

# *Beaker Common Prayer*

*Through the Seasons with*

*The Beaker Folk*

*Of Husborne Crawley*

# Contents

Of the People Called Beaker.....	3
Husborne Crawley.....	9
The Place of Worship.....	13
Of Music.....	16
Of High-Visibility Clothing and Personal Protection Equipment.....	18
Beaker Industry.....	20
Notes on “Occasions”.....	23
The Beaker Calendar.....	24
Winter Solstice – Midnight.....	25
Winter Solstice – Morning.....	27
Yule.....	29
Liturgy of remembrance of Thomas Hardy – 11 January.....	31
Imbolc (2 February).....	33
Valentine’s Day.....	35
Spring Equinox.....	37
Ordinary Time.....	39
The Phases of the Moon.....	41
Beltane (May Eve).....	45
May Day.....	47
Liturgy of the Nativity of Morrissey (22 May).....	49
Summer Solstice Eve.....	51
Summer Solstice – morning.....	52
A celebration of Last of the Summer Wine (12 July – Nora Batty’s Birthday).....	53
Lammas.....	55
The Night of a Thousand Tea lights.....	58
Michaelmas.....	62
Samhain (Halloween / All Hallows).....	64
Bonfire Night.....	66
Winter Solstice Eve.....	68
Of the Moon Gibbon.....	71
On the Gender of the Moon.....	73
The Moot.....	77
The Articles of the Beaker Faith.....	84

# Of the People Called Beaker

## *Foreword by Archdruid Eileen.*

I am delighted to share with you this Beaker Common Prayer book.

When I founded the Beaker Folk of Husborne Crawley in 2003, I never dreamed that the movement would thrive in the way that it has. But to understand the Beaker Folk, you have to understand where I myself came from.

I was brought up in a branch of the Obscure Primitive Methodists. So primitive that they banned all forms of artificial light and heating in worship. I have memories of services in the middle of winter, singing Wesley's great hymns in pitch darkness while wrapped in eight jumpers and a sleeping bag. They were people of great devotion, with a tendency to suffer badly from frostbite.

Mummy and Daddy were fairly comfortably off, and able to send me to a girl's public school in the Midlands. That school could feed 400 girls for about sixpence a head each, while charging their parents the equivalent of the national average wage for the privilege. Maybe that was part of what inspired me in founding the Beaker Folk so many years later.

While I was studying for my degree at St Hilda's, Mummy and Daddy suffered that terrible accident with the hay-baler, and that was what

encouraged me to pursue my career in the Health and Safety industry. After Oxford I moved back to the Great House, and commuted around the country checking out building sites and farms. And then closing them down.

But after fifteen years of dealing with the innuendoes of builders and then slapping safety orders on them, I realized I was missing something. Something on the spiritual plane. And so I hung up my hi-viz vest and steel toe-caps, and went on a pilgrimage to discover who I was. I tried it all – Iona Community, Jerusalem, Walsingham, India – even a group in Stewartby who worshipped Guinea Pigs as gods. But nowhere could quite meet the spiritual yearning in my soul.

It was while attending a Taizé service in Basingstoke that I realised what was missing. You can talk about Wesley's warmed heart, about Moses on the mount ain, about Robert Bruce and the spider – even about Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and the Granita. But this was my moment. The right hemisphere - emotional, spiritual, mystical - spoke straight to the left, logical, one. And the truth came to me in three revelations. I think of them as the three jigsaw pieces of the Beaker religion.

I can share these three fragments of truth with you. Because let's face it, they've made me happy. So why shouldn't they make you happy as well? And they are these.

Secret 1 - People want to feel good in religion. They want to feel connected to the Ultimate – whatever that represents. Oh yeah, there's a few that really like to feel bad – who bash themselves over the head with guilt, see the darkness of what some call sin, and the challenges of temptation - and make everyone else around them feel the same way. But who wants to hang around with them? They're just depressing. The ones who want to feel a connection with the Divine – they don't necessarily want to be challenged. They just want to feel good.

Secret 2 - Retreat centres are amazing places. People go there and you can offer them plain food, give them menial tasks to do (tell them it's "discipline"), just leave them to their own devices (and call it "space". And then you charge them a fortune. Just like my old school.

Secret 3 - It's not good enough to let people discover themselves. People have to go abroad to learn news of home. If you offer them the good old Church of England, they'll think of musty hassocks and dodgy cassocks and stay at home of a Sunday morning. But offer them Celtic Christianity and they'll hear the wind blowing over the heather and the waves crashing on Iona's shores. You can tell them to listen to the "whisper of the Wild Goose" – as if wild geese whisper. They honk. But never mind, if it keeps the punters happy tell you can tell them that wild geese sing 15<sup>th</sup> century madrigals. Let people sing in Latin and they

won't understand it and they'll be released from their mundane lives. Tell them it's Primeval Mystic Truth, discovered by the Ancients, and they'll swallow anything you want to feed them. Tell them it's primeval spiritualism, and brings you one-ness with the universe, and they'll give you all their money.

So I was looking for a form of exotic spirituality that would let me make a fortune. But which one? I had a large house with plenty of space to expand, so it had to be rooted in the Bedfordshire landscape somehow. The Celts had been done. And Buddhism's just so Islington, don't you think? I thought of traditional Norman spirituality – but no-one's gonna buy sitting in a Gothic chapel mumbling unintelligibly. Apart from the Prayer Book Society. But sitting up late in my conservatory one night, reading about the mystery of the Amesbury Archer, it all fell together. Because this early Bronze-Age man, buried within the environs of Stonehenge, was a Beaker Person. My third piece was in place.

Consider what we know about the Beaker Folk.

- They were earlier than the Celts, so they must have been even more exotic and spiritual.



- They built Stonehenge.<sup>1</sup>
- So they must have had druids<sup>2</sup>.
- And the use of stones in worship. (We tend towards pebbles rather than 20 ton sarsen blocks. Easier to move).
- We like the word "folk". Makes you feel all comfy and arransweaterish.
- They probably had tea lights. Obviously, not like our modern tea lights. Probably made of tallow and smelt disgusting, and they hadn't discovered aluminium. But in an era before electricity, and without access to olive oil, they must have made use of some kind of tea light-related technology.
- They were peaceful and gentle - except when massacring their neighbours to steal their wives and sheep.

And better even than all of this (but a root cause of much of the above) - we don't really know very much about them at all. So anything we can imagine about them - must be right. Which is really important when

---

<sup>1</sup> Honest. It wasn't the Celts. They were 1,000 years too late. And too busy singing songs about how much they missed their home to put any effort into moving those big stones around.

<sup>2</sup> Yes, I know that the Druids are traditionally supposed to have been Celtic. But we all know that the Druids built Stonehenge. So, logically, the Druids must have been Beaker People. Maybe they just hung around for the Celts, to give them a bit of inspiration fighting against the Romans?

you're building your own religion out of fuzzy feelings and wishful thinking.

From this discovery to opening the Great House as the Beaker retreat house and the building of the whole Beaker Folk community was just a matter of a minor amount of interior redevelopment (making use of my contacts in the building world) and knocking up some liturgy. The rest is history.

So welcome to the Beaker Folk of Husborne Crawley. A place where the environment is respected. Where no bunny goes un-hugged. Where elven singing echoes among the trees at every full moon. Come and stay for a weekend of cleansing, de-tox your mind from modern thoughts. And if you like us, and you start to feel in touch with your true self – why not stay? To paraphrase PT Barnum, there's always room for one more.

*Archdruid Eileen*

*Lencten 2009*



# Husborne Crawley

Best described as a straggling village, consisting of a number of “ends”, on the borders of the county of Bedfordshire and the People’s Republic of Milton Keynes. Husborne Crawley combines the best of the traditional rural environment, with unrivalled transport links. It is historically a part of the estate of the Dukes of Bedford, which is why one boundary of the village is the enormous wall which runs for a couple of miles down the Woburn road, keeping us out of the safari park. And if they thought of living in a village that is bounded by a gigantic wall makes you think of the Cold War, suspicion and secret informers – then you’ll be in just the right hands when you meet Archdruid Eileen.

## *Geology*

Husborne Crawley lies on the Greenstone Ridge – a band of sandstone lying across mid-Bedfordshire and north Bucks. When first dug, the sandstone is indeed green. However exposure to the air rapidly converts it to a more standard sandy colour. We reckon that it was this apparently magical transformation that first drew the Beaker Folk to the area in the long centuries before the Common Era. Also, being slightly elevated and draining well, it was a generally drier place to live than down in the clay vales below. We believe that the descendants of those less well situated are still to be found in the villages of Woburn and

Aspley Guise, to judge by the number of webbed feet among the inhabitants.

Sand is made of silica, a form of crystal. And as we know crystals have mystical healing powers, harnessing spiritual vibrations to promote well-being and heal migraines and haemorrhoids<sup>3</sup>. And sandstone therefore contains literally millions of micro-crystals. So much better than one dirty great crystal, like you can get in those hippy shops on the high street<sup>4</sup>. Save your money – come down to Husborne Crawley and you can pick up a lump of sandstone for nothing! OK, it may not look so pretty, and it's liable to shed bits of sand on your carpet, but it's cheap.

### *Communications*

It's all very well imagining how great life would have been in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. But it would be quite another one if you had to walk back to Fulham after a weekend's pilgrimage. After a good Solstice celebration at Stonehenge, it must have taken weeks for everyone to get home. So the good news for the modern pilgrim is that Husborne Crawley is ideal

---

<sup>3</sup> Or at least, when it comes to people who believe in the power of crystals, *they're* not the ones suffering from a pain in the backside. Generally speaking, we are.

<sup>4</sup> Wellingborough in particular among nearby towns seems to suffer from a plague of crystal-and-wind-chime shops. And if you've been to Wellingborough town centre, you'll know that all those crystals don't seem to be helping much.

for transport links.

Being highly environmentally sensitive, most Beaker People drive 4x4s. After all, it's a big part of an eco-aware lifestyle, is imagining you live on a farm. And for those who choose to visit by car, we're just two minutes from Junction 13 of the M1.<sup>5</sup> But if you prefer an even lower carbon footprint, we're only a mile from Ridgmont railway station. With a bit of luck and a following wind, changing at either Bedford or Bletchley you could well get here from London in about a week. And for those who prefer a more exciting journey, or for our international pilgrims, why not fly into Cranfield or Luton Airport? If you come into Cranfield, Hnaef will personally collect you with the Beaker motor-rickshaw, giving a truly authentic experience as you sweep into the car park under the Megalithic Gateway.

### *Nightlife*

Husborne Crawley nightlife is always going to be a bit limited – and your chances to enjoy it are necessarily going to be a bit sporadic, what with the moon-watching and dawn and sunset rituals. Beaker Folk always like the winter, as we get the sunset stuff over nice and early and can

---

<sup>5</sup> A major aspect of the sustainable nature of the Community is that we are fed largely on road-kill from the motorway. Hedgehog, badger and squirrel are all very low in cholesterol, while the occasional wallaby is always welcome as an exotic alternative.

get down the White Horse. In the middle of summer it can all drag on a bit. And of course in winter you can have a bit more of a lie-in before the dawn ceremony – very handy after a bit of a session the night before.

Apart from the White Horse, there's always the option of other pubs in Aspley Guise and Ridgmont, and even restaurants in Woburn and Woburn Sands. To be honest, given the scale of the optional contributions that we levy here at the Beaker Folk, we can't see any way you could afford to eat in Woburn anyway, if you were a long-term member of the Community. Beaker People have been known to head for Milton Keynes or Luton for a bit of "excitement". Generally they have found Milton Keynes to be OK, and we continue to hope that one day a survivor will return from Luton to tell us what the scene is like there.

# The Place of Worship

## The Archdruid writes...

Here in Husborne Crawley we have many great advantages when it comes to arranging a suitable worship “space”. In the first place, many of our ceremonies take place outdoors, where we can pay suitable reverence to the heavens. But when bad weather drives us inside, we have a number of suitable locations indoors. And the good news is that, due to the designation of the estate as agricultural land, we can pretty well expand where we like. And still claim subsidies. Don’t you just love the European Union?

Until its unfortunate incineration during last year’s “Night of a thousand tea lights”, most Beaker worship took place in the Moot House. The Moot House is now being reconstructed, slowly. However in the meantime we have a number of alternative premises. The Old Cow Shed is useful, although it can be embarrassing when Norbrek’s in there with Kayleigh. And we also have the use of the dining room in the Great House. Speaking personally, it’s a pain in the rear end, having some bunch of smelly mystics chanting in my dining room every evening. So the sooner we can get the wattle thoroughly daubed on the roof of the rebuilt Moot House, the better in my book.



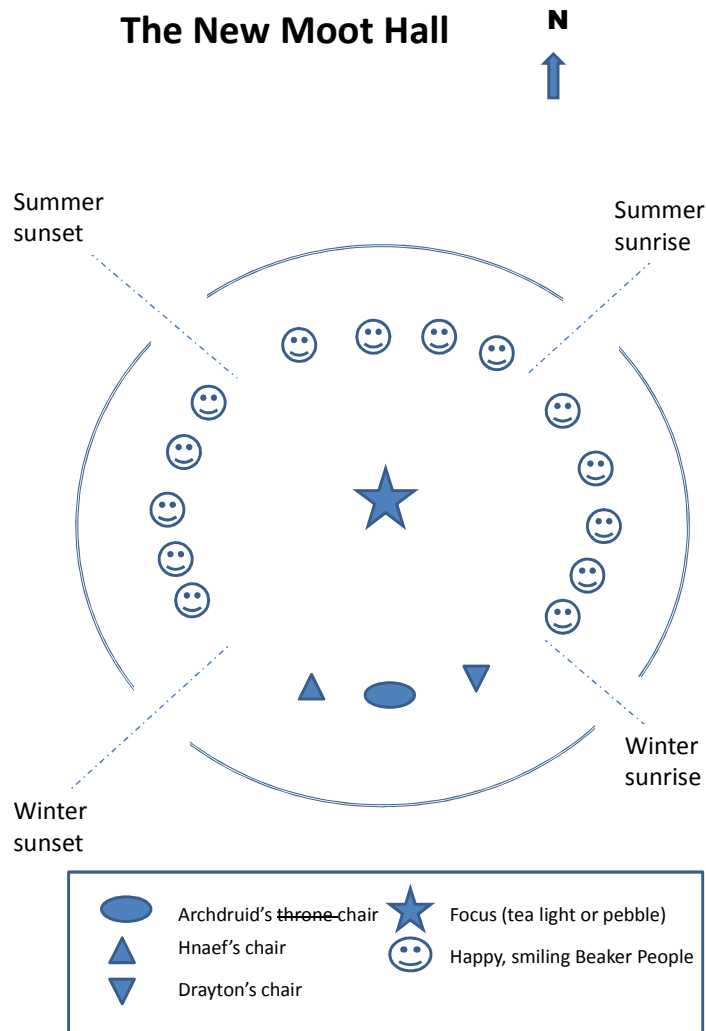
The Moot House, once rebuilt, will have four doors – each facing sunrise or sunset on the solstices. At every meeting of the Beaker Folk, we are thus reminded of the seasons of the year. And it also means that we can celebrate these important occasions in the dry and – relatively – warm. Not least because the new Moot House will have traditional under-floor heating beneath the traditional parquet flooring. All powered by an under soil heat convertor, of course. We in the Beaker Folk are nothing if not environmentally friendly.

In traditional Protestant churches, the pews are arranged in straight lines facing towards the leader. We consider that this reinforces a patriarchal, leader-centred approach to worship. And why would we want to do that? So Beaker worship takes place in a circle, where all are equal. Obviously, the Druidic leadership team sits on chairs, while the other Folk sit on the floor. But that is simply so direction can clearly be given, and not a reflection of hierarchy. And they're chairs, not thrones. But because we spend a lot of time in worship it is only appropriate that they should be very comfy chairs.

At the centre of the Beaker Circle will be placed the Focus of worship. The Focus will vary with the occasion. For an important moon-related occasion, the centrepiece might be a doily. Or if we are considering the beauty of creation, we might use a flower, or a pot plant. But mostly we



just stick with pebbles and tea lights. Spiritual and yet portable, that's how we look at it.



## Of Music

Here in Husborne Crawley we place great store by authenticity.

Needless to say this applies as much to the music with which we accompany our worship as to any other part of Beaker life.

In the absence of any firm archaeological evidence, we can be fairly sure that the original Beaker People would have used ram's horns, flutes made out of water reeds and maybe some kind of stringed instruments like lutes. So to obtain a comparable effect today we tend to use a mixture of tubas, guitars and ocarinas. These seem to be fairly similar, and also it's all that anyone can play. At least, Gardwulf says she can play the tuba, so we leave her to it. The resultant discordant bellowing, twittering and twanging at least helps us to appreciate our periods of silent worship much better. We're now saving up to buy a bodhran drum. Nobody really has any rhythm, so we're not expecting to play it as such. We just think it'll look really ethnic and traditional in the Singing Corner.

In accordance with tradition, we ensure that we play music that is best described as vaguely folky. The singing of Kum Baya is much less popular since the Archdruid pronounced the fatwa, but that leaves plenty of other music in the genre. A certain amount of Bob Dylan's music is

employed, the Lord of the Dance is always good to get the old folk clapping, and when we're feeling a bit down there's always something by Tom Waits or Leonard Cohen to cheer us up. We did have that unfortunate event when Bryony played "Streets of London". Celbert headed straight for Ridgmont Station, saying that kicking up the papers in a closed-down market seemed quite attractive compared to listening to Bryony. We never saw him again.

When celebrating the nativity of a pop star, as happens from time to time in the Beaker Calendar, the music group will perform renditions of that performer's hits. This can really lift the atmosphere on Kirsty MacColl's or Kid Creole's birthday, but it can seriously bring you down if it's the nativity of Robert Smith from the Cure.

# Of High-Visibility Clothing and Personal Protection Equipment

Within the world of faith, wearing the appropriate clothing is very important. Catholics wear albs, chasubles and (in extreme cases) birettas – although not all at the same time. Their evangelical brethren (and sistren<sup>6</sup>) reject such out-dated attire, and say that they should don modern attire such as tweedy jackets and highly-coloured shirts with dog-collars, just like everyone else. Methodist ministers of the old school can still occasionally be found wearing academic gowns, while the old ladies in the back rows of their chapels can often be found claiming that the dead animals on their heads are actually some kind of hat.

Here in Husborne Crawley, we take the wearing of the appropriate clothing very seriously. No Occasion is celebrated without the members of the Community donning the appropriate colour of hi-viz vests. The

---

<sup>6</sup> Is this the politically-correct feminine equivalent of “brethren”? We have no idea. But we use it because otherwise the sistren get really shirty with us. Archdruid Eileen generally doesn’t worry too much about gender-sensitive language, as she owns the place and makes sure we all know it.

standard yellow is suitable for Ordinary time, but red, green, pink and even lilac are all used at different times.

There's a vicious rumour spreading the community that the reason we wear all this high-viz (and steel toe-capped boots at High Festivals) is that I picked up a job lot of the stuff during my days in Health and Safety, which I am flogging off at a decent margin. And it is fair to say that I did buy quite a lot of surplus, and often unnecessary, personal protection equipment, during my former career. But in no way can it be claimed I am profiteering. Consider – many Beaker rituals take place in the dark, outside. Some involve the use of heavy lifting equipment, or bath tubs welded onto shopping trolleys. It is right and proper that I bear the duty of care for our people in these circumstances.

Unfortunately it would appear that the hi-viz vests are not flame proof. So we often have problems with the vests at ceremonies that involve bonfires. Which is another good reason, apart from the purely ceremonial, why we like to keep beakers filled with water all over the place.

## Beaker Industry

Archaeological research has drawn a picture of the great vibrancy of Beaker industry. Even today we can see the sites of their activity – we particularly think of Grime's Graves in Norfolk, the home of the East Anglian flint industry in the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. In many ways Norfolk industry hasn't moved on that much since.

It is a rule of the Beaker Folk that all members of the community should work. We see it as spiritually edifying. It also contributes greatly to the well-being of the community, paying the rates and helping with the upkeep of the buildings. Clearly many of our community have part time or full-time day jobs – Hnaef, for example, as an instructor at a specialist archery school for people with no thumbs, is a Self-Supporting Druid - and could not be expected to carry out any other kind of labour during the working week. So we let them take part at weekends instead. We wouldn't want anyone to feel left out.

### *Doilies*

Beaker Folk love doilies. Partly this is because they remind us of a more genteel England, when doilies were encouraged and the legs of tables respectfully covered up. When maiden aunts cycled through the mist to watch the cricket and the church sold warm beer to the village



blacksmith. And partly because in their whiteness and beauty, they remind us of the moon.

It was therefore with great pleasure that we installed the doily press in the old cowshed of the farm. The production of doilies takes place in two separate operations. Firstly, using the hydraulic doily press, we stamp the shape and pattern of the doily into a wad of blanks. Then, the Beater gets the job of banging the holes out of the doilies. Holding a handful of doilies, the Beater will hammer the doilies against the Banging Bar while the residual paper is sucked away by an industrial-scale extractor. Sadly the extractor doesn't work too well anymore, and the Beater can often end up coughing up lungfuls of lint for the next day or two. Doily Lung is not yet a recognised industrial disease, but we live in dread of it becoming one. Of the making of doilies there is no end. Literally – we're doing so well now that we've had to put in a night shift. Doily making is tedious, painful and tiring. Or, as we put it in the brochure advertising pilgrimages, "soul-deepening".

### ***Flint-knapping***

Even more traditional than doily making is that of flint-knapping. In this activity some poor victim gets to bash two lumps of flint together in the hope of making something we can pass off as a traditional axe-head at the Beaker Shop. Safety glasses are of course provided, but sadly they

don't prevent one's impalement in other parts of the body by flying shards of flint. All Beaker flint is ethically sourced by backing the van into the old chalk pit on Blows Downs in Dunstable, and loading up as much as we can before anyone notices.

### *Corn Dollies*

We'll be honest, we almost can't be bothered making up any spiritual significance for corn Dollies. After all, when it comes to corn dollies you can buy any amount of significance off the Internet by the yard. A race memory of when someone was sacrificed to the spirit of the corn; a place for the spirit of the corn to live at the end of the harvest; small replicas of the Long Man of Wilmington; definitely something to do with fertility; blah blah blah.

We just make them because they're cheap and easy and we can get a quid each for them.

## Notes on “Occasions”

Here at the Beaker Folk of Husborne Crawley, we generally refer to what others might call “ceremonies” or “services” as “Occasions”. We do this because it helps us to understand that these things are important – gives them, you might say, a sense of occasion.

Few of the Occasions that we have reproduced below could be described as complete orders of service, as a liturgically-minded Anglican might consider them. This is partly because we Beaker Folk favour spontaneity in worship; partly so you can develop your own Beaker traditions in line with your own seasonal pattern<sup>7</sup>. And partly because, the Husborne Crawley Folk being as fractious as they are, we rarely get to the end of an Occasion without a brawl breaking out. So we really need only a few lines of liturgy and some kind of focus.

However, we offer them to you as examples of liturgical good practice, to inspire your own search for the divine and to whet your appetite for the Beaker Way.

---

<sup>7</sup> Only licensed Beaker communities are authorised to use the Occasions in this Beaker Common Prayer. To become a licensed Beaker community, call our hotline, where we will be happy to give you details of the druidic training and generous franchise rates that we offer.

# The Beaker Calendar

## January

- 1 New Year's Day (Secular)
- 11 Death of Thomas Hardy OM
- 30 Nativity of Josef Preindl

## February

- 2 Imbolc
- 13 Nativity of Peter Gabriel
- 14 Valentine's Day

## March

- 1 Nativity of David Niven and Harry Belafonte
- 14 Nativity of Michael Caine
- 20-21 Spring Equinox

## April

- 1 Nativity of David Gower
- 19 First broadcast of Simpsons
- 30 Beltane (May Eve)

## May

- 1 Mayday
- 2 Nativity of Morrissey
- 20 Anniversary of the last episode of "Cheers"

## June

- 20-22 Midsummer Solstice

## July

- 12 Nativity of Nora Batty
- 16-21 Anniversary of the "Botham" Test, Headingley 1981
- 31 Lammas Eve

## August

- 1 Lammas
- 12 Nativity of Kid Creole

## September

- 12 Anniversary of John Wesley being pelted with mud in Leeds
- 22-23 Autumnal Equinox
- 30 Anniversary of the first episode of "Cheers"

## October

- 10 Nativity of Kirsty MacColl
- 31 Samhain (Halloween)

## November

- 1 All Hallows
- 5 Bonfire Night

## December

- 20-22 Winter Solstice (Beaker New Year)
- 25 Yule
- 31 Hogmanay

# Winter Solstice – Midnight

The Winter Solstice is the Beaker New Year. We celebrate the victory of light over darkness for another year. Don't forget it can get a bit taters around this time, so make sure you wrap up warm if, like us, you hold your ceremonies outside. You don't want your worshippers going down with hypothermia.

*The Beaker Folk process from the Great House in strict height order, shortest at the front. From somewhere in the orchard, howling can be heard.*

Leader:                      Midnight strikes on this Solstice Night. Below our feet, the Sun kisses the Tropic of Capricorn. He begins his long journey north, with his promise of light and life. Strike up the torches!

*Torches are lit.<sup>8</sup> The Beaker People stagger around for a bit, dazzled by the sudden appearance of all that light.*

All:                      Stone the crows! Is that quite bright enough?

Leader:                      It's meant to symbolise the return of the light.

---

<sup>8</sup> In strict Beaker tradition, these should be oaken staves, wrapped in rags soaked in pitch. Newspapers start well but tend to burn too quickly and randomly. And those new super-powerful torches you can buy in garages are brilliant, don't you think? But don't forget they can catch fire if you leave them on too long...

**All:            Enough light already. Some of us are starting to think we may prefer the darkness after all. Hang on a sec – we need to have a sit down.**

Leader:            OK now? Right. Let's continue. (*pause for breath*)...  
We stand in the eye of Horus - the death of the year - and yet wait here alive. We are in the depths of darkness, but we are children of the light.

**All:            We are the children of light. We reject the darkness.**

Leader:            Well, looks like we've cleared that up. All right, push off!

**All:            And also with you. Can we put those torches out now?  
I tell you, my eyes are really watering**



## Winter Solstice – Morning

The midnight ceremony was in many ways symbolic. While we provided our own light, the Sun itself – the focus of our ceremony – was conspicuous by its absence, what with it being the middle of the night.

We re-assemble in the first light of the new Beaker year to greet the Sun on his first re-appearance after his victory over the darkness.

As well as traditional hi-viz, on this first day of the year, when the Folk are feeling a little delicate, we also allow the wearing of dark glasses, in appropriate colours.

*The Beaker Folk shamle out into the first light of the new day, bleary-eyed having been celebrating the solstice since midnight. An irate Archdruid, ceremonial club in hand, keeps them in line and indicates to them the correct south-easterly direction to face the rising sun. If standing near the top of School Lane, this means we should be watching the sun rise over the White Horse.*

Leader:                The darkness is over. We stand in the light of the new dawn.

All:                    Ooh, I need a lay down. Did anyone notice where I left my drink?

Leader: Let us sing our Winter Solstice Hymn.

*We sing the hymn "It's nice to see the sun again".*

Leader: Brothers and sisters, we gather to welcome the sun of the New Year

*The Beaker Folk join in the following response, as is appropriate:*

All: It's a bit bright, isn't it? Can we face the other way?

*or*

All: You go ahead and welcome the Sun. As far as we can tell it's dull, overcast and raining.

*Or, as it may be:*

All: Is it just me, or is it snowing heavily? You may think you're welcoming the sun, but we're shivering in a blizzard.

*For the rest of the Occasion the Beaker Folk may wander about trying to get a glimpse of the sun, moan about the rain, or check Hnaef the Assistant Archdruid's compass to check which direction is really south-east. Eventually they all slope back to the Great House to sleep it off.*

# Yule

The Beaker Folk flourished between 2000 and about 500 years before the first Christmas. So logically they can't have celebrated it. But if we didn't recognise the Festive Season in some way, we'd be out of touch with the modern world. And we'd miss out on some great marketing opportunities. We use the traditional Anglo-Nordic word "Yule" in an attempt to make ourselves sound authentic.

*The Beaker Folk will be encouraged to wear suitable Yuletide accessories – as it may be reindeer horns, Santa hats or red noses.*

## Introit: "I'm dreaming of a White Christmas"

Leader: Sherry, anyone?

All: Don't normally, but seeing it's Christmas....

Leader: Not very Christmassy, is it? Awful mild.

All: Must be all that global warming.

*The Beaker Folk pass around sherry and nibbles.*

## The grand opening of the presents

*The Beaker Folk disappear under an enormous pile of shiny paper*

Archdruid: We join together in the Seasonal Liturgy of Lies

**All: Oh, that's lovely.**

Archdruid: Really tasteful.

**All: Just what I wanted.**

Archdruid: You shouldn't have.

**All: No, I've not got one already.**

**The dismissal**

Leader: So here it is.

**All: Merry Xmas, everybody.**

*The Beaker Folk proceed to the Internet Cafe to put their presents on e-bay.*

# Liturgy of remembrance of Thomas Hardy – 11 January

Here in Husborne Crawley we tend to think that we pretty well wrote the book on wallowing in the past. But reading the works of the great Tommy H, we are humbled in the presence of a master. Thomas Hardy OM died on 11 January 1928. And given the general attitude of his books and poems, he probably enjoyed it.

*The Beaker Folk process across the adder-infested heath, dodging evil members of the upper class, inventors of modern agricultural machinery, and rakish sergeants. They should be dressed appropriately – smocks, gaiters and open sores are all acceptable in this context. They may address each other in yokel-ish banter which, despite its apparent simplicity, hides a depth of worldly wisdom.*

Leader: Life, eh?

All: Too right. Anyone would think someone up there had it in for us.

*A moment's silence, while we consider the unfairness and futility of the Universe.*

Leader: Did you hear about old Eli?

**All:           Dead and gone, as we all will be.**

Leader:           The ague, as well.

**All:           Who'd have thought it? It's enough to make you go to church, but I can't be bothered.**

Leader:           Thirty-seven years he played the Tibetan Nose-flute in the Beaker Quire. And never sober once.

**All:           Aye, but the Archdruid brought in those new-fangled ocarinas and the Quire all went to nothing.**

*The passing-round of the Nammet Bread is followed by complaints about its quality.*

Leader:           Now go, and lean over a gate for the afternoon.

**All:           With a straw in our mouth and all.**



## Imbolc (2 February)

Imbolc is an ancient festival of light and fertility<sup>9</sup>. It seems to have been associated with the lambing season – that sign of new life in the midst of what is still the dark, cold winter – bringing hope of the returning sun. So the traditional Beaker meal on this occasion is roast lamb with mint sauce.

We have managed to persuade quite a few of the Beaker Folk that at this time of year they can get in touch with their essential sheepishness. In general, this is quite true. Their tendency to be confused, stupid and easily led is a great advantage to the druidic leadership, as is their readiness to be fleeced. However, they also have a propensity for falling into ditches, getting stuck on their backs, or wandering down the road if we leave the gate open. So it is with a combination of reverence, amusement and contempt that we turf them out onto the Big Field to gambol about.

The sight of a dozen or more grown-up idiots, frolicking around the field, is quite impressive. It's become quite a local tradition – the villagers will come round to the Big Field to watch along with the rest of us, and we

---

<sup>9</sup> Needless to say.

can make quite a few quid selling photographs of the event to sight-seers.

A few of the more dedicated sheep people will try eating grass, which doesn't tend to agree with them. And our worst experience was a couple of years back, when they got into a patch of clover and went down with sheep-blast. The sight of the Archdruid, poking holes in the stomachs of those afflicted, will live with us all for a while. Thankfully we only lost a couple.

# Valentine's Day

We can say without fear of contradiction<sup>10</sup> that the feast of St Valentine draws its roots from an ancient pagan fertility festival.

Leader:                That was a nice bunch of flowers you got this morning, Elwë.

All:                    Beautiful.

Leader:                And you too, Morgana. Orchids.

All:                    You lucky girl.

Leader:                I mean. If you walked round the Community this morning, you might think that every woman has received a card or flowers or chocolates or some such token of love.

All:                    Yes, you might....

*A fraught silence will follow, while the Beaker People assembled shuffle their feet nervously.*

Leader:                OK. You can all get out of my sight. I'm sick of the sight of you.

---

<sup>10</sup> Because there's no evidence either way.

*The women of the Community may respond:*

**Women: Men! They're all swines!**

*The Community may leave, to the accompaniment of "I will survive".*

## Spring Equinox

Spring. A time of hope. A time when warmth and light return to the world, with the promise of life and food. A time when a young Beaker person's thoughts turn to running around Aspley Heath with an attractive fellow-Beaker person of whatever gender seems most appropriate to the former (and latter) Beaker Persons. Ideally a member of the Fertility Beaker Folk, who are particularly active at this time of year

We celebrate the Spring Equinox in the Orchard. It's normally a bit early for apple blossom, but at least the trees are normally starting to produce buds round about this time.

The Rite of Spring commences. Three Beaker People carry out the traditional Beaker Spring dance. This consists of dressing up as, respectively, a fawn, a hare and a badger, and dancing around the orchard in an anti-clockwise direction. We're not sure if it has any spiritual significance, but at least it gives us a good laugh in the White Horse when we look at the photos later on.

The dancers proceed to the brook, where they pretend to stoop and drink. This signifies the life-giving properties of the water. But you wouldn't actually want to drink from it, obviously. The banks of the brook can be quite muddy at this time of year, so the dancers often get

thoroughly covered in muddy clay. One particularly cold, wet March morning they all slipped down the bank and back into the mud. How we all laughed. In a thoroughly loving and spiritual way, of course.

In the evening before our special equinoctial festivities, we select the King (or Queen) of the spring. In ancient Beaker times this person would have been sacrificed to the nature gods<sup>11</sup>, but today we have a gentler custom. We make them do all the washing up after the Spring Ball.

---

<sup>11</sup> We guess.



## Ordinary Time

The trouble with Ordinary Time is that it's so... so ordinary, for want of a better word. This is the time between festivals. And just as there's nothing a Beaker Person likes so much as a festival, there's nothing they dread quite so much as a quiet night in.

So we attempt to persuade ourselves that something significant is going on after all, by imposing a pattern on Ordinary Time. The ancient Beaker Folk were fascinated by the Moon, its waxing and waning<sup>12</sup>, as it marked off the progression of days through the month. And likewise we celebrate the simple cycle of everyday – the rising and setting of the sun. Our Daily Occasions consist of two particular ceremonies – the Pouring-Out of Beakers takes place every morning, and the Filling-Up of Beakers occurs at sunset.

In the Pouring-Out of Beakers, we do just that. The Beakers we filled out the night before are emptied onto the ground – representing the gathering together of earth, sky and water energy.

In the Filling-Up of Beakers, one representative of the "Folk" (normally a small one lacking in self-assertion) is sent down to the brook with the

---

<sup>12</sup> Probably.

Filling Beaker. Return to the chants of his or her fellows, the representative advances towards the presiding Druid, who is holding the Storing Beaker. The holy water is poured ritually into the Storing Beaker, while the presiding Druid mutters what appears to be a secret prayer<sup>13</sup>. After a moment's silence, the Presiding Druid advances to the Pedestal – a sawn-off log of oak approximately three feet high. The Storing Beaker is placed on the Pedestal, and left to absorb the energy of the Moon all night. Or something.

---

<sup>13</sup> They claim that it's in the ancient Beaker Language, passed down from druid to druid through long ages. Although some Beaker Folk believe that the Druids may be making it up as they go along.

# The Phases of the Moon

## *New Moon*

The New Moon is an uncertain time. Like the winter solstice, in that we have the concern as to whether the moon will ever return. And yet more like the eclipse, inasmuch as the moon is totally hidden from sight.

Beakers are to be poured out to the North, where we believe the moon may be hiding.

The Beaker Folk love the moon in all its phases. And we get rather edgy when we can't see it – although not so much as the Moon Gibbon Folk (of whom more later). So we sit up and watch for the first glimmer of the New Moon, from the moment when its last edge disappears at the end of the waning crescent phase.

It can be quite a wait. Unless the sky is totally overcast, at least one Beaker Person has to stick it out on the Watching Step, taking it in turns day and night. For the Watching Step to be deserted at the time of New Moon would be a disaster, and the Folk therefore take it in turns to wait in the darkness. In the middle of the night, when all that can be heard is the rumble of tyres from the M1, it can be quite disturbing stood alone on the Watching Step. More imaginative Beaker Folk, under the impression

that “something was there”, have been known to run screaming across the Great Lawn.

The moment when we get the first glimpse of the New Moon is a time of great excitement, involving the traditional Beaker ceremonial gesture known as “Saluting the Moon”. As the excitement grows this can develop into the phenomenon of “Howling at the Moon”. Some say that Howling at the Moon occurs when our spirits are in tune with the spirit of the earth. We have no idea, but it’s certainly great therapy. Gets all the angst out of you. Like a big primal scream, with a spiritual twist.

### ***Waxing Crescent***

The first week after the New Moon, up to the First Quarter, is a time of growing excitement. The moon is slender, delicate – and yet growing in strength every day. Beakers are to be poured out facing East.

Please note – it is an offence carrying the punishment of banishment from the Community (known as “de-Beaking”) to refer to the moon in its crescent phase as looking “a bit like a Pringle”. It may be true, but it’s just plain disrespectful.

### ***Waxing Gibbous***

“Waxing Gibbous” refers to the time between the First Quarter and the Full Moon. The moon grows to full strength, losing the lovely detail of its

shadows and seas and yet gaining in light and power. The red hi-viz that is worn at this time expresses the strength and vibrancy of the New Moon. From now until the third quarter, beakers are to be poured out due South.

### ***Full Moon***

The moon in all her splendour is a beautiful sight. Gorgeous, shining, powerful and yet not dominant – not brazen in glory in the same way as the masculine, bullying sun. The full moon is kind to lovers, poets and people with hangovers alike.

At Full Moon, as well as the regular daily ceremonies, we traditionally hold the Beaker Moot. In many ways the Moot resembles nothing more than a traditional church committee meeting. However the Beaker Folk are rooted in truly ancient tradition. So whereas an Anglican PCC might spend hours arguing over what wattage of light bulb to use in the downstairs toilet, we spend hours arguing over whether what size of candle to use in the downstairs toilet. It is these minor details that make us distinctive.

### ***Waning Gibbous***

As the moon shrinks gradually in the night sky, the Beaker Folk, clad for their Occasions in lilac hi-viz, can get a bit down. General shaking of

heads and mutterings take place. If the Death of Thomas Hardy takes place at the time of waning, you can almost cut the doom with a knife.

*Waning Crescent*

Now clad in dark purple hi-viz (which is no use to man, woman or beast, but it was really cheap), the Beaker Folk amble around the meadows and lanes of Husborne Crawley in silence. The Moon Gibbon people, convinced that the Gibbon is once again about to make off with the moon, get really panicky and start lighting piles of pallets. Again.



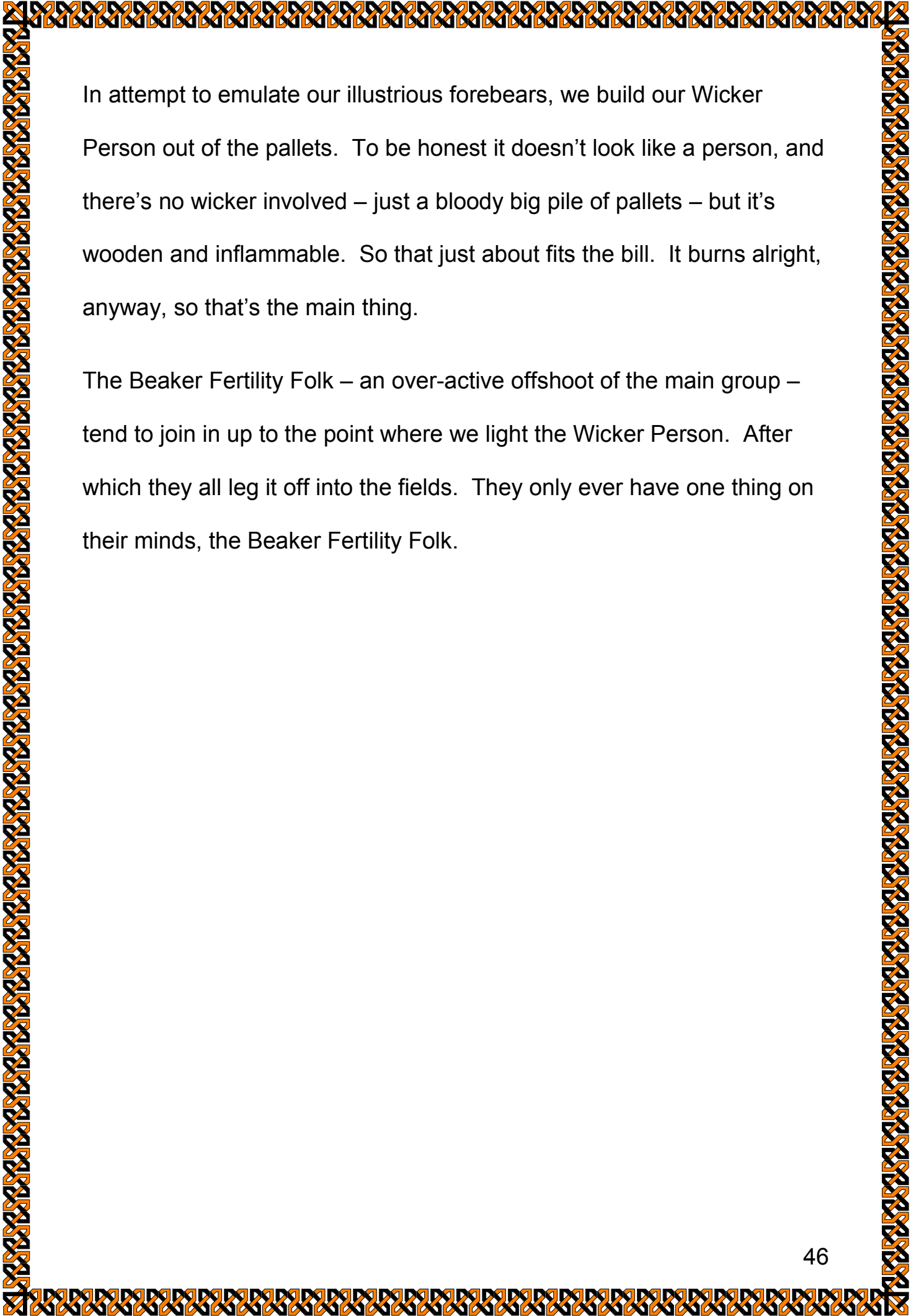
## Beltane (May Eve)

May Eve falls halfway between the Spring Equinox and Summer Solstice. So it is a symbol of growth, productivity and – needless to say – fertility.

The ancient Celts celebrated the feast of Beltane with great bonfires, encouraging the sun to greater strength through the use of sympathetic magic. They also burnt great Wicker Men, which they stuffed with sacrificial offerings of corn, animals and Edward Woodward.

Likewise, we're pretty sure that the Beaker Folk would have had a similar festival. After all, the Celts nicked all the Beaker ones, as well as taking over Stonehenge, and driving the use of Beakers underground until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nasty bullies with their evil iron swords which dented our bronze and flint blades.

The days before May Eve are spent by the Beaker Folk in gathering as much wood for the fire as possible. In the old days, stores of thorn root, ash apple and oak leg-wood would be laid up especially in the autumn. But these days we mostly just stroll round to the cafe at Crawley Crossing and pick up abandoned pallets.



In attempt to emulate our illustrious forebears, we build our Wicker Person out of the pallets. To be honest it doesn't look like a person, and there's no wicker involved – just a bloody big pile of pallets – but it's wooden and inflammable. So that just about fits the bill. It burns alright, anyway, so that's the main thing.

The Beaker Fertility Folk – an over-active offshoot of the main group – tend to join in up to the point where we light the Wicker Person. After which they all leg it off into the fields. They only ever have one thing on their minds, the Beaker Fertility Folk.

## May Day

May Day! What a day! Since all May Day traditions originate in Beaker times<sup>14</sup>, we enjoy an absolute kaleidoscope of ritual. The Beaker Maidens dance around the maypole, weaving the ribbons into a beautiful tapestry. The Beaker Hobby Hoss rampages round the grounds, grappling with whichever Beaker Maidens get in its way. The Morris Dancers appear from who knows where and dance on the Green. So we throw horseshoes at them until they go away. Jack in the Green, some old “eccentric” from the village who likes dressing up in last year’s Christmas trees, appears and jumps about a bit. But if you ignore him he eventually clears off.

The one May ritual we don’t indulge in is the Oxford University tradition of jumping from a bridge into 3 feet of water and breaking our backs. We may not have the benefit of a public school education<sup>15</sup>, but we’re not stupid.

After the early morning singing of *Summer is i-cumen in*, we dance around the ashes of the Wicker Person from the previous night. The Beaker Fertility Folk tend not to join us at this point, claiming to be “a bit

---

<sup>14</sup> Go on – prove they don’t.

<sup>15</sup> Except the Archdruid, obviously

tired and shagged out”. Even though May Day is definitely a fertility festival. Funny lot – why don’t they want to celebrate a stylised celebration of fertility, as cleaned-up by the Victorians, instead preferring to head off into the woods at every opportunity? We can’t work it out.

# Liturgy of the Nativity of Morrissey (22 May)

Other religions have their saints, and so do we. We prefer people from the modern era, on the grounds that most of our target audience have no real grasp of history. Morrissey is about as near to a martyr as you can get, at any rate. Even if he is self-appointed.

**Hi-viz colour:** Grey

## **Lamentations**

Leader:               Panic on the streets of London. Panic on the streets of Birmingham.

All:                **I was looking for a job and then I found a job, and heaven knows I'm miserable now.**

## **Absolution**

Leader:               William, it was really nothing.

## **Primal-scream-like anger catharsis ritual**

Archdruid: Hang the D.J.

All:                **Hang the D.J.**

Archdruid: Hang the D.J.

**All:            Hang the D.J.**

**Liturgy of healing for a post-modern, liberal congregation**

Leader:            Does the body rule the mind or does the mind rule the  
body? I don't know.

**All:            Am I still ill?**



## Summer Solstice Eve

On the whole we prefer the Winter to the Summer solstice. We like to claim this is because it is more authentic. The Stonehenge alignment, for example, is just as much on midwinter sunset as it is on midsummer sunrise. However the main reason is that we don't really fancy getting up that early in the morning. Since it takes place a bit after 9 pm, Summer Solstice Eve is a very popular Occasion – much more so than the following morning.

To be honest, we don't have any real ceremonial or liturgical action on this particular evening. We bumble around in the orchard, drinking cider, mixing Pimms, and watching the sun set. Occasionally we may complain about the ants in the grass, and move to sitting on the fence – a common position for people of a liberal theological persuasion at all seasons. Now and then some-one will comment that they really ought to be turning in – “solstice in the morning” – but don't really feel like it. Comments about how light it still is will be shared. Eventually everyone drifts off to bed, muttering about what time they have to get up in the morning.

## Summer Solstice – morning

The sunrise on the summer solstice is quite literally a highlight of the Beaker year. Or, to be more accurate, you'd probably call it a lowlight, as the sun is only just over the horizon at the point of sunrise. It's probably truer to say that midday on the summer solstice is the highlight. Anyway, enough already. It's important. You get the point.

So it is regrettable that on average the attendance at the sunrise numbers about three. And that's including both of the Archdruid's personalities. Although many noble liturgies have been written for the occasion, we've never been able to use any of them – after all, given the importance of the event, they generally call for massed quires, groups of druids blowing on the ancient Tibetan Yak's horns<sup>16</sup>, dancing vestal virgins (always fairly unlikely in the vicinity of Milton Keynes) – frankly you can't recreate that kind of drama when two or three of you are gathered together. So mostly we just watch the sun rise, go “aah”, and push off back to bed. If it's raining, this ceremony can optionally be held in the Drawing Room in the Great House (or in the Moot House once it's built).

---

<sup>16</sup> Picked up for next to nothing at a car boot sale at MK Stadium.

## A celebration of Last of the Summer Wine (12 July – Nora Batty’s Birthday)

We believe that this Occasion is a race memory of an ancient West Yorkshire sacrifice ritual, whereby the oldest man in the tribe each year would be launched onto the river Holme and left to drift away to his death. Perhaps this was as an offering to the Yorkshire god Earnshaw, but in any event it was clearly not one of the great uplifting spiritual experiences, particularly if you were the second oldest man in the tribe.

On a more optimistic note, maybe the old men jumped off his raft downstream and just spent their declining years in Huddersfield. Or maybe drowning would have been better.

In our version of the ceremony, the oldest man in the community is simply pushed downhill in a bath tub. Throughout this ceremony, any member of the group may at any time utter a random phrase such as “how do, lads”, “just catching the passing thought”, or, as it may be, “ey-oop, Nora”.

*For this ritual, hi-viz is discarded. Dressed in dull brown clothing, plastic macs and wellington boots, the Beaker Folk push a bath tub welded onto a shopping trolley up the hill.*

Oldest Man: Ah tell thee, this en't going ta wuk.

**All: Stop talking in that ridiculous accent. We all know you're from Croydon, tha'knows.**

Archruid: Stop panicking. I've got it all worked out. You'll be perfectly safe.

Oldest Man: Is Nora watching? Is Nora watching?

Scary Woman: What are those silly beggars up to now?

*The Oldest Man is forced into the bath tub and pushed downhill. In an amusing twist, at the bottom of the hill the bath tub may go through the gate, turn right and head off down the lane.*

*It is traditional for the Occasion to end when the bath tub crashes into a hedge, disturbing an old man and a lady of "a certain age" who are hiding therein.*

The words "I think we've really cracked it this time, Marina" may be pronounced to conclude the Occasion.

# Lammas

Yet another so-called “Celtic” festival with a Saxon name which was stolen from the Beaker People at the point of an iron sword. This early harvest festival was when the first fruits of the harvest were offered. We like Lammas because it fills in that big gap in the summer when it seems like a long time till Christmas. I mean, the Christian calendar’s all unbalanced. All that excitement in Spring, and then nothing until December. No wonder Christians normally look so glum.

## *Introit*

*The Beaker folk proceed into the middle of a convenient corn field, clad in green hi-viz.*

Archdruid: Let us celebrate, for it is Lammas Day.

**All:           We can’t see any lambs. You sure you got this right?**

**Don’t you get lambs in the spring? Wasn’t that what Imbolc was all about?**

Archdruid: It’s nothing to do with lambs. It’s all about the harvest.

*All:           Then we shall celebrate, for it is Lammas Day!*

Archdruid: That’s better. Anyone bring the pumpkins?

All: It's too early for pumpkins. We can do you an orange?

Archdruid: Forget it, let's get going with the corn dollies.

### **Entry of the Corn Dollies**

*Four or five Beaker Folk, totally encased in corn dolly outfits, may run around the field singing an appropriate harvest song such as "We torch the fields and scarper", or something similar. In theory they should dance around widdershins five or six times – in practice, due to restricted visibility they generally end up rolling on the ground.*

### **Entry of the Farmer**

Farmer: Oi! What are you doin' on moi land?

Corn Dollies: We've fallen and we can't get up!

*Shotgun cartridges may be discharged, and bull-mastiffs released into the field.*

Corn Dollies: Ooh! Ooh! Who let the dogs out?

*The Beaker Folk may disperse across the fields, heading back to the Great House.*

It should be noted that Lammas was traditionally associated with a certain amount of drinking in Beaker Times. At least we guess it was.



Why else would they have gone to all that trouble of inventing beakers if they weren't putting ale, mead, cider and other such beverages in them? Nobody's going to tell us they went to all that trouble for water. So the Beaker Folk, having bound up their wounds and checked the last time they had tetanus jabs, settle down for a good night in. On the whole, they're quite fond of Lammas Day. Even if it's nothing to do with lambs.

## The Night of a Thousand Tea lights

To a Beaker Person, light is the symbol of hope in the darkness. At Samhain<sup>17</sup> the ancient Beaker Folk lit bonfires to fight against the oncoming darkness. At Solstice they lit them to build up the sun's strength, and encourage it to return in the morning. At Beltane they lit fires again – partly to encourage the sun to bring the warmth to grow the crops, and partly because they just thought it was fun. It is speculated by archaeologists that the sheer number of festivals at which the Beaker People lit bonfires may have been in large part responsible for the deforestation of southern England, and for preventing the return of the Ice Age. It is worth noting that in holding off the Ice Age like this, the Beaker Folk used global warming creatively – working *with* Mother Gaia rather than *against* her. How much we of this post-post-modern era have to learn.

In some ways the tea light is the central symbol of neo-Beakerism. Like an Anglican communion wafer, it provides the ability to enjoy a spiritual

---

<sup>17</sup> According to modern theories of language, Samhain, the Celtic name for Halloween (which they therefore probably nicked from the Beaker People), is pronounced “Sawin”. In which case, why don't they write it like that?

moment in a convenient individual size. The perfect combination of consumerism and spirituality.

However we have some issues with tea lights which we need to resolve. They are questionable environmentally, for starters – the individual aluminium cases must be recycled or they end up in a giant heap at the end of the orchard. And it just feels wrong for a community that wants to stay close to Creation, to be digging massive holes in the Bottom Field to bury tea light containers. And then there's their production. We use the paraffin-based tea lights. These are made from oil, and burning them pours all kinds of polycyclic hydrocarbons into the atmosphere. Clearly we'd like to use a more sustainable source, but the vegans among us object to the use of beeswax, and it's a sight more expensive. Tallow is sustainable, and a genuine waste product. We tried to argue this with the vegans, but they weren't having it. Also, there's nothing destroys the spiritual aspect of lighting a tea light so much as the stink of burning lard. And LED tea lights are just so seventies. So it would appear we are stuck with what we've got.

We were becoming increasingly concerned about the tendency of our Beaker People to lock themselves into the bathroom with a few tea lights. Yes, it made them feel all spiritual, but it was breaking down community cohesion, and it was making it blooming difficult to get into

the bathroom. If you saw Willow heading for the bathroom with a bag of tea lights and an Enya CD, it would all end with dozens of Beaker Folk queuing and hammering on the door. And she was using so much bath oil that we were having to spray cormorants down with detergent on a daily basis.

As an attempt to get the tea light devotees out of the bathroom, we introduced the Night of a Thousand Tea Lights. The concept was simple. If one light makes you feel spiritual, what kind of effect would a thousand have on you?

The tea lights were arranged in the floor in concentric circles. We had a false start where we lit them starting from the outside - various flowing garments caught fire as we leaned over the tea lights that had already been lit. So we blew out the lights (and extinguished a number of unfortunate Beaker People) and started again from the inside. The liturgy was simple - each person took turns to come forward, light the tea light and sit down again. To be honest, we'd miscalculated the time this would all take. At a minute or so per light, to allow for a suitable feeling of solemnity, we realised that it was going to take the best part of seventeen hours to get them all lit. At which point Heloise decided that she was going to get things going a bit quicker, lit a taper and started lighting them as fast as she could. And for a moment or two, as a

thousand tea lights shimmered in the Moot Hall, it looked lovely. A truly spiritual moment.

Now we don't know precisely the chemistry of what went on here. But it's certainly true that a thousand tea lights kick out some heat. Maybe we put them too close together. Maybe there was some freaky synergy between them all. At any rate, we rapidly realised that the heat was rising fast. As the flames of a thousand tea lights merged into one, we evacuated the Moot House.

The Moot House wasn't really designed to be fireproof. With the intention of being authentic, it was made from wattle and daub. So a thousand tea lights didn't take too long to kick a hole in the roof. We withdrew to a safe direction and watched the sucker burn. Let me put it this way – if the aim was to scare away the autumn darkness, it certainly worked for a while. By the end of the evening, we had a strange combination of spiritual ecstasy and physical fear. And the Moot House was at ground level. Our advice is, don't try this one at home.

## Michaelmas

The ancient Beaker Folk feared many things. Lightning, rabid aurochs<sup>18</sup>, wolves, the evil invading Celts with their cheaty iron swords and habit of singing “Land of my Fathers” in close harmony – all these were guaranteed to strike fear in a Beaker Person’s heart. But the thing that made them most fearful was dragons. As a result they took refuge in places where they believed dragon-slayers lived – Glastonbury Tor, St Michael’s Mount, Salisbury Plain and Milton Keynes being just a few examples.

The week after the Autumnal Equinox was originally a feast of dragon-slaying. Beaker Knights would sing of their feats in battle, while drinking mead and cider from their beakers and wishing they could work out how to make iron. A giant dragon was made from wattle and daub, and burned on a hilltop<sup>19</sup>.

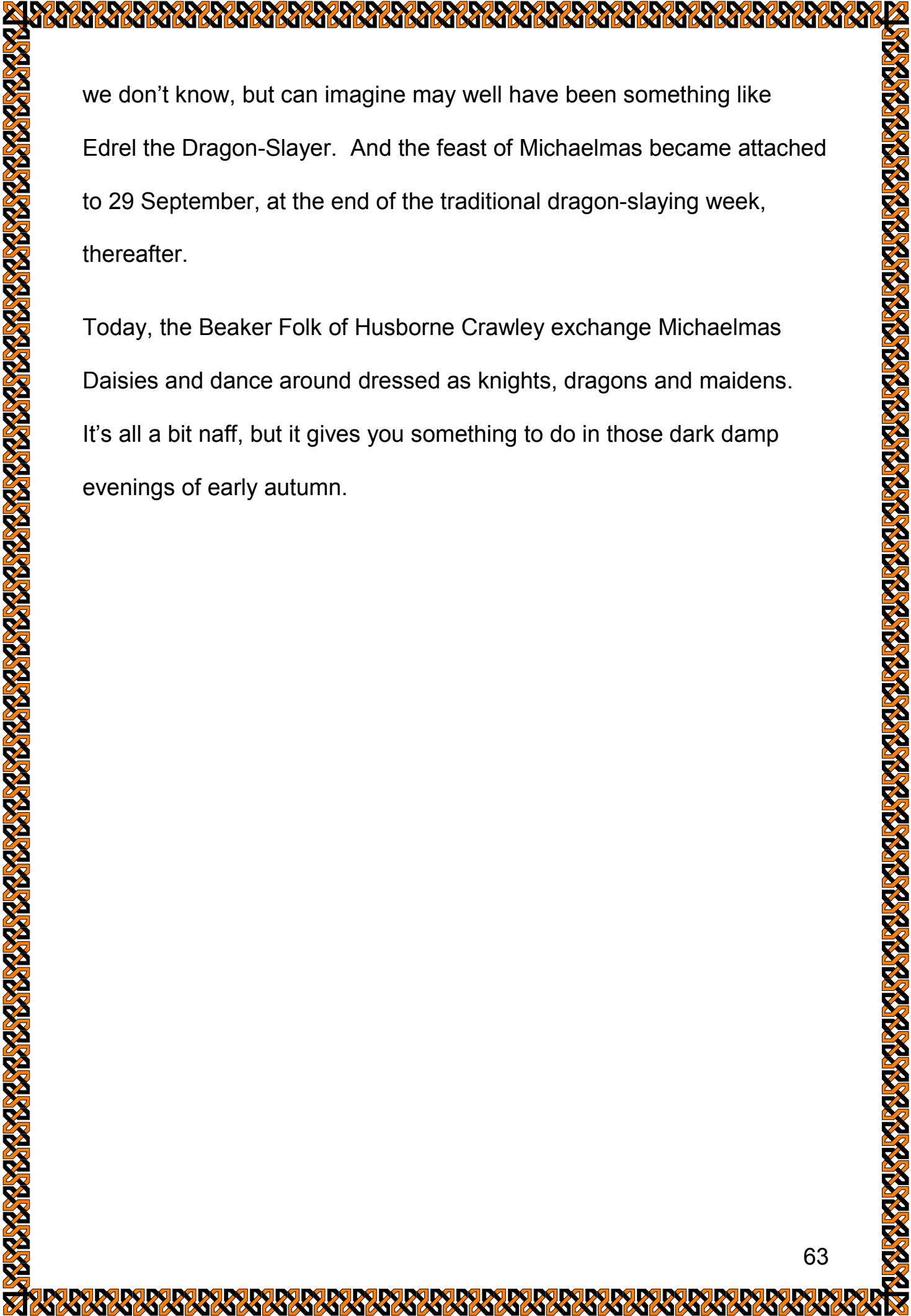
So when the Christian faith was introduced to England, there was immediate sympathy for the dragon-slaying angel, St Michael. The Beaker Folk identified him with some demigod or another whose name

---

<sup>18</sup> A prehistoric ox. We have no idea whether they were around in Beaker times, but it seems a reasonable surmise.

<sup>19</sup> There’s no evidence any of this happened, but wouldn’t it have looked great?





we don't know, but can imagine may well have been something like Edrel the Dragon-Slayer. And the feast of Michaelmas became attached to 29 September, at the end of the traditional dragon-slaying week, thereafter.

Today, the Beaker Folk of Husborne Crawley exchange Michaelmas Daisies and dance around dressed as knights, dragons and maidens. It's all a bit naff, but it gives you something to do in those dark damp evenings of early autumn.

## Samhain (Halloween)

The Celts, with their total lack of understanding of the circles of life, made All Hallows' Eve, or Halloween, their New Year. What a bunch of losers.

We of the Beaker Folk of Husborne Crawley celebrate Samhain in the manner that it was meant to be celebrated – by scaring the wits out of ourselves and everyone else.

Lurking down dark lanes late at night, dressed as random nightmares from the collective subconscious, we have been known to leave the smaller inhabitants of Husborne Crawley screaming with fear as, tip-toeing along in their own Halloween outfits, they have met something terrifying beyond their wildest dreams.

This is because instead of dressing up as amusing ghosts, witches or pumpkins, we have a tradition of dressing up as an assortment of the current villains in the British media. There's nothing scarier than walking down Crow Lane late at night, only to bump into Neil and Christine Hamilton, David Guest, Russell Brand or Jonathon Ross.

After proceeding through the village, we return to the Great House, where the Archdruid personally serves us with her special recipe

Pumpkin Soup, followed by Pumpkin Pie. At this point, every year we remember that pumpkin is really dull and tasteless, and phone out for pizzas.

## Bonfire Night

Bonfire night. What a dilemma for the Beaker Folk. You can see the predicament we're in. We are always concerned when a genuine, traditional pagan festival like Halloween is corrupted into a festival – recognising in Bonfire Night a blatant attempt by the Puritans of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to hi-jack Halloween, removing its spiritual content. And again we are worry that in burning a Guy, we would be falling in with the Puritan agenda and celebrating a narrow sectarian and outdated hatred, between the Puritans and the Catholics. What do the Beaker Folk – spiritually eclectic, remorselessly liberal, and tolerant to the point of obsession and fanaticism - have to do with such a celebration?

But we do like a party. And fireworks. And even those rock-hard baked potatoes you end up fishing around for in the dying ashes of the bonfire, with the sparks putting pin-hole burns in your hi-viz. So we compromise.

We always refer to November 5 as “Bonfire Night”, and regard it as a celebration of the light, standing defiant against the incoming darkness of the winter. Hnaef is in charge of lighting the fireworks, while we stand at a safe distance. This is particularly so since the disastrous year when we allowed Young Keith to light them. He laid the rockets horizontally

along the orchard wall, and shelled the people in School Lane. Not likely to endear you to the neighbours.

Although something is always burnt on the fire, we resolutely refuse to burn the effigy of Guy Fawkes. So we burn some other communal object of loathing. Richard Dawkins, Robert Mugabe and Edwina Currie have all featured in the past – but mostly we just burn effigies of Drayton Parslow. Trouble maker.

In theory we would start the evening with the Prayer Against the Cold and Dark, and the Recognition that it's a bit Taters ceremony. But in practice every time we try to organise it, Hnaef starts lighting fireworks. And it's so hard to pray when there are Roman Candles flying past your ears.

# Winter Solstice Eve

Winter Solstice Eve is held at a really good time of day. It means we can get all our worshipping in early and then have the evening off. We celebrate the end of the Beaker year prior to the New Year's celebrations that occur in a few hours' time.

Sunset on Solstice Eve in Husborne Crawley is generally round about 4pm. The Beaker Folk are always reminded to be there sharp. This isn't one of those occasions when you can turn up late and wait for the worship to "warm up". It'll just all be over.

## *The Gathering in Apprehension*

*Shivering in the cold of the Winter Air, but glowing in their orange hi-viz, the Beaker People gather on Aspley Heath.*

## *Chorus:*

**"Raise your banners high. Don't die, Sun - don't die!" (repeat 12 times, in growing despair)**

## *Looking to the South-East in Silence*

**All: "Is that the sun down there or is it just the floodlights from the Amazon warehouse?"**

*The Archdruid remembers that the sun sets in the other direction.*



*Looking to the South-West in Silence.*

*At the precise time of sunset, the Solstice Fire is lit from the eternal flame. An appropriate song (for example, "Eternal Flame" by the Bangles) may be played.<sup>20</sup>*

*Chorus:*

**"Let the flames burn high - Goodbye, Sun - Goodbye!"** *(repeat 12 times, growing gradually sadder)*

Hnaef: Does anyone have a lighter? The Eternal Flame seems to have gone out...

*As it grows darker, panic may spread among the congregation. The Gibbon Moon folk, generally of an excitable nature, lose it completely and run off into the woods, howling with fear*

Archdruid: Darkness falls and the night is with us. The year is dead.

*Young, keen and generally stupid Beaker Folk may leap over the Solstice Fire, once Hnaef has finally lit it, in an age-old and traditional*

---

<sup>20</sup> Not the Atomic Kitten version. We may be neo-pagans but we're not barbarians.

*ritual. Those whose hi-viz vests catch fire are doused with water from the Safety Beakers.*

***The lighting of the Bling***

Archdruid: OK, Hnaef - flick the switch

*The Orchard is illuminated with the light of a thousand suns, as Santas, Snowmen, inflatable Alan Carrs, flashing lights, Singing Ringing Tree, dancing penguins, a sleigh and about a million blue LED icicles blaze into view. The congregation may go "Aaah".*

***The Dismissal***

Archdruid: Off you go, then. Don't forget – the midnight ritual is at midnight.

**All: Isn't this where we came in?**

## Of the Moon Gibbon

Words are powerful things. The New Testament Church (secretly a Beaker Sect, whose true identity has been hushed up by the Established Church) recognised this when they used “the Word” to represent the creativity of divine power. Mediaeval would-be magicians tried to capture the power of words in their spells and incantations.

But misunderstood words are the most powerful of all. It was at the time of a Gibbous moon that a slightly dim, but extremely persuasive, member of the Beaker Folk misheard and thought that someone was referring to the “Gibbon Moon”. From this they drew the conclusion that the moon is inhabited by a giant supernatural gibbon, who required placating if the moon were to survive from one cycle to the next.

Believing that the Moon Gibbon is both powerful and evil, they are in a constant state of stress as they wonder whether they should be kind to the Gibbon or join in combat against it.

The Moon Gibbon people become increasingly nervous at the time of waning crescent, when they believe that the Moon Gibbon is consuming the moon. At a time of New Moon, they run around the community grounds, anxiously lighting bonfires and begging the Gibbon to give the moon back. However at a Lunar Eclipse they become positively

hysterical. Convinced that the Gibbon is launching an all-out attack on the moon, and that the red colour of the moon is due to the moon bleeding, they rush out into the woods looking for gibbons to kill in order to join the battle on the moon's side. Of course there aren't any gibbons in the woods, but that doesn't seem to deter them.

There was a real problem one month at the time of the waxing gibbous moon. The Moon Gibbon people thought they were being encouraged to wax gibbons. On this occasion actually somebody managed to obtain one<sup>21</sup>. The sight of that poor gibbon, shivering in the north wind of a December morning was pitiful.

Moon Gibbon people are a nervous and excitable bunch, and it's best only to approach them when the moon is waxing, and they'll feeling generally optimistic. Don't try to persuade them that they're wrong – they have an awfully brutal way of dealing with heretics and infidels.

---

<sup>21</sup> We don't know where it came from, but the presence of Woburn Abbey just over the wall from the village makes you wonder. On the other hand, we've never ruled out the possibility it was obtained by mail order.

# On the Gender of the Moon

*A proclamation of the Archdruid on a matter of theological import.*<sup>22</sup>

It's one of those issues that cause great theological disputes late at night in the Community Bar<sup>23</sup>. Goodness knows many issues can cause these debates- the names of all the Three Stooges, whether Augustine of Hippo is the same man as Augustine of Canterbury, who put the ram in the ramalamadingdong, the colour of trains on the Bedford-Bletchley line in the 1930s. But of all of these, the most fractious is always – the gender of the moon.

Debate arises between those who claim that the moon is inherently feminine (as evidenced in Greek and Roman mythology) and those that call the Moon "he" (in line with, for example, the hobbits of the Shire<sup>24</sup>).

On one occasion, it all got a bit fractious. Poor old Gnolf ended up

---

<sup>22</sup> We do not regard these notes from the Archdruid as in any way binding – we are a liberal, tolerant faith that encourages debate and frowns on the imposition of one's views on other people. On the other hand, we've found it best not to argue. She never listens, after all.

<sup>23</sup> Please note - donations only, definitely no purchases. They're not prices on that list, they are suggested contributions. We don't have a licence and we don't want to upset the Revenue.

<sup>24</sup> OK, it may sound illogical to be quoting the Lord of the Rings in a theological debate, but then the whole community is based on a bunch of woolly ideas about a potentially non-existent Stone Age tribe, so who are am I to criticise?

suffering from a severe bruise which he seems to have received from the blunt end of a wood-splitting maul. The finger of suspicion pointed towards Geldwell, but she always denied it, saying that he may have accidentally bumped his head against the bookshelf.

To try to clarify the matter - the Moon has both masculine and feminine attributes.

For example, in its brightness and clarity, its beauty and - particularly during its first and last crescent phases - its delicate and fragile nature, the Moon clearly shows her feminine side. One might also refer to the way that the pregnant Moon in its first and second quarter grows towards Full. The word gibbous actually means “humpbacked”, but we prefer to refer to it as the “expectant” moon. We wouldn’t like to let lexical pedantry get in the way of a nice image.

On the other hand, we can also see that in the way that it disappears at New Moon, the way that the clouds can hide it from view and, particularly when near New in the Summer, sometimes it just clears off completely, like someone who romances you on holiday in Rimini and then never writes and all your post is returned "Not Known at this Address", the Moon has strongly male attributes. *Pig.*



## Of Thin Places

Within the neo-pagan and neo-pagan-syncretistic-Christian traditions, thin places have always been sought out and revered. Glastonbury, Walsingham, Stonehenge, Anfield – they draw pilgrims at all times.

They are commonly found in ambiguous locations – marshland, mountain tops, the wooden pathways which one bunch of Beaker Folk built across the Somerset levels – or the seaside. On the whole we prefer the seaside.

Thin places are where heaven and earth come close. Places where the spiritual and the material come together. Where we can easily reach through to the depths of the Other. Therefore they are to be treated with respect.

In Husborne Crawley, any identified thin places are immediately identified by being marked off by black and yellow tape, bearing the legend “Chemical Hazard – keep out”. We use this tape not because thin places are chemically dangerous, but because the Archdruid had some left over after a visit to an oil refinery during her previous career. The hazard tape reminds us that we are not to bungee-jump over the thin place, dive headfirst into it as if it’s the wall at platform 9¾ at Kings

Cross, or dance on it in steel toe-capped boots. These places must be treated with respect.

Beaker Folk, being of the dreamy class of people on the whole, are best kept back from the centre of the thin place – they will only get all spiritual, and that prevents them being so effective when working in the Mushroom Caves and the Doily Mine. Spirituality's all very well, but it can wreck the productivity of a working retreat centre.

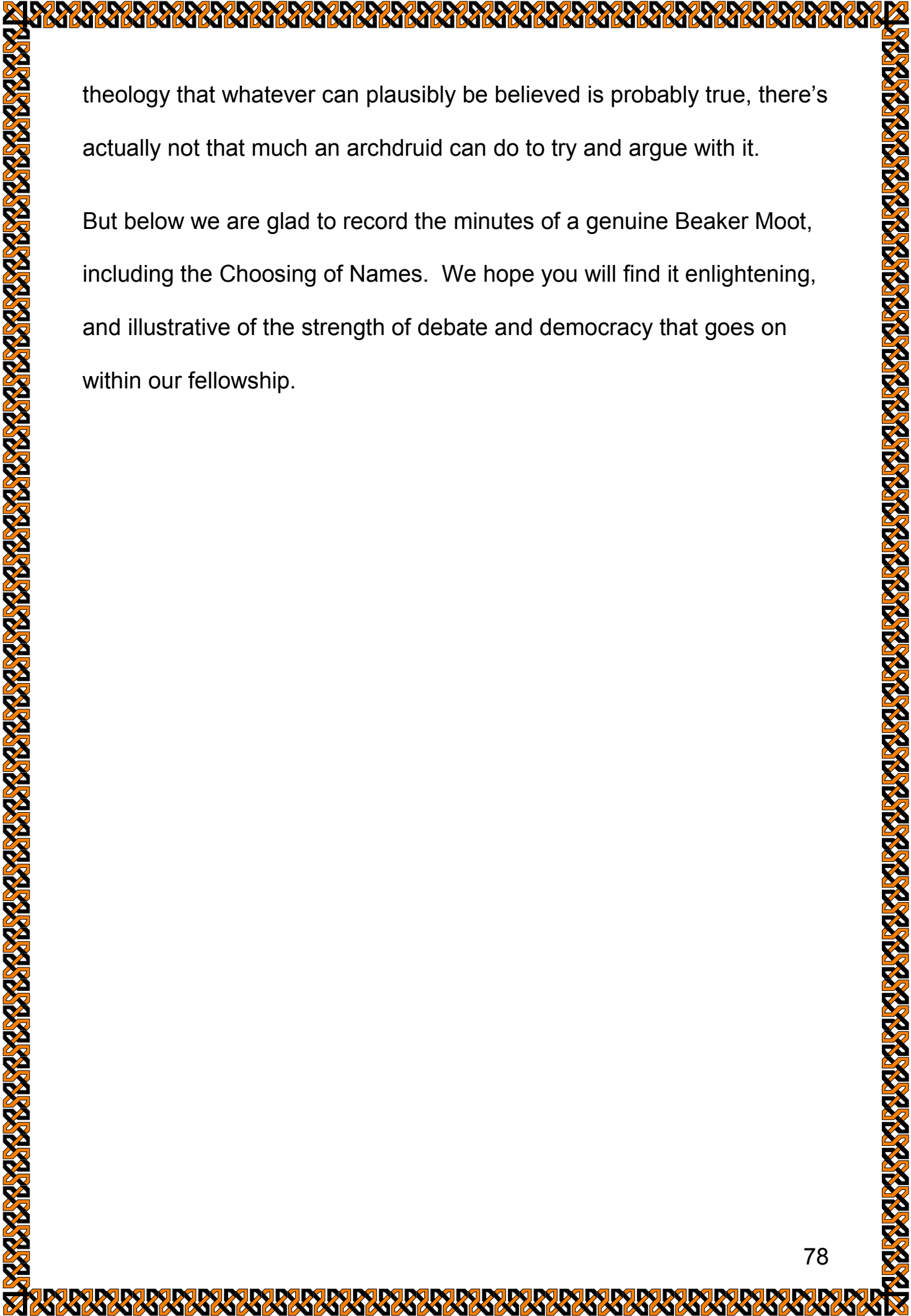
## The Moot

The Moot is held at full moon, before the great Occasion of Saluting of the Full Moon. We believe that as the strength of the moon grows, so do the intellectual and moral capacities of the Beaker Folk. To be honest we've seen no real evidence of this, but since when did belief depend upon evidence? We live in hope, and hope is a cardinal virtue.

The Moot is in many respects not totally dissimilar to a mainstream Christian church committee meeting. However the greater antiquity of the Beaker tradition can cause issues for the Chair<sup>25</sup>. In a Church of England or Methodist meeting, for example, somebody can object to a new idea by saying that they tried it in Reverend Bertie's time and it didn't work – or, to a suggested change, they will protest that the tradition of everyone saying the Lord's Prayer backwards was introduced in Father Aleister's time and they don't see why it should change now. But Beaker Folk can bring up objections by pointing out that such-and-such an idea was rejected during the Early Bronze Age, or that they've been banging flints together since the Mesolithic and they don't see why they should stop now. And since it is fundamental tenet of Beaker

---

<sup>25</sup> So called not for reasons of political correction, but because she's the only one who gets to sit in one.



theology that whatever can plausibly be believed is probably true, there's actually not that much an archdruid can do to try and argue with it.

But below we are glad to record the minutes of a genuine Beaker Moot, including the Choosing of Names. We hope you will find it enlightening, and illustrative of the strength of debate and democracy that goes on within our fellowship.

### ***Minutes of the Beaker Moot held on the Hunter's Moon of 2008***

Present: Archdruid Eileen (*chair*); Executive Assistant to the Archdruid Hnaef (*beanbag*); assorted other Beaker Folk (*floor*).

#### ***Treasurer's Report***

The treasurer refused to answer any questions on the precise details of the Community finances, merely stating that “we’re a bit short” and requesting additional voluntary donations towards the upkeep of the Community. Questions were asked about the Archdruid’s means of support, as the sole shareholder of Beaker Folk Ltd – but merely commented that “God will provide”, and offered to take people out for a spin in her new Maserati.

#### ***Pebbles and Tea lights***

Morgana asked why we were always using small stones and tea lights as part of Beaker worship. After the fifty-third successive Occasion on which we all meditated a pebble and lit a tea light, wasn’t it time we did something else?

The Archdruid responded that the Beaker Folk are committed to creative, alternative worship.

Earwig suggested that maybe it was time we had a different kind of creative alternative worship? If you held pebbles and lit tea lights on

every single Occasion, in what sense was it being alternative or creative?

Elfrida pointed out that the Beaker Folk's creative, alternative worship had always used tea lights and pebbles, and she couldn't see why they should stop now. What was good enough in Archdruid Zinglewix's day (2045-2012 BC) was good enough for her.

The Archdruid answered that in any case we had bought five pallet-loads of tea lights and pebbles during the closing-down sale of "Candles are Us", the alternative worship super-store in Neasden. And we weren't going to stop using them until she could once again fit her car in the garage.

***Resolution A – "That the post of Archdruid be open to Men and Women"***

Burton Dasset introduced this resolution by saying that he thought it was unfair that only women could be archdruids. Men could also feel called to the archdruidhood, and he did not believe that gender should be the determining factor in whether or not somebody's calling should be valid.

Elfrida commented that archdruids had always been female, right back to the days of the founding fathers – or indeed mothers – of the original Beaker Folk. If it was good enough for Archdruid Arglewilda (3021-3001 BC) then it was good enough for today.



Rodalf asked how we would be supposed to refer to a male archdruid?

It was very natural to refer to Archdruid Eileen as “Auntie” but what would we call her male equivalent? “Uncle”? It would sound ridiculous.

Archdruid Eileen stated that in any case, the reason why a man could not be an archdruid was nothing to do with gender - it was because she owned the Great House, so she was in charge. She hoped the matter was now closed.

#### *Naming of New Beaker Folk*

Ron and Maud Ormeroyd were welcomed to the Moot. As novitiate Folk who had completed their induction, they were now to be welcomed as full members. But first they had to choose their Beaker names.

Archdruid Eileen explained that the taking-on of a Beaker Name represents a solemn change of direction – from a secular to a spiritual manner of living, from a world-view that prized modernity and artificiality to one that respected nature and tradition. Therefore the taking on of a Beaker Name is not to be taken lightly. A Beaker Name must be approved of by the whole Moot and must either be the name of a village in the South Midlands which sounds a bit like a real person (such as Burton Dassett, or Drayton Parslow), or else it must sound genuinely Beaker-ish, like Eileen, Earwig or Hnaef.

Maud asked if she could call herself Deidre. Archdruid Eileen told her that this was a Celtic name, restraining herself from spitting at having to utter the names of these Iron-Age upstarts. Maud then asked what about Blodwen? This was rejected as too Welsh. Likewise Boadicea, as being too reminiscent of the Vicar of Dibley, and Sandra as being too Liverpudlian. Eventually Edith Weston was accepted, as being a village name that sounded a bit like a real person.

Ron's initial choice was Gandalf. This was rejected as we already have a Gandalf. The names of what appeared to be every hobbit in the Shire were then suggested and kicked into touch. Likewise Oberon, Rincewind, Norman Wisdom and Richard Dawkins. At this point, Archdruid Eileen asked Ron to stop living in his dream-world and pick a proper Beaker Name or else. Eventually we settled on Ron.

#### *Any Other Business*

Aardwolf asked whether there was any chance of the minutes of future Moots being published in the native Beaker Tongue as well as English. He was reminded that the original Beaker Folk, while skilled in spiritual discernment, astronomy and moving dirty great lumps of rock around, were completely illiterate and we therefore had no way of knowing what the Beaker Tongue would look like written down. Aardwolf then asked whether we could write it in Basque, which was really quite similar to

Beaker Tongue – after all, he didn't understand either so they must be the same. Aardwolf was asked to leave the Moot, as he developed a sudden and unexpected nose-bleed at this point. Archdruid Eileen insisted that the punch was purely accidental; she was merely waving her hands around to illustrate a point.

## The Articles of the Beaker Faith

1. Anything that can be reasonably conjectured when it comes to the original Beaker Folk, and not disproved, can be assumed to be true and therefore a genuine Beaker tradition.
2. Anything we don't understand about previous generations was probably concerned with fertility rituals. Any object we don't understand had symbolic meaning. Even if it could just have been a ritual back-scratcher.
3. There's no spiritual power in the universe greater than wishful thinking.
4. All contributions to the Community are strictly optional. But don't think that means you can get away without paying them.
5. Don't jump and down on Thin Places in steel toe-capped boots. They're liable to break.
6. Don't ask the Archdruid about what she puts in her pipe, or why she needs such regular deliveries of hydroponic supplies. Or why the snow never settles on the roof of the Great House.
7. If it feels good, it's probably fine.
8. Hi-viz is good for your physical safety and your eternal soul. We don't just wear it because the Archdruid bought a job-lot of

personal protective equipment in her old job as a Health and Safety advisor.

9. Pebbles and tea lights are good.
10. Whenever referring to “Celtic” Christianity or the “Celtic” tradition, we will always put the word “Celtic” in inverted commas, to indicate that it is no such thing. We’re still considering putting the word “tradition” in inverted commas also.
11. Never attempt astral projection without a safety belt and hard hat.
12. All religions contain at least grains of truth. But some religions are more profitable than others.