

How do we know about the Druids?

Knowledge of the Druids, and the ancient Celts in general, is derived from direct archaeological evidence, from the writings of classical authors in Greece and Rome, and from folklore transcribed by 12th century Christian scribes and scholars.

Was Stonehenge built by the Druids?

No. The Celts didn't expand into Britain until between the 5th to 3rd centuries BCE. Stonehenge was completed by about 1600 BCE. The Druids, however, did have enough astronomical knowledge to realize the significance of Stonehenge. They may have used Stonehenge, at least for observational purposes, although there is no clear evidence to support this.

Was sacrifice practiced by the Druids?

The ancient Celts practiced sacrifice. It was written that the Druids were required to be present for all public sacrifices. Caesar described huge wicker works that were filled with grains, animals, and humans and then burned. Other classical writers described sacrifice by stabbing and impaling.

There has been a wide range of opinion about sacrifice and its significance to the Druids. Caesar was attempting to show the brutality of the Celts, while some scholars compare these sacrifices to modern executions.

The answer probably lies somewhere between these two. The ancient Celts believed strongly in reincarnation. They did not fear death as most people in our culture do, because they knew that their souls would live again in another body. The Celts were described as having used criminals and political prisoners for sacrifice whenever possible. In the cultural context of the ancient Celtic people, sacrifice may have been the best possible treatment for these people.

Do the Keltrian Druids practice human or animal sacrifice?

No, we don't. Over the centuries, religious thought has evolved. During the time of the ancient Druids, blood sacrifice was seen as a powerful way of contacting the gods. Today we recognize blood as a symbol representing the power that exists within all

of us. In modern practice, we replace blood sacrifice with another representation of our power. We use grain, herbs, a small piece of handiwork, or other positive representation of our devotion to the gods and goddesses of the Irish pantheon.

Explain some aspects of Celtic belief that you emulate in your modern practices.

We know very little about the specific religious practices of the Celtic peoples. We have adopted the use of many Celtic Deities that we know about through the study of mythology. Our rituals celebrate the cycles of life and the year. With the changing of the seasons, we choose different Deities that best represent the things we associate with that season.

We have also adapted many Celtic symbols in our practice. We believe that these symbols helped trigger the connection the Celts felt between themselves and the Gods, and that it can do the same for us. For example, the Celts placed great importance in the number three. We have developed many associations of threes. We revere the Gods, Ancestors and Nature Spirits. We associate them with the realms of Sky, Water and Earth respectively. We also associate them with the three aspects of our being: Spirit, Mind and Body.

Another example: The only detailed account of ritual was written by the Roman Author Pliny the Elder. He described the gathering of mistletoe which was found growing on an oak tree. A Druid, dressed in white, cut the mistletoe using a sickle and allowed it to fall onto a white piece of cloth. This ritual took place on the 6th night after the new moon. From this account, we see that the Druids held some importance to the color white, and used a sickle. We prefer white robes for our clergy in ritual and have adopted the sickle for our use. We also set aside the 6th night of the moon for our Mistletoe Rite.

What is the Keltrian view of Deity?

We see Deity in many different aspects, both male and female. These different aspects of Deity each represent different aspects of life, nature and the seasons.

We use appropriate aspects of Deity in rituals and in our lives to help us maintain contact. The idea that these aspects of Deity are separate from each other is called polytheism (many Gods). The idea that these aspects are part of a larger whole (often called "The Unmanifest" and sometimes "God") is called pan- polytheism. In

Keltrian Druidism, we see both polytheism and pan-polytheism as valid views of Deity.

We believe that Deity exists in all living things. We see each human, animal and plant as a unique expression of the Divine. Some Druids extend this view to what are normally considered inanimate objects such as wells, rivers, and mountains. They see Divinity in many places such as mountains, rivers, and the wind. This idea – that inanimate objects are in some way living – is called animism. Keltrian Druids are animistic at least to the level where they see the Divine within plant life.

What are the other beliefs of Keltrian Druidism?

The following set of statements encompasses the major points of our values and worldview:

- We believe in Divinity as it is manifest in the Pantheon. There are several valid theistic perceptions of this Pantheon.
- We believe that nature is the embodiment of the Gods.
- We believe that all life is sacred and should neither be harmed nor taken without deliberation or regard.
- We believe in the immortality of the spirit.
- We believe that our purpose is to gain wisdom through experience.
- We believe that learning is an ongoing process and should be fostered at all ages.
- We believe that morality should be a matter of personal conviction based upon self-respect and respect for others.
- We believe that individuals have the right to pursue enlightenment through his or her chosen path.
- We believe in a living religion and spiritual practice able to adapt to a changing environment. We recognize that our beliefs may undergo change as our tradition grows.

How do you worship?

Since we consider ourselves a nature religion, the ideal place for our rituals is outdoors, preferably in the woods or another place away from cities and 'civilization'. This is not always practical, especially

during winter, so we worship wherever it is convenient. The purpose of our rituals is to celebrate the Divine and have communion with the Gods and each other. We do this mainly through meditation, prayer and invocation of the Gods, Ancestors and Nature Spirits.

Most of our rituals are done around a sacred fire (or sacred candles for indoor rituals). Our rituals involve the participation of everyone in attendance. We distribute the ritual functions among several people, rather than have everything done by a priest and priestess. Our rituals also involve the participants through a good deal of singing and dancing.

When do you worship?

Instead of worshipping according to the modern calendar, we choose our times of worship according to the cycles of the Sun and Moon.

We celebrate two lunar rites. They are called the Mistletoe Rite and the Vervain Rite. As mentioned before, the ancient Druids collected mistletoe on the 6th night of the moon (roughly the first quarter). Since mistletoe was known as 'all heal,' one of the themes of this rite is healing. This theme extends to healing of our community, through a sharing of food and drink at the rite. The Sun and Moon are in a position of equilibrium at this time, so we also see this as a time of balance. This is when we seek to find balance in our lives.

Our other lunar rite is the Vervain Rite. The time of this rite was also chosen from classical descriptions of ancient Druidic practices. It was written that vervain was gathered when neither sun nor moon were in the sky. This occurs sometime during each night, except when the moon is full. We generally celebrate this around the 3rd quarter. This gives ample time for the rite during the evening hours. It also places this rite opposite the Mistletoe Rite in the lunar cycle. Vervain is said to be of aid in working magic. Thus, the Vervain Rite is our time for working magic. The purpose of magic in a Druidic sense is more like prayer. We work magic to help effect change in our lives. Druidic magic may involve contemplation, meditation, ritual or ecstatic dance.

We also celebrate eight holidays throughout the year. These holidays originally come from two separate cultures. The solstices and equinoxes, which celebrate the cycle of the sun, came from one culture, and the 'cross-quarters,' which mark the agricultural

and pastoral seasons of the Earth, came from another. The cross-quarter feasts are: Samhain (Nov. 1), Imbolc (Feb. 1), Beltaine (May 1), and Lughnasádh (Aug. 1). The solar holidays were adopted by the Celts, and all eight are celebrated by Keltrian Druids. In our modern rites, we also relate the cycle of the year to the cycle of our lives. We choose a specific God and Goddess (Patron and Matron) to honor at each rite. Each of these figures represents a different aspect of our lives, from youth to vitality to old age, wisdom, and finally death. As the year gets older, the Patron and Matron age as well.

In addition, we find this cycle useful in thinking about the stages of bringing things about, from their inception through fruition and beyond.

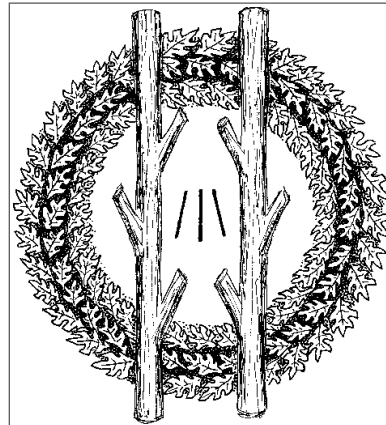
How can I find out more about the Henge?

If you would like to explore Keltrian Druidism further, write us at:

The Henge of Keltria
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or visit our website:

www.keltria.org



WHAT IS THE HENGE OF KELTRIA AND WHAT IS DRUIDISM?

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Henge of Keltria?

The Henge of Keltria is a non-profit initiatory order dedicated to the positive, life affirming spiritual path of Druidism. We call it "Keltrian Druidism." The Henge of Keltria exists to provide information and training to those interested in Keltrian Druidism and to promote Celtic Earth-based Spirituality. Thus, it can be approached as a religion, a personal path or a spiritual discipline.

What is "Druidism"?

Keltrian Druidism is our modern adaptation of ancient Celtic religion. The priests of the ancient Celts were called Druids.

Who were the Druids?

The word Druid may derive from an Indo-European word Drus, meaning "oak," and the Indo-European wid, meaning "to know." Literally, Druid means "to know the oak." The ancient Druids did not have many buildings for worship. The classical writers noted that the Druids' preferred sanctuaries were forest clearings.

Although the Celts existed throughout much of Europe, the Druids were known to exist only in what is called the latter Celtic range. This area is basically Gaul and the British Isles.

The priestly class of these Celts was on an equal level with nobility. They included the Druids (priests), Bards (poets and musicians), and Seers (diviners). The Druids were held above Bards and Seers, and according to Caesar, had authority in peace and war.

The Druids met in caves, deep in the woods, and in buildings for study and training that could last as long as 20 years. All the Druidic teachings were orally transmitted, so little is known about their teachings.