

SERPENT STAR

A newsletter of The Order of Bards Ovates and Druids in the Southern Hemisphere



BELTANE 2016

Welcome to the Beltane 2016 issue of SerpentStar!

This is a busy issue, so I'll be brief because the pictures, poems and stories coming up are just a slice of how wonderful, enriching and fun the 2016 Southern Hemisphere Assembly was! The arch for our Beltane ritual was created by Valkyrie Blacksmith, whose pre-ritual moon shot (yes it was full, and huge) appears on the front cover. The flaming arch shots are from a short video taken by Linda Marson, which we were able to watch after dinner the following night.



The theme for this issue was The Fertile Tribe, and so we are. In addition to Assembly memories we also have Part 2 of Kacey's awen article, Part 1 of a new thought-provoking serial by James Howell, William Rattley gives us the first of a series of articles on his recent journeys in the pagan world, Sara Reeve reviews a book for us and Trudy Richards tells us about her bardic journey.

The next issue will be the first for 2017 - Lughnasadh. The theme is the 'Fires of Lugh' and I look forward to reading your tales of summer. Also there will be a big announcement in the Lughnasadh issue, so stay tuned!

In peace and the joy of Spring
Mandy /\

SerpentStar, Beltane 2016

SerpentStar is a free, volunteer-produced online newsletter for members of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids in the Southern Hemisphere.

Front cover photo by Valkyrie Blacksmith.
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OBOD in the Southern Hemisphere

Groves and Seed Groups

Brisa del Sur

We are a Seed Group called 'Brisa del Sur' (Southern Breeze) from Rosario, Argentina, and we are writing to introduce our group and share with you and the Order the fulfilling experience and wonderful learning we have had as a result of our journey along the Druid Path. You can contact us at southernbreezesfellowship@gmail.com and you can see our profile on Facebook www.facebook.com/Southernbreezesfellowship

The Cradle Seed Group

The Cradle Seed Group is based in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Group currently has only one Druid and three Bards 'in the making'. One area of focus is exploring other spiritual philosophies and understanding the synergies. Other areas of focus are to 'convert' traditional Ogham into the indigenous South African trees and also to understand and use indigenous medicinal plants and trees. All the eight yearly festivals are celebrated, all in solo as we are spread through South Africa – Johannesburg in Gauteng, Haenertsburg in Limpopo. Full moon meditations are conducted for peace and harmony. Email debby@triskel.co.za for details.



The Golden Wattle Seed Group

We are a group of OBOD members living in South Australia, with a few members from different druid backgrounds. We are open to interested people who would like to experience or learn about Druidry within our seed group or in general, and we hold group rituals for the Equinoxes, Solstices and Celtic fire festivals. We also work magic together for world peace, environmental issues, political issues etc. We put emphasis on reciprocity and hospitality in ritual to reaffirm our reverent and respectful relationship with nature, with the spirits of place, the ancestors and deity; offering libations and natural foodstuffs to the earth mother during ritual. Any interests, questions or enquiries you can contact Kacey Stephensen via email - bardofthegreenwood@gmail.com or contact William Rattley at wildra2003@yahoo.com.au

The Grove of the Summer Stars

The Grove of the Summer Stars (Pukerua Bay, Wellington, New Zealand) celebrates the eight great Seasonal Festivals throughout the wheel of the year. Each of these Druid festivals is held as a community festival and meeting point for diverse creeds and cultures to honour the turning of the year and give thanks for its abundance. The Equinox and Solstice festivals are open to all while the four Quarter Festivals are for Grove members only. We meet at The Woolshed/Grove of the Summer Stars at 11am on the nearest Sunday to the particular festival, except for Beltane and Samhain which are held at night. Lughnasadh is held on the Sunday during Druid Camp even though it is a little early, ie the third week of January (Wellington Anniversary weekend). Spring Equinox is celebrated at Stonehenge Aotearoa, an astronomically correct replica of Stonehenge Albion, in Carterton, New Zealand. On the day (or night) people can bring stories, poems, songs, dances, readings and insights etc to contribute to the theme. The ceremonies are followed by potluck feasting to which everyone contributes. Contact: pamela@thewoolshed.com

Macadamia Grove

Welcomes and is inclusive of South-East Queensland and Northern New South Wales OBOD members who wish to join in with any activities. We celebrate the eight festivals of the year, and organise other events depending on members' interests. As Brisbane is a central meeting point most of our events are held close to the city, often in the bushland of Mt Coot-tha. Non-members with an interest in Druidry are able to attend some rituals by prior arrangement. Contact Sandra: macademiagroove@hotmail.com

The Melbourne Grove

Welcomes all OBOD members (local, interstate and overseas) to its seasonal celebrations. Family and friends may also attend with a member and find themselves warmly welcomed. In 2016 The Melbourne Grove we will be celebrating the eight seasonal festivals on the following dates: Lughnasadh - Jan 30, Autumn Equinox - Mar 19, Samhuin - Apr 30, Winter Solstice - Jun 25, Imbolc - Jul 31, Spring Equinox - Sep 18, Beltane - Oct 30 and Summer Solstice - Dec 18. If you would like to join us please send an email to Elkie.whitelk@bigpond.com. Our website is www.themelbournegrove.org

Wollemi Seed Group

Hunter Valley and surrounds. We are gathering on the fourth Sunday of each month at Buchanan close to the expressway. Anyone is welcome and we would love visitors, for details contact Rollick on 0423 626 290 or bonsaidruid@yahoo.com.au

Useful websites for SH OBODies:

www.druidryaustralia.org - A central online resource for druidry in Australia.

Druids Downunder - Facebook group - a closed group for druids of any path, in the Southern Hemisphere and Australia in particular.

Don't see your group or website listed here? Send a listing to serpentstar.obod@gmail.com and spread the word!

OBOD Worldwide

www.druidry.org - Official site of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids

www.druidcast.libsyn.com - Direct download and shownotes for DruidCast (or subscribe via iTunes)

Facebook Groups - OBOD Friends (open to members and non-members, discussing general topics) and **Order of Bards Ovates and Druids** (closed group for members of the Order).

Publications

Touchstone (HQ) Sent free to all members taking the course, and once you have finished receiving course material you can subscribe separately. *Touchstone* is only available to members of the Order.

Druid (USA) www.druidmagazine.com

Dryade (Dutch) www.obod.dds.nl

Il Calderone (Italian) issuu.com/ilcalderone

Druidenstein (German) www.feuersprung.de

Menhir (French) issuu.com/obod-menhir/docs

Pagan Transitions

Pagan Transitions was created over 12 years ago to help pagans create meaningful and beautiful funeral rites which reflect the spirituality of the person who has passed through the Gateway, and offer support to the bereaved.

As well as templates that can be adapted to suit individual funeral requirements, and a selection of reading material and poems, there is also a list of Pagan Funeral Celebrants who can create and lead the funeral rite for you and arrange everything with the Funeral Director. Pagan Transitions is a volunteer-run free service.

If you are a Pagan Funeral Celebrant and would like to be listed please visit www.pagan-transitions.org.uk and complete the application form. Any suggestions on how the service can be improved are welcome.



A beautiful shot of the Bribie Island coastline, by Cecily Vickers

Awen & the Bardic Musician Pt 2

by Kacey Stephensen



Inspiration from the Gods

I don't like to define what I believe in, or how I see deity, but I suppose for ease of understanding I would be a polytheist animist. I believe in many Gods and Goddesses - to me they are expressions of places, of environments and of the human spirit in a complex archetypal connection with nature and art. The way I experience such things isn't linear, it isn't logical but it makes sense spiritually and intuitively.

In terms of nurturing and incubating inspiration, some Celtic deities that have helped me along with this are the two most well known goddesses of inspiration: Ceridwen and Brigid, who both can have very different inspirational powers. Sometimes they help each other - Brigid could be the flame that brews the cauldron of Ceridwen that forms the magic of inspiration: Awen or in Ireland Imbas.

Sometimes I will light a candle and feel the energy of Brigid's light, and connect with all her symbolic wisdom and meaning. I will become aware of her presence in the flame and all around me, and I might pray for her guidance with inspiration and give her an offering in return, sometimes just a bow and a thank you, other times mead, grains or something else.

Cernunnos is another God that inspires me a lot - he is the main male deity who I work with at the moment. Others who have inspired me deeply recently are Mannanan mac Lir, Lugh, Taliesin and the Caeliach, her energy is very present during winter of course!

All these deities with their different symbols and archetypal powers bring different emotions and insights to the surface.

A Gift for Imbolc, and the Inspiration of Brigid Bright

Imbolc is a great time to connect with inspiration, for this is the festival of that beautiful and powerful Goddess Brigid. You can feel and see the days slowly turning to spring; flowers are opening up, blossom is on the tree and birds are giving birth to their young. You may even start to notice at this time that deciduous trees have green buds that are nearly ready to burst into leafy green goodness! This is the time of complete potential realised in its first stages; this is the time to nurture the delicate seedlings of inspiration and creativity. The nights and days are still cold, but within the land we see the signs of rebirth, of warmth and of the sun.

If you feel it would suit you, spend sometime at Imbolc out in your garden or walking through the bush and sit for a while soaking in the energy of the place, the poetry of the land, and with a pen and paper see what poem might arise. Don't force it - it might take a while for you to find that spark of inspiration walking around and just enjoying the day. What you will notice is the best poetry often comes when it isn't forced, it comes when it's meant to - it might not come at all consciously, while you are out there, but it will at least plant the seeds of inspiration in your mind and heart. You might find yourself writing a poem or singing a tune that night when you get home!

Often in ritual or meditation I may have a moment of deep insight that ignites a great feeling of joy or connection or serenity, and other times it might be a deeper understanding of something painful - that feeling I can transform within into a deeper awareness that can ignite the spark of inspiration. In that moment I sing or dance on the earth or just pour love out to the land for such a gift of inspiration because Awen is the essence of insight, as the Awennydion of Wales knew very well - it is a raw and very powerful faculty of mind and of nature.

Awen in its essence is the rebirth of your soul in every moment; it is the cutting away of the old, and the green growing things of spring. It is the dew on the flower and the sunshine that moves through the clouds, but it is also the depths of the deep dark cauldron of your soul and of the universe. It can be challenging and also supporting, just like Ceridwen herself, who at one moment wanted to destroy Gwion and in the next loved him as her own but couldn't keep him. She is the initiator of the dark primal waters of the soul, into the light of the awakened Taliesin. This is why the candle is relit in the ritual of bardic meditation: the dark and light are two aspects of one circle. Often we can't reach the light until we dive deep into the dark to find the light within and, with reverence and great purpose, we relight the seed of complete potential within - the light of hope, the Awen.

As a musician I spend a lot of time connecting with inspiration in song and music, directing it through my instruments and my voice, but I have found that the best moments of Awen as a singer and a musician are when it comes as a sudden insight - the spark of realisation - and often those moments are the ones that are fleeting. Other times we may grab hold of some of that powerful inspiration and channel it through painting, through a story, a poem or a song. When that happens, golden honey drips from whatever Awen touches because it is the creativity of the universe and the light that guides us in the darkness of the night. Such is the wisdom of Bardism.



Kacey showing another string to his bardic bow, hosting and speaking at the Academia in Druidry sessions during this year's Assembly. Pic by Sandra



Pic by Elkie White

From the Seed (Maiden to Mother)

Jowen

***Women's Circle: OBOD Assembly, Bribie Island,
Oct 2016***

*A seed falls
Embraced by the earth
Life quickens
Awaiting birth*

*The rains fall
Earth warmed by the sun
A shoot unfurls
Fresh life has begun*

*The seedling grows
Young, supple and green
Roots seeking surely
In earth, deep, unseen*

*The leaves grow
Towards light they strive
Roots strengthen
Spring has arrived*

*A bud forms
Its face yet to show
Summer's promise
The maiden grows*

*A flower opens
Calls out to the bee
Sweet of nectar
Come pollinate me*

*Fruit swells
As autumn begins
Maiden to Mother
New life within*

*Flesh bursts
Scattering fresh seed
Ripe with promise
Potential freed*

*A seed falls
Embraced by the earth
Life quickens
Awaiting new birth...*



Pic by Sandra

NEWSFLASH...Hedgie flushed out: enjoys himself at Assembly!

I know most Hedgies, and perhaps others, will take this headline as typically sensational and misleading, however if you have the time or inclination please read on.

I've been a Hedgie for many years now and passing through the grades found my Druidic journey to be enlightening and comfortable, in that it effectively agreed with and helped define my beliefs and rose to be commensurate with my thoughts and need for spiritual growth. The key aspect was that it enabled me to have a personal and private journey without interruption or the need to perform to others' pace or expectation, which after many years in a quite regulated and performance related industry was refreshing and exactly what I needed.

I had wondered on occasions about attending an assembly but dismissed it more for personal preference rather than logistics. Reading the accounts in Touchstone or other sources, the reviews of wonderful experiences (made lasting friends, was amazed at peoples talents, felt loved and amongst family etc) seemed either like the expected responses or codified compliments that come so easily to the English tongue yet have not been mastered or really understood by Australians. So I won't bore you with repeating them albeit that they, surprisingly, all turned out to be oh-so-true for me. So I decided with trepidation to go to an assembly hinging off the most obvious and believable comment of 'met like-minded people'.

Having decided, I procured appropriate dress and emailed the organiser with an offer of participation, expecting minimal involvement as I was unknown to the Grove. The answer returned thanking me, and informing me that I would be involved in 'all' the initiations and rituals. Hedgies and introverts will understand that hollow feeling I felt receiving this news.

My journey began, a myriad of excuses ran through my head almost reduced in desperation to the oldie-but-goodie 'I think I can hear my mum calling me', however as she had passed over some years ago it lacked credibility now, and besides my wife has heard it before. I arrived and obtained a personal space away from the bunk rooms and main camp, a safe haven I thought, until a fellow camper arrived and effectively amalgamated our camps into one. My initial horror and dismay soon turned to joy and appreciation. This was the first of many instances that proved the truth in all those supposed rhetorical responses I had read.

Ceremonies, rituals, lectures, discussions, Eisteddfod and the most magnificent Beltane celebration crowned with an enormous and fierce fire arch, created by our own Valkyrie. Plus eight Bardic, six Ovate and two Druid Initiations later I was exhausted both physically, mentally and spiritually. Although the assault on my senses and no doubt that of any introvert or Hedgie was immense, but in the same token uplifting and extremely special.

People of 'the tribe' had travelled thousands of kilometres, from Cairns to Adelaide and even New Zealand, it's so hard to explain the benefits and feelings but I urge anyone who has not attended an assembly and could possibly do so, please do and almost regard it as a must in your Druidic journey. Which now leaves me with not understanding how to differentiate truth from requisite politeness of the codified compliments and comments of the English tongue - perhaps that is a mystery we antipodean cousins will never know.

Love and Blessings from under the Southern Cross, Jez.

2016 ASSEMBLY MEMORIES (PT 1)



Our comfy venue and caterers. Pix by Chris Parker, (cheeky last-minute badly-knitted manual) panorama by Mandy Gibson.



Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.....

...and our little Island grove, with its central stone and sapling.

Pix by Sandra





THE AWEN

Circle of sound,
Circle of power,
First rocking us gently,
At this sacred hour,
Then energy spirals,
And the senses spin,
Destroying the boundaries ,
Our minds built within,
Inspired and enriched,
We stand hand in hand,
As one with Creation,
As one with this land
Pure ecstasy fills us ,
Love flows heart to heart,
We are joined by the Awen,
No longer apart.

"I think the most powerful thing for me at Assembly was the connective energy that we experienced when sounding the Awens. It was immense and awe inspiring. An endless flow of love and power. So here is my totally inadequate attempt to convey the magic of it." Cherry Carroll

2016 ASSEMBLY MEMORIES (PT 2)



*The Bardic initiates, their helpers and the log swing just outside our Grove space.
Pic by Elkie White*

*Julia twirls up a storm.
Pic by Sandra*



*Markets and workshops and readings, oh my!
Pic by Sandra*



*Cernunnos (himself!) tending
our Eisteddfod fire.
Pic by Sandra*

BELTANE by *Chris Parker*

*When the bark starts to fall from the gums all around
And the bush comes alive, vivid colours abound
The Horned God emerges burning with desire
For the Lady of the Land wants to make Bright Fire*

*The energy of the Earth, overflowing with vitality
Fuels the Oak Kings passion now bursting with fertility
For the Goddess of the Spring is awaiting her King
Their marriage tonight is a cause for all to sing*

*The drums start to pound with the heartbeat of the Land
There's a chant through the forest growing ever grand
The Lady and the Lord start to dance to the beat
Their sweat covered bodies writhing in the heat*

*For tonight is the night that they join and become one
Hand-fasted and making love under the Beltane Sun
From the forest they watch their children gather flowers for their homes
Laughing and dancing around the Maypole like the villagers of old*

*Extinguish all your fires and build the Need Fire for Beltane
Hold hands with your partner and jump over the flames
Drive the livestock through the smoke for fertility and protection
Then rekindle your hearths with the flames from the Tein-eigen*

*So let us feast on this night, and celebrate fertility and love
For Summer is about to begin and what we plant will thrive
Take the leap across the fire to banish what brings us strife
Work on your hopes and dreams so they may fulfil your life*



2016 ASSEMBLY MEMORIES (PT 3)



Ovate initiates and their helpers. All pix on this page by Jez Runnalls



There may or may not have been drinking at the Ovate initiation. I'm not allowed to tell you!

Cherry was one of our two Druid grade initiates, there aren't any pix from their ceremony though. Hearty congratulations Cherry and Fiona!



A bundle of Bards raise the Beltane arch. See front cover and editorial page for more pix of that amazing night.

Druidry & Activism in Australia

By William Rattley

To be fair this blog could also be called 'Paganism and Activism in Australia', but since this will focus on a more Druid flavour I thought the title I have suits best.

Yesterday (22/10/16) I attended a LGBTIQ Pride Parade in full Druid robes...with my blue Bardic sash. I did this because as a Druid, and as a Bard, I feel strongly that we have a role to play in shaping and transforming the society in which we live. And all too often I've seen at rallies, including environmental rallies, a very limited - almost non-existent, pagan presence.

At least here in Australia.

I know that the UK, being somewhat more open to Paganism, does indeed have large activist movements like 'The Warrior's Call'. And often they put up on social media times to coordinate with the global community to work together through observance and ritual to invoke positive outcomes. Which is fantastic.

I guess the thing that really woke me up to the absence of a pagan or Druidic presence at demonstrations was when I, and my spirit brother Kacey, attended an environmental rally. There were many church groups, and even some Buddhist communities, in attendance. But no pagans. Or at least not outwardly.

I won't lie, it infuriated me a bit.

I can understand the hesitation to throw yourself out into the community as Pagan or Druid. Especially when so much of our society, being so secular, seems to be content casting blanket ridicule at all religions and spiritualities irrespective of their intentions. I feel that as Bards, Ovates and Druids, we need to cast off the shame and assertively proclaim our desire and intention to protect and preserve the dignity of people and the environment.

In Australia it can be all too easily be assumed that only Christianity has any capacity to add to the social dialogue. Which I think is a missed opportunity for our own community that has such a love of the environment, and such an acceptance for diversity, to simply hide ourselves away out of fear of ridicule. We can do so much more, and personally...I believe we *should* be doing so much more.

At most rituals we chant the following: *"We swear by peace and love to stand, Heart to heart, and hand in hand. Mark, oh Spirit, and hear us now. Confirming this our sacred vow."*

To me, this is not just words. It's intention. I recall many moons ago when a question was posed to Damh the Bard about using ritual and magic to cast positive intentions for social change out into the world. And I agreed with him when he said (roughly paraphrasing), "Ritual work should be backed up with action within communities."

It is not simply enough to conduct ritual...sometimes you have to put in the physical effort of calling local senators, signing petitions and attending demonstrations, to really have the intention of ritual manifest in the world. In fact, in that respect you become the physical embodiment of that spiritual intention. I feel that one of the biggest hindrances to Pagans, and by extension Druids, getting out there visibly under the banner of their beliefs is firstly because our traditions started off being very fringe, and very secretive.



Times have changed however and we need to, where possible, step out into the light and assertively state our beliefs without letting ridicule or shame push us back into the shadows. The time for hiding is over. I find one of the most amazing things, since having taken up my Bardic journey, has been the countless opportunities I've had to involve myself in public speaking. At rallies, at conferences and on local radio. It's allowed me to act as a voice for those who otherwise have limited opportunities or self-esteem to speak out, and it's been a blessing when people approach me and share their own stories.

From a Bardic perspective I strongly feel that we have the potential, and the calling, to speak up for vulnerable people. For the environment. And to call out injustices when they surface. It can be an amazing teacher of self-discipline negotiating and collaborating on issues and playing the diplomat when faced with opposite views or ideologies. Often the reason why injustices carry on for so long is because of social apathy.

People don't speak up. They don't share how they are feeling. Issues get swept under the carpet or the mainstream media keeps us distracted with trivial things. We can change the stories. We can as Bards, Ovates and Druids, lead by positive example.

Yes the small individual acts are necessary, and I'm not trying to fault them...but collectively we can make a truly powerful statement.

Of the Bards in particular it was said, *"Often when the combatants are ranged face to face, and swords are drawn and spears are bristling, these men come between the armies and stay the battle, just as wild beasts are sometimes held spellbound. Thus even among the most savage barbarians anger yields to wisdom, and Mars is shamed before the Muses."* (Diodorus Siculus)

And when the world is going crazy...and teetering on the edge of so many bloody conflicts...we need that Bardic, and Ovate, and Druid inspiration to shine forth and encourage our communities, our governments and our global family to find more inspired ways of addressing issues like poverty, discrimination, gender bias, racism, corporate greed, environmental degradation, war, disease and terrorism.

So, I encourage you...

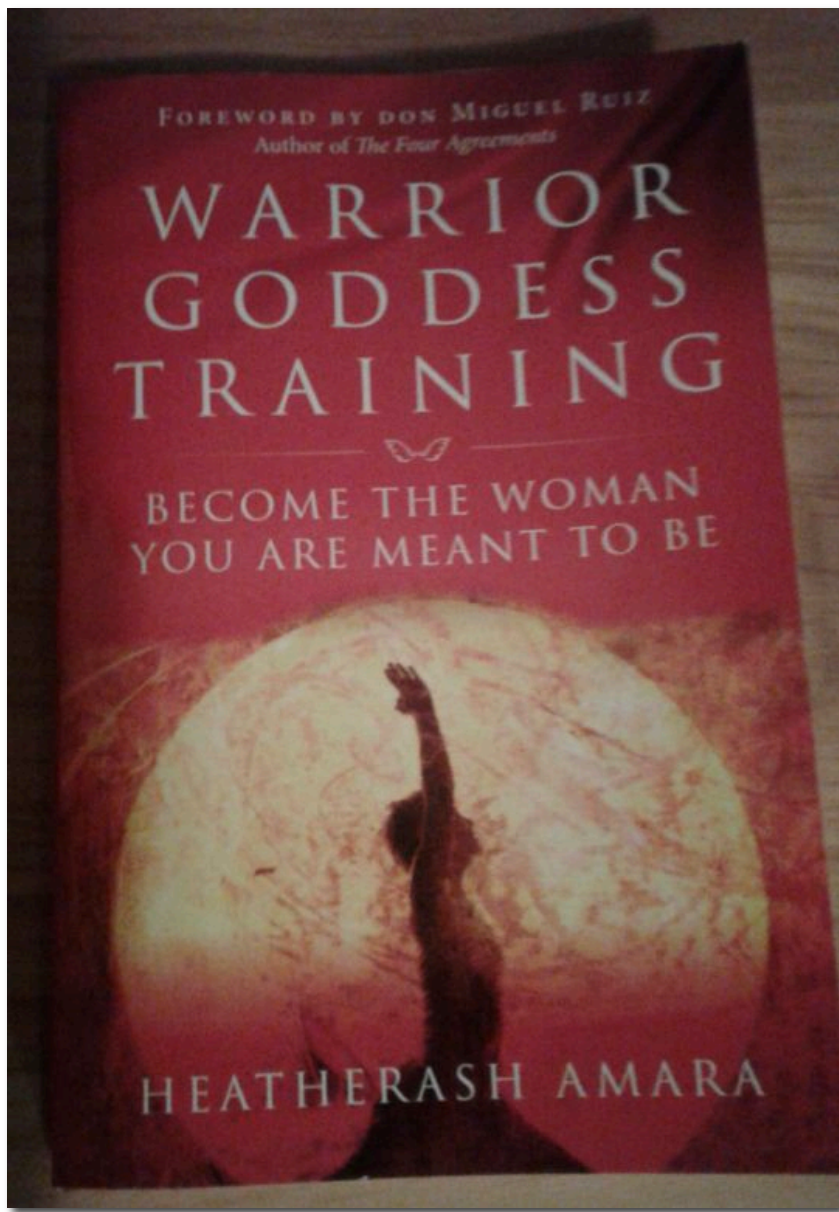
Bards, speak up about an issue you are passionate about. Even if all you do is write a blog on social media. Even if all you do is start a conversation with a friend, family member or work colleague about something that's happening in the world you feel strongly about.

Ovates, I encourage you to share with someone an experience of natural or symbolic significance to you. And draw on your past Bardic training and experience to word your topic in a way that the person you are speaking with can understand.

Druids, I encourage you to mobilise your community for an activity or discussion to touch on an issue that may be directly (or indirectly) affecting you. Get the conversation started...and encourage action and any ideas that may flower from that discussion. Collaborate with other groups and step out collectively to make a true change.

And most importantly...do so AS Bards, AS Ovates, AS Druids. Don't be afraid to say, "This is who I am, this is what I believe." Life is too short and too precious to hide away. Share your inspiration with the wider community with courage, compassion and authenticity. Don't let apathy hold you back. Stay inspired!

(blog extract originally posted online 23/10/16)



***Warrior Goddess Training:
Become the Woman
You Are Meant to Be***
by HeatherAsh Amara
Heirophant Publishing, 2014

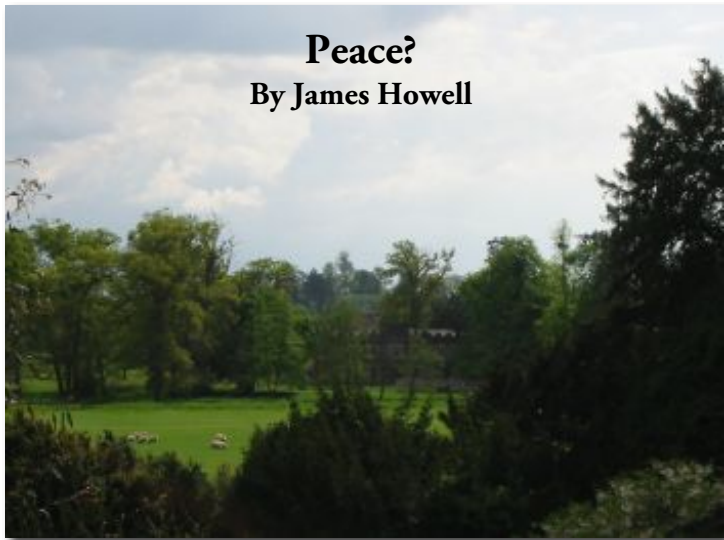
Book Review by Sara Reeve

"If you don't love and honor yourself with every fibre of your being, if you struggle with owning your power and passion, if you could use more joyful play and simple presence in your life, then it is time for an inner revolution. It is time to claim your Warrior Goddess energy." (p xv, 2014)

I was looking for some help to reignite my spark for life and myself, when I serendipitously found HeatherAsh Amara's *Goddess Warrior Training* book online. The teaser introduction, quoted above, follows through in the earthy, helpful and compassionate journey of self-discovery that she invites you embark on. HeatherAsh comes from an unashamedly earth based spiritual stance in honouring the seasons and deeply knowing the power of the elements, yet writes in an accessible way and provides excellent introductions for those not familiar with this path. This rich spirituality is woven throughout the book, and had my soul dancing with the pages.

The journey of personal transformation is not an easy one, and so too with this book. HeatherAsh goes beyond the theory of living compassionately from your authentic Self, to actually helping you achieve this. She guides you through a journey designed to enable you to unpack some of the mental, emotional, spiritual and life baggage that might be holding you back and not serving you anymore. Written with warmth, and sharing her own and other women's life experiences and struggles, she helps you to notice things like: the inner judgement and victim voices we might have, the old stories and beliefs we hold about ourselves and our situations that are no longer true, and the way that can spill into our current lives. She assists in transforming these patterns and habits by teaching tools and ways to reclaim your truth, listen to your intuition and find strength in your inner being.

This might seem like a tall order, but I have found *Goddess Warrior Training* delivers with compassion and humour too. Reading this book is not a passive journey, but one that requires your inner Warrior Goddess to step forward! Certainly this beautiful book has helped me enormously, and I highly recommend it.



Peace?

By James Howell

Everyone wants peace; but, there is no peace. Why not? What needs to change to cause the world to have peace?

What is peace?

The absence of war. The absence of non-physical conflict. The absence of hostility. The presence of goodwill.

What is war?

Politics extended into the realm of physical force. Malicious economic acts by governments. Currency manipulation. Malicious acts in cyberspace by governments.

Why do we have wars?

A double standard of morality. Governments and very large institutions are not held to the same standards of conduct as individuals. The sixth and eighth of the Ten Commandments are not applied to governments. In many circumstances, they can kill and steal without opprobrium. Below the level of physical violence, currency debasement and assumption of unpayable levels of public debt are forms of theft that can lead to war on the level of physical violence.

Greed. Some wars are institutionalised robbery, sometimes armed and sometimes not, to satisfy the greed for wealth of highly-placed persons and of significant portions of many populations. The desire of weapons-producing countries to maintain the income stream from their military industrial complex, and the strong political influence that complex has in those countries, encourages them to overspend on the military, and to encourage military expenditures by other countries.

By continually running a trade deficit, borrowing from other countries to cover the deficit, and then devaluing the world's reserve currency (the US dollar), the United States is essentially stealing value from the creditor nations, thereby building up a reservoir of resentment in the creditor nations that potentially will be a contributor to more wars.

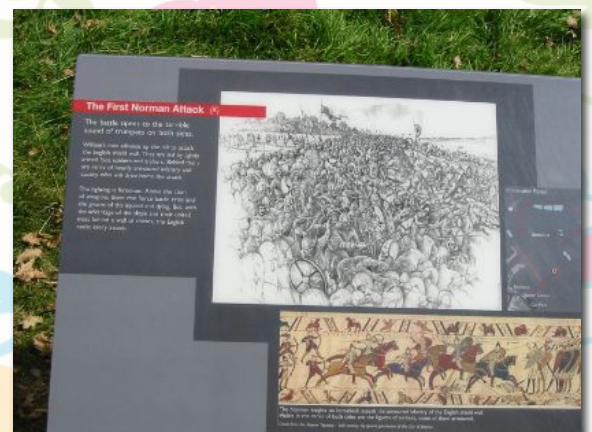
Greed was a contributor to World War II in Europe. Excessive reparations from Germany after World War I, and the 1929 Crash caused by inept US money supply manipulation by the Federal Reserve, provided the environment for the rise of Nazism. Hitler's expansion into Eastern Europe to provide 'lebensraum' for the Germans was greed on steroids.

A few examples of recent conflicts, and of current tensions, with a strong component of greed in their origins are:

Iran: Iranian resentment of the West was exacerbated by MI6 and the CIA deposing, in 1953, Mohammad Mossadegh to preserve Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's profitability in the country and, theoretically, to keep Iran from becoming communist.¹ While this hostility has not yet blossomed into war, it has been simmering since the deposition of the Shah in 1979.

Iraq: The attempted annexation of Kuwait in 1991 was clearly motivated by greed for Kuwait's oil and gas. The sanctions resulting from that First Gulf War helped set the stage for what I believe was Saddam Hussein's fatal mistake. In 1999 Iraq began selling oil for euros, potentially breaking the monopoly of the petro dollar, which is essential to the economic hegemony of the United States.² Saddam had been a fine fellow in 1980 when he attacked the Iranians, but was a complete scoundrel when he tinkered with the oil pricing system.

Libya: I believe Muammar Gaddafi effectively committed suicide by proposing a gold-backed dinar for use in Africa and the Middle East to pay for oil. Such a currency would be a serious threat to the fiat system currently in use throughout the world.³ Prior to proposal of the dinar, American oil companies were drilling in Libyan waters and the relationship between Libya and the West seemed to be normalising.



China: China's current claims of expanded rights in the South and East China Seas, accompanied by occupation of islands and displays of naval force in those areas, are motivated by greed for potential resources. These actions have greatly increased tensions with China's neighbours in the area, and have potential for a major confrontation with the United States.

Israel/Palestinians: Israel's past wars and continuing tensions with its neighbours are largely based on a land dispute.

Imperial wars are heavily motivated by greed.

In *Hoodwinked*, John Perkins states, "For centuries human beings have clung to a belief that in order to get ahead, communities – including countries – have to exploit their neighbours. This is the foundation of the old military empires – from ancient China and Greece to the British Empire – to today's post-World War II neo-colonialism. The insatiable quest to beat out any possible competitors – real or imagined – has been rapidly draining our planet of its most precious resources." ⁴

In *Imperial Ambitions*, Noam Chomsky quotes from a 1914 speech to Parliament by Winston Churchill: "We are not a young people with innocent record and a scanty inheritance. We have engrossed to ourselves [an] altogether disproportionate share of wealth and traffic of the world. We have got all we want in territory, and our claim to be left in the unmolested enjoyment of vast and splendid possessions, mainly acquired by violence, largely maintained by force, often seems less reasonable to others than to us."⁵ In my opinion, what Churchill said of the British Empire a century ago applies equally well to the American Empire today.

Second Anglo - Boer War: The Witwatersrand's gold was a significant motive for this war.⁶

World War II in the Pacific: Japanese conquest of raw materials was the principal theme from China to Singapore and New Guinea to Alaska.

Viet Nam: War in Indochina, which began with the Japanese Empire pushing out the French Empire, was about who controlled the land and resources and what the economic theory would be. The fighting continued with the same theme when French colonialism replaced Japanese imperialism in 1945, and culminated with the anti-communist Vietnamese nationalists and the Americans losing to the communists.

The legacy of strong nations meddling in the affairs of others for power and wealth continues to plague the world. The artificial boundaries created by the Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916 is the source of much of the conflict in the Middle East today.

Fear. Pre-emptive wars, wars of policy, often result from fear of aggression by 'others' who are motivated by greed or by 'others' who are driven to aggression by their own fear. In addition to the imperial motive of greed, another motive for expansion of the Roman Empire seems to have been an inherited fear of Rome being destroyed. That fear was apparently kindled by the Celts sacking Rome in 390BC.⁷ No matter how far the imperial border was pushed away from the City of Rome, just beyond that new border was a new neighbour that could threaten the Empire, and therefore needed to be conquered.

Because of a history of catastrophic invasions from the west, both Russia and China are obsessed with the need to control the territories to their west to allow for a defence-in-depth. The current conflict in Ukraine seems to me to be largely motivated by this strong Russian need for depth, and for a naval base on the Black Sea to have warm water access to the ocean.

Western insensitivity to this need has contributed to the urgency of the Ukrainian problem. Russian fears were undoubtedly exacerbated by American anti-ballistic missiles being stationed in Poland soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union. To me, this represents both American fear and American arrogance.

George Friedman's *Next 100 Years*⁸ forecasts major geopolitical developments over the next century. A remarkable number of the projected events are pre-emptive actions motivated by fears of aggression by a neighbour.



Racial and cultural prejudice and lack of empathy. The clannishness component of the Troubles in Northern Ireland is one of a multitude of examples of perceived differences contributing to and amplifying conflicts between groups. Emphasis of differences compounds more substantial sources of contention, and is often used for power enhancement by those who benefit from the conflict.

Regarding the other side as somehow substandard makes killing them easier. Regarding the opposition as fellow human beings makes killing them much more difficult. I shall never forget, on the morning of 4 May 1970, looking at the dead face of a North Vietnamese lieutenant whose unit we had ambushed the night before, and thinking that he looked like a decent fellow, who could have been a friend under different circumstances.

Over-population and poverty. Over-population in Europe was one of many causes of the migration into the New World between 1492 and the mid-Twentieth Century. This European encroachment into native lands produced many wars during the last five hundred years.

In *Collapse*, Jared Diamond points out that in AD793 one of the reasons for the Viking explosion out of Scandinavia was population growth.⁹ He also describes how over population and extreme poverty were major contributors to the 1994 genocide between the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda and Burundi.¹⁰

The limited resources of the Earth will support only a limited number of any species, humans included.

Egomania and poor leadership. Most wars are at least partially motivated by the desire of highly placed persons and of significant portions of many populations for power and 'glory'.

As George Orwell's *1984*¹¹ so beautifully describes, wars and external threats are used to manipulate populations to enhance the power and egos of the elites. The War on Terror is a manifestation of this principle, and is used to make Americans and Europeans accept many things that are not good for them, such as excessive invasions of privacy, destructive levels of debt, and creation of many enemies that could have been neutral or friends.

An excellent example of ego and poor leadership is provided by the events from 28 June through 31 July 1914, when Europe blundered into World War I.

In *Collapse*, Jared Diamond states: "The usual accounts of the genocides in Rwanda and Burundi portray them as the result of pre-existing ethnic hatreds fanned by cynical politicians for their own ends... This genocide resulted from the deliberate choice of a modern elite to foster hatred and fear to keep itself in power... The evidence is overwhelming that this view is correct and accounts in large degree for Rwanda's tragedy."¹²

*Stay tuned for Part 2 in the
Lughmasadh 2017 issue!*



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Tuatha Dea and Nightsong Studios Presents:

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THE GREEN ALBUM and all the artists on this compilation project are proud and honored to announce our association and partnership with this wonderful organisation. 25% of all (That's ALL 14 artists) sales proceeds from this project will be donated to Rainforest Trust! This amazing group so profoundly echoes the sentiments of this project, and has been putting them into action for 27 years. PLEASE spread the word and get involved!

<http://www.thegreenalbum.net/about.html>

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Direct downloads available from <http://www.thegreenalbum.net/home.html>

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GINGER DOSS	MURPH'S
KELLIANNA	MIDNIGHT
DAVE THE BARD	ROUNDERS
SPIRAL DANCE	SPIRAL RHYTHM
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The Emergence of the Bard...

by Trudy Richards

We as bards all have an inner music, and as our life unfolds we write stories in our head, or on a piece of paper or in a journal. Perhaps as an attempt to define pivotal moments of our life, or maybe because we didn't know why, we just felt like it. We sing along as we travel through our own unique lives; a different verse here, a new tune there, another line added to an uplifting chorus, a song of sorrow, a ballad of adventure, a chant of reflection. Being able to learn and play a musical instrument adds another dimension to your story. The rhythm of each adventure is added to the weaving of your own life songs, and as you play you add to the vibrational energy that moulds you into who you really are.

Many of us are shy about playing and singing our songs in public. It's exposing some of your inner self, and that can be scary. From my own experience, I want to say that when you finally summon the courage to 'put it out there', that inner bard begins to emerge, and you will no longer be content with performing for your own private audience.



My first mandolin!

When I was about six or seven years of age, my dad decided that I was going to learn the mandolin, my sister the piano, and my brother the guitar. As my dad was a fan of Smacka Fitzgibbon I almost got given the banjo instead. Every Saturday morning for the next year or so, until it closed, I went to the Victorian Banjo School in Oaleigh, an eastern suburb of Melbourne, for a one hour lesson on the mandolin. At the time, I remember I wasn't really very impressed because, you know, I'd never heard of a mandolin before, a banjo was what balding old men played on TV and guitars were what the Beatles played. I knew that because my mum played them on the record player in the lounge room. Every day after school I had to practice my mandolin for an hour, or was it half an hour? I can't remember exactly and at times it was hard going, because I'd rather be outside talking to the horse which had wondrously appeared to eat the grass down on the vacant block next door. But then the School suddenly closed and I felt a sense of loss, because it wasn't long after the end of year concert, and I thought I'd played alright amongst my group of fifty or more combined banjo/mandolin players.

After that I had a few lessons on the piano with my sister's piano teacher but then she retired (no connection to the owners of the banjo school!) and somehow my mandolin ended up at the back of the wardrobe, no longer plucked at the end of a hard day at school, haha. But I always kept it, and would occasionally get it out for a bit of a play, until I broke a string and that was that.

My parents had divorced when I was fifteen, and since the age of eighteen I've shifted over twenty five times. Every time I moved house my mandolin came with me. And then one day I heard a song on the radio that had clearly recognisable mandolin playing and I realised that I loved and missed that unique sound. I dragged my mandolin out of the cupboard, but by then the keys were a bit rusted as well as still having that broken string. I got it fixed, bought the sheet music and set about teaching myself how to play that cool song. It was *Losing My Religion*, by REM. And something inside me woke up.

I've never stopped playing and learning new songs since, and have bought three more mandolins. When I began my Druidic journey, Celtic music was already a part of me. Some of the tunes associated with pagan music were ones I'd learnt or heard during my mandolin lessons.

My first OBOD Assembly was at Currarong, on the Southern coast of New South Wales, in 2007. I'd been studying the Bardic grade for a few years but hadn't been to any Druidic event before; I'd never even met another Druid. I hoped that I would fit in, that my 'weird' outlook on life wasn't too different, and that the pull of that inner calling I could deny no longer would be everything my inner self yearned for. My mandolin came with me.

And so I found my family. Within five minutes of arriving I felt like I'd known these people for a long time. They were my tribe, I was a part of them and I was accepted for myself. I certainly wasn't weird, because then everyone else would have to be weird too, and I liked them too much! We had similar ideas and philosophies and a common love for the land around us. I could talk about my garden, what I was reading, and join in conversations. There were common threads everywhere.



At home

A profound moment for me, as that inner bard woke up, was when we'd created a beautiful dragon together in the backyard of where we were staying, and then a spiral of shells and seaweed on the beach opposite the house. We made up a tune and a chant and danced our dragon on the beach, spiralling inwards to the centre, and out again. I was strumming my mandolin, singing, dancing, laughing and full of joy. The magic of Land, Sky and Sea was all around us. The Awen was flowing and my mandolin was playing as if by herself, enchanted by the energy all around.

I don't want to make a career out of music. My singing voice is okay; it enables me to add words to my songs to express the experience I want to share with my audience. I just like to play for myself, my friends and family. I love sitting around a campfire sharing music, stories and songs.

I love getting out there into the real world; away from cities, crowds, people, artificial noise, and listening to the music of the land around me. Writing a song about my memorable experiences, of the elements, the animals and the land around me, helps connect me to the essence of my true self. I'm no Madonna, but I'm sure the pleasure I get out of performing my songs during an Eisteddfod with my Druid family is as great if not greater than the pleasure any successful performer achieves.

Thank you to all who have sat and listened to my songs, and laughed in all the right places...and to those that came up to me later and thanked me for my songs, I am overwhelmed with gratitude. To know that someone else enjoys my music fills me with joy.

After the recent Bribie Island Assembly my inner Bard, initially awakened at Currarong, and nurtured by the intervening years of pilgrimages to the sacred lands and the stone circles, has been inspired by the river of Awen flowing through me after all the energies we collectively created and shared. So now I am crazily scribbling down new lines of song and story, trying to keep up with all the ideas flooding into my head.

I am so looking forward to our next gathering. My Druid family is my audience, the only place where I can be my true authentic self. How lucky am I? Thank you! /\



Playing at Mt Franklin, Beltane 2014 (a pivotal time in my life)

2016 ASSEMBLY MEMORIES (PT 4)



Early morning contemplation. Pic by Jez Runnalls



Getting all academic. Pic by Sandra



Beltane aftermath. Some late rain drew much of the spiral back into the earth. Pic by Chris Parker.



Sad to be going home, but happy to have been together. Pic by Chris Parker

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And finally...

"Feets, don't fail me now!"

A Lighthearted Guide to Surviving Barefoot Ritual in Australia...

By Mandy Gibson



Yikes! One of two foot injuries from the Bribie Island Assembly. Both sustained by the same person, on different feet!

Australia. The Land Downunder. Rugged mountain ranges etc....It's a beautiful and deeply spiritual place. But it can also be unforgiving, especially on the feet of even the most nature-connected and locally knowledgeable Druid. I'd like to close this SerpentStar with a few little points for those planning to get in actual touch with the sunburnt country.

1: Bitey things are bitey. There are many ants, midgey things and flying bugs who, despite our best efforts, simply care not for our intent if we're standing on their house or getting in the way of their dinner. Carry insect repellent.

2: Hot sand is hot. Especially on islands where most tracks are made up of the dreaded 'black sand'. Blisters await the uninitiated, and I don't mean those who haven't done their Grade ceremony yet!

3: Sharp things are sharp. When it gets dry, the soil gets very soft and there are many things just under the surface that see our soft squidgy feet as a good thing to hitch a ride on. Alternately it gets very dry, and turns into naturally-occurring chip gravel.

4: Uneven ground can be very bad for those who need orthotics. Sunwise or counter, walking will still hurt.

The above may seem a little flippant, but it hides a deeper message: sometimes shoes are okay. It's so beautiful to be able to walk barefoot into a ritual space and feel that deep connection with cool soft earth below, but sometimes it's just not feasible. Thongs, flipflops, jandals, whatever your term, are great because they can be kicked off if the ground turns out to be friendly, or discreetly slipped back on if a team of bull ants decides it's either them or the human.

Remember the most important thing when preparing for ritual: Great Spirit, the Spirits of Place and the Gods know you. They don't mind if you protect yourself from the elements so you can focus on the purpose of being in the Circle, and they won't feel disrespected if you elect to wear shoes. They will still know you mean it, by your words and actions.

*The
Wheel
turns...*



Beltane, on May 1st, marks the time of our adolescence and early wo/manhood. Spring is in full bloom, and twin fires would be lit at this time, through which would be passed the cattle after their long winter confinement, or over which those hoping for a child or good fortune would jump.

We see traces of the Beltane celebrations on May Day (in the Northern Hemisphere), when dancing round the maypole celebrates the fertility of the land and creates an echo of the ritual circle dances that must have been enacted in stone circles throughout the country.

Text sourced from Druidry.org

The deadline for contributing to the Lughnasadh issue of SerpentStar is 25 January.

The Lughnasadh 2017 issue will be released on 1 February.