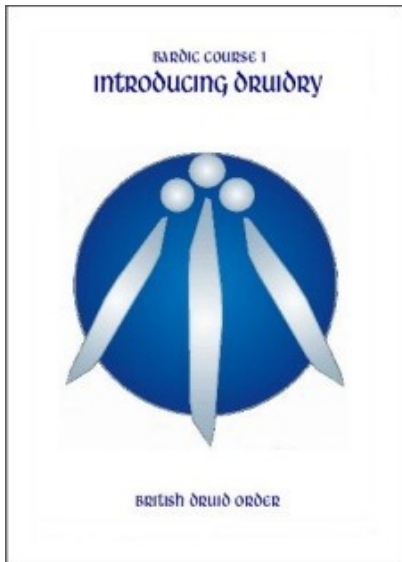


BDO BARDIC COURSE sampler



We want everyone who signs up for our courses to a) have a clear idea of what to expect, and b) to be likely to benefit substantially from them. To be sure of both, we offer the following selections from the bardic course, chosen to represent a number of voices and, to some extent, the course as a whole, while standing on their own outside the context of the course. We trust that they will help you to judge whether you think the course is for you prior to signing up.

Of course, these are just a few pages out of hundreds. The course as a whole runs to 24 booklets, about 800 pages and around a quarter of a million words. This really is just a taster.

One advantage of delivering the course in pdf format is that we're able to include interactive contents pages, and here's one for you to try. Click on an item on the Contents list

and you should be taken to that item in the text. Click on the heading there and it should bring you back to the Contents page. Clever stuff, eh?

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We begin with an extract from booklet 1: Introducing Druidry. Throughout the course, we occasionally pause to answer FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions), the third of which is: "So what do you believe then?"

faq 3: BASIC BELIEFS

“druids ... said that it was they that made heaven and earth, and the sea, &c., and the sun and moon, &c..”

From the medieval Irish text, *Senchus Mor*; 'Great Old Tales,' compiled circa 8th century CE from earlier sources.

Druidry is far from being a monolithic organisation with a single set of beliefs. On the contrary, there are many Druid orders and what they do and believe varies widely. Some grew out of 18th century friendly societies, some have a Masonic slant, some encourage radical political activism, some claim to have started in Atlantis, some are Pagan, others are cultural organisations with roots in non-conformist Christianity; some see Druidry as a religion, others as a philosophy; some try to reconstruct what they see as authentic ancient Druidry, others set themselves firmly in the 21st century (see booklet 21, *A Bardic History of Druidry 2*). Clearly with this degree of diversity, there is little or no general agreement amongst Druids as to what Druids believe. What follows, then, is simply my own understanding of the basic beliefs that define the Druidry taught and practised by us within the British Druid Order.

We see Druidry as a native European manifestation of an Earth-based, ancestral, tribal spirituality that manifests elsewhere in the world wherever native spiritual traditions have survived or been revived. We feel a spiritual kinship with the shamans of Siberia, Native American medicine folk and spirit workers, the Sami of Scandinavia, aboriginal Australians, the Zuni of Africa, the Hindus of India and all other folk around the world who share our basic beliefs.

These are:

1) Animism, i.e. the belief that all things are imbued with spirit. This fundamental belief encourages us to be aware of the true, spiritual nature of all things, animate and inanimate. This awareness encourages us to treat all beings and all things with respect and lies at the heart of the 'green' spiritual environmentalism that is so much a part of modern Druidry. Animism is also found in Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

2) Polytheism, i.e. the belief that there are many gods and goddesses, all of whom are worthy of respect and reverence. Among other things, belief in a multiplicity of deities fosters tolerance,



allowing us to see other faiths as valid paths to spiritual growth. While we see the ultimate goal of all spiritual paths as being oneness with the universe, we do not see that oneness as a single, male father god or female great goddess. Universal unity is vastly beyond any such limited human conception.

3) Respect for our Ancestors. We recognise ancestors of spirit as well as those of our direct bloodline. Ancestors of spirit are those who have walked similar spiritual paths before us and with whom we therefore feel close affinity. Our respect for our ancestors stems from the fact that so much of who we are is derived from them, both physically and spiritually. We may also find teachers and guides among our ancestors.

4) Paganism in its original sense, which is simply that of a spirituality that honours the spirits of the place in which we live. Honouring the spirits of our own locale naturally leads us to honour those of other lands we may travel to. In honouring the spirits of place, we are also honouring the inhabitants of that place, both the living and their ancestors in spirit.

These basic definitions apply not only to Druidry but also to Wicca, Heathenism, Hinduism, tribal religions, shamanism, traditional Chinese folk religion, Shintoism and New Age spirituality. These beliefs are shared by about 3,350,000,000 people, making Paganism the world's largest faith community, consisting of about half the world's population, approximately the same as Christianity and Islam combined.

These, then, are the core beliefs that, for me, define the BDO. We do not claim they define Druidry in general, nor that they make our kind of Druidry better than anyone else's. We are happy both to recognise and to celebrate the diversity of modern Druidry.

You may not accept all of these beliefs yourself. For now, I would simply ask you to think about them and what they mean. We'll look at each of them in more detail later, particularly in our ovate course.

Now, here's a piece from booklet 1 in which Robin Williamson, regarded by many as the greatest living exponent of the traditional bardic arts, talks about those arts.

poetic power

“What is this poetic power that is so often asserted? Why would one study the legends of one's ancestry? Why does one ply words with words and construct notes upon notes of tunes? It is stated repeatedly that there is power to be won here not available in ordinary school; not for sale in colleges. Only one who yearns for poetry with feet made for journeys will get a taste of it. The Gaelic word for poem or song is *dan*, which really means not only song but also skill and destiny. It includes the notions of praising and foretelling and, more importantly, magical power over the article or person so treated.

“Poetry is made of the quality of mist and starlight, of every untouchable thing. It is a mesh to trap the mincing mind till the soul leaps free one moment. Legends, songs: a lifetime to learn them, many lifetimes to learn them all, many years to

understand one tune and many tellings to understand one story.

“Knowing what has happened upon a hill, why a river has a certain name, the meaning of a stone in a field - these are histories that make everyday surroundings magical. This knowledge is a crossing of waters. But the power to tell a story that never happened in the world at all, that is an enchantment; that suspends time and care. It takes the hard mile after the easy mile and the mountain above the hill to do that. ...

“Stepping out of the door of one's own house, one carries the weather in one's head; the history of one's view of the entire universe; memories that haze as days recede. One who wishes to attain understanding seeks to survive the poison, the fact of death. Seeks to leave signs and messages for those who will come later. Sees poetry as a kind of prayer, a kind of teacher. Knows that poetry is not made of words but out of bones and gardens, winter rain, kisses and whatnot. Knows that it is not only found on pages but met upon mountains, eaten in fruit, drunk in strong drink. Poetry is caused by love. It is a sculpture of one's own life.

“These ideas are, I believe, the traditional British approach to the mystery of art.”



From R. Williamson & R. J. Stewart, *Celtic Bards, Celtic Druids*, Blandford, 1996, pp. 28-9 (used by permission). That's Robin in the picture, photographed in 2008. For more about Robin, including tour dates, visit his website at <http://www.pigswhiskermusic.co.uk>

Now here's an exercise from booklet 3: Ritual & Meditation: Approaching the Sacred:

EXERCISE 1: CREATING AN altar

An altar can form the spiritual focus of the home, our lives within it and our wider relationships with the world, or worlds, outside and beyond. An altar needn't be large or elaborate. If you're short of space, it can be a corner of a dressing table, a niche in a wall, a bookshelf, or a mantelpiece. The form is immaterial, the meaning is everything. My friend, Leon Reed, has what he calls his 'god-wall,' a small table with stepped shelves rising



above it on which he has images of deities. Some are the kind of statuettes available in New Age shops, some are bronzes found in antique markets, others are plastic toys, dolls or action figures he has dressed appropriately.

You might decorate your own altar with a painting, drawing or statuette of a deity, pictures of or by your children or your ancestors, flowers, stones, bones, antlers, toys, twigs ... almost anything really. The important thing is that whatever you place on your altar has a powerful meaning for you. It should connect with you spiritually and emotionally. Perhaps it recalls a powerful time of transition in your life, a dream or vision, an aspect of nature you relate to particularly strongly, or an individual who means a great deal to you. Whatever form it takes, each item should be chosen because it represents to you a potent source of awen, or inspiration.

As important as what you choose to place on your altar is how you behave towards it. When you have your altar established, you should make it a focus of your spiritual life by lighting candles or incense on it in honour of the spirits represented on it; by addressing prayers to those spirits through the images on the altar; by regularly cleaning it, renewing wilted flowers, adding new items to it, or removing old ones that may no longer be necessary or relevant to your journey.

There are about 50 exercises scattered through the course, each designed to deepen your personal experience of and involvement with the bardic path.

Now here's a second piece from booklet 3 introducing the art of meditation:

inspiration and meditation

“Meditation brings wisdom; lack of meditation leaves ignorance. Know well what leads you forward and what hold you back, and choose the path that leads to wisdom. ... Meditate. Live purely. Be quiet. Do your work with mastery. Like the moon, come out from behind the clouds, shine!”

Prince Siddharta Gaumtama (563 to 483 BCE),
founder of Buddhism

If we were to condense the essence of all the great spiritual traditions and their core practices down to one word it would be this: Meditation. If we distilled this course down to one word, it would be 'meditate' (should further elaboration be required in the ovate course then we could write “meditate more” and for the Druid course, “keep meditating”). It cannot be stressed enough the importance adopting a regular meditational practice plays in our growth & development as not only aspiring Druids and individuals seeking



greater communion with Great Spirit and heightened spiritual awareness, but also in our evolution as a species. It is highly unlikely we are going to evolve any further physically, growing an extra thumb to enable us to send text messages quicker or an extra pair of arms to multi-task all the more effectively, but our minds are still evolving and regular meditation enables us to tap into the awesome reservoir of untapped potential residing inside of each and everyone of us. It is ours to use for the benefit of not only ourselves, but for all creation. Whether we choose to call this power 'awen' or see it as 'being in the flow' or choose to call it becoming self-realised or self-actualised is irrelevant. This latent potential is ours to claim as our birthright.

I am certain we have all heard that statistics can be manipulated or presented in such a way as to pretty much demonstrate anything, and I am equally as certain you have all come across the one that gets bandied about in various guises so much that it has practically become a cliché, namely; “98% of people use no more than 10% of the vast potential of their minds” (Dunstan, V. 1985.). I dare say you have probably heard a variation of this quote. Even if this statistic is inaccurate and it is 47% of us only use 36% of their potential or any of the multiple variations of this theme is irrelevant. The point it illustrates is this, that most of us actually use very little of our capabilities most of the time, and this also suggests that the overwhelming majority of people we meet and interact with on a daily basis are 'just going through the motions' and 'not really there' (the lights are on but nobody's home). As aspiring Druids I think we can do better than that. Each and everyone one of us is capable of so much more than we currently believe ourselves to be.

Meditating regularly has many positive benefits and not all of them are as obvious as simply being calmer and therefore better able to deal with the trials and tribulations of modern life. Aside from physically feeling more peaceful, focussed and grounded it allows us to work directly on our minds, using our mind as our friend and ally rather than as a tool to beat ourselves up with. Practising meditation regularly not only increases our overall awareness and positivity but also then helps us to “use this strengthened and purified awareness to see into the nature of things as they really are” (Pauling, C. 1995). Meditation, combined with ritual (of which more later) is a very powerful tool for affecting real and positive change in our lives.

Let us now look then at a few of these ideas before exploring further the actual practices involved.

Meditation is relaxing, but this is not the sole reason why we should practice it. Neither is it a flight away from reality, to be used as a form of escapism. The clichéd stereotype of the hippy meditating to 'expand his mind, man,' either in conjunction with mind-altering drugs, or as a substitute when they have none, is misleading, harmful and wrong. Why people expanding their minds should be lampooned says more about our culture than the individual devoting time to the practice (“don't think - shop!”). Certainly the image is popular as many of the concepts 'borrowed' from Eastern cultures were first brought to public attention in industrialised countries in the 1960s with the hippy era of 'flower power' and later reiterated in TV programs in the 1980s with such caricatures as Neil, the hippy in the popular comedy 'The Young

Ones'. It is so much easier to stereotype and parody rather than to make the effort to understand (let alone practice). Martial arts films often portray shaven headed monks possessing otherworldly knowledge and powers, deep in meditation, usually with attendant mystical music, before they leap up, fly across the room and take on and beat half a dozen or more bad guys. Hare Krishnas are met with bemusement and/or derision wherever they go, with many people questioning whether they are on drugs as they look so 'blissed out' and happy.

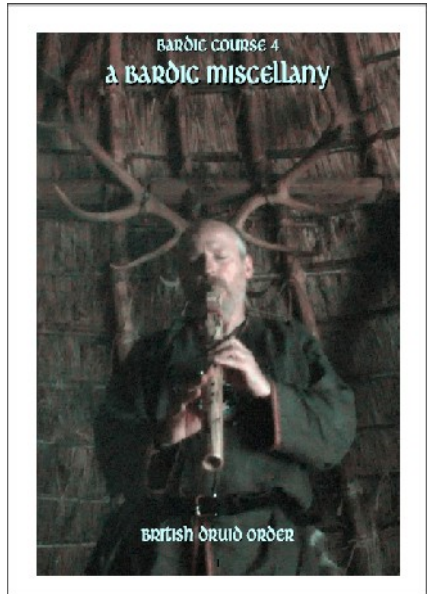
Practising meditation regularly does increase our positivity and does relieve many of the stresses and tensions induced by living in these times, but it is not a flight of fancy or an escape from reality. By regularly meditating we are actually raising our levels of awareness to new heights, previously undreamed of, where greater empathy and understanding emerge in our relationships, not only with ourselves but also with others and with all sentient life (and yes that does include trees and nature spirits...). With this newly discovered awareness it is actually more difficult to evade reality, often painfully so. With increased awareness we are not so easily able to delude ourselves and may find we must face up to aspects of our being we are not comfortable with and need to change. However, with our strengthened and purified awareness this need not be as daunting as it potentially sounds. The more you meditate, the more and better prepared you are to assimilate your increased awareness and the insights gained through it and the more able you are to act upon them. So much for running away from reality then. If anything, 'reality' gets easier to deal with the more one practices meditation.

This leads on to a detailed look at the practice of two linked meditation techniques. Others are given elsewhere in the course.

Now here's an extract from booklet 4: A Bardic Miscellany, offering one instance of the many ways in which we draw practical inspiration from the history and pre-history of our tradition throughout the course.

Looking the part

In past ages, it is likely that bards were marked out as such by distinctive clothing, regalia, or hairstyles. The wearing of white robes by members of the Druid caste is referred to in early classical and later insular sources, and in popular tradition. Pliny the Elder, in a famous passage from his *Natural History*, describes how, "clad in a white robe, the priest ascends the tree and cuts the

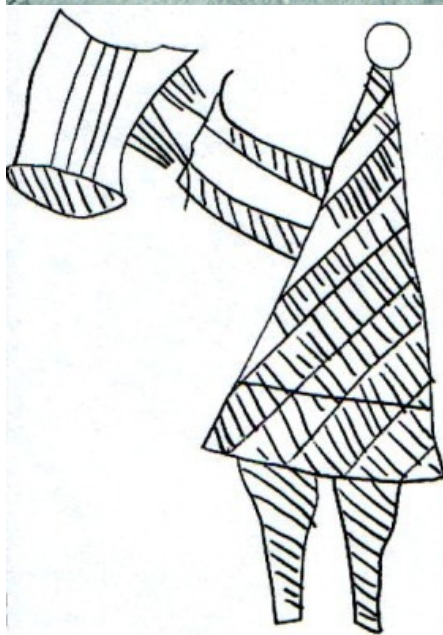


mistletoe with a golden sickle, and it is received by others in a white cloak.” Since the persons in question were required to climb trees, we may assume that they were quite young and fit, so more likely to be trainees rather than ancient sages. Strabo, in his *Geographia* (Book IV, chapter 4), says of the Gauls that “*In addition to their trait of simplicity and high-spiritedness, that of witlessness and boastfulness is much in evidence, and also that of fondness for ornaments; for they not only wear golden ornaments — both chains round their necks and bracelets round their arms and wrists — but their dignitaries wear garments that are dyed in colours and sprinkled with gold.*” By dignitaries, he may mean Druids but could just as easily mean tribal chieftains. Tacitus' description of the Roman attack on Anglesey refers to black-clad women like Furies rushing about amongst the Druids and brandishing flaming torches. They may have been female Druids, perhaps devotees of a war goddess such as the Irish Morrigan, whose British equivalent may have been Rhiannon, both names meaning 'Great Queen.'

Based on these classical references, an early incarnation of the BDO stipulated a white robe for bards, adding a long, blood-red tabard or jerkin trimmed with gold for ovates and topping it off with a black cloak for Druids. This colour scheme fitted well with the common Pagan notion of a triple-aspected goddess as virgin (white), mother (red) and crone (black).

There are several Iron Age representations of figures clothed in the hooded woollen cloak (upper right) known as the *cucullus*, a variation of which was the *bardocucullus*, suggesting a special type peculiar to bards. The cloaks seem to have varied in length and appearance depending on the status of the wearer. The higher the status, the longer and more elaborately decorated the cloak. The three figures shown right are of the type called *genii cucullati*, 'cloaked spirits,' that are found at sacred sites across Britain and Europe and may represent pilgrims to those sites or visiting ancestors.

Comparison of the two Iron Age bards depicted lower right and on the next page shows that, allowing for stylistic differences, they are very similarly dressed. Both wear close-fitting trousers and thigh-length, long-



sleeved tunics in a matching, diagonally patterned fabric, with some sort of decorative belt worn low on the hips. The lower picture on the previous page is from an inscribed pot dating from 8th century BCE Austria, while the one on the right is from 1st century BCE Northern France. The instrument depicted in the picture on the previous page is a type of Iron Age European lyre called a *chrotta* (see booklet 13: *Music*, pages 10-13).

Centuries later, the early medieval literature of Ireland refers to the Druid, Mog Ruith, wearing a 'speckled bird-dress,' while medieval Irish law codes refer to bards (Irish *fili*) being allowed to wear six different colours in their clothing as a mark of their status.

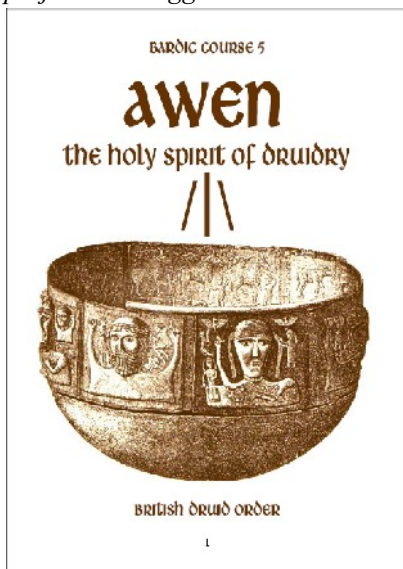
Classical and medieval literature support the idea that bards in training grouped around teachers of the Druid caste with whom they would travel around during the summer months, visiting settlements and feasting halls. Bardic students may also have accompanied their teachers to the great seasonal festivals that brought whole tribes together to worship their gods, to proclaim laws and settle outstanding disputes, to inaugurate new chieftains, to feast, and to indulge in sports and entertainments. It is possible that bardic competitions such as the Welsh Eisteddfod had their origins in gatherings of bards that occurred at these festivals.

When the Druids deemed their students to have learnt enough, they would presumably have gone through some form of ritual to mark their graduation, much as modern university graduates do. Perhaps, as in early medieval Ireland, they would be presented with a silver branch as a symbol of their new status (see below). Perhaps they were presented with robes.

The robes of the modern-day Welsh Gorsedd of Bards, later adopted by the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, have bards wearing blue, ovates green and Druids white. This arrangement was devised by our old friend, Iolo Morganwg, at the end of the 18th century. In the early BDO, as said, we adopted white for bards, dark red tabards for ovates and black cloaks for Druids. Now I'm inclined toward bardic gear like that portrayed in the Iron Age, i.e. trousers and long-sleeved tunics in a diagonal design, perhaps of tartan wool. Having been married to a Kilpatrick for fifteen years, I'd choose a Colquhoun tartan to which the Kilpatricks are entitled. A little delving into your own family tree might reveal a suitable clan tartan for you.



This leads on to instructions on how to make a robe. Various other practical craft projects are suggested.

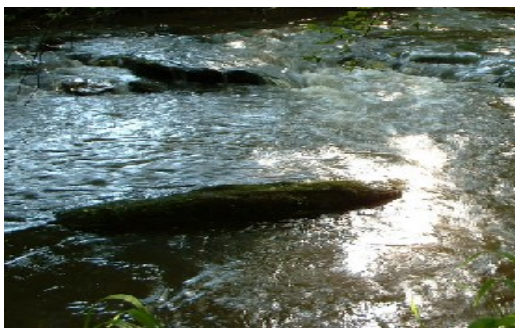


Now here's a piece from booklet 5: Awen: The Holy Spirit of Druidry:

“the awen I sing”

Reference to “three Awens” and to the “ode of Ceridwen” in the poems quoted on pages 16-17 remind us that chanting the word “awen” three times is one method employed by some modern Druid groups for opening the individual spirit to the flow of awen as the source of inspiration (see booklet 3, *Ritual & Meditation*, pages 34-5). That awen was sung, or chanted, in the past is clear from a number of medieval poems, including ‘The Hostile Confederacy’, where the bard says:

*The Awen I sing,
From the deep I bring it,
A river while it flows,
I know its extent;
I know when it disappears;
I know when it fills;
I know when it overflows;
I know when it shrinks;
I know what base
There is beneath the sea.*



Awen, the ‘flowing spirit’, is here referred to as a river, apparently drawn from its source by the poet’s singing. The ‘sea’ may be taken as a reference to the all-encompassing awen-spirit that surrounds us, the ‘river’ being that portion of it which the bard draws to himself through his invocation.

With the new insights and understandings gained from what you've found here, we recommend that you go back to the exercise, 'Hunting the Wild Awen,' on page 34 of booklet 3, *Ritual & Meditation*, and try it again. You might find it useful at this stage to make it a regular part of your spiritual practice, whether daily or weekly depending on your own needs and circumstances. That's if you haven't already. If you have, well done and keep up the good work!

Now let's have another piece from booklet 5: Awen: The Holy Spirit of Druidry, in

which Greywolf muses on his shortcomings and turns for help to an old friend:

awen women

I have written of awen here as primarily a gift of the goddess Ceridwen since that is how it is most often presented in the bardic literature of Britain and because, as a male Druid, I have long been inspired by goddesses. My relationship with Ceridwen began with my first Wiccan initiation in the 1970s. Yet I recall many conversations with Emma Restall Orr (Bobcat) during the years we worked closely together when she would question the masculine attitudes implicit in some of the old texts. She saw them as representing very much a male perspective on awen as apprehended by male bards and their understanding of the goddesses they revered. Emma always asked where the female perspective was. So, to redress the balance a little and give a flavour of a female Druid's perspective on awen, we offer the following from Emma, which appears on the Druid Network website and is published here with her permission. [<http://druidnetwork.org/en/node/1773>]

“A vast swathe of me is feline, craving solitude and certainly seldom ever seeking out company. Yet what inspires me is still complete and exquisitely focused connection. I find that primarily, and essentially, in my relationship with the natural world around me, with the mud beneath my feet (or paws), the wind on my nose, the trees of the forest here where I live, the flowers of the meadows, the occasional blackbird, badger or butterfly.

“The concept that Druids call Awen, divine inspiration, I find within these perfectly connecting relationships, when soul touches soul, when life force meets life force, with recognition, wonder, honesty and respect. Energy of life surges through us, breaking up our preconceptions and expectations, leaving us naked and utterly awake. As an animist, I perceive the spirit of every creature, from pebbles to pussy cats, and my Druidcraft is a glorious adventure of creating and deepening sacred and honourable relationship with those around me in a perpetual quest for inspiration.

“Of course, there are also the handful of human beings who are close to me, and being ever wakeful to those relationships is equally inspiring, allowing me to explore the powers of human nature, the streams of life, its eddies and quirks of flow. Those close relationships also feed my craving for awen, my hunger for beauty, as souls meet, in perfect honesty.



“Questing awen in a more potent form, I reach for deity, perhaps the goddess into whom I most frequently dissolve my soul - the endless darkness of the universe - or some other power of nature, such as wind or rain or wild emotion. Yes, that inspires me ... in an ecstatic mind-blowing supernova sort of way.”



This piece is followed by a look at two medieval women bards, one the 12th century princess who seems a likely candidate to have written the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, the other a 15th century woman whose poetry ranges from the spiritual to the frankly pornographic.

Next we have an extract from booklet 6: Earthsongs, the overall aim of which is to encourage you to create poetry and suggest ways in which you might do just that. In this extract we introduce another of our contributors, the late Robin Skelton, followed by one of Robin's poems that we use to illustrate the 24 traditional metres used in British bardic verse, this particular poem being relevant to the season of Beltaine:

englyn measures



Several English-language poets have worked in the *englyn* form. However, we know of only one who has published English verse in all of the twenty-four metres; the British-born Canadian scholar, teacher, Pagan, poet and word-magician, Robin Skelton (1925-1997, shown left), from whose book, *The Shapes of Our Singing* (University of Washington Press, 2002) we quote the examples below. This book is currently out of print but still available on Amazon. Robin's poems not only work perfectly in the context of this booklet, they are also excellent poems in their own right. They are copyright to Robin Skelton's estate and are reproduced here by kind permission from the author's family. Our thanks to Robin's daughters, Alison and Bridgid, for their generosity. We believe that our use of the poems here is in keeping with Robin's devotion to Paganism and to teaching and

trust that it appropriately honours his memory. For more of Robin's books on poetry and Paganism, see the Notes on page 36.

Purists may object to the use of English to demonstrate these verse forms at all, holding that we should encourage everyone taking this course to learn Welsh. There is much to be said for this argument. Welsh is a beautiful language. However, it is also a fairly difficult one to learn, particularly to the standard required in order to write convincing poetry in it. To achieve such a standard, it would help to have been born a native Welsh-speaker, yet few even in Wales can claim that, while we must accept that the vast majority of people taking this course will be primarily English-speaking. Plus good poetry is good poetry in any language, and Robin's certainly is good.

While not utilizing strict *Cynghanedd* in his poems, simply because it doesn't work as well in English as it does in Welsh, Robin follows the principles upon which it is based and makes use of internal consonance, rhyme, and alliteration. We have rearranged the poems from the order in which they were published in *The Shapes of Our Singing* into the traditional order of the 24 metres. We have added extra information about some of the metres, with examples in the original Welsh and in English translation, following on from Robin's own short analyses of the patterns. This additional information appears after the symbol: +

1: englyn penfyr

may day

*On this early May morning, chill and dry,
larks high over the hill,
I sense no impending ill.*

*Yet May has a dangerous charm; it brings
yearnings that haunt and harm
against which nobody can arm.*

*Love may prove a beautiful cheat, a ruse,
choosing to feed earth's heat,
giving it our bones to eat.*

The *Englyn Penfyr* pattern is:

Syllables: 10 6 7

End rhymes: A A A

The first A word occurs before the end of the first line, and the one, two or three syllables that follow it are echoed in the first syllables of the line following.

+

Englyn penfyr has 16 syllables divided into two lines of 10 and 6 syllables (i.e., a *toddaid byr* - see below), to which is added a line of 7 syllables, hence *penfyr* (brief ending). It is used in verses attributed to a 7th century noblewoman, Heledd, lamenting the death of her brothers in battle against the Saxons and the desolation

that followed the burning of the hall of her favourite brother, Cynddylan, at Pengwern (modern Shrewsbury). The following verse is the first from the poem called *Stafell Cynddylan* (Cynddylan's Hall), part of a cycle attributed to Heledd, collectively known as *Canu Heledd* (The Songs of Heledd). It was probably composed in the 9th century based on earlier oral tradition.

*Stafell Cynddylan ys lywyll heno
heb dan, heb wely
wylaf wers; tawaf wedy.*

*(Cynddylan's hall is dark tonight,
without a fire, without a bed.*

I will weep for a while; afterwards I will fall silent.)

So far, we've looked at extracts from just the first few course booklets, so let's end with one from about halfway through the course, from booklet 13: Bardic Music:

harp hints and tips

I heard somewhere that early Scottish harpers picked out tunes by playing the same notes with the left and right hand, only an octave apart. This old style of playing was eventually replaced by the modern style, in which each hand plays different sequences of notes. Judging from the transcriptions of tunes in the ap Huw manuscript, the older style had already gone from Wales by the 17th century.

Something else I've heard from harpers is that each harp has its own distinctive voice, a unique personality and two names ... one by

which it is publicly known and a secret name known only to its harper. The public name may be one you give the harp yourself. The secret name is the one the harp tells to you. One way to find this secret name is to take your harp outdoors to a quiet place on a breezy day, hold it up and let the wind play through the strings. Listen within the waves of sound and you may hear your harp sing its name to you.

To learn to play the harp properly and well takes some time and effort. However, like the NA flute, the harp is a very gentle and forgiving instrument for beginners. All the strings being tuned to the same key means you can pluck or strum strings pretty much at random and still produce a very pleasing sound. As with most instruments these days, there are harp tutorials available online on Youtube and elsewhere. There's also a very good harp tutor (below) by Sylvia Woods who played harp with Robin

BARDIC COURSE 13
BARDIC MUSIC



BRITISH DRUM ORDER

1

Williamson's Merry Band and taught Robin himself to play. Since Robin went on to win the Folk Album of the Year award for his 1986 LP, *Legacy of the Scottish Harpers*, she must be a pretty good teacher as well as a superb harper. Check out her website at <http://www.harpcenter.com/> and check out her playing on the 1979 Merry Band CD, *A Glint at the Kindling*. A great introduction to Robin's work, and one that focuses on his harp-playing, is the 2008 compilation CD entitled, naturally, *The Celtic Bard*. This features Robin singing, speaking verse and telling traditional tales, all to harp accompaniment. It's pretty much a bardic course in its own right. Check out Robin's website at <http://www.pigswhiskermusic.co.uk/>



On the recommendation of just about every harper I've ever spoken to, you should, if at all possible, get a harp that's fully levered, i.e. one that has levers on every string that enable you to change the key you're playing in easily by pressing down the strings at the top, thereby shortening them and raising the pitch to the sharp of whatever note they were originally tuned to. Without these levers, the only way to play in a different key is to manually retune the strings. Of course, if you want to be authentically 'ancient' in your harping, you'll have to do without these very useful levers as they were only invented in the late 17th century.

As mentioned earlier, there's no shortage of harp-makers around these days. Busy Mole Music, based in Derbyshire, make a range of harps at reasonable prices (web address on page 14). Harps made in Pakistan are probably the cheapest and can be quite playable, though I'd strongly recommend you try before you buy as they vary a lot in tone, playability and quality of construction. They can be anywhere from pretty good to absolutely awful. Check the levers carefully too, to make sure that they are securely attached and that they actually work. My own harp (shown here) was made in the USA by Stoney End Harps whose website can be found at <http://www.stoneyend.com/harps.html> Stoney End harps are obtainable from Hobgoblin Music in the UK, although, perversely, I found it cheaper to order mine from a music store in California and have it shipped over to England.



For more information and advice about buying what are variously called clarsach, lap, folk, bardic or Celtic harps, as well as links to

harp-makers and suppliers in various countries, visit <http://www.celticharper.com/Buyhrp.html> or try Sylvia Woods' advice at <http://www.harpcenter.com/page/SWHC/CTGY/faqs> or you'll find some truly beautiful harps, including historical replicas, from a Scottish maker based on the Isle of Skye at <http://www.macdonaldharps.net/>

I included that one partly because it's got so many links in it you can follow. This same booklet includes information, encouragement and guidance aimed at getting even folk who feel they don't have a musical note in their bodies to start making sweet sounds.

OK, that's a little taster of a few of the things we have in store for you. The course is illustrated with hundreds of pictures like those included here, most of them in colour. Throughout the course, you'll find a lot of active hyper-links that will take you to sites where you can find everything from carefully-selected suppliers (as in the extract above) to whole archives of additional information. This is another benefit of delivering the files as pdfs.

I hope you'll appreciate from these few extracts that we've taken quite a personal, at times autobiographical approach in writing the course material. This is because what we are aiming for in the course is to offer the kind of friendship and guidance that you might get from an actual, hands-on, face-to-face teacher.

You'll note that the approach we've taken is based very firmly around the traditional skills of the bard: storytelling, poetry, music and other arts as well as history and genealogy. We offer practical advice, encouragement and information on all of these. Alongside them, we also offer exercises and guidance aimed at enhancing spiritual and personal growth. This dual approach is designed to help your self and your bardcraft together.

Incidentally, you might like to know that, once you have downloaded each package of files, you may print out a copy for your own use. We also expect and encourage you to share the course material with your spouse or partner and maybe with your kids if they're old enough (i.e. 16 plus). Beyond that, we reserve copyright.

You might also like to know that the BDO is a not-for-profit organisation and that our intention is to channel any funds generated by our courses into Druid-related projects, including the purchase of land on which to hold rituals and set up green burial sites.

*Many thanks for your time and attention, and many blessings from all at the BDO,
Greywolf/*

... and remember ... "Be the Awen!"

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