

Lughnasadh 2011

eOLAS
WISDOM OF THE OAKS



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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

We look forward to hearing from you!

Lughnasadh 2011



Welcome to the Lughnasadh edition of EOLAS Magazine. In this edition we have our usual mix of articles, reviews and interviews.

Summer is in full bloom as I sit down to write just as it was four years ago when I composed an introduction to the very first edition of EOLAS.

That we are still going, despite the occasional hiccup is a testament to all those who have contributed over the years to maintain the magazine.

I'd like to personally thank all those from within the Druidic/Celtic Reconstructionist community and those from wider afield who have contributed to make EOLAS what it is.

If anyone would like to contribute to future editions of EOLAS, please send your contributions to EOLAS@whiteoakdruids.org

Within the peace of the Oaks,
J Craig Melia – July 2011

The Way to the Mill

A Meditation for Lammas

Tony the Prof

It was a pleasant afternoon, and I thought I would take the path to the mill. I watched the ducks and geese gliding across the pond, for a while, and then I took the bridge across the gently flowing stream, and headed up the path into the woods.

The path forked, and I decided to take a different path. I had always taken the lower path, which still meandered up and down until it came to the mill. I had often wondered where the other path led, and sometimes when I had passed, it had been overgrown, hardly a path at all.

It was as if it came and went at times, sometimes there, and sometimes gone. But this time it was there, leading up the hill, and inviting me to take it, to be adventurous, and go forth into the unknown.

The day was warm, and hot, but the trees gave shade, and the sunlight dappled though to the ground, as I climbed steadily upwards. At times, I paused for breath, for this path was steep in places, and required an effort. And then I was walking out onto the summit, the meadowland, rich with sweetly scented heather, and a dolmen ahead of me.

I had seen many dolmens, ancient structures of huge stones, but they all looked weathered, with many stones destroyed by greedy landowners. But this dolmen looked complete, and it looked new, freshly built. The capstones came cross the whole length of the dolmen, and it had been inset inside an artificial mound; all that remained was for the top to be covered over and sealed in. Outside, there was a larger circle of smaller stones.

And beside the dolmen, sitting on the wild grasslands, were people, dressed in rough woollen clothes. There was a lady sitting there, and beside her was a large quern, a rounded piece of granite with an indentation in it. In this was some corn, and she held in her hand a smaller stone, which she was grinding into the corn on the other, and all the while, she was singing a song. And I sit down, and listen to her sing:

Let wind take seeds and scatter
The good seed on the land,
Let rain come down and water
By Cerridwen's mighty hand
That seeds buried in winter
May warm and grow as grain
In breezes and in sunshine,
And soft, refreshing rain.

Bless here our humble acre
Her hand reaching so far
To give us grain for flour
And be our guiding star
Fill cup of mead to brim

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WISDOM OF THE OAKS

Her moonlight overhead
And so to us, her children,
She gives our daily bread.

And a man comes, and offers me bread and mead, and we break bread together, and each in turn take a sip of the same cup, and he says:

Blessed art thou, Cerridwen, goddess of the corn
Who brings forth bread from the earth

A cloud obscures the sun, and it is suddenly getting cooler. A breeze springs up, rustling the wild grass, and I know it is time to take my leave of this tribe. I bow to the man, and he to me, and I head off back into the forest, along the path.

The sky above the forest canopy is darkening, and I feel some drops of rain falling down upon me, and I hasten along the old track. The side of the track is earth, worn and shaped by rain, and there is a stream flowing downwards.

But then the track levels off, and the raindrops cease, and I find myself in a clearing, and in the clearing is a man in a simple brown gown, with a girdle around his waist, and his head shaven in a tonsure. He has short brown beard, and a gentle, peaceful face. And I know he must be a friar, on his travels around the land, pausing between towns, coming to this quiet place to meditate.

He is sitting down on a fallen log, and he opens a knapsack and takes out a flagon of red wine, and a loaf of bread. As if expecting me, he looks up, and holds up the bread, and breaks off a piece. He says:

I ground it in a quern on Friday
I baked it on a fan of sheepskin
I toasted it to a fire of Rowan
And I shared it round my people.

I went sunways round my dwelling,
In name of the Mary Mother,
Who promised to preserve me,
Who did preserve me,
And who will preserve me,
In peace, in flocks,
In righteousness of heart.

And he hands me the bread, and I take it, and afterwards, I sip the rich wine from a wooden cup, and he says to me:

Blessed art thou, Lord of the Dance
Who brings forth bread from the earth

Then we sit together for a while, he and I, looking at the world, the birds calling from the trees, the butterfly fluttering across the clearing, and the small ants going to and throw in their business. We see all this, but we are just watching, the still point in the moving world.

Suddenly, the clouds return, blotting out the sun, and the rain begins to fall heavily. The friar gets up, places the remains of the meal in his knapsack, and bows to me, and hurries off along one path. But I take another path, one into the more heavily wooded trees, that may offer more shelter from the rain.

There is the sound of thunder, and the sky darkens, and I hurry down the path. The rain is running in rivulets down the side of the path, and my feet are beginning to churn up the soil as it turns to thick mud. And the thunder ceases as quickly as it came, but the rain continues, and I see the light sparkling in the water on the leaves, as a voice whispers softly:

I will send you rain at the right time, so that the land will produce crops and the trees will bear fruit.

And I hear the running water even more clearly, and see the water running into a swiftly flowing stream. The stream is running along the lower boundary of the woods, and I see water a meadow between it and the natural stream in the valley bottom.

Then I come to an old stone wall, and a small garden, where there are many different kinds of herbs flourishing. I reach out, and pick one of them, crush it in my hand, and at once, I smell the sweet scent of rosemary.

Behind the wall, I hear the creaking as the watermill wheel turns, and the rushing noise of water pouring down. And I turn through a gap in the stone wall, and there is the water mill, towering above me in all its glory, a fine granite building.

I enter the mill, and see a huge fireplace, stone paving for floor, and climb the stairs. And there are the wheels turning, the great central shaft, large wheels geared to turn smaller ones, and finally the burr stone turning to grind the wheat into flour. There is a man seated there, the miller, and he rises to greet me, and he says:

Hear the call from distant lands
Distended bellies ache in pain
The crying of the hunger pangs
Calling for the wholesome grain

Hear the call from distant lands
Where children hunger to be fed
The crying comes across the globe
Take the flour, and bake the bread

Hear the call from distant lands
Famine strikes, no time for thrift
Give across the world, you must
Bread of life, Cerridwen's gift

And he hands me sacks of flour to take with me, and I know that my task has just begun, and I begin to walk back through the forest, knowing that this precious grain has a longer journey than I.

Soon I will pass it to others, and they in turn to others, and with them I will make a chain which reaches across to those who starve in lands cursed with drought; for I am kindred with those who hunger in distant lands, all fellow children of our Mother Earth, reaching out, hand to hand, to feed the hungry world.

Tony the Prof

Amergin – I am the Wind that blows over the Sea

I am the Wind that blows over the sea,
I am the Wave of the Ocean;
I am the Murmur of the billows;
I am the Ox of the Seven Combats;
I am the Vulture upon the rock;
I am a Ray of the Sun;
I am the fairest of Plants;
I am a Wild Boar in valour;
I am a Salmon in the Water;
I am a Lake in the plain;
I am the Craft of the artificer;
I am a Word of Science;
I am the Spear-point that gives battle;
I am the god that creates in the head of man the fire of thought.

Who is it that enlightens the assembly upon the mountain, if not I?
Who telleth the ages of the moon, if not I?
Who showeth the place where the sun goes to rest, if not I?

The Silures

Shan Morgain

A tribe is a People who are all related by blood, adoption, fosterage or honour contract. A tribe can be tiny, a few hundred people, or it can be huge, with a population the size of a large modern country.

THE SILURES were a tribe which lived across south east Wales - modern Gwent, Newport, Monmouthshire, Breconshire and Glamorganshire, the Forest of Dean. Possibly other parts of Gloucestershire and Herefordshire of present day England as well. The tribe was well established during the Iron Age, continued as a successful society under Roman occupation, then for some time after the Romans withdrew.

The Silures were famously fierce warriors who held out against Roman invasion for 30 years: 48 -78CE. This included defeating the Second Legion, an outstanding achievement. They then participated in the government of their own province, which centred on a large Roman fort at Isca, Caerleon, as well as a sophisticated capital at Caerwent. They had a hillfort nearby at Llanmelin but it is now thought this had never been a capital, as the Silures were not centralised but rather a federated group of sub-tribes.

The Silurian war lasted over a period of 30 years, against two different Roman generals, one after the other. The Silures at first operated in alliance with Caratacus and his surviving Catuvellauni, together with the Ordovices tribe to the north in central Wales. Caratacus and his Catuvellauni had been defeated in the east (Kent). He fled to Wales with his wife, children and his brothers, plus presumably some other surviving Catuvellauni warriors and refugees. Caratacus had some success as a guerrilla strategist. But the new Caratacan alliance was quickly defeated after three years in 51 CE in Ordovices country, after a set battle. The set battle was a military context at which the Romans were the masters of ruthless strategy. Caratacus fled once more to the Brigantes (modern NE England), where he was handed over to Rome by Queen Cartimandua. He was taken abroad as a prisoner.

The Ordovices as recorded by Tacitus, were brutally put down. The Roman claim was that they were "eradicated." It is unlikely that the whole people were killed in such hilly country providing wide expanses to search and many hiding places known to its natives. But the Romans certainly seem to have destroyed the Ordovices as a tribal society as we hear no more about them.

The Silures fought on for another 27 years, and to excellent effect. Scholars now believe that the Silures were not a centrally coordinated tribe but a loose confederation, which would fit with their military tactics. Instead of operating pitched battles they became expert guerrilla fighters, to the despair of the Roman general Ostorius. He reported that they too should urgently be eradicated like the Ordovices, or else wholly transported. After he died the Silures roundly defeated the Second Augusta Legion as it attempted to build controlling forts. Its surviving members were rescued with considerable difficulty and great loss of life.

An effective strategy used by the Silures was to take Roman prisoners from their skirmishes, then distribute them to their sub-tribes and allies as hostages. This could mean ransom money, for fighting or survival funds for the captor group. It also meant humiliation for the Romans, forced to negotiate with various petty tribal groups. Negotiation with the Romans was a skilled performance which seems to have borne constructive results in due course as the Silurian wars ended.

Tacitus the Roman nephew of the British military Governor, Agricola, clearly admired them, saying they were a "strong and warlike nation" (Agricola 17). He also famously comments "- non atrocitate, non clementia mutabatur" (you would be changed by neither cruelty nor clemency).

He described them as dark skin, with dark curly hair, ascribing their origins to Iberia (Spain). This has been borne out by modern genetic profiling, linking to Basque genes; although these results are more generally applicable to a wider Welsh and Irish stock. (See below for more Spanish connections in the etymology section.)

The Silures appear to have negotiated their surrender in 78CE rather than being conquered. There is no record of a punitive conquest at the close of hostilities by the Roman general Frontinus. As is well known the Romans liked to boast of conquests, and hold celebration events. None of that is mentioned.

It may be significant that before their Roman period archaeology shows the Silures already liked Roman luxuries like Italian wine and imported Roman ceramics. Trading for such luxury goods meant an already an established relationship with Romans or their subject peoples, involving negotiation skills. Further negotiations took place during the Silurian wars around Roman hostages. Perhaps these sustained relationships of negotiation helped build a final agreement.

After their surrender, the Silures took to Roman ways with renewed enthusiasm. They adopted a civil capital built in Roman style, separate to their garrison town: Venta Silurum (Caerwent). This was a sophisticated well developed town with forum, baths, temples, theatre, shops, and comfortable houses with mosaic artwork. While this speaks well of their sophistication, Tacitus describes in detail how it was deliberate Roman strategy to pacify conquered peoples by softening them with such luxuries. The more they competed to be snobbish pseudo Romans, and the more they adopted Roman urban and domestic habits, the less fiercely they felt the need to be not-Roman, and rebel.

Within a short period, the Silures were responsible for a significant part of the local administration of their province.

Ray Howell has identified their great fondness for the colour red on enamelled horse gear and personal jewellery. Red is an assertive colour, frequently associated with war, or warriors, and flamboyance. The Silures were accomplished chariot riders back in the Iron Age, which would imply horse breeding and road building. A mediaeval culture of horse breeding excellence in South Wales would suggest the Silures equestrian skills lived on. (See below for a possible horse goddess cult.)

A Roman fort was established at Caerleon, named Isca Silurum or Isca Augusta, after the river Wysg, or "isca" = water. The Second Augustan Legion was stationed there, with plentiful archaeological remains from the standard military buildings, including stables for cavalry. Further evidence of the Silures autonomy is that Caerleon was often vacated by the Legion to attend to matters elsewhere.

The Legion then withdrew by 300 CE although some civil Roman occupation continued until 380CE. This further supports the Silurian ability to negotiate authority and administer territory productively.

A local native god Ocelus was twinned with the Roman Mars, god of war. At Caerwent Ocelus appears on two inscriptions, each linking him to another god. One is Lenus, a Gaulish agricultural and healing deity. The inscription shows part of a goose; symbolic to both Celts and Romans of war. The Roman Mars was also an agricultural deity in his earlier forms. The second partner god is Vellaunus, who is also recorded among the Gaulish Allobriges tribe, but closer to home as the chief god of the Catuvellauni. That would suggest a connection at least as far back as the Caratacan alliance period.

The interpretatio Romanus propaganda crudely paired Celtic with Roman gods. Mars would be an obvious choice for a legionary fort. Mars' early farming identity has been noted already which fits the surrounding rich lands. Ocelus quite likely relates to agriculture and healing as well via the cognate Celtiberian Ocaere in Portugal. Ocaere is linked to the farmer's harrow, which cuts the earth to aerate it, an act of violence skin to war, to make it fertile. Such a double sided concept can easily ally

with war and healing. Healing is naturally a vital concern for soldiers coping with injuries cf. also the healing Nodens temple not far away at Lydney.

Interestingly this 4thC Lydney temple did not centre for once on a Roman partner god but a native Celtic, possibly Silurian tradition of Nudd/ Nodens/ Lludd. That may yet again indicate how strongly the Silures preserved their autonomy.

The Goddess of Gwent?

There is an intriguing small goddess type figure, a few inches high, made of local sandstone, found in 1907 a few feet away from the remains of the Roman temple in Caerleon. She sits upright in a high backed chair apparently wearing a hood, both stance and gear which suggest authority as mature matron or Mother. She is not wearing a long robe as her legs can be seen. Either her tunic is short, or she wears treads; nakedness would be odd with a hood and in an otherwise motherly/ queenly figure.



In her left hand is a sphere, in her right a plant sprig. The sphere or orb is a standard sovereignty symbol still used by British sovereigns today. The sprig is a standard sign of renewal or fertility, and a possible precursor of the sceptre. Both accord with Celtic goddess traditions of sovereignty transmission, and fertility/ abundance, as female domains. The placing of her hands is also suggestive of authority or sovereignty of pharaonic poses with hands tight against the chest holding symbols of rulership.

She is at one with her throne, as if emerging from it. That unity and solidity is a clear image of sovereignty, as if she herself is the throne which represents authority. In some sovereignty images a king or pharaoh is seen on the lap of the Goddess, like her child: she is his authorising throne. Her stiffly regal style of seating is also suggestive of the Matrones (the Mothers); and Epona too, cults both found in Gaul and Continental Europe.

Epona is a horse goddess yet she is frequently seen sitting stiffly upright sidesaddle, oddly not as if riding, but as if on a throne very like this lady. Epona is mainly a Continental deity with not many signs of her presence here in Britain. But she did become recognised in Rome itself. Her (possibly) Dec. 18 feast was listed in the Roman calendar, so widespread was her veneration.

Perhaps this was because as a horse goddess she was beloved of Roman cavalry and auxiliary cavalry, the vital guardians of the Empire's boundaries. A horseman's mounts meant survival in battle, and career status success. They would have been routinely present at Isca where there are numerous archaeological finds of their horse equipment, and the remains of stables. The Silures as noted above had a long established equestrian tradition in the surrounding region, which seems to have flourished well into the mediaeval period.

This figurine may therefore just possibly be Epona herself, carved by a cavalryman when he was posted here, using local sandstone. Or perhaps carved by a Silures craftsman or woman, from civilian Caerwent, and then placed in the Isca/ Caerleon temple. Whoever crafted her she was perceived as precious. She was deliberately buried in the late 3rdC, in a pit 13ft deep, indicating a serious desire to protect her. Was this just before the Legion left? The lady is now in the keeping of Newport Museum.

Caerwent shows signs of continuing as a religious centre after the Roman withdrawal in the late 3rdC. Nearby is the ancient forest of Gwent-ys-Coed, with tumuli and magical associations in Y Mabinogi. There is also Grey Hill which overlooks the Severn estuary with long views, having the remains of a stone circle at the top, and surrounded with suggestive mythic place names.

Not far away up the Severn is Lydney (cf. Ludd, Llew) with a Roman period temple built on a mound, to the healing god Nodens. This has healing and underworld (Annwn) associations. Back in Caerent was a fine mosaic floor with four quartered seasons, and an Orpheus (underworld) theme. Ray Howell suggests it was likely that the Silures also venerated a wild cat deity! All together there does seem to have been a powerful and enduring religious complex in the region.

The etymology of 'Silures' is undecided but suggestive. A strong derivation would be the Common Celtic root "silo- " seed. Other words derived from this root mean lineage, bloodline, descendants, or vegetable seed stock. That would make good sense as a tribal name, invoking close blood bonds and fertile abundance. Another source could be the river Sil in Galicia, northwest Spain. This area holds strong claims to Celtic ancestry. The tribes of that region were either immigrants from or much influenced by Iron Age Celtic cultures, both Hallstatt and La Tene stages. If the Silures emigrated from Galicia to South Wales in the Iron Age period it would fit neatly with Tacitus' account of the Silures' provenance, and the local physical type still evident today as described by him.

Close to the Sil river in Galicia is a region and town called Lugo, deriving from the Celtic god Ludd, or Llew, as found in the name Lydney upriver from the Silures Welsh capital. A tribe naming itself by their river back in Galicia would be skilled boat people, and the Galician coast also offered good trading country with many inlets. Going further afield to the north if they survived the Biscay crossing, such a tribe would end up either on the inhospitable Cornish coast, or in South Wales.

Galicia was savagely conquered by Rome in 45 BCE. It is plausible that an enterprising tribe left rather than accept Roman domination (though they might have left earlier). If the Galician defeat did mark their emigration, then 93 years later their tribal memory of the Romans via hero storytelling, would have stood them well when they had to face the same military might again in their new homeland. This time however they wrested a successful outcome.

Venta Silurum (Caerwent) the Silures' city, remained occupied until c. 450 CE. New kingdoms then emerged in the mediaeval period, based on old tribal loyalties. In this area a persistent kingdom of Gwent (derived from Venta Silures) existed with only a very few years disruption, right up to the Norman conquest here in 1091. The rebellious local character continued to demonstrate vigorously until 1217. After that the English had to build more castles here to control the area than anywhere else in Wales, and castle density is among the highest in Britain as a whole. Modern history also attests a fiercely independent spirit in its politics.

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Shan Morgain

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A World of Druids: Interviews with Druids & Celtic Inspired Pagans

Welcome to our ongoing series of interviews with people from the Druid and Celtic-inspired Pagan community which we hope will provide us with an insight into the issues that are important to us all.

Interview with J Craig Melia

Born in the North West of England, Craig has always identified with the hardy, earthy, northern spirit that is inherent amongst the local population. Those beliefs are ingrained within the landscape, both outer and inner. Although many far-flung places hold great appeal to him it is the majesty of the mountains of North Wales and Cumbria, the tree-lined valleys of the north, and the rolling hills of the moors that call him home. Craig now lives in the Pennine region of Yorkshire.

What was your introduction to Druidism? What led you here?

From as early as I can remember my view of the world was slightly away from what could be described as “the norm”, that “reality” was more than the sum of what our basic senses dictated to us. Before reaching my teens I was reading books by authors such as Anne Ross, Stuart Piggott and many others who all gave me a glimpse into a world that seems both alien to all around me but also strangely familiar.

Like others I would later on find myself in touch with other likeminded folk and groups, many of which weren't quite to my taste, until in the early 1990s I came across a small discussion group – The Albion Conclave. Their goals of taking druidry back to its source spoke to me as did their “dirt under the nails” approach.

How does your faith and beliefs affect your daily life?

Faith to me is something personal to you. I share beliefs with many people but my relationship with the sacred and with divinity is wrapped up within my own journey of growth and discovery. Awareness of where I am within the landscape and the spirits of the place are always a part of my life, even when events push them into a background noise. Faith is the glue that holds us together.

Many hold a romanticized vision of the Celts and Druids and their beliefs and practices. How important is maintaining authentic tradition to you?

I recall a quote by Stuart Piggott condemning bodies of self-styled Druids as representing “the fag-end of the myth”, photos of people dressed in white whilst donning false beards, modern Druid groups rehashing Masonic ritual. Truth is supposedly a basic tenet within Druidism, which begins with the truth of our beliefs and honesty in not making false claims about them.

What role do you see for modern day Druids?

This is a difficult one, given that so many groups have differing views on the matter.

I cannot easily answer this one... to do so would require me to distinguish between those I regard as authentic Druids and those I do not. At best, I would say to maintain, develop and make accessible a body of lore that relates spiritual life and the natural world within the context of contemporary society.

Are you involved in any Interfaith work and how important to do you think that working together with others on common goals is?

I have from time to time had involvement with Interfaith work and do place a high value on anything that helps to break down prejudice between differing belief systems.

What virtues from Druidism would you most like to see the world adopt?

Be excellent.

How important is it that modern Druidism is "seen" in the world?

Returning to the Interfaith question I would say that normal people practicing their beliefs should be accepted by all, having Druidism "seen" isn't massively important to me outside of that context. I'm glad that Druidism isn't a belief system that actively focuses on hard proselytism. Image is important in whatever we do and however we present ourselves. The media likes to focus on weirdos in bedsheets and those with alternative lifestyles as it is more interesting than people who work in offices and take their beliefs into "the modern world". If Druidism is "seen" in the world it needs to be more than the fantasy roleplay that some of the media take it for.

Where do you think that Druidism is heading, what is your vision of the future for Druids?

Again, a difficult question.....my vision for the future for Druidism might not be where I think the movement is heading. Technology, particularly the internet, continues to open up new ways to share information but also changes a lot of the dynamics surrounding communications.

What message would you most like to send to those who share your pathway worldwide?

Focus less on matters surrounding our own egos and more on what will benefit the community and the world as a whole.

Recipes for Lughnasadh

Bread Pudding

- 7 slices bread
- 1 qt milk
- 3 eggs, beaten
- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ tsp salt
- ½ cup blackberries (or blueberries, strawberries, raspberries etc.)
- 1 tsp vanilla
- butter softened to room temperature

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Butter a 2 quart baking dish. Spread each slice of bread with butter and line the bottom and sides of the baking dish with bread, butter side out. Mix the milk, eggs, sugar, salt, berries and vanilla together and pour over the bread. Place any extra bread slices on top and press down until submerged. Let stand for 10 minutes (longer if the bread is very dry). Bake covered for 30 minutes then uncover and bake for 30 minutes more. For a brown upper crust slip under the broiler for a few minutes. Serve warm with heavy cream.

Bannock or Oatcake

- 2/3 cup coarsely ground oats
- 2 tsp. melted butter or lard
- 1 pinch baking soda
- 1 pinch salt
- a handful of ground oats for kneading
- ¼ cup hot water

Combine in a bowl and stir together the oats, salt and soda. Make a well in the centre of the bowl with your fist. Pour in the melted shortening and water and stir until a stiff batter forms. Cover a board with ground oats and empty the batter onto the board. Cover your hands with oats and knead the batter into a ball. Roll out to ¼ inch thickness with a rolling pin. Sprinkle with ground oats and cook on a griddle or flat surface until the edges are curled and slightly toasted.