



PHILIP & STEPHANIE
CARR-GOMM

THE DRUID PLANT ORACLE

*Working with the
magical flora of the
Druid tradition*

Illustrated by
WILL WORTHINGTON

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INTRODUCTION

Ethne sighed as she looked at the fat bundles of mint, pine needles, elderberries, rose hips and balm hanging from pegs on the wall. There was mugwort for the cramps and loosestrife and willow bark for the fever. There was the plant called terrestrial sun for the nerves, yarrow for the stomach, foxglove and hawthorn for the heart and rue and hag's tapers for the cough. Long braids of garlic, useful for everything, swung from overhead along with the most important herbs: comfrey, vervain, figwort and oak bark for poulticing wounds, the last hanging in strips from the mantel.

Priestess of the Forest: A Druid Journey, ELLEN EVERT HOPMAN



Brighid's Blessings

Druidry is above all a spiritual path rooted in the green world of Nature. Much has been written about the Druids' love of trees and about the mysterious lore that has grown up around the Celtic tree alphabet of Ogham (also spelled Ogam), an ancient form of Irish writing. Far less is known about the wider herb and plant lore of ancient and contemporary Druids, but we hope that this plant oracle will help to uncover this treasure trove of information.

Druids today use plants to bring health and inspiration. They cultivate plants for their beauty and their properties, they use them to decorate their homes and sanctuaries, and to make incenses, elixirs and magical baths – and they turn to them for the healing of both body and soul.

In doing this they often remember and invoke Brighid – a goddess of healing, poetry and smithcraft first recognized in Ireland in pre-Christian times. She was later embodied in the figure of Saint Brighid, a woman who was born and raised as a Druid, but who converted to Christianity. Brighid's blessings are invoked to this day all over the world, and in particular at the festival time dedicated to her – Imbolc, on 1 February – and at holy wells dedicated to her in Ireland, Scotland and Cornwall.

The Physicians of Myddvai

The spirit of the Goddess, of the nurturing and healing power of the Feminine, is also present in the tradition of Welsh herbal healing, said to come from the Druids but emerging in the Middle Ages in the lineage of healers known as the Physicians of Myddvai. They traced the source of their knowledge to the inspiration of a spirit, the Lady of the Lake, who taught their first physician, Rhiwallon, the healing properties of herbs.

Of all kinds of knowledge, that of healing is almost certainly the most enduring. If a remedy can cure an ill or save a life, it will be remembered and used over and over again. The knowledge gained in pre-Christian times is therefore likely to have been transmitted through families of healers and in popular folklore down through the ages, appearing at moments in recorded history. We know, for example, that the MacBeth (Beaton) family in

Scotland, like the Physicians of Myddvai in Wales, passed their herbal knowledge across the generations. And since healing concerns matters of life and death, geographical as well as temporal boundaries were transcended as knowledge was shared across the centuries: Oriental, Classical, Arab, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon herbalism were all drawn upon by later healers.

The Druid today can benefit from this universal pool of knowledge, and at the same time deepen their relationship with the plants and lore of Druidry's sourcelands in Western Europe.

The Story of Airmid's Cloak

In Irish legend, Diancecht the god of Healing grew jealous when his son Miach's reputation as a healer eclipsed his own. He struck him with a sword three times, but each time Miach healed himself. On the fourth blow, however, his father struck the sword so deep that Miach died. Diancecht buried his son, and where he was laid there grew 365 herbs. Miach's sister Airmid quickly realized that each of these plants was a cure for one of the illnesses of the human body. She laid out her cloak and picked the herbs, gradually forming the outline of her brother. Just as Airmid was about to record the name of each plant and its location, Diancecht picked up Airmid's cloak in a jealous fury and scattered the plants to the four winds. Ever since, our healers and herbalists have painstakingly tried to piece together the knowledge that was lost on that day.

Some believe that the old herb lore of the Ancient Druids has been lost forever, apart from the little we know from the first-century writings of Pliny the Elder. In his works, Pliny mentions that the Druids of Gaul revered Mistletoe, Vervain, *Selago* (probably Fir Club Moss) and *Samolus*, (possibly Water Pimpernel). We have no other information from any contemporary sources about any other plants the Druids might have used for magic or medicine.

At least Airmid, after her angry father scattered the herbs from her cloak, could have roamed the nearby land, collecting the leaves and flowers that had been blown by the wind. We are surely in a worse position!

Rediscovering the Lost World of Druid Herb Lore

Thankfully, though, it is possible to piece together much of the herb lore from those far-off times, by drawing on information from five sources: the relatively new science of archaeobotany; the information given in the old herbals that were written at the time of the Ancient Druids; accounts of the practices of later herbalists; the clues left to us in the old Irish and Welsh legends and in folklore; and the findings of botanical pharmacology.

To create *The Druid Plant Oracle*, we have taken the approach that if many or all of these sources support the suggestion that a particular plant was used in Ireland, Britain or Brittany at the time of the Ancient Druids, we should consider it for inclusion. We could not feature all the plants that fell into this category, but have been able to include more than the thirty-six named on the cards by mentioning them in the text and sometimes illustrating them.

The Search for Clues

Archaeobotany, also known as Palaeoethnobotany, involves the study of plant remains found in archaeological sites. Organic material is recovered from the earth, analysed and dated. Traces of plants found in ancient human excrement or bodies are also examined. Archaeobotany tells us that all the plants in this oracle grew at the time and – apart from Mandrake – in the territory of the Ancient Druids, and that many were growing in settlements.

Druidry was originally an oral tradition, so we have no records of its early practice, but a good deal of written material has survived from the period in which the Ancient Druids existed – the thousand or so years from the fourth century BCE to the sixth century CE. We know that the Celtic and ancient classical worlds were in contact with each other through trade, and since health is of such central concern to humans, information and remedies as well as plants would undoubtedly have been part of this traffic.

Egyptian papyri dating back to around 1700 BCE list herbal remedies and mention such universally used ingredients as Garlic, Poppy and Juniper. By the time of the Greek physician Hippocrates, around 400 BCE, herbal lore from India and Assyria had already been absorbed into European herbalism,

and herbs and spices were being traded along the Silk route. By the time Dioscorides wrote his classic herbal *De Materia Medica* in around 60 CE, herbal medicine was firmly established and informed, not only by these Eastern influences, but also by the experience of the Roman legionaries in the many diverse parts of the Empire. Dioscorides travelled with many of these legions, and his herbal became one of the most influential medical texts for the next 1,500 years.

If a plant was indigenous to the Druid lands, and if Dioscorides mentions it in his herbal, it is highly likely that it was used by them. If, in addition, the archaeobotanical evidence shows that it flourished beside old settlements, its case for inclusion is strengthened.

Imported Species

The only exception to this rule has been the inclusion of Mandrake, which is not indigenous to northwestern Europe. Of all plants, Mandrake has the most magical reputation and is one of the oldest ingredients used in anaesthesia. Since it was so prized for its ability to relieve pain and bring good fortune, it is highly likely that it was traded across the English Channel and Irish Sea. It is probable that other plants were transported in the same way, and Mandrake can be seen as the representative for imported species in this oracle.

Mythological Sources

The Irish legends, later Welsh texts, the folklore of Brittany, Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England can also help us in our quest. All these sources date from the Christian period and are not contemporary with the Ancient Druids, but we can reasonably surmise that, if the plants mentioned are also cited in the old herbals, and if the archaeobotanical evidence suggests they were flourishing in their time, then they are likely to have been used by them, too.

A Store of Inherited Lore

Two further sources have helped us in choosing the plants for this oracle. Herbalists are, by nature, traditionalists; they like to draw on a store of

inherited lore. Nothing recommends a plant or remedy more than learning that it has been successfully used in the past, and the herbalists of the Christian era would have continued the best practice of their pagan forebears. If the later herbalists of the Anglo-Saxon and Medieval periods mentioned the plants as being of value, this acted as further encouragement to include them. Finally, like icing on the cake, if the modern science of botanical pharmacology affirmed the reputation of a particular plant's virtues, it felt as if its inclusion was not only historically valid, but of practical value, too.

Like the five streams that run from the pool of Segais in Irish mythology, these five sources of information have helped to lead us to some of the plants that were most likely to have been used by the Ancient Druids.

Ceridwen's Brew

An important aspect of traditional healing in Celtic cultures was the making of charms and the singing of poems over healing herbs and the person who was injured or ill. Such charms and songs are recorded in medieval Irish manuscripts and in living Scottish folk practice, carrying on a tradition from the Middle Ages into the early twentieth century. This aspect of Celtic tradition seems not unlike that of Dine or Lakota healing, where song and prayer play as important a role as herbs and surgery in dealing with disease.

Ogam: Weaving Word Wisdom, ERYNN LAURIE

Today, science explains a plant's effect on the body or mind by pointing to its chemical compounds. For Druids, a plant is a living being that is able to influence us on different levels. Its colours and aroma, taste and physical constituents, and above all its spirit, affect us in the context of the time and the place in which we interact with it. The old herbalists were aware of the relationship between plants and time, and used astrology to determine when to pick a plant or take a remedy – combining star lore with plant lore in a way that is only now being tentatively explored at the fringes of science.

Many contemporary Druids are inspired by the old Welsh Tale of Taliesin, in which the goddess-figure Ceridwen prepares a brew of herbs to fill her son

with poetic inspiration – known as Awen in the Druid tradition – to compensate for his dreadful appearance. We can imagine her gathering the berries, roots and leaves for this brew in accordance with the old moon and star lore, linking the movements of vast bodies in the heavens with the flow of sap in the roots of some of the smallest of plants on Earth.

We have drawn on this concept of combining the power of a moment in time with a particular plant in order to encourage Awen – this time in the form of guidance that will hopefully bring inspiration that, in its own way, is healing.

The Ancient Virtues of Plants

Over the centuries, the flowers, fungi, roots, fruits and leaves used by the old healers acquired universally recognized qualities, often referred to as ‘virtues’, and many of these have been found to be scientifically valid. To create the card meanings for this oracle we have tried, wherever possible, to interpret the virtues of these plants metaphorically for the effects they might have in our lives, and for the types of experiences and attitudes they represent. In this way, we aim to combine a modern understanding of psychology and oracular usage with the accumulated wisdom of tradition.

As we created the oracle, we found that it was forming itself with representatives from every type of plant. Ferns and mosses, fungi and shrubs, cereals and aquatics, legumes and parasites, climbers, herbs and trees were all able to present at least one of their kindred to the circle.

So much work has been done on the Ogham and the sacred trees of the Druids that we chose to include just four of the many trees we could have selected, inevitably excluding many worthy candidates. Fortunately, the three blank cards included in the deck can act as templates for any number of extra cards you might wish to create to include further trees and plants in the oracle. In addition, the cards have been made to the same size as the deck in *The Druid Animal Oracle*, so the two decks can be combined to give readings inspired by both the animal and plant realms.

May the wisdom of the Natural world bring you inspiration, encouragement and healing!

THE ORACLE

The following pages present The Druid Plant Oracle deck. For each card the Gaelic name and botanical name is given, followed by a summary of Druid, Celtic and traditional lore for each card.





AGRIMONY

Mur-druidheann

Agrimonia eupatoria



UPRIGHT

- Purification • Liberation
• Preparation for new beginnings

REVERSED

- Unhealthy attachments • Sorrow
• Lethargy

Agrimony is a perennial of grassy places, native throughout most of the British Isles and Europe, introduced in America, growing up to 90 cm (3 ft) tall. It has starry yellow flowers that are apricot scented and turn into rust-red burred fruits. Its leaves, fragrant when crushed, have small toothed leaflets between pairs of larger ones.

The card shows Agrimony in full bloom at the time of the Druid festival of Alban Hefin, the Summer Solstice in June. To one side grows the first of the Celtic Ogham trees *Beith*, the Birch – the tree of beginnings and purification – which offers the same qualities as Agrimony. In the distance stand the lonely stones of the ‘Druids’ circle’ erected during the early Bronze Age at Penmaenmawr, Wales.

Upright meaning One of the Gaelic names for Agrimony is *mur-druidheann*, which has been interpreted as ‘sorrow of the Druids’. However, a more complete interpretation would explain that it is a ‘dispeller of sorrow used by the Druids’, since Agrimony has the special property of helping to liberate people from depression and lethargy by eliminating negative energy from their aura

and their home. If you have drawn this card upright, this may suggest that you are ready to let go of feelings, thoughts or attachments that are no longer serving you. Agrimony brings a sense of purification and liberation that makes you want to step boldly forward into a new phase of your life, or perhaps a new job or relationship. Any sorrow that you may have been feeling will be dispelled, and whatever negative energies may have been lingering in your home or workplace will soon vanish as swiftly as the night vanishes at dawn.

Reversed meaning A feeling of sadness or lethargy may be weighing you down at present. Life may seem to have lost its savour, and you wish that it felt like Spring again. Often, such feelings come from attachments that once may have brought you joy or comfort, but which now seem to have 'turned' – just as milk that once was nourishing can later turn sour. This may mean that you need to spend some time 'spring-cleaning' your life, both inwardly and outwardly. See if you can give or throw away unnecessary clutter in your home, and ask yourself 'Do I really need this?' of just about everything. Just as physical pain is a sign that your body needs attention, so feelings of sorrow and lack of energy may well be symptoms telling you that you must look after your own needs before those of others – at least until you feel better. By doing this, blockages will clear, negative energy will be dispersed, and you will start to move towards a new phase in your life.



A HERB OF PRINCELY AUTHORITY

Such was the name the Roman writer Pliny gave to this herb, which is also known as Church Steeples, Cocklebur and Sticklewort. The herb is a powerful astringent, tonic and blood cleanser, and for centuries was used to treat debilitating conditions in which the patient seemed drained of energy. In France, Agrimony is still used as a major ingredient in a

spring tonic tisane, and in Germany it was highly revered for its protective properties and is often mentioned as an ingredient of a sacred 'nine-herb bundle', used as a panacea for all kinds of physical and spiritual or psychological afflictions.

In addition to its tonic and healing properties, Agrimony is also able to bring deep and peaceful sleep. Its dried leaves and flowers can be used to make a herb pillow, and such is its power that the sleeper will only awake when the pillow is removed, according to this old English rhyme:

*If it be leyd under mann's heed,
He shal sleepyn as he were deed;
He shal never drede ne wakyn
Till fro under his heed it be takyn.*

Agrimony is the perfect herb for a lustral bath taken before meditating or engaging in any kind of spiritual work, or before participating in a ritual. To make an infusion, pour 570 ml (1 pint) of boiling water over two teaspoonfuls of chopped leaves, and leave to steep for ten minutes. The infusion can then be drunk as a tea, added to water for cleansing, or poured into your bath, which you can also strew with leaves and flowers if you wish.

In Druid magic, Agrimony is used as an incense to cleanse the aura and the ritual circle, acting in the same way that sage is used in certain Native American traditions for 'smudging'. The dried leaves sprinkled over glowing charcoal exert a powerful cleansing and purifying effect.

BETONY

Lus bheathag

Stachys sp.



UPRIGHT

Soothing discord • Dispelling negativity
• Protection

REVERSED

Confrontation • Avoidance
• Woundedness



Betony is a common name for the *Stachys* genus of about 300 species growing in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australasia and North America. Five species grow wild in Britain, but according to Pliny it was the species now known as Wood Betony that was held in particularly high esteem by the Ancient Celts. Betonies grow best in full sunlight or partially shaded areas, and can be found growing wild at the edges of woods and in grassland and wasteland. The plant grows to a height of 60 cm (2 ft) and the pink or purple flowers cluster on spikes and bloom through the months of July and August.

The card shows Wood Betony (*Stachys betonica*) in flower beside the dry-stone wall of an old physic garden, which could have belonged to one of the Physicians of Myddvai. A carved Celtic head lies against the wall. Behind the head in the background grows Valerian, which traditionally shares with Betony the quality of soothing discord, and to the right of the image we see Elecampane, which – like Betony – has antiseptic and antibacterial properties.

Upright meaning The ancients believed that Betony protected both the soul and the body. It was also known as a woundwort for its ability to

staunch bleeding and heal wounds. If you have chosen this card, it is possible you feel drawn to healing wounds – either in yourself or within others. When conflict occurs between people, there is often hurt and injury, and it is no easy matter to decide when to call a halt to the dispute and when to let it run its course. For conflict to be productive, rather than destructive, clear communication must be fostered and vindictiveness minimized. A successful couple or enterprise is not one that never experiences conflict, but one that is skilled in resolving the conflicts that inevitably arise in any meaningful relationship. The ability to resolve conflicts is at heart a healing ability – and one that is exemplified by Betony with its reputation as a panacea, and its outstanding medicinal qualities.

Reversed meaning The premature halting of conflict, like removing a symptom without healing its cause, may bring temporary relief (and may sometimes be necessary) but in the end simply delays the time until the cause of the problem is addressed. If you have chosen this card reversed, it might indicate that you have been avoiding expressing a different opinion or an emotion you perceive as negative, in order to ‘keep the peace’. But sometimes it is necessary to allow conflict – because out of the clash of views or feelings a new perspective or renewed closeness may emerge. See if your intuition tells you that you need to confront a person or an issue with no more evasion, or whether it is best to pursue other avenues of resolution.

It is also possible that you are experiencing feelings of discord that have arisen from a negative atmosphere that lingers in a particular location. To test this, avoid addressing the conflict there, and resolve to deal with it when you are in a different place. A further interpretation of this card might point simply to the fact that at present you are feeling wounded.



'SELL YOUR COAT AND BUY BETONY'

So runs an Italian proverb, which shows the value placed upon this remarkable herb by the ancients. For centuries it has been considered one of the most versatile and powerful of healing herbs on virtually every continent. Science confirms the accuracy of our ancestors' understanding of this plant, and we now know that it acts as an alterative, antibacterial, antipyretic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, astringent, carminative, diuretic, febrifuge, hypotensive, stomachic, styptic, tonic, vermifuge and vulnerary. Checking the meanings of these terms in a dictionary or online will in itself provide you with a short course in key concepts in herbal medicine. The fact that Betony possesses all these medicinal qualities explains why it was sometimes known as *All-heal*, an epithet also used to describe Mistletoe, and explains, too, why the Gaelic name for this plant is simply *lus bheathag* – Life Plant.

The name Betony is said to derive from the Celtic *bew* meaning 'head' and *ton* meaning 'a tonic' or 'good' since it was well known from early days for helping to cure headaches.

In Ancient Rome, Betony was believed to cure forty-seven diseases. Anglo-Saxon herbalists believed it could cure 'elf sickness' – caused by malicious spirits – and in medieval times herbalists believed it could drive away 'devils and despair', and it was accordingly planted in churchyards and hung around the neck as a charm. It was also smoked, in combination with Eyebright and Coltsfoot, or taken in snuff to relieve headaches. It has also been said that the herb, when added to their food, can soothe feuding couples.

Druids today might well use the plant medicinally, perhaps taken in a tea to ease headaches. But they might also make an infusion to add to a ritual bath or the water used to wash the floor or house to dispel negative influences and encourage reconciliation.



BORAGE

Borrach

Borago officinalis



UPRIGHT

Courage ♦ Forgetfulness ♦ Gladness

REVERSED

Caution ♦ Inner courage

♦ Coming to terms with suffering

Borage originated in the Middle East, but is now naturalized throughout most of Europe and North Africa, mostly growing wild on wasteland in Britain. It is also known as Starflower, and the oil from its seeds is now popular for its health benefits. It grows to a height of 1 m (3¼ ft), and its stems and leaves are hairy all over. In mild climates the plant blooms all year round with small five-pointed blue or pink flowers.

The card shows Borage in flower beside a Celtic dagger, which is in its scabbard, hanging from a palisade of coppiced Hazel. It is Lughnasadh, in high Summer, the time of traditional games and contests. Thyme and Rosemary are in flower, too – Thyme beside the scabbard; Rosemary behind the palisade.

Upright meaning Borage has been associated with courage since ancient days. If you have chosen this card it may be that this is the quality you need to draw upon at this time. True courage requires a strong and generous heart, and this involves looking beyond your own needs to perceive the greater good of those around you. This may mean you need to be courageous

in standing up for someone who is weaker than you or who needs your protection, or it may mean sticking your head above the parapet to make a stand for what you believe is right.

To be courageous and daring you must also be able to forget. If you hold every eventuality in mind, you will never act, and being courageous often requires a magnanimity that forgets personal slights or errors of judgement. Going beyond judgement or recrimination, true courage is a brave open-heartedness that restores our confidence in human nature, bringing with it joy and happiness.

Reversed meaning There is a courage that lies in action and fighting for what you believe is right, but there is another kind of courage, too, that is less flamboyant and outward. Sometimes it takes more courage to be still and not to act than to take a stand and react openly to a situation. Sadness can come into our lives for many reasons and there is much suffering in the world. If you have chosen this card reversed, it may mean that you are coming to terms with the suffering of life, and Borage urges you to 'take heart' – to know that however difficult life appears to be, your heart and soul are growing strong through your experience of being in the world, with all the pain and hardship this might involve.

Caution can sometimes arise out of fear or cowardice, but it is also often wise to be cautious, avoiding impulsive decisions or actions that appear to be courageous but which are in reality based on bravado. Choosing this card reversed may also simply indicate that you have forgotten something important. Rosemary, which grows beside Borage in the card, has a reputation for enhancing memory – it might be wise to start drinking Rosemary tea!



THE HERB OF GLADNESS

Some believe the name Borage comes from the Gaelic *borrach*, which means 'a person of courage', others that it comes from the Latin, French or Italian words for hair or wool, or from the Latin for 'I bring the heart', since the plant was widely known for its beneficial effect on the emotions. Dioscorides and Pliny, contemporaries of the Ancient Druids, wrote of its ability to 'comfort the heart and purge melancholie', and herbalists ever since have prescribed Borage to lift the spirits and bring good cheer, for which reason the Welsh name for the herb is *Llawenlys* – 'herb of gladness'.

Dioscorides and Pliny also believed that Borage was the famous *Nepenthe* of Homer, which brought absolute forgetfulness when steeped in wine. Whether or not the plant could induce this state, it was certainly used to evoke a related quality – courage – which implies the ability to forget one's anxieties and everyday concerns.

Some writers say that the Celts of old would steep Borage in wine to induce courage, and by the time of the Crusades this had become such an established tradition that Borage was added to the stirrup cups of departing knights. The ancients' observation of the connection between courage and this herb has since been born out by scientific research. We now know that the plant encourages the production of adrenaline, which helps the body cope with stressful situations, as well as possibly acting as a restorative agent on the adrenal cortex. For this reason, Borage might well be helpful for those who have been taking steroids for a long time since it could help to restore the adrenal glands.

Modern life can be very stressful, and one of the purposes of a spiritual tradition is to help relieve us of stress so that we can fulfil our purpose in life, and focus on the goals of our tradition, which in Druidry's case are the attainment of love, wisdom and creativity. Using Borage as a tea or infused in wine, or taken as Starflower oil, may help us to do this.

BRAMBLĒ

An dris bennaichte

Rubus fruticosus



UPRIGHT

Tenacity ♦ Boundaries ♦ Rootedness

REVERSED

Smothering ♦ Irritability

♦ Defensiveness



Bramble, also known as Blackberry, is found all over the world, and is native to most of Europe. In Britain it is common in hedgerows and on any uncultivated ground, where its long prickly stems soon create tangled masses of impenetrable undergrowth. As if to compensate for this unsociability, the plant produces quantities of white or pale pink flowers, which bloom from May onwards, giving way to deep purple, almost black, fruit.

The card illustrates one of the distinctive features of the Bramble – its exceptionally long picking season, demonstrated by its display of unripe and ripe fruit. On the stone we can see the Ogham sign for Bramble – M, which stands for *Muin*. Some writers assign this Ogham to the vine, others to blackberry. The fruit of both plants produce wine, which provides the associations to this Ogham of the loosening of inhibitions and the accessing of intuition or prophecy as a result.

Upright meaning If you have ever tried digging up Bramble roots, you will know how tenacious they are – they travel long and deep, and some root systems can cover a wide area and be of great age. For this reason the

Bramble is the perfect symbol for tenacity and rootedness. It's not going to be pushed around and it's not going anywhere! If you have chosen this card, it's possible that you feel like digging your heels in and just staying put – holding your ground and protecting all that you hold dear. It's also possible that this card represents another person or situation that is 'prickly' and stubborn. It may be necessary to remember how difficult it is to remove a Bramble from its position, and how – at the right season – it can yield delicious fruit that is full of goodness. Knowing our own boundaries is vital to our emotional and spiritual health, and when it comes to relationships, being sensitive to other people's boundaries is vital, too. Often, provided we respect their boundaries and when necessary leave them alone, they will in their own time be generous to us.

Reversed meaning The Bramble is sacred to the Goddess. Like a mother, she protects fiercely and as a result yields sweet fruit. But if you choose this card reversed it might indicate that in some aspect of your life there are signs of a mothering that has been too fiercely protective – becoming, instead, smothering as it seeks to defend its offspring at all costs. It is possible that you, or the issue or person indicated in the reading, has been reacting too defensively to a situation or person. In Scotland, irritable people are described as being 'as cross as a Bramble' and it may be that a more tolerant or accepting stance is being suggested. Alternatively, the card may simply indicate a general sense of irritability or discomfort with a situation that has become deeply rooted. Tenacity may be starting to look to you more like intransigence.



THE BLESSED BRAMBLE

When we go blackberry picking, we're doing something that our hunter-gatherer ancestors did thousands of years ago; blackberry seeds were found in the stomach of a Neolithic man dug up in Essex. Later, blackberries, along with other native species such as bilberries and elderberries, were used not only for food but to make wine and add flavour to beers. Bramble stems were used to bind straw or rushes together to form skeps – forerunners of beehives constructed like woven baskets. In Scotland, the plant is so valued it is sometimes called *an dris bennaichte*, the blessed Bramble, but it has also been called Blackbutters, Blackbides, Bumblekites or Scaldberries. And in Glencairn a traditional riddle about the plant runs:

As white as snaw, but snaw it's not.

As red as blood, but blood it's not.

As black as ink, but ink it's not.

In the old days, Bramble leaves were used as a remedy for burns and scalds – applied with the aid of a spoken charm. The berries, if gathered at the right phase of the moon, were believed to give protection against 'evil runes', and creeping under a Bramble bush was considered effective against rheumatism. In Cornwall, sufferers from boils, and even poorly cattle, crawled or were dragged through arches of Bramble, and in Gloucestershire children with ruptures or hernias were passed backwards and forwards through such archways, too.

By Alban Elfed, the Druid festival of the Autumn Equinox, all your blackberries should be harvested, and it's time to make blackberry wine. You could drink last year's wine at your celebration of the equinox, but hurry if you want to pick any more – the traditional saying is that 'the devil pisses on the berries on Michaelmas night' – which falls on 29 September, just a week after the equinox. By that time the berries have usually turned sour, having picked up mildew or bacteria.



BURDOCK

Seircean suirich

Arctium sp.



UPRIGHT

Harvest ♦ Purification ♦ Attachment

REVERSED

The Outcast ♦ Scapegoating ♦ Blame

Burdock is a biennial thistle that grows in most of Europe, North America and Asia. Reaching a height of about 120 cm (4 ft), it has large rough oval leaves and purple flowers that bloom between July and September. Its distinctive feature is its burrs – prickly seed heads that appear once the plant has flowered. The burrs, a miracle of natural design, inspired the Swiss inventor George de Mestral, who copied their tiny hooks and loops to create Velcro.

The card shows Greater Burdock (*Arctium lappa*) during the time between the two Druid festivals of Lughnasadh on 1 August, which marks the start of the harvest season, and Alban Elfed at the Autumn Equinox on 21–22 September, which marks its end. Beside it grows a Dandelion, a plant with many similar properties to Burdock which was once combined with it to create a popular soft drink and a potent wine. Dandelion was used by the Physicians of Myddvai and was almost certainly used by the Ancient Druids as both food and medicine.

Upright meaning If you have chosen this card, it may mean that enough is enough, and that you need to consider freeing yourself of an influence or a

habit that is no longer serving you, and which has now become toxic. Treat this as a process of harvesting, and separate the wheat from the chaff. Recognize that even the most negative experiences offer valuable learning, and see if you can extract this learning so that you can move on to a new phase of life.

The Burdock propagates widely, because its burrs easily attach themselves to the fur of passing animals and 'hitch a ride' far from home. The ease and simplicity of their attachment offers the perfect image of the way in which we can sometimes, with minimum effort, be carried into new territory in our lives. If this occurs unconsciously, we can find ourselves in difficulty, but if we attach ourselves with awareness and with a light touch to ideas, projects, and people whom we trust, we can achieve far more than if we remained isolated.

Reversed meaning Choosing this card reversed may mean that the process of scapegoating is occurring in your life. It may be that you are being unjustly blamed for a particular problem, or that you have become the scapegoat in your family or work environment. Alternatively, it could mean that you have fallen into the trap of placing all the blame for a situation on one person or group. Either way, the important task for you is to realize that this process is happening, and to take steps to end it. Blaming others, while a natural human reaction, rarely offers more than temporary satisfaction. To truly resolve an issue, a different approach is needed. Discussion, mediation and contemplation can all be helpful. The ritual casting of Burdock burrs into a fire might also help, both psychologically and magically.



THE BEAR'S PAW

Greater Burdock's scientific name is *Arctium lappa*. *Arctium* is derived from the Greek *arktos*, a bear, and *lappa*, to seize. But it's also possible that *lappa* derives from the Celtic *llap*, a hand. Whatever the derivation, when your clothing encounters the burrs of a Burdock, they will be as difficult to shake off as the grasp of a bear's paw.

These extraordinarily tenacious burrs have been used for centuries in the annual harvest festival of the Burryman in the town of South Queensferry, West Lothian, Scotland. At Lughnasadh in early August, a man is dressed in a special suit and balaclava and covered with thousands of Burdock burrs, leaving only small holes for his eyes and a hole through which offerings of whisky can be drunk with a straw. All day this terrifying bear-like figure is paraded through town with his arms outstretched and supported by two staves. Thought to be a relic of an old pagan fertility rite, the march of the Burryman is said to bring good luck to the town, since any evil spirits will stick to his burrs and be carried away.

Burdock has grown in Britain for thousands of years, and has long been used both as a foodstuff and a medicinal herb. The root is usually more than 30 cm (1 ft) long and can be eaten raw or cooked. The roots and leaves provide one of the most powerful and reliable herbal blood tonics and, like Dandelion, Burdock is effective at treating skin conditions such as acne, eczema and psoriasis. It is antibiotic, regulates the hormone system and is a valuable source of B vitamins. It stimulates the lymphatic and immune systems, is effective at removing toxins and may help prevent cancer. Just as the Burryman roams the town eliminating toxic energies, Burdock travels through our body performing exactly the same function.

Druids today might well take Burdock and Dandelion as an infusion, or as a cordial or wine during the harvest season between the two festivals of Lughnasadh and Alban Elfed – cleansing themselves and strengthening their immune systems in preparation for Winter.

CELTIC BEAN

Pònaire

Vicia faba celtica



UPRIGHT

Fertility • Reincarnation • Nourishment

REVERSED

Confusion • The Ancestors • Impurity



The Broad Bean is grown widely around the world today, and is an entirely different plant to other kinds of bean such as kidney, French, string, wax and haricot beans, which came to Europe from South America in the sixteenth century. The 'Celtic Bean' is about half the size of the modern varieties. Its flowers display the characteristic black spot of the species on its petals, and the bean itself is covered in a black skin.

The card shows a plant in bloom in the foreground, and beside it a basket of beans. Behind it we see rows in cultivation on an Iron Age farm, which we can see in the distance. Pigs are busy in the field.

Upright meaning The Broad Bean is associated with fertility and reincarnation. As it sprouts, it is a phallic symbol, and the bean when it has formed resembles an embryo. The ancients saw the plant as being in direct communication with the realm of the dead, with their spirits returning from the Underworld through the hollow stems of the plant. Choosing this card may indicate that something which you thought was dead has come back into your life in a new form. A relationship you believed was over may suddenly

be revived, or a project that was buried a long time ago may be bearing fruit in an unexpected way.

Alternatively, you may be experiencing a sensual earthiness which seeks sexual expression, or you may find that you are drawn to expressing this earthiness in an artistic way.

Reversed meaning The bean seems a mundane plant, yet in the past it was believed to be connected to the Otherworld and the Realm of the Ancestors. If you have chosen this card reversed, it may mean that you are being strongly influenced by the Ancestors at this time. They may be inspiring you to behave or feel in certain ways, or you may simply be acting out a pattern that was laid down by a previous generation. This might be appropriate, or you may wish to represent the generation that finally stops acting out this pattern, in which case a ritual offering of beans to the spirits of the Ancestors may be indicated. Try throwing some over your shoulder or casting them on the ground after stating your intention.

Alternatively, you may be experiencing some confusion or a sense of impurity. Trying to be free of impurity can end up making you feel even more uncomfortable. Purity is a quality rarely found in Nature – everything from water to air needs a good mix of ingredients to make it wholesome, and we need our flaws, weaknesses and history of mistakes to make us human. What counts is not purity but integrity, which literally means wholeness.



SYMBOL OF DEATH, FERTILITY AND RENEWAL

The Broad Bean has been cultivated from Afghanistan in the east to Europe in the west for at least nine thousand years. It was cultivated in the Middle East, in Ancient Egypt and in Mediterranean Europe before making its way to Britain probably about six thousand years ago, in the

form of the 'Celtic Bean', which rapidly became one of the staple foods of our ancestors, along with Wheat and Barley.

Like the pig, which was also a major source of protein, the bean was associated with death, the Underworld, and the powers of fertility and renewal. Beliefs, rituals and folklore from all over Europe, from classical times to the nineteenth century, affirm the power that the humble bean held over the popular imagination. Beans were used for divination, as a charm to persuade spirits to leave a house, and for curing warts, toothache and head lice. A mixture of black and white beans were used for voting, with beans being replaced later by balls, from which the term 'blackball' derives.

Despite the bean's popularity, a number of cults banned their followers from eating them. The most famous of these was the Pythagoreans, but devotees of the Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries, and Roman and Egyptian priests also treated the bean as taboo. Some scholars believe that this was in response to a peculiarity of this plant: a deficiency known as favism, which affects many people, particularly in the Mediterranean. Inhaling the pollen or eating the bean can result in poisoning, and even death. Other scholars argue for its similarity with the Urdu Bean, which is taboo in India, and suggest that its reputation arose because of the plant's black markings, which associated it with death and impurity.

Some believe that Pythagoras was taught by a Druid, while others believe the Druids taught Pythagoreanism. The philosopher was said to have died because he refused to cross a beanfield to escape his enemies. Millennia later the beanfield was once again obliquely associated with Druidism through the infamous 'Battle of the Beanfield', in which police assaulted travellers to the Stonehenge festival.



CHAMOMILE

Camomhail

Anthemis sp.



UPRIGHT

Rest • Guardianship • Regeneration

REVERSED

Stress • Sanctuary • Calm

Chamomile is a perennial herb found growing in most of Europe, North Africa and the temperate region of Asia. In Britain, four species grow in the wild. Common Chamomile is cultivated in herb gardens and on lawns. The plant's natural habitat is cliff-top grasslands, damp woodland clearings and sandy commons, but it adapts well to grazed land or mowed lawns and can be found on village greens and cricket pitches.

The card shows Common Chamomile (*Anthemis nobilis*) growing beneath an apple tree – in early Summer before its fruit has ripened. In the distance an ancient river finds its way to the sea.

Upright meaning Chamomile brings calm, rest and protection. If you have chosen this card, it may mean that you are entering, or need to enter, a calm phase, in which you will be able to connect again to your inner resources – both physical and spiritual. Our lives can be so frenetic that even when we do take the time to rest we find it hard to calm down. Chamomile can help us to do this. In addition, Chamomile is one of the St John's Wort plants – a term that was used for a number of herbs traditionally gathered on St John's

Day, and, originally, probably at the Summer Solstice. These plants convey the energy of the summer sun – of regeneration and vitality. Without vitality, whatever we do is coloured by a sense of fatigue or lack of enthusiasm, and choosing this card may suggest that you need to focus on how you can regain your zest for life, and the energy you need to cope with the demands of the life you have chosen. The card may also be suggesting a need to go back to basics, the simple things in life, or even to return to the family and the nurturing it can offer.

Reversed meaning Most people's lives tend to be stressful, but it is how they cope with it which determines whether or not it makes them ill or depressed. If you have chosen this card reversed, it may indicate that you are experiencing a good deal of stress at the moment, and it can be helpful to focus not on the source of that stress, which could be out of your control, but on how you are reacting to it.

The more you focus on something, the more your awareness is consumed by preoccupation with it. One of the values of a spiritual path lies in its ability to offer inspiring ideas, rather than worrying thoughts, to focus upon. It should also offer an oasis of calm – a sanctuary in the midst of life's troubles – to which you can turn when you feel overwhelmed or under great pressure. In Druidry, this sanctuary is often visualized as a sacred grove – a sun-dappled glade in the woods – in which you can rest and meditate, reconnecting to the essential in life, and finding support in the inspiration of an age-old tradition.



THE PLANT'S PHYSICIAN

Mrs Maud Grieve was a pioneer in the study of herbs, and in 1931 she published her seminal two-volume 'Modern Herbal', which finally gathered much of the traditional herb lore of the British Isles, and further afield, for posterity. In her Herbal she says of Chamomile: 'No plant was better known to the country folk of old, it having been grown for centuries in English gardens for its use as a common domestic medicine ...'

The plant has a strong scent of apple and has long been grown on lawns to release its perfume when walked upon. William Stukeley, the founding father of the discipline of Archaeology and a key figure in the eighteenth-century Druid Revival, created a Druid temple in his garden – laying it out as a sacred landscape with a Mistletoe-covered apple tree at the centre of concentric circles of hazels and evergreens. He built a tumulus and an altar, and when his wife miscarried they ritually buried the foetus underneath the Chamomile lawn they had planted before the altar – an act that is not only touching but accords with the Druidic belief that apples and hazelnuts are sacred foods of the Otherworld.

Chamomile is known as 'The Plant's Physician' as its perfume deters insects; it is said that if you plant it among your shrubs and flowers you will improve the health of your garden and revive ailing plants.

Its medicinal effect on humans has been recognized since ancient times; such was its efficacy that the Ancient Egyptians dedicated it to their Sun god Ra. In the Orkneys, an infusion of the flowers, called 'camavine flooers', was taken for bilious problems, and hot poultices of it were used on inflammations. An old Scottish saying runs, 'To comfort the brain, smell to camomil' – even inhaling the perfume was said to be healing.

Chamomile acts as a mild sedative, and can be drunk as a tea to encourage sleep. But it is also a herb of the sun and Alban Hefin, the Summer Solstice, and brings a sense of rebirth and regeneration. This makes it an ideal ingredient for a ritual bath or incense.

CLOVER

Seamrag chapail

Trifolium sp.



UPRIGHT

Wisdom • Health • Good fortune

REVERSED

Venom • Liberation • Assimilation



Clover is a perennial that grows abundantly in grassland throughout Britain and Europe, Asia and North America. There are many varieties, including White and Red Clover, Hare's-foot Clover and Starry Clover. Red Clover is the most commonly used in herbalism and homeopathy. Clovers normally have three-lobed leaves, but occasionally one with four lobes can be found.

The card shows the Well of Segais, the mythical source of the river Boyne in Ireland. The salmon of Wisdom swims in this sacred pool, which is overhung by hazels. Every so often a hazelnut will fall and the salmon will crack open the nut and feed on it. In the foreground we see Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*) in flower.

Upright meaning Since records began, good luck has been said to come to those who find a four-leafed Clover. It is extremely auspicious to draw this card in a reading, and it may well indicate that you are about to experience good fortune. In Sussex folklore, the four leaves of a lucky Clover were said to represent fame, wealth, good health and a faithful lover, and perhaps one or more of these will come to you. The old phrase 'living in Clover' meant

living in luxury, and it is possible that you will be able to enjoy a standard of living or lifestyle that you have long dreamed about but never quite attained. To dream of Clover is considered a portent of good fortune and health, and the wise understand that the greatest wealth is found not in money, but in good health. If we can find wisdom as well as health, then we can bask in good fortune, regardless of how much money we might have. The Well of Segais, shown on the card, is considered by Druids to be the source of wisdom. From this source they refresh their bodies and their spirits.

Reversed meaning It is said that St Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland by striking one with a Clover-leaf-shaped staff. Some interpret the term 'snakes' to mean Druids, since they were often referred to as 'snake-people' or 'adder-men'. Drawing this card reversed may indicate that you are trying to free yourself of something unwanted, troubling, or even toxic. You may want to rid yourself of a habit or anxiety that bothers you, or perhaps you wish to be free from something that you feel inhibits you or hampers your development. This card may be inviting you to first consider what you have gained or learned from what you wish to banish. The venom of snakes can be curative in minute doses; the experience of difficulty, or even toxicity, may be necessary in some way to your growth as a human being, and before you are able to move on you may need to assimilate this understanding into your awareness.



THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE LADY CERIDWEN

Clover has acted as a magical plant for centuries throughout Ireland, Britain and continental Europe. Some scholars believe the popular motif in Celtic art, the 'triskele', is a stylized representation of the trefoil – the three-lobed Clover leaf. To Druids it represents one of their most important symbols – the three bars of light that symbolize the

solstice and equinox sunrise points and the three branches of their learning: Bard, Ovate and Druid.

In the Druid ceremony of Alban Eilir, the Spring Equinox, Clover is used at a key moment in the ritual to represent the living power of the Three Bars of Light in the trefoil that springs up in the footprints of the Lady Ceridwen.

The plant is also associated with the festival time of Beltane, which takes place on 1 May. In France and Germany, young women would take Clover dew baths at dawn – a custom now adopted by keen contemporary Druids. Fittingly, it is also associated with a third festival time – Alban Hefin, the Summer Solstice. In France, a virgin had to discover a four-leaved Clover the night before the solstice to bring good luck to her family, and St John's Day (a few days after the solstice) was considered an auspicious time for love divination with Clover.

The association of Clover with the period around the Spring Equinox can be seen in its connection with St Patrick and his day on 17 March. It is said that he used a Clover leaf to teach the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and the leaf – known as the Shamrock (*seamraig*) – eventually became a national symbol of Ireland, as did the Rose for England, the Thistle for Scotland and the Daffodil or Leek for Wales.

Dioscorides believed Clover could cure fevers and inflammations of the groin, and herbalists use it in the treatment of coughs. By the medieval period this humble leaf had become a symbol of true love, both worldly and divine, and had influenced architecture in the form of the Gothic three-lobed arch, and playing cards in the suit of clubs (*treffe* in France). In the Tarot, this suit equates with that of Wands – usually attributed to the element of Fire, signifying inspiration: Awen.



COMFREY

Meacan dubh

Symphytum officinale



UPRIGHT

Structure ♦ Ancestral foundations

♦ Fusion

REVERSED

Surrender ♦ Separateness ♦ Individuality

Comfrey is native to Europe and Asia, and has seen several Ice Ages come and go in Britain. Its leafy stem can grow 1 m (3¼ ft) high, and because it prefers a moist soil it tends to grow wild on riverbanks and in ditches. Its stem is rough and hairy and its pale cream or purplish flowers bloom in bell-like clusters from May to October.

The card shows Comfrey growing beside a woodland stream. The alder trees on the opposite bank are starting to lose their leaves, and beside the delicate Solomon's Seal that leans towards the water we see the bones of a hare.

Upright meaning Such is the power of Comfrey that it can act both upon the surface and deep within the body. It soothes and heals the skin, but also succeeds in reaching the skeleton to ease aching joints and to help fuse broken bones. If you have chosen this card, it may mean that you need to attend to both the outward manifestation of an issue and the deep structure or underlying cause. Bones and skeletons symbolize the basis and foundation of things, and they represent our link with the Ancestors, too. It may be that the issue you are dealing with is ancestral in origin, and that you need to

research your family history, or perhaps take the skeleton out of the closet to heal an old wound and then rebury the bones, not in the closet but with proper ceremony in the ground outside.

Alternatively, the card may indicate fusion or union between two concepts, organizations or people. Strength and healing can emerge out of union, confirming the old adage that 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'.

Reversed meaning Although the goal of mysticism is to merge your identity with God – or Goddess – and the goal of romantic love is to merge with your lover, if you wish to live effectively in the world you also need to retain a sense of your individual identity. Romantic love and an intense pursuit of mystical experiences can make us temporarily 'ill'. If you have chosen this card reversed, it is possible that you're having difficulty balancing the need for a strong sense of self with the need for letting go of your sense of self to merge with another person or a deity. Perhaps you sometimes feel so close to someone that your identities seem to merge, and you then have difficulty in feeling a complete person when you are on your own. To live happily and effectively in the world, we need to somehow tread the path of both surrendering to something greater than ourselves, whether that be a relationship, an ideal or the Divine, and sensing ourselves as unique, separate and responsible individuals.



THE MASTER HEALER

Richard Mabey, author of the encyclopedic *Flora Britannica*, describes Comfrey as 'the Master Healer' that has been used throughout Britain and Europe for 'everything from drawing splinters to easing backache'. Comfrey contains an anti-inflammatory compound, large amounts of soothing mucilage, sterols and the healing compound allantoin. This

combination of ingredients makes it ideal for treating sprains, bruises, ulcers, scalds, cuts and abrasions, and for soothing and healing the skin. It can be added to ointments, and its leaves can even be used as plasters, as their tiny hairs attach well to the skin.

An infused oil of Comfrey warmed and rubbed into the skin helps to soothe the discomfort of arthritis and rheumatism, and many of its common names, such as Boneset, Knitbone and Knit Back, point to its ability to help in the healing of broken bones. The Physicians of Myddvai used it 'to promote the union of bone' and the term Comfrey probably derives from the Latin *confervere*, meaning 'to grow together'. Solomon's Seal has been used for similar complaints – as a decoction in wine to knit bones, and as a poultice for bruises. Bruised leaves mixed with lard were considered to be the best remedy for a black eye.

In the past it was believed that Comfrey baths could repair the hymen and thus 'restore virginity'. And it was believed that Comfrey leaves in the shoe would ensure safety while travelling, and the leaves placed in a suitcase would prevent its loss.

In modern times Comfrey has been found to make excellent fertilizer. A bag full of Comfrey leaves left in a bucket of water for two weeks will yield a foul-smelling liquid fertilizer rich in nutrients. The leaves contain two to three times the amount of potassium found in farmyard manure, making them valuable assets for the organic gardener. Some say the leaves should be cut at the start of the moon's third quarter and applied as a foliar feed in the fourth quarter. Leaf mould can be added to potting mixtures, and leaves can be laid in potato trenches or used as mulch around tomato plants or fruit canes, and can also be added in layers to stimulate the compost heap.

CUCKOO PINT

Cluas chaoin

Arum maculatum



UPRIGHT

Union • Creativity • Harmony

REVERSED

Disharmony • Toxicity

• Inability to connect



Cuckoo Pint grows abundantly in Britain in shady spots – particularly in hedgerows and woodland. Its large glossy leaves are among the first to appear in Spring. Its flowers emerge from a sheath-like leaf called a spathe, which is blotched with black and contains a stem called a spadix, which carries both male and female flowers. In Autumn the flowers die away as poisonous green berries form, which ripen to bright reddish orange.

The card shows a Cuckoo Pint in Spring. The large shiny leaves display characteristic black blotches, and the spadix emerges elegantly from the chalice of its spathe. Beside it grows wood sorrel, which contains the same toxin as Cuckoo Pint but in much smaller quantities. A cuckoo leans forward from a nearby willow and in the distance we see the stones of Men-An-Tol in Cornwall, which are traditionally associated with fertility and healing.

Upright meaning The Cuckoo Pint displays the chalice and blade united. This symbolizes at one level the union of man and woman, but at a deeper level the goal of the Druid and all spiritual seekers: the union of the masculine and feminine aspects of the psyche, sometimes termed the Mystical Marriage

or Alchemical Wedding. Drawing this card upright may suggest a time of profound harmony and union with the person you love, or it could indicate that the time favours the further integration of two aspects of your nature. The marriage of the masculine and feminine is often seen as the reflection of the union of the two primal forces of God and Goddess, from which all creation flows. Therefore, this may also be a time of great creativity and fertility for you. Like the androgynous figure in the World card of the Tarot, the Cuckoo Pint is both male and female. The powers and skills of both genders are available to you to further your spiritual quest and your ability to be truly creative.

Reversed meaning When there is disharmony, nothing seems to go the way you wish. If you can't connect openly and warmly with your partner, friends or work colleagues, you can't be fully creative or happy – however favourable the outer circumstances. Choosing this card reversed may indicate that you are going through a period in which harmonious communication is proving difficult. Although it is important to strive for connection and union, these goals may sometimes be difficult, or impossible, to achieve if poisonous or toxic words or feelings have been expressed. Our systems can tolerate, and even be healed by, certain doses of poison, but beyond a particular level, only harm can result and we should avoid contact with such toxins. Whenever we go through a period of disharmony, we should remember that all of life is cyclical, and that a period of harmony is sure to follow sooner or later.



THE ADDER ROOT OF BĒLTANĒ

The idea symbolized by the Cuckoo Pint is depicted powerfully in the stones of Men-An-Tol in Cornwall. There, the pre- or proto-Druidic megalithic builders created an obvious symbol of the two principles of masculine and feminine. The stones' association with fertility and healing

were such that in the old days children with tuberculosis were passed naked through the hole three times, and adults with scrofula or back complaints nine times. The axis of the row of stones aligns with all of the four Celtic festivals celebrated by Druids: pointing to the Beltane and Lughnasadh sunrises in one direction, and the Imbolc and Samhain sunsets in the other.

The festival of Beltane in particular can be associated with the Cuckoo Pint, since it flowers at that time and depicts the union of the Lord and Lady – a central feature of this springtime festival. Today, Beltane is celebrated in many towns and villages simply as May Day; the customary dances around the maypole remind us of the Cuckoo Pint's upright spadix. The plant has more than ninety different names around the British Isles, many of them reflecting the obvious sexual associations with its shape. Cuckoo Pint comes from the Anglo-Saxon for lively (*cucu*), and penis (*pintle*), and its other names include Priest's Pintle or Pilly, Dog's Cock and Lords and Ladies.

Although above ground it is poisonous, its tubers – if treated effectively – yield a starch that was used to treat clothes and as a cosmetic. It was also a substitute for arrowroot in cooking, and was sold commercially as 'Portland Sago' or 'Portland Arrowroot'. The fact that a poisonous plant can be nutritious and helpful depicts well one of the teachings of Druidry – that poison, as a natural phenomenon, has its place in the scheme of things. Druids themselves were once known as 'adders' and Cuckoo Pint has been called adder root, probably because of the fifth-century herbalist Dioscorides' belief that it could cure snake bites. He named it: *Drakontaia Mikre*, or 'little dragon'.

Cuckoo Pint can be used by contemporary Druids as a potent reminder of the qualities associated with Beltane: fertility, the harmony of Lord and Lady, and pride in the beauty of sexuality.



FERN

Raineach

Pteridophyta



UPRIGHT

Life-force ♦ Sensuality ♦ Fertility

REVERSED

Invisibility ♦ Subtlety ♦ Self-effacement

Ferns are among the oldest plants in the world – dating back before the dinosaurs to the Mesozoic era. Around forty-five species grow wild in Britain, the commonest of which is the Male Fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*), followed by Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*).

The card shows a gully in the Scottish Highlands with three of the most frequently mentioned Ferns in British herb and folklore. Lightning streaks the sky and to the right in the foreground is a Moonwort Fern (*Botrychium lunaria*). Behind it is a Male Fern and to the left a Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*).

Upright meaning A plant sacred to midsummer and to Nwyfre, the life-force that snakes through the sky as lightning and along the ground as lines of telluric force, the Fern signifies fertility in every sense of the word. Choosing this card may mean that you are being blessed with life-force and energy at the moment. This energy may manifest in subtle or dramatic ways, but the important thing to remember is that it comes from the essentially spiritual nature of all creation. The way to maintain your contact with this life-force is through a spiritual practice that attunes you to the natural rhythms of the

Cosmos. Druidry is a sensual spirituality, meaning we can accept the pleasures of the body and the senses while recognizing their spiritual nature – enhancing our appreciation of them rather than making us feel guilty. Celebrating the seasonal festivals, meditating on the power of the elements, visiting the old places, soaking in the energies of the moon, sun and stars are all ways that we can open to the powers of the Seen and Unseen Universe.

Reversed meaning The Bracken waves. Its fronds move and the creature is gone – hidden among the Ferns. Many animals have developed astonishing ways of becoming invisible to escape predators. If you have chosen this card reversed, it may mean that you need to develop the skill of going unnoticed in situations where a high profile is inadvisable. We are so used to a culture that encourages fame, disclosure, and being ‘up-front’, that the more old-fashioned qualities of being self-effacing, of working in the background, and of avoiding the limelight, or even credit, are undervalued. Often it is appropriate to be open or challenging, but there are times when common sense or intuition dictates that a subtler, perhaps more oblique, approach is needed.

Alternatively the card may indicate that you are feeling invisible – as if no-one is noticing you or paying attention to your needs and concerns. If this is so, ascertain whether it is an isolated instance or whether it forms part of a long-standing pattern, and then select one or more cards that might help to clarify this issue and suggest ways you could improve the situation.



THE PLANT OF PERPETUAL YOUTH

The Ancient Greeks, medieval Arabian and European herbalists, Cherokee medicine men and the Maoris of New Zealand have all used Ferns for medicinal purposes, and it is likely that the Ancient Druids used them, too.

Mistletoe growing on an oak was deemed more magical than if it grew on another tree. Likewise, according to Mrs Grieve (see page 32), the delicate Oak Fern, which often grows on the mossy roots of old oak trees, was believed by the ancients to be particularly powerful as a medicine.

The Maidenhair Fern, fancifully taken to resemble female pubic hair, was used as a cough syrup and tea in Scotland.

Oil extracted from the Male Fern root has been used as a vermifuge since the time of Theophrastus and Dioscorides – its fronds uncurling like a worm apparently giving our ancestors a clue as to its properties. However, we now know that the oil can rid the intestines of tapeworms because of its highly toxic chemical constituents. The Male Fern was also considered an aphrodisiac, and the root was used in love potions.

Bracken, called the Fern of God in Ireland, was thought to confer invisibility if picked on St John's Eve. This idea probably evolved from the observation that bracken's means of reproduction seemed miraculous as its spores are invisible. St John's Eve is so close to the Summer Solstice that the idea may be linked to an earlier belief that we can contact the invisible world of Faery on Midsummer's Eve. In *Henry IV*, Shakespeare wrote, 'We have the receipt of Fern seed – we walk invisible.' The Fern was also said to bestow perpetual youth – again perhaps because of its apparently miraculous means of growth and renewal.

Moonwort, and its relative Adder's Tongue, are particularly mysterious. They are so small they often remain unnoticed under leaf mould, or beneath the height of surrounding grasses. Adder's Tongue produces one oval leaf that encloses a tongue-like spike reminiscent of the Cuckoo Pint; it was believed to be capable of curing snake bites. Moonwort produces a series of half-moon-shaped 'leaves' and was held to have a strong effect on metal: it was once believed that it could unlock a door if inserted in a keyhole, and draw the nails from the shoes of any horse that trod on it.

FIR CLUB MOSS

Garbhag an t-slàibhe

Huperzia selago



UPRIGHT

Initiation • Beginnings • Power

REVERSED

Letting go • Ending
• Premature conclusion



Fir Club Moss is one of two hundred species of club moss. It is native to many regions in the northern hemisphere, from the Himalayas in the east to Oregon in the west. It can be found growing on moorland and heathland, and on mountain grasslands, rock ledges and mountain tops to a height of 1,300 m (4,265 ft).

The card shows Fir Club Moss growing beside rocks in a forest in Scotland. Since it flourishes in the shade, we see it growing deep in the middle of the dark forest.

Upright meaning Size isn't everything. If you have chosen this card, it may mean that something apparently small, and even insignificant, has entered your life, which may prove to be very powerful. Although it is a very small plant, Fir Club Moss is descended from the giants of the primeval forest that now supply our coal. The power and warmth that coal can bring is echoed in the way that moss can be used to start a fire in the wild. Choosing this card augurs well if you are starting a new project or relationship. Never be dismayed at humble beginnings – with patience, something that begins

small or locally can grow to limits unimagined at the outset. The same principles hold true for spiritual initiation – taking the first step on a path *may* not necessarily give you dramatic mystical experiences at the outset, but in beginnings lies great power, and in time you may well look back and realize how much your life has changed because of this one, seemingly small, act.

It is also possible that this card indicates that you are finally starting to see clearly. Until now your understanding or perspective on a situation has been impaired, perhaps through lack of emotional distance. But now it is as if a veil has been drawn aside and an unmistakable clarity has emerged.

Reversed meaning Fir Club Moss was traditionally used as an abortifacient. If you have chosen this card reversed, it is possible either that you should consider aborting a project before you incur any further outlay of time, energy or money, or that this process has already occurred. Just as a plant or animal produces far more seeds than will ever mature into a new being, so we as humans produce far more ideas than can ever be realized. It can be tough letting go of an idea or project but it is a necessary part of life. We can still grieve for what is not to be, even as we accept the advisability or inevitability of the event.

It is always important to gain an insight into a card's potential meaning by considering the context of the reading and the card's position in a spread. In certain situations this card reversed may indicate that caution must be exercised at this moment to prevent the premature conclusion of an issue or project. In its early days a project needs nurturing, and too much exposure to criticism can be detrimental.



FROM TALLEST TREE TO TINY MOSS

360 million years ago, during the Carboniferous era, club mosses – along with horsetails – were at the top of the evolutionary hierarchy, forming trees that were more than 40 m (130 ft) tall. Although some fossilized specimens can be seen at the Fossil Grove in Victoria Park, Glasgow, most of these mighty trees have now turned into coal.

Fir Club Moss, one of the related species that still exists today, was considered one of the most important herbs of the Ancient Druids. Pliny tells us that the Druids believed it had the power to prevent all accidents and misfortunes, provided the plant was gathered ritually in the following way: wearing white clothing, the gatherer had to perform the rite in washed bare feet. After offering a sacrifice of bread and wine to the gods they were instructed to approach the plant. On no account was a knife or iron tool to be used; instead, the plant was picked only with the right hand, while with the left they raised a fold of their garment to conceal their actions. Once picked, the moss was wrapped in a new linen napkin.

Whether or not Fir Club Moss in particular was used in early fire-making, dry moss acts as an excellent material for starting a fire. And, as well as being used as a charm to prevent misfortune, Pliny tells us that the Druids used the smoke of burning club moss as a cure for afflictions of the eye.

In Scotland, Fir Club Moss was used as a purgative, and is used by the Nitinaht, the indigenous people of Vancouver Island, in the same way today. The plant has this powerful effect because of its toxicity. In high doses it can cause convulsions or unconsciousness, but in lower doses has been used, along with Juniper, to induce abortions. The plant has also been used in Scotland as a mordant in the dyeing process, and an infusion of the moss was widely used by women and girls as a skin tonic. Fir Club Moss is currently being investigated as a memory enhancer and possible treatment for Alzheimer's disease.



FLAX

Lìon nam bean sìth

Linum usitatissimum



UPRIGHT

Ease • Connection • Clothing

REVERSED

Unease • Disconnection • Smallness

Flax is grown all over the world today. There are many different species but they all share the same properties. The British species is grown commercially in the south of Britain, but Flax can also be found growing wild. Reaching a height of 120 cm (4 ft), its flowers are pale blue, making a Flax field in bloom a beautiful sight. Flax seeds, glossy brown like apple pips, contain many nutritional and medicinal benefits. The linseed oil they contain is laxative, has cancer-fighting properties and reduces cholesterol, blood pressure and plaque formation in the arteries.

The card shows Flax in bloom. In the distance we see the thatched roofs of a settlement and in the foreground, beside a mature plant, is a drop spindle.

Upright meaning Flax has clothed us and helped us communicate with each other across the high seas for thousands of years. It is the plant of the Goddess Arianrhod, who spins and weaves the web of love and connection around and between us all. If you have chosen this card, it may be pointing to the importance of connection and communication in your life at the moment. A spiritual path like Druidry teaches us that we are all connected, and, once

we truly believe this, many of our dreams become possible. Synchronicity starts to abound as we become conscious of the web that we can deliberately use to send positive influences and messages out into the world. This is the art of magic, and expresses the law of the Returning Tide (or karma, as it is commonly known) in which the positive energy we give out is reflected back onto us. An element of ease starts to enter our life and our relationships as we feel more and more in tune with the flow of life, sensing that we do have a place in the web that sustains us all.

Reversed meaning Feeling out of kilter with life and one's fellow human beings is such an uncomfortable experience. We know deep inside that something is wrong but often can't figure out what it is, or what we can do to correct it. The Flax seed is such a tiny thing, the colour of the Flax flower so subtle and delicate, its stem so apparently ordinary, and yet this extraordinary plant has been one of the most influential in the development of civilization. It shows us that small things can have a great effect. There is virtue in the 'small adjustment'. Just as a few degrees will determine whether a boat crossing the Atlantic will arrive in North or South America, so a small change in your life can fundamentally affect your sense of well-being and connection to the rest of life. There could be some apparently simple change you can make to your lifestyle or relationship that will result in a new sense of ease and harmony for you and those around you.



'FLAX, GROW AS HIGH AS THE SCROTUM.'

Flax was one of the most important plants for our ancestors. As the Roman writer Pliny the Elder wrote: 'What department is there to be found of active life in which Flax is not employed?' Its use began more than ten thousand years ago, originating perhaps in India, perhaps in

the Near East, and in Britain it has been cultivated for at least five thousand years.

The cloth made from Flax fibre is linen, and Stone Age linen has been found in the Celtic heartland of Switzerland. Egyptian mummies were bound in linen, and it was not until the nineteenth century that cotton supplanted linen as the material of choice for clothing.

Flax has not only clothed us for millennia; it has been instrumental in enabling civilizations to trade and communicate with each other because sailcloth, too, was made from Flax fibre until 150 years ago. And Pliny says that the Gauls invented linen-filled mattresses.

Because from prehistoric times women were responsible for its spinning and weaving, Flax fell under the auspices of the Goddess in many European cultures. One of its Gaelic names, *Lìon nam bean sìth*, translates as 'fairy woman's Flax'. In Druidry, the goddess of the spinning wheel and the stars, Arianrhod (meaning 'silver wheel') is the patroness of Flax. From Somerset in England in the west to Turkey in the east, ritual acts to encourage its growth occurred at times of sowing and harvest. High-stepping dances and special rhymes were recited to encourage the Flax to grow as high as the genitals. Occasionally men would be asked to chant, 'Flax, grow as high as the scrotum', but most often it was the women who would lift their skirts, walk naked through the fields on St John's night, or even urinate on them ritually.

Flax seeds were used for love divination in Scotland, Italy and Germany. On Samhain eve a girl looking for a husband would sow the seed while reciting a charm. If it worked, she would see an apparition of the man she would marry over her left shoulder.

GARLIC

Cneamh

Allium sp.



UPRIGHT

Purification • Flavour • The Exotic

REVERSED

Protection • Vulnerability

• Discrimination



Garlic is a bulbous perennial related to the onion and the leek. Wild Garlic (*Allium ursinum*), usually called Ramsons, is indigenous to Britain; Common Garlic (*Allium sativum*), now used for cooking and medicine, was probably introduced by the Romans, and perhaps originated in Siberia or southwest Asia.

The card shows Ramsons growing in the Ash woods of Crafnant – ‘the valley of the Ramsons’ in Snowdonia, Wales. Like Bluebells, they favour damp woodland, where they gather in vast drifts of green and white.

Upright meaning Garlic has the ability to flavour food deliciously, as well as being a powerful antiseptic and antibiotic. The combined qualities of purification and flavouring are surprising and unusual. Selecting this card may indicate a need to consider how you can purify and strengthen an aspect of your life without introducing any element of sterility. Often, when we feel the need for change, we envisage removing things from our life – and this may be the right course to take – but consider first whether there is something you can add to your life that will naturally replace that which is bothering you, without you needing to exert any effort in eliminating it.

The card may also indicate that it is time to introduce something new into your life; something that in the past you had considered too exotic or unconventional, but which now is starting to attract you.

Reversed meaning In Druidry, Garlic is considered a magically protective plant. Life can present all kinds of stresses and problems and, if you have chosen this card reversed, it may indicate that you are feeling vulnerable or in need of protection. It is important for you to know that your soul is an indissoluble part of the strongest force in the world, called, variously, Spirit or God or Goddess. But in your present circumstances you may need to find a way to protect yourself that is appropriate for your situation; it may be time for you to swallow your pride or sense of isolation and reach out to friends, a counsellor or an organization that exists to help people in just your predicament.

The card may also suggest that in any psychic work you are doing, you need to pay attention to the level of magical protection you invoke – perhaps being more careful of your boundaries and exerting more discrimination in relation to any communications you receive.



THE CURE-ALL

The name Garlic is of Anglo-Saxon origin, derived from *gar* (a spear) and *lac* (a plant). It has flavoured food and maintained the body's health for at least five thousand years. Garlic was used in the Ancient Egyptian and classical worlds – the Egyptian medical papyri, *Codex Ebers*, contain twenty-two formulae that include Garlic, and Pliny recommended over sixty medicinal uses for it. We find it in Sanskrit medical treatises, Chinese medicine, Romany lore where it is one of the five healing foods (the others being Onion, Lemon, Chilli and Honey), and we know that the Vikings and Phoenicians carried bulbs of Garlic on their long sea voyages.

Although the wild Garlic of Ramsons is less powerful than cultivated or Common Garlic, it is still highly effective as a medicine and was included by the Physicians of Myddvai in their pharmacopoeia. Such was this plant's reputation that an old English rhyme runs:

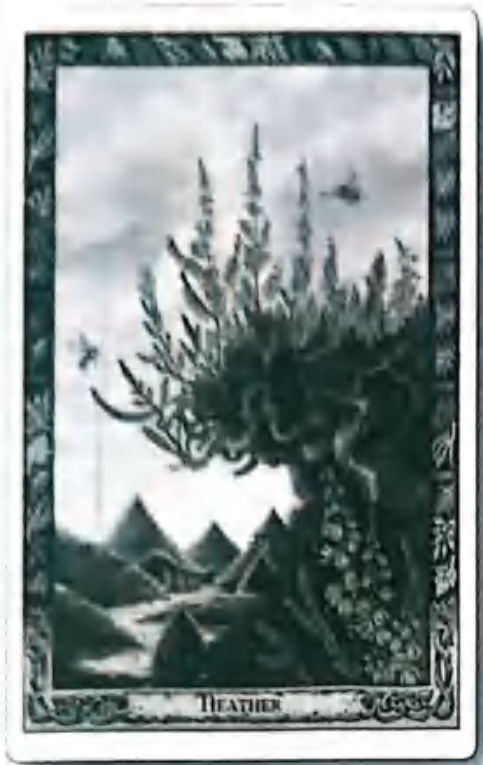
*Eat Leeks in Lide and
Ramsons in May
And all the year after
Physicians may play!*

Ramsons have a mild taste, and their broad-leaved blades can be eaten in salads, soups and stews, as they were in the old days.

Both wild and Common Garlic act as natural antibiotics, destroying a range of invasive microbes and helping to fight infections of the digestive tract. Thirty-three sulphur compounds have been found in Garlic, the largest quantity discovered in a plant to this day, and scientists have recorded nearly twenty major chemical actions induced by its ingestion. The plant contains antifungal, antiparasitic and anticarcinogenic agents and has a strong expectorant effect – syrup of Garlic was once a common remedy for bronchial infections. Garlic has such a range of health-giving properties, including the ability to mop up free radicals through its antioxidant action, support the adrenal glands, maintain heart health and reduce high blood pressure, it is no wonder it was considered a cure-all.

Garlic's ability to free the body of so much ill-health is echoed in the widespread belief found in the folklore of many countries, that Garlic can drive away evil. For this reason, braids of Garlic were hung in the home as a form of protection, sailors carried bulbs to prevent their ships being wrecked, and it was also said to offer protection from vampires.

In Druidry, Garlic is used at the festival of Samhain to ensure that only beneficent spirits visit the ceremony, which welcomes guests from the Otherworld.



HEATHER

Fraoch

Calluna vulgaris



UPRIGHT

Luck • Celebration • Community

REVERSED

Aliciation • Yearning to belong

Heather is an extremely hardy shrub indigenous to most of Europe and Asia Minor, growing well in very wet and dry areas, on heathland, moorland and mountainsides. Never reaching more than 50 cm (1 1/2 ft), it usually grows on hills and mountains above the point where trees will grow, and on open heaths, so-named because they are covered with Heather.

The card shows Heather growing outside a hamlet of roundhouses with thatched Heather roofs. Bees feast on the sweet-smelling flowers before returning to their hives, also thatched with Heather.

Upright meaning Heather honey is so delicious that some beekeepers transport their hives to the moors each Summer to harvest the flowers. Heather, like Clover, is considered to be highly auspicious and a bringer of good fortune. A major celebration may be imminent or the time may have come for you to start celebrating all that is best in your life. Heather symbolizes the power and the joy of community, and much of our pleasures and our pains result from living together. We spend much of our time thinking about the difficult aspects of relationships and of our life, to try to make

sense of them. But try thinking about your life with a different focus. Spend some time dwelling on all the positive aspects of the people you know and have known. Then do the same for your family and community.

Choosing this card may also be indicative of the fact that you are becoming more aware of the communities you live in – at work, at home and spiritually. You may feel drawn to becoming more actively involved in them, or perhaps you're contemplating a change in your relationship towards them.

Reversed meaning Even though you may be trying to get out of a situation, commitment or relationship, you are probably being driven by a yearning for a deeper sense of community. Choosing this card reversed may indicate that you feel you don't belong – in your family, at work or in your relationship. This feeling may be mild or severe, but behind it could be the urge to be part of a community or tribe, as well as a loving relationship and family, in a way that your current situation does not satisfy.

Rather than trying to get away from this feeling by leaving one situation and jumping into another without much thought, Heather may be urging you to pause and explore more fully your feelings of alienation, or not belonging, to discover which aspect of your life you need to consider changing.



A RESTORER OF STRENGTH TO FATIGUED NERVES

The Picts were using Heather to make an alcoholic drink over four thousand years ago – as archaeologists have discovered on the Isle of Rhum, where a Neolithic shard was unearthed with traces of a fermented beverage made with Heather flowers. Heather beer was made in Scotland for centuries, drunk in the Highlands from cattle horns, and in 1994 its commercial production was revived. In the past, Heather ale was popular in Wales, too, and was drunk for its restorative properties,

while in northern England the tips of its flowering shoots were added to beer or herbal drinks in the belief that this helped to purify the blood.

White Heather in particular is associated with good luck and was (and still is by Romanians) used as a lucky charm. This may well be due to the strong connection between Heather and bees. Bees symbolize celebration and a thriving community, so they are linked with joyfulness and happiness – an association that is amplified because of bees' connection with the sun. In addition, the sweet smell of Heather can be almost intoxicating, especially when it arrives on the summer breeze after a long and bitter Winter.

A Heather pillow is said to give restful sleep and, in the past, Heather shoots were used for bedding, since they were found to rival the finest down for softness, while being far healthier: absorbing moisture, and – as one sixteenth-century writer recorded – 'restoring strength to the fatigued nerves, so that those who lie down languid and weary in the evening, arise in the morning vigorous and sprightly'.

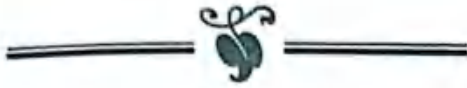
Heather was also used for thatching in Scotland while, further south, reeds, Wheat straw, Flax, Broom and Sedge were also used. The springy nature of Heather made it ideal for packing around bricks, making into rope or weaving into floor-mats. It was also used in combination with mud to make wattle-and-daub walls, and when wood was in short supply it was used as fuel. To this day, Heather roots are carved to be used in the making of the Scottish ceremonial dagger, the dirk.

Druids today might add the flowering tips of Heather to hot water to make a refreshing tea, or to a bath to help tone muscles and ease rheumatic pains. They might also invoke the Ogham of Heather, *Ur*, to bring the warmth and joy of community and the tribe into their lives.

IVY

Eidheann

Hedera helix



UPRIGHT

Prophecy ♦ Connection
♦ Death and rebirth

REVERSED

Ambivalence ♦ Tenacity ♦ Support



Ivy is a common evergreen climbing plant native to most of Europe and northern and central Asia. Unlike Mistletoe, it is not a parasite that feeds on a host. It can grow without support, but likes to climb and is capable of reaching a height of 30 m (100 ft). As Britain's only evergreen liana, it can grow 50 cm (20 in) or more in a year.

The card shows Ivy growing beside a sacred pool. Its black berries will slowly ripen over the Winter to provide food for birds, just as its flowers have offered the year's last source of nectar and pollen for bees. Around the pool we can see the carvings of a green man, a double spiral, and the Ogham glyph for Gort.

Upright meaning Ivy has, since classical times, been associated with prophetic intoxication, sought by the Druids particularly for creativity so that their work is inspired by something greater than their own personalities alone. Selecting this card may mean that such inspiration is coming to you, or that you should seek it. To be receptive, you will need to still your mind, which will mean first resolving any conflict or confusion that is troubling

you. The way to feel free and to forget yourself may lie in the apparently opposite direction of becoming more aware of yourself and that which limits you. The poet Robert Frost says, 'The best way out is always through', and you may have to plumb the depths of the issues that trouble you before you can find yourself free of them.

Alternatively, the card may be reaffirming for you the belief that life is cyclical and that nothing is truly lost.

Reversed meaning Ivy flowers later than any other plant – providing bees with nectar and pollen at the very end of the season. Yet, its charms are hidden and many of us see only the dark, destructive side of its character – in its capacity to smother trees, render walls unstable and invade gardens. Each of us has the ability to be destructive as well as creative, and both powers are necessary in order for life to flourish. If you draw this card reversed, it may indicate that you should look at this ambivalence in your personality and your relationships, to determine whether you need to start behaving differently.

Ivy is an extraordinarily tenacious and vigorous plant. If you are able to channel both these forces within you, in appropriate ways, you will find it easier to pursue your goals and access your innate vitality.



CORN BINDER AND BRINGER OF ETERNAL LIFE

To some, Ivy is a dark and destructive plant; they see it as damaging walls and buildings, and strangling trees. But there is another side to Ivy: it can protect buildings from damp; clothe ugly walls in rich foliage; its flowers and berries provide an important source of food for bees and birds, while its evergreen foliage offers shelter to numerous creatures during the winter months.

In ancient times, due to its associations with Bacchus and Dionysus, Ivy was believed to enhance the positive effects of alcohol while protecting the drinker from its worst effects. Wine goblets were made of Ivy wood, and by medieval times Ivy had become so well associated with the idea that it could help counteract the negative effects of alcohol that Ivy-covered poles – known as ale-bushes – were used to advertise taverns.

In the classical world, Ivy wreaths were presented as accolades to newly married couples and poets, and this custom was continued by modern Druids at the Welsh National Eisteddfod. In the nineteenth century the Ivy Bush Inn in Camarthen hosted the first Eisteddfod in modern times to include Druid ceremonies honouring cultural achievements, with Ivy wreaths being presented to the winners.

In the Celtic tree alphabet, Ivy is represented by *Gort* and has been associated with ideas of tenacity, ruthlessness, achievement, restriction and support, as well as the search for self. In England, Ivy has become indelibly associated with holly, not only because of the carol 'The Holly and the Ivy' and the fact that they combine well for Christmas decorations, but because of the Yule custom in which Holly boys and Ivy girls played forfeit games and teased each other. Some trace the roots of this custom to the Roman celebration of Saturnalia at the time of the Winter Solstice.

Another English custom was to bind the last sheaf of corn cut from a field with Ivy. This was called 'The Ivy Girl' and can be associated with the Goddess as 'slayer of the Corn'. Of all plants, Ivy embodies the dual nature of the Goddess – as Giver and Taker. As Ivy, she is dark and seems to destroy, and yet she is evergreen and thus represents eternal life. White Ivy leaves were seen as sacred to the moon goddess, and Druids today might decorate a moon-altar with White Ivy, while remembering that the Irish hero Fionn was sheltered from his enemies by an Ivy-covered tree when he was a child.



JUNIPER

Aitin

Juniperus communis



UPRIGHT

Cleansing • Pioneering • Magic

REVERSED

Criticism • Self-consciousness

• Longevity

The Juniper tree is found in many regions of the northern hemisphere from the Arctic to Africa. Growing up to 5 m (17 ft) high, it has a twisted trunk and deep-green needles, often with a bluish tinge. In Britain it grows wild on chalk and limestone heathland.

The card shows a Juniper shrub in Scotland, with berries ripening on its branches. In the foreground lies a Druid's leather crane bag decorated with hag stones: stones of pebble or flint with naturally formed holes through the middle, thought to ward off evil; also known as fairy stones, eye stones and witch stones.

Upright meaning In the old days, Juniper was used to cleanse houses, cattle and people in preparation for the coming of Summer. This card may mean there is something you need to complete or clear away before you begin a new project or phase. There is a saying: 'Before you can welcome something new, you need to say goodbye to something that needs release.' If you are having difficulty beginning a new endeavour or relationship, perhaps you must first attend to an old one – to tie up loose ends and complete the cycle.

The card may also suggest that it is time to pay attention to the significance of beginnings. How we start something determines in many ways the journey and the outcome that will follow. This is why intention, forethought and planning are so important. The art of living well lies in maintaining a genuine sense of spontaneity, while still acting thoughtfully and purposefully.

Reversed meaning Juniper is a powerful disinfectant. Selecting this card in a reading may be a caution to avoid being overly critical. Although the spiritual path helps us to become more and more conscious, there is often the danger that the very consciousness we seek will purge us of spontaneity and creativity. Too much thought or self-consciousness can spell the death of an idea or an impulse. Just as a human or animal birth can be aborted, so can a new relationship or project if too much analytical thinking is applied. It may take a lifetime to determine the balance needed between impulse and restraint, but if we develop our humanity and our hearts we will gradually come to an intuitive sense of when we should act before thinking, and when we should think before acting.

The Juniper tree is associated with longevity, and one of the keys to a long life is in learning to combine the youthful spontaneity of childhood with the wisdom of age.



THE BELTANE TREE

Juniper is such a magical tree that it is surprising we don't find it in the Irish Ogham tree alphabet. It grows wild in Ireland, but is under threat there as it is in Britain, where its numbers have declined by sixty per cent since 1960.

Juniper was probably the first tree to colonize the northern British Isles once the last of the ice sheets retreated about twelve thousand years

ago. In Ancient Egypt the plant was used in the embalming process, and as a tapeworm remedy. Its wood, needles and berries contain an oil that is used medicinally, in aromatherapy and in perfumery where its woody balsamic smell is considered 'masculine' and ideal for aftershave products. Juniper twigs were sometimes burnt in hospitals because of the oil's antiseptic and disinfectant qualities. In central-European folk medicine the oil was considered a cure-all for typhoid, dysentery and cholera, and other diseases related to poverty and lack of sanitation.

In old times on New Year's morning, Juniper was burned in houses in Scotland to purify the building and its inhabitants, and, in some parts of Cornwall and Brittany, Juniper wood was used in the Beltane fires to purify the livestock. In Aberdeenshire, the berries were burned to cleanse stables, and in central Europe they were burned during the three days leading up to Beltane to purify the home and welcome Summer.

Such is the cleansing power of burnt Juniper that the famous magician, Dion Fortune, made it, together with cedar and sandalwood, an ingredient of her 'Fire of Azrael', used for divining past and future, which she mentioned in her occult novel, *The Sea Priestess*.

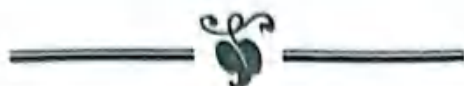
Juniper berries are used in cooking and to flavour gin and, in Scotland, they were used to make a fortifying tea, while the branches were sometimes combined with Heather and clay to fill cavity walls. The wood was used for drinking cups or bowls – its oil lending a 'grateful relish' to whatever was served in them. The oil was also used to induce abortions and, as late as 1993, Juniper pills were advertised as 'The Lady's Friend'.

In Druidry today, the Juniper tree is considered magical and sacred, and dried Juniper berries, needles and essential oil are used as ingredients for incense and for ritual baths. A pouch containing a few Juniper twigs or some dried berries can be hung in a room to bring protection and cleansing to the home.

LADY'S MANTLE

Copan an driùchd

Alchemilla vulgaris



UPRIGHT

The Feminine • Detail • Miracles

REVERSED

Alchemy • Opportunity • Trials



Lady's Mantle is at first sight inconspicuous, since its leaves, stems and flowers are all shades of green. Growing to only a foot high, this hardy perennial is native to northern Europe, Asia, Greenland, Labrador and all parts of Britain, where it grows in damp grassland and woodland. It is most common in the north – particularly in the Yorkshire Dales and Scottish Highlands up to a height of 1,000 m (3,300 ft).

The card shows Lady's Mantle in flower. It is early morning and dewdrops lie like jewels on the leaves. Burnet roses grow in the background; native to Britain, these wild roses, like Lady's Mantle, grow low on the ground and have the sweetest smell of all roses – a combination of honey and jasmine. A Sheela na gig in the rock, inspired by the carving on a church at Kilpeck, Hertfordshire, reminds us of the plant's association with the Feminine.

Upright meaning A dewdrop is a tiny thing but, when you gaze into it, it acts like a crystal ball, revealing the whole world within it; it is reminiscent of William Blake's famous lines:

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.*

This card may be reminding you to treasure the small things in life, because it is in the detail that a life grows rich, and every person, every subject, every event, grows richer the more we focus upon it.

The card may also urge you to connect more deeply with the Goddess in your spiritual practice, or, more generally, with the Feminine principle in your emotional and psychological life. It may be that you have been used to approaching the world and relationships in an analytical or objective way that is no longer serving you. Now may be the time to open to that less predictable, sometimes wilder, way of relating to and looking at things that could bring miracles into your life.

Reversed meaning Most people are quite naturally dismayed when the going gets tough. But if you have chosen this card reversed it may indicate that you have the good fortune of being able to see opportunities for growth even in the most despairing of situations. The alchemists of old believed that gold could be made out of 'base matter' and that this, though dismissed as worthless by many, provided them with their working material. In the same way, the challenges and trials of life are seen by the Druid and spiritual alchemist as ideal opportunities for learning and development. Although to some extent this involves reframing a situation in its most positive light, to 'make the best of a bad job', a deeper process is at work. Character, qualities of soul, wisdom, maturity and compassion come not from a life of ease and tranquility, but from a life in which our hearts, minds and sometimes even bodies are pitted against forces we may not understand.



THE ALCHEMICAL CHALICE

The Gaelic name for Lady's Mantle is *Copan an driúchd*, meaning 'dew cup'. One of the most striking characteristics of this graceful plant is the way its leaves gather dewdrops. During the night the leaves fold like umbrellas, opening in the morning to reveal their watery treasure.

Dew has been considered to have magical properties since ancient times, when in the Celtic lands maidens were said to bathe their faces in dew on Beltane morning, and in France and Germany young girls rolled naked in the dew on Beltane eve. The alchemists and early herbalists believed strongly in the healing powers of dew.

The health-giving properties of dew-bathing, long known to birds, were still being promoted by the Victorians, and by naturists in the twentieth century. In the 1920s, Edward Bach developed his system of remedies using dew gathered from different flowers. He, like the alchemists, believed that sun-warmed dew absorbed specific healing powers from plants, so that the dew gathered from one plant would have very different effects to that gathered from another. In the 1960s the French alchemist Armand Barbault wrote about his work to create an elixir of life from dew in *Gold of a Thousand Mornings*. Alchemists believed that Lady's Mantle imparted a subtle but vital influence to the dew it gathered, and the plant was much prized by them as a result.

Herbalists have used the plant to treat inflamed wounds, colitis and vomiting, and its folk name, 'Women's Best Friend', comes from the belief that it can help to regulate periods and curb excessive menstruation. The plant is also used to calm period pains and vaginal discharge, and after childbirth is said to stimulate the contraction of the womb.

Druids today might make an infusion of Lady's Mantle leaves to drink as a tea or to add to a lustral bath to help them connect with the Goddess, or they may enjoy sipping dew from its leaves or the invigorating sensation of an early-morning dew bath.



MADDER

Madar

Rubia sp.



UPRIGHT

Strength ♦ Coming of age ♦ The Goddess

REVERSED

Depletion ♦ Resistance ♦ Anger

Madder, in its wild and cultivated versions, is a plant native to southern Britain and Europe. Although it can grow to 2.5 m (8 ft) in height, its stems are so weak the plant often lies on the ground. Its root is thick and reddish brown, its stem is prickly, and its leaves lance-shaped. Its small flowers appear only after the second or third year, and these are followed in the early Autumn by small black berries.

The card shows a Madder offering its flowers to a hummingbird moth, which thrives on its nectar. A strip of cloth dyed red with Madder hangs as a cloutie, a prayer token, from the Elder tree above. A goddess figure, inspired by the Bulgarian 'goddess of Pazardjik', left as a votive offering, rests in the stones beneath the tree.

Upright meaning Madder is the plant of blood and the Goddess. The rich red dye it produces symbolizes the vitality of the body and the fertility of the land. If you have chosen this card, it could mean that you have reached a time of major change in your life – perhaps a particular life-stage such as puberty, the menopause or the andropause. Alternatively, it may simply

indicate that you have reached a certain point in your development. Either way, this card signifies something meaningful and worthy of recognition. You might want to mark this time consciously with a rite of passage, or a pilgrimage to a sacred place where you can tie a clootie to a tree with a wish and a prayer.

Another interpretation of this card is less specific, suggesting simply that strength is now needed. This may be physical strength or it could be strength of character – to endure in the face of difficult circumstances, to resist the easy option, or to delay your own satisfaction or reward for the sake of something more important.

Reversed meaning The blood-red colour of Madder can symbolize life, but it can also reflect our vulnerability and the destructive power of anger. Although it is important to be able to express our anger at times, it is equally fundamental that we understand its power to wound. Drawing this card reversed may indicate that you are struggling to deal with your own or another person's anger. It is possible that you have spent your life believing the demands and needs of others to be more important than your own, and deep down you are harbouring feelings of resentment and anger towards those closest to you. Now is the time to change this pattern and attend to your own needs. Drawing another card may give you an insight into how you might do this effectively.

Alternatively, this card may indicate that you need to take care of your life-force, and that your vitality needs strengthening. A herbalist might suggest a blood cleanser or tonic, or you may wish to explore what it is you are resisting.



BLOOD OF THE EARTH AND PLANT REALM

In the rich and colourful world of the Ancient Celts and Druids, three plants held supremacy in the dyeing of wool, leather and the linen spun from Flax: Woad for shades of blue, Weld (known as Dyer's Rocket), which yielded bright yellows; and Madder, which gave crimson reds.

Ancient Irish law texts produced shortly after the Christianization of Ireland (but with the traces of Druids still strongly present in the land) mention the herb gardens – known as *Lubhghoir* – attached to farmyards, in which grew Woad and Madder. Madder produces a crimson red dye in cold water and a rich brown dye in hot water, and all shades in between depending upon the additive used to fix the dye, known as the mordant.

Madder dye was used by the Ancient Egyptians – evidence of which was found in the cloth of mummies. It has been unearthed, too, in the dyer's shops at Pompeii, and is mentioned by both Pliny and Dioscorides.

In the very earliest times, red ochre (hydrated iron oxide derived from clay) was used to signify Life, and undoubtedly the Goddess, too. The Paviland caves on the Gower peninsula in South Wales revealed the oldest known ceremonial burial in western Europe. Found at the thirty-thousand-year-old site was a skeleton covered in red ochre.

The association of red with blood, life and, hence, good health, continues to this day in the practice of tying clooties to the branches of trees, usually around sacred wells in Cornwall and Ireland. These cloth strips are often red, and in the old days were dyed with Madder. Such is the universal association of red with life that red prayer ties are offered in Native American sweat lodges, and dyed-red string or cloth has sacred uses in Tibetan Buddhism, Kabbalism and Bulgarian folk customs.

Druids today might use Madder to dye their robes or clooties, and to dye cloth to give to a girl in her coming-of-age ceremony when she becomes a woman.

MANDRAKE

Mandrag

Mandragora officinarum

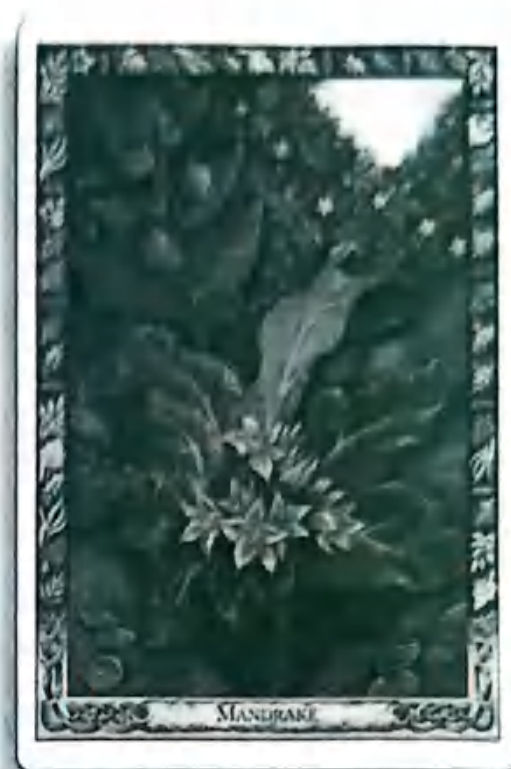


UPRIGHT

Wealth • Fertility • Anaesthesia

REVERSED

Amplification • Obsession • Madness



Mandrake is a perennial herb indigenous to the Mediterranean, the Middle East, central Asia, India and western China. Looking like a large Primrose plant, its two varieties, known as Spring or White Mandrake and Autumn or Black Mandrake (sometimes called Womandrake), have creamy white or purple flowers respectively. Its berries are yellow or orange, smell like pineapple, and are the size of large plums. The forked root can grow to 120 cm (4 ft) long. Mandrake is a member of the nightshade family, as are the potato and tomato, and is a close relative of Deadly Nightshade.

The card shows Mandrake and Deadly Nightshade growing together. Bryony trails across the trees behind. Celtic gold coins, reminiscent of the Mandrake's yellow or orange berries, lie on the ground.

Upright meaning The ability to assuage pain is Mandrake's greatest gift to humanity. Easing pain in others – whether it be physical, mental or emotional – is a skill that should be treasured. If you have chosen this card, it may indicate that you are called upon to alleviate suffering in some way. This may be as simple as offering reassuring words to distressed friends, or it

might involve a vocational choice; perhaps you are considering whether to follow a course of training or work that focuses on alleviating pain in others.

Alternatively, the card may suggest that you are entering a phase of great luck and even wealth. Mandrake has been associated with prosperity and good fortune for centuries, and those who have planted seeds of happiness for others in the past can expect to experience joy in their own lives, too.

Since Mandrake is connected with love and fertility, the card may also mean that love is entering your life, or that you are beginning a fertile phase in your physical or spiritual life.

Reversed meaning Mandrake was considered a magical 'amplifier', which could act as a magnet to attract love, power and wealth. Like the Devil (or Cernunnos) card in the Tarot, the forces it represents can be beneficial or detrimental depending upon intention and maturity. If you have chosen this card reversed, it may indicate that you need to be aware of the dangers of obsession – of becoming overly preoccupied with a notion or desire that may have a value, but which risks becoming all-consuming. Although Mandrake was used medicinally in the ancient world, it was also the first plant to be used in chemical warfare. Hannibal, the Carthaginian general, faked a retreat from an African enemy, leaving behind wine steeped in Mandrake as a poison. Something that is life-enhancing in small measures can become toxic in higher doses.



THE LUCK OF THE ELF MANDELOIRE

Mandrake has the greatest magical reputation of all plants. Like Belladonna and Henbane, it contains tropane alkaloids, which are responsible for its toxic and narcotic properties. It was probably first used as a surgical anaesthetic in Persia more than three thousand years

ago, and its ability – in the right dosage – to act as a soporific and as the most effective painkiller available meant that it was soon being used and traded all over the ancient world, including, in all likelihood, among the Druids on the Continent and in the British Isles.

Such was Mandrake's reputation as a magical plant that just to possess part of a root was considered wise: it could drive away illness, demons and misfortune, and attract wealth, fertility and good luck. Tutankhamen was buried with eleven Mandrake roots, Dioscorides and Pliny wrote of the plant's wondrous effects, and Greeks and Romans carried root manikins as amulets for luck and protection, as did King Solomon who reputedly carried Mandrake root in his signet ring.

The plant was introduced to Britain by the Romans and was used in surgery for centuries: Anglo-Saxon doctors were using it in the eighth century; and a 'soporific sponge' soaked in Mandrake and opium was used in the thirteenth century. It was still popular in English gardens in the nineteenth century. Although its most valuable application was as an anaesthetic, Mandrake was also known from earliest times as a powerful aphrodisiac. In the third century BCE, Theophrastus wrote of its use in love potions, and its reputation in all matters of love continued throughout Europe well into the nineteenth century, when Romanian girls would gather the roots with the help of old sorceresses as they chanted, 'Mandragora, Mandragora, marry me after a month.'

Mandrake roots resembling human beings, complete with genitalia, were often treated as fetishes that could house a wandering spirit or the elf 'Mandegloire', who would bring the owner wealth and help with divination and magical protection. A brisk trade in fake Mandrake manikins, usually using White Bryony roots, developed in the medieval period and continued into the early twentieth century. Roots were dug up, sculpted to human form, then seeded with grass or millet to resemble hair, before being re-planted in damp sand until the hair had grown.



MEADOWSWEET

Crios Chuchulainn

Filipendula ulmaria



UPRIGHT

Transition • Blessing • Celebration

REVERSED

Transience • The Familiar • Routine

Meadowsweet is a hardy perennial found all over Europe, temperate Asia and eastern North America. A member of the rose family, it loves damp meadows and riverbanks, ditches, marshes and wet woodland. Growing to a height of around 1 m (3¼ ft), its tiny cream five-petalled flowers bloom from June to August, filling the air with a sweet almond-like scent.

The card shows bees gathering pollen from Meadowsweet in full bloom. We also see Blodeuwedd, 'flower-face', whose story is part of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogion – the tale of Math, son of Mathonwy. She was made out of Oak, Broom and Meadowsweet by the wizard Gwydion, as a wife for Lleu Llaw Gyffes, but later turned into an owl.

Upright meaning Traces of Meadowsweet, Heather and Royal Fern have been found on Neolithic drinking vessels in Scotland – leading archaeologists to speculate that these plants were used to brew ale. Later, Meadowsweet was used in marriage celebrations. This card may indicate that a time of celebration or transition is due. Meadowsweet's creamy flowers and summery smell are a reminder that change is one of the greatest features of being

alive in this world, and that the best way to accept change is to celebrate it. Whether you are leaving a job, relationship or familiar surroundings, or are joining forces with colleagues or a partner, this is a time to truly celebrate the change that is occurring – offering flowers to the gods or the Goddess and accepting the transformations this transition will bring.

The card may also be urging you to formally mark and celebrate a transition or major event in your life, or that of your family, that you've been tempted to ignore, such as moving or leaving home, reaching puberty, succeeding in a creative project, achieving a significant age, separating or divorcing.

Reversed meaning In the old times, change was considered significant, and was often celebrated or marked ritually. Today we are so used to change that we often barely give it a thought – we change cars and computers, houses, partners and jobs, with a speed that would have amazed our ancestors. Although our potential for learning and freedom has expanded, we have suffered as a result. Hurling furiously towards the future, we have forgotten how to live in the moment and how to enjoy both change and the stability that comes from the familiar.

Choosing this card reversed may indicate that it is time to celebrate the familiar, and to take time to enjoy the constants in your life that don't often change. Routine and sameness can be stultifying, but they can also provide the ground through which you can deepen your character and soul.



QUEEN OF THE MEADOW

Meadowsweet has been associated with indigenous spiritual practice in Britain for thousands of years. Some writers say that it was one of the three most sacred herbs of the Ancient Druids, the other two being Water Mint and Vervain. It was certainly considered sacred in the pre- or

proto-Druidic period of the Bronze Age when its flowers were offered as floral tributes at burial sites. This was clearly a widespread practice that could well have been continued into the period of classical Druidry, since analysis of pollen grains has now traced the use of Meadowsweet flowers to sites as far flung as the Orkneys and Perthshire, Scotland, in the north; and Carmarthenshire, Wales, in the west.

The Welsh burial site, where Meadowsweet tributes have been found alongside pottery, flint tools and cremated bones, lies above the lake of Llyn y Fan Fach, which is the site of the original story of the Physicians of Myddvai. These famous healers were said to have inherited much ancient lore, and it is of great significance that in their region we have now found physical evidence of the use of a herb that has been part of the traditional British herbal for centuries.

In the nineteenth century, salicin was extracted from Willow bark and Meadowsweet, and this led to the development of aspirin, which was named after the latter's original Latin name, *Spiraea ulmaria*, in recognition of the part it had played in its discovery. A herbalist might use Meadowsweet as an infusion for a whole range of complaints, while rainwater soaked in its flowers can be used as a skin tonic, and a decoction of its boiled root can be applied to sores and ulcers.

For the Druid, Meadowsweet is clearly the perfect herb and flower to use for funerals, and, since such an event is at heart a rite to encourage safe passage between one state and the next, the herb is also good to use for any 'coming of age' or initiation. In ancient times it was used to flavour mead (and sometimes called Mead-sweet) and was given in posies to bridal couples. It was also strewn on the ground to perfume the air with its sweet scent, which is rather like marzipan with hints of honey and musk. The flowers can be used to scent ritual clothing, or in an infused oil for ritual anointing.

MINT

Meannt

Mentha sp.



UPRIGHT

Clarity ♦ Concentration ♦ Renewal

REVERSED

Confusion ♦ Dullness ♦ Lack of focus



Mint is an aromatic perennial herb growing to 120 cm (4 ft), found throughout the northern hemisphere and Australia. There are now at least twenty-five species, and more than six hundred varieties. Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) is indigenous to Britain and thrives in marshland and other wet areas.

The card shows Water Mint in flower growing beside the Neolithic Sweet Track – a six-thousand-year-old elevated footpath that runs for nearly 2 km (1¼ miles) across the waterlogged marshland around Avalon, now known as the Somerset Levels, near Glastonbury. Behind the Mint grow bulrushes, and we see the Tor in the distance.

Upright meaning Mint was traditionally used to aid concentration and digestion. Today we often need to process a vast amount of information, and our concentration is challenged by a thousand distractions. Choosing this card may indicate that you are entering a period when you need to focus carefully on your work or on what is currently happening in your life.

It could well be that a renewal or freshness will appear in a relationship or project that you hadn't expected, and to profit from this you will need to

be attentive. Just as vibrance and clarity are elusive qualities that can easily disappear in a moment, so too can opportunities for new life and growth be missed if you are inattentive. You might also like to think about ways in which you could be proactive in initiating renewal, rather than simply waiting for it to occur.

Reversed meaning Clarity is a subtle quality that is worth cherishing. If you have chosen this card, it may indicate that you have lost this characteristic and that you need to focus on bringing it back into your life. Remember the feeling of waking to a bright spring day when you were young, of splashing your face with cold water and of feeling wonderfully clear-headed and alive. Ask yourself what you need to do to regain that feeling, and see if you can take steps towards this. The plant world in particular can help you in this respect – walking in Nature, communing with trees and plants, eating the right foods and taking the right herbs can all help to bring you the sense of clarity, freshness and renewal that you seek.

Alternatively, the card may signify a temporary loss of focus. It could be time to explore your goals and discover what it is you really want out of life, and to start prioritizing your life accordingly.



A PLANT TO STIMULATE THE MIND

Like so many of the plants that would have been used by the early Druids, Mint was widely revered in the ancient world as far afield as China. Garlands of Peppermint have been found in Egyptian tombs ranging in origin from 1200 to 600 BCE. The herb was placed with the dead by the Ancient Greeks, too, who also used it, along with barley and water, in the sacred drink of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The Arabs have drunk Mint tea for centuries.

The Greeks used Mint on their temple floors, as did the Hebrews in their synagogues and, later, the Christians in their churches. In Italy it became known as the 'Erba Santa Maria' and was strewn on the ground at religious processions. In England it was often known as Churchwort or Bishop's Wort, and was traditionally gathered at dawn on St John's Day, together with many other herbs, and kept until Christmas.

The Greeks added the herb to their baths, sprinkled it in their beds, and used it as a perfume. The Romans used it to flavour wines and sauces and considered it a symbol of hospitality. The name Mint either comes from the greek nymph *Minthe*, who was turned into a scented plant by the jealous wife of her lover Hades, or from the Latin *mente*, meaning thought, as the plant was widely believed to stimulate the powers of the mind. Pliny recommended wearing a crown of Mint to aid concentration and, along with Dioscorides, endorsed the plant as a remedy for many illnesses.

Medieval herbalists continued the tradition of prescribing Mint for a variety of problems, including digestive and stomach complaints, headaches and excessive menses. The Ancient Greeks and Chinese used Mint to alleviate pain in the joints, and now scientists have uncovered the physiological basis for its pain-relieving properties and believe this will greatly benefit the millions of chronic-pain patients, for whom conventional painkillers such as morphine are often ineffective – including those with arthritis and those who have had nerve damage or spinal injury following a major accident.

A Druid today might offer Mint, along with Meadowsweet, as a gift to the departed at a funeral. They might add it to a bath or carry it close to them to sharpen their senses and aid their concentration, or they might wisely drink it as a tea when suffering from indigestion.

'The savor or smell of the water Mint rejoyceth the heart of man ...'

JOHN GERARD, 1633



MISTLETOE

Druidh-lus

Viscum album



UPRIGHT

Healing ♦ Fertility ♦ Inspiration

REVERSED

Sterility ♦ Lack of guidance
♦ Distilling wisdom

Mistletoe is an evergreen parasitic plant that is native to Europe, North Africa and central and western Asia. The plant can grow to a roughly spherical cluster 1.5 m (5 ft) in diameter, and its leaves are thick and leathery. The small, inconspicuous spring flowers leave behind white, sticky autumn berries. The seeds in these berries become lodged in trees by birds such as the mistle thrush, which wipe their beaks against the bark in an attempt to remove its viscous fluid. Apart from a few specific locations where it can be found growing on Oaks, such as in Epping forest in England, Mistletoe grows mostly on Apple, Sycamore, Ash, Lime, Poplar, Field Maple and Hawthorn.

The card shows Mistletoe growing on an Oak at the time of the Winter Solstice. All the leaves have been blown from the tree's branches, except for one solitary leaf which clings on tenaciously. The moon is in its sixth day of waxing, and a Druid's sickle lies on a stone, ready to be ritually used. A mistle thrush picks a berry, ready to fulfil its mission of spreading mistle seed to other trees.

Upright meaning In the Druid ceremony of Alban Arthan, the Winter Solstice, all lights are extinguished at the heart of the rite, to symbolize the

time of the longest night. Then a candle is lit and all participants light their own candles from this one flame. This symbolizes the rebirth of the sun and the birth of the Mabon – the divine child that lives in each of us. Mistletoe is then distributed to all, since mistle berries symbolize the power of this moment. Drawing this card may indicate that a period of difficulty is over, as a new cycle dawns. Just as a newborn baby should be nurtured in warmth and safety, so too should the beginnings of new projects and phases in your life be nourished close to your heart. Like Awen – the three drops of inspiration in Ceridwen's brew – Mistletoe brings guidance, inspiration and fertility, which augurs well for any creative endeavour. Since Mistletoe was known as All-heal, finding this card in a reading may well indicate that, indeed, all is being healed.

Reversed meaning Sometimes we need to learn to walk in the dark. However much we seek guidance and advice, it eludes us as if the Universe is telling us that we must stand on our own two feet and make our choices without any help. While this can be lonely and painful, it forces us to draw on our inner qualities and instincts and, in the end, this can serve our deeper purpose. In this way, lack of guidance becomes a meaningful part of our soul-journey.

Choosing this card reversed may also indicate that you are experiencing a time of sterility or lack of inspiration. Remember that the sun is only reborn at the time of the longest night, and that the Bright Knowledge of Awen emerges out of a 'baleful' brew that is poisonous. Out of difficulties we can distil wisdom.



THE MIRACULOUS 'ALL-HEAL'

Of all plants, Mistletoe is the most commonly associated with Druids. The Roman writer Pliny tells us that the Druids ritually gathered Mistletoe from the Oak on the sixth day of the new moon. Although it is rare to find Mistletoe growing on an Oak, there is now evidence that the constituents of mistle berries vary according to the species of tree it grows on, making oak-mistle different from all other kinds. Its name derives from the Anglo-Saxon *mistel* (dung) and *tan* (twig) – it was thought that mistle seeds were deposited on the tree in bird dung.

Known in ancient times as the 'All-heal', modern research is starting to reveal the truth about this plant. Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy, pioneered the use of Mistletoe for treating cancer, and recent research suggests that the plant stimulates the immune system and contains cancer-fighting ingredients.

The body of an Iron Age man found preserved in a peat bog in 1984, revealed well-trimmed hair and nails and a fox fur armband, suggesting nobility. When traces of Mistletoe were found in his stomach, he became known as the Druid Prince.

Mistle berries are responsible for the folkloric and magical associations between the plant and ideas of fertility. The berries only appear on female plants and nestle at the junction of two leaves, which are evocative of the labia, while the berries themselves, due to their colour and consistency, are suggestive of human sperm. Some writers say that the ancients believed that mistle berries held the semen of the sacred oak tree itself.

Mistletoe traditions associated with fertility are well known: we kiss under Mistletoe at Christmas; and in some parts of England in earlier days, women wanting to conceive would tie a sprig around their wrist or waist. In modern Druid practice, Mistletoe is used almost exclusively at the Winter Solstice, with sprigs distributed to all present as tokens of good luck and fertility, in its widest sense, for the coming New Year.

MUGWORT

Liath-lus

Artemisia vulgaris



UPRIGHT

Prophecy • Clairvoyance • Protection

REVERSED

Confusion • Indecisiveness • Negativity



Mugwort can be found throughout Europe, eastern North America, North Africa and western Asia. In Britain it is one of the most common weeds, growing along footpaths and on waste ground and riverbanks. Growing up to 120 cm (4 ft) tall, it propagates vigorously. Its leaves are dark green on top and downy-white underneath, with small pale yellow or reddish flowers that bloom between July and September.

The card shows Mugwort growing on a riverbank. Its flowers have not yet fully opened as it is Midsummer's Eve, the time when tradition dictates that its leaves should be gathered. A full moon can be seen between the summer clouds, and the moonlight on the surface of the water reminds us that Mugwort is reputed to aid in the ancient art of scrying, whereby the seer gazes onto the surface of water or into a crystal ball to divine the future.

Upright meaning Using an oracle such as this can help you to see beyond the everyday. But in addition to reading the words on this page, you need to engage your intuitive abilities so that you can sense the card's meaning in a way that is valuable in the context of your own life. Choosing this card in

a reading may suggest that conditions are propitious for the development of your intuitive powers. Mugwort is said to aid in the work of prophecy and clairvoyance, which means literally 'clear-seeing'. Rather than developing any 'psychic power' for its own sake, the Druid seeks to develop the ability to see and understand things clearly, and it may be that such a clarity is a quality that you need to seek in your present situation. You can only achieve the objectivity necessary for clear-seeing when you are untroubled – when you feel safe and secure emotionally. Mugwort is a powerful herb of protection and can help to create an atmosphere of safety that banishes all negative influences while also connecting you to your inner source of strength and healing.

Reversed meaning There are times when it seems almost impossible to see things clearly. There is such turbulence in your inner or outer life that it is hard to come to any kind of objective decision about how you should react or behave. If you have chosen this card reversed, it may indicate that you are finding it hard to come to a decision or to see the way forward. It may be that you simply need to wait for the situation to change – for the turbulent waters to become still again, so that you can gaze onto the surface to know yourself again – to see your reflection clearly once more. And then, looking beyond yourself towards the moon reflected in the water, perhaps you will be able to discern your deeper purpose and the choices you should make. In the meantime, ask yourself how much time you spend in critical thought, and to what degree you blame other people or situations for your current difficulties. It may be that you need to find ways to dispel negative influences in your life, and the best place to begin is within your own heart and mind.



HERB OF THE GODDESS

Mugwort was revered in antiquity as a herb of great magical power. Pliny and Dioscorides both mention its reputation, and Pliny records Sea Mugwort's use in Egypt to honour Isis. As a herb sacred to the Goddess, its Latin name is probably a dedication to Artemis, goddess of the moon and childbirth. Known throughout the Egyptian and classical world, the Celtic, Germanic and Slav peoples also revered this plant, which they used for a wide range of medicinal and magical uses. And although we can't be sure that the plant mentioned by classical writers is *Artemisia*, by the Middle Ages the identification is certain. By then it was often known as Motherwort and was attributed to Venus. It was used for treating female ailments, epilepsy and cramp, and herbalists today continue to use it as an antispasmodic. It is good for stimulating the menses and as a worming agent, and was used for smoking, flavouring beer, repelling insects, and vanquishing fatigue, with sprigs being placed in shoes to relieve tired feet.

The plant was considered highly effective in banishing the harmful influences of witches or spells, and it was even believed to offer protection from poisonous animals. As a protective herb, it was hung over the entrance to a house to guard against lightning or misfortune, and, if hidden under the doorway, would ensure protection against unwanted visitors.

Known as *Bollan banc*, Mugwort is the national flower of the Isle of Man, and is worn by all the participants at the parliament of Tynwald, which has met in the open air for over a thousand years.

Mugwort is also said to aid clairvoyance, and an infusion may be drunk as a tea before divination or scrying, and can be rubbed on crystal balls or scrying mirrors.



NETTLE

Feanntag

Urtica sp.



UPRIGHT

Irritation ♦ Hidden gifts ♦ Transmutation

REVERSED

Fear ♦ Irritability ♦ Adventure

Nettles are found in about five hundred species all over the world; the Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) is a perennial native to Europe, Asia and North America. It was growing in Britain before the last two ice ages but only began to flourish when humans started clearing the forests. Although it grows best in fertile soil, the Nettle will grow in widely varying conditions, reaching a height of 60 cm to 1 m (2 to 3 ft), and flowering from June to September.

The card shows a Nettle in flower in high Summer. A comma butterfly hovers, ready to feed on the flowers, while in the grass a male adder awakens from his sleep. In the distance we see the standing stone of the Merrivale ceremonial complex on Dartmoor.

Upright meaning Nettles present a harsh exterior that conceals incredible goodness. This card may reflect a situation or person with similar characteristics. It is easy to dismiss 'prickly' people as irritable, but this defence may conceal their true gifts. If you try not to take their irritation personally, and seek to communicate more deeply with them, you may be surprised by what they have to offer. Likewise with a tricky situation, you need to work out

whether this is telling you to back away, or persevere – to ‘grasp the Nettle’ and put up with any initial discomfort in order to benefit later. Nettles teach us that appearances can be deceptive and that first impressions can be wrong. In the old days, alchemists sought to transmute lead into gold. Nettles teach us the secret of transmutation, whereby an experience that is initially uncomfortable transforms into something treasured and valuable.

Reversed meaning Our ancestors were undoubtedly much hardier than us. Our increasingly urban and sophisticated lifestyle has brought many benefits, but it has also made us ‘softer’ – scared to interact with the natural world for fear of its dangers. Choosing this card reversed might imply that this applies to you or is relevant in the context of your reading. Although Nature can be severe, and life-endangering, it is only by vigorously engaging with it that we feel fully alive. The time may have come for you to take an adventure outdoors.

An alternative meaning for this card may come to you if you ask the question, ‘What is nettling me?’ Often, if we are of a positive disposition, we tend to ignore signs of our own irritation, but like a physical symptom such feelings should be listened to. If a person or situation aggravates us, it may mean that we are not in tune with them.

Finally, the card could simply be telling you to stop being so irritable, and to address the underlying cause of your annoyance rather than being prickly towards others.



A STOREHOUSE OF GOODNESS

The Common Nettle was one of the most important plants for our ancestors, providing nutrition, clothing and medicine. It is hard to believe that a plant that punishes us with such an unpleasant sting, and that is now treated as a nuisance, can represent such a storehouse of

goodness. But it is only in recent times that we have turned our back on this most generous of plants.

As Neolithic tribes cleared the woods for their settlements, Nettles sprang up in great swathes and were soon being used to provide fibre for string, fishing nets and cloth, until Flax became the material of choice. But Nettle fibre is incredibly strong and it was still being woven in Scotland in the seventeenth century, when it was used to make sheets and tablecoths. During the First World War, Germany and Austria used the fibre to produce clothing when cotton supplies ran out.

As a food – boiled as a vegetable or cooked in soup – Nettle tastes like spinach or kale, and contains calcium, potassium, iron, manganese and vitamins A and C. In Scotland it was added to rennet to make butter and cheese, and boiled with oatmeal to cure constipated cattle, or used simply as fodder. Not only animals and humans can feed off this versatile plant: Nettles support over forty species of insect, including many butterflies, such as the tortoise-shell which feeds exclusively on Nettle. In late Summer many seed-eating birds feed off the huge quantity of seeds produced by Nettles, and the plant is so rich in phosphates it makes an ideal green manure when steeped in rainwater.

Nettle facial steams are said to improve the complexion, and infusions help with eczema. It is also used as a hair tonic and facial cleanser for oily skin. An old folk remedy used in many parts of the British Isles involves deliberately stinging the body with Nettles to ease the pain of aching joints and restore the circulation. This secret was also known to the Roman legionaries, the Romanies, and the inhabitants of the Isle of Man, who called the plant *Undaagah* from an old Gaelic word for flaying.

'We did eat some Nettle porridge, which was very good ...'

SAMUEL PEPYS, 1661

PLANTAIN

Slan-lus

Plantago sp.



UPRIGHT

Assertiveness • Calm • Resilience

REVERSED

Healing • Strength

• The secret source of power



Plantains are small inconspicuous perennials found in about two hundred species all over the world. Greater Plantain (*Plantago major*) has survived three ice ages in Britain, but only really began to flourish in the wake of human settlement. In long grass it grows directly upwards reaching as high as 30 cm (1 ft) above ground, but on grazed land it hugs the ground to avoid being eaten and becomes a menace on lawns, cannily avoiding the lowest mower blades.

The card shows Greater Plantain in the Summer, with its flowering spike reminding us of one of its popular names, Rat's Tails. In the distance an old track leads beside the stones of Callanish on the Isle of Lewis in Scotland.

Upright meaning Plantains are extraordinarily resilient. If you have chosen this card, it may indicate that you are being called upon to display a similar characteristic. Although Plantains may drive gardeners mad, they can't help admiring its tenacity – the way it hugs low to the ground and refuses to budge. Maybe that's what you need to do. You just need to be aware of the difference between being a 'doormat' and a Plantain. If you let people 'walk all over you', you need to look at becoming more assertive and defending

your boundaries more robustly. If, however, you just know you must stand your ground, even if it means putting up with difficulties and criticism and perhaps keeping a low profile, then you are acting like the Plantain.

Remember that, however many times the Plantain is trodden on, within its leaves lie soothing ingredients. Regardless of how tough life is, in the end the real healing comes from within.

Reversed meaning When life gets difficult, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking like a victim or martyr. We all have spells when we just seem to suffer one problem after another, and it feels impossible to break out of the cycle. If you have drawn this card reversed, it may suggest that you need to understand your situation in a different way. Imagine that what you need is way down beneath you – in the earth – and deep down inside you. Instead of reaching out to be 'saved', by looking for someone or something that can rescue you, try reaching in. 'Hunkering down' then becomes not resignation and fatalism, but the act of drawing on your secret source of power. Weakness turns into strength and the wheel will turn.



PLANT OF HEALING

One of the Gaelic names for Plantain is 'Slan-Lus', which means 'Plant of Healing', and shows how much it was revered for its considerable healing powers. The Maoris and Native Americans have called it 'Englishman's Foot' because of its propensity to spring up wherever the white man travelled, and, in Britain, as well as being called Rat's Tails, it was known as Angel's Harps, since when the leaves are pulled apart the fibres can be seen in a harp-like formation.

The Ancient Greeks and Romans wrote of its medicinal properties, having such faith in its healing powers that they believed it could cure

mad dogs. Similar hopes were pinned on the plant by Native Americans who called it Snakeweed, believing it could counteract rattlesnake poisoning. Modern research shows that Plantain contains compounds that are anti-inflammatory and antibacterial, and which stimulate the immune system. The plant contains mucilage, which is soothing to the intestines, and the seed husks of Sand Plantain (*Plantago psyllium*) have recently become popular in detoxing regimes.

Plantain leaves contain tannins, which are astringent and antiviral – making them ideal for applying directly to wounds. These properties can be released simply by chewing the fresh or dried leaf, which can then be put straight onto the affected area. It is no wonder that the plant was quickly adopted into Maori and Native American herb lore.

By the time herbals were being written by the Greeks and Romans during the time of the Ancient Druids, Plantain's healing properties were well known. The Anglo-Saxons, who merged with the earlier peoples in Britain, recognized the plant's power and called it Weybroed (Waybread) and included it in their Nine Herbs Charm, along with Mugwort, Lamb's Cress, Cockspur Grass, Chamomile, Nettle, Crab-apple, Chervil and Fennel.

The Physicians of Myddvai used Plantain to draw out splinters, and in plasters for bruises, and made a lotion of it with Honeysuckle, white Rose and camphor to soothe inflammations.

Ripe seed-rich Plantain spikes were once picked commercially as food for caged birds around London, and herbalists recommended the seeds as a substitute for linseed. Today, extracts of the plant are used to treat bronchitis and coughs, as it is antispasmodic and has been found to dilate the bronchi. The combination of its astringency and its soothing mucilage also makes it ideal for treating ulcers, Irritable Bowel Syndrome and haemorrhoids. The renowned herbalist Mrs Grieve said, 'Decoctions of Plantain entered into almost every old remedy.' Now we understand why.



POPPY

Meilbheag

Papaver sp.



UPRIGHT

Redemption ♦ Motherhood
♦ Remembrance

REVERSED

Languidness ♦ Excess ♦ Indifference

The Common Poppy, also known as the Field Poppy or Corn Poppy, probably came to Britain with the first Neolithic farmers. Growing about 30 cm (1 ft) high with flowers of rich scarlet, each plant produces an average of seventeen thousand seeds, many of which will lie dormant for years in the earth before springing into life.

The card shows a Corn Poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*) growing on a hot Midsummer's Day. In the distance we see a round barrow with its entrance open, symbolizing both tomb and womb: death and the Mother Goddess.

Upright meaning Like the best of mothers, the Poppy combines vigour and tenderness in the most beautiful way. They seem to disappear forever, then one season, as if out of the blue, Poppies can return to a hillside or field to astonish us with their beauty. This card may suggest the reappearance of someone or something that you thought you had lost forever.

Alternatively, it may indicate that a quality or feeling you felt you could no longer access will become available to you again. Sometimes things have to be forgotten or hidden for a while before they can return like a new dawn

to surprise us. And, in doing so, a redemption occurs. Just as we speak of redeeming an investment that has matured in value out of sight, so we can sometimes redeem a situation or relationship by forgetting it, letting it go, or simply not attending to it for a while, so that it has a chance to grow. It takes skill to know when to pay attention to something and when to leave it alone. Some situations require action, vigilance and even confronting; others require forgetting or ignoring. Raising children often requires us to know when each of these strategies is best.

Reversed meaning Any quality in excess can have a negative effect. Selecting this card reversed may mean that you risk being seduced by the apparent benefits of being anaesthetized to the difficulties of life. There is a reason why we have the psychological defence of denial, and we all need to protect ourselves at certain times from the harshness and pain of being in the world. But, in the end, we need to be able to find a source of comfort, well-being and protection that is rooted in our essence or our spirituality rather than in an external agent. Chronic pain or certain other disturbances may need to be treated with medication, but there is a distinction between the valid use of substances for medical reasons and addictive self-medication or sedation.



THE FLOWER OF LIFE AND DEATH

So delicate are the petals of a Poppy that you can't pick them as a flower for display. No-one is sure of the common Poppy's origin – it is as old as agriculture and has sprung up wherever the soil has been tilled. Poppy seeds have been found in Twelfth Dynasty Egyptian tombs and archaeologists have found traces of the Common Poppy's relative, the Opium Poppy, in sites in the western Mediterranean dated to 4000 BCE.

The Poppy's blood-red colour combined with its seeds' uncanny ability to remain dormant in the ground for decades – only to reappear as a blaze of crimson – led to its natural association with ideas of death and rebirth, and the fertility of the Mother Goddess. Before the introduction of herbicides, Poppies grew among the corn, further reinforcing this connection with fertility, and with the harvest and cyclical rebirth.

The Opium Poppy arrived in Britain later than the Common Poppy but, due to the climate, produces negligible amounts of narcotic. Opium was treasured by the Persians, Greeks and Romans for its powerful painkilling effect, and was often combined with Mandrake. Both these plants would have been traded between mainland Europe and the cooler regions of Britain, and may well have been important ingredients in the medicine bags of early Druid healers.

Centuries later the Physicians of Myddvai used an anaesthetic that contained the fresh juice of Hemlock, Mandrake, Wild Lettuce, Ground Ivy, Sea Holly, Orpine and Poppy. This potion was dripped very slowly into the patient's nostril. The Hemlock and Mandrake would have contributed the major anaesthetic effect, while Wild Lettuce and Poppy, even in its common variety, are mild sedatives and would have counteracted some of the more unpleasant side-effects of this powerful combination of ingredients. The Physicians also recommended the bruised heads of Poppy infused in wine to induce sleep.

Symbolically the Poppy unites the worlds of sleep and wakefulness, birth and death, in the way that it can act as a sedative and remain dormant for years, and yet at the same time appear bright red in the Summer as a symbol of vigorous life.

*But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed.*

TAM O'SHANTER

PRIMROSE

Sòbhrag

Primula vulgaris



UPRIGHT

Love • Creativity • Rebirth

REVERSED

Romantic illusion • The quest
for wholeness



The Primrose is a low-growing perennial herb which is native to western and southern Europe and Britain. Flowering in April, it is one of the earliest spring flowers. It enjoys damp conditions and grows in woodlands, hedgerows and pastures. Individual plants can live up to twenty-five years, and in Britain it is now illegal to pick the flowers in the wild.

The card shows Primroses in full bloom in Snowdonia, at the time of Beltane. Beside Lake Bala stands a cauldron in which Ceridwen has strewn the herbs that will produce three drops of Awen when boiled for a year and a day. Behind the Primroses we see their relative, the Cowslip, which has a number of medicinal uses.

Upright meaning Because they are so small and beautiful, and are among the first flowers to appear after Winter, Primroses have always been associated with romantic love and new beginnings. Drawing this card may indicate that a new love is entering your life, or that a fresh wave of tenderness will appear in an existing partnership. Our relationships, like our dreams, have seasons, and however long you have been together it is still possible for a new cycle to begin.

Alternatively, the card may be indicating not the dawn of romantic love but the rising of creativity within you. The Primrose is the flower of the Bard, and each of us has a Bard within us who longs to sing the song of their soul and tell the story of their heart.

Out of the cauldron of Ceridwen came three drops, and the changes wrought in Gwion Bach were profound and many. A third possibility is that, rather than love or creativity, this card is pointing to a birthing of wisdom.

Reversed meaning The search for romantic love can easily turn into a trap that ensnares you in a world of illusion. Hollywood tries to ensure that none of us feels fulfilled unless we are in the throes of a passionate love affair, and yet experience, and now studies of brain chemistry, tells us that the initial stages of love give way either to disillusion and separation, or a less intense form of affection, care and companionship that can lead to a fruitful and long-lasting relationship. If you have chosen this card reversed, you may need to objectively assess whether you have fallen prey to the illusory aspect of romantic love. To what degree is your quest in life to find completion through another human being, or through yourself?



THE FLOWER OF A NEW BARD

The term 'Primrose' comes from the latin, *prima rosa*, meaning the first flower, and it is certainly one of the earliest flowers to bloom in Britain. It has no connection with the Evening Primrose, a native of North America and now popular for its oil.

The plant was used by the ancient herbalists, and Pliny believed that it was helpful in the treatment of rheumatism, paralysis and gout. Primrose has sedative qualities and, many centuries ago, herbalists recommended Primrose-flower tea drunk in May to 'cure the phrensic'

– nervous distress. The flowers can also be eaten, and they formed the main ingredient of a once-popular ‘Primrose Pottage’.

In Ireland they are called ‘fairie flowers’ and in folk magic they were used to attract love.

In the sixth-century poem ‘Cad Goddeu’, *The Battle of the Trees*, Primroses are mentioned as ingredients in the making of a mythical character – either the Flower-Woman Blodeuwedd, or Taliesin the archetypal Bard. And in another ancient poem, *The Chair of Taliesin*, Primroses are included in the ingredients of the Bard’s initiatory cauldron.

Primrose Hill is one of the most powerful sacred sites in London, with commanding views over the surrounding area. It was originally called Barrow Hill after the tumulus on its western side, and in the past was covered with Primroses in the Spring. It became the site for the ceremony that marked the public proclamation of the Druid Revival, when on the Summer Solstice of 1792, Iolo Morganwg performed his Druid rite that was later adopted by the Welsh National Eisteddfod. Once again the Primrose was able to play an important symbolic role in the unfolding story of Druidry.

Druids today might use Primroses decoratively or as a gift in the initiation of a Bard, or they might make a tea of the flowers with Vervain leaves, or annoint the new Bard with infused oil of Primrose flowers and Vervain.

*Gwydion it was who with great magic from his wand of enchantment
flung fire among the nine forms of elements, so that they combined into
a wondrous growth: essence of rich soils, water of the ninth wave,
Primroses of the hillside, bloom of woods and trees.*

THE COMING OF THE KING, NIKOLAI TOLSTOY



PUFFBALL

Balgann losgainn

Lycoperdon sp.



UPRIGHT

Mystery ♦ Relief from pain
♦ Inner connection

REVERSED

Delusion ♦ Pretence ♦ Inflation

Puffballs include the largest and most conspicuous mushrooms of the fungi family, and are found in temperate regions throughout the world, but seem absent from South America. The Giant Puffball (*Lycoperdon giganteum*) can grow to 1 m (3¼ ft) in diameter, and weigh up to 18 kg (40 lb). All Puffballs, including the smaller Gem-studded or Common Puffball (*Lycoperdon perlatum*) depicted here, have firm, white flesh when young and most are edible. The skin gradually darkens and the flesh turns to a mass of brown, powdery spores as it matures and dries. Finally, the skin bursts to release trillions of spores.

The card shows two Common Puffballs ready to eat, and a third about to release its spores – ripe for careful picking for medicinal use. In the foreground grows Lesser Celandine, beside which crouches a frog. Behind a tree we see the hallucinogenic, toxic mushroom Fly Agaric.

Upright meaning Mushrooms are mysterious; they grow in the darkness and feed on decaying matter. Picking this card may mean that something peculiar is happening, or about to happen, that you can't fully understand. Mushrooms are symbols of the Inner Mysteries: they are connected beneath

the ground in vast networks; they grow in darkness, and perform the alchemy of turning dead matter into new life. Like the Inner Mysteries, they have guardians that prevent access to the unworthy, but if approached with reverence they will show you their inner world. Befriending mushrooms gives you access to a deep level of the Earth's mysteries and, some say, access to the realms of Faery. With this comes the healing of any sense of woundedness, and a feeling too of being connected to the Web of All Being.

Reversed meaning Mystery for mystery's sake is a dangerous game to play. We all want to be noticed and admired, and some of us have learned to achieve this through acting as though we are privy to mysterious secrets. Choosing this card reversed may mean that you – or someone you know – is trying to pull the wool over someone's eyes by pretending you know more than you really do. This pretence may be motivated by a sense of inadequacy, or it could be happening unconsciously.

Mushrooms can connect us to the inner workings of the Earth and the spirit world, but they can also lead us into the realms of delusion and hallucination. The spiritual quest is full of tests and challenges, and this card reversed presents one of the most common. So much stress is placed in certain 'New Age' and occult teachings on psychic powers, that it is easy for a seeker to become misled or seduced by the idea that they possess unusual abilities. Humility and discrimination is needed when treading the spiritual path.



THE DEVIL'S SNUFFBOX

A number of the smaller Dusty Puffball (*Bovista nigrescens*), dating back to 5000 BCE, have been unearthed at the Neolithic settlement of Skara Brae in the Orkneys. They could have been used for food, but some archaeologists believe that they were treasured for their medicinal qualities.

The mushroom acts as an astringent and haemostatic, and is good for disinfecting wounds and clotting the blood. In its cottonwool-like phase, the flesh could have been used as a sponge; when the spores were dry, its dust could have been puffed onto wounds to stem the flow of blood and help scabs to form.

The Puffball has been called the 'Devil's snuffbox', and the spores squirted into the nostrils were said to stop nosebleeds. In later centuries, Puffball-squirting was more likely to be a pastime of schoolboys trying to temporarily blind each other, but in earlier times the mushroom's medicinal properties were highly prized. The tradition of using the spores to staunch wounds is found as far afield as Borneo and Sri Lanka, as well as in Scotland and Britain where a dry Puffball was said to be kept hanging by the blacksmith's forge to treat wounds.

In Scotland, Puffballs were used to transport fire; a good dry specimen will keep a coal or cinder hot as it is carried from one hearth to another. Smouldering Puffballs were also used by the Scots to smoke bees out of their hives.

In the 1950s a number of writers – among them Robert Graves – suggested that the Druids were guardians of a cult of hallucinogenic mushroom ingestion, and this was quickly promoted by the counter-culture of the 1960s. Fly Agaric was the mushroom most often associated with Druids, but its toxicity and widely varying hallucinogenic content makes it an unlikely candidate. The Liberty Cap is less toxic and more consistent in its psychotropic content, but there is no evidence of it being used by the Ancient Druids.

The fact that Puffballs have been found in Neolithic settlements, that there is a long tradition of their medicinal and other uses, and that they are non-toxic and a good food source, make them a far more likely candidate for use by the Druids of old and their contemporaries.

VERVAIN

Trombhad

Verbena officinalis



UPRIGHT

Reconciliation • Awen • Magic

REVERSED

Conflict • Obstacles
• The search for love



Vervain is found in most areas of Europe, in North Africa and much of Asia. A perennial that grows to a height of 80 cm (2½ ft), it is usually seen at roadsides or in meadowland. Its small flowers range from pinkish to pale lilac and appear on sparsely leafed stems in May. They carry no perfume, while the leaves have a bitter, astringent taste.

The card shows a plant in bloom, with a honeycomb laid as an offering beside it. Magical Rowan berries hang down from the tree above, and in the distance we can see a hare who has left his form beside the Vervain.

Upright meaning If we can infuse a sense of magic into our lives we are truly blessed; sadness and apparent obstructions seem to flee from us as if unwelcome. A beneficent cycle is set in motion whereby our good intentions and acts result in further positive actions from others which, in turn, enhance our own lives. Druids offer gifts of honey or milk to plants that they harvest. This ritual act conveys gratitude and the desire to not simply take from the Earth. If you have selected this card it may indicate that you are entering such a cycle because of your own acts of goodness. In the old days

it was believed that Vervain favoured the settling of disputes, and choosing this card may mean that you are being called upon to settle an argument or achieve reconciliation between two opposing positions. In addition, it could suggest that you are likely to be inspired in your creative life (inspiration is known as *Awen* in Druidry). Creativity, like everything in Nature, works in cycles, and you may be beginning a new cycle of creative flowering.

Reversed meaning Vervain is considered sacred to Venus, and has been associated with love magic since antiquity. Drawing this card reversed may signify that you are searching for love. One way to approach this universal quest is to seek this quality within, rather than from the outside. If you are able to open to the inherent magic in life and receive the inspiration to fulfil your creative potential, you are more likely to attract love into your life – whether in the form of a partner, or loving and positive friends who enjoy your creativity and are of like mind.

Vervain comes from the Celtic word *Ferfaen*, meaning ‘to drive away a stone’. It refers to the belief of early herbalists that the plant could help expel kidney stones. Taken at a symbolic level, it is possible that this card is indicating a need in you to expel or overcome conflict or obstacles that you feel are impeding the proper flow of your life. By encouraging *Awen*, the magical force of inspiration sensed by Druids as omnipresent, the circumstances of your life could start to change so that they encourage rather than hinder the expression of your love and creativity. In doing this you may also find that situations of tension and conflict start to ease, allowing mediation or even reconciliation to occur.



THE WIZARD'S PLANT

Vervain was considered so sacred and important in ancient times that it was known by a host of names that reflect the awe in which it was held, including Enchanter's Plant, the Herb of Grace, Holy Wort and Wizard's Plant. On the Isle of Man it was considered so important it was called simply The Herb (*Yn Lus*) or The Chief Herb (*Yn Ard Lus*). When picked in Lancashire, you would say, 'Hallowed by Thou, Vervain, If Thou growest on the ground.'

Pliny's *Natural History* included Vervain as one of the four herbs used by the Ancient Druids, the other three being Mistletoe, *Selago* (probably Fir Club Moss) and a plant he termed *Samolus*, which is thought to be either Brookweed, Pasque-flower, Water Pimpernel or Marshwort. According to Pliny, the Druids harvested Vervain just before it flowered, at the dark of the moon with Sirius rising. It had to be cut with a sickle and raised aloft by the left hand, after which an offering of honey or honeycomb was given to the earth. It was considered a cure-all, and in Gaul was used for divination and prophesying.

Contemporary Druids believe Vervain can stimulate the flow of inspiration (*Awen*) since, according to the poem *The Chair of Taliesin*, it was one of the ingredients of Ceridwen's cauldron. The poem was found in a thirteenth-century manuscript, but was undoubtedly inspired by earlier material. The other ingredients listed are sea foam, Rowan berries, Lesser Celandine and Wort – probably Flixweed.

An infusion of the leaves can be sprinkled in your bath or taken as a tea to encourage creative inspiration, and bunches of Vervain can be used to decorate your altar or to ritually sweep your sacred space.



WHEAT

Cruithneachd

Triticum sp.



UPRIGHT

Harvest • Nourishment • Abundance

REVERSED

Restlessness • Seeking roots
• Wanderlust

Wheat is a grass that is cultivated the world over as a cereal crop. As straw it is also used as bedding, for feeding animals and for roofing. Wheat is derived from three wild ancestral species that, in two separate mergers, evolved into a plant with extra-large seeds incapable of dispersal in the wild. As a result it is dependent entirely on people to sow its seeds, and in becoming a staple food for humanity it has played a major part in the development of civilization through the transition from hunter-gatherer to agricultural societies.

The card shows a Lughnasadh harvest scene in bright sunshine. There is a Brigid's cross in the foreground and we can see a settlement in the distance. Dandelions grow in the field and there is gorse in the background.

Upright meaning The time of harvest is a time of abundance – of appreciation for all that Nature has given us. It is also a time for celebrating the results of your hard work, and choosing this card could indicate that it is time to stop working for a while, to take some time to appreciate your achievements and give thanks for the harvest of your life. It may be that you spend a great deal of energy sowing seeds and caring for your plants – working for the future and

caring for your family – but it is vital that you also give yourself time to savour life in the moment, and to enjoy the family as a community, a tribe, too.

This card may also indicate that you are entering a phase of abundance, bringing you riches in your relationships and in your spiritual, creative and material lives. This is a card that symbolizes generosity: when your needs at a material and emotional level are satisfied, you are then free to focus on the gifts you can give to the world.

Reversed meaning The change in outlook and behaviour, from being part of a hunter-gatherer society, to living in a settled agricultural community, is one that our ancestors would have experienced, and these two ways of living may still compete for our affections even today. This card reversed may indicate that you are having trouble settling in one place. You may long to go travelling, or to have a more flexible lifestyle. Or you could be experiencing quite the opposite feeling – you may have been moving often in recent times and now you feel that you need to settle and put down roots. Alternatively, perhaps you are torn between the nomadic life, with all the excitement that movement and travelling can bring, and the settled, rooted life, which offers comfort and familiarity. It may help to remember that both the hunter-gatherer and the settled farmer live within us as ancestral archetypes, and that we can honour both at different times of our lives.



THE DRUID PRINCE AND OTZI THE ICE MAN

Wheat has been a staple of our diet for thousands of years. It first emerged in the Middle East about ten thousand years ago when Wild Einkorn crossed with Wild Emmer, with further hybridizations producing Spelt, Durum, Bread Wheat and other varieties. It was grown along the Nile in Ancient Egypt, and the fossil record shows that cereals

such as Wheat were being grown on the Scottish Isle of Arran eight thousand years ago – around the time that arable farming began in Greece. By 4000 BCE, arable farming was well established all over Britain.

In recent years, two bodies have been recovered that had been so well preserved that their stomach contents could be analysed. Just over five thousand years ago a man, now known as Otzi, died as he struggled over an Alpine pass, and his body was preserved in the ice. His last meal was of meat, a herb or green, and some unleavened bread made from one of the earliest species of Wheat, Einkorn. Three thousand years later, a man died in a peat bog in the Midlands, and became known as The Druid Prince after scholars speculated that he had been a willing sacrifice to protect Ireland from the Romans. Mistletoe, Wheat and Barley were found in his stomach. These findings demonstrate just how long humans have been eating Wheat.

Wheat was used in the religious rites of the Ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Romans and Greeks and in India – and in the form of bread became part of the central mystery of Christianity.

In Druidry it plays a central role in one of the most important stories of the tradition: *The Tale of Taliesin*, in which the Goddess Ceridwen chases the young initiate through the four seasons and elements, until he turns into a grain of Wheat and she turns into a hen. She eats the Wheat and becomes pregnant, giving birth to the finest poet in the land.

As a symbol of nourishment, fertility and the way in which life is continually reborn each year, Wheat acts as the offering in the Druid harvest festival of Lughnasadh on 1st August in the northern hemisphere and 1st February in the southern. A Druidess, taking the role of Lady Ceridwen, offers Wheat to the land, and the 'first loaf' of the season is shared by all participants.

WOAD

Guirmean

Isatis tinctoria

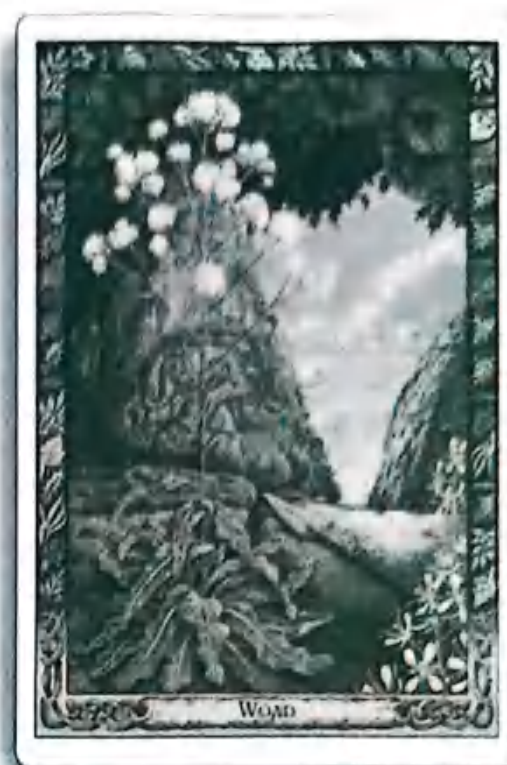


UPRIGHT

Freedom • Bardistry • Warriorhood

REVERSED

Limitation • Obstacles • Wounding



Woad is a biennial native to Europe and western Asia and was probably introduced to Ancient Britain by Celtic tribes emigrating from western and southern Europe. Growing to a height of 1 m (3¼ ft) or more, it has long bluish green leaves. Its small yellow flowers appear from June to September, then producing seeds that resemble little black tongues. Although it is usually found growing wild at the edge of cornfields or on cliffs, there is now a revival of interest in Woad and it is being grown commercially again in Britain and France.

The card shows Woad flowers in detail in the foreground, and a mature plant grows proudly beside a spear, symbolizing Woad's connection with warriorhood; this is enhanced by the carving of the boar in the rock behind. Spears were often made with the wood of Holly – *Tinne* in Ogham, the Celtic tree alphabet – and we can see the unmistakable outline of Holly leaves in the tree above.

Upright meaning Nothing evokes the feeling of freedom more than the sight of a clear blue sky, and Woad dye reproduces this shade of blue perfectly on

cloth or in paint. If you have chosen this card, it may indicate that you are striving to gain freedom, and the fact that Woad evokes the qualities of both bardistry and warriorhood offers a clue as to the way forward. Bardistry is the art of the Bard, who in the old days was Druid storyteller, poet or musician. Each of us has a Bard, a Creative Self, within us, and this card suggests that true freedom comes when you are able to give full expression to your creativity. To do this, you sometimes need the energy of a warrior, not to wound others but to provide you with the aggression, ambition and single-mindedness to achieve your aim. Without these qualities it is hard to avoid stifling your creativity with concern for others' needs, and doubts about your own abilities.

Reversed meaning Astrologers assign Saturn, the planet of structure and limitation, to Woad, and if you have chosen this card reversed it may mean that the structure around you is hindering rather than helping you. Perhaps you are feeling wounded or hampered by obstacles; longing for freedom from the limitations around you. If this is the case, it may be of help to turn this card around and gaze at the image upright – particularly at the sky. Rather than thinking about what you want freedom *from*, think about what you want freedom *for*. Finish the sentence 'I want the freedom to ...' If you are able to find goals that make your heart sing, the very things that seemed to be standing in your way can become stepping stones that lead to a flowering of your creativity. In the same way, if you feel wounded, although it is important not to deny that awareness, it may be helpful now to shift your focus from the wound to what you can give to the world.



PAINTED WARRIORS AND WOAD BARONS

In his *Gallic Wars*, Caesar tells us that British warriors rode into battle with their bodies painted with a substance that later commentators believed was the bright blue dye of Woad leaves. Whether it was indeed Woad is still a matter of scholarly debate. If it was, the warriors may have been using it for its medicinal value as well as to scare their enemies. Woad acts as a styptic, helping to contract blood vessels. It is therefore good for staunching the flow of blood from wounds, as the classical writers Dioscorides and Pliny noted, and it also acts as a natural insecticide. Today it is a main component of ointment used to treat eczema in Chinese herbal medicine, and herbalists make use of the strongly astringent quality of Woad leaves in poultices to treat ulcers and inflammations.

By the Middle Ages, Woad cultivation was so developed that Woad guilds grew up across Europe, and 'Woad barons' controlled its lucrative trade. Its dye was sometimes combined with another plant dye, Weld (also known as Dyer's Broom), to make a bright green. The blue threads in the Bayeux Tapestry were dyed using Woad, and the blue is the only colour in the tapestry not to have faded in more than nine hundred years. In the sixteenth century, Indigo began to be imported from the tropics, and the use of Woad as the main source of blue dye began to decline. However, it wasn't until the 1930s that British police and airforce uniforms stopped being dyed with it and the last two Woad mills in the country closed down.

Scientists have now found that the plant has powerful cancer-fighting properties, producing large amounts of glucobrassicin – more than sixty times the amount found in broccoli, which is already known for its potential to reduce tumours. Woad is now produced commercially for home dyeing and painting. Druids today use it to dye their Bardic robes.



YARROW

Lus chosgadh na fola

Achillea millefolium



UPRIGHT

Fidelity • Masculinity • Virility

REVERSED

Divination • Uncertainty • Indecision

Yarrow is a hardy perennial native to Britain and Europe and found throughout the northern hemisphere, from Ireland to China. Usually considered a weed, it grows everywhere, although it prefers sunshine and a fertile soil. Flowering in late Summer or early Autumn in clusters of white or pink, it reaches a height of about 1 m (3¼ ft).

The card shows Yarrow in flower growing by the snakestone altar in Cumbria. It is a late Summer's afternoon and a rare smooth snake glides past.

Upright meaning One name for Yarrow is 'Seven Years' Love', since it was believed that a charm made with Yarrow could keep couples loving and faithful for seven years. What happened after that we do not know, but Yarrow's association with fidelity may provide a clue as to what this card means for you. Faithfulness to a partner or to certain values or shared ideas forms the basis of trust, and sometimes we can take this for granted without fully examining it. A review every seven years is a wise idea – for business partners as well as lovers. Values, goals and boundaries can be assessed and re-contracted, with the potential for a renewed sense of purpose and commitment.

Some writers say that Yarrow is sacred to the Horned God and the male principle, and another meaning of this card might revolve around your relationship to masculinity. Many of us hold a partly conscious representation in our awareness of a powerful and virile man that we would like to become or merge with. It is possible that this card signals a time in which you will start to work more consciously with this figure.

Reversed meaning Yarrow stalks have been used for divination for centuries. We turn to divination when we are uncertain about the future or need guidance. This process can easily become fatalistic and disempowering; used wisely an oracle should encourage us to draw on our inner wisdom and stimulate our ability to think more deeply about our situation before making any decisions. This card reversed may indicate that you are turning to this oracle to help you make a choice that, deep down, you suspect you've already taken. But hesitancy and doubt have their values: they help us to avoid arrogance and impulsiveness, and to fine-tune our decisions and timing. Sometimes in an oracle we seek only the echo of our own thoughts and feelings.



A PLANT OF DIVINATION

From the earliest times, Yarrow was recognized as an important plant. It may have been used as an offering as long ago as 60,000 BCE; pollen samples from the grave of a Neanderthal man in northern Iraq show it was present. Later it was mentioned by Dioscorides, and by Pliny who tells us that the centaur Chiron taught Achilles how to make a salve from Yarrow to heal his warriors.

Yarrow's ability to staunch bleeding was widely known in America and Canada where the indigenous peoples used it to heal wounds, and the leaves were chewed as a general cure-all. It was a favourite plant of

Saxon and medieval herbalists, and is an important constituent of traditional Chinese medicine.

Yarrow's ability to stem bleeding was recognized all over Britain and Scotland, and this is reflected in many of its common names such as Soldier's Woundwort and Staunch Grass. Highlanders used it in a healing ointment and it may have been burnt as an insect repellent, as it was in North America. It's now known to contain strong repellent compounds.

In the Orkneys, depression was treated with Yarrow, and all over Scotland it was considered good for sheep and black cattle.

Yarrow stalks have traditionally been used for divination in both China and Britain: in China, fifty stalks are used to divine from the I Ching, the Book of Changes; in Britain, we have records of the plant's use in love divination. There were connections between these far-flung regions in ancient times – hundreds of Bronze Age mummies have been found in western China with clothing (including tartan leggings) and DNA that traces them to the Celtic lands – but the same plant being used for divination is more likely to be a result of chance.

In England, Yarrow was used as a remedy for staunching nosebleeds; a leaf was inserted into a nostril while the diviner chanted: 'Yarroway, Yarroway, bear a white blow, If my love love me, my nose will bleed now.'

In Scotland, women or girls who were curious about their prospects were advised to pick Yarrow with their eyes closed on a May morning, while reciting: 'Good morrow, good morrow, to thee braw Yarrow. And thrice good morrow to thee. I pray tell me today or tomorrow wha is my true lover to be?'

A challenge for a Druid today would be to find new ways to work with Yarrow as a divining tool, to broaden its application to other areas of life.

'The nature of the Yarrow is round and spiritual.'

THE TA CHUAN (THE GREAT TREATISE)

THE BANES

Wolfsbane Fuath mhadhaidh *Aconitum napellus*

Henbane Gafann *Hyoscyamus niger*

Hemlock Muinmhear *Conium maculatum*



UPRIGHT

Power • Unexpected aid • Relief

REVERSED

Ill will • Betrayal • Difficulty



The Banes are deadly plants that also offer gifts if used wisely. Native to Britain, Wolfsbane (also known as Monkshood) and Hemlock (not to be confused with the conifer of the same name) grow in damp, shady conditions, whereas Henbane likes drier, sandy soil. Hemlock and Henbane are foul smelling.

The card shows Wolfsbane growing in the light of a full moon. To the right is Hemlock and to the left Henbane. Spent arrow heads lie on the ground.

Upright meaning Life can sometimes seem almost unbearable. If you have chosen this card, it may mean that you are surrounded by pressures and difficulties. But life is fundamentally mysterious, and out of the blue something can happen that acts as a catalyst for change. We are so used to the high drama and 'big stories' of movies and television that we forget the immense power of the smallest things. Just one remark of a friend or stranger, one line in a book, or a dawning realization of your own can trigger a new direction in your life, or a turning point in your affairs. Such a gift may come to you from a completely unexpected direction, bringing a relief to your situation

that you would never have imagined. Consumerism has trained us to look for the biggest when really we should be looking for the best.

Reversed meaning Each of the Banes can be used to deadly effect. If you have chosen this card reversed, it may mean that you need to be aware of the harmful consequences of your words or actions. It is possible that you have betrayed someone or a value that in your heart of hearts you hold dear. Rather than openly confronting or challenging the person or the problem, you may instead have worked in the darkness of unexplained motives – with feelings of hurt and a desire for revenge that you never dared express. Rather than now feeling despair, it is important to realize that your actions have created a difficulty that can become a challenge for you: to show the strength of character to resolve the issue, make amends or move on in your life with wisdom and compassion. The soul creates learning experiences for us.



GREEN OINTMENT AND ELF BOLTS

In Britain, poisonous plants were often called 'Banes' from the Old Norse and German words meaning destruction and death. Anyone wishing to work with plants, or simply to get closer to Nature, needs to know about the Banes and other poisonous plants, which despite being dangerous can often be of value. Fleabane, for example, was burned to rid houses of fleas, and we now know that the plant contains the insecticide pyrethrum. Wolfsbane contains the deadly poison aconitine, and is much used in homeopathy, and Henbane and Hemlock have been used medicinally in minute doses for centuries.

The classical herbalists were well aware of these plants' poisonous properties, but were keen to exploit their medicinal powers; later we find Saxon herbalists and the Physicians of Myddvai making use of them.

Henbane is one of the oldest recorded poisonous plants with a magical reputation. It was used by the Ancient Egyptians, and is related to Mandrake and Deadly Nightshade. Despite its deadly potential, Henbane was used in folk medicine in Britain and Europe for its pain-relieving and sleep-inducing properties. In Sussex in the seventeenth century, a teething necklace for babies was made out of Henbane, Orpine and Vervain roots soaked in red wine, and Henbane seeds were smoked to alleviate the symptoms of neuralgia, toothache and rheumatism. In the twentieth century it was used in interrogations as a truth serum, and in modern herbal medicine is used as a sedative.

Wolfsbane is so toxic it has developed a fearsome reputation. It is said that Celtic hunters dipped their arrowheads in the plant's juice, and in medieval times it was linked with murder and sorcery. Witches were believed to dip flints in Wolfsbane and hurl them at their victims. These 'elf bolts' could administer the poison simply by scratching the skin.

Hemlock was used by the Ancient Greek and Arabian physicians as a treatment for tumours, as it was in Scotland into the twentieth century. One of its common Scottish names is 'Mother die', as children were told that their mother would expire if they dared to pick it.

Hemlock, Wolfsbane and Henbane have all been listed as ingredients in recipes for hallucinogenic 'flying ointments' or 'green ointments' used by witches. Some scholars believe these recipes, first recorded in the fifteenth century, to be evidence of a magical or shamanic tradition of plant use in Britain and western Europe that could stretch back to the time of the Ancient Druids, and may have included the use of the mushrooms Fly Agaric and Liberty Cap. Other scholars question the veracity of information obtained from witch-hunts mainly carried out during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and suggest that individuals' sensitivity to toxicity and the concentrations of relevant chemicals from plant to plant vary so widely as to render such a practice unlikely.



THE GUARDIANS

Elder Ruis *Sambucus nigra*

Hawthorn Huath *Crataegus oxyacantha*

Birch Beith *Betula pendula*



UPRIGHT

Immunity ♦ Strength ♦ Longevity

REVERSED

Slowness ♦ Combination ♦ Synergy

The Guardians are three trees which together act as preservers of our health, possibly even prolonging our lives, by strengthening the immune system and the key organs of the heart and circulatory system, the liver and kidneys. Each of them is a member of the Ogham family of eighteen trees and seven plants that make up this mysterious woodland alphabet that has come to be known as the 'Druids' tree language'.

The card shows a Birch tree growing between an Elder and a Hawthorn. The three trees act like guardians of the sacred pool, in which we can see Brooklime, also known as Water Pimpernel. This may be the mysterious *Samolus* revered by the Druids, according to Pliny.

Upright meaning If you have chosen this card, it may indicate that a situation or relationship which seems to be in difficulty can be preserved and strengthened if action is taken. Sometimes, if there is no expectation of a 'quick fix', a problem can slowly be turned around over a period of time by a number of – possibly quite small – adjustments. The three Guardians act by gradually strengthening the key organs of the body. Similarly, if you take

actions to strengthen specific aspects of a relationship, this will, in time, affect every part of it. Rather than focusing on areas of weakness between you, identify where you do connect well, and try to build on these. Long-term relationships need healthy 'immune systems' that can cope with the inevitable stresses that arise between two individuals.

Reversed meaning Plants sometimes work best when they are given as a remedy on their own, and sometimes in combination with other plants. If you have chosen this card reversed, it may indicate that you are being called upon to work in a group. Your independence might feel threatened, but it is likely that the synergy generated as a team will be far more effective than if you were to continue to work alone.

Alternatively, the card may suggest that you need to have the confidence in your abilities and the trust in life to slow down and not take on every offer that is made to you. We often find ourselves rushing through life, anxious that if we stop nobody will want us. Generally this is not true, and by slowing down or pausing we give life a chance to show us new directions.



TONICS AND FORTIFIERS

The three Guardians act in some ways like the archetypal family, with the Elder as mother, the Hawthorn as father, and Birch as the young child bringing freshness and renewal. Each tree offers extraordinary gifts.

Elder has grown in Britain for millions of years and, as early as 400 BCE, Hippocrates described it as his 'medicine chest'. It is associated with the Crone, and in ancient times was both feared and revered. It was linked with death and malicious witchcraft, but also with protection from lightning and witches. These contradictory associations echo the chemical nature of the tree, whose bark and leaves are poisonous,

but whose flowers and berries are powerfully healing and fortifying. The berries and blossoms of the Elder make excellent cordial and wine, and its flowerheads can be used in incense. Drinking Elderberry juice regularly stimulates the immune system, relieves stress, helps maintain a healthy circulation and heart and helps prevent hardening of the arteries.

Hawthorn is also known as May, as it flowers at Beltane, filling the hedgerows with blossom. The blood-red haws, or berries, that follow are so good for the heart and circulatory system that the tree has sometimes been called 'The father of the heart'. In Druidry and folk tradition, the Hawthorn is associated with the world of faery and of sexuality, and it has become one of the most important trees in herbal medicine. The leaves, flowers and berries contain antioxidants that protect the heart's tissues. Preparations made from the plant also strengthen the beating of the heart and lower the blood pressure, and taken daily as a tea will protect the heart and circulation.

Birch was one of the first trees to colonize Britain as the ice sheets melted. It is associated in Druidry with cleansing, birth, and new beginnings. Birch switches were used on miscreants – and in Scandinavia on willing sauna participants – to drive out impurities. Cradles were also traditionally made of Birch. The cleansing effect of this eye-catching tree is now known to occur physiologically, too, and the leaves, sap and oil extracted from the bark are all used medicinally. The sap, as well as making a good wine, can be used as a tonic in the Spring and Autumn – particularly to improve protein metabolism and the excretion of waste products from the liver and kidneys. For this reason, the old herbalists prescribed Birch for rheumatism and kidney stones, and it now seems that Birch compounds may be effective in treating cancers and HIV. The leaves and bark may also exert a life-prolonging effect if taken regularly as a tea.

THE RESTORERS

Roseroot Lus na Laoch *Rhodiola rosea*

St John's Wort Eala bhuidhe *Hypericum sp.*

Valerian An tribhileach *Valeriana officinalis*

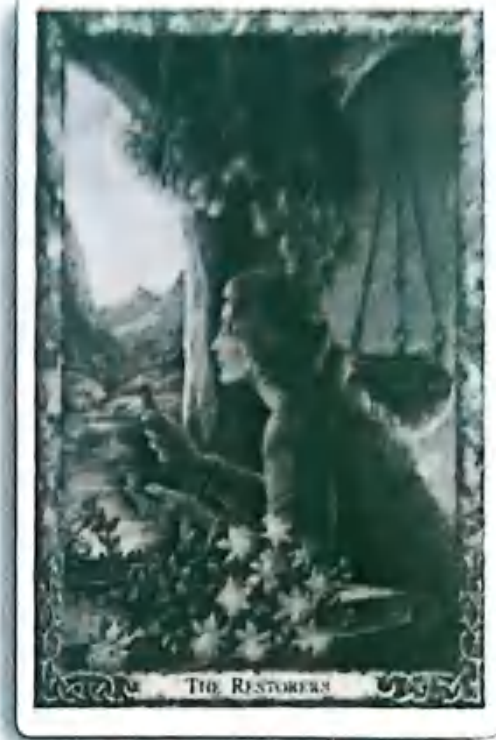


UPRIGHT

Retreat • Balance • Calm

REVERSED

Imbalance • Anxiety • Disturbance



The Restorers are a trio of ancient and indigenous plants of the Druid sourcelands, which act to restore the balance between body and soul, healing the heart and mind with their calming and strengthening powers. Roseroot is found in the mountainous regions of Wales and Scotland, and on coastal cliffs in the north-west of Britain. Valerian can be seen throughout the countryside in moist ground and ditches, and on riverbanks and wet meadowland, while St John's Wort prefers dry woodland and meadows.

The card shows a Druid healer in her bothy, sitting beside the fire. Through the open door we see the Scottish Highlands. Roseroot and Valerian hang drying in bunches from the rafters, and freshly gathered St John's Wort lies on the table.

Upright meaning Although adventure and excitement are necessary ingredients in life, we also need periods of peace and calm: oases in our busy lives. Drawing this card in a reading may mean that you should create such a time for yourself now. Retreats are an important part of spiritual practice, and in Druidry these can include visiting the old sacred sites and walking the old

tracks. But wherever you are you can take a retreat. Even if you are busy, see if you can withdraw from your schedule for three hours, during which time no-one disturbs you and you treat yourself to whatever will help you find calm. Better still is a longer retreat – three days or more – in a setting close to Nature. By taking such a break you give your body and soul a chance to catch up with each other and to find balance once more.

Reversed meaning Drawing this card reversed may indicate that you (or someone you know) are out of balance and feel disturbed and anxious. Life is often puzzling, and relationships are so difficult it is no wonder so many people suffer from anxiety and depression. Now may be the time to tackle this imbalance with a combination of counselling, herbal medicine and lifestyle changes.

Alternatively, the card may indicate that a situation or project is unstable or completely unrealistic, and that a good dose of common sense is required to get it back on track. It may be time to hire a consultant, or simply get someone to look at the problem objectively and give advice.



PLANTS FOR SOUL HEALING

A number of plants are well known for their effects on our mental state, and a Druid healer today might well approach psychological distress from two angles: firstly – if they are a qualified counsellor – by acting as an *Anam Cara* or soul-friend, who will listen to the patient without judgement and interact with them therapeutically; and secondly – if they are a qualified herbalist – by prescribing herbal medicines that will help relieve anxiety and lift the spirits. The Restorers are three plants they might well recommend.

Roseroot is a little-known plant indigenous to Britain's mountainous regions and parts of Asia, northern Europe and the Arctic. Dioscorides

knew of its value, and it has been used as a tonic in traditional medicine in Scandinavia, Russia and Siberia for centuries. In Mongolia, families kept the location of the plants secret; its properties are so miraculous that in *The Healing Power of Celtic Plants*, Angela Paine suggests that the Druids may have done the same. Scientific analysis now confirms that Roseroot acts as an adaptogen, stimulating the immune system and sexual hormones. In addition it has antioxidant and other anti-cancer effects, and seems to act in a similar way to ginseng, stimulating the release of neurotransmitters and enhancing learning and memory. It also improves the function of the thyroid, thymus and adrenal glands. It is now commercially available as a supplement.

St John's Wort was growing in Britain before the last Ice Age and was known to Dioscorides, who recommended it for malaria, sciatica and burns. Bunches were traditionally picked on the eve of St John's Day and tied to the eaves to protect the house from lightning and chase away evil spirits. The latter could be seen as an awareness of its ability to free sufferers of depression – a quality only recently formally discovered. Extracts of the plant are now prescribed for depression and menopausal symptoms with considerable success, and it seems that this ancient plant with its bright yellow flowers is one of Nature's great gifts to humanity.

Valerian is also an ancient plant indigenous to Britain and known to the classical herbalists, who recommended it as a diuretic. More than a hundred and twenty active chemicals have been detected in Valerian, and it was so esteemed that it became known as an All-heal. Its most noticeable healing effect lies in its sedative power, which was harnessed in the treatment of epilepsy and for calming those about to start fighting. It is now often prescribed (particularly in France and Germany) as a safe alternative to tranquilizers; it reduces anxiety, encourages sleep and relieves stress, with no danger of addiction.

HOW TO USE THE CARDS

Excellent herbs had our fathers of old –

Excellent herbs to ease their pain –

Alexanders and Marigold,

Eyebright, Orris and Elecampane –

Basil, Rocket, Valerian, Rue,

(Almost singing themselves they run)

Vervain, Dittany, Call-me-to-you –

Cowslip, Melilot, Rose of the Sun,

Anything green that grew out of the mould

Was an excellent herb to our fathers of old.

Our Fathers of Old, RUDYARD KIPLING



The desire to look deeper than the world of appearances through the use of oracles is a natural human instinct – however much some may feel it unnatural or that it calls upon supernatural powers. As human beings we have turned to the world of Nature in pursuit of this instinct from our very earliest days, using as divinatory tools sticks and bones, earth and sand, animal behaviour and the stems and flowers of plants.

Most of us, when young, have probably plucked petals from a Daisy chanting, 'He loves me, He loves me not', and from lands as far apart as Scotland and China there is evidence of Yarrow stalks being used many centuries ago for divination.

Although this oracle has been newly created, as you work with it you might like to remember that plants have been used for this same purpose since ancient times, and that you are participating in an activity which is ancient and primal.

In the world of plant lore and herbalism, ingredients and dosage are important factors. Less is often more, and it is possible to reduce the beneficial effects of one herb by combining it with too many other plants. So it is with this oracle. Be attentive to how many cards you need to consult, because sometimes it will be of more value to you to select just one or two, rather than trying to extract insights from many.

A Magical Tool for Creating the Future

The Druid Plant Oracle is designed to help you create your future, not predict it. Rather than the cards telling you what will happen, they offer ideas and suggestions that may provide you with insights into your own life or the events surrounding you, so that you can then make more informed choices. These insights can help you take responsibility for your life rather than passively accepting your 'fate' or 'destiny'.

Before working with the Oracle, it is important to know that the way you interpret the guidance given by each card will depend on your mental and emotional state, and for this reason it is important that you feel reasonably calm and clear-headed. Interpreting the cards and applying their meanings

to your life, or someone else's, requires skill, intuition and common sense. If you are feeling upset or troubled, you may pick out one or two words or phrases in the written interpretations and take these as predictions or as the absolute truth, rather than adapting them to the context of your life. The card interpretations given in this Oracle are not intended to be understood in this way, and if you choose to take this approach you must accept the responsibility and know that you are doing this – not the Oracle.

To begin with, you will probably rely on the interpretations given in this book. But remember that these are not carved in stone. As you learn about the associations and traditions surrounding each plant, and as you meditate on each card and become familiar with the plant itself, you may well come to your own sense of the card's meaning, with the result that you will not be dependent on the interpretations given here.

A Catalyst for Meditation

The cards don't necessarily have to be used for seeking guidance. They also present a way of developing an affinity with the natural world and of learning plant lore. To use the cards in this way, read the lore associated with the plant you have chosen, research it on the Internet and in the books cited in Further Reading (see page 142) and, if possible and appropriate, grow it and make use of it.

One of the key concepts in Druidry is that there is an 'Otherworld' – a spiritual world that can be accessed through meditation and the imagination. Each of the cards can be used as a doorway to this Otherworld, in which we can make journeys to gain a deeper insight into the meanings of the card, and access the spirit or essential quality of the plant. To embark on such a journey, gaze at your chosen card and then close your eyes, visualizing the image before you. Open your eyes a few times to check on the details; this will also help you to build your inner imagery. Once it is clear to your inner eye, step into the picture in your imagination, explore its landscape and commune with the plant – opening to any messages or subtle energies it may wish to give you.

Using the Cards for Guidance

If you wish to use the cards for guidance, you can try trusting your inner spirit and the Oracle and simply pick a card, or cards, without consciously articulating your question. This works for some people, but others find that they get a better result if they formulate a clear question in their mind that they would like the Oracle to clarify.

If you simply require an insight into the current stage of your life journey, this request may be all you need to bring into your awareness before selecting cards. But, if a particular issue is worrying you, spend some time formulating your question as clearly as you can. This will help you to clarify your concerns, and it will also help you to interpret the cards more accurately. The cards do not predict the future or tell you what you absolutely must do, so do not ask whether something will happen, or if you should do something. Rather, frame your question as a request for clarification around the issue that concerns you. If, for example, you are thinking of leaving your job, do not ask, 'Will I leave my job?' or, 'Should I leave my job?' Instead, ask for insight into your relationship with your job that can help you make the decision about whether to stay or leave.

The Blank Cards

Before you prepare to do a reading, decide what to do with the three blank cards in the deck. These can either be discarded or used in one of two ways. You may choose to leave them in the deck as they are, in which case when you receive one in a reading it will indicate that it is up to you to find your way – the Oracle doesn't offer any insights at this moment. Or you can use them to create new cards of other plants that are meaningful to you.

Working with the Deck

First, shuffle the cards. Then turn half of them upside down and shuffle the pack again, holding the question in your mind. As you do this, watch out for the rogue card or wild card. This is the one that sometimes seems to have a life of its own, jumping out when you're shuffling or trying to pick another

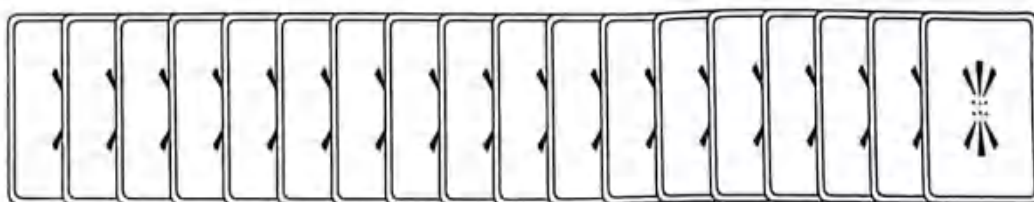
card. If this happens, put the card to one side and look at it at the end of the reading. It's amazing how often it seems to be significant. Also watch out for shy rogue cards – ones that just nudge themselves out. These can also often add something to the overall guidance of a reading.

By using reversed cards as well as upright ones, the Oracle has the ability to give you seventy-two readings rather than thirty-six. Some people worry that reversed cards are 'bad' or 'unlucky' – this is not the case with this Oracle. In most cases, a reversed card simply offers more of a challenge than one which is upright.

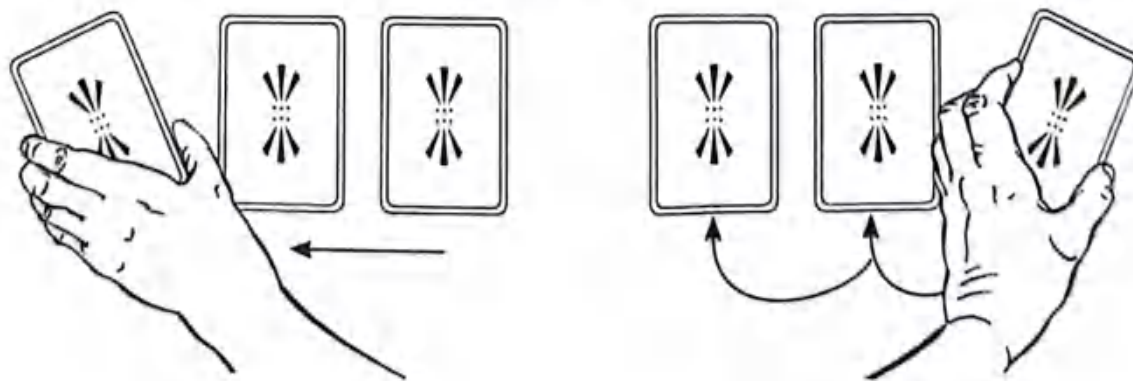
You might like to combine a set of cards from *The Druid Animal Oracle* with this deck; they are the same size, and the two decks work well together.

Choosing the Cards

There are two ways to select cards from the pack. One method is to spread all the cards face downwards in a row (see below). Then draw cards one at a time to build up your spread.



Alternatively, holding the pack in your left hand, cut it from the bottom, twice to the left, forming three piles (see below). Then reassemble the pack from right to left, so that the bottom third now becomes the top. The left side represents the Unconscious, and in most people the left hand is



controlled by the right, more intuitive, side of the brain. In some people (usually those who are left-handed) the opposite is the case and, if this applies to you, you may prefer to use your right hand, cutting the pack to the right. Now lay the cards out in the sequence required for the spread, starting with the top card in the pile and working down through the pack.

Both methods allow moments for the Spirit or your Inner Self to choose the right cards: with the first method during the selection of each card from the row; and with the second, during shuffling and cutting – with the exact place the pack is first cut being decisive. Remember to watch out for rogue cards – even shy ones!

Working with One Card

The simplest way to work with the Oracle is to shuffle the pack as described, then pick just one card. The question you ask as you shuffle and select the card may be as simple as: 'May I receive some inspiration for the coming day?', or as specific as: 'May I receive some insight into what it is that is holding me back?' or 'What aspect of my life do I need to look at now?'

Working with one card at a time is an excellent way to develop familiarity with the plants and their meanings, and can also be used to provide insights for a daily meditation. After you have read the interpretation and the section on the lore associated with that plant, see if you can open yourself to any message the plant may want to convey to you personally. Gazing at the card – or, better still, being close to the plant itself – visualizing the plant with your eyes closed, you may be able to smell it, to feel it breathing, to touch its leaves or petals. Gradually you will develop a relationship with each of the plants, and your readings will become more complete and intuitive as they become dialogues with the plant spirits.

Working with Two Cards

Sometimes working with two cards can give you just the insight you need – particularly when the issue you are considering has two sides to it, or when your question falls naturally into two parts. In dealing with a dispute

between two parties, you could draw a card to shed light on each of their positions. To go deeply into a question, you could select one card to give an insight into the conscious agenda, and another to give clarity on any unconscious agenda. Or, one card could be chosen to address your hopes and another for your fears around an issue, and so on.

Working with Three Cards

Druids are fond of triplicities. Much of their traditional wisdom is encapsulated in 'triads' – three-part wisdom-sayings – and three-card readings can often be illuminating. You can pick one card to give an insight into your situation or issue of concern as it is, another for how you would like it to be, and a third (which you can place between the two already drawn) for an insight into how you might move the situation or issue to this desired state.

The Intuitive Method

Don't feel you have to use a spread to do a reading. Try trusting your intuition and just ask your question, then pick however many cards feel right to give you the insight you need. Practising with this method can prove liberating as you discover how your intuition guides you to pick just the right number of cards.



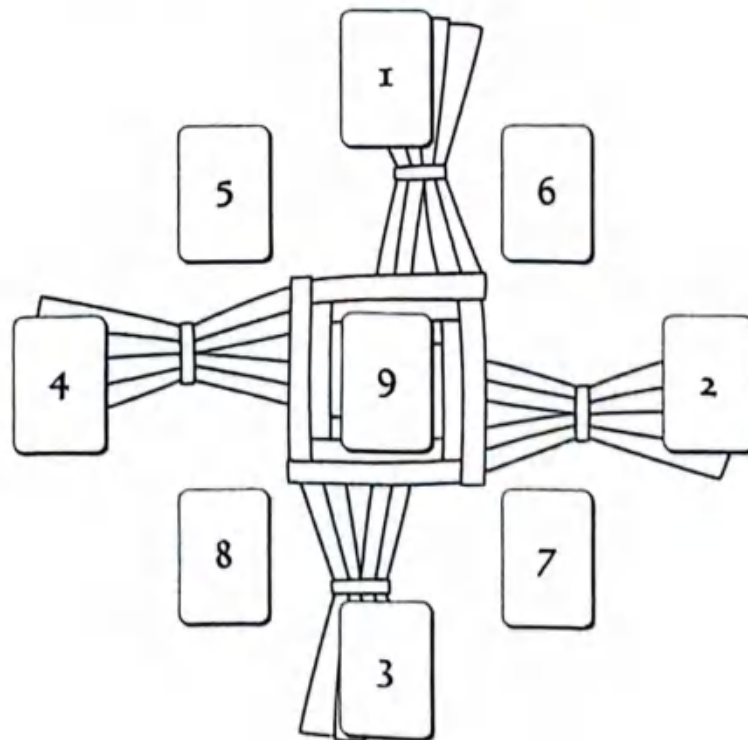
THE SPREADS

Spreads are specific patterns that you can use to lay out the cards for a reading. Here we give five suggestions based on Druid symbology, but you may use other spreads, such as those demonstrated in *The Druid Animal Oracle* or *The DruidCraft Tarot* for example; you could even invent your own. You need to decide which spread you're going to use before you start shuffling, as you'll need to know how many cards to select and where to place them.

THE BRIGHID'S CROSS SPREAD

For exploring issues related to healing and personal development

The cards are laid out in the form of the old Celtic Brighid's cross, which was made at the time of Imbolc – 1 February – from straw or rushes, and was hung by the hearth to bring good luck to the home. Just as the figure of



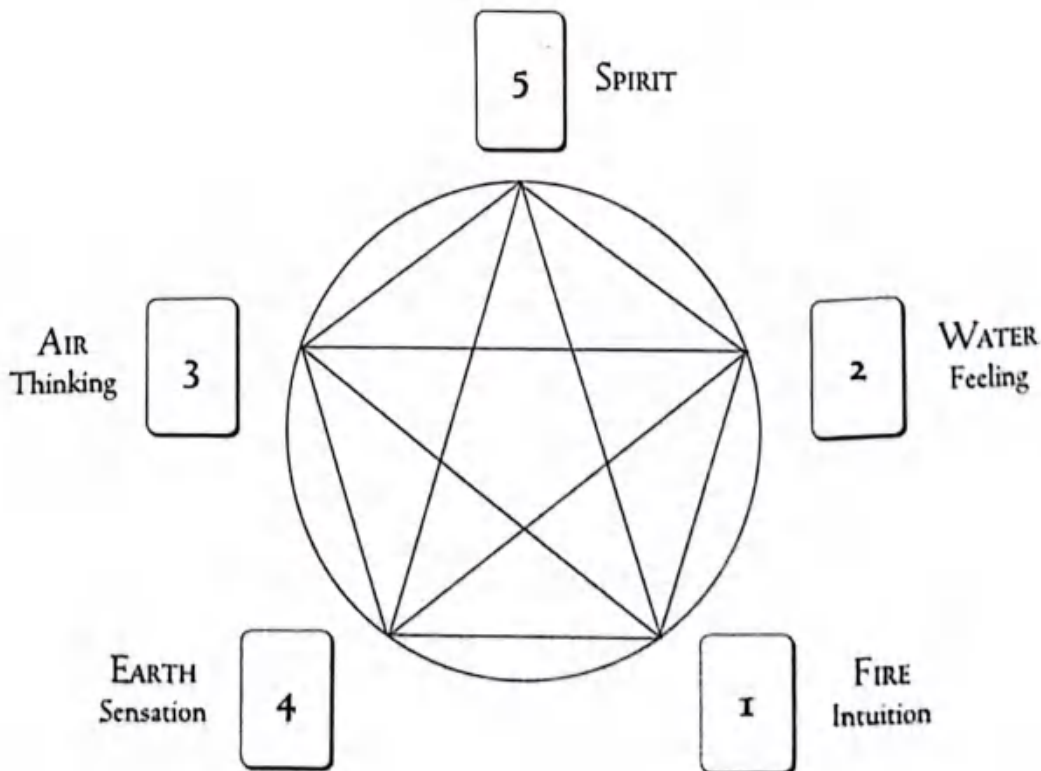
Brigid was originally a pagan goddess, the Brigid's cross may once have been a pre-Christian solar symbol. St Brigid, named after the goddess, was raised as a Druid until she converted to Christianity. Legend states that she wove a Brigid's cross from rushes, to help illustrate the story of the Crucifixion to a dying pagan chieftain.

As you lay the nine cards out face downwards, imagine that each card offers an insight that brings you closer to the heart of the matter you are considering. Turn over each card one by one, except for the central ninth card. Read each of the other eight cards to see if they offer helpful ideas, then turn over the ninth card and see if the insight it offers cuts to the heart of the matter.



THE PENTAGRAM SPREAD

For help in your search for wholeness, healing, integration and spiritual development



The Pentagram is an ancient symbol of power, protection, healing and wholeness. It is used in Druidry to denote the human body, health, and the five elements of Earth, Water, Air and Fire, and Spirit.

This spread works with the functions of human consciousness that the psychologist C. G. Jung related to the elements: thinking with Air, feeling with Water, intuition with Fire, and sensation (using the five senses) with Earth. Jung also identified a 'transcendent' fifth function that we might term 'Spirit'.

The Pentagram spread is particularly helpful when exploring issues and blockages related to your personal and spiritual development, and can often offer insights into the steps you need to take to achieve a greater sense of balance and integration.

Card 1 – THE PLACE OF THE INNER FLAME The bright fire of your intuition offers you the seeds of inspiration to bring enthusiasm, creativity and new ideas. The card in this position may illuminate the role of intuition in your life, or suggest ways in which this might be developed, or it may relate to a new idea or direction that is about to dawn.

Card 2 – THE PLACE OF THE WELL The deep well of feeling brings humanity and warmth to our actions and experience. The card in this position may illuminate the role of your emotions in your life, or suggest ways in which your emotional maturity might be developed, or it may relate to influences that are affecting your feelings, or the life of your heart.

Card 3 – THE PLACE OF THE SWORD The sword of the mind brings clarity, discrimination and the ability to judge between courses of action. The card in this position may illuminate the role of your intellect in your life, or suggest ways in which your mind might be developed, or it may relate to influences that are affecting your thoughts or judgement.

Card 4 – THE PLACE OF THE STONE The realm of stone and earth is the realm of the body, the five senses, and the physical world. The card in this position

may illuminate the role of your body and senses in your life, or suggest ways in which your health might be developed, or it may relate to influences that are affecting your health and physical circumstances

Card 5 – THE PLACE OF SPIRIT/SOUL. Here the card represents the gifts or advice coming from the spiritual world and your essential Core Self, which might be in the form of an idea or ideas that can help you achieve a sense of wholeness, balance and integration.

Once you have explored the meaning of each of the five cards and their relationship to each of the five functions or aspects of your life, you may find it helpful to explore the relationships between the cards themselves. Each of the five points of the pentagram is connected by lines to the other four points, symbolizing the relationships that exist between each of the functions. This means there are twenty different juxtapositions to examine.



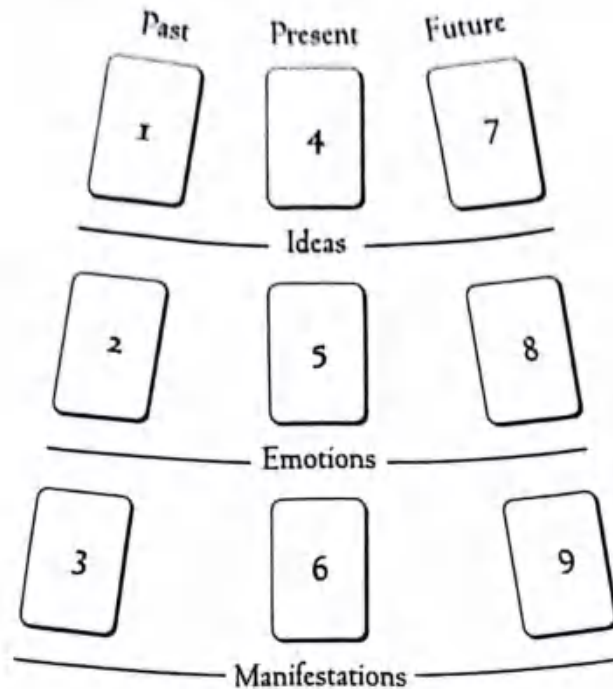
THE AWEN SPREAD

*For finding the seeds of inspiration that can guide your life,
and for observing the relationship between past, present and future
in your mental, emotional and physical worlds*

Awen is a Welsh word, used in Druidry to denote divine blessing and inspiration. It is symbolized by three rays of light emanating from three points – these are the three drops of Awen that flew from the cauldron of Ceridwen, and they also symbolize the three sunrise positions: the equinoxes at due east, and the midsummer and midwinter solstice positions to either side.

A simple version of this spread involves choosing just three cards to represent the influences that may affect your past, present and future. Be careful not to use a simplistic interpretation in relation to the future card.

Remember: it is not indicating what will come to pass, but rather what may be helping to shape the future. The full spread involves laying out nine cards:



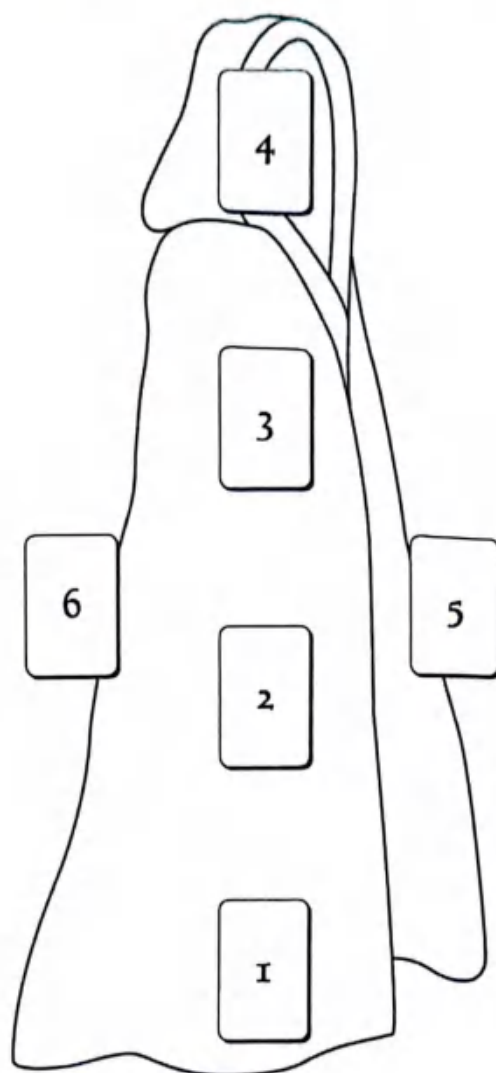
Cards 1, 4 and 7 may reveal the guiding ideas or impulses that affect your life, or the issue under consideration. Ideas tend to be causal to the world of feelings and actions, so cards 2, 5 and 8 may show the effects of the influences indicated in the top row of cards in the emotional realm. Alternatively, they may simply illuminate factors relevant to your emotional life in the past, present and future. Likewise, cards 3, 6 and 9 may show the effects of the influences of the cards above them in the physical world of practical matters, finances and health, or they may simply illuminate factors relevant to your physical life in the past, present and future.

It may help you to read the cards row by row first, from left to right. Then look at the vertical relationships. Finally, look at all nine cards to see if there are any patterns of card types or particular themes running through the spread.

A further development of this spread uses twelve cards – introducing a fourth row of three cards at the top to indicate the spiritual level, so that each vertical line has cards running in positions 1 to 4 for the Past, 5 to 8 for the Present, and 9 to 12 for the Future.

THE AIRMID'S CLOAK SPREAD

*For general readings and for times when it is unclear
what action you should take*



When the legendary healer Miach was laid to rest in the ground, 365 herbs grew up in the shape of his body. When Miach's sister Airmid saw this, she realized that each of these plants was a cure for one of the illnesses of the human body. She laid out her cloak and picked the herbs, gradually forming the outline of her brother's body. (*Turn to page 6 for the story of Airmid's Cloak.*)

In this spread, four cards are chosen and placed symbolically on Airmid's cloak. Once these have been read, a further two cards are drawn and placed on either side of the line of four cards.

Card 1 – THE PLACE OF FOUNDATION: *At the feet* This card relates to the fundamentals of a situation or issue, or of your life in general.

Card 2 – THE PLACE OF GENERATION: *At the genitals* This card relates to the creative driving force in the situation or issue under consideration, or that is operating in your life at present.

Card 3 – THE PLACE OF THE HEART: *At the heart* This card relates to the emotional and heart-felt aspects of the situation or of your life.

Card 4 – THE PLACE OF VISION: *At the forehead* The card in this position relates to the guiding principles of vision and purpose that overlook the situation or issue.

After you have drawn and read these four cards, ask for an insight into what actions you might take in the world to further your objectives, and place them to either side of the central line.

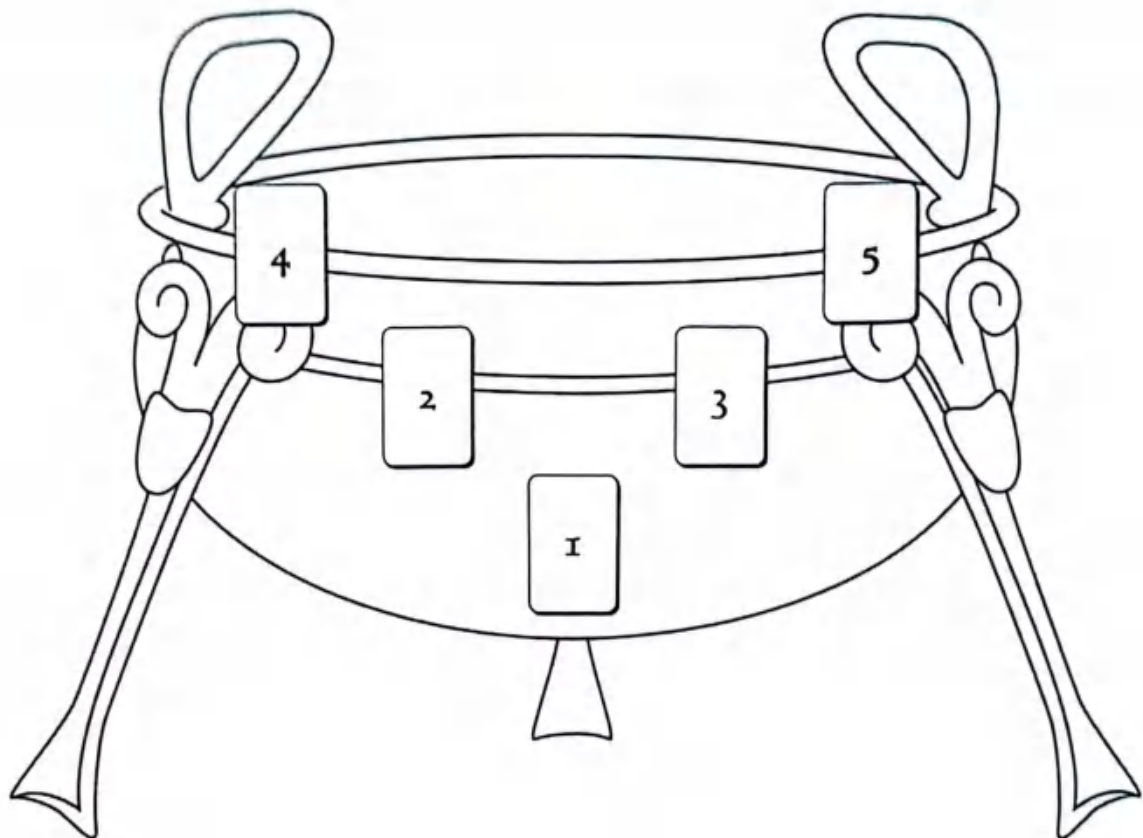
Card 5 – THE PLACE OF INNER ACTION: *At the left hand* The card in this position relates to what you might do in the worlds of thought and feeling to further your goals.

Card 6 – THE PLACE OF OUTER ACTION: *At the right hand* The card in this position relates to that which you might do in the physical world to further your aims.



THE CERIDWEN'S CAULDRON SPREAD

For exploring creative projects, for encouraging insight when everything seems to be in a state of flux, or for help with solving a particular problem



Ceridwen's brew (see pages 9–10) was made by heating sea foam, Rowan berries, Lesser Celandine, Vervain and Wort – probably Flixweed. For this spread, place five cards in the shape of a cauldron or horseshoe; each position relates to the qualities of each of the five ingredients.

Card 1 – THE PLACE OF SEA FOAM The card in this position relates to the overall context of the project or issue you are considering. It may offer an insight into its agenda, intention or motivation.

Card 2 – THE PLACE OF VERVAIN The card in this position relates to any obstacle, blockage or difficulty you may be experiencing in connection with the project or issue. Vervain is traditionally associated with magic and reconciliation. See if the card in this position offers any clues as to how you could resolve any difficulty.

Card 3 – THE PLACE OF ROWAN BERRIES This card relates to the protection that may surround you or the project or issue. Rowan berries, with their pentagram pattern, are traditionally linked to protection. Consider whether the card in this position offers any clues about making yourself or the project feel secure.

Card 4 – THE PLACE OF LESSER CELANDINE The card in this position relates to what will give you joy in this project or issue. Lesser Celandine is known as 'Grian' – the Sun – in Irish, and is a plant traditionally associated with joy and awakening.

Card 5 – THE PLACE OF WORT This card relates to the potential for transformation that exists within the project or issue. Although it is treated as a weed, Flixweed provides food for caterpillars, which will be transformed into butterflies.



INTERPRETING THE CARDS

The first few times you use the cards you will probably want to refer to the keywords and interpretations given in this book. For an upright card, you may also like to read the reverse meaning, for sometimes it can represent a hidden side of the issue being considered. Likewise for a reversed card, reading the upright interpretation may reveal hidden dimensions.

Once you have read the keywords and interpretations, and related them to their positions in the spread, consider whether a preponderance of cards fall into any of the groups listed below. If so, this may indicate an important theme in your reading. We have titled the themes in accordance with traditional roles or aspects of the Self. You may wish to add your own groups, or alter those given in accordance with your intuition and guidance.

THE HEALER Agrimony, Betony, Burdock, Chamomile, Comfrey, Garlic,

Juniper, Lady's Mantle, Mandrake, Mint, Mistletoe, Nettle, Plantain, Puffball,

Yarrow, The Guardians, The Restorers

THE WARRIOR Borage, Nettle, Woad

THE LOVER Clover, Cuckoo Pint, Fern, Flax, Mistletoe, Primrose, Yarrow

THE BARD Heather, Poppy, Primrose, Vervain, Woad

THE OVATE / SHAMAN / SEER Agrimony, Celtic Bean, Fern, Ivy, Mugwort,

Nettle, Poppy, Puffball, The Banes

THE DRUID / DIPLOMAT Betony, Mandrake, Meadowsweet, Mint, Mistletoe,

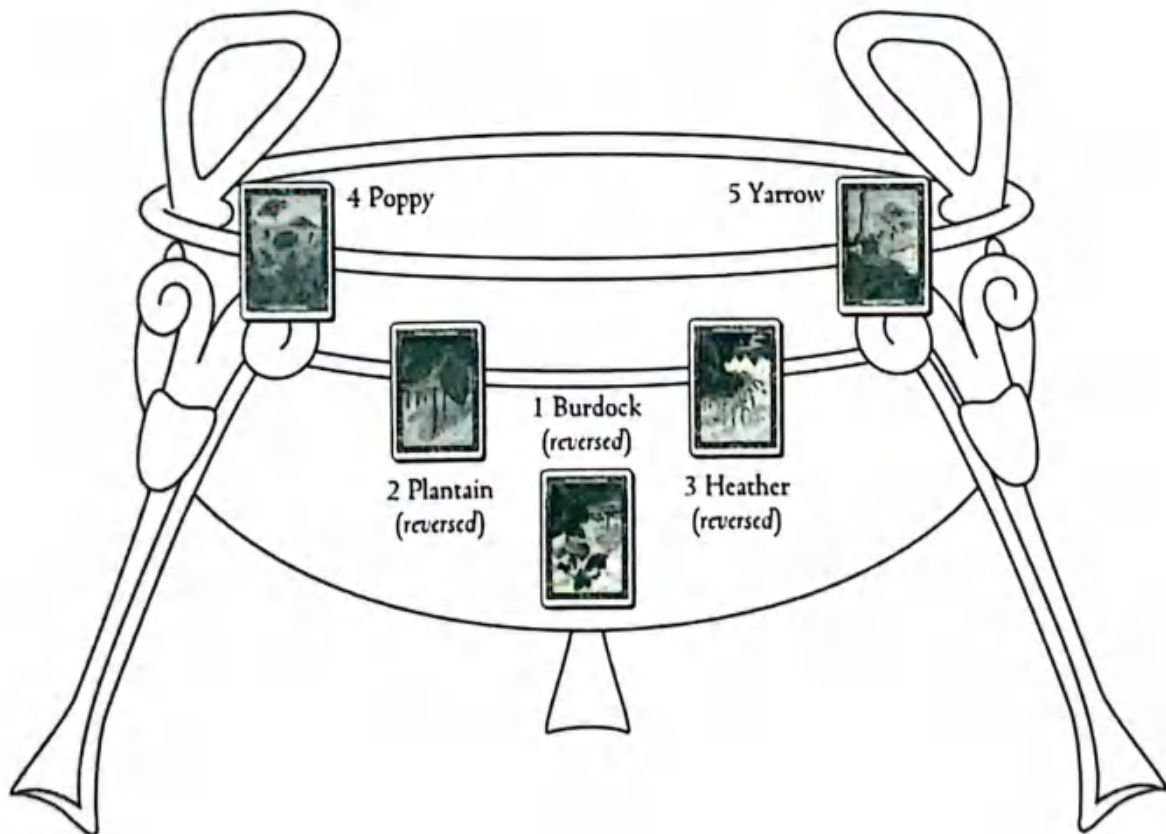
Vervain, Wheat

The card interpretations are intended only as a guide, and should not be treated as the final word. They are derived from our knowledge of the lore related to each plant and their characteristics and from inspiration. If you read about the traditional lore and combine this with your own intuition and knowledge, you may find you can refine and expand our interpretations, particularly if you are familiar with, and love, these plants – and perhaps grow them, too.

SAMPLE READING

The Ceridwen's Cauldron Spread

Bill was a successful financial adviser who wanted to use the cards to give him an insight into how he could resolve a difficult situation that had developed between him and his neighbour. They shared a drive to their properties, and various incidents had led to acrimonious exchanges. We suggested the Ceridwen's Cauldron spread, as it is designed to shed light on difficulties such as this, and the cards he chose were as follows:



As Bill was picking the first card, a shy rogue card appeared – poking out from the row of shuffled cards. As he selected the fifth card, another rogue card arrived, hitching a ride behind the fifth card he lifted up. We took both and put them face down to one side.

Card 1 – THE PLACE OF SEA FOAM • Burdock (reversed) The first card indicates the context or issue at hand. Burdock reversed directed us straight to the heart of the issue and suggested that Bill was being unjustly blamed for the situation that had arisen. The neighbour was very aggressive and openly offensive towards him and his family. The reversed card's interpretation encouraged working to resolve the situation.

Card 2 – THE PLACE OF VERVAIN • Plantain (reversed) The card in this position relates to any blockage you might feel in relation to the issue being explored. On hearing the interpretation for Plantain reversed, Bill realized that he had been preventing himself from resolving the situation by feeling like a victim who had no control over the situation. The interpretation encouraged him to seek a solution within himself.

Card 3 – THE PLACE OF ROWAN BERRIES • Heather (reversed) The third card indicates what you might do to feel safe in a situation, and the interpretation for Heather reversed suggested that Bill's negative relationship with his neighbour had resulted in him feeling alienated in his own home. He realized that, for his own sake and the sake of his family, he had to explore these feelings rather than trying to ignore them, so that he could find a way for them all to once again feel at home in their own house and garden.

Reversed cards tend to emphasize the challenges we face, and Bill's first three cards were all reversed. The fourth and fifth cards in this spread shift the focus from analysing the problem to discovering the good that might emerge from it and, appropriately, these next two cards were upright for Bill.

Card 4 – THE PLACE OF LESSER CELANDINE • Poppy The card in the fourth position suggests what could bring joy. Bill enthusiastically listened to the interpretation for Poppy, and then explained how when he was meditating in his garden recently he had become reacquainted with the spirit of his garden, who he had been unable to sense for months. He felt that her reappearance

was a positive sign, and that the garden would again become a place of joy and sanctuary once he had resolved the situation with his neighbour.

Card 5 – THE PLACE OF WORT • Yarrow This card indicates the potential for transformation that exists within an issue. On hearing the interpretation for Yarrow, Bill was struck by the idea that the situation might lead to a renewed sense of purpose and commitment. He decided that he and his partner would take time to review their lives and renew their commitment to their home.

The time had come to look at the rogue cards. We read the interpretations to Bill and asked him how he felt they related to the reading.

Celtic Bean Bill felt that this card was stressing the redemption theme of the Poppy card. One of the most important messages the cards were giving him was that the spirit of the garden, whom he thought had disappeared, had returned. This gave him hope, and the encouragement he needed to seek a resolution.

Cuckoo Pint (reversed) This card speaks of the way in which we should strive for harmony, but how sometimes communication becomes so toxic we need to simply disconnect from it. Hearing this confirmed for Bill the wisdom of a strategy he had been pondering: he would offer to pay for the neighbour's fence to be extended, to satisfy both their needs for privacy and resolve their disputes about parking. If she refused his offer, he would simply build the fence within his boundary and let go of any further attempts to communicate. Any sense that this solution was 'weak' because he was offering to pay all the costs vanished when he discussed it, and we invited him to read both the upright and reversed interpretations for Plantain.

The two rogue cards crystallized for Bill the insights of the other cards, affirming the need to finally address the problem so that he and his family could enjoy their home. These cards also affirmed that the solution lay within Bill's power, and that he need not be a victim to another's aggression.

INDEX OF CARDS

AGRIMONY	Mur-druidheann	<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>	Purification, Liberation, Preparation for new beginnings	Unhealthy attachments, Sorrow, Lethargy	12
BETONY	Lus bheathag	<i>Stachys sp. (species)</i>	Soothing discord, Dispelling negativity, Protection	Confrontation, Avoidance, Woundedness	15
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CUCKOO PINT	Cluas chaoin	<i>Arum maculatum</i>	Union, Creativity, Harmony	Disharmony, Toxicity, Inability to connect	39
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COMMON NAME	Gaelic NAME	BOTANICAL NAME	KEYWORDS UPRIGHT	KEYWORDS REVERSED	
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MEADOWSWEET	Crios Chuchulainn	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>	Transition, Blessing, Celebration	Transience, The Familiar, Routine	72
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PLANTAIN	Slan-lus	<i>Plantago sp.</i>	Assertiveness, Calm, Resilience	Healing, Strength, The secret source of power	87
POPPY	Meilbheag	<i>Papaver sp.</i>	Redemption, Motherhood, Remembrance	Languidness, Excess, Indifference	90
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FURTHER READING

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RESOURCES

If you are interested in learning more about Druid herbcraft and Druidry, we can send you details of the training courses offered by The Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD), which includes a monthly journal and written and audio teaching material. Camps, workshops, retreats and assemblies are also held, and there are now many groups worldwide. The Order also promotes the Campaign for Ecological Responsibility and a Sacred Grove planting programme. For details see www.druidry.org or contact OBOD, PO Box 1333, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1DX, England, Tel/Fax: +44 (0)1273 470888; e-mail: office@druidry.org

THE CREATORS OF THE DRUID PLANT ORACLE

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Stephanie Carr-Gomm studied at Bath Academy of Art before travelling extensively. After returning to the UK she trained as a scenic artist at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and has since worked as a freelance artist for many theatre, opera and ballet companies. She is now scenic artist in residence at the Glyndebourne Festival Opera. Stephanie was appointed Scribe of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids nearly twenty years ago, and helps administer its training programme, which is published in four languages and reaches thousands of people all over the world. She is co-author with Philip of *The Druid Animal Oracle* and *The DruidCraft Tarot*.

Philip Carr-Gomm is Chief of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids and the author of *Sacred Places*, *What Do Druids Believe?*, *Druidcraft: The Magic of Wicca and Druidry*, *The Druid Way*, *Druid Mysteries* and *In the Grove of the Druids*, and editor of *The Book of Druidry* and *The Rebirth of Druidry*. For details of his books, talks and workshops see www.philipcarrgomm.druidry.org

THE ARTIST

Will Worthington is Pendragon of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids and has worked as an illustrator for the last thirty years. He has had a life-long interest in botany and gardening, and has helped to create a number of exquisite gardens in the north of England. His interest in the ancient past and in Arthurian and Celtic mythology is reflected in his paintings and drawings, and he has contributed illustrative work to *The Book of Druidry* and *The Druid Way*, in addition to painting *The Druid Animal Oracle*, *The Green Man Tree Oracle* and *The DruidCraft Tarot*. For information on cards, prints and original paintings contact Will Worthington c/o OBOD, PO Box 1333, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1DX, England, or e-mail Will at willworthingtonuk@hotmail.com

A NOTE FROM THE ARTIST

Illustration has long been thought of as a poor relation to fine art, but at the turn of the nineteenth century there was a surge of finely printed books illustrated with original paintings by the likes of Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac, which are now recognized as works of art every bit as fine as those created by artists considered at the time to be the 'serious painters'.

I have been an illustrator all my working life but now concentrate more on painting, so working on *The Druid Plant Oracle* was an absolute joy. Rather than just illustrating a text or producing an image to order, this project gave me the opportunity to treat each card as one of my own paintings – allowing the spirit of the Green Man to take me on a journey through the British landscape.

Wherever I have lived, I have made gardens, sometimes out of old farmyards, sometimes from rough grassland. I love natural gardens, so each one ends up looking like a piece of the countryside with cob-

bled paths and stone walls and a profusion of wild plants. It's a perfect complement to painting, allowing me to produce my own landscape from natural materials just as I do with the medium I choose to paint with – egg-tempera.

To create the paintings for this deck, I started with a wooden panel covered in layers of gesso, which I prefer to make myself from powdered chalk and rabbit-skin glue. On to the smoothly sanded surface I painted with powdered pigment mixed with egg yolk.

I have grown many of the plants in this oracle for decades so it felt like I was painting portraits of old friends. Through the intense observation needed to paint the pictures I discovered more of the character of each plant in the process.

I hope that some of the pleasure I had in painting the plants and landscapes comes through in the paintings, and that you have as much pleasure in using the cards as I had in producing them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With deep thanks to Will Worthington for creating the beautiful artwork for this deck; to Ian Jackson, Nick Eddison, Elaine Partington and Katie Golsby at Eddison Sadd for their enthusiastic support of the project; to Professor Gordon Hillman, Dr Andy Letcher, Dr Susan Jones and Dr Angela Paine for their informed advice; to herbalists Melanie Cardwell, Anna Richardson and Romilly Swann for sharing their knowledge; to Siusaidh NicNeill for her help with Gaelic plant names; and to Joan and Kevin Sampson of Katikati Naturist Park and Pamela Meekings-Stewart for creating the perfect environments to work on this project.

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