

Drops of the Awen



Winter/Spring 2006

No. 31

*Newsletter of the Pagan
Federation South and
Mid Wales Region*



"Co-Ord's Corn" by M. & A. Walters

After a rest, here we are again...Many thanks to Stuart Little for 'Carrying the can' for a couple of years; as it is, he has been beset by health/family health problems and we're sure he and his family are wished health, wealth, happiness and peace – and we send them our best wishes and blessings. Thank you Stuart!

Those of you who know us (belated apologies to those who don't, as well) will be familiar with our inabilities in being on time with 'Drops' articles and replies to letters etc...This is in part due to our chaotic lives, jobs, families and commitments, also to the fact that is there were a PhD in procrastination we'd have a first – if we'd turned up to collect it on time...

So we'll start with a warm welcome to our new members, and a thank you to all you who renewed. You may have joined a little while ago and not heard from us yet – par for the course and we're sorry – but you will soon, honestly! (unless of course you don't wish to...) Our names, address and phone number are at the end of this article.

Many people join the PF to 'get in touch with like-minded folk'. Due to the 'Data Protection Act' this means we have to get your permission, signed and in writing, before passing on your contact details to other members – so we are asking any/all of you who wish, to get in touch with us by snail mail at the address given below (email/phone cannot provide your signature). We will then put a list together, by the end of May, and everyone who is on it will be enabled to receive a copy. (Of course it still stands that anyone who wishes to get in touch with us for any reason can (please!) do so.

As some of you will already know, our region nearly always celebrates Earth Day at Arthur's Stone, near Reynoldston on the Gower Peninsula – well, we'll be there again this year on Sunday April 23rd. Please put this date in your diaries, and come and join us anytime around 1-2pm for a 3 o'clock start – an open ritual, as well as pledging ourselves to DO something for the Earth's future. A bit of litter-picking; using light/heating etc sensibly; recycling; you already know the story. Many, many people, groups, etc all over Britain (and Europe!) will be meeting/working at the same time, the same day, so the combined energy generated could be really powerful...

It does look, sadly, unlikely that we'll be holding a campout this year, for various reasons – so, until we can set up something or, of course, if some of you 'out there' have heard of, or arranged, something, here's a couple of very highly recommended 'doings' this summer.

First: The Esoteric Conference and Occult Book Fair at the Assembly Rooms, Ludlow on June 10th (Saturday): starting 10am, finishing approx 6pm. As it's a fair old way, Mike and I can recommend a good (not Pagan, but very civilized) campsite just a mile from Ludlow – some of us have been camping

there for a couple of years, as its so convenient; ok, no fires or excessive noise, but a bit of tent-hopping is fine and its very spacious:

(Whitcliffe Campsite, North Farm, Ludlow: Tel. 01584 872026 – a Mr. P. Dicken - for reservations, approx £9-10 per night for 2 adults, car & tent (big). The conference is sponsored by Verdelet magazine, tickets £10 (pay Verdelet, PO Box 58, Craven Arms, SY7 8WG). FFI:

<http://www.theapothecaries.com>

Second: The District (all Wales and Borders) campout – come on, you made it to Cornwall! – between Whitchurch and Ellesmere (turn right just after Oswestry) in an isolated place off the beaten track (though accessible by car) over 1 miles from main road, and just under ½ mile from nearest (and only) cottage – PF and Pagan friendly! So, folks can do more or less what they like; drumming, singing, dancing skydial – no problem. Plenty of camping room, water and W.C. on site. From Fri. am – Sun. pm, July 7th, 8th & 9th; speakers and workshops being confirmed as we write. FFI. Tel. Steve (District Manager) on 01691 679066.

Now the tough bit. We've had difficulty and sadness, not quite knowing just how to say/write this. After over 10 years (one of the longest running local mags ever) 'Drops' is going to be amalgamated with 'Myddle Earth' the mag that serves the other 3 regions in our 4 region district (We've been the only district with 2 mags in all that time; no-one wanted the status quo changed, as 'Drops' was so well presented, and doing such a great job!) It is for financial reasons only – PF has been, obviously, affected by the 'lost' national conference; and membership numbers work out that it will be more economical to print one 'run' to cover the whole district. To Karen and Ken our intrepid editors, no words are adequate to thank them for producing a mag that has had VERY favourable comments, some envy and much praise, from other district managers and PF officers countrywise.

We will still have a 'Co-ords Corn', space for readers' letters, any articles you wish to submit and, most of all, we hope that Karen and Ken will continue to contribute in their own inimitable style. Many, many thanks, goodwill and blessings go to them for their hard work in producing one of the best 'in-house' mags we've ever seen – we trust we've definitely not heard the last from them...

With many blessings and growing cheer from the strengthening light –

Mike & Angie Walters

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Editorial

Dear All,

Well, if you've just read the above words from our regional co-ordinators you will have learned the sad news that Drops of the Awen will no longer exist after this issue. The newsletter has been running since 1995, so it's been just over 10 years that our region has had its very own magazine. I'd not been a member of the PF for that long when Drops first started, at the time I was involved in running the Cardiff University Pagan Society, known then, and now, as CUPS. On the back page of Drops, the Round the Region section lists my contact details for CUPS and the Cardiff Dragon group which at that time used to meet in the flat I lived in. Eleven years later and its gratifying to know that CUPS is still in existence having gone through various incarnations (and you can check out their website - details in the current Round the Region section). The first issue of Drops, edited of course by the regional co-ordinators of that time, Graham and Margaret, in addition to the regular co-ordinator's corner, also featured two pieces on the Autumn Equinox, a recipe for Harvest Betsy Cake, a poem and information on the Corn Dolly, and an Out and About article on Pentre Ifan and Nevern Church. (In case you hadn't guessed it was out in time for the Autumn Equinox!). Graham and Margaret continued the good work with Drops for another 7 issues, and their final issue came out at the same time of year in 1997. They handed over the reigns of editing after this to Anthony who'd been involved in Swansea University's Pagan Society. He edited Drops for a year (4 issues) before leaving the region for a job in the big smoke. At which point I took over, at the same time that Mike and Angie first became our regional co-ordinators. Flicking through the back issues (and yes, I admit to being sad enough to have kept them all!) it's interesting to note the things that have changed and the things that have remained constant. There have been some wonderful articles over the years, some great contributions, but the editors have always been asking for more! There are a lot of talented people in the region but getting you lot to offer things to Drops has always been hard work!!! The future of Drops has often been in the balance due to finances, which makes it particularly sad that it has finally fallen.

One large change, I believe, is seeing how the moots in the region have grown and really taken off. When Graham and Margaret first became co-ordinators they faced a large job in getting the region into shape, and they succeeded fantastically. Giving the region focus, contacts, a newsletter and a regional gathering. At that point Drops was crucial in informing the members about what was going on in their region. Things are very different now with the rise of the internet and email, many members make their first contacts with other pagans online, and news of events and moots is obviously far speedier online. In recent years moots in the Mid and South Wales area have really taken off, and the region feels quite different to how it did 11 years ago.

For some new members this may be their first and last issue of Drops, and for that I am quite sorry. The last year has flown by without a single issue being sent, I had originally attempted to step down as editor, but no replacement had been found. Getting contributions from members has also been proving almost impossible. But in the Autumn just gone I decided to carry on with Drops anyway, and started to formulate new ways of generating articles - see for example the interview with local pagans slot - but fate had decided otherwise. As Angie mentioned above, the magazine members will be receiving from now on 'Myddle Earth' will still be looking for contributions from our region, so I am hoping to carry on 'interviewing' pagans from our area, amongst other things. For now I would just like to say a big thank you to Graham and Margaret for starting Drops and rejuvenating the region, a thanks to Anthony for continuing the magazine, and thanks to Mike and Angie for all their support.

See you all again soon,

Bright blessings from Karen, and from Ken who has helped an awful lot in the past few years.

P.S.

We'll be hosting this years Earth Day, so please come along and support your region.

Back Issues of Drops

If anyone is interested I have a selection of back issue of Drops available, please email me, or contact me via Angie & Mike (address at the bottom of Co-ordinators Corner). 1-2 issues = 50p (p+p), up to 5 issues £1.00 (p+p).



Freecycle

The latest green trend to be sweeping the nation is that of the freecycle network. Originating in Tucson, USA in 2003 to help prevent desert landscape being taken over by landfills, it has rapidly spread across the globe and it is likely that you'll be able to find a group near you.

What is it? Well, to quote the website [<http://www.freecycle.org>] "it's a grassroots movement of people who are giving (and getting) stuff for free in their own towns." It means that instead of taking perfectly good stuff to the tip, or even stuff that's a bit battered and broke, you can offer it on your local site, and see if anyone wants to take it off your hands – one person's junk is another person's treasure! Additionally, if there's a certain something that you really need and can't find, or can't afford, you can post up your 'want' and see if someone out there can fill it. No guarantees of course, but many people are lucky enough to get what they require. I've been signed up to the Cardiff group for a couple of months now, and I've seen a whole range of items get exchanged, such as bikes, sofas, TVs, compost, a paper log maker, paving slabs, PCs, tables, cardboard boxes and greenhouses etc etc. This is not to say that all this stuff would have automatically have gone to landfill, but it's possible a lot would have. Charities and/or charity shops might not have accepted these goods, plus in today's busy world a lot of people don't have the time or energy to search our somewhere suitable to donate their unwanted objects. (But don't worry the charities are not missing out as many sign up to these lists anyway). With freecycle you can post a quick mail and give a time limit for collection, for example if you are moving house and really need to get rid of that old bed/chair/video before the week is out then you specify it has to be gone in five days.

So how exactly does it work? It's a yahoo group, so you go along to the main web address and find the nearest group for your area. I've counted 15 groups for Wales, ranging from Cardiff to Aberystwyth, Carmarthen to Wrexham, and if there isn't one already near you, then why not set one up? As with any Yahoo group when you become a member you can choose to either read the messages online or have them sent to your email account. There are of course certain rules of etiquette to be followed to ensure that people are treated with respect, are not hassled, that personal safety is maintained, and that the stuff being offered is legal! All items offered must be free and you can't advertise your own business. Once the item has been claimed you must inform the list in order to prevent others wasting their time – but it's all common sense really. How the items are exchanged is up to you, you can either arrange a mutually convenient drop off place, or get them to pick it up from your house.

It's free, it's easy, and it's potentially preventing unwanted items going to landfill, so what are you waiting for, do your bit for the environment, create some community spirit, and practice those reduce and reuse ethics of recycling.

Pagans in Your Area

This issue's featured local pagan is Kim Huggens, the ex-president of Cardiff University Pagan Society (CUPS).



Editor: Hi Kim, welcome to DROPS, could you start off by giving us a brief biography of yourself?

Kim: Sure- I'm 21 years old, and originally from St. Ives, Cambridge. My family moved to Christchurch, Dorset, when I was 8, and that's pretty much where I grew up. It's a beautiful area, full of history and right next to the New Forest. It's also where Gerald Gardner lived for a significant period of his life – my comprehensive school is ten minutes walk from his old house.

I now live in Cardiff – not as much Pagan history here, but nevertheless a place I'd love to spend a good few years in yet – and I moved here to study for a Philosophy degree. Graduated July this year with a 2:1,

and am now slaving away at a Religious Studies MA (focusing on 2nd century Christianity; sacrifice in Indian religion; and Greek and Roman magical practice).

Ed: Congratulations on the degree. Now, would you actually call yourself a pagan? Or would you identify yourself in another way?

Kim: I call myself a Pagan whenever asked, but more specifically I'm an Eclectic Pagan. This doesn't mean I pick and mix my religion by taking bits and pieces out of other religions and putting them into a big mixing bowl of confusing mess. It actually refers to the fact that I look beyond different religious practices and try to see the reason behind them – often, I find something universal, which I then work with as a Pagan. It also means I find spiritual inspiration in many different things that aren't necessarily of one Pagan path – Christian mysticism, Sufi poetry, Celtic mythology, Hermetic magic, Indian religion, other mythologies, Saints, Tarot, and much more secular stuff.

Ed: When did you first start identifying yourself with pagan beliefs?

Kim: I was about 14 I think when I got interested in Paganism, and it was Tarot that lead me to it. All the Tarot books I read mentioned Paganism in

some way, so I thought I better check it out. I can't quite remember what got me hooked, but it must have been something deep and meaningful. Honest.
;p Actually, I think at first it was the glamour associated with magic that attracted me to it. But I kept studying it because it was a tolerant, open-minded religion that encourages you to find answers to big questions for yourself.

Ed: So, would it be fair to say that one of your main interests is the Tarot, I think I've heard that you have a huge collection of packs?

Kim: Yes, definitely – Tarot has been my life since I was 9, and it was my first love. It's the language I speak in, the system I use when thinking about the universe, magic, spiritual experiences, and more... Some people use Kabbalah, some use mythology, some use a holy book. I use Tarot. I see it as representing all the big 'things' that make up the human experience, and as showing us all the universal features of life common to people from all walks of life and cultures. The thing that really fascinates me about Tarot though – the thing that keeps me going back to it time and time again – is that I always find something new in it. It continually surprises me and teaches me something different. And yes, the Tarot deck collection is huge – I lost count when I hit 200, and that was months ago!

Ed: Am I right in saying that you are currently involved in a project to create a tarot deck? Could you tell us how this came about, and why your pack is different than other packs currently on the market?

Kim: Yes indeed – "Sol Invictus: The God Tarot" is my baby. My co-creator, Nic, and I have been working on it for over a year now, and it actually came into being through a joint rant we were having over a particularly disgusting example of a rampantly anti-man/male God feminist Tarot deck I bought. It annoyed us that there were so many feminist and Goddess-oriented decks on the market, and so much emphasis on the Divine Feminine almost to the exclusion of the Divine Masculine. We felt that both had a lot to offer, so decided to create a deck that would provide the other side of the coin and explore the Divine Masculine through the stories of Gods, heroes, male saints and literary figures from around the world. It's not a deck for men though – we feel that it's a deck that can be used by anybody with an interest in the Divine Masculine. In fact we've had many emails from feminists and Goddess-worshippers praising the deck having seen it online!

The God Tarot is different to other decks because of its theme, the theory behind it, and the imagery. We've done our best to be original in card design, without making the cards too alien to traditional Tarot themes and meanings. We've also got a mixture of Tarot influences in there – Rider Waite, Thoth, and Marseilles tradition all find a place in the deck somewhere. The Court Cards have also had a rethink, so that they are a lot easier to read and relate to than the traditional (and somewhat outdated) King, Queen, Knight, and Page.

Ed: It sounds good, when will it be available to buy? Can we see a preview?

Kim: We've sent off a proposal to Llewellyn publications, so we're holding our breath for that. Other than that, the deck is not yet complete (though we've finished over 60 cards, and the book is almost two-thirds finished), and we doubt we'd publish it privately due to cost. Until then, people can see all the completed cards at <http://www.godtarot.com>

Ed: I remember that you also set up a project within CUPS to create a pack with members as a joint venture – did this work? And are these cards available?

Kim: It worked to some extent, in that it was fun and most of the cards were completed. You can see the cards at <http://cardiffpagan.co.uk/gallery/thumbnails.php?album=7> It is still not yet complete, and I doubt it will be, and I do believe a certain President of CUPS still owes me the Eight and Knight of Coins...

Ed: What advice would you give to someone who was new to the Tarot, and do you have any tips on using it?

Kim: The best advice I think I could give is not to plan your Tarot studies - it's not going to happen. Half the fun of learning Tarot is playing around with it, learning new stuff about it when you're ready, and gaining experience with it through use and abuse. You're not going to learn more about it by planning and scheduling yourself - in fact, you'll probably find that you force yourself to learn things that you're just not ready to learn yet, or you force yourself onwards so rapidly that you cover everything shallowly. Another tip, especially for those who want to start reading for others but are scared, is just to throw yourself in the deep end. Start off with a few friends and read Tarot for a laugh: it doesn't matter how silly the questions are! What matters is that you get practice at reading. When you're comfortable with that, take your deck to a local pub and do some readings for complete strangers - I started doing this when I was 16 and it really helped me improve. Final piece of advice for those new to Tarot would be to remember that the deck is not made of glass: putting it in the wrong cloth or storing it in the wrong manner, reading with it in the bath or near smoke is not going to damage it irrevocably. Tarot decks are remarkably versatile, and realising that not following every superstition in the book is the way to go means that you start thinking outside the box with Tarot - a whole new world opens up with it, a world beyond divination or magical use (Tarot cards make great coasters by the way...)

Ed: Do you have any favourite decks, or any that you would recommend?

Kim: I am fond of the Robin Wood for beginners, but personally I love really deep, complex decks that aren't just clones of the Rider Waite. The Mary-el Tarot, Book of Kaos Tarot, Thoth Tarot... Generally however I'd recommend that people buy the deck that speaks to them most. It helps to have a Rider Waite or Rider Waite clone to reference, because most other decks are based on this system, but beyond that there are so many different tastes and decks.

Ed: You sound like a busy woman, are you involved in any other kinds of projects – tarot cards, books etc?

Kim: *I've always got something on the go! I've been involved in Aeclectic.net's many collaborative Tarot projects, and I write reviews of Tarot decks and books for www.tarotpassages.com. I'm also in the process of creating a Harry Potter Tarot (for my own personal use, not for publication) and of course editing the CUPS magazine, "Offerings". I've had a book planned for a while now, which would be a collection of Tarot spreads inspired by my various trips and pilgrimages to sacred sites around the UK. That will have to wait for some time in the distant future however!*

Ed: Over the last few years you have been instrumental in running CUPS, how did you get involved?

Kim: *Becoming President of the Pagan Society was completely accidental at first. It all began with helping the President, Paul, with organizing a Yule ritual, then an Imbolc ritual, then a Glastonbury trip... and then when it came to re-elections of the committee in May there was nobody else who wanted to be President. In the end I felt as though circumstances were pushing me towards it, and it was easier to go along with it than fight it. But it wasn't a natural role for me – I came to University as a naturally shy, quiet person. I was also very disorganized. But I had to learn quickly to be the opposite of this, and being President helped that. I guess I threw myself in the deep end, but I wouldn't change it for the world!*

Ed: Having been so actively involved in a student pagan society what do you think the benefits of being a member are? Can you also think of any particular highlights of being in this group?

Kim: *A student Pagan Society is a marvellous addition to any Student's Union, simply because it offers Pagan students somewhere to go, something to do, and people to meet. It also acts as a way for students to find out what Paganism is about if they're not Pagan themselves, so in a way it is PR for youth Paganism. I'm really glad I've been involved with CUPS – not only do I feel I've done something worthwhile at Uni (other than the degree!) but I've also met some amazing people who've become some of the closest friends I've ever had, and learned a lot. The trips – especially to Glastonbury – have been the highlights of being in CUPS for me, but really I've loved it all. I've loved the rituals – no matter how difficult they were to organize; I loved meeting newbies every year; I loved going to talks; I loved giving talks; I loved being a part of the wider Pagan community; but mostly I loved the people. They're funky.*

Ed: Has CUPS met up with any other University pagan societies in Wales/UK?

Kim: *We went to Glastonbury on a daytrip with UoBERS (University of Bristol Earth Religions Society), but other societies are usually too far away to have joint events with.*

Ed: Now you've graduated and become a postgraduate are you still involved with the society?

Kim: *Yes, as a member and editor of the magazine. I also give talks every now and then (usually on Tarot!), run the Tarot Coffee Club, and just help out if needed.*

Ed: Have you become involved in the wider pagan scene in Wales, and do you like what you've seen?

Kim: *I've been involved quite heavily in the UK Pagan moots that occur monthly here in Cardiff – I regularly attend and sometimes give talks for them. I've also been to the last three Witchfest Wales' since 2003, and gave a talk on the Tarot Court Cards at last year's. I've met many non-student Pagans, and many of them have been great. It's been interesting to meet Pagans from so many different paths – that's probably the way I learned most about Paganism. Quite a few people I've met I now work with privately outside of the Pagan community as well – group ritual, pathworking, etc, usually sharing traditions with each other.*

As for the friendliness of the Pagan community – Pagans are people like any other, so there have been some cool people and some utter bastards. More cool people than bastards so far, luckily.

Ed: Do you identify with any special spiritual/pagan place?

Kim: *Glastonbury. I can't put into a short space exactly how much I feel for this place, and it really is my spiritual home. I also love Boscastle, Tintagel, and in particular St. Nectan's Glen in Cornwall. Stunning. Once again, it's difficult to write about these places without getting all mushy and overly long so I'll leave it at that. Back home, I feel at home on the beach in Winter – the smell of seaweed and salt, the breakers and the bitterly cold wind... Reminds me of so many evening strolls. As for Wales, I really feel at home in the studenty pubs and cafés of Cathays...*

Ed: As a final comment, do you feel that Wales (South Wales in particular) has much to offer pagans?

Kim: *I don't think I've lived here long enough to fully comment, but it's better for Paganism than most places I've visited – it's got a few good shops, and there's a decent Pagan community here that's easily found.*

Ed: Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us Kim.

A gift from Gaia's Garden

At Yule my cat was given a gift from a friend, and she could hardly believe her nose – she ripped off the wrapping paper without any help from her humans, and has been in seventh heaven ever since. Yes, ok, the present contained catnip, but my cat has never reacted like that before to your average shop bought catnip toy. Her present was a 'Kitty swag bag' from Gaia's Garden, and contained organic catnip and marjoram. I was keen to see who had created such a cat-lovable toy, and went along to their website to investigate: <http://www.gaias-garden.co.uk/>

Gaia's Garden is a pagan website that contains a whole host of areas, from the shop, forum, recipe pages, library, poetry competitions etc etc. Many of the items for sale in the shop area are hand-crafted, or hand-blended by the owners, and appear to contain only natural and organic ingredients, with no artificial additives or preservatives. (Their products are for humans - as well as cats!) There are also a lot of pyrographed objects including some lovely mini-altars (think small coffee table/stool). They also sell the usual pagan stuff such as incense (hand-blended of course), and censers, pentacles, jewellery, books and cards. But as mentioned above the site is not just a shop, it's a place to meet and talk (forum), share poetry and write articles, learn about herbs and cooking, check out the artwork and photography and contribute if you can. It's a sort of 'pagan shop and community centre' online.

There is a myriad of stuff on the website, too much to go into, but if you've time it's worth checking out and having a browse around, and if you have a feline of your own – Darkle (my cat) highly recommends the Kitty swag bag!

Witchfest Wales – a review

Way back in June last year, the Children of Artemis hosted their Witchfest Wales conference at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff. Two years previously Witchfest Wales took place at Llandaff Rugby Club, a relatively small and humble venue in comparison to the stadium, however for all its smallness a preferable space. There are quite often criticisms of CoA and their Witchfest events, and their glossy, glamour, goth witch image, which I am not going to discuss here. Suffice to say that whatever your opinion of them (and they are sometimes touted as rivals to the PF), at least they have managed to organise a large event for Wales (albeit situated in South Wales – which is great for our region!) something which we in the PF have yet to do. This is despite the fact we've had some excellent camp-outs over the years, and many smaller events such as the PAN Samhain gatherings, earth healing days and some mini PF conferences held at Lampeter University about 7 or 8 years ago. There have been a couple of events in Wrexham hosted by the PF region that I

think includes North Wales and the Marches, but there does seem to be a bit of a north/south divide in Wales, as demonstrated by the split regions, but presumably generated by geography and transport problems. Thus, for now, we are reliant on CoA to bring us a 'national' conference.

Anyway, back to the event in June. If you know Cardiff then you couldn't exactly miss the venue as it dominates the city centre – however, if you hadn't frequented the stadium before, it proved to be difficult to find where exactly the conference was being held, as no explicit instructions had been included with the tickets. My friend and I wasted a good 20-30 minutes trying to find the right entrance, walking round the large edifice to do so (it didn't help that we'd started on completely the opposite side), and we weren't the only ones.

Eventually we got there and finally had a programme in front of us to discover what we'd just missed, and to see the vast array of talks lined up for the day. With two talks happening at any one time we had to choose carefully, which to miss, which not to miss! I always seem to find my favourite choices clash, and I'm sometimes disappointed when I take a gamble, well I guess there is no pleasing all the pagans all the time. With the late arrival of one of the speakers some of the talks got swapped round at the last minute which meant I missed out on at least one talk I'd really hoped to hear. With no gap for lunch, and nowhere nearby to get lunch, yet another talk had to be missed. For such a prestigious venue we were sorely disappointed at the lack of catering, obviously we realise that its in the centre of Cardiff, but with no time slot for lunch it wasn't possible to find somewhere to eat/get food and not completely miss a talk. If I'd known I'd have brought sandwiches! I don't think many of the stallholders were too impressed with the lack of catering either.

Ok, enough whinging, was there anything good about Witchfest Wales? Of course there was, there were some excellent speakers, a good line up with a mixture of local people (eg Tanis, Peter Nash, Karin Rainbird and Kim Huggins (of CUPS)), and 'national/CoA' people (eg David Rankine, Sorita, Kate West and many others), good workshops and good talks. A non-stop programme, which although I've just criticised did also mean that there was plenty to see/hear. The only part that I really didn't enjoy was the rather sleazy belly dancing act at the end of the day, or maybe I'm just a prude and rubbing your breasts in men's faces at a family event is ok (believe me I have nothing against belly dancing in general). I wasn't able to stay for the evening entertainment but there were two bands scheduled to play, so you certainly got your money's worth for a day conference.

Whatever its faults (and they could equally be levelled at conferences hosted by other organisations), I'm glad to see Witchfest in Cardiff and glad to see it is carrying on. The main problem the organisers have faced

is the venue, and until a suitable one is found (bigger than the rugby club, more accommodating than CIA, better laid out than the stadium) there will always be problems and people whinging! I've heard rumours that this year's event will be at the Students Union, which I have to say can only be an improvement on the Millennium Stadium. I realise that it is easy to complain when one isn't involved, and I've organised a few events myself in the past to know what goes into it, so all my sympathies do lie with the organisers. If they get the venue right, with good catering available or nearby (with veggie food too!), then punters and stallholders will all be pleased.

Diana B.

[See details of this year's event below. Ed.]

The Song of Parting

*As the sun grows red in the west
And sinks to the edge of the sky
As the light bleeds from the valleys
And the day begins to die*

*As the life ebbs from my body
And my soul from the flesh is set free
The huntsman's horn is sounding
And I know he is calling for me*

*My soul soars o'er the valleys
And the fields I once called home
The lakes and the rivers I swam in
The forests and paths I would roam*

*My Balefire burns in the evening
As my soul travels west of the sun
To the island of apples, Annwn
The blessed land of the young.*

Brochfael

Glastonbury: Myth and Archaeology

By Nic Phillips

This article originally appeared in Cardiff University Pagan Society Magazine (now known as Offerings), Issue 4.



Glastonbury has always held a special significance to me. The place evokes a sense of mystery, of long remembered traditions and long forgotten details. It is in the convergence of Pagan and Christian heritage on this one small town that I find my interest. I chose to investigate the corresponding and conflicting elements of the Glastonbury myths and tried to work out why this town holds such interest, not only to spiritual pilgrims but also to historians and archaeologists from the Middle Ages to the present day. Do the academics or the 'believers' have a greater claim than one another to Glastonbury and what they feel is 'true'? Does there need to be reconciliation between the different schools of thought?

The Glastonbury we see today is a far cry from the waterlogged scene the prehistoric inhabitants of the Somerset Levels would have gazed out over. The proposed idea of Glastonbury as the mythical Isle of Avalon may have some basis in the Neolithic landscape. Philip Rahtz, the leading archaeological authority on Glastonbury, tells us the area immediately surrounding the Tor would have been not an island but a peninsula, almost completely engulfed by water except for a small strip on the eastern side. If one were to approach Glastonbury from the west, it would indeed appear to be an island (Rahtz and Watts, 2003: 11).

Archaeology has established that the area has been inhabited since the Neolithic, but what of the Tor, the most distinctive and unusual feature of

the Glastonbury landscape? Rahtz tells us it was naturally formed from the cap of Midford Sand, a substance harder than the surrounding Lias strata which eroded away to leave the conical hill we see today. It is speculated that the cap was so strengthened by the high quantity of iron in the water of the neighbouring Challice spring (Rahtz and Watts, 2003: 20). Considering the unusual way it rises from the flat landscape, surely it would have held some significance to the lake dwellers? Geoffrey Ashe theorizes that as it was among the little dry land around, it would have served as a burial ground for them (Ashe, 1957: 100). This makes sense as the absence of burials discovered alongside the other well-preserved items in the peat suggests they did not practise water burials. There is also some suggestion among researchers of myth that mounds and hills represented points of entry to the underworld to the Celts.

New Age writer John Michell speaks of the legendary Tor Labyrinth, a series of terraces on the slopes of the hill, the purpose of which is still hotly debated. He puts forward claims that it was carved some time after 4000 BC for initiatory purposes (1990: 40). He also tells of some dowzers who discovered a geomagnetic current which follows the contours of the hill and is connected to the 'St. Michael' leyline, which runs the length of Southwest Britain passing through significant monuments on its way. Such claims can never be ultimately proven and this interpretation is nowhere near being the only one. A recent B.B.C. programme entitled 'Terraces on the Tor' (2003) looked at the possibilities from a more archaeological standpoint, including Neolithic monumentalism, natural erosion, and medieval monastic agriculture. Some of the interpretations hold up better than others, but one conclusion cannot yet be drawn.

The Grail tradition is where pagan and Christian paths merge at Glastonbury and where the footsteps of Joseph of Arimathea cross with those of King Arthur. The Grail did not come into connection with the Arthurian story until the medieval fictional romance of Chrétien de Troyes and only came into connection with Joseph of Arimathea in Robert de Borron's work (Matthews, 1990, 35-7). Interestingly, Treharne tells us that the Church never formally recognised the belief in the Grail. The monks instead supported the idea that Joseph brought two cruets with him, containing the blood and sweat of Christ (Treharne, 1967: 114). Ideas of a cup of salvation held whiffs of heresy to some, and the Grail became connected with the Knights Templar and the Cathars (Matthews, 1990: 44-5).

Stories of the miraculous cup did not originate from Chrétien though. Its origins can be sought in the Celtic emblem of the Cauldron of plenty, or the Cauldron of rebirth. Magic cauldrons that impart great knowledge, or unlimited food, or even revive the dead can be found in *The Mabinogion* (Matthews, 1990: 12-22). One story tells of Peredur, who travels to the court of the Wounded King but does not ask what ails him, and it is upon this story that Chrétien's 'Perceval' is based. Arthur is present, but only in the background as a figure of "grandeur, glory and moral assurance" (Treharne, 1967: 43). Arthur becomes in these stories the guardian of the land or the Grail-object and is to some point analogous with Bran, another Celtic deity (Matthews, 1990: 19-

20). Therefore, he is important in the formation of the Grail legend, and although these texts survive in written form only from about the 12th century, they may in fact originate much earlier in bardic material. Miranda J. Green argues that these emblems in medieval literature are in fact present in the archaeological record such as in the ritual deposition of cauldrons. We know medieval authors like Gildas and Gerald of Wales observed past remains, so the writers of these myths may have drawn on the beliefs of the Celts when creating an image of the past (Green, 1999: 49-50). She argues for the socio-religious importance of the mythology (1999: 49). It can be argued that the physical whereabouts or origins of the Grail are not as important as what it represents and inspires spiritually, from the accumulation of pagan and Christian myths; whether that be the height of chivalry, heavenly salvation, or the blood of Christ. The variance of spiritual meaning of the Grail can be given as one reason for the existence of paganism and Christianity existing harmoniously at Glastonbury.

Now we have looked at some of the history and mythology concerning Glastonbury, we may ask why it is that people feel drawn to this place and why it has become such a centre of interest for archaeologists, Christians, pagans and New-Agers, not to mention its local inhabitants and environmentalists? Does any one group have a greater claim to it than another? Do archaeologists have a right to dismiss 'fringe' interpretations as nothing but fancy and supposition? Do they have a right to primary access to sites like the Tor and the Abbey over other groups should they wish to excavate there?

Traditionally, academics who study Glastonbury from an archaeological point of view have little time for the 'alternative' views presented by other interest groups, except perhaps to hastily dismiss them as fantasy. The problem with this is that in most cases archaeology cannot disprove these theories anymore than it can prove them, yet they still do, for instance in the case of Katherine Maltwood's 'Glastonbury Zodiac'. However, modern postprocessual archaeology encourages multiple interpretations, and denies that there has to be a scientific conclusion that explains 'everything' (Johnson, 1999: 106). In some cases, fringe and native interpretations are actually starting to be encouraged in order to present some healthy variation from the white, male, middle class archaeology that seems so prevalent in our libraries. Certainly, books like John Michell's *New Light on the Ancient Mystery of Glastonbury* (1990) equal the number of academics' volumes in bookstores and libraries. Archaeologists may see these books as providing misinformation, and to be fair, it is harder to find references in the works of authors like Michell for the theories they are proposing. However they do come up with some interesting theories that are often not too preposterous to be true. In defence of the academics, New-Age writers are yet to produce any significant evidence but the archaeology is so scant that surely any clues or theories are of use when trying to uncover the past. I would argue that archaeologists should apply more attention to 'fringe' theories and actually test them out, rather than just dismiss them, despite some of the ideas coming from unconventional methods such as Gematria (Mann, 2001: 99-109). They could actually make important discoveries in the process.

One example is Michell's theory about the seven sacred isles surrounding and including Glastonbury. He supports his theory of their special status with the fact that all seven were notable in the Glastonbury charters and the Doomesday book as being exempt from tax, and also each 'island' was topped by a chapel dedicated to a saint of local association. Michell argues for their special status coming from a barely remembered pre-Christian belief. This involves the positioning of the seven islands mirroring the shape of the Great Bear constellation from a bird's eye view (1990: 9-16). This could be dismissed as a pure coincidence but the reader may judge for themselves by looking at their positions on a map provided. It would be foolish to accept Michell's theory as being true on these grounds, but it is not completely deniable either. Further excavation of the area could turn up evidence to support the view of stations in the Glastonbury landscape being sacred and nomadically visited.

Increasingly, sites such as Stonehenge, and sites in America even more, are becoming the arenas for dispute over who has primary rights over access to ancient sacred sites. This issue links Stonehenge to Glastonbury and is addressed by Rahtz, among others. In asking 'Whose Glastonbury is it?' Rahtz talks about the possible disputes that could arise, between academics and 'the irrational'; between locals who wish to conserve Glastonbury's surroundings and the incomers who force the town to gain in size; and between Christian pilgrims and those who come for more New Age spiritual reasons (2003: 166). I would like to argue that yes, it is possible for these kinds of disputes to occur but in fact they rarely do, at least not to the extent of the disagreements regarding Stonehenge. I think the reason for this lies in the sheer volume of myth and mystery surrounding Glastonbury. For one thing, neither archaeologists nor New Age writers can come up with completely satisfactory explanations for features such as the Tor Labyrinth. Secondly, the amount and, to be honest, the confusing nature of the intertwining Pagan and Christian myth about Glastonbury mean that followers of either faith will find suitable spiritual relevance in them. It is virtually impossible to separate the two traditions in stories such as that of the Holy Grail. It is this almost alchemical relationship, the product of the weaving of two faiths, which gives Glastonbury its special significance to pilgrims today. This blending is analogous with the alchemical marriage which features in the legends - the Red and White Springs, the hounds of Gwyn ap Nudd, the blood and sweat of Christ - and the list goes on.

Marion Bowman takes a slightly more cynical look at paganism today and its motives. She suggests that Neo-pagans wish to look back to a Celtic golden age and see their ancestors as being closer to Nature. She sees this as a reaction against Christianity and its failings and speaks of Glastonbury as a centre for New-age therapies and commodification of all things 'Celtic' (Bowman, 1994: 143-4). I would disagree with this view. It can be easily seen that paganism and Christianity co-exist peacefully in Glastonbury and may well have done for centuries. Not all pagans have a problem with Christianity and accept it as just one of the many spiritual paths.

It can also be argued that the interests of New Age/Pagan groups are not always diametrically opposed to the interests of the archaeologists. It would be injudicious to assume that Pagans do not wish to discover truths about the land in which they are interested as much as the archaeologists. For this reason, opposition is not likely to occur when surveying and excavating is carried out on the Tor. In fact, some archaeologists and historians concerned with Glastonbury have Pagan sympathies, such as Professor Ron Hutton, who recently appeared in the 'Terraces on the Tor' documentary about Glastonbury (B.B.C. 2003). In summary, disagreements over Glastonbury seem to be found only on the pages of books, and not on Glastonbury's streets. The issue of rights to Glastonbury locations has not yet come to serious disputes, in the present at least.

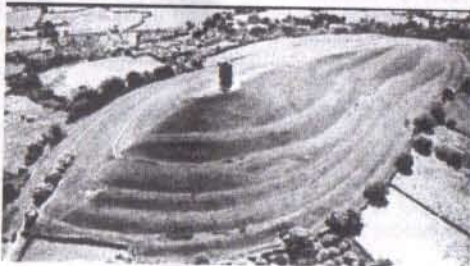
It would seem that academic and New-Age writers are still very separate and unwilling to converse on matters (Meskill, 1999: 83). I would agree that archaeologists and those who believe in the mythology come to their conclusions in very different ways and neither find the other's satisfactory. Imagine an archaeologist attending a New-Age gathering, on a festival day specified by folklore, in order to test for physical differences in the ground using scientific methods. The fact is they would not for fear of ridicule from fellow archaeologists who might accuse them of belief in 'lunatic' theories, and from the pagans who would deride them for trying to apply redundant scientific methods to detect ethereal nuances.

Trying to draw any conclusion about Glastonbury seems like an impossible task. Despite wading through the tangle of Glastonbury's major myths (and without having time to look at some of the minor ones), no conclusion can be drawn that would satisfy all audiences with an interest in the place. The archaeology is useful in putting pieces of the ecclesiastical and settlement history together, but we are still left with a jigsaw of folk tales, historical scraps and forgeries, and New-Age theories. Might the reconciliation of the academic and 'fringe' ideas be the key to uncovering more of Glastonbury's past? We have already witnessed their unwillingness to work together through the segregation of ideas in their publications. Maybe the differing schools of thought can never be reconciled because of their different methods of searching for the ever-elusive 'truth'. Maybe it is because New-Age thinking does not search for the same truth as archaeology. It tends to look for spiritual meaning rather than physical proof, and to all intents and purposes there is a wealth of it at Glastonbury. Finally, I would like to end by raising the question of whether Glastonbury itself could suffer from the academic persistence to dispel the myths that bring so many pilgrims to its door. If it were possible to disprove the legends, would we be irrevocably damaging one of Britain's most beloved centres of heritage?

(This article is an edited and abridged version of an Independent Archaeological Study used in my degree course.)

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EVENTS PAGE

Witchfest Wales

24th June 2006 (10am - 2am)
Cardiff University Students Union

Speakers include: Kate West, Cassandra Eason, David Ranking, Tam Campbell, Karin Rainbird, Galatea, Sorita D'Este, Sara Kobuszka, Marion Davies, Katie Gerrard, Awengwau, Gareth Gerrard, Tanis, Chris Warwick, and Kim Huggins.

Live music from Kitty Hudson and Circulus

Tickets: Before 31st March, (Children of Artemis) members £9.00, non-members £12.00

After 31st March, (Children of Artemis) members £10.00, non-members £14.00

Evening ticket only, £5.00

Witchfest, BM Artemis, London, WC1N 3XX

<http://www.witchfest.net>

Saturday June 10th 2006 -The Esoteric Conference and Occult Book Fair at the Assembly Rooms, Ludlow starting 10am, finishing approx 6pm. Organised by Verdelet magazine, tickets £10 (pay Verdelet, PO Box 58, Craven Arms, SY7 8WG). FFI: <http://www.theapothecaries.com>

Friday - Sunday July 7th - 9th - The District (all Wales and Borders) campout, between Whitchurch and Ellesmere (turn right just after Oswestry), in an isolated place off the beaten track (though accessible by car), speakers and workshops being confirmed as we write. FFI. Tel. Steve (District Manager) on 01691 679066.



Round the Region

Bridgend Moot – cancelled until further notice

Cardiff Moot

Please note the Cardiff Moot is now meeting on the 1st Sunday of each month, and not Saturday as was previously happening.

All talks will take place in the upstairs room of the Rummer Tavern, Duke Street, Cardiff, from 8pm. The venue may be subject to change but we will notify members of any change as soon as possible. For more information on the events listed below please contact Welshwytch@ukpagan.com

Sunday 2 April 2006 – Talk by Danielle Marsden – Babylonian Mythology

Please note this talk will be held at the Students Union – Please meet outside Threshers in Senghenydd Road at 7:45pm.

Danielle Marsden lives in Mid Wales and visited us back in August 2005 and kindly agreed to give a talk on Babylonian Mythology. I for one am really looking forward to hearing her talk, I am sure there are plenty of others who will be too.

Sunday 7 May 2006 – Workshop – Divination

Following the success of Kim's talks on Tarot and Runes we will be having a Workshop to learn different forms of divination. Everybody is invited to bring their favourite tools for divination and teach/learn about different kinds.

Sunday 4 June 2006 – Meeting to Discuss Future Events

In order to get another Events Listing agreed, we will meet at the usual time, usual place to decide the future events listings and any other items that need to be discussed.

Carmarthen Moot

The first Saturday of every month. Held at the Three Salmons, Water Street, in Carmarthen, 14.45pm onwards.

Neath Moot

The last Thursday of every month. Held at the Burrough Arms (we are normally in the back room), 7.30pm onwards.

Penbrokehire Moot

The first Saturday of the month. Held at the Oak, Haverfordwest. For further details email owlbinker@hotmail.com or contact Matt on 01646 622094 or 07766 162285

Pontypridd Moot (Trefforest)

The third Wednesday of every month. Held at JJ's, opposite train station in Trefforest (nr Pontypridd). 8pm-11pm.

Swansea Moot

The third Tuesday of the Month. Held at Crowley's Bar, Cradock St, just off the Kingsway, 8 p.m onwards.
Merry meet? FFI: Chris 01792 578 309

Yahoo groups available:

Carmarthenshire Pagan Community Network
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CarmsPCN/>

Pagans around Neath (PAN)
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/pagansaroundneath/>

PF Wales
<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/pfwales/>

Pembrokeshire Pagans
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Pembrokeshire_pagans/

Welsh Pagans
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Welsh_Pagans/

See also:

Cardiff University Pagan Society (CUPS)
<http://cardiffpagan.co.uk/>



Earth Day

Sunday 23rd April 2006

Meet at Arthur's Stone, Reynoldston,
Gower Peninsula
1-2pm for a 3pm Start

*was a reasonable success, c. 35 people,
rite acknowledged*



Open ritual to be run by 'Cranes Egg' group
from Cardiff

Please bring drums, rattles, noise making items!!
Dried pulses in boxes will suffice!