

ISSUE 160 - IMBOLC 2023

# MYDDLE EARTH

OFFICIAL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE  
PAGAN FEDERATION MIDWEST AND WALES  
DISTRICT

## FOR BRIGHID

For Brighid and the silver streams  
Running deep in the Earth  
For the kindled fire  
And the sacred well  
And the hope she guards through the dearth

Find her in the snow-filled dell  
Where the old dry leaves lie still,  
Look for her in the empty woods  
Where the early shoots are bidden  
But slowly as the fire grows  
For her secrets are yet hidden.



A Poem by Greg

## Calling all members

We are always looking for new articles, stories, recipes, reviews and new writers to create them. If you would like to have your work included in a future issue of Myddle Earth please email [MWAW.editor@paganfederation.co.uk](mailto:MWAW.editor@paganfederation.co.uk)

As Editor I can help with all the spelling, grammar and punctuation business so don't worry about that. Your content makes this YOUR magazine and I'd love to see it go from strength to strength with local content.

Imbolc Blessings

*Wren*



IMBOLC 2023

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# DISTRICT MANAGERS' REPORT - Imbolc 2023

BY AUDREY & RICHARD  
DISTRICT MANAGERS, PF MID-WEST AND WALES

## **MWAW...Wha-a-a-t? And why 'Myddle Earth'?**

It's occurred to us that some things about this PF District may be puzzling to some of you, and there may be some confusion about what it all actually means. Let us explain and perhaps clarify.

Apart from sounding like an air-kiss, 'mwaw' is an abbreviation of 'Mid-west and Wales', the name this District is known as in the PF's administrative structure. Members don't really need to bother themselves with the boring intricacies of how the PF is run, but this basic fact may be of interest.

Mid-west and Wales includes all of Wales (!) and the border counties of England, plus a few neighbouring places: Bristol, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, part of Staffordshire, part of Cheshire and part of Shropshire. The term 'Mid-west' simply means the counties that are in the middle and west part of England.

Now, what is this 'Myddle' about? Well, one of our long-serving and now deceased volunteers decided to name the District magazine after a village in Shropshire, the fact that much of this District is in the middle of Great Britain, and because it's a play on the name 'Middle Earth' from Tolkien's Lord of the Rings fantasy epic. Pagans love fantasy, legends, myths, and folklore, it just seemed to fit. So there you have it. None of this is fixed, we're always open to new ideas, so do chip in. All politely-worded contributions welcome!

## **DISTRICT VOLUNTEERS**

### **Regional Co-ordinators**

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### **Facebook: Pagan Federation Midwest and Wales**

**(Please note: there is a very old FB page called "Pagan Federation Midwest Region" which has not posted anything since 2015 and is nothing to do with us)**

**Website: Myddle Earth Midwest and Wales District Pagan Federation**

As the snowdrops peep through the cold snowy ground and the sun rises visibly higher in the sky, we bid good-bye to Winter and look forward to longer days of Spring. Our good wishes go to you for the coming months as Mother Earth slowly awakens again.

**Audrey & Richard District Managers, PF Mid-west and Wales**

# How to get in touch

## District Managers

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Email: [mwaw.editor@paganfederation.co.uk](mailto:mwaw.editor@paganfederation.co.uk)

## Social Media

Facebook: Pagan Federation Mid-west and Wales

**Myddle Earth is distributed four times a year to local PF members (and a few others). Your contributions are essential to make this a great magazine. Don't be shy, get in touch. After all this is Your magazine.**

## COPY DEADLINES

- 31 December for Imbolc Issue
- 31 March for Beltane Issue
- 30 June for Lammas issue
- 30 September for Samhain issue

## ADVERTISING

This is free for non-profit making ventures. For commercial advertising, prices are available on request. Adverts can be emailed to the Editor or posted (see address opposite)

## Submission Guidelines

Your submission should meet the following guidelines:

- the content must have a pagan-theme or be of interest to the Mid-West and Wales Pagan community;
- articles should be submitted as a MS Word document or OpenOffice document.
- use a friendly, casual tone as we want to make the content as accessible as possible.
- authors are responsible for the accuracy of references and reference citations;
- images need to be of high quality, minimum resolution 300dpi, preferably in .jpeg format. Please ensure you have copyright permission for their further publication.

Please note the following before submitting your content:

- We reserve the right to abridge articles and to edit them for clarity, style, grammar and accuracy;
- All articles remain the copyright of the author;
- For Welsh language submissions, please accompany with the English translation;
- Although every effort will be made to accept your contributions for publication, we reserve the right to refuse submissions;
- We are sorry but we are unable to pay for submissions; and finally
- If you would like a copy of our GDPR statement, please email [mwaw.editor@paganfederation.co.uk](mailto:mwaw.editor@paganfederation.co.uk)

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed by writers are not necessarily those of the Pagan Federation or its Officers.



## HOW ABOUT A HOT TODDY TO CLEAR UP THE LAST OF THE GREAT BRITISH COLD?

RECIPE BY AMBER

Whiskey is good for opening up the passages, but if you are taking medication always consult the instruction leaflet for advice, you can still make a warming drink without the spirit, or even change it for Rum if liked.

### INGREDIENTS

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup water

\* 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounces whiskey

\* 2 to 3 teaspoons honey, to taste

\* 2 to 3 teaspoons lemon juice, to taste

\* 1 lemon round

\* 1 cinnamon stick (optional, for garnish)

## LITTLE QUIZ

Which insect symbolises:

1. Industriousness, chastity, secret wisdom, as well as deities Artemis, Krishna, Diana and Demeter?
2. Immortality, swiftness, weakness, unreliability?
3. The path of the Sun, divine wisdom, virility, eternal renewal?
4. Orderliness, patriotism, and the corn Goddess Ceres?
5. Abundance, good luck, improvidence, nobility and a scourge?

Answers on page 14

# Working with energy in your business

BY COZ CATLIN



I'm Coz Catlin and I've been a witch for many years and have run my own business for 13 years. I am the author of **Witch Business**, a collection of the thought processes, methods, and techniques I have developed and used myself in my own work.

My path is one of kitchen/garden/eclectic witchcraft. I live in harmony with nature and use elements from each of these different traditions, as well as others I have learned along the way, to create an individual practice that works for me.

My own marketing and consultancy business is run using the methods I explain in the book. I write and deliver business, sales, and marketing plans for my clients so by bringing these worlds together the book brings useful and practical advice that you can apply to you and your business.

Website: [www.witchbusiness.co.uk](http://www.witchbusiness.co.uk)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/yourwitchbusiness>

Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/yourwitchbusiness>

We naturally work with energy in one form or another all the time, from deciding which tasks we take on according to our mood to raising energy in ritual - everything we do is affected by our energy and the energy around us.

## **So how do you manage your own energy and that in your workplace – be it in your own business or at work?**

When thinking about managing energy the most important energy to start with is your own, as it's the one area that you can have direct control over. Sometimes things can get on top of us, and we feel swamped which affects our energy. Always remember that you have successfully made it through 100% of life so far and you can deal with whatever the situation is too – a positive mindset can have a huge impact on how you see the world and work with the energy in it. It's important to acknowledge negative emotions as being falsely positive, engaging in fake reassurance or sweeping difficulties under the carpet isn't helpful and can even lead to bigger problems down the line. Acknowledge when you feel life is unfair or bad things happen and then process through it in whatever way works for you; this may be talking to a trusted friend, seeking professional help or simply just working out your own game plan for dealing with it.

# Working with energy in your business - part 2

BY COZ CATLIN

## Some techniques for releasing heavy or negative energy from yourself:

### Grounding and centring

Grounding and centring helps to calm and focus your mind by connecting you back to the earth, it's a method of clearing out any excess energy that might be making you feel anxious, hyper, or angry (or any other emotional state that you don't want to be in at that time). To ground yourself, visualise golden roots going deep into the earth and letting all the negative feelings flow down and away. In return, feel the strength of Mother Earth connect back to you to replace these feelings and fill your central core with the good stuff.

### Breathing exercise to clear yourself of negative energy

Breathe in through your nose for a count of 3 and out through your mouth for a count of 6. Consciously push out any stagnant energy, frustration, and stress. Repeat 3 times and then ground and centre.

### Cursing stones

Using a cursing stone can help you release stress and a build-up of negative energy, charge it with all the negative feelings, stresses and anxieties and then throw it in the sea or a river for them to be washed away.

Managing the workplace environment (or your home) can also really affect the energy around you. Stagnant, sticky and stuck energy will affect you and bring you down, so it is important to regularly give your workspace a spruce up....

- **Tidy your space** – Clutter attracts more clutter and stuck energy, which means the good stuff can't flow around freely bringing with it inspiration, clarity and helping you to feel positive. Also get rid of any items that don't lift your mood – that manky old free mug from an away day you hated – get rid of it and replace it with one you like.
- **Cleanse and purify** – regularly do this in your workspace - it works great alongside a good tidy up. You can use a herb bundle (easily found in witchy shops or just make your own from herb plants in your garden). Work anti-clockwise around the space and get the smoke into all the nooks and crannies. Open the window to let it all out and take any stuck energy with it.
- **Bring in the outside** – we are designed to be in nature, it is only more recently we have surrounded ourselves with technology and stifling environments. Add in some plants, open the window to let in some fresh air and hear the birds outside or the wind in the trees (even if it is cold), put in a desktop water feature. Feeling more connected with nature helps to lift our mood – think of the feeling you get with a lovely natural view, a bracing walk along the seafront with your dog, or a sunny summer day – it's these feelings you are trying to bring in.
- **Lighting and atmosphere** – try to bring in good natural light, if you can, put your desk by a window. Try and get outside for a bit during the day too, this will help you feel more connected and grounded and recharge your energetic batteries.

# Working with energy in your business - part 3

BY COZ CATLIN

- Use some room sprays or scented candles to lift the atmosphere too – you can connect these with what you are trying to achieve that day:
  - o Creativity – bergamot, mandarin, vanilla
  - o Concentration – ginger, peppermint, juniper
  - o Productivity – rose, geranium, frankincense
- Colour Me Happy – colour can massively affect our mood. A dark, dingy, grey workspace is likely to leave you feeling drained and tired, whereas a lighter brighter setting can help support your mood. Some colours can be a bit overwhelming – for example you may not want a whole room painted neon orange, but feature walls or coloured accents in the workplace like chairs or pictures can bring these brighter colour energies into a more neutral setting.

Some suggested colour correspondences to work with:

- Yellow - Abundance, joy, confidence, happiness
- Orange - Creativity, strength, self-expression, confidence
- Red - Passion, desire, willpower, ambition, energy
- Pink - Love, self-care, nurturing, harmony
- Purple - Intuition, wisdom, independence
- Dark Blue - Protection, change
- Light Blue - Calm, peace, truth, communication
- Green - Earth, growth, fertility, nature, healing, balance
- Brown - Steadfastness, foundations
- White - Purity, peace, spirituality
- Black - Letting go, mourning, remove negativity



By learning to work with your energy, your working day and workspace will feel lighter which will improve your overall productivity and allow you to focus on your goals for your business or working year. This short article is just a brief overview with inspiration of how you can lift and manage your energy and that of your workplace. If you'd like to learn more about this and other ways you can support your business, you can find out more detail in my book *Witch Business* – available now from Amazon in both print and ebook.

Blessed be x



# The Sky At Night for this Season

BY HANNAH

## February

1st/2nd Imbolc

5th Micro Full Moon 18:28

20th Super New Moon 07:05

## March

7th Full Moon 12:40

20th Spring Equinox 21:24

21st New Moon 17:23

## April

6th Full Moon 05:34

20th New Moon 05:12

### Just out of interest

The 1883 eruption of the Indonesian volcano Krakatoa threw up huge ash clouds and caused vast crimson and purple twilights which carried on glowing in the sky for hours after sunset.

## Children and Families Update

As always the Families team has been extremely busy. Look out for our God blogs and our series on how we introduced certain aspects of Paganism to our children. The blogs are found on the PF community website.

We are also hosting the Online Imbolc festival this year which will be held via Facebook. Pop on and join us for story telling, poetry, craft and fun.

As if all that wasn't enough we will also be launching 4 new Aether patches this year, the first one Herbs should have been released already so keep an eye out for that. The patches are a really great way of involving your little ones and older ones in Paganism. Plus the FREE winter Aether magazine is up online if you haven't seen it yet and is crammed full of great stuff. It's available via the PF shop.

As always if you have any queries don't hesitate to contact me at [mwaw.families@paganfederation.co.uk](mailto:mwaw.families@paganfederation.co.uk)



# Tilly Treehugger - Action Stations

**Who's up for making a difference?** It won't happen by itself. The lessons of history show us that very little important change occurs unless lots of people make a fuss about it. I'm talking about big changes to how society is run, stopping a major ecological disaster, maybe pointing out the folly of a 'vanity project'. People in governments and corporations are sitting on their privileged bottoms enjoying a range of powers and comforts while the Earth's biosphere is gradually being destroyed. They need to be given a bit of a shock at times, and preventing environmental destruction has become urgent.

Let's start with direct action. Actually, no, cancel that idea. The UK government is trying to bring in some heavy laws against protests, and neither I nor the Pagan Federation can condone any law-breaking. This is a shame, because it doesn't have to be dangerous or destructive, just visible.



Having been on many demos, I've enjoyed the quickly-forged friendships that arise with people united in a common cause, and we had a lot of fun too. When done with colourful flair and crazy humour, it can win over the doubters on the sidelines (or watching on screens). However, this type of action is becoming legally risky now, so we have to try other methods.

Someone I know made a long banner with a statement about stopping the use of fossil fuels, then draped it over the railings of a bridge spanning a major road in Devon. No traffic was obstructed, local police unconcerned, no fights broke out, but a serious message was there for all to see. Slogans on t-shirts, badges, hats, etc., all get noticed. Write a catchy eco-aware message on a green heart and hang it in your front window, there's no law against that (yet). Actions such as these are as 'direct' as you can get without landing yourself in court.

Use people power! Contact MPs and Councillors to draw their attention to issues that harm the environment, especially local ones. Remember this: government representatives work for us, so make them earn their keep. If yours are unsympathetic or show little interest, write to the press with your concerns. They read the news, and would not like to see any damaging publicity because they know many others will be reading it too. Make them squirm. Show them you aren't one of the 'silent majority'. Alternatively, if your local representatives are concerned and care for the environment, so much the better. Tell them they are appreciated and get behind them in campaigns. One person can't achieve much, but a rising tide of active citizens can't be ignored for very long.

## Tilly's Top Tip

Use a jug or two to collect the cold water that runs through the tap when you're waiting for the hot water to come through. Use it to rinse the dishes, boil spuds, water the garden, or something. Much better than just running it down the drain.

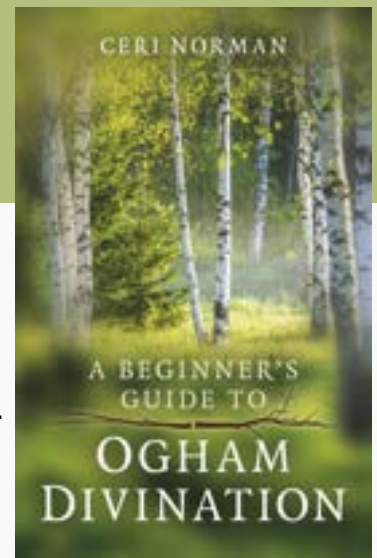
A stylized, cursive signature of the name 'Tilly' in a dark green color.



# The Ogham Today

By Ceri Norman- Writer and Moon Books' Author

CERI NORMAN IS A GREEN WITCH, FOLKLORIST, HISTORIAN AND AN INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN AUTHOR. HER INSPIRATION COMES FROM THE NATURAL WORLD, ANCIENT MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY AND SACRED MONUMENTS, AS WELL AS THE INNER REALMS OF MAGIC AND MYSTERY. THROUGH HER WORKS SHE HOPES TO INSPIRE OTHERS TO APPRECIATE THE MAGIC AND MAGNIFICENCE THAT IS ALL AROUND US.



The Irish Ogham is an ancient mythical and magical alphabet rooted in Irish lore, legend and the landscapes of the Emerald Isle. Today it's best known, somewhat simplistically, as The Tree Alphabet, but once upon a time each of its letters referred to a lot more than just a tree, for it could also refer to an art form, rivers, Kings, Gods and birds. Each of its symbols, known as fews, was a code for a great deal of information, and could even be used as a kind of Druidic secret semaphore by which to convey messages. It was and still is a powerful method of communication between Humankind and Nature.

Perhaps it is because of our need to reconnect with Nature, and especially with the trees who are Nature's guardians and perhaps our closest spiritual allies, that so many people connect to the Ogham today as The Tree Alphabet. Of the original twenty-five letters, only around half were connected directly to trees, but in the intervening centuries every single one of them has become linked with a tree, and it's not just the letters of the Ogham to which this has happened either for even today in the formal, albeit a little archaic form, the letters of the Irish alphabet are named for trees and shrubs, just like the Ogham.

The ancient Celts, much like their descendants today, and all those who are interested in Celtic spirituality, have always had a thing about trees. Trees are wise; they are ancient beings who have seen so much over their long lifetimes. They know things that we do not and they can teach us of their ways and the ancient knowledge if we wish. As well as knowledge, trees, as individual species, as well as the individuals within a species all have their own personality, their own associations and their own kind of wisdom to share. It's all there in the Ogham, in our rich folklore, our modern magical associations, in the sound of the rustling leaves and in the living energies of the trees.

We all know the Oak to be the King of the Forest, a wise old King who offers protection to all creatures. It's links with Royalty are ingrained in our culture, hence the sheer number of taverns and inns the length and breadth of the UK and Ireland known as The Royal Oak. This mighty King offers protection as needed, not just to its fellow Monarchs though, but to all who need it whatever their status in life. In the tales the Oak sheltered King Charles II as he escaped the Roundheads after the Battle of Worcester and is just as happy sheltering Robin Hood and his fellow outlaws in Sherwood Forest.



# The Ogham Today - part 2

By Ceri Norman- Writer and Moon Books' Author

The Birch is often seen as the Queen to the Oak as King, for she is the ever regal and graceful, and some say ghostly, Lady of the Woods. The Hawthorn is the tree of the Faeries and of healing, for many Hawthorns are found, even today, close to old Holy Wells and Springs which people frequented to seek healing blessings. The water-loving Willow reflects our psyche and the spiritual dimensions back at us from the pools of water it grows by. The Blackberry symbolises abundance with its countless berries on which we all – animal and human alike - like to gorge on come autumn. The evergreen Holly and Ivy are the literal spirits of Midwinter, celebrated in hymns as well as in how we decorate our homes at the darkest time of the year.

Trees are a part of our culture, our identity, our magical practices and our world. They are the lungs and the guardians of this world on whom we depend for our very lives. To our ancestors trees were even the means to travel between worlds or spiritual realms, for the great World Tree of the Vikings, Yggdrasil, connected all of the Nine Worlds and to the Witch of Old the wooden broom – crafted with a birch or ash handle and willow or broom bristles allowed her to travel spiritually between realms.

We work with trees to keep us sane in the modern world. We adore and often seek to protect the few trees that survive in our parks and gardens and we yearn to be amongst them when we are weary of our concrete jungles. Trees inspire us with their tenacity – especially when they go and grow through concrete as if to remind us of how powerful they and Nature are, their sacredness, their great age and their fabulous changing colours as the seasons turn. Trees can brighten our day in so many ways. Trees are living like us, but can teach us how to live better and more fully which many of us seem to have forgotten how to do these days. We craft our magical tools from trees, we seek their wisdom in myth and modern life, and we can work with them through the means of the Ogham as a form of divination or of daily practice. The trees have much to share with us in both the physical and metaphysical sense, all we have to do is learn to listen.

The Ogham is a great way to start connecting to the power and magic of trees for it allows you to talk to the trees and the trees to talk to you, either through readings or just by picking a tree a day to guide and inspire you.

**Are you ready to walk and talk with the trees?**



# A Bard's Tale

By Andy Harrop-Smith

Hi, I'm Andy Harrop-Smith, Druid, storyteller, folklorist and a bit of a historian, all at an amateur level of course. I enjoy researching folk lore and history to inform my storytelling, and I'd love to share some of my findings with you.

Is it too late to wish everyone a Happy New Year?

I'm most honoured to be invited back to write a piece for this edition of Myddle Earth. As it's Imbolc it feels appropriate to mention the goddess Brigid of the Many Spellings. A very powerful and well-respected Lady! She's Goddess of the Strengthening Light, the Returning Sun and New Beginnings to name but just a few of her many duties. At Kildare in Ireland, she has a healing well and an eternal flame dedicated to Her. As a 'fire' goddess She looks after hearths and forges, and has a great knowledge of metalworking. No surprise then that She's the 'Goddess of Blacksmiths'.

## The History and Folklore of Blacksmithing (Part 1)

And there we have a seamless link to my chosen subject for this edition, 'Blacksmithing', a trade dear to my heart. My surname is 'Smith' from many generations past, and so last year I decided to research the trade as a way of honouring my Blacksmith ancestors. I also answered some 'burning' questions like, 'why is Iron considered to be magical', and I spent many wonderful 'hands-on' hours at a forge, literally going at it 'hammer and tongs'. It was hard work but a spiritual, enlightening process, and most enjoyable. I'd certainly recommend a 'Blacksmithing weekend' to anyone interested. I turned up a wealth of material that culminated in a full storytelling performance, parts of which I would like to share.

(Please note: Throughout history there have been both male and female Blacksmiths [see movie: 'A Knight's Tale'...a brilliant film!] but, during the early years, men tended to predominate in the trade. You will therefore understand why I use 'he/his/man' when referring to Blacksmiths in this article).

### A bit of Blacksmithing background

As always, a bit of historical background and factual information helps to inform the folk-lore and tales. Blacksmithing is a well-respected and ancient art that has played a vital role in civilization for thousands of years, and the Blacksmith has worn many hats throughout his illustrious history. As well as being the skilled designer and maker of all things iron, he's also been credited with being a magician, cunning man, healer, surgeon, vet and wedding celebrant! And a 'god' of course. Throughout history most civilisations have had at least one Blacksmith god, some of which we'll explore next time.





## A Bard's Tale - Part 2

The Blacksmith traditionally works with the ferrous metal, iron or more often these days, mild steel. The name 'Smith' is derived from Old English meaning 'to strike' or 'smite', and 'Black' refers to the fire-scale or black oxides that coat the metal during the heating process. The Smith works in the 'Smithy' at his fire or 'forge', using a variety of techniques including 'forging', the process of shaping metal by heating and hammering. The term originates from the French word 'forgier', meaning to shape, re-shape or copy, (the same as a 'Forger', although that's not so well respected as an occupation!)

### **An ancient craft.**

There is always much competition for the title of 'the first trade developed by humankind'. Blacksmithing makes no claims to that title, although the trade is most definitely ancient. Ironworking was developed about 6000 years ago by the ancient Egyptians, although there is no evidence to show that they smelted their own metal from iron ore. Ancient Egyptian iron was found in meteors that had crashed to Earth, where it was heated and re-shaped to make ceremonial items. Meteors were thought to be the 'tears of the gods', and so from its early beginnings, iron was considered to be sacred. A ceremonial dagger made of meteoric iron was found in Tutankhamun's tomb.

The earliest evidence of metalworking in Britain is in bronze and dates back to about 3800 years ago in Ireland. The ancient British Iron Age began about 100 years later, although iron tools and weapons were not used extensively until about 2500 years ago. Ideas take time to catch on! By the Middle Ages most towns and villages had their own Blacksmith which was one of the earliest trades to organise into a Guild in 1434.

### **A Master of many skills.**

The Blacksmith was invaluable to the community that he served, and his functions were many-fold, although much of his work was either agricultural or martial. Together with shoeing horses and making weapons that were arguably the mainstays of his trade, the Blacksmith would make anchors, chains, gates, railings, Church bells and any number of household and cooking items. The list is endless, and of course he would make, repair and sharpen the iron tools of other craft-persons. Thus, he was granted the title, 'King of all Trades' by none other than King Alfred the Great, or so folk tradition would have us believe...it's a great story!

Blacksmiths, although often poorly educated were innovative, inventive and expert designers. As the use of the horse declined, they developed skills such as motor mechanics, and the Scottish Blacksmith Kirkpatrick McMillan is credited with inventing the bicycle. The Blacksmith's shop or 'Smithy' was a hub of village life. Usually located on the outskirts of the community to prevent unwanted fires, it was a warm place where the men would gather to gossip and brew tea (women often met at the village well when working!).

# A Bard's Tale - Part 3

## The 'Magician'.

The skills of the Blacksmith were, for many hundreds of years, closely guarded secrets. The ability to turn stones (iron ore) into weapons and tools of beauty was an awe-inspiring mystery, especially as the Smith used the four magical elements: Earth (ore), Air (bellows), Fire (to heat and shape) and Water (to cool and temper the metal) to 'conjure' iron. In fact, it's been suggested that Excalibur, the 'sword from the stone', is a metaphor for this 'magical' process. No wonder then that Blacksmiths were thought of as 'magicians' imbued with supernatural abilities.

I think that I've probably overstayed my welcome for this edition, and will conclude this article next time. TO BE CONTINUED!

Thanks for listening.

*Andy*

## Quiz Answers

1. Bee
2. Dragonfly
3. Scarab
4. Ant
5. Grasshopper

Well done if you got them right!

LOOK OUT FOR MORE  
FROM ANDY IN THE NEXT  
ISSUE  
BELTANE 2023

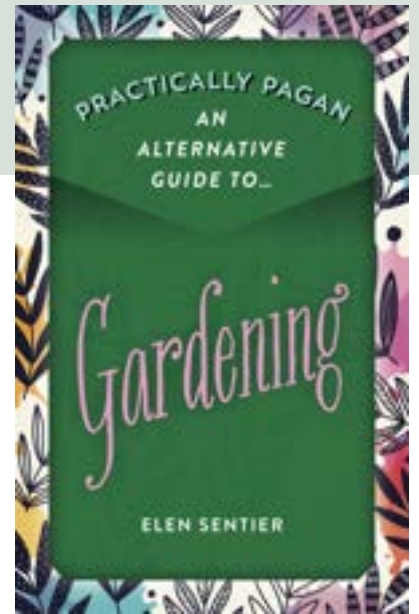
## Welsh Daffodils A Poem by Hannah

Golden bugles  
Gladly blow  
The last remnants of winters sleep  
Blooms aglow  
In joyful triumph  
Lighting up Welsh valleys deep  
Bonnetts bowing  
Fair headed beauties  
Play for us a merry song  
Dancing in winds  
Of wild abandon  
On Welsh hills where they belong.

# Imbolc in the Garden

By Elen Sentier - Writer and Moon Books' Author

Best-selling author of British native shamanism, Elen also writes paranormal mystery-suspense novels. She's a wilderness woman, born on Dartmoor and grew up on Exmoor in a family who had practiced the old British magic for hundreds of years. She's a quirky, unconventional person with an intensely strong connection to nature, a wilderness woman deeply into ecology and the environment. Elen is also active on Twitter and Facebook fighting for wildlife and rewilding as well as for real compassion in politics.



Imbolc is the beginning of Spring – the equinox is the mid-point, and Beltane the end of Spring and the beginning of Summer – so, for me, Imbolc is about the garden waking up again. It's also when I really feel the light coming back. Yes, I know there's been more light every day ever since Sun Return on 23th December but I don't really begin to feel it until Imbolc.

Some of that is the snowdrops. As climate change progresses the snowdrops come earlier, in January now, but seeing those lovely nodding white bells is such a wonderful signal of the awakening Earth, and I still associate them with Imbolc. I go out and pick nine blossoms for the day's celebration each year to symbolise Olwen's white tracks as she takes the Cup of Winter Ceridwen hands her to lead us into Spring.

Imbolc – that turning-feeling of more light – gets me out into the garden again too. Before that I always get a distinct feeling there's a Do Not Disturb notice out there – don't come and weed, don't clear anything yet, don't plant new stuff, we're all deep inside, going inwards, working with our roots so leave us along please! But come Imbolc I begin to see the first bumble bees come out of hibernation to test the air, see if it's time to wake up yet.

The queen bee comes out of her winter nest as Olwen of Imbolc calls, so I always try to make sure there's some flowering plants out as she'll be hungry when she wakes. Good ones are all the Christmas Roses, hellebores, and they come in lovely colours too from crystal white through pinks and reds to deepest midnight purples, and there's Viburnum bodnantense, the Bodnant viburnum, that flowers from December through to March-April, a lovely bushy shrub with a fabulous scent we enjoy as well as the bees. I've got Flowering Currant too, and that comes early, mine is just one solid Buzzzzzz for a month or even 6 weeks while it flowers. And Blackthorn, Ceridwen's tree that gives us the sloes for the gin in early winter. Blackthorn flowers before the leaves come, at the end of winter, it's Ceridwen's parting gift as she hands the cup to Olwen. The hedges hereabouts are one long mass of scented white snow-flowered trees – I have to be careful driving not to go off the road staring at them in delight!

# Imbolc in the Garden - part 2

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Then there's all the bulbs we love. The winter aconites cover the ground even in January with a carpet of shining gold flowers on brilliant green leaves. Together with the silvery snowdrops they're pure magic. Tiny alpine irises sparkle bluely along with the vibrant scarlet and flashing white-and-gold of the star-petalled species-tulips whose striped leaves echo those of the delicate cyclamens And the crocuses ... another carpet of purple colour splashed with gold and pink and white. I can never have too many crocuses!

And the miniature daffs! You may have had some indoors over Midwinter, they can go outside when the weather is warm enough and they'll naturalise into the lawn. I plant loads of them in the edges and hedges in my garden, many of them are scented and – as long as you always buy the single, open, varieties – they're super-food for bees and insects.

Back to bushes and trees again ... Sarcococca, Christmas box or sweet box, is a must-have. Its long, shiny leaves are topped with gorgeous creamy-pink-white flowers that have the most fantastic fragrance, and it's another food-provider for lots of insects. And as a biggish evergreen shrub it provides winter shelter for birds too. It likes part-shade and isn't fussy about what sort of soil it likes so easy to grow.

Bergenia – elephant's ears – is often thought to be a dull and boring plant but give it a sunny spot and watch the difference! It'll really come to life. And, as it's evergreen it covers the ground, giving warm shelter for little beasts, beetles, spiders and insects through the winter, putting out its delicate flowers come the spring to add more food for our pollinators.

I love all this abundance. It's like the Earth really puts on a show, so exhilarating, full of colour and scent. That long winter sleep from Samhain through to Imbolc, first going down into the dark Earth-womb through November and December. Then the wonderful standstill (solstice) between Midwinter's Day and Sun Return, such a great time for reflecting on what has been, dreaming into what will be, and so coming fully grounded in what is. And then the snuggle into the roots, the stretching and eye-opening as the days slowly get longer until the final bursting through the cold soil of the first snowdrops, heralding the new season and the coming of growth and rebirth again.

So Imbolc gets me outside in the garden again. It calls to me – come on! We're awake now! Let's get going! The grass begins to think about getting its first haircut of the year but, before that, I'm watching for the bees. Like I said, the queen bumbles wake up and come out to sniff the temperature and the air, see if they feel it's safe to waken fully yet or if there'll be damaging frost. When I see five bees then I know they know it's safe, so then I can clear the dead tangled grasses in the meadows. If I do it before then I'll kill the larvae, caterpillars, of many of our rarest butterflies!

Many of our now-rare butterflies lay their eggs on long grass stems. The caterpillars hibernate or overwinter in that long grass and in the tussocks so I never, ever, cut the long grass. I know if I do I'll kill all those babies and make butterfly extinctions even worse!





# Imbolc in the Garden - part 3

By Elen Sentier - Writer and Moon Books' Author

But, when I've seen five bees, then I know the caterpillars are ready to come out, they'll be going to their spring feeding plants, fattening up and making their chrysalises to hatch on to butterflies a bit later on. So then I can "comb the grass". Gloves and fingers are the best way, then you can feel which stems are loose and want to go and which are still firmly attached. Your fingers won't slice any late caterpillars like the strimmer and the lawn mower will!

So I collect the dead grass, let it lie for a day like you do when you clean the pond so anyone left in there has time to come out and find a good new home, and then it goes in the compost bins. It's super-brown stuff, soaks up the wet that's accumulated over the winter and freshens the whole mix up. And it gives me the chance to turn the compost if it needs it.

So Imbolc is a great place to be in the garden. Watching and feeling and sensing and hearing the garden wake up and come to life again.

And, for a final tip, Imbolc is mole-time too! Mole hills are the very best compost for growing your new veg seeds in so get a bucket and collect some. Your veg plants will love you forever 😊



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# Lessons from the Landscape: What the Welsh Coast Taught Me by Katrina Townsend - Moon Books Author

Katrina Townsend is becoming the anarchist hedge Druid she was born to be, exchanging shopping addiction and an Instagram obsession for green and simple living, creativity and connection with nature. Books are her lifelong passion, and other things that make her heart beat faster include folklore, folk art, folk rock (and pirate metal), libraries, forests, truck stops and other underrated liminal places, road ghosts, real ale, horned gods, yoga, yarn crafts, zines, mead and sunsets. Living in England, she is mother of one small Spud, and married to a Welsh Viking. There are faeries at the bottom of her garden.



In my book *The Anti-consumerist Druid*, I spoke at length about my annual trip to Pembrokeshire with my husband's family, and what a life-changing experience this was for me.

I wasn't looking for a life-changing experience at the time, but I don't think that I would be the Pagan – or the person – that I am today without the influence of this quiet pocket of the West Wales coast. To be honest, that first trip, I wasn't expecting much. Wales? Damp and muddy, right? And full of sheep. I hadn't been across the bridge since childhood, and I fully expected to find myself putting a brave face on a wet week in a grim, grey field. And no Wi-Fi! For me now, this is a bonus, but on that first holiday, some five years ago, I was heavily pregnant and involved in a tempestuous one-sided love affair with Instagram. In hindsight, I suspect that my father-in-law, who is referred to in some circles as 'the Welsh Buddha', knew exactly what he was doing when he insisted that my husband and I come and stay in a little village in Pembrokeshire.

*The Anti-consumerist Druid* is a memoir I wrote while my son was very small, in snatched moments after bedtimes and during naps. It began life as a journal I started in 2019, six months or so after I was first introduced to the charms of the Welsh coast. I had a problem with shopping, and it was getting out of hand, which was not exactly what we needed whilst I was on maternity leave and we were saving for a wedding.

When I started that journal, I was at my wits' end with myself. I had tried several times by then to stop compulsively shopping, or even to cut back, and my inability to press pause had really brought home to me how little the problem was under my control. I started writing to explore my thoughts and feelings around these obsessive purchasing behaviours, with the goal in mind of a year without shopping. I'd expected it to be difficult, and it was. I was surprised, over and over, by just how difficult I found it. But that trip to Wales had sown some seeds in me, which enabled me to carry on.

How can I explain the bliss of that first week without Wi-Fi? We were lucky with the weather that week, gloriously so, and once I'd come to terms with the fact that in this tucked-away nook with no phone signal and no internet, my phone was completely useless, I felt myself start to open up to the world around me. My social media addiction and my shopping habit went firmly hand in hand, yet after a couple of days the initial fluttery feeling of panic subsided, and for the first time in many years I found myself able to just be present in the moment. I didn't have to worry about being photogenic. I couldn't escape, boast, compete or compare via my ever-present screen. I felt so phenomenally free.

# Lessons from the Landscape: Part 2

## by Katrina Townsend - Moon Books Author

I guess that for a long time I'd been so focused on the world inside my pocket that I'd learned, as many people seem to, to disregard the actual, physical one. In a place as beautiful as West Wales, this was no longer a possibility. I swam every day in water as clear as glass, buttery-gold in the sunshine, bordered by rolling cliffs where heather, gorse and foxgloves grew wild and abundant. I read novel after novel under vast blue skies, and every evening I watched the moon rise over the bay.

A few months later, staring down the barrel of my shopping addiction, at last I had an idea of how to pull myself out of the quagmire. I turned off my phone, and I started going outside, taking the baby with me – in his buggy at first, and then toddling hand in hand as he grew.

To begin with it was a chore. But in very little time at all, our walks on the nature reserve became the reason I got out of bed every day. We paddled in rivers and streams, played in mud, foraged flowers and berries, even hugged the occasional tree. I began campaigning for environmental causes. I had begun to fall in love with nature, and I sensed a deep connection, an experience something akin to ecstasy, that I could only define as magic.

I turned to spirituality to explain what I was feeling. Having been interested in Wicca as a teen and read widely on various topics of Paganism in the years since, these paths and religions were my first port of call, and it was during this research that I found Druidry. Druidry strengthened and bolstered my new-found environmentalist, anti-consumerist perspective, and gave me a less anthropocentric lens with which to see the world.

That summer, and every summer since, we returned to the little cottage in Pembrokeshire, and each year it was just as beautiful as before. I had jokingly referred to the trip more than once as 'a pilgrimage', but last year this became very literal indeed.

I had begun to experience synchronicities – nudges, if you will – which I believe came from the goddess Brigid. Her various names – Brig, Bride, Ffraid, Brigantia, to specify but a few - were cropping up everywhere I turned – in every book I read, however unrelated; I was showered in her symbols. When it became so obvious that even my husband started to notice, I shoved aside my habitual scepticism and set up an altar on the kitchen windowsill.

Not knowing what, exactly, to do with an attentive goddess – something I had thought was the preserve of more experienced folks, or those with capital-S Sight – I had searched online for Brigid's holy places, with the vague idea in mind that since everything I'd experienced so far had been firmly rooted in the natural and the physical, a guided meditation or a spot of visualisation wasn't going to cut the mustard.

A list came up, and I started reading out the locations to my husband, feeling a tingling sense of awe, hope, joy – and okay, a little terror – well up in me as I did so. It was like a list of places that he and I had visited in recent years, from Glastonbury Tor, where we went for my birthday, to St Non's Chapel – and not least of all, our beloved holiday rental cottage, which was bang-smack in the centre of an area called St Bride's Bay.

A pocket of the West Wales coast had taught me unequivocally: sometimes, that which you seek really is seeking you.