

## Lughnasadh 2009

Welcome to the Lughnasadh edition of EOLAS, the magazine of Ord na Darach Gile - the Order of WhiteOak. In this edition we have our usual mix of articles, poems, the ancient and the modern.

Believe it or not it is now two years since we first launched EOLAS magazine and aside from the rare delay we have managed to maintain a good combination of interesting content from our contributors, not just those within the Druidic/Celtic Reconstructionist community but also content coming from wider afield. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our contributors in making this magazine what it is.

If anyone would like to contribute to future editions of EOLAS, please send your contributions to [membership@whiteoakdruids.org](mailto:membership@whiteoakdruids.org) - we are also keen to hear from you about your opinions on articles or important matters, so please feel free to write to us at the above email address for our Dear Editor section.

Within the peace of the Oaks,  
J Craig Melia – August 2009

## Visit our Virtual Shrine

The Virtual Shrine Of The Goddess Brighid is dedicated to all people who are suffering and to their loved ones who are in need of help. It is also a place to celebrate and commemorate significant life passages. It is intended for the use of all People of Faith, here you may offer prayers, give thanks or write petitions within our Messages area.

We take our lead from the ancient and sacred places used by our Ancestors, those Ancient Shrines and Holy Wells that dot the landscape, allowing the traveller to give thanks and to make offering for safe journey and good fortune.

Our Blessings and Remembrance sections offer words of wisdom and prayers from many traditions, not just Celtic but also Northern Traditions, Hinduism and Buddhism.

The shrine can be viewed at [www.celticheritage.co.uk/virtualshrine](http://www.celticheritage.co.uk/virtualshrine)



The Order of WhiteOak has instituted a teaching program and system of fostership. For more details visit our website at [www.whiteoakdruids.org](http://www.whiteoakdruids.org) or email us via [membership@whiteoakdruids.org](mailto:membership@whiteoakdruids.org)

## What is a Spiritual Warrior? - Sefriel

What does the term “spiritual warrior” conjure nowadays? Some love ‘n’ lighter waving a crystal? The Loyal Arthurian Warband waging holy war on a brewery? Surely there must be something more that can be done to affect change and walk the path we find before us. I can do nothing more than tell you of my philosophy.

I believe that a true spiritual warrior must be of the old ways, not of paganism, but of the soldier caste which has survived through the ages much better than any ancient religion. To draw upon chivalry, to draw upon bushido, to draw upon the Nine Noble Virtues of the Norse and the warrior-monk precepts of the Shaolin is to hearken back to the true warriors of spirit.

A samurai would have a very simple tenet: You are a skilled swordsman, but there will always be someone who is better than you. One day you will meet this man in battle, and you will die. Therefore, you are already dead, and so each step you take, each breath, each action, is filled with life. Surely this is an attitude to aspire to? To live each day to its fullest, to know with absolute certainty that one day, you will die, and then your deeds will be laid bare before you.

Unfortunately, modern society does not favour this outlook, and instead of living each day until death, the world of today tends to die a little each day. To greet the morning with fierce will and intent, to strive and conquer one’s fears and insecurities, and to triumph, is frowned upon. “Never take chances, don’t go out of your way for others, keep your head down, have a steady job...” The mantras of the mundane, the bland platitudes of the masses forever beat upon anyone who steps out of line, and wishes to distance themselves from those who walk by on the other side.

In the same way, chivalry suffers derision from all corners. The Left say that it is misogynistic and chauvinistic, the Right say it is too bleeding-heart, and most people just think it’s outdated and useless. True enough, chivalry moved into the realms of the ridiculous and served to hole up women to be treated as livestock, but it started with people genuinely wanting to help others.

The idea that the weak should be helped by the strong, that those who cannot stand up for themselves should have a champion, and that sometimes Justice must be served no matter the personal cost is not useless; nor is it incompatible with the modern world. Okay, I get a funny look every now and then when I ask someone if they need a hand with something, but the usual response when I offer to carry a heavy suitcase up the Underground stairs in rush hour is of great relief.

This can be applied to all situations – strive forwards toward a better world. To quote a cheesy popcorn flick with some brilliant platitudes: “What man is a man who does not make the world a better place?” To seek out the opportunity to bring about change for the better, to find the noble quest and complete it, is to be righteous and holy. True, it is not the way of most people, but then it cannot be the way of all people. A Knight would understand that although he leads the household, without a stable-hand he would not ride, and without his cook he would not eat. In the same way, someone wishing to be a spiritual warrior must not entertain contempt for people who do not walk the same path – a spiritual warrior must see his place in the world and understand that it is not for everyone.

This in turn brings a revelation: Far from being removed from society, someone striving to change the world must be a part of society. The spiritual warrior must be a part of the system it wishes to change, or it is merely an enemy. To step up against injustice, to fight against the oppressor is laudable, but to lead others forwards into a better world is righteousness.

Herein lies the kicker: Those of us who have spent years, if not decades, avoiding the uncomfortable conversations with normal people must now turn about and embrace open discussion. Hi, my name is Sef, and I save the world. I invite you to join me, in whatever capacity you feel you may, without prejudice and without derision. Don’t follow me, just stand by me, and act when you feel you should. In right thought and right action lie righteousness, and together we will face whatever comes with joy, with life, and with courage.

- Sefriel

## **The Immortal Yew - Michael Dunning**

*“The trees signify the universe in endless regeneration; but at the heart of the universe there is always a tree – the tree of eternal life or of knowledge.” [1]*

For thousands of years, the mysterious power of the yew tree inscribed itself into human consciousness as a living symbol of healing and transformation. The yew is firmly rooted in the earth of our culture and in our deepest collective memory. Take a look at any map of Europe and you will see a myriad of places named after the yew – from Iona to York, from Ireland to Spain, the yew lives on in the sentience of the land. What can we learn from the yew today, and what message does it hold to guide our spiritual development?

## **The Whittingehame Yew – An Initiation**

Many years ago, I desperately needed a symbol of healing and hope. I was dying – my life shattered into fragments of discontinuous meaning and undiagnosable symptoms. A combination of factors and events plucked me from a gloomy city existence, transporting me to the fresh sea breezes of Scotland’s southeast coast and to an ancient female yew tree that was to restore my health and initiate me into a practice of healing and mystic physiology that I have come to call Yewshamanism.

As an art student in Edinburgh during the early 1980’s I knew nothing of this sacred tree. I had a philosophy to live by in emergent Postmodernism and an ‘elixir’ to sustain me in late night bars. Two dramatic events were to entirely change the direction and purpose of my life. The first occurred in the north of Scotland, near Thurso. [2]

I had taken a seasonal job planting trees on an area near the Dounreay nuclear processing plant. One night, I awoke in a blind panic unable to breathe. The entire atmosphere inside my tiny caravan had become pervaded and compressed by a strange fluid. The fluid smelled of sulphur, and burnt horribly as it entered my lungs. Every cell in my body became compressed, as if my spirit was being squeezed out of physical existence. Attempting hopelessly to rationalize the situation I thought of the recent Chernobyl incident and wondered if there had been a radioactive leak from the nearby plant. Then I became aware of a presence outside the caravan. I sensed a vast and dark intelligence watching me. This ‘intelligence’ seemed identical to the fluid that filled my lungs and compressed my physical space. Desperately looking for an escape route I slowly dragged myself on my belly toward the door and managed to open it. I sensed the spirit presence stop right before me in the dark. I could see nothing. It increased the compression to an unimaginable level, almost as if I was being held at the bottom of the ocean, a massive crushing pressure on all sides. I sensed the energy of the spirit pull back like a coiled snake about to strike. It remained poised. There was a silence as if it was deciding my fate. With an audible ‘pop’ it suddenly vanished and with it the sulphur and the compression. I had survived. However, in the weeks and months following this incident my state of health deteriorated rapidly. The second event occurred several years later in Edinburgh where I was struck in the head by a bolt of white light. After this last event I had barely enough energy to walk and my sense of orientation to space and to time diminished greatly. I sensed that I was close to death, I felt the weak pulse of a cold breath in my blood, and could do nothing as my ashen skin collapsed and shrank around my exhausted bones. In the early 1990’s I was helped by a friend who invited me to live with her in a charming little cottage not far from Edinburgh. A few minutes from her cottage stood the Whittingehame yew tree. Little did I know then that this ancient, 2000+ year old female tree was to lead me through an arduous process of shamanic initiation and healing.

My initiation beneath the yew evolved over ten years and was comprised of three distinct phases lasting approximately three years. During the first phase, it was enough to get to the tree given my poor state of health. To enter the small and circular entrance of the yew it was necessary to bow close to the ground – a gesture of reverence and respect which seemed appropriate in the presence of such an ancient being. Tentatively, I would make my way through a tightly woven network of spiralling branches forming a tunnel almost 40 feet long which led to the inner chamber of the yew – a vast cathedral-like

plexus entirely sealed off from the outside world. Within this womb of living wood I would experience painful convulsions, a sense of extreme compression against my body both externally and internally, and emotional states that lasted for hours at a time. I felt as if the fluids in my body, especially my blood, were being completely altered. The cells of my body felt as if they were being flattened and stretched beyond the confines of the physical, to touch dimensions that were beyond my comprehension. Later, I learned to enter these dimensions at will. During this stage I was aware of many spirit presences around me, although at that time I could not see them directly. Instead, I began to see 'light tendrils' that appeared immediately after my seizures as a moving web of illumination hovering around me, eventually entering into my body as a force of healing.

During the second phase I began to 'see' the spirits at the yew. These were of many kinds and one spirit in particular that I called the 'bird-man' or the 'bird-shaman' led me through a series of rituals and body experiences involving animal spirits, the local and non-local landscape and various sacred objects. The yew was teaching me how to use my body in relationship to the land as a form of healing.

The third phase was much more involved and, in some ways, more arduous. I experienced many rituals of dismemberment and was challenged by various spirits and situations more directly than I had been. My work with the fluid light tendrils also intensified and I began to learn how to use this viscous light fluid as a practice of healing by concentrating on different areas of my body. By 2003, my healing and initiation were almost complete.

## Discovering the Tree Archetype

*"In its great wisdom it ascends gently from Earth to Heaven.  
Again it descends to earth.  
Then unites in itself the force from Things Above  
To the force from Things Below."* [3]

Through countless generations, the accumulated knowledge of oral traditions gave rise to legends of an evergreen tree with magical abilities to heal and the power to transcend death. Seeking to embody the secrets of its immortality, our early ancestors conceived themselves as the children of the tree. In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Icelandic poem, *'The Voluspa'*, humanity is described as the 'hallowed seed' and 'sons of Heimdallr'. It has been suggested that Heimdallr, the guardian of the gods, could literally mean 'World Tree' with *Heim* meaning 'world' and *dallr* as a possible archaic word for tree. [4 ] Heimdallr has one father in Odin, but nine mothers, known as Ividia. *Vid* means tree but *ivid* could mean 'yew tree', or 'yew root'. According to this view, we are collectively born from the yew tree.

The lore of the World Tree survived longest within Norse myth and it is generally accepted nowadays that Yggdrasil, The world Tree, was a yew. Gradually, the yew tree became the spiritual mid-line of the community, the inter-dimensional axis able to hold the terrestrial and the celestial forces in balance.

At 150 million years, the yew is certainly the oldest tree species in Europe and yet, because of its uncanny powers of renewal, it is also the youngest. The yew tree has always been paradoxical in nature. The early indigenous shamans obtained profound visions and performed



miraculous healings under the tree, and yet almost every part of it is a deadly poison. The only non-poisonous part, the red fleshy aril of the female yew, has been linked by some authors to the apples of life-in-death given to Heimdallr by Iduna to confer immortality.

The relationship of the red yew aril to immortality and wisdom has also been proposed in the Irish myths of the hazelnuts of wisdom and the salmon of knowledge. The three fruits of the branch given to Fintan that gave rise to the five sacred trees of Ireland, may refer to the three visually distinct stages of growth of the yew aril from 'nut' as the seed, to the 'acorn' as the unripe fruit, to the 'apple' as the mature fruit.

Many parts of the yew tree when properly prepared were used medicinally, and the bark of the tree has been found to emit a hallucinogenic toxin. Since the 1960's, the bark and needles from the yew have been used as a cure for certain forms of cancer.

The yew is the tree of the thirteenth rune *eihwaz* – the symbol of a tree that grows upward and downward at the same time. Its branches reach for its roots. (*Note: this is called branch layering. Please refer to the photographs*). The yew folds itself around space; it contains and seals the inner space off from the outside environment. Within its chamber, the life force of the yew gestures outward through its vast network of branches before it bows and flows with gravity back to the earth.

Sometimes even the very heart of the yew becomes empty space – the trunk becoming hollow for 1000 years or more in anticipation of an ariel root. This root grows downward within the hollow tree at an imperceptible pace, eventually embracing the earth as the expression of a new centre. The yew gestures into, and embodies space. Our early ancestors saw that the yew tree did not die, but rather that it died continuously to itself, folding itself back on its origin as a gesture initiating its rejuvenation. This is a vital function of the yew tree that our ancestors sought to embody within their sacred-somatic existence as expressed in ritual and magical practice.

## Yewshamanism

*"If you cannot find it in your body, you will not find it elsewhere."*[5]

The cultural, archetypal and psychological dimensions of the yew tree are available as a living stream of information and vitality within its inter-dimensional axis – an axis that relates, as we shall see, to the biology of the human body.

The forces and polarities acting on my body during my initiation, such as internal compression and outer expansion, the continuous reversal of outside and inside, the shifting sense of gravity and levity, (earth and sky), the folding, unfolding and stretching of the fluid and visceral shape of my body, and the dynamics of the blood, are almost embryonic in nature. I began to realise that these forces and polarities could be perceived in the dynamics and gestures of the yew tree itself. Profound connections emerged between the nature of the yew tree, the events of my initiation and the stages of early development of a human being from conception.



Humanity as the hallowed seed and sons of Heimdallr, himself born of the nine yew roots, was suddenly making sense. The womb-like gestures of the yew created by branch layering and the process of the tree's endless rejuvenation, had led our early healers and mystics to seek to create a kind of intuitive embryology of immortality. Could it be that they saw and, more importantly, *sensed* this connection, and that they were inspired by the

nature of the yew to seek experiences of healing and transformation within rituals that sought to symbolically link the beginnings of life from conception to the creation of the universe itself?

The yew communicated a 'language' of nature and rejuvenation that had been known by the early indigenous shamans, and which greatly influenced and underpinned many strands within the vast Western mystery traditions. It is clear to me that my initiation under the yew tree represents the embodiment of a practice of mystic physiology and spiritual embryology that was practiced in the West until as late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

When I read the works of the alchemists I see the influence of the yew tree on every page. Would it be going too far to suggest that the healing and transformational power of the yew tree became a closely-guarded secret – a secret that was eventually lost within the baffling writings of the Hermetic philosophers?

Yewshamanism describes a circulatory movement with nature. We desperately need to be reconnected with nature, to the Tree of Life or The World Tree, as a circulatory experience. The yew is a symbol for the container of sacred space, of origins and of rebirth. It represents the original womb of nature, the symbol of rebirth and regeneration and the mystery of incarnation.

Yewshamanism is first and foremost a practice of mystic physiology, involving states of deep interiorisation and stillness that engage with the primordial embryonic forces of the body. I call this the 9-dimensional space of Yewshamanism. The yew as the tree of life has always been ritually linked to our beginnings and that's where we can turn to rehabilitate the health of our culture in the proper relationship with nature.

The sacred yew tree has returned. I believe that the yew tree no longer wishes to remain hidden in obscurity, but that it signals us to rediscover its truth and power as a great symbol of healing and wholeness for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- 1: *Eliade 1958*
- 2: *Thurso means 'Thor's River'*
- 3: *Burland 1967*
- 4: *Hageneder 2007*
- 5: *Upanishads*

## **About Michael and Yewshamanism**

Michael Dunning was born in Scotland and emigrated to the USA in 2003. He offers workshops in Yewshamanism as a spiritual embryology and has written about his experiences at the yew tree in the recently published book, *Soul Companions* by Karen Sawyer. [www.soulcompanions.org](http://www.soulcompanions.org)

He has also contributed a recent article about the yew tree and Yewshamanism to *Sacred Hoop* magazine, issue 63. Michael also practices and teaches as a biodynamic craniosacral therapist. As a professional musician, he has performed throughout Japan and Europe and has composed for the Carnyx, the 2000 year old Celtic war horn depicted on the Gundestrup Cauldron. Michael is currently working on a book about yewshamanism. For more information, visit: [www.yewshamanism.com](http://www.yewshamanism.com)

*Notes: The Whittingehame yew lives on private land. Anyone wishing to visit the tree must seek permission from the Whittingehame Estate by writing. Parts of this article first appeared in Sacred Hoop, issue no 63*

## Song to Lugh - Lughnassad

Ah, the heart of summer, celebration of Sun... Lugh.

Lugh the Many-Handed, Lugh of the Strong Arm, Lugh of the Bright Eye

Lugh, Loki, Ava\_Loki\_Svara... the Thousand-Armed Bodhisattva

Look what You have done.

Now the fruit is dropping from the trees and bushes

Now the oats and rye and barley and hard wheat are swelling in

their husks, and all grains are waving yellow in the warm wind

Now the vines are ripening, the peas and beans are moist hard in their shell cases

Now the game animals are fattening, the fish are lazy swimming and biting hook

Now the birds are full in flight and busy eating

And the kind are weaning young... goats and sheep and cows and

oxen, and all are head nodding feeding in the summer fields

And the people, Your people, sleep nappy hot afternoons and rise

early but not too fast to water the stock and mow the grasses and pick the

corn, and stop to drink beer and eat cheese and bread, and kiss and play and swim

And the children roll dusty grass balls and chase kittens and

splash happily in the turning brook, and stuff berries in their mouths from heavy hung bushes.

It is the time of ripened and ripening, under that bright sun.

It is the work of Lugh the Many-Handed, blacksmith, lover,

fashioner of tools and methods (once sole domain of Inanna/Brighid), enthusiastic

champion of all once small... grown strong with worth and will.

Lugh with his bright crown, Lugh with his endless sight, Lugh with his golden song, Lugh with his hoov-ed steed

Lugh with his sharp smile, Lugh with his iron nail, Lugh with his

studded leathers, Lugh with his quick wit

Lugh with his bursting warm heart, Lugh with his loaded table, Lugh

with his endless generosity, Lugh with his quick courage

Lugh with his many children, Lugh with his rough love, Lugh with his sheathed sword, Lugh with his big laugh.

Thanks be to Lugh.

May the Sun be with you... always warming your back and

strengthening your heart, growing your crops and lighting your path.

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### Dear Editor

If you'd like to comment on any of the articles, discuss issues or make announcements of interest feel free to drop us a line at [EOLAS@whiteoakdruids.org](mailto:EOLAS@whiteoakdruids.org)

We look forward to hearing from you!

## Northerner (A Villanelle)

In the mist enfolded hills and dales  
Mighty armies clashing in wars  
Northern roots tell deepest tales

The eerie howling, ghostly wails  
Creatures prowl, leave their spoors  
In the mist enfolded hills and dales

Beacons at Beltane, fire unveils  
A seasonal pattern of the moors  
Northern roots tell deepest tales

Sheep graze along the hilly trails  
And miners dig for precious ores  
In the mist enfolded hills and dales

On mountain peaks, hills of shales  
Hikers enjoys the great outdoors  
Northern roots tell deepest tales

The folk of the North, amidst travails  
Love this land, which each adores  
In the mist enfolded hills and dales  
Northern roots tell deepest tales

## The Next Life

The wind is blowing strongly by the stones  
And I am here, the guardian of these bones  
Not by learning, nor by skill, another way  
Tide upon the sand, waves against the bay  
And here I am, I am who I am, not more  
No magic, no circle, no opening the door  
The moon across the graves, shadows fall  
But no rites needed, nothing to enthrall  
These are not needed, and no secrets here  
Paths of renunciation, of removing fear  
Of giving up the spells, self now dying  
Truth sets free, takes away all the lying  
No hidden path, only windswept sands  
Blown lightly on the shore, and strands  
Of seaweed, cast up with the rising tide  
And only daylight, sun, no place to hide  
The next life, time to let go, time to be  
Finding the rhythms of the eternal sea.

## Cailleach an Dudain (Dance of the Mill Dust)

I hold my rod, my druidic wand  
And make with dance my bond  
Round and round I circle you  
This the path, the path I knew  
Over my head a sign I make  
Beloved, never do I forsake  
In the dance, let all now see  
As together be, together we  
Now my rod upon your head  
And you swoon, as one dead  
My dear carlin, lying down  
And in tears, I would drown  
Woe to me, and woe to thee  
And sorrow like a restless sea

I hold my rod, my druidic wand  
And make with dance my bond  
I touch your hand, limp and soft  
And come to life, it lifts aloft  
And waves freely, side to side  
And for joy, I could have cried  
I dance around, around, around  
Raise my wand, to make unbound  
Legs and arms, touch each in turn  
Until I feel your heart's return  
And up you leap, my lover mine  
And circle me, and all is fine  
And I see your eyes so bright  
We dance together, all the night.

© Tony the Prof



“Bilberries”, the only thought on Arens mind as he strolled along the path on his way to Summers Hill, he could already taste the sweet jam on the first freshly baked bread of the year on his lips and it seemed like an eternity since he’d last enjoyed this precious delicacy.

As Aren reaches the crest of the hill he notices that there is already someone sat in his favourite spot, a man in a long cloak is sat in contemplation looking out across the valley towards the sea. Aren approaches and the man becomes aware of his presence and rises to his feet, “Halt, who goes there?”

“My name is Aren and it warms my heart to see you seated in a place that I too value as a place of contemplation, please return to your seat and I will leave you in solitude if that is what you require”.

“No, please join me if that is your wish, there is more than enough room for two”, the man gestures to the stones on which he was sat, “My name is Quintus Ovidius Licinus and I am far from Rome, I was thinking about my friends and family back home and your company will be very welcome”

They both sit and regard the view in silence for a while. “Why do you travel so far from home if it causes you pain to be away?” inquires Aren.

“To bring civilisation and order to the savage lands in the name of Caesar”

“Savage lands, does that make me a savage?” asks Aren.

Quintas takes a few moments to regard Arens appearance and replies with a smile, “You wear animal furs, unkempt and unshaven, but you are politely mannered and carefully spoken, a paradox within these lands I must agree”.

Aren returns the smile, “I’ll take that as a compliment”, “Have you chosen this spot as the best place in the region to view the bonfires tonight?”

“Bonfires, tonight, why?” asks Quintas raising a quizzical eyebrow.

“It is the festival of Lughnasadh, in honour of our ancestor Lugh, there will be much merrymaking tonight and it will continue on into the next few days with good humour and well-meaning revelry of that I’m sure”

“Your ancestor? Are you descended from some great King or famous Warrior?”

“In a way, but not in the way that you understand. It is our belief that we are the descendants of all our Gods, the divine exists within all of us and the land is our Mother”

“But how can you all be descended from Gods? that is not as it is, you cannot all be bestowed with the favours and powers of the Heavens, destined to achieve great feats and have your stories remembered down the ages? That is impossible”

“Why is that impossible? We all have a place in the cycle of life and each act is one of divinity. Is not the planting and loving nurture of a seed which grows into a strong stem of life-sustaining corn not a miracle? Is not the mixing of ingredients and the

THE ELMAREN  
CHRONICLES



use of heat to make bread not akin to the act of a God in the throes of creation? Is not the happiness and joy raised in another's heart from a kind word, act or gift not the same as the feeling inspired by the gift of a beautiful sunrise?"

"Yes I suppose that may be true but we have built amazing temples to honour our Gods, I have travelled far across these lands and seen nothing to compare, what have you done to appease yours?"

With a sweep of his hand to gesture across the valley Aren replies, "Is not the appreciation of the splendour of the natural world not enough to honour the Gods, the magnificence of the trees and the delicate beauty of the flowers are their gifts to us and for that I am eternally grateful"

"And where are your Priests, those that are the closest to the Gods and lead the worship and speak on their behalf?"

"We have those who lead our festivities and maintain the knowledge and wisdom of our traditions, but each person speaks to their Gods directly, we have no need for anyone to speak to them on our behalf and no person is holier than the next. Our daily rituals are personal and intuitive and when we feel that there are special times where we feel drawn to worship together we do so by celebrating our connection with singing, dancing and feasting not mourning our inferiority with heads bowed and sadness and fear in our hearts"

"That may be so, but we see that as primitive and an indulgence in personal pleasure. To be astute and reserved in pious reverence designates intellect and culture. But what exactly is it that you believe? What defines your spirituality? What defines your focus and purpose?"

"That is very simple. My connection with the Earth, my perception of the divine in all things and the identification and confirmation of my place within the cycle of life"

At this Quintas falls silent and Aren sees from his expression that he finds Truth in his words so decides that it is time to turn the tables.

"If you don't mind me making a few observations from what I see you are slaves to Rome, to your State and to your Faith, how can this be progress and why would you strive to enslave others to this tyranny?"

"Because it is our purpose to increase our wealth, power and might that we may rule the World. The Roman Empire is the greatest that the World has ever known and we must secure our future against all those that wish to take it from us".

"So you do this all out of fear? The fear of losing what you have? Is this not a false concept that you can own what is not yours? The World is not yours to own and the spirit of a human no matter how much broken and oppressed will never be totally owned by another"

"It is not fear, it is about leaving a legacy to show future generations how great and powerful we were. It is about setting the foundations for the next period of human development and an advance in knowledge. Is it enough for you to see your people stay still and follow the same cycle of birth, struggle and death year in year out? The constant reliance on a good yield praying against pestilence and plague to ensure you can feed yourselves for one more year."

"If that ensures that we retain our connection with the natural world, yes, as that brings with it a sense of belonging, of value and our reason for being is never in question. It is the simple acts that bring the greatest rewards and we are as much a part of our environment as that tree or that snail. But you state that legacy is the central theme of your reason to exist and here may we both find common-ground. But where we differ is that my people prioritise their quest with a spiritual legacy and yours material. I see merit in this as we are both brothers living a spiritual life within a physical existence. But in truth we could learn a lot from each other if only we could work together in perfect balance".

Quintas looks at Aren in new discovered understanding and for the first time sees himself mirrored in his eyes. He nods slowly as he feels the connection between the two men who chance called to meet on this special day. “Indeed, that is very true”.

Aren smiles and reaches forward placing the bilberry garland he’d been making while he talked around the neck of Quintas, “All this aside my new found friend, Lughnasadh is a time to declare peace and to set aside rivalries and you are far from home this day, come and walk with me down to the village and allow yourself a rest from your cultural restraints to take time to enjoy our new found understanding and your connection with the World”

“Yes, I will accept your invite in the manner in which it was offered, Thank you Aren for your gift, your time, your companionship and although I’ll probably regret saying this, your wisdom too”. Said Quintas as he pats Aren on the back and a huge smile spreads across his face.

That said they walked together back down the path to join the festivities.

“I wonder where this will all lead and which of us has been changed the most this day” smiles Aren to himself realising that there were some things sweeter than bilberry jam.

## **A Triad of Ogham Wisdom and Magic – Book Reviews by Kevin Short**

### **Ogam: Weaving Word Wisdom by Erynn Rowan Laurie**

The first book in this triad is a complete departure from “traditional” Ogham use and interpretation. By traditional, I mean that the correspondence to trees usually understood in Robert Graves’ The White Goddess is only a corollary here- not the main part. Laurie points out in chapter one that the “tree alphabet” description of Ogham, while accurate, is not the only type of Ogham. She mentions that in the Ogam tracts of the Irish *Auraicept na n-Éces* there are more than 100 varieties of Ogam. Incidentally, the spelling “ogam” is Old Irish. The newer “ogham” is entirely interchangeable. The pronunciation is different; ogam is pronounced “ahg-um” while ogham is “oh-um”.

As a *Fili* (poet), Laurie combines her poetic expertise with her significant knowledge of Celtic Re-constructionism. The resultant characteristics of her writing make use of her wealth of research. As she points out on page 30:

*The response of spirit to symbol is more complex in its native habitat, vibrant with possibility. Ogam and Filidecht speak the same language; they are filled with the same symbols and images. Each is easier to understand in the company of the other.*

The interpretations of each Ogam *fid* (letter) presented are complex as a result of Laurie’s background. They are poetic in nature, at times almost difficult to see their connection with their associated letter. However, this creates a marvelous read, and almost infinite possibilities for the interpretation of any divination. There are several chapters devoted to the methodology of divination. Ranging from simple, single *fid* readings to complex, multiple *feda* (letters) spreads, the interpretations take on a variety of characteristics. This can be very challenging to the beginner. Good advice is given on pg. 174:

*Ultimately, what matters is not the source of the information received in divination, but the attitude with which answers are sought.*

This book is an excellent resource to have in your library. I find myself referring to it continually for inspiration in my work with the Ogham. Well done, Erynn Rowan Laurie!

## **A Druid's Herbal of Sacred Tree Medicine** by Ellen Evert Hopman

This book is an excellent follow up to Hopman's previous book, [A Druid's Herbal for the Sacred Earth Year](#). Along with explanations using her own personal *imbas* (poetic inspiration) for the Ogham Tree Alphabet meanings and interpretations, she includes practical herbal lore from ancient Irish and American Indian sources for the trees included in the Ogham. As an herbalist, Druid priestess, and homeopath she is well qualified to speak to this multitude of subject matter.

As the origins and primary use of Ogham are lost to us, Hopman wisely cautions the reader to take this into consideration when studying this ancient language. There is no one single interpretation for the Tree Alphabet. Indeed, there are many Ogham "alphabets" other than this one. The Ogham Tree Alphabet is simply the most common.

The uses of Ogham are many. Hopman includes a description of Druid magic and magical tools. She discusses the Celtic Fire Festivals, including a detailed description and a bit of their historical significance. Divination using the Ogham is explored, giving useful insights and affirmations that may be used for each Ogham tree. Possibly best of all, for those of us not fluent in Gaelic, is the pronunciation guide in the appendices.

As a guide for Celtic Reconstructionists, this book is invaluable. There is a section on the use of Ogham as a divination tool, a chapter explaining the Celtic fire festivals (along with some marvelous traditional recipes for seasonal foods), and a brief discussion of *druidecht* (druidism). It should be remembered that these subjects are widely open to individual interpretation; readers must take each step of this path with a critical eye, and form their own conclusions. Hopman's version of the Ogham meanings and use is just one of many; yet this book is so well researched and written that one cannot help but see the truth in it.

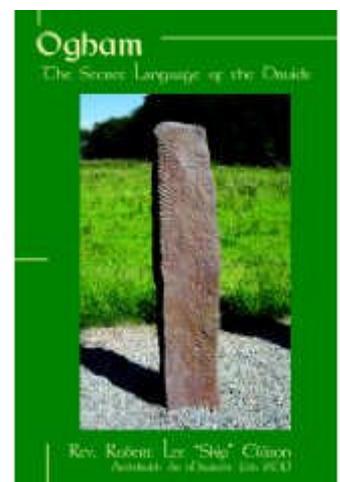
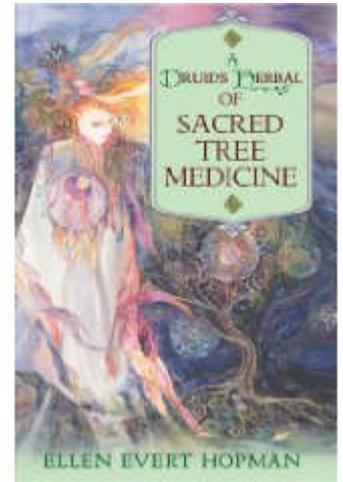
I found the overall experience of [A Druid's Herbal of Sacred Tree Medicine](#) to be one of calm reassurance. This sounds a little strange, but the connection to the Earth Mother is just exactly that- calm reassurance. Ellen Evert Hopman provides an aspect of that connection that we can all share.

## **Ogham: The Secret Tree Language of the Druids** by Rev. Robert Lee "Skip" Ellison

The author of five books on Druidism, Ogham, and other Pagan subjects, Rev. Ellison is the current Archdruid of Árn nDraiocht Féin (ADF). His scholarly approach to understanding Ogham divination methods is based largely on the *Auraicept na n-Éces*, or *The Scholar's Primer*.

This is the Ogham tract from the Book of Ballymote, an ancient Irish text. The third chapter contains prints of the actual pages of *The Scholar's Primer* that show the more than 120 different types of Ogham. Listed are abbreviations, Secret Writing Ogham, ciphers based on Old Irish, mnemonic lists, and the only Ogham listed as used in divination, the Boy Ogham. This Ogham was used to determine the gender of an unborn child.

The book starts with a history of the Oghams, and a brief instruction on how to read them. The text indicates that they are read from the bottom up if inscribed vertically, starting on the left side; if written horizontally they are read left to right. Unfortunately, due to a printing oversight, the font used in preparing the book contains an error that reverses the first two



groups of characters when they are shown vertically. In pointing this out in an email conversation with Rev. Ellison, he was grateful that the error could be corrected before the next edition.

For each Tree Ogham letter shown there is a list of kennings, or interpretations, from a variety of sources, mostly from *The Scholar's Primer*. Also included are some word associations in English, and a brief description of the magical meaning and use of the Ogham letters. There is a section in the back that shows the reader how to make their own Ogham disks.

I would really like to see an expanded section for each of the uses and magical meanings. It seemed that the book was overly brief in this area; however, as a resource for students of the Ogham this is an indispensable tool.

Rev. Ellison is a highly experienced researcher of neo-pagan spirituality, and has produced another book that belongs on the shelf of serious Celtic students.

## Reasons and Resources Decreasing Number of Legal Cases Involving Discrimination Against Pagans - Larry Cornett

Over the last 28 years, I have noticed a significant decrease in the number of legal cases that have come to the attention of National Pagan organizations, e-mail lists, and echoes (before the Internet became common) in which Pagans were facing legal problems because of religious discrimination. The reasons include:

- Accurate reporting about Pagan beliefs and practices in mass media
- An increasing inventory of pertinent legal precedents.
- Increasing numbers of Pagans and Pagans out of the broom closet, resulting in with more people knowing Pagans personally, along with something about their character and practices. Between 1982 and 2000, I published a relatively comprehensive Calendar of public Pagan events two days or longer in duration (covering English Speaking Nations). My records between 1982 and 1995 showed the number of such events to double about every 4.5 years.
- Increased availability of information and resources to investigate and deal with religious discrimination without having to go to a national organization. The vast majority of such cases that I run into now are dealt with local or regional resources, without having to call on National Pagan rights groups and media.
- Increased willingness of some Government Civil Rights Commissions to quickly take action against discrimination against Pagans. For example, a 2006 case in Ohio involved Camp Crooked Lane, a Girl Scout Camp, being unwilling to continue renting to the Pagan Community Council of Ohio (PCCO) for their Somerset and other gatherings because of complaints about the camp being made available for Pagan events. A complaint by the Pagan Community Council of Ohio to the Ohio Civil Rights Commission resulted in quick action in which the Civil Rights Commission informed them that, if they will not rent to the PCCO, they could not rent to any organization that is not actually part of the Girl Scouts. It did not result in their making the site available to PCCO, but it did make them pay a heavy cost by not being able to rent the site (at least legally) to outside organizations.
- Help from the Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU), the ACLU and the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty (BF). In addition, the serious threat of bringing them into a situation as put a stop to many religious discrimination situations before they had to go to court (as has education of the people who were discriminating).



While many cases of religious discrimination against Pagans are alleged, often Paganism may not be a major factor in the situation (if it is at all). Research is needed to determine the truth of an allegation. However, religious discrimination against Pagans continues to happen from time to time, sometimes with serious results. This is especially likely when the Pagan and the Pagan's attorney are unprepared and/or the judge or institution involved is prejudiced.

My experience is that serious cases of discrimination happen most often in rural areas, small towns and places that are not culturally diverse. Florida, Tennessee, and Texas had more than their share. It also does happen in cosmopolitan areas, but it is much less likely. Furthermore, dealing with large government organizations with ponderous rules and prejudiced bureaucrats can require a tremendous amount of expense and legal help, such as with the recent Prison and the VA pentacle gravestone marker cases.

The most common problems are when Paganism is brought up in Custody cases; the parent and his or her attorney are unprepared; and the judge is prejudiced against Paganism. Employment problems come up second.

While a spouse or relative may bring up Paganism through their attorney in a divorce, cases also happen when the local Family Services agency takes children away from both parents because they are Pagan (or attempts to take them away). However, increasingly (but not always) judges and family services investigators know that Paganism is a category of religion protected under the constitution, and immediately throw it out as an issue when brought up (unless very unusual and harmful practices can be proven).

Custody cases are so common that I have developed Boilerplate text with instructions on how to remove Paganism as an issue in custody cases when it comes up. The latest version is on-line at <http://www.erlan.org/BOLRPLAT.TXT>. Suggestions on how to improve the guidance are appreciated.

This guidance cites the Lady Allyn evidence packet, a 1996 collection of evidence that has been used successfully in court cases to establish that Wicca and Pagan practices are religious and protected under the US Constitution. Documents included in the evidence packet include:

- A Pledge to Pagan Spirituality by Pagan Spirit Alliance
- The Invisible Pagans, by Julian Vayne, Pagan Voice, Issue 40, 17, Blenthwin Close, Henbury, Bristol BS10 7BH Tel: 0117 9506895
- Paganism: Precursor of the Future, by Ed Fitch (may be from Llewellyn New Worlds, date unknown)
- Satan has no Place in Wiccan Theology by Clark Morphew from St. Paul Pioneer
- Come All Ye Pagans by Curt G Columbus Alive, December 25, 1981
- Witchcraft by Joan Scobey from New Woman, September 1987
- Witches in Military Demand Rights, by Grant Willis, Army Times (date unknown)
- Pagans Emphasize they Don't Worship the Devil, by Grant Willis, Army Times (date unknown)
- An Introduction to Paganism and Witchcraft, by Andras Corban Arthen, The EarthSpirit Community
- Types of Occult Activity by State of California, Office of Criminal Justice Planning
- Religious Requirements and Practices of Certain Selected Groups, a Handbook for Chaplains, Department of the Army Pamphlet 165-13, April 28, 1978

- American Council of Witches, Organization, Leadership, Worship
- Letter from Richard Walinski, Chief Council, State of Ohio, Office of the Attorney General on whether or not Organizations are Religious Societies, December 6, 1976
- Pater vs. Pater (1992), 63 Ohio St.3d 393 -Supreme Court of Ohio on Custody Law and Religion
- Unitarian Universalists and Pagan Culture, Circle Network News, Spring 1996, Vol. 18, No 1, David Burwasser, Oberlin Ohio
- Ethics and Oracles by Patrick Price, Pagan Solitary Network Newsletter, Winter 1990
- Getting and Keeping a Coven Going, by Rebecca Crystal, Circle Network News, 1981
- Birth of Pagan Groups, Grey Cat, Circle Network News, Samhain 1986
- Starting a Circle, Some Suggestions

It could use an update, especially a comprehensive and up to date record of pertinent legal precedents and scanned documentation from the various Parliament of World Religions gatherings. However, it still is useful.

Unfortunately, many of the documents in this evidence package are still covered by copyright, or I would have uploaded it to several FTP sites and posted the associated documents on the web by now. However, the information can be shared privately for "research" purposes, especially to Pagans and their attorneys when dealing with Religious Discrimination. Contact me at lcornett@en.com if you need a copy of packet as a .pdf file for research purposes.

Pagans facing legal problems associated with their religion are encouraged to read the documents, identify the specific documents that fit their beliefs, and provide them to their attorney. Attorneys can take it from there. If needed, they can contact Lady Allyn (a paralegal) for specific information on how the evidence was used successfully in specific legal cases. If the attorney needs certified copies, Lady Allyn can make the necessary arrangements. Lady Allyn can be contacted at:

Lady Allyn  
136 Prospect Avenue, Middletown, New York, 10940  
(845)343-2372 ladyallyn17@yahoo.com

She does not have a PC at home, so the best way to contact her is by phone.

At one time, Lady Allyn was receiving a case about every ten days, but the frequency was dropping off. Her last case was around 2004 (probably partially because her older public contact information was no longer good, and we lost contact with her; and partially because cases that would benefit from her attention are lest frequent). Similarly, I used to receive requests for assistance from Pagans with upcoming custody cases several times per month, but the frequency has dropped off to several requests per year.

To the best of my knowledge, no Pagan parents have lost custody of their children based on general consideration of their being Wiccan or Pagan, when their attorneys have been properly prepared through:

- Use of the Lady Allyn evidence package
- Appropriate consideration of the legal precedents in their State and constitutional law regarding the role of religion in custody cases in their state

However, in one case the evidence was ignored by the judge, and had to be appealed. Arranging for a transcript of your custody hearing to be taken and having a copy of the transcript can be very helpful if your case has to be appealed.

Lady Allyn and members of her coven host informal Pagan moots (with a different theme every day) next to Babylon Heights between 5 and 7pm at Sirius Rising and Starwood.

Groups like AREN, the Lady Liberty League, the Our Freedom Coalition, and the Earth Religions Legal Assistance Network have been very helpful when additional help is needed -- especially when they and their contacts help mobilize the AU, ACLU and/or BF when serious legal resources and associated funding are needed.

For other guidance and resources, see the files in <http://www.erlan.org>, especially the topic specific links at <http://www.erlan.org/helpink.htm> and the links to Pagan Rights organizations at <http://www.erlan.org/ERRO.htm>.

I would have added the Our Freedom Coalition at <http://www.ourfreedomcoalition.org> to <http://www.erlan.org> by now, if I were confident that the publicity would be appropriate. Cases and issues are generally brought to the coalition through its members, rather than directly through some central clearinghouse. The Our Freedom Coalition replaces much of the active networking between groups that was occurring when the Sacred Earth Alliance was formed. However, the Sacred Earth Alliance's Call to Action <http://www.erlan.org/SEAHomepage.htm> and associated webpages continue to provide valuable guidance.

I encourage you to link your webpages to <http://www.erlan.org> and other pertinent resources so that people facing religious discrimination can more easily locate the contacts and information that they may need.

Suggestions on additions and corrections to the aforementioned files and webpages are encouraged.

Blessed be and Never Thirst!

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## **Keltfest in Dordrecht, Holland - Carmel Diviney**

I went over for 4 days and it was brilliant. At the Festival, various tents and marquees displayed a vast array of jewellery, groovy clothes, crystals, books, candles, incense, and crafts. Battle reenactments were to be seen scattered around and a Scottish Highland Games area included the famous caber tossing tournaments - big men!

There was iron smelting and weapon/utensil making, bow and arrow making, leather workers, cooking on open fires, examples of every day life set in times gone by.

The center piece of the Festival layout was a model of the Lia Fáil which was made by Brigitte, Tommy and some of their friends. It was obvious that they went to a lot of trouble making it even before they told me that they had to make it 3 times as it kept collapsing! It was perfect down to the detail of the present day radial flagstones that surround the base.

For the purpose of sending healing energy to the grid at Tara, the top of the Lia Fáil was replaced by a copper pyramid. The highlight of the Festival was a Ritual to send this healing energy. Drummers and a bagpipe led the procession into circle around the Stone and fires were lit at each quarter - north, south, east and west. It is the first time I have ever been at a ritual where no words were spoken- just energy sent. I found the experience really intriguing and powerful. As soon as the lady leading the ritual raised her hand to signal that it was over, torrential rain came down and extinguished the fires.

I did a presentation on the Hill of Tara and talked about various topics including the Reburial Petition. We got loads of signatures for it, people kept coming over the whole two days. I havnt counted them yet- sorry- but there are lots! What struck me most about the questions and answers part was how much the Dutch people were shocked by what is happening here and how the Irish people dont seem to want to do anything about it. Very Sad.

I have a lot of video footage which hasnt even been uploaded yet but as soon as I can find someone to help me edit it I will post a link to it here. We had a fantastic time and I would love to thank Brigitte and her friends for the tremendous amount of work, love and effort they put in to the presentations, rituals and raising of awareness.

