

THE ORDER OF BARDS OVATES & DRUIDS MOUNT
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What Druidry does: a perspective on the spiritual dynamics of the OBOD course

INTRODUCTION

Seventeen years as Mentor Co-ordinator for the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids placed me in a unique position to watch and wonder at the impact of the OBOD course [1] on those working with the gwers. Therefore when I retired in 2017, I jumped at the opportunity given by Philip Carr-Gomm, head of OBOD, and Dwina Murphy-Gibb, our Patron, for this Mount Haemus Scholarship.

Most studies of Druidry by scholars, historians and commentators focus on what Druids do – what they believe, the concepts that are important to Druids, Druid attitudes, the outward practice of Druidry, especially of rituals, and the perennial question: what defines Druidry. Recent examples include Jennifer Susan Uzzell's PhD on death-related rituals and associated attitudes and beliefs [2] and books such as John Beckett's *An Experience-Based Guide to Modern Pagan Practice* [3]. The 2021 Mt Haemus scholarship will be Larisa White's ambitious worldwide study of modern Druidry [4]. Jonathan Woolley's 2017 Mt Haemus paper and Suzanne Owen's new book [5] both grapple with defining and categorising Druidry.

The published history of Druidry tends to focus on individuals – those seen as the leaders, who have written the most influential books and papers and those who have been prominent in what they have done to lead the movements and organisations that bring Druidry to where it is today.

I am addressing something different, asking not what Druids do, but what does Druidry do? Blessed with contact with members of OBOD who, through their experiences of the OBOD course, for over twenty years have been telling me what Druidry does to them, or for them, I wanted to pay tribute to these remarkable people.

In all I've worked with over 7000 members of OBOD, about half of them in the Americas, about their experiences of Druidry and of the OBOD course in particular. And to give some idea of scale, only about half of us would fit in London's largest theatre, the Hammersmith Odeon [6]. The relationships between us may be long and therefore close. It was a little unusual to recently attend the initiation of someone moving on after being in one grade for twenty-seven years, but it does happen.

The job of Mentor Co-ordinator is to recruit, train and manage about fifty Mentors, allocate OBOD members to Mentors, and oversee transitions through the OBOD grades. My daily routine would be to get up, have breakfast, then make my way to my office to do the OBOD work. My late mother's morning routine was tea and a cigarette. Mine was breakfast and OBOD, even when there was other work to do. Most days would take to about lunchtime, sometimes revisiting the office during the afternoon and evening. Every other day or so I'd see a member move from one grade to the next. So, contact with OBOD members – or OBODies as we tend to call ourselves - really has been, to borrow from the poet Auden, "...my North, my South, my East and West, my working week and my Sunday rest, my noon,

my midnight, my talk, my song.” [7]

I loved hearing about journeys to and through the OBOD course. It was remarkable to be able to share with such amazing people. I’m grateful beyond words to those OBOD members who’ve shared something of themselves, their experiences and preoccupations, their world of ideas and dreams.

There have been few empirical studies, as Dana Driscoll demonstrated in the 19th Mount Haemus scholarship. Nearly all are small-scale or rely on an element of self-selection by the subjects, for example through questionnaires. I wanted to do what only I could do, which was some post-hoc analysis of 7,000 subjects, the largest sample size to date.

The research would not be an evaluation, or an impact assessment, or a formal review or a comparison with other Druid courses, but would address the question: what does Druidry do? What effects does the OBOD course have on those who follow it – what does it do?

I also wanted to address another question that all Mentors ask. What about those people who enrol and from whom we never hear again? We never chase. We reckon there is enough chivvying in everyday life. But we were curious and even a little worried. Anecdotally, we knew that ‘Life Got in the Way’ for many. Perhaps some people felt that Druidry didn’t do much for them. Perhaps some had started the OBOD course then then found something better - greener grass on the other side of a different fence. Here was the opportunity to find out.

THE METHOD OF STUDY

This study focuses on OBOD members’ correspondence and comments from start to finish of the course, covering the period from 2000 to 2019.

It omits the Ovate grade. As members will know, the Ovate grade is more personal. And by the end of it, something remarkable sometimes happens. I have no wish to spoil that discovery for those who have not yet reached that point. The Order is at its heart a mystery school, an initiatic order, of the Otherworld, and for many it is deeply spiritual, the privacy of which should be respected.

Therefore, addressing the research questions presents some challenges.

First is an ethical one. We take the privacy of members very seriously. The exchanges between OBOD members and their Mentors are confidential. OBOD members can be reassured that remains the case. Where members are quoted directly, I have shared my draft with them to ensure their consent to be quoted by first name, full name, alias, or anonymously. Some quotations are already in the public domain. Some members are referred to as Somebody. ‘Somebody’ said something that will be lodged forever in my mind but alas I have forgotten the author. If you are ‘Somebody’ and would like to be credited or just give me the opportunity to thank you personally, then please get in touch.

The essence of academic and scientific study is that results are made available for verification and alternative interpretation. That is not possible here, which could fairly be said to invalidate the academic value of the whole study. But it doesn’t invalidate a celebration.

Second is a risk of bias, as the researcher could hardly be said to be objective. So, the impossibility of true scholarly scientific research relieved me of the responsibility. It was the perfect excuse to do what I really wanted - to sit under a tree and read. At the end of the OBOD course, members write to tell us about their experiences of the course. I read every account from 2013 to 2018, about 90 in all. From the Bardic grade I revisited a sample of the 3000 or so members I had seen through from Bard to Ovate over the years.

The survey of people who had started but not finished the course involved the assistance of the Order’s Scribe, Stephanie Carr-Gomm. She identified such people on the membership database, checked to make sure there was no reason of privacy or practicality not to contact them, then wrote to them, inviting them to contact me if they had an interest in being

involved. Surveys of this type are labour intensive, with, as a rule of thumb, only 2-3% response. We did a pilot for members joining the year 2013, starting with 200 members representative of the geographic spread of the membership. In fact I was delighted to receive 10 replies. Because of the content of the replies, which I will come to later, we decided the pilot was enough. I'm grateful to Stephanie and to all the respondees.

Each Mount Haemus scholarship [8] runs for a year. Each part of the OBOD course also makes a journey through a year, with diversions expected and welcomed. And so, pursuing this Mount Haemus year, it seemed fitting to do so in the context of time, between 2017 and 2019. What follows is a picture of what was gleaned from that immersive journey.

SETTING THE SCENE

To set the scene, looking at how others have seen Druids and Druidry, it's clear that Druidry still has an image problem. Media delight in Druid-bashing is ceaseless. A recent episode of the BBC radio sketch show *Dead Ringers* had William Hague, former leader of the Conservatives and currently supporting the legalisation of cannabis, with "a row of smiling Druids holding their phalluses, hennaed around where my hairline used to be." [9]

A few months earlier, reports of a body by the M56 motorway in Cheshire led police to a man claiming to be a Druid doing yoga in a nearby field. [10]

A new phone app, *Druid*, tells you if you are stoned.

The writer and director of the 2017 film *The Death of Stalin*, Armando Iannucci, on 24 Jan 2019 tweeted: "One way out of the Brexit logjam would be a Parliamentary Amendment to change the UK calendar to Druid Time. That's currently set at the year 1268, giving us seven hundred and fifty one years before we invoke Article 50."

In Dorset England in May 2018 a retired couple were sentenced for stabbing their neighbour, a Druid. The neighbours were "angry at his noisy pagan rituals." The neighbours were sentenced, the Druid survived. [11]

In Australia, a self-proclaimed 'druid' with 'divine and limitless' jurisdiction won a New South Wales Supreme Court appeal over a conviction for sending an offensive email to the licensees of a pub.[12]

And even more unpleasant, in Germany came a report of a "Segway-driving Nazi who dresses as a druid and carries a tribal spear is arrested on suspicion of plotting attacks on Jews and Muslims". He was "held on suspicion of coordinating a far-right terror network." [13] American media is relatively quiet, perhaps because Druidry is still 'below the horizon' in America. [14]

OBOD's most high profile media appearance was bad boy Russell Brand's interview with Philip in Nov 2017. [15]

It's not all bad news or no news though. Russell Brand's interview with Philip was a brilliant insight into Druidry. Medical research suggested that an ancient Irish Druid healing treatment shows potential for killing superbugs [16]. My favourite good news was this. BBC Radio 4 in the UK during the Saturday teatime news programme has a three minute slot called *iNews*, in which someone reads out snippets of news from listeners. On 5 January 2019 one of the items read "I am 68 today and have decided to become a Druid."

TO FLOURISH AND BLOSSOM?

Turning to what the Order has said about itself recently, especially about its course, I noticed for the first time something that has probably been there for years. In spite of having no intention to evaluate the OBOD course, nevertheless, I was struck by how modest are its claims. In all the publicity, only one aim is stated. And it is this:

“The aim of the Bardic course is to help your life flourish and blossom - to help your Soul express itself fully in the world.” [17] There are many references to how the course sets out to do this, such as “how we can open to the magic of being alive”, and “how the Bardic grade takes you on a journey through the cycle of the year, how rituals help to attune you to the natural world, to the rhythms of the earth and moon, the sun and stars”. And so on. But the aim of the OBOD course is singular.

It is easier to agree on what the OBOD course - and indeed Druidry more broadly - doesn't aim to do. Druidry doesn't have laws, it doesn't prescribe what to eat or how to behave, it doesn't claim to fix or repair anything, it doesn't offer an escape from suffering and rebirth or relief from the problems of the world. It doesn't claim that it can save humanity from the consequences of its actions. It doesn't promise judgement, grant eternal life, promise enlightenment, it doesn't claim it is the first or last word of God or gods. It offers no option for the righteous to be rewarded or enemies to be punished. It doesn't, as a yoga class local to me advertised recently “release the suffering of conditioned existence that suffocates the joy of the majority of every human.” Compared to that, Druidry doesn't claim to do very much at all.

So, does Druidry, and the OBOD course in particular, do what it says? Does it help us flourish and blossom?

In fact the effects of Druidry can be immediate. For some people, meeting Druidry is love at first sight, with all the tender feelings that go with that. The most common response from members starting the OBOD course is a sense of homecoming. Very few say they are looking for something. Most do not become Druids in quest for something new but to reclaim something that was once theirs. [18]

Once into the course, the reported effects are as wonderfully diverse as its members. People have, for example, been inspired to climb up cliffs, climb down cliffs, stand on top of cliffs. They have started dancing, swimming, singing, telling stories, walking, gardening, birdwatching, getting fit, losing weight. Books, feathers, stones, acorns and people have mysteriously arrived into their lives. Things have disappeared too. I remember a particular greenhouse that took off in a storm. Some health conditions have improved – Seasonally Affected Disorder is one. And Somebody who wrote “I discovered I enjoyed sex.”

In all the marvellous variety, themes became apparent. These themes resonate with what the founding father of psychotherapy research, Carl Rogers, identified as ‘the good life’. In his seminal book, *On Becoming a Person* [19] he describes ‘the good life’ as being where the organism continually aims to fulfil its full potential. Rogers listed the characteristics of a fully functioning person. Very briefly, they are:

- A growing openness to experience – with no need to prevent troubling stimuli from entering consciousness.
- An increasingly existential lifestyle – living each moment fully, "To open one's spirit to what is going on now, and discover in that present process whatever structure it appears to have"
- Increasing organismic trust – trust in their own judgment to choose behaviour that is appropriate for each moment, trusting their own sense of right and wrong.
- Freedom of choice – able to fluently make a wide range of choices and feeling responsible for their own behaviour.
- Creativity – it follows that they will feel more free to be creative, creative in how they adapt to their own circumstances.
- Reliability and constructiveness – they can be trusted to act constructively.
- A rich full life – joy and pain, love and heartbreak, fear and courage are experienced more intensely.

These characteristics are remarkably close to what OBOD members report as being the effects of Druidry. They often report that they have gained greater awareness within and without, that they have become more themselves, that they are more open to experiment and more settled in routine, that they are achieving more (or doing less), that they are creative in the arts and in many other realms.

The following three examples of some of the above themes are all from solitary members who we hadn't heard from since they enrolled in 2013 and who responded to the research question of the effect Druidry, and in particular the OBOD course, has had on them. This one reflects openness and challenge: "Yes I did undertake the OBOD course and found it to be very interesting and informative. The whole thing was a new experience for me. At the time of undertaking it I had moved away from being part of a christian denomination for many years and began exploring other avenues of understanding. In part I found myself challenged by what I might term the freedom of thought and expression of Druidry, as I had moved away from a background that had fairly rigid teaching about the way things were to be believed, and therefore had little room for other viewpoints. However I equally found it liberating that I was able to discover other views together with the freedom in being encouraged to explore different stories and beliefs." The same person writes of the freedom of the journey: "I have always felt at home in the environment of the natural world and my love for our planet and so began to enjoy and appreciate the journey I was on. ... I don't currently consider myself as christian, druid or anything else for that matter, simply someone who is doing a bit of exploring as part of his life's journey. Who knows where my exploration might lead?" [20] This next contribution illustrates the existential lifestyle and a rich, full, constructive life: "I suppose I have become a little more 'go with the flow' rather than how I was previously. My life has changed beyond all recognition from when I set out on this journey. I've been through some tough times with illness myself and with my parents. Lots of change was forced on me. ... I have read many religious texts including the Bible, The Holy Quran, Triptaka, The Book of the Dead and other Eastern based religious texts. The common theme I have found in all the religious texts I have read is kindness. I also found this in the Bardic course.... I am an Eye Care Liaison Officer. I work in a busy hospital where I help people who are losing their sight. My patients range from birth to 104. ... There is nothing in the world that gives me greater pleasure than helping someone to see the happy in their life. The Bardic course again has also helped me with this" Again, nature plays a part: "It [the Bardic course] also taught me how important it is to be present in nature. ... A spiritual connection with the earth and a love for all that it is." Adding, "I shall carry on using the Bardic course as a reference throughout my life. I find that it calls me before I even know that I need it. It has pride of place in my bookcase. In between the Celtic Book of Myth and the Book of English Magic." [21]

For some, there is transformation. "Please allow me to list the Teachings I have practiced for nearly 40 years: Shaolin Kung Fu... Mao Shan Daoism ... Yungdrung Bon: The Eternal Light Teachings of Tibet (the pre Buddhist Teachings practiced in Tibet) Disciple of Lama Khemser Rinpoche; Empowerments in Zhine, Phowa, Tummo, Trul Khor, Chod; Kriya Yoga; Tantrayana. I never felt it correct to blindly follow a Teacher. I always wanted to experience the Teaching for myself. As a result I journeyed all over Asia, and lived for many years as a full time practitioner immersing myself in these practices. ... I discovered that all of these Teachings are about inner transformation. ... And so to Druidry. I've always loved Fairy Tales, Myth and Legend, tales of Magic. I never knew that "magic" lived on in a tradition from these Isles. I travelled round the world to finally come home. I found Druidry to be a path to inner transformation, to union and correspondence with Nature in the outside world and our true inner nature within. Now I really must continue on to the Ovate course ASAP! :-)" [22]

“This process of the good life” Rogers wrote “is not, I am convinced, a life for the faint-hearted. It involves the stretching and growing of becoming more and more of one's potentialities. It involves the courage to be. It means launching oneself fully into the stream of life.” For some people, the OBOD course fosters the characteristics of ‘the good life’. It helps some people to flourish and blossom. I have huge respect for those who have taken the steps to allow that to happen. Any course of study requires commitment, but to complete a self-directed course of study in this field is a challenge, especially when the majority who take the course are solitary, most of those because they choose to be so. The start of a poem by one OBOD member could be a mantra for many: “I’m medium-sized and medium height, I’d never stand out in a crowd.” [23]

OBOD members follow the course through a huge range of realities of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, education, religion, health, fitness, social situation, geography, landscape, climate and so on. Some face difficulties, such as serious illness, bereavement, looking after dependents, the isolation of being housebound, the legacy of past abuse, and just fitting in the day-to-day demands of earning a living. For some it really does take courage.

Sometimes we hear the comment that the OBOD course is overly psychological. Philip wrote recently “Psychological research shows that having a sense of the deeper meaning of life, having a sense of belonging to a community of like-minded souls, holding to positive beliefs and engaging in practices like meditation, all contribute hugely to our well-being. We may or may not have been drawn to Druidry out of a concern for our own wellbeing, but either way, it’s good to know that it’s good for our health.” When people look back on their lives, it would be sad if they said “I wish I’d had the courage to live a good life true to myself”. Yet, according to writer and nurse Bronnie Ware, that sentiment sums up the main regret of people at the end of their lives. [25]

What about the people who had started the course and then disappeared? Everybody who responded had found the course useful.

One had found the course helped at the difficult moment of being diagnosed with a serious disease the year they joined OBOD, but now, understandably, did not have the circumstances or energy to pursue a formal course. [26]

“To be honest, I found the course much harder than I thought I would. I have completed it all the way through twice but listened to some of the gwerses several times. Since I received your letter I have decided to do it again from the beginning. ... A couple of weeks after starting the course I was visiting Lewes by train and entered the town a different way along a street near the station that I didn't often use and coming towards me was Philip. (I had only seen him previously on youtube or on TV) I thought that I had to speak to him so I thanked him for speaking out against fracking and told him that I had just started the O.B.O.D course). I had never seen him before and have never seen him again. I listen to the Druid podcasts and watch Tea with Philip on Facebook and follow OBOD on Facebook. I believe I still follow the Druid way even though I have found some of the Gwerses difficult.” [27]

One person had learned a great deal from the OBOD program but felt they had found ‘the presence of a degree of dogmatic prescription’, choosing to adopt a reconstructionist approach to Celtic paganism and subsequent affiliation with ADF. [28]

I’m so grateful to everyone who wrote. I’ll cherish your responses and I wish you well wherever your explorations might lead.

Incidentally, the survey highlighted how research results might be different depending on the method of study. A theory is that individuals change their behaviour in response to their awareness of being observed. Here, our approach by letter prompted some people to resume the course. This is something similar to the Hawthorne Effect, the famous organisational behaviour experiment from the Illinois factory where the phenomenon was first observed in

the 1920s.

The impact of the OBOD course isn't the same for everyone. Among the exceptional are those who are isolated. The composer Michael Tippett wrote in a letter from prison "One is also closer to the spirit in here, by the act of cutting off. I've never felt it more strongly... [...] I have a sense of cleansing the grossness, by means of which the spirit shines clearly through one..." [29] That is certainly an effect I have had the privilege to observe, in those who find themselves cut off from the world, for any reason from being bedbound to being in prison. [30]

A marked difference is between those who take the course as a genuine step on their journey of spiritual awareness and those with another purpose. The latter group is mostly people who identify primarily as academics and professionals, and those whose main intention is to observe the course with a view to including it as part of ministry or teaching. The initial impact of the course may wear off. And, in spite of best intentions, the OBOD course does not work for everyone, for reasons both simple and diverse. For many, their commitments in life leave little time and energy. Timing might not be right. Working with symbolism is difficult for some. Self-directed distance learning doesn't suit some people. Embarking on a journey with no known outcome introduces an element of trust in being led, and that trust is more than some people feel they want to give or can give. Somewhat paradoxically sometimes, encounters with other Druids – either online or in person – causes some to abandon Druidry altogether.

But by and large, the OBOD course does indeed do what it says. Lives flourish and blossom. And the credit for that goes largely to the commitment, persistence and wisdom of members themselves.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE OBOD COURSE THAT DOES WHAT IT DOES?

We know what the OBOD course does and doesn't do. How does it do it?

Course content

It is not just the content of the course that is having an effect. There are hundreds of books about Druidry. It seems to be something about the way the course is structured and delivered and what members do with that. My perspective is that the route the course takes is a work of genius. That it is delivered sequentially, over time, rather than as one mailing or as a book is crucial. Why? It's not just because it prevents spoilers. The trust in being lead transfers over time to trust in self. And we follow the course against the background of what's going on in our lives and all around us, in incremental steps of the year in nature and in ourselves.

In addition, of all the myriad of explanations for how and indeed why OBODies experience things as they do, I want to focus on two aspects that interest me as a biologist: nature and the organisation – the living organism - that is OBOD.

Nature within and without

With three exceptions, events on the world stage feature less than one might imagine in their reported impact on OBODies. The democratic crisis, the tragedy of the largest migration in human history, a pinnacle of liberalism about sexual orientation, even Britain's long hot summer of 2018 – tend to be in the background. The exceptions I have noted are: 9/11, the election of Donald Trump as President of the US, and the threats to the natural world of climate change and biodiversity loss. The concern of OBODies everywhere for the natural world is striking. OBODies are, of course, not the only people concerned about and doing something about it. The OBOD course often seems to create tremendous energy. Here are some actions it inspires:

- Visiting sacred places
- Supporting the anti-fracking initiative the Warrior's Call
- Donating money and effort to environmental concerns and conservation charities,
- Earning ethically
- Using ethical sources for gas and electricity, cleaning products
- Using plant-based plastics
- Joining campaigning movements and organisations
- Planting trees
- Joining, leaving and changing political parties
- Debating eg, if cutting down on plastic means replacing it with plant-based products
- Keeping bees
- Keeping chickens
- Eating organic food
- Giving up meat, dairy
- Picking up litter
- Keeping light pollution down.
- Making a garden more friendly to nature with a bird table, bird bath, insect hotel, bee hotel, composter, water butt, plant bee and butterfly friendly plants.
- Re-homing hedgehogs [32]

That list comes from just one person. OBODies are involved in hundreds of activities, too many to do justice to here. [33]

I'm interested in the biological reasons for why nature is so important to us that it inspires both art and action. Human beings have some ancient components. Our brains and therefore our minds, are just the same as those of ancestors who, hundreds of millions of years ago, lived outside, by pools, in all weathers, in nature. Back then we'd have been some sort of reptile. We have new minds that came with the evolution of the human species, but the human mind didn't totally replace the old one, which still functions and needs expression. The dawn of humanity's spirituality, of that relationship with things unseen, came around 40,000 years ago. It's interesting that the Lion Man, the little statue who is the first representation of a figure that exists in human imagination but not in nature, dates from that time. He has a lion head and a human body - not the other way around. Being eye-to-eye with the Lion Man, an experience I've had twice when he's been at the British Museum in recent exhibitions, is a profound reminder of nature within.



Lion Man. Stadel Cave, Baden-Württemberg, Germany, 40,000 years old.

What OBOD members do that I most admire is develop a relationship between, broadly, nature within and without. That requires openness, awareness, alertness, listening skills, and the ability to make sense of all they experience. They do this in real time immersed in a constantly changing natural world. It's no mean feat. It all starts with paying attention to the insights that come our way. OBOD member Isabel Crabtree puts it well: "And pay attention. Because once I really decided to jump into the course, and said 'howdy' to what I call 'Ancestors, Spirits of Place and Spirits of Tradition' the energy really opened up. We saw eagles seven times during the first six months or so of the course, and I'd only ever seen one once before in my life. And at least three times they were right around our house! The synchronicities let me know that those I was speaking to heard me and were saying 'Howdy' back." [34]

Notice the courtesy in the exchange.

Insight doesn't always arrive on schedule. More often it's a slow process, which is one of the reasons why in OBOD we spend time looking back, reviewing, perhaps spotting things we've missed. In doing that, OBOD members go beyond the immediacy of 'do what feels right', 'let your guides tell you', 'follow your dreams' and all that. They are making judgements between instinct and intuition, and between good and bad intuition. They are guided by the evidence of the experience of their own lives, in a phenomenological sense. Some liken this way to a dance, a duet, where the inner leads the outer, outer leads the inner. Even dancing doesn't quite describe it either, for dancing implies a pattern of steps that you have to learn and then be able to do in some sort of order.

There is no simple way of describing what's going on. Some beautiful words of OBOD member Jennifer Friedmann come close: "Druids see Nature as their beloved one. And as you learn the language of the person you fall in love with, druids try to understand Nature as good as they can, communicate with her and express their love to her. As Nature speaks to us in many different ways, there are many different languages to learn: animal and tree lore, storytelling and poetry, meditation and rituals, cloud-gazing and card-reading, philosophy and ethics, science and mythology ... Druidry is not about a belief system, it is about a relationship, the relationship to the deepest heart of Nature. We can't teach the relationship itself, but we can teach the 'languages' of our communication with Nature, so that everybody who is willing to do so can form his or her own relationship. You don't need to know - or love - all of these languages. Maybe you don't feel gifted, or the spiritual path you are coming from doesn't allow a certain kind of practice - that doesn't matter. Learn the language/s that speak/s to you..." [35]

We might call that 'wisdom'. The one thing that OBOD Mentors do that perhaps is of the greatest benefit to the most people is to 'listen' as members develop their own unique spiritual languages.

Humanity still has a long way to go to understand the underlying spiritual mechanisms in the human mind. In June 2018 *New Scientist*, the international magazine of scientific discovery and its social consequences, reviewed how far we're come in understanding the feeling of being, of consciousness. Old theories tended to focus on the idea of consciousness being in a specific place in the brain. Except that individuals who didn't have those areas - for various reasons - still had consciousness. Now, the main ideas are less to do with place and more to do with travel. One is the 'Global workspace theory', in which messages in the brain compete for dominance and the winner is broadcast globally through special neurons - a sort of Twittersphere of the brain. Only then do we register it and become aware of it. Perhaps the OBOD course casts so wide in human experience because it wakes up the senses within and without and trains them to become more effective. If so this has implications for how we live our lives, being very discerning about what we put into our minds. *New Scientist* concludes that we're at least 100 to 200 years away from understanding consciousness. If so, we can be glad that Druidry will remain a mystery school for a while yet. Perhaps the Mount Haemus scholar of 2119 will be here with the latest explanation.

OBOD – A VERY UNUSUAL ORGANISATION

The other aspect I would like to illuminate is the role played by the organisation that is the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. It seems appropriate to do so as the Order is midway through its first transition of leadership for 30 years. First and foremost, I think we all feel that we are guided by a 5th Dimension, a sense of something greater and beyond ourselves. I know for myself that I have felt the spirit of Nuinn, Ross Nichols, the Order's founder, looking over my shoulder, checking I was getting things right. He would be the first to note and, we hope, approve that OBOD is by any standards a very unusual organisation.

To begin with, OBOD has little material presence. It has no fancy HQ for administrative or meeting purposes. The OBOD Office started, as do many worthwhile enterprises, on a kitchen table. It then moved to a disused shop, then to the garage attached to the right of Philip and Stephanie's house, then to the garage to the left of Philip and Stephanie's house and last year to the small 'granny flat' next door – the most luxurious premises to date. And that has liberated the whole organisation from the responsibilities of property, as well as being generous of Philip and Stephanie.

OBOD's structure is slight too. It is variously described as non-hierarchical, a flat structure, 'bottom-up', decentralized, a network, a tree with roots, a trunk, branches and leaves, a 'benign dictatorship', in two parts - creative and non-creative, or indeed of no organisational structure at all. [36] But none of these quite fit. In the absence of definition, some turn more poetic imagery, as did Philip in his 2018 Annual Review [37] imagining the Order among the stars in the night sky: "Just focusing on the closest stars, I see within the order both constellations and individual stars shining in the night sky. ... Each one of us is a 'lone star' ... but many are also part of a constellation and each of these has their own distinctive feeling or 'personality'." And so on. Which doesn't offer reassurance as to the validity of the teaching, when or indeed if the mailings will arrive, or what to expect if you meet an alien at an OBOD event.

One model that might appeal to OBOD members is by the British management writer Charles Handy, who described organisational style and structure in terms of the personality of four Gods [38].

The ZEUS culture is a club culture, with one individual in overall direction and control, supported by a web of contacts who share the boss's enthusiasm and vision. It is the realm of the king of the Gods.

In the APOLLO culture, the emphasis is on the roles of people within the organisation, which is a well-oiled machine for getting things done. Everybody knows their job, there is a clear hierarchy and decision-making is top down. An administrative bureaucracy supports the hierarchy. Apollonian organisations might keep going the same way for years. It is the realm of the sun God, the God of many things.

The ATHENIAN culture is a task culture. It's all about projects and the expertise needed to complete tasks or projects. Experts drive the decisions, so the Athenian culture is more of a meritocracy. Athenian organisations might be short-lived, just for the duration of the project. It's the realm of Zeus' favourite daughter, who sprung fully formed from Zeus's head.

The fourth style is that of DIONYSIUS, the people culture. This is the organisations that exists for individuals to achieve their goals. Management is considered unnecessary and kept to the minimum. It is the members of the organisation who make the decisions, see themselves as independent people who lend their energy and skill to the organisation. This is the realm of the god of the grape-harvest, of ritual and theatre.

Handy saw most organisations as being a mixture and did not favour one style over another, each having its pros and cons.

OBOD is the club to which all OBODies belong, a Zeus culture, its style guided by its Chosen Chiefs who see themselves more as guardians than as gods or gurus [39]. The OBOD club has many non-member friends too. Distributing and supporting the OBOD course would be impossible without Apollo, in the shape of Stephanie Carr-Gomm, Annie Gayford and a handful of people, some in the Office, some dispersed, such as Steve Hounsome and the other Mentor Co-ordinators and Mentors, the publishers of the translated editions, Kathleen Harrington and the hosts of the Members' online Discussion Forums, Gary Armstrong and Jo Ashbeth Coffey of the Facebook Groups, Penny Billington, for 19 years the Editor of the Order's magazine Touchstone, Damh Smith, producer of the podcasts and, behind the scenes, the office manager and overall co-ordinator of the Glastonbury

Gatherings. All projects and gatherings, such as the Tree Planting programme, the Mount Haemus programme, the twice-yearly Glastonbury gatherings, and all the other camps and get-togethers are the realm of Athena, with all the skill and time and energy and creativity and sheer hard work of a handful of organisers.

Counting up, by now we've probably got to no more than about 100 individuals, one row of the Hammersmith Odeon. The major part of OBOD, over 20,000 members, would scarcely fit in London's O2 Arena. This is the Dionysian organisation which exists for individuals to achieve their goals and where management is kept to the bare minimum required to achieve this. There might well be wine, ritual and theatre.

I was lucky to be taught by Handy at London Business School, just before I encountered OBOD. In all my experience of organisations, I have never come across another where all four 'Gods of Management' co-exist and work together as they do in OBOD. The idea that style and function suggest structure is helpful in understanding how to co-ordinate activities in ways that are true to an organisation's people, aims and functions and it has certainly guided us in OBOD. It generates respect for people and what they do and gives clues as to where tensions might occur. It gives us all a sense of our belonging and connections. The effect of Druidry on people's lives might be very different if it weren't for OBOD's ways of doing things. As to why OBOD works as well as it does, Ronald Hutton in his Golden Anniversary talk in 2014 offered an answer, also from ancient Greece, from Aristotle, who said the most successful structures are formed with the right mixture of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. [40]

WHAT WILL DRUIDRY DO NEXT?

While I was at London Business School in the 80s, Philip and Stephanie were putting together the OBOD course. Our paths might well have crossed in London. It was several years later when we first met in a field at an early OBOD camp. We had tea sitting on the grass outside my tent on a hot day. Fast forward to June 2018, when Philip announced he was stepping down, and that Eimear Burke would be the next Chosen Chief. Typical of Zeus, this would be no ordinary transition but a two-year period of shadowing and handover.

I'd like to say something about these three people.

I first saw Stephanie's influence on the Order on that field all those years ago. Steph, as many know, is an artist whose work has been mainly in the theatre. At that camp, with a few sticks and plain paper Steph fashioned two utterly convincing dragons. Druidry is very often about symbolism, how one thing can represent something else. Steph understands that implicitly, and how to cue the imagination so that it might, say, be looking at sticks and paper but is seeing dragons. In 2012 the highpoint of her career, quite literally, was the painting of the Olympic rings of fire, suspended at a dizzying height above the London Stadium, and which became the icon of the 2012 Olympics. She worked on the project for months, in secret, sometimes with Annie from the office, and all the while the membership mailings continued like clockwork. All OBOD members know and appreciate Stephanie's kindness and her work in keeping OBOD running. But also, her artistic skill and her confidence in the power of the human imagination have added immeasurably to the OBOD course and to the whole organisation. A little-known detail is that for the last 30 years she has advised Philip editorially on most of the course and his books.

Philip, the Chosen Chief, does indeed seem to have been chosen. How fortunate OBOD has been.

OBOD members often comment on how much they appreciate the 'voice' of the gwers – both the written voice and the speaking voice. That distinctive voice comes across as if the author is the sort of person one can say anything to. I'd suggest that Philip's distinctive voice

encourages the reader into a reflective dialogue, perhaps not with anyone else but themselves, but helpful none the less.

He is by now a hugely prolific and assured writer and surely the world's leading authority on the Druid movement of today. He describes himself as a bloodhound, a hunter, in research. You'll often hear him going right back to the origins and he has an instinct to make connections and follow a line of thought in a remarkable way. He has a way of presenting ideas almost as if unpacking a parcel very carefully. Not one to cut the strings, rip off the sellotape and tear the paper, no, his is a tidy way, every knot untied and each layer of paper removed in turn. Books like *What Do Druids Believe* and *The Book of English Magic* demonstrate this to perfection.

Philip is philanthropic, wanting the course to be available to as many people as possible. That principle guided my working relationship as Mentor Co-ordinator. We discussed deeply the OBOD course and members' experience of it, he left me to get on with things within the principles we shared and yet he was there within seconds when needed.

Philip's work is his life. Virtually everything he does seems to be related to Druidry and to exploring spiritual teachings and the way psychology can illuminate them. Unless he has been hiding it for over 20 years, he doesn't have assorted unrelated hobbies. Perhaps we will find out in a yet to be written biography.

Philip and Stephanie were, without doubt, the right people for the job. They have gifted me with the best working relationship I could have imagined.

I wish them both well.

Eimear is a psychologist, a ritualist, rooted in the land and lore of Ireland, and is herself a wonderful storyteller, which is an exciting prospect as she herself takes OBOD's story forward. She is fearlessly independent as you would expect of anyone taking on the role of OBOD's Chosen Chief. One person who had an influence on Eimear, Philip and Nuinn was the late Olivia Robertson, co-founder in Ireland of the Fellowship of Isis. An article by Pat Booker tells the extraordinary story of connection over half a century between Olivia and these three Chosen Chiefs of OBOD [41]. Olivia herself is quoted as saying "We believe in love and beauty and have no truck whatsoever with asceticism." [...] "We don't interfere with anybody's religion, they have all got something to offer." [42]

What will OBOD itself need to do to flourish and blossom? It will need to decide its own stance on the world stage, especially in relation to the future of the natural world. Should OBOD merely encourage members to use their energies and inspiration in their own spheres? Should it stay out of public affairs altogether? Or should it become a fully-fledged campaigning organisation? If it chooses to speak out more, how will it improve its public credibility? Will its voice ever be loud enough? As one member commented "Druidry can't afford to remain in the dappled woodland fairy-haunted vistas anymore." [43] I'm not sure OBOD quite knows. The evidence I see is that the OBOD course inspires people to make their own choices. My guess is that most members would agree that this is preferable both to being told what to think and do, and to telling others what to think and do. Perhaps that is the better way for OBOD to do good in the world. There remains a debate to be had.

As a spiritual path, Druidry is a magical one, in other words, there is much we don't understand. Somewhere, out there in the galaxies of books and papers in the nebula of esoterica, spirituality, religion, nature, psychology and social science there might an undiscovered star where the secret of Druidry lies. That doesn't seem to matter at all to the thousands of people who know what Druidry means to them through the lens of the OBOD course.

To end, this poem by an OBOD member Fionn Feasa sums up with bardic artistry what being an OBODie is all about:

Being an OBODie

Why am I an OBODie?
Some people like to ask,
Sure isn't that all Welsh stuff,
And lots of made-up lark?
I'm also slightly jaded,
And I almost half agree,
And then I start to look at
Why I am an OBODie.

I've seen the online arguments
About scholarly and 'right'
But where is the community
Among the 'right' who like to fight?
Where's the dru of druidry,
A jackeen [self-assertive person] may be glic [clever]
But does he walk among the trees
With muddy squelchy feet?

Does he mark the seasons
'cause the calendar tells him so
Or does he feel it in his bones
The seasons growing old?
Having all the answers
Seems clever it is true
But living life with questions
Grows us wise as well as old.

Why am I an OBODie?
Because it's something good
A druid's not ideas
But a deed among the woods.
I don't need to know the answers
I don't need to be 'just right'
So long as I have wonder
And my inner child's alight. [44]

THANK YOU to Dwina, Philip and Stephanie, Annie, all the 150 Mentors I've worked with over the years, and especially, thanks to OBODies everywhere.
Members of OBOD, this paper is for you. May your lives flourish and blossom.
May 2019

NOTES

1. The Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids offers a self-directed, distance-learning course that can be followed anywhere in the world. It teaches the ideas and practices of Druidry in an experiential practical way. The course is presented in the form of gwersi (a Welsh word for lessons) in three grades: Bard, Ovate and Druid. It starts with the Bardic grade, a package each month for 12 months, each with 4 gwersi and extra material, and

including through the year 10 editions of the Order's magazine Touchstone and material relevant to the 8 festivals of the Druid year. The Ovate and Druid grades follow. The papers are available in text and/or audio format. Enrolling on the course gives membership of the Bardic grade of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, to and to the Order's gatherings and online communities. Membership is open to over 18s of all faiths and none. The course can be started at any time. There are no time limits to membership or to how long it takes to complete the course. There are no oaths and members can leave at any time. Mentors provide one-to-one support throughout the OBOD course.

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4. Details of the Mount Haemus award programme, including all previous papers, are at <https://druidry.org/events-projects/mount-haemus-award> [last accessed 18 March 2019].
5. Owen, Suzanne. (2018). *Contemporary Druidry: A Native Tradition?* Bloomsbury Academic.
6. Eventim Apollo as it is currently named.
7. Auden, W.H. (1938) *Funeral Blues*. *The Year's Poetry*, Lane, London.
8. Ronald Hutton, in the first Mount Haemus lecture, explained the significance of Mount Haemus to Druidry. Ross Nichols, in the *Book of Druidry*, had discussed the early history of Druid groups in Wales and how several combined to found the Mount Haemus Grove in 1245, but this seems to have been a myth. In the mid-eighteenth century, William Stukely described himself as 'A druid of the Grove of Mount Haemus'. "All that he meant by this was that he was one of a group of friends who met at his house on a hill in the Highgate area near London which, because of its windy position, was nicknamed by them after the mountain in Greek mythology which was the home of the winds." In Carr-Gomm, P. (2008). *The Mount Haemus Lectures*, Volume 1, Oak Tree Press. Available from <https://www.druidry.org/events-projects/mount-haemus-award/first-mount-h...> [last accessed 16 March 2019].
9. Dead Ringers, 22 June 2018, radio programme, BBC.
10. <https://www.cheshire-live.co.uk/news/chester-cheshire-news/motorway-cops...>, 9 January 2018.
11. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/10/druid-witch-attacked-stabbed...> 10 May 2018
12. <https://www.northernstar.com.au/news/now-thats-magic-druid-wins-appeal-i...> 1 June 2017
13. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4163362/Segway-driving-Nazi-dre...> 27 January 2017
14. The view of members at OBOD Gulf Coast Gathering, March 2019, Pers. comm.
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17. <https://www.druidry.org/join/membership-orders-training-course>

18. Jones, S. (2015). The Age of Druids, in Zak, S., Ede-Weaving., The Golden Seed, Celebrating 50 years of OBOD, Slippery Jack Press.
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22. Anonymous, Source 4, Pers. comm.
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25. Ware, B. (2012). The Top Five regrets of the Dying, Hay House publications.
26. Anonymous, Source 1, Pers. comm.
27. Wood, Roy. Pers. comm.
28. Anonymous, Source 3, Pers. comm.
29. Tippet, M. to Evelyne Maude, 19 July 1943 (Sel. Lett., pp.304-7)
30. Subsidised courses (without copies of Touchstone to preserve confidentiality of addresses) reached over 400 prisoners, until in 2012 OBOD produced a tailor-made course for those in prison, called ‘Beyond the Ninth Wave’, with correspondent support but without membership.
31. The Warrior's Call is a global pagan movement against extreme fossil fuels.
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33. For some published examples see Carr-Gomm, P. (2014). Annual review of OBOD 2014. <https://www.druidry.org/about-us/annual-reviews-order-and-druidry/2018-a...> [last accessed 17 March 2019]
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36. OBOD website. <https://druidry.org/about-us/who-runs-order-how-it-structured> [last accessed 17 March 2019]
37. Carr-Gomm, P. (2018). Annual Review of OBOD 2018, op cit.
38. Handy, C. (1978). Gods of Management Souvenir Press.
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Dr Susan Jones is an OBOD Mentor, and for 17 years was OBOD's Mentor Co-ordinator for the English course. After gaining a PhD in the evolutionary taxonomy of trees, she developed a professional life in communications and management. While studying at London Business School for an MBA, she was inspired by one of her teachers, the author and philosopher Charles Handy, to develop a 'portfolio' career. Susan combined her time as OBOD Mentor Co-ordinator with being one of the UK's top Government speechwriters – she is the author of *Speechmaking* (Methuen, 2nd edition 2008) - and a consultant in the science, business, education and heritage sectors. She has an enduring fascination for how the exploration of nature, of the inner self and of otherworld can be transformational or, at the very least, can add to life's richness. She lives in the English Lake District, with an organic garden, and a micro-business of willow growing and basket-making.

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