

## FESTIVALS

Most modern Druids celebrate the cycle of the year with eight festivals commonly called by their anglicised Gaelic names. Occurring every – weeks the festivals keep the Druid in harmony with the natural world's tides of light, warmth and growth, darkness, cold and decay.

- Samhain honours the dead and the start of Winter. It is usually celebrated around the beginning of November.
- The Winter Solstice and Midwinter acknowledge the rebirth of the sun.
- Imbolc, in early February, is the first cold breath of spring.
- The Spring Equinox in March leads us to the greening of the landscape.



family and friends

- Beltane is May Day, celebrating fertility and the start of summer.
- The Summer Solstice and Midsummer in June mark the longest days.
- Lughnasadh is the festival of the grain harvest and takes place in late July or early August.
- The Autumn Equinox is an

acknowledgement of the harvest brought in and the return of the darkness.

As well as the eight festivals, Druidry encourages honouring the cycles and tides of the moon as well as marking the important transitions of life with rites of passage, witnessed and celebrated by community

## SPIRITS OF PLACE

Just as the indigenous traditions of other lands reflect their own character, Druidry in Britain is a celebration of resilience and change. It reflects the constant moods of the weather, the regenerative powers of spring and the release of autumn, the darkness of winter and the long days of summer. Its song can be found in the fertility of the meadows, the bleak and beautiful moors, the wild



life of the greenwood, the harshness of the mountains and the long miles of seashore. It is an expression of the relationship between the land and the people.

If you would like to find out more about Druidry, please write to us or visit the Druid Network's website. Here you will find more in-depth articles as well as upcoming events in your local area.

For further information please send an S.S.A.E. international reply coupon or email address to:

# THE DRUID NETWORK

Inspiration and Honour

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# The Druid Network WHAT IS DRUIDRY

## NATIVE RELIGIOUS TRADITION

For many, Druidry can be simply defined as the native religious tradition of the British Isles. As it was for the ancestors, Druidry's practice is both an expression of reverence and the search for the wisdom of the natural world. This wisdom can teach one to engage with life and nature wakefully, that Nature's vibrance, patterns and currents are fully experienced through learning to live in harmony, creative and inspired.

Though knowledge can be taught, it

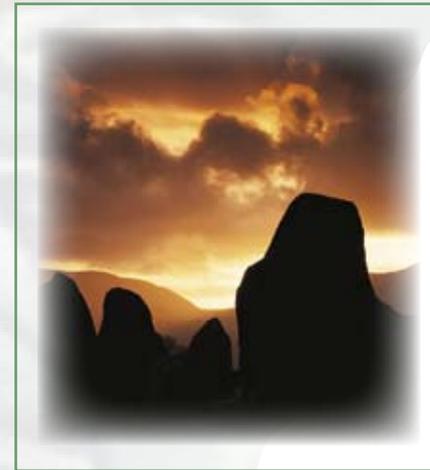
is only through experience that Nature's wisdom can be felt. As such, Druidry is a profoundly earthy religious tradition, with no need to hold blindly to belief. With feet upon the ground, the Druid strives to achieve an awareness of him or herself as a part of nature, feeling the web of connections that is the fabric of existence. With honed physical and spiritual senses, the Druid drinks in deeply the vitality of nature, feeling the flow of divine inspiration that is called Awen.

## A BRIEF SKETCH OF DRUID HISTORY

Druidry in Britain has evolved naturally over the many millennia since the arrival of the first post-glacial settlers. Its oldest roots lie in the indigenous religions of Europe, amongst the Neolithic peoples who built the tomb shrines and stone circles between around and BCE.

The earliest of these people are understood to have been migratory Hunter-gatherers, some travelled great distances sharing philosophies and technologies along the way. With climate changes and developing agriculture, slowly a more settled and communal lifestyle developed, which in

turn gave rise to expanding populations and rising tensions between tribes. Religious focus evolved, adapting to address each new need. The first written accounts of Druidry come from Roman philosophers and soldiers, describing the tribes of Gaul that Rome was conquering in the first century BCE. These texts tell us that the religious leaders were called Druids, and suggested the tradition



originated in Britain. Not only great thinkers, the Druids held political power, and as Rome claimed that power, a good deal of Druidry was destroyed.

# INSPIRATION AND HONOUR

What remained was inevitably influenced by Roman culture over the following four centuries. When Rome withdrew, the religious traditions of Britain were further influenced by the incoming pagan Germanic and Nordic settlers, the last of these bringing with them the ideas and strictures of Christianity.

In the eighteenth century, responding to massive social changes, interest in the old traditions, local cultures and the natural world inspired the Romantic movement, a deep questioning of Christianity and renewed interest in Classical Paganism. This led to the emergence of a Druid revival. The old Druidic wisdom and mythology which had persisted in the Bardic traditions of ballads and tales, and in local folklore and customs, was sought out and celebrated once more.

## DRUIDRY IN PRACTICE

Because Druidry is based upon reverence for nature, it is a religion practised through every part of daily living, through each relationship and interaction.

A Druid will welcome the sun as it rises, giving prayers of thanksgiving for every opportunity and gift of nourishment received through the course of the day. At sunset, he or she will acknowledge its setting, giving thanks once again and welcoming the darkness that brings rest.

Many Druids have special places where they perform rites and rituals, meditate or make prayers. These are often outside in gardens and parks, or rural woodland, moors and meadows, or at historic or prehistorical places of significance such as standing stones.



Over the course of the nineteenth century, this strand divided into the pantheistic and polytheistic Romantics, poets, artists and thinkers who perceived nature as sacred, as well as those who held to the monotheistic Enlightenment values of a new scientific and increasingly secular world.

Nourished by this long history, the 19th century saw the start of a new revival of Druidry. Influenced by feminism, postmodernism and an increasing concern for the environment, Druidry attracted many who felt the desire for an alternative to the disconnected consumer lifestyle pervading so much of society.

Druidry continues to evolve, changing in response to changes in our world. It is currently one of the fastest growing spiritual and religious traditions in Britain.

Such a place is often called a temple, grove or nemeton. Yet Druidic practice is not limited to distinct rituals, times or places; it is not a robe one wears once a week.

Because all nature is sacred, each relationship, whether with another human being or with the environment or any creature within it, is a part of the Druid's ongoing expression of spiritual practice.

Integral to Druidry, then, is an awareness of how humanity deals with nature.

A Druid is likely to be actively involved in environmentalism, ethical consumerism, interfaith work, the defence of animal rights, care within the community or peace achieved both locally and further afield. The Druid's life is an expression and a testament of his or her spiritual and religious practice.

## ANCESTORS

Within its reverence for nature, including human nature, respect for ancestors is fundamentally important to Druids. This begins with care for our immediate family and community, and stretches back as a study of history and heritage. The Druid explores his own bloodline, the peoples of the land he calls home, and the lives and legacies of great

thinkers, teachers and priests.

Ancient Druids are said to have believed in the transmigration of souls and that individuals could return to a tribe to live again. Many modern Druids also hold this belief, though like much in Druidry, such beliefs tend to be personal ideas and convictions rather than seen as a set of specific metaphysical laws.

## THE GODS OF DRUIDRY

The Druids' gods are powerful and integral elements of nature, both human and nonhuman. They include the rain and mist, rivers and springs, sun, stars and moon, hills, moors and valleys, fertility, death and hunger, love, regeneration and justice.

The Druids' gods are also those who have been revered for perhaps millennia, whose names have become etched into folklore and mythology.

As spirits of place and ancient heroes, they may once have embodied qualities of nature and are now honoured as deity, guides and sources of inspiration.



Many of these are familiar to readers of the old tales. They include Rhiannon, Brighid,

Llew Llaw Gyffes, Sulis, the Cailleach and the Green Man.

Some Druids revere gods brought to these lands with ancestral travellers, such as Mithras who came with the Roman armies two thousand years ago, or Woden and Freyja who were brought by the Germanic and Nordic tribes.

Druids do not bow before their gods in submission.

Instead, relationships are forged so that one is able to understand a deity's nature and therefore seek inspiration, peace and creativity through that connection.

## ORDERS, GROVES, GORSEDDAU AND INDEPENDENT DRUIDS

Orders are Druid organisations that provide a specific perspective or service and can have a very small membership or one of thousands. Some Orders offer teaching programmes, often nowadays through a correspondence course, and many publish journals or newsletters for members. It is possible to be a member of an Order without ever meeting others of the Order, simply using its services at a distance.

Groves are groups that gather together face to face, for ritual, teaching and

celebration; they can be just a handful of people, and at their largest tend to be no bigger than 100 or so.

The term Gorsedd is now most often used to describe a gathering for a public ceremony, usually at one of the eight festivals.

It is not necessary for a Druid to belong to an Order or Grove, and many within the tradition are independent, practising and celebrating on their own, with their families or with the spirits of their local landscape.