PAGANS
OF THE NORTH

ISSUE 29

Editors Letter

Hello,

Finally, it's Samhain. This holiday holds so much cultural richness, its roots going back thousands of years, and fragments have floated through time with each generation. It has travelled oceans and skies and adapted and grown and came back to its original lands, with some differences, new names for older traditions and yet somehow it has survived history and now modern Pagans and Witches are reviving the old name of Samhain and breathing new life into it's much older and faded traditions and customs.

This issue will be our last digital issue before our PRINTED Winter Annual! We are very excited and pre-orders will be open very soon! This issue though, we look at Yorkshire in our Ancient Cities/Ancient Stories, we have Magical Mugwort in our Witches Corner, we interview Emma Swailes, the Friendly Green Witch and all her exciting endeavours plus another Witching With Kids article! Plus loads more.

We hope you enjoy and have a magical Samhain and Halloween!

Quinn x

PAGANS OF THE NORTH

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Trader Of The *Month*

We chatted with Emma Swailes, our recent team member, and 'The Friendly Green Witch'. She tells us all about her experience over the years selling witchy items such as Tarot and even starting her Podcast The Bell Witch Podcast!

POTN: Can you please tell us about The Friendly Green Witch?

The Friendly Green Witch started off as a modest side hustle on Depop back in lockdown times called 'Clothes and Curios'. As many of us did back then, stuck indoors, we looked around our houses at all of our surplus stuff and slapped it online! People were doing a lot of online buying and my witchy stuff sold well. I realised how much I loved buying and selling tarot, oracle and altar goods so I began sourcing stuff from car boots, to charity shops and the tip before they chucked it in. I even dipped my toes into the world of wholesale, however, I have loved saving stuff from landfill. I seemed to have a knack for picking the witchy stock to sell, and a lot of it was stuff from my teenage years that I grew up with. I was brought up with a tarot-reading psychic mum who had a vast collection of spiritual tools, so I knew the vintage decks. I put a large emphasis on supplying authentic decks as there are so many Wish fakes around these days (it really bugs me). This became my shop's unique selling point.

The shop did well for a good 3 years and I was able to invest money in magical things such as getting my Reiki level 1 and 2, and buying a bell tent to go camping at pagan events with my young daughters. I met so many lovely people who invited me to amazing events and my witchy ideas grew. However, I was still focused on my online shop.

I was clueless when it came to what I wanted to achieve regarding my career and I flirted with the idea of being a professional tarot reader for a bit. In October 2022, I began The Artist's Way by Julia Camron with an online tarot community called Cult Mother Tarot. I had little expectations about the 12-week program but it ended up being a massive turning point for the Friendly Green Witch. I began a Podcast called The Bell Witch Podcast and wrote daily poetry which has since been published! The Artist's Way has helped me to be generally open to opportunities coming my way and I am so much more fluid in my plans. I worry a lot less too. I now work in a crystal healing shop in Yeadon called The Crystal Booth every Tuesday, offering Reiki and stocking magical supplies and divination decks. It's a great place with a warm vibe and a lovely team.
The Friendly Green Witch has grown and become an umbrella business that I offer a range of services under, such as healing, custom magic, and sigil services as well as my online shop. On reflection, I realise that 2020 was a big year for many businesses, as we had room for new direction, reflection and things we never would have discovered if we had carried on living our busy lives. The Friendly Green Witch has become so much bigger than a Depop side hustle!

How would you describe your Pagan or Witch path?

It's all over the place! I am a Wiccan for sure. I believe in karma and harming none because that's how I was nurtured. My Nan brought me up till I was 11. She was such a Wiccan and didn't know it! I love plants, nature, growing food and looking after the earth so I call myself a Green Witch. I suck at cooking so I cannot be a Kitchen Witch! I am solitary and eclectic because nothing is stagnant in life, is it? I do rent-a-coven style rituals with fellow witches but I am not able to join a hard-core coven because Mum life is the most important role for us right now and regularly takes over my witchy life. In general, my witch life ebbs and flows and sometimes I don't get any magic done for weeks and months. But that's ok if I am true to myself and doing the best I can.

What has been the highlight of the Friendly Green Witch?

It has got to be The Bell Witch Podcast. I love podcasting. I can't believe it's something I can do. I have learnt lots and fast since starting in March, getting all the books out from the library and listening to podcasts on how to podcast! I am very proud of this achievement. Almost a year ago, I was wondering how to get more traffic to my Depop shop and one of the things suggested online was to do a podcast as it's all the rage right now. I was listening to one that was not witchy at all called 'Single, Fat and 40' - it was an absolute blast! The co-hosts made me laugh so much and I started to think 'Oh, how fun would it be to do one?' I was right in the middle of The Artist's Way and a new way of thinking, and ended up at 'Well, why not?' Let's give it a go! It was daunting, where to start!? I knew absolutely nothing. The thing about podcasting is it does wonders for one's internal development. You must listen to your voice repeatedly as you edit and then it actually becomes not so bad. I started to really listen to people, to their words, and realised how understanding is achieved. I found that my inner dialogue as well as outer dialogue improved tremendously. I started to be clearer and more self-assured. I began to communicate better. I like my broad Yorkshire accent, and people enjoy listening to the things I share! There is no money in it - YET - but I dream about what it could become. It is a true labour of love but it's an absolute joy to create.

What advice would you give to other Pagans beginning their journey?

Listen to your intuition and don't compare yourself. If you are drawn to it, the magic has been there all this time, dormant, and now it is growing like a seed in your soul. Read all the books from the library, eat up all the knowledge, and pick up what stands out to you. Investigate! Trust in the universe and it will deliver. I am sorry that I am sounding like a right woo guru right now but I believe there is so much worry about getting it 100% correct to be taken seriously as a proper pagan/witch that some get scared off. Comparing yourself to Instagram witchy aesthetics and feeling like you will never be that good is a dangerous hole you can fall into. I absolutely fall into it briefly from time to time. Be true to yourself, harm no one, and do your best. That's all you need. A tiny bit is better than none and the fact that you are drawn to this path speaks volumes.

What does the future hold for the Friendly Green Witch? Any Goals for 2024?

Oohh, what a question! I am always daydreaming, me. I would love to hold some kind of magical circle or perhaps an Artist's Way work group would be awesome. (It really is life changing.). I would love to attend pagan events and offer my witchy services from my tiny bell tent. I think about going mobile with Reiki too but something is holding me back. For the podcast, I am working on getting guest speakers in every month to keep it vibing and would love to be a guest on another podcast. Who knows, perhaps in the near future, it will explode, and I will make it big! Think Patron community, merch, and even a Bell Witch Festival!
Not in 2024 though!

How can we listen to your podcast?

The Bell Witch Podcast is available on all major platforms like Apple Podcast, Spotify and Amazon Music, as well as a few smaller ones.
It is also on YouTube in video form.

Find all the links at *https://linktr.ee/friendlygreenwitch*

Photography By: Beverley Thornton

Do You Really Need It?

By Louisa Chisholm-Kelly

"Have you heard of this book? Everything I'm seeing is telling me to buy it, but it's soooooooo expensive!" Uh oh.

"What's the book?"

The typing dots appear, disappear and reappear 3 times over.

"Folklore of Britain. It's £100 on eBay"

"Do you mean Folklore Myths and Legends of Britain? The Readers Digest one from the 70's?"

"Erm, it's new isn't it?"

"The one with the gold horned head on the cover? Nope! It's older than me!"

"Yes, that one. Do I need it? All the witches on IG and TikTok have it. They say it's the best."

I can't tell you how many times I've had that conversation over the years. The obscure and expensive book title is different every time, but the peer pressure and the rising cost is the same.

Fads and obsessions aren't just the territory of clothing brands and catwalks, they happen in all walks of life. The Pagan world is far from immune. Some fashions are easy to join in with, especially those that involve plentiful or cheap things. Others are much harder and involve sourcing rare, older or expensive items. Sometimes the items start off unpopular and/or cheap and the price skyrockets (erm, moldavite anyone?!). The darkest side of this trend is when a rare commodity gets obliterated, what is happening to wild white sage is the perfect example.

This season's obsession is a book; **Readers Digest Folklore Myths and Legends of Great Britain.**

It's currently selling on eBay for anything between £65 and £120, depending on the edition and the condition.

The big question is, of course, is it worth it?

Short answer; For that kind of money? ***No.***

Long answer; ***Yes***, if you stumble across one in a charity shop or at a boot sale, nab it. As a reference book, it's very useful. Especially if you use it to then go and do deeper research into a specific person, place or story. It touches on an awful lot. The book begins with a collection of myths and legends. Essentially a brief history of all things supernatural or non/early Christian. The bulk of the book is a collection of local stories separated by region and place. The last section features stories about people. A mix of royalty, saints and characters of infamy. It's interesting and fun, but it is a product of it's time. Many facts have been debunked or clarified in the years since it was first published in 1973. Our understanding of history has changed, as has our understanding of humanity

.

For me, it's worth having for the regional stories, but take the historical sections with a pinch of salt. If you want accurate history, you need Ronald Hutton!

A few years ago the fashionable must have book was at least easier to find, and much cheaper.

A Witches' Bible, by Janet and Stewart Farrar.

Now let's be clear, this book is about Wicca. Alexandrian Wicca mostly. If you want to learn about Wicca, it's a pretty good book to have. It's filled with rituals and spellwork, the wheel of year and more. When the book hit peak popularity on social media, it was touted as the be all and end all of Witchcraft books. Everyone was told to use it, stick to it and virtually learn it by heart. If that's your thing, great. If you're looking for information on other aspects of Witchcraft or Paganism however, you don't need it. In fact, you're better off ignoring it.

As with the previous book, we need to remember that it is a product of it's time. First published in 1981, it has been criticised for it's use of gender roles. Wicca as a whole has been quite rigid with it's gender roles in the past. As society becomes more inclusive, Wicca is too.

When I was a young and impressionable witch, and MySpace was the way to find each other (ok, I know, I'm old!), we were also subject to social media fads. I spent far longer than I'm willing to admit looking for a copy of the **Malleus Maleficarium.**

Everyone that was popular seemed to have one. Buffy, Charmed and The Craft were huge, the power and the persecution of witches seemed to be what everyone was talking about and that book was at the centre of it all. I don't believe any of the social media witches ever actually read it. It was just a prop for their jaunty angle and big hair profile pictures. I found a few copies, but could never afford the insane price tags they came with. A few years ago my husband found a folio copy from 1968. He bought it for a very cheap price, mostly because no one wants them any more.

It's a hard read, but as a slice of history it is morbidly fascinating. It was probably first printed in 1486, and was republished at least 29 times before 1669. Initially in German, it was also published in Italian, French and English. It was the book that served as the guide to hunting and persecuting witches. It was written by Jacob Sprenger and Henricus Institoris. Both men were Holy Inquisitors working for The Vatican. I won't go too far into what it is, I'm sure you have a good idea already, I'll just say that of all the books I've seen fall in to, and out of, fashion over the years this one is probably the most niche. While it is an important piece of our history as witches, it's not actually written about us. It's a book about what Christianity at the time thought the devil, and people that believed in him or worked with him, were doing. Pagan witches generally don't believe in the devil because he is created by Christianity, and we're not usually Christian. If the witch hunts are a piece of history you are interested in, then this book could be interesting to you. If it's not, or you don't feel the need to go into this much detail with your studies of it, then you really, really, don't need this book!

Phases come and go. Fashions come and go. If something you've seen on social media piques your interest, then seek it out. Don't ever feel you must do something, buy something, or read something just because everyone else is. Don't let the glitz of social media pressure you into spending silly money on something you don't need.

The joy in Paganism is that we are all individual, we all forge our own way and follow our own path. Sometimes others walk with or very near to us, sometimes they are parallel but walk at a distance. No matter what your path, or your interests, there is something out there for you...

...but if you see the Readers Digest book, flick though it and see if there is a story that hails from your home town. ***You don't need to buy it***, just look at it!

Deity Of The Month

By Quinn Green

Aos Sí

The Aos Sí are a fascinating part of Celtic folklore. They are believed to inhabit an invisible realm called "The Otherworld", or "Faeryland", that exists alongside our own or underground in fairy forts. Often seen as both helpful and mischievous, they are believed to have magical powers and can be seen in many traditional stories from around the British Isles. They are said to descend from the Tuatha Dé Danann, the deities of Ireland. They are frequently referred to as "The Good Neighbours", "The Fair Folk", or simply "The Folk" to avoid being named directly. Their name, Aos Sí, means "people of the mounds" and they are described as stunningly beautiful, although they can also be terrible and hideous

The Aos Sí are not like the popularised depiction of fairies in modern culture with delicate wings and glittering gowns. They are ethereal beings that come in various forms, ranging from tiny creatures to towering entities. Some common types of Aos Sí spirits include Banshees, Pookas, and Leprechauns, each with their unique characteristics and roles in Celtic culture. One such spirit is the Banshee. Often depicted as a female entity that wails or screams to foretell a death in a family, she appears as an old hag or a beautiful young woman depending on the context of the story. The Banshee is known for her mournful cry, which is said to be both chilling and haunting.

Another well-known Aos Sí spirit is the Pooka, a mischievous creature that can shape-shift into various forms. It is often portrayed as a horse, black in colour with fiery eyes. The Pooka is known to be both playful and unpredictable, leading unsuspecting travelers astray or causing mischief in the night. However, it can also be helpful, guiding lost souls to safety or warning of impending danger.

Aos Sí are known as strong protectors of their homes, which can be fairy hills, fairy rings, special trees (often hawthorns), specific lakes or forests. If someone intrudes on these spaces, the Aos Sí will retaliate to drive out the invaders. These stories often contribute to the changeling myth in European folklore, where the Aos Sí punish trespassers by kidnapping them or swapping their children with changelings.

Interacting with Aos Sí spirits was and still is an important aspect of traditional Celtic practices. People would leave offerings or gifts for them, hoping to gain their favour or protection. Rituals and customs associated with the Aos Sí spirits were often conducted during significant events such as harvest festivals or weddings.

Overall, in parts of Ireland, Scotland, and the diaspora, the practice of offering milk and traditional foods to the Aos Sí has continued from the Christian era to present day. Those who still believe in the Aos Sí also take care to preserve their sacred places and prevent damage from construction. Even plans for buildings or motorways have been diverted or built around significant places associated with the Aos Sí so as not to disturb or anger them.

The belief in Aos Sí is well woven into the heritage and culture of Celtic Traditions and has managed to survive to modern times, still playing a large part and influence on modern day Irish and Scottish Peoples.

The Image chosen is:
John Duncan's "Riders of the Sidhe" (1911).
Sídhe being the hills and mounds in which the Aos Sí inhabit.

Witches Corner

MAGIC MUGWORT

By Claire Louise from Hedge Witchery UK

I love mugwort, and my little craft stall is full of items i've made using it. Mugwort, also referred to as the moon goddess plant is native to the UK and grows in abundance. As always the information provided in this article are my own views on my path as a pagan Hedgewitch.

Mugwort has links to Artemis in Greek mythology and Diana in Roman mythology. Mugwort is considered by many as the sacred goddess herb full of feminine energy. It has been used by many to help treat different feminine related illnesses such as menstruation cramps & regulation, menopausal symptoms and much more. However mugwort should not be used during pregnancy or when breastfeeding because it can promote menstruation.

Other uses mugwort has been known to be used for are to treat stomach disorders, including stimulating the appetite, easing nausea or curing worms.

Historically it was known as traveller's or sailor's tobacco, and was often smoked in the place of tobacco. When smoked some say it brings on vivid/lucid dreams. It's smell when burned is not too different to another more commonly smoked weed for recreational purposes.

I've had so many discussions with my lovely customers about how it can be used in their craft. One of my favourite ways is to create cleansing burning bundles. That can be used to clear spaces of negative energies replacing them with beautiful gentle feminine energies.

To make one of my burning bundle wands I harvest my mugwort from the massive plant I have grown in my garden. Mugwort can be identified by the sunning silver moon colour on the back of it's deep green leaf. It's blossoms, also silver in colour before they bloom, are soft and fragrant. I cut the stalk at ground level and strip it of it's leaves. I keep the stalk as I use this for other crafts that I'll discuss later.

Once dry, I manipulate a bunch of the leaves and smaller branches to create a wand shape about 6 inches long and about 1 ½ inches wide. At this point I add in a few rose petals before wrapping with a natural yarn. I cut the ends with scissors to make straight edges which are easier to light. This is then ready to use. I light my bundles with a flame and blow this out before using the smoke to cleanse my area. I also use this smoke to cleanse my magical tools and crystals.

The stalks that are strong and sturdy when dry, I cut into 5 equal lengths. I then place these down on a flat surface in the shape of a protective pentagram. I secure this shape again with a natural yarn to make a lovely wall hanging ready to project goddess energy into a room of your choice.

Mugwort can also be used in magical teas, simmer pots, spell sachets/mojo bags, poppet dolls and loose incense.

One of my favourite magical teas I make with mugwort is my goddess tea. I found this tea very useful when struggling with unpredictable heavy periods. To make my goddess tea blend I shred and mix equal parts of the following:

Raspberry leaf
Ladies Mantle
Mugwort
Red rose petals

I add a teaspoon of this into my tea diffuser and add to boiling water this is also lovely with a teaspoon of local honey. I take a cup of this every other day.

I asked members of Hedge Witchery UK for some of their uses for mugwort too:

Flies don't like the smell, so it's a good idea to hang bunches in open windows - Ruth

You can stuff a pillow with it to aid lucid dreaming - Jessica

Mugwort and Oak Leaves were carried by travellers to help them stay safe. I carry them in a cotton pouch that is sewn up and keep it in my hiking jacket. It's been with me for several years now. When I moved onto my narrowboat I placed a sprig of mugwort and oak to the bow for safe journeying. - Katja

I'm making my own herbal tobacco blend and mugwort is a base herb. - Allison

The nine herbs charm is an interesting one for mugwort & flying ointments. Mermaids were said to give it to humans as a present. I've recently made besoms with it for its cleansing and powerfully protecting properties that draw in energy conductive to divination/spiritual workings. You can also pop it in your shoes when out hiking for achy feet. - Karen

I smoke it occasionally, in an old woman's pipe it's amazing. It was used in old times to protect villages, the woman herb. You can use it in your cooking like sage. Moon magic plant. - Rachel

My bestie! Full of flying power or a gentle soothing smoke. Tea, bath, oil, rub, all are mugwort's home of love. Tobacco, charm, food, and healing. Mugwort's skills are still revealing. - Lara

At *Pagans of the North* we love to hear about what you get up to in your own crafts. Why not join us over in the official facebook group and share your own mugwort crafts.

ANCIENT CITIES ANCIENT STORIES

Yorkshire

Yorkshire, including North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, East Riding of Yorkshire, and West Yorkshire, along with the city of York, is a culturally vibrant region in the North of England with a rich history. The area has been inhabited for thousands of years, starting with neolithic peoples who left behind monoliths and stone circles including the Thornborough Henges. Celtic tribes then took control of the land, marking their territories. The Romans later arrived, constructing roads and enforcing their laws, primarily along the Eastern coast.

After the Romans left, some Celtic tribes established Kingdoms in Hen Ogledd. However, the Angles eventually took over and established their own kingdoms, including Deira and Bernicia, which later merged to form the powerful Northumbria that spanned across the entire North of England. The Vikings then arrived, establishing Danelaw and claiming the City of York as their own. Throughout its history, Yorkshire has experienced a blend of cultures, growth, battles, love, death, and worship, which has contributed to the rich cultural heritage it has today.

The Celts had a number of tribal territories covering Yorkshire, including the Brigantes tribe that held most of the land reaching North towards modern day Scotland, and the Parisii that lived around the River Humber. The Brigantes were one of the largest and most powerful tribes in ancient Britain. They were known for their fierce resistance against Roman invasion and their strong influence in the region. They also had trade connections with other Celtic tribes and the Roman Empire, extending their influence beyond their own territories. Today, the Brigantes' legacy as a prominent Celtic tribe in England can still be seen in the region's history and culture.

The Romans first arrived in Yorkshire in 71 CE, and their presence left a lasting impact on the region. One of the most notable contributions of the Romans was the establishment of Eboracum, which later became the City of York. Eboracum served as a major military and administrative center for the Romans in Northern Britain.

The Romans built impressive structures in York, including the iconic city walls that are still standing today. These walls were constructed to protect the city and served as a symbol of Roman power and authority. In terms of culture and society, the Romans brought their customs, language, and legal system to Yorkshire. They established a civilian settlement outside the fortress walls, where local people interacted with Roman soldiers and traders. This cultural exchange had a profound impact on the local population, influencing their way of life and introducing new ideas and practices.

When The Vikings arrived in Yorkshire, much of North Eastern England had already been established into Kingdoms by The Angles, who had moved away from Paganism and converted to Christianity. The Angles had also begun building magnificent churches and places of worship.

The Viking influence in Yorkshire and the City of York was significant. Vikings, who were seafaring warriors from Scandinavia, invaded and settled in these areas during the 9th and 10th centuries.

Their presence left a lasting impact on the region's culture, language, and architecture. The Vikings established trading routes, introduced new farming techniques, and they loved the City of York so much they claimed it as their Capital, naming it Jorvik. They also created Danelaw, this was a legal system that was based on Viking law and customs, and it covered much of Northern and Eastern England. Under Danelaw, the Vikings were able to maintain a degree of autonomy and control over the areas they had settled in, and they were able to continue practicing their own customs and traditions.

Eventually after many battles for continued power, the Kingdom of Jorvik ceased to exist. The Kingdom of Wessex rose to power and asserted control over the North, including Yorkshire, which became part of Northumbria. When the Normans arrived in England in 1066, Harold Godwinson, an Anglo-Saxon King, had successfully defeated Norwegian King Harald Haradrada ending Viking reign in England. He sent his tired army down to Hastings to meet with William the Conqueror and well, you know how that ended! The Normans won, and that was the end of Anglo-Saxons and Vikings ruling in England.

Other Notable mentions:

Goodmanham, All Hallows Church
The All Hallows Church has an intriguing connection to pagan history. Legend has it that the church was constructed on the grounds of a pagan temple that was burned to the ground by a priest called Coifi in around 627 CE. King Edwin of Northumbria wanted to convert to Christianity and consulted his advisors and his high Priest Coifi. Coifi declared he would turn his back on his old ways, burn the temple down as a symbol of dedication to Christianity and convert the King. It is a story described by Bede as a significant turning point in History for Northern England, for this moment, in the shadow of a burning Pagan temple, was Christianity becoming the Religion of the North finally after so long.

Rudston Monolith
The Rudston Monolith in Yorkshire is a remarkable ancient standing stone that holds great historical and cultural significance. Located in the village of Rudston, East Yorkshire, this monolith is one of the tallest standing stones in Britain, standing at an impressive height of approximately 7.6 meters (25 feet). The monolith is believed to date back to the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, making it over 4,000 years old. It is thought to have been erected as a ceremonial or religious monument by the early inhabitants of the area. The stone is positioned in the churchyard of All Saints Church, which adds to its unique and intriguing nature. The stone is weathered and worn, bearing the marks of centuries of exposure to the elements. It's surface is covered in lichens and moss, adding to it's ancient and mystical aura.

SAMHAIN (SOW-WIN)

Samhain is an ancient Celtic holiday that dates back over 2,000 years. Celebrated in modern times on the 31st of October, but traditionally celebrated on the 1st of November, as the ancient Celtic people lived from sunset to sunset. So at Sunset on 31st October, a new day started and continued into the next day.

Samhain is a time for honouring the dead, the cycle of life, and preparing for the coming year. It is a time, alongside Autumn in general, for reflection and balance.

Pronounced Sow-In, this holiday is well loved by modern Pagans and Witches alike. It signifies the start of Winter drawing closer and closer for the ancient Celtic people, as they saw the seasons a little differently (Bealtaine being the start of Summer).

Many believe that during this time of the year, the veil between this world and the other world becomes the thinnest, and so it was believed on Samhain night the spirits of the spirit realm would walk the earth freely and so many rituals and practices were conducted to contact and honour them. Many people would also leave offerings such as food and drink outside their homes for spirits.

Bonfires would sometimes be lit to drive away evil spirits or offer protection, and people would dress in costume or disguise themselves as ghouls and spirits so malevolent spirits would be tricked and would not snatch them away to the other side. This tradition has survived into the modern traditions we practice today during Halloween.

Modern Times

Many modern day witches, and even Pagans, will use divination such as card reading and scrying, believing the energy is the strongest this time of year for such practices.

Additionally, altars can be decorated in autumnal themes, and have photos of loved ones who have passed away, candles and other items that may hold special significance to them. The Halloween that is celebrated today by people around the Western world, many in a more secular way, has it's roots in the ancient Celtic ways.

Creating what many call Jack-O-Lanterns, which is more of an American term, is credited with reviving customs and making Halloween popular again in modern society. People in Ireland, Wales and Scotland had been carving turnips for hundreds of years during this time to scare away evil spirits, or to trick them into leaving people alone. The custom travelled to the Americas, where they picked up pumpkins and used them instead. Eventually, the idea travelled back over to the rest of the World and now the Pumpkin is the most popular choice to carve on Halloween.

There's no denying that Halloween and Samhain have a deep connection to their past and a rich cultural tradition that has survived through generations. It may have changed a bit over time, but there's still enough for us to celebrate and bring back Samhain in our modern world as modern-day Pagans and Witches.

Witching With Kids

By Emma Swailes

Hello there Beautiful Souls. Spooky season is upon us at last! Samhain & Halloween, full moons and Friday the 13th- it's been a bumper October for us witches.

There is so much exciting change in this month, and with it a few scary traditions. Horror films, dressing up, scary storytelling, autumnal food, frost creeping in, last harvest. I love it all. October is full of gifts; nature displays a transformation to autumnal colours as it sheds her leaves preparing for her winter snooze. Life is slowing down. Pumpkins and spiderwebs all about, crispy leaves under your feet as you walk the forest. It's a grand change in the year and it is beautiful.

I have always liked to get my gothic spook on in October especially and having kids has only encouraged me to do more of it for Halloween. I own the spooky lifestyle throughout the year, being the pale and interesting witchy mum on the school run, in a big hat riding a broom... Well, it's a scooter but I pretend it's a broom, sshhhh! I wish Parkin was available all year round, and we have a skeleton called Frankie Bones, who serves at our Tiki bar all year round (yes, really) I don't exaggerate when I say it really is Halloween all year round in here. I realise our house is one of the weirder ones in the neighbourhood!

To celebrate Halloween we get the decorations down from the loft like we do at Christmas, usually in half term, the week before Halloween, and make a big spoopy mess.

Stickers on the window, blow up pumpkins and a skeleton hanging by his neck on the lamppost outside. I even go as far as tying a giant spider on the tree at the end of the road, which is a cul-de-sac, as otherwise the kids don't come up our street and I end up eating all the candy myself which is not good for this witch's waistline.

Sadly the kids don't venture up so much, mostly because there is only me and one other house on our street that want little ghosts to knock on our doors. I get envious of our neighbouring street which is an impressive Disneyland style 'avenue of horror' houses where all the kids go to have an eyeball and a haunt. ***Boo Hiss***. It's like a vacuum for trick or treaters!

When I take my two there and wonder at the houses converted into haunted mansions with zombie tea party scenes laid out to squirm at, I wish it were my street! However, where we live everyone else is mostly retired, goes out for the evening to avoid us or hides in the dark trying to ignore the constant knocking.

This does make me a bit sad. Then I remind myself not everyone is into Halloween. Even some witches and pagans find the whole thing quite offensive and distasteful, and I appreciate that.

October is a big month in the wheel of the year, Sabbats have been celebrated for centuries and it is so much deeper than what is commonly done to celebrate it today.

To me, Halloween and Samhain are very separate events. Halloween is a chance to find common ground with my kids, dress up and achieve great treats together as a family of Frankenstein's monsters. We can go to parties with eyeball cocktails and bob for apples. Doing the things, I used to do as a kid myself, it's wonderful. I know there is a historic progression of disguises and tricks throughout the centuries for Samhain/Halloween, but recent history has seen to it that Halloween is massively commercialised and one can be enchanted or repulsed by the skulls and ghost dust collectors appearing in Tk Maxx in early August, enabling folks to goth up their house all year round. A witch is for life and not just for Halloween! I dress my little ones up as cute witches on plastic brooms with rubber mice but please know we only visit the doors that are inviting us to. I am with them as they knock and wait and never do actual tricking! They are safe while having fun, and I am too! It appears Halloween has grown into a very different celebration organically.

Samhain is a lot more serious of course. I decorate an altar for my ancestors and family I love and miss, as I am sure most witches do, and I lay a space for a loved one and make offerings. I feel it's important that I talk to my girls about deceased family members in simpler terms, especially at this time of the year. As they grow up, I plan to include them more in the Samhain side of celebrations of life and death. Right now, however, they are young, and I worry about how much mortality I should talk to them about without adding to the realisation of how delicate a life is. My daughters know no one lasts forever; the living eventually die and it's the celebration of what has been that is an important part of Samhain.

Ultimately it's all about respect and understanding that some pagans find the whole Halloween tradition distasteful, as in many cases it's just an excuse to get up to no good, terrorising the town. That's why I believe both can be celebrated at this time of year by a pagan family like mine, as they have different messages to communicate. They both may happen on the same date and have very similar themes but totally different meanings and directives, both super important for my witchy parenting lifestyle. Or maybe I am just an aging adult with a desire to grip onto my younger self and connect with my kids through Halloween celebration, but it is quirky having our Frankie Bones eternally serving at our bar! Cheers Frankie!

Swailes x

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Poetry By Swailes

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Breathing in and out
To help humans grow
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Rings of the years they
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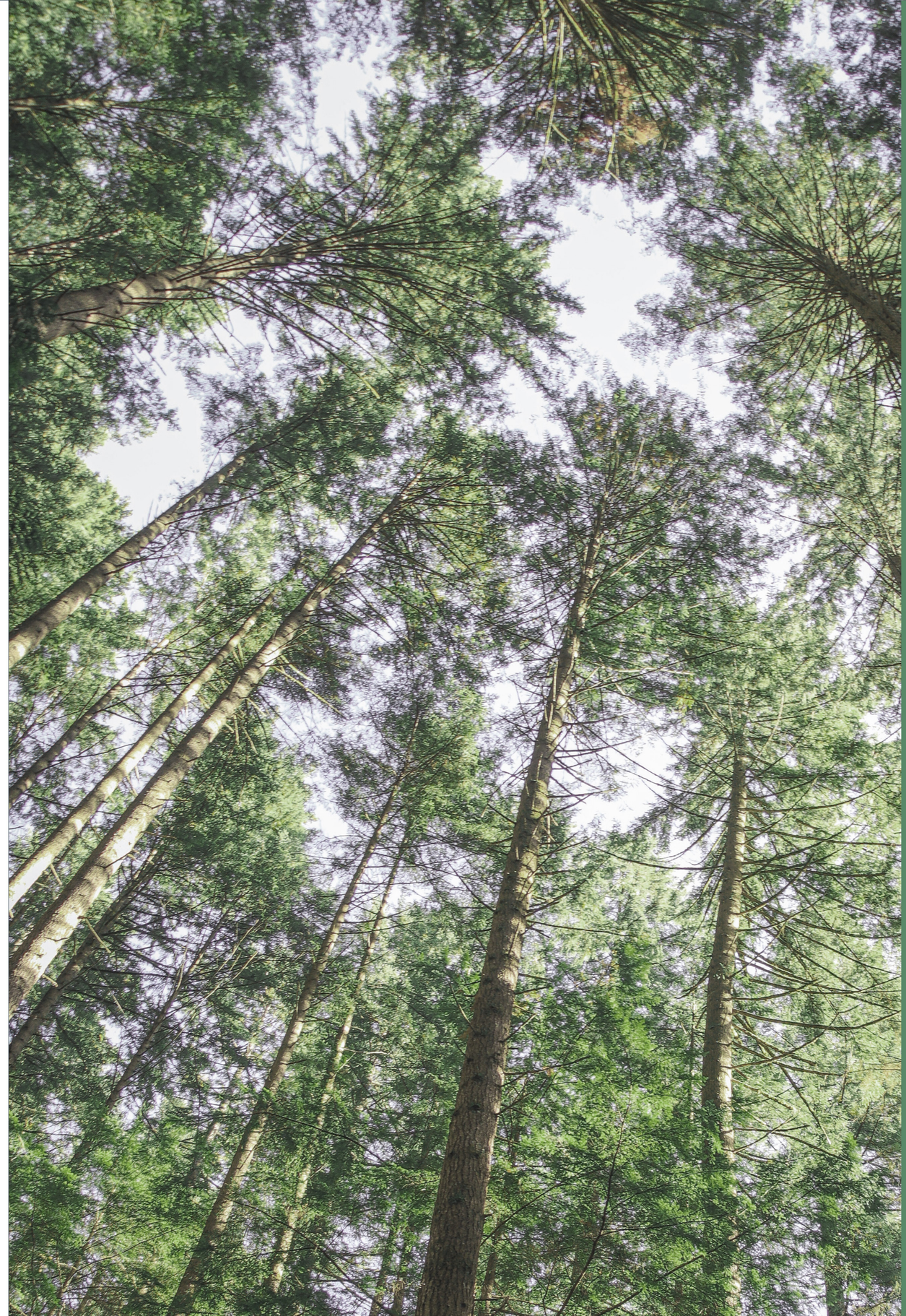

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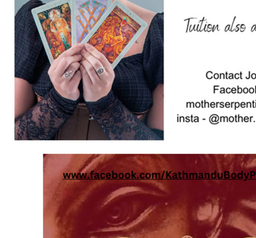

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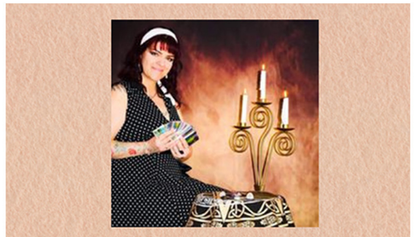

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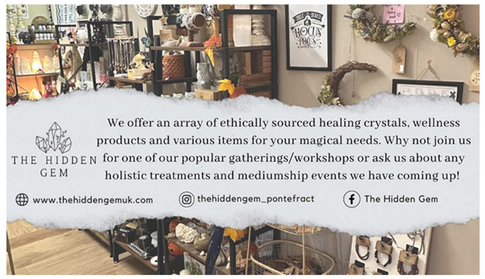

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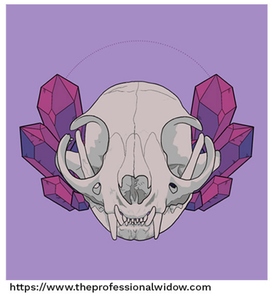

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