

DROPS OF THE AWEN



NEWSLETTER OF THE PAGAN FEDERATION
SOUTH AND MID WALES,
HEREFORD AND WORCESTER REGION

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EDITORIAL

Merry Yuletide Greetings - fingers crossed this issue will manage to wend its way through the seasonal post reasonably on time. We have several interesting articles for you to read, and some humorous snippets too. I've included a couple of 'pagan cards' that were forwarded to me by Blanche - actually for the last Yule issue (but I lost them!) so only a year late (is that anything to do with Pagan Standard Time??!!). Of the four articles we are featuring this time, one is an account of a Handfasting that two of our members celebrated in the summer and have kindly shared with us. Another article, by Simon Barrett, may seem vaguely familiar to you - this is because another version of it appeared in the Lammass issue of Pagan Dawn. Simon wished to share this version with 'Drops' because many people in the region were interviewed by him for his research. The other two articles manage to share a theme (although written entirely separately), and look at issues surrounding wicca, witchcraft and Celtic traditions. If any of these pieces manage to rouse you please do write in with your responses. We welcome articles and letters, and there would be a letters page, but for the fact 'Drops' very rarely gets any letters!!! So during this mellow season when you are feeling stuffed with food and drink, get out your pen and write to us! Meanwhile, watch out for the 'Millennium', how much impact it will really have remains to be seen. The government, the utilities, the banks, and the world at large seem ready to reassure us that they have everything under control and that the Millennium Bug won't bite. That's as may be, but with Rusala currently too happy to remind us that they have nuclear weapons, and local government/councils preparing large halls as emergency morgues in cities, the beginning of the year 2000 may just be as unstable and volatile as all the doom mongers have been warning us - hopefully the worse anyone will wake up to on 1st January will be a bad hangover, and the memory of Cliff Richard still buzzing round their head.

Wherever you are, have a good Yule/Seasonal celebration(s),
Brightest of Blessings

Karen



CO-ORDINATORS CORN...

As we write, Yule is yet to come, so a very Merry Yule to all! However, with Christmas post, 'seasonal' delays etc., it may be that you actually receive 'Drops' after the 22nd (Yule according to the ephemeris this year) so belated best wishes from Mike and me...

As for the 'Millennium', well if you are that fussed about the carpenter's son, contemporary historians (Josephus, etc) have him crucified around 29-31 CE, which would make his D.O.B. 4-2 BCE; and astrology shows the Venus-Jupiter etc. conjunction (which would have made a star bright enough to follow) at 6 BCE (- in August)...So take your pick! However, even though two of the world's three monotheistic religions don't agree, there will be a fair few (nominal) Christians celebrating like made, and this is bound to set up a fair few 'vibes' - so enjoy! The P.F. conference, which we managed to get to, went very well. Although there were not as many folk as last year, the atmosphere was great, the workshops fantastic and the closing ritual very well thought out, involving a Northern Tradition Ceremony and representatives from each District carrying lanterns towards the central area, which was quite moving. Many thanks to Pete Jennings for arranging this, and, in fact, the whole thing!

Unlike last year, the Council meeting did not follow on the Sunday morning (a good idea, as even those who don't have to travel as far as we did would still be exhausted), but will be held in a few weeks' time, so hopefully more news then.

Also, news of the PF Devon and Cornwall Spring Conference - Saturday March 11th at Wharnecliffe Arms Hotel, Tintagel (FFI: PF Devon & Cornwall, P.O. Box 314, Exeter, Devon, EX4 6YR) A long way, we know, but we're all invited...

Forewarning for Earth Healing Day - full details will be in next 'Drops', but provisionally 16/17th or 23/24th April 2000, again at the 'Dingle'. Any feedback, or further details required, Mike and I are still on 07747 858086; if ringing our mobile is too expensive, just leave name, number and which evening is best for you and WE will phone YOU!

Finally congratulations to new members Paddy & Carolyn who Handfasted in September; may they dance with the Lady and Lord down all the ways of happiness...

And may the turning of the wheel through into the New Light bring us all new hope and joy.

Mike and Angie

WELSH PAGANS (E)MAILING LIST

A list for - pagans of any path who live in Wales or the Marches - pagans of Welsh origin who live outside Wales - followers of Welsh pagan paths - anyone interested in Welsh folklore or Celtic spirituality.

Rhestri I - baganiaid o unrhyw lwybr sy'n byw yng Nghymru a'r Gororau - paganiaid Cymreig sy'n byw tu mas I Gymru - dilynwy'r llwybrau pagan Cymreig - unrhywun a diddordeb mewn traddodau gwerin Cymru neu ysbrydoliaeth Geltaidd.

You can join this list by going to the following web page:
http://www.onelist.com/subscribe.cgi/Welsh_Pagans

Pagan Sacred Places: Stories from Wales
by Simon Barrett

Within Paganism all the land is considered sacred. Yet many Pagans express affection for particular places that have more significance for them. These are often ancient sites: stone circles, megalithic tombs and holy wells surrounded by myths, legends and folktales. Some sites like Avebury, the Roll Right Stones, Stonehenge and more recently the Cornish Sacred Sites are of collective importance that groups want to protect. Other places are personally sacred to individuals. They are not necessarily marked on maps, written in books on 'mysterious Wales' or can even be physically visited, but which individuals find meaningful.

Personal sacred places are the focus for my doctoral research. It explores the meaning and roles people give to such sites. In interviews with Pagans in Wales, individuals shared their personally sacred places. Perhaps not surprising they all identified very different places. These mostly include ancient sites (stone circles, places of burial and holy wells), but also a valley and places accessed by meditation. This article describes two places in detail, both of which are illustrative of the richness of such places. It then draws upon academic ideas to discuss two facets of Pagans' personal sacred places: ideas about how sacred space forms and its role as a centre.

Case Study 1: Arlais

For Maggie, to describe her as following any Pagan path is a misunderstanding. Her individual interaction with the divine and growing understanding of her own divinity is Maggie's personal path. She is the only one who can walk it. Arlais, a place on the inner planes and depths of her consciousness is a place where Maggie is seeking a stronger sense of divinity. It is a temple and a pre-established mental picture purposely designed for a series of pathworking meditations.

In the pathworking meditations the focus at Arlais had been a temple garden. This is a public place designed for everyone to use. What is happening elsewhere in the temple is about Maggie and the divine. Recently when Maggie has thought about Arlais she has found herself in a bare, small workroom at the front of the temple. These are the workrooms of the temple where people come for help and advice from the Priestesses and Priests. The temple has no religious persuasion, but for Maggie neither is it relevant to those who ask for help that she is a Priestess. What she does and how she reacts is important. Maggie keeps her religion private and to herself.

Whilst seated in the bare, small work room waiting, wondering why she was there, Maggie began to excavate a hole in the back wall. This excavated; she climbed through to some tunnels at the back. There is no one in the tunnels except for some large snakes. These are to her deeply symbolic of divinity within the earth. Travelling along these tunnels Maggie has reached a large cavern with a waterfall dropping vertically down. The water flows softly and Maggie can sit immersed in it, benefiting from its association with energy. There she will rest because of exhaustion and recoup energy. The last few years have been strenuous for Maggie and her husband. They have been involved in an ambitious project as well as having very energetic children. The children have just started to go to school and the project is nearly accomplished. Maggie now has the opportunity to return to spiritual matters, to celebrate the festivals and work with herself.

Case Study 2: Ffynnon y De

When Dafydd and I visited his spiritual place dappled sunlight from an early summer sunset, shone through the trees. Dafydd's Celtic form of Paganism is important in his self-identity as a Welsh-speaking Pagan living in Wales and his own experiences of childhood. Ffynnon y De is part of a mountain that had been his childhood milltir sgwar or square mile. It is one of the places where, as a child, he had a numinous experience. An experience he now identifies as an otherworldliness.

Ffynnon y De is a holy well recorded in the past histories of the area. Traditions associated with the well also remain in living memory, although it appears to have only been used by the older members. For one old man the well water made excellent beer. Such places were, Dafydd explained, places of boundaries within the Celtic consciousness. Places where it is easier to cross over to the Otherworld. Ffynnon y De is no exception, but Dafydd chooses to do this at home through visualisation. In these visualisations he meets the guardian of the well, a white lady who is described in an old poem. She is peaceful, light, and in Dafydd's visualisation a spirit of spray and mist.

The well and the guardian both speak to Dafydd with a message that changes with the waters' flow. In the summer when the water is trickling its message is of stillness. He should simply enjoy what she is offering and forget about the stresses of everyday life. The message is important in calming Dafydd. He will wash his crystal that he keeps in his pocket. For Dafydd the water washes away the negativity that the crystal accumulates from his mundane life. After visiting the well Dafydd also takes a sense of the otherworldliness away with him, back to his more mundane life.

The well, unidentified on maps or by road-signs, trickles through a brick facade and drops into a bowl of much older origin. Debris often slips into the well, off the surrounding slopes or is thrown in by children. Dafydd regularly visits the well and cleans it. This for him is doing Paganism, not just talking Paganism. The discreet area of the well is manageable for one person and is also symbolic of helping the environment. To Dafydd it is an act of devotion through which he has formed an attachment to the well. He will leave gifts depending on the season such as leaves or berries. He also receives gifts. When we had finished the interview I went back to the car to give Dafydd time alone with Ffynnon y De. I too received a gift; Dafydd presented me with a stone on behalf of Ffynnon y De that I now use in my ritual celebrations.

All the interviews, which these two case studies illustrate, richly describe the religious experience and meaning of sacred place. This resonates with academic studies upon the nature of religious experience. In particular Eliade's work is useful in understanding the role of sacred space and sacred time for religious people. For religious people, he notes, how the formation of sacred space interrupts the homogeneity of profane space. It creates a space a part from the everyday (in peoples' perception and usually distant from places of home and work). This is not unfamiliar to many Pagans for whom sacred space is usually 'between the worlds'. Such space is transforming. Maggie transforms when she more consciously adopts the role of priestess upon entering her inner world. She is more aware of certain obligations and responsibilities to others this role of authority contains. Generally other participants express this as being more aware of deeper relationships with the world. This has an eco-politics of understanding how people interconnect and affect the world. Ordinary objects also take on deeply symbolic meaning. Again, these affirm relationships.

Ffynnon y De's gift enters me into a relationship with that place, which for Dafydd extends to the whole land. Yet it illustrates to me my dependency upon the world. I can only give back what the world first gives me.

Sacred places act as centres of peoples' lives. The notion of a centre is evocative of many positive cultural associations. It implies a sense of stability. Despite the ever-changing world the sacred place will be there. It connotes a momentary sense of peace ('the eye of the storm') against the turbulent business of everyday lives. Indeed the momentary sense of peace may be an opportunity to review what is happening. To find one's centre is to find a sense of calm, but also to draw upon inner strength. Ffynnon y De acts in this way for Dafydd. He benefits from the well's message of stillness. A sense of calm he is able to take back with him by washing a crystal in the well's water. A centre is therefore a haven and empowers people to deal with life. It also enables people to orientate themselves in the world. Sacred space embodies cosmologies that position the divine and people in the world. This is one reading of Maggie's experience. Her inner world is a cosmology about herself and the divine. By positioning herself as part of the divine she desires to direct that into her everyday world.

The sacredness of the land expressing itself at certain places is important within people's lives. Some places may be of collective importance, but many are personally sacred to a few. This article focuses upon Pagans' personal sacred sites in Wales. Describing in detail two case studies it develops themes of transformation, recouping and orientation. Obviously these themes are not exhaustive. Perhaps you, the reader, can think about your own sacred place: its meaning and role in your life.

Acknowledgements

I would just like to thank all those people who took part in this piece of doctoral research and made it possible. The Pagan Federation representatives for distributing questionnaires and for those people who took the time to complete them and agreed to be interviewed. I am also grateful for the comments received on an earlier draft of this article from the members of the Pagan Federation with whom I spoke. Finally to Dave and his inspiring talk about astrology: water takes the route of least resistance.

The author is currently studying for a PhD. at the Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, Llandinam Building, University of Wales, ABERYSTWYTH. He would be happy to receive any comments or suggestions about this article. Please write to 563a Chiswick High Road, LONDON, W4 3AY.

Bibliography

Marion Bowman, 1998 "Belief, Legend and Perceptions of the Sacred in Contemporary Bath" in Folklore, Vol. 109, p28. For PD readers you may like to refer to Philip Shallcrass' article "Seeking Spirit Signs and Songs" in Pagan Dawn Vol. 124, Lammas 1997, pp22-24.
David Bellamy, 1997, "Foreword" in Martin and Nigel Palmer Sacred Britain: A Guide to the Sacred Sites and Pilgrim Routes of England, Scotland and Wales, Judy Piatkus, London, pp12-13. In his foreword David Bellamy encapsulates this personal sense of sacred place. The rest of the book may be of further interest and it is beginning to enter the 'bargain bookshop market'.

Mircea Eliade, 1957, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, translated William Trask, Harcourt Brace Javanovich, London, especially pp8-17. His work extends Rudolf Otto (1959) classic work The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex. Otto focus is however upon the nature of religious experience. In this article I can only simplify Eliade's work which does injustice to his rich and complex ideas. Further Eliade concentrates upon cultures, yet much of what he writes can be applied to personal senses of the sacred. In its application to the personal my reading of his text is perhaps 'novel'.

A Pagan 'Carol' courtesy of Blanche:

DANCING IN A WICCAN WONDERLAND

Pagans sing, are you listenin',
Altar's set, candles glistenin',
It's a Magickal night, we're having tonight,
Dancing in a Wiccan Wonderland.

Blades held high, censer smoking,
Ancient powers, we're invoking,
Through elements five, we celebrate life,
Dancing in a Wiccan Wonderland.

In a Circle we can light a Yule Fire,
And await the rising of the Sun,
It's the Great Wheel turning for the new year,
Loaded with abundance and great fun!

Queen of heaven is in Her place,
Triple Goddess, now the Crone Face,
Above and Below, She's the goddess we know,
Dancing in a Wiccan Wonderland.

Now the God is beside Her,
Forest Lord share our fire,
Above and Below, he's the Horned One we know,
Dancing in a Wiccan Wonderland.

In a Circle we can light a Yule Fire,
And await the rising of the Sun,
It's the Great Wheel turning for the new year,
Loaded with abundance and great fun!

Later on, by the fire,
Cone of Power, gettin' higher,
It's a Magickal Night, we're having tonight,
Dancing in a Wiccan Wonderland.

A 'LAMMAS' HANDFASTING

What follows is a brief resume of our Handfasting which took place on September 25th 1999 at Whittington Village Hall at 4pm.

When I announced to my family and friends that Carolyn and I were to celebrate our marriage according to the "Old Ways" and have a Handfasting some thought it was a good idea, others asked for details before they could decide whether or not to attend (they had visions of black cockerels, blood letting and naked orgies) and some, mainly family, refused point blank to have anything to do with it. On a lighter note Carolyn's mother, Pam, didn't know what to do so said she'd rather not attend but instead would stay at home to prepare sandwiches etc for the buffet in the evening (Carolyn's dad was videoing the whole day and had no problem with any of it). This was fine until Pam decided she didn't really have enough room at home and besides she needed to get all the bits and pieces up to the hall so it would be better if she prepared everything at the hall but behind closed shutters. In the event she was making sandwiches with the kitchen shutters open and didn't miss a thing - Bless her.

6.30am I got up and ready and started cooking breakfast for the 7 guests who were staying at our house - Carolyn stayed with friends. Our photographer arrived at 8.30am and the day began in earnest.

As Handfastings are not yet recognised in law we had to have a registry office "service" - this we did at 11am which was attended by 40 odd friends and my mother, 4 sisters and brother. This was short and sweet along the lines of "Will you? - Yes. Will you? - Yes. OK - you're married" (Not quite that short but near enough - the Handfasting was the important bit.). We all then went to a local pub for a bite to eat and a couple of beers. Only mum and 1 sister stayed for the meal etc - the other family members went off around town after toasting the "Bride & Groom". Their religious beliefs/fears could not be allayed.

After the pub we (all those who wanted to) moved on to the village hall for the Handfasting ceremony proper with around 30 attending. None of my family felt they could attend. This was conducted by Ray and Lynda Lindfield from Eastbourne (you'll have seen mention of them in the last issue of PD in relation to Doreen Valiente - They were good friends and sadly miss Doreen).

Ray and Lynda prepared the altar, set the sacred circle of light and blessed the space calling on the "old ones" to watch over all those present. It was at about this point that the local newspaper turned up - having been informed of the ceremony by a colleague of Carolyn's. We agreed to the photographs but not during the ceremony proper so they were stage managed and the photographer left.

When all was in readiness Ray called everyone to gather around the circle of light and we (Carolyn and I) were brought in. The service took about 40 minutes with Carolyn and I exchanging our own vows (Angie, if you want to include any of the service I sent you please feel free to do so) and instead of rings - which we had exchanged at the registry office we exchanged Pentagrams - Carolyn's was a standard silver one while mine was a gold Celtic one made for us by Caduceus in London specially for our Handfasting.

After we had shared around the cake and Mead (which everyone enjoyed) we jumped the broomstick (so did some of our friends) and brought the ceremony to a close. Ray and Lynda made a gift of a Celtic chalice to us to help remind us of a wonderful experience - something I shall never forget.

Ray and Lynda were then approached by at least 1 couple asking if they would be prepared to celebrate the renewal of their marriage vows at their forthcoming 10th wedding anniversary. To which I believe they agreed. We're looking forward to that.

At 6.30pm the bar opened and the disco got underway. At 8pm the buffet was brought out and all had their fill. We all partied until midnight with 142 guests. Some of my family even managed to turn up but one (a devout catholic) had "a bit of a turn" when she realised there was a pagan altar in the hall - she felt the "presence of the Devil", became very upset and had to be taken home (with the other family members in tow). I think it was quite considerate of the devil to wait until she had had her fill of the buffet before upsetting her. Maybe he's not so bad after all!!

To end what had been a very long and eventful day we had to clean the hall as it had been booked for the next morning for a computer fair and had to be left the way we found it. A few of our friends stayed behind to help us and by 2am we finally got away to a house full of guests and eventually our beds.

Sunday morning dawned, everyone slowly came awake with varying degrees of hangover, I cooked more breakfasts, people began to drift off to their own homes and Carolyn and I collapsed on the sofa agreeing to do nothing until Monday.

Paddy

PAGAN DRINKING SONG (to the tune of 'Bread in Heaven')

We don't worship God Almighty -
We've got multiplicity.
Triple Goddess, Horned Hunter,
All the gods of earth and sea.

We don't hold with inhibitions,
We've got sensuality;
Skyclad, naked, not a stitch on
That's the way we like to be.

Triple Goddess, Horned
Hunter,
Horned Hunter of the night!
(Of the night...)
All the gods of earth and sea.

Shameless Pagans! Blameless
Pagans!
That's the way we like to be!
That's the way we like to be.

None of us have clocks and watches,
We've got synchronicity;
Sun and Moon and sticks with notches,
Astrolobes and orreries.

We're not followers of fashion,
We've got eccentricity.
Pointy hats and cloaks of velvet,
Individuals all are we.

Pagan Standard, Pagan
Standard,
We're on Pagan Standard
Time!
We're on Pagan Standard
Time.

Individuals, individuals,
Individuals all are we -
Except for thee and
sometimes me.

THE BRYTHONIC CELTIC TRADITION

Definition of Paganism and Craft

Before writing this article on the Brythonic Celtic Tradition, I felt that some definitions were necessary. So here goes...

PAGANISM: The recognition and subsequent reverence and respect of and for the Natural Spirituality arising from the environment, the land, upon which we find ourselves.

PAGAN: One who practices a Religious (Spiritual Path) based upon the above definition.

WITCHCRAFT: Knowledge of the natural forces and their workings that surround us all.

WITCH: One who uses, manipulates, works with the Natural Forces for their own, or other peoples' purposes.

These are my definitions, based upon my own experiences and understanding gained over some twenty years of study and practice, and over sixty years of living in this plane of existence.

From the above, it should be clear that Paganism and Witchcraft although related, are not necessarily one and the same. I would go so far as to state that, theoretically at least, it is possible to be of *any religion*, and *still be a witch*. A Roman Catholic priest making Holy Water, is doing what a witch might do. He utters incantations, invokes his God into the water, oil, and salt. Take away his cassock and collar, give him a cloak (and pointed hat!) *and he becomes a witch!* The priest of course, would deny this, but then he would, wouldn't he? Having cast his spell, and service during which (witch!) he will sprinkle his congregation with the now magically charged water! QUOD ERAT DEMONSTRATUM (Q.E.D.).

Now to continue with the Article...

The Brythonic Celtic Tradition

At the risk of upsetting those of other traditions in this country, it must be stated, that the oldest Pagan path available to us, is that of the Celt. Other traditions such as Norse, Anglo Saxon and Wicca came later, this fact is indisputable, but of course it does not make them any less valid. This understood, then it should be clearly seen that *those of us practising the Brythonic Celtic Tradition are not Wiccans*, we are Pagans. Some confusion seems to have come about lately whereby Wiccan and Pagan are thought of as the same thing. This may seem pedantic, but it is important. All traditions that follow paths based upon Natural Spirituality are Pagan, but all are not Wiccan, that is but another path within Paganism generally.

The Celtic Tradition, in common with most Pagan Traditions, follows the Seasonal Cycles, and is nature based. The usual eight festivals are held, although the names are different, as indeed are some of the dates. Welsh (Brythonic) terms are used, in place of Gaelic, Anglo-Saxon, or indeed any foreign terms. The Goddesses and Gods are purely *Welsh Celtic*, being based upon those found in Welsh mythology such as Y Mabinogi, Black Book of Carmarthen, etc.

The tradition takes the form of family groups, members being either born naturally into the family, or brought in by means of *adoption (not initiation)*. There is a tendency to be private, not mixing with other Traditions. Our Ceremonies/Festivals generally follow the following model:-

The Altar in the North is decorated in accordance with the Season and/or aspect of Goddess/God.

We do not have Priestess/Priest, but use other titles.

A female and male with lead the ceremony with others taking part as appropriate. Invocations are made to Goddess and God, High Kindred and others as appropriate. The festival then continues, and usually includes an enactment of one of our legends appropriate to the Season. At the end of the festival, the Goddess/God and any other forces called on, are thanked. We do not dismiss our Deities!

This is, of necessity, a brief description. The above can be seen as being purely Pagan Spirituality and *not Craft*.

The Craft of the Wise or Witchcraft, is also practised by, and through the Celtic traditions, *but it is not called Wicca*, neither does it have Priestesses/Priests - as it is not seen as a religion, but as a *Craft practised within the Religion*. Celtic Craft involves spells and other 'Witchy' things.

I cannot discuss the workings of Celtic Craft, they are even more private than the religion.

Suffice it to say that not all Celtic Pagans are what are specified as 'Witches'. Those that are, or become one, are taught additional skills which have nothing to do with the Seasonal Pagan Celebrations. They do of course have to understand Paganism and its ceremonies, and worship Goddess/God. The Craft practitioners have additional and separate meetings amongst themselves, and in addition they will also attend the normal Festival celebrations along with the non Craft followers.

I hope that this short article clarifies any misunderstandings. *We are definitely not Anti Wicca* or anything else for that matter. We have our own system that works for us. To clarify further, let this be stated:-

There cannot be such a tradition as Celtic Wiccan. There is a Celtic Tradition, and a Wiccan Tradition, both are Pagan. Let us keep to our chosen traditions, and respect the rest, remembering that we all honour Goddess/God.

Iain Steele

Kynran, The Silver Branch, Brythonic Celtic Group.

Anyone interested in finding out more of this tradition is invited to contact Iain, tel. 01547 510 343. We are based just over the Welsh border near Knighton, Powys.

Somebody said to me recently: "Wicca you know is Celtic in origin and nature." This conversation-stopper is an interesting statement, but does it stand up to historical and theological scrutiny? It may certainly apply to the modern forms of 'Celtic Wicca' which have sprung up in the last twenty years, especially in the States. They seem to base their beliefs on The White Goddess, The Mabinogion and the works of John & Caitlin Matthews and R.J. Stewart. However it is a doubtful proposition when applied to the Alexandrian and Gardnerian branches of modern Wicca.

As is well known, when Gerald Gardner created Wicca in the 1940's and 1950's he used material from various sources. They included the works of Aleister Crowley, Apuleius, Charles Leland, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the Key of Solomon. The nearest Wicca got to anything Celtic was its Yule ritual, written by Doreen Valiente in 1953 and based on a 19th century collection of Gaelic Christian prayers, and the use of the Gaulish stag god Cernunnos as a form of the witch-god.

Where did this idea that Wicca was Celtic come from? Following in the footsteps of Dr Margaret Murray, Gardner believed that the early witches were the racial survivors of the 'Little People'. These were not actual Otherworldly denizens, but "probably members of the various races who inhabited Europe in pre-Celtic times..." [Gardner 1970:66] Gardner drops several hints however that he knew of the origins of historical traditional witchcraft. For instance he describes the grave goods belonging to a Bronze Age 'witch' excavated in Denmark [39]. He goes on to say: "The Scandinavian sagas show striking resemblance to the witch beliefs of today; riding on staves, wild waving hair, sending out of the body, changing of shape and many other things." [40].

What Gardner was probably referring to was the magical art of seidr or seith practised by the seer-priestesses of Freya and taught by that goddess to Odin. Several modern writers on the runes and the Northern Tradition have pointed out the similarities between seidr and historical witchcraft. Freya herself has many of the attributes of the traditional image of the witch-goddess. When considered in her Central European form as Dame Holda or Perchta she also takes on some of the attributes of Diana-Artemis, as well as the role of the female leaders of the Wild Hunt. This also features in her northern form where she and her Valkyries share the soul of the battle-slain with Odin. A 12th century representation of Freya/Frigga in Cologne cathedral depicts her naked except for a cloak and astride a broomstick or distaff.

The Norns or Wyrd Sisters have also been regarded by some in the Traditional Craft as legitimate aspects of the witch-goddess. This was recognised by the late Robert Cochrane, magister or witch master of the Clan of Tubal Cain, who declared that the Goddess(es) of Fate were the true objects of the witch's worship. After the late Doreen Valiente became disillusioned and left Gardner's coven in the late 1950's she met and worked with Cochrane. She has said: "...the Anglo-Saxons embodied the idea of destiny or fate...in the mysterious goddess they called Wyrd. She was originally conceived on triple form and is evidently analogous to the Three Fates of classical myth." [Valiente 1978:39] Doreen was clearly telling those of her readers in the know that she also knew who the witch-goddess really was. On page 75 of *Witchcraft Today*, Gardner seems to have been back on track, even when he romances about mixed marriages between the Saxons and the 'Little People', the so-called 'people of the heath' or heathens. In this context he briefly refers to Robin Hood and his relationship with Woden and the witch-god. According to Robert Graves, admittedly not the most reliable sources of historical fact, the name Robin Hood comes from the Old English and means 'bright strength of Woden'. Odin/Woden is sometimes called Grimr when he wanders

Middle Earth inhuman guise meaning 'the masked one' or 'the hooded one'. The Hooded Man is one of the traditional titles for the god of the witches. On a mythical level as a folklore character, as opposed to a historical figure, Robin represents the witch-god in his summer aspect as the Green Man or Lord of the Greenwood.

Behind the foliate mask of the Green Man lurks the stag skull and antlers of Old Herne in his winter aspect as Lord of the Wild Hunt. Wiccans have often said that Herne is a folk memory of the Celtic stag god Cernunnos. Many Americans who are fans of the 1980's British TV series *Robin of Sherwood* even believe Robin was a Celt! However, anyone who examines the myths, legends and folklore surrounding Herne the Hunter will see that all his symbolism points northwards to him being a form of Woden. Talking about the traditional witch's primary tool the stang, the English wizard Nigel Aldcraft Jackson has said: "...the stang is used as the cultic standard icon of the Old God - a forked staff which represents Woden as Lord of the Wild Hunt." [1996: 158]

Today many Wiccans and neo-pagans are obsessed with Celtic myth and symbolism and this has greatly influenced the modern witchcraft revival. Historical facts have never featured very strongly in the revival. Because of this certain assumptions made by early writers and practitioners in the modern era have been accepted without question, taken as gospel and repeated parrot-fashion. One of these assumptions has been the modern myth that witchcraft is Celtic in nature and origin. Despite the clues littered in the works of Gardner, Valiente, Evan John Jones, Nigel Jackson, Nigel Pennick and others, the possibility it had northern influences and elements has largely been ignored.

In recent years there have been several branches of the English Traditional Craft who have emerged from the shadows and claimed roots back to the Norse and Saxon traditions. In fact it is ironic that Gardner called his version of the Craft 'Wicca' from the Anglo-Saxon name for a male witch. Perhaps, however, he inherited this from the old New Forest coven into which he was initiated in 1939. It has been claimed that this group was descended from the remnants of one of the Nine Covens found by the 19th century witch-master Old George Pickingill. Allegedly, the Pickingills could trace their family tree back to Saxon times and had been devotees of the Vanir into the historical period [Liddell 1994].

Before they get totally swept up, or away, by the romantic Celtic revival of the late 20th century, perhaps modern witches should cast their eyes to the north for the source of some of their beliefs. After all, even in Gardnerian Wicca, the north is the sacred point in 'the space between the worlds' where the altar stands and the Old Gods descend to Earth.

The author has been writing on the runes and the Northern Tradition for over twenty-five years and he is the author of *The Mystery of the Runes* (Capall Bann). He has also edited and published the pagan and craft journal *The Cauldron* since 1976.

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Spotted in the Guardian, Monday 22nd November 1999

Well of Mystery in Welsh Forest

Buried deep in forest in West Wales, on a hill above the ruined medieval Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida, an archaeologist has uncovered a holy well. It has no name, appears on no map, and yet somebody knows it is there: flowers, and white quartz stones are found beside the well, an hour's walk from the nearest forest track or house. Welsh Heritage has recently declared the well a scheduled ancient monument, the highest category of protected site, along with several other mysterious and previously unknown structures discovered in the North Tywi forest by the archaeologist, Caroline Earwood.

Another site, a heap of stones and earth banks, is named on the oldest maps as Tir Hir - the long house. It is believed to be the remains of a house and animal enclosure, where lay monks tended the abbey's sheep or cattle.

The abbey, founded under the royal patronage of Rhys ap Gruffydd in 1164, was one of the wealthiest in Wales, with magnificent buildings and thousands of acres of land. Tir Hir was also scheduled and is regarded as an exceptionally rare and important site.

Ms Earwood, who is surveying hundreds of miles of forest for Forest Enterprise Wales before the trees are felled, has added thousands of previously unrecorded sites to the archaeological map.

Another site, on the mountain opposite the well, has not been listed because Welsh Heritage is as baffled by it as Ms Earwood. Locals call it "the monks graveyard". It consists of a number of small upright stones, some with carved crosses very similar to medieval crosses in the abbey ruins 800 feet below. Ms Earwood finds it hard to believe anyone would have carried bodies up to the top of the mountain for burial, but is at a loss for an alternative explanation. A forest ranger, John Griffiths, who was born in a mud cabin eight miles away, offered another piece of local folklore - the stones are also said to mark the graves of the outcast "monks' wives". The date 1754 carved on one stone, possibly long after they were put in position, just adds to the mystery.

Ms Earwood only found the well by spotting a clearing in the plantation in an aerial photograph. It took her hours to reach it by scrambling down into a steep valley, following the bank of a stream until a place where it is shallow enough to ford, up the opposite slope of the mountain, and through dense rows of Sitka spruce. But somebody had been there before her: beside the well there was a brown Denby mug without a handle, holding a posy of flowers. The well is beautifully made, with carefully cut slate slabs- which must have been brought from miles away - lining the cistern and forming a broad platform and steps around it. A timber pipe, which Ms Earwood is eager to obtain a carbon dating for, feeds the spring water into the cistern.

Holy wells are known at many Welsh sites, often attributed with miraculous healing properties. They are often associated with medieval religious foundations, but many are believed to have far older pagan water worship origins, and have a power which, as the flowers prove, endures.

GODDESS AND GREENMAN CREATIVITY DAY

On a Saturday in November a group of pagans gathered to have lots of fun with bits of paper and paint! In other words to create images of the Goddess and the Green Man which were inspired by meditation. The morning was devoted to the Goddess images, and after introducing ourselves and placing representational objects on an 'altar' we were led in a meditation in which the image of the Goddess was revealed to us. She came in many different forms, which we shared with the group afterwards, most of us wondering how on earth we were going to get that down on paper! It was quite nervewracking for some trying to create the image that had been presented, but we all had a go, and it felt just like being a child again (only quieter and more disciplined I think!). We all sat round a big table colouring in our pictures and listening to music. When all the pictures were finished we placed them round the altar, and then had lunch! As usual, when a group of pagans are asked to bring a shared lunch, there was huge amounts of food (six tubs of humous for a start!!). After eating our fill we all felt quite sleepy and more inclined to curl up and hibernate than to be creative. Once again we were led in a meditation in which we had an exciting whirling dance with the Green Man. Once again we felt the difficulties of committing this image to paper! Instead of drawing a picture this time, most of us created collages - which led to great fun with small bits of paper and glue (sticky fingers etc. etc.!). The afternoon passed swiftly by, and it was soon time for our celebratory ritual. We dedicated our images to the Goddess and God and managed a small spiral dance, before sharing in some delicious home-made wine (thanks Mitch!). All in all it was a fun day and everyone who came seemed to enjoy it. All the images are currently being scanned into a computer and at some point will be available to view on the web (for those who have computers), so the rest of the world will get to see our efforts!

Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road ? (Pagan-style)

Just a little snippet to make you all smile...

Alexandrian/Gardnerian:

To reveal this would be to break my oath of secrecy. I can say, though, that it *really* is an ancient rite, dating far back in time, back even before 1951, and I have learned it from an unbroken lineage. As Gerald said, it takes a chicken to make an egg.

Asatru:

First, we don't believe in a "One Chicken" or a "Hen and Rooster." We believe in many chickens. Second, "crossing the road" is part of the three levels, or worlds, and the chicken simply crossed from one level to another. Hail to the Chickens!

British Traditional:

The word "chicken" comes from a very specific Old English word ("gechekken"), and it only properly applies to certain fowl of East Anglia or those descended therefrom. As for the rest, I suppose they are doing something remotely similar to crossing the road, but you must remember that traditional roads are not to be confused with the modern roads....

Celtic:

In County Feedbeygohn on Midsummer's day, there is still practised St. Henny's Dance, which is a survival of the old pagan Chicken Crossing fertility rite. Today, modern pagans are reviving the practice, dedicated to the Hen and the Green Rooster.

Ceremonial:

"Crossing the road" is a phrase that summarises many magical structures erected and timed by the chicken to produce the energy necessary for the intention of the travel across the road. For example, the astrological correspondences had to be correct, the moon had to be waxing (if the chicken intended to come to the other side of the road) or waning (if the chicken intended to flee to the other side of the road), and the chicken had to prepare herself through fasting and proper incantations.

Note: certain forms of invocation (summoning an egg *inside* your chicken self) can produce abnormal or even dangerous eggs and should only be conducted inside a properly erected barnyard. ...

Chaos:

Thinking in terms of "roads" and "crossings" is simply looking at the formal, typically perceived structure of chicken crossing space-time. We, instead, focus on the possibility of chicken crossing itself; what appears to be a random act is thus actually the norm ---- it is the **road** which is the freak of chance. Indeed, quantum mechanics now demonstrates what we knew all along: two roads can simultaneously exist in the same place at the same time. Thus, by attuning ourselves to the dynamic energy (called "crossing"), we can manifest the road. Of course, to the unknowledgeable, this appears as a chicken crossing the road.

Dianic:

The chykyn ("chicken" is term of patriarchal oppression) sought to reclaim for herself the right to be on the other side of the road, after it had been denied to her for centuries. By doing so, she reawakened the power of the Hen within herself.

Discordian:

cock-a-doodle-doo !

Druid:

To get to the sacred grove, of course! Keep in mind that 99% of everything written about chickens-crossing-the-road is pure hogwash, based on biased sources. Yes, there were a few unfortunate chicken sacrifices in the past, but that is over now...

Eclectic:

Because it seemed right to her at the time. She used some Egyptian style corn and a Celtic sounding word for the road and incorporated some Native American elements into her Corn-name, Chicken-Who-Dances-and-Runs-with-the-Wolves.

Faery:

In twilight times and under sparkling stars, those properly trained can still see the chickens crossing the roads. Reconnecting with these "fey-fowl" as they cross is crucial to restoring the balance between the energies of modern development and living with the earth.

Family Traditional:

Growing up, we didn't think much about "crossing the road." A chicken was a chicken. It crossed the road because that was what worked to get her to the other side. We focused on what worked, and we worked more with the elders of the barnyard and less with all this "guardians of the chickenco-op" business. We didn't get our concepts of "chickens" or "the other side" from Gardner, either. You can choose not to believe us since we did not "scratch down" on paper what was clucked to us orally (which, at certain times in history, was the only

way to avoid becoming Easter chicken soup!), but that doesn't change the facts: there *were* real chickens, and they *really did* cross the road!

Kitchen Witch:

The chicken crossed the road to get food, to get a rooster or to get away from me after I decided to have chicken for supper !

Left Hand Path:

White, fluffy chickens prancing across the road ! Do you think that is *all* there is to crossing the road? Do you *dare* to know the Dark Side of crossing the road and the *other* path to self-development?

New Age:

The chicken crossed the road because she chose this as one her lessons to learn in this life. Besides, there was so much incense and bright, white corn to explore on the Other Side.

Newbie:

well, 'cause I read in this really kewl book that said, like, chickens are supposed to cross the road, right?

Posting on an Online Discussion Group:

What do you mean <> ???!!!!??? Haven't you read **any** of the previous posts? We've been [expletive deleted] debating every word of that question, painstakingly trying to come to some kind of answer. I know you wrote <was why chickens cross the road, I'm not looking for any chicken spells>> but I'm fed up with newbies who can't even bother to REEEEEEEEEAAADDD the posts on that very topic! No, this is *not* a flame. But, I and several others here have the *maturity* to properly explore and respond to this question, and we were properly trained; we *didn't* just read a book and think we were full-fledged chickens. much better after ranting>

Solitaire:

The chicken didn't want to be part of a coven or an oven.

Shaman:

Crossing the road is a way to reconnect with the healing, visionary lifeways of the past. Chickens have long known this, but increasingly the Rooster's Movement is adding more roosters to the crossings too.

Wiccan:

The chicken crossed the road because she felt like she was finally "coming home." She could do it alone or with others, but she had to call to the Guardians of the Watchtowers of the Barnyard first... uhm, after casting the circle.





Pagan Federation Devon & Cornwall

Invite you to our

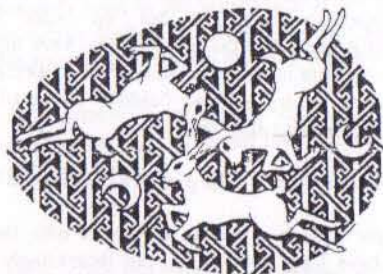
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Please send SSAE for return of ticket(s) with your cheque payable to Pagan Federation Devon & Cornwall and no. of Member/Guest tickets required (please list membership no.s and names and addresses of all who will attend) to:-
Pagan Federation Devon & Cornwall, (Regional Conference), PO Box 314, Exeter, Devon EX4 6YR

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!

STONE TEMPLE MAGAZINE, Craft and Paganism in S. Wales, published 3 times a year, £1 per copy. Contact (01446) 412607. Email: chris@stonetemple.freereserve.co.uk

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, Marchoghywyn 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: po027@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 Fred for details - (01792) 426506
email: manawydan@dtu.nfl.com

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

VALE OF GLAMORGAN: Pagan Society, monthly meetings, for details ring Chris (01446) 412607 or email chris@stonetemple.freereserve.co.uk

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.

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