

WITCHTOWER

Volume 2 : Issue 1
Yule 2005
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The Pagan Network Magazine

What is Magick?

David Rankine explains all on
p. 16

Leaving no traces

Bamboo coffins and woodland
burials – fancy a zero-carbon
funeral? More on pages 6 and 7...

... plus news, reviews, events, and the PN Convention 2006...

Wichtower

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Contents

All change!	2
This issue's cover	2
Folklore and Customs of Yule..	3
Astrological Birth Stones	5
Green News.....	6
A Woodland Burial.....	7
Interview with a Pagan.....	8
Paths through the Zodiac.....	10
Rights and Perceptions.....	12
News in Brief	14
Notes from the AGM.....	15
What is Magick?.....	16
Bah Humbug.....	17
Book Reviews	18
PN Convention 2006	19

All Change!

Welcome to the Yule edition of Wichtower! It has been some time since the last edition, and in that time there have been some significant changes made. The most important being WiccaUK is no more! After much discussion and voting of the Full Members; we have now become Pagan Network, connecting all Pagans across the United Kingdom.

We had our first ever AGM, held on the 1 October 2005, in Leeds, and a great success it was too.

Another major change for Wichtower itself is me!!! Yes, my name is Michelle, known online as MouseDemon and I am now the new Editor of Wichtower. My team and myself will be bringing you a varied and interesting magazine for you to enjoy.

In our Yule edition we bring you seasonal lore by Jools, a hilarious insight into Pagans and their Birth Signs by Beith-ann, an article on "What is Magick?" by David Rankine and much, much more.

If any of you wish to volunteer for a position on our team, please PM on the Pagan Network web site, or email wichtower@pagan-network.org

This issue's cover:

Melanie
(Twilightgirl)

www.sensorychaos.co.uk

Melanie (aka Twilightgirl) is a woman of many creative talents. She is a digital artist who has seen her work published in magazines, calendars and CD covers. She also enjoys expressing herself through the world of film production and writing. Never one to sit still, she also makes handmade Pagan cards and jewellery as well working in the role of Membership Manager for Pagan Network.



FOLKLORE AND CUSTOMS OF

Yule

Deck the halls? What's that all about anyway? Jools sings the praises of Yule customs...

Midwinter, also known as Yule, is a mixture of Pagan and Christian traditions and symbolism.

Yule is the most widely celebrated of all the Sabbats because its customs and lore have so deeply invaded popular cultures and the mainstream religions, and virtually every culture in the northern hemisphere in some way.

For example, the 17th December was once known as Sow Day because this was when beasts were customarily slaughtered in readiness for Christmas. Boar's head was a favourite dish with Nordic settlers, who believed that they would acquire the strength and stamina of the animal by eating it. It was also the start of Saturnalia, when Roman invaders indulged in a week-long feast and orgy.

Alternatively, the 13th December is St. Lucy's Day, and prior to the calendar change, festivities would be held to celebrate both Yuletide and the Winter Solstice.

Midwinter Day (21st December) is also known as St. Thomas' Day, the time when Christmas activities, such as carol singing and putting up decorations, begin in earnest.

The observance of the winter solstice was significant in ancient times. Since this date represented the moment when the days would become longer and light would return to the land, the rural folk who faced lean times in winter had reason to be thankful.

For modern pagans, Yule (from the Anglo-Saxon *yula*, meaning "wheel" of the year) is usually celebrated on the

actual winter solstice, which usually occurs on or around December 21. It is a Lesser Sabbat or Low Holiday in the modern Pagan calendar, one of the four quarter days of the year, but an important one.

Symbolically, the god (who died at Samhain) is reborn of the Virgin Goddess. The God is represented by the sun which returns after this darkest night of the year to once again bring fertility and warmth to the land.

The holiday spectacle of coloured lights on houses and trees at Christmas is a modern version of the pagan custom of lighting candles and fires as acts of sympathetic magic to lure back the waning sun.

As the nights grew darker and longer, and the days colder and shorter, it was important that the sun be lured back to the earth. The sun's return meant spring was on its way, and with it, the birth of new animals to the flock, and the softening of the soil tilled by our ancestors who lived as animal herders and farmers.

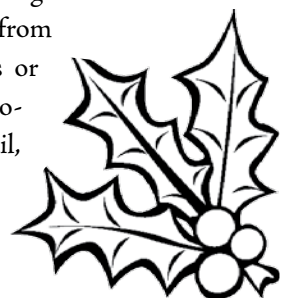
The holiday of Christmas has always been more Pagan than Christian, with its associations of Nordic divination, Celtic fertility rites, and Roman Mithraism.

That is why the Puritans refused to acknowledge it, much less celebrate it (to them, no day of the year could be more holy than the Sabbath). The holiday was already too closely associated with the birth of older Pagan Gods and heroes. And many of them (like Oedipus, Theseus, Hercules, Perseus,

Jason, Dionysus, Apollo, Mithras, Horus, and even Arthur) possessed a narrative of birth, death and resurrection that was uncomfortably close to that of Jesus. And to make matters worse for the Puritans, many of them predated the Christian Saviour.

Ultimately, of course, the holiday is rooted deeply in the cycle of the year. It is the winter solstice that is being celebrated, the longest night and shortest day. It is the birthday of the new Sun King, the Son of God—by whatever name you choose to call him. On this darkest of nights, the Goddess becomes the Great Mother and once again gives birth.

Long before the world had heard of Jesus, Pagans had been observing the season by bringing in the Yule log, wishing on it, and lighting it from the remains of last year's log. The Yule log was the centre of the celebration. It was lighted on the eve of the solstice (it should light on the first try) and must be kept burning for twelve hours, for good luck. The Yule Log was said to have many magical properties. Remnants of it, or its ashes, were kept in the house throughout the year for many purposes. Among these were protection from thunderstorms or lightning, protection from hail, preserving humans from chilblains and animals



from various diseases. Mixed with fodder, the ashes would make the cows calve and brands were thrown into the soil to keep corn healthy. Women often kept fragments until Twelfth Night to ensure a thriving poultry flock in the coming year. It was customary to pour libations of wine or brandy upon the Log and to make offerings by scattering corn or bread crumbs over it. Even money was placed on the Log. Those charred "lucky coins" were then given to children or servants as gifts.

A lesser known tradition is that of the Yule Clog. The Clog was a knobby block of wood, burnt in the kitchen hearth. Household servants were entitled to ale with their meals for as long as the Clog was kept burning. In many parts of Scandinavia, the object burnt was a fat wax candle, instead of a log. The candle was lit at Dawn and must burn until Midnight, or be considered an ill omen

Along with the evergreen, the holly and the ivy and the mistletoe were important plants of the season, all symbolizing fertility and everlasting life. Evergreens were cherished at this time of year as a natural symbol of rebirth and life amid winter whiteness.

But holly was particularly prized to decorate doors, windows and fireplaces because of its prickliness – to either ward off or snag and capture evil spirits before they could enter and harm a household. An old holly spell describes how to know one's future spouse. At midnight on a Friday, nine holly leaves must be plucked and tied with nine knots in a three-cornered cloth. This is then placed under the pillow and, provided silence is observed from the time of plucking until dawn the next day, your future spouse will come to you in your dreams. In certain areas of Wales, it was thought extremely unlucky to bring holly into the house

before December 24th and if you did so there would be family quarrels and domestic upheavals. You would also be inviting disaster if you burned green holly or squashed the red berries.

Mistletoe was especially venerated by the Celtic Druids, who cut it with a golden sickle on the sixth night of the moon, and believed it to be an aphrodisiac. In the north of England, it used to be the practice of farmers to give mistletoe to the first cow that calved after New Year's Day. This was believed to ensure health to the stock and a good milk yield throughout the year. Underlying this old belief is the fear of witches or mischievous fairy folk who could play havoc with dairy produce, so here mistletoe was used as counter magic against such evil influences.

Riddles were posed and answered, magic and rituals were practised, wild boars were sacrificed and consumed along with large quantities of liquor, corn dollies were carried from house to house while carolling, fertility rites were practised and divinations were cast for the coming spring. Many of these Pagan customs, in an appropriately watered-down form, have entered the mainstream of Christian celebration, though most celebrants do not realize their origins. Contemporary reports indicate that the tables fairly creaked under the strain of every type of good food. And drink! The most popular of which was the "wassail cup", deriving its name from the Anglo-Saxon term *waes hael* ("Be Well," "Be Whole" or "Be Healthy."). The proper response to this toast is "Drink Hael", making it a shared blessing, a mutual well wishing. Traditionally, carollers went from door to door, singing and bearing their "Wassail Cups", to be rewarded with the drink and fruited breads or other sweets.

Medieval Christmas folklore seems

endless: that animals will all kneel down as the Holy Night arrives, that bees hum the 100th psalm on Christmas Eve, that a windy Christmas will bring good luck, that a person born on Christmas Day can see the Little People, that a cricket on the hearth brings good luck, that if one opens all the doors of the house at midnight all the evil spirits will depart, that you will have one lucky month for each Christmas pudding you sample, that the tree must be taken down by Twelfth Night or bad luck is sure to follow, that "if Christmas on a Sunday be, a windy winter we shall see", that "hours of sun on Christmas Day, so many frosts in the month of May", that one can use the Twelve Days of Christmas to predict the weather for each of the twelve months of the coming year, and so on.

In Northern Europe and Scandinavia it was noted by the early Christian scholar, Bede, that the heathens began the year on December 25th, which they called Mother's Night in honour of the great Earth Mother. Their celebrations were held in order to ensure fertility and abundance during the coming year, and these included much feasting, burning of lamps, lighting of great fires (the Yule fires) and exchanges of gifts.

The Romans, too, held their great celebrations – Saturnalia – from December 17th to 25th and it was the latter date which they honoured as the birthday of the Unconquered Sun. The Saturnalia was characterised by much merry-making, sometimes going to extremes, with masters and slaves temporarily exchanging roles. The use of evergreens to decorate the streets and houses was also very much in evidence at this great winter festival.

So however you celebrate Yule this year, whether in an orgy of food and presents or of other things, you can be sure that just about every Christmas tradition has a basis in ancient paganism. Even overeating.

Bees hum the 100th psalm on Christmas Eve.

ASTROLOGICAL BIRTH STONES

It's coming up to Christmas and so you may be looking for that special gift for your loved ones. What better than something that is personal to their Sun sign and with the latest thing being crystals, something in their birthstone may suffice very nicely.

Particular stones are chosen for specific signs because the property of that crystal resonates with the personality of the sign. This is why people of certain signs are attracted to particular stones.

This list is in no way definitive and I have tried to include some unusual but readily available stones too.

Beith-ann

ARIES – The Ram – 21 Mar. – 20 Apr.

Aventurine, Diamond, Red Tiger Eye, Imperial Topaz

Aventurine has little sparkly bits in it, the Diamond goes without saying and the rich red/brown colours of the Tiger Eye and the Imperial Topaz all resonate with the adventurous, fun loving Aries.

TAURUS – The Bull – 21 Apr. – 21 May

Aventurine, Dumortierite, Emerald, Malachite

Venus, the ruler of Taurus, rules most of these stones and they invoke a sense of luxury and steadfastness, just like the steady, reliable Taurus personality.

GEMINI – The Twins – 22 May – 22 Jun.

Citrine, all Agates, Sapphire, Watermelon Tourmaline

The blue of the Sapphire relates to the communicative skills of Gemini whilst the other stones are all resonant of the adaptability and variety found within the Gemini personality.

CANCER – The Crab – 23 Jun. – 22 Jul.

Bornite (Peacock Ore), Moonstone, Pearl, Rhodonite

The Moon rules Cancer and the emotions. All the above stones are ones that balance and allow us to express our emotions effectively. The pearl, not strictly speaking a stone is formed in the water and looks like a full Moon, goes without saying really.

LEO – The Lion – 23 Jul. – 23 Aug.

Carnelian, Ruby, Golden Tiger Eye, Amber

All the above stones reflect the glory that is Leo. The Lion is the most majestic of signs and deserves a majestic stone. Ruled by the Sun, Leo is not to be ignored and the birthstones reflect the courage and opulence of the Leonine personality.

VIRGO – The Maiden – 24 Aug. – 22 Sept.

Apache Tear, Flourite (esp. green/blue colours), Blue Tiger Eye, Garnet

The discernment of Virgo and the ability to communicate are reflected in all the above stones. If you have a Virgo on your

side, you have a fount of knowledge second to none and this is how the above stones help in life.

LIBRA – The Scales – 23 Sept. – 24 Oct.

Ametrine, Rose Quartz, Jade, Iolite

Balance is the watchword for Librans and all the crystals assist in attaining and keeping a balanced outlook on life. The Rose quartz suggests the unconditional love that the Librans crave.

SCORPIO – The Scorpion – 25 Oct. – 22 Nov.

Opal, Red Jasper, Labradorite, Jet

Deep colours and stones with flashes of iridescence all resonate the mystical Scorpio personality. The stones that attract a Scorpio echo all the depths that they seek and the ability to shine rainbow hues when others least expect it

SAGITTARIUS – The Archer – 23 Nov – 22 Dec.

Azurite, Lapis Lazuli, Topaz (Blue), Epidote

Rich blues and greens of these Jupiter ruled stones are just the ticket for the adventurous, generous Sagittarius. They reflect the ability to communicate in the artistic and grand way that the Saggi storyteller loves to do.

CAPRICORN – The Sea-Goat – 23 Dec. – 20 Jan.

Hematite, Green Jasper, Snowflake Obsidian, Smokey Quartz

The solid, grounding properties of the Capricorn stones suggest the strong earthy qualities of the Capricorn personality. These stones help you to put things into a real perspective, just like the one the Sea-Goat has.

AQUARIUS – The Water Carrier – 21 Jan. – 19 Feb.

Amazonite, Amethyst, Clear Tourmaline, Rutilated Quartz

There has always got to be a twist with an Aquarian and all these stones break away from the norm. They help us to achieve our individuality and the Amethyst particularly reflects the positive humanity of the Aquarian personality.

PISCES – The Fish – 20 Feb. – 20 Mar.

Blue Lace Agate, Aquamarine, Flourite (esp. purple/pink colours), Tourquoise

Watery, mystical Pisces just loves the blue watercolours of these Neptune ruled stones. The variety of the fluorite mirrors the many faces of the Pisces personality. The healing, clarifying blue/greens of the other stones pull back the veil to find the truth within.

Hope this helps with you Christmas shopping or any time that you need to choose a gift. However, this list is just a guide. If you want to choose a stone for a friend or loved one, just think of them and see which stone attracts you the most. Chances are that you will pick just the right one for them.

Happy shopping.

Green News . . .

Casparian has been checking out options for green living

Green Burials

Following the death of Harry Greenfield recently, who was buried in a green ceremony near his home, I did a bit of investigation in to "green" funeral options. It's only in the last few years that green burials have become viable, thanks to reduced

Of the 600,000 deaths which take place every year in the UK, some 70% are cremated and just 30% are buried. Less than 0.5% of burials are 'green', but numbers are increasing.

Britain's crematoria emit some 1.3 tonnes of highly toxic mercury every year; that's about 5.5 kg each – all because of tooth fillings. And every cremation uses 20 litres of fuel and releases 5 kg of activated carbon into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming.

The term 'green burial' means an eco-friendly burial in a wood or meadow so as to create and protect wildlife habitat. Natural burial is the most ancient form of burial and yet the green burial movement represents the most forward-looking and ecologically sensitive way to be laid to rest. As well as



Bamboo coffins

less nasties in the air, most bodies are buried in bio-degradable coffins made from bamboo, cardboard or even just cotton sheets and rather than a headstone, a tree can be planted, further helping reduce carbon in the atmosphere.

They are an alternative to 'production line' funerals and encourage a wider choice of ceremony and memorial.

Natural burial welcomes followers of all faiths and religions as well as those seeking a spiritual alternative.

Most green burial companies are happy to work with your chosen funeral directors or they can handle arrangements themselves. Many also offer pre-payment plans, just like traditional burials. Double plots are also often available should you and your partner wish to be buried together.

www.naturaldeath.org.uk

www.green-burial.co.uk

www.greenlaneburialfield.co.uk

www.uk-funerals.co.uk/green-funerals.html

See also the article "Woodland Burial" elsewhere in this edition.

Own part of a woodland

If you've always dreamed of owning your own woodland but have been put off by the cost, there's a unique opportunity for you to become part owner of Taldrum Wood.

Located in an unspoilt sheltered valley in South West Wales, for a payment of £50.00 you can protect this rich diverse woodland forever.

Woods for All are offering a limited number of Taldrum Wood Shares for sale. This means that everyone who buys a Taldrum Wood Share has a legal right to walk on and visit (at any time) the whole wood. Approximately 12 thousand trees set in over 12 acres of woodland are yours to enjoy and explore. By dividing the ownership of Taldrum Wood in this way we ensure that it will be protected and preserved for generations.

If you're interested, pop over to www.woodsforall.org

Bee keeping in your garden!

Did you know that of over 250 varieties of Bee found in Britain, over 25% of them are endangered?!

The Red and Blue Mason Bees are two native species, and helping them is easy. They are solitary so don't swarm and will only sting if they're squished, so they're safe around pets and children!

The females lay eggs in areas they can easily seal over with mud to protect them over winter. The Oxford Bee Company has invented these nesting tubes which are ideal for them, they have long tubes, similar to drinking



Oxford Company bee nesting tube

straws. The Mason Bees crawl to the end, lay an egg, leave some pollen for it to eat when it wakes up, and seals it with mud. It continues this process until the tube is full with 6-8 cells, each partitioned off from the next. In the Spring, the oldest (the one at the back) wakes up, breaks down the wall and bites the one in front on the bottom to wake it up, and the process repeats until the bee at the opening end frees them all. The process repeats every year. You can buy tubes with 30 nests for about £10 and 100 nests for £20. It's too late for this year (they need to go up in April-June) but next year, attach them to a south facing wall and try to put some very slightly damp mud nearby, and you could end up with a collection of pet Bees!

A WOODLAND BURIAL

by Ted Pitman

From *Vegan Views 95* (Winter 2002/3)

HAVING BEEN VERY involved with green issues for many years, it was only natural that when we died Joy and I would both want a green burial. We discussed our thoughts on the subject at some length, eventually deciding that we would like to be buried in our own garden. The garden had been a field and it was our intention to fence off a small portion at the end as our burial site so that, when the house eventually came to be sold, the piece of land would be made over to our children. The Environment Agency established that there was not a water course nearby which could become contaminated and the local authority could see no health hazard, so we were given the go ahead. We chose a site where there were no tree roots and primed our four sons and sons-in-law that one day they might be called on to dig a hole.

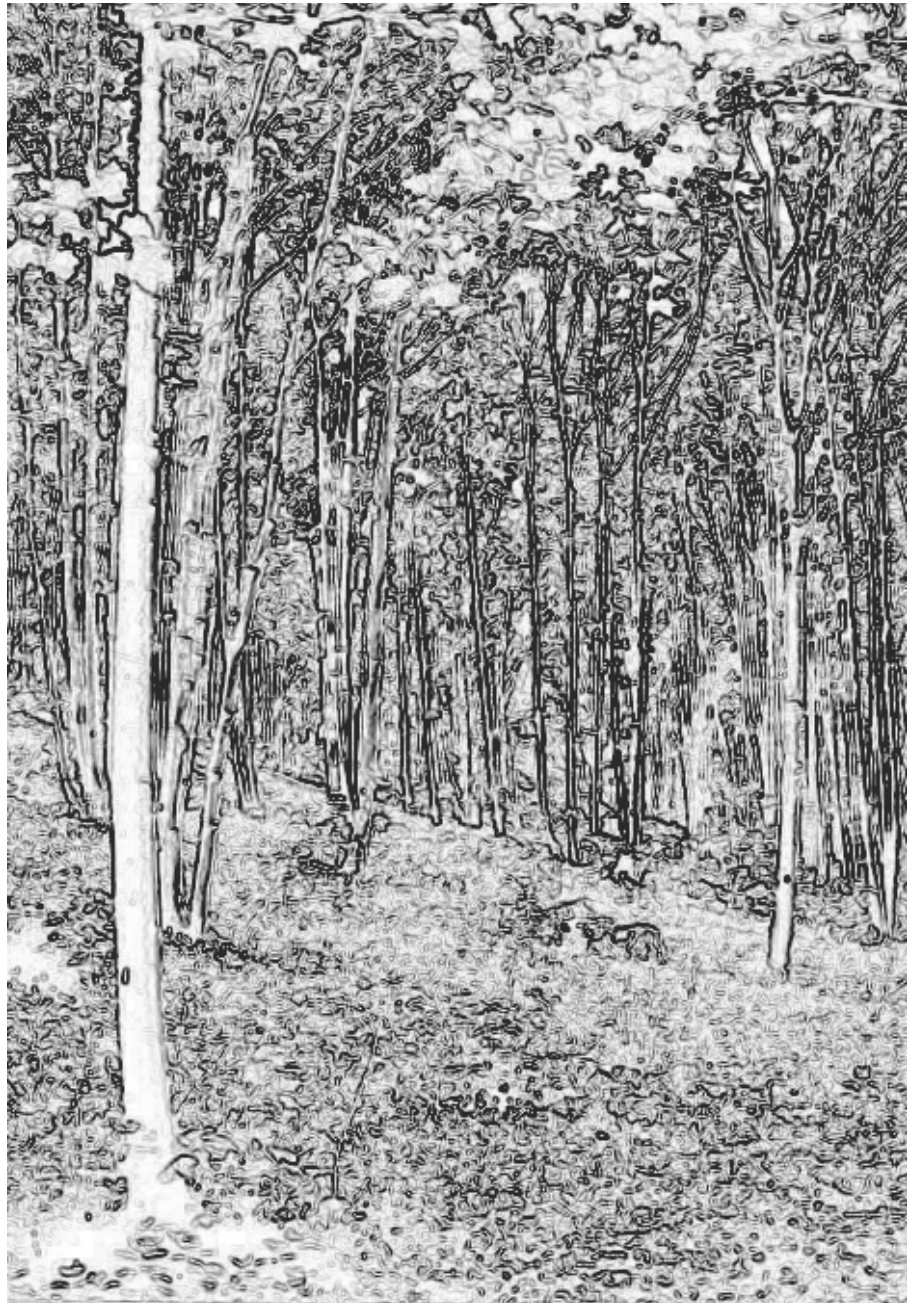
In the mid 1990s Joy and I were co-founders of an organic gardening club. During Joy's secretaryship, she invited a local green undertaker to talk to our group. As a result of the talk, one of our members offered some land to the charity to be used as a burial site. The site is quite close to our home and after some further discussions we decided there might be problems with a garden burial when the house came to be sold, so we changed plans and opted for a woodland burial.

In the summer of 1999, Joy was diagnosed as having breast cancer which had already spread to the lymph glands. After removal of the glands and the lump in the breasts came the usual chemotherapy and radiotherapy, but a few months after the treatment, a

scan showed that there were secondary cancers in the skull and other bones. Further chemotherapy was recommended but Joy decided that the quality of her life was paramount and she opted for alternatives: acupuncture, lymph drainage, homeopathy and spiritual healing. We contacted the undertaker, having decided not to ask our sons to dig the grave and discussed, in general terms, the burial and then did our best to live as normal a life as possible.

After some months, Joy felt she would like to spend some time in a retreat. She booked in for a week but halfway through her stay, she phoned me to say she was feeling unwell and would like to come home. When I entered her room I knew that she was very ill and after a day and a half in bed, she died. Her son, daughter, sister and I were at the bedside. Earlier that year, Joy had written a poem entitled

continued on page 13



INTERVIEW WITH A Pagan

First of a series of interviews with the members of Pagan Network. Here, telesillawitch puts the questions to Yewtree.

Pagan identity

PN: Name / username:

YA: Yvonne Aburrow (Yewtree)

PN: What age are you and where do you live?

YA: 37. Bristol.

PN: How would you describe your spiritual path?

YA: Polytheist Wiccan – lover of landscape, nature and wild things

PN: How did you get involved with this path? What's your "history"? How did your personal background influence this?

YA: I realised I was a Pagan aged 17, when I realised that it was an apt "umbrella term" to cover all my various views about the nature of deity, humanity's relationship to the cosmos, and the sacredness of pleasure. At that time I thought I was the only one, until I joined a re-enactment society and started meeting other Pagans there. I had always been interested in witchcraft, as a result of reading a book by Cynthia Harnett. My interest in Paganism, apart from being based in my interest in nature and the landscape, stemmed from reading "Puck of Pook's Hill" by Rudyard Kipling. Eventually, after leaving university, I met a suitable Gardnerian Wiccan group and was initiated. I was lucky enough to find a coven who were also interested in our connection to the land and local deities and spirits. My current coven also have a similar spirituality, and we work in a very egalitarian way.

PN: Have you always felt the same way about your spirituality, or have there been changes? If so, when, and how?

YA: I was originally brought up as a Christian (in the Plymouth Brethren, something I have in common with Aleister Crowley) but fortunately my parents left that organisation when I was 9. Around the age of 14 I had a bout of Christianity, but recovered from that when I realised that my Christian friends disapproved of gay people - my best friend was (still is) gay, and he is one of the most spiritual and kind and wonderful people I have ever met, so I could not understand how Christianity could be against him, and decided it was a choice between Christianity and my friend. I chose my friend. So that was the first major change in my spirituality. I became an atheist for a while, looked into various paths (Hinduism, Buddhism etc) but decided I wanted a path that celebrated the joys of sexuality and physical existence - so Paganism seemed the obvious choice. Since then I have travelled along the path of Paganism in much the same direction, and have always been polytheist, believed in nature spirits and many gods and goddesses, and felt attracted to nature and the landscape.

PN: Have you ever been physically attacked or discriminated against because of being a pagan?

YA: Physically attacked: No. Discriminated against: Yes.

PN: Has anyone ever made assumptions about you (good or bad) because of being a pagan? What were they?

YA: Yes, someone assumed I was a bad person, but subsequently realised otherwise.

How paganism fits into your life

PN: What do you do for a living? Is there any conflict between your work life and your spirituality?

YA: I'm a Web Developer. I'm out of the broom closet at work, and as I work for a University and am very keen on equal opportunities and diversity, and ensuring my web sites are accessible, I feel this fits in well with my Pagan path.

PN: What are your hobbies and interests?

YA: Hobbies: Walking, reading, writing poetry, books, and articles, blogging, posting on mailing lists and the Pagan Network forums, going to films (sometimes theatre and opera), eating, cooking.

Interests: history, archaeology, anthropology, science fiction, folklore, mythology, Wicca (of course), folktales, storytelling, folk magic, botany.

PN: What about your family and friends? Are they of similar spiritual paths to you, or are there differences?

YA: Family are Christian to varying degrees, but very tolerant. Friends: some Pagan, some other religions, some atheist, some agnostic.

Beliefs

PN: Do you believe in the existence of a 'deity'? If so, have you ever had any divine experiences?

YA: I believe in many gods and goddesses. I have encountered some of them and have a particular relationship with a few from different pantheons, whom I consider to be my "household gods".

PN: Do you believe in the existence of 'spirits' - human or non-human? Have you ever had any experiences of 'spirit'?

YA: Yes

PN: Do you believe in the existence of magic? As a believer, how would you explain it?

YA: Yes, I believe in magic. I think it is something to do with the fact (now confirmed by quantum physics, string theory, etc.) that everything in the universe is connected to (perhaps even next to) everything else, and that the universe is permeated with consciousness.

PN: Do you practice your spirituality alone, in a group, or both? Was this a deliberate decision or a necessity, and which do you prefer?

YA: I do both and like both of them equally. I like the group work for the resonance and companionship of the group, and the fact that it makes you look at issues you might otherwise not look at, and individual work for the opportunity to do whatever you feel like.

PN: Do you think the law of threefold returns exists?

YA: Well, sort of, but not in the popular sense - not as an actual property of the universe. The source of the idea is from the 2nd degree, where people are told to return good threefold. That's it, and it is specific to the [Wiccan] 2nd degree.

Activities

PN: What practices are regularly

incorporated in your spiritual life?

YA: Ritual, magic, visualisations, energy work.

PN: What festivals, holy days, special occasions etc. do you mark as part of your spirituality?

YA: The eight festivals of the wheel of the year. Plough Monday. Anything else we feel like at the time.

PN: Have you ever done magic to get something and did it work?

YA: Yes and yes.

PN: Do you spend much time in nature, in the wild? Do you spend enough time out there? Also, do you think paganism works better in the country than in the city? Why?

YA: I spend a lot of time in the wild, but probably not enough. I go a bit crazy if I don't get to see lots of trees at least once a week. I also really love the sea. As to whether paganism works better in the country or not, see my article, "I'm the Urban Pagan, Baby". <http://www.handstones.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/yewtree/articles/urbanpagan.htm>

PN: Is this your main online hang-out? Where else do you go to regularly (especially pagan / Wicca / magic-related)?

YA: Yes it is. I also visit Britpoly (a Yahoo group for British polytheists) and Hexengefluester (a Yahoo group for German Pagans).

Contentious Pagan Network Questions

PN: How do you define the term "Wiccan"? How do you feel about the idea that "Wiccans" are people who have been initiated into a lineaged Wiccan coven?

YA: I think we need a new term to indicate initiated Wiccans (e.g. "initiated Wiccans"), as the term is now widely understood to include non-initiates. Actually that's fine.

PN: Is Wicca and paganism generally too "fluffy"?

YA: Some people are a bit fluffy but

I think the trend is generally moving away from that towards a deeper engagement with reality on all levels.

PN: How involved are you with the Pagan 'scene'? What are your views on the Pagan community -its strengths, weaknesses and any issues facing it?

YA: Some Pagans can be too consumerist, self-centred, and think it's all about rebelling against authority for the its own sake. I think we need to address this.

PN: Does British Traditional Witchcraft represent a real surviving ancient form of witchcraft pre-existing Gardnerian Wicca?

YA: It can't be proved either way. I suspect there were isolated pockets of witchiness, but nothing that amounted to a full-blown tradition.

... and finally ...

PN: Are there any other things about your path that you would like to share?

YA: The source of my religion is my feeling for the Earth and the landscape, but mythology gives it form. Then I can express it through Ritual. Magic is part of my practice. For me, religion is a connection with other people who have a similar spirituality. Magic is a practice whereby one can come nearer to gods and goddesses.

I am a polytheist, that is, I believe that deities are individuals in the same way as humans and other people. They can interact and even be interpermeable with us and with each other, and with the underlying patterns of energy or *wyrd*; they are not merely aspects of some great nebulous divine unity, rather they are distinct identities. I am also an animist, that is, I believe that everything has spirit, and that spirit is interpermeable with matter. I am neither a holist nor a rationalist, preferring a middle way, where diversity, multiplicity and incompleteness are welcomed.



Paths through the Zodiac

Still haven't found your true path? **Beith-Ann** leads us a merry dance through the stars

There are many different paths in paganism and this is a trawl through the signs having a look at what they might choose to follow.

Aries – Warrior path

Aries are energetic, warm, enthusiastic and belligerent as hell. They'll fight with anyone and anything, they'll fight for anyone or anything, whether those they are trying to save it or not. They are drawn to the warrior path: why bother with an athame when a sword is far more imposing. They will be the first to volunteer to be the Oak or Holly King, and do their damndest to win, even if it's not in the script. They are good to have on security at your pagan function because they think that chasing people off is much more fun than some dusty old ritual.

Taurus – Earth mysteries

Actually the Earth isn't that much of a mystery to Taureans because they spend so much of their time being stuck in it. They like outdoor rituals and will yomp for miles to some secluded stone circle, just on the right confluence of ley lines for what they want to do. As long as they have a sturdy pair of walking boots, half of Sainsbury's stuffed into their rucksack and someone to

carry it, they are OK. They aren't into 'pongs and gongs'; they'll say it's because you can perform magic with anything if you're good enough. They say it's because they don't need the paraphernalia, but mainly it's because there isn't any room left in the rucksack. They are quite useful for telling off over-zealous Aries.

Gemini – Writes the book

Geminis get bored easily, so they know little bits of information about a lot of different paths, have read lots of books, well lots of bits of books, the bits that interest them like calling up interesting elementals. The Pagans that you see who look perpetually startled are probably Geminis. They have most likely called up something that they can't get rid of and who is jumping on their head. Possibly Pan; they like Pan, he's a party person like them but they didn't expect him to jump on their head because they'd skipped the chapter on warnings. So it's useful that Geminis will always write down their experiences and happily show you the journal. The more mercenary among them will publish it, but in either case, we can all learn from their mistakes and have a good laugh at the same time.

Cancer – Hereditary

Cancerians are family orientated, and you won't find one who can't trace their magical lineage back for thousands of years. They will show you hand written books, hundreds of years old, full of magical knowledge and arcane wisdom that have been handed down through the generations. They will have a good excuse as to why they are written in W. H. Smith's exercise books or in the back of a 1987 diary. Very useful people to have around because of their Great Grandmothers recipe collection. The flying ointment may bring you out in a nasty rash but the rhubarb crumble will be delicious.

Leo – Any as long as they're

High Priest/ess,

Probably A&G because they like all the showy-offy stuff. They will have a heavily embroidered velvet robe, a gold torque, a large pentagram, lots of ritual jewellery and a fancy athame. If they work out, they will probably leave off the robe, but nothing else. They will have a very dramatic presentation of just about anything in the ceremony, right down to snuffing out the candles with panache. You'll never be bored with a Leo around because they are

always entertaining and willing to perform; they never get bored with showing off. They are the only sign that don't feel really silly with the theatrical stuff, and are exactly the right type to 'cut down' in a Lughnasadh celebration.

Virgo – Reads the book

Virgos are the natural researchers of the Zodiac and they like to do everything by the book. It isn't that they don't have any imagination; they just like to know that they are doing things correctly. It will take them several weeks to set up a ritual because they will be gathering together the right ingredients for the incense, collected at the right moon phase and dried for the necessary length of time, before being blended together when Mercury was making the right aspect to the Sun at the correct planetary hour. Useful people to have around for their vast amount of arcane knowledge and quantity of correctly gathered incense ingredients . . . as long as you can put up with the continual 'Are you sure that's the right way to do it?' Virgos seldom perform ritual; they never have the time.

Libra – Usually fluffy bunny stuff

You can usually tell Libra because they float around in lilac muslin for the majority of the time, and have half the underground parts of Brazil either hanging around their necks or under their pillows. A pagan tradesman's dream, they will buy anything with the right image and pay any amount for it. They tend to frequent Glastonbury, Avebury and the more accessible sacred sites. They won't walk too far because their fairy sandals will disintegrate if used too much. Just the right people to have around during healing rituals because they have so much love and advice to give. It depends on how long you can take the scent of lavender and jasmine before throwing up.

Scorpio – Anything involving

Sex

Natural magicians because of the thought of all that power. It was probably a Scorpio who coined the phrase; 'Life's a bitch when you mess with a witch' and proved it beyond all doubt. They love the whole idea of a magical path, but won't admit it because doing so will lose them the advantage of surprise. They like it even better if you can be persuaded to get your kit off and indulge in the 'lance to the grail' stuff. Beltaine is their favourite festival because sex is almost compulsory then, but they can always find an excuse any time of the year. Great to have around if you are particularly frustrated or have a penchant for voyeurism.

Sagittarius– High magic

The bards of the Zodiac, Sagittarius loves pomp and ceremony even more than Leo does. They write long and convoluted scripts about the myths and legends of their path, and will generously offer everybody a part in their play. In fact they are so generous about it that they will make sure that everyone has a part by creating characters for those who haven't got one, so everyone gets a go whether they like it or not. Third goblin from the left? Be glad of it, and next time you may get a speaking part. They are good to have around if the after-circle party starts to flag. They will always have an appropriate game or story, always about themselves, because if they can't think of a good one, they will tell someone else's story, putting themselves in the part of main protagonist. Oh, and you can always tap them for a loan.

Capricorn – Shamanism

Capricorns leave all the glory getting to the fire signs and slope off by themselves to discover real power. They like to be in a position where people come to them for advice and the Shamanic path gives them the necessary kudos and knowledge. The remoteness of the Shaman appeals to Capricorn's need to

keep people at bay and instill a sense of mystery that they don't really have once you get to know them. You think that no one could be that boring in real life, until you get to know them and discover the truth. They are good to have around because they are able to make up a full ritual altar for next to nothing out of cereal boxes. It may not be very pretty but it will be functional.

Aquarius – Eco-warrior.

Aquarius' spirituality is their life, not for them the occasional celebrations in someone's back bedroom. They will be too busy digging in under the roots of a condemned tree, or trying to stop toxic dumping with a rubber dinghy. They will deny that they are obsessed, but you only have to notice the wild look in their eyes. Their chosen path will be very different from anyone else's because they don't want to be seen as running with the crowd. They are drawn to something different until someone else discovers it and then they will change. Probably vegetarian for years while it was seen as a bit of a statement, they are now rabid carnivores because everyone else they know has become veggie. Nice people to have around, except they never are; they are always off protesting near a stone circle somewhere.

Pisces - Chaos

Pisces tend to follow a Chaos path, not through choice but because they are so disorganised. They always want to do the very best and spend ages thinking of all the things they need, and making sure that all tastes and preferences are catered for. They will then misplace the sacred and consecrated box of matches five minutes before circle is cast, forget the bread until the point where it needs blessing and try to lead the spiral dance, go the wrong way at some point so everyone ends up in a heap. They have a good heart and are willing to please, and are useful because they can make a really good cup of tea and know how to open a bottle of wine.

RIGHTS AND PERCEPTIONS

Beólach wades through a minefield of how we are perceived, and what rights we really have in our free society.

It's strange. When I first sat down to write this article two years ago, I immediately thought that it should be focused on rights. But then, aren't perceptions more important? I mean, it's not all too often I've experienced someone actively trying to deny me my rights, but everyone will have to come up against someone's perceptions of them based upon what box they can most easily be fitted in.

Take this example: I attend a Catholic Sixth Form college, which has a very diverse population. So one day, while walking around the college grounds, talking to my also-Pagan friend about the upcoming Samhain celebrations, another of my friends overheard our conversation. After a short discussion of what exactly Samhain was, she turned around to me and very bluntly asked "So you're a Pagan then?" More of a statement than a question I suppose. I answered yes, and she immediately said, "You don't look gothic or have makeup." She seemed quite honestly stunned that I could wear what she perceived to be "normal" clothes and not have a "normal," mainstream religious belief. It was this perception that immediately challenged how she thought about things.

Something similar happened to me another time when challenged on my sexuality. A group of lads discovered there was a queer at college, and they found out it was me. They were so surprised when I didn't have pink tight T-shirts and flailing limbs, or makeup and a high squealing voice. This was yet another perception that had been applied to me, simply because of a group I belonged to.

Of course, the issue of gay rights and perceptions is different. Everyone is much more vocal in their opinions

(mostly negative in my experience) and actively try to deny us our rights: the right to kiss or hold hands with our partners in public because we might just offend them so much they have no choice but to bash our faces in. But Pagan rights and perceptions are different from this.

When I told an (Anglican) ex-partner that I was Pagan, he reacted with fascination. He knew hardly anything about it and wanted to learn. It was an amazing change from another, whose opinion ranged from not caring less to thinking that I was a loony toon.

One of the main reasons Pagans are perceived in a bad light by others is because of a lack of information, and what information they do get often comes from the media.

Oh the media. You can always trust them to take something that isn't really much and blow it out of all proportions. Take all those stories of ritual animal slaughter, which were for a while growing in number – hardly any of the cases had anything to do with ritual animal slaughter until the media came up with it and printed it. One of my friends had it in his head that all Pagans slaughter chickens on the night of the New moon. He read it in the local tabloid. It took him about three weeks before he'd believe me that we didn't. Another friend had too many thoughts of Charmed and Buffy in his head (both of which I love anyway), and it made him think either the world he knew was completely out of whack or we were just doodle-ally.

I think that the fact that Pagans (where I live anyway) seem to keep very much to themselves doesn't really help. It's understandable considering the amount of prejudice that exists, especially in small conservative com-

munities. Mention you're a Pagan down here and you can see the disapproving or uncomfortable looks in their eyes.

But if we continue to keep to ourselves, how will we ever get anywhere? This debate could continue on and on as to how we're perceived without resolution, unless we actively stand up for ourselves – in the media, to friends and family.

But things have improved. When I came up to the college, I was pleasantly surprised when my Catholic religious education teacher knew quite a bit about basic Pagan beliefs, and was open minded about a lot of things. It reminded me that we can't blame all Christians for the ramblings of a few.

In fact, I think we might be guilty of having some perceptions as well. I've done it before in the past without thinking, and talked about the Christians as though they were the Third Reich. But they aren't; many are enlightened souls. One of the reasons we have this image of them is because the ramblers, though a minority, are loud enough to drown out the sensible people who don't even bother to correct them any more.

But our rights – that's where I believe things get complicated. I know that in theory I have the right to free worship so long as my religious belief doesn't incite racial hatred or other kinds of horrible nasty abuse. But putting my rights into practice is another matter.

A couple friends and I were planning to have a ritual in a local field area. It's public land, and is reasonably far from residential houses although some houses do overlook the area we were planning on. While we were setting up, a man started to watch us. We

caught sight of him, and we honestly didn't know if we could continue. In theory we were on public land and we weren't interfering or causing harm. Then again if this man had called the police, could they have arrested us for something or other? And worse still, what if we'd started waving our athames in the air, looking to outsiders probably quite mad? It meant we had to stop, and we haven't attempted much outdoor work since. I'm afraid to do so in my own back garden for fear of what neighbours would say, or what they could do to stop me.

Whatever rights I should have, I have no idea whether or not I can exercise them or not. Had the man at the field called the police, would their perceptions of us have affected what rights we really had in their view? It's a very complicated concept to grasp practically, until there are clear guidelines.

I firmly believe that while perceptions are changing, we need to be willing to educate people when we're challenged. Otherwise, we get stuck where we are and could even move backwards. Also, while the theory on our rights is sound, the practical application is lacking. We have the basics as set out in such documents as the European Convention on Human Rights and so on, and in theory they are enforceable – but take it out of a theoretical context, and what are you left with practically?

Two years on: When I first wrote this article two years ago, I wondered how my perceptions would have changed. The laws on discrimination, and the laws on religious rights have changed. Groups such as PEBBLE are working directly with the government and are as a whole improving both public perception, and individual rights for the average Pagan person. But practically, have I seen an improvement yet? Has the day-to-day living of every day life changed? Do I feel comfortable enough to go out to the public space, out of the way, and practice? Nope. Not yet anyway.

Woodland Burial

continued from page 7

'Rainbow Dream', the first few lines of which are as follows:

I'd like to rest

Forever oscillating gently

In the purest crystal drop

And let the light flow through me

Orange, yellow, green

Changing my blood from indigo to scarlet.

We had a number of crystals in the house, one of which was suspended in the window. When the sun came out, the colours of the rainbow were projected around the room. A few moments before Joy died the sun came out and the refracted light from the crystal lit up her face in the colours of the rainbow. Joy died in midsummer 2001. Had it been wintertime, I would have preferred to keep her body at home until the burial, but unfortunately this was not possible in the height of summer. We had decided on a family only ceremony but, so that friends and neighbours could get together to celebrate Joy's life, I booked the village hall and a caterer to provide tea and buns. The family came back to the hall, met up with the gathering and we spent a couple of hours in lively chat. There was sadness, some tears, much hugging, laughter and love.

Returning to the burial ceremony, we used a cardboard coffin and Joy's body was lowered into the grave as soon as we gathered around. The bearers then backed out of the way, so that only the family formed the group around the grave. Joy and I were both Quakers so at the start of the ceremony I requested a period of silence in the manner of Quakers. I then said a few words about Joy's life, mentioning also that in many of the cards I had received were the words: "Her name was Joy and she was a joy to be with". I then invited others to say a few words if they felt moved to do so. The children spoke about their mother, a grandson read a poem he had written and another family member read a passage from the Old Testament. Finally there was a brief blessing.

Writing this almost a year after the burial, I am convinced that a major factor in helping me to come to terms with Joy's death is that I was totally involved with the burial ceremony. It seems very odd to me that a partner who has shared his or her life with a loved one should, on the death of that loved one, hand over the burial ceremony to be conducted by another person who may be a total or barely known stranger. Some while after the burial my son-in-law said to me, "You know Ted, that was the best funeral I've ever been to".

A few months ago my friend's wife died. He had, some time previously, asked me for information on woodland burials and, as a result of our talks, was torn between cremation (which he suggested to his undertaker during his wife's illness) and a woodland burial. A day or so before the funeral, he told me he had spoken to the undertaker who had come up with a number of reasons why it would not be in my friend's best interests to have a woodland burial. I have recently been to three cremations and in each case I felt that the ceremony was very cold. The family members were obliged to sit in straight rows, the coffin was viewed from some way away, and there was no opportunity for family to gather as a unit around the coffin to share thoughts and emotions.

News in Brief

It's been a turbulent few months for Paganism in the media, though Samhain this year was largely peaceful media wise, and in many cases positive.

As always a lot of news has been dredged up from the past at this time of the year, such as with the case of the Dutch Witch that got Witchcraft education qualified for tax breaks in Denmark, and has since seen a large uptake in people signing on for the courses.

<http://www.religionnewsblog.com/12435>

There have been plenty of profiles of paganism, witchcraft, pagans, and witches which goes hand in hand with the Samhain to Yule period. *The Tribune-Review* in America focused on one witch and her mission to teach people a new and more balanced religion, it was a mostly positive article highlighting that it's not about turning boyfriends into toads (well it wouldn't be would it? I mean it's hard to sleep with a toad, ex's are another matter).

"Most of them have felt a calling for a while," Mokricky said. "They want to be able to commune with the divine in a sacred manner to manifest spirituality in their lives."

http://pittsburghlive.com/x/search/s_385326.html

Germany's election was marginally won

by the Christian Democrats, however it has been reported that increasingly Germany is turning to Paganism and Witchcraft:

"This de-Christianisation is the result of a serious crisis of faith that has been spreading for many years, fed by two world wars and the protracted division of Germany," says Hansjoerg Hemminger, a leading Lutheran theologian.

"Witchcraft and the occult are filling that age-old human need for spiritual reassurance, particularly among young people, millions of whom have seldom or never set foot inside a church," Hemminger says.

<http://www.religionnewsblog.com/12651>

Australia too is apparently feeling the waves of religious change as the number of Christian Australians drop, and the numbers attracted to Pagan and New Age religions rises upto 25,000

For many, nature religions were seen as environmentally friendly.

But Dr Hughes said their numbers remained small, with fewer than 25,000 adherents in Australia.

"They are never going to be really numerous as it is largely a protest movement."

<http://www.religionnewsblog.com/12488>

In related news the Australia state of Victoria recently finally got around to repealing the laws that banned witchcraft

Victoria's witches are rushing to get hitched following the repeal of antiquated laws banning witchcraft. <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/w02.html>

To cater for the rush, four new marriage celebrants specialising in witch weddings, or handfastings, were approved by the federal attorney-general's department this week. <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/12220>

NotsowiseSage keeps up bang up to date with what's happening in the wide world...

Back home in the UK we've had our fair share of coverage, including the announcement that ritual tools and equipment would be allowed for prisoners whom are practising Pagans. Over the past few months, the role of Pagan chaplains has been developing. *The Times* has this to say:

Pagan priests will be allowed to use wine and wands during ceremonies in jails under instructions issued to every prison governor.

Inmates practising paganism will be allowed a hoodless robe, incense and a piece of religious jewellery among their personal possessions. They will also be allowed to have Tarot cards but are forbidden from using them to tell the fortunes of other prisoners.

<http://www.religionnewsblog.com/12930>

Well we wouldn't want them knowing the Parole board's decision before the governor does, nor just what time's best to make an escape. Meanwhile a couple of weeks later *The Telegraph* reported:

Ian Edwards, a pagan priest, visits the men at a cost to the taxpayer of £11.56 an hour plus expenses. He is able to bring with him tarot cards and a wand, but not the cauldron he uses in spell-making.

Mr Edwards, who receives the title of reverend by being a prison chaplain, visits the inmates in their cells three times a month and has helped them to celebrate Samhain, the pagan name for Hallowe'en.

He said he only conducted positive spell-making and would not help prisoners who wished harm on anyone.

<http://news.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/11/01/npris01.xml>

So, inmates, no more setting lesser demons on the prison bully, it's against the rules, you don't want the prison

warden to have to do a banishing ritual to get rid of it now do you?

On a lighter note, the news that seems to be buzzing around is that faeries stopped the bulldozers – of course it wasn't anything so grandiose, however a community stopped plans to bulldoze over an area of land containing a mythologically important rock, attributed to being the home of faeries, *The Times* reported:

Villagers who protested that a new housing estate would "harm the fairies" living in their midst have forced a property company to scrap its building plans and start again.

Marcus Salter, head of Genesis Properties, estimates that the small colony of fairies believed to live beneath a rock in St Fillans, Perthshire, has cost him £15,000. His first notice of the residential sensibilities of the netherworld came as his diggers moved on to a site on the outskirts of the village, which crowns the easterly shore of Loch Earn.

He said: "A neighbour came over shouting, 'Don't move that rock. You'll kill the fairies.'" The rock protruded from the centre of a gently shelving field, edged by the steep slopes of Dundurn mountain, where in the sixth century the Celtic missionary St Fillan set up camp and attempted to convert the Picts from the pagan darkness of superstition.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-1881612,00.html>

Just goes to show you don't need to be Pagan to believe in faeries, of course if faeries were real then the villagers did Salter a massive favour in stopping him really upsetting them. Historically, faeries weren't the most forgiving of creatures.

Well that's your lot, a brief news review of the past few months both internationally and at home.

Feel free to email news snippets you find to news@pagan-network.org.

Notes from the AGM

We held our our most recent A.G.M. on 1 October 2005, and the results of voting are as follows:

On the ratification of Kevin Peel as Volunteer Manager, 33 votes for yes, 9 voted No. *This was approved.*

On the ratification of Sharon Vivers as Events Officer, 41 voted Yes, 2 voted no. *This was approved.*

On the motion to convert Pagan Network to a Company Limited by Guarantee, *this was approved with 39 votes for yes and 6 for no.*

On the motion for the alteration of Section 2 of the constitution, 32 voted yes and 13 voted no. *This was approved.*

On the motion to create a new position of Communications Officer, *this was approved with 26 votes for yes, 16 for no.*

On the motion to create a Finance Sub-committee, *this was rejected with 20 votes for yes, 25 votes for no.*

Of the motion for Communications Sub-committee, 19 voted yes, 26 voted no. *This was rejected.*

And finally, on the motion regarding charging web sites for their use based on their usage of resources, *this was approved with 29 votes for and 16 votes against.*

We would like to thank all those who submitted and discussed the motions put forward and those who took the time to vote, especially those who came along to meet us in person! It was encouraging to see members travel from near and far to participate.

Casp, Arual (Laura), Sparks (Marcus), TwilightGirl (Mel), LiverpoolPagan (Kevin) & Thistlewitch (Sharon)

What is...

WHAT IS MAGICK? Forget all the fallacies and stereotypical preconceptions taught to you out of fear and ignorance and approach this question with an open mind. You will probably find it is not what you have been taught to think. Magick has been defined as "The art and science of causing change to occur in conformity with will" which could be put more simply as making desired change happen; or as "energy tending to change"; a definition I use is "magick is conscious evolution through directing energy". This does not really explain magick though, so I will try to elaborate on these phrases without jargon.

An aim of magick is to train the mind by harnessing and making more consciously accessible such higher faculties as intuition, inspiration and the creative imagination, and by drawing on the power of the unconscious – to try and use more than the 10% of our brain's capacity that we do.

Magick assumes belief in, or rather experience of, subtle energies. We can only see about one seventieth of the light spectrum, yet what we cannot see still affects us – such as x-rays and ultraviolet light. Similarly, magick is about focusing more subtle, non-physical energies, and directing them to create change. To go about this requires experience, and training to improve the power of the mind, and specifically, the will.

Acts such as meditation, breath control, voice work, body work, visualization, drama, ritual, and others, are all designed to improve our body and mind, to better sharpen us and balance us, and to enable us to perceive and wield

more subtle energies.

In the same way, an individual is as strong as their will, and the more balanced and integrated a person is, the stronger their will (note, this is probably one of the main reasons why so many magicians have experience of counselling and/or psychology, recognising the help these processes can give, both through training and experiencing them. This also acts as a removal of farcical social stigma often attached to these processes).

Practising magick tends to act as a deconditioning mechanism and can be a subtle process, the longer you practice, the more you change and the unnecessary inhibitions, stigmas, guilt and sin complexes that society builds in are removed. This has the effect of releasing their energy into the psyche, where it can strengthen the individual.

The more physical side, such as yoga, bodywork, dance and massage, also removes the tension held in the body as body armour, and releases this and removes energy blockages which impair full efficiency and may result in illness.

Possibly the major difference between magick and many of the religious paths to spiritual growth is that magick is more dynamic, and places the emphasis on you to work for change – there are no gurus in magick,

rather there are fellow students with different perspectives and experiences – we learn from each other, as in other areas of life.

Magick tends to work a lot with symbols, as these are the language of the unconscious, and this is an area of tremendous power to tap. Symbols have many functions, and one of these, released through magick, can be the ability to confound the ego and the censor mechanisms, and enabling us to perceive more subtle truths, or experience direct revelations. Although we may not be able to fully explain how symbols work, we know from experience that certain symbols seem harmonious with certain types of energy.

For example a magician may tell you that if you want to attract love you should wear green, and rose perfume, perhaps wear copper, like a bracelet or necklace, etc. These are all things attributed with Venus, who is associated with love, and so the principal is one of contagion – sympathetic magick, or making something happen by working with items linked to it. This is one of the oldest and most commonly practised forms of magick. Working with the symbols of a type of energy does seem to attract that energy.

A cautionary word here, magick is often seen as a way to hidden powers, and entered for the wrong reason, the "I want sex, power and lots of money" syndrome. Now there is nothing wrong with these things in themselves, but when you do magick you will discover that you tend to get what you

Magick?

by David Rankine

need rather than necessarily what you want.

When you do magick you generally use techniques to alter your state of consciousness and raise energy, and then direct that energy to create a desired result. The channel that energy takes as directed by your altered state of consciousness is not necessarily the path you might expect in your normal everyday state. Magick does bring you power, yes, but it is power over yourself, not other people. It is the power that is important, to grow and to create positive change.

This does not mean there is anything wrong with using magick to gain more physical things, there is nothing wrong with doing a ritual or spell to get a job, whereas trying to make a specific individual go to bed with you would be wrong. Magick is very much about intent, and if your intent is to get work, you are not imposing on people, whereas if you were trying to make somebody do something that they would not naturally do, you are imposing on their will.

If you did a ritual to attract love without specifying a person, but opening yourself to the opportunity to meet someone where love may arise, and to feel more attractive and better about yourself, you are not imposing, you are trying to create positive change.

Magick is a commitment to yourself, and it requires determination, perseverance, strength, openness to change and absence of rigidity, a love of life (including yourself), and a desire to grow and fulfil your potential. It may be that you already have all these qualities and do this already without calling it magick – magick is not about labels, and those who think and talk as if it is unfortunately put some people off. Magick is learning about the natural flows of energy in the universe, and working in harmony with them to effect positive change, both in yourself and in your environment.

Some people ask why magick is spelt with a 'k' on the end. This is to distinguish it from magic, associated in the popular mind with illusionism and prestidigitation, stage magic. Magick is not about illusion, it is about creating real change, and the 'k' signifies this. K is the eleventh letter of the alphabet, i.e. the one beyond ten. Symbolically this is very powerful, as we work in base ten, and eleven represents the unseen, or hidden energies – the subtle energies of magick, eleven is considered to be the number of magick.

Magickal training and experience bring forth the energies of the unconscious, and so it is no surprise to see that symbols become more important as you develop, providing not only the language of dream and the unconscious, but also helping create a more flexible perception grid of the universe. To grow spiritually, it is vital that you remain flexible and do not become dogmatic, rather that you are open to experience and willing to question your ideas and beliefs as a result of those experiences.

Magick can be a painful process. It is not easy to maintain the discipline and honest self-critical approach all the time. It can also be hard work dealing with the energy released without being knocked off balance sometimes. The important thing in these cases is to remain honest and keep at it. Nobody said magick was easy!

It takes a lot of practice and hard work and pain, but the rewards are spiritual and mental growth, the joy of life and the beauty of unconditional love. Beyond the limits, there are no limits.

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Bah Humbug

Queues never ending

Toys out of stock

Rudeness and shoving

We've all had too much

Too much stress

Too much planning

Too much family not friends

And way way too much Jingle

Bells!

Now comes Christmas Day

And it's fighting season

Over TV shows, turkey legs,

Cracker toys and

The last mince pie

Who does the dishes?

Who's spent the most?

Who forgot the batteries?

Who's got the worse taste?

Now Christmas is over

Only bills are left,

A dead tree, broken baubles

And presents to return

It's back to school, back to work

Back on that diet

Back on the treadmill

Summer Holidays to plan!

By B. Pearson (Willow)

December 2003

Book Reviews . . .

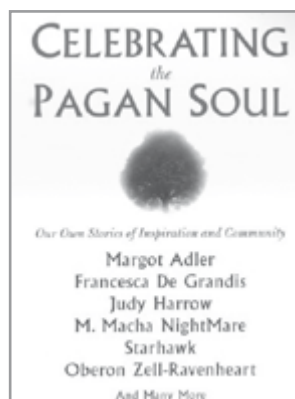
Celebrating the Pagan Soul

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£8.99, Paperback

Rating: 7/10



This book is 250 pages of personal stories and reflections on the Pagan community. Personalities such as Margot Adler, Judy Harrow, Starhawk, Fredric Lamond and many more have written down their memories and thoughts of the "Pagan Community". Wildman says in the introduction that, as neo-Paganism gets older, we're losing many of our elders from the early days, and that she hopes this book is a way of ensuring that these snippets are remembered and passed down.

The essays are split into five chapters; Earth – Community, Air – The Learning Process, Fire – Magical Transformation, Water – The Seasons and Cycle of Life and Spirit – The God and Goddess in Our Lives. There are over fifty contributions, some just a page or so long, others significantly longer.

Not a how-to or 101 book, you won't learn any new skills from it, but you will learn a little about the history of our Community and it is a delight to dip in and read a new story every so often. Not an essential read, but a highly desirable one I feel. CA

Paganism: an Introduction to Earth-Centred Religion

Authors: Joyce and River Higginbotham

Published by Llewellyn Publications

£12.99, Paperback

Rating: 9/10

For those of you wise in the ways of your chosen path, this book may be a little like teaching granny to suck eggs.

But for those, like myself, just setting out to explore the possibilities that pagan spirituality offers, it is a clear, concise, and useful introduction to the issues and ways of thinking about the choices available.

But even though this is an introduction, the work you are asked to put in can be hard. The authors ask you to examine your innermost feelings and beliefs about the most nebulous of subjects, like what you think the Deity is like, what your early religious experiences were, what you think about the existence of evil. Some of us just aren't used to examining our belief systems so extensively, so this book is not an easy option if you're serious about your intention to pursue a pagan spiritual path.

Hell, it's just possible even well established pagans could learn a thing or two from this book.

The authors, rather than giving an in-depth looking at particular paths, set out to explore the issues that confront every seeker of pagan spirituality (although a very brief overview of different paths is given in Chapter 1). A glance at the table of contents tells the story:

1. What is Paganism?
2. You are what you believe
3. A pagan view of Deity
4. What about Satan?
5. The Living Universe
6. Magick
7. Ethics and Personal Responsibility

One of the things I really like about his book is its ecumenical flavour. The authors, though from a Wiccan background, describe themselves as eclectic pagans, and they have managed to walk the fine line of being enthusiastic without proselytising for one particular path or another.

Chapter 5, "The Living Universe", was particularly interesting to me, having come from a rationale, science and maths based background. It reviews recent thinking about the nature of the universe, and establishes an underpinning for the authors take on multi-layered realities, and sets the scene for the chapter on Magick. Fascinating stuff.

This book is very methodical, and stems from the authors work in community outreach, having participated in ecumenical conferences and even taught Sunday school! As a result of this background, each chapter builds on the previous ones in an organised way, and there are plenty of practical (making your own spiritual bead rosary), written, and creative exercises.

I would recommend this book not only for people who want to explore paganism on their own, but also a set book for discussion groups or formal classes. SC

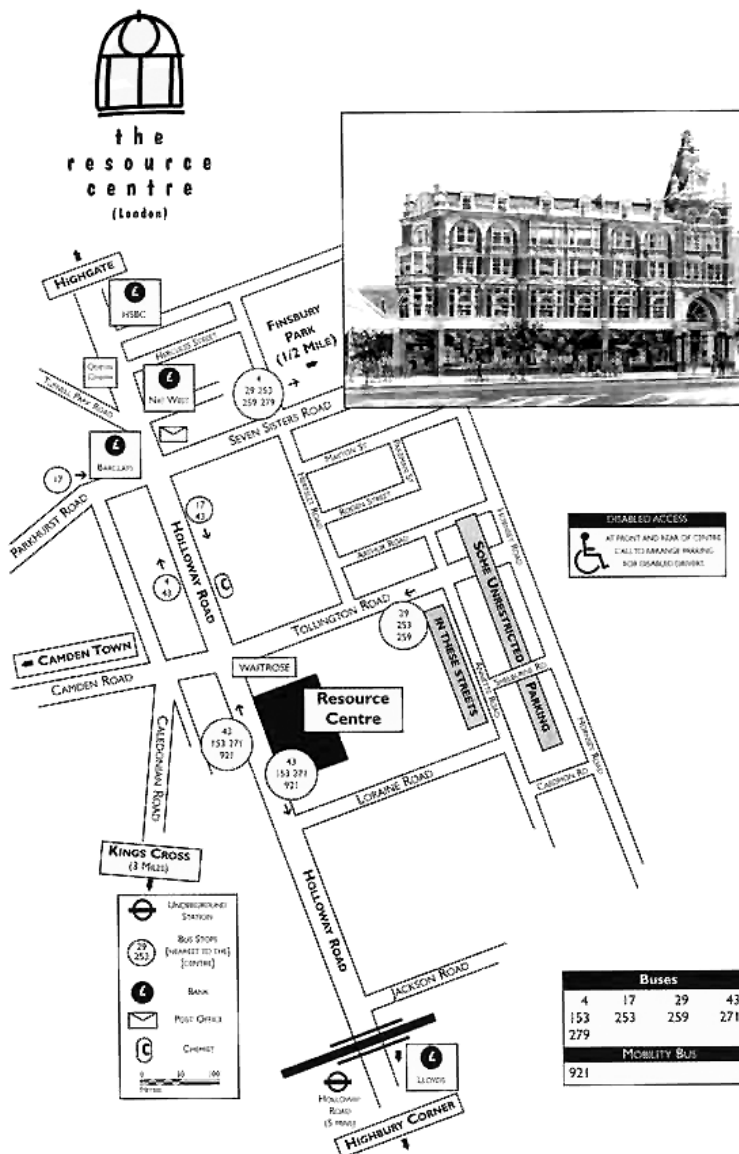


Pagan Network Convention 2006

The first ever Pagan Network Convention is being held on 4th March 2006 from 10am at The Resource Centre, Holloway Road, London.

The Resource Centre
356 Holloway Road
London
N7 6PA

The closest tube station is Holloway Road on the Piccadilly Line. It is just two stops from Kings Cross and three stops from Euston main line station, offering easy access to those travelling from the North and North West.



Speakers

Anna Franklin
Dr. Christina Oakley
Christine Cleere – *Druidry and the Druid Network*
Geraldine Beskine
Jaq Hawkins
Dr Jenny Blain
Steve Wilson – *Archaic Witchcraft*

Workshop Holders

Dr. Christina Oakley - *Altars*
Jacqueline Anne Woodward-Smith – *Brigit's Totem Animals*
James Butler - *Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram*
Kate Waterfield - *Musical Runes*
Mani Vannan - *Drumming Workshop*
Mario - *Hoodoo and Rootwork*
Orianna and Indigo - *Introduction to Tarot*
Rebecca and Rebecca - *Ritual Bath-Bomb and Soapmaking*

Entertainers

Harmonic Concordance - *Choral Selection*
Kate Waterfield - *Musical Entertainment*
Daughters of Gaia - *Musical Entertainment*
Midnight - *Musical Entertainment*

Tickets for the convention:

Non-members
In advance: £10
On the door: £12

Pagan Network Full Members
In advance: £8
On the door: £10

You can buy them online (www.pagan-network.org/shop/) or at the following outlets:

Treadwells Bookshop, Tavistock Street, Covent Garden, London

