvest in all your endeavours!

Mike and Angie Walters

DOREEN VALIENTE - AN OBITUARY

At 6.55 am BST on Wednesday 1st September 1999, Doreen Valiente passed into the Summer Lands in her home town of Brighton. Doreen was one of the founders of modern witchcraft, shaping the face of Paganism as we know it today, as well as being one of the founders and strongest supporters of the Pagan Federation. Through her writings, many thousands across the world have been introduced to the Goddess and God, and have found the modern relevance of the Old Religion. Those who have met her found her warm, friendly and open, not to mention astoundingly humble about her status in the Pagan community. When speaking at the PF conference in 1997, she was amazed that over 1000 people packed the hall just to hear her!

"I am the Gracious Goddess, who gives the gift of joy unto the heart of man. Upon earth, I give the knowledge of the spirit eternal; and beyond death, I give peace and freedom and reunion with those who have gone before."

(From *The Charge of the Goddess* by Doreen Valiente)

She will be sadly missed by all.

A simple family service will take place in the next few days. Doreen requested that anyone wishing to send flowers should instead send a donation to the Centre for Pagan Studies of which she was Patron, and that a list of those kind enough to send money should have their names published and a book of commemorative letters should be displayed at the centre.

Please respect her wish for privacy of those she has left behind at this time. There will be a requiem service in the future organised by John Belham-Payne either at the Centre or somewhere in London. Those that would like to attend 'A Day for Doreen' should send a stamped addressed envelope to:

*The Centre for Pagan Studies,
c/o The Old Oast,
Underhill,
Maresfield,
East Sussex.
TN22 3AY
England.*

Cheques should be made payable to CFPS.
(With thanks to the Children of Artemis)

This obituary was taken from the Pagan Federation's website. Many others have expressed their sympathy, including the following piece; let us all remember her with warmth in our hearts.

There are few who had met her who did not find her unassuming, modest, and unpretentious. There were many reasons for her to be the opposite though. She was (and still is) the mother of one of the fastest growing religions of the later 20th century - Wicca. Her books have introduced thousands to the concept of the Goddess for the first time, as well as the joys of a fresh spirituality. While many who had done far less had donned titles, her humility prevented her from ever using a title such as 'Queen of the Witches'; but she more than anyone was responsible for its growth, its poetry and beauty in its ritual.

May the Great Goddess indeed welcome her with open arms. May she be re-united with those she has loved. She will be sadly missed by all who practice the Old Religion.

Janet & Stewart Farrar, and Gavin Bone.

Elegy for a Dead Witch - by Doreen Valiente

To think that you are gone, over the crest of the hills,
As the moon passed from her fullness, riding the sky,
And the White Mare took you with her.
To think that we will wait another life
To drink wine from the horns and leap the fire.
Farewell from this world, but not from the Circle.
That place is between the worlds
Shall hold return in due time. Nothing is lost.
The half of a fruit from the tree of Avalon
Shall be our reminder, among the fallen leaves
This life treads underfoot. Let the rain weep,
Waken in sunlight from the Realms of Sleep.



THE WOMB OF CERIDWEN - by Mike Howard

In West Wales there are numerous sacred places, too many to count. Some are well known, others are hidden and known only to a few. Pentre Ifan is one of the better known. It is a cromlech or ruined burial chamber situated between Cardigan and Newport a few miles off the main A487 road. It is situated in an exposed position overlooking the Nevern valley and in the shadow of the Preseli hills. On a clear day the sea can be seen in the distance. The earth mound which originally covered the stones of the chambered tomb have long gone. However what is left is still quite impressive; a huge capstone poised on several standing stones which originally would have been the entrance to the mound.

The first recorded account of the site dates back to the 17th century and was written by a landowner. Another contemporary account mentions a stone altar in the middle of a ring of standing stones. No trace of this can be found today, although the nearby fields are scattered with stones. A few yards from the cromlech is a fallen standing stone and near it archaeologists discovered a 'ritual pit'. This had either been used in funeral rites or to cremate sacrificial offerings. The pit is a psychic 'hot spot' and on several visits to the site over the years I have received vivid impressions of the Old People who used it in ancient times.

According to the notice displayed on site, Pentre Ifan was erected at the cross-over points between the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. Local folklore claims that in the Celtic period the Nevern valley was the site of a Druidic college. Pentre Ifan is popularly called the 'womb of Ceridwen' and it is alleged that druid initiations were held there in the distant past. The evocative name for the site suggests these initiations may have contained elements of a death and rebirth nature.

During the Iron Age the area was an important tribal centre in Dyfed. At the nearby hill-fort of Castell Henllys a chieftain of the local Demetae tribe had a large settlement with up to 150 relatives and retainers. From this fortress village he ruled over an area of about thirty square miles. High quality woollen clothes and jewellery were imported from as far away as Somerset by the chief. It is obvious that such a large and wealthy settlement would have had several druids and may have attracted novices from far away.

Many legends and myths surround Pentre Ifan, one famous one is the story of a ghost and buried treasure. In the 19th century a local farmer suddenly became very wealthy and when he died he left £50,000 in his will. This was a considerable fortune in those days. Rumours circulated that his wealth had come from a gold statue of a pagan god he had dug up at Pentre Ifan after following the instructions of a ghost.

Traditionally, Pentre Ifan has been the home of the Tylwyth Teg or the Welsh Faeries. Two hundred years ago the locals regularly reported seeing them dance around the stones in the form of small figures wearing red jackets and red pointed hats. I try to visit Pentre Ifan each autumn around Hallows to acknowledge the Ancient Dead and I can report that the faery folk are still very active there.

On one visit a couple of years ago I also went in search of a sacred spring which was supposed to be in the vicinity of Castell Henllys. I was having problems finding it and asked for directions at a cottage near a ford owned by an old Welsh man who still carves the traditional Welsh love spoons. At first he denied all knowledge of the spring. Then in conversation I told him I had just been up to Pentre Ifan. His eyes lit up. "Did you see any Old People up there?" he asked. "No," I replied, "but I did see some Good People (faeries)". At this response he laughed and immediately directed me to the spring, which was in fact only a few yards from his cottage hidden in the hedgerow.

Pentre Ifan still has an aura of myth and mystery for the locals and is regarded by them as a special place. Some years ago there was an HTV programme in the form of a video diary about a land dispute involving a farmer in Newport and the Preseli council. This had gone on for some time with increasingly bitter exchanges of letters and telephone calls. Finally the planning officer asked for a face-to-face meeting. The farmer agreed, providing it was on neutral ground. The place he chose was - Pentre Ifan. So it seems its sacred nature still lives on even in these sceptical and secular times.


Mike Howard is the editor of the Cauldron magazine and the author of seventeen books on runes, Earth mysteries, and ritual magick.



GODDESS AND GREEN MAN CREATIVITY EVENT!

SATURDAY 27 NOVEMBER
SWANSEA UNIVERSITY

Inspired by the Goddess 2000 project (see previous issue of Drops), this regional event aims to bring out the creative urges in all of you! A day of 'art' and meditations, with a spiral dance and closing ritual. No artistic talent required. For full details please send a SAE to K. Pierce, Sunny Hill, Allt-y-blaca, Llanybydder, Ceredigion, SA40 9SU. Support your region, and come and have some fun!



ECLIPSE - around the region...

So how was it for you...

The 11th August saw the much hyped event of the total eclipse take place in Britain. Although totality only took place in the south of England, in Cornwall and Devon, much of the country was witness to a good proportion of the sun being covered by the moon. Here are a few accounts of the eclipse from personal perspectives by members of the region. Personally I didn't make it to Cornwall but ended up experiencing the event on the Gower (S. Wales) at Arthur's Stone. There was an air of excitement about the place, and a fair few people had chosen that spot to gather, most I would expect were not consciously pagan, so it is interesting that they picked a place that we would regard as 'sacred' in some sense. The media were out in force too, and much to be expected they focused in on a bunch of hippy looking types carrying musical instruments. For those of you who caught the local news in the evening, I was there muttering on about Chinese mythology (how they believed that an eclipse was a dragon eating the sun, and that they banged drums to frighten away the beast), and Ken was featured playing a song on his guitar - ah fame at last! Unfortunately it was fairly cloudy that morning, as was perhaps to be expected, and as the fateful hour, of 11 minutes past 11, ticked by we were still all staring at a cloudy sky. It dimmed to a certain extent, much as if there was going to be a storm, and it was indeed colder, but nothing too dramatic. It was a short while later before the clouds parted, and with a shout of joy, we were able to finally see the sun, covered largely by the moon (with our eclipse viewers of course!). The atmosphere at the stone was friendly, if the event a little uneventful, and little litter was left behind. All in all I had a fun day out, but not perhaps one I'll be regaling the future grand children with.

Karen

'We were originally planning to go down to Cefn Bryn with some friends but after hearing reports about 10,000 people supposedly heading for Rhosili, and seeing the depressing amount of cloud decided not to go. I tried a bit of weather-working about half past 10 and managed to get the clouds to thin a bit but not much. But then just before 11 the clouds started to break up and we had some genuine sunlight and just enough bands of cloud to make it possible to look up and see the thing happening at maximum. I was surprised that it didn't get darker than it did - the light changed dramatically and sucked all the colour out of everything but I expected it to be more like very late evening than it was. And then it was all over and the day just got brighter and brighter again - sun and moon had had their brief moment of togetherness and both went away refreshed. Don't know whether I'd agree with that West Country HPs who was quoted as saying it was as important a spiritual event for us as the millennium is for Christians tho' but what do you think?' Ffred

'I found it so moving, the skin was tingling all across my back and down my arms - this is usually what happens if I am picking up earth energy or near a special tree, so it seemed most appropriate to have that same feeling. My partner, Andy, was on the twelfth floor of the AA building in Cardiff where he works and they had the most fantastic view of the almost total eclipse through the special glasses. It was a bit more cloudy here in Maesygartha but just after the most total bit the clouds cleared and we used pin hole cards to look at the shadow it made. We did keep looking briefly with sunglasses on - I wasn't very well prepared because it seemed we would not get good weather that day.' Lizzie



THE ECLIPSE - A PAGAN PERSPECTIVE

I can remember this special event being discussed at one of our weekly Crane's Egg meetings last year but I did not know how I would celebrate it until a few weeks before. Everyone seemed to be doing something big - someone was cycling all the way to Cornwall from Cardiff and there were workshops and camping trips galore to choose from.

As I was unable to get to Cornwall on the day and did not fancy encountering all the crowds anyway, I decided to go to a local sacred site - Tinkinswood Burial Chamber situated about five miles north of Barry. I have often visited there with my horse, Storm, as it is a nice ride away from the farm that she lives on, so I had experienced some communication with the guardians of the site. But it was not enough simply to turn up on the day, see the Eclipse and go again, I wanted to do something special.

The night before the Eclipse found me and my partner Phil tramping through the fields in the pitch blackness towards the stones. The silhouettes of the trees all around us shaped themselves into horses heads and old women and I was acutely aware of every sound in the silence and anxious not to disturb anything.

Our flat in the middle of Cardiff seemed like another world as we set up a space to camp out under the stars. I lit a candle at the entrance to the chamber and tried to attune my senses to the noises and rhythms of the night and the stones.

Some people have said they feel Tinkinswood has a sad or dark energy and I attribute this to all the disturbances it has suffered over the six thousand years since its construction. Not least if these was the excavation in 1914 and the installation later of electricity cables running directly overhead. But when I had adjusted to the new environment I felt exhilarated yet quite peaceful.

As the night progressed and I lay staring silently into the great mouth of the cavern, the concept of the chamber as a gateway to other realms kept occurring to me. In my half sleep state I saw the shadows move to reveal a passageway leading from the chamber into the earth and the Underworld.

We awoke stiff and groggy to a grey dewy dawn. Everything seemed different in the cold light of day. When I looked towards the Chamber I was amazed to see that the candle I had lit the night before was still burning as if it had kept a vigil over us through the night. We watched it burn down and then it was time to go and collect Storm.

As I am a devotee of the goddess Rhiannon who sometimes takes the shape of the white mare, Storm was an integral part of my magickal work for the Eclipse. I wanted to direct the energy into strengthening the power of the Goddess across the land to help in the rebalancing of the male/female polarity.

As the time approached, so did more people. Tinkinswood was no longer our own sacred place, anyone could come and share its magick, but I felt that by staying overnight we had been given a glimpse of the true essence of the place, of something beyond the collection of weathered stones. I held this secret warmly inside me as I watched the new arrivals clambering over the capstone.

A shamanic group set up a circle and the leader, Coral, whispered to me that a white horse was one of her totem animals so she was not surprised to see Storm there. The drumming filled the air, primitive and alive, and the sound, the stones, and the horse all became one for me as I sat holding my consecrated herbal charm and visualising the power of the Goddess spreading like roots and blossoming all over the land. I began to chant softly as the skies grew darker - words that began as Rhiannon and gradually formed themselves into 'Mother may your power grow.'

Phil said afterwards that the light quality was eerie - like the faery light in New Age paintings. For one moment everyone was caught up in the wonder of it all and there was silence like an in-drawn breath. As the light returned Storm let out a clarion whinney towards the south east heralding the 'new dawn' and somehow released the energy of the moment. People began to stir as if awakening from a long sleep, and the sun shone brighter dispersing the greyness of before. There was a sense of joy as everyone prepared to leave, bonded in their experience.

I found a moment to bury my herbal charm before I was swept along in the return to normality and the mundane - packing up and getting Storm safely back to the farm. But inside I felt that on a deep level something had shifted and changed and the results would benefit us all.

Sarah Lee

WELSH HARVEST CUSTOMS

"When they set out, what Manawydan did was to take a load of wheat with him...he began to till the soil and then he sowed a croft, and a second and a third. Lo, the wheat sprang up the best in the world, and the three crofts equally successful in growth, so that no-one had ever seen wheat finer than that. He passed the seasons of the year. Harvest time came, and he went to look at one of his crofts and it was ripe. 'I'll want to harvest that tomorrow,' he said." (*Manawydon son of Llyr* trans. Patrick K. Ford)

Harvest is a matter of life and death. City-dwellers and country-dwellers alike are just as dependant on the fruits of the Land as for any ancient Celt, although in the last century most people in the developed world have ceased to remember this - a dangerous naivete. An intellectual understanding of our utter dependence on the earth is one of the most significant realisations needed for us to 'save the Earth' and ensure the survival of our species. The customs of traditional agricultural communities all over the world - the Celts, for example - can help lead us to the emotional and spiritual acknowledgement of that dependence, without which the intellectual understanding withers in inaction. In Welsh, the importance of the harvest is reflected by the seasonal and month names. In Welsh, the month of September is simply *y mis Medi*, 'the harvest-month'. The name of autumn, *Cynhaef*, tells us what season it is - *cyn+gaeaf*. 'before-winter' - but has also come to mean the chief activity occupying the before-winter season: harvest.

The so-called agricultural revolution, however, has wiped out many of the old harvest customs and practices; the principle of *cymortha*, mutual help, a necessary part of agriculture in pre-industrial, peasant communities, has been made largely obsolete. The regional specialisation forced by modern agribusiness concerns and government agricultural policy have led to increasing regional specialisation and the predominance of livestock farming in Wales today; less than four percent of Welsh agricultural land is today used for arable cropping. But not so very long ago, a fifth of Wales' agricultural land was in arable crops. The island of Anglesey, *Ynys Môn*, the long-ago stronghold of the Druids, is still known as *Mam Cymru*, 'Mother of Wales', since it was once the breadbasket of the nation.

The opening of the harvest in the Celtic year is at the beginning of August, but the celebration of this time is not as marked in Welsh folk custom as in other Celtic regions. John Rhys told us in the nineteenth century that *Gwyl Awst* ("Feast of August"): "is now a day for fairs in certain parts of North Wales, and it is remembered in central and southern Cardiganshire as one on which the shepherds used till comparatively lately, to have a picnic on the hills...But in Brecknockshire, the first of August seems to have given way, some time before Catholicism had lost its sway in Wales, to the first holiday or feast in August, that is to say, the first Sunday in the month. For then crowds of people early in the morning made their way up the mountains called the Beacons, both from the

side of Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan: their destination used to be the neighbourhood of the little Van Lake (*Llyn y Fan Fach*), out of whose waters they expected to see the Lady of the Lake make her momentary appearance."

The Lady of *Llyn y Fan Fach* is a well-known legend of Wales; the Lady was an Otherworldly woman of the Lake who married a mortal man, bringing with her a dowry of Otherworldly cattle. She eventually returned to the Otherworld after her husband had struck her three causeless blows, but nevertheless taught her healing skills to her sons, who became a line of famous physicians, the Physicians of Myddfai, the last of whom died in the nineteenth century.

We can see in this tradition two of the basic characteristics of *Lughnasadh* customs (as discerned by Máire MacNeill in her famous study, *The Festival of Lughnasa*) that of climbing to a height (associated with both the god *Lugus/Lieu/Lugh* and his Christian successor, St. Michael) and of the presence of water - for the sun's heat is becoming dangerously strong and must begin to be assuaged for the harvest to survive. Another feature of the opening of the harvest season has often been the presentation or 'harvest' of the bardic arts of the past year's efforts. It is pleasing and delightful, then, that the National Eisteddfod - the musical and literary festival in Welsh-speaking Wales today - is always held in the first week of August, and that a feature of the pageantry has been the presentation of the *Corn Hirias*, a harvest horn, to the Archdruid by a local matron. However, the central harvest custom in Welsh Wales was associated with the end of the grain harvest: the end-of-harvest sheaf - a custom found all over Europe in various forms. The sheaf is often referred to as a woman - a hag or maiden - or as some type of animal. In Wales, the sheaf was most usually known as *y gwraich*, 'the hag', or as *y gaseg ben fedd*, 'the end-of-harvest mare'. Drawing from several accounts the following is a basic outline of custom as it was practised in Wales. As grain harvesting drew to its close, a last tuft or tussock of grain was left standing, perhaps a foot square, and as the reapers closed in on the last area, there was a 'special significance' - possibly once divinatory - to the last rabbit leaving the unharvested area. When all had been cut but that last tussock, one of the reapers often would braid it into a plait, as it stood. The harvesters would then, taking turns, throw their sickles or reaping hooks at the sheaf from a distance until someone successfully cut it down - a process that might take some time. In some areas, each reaper would attempt a throw, with the least skilful going first, and if no-one was successful, the head reaper would then cut it by hand. There was a certain amount of attention paid to ensure that chance would play a main part in the process, not skill. In any case, the reaper who eventually cut the sheaf would then cry out a rhyme, such as:

Bore y codais hi
Hwyrach y difynais hi
Mi ges i, mi ges i!
(Early I got on her track.

Late I followed her;
I got her, I got her!)
and the other reapers would ask,

Beth gest ti? (What did you have?),
and depending on the name used for the last sheaf in the area, the reaper would answer a phrase

such as,
Gwrach, gwraich, gwraich (a hag, a hag, a hag!) or,
Pen medi bach mi ces! (I got a little harvest-mare!).

Having cut the last sheaf, the sheaf then had to be brought to the house - an event which the women of the household, aided by other harvest helpers, attempted to prevent. Armed with buckets and pans of water, they blocked the way of the reapers into the house, one of whom was the successful reaper with the tuft hidden under his clothes (attempting to partly strip the reapers in order to find who was the tuft-carrier was an option). The object was to wet the tuft with water - an



act with some sexual symbolism - and if the successful reaper managed to bear the tuft into the house dry, he might in some areas have as much beer as he wanted and a place of honour at the table - whereas failure to do so earned him no beer and joking derision. The wetting of the tuft gave the name to the custom as a whole in some areas, Boddi'r Cynhaeaf, 'Drowning the Harvest' (though presumably this could also refer to the quantity of beer downed at the harvest feast!). The disposal of the tuft was always a matter of importance as well, and reflected the essential ambiguity of the relation of humanity to the Land. The tuft in some cases was kept in the house until the next year, and its seed was mixed with the new seed 'to teach it to grow'; in other areas or in the case of a bad harvest, it was treated as a somewhat malevolent token, and disposed of in the cleft of a tree or other liminal place (where its power would be neutralised), or sent as a taunt to any farms that were late with their harvest. Although many explanations have been mooted for the end-of-the-harvest sheaf custom, it seems clear that in some way the energy of the Land goddess, perceived in whatever way, is concentrated into the Last Sheaf and carries her ambiguous power.

Harvest parties were regular accompaniments to the work of harvest. In 1760, Lewis Morris recounted the plans for the forthcoming mid-August rye-reaping on his farm in Anglesey, which was attended by about 45 harvesters: "A breakfast of bread and cheese, buttermilk and whey. A dinner of llymru ('flummery' sweet porridge or pudding) and milk and bread and butter. But the supper, which is the great meal, is made up of the contents of a brewing pan of beef and mutton, with arage and potatoes and pottage, and pudding of wheaten flour, about 20 gallons of light ale, and over 20 gallons of beer. The red wooden fiddle must have strings, and a fiddler must play for them when they have eaten their belly-fuls, going into the barn and dancing on the wooden floor until they drip with sweat, there being a big can with beer at hand for them, and a piece of tobacco for each one."

In another district. The end of the harvest feast was called Cwrw Cyffeddach, 'beer carousel', and featured very strong beer and the playing of the harp and singing of penillion stanzas to the harp. D.G. Williams, writing on Carmarthenshire folk-customs in 1895, described how farmers in that area arranged to harvest as a group each one's wheat in turn, and the special suppers that followed these harvests included a dish called whipod, which included bread, rice, treacle and raisons. The party again included dancing and games, including a game known as Rhibo (it has been suggested that this is the remains of a fertility rite). Six men stood facing each other in two rows of three, each joining hands with the man opposite. Then a man and a woman lay down on the joined arms, and the couple was thrown up in the air and caught repeatedly.

A grain based recipe seems the appropriate way to end a harvest article; the following is a quick-bread version of the Welsh bara brith, or 'speckled bread':

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees Fahrenheit.

Soak 4 tablespoons of marmalade and 1 cup of raisins in 1 cup of strong black tea for an hour.

Add to the above mixture, 1 cup brown sugar, 3 cups self-raising flour (or 3 cups plain flour, a teaspoon of salt, and 2 teaspoons of baking powder), 2 eggs, cinnamon and nutmeg to taste.

Mix well and pour into a greased baking tin.

Bake for 1 1/2 hours, or until a knife inserted in the centre comes out clean.

Meredith Robbins

SNIPPET - Spotted in the TSP book club magazine recently, a review of *Practical Paganism* by A. Kemp and J. M. Sertori: "These questions and many more are answered in this fascinating survey of a religion which, although it draws on ancient belief systems such as those developed by the Celtic, Nordic, Druidic and Wiccan peoples, has remained relevant to the modern world."

Hmmmmmm.....

TRANSPORT PROBLEMS?

Would you like to attend more P.F. events in this area but are unable due to lack of transport? Maybe I can help, I'm the new transport Organiser for the mid-west region. The idea is to allow a maximum amount of people to attend events in the minimum amount of cars. I have a list of people with car space who are willing to give lifts.

If you need a lift, just give me a call on - 01547 510343

Obviously I cannot guarantee a lift but I will try my best to match you up with a driver with space.

I also need more people with car space, so if you are attending an event and are able to offer someone a lift, please contact me on the above number.

Iain Steele

BOOK LIST

(some new titles available)

(Good quality) 2nd hand books for sale - profits go towards funding Drops.

First come, first served, please order by post.

Cheques/P.O.'s made payable to 'A. Robbins', add £1.00 P&P.

Flat 1, 36 Broad Street, Ross-on-Wye, HR9 7DY.

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ROUND THE REGION

It is always encouraging to find PF members actively involved with their spirituality, and willing to share with others. This space is for you! If you would like us to publish details/dates/venues of your group/society/moot/workshops etc. which you think would interest other members then don't hesitate to contact us for inclusion in Drops!

ABERYSTWYTH: Monthly Pub Moots. FFI email: aberpagan@psynet.net

BARRY: Contact Chris and Maria for details of open rituals and workshops - (01446) 730221. Email: Stotemple@aol.com

CARDIFF: Contact David for details of regular meetings and moots - (01222) 529805.

CARMARTHEN: Sweat Lodges, held monthly in a secluded grove by woodland stream. All welcome, no charge. Enquiries to - J. Adams, c/o The Farmhouse, Marchogywyn Fawr, Llanfynydd, Carmarthen, SA32 7UQ

LAMPETER: University Pagan Society, regular meetings, talks and workshops during term time. All welcome. For further details please contact K. Pierce c/o Pagan Society, Student's Union, Lampeter University, Lampeter, Ceredigion. email: pn027@Lampeter.ac.uk

POWYS: Discussion group/house moot hosted by Iain Steele in Felindre, Knighton, Powys. For details please ring (01547) 510343.

SWANSEA: Pagan social meetings, contact Ffred for details - (01792) 426506 email: manawydan@dn.nfl.com

New - Pagan Society at Swansea University, for further information please email: piglet@pagans.org (and look out for posters round campus!)

DROPS OF THE AWEN is your newsletter, here to reflect your views, voice your opinions, and answer your questions - please use it!! To contribute please send a neatly written proof, typed script, or disc (Word for Windows version 6). We also need illustrations, stories, poems, helpful hints, news etc.....

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor, or the Pagan Federation as a whole. The Editor has the right to 'edit' all submissions as she sees fit.

Editorial Address: Sunny Hill, Allt-y-blaca, Llanybydder, Ceredigion, SA40 9SU. email: Drops@greenman.swinternet.co.uk

Regional Co-ordinators: Mike and Angie Walters, Flat 1, 36 Broad Street, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire, HR9 7DY (please do not put anything too "interesting" on the envelope...). Tel: (07747) 858086



Halloween

"May all the Witches that here are seen
Bring you good luck on Halloween."

