Welsh Culture in Neo-Paganism: Practice, Identity, & Community in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Academic research on Neo-Paganism has been gaining momentum in building a corpus of data and descriptions of this religious group over recent decades. However, the study of Celtic Neo-Paganism, and especially sects of Celtic Neo-Paganism centering Welsh culture, is severely lacking amid this growing corpus. It is the goal of the present research to close a portion of this gap by presenting a study of Neo-Pagans who specifically center or incorporate Welsh culture in their Neo-Pagan practice.

Field research was gathered from a combination of an online survey, which garnered seventy-four participants, as well as from live online video interviews (of about two-hour duration each) with three leaders in the Welsh cultural Neo-Pagan sphere, namely Kristoffer Hughes (leader of the Urdd Derwyddon Môn/Anglesey Druid Order, Druid member of the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids, author of seven books on Neo-Paganism, most with a Welsh cultural focus, and television personality), Mhara Starling (Welsh witch, TikTok and YouTube personality, author of three books on Welsh-culture-centering witchcraft and Neo-Paganism, and member of Urdd Derwyddon Môn/Anglesey Druid Order), and Dr. Gwilym Morus-Baird (PhD Welsh Medieval Literature, Bangor University, Gwynedd, author of *Taliesin Origins* and owner of Celtic Source online courses and YouTube channel).

Results revealed that Neo-Pagans who incorporate or center Welsh culture in their practice are majority white European in race/ethnicity, evenly distributed between binary genders (men and women) with a high proportion of nonbinary genders (over one-sixth), and middle-aged to

elderly. Nationalities are overwhelmingly from the U.K. and its former anglophone colonies, with almost one-quarter identifying as Welsh. Nearly half have lived in, or currently live in Wales, and over 88% are either fluent in or learning the Welsh language. Self-labeling conventions were inconsistent, and a majority of participants were affiliated with groups, with Druidry groups being the most popular.

A majority of the cohort value inclusivity regarding race/ethnicity, gender identity, and disability, although there are outliers who diverge from these trends. Cultural (mis)appropriation and especially Welsh historical knowledge were of high concern, with most participants being accepting of non-Welsh practitioners as long as proper "respect" for Welsh culture and avoidance of cultural (mis)appropriation was endeavored. Common reasons for incorporating or centering Welsh culture in Neo-Pagan practice included the practitioner being Welsh, having lived in or visited Wales, having Welsh ancestry or familial ties, having spiritual experiences with Welsh deific figures or spirits, being enamored of Welsh literature or culture in general, and/or being introduced to Welsh culture via Neo-Pagan publications, organizations, or community leaders.

Engagement in Welsh cultural traditions and Welsh language use or study were popular, with a majority adhering to a culturally Welsh version of the usual Wiccan or OBOD Wheel of the Year. Many also observed Christian holidays and saints' days. Welsh cultural traditions were popular, with lighting bonfires, giving offerings to the dead at Calan Gaeaf, and the Mari Lwyd at Midwinter-to-New Year's, and the May Pole being the most popular. Welsh literature and literary figures, Welsh socio-political action, and consumption, production, or support of Welsh arts, crafts, and media were also popular.

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I must disclose the important context that I myself am a person who matches the description of those whom I have studied here: meaning, I am a Neo-Pagan who centers Welsh culture in my practice, am a member of UDM/ADO and OBOD, am a supporter of Mhara Starling's Patreon and Gwilym Morus-Baird's Celtic Source courses, and frequently practice with my local CUUPS community. This is worth keeping in mind, both for the possibility of biases (as we all inevitably possess) as well as for the awareness that I speak from a position within these communities. It has been my utmost goal to present sources, data, and analyses in the most fair and unbiased way possible, and to not ignore any trends, outliers, or opinions which I personally may personally or religiously find disagreeable.

I must begin my gratitudes with thanking my spouse and my child, who have been a constant source of love and encouragement as well as very tolerant of the amount of time I have spent focused on this endeavor instead of on spending time with them. I am grateful to my two cats, who have been ever by my side as I type away at my desk.

I am also so thankful to the Neo-Pagan communities and individuals who have made this research possible: Kristoffer Hughes and the members of UDM/ADO, Dr. Gwilym Morus-Baird and the students at Celtic Source, Mhara Starling and her Patreon supporters, Irene Glasse and all the people at Frederick, Maryland CUUPS, and many others. Without you and your gracious support and participation, this project would not have been possible.

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Abbreviations

ADF: Ár nDraíocht Féin/A Druid Fellowship

AODA: Ancient Order of Druids in America

ATR: African Traditional Religions

BDO: British Druid Order

CR: Celtic Reconstructionism

CUUPS: Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans

MENA: Middle-East North Africa(n)

OBOD: Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids

SoA: Sisterhood of Avalon

UDM/ADO: Urdd Derwyddon Môn/Anglesey Druid Order

WotY: Wheel of the Year

Chapter 1: Research Questions & Defining Neo-Paganism

Research Questions

A cameraman wearing a hooded black cloak over a casual blue hoodie and black T-shirt is seen for just a moment before the camera spins at dizzying speed as he adjusts its placement, revealing a large group of others ranging from the youth of teen years to the grey hairs of old age. Most are likewise dressed in long cloaks covering simple, long white robes reminisce of Pliny's description of ancient Druids, or casual wear as exemplified by the commandeer of the camera – or both, as most are in multiple layers for protection against the bone-chilling damp of the Welsh winter winds.[1]

Another man – in at least four layers, covered in an earth-brown cloak over the same simple white robe as many others in attendance, and that over a green hoodie and black T-shirt – steps into the camera's view. A silver glint draws attention to his only obvious adornment, a pendant in the shape of the Nod Cyfrin (the mystic/secret mark) – or as most English-speakers call it, the symbol of Awen – its three rays beaming down from within a silver circle hanging on a thin chain about his neck. This is the leader of the group, Kristoffer Hughes. Clutching a small book to his chest reminisce of how a priest might carry his Bible, he steps behind a large, dented metal cauldron of dull copper hue bellowing smoke of unknown perfume and held aloft on a silvery metal tripod, large

[1] Pliny the Elder, trnsl. by John Bostock & Henry T. Riley, *The Natural History of Pliny*, Vol. 3, (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855), p. 436: "Clad in a white robe the priest ascends the tree, and cuts the mistletoe with a golden sickle, which is received by others in a white cloak".

bunches of fresh mistletoe hanging from each of the three legs. Behind Hughes, the long, wind-swept grasses upon which the gathering find their footing is interrupted by the sudden jutting up of a tumulus with impossibly heavy grey stones of ancient cut lining the entrance to the darkness within – the neolithic site of Bryn Celli Ddu on Ynys Môn (the Isle of Anglesey). A few spectators, none wearing the cloaks and including a few children, sit or stand atop the mound in coats and beanies.

"Croeso, pawb, i defod Urdd Derwyddon Ynys Môn Alban Arthan," the leader begins in Welsh and repeats in English.[2] The ritual begins, the camera serving as a portal across time and space to those unable to attend in person from as far afield as Australia, opening with a member leading a call to connect with the earth, sea, and sky before Hughes proceeds to recite Iolo Morganwg's Call for Peace – the same as is used at the Gorsedd of the Bards – with three vehement replies from the crowd of "Heddwch!"[3] He then guides the crowd in an echoing of the Gorsedd Prayer (also called the Druid's Prayer and commonly used in the rituals of the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids [OBOD]) first in Welsh and then in English, notably pluralizing *gods*.[4]

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[2] "Croeso, pawb, i defod Urdd Derwyddon Ynys Môn Alban Arthan": Welcome, everyone, to a Winter Solstice ritual of the Anglesey Druid Order".

[3] Amgueddfa Cymru, 'Scrolls, swords and mystic marks', *Collections & Research*, (Amgueddfa Cymru, 25 July 2010): "One of the Gorsedd's oldest rites is the ceremony of partly unsheathing the Grand Sword. The Archdruid asks the following questions and the audience replies '*Heddwch*' (Peace) three times: *'Y Gwir yn erbyn y Byd, A oes Heddwch? (The Truth against the World, Is there Peace?) Calon wrth Galon, A oes Heddwch? (Heart to Heart, Is there Peace?) Gwaedd uwch Adwaedd, A oes Heddwch? (Shout above responding Shout, Is there Peace?)*";

Constantine, Mary-Ann, *The Truth Against the World: Iolo Morganwg and Romantic Forgery*, Iolo Morganwg and the Romantic Tradition in Wales Series, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 2: "The internal daylight of Iolo's midnight walk can be read as a precursor of what would become his bardic vision, the 'truth' that in his most famous motto he set 'against the world' (Y Gwir yn erbyn y Byd)".

[4] Morganwg, Iolo, and J. Williams ab Ithel (ed., trnsl.), *Barddas: A Collection of Original Documents, Illustrative of the Theology, Wisdom, and Usages of the Bardo-Druidic Systems of the Isle of Britain*, Vol. 1, (Llandovery: D.J. Roderic, 1862), p. 363: "Grant, O God, Thy protection; / And in protection, strength; / And in strength, understanding; / And in understanding, knowledge; / And in knowledge, the knowledge of justice; / And in the knowledge of justice, the love of it; / And in that love, the love of all existences; / And in the love of all existences, the love of God. / God and all goodness".

A few members step forward. One invokes the spirit of Môn – the isle on which they stand, calling her Mam Cymru (Mother of Wales), a title stretching back to Gerald of Wales in the twelfth century and reminisce of the sign on the Menai Bridge connecting the isle to the rest of Wales, and Nain y Byd (Grandmother of the World). The others invoke Braint – the nearby river, the land and the house of Dôn, the sea and the house of Llŷr, and the sky and the house of Beli Mawr in both Welsh and English in poetic fashion.[5] The whole group then reach towards the central cauldron and together chant a line from the Book of Taliesin's *Preiddeu Annwfn*: "yr awen aganaf, o dwfn y dygaf" before another member steps forward to recite, first in Welsh and then English, the portion from the Fourth Branch of *The Mabinogi* in which Gwydion calls down Lleu Llaw Gyffes by singing an englyn.[6] Lleu – as the spirit or representation of light, y goleuni, a word whose root is his name – is then invoked, to be brought back from the darkness of Winter Solstice.

The main working then begins, in which both those present as well as those watching online imagine the tree which held Lleu rising from the central cauldron, and from which they likewise sing the light back down to the earth by repeating the englyn Gwydion had used, first in Welsh and then English. The attendees are then invited to imagine how their

[5] Cambrensis, Giraldus (Gerald of Wales) & Ernest Rhys (Ed.), *The Itinerary through Wales, Description of Wales*, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1908), p. 120: "For this island [Ynys Môn] is incomparably more fertile in corn than any other part of Wales, from whence arose the British proverb, 'Mon [sic] mam Cymbry [sic], Mona mother of Wales;'…".

[6] Davies, Sioned (trnsl.), *The Mabinogion*, (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 62-3: "He thinks that the eagle is Lleu, and sings an *englyn*: 'An oak grows between two lakes, / Very dark is the sky and the valley. / Unless I am mistaken / This is because of Lleu's Flowers.' The eagle lowers himself until he is in the middle of the tree. Gwydion sings another *englyn*: 'An oak grows on a high plain, / Rain does not wet it, heat no longer melts it; / It sustained one who possesses nine-score attributes. / In its top is Lleu Llaw Gyffes.' And then he lowers himself down until he is on the lowest branch of the tree. Then Gwydion sings him an *englyn*: 'An oak grows on a slope. / The refuge of a handsome prince. / Unless I am mistaken / Lleu will come to my lap'";

Haycock, Marged (ed., trnsl.), *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin*, 2nd edn., (CMCS, 2007), 'Angar Kyfundawt', p. 119: "Awen a ganaf, *I sing inspiration*, / o dwfyn ys dygaf. *I bring it forth from the depth*".

own inner light might impact the world, and to bring that light in to shine on their own inner darkness as three members step forward around the cauldron to speak of the symbolism found in an acorn, in a pinecone, and in mistletoe, each placing one of these into the smoky cauldron. Filling the quiet that follows, all chant "On shortest day and longest night, we offer you the gift of light" as Hughes steps forward with a large, dangling hand lantern of glass panes in a frame of black metal housing a tall flame.

This sets the stage for the Mari Lwyd to be sung into the ritual space – first in the traditional Welsh, "Wel dyma ni'n dŵad / gyfeillion diniwad / i ofyn am gennad / i ganu!" and then in an English adaptation – bobbing and jingling and snapping, bauble eyes twinkling brightly-lit from dark holes in the yellowed bone of a horse's skull sporting a bright mane of long ribbons, thirsty for beer.[7] As Mari is offered the beer, the whole gathered recite an adapted line from Vernon Watkins' *The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd*: "Mari Lwyd, Lwyd Mari: a sacred thing through the night we carry. Betrayed are the living, betrayed are the dead, all are confused by a horse's head".[8] A member then begins playing guitar and singing as the merry Mari dances about and cheers those gathered with her antics while accepting donations into her mouth with a snipping of her boney jaws. As the merriment dwindles, the nearly one-hour gathering concludes with singing *Ar Hyd y Nos* to the accompaniment of a fiddle played by another of those in attendance and each of the attendees being given a sprig of mistletoe from the bunches hanging by the curls of the tripod to take home.[9]

[7] Ifans, Rhiannon, *Mari Lwyd*, (trac: Traddodiadau Cerdd Cymru/Music Traditions Wales, 2013), p. 48.
[8] Watkins, Vernon, 'Ballad of the Mari Lwyd', *Ballad of the Mari Lwyd and Other Poems*, (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 82.
[9] Urdd Derwyddon Môn - Anglesey Druid Order, *Alban Arthan - Midwinter Ritual*, Livestream Video Recording, (17 Dec 2023), <https://www.facebook.com/angleseydruidorder/videos/943188533806050> accessed 14 April 2025.

Image 1: Urdd Derwyddon Môn/Anglesey Druid Order's 2023
"Alban Arthan - Midwinter Ritual" [10]



Not quite the romantic stereotype envisioned by the likes of Thomas Gray as they huddle in hoodies and T-shirts streaming online with gales whipping loudly into the microphone, these are Neo-Pagan Druids – but what does that really mean?[11] Who are these modern people who blend

[10] Urdd Derwyddon Môn - Anglesey Druid Order, *Alban Arthan - Midwinter Ritual*, Screenshot from Livestream Video Recording, (17 Dec 2023), <https://www.facebook.com/angleseydruidorder/videos/943188533806050> accessed 14 April 2025.
[11] Gray, Thomas, 'The Bard: A Pindaric Ode', *Thomas Gray Archive*, (1757).

into the daily life of the greater populace by day, yet on evenings or weekends gather in circles around cauldrons at neolithic structures, reciting medieval poetry to invoke deities, and singing with a horse skull on the windswept plains of Môn, all while wearing white robes and hooded woolen cloaks over T-shirts, almost as if to symbolize an acknowledgement of donning their esoteric spiritual identity overlaid upon a core persona of the mundane everyman? It is some of these very individuals, and those similar to them, upon which this study will focus.

Why do these people favor a specifically Welsh-flavored Neo-Paganism? Are any of them actually Welsh, or is this yet another Neo-Pagan indulgence in cultural misappropriation? How do they self-identify? How inclusive or exclusive are they and how do they define their in-group(s)? What social values are important to them? Do they believe that what they do is ancient Paganism or that figures from *The Mabinogi* are ancient gods? To what extent do Neo-Pagans who claim to incorporate or center Welsh culture in their practices actually do so, and is there any benefit or contribution to the broader Welsh culture or community in their doing so? And, perhaps the most burning question of all – why do they do it?

Academic research regarding the identities, practices, and views of practitioners of specifically Celtic sects of Neo-Paganism is scant, and this is especially the case outside those which center Irish culture. The present study aims to remedy some portion of that gap with a focus on specifically those Neo-Pagans who center Welsh culture or at least incorporate some elements of Welsh culture into their practice.

Neo-Paganism: A Broad Umbrella

Before diving into the data, it is imperative to first ensure a solid grasp of what Neo-Paganism itself is – its frameworks and its function as perceived by those who practice it – as these are not widely well understood due to their being quite different from more well-known majority religions.[12] Misunderstandings also seem to stem in part from Neo-Paganism's total number of adherents being extremely small compared to more popular religions, and in part from a troubled history of animosity between some majority religions and those of other religions, including Pagans (both *neo*- and ancient), which persists into the present.[13]

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[12] Aitamurto, Kaarina and Scott Simpson, 'The Study of Paganism and Wicca: A Review Essay', in James R. Lewis and Inga Tøllefsen (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements: Volume II*, 2nd edn, Oxford Handbooks (2016; online edn, Oxford Academic, 7 July 2016), p. 487: "... as with other New Religious Movements, Paganism may be poorly understood or stigmatized by the general public, and therefore many scholars feel a responsibility to debunk prejudices and errors about it". LARP stands for Live-Action Role-Play.

[13] Illustrating the comparatively tiny number of Neo-Pagans in the U.S. and U.K., where they are reported to be most numerous: Pew Research Center, '2023-24 U.S. Religious Landscape Study Interactive Database', (Pew Research Center, 2025), doi: 10.58094/3zs9-jc14: According to the *Religious Landscape Study* conducted by Pew Research Center, approximately 62% of U.S. adults are practitioners of Christianity, 2% are Jewish, 1% are Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu, and less than 1% identify as Pagan or Wiccan. The Neo-Pagan magazine *The Wild Hunt* reported in 2019 that the 2014 data from the same study specifically listed "Pagan or Wiccan" adherents at 0.3% of the U.S. population, while the 2023-2024 Pew Research Center data reports 0.7% identifying "with New Age groups" which includes "Pagans, Wiccans, druids, Satanists and others" (McShee, Sean, 'Estimating growing number of US Pagans', *The Wild Hunt: Pagan News & Perspectives*, (9 January 2019)).

Similarly, the UK Census for England and Wales in 2021 reported that approximately 74,000 persons self-identified as "Pagan", with several thousand more identifying "Wicca", "Shamanism", "Heathen", and "Druid" as their religious affiliation. Extrapolated to apply to the population as a whole, this translates to approximately 0.12% of the total 2021 England and Wales population, as reported from the Office for National Statistics, *Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021*, and in Kerr, Sarah, "Census 2021 – Results", *The Pagan Federation*, (7 December 2022).

Although the long history of animosity and oppression, both real and imagined, between Christianity or Islam (we will focus on Christianity here, given that the focal culture of Wales is in western Europe) and any who do not adhere to their creeds is relatively common knowledge, one may find extensive discussions and widely varying viewpoints on the subject specifically regarding interactions and perceptions between Christianity and Paganism both modern and ancient within the following: Jeremiah, Dr. David and Carole C. Carlson, *Invasion of Other Gods: The Seduction of New Age Spirituality*, (W. Publishing Group - Thomas Nelson, 1995); MacMullen, Ramsay, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, (Yale University Press, 1997); Barner-Barry, Carol, *Contemporary Paganism: Minority Religions in a Majoritarian America*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Hyde, W. W., *Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire*, (Wipf and Stock, 2008), Assmann, Jan and Robert Savage, *The Price of Monotheism*, (Stanford University Press, 2009), Freeman, Charles, *A.D. 381: Heretics, Pagans, and the Dawn of the Monotheistic State*, (ABRAMS Press, 2009), Currid, John D. *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2013), Dunn, Marilyn, *Belief and Religion in Barbarian Europe c. 350-700*, (Bloomsbury, New York, 2013), and Smith, Steven D., *Pagans & Christians in the*

Neo-Paganism itself is an umbrella term which covers a wide variety of subcategories.[14] As a relatively new religious movement, and lacking a unifying structure or hierarchy, it has eluded attempts at strict definition (as even the most basic of abstract terms often do when placed under scrutiny).[15] It is no wonder that the movement is difficult to define, given that Neo-Paganism spans a huge spectrum from Goddess Eco-Feminism to English and Anglo-American Wicca, from veneration of the gods of ancient Egypt to attempts to reconstruct pre-Islamic Arabian polytheism, from white-nationalist Nazi-origin forms of Heathenry to Heathens Against Hate, and from those who venerate many gods from across world cultures to those who put no stake in gods at all and primarily venerate nature, archetypes, and/or ancestors.[16]

City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2018).

[14] Aitamurto and Simpson (2016), p. 482: "Neo-Paganism (increasingly known as Modern Paganism or Contemporary Paganism…) is an umbrella term typically used to embrace a broad range of loosely related movements";

Strmiska, Michael F. (ed.), *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, (2005, Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO), p. 2: "The revived Paganism of modern times has sometimes been referred to as *Neopaganism* or *Neo-paganism*, with *neo* denoting the new and contemporary nature of these religious movements and *paganism* identifying the past religious traditions that the modern movements see themselves as building on".

[15] York, Michael, *Pagan Theology: Paganism as a World Religion*, 1st edn., (New York University Press, 2003), p. 8: "The difficulty in comprehending paganism as a world religion was made clear on the Nature Religions electronic discussion list after its participants failed to achieve official recognition in the American Academy of Religion";

Palmqvist, Carl-Johan, 'The old gods as a live possibility: on the rational feasibility of non-doxastic paganism', *Religious Studies*, 59: 4, (Cambridge, Dec 2023), pp. 651-664: "In pagan studies, there is considerable disagreement over the term 'paganism'. Some, like Michael York (2003), view paganism as a wide-ranging phenomenon, including most historical and present-day religions outside the Abrahamitic and Dharmic traditions. On the other side of the spectrum, Ethan Doyle White suggests a narrow definition according to which only pre-Christian European religion and its modern revival counts as proper paganism (White (2016))".

Following are a mere handful of examples illustrating the difficulty of precise, academically rigorous definition of what appear to be straightforward, basic terms, which is a problem commonly-known of virtually all words within the field of cognitive linguistics, especially those representing concepts which are intangible: Birukou, A., *et al*, 'A Formal Definition of Culture', in *Models for Intercultural Collaboration and Negotiation: Advances in Group Decision and Negotiation*, ed. by K. Sycara, M. Gelfand, & A. Abbe, 6, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013); Chiesa, A., 'The Difficulty of Defining Mindfulness: Current Thought and Critical Issues', *Mindfulness*, 4 (2013), 255–268; Leonardi, Fabio, 'The Definition of Health: Towards New Perspectives', *International Journal of Health Services*, 48: 4 (2018), 735-748; Macklem, Peter T. & Andrew Seely, 'Towards a Definition of Life', *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 53: 3 (Project MUSE, 2010), 330-40; Madden, A. D., 'A definition of information', *Aslib Proceedings*, 52: 9 (2000), 343-349; Steiger, Tanja, Christine Duller, & Martin R. W. Hiebl, 'No Consensus in Sight: An Analysis of Ten Years of Family Business Definitions in Empirical Research Studies', *Journal of Enterprising Culture*, 23 :1 (2015), 25-62.

[16] Davy, Barbara Jane, 'Inclusive Heathens Practice Ancestor Veneration, but Not Pride in Ancestry', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 26: 3, (Regents of the University of California, 2023), pp. 30-51; Heathens Against Hate, <https://www.heathensagainsthate.com/> (2025).

The common practice of symbologizing and ritualizing nature and natural cycles (e.g. seasons, birth and death, etc.), combined with a tendency towards animism or pantheism has led to Neo-Paganism sometimes being referred to as a "nature religion" or "earth religion".[17] However, the extent to which individual Neo-Pagans actually center, revere, or animize nature, or engage in environmentalism, can vary widely.[18] Some Neo-Pagans deify nature itself, the earth itself, and/or natural forces and features (e.g. lightning, wind, trees, mountains, rivers, stars and planetary bodies, etc.), or consider these as enspirited, while others maintain a reverence or respect for nature without any sense of enspiritification or deification.

Further, there are differing views among Neo-Pagans regarding what "counts" as natural. Indeed, philosophical discussions within the Neo-Pagan community are currently ongoing regarding: whether humanity itself, various human identities and behaviors, synthetic materials, and

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[17] Aitamurto and Simpson (2016), p. 483: "Some shared themes may also be pointed out. Most visibly, nearly all current forms of Paganism present themselves as nature religions. This may manifest itself as devotional worship of deities or spirits of the earth, sun, moon, thunder, or other natural phenomena. It may also appear in a sense of sacred stewardship for nature, or in religiously motivated environmental activism or lifestyle choices";

Rountree, Kathryn, 'Neo-Paganism, Animism, and Kinship with Nature', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 27:2, 302-320, (May 2012), p. 306: "The notion of society as a network of conscious, agentic, related, mutually dependent, and responsible beings, of whom only some are human, represents a projection of Pagan philosophical and political values and claims regarding human-environment relationships, including ideas about how power, agency, and responsibility should be negotiated and enacted within these relationships. Using a Pagan definition of society, where society incorporates Earth's entire eco-system, Paganism's purpose is certainly the maintenance and cohesion of society – in short, the survival of the ecosystem. … If one employs the common Euro-centric definition of 'society', where membership is restricted to humans, modern Paganism can be seen as a protest against, rather than a projection of, society."

[18] Rountree (2012), p. 313: "For a minority, especially Eco-Pagans, kinship with nature is more thorough-going, leading, for example, to environmental and peace activism (including, sometimes, life-risking activity) and protest against all manner of injustices and cruelty to human and other-than-human beings and places (see Harvey, *Animism*). … For most Pagans, kinship with nature is talked and written about and may be experienced in rituals, at sacred sites, while walking in the woods, gardening and swimming, for example, but it does not determine the rules of everyday life in the ways it does for other animist peoples";

Magliocco, Sabina, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 217-18: "Both strategies are ultimately based on a desire to return to origins, in the [Neo-Pagan] belief that earlier cultures had a relationship with nature and divinity that we have lost".

One can find an in-depth discussion of Neo-Paganism as a nature or earth religion in Chas S. Clifton's chapter titled 'Earth Day and Afterwards: American Paganism's Appropriation of 'Nature Religion"', in Pizza and Lewis, (2009), pp. 109-118.

human-settled areas are or are not in a holy-profane binary opposition with “sacred nature”, and whether attempts should be made to re-sacralize human-polluted or abandoned areas as-is and reclaim human settlements and human-made items as “natural”.[19] The practical implications of such perspectives and worldviews on identity, socio-political movements, and human settlement and stewardship of the planet likewise continue to drive dynamic discussions.

[19] For example: Savage, Samphire, ‘Desecrated Sacred: Reclaiming Abandoned Spaces in Our Communities and Ourselves’, live presentation at *Sacred Space Conference 2025*, (27 March 2024), description (from conference schedule): “As we strive to unpack the shadows of our culture, one that persists in pagan communities is a purity ethos that holds wild places–grottos, groves, and other ‘untouched’ places– as more sacred than humanized ones, and replicates dominant culture patterns of simultaneously devaluing and worshiping the foreign or distant Other. In this time of upheaval and consumerism, there is a counter call: in guerrilla gardening and reclaiming of the commons, to upcycling, and graffiti arts. The “negative” spaces of abandoned buildings, irradiated landscapes and other edge spaces offer a possibility for generational healing: how can we reclaim as sacred that which [sic] we have abandoned, trashed, or poisoned in ourselves and the places we belong?”

Orthopraxy & Practical Pluralism

Practitioners of Neo-Paganism generally tend towards concern with orthopraxy over orthodoxy when compared to more widely-known "revealed" religions and are therefore more likely to prioritize individual practice and ecstatic or shared experiences over removed analytical philosophy, hierarchical decrees, or dogmatic belief.[20] Although many Neo-Pagans hold a polytheistic view of divinity, humanist, atheist, agnostic, and monotheist Neo-Pagans are not uncommon.[21] De-emphasis of "correct belief" (and what exactly constitutes such) leads Neo-Pagans to philosophical outlooks, core religious assumptions, frameworks, and worldviews which are unfamiliar to, and sometimes at odds with, the common foundational assumptions of more popular orthodoxy- and dogma-centering religions – assumptions which are largely taken for granted in religious discourse in the West and thus require elaboration.

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[20] Luhrmann, Tanya M., *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 324: "Indeed, magicians seem to tolerate a very wide range of justifications for practising magic, to the extent that being a magician does not seem to involve a commitment to a particular assertion about the world, but a commitment to the idea that magical practice is important…";

Pizza and Lewis, *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 114: "Paganism values embodied experience over detached spirituality";

Urban, Hugh B., *New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements*, (University of California Press, 2015), p. 159: "... neopaganism tends to be a very practice-oriented movement, typically with a stronger emphasis on ritual performance and magic than on dogmatic belief systems";

Horák, Pavel, '"If the Base Fundamentals Are Too Much for You…": Reconsidering the Existence of Doctrines in Modern Paganism', *Nova Religio*, 26: 2, pp. 30-48, (2022), p. 30: "Generally, Pagan studies scholars widely consider modern Paganism a religion without doctrines. Furthermore, Margot Adler, one of the early researchers of modern Paganism, established a narrative that practice is more important than beliefs in modern Paganism".

[21] Halstead, John (ed.), *Godless Paganism: Voices of Non-Theistic Pagans*, (Lulu.com, 2016), p. 1: "The 'Big Tent' of Paganism: Contemporary Paganism is a diverse group with varied beliefs and practices, which includes Witches, Wiccans, Druids, Shamans, Goddess worshipers, Unitarian Universalist Pagans, Christo-Pagans, Quaker Pagans, Pantheists, Animists, Humanistic Pagans, Atheopagans, Heathens, Polytheists, Pagan Reconstructionists, Occultist [sic], and many more varieties." This book on the whole also illustrates the diversity of non-theistic Neo-Pagan perspectives;

Pizza and Lewis (2009), p. 1: "Contemporary Paganism—which consists of Wicca and Witchcraft, Druidry, Heathenry, Asatru, Goddess-worship, Ethnic Reconstructions, and many other traditions—is a movement that is still young and establishing its identity and place on the global religious landscape".

For example, Neo-Paganism frequently enables pluralistic acceptance of adherents who have large fundamental gaps in belief, such as atheist Neo-Pagans who are not viewed as heretical by their theist Neo-Pagan peers, and vice-versa. Such facts lead some, particularly from outside the Neo-Pagan or polytheist sphere, to question whether Neo-Pagans in fact believe anything and what the point of the religion is, revealing fundamental differences in the presumed function and purpose of religion and deity between Neo-Pagans and those who are only familiar with more globally popular (and usually also revealed, monotheistic, orthodoxic, and dogmatic) religions. This is not to insinuate that traditions of Neo-Paganism do not undergo schism due to differences among members (they do), but highlights how very divergent the acceptable fundamental religious views of individual practitioners can be. Indeed, atheist and theist Neo-Pagans frequently do not only tolerate other views at a distance, but also usually do not seek to challenge, exclude, or avoid one another, often even engaging in co-active practice.[22]

To the outside observer, what appears to be a wholly polytheistic ritual may actually involve any number of monotheistic, duotheistic, atheistic, or agnostic Neo-Pagans who invoke the same deities in the same rituals together with the polytheists.[23] While the polytheists may believe in

[22] Author's personal observation over a span of more than 19 years of group Neo-Pagan practice across the U.S. and U.K., including on a U.S. military base in the Republic of Korea. My observation is corroborated by the fact that the above-detailed ritual in the introduction included both polytheists and agnostics/atheists as participants, as well as by: Luhrmann (1989), p. 335: "There are those who seem to accept strange magical forces as a literal part of the physical world, and others who claim that the concept is a useful metaphor. A magical group may contain people with both these views. … This is a very self-conscious awareness of the multiplicity of interpretation. Any modern magical ritual can be understood by its participants as a manipulation of supra-physical force, a religious invocation of the transcendent, a poetically expressive metaphor, a therapeutic encounter, a political rebellion against convention", and Lassander, Mika, 'Modern Paganism as a Legitimating Framework for Post-Materliast Values', *The Pomegranate*, 11:1, (2009), pp. 74-96, p. 93: "Modern Paganism appears to be well adapted to dealing with plurality. Rather than being disconnected individualists or in-group bound collectivists, Pagans see themselves as interconnected based upon a more universalistic feeling of connectedness. This makes it easier for them to form connections that bridge differences between individuals and groups across cultural, religious, and social boundaries".

[23] Halstead (2016), p. 193: "In contrast to the Abrahamic religions, there has never been a test of belief imposed for participation in Paganism. Non-theistic Pagans can easily practice alongside other kinds of Pagans, including theistic Pagans. In fact, the religious practices of some non-theistic Pagans may be outwardly indistinguishable from those of theistic Pagans".

each deity's autonomous existence, the atheists may treat the deities as archetypes or symbolic reflections of various facets of the self, of humanity, or of nature. In other contexts, the line may be more palpable, with some ritual participants invoking deities while others invoke – or express awe or gratitude to – the physical earth itself (again, this can happen within the same ritual). Thus, strong beliefs regarding the fundamental nature of divinity which are mutually exclusive can diminish into near insignificance in the context of group practice. It is the practice itself and the shared values, rather than dogma, around which community commonly coalesces for the Neo-Pagan.

For example: a Neo-Pagan regularly studies and engages with Hellenic mythology in a deeply devotional manner and studies ancient Greek religious philosophers. This Hellenist Neo-Pagan also makes daily invocations to Zeus, Hekate, and Hestia, meditating on the values they and their myths symbolize and making offerings in accordance with Hellenic pre-Christian sources. However, this Neo-Pagan personally views his practice as spiritual enlightenment via engagement with ancient Greek culture and views the gods he prays and offers to as symbolic divine archetypes of nature and human social values rather than as autonomous spirit beings. Is such a person an atheist or a polytheist?

Answering such questions from perspectives outside Neo-Paganism itself risks imposition of outside views regarding what does and does not define divinity and what "counts" as a "god". Commonly-held assumptions of theism in Western cultures are couched in a monotheist, binary, revealed, orthodoxic worldview rather than a polytheist, plural, mystery-welcoming or spectrum-based, orthopraxic one – the latter being common in Neo-Paganism. Many types of

Neo-Paganism do not tend toward binary worldviews where divinity is seen in a "yes-no", "existent-absent", and "divine- profane/fallen/mundane" binary, with both divinity and answers to "big life questions" proclaimed with certainty. Rather, divinity is often seen as relative or spectrum-based, and both divinity and "big life questions" are speculated with open *uncertainty*. In short, a portion of what marks most sects of Neo-Paganism as *not* revealed religions is the fact that they do not claim to have (and therefore cannot reveal to adherents) all the answers to life's big questions but instead encourage individual discovery via practice, which explains the heavy emphasis upon it.[24]

[24] Beckett, John, *The Path of Paganism*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2017), pp. 5-6: "Religion helps us deal with life's pain and complexity. It helps us answer the big questions of life. Where did we come from? What happens when we die? How should we live? What is good and what is evil? What is good and what is better? … Any religion can give you answers to these questions. The fact that different religions give different answers … is proof of how hard they are. A good religion will help you explore the questions, contemplate possible answers, and find the ones that best fit your values, beliefs, and experience of the world. Good religion will give you tools for living when there are no answers. … What happens to the individual consciousness after we die remains a mystery. What happens in this world is not." and p. 7: "Any religion can give you rules to follow. A good religion will teach virtues and values – what is right and fitting, what works well. A better religion will teach you how to embody these virtues and values on a daily basis, so when you're faced with a difficult situation, you know how you want to respond and you will. … Religion helps us understand religious experiences. … Religious experiences still happen today. … But these experiences are literally meaningless until we interpret them. Religion gives us a framework for interpreting and understanding our experiences, offers practices to reinforce them and to repeat them, and makes practical suggestions for implementing them in our ordinary lives. Pagan religions do all these things, and they do them from a perspective that honors nature, the gods, our ancestors, and our own unique place in the world".

From Atheism to Polytheism & Eclectics to Reconstructionists

Within the wide spectrum of Neo-Pagan views concerning who or what the gods actually are, types of polytheism common to Neo-Pagans also range from a duotheistic tendency to focus on a universal "Goddess" and "God", as is common in Wicca, to polytheisms honoring pantheons of dozens or even hundreds of autonomous gods, spirits, and beings whose identities may or may not be considered to overlap with one another, as is more common in ethno-cultural traditions. The idea that a singular overarching supreme or universal divinity (or two such divinities, in the case of duotheism) incorporates all world cultures' deities past and present, which are culture- and time-specific "facets" or "expressions" of this same universal all-deity, is a view of some "monocentric polytheist" or soft polytheist Neo-Pagans.[25] Neo-Pagan monocentrism and/or duotheism are often coupled with pantheism or panentheism wherein all creation is thought to contain, express, or embody a portion or "spark" of the divine whole, or wherein the divine is

[25] Dumsday, Travis, *Alternative Conceptions of the Spiritual: Polytheism, Animism, and More in Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), p. 15: "The aforementioned pantheistic and panentheistic polytheisms would thus count as versions of what is sometimes called monocentric polytheism. These are forms of polytheism in which a belief in multiple divinities is paired with belief in an ultimate God or Absolute which is in some way the existential source of those lesser divinities. It is contrasted with polycentric polytheism, in which multiple gods are themselves fundamental and existentially self-sufficient (whether individually or collectively), and thus not dependent upon any ontologically prior creator God or Absolute. … On these versions monocentric polytheism, there are many lesser gods, but they are all the creations (or sometimes emanations) of a single, personal High God".

The theology of Neo-Paganism is a discussion unto itself and, by necessity of space, is beyond the scope of this paper. More in-depth treatment of the topic from varying perspectives may be found, varyingly intended for academia and the lay Neo-Pagan practitioner, within the following publications: Blain, Jenny, et al, 'The Nature of the Divine: Transcendence and Immanence in Contemporary Pagan Theology: A Symposium', *The Pomegranate*, 16, (December 2001), pp. 4–16; York, Michael, *Pagan Theology: Paganism as a World Religion*, 1st edn., (New York University Press, 2003); Sylvan, Diane, *The Circle Within: Creating a Wiccan Spiritual Tradition*, (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2003) particularly chapter two 'In Search of a Mystery: Our Relationship with Deity', pp. 19-40; Strmiska, *Modern Paganism in World Cultures*, (2005) especially the chapter 'Pagan Deities and the Principle of Cosmic Order'; Pizza and Lewis, (2009) particularly Michael York's chapter 'Pagan Theology', pp. 283-309; Thomas, Kirk S., *Sacred Gifts: Reciprocity and the Gods*, (ADF Publishing, 2015); Beckett, John, *The Path of Paganism*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2017); Beckett, John, *Paganism in Depth: A Polytheist Approach*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2019); Butler, Edward P., *The Way of the Gods: Polytheism(s) around the World*, (Indica, 2022); Dillon, Steven, *Polytheism: A Platonic Approach*, Pagan Portals series, (Winchester, UK: Moon Books, 2022); and in Dumsday (2024), quoted above; for an example from specifically the Reclaiming Neo-Pagan tradition: Morgain, Rachel, 'The Alchemy of Life: Magic, Anthropology and Human Nature in a Pagan Theology', *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 24: 3, (December 2013), pp. 290–309.

expressed both through creation *as well as* simultaneously existing autonomously outside of and above it, respectively. Hard polytheism, on the other hand, is frequently paired with animism wherein all is thought to be autonomously enspirited or ensouled, including deities who can therefore have, or be perceived to have, conflicting goals and values.[26] It is also a common view among hard polytheists that even the highest divinities (including the "heads" of pantheons, e.g. Zeus and Hera in the Hellenic pantheon, or Isis and Osiris in the Egyptian) are believed to possess great, but still ultimately limited, power (i.e. not omnipresent, omnipotent, or omniscient, as is often assumed of any entity worthy of the label "deity" or "god" in monotheistic frameworks).[27] These are fundamental points of difference from monotheistic religions which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings surrounding the presumed definition, nature, and purpose of divinity within the Neo-Pagan context.

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[26] Harvey, Graham, 'Animist Paganism' in Pizza and Lewis (2009), p. 393: "Increasing numbers of Pagans are identifying themselves as animists or naming their worldview animism", and p. 395: "According to Tylor, religion would die out as proper scientific knowledge ousted these mistaken beliefs and provided better understandings of the world. According to this first version of animism, the question religious believers ask is 'how are living beings different from inanimate matter?' Since the 1990s scholars … have revisited the concept of animism and offered a different interpretation in which the key question animists ask is 'how should I live with other beings?'. That is, animists are people who understand the world to be a community of persons, most of whom are other-than-human, but all of whom deserve respect".

[27] Strmiska, (2005), pp. 35-6: "Unlike the impersonal, transcendent deity of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic monotheistic traditions, the Pagan deities are often described in myth and portrayed in various forms of art as human, all too human. They have passions and pleasures and enjoy various pursuits, according to their individual personalities. They have sexual relations, friends, and families, exactly like human beings. They are superior to human beings in their powers and abilities, but their power is not absolute. For Christians and other monotheists accustomed to a single, standalone supergod with absolute supremacy over all things, the humanlike personalities, imperfect nature, and limited power of the Pagan deities may seem like a perversion of the very idea of deity. To Pagans, the limitations and imperfections of their deities reflect the actual dynamics of life on earth in a far more compelling manner than the absolute perfection of the monotheistic supergod";

York, (2003), p. 13: "What ultimately distinguishes paganism from Christianity is not the number of its gods but the nature of its deity. Whereas the Christian God is transcendent, the pagan godhead is immanent. Spirituality for the pagan is corporeal or at least includes the physical. The pagan god is not "wholly other" (ganz andere), as is the Christian God. Consequently, paganism's corpospirituality allows for perception of the divine in nature, for idolatry, for appreciation of the sacredness of place, for contact with the divine through both local geodynamics and pilgrimage to revered holy centers, and for multiplicity of manifestation. Its deities are in some sense corporeal, whether through metaphorical bodies or venerated physical representations. In a profound sense, pagan gods are human. Their superhuman qualities, whatever they may be or symbolize, are secondary to their essential human nature. It is through this anthropomorphic understanding of the godhead that paganism affirms its recognition of the fundamental affinity between humanity and its gods. The human being and the divine are intimately related to the extent of sharing a mutually kindred nature".

Neo-Pagan monotheism, monocentric polytheism, duotheism, or polytheism can all be either "eclectic" – revering a mixture of divine beings (or archetypes) from a variety of modern-made or ethno-cultural traditions, or they can be ethno-cultural, focusing on the worship or veneration of divinities from a particular pantheon or cultural tradition.[28] On the opposite end of the spectrum from the universalist eclectic is the reconstructionist form of ethno-cultural or historical polytheism, in which the practitioner attempts to recreate and incorporate only those practices and traditions which are attested in historical, philological, philosophical, mythological, liturgical, and/or archaeological records (preferably pre-Christian where available).[29]

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[28] Magliocco, Sabina, 'Reclamation, Appropriation and the Ecstatic Imagination'' in Pizza and Murphy (2009), p. 236: "Within the American Neo-Pagan movement, a range of attitudes towards cultural borrowing exists. At one pole of the spectrum are nativist and traditionalist practitioners, who generally avoid borrowing from outside their own traditions. … At the other end of the spectrum are eclectic traditions, which tend to see themselves as part of a human family sharing common elements cross-culturally, and united by similar beliefs and practices. These similarities between different cultures are interpreted as evidence of a greater spiritual truth underlying all religious traditions. Eclectic Pagans perceive cross-cultural borrowing as an act of admiration, and are much more likely than nativist or traditionalist groups to indulge in it".

[29] Blain, Jenny and Robert J. Wallis, 'Heathenry' in Pizza and Lewis (2009), p. 413: "Among the forms of paganism being developed today are those which look to the mediaeval and earlier writings. These are often termed 'reconstructionist' although the term is somewhat misleading: while some practitioners attempt to copy practices and lifestyles, most are concerned to relate these to the 21st-century societies in which they live" and p. 414: "As indicated above, the expressed aim of reconstructionist groups is not to recreate pagan society or ritual exactly as it was, but to use sources from the past to aid in the creation of religious, spiritual and ritual experiences and structures that suit the present-day: to draw on the understandings of the past for an improved understanding of the present. That is, to work from the principle that documents or artefacts from 'the past' hold clues to religious or spiritual practice and relationships with deities or spirits, and in particular to world-views or religious philosophies. … a more usual sense of 'reconstructionism' is bounded by its adherents' location in today's world, and indeed practitioners may caution against too great a degree of involvement with 'correctness' over personal practice" and p. 415: "Many polytheist practitioners, including Heathens, are attempting to uncover previous rituals, philosophies and theologies, and adapt these to a present-day setting, creating religious philosophy and practice that they consider appropriate. … Arriving at these definitions is not a simple matter: it involves personal understanding and interpretation. In drawing upon evidence from archaeology and literature, practitioners will engage in lengthy debates over the interpretation of particular passages of 'ancient' material, and how these shed light on their spiritual ancestors' concept of soul and spirit, or religious practice, or indeed how these inform their own responses to questions that concern present-day people";

Lewis, James R., 'Celts, Druids and the Invention of Tradition' in Pizza and Lewis (2009), pp. 490-1: "Advocates of Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism tend to embrace the same kind of paradoxical attitude we noted among contemporary neo-Druids. On the one hand, most are careful not to claim that they are direct, linear descendants of any intact, ancient Celtic religion… At the same time they tend to imply, or even assert, that reconstructed European Paganisms are 'the latest manifestation of a continuous native tradition,' and that there are 'continuous threads of outlook, of practice, and of place' (Jones 2002, pp. 221-222). Though it is easy to criticize the 'invention' of modern Celtic Paganism and the waffling of the continuity issue, we should not ignore comparable patterns in other religious traditions. … These kinds of legitimation strategies can be found in all major religious traditions (Lewis 2003, p. 78), which means that dismissing Celtic Neopaganism's fabrications as inauthentic while ignoring comparable fabrications in other religions is a blatant double standard".

Unbroken practices of polytheistic indigenous religions that are not Western or from the MENA regions such as Hinduism, Chinese folk religions, Shintō, African Traditional Religions (ATR), Native North, Meso-, and South American religions, and various tribal and folk religions from around the globe are not generally placed under the Pagan umbrella. However, these are sometimes compared with Neo-Paganism due to certain shared characteristics.[30] Similarly, various systems of witchcraft, folk magic, and ceremonial magic are popular among Neo-Pagans, and the two groups (magical practitioners and Neo-Pagans) have much overlap. However, not all Neo-Pagans practice magic (or consider their rituals and observances to be magic), and not all magical practitioners are Neo-Pagans. Therefore, the focus shall remain on Neo-Paganism, with the acknowledgement that many, but certainly not all, Neo-Pagans also identify either as witches or as practitioners of varying types of folk magic or ceremonial magic.

[30] York, (2003), p. 14: "The traditional contemporary understanding of pagan refers to a person who is not Christian, Jewish, or Muslim. It is also a term applied to someone who is irreligious. Finally, it refers to an adherent to a modern revival of an ancient religion." Indeed, a large part of the point of York's book *Pagan Theology* is to highlight the similarities between indigenous folk religions and ethno-cultural Neo-Paganisms in support of his argument that they should be grouped or considered together under the term "Paganism" – an argument he makes in depth due its not being the commonly accepted scope of the term.

"The Ancestors"

Many Neo-Pagans hold special reverence for what are referred to as simply "ancestors". These honored or beloved dead are often not limited to blood relatives, also encompassing "found family" and friends, and frequently extending to any historical figure or religious teacher who may serve as a role model or inspire the practitioner (with religious teachers or forebears sometimes referred to as "ancestors of the order"), and even beloved pets.[31] Photos or memorabilia of any or all of these may be found on a Neo-Pagan "ancestor altar". Reverence of inspirational historical persons is especially the case among Neo-Pagans who are members of marginalized groups and who find comfort, solidarity, and motivation to persevere in connecting to the historical heroes of their respective group identities.[32]

[31] Rathouse, William, 'Contemporary Pagans and the Study of the Ancestors' in Williams, Howard and Giles, Melanie (eds.), *Archaeologists and the Dead*, (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 334: "Pagans often cite the importance of reverence for 'the Ancestors' in their spirituality, but this is a term that needs some unpicking. Common usage of the word ancestors refers to parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, i.e. lineal or genetic progenitors. … However, a few belief groups acknowledge spirit Ancestors who may not necessarily be relatives (e.g. South African Sangomas in Hall 1995: 95). Contemporary Pagans may often have problems connecting spiritually with known ancestors who are generally Christian and therefore presumed to be hostile to Paganism. Therefore Brown (2012: 6-24) aka Colvin (2006: 16), and Restall Orr (2000: 90) suggest that, in addition to 'blood' Ancestors, Pagans may acknowledge Ancestors 'of place' who have dwelt in the same place and 'of tradition' who have held similar beliefs".

[32] Examples of this can be seen in the Black Neo-Pagan experience, e.g.: Blanton, Crystal, 'Column: Honoring the Slaves as Ancestor Reverence', *The Wild Hunt: Pagan News & Perspectives*, (21 Oct 2016): "I have often found that discussions of ancestral work within the Modern Pagan community often neglect to speak to some of the very relevant pieces of my own ancestors stories, which do differ from the crowd. The ancestors within the African American communities tell a very different tale, one that can be neglected in the generalized perception of who the "mighty dead" are. There isn't [sic] often allowances made or room for the discussions of our ancestors [sic] specific path. … There is power in being able to connect with the ancestors in true, authentic, and supportive ways. While many traditions within modern Pagan and polytheist communities embrace a connection to the ancestors, how are we addressing the distinct stories of the diverse ancestry that enters into our communities and circles? How can we acknowledge the necessity of such things when we engage in community ancestral practices? How are those specific stories left out of our shared spaces?"; Hedera, Via, 'All Your Grandmas: Ancestor Veneration, Mixed-Raced Identity and the A Word', *Folklore and Animism in the New World*, (24 July 2017): "In the black pagan community I've encountered, there's a definite question as to how one can honor their African ancestors while at the same time acknowledging the ancestors who bought, sold, worked and raped those African ancestors. How do we deal with the dissonance of history? It depends entirely on you, your familial history, your culture – but ultimately, why don't you just ask the spirits? Is there room at the altar for all of your grandmothers, or do some grandmothers need to be quietly relegated to the pages of history? Maybe, just maybe, there isn't room at every altar for every grandma, and that's okay. … There's room at my altar for all of my grandmothers, I know this because they share something wonderful in common that extends beyond the scope of space and time and history. They have me. They have the culmination of their bloodlines, they have the reflection of their deeds and lives all personified in a single person,

Image 2: Altar for Ancestors of the Order at a Neo-Pagan Samhain Ritual, 2023.



Frederick, Maryland CUUPS community Samhain ritual, 2023, faces obscured for privacy and respect. Other altars at the ritual included one each for family, friends, and departed pets.[33]

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and that's me and my siblings. There is no bad blood between Brigid and Oshun in my house, or between Grandmother Spider and An Morrigan".

Examples can also be seen in the LGBTQ+ Neo-Pagan experience, e.g.: Padrón, Ron, 'Venerating Our Queer Ancestors: Working with a Queer Ancestor Shrine', *White Rose Witching*, originally published in *CoffeeTable Coven,* (2020): "The political landscape of the last several years forced me to reckon with LGBTQ+ community trauma and how it impacted me. … For a long time I felt the only way I could truly engage in some sort of ancestral practice would be to learn more about my own family and 'blood ancestors' and, to be honest, there wasn't much that I felt inclined to connect to. As I learned more about LGBTQ+ history I began to see echoes of my life and the struggles of our modern day community written across time. I would read autobiographies or listen to podcasts about queer life pre-Stonewall and a part of me that I can't quite put into words would resonate with these stories. … One day it became apparent to me how much working with Queer Ancestors had become a central part of my spiritual practice. I sat with this realization and decided I wanted to formalize this relationship. I decided to build a shrine"; Avende, Jan, 'Queer Grief and Ancestor Veneration', originally published in *Oak Leaves*, (ADF Publishing, 2024): "The Queer Community is so cognizant and connected to Ancestor worship and remembrance. … We have to be connected to these Ancestors. We have lost so much, and the drive to honor those loses in a meaningful way is what we can give our descendents".

[33] Brown, Jennifer (October 2023). Author's personal photo.

Defining Neo-Paganism

Practitioners falling anywhere on these spectra and intersections can and do center or incorporate Welsh culture in their practices and may be found among the study participants, requiring that the data be viewed in these contexts. Although none of the following traits are universal, this paper shall move forward with a loose definition of the Neo-Pagan centered on commonly-held practices and worldviews. Practices of a "Neo-Pagan" include: a reverence for nature and/or ritual observation of natural cycles, treatment of the natural world and its beings as persons or enspirited (animism) or as embodying the immanent divine (pantheism/panentheism) or as sacred, attempts to partially reconstruct cultural religious traditions from pre-Christian European and/or Middle Eastern-North African (MENA) regions or use parts of these as a foundational and inspirational springboard for building a modern practice, reverence for the deities, cultures, and/or myths of at least one the aforementioned regions, and/or veneration for those perceived to be "ancestors" as described previously.[34]

[34] Michael York's definition may also prove useful as a comparison between both modern and ancient Paganisms as well as between Paganism and Christianity. York, Michael, *Pagan Theology: Paganism as a World Religion*, 1st edn., (New York University Press, 2003), p. 14: "In comparing classical and related pre-Christian paganisms with Christianity, we find that paganism includes (1) a number of both male and female gods, (2) magical practice, (3) emphasis on ritual efficacy, (4) corpospirituality, and (5) an understanding of gods and humans as codependent and related. Paganism has no belief in historic revelation. Instead, this world and the otherworld are intimately interrelated, and while the myths and stories about the gods are chiefly to be understood as metaphors, the divine itself is to be experienced directly. Individual pagan religions furnish frameworks and techniques for encouraging experiential encounters with the godhead for both improving one's welfare in this world and exploring the otherworld in search of spiritual renewal. In other words, they provide hermeneutical tools for interpreting the world and the supernatural and humanity's relationship to both."

Chapter 2: Methodology, Identity, & Inclusivity

Methodology

The present study combines two methods in gathering field data: an anonymous online survey which was posted on 4 November 2024 and collected submissions for a period of eighty-one days from 8 November 2024 until 27 January 2025, and live online video interviews with three public-facing authors of books and instructors of courses with a Welsh cultural focus which target a Neo-Pagan audience conducted in April and May of 2025, all three of whom explicitly waived their rights to anonymity for the purposes of this study. The online survey, titled *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, was posted on various social media platforms (e.g. Threads, Facebook, Bluesky, Reddit) on the author's personal page and in groups which commonly attract Neo-Pagans who might incorporate Welsh cultural elements, such as the Facebook pages for OBOD, Ár nDraíocht Féin/A Druid Fellowship (ADF), Celtic Source, and a local (to the author) Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS) group, as well as the Brythonic Polytheism community on Reddit and two Neo-Pagan-targeted Discord servers. The survey attracted seventy-four participants.

In an effort to identify trends regarding who is drawn to incorporate Welsh culture into Neo-Pagan practice, Section 1 of the survey, entitled "Basic Demographics" covered items such as age, nationality, gender, race/racial descent, whether the participants had ever lived in or visited Wales, and their Welsh language ability. Discovering the self-labeling norms, inclusivity and in-group perceptions, and reasons for incorporating Welsh culture into Neo-Pagan practice

was the target of Section 2, “Identity and Community Membership”. Section 3, the final section, surveyed how and to what degree the cohort engages with various aspects of traditional and modern Welsh culture.

Participants spanned the spectrum from honoring a Welsh deity figure or two and knowing no Welsh language at all to a more immersive Welsh culture-focused practice honoring a whole pantheon of Welsh figures, celebrating traditional observances year-round, and studying or utilizing the Welsh language with religious devotion. Survey responses will be compared and contrasted with the views of the three Neo-Pagan community leaders who are Welsh and have been interviewed more in-depth. These three are:

> Kristoffer Hughes: head of the Urdd Derwyddon Môn/Anglesey Druid Order (UDM/ADO), Druid-level member of OBOD, Gorsedd member, television personality (interviewee in the series *Mystic Britain* and host of the documentary series *Marw gyda Kris*), and author of seven books on Druidry and/or Neo-Paganism targeting the lay Neo-Pagan population, most with specifically a Welsh cultural focus; [35]

[35] Hallam, Gwion [Producer & Director] & Sioned Wyn Roberts [Executive Producer], *Marw gyda Kris* [Documentary TV Series], Ffilmiau Twm Twm, (S4C [Sianel Pedwar Cymru], 2024); Hughes, Kristoffer, *The Book of Druidry: A Complete Introduction to the Magic & Wisdom of the Celtic Mysteries*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2023); Hughes, Kristoffer, *Celtic Goddess of Inspiration: Cerridwen*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2021); Hughes, Kristoffer, *A Pagan's Perspective on Death, Dying & Bereavement: As the Last Leaf Falls*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2014); Hughes, Kristoffer, *The Book of Celtic Magic: Transformative Teachings from the Cauldron of Awen*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2014); Hughes, Kristoffer, *From the Cauldron Born: Exploring the Magic of Welsh Legend & Lore*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2012); Anglesey Druid Order website <https://www.angleseydruidorder.co.uk/index>.

Mhara Starling: self-identified Welsh witch, Neo-Pagan practitioner, recently-joined member of UDM/ADO (2023), YouTube and TikTok personality, and author of three books intended for lay Neo-Pagan practitioners; and [36]

Gwilym Morus-Baird (PhD Welsh Medieval Literature, Bangor University): creator of, and instructor on, the online Welsh medieval literature and folklore website "Celtic Source" as well as the YouTube channel of the same name, and author of the more academic-style book *Taliesin Origins*.[37]

All three of the interviewees have also appeared on Neo-Pagan-targeting podcasts and YouTube videos, as well as an S4C (Welsh-language TV channel) Calan Gaeaf special in 2023 in connection with their roles in the Neo-Pagan community, or as knowledgeable of Welsh literature, folklore, and/or customs, or both.[38]

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[36] Starling, Mhara, *Pagan Portals Y Mabinogi: Exploring the Magic and Wisdom of Welsh Mythology*, (Winchester: Moon Books, 2025); Starling, Mhara, *Welsh Fairies*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2024); Starling, Mhara, *Welsh Witchcraft*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2022); Starling, Mhara, *Mhara Starling*, TikTok, <https://www.tiktok.com/@mhara_starling?lang=en>; Starling, Mhara, *Mhara Starling*, YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/@mharastarling2730>.

[37] Morus-Baird, Gwilym, *Celtic Source: Exploring the Myths of the Celtic Nations*, (2025); Morus-Baird, Gwilym, *Celtic Source: Exploring the Myths of the Celtic Nations*, (2025), <https://celticsource.online/>; Morus-Baird, Gwilym, *Taliesin Origins*, (Celtic Source, 2023); Morus-Baird, Gwilym, *Celtic Source*, YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/@CelticSource>.

[38] Rowlands, Catrin [Producer & Director], *Calan Gaeaf [gyda] Carys Eleri* [TV Special], S4C, [Sianel Pedwar Cymru], (2021): this single-episode TV special features Kristoffer Hughes, Mhara Starling, and Gwilym Morus-Baird speaking about traditional and Druidic Neo-Pagan observations of Calan Gaeaf, witchcraft practices common to Calan Gaeaf, and medieval Welsh literature and later folklore regarding Gwyn ap Nudd and connections to Calan Gaeaf, respectively.

Shapiro, Rami (Rabbi), 'Kristoffer Hughes, the Power of Druidry' [Podcast Episode], *Explore Spirituality with Rabbi Rami*, (Spirituality & Health, 2025); Moon Books Publishing, 'Deep Dive into Arianrhod & Welsh Paganism w/ Kristoffer Hughes', *The Pagan Portal Podcast*, (Audible, 18 August 2025); "Laylla & Chelle", 'Gods, Goddesses, and a Bloody Good Moon' [interviewing Kristoffer Hughes], *Back on the Broomstick: Old Witchcraft, New Path* [Podcast Series], Episode 106, (Apple Podcasts, 14 Mar 2025); "Cariad", 'Kristoffer Hughes', *Griefcast* [Podcast Series], (Spotify, 3 Nov 2021); Fire Lyte, 'Inciting a Welsh Witch Riot' [interview with Mhara Starling], *Head on Fire* [Podcast Series], Episode 161, (Apple Podcasts, 26 January 2021).

Wikimedia Community Ireland, 'Welsh Magic & Folklore Unveiled: Exploring the Feminist Narrative in Welsh Folklore & Tradition with Mhara Starling', Episode 2, *Wikimedia Community Podcast*, (Wikimedia Community Ireland, 21 Feb 2024); Starling, Mhara, *The Welsh Witch Podcast* [Podcast Series], Audible [also on other platforms such as Spotify and YouTube], (2022-2025); Minhas, Narinder [Executive Producer], *Am Dro!*,

Religious and Group Identity

Due to the highly personalized nature of Neo-Pagan practice, elements of Welsh culture can be included in myriad forms of Neo-Paganism. However, the subcategories which commonly feature, or even revolve around, Welsh culture include:

> *Celtic (Neo-)Paganism*: a category of ethno-cultural Neo-Paganisms which centers one or more Celtic cultures (e.g. Gaulish Paganism, Irish Paganism, Welsh Paganism, etc), but which do not necessarily have initiatory orders nor a focus on bardism, druids, or Victorian-era influences, and so are not considered Druidry. This category includes Celtic Reconstructionists (CR).[39]

> *Celtic Wicca*: Wicca is the most popular form of Neo-Paganism. An eclectic tradition, it was founded in England by Gerald Gardner in 1954 under myriad influences of contemporary occultists such as Doreen Valiente and Ross Nichols, himself the founder of the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (OBOD).[40] Wicca has many variants, some of

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Season 5, Episode 1, (S4C, 2022): this episode features Mhara Starling as a contestant; Eleri, Carys & Kiri Pritchard McLean, 'Witches Be Tripping', *A Welsh Witchy Road Trip* [Radio Show], (BBC Radio Wales, 31 Oct 2022): this radio show features Mhara Starling; "Austin & Marshall", 'Welsh Witchcraft with Mhara Starling', *Southern Bramble: a Podcast of Crooked Ways*, Season 2, Episode 17, (Spotify, 2 Aug 2022).

"Tara", 'Welsh Spirituality and Cultural Appropriation ~ Gwilym Morus-Baird', *Dreaming the Ancestors* [Podcast Series], (2 Apr 2025).

[39] White, Ethan Doyle, 'Cutting the Mistletoe: An Introduction to Modern Religious Druidry' in White, Ethan Doyle & Jonathan Woolley (eds.), *Modern Religious Druidry: Studies in Paganism, Celtic Identity, and Nature Spirituality*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), Classifying Druidry section: "It [modern Druidry] … sits alongside – and sometimes intersects with – Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism, Celtic Shamanism, and Celtic Christianity. The former is a modern Pagan religion which seeks to reconstruct the pre-Christian traditions of those West European societies which have been regarded as being ethnically, culturally, or linguistically Celtic using surviving historical and archaeological material as a basis. It can be distinguished from modern Druidry both by the fact that it does not foreground the image of the druid as being central to its identity and by the way in which it avoids Druidry's theological eclecticism, instead placing far greater emphasis on being Pagan and polytheist".

[40] Strmiska, Michael F., 'Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives' in Strmiska, (2005), p. 2: "The most well-known modern Pagan or Neopagan religious movement is Wicca…";

Pearson, Joanne, 'The History and Development of Wicca and Paganism' in Pearson, Joanne (ed.), *Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age*, (London: Routledge, 2017; Ashgate Publishing & The Open University, 2002), p. 32: "Wicca was developed in the UK in the 1950s as a highly ritualistic, nature

which focus on a particular pantheon or culture imported into the Wiccan framework and rendering Celtic Wicca, Norse Wicca, etc. Celtic Wicca is frequently Irish-focused, as reflected in the Irish, or anglicized Irish, names for four of the eight holidays observed in the standard Wiccan Wheel of the Year (WotY). However, some practitioners choose a Welsh or Arthurian focus or blend traditions in a Pan-Celtic manner.[41]

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venerating, polytheistic, magical and religious system, operating within a predominantly western framework like that which emerged during the occult revival from the 1880s onwards. It … is largely undisputed that the modern religion of Wicca was formulated by Gerald Gardner";

White, 'Cutting the Mistletoe' in White & Woolley (eds.), *Modern Religious Druidry*, (2024), Defining Druidry section: "He [Ross Nichols] ultimately split from the organisation [the Ancient Druid Order] to form his own Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (OBOD) in 1964, … Nichols had been a friend of Gerald Gardner (1884–1964), the central figure in the emergence of Wicca".

[41] Popular books on Celtic Wicca are still available today, many featuring Wiccan teachings rebranded as "Celtic", plugging Celtic medieval literary figures/deities into Wiccan frameworks, and/or riddled with inaccuracies, mispronunciations, and personal interpretations or fabrications with no basis in history, folklore, folk practices, or literature and bearing no citations. It was, in part, this sort of common inaccuracy and lack of academic honesty which spurred the CR movements and Neo-Pagan backlash against "fakelore" and cultural appropriation in general. Illustrative examples of the phenomenon specific to the Welsh context include (all [sic!]):

Conway, D.J., *Celtic Magic*, (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1990; 2004), pp. 103-4: "ARIANRHOD (ari-an-rod): Wales. 'Silver Wheel'; 'High Fruitful Mother'; … Keeper of the circling Silver Wheel of Stars, a symbol of time or karma. This wheel was also known as the Oar Wheel, a ship which carried dead warriors to the Moonland (Emania). … Mother aspect of the Triple Goddess in Wales. … BLODEUWEDD (blod-oo-eeth) [sic] /BLODWIN/ BLANCHEFLOR: Wales. 'Flower Face'; 'White Flower'. Lily maid of Celtic initiation ceremonies" and p. 109 where "Don [Welsh Dôn]/Domnu/Donn [Irish]" are given as "[t]he equivalent of Irish Danu", and page 115: "WHITE LADY [the Ladi Wen, of common ghost stories, listed here under the heading 'The Major Gods & Goddesses']: Known to all Celtic countries. Dryad of Death; identified with Macha; Queen of the Dead; the Crone form of the Goddess. Death, destruction, annihilation".

McCoy, Edain, *Celtic Myth & Magick: Harness the Power of the Gods and Goddesses*, (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1995), p. 11: "These are the traditional Celtic time associations for the four elements: Air Dawn, Fire Midday, Water Dusk, Earth Midnight". McCoy perpetuates the myth of a lunar Celtic tree calendar, at once acknowledging and dismissing scholarly scepticism of it on p. 68, p. 95: "MABON (MAY-bone or MAH-bawn) is named for the Welsh God and it is seen as the second of the three harvests, and particularly as a celebration of the vine harvests and of wine. It is also associated with apples as symbols of life renewed. Celebrating new-made wine, harvesting apples and vine products, and visiting burial cairns to place an apple upon them, were all ways in which the Celts honored this Sabbat". She lists the village of Aberffraw and also "Ynys Mon" [sic] itself each as one of the "common names for the Otherworld" on p. 111; p. 178: "Arianrhod (Welsh) … Her heavenly star/island, Caer Arianrhod in the Corona Borealis, is believed in some Welsh traditions to be the place where dead souls go to await reincarnation. There she lives with her female attendants presiding over the fates of the departed. She is sometimes depicted as a weaver, which links her to lost creation myths … Arianrhod mated freely with whomever she chose … She married her brother Gwyddion…"; p. 185: "Branwyn [sic] (Welsh, Manx) … Also Branwen. A daughter of Manann and Iweridd whose name means 'fair bosom.' She is often equated with the Greek Aphrodite and is a Goddess of love, sexuality, and of the sea"; p. 191: "Cerridwen (Scottish, Welsh) … Cerridwen is a sow Goddess, … She is also a moon and grain deity with many crone and mother attributes. Her cauldron's name was *Amen*, in which her potion of wisdom called *greal* was made, ... She is often equated with the famous Greek crone, Hecate, and to the Irish Badb"; p. 222: "Mabb (Welsh) This warrioress is believed to be a Welsh version of Ireland's Queen Maeve. However, she has come into present-day Welsh folklore as a faery who brings nightmares and as a midwife to the Welsh faery folk, the Twlwwyth Tegs [sic]".

Druidry or *Druidism*: a branch of Neo-Paganism centering (or claiming to center) one or more Celtic cultures and focusing on the druids (and often also bards and ovates as described in classical writings). Druidry's roots tie it to Victorian-era romanticist "Druidic" and bardic writings (such as those of Iolo Morganwg) and British fraternal societies or clubs.[42] Groups are often organized into "groves" which are themselves subordinate to "orders" such as OBOD, ADF, UDM/ADO, the British Druid Order (BDO), etc.

Eclectic (Neo-)Paganism: a type of Neo-Paganism which combines practices, deities, lore, or other aspects from any of the various sub-types of Neo-Paganism. The term "eclectic" is also sometimes used to describe persons who adhere to more than one tradition and practice them separately. An eclectic Wiccan is typically one who borrows,

[42] White, 'Cutting the Mistletoe' in White & Woolley (eds.), *Modern Religious Druidry*, (2024), introduction and Defining Druidry sections: "Modern religious Druidry, which on rare occasions is also called Druidism, is a movement whose practitioners draw a link between themselves and the ancient druids who served as ritual specialists in parts of Iron Age Western Europe. … Centuries after the extinction of the ancient druids, modern people first began reclaiming the label of 'druid' in the eighteenth century; perhaps the earliest example was the English antiquarian William Stukeley (1687–1765), a man known affectionately among friends as 'the druid' (Hutton 2009a, 90, 128). From the 1770s, British fraternal groups that embraced a druidic identity began to spring up, typically influenced by Freemasonry. … The late eighteenth century also saw special enthusiasm for the druids develop among Welsh cultural nationalists, many of whom came to regard these ancient ritualists as the forerunners of Wales' famed medieval bards. Key to this development was Iolo Morganwg (1747–1826), a Welsh poet who advanced his ideas both through his forged historical texts and through the formation of the Gorsedd of the Bards of the Isle of Britain. This group, whose senior members called themselves druids, went on to play a key role in the annual Welsh national eisteddfod and helped spawn similar groups, first in Brittany in 1898 and then Cornwall in 1928 (Hutton 2009a, 146–82, 241–86, 313–17)".

Much as with Celtic Wicca, Druidry has had issues of inaccuracies regarding the Celtic cultures and history, especially notable in the 1990s-2000s timeframe, e.g. Carr-Gomm, Philip [former head of OBOD], *Druid Mysteries: Ancient Wisdom for the 21st Century*, (London: Rider, 2002), p. 14: "It has been considered unfashionable and overly dramatic to believe that Druidry's roots lie in Atlantis, but if present discoveries continue we may find that this is a perfectly logical hypothesis. … The founder of Anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner, believed in an Atlantean origin for Druidry, and he used his clairvoyant powers to observe the events surrounding the fall of Atlantis and the migration of its sages east and westwards," and page 40: "Although only excerpts were ever published, the effect of his [John Aubrey's] work was to forge an association between Stonehenge and the Druids which lives in the minds of most people to this day. In Chapter 2 we saw how the latest research makes this association perfectly legitimate. But as recently as the mid 1960s many academics deemed it spurious, …".

mixes, or "plugs in" deities, practices, or aspects of other traditions into the Wiccan framework.

Christopaganism: a label used by those who combine common Neo-Pagan practices and nature-centered observances with a focus on the Christian pantheon (Christian God, Jesus, Virgin Mary, Satan, angels, saints, demons, etc.) and mythos (usually the Bible but sometimes including Gnostic texts and etc.) and often valuing universalism.[43] Not to be confused with Christian forms of witchcraft or folk magic.

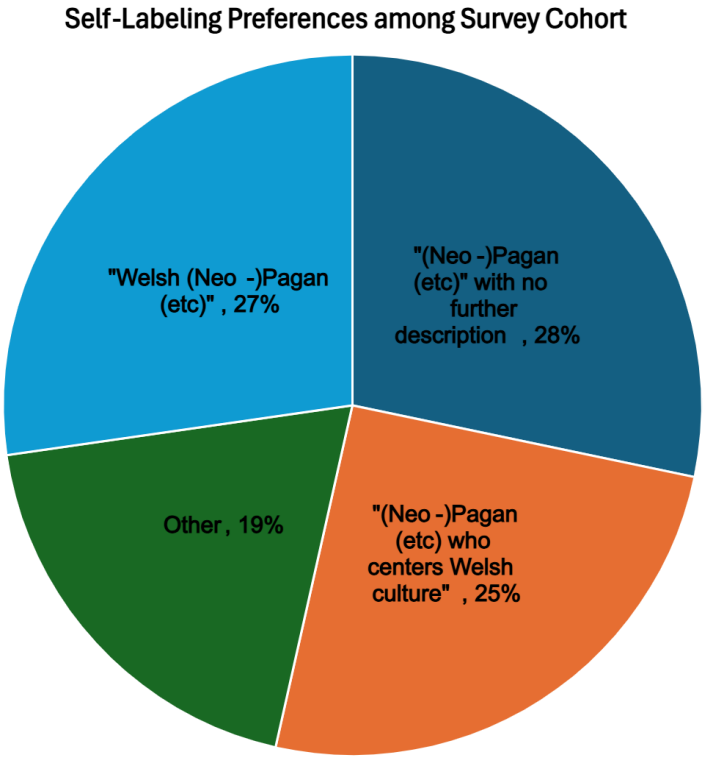
One or more of these terms broadly describe the majority of participants in this study. However, most of these terms do not specify that the Welsh culture is involved, and precisely how the participants themselves should be labeled has yielded the most unclear results in the entire survey. Responses were nearly evenly split between: "'(Neo-)Pagan / Druid / polytheist / witch' with no further description" (about 28%), "'(Neo-)Pagan / Druid / polytheist / witch who centers Welsh culture'" (roughly 25%), and "Welsh (Neo-)Pagan / Druid / polytheist / witch" (about

[43] Kelsey, Robert Bruce, '"Deep" Theology and the Christo-Pagan Turn', *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 8: 1, (June 2020), pp. 10-16, p. 10: "'Christo-Paganism' can be defined in several ways. It can mean the adaptation of traditional Christian doctrines and practices to fit a non-Christian culture during its conversion to Christianity. It can mean the incorporation of Pagan rituals or perspectives into one's own mainstream Christian religious practices, or vice versa. And it can refer to an ideological and theological shift away from a Trinitarian and Bible focused Christianity, as represented and promulgated by the Western Protestant and Catholic mainstream sects, towards a panentheist view of the relationship between divinity and humans";

Higginbotham, Joyce, *Christopaganism: An Inclusive Path*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2009), p. 5: "Paganism's blended traditions, of which ChristoPaganism is one, arise from this growing interspiritual awareness. ChristoPaganism does not desire to do away with the diversity of religious expression, but adds itself as one more diverse expression. ChristoPagans know that the spiritual journey takes many forms, and they are willing to share within and across traditions. Many ChristoPagans believe that everything in the cosmos is part of a related system and that physical and nonphysical reality are interconnected. … Paganism in general and its interspiritual traditions in particular allow this wide range of experience without being threatened by it, or requiring it to be codified into dogma".

27%). The remaining participants (nearly 19%) chose to fill in their own answers, ranging from "Celtic animist" to "Swynwyr [C]ymraeg".[44]

Figure 1: Self-Labeling Preferences among Survey Cohort (Pie Chart)



Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding of decimals.

This nearly even but varied distribution indicates a lack of consensus regarding what the cohort perceives as a proper label for themselves. Among the interviewees, Kristoffer Hughes identifies as a Druid, Mhara Starling identifies primarily as a witch but is also an initiated member of UDM/ADO, and Gwilym Morus-Baird himself questioned what practitioners should be called and maintained a resistance to labels for himself while acknowledging that he is nevertheless

[44] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "What should people who primarily centre Welsh culture in their Neo-Pagan practice (regardless of nationality) call themselves? For example, 'I am a(n) _____.' Responses: '(Neo-)Pagan / Druid / polytheist / witch' etc. (with no further description) (21); (Neo-)Pagan / Druid / polytheist / witch / etc. who centres Welsh culture' (19); 'Welsh (Neo-)Pagan / Druid / polytheist / witch' etc. (20); Other (Please fill in.) (14)."

"adjacent".[45] The survey responses also highlight a roughly one-quarter to three-quarters ratio of Neo-Pagans who do or do not (respectively) prefer the ambiguous "Welsh ___" label to describe their religious identity.

Ambiguity between nationality and religious practice is avoided in some other ethno-cultural sects of Neo-Paganism, where the terms for a culture's nationality and the sect of Neo-Paganism centering it differ. For example, Neo-Pagans who center Greek culture are not "Greek (Neo-)Pagans" but "Hellenists"; Neo-Pagans who center a Germanic culture are not "Scandinavian/Germanic (Neo-)Pagans" but "Heathens", etc. Given the lack of consensus regarding an appropriate label for those who center Welsh culture, this paper will proceed with the term *Cymric (Neo-)Pagan*, as the word *Cymric* [ˈkəmrɪk] combines the borrowed element of the Welsh-language root for Wales (Cymru) with an English adjectival suffix (-ic) and refers to the Welsh in language, culture, or people but is not typically used to refer to the nationality.[46]

Over 82% of respondents claimed affiliation with a group and/or course, many claiming more than one.[47] Druidry orders were particularly popular, with OBOD – currently headed by Neo-Pagan Druid Eimear Burke from Kilkenny, Ireland – having the most by far at thirty-six, and UDM/ADO – headed by Kristoffer Hughes from Ynys Môn, Cymru (Anglesey, Wales) – coming in second with sixteen.[48] Other notable affiliations included Dr. Gwilym Morus-Baird's

[45] Brown, Jennifer, *Interview with Gwilym Morus-Baird*, (Part 1: 30 Apr 2025; Section 2: 19 May 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document]: "So, I think that what- what little insight I can offer, um, to Welsh-centered Pagans – is that the right term? Pagans who center Welsh culture? Whatever. You know- you know, you guys, yeah. You guys, and me guys, of course, because I'm kind of adjacent to that".
[46] *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 5th edn., 'Cymric', (HarperCollins, 2025).
[47] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Who Are Perceived to be Community Members and What is Important to Them?', (Jotform, 2024): "Are you a member of, active in, or have taken classes with, any of the following Welsh cultural, Neo-Pagan, or Druidic groups or courses?"
[48] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Who Are Perceived to be Community Members and What is Important to Them?', (Jotform, 2024): "Are you a member of, active; Druidry.org, 'Eimear Burke: The Current

Celtic Source online courses (twelve participants), Mhara Starling's online Patreon courses (eleven participants), ADF (nine participants) headed by Jan Avende from Ohio, U.S., BDO (nine participants) headed by Philip Shallcrass from England, CUUPS (eight participants) with chapters across the U.S., the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA; seven participants) headed by Dana O'Driscoll from Pennsylvania, U.S., and the women-only (trans-inclusive) Sisterhood of Avalon (SoA; five participants) run by Jhenah Telyndru from New York, U.S.[49]

It is atypical for such a high percentage of Neo-Pagans to be affiliated with groups, as a majority of Neo-Pagans are "solitary" – not a member of any Neo-Pagan group and primarily practicing alone.[50] However, the survey was posted in some of the above groups' online social media spaces when seeking participants, and so while it may be possible that those who incorporate elements of Welsh culture (or ethno-cultural Neo-Pagans in general) are more likely to be involved with groups than is typical of Neo-Pagans overall, the current data cannot confirm this due to the methods by which participants were solicited.

Chief', *Order of Bards, Ovates, & Druids*, (Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, publication/webpage posting year not given); Anglesey Druid Order, 'Kristoffer Hughes', *Anglesey Druid Order*, (Anglesey Druid Order, 2025).

[49] Morus-Baird, Gwilym, *Celtic Source: Exploring the Myths of the Celtic Nations*, (2025); Starling, Mhara, 'Mhara Starling Patreon', (Patreon, 2025); Avende, Jan, 'ADF Elects a New Archdruid: Rev. Jan Avende to Focus on Empowerment and Connection', *Mist to Open. Mists to Bind.: an Initiate-Priest's Journey Diving the Depths*, (Wordpress, 1 May 2025); The British Druid Order, 'About the British Druid Order: Who's Who in the BDO: Meet the Elders Group', *The British Druid Order*, (The British Druid Order, 2019); Ancient Order of Druids in America, 'Grand Grove Bios', (AODA, 2024); Telyndru, Jhenah, 'About Jhenah', *Jhenah Telyndru: Walking the Priestess Path*, (Jhenah Telyndru, 2025).

[50] Berger in Pizza and Lewis (2009), p. 167: "In the Pagan Census we found that just over half (50.9 percent) of contemporary Pagans practice alone"; Berger, *Solitary Pagans* (2019), p. 1: "The percentage of contemporary Pagans who are solitary practitioners has jumped from just over 50 percent in 'The Pagan Census' to 78 percent in 'The Pagan Census Revisited'. Among the youngest cohort in my current survey 86 percent are solitaries";

Magliocco, Sabina, 'New Age and Neopagan Magic' in Collins, David J. *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West: From Antiquity to the Present*, (Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 652: "The basic unit of organization is the small group, called a circle, coven, or grove, but recent surveys indicate that the highest growth rate in Neopaganism is among solitary practitioners. These individuals may meet with other adherents at regular 'moots' or for seasonal celebrations, but they are essentially independent agents".

That Druidry orders were the most popular affiliation is no surprise as Welsh culture and history do not merely share ties with, but are foundational to, Neo-Pagan Druidry. Not only were the first (non-religious) Bardo-Druidic societies – the Druidic Society (1772-1844) and the Society of the Druids of Cardigan (c. 1779) – founded in Wales, pre-dating the Ancient Order of Druids in London (1781), but also Georgian- and Victorian-era Welsh scholars such as Evan Evans (1731-1788), Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams, 1747-1826), and Dr. William Price (1800-1893) were among the first and most influential persons to present medieval Welsh literature and bardic poetry as possibly containing survivals from the Druids.[51] Morganwg and Price were likewise among the first to take the ideas of Bardism/Druidism and the Bardo-Druidic society and merge these with historical and Welsh cultural elements alongside their own interpretations of Christianity to form a personally-constructed religious expression.[52]

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[51] Hutton, Ronald, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain*, (London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 130: "The first appeared on 15 October 1772, when eighteen of the most important inhabitants of Anglesey founded an association to improve it, socially and economically. The one thing that most educated people knew about the island by that date was that it was supposed to have been a notable stronghold of the Druids. This fact, and the favourable impression that the British generally had of ancient Druidry during the period, ensured that the new body was called the Druidical Society," and pp. 131-2: "About seven years after the foundation of the Anglesey group, a Society of 'the Druids of Cardigan' was formed… the creation of an original genius, William Jones, … the discoverer of the concept of the Indo-European family of languages. … His poem 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India' proposed that the pantheon of Hindu deities should be given as much honour, by civilized modern people, as those of the Greeks and Romans. Most remarkable was his response to the Gordon Riots of 1780, … Jones was shocked into writing a poem which both made a passionate plea for religious tolerance and advanced the argument that behind all the main world religions lay the veneration of a single great ancient goddess, whose worship had united the human race. He seemed to suggest that a revival of her religion might be the cure for the evils of religious division and hostility…".

Evans, Evan, (trnsl.), *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards*, (Llanidloes: John Pryse, 1764), p. 51: "It is certain from [Taliesin's] history, that he was a very learned man for his time, and seems to have been well versed in the doctrine of the Druids, particularly the μετεμψύχωσις, which accounts for the extravagant flights frequent in his poems. … It is a great pity Taliesin is so obscure, for there are many particulars in his poems that would throw great light on the history, notions, and manners of the Ancient Britons, especially of the Druids, a great part of whose learning it is certain he had imbibed".

[52] Regarding the influence of Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams) and Dr. William Price on modern Druidry, see: Williams, Edward, "Bardism", *The Heroic Elegies and Other Pieces of Llywarç Hen, Prince of the Cumbrian Britons* (London, 1792), pp. xxi–lxxx; Morganwg, Iolo [Edward Williams], and J. Williams ab Ithel (ed., trnsl.), *Barddas: A Collection of Original Documents, Illustrative of the Theology, Wisdom, and Usages of the Bardo-Druidic Systems of the Isle of Britain*, Vols. 1 & 2, (Llandovery: D.J. Roderic, 1862); Griffin, J. P., 'Eccentric or Visionary–Dr Price of Llantrisant', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 84: 4, (1991), pp. 229-232; Powell, Dean, *Wales's First Radical: Dr. William Price*, (Amberley Publishing Limited, 2012); and Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe*, (2009), particularly chapters 5 "Iolo Morganwg" (for a discussion of Iolo Morganwg and his contributions to Neo-Paganism and Druidry in general) and 8 "Iolo's Children" (for a discussion of Dr. William Price).

Neo-Pagan Druidry has of course changed since its origins in the Romanticism movement of roughly two centuries ago, notably expanding to include the acceptance of non-Christian worldviews rather than adhering to the Victorian-era tendency to project a Christianized framework onto pre-Christian peoples in order to legitimate ancient Pagan practices or societies in the eye of the "appropriate" overculture.[53] However, many recognizable elements persist from the Victorian era across Druidry today, including tropes which define the popular image of Druids, such as: gathering in circles; observing rites in or near stone circles or prehistoric sites; ritual call-and-response (in the case of Iolo Morganwg's Gorsedd Prayer and Call to Peace, a continued use of the liturgy verbatim or only slightly altered, as was seen in the UDM/ADO's Winter Solstice ritual in Chapter 1); an emphasis on truth and peace – also rooted in the works of Iolo and influenced by classical writings on the druids; an emphasis on connections between present practices, medieval Welsh bards, and roots in the pre-Christian past (informed by classical writings); a belief in, or at least passive openness to the possibility of, reincarnation (influenced by classical records); religious and also often socio-political universalism; cremation; and ritual observation of the seasons.[54]

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[53] Lewis, 'Celts, Druids and the Invention of Tradition', in Pizza and Lewis, (2009), p. 489: "Characterizing the Druids as crypto-Christians had the effect of making them safe for public consumption"; Charnell-White, Cathryn A., *Bardic Circles: National, Regional and Personal Identity in the Bardic Vision of Iolo Morganwg*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 164: "III: [Bardism or Druidism] (NLW 13144A, pp. 390…) … [quoting the previously given manuscript of Iolo Morganwg's writings] (390) Bardism, or as commonly termed, Druidism, is purely monotheistical and theosophical. It is as pure a specimen of the Patricarchal, or primeval religion of the world, as any where can be found; more simply so than the Brahmin or the ancient Persic systems, and is on that account valuable, as it not only harmonizes with, but confirms the truth of the ancient Jewish and the regenerated Christian systems. It proves that God has in all ages and countries so ordered in his divine providence, that the evidence of his truths should never be lost".

[54] Regarding the Gorsedd or "Druid's" Prayer: Morganwg and ab Ithel (ed., trnsl.), *Barddas*, Vol. 1, (1862), p. 363.

Regarding classical writings on the connection between Britain and Druids, between Druids and bardic practices, between peace and Druids, and between reincarnation and Druids:

Julius Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, 6.13: "This institution [of druids] is supposed to have been devised in Britain, and to have been brought over from it into Gaul; and now those who desire to gain a more accurate knowledge of that system generally proceed thither for the purpose of studying it" and 6.14: "The Druids do not go to war, nor pay tribute together with the rest; they have an exemption from military service and a dispensation in all matters. … They [the druids] are said there to learn by heart a great number of verses; accordingly some remain in the course of training twenty years. … They wish to inculcate this as one of their leading tenets, that souls do not become extinct, but pass after death from one body to another, and they think that men by this tenet are in a great

Demographics

Helen Berger's research from 2003 and 2009 has shown that Neo-Pagan demographics tend to skew towards mature adults to middle-aged (31-60), white/European ethnicity, and women.[55] The present survey's participants skewed older, with over one-fifth aged 61 or over, compared to only 3% over age 60 reported among Neo-Pagans at-large.[56] Nearly two-thirds were between the ages of 31 and 60, considerably less than in previous trends of around 76% between the similar age bracket of 26-58.[57] At the same time, only about 13.5% were aged 18-30, fewer than Berger's more restrictive grouping of 15% of Neo-Pagans between ages 18-25.[58] This contradicts

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degree excited to valor, the fear of death being disregarded. They likewise discuss and impart to the youth many things respecting the stars and their motion, respecting the extent of the world and of our earth, respecting the nature of things, respecting the power and the majesty of the immortal gods";

Cornelius Tacitus & Sara Bryant (ed.), *Complete Works of Tacitus*, (New York: Random House, Inc, 1876/1942), 11: "But a general survey inclines me to believe that the Gauls established themselves in an island so near to them. Their religious belief may be traced in the strongly-marked British superstition. The language differs but little…";

Oldfather, Charles Henry (trnsl.), *Diodorus Siculus's Library: Books 1-7*, (Loeb Classical Library, 1933), 5.31.1: "Among them are also to be found lyric poets whom they call Bards. These men sing to the accompaniment of instruments which are like lyres, and their songs may be either of praise or of obloquy. Philosophers, as we may call them, and men learned in religious affairs are unusually honoured among them and are called by them Druid**s**" and 5.31.5: "Nor is it only in the exigencies of peace, but in their wars as well, that they obey, before all others, these men [druids] and their chanting poets [bards], and such obedience is observed not only by their friends but also by their enemies; many times, for instance, when two armies approach each other in battle with swords drawn and spears thrust forward, these men step forth between them and cause them to cease, as though having cast a spell over certain kinds of wild beasts".

[55] Berger, Helen A., Evan A. Leach, and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States*, (University of South Carolina Press, 2003), p. 29: "Our study, like all previous research on Neo-Paganism, finds that most Neo-Pagans are Caucasian"; Berger, Helen A., 'Contemporary Paganism by the Numbers', in Pizza and Lewis (2009), p. 157: "The quantitative research on Contemporary Paganism in North America consistently shows that Pagans tend to be well-educated, middle class, and disproportionately female".

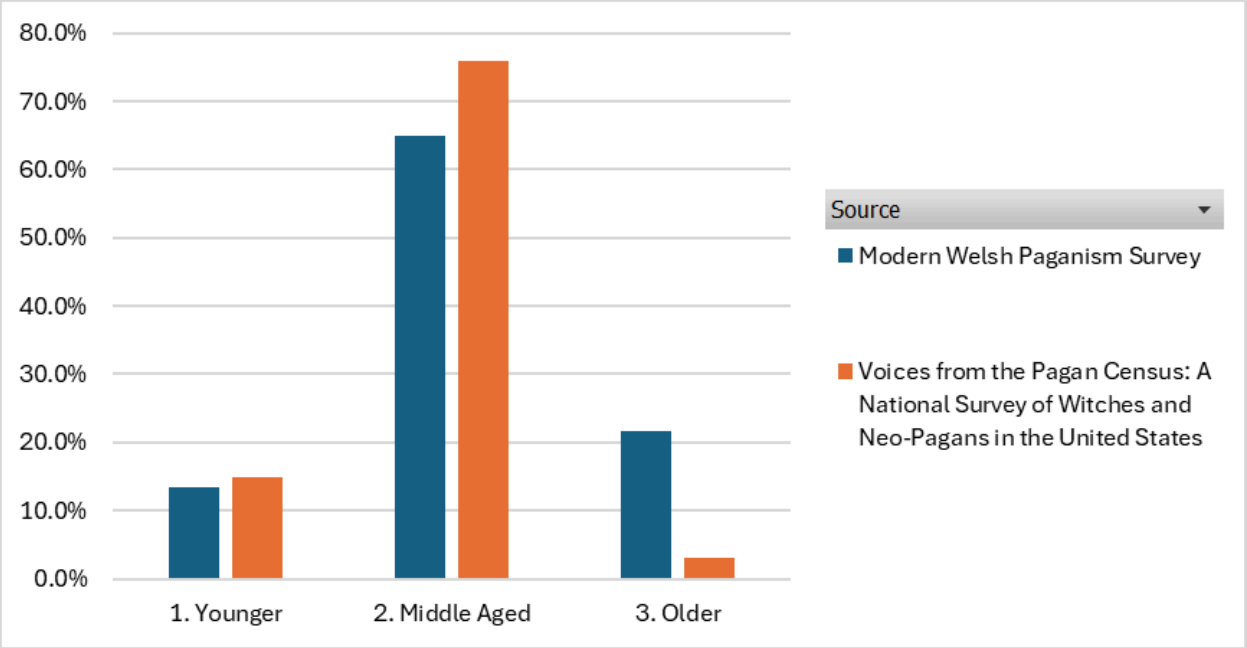
[56] *Ibid.*

[57] Brown, Jennifer, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 1: Basic Demographics', (Jotform, 2024): "What is your age? Please Select [drop-down menu] 18-30 (10 participants); 31-40 (14); 41-50 (17); 51-60 (17); 61-70 (11); 71 or over (5)"; Berger, in Pizza and Lewis (2009), p. 158: "All [the surveys by Jorgensen and Russell, Covenant of the Goddess, the Pagan Census, and Reid] found that there are more adult practitioners than adolescents or people in their early twenties. … Although one would expect that there would be more teenagers who are Witches today, most of the members are older, as a large cohort joined the religion in the 1960s and 70s and are now [2009] middle aged … In the CoG Poll, 15 percent state they are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, with 6 percent younger than eighteen and only 3 percent over the age of sixty. The vast majority 76 percent were between the ages of 26-58".

[58] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 1: Basic Demographics', (Jotform, 2024): "What is your age? Please Select [drop-down menu]" and Berger, in Pizza and Lewis (2009), p. 158.

stereotypes around Neo-Paganism primarily appealing to young people due in part to the high visibility of young "WitchTok" (Witches on TikTok) and Instagram influencers. Whether this trend is reflective of the current overall Neo-Pagan population is a question ripe for further research, as accessible statistics on the age of Neo-Pagan practitioners were over fifteen years old.

Figure 2: Age Comparison between Cohorts of Brown and Berger (Bar Graph)



"Younger" cohort in Brown ages 18-30, in Berger ages 18-25. "Middle Aged" cohort in Brown ages 31-60, in Berger ages 26-58. "Older" cohort in Brown ages 61 and over, in Berger ages 60 and over.

Survey participants adhered to broader Neo-Pagan racial-ethnic trends, with an overwhelming majority, approximately 96%, self-identifying as at least partially "European" in terms of "race or racial descent".[59] However, several chose more than one category, four self-identified as

[59] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 1: Basic Demographics', (Jotform, 2024): "If you had to describe yourself in terms of race or racial descent on a legal document, how would you describe yourself? You may choose more than one. Responses: European (e.g. German, Irish, Italian, Slavic, Spanish, 'White', etc.) (69); Native Meso-American (e.g. Aztec, Mayan, Olmec, Teotihuacan, Huastec, etc.) (1); Native North American (e.g. First Nations, Choctaw, Inuit, Lakota, Métis, etc.) (1); Hispanic (4); Mixed (1); South Asian (Indian, Nepalese, Pakistani,

"Hispanic" (about 5.5%) and one each (roughly 1.4%) identified as "Native Meso-American", "Native North American", "South Asian", "Southeast Asian", and/or "Mixed".[60] Combined with approximately one-third of respondents claiming no "Welsh (or partially Welsh) ancestry or descent", these numbers highlight the fact that Cymric Neo-Paganism appeals to persons of ethnic origins from around the globe.[61]

The vast majority of survey respondents claimed legal nationality from either the United Kingdom or one of its anglophone former colonies where Welsh diasporas are likely. Specifically, roughly 51% were of U.K. nationality, about 39% were of U.S. nationality, and two each were of Canadian and New Zealand nationalities.[62] The remaining nationalities were European.[63] A clear majority of U.K. nationals had previously or currently live in Wales (about 89%).[64] Similarly, all but one U.K. national had at least visited Wales.[65] By contrast, only about 27% of those with non-U.K. nationalities had ever visited Wales, and only two had ever lived

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Sri Lankan / Sinhalese, etc.) (1); Southeast Asian (e.g. Filipino, Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese, etc.) (1); Did not answer (2)".

[60] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 1: Basic Demographics', (Jotform, 2024): "If you had to describe yourself in terms of race or racial descent on a legal document, how would you describe yourself? You may choose more than one. Responses: European (e.g. German, Irish, Italian, Slavic, Spanish, 'White', etc.) (69); Native Meso-American (e.g. Aztec, Mayan, Olmec, Teotihuacan, Huastec, etc.) (1); Native North American (e.g. First Nations, Choctaw, Inuit, Lakota, Métis, etc.) (1); Hispanic (4); Mixed (1); South Asian (Indian, Nepalese, Pakistani, Sri Lankan / Sinhalese, etc.) (1); Southeast Asian (e.g. Filipino, Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese, etc.) (1); Did not answer (2)".

[61] *Ibid.*; and "Do you consider yourself to be of Welsh (or partially Welsh) ancestry or descent?" Responses: Yes (49), No (24), No answer (1)".

[62] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 1: Basic Demographics', (Jotform, 2024): "What is your legal nationality? This is the nation that your passport would be for. (Select the nationality with which you most identify if you hold multiple legal nationalities.) Responses: United Kingdom (40 participants); Canada (2); United States (27); New Zealand (2); Gibraltar (1); Greece (1); Sweden (1)".

[63] *Ibid*.

[64] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 1: Basic Demographics', (Jotform, 2024): "Have you ever lived in Cymru (Wales)? (Holidays, vacations, or staying less than 1 month do not count.) Responses: Yes (36); No (38)". 36 out of 38 U.K. nationals selected "Yes" to this inquiry, and one respondent who selected "no" on the question of ever having visited or gone on holiday in Wales had selected "yes" to living there and being a fluent or first-language Welsh speaker.

[65] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 1: Basic Demographics', (Jotform, 2024): "Have you ever visited or gone on holiday in Cymru (Wales)? (Cymru as an intended destination. Not merely passing through on the way to somewhere else.) Responses: Yes (46); No (27); Did not answer (1)".

there.[66] High travel costs are likely a barrier for those living far from Wales, as was referenced by some in response to whether Cymric Neo-Pagans should engage in pilgrimages to Wales.[67]

In addition to about a two-thirds majority of respondents having at least visited Wales, over 88% either fluently spoke or were learning the Welsh language.[68] However, a large portion of these (about 44%) self-assessed as "beginner" level, while a further sixteen (nearly 22%) self-assessed their ability as "not at all", resulting in roughly two-thirds of respondents claiming either low or no Welsh-language ability.[69] The validity of language ability demographics in this survey is hampered by the self-assessed nature of the data, but it grants at least a preliminary glance into the degree of Welsh language engagement of Cymric Neo-Pagans, which is high overall.

Almost even numbers of respondents identified their gender as "Man / Masculine" and "Woman / Feminine", while more than one in six selected a nonbinary option ("Agender / No gender", "Gender fluid", or "Nonbinary").[70] The nearly even split between women and men in the survey

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[66] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 1: Basic Demographics', (Jotform, 2024): "Have you ever visited or gone on holiday in Cymru (Wales)? (Cymru as an intended destination. Not merely passing through on the way to somewhere else.)" and Brown, (Jotform: 2025): ""Have you ever lived in Cymru (Wales)? (Holidays, vacations, or staying less than 1 month do not count.)".

[67] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 1: Basic Demographics', (Jotform, 2024): "Should Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture try to visit and / or make pilgrimages to Cymru (Wales) if they do not already reside there?" Responses: Yes (48), No (5), I want to say more. (Please explain.) (20), No answer (1). "If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here." Response examples: "Preferably they should make the attempt to visit Wales, but I can also appreciate that a visit/pilgrimage may not be attainable to everyone", "If possible but some people don't have the means", "I want to say yes, but poverty is a real issue globally and many cannot afford the trip", "Ideally yes but that may be out of reach financially and or in other ways for many sincere people", "It could be an unreasonable financial burden to visit Cymru…", "If this privilege is available to them", "this could be quite expensive and should be left up to the individual", "If possible, yes. I recognise that not everyone has the money or ability to visit Wales, but I think that it is something that is highly beneficial if they can", "For me the Spirit is willing, but the pocket book is weak".

[68] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 1: Basic Demographics', (Jotform, 2024): "Do you speak or sign, understand, read, and / or write Cymraeg (the Welsh language)? You may choose your own personal assessment of your current ability level. Responses: Not at all (16); Beginner (33); Intermediate (12); Advanced (2); Fluent / First Language (5); It's complicated / Not sure (Please explain.) (6)".

[69] *Ibid.*

[70] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 1: Basic Demographics', (Jotform, 2024): "What is your gender identity? Responses: Agender / No gender (2); Gender fluid (2); Man / Masculine (30); Nonbinary (9); Woman /

alongside a significant proportion of nonbinary gender identities differs from: Neo-Pagans at-large, who skew majority women, Druids at-large, who skew majority men, and the general population, for whom only a small percentage (approximately 3% or less in both the U.K. and U.S.) are estimated to be nonbinary.[71] Considered together, these trends may indicate actual or perceived gender equality and/or gender inclusivity among Cymric Neo-Pagans specifically. While it is already established that Neo-Paganism is both popular among, and relatively welcoming of, LGBTQ+ persons (although not without some controversy or sects who are exclusionary), data on the number of nonbinary practitioners within the greater Neo-Pagan community is needed for comparison.[72]

Feminine (31)". This author intentionally chose not to include a demographics question relating to physical sex assigned at birth or cis/transgender status, as this is often considered private and may or may not be relevant to a person's daily lived gender experience, and so the gender identity question was deemed sufficient.

[71] Lewis, James R. and Inga Bårdsen Tollefsen, 'Gender and Paganism in Census and Survey Data', *The Pomegranate*, 15: 1-2, (2013), 61-78, p. 65: "Druidism is a male-oriented form of contemporary Neo-Paganism, and this is reflected in the data from New Zealand (111 males; 39 females), Australia (456 males; 235 females) and from England and Wales (1155 males; 502 females)";

Berger, Helen A., *Solitary Pagans: Contemporary Witches, Wiccans, and Others Who Practice Alone*, (University of South Carolina Press, 2019), p. 21: "The religion [of contemporary Paganism] remains disproportionately female, with women making up 71.6 percent of adherents";

Brown, Anna, 'About 5 percent of young adults in the U.S. say their gender is different from their sex assigned at birth', *Pew Research Center*, (7 June 2022): "Adults under 30 are more likely than older adults to be trans or nonbinary. Some 5.1 percent of adults younger than 30 are trans or nonbinary, including 2.0 percent who are a trans man or trans woman and 3.0 percent who are nonbinary – that is, they are neither a man nor a woman or aren't strictly one or the other. (Due to rounding, subtotals may not add up to the total.) This compares with 1.6 percent of 30- to 49-year-olds and 0.3 percent of those 50 and older who are trans or nonbinary";

Office for National Statistics, *First Census Estimates on Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation*, (6 January 2023): "There were responses from 45.7 million (94.0 percent) of people aged 16 years and over to the voluntary question 'Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?' Some 45.4 million (93.5 percent) answered 'Yes,' while a total of 262,000 people (0.5 percent) answered 'No,' indicating that their gender identity was different from their sex registered at birth. Within this group: 118,000 (0.24 percent) answered 'No' but did not provide a write-in response, 48,000 (0.10 percent) identified as a trans man, 48,000 (0.10 percent) identified as a trans woman, 30,000 (0.06 percent) identified as nonbinary, 18,000 (0.04 percent) wrote in a different gender identity. The remaining 2.9 million (6.0 percent) did not answer the question on gender identity".

[72] Regarding the popularity of Neo-Paganism among the LGBTQ+ community: Berger, Leach, & Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census*, (2003), p. 28: "Orion finds that 61 percent of Neo-Pagans are heterosexual, 11 percent homosexual and 28 percent bisexual. In our study we find that 67.8 percent of the population are heterosexual, 4.8 percent lesbians, 4.5 percent gay men, and 19 percent bisexual".

For examples of LGBTQ+ inclusivity within Neo-Paganism, see: Marchetti, Kathleen, 'A Political Profile of U.S. Pagans', *Politics and Religion*, 15, (Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 142-168, p. 158: "Pagans' belief that society should accept homosexuality is nearly universal with a 93% likelihood of agreeing with that position compared to 69% for non-Pagans"; Cieslik, Emma, 'How Trans Covens and Nonbinary Witches Are Reshaping

Inclusivity and In-Group Perceptions

The value of LGBTQ+ inclusivity among Cymric Neo-Pagans may be bolstered by the high visibility within this community of both Kristoffer Hughes, who publicly identifies as gay, and Mhara Starling, who is a trans woman, as two participants mentioned in open text.[73] However, LGBTQ+ inclusivity appears to be of high priority regardless of association with UDM/ADO or Mhara Starling, as over 95% deemed it important.[74] This is slightly higher than the general Neo-Pagan population's acceptance of specifically homosexuality reported at 93% (there was no known data for at-large Neo-Pagan views on trans, nonbinary, or queer inclusivity; only for homosexual and/or bisexual identities).[75] Only three participants diverged from this trend.[76] The importance of inclusivity for "people who are disabled (mentally, physically, developmentally,

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Tradition for the Future of the Craft', *them*, (1 Nov 2024); Faerywolf, Storm, 'Column: Recognizing Trans and Nonbinary Pagan Creators', *The Wild Hunt: Pagan News & Perspectives*, (18 Mar 2023).

For examples of exclusion and controversy around LGBTQ+ identities in Neo-Paganism, see: Manning, Sanchez, 'Witch 'Thrown Off Druid Course' in Trans Row', *The Times*, (30 May 2025) and the other side of the same story: "Greywolf" (Philip Shallcrass), 'Witch 'Thrown Off Druid Course' in Trans Row'', *The British Druid Order*, (June 2025); Kaminski-Jones, Rhys, 'Anti-Woke Druids and Radical Bards: What Links Welsh 18th Century Romantic Druid-Bards, Gathering around a Circle of Pebbles in North London, and the Contemporary Online Right?', *Verso*, (14 August 2024); Pagliarulo, Antonio & Manny Moreno, '"Traditional Gardnerian" Declaration Draws Accusations of Transphobia', *The Wild Hunt: Pagan News & Perspectives*, (31 July 2022).

[73] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture to be welcoming and inclusive of people who are LGBTQ+ and / or who are of any gender? Responses: Yes (65); No (1); I want to say more. (Please explain.) (7); No answer (1)", open-text participant responses to follow- up question: "If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here": "The Penn [sic] of the Anglesey Druid Order is gay" and "Many of the 'leading' voices in the Welsh neo-pagan/ druid community are LGBTQ+ themselves. I deeply beleive [sic] that human rights are something that are not for question in the neo-pagan community, and LGBTQ+ rights are human rights".

[74] *Ibid*. In addition to 89% of respondents choosing "Yes", an additional 5 respondents gave longer versions of "Yes" in open-text responses to the query.

[75] Marchetti, 'A Political Profile of U.S. Pagans', (2022), p. 158.

[76] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2', (Jotform, 2024): "Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture to be welcoming and inclusive of people who are LGBTQ+ and / or who are of any gender?" No (1); "If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here": Negative or dismissive open-text responses: "This is a nonsensical question. What is covered under the +?" and "This agenda of LGBDQ [sic] people is misleading. We are born from nature in some gender, why go to such horrible transformations with drugs and surgeries to change what nature make of [sic]?? They are not worship nature, they are worship [sic] their looks! And in the end they distroy [sic] their bodies in [an] unchangeable way".

For further discussion of Neo-Pagans and specifically Druids weaponizing narrow definitions of "nature" and "natural" (nature being frequently viewed as sacred among Neo-Pagans, as discussed in Chapter 1) to exclude and attack the trans community, see: Rhys, 'Anti-Woke Druids and Radical Bards', (2024).

etc.)" was also high, with nearly 95% agreeing on its import.[77] Only one participant answered "No"; two did not actually answer the question, instead relating that they themselves were disabled, and two answers were somewhat noncommittal.[78]

If inclusivity towards LGBTQ+ persons and disabled persons was nearly universally agreed upon, opinions on what makes a person Welsh were far less so. Simply defaulting to a legal document declaring nationality, such as a passport, is not an option for a non-autonomous nation such as Wales, so other factors and perceptions which shape identity and Welshness in the minds of the participants were forced to the fore. The most popular choice was "location of birth in Cymru (Wales)" (about 82%) followed by "ancestry from Cymru (Wales)" (about 67%).[79] However, most participants chose (an)other option(s) in addition to these, suggesting a multi-faceted and nuanced approach. Other popular choices were "participating in Welsh culture (even if not living in Cymru [Wales])" (exactly 50%), "residence in Cymru (Wales) for a certain length of time" (about 42%), and "residence in Cymru (Wales) for any length of time" and "Using Cymraeg (Welsh language)" (both at about 35%).[80] The fact that over one-third of

[77] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture to be welcoming and inclusive of people who are disabled (mentally, physically, developmentally, etc.)?" Responses: Yes (66); No (1); I want to say more. (Please explain.) (7). "If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here".
[78] *Ibid.*, noncommittal answers were: "It depends on the situation. If someone can participate, learn and interact in [a] harmonial way with others[,] why not" and "If possible and feeled [sic] called to do so".
[79] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "In your opinion or view, what makes a person Welsh? (Select all that apply.)" Responses: Ancestry from Cymru (Wales) (50); Location of birth in Cymru (Wales) (61); Residence in Cymru (Wales) for any length of time (26); Residence in Cymru (Wales) for a certain length of time (31); Participating in Welsh culture (even if not living in Cymru [Wales]) (37); Race or skin colour (2); Using Cymraeg (Welsh language) (26); Other (Please explain.) (7).
[80] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "In your opinion or view, what makes a person Welsh? (Select all that apply.)" Responses: Ancestry from Cymru (Wales) (50); Location of birth in Cymru (Wales) (61); Residence in Cymru (Wales) for any length of time (26); Residence in Cymru (Wales) for a certain length of time (31); Participating in Welsh culture (even if not living in Cymru [Wales]) (37); Race or skin colour (2); Using Cymraeg (Welsh language) (26); Other (Please explain.) (7).

participants view the use of the Welsh language as a factor in determining one's Welshness speaks to the continued importance of the language in Welsh identity.

The survey responses contrast with the views of the three interviewees who are leaders in the Cymric Neo-Pagan community, all of whom emphasized time spent in Cymru and engaging with Welsh culture or language over place of birth or bloodlines. When asked "What does it mean to be Welsh to you?", Mhara Starling responded:

> "... [I]t is the state in which you interact with the world around you. So, it's something that has been fostered within you, based on where you grew up. … your ancestors, your parentage, your grandparents; that can also be a part of it. But, beyond those things, … culture is lived, and culture is not something that is, you know, flowing through our veins, in our blood. … I don't think I would ever deny somebody … who grew up, say, in Spain or Portugal or even America or something, if they grew up with their parent reading them bedtime stories in the Welsh language; if they grew up with a parent who perhaps played Welsh music to them …, and they told them stories about their mam-gu, their nain, … If they grew up with those stories, with those songs, with that language as a lens … that altered the way in which they interact with the world, and they now identify as being either partly or wholly Welsh or Celtic. Then, I refuse to deny them that identity just because they didn't grow up on the soil of Wales or whatever, or because they didn't have two parents that were Welsh or something like that."
>
> — Mhara Starling, quoted from Brown, Jennifer, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025).

Kristoffer Hughes, in his *Book of Druidry*, wrote "Can you be a Celt today? Yes, you can, for it's entirely cultural", and "Celticity is defined by cultural expression, and Druidry is an aspect of that culture, but it's not a closed practice".[81] In interview, he expanded on these ideas, saying "So, Celticity, we *know* that that's not a bloodline. We know that it's a cultural stream rather than a bloodline, and … And that Celticity is transmitted by culture. … I've got friends who are completely fluent in Welsh who don't live in Wales, and never have done. So many members of our Order have become utterly fluent. Do I consider those people to be Welsh? Yes, I consider them to be Welsh, because they speak the language."[82]

Gwilym Morus-Baird tied Welshness to time spent living in Cymru due to the difficulty of immersing in the culture from outside of Wales, but he distinguished that from the ability to connect with the culture via religion: "I think it would be very difficult to immerse oneself in Welsh culture without being in the places where it lives. Um, because it has to be a reciprocal relationship; it can't just be one-way. You can't just watch a hundred years' worth of S4C sitting in your apartment in … Oregon or wherever, … and then be Welsh, you know. … these are different things. Practicing a Welsh-centered spirituality does not require you to be Welsh, yeah? … when someone who isn't a- a Welsh or an Irish person comes to Celtic mythology, I think we do have to appreciate that there's always going to be some distance, and that some nuance is going to be missing, and … some engineering is going to be required to make it fit in that person's life, let's say."[83] A similar sentiment was expressed by a survey participant regarding

[81] Hughes, *The Book of Druidry*, (2023), pp. 46 & 273, respectively.
[82] Brown, Jennifer, *Interview with Kristoffer Hughes*, (22 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].
[83] Brown, *Interview with Gwilym Morus-Baird*, (Part 1: 30 Apr 2025; Section 2: 19 May 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].

whether it were important "to be welcoming and inclusive of people who do not currently, or have never, lived in Cymru (Wales)", agreeing to inclusivity as long as those in question accepted that they would always be outsiders and would never truly "get it".[84]

While the majority (over 90%) of participants judged inclusivity towards persons who are not of white/European ethnicity as important for Cymric Neo-Pagans, one simply responded "no" (also the sole "no" to the query regarding LGBTQ+ inclusivity), and one (the same who dismissed the validity of the LGBTQ+ inclusivity question) responded defensively without answering the question: "Welsh people are, overwhelmingly, white. Sorry if that upsets anybody, and of course people who settle here can be from diverse ethnic backgrounds and enjoy full citizenship, but I'm not going to apologise for being a white person in Wales. We are not living on anybody else's stolen land. This little Whitey stayed at home, which has been true for time out of mind. Yma O Hyd".[85] It is of note that this participant also did not agree that inclusivity for those "who have NO [sic] Welsh ancestry or blood descent" was important, yet did not select "race or skin colour" as a determiner of Welshness, perhaps pointing to xenophobia specifically within the Neo-Pagan context or a belief that excluding non-whites from Cymric Neo-Paganism is not

[84] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture to be welcoming and inclusive of people who do not currently, or have never, lived in Cymru (Wales)?" Responses: Yes (59); No (2); I want to say more. (Please explain.) (12), Did not answer (1) "If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here": "Yes, but the people coming in to the culture do need an understanding that it's not 'theirs'. Even if they do have heritage from non living [sic] people. The air breathes differently in Wales! It's impossible to properly understand the culture, the myth and the community unless you are within it. I can understand that the impact of reading or watching something about Wales/ Welsh paganism can resonate with non-Welsh people and they want it! Especially if it turned up in 23 and [M]e results! But the socialisation process would have happened away from Wales and so they have little chance of properly 'getting it'. They are respected outsiders looking in, and should have an understanding that because they are a few steps away, it won't wholly make sense".

[85] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture and who are "white" European to be welcoming and inclusive of people who are not (or do not stereotypically appear to be) of "white" or European descent?" Responses: Yes (66); No (1); I want to say more. (Please explain.) (6); Did not answer (1). "If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here".

racist.[86] By contrast, one participant connected racial inclusivity to the broader Welsh nationalist movement: “Yes. It's an important element of contemporary Welsh nationalism to be clear that ‘Welshness’ is a personal, cultural commitment, not a genetic inheritance”.[87]

The above answers may also be considered alongside whether participants had “ever experienced or witnessed any exclusion, racism, and/or colonialism bias based on skin color, race, ethnicity, cultural background, indigeneity, nationality, and/or Welsh ancestry from other Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture into their practice”.[88] About 75% chose “No”, but five chose “Yes (witnessed)”, and two chose “Yes (experienced & witnessed)”, indicating they had personally been the target of such.[89] Among narrative answers, one noted they had never been in

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[86] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, ‘Section 2: Who Are Perceived to be Community Members and What is Important to Them?’, (Jotform, 2024), “Can or should persons who have NO Welsh ancestry or blood descent incorporate Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?” Responses: Yes (52), No (1), I want to say more. (Please explain.) (18), No answer (3, but all 3 gave a narrative response). “If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.”: “I would prefer people didn’t pretend to a culture with which they have no real affinity. People are quick enough to screech about ‘cultural appropriation’ if it is *any other* [sic] ethnic group”.

The fact that persons who adhere to exclusionary/racist ideologies or behaviors frequently do not perceive themselves or their actions as racist is well-documented, e.g.: Lentin, Alana, ‘Beyond Denial: ‘Not Racism’ as Racist Violence’ in *Unsettled Voices: Beyond Free Speech in the Late Liberal Era*, (London: Routledge, 2021); Stikkers, Kenneth, “‘ . . . But I’m Not Racist’: Toward a Pragmatic Conception of ‘Racism’”, *The Pluralist*, 9: 3, (2014), pp. 1–17; Raby, Rebecca, ‘‘There’s No Racism at My School, It’s Just Joking Around’: ramifications for anti‐racist education’, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 7: 4, (2004), pp. 367–383; and Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo & Tyrone A. Forman, “‘I Am Not a Racist But…’: Mapping White College Students’ Racial Ideology in the USA”, *Discourse & Society*, (2000), 11:1, pp. 50-85.

Regarding the prevalence of xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments in the U.K.: Abbas, Tahir, ‘Islamophobia as racialised biopolitics in the United Kingdom’, *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 46: 5, (2020) pp. 497-511; Rhodes, James & Natalie-Anne Hall, ‘Racism, Nationalism and the Politics of Resentment in Contemporary England’ in Solomons, John (ed.), *Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Racisms*, (London: Routledge, 2020); Rzepnikowska, Alina, ‘Racism and Xenophobia Experienced by Polish Migrants in the UK before and after Brexit Vote’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* (2018), 45: 1, pp. 61–77.

[87] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, ‘Section 2: Identity and Community Membership’, (Jotform, 2024): “Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture and who are “white” European to be welcoming and inclusive of people who are not (or do not stereotypically appear to be) of “white” or European descent? If you selected ‘I want to say more’ above, please explain here”.

[88] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, ‘Section 2: Identity and Community Membership’, (Jotform, 2024): “Have you ever experienced or witnessed any exclusion, racism, and / or colonialism bias based on skin color, race, ethnicity, cultural background, indigeneity, nationality, and / or Welsh ancestry from other Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture into their practice?” Responses: Yes (witnessed) (5); Yes (experienced & witnessed) (2); No (56); I want to say more (10); No answer (1). “If you selected ‘I want to say more’ above, please explain here”.

[89] *Ibid.*

a Cymric Neo-Pagan gathering at which there were any non-white attendees and thus acknowledged their lack of context in which to witness such.[90] One recounted having experienced exclusion for having a non-Welsh surname (despite the respondent's mother being Welsh), while others expressed that their experiences had been explicitly anti-racist.[91]

All three of the interviewed community leaders expressed strong opinions regarding racial inclusivity within the Welsh and Celtic cultural contexts. Mhara Starling was concerned to be clear that "the notion – that being Celtic is inherently tied to soil, to DNA, to blood, to any of these kinds of things … those ideas I personally consider rather tremendously scary and also dangerous."[92] She tied this in with the tension between Wales as an oppressed nation which yet has its own history of participation in colonizing others: "[W]e are a nation that has gone through a strange history of suppression, and … some people will say that we were essentially the blueprint for British colonisation,… … So, it's important to acknowledge that, but it's also important not to use that as a shield to try and [sic] deflect any, um, criticism that we have also participated in that colonialism. … it's important that when we talk about what it means to be Welsh, we accept and acknowledge that is part and package of our history".[93]

Kristoffer Hughes cautioned against gatekeeping in general: "[T]he second we start gatekeeping those practices, very quickly afterwards, what naturally ensues from that gatekeeping is fascism,

[90] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Have you ever experienced or witnessed any exclusion, racism, and / or colonialism bias based on skin color, race, ethnicity, cultural background, indigeneity, nationality, and / or Welsh ancestry from other Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture into their practice? Responses: Yes (witnessed) (5); Yes (experienced & witnessed) (2); No (56); I want to say more (10); No answer (1). If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here".
[91] *Ibid.*
[92] Brown, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].
[93] Brown, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].

bigotry, and racism. And we see that in the extreme right wing, sometimes religious movements, particularly within Anglo-Saxon traditions… … And, that's definitely what we've seen with some of these far right groups who then will take symbols that were *profoundly* sacred and have turned them into symbols of, um, alienation and- and hate, and often violence."[94] Hughes' comments regarding "Anglo-Saxon traditions" may be a reference to white nationalism in Heathenry which, due to its historical associations with Naziism, has already drawn a good bit of research and media attention in this arena.[95]

Dr. Morus-Baird shared the bluntest "thoughts or feelings regarding the use of Celtic symbols by white supremacists and openly racist groups", replying with an unapologetic "Yeah, they can all f*** [redacted curse word] right off. Um, and um, you can quote me on that" before expounding on his views tying ancestral purity to aristocratic classism: [96]

> "I think that there is a- a real crisis in modern identity… regardless of whether, you know, we- we want to talk about American politics or the idea of the nation-state, but in terms of a culture, that's just proof to me that, you know, culture is not determined by DNA; it's just not. Um, I think DNA, or blood, let's say, because that's- I think what people *really* mean when they say DNA, they mean blood. In the- in the traditional sense of ancestry.

[94] Brown, *Interview with Kristoffer Hughes*, (22 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].
[95] Gardell, Mattias, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Furth, Brett H., "Ethnic Neo-Pagan Altars and Ancestors in Texas: An Ethnoreligious Strategy to Reconfigure European Ancestry and Whiteness", *Western Folklore*, 76: 3, (2017), 313–45, *JSTOR*; Kurlander, Eric, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Strmiska, Michael F., "Pagan Politics in the 21st Century: 'Peace and Love' or 'Blood and Soil'?", *The Pomegranate*, 20:1, (2018), pp. 5-44.
[96] Brown, *Interview with Gwilym Morus-Baird*, (Part 1: 30 Apr 2025; Part 2: 19 May 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document]. I am quoting him on it, but redacting the actual word for the sake of professionalism in an academic work.

> … Which is, in many ways, quite an aristocratic idea, I would say. … You know, pure lineages, you know, can't marry the riffraff, you know, we've got to keep the blood pure, all that kind of stuff is intensely aristocratic. … [I]f I truly believe that, then- and I do, then of *course* culture is not something that you can gatekeep by claiming that it's only appropriate for people of Celtic blood to get involved in Celtic mythology".
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> — Dr. Gwilym Morus-Baird, quoted from Brown, Jennifer, *Interview with Gwilym Morus-Baird*, (Part 1: 30 Apr 2025; Part 2: 19 May 2025).

The survey results and interviews come together and begin to paint a picture of a Cymric Neo-Pagan community that is majority white European and middle-aged to elderly, has a high proportion of nonbinary genders with binary genders nearly evenly represented, lives mostly in the U.K. or one of its anglophone former colonies, and nearly half have lived or currently live in Wales. They tend to favor Druidry orders and have high engagement with the Welsh language. The majority support gender, ability, and racial-ethnic inclusivity but are less in agreement regarding how to define what it means to be Welsh, or even how to label themselves. There is something, however, that is universally precious to them – history.

Chapter 3: History, Cultural Appropriation, and Paths to Paganism

The Gravity of History & Academia

The intersections of Welsh identity and culture, intertwining with centuries-old roots in medieval bardic poetry and literature, Victorian-era Welsh pre-Druidry, and Neo-Paganism's often-present desire to build upon pre-Christian ideas, naturally leads to an emphasis on the need for Cymric Neo-Pagans to have cultural and historical awareness. This in turn predictably points to academia. It is no secret to those within and observing the Neo-Pagan community that a significant proportion of adherents are "often well-read people", demographics research showing that Neo-Pagans are more educated than the general populace in the U.S.[97] Indeed, two of the survey participants mentioned the need for "homework" in Neo-Paganism.[98] Some of the larger (still small relative to more popular religions) formal Neo-Pagan groups also require a certain amount of study before granting full membership.[99]

The need for a foundation of reliable knowledge about one's own Neo-Pagan path and/or cultural focus, and the history relevant to it, is further highlighted within the Neo-Pagan community due

[97] Aitamurto (2016), p. 487; Berger in Pizza and Lewis (2009), p. 160: "All the research indicates that Neopagans have a higher level of education than the typical American. … Although educational attainment varies regionally in the United States, this is not the case for Neopagans who maintain a high educational level regardless of region in which they reside".
[98] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Can or should persons who are entirely or mostly ignorant (unknowing) of Welsh history incorporate elements of Welsh culture in their Neo-Pagan practice? If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here.: 'It is really offensive when people appropriate Welsh language and culture and misquote or mispronounce it. If you want to use it, do some homework and get it right!'; 'Paganism is the group of faiths with homework[.] You can be a pagan and not fully research your faith, but you can enrichen [sic] your faith with the research you do'".
[99] For example: ADF training programs: <https://www.adf.org/training-practice>, UDM/ADO Awenydd member training course: <https://www.angleseydruidorder.co.uk/courses?tab=pathoftheawenydd>, OBOD training: <https://druidry.org/our-courses/train-in-druidry>. Many covens, both small and large, also have a required training and study period and curriculum before each step of initiation.

to a major feature of its own recent history – the lingering shadow of wariness cast by forgers, plagiarists, cults of personality, cultural misappropriation, and pseudohistories which have plagued the movement since its Victorian precursory inceptions and of which an ever-growing number of Neo-Pagans have become aware, with some insisting on correcting it and others hand-waving its significance.[100] In its infancy from the 1950s to about the 2000s, Neo-Paganism was so new and disorganized, and reputable sources so much more difficult and time-consuming to access, that it could be genuinely challenging for those outside academia to discern the validity of what relatively few Neo-Pagan publications were circulating. For some, this has led to the Neo-Pagan movement (and its public reputation) having become virtually synonymous with a sham due to a barrage of mishmashed pseudohistories, misinterpretations, personal spiritual views, and cultural misappropriation packaged (and often sold for profit) as "ancient wisdom" or similar.

Even with the explosion in accessibility of reputable sources on the internet, misinformation does persist in Neo-Paganism. However, persons both within and outside the Neo-Pagan community have called out these instances of misrepresentation and fraud, emphasizing the need for academic honesty and culturally and linguistically sensitive materials, creating the breeding ground for entire new sub-categories of Neo-Paganism in reaction, such as Reconstructionism, as

[100] Iolo Morganwg himself, integral to the origins of modern Druidry as previously discussed, is well-known as a forger. For more recent examples of such inaccuracies, refer to citations 42 and 43 for Celtic Wicca and Druidry, respectively, on pp. 33-34 in Chapter 2. For examples expressing the need for caution regarding cultural appropriation in the Neo-Pagan community: Blanton, Crystal, 'Culture and Community: Appropriation, Exchange and Modern Paganism', *The Wild Hunt: Pagan News & Perspectives*, (14 Nov 2014); Morus-Baird, Gwilym, *Celtic Source*, 'Spirituality and Cultural Appropriation with Dr Gwilym Morus-Baird', (YouTube, 30 January 2020), and O'Brien, Lora, 'A History of Pagan Religion: The Roots of NeoPaganism', *Irish Pagan School*, (20 Feb 2025).

For examples arguing against the significance of 'fakelore' and historical accuracy in the Neo-Pagan community: Mankey, Jason, 'Not Fakelore: The Witchcraft Revival', *Raise the Horns*, (Patheos, 12 June 2015), and Hale, Amy, 'On Paganism, Fakelore, and Tired Conversations about Authenticity', *Medium*, (18 Nov 2018).

well as sparking more scrutiny even within well-established traditions.[101] Some Neo-Pagans can be quite deferential to the works of academia, citing relevant publications to inspire or legitimize their practice or interpretations, a growing tendency which has led to certain academics such as Ronald Hutton becoming household names among many Neo-Pagans and to academics being invited as guest speakers at Neo-Pagan events.[102] This trend has been especially notable from about the 2010s as reputable information (although sometimes outdated, due to copyright limitations) continues to become more accessible and as the Neo-Pagan community at-large continues to experience a backlash against both cultural misappropriation and "fakelore".[103]

As for Welsh cultural influences in particular, the increased demand for more honestly-presented Neo-Pagan publications has resulted in more works with proper bibliographies, the use of

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[101] For further discussion of the Neo-Pagan concern with cultural (mis)appropriation and complex factors which affect it, see: Magliocco, (2004), especially Chapter 7 'The Heart Is the Only Nation: Neo-Paganism, Ethnic Identity, and the Construction of Authenticity', pp. 205-238; Lupa, *Talking about the Elephant: An Anthology of Neopagan Perspectives on Cultural Appropriation*, (Megalithica Books, 2008); Magliocco, 'Reclamation, Appropriation and the Ecstatic Imagination in Modern Pagan Ritual' in Pizza & Lewis (2009), pp. 223-240; Lewis, James R., 'Celts, Druids and the Invention of Tradition' in Pizza & Lewis (2009), pp. 479-493; and Blanton, 'Culture and Community: Appropriation, Exchange and Modern Paganism', *The Wild Hunt*, (2014).

[102] For example, University of Wales Trinity Saint David's chair of Celtic Studies, Dr. Jane Cartwright, was keynote speaker at the Sisterhood of Avalon's annual Ninefold Festival in 2022 <https://www.instagram.com/p/CgmrxKOrBfT/?hl=en>, and Dr. Delyth Badder, Welsh folklorist and Honorary Research Fellow at St. Fagans National Museum of History in Caerdydd, was a presenter at the Neuadd Ogwen's Welsh Magic Day 2024 alongside Kristoffer Hughes, Mhara Starling, Dr. Gwilym Morus-Baird (the three Welsh Neo-Pagan community leader interviewees in this study) and storyteller Gwyn Edwards (member of OBOD).

[103] Dziak, Mark, 'Fakelore (pseudo-folklore), *Research Starters*, (EBSCO, 2023); Oxford Reference, *Fakelore*, (Oxford University Press, 2025) <https://neuaddogwen.com/en/events/welsh-magic-day-2024/>.

Note: *Fakelore* has been adopted by the Neo-Pagan community from folklorists (communities which themselves are not without their individuals who straddle both) as a colloquial term of negative connotation and play on "folklore" referring to new stories or folklore misattributed as traditional or to pseudohistory such as the idea that some form of Wicca or any form of Neo-Paganism has survived "underground" since pre-Christian times, or that such was handed down since "the Burning Times" (i.e. the Inquisition and Witch Craze periods) via small groups or families in secret, which were once cornerstones of popular publications within the genre and are noticeably missing from more recent works. It may also refer, in the Neo-Pagan context, to cases of cultural misappropriation where cultural traditions of folklore or practice are misrepresented, or invented and mislabeled.

Examples of frequently cited older academic Welsh sources in Neo-Paganism include: Rhŷs, John, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom*, (Williams and Norgate, 1888); Rhŷs, John, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, Volumes 1 and 2, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), and Williams, Ifor, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1930); Williams, Ifor, *Canu Llywarch Hen*, (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1935); Williams, Ifor, *Canu Taliesin gyda Rhagymadrodd a Nodiadau*, (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1960).

higher-quality translations, and more care being taken by authors to differentiate between their own ideas and those attested in history or tradition. This has been the case even in short, introductory-level materials targeting lay Neo-Pagan audiences who may be totally new to Welsh culture.[104] These developments, and the environment which fostered them, give context to the concern among many Neo-Pagans regarding historical accuracy and cultural misappropriation.

A strong negative reaction towards those ignorant of Welsh history among survey participants reflects this concern, with the query "Can or should persons who are entirely or mostly ignorant (unknowing) of Welsh history incorporate elements of Welsh culture in their Neo-Pagan practice?" garnering the most "No" responses of any question in the survey at over 59%.[105] A majority of open-text responses also indicated disapproval and/or concerns of cultural (mis)appropriation without a proper grounding in Welsh history.[106] The value of Welsh history

[104] For example, the following is representative of bibliographies in books targeting lay practitioners of Celtic Welsh Neo-Paganism and Druidry by Kristoffer Hughes from the early 2010s onward, including titles such as *The Book of Celtic Magic: Transformative Teachings from the Cauldron of Awen* (2014), *Celtic Goddess of Inspiration: Cerridwen* (2021), and *The Book of Druidry: A Complete Introduction to the Magic and Wisdom of the Celtic Mysteries* (2023): Hughes, Kristoffer, 'Bibliography', *From the Cauldron Born: Exploring the Magic of Welsh Legend & Lore*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2012), pp. 267-273: "NLW MS 5276D. Chronicle of the History of the World. Elis Gruffudd. ca. 1552. National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 111, Hanes Taliesin. John Jones. 1607. National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 2. Llyfr Taliesin (Book of Taliesin). Fourteenth Century. National Library of Wales," and further citations of the works of scholars Andrew Breeze (Four Courts Press), Rachel Bromwich (University of Wales), Simon D. Evans (University of Wales), Iestyn R. Daniel (University of Wales CAWCS), Sioned Davies (Oxford University Press), Patrick K. Ford (University of California Press and University of Wales Press), Miranda Aldhouse-Green (various publishers including University of Wales CAWCS), Marged Haycock (CMCS [Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies] and University of Wales Press), Ronal Hutton (Yale University Press), Rhiannon Ifans (Y Ganolfan Astudiaethau Addysg [The Education Studies Center]), and John T. Koch (Celtic Studies Publications), as well as numerous Welsh- and English-language renditions of Welsh traditional folklore. Llewellyn-published author Mhara Starling, whose books are intended for a lay Neo-Pagan audience who may have no knowledge of Welsh culture or language, likewise cites similar sources.

[105] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Can or should persons who are entirely or mostly ignorant (unknowing) of Welsh history incorporate elements of Welsh culture in their Neo-Pagan practice?" Responses: Yes (8); No (44); I want to say more. (Please explain.) (22; 26 total open-text responses, as some who selected "Yes" or "No" also responded in open text). "If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here".

[106] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Can or should persons who are entirely or mostly ignorant (unknowing) of Welsh history incorporate elements of Welsh culture in their Neo-Pagan practice?" Responses: Yes (8); No (44); I want to say more. (Please explain.) (22; 26 total open-text responses, as some who selected "Yes" or "No" also responded in open text). "If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here". Examples of negative responses or those qualified by a preference for

was repeated in the later question, “Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture to learn about the history of Cymru (Wales) and the isle of Britain?”, with over 94% of respondents selecting “Yes”, and narrative answers all expressing more complex versions of the affirmative, rendering this the only question in the entire survey on which all respondents agreed.[107]

The three community leader interviewees also held history in high esteem, with Dr. Morus-Baird going so far as to say “there is no Wales without Welsh cultural history”: “I don’t think that it’s possible to be a human without culture. Uh, and culture means engaging with cultural artifacts that are historical, that have a long past, that are deeply rooted in the history of where you’ve come from. And so, for Welsh folks in particular, I think it’s really important that we understand what our cultural history is in detail … not for us to make it fit what we want it to fit, not for us to ventriloquize the dead, to make … our ancestors tell us what we want to hear, but just so that

willingness to learn include: “It's complicated. It's not a closed religion/culture but you shout [sic] make the effort to learn”, “Based on the same spirit of my responses, I would say No. I would hope that a practitioner approaching Welsh Culture this way would learn about Welsh Culture before incorporating it into their Neo-Pagan practices”, “I don't think ignorance has a place at the table”, “Yes, but they should strive to do some research. I feel that if they are drawn to a Welsh deity or custom, they will naturally begin to become interested in Welsh culture”, “I think people should respect welsh [sic] culture like the [sic] would or should respect native American, Aborigines etc. Part of that is learning some history of Wales or you get the Mabon thing every year with people still not understanding who Mabon is”, “I think people should learn why they are incorporating welsh culture in their practice and be able to articulate reasons for including it”, “Again, I think you can, but you -should- from a moral standpoint learn about it”, “It depends on how they're incorporating it. If it's being done in a way that culturally appropriates and doesn't respect the culture, probably not. But at one point in time, many who incorporated Welsh culture into their practice were probably ignorant of things but I don't think that automatically discounts being able to honour Welsh culture in their practice”, “They should make a point to at least familiarise themselves with the Mabinogion”, “They can but I would exoect [sic] and like them to seek and take up opportunities to learn more”, and “... If you have no concept about the culture the ideas/stories/folklore arose from then you cannot fully engage in the practice and it is no longer cultural elements-it is just words. I belive [sic] that whenever a person chooses to take an [sic] particular concept/idea as part of their practice they should have an understanding of where that concept arose from. If we totally unlink history with modern practices then we should at least be honest in admitting we are purely inventing practice using a few randomn [sic] names that sound good, rather than claiming we are following any sort of ancient (or even old/traditional) ideas”.

[107] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, ‘Section 2: Identity and Community Membership’, (Jotform, 2024): “Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture to learn about the history of Cymru (Wales) and the isle of Britain?” Responses: Yes (69); No (0); I want to say more. (Please explain.) (4); Did not answer (1) “If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here”.

we have an appreciation of what our history is, as a way of rooting ourselves and our identities and our culture in, in this very rich vein of history. … I think … there is no Wales without Welsh cultural history…".[108]

Kristoffer Hughes remarked several times on the importance of history, tying it to his personal journey towards Neo-Paganism and to modern revivals of community-wide cultural traditions such as the Mari Lwyd and well-dressing.[109] Mhara Starling referenced the connections between history and her Welsh identity and embrace of the Welsh language.[110] She also emphasized the

[108] Brown, *Interview with Gwilym Morus-Baird*, (Part 1: 30 Apr 2025; Part 2: 19 May 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].

[109] Brown, *Interview with Kristoffer Hughes*, (22 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document]: "And then, as I grew up into my teenage years I became more aware of Welsh history, of this ancient, romantic priest caste in the deep past. You know the Druids. And when I was analysing my own relationships to the landscape, I was aware that my viewpoint, my ideas of divinity, was locked into the land rather than to this über being in the sky that Christianity was talking about, that I just couldn't resonate. It never quenched my spiritual thirst, but the landscape did. So from a very- a *very* young age, from I'd say around 13 years old, when I had an understanding of what, and I didn't necessarily have the words like animism or polytheism, I didn't have those words in my vocabulary. But, I certainly had a sense of that within the landscape, and there was *some* material available, even though it was nowhere near as easily accessible as it is now. And I discovered that I was more — I had leanings towards what *could* be described as a paganism rather than anything that was uh, revealed religion. You know? So, I became, I guess, a self-identified pagan in my mid-teens, and- and it just stuck with me"; "And we know that there was a Mari Lwyd here on Anglesey around about the 1920s, and that was in Llangadwaladr, which is only around the corner from where I'm currently sitting. But we don't know anything else. There was nothing much recorded other than there was a Mari Lwyd. And, and I don't think that's unusual, because when you read one of the first accounts of the Mari Lwyd, historically speaking, it was a book by I forget the man's name, but it was called um, *A Tour Through a Part of North Wales*. And he describes the Mari Lwyd tradition in what is the town of Ruthin, the market town of Ruthin, well, that's North East Wales. That isn't the South West of Wales where that stronghold of the Mari Lwyd has been perpetuated for a long time. He was describing it in North Wales. So, and you'll often get people going, oh, it wasn't a North Walian tradition. And you're like, yeah, but when you read the history books, actually it was. It seems as if it was prevalent in most agricultural areas or pastoral areas. And there's certainly a record of there having been one here on Anglesey", and "So, we've got, currently, a bunch- and they're- these are secular people, they have, as far as I'm aware, no inclination towards Neo-Paganism, they're in the village of Llangoed adjacent to Beaumaris, and they found that there used to be a well in Llangoed that was dressed in a particular way at a particular time of year. So, they found this in, you know, folkloric records, and they were like, 'Oh, this is amazing! Why did people do this?' So they looked into it, and they looked into the- because, the well was so important, they didn't really have taps! You know. We- we had community wells and springs. And then, so, on [?] hill, they actually found this- this spring, this well, that was completely overgrown. Nobody even knew it existed; it had fallen out of memory. So they found it, they reclaimed it, but then they reclaimed that tradition".

[110] Brown, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document]: "... it always felt like there was something holding me back from being able to connect with my culture. And, it was only when I found, um, the more enchanting elements of my culture that I started to feel as though I had found an in to feeling pride in my own cultural identity. So, by embracing Paganism, and magic, and witchcraft and such, I ultimately ended up embracing folklore and folk traditions and stories. But beyond that, I also embraced the language itself. And the history of the language itself is something that is inherently quite magical".

importance of historical knowledge to inform opinions regarding who may incorporate Welsh cultural elements into Neo-Pagan practice, given that Welsh people historically immigrated, colonized, and settled in various places around the world, taking their culture, place names, and traditions with them, saying the Welsh "weren't so precious about it once upon a time", tying history back into the question of cultural appropriation.[111]

All this emphasis on history is not to insinuate that Cymric Neo-Pagans are collectively under the illusion of an unbroken history of Pagan practice from pre-Christian ancient times.[112] That modern Neo-Pagan Druids, for example, "draw a *link* between themselves and the ancient druids who served as ritual specialists in parts of Iron Age Western Europe" [emphasis added], does not *per se* imply that the link is believed to be direct, unbroken, nor self-unaware in the liberalness with which it is applied.[113] Of course, Neo-Pagans and Victorian-era Romanticists are not alone in drawing links between medieval Celtic literature and possible origins in pre-Christian Celtic culture, nor in referring to medieval Welsh literature as "mythology" or its figures as "gods", as

[111] Brown, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document]: "So we know, for example, that it [the Mari Lwyd] was carried out in places like Wrexham, and the reason it was carried out in places like Wrexham is because somebody from the south of Wales moved and took that tradition with them. So, in that same kind of energy of the way in which people would, at some point, have moved from one community to another and taken their practices with them, I think it's important that we acknowledge that history, acknowledge the fact that we weren't so precious about it once upon a time, so why should we be precious about it now? Um, it also feeds into the idea that, you know, we have to acknowledge our own past, our own history when it comes to colonialism, our own history when it comes to the way in which we, um, added to the colonisation of certain landscapes today. And so, to ignore that and to state that people outside of Wales cannot participate or cannot practice these traditions unless they do it within the confines of our country today is to ignore that history and to ignore the fact that people in areas such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and various places across the world have a connection, whether it is by ancestry, by culture, by whatever, and so they have a right to participate in these things as well".

[112] Relatively recent publications on Neo-Paganism have increasingly acknowledged this, the effects of which are referenced in Rathouse, William, 'Contemporary Pagans and the Study of the Ancestors' in Williams, Howard and Giles, Melanie (eds.), *Archaeologists and the Dead*, (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 334: "Lewis and Hammer (2007: 15) note that since Hutton's (2001) exposition of the recent genesis of Wicca, contemporary Pagans have acknowledged the lack of continuity between the paganisms of antiquity and contemporary Paganisms and are therefore uniquely unconcerned about legitimating their beliefs and practices through the past."

[113] White, Ethan Doyle, 'Cutting the Mistletoe: An Introduction to Modern Religious Druidry' in Ethan Doyle White & Jonathan Woolley (eds.), *Modern Religious Druidry: Studies in Paganism, Celtic Identity, and Nature Spirituality*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), introductory section.

many respected scholars have done the same, and indeed, Neo-Pagan interpretations are informed by said scholars.[114] Nevertheless, as Kristoffer Hughes plainly puts it in *The Book of*

[114] Following are but a few examples of the many, many instances of well-regarded scholars for whom Celtic Studies are their life's work referring in academic publications to medieval Welsh (and Irish) literature as mythology or a survival of former mythology and its figures as deities or former deities:

Aldhouse-Green, Miranda, *Enchanted Wales: Myth and Magic in Welsh Storytelling*, (Calon, 2023), p. 30: "It remains, though, that the interesting, and perhaps date-driven, difference between the superhuman beings that inhabit **the myths of Wales** and Ireland is that **the Welsh characters are not overtly displayed as deities**, while the pagan pantheon of Ireland is blatantly expressed as such. It seems as though, **in Welsh mythic tradition, the beings that had once been gods within a pagan pantheon had been demoted and were treated not as divine but as heroes**" [emphasis added];

Warmind, Morten, 'Once More the Celtic Horse-Goddess', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 36, (2016), pp. 231-240, pp. 234-6: "It cannot be emphasized enough that the Welsh and Irish tale are literature. **They can be demonstrated to contain loose elements of myths – Patrick Ford uses the happy term 'detritus'--reordered into fiction**. … Admittedly it [the preceding argument] presumes that the insular literature actually does contain mythological 'detritus' and that the supernatural references are not inventions of scholars of the ninth or tenth century. **The fact that later forms of names from Gallo-Roman inscriptions, such as Nodens, Brigantia, Maponus and possibly Catubodua, turn up in medieval literature strengthens this assumption, as these names are clear evidence of some kind of continuity over the temporal divide**" [emphasis added];

Bromwich, Rachel, (Ed. & trnsl.), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, 4th edn., (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), p. lxxii: "**They [the Four Branches of the Mabinogi] are fundamentally the stories of the old Brittonic gods from whom the leading Welsh dynasties in early historical times claimed descent, and as such they are directly affiliated to the canonical tradition whose preservation was a primary concern of the bards**" [emphasis added], p. 288: "I suggested previously (SEBH 131-2) that ***Beli Mawr* was the ancestor deity** from whom the principal dynasties who ruled in early Wales claimed to be descended. This view gains support from Ifor Williams's suggestion (Cyf. Ll. a Ll. 12) that ***Beli Mawr* is to be identified with the Gaulish god *Belenos* or *Belinos***" [emphasis added], p. 330: "***Don* is to be equated with *Danu*, *Anu*, the mother of the gods in the Irish pantheon**. Her name is preserved in that of the River Danube (*Donau*), and perhaps in that of the River Dee, for which the form *Dyfrdonwy* is attested" [emphasis added], p. 449: "**Modron verch Auallach** [sic] … ***Modron* < Celt. *Mātrŏna,* 'the 'Great Mother', the deity** who gave her name to the River Marne (ACS II, 468)" [emphasis added aside from that marked (sic)];

Davies, Sioned (trnsl.), *The Mabinogion*, (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. x: "**Resonances of Celtic mythology are apparent throughout these four tales [the *Mabinogi*]**, …" [emphasis added].

Carey, John. "A British Myth of Origins?" *History of Religions*, 31: 1, (1991), pp. 24–38, p. 35: "The considerations set forth above **suggest that in *Math* we have the remnant, much changed but in many respects remarkably intact, of a myth** describing the end of a paradisal state of being, and the emergence of the conditions of mortality" [emphasis added];

Zeiser, Sarah E., 'Performing a Literary Paternity Test: "Bonedd yr Arwyr" and the Fourth Branch of the "Mabinogi"', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 28, (2008), pp. 200-215, p. 200: "**The mythical characters that populate the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*** exist in a world of unexplained mysteries…" [emphasis added];

Hemming, Jessica, 'Reflections on Rhiannon and the Horse Episodes in "Pwyll"', *Western Folklore*, 57: 1, (Winter, 1998), pp. 19-40, p. 19: "The text is full of tantalizing hints that she [Rhiannon] is more than simply a British chieftain's daughter who happens to take a fancy to the Prince of Dyfed. **Rather, she seems to be a complex blend of euhemerized Celtic goddess, fairy mistress, folktale heroine, and elegantly imagined literary character**" [emphasis added].

Koch, John T., 'Some Suggestions and Etymologies Reflecting upon **the Mythology of the Four Branches**', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 9, (1989), pp. 1-10 [emphasis added].

Ford, Patrick (Ed., trnsl.), *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales*, (The Regents of the University of California, 1977), p. ix: "**The *mabinogi* and the other tales are rich sources of Celtic mythological tradition**, but they are not less impressive for their literary virtuosity" [emphasis added].

Druidry: "Modern Druidry is precisely that – modern – and it is inspired by the past, not defined by it".[115]

All three interviewees shared extensive explanations of why they "tend to view some figures from Christian-era medieval Welsh texts, such as Rhiannon or Cerridwen or Gwyn ap Nudd, as possible survivals of figures who were previously seen as deities even though [they] do know that they're not referred to as deities in the primary texts and that those texts are from the Christian era".[116] Dr. Morus-Baird, whose PhD is in Welsh medieval literature and has continued to study it extensively, emphasized:

> "[T]here isn't just one experience of a cultural artifact like a myth or a story. … [Cerridwen's] story does express a type of mythology. It is *mythic* … it contains within it the latent possibility for religious expression, … and we can say it's a mythology, because we can compare it to other stories, usually older stories, and find similar elements … Now, of course, that doesn't mean that Cerridwen … survives from the Iron Age complete. She is the fruit of an evolving tradition where these *types* of characters, and these *types* of symbol [sic], these types of mythologies are being played with, from generation to generation. So, when I say things like, you know, 'maybe we can trace Cerridwen's roots, and her mythology as a goddess back into earlier periods', I'm kind of saying, 'Well, there must be some cultural roots to these elements in Welsh culture'. And to be frank, it would be weird if there wasn't, yeah? It would be odd if … the culture of the Celtic Iron Age did not persist in some evolved form into the early medieval period. I

[115] Hughes, *The Book of Druidry*, (2023), p. 180.
[116] Brown, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025); Brown, *Interview with Kristoffer Hughes*, (22 Apr 2025); and Brown, *Interview with Gwilym Morus-Baird*, (Part 1: 30 Apr 2025; Part 2: 19 May 2025) [full transcripts included within the appendices of this document].

> think it's kind of ridiculous to claim that it didn't … because culture doesn't work like that. …
>
> "[W]e've got evidence for, you know, deities like Nodens, the name surviving in an evolved form, into the father of Gwyn ap Nudd. Uh, Lleu, Lugh, the earlier precursor in the ethnonym [sic] Lugus … we've got evidence for these survivals, so I don't think it's unreasonable to assume that as well as these names evolving and surviving, that elements of the myth evolved and survived. But, we have to be clear that we can only make educated guesses, that's all we can do. … but … they're not unreasonable guesses …"[117]

Mhara Starling expressed a similar sentiment regarding linguistic survivals of attested pre-Christian deities in Welsh medieval literature.[118] However, she also argued for the validity of Neo-Paganism in its own right as a modern religion:

> "[T]he modern perspective is ignored. So, yes, we have no evidence that Cerridwen and Rhiannon and Arianrhod were deities in the ancient world at all. But, why can't they be now? I don't understand why there is this focus intently on ensuring that people are aware that they were not deities in the past. Most people who are into Paganism … are absolutely aware of that fact, but … [t]here are shrines built to them right now in the modern day, and people interact with these entities as though they are deities *today*. So,

[117] Brown, *Interview with Gwilym Morus-Baird*, (Part 1: 30 Apr 2025; Part 2: 19 May 2025) [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].

[118] Brown, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025) [full transcript included within the appendices of this document]: "So, within the realms of academia, you need proof. You need citations. You need to be able to link it back to something. So, this is a little speculative, but one of my arguments is always: if we are aware that there are some names in the Mabinogi that are cognate with older pre-Christian Brythonic deities, why couldn't it be possible that perhaps some of the entities or characters that exist in the Mabinogi had a version that existed prior to Christianity that we just now don't have any evidence of? … hopefully that can help people within academia understand Pagans a little bit more, is that the undercurrent of belief is that perhaps these characters were not gods in the way they exist now, but that they carry an echo of a divine entity which perhaps might have existed prior to them. And, they continue a lineage of something that harkens back to an older world."

> it's almost the difference between looking at these stories as being stuck in a stagnant … medieval past, versus looking at them as living, pulsating, breathing stories that are still inspiring people and still influencing the lives of people across the world today. … So, to me, it doesn't *need* to be validated by some ancient past, because it's existing and happening right now in front of us, and I think that's rather intriguing."[119]

Kristoffer Hughes also made an argument for the modernity of Neo-Paganism, pointing out that ancient Celtic cultures quite famously did not write religious things down. He also cited scholarly interpretations of potential pre-Christian roots to some of the medieval literature:

> "So, I don't claim to practice a pre-Christian tradition; I practice a Druidry that is very much rooted in modernity, … none of us are under any illusions that those things are not from a particular point in time. You know, we don't have myths written from 2,000 years ago. They didn't write *anything* 2,000 years ago … in Celtic cultures. And there have been arguments made by people like Sir Ifor Williams and other academics … that when you look at … the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, … it seems as if it's reflecting a time before the Romans came here. … Whether they have tentative links to deities in the past is kind of irrelevant to modern practice, because we're not a pre-Christian tradition. We're *inspired*, perhaps, by pre-Christian classical records, by pre-Christian archaeological evidence and records, but they're inspirations. They add to the pool of modern Druidry for this link or connection – again, however tenuous – to an ancient Druidic past that we're not trying to recreate, but rather *reclaim* that title and renewing it for modernity".[120]

[119] Brown, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025) [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].
[120] Brown, *Interview with Kristoffer Hughes*, (22 Apr 2025) [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].

In a similar vein to the acknowledgement that the ancient Celts did not write much: in demanding archaeological inscriptions or shrines or statuary remains for pre-Christian – and especially pre-Roman-colonization

Cultural Misappropriation

Discussion of cultural (mis)appropriation is ongoing in Wales as in other parts of the world.[121] Survey questions regarding the importance of supporting and learning from Welsh people and regarding inclusivity for persons not born or raised in Wales, or who have never lived in Wales, or who have no Welsh ancestry all provoked cultural (mis)appropriation concerns.[122] A common theme regarding the need to "respect" Welsh culture and to listen to Welsh voices manifested across many responses to questions of this nature, indicating a majority of participants hold permissive attitudes towards non-Welsh persons, persons without Welsh ancestry, and/or those who have never been to Wales incorporating Welsh culture into Neo-Pagan practice *if* there is an effort to avoid culturally misappropriative behaviors.[123]

– Brythonic (or Goidelic, for that matter) Paganism, academia is ignoring the impossibility of these within the pre-Roman Celtic cultural context, as ancient Celtic cultures viewed iconographic religious artifacts, including writing, as taboo, which explains the amazing dearth of pre-Roman-invasion archaeological evidence for Celtic religion. It would be comparable to future scholars claiming Islam does not currently exist due to no statuary or art left behind portraying Allah or Mohammed – it is taboo to the culture; of course there is none. In combination with the fact that the Roman invasion of the Isle of Britain was quite late – butting right up against the introduction of Christianity, leaving little time (historically speaking) for *interpretatio Romana* and its accompanying Pagan religious iconography to catch on among Brythonic Celts – it is only logical that there is almost nothing to find. Rankin, David, 'The Celts through Classical Eyes', in *The Celtic World* ed. by Miranda J. Green, (London: Routledge, 1995/2005), 21-32, Chapter 3: "Brennus is said to have mocked the anthropomorphic statues of the gods he saw in Delphi" (p. 25), and "Greek sources knew that **it was against Celtic sentiments to make naturalistic likenesses of the gods**" (p. 26, emphasis added).

[121] Morus-Baird, Gwilym, *Celtic Source*, 'Spirituality and Cultural Appropriation with Dr Gwilym Morus-Baird', (YouTube, 30 January 2020); Price, Stephen, 'Mari Lwyd and the Appropriation of Welsh Mythology', *Nation.Cymru*, (Nation.Cymru, 3 Dec 2023); Unknown Author, 'Mari Lwyd Discovered Hiding Out Down Under', *Nation.Cymru*, (Nation.Cymru, 15 Jul 2024); Aitken, Catriona, 'Our Culture Isn't Fantasy – So Stop Misusing It for Mystical Books', *BBC News*, (4 Jan 2025); Johnson, Jimmy, 'Is Romantasy Ruining Welsh (and Scottish and Irish) Culture?', *The Welsh Viking* YouTube Channel, (YouTube, 20 Jan 2025).

[122] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Who Are Perceived to be Community Members and What is Important to Them?', (Jotform, 2024).

[123] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): open-text responses to "Can or should persons who were NOT born or raised within the borders of Cymru (Wales) incorporate or centre Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?", "Can or should persons who have NEVER lived in Cymru (Wales) incorporate or centre Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?", and "Can or should persons who have NO Welsh ancestry or blood descent incorporate Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?" such as: "Yes, if they understand the Welsh cultural elements that they are using in their practice", "Yes, but immersing into the culture to honor where it all came from", "I think yes, but it's imperative to do so in a respectful manner. Learn more than the Welsh deities. Learn the history and how to speak at least some of the language. Engage with Welsh media and, if you can, support Welsh creators", "Yes, as long as significant veneration around the use of the culture of Cymru, the history of Cymru and language is endeavoured", "As long as

Some compared (mis)appropriation of Welsh culture to the experiences of cultures originating outside of Europe who have suffered colonization and/or genocide.[124] Some participants held exclusionary views towards non-Welsh people, while others questioned the motives of persons who do not live in Wales wanting to incorporate Welsh practices or venerate Welsh deities.[125]

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they do it respectfully", "Borrow but don't appropriate", "It depends on the sincerity and depth of their adoption of the culture", "So long as someone incorporates Welsh cultural practices respectfully and listens to the voices of those who live in the culture, I see no issue with someone incorporating Welsh cultural practice", "I think yes, provided they do the necessary research on the lore, customs and language. They should recognise that they should not be the ones spreading information without extensive research", "While I would still tentatively answer 'Yes', I would hope that a person from a different culture would approach practices based on Welsh Culture in the spirit of learning and understanding, rather than aesthetic or 'flavour'", "There are a lot of reasons to practice Welsh paganism. I think that if you are neither of Welsh descent nor born in wales [sic] or live there, I would expect a lot of self reflection to avoid exotisizing the culture", and "I would say this is a matter of sincerity. Many of the Welsh elements of Neo-Pagan practice, such as Y Mabinogion or Hiraeth, are often misrepresented or misunderstood. This is not unique to Welsh Culture at all, and much of European Mythology has experienced similar things, but Welsh culture is becoming increasingly prominent on a more international level, and as such is exposed to more of this. However, where a sincere effort is made to research and understand the aspects of Welsh Culture that are incorporated into Neo-Pagan Practices, I would answer 'Yes'".

Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture to support and learn from persons who were born in Cymru (Wales), grew up in Cymru, and / or have lived in Cymru?" Responses: Yes (50); No (7); I want to say more. (Please explain.) (16); No answer (1). Five questioned whether growing up or living in Wales made one better qualified to teach Welsh history, traditions, "mythology" (presumably medieval literature, as this is usually what is meant by this in the Neo-Pagan context specific to Welsh culture) or cultural practices compared to those who have studied it or work with these professionally (regardless of where they are from), one mentioning that many Welsh people are not particularly interested in their own culture. Others expressed the importance of listening to Welsh voices in order to avoid cultural appropriation or "cultural hurdles" and to avoid excluding Welsh people.

[124] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): open-text responses to "Can or should persons who were NOT born or raised within the borders of Cymru (Wales) incorporate or centre Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?", "Can or should persons who have NEVER lived in Cymru (Wales) incorporate or centre Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?", and "Can or should persons who have NO Welsh ancestry or blood descent incorporate Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?", for example: "Welsh is a minority culture in the UK and should be treated with the same respect as other groups that have experienced prolonged cultural suppression, attempted eradication and appropriation. We are not a closed practice, but neopagans outside the UK should be aware of our history"; "I believe I agree yes on this, but also as a mestizo/Mexicano/Chicano/whatever, I am very much aware that I avoid cultural (mis)appropriation"; "Provided they are respectful of our traditions, and don't attempt to 'pretty' them up, why not. I live in America. Many Native American tribes allow non native [sic] people [to] join them in traditional experiences, provided those people are respectful. I think we should be the same", and "I would prefer people didn't pretend to a culture with which they have no real affinity. People are quick enough to screech about 'cultural appropriation' if it is *any other* [sic] ethnic group" (the lattermost response being from the same participant who refused to apologize for being a white person in Wales).

[125] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): open-text responses to "Can or should persons who were NOT born or raised within the borders of Cymru (Wales) incorporate or centre Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?", "Can or should persons who have NEVER lived in Cymru (Wales) incorporate or centre Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?", and "Can or should persons who have NO Welsh ancestry or blood descent incorporate Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?"

Example responses include: "If you have no relationship with Wales I would struggle to understand why you would but I think everyone should feel free to explore what they are interested in. Personally, had I not spent a

Legitimizing the right to incorporate Welsh culture through ancestry was a common strategy, aligning with the popular view in the survey that Welsh ancestry at least partially defines one's Welshness.[126] A few rejected the significance of ancestry, while a small number stated that they had no issue with others incorporating Welsh culture at all.[127]

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significant time living in Wales I would be unlikely to incorporate it", "I rather wish they wouldn't, if I'm honest", "While people who don't come from or descend from the British Isles are of course free to believe in whatever they like, cultural appropriation can be seen as disingenuous and disrespectful. However I can see how someone who moves to Wales and lives here a long time can be called by the gods here, as the spirits places are an important part of the religion", and "Much of the culture we now call Welsh is relevant to all parts of Britain, since the whole island was once Brythonic speaking. There is no reason to think that folk practices or deities/mythology were enclosed within the area now described by the modern English/Welsh border before it was drawn. I wouldn't limit the 'right to incorporate' to just people living in Britain - but this is a very important factor in my own spiritual orientation. (I lived most of my life in Yr Hen Ogledd.)".

[126] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Can or should persons who were NOT born or raised within the borders of Cymru (Wales) incorporate or centre Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?", "Can or should persons who have NEVER lived in Cymru (Wales) incorporate or centre Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?", and "Can or should persons who have NO Welsh ancestry or blood descent incorporate Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?", examples include the following responses: "I wouldn't restrict it to Wales but I might to the UK and Ireland, and to those who descend from there. Many fellow Welsh people hate to admit it but the British Isles are ethnically pretty well mixed together at this point, not only that but the traditions we might call 'Welsh Paganism' were not restricted to modern Wales but all of Great Britain and was heavily influenced by Ireland"; "Yes, not least of all because of the fact that what we in the current day call 'Welsh' culture/language/ belief etc. was found throughout at least a lot of the rest of the island Britain, and there are some nearby areas of England that are known to have been ethnically and culturally indistinguishable from the 'Welsh' across the nearby border"; "Wales is just an intersubjective thing – didn't exist asa [sic] stand alone nation when Brythonic was prevalent. Plenty of those outside of Wales would have relevant ancestors"; "We have a contingent of Welsh and Cornish folks descended from immigrant miners in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan...of course they should celebrate their heritage"; "If they are descendants of the British, yes. Ancestor work is an important part of the religion. But I would encourage them to travel here as spirits of specific places are also an important part"; "Additionally, sometimes a second-hand exposure to Welsh culture can still be an extremely meaningful one. E.g. if a person[']s parents are Welsh, and passionate about passing on the customs, language, etc.", and "A difficult question to answer. So much of my understanding of my belief system (welsh [sic] animist pagan) is tied up in the living, active landscape and culture of the place I belong (south wales valleys) that I struggle to understand why someone with no knowledge or experience of place/landscape would want to include these elements. Maybe as a form of ancestor worship".

[127] *Ibid.*: "Yes, as it is impossible to know what percentage of your ancestry was originally Welsh (Brythonic people), any of the most involved Welsh druids and pagans today could be 100 percent Anglo-Saxon/ Viking DNA/'blood'. Also someone who has come to live in Wales only a year ago could have more reverence to Welsh culture/history/druidic past than someone who's family have been in Wales for hundreds of years", "Blood doesn't matter; culture and conviction does", and "Blood is irrelevant. Personal connection can be an entirely individualistic thing".

For example re: no issue: "I do not see any problem with anybody from anywhere using the Welsh culture in their practises. The Wales I live in now is unrecognisable from the one that the c12 writers of the early Welsh mythology knew, which in turn would be unrecognisable from the pre-Roman Wales that was the actual home of Welsh pagans. Given how different it is I do not feel that as a modern Wales resident I am any real closer to having a real understanding of the local area pagan gods than a person in any other place (so long as that place is fairly cold and wet!) There are some things i [sic] would find odd, such as being a worshipper of Sabrina when you couldn't actually go down and honour her at the river Severn. Having said this I feel it is easier to relate to the deities when you live in the area and can map the folklore to the land -but if you want to use the Welsh ideas/traditions -then go ahead", "People need to find the place where they feel safe and find joy. If the Welsh culture gives them this[,] they

The interviewees also expressed concerns with cultural misappropriation. Kristoffer Hughes made particular reference to the cultural misappropriation rampant in Neo-Pagan publications from the 1990s (such as those cited in footnotes 41 and 42 in Chapter Two): “And, we certainly saw that in the ‘90s, with Celtic Paganism, of people … making these outlandish claims that they received a Book of Shadows from a person in South Wales, and unfortunately, the Book of Shadows was burnt in a housefire in 1999, conveniently, you know, and *they’re* the ones who have access to this power. That’s just appropriation, but also *manipu*lation [sic] of peoples”.[128] He also mentioned the importance of working with people from the source culture and ensuring traditions are spread and upheld correctly when taken up in places outside of Wales.[129]

Mhara Starling opined that false claims of “authenticity” or “unbroken lineage of Welsh tradition” were core determinants of cultural misappropriation, elaborating with “I don’t truly

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should be welcomed with open arms”, and “Why not? Wales and the Welsh are not oppressed or disempowered minorities. Neither is the Welsh culture or identity widely exploited for money by non Welsh people. I don't think fears around cultural appropriation come into play here. Also there is the complicated fact that some underlying cultural strata in non Welsh areas of Britain are Brythonic in origin. Even in Orkney where I live, almost as far away from Wales as you can get in the UK, we have surviving Pictish (Brythonic) place names and archaeology”.

[128] Brown, *Interview with Kristoffer Hughes*, (22 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document]. Hughes also discusses cultural appropriation in his book *The Book of Druidry* (2023) in Chapter 4 ‘Druidry and Celtic Spirituality’, pp. 41-48.

[129] Brown, *Interview with Kristoffer Hughes*, (22 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document]: “So, as somebody who *is* involved in those traditions, I'm aware of other Mari Lwyd tropes and other people who practice Welsh folkloric components as a part of contemporary Western Paganism, and I've seen elements of that that have been problematic, and elements of that that have been very respectful. And I think, as somebody who is vested in those things, then, that gives me a responsibility, and then I, because of my platform, have the ability to respond to that and maybe inform, and I try and do it as kindly as I possibly can and by telling people if you are going to incorporate things like the Mari Lwyd into your practice and you're in the U.S., for instance, then don't- don’t eliminate elements of that practice which are essential to its well-being, uh, because then that does fall into appropriation rather than appreciation. … And, you know, and so that you honor the actual heart of the tradition, and of course with the Mari Lwyd, the heart of that tradition is the pwnco, so eliminating the pwnco is to denigrate the Mari Lwyd, so there are some people who have got very, very, very high opinions of this but aren't necessarily vested in the tradition either. They're not involved in it, but they have an opinion, you know, and I think, well, actually, we can also be kind. We shouldn't gatekeep the tradition, because there's evidently iterations of that tradition in other Celtic nations. And there are people around the world who feel a connection to it, but there's a way in doing it which bridges that chasm between appropriation and appreciation.
And I think if a Welsh person has a problem with the way somebody else is doing something, there's no point bitching about it to other people or on Facebook. Ask these people if they want your help, because we can help them”.

believe that, you know, a Pagan from New Jersey mixing the ideas that we have within our folklore with the local land spirits that they have over there is misappropriation, because that's just … turning to your ancestry or turning to a culture which inspires you in order to inform your practice, but then rooting it to your locale instead. But when it comes to things like claiming some kind of link with the culture that is still a living culture to this day, um, and then making money off of that even though you are presenting something that is wholly false, and you're aware of it, there's very big differences between those two things."[130]

Dr. Morus-Baird discussed his shifting perspectives on cultural appropriation over time, saying his past interpretations were "not morally justified" and are "setting up barriers and walls, as opposed to try[ing] [to] find common ground with other people, which is- I think is more important".[131] Highlighting this about-face in perspective, when asked whether it is "important for Druids and Neo-Pagans who center Welsh culture to participate in working to revive, continue, and/or spread Welsh cultural tradition", he stated "I think it would be rude not to. Uh, I

[130] Brown, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].

[131] Brown, *Interview with Gwilym Morus-Baird*, (Part 1: 30 Apr 2025; Part 2: 19 May 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document]: "I think that um, in terms of my own relationship to what I'm trying to do, um, I- there- there's no way that I could've continued to do what I do now with the moral outrage I felt in my early twenties, coming across modern Pagans and modern Paganism and- and what, what was being done with 'my culture', as I felt it, at the time. Because, you know, my- my sense of what cultural appropriation is has changed over time, it's shifted, you know. Um, I don't think we should be gatekeeping culture so stridently or so aggressively, um, I don't think it's helpful. I think it's regressive, as opposed to progressive. And, you know, a lot of my indignation at seeing- just English speakers in general, they didn't have to be Pagan, but just anybody who wasn't a Welsh speaker, you know, discussing um, Celtic myth or Welsh myth, um, would- would rile me when I was younger. And I realized that that was a- a war I just didn't need to fight, and that it was just- it was stupid, and it was immature, um, because it's, it's kind of a fantastical war. It's a war that happens in the imagination, and it just takes up way too much energy, and it just- it's wasteful, and it's unnecessary, and it's not morally justified. Um, you know, I think that I- I want more acknowledgement of the one humanity. I think that's what we need, and if that's what I *believe*, then I kind of got to walk my talk, and sort of set aside that great big chip on my shoulder that I had as 'I'm a-, you know, a Welsh person with a- with degrees in Welsh literature; I get to say what happens to this material', you know, I had to set that aside, because it's just… Yeah, I mean, like I said earlier, it's not like anybody's going to listen to you anyway. You know, like the- the cat's out of the bag; the horse has already bolted. You know, it happened centuries ago, this influence on English-speaking culture, so like to try and do anything, you know, it's just like totally impractical, and it's not morally justified, because you're setting up barriers and walls, as opposed to try and find common ground with other people, which is- I think is more important".

mean, it comes down to what you think culture is for. Uh, and, I'm a great believer in universality. You know, I think that there are basic fundamental human experiences and rites that transcend culture, um, or that culture is nested within."[132] He also encouraged the spread of Welsh cultural traditions outside of Wales if proper care was taken, mirroring common sentiments among survey participants: "So outside of Cymru is a different matter to inside of Cymru. Uh, outside of Cymru, I – I firmly believe that people should do as they want, so long as they seek to not to [sic] misrepresent and so long as they respect the cultural artifacts they're handling and dealing with. Um, I think it's great! I think it's brilliant that people are inspired to take up aspects of 'other people's' cultures, and I'm saying that in inverted commas because again, you know, I think we're all one humanity, personally, all trying to, you know, muddle along in this crazy world".[133]

[132] Brown, *Interview with Gwilym Morus-Baird*, (Part 1: 30 Apr 2025; Part 2: 19 May 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document], continuation from quoted text for contextual clarity: "And so, I feel like, if you want to, if you want to really get to grips with things like medieval Welsh literature or Welsh myth or Welsh poetry, like, you would just be missing out on so much if you didn't at least approach modern Welsh culture in some way, and also understand the history of Welsh culture and how we've got to this, this point in time. And that includes understanding how Welsh custom, folk custom, tradition has evolved and changed and declined, and you know, understanding the current political situation of Wales and Welsh speakers. I think, yeah, as I said, I think it would be rude not to, you know. I think um, because these materials are, for want of a better way of putting it, you know, they're a part of our soul, in lots of ways, so, you know, we are – we are inevitably going to share our souls through culture. You know, you can't stop it, you can't police it, you can't say 'no' – well, you can say 'no, you can't do that', but you know, no one ever listens to you. So, it's worth, it's worth you know, um, yeah, encouraging people to accept that these things are alive in a very profound way, in the nation and in the culture that gave birth to them, yeah".

[133] Brown, *Interview with Gwilym Morus-Baird*, (Part 1: 30 Apr 2025; Part 2: 19 May 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document], continuation from quoted text for contextual clarity: "So, that's why it's important to do our best not to misrepresent uh, and to acknowledge that these things are part of, yes, someone else's soul, I suppose. And you know, as we, as people practice them and they make them part of *their* lives and *their* souls, then the you know, my hope would be that they therefore then want to safeguard the integrity of those traditions as much as anybody from Wales would want to. That would be a natural part of the process, I suppose".

The Welsh Language

The question of whether those who cannot understand Cymraeg (Welsh language) should incorporate Welsh cultural elements into Neo-Pagan practice drew nearly 42% to answer in open text – the most of any question of this type.[134] The majority of participants who opted for narrative answers expressed the general sentiment that while learning Welsh was not "strictly necessary", it was highly encouraged and an effort should be made – with an especial insistence on at least learning to correctly pronounce deity and place names and Welsh words used in practice.[135] As one respondent put it: "If you want to use our culture as set dressing on your rituals[,] [d]o us the courtesy of learning correct pronunciation of our language".[136] Other views included three who stated the language was not necessary in order to understand the concepts involved, five who pointed out that requiring Welsh language ability would exclude a majority of Welsh people, and three who opined that "language ability should not be a barrier to religious experience or cultural appreciation" or similar.[137] A majority (nearly 89% of respondents) also answered that they "believe learning or using Cymraeg (Welsh language) can be an act of religious or spiritual devotion".[138]

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[134] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Can or should persons who CANNOT understand any Cymraeg (Welsh language) incorporate elements of Welsh culture in their Neo-Pagan practice?", Responses: Yes (42); No (1); I want to say more. (Please explain.) (30); Did not answer (1, but this participant left an open-text narrative answer despite not selecting any of the radio button options in the lead question). "If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here".
[135] *Ibid.*
[136] *Ibid.*
[137] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Can or should persons who CANNOT understand any Cymraeg (Welsh language) incorporate elements of Welsh culture in their Neo-Pagan practice?", Responses: Yes (42); No (1); I want to say more. (Please explain.) (30); Did not answer (1, but this participant left an open-text narrative answer despite not selecting any of the radio button options in the lead question). "If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here".
[138] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "As a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh culture into your practice, do you believe learning or using Cymraeg (Welsh language) can be an act of religious or spiritual devotion?" Responses: Yes (64); No (2); I want to say more. (Please explain.) (6); Did not answer (2). "If you selected 'I want to say more' above, please explain here".

Image 3: “Mae Mari Lwyd Yma”. An example of Welsh language use in the U.S.



The back of the sheet behind the ribbon-covered Mari Lwyd skull reads “Mae Mari Lwyd Yma” (Mari Lwyd Is Here), referencing the traditional pwnco line “Mae Mari Lwyd yma / llawn sêr a ribanau” (Mari Lwyd is here / full of stars and ribbons).[139]

The three interviewees, who are all first-language Welsh speakers, were also supportive of Welsh-language use. Mhara Starling emphasized the connection between culture and language, giving examples of how she discovered meaning tied to places’ Welsh-language names, such as the *Ffraw* in *Aberffraw*, or *Carreg Dewin*, as well as certain character insights in the names of

[139] Brown, Jennifer, (December 2023). Author’s personal photo; Ifans, Rhiannon, *Mari Lwyd*, (trac: Traddodiadau Cerdd Cymru/Music Traditions Wales, 2013), p. 43.

figures from literature such as the *Mabinogi*.[140] She also mentioned study of her native language as an act of devotion:

> "...the Welsh language has its rooting in a bardic tradition, in poetry, and in ceremony. … I can relate that to my Paganism easily. And so, one big thing that I'm doing right now as a devotional act is I'm bettering my written Welsh. So, I grew up speaking fluently, but I have no idea how to mutate some words and such, and how to stick to the grammatically correct ways of writing in Welsh. And to me, that's a huge source of shame. … But, ever since I've embraced a spiritual path which is much more rooted in my locale and such, I've almost seen it as a devotional and spiritual act to better my Welsh. So, in turn, my

[140] Brown, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document]: "The language acts as a cradle for the culture. And, as such, if you want to connect to the culture, if you want to connect to the landscape on a deeper visceral level, then the language will help you do that. Beyond, you know, the stories and such that we have recorded within the language, there's also place names and such which tell us stories of our locale. So, I come from Aberffraw, and Aberffraw can very easily be translated to just 'the mouth of the River Ffraw'... Very, very simple translation of Aberffraw there. But, then you look into what the word Ffraw, which is the name of the river that runs through the village, means. … So, the word *ffraw* essentially translates to mean excitable or even unpredictable. And, it is a saltwater river that has really strong currents and gets deep in some parts, but is very shallow in other parts, and it is this river that has its own identity. And when I learned the meaning of the name, it helped me connect to the river on a much more visceral level. … So, there's a- there's a kind of a rock, kind of a tiny little island that's just off the coast in the sea, and it's this black rock that emerges out of the sea and the waves lap against it. And, sometimes, at high tide it's completely submerged, but it's there. And, I discovered by looking into old maps and such that the name of this rock is Carreg Dewin, which is of course enchanter's or wizard's rock. And, I'm intrigued by that; I want to learn more. So, I'm kind of on a mission right now to learn why. … So, it's these ways in which that it can help you connect deeper with your landscape, with your surroundings, once you know the terms. Beyond that, a big part of modern Neo-Pagan practice which draws upon Wales is: we all tend to love the Mabinogi. We all love our stories. We love our myths and our folk tales and such. And, when you know a little bit about the language, then things are unveiled in those stories that perhaps you would have not noticed otherwise. So, from things like the meaning of some of the characters' names, so like Pwyll and Pryderi, you know, these are actual words in the Welsh language that we use daily. So, they're not just traditional names. They're something that tells you a little bit about the character, that tells you about their journey throughout the stories and such. And, that little piece of knowledge helps you connect with these stories on a much more visceral level, and, it intrigues me that even a lot of books written in English about these stories don't focus on that. … So, it's little things like this: the way in which the language can connect you to the people of Wales, to your local communities if you live in Wales and such, it can connect you to your landscape by looking at place names and such, it can connect you to history, it can connect you to all sorts of different elements like that. So, through and via those lenses, it will in turn connect to your spiritual and magical journey, and it will also enable you to build something that is much more visceral, and much more meaningful if you interact with the language in that way".

> culture and my language inspire my spirituality, but my spirituality and my magical practice have also inspired the way in which I interact with my culture."
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> — Mhara Starling, quoted from Brown, Jennifer, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].

Dr. Morus-Baird declared use of the Welsh language to "contact, engage with, or touch the spirit of a tradition" is "a very potent and powerful way of doing it".[141] He tied the learning and use of language to relationships in addition to culture, explaining, "I think most people find language-learning is far easier when it comes alive in relationships" and stressing that translation is not merely of the language in the literal sense of words but also a translation of the cultural context and symbolic meaning was required.[142]

Kristoffer Hughes described the learning and use of language as a form of honoring or right relationship with any culture and its deities.[143] To illustrate, he related the story of his own journey in becoming a devotee of Santa Muerte and initiate of the Templo Internacionale Santísima Muerte in Mexico City despite his lack of grounding in Mexican culture, recounting the care he took to learn directly from the Hispanic community how to pray to her in Spanish correctly.[144] Acknowledging that various aspects of personal identity, lived experience, and values can be strongly tied to both spiritual and cultural practices which are not limited to ancestry and land of domicile or birth, Hughes compared his experience to the circumstance of

[141] Brown, *Interview with Gwilym Morus-Baird*, (Part 1: 30 Apr 2025; Part 2: 19 May 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].
[142] *Ibid*.
[143] Brown, *Interview with Kristoffer Hughes*, (22 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].
[144] Brown, *Interview with Kristoffer Hughes*, (22 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].

people outside of Wales who wish to incorporate Welsh culture into their Neo-Pagan practice, sharing how his identity as a gay man was one of the factors which drove his own personal spiritual engagement with elements of foreign culture: “I can’t really explain why I’m drawn towards Santísima Muerte. … I have absolutely no genetic connection to Mexico or to California, but I have this pull and this draw, probably because I’m a death service professional, so I have an affinity because of that. Probably because I’m a homosexual, so I have an affinity to her because of that”.[145]

Much as Hughes has no residential, ancestral, or linguistic ties to Mexican culture, as has been revealed from the survey, not every Cymric Neo-Pagan is Welsh, nor is of Welsh ancestry, nor speaks Welsh – many have never even visited Wales. This begs the question of why these practitioners elevate Welsh culture such that they include it in their religion in the first place.

[145] Brown, *Interview with Kristoffer Hughes*, (22 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document].

Motivations towards Welsh Culture in Neo-Paganism

The final item in Section 2 of the survey asked why participants "personally incorporate or centre Welsh culture in [their] Neo-Pagan practice".[146] Seventeen participants (nearly 25%) mentioned being Welsh, or growing up in or near Wales, and wanting to (re)connect to their heritage and culture as a/the reason, one writing simply "I am Welsh".[147] The existence (or belief in the existence) of an ancestor or relative from the given cultural focus of *any* ethno-cultural Neo-Pagan path is often a reason for practitioners having taken that particular path up, and Cymric Neo-Paganism is no exception.[148] Welsh ancestry was also a popular cause for

[146] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): "Please give a brief summary of why you personally incorporate or centre Welsh culture in your Neo-Pagan practice" Responses: 70.

[147] *Ibid.* For example: "I am Welsh born, raised in Cymru, living yn Nghymru, reclaiming y [sic] iaith Cymraeg as a marker of identity, rooting myself in a landscape, language and culture largely denied me growing up. Appropriation and unthinking eclectic ism [sic] by 'neo-pagans' is wholly disrespectful to a minoritised culture such as ours", "I am Welsh and I am proud of it. I therefore have an affinity towards the gods and goddesses of my own history and culture …", "I lived in Wales all my life then moved to an English university and missed being involved in Welsh culture so I became interested in the history and language of my home country which coincided with lockdown and the big witchcraft 'boom' on social media which then got me involved with Kristoffer Hughes and Mhara Starling. I've become more and more interested in folk culture from herbal remedies of the Physicians of Myddfai, the Mabinogi and the 'deities' within, and general spirituality which has all combined nicely into a Welsh pagan practice", "I lived in Wales for many years and my ancestral home is there (Welsh borders and not historically Welsh). It would feel wrong not to as it's part of me", "I grew up on the Welsh borders, so this is the landscape that speaks to me, and I wanted to learn about its mythology, the stories that live within the land. I also have found a great deal of meaning and personal importance and spiritual development in exploration of the myth of Blodeuwedd. This myth has had a hugely important and deep influence on my life", "I'm a Welsh occultist. When I was in primary school we learnt nothing of our history, and those who spoke Welsh were considered backward. Nothing changed in Secondary school. Over the last 10 years I've made an effort to embrace my heritage", "Partly because it's my roots and my culture. Partly because, after exploring other paths, it makes the most sense for me", "I was born and raised in Wales and raised around the lore and myth. My family has turned their backs on me due to my LGBTQ+ status and I lost the one support I had in my family to death. Incorporating Welsh culture helps me feel whole and connected to my culture", "Because it is my indigenous ancestoral [sic] heritage", "I am born and bred weak [sic] as a celebrant and a welsh Druid it is my job to offer and include the following: Language, Terms, Traditions, Landscape references, Teach an online course, Run a Druids tour in wales [sic], Mentor in welsh [sic] Druidry, Cultural advisor", "I am Welsh", "I am Welsh and a Welsh-speaker. Welsh culture is central to my Neo-Pagan prectice [sic]. …", "I am Welsh and want to connect with my cultural heritage in my spirituality", "I am Welsh and have been pagan since I was 16. I am 38 now and have been incorporating Welsh aspects into my practice for about 15 years now. … I feel like I used to view Welsh culture as almost boring, as it was the norm, but living in England has made me feel ever closer to Wales than ever", "I am Welsh. My ancestry is a mix of British but mostly Welsh. I live in Wales. I am of this land and this land has it's [sic] gods", etc.

[148] Butler, Jenny, 'Remembrance of the Ancestors in Contemporary Paganism: Lineage, Identity, and Cultural Belonging in the Irish Context', *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions*, 1/2, pp. 94-118, p. 95: "Ancestors and ancestry are highly significant in modern Paganism for a variety of reasons: genealogy, lineage,

incorporating or centering Welsh culture in the participants' Neo-Pagan practice, cited by exactly 20 percent of respondents.[149] A couple of U.S. participants felt that they *must* turn to their ancestry for grounding in an ethno-cultural Neo-Pagan practice specifically because Native American traditions are closed, potentially revealing a belief that place of domicile or ancestry were the only two viable options for connection with an ethno-cultural tradition. One of these participants also mentioned that Native Americans have "asked us to connect with our own ancestral traditions", and the participant wished to honor that.[150]

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cultural heritage and history all have a bearing on an individual's sense of belonging and feeling of integration within a particular community, social network, nation and locality. The significance of ancestry extends to Pagans' sense of authenticity when it comes to cultural traditions and specific ritual practices. It also has a bearing on access to, and authoritative presence at, specific sacred sites, which are often the loci for ritual practices";

Furth, Brett H., "Ethnic Neo-Pagan Altars and Ancestors in Texas: An Ethnoreligious Strategy to Reconfigure European Ancestry and Whiteness", *Western Folklore*, 76: 3, (2017), 313–45, *JSTOR*, p. 339: "It appears working and middle-class white people in the US are trying to find novel ways to reconnect with and revalorize their European ancestors and ancestral pasts to help ground them in an increasingly frantic modern world, and ethnic Neo-Pagans have found one way to do so through covertly racialized ethnoreligious practices and beliefs that include the veneration of resacralized European, and thus white, ancestors".

[149] Brown, Jennifer, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', "Please give a brief summary of why you personally incorporate or centre Welsh culture in your Neo-Pagan practice", 14 respondents mentioned ancestry. For example: "I have some Welsh ancestry and am in a coven devoted to Morgan Le Fay as our Patroness. I have devotion to Gwyn ap Nudd as well. I am learning Cymraeg with the SSIW app and would love to be able to visit someday", "My recent ancestry happens to be Welsh. Growing up in the USA, most people have no knowledge of Wales, so I was ostracized a lot. Wanting to fit in as a child, I hid that part of myself. As an adult, something was missing. I didn't fit in, until I saw Welsh media on the Internet, met some Welsh folk in Welsh heritage organizations, and began a deeper reading of welsh [sic] language, folklore, culture, and history. And then it all clicked. … it connected with something deep and primal in me. I felt like I had found my people. I felt Hiraeth. Falch o fod yn gymreig [sic]", "Partially out of ancestral interest (part of my family came from Cymru in the early 1900's), partially out of love of the language, and beyond that... I just do. I follow what feels right or feels like it's 'calling' me", "My family is Welsh", "It's a big part of my ancestry, and I've felt drawn to Cerridwen in my practice", "Welsh ancestry and it is used by the druid orders I am in", "I have distant Welsh ancestry, and I was raised by a grandmother who told me stories that made me very curious about my heritage. …", etc.

[150] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): open-text response to "Can or should persons who were NOT born or raised within the borders of Cymru (Wales) incorporate or centre Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?" and "Please give a brief summary of why you personally incorporate or centre Welsh culture in your Neo-Pagan practice": "As an American the spirituality of the land I live in is closed indigenous practice. If Americans can't adopt or adapt the pagan spirituality of our ancestors we have access to no spirituality at all. We could just make up some random personal gnosis, but for many religion is also being part of a community…" and "It's part of my ancestral heritage and I have felt called to connect more with that. Also as an American of European heritage, we sometimes struggle to connect with our own place in a way that's respectful to Native Americans and other people of color, who have asked us to connect with our own ancestral traditions. It's not always simple to do so for us either, but I respect that feedback".

The claim that Native Americans have asked white European-heritage persons in the U.S. to take up the practices of their own ancestors is not unfounded, e.g.: Macy, Terry & Daniel Hart [Directors], *White Shamans and Plastic Medicine Men*, Documentary Film, (1996), 23:25-23:37, Blackfeet elder Betty Cooper in interview: "Each one of them [white people] should be exploring their background, you know, before their- their ancestors came from across the ocean. They should go over there and learn their own ways and practice"; Johnson, Myke, 'Wanting To

Living in Wales (either currently or in the past) or visiting there was a key part of what drew several participants to include Welsh culture in their practice, although it was not always clear who was originally from there and who had only lived or visited there.[151] Fourteen participants cited a love for or identification with the culture, history, and stories of Wales, and/or personal interactions with or devotions to Welsh deities or spirits as a motivation (20%).[152] Connecting to Welsh culture in a Neo-Pagan context through OBOD, the SoA, Kristoffer Hughes or UDM/ADO, and/or Mhara Starling were also cited as reasons for incorporating Welsh culture into Neo-Pagan practice (over 17%).[153]

Be Indian: When Spiritual Searching Turns Into Cultural Theft, by Rev. Myke Johnson', *Wabanaki REACH,* (8 Mar 2017): "Native people have encouraged us to explore the earth-centered traditions of our own ancestors".

[151] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', response to "Please give a brief summary of why you personally incorporate or centre Welsh culture in your Neo-Pagan practice", For example: "As a [sic] increasingly long term resident in Cymru, and having a little Welsh ancestry, I feel that incorporating Welsh traditions and culture into my practice is sympathetic to the area I live and practice in", "Because I live in the Welsh countryside and the spirit of the land that surrounds me is Welsh. When I lived in England I worked with local English culture and spirituality", "I have lived and worked (as an archaeologist) in Wales for almost 40 years. I feel very close to the fabric and history of the land, and out of this I have studied Welsh mythology and lore…", "I lived in Wales for two years 50 years ago and became a self initiated witch there, inspired by landscape spirit and awen. …", "I fell in love with Wales. I visited many places during my summer at Oxford. … but Cymru was magical. …", "I had a spiritual awakening in Wales", "I have always felt my connection to anything spiritual came from my connection to the land i [sic] was on and the history and culture of the place i [sic] am in. [S]o it is important for me to centre that. [I] also believe outside of a spiritual context that welsh [sic] history and traditions (even if reconstructed) is good to maintain", etc.

[152] *Ibid*.: "I started studying druidry and learning about welsh stories and they spoke to me, I felt connected. The more I learned and incorporated, the more it made sense to me", "Even before I found out my surname (Blevins) was Welsh I was drawn to the culture. King Arthur always spoke to my soul and was some of what sparked my journey into paganism. Most people seem to come into Celtic paganism through an Irish lense [sic] but I began through the Welsh. I connected with Bendigidvran [sic] in my teens and have kept that connection throughout my life. The more I learn about Cymru the more it feels connected with my soul", "The Welsh deities spoke to me, and I felt more welcomed by them", "I work with Welsh, and some earlier Brythonic, deities. I also am studying Welsh folk magic and modern neo-druidry", "So, basically I'm a Heathen who started worshiping Gwyn ap Nudd after a series of encounters with him over the course of years. … Blodeuwedd also seems to show up from time to time as well", "I honor some Welsh deities, it'd be pretty rude not to incorporate some Welsh culture in too…", "The gods and goddesses of the Welsh lands and culture approached me in dreams. I decided to work with them based on these dreams, and I was encouraged by them to learn more and continue with a personal practice…", "There are a number of Welsh deities who are part of my practice, I feel a deep personal connection to them and the interpretation that has been ascribed to them…", "Cerridwen, Elin of the hosts", etc.

[153] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 2: Identity and Community Membership', (Jotform, 2024): open-text responses to "Please give a brief summary of why you personally incorporate or centre Welsh culture in your Neo-Pagan practice": "Welsh myth and culture have been central in my path as a Priestess of Avalon so it was important to me to bring my understanding of these things in alignment with correct/right information and to properly honour the culture. This includes learning the Welsh language and incorporating it into my practice", "There is a Welsh emphasis in my druidry training (OBOD) and I have some Welsh ancestry. I'm a first-generation NZer and conscious of the fact that while I was born here I'm not tangata whenua (people of the land i.e. Māori), so being a 100% fit for any one cultural pagan tradition is not an option for me. All I can do is do my best to work

Chapter 4: Practice and Cultural Engagement

Holidays and Seasonal Traditions

Which elements of Welsh culture are incorporated into the participants' Neo-Pagan practice and why are the very meat of what differentiates the cohort under investigation from other Neo-Pagan sects. The works of folklorists such as the late Trefor M. Owen (former curator of the Welsh Folk Museum) and Thomas Gwynn Jones (scholar and poet) have served as references for bygone Welsh seasonal traditions and folk customs revolving around the agricultural year, rites of passage, and etc.[154] Some of these customs involved symbolism which had already long lost their salient meaning to the mists of forgetful time and been decried as "Pagan" at the time of recording, such as the Mari Lwyd.[155] (Indeed, Neo-Pagans are hardly above utilizing the descriptions of activities – left by Christian religious leaders who were lambasting the practices –

honestly and respectfully with the traditions(s)/culture(s) that I feel called to", "Wicca never quite worked for me; one day I chanced on a book by the head of the ADO and began integrating Druidry into my practice", "I met Kristoffer Hughes when I started learning about druidry. I like his methods and am using as [a] springboard in examine [sic] the deities and practices of my own (way back in the past) indigineous [sic] culture", "I am an awenydd of the Anglesey Druid Order. I follow and work with Cerridwen and Taliesin", "It spoke to me for the moment I joined O.B.O.D. lessons", "I am a Druid within the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. OBOD teachings incorporate Welsh culture and pantheon into their lessons, and it resonated with me. I was born in Manchester, England and in my childhood visited Wales. I live in New Zealand and wildcraft my Druid practices incorporating Celtic, Nordic and Māori pantheons into my practice. I am currently learning Māori and Scottish Gaelic. My ancestry DNA includes English, Welsh, Irish, Scottish and Nordic", etc.

[154] Wiliam, Eurwyn, 'Trefor Meredith Owen (1926-2015)', *Folklore*, 126: 2, pp. 235-7; Gwynn, Arthur ap and Francis Wynn Jones, 'JONES, THOMAS GWYNN (1871-1949), poet, writer, translator and scholar', *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig/Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, (2001); Owen, Trefor M., *Welsh Folk Customs,* (National Museum of Wales: Welsh Folk Museum, 1959); Jones, T. Gwynn, *Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom*, (London: Methuen & Co, Ltd., 1930).

For examples of the use of their work by Cymric Neo-Pagans: Starling, 'Bibliography', *Welsh Fairies*, (2024), p. 226 cites T. Gwynn Jones' *Welsh Folklore and Folk Custom*; Hughes, 'Bibliography', *The Book of Druidry*, (2023), p. 298 cites Trefor M. Owen's *The Customs and Traditions of Wales*.

[155] Owen, *Welsh Folk Customs,* (1959), pp. 25-6, quoting Rev. William Roberts in 1852: "Probably the *main*, if not the *only* cause of this adherence to these traditions is ignorance of their source. … I hope therefore that nobody will be so *foolish* and *ungodly* in Wales after understanding the origin and descent of these practices as to give the least support to a mixture of old Pagan and Popish ceremonies which have come down to us from the darkest ages in learning, behaviour and religion, …".

Howell, David, 'Contemporising Custom: the Re-Imagining of the Mari Lwyd', *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 13, (2018), pp. 66-79.

to intentionally revive them, e.g. the condemnation of the Welsh addressing Gwyn ap Nudd near wooded areas in one atypical 15th-century manuscript of the *Speculum Christiani*.)[156] Elias Owen, and to a lesser extent Marie Trevelyn, were also references for the construction of survey questions regarding traditional Welsh folk customs and folk magic.[157] Regarding observances, practices, and figures likely to be venerated in Neo-Pagan practice specifically, books by Kristoffer Hughes, Mhara Starling, Gwilym Morus-Baird, and Jhenah Telyndru (head of SoA who has also recently become a member of ADO) served as frequent references, as these are currently popular influencers and leaders in the Neo-Pagan movement as it pertains to the Welsh cultural context in particular.[158]

One of the cores of any cultural or religious tradition is its holidays or holy days. A majority of participants in the survey incorporated Welsh cultural traditions and holidays into their Neo-Pagan practice, regardless of their nationality. Among the survey cohort, Figure 3 charts the most commonly observed holidays ("commonly observed" defined here as being observed by 25% or more of responding participants). All of these holidays conveniently fall on or near to Christian and/or Wiccan/OBOD WotY holiday dates and frequently share overlapping seasonal themes or customs.[159] These parallels would enable a smooth transition to more specifically

[156] MS 239, *Speculum Christiani*, (Balliol College Archives & Manuscripts), p. 30v.; Starling, *Welsh Fairies*, (2024), pp. 49-50.
[157] Owen, Elias, *Welsh Folk-Lore: A Collection of the Folk-tales and Legends of North Wales being the Prize Essay of the National Eisteddfod 1887*, (Messrs. Woodall, Minshall, & Co., 1887); Trevelyan, Marie, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales*, (London: Elliot Stock, 1909).
[158] Hughes, *From the Cauldron Born*, (2012); Hughes, Kristoffer, *A Pagan's Perspective on Death, Dying & Bereavement: As the Last Leaf Falls*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2014); Hughes, *The Book of Celtic Magic*, (2014); Hughes, *Cerridwen*, (2021); Hughes, *The Book of Druidry*, (2023); Starling, Mhara, *Welsh Witchcraft*, (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2022); Starling, *Welsh Fairies*, (2024); Telyndru, Jhenah, et al, *Flower Face: A Devotional Anthology in Honor of Blodeuwedd*, (Ninth Wave Press, 2016); Telyndru, Jhenah, *Pagan Portals. Rhiannon: Divine Queen of the Celtic Britons*, (Winchester: Moon Books, 2018); Telyndru, Jhenah, Moon Books, 2018); Telyndru, Jhenah, *Pagan Portals. Blodeuwedd: Welsh Goddess of Sovereignty*, (Winchester: John Hunt Publishing, 2021).
[159] OBOD's version of the Wheel of the Year, which mirrors Wicca's aside from the names of the solstices and equinoxes for which OBOD uses terms from Iolo Morganwg beginning with "Alban", can be found on: Carr-Gomm,

Welsh-culture-centering Neo-Pagan holiday observances for adherents who have converted from, or co-practice, one or more of these three other religions (Christianity, Wicca, and/or OBOD Druidry). These alignments would also facilitate cross-community celebrations – a potentially significant factor, given the very small number of Cymric Neo-Pagans overall, that some co-practice Christianity, primarily or co-practice Wicca, and/or are members of OBOD, and that some gather with Christian or Wiccan or OBOD groups, friends, and/or family.

Philip, 'The Eightfold Wheel of the Year' [adapted from the book *Druid Mysteries*], *Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids*, see URL in bibliography.

It is worth noting that, as Magliocco in Pizza and Lewis (2009) states on p. 224: "Non-Wiccan reconstructionist traditions may follow very different calendars … which reflect those of the religious cultures they are reviving" – however, as Wicca (and also OBOD-style Druidry) is heavily influenced by Celtic as well as greater British cultural and seasonal observations, and Cymric Neo-Paganism or Druidry are themselves also placed within and built upon these same Celtic and broader British traditions, the overlap with the Wiccan Wheel of the Year is not identical (often involving *more* observances which are Welsh-culture-specific *in addition to* Welsh-culture-specific versions of those represented in the Wheel of the Year, as shall be seen in the data), but the overlap can be much larger than in other, non-Celtic and non-British ethno-cultural Neo-Pagan traditions.

Figure 3 : Chart of Commonly Observed (≥25% of respondents) Holidays

Enw'r Gŵyl yn Gymraeg	English Name	Wiccan/OBOD WotY or Christian Holiday Proximity	Date(s) Observed	Participants/ Total Responses	% of Total Responses*
Dydd Santes Dwynwen	Saint Dwynwen's Day	Christian/cultural holiday	25 January	17/60	28%
Gŵyl Braint; Gŵyl Canhwyllau	Festival of Braint; Festival of Candles	Imbolc (Wiccan/OBOD); Candlemas/St. Brigid's Day (Christian)	1 February	50/71	70%
Dydd Dewi Sant	Saint David's Day	Christian/cultural holiday	1 March	28/60	47%
Alban Eilir; Cyhydnos y Gwanwyn	Spring Equinox	Ostara (Wiccan); Easter (Christian)	20-22 March	56/73	79%
Calan Mai/Haf	Calends of May/Summer	Beltane/Bealtaine (Wiccan/OBOD)	1 May	59/71	83%
Alban Hefin; Heuldro'r Haf; Hirddydd	Summer Solstice; Long-day	Litha(tide) (Wiccan); St. John's Day (Christian)	20-22 June	62/73	87%
Gŵyl Awst	Festival of August	Lughnasadh/ Lúnasa (Wiccan/OBOD); Lammas (Christian)	1 August	47/71	66%
Alban Elfed; Cyhydnos yr Hydref	Autumn Equinox	Mabon (Wiccan); Michaelmas (Christian)	20-22 September	58/73	82%
(Nos) Calan/ Galan Gaeaf; Gŵyl y Meirw	Calends of Winter (Eve); Festival of the Dead	Samhain/Samhuinn (Wiccan/OBOD); All Souls' & All Saints' Days (Christian)	31 October-1 November	66/71	93%
Alban Arthan; Heuldro'r Gaeaf; Hirnos	Winter Solstice; Long-night	Yule(tide) (Wiccan); Christmas (Christian)	20-22 December	65/73	92%
Nadolig	Christmas	Christian holiday	25 December	24/60	40%

*Percentages rounded up if number after . is 5 or greater; rounded down if 4 or lower.

With the exception of Nadolig/Christmas, the chart above matches exactly with the holidays listed in Kristoffer Hughes' *The Book of Druidry*, perhaps pointing to familiarity with the author's work among Cymric Neo-Pagans or else to Hughes' awareness of which holidays are most commonly observed among Cymric Neo-Pagans, or both.[160]

The most popular holidays observed among the cohort were (Nos) Calan Gaeaf (Calends of Winter [Eve]; 93% of the 71 respondents) and Alban Arthan/Hirnos/Heuldro'r Gaeaf (Winter Solstice; 92% of the 73 respondents).[161] (Nos) Calan Gaeaf being one of the most popular highlights the importance of ancestor veneration among the cohort, especially given that over half are from the U.K. where Halloween is not already a very popular and well-established holiday (as it is in the U.S.), with nearly 57% of responding participants indicating that they engage in "leaving offerings for the dead on/around Calan Gaeaf" – the most popular traditional Welsh observance after bonfires on the Tair Ysbrydnos (Three Spirit-nights, i.e. Nos Calan Mai, Midsummer/St. John's Eve, and Nos Galan Gaeaf).[162] Nearly 32% marked themselves as

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[160] Hughes, *The Book of Druidry*, (2023), p. 181.

[161] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Seasonal / Agricultural Holidays: At any point within the past 5 years, I have observed the following seasonal traditional holidays partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements". Responses: Gŵyl Braint / Canhwyllau (February 1st) (50 participants); Calan Mai / Calan Haf (May 1st) (59); Gŵyl Awst (August 1st) (47); Calan Gaeaf / Nos Galan Gaeaf / Gŵyl y Meirw (November 1st / October 31st) (66); None (3); No answer (3). Total respondents who observe all four: 47; respondents who observe Calan Gaeaf and Calan Mai only: 8; respondents who observe Calan Gaeaf only: 9; respondents who observe Calan Mai only: 1.
and "Seasonal / Solar Holidays: At any point within the past 5 years, I have observed the following solar seasonal traditional holidays and / or Iolo Morganwg-influenced holidays partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements". Responses: Alban Eilir / Cyhydnos y Gwanwyn (Spring Equinox / Easter timeframe) (56); Alban Hefin / Heuldro'r Haf / Hirddydd (Summer Solstice / St. John's Day timeframe) (62); Alban Elfed / Cyhydnos yr Hydref (Autumn Equinox / Michaelmas timeframe) (58); Alban Arthan / Heuldro'r Gaeaf / Hirnos (Winter Solstice / Christmas to New Year timeframe) (65); None (5); No answer (1); respondents who observe all 4: 54; respondents who observe solstices only: 5; respondents who observe Winter Solstice only: 4.

[162] Jones, *Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom*, (1930), p. 150: "In Carnarvonshire, white cheese and oatmeal bread were eaten and a piece of bread was placed on the window-sill outside, these words being repeated in doing so: *Gwen y gwnei â dy holl deulu, / Hyn a gei di genni leni,* May'st thou bless thy whole family, / This is what I give thee this year"; p. 151: "Winter's Eve [Nos Galan Gaeaf] was one of the three Ghost Nights (y Tair Ysbrydnos) the others being the Eve of Summer [Nos Galan Mai] and the Eve of St. Johns, June 23rd". Owen, *Welsh Folk Custom*, (1959), p. 97: "The festival of May-day began on the previous evening, and as on Hallowe'en and the Eve of St.

conducting traditional Welsh forms of divination, about 21% as carving a Bwgan Rwdan (Turnip Ghoul), and six (over 8%) as doing apple-bobbing/twco ‘fale.[163] These traditions, in addition to making solod (soul-cakes) or stwmp naw rhiw/rhyw, are detailed in the works of Trefor M. Owen and/or Thomas Gwynn Jones.[164] It is worth noting that, although some of these traditions

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John’s – the two other ‘spirit nights’ (*ysbrydnos*), May Eve had its own customs inspired by the belief that supernatural powers were unleashed and that the spirits of the dead roamed abroad that night. Bonfires were formerly lit on May Eve in many parts of Wales”; p. 110: “Like May Eve, St. John’s Eve was celebrated by a bonfire, …”; pp. 123-4: “The apparition of the black sow, in fact, was closely associated with one of the oldest *Calan gaeaf* customs, namely that of lighting bonfires after dark”.

Regarding the popularity of Halloween in the U.K.: Difford, Dylan, ‘How Do Britons Feel about Halloween?’, *YouGov UK*, (YouGov PLC, 31 Oct 2024): “28% of Britons will celebrate Halloween this year, but the public overall tends to prefer Bonfire Night”. By comparison, regarding the popularity of Halloween in the U.S.: YouGov US, ‘The Most Popular National & Religious Events (Q2 2025)’, *YouGov US Public Data*, (YouGov PLC, 2025), “Popularity is the % of people who have a positive opinion of a national & religious event. … 7. Halloween, Fame: 97%, Popularity: 71%” and Wolf, Christopher, ‘More American Fall Under Halloween’s Spell’, *U.S. News & World Report*, (27 Oct 2023): “About 73% of Americans are planning to celebrate Halloween this year, the highest level in the 18 years that the National Retail Federation has conducted its annual survey …”.

Regarding engagement with Welsh Calan Gaeaf traditions: Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, (2024), ‘Seasonal / Annual Traditions: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh cultural events or products partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements. (Some of these are found in multiple cultures. Only select items if you engage at least partially due to the tradition, event, or item being Welsh)’: 43/72 respondents selected “Bonfires or similar fires (especially at Calan Mai, midsummer, and Calan Gaeaf), and 41/72 respondents selected “Leaving Offerings for the Dead on/around Calan Gaeaf”.

[163] Jones, T. Gwynn, *Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom*, (London: Methuen & Co, Ltd., 1930), pp. 155-62; Owen, Trefor M., *Welsh Folk Customs,* (National Museum of Wales: Welsh Folk Museum, 1959), pp. 121-41. Re: bwgan rwdan carving and twco ‘fale: Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, ‘Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture’, (Jotform, 2024): “Seasonal / Annual Traditions: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh cultural events or products partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements. (Some of these are found in multiple cultures. Only select items if you engage at least partially due to the tradition, event, or item being Welsh)”. Responses: Bonfires or similar fires (especially at Calan Mai, midsummer, and Calan Gaeaf) (43); Bwgan Rwdan / Turnip Carving (15); Calennig (7); Carolling (6); Caseg Fedi / Harvest Mare or wheat braiding (8); Leaving Offerings for the Dead on or around Calan Gaeaf (41); Mari Lwyd (37); May Pole (23); Mumming or Mummer’s Dancing (5); New Year’s Water (2); Plygain (3); Siôn Corn (6); Twca Fale (Afalau) / Bobbing for Apples (in water or dangling from strings) (6); Wassailing (22); Wren Procession (as was traditionally common around the midwinter to New Year timeframe) (3); None (10); No answer (2).

Re: traditional Welsh divination: Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, ‘Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture’, (Jotform, 2024): “Other Tangible and Intangible Items of Cultural Significance: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh cultural items or activities partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements”. Responses: Divination / Fortune-telling (using traditional Welsh methods) (22); Flag of Cymru (Wales) (42); Flag of St. David (7); Red Dragon of Wales / Y Ddraig Goch (40); Welsh Folk Magic (40); Welsh Food / Cooking / Cuisine (35); Welsh History / Historical Persons (43); Welsh News (BBC Cymru, BBC Wales, nation.cymru, Wales Online, etc.) (32); Welsh Radio (BBC Radio Cymru or BBC Radio Cymru 2) (17); Welsh Slate (14); Welsh Trains (locomotives) (8); Welsh TV and/or Movies (S4C, Hansh, Cyw, YouTube, etc.) (34); None (6); No answer (5).

[164] Jones, *Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom*, (1930), pp. 155-62; Owen, *Welsh Folk Customs,* (1959), pp. 121-41.

may have overlap with other cultures, the prompt specified that participants should "[o]nly select items if [they] engage at least partially due to the tradition, event, or item being Welsh".[165]

Of Midwinter Welsh traditions important to Cymric Neo-Pagans, the Mari Lwyd was the most popular (and the third most popular seasonal Welsh tradition overall, after bonfires and offerings for the dead around Calan Gaeaf), showing strong engagement at over 51% of respondents, some of whom explained in detail that they do not merely attend the event but themselves "go under the sheet" or troop with a Mari.[166] The popular participation in the revival of the Mari Lwyd custom among Neo-Pagans may be due in part to its being referred to as Pagan not only by the condemnations of Rev. William Roberts in the 1800s, but also by modern popular Welsh scholar Rhiannon Ifans, who perhaps ironically has published that the Mari Lwyd is "in essence … pagan" while popular Welsh Neo-Pagan witch Mhara Starling publicly admitted on social media that "the truth is, we don't know" regarding whether the Mari Lwyd may have a pre-Christian past.[167] Other Welsh winter traditions such as wassailing (about 30.5%), Calennig (nearly 10%),

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[165] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Seasonal / Annual Traditions: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh cultural events or products partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements. **(Some of these are found in multiple cultures. Only select items if you engage at least partially due to the tradition, event, or item being Welsh)**", emphasis added.

[166] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Seasonal / Annual Traditions: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh cultural events or products partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements. (Some of these are found in multiple cultures. Only select items if you engage at least partially due to the tradition, event, or item being Welsh.)" And responses to the follow-up: "Please give a brief summary of specifically how you engage with and / or support the seasonal or annual Welsh cultural traditions or items you selected above, if applicable. If you selected 'Other', please also list those items here".

[167] Owen, *Welsh Folk Customs,* (1959), pp. 25-6, quoting Rev. William Roberts in 1852: "Probably the *main*, if not the *only* cause of this adherence to these traditions is ignorance of their source. … I hope therefore that nobody will be so *foolish* and *ungodly* in Wales after understanding the origin and descent of these practices as to give the least support to a mixture of old Pagan and Popish ceremonies which have come down to us from the darkest ages in learning, behaviour and religion, …";

Ifans, Rhiannon, *Mari Lwyd*, (trac: Traddodiadau Cerdd Cymru/Music Traditions Wales, 2013), pp. 16/17: "Defod baganaidd yw defod y Fari Lwyd yn ei hanfod./In essence, the Mari Lwyd ritual is a pagan one".

carolling and traditions surrounding Siôn Corn (both about 8%), Plygain and the Wren Procession (both about 4%), and New Year's Water (around 3%) were less popular but still garnered some participation.[168]

Fifty-two participants (over 86% of the sixty respondents, and over 70% of the seventy-four total participants) indicated that they also observe Christian holidays.[169] While the popularity of Winter Solstice observances may be easily linked to the adjacent Christmas-to-New-Year's timeframe and their overlapping seasonal decor and customs, that 40% of the cohort *also separately* observe Christmas points not to the Winter Solstice replacing Christmas for many, but rather to multi-tradition religious pluralism or eclectic Christopaganism, celebrations with non-Neo-Pagan family and friends, adherence to tradition, and/or the impact of high pressure from the majority overculture, all of which were given as motivations for participants'

Starling, Mhara, 'Pagan Origins of the Mari Lwyd?', *mhara_starling*, (Instagram, 27 Dec 2023): "Among most modern pagans who have a fondness for the Mari Lwyd, there is a strong belief that the tradition involving this bedazzled horse's skull has its origins in the Pre-Christian past. But does it? The truth is, we don't know. What we do know for certain is that we have no written evidence of the Mari Lwyd prior to the very early 19th century".

[168] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Seasonal / Annual Traditions: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh cultural events or products partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements. (Some of these are found in multiple cultures. Only select items if you engage at least partially due to the tradition, event, or item being Welsh.)"

[169] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Christian Holidays: At any point within the past 5 years, I have observed the following Christian holidays partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements". Responses: Dydd Sant Cynderyn Garthwys / Saint Kentigern's Day (14 January) (1); Dydd Sant Catwg / Saint Cadog's Day (24 January / 25 September) (1); Dydd Santes Dwynwen / Saint Dwynwen's Day (25 January) (17); Gŵyl Fair y Canhwyllau neu y Morwyn, Gŵyl San Ffraid ; Mary's Feast of the Candles or the Virgin, or Feast of Saint Brigid (1 February) (14); Dydd Dewi Sant / Saint David's Day (1 March) (28); Dydd Santes Non / Saint Non's Day (5 March) (2); Dydd Sant Padrig / Saint Patrick's Day (17 March) (7); Grawys / Lent (1); Dydd Sul y Meibion / Sunday of the Sons (3 Sundays before Easter) (1); Dydd Sul y Pys / Sunday of the Peas (2 Sundays before Easter) (1); Dydd Sul y Blodau / Sunday of the Flowers (Sunday before Easter) (1); Pasg / Easter (8); Dydd Sant Brynach neu Frannoc / Saint Brynach or Brannoc's Day (7 April) (1); Dydd Santes Elen Luyddog / Saint (H)elen of the Hosts or of Caernarfon's Day (22 May) (2); Dydd Santes Melangell / Saint Melangell or Monacella's Day (28 May) (4); Dydd Saint Alban, Julius, ag Aaron / Saints Alban, Julius, and Aaron's Day (20 June) (1); Dydd Santes Tudful / Saint Tydfil's Day (23 August) (1); Dydd Santes Gwenfrewi / Saint Gwenfrewi or Winifred's Day (3 November) (2); Dydd Sant Illtud / Saint Illtud or Hildutus's Day (6 November) (1); Nadolig / Christmas Eve and / or Christmas Day (24 / 25 December) (24); None (18); No answer (14).

observance of Christian holidays.[170] In formulating the survey question measuring Neo-Pagan observance of Christian holidays and saints' days, heavy reference was paid to the works of Elissa Henken, Huw Pryce, W. J. Rees, and Baring-Gould and Fisher regarding Welsh saints.[171] Engagement with St. David's Day outstripped even Christmas, with 47% of respondents, making it the most commonly celebrated Christian holiday among the cohort, although the fact that this (and some other Christian holidays) was viewed more as a celebration of Welsh culture than as a Christian celebration was an important point of context for over one-fifth of respondents.[172]

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[170] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Christian Holidays: At any point within the past 5 years, I have observed the following Christian holidays partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements. … If you selected any of the Christian observances above, please share why you engage with certain Christian holidays, observances, and / or saints as a Neo-Pagan": "Dual faith and dual practice were and are common in Cymru, as elsewhere in Britain. As a cunning man/Dyn Hysbys, the two are complementary if not inseparable", "They are hard to avoid culturally and spirituality can be found within them", "Modern culture and a teen age son means that some observance of Christmas is unavoidable", "I didn't select any in that list, but I am a Christian as well as everything else", "Because there is so much crossover between the both belief systems. I personally hate those smug pagans who go on about ' all Christian holidays are pagan ' they're absolute idiots", "The rest of my family is Chrisitan I celebrate with them", "We have a religiously fluid household", "I was brought up Christian and celebrate Christmas day in New Zealand at the height of summer. It is a wonderful time to spend time with friends and family, celebrate summer solstice and gift the light back to the northern hemisphere!", "St David is the patron saint of Wales and part of our traditional cultural calendar. We celebrate Nadolig, Solstice and Jul!!", "tradition in my family who is mostly christian [sic]", "I grew up Catholic and I have always had an eclectic practice, and identify as a chaos magician. Saints and ancestors are important to my work. Also my family still celebrates Christmas so by making it more, Welsh, I am make it more appropriate to my own practice", "a lot of sources for welsh [sic] paganism come filtered through a christian perspective and this is the way alot [sic] of culture has survived. I [sic] do not theologically believe in christianity but i [sic] do practice it to some degree because it is where i [sic] find spiritual connections in modern day", "Culturally appropriate within my family. Plus I like the idea of lots of people celebrating across the world at the same time", "Pressure from others, curiosity, and for the food", "Tradition. Family traditions. I observe many Christian holidays, as I am a follower of very early Celtic Christianity. I am particularly fond of some early saints".

[171] Rees, W. J., *Lives of the Cambro British Saints of the Fifth and Immediate Succeeding Centuries, from Ancient Welsh & Latin MSS, in the British Museum and Elsewhere, with English Translations, and Explanatory Notes*, (Llandovery: William Rees, 1853); Baring-Gould, Sabine & John Fisher, *The Lives of the British Saints: The Saints of Wales and Cornwall and Such Irish Saints as Have Dedications in Britain*, Vols. 1-4, (London: Honorable Society of the Cymmrodorion, 1907 [Vol. 1]; 1908 [Vol. 2]; 1911 [Vol. 3]; 1913 [Vol. 4]); Henken, Elissa R., *Traditions of the Welsh Saints*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987); Pryce, Huw, 'A New Edition of the *Historia Divae Monacellae*', *The Montgomeryshire Collections: Journal of the Powysland Club*, 82, (Welshpool Printing Company, 1994), Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru, 23-40.

[172] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Christian Holidays: At any point within the past 5 years, I have observed the following Christian holidays partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements. … If you selected any of the Christian observances above, please share why you engage with certain Christian holidays, observances, and / or saints as a Neo-Pagan", open-text responses: "Bringing myself closer to Welsh holy-days/holidays and culture", "Dydd Dewi Sant is a Welsh holiday to me, a day to celebrate Wales and Welshness, like the US Fourth of July", "As my knowledge of Welsh culture has slowly grown, I have begun to observe these holidays with a local Welsh Heritage organization in my home state of Oregon, many of whom are Christian, and are closely associated with Bryn Sion church, holding Noson Lawen there every year", "St. Patrick's Day and Christmas are unavoidable",

Other Christian observances included Dydd Santes Dwynwen (St. Dwynwen's Day) at 28% of respondents, Gŵyl Fair y Canhwyllau / y Morwyn / Gŵyl San Ffraid (Mary's Feast of the Candles / the Virgin / Feast of Saint Brigid) at 23%, Easter with 13%, Saint Patrick's Day at 12%, and Dydd Santes Melangell (St. Melangell's Day) with 7%.[173] Aside from Christmas and Easter, the most popularly observed Christian holidays were all Welsh saint's days (although St. Brigid/San Ffraid is primarily Irish, she also has her own set of Welsh mythical/miracle stories). The potential for ancient Pagan origins behind the surviving stories of the saints was not a majority motivation, only being mentioned by eight respondents (just over 13%).[174]

"Feast of St Brigid due to her being called Braint in Welsh and a patron deity - this is incorporated into my celebration of the Gwyl Canhwyllau. I admittedly haven't done much research into Welsh saints - St. Melangell is a story that reached me in some way, and now I honour her as a patron of wildlife and sanctuary and the natural environment of Wales", "St David's Day as a tradition from living in Wales and my spouse being born in Wales", "For me Dydd Dewi Sant is a day to share my welsh culture with partner and friends here in the states with out them feeling like they have to participate in a religious ceremony", "St David's Day is the holiday used to celebrate and educate about Welsh culture", "I celebrate Dydd Dewi Sant as I do not see it as a Christian holiday, but instead as a general celebration of Wales", "Dates chosen are also largely celebrated as secular observances. St Dwynwen's day is mostly an excuse for me to tease my very English husband about him not having given me a love spoon yet", "Dwynwen is too good for the Christians to keep, Saint David I regard as a national institution, and Christmas because 'A Child's Christmas in Wales'", "Gŵyl San Ffraid as it aligns with Gŵyl Braint and Dydd Dewi Sant in celebration of Cymru and an excuse to make Welsh cakes".

[173] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Christian Holidays: At any point within the past 5 years, I have observed the following Christian holidays partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements". Responses: Dydd Sant Cynderyn Garthwys / Saint Kentigern's Day (14 January) (1); Dydd Sant Catwg / Saint Cadog's Day (24 January / 25 September) (1); Dydd Santes Dwynwen / Saint Dwynwen's Day (25 January) (17); Gŵyl Fair y Canhwyllau neu y Morwyn, Gŵyl San Ffraid ; Mary's Feast of the Candles or the Virgin, or Feast of Saint Brigid (1 February) (14); Dydd Dewi Sant / Saint David's Day (1 March) (28); Dydd Santes Non / Saint Non's Day (5 March) (2); Dydd Sant Padrig / Saint Patrick's Day (17 March) (7); Grawys / Lent (1); Dydd Sul y Meibion / Sunday of the Sons (3 Sundays before Easter) (1); Dydd Sul y Pys / Sunday of the Peas (2 Sundays before Easter) (1); Dydd Sul y Blodau / Sunday of the Flowers (Sunday before Easter) (1); Pasg / Easter (8); Dydd Sant Brynach neu Frannoc / Saint Brynach or Brannoc's Day (7 April) (1); Dydd Santes Elen Luyddog / Saint (H)elen of the Hosts or of Caernarfon's Day (22 May) (2); Dydd Santes Melangell / Saint Melangell or Monacella's Day (28 May) (4); Dydd Saint Alban, Julius, ag Aaron / Saints Alban, Julius, and Aaron's Day (20 June) (1); Dydd Santes Tudful / Saint Tydfil's Day (23 August) (1); Dydd Santes Gwenfrewi / Saint Gwenfrewi or Winifred's Day (3 November) (2); Dydd Sant Illtud / Saint Illtud or Hildutus's Day (6 November) (1); Nadolig / Christmas Eve and / or Christmas Day (24 / 25 December) (24); None (18); No answer (14).

[174] *Ibid*.: "I tend to engage with Christian holidays on those days that had a pagan origin", "I regard St Dwynwen as a culture hero of Wales and that one does not have to be Christian to celebrate her. I regard many Welsh saints as possibly memorialising pre-Christian figures. I might observe Melangell's day and also St Tanwg who was the saint of the village my ancestors came from in Gwynedd", "I engage with Brigid as a goddess but incorporate elements of her as a Saint into my worship. I also honor St Elen, who has had a very strange journey into paganism. So, basically, I engage with Christian holidays and observances where they overlap with pagan ones", "Please note that nit [sic] all Christian dates above were Christians most are from pagan origins", "The [sic] are perhaps echoes of older pre Christian elements and significant to Welsh culture", "Oftem [sic] embedded in older beliefs, school", "These festivals have been lifted out of the pagan calendar by the church. The actual yearly calendars have shifted,

Welsh Cultural Engagement via the Arts, Media, & Language

Participation in, and consumption or support of, Welsh literature and arts saw high rates of engagement among the cohort. From the seventy-two respondents, Welsh medieval literature and the figures, beings, or gods from Welsh literature or folklore reflected the highest rate of engagement, with about 86% and exactly 87.5% of respondents engaging with these, respectively.[175] This is a predictable result, as Welsh medieval literature (prose, poetry, folklore, etc.) and the figures from it are the primary sources for lore/mythology in Cymric Neo-Pagan practice. However, other Welsh literary or artistic events and crafts were also popular, such as Welsh storytelling or folklore (approximately 71%), Welsh music (about 61%), modern Welsh literature (about 40%), informal eisteddfodau (around 39%), "Welsh wood-carving, lovespoons, or carpentry", as well as "Welsh paintings, drawings, digital art, or other static 2-D visual arts" (about 28% each), "Welsh textiles, quilting, weaving, embroidery, traditional clothing, etc." and "Welsh theatre, plays, or cinema" (about 26% each), and the National Eisteddfod (over 23%).[176]

Participants span a spectrum from engaging in Welsh arts and literature in a strictly Neo-Pagan religious context (such as informal eisteddfodau with Druidry groups) to running a shop selling Welsh cultural items and souvenirs, supporting family who compete in the National Eisteddfod,

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likewise. I keep Old August on the 12th, in fact, just like Old Hallowe'en is actually later in November. There's an ancient reason why Armistice Day is the 11th", "Tradition and centred around Yule[.] Dwynwen is a Celtic Goddess of Ynys Môn".

[175] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Art & Literary Traditions: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements".

[176] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Art & Literary Traditions: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements".

teaching classes, performing professional storytelling, hosting Welsh radio programs, playing Welsh folk music or creating art themselves, attending Welsh art exhibits or galleries and concerts, writing poetry or novels, and many specifically putting forth effort to buy from Welsh artisans and creators.[177]

Welsh media were popular as well, with over 49% of the sixty-nine respondents engaging with Welsh TV and/or movies (e.g. S4C, on YouTube, etc.) and over 46% keeping up with Welsh news (e.g. BBC Cymru, BBC Wales, nation.cymru, Wales Online).[178] Other items of Welsh cultural significance also saw high engagement, such as the Flag of Cymru (Wales) with about 61% of respondents, Y Ddraig Goch (the Red Dragon of Wales) and Welsh folk magic with nearly 58% each (reflecting the high but not universal overlap between Neo-Pagans and magical practitioners), and Welsh food, cooking, or cuisine at over 50%.[179] These results suggest an interest and engagement with Welsh culture across a broad range of aspects of the cohort's lives, even among those who live outside of Wales. Some participants elaborated on cooking particular Welsh foods, using Welsh media in part to increase their language skills, wishing they could watch Welsh television programs outside the U.K., and many mentioned having a Welsh flag.[180]

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[177] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Art & Literary Traditions: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements", open-text responses to the follow-up prompt: "Please give a brief summary of specifically how you engage with and / or support the art and literary Welsh cultural traditions or items you selected above, if applicable".

[178] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Other Tangible and Intangible Items of Cultural Significance: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh cultural items or activities partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements".

[179] *Ibid*.

[180] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Other Tangible and Intangible Items of Cultural Significance: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh cultural items or activities partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements"., open-text responses to the follow-up prompt: "Please give a

In keeping with the importance of the Welsh language among the cohort, nearly 83% of the seventy respondents indicated that they use language-learning tools or services to improve their Welsh, with many selecting more than one.[181] Five participants were already fluent in Welsh, resulting in over 85% of total participants who are either putting forth effort to learn Welsh or already speak it.[182] The most popular choice by far was DuoLingo, with about 58.5% of respondents using it, followed by Say Something in Welsh, at about 38.5%.[183] Other popular methods included Welsh language-learning books (30%) and Dysgu Cymraeg/Learn Welsh (over 24%).[184] Say Something in Welsh was founded by Aran Jones and is based in Bangor, Gwynedd, while the Dysgu Cymraeg/Learn Welsh program is run by the National Centre for Learning Welsh (NCLW) under the Welsh government.[185] Both of these language-learning programs cost money (except for certain programs for in-Wales residents run by the NCLW), meaning those who use Say Something in Welsh, or Dysgu Cymraeg outside of Wales, are directly contributing financially to Welsh-language-strengthening efforts and/or Welsh government programs.

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brief summary of specifically how you engage with and / or support the Welsh cultural items or activities you selected above, if applicable".

[181] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Language: At any point within the past 5 years, I have used the following to learn or improve my Cymraeg (Welsh language) partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements". Responses: Amdani (novels targeting Welsh language learners) (4), DuoLingo (41), Dysgu Cymraeg / Learn Welsh (17), italki (1), Learn Welsh Podcast (14), learn-welsh.net (4), Lingo Newydd (magazine targeting Welsh language learners) (2), Residential immersion intensive (3), Say Something in Welsh (27), University-hosted language class (3) [including narrative text input "college evening classes" = (4)], Welsh grammar books (12), Welsh language-learning books (21), I already use Cymraeg fluently and do not need to learn or improve it via methods intended for second-language learners (4) [including person who said they speak fluently but their reading and writing are rusty in narrative text = (5)], None (I do not already know Welsh and am not learning it) (7) [technically 8, but 1 also selected that they are already fluent and don't need to learn it], Other (16), No answer (8) [4 have fill-in answers in the "Other" follow-up]. "If you selected "Other" on the question above, please list additional Welsh language learning or improvement methods you have used here".

[182] *Ibid.* This result closely mirrors, but does not exactly match, the 88% who indicated they speak or are learning Welsh in the question regarding Welsh language ability in Section 1 of the survey, although not all participants responded to this later query in Section 3, possibly due to fatigue or disengagement by this point in the survey.

[183] *Ibid.*

[184] *Ibid.*

[185] SaySomethingin, 'Our History', (SaySomethingIn, 2025); Dysgu Cymraeg, 'The National Centre for Learning Welsh', (Cymraeg, 2025).

Historical Observances & Modern Movements

Other historical or cultural observances which participants claimed to take part in partially or entirely because of their being a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements included: Pride Cymru LGBTQ+ (fifteen participants), Diwrnod Crempog (twelve participants), Black History Month in Britain (nine participants), the anniversary of the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (seven participants), the anniversary of Owain Glyndŵr's rebellion (six participants), Welsh Rarebit Day (four participants), and Hen Galan (Old New Year, three participants).[186] Other answers written in by the respondents included Remembrance Day and Armistice Day, and 21 October observance for Capel Celyn and Aberfan.[187]

Sixty-seven respondents indicated involvement in socio-political causes in or related to Wales.[188] Movements which garnered the most engagement were Welsh language-support initiatives (over one-third of respondents), Welsh independence (about 27.5%), environmental/conservation/ rewilding/clean water and similar efforts within Wales (approximately 26%), Pride Cymru (about 25%), and political parties in Wales (around 20%).[189] Charities in Wales, community

[186] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Other Historical / Cultural Observances: At any point within the past 5 years, I have observed the following dates partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements". Number of Respondents/Total Participants: 59/74. Responses: Dydd Miwsig Cymru / Welsh Language Music Day (7 February) (1); Diwrnod Crempog / Pancake Day (Day before Lent) (12); Dylan Thomas Day (14 May) (2); Pride Cymru LGBTQ+ (month of August) (15); Welsh Rarebit Day (3 September) (4); Owain Glyndŵr's Rebellion (16 September) (6); Black History Month in Britain (October) (9); Death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (11 December) (7); None (26); Other (7); No answer (15).
[187] *Ibid.*: "If you selected "Other" on the question above, please list additional Welsh historical or cultural dates of significance you have observed here".
[188] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Socio-Political Action: At any point within the past 5 years, I have hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh social and / or political events, movements, or causes partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements".
[189] *Ibid*.

improvement or support projects in Wales, and Welsh devolution or autonomy efforts all registered ten respondents each (about 14.5% each).[190] Socio-political demonstrations or protests in Wales saw the least engagement with five participants (about 7% of respondents). In open-text response, two participants mentioned supporting the Plaid Cymru political party, six wrote of reading or disseminating information about some of the listed movements, two were involved in Welsh independence movements or marches, and four mentioned specific volunteering or work-related environmental conservation efforts.[191]

The relatively high rate of engagement with Welsh language-support programs once again highlights the perceived importance of the Welsh language among Cymric Neo-Pagans despite a minority of participants being able to actually speak it beyond a beginner level. Considered in conjunction with support for Welsh independence or devolution/autonomy and some participants' observance of the dates of Owain Glyndŵr's rebellion and the death of Llewelyn ap Gruffudd, these trends may point to a tendency towards Welsh nationalism among those who are socio-politically active. However, the majority of participants placing importance on welcoming those who are not of white European or Welsh ancestry may indicate favor for a non-racialized, inclusive Welsh nationalism that centers national autonomy goals, as opposed to ethno-state nationalist ideologies. Investigating the details of Welsh nationalist thought among Cymric Neo-Pagans is a ripe field for deeper research and one for which there is much comparative research material among the Heathen community.

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[190] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Socio-Political Action: At any point within the past 5 years, I have hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh social and / or political events, movements, or causes partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements".
[191] *Ibid*.

Welsh Cultural Engagement as Community Building & Identity Rooting

The strong engagement with Welsh culture displayed by the survey cohort, going beyond the minimum requirements of historical knowledge and medieval literature, which are the core of the lore used as a mythological basis for Neo-Pagan practice, suggests an attempt to connect with the Welsh culture by weaving it not only into their religious framework but into their way of life, fueled at least in part by their Neo-Pagan identities. Engagement with Welsh culture is also seen among participants who are not themselves of Welsh nationality or domicile despite the greater effort required to connect with the culture than for those who live in Wales or in nearby England. Several of these cultural events and items are also not accessible for free, indicating that some participants financially contribute to the support of Welsh culture and language beyond the strictly Neo-Pagan sphere in addition to spending their time or effort in learning about them (as strictly religious engagement could be argued for those paying for courses on Celtic Source, or for membership with UDM/ADO or OBOD, or Mhara Starling's Patreon, for example).

The concern among Cymric Neo-Pagans surrounding the building or adoption of practices which are couched in historically sound information and supportive of Welsh culture, coupled with the intensely personal, experiential, and often community-building nature of Neo-Paganism in practice (when performed in groups), blurs Cymric Neo-Pagan practices into broader forms of cultural and traditional reclaiming and revitalization. Neo-Pagan religious motivation and the resulting cultural passion (or is it the other way round?) is, in part (to what extent is a topic for further research!), responsible for the recent resurgence of some Welsh cultural traditions being revived in Wales from the brink of fossilization, or even post-abandonment, and intentionally

being transmitted to other regions as well. The overlaps can be quite direct, as several Cymric Neo-Pagan individuals attend, are involved in, or even lead the charge on, community events, classes, and revival of folk practices, as a zeal rarely observed outside religion motivates them to be among those who go out and do the work to make the events happen, purely – as Iolo Morganwg might say – for the love of it. In so doing, they become a part of the greater cultural and linguistic support efforts of Wales, working to reverse the tendency to look upon Welsh culture as treasured but crystallized relics of the past only to be observed from afar and dissected in a purely academic, sterile, removed manner from the "respectable" or "neutral" venues of academia or the dominant Anglo-American culture, instead highlighting its vibrant, living, unique beauty and worth.[192]

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[192] Brown, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025), [full transcript included within the appendices of this document]: "We um at the Anglesey Druid Order, we perform the Mari Lwyd Calennig every January. We go around Beaumaris with the Mari Lwyd with us and such in a retinue where we go from pub to pub and we cause all sorts of chaos";

Urdd Derwyddon Môn - Anglesey Druid Order, 'Hen Galan a Mari Lwyd', (Facebook, 10 Dec 2024): "Sadwrn/Saturday 11 Ion/Jan Dewch i ddathlu Hen Galan gyda'r Fari Lwyd - Sgwar y Llys - Biwmaris am 730 YH. Dewch a'ch Mari Lwyd bychan a llusern Celebrate Old New Year with Mari Lwyd - Court Square, Beaumaris at 730 PM. Bring a mini Mari and a lantern"; Urdd Derwyddon Môn - Anglesey Druid Order, *Hen Galan - Old New Year*, Video Recording Compilation (Facebook, 14 Jan 2024); Morus-Baird, Gwilym, 'Mari Lwyd - The Welsh Sources and Meaning', *Celtic Source*, (YouTube, 24 January 2020);

Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, 'Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture', (Jotform, 2024): "Seasonal / Annual Traditions: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh cultural events or products partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements. (Some of these are found in multiple cultures. Only select items if you engage at least partially due to the tradition, event, or item being Welsh)". Open-text responses: "I help with the local Mari Lwyds with transport, performance and event promotion", "I run a druid group who hold seasonal ceremonies incorporating the Welsh language, translated and spoken by Welsh speakers. We regularly incorporate seasonal and cultural traditions in our ceremonies", "For some of the more widely practiced traditions like bonfires and the May Pole, I am usually part of a bigger general community celebration, not specifically Welsh focused but I do spend some time contemplating the cultural connections and how it connects me to my Welsh ancestors. For the other activities, like wheat braiding and turnip carving, I started engaging in them as a way to connect with my ancestors as well as celebrating the season", "This mostly occurs through my local Welch heritage organization to which I am a member", "I've attended the small gorsedd gatherings in Cardiff which are around the mainly holidays (Calan Gaeaf, Heuldro'r Haf etc.) organised by Mari Mathias. I take offerings to ancestors of poetry, listen to folk music and poetry and then burn written notes of wishes in a fire outside which is jumped over…", "I'm in the process of learning how to sing Wassail songs. I've been to several gatherings where we used bonfires, some incorporating a wickerman. I've been to several Mari presentations/ rituals", "I have been to a gathering of Mari's and vist [sic] the graves of people who I've lost to leave offering [sic]. If I am in Glastonbury at these times, I will go to a church and light candles for the dead", "I do my best to bring those traditions to my grove in Colorado. I use this as an opportunity to teach my community through engagement. Bringing my families [sic] Mari Lwyd to gatherings has become the most requested practice", "In Abergavenny we celebrate yr Hen Galan with a Mari Lwyd procession, a

For example, UDM/ADO leader Kristoffer Hughes described the Order working with the town council in Beaumaris to revive the Mari Lwyd tradition in Ynys Môn:

> "So we wanted to not only incorporate her [the Mari Lwyd] into ritual, but we also wanted to incorporate her into the secular folkloric aspect of our community, which we've been doing now … since the pandemic, by taking the Mari Lwyd to Beaumaris on Hen Galan, or Old New Year, and the response has been absolutely remarkable. Not only from the town council themselves, who have always been somewhat concerned that Beaumaris has only ever attracted Anglicised events. And, they've been keen on having something specifically Welsh within the town. So, we've had the full backing of the Beaumaris town council, because it's brought 2-300 people to the event who are then partaking of the taverns, the restaurants, the hotels, and adding to the island's economy as well. … And then, last year … we've got a couple of school teachers who are members of the Order. So, they wanted to offer a children's mini Mari Lwyd-making workshop. Forty-five kids came to it! It was the first time we ran it, and all of these kids came, and they just had a blast. And … whilst it is facilitated by the Anglesey Druid Order, it isn't specifically about Druidry. It's about this folk figure [the Mari Lwyd] that we love and adore having as not only part of our order, but also part of our *culture*. And, and it feels, from the Hen Galan event, that we've managed to bridge that if people have presumed or wrongly assumed that there's a chasm between what is contemporary Western Druidry and Welsh culture – there really isn't, because we incorporate so much of our folklore into it. And,

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plygain service and a supper. We also have a communal wassail at the Community Orchard at Imbolc/Gwyl y Canhwyllau. I make a caseh [sic] fedi every year and my wife and I leave offerings for our dead loved-ones at Calan Gaeaf", "Mari Lwyd in Cornwall at the dark gathering. They also have Welsh dancers at the celebrations. I've been annually for years", "Leaving offerings to the dead - both those who have been close to me, as well as in a more communal sense, offering to ancestors of mine an [sic] others that they shared the land with - is something that I do both both [sic] on/around Calan Gaeaf and throughout the year, at other meaningful, sessional occasions …", "Engaging with Welsh spirits, in particular", "... Here in Pennsylvania, there is a corner that will be forever Cymru, circa 500 CE. We dress in simple style, light fires, cook, say prayers, sing, feast, offer gifts and tell the old stories", "I go wassailing with a group of people round the community orchards - it is a mix of pepole [sic] from different traditions - some are thanking God, some are calling on the old gods, some like me are calling on the spirit of the trees, as we sing to them and give them offereings [sic] of cider and toast. (It is good because we all get along and noone [sic] objects to either the pagan gods or the Christian God being thanked. I support the maintainace [sic] of our local Mari lwyd (but keep managing to miss the actual procession) Other traditions such as bonfires and offerings for the dead I do myself but also insist on telling my friends and work collagues [sic] about the customs -and trying to encourage them to not just get lost in the great take over by American customs!", "Bonfires and leaving offerings are elements that have been added to my witchcraft practice as a result of centering Welsh traditions. Turnip carving and apple bobbing are things I'd learned about when researching traditions. Mari Lwyd is something I've learned about and shared with others".

that folklore doesn't belong to us [Druids]; it belongs to *all* of us. It belongs *to* the people, to the Cymry."

— Kristoffer Hughes quoted from Brown, Jennifer, *Interview with Kristoffer Hughes*, (22 Apr 2025).

Image 2: UDM/ADO's Mari Môn on Hen Galan (Old New Year) in Beaumaris



The accompanying musical entourage is singing pwnco and carrying Calennig.[193]

A U.S. survey participant based in Pennsylvania (a state with a historically heavy Welsh diaspora population) teaches Welsh folklore and participates in Welsh cultural events and revitalization

[193] Starling, Mhara, 'Celebrating Hen Galan in style! Wassailing and frolicks with the Anglesey Druid Order and Mari Môn!', *mhara_starling*, (Threads, 13 Jan 2024).

efforts in her state: “I am a storyteller and folklorist, specialising in Welsh, Cornish and West of England folklore. I teach Welsh folktales, and study Welsh folklore. I am also a spinner, weaver, embroiderer and knitter, and study the history of textiles for my own amusement. There are many skilled practitioners of traditional Welsh crafts and arts in Pennsylvania. I have attended festivals and workshops, watched skilled craftspeople making items. There are two wonderful love spoon makers within easy driving distance from me. As a radio producer, I have programmed Welsh music on the radio for twenty years. I had an annual St David’s Day programme, where I played Welsh music, both old, and highlighting newer Welsh folk singers and composers. I also programmed special one hour radio programmes to support any new releases by Sir Karl Jenkins, of whom I am a huge fan”.[194]

Mhara Starling spoke of Neo-Pagan engagement with Welsh cultural traditions as a “bridge” between the past and the present, a bridge that was once “the beating heart of communities”:

> “So, to me, it's a big idea of reconnecting with the traditions that at one point were the beating heart of communities throughout our- our landscape, throughout our culture. And,

[194] Brown, *Modern Welsh Paganism Survey*, ‘Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture’, (Jotform, 2024): “Art & Literary Traditions: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements. … Please give a brief summary of specifically how you engage with and / or support the art and literary Welsh cultural traditions or items you selected above, if applicable”. Response slightly edited for clarity and minor grammatical/spelling errors.

Regarding the history of the (almost wholly anglicized) Welsh in Pennsylvania: Schlenther, Boyd Stanley, ‘“The English Is Swallowing Up Their Language”: Welsh Ethnic Ambivalence in Colonial Pennsylvania and the Experience of David Evans’, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 114: 2, (Apr 1990), pp. 201-228; Lewis, Ronald L., *Welsh Americans: A History of Assimilation in the Coalfields*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Tyler, Robert Llewellyn, ‘Migrant Identity and Culture Maintenance: The Welsh in Clearfield County, Pennsylvania, USA, 1880-1920’, *Immigrants & Minorities*, 38: 3, (2020) pp, 205–32.

> it enables us to ultimately reconnect with ourselves because we are connecting with something that has existed for a long time, but that we can reinterpret our connection to it in the modern day. So it acts as a bridge. And, that's a big part of my- my own spiritual practice, is this idea of bridging two things together. So by interacting with traditions such as y Fari Lwyd or making offerings at Nos Galan Gaeaf, we are then bridging the past and the present. And, we are bringing something that's wholly, uniquely Welsh and beautiful, but also something that can consistently change and evolve as time goes on. And, I think there's something quite powerful in that, especially when it comes to aiding people in connecting not only with their culture or their heritage, but also their landscape."
>
> — Mhara Starling quoted from Brown, Jennifer, *Interview with Mhara Starling*, (21 Apr 2025).

While that bridge is serving once more as the beating heart of Cymric Druid and Neo-Pagan communities, to what extent it will serve as one of the pillars that support the greater Welsh culture and community beyond Neo-Paganism can only be revealed with time.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

It is hoped that a step forward has been made in beginning to unearth who Neo-Pagans who center or incorporate Welsh culture into their practice are, what they value, and how and why they incorporate Welsh culture into their practice in the first place. Much like other Neo-Pagans, Neo-Pagans for whom Welsh cultural elements find a place in their practice are overwhelmingly of at least partial white European race or ethnicity, hailing from the U.K. or one of its former anglophone colonies, and a majority are mature adults to elderly. Also much like other Neo-Pagans, they tend to skew socially liberal and value inclusivity, with overwhelming, though not universal, acceptance and welcoming of the LGBTQ+ community and those with disabilities.

The majority of Cymric Neo-Pagans and others incorporating Welsh culture into their practice are not Welsh themselves, but about a quarter of them are. Nearly half of them have lived in Wales, and nearly two-thirds have visited. Most are welcoming of persons from outside of Wales and/or with no Welsh ancestry (given that they engage with the culture "respectfully") as well as of people who are not or do not stereotypically appear to be racially white, with the three community-leader interviewees (Mhara Starling, Kristoffer Hughes, and Dr. Gwilym Morus-Baird) expressing views ranging from straightforward denunciation of "gatekeeping" or exclusionary practices to open hostility towards them, especially in the case of white-supremacist racism. However, also like other types of Neo-Paganism, this cohort is not without its individuals who are intolerant of some or all of the above-listed groups, and some research participants have unfortunately experienced or witnessed discrimination from within the community. Whether intolerant attitudes will continue to be a rarity, especially as the West veers right politically, will

be a point for future research comparison, as ethno-cultural sects of Neo-Paganism are frequently vulnerable to racialized, xenophobic, and supremacist nationalist ideologies.

Tolerance for ignorance is low across the board, with high importance assigned to knowledge of Welsh history by 100% of both survey participants and the community-leader interviewees. A majority also agree that it is important to support and learn from persons who are Welsh themselves, a value which is being reflected by the rising popularity within the Neo-Pagan community of the three community-leader interviewees who are all Welsh.

Unlike the overall population in either the U.K. or U.S. (from which the overwhelming majority of participants hail), the cohort is composed of a high proportion of those with nonbinary gender identities, with over one-sixth of participants identifying as nonbinary. Unlike both Neo-Pagans and Druids at-large, those of binary genders are almost perfectly evenly represented. While over one-fifth of the group are elderly (age 61 or over), in the absence of newer data regarding the Neo-Pagan population as a whole, it is unclear whether this is a trend across Neo-Paganism or Druidry, or only for those who incorporate Welsh culture. Approximately 5% of survey participants identify as Hispanic, another trend which needs more up-to-date data from Neo-Pagans at-large for proper comparison. Differing from some other Neo-Pagan subgroups (but in common with subgroups which also center a Celtic culture), there seems to be a lack of agreement on what Neo-Pagans who center Welsh culture themselves should be called, a point which may make rallying around common cause or finding others of similar identity more difficult than if there were a consistent label, such as is the case for Heathens and Hellenists.

The data from both survey participants and the three community-leader interviewees points to a consistent significance assigned by Cymric Neo-Pagans to Welsh language, culture, and tradition, influencing their choices in broad areas of life even outside those strictly tied to religion (such as holiday observances, folk magic, and consuming what is perceived to be mythological literature). Engagement with Welsh culture for some participants – not all of whom live within Wales – extends to include learning and using the Welsh language, practicing Welsh folk customs and storytelling, cooking and consuming Welsh cuisine, creating or purchasing Welsh arts and crafts and literature, Welsh media consumption (including music, television, and news), and/or being active in or donating to Welsh politics and environmental protection or community support projects. A few participants even teach or host community events featuring Welsh culture and traditions, helping to reinforce and/or spread Welsh culture directly.

Religion has long been a powerful vector around which community gathers and strengthens. It is also frequently counted among the most important pieces of the tapestry of culture – and no wonder, for it holds our celebrations of the seasons of life and of death, of our greatest joys and sorrows, shared with those with and to whom we feel we belong, if not in blood or nation-state, then in heart. Combining the seeds of traditional Welsh culture and language and planting them in the soil of religion – a religion that cannot be easily anglicized, as its entire appeal *is* its Welshness – is perhaps beginning to sprout a tree around which those who value Welsh culture so strongly that they would make it a central pillar in their religion can congregate. The people surveyed and interviewed in this research are not the planters – but they are the nurturers – of that deep-rooted, but still small, sapling. How large will it grow, and how long will it live?

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Appendices

Jotform Survey & Responses

74 Submissions received between 8 November 2024 and 27 January 2025.
Jotform Survey URL: <https://form.jotform.com/243083624077154>

The following is a direct copy of the contents of one of the primary field data sources for this study, the Jotform Survey "Modern Welsh Paganism Survey". Each question/prompt and instructions are copied and pasted as near as possible to exactly as they appear on the survey's Jotform website, including font and use of **boldface** or CAPS (thus the font is not Times New Roman as with the rest of this paper). Each question/prompt is followed by the total number of respondents to that query out of the total 74 participants and the listed answer choices available on the survey (with the addition of "No answer" in the case that any participants did not respond to the question) and how many participants selected each answer in parentheses () to the right of each answer. An answer which zero participants have selected has no number in parentheses following that answer option. The only query which appeared on the Jotform survey which does not have its answers listed is the prompt to share an email address, as the participant email addresses have been omitted from this data report for the sake of maintenance of participant anonymity. Open text box queries are followed by the narrative answers of each participant in " " marks, with [sic] added by Jennifer Brown where applicable. The original data is stored on the Jotform website itself and is encrypted requiring a password confidential to the author in order to access.

The contents of the survey and its responses as described above begin on the next page.

Modern Welsh Paganism Survey

Prifysgol Cymru Y Drindod Dewi Sant | University of Wales Trinity Saint David

All fields marked with * are required and must be filled.

Welcome to the Modern Welsh Paganism survey.

This survey is for legal adults only.

This research aims to provide a better understanding of the Neo-Pagan community who incorporate elements of Welsh culture into their practice by finding out the following directly from practitioners:

- The basic demographics of Neo-Pagan practitioners who centre or incorporate Welsh culture into their Neo-Pagan practice,
- How these practitioners self-identify,
- How these practitioners identify other practitioners and what criteria are used to determine if others belong in their community, and
- How, why, and to what extent these practitioners draw on, participate in, and / or support Welsh culture, traditions, and / or language.

Participation, Ethics, and Your Data

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.

You are not required to complete this survey.

None of the questions in the survey are required. Only written consent to participate is required via providing a functioning email address.

You may skip any question you wish.

You may stop or withdraw at any time for any reason.

The amount of the survey completed, and your answers to survey questions, will not affect your treatment.

Data collected from you will be anonymized and treated with full

confidentiality (for example, no names, email addresses, IP addresses, etc. will be attached to your answers).
If published, your data will not be identifiable as yours.

Surveys submitted on or after 15 March 2025 will not be considered or included in any publication or final written analysis, and their data will be deleted.

After submitting, you may contact the researcher (Jennifer Brown) at any time before 1 September 2025 to withdraw your submission or request that your anonymized submitted responses not be included in the research data set or the final written analysis.

PLEASE NOTE that this survey asks questions about your demographics (e.g. age, nationality, race, gender identity) and your views regarding sensitive topics such as race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability as regards practitioners of Neo-Paganism who incorporate Welsh culture into their practice. This data will be anonymized and not tied to your identifying information (it will not be tied to your name, email address, IP address, etc).

About This Survey

The following survey is 3 parts totalling 43 questions all together.
The whole survey should take approximately 15 to 30 minutes to complete, depending on your reading speed and how in-depth you wish to answer the questions.
Your progress will be saved.

Email and Consent to Participate

A post-survey debrief is required for research ethics considerations. Entering your email address also constitutes your written consent to participate in this survey. If you wish to continue on to the survey, please enter an email address you would like us to send the post-survey debrief to here:*

Survey Relevance Pre-Screening
2 Questions

In this survey, we use "**Neo-Pagan(s)**" as an umbrella term which includes:

- Polytheistic Pagans,
- Polytheistic witches / occultists,
- Monotheistic Pagans (e.g. Christian, Jewish, or Muslim Pagans)
- Monotheistic witches / occultists (e.g. Christian, Jewish, or Muslim witches)
- Non-theistic Pagans,
- Non-theistic witches / occultists,
- Reconstructionists -- theistic or non-theistic (persons who base their practice on aspects of pre-Christian religions, philosophy, cultures, and / or history),
- Eclectic, mixed, or syncretizing practitioners of paths regularly deemed "Pagan", "Neo-Pagan", or "polytheist",
- Druids (self-labeled or students / members of any Druidic order),
- Wiccans (self-labeled, solitary, or students / initiates of any Wiccan coven/tradition),
- Nature-centreing theistic or non-theistic / humanist religions or lifestyles which may or may not include magic(k)al practice,
- Traditional culture-centreing theistic or non-theistic / humanist religions or lifestyles which may or may not include magic(k)al practice.

Do you consider yourself to be a Neo-Pagan as described above?*

Total Respondents/Total Participants: 74/74
Yes (74 participants)
No

Do you incorporate any elements of Welsh culture into your Neo-Pagan practice? Elements of Welsh culture include, but are not limited to: Welsh language, Welsh persons or figures or deities (such as Cerridwen, Taliesin, Rhiannon, Gwyn ap Nudd, historical persons, etc.), Welsh holidays, Welsh traditional or folk practices, Welsh literature, Welsh stories or folklore, Welsh poetry, Welsh art, Welsh music, Welsh history, Welsh food, etc.*

Total: 74/74
Yes (74 participants)
No

If your answer to **both** of the above questions is “Yes”, you may proceed to the survey on the next page by clicking the "Next" button below.
If your answer to either of the above questions is “No”, there is no need to complete this survey, and we thank you for your interest.

Survey Section 1: Basic Demographics
9 Questions; about 5 minutes

Please answer the following questions based on your own personal opinions, feelings, and worldviews (not the official / public stances of any groups you may be a member of). Please feel free to explain more complex responses in the spaces provided, if you wish.

What is your age?

Please Select (drop-down menu)

Total: 74/74
18-30 (10 participants)
31-40 (14)
41-50 (17)
51-60 (17)
61-70 (11)
71 or over (5)

What is your legal nationality? This is the nation that your passport would be for. (Select the nationality with which you most identify if you hold multiple legal nationalities.)

Please Select (drop-down menu of world nations)

Total: 74/74
United Kingdom (40 participants)
Canada (2)
United States (27)
New Zealand (2)
Gibraltar (1)
Greece (1)
Sweden (1)

In which nation were you born?

Please Select (drop-down menu of world nations)

Total: 73/74
United Kingdom (37)
Canada (3)
United States (28)
New Zealand (1)
Gibraltar (1)
Greece (1)
Sweden (1)
Bangladesh (1)
No answer (1)

What is your gender identity?

Total: 74/74
Agender / No gender (2)
Gender fluid (2)
Man / Masculine (30)
Nonbinary (9)
Woman / Feminine (31)
Other (Please fill in.)

If you had to describe yourself in terms of race or racial descent on a legal document, how would you describe yourself? You may choose more than one.

Total: 72/74
Aboriginal / Native Australian (e.g. Koori, Palawa, etc.)
African (e.g. “Black”, Congolese, Kenyan, Malian, Togolese, etc.)
Caribbean Islander (e.g. Cuban, Haitian, Jamaican, Taíno, etc.)
Central Asian (e.g. Afghanistani, Kazakhstani, Turkmenistani, etc.)
East Asian (e.g. Ainu, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, etc.)
European (e.g. German, Irish, Italian, Slavic, Spanish, “White”, etc.) (69)
Middle Eastern (e.g. Arabian, Egyptian / Coptic, Iraqi, Syrian, Turkish, etc.)
Native Meso-American (e.g. Aztec, Mayan, Olmec, Teotihuacan, Huastec, etc.) (1)

Native North American (e.g. First Nations, Choctaw, Inuit, Lakota, Métis, etc.) (1)
Native South American (e.g. Chono, Incan, Guarani, Mapuche, Puelche, etc.)
Hispanic (4)
Mixed (1)
Pacific Islander (e.g. Chamorro, Fijian, Hawaiian, Maori, Yapese, etc.)
South Asian (Indian, Nepalese, Pakistani, Sri Lankan / Sinhalese, etc.) (1)
Southeast Asian (e.g. Filipino, Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese, etc.) (1)
No answer (2)

Do you consider yourself to be of Welsh (or partially Welsh) ancestry or descent?

Total: 73/74
Yes (49)
No (24)
No answer (1)

Have you ever lived in Cymru (Wales)? (Holidays, vacations, or staying less than 1 month do not count.)

Total: 74/74
Yes (36)
No (38)

Have you ever visited or gone on holiday in Cymru (Wales)? (Cymru as an intended destination. Not merely passing through on the way to somewhere else.)

Total: 73/74
Yes (46)
No (27)
No answer (1)

Do you speak or sign, understand, read, and / or write Cymraeg (the Welsh language)? You may choose your own personal assessment of your current ability level.

Total: 74/74
Not at all (16)
Beginner (33)
Intermediate (12)
Advanced (2)
Fluent / First Language (5)
It’s complicated / Not sure (Please explain.) (6)

If you selected "It's complicated. / Not sure." above, please explain here.

“I have made attempts to learn”

“But I like to listen to welsh songs”

“Ritual use....parriting [sic]”

“Learnt Cymraeg for my first 5 years then moved to Australia and forgot it”

“I am not fluent by any means, not am I actively learning so I'm not a "beginner," but when you grow up and live in Wales the language is around you all the time, in place names and so on. I can read and pronounce Welsh properly and know many words without actually speaking it.”

“I used to be fluent, but I've forgotten a lot. I'm relearning.”

“My Middle Welsh is better than my modern Welsh.”

Survey Section 2: Identity and Community Membership
20 Questions; about 5-12 minutes

Please answer the following questions based on **your own personal opinions, feelings, and worldviews** (not the official / public stances of any groups you may be a member of). Please feel free to explain more complex responses in the spaces provided, if you wish.

1. What should people who primarily centre Welsh culture in their Neo-Pagan practice (regardless of nationality) call themselves? For example, “I am a(n) _____.”

Total: 74/74
“(Neo-)Pagan / Druid / polytheist / witch” etc. (with no further description), 21
“(Neo-)Pagan / Druid / polytheist / witch / etc. who centres Welsh culture”, 19
“Welsh (Neo-)Pagan / Druid / polytheist / witch” etc., 20
Other (Please fill in.), 14

If you selected "Other" above, please fill in your preferred answer here.

“Anything other than 'Welsh'. Cymraeg is a nationality, not a label of practice.”
“There is no 'should', however I feel that non-Welsh resident/ancestry neo-pagans shouldn't say they are a 'Welsh (neo-) pagan/druid/witch etc if only to prevent confusion.”
“Swynwyr cymraeg”
“Whatever they want to, as long as they are accurate in the mythos lore.”
“Neo-pagan who centres Welsh in part but not all of my eclectic practice”
“I don’t think I should dictate what others call themselves.”
“Whatever they want depending on context”
“Mormon (therefore polytheistic animist) druid, former Catholic with tendencies towards witchcraft.”
“No labels”

“IMHO its not important what you call yourself. Plus I don't 'primarily centre my practice on Welsh Culture' so not sure I should comment, I'll leave that discussion to people who do.”
“Could also be ‘Welsh Pagan’ or ‘Pagan with Welsh polytheism focus’.”
“Celtic animist”
“folk practitioner”
“I prefer the term Brythonic over Welsh, as modern day Wales did not exist in the context of the ancient Britons.”
“Brythonic pagan”
“To me it depends on your background. As an American who has never lived in Wales, I would never call myself a welsh witch despite welsh folklore being the basis for much of my practice. I would use the first or second option but for actual welsh folks, the third makes more sense to me.”

Are you a member of, active in, or have taken classes with, any of the following Welsh cultural, Neo-Pagan, or Druidic groups or courses? Please select all that apply.

Total: 73/74
ADF (Ár nDraíocht Féin/A Druid Fellowship) (9)
ADO / UDM (Anglesey Druid Order/Urdd Derwyddon Môn) (16)
AODA (Ancient Order of Druids in America) (7)
ATC (Aquarian Tabernacle Church) (0)
BDO (British Druid Order) (9)
Bricket Wood / Hertfordshire Coven (0)
Celtic Source (12)
CDT (Celtic Druid Temple) (0)
Chalice Circle (UU) (0)
Children of Artemis (3)
Church / School of Wicca (2)
Circle Sanctuary (2)
Covenant of the Goddess (2)
CUUPs (Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans) (8)
DCD (Druidic Clan of Dana) (1)
HDNA (Hasidic Druids of North America) (0)

HoK (Henge of Keltria) (2)
Irish Pagan School (3)
Mhara Starling's Patreon Courses (11)
MOCC / RDW (Missionary Order of the Celtic Cross/Reformed Druidic Wicca) (0)
Modern Witch University (1)
NOD (New Order of Druids) (1)
NRDNA (New Reformed Druids of North America) (1)
NRG (Northern Roots Grove) (1)
New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn (0)
OBOD (Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids) (36)
OMS (Order of the Mithril Star) (0)
OWO (Order of the White Oak) (1)
Panthean Temple (0)
RDG (Reformed Druids of Gaia) (1)
RDNA (Reformed Druids of North America) (2)
Rowan Tree Church (0)
SDNA (Schismatic Druids of North America) (0)
SoA (Sisterhood of Avalon) (5)
TDC (The Druid Circle / "Druid Order of Blest Stone and Wood") (0)
TWA (The Wiccan Alliance) (0)
Universal Eclectic Wicca (0)
Wiccan Church of Canada (0)
Wiccan Federation (0)
ZDNA (Zen Druids of North America) (0)
Other (Please fill in.) (14)
None (13)
No answer (1)

If you selected "Other" above, you may fill in your answer(s) here.

"Glastonbury Goddess Temple"

"Treebridge Foundations"

"Other BTW [British Traditional Witchcraft] coven in Wales"

"Seax-Wica, Ord Draochita na Uisnech, Draig Sidhe"

"Kris Hughe's classes at go deeper.info and current member of the Isle of White Order of Druids"

"Reclaiming"

“Fellowship of Isis”

“Illuminates of Thanateros”

“The Druid Network”

“The Druid Network”

“Isle of Wight Druid courses”

“Goddess Temple, Glastonbury”

“Touta galation”

“Covens”

In your opinion or view, what makes a person Welsh? (Select all that apply.)

Total: 74/74
Ancestry from Cymru (Wales) (50)
Location of birth in Cymru (Wales) (61)
Residence in Cymru (Wales) for any length of time (26)
Residence in Cymru (Wales) for a certain length of time (31)
Participating in Welsh culture (even if not living in Cymru [Wales]) (37)
Race or skin colour (2)
Using Cymraeg (Welsh language) (26)
Other (Please explain.) (7)

If you selected "Other" above, please fill in your answer(s) here.

“It a mix of what checked off, and matter of how you phrase it. Ancestry wise I’m an American mutt. My grandparents make me German, Polish, Welsh, and English. Go back one more generation and add Scottish and Irish. Go back further and it gets complicated. The earliest ancestors to arrive in America were colonists, while the most recent arrived in the late 1800s. By the time that cultural melting pot got to me, there wasn’t much culture left. I spent a summer at St Edmund Hall, Oxford. While there I took a weekend Chepstow. I feel in love. The bilingual signs, the bilingual audio at the castle. The land. For a while after that took a Welsh language class taught by Alexei Kondratiev. He was also

my high priest. I'm not as Welsh as someone that lives there, but Welsh enough to feel Hiraeth."
"As well as people born in Wales, people who were either raised there or become citizens there too."
"Participation in culture, residence for some amount of time, and use of language are the most important. The others may or may not qualify someone/are subjective to that person's experience."
"Hwyl, Enaid, Cynefin."
"I believe that only someone born in Wales is truly Welsh, however, those who live in Wales for a long time and who openly accept the language and culture could be considered honorary Welsh. Those who are born outside of Wales, but who have Welsh parents could also be considered Welsh in my opinion."
"To be Welsh I feel you should be born and brought up in Wales. I may have lived in Wales 25 years now, speak more Welsh than most of the native born in my area, and have a deep relationship with the Welsh landscape, mythology and ancient gods - but I do not feel I should call myself Welsh as I was not born here. I consider myself 'honorary Welsh' or 'adopted Welsh'!"

Can or should persons who were NOT born or raised within the borders of Cymru (Wales) incorporate or centre Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?

Total: 74/74
Yes (48)
No (1)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (24)
No answer (1) (but has input a narrative answer on next sub-item)

If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

“Yes, if they understand the Welsh cultural elements that they are using in their practice.”
“If you have no relationship with Wales I would struggle to understand why you would but I think everyone should feel free to explore what they are interested in. Personally, had I not spent a significant time living in Wales I would be unlikely to incorporate it.”
“Should is a strong statement. I dont think anyone should necessarily do anything. I would say its acceptable to use Welsh elements in neopagan faiths and practices.”
“Yes, but immersing into the culture to honor where it all came from.”
“As an American the spirituality of the land I live in is closed indigenous practice. If Americans can’t adopt or adapt the pagan spirituality of our ancestors we have access to no spirituality at all. We could just make up some random personal gnosis, but for many religion is also being part of a community. It is hard to form a community of people each practicing something they made up.”
“I think yes, but it's imperative to do so in a respectful manner. Learn more than the Welsh deities. Learn the history and how to speak at least some of the language. Engage with Welsh media and, if you can, support Welsh creators.”
“Yes, as long as significant veneration around the use of the culture of Cymru, the history of Cymru and language is endeavoured.”
“If they do it respectfully and properly”
“As long as they do it respectfully”
“Borrow but don't appropriate. Some things based in culture become universal”
“well clearly they can, because they do!”
“People need to find the place where they feel safe and find joy. If the Welsh culture gives them this they should be welcomed with open arms.”
“So long as someone incorporates Welsh cultural practices respectfully and listens to the voices of those who live in the culture, I see no issue with someone incorporating Welsh cultural practice. Those who attempt earnestly at

learning the language, lore/myth, or cultural practices are welcome. As someone no longer living in Cymru I feel I fall into this category as my connection to home is my practice. But I will step aside for someone who is actively involved in the daily culture of the nation."

"As long as the source of thier knowledge is correct, respectful and maintained and not made up!"

"Yes. Providing that they involve themselves in the culture of Cymru and the Cymraeg language"

"Yes, if they take time to learn and use correct pronunciations and recognise the origins."

"I am not the arbiter of who is acceptably Welsh or not."

"I think yes, provided they do the necessary research on the lore, customs and language. They should recognise that they should not be the ones spreading information without extensive research. They should always be boosting Welsh pagans content when it comes to the practice, and learn as much as they can."

"To be able to practice brythonic polytheism you need to practice it. And same with welsh polytheism, the duwiau/doi/deūoi (gods) in my opinion do not care were you were born just that you venerate them"

"They can, but only as an appreciation and interest in the culture. Also, they must take it in its truest form and not out their own non-Welsh interpretations and experiences on to it."

"I wouldn't restrict it to Wales but I might to the UK and Ireland, and to those who descend from there. Many fellow Welsh people hate to admit it but the British Isles are ethnically pretty well mixed together at this point, not only that but the traditions we might call "Welsh Paganism" were not restricted to modern Wales but all of Great Britain and was heavily influenced by Ireland."

"The answer above would have been "Yes", but I also wanted to say more: Yes, not least of all because of the fact that what we in the current day call "Welsh" culture/language/belief etc. was found throughout at least a lot of the rest of the

island of Britain, and there are some nearby areas of England that are known to have been ethnically and culturally indistinguishable from the "Welsh" across the nearby border.”

“Yes, within reason. Welsh is a minority culture in the UK and should be treated with the same respect as other groups that have experienced prolonged cultural suppression, attempted eradication and appropriation. We are not a closed practice, but neopagans outside of the UK should be aware of our history.”

“I would say this is a matter of sincerity. Many of the Welsh elements of Neo-Pagan practice, such as Y Mabinogion or Hiraeth, are often misrepresented or misunderstood. This is not unique to Welsh Culture at all, and much of European Mythology has experienced similar things, but Welsh culture is becoming increasingly prominent on a more international level, and as such is exposed to more of this. However, where a sincere effort is made to research and understand the aspects of Welsh Culture that are incorporated into Neo-Pagan Practices, I would answer ‘Yes’”

“Wales is just an intersubjective thing - didn't exist asa stand alone nation when Brythonic was prevalent. Plenty of those outside of Wales would have relevant ancestors”

“I do not see any problem with anybody from anywhere using the Welsh culture in their practises. The Wales I live in now is unrecognisable from the one that the c12 writers of the early Welsh mythology knew, which in turn would be unrecognisable from the pre-Roman Wales that was the actual home of Welsh pagans. Given how different it is I do not feel that as a modern Wales resident I am any real closer to having a real understanding of the local area pagan gods than a person in any other place (so long as that place is fairly cold and wet!) There are some things i would find odd, such as being a worshipper of Sabrina when you couldn't actually go down and honour her at the river Severn. Having said this I feel it is easier to relate to the deities when you live in the area and can map the folklore to the land -but if you want to use the Welsh

ideas/traditions -then go ahead."

"Much of the culture we now call Welsh is relevant to all parts of Britain, since the whole island was once Brythonic speaking. There is no reason to think that folk practices or deities/mythology were enclosed within the area now described by the modern English/Welsh border before it was drawn. I wouldn't limit the "right to incorporate" to just people living in Britain - but this is a very important factor in my own spiritual orientation. (I lived most of my life in Yr Hen Ogledd.)"

Can or should persons who have NEVER lived in Cymru (Wales) incorporate or centre Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?

Total: 74/74
Yes (51)
No (1)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (20)
No answer (2) (but both gave a narrative answer on next sub-item)

If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

"Yes, if they understand the Welsh cultural elements that they are using in their practice."

"See previous response"

"Yes, see my answer to the previous question."

"Same answer as above."

"Yes, as long as significant veneration around the use of the culture of Cymru, the history of Cymru and language is endeavoured. (Feel the same way about this as above)"

"If they do it respectfully and properly"

"As long as they do it respectfully"

"I believe I agree yes on this, but also as a mestizo/Mexicano/Chicano/whatever, I am very much aware that I avoid cultural

(mis)appropriation."

"We have a contingent of Welsh and Cornish folks descended from immigrant miners in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan...of course they should celebrate their heritage."

"Why not? Wales and the Welsh are not oppressed or disempowered minorities. Neither is the Welsh culture or identity widely exploited for money by non Welsh people. I don't think fears around cultural appropriation come into play here. Also there is the complicated fact that some underlying cultural strata in non Welsh areas of Britain are Brythonic in origin. Even in Orkney where I live, almost as far away from Wales as you can get in the UK, we have surviving Pictish (Brythonic) place names and archaeology."

"People need to find the place where they feel safe and find joy. If the Welsh culture gives them this they should be welcomed with open arms."

"Same as above"

"It's about the teaching and appropriation."

"As above"

"Yes, if they take time to learn and use correct pronunciations and recognise the origins"

"I rather wish they wouldn't, if I'm honest."

"Same as above. In addition, they should research Welsh customs and tradition."

"To be able to practice brythonic polytheism you need to practice it. And same with welsh polytheism, the duwiau/doi/deūoi (gods) in my opinion do not care were you were born just that you venerate them"

"As above"

"If they are descendants of the British, yes. Ancestor work is an important part of the religion. But I would encourage them to travel here as spirits of specific places are also an important part."

"See above. Additionally, sometimes a second-hand exposure to Welsh culture

can still be an extremely meaningful one. E.g. if a persons parents are Welsh, and passionate about passing on the customs, language, etc."
"A difficult question to answer. So much of my understanding of my belief system (welsh animist pagan) is tied up in the living, active landscape and culture of the place I belong (south wales valleys) that I struggle to understand why someone with no knowledge or experience of place/landscape would want to include these elements. Maybe as a form of ancestor worship."
"In their heart and soul they feel they are Cymric; a matter of choice or maybe re-living a past life."
"Once again my answer would be 'Yes', subject to the same considerations as my previous response, where the sincerity and respect would be the key factor."
"I have known people with a strong Welsh identity, who are from the Welsh diaspora, who study and center their practices on Welsh elements.

They keep alive the tradition of Cymru, even though they do not live in Cymru. They are sincere, and learned their culture through their parents /family/ancestors. Many even learning and speaking Welsh. I think these folk can and should incorporate Welsh elements into their practices."

Can or should persons who have NO Welsh ancestry or blood descent incorporate Welsh cultural elements in their Neo-Pagan practice?

Total: 74/74
Yes (52)
No (1)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (18)
No answer (3) (but all 3 gave a narrative answer in next sub-item)

If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

"Yes, if they understand the Welsh cultural elements that they are using in their practice."

"I don't have an opinion about this."

“It depends on the sincerity and depth of their adoption of the culture.”
“Same answer as above.”
“Yes, as it is impossible to know what percentage of your ancestry was originally Welsh (Brythonic people), any of the most involved Welsh druids and pagans today could be 100% Anglo-Saxon/Viking DNA/'blood'. Also someone who has come to live in Wales only a year ago could have more reverence to Welsh culture/history/druidic past than someone who's family have been in Wales for hundreds of years.”
“Blood doesn't matter; culture and conviction does.”
“As long as they do it respectfully”
“People need to find the place where they feel safe and find joy. If the Welsh culture gives them this they should be welcomed with open arms.”
“Same as above the knowledge and learning has to be culturally appropriate and not made up.”
“As previously stated”
“Yes, if they take time to learn and use correct pronunciations and recognise the origins”
“I think it depends on why they are incorporating the welsh aspects and definitely needs to be done with respect and not for making money.”
“There are a lot of reasons to practice Welsh paganism. I think that if you are neither of Welsh descent nor born in wales or live there, I would expect a lot of self reflection to avoid exotisizing the culture.”
“I would prefer people didn’t pretend to a culture with which they have no real affinity. People are quick enough to screech about “cultural appropriation” if it is *any other* ethnic group.”
“Same as my previous answers.”
“To be able to practice brythonic polytheism you need to practice it. And same with welsh polytheism, the duwiau/doi/deūoi (gods) in my opinion do not care were you were born just that you venerate them. Ethnicentrism harms

paganism”

“As above”

“While people who don't come from or descend from the British Isles are of course free to believe in whatever they like, cultural appropriation can be seen as disingenuous and disrespectful. However I can see how someone who moves to Wales and lives here a long time can be called by the gods here, as the spirits places are an important part of the religion.”

“Yes. Blood is irrelevant. Personal connection can be an entirely individualistic thing.”

“See previous answers.”

“In their heart and soul they feel they are Cymric; a matter of choice or maybe re-living a past life.”

“While I would still tentatively answer ‘Yes’, I would hope that a person from a different culture would approach practices based on Welsh Culture in the spirit of learning and understanding, rather than aesthetic or ‘flavour’”

“Provided they are respectful of our traditions, and don't attempt to "pretty" them up, why not. I live in America. Many Native American tribes allow non native people join [sic] them in traditional experiences, provided those people are respectful. I think we should be the same. I do draw the line at being lectured to, or told to do things differently by someone who has no Welsh background. (as I am sure do native Americans with "white" attendees at their pow-wows)”

“I have complicated feelings on this one. For myself, I wouldn’t if I didn’t have ancestry because I feel you need a connection even though it’s not a closed practice. But I a) definitely don’t have the authority to say others shouldn’t and b) I don’t disagree with anyone who doesn’t have ancestry delving in. It’s just something I wouldn’t do myself.”

Can or should persons who CANNOT understand any Cymraeg (Welsh language) incorporate elements of Welsh culture in their Neo-Pagan practice?

Total: 74/74
Yes (42)
No (1)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (30)
No answer (1) (but has narrative answer in next sub-item)

If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

“Yes, if they understand the Welsh cultural elements that they are using in their practice.”

“The concepts can still be taught. But I personally wouldn’t do it without trying to learn welsh.”

“I don't think learning Welsh is strictly necessary for pagan practice, though I do get frustrated with people who don't learn to pronounce Welsh words and names properly! Learning basic conversational Welsh certainly deepened my pagan practice, and it's important to keep a living culture alive.”

“I don't think it should be necessary but personally I would feel uncomfortable if I knew none.”

“I think you can, but you should make an effort to understand the language on some level.”

“Personally, I couldn’t do it, but maybe someone can make it work. One of the things I learned from studying the language is that some nouns are by default plural. That the natural state of children and trees is plural. That makes me smile.”

“Wouldn't that also exclude Welsh people who don't speak Cymraeg?”

“Obviously people should be free to worship in whatever way suits them best, however I believe the Welsh language has important connections to Welsh culture/mythology, so people should make an effort to learn it”

“I think someone who wants to engage in Welsh neo-paganism will need some level in Cymraeg and should be interested in obtaining this. For example, if using names of deities, the correct pronunciation of them should be used.”

“For an eclectic using a little bit incidentally, it doesn't matter. For someone

using more than that, they should try to understand at least what's relevant to the stuff they're using.”

“As long as they do it respectfully”

“Linguistic ability should not be a barrier to religious experience or cultural appreciation.”

“I think that should one choose the Welsh culture as a personal basis of being that they naturally would incorporate the Welsh language. Perhaps not fluently but it would come with habitual change if one's commitment is strong.”

“Culture is more than just language and language is an important but specific domain within culture. So I think that persons who cannot understand Cymraeg can still incorporate elements of Welsh culture or polytheism into their Neo-Pagan practice without being hypocritical or disrespectful of Welsh culture. They should not claim to be a Welsh person if they're not, and should only borrow Welsh elements respectfully if they do, not out of appropriation. My spiritual path is Druidry and that is what piqued my interest in this survey. I don't incorporate much Welsh influence in my own practice but do respect figures such as Taliesin and Merlin and respect the Druid's Prayer as well, which was originally composed by Iolo Morgnwg. I respect the Mabinogi as a text even though I have more interest in Irish and Gaulish mythology when it comes to religion.”

“I would encourage them to learn basic understanding at least for pronounciation, and more fluent for a deeper understanding.”

“Only if they understand the source and advise if thier source of learning”

“As above”

“Yes, if they take time to learn and use correct pronunciations and recognise the origins”

“I think they can, but Cymraeg is incredibly beautiful and I would strongly recommend anyone who is drawn to Welsh culture to learn and use at least a little bit. It would seem weird to me for someone to identify as a Welsh pagan

and not know any of the language at all. But, just because I would raise an eyebrow doesn't mean I would say they can't participate."

"i think it would be good to make an effort to learn. that would also deepen the understanding of any practice someone might partake in"

"Large numbers of people who cannot speak, write, or understand Cymraeg are Welsh in all material aspects. It is a minority language, even inside Wales. I wish everybody here would learn the language and enjoy it, but that's unlikely in my lifetime or yours."

"Yes, I am Welsh and was taught Welsh since a very young age. However, in my high school Welsh was replaced with French and thus I forgot most of it. Just because someone cannot speak Welsh doesn't mean they shouldn't be able to practice Welsh witchcraft. Many people who are not Welsh can speak excellent Welsh too! A language should never be a barrier."

"To be able to practice brythonic polytheism you need to practice it. And same with welsh polytheism, the duwiau/doi/deūoi (gods) in my opinion do not care were you were born just that you venerate them Learning the language is good for understanding the gods more though and one should strive to understand more"

"They should just take little parts of the Welsh language and fit those parts into their own schema."

"Yes. But preferably only at the start of their journey, so to speak. The language is important - for connecting with the literature, with other Welsh folk, with the past, and ultimately, with those one worships."

"Yes but they should make every effort to understand the meaning of all they see to appreciate the deeper knowledge within the words and also make an effort to listen to the spoken words in order to say them correctly."

"Incorporating some elements has enabled me to use Welsh language."

"If you want to use our culture as set dressing on your rituals. Do us the courtesy of learning correct pronunciation of our language."

“Learning disabilities are a thing.”
“In their heart and soul they feel they are Cymric; a matter of choice or maybe re-living a past life.”
“Yes. While I believe Cymraeg is important to Welsh Neo-Paganism, it would be perhaps unrealistic to expect every approaching practitioner to learn the Welsh Language.”
“I think you should study it, even if cannot speak it as it helps understand some concepts”
“They should do so only if they're willing to at least learn Welsh pronunciation.”
“Provided they are on a learning path, and respectful. Same answer as above”
“A lot of people born and brught up in Wales speak no Welsh (esp in South Wales where I live). This is sad but it does not mean they are not tied to the power of the land and able to connect with the Welsh deities and the folk traditions. So I do not think that the language is needed to use Welsh ideas/culture in their practice. After all the modern WElsh is unrecognisable from the language that the original pre Chritstian worshippers in Wales would have spoken - and so the use of non-Welsh languages is simply a continuation of the evolution of cultures.”

Can or should persons who are entirely or mostly ignorant (unknowing) of Welsh history incorporate elements of Welsh culture in their Neo-Pagan practice?

Total: 74/74
Yes (8)
No (44)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (22)

If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

“It depends on how they're incorporating it. If it's being done in a way that culturally appropriates and doesn't respect the culture, probably not. But at one point in time, many who incorporated Welsh culture into their practice were

probably ignorant of things but I don't think that automatically discounts being able to honour Welsh culture in their practice.”

“They should make a point to at least familiarise themselves with the Mabinogion”

“It is really offensive when people appropriate Welsh language and culture and misquote or mispronounce it. If you want to use it, do some homework and get it right!”

“I'd say, on the whole, no. But stumbling into a Welsh story can open the door to a broader appreciation of Welsh language, history and culture, and especially as non-Welsh outsiders, we've all got a lot to learn!”

“Again, I think you can, but you -should- from a moral standpoint learn about it.”

“They can but I would exoect and like them to seek and take up opportunities to learn more.”

“Why would they want to?”

“Gah, I actually dislike these questions so much, because it's really not for me to say any of this stuff, but in my completely unqualified view, being ignorant isn't a problem as long as you take the time to actually learn.”

“No, but it isn't hard to look these things up. They don't need a degree.”

“By using, they become less ignorant”

“well they clearly do. Hopefully such elements will spark an interest in wider elements of Welsh culture and history. But if they don't, its not a crime!”

“People should incorporate anything from anywhere that brings them peace and joy and causes no harm to anyone else.”

“It is entirly possible someone incorporates something accidently, it is what they do with the knowledge after being told something is a Welsh practice. Intention to facilitate a deeper understanding or learning from there should not be held against someone.”

“I would encourage some knowledge to be aware,respect and honour ancestoral links.”

“I think people should respect welsh culture like the would or should respect native American, Aborigines etc. Part of that is learning some history of Wales or you get the Mabon thing every year with people still not understanding who Mabon is.”

“I think people should learn why they are incorporating welsh culture in their practice and be able to articulate reasons for including it.”

“I would prefer it if they didn’t. Their own countries will have a pagan tradition they can connect with in a way they will find more meaningful. A sense of place (your own ground, trees and waters) is important.”

“Yes, but they should strive to do some research. I feel that if they are drawn to a Welsh deity or custom, they will naturally begin to become interested in Welsh culture.”

“Paganism is the group of faiths with homework You can be a pagan and not fully research your faith, but you can enrichen your faith with the research you do.”

“It's complicated. It's not a closed religion/culture but you shout make the effort to learn.”

“Yes, but the answer is the same as the previous one. Improving knowledge and understanding of this can only help connect a person with Welsh culture. I suppose that in the most technical of senses, an exception could be made for Reconstructionists who are interested exclusively in the period of the past for which no history (in its most strict definition) exists.”

“I think that would annoy the awen.”

“In their heart and soul they feel they are Cymric; a matter of choice or maybe re-living a past life. Are they willing to learn about Welsh culture?”

“Based on the same spirit of my responses, I would say No. I would hope that a practitioner approaching Welsh Culture this way would learn about Welsh Culture before incorporating it into their Neo-Pagan practices.”

“I don't think ignorance has a place at the table.”

“I will admit to a personal bias here as I love Welsh history! I think it would not be possible to utilise Welsh cultural elements without having an idea of where those elements come from. If you have no concept about the culture the ideas/stories/folklore arose from then you cannot fully engage in the practice and it is no longer cultural elements-it is just words. I belive that whenever a person chooses to take an particular concept/idea as part of their practice they should have an understanding of where that concept arose from. If we totally unlink history with modern practices then we should at least be honest in admitting we are purely inventing practice using a few randomn names that sound good, rather than claiming we are following any sort of ancient (or even old/traditional) ideas.”

Should Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture try to visit and / or make pilgrimages to Cymru (Wales) if they do not already reside there?

Total: 73/74
Yes (48)
No (5)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (20)
No answer (1)

If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

“Preferably they should make the attempt to visit Wales, but I can also appreciate that a visit/pilgrimage may not be attainable to everyone.”

“If possible but some people don’t have the means.”

“I want to say yes, but poverty is a real issue globally and many cannot afford the trip.”

“Ideally yes but that may be out of reach financially and or in other ways for many sincere people.”

“To be able to travel is a privilege not all have.”

“If they can, but not as a requirment.”

“If possible but it could be impossible for many.”

“It could be an unreasonable financial burden to visit Cymru. It would be wonderful if they could. I would love to go back. If I did I might not want to leave.”

“I think it's wonderful if they can, I don't know that I'd say it's entirely necessary, however.”

“Within reason”

“if they want to”

“If they want to. Pilgrimage is a growing area of contemporary spirituality. I've made such a journey to Bedd Taliesin. I know people who have made journeys to Lake Tegid.”

“If this privilege is available to them”

“In a perfect world, yes. Visiting Cymru feels like a re-establishment of my roots, personally. But cost and life are very real factors and there are a number of resources available today that were not even around 10 years ago. Someone shouldn't have their beliefs or validity taken from them just because they can not afford or may not be safe to visit.”

“this could be quite expensive and should be left up to the individual”

“again i think there should be be an effort to immerse in the cultural context of what you are practicing”

“Peoples’ *own* cultural idiom will serve them better than aping other peoples’. The Goddess is not hanging about in Llangorse Lake, just waiting to lob a sword at some random Saes…”

“Yes if they are going as a pilgrimage and/or to learn, not just to do the "touristy things" and enjoy themselves without actually stopping to absorb what they're experiencing. Also this is an unrealistic goal for most people outside of UK/Europe so I don't think it NEEDS to be a goal in order to incorporate Welsh culture into your spirituality.”

“If possible, yes. I recognise that not everyone has the money or ability to visit Wales, but I think that it is something that is highly beneficial if they can.”

“Again it is advantageous to visit sited, but not all can. That does not make them less pagans.”
“Terrible idea. They should go because they need to, not to check off a list.”
“For me the Spirit is willing, but the pocket book is weak.”
“While I believe this could be encouraged, I would say it is by no means necessary.”
“Might be a good thing to do if pilgrimage feels right. But equally pilgrimage to Salisbury might be just as valid.”
“Wales is great. Everyone should visit, regardless of their beliefs!”
“I guess that depends. I don't think people coming to Wales for a week or two and going round the 'sacred sites' helps anyone. Too much tourism already, and then there's the environment.”

Have you ever experienced or witnessed any encouragement or pressure to learn or use Cymraeg (the Welsh language) from other Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture into their practice?

Total: 73/74
Yes (encouragement only) (33)
Yes (pressure only) (0)
Yes (both encouragement and pressure) (7)
No (29)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (4)
No answer (1)

If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

“I haven't, but I wish I had seen some encouragement to learn Welsh. Especially in an organisation like OBOD, whose bardic teaching centre on Welsh mythology, this feels like a missed opportunity.”
“No, but I've wanted to learn Welsh for years anyway. The first pagan I met in my local area who centers Welsh culture offered a basic Welsh class, which I was *super* grateful to be able to take!”

“Yes and I am glad for both. Dw i eisiau dysgu Cymraeg.”
“I've been the person giving encouragement! In particular, I think that it's important for people incorporating Welsh themes, or Welsh words, into their practise understand & use the actual Welsh meaning rather than assigning their own meaning. An example here is the considerable number of people who mistranslate the name of Ceridwen's son, Morfran, as 'Sea Crow'. That's the literal translation, but it actually means 'Cormorant', and understanding the nature and behaviour of the cormorant, especially its clumsiness, is important. And yet many people who speak not one word of Welsh will furiously insist that he should be represented as a crow, because crows are cool. It's in this kind of area that interest in Welsh culture turns into cultural appropriation. A second example would be the well-known Druid's prayer. I've seen people getting hung up over the use of the word 'justice', because this has particular, and negative, associations in their own culture (it's usually Americans). Here, it's essential to understand that the prayer was originally written in Welsh, so to get the true meaning you need to go to the Welsh and check the semantic associations in the Welsh language.”
“I have always wanted to learn the language, so I was already a language learner before I connected to any Welsh pagans.”
“I am a second language Welsh speaker. Born and raised in Wales. I have tried to be encouraging and polite when it comes to incorrect use of the Welsh language in neo-pagan settings.”

As a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh culture into your practice, do you believe learning or using Cymraeg (Welsh language) can be an act of religious or spiritual devotion?

Total: 72/74
Yes (64)
No (2)

I want to say more. (Please explain.) (6)
No answer (2)

If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

“I think it can be.”

“Yes, i even make Duolingo a part if my spiritual practice (and this has improved my Welsh).”

“As well as respecting hero and deity figures with correct pronunciations, I have found that learning the Welsh names of plants etc to be very beneficial in learning the cultural uses and perceptions of them in Wales.”

“Can be, but this is not the case for everyone.”

“No but for any aspects of Cymreig it’s appropriate you understand that we don’t have English translation that our language has a deeper meaning and essence”

“Not sure yet - need to decide where to put my energy and i’m not sure learning the welsh language is in the cards right now.”

“My main reasons for wanting to learn Welsh properly is to be closer to my country and heritage, but also to write and recite poems and prayers to the deities in Welsh.”

“Not sure. I think what is in the heart of the Neo-Pagan is the primary concern.”

“Anything we do can be used as an act of religious/spiritual devotion. So yes learning Cymraeg could be.”

“I can be, but when done outside of Wales it can also 'other' people who don't know the language. Within Wales it should probably be the norm. I think a lot of non-natives have the mistaken idea that by learning a bit of Welsh and using it in some far-flung place they are helping to preserve the Welsh language, though, which they're really not.”

Have you ever experienced or witnessed any exclusion, racism, and / or colonialism bias based on skin color, race, ethnicity, cultural background,

indigeneity, nationality, and / or Welsh ancestry from other Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture into their practice?

Total: 73/74
Yes (witnessed) (5)
Yes (experienced) (0)
Yes (experienced & witnessed) (2)
No (56)
I want to say more (10)
No answer (1)

If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

“Not in person. A little online, but trolls will be trolls.”
“I don't think so. My experience with pagans who center Welsh culture has overwhelmingly been with people who are very conscious of social injustices.”
“It is definitely possible that this occurs, the small group of Welsh pagans I know are very inclusive and welcoming”
“No, but I have not been in many environments where encountering it would be likely. The group I personally belong to is explicitly anti racist. I don't have direct experience with other groups.”
“Not from any who incorporate the culture, but other types of pagans, most definitely.”
“Well some Greek people that following the ancient Greek religion believe that if we are born and raised here in Greece, we have to worship the "true" for them religion that is the encient greek polytheism. But I don't want to! I feel the celtic philosophy more close to me that the greek”
“Not entirely sure what is meant by 'colonialism bias' but, as noted above, have noted a lot of cultural appropriation by people who have never visited Wales or engaged with Welsh as a living language and culture.”
“I would not be surprised if at least some Welsh-centered Pagans were ethocentric or racist towards Neopagans of Welsh focus if these other Pagans had no connection to Welsh ancestry or country. This is a problem with ethnic

religions -- some members may resort to gatekeeping such that race and culture become barriers to inclusive spirituality instead of being open to persons from many cultures and races. I tend to hear of this problem more often from Heathenry than Welsh Paganism, but there are probably more Heathens in North American than Welsh-centered Pagans."
"In the states we tend to have alot of elitests and have seen some peopke targeted due to the colour of the skin, this is usually corrected quickly when in the grove but I see it online more. I have even experienced it because I was given am Italian name by my father and have had people disregard my welsh ancestry on my mothers side"
"No. In fact quite the opposite. People go out of their way to be as welcoming as possible whenever I've seen the subject come up."
"I was going to say no - BUT I then realised I have never met a non-White who stated they incoperated Welsh practice. So although I have not seen any exclusions it is possibly so ingrained as a "white" practice that people from other ethnicities would not think it possible to incorporate Welsh practice (even when they may have been born and brought up in Wales so be more WElsh than I am)"

Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture to support and learn from persons who were born in Cymru (Wales), grew up in Cymru, and / or have lived in Cymru?

Total: 73/74
Yes (50)
No (7)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (16)
No answer (1)

If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

“I'm not entirely certain that persons born and who grew up and live in Cymru are any better at their own heritage than those who feel drawn to the deities of Cymru.”
“It depends if the neo-pagans have access to persons who were born in Cymru/grew up in Cymru/lived in Cymru. It's not always possible.”
“Having lived in Wales doesn't really qualify a person as an expert. I am an English person who married a Welshman and have lived here 20 years, but would never presume to be an authority on Welsh culture.”
“It is best practice, but not a requirment.”
“There are many people from outside of Wales who are knowledgeable of Welsh 'occulture' and quite true to it, so anyone can learn from them.”
“There are many people who were born in Cymru (Wales), grew up in Cymru, and / or have lived in Cymru who have no interest in Welsh culture or spirituality. Apart for civil courtesy, there is little that this group may contribute. However, persons who have studies spirituality within Welsh culture and language may be very informative.”
“Usually yes, but it's always ok to apply discretion.”
“if they want to”
“I'm not sure. I think a respect for and willingness to learn about, understand, and protect, the culture is important. So this may be a yes, but an indirect one?”
“I think expertise is important, but being Welsh does not give you intrinsically more knowledge of Welsh mythology or history than anyone else, or right to comment on it in a scholarly sense.”
“There’s a fine line here, because just being from there doesn’t necessarily mean your historical expert. However, it is important to not exclude the perspectives of people who live there or are from there.”
“I think it is very important that neopagans who want to incorporate Welsh culture to listen to and respect Welsh voices on the matter. This is to ensure that they are not appropriating Welsh culture by engaging in negative stereotypes

and not spreading misinformation."
"Advantageous and better yes, but you don't have to. Not for me to decide whether you should or not"
"Lots of people with Welsh culture who aren't FROM Wales would also be good at this I think."
"I think it would be helpful. Maybe get over some cultural hurdles."
"I would say 'Yes', however I would add that there are many other resources available to allow someone to incorporate Welsh Culture into their practices."
"Absolutely, but not exclusively. Every teacher needs to be considered on their specific merits."

Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture to learn about the history of Cymru (Wales) and the isle of Britain?

Total: 73/74
Yes (69)
No (0)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (4)
No answer (1)

14b. If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

"I suspect that learning more about Welsh culture could do no harm"
"Yes. I think it is really important that if you are not Welsh, but want to incorporate Welsh culture into your practice, that you are not just co-opting it, picking and choosing what you incorporate, potentially distorting it and removing it from its historical basis (cultural appropriation, I suppose). Instead, it's important to learn about the history and the cultural context."
"I think context is important and culture is only fully comprehensible in context."
"History is an important component of modern Paganism since Pagan traditions organically arise from certain cultures and countries. Knowing the basics of their history is important for these religions."

“I think that learning about the history of Wales is not completely essential but is very beneficial to practicing Welsh witchcraft/paganism, as so much of our spirituality and culure/history is so intertwined.”
“I hate it when the mabinogi is personally translated to suit the agenda of the non-Welsh person. I trained in the Avalonian tradition at Glastonbury before I became a Druid. When I actually read the myths I was shocked at how transformed they were in the Glasto tradition. I found it disrespectful.”
“If you are claiming you are following some form of "old belief" than you should definitly understand the history of the area that those beliefs originate in. If you are not claiming that your ways have any hisotrical links/ties than it is not really important.”

Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture and who are “white” European to be welcoming and inclusive of people who are not (or do not stereotypically appear to be) of “white” or European descent?

Total: 73/74
Yes (66)
No (1)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (6)
No answer (1)

15b. If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

“I do not see that race or skin colour make a significant difference.”
“Yes, but it is important to not interpret a lack of interest from non white people as necessarily meaning that you aren't inclusive enough.”
“Its good to be nice and welcoming to others”
“Yes. It's an important element of contemporary Welsh nationalism to be clear that 'Welshness' is a personal, cultural commitment, not a genetic inheritance.”

“its important for all humans to be welcoming and inclusive in all contexts!”
“YES, as someone of Asian descent who embraces Druidry I feel this is very important. This way, Welsh-centered Pagans can actively be inclusive and non-racist instead of falling into racist patterns of thought and behavior. Non-white Pagans are already a double minority in North America b/c Paganism (as an umbrella term) is racially mostly White at present. Pagans in North American and Europe should actively welcome non-white persons who wish to be Pagan or get along with Pagans, not make them feel the least bit unwelcome. I consider this a sensitive issue because racism and folkish patterns remain problematic in contemporary time.”
“Welsh people are, overwhelmingly, white. Sorry if that upsets anybody, and of course people who settle here can be from diverse ethnic backgrounds and enjoy full citizenship, but I’m not going to apologise for being a white person in Wales. We are not living on anybody else’s stolen land. This little Whitey stayed at home, which has been true for time out of mind. Yma O Hyd.”
“Yes, there never any excuse for racism.”
“Obviously non-white Welsh people’s voices should be louder and more seen than white non-Welsh people. Any sort of racism sucks, and it’s particularly hateful when it’s spirituality-based.”
“In the spirit of my previous responses, I would say ‘Yes’ provided that the sincere effort is being made. When and where it is, Welsh Pagans have an important role to play in encouraging and welcoming people who are not of ‘stereotypical Welsh descent’.”

Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture to be welcoming and inclusive of people who are LGBTQ+ and / or who are of any gender?

Total: 73/74

Yes (65)
No (1)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (7)
No answer (1)

If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

“Last time I checked Welsh people are all of these things.”

“I do not think that this is implicit of Welsh spirituality, it is just good manners in our contemporary society.”

“The Penn of the Anglesey Druid Order is gay.”

“This agenda of LGBDQ people is misleading. We are born from nature in some gender, why go to such horrible transformations with drugs and surgeries to change what nature make of [sic]?? They are not worship nature, they are worship [sic] their looks! And in the end they distroy [sic] their bodies in unchangeable way”

“Its [sic] important for all humans to be welcoming and inclusive in all contexts!”

“Many of the 'leading' voices in the Welsh neo-pagan/ druid community are LGBTQ+ themselves. I deeply beleive [sic] that human rights are something that are not for question in the neo-pagan community, and LGBTQ+ rights are human rights.”

“This is a nonsensical question. What is covered under the +?”

“Yes, homophobia and transphobia have no place in Welsh paganism.”

“It is important to be welcoming to all”

“Yes, but this is a universal ethical standard rather than a particular religious one.”

Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture to be welcoming and inclusive of people who are disabled (mentally, physically, developmentally, etc.)?

Total: 74/74
Yes (66)
No (1)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (7)

If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

“I do not think that this is implicit of Welsh spirituality, it is just good manners in our contemporary society.”

“If possible and feeled called to do so”

“It depends of the situation. If someone can participate, learn and interact in harmonial way with others why not.”

“its important for all humans to be welcoming and inclusive in all contexts!”

“I am multiply disabled, and I don’t ask anyone to make special provisions for me in their ritual practice. Also, one should be very careful never to be in a situation where one is open to accusations of undue influence over people with reduced intellectual capacity, so the very young and the cognitively disabled should not be ‘recruited’.”

“It is important to be welcoming to all”

“I have a few physical limitations myself.”

“Yes, but this is a universal ethical standard rather than a particular religious one.”

“Yes. I began practising at the age of 16. In Wales. I am now 69 years old, and due to an accident, disabled. However, my contribution now to my small circle of neo pagans, is as important now as it was when I was hale and hearty, and could run up mountains.”

Is it important for Neo-Pagans who centre or incorporate Welsh culture to be welcoming and inclusive of people who do not currently, or have never, lived in Cymru (Wales)?

Total: 73/74
Yes (59)
No (2)
I want to say more. (Please explain.) (12)
No answer (1)

18b. If you selected "I want to say more" above, please explain here.

“Again, 'Welsh' is a nationality, not a label of praxis.”

“As someone who doesn't live nor has ever lived in Cymry, this question feels really out of my lane.”

“As a dual citizen who has only ever lived in Canada (but has been to Wales), I can't really blame people if they feel like I'm not one of them. I'm glad I have found a group that accepts me and values my additional experience/perspective being connected to the land of Western/Northwestern Canada as well as Wales. However, I am not offended by groups who are exclusive to people who've lived there.”

“Yes, providing the people concerned are being respectful and are genuinely interested in Wales and Welsh culture, and not just culturally appropriating for their own purposes.”

“Yes, but not without qualifications. It's important for those who've never lived in Wales to respect our culture as a living and valid culture, separate and distinct from (say) Anglo-American culture. Our values and traditions are distinct, and it's up to others to adapt to us, not the other way round.”

“its important for all humans to be welcoming and inclusive in all contexts!”

“For all questions about whether Welsh-centered Pagans should be welcoming, I'd vote for more inclusion rather than less. This includes being hospitable to people who have never lived in Cymru, including English, Scottish, Irish, French, North American, and Asian peoples (and everyone else).”

“I’m opposed to proselytising, on general principles. People either find their own way to the Old Gods, or they don’t. If you can be put off, you probably should be.”

“Yes, but the people coming in to the culture do need an understanding that it’s not ‘theirs’. Even if they do have heritage from non living people. The air breathes differently in Wales! It’s impossible to properly understand the culture, the myth and the community unless you are within it. I can understand that the impact of reading or watching something about Wales/ Welsh paganism can resonate with non-Welsh people and they want it! Especially if it turned up in 23 and me results! But the socialisation process would have happened away from Wales and so they have little chance of properly ‘getting it’. They are respected outsiders looking in, and should have an understanding that because they are a few steps away, it won’t wholly make sense.”
“Within reason, yes. If people show respect to the history and current, living culture, then I see no reason not to be welcoming. If it is blatant appropriation then I prefer to avoid such groups.”
“I think this is a good idea but frankly that's an inside decision not outside”
“In their heart and soul they feel they are Cymric; a matter of choice or maybe re-living a past life.”
“Absolutely. As long as they are respectful of our culture and history.”

Many Neo-Pagans point to the importance of orthopraxy (right practice / action) over orthodoxy (right belief). In your opinion, what is most important for Neo-Pagans who incorporate Welsh cultural elements into their practice to do?

Total: 66/74

“Neither, see above on the use of 'Welsh'. Use of minoritised cultural practice/belief is deeply disrespectful.”
“To be as inclusive as they possibly can and not feel pressured into accepting things that make them uncomfortable. For instance, I have absolutely no desire to perform spells 'sky-clad' for several reasons. The first and probably the most

important is...this is Britain for the goddess sake...it's NEVER warm enough to go 'sky-clad' and secondly, if my chanting spells isn't powerful enough to go through my clothes, then I should probably rethink the wording of the spell."
"I'm not sure I understand the question but if it's down to orthopraxy or orthodoxy, I would say orthopraxy."
"Respect for the gods and spirits"
"Orthopraxy."
"Your actions mean everything."
"I don't understand this question"
"Learn about, respect and understand Welsh culture and history."
"Orthopraxy"
"I think, especially for those of us who haven't been to Cymru, let alone lived there, it's important to study the history and folklore, not just the better known myths and legends, ideally from people who have grown up in the culture."
"Act with respect and integrity, and keep trying to grow the base of knowledge from which you act."
"Be able to articulate why they feel a kinship or connection to Welsh elements in their practice. Take the time to read classic Welsh folklore, like Y Mabinogi, as well as diverse opinions on what it means to be Welsh. Don't be afraid to do what is right for your own practice. Always be a seeker, stay humble, and expand your knowledge. Make healthy connections with fellow welsh pagans."
"Familiarize yourself with the history, archaeology, mythology, and folklore."
"Balance between the twp"
"Both"
"There is no real orthodoxy, so one's path can only be orthopraxic and based on UPG."
"Incorporating Welsh-based deities, folk practices, and learning from Welsh neo-pagans."
"Right action"

“I don't know that I have a leg to stand on here, as I am from the US, a Welsh-language learner (been learning since 2019) and an eclectic pagan incorporating Welsh concepts into my beliefs as much as I incorporate anything else. My beliefs are very complicated and come from a plethora of global sources, including but not remotely limited to Cymru. I am early in my learning about Welsh spiritual concepts and I am no authority - that said, I think the biggest things for me have been obsession with learning/history, veneration of ancestors, and forming relationships with spirit in whatever form it may take - if a spirit calls me, I pick up the phone. So.... that.”

“To understand what they are including and why.”

“I have no idea honestly. I used to fall more on the side of orthopraxy than orthodoxy, but praxis can vary so widely from place to place. I figure just try to be a good person and member of my community (both human and other than human). Be respectful.”

“Respect the culture”

“I think as neo-paganism is a very individual religion with some being atheist pagans/polytheists/only celebrate 1 Welsh celebration of the year (Calan), orthopraxy is more important. From research, Orthopraxy puts more importance on cultural integrity, the transmission of tradition and ethical considerations which definitely fits more with my practice.”

“I know valid groups who practice both aspects orthopraxy and orthodoxy. I do not class either as not important but have a personally bias towards orthopraxy because our knowledge of what ancient Welsh belief was is very thin.”

“In my opinion, this philosophical question transcends religion. But I am firmly on the side of orthopraxy.”

“Orthopraxy. I very much believe that as a pagan there is nothing set in stone that I have to 'believe'. It's about the way I approach nature and life and my practice.”

“I feel that the gods and goddesses speak to us on a personal level in many

different ways, so as long as a person is following their heart, intuition and not harming anyone else, then there's no need to have orthodox rules or practices. It's perfectly fine and should be encouraged to make a pagan practice one's own."

"Understanding what you're doing and saying, not just the rituals you engage in."

"Orthopraxy, an individuals ethical beliefs, how they live their life and treat others are more important than if they can recite creeds or prayers in a prescribed manner or in Welsh. All practice is a form of reconstruction or new practice gathered from elements of historical stories. To claim any group of Neo-Pagans are the only truth holders and for that practice to be orthodoxy is disingenuous."

"Practice whatever they think is right/appropriate and do not feel they have to have the same Practice as more established pagans."

"The right practice and beliefs has to be employed in equal measures. One is not more important than the other"

"There is no right practice or right belief. Spirituality is open for enyone to believe and practice what they want and call it what they want. As long as they do not try to name their practice as a specific path that there isn't and sell it that way for profit"

"Practice how you practice....it is your journey"

"I think every individual, and every group, is likely to develop their own practices. So, probably, 'right belief' is more important - but what does that mean in this context? For me, it means understanding the society, culture and traditions of the Welsh from which these stories, gods and belief systems emerged, and to understand them as elements within a larger, consistent & integrated Welsh whole. I'm less convinced by those who cherry-pick isolated elements."

"I think its more like paganism and pagan identity is more easily defined by

praxis than doxis. I don't think the 'ortho' part comes into it, no-one is enforcing any orthodoxy or orthopraxis.”

“To be true to themselves as an individual and their personal relationship to their 'God'”

“I think of intent within my Druid practice rather than orthopraxy or orthodoxy. Human beings have many beliefs and they can be expressed in so many ways. All are valid.”

“I'm not familiar with Welsh-centered Paganism as its own path, but would answer that it would be important to follow the teachings, worldview, ethics, and practices taught in this Pagan tradition or subset of Druidry. This may include specific forms of prayer, devotion to a Welsh pantheon, meditation, study of Welsh texts, cultivating Welsh wisdom and ethics, etc. Orthopraxy is indeed more important than orthodoxy.”

“Orrhopraxy is more important to modern neo-pagan in our climate, especially when considering politics. Actions are louder that beliefs.”

“Communicate with nature, listen to nature. Make offering and respect. She will teach you, not some group or organisation.”

“Learn from a welsh person.”

“To learn some of the language”

“Learn to pronounce things correctly Check that what you think is from reliable sources Don't use Wicca names or Gaelic names for festivals”

“Show respect for Welsh culture and language.”

“I would say, learn and practice the language, and honor of the spirits of the land wherever they are.”

“orthopraxy”

“Dear Gods! If we can’t be heterodox, who can be?”

“Out of these two, I think orthodoxy is most important. I believe the gods would be understanding of orthodoxy without orthopraxy "he's a little confused but he's got the spirit" but orthopraxy without orthodoxy isn't spiritual.”

“I strongly believe that religion and spirituality are individual, and every single person on Earth experiences it differently. What one wants to incorporate into their practice is their own choice. If a person uses deities or customs from another culture then they must make sure that 1) that culture/religion is open, and 2) that they do it with the utmost respect. If a person believes that speaking in Welsh and doing a ritual at the shores of Llyn Tegid is the only "legitimate" way to practice Welsh paganism, then that's their opinion. If someone strongly believes in Ceridwen, converses with Her, makes offerings to Her, but perhaps does so in a much more casual way, then that's their choice. Whatever works for one person might not work for another. For neopagans who incorporate Welsh culture into their practice, I believe that at least some background research is needed. At an absolute basic level, this could just be the correct pronunciation of the names, places and concepts associated with Welsh mythology and folklore. There doesn't exist a strict, central ritual associated with Welsh paganism - most of it stems from local folklore and superstitious belief. In my opinion, there is not really a right or wrong way to practice Welsh paganism, as long as it is done respectfully.”

“Act of reciprocity. Cleanliness and clearing of mind before, during and after ritual.”

“The problem with Brythonic Paganism is there is very little left to go on in terms of either belief or practice, so I'd say learning how to embrace the mystery of it all is the most important thing.”

“Just be truthful and honest with your oath. Learn from those who went before but don't be stuck in the past.”

“Orthodoxy has always been my personal priority. I'm a Reconstructionist, always looking for something that can get me close(r) to an understanding of the oldest incarnations and interpretations of the Gods. And knowing them, for who they are, is the whole point, to me. I've always been an intention over results kind of person, and I think that crosses over into trying to have the most

accurate belief and internal relationship, over a specific physical action or habit. I do, however, try to reverse engineer what I see of other peoples ritual behaviours into a better understanding of what can be understood about the Gods for whom those actions are intended to display reverence."

"The right belief/intention has to come first."

"The most important is to ensure the names of the Gods are spoken correctly"

"Respect other people and nature. I struggle with the use of Welsh practice and language as an American. However, I have been encouraged to incorporate all of this into my persona practice."

"Orthopraxy all the way. Respect that Welsh culture is a living, changing thing and not a frozen, vaguely medieval fantasy story."

"Be kind."

"Intention, belief"

"This is a difficult question to answer. On a surface level, I would encourage any Neo-Pagan to develop their own personal practices, free of doctrine and orthopraxy, in their acts of worship. However, when incorporating elements of a living culture into Neo-Pagan practices, I would say that a certain level of Orthopraxy is important to preserve the element and spirit of that culture. For example, Reconstruction Focussed Neo-Pagans may appear very different to those more focussed on aspects like Wicca or Neo-Druidism. Overall I would emphasise the importance of Orthodoxy more, but not to the detriment of the cultural elements that are being incorporated."

"Unclear what question is asking. Is this an either/or? In which case, Orthopraxy."

"Use the Welsh language for the names of deities, spirits, and practices. Read Welsh myth, such as the Mabinogion. Learn from the great bards Taliesin, Dafydd ap Gwilym, and so on. Adapt Welsh folk customs to seasonal practice, such as the Mari Lwyd for winter."

"In my 53 years of practice, I have seen trends come and go "Rules" created

and broken, the whole lot. It is most important for Neo Pagans to be mindful of trends. Prayerful (Yes, Neo pagans can be prayerful!) and heedful of our ancestors and the gods."
"I find this whole concept difficult. After all what is right practice. If we want to follow the ancient pagan beliefs this would almost certainly mean animal sacrifice, potentially human sacrifice (it is unclear) and warring with people who did not hold your tribes beliefs! Likewise what is right belief - we have no way of knowing what ancient individuals actually believed, did they think the dieties were literal, did they think of them as supernatural concepts, of beings from parellel universes -and is trying to follow any particulr belief right anyway. Both orthodoxy and orthopraxy are such culturally biased concepts I find them meaningless."
"Honour deities and know how those deities are talked about in the relevant medieval texts and in folklore."
"Having a reverence and respect for the culture/history/land and a desire to learn. To go back to the question on cymraeg I don't think you have to know it but there should be at least a respect/recognition of it if not a want to learn and connect further."

Please give a brief summary of why you personally incorporate or centre Welsh culture in your Neo-Pagan practice.

Total: 70/74

"I am Welsh born, raised in Cymru, living yn Nghymru, reclaiming y iaith Cymraeg as a marker of identity, rooting myself in a landscape, language and culture largely denied me growing up. Appropriation and unthinking eclectic ism by 'neo-pagans' is wholly disrespectful to a minoritised culture such as ours."
"I am Welsh and I am proud of it. I therefore have an affinity towards the gods

and goddesses of my own history and culture BUT, that is NOT to say that I culturally appropriate the other panoply of gods that belong to other ancient civilisations. These gods have way more in common than not."

"Welsh myth and culture have been central in my path as a Priestess of Avalon so it was important to me to bring my understanding of these things in alignment with correct/right information and to properly honour the culture. This includes learning the Welsh language and incorporating it into my practice."

"I have some Welsh ancestry and am in a coven devoted to Morgan Le Fay as our Patroness. I have devotion to Gwyn ap Nudd as well. I am learning Cymraeg with the SSIW app and would love to be able to visit someday."

"As a increasingly long term resident in Cymru, and having a little Welsh ancestry, I feel that incorporating Welsh traditions and culture into my practice is sympathetic to the area I live and practice in."

"I started studying druidry and learning about welsh stories and they spoke to me, I felt connected. The more I learned and incorporated, the more it made sense to me."

"Because I live in the Welsh countryside and the spirit of the land that surrounds me is Welsh. When I lived in England I worked with local English culture and spirituality"

"Even before I found out my surname (Blevins) was Welsh I was drawn to the culture. King Arthur always spoke to my soul and was some of what sparked my journey into paganism. Most people seem to come into Celtic paganism through an Irish lense but I began through the Welsh. I connected with Bendigidvran in my teens and have kept that connection throughout my life. The more I learn about Cymru the more it feels connected with my soul."

"I lived in Wales for many years and my ancestral home is there (Welsh borders and not historically Welsh). It would feel wrong not to as it's part of me."

"It's part of my ancestral heritage and I have felt called to connect more with that. Also as an American of European heritage, we sometimes struggle to

connect with our own place in a way that's respectful to Native Americans and other people of color, who have asked us to connect with our own ancestral traditions. It's not always simple to do so for us either, but I respect that feedback."

"There is a Welsh emphasis in my druidry training (OBOD) and I have some Welsh ancestry. I'm a first-generation NZer and conscious of the fact that while I was born here I'm not tangata whenua (people of the land i.e. Māori), so being a 100% fit for any one cultural pagan tradition is not an option for me. All I can do is do my best to work honestly and respectfully with the traditions(s)/culture(s) that I feel called to."

"My recent ancestry happens to be Welsh. Growing up in the USA, most people have no knowledge of Wales, so I was ostracized a lot. Wanting to fit in as a child, I hid that part of myself. As an adult, something was missing. I didn't fit in, until I saw Welsh media on the Internet, met some Welsh folk in Welsh heritage organizations, and began a deeper reading of welsh language, folklore, culture, and history. And then it all clicked. The pastoral essence of being welsh, doing the little things, small acts of caring in community… it connected with something deep and primal in me. I felt like I had found my people. I felt Hiraeth. Falch o fod yn gymreig."

"Llyr is honored in Reformed Druidism, my main practice. There are some rituals that pay homage to Llyr, so it is important to learn what we can. There is also a (perhaps entirely modern) deity in Reformed Druidism named Dalon Ap Landu, who we cannot find any historic basis for so far. We think Dalon was perhaps mentioned in Victorian or Druidry Revival period writings that might now be out of print. Dalon has an epithet of "Lord of the Grove." The closest we have come to uncovering more clues is the James Forlong book "Rivers of Life" which mentions a Welsh deity "Duw Keli" (Forlong used phonetic spelling instead of proper Welsh). Duw Keli meant "[Him of the] Dark Grove." We do know that Bryn Celli Ddu means "Mound of the Dark Grove," and we're still

exploring the possibility that there may have been a Welsh deity of Groves, and discover connections, if any, to Dalon Ap Landu, or to correct his name to something historical in our Order. If by chance, the founders of Reformed Druidism had misspelled something they saw in an old book, some of us speculate on Landu perhaps originating from "Llan Ddu" or "Dark Church Enclosure." I'm not sure how old the word "llan" is, but I would suspect the word predates the arrival of Christianity to Britain, and could have applied to sacred enclosures such as open air temples or groves, perhaps as an archaic synonym for "Celli." If that's even remotely the case, we'd have to change our pronunciation of Landu and rewrite our books!”

“I enjoy Welsh mythology and thoigh I'm not wiccan i do follow wiccan sabbats.”

“The Welsh deities spoke to me, and I felt more welcomed by them.”

“I have lived and worked (as an archaeologist) in Wales for almost 40 years. I feel very close to the fabric and history of the land, and out of this I have studied Welsh mythology and lore. But my own pagan practice is very eclectic, and the Welsh elements are part of a rich confection on my part.”

“I work with Welsh, and some earlier Brythonic, deities. I also am studying Welsh folk magic and modern neo-druidry.”

“I lived in Wales for two years 50 years ago and became a self initiated witch there, inspired by landscape spirit and awen. I have some Welsh ancestry and identify with the struggles of the Welsh people against colonisation and domination by Romans Normans and English. I have had personal relationships with Welsh deities over many years. I study, research and care about the history and culture of ancient Brythonic speakers in England and Scotland as well as Wales, especially in London where I live and in Somerset where my parents lived.”

“Partially out of ancestral interest (part of my family came from Cymru in the early 1900's), partially out of love of the language, and beyond that... I just do. I follow what feels right or feels like it's 'calling' me.”

“I fell in love with Wales. I visited many places during my summer at Oxford. London, Bath, Avebury, Cerne, Killkenny, Edinburgh, and the Isle of Skye, but Cymru was magical. I also worship Sulis, I felt a connection to her, but not her city.”

“So, basically I'm a Heathen who started worshiping Gwyn ap Nudd after a series of encounters with him over the course of years. I had no idea who he was until 2018 despite having experiences since at least 2005. My first experiences were seeing him come to collect the recently deceased at an old job. Blodeuwedd also seems to show up from time to time as well.”

“I honor some Welsh deities, it'd be pretty rude not to incorporate some Welsh culture in too. Besides, I work across and within multiple Celtic cultures, and I think it's important to treat them all with respect.”

“I lived in Wales all my life then moved to an English university and missed being involved in Welsh culture so I became interested in the history and language of my home country which coincided with lockdown and the big witchcraft 'boom' on social media which then got me involved with Kristoffer Hughes and Mhara Starling. I've become more and more interested in folk culture from herbal remedies of the Physicians of Myddfai, the Mabinogi and the 'deities' within, and general spirituality which has all combined nicely into a Welsh pagan practice.”

“I tend to incorporate the concepts of land, sea and sky, the eight festivals within a Welsh context (e.g. Calan Gaeaf), and venerate and honour Welsh entities which may be regarded as deities, e.g Rhiannon and Gwyn ap Nudd.”

“-Was always drawn to paganism

-My family is Welsh

-Wicca never quite worked for me; one day I chanced on a book by the head of the ADO and began integrating Druidry into my practice

-I had a spiritual awakening in Wales ”

“Only when it is appropriate and respectful to be inclusive of others.”

“I grew up on the Welsh borders, so this is the landscape that speaks to me, and I wanted to learn about its mythology, the stories that live within the land. I also have found a great deal of meaning and personal importance and spiritual development in exploration of the myth of Blodeuwedd. This myth has had a hugely important and deep influence on my life.”

“The gods and goddesses of the Welsh lands and culture approached me in dreams. I decided to work with them based on these dreams, and I was encouraged by them to learn more and continue with a personal practice. I see them as supportive guides along my path.”

“I met Kristoffer Hughes when I started learning about druidry. I like his methods and am using as springboard in examine the deities and practices of my own (way back in the past) indigineous culture.”

“There are a number of Welsh deities who are part of my practice, I feel a deep personal connection to them and the interpretation that has been ascribed to them. I also feel a connection to the land and landscape in Wales.”

“I'm a Welsh occultist. When I was in primary school we learnt nothing of our history, and those who spoke Welsh were considered backward. Nothing changed in Secondary school. Over the last 10 years I've made an effort to embrace my heritage.”

“I am an awenydd of the Anglesey Druid Order. I follow and work with Cerridwen and Taliesin”

“It spoke to me for the moment I joined O.B.O.D. lessons.”

“It is part of the overall Celtic tradition of druidry”

“Partly because it's my roots and my culture. Partly because, after exploring other paths, it makes the most sense for me.”

“I have an interest in history, mythology and ancient literature like many self identifying pagans. I came to the ancient literature and mythology of Wales more than 25 years ago through the writings of Caitlin Matthews, specifically a book called Mabon and the Mysteries of Britain. I found it aesthetically and

imaginatively very satisfying. I was just starting as a Druid at the time and this literature informed my practice. This has continued to some degree - though I have moved into a broader nature based Animism and away from culturally rooted mythology based Paganism I still find these stories satisfying. I also find elements of the Cauldron of Poesy very interesting and may look into this more deeply at some point. Part of my livelihood is as a musician reconstructing ancient music, and this has led me to learn pibgorn and crwth and play some Welsh traditional music. I do have some Welsh ancestry on my fathers side, but I don't think this is a significant factor. I suspect that had I encountered Irish mythology first this might have formed a similar core of my practice."

"In my fifty years journey of spiritual development I have researched and adopted some practices and beliefs as they suited at different times."

"I am a Druid within the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. OBOD teachings incorporate Welsh culture and pantheon into their lessons, and it resonated with me. I was born in Manchester, England and in my childhood visited Wales. I live in New Zealand and wildcraft my Druid practices incorporating Celtic, Nordic and Māori pantheons into my practice. I am currently learning Māori and Scottish Gaelic. My ancestry DNA includes English, Welsh, Irish, Scottish and Nordic."

"It's a big part of my ancestry, and I've felt drawn to Cerridwen in my practice "

"Welsh culture, history, symbolism, terminology, mythology, and texts all contributed to the formation of Revival Druidry, which in turn influenced other branches of the modern Druid movement. One of the formats for ritual I follow comes from John Michael Greer's _The Druidry Handbook_, and that text also draws upon Welsh lore through Iolo Morganwg; this indirectly connects me with Welsh paganism in some way. Key terms such as "Awen" and "nwyfre" that are important in Revival Druidry also derive from Welsh.

The names of the solar holidays in the Wheel of the Year, such as "Alban Arthuan", also derive from Welsh, and I sometimes use these terms instead of

calling them by Solstices or Equinox names. But for the Celtic Fire festivals I often use their Irish names instead of Welsh, though I do like the term "Calan Mai".”

“I was born and raised in Wales and raised around the lore and myth. My family has turned their backs on me due to my LGBTQ+ status and I lost the one support I had in my family to death. Incorporating Welsh culture helps me feel whole and connected to my culture.”

“Because it is my indigenous ancestoral heritage.”

“I am born and bred weak as a celebrant and a welsh Druid it is my job to offer and include the following: Language

Terms

Traditions

Landscape references

Teach an online course

Run a Druids tour in wales

Mentor in welsh Druidry

Cultural advisor.”

“I am Welsh”

“Cerridwen

Elin of the hosts”

“I am Welsh and a Welsh-speaker. Welsh culture is central to my Neo-Pagan prectice. As an example, I would cite my experience as an active participant in the Mari Lwyd.

The connection with Rhiannon-Epona has always been part of my Pagan journey. Also the fact that the story of Teyrnon and Gwri is set in Gwent (my native county) and that W. J. Gruffydd thought that Rhiannon was originally the “Lady of Gwent” is especially important to me. There is also evidence that Epona was honoured at the Romano-British town of Caerwent. Couple the presence of a local horse-goddess with the stubborn tradition of the Mari and a

strong theme emerges!

When I'm "under the sheet" I do feel that Epona-Rhiannon is very close, that she is present with us and generates the electric atmosphere that there always is when the Mari enters the room. I feel that the goddess's presence and power is channelled through me and the pony at the same time – the pony and I meld into each other as the conduit for the magic of the goddess. I know that all sounds a bit dippy, but that is how it feels and it is very real. The Mari generates powerful, palpable magic and there is a real otherworldly atmosphere – often enhanced by the response of the onlookers to the Mari."

"Welsh ancestry and it is used by the druid orders I am in."

"I have distant Welsh ancestry, and I was raised by a grandmother who told me stories that made me very curious about my heritage. I also was always curious about the language as a child. I finally got to start studying it in 2019, and felt a strong spiritual connection. The other side of my family is Italian, and I think the history of Wales is a really interesting intersection between Rome and Celtic Britain. And I think my personal history reflects that? I also studied with a lot of native Americans and grad school, who were very involved in language revitalization, and they inspired me to learn a heritage language of my own, and to see the connections between language and ecological knowledge and beliefs and spirituality."

"I have always felt my connection to anything spiritual came from my connection to the land i was on and the history and culture of the place i am in. so it is important for me to centre that. i also believe outside of a spiritual context that welsh history and traditions (even if reconstructed) is good to maintain"

"I'm on my own ground. So should you be."

"I am Welsh and want to connect with my cultural heritage in my spirituality."

"I am Welsh and have been pagan since I was 16. I am 38 now and have been incorporating Welsh aspects into my practice for about 15 years now. I used to live next to the Dee Estuary/Aber Dyfrdwy, and would often walk next to the

estuary and use it to aid my spiritual practices. I ended up moving out of Wales due to a bad situation, but moving away has only made my connection stronger. I feel like I used to view Welsh culture as almost boring, as it was the norm, but living in England has made me feel ever closer to Wales than ever."

"In my faith I am primary gaulish polytheistic (subuta!; well met!), I havesome brythonic dieties I do follow as well as being a practicing witch that focuses a lot on folkmagick and have tended to do more in honour to the gods. Welsh traditions have taught me new ways of including practices int0 my migick and devotion"

"I live just over the Bridge, so Wales is very accessible to me, and I can't help but feel the spirituality of the land when I'm in it.

I am part of Obod and the Bardic part of this is entrenched in their interpretation of Welsh mythology. I also learn a lot from Celtic Source and bring his thoughts into my practice.

Wales has held the language and the myth in a wonderful way, and England lost hers. It feels older and more real and genuine than other things. I like it, but i recognise that I'm a visitor. And that it belongs to another culture and I don't have a chance in experiencing or understanding it in the same way."

"I am Welsh. My ancestry is a mix of British but mostly Welsh. I live in Wales. I am of this land and this land has it's gods."

"I love north Wales and belive it to be a special place"

"A mixture of several factors: [1.] Local paganism has been something I've been fascinated with for as long as I can remember, as far back as my young childhood. And while I wasn't born in Wales, I WAS born within sight of it, and it was always the place that called out to me. The place that, as soon as I crossed over and surrounded myself with the land that I'd looked at longingly whenever away from it, waiting for my next chance to return, that's when I actually felt like I had come home. Every single time, without exception, as best as I can tell. So I developed a connection with the land itself from a very early age.

[2.] From very early on I was fascinated by - and made every effort to visit as regularly as I could - the standing stones, burial chambers, ruins, and other signs of ancient cultural and religious importance. So I developed a very early interest in the Gods of my home, so to speak. I wanted to understand the meaning of these powerfully-affecting places and monuments.
[3.] From the earlier stages of my paganism, through to the present, I've always had a desire to find a "truth", as best I can, about what our ancestors actually believed. That's not to say that I ever have or ever would tell someone else that what I've found to be that closest thing I've found to be a truth needs to be their truth. But with the otherwise scientific mindset that I have, always putting rationality, logical reasoning, robust evidencing first, etc., I have always been drawn to the idea that if I can find Gods, beliefs, and practices that were shared with other, local, but culturally-distinct peoples, from nearly nations, there is a greater chance of what relatively little knowledge that we have retained in the present day to be that much more likely to be authentic, and actually, meaningfully important to our ancestors. So I'd be returning to this home away from home, as regularly as I could, and finding local truths and incarnations of Gods that were spoken of from far afield parts of Britain, Ireland, and even continental Europe; and it would make THIS place feel like their home, as well as mine.
[4.] I’m absolutely fascinated with language, and particularly with the history of languages and what they can tell us about the peoples who spoke them at various points throughout the past. So I've tried to learn others. Gaelic (in terms of biological heritage, I'm a lot more Irish and Scottish than I am Welsh, after all), Norwegian, Lithuanian, and those that we were made to learn in school, etc. but none of them have come close to sticking anywhere near as much as Welsh has. Whether as a happy bonus experience, or a subconscious majority portion of my motivation for learning it, it has always felt like it's helped me to connect with the past. With the Welsh of the past, in particular; obviously. With

my Welsh ancestors. But also with the Welsh people with whom I have friendships and relationships, today."

"I was born and raised in Wales. I think the landscape/nature/energies really affected me. Certain characters and themes from Y Mabinogi have been special to me for a long time too."

"I am Welsh and speaking Welsh in ceremony and in practice deepens my connection to my ancestral Heritage and the land, sea and sky in which I dwell"

"It helps to create a "Welsh mind' and greater understanding of practice, beliefs and myths. It also stretches my experience and perceptions of the world."

"Second generation pagan, born in Pontypool and raised in Caerphilly, in the South Wales Valleys.

My mother is Wiccan with a heavy bias towards Welsh mythological figures as deific entities. My personal practice is less deity focused and leans more towards animism and Druidry."

"Because if a bwbach who thinks he's Dylan Thomas asks very sweetly if you'd upend your entire worldview, learn a new culture and craft a story that accounts for his existence, he can be adorably persuasive about it."

"I am drawn to Taliesin, Talhaeran, Aneirin, Llywarch Hen, Cerridwen."

"I grew up in Wales and have always lived there. The land itself played a strong role in the foundation of my personal Neo-Pagan practices, and I have always approached Neo-Paganism through a Celtic lens, to connect with those who had lived in this land."

"Resonates to my identity"

"I am an American of Welsh descent who sees value in that ancestral connection. I value my family dearly, and the "hen grefydd" is the most recent faith my ancestors practiced before converting to Christianity. It is, in many ways, culturally familiar in the Anglosphere through Arthuriana. It is also obscure enough to not feel like cringe roleplay, like has been my experience with Greco-Roman and Germanic polytheism."

“Welsh culture has been central to my culture and belief system my entire life. I respect other Neo Pagan practioners, but I am always on the outside looking in at other practices ....groves, churches, etc.
I am at home with my own culture. My own way of practicing.”
“I am primarily an animist (in South Wales) so am closly linked to the local landscapes. THis means I will honour the energy of local stones, the waterfalls, the plants. But when I want to honour a more abstract or overarching energy, such as the wilderness in general, or love, or work -then I find it useful to use the figures in the Welsh mythologies to embody these ideas. So I honour Gobbanium as a way of honouring the energies of craftsmanship -a way of giving thanks to the creative energies and what comes out of them. I use the Welsh figures more than other mythology/foklore figures because for me it feels right as these are how the people of my area saw these energies/powers. If I moved I expect I would use the new areas local deities/concepts rather than stick with the Welsh.”
“I spent most of my life in southern Scotland. In the past, this was very much a crossroads of Brythonic and Goidelic religion and language. I found that both sets of deities, if you like, were immanent in the landscape and it was natural to want to honour them all.
Of the two, I find I am slightly more drawn to Brythonic culture, but I think that is partly because the Welsh have been both welcoming and more ready to help me combine spiritual pursuits with good scholarship.”
“As a very white person living in America I wanted to be very conscious of finding folk practices that I had an ancestral connection with. My grandad immigrated to the states from England as the son of a Welshman. So I mainly focused on practices from England and Wales but often English sources were very muddied with Wicca which wasn’t my thing so Wales became my focus. Learning cymraeg and studying welsh folklore has been both a devotional and

grounding practice allowing me to learn more about my ancestry and further connect with loved ones/spirits.”

Survey Section 3: Engagement with Welsh Culture
14 Questions; about 5-12 minutes

Please answer the following questions based on your own personal actions.

Please select **ALL** of the following Welsh cultural elements that you personally incorporate **as part of your Neo-Pagan practice and / or your Neo-Pagan identity**.

Observations or participation can be elaborate or simple and can be done privately or publicly, alone or in groups.

Seasonal / Agricultural Holidays: At any point within the past 5 years, I have observed the following seasonal traditional holidays partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements:

Total: 71/74
Gŵyl Braint / Canhwyllau (February 1st) (50)
Calan Mai / Calan Haf (May 1st) (59)
Gŵyl Awst (August 1st) (47)
Calan Gaeaf / Nos Galan Gaeaf / Gŵyl y Meirw (November 1st / October 31st) (66)
None (3)
No answer (3)

- All 4 (47)
- Calan Gaeaf & Mai/Haf only (8)
- Calan Mai only (1)
- Calan Gaeaf only (9)

Seasonal / Solar Holidays: At any point within the past 5 years, I have observed the following solar seasonal traditional holidays and / or Iolo Morganwg-influenced holidays partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements:

Total: 73/74
Alban Eilir / Cyhydnos y Gwanwyn (Spring Equinox / Easter timeframe) (56)
Alban Hefin / Heuldro'r Haf / Hirddydd (Summer Solstice / St. John's Day timeframe) (62)
Alban Elfed / Cyhydnos yr Hydref (Autumn Equinox / Michaelmas timeframe) (58)
Alban Arthan / Heuldro'r Gaeaf / Hirnos (Winter Solstice / Christmas to New Year timeframe) (65)
None (5)
No answer (1)

- All 4 (54)
- Solstices only (5)
- Winter solstice only (4)

Christian Holidays: At any point within the past 5 years, I have observed the following Christian holidays partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements:

Total: 60/74
Dydd Sant Cynderyn Garthwys / Saint Kentigern's Day (14 January) (1)
Dydd Sant Catwg / Saint Cadog's Day (24 January / 25 September) (1)
Dydd Santes Dwynwen / Saint Dwynwen's Day (25 January) (17)
Gŵyl Fair y Canhwyllau neu y Morwyn, Gŵyl San Ffraid ; Mary's Feast of the Candles or the Virgin, or Feast of Saint Brigid (1 February) (14)
Dydd Sant Seiriol / Saint Seiriol's Day (3 February)
Dydd Sant Teilo neu Eliud / Saint Teilo or Eliud's Day (9 February)
Dydd Dewi Sant / Saint David's Day (1 March) (28)
Dydd Santes Non / Saint Non's Day (5 March) (2)
Dydd Sant Padrig / Saint Patrick's Day (17 March) (7)
Dydd Sant Cuthbert / Saint Cuthbert's Day (20 March / 4 September)
Grawys / Lent (1)
Dydd Sul y Meibion / Sunday of the Sons (3 Sundays before Easter) (1)
Dydd Sul y Pys / Sunday of the Peas (2 Sundays before Easter) (1)
Dydd Sul y Blodau / Sunday of the Flowers (Sunday before Easter) (1)
Pasg / Easter (8)
Dydd Sant Brynach neu Frannoc / Saint Brynach or Brannoc's Day (7 April) (1)
Dydd Sant Padarn / Saint Padarn / Paternus's Day (15 April)
Dydd Sant Beuno / Saint Beuno or Bonus or Bono's Day (20 April)
Dydd Santes Elen Luyddog / Saint (H)elen of the Hosts or of Caernarfon's Day (22 May) (2)

Dydd Santes Melangell / Saint Melangell or Monacella's Day (28 May) (4)
Dydd Sant Euddogwy / Saint Euddogwy or Oudoceus's Day (1 June)
Dydd Saint Alban, Julius, ag Aaron / Saints Alban, Julius, and Aaron's Day (20 June) (1)
Dydd Sant Peblig / Saint Peblig or Publicus's Day (4 July)
Dydd Sant Samson / Saint Samson's Day (28 July)
Dydd Santes Tudful / Saint Tydfil's Day (23 August) (1)
Dydd Sant Deiniol / Saint Deiniol / Daniel's Day (11 September)
Dydd Sant Ninian / Saint Ninian's Day (16 September)
Dydd Sant Cynog / Saint Cynog's Day (9 October)
Dydd Santes Gwenfrewi / Saint Gwenfrewi or Winifred's Day (3 November) (2)
Dydd Sant Cybi / Saint Cybi or Cuby's Day (5 November)
Dydd Sant Illtud / Saint Illtud or Hildutus's Day (6 November) (1)
Dydd Saint Cymru / Day of the Saints of Wales (8 November)
Dydd Sant Tysilio / Saint Tysilio or Tysilius's Day (12 November)
Dydd Sant Dyfrig / Saint Dyfrig or Dubricius's Day (14 November)
Dydd Sant Cynidr / Saint Cynidr or Kenider's Day (8 December)
Nadolig / Christmas Eve and / or Christmas Day (24 / 25 December) (24)
Dydd Sant Tathan / Saint Tathan or Tatheus's Day (30 December)
None (18)
No answer (14)

If you selected any of the Christian observances above, please share why you engage with certain Christian holidays, observances, and / or saints as a Neo-Pagan.

"Dual faith and dual practice were and are common in Cymru, as elsewhere in Britain. As a cunning man/Dyn Hysbys, the two are complementary if not inseparable."
"I tend to engage with Christian holidays on those days that had a pagan origin"
"Bringing myself closer to Welsh holy-days/holidays and culture."
"Brigid is a goddess as well as a saint. Dydd Dewi Sant is a Welsh holiday to me, a day to celebrate Wales and Welshness, like the US Fourth of July."
"I honour Brigid, so it feels appropriate to honour on her feast day."
"They are hard to avoid culturally and spirituality can be found within them."

“As my knowledge of Welsh culture has slowly grown, I have begun to observe these holidays with a local Welsh Heritage organization in my home state of Oregon, many of whom are Christian, and are closely associated with Bryn Sion church, holding Noson Lawen there every year.”

“American culture”

“There should be a choice for 'other' here. I celebrate All Souls Day, and I now celebrate St Lucy's D in conjunction with the Winter Solstice.ay”

“I regard St Dwynwen as a culture hero of Wales and that one does not have to be Christian to celebrate her. I regard many Welsh saints as possibly memorialising pre-Christian figures. I might observe Melangell’s day and also St Tanwg who was the saint of the village my ancestors came from in Gwynedd.”

“St. Patrick's Day and Christmas are unavoidable.”

“I engage with Brigid as a goddess but incorporate elements of her as a Saint into my worship. I also honor St Elen, who has had a very strange journey into paganism. So, basically, I engage with Christian holidays and observances where they overlap with pagan ones.”

“Feast of St Brigid due to her being called Braint in Welsh and a patron deity - this is incorporated into my celebration of the Gwyl Canhwyllau.

I admittedly haven't done much research into Welsh saints - St. Melangell is a story that reached me in some way, and now I honour her as a patron of wildlife and sanctuary and the natural environment of Wales.”

“Modern culture and a teen age son means that some observance of Christmas is unavoidable.”

“I didn’t select any in that list, but I am a Christian as well as everything else”

“St David’s Day as a tradition from living in Wales and my spouse being born in Wales.”

“Because there is so much crossover between the both belief systems. I personally hate those smug pagans who go on about ' all Christian holidays are

pagan ' they're absolute idiots.”

“The rest of my family is Chrisitan I celebrate with them”

“Brigid and Patrick are also part of the Irish Catholic tradition that I was raised 8n”

“We have a religiously fluid household.”

“I was brought up Christian and celebrate Christmas day in New Zealand at the height of summer. It is a wonderful time to spend time with friends and family, celebrate summer solstice and gift the light back to the northern hemisphere!”

“For me Dydd Dewi Sant is a day to share my welsh culture with partner and friends here in the states with out them feeling like they have to participate in a religious ceremony.”

“Please note that nit all Christian dates above were Christians most are from pagan origins”

“The are perhaps echoes of older pre Christian elements and significant to Welsh culture”

“Oftem embedded in older beliefs, school”

“St David is the patron saint of Wales and part of our traditional cultural calendar. We celebrate Nadolig, Solstice and Jul!!”

“tradition in my family who is mostly christian”

“I grew up Catholic and I have always had an eclectic practice, and identify as a chaos magician. Saints and ancestors are important to my work. Also my family still celebrates Christmas so by making it more, Welsh, I am make it more appropriate to my own practice.”

“a lot of sources for welsh paganism come filtered through a christian perspective and this is the way alot of culture has survived. i do not theologically believe in christianity but i do practice it to some degree because it is where i find spiritual connections in modern day”

“These festivals have been lifted out of the pagan calendar by the church. The actual yearly calendars have shifted, likewise.

I keep Old August on the 12th, in fact, just like Old Hallowe'en is actually later in November. There's an ancient reason why Armistice Day is the 11th."
"St David's Day is the holiday used to celebrate and educate about Welsh culture"
"I celebrate Dydd Dewi Sant as I do not see it as a Christian holiday, but instead as a general celebration of Wales."
"Culturally appropriate within my family.
Plus I like the idea of lots of people celebrating across the world at the same time."
"Pressure from others, curiosity, and for the food."
"Tradition and centred around Yule
Dwynwen is a Celtic Goddess of Ynys Môn"
"Socially I recognize some of those days but they are not part of my spiritual beliefs or practices."
"Dates chosen are also largely celebrated as secular observances.
St Dwynwen's day is mostly an excuse for me to tease my very English husband about him not having given me a love spoon yet."
"Dwynwen is too good for the Christians to keep, Saint David I regard as a national institution, and Christmas because 'A Child's Christmas in Wales'."
"Tradition."
"Tradition. Family traditions. I observe many Christian holidays, as I am a follower of very early Celtic Christianity.
I am particularly fond of some early saints."
"Gŵyl San Ffraid as it aligns with Gŵyl Braint and Dydd Dewi Sant in celebration of Cymru and an excuse to make Welsh cakes"

Other Historical / Cultural Observances: At any point within the past 5 years, I have observed the following dates partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements:

Total: 59/74

Dydd Miwsig Cymru / Welsh Language Music Day (7 February) (1)
Diwrnod Crempog / Pancake Day (Day before Lent) (12)
Diwrnod Cenedlaethol Bara Lawr / National Laverbread Day (14 April) (0)
Dylan Thomas Day (14 May) (2)
Pride Cymru LGBTQ+ (month of August) (15)
Welsh Rarebit Day (3 September) (4)
Owain Glyndŵr's Rebellion (16 September) (6)
Black History Month in Britain (October) (9)
Death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (11 December) (7)
None (26)
Other (7)
No answer (15)

If you selected "Other" on the question above, please list additional Welsh historical or cultural dates of significance you have observed here.

"Old New Year (around the 11January)"

"None of these exist within the US state of Ohio...."

"Does hanging out with Mari Lwyd count?"

"Mari Lwyd"

"I attend the National Eisteddfod of Wales every year. I am a member of the Gorsedd of Bards."

"Hen galan"

""Music" in Welsh is "cerddoriaeth", not bloody "miwsig", FFS!"

"Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day."

"Hen Galan 13 January"

"I am not yet familiar with the Welsh celebratory days. I am planning to come to Wales to live and learn more."

"21st October. Observances for Aberfan and Capel Celyn."

Language: At any point within the past 5 years, I have used the following to learn or improve my Cymraeg (Welsh language) partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements:

Total: 70/74
Amdani (novels targeting Welsh language learners) (4)
DuoCards (0)
DuoLingo (41)
Dysgu Cymraeg / Learn Welsh (17)
italki (1)
Learn Welsh Podcast (14)
learn-welsh.net (4)
Lingo Newydd (magazine targeting Welsh language learners) (2)
Residential immersion intensive (3)
Say Something in Welsh (27)
The Open University (0)
University-hosted language class (3) [including narrative text input “college evening classes” = 4]
Welsh grammar books (12)
Welsh language-learning books (21)
Wlpan (0)
I already use Cymraeg fluently and do not need to learn or improve it via methods intended for second-language learners (4) [including person who said they speak fluently but their reading and writing are rusty in narrative text = 5]
None (I do not already know Welsh and am not learning it) (7) [technically 8, but 1 also selected that they are already fluent and don’t need to learn it]
Other (16)
No answer (8) [4 have fill-in answers in the “Other” follow-up below]

If you selected "Other" on the question above, please list additional Welsh language learning or improvement methods you have used here.

“I speak Welsh fairly fluently and I am able to read it fairly well, however my reading and writing are extraordinarily rusty but then again, I am rarely asked to read or write Welsh in any event.”

“College evening classes”

“When I worked for the Welsh Assembly and the RCAHMW, I took some lessons in Welsh, but that was more than 15 years ago.”

“London Welsh Centre
S4C watching”

“I started and then failed to keep up with a language class taught by Jenny Brown” (this was an absolute beginner survival Welsh class following Cwrs Mynediad and supplemented with videos, reading, and other audio for Welsh learners)

“Talking to friends who are also learners of Welsh at a similar intermediate level.”

“-Journaling in Welsh
-Reading poetry with translations (more just due to an interest in medieval poetry; I also do this with other languages that I'm not learning)”

“Curfa is a group of people here in Greece that learn to sing ancient rithms from celtic or Scandinavian roots and they sing in english, welsh and nordic languages”

“I am way too old to take up a new language with such diverse grammar and condonation. I have a hard time remembering the Spanish and Latin I know when there are no opportunities to use it.”

“Mhara starling language class”

“YouTube channels aimed at Cymraeg learners”

“I've been teaching welsh to an English friend to relearn it myself.”

“Took Mhara's pagan Welsh course.”

“I don't know the Welsh language, but would like to.”

“I've used some online stuff for Middle Welsh - don't recall their titles, offhand.”

“Mhara Starling’s Learn Welsh Course and following the Doctor cymraeg’s Instagram page and resources on his website”

Seasonal / Annual Traditions: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh cultural events or products partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements. (Some of these are found in multiple cultures. Only select items if you engage at least partially due to the tradition, event, or item being Welsh):

Total: 72/74
Bonfires or similar fires (especially at Calan Mai, midsummer, and Calan Gaeaf) (43)
Bwgan Rwdan / Turnip Carving (15)
Calennig (7)
Carolling (6)
Caseg Fedi / Harvest Mare or wheat braiding (8)
Leaving Offerings for the Dead on or around Calan Gaeaf (41)
Mari Lwyd (37)
May Pole (23)
Mumming or Mummers’ Dancing (5)
New Year’s Water (2)
Plygain (3)
Siôn Corn (6)
Twco Fale (Afalau) / Bobbing for Apples (in water or dangling from strings) (6)
Wassailing (22)

Wren Procession (as was traditionally common around the midwinter to New Year timeframe) (3)
None (10)
Other
No answer (2)

Please give a brief summary of specifically how you engage with and / or support the seasonal or annual Welsh cultural traditions or items you selected above, if applicable. If you selected "Other", please also list those items here.

“As a solitary practitioner I tend to celebrate significant dates, quietly with rituals that don't require a large amount of fuss.”

“I can attend a wassail because there is a Morris dance side here that does one. I would go to any of the others if I was somewhere where they occurred”

“I help with the local Mari Lwyds with transport, performance and event promotion.”

“May pole at beltaine”

“I run a druid group who hold seasonal ceremonies incorporating the Welsh language, translated and spoken by Welsh speakers. We regularly incorporate seasonal and cultural traditions in our ceremonies.”

“For some of the more widely practiced traditions like bonfires and the May Pole, I am usually part of a bigger general community celebration, not specifically Welsh focused but I do spend some time contemplating the cultural connections and how it connects me to my Welsh ancestors. For the other activities, like wheat braiding and turnip carving, I started engaging in them as a way to connect with my ancestors as well as celebrating the season”

‘“This mostly occurs through my local Welch heritage organization to which I am a member.”

“We have bonfires on all eight Wheel-of-the-Year high days at our ceremonial observances. We borrowed a maypole from a UU church last year for the first time.”

“Teaching others about the origins”

“I'd like, when I am able to in my life, engage and support the seasonal and annual cultural traditions from America.”

“Only by learning...”

“I join Jenny Brown in her Mari Lwyd caroling some times, and I adore doing so. I carve turnips because both the Welsh and the Irish do it, and I work with both cultures. Same with leaving offerings for the dead.”

“I've attended the small gorsedd gatherings in Cardiff which are around the mainly holidays (Calan Gaeaf, Heuldro'r Haf etc.) organised by Mari Mathias. I take offerings to ancestors of poetry, listen to folk music and poetry and then burn written notes of wishes in a fire outside which is jumped over. I will also be attending the Beltane festival in either Edinburgh or central Ireland soon.”

“Most within the context of camps and druid grove celebrations.”

“I attend wassail and mari lwyd events. I have been part of a borders morris group, which celebrates with some of these traditions. I have taken part in some as part of a druid group.”

“I do solitary rituals for each of the seasonal holidays. I also connect to the sacred sites and deities in meditation.”

“I’m in the process of learning how to sing Wassail songs. I’ve been to several gatherings where we used bonfires, some incorporating a wickerman. I’ve been to several Mari presentations/rituals.”

“I have been to a gathering of Mari's and vist the graves of people who I've lost to leave offering. If I am in Glastonbury at these times, I will go to a church and light candles for the dead.”

“8 practice the 8 gold [sic] yearly cycle and use the ritual formats from OBOD that incorporate Welsh traditions. And ..Kris Hughes (a good friend) has influenced how I perceived some things.”

“I have done many of these things because they are also English or just parts of Pagan culture (like the various fire festivals), the Welshness is not a deciding factor, but neither is it totally unimportant in the context of these things.”

“Ceremony, feasting
Lent=fasting, contemplation, preparation for spring. Ritual cleaning- physical, mental, spiritual”

“I observe ritual for high days in the Wheel of the Year, often with a local OBOD group and often in a solitary way, too. I love bonfires for some of the high days and the May Pole for Calan Mai.”

“I do my best to bring those traditions to my grove in Colorado. I use this as an opportunity to teach my community through engagement. Bringing my families Mari Lwyd to gatherings has become the most requested practice.”

“I do offering and public rituals”

“In Abergavenny we celebrate yr Hen Galan with a Mari Lwyd procession, a plygain service and a supper. We also have a communal wassail at the Community Orchard at Imbolc/Gwyl y Canhwyllau. I make a caseh fedi every year and my wife and I leave offerings for our dead loved-ones at Calan Gaeaf.”

“I have been trying to a Mari lwyd going but we so far, I’ve only been able to decorate the house with images and not actually get a real skull.”

“i like to attend holiday events sometimes put on by a local group or sometimes organised by family. my uncle and his folk music group often organise things as an excuse to host a mini concert.”

“In any litanon (celebration) we have a host that makes sure that the area of celebration is good and fair before any celebration is done there. I give offerings, libations, help out with food and rituals. As a ūatid (ovate/seer, the id at the end is pronoun neuter) I also pray with people , help at the shrine and make sure that I'm a good guest/host.”

“Mari Lwyd in Cornwall at the dark gathering. They also have Welsh dancers at the celebrations. I’ve been annually for years.”

“Leaving offerings to the dead - both those who have been close to me, as well as in a more communal sense, offering to ancestors of mine an others that they shared the land with - is something that I do both both on/around Calan Gaeaf and throughout the year, at other meaningful, sessional occasions. Sometimes it's material, sometimes it isn't. Fire reverance of the peoples of the past has also long been something that I've found myself most motivated to replicate and

connect with, on every occasion my research suggests having had fire ritual as part of it.”

“Have attended bonfires and engaged in online ceremonies for others.”

“Engaging with Welsh spirits, in particular.”

“I use candles as representations of bonfires, and place food out on my back deck or front entrance way for wondering Spirits to help themselves.”

“I have a small circle /"Tribe" of like minded folk who meet and gather to celebrate the cultural traditions and holidays.
We have been gathering for over 20 years, and include people of all ages (although I am the oldest) , and are like a family. We have watched the babies grow up, and bring their own babies to the circle. Including my children, grandchildren and now great grandchildren.
Here in Pennsylvania, there is a corner that will be forever Cymru, circa 500 CE. We dress in simple style, light fires, cook, say prayers, sing, feast, offer gifts and tell the old stories.”

“I go wassailing with a group of people round the community orchards - it is a mix of pepole from different traditions - some are thanking God, some are calling on the old gods, some like me are calling on the spirit of the trees, as we sing to them and give them offereings of cider and toast. (It is good because we all get along and noone objects to either the pagan gods or the Christian God being thanked.
I support the maintainace of our local Mari lwyd (but keep managing to miss the actual procession)
Other traditions such as bonfires and offerings for the dead I do myself but also

insist on telling my friends and work collagues about the customs -and trying to encourage them to not just get lost in the great take over by American customs!"

"Bonfires and leaving offerings are elements that have been added to my witchcraft practice as a result of centering Welsh traditions. Turnip carving and apple bobbing are things I'd learned about when researching traditions. Mari Lwyd is something I've learned about and shared with others."

Art & Literary Traditions: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements:

Total: 72/74
Eisteddfod (informal / not national level) (28)
Figures, Beings, or Gods from Welsh Literature, Poetry, or Folklore (e.g. Cerridwen, Taliesin, Rhiannon, Gwydion, Gwyn ap Nudd, Brenin Llwyd, Tylwyth Teg, Pwca, Gwrachod Llanddona, Welsh Saints' Lives, etc.) (63)
National Eisteddfod / Urdd (17)
Welsh Dance (modern and/or traditional) (4)
Welsh Literature: Medieval (e.g. the Mabinogi, Athuriana, medieval bardic poetry, Triads, etc.) (62)
Welsh Literature: Modern (e.g. novels, nonfiction, modern poetry, magazines, websites, blogs, etc.) (29)
Welsh Lovespoon(s), Wood-Carving, and / or Carpentry (20)
Welsh Metalwork and / or Jewelry (12)
Welsh Music (44)
Welsh Paintings, Drawings, Digital Art, or other static 2-D Visual Arts (20)
Welsh Pottery and / or Dishwares (modern or vintage / historical) (10)
Welsh Sculpture, Masonry, and / or Statuary (6)
Welsh Story-telling or Folklore (51)
Welsh Textiles, Quilting, Weaving, Embroidery, Traditional Clothing, etc. (19)
Welsh Theatre, Plays, and / or Cinema (19)

None (2)
No answer (2)

Please give a brief summary of specifically how you engage with and / or support the art and literary Welsh cultural traditions or items you selected above, if applicable.

“Attend film screenings in Welsh, attend art & craft exhibitions, listen to/share Welsh language music etc.”

“Eisteddfod was during MAGUS, which is a joint OBOD/AODA event.”

“We have a gift shop where we sell items and books of Welsh culture. We also go on outings to the theatre to watch Welsh plays, with our druid group. My husband sings in Risca male choir who won the National Eisteddfod in 2024”

“I have been spending the last year rereading the Mabinogi and looking up research on it. I have been studying Celtic music including in literature which included Welsh. This led me too look at folk art, archaeological finds, modern art, classical art and other artforms that portrayed Welsh figures. I also watched The Green Knight. I love the A24 film. I'm probably missing some things.”

“Have participated in a local Eisteddfod hosted by a local Druid group. Have spent time reading about or taking classes on the others, and have purchased statuary of figures. Have also learned about and purchased lovespoons and carving but that was more than 5 years ago.”

“I don’t even know where to begin. I have been immersing myself the last few years in all things Welsh. Music and poetry and song are wonderful way [sic] to learn Welsh, in addition to watching programs on S4C.”

“I have two books from Kristoffer Hughes on Druidry.”

“No money to support the arts”

“I try to buy products from Welsh manufacturers, and engage in learning the mythology and folklore of Wales.”

“Sorry not emough time”

“Lots, and lots, and lots of reading. Listening to music. Scouring the internet for art. And my husband gave me a lovespoon.”

“I found images of Welsh deities. I printed the images on water proof stickers. I put the stickers on votive candle holders.”

“I study and honor deities from the mabinogion and other old Welsh sources. I also enjoy reading and telling the old stories. And sometimes I listen to Welsh music.”

“I have bought figures for altars but usually general medieval small figures out of pewter that reflect the deities to me. Regarding the other art cultural traditions I try to engage with Welsh music and literature on a frequent basis and studying the Red Book of Hergest and the Mabinogi provides a lot of evidence to the correspondences of plants and personalities/aspects of the gods”

“Druid grove and camp focused / hosted eisteddfods.
Making of representations of Welsh mythical entities as devotion and practice
Attending and telling at events with Welsh folk tales and lore (e.g. Beyond the Border)”

“I have been to art exhibitions related to Welsh identity and the Mabinogion. I have listened to Welsh music and attended concerts. I've taken part in Eisteddfods with a druid group. A friend of mine makes dolls and artwork inspired by Welsh mythology, which we discuss. I read retellings of the Mabinogion, and contemporary writing. I learn about Welsh mythological characters. I also write and publish poetry incorporating Welsh myth and beings.”

“I took folklore classes and attended a ritual in honor of the god Mabon/Maponos in which I lead a meditation and poetry was shared by others. I support several online video, literary, and poetry creators of Welsh content. I bought incense and candles designed specifically for Gwyn ap Nudd, Blodeuwedd, and Cerridwen. I also had someone carve me a talisman for Gwyn ap Nudd. I’ve been studying the Mabanogi in depth and learning about traditional dance, music and poetry.”

“I’ve participated in various Eistedfoddu at gatherings. I’ve watched videos from the National Eistedfod and hope to go someday.”

“Mainly by going to story telling evenings and lectures.”

“Inside the OBOD lessons there are pieces of literature of welsh tradition. Plus I have a friend of mine that has translates some stories that has been published and I have read them”

“By study, proximity with Welsh friends”

“I wrote a blog on Welsh Druidry (no longer extant), and contributed to OBOD discussions.”

“I play Welsh folk music, especially pibgorn. I've also used Mabinogion stories in storytelling. I got into pibgorn and Welsh bagpipes at the time I was deeply interested in the Mabinogion and British Mystery Tradition, so I think these are connected for me.”

“Historical texts, television, music appreciation, chants”

“I do my best to support authors in the Welsh neo-pagan community through crowdfunding and preorders. I create art around the lore and have crafted a love spoon for my partner last year. We have also started watching welsh language Tele”

“Too long to write here..
... sorry.”

“Purchase and involve”

“I started listening to a lot of welsh rock? Also rhiannon translated into welsh lol”

“I buy locally-made artefacts and consumer goods wherever possible, partly because of my spiritual beliefs.”

“I enjoy reading and listening to podcasts about Welsh folktales, history and literature. I often give and receive Welsh art, jewellery, etc as gifts.”

“I donate and I buy literature and art.”

“I buy those media and published items listed above, from Welsh authors, creators, musicians, etc. Most of the household-ish items that I buy with a historic and/or spiritual Welsh connection I buy from independent sellers selling

through Welsh museums, galleries, craft events, and particularly from one specific co-op shop in Llangollen. I share my love of Welsh literature and music in particular, frequently and widely."

"I read Y mabinogion [sic], and other stories/poems that have anything to do with Annwfn.
I've been to art exhibitions by welsh [sic] artists, who made sculpture and paintings inspired by Y Mabinogi.
I've learned a bit more about welsh traditional clothing."

"Have been enrolled in a 12 month course which gave me some beginnings and encouraged me to continue to study."

"Shopping through local artists, consuming media via local television channels and cultural events. Telling stories myself when invited to do so."

"Aside from learning a great deal, I sat down and wrote a sequel novel to 'Under Milk Wood'."

"I occasionally host Bardic gatherings. I haven't done this lately because of a somewhat recent fall I took and broke my hip."

"Books and music usually"

"I attempt to buy Welsh goods when I can, especially clothing and foodstuffs. I woodcarve Welsh designs myself. I am currently reading through the Mabinogion. I love the Welsh band Plethyn."

"I am a storyteller and folklorist, specialising in Welsh, Cornish and West of England folklore. I teach Welsh folktales, and study Welsh folklore.
I am also a spinner, weaver, embrioderer [sic] and knitter, and study the history

of textiles for my own amusement.
There are many skilled practioners of traditional Welsh crafts and arts in Pennsylvania. I have attended festivals, and workshops, watched skilled craftspeople making items . There are two wonderful love spoon makers within easy driving distance from me.
As a radio producer I have programmed Welsh music on the radio for 20 years. I had an annual St David's Day programme, where I played Welsh music, both old, and highlighting newer Welsh folk singers and composers.
I also programmed special one hour radio programmes to support any new releases by Sir Karl Jenkins, of whom I am a huge fan."

"I am passionate about Welsh medevial history and lierature and mythology. I have joined several online groups looking at the medevial literature and how we can use it to try and pick out what Welsh pagans believed.I am regularly reading Welsh mythology, folklore, or academic articles about them (and am saving up to do an MA in Celtic studies with an emphasis on Wales)."

"I teach classes about Brythonic deities and related medieval texts.
I have supported teachers and institutions based in Wales by studying the same subjects with them on a paid basis.
I buy many books published in Wales.
I promote the work of Welsh writers and teachers on my YouTube channel.
I try to provide accurate analysis of Welsh medieval texts on my YouTube channel.
Some of the above work involves me doing storytelling as well as pointing people to native Welsh storytellers."

"Folklore, the mabinogi, figures/Gods/beings have all been pieces of a learning/devotional practice. Welsh music is part of how I celebrate each

holiday. Welsh lovespoons were something I came across when researching marriage traditions and hope to have one after visiting one day."

Socio-Political Action: At any point within the past 5 years, I have hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh social and / or political events, movements, or causes partially or entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements:

Total: 67/74
Charities or Charitable Projects/Events in Cymru (Wales) (10)
Community Improvement Projects, Involvement, Support, or Initiatives in Cymru (Wales) (10)
Environmental / Conservation / Rewilding / Clean Water and/or similar Movements, Organizations, or Causes in Cymru (Wales) (whether for, against, or undecided) (18)
Political Party / Parties in Cymru (Wales) (14)
Pride Cymru (LGBTQ+) (17)
Socio-Political Demonstration(s) or Protest(s) in Cymru (Wales) (5)
Welsh Devolution / Autonomy (10)
Welsh Independence (19)
Welsh Language Programs, Initiatives, Supports, etc. (23)
None (28)
Other (2)
No answer (7)

Please give a brief summary of specifically how you engage with and / or support the Welsh cultural events, movements, or causes you selected above, if applicable. If you selected "Other", please also list those items here.

"Vote and support Plaid Cymru. Yes Cymru independence movement. Republic movement."

“As I work from home, I consider myself to be a keyboard warrior and tend to use the keyboard to disseminate information on any and all things that concern me ”

“I would support all those things if I were in the UK”

“I voted for Plaid in the last election, am an active member of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales. I am also one of the leaders of a group fighting to protect our local mountain from industrialisation (https://www.mynydd-maen.co.uk)”

“I read about and tell people about Welsh political history and the importanceof their independence. I'm in the process of learning Cymraeg”

“Mostly reading online articles”

“Acknowledging PRIDE worldwide”

“I have gone on numerous Welsh independence marches.”

“I'd like to celebrate Pride Cymru in the future, as a trans person.”

“Sorry not enough time”

“Regularly volunteer with wildlife and conservation charities helping with bird/fungi surveys, river clean up campaigns and water pollution testing.”

“CAT”

“I don't live in Wales and politics are for those that actually do. It is none of my business to try to influence how people live elsewhere....”

“I actually have no connection with any charitable, environmental, social, or political cause related to Cymru itself, but would support devolution for the country since I already do so for Scotland too. I don't like English hegemony over the United Kingdom and also believe that northern [sic] Ireland should reunite with Republic of Ireland on their own, peacefully, or at least become more devolved and autonomous from London/England.”

“My partner supported pride Cymru by ordering custom pride flags from local artists for me with the welsh dragon for display in our home.”

“Teach it and donate”

“I used to follow a lot of Welsh content on Twitter, but I have” [incomplete]

“All of these initiatives are right here in my community. It’s easy to support them. I contribute to women’s charities and fundraisers nationally and internationally as an adjunct of my spiritual beliefs, as well.”

“I support environmental and community causes in relation to my spirituality, but choose to focus on those in my area as I am currently living in England.”

“Donate and speaking up”

“I've actively learned about all of those, at length. Some of them affect me directly, so had even greater importance (e.g. Pride). Some have significant crossover with my career (conservation) and other work-ish work life elements (politics). Each of those elements ticked above are things that I've at least

attended online events for. Others I've paid to attend in-person events in relation to (charity events, environment-focused ones in particular). I was in Cardiff for and supported some of the protests to try to halt the violence in Gaza earlier in the year (I don't live anywhere near Cardiff, so it was a one-off).”

“I've been learning a bit about environmental efforts that are happening in Wales. I'm studying biology, and that's an area I'd like to work in one day.”

“I am interested in several of these, but not as a pagan.”

“Too much going on in the United States.”

“I keep in touch with activities at home, and support causes where I can.”

“I go tree planting with volunteer groups, and am involved with local conservation as it is a way for me to honour the energies and gods of the local area.”

“Most of this has just been at the 'learning about' level. I'm very interested in current affairs in the UK generally, and in Wales and Scotland in particular.”

“Just learning more of what I can/general research.”

Other Tangible and Intangible Items of Cultural Significance: At any point within the past 5 years, I have consumed or purchased, produced or made, hosted, attended (virtually or in-person), participated in, learned about, taught others about, or supported the following Welsh cultural items or activities partially or

entirely because of my identity as a Neo-Pagan who incorporates Welsh cultural elements:

Total: 69/74

Divination / Fortune-telling (using traditional Welsh methods) (22)
Flag of Cymru (Wales) (42)
Flag of St. David (7)
Red Dragon of Wales / Y Ddraig Goch (40)
Welsh Folk Magic (40)
Welsh Food / Cooking / Cuisine (35)
Welsh History / Historical Persons (43)
Welsh News (BBC Cymru, BBC Wales, nation.cymru, Wales Online, etc.) (32)
Welsh Radio (BBC Radio Cymru or BBC Radio Cymru 2) (17)
Welsh Slate (14)
Welsh Trains (locomotives) (8)
Welsh TV and/or Movies (S4C, Hansh, Cyw, YouTube, etc.) (34)
None (6)
Other
No answer (5)

Please give a brief summary of specifically how you engage with and / or support the Welsh cultural items or activities you selected above, if applicable. If you selected "Other", please also list those items here.

“I am a medieval historian by degree though not by practice, for that is truly dead men's shoes. Once you work in the medieval history profession, you may shuffle sideways in your carpet slippers or you may rise to the heady inner sanctums of such a subject but you never leave and so, room at the bottom is at a premium. I am also an amateur genealogist so my Welsh medieval ancestors are fascinating and given my unusual surname, I have been able to go back to at least the Battle of Cilgerran in 1258. I love food and will try any and all recipes provided they are vegetarian.”

“I listen to welsh radio to help in learning”

“I talk about the flag and the dragon quite often and read about the symbols because they are religious, mythical and esoteric. I practice Welsh magic. Some of it my family practiced and I didn't know it until studying it. I am constantly reading about and watching videos about Welsh history. I usually keep up with Welsh news on Facebook. I also watch Welsh folk on YouTube a lot.”

“Mainly reading online articles in the last 5 years but some books longer ago than that.”

“We sometimes use imported Ty Nant spring water in our rituals, consecrated as the Waters-of-Life in the summer, or Waters-of-Sleep in the winter.”

“Just consumption.”

“I try to consume Welsh cultural material.”

“Sorry not enough time”

“I've got a Welsh flag a friend gave me. I read Welsh news sometimes and watch Welsh videos on Youtube to help learn the language. Food is universal. Being pagan, the divination/folk magic are things I do whether it's Welsh or not.”

“I so wanted to watch a Welsh show on Netflix but the version I could see in America was a remake in English.”

“Mhara Starling and Gwilym Morus Baird's books and YT content.”

“I cook Welsh food for some of the Celtic holidays, and I practice some folk magic some of which is from Wales.”

“When learning Welsh I've tried to get a broad range of sources to improve my language from written words to listening and watching Welsh media. I purchased a Cymru flag and a Owain Glyndwr flags as decoration. Not sure if Welsh-specific but I have the Llewelyn Welsh folk magic-inspired tarot deck.”

“Learning Welsh folk magic, SOA solitary rituals and classes”

“I am headed to Anglesey on a trip I’m currently on, and hope to patriots.”

“I just pick up anything I find interesting.”

“As part of the Awenydd of the ADO and also as my journey into learning the language in order to understand better and pay homage to my beliefs”

“Written a book about Iolo Morganwg; had numerous articles published in magazines & online.”

“None”

“My nationality is British not UK. UK is a state, my country is Wales. The UK is made of 4 countries.
I am not UK please respect this.”

“I bought a giant flag, but I haven’t hung it up anywhere yet”

“Again, this is all readily available, local praxis for me.”

“I regularly read/listen to podcasts/watch videos about Welsh history. I think keeping up to date with Welsh news is relevant to spirituality because I want to keep up to date with new archaeological finds that might bring more insight into the practices and beliefs or [sic] our ancestors, and to keep up to date with any developments to sites of spiritual significance in Wales.”

“With certain things I beseech welsh practioners [sic] for divination and magickal works, if I learn about food and traditions I personally will ask welsh [sic] people. For other [sic] I speak to welsh [sic] people for veneration of place specific dieties [sic] and heroes.”

“I had the opportunity to meet some long lost relatives this summer who are American, and they were curious about the Red Dragon flag.”

“The history-related ticked items (flags, the dragon, the histoy itself, etc): I buy and read books on it, and have integrated some of it into some talks in a local interest group that I'm part of. I consume and enjoy the media elements at least occasionally (radio and film, etc.). I use the trains around north Wales sometimes - for a lot of the locations I'm going to/from, public transport is unfortunately insufficient. And I've sought and bought Welsh slate whenever I have a new opportunity to replace something in my home - I'm regularly using mine that I already have.”

“I incoorprate welsh [sic] deities into my divination stuff.
I have a Welsh dragon as one of my guardians.
I have slate from Dinorwic that I'm gradually etching something into.
I've taught other [sic] a bit about welsh food.”

“Have purchased flags and flown them, lots of literature. I have links to Welsh TV.”

“Living in Wales and using public transport covers most of the above list!
As I travel frequently between wales and south east England I am frequently a touch point for Welsh culture in my non-Welsh social circles.”

“Consumed mostly. And made. Cooking and magick.”

“I own a flag of Wales and have a few books on Welsh history particularly the early history prior to 1066.”

“I have through my radio programme highlighted and helped people become aware of Welsh history and folk lore.
I have been researching the life of Joseph Parry for 30 years (Welsh composer, who lived here in Pennsylvania). I offer research materials and knowledge to writers and historians on the Welsh in Pennsylvania.”

“I practise some of the traditional WElsh [sic] folk magic practices and divinitatin techniqus [sic].”

“see previous response”

“Magic/divination/history have all largely been through Mhara Starlings classes. Learning about the flag and the Ddraig Goch. Plans to find a handmade Ddraig Goch to add to my altar. Regularly making welsh cakes. Following S4C and BBC Wales on social media.”

If you are satisfied with all your answers, please press "Submit" below to complete the survey.

Surveys submitted on or after 15 March 2025 will not be considered, and their data will be deleted.

This survey has asked questions of a sensitive nature that may cause emotional stress. If you are in need of support, please find below some resources that may be helpful to you.

United Kingdom

Black Equity Organisation: blackequityorg.com
Black Minds Matter: blackmindsmatteruk.com ; 44-0117-330-9609
Disability Rights UK: disabilityrightsuk.org ; 44-0330-995-0400
GALOP (national helpline for LGBT+ victims & survivors of abuse & violence): galop.org.uk ; 44-0800-999-5428
LGBT+ Cymru Helpline: lgbtcymru.org.uk ; 44-071-9231-6137
LGBT Health and Wellbeing: lgbthealth.org.uk ; 44-0800-464-7000
London Friend (LGBTQ+ health & wellbeing services in London): londonfriend.org.uk ; 44-207-833-1674
Mermaids (trans, non-binary, & gender-diverse youth support): mermaidsuk.org.uk ; 44-0808-801-0400
Mindline Trans + (helpline for trans, gender fluid, agender, and non-binary persons): mindinsomerset.org.uk ; 44-019-3547-4875
National Suicide Prevention Helpline: spuk.org.uk ; 44-0800-689-5652
On Your Side (support for East & Southeast Asians): onyousideuk.org ; 44-0808-801-0393
Pink Therapy (LGBTQIA+ friendly therapists directory): pinktherapy.com
Race Equality Foundation: raceequalityfoundation.org.uk ; 44-020-7428-1880

Runnymede Trust (race equality and civil rights research and policy): runnymedetrust.org ; 44-020-7377-9222
Scope (disability activism & support): scope.org.uk ; 44-0808-800-3333
Stonewall Equality (LGBTQ+ rights): stonewall.org.uk ; 44-020-7593-1850
Stop Hate UK: stophateuk.org/report-hate-crime/ ; 44-0800-138-1625
Support Line (confidential emotional support): supportline.org.uk ; 44-017-0876-5200
Tell MAMA (supports victims of anti-Muslim hate): tellmamauk.org ; 44-0800-456-1226
Victim Support National Hate Crime Report & Support Centre Wales: reporthate.victimsupport.org.uk ; 44-0300-303-1982
Victim Support Scotland: victimsupportsco.org.uk ; 44-0800-160-1985

United States

Advocates for Trans Equality: transequality.org ; 1-202-642-4542
American Association for People with Disabilities: aapd.com ; 1-202-521-4316
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: 988 ; afsp.org
The Arc (promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities): thearc.org ; 1-202-534-3700
Blackline (centers BI&POC, LGBTQ+, Black femme Lens): callblackline.com ; 1-800-604-5841
Black Minds Matter (education & school options for Black students): blackmindsmatter.net ; 1-202-280-1990
CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations): cair.com/report/ ; 1-202-742-6420
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund: dredf.org ; 1-510-644-2555
GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, LGBTQ+ advocacy): glaad.org ; 1-800-926-4551
Human Rights Campaign (LGBTQ+ advocacy & support): hrc.org ;

1-202-628-4160

Job Accommodation Network (workplace accommodations & disability employment issues): askjan.org ; 1-800-526-7234

LGBT National Help Center: lgbthotline.org ; 1-888-843-4564

NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People): naacp.org ; 1-410-580-5777

National Disability Rights Network (legal advocacy services for people with disabilities): ndrn.org ; 1-202-408-9514

Racial Equity Support Line: linesforlife.org ; 1-503-575-3764

Respect Ability (advocacy for how society views & values people with disabilities): respectability.org ; 1-202-517-6272

StrongHearts Native Helpline (centering Native Americans and Alaska Natives): strongheartshelpline.org ; 1-844-762-8483

Thriveline (crisis support line for people of color, LGBTQ2S+, disabled, neurodivergent, & marginalized identities; trans-led and operated): thrivelifeline.org ; 1-313-662-8209

Trans Lifeline (connecting trans people to community, support, & resources; run by and for trans people): translifeline.org ; 1-877-565-6366

Trevor Project (crisis intervention & suicide prevention services for LGBTQ+ youth): thetrevorproject.org ; 1-866-488-7386

Mhara Starling Interview Transcript

Mhara Starling (M.S.): “Hello. Oh my goodness!” [Jennifer Brown (J.B.): “Can you hear me?”] “How are you? Yes, I can hear you.”

J.B.: “Yay!”

M.S.: “Put my volume up. There we go.”

J.B.: “How are you?”

M.S.: “I'm good. Can you hear me OK and all that?”

J.B.: “Yeah. I'm nervous.”

M.S.: “Oh gosh! Don’t. It'll be fun.”

J.B.: “Okay, uh- okay, uh I don't know how much time you've got, so I guess we'll just jump into it, um I suppose.

M.S.: “As long as you need.”

J.B.: “Okay. So, diolch yn fawr, first of – cyntaf. And then uh, also, before we get started, for ethical research reasons, I need to inform you that your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary. You may skip any questions. You may withdraw at any time for any. reason and you may stop the interview at any time. Your participation or refusal to participate will not affect your treatment. And since I'll be asking you about publications you've authored, which are open to the public, you've waived your right to anonymity and confidentiality for the purposes of the interview. Does that sound okay?”

M.S.: “Yes, absolutely. No problem at all.”

J.B.: “Yay! Uh… Okay um. Well, you are Mhara Starling, yes? And you're rather well known, um especially in the Neo-Pagan community. You've published a lot, and spoken several times, and led classes on Welsh witchcraft and Neo-Paganism, Welsh culture, and you've talked about traditional Welsh culture on YouTube and TikTok and Facebook. And, would you mind to share with us briefly how you came to be a witch whose practice is primarily centered on Welsh culture and honors Welsh spirits or deities?”

M.S.: “Of course. So um, I was raised on the Isle of Anglesey, Aberffraw, this tiny little village on the coast of Anglesey. And um, as such, I was raised in a Welsh-speaking community. So, Welsh was my first language, and Welsh was also the medium that I did most of my schooling in, all the way up to uh, college. It was only when I went to university that I switched over to English as the primary language that I was conducting my education in. So, I've been immersed in Welsh culture since I was born, essentially. Um, but, I came to Paganism and witchcraft, Neo-Paganism and such, from a quite young age compared to some people in that I discovered a book on Neo-Pagan practice from the age of around 12. And from then, I've been rather intrigued and interested in modern Pagan beliefs and modern Pagan practices. And, when I was just starting out, I was led to a more specifically Welsh-tailored pathway within modern Neo-Paganism because of my geographical closeness, I suppose, to people like Kristoffer Hughes, who is the um, the chief of the Anglesey Druid Order, and also thanks to certain mentors and teachers who guided me along the way at that time. And my interest in Welsh folklore, mythology, Welsh specific traditions and such started from a rather young age, because I've always had an interest in mermaids and fairies, and anything to do with folklore and magic and witchcraft and such. And I was directed by my teachers in primary school towards specifically Welsh stories. So, the story of the Second Branch of the Mabinogi, for example, I have a huge relationship with that because we were taught about it in school. Um, stories about the Tylwyth Teg, the fairies of our region, and such, and folk stories that were rooted in my own locale. These are the stories that I was directed towards by my teachers in primary school in Ysgol Gynrad Aberffraw. And through that, I then eventually, as a preteen going through to teenage years, met Kristoffer Hughes and was introduced to the idea that not only could I practice a of modern Neo-Pagan witchcraft that, you know, embraced this idea of a belief in magic, but also a belief in self-empowerment and such, but that I could do that via the lens of my own culture. And that spoke to me on a deep level, because I grew up as, also, as another aspect or element of my being, I grew up as a queer person in a highly kind of rural area, which means that it wasn't something that was, you know, completely wholly accepted by everyone within my community. And as such, I was made to feel like a bit of an outcast in my own community, because I didn't fit into certain societal norms.

And so, when I found um, Kristoffer Hughes, the Anglesey Druid Order, and Paganism in general, and saw the interconnectedness between the Welsh identity and Paganism and magic, it felt like a coming home moment, because it was almost as though somebody was telling me ‘you are allowed to feel like you can embrace your own culture, your own identity. You don't have to feel like a broken cog in a machine that you don't fit into. You fit – and you fit in a way that is rather enchanting. And your job is to raise an awareness of that enchantment and that inspiration that underlies your culture that a lot of people ignore’. So, from that moment, it was almost like I found something that helped me belong. So, since then, I've dedicated my life to this idea that when we turn to beliefs like Paganism and witchcraft, which a lot of people do in the U.K., we don't have to look to cultures that are thousands of miles away that are across the ocean. We can

look to our very own square mile. We can- we can root our practice, our spirituality, our beliefs to our own locale, and that's primarily what I try and do."

J.B.: "Thank you. That's a lovely story of your coming home kind of feeling, um… Let's see, um, in- in line with your talking about connecting to your own culture and belonging where you are: in your book *Welsh Witchcraft*, you talk about the Mari Lwyd and said 'it's a Welsh tradition I surely do not wish to see lost to the mist of time, hence my reasoning for including it here'. Do you think it's important for witches and Neo-Pagans who centre Welsh culture to participate in working to revive, continue, or spread, depending on where they live, Welsh cultural traditions like the Mari Lwyd and Nos Galan Gaeaf and things like that?"

M.S.: "Absolutely. I am very much of the belief that when we connect to these older traditions that perhaps don't have as much relevance in the modern day as I would like, that we are tapping into a current which essentially reminds us that we have these elements of our culture that um, could potentially be lost one day, but that we could also interact with in the modern day.
And, I think a huge part of my own belief system around that is that when we do interact with them, we don't have to fall into the trap of thinking we have to do it perfectly or precisely in the way that our ancestors did, because I don't think that's necessarily possible, especially when it comes to certain methods that we don't even remember what people perhaps did aside from these echoes that were written by folklorists or by historians in the past and such. So, to me, it's a big idea of reconnecting with the traditions that at one point were the beating heart of communities throughout our- our landscape, throughout our culture. And, it enables us to ultimately reconnect with ourselves because we are connecting with something that has existed for a long time, but that we can reinterpret our connection to it in the modern day.
So it acts as a bridge. And, that's a big part of my- my own spiritual practice, is this idea of bridging two things together. So by interacting with traditions such as y Fari Lwyd or making offerings at Nos Galan Gaeaf, we are then bridging the past and the present. And, we are bringing something that's wholly, uniquely Welsh and beautiful, but also something that can consistently change and evolve as time goes on. And, I think there's something quite powerful in that, especially when it comes to aiding people in connecting not only with their culture or their heritage, but also their landscape. We um at the Anglesey Druid Order, we perform the Mari Lwyd Calennig every January. We go around Beaumaris with the Mari Lwyd with us and such in a retinue where we go from pub to pub and we cause all sorts of chaos. And, it's ultimately led to people being more interested in connecting not only with the Mari Lwyd tradition, but with wanting to know more about: 'What other traditions do we have? What other traditions have been lost? How can I preserve this? Could I perhaps learn the Welsh language?' And it's the fact that it opens those doors for people, that it helps people to come, and then, by extension as well, it also has led some people to want to learn more about places like Beaumaris, because that's where we host them and such. So, they come and they interact with the community there, and

um, I think it just is a way of opening various doors. So yes, I do think it's important for that reason."

J.B.: "Thank you. Um… So, regarding those types of practices that connect people to uh, the culture, what are your thoughts on doing traditions like that, either hosting or participating in them outside of Cymru?"

M.S.: "So I think that, when it comes to the transmission of traditions like this, I think that follows in a tradition that has been part and package of Welsh culture for centuries. We know from reading certain books, from you know, even watching some old documentaries and such, or from visiting areas where Welsh people have settled across the world – we know that when the Welsh travelled, they took their traditions, they took their cultures, they took their practices, and they invited people to join in with them. So, I'm not as much of a stickler for, 'oh, you have to be Welsh and you have to do it in Wales', as many people are, especially when it comes to say a tradition like the Fari Lwyd. It's an interesting one because you do get criticism even within Wales, because of the fact that from an academic perspective, when we look at the history of the Mari Lwyd, it is a tradition that seems to rooted to a specific community located in the south of Wales, and as such, the criticism that people like us get because we do it in the north of Wales is 'Why are you doing that? That wasn't part of your culture or your traditions in the north of Wales. What's the point of that then? That should be something that is limited and rooted to the area we know it was recorded in.' Um, I personally, from my own reading, so there's a book from the 19th century called *Crefydd yr Oesoedd Tywyll or Henafieithau*, and that book talks a little bit about the transmission of the Mari Lwyd tradition and the way in which it was migrated to other parts of Wales. So we know, for example, that it was carried out in places like Wrexham, and the reason it was carried out in places like Wrexham is because somebody from the south of Wales moved and took that tradition with them. So, in that same kind of energy of the way in which people would, at some point, have moved from one community to another and taken their practices with them, I think it's important that we acknowledge that history, acknowledge the fact that we weren't so precious about it once upon a time, so why should we be precious about it now? Um, it also feeds into the idea that, you know, we have to acknowledge our own past, our own history when it comes to colonialism, our own history when it comes to the way in which we, um, added to the colonisation of certain landscapes today. And so, to ignore that and to state that people outside of Wales cannot participate or cannot practice these traditions unless they do it within the confines of our country today is to ignore that history and to ignore the fact that people in areas such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and various places across the world have a connection, whether it is by ancestry, by culture, by whatever, and so they have a right to participate in these things as well. Um, so, my own personal perspective on that is that by publicly performing it outside of Wales, it is raising the cultural awareness of the over-culture awareness of Wales in general, so it's making people aware of us. And, it's also making people aware of the fact that these traditions are something that doesn't need to be stagnant and stuck in

the mists of time. It *can* be something that is vibrantly part of the modern world that we live in as well."

J.B.: "Thank you. Yeah, that's- it- it does, like it was, it was exciting, because I did a Mari Lwyd the past couple of years as part of uh, as part of the Krampuslauf parade for fundraising for Toys for Tots, which is a fundraiser for children's toys that we do out here. And somebody pointed at her and went, 'it's the Welsh horse!' And I was like, 'Yes! Yes it is!' And people, you know, coming up and they're like, 'how do you say it?' And it's like 'Yes! People are interested'. It was a happy time. Um, so uh, in, I guess kind of in keeping with that theme, we'll skip ahead a bit in the questions about – since you brought up colonialism, let's see. Um… Yeah, since you brought up colonialism yourself, um, there are uh, you had said in your- in your book, *Welsh Witchcraft*, that Welsh culture, quote, 'is not a closed practice. Being Celtic, in my view, has very little to do with ancestry, blood, race, or location. Being Celtic is a state of mind, a way of living, a way of believing'. And, uh, later, you said 'the Celtic culture is not stagnant or attached to any single location. Today, there are people with a connection to the Celtic across the world', which is in line with what you were saying just now. Um, uh, 'Welsh Celtic paganism, spirituality, and magic are open to you regardless of whether you have an ancestral link to our culture, regardless of whether you speak fluent Welsh, regardless of where you are in the world, and regardless of how you look'. Um, and these statements are in contrast to certain ideologies and statements that other people and groups make regarding whether Celtic traditions are closed or partially closed, or whether one should be of Celtic ancestry or blood, or be, you know, either residing in or raised on, or both, Celtic land in order to appropriately participate fully in a given Celtic Neo-Pagan path or be considered a fully recognized member of the Celtic Neo-Pagan communities, and such. And unfortunately, there are Celtic symbols, such as the Celtic sun cross and stylized triskelions, and such that have been appropriated as hate symbols by neo-Nazis in the KKK and on the racist website Stormfront. Um. What do you feel can connect people who haven't ever lived in or even visited Wales to Welsh culture or to that state of mind and way of living that defines being Celtic for you?"

M.S.: "Well, I think firstly and foremostly, I would state very openly and clearly that the idea – the notion – that being Celtic is inherently tied to soil, to DNA, to blood, to any of these kinds of things that- those ideas I personally consider rather tremendously scary and also dangerous. And, they also ignore and erase the fact that Wales is inherently a modern nation, a modern country with people who live here and interact with Welsh culture, and who are part and immersed in Welsh culture, who perhaps do not fit the mould of what those types of people who might say that it is all rooted in blood, in DNA, in genetics, and in the soil and the landscape in which you live on, that they perhaps do not look the way that those people believe Welsh people should look, nor do they have the ancestral background that people believe Welsh people should have and such. And when we go into those areas, we start to erase and eradicate people's identities, their cultural identities, um, due to things that are beyond them. So, this is a problem that seems

to be quite relevant in Wales today, this notion that some people will debate who is or who is not Welsh enough, and those debates can go from simple discussions like, you know, should you be able to speak Welsh if you identify yourself as Welsh? Should you be able to speak the Welsh language in order to identify as Welsh, through to entire discussions that then verge into dangerous racist territories, like: are people who live in Wales, who are not white, who identify as Welsh, actually Welsh? Which is why these ideas, these ideologies are, in my opinion, incredibly dangerous. Having grown up in Wales, specifically having gone to school in Wales and such, I can say wholeheartedly that my school was multicultural, was very much a place that you saw various peoples who looked in various different ways, and they were all Welsh. So, to me, the big idea is to ensure that we do not promote these ideas that Welshness or even Celticness is rooted to land, to soil, to nationhood um, in that kind of respect, nor is it linked to race, or to blood, or to genetics. Uh, when it comes to the term Celtic, I'm aware of some of the debates that seem to occur in academia today. Um, I am especially aware of the fact that some people are somewhat against using the term these days, but I still think that it is a helpful term in terms of helping us connect to cultures that are not only our own but also cousins to us, so helping us feel a sense of connection to other nations and other cultures within the U.K. and elsewhere outside of the U.K., so in Ireland and in Europe and such, which have a connection or some kind of link or relationality to us whether that be via a shared cultural history or whether that be via links in language and such. So, I do like the term Celtic, and I still tend to use it, but I think it's important when we use it that we narrow down what exactly we mean by it. And to me, the term Celtic is an umbrella term which encapsulates a variety of cultures, which their rooting — their- the main thing that connects them is language, is that shared linguistic background and history. And that's not to say that in order to be Celtic you have to *speak* a Celtic language, but that you have to have some form of connection to the culture in which the language has influenced and put an impression on. So, people in Wales today are, by definition of that, by that personal definition of mine of Celtic, are Celtic in the same way that people from Ireland or Scotland or Cornwall and such are. The Celtic language has influenced and inspired the way in which we express our culture today and, as such, we are Celts in that regard. But at the same time, I also believe that it's important to acknowledge, as I was mentioning earlier, our history. Um, we are a nation that has gone through a strange history of suppression, and, you know, some people would even say colonisation, and that's something that some people will debate, but some people will say that we were essentially the blueprint for British colonisation, that they colonised us before they went elsewhere in the world. And whilst it's valid to focus on that and to acknowledge that, and that is part and package of our history and something that still affects us to this day – we still reel from the effects of colonialism and suppression of our language and our culture and such – you know, there is still this attitude towards the Welsh language, which is born from those same attitudes of colonialism, which seems to imply that the over-culture of Britain, the over-culture of England is inherently superior to the cultures of Wales and the other Celtic nations. So, it's important to acknowledge that, but it's also important not to use that as a shield to try and deflect any, um, criticism that we have also participated in that colonialism. The sad

reality is that when you are a colonised nation, you also have this background in assimilation into that colonised nation as well, and as such, we do have a history which ties us to British colonisation that we cannot completely separate ourselves from. And, part of that, of course, that we have settled across the world. There are Welsh settlements, there are Welsh colonies, I suppose you could call them, Welsh communities located across the world in various colonised nations nowadays, and so as such, it's important that when we talk about what it means to be Welsh, we accept and acknowledge that is part and package of our history. And, because of that, there are now people across the world who have some form of connection to Wales because of the way in which we migrated and travelled and colonised around the world.
So, it's important that when we try and identify who's allowed to interact with Welsh culture, who's allowed to interact with what it means to be Celtic, that we accept these realities of our history and our culture and such. And that doesn't necessarily just mean that it's a case of, 'oh, there are people in, you know, the east coast of America who have Welsh ancestry, and therefore they should be allowed to connect'. Like, yes, that is true, but beyond that, there are also people who live in those areas who perhaps don't have Welsh ancestry, but surrounding them in that locale, in that area, there is an undercurrent of Welsh culture which has been transplanted over to the United States, and as such, they interact with that on a daily level. And so, they would also have, in my eyes, every right to look into that and go, 'What is this undercurrent which underpins this location that I now live in?' So, to me, when it comes to people and how they can connect to the idea of being Celtic and how they could interact with it in that way, it's, um, all about accepting that history of migration, of movement, of um, of colonization, and accepting that we are a part of that story. And, to ignore that would be a detriment to us and also a detriment to the world in general. So, it's important that we acknowledge that history and part and package of that history is acknowledging that when we took our cultures across the world, we shared them. So, why should we stop now? So, I hope that makes some sort of sense."

J.B.: "It does. Thank you, uh, for sharing your thoughts on that. So, talking about sharing your cultures wherever you went, at the same time, it's obvious that places like the United States and Australia are not the same place as Cymru. So, we've also got some of our own local stuff that we do, as any region does. So, I was wondering what your views are on people blending their local culture and traditions with those of Wales, like, and does it depend on how it's done whether you would consider it cultural diffusion or syncretism, or whether it starts creeping into misappropriation? Do you have any thoughts on that?"

M.S.: "Um, a little bit. So, when we look to areas where the Welsh settled across the world, um, one thing that I'm particularly interested in is the way in which folklore was transmitted to these areas, and we see a comparison between the stories that we have gathered in books on folklore collected, of course, by folklorists in the 18th and 19th centuries, even through to the 20th centuries and such. When we read books that then express the folklore of regions where we know the Welsh settled, so in certain parts of the United States or even parts of Australia, we

start to see these similarities between the stories. We start to see this kind of sense that these are similar stories, but they've obviously been tweaked to fit better within the locale. Some of the stories are almost word-for-word similar to the stories we have over here, but they've just been changed so that it's more rooted to the locale. And that, to me, in my opinion, is just how folklore works. It's always been how folklore works. Folklore is usually transmitted from community to community, and when it is transmitted, it is usually rooted to a specific locale, a specific community a specific, you know, regional culture. And so, when these stories went over the sea, it's not surprising to me that that happened even further. And, I'm really intrigued by the blend of, so for example, there's an author called Peter Stevenson who wrote a book on uh, Welsh American folktales, and in his book, he talks about the similarities between some of the stories that the Welsh settlers over in certain areas of America have to some of the stories that some of the indigenous tribes in those areas also had. And, it's almost as though those two things have kind of blended, and I'm intrigued by that, but I also think that that again is just part and package of how folklore works. If there is already a folklore in an area, but there are people coming with their own stories, it's just a matter of time before those stories start to blend and start to mix, especially when, as humans, we are kind of hardwired to find connections. We're hardwired to find points of relatability, so we like to relate ourselves. So, you know, it's very easy to hear the stories of other people and go, 'Oh, I know that story, but my people call it by this name instead of that name and such.' So, it just makes sense that that would happen. I think where it moves from syncretism and just, you know, cultural development and movement and such into the areas of appropriation is – or misappropriation – is when we start to see people who claim some form of authenticity and kind of link to an unbroken lineage of Welsh tradition when it's clearly not the case. So, for example, within the spheres of Neo-Paganism, there are many people who claim to have these strong ties to Welsh culture in order to try and amplify their lineage or their status in the Neo-Pagan world. So they will, like, claim to be in some form of connection with Welsh culture that perhaps is not 100% true. So, this could be anything from saying that their grandmother was Welsh and, as such, spoke the Welsh language and taught them all the sacred ways of Welsh witchcraft. And then, you know, they come out with a book, and they sell that book for hundreds of pounds or hundreds of dollars, and they make money off of this notion that they've created, which may, in fact, be false. Um, and then, especially if they are doing things like writing books on the subject, and not doing their research, not doing any of the due diligence to look into what they're writing, and then they're presenting their work as being Welsh culture, even though they themselves perhaps have never stepped foot in Wales, nor do they have much of a link to Wales beyond perhaps that their great-great-great- grandfather came over from Wales on a boat. Um, and that's where I think the damage starts to be done, because then you are not only trying to monetise your connection to Wales in that way, but you are also influencing the way that people view Welsh culture and um, presenting Welsh culture in a very kind of bastardised and altered manner in order to benefit yourself. And, that's where it enters into misappropriation in my eyes is when Welsh culture is kind of blended and bent in such a way that is obviously manipulative and used to gain something for that specific person that's doing

that. So, I don't truly believe that, you know, a Pagan from New Jersey mixing the ideas that we have within our folklore with the local land spirits that they have over there is misappropriation, because that's just, you know, turning to your ancestry or turning to a culture which inspires you in order to inform your practice, but then rooting it to your locale instead. But when it comes to things like claiming some kind of link with the culture that is still a living culture to this day, um, and then making money off of that even though you are presenting something that is wholly false, and you're aware of it, there's very big differences between those two things. And, that's, I think, the line is where do you cross that line into that area?"

J.B.: "Thank you. Uh… Yeah, that makes sense. Um… Speaking of the culture being living to this day, um, it is a modern, multifaceted culture with modern, multifaceted problems and good things about it. Not just the old mystical stuff, which is great, but that's not all there is to it, right? So, um, at the same time, though, Celtic Neo-Paganism — and that includes the Welsh, of course — tends to focus on traditions that are a century old or more, like pre-Christian, medieval, early modern, Victorian, sometimes Edwardian era stuff. And often, but not always, they are traditions that are nearly or completely extinct outside of the Neo-Pagan community, like folk magic, or outside of specific vocations, like professional storytelling or historical reenactment. And, you've spoken publicly before about your opinion that antiquity does not equate to legitimacy for practices. Um, are there any modern Welsh traditions began or gained popularity within the last century or so, like since 1925-ish, that you weave into your practice?"

M.S.: "So, I think this is a difficult question because, like you say, a *lot* of what we do is inspired and informed by periods of time that are probably older than the last century, which is quite unique really when you look at it from a modern Pagan perspective. Because, a lot of Neo-Paganism, especially modern-day witchcraft and such, does tend to pull a lot of its inspiration from the last century. That's not to say that it wasn't influenced by things that were older than that, but when we look at traditions like Wicca and modern-day witchcraft and Paganism in a broader sense like that, a lot of it does come from the mid to late 20th century. But then, when we look to Welsh culture, when we look at, say, for example, Pagan Druidry, the way that it exists today within Wales and such, we do tend to look a little bit further back, which is a strange thing in contrast to what's going on on the witchcraft side. And, for me personally, I identify as a witch, but I'm also part of a Druid order and such. So, I've got both of those worlds kind of interacting and fighting with one another constantly. Um, and I do find that intriguing, that when we look to traditions like Wicca, which draws on the works of people like Gerald Gardner, Doreen Valiente, and even later authors like the Farrars and such, we do see this contrast between, when we look to Welsh traditions, or more specifically Neo-Pagan traditions that draw on Welsh traditions, we then have people like Iola Morganog, and early medieval literature, and you know, these different things that seem to come from an older period in time. I think one thing that I do in my own personal practice that draws upon modernity a bit more is that I don't try and warp the way in which I've interacted with Welsh culture to fit a more

romanticized, antiquated view of Welsh culture in general, which might be wholly unique to me. I don't know; I don't know if other people do this, but it is something that is important to me. So, for example, the National Eisteddfod has been a part and package of my life since I was a child, because I've interacted with it, taken part in it, gone to the Eisteddfod, you know, almost every year since I was a child, and such. And, the way in which I interact with the Eisteddfod hasn't really changed since I was a child. It's a very modern thing. It's, you know, we go there, we shop at the stalls, we dance around Mr. Urdd when he comes and takes photos with us. We interact with what's going on in the area. We interact with the art that is demonstrated. We go and listen to comedy shows and stuff. Um, so all that is still part of it. But, because of my underpinning as a spiritual person who centers my spiritual and magical practice on the culture of Wales, I still see the Eisteddfod as a sacred event despite the fact that it's just so many people in Wales, just part and package of the cultural calendar for them, you know, something they do for fun. For me, there is an undercurrent of spirituality in there because of the connection to the Bardic tradition, because of the connection to the rise of um, Neo-Druidry and such, you know, the influence that the Eisteddfod tradition, that Iolo Morgannwg, that the Neo-Druid traditions of the Gotsedd, and such, the influence they had on modern Paganism in general. Because of all that, to me, the Eisteddfod is a sacred event. And uh, because of that, I think I interact with it in a slightly different way, because I view it as something that connects us to our culture, our heritage, and our landscape, even though sometimes you're just walking past someone who's absolutely drunk, walking around in wellies and such, who's complaining about how muddy it is, it's still, to me, this, like, there's this undercurrent of sacred- sacredity to it as well. Another thing is that my definition of things like sacred spaces is very different to a lot of people. So, when it comes to modern Pagans today, there is this tendency to have a love for ancient sites. So, places that, you know, are the remnants of ancient Neolithic cultures and such. So places like Stonehenge, Avebury, and closer to home in Wales, Bryn Celli Ddu, Treficnath, all of these beautiful monuments that have stood for thousands of years. And, whilst they are very important to me, and they're part and package of my tradition and my culture today as a modern day magical practitioner, I still also find some places that are much more modern to be just as sacred. And a big part of that links to the Eisteddfod tradition, which is, of course, the Gorsedd Circles. So, when I'm planning a ritual – when I'm planning a rite – and I'm trying to figure out where we could conduct the ritual or the rites at those times, um, I don't disregard places like Gorsedd Circles as being sacred places. And, they are very much part of um, the practices that we carry out today. I recently took part in a ritual which took place in the Gorsedd Circle just next to the Menai Bridge, in Porthaethwy, Menai Bridge. So, the Gorsedd Circle there, I think, only dates back to around the '60s, and it's still, to us, a sacred space which connects us to that landscape, so that's still part of it. But again, even when we talk about things like that – that Eisteddfod tradition, those Gorsedd Circles, they link back to something that was going on in the 18th and the 19th century, so there's still that connection to something old going on. Um, I suppose another way that we interact with more modern culture is that we like to incorporate songs into our rituals and such, and those songs don't need to be these ancient songs that have been passed

down for thousands of years and such. Um, so, I'm obsessed at the moment with the musical workings and stylings of Mari Mathias, and Mari Mathias is like, she writes these songs that are beautifully spiritual, rooted in uh, an inspiring force that seems to draw upon those same wellsprings that we draw upon so medieval literature and folklore and such. And yet, there is something quite modern about the way in which she sings about them and the way in which she expresses her music. And so, we've kind of adopted those songs into some of our rituals and such, and that's another way that we interact with modern culture. But, then I think when we like, really boil it down, the biggest thing that we do that is inherently modern is the way in which we interact with the stories and the way in which we interact with the things that do inspire us. So, whilst yes, the Eisteddfod tradition is something that we can draw back all the way to the Victorian era, if not even older than that, because of some whisperings in Welsh history that seem to link it to things going on in the 12th century and such. However, you know, true that may be, so whilst we can tie it back to that historical underpinning similarly with things like medieval literature, the Mabinogi and such, we can link it back into the mists of time and such, but the way in which we interact with it is still quite modern, is still quite rooted in today rather than in the past. So, for example, I'm not against looking at stories from the Mabinogi via a modern lens, so incorporating ideas of modern feminism, incorporating ideas of modern social justice movements into these stories in order to relate them to today. And, in my opinion, that's not something that you know warps the stories into something they're not, because I believe that is why they still persist. I believe these stories are still a huge, integral part of Welsh culture, not because they are locked in the mists of time and, you know, stuck and stagnating as some old stories that we've kept traditionally exactly the same, but *because* they are still relevant to who we are as people today. We can still relate and reflect our own personal stories, our own personal journeys through life through these stories that, at the very least, have their origin in the um, early medieval period, if not even sooner than that, earlier than that in time. So the fact that they persist and we can still relate to them in this really visceral way, to me, is part of the magic of those stories and part of why they are still so relevant and important to us within Welsh culture today. So, I'm not against looking at them via that modern lens and incorporating some of that modern lens into the way in which we interact with them. So, yeah, I think – I hope that answers the question in some regard, but that's kind of the way in which I incorporate modernity into my practice today."

J.B.: "Yeah, that's that sounds great; the- your talking about applying older texts and ideas and literature to modern things, like feminism and stuff made me think of Gwerful Mechain and her poetry, and it's like still relevant from the 1500s. It's like, I don't know if it's necessarily good, but anyway, it's like, you know, we're still dealing with this. Um… Let's see. Oh, and the thing you were saying about the Gorsedd stones, we used, like, back when I was at Bangor, I was trying to revive the Earth Religions Club at Bangor, and we would hold rituals in the Gorsedd circle that was off behind the campus, you know, down by the water there. It's like – it's right there!"

S.M.: “Yeah, I love that one. The one in Bangor seems to be, like, quite big too compared to the one in Menai Bridge, which is quite tiny.”

J.B.: “The only issue is sometimes, you know, the nettles would sting people's ankles a bit, but it was so convenient. Let's see. And it's like, and we're connected to the Eisteddfod and everything via that. Let's see. Um… So, kind of related to the history versus now and all these different things that you've talked about that you consider when you're building your practice and that you consider the Eisteddfod as sacred, even though it's very much a, like, secular cultural tradition as it's practiced now. Um… How do you decide? Like, do you find that there are any patterns to how you decide which elements of your culture to incorporate into your practice or to emphasize in a sacred or spiritual way, and which you kind of de-emphasize in that way or just leave to secular life?”

M.S.: “So, to me personally, pretty much every aspect of my culture is perceived as sacred within my life. Um, but then, of course,” [J.B.: “Even the rugby!”] “I will be a bit selective. Yeah, that's what I was going to say; I can be a bit selective about, like, what aspects are important to *me*. But, that's less of a kind of decision that comes from my Paganism and more a decision that comes from me as a person. So, a big part of my upbringing was that I felt as though I wasn't allowed to embrace my Welshness because I didn't fall into the same camps that people seemed to fall into within my own community, which was quite a small community at that. There was only 500 people living in Abergfraw, um, and still to this day, it's only around 500 that live there in the village. As such, there were only 26 students in my primary school. So, it was very easy to feel left out if you didn't like the same things as everyone else. So, I'm somebody who, which you know, this might be blasphemy to say as a Welsh person, I'm somebody who's never had an interest in rugby. Um, as well as that, like, despite the connection with the rugby in Wales, up in North Wales, there's also this huge emphasis on things like football. Um, and I've never had an interest in that. My family, so both sides of my family, when you go back to my grandparents, are farmers. And, as such, I've never had an interest much in farming or in agriculture, and because of that, like, you know, I couldn't connect with my grandparents in the same way and such. So, it always felt like there was something holding me back from being able to connect with my culture. And, it was only when I found, um, the more enchanting elements of my culture that I started to feel as though I had found an in to feeling pride in my own cultural identity. So, by embracing Paganism, and magic, and witchcraft and such, I ultimately ended up embracing folklore and folk traditions and stories. But beyond that, I also embraced the language itself. And the history of the language itself is something that is inherently quite magical. There is this kind of mythopoetic quality to the Welsh language, which is sometimes criticised because it can easily be romanticised to the extreme. And, you know, the romanticism of our language and our culture can be detrimental, because it does lead to people viewing our culture as being this archaic thing that's locked in the mists of time, rather than something that is modern and contemporary and alive and thriving to this day. So, it's very easy for people to associate our language and our

culture with this romanticised, fantastical idea, which looks like something that derives instantly from like a Disney movie or something that the idea of women riding around on horses with big flowing red hair, shooting arrows whilst singing in Welsh, you know, that's the idea that people have. And, it's not representative of who we are today. And yet, beyond that, I do think it is a disservice to our culture to also ignore the fact that we do have a little bit of an enchanting undercurrent, which, you know, bolsters up our language and our culture in a way that you know in many ways not many people can say about their language and such. So, the English language, for example, is a language that developed out of the fusion of the various cultures that invaded these isles, that invaded this area. Whereas the Welsh language has its rooting in a bardic tradition, in poetry, and in ceremony. And as such, I can relate that to my Paganism easily. And so, one big thing that I'm doing right now as a devotional act is I'm bettering my written Welsh. So, I grew up speaking fluently, but I have no idea how to mutate some words and such, and how to stick to the grammatically correct ways of writing in Welsh. And to me, that's a huge source of shame. And I think when we look to Welsh culture today, there is this undercurrent of shame that seems to exist in general. And that shame can sometimes immobilise you and make it so that, rather than trying to fix that shame or trying to approach it, we then ignore it. And that is exactly and precisely what I have done for years. Um, I can't write in Welsh, and therefore I won't try, is essentially the mentality that I had. So, I would give up, and I wouldn't even bother. But, ever since I've embraced a spiritual path which is much more rooted in my locale and such, I've almost seen it as a devotional and spiritual act to better my Welsh. So, in turn, my culture and my language inspire my spirituality, but my spirituality and my magical practice have also inspired the way in which I interact with my culture. So, I don't think there's anything that's off the table to be seen as an aspect that we can incorporate into the sacred way in which we practice our spirituality, because we can look at pretty much any aspect of our culture and see it as something that connects us to our landscape, to our community, to our people. And, as such, it is very much in keeping with the idea of our practices as modern-day Pagans today."

J.B.: "Well, good luck with the- the bettering your writing! I know bettering my Cymraeg is also a goal that I'm always pursuing. Um, and that's, you kind of answered another question on here all at once with that, because uh, I- I've done, you know, a written survey – an anonymous survey – and, I had 74 responses to that. And, over 90% of the people who responded said that they view learning or using the Welsh language as a potentially, like something that could be a spiritual or religious devotional act. So, you, uh, kind of already stated that you also see it as a devotional sort of engagement to uh, better your language. So, that's something that is commonly, uh, a commonly held belief amongst those of us who incorporate Welsh culture in our practice, I

suppose. Um, uh, and you also said in your book *Welsh Witchcraft* that you believe it is necessary- you do *not* believe it is necessary to be a fluent Welsh speaker to fully connect with the magic of the Welsh landscape. However, learning as much of the language as possible would help tremendously. So, um, can you explain how you think learning the Welsh language helps tremendously with connecting to the magic of Wales?"

M.S.: “So, the Welsh language, in my idea, and language in general, is, in my opinion, a carrier of culture and a carrier of tradition. So, when we turn to the traditions and practices and cultural elements of Wales, we see that it is the language that has preserved those elements for a long time. And, we find some of the best kind of insights into the way in which we engage with our stories, with our landscape, with our people, with our communities via texts and such, which were written in our native language or via stories that have been passed down in our language. So, the language carries culture. The language acts as a cradle for the culture. And, as such, if you want to connect to the culture, if you want to connect to the landscape on a deeper visceral level, then the language will help you do that. Beyond, you know, the stories and such that we have recorded within the language, there's also place names and such which tell us stories of our locale. So, I come from Aberffraw, and Aberffraw can very easily be translated to just ‘the mouth of the River Ffraw’ or ‘the place where the River Ffraw lets out into the sea’. Very, very simple translation of Aberffraw there. But, then you look into what the word Ffraw, which is the name of the river that runs through the village, means. And, that in and of itself gives you a little bit of an understanding of the identity of the river and the way in which people interacted with the river. So, the word *ffraw* essentially translates to mean excitable or even unpredictable. And, it is a saltwater river that has really strong currents and gets deep in some parts, but is very shallow in other parts, and it is this river that has its own identity. And when I learned the meaning of the name, it helped me connect to the river on a much more visceral level. Similarly, one of the tasks I gave myself as I was growing up was to learn the different names of the different kinds of coves and beaches that exist along the coastal path where I live. And, some of them are shrouded in mystery — I don't understand why they're called what they're called, but that in and of itself helped me interact with them better, because I had to go digging to find it and such. So, there's a- there’s a kind of a rock, kind of a tiny little island that's just off the coast in the sea, and it's this black rock that emerges out of the sea and the waves lap against it. And, sometimes, at high tide it's completely submerged, but it's there. And, I discovered by looking into old maps and such that the name of this rock is Carreg Dewin, which is of course enchanter’s or wizard’s rock. And, I'm intrigued by that; I want to learn more. So, I'm kind of on a mission right now to learn why. Why is it called Carreg Dewin? Is there a piece of folklore, a story that connects to it? And, via that journey I now am going to go and ask my grandparents and some of the older members of the community in Aberffraw, see if they know anything about it. I'm going to start digging in books; I'm going to start researching it online. So, it's a way that I'm connecting to my landscape and my culture. And, it all started because of the language and because I learned that it was called Carreg Dewin. And, I know that Carreg Dewin means a wizard's stone or a wizard's rock. So, it's these ways in which that it can help you connect deeper with your landscape, with your surroundings, once you know the terms. Beyond that, a big part of modern Neo-Pagan practice which draws upon Wales is: we all tend to love the Mabinogi. We all love our stories. We love our myths and our folk tales and such. And, when you know a little bit about the language, then things are unveiled in those stories that perhaps you would have not noticed otherwise. So, from

things like the meaning of some of the characters' names, so like Pwyll and Pryderi, you know, these are actual words in the Welsh language that we use daily. So, they're not just traditional names. They're something that tells you a little bit about the character, that tells you about their journey throughout the stories and such. And, that little piece of knowledge helps you connect with these stories on a much more visceral level, and, it intrigues me that even a lot of books written in English about these stories don't focus on that. Don't focus on the meaning of the names or the words that are sometimes used and such in the stories. So, in order to understand these stories at any depth, you need to have some kind of grounding in the way in which the language works. So, it's little things like this: the way in which the language can connect you to the people of Wales, to your local communities if you live in Wales and such, it can connect you to your landscape by looking at place names and such, it can connect you to history, it can connect you to all sorts of different elements like that. So, through and via those lenses, it will in turn connect to your spiritual and magical journey, and it will also enable you to build something that is much more visceral, and much more meaningful if you interact with the language in that way. So, the reason that I put in that it's not necessary to be fluent is because there is a tendency among some Welsh-speaking communities to view Welsh people who do not speak Welsh as somehow lesser-than, as in, they see them as not quite as Welsh, which I think is a travesty because of the history of why people in Wales don't speak Welsh, you know. If we're going to acknowledge – and this is kind of a strange, uh, juxtaposition going on amongst people who, um, kind of embrace Welsh history as being almost a shield against any claims of like, colonialism and such, to say 'Well, I'm Welsh, and the culture has been suppressed and oppressed for so long that, you know, I can't be a coloniser and all that', and then at the same time, they turn to people who cannot speak Welsh and say 'Well, you're not truly Welsh then, if you don't speak Welsh', which in and of itself is, in my opinion, an effect of colonialism,. So, it's the idea that, you know, you're not Welsh unless you speak Welsh – but why don't they speak Welsh? Because, we have this history that's rooted in suppression and such. So, it's important to acknowledge that, you know, we don't gatekeep, essentially, the culture from people who don't speak the language. But, I do also believe that the language is a gateway into understanding the culture, the landscape, and the people on a much more visceral level."

J.B.: "Thank you, that was nice and like, very thorough explanation. Um, do you need to take a break or anything? We've been going at it for an hour."

M.S.: "No, I'm good. … [?] through."

J.B.: "And um, it also- like, it made me think of, you know, when you brought up the Mabinogi and stuff, like, you know, the stories hit different when you know some of like what the names mean, and it hits different when Gwydion's name is rooted in wisdom, and then wisdom is slaying anxiety, you know, in the Fourth Branch, and things like that." [M.S.: "Yeah."] "Like you said, it opens up lots of different ways of looking at things that wouldn't be as obvious or

apparent, I guess, uh, just with the names, and so how much more is opened up when you know even more.
And, nuances of how things are worded and such. Um, let's see… But, you had talked about how people sometimes um, have differing opinions on whether one is Welsh enough, whether they speak the language fluently and such. Um, you had said in- in *Welsh Witchcraft* that, 'contrary to popular belief, the term Celtic does not refer to any particular bloodline or race of people', which is in line with what you said a minute ago. Uh, 'the only thing that connects Celts to one another is language and certain shared cultural practices. There's no standard way a Celt will look, despite what some people may believe. Due to the nature of Celts being more so a cultural group connected by language, modern Celtic spiritualities are open for all to explore'. Um, what does it mean to be Celtic or to be Welsh, since that's more specific uh, to your experience. What does it mean to be Welsh to you?"

M.S.: "So, to be Welsh to me is more to do with how you interact with the world. Um, so, I think- I've received a lot of criticism, because I said that it's more of a state of mind. So, to kind of give a little bit more of an explanation of what I mean by that, it's a state of mind. It's not a state of, you know, what I did not mean by that was that you can just wake up one morning and decide 'I'm Welsh now, actually. I feel Welsh, so therefore I am Welsh'. That is not what I meant by that. What I meant by that, it's a state of mind, is that it is the state in which you interact with the world around you. So, it's something that has been fostered within you, based on where you grew up. That can be a part of it, uh, your ancestors, your parentage, your grandparents; that can also be a part of it. But, beyond those things, beyond, you know, your genetic line, or your familial line, or whatever, or even where you were raised, it can also be the way in which you interact with music, with language, with poetry, with culture. So, culture is lived, and culture is not something that is, you know, flowing through our veins, in our blood. It is something that we experience throughout our entire lives. And, it can change, it can alter, and it can grow throughout time as well. So, to me, I don't think I would ever deny somebody who claimed to identify wholly as Welsh or wholly as Celtic, who grew up, say, in Spain or Portugal or even America or something, if they grew up with their parent reading them bedtime stories in the Welsh language; if they grew up with a parent who perhaps played Welsh music to them as they were like, you know, doing their homework or something, and they told them stories about their mamgu, their nain, their, you know, their grandparents and such. If they grew up with those stories, with those songs, with that language as a lens in which that altered the way in which they interact with the world, and they now identify as being either partly or wholly Welsh or Celtic. Then, I refuse to deny them that identity just because they didn't grow up on the soil of Wales or whatever, or because they didn't have two parents that were Welsh or something like that. I refuse to deny people that identity just because they don't fit into that very narrow view of what it means to be Welsh or to be Celtic. At the same time, I do not believe that ancestry alone can give you a Celtic lens either. There are some people who, you know, they take DNA tests and they find out that they're like 14% Welsh or Scottish or Irish, and then from that moment, they're

like well I'm Celtic now! And, I don't believe it works that way either. And, I think sometimes that can be seen as almost a form of gatekeeping when I say that, when I say that having ancestry does not necessarily mean that you are Celtic or are Welsh. But, it's not gatekeeping because there are ways in which you can interact with the culture. So, I always use the example, and I hope she doesn't mind that I use her as an example, um, of a friend of mine that I grew up with in school. So, when I was in around year five in school, a girl moved to the area. I won't name her obviously. She moved to the area from England, and she had grown up, up to that point, as an English person. She spoke English as her only language; she didn't speak any other language. And, she moved over, and she felt at first a little alienated because of the fact that we were a Welsh medium school. The only times we ever spoke English in the classroom was when we were reading an English book during like, you know, English lessons and such. So, everything was carried out via Welsh, and she felt a little alienated initially because of that, but, she embraced the culture. She embraced the culture. She learned the language. She started competing in the Eisteddfod with us. She went on to secondary school speaking Welsh fluently. She undertook various courses in order to learn Welsh completely. She now speaks Welsh as fluently and as well as I do. And, if you ask her, what are you? She will tell you, I am Welsh. And, I refuse anyone, I refute anyone who tries to deny her that identity, because since she was around 10 years old, she has been immersed in the culture. So, in my eyes, that is the– that is the crux or the seed of what it means to be Welsh or Celtic, is the way in which you interact with the culture. So, I am very much keen on the idea that people can adopt that culture as well. I have numerous friends who live in Wales, who were not born in Wales, who perhaps did not grow up speaking Welsh, but I would very happily say are Welsh because they- of the way in which they interact with Welsh culture and the way in which they identify to this day. So, that's a big part of it for me. Though I do wonder sometimes if a little bit of my queer identity comes into that, like the fact that, you know, I am somebody who identifies as queer, I identify as a woman, and I refute anyone who tries to deny me those identities. So, as such, maybe I'm a bit more protective of those identities for that reason. So, to me, it is a state of mind, but it's a state of mind that has been fostered throughout your life. It's the way in which you interact with the world, the stories you were told, the songs that you listened to, the songs you sang, the language you speak, the language you interact with, and the culture that you interact with on a daily level. These are the things that inspire and influence your life in order to give you that Celtic viewpoint, that Celtic mindset that many people from across the Celtic nations have. Um, and so, yeah, it's not rooted in blood, not rooted in these. Those can be part of it, you know, it can be part of it that you have an ancestral line that links you back to Wales or Scotland or whatever. Um, it can be that your parents were born there, it can be that you grew up in the area, but that's not the- the be all and end all of what makes you Welsh or Celtic."

J.B.: "'Kay. I tend to agree, personally, I've got on one of my websites that I'm like- I- I'm adopted, so I have some personal feelings about it too. But it's like, DNA and all that jazz, I mean, it's *a* connection, not *the* connection. That's how I see it. But, um, let's see, we're all

getting close to done, I think. Let's see. Um, oh! So, um, you had noted in your book *Welsh Fairie*s that there are some people, particularly in academia, who turn their nose up at modern Pagan practice and 'think us all a bit silly', as you put it – um, uh, which has also been my experience – due to the combination of the surviving Welsh literature that we tend to center as uh, Neo-Pagans and witches and Druids, uh, the people or figures we perceive as gods in those uh, pieces are written in the medieval Christian period. They often, not always, but often lack ancient pre-Christian inscriptions, um, for the most popular figures, especially. Um, here are some like Nudd, who's got a Brythonic precursor of Nodens, who's got the um, remnants of a, what's the word, a shrine at Lydney Park. And, there's the Brythono-Gaulish precursor of Mabon in Maponos and such. But, a lot of the most popular figures, like Rhiannon, and Cerridwen, and Gwyn ap Nudd don't have any obvious linguistic uh, deific precursors from the pre-Christian era. Um, could you please explain to whoever is going to be seeing this recording in all of academia why you tend to view figures from Christian-era medieval Welsh texts as deities, even though they don't have known pre-Christian attestations or inscriptions, and aren't referred to as deities in the primary texts that survive?"

M.S.: "So, this is kind of — I'll give a twofold answer, and hopefully I won't waffle on for too long. My first answer to that question is always a little speculative. And as such, I understand that it doesn't hold much weight among academics. So, within the realms of academia, you need proof. You need citations. You need to be able to link it back to something. So, this is a little speculative, but one of my arguments is always: if we are aware that there are some names in the Mabinogi that are cognate with older pre-Christian Brythonic deities, why couldn't it be possible that perhaps some of the entities or characters that exist in the Mabinogi had a version that existed prior to Christianity that we just now don't have any evidence of? Why couldn't that be possible? Um, beyond that, it's also the idea of, you know, when we look at characters like Cerridwen or Rhiannon, for example, and we say there are no shrines built to them, there are no offerings given to them, we have no evidence that they were goddesses beforehand, um, I also ask like, could it be that perhaps these characters carry an echo of an older deity, um, but that they were into Welsh culture? Because, we have to accept and acknowledge as well that Welsh culture, as it exists nowadays, is *relatively* modern when you compare it to ancient pre-Christian Paganism and such. So, when we look at the past we know that being Welsh didn't really exist until after the Romans left Britain. Before that, we were a collection of Brythonic tribes and such, wandering around um, speaking a language which was an ancestor of Welsh but wasn't quite the Welsh language that we know today and such.
Um, and, you know, could it be that perhaps these entities existed in pre-Christian culture, but that they were kind of warped to fit into the Christian culture? But again, I'm going to accept that's all speculative, and none of that could ever lead into any proof. I will say that that is the undercurrent of belief that I see and tend to come across when it comes to Pagans. So, hopefully that can help people within academia understand Pagans a little bit more, is that the undercurrent of belief is that perhaps these characters were not gods in the way they exist now, but that they

carry an echo of a divine entity which perhaps might have existed prior to them. And, they continue a lineage of something that harkens back to an older world.

“But, beyond that, there's also two arguments that I make that I don't feel like gets the attention it deserves in academia. And, the first is that the modern perspective is ignored. So, yes, we have no evidence that Cerridwen and Rhiannon and Arianrhod were deities in the ancient world at all. But, why can't they be now? I don't understand why there is this focus intently on ensuring that people are aware that they were not deities in the past. Most people who are into Paganism say no, that there is no evidence, that they were not deities in the past. They are absolutely aware of that fact, but we take into account the fact that yes, there were no shrines built to Cerridwen; there were no shrines built to Rhiannon in the ancient past, but there are now. There are shrines built to them right now in the modern day, and people interact with these entities as though they are deities *today*. So, it's almost the difference between looking at these stories as being stuck in a stagnant past, in a medieval past, versus looking at them as living, pulsating, breathing stories that are still inspiring people and still influencing the lives of people across the world today. So yes, we have no evidence of a shrine to the goddess Cerridwen found anywhere along the shores of Llyn Tegid in Bala. But, there is a temple to Cerridwen built there right now that people go to, and venerate her, and pray to her, and worship her at today. There is a shrine to Rhiannon to my right, here, in my living room. I have a shrine where I leave offerings to her, where I pray to her, where I write to her. So, they are very much alive and thriving as deities today, and that is how a lot of people are interacting with them today. So, to me, it doesn't *need* to be validated by some ancient past, because it's existing and happening right now in front of us, and I think that's rather intriguing. That's interesting. But, another argument that I would make personally, as somebody who grew up in Wales, is I think despite the fact that there is no evidence to prove that these entities were deities prior to, you know, the modern day, I think there is an element of apotheosis going on within Welsh culture in general. So, I don't just mean within the confines of modern Paganism; I genuinely believe that Welsh culture has elevated these entities into deific format, perhaps without even realizing they’re doing it. So, the ancient bards, the old bards of medieval Wales and such, they sang songs in praise of Cerridwen, and they saw her as a muse that distributed inspiration to them. So much so that they sang in complete praise of her power, which in turn feels very god-like to me. It feels as though they’re looking at her as a goddess, and though they didn't talk about her in that way, we could compare it to the way in which deities are approached in various polytheistic cultures that still exist to this day – and I don't just mean modern Pagan cultures, but actual polytheistic, um, indigenous cultures that exist to this day and such. And, that element of who Cerridwen was, as this muse that inspired and stirred the spirit of the bards, that persisted throughout all of Welsh culture to the point that she *has* been essentially elevated as this almost deific but also terrifying character, and she has this spirit that has, you know, continuously survived throughout Welsh culture, and that's the same for many of the other characters that we revere as gods and goddesses within, uh, modern Welsh spiritual Paganism and such today. It's that idea that they have been viewed and venerated as being an intrinsic

aspect of our cultural expression and our identity as Welsh people, which in turn feels very godly, feels very divine, feels- even though people don't express it in that way. So, within a more spiritual lens, um, it's hard to look at that and not feel that something has been built on the foundation of that. And, despite what many might say nowadays, there are many people in Wales today who are not Pagan who *do* view them as goddesses and such. There are many people I know: artists and singers and songwriters, and people who write books, people who write uh, poetry and such. There are numerous people across Wales that I'm aware of who are not Pagan themselves, some of whom very much identify as Christian, but who still view characters like Rhiannon and Cerridwen as goddesses. And so, it's becoming essentially part of the cultural consciousness of our nation. So, I do kind of feel a little sad that that is sometimes ignored in arguments that they are not deities. Whilst yes, it's important to acknowledge that no, we have no evidence that in the ancient past they were ever venerated as goddesses. I think it would be nice to sometimes just get a little footnote that says, but, you know, keep in mind that there are hundreds of thousands of people across the world who do venerate them as deities today. And, that's part of the way in which people continue- continue to interact with these stories, which gives more credence to the idea that these stories are alive and thriving and influencing culture to this day. So yeah, I hope that that answers the question."

J.B.: "Yes, like bringing it into, *continuing* to bring it into the now, as people have done for generations. Um, and it's- it's not *just* something to be studied in dusty tomes, as it were."

M.S.: "No. No, absolutely. And, I think an argument that I made recently in, um, a book that hasn't been published yet, but I'll say it here as well, is: I think when we limit the definition of how these stories are interacted with to the confines of, like you were saying, dusty old tomes, medieval texts that need never change and need never be seen as anything other than what is written, what we're doing essentially then is we're saying that the only people who can authentically interact with these stories are academics. And, I find an issue with that because these are not the stories of academics; these are the stories of our people. These are the stories of our culture, and so by limiting the way in which we interact with them, we are essentially cutting off a lot of people from that cultural undercurrent that exists. Um, so I do take a little bit of an issue with that, and I think that it's important to also *allow* people to interact with these stories in whatever way. And, that's not to say that, you know, we have to completely, you know, go off the rails and make up millions of things about them. We can still talk about them in an academic way, but also acknowledge that the way in which people interact with them is changing and has changed over the last century."

J.B.: "Right, like it's just where integrity comes in, kind of like with the cultural appropriation bit, where it's like as long as you're acknowledging 'this is how I interpret it now' instead of saying 'this is what the medieval writer thought when they were…' you know, then you're interacting with it now. Okay, with the kind of similar thread with uh, how we define and

interpret deity – in *Welsh Witchcraft*, you suggested that it was possible, again unprovable but possible, that Saint Dwynwen and her story may have been based on ancient pre-Christian deity, um, kind of like is sometimes claimed for Saint Brigid in the Irish tradition. Uh, and you went on to speak of how regardless of whether she was a goddess or not, originally we as Pagans and witches, quote, 'can still call upon the spirit of in our practices if we so wish it'. Um, and you're not the only um, Neo-Pagan I've met who uh, interacts with St. Dwynwen in a Neo-Pagan context as a goddess. So, could you share with us what draws you to recognize or include some of the Welsh Christian saints in your Neo-Pagan or witchcraft or Druidic practice, such as Dwynwen, while not including others such as like Beuno or Gwenfrewi or Tysilio, for example?"

M.S.: "So, my own personal relationship with this will differ to a lot of Pagans, because I tend to identify myself as, first and foremost, a witch. And, within that category when I try and like, narrow down what kind of witch I am; I usually tell people that I'm a folk witch. So, I'm interested in um, what is sometimes referred to poetically within Paganism as 'the crooked path'. And, that's a very, for me personally, that's a very poetic way of saying that my practice is not limited to one narrow path. It's not limited to this idea that I am Pagan; therefore, Christianity is something I do not look at. I instead maneuver myself on this crooked path, which moves from different beliefs to another, constantly making it a crooked kind of pathway out before me. Um, so, I'm not afraid of incorporating elements of Christianity, and Christian folk belief, Christian folk magic, into my practice today. And as such, saints do play a role sometimes in that magic, um, beyond Dwynwen as well, I have also worked with various other saints across Wales on a magical scale. But, when it comes to my polytheistic work, it is intriguing that there are some saints, like Dwynwen, who do take precedent, who kind of are viewed in my eyes as more deific, as more goddess-like, as opposed to being saint-like. And, I think part of that comes from the identity that they have fostered within both modern-day Wales and on a global level as well beyond that. So, Dwynwen, in particular is one that was close by, regionally, to where I grew up. And, my association with Dwynwen, as I grew up, was not rooted in Christianity. So, I didn't grow up; I didn't grow up going to church, I didn't have that Christian background. The only times I ever interacted with Christianity was via school. So, for example, during like, the Christmas concert and such at the end of the year in December, um, we did our Christmas show for school and such; sometimes we did the Nativity, and that was the majority of my interaction with the church and with Christianity. And then, of course, going on school trips and sometimes going to places like Penmôn or to various other places that had churches and cathedrals that were important and such. So, those were my only interactions with Christianity growing up. And when, for example, we celebrated Dydd Santes Dwynwen, so St Dwynwen's feast day, um, we didn't really do *that* even through the lens of Christianity. Of course, her story was told to us, which has a little bit of Christianity woven into it, the angel and such. But, on top of that, it was seen more to us in school, or at least to me, I can speak for myself here, but I would probably wager a guess that some of my classmates would have said the same. The way it was presented to us was more akin to a folk story or a fairy tale than it was a Christian story. So, that's the way

I've interacted with the story of Dwynwen since I was a child, as this folk story, this magical, enchanting story that is something that happened quite near to where I grew up because Saint- uh, Ynys Llanddwyn is only down the from where I grew up. So, beyond interacting with the story as a folk tale or almost a myth that we knew happened, uh, in our landscape in Wales in general, we also had this real place that we could root Dwynwen to, and it was this very beautiful island just off of a very beautiful beach off of a very beautiful forest. So, it's hard not to associate her with that forest, that beach, that island, the sea. So, it's hard not to basically implant Dwynwen onto the landscape as well, which in turn ends up feeling very Pagan, because it's this connection with this real, natural place where the elements are very much apparent. You know, you go there; sometimes the wind batters you, the sand is moving around, you have to walk over water to get to the island sometimes, and you have to be immersed in this area which the waves are constantly crashing up against the rocks. And, it's this beautiful, gorgeous, rugged location. So, it's hard to think Dwynwen, in my mind, and not think of nature, not think of the landscape around it. But, beyond that, it's hard to think of Dwynwen and not think of the concept of love in general. So, from my own perspective, I never viewed her as this purely Christian saint that only Christians could interact with. To me, she was an entity that existed within my culture who was associated primarily with the concept of love. And, I don't mean love as in romantic love. The way she was presented to us was that she represented love in all of its forms. So, we made cards on Dydd Santes Dwynwen for our grandparents, for our parents, for our pets, for our loved ones. Like, it wasn't just, you know, for your crush or for somebody that you had a romantic attachment to. It was just love in any and all formats that had existed. So, Dwynwen embodied that sense of love, but she also embodied the rural, natural, rugged landscape of Ynys Llanddwyn. And as such, it was difficult not to perceive her as this elemental force, essentially. This elemental force that connects you to something that is deeply visceral to us as humans, which is love, something we feel every day. So, with that as my background to Dwynwen, it was kind of hard coming into Paganism and *not* perceiving her as a goddess in that regard. So, I think what differentiates between Dwynwen and other saints, and whether or not there are other saints that we also view as being more than just saints, is the way in which their story is interacted with in modern-day Wales today. Dwynwen is not limited to Christianity, she's not limited to a very Christianised story, you could even tell her story and omit the Christian elements, and the story stays the same; it's not changed too much by doing that. So, there's an undercurrent there within her story that seems to connect us not to a specific religion, but instead to a place and a feeling, and that in and of itself is grounds for something to transcend the religion they exist within. So, yeah, the idea that she might have an origin which is older than Christianity is purely speculative, and we cannot prove it at all. Um, my beliefs of that come more from a mytho-poetic spiritual place than they do any kind of rooting in academia or any rooting in history. But, also we can view her as something, as an entity that transcends culture, that transcends religion as well, who exists now in almost a very secular way. As such, she can be implanted into almost any belief system through that. So, that's why Dwynwen is special to me; that's why people like Saint Ffaid, Saint Ffraid who has an association with Brigid and Braint and such, that's why those saints are

kind of more, more so deific forces within my practice today, as opposed to being worked within a very specific Christian manner, whereas other saints, like say for example, Saint Collen, um, Saint Collen who is associated with Gwyn ap Nudd, but as somebody who basically worked against Gwyn ap Nudd, it's impossible to view him outside of that lens of Christianity. So, his story is immersed. Now, even though there are some really mythical and legendary elements to his story as well, prior to his interaction with Gwyn ap Nudd. Still, that interaction with Gwyn ap Nudd is where we see most Pagans interact with Saints Collen, so, it's hard to see Collen as anything other than a Christian saint in that regard. So, that's the difference in that: can you divorce them from the Christianity and their story still stay the same, or is- is Christianity the very beating heart of who they are? And of course, some Christians might disagree and say that Dwynwen is very much rooted in Christianity, and you can't divorce her. But, I- as somebody who grew up in Wales, interacting with her on Dydd Santes Dwynwen, I don't agree with that at all."

J.B.: "Okay, thank you. Yeah, so like, every time I think of Sant Ffraid, I'm like thinking of her, you know, surfing across the sea on her turf, like, piece of turf coming over from Ireland, and the- the fish story there in Conwy. Um, so, I guess kind of piggybacking off of- of that idea, and shifting a bit over away from Saints towards fairies, towards the Tylwyth Teg. In your book *Welsh Fairies*, you've devoted chapters to deities connected to fairies in some capacity. Um, and you refer to yourself as a modern-day devotee of Gwyn ap Nudd and refer to Rhiannon as a great queen and sovereignty goddess and a denizen of the other world. Um, and, both the figures, both of them, seem to be deemed by people as both deities *and* as the Tylwyth Teg, or some people will deem them as only one or the other, but, a lot will deem them as both. But, either way, they're deemed as both by various people, and they inhabit Annwfn, obviously. Um, and so, I was wondering what your views are on the relationship between Welsh cultural figures who are seen as deities and the Tylwyth Teg. Like, do you view- since they both inhabit Annwfn in many cases, like do you view the Tylwyth Teg as the same sorts of beings as the deities? Or as different types of beings? Or but, like do you, how do you view that relationship?"

M.S.: "So, Tylwyth Teg, to me personally, is a complicated term in and of itself, because we have a lot of influence in the way in which we perceive that term. S,o the first influence, of course, is the whole idea in the modern world that fairies are very much the Victorian idea of fairies. So um, Tinkerbell, you know, the flower fairies by Cicely Mary Barker, the flower fairies drawn in the works of Margaret Tarrant, these kind of artists who influenced the way in which we perceive fairy. So, to a lot of people in Wales, I think today when they hear the word Tylwyth Teg, that is what they think of. They think of that very Victorian, romanticised, beautiful, um, small creatures with gossamer wings and flower petal skirts and such. So, it's important to acknowledge first and foremost that they're not that within a Welsh context. That's a very modern idea that is not rooted in any kind of, um, belief that we see within Welsh culture at all. Um, so

then, the big question, the big difficulty then, is answering the question of what are the Tylwyth Teg then?
And, that's a question that literally is almost impossible to answer, because of the amount of lore that backs the idea of what the Tylwyth Teg are. We have regional specific folklore associating the Tylwyth Teg as ghosts or spirits of Druids and such. We have regional specific folklore which states they are little people who live under the ground. And then we have the idea that no, they are actually just otherworldly denizens who visit our world and look exactly like us. They are the same height as us, they look like us, sometimes they have certain features which mark them as other, but ultimately they are almost indistinguishable from us, apart from the fact that they are inherently more magical and come or hail from some otherworldly place. Um, so, the easiest way to define what a fairy is by looking at the majority of stories concerning them within Welsh folklore – so, the Tylwyth Teg specifically – is that they are denizens of the otherworld. They are people who come from Annwfn, from the otherworld in some format or another. And, when we define them in that way, when we narrow them down to being denizens of the otherworld, that means that characters like Rhiannon are very much otherworldly in nature and, as such, are probably one of the Tylwyth Teg, even though they're never referred to as such in the medieval texts, because the term Tylwyth Teg, as we know it today, didn't really crop up until around the 15th century. So, that's when we start to see this terminology take place, but that's not to say that the *idea* wasn't apparent within Welsh culture from a much, much earlier point: the idea of these visitors from another world. So, my personal opinion is that characters like Rhiannon or Arawn, they exist within that same literary motif, that same folkloric motif that the Tylwyth Teg fit into in later folklore and such of these visitors from another world. And as such, we can view them in that capacity, in that context and such, which then gives issue, because, um, we're a little obsessed with categorization as humans, and especially because, as I mentioned earlier, that very romanticized and Victorian view of fairies as these small, twinkly flower fairies – that came from a period of time when trying to box things and classify things very, very neatly and succinctly was all the rage. You know, it's the same time period when the works of Charles Darwin were taking off, when people were categorizing the ideas of race and- and species and such. So, it makes sense that it also happened within a folkloric context as well, that people were trying to categorize these beings into very neat little boxes, which is kind of impossible to do, because they are beings that are liminal, that are- very much, they exist in contradiction. So, you find one source that says A B C about them and another source that says absolutely not, they're not A B C, they're X Y Z instead. And, that can sometimes be perplexing when you're trying to understand what exactly they are. My very, um, open-ended view of them is that they are y Tylwyth Teg, because to me, y Tylwyth Teg is just a classification that tells us what they are and where they come from, which is that they are a genus of beings that come from the Otherworld, and that they are referred to as y Tylwyth Teg, the Fair Folk, which is a euphemism, the Fair Family, uh, a euphemism given to them as a form of almost folk magical protection to the people talking about them, um, because they were known to sometimes cause mischief and malice towards humans. And so, we talk about them kindly, even though they're not always kind. Um,

but the undercurrent of what's going on, what we're referring to when we say Tylwyth Teg is, at its very essence, visitors from another world. So, by that definition, Gwyn ap Nudd, is a member of the Tylwyth Teg, if you look at it from the folkloric perspective. Uh, not so much from *Culhwch and Olwen*, he's more just a normal dude there, uh, who has connections to Annwfn, but there's no definitive answer as to whether he *comes* from Annwfn there. But, in folklore, he seems to come from under the hills, and fly around in the sky with the Tylwyth Teg, so he's one of the Tylwyth Teg. But, Rhiannon is definitely one of the Tylwyth Teg, because she uh, follows the same motifs – the same literary motifs – as the other otherworldly characters. Similarly to Arawn, Arawn doesn't even need to follow in the motifs, because we're told, instantly, that he is a king of Annwfn; he comes from Annwfn. So, as such, they are both part of the Tylwyth Teg, this idea of the Tylwyth Teg that we see in Welsh folklore, but they are also deities. They can both exist simultaneously; it doesn't have to be one or the other. But, of course, there are certain theories that the deities of Wales, um, were turned into fairies. As time went on, they were essentially reduced from being deity down into fairy. So, a lot of folk tales about women rising from the depths of lakes or fairies giving gifts to humans, or fairies sometimes punishing humans, there are some people who theorise that perhaps these are echoes of older religious stories that were pre-Christian in nature, and those who are expressed as fairies in these stories might carry an echo of a deity or something. I don't know how I feel about that, but that is one way that people interact with these stories. Alternatively, it could be the other way around, that instead they were fairies, and they were launched into deific status. If we look at it from the context of apotheosis and evolution as time went on. So, yeah, there's a multitude of ways that we can look at these stories and interpret them in that way, but to me personally, Tylwyth Teg just denotes somebody who is a visitor from the otherworld and, as such, some of these deities like Arawn, Rhiannon, they have an association with the otherworld, so as such, they're also part of the Tylwyth Teg as well as being deities."

J.B.: "'Kay, thank you. Um… And did you have- that's all the questions that I've specifically got. Did you have any closing thoughts or anything you'd like to communicate to academia or the- the wider world who are seeking to better understand Neo-Pagans and witches who center or incorporate Welsh culture into their practice?"

M.S.: "I think something that's important to communicate to the more academic fields when it comes to looking at Welsh medieval literature, Welsh mythology, Welsh culture in general, is that you are about to see a wave of people entering into academia *because* their interests initially aligned with Paganism and witchcraft. You are going to see a wave of people who are coming into academia because they want to deepen their relationship with these stories, with these characters, with these entities, who they might perceive as deities. So, it would be unwise to essentially continue this way of looking down our noses, uh, within an academic context, at Pagans and such, because it seems that that is the future of your career, of your- of your, um, profession. A lot of the people I know nowadays who are Pagans, who are witches, who are

polytheists, who venerate these entities as deities are pursuing the academic fields, just like Jenny before me. Uh, just like myself, I plan on one day going back to university and pursuing a master's degree in Celtic studies. So, if we are to continue this trend of viewing Pagans as just silly people who don't understand the lore and such, then it's going to ultimately end poorly. Um, so, perhaps it's time that we start asking why people are so interested in incorporating these stories, these elements of our culture, these folktales and such into their spiritual lives today. What's going on there? And isn't that interesting? From an academic perspective, isn't that fascinating? Rather than seeing it as some silly nonsense, isn't it fascinating to study what's going on here? Why are people interacting with these stories in this way? Why has it gripped the world, not just Wales, but the world in the way that it has? And, I hope that that is the future of academia when it comes to their perception of Celtic spiritualities and Paganisms and such. And that's not to say that there aren't elements of Celtic spirituality, of Welsh Celtic spirituality, that need to be looked at, and deconstructed, and looked at with a very, um, critical lens. Definitely needs to be done, and we're very thankful for people who do that, so long as the critical lens isn't so critical that it essentially reduces us to just idiots who don't understand anything. So, I hope that in the future, there is more open dialogue between Pagans and academics, that there is more of an availability of being able to, um, open doorways between us, so that we understand things better. And, I will finish what I'm saying now by saying you cannot critique people for not understanding something on the same level as you if you're not making that information accessible. So, that's a big, big part of what I'm doing with my work at the minute. I'm not an academic, but I'm very much of the mindset that these stories, these ideas, these things that we love to study and delve into, they need to be more accessible. And, if you are going to look down your nose at a group of people, because they are not getting it, then what are you doing to enable and ensure that they do get it? What are you doing to make it more accessible? Because, not everybody can afford these academic journals, not everybody has access to them, not everybody can pay hundreds of pounds to get academic access to JSTOR and such. So, what are you doing to make it more accessible for the masses? You cannot critique it if you're keeping it behind paywalls, and you're making it inaccessible, and you're surrounding it with academic language and jargon that the majority of the population will not understand. So, if you have genuine concerns that people aren't understanding these things in the way that you do from academia, make it more accessible, make it more open-ended so that we can also interact with it in a way that you think is more appropriate. So yeah, that's my only closing remark, I suppose."

J.B.: "Okay, well, diolch yn fawr iawn am rannu dy meddwl [sic]. And yeah, I guess that's it for the interview part. And like, if you want to hang out and chat, I guess we can. Or if you've got, I don't know, a life or something, you can go to- gods forbid you have a life. So anyway, yeah, that was it. Thank you so much."

M.S.: "Well, thank you for having me. Oh gosh, I hope that was okay."

J.B.: “Oh, it was great! And yeah, once I've got the video downloaded, I can send it to you or send you a shared folder link. I guess it would be like, way too big to put in an email, but yeah.”

M.S.: “No, that would be brilliant. Thank you! Oh my goodness.”

J.B.: “It was great. Thank you for sharing all your thoughts and points of view and such.”

M.S.: “I hope it wasn't too much waffle and that you don't have to wade through too much nonsense.”

J.B.: “Oh no, it was very informative, and it's kind of a ‘the more the better’ type of thing for, like,” [M.S.: “The more to draw from.”] “Yeah, and comparing with what other practitioners do and just to also kind of have a more in-depth grounding in some of the- the questions and stuff, because you know, with the written survey, you can only go so far into…”

M.S.: “Yeah, absolutely. I might have to shoot off, because I desperately need the toilet. I also need to go and sort food. Yeah, so thank you again, diolch, for all this, and I hope that I'll get to maybe have a peek at what you're up to when you’re- when you, when you publish it. Thank you, Jenny. I'll see you very soon anyway. Hopefully, get to hang out again soon.”

J.B.: “Yes, great. Okay.”

Kristoffer Hughes Interview Transcript

Jennifer Brown (J.B.): “Okie dokie. Uh, first of all, diolch yn fawr iawn, of course, for your time and willingness to squeeze me into your schedule.”

Kristoffer Hughes (K.H.): “Croeso. I'm trying to squeeze so many things in, like trying to find the time. Oh my word!”

J.B.: “Like a crowbar!”

K.H.: “Yeah.”

J.B.: “Um, I have to tell you for ethical research purposes that, uh, your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary. You can skip any questions you wish. You can withdraw at any time for any reason. You may stop the interview at any time. Your participation or refusal to participate will not affect your treatment. And since I'll be asking you about publications you've authored, which are open to the public, you've waived. your right to anonymity or confidentiality for the purpose of the interview. Does that sound OK?”

K.H.: “Yeah, good.”

J.B.: “OK. All the official stuff.”

K.H.: “That's standard.”

J.B.: “Yeah.”

K.H.: “Oh my Gods, that's all gone.”

J.B.: “Oh, do you need to go get a drink?”

K.H. “No, I've got some water as well.”

J.B.: “Oh, OK.”

K.H. “I'm hydrated.”

J.B. “Oh, good. You're the head of Urdd Derwyddon Môn, the Anglesey Druid Order,” [K.H.: “Yes.”] “and you've authored many books on Welsh culture-centred Druidry. Would you mind sharing with us briefly how you came to be a Neo-Pagan and found the Urdd?”

K.H.: “Wow, I suppose that's quite a long story. But um, but I guess it begins that since I was a child, I was very fortunate. I went to a language primary school, and some of the teachers that we had there loved stories – one or two more than others loved stories. And I guess looking back now with a bit more of a cynical eye, UH, they may have just enjoyed telling us stories because it just kept us quiet. And a lot of my classmates, they weren't necessarily into the stories; they'd be doodling or colouring something in. But I was always transfixed by these stories and the abilities of these enthusiastic teachers to be able to bring them alive in such a way that, as a child, I didn't consider them to be things that were ancient but rather things that were- that were very present. So, as a child, I was- I was very lucky, I was brought up in Llanberis, where my grandparents lived, their house backed onto this amazing woodland, gorgeous. And to me, it was a magical woodland. And even as a small child, I suppose gone are the days now.
Whenever I go back to those woods, I never see children playing in the woods anymore, but we were always in the woods. And I would make war games and play games with all of these characters that came from Welsh stories. And then, as I grew up, I got to appreciate those stories and myths from a different angle, but they were always a part of my wonder and my awe for my land, my culture, my language. And the fact that these characters, these people that populated these stories were – they felt very real to me. It always felt that when Mrs. Griffiths or Mrs. Morris would tell the stories, I always felt as if I was hearing news from people that I knew on some other level that a child of six or seven years old couldn't possibly articulate.
And then- and then I grew up. My parents were not religious at all. Um, they didn't want us to go to Sunday school or anything like that. They were of the opinion that was something that we should decide for ourselves upon growing. So Christianity was there; evidently, obviously it was there, but I never resonated with it. I tried it, and it didn't resonate at all. And then, as I grew up into my teenage years I became more aware of Welsh history, of this ancient, romantic priest caste in the deep past. You know the Druids. And when I was analysing my own relationships to the landscape, I was aware that my viewpoint, my ideas of divinity, was locked into the land rather than to this über being in the sky that Christianity was talking about, that I just couldn't resonate. It never quenched my spiritual thirst, but the landscape did. So from a very- a *very* young age, from I'd say around 13 years old, when I had an understanding of what, and I didn't necessarily have the words like animism or polytheism, I didn't have those words in my vocabulary. But, I certainly had a sense of that within the landscape, and there was *some* material available, even though it was nowhere near as easily accessible as it is now. And I discovered that I was more — I had leanings towards what *could* be described as a paganism rather than anything that was uh, revealed religion. You know? So, I became, I guess, a self-identified pagan in my mid-teens, and- and it just stuck with me. So, as I grew up and as I started studying the Western mystery tradition in particular, I became aware of other Druid organizations, none of

which, of course, were Welsh, but they were- uh, they compelled me to join, study, do all of that good stuff, and I joined the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids. But then, at the same time, Druidry is something that feels very endemic in my culture, and I was suddenly exposed to a Druidry that was *inspired* by my culture but expressed through a language that was *not* of my culture. And- and that was fine; it was cool, but I wanted something that could also address my culture and be more relevant to my culture, and there wasn't anything. And you know what they say: if there isn't something, then maybe you're the one who should start it. So I did. So that was 19 — well, it was the mid-90s — that was responsible for bringing a group of people together that we called Cylch Awenydd, and we didn't really know what we were doing, you know. We were just reading the odd book, reading an article from *Pagan Dawn* or *The Cauldron* or whatever else was available in the 90s that you had to send off by mail order, and we would try and put things together. And by 1999, it kind of developed into, well, there isn't a Welsh Druid order that is part Western mystery tradition, partly inspired by Welsh folklore and myth. So, that's what we'll do. So, we started it, and then I guess from about 2000 to 2007, we were finding our feet, finding what resonated, what didn't resonate. And so it was- it was a journey that took, you know, like a couple of decades in total from understanding what being a Pagan was to actually identifying as one, to then going ahead and starting with- with, um, gumption and gusto the Anglesey Druid Order in the year 2000. So even though 1999 was when all those discussions were happening, it was September, was it September or March? I should have written all that down in the very beginning. But yeah, so it was like 2020 you when we adopted took that name, and the name wasn't entirely accidental either, because I was aware of the Anglesey Druidical Society. They were the first non-Anglo- non-Anglo Druid group to actually use the title, or the name of ‘Druid’ within the name of their organisation. And, that was 1772 in Beaumaris, and so the Anglesey Druidical Society's material has been archived here in Llangefni. So, we read up on them, so we took up inspiration from them and thought, right, let's see whether we can carry on some of their principles, their ideas, but then morph it into Welsh culture, Welsh mythology, stories and folklore, and also the Western mystery tradition, because undoubtedly we're part of the Western mystery tradition as well. And um, and it went from there, and now I look back, it's like, well, I held it 25 years ago. It seems crazy, but yeah, it's been a- it’s been an amazing rollercoaster of a journey, but you know, I'm very proud of it. I'm very proud of the community that we have and the *kind* of people that we have and the enthusiasm those people have in maintaining a community of contemporary Western pagan Druids.”

J.B.: “Okay, thank you. And it's- uh, congratulations on the quarter-century-old anniversary this year!”

K.H.: “Yeah!”

J.B.: “Um. Okay, ah. Let's see, Urdd Derwyddon Môn hosts the Mari Lwyd procession in, uh, local settlements around your area, and you also incorporate it into some of our rituals. Um, and

the Mari Lwyd's also performed across Cymru in various secular community settings. Uh, could you please describe why you chose the Mari Lwyd in particular to incorporate into the Urdd's practice?"

K.H.: "Oh, I've always been in love with the Mari Lwyd. *Always* been in love with it since I first heard about the Mari Lwyd as a young child. But, back then, in the 70s and 80s, there wasn't much talk outside of history books about the Mari Lwyd. And the Mari Lwyd practice had kind of gone to sleep, I guess, in the majority of Wales. There were only some pockets down in southeast Wales that were still maintaining some Mari Lwyd practices, particularly on- during the time of midwinter, Christmas, New Year, Hen Galan. But, they were very isolated, I guess. But, I was fascinated by this figure that was simultaneously dead and alive. Alive and dead. And, I use that metaphor a lot for the oral tradition, and she's a part of our folkloric oral tradition. It's dead *and* it's alive. It's alive and it's dead. It's- it's like, it's an undead thing. It's like the living dead almost. And the Mari Lwyd is very much the *living* dead. And, I've always been fascinated by her and her uniqueness as well, because whilst there are you know, there's the hoodin horse, there's the obby horse, there's a couple of iterations of that horse figure in Cornwall and in other parts of England, but the Mari Lwyd is *so* specifically and uniquely Welsh, particularly because of the function of the pwnco, the bardic battle. And the fact that not only is she an element of our folklore, she's evidently something to do with Welsh bardic tradition at large. Because, the people doing the pwnco and the pwnco that we have recorded, you know, in the various books that have recorded the tradition, they're very bardic. You know, they're like cynghanedd, the cerdd dafod, they're utilising the techniques of the Welsh bardic tradition. And whilst there's no evidence at all to suggest that she existed in antiquity, I think because of the fact that she's so connected to the Welsh bardic tradition, we can hazard a guess that she probably was there in some guise or another. There are just no records of it. But, certainly, the horse is important to not just Welsh culture, but Celtic culture in general. And, you only have to look at some of the hills in England in particular, and there's white horses; the horses are there, the horses are on Iron Age Celtic coins. So, the significance of her not only being a horse, but also some kind of sovereignty figure that is associated with the dead time of the year, when people could possibly be at their most despondent, at their most fearful, particularly before the advent of commercial food production, she would have been this symbol of joy and a symbol of unruliness, but carrying this element of threat, as well the danger of winter. And- and also, that bardic quality of 'open the door if you fail', implying that the poetry is *hard*. It's really hard to be faced with an actual bardic battle. And whilst that isn't necessarily what people do anymore, people tend to use the verses that have been recorded, and they will sing them backwards and forth. And, to all of the Mari Lwyd events I've been to, and I've been to *a lot* in the last 20 years, *that's* what tends to happen. But I have, on occasions, been to a particular event where the bard- where the pwnco is within the moment, and you have to make it up. And it's really difficult. And that demonstrates how incredible the bards were at being able to rhyme on the spot, you know? And I think that's a- a particularly powerful talent of one's creativity. So, all of those lovely things went into the- the

idea of the Mari Lwyd being something that was- that could be incorporated into our Druidic practice. But of course we didn't have a dead horse at hand, you know. It's like, where do you get a dead horse's skull from? So, we talked and we talked about this for years and years and years. The core group of the order. Uh, until one day, I think it was around 2010, I think 2011 maybe, uh, one of our committee members, Barry, he found this dead horse's head on eBay. And the story that came with it was compelling in and of itself. It was, it had been in an artist's studio, painted in all kinds of garish colors, but loved— absolutely loved. And she'd inherited it from her mother, who was also an artist, who had found this skull on Dartmoor. So, this was a Dartmoor wild pony that, you know, as they do, just died wild. Whereas now, I guess they might get cleared, but you're probably talking about the 1930s, '40s when this lady found this head and passed it to her daughter, who then passed it on to her daughter, who wasn't an artist and didn't feel that she could do anything with this head, so she- she sold it. But she's pleased and also quite touched by the fact that the head isn't just an ornament – that Barry explained to her what would happen to this head. So, I think she was quite excited by the thought of that. So, suddenly, we find that we had a head. But then you've got a head; what the hell do you do with this head? How do you bring that dead thing to life? So, Barry did a- significantly more research than I did on how to articulate her, how to prepare her. He spoke to other Mari Lwyd troops because there were more and more and more of these troops coming into being, culminating in the Chepstow Wassail and Mari Lwyd, which ran for a number of years until it stopped just before the pandemic, and it's just restarted. Where all of that, well, you know, *a lot* of Mari Lwyds from Wales will gather at Chepstow, and there's this huge event, which is fabulous, and we went for a number of years in the last decade, and um, until, of course, we came to the conclusion that actually not only is she a folkloric, she's of folkloric importance to Wales and Welsh culture. The *horse* and the figure of the horse is also important to us in contemporary western Druidry, particularly in relation to the archetypes that have an association with horses, so, Rhiannon being the primary one within our tradition. So, it made sense for us to incorporate the Mari Lwyd as an iteration of the sovereignty that Rhiannon expresses, and- and it worked beautifully. And people kind of get it, you know? They're like, oh yeah, there we go, here's the- the great queen, the great mother, but in her winter guise. So initially, we just started to incorporate the Mari Lwyd into our winter solstice rituals at Bryn Celli Ddu, and, and what- I think what struck me the most was how people responded to it. We were already garnering a fair crowd for summer and winter solstice; it amazed me how many local people were just so overjoyed that the Mari Lwyd was there and were compelled to come again and again. They- they really enjoyed it. And we know that there was a Mari Lwyd here on Anglesey around about the 1920s, and that was in Llangadwaladr, which is only around the corner from where I'm currently sitting. But we don't know anything else. There was nothing much recorded other than there was a Mari Lwyd. And, and I don't think that's unusual, because when you read one of the first accounts of the Mari Lwyd, historically speaking, it was a book by I forget the man's name, but it was called um, *A Tour Through a Part of North Wales*. And he describes the Mari Lwyd tradition in what is the town of Ruthin, the market town of Ruthin, well, that's North East Wales. That isn't the South

West of Wales where that stronghold of the Mari Lwyd has been perpetuated for a long time. He was describing it in North Wales. So, and you'll often get people going, oh, it wasn't a North Walian tradition. And you're like, yeah, but when you read the history books, actually it was. It seems as if it was prevalent in most agricultural areas or pastoral areas. And there's certainly a record of there having been one here on Anglesey. So we wanted to not only incorporate her into ritual, but we also wanted to incorporate her into the secular folkloric aspect of our community, which we've been doing now um, only for a few years since the pandemic, by taking the Mari Lwyd to Beaumaris on Hen Galan, or Old New Year, and the response has been absolutely remarkable. Not only from the town council themselves, who have always been somewhat concerned that Beaumaris has only ever attracted Anglicised events. And, they've been keen on having something specifically Welsh within the town. So, we've had the full backing of the Beaumaris town council, because it's brought 2-300 people to the event who are then partaking of the taverns, the restaurants, the hotels, and adding to the island's economy as well. So, which is lovely. And then, last year we started – we've got a couple of school teachers who are members of the order. So, they wanted to offer a children's mini Mari Lwyd-making workshop. 45 kids came to it! It was the first time we ran it, and all of these kids came, and they just had a blast. And- and whilst it is facilitated by the Anglesey Druid Order, it isn't specifically about Druidry. It's about this folk figure that we love and adore having as not only part of our order, but also part of our *culture*. And, and it feels, from the Hen Galan event, that we've managed to bridge that if people have presumed or wrongly assumed that there's a chasm between what is contemporary Western Druidry and Welsh culture – there really isn't, because we incorporate so much of our folklore into it. And, that folklore doesn't belong to us; it belongs to *all* of us. It belongs *to* the people, to the Cymry. And so, if we've got something that's representative of that folklore, like a dead horse, then it seems utterly selfish for us to just keep it to ourselves. But rather, let's share it with the community. So- so, she's become something much bigger than what we had originally anticipated, you know, as in, 'oh, let's have something that is totemic or a guise of the winter queen of the sovereignty of Rhiannon in winter', which is entirely our invention. And she's become something that the community have fallen in love with. And I love that in return. It's fabulous."

J.B.: "Thank you. Uh, I also have a soft spot for Mari Lwyd. I've got one over here that I take out for charity events around Solstice time. So, um, are there any other cultural traditions besides Mari Lwyd that- that the Urdd has been involved in reviving, or continuing, or making more accessible to the greater public?"

K.H.: "Um. Yes, but unfortunately, because there's a number of folkloric customs and traditions throughout Wales, and it's very difficult to not only be able to pick something that you'd want to focus on, but then also find a person who is going to be able to invest time to develop the idea within the structure of the order. And, thankfully, there are more and more people now who do have um, an attraction towards other folk customs, but for a number of years, it was

predominantly down to the main six people who run the order. So, and we were having to be very selective, owing simply to the fact that all of these people are volunteers. You know, they've all got full time jobs; they all live several hours away from the island, so it's been very difficult to pick and choose which one. So, we've had to go with the things that have resonated the most with the six people at the core of the order. And, one of those, probably because of my influence as having been a death service professional for over 30 years, are the- the mynwenta practices of Calan Gaeaf. So, the folk tradition of creating solod, of visiting cemeteries at particular times of the year. Again, it involves bardism; it involves verse and the singing of verses, or the singing of particular songs that are relevant to Calan Gaeaf. And these are found in the various, um, llen gwerin, you know, the folk traditions and literature of Wales. And there are various— the one that I've referenced the most is Llyfr Gwerin Llengwerin Sir Garnarfon, or the folklore of the county of Caernarfon, which also kind of encompassed Anglesey. And, there are a lot of traditions in there from the Ladi Wen, the Hwch Ddu Gwta, the solod, the Coelcerthi, the bonfires, um, elements of divination, elements of prophecy or darogan – all of these, and they're all folk traditions within that particular time frame of Calan Gaeaf, you know, the … of winter, Halloween. So, we've incorporated those fairly successfully over at least the last 20 years from not just an order-specific perspective, but also from a wider secular perspective, by inviting anybody to come along to those particular events. And we've done various iterations of them, trying to differ them every year by incorporating other elements of that folklore into it. So, one year we might have been making solod and explaining what the solod was; other years we might have done a comparative between the folklore of Halloween in Wales, but also the folkloric practices that you see in other countries like Mexico and its Días de los Muertos, is really similar, really similar to what the Irish and what the Welsh practiced as wel, you knowl. And this was something that we practiced significantly prior to the two World Wars. And it seems, and that's the same for the Mari Lwyd as well, it seems that after, or maybe between World War I and World War II, those practices seemed to diminish. And, I would hasten to guess that that was probably because death was in everything that people saw; that's all they witnessed, that’s all they saw was death. The death of so many of our men were just killed, wiped off the face of the earth, and for a lot of these traditions, and I don't think it was in any shape or form misogynistic or chauvinistic, but it was the men folk who seemed to perpetuate these traditions. It was usually a man under the Mari Lwyd; it was *usually* men that went out with the Mari Lwyd, but that wasn't to the exclusion of women. They were certainly there and a part of it, but it seemed as if they had a- a role in maintaining those traditions. And, when so many of them died, and everybody else is just left with all of this grief, maybe they didn't want to focus on those things anymore. Maybe that's why, to hasten a guess, um, why these practices seemed to fall off and go to sleep after the Second World War, only to then be revived much later. You know, you're talking about the '90s and into the 2000s, particularly with the Mari Lwyd. Her reviving is fairly recent, and so, so yes, there are other- there's a lot of other folk practices, particularly folk magic, of which there's a *lot* of documentation, and a lot of- of written, not only written accounts of folk magic, but also whole books that describe how to invoke the Tylwyth Teg or, you know, how to

appease or please the Tylwyth Teg. They're all there, and now we have people who have an appeal towards those things. They're attracted to those ideas, who are bringing *those* elements of folklore into the Order as well, offering, you know, workshops or offering classes or the actual *doing* of these folkloric practices. So, as our membership increases, so does the chance of more and more people who are, who have an expertise perhaps, or who have an attraction towards those things. Then they're coming forward and incorporating them into our practice, you know."

J.B.: "Great! Thank you. Um, what are your thoughts on Neo-Pagans and Druids performing Welsh traditions like the Mori Lwyd, or Calennig, or the Nos Galan Gaeaf, uh, ancestor offerings outside of Cymru?"

K.H.: "So, I think that's a fairly loaded question, and I don't think there could be, uh, a succinct answer to it, because I've spoken to a lot of people, and I've been on various panels about this over the years, and- and I think it depends on the person's perspective and also their involvement within these traditions. So, as somebody who *is* involved in those traditions, I'm aware of other Mari Lwyd tropes and other people who practice Welsh folkloric components as a part of contemporary Western Paganism, and I've seen elements of that that have been problematic, and elements of that that have been very respectful. And I think, as somebody who is vested in those things, then, that gives me a responsibility, and then I, because of my platform, have the ability to respond to that and maybe inform, and I try and do it as kindly as I possibly can and by telling people if you are going to incorporate things like the Mari Lwyd into your practice and you're in the U.S., for instance, then don't- don't eliminate elements of that practice which are essential to its well-being, uh, because then that does fall into appropriation rather than appreciation. So, one of the Mari Lwyd tropes up in New Paltz, New York, in upstate New York, they just recently two years ago got their own Mari Lwyd, and so I consulted with them. I said well, here are the pwnco, here's where you need to go, go to Track Cymru, buy their kit, you know it's got a CD, it's got the books, it's got all the stuff in it. Go to Track; go and read Rhiannon Ifan's book you know um, *Stars and Ribbons,* I think it's called *Stars and Ribbons*, isn't it? And go and read that you know, go and read this, go and whatever. And I've always offered to people, if you want, I'll just sit down with you on a Zoom, and I'll sing you the pwnco, so at least you can hear it from a native perspective, you can record it on your Zoom, or if I see you in person you can record it on your phone and then practice it! And, you know, and so that you honor the actual heart of the tradition, and of course with the Mari Lwyd, the heart of that tradition is the pwnco, so eliminating the pwnco is to denigrate the Mari Lwyd, so there are some people who have got very, very, very high opinions of this but aren't necessarily vested in the tradition either. They're not involved in it, but they have an opinion, you know, and I think, well, actually, we can also be kind. We shouldn't gatekeep the tradition, because there's evidently iterations of that tradition in other Celtic nations. And there are people around the world who feel a connection to it, but there's a way in doing it which bridges that chasm between appropriation and appreciation.

And I think if a Welsh person has a problem with the way somebody else is doing something, there's no point bitching about it to other people or on Facebook. Ask these people if they want your help, because we can help them. Um, ask them if they would like to talk about it, and I think for me personally, I think opening channels of dialogue with those people is significantly more important than just being hostile towards them. As in, you know, 'this is our culture and you can't have it!' It's like, well, you know, we might have been guardians of this culture, but I don't think it's a possession. I think there's still inspiration to be had in it and that other people can be inspired by its practice. But I think that there's a correct and nice way of doing that that honours Welsh culture and doesn't denigrate it for 'oh, look at this ancient, mysterious thing that we've got!' It's like, well, no, learn about it and just ask a Welsh person; we'll always help. You know, and if you're struggling with your pronunciation, ask us, and we'll help you. And so, with the people from New Paltz, I sat with them on a Zoom for a couple of hours, and we just ran through it, and they got it really well. You know? They really got it down to a T, and then they taught their troop. So, when they go into whatever environment— a tavern, a restaurant, a bar— they start it in Welsh; they always start it in Welsh, they do the pwnco in Welsh, and then they'll go into an English pwnco, and that's absolutely fine. Because we do the same, we alternate ours, you know. So, in our public ones, we might have the call in Welsh and the response in English, or the call in English, the response in Welsh, and we'll alternate it and play it so that it doesn't exclude anyone, but that it still honors the- the heart of the tradition, which I think is really important. So, but yeah, I love it. I love seeing the different Maris all over the world, and- and when I do see them, I will invariably try and reach out to them and ask them, do you need help? Do you need any advice? Do you need pointers in certain directions? You know? Because to me that's the right thing to do, rather than gatekeep it."

J.B.: "Okay, thank you for sharing that. Um… Uh, so we were talking about, um, these cultural traditions and Welsh culture, as you obviously know, is a modern, living, multifaceted culture. But modern Druidry and Celtic Neo-Paganism tends to focus on traditions that are older, like over a century old usually, whether it's pre-Christian when that's accessible, or medieval, early modern, Victorian. Um, and often these are either, as you had mentioned earlier, they're either kind of diminished to smaller um groups than perhaps were previously engaged in it in the current day or possibly even limited to the Neo-Pagan community, such as things like folk magic and stuff. Do you feel that a tradition's antiquity makes it more valuable in a neopagan or Druidic practice?"

K.H.: "I think that's a million dollar question, and I think that that question possibly has more relevance to people within contemporary Western Paganism who are starting anew within uh, an anglophonic culture that doesn't necessarily have living traditions within them. And- and it's very difficult for somebody, particularly like myself from Wales, to feel or consider Neo-Paganism to need this authentication from the past, because, uh, my culture is alive and has always been alive. And whilst 2,000 years ago my culture was certainly Pagan, for the last 1, 400 years we've been

Christian. But, elements of the folk practice have still been alive within Christianity and within Christian Welsh culture. So, I've never felt as if us pulling on folkloric components from our past is a method of authenticating, but rather a method of continuation. It's that the way the Mari Lwyd is being used today. So if you saw how she's being used at the Chepstow Wassail and Mari Lwyd is very, very different to how it would have been practiced 120 years ago. And yet these are Welsh people with their own Maris in the 21st century. And- and I don't think, and I've had a lot of conversations with these people, and we don't believe that we need that authenticity from the past, because the tradition has always been there. And whether it was asleep for a few decades is kind of irrelevant because it was still there. It was a part of our culture, part of our identity, and the fact that we work with those elements now feels pertinent to us, because we all felt as if we needed the Mari Lwyd to be a part of our tradition, but not to give us an authentic bridge to the past, because we're not using her in the same way as the past. And, and as somebody who lives here in a living culture, that authentication doesn't feel necessary because we are those people. They- those people are in our soil. Their words are still in books and on parchment, and we are their descendants. So to us, it just feels like it's a natural, not even a borrowing. And I remember having this conversation with Dr. Gwilym Morus-Baird about, I'm trying to think what it was in relation to now, and I can't quite recall, because I've had a lot of conversations with Dr. Morus-Baird over the years. And what the hell was it? I think it was something about the Taliesin tradition, I think, or the school of Bardism. And I asked, oh Gods, if only I could remember. What the hell was it? But anyway, I asked him, is it all right for me to do this in this particular way? And he looked at me aghast, and he said, well, it's yours! He said, you can do with it whatever you want; it's yours; it belongs to you – your ancestors didn't just write it with a full stop at the end. They wrote it *for* you. They wrote it *for* their people, and you *are* their people! And, I think for the first time, I had this lightbulb moment of- oh yeah, it is! So, I know sometimes people will say we're borrowing something from the past, that it might make our tradition feel more authentic, but we're not borrowing anything from anyone, because it's ours to begin with."

J.B.: "It's already yours."

K.H.: "It's, yeah, and I think the- the clue to that is in the word, whether it's Welsh or in English, it's in the word *gwerin* – it's in the word *folk* – it's *of* the people. And, and whilst, you know, nobody *owns* this; nobody has a certificate of *ownership*, but, it's a cultural treasure, and we're still a part of that culture. So, so I've never felt the need to- we have to have this folkloric component, because it will authenticate what we do, because of its antiquity, but rather, because it's a legacy from our ancestors. And, legacies only work if you keep them alive in order to pass them on again. So, so, to us, particularly within the Anglesey Druid Order, we consider that these elements and the way that *we* use them are seeds that we plant for the future. So that the kids who come to the Mari Lwyd events will end up doing their own Mari Lwyds, and of course, we're not going to be sitting there in twenty years' time going 'oh, well, that was *our* idea!'

That's- that defeats the object entirely. It's the- that there are seeds of these wisdoms, because, there is something that pulls us and attracts us and draws us to these figures, these elements of our folklore. And, we don't necessarily know why, and most people might not even be able to articulate why, but I think it's because we remember. There's a part of our cultural memory that just remembers that these things were important to us, and that they're coming back, I think, highlights their importance to the people. And, and I love it, I just love seeing all of these things popping up all over the place. But, do I feel that a tradition's antiquity makes it more valuable? No. No, not at all. I think it's- I think it- the value of the tradition is utterly dependent on the meaning that people derive from that tradition. You know, and having had twenty-five years to the Anglesey Druid Order now, and whilst, yes, we have horses, and we have this, and we have all sorts of shenanigans that goes on, ultimately, the biggest pleasure and the gift, to me, by means of the Order, is when I see the profound relationships that people have within the community, and the deep, deep friendships and kin-ness that they feel towards one another. And um, and sometimes, that kind of like catches in my throat, because a part of me stops, you know, and kind of thinks, well we did that. You know, we did that; we facilitated that. And, um, and it's that sense of community – I know community's probably something very different today in the way that we define it to how the people like, here, in this parish defined it a hundred years ago. Now, we have more of a global village, a global community. But, even though we're miles and miles apart, some members of the Order, there's that connection that people have, that longing for that village, that feel of that village. So, things like the Mari Lwyd and the other folk practices, like of Halloween and, you know, Summer Solstice, and all of these things, I think, are reminiscent of that village feel that we still long for. We've just replaced that village with Facebook, and X, and Instagram, but essentially, we're still creating and longing for those villages where people gather and celebrate, and that it's *that* that really matters. It's the celebrating of the cycles of life, and so things like the Mari Lwyd, of course, represents death in life, and that fear and anxiety that people would have felt in winter, and of course, we've lost that because we have supermarkets and centrally heated homes. So, and I, but I'm also aware that within contemporary Western paganism, in particular, there has been maybe not so much now. I think people are becoming a little bit more wise, I hope. There had to be something to authenticate a tradition from antiquity, or it wasn't valid. But I think that came from the fact that contemporary Western paganism is new, and because it was new, people carried an anxiety that if it's new, it must be worthless, or it must mean less. But that's not true at all; Christianity was new, and there was huge kickback against that. Islam was new. Stonehenge was new. You know, and we know that that woman down the road in Devices would have looked at those people in Stonehenge and thought, what the hell are they doing? You know, and then two years later she's down there selling wormwood on the winter solstice, you know, because it's brought the people together. And so I think people will always have a problem with newness, but if we can be sure of anything throughout all of time, that newness is steadfast. Newness and change will always happen and that you don't have to be in apostolic succession to a far distant Druid to authenticate your tradition. And um, and whilst I probably, in all likelihood, my genetics show that I'm 100%

British, so I've probably got Druid ancestors whose bones are buried in the soil of this island. But does that make me more of a Druid? No, not at all, because I'm still a Druid in the ADO, and I'm a Druid in the Gorsedd of the Bards. And, that has- that… it doesn't *matter* whether my ancestors were Druids and are buried in the soil. It's *how* that Druidry enables me to be my authentic self in the now and not having to obsess about how the past authenticates that. The past is important to us, obviously, because we- we take inspiration from it. But, we've never been dead. My culture never died; it never went anywhere. It's still here; it's still maintained; it still continues. So, I always feel that when I hear other people, particularly in like the noughties and the nineties, Wiccans in particular, who had to have a sense of apostolic succession and antiquity to authenticate the present. And, I've never felt that, so I've just thought, well, we didn't die; we didn't go anywhere. We're just here; we're still carrying on. So, so yeah, maybe I'm not the right person to answer that question, or maybe I've answered it perfectly, I don't know."

J.B.: "That's a great answer, I think. Thank you. Uh, we are coming up on an hour soon; do you need to take a break?'

K.H.: "No, I've got my water there, I've got my vape here, I'm fine."

J.B.: "Oh, okay. Uh… In your recent book, The Book of Druidry, you list Diwrnod Santes Dwynwen, and Dydd Dewi Sant as days in your modern Welsh Druidry's version of the Wheel of the Year. And, you state that St. Dwynwen quote "has been adopted in a Neo-Pagan sense as a goddess". And, you also posted a short video last year in May about St. Melangell on Facebook. Um, can you share with us what draws you to recognize some of the Welsh Christian saints in your Druidic practice, like Dewi, and Dwynwen, and Melangell, and- but not necessarily others like Beuno or Tysilio?"

K.H.: "Well, I certainly do honour Sant Tysilio, because he's very much local. So I think, it's um, again, well, there's a fabulous book that was written by um, Jane, what's her name? She's at the Trinity St David's University."

J.B.: "Jane Cartwright. She's the chair of Celtic Studies."

K.H.: "Yes, yes. She wrote a- yeah, she wrote a…"

J.B.: "She told me to interview you."

K.H.: "Oh right, yeah, yeah, of course, of course, yeah. So she wrote a fabulous book about female saints in Wales. And, I- I think that, and just female saints, right, of which there are millions of them. They're literally falling out of stonework all over Wales. Huge exaggeration, but there are a lot of them, so many of them. And then when it comes, and she didn't even touch

much on the male saints, and there's a bucket full of those as well. We have saints literally *everywhere*. They're all *over* the place. So I live next to the parish of Llangadwaladr; so, Llangadwaladr was the parish of the- of St. Cadwaladr. Llangeinwen is just around the corner, where the Order's Grove is; so that's the parish of St. Ceinwen. Ceinwen is the sister of Dwynwen, and it's the same just, just on Anglesey. We have dozens and dozens of these saints. And what fascinates me about Welsh saints in particular that none of them are acknowledged by the Vatican Church, you know? Well, hardly. There may be the one or two; I don't really know, but, the majority of them are not acknowledged as actual saints within, you know, the Catholic Church. And these are Celtic saints. These are figures that were of importance to this culture and to my people. And, and I find them absolutely fascinating in that when you scratch the surface of them, you see something else, you know? So one of the saints that, in my, um, I do incorporate her into some elements of the Order, but again, I think when people don't see a particular saint popping up in the order, it's probably because *I* don't have the time. You know. It's like as simple as that; it's like logistics of who, which one of us has got the time to- to dedicate all of our studies to this particular saint and do something with it. And um, but there are some, you know, so Dwynwen is one that we do talk about. Um, Melangell is another one that we talk about. Tysilio, Ceinwen, Cadwaladr— there's a few of them that crop up every now and again within the works of the Order. But one in particular that I feel an affinity for, simply because of where I was brought up. So my mother's side come from Anglesey; my father's side come from the mainland. And so still, a lot of my family are in the Llanberis, Caernarfon area, and one of the saints there is um, Saint Helen or Elen Luyddog from the Mabinogi in the Dream of Maxen Wledig. And Saint Helen, she's got, you know, tenuous perhaps associations with Saint Helena, with Helen of Troy. And, maybe those have been conflated and exaggerated over the centuries, but she's certainly there. And, she was a very, very important figure in the Celtic Christian church. But, when you scratch at the surface of her, there seems to be something older there. Not that we've got any particular proof of that, but just even looking at the way she's described within the Dream of Maxen Wledig, there's like an echo or a hint of something else. And, was that something else or the divine feminine? And if it was the divine feminine, was the presence of that divine feminine influence within the landscape and within the culture so powerful and so needed that it had to be syncretically adopted into medieval Christian culture and, you know, and into modernity as a Christianized saint within the Celtic church. And- and, I would probably hasten to guess that that's exactly what's happened, that so many of these saints have older iterations. They're reflective of something older. So even what we know of Santes Dwynwen, who's been adopted fairly recently only in the last couple of centuries into Welsh modern culture. And yes, there's some folklore regarding Santes Dwynwen, but swathes of that folklore also come from Iolo Morganwg. And, you know, we *know* what Iolo Morganwg was like. Did he make that up? Did he find it somewhere else? Did he just invent it? But, we've still incorporated it into both Christian and Pagan thinking. And, so again, I think it's that question of is it new? Is it old? Does it really matter if it's one or the other? Or does it matter more as to what that figure can offer an individual or a group of people? There are churches dedicated to St. Helen, to Elen,

you know, around the Caernarfon area. She's described in very similar ways in the Mabinogi to the way that Aranrhod is described. And, she evidently has supernatural qualities to her in the Mabinogi in the way that she's able to communicate with Maxen through dreams. And- and then she's in the triads, you know, and the triads are old. The triads are older than the Mabinogi. And, you see these echoes of Elen in there, you know, in the three levees that are part of the Islands of Britain and all of that gorgeous history that are locked into the triads. So, she was obviously important. And, to me, I just think if something's important, you're not going to get rid of it. You're going to assimilate it into whatever you're doing. And, had she not have been assimilated into the Christian church, we may have lost her forever, but, because she was assimilated and because Santes Dwynwen kind of had the same fate, they're still her. And- and, for me as a Druid, as a Pagan, as an occultist, I believe as an occultist that there are other forces at play there, not just the will of mankind. But that these are elements of the very story of this land, and the land is, telling us the story, and we're interpreting those stories depending on time, culture, language, peoples, politics, socio-religious communities, and that we're interpreting them, and then bringing them to life in a way that is meaningful. And the Christians did that with- with, you know, Saint Melangell, with Dewi, with all of these saints, because I think they were important to us in the deep past, and they're still made relevant by their preservation in Christianity. So to us, when we – I don't think I'd use the word reclaim, because that sounds as if you're taking something back and accusing somebody of not having really owned it in the first place, and I think that's bollocks. But, I think it's more, it- to me, it's not a problem that we see Dwynwen as a goddess within Neo-Paganism, because that's how she's made relevant to us in the same way that she was relevant to the Christians who decided that she was a saint when she probably wasn't previously. But they made her into a saint. And, they didn't need anybody's permission to do that; they just did it, because it felt right. And I think the way these change, so I see Elen, I see her as both a saint within my culture and as a goddess within my Paganism, and that they're not in diametrical opposition because if it wasn't for the Christians, we'd have lost her. So, I honor the fact that she's also a saint because Christianity is a part of my heritage, you know, part of my history, and I can't denounce that because that would be immoral and highly dishonorable to my culture because we were Christians for a very, very long time."

J.B.: "Okay. And, regarding that, in your culture, do you find that there's any sort of pattern, or is it like, how is it that you decide which elements of your culture to incorporate into your Druidic practice, and which to kind of just leave to secular life?"

K.H.: "Um, I'm not sure whether I differentiate… them."

J.B.: "Or is there even really a [gestures *separation*] necessarily separate category?"

K.H.: "Yeah… I don't, I don't think I can separate them, because, I think again, you know, I might sound like a broken record, but… when you look at the Mari Lwyd, she is both a secular

and um, sublime aspect of our culture, and, and I think that's true for huge swathes of our folkloric traditions as well, that they appeal to storytellers who are just storytellers, and whose primary objective in life is just to tell stories. And, that they're just as important to somebody who's a bard who might also be a Pagan Druid, and, so, I don't think that I've ever considered or classified one as having more relevance to my Pagan aspect or my secular aspect, because, ultimately, they're still facets of my culture. I think it's- I think the only main difference, I guess, is that the Order has a platform in which to broadcast that particular tradition to a larger audience than just myself, and bring those things to the attention of people who may have forgotten about them. And, we certainly forgot about the Mari Lwyd for a number of decades, and when it comes to our folkloric practices, we've forgotten huge, huge, huge swathes of them. So, I think the aim of incorporating those into the Order is that we can then reintroduce them back into the wider community as to, 'Oh my gosh, did you know that our people used to do this?' and most people's answer to that is 'No! I didn't know! That's fabulous!' you know, 'Can *we* do it?' and then our answer to that is, like, 'It's yours, sweetie!' you know," [J.B.: "Of course you can!"] "'It's yours, use it'. You know. There you go, and sometimes, I think it's more of a- because we use it as part of our philosophy, you know, of reclaiming, of remembering – let's see if I can get the order right, now. Reclaiming, remembering, renewing. So, cofio, atgofio, adnewyddio. And, and I think the adnewyddio bit is the most important element, because we can remember things simply from reading a book in a library, from somebody who wrote about the folk traditions of Clwyd, you know, in the 1800s, and we can then reclaim those elements by bandying about with a group of people and get like, 'Hey, let's do *this* on Halloween; let's do *this* on Bonfire Night!' And that's reclaiming it, but I think the renewing is the important aspect and component, which then makes it meaningful to people within those communities. So, we've got, currently, a bunch- and they're- these are secular people, they have, as far as I'm aware, no inclination towards Neo-Paganism, they're in the village of Llangoed adjacent to Beaumaris, and they found that there used to be a well in Llangoed that was dressed in a particular way at a particular time of year. So, they found this in, you know, folkloric records, and they were like, 'Oh, this is amazing! Why did people do this?' So they looked into it, and they looked into the- because, the well was so important, they didn't really have taps! You know. We- we had community wells and springs. And then, so, on [?] hill, they actually found this- this spring, this well, that was completely overgrown. Nobody even knew it existed; it had fallen out of memory. So they found it, they reclaimed it, but then they reclaimed that tradition. And, now, they're doing amazing things, they got the community involved, and they've tidied up this spring, and people have pride in it, because it's such a- a beautiful part of their village's history. So, they've renewed it, and um, and that's what- and, they don't need to be Druids, they don't need to be Pagans, they don't need to be anything, scholars or anything in between. It's people reclaiming traditions of the people, and- and that really warms my heart to see that renewal. So, I think the remembering is important, the reclaiming is important, but, I think it's the renewing that brings meaning and value."

J.B.: “Okay, thank you. Um, back in 2014, uh, you did an interview with American OBOD Druid John Beckett, if you recall.”

K.H.: “I did.”

J.B.: “And you said ‘we’, meaning the members of Urdd Derwyddon Môn, ‘could not fathom how one could be in a relationship with Môn fully without actually being here, walking on her skin and swimming in her waters. We have absolutely no plans on creating a correspondence course’. And then, of course, nine years later, in 2023, you began hosting year-long online correspondence Awenyddion membership courses to join Urdd Derwyddon Môn. Could you please share with us what led you and the other members of the Urdd to change your minds about distance membership in the Order and building a relationship with Môn and Welsh culture from physical distance?”

K.H.: “Yes, we had absolutely no plans whatsoever. And, I've always been somewhat of a technophobe as well. So, just the idea alone terrified me and made my blood run cold.
I'm like, no, no, no, no, no, I'm never going to do that. I'm never, ever going to do that. Nothing's going to ever change my mind. Never doing that. And um, it just filled me with just utmost existential dread with thoughts of, oh my Gods. I couldn't even fathom it, and- and, we were kind of, most of us, most of all of us, but most of us were okay; fair enough, reluctantly agreeing with me maybe. And um, because to us, it was, because our relationship with the Order has been *so* locality-specific. So, when you consider other Druid orders: OBOD, the BDO, the TDN, or ADF, all of these, they're not locality specific. It's just a Druidry that you can do wherever you are. But we were always the *Anglesey* Druid Order. So, we were kind of limited and restricted to an island surrounded by water, in a place where so many people had come, immersed themselves in the- the events, the workshops, and classes and stuff that we did, and fell in love not only with each other but also fell in love with a place. And, that was so *valuable* to us, to see these people develop, and that still is to this day. We still run a residential course that starts in June, and so we have a residential course that's continuously run, you know, every year in our school. And, again, like I said earlier on, the biggest joy for me is seeing those people falling in love with a place, but also falling in love with each other. That's just so lovely, seeing these fronds of lifelong friendships being forged, you know. And of course, that informed our relationship with the way we saw the Order and the way in which we saw the Order going. And, that- that's how it was for, you know, nearly, well, 20 years. That's how it was. That's how we felt. And then the pandemic happened; the pandemic changed everything because the Order wasn't able to come together. We couldn't come for ritual. We couldn't — the community itself felt fractured, because nobody all over the world — we were all in the same boat – and, we were like, what the hell are we gonna do? Because, we longed for that, and we craved that connection. And, and of course, what we realised was that whilst that connection that we have to the island was really, and is important to us, it was also of great importance — the connection that we had to these other people.

And suddenly, we didn't have that. None of us had that. And, so, we turned to what everybody else turned to, to Zoom. You know, and of course that story isn't original for us. That's the story of Gods knows how many millions of people out there. And, I was very sceptical. I thought, oh, we're gonna do these rituals online. They're not gonna work. I thought, how is it gonna work? But then I had to eat humble pie with lashings of custard over it because it did work. And, we were in community, and we could see each other. And, we could engage, and we could share, and we could cry and talk about our woes, and the trauma of what was happening to the world. And- and, I remember sitting in my office at home in one of these online rituals, and my people were there. We were there; we were together; we were connected. And then Barry, you know, sometimes he can appear a little bit cynical, but he always comes out with pearls of wisdom, you know. And he said, had the ancient Druids have had this technology, they'd have used it. You know. I'm like, of course they would have. And- and then, as we did more rituals, predominantly they were rituals online. And then I did a couple of classes, and somebody did a workshop here and there. And, I started to appreciate the value of it. So, we sat down, we talked about it, and it was apparent, and you know, that- and, it genuinely was how we felt for 20 years. That's how we felt, because we were a people here on a land very locality specific. But then, I think what the pandemic taught us was the fact that wisdom in and of itself can transcend locality; it can transcend place. Wisdom is something that we use to seed the future with that wisdom, and to hopefully place the future in accordance with that wisdom. Um, and that was a bit of a- an eye-opener. And it blew my mind a bit. It's like, well, of course we can share what we do. It's still connected to the island, you know, and as you know, so many of those people have actually come *to* the island, and that's meant something deeply to them, to have been here, to have come here, to have stood in a maelstrom of hailstones, in initiation ceremonies and stuff. You know, it's- it's… To see those faces knowing that they feel a connection to a community that they only ever really engaged with virtually post-pandemic, doesn't negate the value of that or the worth of that. And, and we all realized that we weren't *wrong* in thinking the way that we thought, because that was our only point of reference, really, was this land. And, the pandemic taught us- I think it taught many of us a lot of lessons, and to us, it was the fact that we can share that wisdom with other people in the hope that they will take that wisdom and share it with others, and add to it and, contribute to the community of the Order knowing that that community is not just physical. And, I think from an occulted perspective, it's quite a powerful thing, because these things, like even this now, is happening between worlds, you know? Spanning oceans, spanning timezones, and we can do that with this magic that we've got, that we call 'Zoom', or the internet, and that's- and of course our ancestors would- our ancestors would've used any technology that they had available to them. Um, it's what people do, it's why we have technology. Um, so yeah, we- we did have that opinion, very much so, and, we were very like no, no, no, and I certainly was like, 'No, I'm not doin' it; I'm not doin' it!' and then until I realized its value and worth. But, I think had the pandemic not have happened, uh, we would've probably still been toeing that same line, you know. I think, sometimes, it takes something to shake the foundations of something, to cause bubbles of influence to inspire people in the

moment. And whilst the pan- you know, the pandemic traumatized me, for the rest of my life. I've been traumatized by it, you know, I was a death service professional. I've never experienced anything like it in my life and never want to experience anything like it again. And, and, that's true of so many people on this planet who've been traumatized for life by what happened in those two dreadful years, and I think the way we rebuild from that is by changing and renewing the very foundations of what we thought to be stable and true. And… finding some healing in that, perhaps, you know?"

J.B.: "Yeah, the momentous change in how things have happened."

K.H.: "Yeah."

J.B.: "And it, yeah, it impacted a lot of different ways. Um, so, I've been, before these interviews, I for some months was conducting a- a written survey of Neo-Pagans who incorporate Welsh culture into their practice, and over 90 percent of them responded that they believe learning the Welsh language can be an act of spiritual or religious devotion." [K.H.: "Yay!"] "Do you view, yes, do you view the use, uh, learning, or teaching of the Welsh language as an act of spiritual or religious devotion yourself?"

K.H.: "I do, yes, I do. I think it's um- I think it not only pushes one's own boundaries of comfortability and vulnerability; it also honours the roots of whatever you're using. So, an example that I would use for myself, which is not Celtic *per se*, is that I have a connection to Santísima Muerte, and I was introduced to Santa Muerte when I worked in Los Angeles by the Hispanic community that I worked with at the coroner's office. And, I was intrigued to see this skeletal figure on these shrines and altars that people had on their desks and, you know, in places within their workplace. I'm like, who is this? Is this the Grim Reaper, you know, in my innocence and naivety? And they introduced me to Santa Muerte and, of course, by now I know an *awful* lot about Santa Muerte and who she is, what she represents. You know, 20 to 25 million people are devotees of Santísima Muerte in Mexico alone, (gasps) 20 to 25 million people – *not* in any shape or form condoned by the Roman Catholic Church, and yet these are predominantly Catholics, right, who have this connection to Santa Muerte. And, I've always felt, um, a particular devotion towards Santa Muerte. I have a shrine to her at home, and that's because of the influence of my Hispanic friends in Los Angeles, uh, who were all Hispanic or Mexicans. And um, so when I got home, I'm like, so how do I incorporate that into my practice? Because yes, the predominant origins of Santa Muerte come from Mexico, but by now she's a global phenomenon to different cultures, you know, because it's death, and death transcends cultures. And yet, she has these very, very strong cultural roots in Hispanic language and culture. And, it's important for me to be able to honour those roots. So, on my shrine, so I was initiated into the Templo Internacionale Santísima Muerte in 2019 in Mexico City, and um, and, it was an amazing moment. They acknowledged that you are a devotee of Santa Muerte; you are one of her

children; you are welcome in our temple at any time. And, they initiated me into the temple, and it was like the most touching, most moving thing, because she does represent people on the outside. She represents, you know, the homeless, criminals, homosexuals, um, drug addicts, people who have never felt that they were a part of community, part of society, people who are vulnerable and um, and people who have lost people, this universal face of death. So every single day, every night, I do devotional activities every single night by my Santísima Muerte shrine, and I always start it in Spanish. And I have a particular prayer, and even to this day I'm not very good at memorising stuff. I have it, it's on a card that the temple gave me. And, in order to get it right, I got the priestess of the temple to recite it into my phone very, very slowly um, so that I could repeat it to the best of my Spanish abilities. Because I'm not Spanish, I don't know a lot of Spanish, but when it comes to my devotional practices with Santa Muerte, to me it's important that not only I honour the roots of the cultures who brought her into being, but that I can also use the language of those people in a way that is honourable. And, to me, the honourable way of doing that is to be able to pronounce it as best as I can. And it might not be perfect; it probably isn't perfect, but it starts that devotional practice off on a good footing for me, because I feel that as I do that, that Santa Muerte kind of goes, do you know what? He's doing his best, you know, and his best is good enough for me. So, I start it in Spanish, and then I revert to speaking to her in Welsh, because that's my language. She's death, right? So she understands Welsh, I'm sure she does. She's a goddess, right? And um- Or she's a saint- she's a saint. But, to me, she's a goddess. And um, and I think the same applies for people who *feel* that sacredness. And I think when you have a sense of that sacredness, that this process of hierophany happens and that when you're in the presence of hierophany, of the sacred bleeding through the mundane and touching you, I think it leads people to honourable actions as best as they can. So, I get people all the time, all the time. I had a person this morning saying, I want to incorporate this into my practices of my devotions to Cerridwen. Is there any chance you can help me by checking that this is correct? Am I honouring? Have I got it wrong? How do I say it? And of course, the beauty of these things is I just click reply using the voice function. And they've got it; they've just got a file. And, and that really makes their day, and hopefully, that also adds something to their devotional practices. And, but I think people can get a little bit locked up in here [taps head], they can overthink it, they're gonna think, 'Oh, I'm doing it all wrong; I'm doing it all wrong', just ask! Ask someone; that's what I did, just asked my Hispanic friends, you know. Is this right? Have I got this totally wrong? And, and, invariably, they will come back and say 'Let me help you get it right', so it feels as if I'm honouring that culture. So, I think the same is- is valid in reverse, about- yes, it's important. I think it *is* really important. Like, when I mentioned earlier about doing the pwnco in Welsh, you know, even if you did, just do, I don't know, four verses, just do four, you know, do- do eight. Do, do, do what you think you can manage to respect that culture, you know, so that we're not just colonizing those practices without any thought for the culture that brought it."

J.B.: "Yes, it's not the Mari Lwyd if you're not singing 'Wel, dyma ni'n dŵad', right?"

K.H.: “Yeah, yeah, exactly.”
J.B.: “You gotta have someone singing *Wel, dyma ni’n dŵad*. Um, let’s see, uh, in the *Book of Druidry*, in Chapter 13, which was titled ‘The Ancestors’, you stated that finding your ancestry was uh, in a list of possible ways to move towards healing inter-generational trauma. And then, you expanded on that by suggesting DNA tests to- which can often result in surprising discoveries about who we are and where we came from. Uh, in the same list, you also said that your tribe can also be those people who you have no blood relation to, but who hold and support the virtues and qualities that define your life. Um, on the surface, these statements seem to be a bit contradictory with one another, because the first supports the significance of DNA or blood ancestry in people’s identity, and the second one de-emphasizes this. Um, so, could you please expand on your thoughts and opinions regarding DNA or blood ancestry in personal identity and how that could help one heal generational trauma in the Welsh Druidic context?”

K.H.: “Yes. So, so, basically, what I’m referring to there, or trying to refer to in a kindly manner, is um, one of the triskele philosophies of the Anglesey Druid Order which I talk about in my *Book of Druidry*. It’s that we have three constitutions, right? So, I’m a Druid; we do everything in threes, right? So, we have the cultural constitution, a worldly constitution, and a psychic constitution. And, whilst they may appear on the surface to be very different things, to us, as Druids, we consider that they all spin out from a central archetypal place, you know, an archetypal ancestral point, and then these three expressions spin out, so that we’ve got a cultural constitution, which might be the culture that we’ve been brought up in, but not necessarily even speak the language, right? Because there are Welsh people who don’t speak Welsh, but they’re still Welsh. They’ve been born here, they’ve been raised here, their ancestors are Welsh, their ancestors are buried in this soil, but they don’t speak Welsh. That doesn’t make them less Welsh than me, just because I speak the language. And, so they have this cultural constitution. But then we have this worldly constitution, or like a physical constitution, where we can do Me and 23 [23 and Me], we can do ancestry.com, and we can find these elements of our physical makeup that pinpoint our ancestry to a particular place, you know, a particular time, a particular people, and- and, that’s the song of our genetics. But then, we have psychic- um, psychic constitution, or a subtle constitution, which I guess you could secularize as everything from species memory to, you know, cultural memory, or um, racial memory perhaps, but as a Druid, I choose to call it my psychic constitution, um, that element of something that we can’t explain. I can’t really explain why I’m drawn towards Santisima Muerte. I can’t really explain it. I have absolutely no genetic connection to Mexico or to California, but I have this pull and this draw, probably because I’m a death service professional, so I have an affinity because of that. Probably because I’m a homosexual, so I have an affinity to her because of that. But, those are elements of me that are very subtle, they’re very difficult to quantify, they’re some of them are very subjective, so, to me, they fall into that category of psychic constitution. And, so, one of my friends, her genetic predisposition is *entirely* southern Europe. So it’s, uh, Italy and Greece. So, you know, like Roman, this is Roman ancestors, right? But, she’s drawn, she’s compelled, and attracted towards

uh, Celtica, and towards the Celtic cultural continuum, which would seem completely anathema, right? To think, what, your ancestors were Romans? But, so were mine! So were- my ancestors were Romans as well, because they came here, they lived here for five centuries, they bred with our people. So, of course there's going to be a bit of Rome in me yet, and even if Me and 23 [sic] can't identify that, there's bound to be some of that in me. And um, and that's a really difficult thing to explain, and I don't think even as an occultist I can explain why does somebody who has *no* cultural link to Wales or Ireland or Scotland or Greece – why do they have this compulsion? And, I think only those people can possibly eventually articulate why that's the case. And, that might be in complete contradiction to what their genes are saying. Uh, but, I don't think it negates that. And, just because your genes are saying, you know, you are connected, I don't think that validates it either, because I spend a *lot* of time in Finland and have a *profound* affinity for northern Finland, *zero* affinity for southern. So places like Oulu, Helsinki, I've got no affinity to whatsoever. But, the second I go up above the Arctic Circle, to the places of the Sámi people, I feel as if a part of me is home. I'm like oh my gosh, I feel at home here. I feel a deep affinity towards the Sámi traditions, Sámi religiosity, and rituals. I have zero genetic connection, *zero*. There's nothing. There's not a single part of me that comes from the Nordic regions, blood speaking, genetically speaking. So, why do I have this affinity that seems to contradict my genes, right? And, when I did my Me and 23, I thought, oh, I bet you anything there's a percentage of me that's Sámi or Finnish – nothing whatsoever. So why am I drawn to it? I have absolutely no idea. The only thing I know is how it makes me feel. It feels valuable. It feels worth- worthy. It feels meaningful. Um, I take this with a slight pinch of salt – I speak Finnish right? So, when I say I speak Finnish, I can go into shops and have little conversations. I can get my way around because to me that honors the land that I visit. And, I can speak to the spirits of that place in that language, in the language of that people. And, I'm very comfortable, I'm very comfortable with my ability to communicate in Finnish. I'm nowhere near fluent, but... Uh, so it honors that connection. So, I think on the surface, those things can appear contradictory. But, I think when we consider that we are not one thing, we're not just the products of our genetics, we're not just the products of our culture. Because we live in a global village, we're influenced by other cultures. And, we're not just the product of our subtle or psychic constitution. We're this delicious mishmash, all of it that's thrown into a cauldron and stirred. And, what comes out is you. And, I think that's beautiful, and fabulous, and complex, and paradoxical, and contradictory.
But, it makes that individual *feel* that there is a value in whatever they're being drawn towards. And um, and I don't think you can place a price on that."

J.B.: "All right, we've got two more questions, okay. So, um, speaking of Welsh people who don't speak Welsh and the role of all the DNA and what its role is and if it has any. Um, also in your *Book of Druidry* you wrote 'Can you be a Celt today? Yes, you can, for it's entirely cultural'. And then you went on later to say 'Celticity is defined by cultural expression, and Druidry is an aspect of that culture, but it's not a closed practice'. Um, this is in contrast to some other people and ideologies who state that various Celtic cultural traditions *are* closed, or are

partially closed, or people who say you have to be of Celtic blood or ancestry, or residing on Celtic soil, or have been born there or raised there to be allowed to fully participate in a Celtic, you know, Pagan path, or considered a fully recognized member of those communities. So, related to that, there are unfortunately some Celtic symbols, such as the sun cross and stylized triskelions, and such that have been appropriated as hate symbols by neo-Nazis and the KKK and on the racist website Stormfront. Um, would you please expand on your personal thoughts around what you personally think makes someone Welsh or makes someone Celtic?"

K.H.: "So we know that Celtic, Celtic, Celticism, Celticity — are they even words?"

J.B.: "Yeah, Celticity."

K.H.: "So, Celticity, we *know* that that's not a bloodline. We know that it's a cultural stream rather than a bloodline, and that was exemplified fairly recently in a study that was done of genetics in the British Isles. And, I was surprised to learn that I was as far removed genetically speaking from the people of South Wales as so removed, more removed from them than I was from people in Finland, you know, or Germany or Italy. That we are genetically *not* the same; we have a very different um, genetic makeup. And yet, those people are Welsh, right? And um, and they live in Wales, they are immersed in Welsh culture, but our blood tells a different story, tells us something else. So again, I think your genetics is one story, your culture is a totally different story. And that Celticity is transmitted by culture. And one of the primary definitions of culture is language. And that language carries that particular culture, which is why I think it's important that people do learn as much as they can about the language. And, you know, and I did mention, I was trying to not be shady in my book, because there are people out there who will take old verses or they'll go through a dictionary, and – particularly in the times before you had Google Translate – and they would come up with a mumbo jumbo of Welsh words and then pass that off as authentic and ancient, and that only they had access to it. And we saw this a *lot* before more research was made readily available via the internet, I mean, the internet can still be a minefield, but it's easier now to find genuine authentic translations and materials than it was prior to the internet. So, there have been times, you know, so and in the public domain so things like the 21 Lessons of Merlin was written by Douglas Munro made a complete mockery of Welsh culture but passed it off as being authentic, then drawing people into that particular illusion and delusion of 'I am the person who has this authenticity, this authentic practice I have been given it'. And that's gatekeeping. Um, the second we start gatekeeping those practices, very quickly afterwards, what naturally ensues from that gatekeeping is fascism, bigotry, and racism. And we see that in the extreme right wing, sometimes religious movements, particularly within Anglo-Saxon traditions, that have utilised that gatekeeping as a safeguarding principle that excludes people and makes it so inclusive that if you're not in the in-group, then you're out and you will always be a scapegoat, you will always be othered. And fascism and racism develops within these particular circles the second we start gatekeeping, considering that, of course, there are closed

traditions in the world. And those closed traditions exist for a reason: to perpetuate those traditions within a particular cultural stream. But that isn't true of our material. And, we can't even define what Celticity is. There are currently six Celtic nations, each with their own identities, each with their own individual languages. They're connected; some of us are siblings, some of us are cousins. No, I'm not particularly drawn to study the Irish myths or the Irish cycles because I'm not Irish, but I do like to compare that material because so much of it is cognate. When I go to Ireland, I honour the Irish gods. And I don't feel as if I'm insulting them by honouring them. I'll ask my Irish friends, can you give me a couple of phrases via Facebook Messenger on voice message so I can address the gods of that land in their own tongue. And they're like, of course we can, you know. Here you go, have a go. Go and meet Danu or go and meet, you know, uh, Finn McCool or whatever when I'm there. And- and, they do it in a way that doesn't gatekeep, and doesn't lock that wisdom directly into a group of people who believe they're the sole owners and possessors of it. And, we certainly saw that in the '90s, with Celtic Paganism, of people claiming, making these outlandish claims that they received a Book of Shadows from a person in South Wales, and unfortunately, the Book of Shadows was burnt in a housefire in 1999, conveniently, you know, and *they're* the ones who have access to this power. That's just appropriation, but also *manipu*lation of peoples. And, so I think, for somebody to be able to identify as Welsh, so it's that case of, I've got friends who are completely fluent in Welsh who don't live in Wales, and never have done. So many members of our Order have become utterly fluent. Do I consider those people to be Welsh? Yes, I consider them to be Welsh, because they speak the language. Do I consider them to be Celtic? I don't think I'm in any position to mark somebody as 'that person is a Celt', you know. I think that comes entirely from your own connection to what defines a Celt, which is very vague – it's, it's really vague, because there are so many different Celtic nations, all with their own ideas of what it means to be a Celt. Do I consider myself to be a Celt? Yes, I think so, but I consider myself to be a Welsh Celt. You know, that Celtic car [?], the Celtic cultural continuum is a part of my culture; it's a part of my expression. My language is Welsh, but that's just one language within the Celtic cultural continuum. And, I do think we have to be very mindful of how we gatekeep, because the second we over-gatekeep and consider- you know, if I was to consider our Druidry as a closed practice, and nobody can have a part of it, it just leads to fascism and leads to bigotry and ultimately racism. And, that's definitely what we've seen with some of these far right groups who then will take symbols that were *profoundly* sacred and have turned them into symbols of, um, alienation and- and hate, and often violence. So, I mean, you know, the prime example of that is to have taken the swastika – a deeply sacred symbol for not just one culture but for several cultures throughout Europe and Asia and Northern Africa, you know. Tunisia – the, the swastika is- is present there in ancient cities in Tunisia, that I've been and seen. And, and then people took that symbol and reversed it and altered its meaning, and that carries the weight of that now – it carries the weight of that fascism and bigotry. So, I think we have to be incredibly careful, and that the care that we take is to not facilitate gatekeeping, because when we do that, it becomes a problem.

And, I think it almost gives permission for objection and alienation to happen… If that answers it."

J.B.: "Yeah, that's a thank you for the clarifying your thoughts on that. Um, and finally, there are some persons, including in academia, who are concerned that Neo-Pagans know that the Mabinogi and Book of Taliesin and other such literary and poetic sources are not pre-Christian, and that the works themselves do not refer to the figures within them such as Rhiannon and Gwyn ap Nudd as deities. There's also a tendency sometimes to, uh, point out that there's no known pre-Christian inscriptions to many of the most popular figures from these sources on the Isle of Britain, such as Cerridwen and stuff, although there are some, like the remnants of the Shrine to Nodens in Lydney Park, who's the Brythonic linguistic precursor of Nudd, and Maponos, being the Brythono-Gaulish precursor of Mapon, um, who *do* have pre-Christian deific inscriptions. But, a lot of the more popular figures don't. Right? And, you're very straightforward in acknowledging that in your own publications. Um, so, could you please explain why you tend to view figures from Christian-era medieval Welsh texts like Rhiannon and Cerridwen and Gwyn ap Nudd as deities, even though a lot of us do, in fact, know that they aren't referred to as deities in the primary texts and that those texts are from the Christian era."

K.H.: "Yes. So, I don't claim to practice a pre-Christian tradition; I practice a Druidry that is very much rooted in modernity, and it's applicable and appropriate as a practice because it has its roots in modernity as much as it has other roots in old Welsh culture, so primarily the Bardic tradition and also from our myths. But again, none of us are under any illusions that those things are not from a particular point in time. You know, we don't have myths written from 2000 years ago. They didn't write *anything* 2000 years ago in- in Celtic cultures. And there have been arguments made by people like Sir Ifor Williams and other academics and scholars over the years that when you look at, so if you took the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, it doesn't give us a timestamp. But, when we look at the narrative, it seems as if it's reflecting a time before the Romans came here. The Romans are close, and you can see and hear the echoes of the Romans' proximity to Britain within, so, you know, say, like the Second Branch of the Mabinogi, but they haven't arrived yet. So, there are hints there are echoes there that these stories may well have been told in different iterations in the deep past, but they're written on parchment over several centuries in the medieval era. And, I think sometimes people, when they consider modern pagans, I think there's an assumption that we are worshipping or revering pre-Christian figures. But we're not. Within our tradition, we're revering and honouring *Welsh* deities. And, I have this argument fairly often, even within pagan circles, where people will say, well, you've got no evidence that Rhiannon was a goddess in antiquity. And, my answer to that is, but you're missing the point. She's a *Welsh* goddess And some people will say oh you know there's a possibility that Rhiannon is an iteration of Epona, that she is an iteration of Rigantona. And you kind of think well yeah, that may well be the case. And if there are those links, those links may be tenuous to say the least, you know, and that linguistically or etymologically speaking we might be able to say that Rhiannon is an

iteration of those two figures from antiquity. Then other people might say ‘oh Rhiannon is a Brythonic goddess’. I'm like well no, she isn't because the word Rhiannon didn't exist in Brythonic culture. And if it did exist, it might have been Rigantona. Might have been; we don't really know for sure. And um, we can possibly be a little bit more sure about other figures like Lleu, Lugus, Lugh, you know, and some of the Gaulish gods that carry those particular names: Mabon and Maponus. Again, there are these tentative connections. But I think even within Paganism, within contemporary Western Paganism, and in academia, that there's an assumption made that these are ancient deities. And my answer to that is always no, that's not our perspective at all. They're Welsh deities because we've made them Welsh deities. We've apoth-, by the—what's that word in English?—by process of apotheosis, have deified these particular figures. Whether they have tentative links to deities in the past is kind of irrelevant to modern practice, because we're not a pre-Christian tradition. We're *inspired*, perhaps, by pre-Christian classical records, by pre-Christian archaeological evidence and records, but they’re inspirations. They add to the pool of modern Druidry for this link or connection – again, however tenuous – to an ancient Druidic past that we're not trying to recreate, but rather *reclaim* that title and renewing it for modernity. And, we see the same thing happening within the Gorsedd of the Bards of the Islands of Britain, that for centuries and centuries, the Welsh were not concerned with Druids; they were concerned with bards. But you know in the 1700s that started to change for various social political reasons, and Druids became a thing again. And now, Druids are kind of endemic here in Wales. They're a part of the Gorsedd, they're part of the Eisteddfod, part of this cultural expression with Druids at the heart of it. But that has also been renewed and reclaimed. It isn’t pre-Christian, and certainly the Druids of the past probably did not look like the Druids of the present at all, whether it’s the Gorsedd Druids or whether it’s Pagan Druids. So, I think when people assume that, ‘oh these are worshipping gods, and there’s no evidence of those gods in the past’, they’re completely missing the point. We’ve by process of apotheosis made them gods, because we need them to be gods, and- but that’s happened throughout time. You only have to look at the tensions between Judaism and Christianity. Judaism does not acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Naza-, that the Nazarene is the Messiah. They don't acknowledge that at all. It's irrelevant. That was created and renewed in Rome, not in Israel. It was made new in Rome that Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, became the Savior, and it created a new religion. And, Judaism is a completely separate – you know, the very land of the Nazarene itself does not practice or believe in those tenets because it's not a part of their culture, and um, and we see this happening throughout time; of gods being made new. The Egyptians did it every bloody two minutes, you know. The Romans were, the Romans are often called the original polytheists of Europe, and I consider that the Romans were not – that the Romans were poly-*thievists*. They stole gods. They were like, ‘oh, have you seen that god? Where's she from? Somewhere on the Danube’s shores. We'll have her!’ You know. They would just steal them. They would incorporate them into, you know, that Pagan Roman Empire, and I always consider that they were polythievists. They were constantly incorporating gods, and eventually, you know, some of those became saints, you know, actual saints within what was to become the Roman Catholic faith. And um, and, the same

is happening here, that for now, for a couple of centuries at least, these figures have become more and more deific in the minds of the people who are connecting with them, and yet none of us are under any illusions that they were not revered in this iteration in the deep past, but that that doesn't matter. But, I find what can become problematic again for very similar themes to what I mentioned earlier on, and I tend to see it coming from academia – academia will often try and gatekeep this material. It's not theirs to gatekeep. They don't own it. And, when they consider, I mean, you know, we know so much about these myths from academia, yes, but they don't own it. They don't possess it. There's nothing that gives them the right to say that they own this material, and I find that that gatekeeping can be problematic, because they're not the authorities. What they've been studying, and the linguistics of it, and the patterns, and the syncretism, and the cognates, and the wonders of these myths um, have always belonged to the people. The people own them.

They're not the possessions of one particular caste in society. So, I've always had that problem with academia, and you know, and at any given opportunity, I will quite happily say to them, you do not own this material, and you don't get to say what people do with it, because it belongs to the folk. It belongs to the gwerin, and if Betty in the middle of Llanudloes finds value and meaning in Hafren, the tutelary spirit of the river that runs through the middle of that, you know, randomly selected town, and considers that Hafren is to her a deific archetype that brings value and meaning not only to her life but to the connection that she feels with that river. I don't have the right or the authority to denigrate that. Um, there's nothing to claim that Sabrina or Hafren was a goddess to the people in antiquity. She certainly was to the Romans, and you know, maybe that was lost for a while in the medieval period, and now yet again she's become a goddess. And, and I think she's a goddess because people need her to be one, and they require that connection. And, somebody like Sabrina is possibly a beautiful example as well because she is locked into landscape, right? She's a river. So somebody like Rhiannon or somebody like Cerridwen, they don't have that uniqueness to them that Sabrina or Hafren does. And somebody like Cerridwen again – no proof, no evidence at all to suggest that the bards venerated her or revered her as a goddess, but they were medieval bards, and people can't conceptualize that which they have no concept of. And, I doubt that those people in medieval Wales would have been able to conceptualize what a goddess was within a monotheistic revealed religion culture. Um, that- that wouldn't have been a part of their reality, but they certainly seemed to have veneration and respect for her as a muse and as that conduit for inspiration. So, when it comes to somebody like Cerridwen, I often think that there are no shrines; there are no altars to her. But a part of me, romantically speaking, the Druid in me, the visionary in me, kind of disagrees with that as well. And, I think, 'no, there *were* shrines to her, and those shrines were the lips of the bards and the poetry that they wrote, and that perhaps the altars of devotion are not necessarily stone structures with figures on them, but they can also be poetry.' But did those people consider her to be a goddess? Probably not. Um, did they have the capacity to consider her a goddess? No. I don't think they did. Does that negate that she's a goddess now? No, I don't think so, because she has become that to so many people all over the world, because they have a deep desire to feel the

power of inspiration and as, arguably, she is the mother of Awen; we refer to her as Mam yr Awen in the Welsh bardic tradition. She is the mother of inspiration, and um… But of course, within contemporary western Paganism, not just Druidry, there are people who are non-theists as well who don't subscribe to this idea of polytheistic principles; they see them only from the platform of archetypes or constructs or perhaps an iteration of a genius loci, and that's fine. That's- that's just as valid, and we certainly have Druids within the Anglesey Druid Order who are non-theists, but they have an appreciation of the philosophy, I guess, that these deities can also be perceived as psychological constructs, or psychological states of mind, or reflections of the human condition. And, to others, they're considered to be hard polytheistic principles, soft euhemeristic principles, genius locis turned into gods. There are so many different ways in which they can be perceived. To me, I kind of fall into many of those categories. I might see Branwen as purely archetypal; I might see Cerridwen as a hard polytheistic principle or Sabrina as a soft polytheistic principle. Um, but again, within my own personal practice and within the Order, I don't see that to be a problem or complex; that that's just the nature of polytheism. That polytheism seems to be the factory setting of mankind that, if left alone, abandoned on an island in the middle of the Indian Ocean, would we, without any reference to the outside world, naturally be drawn towards monotheism or polytheism?

Probably polytheism, because of, you know, it… it connects so much to that animistic principle in the world that all things are alive. So, because, you know, some of the gods, particularly when you look at Hinduism, they reflect everything from stones to trees to rivers to stars to the universe itself you know, they're reflective of all of those things deified. So, I think a lot of people miss the point when they consider that these were not pre-Christian gods. And, I think my answer to that is this Druid is not a pre-Christian Druid. This is a Druid in the 21st century. And, Rhiannon and Gwyn ap Nudd exist in the 21st century, and they didn't go anywhere. They never went anywhere. All they did was they changed with the people and evolved with the people. And, as everything else around us has evolved and developed, you know, our technologies, our, you know, ability to read and write, all of that has evolved. And, to me these characters – archetypes – are reflective of the human condition, which I think is why myth is such a powerful thing, that wherever you go in the world, you see myths that reflect other myths. And, you know, I've told stories and listened to stories from as far as uh, Sulawesi in Indonesia to Southern Australia, Finland, the United States, uh, Northern Africa, and heard these stories told by other cultures. I'm like, how does that happen? How do these international motifs, as they might call them in scholarly terms – how does that happen? And, I think it happens because it's the land itself telling us these stories, and we're interpreting them according to our cultures and our languages and time that we live in. And, that sometimes, those… I don't like to use the word 'characters' in relation to the people that inhabit the Mabinogi. I think 'characters' oversimplifies it; it makes them sound as if they're people in a drama. Uh, but the drama is life itself and the human condition. And um, but I do think it's dangerous ground when people attempt to gatekeep that and to say to somebody else, 'you can't do that because, in my opinion, that's not what it means. Alright. It's like, well, you're entitled to your opinion, but it doesn't change the fact that

these have become gods, and will continue to be gods probably for centuries to come. They're not going away. So, you know my answer to them is: get used to it, honey, because they're not going anywhere. That boat has long since sailed."

J.B.: "Yeah, I found myself uh, writing a lot of similar points that you were making in my introduction to- to the dissertation because it's like 'let's go ahead and just lay some groundwork on some of the different assumptions about what religion even is and what it's for between monotheism and polytheism before we get started, just to like clear up, you know, any misconceptions on- ahead of time'. [K.H.: "Yeah."] "Um… So, in closing, do you have any thoughts you'd like to communicate to those in academia or beyond who seek to better understand Neo-Pagans and Druids who centre or incorporate Welsh culture into our practice?"

K.H.: "I think- I think, ultimately, in the same line where I spoke earlier about, okay, so how do I connect honourably to Sanctissima Muerte? Um, I was, you know, somewhat immersed in that culture; I went back and immersed myself in that culture. But, I opened channels of dialogue, and I think that ultimately, in the case of anything, anything in life, whether it's assumed perspectives or arguments that people might have online, that the honourable thing to do, if somebody is curious as to why is somebody doing something in a particular way, then I think the most honourable thing to do is to open channels of dialogue and then ask those people directly: 'why do you do it in that way? Can you explain that to me?' You know. This is what my perspective was on it; can I please have your perspective? And um, and that that bridges chasms of misinformation and assumptions, and that in today's age, I don't think there's any excuse for not opening channels of dialogue. We have the internet; most people are on social media and can be contacted so, so easily. And, I've certainly had people um, from academia and from contemporary Western Paganism and secular life who will frequently contact me and ask me for, you know, a chat, and I'm always more than happy to have those conversations with people, because there's significantly more to unite people than there is to separate them. And, there was an occasion where, from an archaeological perspective, there were archaeologists who didn't understand what we did and why we did it and why we chose to do stuff in certain locations until channels of dialogue were opened. And suddenly, within those channels, the common ground that we found was that both parties are in love with this stuff; from just a slightly different angle, but they love it, they love it! They love the monuments and the sites and the archaeology of it. And so do we; we love it, but we just have this other angle, this other perspective, which of course is in the spirituality domain. And- but until they actually sat down and talked to us about it, they had no appreciation of why we were turning up at Bryn Celli Ddu and doing weird Druid shit, you know. And it's like, well, it's because we're in love with the place, and it turns out that that was the common ground. It was a love of that material, of that soil, of that land. And um, and it's like, okay, so we have this common ground; what can we build on that? How can we develop an appreciation rather than a hostility? Because hostility doesn't get us anywhere; it just leads to fascism."

J.B.: “Who needs more of that?”

K.H.: “I know, huh, we don't need more of that. So yeah, that would be my advice: always open channels of dialogue.”

J.B.: “Wel, diolch yn fawr iawn am .

K.H.: “Croeso, croeso dim problem. Croeso tad. Oh my god, we were two hours and ten minutes.”

J.B.: “Yeah, I assume you've got life to get back to and deadlines and all that.”

K.H.: “I have, yeah, although I might- I'll probably just pack up here now and just go home and have my dinner,” [J.B.: “Mmm, yeah, it is dinner time for you.”] “and then tomorrow, I've got to drive to Leicester tomorrow, so I've got to be up at seven to drive to Leicester, which is like three and a half hours away.” [J.B.: “Ick.”] “So, and that's just a whole day, you know, it’s like seven hours of tomorrow, or just be driving to Leicester and back.
J.B.: “Eh, sounds like driving over here.” [K.H.: “Yeah.”] “Everything's so far apart.”
K.H.: “Yes, well, it's much further apart over there.”

J.B.: “It's like we have to drive six hours one way to visit the grandparents.”

K.H.: “Oh my word!” [J.B.: “You do what you've got to do.”] “Yes, it's very difficult for people over here to fathom the distances over there. [J.B.: “Yeah.”] “But then you can fit this country in just one of the Great Lakes, so you know.

J.B.: “Yeah, the Great Lakes are- it's hard for *me* to fathom how huge the Great Lakes are.” [K.H.: “Those things are enormous!”] “You can’t see the other side.”

K.H.: “Yeah, it's just like a sea. It's bizarre, and you can drink it! Right then love, I shall pack myself up here and get myself home.”

J.B.: “Safe travels!”

K.H.: “Thank you very much. And hopefully that will be of some help.”

J.B.: “Oh yes, very much, thanks!”

K.H.: “Fabulous! All right then, Nev, you take care and I'll speak to you soon.

J.B.: “Yes! Hwyl.”

K.H.: “All right, hwyl fawr, cymero fawr. Hwyl.”

Gwilym Morus-Baird Interview Transcript

Me: "You are a musician and a scholar, some would say a bard, as well as the author of the book *Taliesin Origins*, and you're also a teacher on Celtic Source, which is an online course platform which is an online course platform where you teach other people about Welsh and Celtic literature, folklore, and cultural traditions. You've stated that you yourself don't identify as a Pagan and don't prefer labels for yourself, but you've also stated that you view yourself as kind of 'bridging' modern Paganism and academia, and that you view much of the literature that you teach about as part of a greater cultural wisdom tradition which includes moral teaching tales. And your courses on Celtic Source are popular in the Neo-Pagan community, especially among people who center Welsh culture or incorporate cultural elements from Wales into their practice. So, would you please briefly share with us how you came to found Celtic Source."

GMB: "Oh, uh, I should've looked at these questions before you started to ask them, shouldn't I? Apologies, I feel unprepared. So, how did I get into Celtic Source? I suppose, so very briefly, I… I'm primarily a musician. I don't really think of myself as a bard. Whenever someone says 'bard', I think of green tights and feathers in hats and things. But, you know, people can call me whatever they want; I don't care. And then I was a musician for a very long time, a Welsh language musician, and making a living in Welsh language music is just, it's a fool's game. Some people succeed at it, but it's very difficult. But you know, I was kind of, I was a Welsh musician because I wanted to do something in my culture and to support my culture and my language and sort of make it live in some way. So, I was kind of happy to take the financial 'hit' if you like. Uh, but to sort of sustain myself, I ended up going to university because the grants and the student loans were pretty good, and you know, in a very mercenary sense, that's how I ended up in university. But, I chose a subject that I love, I've always had an interest in Welsh poetry and medieval Welsh literature, I suppose, and Welsh myth was always a passion of mine. So, I went to do something that I loved, not because I thought I would do anything with it, but mainly because I thought it was something interesting to do while I got extra money to support myself as a musician. But I ended up, I suppose, really loving it, and the department didn't think I was that bad, so I got to stay to do some qualifications, but I never thought that I would… I never saw myself as someone who would stay in academia, basically. I never saw myself as someone who would become a lecturer. I did actually try for one lecturing job after having kids, but, suddenly realized that it just really wasn't for me. Um, and that just kind of confirmed what I'd always suspected, that you know, me and formal university education were never really meant to be bosom buddies, and so… I had… you know, I got married, had kids in sort of my mid-30s, and realized 'oh shit, you know, now I really have to be serious about earning a living', and I'd always um, what's the polite way of putting it? I'd always been able to ask for free tickets to festivals by saying 'oh I'll run workshops for you on Celtic myth'. So again, it was like, it was a way of me getting to do something else. And then I really enjoyed it, I really had a good time,

and when I was seriously thinking about work, I wanted to be self-employed, and I realized that you know, it's very difficult to find work through the medium of Welsh unless you become a teacher or some type of media assistant, and I really didn't want to do either. So, that's why I thought 'well, I could just run courses on Welsh myth on, you know, on Celtic myth in a more general sense'. And that's how I first sort of ventured into Celtic Source as a business, was just trying to find some way of being self-employed to support my family. Um, and it was through – I always assumed that what I was doing might be appealing to an English-speaking audience, just through my experiences in various festivals running workshops. And obviously, I was aware – I wasn't massively aware, but I had a sense that there was a broader Pagan community interested in Celtic myth which was kind of, I would you know, kept sort of, in various contexts, I would meet these people and come across these people. So I knew that there was some people who basically might be willing to pay me to keep doing what I want to do. And that's how I ended up doing Celtic Source. And it's become more than I anticipated it would become."

Me: "Okay, thank you for sharing your background with building your current course website. Um, let's see. You have shared on your public YouTube channel that you've participated in or attended various Welsh cultural traditions such as performing folk music, as you've said, uh public storytelling, the Mari Lwyd, codi'r fedwen around Calan Mai time. What other Welsh cultural traditions have you been involved in reviving, continuing, and/or making more accessible to the greater public?"

GMB: "Um, well more recently, uhm, I've been running a course on Welsh bardic craft, which is a specific quite sophisticated form of poetry. Uh, it's like classical Welsh poetry. Uh, and teaching it through the medium of English and trying to apply it to English language poetry. It's a Welsh – it's a poetic craft based in the Welsh language, so it's really formed around the Welsh language, but there are ways of adapting it to English speakers. So, I've been doing that, and while, you know, obviously, because we're studying a traditional craft, I'm having to draw on traditional Welsh examples. So, I'm always trying to put the Welsh bardic craft, the Welsh term is *cynghanedd* or *cerdd dafod*, in a Welsh context. And I think that there is, I mean, it's difficult because it's a craft that's so unique to the Welsh language and has evolved alongside the Welsh language, or within the Welsh language, if you like, it does take a little bit of work to make – to make it sound good in English, but I think we're getting there. I mean, various other people are dubious of attempts to translate Welsh bardic craft into English, but I think, you know, I think there are useful techniques for people interested in English-language poetry that they can derive. So, I think that's probably one of the more important things I've done recently."

Me: "Okay. I've got *Singing in Chains* on my reading list but haven't gotten to it yet."

GMB: "You'll love it."

Me: “Huh?”

GMB: “You’ll love it.”

Me: “Oh, good! Let’s see… Uh, so, for you personally, do you think it’s important for Druids and Neo-Pagans who center Welsh culture to participate in working to revive, continue, and/or spread Welsh cultural traditions?”

GMB: “Uh, I think it would be rude not to. Uh, I mean, it comes down to what you think culture is for. Uh, and, I’m a great believer in universality. You know, I think that there are basic fundamental human experiences and rites that transcend culture, um, or that culture is nested within. And so, I feel like, if you want to, if you want to really get to grips with things like medieval Welsh literature or Welsh myth or Welsh poetry, like, you would just be missing out on so much if you didn’t at least approach modern Welsh culture in some way, and also understand the history of Welsh culture and how we’ve got to this, this point in time. And that includes understanding how Welsh custom, folk custom, tradition has evolved and changed and declined, and you know, understanding the current political situation of Wales and Welsh speakers. I think, yeah, as I said, I think it would be rude not to, you know. I think um, because these materials are, for want of a better way of putting it, you know, they’re a part of our soul, in lots of ways, so, you know, we are – we are inevitably going to share our souls through culture. You know, you can’t stop it, you can’t police it, you can’t say ‘no’ – well, you can say ‘no, you can’t do that’, but you know, no one ever listens to you. So, it’s worth, it’s worth you know, um, yeah, encouraging people to accept that these things are alive in a very profound way, in the nation and in the culture that gave birth to them, yeah.”

Me: “Okay. Um, speaking of them being alive in the nation and culture of Cymru that gave birth to them, uh, kind of as a follow-up question: what are your thoughts on Neo-Pagans and Druids who aren’t from Wales publicly performing Welsh traditional things such as the Mari Lwyd or Calennig or ancestor offerings at Calan Gaeaf outside of Cymru?”

GMB: “So outside of Cymru is a different matter to inside of Cymru. Uh, outside of Cymru, I – I firmly believe that people should do as they want, so long as they seek to not to misrepresent and so long as they respect the cultural artifacts they’re handling and dealing with. Um, I think it’s great! I think it’s brilliant that people are inspired to take up aspects of ‘other people’s’ cultures, and I’m saying that in inverted commas because again, you know, I think we’re all one humanity, personally, all trying to, you know, muddle along in this crazy world. So, I, you know, if you find it enriching to- to do these things, then do them! But, it’s not just – but we can’t just do it while remaining ignorant of the reality of Welsh people. So, that’s why it’s important to do our best not to misrepresent uh, and to acknowledge that these things are part of, yes, someone else’s soul, I suppose. And you know, as we, as people practice them and they make them part of *their* lives

and *their* souls, then the you know, my hope would be that they therefore then want to safeguard the integrity of those traditions as much as anybody from Wales would want to. That would be a natural part of the process, I suppose."

Me: "Okay. Um, let's see. Uh, works of traditional Welsh literature, such as poetry, triads, folklore, medieval prose, et cetera, are central to many of your courses on Celtic Source and inform many of the students there's spiritualities, or values, or worldviews. Um, you also reference several such sources in your book *Taliesin Origins*, discussing them at length on your public YouTube channel also, and you've also appeared on television broadcasts discussing them, such as on S4C. Um, I saw you in the Calan Gaeaf special last year. What would you say motivates you to bolster the accessibility to education of the public regarding Welsh traditions and literary sources?"

GMB: "Um, because, because we're not – I don't think that it's possible to be a human without culture. Uh, and culture means engaging with cultural artifacts that are historical, that have a long past, that are deeply rooted in the history of where you've come from. And so, for Welsh folks in particular, I think it's really important that we understand what our cultural history is in detail, and in you know, in unflinching detail also. You know, not for us to make it fit what we want it to fit, not for us to ventriloquize the dead, to make you know, our ancestors tell us what we want to hear, but just so that we have an appreciation of what our history is, as a way of rooting ourselves and our identities and our culture in, in this very rich vein of history. Um, there is no identity or culture, as far as I'm concerned, without history. Not that I'm necessarily for branding history that much, it's more engagement – a creative engagement – with that history that I'm interested in. Um, but, yeah, I think, you know, there is no Wales without Welsh cultural history or the culture or the history of Welsh culture even. Yeah, it doesn't exist. So if we want to be Welsh, we've got to keep- keep coming back to those sources, that is what makes us what we are. That *is* what gives us this viable identity in modern culture."

Me: "Okay. Um, speaking of history, Welsh culture is a living, modern, multi-faceted uh, culture and society, yet modern Druidry and Celtic Neo-Paganism tend to focus on traditions that are over a century old, such as from the pre-Christian, when available, medieval, early-modern, Victorian era cultural traditions for the most part. Uh, sometimes, they are also even traditions that are either near or basically extinct outside of either the Neo-Pagan community or specific vocations like professional storytelling. Um, are there any *modern* Welsh traditions or literature that began or gained popularity within the last century, like since 1925-ish, that you think are significant to uh Welsh culture or could be meaningful in a spiritual practice that centers Welsh culture?"

GMB: "Oh, that's a very interesting question. So, if I'm right in understanding you, cultural phenomena or customs that have developed in Wales in the last century?"

Me: “Mm. [Nod.]”

GMB: “Um… ooo. That’s … I haven’t even thought about it in those terms. Um, I suppose there are Welsh traditions that have a very modern form that are older in their origin than 1925 but that have a very modern expression, that might help provide some mood music, let’s say, to help, you know, modern Pagan folks get into the mood a bit. Um, so yeah, there’s, there’s the modern traditions of music, uh, choral singing, choir singing, various forms of harp music, things like cerdd dant, which is like a modern traditional music, but which is rooted in older ideas, as is the choral singing. And I suppose the Eisteddfod tradition as well, you know, this idea of, of having a competition, uh, so clearly you know, hierarchical in one sense, trying to find, you know, individuals who display a certain level of expertise and who embody a certain standard of practice, and then celebrating them, and then getting them to embody the traditions they practice, getting them to be sort of avatars for the spirit of that tradition, if you like. I think that’s, that’s one of the more powerful *relatively* modern Welsh customs we have, but of course it’s all rooted in an earlier period. But you know, the chairing of the bard, the crowning of the bard, or the *bardd*, or the poet, in the modern Eisteddfod, um, which is also the moment at which we, we declare ourselves as a, as a peaceful nation of course. Uh, for those of you who don’t know, in the chairing of the bard ceremony, um, the- the Welsh Druids get up, and they have a big sword, and they half-unsheathe the sword, and they- they cry out ‘A oes heddwch?’ ‘Is there peace?’ and the congregation or the audience all respond ‘Heddwch!’ ‘Yes, there is peace!’ So, we kind of affirm our native pacifism in that sense, and then the, the sword is sheathed and unsheathed three times, so there’s three chances for some crazy bugger to go ‘No! War!’ uh, but no one ever has, as yet, uh so we are still affirming our paci- our native pacifism in that sense. Um, and um, you know, these are sacred moments in any culture, uh, and I think it’s the moment in- in modern Welsh culture where I have a- a very distinct sense of- of the sacred in Welsh culture. And I think, you know, if- if, I know that there are some modern Pagans and Druids who have sort of taken up- I know there was a, there’s a similar custom evolving in Glastonbury if I’m not mistaken, in Somerset in England, where there’s, there are various bardic circles and what have you. But yeah, I think, you know, that’s a- that’s a very powerful affirmation of tradition and culture, and the sacred, for sure, that, you know. I mean, spiritual practitioners and traditions tend to gravitate towards these things anyway. But yeah, the- the fruits of Iolo Morganwg’s dreamings and their impact on modern Welsh culture, you know, um, I think uh, yeah, they’re very potent, and they’re very rich, yeah.”

Me: “Okay, um… So, that’s a- a great segway into another question I’ve got here. Um. In the introduction to your book *Taliesin Origins*, you ended with a consideration of peace, uh, saying ‘I remember sitting in front of a large fire in a teepee about fifteen years ago now, listening to Navajo songs accompanied by drum and rattle and thinking to myself how much more I could get done if I acted out of peace instead of rage. It felt like I was returning to the native pacifism

of my nonconformist ancestors'. Uh, reading this, I was immediately reminded of Iolo Morganwg's challenge to peace that is used at the Eisteddfod and in many Neo-Pagan and Druid orders. Um, uh, what are your personal views on the importance, or, sanctity, which you even used I believe, uh, of peace in and via Welsh culture?"

GMB: "Oh. I suppose I'm using 'nonconformist' there to mean the Welsh tradition of Christianity, because of course there were plenty of pacifists and still are plenty of pacifists who are Quakers, um, and various other, you know, of the various Christian denominations in Wales. So, nonconformism really, is a catch-all term that I use, although they're not all technically nonconformists. Um, I feel like pacifism as a relatively modern tradition in Wales, because it, it really finds its fullest expression in the twentieth century, um, you know the various anti-war movements, the various uh, peace movements, women's peace movements, the CND, you know, closely related to various folks in Wales… It's been the- the strongest um, what would you call it… It's definitely the strongest element in contemporary Welsh spirituality that I resonate with. Um, now, I'm not a hundred percent pacifist. I'm kind of ninety-nine point five percent pacifist. Um, I do believe that there are very, very rare occasions when violence is necessary, but they're very rare, under very particular circumstances. But generally speaking, that pacifism has given a great depth and humility to the modern Welsh tradition, I would say, particularly as expressed through poetry. Um, many of our finer poets of the twentieth century were pacifists. I think that um, in terms of my own relationship to what I'm trying to do, um, I- there- there's no way that I could've continued to do what I do now with the moral outrage I felt in my early twenties, coming across modern Pagans and modern Paganism and- and what, what was being done with 'my culture', as I felt it, at the time. Because, you know, my- my sense of what cultural appropriation is has changed over time, it's shifted, you know. Um, I don't think we should be gatekeeping culture so stridently or so aggressively, um, I don't think it's helpful. I think it's regressive, as opposed to progressive. And, you know, a lot of my indignation at seeing- just English speakers in general, they didn't have to be Pagan, but just anybody who wasn't a Welsh speaker, you know, discussing um, Celtic myth or Welsh myth, um, would- would rile me when I was younger. And I realized that that was a- a war I just didn't need to fight, and that it was just- it was stupid, and it was immature, um, because it's, it's kind of a fantastical war. It's a war that happens in the imagination, and it just takes up way too much energy, and it just- it's wasteful, and it's unnecessary, and it's not morally justified. Um, you know, I think that I- I want more acknowledgement of the one humanity. I think that's what we need, and if that's what I *believe*, then I kind of got to walk my talk, and sort of set aside that great big chip on my shoulder that I had as 'I'm a-, you know, a Welsh person with a- with degrees in Welsh literature; I get to say what happens to this material', you know, I had to set that aside, because it's just… Yeah, I mean, like I said earlier, it's not like anybody's going to listen to you anyway. You know, like the- the cat's out of the bag; the horse has already bolted. You know, it happened centuries ago, this influence on English-speaking culture, so like to try and do anything, you know, it's just like totally impractical, and it's not morally justified, because you're setting up barriers and walls, as

opposed to try and find common ground with other people, which is- I think is more important. Does that answer your question? Did I go around the houses too much?"

Me: "No, I think- I think that's fine."

GMB: "M'kay."

Me: "Uh, kind of, following up on that, do you have any thoughts regarding the portrayal of glorified war in ancient Welsh poetry versus the tone of, say, the Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi or the emphasis on peace that's voiced by Iolo Morganwg and more upheld today?"

GMB: "Um, well it's a long and complicated history, and I think that, you know, pacifism is only really possible under certain material conditions. And… And this is why I'm only ninety-nine point five percent pacifist is because for long periods of our history, and by 'our' I mean all of humanity, not just the Welsh now, violence was necessary, there was just no other way of getting around it, you know. You had to, you had to be able to defend yourself, it was just a real thing. Um, and it would be, you know, deluded to pretend otherwise. So, whereas I can appreciate the- the need for heroic poetry, and I can appreciate the function it served, and I can appreciate why that type of myth-making, you know, was- *was* important in the past, our material conditions today are much different, and we don't live in- you know, in a situation where easy access to violence is necessary. Um, so I suppose, in a way, I mean personally, I went through quite a long process of trying to come to terms with the violence in my own tradition. Particularly, it- I mean, we're talking about twenty years ago now, again, in my early twenties, I was quite an active anti-war campaigner and protestor, particularly around the time of the Iraq War. Um, you know, I was quite a fervent activist in that sense, and I've always um, I've always really hated hypocrisy, and so there was a tension in me that felt hyp- that felt like an unresolved hypocrisy. In, you know, 'ah yeah, you know, the historical Taliesin poetry, ah, it's so great, it's so brilliant, so inspiring, so engaging, so enriching', you know. It's very beautiful, uh, poetry in many ways. It has this kind of this really beautiful tension is one of the only ways of describing it; I'm paraphrasing someone else here, but… You know, that whole appreciation and pride in that tradition really ha- really kind of um, came into conflict with my newly discovered political pacifism in my early twenties, and so… Yeah, it- it took a while to just to think through the contradictions, and just to come to appreciate the historical reality of violence. And, you know, and that doesn't- that doesn't mean that I'm not aware of the need for violence in the modern age either. You know, we're very lucky living in the first world, that a lot of our violence has been exported to the second and third worlds, um, you know, and our- our material conditions are, are rooted in the injustices of violence elsewhere in the world. Like, that's another part of- of the contradictions of pacifism, if you like, in the modern age. So, I- I suppose I just always want to check that I'm not deluding myself. I think that's- that's one of the big things I'm into. You know, not that you can ever be undeluded or not- not lie to yourself, but I think that, yeah, that-

that appreciation of- of appropriate violence and inappropriate violence, it's really important to understand that nuance, uh, if you… Particularly if you've, you know, ever been a- a politically active pacifist, I suppose, as I was, yeah."

Me: "Thank you for sharing your thoughts and feelings on that. Um, I've been having a lot of thoughts on that myself for the past few years especially, but off-and-on, you know, because I'm- I used to serve in the military, back when I was in *my* early twenties, so it's uh… There's been a lot of heavy processing there. Um…"

GMB: "Well, can I unironically say 'thank you for your service'?"

Me: "Um, sure? I guess."

GMB: "Well, you know, because this is another part of it for me. People do sign up from a- from a genuine sense of service-"

Me: "Yeah."

GMB: "You know, and regardless of how it's politically manipulated-"

Me: "That part."

GMB: "Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's-"

Me: "There's a lot of heavy processing, you know, when you're in your late teens, early twenties, trying to serve- serve your country, and then, as you get older, you realize, you know some of the forces behind what you were being told to do."
GMB: "Yeah. Well, what a betrayal, you know. What a betrayal of that, of that desire. Because that- that is literally, it's that very instinctive and natural desire which has kept us going as an animal on this planet for quite a long time. So, it's like, you know, to- to manipulate that, I know we're totally off topic now, but- but you know, it's a great tragedy-"

Me: "Yeah."

GMB: "-that that's what gets manipulated. *And*, it's not just that it's modern politicians that manipulate it. This stuff was manipulated in the past too."

Me: "Oh, oh yeah, and always with like, you know, fresh, barely-adult young people without fully formed frontal lobes yet and all that jazz."

GMB: “Yeah, yeah, yeah. Totally, yeah, yeah.”

Me: “But anyway. Uh, so, you grew up there in Cymru, speaking Cymraeg, and immersed in Welsh culture, and of course not everybody likes or identifies with, or is equally involved in every possible aspect of their own culture regardless of where they’re from. Um, how do you personally uh, whether it’s conscious determination or more of a subconscious feeling sort of thing, um, kind of place which parts of your culture to emphasize or view in a spiritually significant manner and which to kind of leave to secular life or de-emphasize from spiritual views, if…”

GMB: “Mmm, well, there’s an assumption in your question there that I separate the secular and the spiritual, um…”

Me: “Yep.”

GMB: “Which I don’t, but anyway, um… I- I suppose-”

Me: “Well, that is an an- that is a way to answer the question. You can answer it that way.”

GMB: “Yeah. I mean, you know, to be blunt-”

Me: “It kind of highlights that, when that’s not the case, doesn’t it?”

GMB: “Yeah, yeah. I- I… the, my litmus test is that it has to inspire me. If it doesn’t inspire me, I mean, it’s quite a self-centered way of approaching your own culture, but… If it doesn’t inspire me, it can’t live in me, and if it doesn’t live in me, I can’t transmit that life to other people. Like, it’s just a very practical… Yeah, it’s a very practical uh, requirement, that it needs to live in me; it needs to be fiery in me in some way; it needs to make me passionate about it. Um, you know, and that’s probably another reason why I didn’t end up in formal academia, because I’m- I’m not very disciplined about stuff that doesn’t- doesn’t inspire me. Yeah, that’s the musician in me. Uh, I suppose. And, you know, I am… I hope I’m open about this, on the courses, but I- I am emphasizing the non-Christian elements of Welsh culture, which is an almost impossible task. Because, you know, for as long as we’ve been Welsh, or we’ve had the term ‘Cymru’, you know, we’ve- there’s been some nobleman or bureaucrat that’s been a Christian, you know. Of course, that doesn’t mean that we were all Christian all the time, or that we couldn’t be Christian *and* other things, like, it’s a complex and nuanced history all of its own which doesn’t get enough, uh, attention. But, you know, I am- I am specifically trying to unpack a native mythology, and of course, there’s plenty of people in modern Wales that would argue, ‘Well Christianity is now a native mythology’, and they’d be perfectly right, of course. It’s- like, it’s been here for nearly fifteen hundred years, how could it *not* be a native mythology? But, I suppose what I’m looking

for is a mythology – and it doesn't have to specifically religious or *explicitly* religious, I mean, all mythologies are *potentially* religious, but at least in its latent form, doesn't have to be explicitly religious as a- as a mythology. Um, you know, I'm looking, I myself am interested in how far back we can trace these things. How alive were these types of myths in our past, you know, the last two thousand years, even whilst Christianity is taking hold? I mean, one of the reasons, you know, why, um, I kind of- it's not that I *reject* Christianity, but why I'm not that interested in it, is because I'm far more interested in the underdog story. You know, uh, it- it's kind of innate, if you like, to the Welsh perspective in many ways, to have that- you know, we've been underdogs for quite a long time, and then within Wales, well, the non-Christians are the underdogs within the underdogs. And so, you know, I've always been interested in- in emphasizing and sort of reclaiming and bringing back to life what- what was naturally arising amongst common folk over the last sort of fifteen hundred, two thousand years. You know where, what is- what is the spirit that comes through without having to be patronized, or formalized, or dogmatized? You know, what's the- how close can we get to the source of that, whatever that is, in Wales? That- I suppose that's what I'm interested in. And so, the emphasis has to be on: what inspires me in that context, what comes alive to me, um, and how close is it to something that's unadulterated? How close is it to the source of that spirit, I suppose, is one way of putting it. Yeah."

Me: "Okay. Uh, okay… Uh, so you've talked about, um, your background in academia a bit. Um, and as- so, as you already know, there are some people who seem very concerned that everyone including Neo-Pagans know that the Mabinogi and the Book of Taliesin and other such medieval literary and poetic sources are *not* pre-Christian, and that the works themselves do *not* refer to the figures within them, such as Rhiannon or Gwyn ap Nudd as deities. And, there's also a tendency in academia to make sure they point out that there are no known pre-Christian inscriptions to many of the most popular figures from those sources on the isle of Britain – although there's a few, like the- the temple to- temple remains to Nodens in Lydney Park, who's a Brythonic linguistic precursor of Nudd, and the Brythono-Gaulish Maponos, linguistic precursor to Mabon – but, the more popular ones are often not attested in archaeological records. Um, and you're very straightforward in acknowledging all of those facts in your book, and your courses, and your YouTube videos, but also make statements hinting that it's nevertheless possible that such figures were at one time considered deific. For example, in Celtic Source [sic, in his book *Taliesin Origins*], you say 'We can take this a step further and guess at Cerridwen's mythology as a goddess in her own right by seeing how her tale compares with other myths'. Um, so, could you please expand on why you tend to view some figures from Christian-era medieval Welsh texts, such as Rhiannon or Cerridwen or Gwyn ap Nudd, as possible survivals of figures who were previously seen as deities even though you do know that they're not referred to as deities in the primary texts and that those texts are from the Christian era."

GMB: "Woah, well done for getting through that question, by the way."

Me: “Yeah, it was a lot to read.”

GMB: “So, please… I might- I might head off in different tangents here, but I’m going to try to remember what the focus of the question is, because there’s a- there’s a few ways of answering this. Okay. So the- I think the first thing to- to remind folks is that there isn’t just one experience of a cultural artifact like a myth or a story. Um, even within res- you know, ‘accepted religions’, with dogmas, and books, and priests, and- you know, like a whole bureaucracy working really hard to keep everybody on the same religious page, there are a diverse range of responses and experiences to the mythology. And so, I just think it’s ridiculous when some people claim that there was no such thing as a non-Christian mythology in medieval Wales. Like, how do you know? Yes, everybody was nominally Christian, yes, everybody, you know, was probably afraid of- of, uh, of appearing too Pagany, depending on how close to power they were. Um, but that doesn’t mean that they couldn’t respond to myth and their native stories as myth, and perhaps *have* personal religious experiences that were sort of facilitated or inspired by that mythology. Like, it would be ridiculous to say that- that that never happened. So that’s the first thing, we’re always looking at history as if there was only ever one response to culture, but there’s a whole range of responses. Uh, and all we can do is guess at the full extent of that range, that’s all we can do, yeah? And so we know that things like, you know, phenomena like the Tylwyth Teg, a belief in the Tylwyth Teg survives well up into the Industrial Revolution. Prior to that, you know, uh these- these beliefs, uh, you know, we can call them quasi-animistic, or at least beliefs in a type of personhood in the landscape or living beings from other dimensions, or what- however you want to call it, these things had been evolving for a very, very, very, very, very long time, and evolved while Christianity was here. So, even though, for example, Cerridwen uh, is a witch in a folktale, in a very simplistic sense, her story does express a type of mythology. It is *mythic*, and I would say it’s mythic in the full sense, in that it- it contains within it the latent possibility for religious expression, because it- it provides in symbolic form a description of some kind of cosmic order. A cosmic narrative in a greater archetypal narrative uh, that Cerridwen, and Gwion Bach, and Taliesin, and the animals, and all the other characters and elements all symbolize. So that’s the first thing, uh, you know. Latent in Cerridwen’s story, there is a mythology, I would say. Uh, and we can say it’s a mythology, because we can compare it to other stories, usually older stories, and find similar elements, similar cosmic patterns, um… We can say that this is a- there’s a latent religiosity in the story, because it talks about the soul, and death, and all the things that religions usually talk about are encoded in that mythology. Now, just because Cerridwen is a witch in a folktale, it doesn’t mean that she can’t also be a mythological figure in a myth that was popular amongst common people. I think it would be patronizing to assume that those people weren’t sophisticated enough to have that type of cultural and spiritual life. Now, of course, that doesn’t mean that Cerridwen- excuse me, that doesn’t mean that Cerridwen necessarily um, is a character who uh, who survives from the Iron Age complete. She is the fruit of an evolving tradition where these *types* of characters, and these *types* of symbol, these types of

mythologies are being played with, from generation to generation. So, when I say things like, you know, 'maybe we can trace Cerridwen's roots, and her mythology as a goddess back into earlier periods', I'm kind of saying, 'Well, there must be some cultural roots to these elements in Welsh culture'. And to be frank, it would be weird if there wasn't, yeah? It would be odd if, you know, the culture of the Celtic Iron Age did not persist in some evolved form into the early medieval period. I think it's kind of ridiculous to claim that it didn't. Um, and you know, people who make those claims usually can't see the woods for the trees, as far as I'm concerned, because culture doesn't work like that.

"And as you noted in your question, you know, we've got evidence for, you know, deities like Nodens, the name surviving in an evolved form, into the father of Gwyn ap Nudd. Uh, Lleu, Lugh, the earlier precursor in the ethnonym Lugus. You know, we've got evidence for these survivals, so I don't think it's unreasonable to assume that as well as these names evolving and surviving, that elements of the myth evolved and survived. But, we have to be clear that we can only make educated guesses, that's all we can do. They are educated guesses. Uh, but you know, they're not unreasonable guesses, and just because there isn't direct evidence, it doesn't mean there's not a lot of circumstantial evidence that we can use to reverse engineer these evolutions. Which is, I suppose is what a lot of my work is about, in one sense. *But*, you know, on the other side of things, I also don't like to get too caught up in those discussions or those debates. I think they're important, and we must have them, and they're kind of foundational to any study of- of historical Celtic culture, of course they are. So, I'm not saying we should jettison them, or get rid of them, or forget about them. We need to have them, but I'm also interested in interpretation – in understanding the symbols in the myths. I'm interested in drawing out meaning. I'm interested in making them live, if you like, in our imaginations. I'm interested in how we make them uh, yeah, how we can be inspired by them, I suppose. And in that sense, I'm- I'm *not* so concerned with the accuracy of the history. You know, whether we have got enough evidence to say this or that thing, all the time. Sometimes we've got to be careful like that, especially if we're sort of trying to um, address certain claims made about Celtic history which are untrue. I think we do have to be clear about that. I mean, I just came across one the other day, you know, Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwythr are the- the rival, the rivals, and therefore they are the constellation of Gemini. Uh, and I- I've kind of, this is like a very new thing that's emerged in the last sort of few years, but I've- you know, I've had people emailing me, saying 'oh, yeah, Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwythr, yeah, the constellation Gemini', and it's like well, show me the source! Tell me where it is. So there are some claims that we have to be very careful about, and in that sense we *need* an appreciation of the history, and we *do* need to know, we do need to think through what we can and cannot say. But beyond that, there is a life to these myths, there just is, you know. That's why they've survived; they are potent and rich. And even before we get to spirituality or religious thinking, or religious experience, you know, they are viable, intriguing, inspiring myths in their own right. I mean, take- I, you know, there's a natural progression then onto spirituality and the religious experience, of course there is, but even just as a cultural phenomena, there's plenty to

be getting on with in terms of- of inspiration and interpretation. And I don't want to feel like we're holding ourselves back just because we can't prove that, you know, uh, Gwyn ap Nudd has a precursor from the Iron Age. You know, that would be a shame to restrict ourselves so much. Does that answer the question?"

Me: "Yeah, I think so."

GMB: "Okay, good."

Me: "Um, speaking of- of Gwyn and Gwythr being uh, the constellation Gemini, that was also- like, there was a little segment, uh, about that in the same Calan Gaeaf special that you were interviewed about Gwyn ap Nudd for."

GMB: "Oh, really?"

Me: "Right after they talked to you, that part came up. So that's probably where people are getting that."

GMB: "Okay. That's such a shame. I mean- I mean, just to be clear on this, I'm totally fine with someone saying 'yeah, I had this inspired vision where Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwythr were the constellation Gemini', or like 'I had this- this moment of personal gnosis, and that was what was revealed to me'. Like, yeah! Great! Go for your life! But to make- to then make these historical claims is a misrepresentation, and that's where we need to be careful."

Me: "Yeah, I was a little bummed myself, because I was like, 'that's interesting, but it was- you know, it was just a TV show," [GMB: "Yeah, yeah."] "like, Calan Gaeaf special thing, so they didn't cite any sources, *per se*, they just kind of interviewed this um, I don't know if she was an astronomer or what, and I'm like 'Where's this story from?' So…"

GMB: "I've- I've looked. I've even- I even bought her book and looked at her sources, and there's just nothing, you know. So it's… unfortunately, yeah."

Me: "Uh, alright. So, um… So I've done an anonymous um, written survey, collecting data from people who incorporate- either incorporate elements of Welsh culture into their spiritual practice, or who center it, um, and one of the- the instances of greatest disparity of opinion on that survey was what makes somebody Welsh, and whether people who aren't Welsh in either nationality or ancestry should include Welsh culture in their Neo-Pagan practice. Um, in an interview with Kris Hughes that you did earlier in 2023 titled 'Modern Paganism's Translation Problem', you said, quote, 'I would like people such as yourself [Kris Hughes] to be able to lay claim to Celtic myths and therefore to work towards preserving their integrity. I don't feel like it's just up to us

‘technically DNA Celts’ to do this, and I say that in inverted commas because I personally don’t think it’s DNA or blood that qualifies your ethnicity. I think culture is far more powerful, that you can learn a language, you can learn a culture, and it doesn’t really matter so much where your family comes from, although that’s part of it’. Um, I don’t know if your feelings around that have changed, because that was a couple of years ago now, but those statements are directly in contrast to certain types of people with ideologies or in groups who say that Celtic traditions are closed, or are partially closed. Um, those same persons also often insist that you must either be of Celtic blood ancestry or else be residing in or born on Celtic land, or both, in order to fully participate in a Celtic Neo-Pagan path or be considered a fully recognized member of certain Celtic Pagan communities. And, in line with this, there are some Celtic symbols such as the Celtic cross, or the sun cross, that have been wielded by groups such as Neo-Nazis and the KKK, and it’s also been incorporated into the logo for the openly racist website Stormfront. Are you willing to share any of your thoughts or feelings regarding the use of Celtic symbols by white supremacists and openly racist groups?”

GMB: “Yeah, they can all f*** right off. Um, and um, you can quote me on that.”

Me: “Okay.”

GMB: “Um, oh, God, it’s such a can of worms, isn’t it?”

Me: “Mmhmm.”

GMB: “I mean… I think that there is a- a real crisis in modern identity, and it’s because… It’s be- I mean, I just think, like, American culture is just such a brilliant example of this. Um, you know, *loads* of different ethnicities from *loads* of different places turning up, voluntarily or forced, in one place, and over several generations, all sort of forming this national culture, called ‘American’. And regardless of whether, you know, we- we want to talk about American politics or the idea of the nation-state, but in terms of a culture, that’s just proof to me that, you know, culture is not determined by DNA; it’s just not. Um, I think DNA, or blood, let’s say, because that’s- I think what people *really* mean when they say DNA, they mean blood. In the- in the traditional sense of ancestry. DNA is just like the- the modern, yeah, placeholder for that very, very ancient idea. Which is, in many ways, quite an aristocratic idea, I would say. Or, how it comes into modern culture – it comes through aristocracy. You know, pure lineages, you know, can’t marry the riffraff, you know, we’ve got to keep the blood pure, all that kind of stuff is intensely aristocratic. Um, and so, you know, when- if, if I truly believe that, then- and I do, then of *course* culture is not something that you can gatekeep by claiming that it’s only appropriate for people of Celtic blood to get involved in Celtic mythology. I mean, it- it happens a lot. I get a lot of YouTube comments and emails from people, especially Americans, who start out by saying

‘and my ancestry is this’, and that’s interesting, but also, I don’t care! You know, it’s like- it’s like, yeah! Great! I’m glad that-.”

Me: “Woohoo!”

GMB: “Yeah, yeah. It’s like, brilliant! You know, like… If, if you find that meaningful, and it roots you in something real and tangible, then by all means, continue to do so. And you know, maybe I’ve just got this unconscious privilege, because I grew up in a Welsh-speaking culture, you know, like it just comes naturally, whatever. Allowing for all of that. But the minute we- we start to use that as um, uh, you know, a passport, and we start policing the boundaries of this imagined sort of ‘pure ethnicity’, then of *course* that lends itself to notions of supremacy. I mean it- supremacy isn’t just some dislocated cultural phenomena; it arises out of what we might- because it has been more liberal ideas regarding family and ancestry, um, I’m not necessarily saying that one results in the other, but supremacy is just an extreme version of this idea of pure lineage. And you know, the- the crisis in modern identity, I would say, *is* that contradiction. Is that we’ve inherited these very traditional notions of what it means to belong to the ‘in-group’, because for a very, very long period of time, it *was* your blood family group. It was determined by your family, and your extended family, and your community, who usually were all interrelated, because people didn’t move around that much when they were serfs, and you know, peasants, and land-workers. We weren’t *allowed* to move around too much. So I get it. That’s- that’s our understanding, but the modern age has shown us something very, very different, which is that, uh, what determines your identity is your culture, and your culture really has nothing to do with your blood ancestry. So, just to qualify this a little bit, because it’s complex, that’s not to say there aren’t any epigenetic effects. Some people do feel like they need some familial or blood ancestry connection to give them some type of legitimacy. And, you know, I’ve met people who- who um, were um, uh, adopted, and grew up in, in English families, but were always drawn to Celtic myths for whatever reason, and then they become full-blown Pagans, they’re involved in Druidry and Celtic mythology, and they become a- you know, a practitioner of whatever is latent in Celtic mythology in terms of religion. They do all that, and then they discover that their original birth family was Welsh. So, clearly, there’s something- there *is* something going on. But I don’t think that disproves the reality that people can also adopt and learn cultures. Now, I’m not saying that it- you can just decide yourself. I’m not saying that you can just wake up one morning and decide ‘I am Welsh’.”

Me: “I’m Welsh!” [holding up forefinger as if making a discovery]

GMB: “Yeah. I- I don’t think it works like that, because culture emerges through relationships. And so, you know, I would- I would expect that anyone who wants to identify as Welsh will have at least come to live with us for a while and learnt our ways. But, you know, they’ve- they’ve got involved in Welsh culture, like, they’ve become a part of- of the living, breathing language. You

know, that they are immersed in it in some way. Um, you know, I don't think it's something that happens overnight, but I do think it's something that can be learned, because I've seen it happen. Like I- you know, I went to school with uh, children from incoming English families, you know, English mother and father, come to Welsh school – secondary school, at a late stage, like eleven, twelve – not being able to speak a word of Welsh, and then they learn Welsh, and they grow up with the rest of us Welshies, and by the time they're like sixteen or seventeen, they're just us. It's just, you're just us, yeah? And to say otherwise would just be bizarre, you know. So, yeah, blood and ancestry is not a prerequisite, I would say. Is that the full enough answer? Yeah, and f*** the supremacists, just again, for good measure." [makes accompanying hand gestures]

Me: "Um, uh, yeah, that's a thorough answer. Um, what would you say does make a person Celtic or Welsh in your opinion, and uh, how do you think people who haven't ever lived in or visited Cymru could possibly immerse themselves in the culture deeply enough to take on somewhat a facet of that identity or is that not possible without living there, in your view?"

GMB: "I think it- I'm not saying it's impossible, but I think it would be very difficult to immerse oneself in Welsh culture without being in the places where it lives. Um, because it has to be a reciprocal relationship; it can't just be one-way. You can't just watch a hundred years' worth of S4C sitting in your apartment in, I dunno, wherever, Oregon or wherever, and- and be, and then be Welsh, you know. Like, you've watched a lot of Welsh telly, but you haven't been in dialogue, and therefore, you know, that's I suppose where immersion really is only a means to achieve embodiment. Uh, now, so this is- these are different things. Practicing a Welsh-centered spirituality does not require you to be Welsh, yeah? I don't feel, yeah? It's a very specific activity; it's a very specific cultural mold, I suppose you could say. Uh, it's a very um, uh… Not that it's necessarily restricted to- to just practice and, and uh, you know, devotional relationships and what have you, and religiosity. But it doesn't require the- the prior identity. Fostering and embodying a Welsh or Irish or Scottish or Cornish, or English or French or any other identity does require not just immersion, but a dialogue, a reciprocal relationship, where you become a part of the life of the culture. Uh, but yeah, I don't th- you know, I know that might be a little bit confusing for folks to understand, but, uh, and you know, as far as I understand it, in my limited understanding, when you… And this comes from someone who's, you know, practiced, like, *way* too many types of spiritual tradition in my lifetime, not that it made me any wiser. But you know, I've been part of lots of different traditions, and lots of different practices, and ceremonial processes, and initiations, and all that gubbins, and I never felt like I couldn't take part in those just because I wasn't part of that culture or that ethnicity. I think that there, what- what is missing though – this is turning into a very long answer, but it's a very intriguing question. And this is, I think this is something that, um, was it Jung? I think it might've been Jung, I could be wrong there, but Jung, I think it's in his foreword to one of the earliest translations of the I Ching, where he talks about the- the need for an immersion in a culture before there's an appreciation for the subtleties of the mythology. And so, you know, when- when someone who isn't a- a Welsh or an

Irish person comes to Celtic mythology, I think we do have to appreciate that there's always going to be some distance, and that some nuance is going to be missing, and, you know, some- some engineering is going to be required to make it fit in that person's life, let's say. Uh, I'll just give you uh, a brief example from my own experience, so… I spent a fair few years um, studying with various teachers in a Daoist tradition, studying different types of Daoist meditation, and practice, uh, and you know, got very uh, um, immersed in it, and was, you know, very inspired by it, uh, and very affected by it, in- in some quite profound ways. Um, and yet, I had to appreciate that a lot of the nuances in that tradition, which is uh, you know, is still a vibrant and living tradition uh, in China… A lot of the cultural context was going to be missing for me, and that I just had to accept that what little value I was deriving from it had to be enough. Like, the- unless I went and learnt Chinese and went to live in China, I was never going to really be able to embody the full tradition in the traditional sense. So, I think we've just got to be happy with what we've got, really, and just accept that it might be enough, still. You know, and that, because I did find those- those practices and those traditions plenty to be getting on with. I may have been missing some context for the symbolic and mythological narratives, in some of those traditions, but you know, as- as just a beginner in those traditions also, like I had plenty to be getting on with, for sure. And I think it- I'm guessing it's the same in- in any tradition including modern Celtic spirituality. There's always going to be something missing, um, but it might not be that important, that it's missing, I suppose is what I'm trying to say. Yeah."

Me: "And, for me personally, anyway, uh, because I've also studied various, you know, things, but part of the- the joy and excitement is, you know, once you move beyond that initial introduction stage and start really getting into the meat of things and start to discover 'Oh! This is related to that', and 'that's where that symbolism comes from!' and 'Oh, this means, this has a deeper meaning, because it's connected to this, and I didn't see that before', and all this kind of thing."

GMB: "Yeah, exactly. Isn't that the best bit?"

Me: "Yeah!"

GMB: "You know, like it's great! Yeah, yeah. And to make it live in yourself. Yeah, yeah."

Me: "And then, you know, and also it's different in- across different time periods, and it doesn't necessarily matter if it's exactly what the ancients got out of it, but anyway."

GMB: "Yeah."

Me: "Um, so, related to the previous question, um… As a U.S. American, currently domiciled on the east coast, uh, I can't help but be reminded occasionally, you know, just going about my day,

of the involvement of Celts, including the Welsh, in the colonization of our locality here, of the indigenous peoples, uh, because I live in a state that has cities named things like Bethesda, and Berwyn Heights, and street names like Llywellyn Avenue, and Conway Road, and there's a school not far from here called Bryn Mawr. Um, do you think that Welsh culture-centering spiritual paths could be actively used to aid in decolonization or anti-racism efforts leading to facing history in a more honest way without dismissing the- without also dismissing your own oppression and prejudice that's suffered by the Welsh yourselves, like without ignoring that, but also acknowledging that reality?"

GMB: "Yeah. I would hope that any spiritual practice or tradition worth its salt would achieve those aims of challenging, yeah, historical, and the current effects of colonialism, and all the other types of nasty stuff we've done to ourselves as a humanity. Um, I mean it- it's such a brilliant piece of history to acknowledge and be aware of, you know, the participation of the Welsh and the Irish and lots of other ethnicities and cultures in the colonization and the, yeah, just the- the devastation uh, of Native American peoples in history. I mean it's just, it's frightening. And the- the continued impacts of that, to this day, as well. Um, um, myself and a friend of mine, we put on a show almost every year, we've done it for a few years now, called Gafal Tir, which is a history of land rights and protest in Wales, where we tell the story of the uh, um, the migrations, uh from Wales to America and various other places. And those migrations happened largely because of poverty, so the Industrial Revolution kicks off, it displaces the artisanal um, culture in lots of communities, so artisans are basically put out of work, the cottage industries are literally competed out of existence because of cheap produce produced by factories. That causes a massive poverty and desperation, uh, over you know, several generations, and those generations flee, really. They flee that poverty in hope of a better life in the promised land, in uh, in America and the other ex-colonies. So, one displaced people causes the displacement of another people, and it's like uh, it's a- it's a terrible tragedy, that story. Um, I think that, well just before I get to that thought, there's another side of that of course, is the impact of slavery, um, you know, nominally Welsh aristocrats and capitalists owning slaves, and the role of Wales in the slave trade. Uh, and how African slaves were- were traded through the ports of Wales. Um, and then the relationships to the various sugar plantations and what have you in 'the New World', which is such an arrogant term, I find, but anyway. Um, those two – and you know, I'm terribly simplifying now; I'm butchering the history a bit, but – those two phenomena, the displaced becoming the displacers, and then the desperately poor becoming the cogs which- which run the machinery of slavery in Wales, you know I really, what I hope for the Welsh is that it gives us an opportunity to be a bit more humble. Um, and to realize that, you know, even though many wrongs have been done to us, and you know, we're still a colonized nation, as far as I'm concerned. We're still in this forced marriage with London that we can't ever seem to get out of. Uh, you know, there's the- the economic impact of English folks moving into Wales is unfortunately still very detrimental to the Welsh language, it just is. It's just a fact, really, you know. For all of that, um, we're still living in a first world country, and our um, our

own colonization and our own oppression, even though it persists, and its effects persist to this day, and, like, they're just, they fade in comparison to what happened to Native Americans. You know, I- I don't know what the exact numbers are, but you know, ninety percent of the population being wiped out, that never happened to us, you know. Um, so I think we need to understand our own history, and how it relates to the history of other peoples, and our role in that. You know, I think that it- it would be a good thing for, for the Welsh nation to make formal apologies in some instances, to some communities and some peoples for our, for the part that our ancestors played in that. I think it's right for those types of, I mean, you know, it's not just about saying stuff to make yourself feel better, it's about let- helping us all move on as one humanity. We've got to say, we've got to acknowledge past- past hurts and past harm. Um, and current harms, too, and current oppressions. You know, they're all interlinked. All of the peoples who are experiencing oppression today, that oppression has its roots in a very, very long history. So, I'm kind of wandering off track now, aren't I? But, you know, politically speaking, I feel like, uh, a Welsh-centered spirituality *must* come to grips with that history. Uh, any spiritual tradition, pathway, practice, I believe, *must* as part of what it's- of its core tenets, come to terms with past atrocities. You know, if- again, lots of people are going to disagree with me, but, you know, in my opinion, you know, a spiritual tradition is- is about transcending the self in some way, be that through culture, or creativity, or contemplation, or whatever. You know, we're always trying to go beyond ourselves to something else. If we really believe in that as a core tenet of our practice, then there are various obstacles to going beyond ourselves, and one of those things are the atrocities of history. You know, it- it would be ridiculous to assume that we could just transcend and move on without at least acknowledging in some way the shit that has been done in our name, you know. And unfortunately it is done in our name. That *is* the history of Welsh people, so Welsh people alive today have an obligation to- to do something about it. I'm on my high horse there a little bit, I'm afraid, Jenny. But, you know, like, I think it's important, so."

Me: "I mean, it- I would personally agree that it's important. I mean, yeah. I mean, I'm over here, so, yeah. We've got so much… work to do."

GMB: "Yeah. I know, and- and how, you know, I know it- it feels like hard work, sometimes, but what a great opportunity, as well, you know. Like, yeah. Hmm."

[Discussing plans for finishing the rest of the interview at a later time.]

Me: "Um, but, yes, that is… It's- it's been a bit, you know, um… I don't know what the right word is… verging on despair at times, over here, lately, so it's- it's nice to hear it framed in the- the frame of opportunity instead of like, 'we're drowning in our own crap!' you know."

GMB: "Yeah."

Me: “Um. Uh, in the survey that I was talking about earlier, uh, that I conducted, I got seventy-four Neo-Pagan responses to that survey. Um, of people who incorporate Welsh culture into their practice from various areas in the world, and over ninety percent of them stated that they believe learning the Welsh language can be an act of spiritual or religious devotion. Uh, this is in line with my personal experience of several people asking me for recommendations on where or how to learn Welsh outside DuoLingo. Um, do you have any thoughts or feelings in response to that news, and do you think it’s possible uh, for new Pagans outside Wales to help bolster Welsh language-learning or preservation programs or initiatives of that nature?”

GMB: “Short answer, yes, absolutely. Longer answer, and I suppose this is just in terms of uh, practicality, um, you know, and having taught Welsh classes to Welsh learners myself, and also, you know, um, I’m married to an English woman, and you know, experiencing my wife’s experience of learning Welsh… Um, I think if you want to be successful at learning any language, you- you have to use it in relationships. You can learn it in like an abstract, internal way, and some people *can* do that, but I think most people find language-learning is far easier when it comes alive in relationships. So, as much as possible, I’d encourage people to participate in live classes and uh, you know, like, I appreciate how difficult it is to learn new languages sometimes. Um, but once you reach- once you cross a certain threshold, joi- just joining in conversation groups, I think, is really good. I think it’s one of the more- one of the more overlooked aspects of learning a language, I would say. Um, in terms of using the Welsh language as a medium through which to contact or, or engage with, or, yeah, or touch um, the spirit of a tradition, if you like, I think it’s- I think it’s definitely a very potent and powerful way of doing it. Um, I mean, what one of the, one of the- the great obstacles in the work I do is language, because we’re always working in translation with my students, because they’re all English speakers. Very- sometimes we’ll get Welsh speakers, but, you know, and sometimes Welsh learners, but generally, we’re working in translation, and of course, when we say ‘translation’, we don’t just mean a technical process of changing, you know, swapping this word for this word. Translation is also an attempt to- to point to a broader cultural network of meaning, um, or- or replacing a broader cultural network of meaning in the new language. So, whatever the network was in Welsh, we’re trying to replace it with whatever’s in English, and use similar cultural signifiers, which aren’t the same, but are hopefully similar enough to be able to get away with it. So, translation, you know, it’s a- it’s a difficult process, uh, to do it well, and you know, just on- on a bit of a tangent. You know, I’d encourage people to use translations um, that either have notes or have access to notes. You know, so I’ll get away with this, a lot of the time by saying ‘yeah, yeah, you can use my translations of a poem, but if you want to understand it properly, go and see Marged Haycock’s notes’, you know, because then I don’t have to make the notes. But yeah, notes are important if you really want to appreciate translations properly. And then the, the pronunciation of names, the- the sense of names, and the sense of words in a language as you say them, I think is a- you know, as a contemplative practice now, I think it’s quite powerful, you know. Um, chanting in religion is- is a, you know, a very powerful practice

of contemplation. It is a way of removing oneself from what we might call the more mundane frames of mind to, you know, something a bit- that's approaching supernature a bit more. Um, and so, using the Welsh language in that sense, in terms of devotional practice or contemplative practice, I think is something really important to do, for sure. If you're serious, you know, in- in approaching a Welsh-centered spirituality, um, but again, you know, there is- there isn't necessarily an onus to therefore identify as Welsh. You're going to use Welsh materials and materials and phenomena and artifacts drawn from Welsh culture, and therefore we need to abide by the same standards of good relation that you'd have with anybody, yeah? Be polite, don't be rude. Uh, but so long as you're polite, and you're not rude, then I think you can go a long way in using materials like language to enhance, yeah, your contemplative experiences, let's say."

[Further discussion of scheduling for the remainder of the questions.]

[Second recording begin.]

Me: "Wel, Croeso nôl, welcome back. Uh, I guess we'll just get right into it, then. Um, so. To start off again. Uh, you are one of the co-founders of Eos, uh, the nightingale, yeah?"

GMB: "Oh, blimey, yeah."

Me: "The broadcasting rights agency for Wales," [GMB: "Yes."] "who fought in court for comparable royalty entitlements for Welsh music artists."

GMB: "Yep."

Me: "And comparable to what's already in place for English- English-language artists. Uh, do you ever find that your passion for music and your advocacy for Welsh rights overlaps or are intertwined with your deep interest in your traditional culture and literature. If so, how?"

GMB: "Oh. Well, it all comes from the same place. I mean, the whole venture was a very bureaucratic, and relatively technical and political… You know, there wasn't much in terms of, you know, the, like the spirit of Welsh music. Although I think that all of us who were involved in the campaign, we all had a- an appreciation of that. We knew that that's why we were doing it, to keep something alive, you know, to keep something viable in our culture. Um, I mean, you know, one of the arguments that I made in an article when we were promote- I mean, this is like, a long time ago now. Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years ago, when we started the whole thing, and um, one of the articles I wrote when we were promoting the idea of an independent Welsh royalties society, basically, so that we could negotiate our own- Just a bit of background for people, the- there's only one dominant royalty collection agency or society in Britain, and that's PRS, and because they collect royalties for everybody, it's really easy for small, subcultures,

‘sub-cultures’ [makes hand gesture of air quotes], you know, like we are a national culture. But, in terms of the broader U.K., uh, British scene, we’re a subculture, and therefore, we were never earning royalties at the rate we felt was fair, and so, to renegotiate our royalties with corporations – media corporations like the BBC, or various TV companies, or what have you – we had to create our own agency. And, I wrote an article sort of comparing that situation to the very traditional situation of the Welsh bards, which is: we work on a system of patronage, you know, we expect patronage from the establishment to be able to create this art, this cultural artifact, because um, it’s not viable as a- in terms of pure capitalist economics. It needs some kind of subsidy to keep it going. Uh, because, you know, our market economies aren’t structured in a way to support independent grassroots artists. So there was a- an echoing of our tradition in that campaign, you know. We- we have to- we have a native uh, concept of this patronage structure already in place, we simply need to expand it to include music, and so to revitalize this idea that, you know, you need us as much as we need you. If you don’t, you know, we were really in- in argument with the BBC. The BBC is a British corporation, dominates broadcasting in Wales, and our argument was, well, if you are going to be our national broadcaster in Wales, then you need our content as much as we need your funds to create the content, you know. So, that, that was pretty much the um, the situation that we- that we were in, because the BBC was basically unwilling to pay more for our music, even though our music was the only Welsh music it had available to it, to provide its Welsh-language services. So, I was trying to describe the situation in terms of the bards and their patrons, you know. We- we create culture, you pay for the culture. You pay for the culture because you see it has a broader societal value. And it, you know, the campaign was relatively successful. We didn’t get- we did manage to double the royalty rate,” [Me: “Oh, that’s good.”] “but it was doubling not very much to a little bit more than not very much. So it was still a cut in real terms, um, of what we once had been able to attract. But you know, it’s kind of, I haven’t had anything to do with that for a long time, I kind of… That was the moment I gave up on music as a career.”

Me: “Ah.”

GMB: “And where I pivoted to doing, you know, teaching courses, basically. So, that was the impact, and you know, there is still a- a vibrant and viable Welsh music scene, but not as many people make a living out of it. Not that anybody really made that much money out of it anyway. But you know, the little we *did* have, we were trying to protect, yeah.”

Me: “Mmhmm. Okay. Thank you for sharing your background with that.”

GMB:

Me: “Um, pivoting back towards the, the things that you teach about, I’ve got uh, one more- slightly more specific question, regarding that. Uh, that I was curious about your thoughts on.

Um, there are some scholars, and Neo-Pagans too, who posit that the land of 'Ireland' mentioned in the Second Branch of the Mabinogi could be a gloss of either a place in Annwfn or a substitute for Annwfn itself, pointing to the brocaded silk sails of Matholwch's ships, and the common theme of crossing over water as a portal of entry to Annwfn, and attestation of Otherworldly magical islands in the westerly direction from Wales, and also parallels between the Second Branch and the Spoils of Annwfn. Um, do you think it's possible that the Ireland of the Second Branch could be symbolic of either Annwfn or a location in Annwfn, and if so, why do you think it's referred to as Ireland in the Second Branch even though the First Branch refers to Annwfn directly by name?"

GMB: "Hahaha, okay. Good question. Complicated question, but good question."

Me: "Yeah."

GMB: "So, may- maybe I'll rephrase or reframe the question, so it's easier for me to answer."

Me: "Okay."

GMB: "Because, the way I work with the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, as you know, and as most people will probably know if they know anything about me, is that I- I treat the Four Branches as a symbolic text."

Me: "Mmhmm."

GMB: "Um, and therefore, I don't read it naturalistically, as we would a novel. I read it primarily as a work that's been created to express a symbolic meaning, and therefore, the author, uh sort of prioritizes symbolic meaning over naturalistic meaning or over what you might think of as like, the real-world logic that, you know, that we usually assume is occurring in a story. Like, the author will sometimes cut corners with real-world logic so as to prioritize symbolic meaning. So, sometimes, the- the plot doesn't work very well. You know, sometimes it feels a bit clunky, or it's like, 'well, why did that happen?', you know. Uh, we were having this conversation in- in the First Branch course last night, you know. How come we can't explain certain events in the tale according to the laws of the natural world? And my answer is usually, well, it's because the author is creating a symbolic narrative, and those considerations are secondary. So, that's the first thing to- that's the first part of the framing. The other part is- is the, um, the nature and the condition of the storytelling tradition. So, the storytelling tradition that we're assuming is the roots of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi is a tradition where storytellers will be aware of traditional myths – there is a traditional myth of Bendigeidfran and his sister Branwen, and a traditional myth concerning the kind of betrayal of Branwen by the Irish King – that's the myth part. Like uh, a very general story, and then, alongside those types of traditional myths, there are

variations on these very basic general stories. So, different lineages telling different variations of the same basic story, sharing you know, very similar features, lots of overlap, but also distinct elements. But it's also a storytelling tradition that was, uh, aware of narrative structure, so, underlying shapes in story that could be reused in different contexts. So, as well as there being traditional stories – traditional myths – and variations of traditional stories, there are also traditional structures – shapes – in stories. Um, you know, the mortal has a supernatural encounter while out hunting in the woods, uh, and that leads to some kind of test – Otherworldly test – of the mortal. That's a- a common structure or pattern that we find in- in lots of different Welsh and Irish stories. So, that would be an example of a structure. So, to come directly to the question, you know, *can* we assume that Ireland is a gloss for, or can be considered a version of, Annwfn? Yes, but that's not necessarily because that's what the author was intending. *We* can make that interpretation, that reading, because we have available to us uh, a you know, a modern tradition of scholarship that's studied all these stories, and we can say: 'Oh yeah, look, there's a similarity between *Preiddeu Annwfn* and this episode from *Culhwch and Olwen*, and the Second Branch of the Mabinogi. They all kind of do the same type of thing; they- they're all, they all appear to be drawing on the same basic structure', which I've discussed at length in various places, you know, uh, king of Britain travels to the supernatural Otherworldly island, his chief bard is involved – Taliesin, usually – there's a cauldron involved in the mix, you know, seven companions, uh, you know, there's a great battle, loads of bloodshed, and only seven survive, and these seven companions return, and variations on that basic structure. So, once we understand that structure, then for us, as modern readers, then we can go, 'well yeah, you know, so that means that Ireland in the Second Branch of the Mabinogi, resonates with Annwfn in other texts'. Because, in the Second Branch of the Mabinogi, the other- the island is Ireland, the island of Ireland, but in the Spoils of Annwfn, the island is Annwfn. In the episode from Culhwch and Olwen, the island is Ireland, but, all three of these stories have such common features that Ireland, in a way, can be read as Annwfn. Now, for the story in the Second Branch to work, we don't have to know any of that. The author doesn't need to be aware of- of any of those resonances; they might just be telling a traditional story, and kind of, and that's enough. But, what's interesting about reading this deeper structure, is that it can help us explain why certain things in the Second Branch happen. Why is this supremely passive character, Branwen, who for all intents and purposes is a mortal woman, in the story, who does absolutely nothing but do exactly what the men in the story tell her to do, and does this from a position of wanting to serve her country, obviously, you know. She's doing it for all the right moral reasons, but she's still subservient to the patriarchy, and doing everything she's been told to do, and then the *moment* she decides to do the *smallest* thing, like the *tiniest* thing, which is to talk to a tiny, tiny, little bird, and say [whispering] 'hey, little bird, go and tell my brother that I'm being abused and punished, and he needs to come and rescue me' – she does this *tiniest* thing, that the tiniest moment of self-agency, and f***in' all hell breaks loose. An island – it's apocalypse. *Everybody* in Ireland dies, apart from five women, and *everybody* that's on the Welsh invading force dies, apart from seven. Now, in many ways, her one moment of the tiniest moment of- of self-agency

is so powerful that it causes absolute destruction, but if we read Ireland as a version of- as a, as a place, as a real place, where supernature becomes present, for whatever reason – so it's not that we have to decide between Annwfn and Ireland; they can be both at the same time, because that's how symbols work – so it *is* Ireland, but it *is* Annwfn, because supernature's weird, and therefore, you know, mad shit happens in Ireland, this mortal woman, in the moment of her tiniest choice, basically becomes a war goddess. And, and just- and you know, and in some ways, you know, she dies of a broken heart because, in some ways, maybe she acknowledges that some greater force acted through her in Ireland. So, it's not that Ireland has to be Annwfn, it's just that it helps us make a particular interpretation that gives depth – ironically, pardon the pun – to the story. An Annwfian depth, yeah? It's like, oh, there's a depth here now. So that's- that's what's interesting about these structures. It's what's interesting about the concept of Annwfn, because, if we read the First Branch correctly, then Annwfn is like, just around the next tree; it's just there. And, we didn't have to do anything special to get there, it's- it's always immanent in our reality, as it appears to be in the First Branch, and therefore, it is always immanent in Ireland, also, yeah? So it helps us fill out this, this sort of metaphysic, if you like, this description of the spiritual cosmos that *might* be embedded. It's all guess work, of course, we can never prove any of this, but we can create this kind of internal logic where it all starts to make sense, somehow. We can explain this awesome, devastating power that Branwen appears to have in the moment of her tiniest choice. We can understand how that might be uh, brought into- into the mortal realm because the gods and goddesses are close in Ireland, because Annwfn is present. Because, in- in other texts, Annwfn appears to be, yeah, an analog for Ireland. Yeah, and it helps us understand this, this greater metaphysical sort of idea of what Annwfn is, basically. Um, so to cut a long story short, it just helps us imagine better, basically. And that- and you know, that's- that's good enough for me. Like we can't, like I said, we can't prove any of that, but it- I think I can make a good argument for it, which is- which is all we've got, is good- yeah, better or worse arguments. Does that, does that make sense?"

Me: 'It makes sense to me; we'll see what the dissertation analysts think."

GMB: "Yeah, yeah they might think I'm crazy. Well, you know, like, I can cite loads of-"

Me: "I'll join the club."

GMB: "Well, you know, that's kind of what they're for, they're- they're there to be skeptical."

Me: "Yeah, it's part of the job."

GMB: "Yeah, indeed. I mean, there's- there's a, you know, I'm, like, Patrick Sims-Williams, who's a- you know, a renowned scholar, you know, loads of credentials, very important, well

respected, you know. This is just building on an argument that he makes, basically, and that's been made by plenty of other folks in the past, too. I'm not the first to- I'm just extrapolating."

Me: "To draw the parallels, yeah."

GMB: "Yeah, but I'm- I am- I'm taking it a step further than they would, for sure, yeah."

Me: "Mmhmm. And, you know, I mean, skepticism has its place; it's good and helps keep the mind open."

GMB: "Yeah, totally, yeah, yeah. It makes us hold things gently. Yeah, instead of grasping, exactly."

Me: "Um, alright, thank you. Um, in closing, do you have any other thoughts or closing ideas that you would like to communicate to those in academia or beyond in the wider world who seek to better understand people who center or incorporate Welsh culture into spiritual values, practices, or worldviews?"

GMB: "Woah, that is a *really* big question. Um-"

Me: "Going out with a bang."

GMB: "Well, so… I mean, so, I've been thinking a lot about this recently, funnily enough, and I'm- I'm just about- I've just scripted a video on this that's going to go out on the YouTube channel, but, you know, just to give you sort of a- the headlines, if you like, um… So, I think that what- what little insight I can offer, um, to Welsh-centered Pagans – is that the right term? Pagans who center Welsh culture? Whatever. You know- you know, you guys, yeah. You guys, and me guys, of course, because I'm kind of adjacent to that. And then, um, and Welsh scholarship, or Celtic scholarship in general, I think is that we- we just need to know where we are in the evolution of culture. Because, I think it's really easy, particularly for people coming into Paganism, specifically, and perhaps into the study of Celtic mythology, more generally, to forget what's happened over the last sort of few thousand years, you know. Like, uh, it's- it's a bit of a task to remember it all, don't get me wrong, but- but the way I explain it to myself is – to cut to the chase, apologies for the long intro –"

Me: "No, it's fine."

GMB: "I- I think the situation that we find ourselves in is best described as um, the um, the lack of form while preserving content. So, in a- in a normal – in a normal, as if there is such a thing – in a 'normal' religion, or spiritual tradition, you've got form *and* content, yeah? You've got

content, which is myth, stories, values- that kind of encode or symbolize values, concepts, metaphysics, beliefs, all the big think-y stuff, all the belief stuff, is usually expressed through myth, and then the form, usually, grows out of the- the think-y belief stuff, and is- is the behaviors, yeah? So like, in Christianity, we've got the Bible, stories of Jesus, even the Old Testament, the myth-making content part, and the form is, you know, uh, uh, monks and nuns and churches and prayers, and behaviors, yeah, church ritual. Uh, dogma, yeah, prescribed behaviors, moral codes, codes of behavior. So, form and content. Same thing in Buddhism – stories about the Buddha's life, symbolizing particular ethics, and concepts, and metaphysics, and what happens to him, uh, and then the form is sort of you know, meditation, practices of contemplation, self-reflection, compassion, all that kind of shit. So, form and content. In the Celtic tradition, we've got loads of content, but our form was absorbed, and messed about with, and disappeared because of Christianity. So, we've preserved loads of content, but we lost all the form for- for various historical reasons, usually to do with Christianity. And the content even to a degree has been… not messed with, but it's been filtered through Christianity also. But, we've still, you know, like, I'm definitely the camp that we've still got proper, rich, deep, Pagan content in the Celtic myths. So, we turn up in the modern period with this situation where we've got loads of content, but we ain't got no form, and so, what has happened so far outside of the Celtic cultures, usually, apart from a few instances… But, you know, let's say it begins- part of this begins in the Celtic Revival, and, you know, we can say that figures like Iolo Morganwg play a big part in this, but, Iolo Morganwg was- was one of the few Welsh people to instigate and engage with this process. Since Iolo Morganwg, most of this form creation has been happening in English-speaking culture, and you know, this is going to sound really snobby, but, I'm not going to apologize for it, because it is my opinion, is that – and this includes, like, Iolo Morganwg and everybody in the modern period – we've- we've had people basically looking at form – *any* old form – and just trying to bolt it onto the content and make it work. And, for me, that's putting the cart before the horse. We've- we've had influences from the western Hermetic tradition, high magic, Wicca, shamanism, Buddhism, Christianity, you name it, like, people who want to engage with the content of Celtic myth have gone all over the place to look for a form that will help us develop behaviors centered on Celtic myth. But, that's been happening without really understanding the content, I would argue. Now, I don't want to be too snobby, so we need to acknowledge that, at least in terms of folk magic and folk belief and folk Paganism, that's always been eclectic. It's always been kitchen sink. It's always been, 'If it works, great! Let's have that! Christian charms? Brilliant! Yeah, get it in! Uh, you know, a bit of Pagan custom here? Yeah, brilliant! Get it in! Uh… children's stories, you know, about fairies and Tylwyth Teg, yeah, get it in!' Whatever works, we'll use it, yeah. So, Paganism today is still continuing with that eclectic vibe, which is great, like, it's one of the great strengths of Paganism, really, is that it can be so kitchen sink about stuff. It's not- it's not worried about the provenance of things all the time, and why should it be? So that is a reality, and that *is* the Pagan tradition, in many ways, regardless of what the content is, the form has always been very eclectic, and therefore, it's always goal orientated, it serves this function, and therefore, that's why we do it, yeah? So, that's

great, *but*, we live in a very different cultural moment now, and this is a very long way round of- of explaining this, but, our current cultural moment is that, well, yeah, eclectic kitchen sink Paganism served our ancestors very well, because they didn't have easily accessible knowledge. Like, they had to make do, and they did make do, brilliantly, in lots of ways. You know, if you study any type of folk magic, particularly in- or folk beliefs in Britain, like, there's a certain intellectual rigor and sophistication to what's going on, like, it's consistent. It's *far out*, a lot of the time, like, proper mind-blowing stuff, a lot of it, but it also has a certain coherence and rigor, although not in an- in like an academic rigor, that's not the type of rigor I mean. I mean, 'tried and tested in the world – it works, let's do it' rigor. But that's not the world we live in anymore. We do live in- in a culture where scholarship, academia, information *is* accessible to us, and therefore, it's not that I'm encouraging people to jettison the eclectic traditions of Paganism, but to realize that, well, we *can* actually just come to the content, and see what forms naturally grow out of the content, as opposed to continually trying to graft on branches from other traditions. You know, which does work, like, it's viable, like the- you know, the popularity of Celtic spirituality today shows it's viable, but we don't have to keep doing that. There is a- but to- to pull it off successfully, and this is kind of my message to- to folks, is that – so let's figure out what the content means first, properly, in depth. What are the philosophies, concepts, metaphysics, uh, spiritual ideals, wisdoms that the content holds, and *really* understand that, like really humble ourselves to that work, and understand it properly, and *then*, let's try and see what forms evolve out of that, you know, in a natural sense while accepting influences from other places. And, without being too snobby or too worried about it, like, there's no getting it wrong, but I would- I- I've come to the situation where I feel like we keep putting the cart before the horse, we keep putting the content f- the form first, and then expecting the content to fit to it, and to me that's- that's not really paying attention to what we've inherited. That's-"

Me: "Trying to shove it into someone else's framework."

GMB: "Yeah, yeah. Which *can* work, like, you know, because frameworks are powerful, but it- it means that the content comes to mean something slightly different. To, you know, a- a better situation would be that we start with the content, the form grows naturally out of it, and then we create this virtuous cycle of form and content, form and content, form and content. That would give modern Celtic spirituality a far greater sense of itself and a far greater sense of integrity. Because you know, like, we're all worried about cultural appropriation and getting it wrong, you know, because I think, basically, we- we- I think a lot of people are in- involved in 'the scene' kind of know all this stuff instinctively, and we all respond to it instinctively. So, I just want to kind of make it explicitly, as opposed to instinctive, so that we can talk about it, and that- you know. So that's, that's kind of one thing for Pagans, but also the scholarship makes itself useful to that, you know. Because that is something we're good at. We're good at that shit, you know, of understanding things in depth, creating interpretive models, you know, like, thinking through the logic of things, appreciating historical context, that's all stuff that scholarship is really, really

good at. But, for that to happen, scholarship also has to kind of get off its high horse a bit, and just accept that it lives- it can't, scholarship will not survive in the ivory towers anymore, because the university system *is* collapsing. Like, it's coming, AI is coming for your jobs, and, you know, neoliberalism has already bankrupted a lot of the universities already. Like it-"

Me: "At least the humanities."

GMB: "Yeah, like, it's coming, man. You know, like, we can't escape it. So, if- if you want to make yourselves useful-"

Me: "Ultimatums!"

GMB: "Yeah, then, like, there's a whole bunch- and if you want to earn a living doing it, you know, and you want some dignity in your work, then there's a whole world of people who- who would gladly use this work that we can create, so long as it is framed in the right way. And I think that's the appropriate framing, but I think I'm kind of one of- you know, I c- I'm- I might be on a losing battle here, because I feel very alone, you know. Like, I'm not depressed about it, but I don't feel like there's lots of other people doing it from the, you know, and maybe, like, it'll never happen, but I want to put the horse before the cart. I want the content to go first, and then we'll- let's figure out the form after that. So, I dunno. I dunno, Jenny, but that's what I would really like to say to people, is to have an appreciation of that situation. How to make things better for everybody. Let's save Celtic scholarship from the rubbish heap. Uh, let's find it- you know, and I'm being totally mercenary about it, and in a capitalist sense, let's find a bunch of people who are willing to employ scholars to do this type of work. Because they're all f***ed otherwise, like…"

Me: "I mean, it deserves to stand on its own, but, capitalism being what it is," [GMB: "It's not going to, yeah."] "take whatever avenues are available, you know."

GMB: "So, you know, may- like, I really hope I'm wrong. I really hope- I really hope that neoliberalism and AI won't see off the humanities, but I'm- that's the way I think it's going, you know. I don't think people are going to be doing courses like you're doing in twenty years' time, you know."

Me: "Yeah…"

GMB: "I don't think it's going to happen. I think, you know-"

Me: "I mean, they've already been cutting them in various places, so…"

GMB: “Yeah, and- and there is a *place* for it, like, you know. There is a place for it, and we do need to find a new economic model for developing Celtic scholarship that’s potentially outside the universities, you know. Uh, I see myself as a- as a forerunner of that, kind of accidentally. Like, I just made the decision much earlier than most people did, um, to- to try and work in this economic model. But, spiritually, I feel like, you know, there’s- there’s a really good, viable way of doing this that would solve a lot of problems, let’s say. That’s from my perspective. I might be totally wrong, and you know, like, who the f***’s going to listen to me, anyway? At the end of the day. I know you- you will, but you know, and a few other people will, but you know, if I- if I was king for a day, that’s what I would do. That’s what I would do. Yeah.”

Me: “And, I mean, I don’t think it’s an unreasonable avenue to ask people to look at, to like, I mean, look at what, you know, looking- approaching things from a spiritual or religious point of view has, like, helped revive the Hebrew language, and” [GMB: “Yeah.”] “done, like all kinds of- it motivates people in ways that other than ‘can this degree get me a job?’ Like, you know, it’s beyond that, so.” [GMB: “Yep, yeah.”] “I don’t think it’s an unreasonable avenue to consider, personally.”

GMB: “That’s- that’s such a good point, as well, you know. And here, I’m, you know, if any Welsh folks watch this, they’re going to be annoyed with me, but like, Christianity definitely saved the Welsh language a couple of hundred years ago, but it’s in the process of making it a museum piece. Because, you know, Iolo Morganwg- the last great spiritual revival we had was Iolo Morganwg, like, you know. And yeah, it was kind of Christian in- there was a veneer of Christianity, um, and it’s kind of framed in Christianity, but fundamentally, it’s a non-Christian metaphysic that he’s presenting, although it draws on Christianity. Like, we should learn that lesson, you know. That is- that is how you revive your culture. You allow the myths to live and breathe, and you- you accept that people want to believe in shit. You know, and just like, just let us be living, believing creatures, you know, that’s what we want to be. But- but, the more constraints there are on that, the more dogmatic, the more restricted the potential for living in culture – living in belief – is, then yeah, the more dead the culture becomes, basically. And that- that is one of the great problems we’re facing, all of the Celtic nations are facing. That’s why our languages are dying, at the minute, because no one-”

Me: “Yeah, and I mean, it’s in the greater context, too, of just, you know, hard materialist, atheist, uh, points of view are quite uh, popular and growing a lot, like across cultures, and across the- the world, so people are… Like, I feel like having, you know, been in the military and moved around different places, I feel like people in lots of different places are kind of feeling that tension between preserving culture and also maintaining an agnostic or atheistic worldview. And I don’t think those are mutually exclusive, but people are kind of figuring out how to navigate that, and sometimes, they kind of throw the baby out with the bathwater and just, focus on ‘modern’, which is Anglo-American code, um, culture and uh, like, chasing just straight-up

only material world values, and kind of throw their traditional cultures away. And that's happening like, in all kinds of places around the world, you know. And so, it's…"

GMB: "Yeah, I think you've just very beautifully explained the- the modern psychosis, you know."

Me: "Mmhmm."

GMB: "Because it- it is, it's a bit schizophrenic. It is."

Me: "Yeah, meanwhile, Anglo-American, you know, cultured folks, you know, as an American myself, it's like, meanwhile, we're over here like, 'we have no roots, and where do we belong, and how do we, you know, connect to anything spiritual other than evangelical Christianity?' And it's like, and then, while the rest of the world is you know, putting themselves on a similar path to where we're at, and there are people here who see that as a good thing and people who see it as a bad thing, and, you know. It's a- it's a mishmash of things going on."

GMB: "Well and, and you know, well no, no, but this is where, to- to ride my high horse again, and to blow my trumpet, you know, if we start putting the content before the form, then whatever grows out of it will have a far greater sense of integrity. And, and it will, because you know, from the perspective of skeptical academics, oh it's just something that's made up. You know. Because it looks so eclectic and it- it *is* eclectic, of course it is, like, that's its nature, you know. And so, so trying to convince that crowd, who currently still have some resources, and have a lot of authority, and have a lot of influence on the quality and content and- and nature of this culture, because you know, scholarship does, you know. People do worry about the judgement of academics – of course they do. You know, if they could just get over themselves a little bit, and realize that you know, you could do something really good. Like, you could provide an actual cultural service for people, you know, that has some integrity, that gives them- you know, you don't have to get involved in the spirituality stuff. If- if you don't like it, you know, if you didn't smoke enough weed when you were a teenager, that's fine, you know. Like, don't worry about it, others of us did, you know, so we're good with that. But, you can still serve the same type of culture that has a, you know, a bit more integrity about it, and we'd all feel a bit better about it, I think."

Me: "Make it practical. Or, let other people make it practical, at least." [GMB: "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah."] "Instead of being from this outside glass box looking through at it." [GMB: "Yeah, yeah, yeah."] "That's something I've noticed in some of the essays that I've read in, like, researching for my dissertation, is like, some complaints about how uh, it's- people complaining about how it's almost impossible to just observe as an outside observer Pagan rituals, because they draw you in, and they're so experiential, and so you have- it's hard for them to sit on the

outside and understand what's going on without participating, and they complain about that. And it's like, yeah, but that's not how it works, like, you can't understand what we're doing if you're not doing it." [GMB: "Yeah, yeah. Exactly, yeah, yeah."] "Like, otherwise, it's just people doing weird hand motions and things, you know," [GMB: "Yeah."] "self-help book-type stuff to each other, is what it looks like from the outside."

GMB: "And that's not rocket science, to figure that out. Like, I'm sorry, it isn't. Like, really, it's not rocket science. Like, it should- but, but that's- that's the problem with the arrogance that comes with being educated. Being educated does-"

Me: "Yeah, wanting to like, wanting to like dissect something in this sterile- sterile environment, you know."

GMB: "All the best anthropologists went a little bit native."

Me: "Mmhmm."

GMB: "They just did, you know. And they didn't take themselves too seriously, as far as I'm concerned. Anyway. You know, I- I think that it's possible, like if you- if you don't want to get dressed up and join in the fun, that's fine, but you can still work towards an understanding of the content that serves, at least partially, that aim. You know, but- but to do that, you have to take the content seriously as a coherent mythology that contains this type of material in the first place, which is the first barrier, you know. And that's, that's- that's the um, the obstacle I feel like scholarship still has, is that it just can't take Celtic mythology seriously enough, basically, as a coherent mythology, unfortunately. Capital M 'Mythology', that serve- can serve a spiritual purpose, you know. Uh, yeah. That's- That's- I'll get off the high horse now. Is there any-"

Me: "Well, we'll see where it goes, I guess."

GMB: "Yeah. Any- any more, for any more?"

Me: "Uh, not really, I guess that's about it."

GMB: "M'kay. Great."

Me: "Unless there was something else you wanted to say or talk about, or-"

GMB: "Not really, I think. I think that's me, um. If there is something you want me to clarify, email though." [Me: "Okay."] Like, you know, I want you to get good- good data."

Me: “The content!”

GMB: “Yeah. Yeah, get good content. Uh.”

Me: “I appreciate that.”