

Damh the Bard:

I have been brought to Highdown Hill, and I'm here with Sue Rance, a member of our Grove. Somebody I've known for many, many years. In fact, I knew you before you were in the Grove, when you were on a different path as well. The sun is shining, the sky is clear blue. It's a perfect winter's day for a walk. So come on then, Sue. Hello. Hello.

Suzanne Rance:

Hello, Damh.

Damh the Bard:

All right. Okay.

Suzanne Rance:

Lovely to see you.

Damh the Bard:

It is, is it? Yes.

Suzanne Rance:

It really is.

Damh the Bard:

I think we've seen each other... Wow, that's a good point. We've seen each other probably three times in the last two years.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah, yeah, yes. Probably, which is ridiculous, isn't it?

Damh the Bard:

It is.

Suzanne Rance:

We were pretty much seeing each other most of the time with Grove and camps and all sorts of other bits and pieces. Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, and then suddenly it all stops.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

So, the ground is lovely and hard, even though it's frosty. Well, it is because it's frosty, but I bet this would be muddy if it wasn't.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, definitely.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. We're heading up a hill on the South Downs. Now, you told me that this is the south South Downs just now.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, technically it is.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. The south South Downs.

Suzanne Rance:

The south South Downs. It's a little bit of downs. It's part of the South Downs National Park, but eons ago in history, there was a row of downs south of the South Downs. This is pretty much all that's left of it.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. It got washed away by the sea, ultimately.

Damh the Bard:

It got washed away by the sea? Wow, okay.

Suzanne Rance:

These little bits left. It's quite lovely.

Damh the Bard:

It really is. Do you know about the history of the South Downs? Because I've got people listening to this all over the world who are going to go, "The South Downs. Okay." So, we are in Sussex in the south of England.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

It's a chalk kind of, well, it's a range of chalk Hills, isn't it?

Suzanne Rance:

It is. There's a range of chalk hills. The South Downs itself has got quite, and not very far from here, in fact you can see it from here, a place called Cissbury Ring, which is one of the oldest flint mines that we've got in England. Well, in Britain I think. So it has long, long history. One side of this hill is the sea. A little bit of flatland and the sea. The other side is the South Downs, and then you've got the Weald, which is historically a soggy, muddy piece of flattish land with rises. Then you've got the North Downs and then London.

Damh the Bard:

Oops. I say, it's slippery as well.

Suzanne Rance:

Oh yes. We've gotten the sunshine now.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. It's melted away the...

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. So we're now on mud. So South Downs, the chalk and flint mines. This all, this whole area, was at the bottom of the sea, wasn't it?

Suzanne Rance:

It would have been, yes. Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. In right way, way, way back, this was at the bottom of the sea and the chalk, as far as I can remember, is made up of sea creatures and things like that.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, and even the flint, which is a very, very hard, very sharp stone that you find within the chalk. I found out last night from the tele, it has the same smell as coral. So yeah, weird. There was a program on TV and it was Martin Clunes in Tahiti. He was talking with the people who live there. This guy was telling him that this particular food that he was making, can't remember what the food was, was cooked with coral. When he rubbed the two bits of coral together, it had a smell, which was quite nice. It's own things. But Martin Clunes says, "Do you know, it smells like flint." The other goes, "Yes, it does smell like flint." So maybe the flint in the chalk is actually really, really hardly compacted coral.

Damh the Bard:

Maybe it is.

Suzanne Rance:

Maybe. You never know.

Damh the Bard:

Wow. What that does say to me, though, is Martin Clunes has decided at some point in his life to sniff a flint.

Suzanne Rance:

To sniff flint. Yeah. I mean, traditionally later on, flint was definitely used to light things. Yeah?

Damh the Bard:

Yes.

Suzanne Rance:

Flint and iron.

Damh the Bard:

Yes.

Suzanne Rance:

You can spark it off. I wouldn't put it in a fire, it'll explode.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yes.

Suzanne Rance:

Very, very hard. A lot of our buildings down here are made of flint, Sussex flint. Walling.

Damh the Bard:

Of course, in pre-history it was the first cutting tool that we had as human beings, wasn't it? I guess that remained and was the reason for the flint mines.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, definitely.

Damh the Bard:

At Cissbury, and-

Suzanne Rance:

There's another one called Church Hill. Cissbury, being that... I know you can't see this, people, but there's a prominent tree there. That's Cissbury.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. So we're looking over a valley, a wooded valley. What town is that? Is that...?

This transcript was exported on Jan 18, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Suzanne Rance:

That's Findon. So there's north of Worthing, Findon.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Then the Downs above the town, and you can see a cusp of trees. That would be the massive Cissbury Hill, Cissbury Ring.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

A full, is it a kilometer or a mile around? I can never remember which one it is, but it's a massive earth works.

Suzanne Rance:

I think it's more like a mile around. It is big. Very, very big.

Damh the Bard:

It's the biggest hill fort in the south of England, as far as I can tell.

Suzanne Rance:

It's quite interesting. As we go further up the hill, of course, you'll be able to see more of the positioning of this. You'll be able to see the separation from here and the South Downs, and then there's the sea as well. If it's really, really nice, you can see the Isle of Wight from here.

Damh the Bard:

Oh really?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Fantastic. There's a hill fort up hill?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Yes?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. We'll start to get that in our view in a minute. We come through a band of trees there. See where the tree clump is?

This transcript was exported on Jan 18, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

Used to be all the rage to plant clumps of trees on the tops of hills.

Damh the Bard:

Absolutely. Yep. Chanctonbury being the classic local one of those.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. So that's up there, and there's all sorts of oddities and lovely little histories. We've just passed the Miller's Tomb. Might talk about that a bit later.

Damh the Bard:

The Miller's Tomb?

Suzanne Rance:

The Miller's Tomb.

Damh the Bard:

So you can't say we just passed the Miller's Tomb and say, "I'm going to talk about it later." What's the Miller's Tomb?

Suzanne Rance:

The miller was a guy in the 18th century, born somewhere close to the early part of 1700s, and died, I think, in 1797. He was a miller. His name was John Oliver. He lived south of the South Down here. But then he inherited a mill, which was up on the top. He built a house, which was around here somewhere, I think.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Suzanne Rance:

Some people say he was a bad, bad man.

Damh the Bard:

Oh really?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Oh dear.

This transcript was exported on Jan 18, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Suzanne Rance:

Smugglers.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, I love that.

Suzanne Rance:

So, so-

Damh the Bard:

I love that. Smugglers, argh. It just makes me want to talk like a pirate.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah. So just south of here, you can see the sea and then you can see the land on the beach. There's a place called Ferring, which is a really old name. It could be the people of the boat.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, okay.

Suzanne Rance:

To fare.

Damh the Bard:

In old English.

Suzanne Rance:

As in old English.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

And you've got Goring, which is Gare Ingers or something, which is the people of the spear.

Damh the Bard:

Sounds like a dodgy place to live.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah. Well, this could be actually.

Damh the Bard:

You wouldn't have thought it was Goring now, would you?

Suzanne Rance:

Very old. No, no, no, you wouldn't. Definitely not. Definitely not. But John Oliver lived up here. It is said that he would signal the smugglers if those customs men, what are they called? I can't remember what they're called.

Damh the Bard:

I'm sure they had very many names for them.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, yes, and very rude ones.

Damh the Bard:

Yes.

Suzanne Rance:

But he was also somebody who was very, very clever at making models and engines and things like that. What he actually did was he made wind-powered models that sat on the front of his house. One of them was an old lady chasing one of these customs men with a bag of flour. As the wind blew, it would hit him over the head. Yeah. He was notoriously eccentric. But some people say it was the way he turned the sails of his windmill, because it would be seen all along the coast here, if he did.

Damh the Bard:

Okay, so that was like a signal for the smugglers to say, "Bring the rum aboard, my mates."

Suzanne Rance:

Signal to the smugglers. Yes. It's the rum.

Damh the Bard:

Fantastic.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Wow.

Suzanne Rance:

Great story.

Damh the Bard:

We've got loads of eccentrics in Sussex.

Suzanne Rance:



We do.

Damh the Bard:

Old mad Jack Fuller out of Brightling, buried in his pyramid in the church and all that sorts of stuff. I remember, do you remember the old guy who used to stand at the roundabout?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Definitely.

Damh the Bard:

I can't remember his name, but he would be dressed there in a kind of-

Suzanne Rance:

Definitely a 1920s summer boater.

Damh the Bard:

That's right. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

Light suit with stripes on it, and he always had his bicycle and he would wave to everybody.

Damh the Bard:

Just wave at everybody at the roundabout.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah. Yeah. I miss him.

Damh the Bard:

I do.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Mate, I used to drive down there and go, "Oh, there he is." Yes. Good old Sussex eccentric tradition right there.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Yes, definitely. The miller's eccentricity, he built his tomb and his coffin 27 years before he died. He arranged for his funeral to have, well, there were 2000 people went to his funeral. He must have paid a lot of money out, I think. But there was a whole cohort of young women all dressed in white that surrounded his coffin as it was paraded to his final resting place, just down there on the hill. He built a

special machine to be able to move his coffin up the hill on this rough ground, because nobody could actually carry it all the way up.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

So he made this special sort of cart for that.

Damh the Bard:

Amazing, and he lived up here somewhere.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Do we know where the windmill... Is there a-

Suzanne Rance:

I know where the windmill was.

Damh the Bard:

Oh okay. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

That's just the other side of the fort. So we can have a look when they go around there. From up here, again, you can see Cissbury. Crown of trees right away over there, I think is Chanctonbury.

Damh the Bard:

That does indeed look like Chanctonbury Ring.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. It does. It does. They say that this hill was actually on the crossroads of two old, really old traveling roads. One went from I suppose it was further than Arundel. It might have been as far as across the Isle of Wight. Along this way, straight down towards Brighton, as you can see. You can see Brighton now, and you can see-

Damh the Bard:

I see my house almost. I can see the chimney anyway, of the power station.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah. Probably even Beachy Head over there.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, there is.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Wow. What a view.

Suzanne Rance:

It's amazing view.

Damh the Bard:

It is. Yes.

Suzanne Rance:

There's another road that goes from south up to north, and it goes up to the other side of the South Downs. So that's the beginning of the South Downs. There you have Clapham Woods.

Damh the Bard:

Well, Clapham Woods. Yes.

Suzanne Rance:

Of great fame.

Damh the Bard:

Is that it?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. That's Clapham Woods.

Damh the Bard:

Oh. I know I've been in there many times, but I haven't seen it from the outside before.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah. It sort of goes from across the ground there.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. Well, Clapham Woods is where we, in my early days, I think I've told this on a DruidCast. I think it was last month even. It was, we used to go there very early on in my pagan path when had a little eclectic group for the festivals. We went there for one Samhain, and we found a pit in the woods. There were lots of these little pits, and we held our Samhain ceremony there. Had Hazel trees overhanging this

little pit, and you could have a little fire in the pit and no one could see you because it was so low. Of course, I later found out that all those pits are plague pits.

Suzanne Rance:

So they're, all right, okay. So they're plague pits. They also had, in Clapham itself, they had one of those secret auxiliary units during the war.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Right. Oh, okay. Okay.

Suzanne Rance:

They weren't supposed to be known about by anybody. They had a headquarters there.

Damh the Bard:

Well, maybe they utilized the plague pits.

Suzanne Rance:

They did. They might have, yes. Yes. Well.

Damh the Bard:

Of course, holding a ceremony at Samhain, literally standing above the bodies of hundreds of people. That was interesting ritual, that one, I've got to say.

Suzanne Rance:

I should imagine so. Yes.

Damh the Bard:

All done with honor and respect for the space.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, of course.

Damh the Bard:

Anyway. Right. Well, we're nearly at the thing so let's shut this off. I'll pick it up again in a minute.

Suzanne Rance:

Okay.

Damh the Bard:

Okay, so a little further on towards the hill fort. I can see, that's one of the ramparts just there, is it? Okay. We've stopped on this lovely green vista overlooking the sea. That way, they've got, I'd say, beachy head and Brighton there. I love that view of the wind turbines. I've got to say, it gives me hope.

Although, some people think it's ugly, but I look at that and go, "No, that's..." To me, that's a step in a lovely direction.

Suzanne Rance:

It is. Definitely a step in the right direction.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

I think.

Damh the Bard:

Out to sea there. So why have you brought me here? What's your connection with Highdown Hill?

Suzanne Rance:

This is my roots, really. If you look down there towards the sea on the coast, you can see a church spire. That's the church that my parents got married in. They live a little bit further to the east, and my dad's house is still there. Although, unfortunately he's had to move into a home. That's where I grew up. So Highdown was always a little Sunday jaunt.

Damh the Bard:

Well, with the family and stuff, yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

And at Christmas as well. If it was lovely at Christmas, we'd walk up here and things like that.

Damh the Bard:

It's your Boxing Day walk or something like that.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Then I'd also bring my daughter up here for a walk and come to walk myself, although don't live in Goring, which is where I grew up. I actually live in Rustington, which you can see from here as well. Littlehampton's, where that block of flats is, this way is Rustington. I can actually walk to here from Rustington. Walk up, and I used to sometimes walk up around here, back down the hill down to Goring to see my dad when he was at home.

Suzanne Rance:

So it's a place I've always come to, to think things over. It's very historical. The ramparts you can see. That's later on in age. In the center of it, there's actually a Saxon cemetery. There's those, and then there's all the eccentricities of, I'll show you where the mill was in a minute.

Damh the Bard:

So you're Sussex born and bred, basically?

This transcript was exported on Jan 18, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Sussex born and bred. I was born in Southlands Hospital, which is in Southwick, near where you live.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, I know. I've visited it on a couple of occasions.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

All right. Okay. Do you feel a real connection to Sussex? Do you see it as a home? Could you live anywhere else, do you think?

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah. I can live elsewhere. I did live in Wales for seven years. But I must admit, what Wales did for me was to make me realize where my home used to be. Because when you grow up somewhere, you often really don't notice what's around you. I must admit, moving into paganism helps to do that. It helps to look at the land that you're on, look at the land that's around, look at the history that's around and everything else like that. But I think I found out more about the history from down here when I lived in south Wales than I did when I was living here, weirdly.

Damh the Bard:

What, is that your own version of a Sussex Hiraeth, I think you reckon?

Suzanne Rance:

No. No.

Damh the Bard:

No? No?

Suzanne Rance:

I was learning about Celtic Christianity. It was just learning about... I wanted to know more about the land that I was in, so I was reading a lot of Celtic histories. Anne Ross wrote a big book on Celtic history arch. She was the historian.

Damh the Bard:

Pagan Celtic Britain.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Pagan Celtic Britain.

Damh the Bard:

I've got that on my shelf. Yeah, yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

In it, she spoke about the pits, the long pits that they would find things in dedicated to the gods of below And things like that.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, I think-

Suzanne Rance:

We're going to be over-run by dogs. Hey, yes.

Damh the Bard:

We're going to be over-run with dogs and people. Here we go. See, every Walking the Talk DruidCast needs to have... I'll walk over here a little bit.

Suzanne Rance:

But what did happen with that, I discovered that one of those pits is just over there, Damh. Just over there. If you're looking towards where Chanctonbury is. Actually, if you stand here and go to the other side of where Clapham Woods is, into long Furlong, it's just up there.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, right.

Suzanne Rance:

It's 127 feet deep. It's lined with flint at the bottom.

Damh the Bard:

Is there anything around it?

Suzanne Rance:

No. Well, yes there is because just at the back of it is a late Iron Age spiritual complex. There was a late Iron Age village on the hill, and then a temple at top. Then down the bottom was this pit, but they don't normally go together. Or a shaft, a ritual shaft. But they're not really talked about as being together, and yet these two were. It's marked as a Roman well, on the maps.

Damh the Bard:

So it's Romano-British, I think.

Suzanne Rance:

Romano-British, yeah.

Damh the Bard:

All right. Okay.

This transcript was exported on Jan 18, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Suzanne Rance:

It was a Romano-British hill.

Damh the Bard:

But contemporary with the ancient Druids, probably.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Which is really what I love about this, where we're going now. So it's this.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

This hill fort.

Suzanne Rance:

This whole thing is contemporary with who we believe, the ancient Druids, to have been unto. There's no reason why it wasn't.

Damh the Bard:

No, no. They found, I think, a golden cauldron at Hollingbury, for instance, during one of the big digs there. That's not that far from here. It's probably there, over there somewhere.

Suzanne Rance:

Over there somewhere.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

One of the finds that they've made at the temple was actually like a plaster foot, as if it was somebody trying to get some healing, ask for some healing. There was also a Romano-British, it was a fish. Other things like that, that they found on the temple are actually very much related to Nodens.

Damh the Bard:

To Nodens. Okay. That might be a new name to a lot of people listening.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.



Damh the Bard:

What do we know about Nodens?

Suzanne Rance:

Well, Nodens was a God of hunting, but he had fishing, fishing and hunting, and healing and things like that. He's related, they say, etymologically to Nudd and the old Celtic gods in that respect. So although he himself is Romano-British god, he's related to the Celtic.

Damh the Bard:

Are there any images of Nodens to suggest...?

Suzanne Rance:

No, it's more to do with his name and to do with the things that they find. There's a big, there might be but I don't know very much, on the River Seven, there's a big temple complex, a big Roman. But that's dedicated to him definitely.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. So this is not a local deity we're talking about here.

Suzanne Rance:

Not a local deity, no.

Damh the Bard:

Interesting, isn't it?

Suzanne Rance:

So yeah, so that's fascinating.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. Because he's a name that does not come up very often in lists of Celtic gods.

Suzanne Rance:

No.

Damh the Bard:

But obviously, at one point, his worship was very important.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

If this god, Nodens, was revered at that time, was there... It feels like there was an acceptance of the Roman occupation, that this worship could still go ahead, I guess.

This transcript was exported on Jan 18, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Suzanne Rance:

Well, I think it was at the time when the Romans were actually ruling. They had soldiers from all over Europe.

Damh the Bard:

Yes.

Suzanne Rance:

So it could well be related to any god from Europe that had originally had the same roots as perhaps Neith and all that. Although, Nudd also has relationships with gold. Because Gwyn ap Nudd could be Gwyn, the son of Nodens.

Damh the Bard:

I love that stuff. Yeah, great.

Suzanne Rance:

Then when I told you where I told you that the temple was on the top, and then there was a shaft on the bottom, who would be in the shaft but God of the underworld?

Damh the Bard:

Exactly.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

So what are those offerings going to exactly?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Wow.

Suzanne Rance:

You've got actually a site where the two ritual places are within a short walking distance of each other.

Damh the Bard:

Amazing. Amazing. So we've arrived at the ramparts. There's double ramparts here.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

There's two. There's a lower one and a higher one, and a lovely Holm oak right there.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, there's a few Holm oaks around.

Damh the Bard:

The evergreen oak. Oh, there's quite a few, isn't there? Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

So I've been here once before, to the place where we are standing here. Holy site, a sacred site, Where you had your handfasting. I remember it very well, that day. It must have been lovely to have that ceremony place so important to you, with your life and history and stuff.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, definitely. It is a beautiful place and it was a place where everybody could come and feel quite relaxed. They had people walking around it. That was all right. It was wonderful. I can't explain how wonderful it was. One, to have all of my friends here. I've been married more than once, by the way. You tend to do things as other people want you to, don't you, when you're young.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

So I quite happily say my first wedding was very much involved with my parents, and it was something that I wouldn't necessarily have wanted for myself. But it was nice, it was lovely, and everything else, about it.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, yes. Traditional.

Suzanne Rance:

It was traditional. Given the chance for this one, have all of my friends and my family around, and we walked up the hill and we had Kate and Corwen doing a pipe and saber. Up the hill, marching us all up the hill. Then there was this lovely area here and it was just beautiful. It was sunny. It was a bit windier than today.

Damh the Bard:

This transcript was exported on Jan 18, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

It was. Yes.

Suzanne Rance:

But at least it was sunny and it wasn't wet. This is the middle of the Hillfort. Pretty much.

Damh the Bard:

Interesting. It's not huge.

Suzanne Rance:

No, no it isn't.

Damh the Bard:

It's like if there was a community here, it would be quite a small one, I would've thought.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Are there evidence of activity and stuff, or no?

Suzanne Rance:

They found one late Iron Age body. It might be that they mostly use this for sacred work.

Damh the Bard:

Ceremony.

Suzanne Rance:

If you live down south of here, then you've only got flat land to the sea. Just up here, you are just surrounded by the land, the sea and the sky. I can imagine it very much being a place like that for communal gathering. In fact, even today, if it wasn't for the fact for COVID, every midsummer, they get a group of Morris dancers come up here. Loads and loads of people come up here and they have all sorts of party, picnic open for free.

Damh the Bard:

For the dawn? For the dawn?

Suzanne Rance:

Some people stay for dawn. Some will just come for the late going into the dark bit. That's just a totally free get together.

Damh the Bard:

Do you know, it's interesting those things, I think. I bet a lot of people who come to that would not identify as pagan or anything like that. But there's something about those traditions, like the Beltane

tradition at the Longman, where the Longman Morris go and would dance there, and this one here. There is something within everybody, I think, That just knows there's something else going on and needs to connect to it.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Okay, so what brought you to this path in the first place? Let's go back and do all that.

Suzanne Rance:

Okay. Go back, go back, go back. Well, we're going right back into the 1980s.

Damh the Bard:

Oh.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. I suppose I was a bit of a hiatus. I could not connect to the Christianity that I was associated with. Although I was never taken to church as a child, my parents joined a naturist club, which is weird for some people, when I was five. Yeah. My mom then would always say, "Well, we worship the sun." She said that until I joined the first path, which was witchcraft, in which case she turned around and said I ought to join the local church. I thought I'd just chosen a path where the sun is part of the worship, part of the deity.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah. That's not quite what I meant.

Suzanne Rance:

No. Love her. But yeah. So I joined Wicca because I didn't find anything Druid there. There wasn't really any, because it was late eighties, sort of '86.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. That before OBOD was refounded in '88. So it was before that. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

I was looking into it before that. I found a local group and I joined them. They're a nice, really nice people. I started on this journey of learning loads and loads and loads about different gods and goddesses and things like that. As I've traveled my path, I found myself changing. Because if you don't, what are you doing?

Suzanne Rance:

Then I came to one of your very early camps. I actually fell in love with the druidry that I found there, with the people that I found there. They were more open because the Wicca that I belonged to, as in old traditional Wicca, is very sort of secretive.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, of course.

Suzanne Rance:

I was often finding that secretive aspect, which I totally appreciate, as being a place where a lot of people would go to hide. Hide or pretend. They could turn around and say, "I've got loads and loads of power. Oh, I can't tell you that because you're not the right degree."

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Okay.

Suzanne Rance:

There was lots and lots of hidden that could be abused. I'm not saying that the people I were with were abusive, but you could see how that would happen. That doesn't fit with my nature.

Damh the Bard:

No. It fits with some people.

Suzanne Rance:

It does.

Damh the Bard:

I can see the attraction of it, because there is that... People love a mystery. People love mystery and mysticism. Of course, if there's something hidden and occult, it's really fabulous and interesting. I totally get why people are drawn to that kind of thing.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Of course, all of that is still within druidry.

Suzanne Rance:

It is.

Damh the Bard:

What I liked about it was the fact that we could do these open camps, and that we aren't oath-bound to secrecy. So we can be a lot more open with people when people say, "What do you do?" I can really, really talk very openly about what I do. I did appreciate that difference, whereas, I had, at that time, my time was the very early nineties, late eighties, early nineties. I couldn't work out how I could know if I wanted to be part of this if no one could tell me what I was joining.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, I would agree with that.

Damh the Bard:

That was what I couldn't work out. It's like, "You work with us for a year and a day, and then you have to ask for initiation." "Well, what will I get after my initiation?" "Well, we can't tell you that." Well, how do I know I want it then? That didn't work for me. As I say, it's fine for other people. It didn't work for me at all.

Suzanne Rance:

It is, definitely, and a lot of people do find it's intriguing and are very fulfilled by it. To a certain degree, I was. I wouldn't say I've totally left it behind, but I carried on my journey. I think what I found personally with it, and it wasn't necessarily from the group that I was with. It's from the others I'd met in bits and pieces. So once you're in one group, you either leave them to learn whatever, or you stay and learn within that group. Not everybody within that group wants to learn the same things as you.

Suzanne Rance:

I was never really that into interested in magic in early years. I was as a child, I must admit to not being a magical being at all. I actually made fun of a little girl whose mother had sewn the leaves in the trees and said it was the local fairies. And I'd go, "No, it's not." I don't know whether it's because I had such a really secure upbringing, because I had no need for that. So I came from a base which was really quite, I didn't really believe in anything other than what I saw.

Suzanne Rance:

I loved what I saw. I loved the nature. I love everything else. I love the connections. So when I joined into witchcraft, it was definitely more for the different, the eight celebrations of the year, and learning to celebrate the nature that was around. It was the only place I could get that from at that time. When I move on into, after the first camp, I'm thinking I love these people. I love the use of voice for the Awen. I love the friendliness and just the getting together and having fun bit of it. So I want to learn more, so I joined OBOD just to learn more about it. Then I just fell in love.

Damh the Bard:

That's where you've stayed. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Also, it allows me to go and learn about Saxons, which is another thing that's here. Although, they're not necessarily druids, They're part of our historical past. They had their own belief systems that we don't know 100% about on anything. So it's all part of that history connection. As I've grown up over the years, I have more interest in magic now because I've learned what true magic is.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. Yes. We've seen it, experienced it.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Yes.

This transcript was exported on Jan 18, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, those camps, for instance were a very unique-

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah. Absolutely amazing.

Damh the Bard:

So many things happened there that you can't just kind of go, "Oh, okay then."

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

This stuff is real.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Yes. So now I believe 100% in magic. I've gone from no to 100.

Suzanne Rance:

When it was really, really fashionable to plant loads and loads of trees on the tops of hilltops, somebody called Mr. Henty] wanted to put trees on the top of this fort. Before he did that, they did some digging to see, and they found a Saxon burial site. It's pretty much all around this side more.

Suzanne Rance:

That was in the 1800s, I think it was 1832 or something like that, archeological dig where they took the bits out that they thought were interesting, left the other bits and pieces. Unfortunately separated people's skulls from the rest of their bodies, because skulls were interesting, bodies weren't. All sorts of things like that.

Damh the Bard:

I love the Victorians...

Suzanne Rance:

And lots and lots of finds. They decided that it was definitely a Saxon burial site. In fact, it's one of the earliest Saxon burial sites.

Damh the Bard:

Do they know what year it would have been?

Suzanne Rance:

The early 400s.

Damh the Bard:



Early 400s? So, pre-Christian.

Suzanne Rance:

So you've got a crossover between the Romans as well, and there is Roman glass that was found in some of these burial sites.

Damh the Bard:

Within Saxon burial sites?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, within.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, so these are real early arrivals.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, they are. Really, really early. There's other early arrivals at Friston they've got. There's another, in Eastbourne. They've got a couple of other burial sites that are of this early. Not very many of these are found at this early stage. They think it's perhaps because it's not far from Selsey, which was a great big market area. On the Isle of Wight, which we've just seen, that's where they have Jutish burials. Some of the fashion was Jutish as well. So there's not very many Jutes, and they came from-

Damh the Bard:

So what's the difference between Jutes and Saxons?

Suzanne Rance:

Supposedly, the Saxons came from Saxony, which was a north German group and area. The Jutes, Jutland.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. Right.

Suzanne Rance:

The Jutes came from Jutland. They were part of what would now be Denmark. The Angles came from just across the water, I think.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay. And gradually these people just became the Saxons?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Yes. Even by the venerable Bede's time they were the Saxons. He doesn't really know where the Saxons came from. There was a really good chance that these Saxons were here for a long time, and from even earlier as part of the Roman occupation. We got lots of Roman stuff here. We've got

Fishbourne Roman Palace, which is one of the very early Roman sites. They believed that it was Toddy Dim... Oh, I don't know what his name is. Some Roman name. Invited them in. Invited the Romans in.

Damh the Bard:

Yes.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Good for him. Well done.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, yeah. It's nice. Yes. Try going to talk to the people at the Anglesey Druid Order knowing your great shame that you come from Sussex.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, that's true. Yes. I've heard that he was the one who sort of said, "Oh, just come over and bring wine." I can almost hear it.

Suzanne Rance:

Well, but I think it's because the early tribes that came over, and we're talking Caesar this time. We're talking in the times of Caesar. People were already here from Belgium. All the Belgaec peoples. They were escaping from Caesar and coming over here. This whole area from pretty much all the way down to Dover up to Hampshire was where the Belgaec people's lived.

Suzanne Rance:

So there were sort of a mix of Germanic and Gaulish. They weren't really one or the other. So they came over early, and this place apparently Caesar was told this whole place was like a bread basket heaven. It was already under a Manorial type of structure. Then when the Romans left, they left their Manorial people in charge, who were by that time already readily mixed with whoever.

Damh the Bard:

And a political vacuum and everything else.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. I mean, we can see even today what happens when you leave a political vacuum. So there we go. All right. Looking around here as well, because what we do know about Sussex is that we had the Forest of Anderida here.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

That went all away from Dover right the way down to sort of Southampton, as far as I can remember that kind of line.

Suzanne Rance:

I think it's Pevensey, because that's the city-

Damh the Bard:

Fort.

Suzanne Rance:

Fort of Anderida Fort.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, yes.

Suzanne Rance:

Then it goes all the way between the North and the South Downs, right the way to Hampshire.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, and that would still have been here to a certain degree at that point, because I remember the story of St. Wilfred, is it, who landed and was almost killed because the place was, even in the 700s, was still a pagan place?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Definitely.

Damh the Bard:

St Wilfred landed and he was the one who began to convert people onto the Christian path. But it had malaria, didn't it? And this forest was swamps.

Suzanne Rance:

Oh, I should imagine so.

Damh the Bard:

Looking around now, it's hard to believe that Sussex, one of the gardens of England, was once so inhospitable and cut off from the rest of the country.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah. Well, you couldn't get down. You could go via Worth.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. Up near Worth.

Suzanne Rance:

Up near Worth was one of the crossing points. You could get down south from a road that went through Worth To the south of the Weald. You could get down, I think, in a couple of other places, but they were the only places-

Damh the Bard:

Open to.

Suzanne Rance:

Open that you could travel through, especially in the winter when it became so muddy. There's these jokes, wondrous jokes, of you're walking along the road and you can see a hat. Somebody picks the hat up and there's a man's head under it. "Oh my gosh. How long have you been there?" "Well, I seem to have got stuck in the mud and my horse, which I'm sitting on, it's beneath me. We'd already climbed onto a wagon to stop ourselves from sinking."

Damh the Bard:

Yes. And that was Sussex.

Suzanne Rance:

And that was Sussex. The Sussex Weald.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. So these hill forts would have looked out upon a very different landscape, wouldn't they?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

They would have been literally palisaded with a big fence or something, maybe here. I don't know. But you would have just seen these settlements on the hills amongst the forest.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

You look at there and go, wow. It's very different.

Suzanne Rance:

Of course, another thing you have to think of the forest is the forest is created of groups of trees, and then open land. A bit like the New Forest. If you go across the New Forest, you can actually see a lot. You think, well, where's the New Forest?

Damh the Bard:

It's more like moorland anyway, yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

You're expecting all the trees. It's moorland. It's clumps of brush and all sorts of things like that. That's what Anderida would have been like. There's a place just north of here called Knepp, where they're re-wilding everything. It's an estate where they're re-wilding. I love going for walks there, but not this time of year.

Damh the Bard:

No?

Suzanne Rance:

No, because...

Damh the Bard:

It's been properly re-wilded? It's probably swamp, is it?

Suzanne Rance:

They've got the cattle in. So they did use it for cattle farming.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

Especially the edges. So if you had crops growing south of the South Downs here, and you'd then in the summer, you'd then move your cattle up into the Weald because they'd browse the trees and bits and pieces. And they could cope with the mud that was left. It's really, really fascinating. Then towards Eastbourne end, they had a lot more iron. So even during Roman times, the Romans opened up the iron smelting works and things.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. There's an iron tradition up Thundersbarrow Hill as well. You can walk there when, I think, they've plowed the field within the hill fort. Okay. Is that a woodpecker?

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah, it might be.

Damh the Bard:

This transcript was exported on Jan 18, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

It's a woodpecker. Wow. You can literally see the slag on the top there. The other thing I love about Thundersbarrow Hill, and it's probably the same here if they've plowed around it, is you can find fossilized sea urchins within the chalk as well.

Suzanne Rance:

Oh, lovely. Yeah. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah. Okay. Well.

Suzanne Rance:

It is just really, really fascinating.

Damh the Bard:

It is. It is.

Suzanne Rance:

It is. I think I saw the woodpecker, by the way.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. Well, that's lovely.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

That's lovely.

Suzanne Rance:

It is gorgeous. You can see Arundel Castle from here as well. If you can go out by the Trig point.

Damh the Bard:

Well, let's go up by the Trig point.

Suzanne Rance:

All right. Okay then.

Damh the Bard:

Let's go.

Suzanne Rance:

Let's have a look.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. So we've walked along a little bit towards the Trig point, and there's a patch of grass. That's where the old miller's windmill was.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Is that right on the edge?

Suzanne Rance:

It is.

Damh the Bard:

Or is it within the hill fort?

Suzanne Rance:

It's sort of just on the edge. It sits-

Damh the Bard:

All right. Okay. Okay. Then you've got these twin pits here. Now, if this was on Cissbury, I'd said flint mines.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah. But no, it's not Flint. It's very likely to be second world war installations. They had quite a lot up here.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. There's one on Caburn as well, isn't there?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, that is marked as such. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

It shows how history travels right the way through. It's just lovely to learn where you're coming from, while you're traveling to where you're going to.

Damh the Bard:

Absolutely. Something that was used... This one might not have been used as a defensive thing. It might have been a gathering point and the settlement may have been outside. But if it did have the hill fort idea at some point, being used as a defense. Then thousands of years later, an installation being placed upon it to use it as a defense against...

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, definitely. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Okay.

Suzanne Rance:

So, Arundel Castle.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, yes. I can see Arundel Castle just peeking out between the hills.

Suzanne Rance:

Do you want to head up there?

Damh the Bard:

It's a beautiful, beautiful. I'm still amazed that we can see the Isle of Wight from here. I wish you could see this, podcast listeners, because it really is the most glorious, beautiful winter's day.

Suzanne Rance:

It's not the clearest Isle of Wight at the moment. It is where the high clouds are, but it's over there and it is clear. On a clear day, you can really, really see it, which means you can see the backs of Portsmouth.

Damh the Bard:

You've got a huge interest in Saxon and the runes particularly, haven't you?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Yes, I have.

Damh the Bard:

What's the attraction? Where did the runes appear in your life?



Suzanne Rance:

In my life, they appeared back in the eighties, but it was definitely the Elder Futhark. It was definitely Ralph Blooms set.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, good old Ralph Blooms.

Suzanne Rance:

Good old Ralph Blooms.

Damh the Bard:

I bought a set. W. H. Smiths, I think, I got mine from.

Suzanne Rance:

I probably got mine from the same place. I just sort of found them quite fascinating. I used to love writing in them. Trying to learn out what they sounded like, and write to them and write messages like a code and things like that. Then left them behind a bit. I've always kept my eyes open, but then I... I can't remember exactly. I think it was just trying to learn a little bit more about the Saxon era, because I started with my history back to neolithic. I've gradually moved forward. I got to '63 and I'm at the Saxons. A bit of the Normans, because I work in a Norman castle, Arundel Castle, in the summer. But they're as far forward as I've got.

Suzanne Rance:

When I was looking at that, and J.R.R. Tolkien and people like that. He used the runes. He used the English runes. He called them the English runes. A lot of people call them the Anglo-Saxon runes or the Anglo-Frisian futhorc. Tolkien called them the English runes. He used them around the Hobbits, the book of the Hobbit and all sorts of things like that. I'm just thinking, well, this is really, really fascinating. So then I started looking at the old English rune poem, being the oldest version of what these runes could possibly mean.

Damh the Bard:

Is that right? Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

All the Saxon scholars, they study it. If you're doing anything Saxon really, you study the OERP. Especially as it's the language and it's associated with the language. So each one of those runes would have a sound that was used in old English. Interestingly, it's younger, obviously, than the Elder Futhark, which is the oldest rune rows that they found. They already knew which order it went into because they seem to write it in order.

Suzanne Rance:

The oldest find is the Kylver Stone, with the Elder Futhark. The Kylver Stone is in an order that is the same as you would-

This transcript was exported on Jan 18, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Damh the Bard:

I would recognize it?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

It spells futhark or something?

Suzanne Rance:

It spells Futhark at the beginning, yes. The old English spells futhorc, so it's slightly different because the language had changed. The elder is more the early Germanic, common Germanic language-based. Then English has developed out of that. So as people move on there, A's turn to a, or a's turn to R's, and R's and or's. Orc, even in the English futhorc, is AC. You'd think that was AK. But actually it's orc.

Damh the Bard:

Orc?

Suzanne Rance:

Orc. It has more of an or sound.

Damh the Bard:

That sounds proper Yorkshire. It's an orc.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah, but it, orc, it moves. The sounds move. So it's slightly different and there's also, there's 29 runes in the English futhorc. So I just got fascinated by it. And then I was reading loads and loads of people's versions of what the runes mean. You to different places and they're all basically sort of mean the same, but everybody has their own attachment to the runes.

Damh the Bard:

Those meanings, are they within the old English rune poem?

Suzanne Rance:

They're often based on the old English rune poem. Or what people have decided.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. Okay. So these are traceable back to an ancient text or something?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. There is a Norwegian one. It's not as old as the old English rune poem, and there's an Icelandic one. So people will join those in. The Norse runes, the old, there's only 16 of those in their rune row.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, right? Okay.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. So as a usable rune row, the English runes are definitely the longer one. So I'm reading everybody else's view on what it is, and trying to find my view on what it is. Until I decided, hey, why don't I just go back to what the poem says and then look at how that could develop as a meaning that would mean something to me as well as others? That's what I encourage to do in my book, when I wrote my book.

Suzanne Rance:

With the use of the rune cards that I just developed is to have a look at what the ancients used to do, see if that can be related to what you do. If, for instance, you've got one rune, which is the cross, which is probably the most famous, which is Gyfu or Gebo or whatever people call it. It's known as a gift. It sort of is a gift. But today you'd walk straight away into that gift and think, oh, it's a gift. I'm going to get something. I don't have to do anything for it because it's a gift. Or you give a gift. So the receiver doesn't have to do anything for it. But when you go look back in history, you find that a gift is almost like a contract. So there was open house. If you had a stranger walk by and they didn't have anywhere to stay, you would invite them to stay in there.

Damh the Bard:

But they can do the washing up.

Suzanne Rance:

You would give them food. They could even work a day on your field.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. Yes. So it's like terms and conditions apply in small print gift.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. It was part of their social structure that we don't really have anymore. That really got me thinking, looking back and thinking, well, I've grown up to, I've been told, unconditional love, unconditional love, unconditional love. Which is great, I think, for babies. But what's is unconditional love for adult to adult, or even for children growing up, if you are turning around and saying, "I'm going to give the whole of my life to you. I don't need anything in return." You're doing yourself down. You're not building your own self-respect. Even as children get older, you start to teach them that if they get a gift, they should be nice about it. They should say thank you. They should do this. Or if they want a little bit of money, then perhaps do the washing up to learn that-

Damh the Bard:

Exchange.

Suzanne Rance:

Exchange. That exchange, then-

Damh the Bard:

It's all about community as well, isn't it?

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah, it's about community and it's about building your self-respect and self-reliance, and giving your people responsibility.

Damh the Bard:

Wow.

Suzanne Rance:

If you're responsible for yourself... And I learned that.

Damh the Bard:

So going from the idea of just a gift in our current way of thinking, Which is, oh, I'm going to get something without really trying, that's not really what it means.

Suzanne Rance:

No.

Damh the Bard:

Even though it's called a gift.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

And there's others like that?

Suzanne Rance:

Oh yes, there are all sorts of things. But by looking back, a lot of it you can think, well, that doesn't happen now. But if you learned how hard it was for those people, and then bring that forward and thinking, well, I can't just expect all of these things. I have to work. If I do any magic with runes and buying runes and bits and pieces like that for people who want help with something, I never just give it to them and tell them it's going to solve it. I give it to them as saying I've spoken to the runes, which for myself, I believe are entities that live within Wyrd, which is the web of life. I'm not going to insult these runes that I've asked help from for somebody by telling the somebody that they don't have to do anything for them. They need to help themselves. If they help themselves, the runes then will also help.

Damh the Bard:

It backs it up, doesn't it? It backs it up and it adds the energy and focus and stuff like that. It's like saying, "Here's a car, but you've got to drive it."

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

I remember we were talking about, Tony Robbins, weren't we? Before we came out.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, we were.

Damh the Bard:

He said something years ago that's always stuck with me. It's one of his go-to things he says, and I won't do an American accent and insult all of my American listeners. But he says basically, "Affirmation without discipline is the beginning of delusion. Affirmation with discipline creates miracles." That's the same with magic.

Suzanne Rance:

It is.

Damh the Bard:

Just working with magic is not going to do it. But magic with discipline and with work and with effort, that's when you start to see those results. It's the same with the runes. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. It is a whole body experience, really, isn't it? You're getting into that place, which is another reason why I now believe in magic.

Damh the Bard:

Because you've tried, as well.

Suzanne Rance:

I've put effort into this and I've asked for help because I knew that I couldn't personally do that, and then seen what seems to be a miracle happen in some cases. Absolute miracle. Or just the pure magic of standing here and looking out and remembering that these things are not just to be taken for granted.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. The magic of connection.

Suzanne Rance:

They're the magic.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. That's it. I think a lot of this stuff is remembering. I think we are innately magical. I think our ancestors understood that a lot better than we did, and over the course of years, we've had influences of technology, of other religions telling you that magic is bad. All those things that the culture and

society have laid upon people. Then of course, you've got the atheism and stuff like that saying, "Oh no, no, it doesn't exist unless it's real and materialistic." Viewpoints and stuff like that.

Damh the Bard:

But every time, that's why people come up here at the summer solstice just to watch Morris dancers. Because they know inside there's something going on. But they might not necessarily understand what it is, but they've just got to be there. It's why people visit Wayland Smithy with their kids, yet they have no real concept of what it is or anything, but something draws you there. I think that's what we key into, don't we, with what we do?

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Most definitely.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. We're just remembering, at the end of the day.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Yes it is. I think also that one of my big bug bears at the moment is nature. Okay? It's not by personal, but it is a bug bear. I love nature. But I remember Graham Harvey. He turns around and says, "Why do people go out into nature? They've never left it. They are part of nature." People, students, fundamentally people need to know that they are nature and part of nature, and that going out into nature separates nature from the human.

Damh the Bard:

It does. Even looking at a reservoir and saying, "Oh, that's not natural. That's human-made." Well, we are natural. An ant builds an ant's nest in a woods.

Suzanne Rance:

We think, "Oh, nature."

Damh the Bard:

We think that's natural. That's just the ant doing what we've done with the reservoir. If you don't see it as natural and part of the natural world, you don't take responsibility for it being part of the natural world. Or what it does to the rest of it.

Suzanne Rance:

Right. Or effect the natural world, yes.

Damh the Bard:

So yeah. Yeah, absolutely. It's all part of remembering.

Suzanne Rance:

Yeah, everything. Everything is nature.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Everything is nature. Indeed. I think that's what druidry, and that's why I think there's such still a burgeoning interested in this stuff, from Wicca, witchcraft, Heathenry, the whole lot, is this remembering. From an ancestral thing, yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

It's celebrating nature, and then gradually as you celebrate nature, you start to become, realize how much part of nature that you actually are. By being in a magical place, you are nature. By just living, you're nature. By breathing, you're nature. So, yes. So it's a bug bear when every time you're seeing on the television and everything, "Oh, people got to get out into nature and people have got to do this." No, they've got to learn that they are nature.

Damh the Bard:

Yes. Get out into nature. No, be nature.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. Be nature.

Damh the Bard:

You've spoken a lot about that you found your path in witchcraft and then found in druidry, and that you are really fascinated and interested with the Saxon stuff and with the old English runes and the old English rune poem and things like that. But to be honest, if you look at history, the Saxon and Briton aren't natural bedfellows. So how do you go about redressing and reintegrating, reintroducing maybe to each other, the red and white dragon?

Suzanne Rance:

Well, it's definitely always been within me. I moved to Wales. I lived in Wales for seven years. I learned to speak Welsh fluently, and I became a Welsh teacher in school. Well, I was training to be. I didn't actually become, because then I moved back here. I love all of the Welsh tales, and as I say, I can speak Welsh. That is fine for the red dragon in me.

Suzanne Rance:

But I come and was brought up in Sussex. When I actually look at my genetics, I am Sussex and the northwest of Britain. When you look at it a lot bigger, it tells me that then my genes also come from the area where Belgium is now, or the Belgae used to be. The Belgae came across here. I know from other old archeological finds and bits and pieces, they stayed here a lot. So part of me must be Belgae if I come from here.

Suzanne Rance:

Part of me will be Welsh, because hell, there was a lot of Welsh people in the northwest. In fact, when I learned to speak Welsh, I was really quite amazed by how far north that language went. It was there, as well.

Damh the Bard:

It was, wasn't it? Yes. Absolutely.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes. It was based on Brythonic. So I sorted the Welsh bit, but thinking, well, hang on a second. There's part of me that feels like it's really quite Saxon. I need to find out a little bit more about that. I wanted, I've always wanted to find the links between the stories of the Brythonic peoples and the stories of the Saxon peoples, and things like that. It is there. It's to be found in the Indo-European myths and legends.

Damh the Bard:

You can see it in the art as well.

Suzanne Rance:

You can see it in the art.

Damh the Bard:

What is called a Celtic knot is often on a lot of Anglo-Saxon jewelry.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes, definitely. Definitely.

Damh the Bard:

So it's not as cut and dried.

Suzanne Rance:

The people have moved. The people move all of the time and they interbreed. There's no proof of the people of Sussex being killed off by the Saxons. There is no proof of that. There's no proof that they went off and killed everybody else. Yes, there were tussles and there were arguments and bits and pieces like that. Fashions changed.

Suzanne Rance:

What I will find fascinating as well though, so there's the old stories and you can find the links between Woden and sometimes with Gwyn because of their nature. When you look at the old gods that they were representing and bring them forward into both, you can see connections. There are connections there. The belief systems weren't totally different.

Damh the Bard:

No.

Suzanne Rance:

They believed in nature. They lived in nature, as we were talking about there. It doesn't matter where you came from, you lived in nature and that's how you used to cope with life. I know that just recently, the skeletons that were originally found, because unfortunately, they removed the skulls from the rest of the body. That was the Victorians. I know the archeologist at the local museum here. He says we would like to reunite their heads with their bodies. We'd like to try and treat them as well as we possibly



can. But while that's happening, they're taking DNA samples. So it will be really quite interesting to see if there are matches in my DNA with the DNA from here.

Suzanne Rance:

I know that when I was in Wales, I was told, "No, you're Welsh." All the Welsh people told me I was Welsh.

Damh the Bard:

Because you spoke the language?

Suzanne Rance:

No, but even the people who were teaching me to speak it.

Damh the Bard:

Oh, okay. Yeah.

Suzanne Rance:

It was quite fascinating. But reality is, my blood and my DNA doesn't show very much. It shows some, but I am 97%, I think it's, no, it may have gone down to 92 as ancestry finds more links and things like that, percent English. Then I'm a 2% Swedish and I'm 2% Irish and I'm... No, 4% Swedish, 2% Irish, and 2% Scottish. It's very important for me not to just follow one aspect, but find the truth as much as I can. That's changing all of the time. But in things that can be related to each other, because we are modern druids. We are moderns. We take from the historical past of our lands, our peoples, et cetera, et cetera. Then we rebuild it in a way to make it today. Just to make it today, with full respect to yesterday.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, absolutely. And you stand on here. I remember at one of our camps, we did runes, and we had the great Steve Pollington talk.

Suzanne Rance:

Oh yes.

Damh the Bard:

It was the first time, I think it was probably the first time, I'd heard old English spoken fluently. He just said these words, and we were in this field just outside of Lewes. It felt to me sitting there that every single blade of grass in that field suddenly turned its head, if it had a head, and thought, hold on a minute. I know those words. I haven't heard those words for a while. But the land remembers, doesn't it? The land remembers all of these things. All of the people who lived here. It kind of just remembers these languages and histories and mythologies and everything. It's just built up layer upon layer.

Damh the Bard:

Well, thank you, Sue, for taking me on this lovely walk up to Highdown Hill.

Suzanne Rance:

This transcript was exported on Jan 18, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

You're welcome.

Damh the Bard:

How do people find out more about you and your books and your cards and what you do?

Suzanne Rance:

I have a website, which I don't do very much of. I do have a Facebook page, Suzanne Rance, English runologist, which is probably the easiest place for people to get to. Probably I'll put more notes on there than I do on the website. Then I sell cards on Etsy and I sell my books on Amazon.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Okay.

Suzanne Rance:

And through Amazon.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. I'll put all of those links into the show notes. But other than that, thank you very much of bringing me on this lovely walk.

Suzanne Rance:

Thank you. It's been a pleasure. What a day.

Damh the Bard:

I mean, wow.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

What a day.

Suzanne Rance:

Yes.

Damh the Bard:

Thank you.