### PAGANS of the north

#### ISSUE 33



## Editors Letter

Bealtaine, also known as Beltane, is a delightful holiday that is celebrated worldwide today. However, its origins can be traced back to the ancient Celtic peoples who used to adorn their homes with flowers and light bonfires. Nowadays, Bealtaine is seen as a celebration of the vibrant arrival of spring and the anticipation of the upcoming summer.

In this edition, we delve into the ancient city of Chester, provide a guide on crafting incense sticks in Witches Corner, shed light on lesser-known deities from the northern and local regions and their historical significance, showcase poetry and story extract submissions, an interview with Sif Brookes, and discuss the charitable status of Pagan Federation.

We also take a closer look at the burial of the Saxon Princess in Loftus and reveal the shortlisted candidates for the Spotlight Awards. How exciting!

We hope that you find this issue enjoyable and wish you a delightful Bealtaine!

Quinn x

BOOK REVIEW - 5/6 DEITY OF THE MONTH - 7/8 WITCHES CORNER - 9/10 ANCIENT CITIES ANCIENT STORIES - 11/12 LEARN: BEALTAINE – 13/14 NORTHERN DEITIES – 15/16 PAGAN FEDERATION SUPPLIERS LIST - 33/38

TRADER OF THE MONTH -3/4PAGANS MOONSTRUCK POEM – 17/18 CHARITABLE STATUS - 19/20 THE SAXON PRINCESS - 21/22 INTERVIEW WITH SIF BROOKES - 23/26 WITCHING WITH KIDS - 27/28 POEMS AND STORY EXTRACTS - 29/30 THE SPOTLIGHT AWARDS SHORTLISTERS - 31/32

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**Quantum Energy He Crystals & Miner** Incense Sustainable Clot Face Yoga LED Light Thera Qi Beauty Faci: **Original Artwo** Meditation Tarot Cards, Candles & other Pagan G

30+ years in the busi Have a question? I'd lov

### Trader Of The Month **By Louise Bloomer**

In this edition, we spoke with Kerbi from EarthSpirit Healing Gardens in Stalybridge. I've been in their shop a few times and the couple who own are the most loving and giving couple to their customers I've met in a long time. The shop is a mix of Pagan goods, artwork and a healing centre and its vibe is relaxed and beautiful.

#### POTN: Tell us a bit about your business and how long you've been open?

Kerbad: We are nestled in the heart of Stalybridge. EarthSpirit Healing Gardens has been a beacon of tranquility and growth for over a decade. As a one-stop shop for all things spiritual, artistic, and rejuvenating, we invite you to embark on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment with us. When you step into our sanctuary, the fragrance of sage and lavender fills the air, and the gentle sound of wind chimes whisper ancient wisdom. For 11 years and counting, EarthSpirit Healing Gardens has been a labour of love, fueled by our unwavering dedication to serving our community and nurturing the growth of each individual who walks through our doors. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to share our passion with you and witness the beauty of your journey unfold.

#### POTN: What can people expect to find in the shop?

**Kerbad:** We sell spiritual Items like crystals, candles and incense, each imbued with the energy of the earth to support your spiritual journey. We run courses, so customers can dive deep into the realm of self-discovery with our array of workshops, books and resources aimed at empowering you to unlock your full potential. Sarah my wife is a therapist, called The Skin Wytch and offers luxurious facials tailored to your unique skin needs, using innovative techniques and premium skincare products to reveal your inner radiance. We offer Energy Healing too, where you can realign your body, mind, and spirit with our transformative energy healing sessions, designed to release blockages and restore harmony within. So whether you're seeking solace, inspiration, or transformation, EarthSpirit Healing Gardens is here to support you every step of the way. Come, immerse yourself in our oasis of healing and renewal, and discover the magic that awaits within.

**Kerbad:** Embracing my pagan roots, I draw inspiration from my Zoroastrian heritage while weaving in elements of Hindu, Norse, and various other beliefs. At the core of my spiritual journey lies a simple yet profound goal; to cultivate kindness, wisdom, and compassion, striving always to be a beacon of light in the world. My eclectic spiritual path influences the selection of items available in my shop. From Zoroastrian symbols to Hindu deities, Norse runes, and beyond, the products reflect the diverse spiritual traditions that resonate with me personally. Each item is chosen with care and intention, offering customers a glimpse into the rich tapestry of beliefs that inspire me on my journey.

**Kerbad:** Working closely with Sarah in the shop is a blessing that brings us even closer together. We share a deep connection not only as partners in life but also as collaborators in our shared passion for our business. Our complementary strengths and mutual support create a harmonious work environment where we can thrive both personally and professionally. Together, we navigate the challenges and celebrate the victories, knowing that we are stronger together than we could ever be apart.

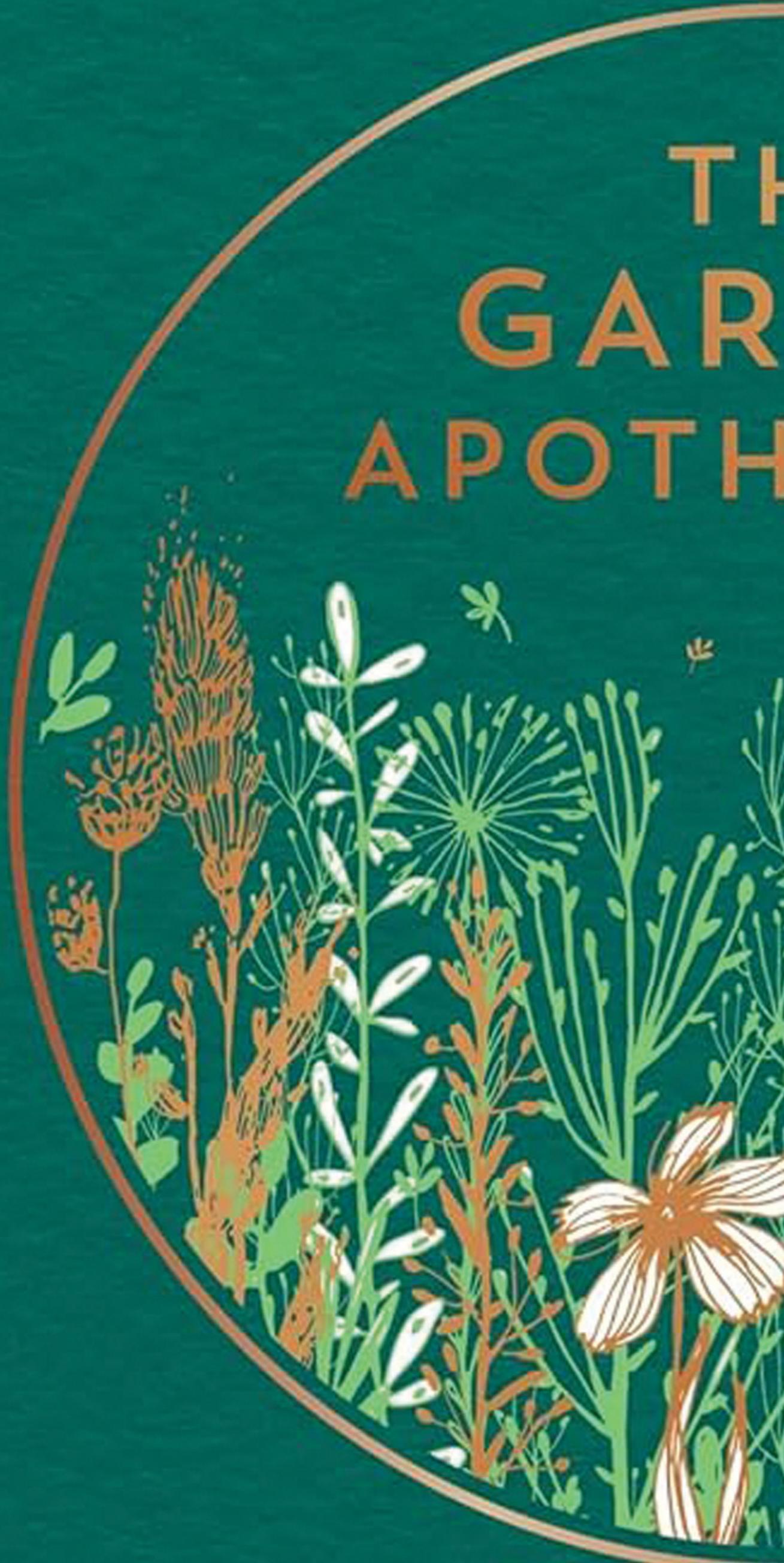
**Kerbad:** Creating art is a journey that transcends mere expression; it's a conduit for healing, drawing you into a realm where inner turmoil finds solace in strokes and colours. It's my sanctuary, my tether to sanity, for within its embrace, I find the freedom to release to liberate my soul through the canvas of imagination.

#### POTN: How would you best describe your Pagan path and does it have a bearing on your shop?

#### POTN: What's it like working so closely with your lovely wife Sarah?

#### POTN: I understand that you are an artist too, tell us about that?

Thank you for asking us to do this and if customers want to find us: 5 Stamford Street, Stalybridge, SK15 1JP via the website: www.earthspirithealinggardens.co.uk or on facebook at /earthspirithealinggarde



#### RECIPES, REMEDIES AND RITUALS

#### CHRISTINE IVERSON

author of the bestselling The Hedgerow Apothecary

# THE APOTHECARY

### BOOK REVIEW: The Garden Apothecary by Christine Iverson

Following on from ISSUE 31 and The Magical Apothecary book, I thought I would look at The Garden Apothecary, which is more suited to herbalism for health rather than magic, but still an ideal addition to any Pagan's bookcase. It's full of recipes, remedies and rituals and is very easy to follow, with lovely colour illustrations and all the plants are in alphabetical order.

If you have read the Hedgerow Apothecary or the Herbal Apothecary, you will recognise the author's name above and maybe be a little disappointed with this book as it does feel a little like old info written differently. A tad revived and a little samey. That said, if you are new to Christine Iverson's work, then the content is good and shows us how to work sustainably with the herbs and plants in our own gardens.

There are recipes for edibles, herbal cures and beauty treats and all with a folklore punch. The photos will help with identifying plants and the recipes are easy to follow which is always useful.

Like many of these books, it's great for going back to time and time again and as a hardback, it looks well placed on any bookcase in between times. So whether you want to make a mouthwash with rosemary from your garden, a cooling lemonade with red clover or enjoy a good night's sleep with cherry moon milk, you will find it all here. Plants included in the book range from Agrimony through to Viola, covering 38 in total which is a nice number to get you started. The book also has a table at the back which shows the healing properties of each plant, which makes it a perfect friend to anybody who is learning herbalism, but isn't fully versed with the plants yet.

#### **Reviewed by The Wiccan Lady**



A nice follow-up to last month's Artemis article, this issue we are talking about her twin brother, Apollo.

Apollo is an interesting Greek god, Apollo being only one of his many names. Epithets (alternative names) go far and wide for this deity and all are descriptive based on what he was being worshipped for in that instant. One of the most widely known ones is Phoebus, which translates to 'bright', linking him to being a sun god. As a sun god, he also went by Sol and Helios. The names Arcitenens, Paean, and Lycegenes denote archery, healing, and protection of sheep from wolves respectively.

As well as these characteristics, Apollo was also known as the god of distances/communicating over distance, poetry and music too. Often depicted carrying a golden bow and arrows, archery clearly ran in the family. Apollo is the son of Zeus, king of the gods, and Leto, daughter of titans and herself linked to wolves.

Homer wrote about Apollo in his Iliad, mainly keeping Apollo as a healer, and with the name Paean, the personification of a song sung by healers in order to cure. The tale of Apollo goes that he left his birthplace and slayed a serpent (some stories say this happened when he was a babe in his mother's arms!), then transformed into a dolphin and commandeered a ship to spread the word of his being a deity/prophet, forcing the existing crew to serve him, and turning them into his priests when they reached shore.

Apollo is known as 'the most Hellenic god', which isn't well explained anywhere, so maybe he was incredibly Greek in appearance, or just patriotic. One thing is for sure: Apollo was a twink. Beardless, hairless young man, the Greeks claimed he was the most beautiful god out there. Sadly, despite his gorgeous appearance, Apollo was unlucky in love. None of his suitors came to fruition and they had a tendency to run away and turn into trees (Daphne), or get shot by his twin (Coronis).

Another notch for Apollo's list of Godly Acts is inventing the lyre, firmly grounding himself as a god of music. Some stories say that when Leto gave birth to him, seven swans swam around the woman-turned-island she gave birth on, which was foreshadowing of Apollo inventing the seven-stringed instrument. Others say that immediately after birth he demanded and was given a lyre. His music healed people, linking back to his songs of healing and status as a healer deity. Back to swans, Zeus gave Apollo a chariot pulled by swans too, which were considered a very musical bird. Though his music eventually wrought peril - he had an ancient lyre playing version of a rap battle with Marsyus, a satyr known for his musical skills. Apollo won and flayed the satyr alive, then felt awful for what he had done and swore off music for a while.

Apollo had many, many temples built in his honour, some of which still stand today. He was worshipped with temples, sanctuaries, festivals and statues. People would have made offerings and sacrifices related to his characteristics. Apollo is still revered throughout Hellenism today.

## Deity Of The Month By Sam Stoker



### Witches Corner. HAND MADE INCENSE STICKS

By Claire Louise from Hedge Witchery UK

Welcome to another witches corner. In this issue, I'll be showing you how I make my own incense sticks. There are not many better ways to fill your home with mystic aromas than burning incense. Incense sticks really add to the ambience of a space and the glowing ember of a burning piece of incense can really help to invoke your magical energies.

The use of incense can be traced back to ancient Egypt; it is seen in wall art with images of incense being used by priests for ceremonies. Egyptian graves were also discovered containing resins such as frankincense and myrrh. It is believed that Egyptians used incense to remove demons and as an offering to their gods during rituals.

As always please be reminded that the information in this article is from my own craft. Some, all or none of this may apply to your own path and individual beliefs. With that in mind let's begin.

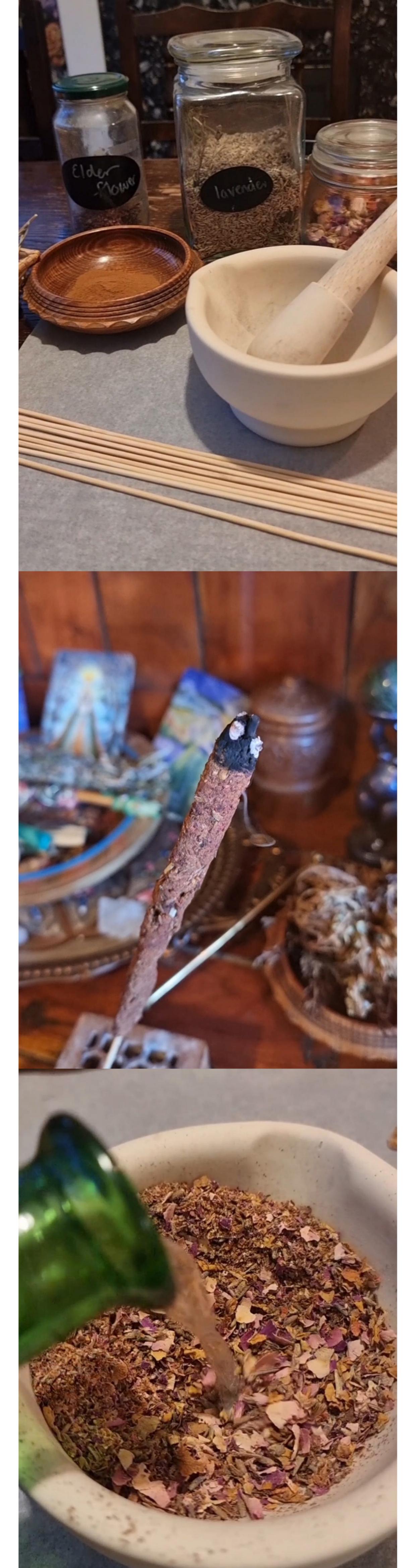
Incense sticks can be used in a variety of ways in your craft. I use mine for cleansing spaces and individuals, setting intentions, cleansing altar and divination tools or even amplifying my spell and ritual work. This is useful as when making my own incense I can incorporate the flowers, herbs and plants that best correspond with my intentions.

grow many of my own magical ingredients in my garden such as flowers, herbs and other plants. I feel this adds an extra level to my magical workings as my ingredients are filled with my own magical energy from tending and nurturing the plants as they grow. However, if this is not the case for you, you can easily source the ingredients by foraging or purchasing from a trusted supplier. If using fresh herbs they need to be fully dried out before using them in this craft.

For the example in this article, I'm making all purpose incense sticks. I've chosen the following ingredients:

> Black Lace Elder blossom - Protection and healing Peony - Invoking the goddess and counteracting bad energies Rose - Love and manifestation Rosemary - Removing negative energy and strength Green Garden Sage - Cleansing Cinnamon - magical booster

I intuitively selected the amount but as a guide, I'd say I added about a tablespoon of each apart from the cinnamon which was a teaspoon as I didn't want it to overpower the other ingredients. It's important when selecting ingredients for this project you use ones that are safe to burn and do not release harmful toxins when lit.



You will also need some wooden skewers, a teaspoon of plain flour and water. I used moon water from the last full moon. You can also add a few drops of incense oil to enhance the aromas of your incense.

Using a pestle and mortar I ground down the plants to the consistency of shop bought herbs. To this mixture I added the flour and then the water a bit at a time until it formed a smooth paste. It's important not to add too much water as you will struggle to form the sticks,

I then gently spooned the mixture onto baking parchment in a 1-2cm thick row. At this point, I placed a wooden skewer on the top of the row of mixture. Using my fingers gently formed the mixture around the skewer before wrapping the parchment around. The next part is tricky as using the baking parchment you need to roll the mixture around the skewer. Apply a little pressure so the herb mixture doesn't fall off but wraps evenly and securely around the stick.

If you're struggling at this point try adding a splash of water to your mixture or a dusting of flour until it's bindable to the stick. It's really a task of experimentation. It took me a while to perfect my mixture.

Once you're happy with the look of your stick and the wood is fully covered, leave to dry for about a week on a sunny windowsill. When your sticks are completely dry they are ready to light. They should light the same way as a shop bought incense but I found my sticks needed relighting now and again where the mixture wasn't quite sealed around the stick.

The great thing about making your own incense is you can customise them to your own intentions. For example, if I was making incense for prosperity and abundance I could use mint, cinnamon and lemon balm. For peace and study, I could use lavender, rosemary and sage.

If you make your own incense sticks we would love to see photos. Feel free to join the community online in your Facebook page and post your incense stick photos.

Until next time

Claire Hedge Witchery UK

Łukasz Nurczyński - Own work -Recreation of Deva Victrix Found on Wikipedia



### ANCIENT CITIES ANCIENT STORIES CHESTER

Chester, a city with a long and fascinating history, has been a part of British history for nearly two thousand years. The land was occupied by Celtic tribes such as the Cornovii who had settled in England along the border of Modern day Wales.

Archaeologists discovered the tombstone of a woman named Vedica, who belonged to the Cornovii tribe. The tombstone was found at Ilkley, a location outside the known territory of the Cornovii. The inscription on the tombstone, written in Latin, reads "DIS MANIBVS VEDIC [...] RICONIS FILIA ANNORVM XXX C CORNOVIA H S E," which translates to "To the spirits of the departed and to Vedica, thirty years old, daughter of Virico of the Cornovii; she *lies here."* This is the only piece of evidence that suggests civilian occupation at Ilkley during the Roman period. Vedica might have been the daughter of a chieftain named "Viroco" of the Cornovii, who was killed during the western expansion of early 47 CE, commanded by Publius Ostorius Scapula.

In the 70s CE, the Roman Empire established a fort named Deva Vitrix, which was later developed into the Fortress Deva Victrix, now known as Chester. The city's name, Deva, was derived from the goddess of the Dee River, while *"victrix"* was taken from the title of the Legio XX Valeria Victrix, a Roman legion stationed at Deva. As the Roman fortress grew, a civilian settlement emerged around it. Interestingly, the Chester fortress was larger than other fortresses in Britannia, suggesting that it may have been intended to become the province's capital instead of London.

The city also boasted a remarkable military amphitheatre, capable of accommodating between 8,000 and 10,000 people, making it the largest known amphitheatre of its kind in Britain. There was also a shrine to Minerva, and is the only rock-cut Roman shrine still in situ in Britain. Minerva's Shrine, located in Edgar's Field, Handbridge, Chester, England, is a Grade I listed building and dates back to the early 2nd century. The shrine, carved into a sandstone quarry, is surrounded by a 19th-century stone structure with a hood that was restored in the late 20th century.

Adjacent to the shrine is Edgar's Cave, a rock opening that may have started as a natural crevice and was later expanded. The shrine's location next to the ancient Roman road leading to the Deva fortress from the south highlights its historical significance. Minerva, the goddess of war, knowledge, and craftsmanship, is typically depicted with her armour and weapons, but at this shrine, she is portrayed in a simpler form, standing in what resembles a temple.

While the Romans eventually withdrew from Britain in 410, the civilian settlement in Chester continued to thrive. Although the army had left the fortress, the inhabitants of Chester likely utilised its defences to protect themselves from raiders in the Irish Sea. The Anglo-Saxons adopted the native name as the calque Legeceaster, which over time was shortened to Ceaster and finally to Chester. The Anglo-Saxons eventually converted to Christianity and built the churches and cathedrals that can still be seen today in Chester.



Beltane (Anglican spelling), or Bealtaine (Irish), Bealltainn (Scots Gaelic) and Boaltinn (Manx) is a Gaelic May Day festival celebrated on May 1st. The Welsh equivalent to this festival is called Calaan Mai. This festival marks the start of summer for Celtic people at sunset. It is mentioned in early Irish literature and has great importance in Irish lore. Cattle were driven out to the summer pastures and large bonfires would be started to protect the cattle, crops and people.

The Celtic people felt the flames, ash and smoke of the bonfire would hold protective powers, and so people would walk around or between the fire, sometimes even leaping over the flames.

There would be feasts, and food would be offered to the aos si (faeries or elves in Celtic lore), homes, such as windows and doors would be decorated in flowers, especially the colour yellow. The colour was perhaps linked to the fires. In some places, 'May Bushes,' would be made, where thorn bushes would be decorated with flowers, ribbons and shells. Holy wells were also visited.

Another custom was to bake a cake and place it and a jug on the table in the home as it was believed that anyone who had died abroad would come to their ancestral home and that the dead would come back home to visit their family and friends. In some places such as Scotland, the dew of Beltane morning would be collected by a young maiden and she would wash her face with it to evoke ever-lasting beauty or youthfulness.

Over time, Bealtaine customs fell out of practice or evolved into other practices, though stories were collected and passed down and sometimes even written down by Folklorists in modern times. Some of these folklorists describe Beltane festivities, though not being as big and community-wide as they were hundreds of years ago, as still in some small way practised. They were clearly dying out though. In the 20th Century with the rise of Wicca and Neo-Paganism, Beltane was mentioned again and is now part of the popular 'Wheel Of The Year' and called a cross-quarter 'sabbat' (to Wiccans) or holiday. Fertility wasn't a large part of ancient Beltane customs but was made popular by Wicca, taking from Germanic/English May Day customs as well and mixing them together, including the maypole. Although now marriage seems to be a popular focus during Beltane, ancient traditions suggest marriage or birth during Beltane was believed to be ill-fated.

The concept of the maypole as something that is abundant during May Day is believed to have come from Germanic Europe and, although it may have possibly been pagan in origin, its true origins and meaning have been lost. This is the case with a lot of folklore customs and practices that are now a part of some Christian customs. So although there are many theories that can point to the maypole's significance in Paganism, we will never know for sure.

Thoughts: 'In colour theory, Beltane and the month of May to me is the colour purple, perhaps because of the bluebell woods I love to visit as well as the Lavender, Lilacs and Heather that grow and bloom in May. The ancient celts considered Beltane to be associated with yellow, as the etymology of the name of this festival links it to words meaning, 'Bright fire.' The name Latha Buidhe Bealltainn (Scottish) or Lá Buidhe Bealtaine (Irish), 'The bright or yellow day of Beltane', means 'The first of May.'

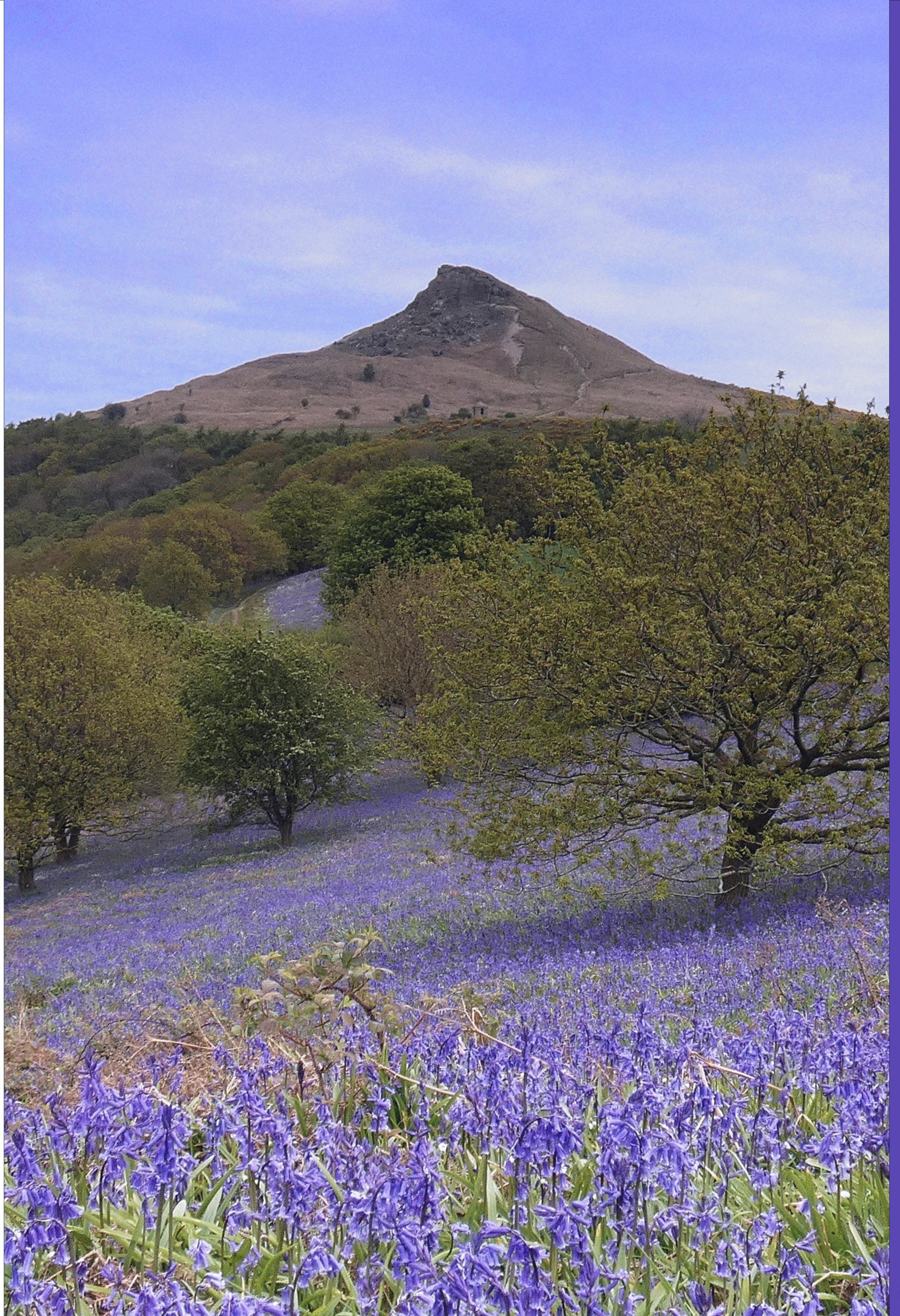
#### Things you can do to celebrate Bealtaine:

Decorate your home with flowers, much like our ancestors. You can buy daffodils and other beautiful flowers to decorate your home.

Light a bonfire, or even smaller, light candles!

Go out in nature and find signs of spring.

Have a feast!



RN: BEALTAINE 14



Moonstruck By Nicola Robinson

I feel the glow of the moon, on the nights she is bright and round Illuminating the dark areas, light shining, revealing feelings once drowned Sometimes Luna makes me feel alive, like anything is possible Other nights, she tests me, she agitates me, my temper is unstoppable

I find myself pointing at her, when my emotions overwhelm me She made me do it I say, it is her fault, like I am totally blame free This silvery woman is naughty, she impacts my emotions and my mood We both go through phases her and I, and our intentions can be misconstrued

This celestial body in the sky, we say goodnight to and wish upon She can help us change from an ugly duckling to a majestic swan A new moon heralds a fresh start, upon which we can build Then comes a full moon spell, and we patiently wait for it, to be fulfilled

I am here, at every phase, gazing up in awe of her beauty Worshipping her, adoring her like a star crazed loved up groupie. I don't always express the gratitude I feel, for her lighting up my way I do understand why the stars are close to her and why they always stay



You can find The Pagan Federation online at:

https://www.paganfed.org/ https://www.facebook.com/paganfederation



# PAGAN FEDERATION CHARITABLE STATUS

On Tuesday 16th April 2024, Sarah Kerr, president of The Pagan Federation, took to Facebook to announce some exciting news: The Pagan Federation has been awarded charitable status!

Over a quarter of a century in the making, this attainment has been down to the hard work of many dedicated Pagans, toiling diligently in order to meet the rules laid out by the Charity Commission here in the UK. The Charity Commission regulates charities in England and Wales and having that status acts as a badge of honour, allowing the public to place more and more trust in the work of The Pagan Federation, to know and understand that it is honourable and aims to teach and broaden understanding.

Here at Pagans of the North, we wanted to say a big congratulations to all the members of The Pagan Federation, past and present, who have worked to achieve this goal. We understand what huge news it is for them – and for Pagans across the UK – and how much of an impact this will have not only countrywide but also in our local areas.

Sarah wrote:

"I've got some fantastic news to share with you all. After over 25 years of effort and commitment from many PF volunteers, we have officially been granted charitable status.

This achievement marks a monumental milestone in our journey, one that holds profound significance for the entire Pagan community. For decades, we've worked hard to foster understanding, promote inclusivity, and celebrate the rich tapestry of Pagan traditions and beliefs. And now, with charitable status, we're poised to make an even greater impact than ever before.

But what does this mean for us, you ask? Well, let me break it down for you. Firstly, charitable status provides us with a solid foundation to expand our reach and amplify our voice. It opens doors to funding opportunities, which will allow us to support vital initiatives, events, and resources that benefit both Pagans and the wider community. Moreover, it grants us legitimacy and recognition on a broader scale, helping to lift our status within society and enhancing our ability to advocate for Pagan rights and representation. In a world where misconceptions and stereotypes often overshadow the truth about our beliefs, this legitimacy is invaluable.

But perhaps most importantly, charitable status signals a significant step forward in our ongoing quest for acceptance and understanding. By achieving this milestone, we're not only affirming the validity of Paganism as a legitimate faith but also challenging outdated perceptions and encouraging a culture of respect and tolerance.

So, to all our members, supporters, and allies, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude. Your dedication and support have helped to bring us to this moment, and together, we will continue to shape a brighter future for Pagans everywhere.

Here's to the next chapter in our journey—a chapter filled with boundless possibilities, endless opportunities, and, above all, a profound sense of unity and purpose."









# The Saxon Princess

This month I had the privilege of being able to visit an amazing exhibition at Kirkleatham Museum.

The exhibition was a true joy to visit, as it consisted of amazing artefacts that belonged to a Pagan Anglo-Saxon Princess. The artefacts were excavated at an archaeological project right here in the North East, in Loftus. Archaeologists have stated the site is that of an Anglo-Saxon community and burial ground.

The Princess's burial is said to be the richest Anglo-Saxon grave found in North East England and the items found at the burial site are unique to this area and extremely rare. The Items are beautifully made and have very intricate details. It was amazing to view these now and consider the pagan history of the local area.

It was discovered that the burial ground the princess was buried in was created shortly after 650 CE and was only used for a short period of about 30 years. Archaeologists are unsure why this is but surmise that more inhabitants of the Anglo-Saxon settlement may have started following the Christian religion after the Princess's Death.

It was around this time that St Hilda set up the Monastery at Whitby. Pagans of the settlement may have been under pressure to forget their pagan ways with no leadership from their princess. It is believed that as the pagan community died out so did their way of doing things. This does lead me to wonder that if the Anglo-Saxon princess did not die when she did, would the history of our local area and northern pagans have been different?

The Princess's grave contained many valuable treasures including three golden pendants, two glass beads, gold wire and part of a jet hairpin. The most stunning part of the discovery was a shield-shaped gold pendant decorated with 57 red gems. This find is unmatched by any other Anglo-Saxon archaeological discovery. The pendant's shape is said to have associations to Anglo Saxons of love, fertility and birth. Archaeologists surmise the inhabitant of the grave was female as all other similar Anglo-Saxon burials of this kind have been female.

One of the most unusual finds that are part of the exhibition at Kirkleatham Museum were the gold coins, they were made during the iron age and dated between 15 and 45 AD. They were over 600 years old when they were reused as jewellery by the princess and are thought to be unique in the Anglo-Saxon world.

I was particularly drawn to the beads that were part of the exhibition. They were bright in colour and of a mixture of shapes and sizes. It is said that in early Anglo-Saxon times, women would wear a necklace of up to 100 beads at a time.

The exhibition along with all its treasures includes parts of the bed the princess was buried in, parts of a short sword with a replica sword for comparison and many other items. It was also fun to see the replica anglo Anglo-Saxon House as part of the exhibition and a short explanatory video about the Saxon Princess and her community.

I highly recommend giving the exhibition a visit, as the museum is also home to an owl sanctuary and it's not every day you get to see the treasures of an Anglo-Saxon Princess.

By Claire Keen

# **INTERVIEW WITH:** SIF BROOKES



Not quite Trader of the Month, but we just had to run a feature on Sif Brookes. We've bent our northern rule for a change because Sif isn't \*technically\* northern, more midlands based, but she has just written a book with Dan Coultas from Yorkshire, so we're going with at least that is half northern! Sif volunteers for The Pagan Federation and Asatru UK amongst her personal projects and we're really excited to speak to her about her wealth of knowledge and new book.

#### POTN: Hey Sif! Thanks for speaking with us. Can you tell us a bit about you?

Sif: Heylo! My name is Sif and I'm a Reconstructive/Revivalist Norse Heathen. I'm obsessed with the Valkyries and Pre-Christian practices around death and burial, and all things liminal spaces – my current hyperfixation is on the boundary between civilised spaces and 'the wild'. It manifests in really fascinating ways in the archaeology and literature, and directly ties into the presentation of the Valkyries throughout their literary appearances.

I'm also on the Committee of Asatru UK and the Pagan Federation, and I'm the Social Media Co-Ordinator for Pagan Aid. I write a lot of things, and tend to pop up pretty much everywhere if it's a pagan space and they'll let me in. I was a founding host of the Heathen Wyrdos podcast, but left last year to pursue solo projects, including my work in progress YouTube channel, Valsif, where I discuss topics that ask questions of practitioners and get the brain thinking.

I'm an artist, author, editor and speaker, and often give talks about all of the aforementioned, alongside inclusive paganism and LGBTQIA+ advocacy within paganism. I'm a busy bee, and probably too online for my own good.

#### **POTN: How would you describe your** path? How has it influenced your work?

Sif: My path is heavily influenced by history – the archaeology, the literature, academic thought, but with a personal spin to consider my own experiences and what works for me. For instance, I'm well aware that many of the Gods that I worship were likely not worshipped during the Viking Age, but they are deities that I love with all my heart, and have helped me immeasurably in maturing as a person and as a Heathen equally.

eagerly seek out new information, which compliments my fascination with the early Medieval period. I'm hoping to pursue a Masters degree in the near future, with all of the tools and information I learn during that adventure feeding back into my praxis. There's a nice feedback loop that just feels very natural and fulfilling.

In terms of how it influences my work – heavily, in every aspect. From my writing, to my art, to my advocacy, to my day job amidst it all. I am strongly committed to social justice and building community. I've discovered that I get no greater pleasure than helping people to find 'home' and 'family', especially when it is so easy to feel isolated and distant in the modern world.

With a practice so focused around the ephemeral nature of life and the people around us, I've learned that the essence of community, the things that tie us together, the relationships we cultivate, and the memories we leave behind are really all we are, far outlasting our physical forms. That's come from my path, in the Heathen beliefs of frith, in enduring as ancestors, and in passing down parts of our pluralistic soul to whoever comes next. You need to make sure that you do something to make that element richer.

existential for that too а light-hearted interview? Maybe!

#### POTN: Your new book is out now! What's it about? Did you enjoy collaborating?

Sif: Yes! It's called The Wyrd Less Woven, an Alternative Heathen Prayer Book, and it's a prayer book for Nordic Heathens or those with a practice that involves Norse deities. The main aim of the book was to create something that was unambiguously inclusive and pro-LGBTQIA+, which is an issue in Heathen spaces and within Heathen materials. It's all too easy to stumble upon problematic literature that only works to push people away from a path that can be so fulfilling and empowering. We need more Heathens, not fewer.

The book also focuses on deities and beings that are, themselves, often 'othered' within pagan spaces – Loki, Hel, Skaði, Surtr, Jörmungandr, Fenrir and the Valkyries, for example. Many LGBTQIA+ pagans worship these figures, which can only emphasise the sense of being unwelcome that many groups.

LOVE collaborating. I love seeing how creativity can thrive and flourish in unexpected ways once you start to share ideas. Dan Coultas is, well, a genius and an absolute asset to Heathenry and Paganism in the UK. I've made no secret of how I was quietly fangirling in the background of the first meeting we ever had together (for the Pagan Federation). I consider him a mentor, and a guide, and just someone I look up to, and will look up to for the rest of my life. He'll hate that I said all of that, but it's absolutely true. I'm lucky and grateful to have met him and to consider him a true friend.

We worked seamlessly together, being on the same page from the very beginning of what we wanted the book to be, and I couldn't be happier with the end result. I'm hoping it makes people feel affirmed on the path and practice they follow. We always need more seats at the table, so to speak. Come join us, let's talk and celebrate the Gods!



#### **POTN:** Do you have any tips on those new to a Norse/Heathen path?

Sif: Do what feels right to you. There's a lot of noise out there in terms of strict rules and guidelines to follow, and you can follow those if you wish, or you can go the road less travelled. Don't be put off by Heathens, we can be a loud bunch, but you won't find a group of more loving and loyal people (in my experience, shout out to Asatru UK).

The Nordic Gods are multifaceted, and so, so varied. They challenge you, but always know your limits. Get stuck in, read what you want to read, talk to other Heathens, find the space that suits you, and just watch how you flourish. I'm also absolutely free to talk whenever, and totally open in my practice.

#### POTN: What's next for you? Any plans for 2024 and beyond?

Sif: My next book. Oh boy. It's about, you guessed it, the Valkyries, and it's called 'Valkyrjur: Servant or Master?'. It has a publisher attached, and now I've just got to finish the thing (I'm about 60,000 words in right now, and probably looking at 70,000 to finish). It's a thorough exploration of the Valkyries over the early Medieval period, tackling common misconceptions and really just doing a big deep dive into who they are, and how that image has changed over the Viking Age, into the conversion period, and beyond. I've got a few more ideas percolating in the background too, and once I've finished this book I'll move onto those.

Other than that, there's The Great Heathen Gathering Helsmoot in August, organised by Asatru UK, where I'll be leading a blot to the Valkyries. Should be a lot of fun!

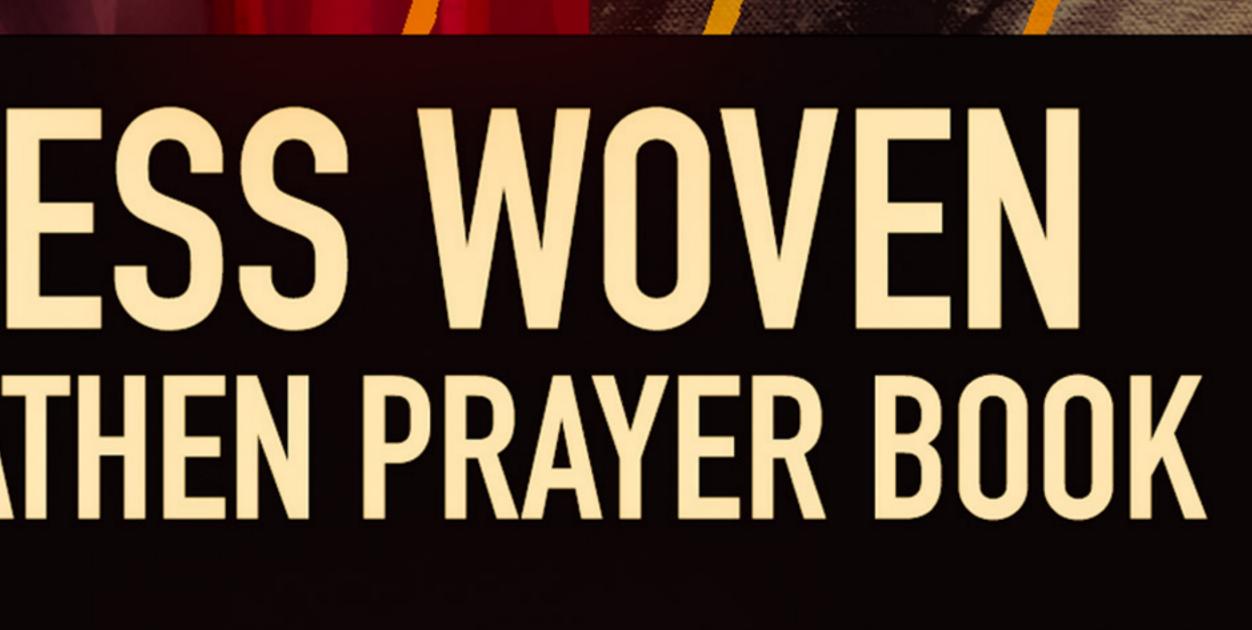
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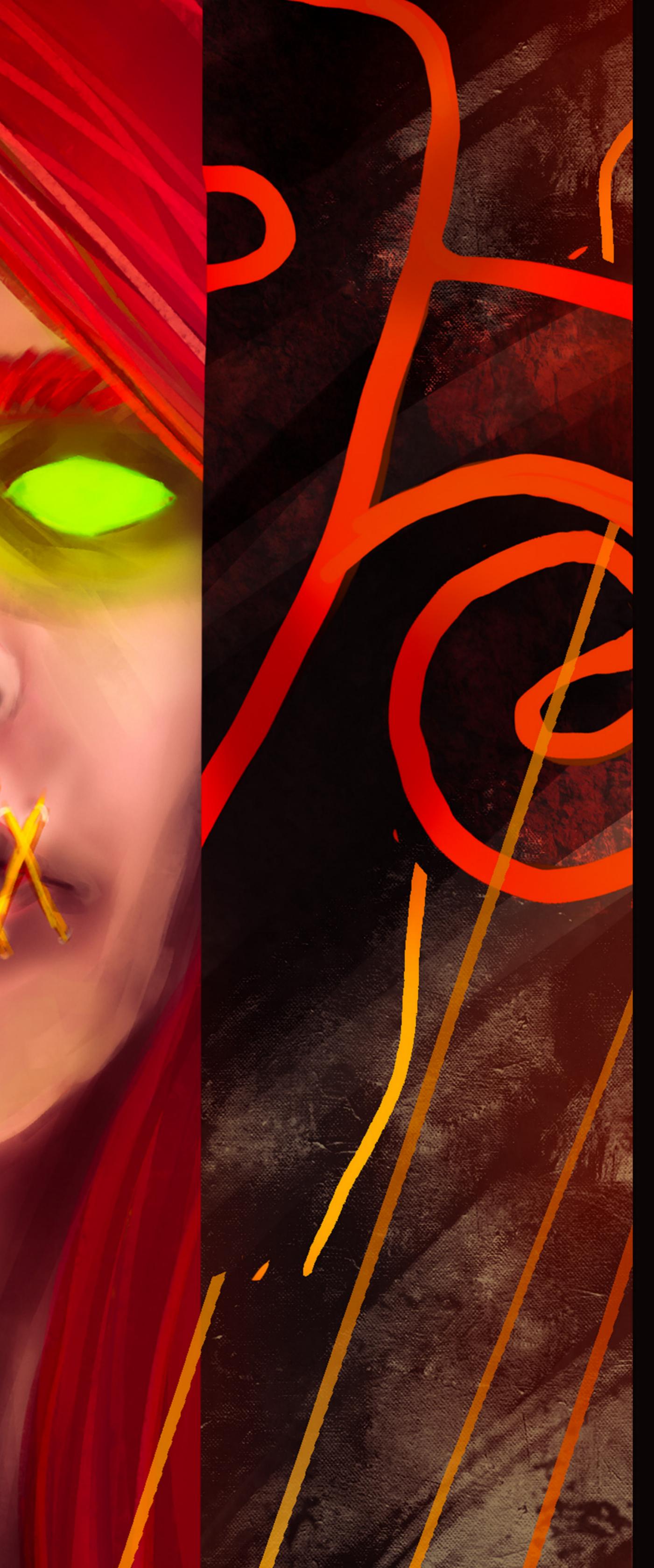
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### THE WYRD LESS WOVEN AN AITERNATIVE HEATHEN PRAYER BOOK SIF BROOKES & DAN COULTAS





26

With Kids

Hello there fellow readers, welcome to my little column of witching with kids. I must be honest, I have been stressing about this write up as nothing amazing or fun has happened recently.

After our holiday by the coast, life just resumed as normal, back to the daily grind. took on the role of PTA chair at my 'witchlings' school and quite honestly, underestimated how much time it would swallow up. With meetings, bun sales and Easter Egg scrambles, messy storage cupboards and unclear communication, found myself knee deep in things to do, wanting to try new things but I wasn't sure how. I'm desperate to get some pagan themed celebration into the PTA plans, Samhain party?? Yule traditions?? I'm sure it can be done, and it will...next year!

While surfing the internet I got target advertised for an online master class called, 'How to stop shouting at your kids,' run by the online community business, 'All About Parenting,' where one signs up for a monthly subscription to get support through the challenging world of bringing up small humans. Always trying to do better, I signed up and waited for the email, feeling a moment of sadness. I know my parenting needs work, but playing - I would rather not. I'm not as shouty as I once was, but I compare and despair, the black hole that is TikTok. I see it in them too, YouTube Kids is only the beginning, and it scares me. I feel as parents it's more challenging to get off the screen, get them off the screen too and interact, especially in today's times. The class leader confirmed my suspicions with direct accountability, and yes it was hard to hear. "Do you sit for 6-8 hours scrolling, then complain there is so much to do?" Yes, I do. "Do you speak to your children with the phone in your hand, only really giving them 75% of your attention?"



By Emma Swailes

Guilty of that as well. He went on to say, no wonder children miss behave or have self-esteem issues, it's the only way they get 100% of your time.

When I say, dear readers, that this statement hit me in my face like a baseball bat mid swing, it would be an understatement. It was such a big moment of 'ah' for me. It seems so obvious now, but honestly didn't make the connection. I struggle a lot with my own baggage, past childhood traumas and all that jazz, I hate playing with toys, I avoid anything childlike. It is such a shame and something I need to work on, as a twisted-up millennial, with no family to call upon to show me how to do this gig. It is a hill I must climb. I must not beat myself up over it, but know better, do better. Try to connect with things we both find interesting and magical, like the witchy life!

Flossy is a magpie for crystals, I see her little treasure box filling up with quartz and mini spell jars and it reminds me of the crystal I used to pinch off my own mum when I was a similar age, but I used to get shouted at for it. My mum's tools were strictly off limits. She had decks of tarot and oracle, runes and pendulums, magical items do get sucked into the doom scroll, the I was so drawn to. A piece of chunky amethyst would make a fabulous table centre piece for the dining table in my dollhouse, (still own this amethyst) and although I borrowed them, I treated them with the utmost respect and care. However, it was something my mum was not a fan of. It upset me often because she would lose her mind over it. Weirdly enough I couldn't seem to stop myself from doing it. Am I going to repeat this scene, by allowing it to become my own irritation as a mum? I am in my late 30s and I am still hurting from it apparently.

really did have this conversation with myself a few years ago when my diaries began being filled with flossy drawings of stick people with long legs and big smiles. I remember having a discussion with another parent about it being annoying, and their reaction was life changing for me. "In a few years you will miss them, when you open a book with their drawings, you'll look back with such love, I think it is beautiful."

That response honestly stopped me in my tracks, (like the baseball bat) and now my notebooks and journals are a sweet balance of my thoughts, poetry, spells and my children's drawings. I get my decks out for them to look at, it's amazing to think they can be so interested. I choose to share my magic tools with them. Turns out Flossy is brilliant at Dowsing rods and pendulums (much better than I am) and has requested one of her own! Witching together, as mum and daughters can be part of the full experience of parenting, used as a tool. And for me, it must, for their mental health and well-being.



Flossy is extremely mature for her years (and a bit of a pessimist). I just know her soul is old, and I believe she has been here a few times before. Clementine seems young in soul experience in comparison, and I get the vibe they will balance each other out with sisterly love throughout their life. I am so glad they have each other, may they always be close. And may I change the pattern of my upbringing, the mother wound of my past so that my kids don't feel the sadness like I did.

This column became a lot more personal than I intended it to be, it is an honest account on how parenting is a challenge for me. That said, we all do our best for our children and although I choose to share my craft with my kids (hence the name- 'Witching With Kids') everyone has their own preference, and if you chose to keep your craft solely for you, then that's perfectly okay too.

Blessed Be Swailes the Friendly Green Witch https://linktr.ee/friendlygreenwitch Listen to Swailes on The Bell Witch Podcast. Available wherever you listen to your podcasts.

# Don't Poss Me Your ceremonies

The default is no pain, the normal is no pain

Your body may be a temple, but mine doesn't work Don't pass me your ceremonies and then pity and lurk I want to polish the walls, arrange flowers in a vase, light incense and smoke out my insides

> All in moderation, don't overstep that line Regulate, intake, rest, and repeat

My heart beats as fast as a war drum, on quiet summer mornings. It has the pace and persistence for a runner when I could do no such thing. The drum turns into a hum and settles in the walls. I smoke it out from the inside to steady it down, to steady it down, to steady it down.

Loosen my limbs and hang them out to dry, beat the dust off them and give them some time.

Murals and masterpieces documented on the walls, some from my own hands others are unknown. Every day a new one appears and a different one goes, terrified to forget that this is where they call home.

Rinse my system out with my favourite water of life, lower the current and extinguish the fuse. The wires are still tangled but this is the most I can do.

Smoke and rinse - to keep the temple light and warm. Bathing in peat, and patchouli. You tend to forget the ground is hurting. Habit, ritual, addiction.

A sensual gasp of relief.

Balance it right and it almost feels like home - looked after in a regulated and precarious way. A moderated and hidden method. Wrapped in many labels, none of them prescribed. War drums should have no place in here, the lights should not flicker, the ground should not moan, my limbs should not creak, and the fuse should not blow. I'll turn away anyone who begs for sanctuary unless they know.

Create one issue to fix another, a fair trade to make when I was cut no fair deal of my own.

The temple's alright for now, but for how long I don't know.

By Arwen Dale

### One, Two, Three By Aly Smith

One, two, three, four and five, I caught a hare alive, Six, seven, eight, nine and ten, I let him go again.'

From Tales of Mother Goose 1729. The modern version changed hare to fish and added a second stanza.

Hold on tight, damn it! It's just one damn finger, and a small one at that. We've all been through this. What do you mean "What will happen if you don't do it?" I don't know - maybe nothing, or maybe the world will burn. How does that sound? All those innocent people writhing in agony as the Ancestors weep and the earth itself shakes with fury...all because you couldn't handle a little pain.

Fine, give it to me then. I've opened its mouth - quick, quick, put it in. Holy Taranis, what's with all the screaming? I've heard newborns make less noise when they enter this world. It's done, it's done...now hold still while I bind your hand. This poor creature has been out of its field for too long because of your bloody twitching.

# The Spotlight Awards SHORTLISTERS

We would like to express our deep gratitude to every person who took the time to nominate someone deserving of a Spotlight Award this year. Our first year of the Awards has been amazing, all thanks to the incredible support and participation from all of you who nominated someone. Your excitement and involvement have made this whole process even more exciting. You have uplifted and supported hardworking businesses, dedicated individuals, and talented creatives who contribute tirelessly to their communities in the North of England. It is abundantly clear to us, just as it is to you, that these exceptional individuals truly deserve to be recognised and celebrated for their unwavering dedication and invaluable contributions.

Our PUBLIC VOTING starts 1st May on Bealtaine! We have shortlisted each category and now i is time to choose a winner!

What do the winners get? They will receive the honour of proudly saying they won a Spotlight Award! And for no charge, they can also request a 'WINNER' plaque with a stand.

Keep an eye out on our website for our Shortlisters VOTE page that will go live on the 1st May and we wish all our shortlisters the best of luck.

Public Voting will close 1st June and winners will be announced soon after.

Our Shortlisters are:

AUTHOR OF THE YEAR Ann Ball - How to Set Up Women's Circles - A Guide

Jennifer Lane - The Witch's Survival Guide: Spells for Healing from Stress and Burnout : Spells for Stress and Burnout in a Modern World

Dan Coultas - The Gods' Own County: A Heathen Prayer Book

BEST BLOG Backyard Banshee

The Geordie Witch (Kath Wallace)

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PODCAST OF THE YEAR The Backyard Banshee Presents...

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VIDEO STAR Mistress of Macabre

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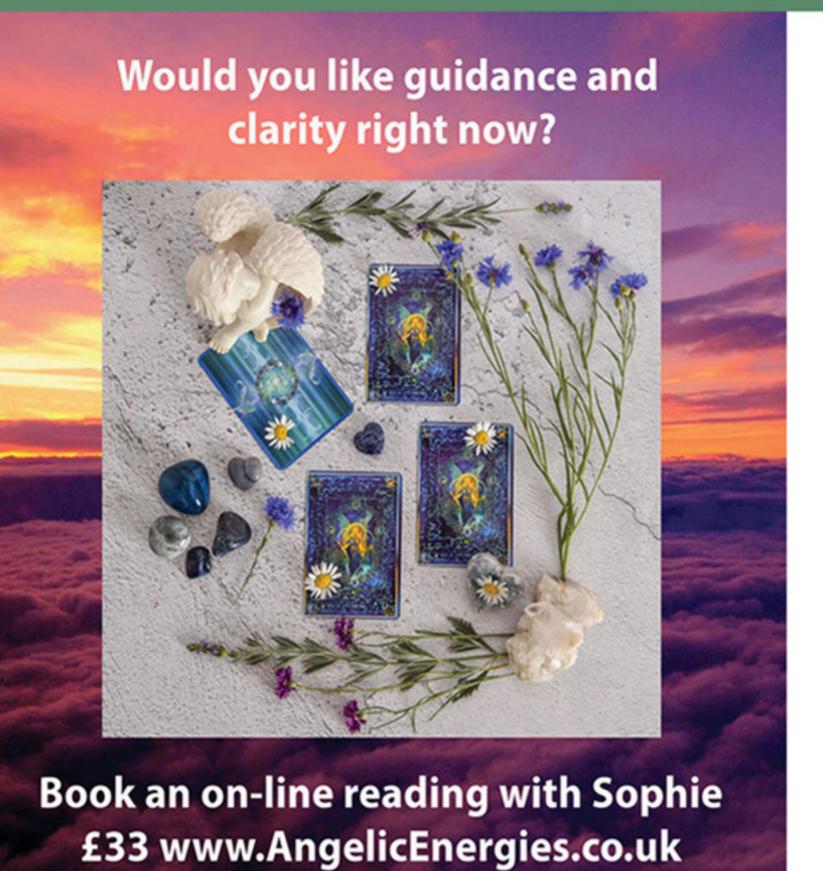
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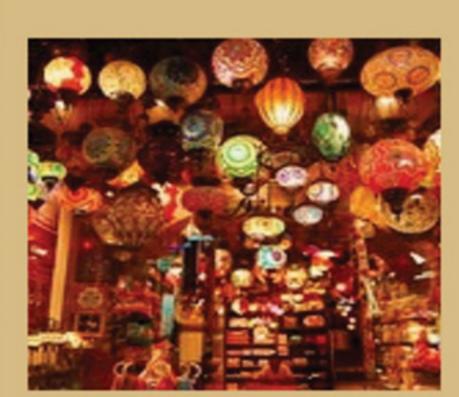
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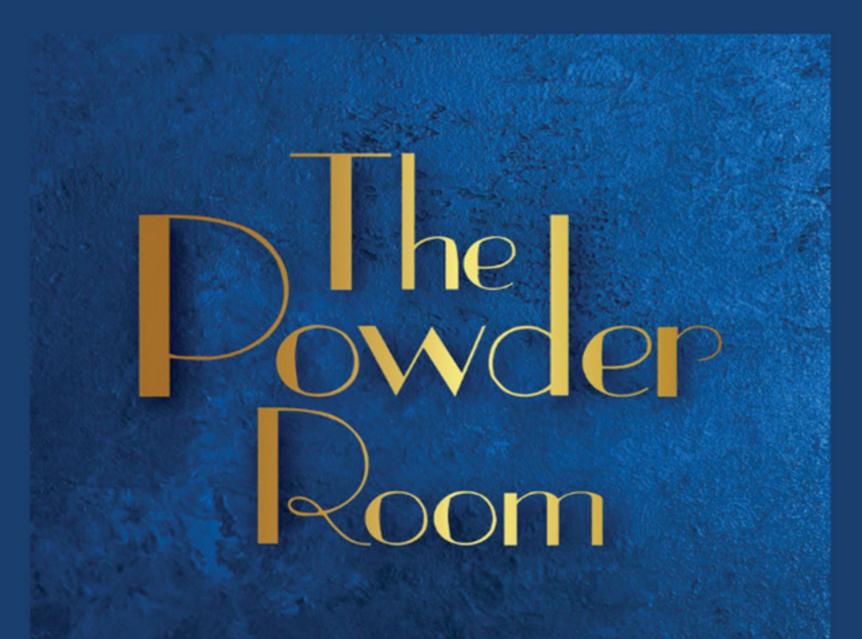
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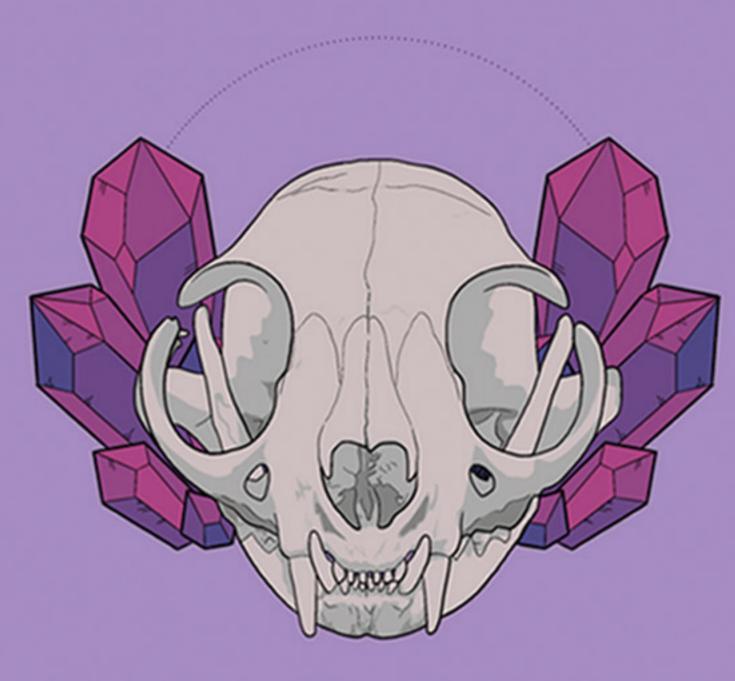
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