

WITCHTOWER

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The Pagan Network Magazine



Bumper Fiction Issue!

The Oak Tree and the Mole
tell their stories, beginning on
page 10

So you think you
know trees?

Steve Wilson's course
starts on page 5

Witchtower

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Imbolc

Well, hasn't the time flown? It seems like only last week was Yule and now it is Imbolc. Spring is tentatively poking its nose out, and having a sniff around. I cycle part of my way to work these days through a country park, and even I can smell the change in the air. It may be absolutely freezing, with frost crunching under your feet, but it smells different. Get yourself outside and smell for yourself. (Unless of course, you live in a concrete jungle, those CO gases always smell the same!)

This issue is packed full of interesting articles, stories and poems. And we have discovered two fantastic American artists who have donated their work to us for the front and back cover. We are always on the look out for artists so get sending those pictures in.

You will notice also that we have run the first lesson of Steve Wilson's (Sethur) Tree Correspondence Course as well as the second lesson. Due to the large gap between publications, we felt that it would make more sense to run them together and start again. We aim to get the next lessons out with the next editions.

On Saturday 4th March, the Pagan Network are holding their first Convention. We will have exciting and interesting speakers, activities and entertainment. It also gives everyone

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the opportunity to meet their online friends in the flesh and get out in the real world. Make sure to buy a ticket and bring yourself along. In fact, buy several tickets and bring some friends and family too!

The PN forums are alive with debate and discussion at the moment, so make sure that you are joining in.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Witchtower.

Your Editor

MOUSEDEMON

This issue's covers: Carey Reynolds (front)

Carey is currently a board member of Gaia Community (www.gaiacommunity.org), and am also active in an ADF protogrove (www.wild-hare.org). She does freelance web design and art full-time, through her creative services

company, Nine Fires Press (www.ninefirespress.com), which is also starting a line of Pagan and alternative greeting cards. She also has prints and original artwork available for purchase on her website (www.gaia-kat.addr.com).

Adrian Welch (back)

Adrian is an artist, photographer, and designer whose unique work has been

published internationally, and has won numerous awards for originality and design. He specializes in vintage photo restoration and period reproduction. Antiques and exotic finches dominate his spare time.

A Miami native, he left New England several years ago for the Pacific North West, following the trail of new inspiration.

<http://www.adrianwelch.com>

FOLKLORE AND CUSTOMS OF

Imbolc

Whether you're getting ready for lambing or milking your ewes, you've come to the right season, as jools explains...

February is a bitter month. It seems darker and wetter than January, but at least it is shorter. In old Scotland, the month fell in the middle of the period known as Faoilleach, the Wolf-month. It was also known as a' marbh mhiòs, the Dead-month.

But although this month is so cold and dreary, small signs of new life begin to appear: The lambing season is starting and new grass starts to appear. Ravens begin to build their nests and larks apparently sing with a clearer voice, although if you are lucky enough to hear a lark these days, you may not recognise the sound!

This is when the first buds can be seen appearing on trees, when the days are quite visibly longer than they were around Yule, and when there are the first days of semi-bearable temperatures, although you may not believe it.

Imbolc can fall on February 1st or 2nd. It is also known as Oimelc, Candlemas and St Brigid's Day. It was said that Brigid was so important to the people of Ireland, the only way the Christians could convert the Irish to Christianity was to canonise her, which they did. In the 1960's it was decided that there was not enough evidence for her to be a Saint, and she was decanonised, but she is still revered in Ireland and with-in parts of the Wiccan community.

Brigid (or Bride) was a Sun Goddess who presides over the hearth and smithy, over the inspiration and skill of sacred art and craft, and over the world of crops, livestock, and nature.

In particular she is important to

sheep who begin to lamb at this time of year. The starting of their lactation is a sign that Imbolc is near. Milk has always been important to Brigid and you can see her above the southwestern door of the tower on Glastonbury Tor. She is milking a cow.

Imbolc in Irish means 'in the belly' (imbolg), which refers to the sheep being pregnant. Oimelc means ewe's milk, so we can see that the festival is very closely related to those woolly animals.

Imbolc was one of the cornerstones of the Celtic calendar as the success of the new farming season was of great importance. Winter food stores were getting low and rituals were performed to ensure a steady supply of food until the harvest in the late summer and autumn. It was too soon for cow's milk so the ewe's milk was particularly welcome.

Like many Celtic festivals, the Imbolc celebrations centred around the lighting of fires. Fire was perhaps more important for this festival than others as it was also the holy day of Brigid who was also a Goddess of fire, healing and fertility. The lighting of fires celebrated the increasing power of the Sun over the coming months. For the Christian calendar, this holiday was reformed and renamed 'Candlemas' when candles are lit to remember the purification of the Virgin Mary.

As the world slowly springs back into action it is time for the small tasks that are neglected through the busy year. Rituals and activities might in-

clude the making of candles, planting spring flowers, reading poetry and telling stories.

In Ireland, the day may have been celebrated by the filling of a basket with soft grass and flower petals to make a "Bride's Bed." An image, or "corn dolly", known as a brideo'g, was then created and laid in the bed. When the bed had been made ready, the women opened the door and invited the Brigid to enter. They cried, "Bride is welcome! Bride is come!" In some areas, the brideo'g was left near the hearth overnight. A wand, usually a rowan or birch branch, was placed in the bed with the image, in hopes that Brigid would come during the night. In the morning, if marks from the wand were found in the ashes of the fire, it was considered a good omen. In other areas the brideo'g was carried about the town in procession by the young girls who were called banal Bride, the "Bride Maiden band, "all dressed in white and wearing their hair down, personifying the spirit of purity and youth".



The customs in Wales also involved candles. One of them was a very practical one. Sometime in autumn, the oldest woman in a household ceremoniously presented a lighted candle to a younger woman, for use in the out-houses. On February 2nd, the young woman returned a lit candle to the giver. It was considered that artificial light was no longer necessary after Candlemas.

Another custom required the lighting of two candles on either side of a chair. Each family member would then sit in the chair and take a drink from a horn goblet. The vessel was then tossed backwards, over the head. If it landed upright, it signified a long life for the person who threw it. An early death was in store, if it landed bottom up.

The rowan tree, also known as the quickbeam, bears several connections to Imbolc. In the Sacred Tree Alphabet, rowan is the second tree, luis. The corresponding month begins January 21 and ends February 17, placing the festival in the middle of the rowan month. This is the festival of the "quickenning" of the Earth, and the rowan is known as the Quickenning Tree, or the Tree of Life. The bonfires lit in honour of Brigid traditionally contained rowan wood. (The Gaelic word "luisiu" means "flame.") The red berries of the rowan tree are said to contain sustenance equal to that of nine meals, to heal the wounded and to add a year to the life of a human who partakes of them.

Our ancestors predicted the weather according to the conditions on Candlemas day, as is shown in the following nursery rhyme from the Middle Ages:

*If Candlemas day be fair and bright,
Winter will have another flight;*

*But if it be dark with clouds and rain,
Winter is gone and will not come again.*

This has survived into modern times. In the United States, February 2nd is commemorated as "Groundhog Day" (yes, the film is based on real events). On this day, the groundhog (notably, Puxatawnee Phil) comes out from his winter sleep. If he sees his shadow (i.e., the day is sunny), he will run back into his hole, and winter will continue for six more weeks. If he does not see his shadow (the day is overcast and cloudy) he will remain outside and winter is done. Of course, groundhogs

***A plough is dragged
from door to door, with
children asking for food,
drinks, or money. Should
they be refused, the
household has its front
garden ploughed up.***

are not native to the UK. The little burrowing animal sacred to Brigid, and seen as a weather predictor, was a hedgehog.

An old British rhyme tells us that 'If Candlemas Day be

bright and clear, there'll be two winters in the year.' Actually, all of the cross-quarter days can be used as 'inverse' weather predictors, whereas the quarter days are used as 'direct' weather predictors.

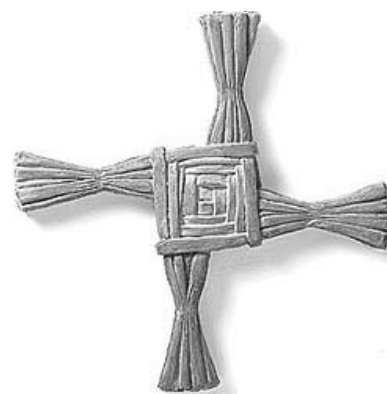
One of the nicest folk-customs still practiced in many countries is to place a lighted candle in each and every window of the house (or at least the windows that faced the street), beginning at sundown on Candlemas Eve, allowing them to continue burning until sunrise. If you decide to do the same this year, make sure that such candles are well seated against tipping and guarded from nearby curtains, etc.

If you happen to like making candles, Candlemas Day is the day for doing it. Some covens hold candle-making parties and try to make and bless all the candles they'll be using for the whole year on this day.

Imbolc is also the time to bless the

seeds and farming implements. Another traditional symbol of Imbolc is the plough. In some areas this is the first day of ploughing in preparation of the first planting of crops. A decorated plough is dragged from door to door, with children following asking for food, drinks, or money. Should they be refused, the household is paid back by having its front garden ploughed up. In other areas, the plough is decorated and then whiskey is poured over it. Pieces of cheese and bread are left by the plough and in the newly turned furrows as offerings to the nature spirits. It is considered taboo to cut or pick plants during this time.

Other customs of the holiday include weaving Brigid's crosses and wheels from straw or wheat to hang around the house for protection, performing rites of spiritual cleansing and purification and making Crowns of Light (i.e. of candles) to wear for the Candlemas Circle, similar to those worn on St. Lucy's Day in Scandinavian countries, blessing rushes and straw and removing yuletide greens from the house and burning them. There is also an old Scottish tradition of feeding the last ear of last harvest's corn to the livestock on this day. Some people started to purify and clean the house at this time of year, which may have been the basis for our 'spring cleaning'. Although it may not quite be spring, it is never too early to start!



a short course in

Steve Wilson shares his wisdom
in this repeated first course.

TREE LORE



While there is a lot of controversy over the origins and nature of Druidry, the connection with trees is definite. Some derive the word "Druid" from an ancient Indo-European root Dru-Vid – tree-wise, and the word may be linked to

the Dryad of Greek mythology (the Greeks would have pronounced it Druad). This ancient root-word "Dru" may also be the origin of such words as True, and even Tree itself.

There are actually very few ancient references to druids acting as priests, as we understand the concept today. The three grades – the Bard, Faídh and Druid – were respectively poets, magicians and judges. One of the aspects of the Law on which Druids gave judgement was the illegal felling of trees. The illegal felling of "Royal Trees" was punishable by death. If only illegal logging companies in tropical rainforests were subject to such laws today! Caesar mentions Druids "making sacrifices to horrible Esus". We know of Esus from three images (one without his actual name), which show a man felling a tree with a peculiar double-bladed sword. Perhaps these "sacrifices" were simply judicial executions.

During the last phase of classical Druidry a system of writing was invented called the Ogham. Each sign was associated with a particular aspect of nature, and the way it was learned was by memorising the tree whose name began with that particular letter. To this day the Gaelic for (alphabetical) letter means tree.

There were originally 20 Ogham signs. This corresponds with the 20 years it took to learn to be a Druid. The Druid definition of what constituted a tree (as opposed to other related things, such as bushes) was different than nowadays,

and there are letters for "Holly", "Vine", "Ivy" and "Reed" for example. How they attributed particular spiritual properties to the trees was also very different from western post-Christian magic. It was how the trees were of use to people *in practice* that determined what they symbolised. This is also very true of the runes that are named after trees (except in the Younger, Icelandic Futhark – there are apparently no trees in Iceland).

This is intended to be a 20 festival course, that is, there will be one article for 20 issues of the Wichtower. Since the practical uses of the trees from which the meanings are derived didn't change the moment that Christianity arrived, it is also relevant to those interested in Witchcraft – especially Archaic Witchcraft, which derives symbolism from practical uses of, well, everything.

How to do the course

If you are just interested in reading the articles, that is fine. But there also practical methods to take the meaning of the trees within, to connect with them. If you are interested in actually qualifying as a Druid please pm me on Pagan Network and additional tasks, practical out of door stuff and meditations, for example, will be given. There is no charge, the course will take no longer and the Druid group to which you will be initiated at the end - the Order of True Wisdom - will only be for people who have done this course via the Wichtower. This is not a recruiting exercise for any other group. For those interested in initiatory lines, the OTW has a direct line back to Britain's oldest Druid revival groups in the 18th century through Ross Nichols, an Ancient Druid Order initiate (along with Gerald Gardner).

In order to get the additional material please pm me on Pagan Network – this course is not available to non-members except in exceptional circumstances – such as if someone really doesn't have access to the Internet.

Now turn over the page and begin...

The First Tree

Birch

Known as Beth in Gaelic and Beorc (but pronounced Birch) in Anglo-Saxon the Birch has many associations. Above all it is a Tree of beginnings. Not only does it begin the Tree Alphabet, it also begins the process of colonising newly uncovered land. 10,000 years ago, when the last glaciers retreated from Britain, the newly formed island (we had been part of mainland Europe before that) was covered with Birches, along with other “pioneer trees” such as Sycamore. 10,000 years later, the replacement of steam railway engines by electric motors meant that dead embers were no longer shovelled to the side of the tracks, and the Birch reclaimed the banks. The result – leaves on the line. The Birch is a deciduous tree, but not only does it shed its leaves every year, it does so over just 3 days. The result, as we know all too well; can be that the trains slither to a halt.

The word for Birch begins with the letter B in many languages, dating right back to “Bhurzah” in Sanskrit. This makes it one of the least-changed words in our language. There are several types of Birch, unless otherwise noted the following refers to the Silver Birch.

Ogham

The Ogham character is a single line running to the right of the central stave used in all of the original Ogham characters.

Practical Uses

A hardwood, Birchwood is popular in interior settings because of a quality that is mentioned below, but its abundance also makes it a main source of plywood. It is often used for furniture. It was also used for arrow-shafts, a

use that appears in the Faerie Queen (1.1.8) – where a different list of 20 trees is recorded. It is also a source of an aspirin-like compound but its use is rare in Europe due to the abundance of Willow, which is a better source.

For fires, Birch burns hot but quickly. It will burn unseasoned but is best mixed with slower woods.

There is a tradition that witches’ brooms were made of birch twigs around an ash stave. This is an appropriate mix – Ash is the last tree of the first set of Ogham characters, but I am not at all sure that this combination wasn’t simply a standard way of making a tough yard-broom.

Intoxication

The Birch is the direct source of one form of intoxicant and the indirect source of another. Birch sap can be used to make a wine or a beer, is easily obtained (too easily perhaps) and is available in Spring, the opposite half of the year from Apple and Grape juice

and the fruit of the Barley. In certain parts of Eastern Europe, overtapping almost destroyed entire forests. At a time when fermented drinks were safer than drinking water, Birch Beer was a staple of the building industry and, along with Sycamore and Service beer, and was known as “Checkers”. A pub called the Checkers is usually of Mediaeval origins, no matter how recent the modern building might be. Here the men would be paid on Checkered boards (across for how many days they had worked, down for how many hours each day). The word “Exchequer” comes from this period, as does the Checkerboard floor of Masonic Temples.

The second, indirect source of intoxication is the Fly Agaric Mushroom, which habitually grows at the foot of the Birch. The source of Shamanic visions for both humans and reindeer, Father Christmas and Santa Claus are descended from Mesolithic reindeer-hunting shamans. It is noticeable too



that the great Spirit Guide who inspired the founding of Psychic News was called Silver Birch, and though usually depicted as a "Red Indian" made it clear that this was simply because this is how people expected him to appear. Rather, he claimed to be a spirit of 10,000 years ago. People who think of Spiritualism as a bit fluffy and simplistic should read the book *Teachings of Silver Birch*. But not any of the sequels (they are a bit fluffy and simplistic).

Magic

As the Birch begins things, it is associated with learning. Even Tolkien noted this! Birch bark was used as the source of a primitive type of writing-paper, so it is appropriate to always begin with Birch. Since cleansing is also a good way to start any magical working, a birch-whisk (just a bundle of birch twigs tied together, without a handle to make it into a broom) can be shaken around the sacred area or used to symbolically sweep around it.

The Druids also seem to have been particularly concerned with the first letter of words. They felt that they connected things together. In the case of the Birch, the goddess Brighid (Bride in modern Gaelic) would seem to be the most obvious deity and Beltane the obvious festival, as it begins the summer months and is the month (Beltane is actually the whole of May, it was just the *feast* of Beltane that was marked on May 1st) when the Birch sap rises and can be tapped. Brighid was the Goddess of poets – Druid learning was originally all done in verse – as well as of smiths, and is thus associated with fire, as is Beltane itself, when cattle would be driven through two fires.

Finally – How to find a (Silver) Birch

Look it up online, then get outside!

The Second Tree



Rowan – Luis for the letter L – is the second Ogham tree, drawn as two lines at right angles to the staff. There is no specific rune for Rowan (I should have mentioned in the previous article that the rune for Birch is Berkana – Norse – or Beorc – Anglo Saxon – but the meanings are very similar), although some of the qualities of the Anglo-Saxon rune Aesc ("a" as in "hat") seem relevant, but the ordinary Ash is a separate Ogham character and Aesc will be dealt with then (although see "De-

ity" below). Of course, unlike Ogham, only some of the runes relate to trees.

If the Birch is a particularly appropriate tree for Druids and Bards, the Rowan is definitely one for Witches. As the old saying goes:

'Rowan tree and red thread - have the witches all in dread'

It must be understood that this saying is referring to evil magic, and belief in the power of Rowan to ward off evil survived into modern times. On May eve Rowan crosses used to be worn in UK and were sometimes fastened to cattle (or their barns) for protection against evildoers (a literal translation of the Latin word often translated as Witch). Magical items of Rowan had to be made without a metal knife to

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INTERVIEW WITH A Pagan

Second in Witchtower's series of interviews with the members of Pagan Network. In this issue, jools is in the hotseat

Pagan Identity

PN: Name / username

J: jools

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

J: I am 38 years old and I live in York

PN: How would you describe your spiritual path?

J: I am an atheist witch

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

J: My grandmother bought me a book about the tarot when I was 14. In the bibliography there were references to books by Regardie and Valiente so I got them from my library. Since then I was hooked. My mother is a strict Christian but thankfully never made us go to church. She was very concerned at my 'dabbling with the devil' as she thought it.

The idea of paganism appealed to me as I was always strongly drawn to fairy tales, magic and using my imagination as a child.

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

J: I originally agreed with wiccan ideals as a teenager and came close to joining a coven but found it too much like Christianity. I pretty much gave up all spiritual practices for the first 5 years after my daughter was born. I then started on my current path 10 years ago.

PN: Interesting – would you like to expand? (Was it a "real" Wiccan line-aged coven?)

J: It was a wiccan discussion group, which would have morphed into a coven in time. I found their stances on various points as being unresearched and 'unsatisfying' in a way. It was closed soon after and I was not invited back, purely because it was a case of last in first out, and I was last in (or so they said). I then dabbled with eclectic paganism until the birth of my daughter. Mostly kemetics.

PN: I empathise about stopping spiritual practice after having children – I have two under five and I'm barely beginning to get my spiritual head above water... Did you have a burning desire to get back into it or did you get led back in by a friend?

J: It wasn't a burning desire but after five years I was drawn back to it. A shame as I had given away nearly all my books and had to replace many of them. I suppose the underlying need was always there but being a parent meant not too much time for personal things. If it is within you it never really goes away.

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?

J: I am a civil servant working for the Ministry of Defence. There is no conflict.

PN: Do you feel uncomfortable about MOD use of British sacred land, in Wiltshire and elsewhere?

J: Not really. It belongs to them, but they are giving (or at least selling) a lot of it back. It wasn't the army's fault really, it was the government's. I am sure that it would not happen now, for example.

PN: What are your hobbies and interests?

J: Cooking, reading, brewing wines, baking, comparative religion, camping, my daughter

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

J: Most of my friends are interested in the occult and/or pagans. My mother is high Christian and my sisters aren't religious at all. My partner is wiccan.

Beliefs

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

J: No

PN: How do you resolve the pagan nomenclature of deities and the pagan practices of working with deity with identifying an atheist witch?

J: Being a witch is independent of paganism. You can be a wiccan witch, a Christian witch or even a Satanist witch. Witchcraft is more of a skill than a spiritual path. I was an atheist before I became a witch, as the religious parts of wicca and paganism always gave me

a problem. I didn't have success with talking to the gods, and when I really thought about it, it seemed more acceptable to me that deity doesn't exist. Witchcraft fits around that perfectly.

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

J: Yes. I talk to trees.

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

J: Yes. It is science that hasn't been explained yet. It is the human brains ability to bend the universe to its will.

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

J: Both. It was more of an accident. I used to practice alone. When I started seeing my current partner it turns out he did an Open Circle so I joined in with that.

PN: If you've done both, which do you prefer?

J: Both as good as the other.

PN: Do you believe in the reality of curses? Would you ever do one? What types of spell would you include in your concept of a 'curse'?

J: Yes. I have done a couple. Curses are spells with the intention of causing harm or hurt to a person. I only use them in response to hurt or harm experienced by me.

PN: Did they work?

J: Yes they did.

PN: 18. Do you think the law of three-fold returns exists?

J: No

Activities

PN: What practices are regularly incorporated in your spiritual life? (E.g. meditation, prayer, ritual, magic, visu-

alisations, trance work...)

J: Pathworking, guided meditation, spell working, visualising, potions, divination, ritual.

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

J: Mainly Beltaine and Samhain, but we celebrate the main fire festivals and quarter days.

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

J: Yes and yes.

PN: Do you spend much time in nature, in the wild? Do you spend enough time out there?

J: I tend to go for a good long walk in the countryside near my house once a week. I think it is enough.

Being a witch is independent of paganism. Witchcraft is more of a skill than a spiritual path.

PN: Do you think paganism works better in the country than in the city? Why?

J: No. Because paganism is a path that is made spiritual by the

people who practice it, not by where they are.

Identity on Pagan Network

PN: How long have you been a member?

J: Two and a half years

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

J: Yes. I belong to three other forums, and I hang out on several pagan communities on Live Journal.

PN: Do you like the style of discussions that happen at Pagan Network? Do you like the subject matter?

J: Yes and yes.

PN: Do you think it's always fresh or too repetitive?

J: It can get repetitive. Sometimes old threads are re-animated and the same things are said all over again. Also, some of the comments go round in circles.

PN: What would you change about Pagan Network?

J: The committee needs to work harder at keeping the forum going, as well as the site. They spend a lot of time on the forum but don't seem to take responsibility for the things they were elected to do. Apart from that, this site is pretty OK.

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?

J: A Wiccan is a member of an initiatory tradition that is part of the western mystery tradition. I have no problem with people being initiated into covens, as that is what Wicca is.

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

J: It can be, but that is down to the books being published now. These bear no relation to books published soon after neo-paganism gained in popularity.

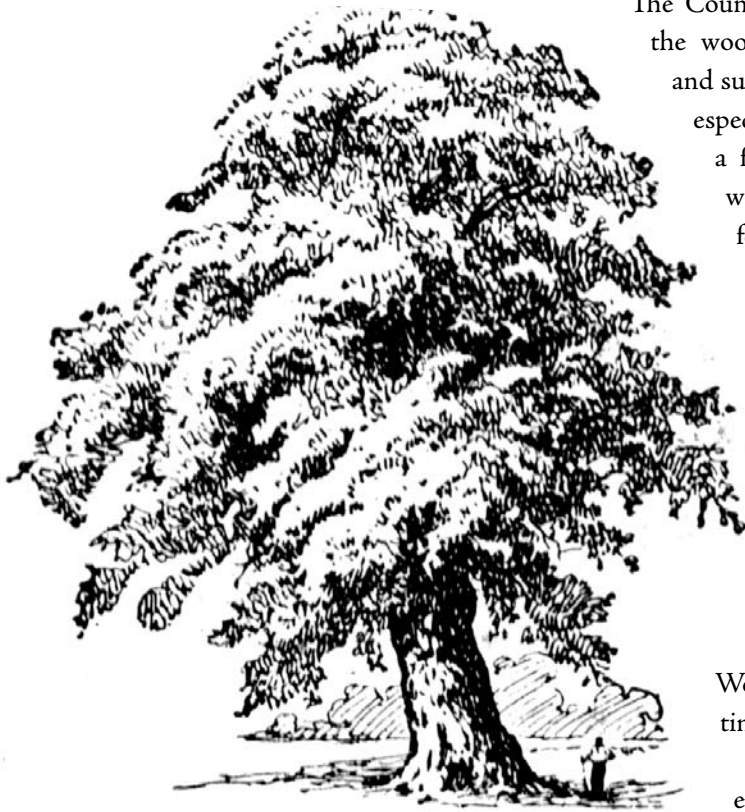
PN: Which ones did you have in mind – and would you recommend them to newbies?

J: I am thinking more of books by Paul Huson, which would have had much less fluff and more witchcraft in. Unfortunately they would not have been any more historically accurate than the books we have now. Just less fluffy. So no, I would not recommend those books now. The only 'older' books I would recommend to newbies are books by Valiente, but in conjunction with Hutton or Davies because she still gives an incorrect history of witchcraft.

cont. on page 16

Diary of a Sacred Tree

as told to Beith-ann & Candlesprite



The Oak tree had been standing in the middle of the woodland for many centuries now and had become very old and knarled. This he did by keeping quiet and avoiding the axe. A short distance away, (well, about 10 miles away as the crow flies) archaeologists had found some 'ancient' remains, which actually turned out to be a late Mediaeval dumping ground. This has, for some reason, become the legend of the remains of a Celtic King and his household. The previously privately owned wood had been sold off to the local County Council because the farmer had got fed up with people dressed in weird costumes knocking on his door at all hours of the day and night asking stupid questions about the energies of the wood which 'must have been the hunting ground of the King' and speaking in badly pronounced Brythonic Welsh.

The Council had then opened the woodland to the public and suddenly the wood and especially the Oak became a focus for rituals and worship for many different groups (much to the amusement and bemusement of the tree). The diary is written from the tree's perspective and how it views things at the different seasons of the year.

Imbolc

Well now, I see it's that time of the year again!

It started off gently enough with people coming to give me a hug and stroke my trunk and humming at me. Goodness knows why they want to do that after all these years. They never bothered for centuries and now they arrive like lightning bolts; I don't get struck by one for 50 years and then suddenly five come at once! I don't really mind the people - it's nice and makes me feel wanted. They also don't hurt as much as a lightning bolt!

Just a few weeks ago even weirder things have started to happen; some strange chap dressed in a long white frock stood in front of me (or what he obviously thought was the front of me) silently nodding his head. I don't know what he was doing but he stood there for some time. I did hear him tell his female companion (I assume it was female because I'm told they have extra bumps on their trunks), who looked like she had half of the underground

parts of Brazil around her neck, that he had petitioned me for something or other. Well, he's going to be wildly disappointed because I couldn't make out a thing he was saying. Perhaps he needs something to keep his head still, or some trousers, I hate to think what would happen in a strong wind! Hmm! I do love those northern winds best at this time of year that help to shake off the remains of last autumn's leaves.

Anyway, the nutters have been arriving. I am just waking up properly after the usual winter hibernation and this is a bit like an alarm clock - very alarming - just likes having some newly-wed squirrels taking up residence and inviting in their whole damn extended family to stay! The first lot of people to come along this morning started tying things to my branches - all very festive but surely they were a few weeks too late? I have heard about this midwinter tree decoration lark from the conifers that are grown for just a few years and then they get cut down and taken away. The *Green spike-leaves* have this theory that they are going onto some sort of tree Nirvana where they are all lit up and with twinkly things hung from their branches and then worshiped like the Gods they think they are. No one in the woodland really knows because none of the conifers ever came back to confirm it. That stopped a few weeks ago, as the sun started to come closer again, for some reason and since the weirdoes started to arrive. Now I'm surrounded by bolshy juvenile spruces and firs wondering why they haven't been the 'chosen ones' and arguing about who is the most 'deserving' of Fir-vana. Now all sorts of things are being hung on my branches, the other *Spike-Leaves*

are getting really stropky and accusing me of being Messianic and too big for my roots, condemning me to become charcoal and even stopped talking to me. To be honest that's as much a blessing as some of those damn squirrels sodding off and never returning.

Well if it's all about that midwinter lark they can keep it. I was just enjoying listening to a thrush singing on one of my branches the other morning when some bright spark in a multi-coloured cloak came up to me and said he was going to give me an offering, got out a hammer and started knocking a round metal disc into my trunk. It bloody stung and the thrush didn't look too happy either - he had been serenading a lady of his acquaintance perched in a nearby Rowan. Because he got interrupted his potential bride had taken off with a different and dubious-looking thrush from the edge of the woodland. Apparently *Rainbow Man* did ask me if he could make the offering, but he couldn't hear me when I said "No! Bigger off and don't come back" I know who he is now and the next time he comes along he'll get a poke in the eye, see how he likes it! Trouble is he's set a precedent and others keep following his example.

Another thing the people tend to do is to put crystals and stones in amongst my branches. That's a pain too because the *rock-heads* are a miserable lot, saying that they weren't made to be so far off the ground, moaning it's too hot or too cold or too bright or too wet and that squirrels keep mistaking them for acorns and breaking their teeth. There was one stone that suffered from vertigo and did nothing but moan and groan while I was trying to get some sleep - so I wiggled my branches and got rid of it - it's happier down by my roots now or I think it is. I can't hear it from down there.

The really entertaining stuff starts to happen after the Sun goes down. There are a group of people that gather who are all wearing long white

frocks and cloaks and carrying staffs (which is worrying because they are all branches of trees and I keep getting mine looked at in an acquisitive way. Luckily I haven't got any straight ones). The *White Ones* all gather in a circle and start to get odd items and things out of backpacks. Then they light a fire which they have the good grace to contain in a metal dish, but then they start placing naked flames in the form of candles on one of my roots, which is fairly prominent above the ground, along with a goblet of wine, a loaf of bread and something that smokes and smells funny. I have shouted 'Hey, I am made of wood, you know, and my dead leaves are very dry' but they don't listen and yet they reckon I can hear them when they direct their thoughts at me. It was worse this time because they said the celebration was something to do with light and started lighting more and more candles and placing them around my roots to 'honour' me - bloody scare me more like it! Perhaps I shouldn't have scoffed quite so loudly at the charcoal curse from the conifers!

The *White Ones* then all joined hands and started dancing around me singing some strange chant. It went on for ages and got really boring. I'm glad to say though, there was a moment of divine justice when just as they were getting to the climax of this event there was one daft prancing dipstick of a woman, who had turned up in a sparkly lurex cloak (stupid in the first place as it's damn cold at the moment and everyone else had turned up in what could only be described as horse blankets with hoods), added an extra flourish to her pirouettes and the edge of her cloak caught a candle flame. It didn't do too much damage because they were able to dowse it with the wine from the chalice. I did take pity and offered one of my branches to be used to beat her out! How I laughed - but they didn't hear that either.

Just as the *White Ones* and the

still-smouldering woman were breaking up to leave several people dressed in black and looking really angry went up to the main man in the circle and started saying that the white-gowned first group had no right to be there and that they (the *Men in Black*) had the real right because they have been coming here for years. The second group, who called themselves the *Coven of the Rainbow Fart-arses* (or something), announced they were the true Guardians and should have been asked permission first. Been coming here for years? I don't think so! I have only seen one of them before and he had been dragged off by the farmer at the point of double-barrel because firstly he was trespassing and secondly he was drunk on Diamond White cider and singing obscene songs within earshot of the farmer's wife. He, or she, (I couldn't quite make out the gender), had climbed over the fence. He must have been drunk or something to begin with because the fence was electrified at the time. This might also explain the person's hairstyle and the wild look in their eyes, which was not unlike the expression of a squirrel passing a piece of green agate from his rear end after mistaking it for an acorn lunch!

Anyway, the first group, 'The Druid Grove of the Unicorn-fiddlers', I think they called themselves, told the *Fart-arses* to 'Bollocks, we've got big sticks' and then walked off muttering something about revenge and a wicker man. There's going to be 'tears before bedtime' methinks. (Bedtime for me is in about 6 month's time - watch this space).



DAD ...

and the Mole

an almost true story by Scorch

At home in sunny Norfolk, my father has a large and fertile garden, in which he grows all manner of delicious and healthy vegetables for us all. Well, not only for us - the slugs and grubs and weevily insects get a share too, and Dad does battle long and grimly against them all. He anoints the tiny seeds lovingly with all manner of mystic powders as he sprinkles them in the freshly-turned soil, and sets out nice saucers of beer for the slugs to drown themselves in. He even sifts his earth-stained fingers through each crumbly spadeful of soil to extract the wireworms and other nasty wriggles, tossing them into an old tobacco tin for the almost-tame robin to come & take to his chicks for lunch.

Against all these garden pests there is a proven deterrent - all, that is, except for the moles. These furry fiends migrate from the woods behind the garden in search of a home, and fall upon Dad's lovely neat vegetable-filled plots with tiny cries of delight! They make merry in the freshly-dug soil, gleefully unearthing the half-grown carrots and turnips in the process of munching up all the health-giving worms. The tunnels they dig do help to aerate the soil, but all the worms they eat mean that Mother Earth doesn't get the help she needs to produce really yummy vegetables. Hence, despite all their cuteness & cuddliness, Dad doesn't exactly greet the moles with love and rejoicing in his heart.

There are many ways to try and

remove a mole, but they're not all terribly effective. Sticks with windmills just amuse them, they stoically ignore the new electronic sonic devices, and the old steel traps are just too cruel to even contemplate using. The cream of the crop of mole-detering ideas one year was to stick a hosepipe down his hole and "flood the buggers out". This was duly attempted, and the full force of Norfolk's awesome water-pressure was solemnly brought to bear against the mole. The water ran for half an hour, as we stood breathlessly at the window, expecting any moment to see a mole bursting from the ground, borne up atop a foaming geyser of cold water... but no. All that ever happened was that the garden got a bit damp, no matter how long the water ran. We had insane visions of the mole, safely clad in wetsuit, flippers and aqualung, diving merrily about beneath the ground, harpooning for worms and chuckling as he swam!

But at last, Dad did find a guaranteed method of mole removal. He creeps out with his spade, and stands poised with spade in place above a likely molehill, waiting for the mole to surface with a pawful of soil poised to fling up onto the growing heap. Then he strikes! The spade is driven down and levered up with all the speed and strength Dad can muster, and a huge chunk of earth is flung up into the air, hopefully containing the bewildered mole. The hapless mole flies through the air, squeaking in fright, to land,

momentarily stunned, at Dad's feet. Helpless and confused, he is unceremoniously grabbed by the scruff of the neck before he can dive for the safety of the earth, and dropped into a big blue bucket.

Now, the practical thing to do at this point would be to knock the mole on the head with the spade, and thus end his digging days permanently, but Dad's conscience and the pleas of us kids prevent this final solution, so he has to be relocated instead. After a brief but careful interlude of mole-patting, the confused and unhappy mole is taken to the other side of the wood and released into his natural habitat. This gives Dad a few mole-free weeks, but eventually another mole turns up, and the whole process begins again! Well, we've always assumed it's another mole, but it could actually be the same determined but footsore little mole, undertaking the long trek back with the true pioneering spirit, but we doubt it. It's a fairly comfortable arrangement, if not what you'd call high-tech, which seems to work fairly well for Dad.

But, what I always wondered was what the poor **mole** made of all this carrying on? How did all this fit into his understanding of the world? So...

THE TUMBLING

Snuffling sounds echoed gently around the long, dry tunnel, as the dreamer's age-whitened snout twitched fitfully in his sleep. The burrow was dark and warm, a soft surruration emanating from one corner as the heap of disabled worms slid feebly over one another. The faint sounds of pattering paws awakened the sleeper, stirring him from his dreams of warm sunshine and crunchy insects. The paws, swiftly followed by their small and pudgy owners, tumbled into the dusty chamber.

The three young moles scabbled to a stop inside the elder's burrow,



crouching down in respect for his age and wisdom. They cowered back further as the old mole surged upwards from his warm nest of grass, rolling his still-powerful shoulders to swipe his seven strong, curved talons through the air fiercely. "Well, what do you rabble want, disturbing an old mole from his well-earned rest?" he growled, smiling to himself as the youngsters huddled closer together. "E-Elder Three-claw..." the largest stammered, "We, we thought you might like a worm or two...?"; offering up a grubby paw, stuffed with writhing invertebrates. The worms disappeared in two swift bites, their soft bodies crunching in the elder's powerful jaws. "Good." Three-Claw pronounced, settling back on his grass bed, "Thank you. Now, what did you **really** want?"

Reassured, the juveniles brightened, relaxing their tense bodies into more comfortable, yet still respectful, poses, before Bite-Fast, the larger and darker-furred of the three hesitantly asked, "Well, we wondered if you'd tell us about all your adventures... you know, how you came here?" "Yes, yes!"

chimed in Sharp-Ear, the smallest mole, "Tell us about the Tumbling!" Old Three-Claw chuckled, shaking his round head, "You've heard all about it before - you don't really want me to tell you again, do you?" "Yes, yes, please..." the pups clamoured, "It's wet and cold, and we're bored... please!". "You'd better settle down a bit, then," the old mole said, "get yourselves comfy-like." He wriggled his thick-furred haunches deeper into his hollowed-out bed as the young moles swarmed into the rounded burrow, tripping over their paws in their haste to get settled before he changed his mind. Absently licking at the stump of the missing talon that gave him both his adult name and a constant reminder never to argue with a cat, he leaned towards the youngsters and began his familiar tale.

"Now," said Three-Claw, "the first thing I remember is the warmth of my dam, in the milky darkness of the brood-nest, snuggled up with my litter-mates in the dry grass. We rolled and tumbled together, batting feebly at one another with our still-soft talons, getting the scent of ourselves. You all

remember those warm and happy days - you're barely out of them, the smell of your dam is still all about you! As the seasons turned, I grew into a fine, fat little youngling mole, just like yourselves, happy with my littermates in the warm den. We tumbled together in the slowly-growing warmth of the Time of New Life, learning to be moles, watching the world grow green around us. Our dam made our lives secure, warning us away from the Eaters, keeping us safe from the empty, devouring Sky in the warm darkness given us by the One Below.

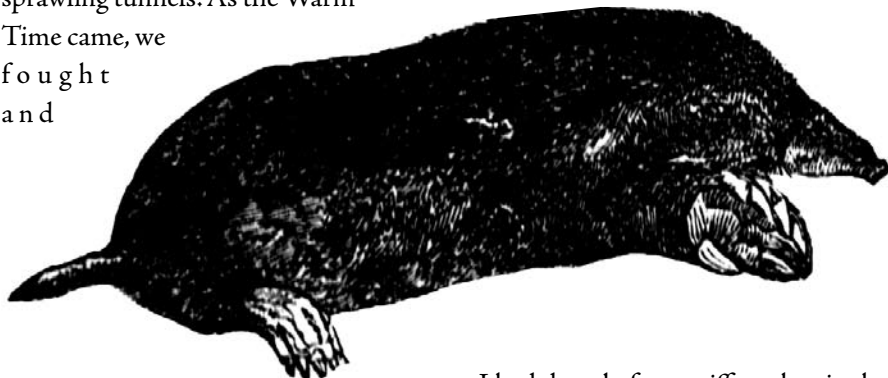
"My life was free from worry, scampering along the burrows, crunching up unwary worms, sampling the clean Surface air with curiosity, until the day when, trying my talons on the tunnel wall, I clawed my way further than I expected. I remember falling... falling through the hole I had made, squeaking in shocked indignation as the soft earth fell on my head! I scrambled back to safety, shaking with fear at the terrible feeling of falling through the air, tossing my head free from the suddenly-clinging soil and thanking the

One Below for my safety. From that day, the Restlessness came upon us, my littermates and I, and the warmth we felt began to leave us as we roamed solitary through our dam's sprawling tunnels. As the Warm

Time came, we

fought

and



bit one another, unaccountably irritable, nothing satisfying the unknown urge.

"One day, the itchy feeling was just too strong for me, and I ventured out alone into the vast unknown beyond the familiar surface exit. The Surface was strange to me still, the brief visits my dam had allowed not enough to satisfy my curiosity. Strange noises drove me back, shivering in fear of the unseen and terrifying Eaters, dashing to the safety of the well-known tunnels of home. Yet still I felt drawn to explore, running and hiding on the Surface, until at last I roamed far beyond my puphood home, never to set eyes on my dam or littermates again. I wonder what lives they lead, back on the Hill, where the soil is hard and the trees close.....

"I grew fast and lean over the Warm Time, ranging far in the search for a place of my own. I fought twice, once a strong old male that drove me far into brambles before I could escape, but could find no home. I resorted to asking stranger moles what lay before me on my path, but gained no help. A near-dead female, old and grey, cursed me as I ran, screeching after me that I would only meet with death, but my bones would never be seen. I was puzzled and afraid, but was too far from my puphood home to return, even if

I had known the way. When the Fat Times came, I was travelling close to the foot of the Great Rift, wandering between the trees and diving beneath the bracken for cover. I moved along as

I had done before, sniffing the air, then making another trial dig before scenting a rival yet again. I asked the One Below for help, as I was afraid, knowing that I must have a home while the Fat Times lasted, or I would starve, freeze and die in the Great Cold.

"At last, my trial scrape yielded no scent of another mole, just soft earth with the ripe odour of well-fed worms. The soil was mostly light and easy to dig, only hard in a few scattered patches. Rejoicing, I dug and dug until my paws were sore, but never a trace of mole I found. Thanking the One Below for this bounty, I settled in to make this my home. After a day or so, I had a few tunnels, and after a month of digging I had made a fine system, with tunnels near the Surface for worm-hunting, deep burrows for flood drainage and fine round dens for sleeping warmly. This was an ideal place for a young mole.

"The soil, light as it was, carried wormsound clearly, and I fed well, growing fat and tunnelling far. This was as good as the Place of All Worms that my dam told me stories of, the paradise of the One Below where the eating was fine and a mole safe in peace and happiness. But my tunnels had to be dug deep, though, for close to the surface were many strange roots, unlike anything I had seen before. Still, they seemed to attract the fattest worms, so I made merry amongst them, should-

dering them out of the way where they ran too deep, and my worm-heap larders grew high with stored food.

"But as I went on my merry way in my new home, I noticed strangenesses, things my dam had never told me of. My spoilheaps were scattered when I returned to them, and strange sounds came to me through the earth, resonant and deep, but with no source. Sometimes the earth shook again and again, but did me no more harm than hurting my ears. Tunnels that I had made sound and strong were found suddenly filled in, the soil lying soft and even in them, but still with no scent of mole nor Eater. I knew of the dangers of the yellow sand, sifting in to bury the best-dug tunnel, and of mud, sliding treacherous to drown a mole, but good soil has no business just filling up on its own! Still, I knew I had no hope of finding another home before the Great Cold, and the eating was good, so I thanked the One Below, dug deeper and longer, ate well and grew fatter in my mysterious home. When the sounds came, I stayed deep in the ground, far from any harm that could come.

"On the day that I would remember ever after as the Day of the Tumbling, I had been enlarging one of my surface runs between those odd roots, munching up the fat worms as I dug. The strange sounds had been rumbling through the earth, but I no longer feared them, and I came to the Surface with a fine sweep of my talons. As I threw the loose earth up to the spoilheap, it happened. One moment I was secure and happy in the One Below's good earth, the next I was assaulted by the most amazing wall of sound as the tunnel floor came up under my paws. My snout hit the burrow roof as I crashed through the crumbly earth, then I was lost! I glimpsed the horrifying Sky wheeling above me, the friendly earth far below, as I fell upwards, tumbling in the air with the loose soil. I squealed at the appalling

yawning sensation of the Tumbling, my eyes squeezed tight against the devouring Sky. My paws flailed uselessly in the air as I Tumbled in the Sky...

"Then my body hit the ground, knocking all the breath from me. I thought my life had ended, that the Great Eater had come for me, but not so - I could still move, if only to twitch. Then, as I lay stunned with the pain of my fall and the horror of the Tumbling, a great force came down upon me. The ground fell away from my paws again as I was hoisted squealing into the Sky, dangling like a week-old pup lifted by it's dam, then dumped down on my feet again. But... I was still in the Sky! There was welcome solidity under my paws again, but it was alien. hard and cold, with no earthy welcome to my talons. Panicked, I ran and ran, my claws scrabbling on the hard Sky's surface, until my snout met hardness. Again and again I dashed blindly about, dazed and confused, trapped in the Sky.

"Eventually, exhausted, I lay hopeless and still, panting harshly for breath. I felt bruised from snout to tail-tip, and despaired of ever escaping from the Sky. I gazed about me in the deep blue, lost and helpless, and resigned myself once again to my fate in the jaws of the Great Eater, hoping to come at last to the welcoming paws of the One Below. As I lay gasping, the deep blue Sky moved beneath me, loud harsh noises rent the air, and I feared that the Tumbling had come again. But my paws stayed safely on the hardness, so that as a shadow blocked the paler Sky above, I could dash away from the great thing that came towards me. Yet it chased me, staying near as I ran clumsily about, never resting until it had ruffled my fur. Although the thing was huge, it didn't harm me, but nudged me once and then again, soft as a female in the dark, leaving its' strange scent behind it. What it was I'll never know, mayhap a visitation from the One Below, but it did me no harm.

"Then suddenly the world lurched beneath my paws, and I slid on the hard Sky under me. I slipped back and forth, my flanks brushing the bright Sky's smooth boundaries as I scrabbled frantically for purchase. I slipped and slid for a long while, and then the world settled down solid again with a loud noise and a violent jerk. As I struggled to regain my breath, everything slowly tipped over, and I went careering across the slippery Sky, and out into the real world again. Momentarily stunned, I crouched down small in the friendly grass, breathing the welcome scent of soil again. A great shadow lay across me, cold and dark, from the huge shape that must have been the Tumbling itself. Deep, rumbling sounds washed over me as I regained my senses and dashed wildly away.

"I curled up, frightened and calling upon the One Below, for a long while, until I was a mole again, not a bundle of fear and trembling. When I came to myself, I found myself beneath a bracken clump, covered in bruises and scrapes from the Tumbling and my mad flight. Lost and alone, exhausted from my strange ordeal, I stumbled around until I found molesign. I was lucky, for the mole I met was old Fur-So-Soft, and she treated me as tenderly as if I were one of her own pups. In her care I slowly recovered, and became almost my old fearless self again. In the years to come, I gained my own territory here in our Bluebell Valley, mated with my dear lost Dark-Ears, and saw my pups grow strong with their dam and leave to find their own homes.

"Now I am old and tired enough to sleep here and tell stories to you pups! But I have never forgotten the terror of the Tumbling, and nor should you. If you should ever find yourself in a place like the Place of All Worms but not, a place of strange roots, soft soil, fat worms and tunnels that fill themselves in, then you know that you are in danger. Call upon the grace of the

One Below, leave worms on the Surface as an offering to the Sky and run back as fast as your paws can carry you, or the Tumbling will come for you as it came for me, and you will never be seen again!"

The small moles shivered with delicious fear at the Elder's tale, huddling together with small squeaks of excitement. "How brave", breathed Sharp-Ear, trembling beside his brothers as he gazed at old Three-Claw in awe. "No, not brave," replied the old mole, preening himself under their respectful gaze, "but a mole doing as he must. Bravery is for the times when there is a choice, but the Tumbling left me no choice. The best I could do was to survive, and to tell you this tale in my turn." The three pups looked at one another, unconvinced, but dutifully nodded their heads, keeping their small snouts low down in respect.

"Now off with you to your dam", ordered Three-Claw, combing his dense fur with his front talons in search of the tiny Biter that had nipped him, "go and learn about digging, to strengthen your paws and train your snout." The old mole lay down in his nest of dry grass, waving away the pups as he lived his youth again in his memories. The pups crept out, their soft steps gathering sound as they moved down the tunnel, their chatter resounding from the walls, but never disturbing old Three-Claw's deepening sleep.



LONDON IMBOLC

DAWN

I'm chanting to myself as I walk to the bus stop
Resounding with my footfalls on the cold stone path

Gazing at the glimmer of the frost in the moonlight
All glittering and sparkling on a dark blue Ford.

A hundred million glints, a hundred million star fires
A hundred million life lights on the turning Earth

All sparkling in the light of the Moon in Her fullness
As She's framed in the branches of a London plane

The midnight sky above is shading down to purple
Her light a lambent white pool in the deep blue sky

Melding with the glow of the streetlight on the corner
Reflecting off the windows of the leaving bus

Lady, is your lesson "Don't dawdle in the morning"?
Or a blessing of the time to enjoy Your dawn?

Scorch

sonal responsibility for that. The issue facing paganism is basically acceptance by mainstream society.

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

J: It may represent pre-Gardnerian witchcraft, but that would only make its lineage early 20th Century (post Murray, Graves etc). There is no ancient form of witchcraft surviving in this country. British Traditional Witchcraft and Wicca both incorporate ideals of what the protagonists thought was witchcraft but was probably just cunning craft or wise craft. Until Murray printed her theses witches were always thought of as malefic, so pre 20th century people will not have wanted to be identified as a witch.

And finally ...

PN: Is the political climate getting more or less amenable to pagans?

J: More so, definitely. I have no problems with other religions but there are always people who want to stir up trouble. The Discrimination at Work Act has allowed pagans to be honest about their path without fear of being discriminated against.

PN: What would make the pagan scene in York better?

J: More interest.

PN: Is Martin Shaw really all that?

J: Are you kidding me? Did you see him in the Scarlet Pimpernel? He is gorgeous.

PN: Do you think synaesthesia influenced you to start doing pagan stuff?

J: No, because I didn't know what it was until I saw it on TV. I thought everyone was like me. I believe that it helps my path now as I find visualisation extremely easy, and every sense is inter-related.

Interview

cont. from page 9

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?

J: I run a pagan gathering in York, and help my partner run two others. We also run an Open Circle for all occultists to attend and celebrate the festivals. My views are that pagans are too

apathetic. They ask for moots to be provided and complain at the lack of interactivity but when it is provided they don't want to come. This is not the case everywhere – there is a strong pagan community in Bristol and other places that I have visited, but in York it seems that it is a bit fractured.

Pagans' strengths are that they do believe in fair play and that they should be heard. Their weaknesses are that they are not willing to take on per-

Tree Lore

cont. from page 7

work properly and red thread or ribbon can be used to either bind bits of Rowan together or to tie a charm to something else.

'Rowan' is a fascinating tree name; it is connected to the old Norse word 'Runa' - meaning a charm - specifically with being able to ward off the effects of the 'evil eye'. 'Runa' was the Sanskrit word for 'magician'. 'Run-stafas' were staves cut from the Rowan tree and inscribed with runes for magical reasons although Beech (which is not an Ogham or Runic tree) was used for smaller runic tablets and "lots". The smooth bark of the Rowan is ideal for this purpose.

The Rowan was a Holy tree to the Welsh, many churchyards in Wales still include the tree and I have found a churchyard planted almost entirely with Rowan in Kent, in the village called - wait for it - Ash! The berries, the easiest way to identify Mountain Ash (the common Ash has "keys" like half of a sycamore "helicopter") were much used for brewing and flavouring drinks such as mead, ale, perry and cider. The fresh juice is mildly laxative and good for soothing inflamed mucous membranes. In herbal medicine the juice forms the basis of a gargle for sore throats and in the 19th century it was used to treat scurvy since, like much of the Rose family, the berries are high in vitamin C.

FOOD AND DRINK

(from an online article free for reprint by Simon Mitchell at http://www.articlecity.com/articles/food_and_drink/article_219.shtml)

Rowanberries are around from July/August through to November in the UK and may even stay on a tree until January if the thrushes don't eat them. They are at their best for Rowan Jelly when they have attained full colour but are not yet mushy. They contain varying amounts of tartaric, citric and

malic acid dependent on their ripeness. Cut them from the stalks in clusters and remove as much stem as possible before cooking. When made into a jelly the fruit becomes quite astringent and the tart taste makes a good 'digestif' accompaniment to meats such as venison, cold game or fowl.

Take about 3 pounds of Rowan berries and two pounds of juicy apples. Peel and core the apples, slice them and place them to simmer in 2 pints of water for 10 minutes, while you are washing and sorting the berries. Add the berries and simmer to a pulp. Use a potato masher to help this process if you like. Let the mixture cool a bit and then strain it through a jelly bag, leaving it to drip overnight.

Warm about 2 pounds of sugar and stir in the liquid mixture and heat to a simmer. I must admit to adding some pectin at this point as I have a problem with runny jams. You can do this and leave the apples out for a clear jelly. Add a knob of butter and stir to a rolling boil for a few minutes and put it into sterilised jars and seal. It is a most unusual taste but the thing that delights me most about this jelly is the fantastic colour.

ROWAN WOOD

Rowan produces strong, flexible, yellow-grey wood, which was once widely used for making tool handles, small carved objects, plough-pins, pegs for tethering animals, cartwheels, poles, hoops for barrels, churning staves, equipment for watermills, even rough basketwork if Willow wasn't available. It provided planks and beams, but generally doesn't grow large enough to produce many. It was sometimes used to make longbows, instead of the Yew and common Ash, but this seems to have been when they weren't available and it is not ideal. But it grows quickly, making for excellent coppices and it is still used to make charcoal. All parts of the tree were used for tanning hides and for dyeing cloth black since it is high in tannin.

As firewood, Rowan burns hot and slow.

Deity

Based both on the first-letter and its properties Lugh seems the most likely God corresponding to the Rowan. As a magician, chief warrior and king of the Gods there are clear similarities with Woden/Wotan/Othinn (commonly misnamed Odin). Woden's sacred tree, though, is the common Ash. Lugh is the deity of Lughnasad - the month of August, marked with fire-festivals on August 1st, but this festival is noted as being particularly sacred to the Goddess Maeve, who was Goddess of the Fir Bolg, remembered in the Book of Invasions as the people forced to build the great fairy mounds of Ireland.

Magical uses

Rowan wood was used as for protection from lightning. Druids are said to have made fires of rowan wood before battles. They spoke incantations over them in order to invite the fair folk to take part in the fight.

All of the above indicates that Rowan is associated with magical protection. There is also a clear link with the concept of resilience. Rowan was used for a great variety of magical purposes including wands, magical spears and talismans inscribed with runes, but this it has in common with the ordinary Ash, and I will deal with those associations later. However, a wand of Rowan with the Ogham character inscribed, with a red thread around it, is good for spells of protection. There is no need to strip the bark.

How to spot a Rowan

Last time I said, "look it up online", but as a deciduous tree it can be hard to spot in winter. Its bark is not as distinctive as the Silver Birch. When the leaves are out Rowan does indeed look like Ash, but it is the red berries that give it away. As Simon Mitchell's article mentions, these may still be on the tree.

PNukkie: Convene!

by Beòlach

After Pagan Network's first AGM last October, we're going all out to create the PN Convention – the first event of its size to even be attempted by the organization. Just – what *is* going on?

There are two elements to the convention, the day and the night-time events. The night-time will no doubt be the typical trying to erase the day's events with as much alcohol as possible, and I have no doubt will be fantastic – they tell me the Midsummer Ball was! The daytime will be what really gets me going this time though. From 10am, the Resource Centre in Holloway Road will be filled with pagans on stalls, pagans on stage, pagans doing workshops with other pagans. With people like Dr. Christina Oakley, James Butler and so many others, the rooms should be buzzing with the magic of ideas and concepts being exchanged, with that healthy amount of commerce for the Pagan, by the Pagan – can't wait.

Getting the speakers wasn't as much of a problem as had been originally thought; asking a lot of people very nicely and so many people agreed, and really became a full day. The workshop was pretty much the same, asking people and them agreeing. A few people even asked us! The point that an event starts becoming a good one is when people are asking the organisers to do something as well as the other way around really. The stalls has been the biggest problem, getting shops and other pagan retailers and outlets interested in actually setting up shop at the convention. But then I suppose it's understandable – first event, you need to scope it out maybe. Treadwell's will be there though, that's

always good! The quality of the product at the stalls (not just Treadwell's but all of them) will be fantastic though, of that I'm sure. Honest! I've been told that entertainment is provided as well, but I think they're trying to keep me away from entertainment in case I start doing really bad karaoke at the convention (*"You're makin' me a crazy chick....!"*)

Now our last issue is (drum roll...) tickets! Yes, those things that allow members of the public to turn up! Tickets are £10 in advance for non-members of PN, and £8 in advance for full members of PN. If you buy on the door, add two pounds to those prices and that's the only increase. Now the only way that this event can be a success is, of course, only if people turn up to it. There's no point having the best stalls, the biggest names and the most invigorating workshops if no-one apart from the organizing team is there to appreciate it. So really, if you can make it down, we would love to see as many of you as we possibly can. You can purchase tickets through the online shop, by PayPal and if you see an organiser about, by cheque or cash. When you buy them in advance, your tickets will either be given to you by hand or will be waiting for you on the door. More details are available on the website, under Convention.

The first ever PN Convention... it's too early to say for definite, but I'd say it'll be one for the PN history books. To close, I'd like to say a big thank you to the PN Convention team – they've done a superb job in organising, arranging and collating (yes there was collation!); without their efforts the convention wouldn't be happening at all.

PN 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*

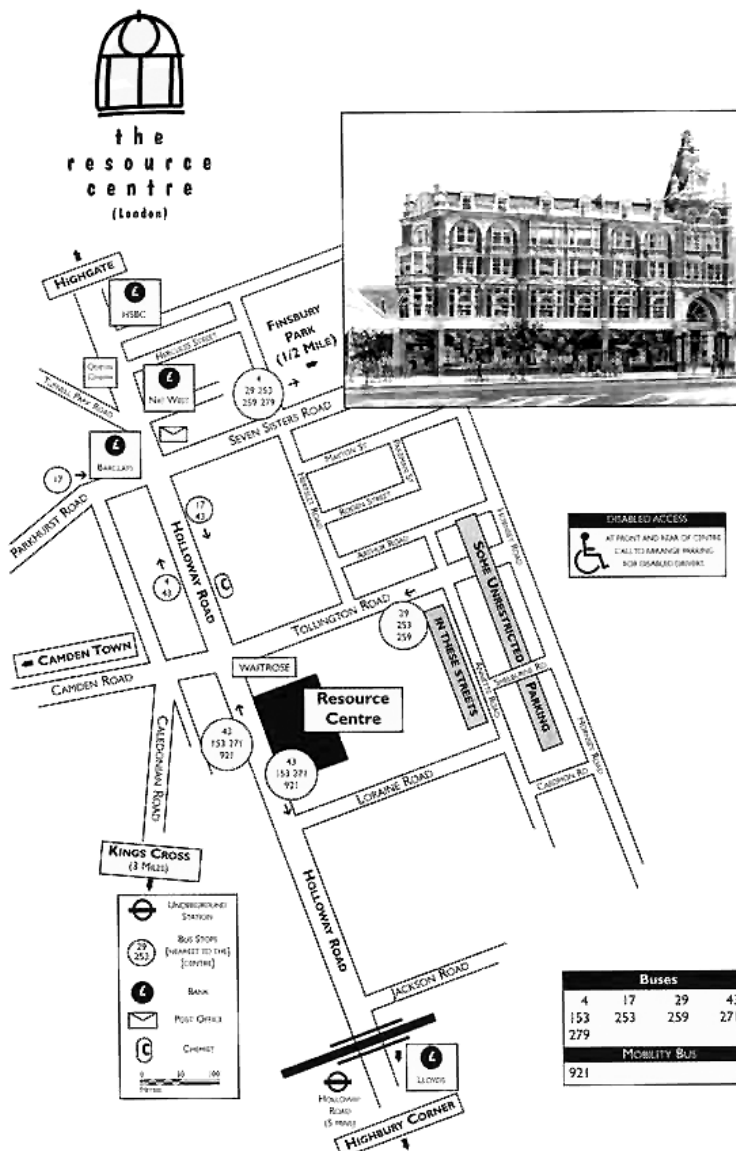
Tickets for the convention:

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





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