

Druid

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For other uses, see [Druid \(disambiguation\)](#).



Two druids, from an 1845 publication, based on a bas-relief found at [Autun](#), France.

In [Celtic polytheism](#) the word **druid** denotes the priestly class in ancient [Celtic](#) societies, which existed through much of [Western Europe](#) north of the Alps and in the [British Isles](#) until they were supplanted by Roman government and, later, Christianity. Druidic practices were part of the culture of all the tribal peoples called "Keltoi" and "[Galatai](#)" by Greeks and "[Celtae](#)" and "[Galli](#)" by Romans, which evolved into modern English "Celtic" and "[Gaulish](#)". They combined the duties of priest, [arbitrator](#), healer, scholar, and [magistrate](#).

The Druids were [polytheists](#), but also deified elements of nature, such as the sun, the moon, and the stars, looking to them for "signs and seasons". They

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Ancient Celtic religion

also venerated other natural elements, such as the [oak](#), certain [groves](#), tops of hills, streams, lakes and even plants, most of all, [mistletoe](#). Fire was regarded as a symbol of several divinities and was associated with the sun and cleansing.

Their calendar year was governed by the lunar, solar, and vegetative cycles. Archaeological evidence suggests that ceremonies were conducted to celebrate the two solstices and two equinoxes every year. These festivals would have been governed by the position and motions of the Sun alone. In addition to these, four holidays were celebrated according to the lunar and vegetative cycles. These include Imbolc (Imbolg) to denote the first signs of spring, Beltane (Beltain) to recognize the fullness of life after spring, Lughnassah to celebrate the power of the Solar deity Lugh, and Samhain to recognize the lowering of the barrier between the world of the living and that of the dead. The timing for these latter four festivals would have been determined by the presence of a full moon and the signs of life implied by the above. Imbolg would thus be celebrated at a full moon roughly halfway between the winter solstice and the vernal equinox, Beltane between the vernal equinox and the summer solstice, Lughnassah between the summer solstice and the autumnal equinox, and Samhain between the autumnal equinox and the winter solstice. This is contrary to popular "New Age" beliefs about Druidism that celebrate a given holiday according to the Julian calendar, which of course did not exist at the time of the formulation of these holidays. In modern times, Imbolg has been transformed into Groundhog Day, elements of Beltane have been absorbed into Easter, and Samhain has become Halloween (or All Hallows' Eve or All Saint's Day).

Modern attempts at reconstructing or reinventing Druidism are called [Neo-druidism](#).

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Etymology

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The word "Druid" probably traces to the ancient tree magic practiced by the Celts, and the tree calendars they originally used. A vestige of this tradition, perhaps the last vestige, survives in the traditional Irish names for the letters of the alphabet. The traditional name for each letter of the Irish Alphabet (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, u) is the name of a tree.

The etymology given by the editors of the *American Heritage Dictionary* (4th Ed.), based on Pokorny's *Indo-germanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, is as follows: **Druid** comes to English from Latin *druides* (pronounced "droo-EE-dess"), which is the same as the term used by [Ancient Greek](#) writers, the first to discuss the Celts: Δρυ•δης (*Druides*), associated by folk etymology with δρυς (*drus*, pronounced "drooss," meaning "oak tree"). The Latin and Greek terms trace via [Proto-Celtic](#) ***druwid** (also reconstructed as ***druwis** and ***druwids**) to the [Proto-Indo-European](#) roots **deru** ("dru-") and **weid** ("-wid").

"Deru," (also spelled "dreu"), means "to be firm, solid, steadfast." Thus, the word acquired specialised senses meaning "wood," "tree," and things made from or analogised to trees and wood. Other modern words (here, in their English forms) that trace to *deru* include: tree, truce, true/truth, troth/betroth, trust, tryst, tray, trough, trim, tar, durum, duress, endure, drupe, dryad, dendron, philodendron, and deodar.

"Weid" means "to see" and, by extension and figurative use, also refers to seers, wisdom, and knowledge - especially secret knowledge or wisdom that requires a kind of deeper sight (or "second sight") to ascertain. Other modern words (again, in their English forms) that trace to *weid* include: twit, guide, guise, wise/wisdom, wit, witenagemot (the "wit" portion), kaleidoscope (the "eid" portion), view, visa, visage, vision, review, revise, improvise, supervise, history/story, veda, and penguin (the "guin" portion).

Greek and Latin "druides" bear comparison with Old Irish *druídecht* (pron. "DREE-jekht"; the 'u' is part of the spelling only to indicate the 'd' and 'r' are broad instead of slender), which yields Modern Irish *draíocht* (pron. "DROO-awcht"), "magic." **Welsh** *dryw* ("DREE-oo", meaning seer) may be **cognate**.

The **Modern Irish** for Druid is *drúa* ("DROO-uh"), from Old Irish *druí* ("droo-EE"); which also produced Irish *draoi* ("DROO-ee"), "magician" and **Modern Gaelic** *druidh* ("dr:ee"; the 'u' is only there to indicate the preceding consonant is broad, not slender), meaning "enchanter" and *draoidh* ("DROO-ee"), "magician." Observe that the Irish and Gaelic words are actually the same word. The spelling difference dates from the mid-twentieth century, when the government agency that regulates the standard dialect of the Irish language combed through the lexicon and modernised many spellings.

Some research done on the ancient Indian scripture Rig Veda,(<http://www.bharatvani.org/books/rig/>) suggests a close parallel between the Druids and the Druhyus referred therein.^[*citation needed*] This may represent a common **Proto-Indo-European religious** heritage for the tradition.

History

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From what little we know of late Druidic practice, it appears deeply traditional and conservative, in the sense that Druids were conserving repositories of culture and lore. It is impossible now to judge whether this continuity had deep historical roots and originated in the social transformations of the late **La Tène culture**, or whether there had been a discontinuity and a Druidic religious innovation.

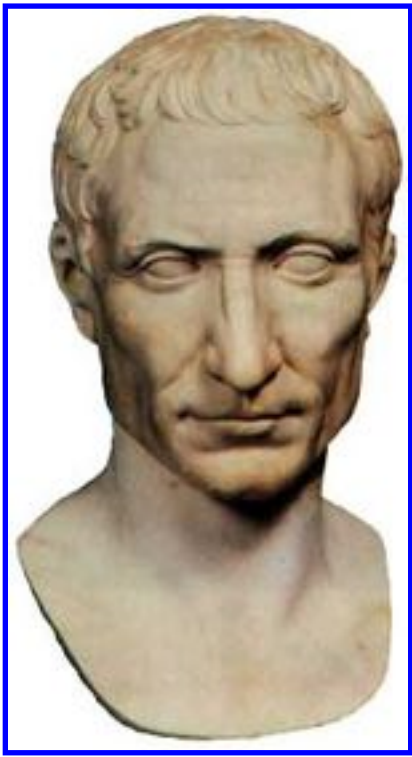
Our historical knowledge of Druids is very limited. Druidic lore consisted of a large number of verses learned by heart and it has been claimed that twenty years were required to complete the course of study. There was a very advanced Druidic teaching centre on **Anglesey** (*Ynys Môn*) centred on magical lakes and Druids went there from all over Europe to learn their secrets, but what was taught there, or at other centres, is conjecture. Of the Druids' oral literature (sacred songs, formulas for prayers and incantations, rules of divination and magic) not one verse has survived, even in translation, nor is there even a legend that can be called purely Druidic, without a Roman and/or Christian overlay or interpretation.


Roman sources

[[edit](#)]

Caesar

[[edit](#)]



Gaius Julius Caesar, 
author of the *Gallic Wars*

[Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*](#) gives the fullest account of the Druids. Caesar notes that all men of any rank and dignity in Gaul were included either among the Druids or among the nobles, indicating that they formed two classes. The Druids constituted the learned priestly class, and as guardians of the unwritten ancient customary law they had the power of executing judgments, among which exclusion from society was the most dreaded. Druids were not a hereditary caste, though they enjoyed exemption from military service as well as from payment of taxes. The course of training to which a novice had to submit was protracted.

All instruction was communicated orally, but for ordinary purposes, Caesar reports that the Gauls had a written language in which they used Greek characters. In this he probably draws on earlier writers; by the time of Caesar, [Gaulish](#) had moved from the Greek script to the Latin script.

As a result of this prohibition — and of the decline of Gaulish in favour of Latin — no druidic documents, if there ever were any, have survived. "The principal point of their doctrine", says Caesar, "is that the soul does not die and that after death it passes from one body into another" (see [metempsychosis](#)). This observation led several ancient writers to the unlikely conclusion that the Druids may have been influenced by the teachings of the Greek philosopher [Pythagoras](#). Caesar also notes the druidic sense of the guardian spirit of the tribe, whom he translated as *Dispater*, with a general sense of *Father Hades*. However, linguistically *Dis Pater* is related to [Jupiter](#) (Jovis Pater), from [Proto-Indo-European](#) word [Dyeus](#).

Caesar noted that Druids punished members of the society by a form of excommunication, by preventing

them from attending religious festivals. As these religious festivals were common and well-attended, this was an effective means of excluding punished persons from society.

Caesar also says that the Druids engaged in human sacrifice, and that it originated in [Britain](#).

Other writers

[\[edit\]](#)

Writers such as [Diodorus](#) and [Strabo](#), with less firsthand experience than Caesar, were of the opinion that the Celtic priestly order or class included Druids, [Bards](#) and [Vates](#) (soothsayers).

It was also claimed by Roman writers that a general assembly of the order was held once every year within the territories of the [Carnutes](#) in Gaul.

Pomponius Mela

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[Pomponius Mela](#) is the first author who says that the Druids' instruction was secret, and was carried on in caves and forests. Certain groves within forests were sacred, and the Romans and Christians alike cut them down and burned the wood. [Human sacrifice](#) has sometimes been attributed to Druidism. While this may be Roman propaganda, human sacrifice was an old European inheritance and the Gauls may have offered human sacrifices, whether of criminals or, to judge from Roman reports, of war captives.

Cicero

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Cicero remarks on the existence among the Gauls of augurs or soothsayers, known by the name of Druids; he had made the acquaintance of one [Divitiacus](#), an [Aeduan](#).

Diodorus

[\[edit\]](#)

[Diodorus Siculus](#) asserts, on unnamed sources, that a sacrifice acceptable to the Celtic gods had to be attended by a Druid, for they were the intermediaries. He also claims that before a battle they often threw themselves between two armies to bring about peace.

Diodorus remarks upon the importance of prophets in Druidic ritual: ‘These men predict the future by observing the flight and calls of birds and by the sacrifice of holy animals: all orders of society are in their power...and in very important matters they prepare a human victim, plunging a dagger into his chest; by observing the way his limbs convulse as he falls and the gushing of his blood, they are able to read the future.’ These [Greco-Roman](#) comments are supported to some extent by archaeological excavations. At Ribemont in [Picardy](#), [France](#), there were revealed pits filled with human bones and [thigh](#) bones deliberately fixed into rectangular patterns. This shrine is believed to have been razed to the ground by Julius Caesar while he was subduing Gaul. At a bog in [Lindow](#), [Cheshire](#), [England](#) was

discovered a body which may also have been the victim of a druidic ritual. The body is now on display at the [British Museum](#), [London](#).

Imperial decrees

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Druids were seen as essentially non-Roman: a prescript of [Augustus](#) forbade Roman citizens to practice Druidical rites. Under [Tiberius](#) the Druids were suppressed by a decree of the Senate, but this had to be renewed by [Claudius](#) in 54 CE.

Strabo

[[edit](#)]

In [Strabo](#) we find the Druids still acting as arbiters in public and private matters, but they no longer dealt with cases of murder.

Pliny

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In Pliny their activity is limited to the practice of medicine and sorcery. According to him, the Druids held the mistletoe in the highest veneration and groves of oak were their chosen retreats. In what is probably a fanciful extension of this story, Pliny claims that the mistletoe was cut with a golden knife by a priest clad in a white robe, two white bulls being sacrificed on the spot.

Tacitus

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[Tacitus](#), in describing the attack made on the island of Mona ([Anglesey](#) or *Ynys Môn* in Welsh) by the Romans under Suetonius Paulinus, represents the legionaries as being awestruck on landing by the appearance of a band of Druids, who, with hands uplifted to the sky, poured forth terrible imprecations on the heads of the invaders. The courage of the Romans, however, soon overcame such fears, according to the Roman historian; the Britons were put to flight, and the sacred groves of Mona were cut down.

Late Roman

[[edit](#)]

After the 1st century CE the continental Druids disappeared entirely and were referred to only on very rare occasions. [Ausonius](#), for one instance, apostrophizes the rhetorician Attius Patera as sprung from a race of Druids.

Early Druids in Britain and Ireland

[[edit](#)]

The story of [Vortigern](#) as reported by [Nennius](#) provides one of the very few glimpses of Druidic survival in Britain after the Roman conquest: unfortunately, Nennius is noted for mixing fact and legend in such a way that it is now impossible to know the truth behind his text. For what it is worth, he asserts that,

after being excommunicated by [Germanus](#), the British leader Vortigern invited twelve Druids to assist him.

In Irish literature the Druids are frequently (and reliably) mentioned, and their functions in the island seem to correspond fairly well to those they performed in Gaul (the Modern [Irish](#) word for "magic", *draíocht*, derives from [Old Irish](#) *druídecht*). Even in very early times, however, the [bards](#) usurped many of the duties of the Druids and finally supplanted them with the spread of Christianity.

The most important Irish documents are contained in [manuscripts](#) of the [12th century](#), but many of the texts themselves go back as far as the [8th](#). In these stories Druids usually act as advisers to kings. Once again legendary elements crept in: they were said to have the ability to foretell the future ([Bec mac Dé](#), for example, predicted the death of [Diarmait mac Cerbaill](#) more accurately than three Christian saints) and there is little reference to their religious function. They do not appear to form any corporation, nor do they seem to be exempt from military service.

In the [Ulster Cycle](#), [Cathbad](#), chief Druid at the court of [Conchobar](#), king of [Ulster](#), is accompanied by a number of youths (100 according to the oldest version) who are desirous of learning his art. Cathbad is present at the birth of the famous tragic heroine [Deirdre](#), and prophesies what sort of a woman she will be, and the strife that will accompany her, although Conchobar ignores him. The following description of the band of Cathbad's Druids occurs in the epic tale, the [Táin bó Cuailnge](#): The attendant raises his eyes towards heaven and observes the clouds and answers the band around him. They all raise their eyes towards heaven, observe the clouds, and hurl spells against the elements, so that they arouse strife amongst them and clouds of fire are driven towards the camp of the men of Ireland. We are further told that at the court of Conchobar no one had the right to speak before the Druids had spoken.

Before setting out on the great expedition against Ulster in *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, [Medb](#), queen of [Connacht](#), consults her Druids regarding the outcome of the war. They hold up the march by two weeks, waiting for an auspicious omen. Druids were also said to have magical skills: when the hero [Cúchulainn](#) returned from the land of the fairies after having been enticed there by a fairy woman or goddess, named [Fand](#), whom he is now unable to forget, he is given a potion by some Druids, which banishes all memory of his recent adventures and which also rids his wife [Emer](#) of the pangs of jealousy.



Hill of Tara in County  Meath, Ireland, legendary

seat of the High Kings.

More remarkable still is the story of [Étain](#). This lady, later the wife of [Eochaid Airem](#), [High King of Ireland](#), was in a former existence the beloved of the god [Midir](#), who again seeks her love and carries her off. The king has recourse to his Druid Dalgán, who requires a whole year to discover the haunt of the couple. This he accomplished by means of four wands of yew inscribed with [ogham](#) characters.

In other texts the Druids are able to produce insanity. [Mug Ruith](#), a legendary druid of [Munster](#), wore a hornless bull's hide and an elaborate feathered headdress and had the ability to fly and conjure storms.

Social and religious influence

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The Druids' influence was as much social as religious. They not only performed roles similar to modern [priests](#), but were often the [philosophers](#), [scientists](#), lore-masters, [teachers](#), [judges](#) and counsellors to the [kings](#). The Druids linked the Celtic peoples with their numerous gods, the lunar calendar and the sacred natural order. They were suppressed in Gaul and Britain after the [Roman](#) conquests, but retained their influence in Ireland until the coming of Christianity. The Druids' roles were then assumed by the [bishop](#) and the [abbot](#), who were usually not the same individual, however, and might find themselves in direct competition.

Nevertheless, much traditional rural religious practice can still be discerned from Christian interpretations and survives in practices like [Halloween](#) observances, [corn dollies](#) and other harvest rituals, the myths of [Puck](#), [woodwoses](#), "lucky" and "unlucky" plants and animals and the like. Orally-transmitted material may have exaggerated deep origins in antiquity, however, and is constantly subject to influence from surrounding culture.

Druidic sites

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Sites associated with Druidry include:

- The Isle of [Ynys Môn](#)
- The [Isle of Man](#)
- The [Isle of Arran](#)
- Wistman's Wood on [Dartmoor](#)
- [Newland's Corner](#) in Surrey
- [Iona](#)
- [Draoi-Heil](#)

The association of Druids with [Stonehenge](#) was invented in the sixteenth century in attempts to explain

the mysteries of Stonehenge, a prehistoric monument that was abandoned long before any Druids came to Britain. There is no evidence whatever that it was ever used by authentic Druids in ancient times. Nevertheless, it has become an important site for modern movements calling themselves druidic.

In Christian literature

[[edit](#)]

In the lives of saints and martyrs, the Druids are represented as magicians and diviners opposing the Christian missionaries. In [Adamnan's](#) *vita* of Columba, two of them act as tutors to the daughters of [Lóegaire mac Néill](#), the [High King](#), at the coming of [Saint Patrick](#). They are represented as endeavouring to prevent the progress of Patrick and Saint [Columba](#) by raising clouds and mist. Before the battle of Culdremne (561) a Druid made an *airbe drtiad* (fence of protection?) round one of the armies, but what is precisely meant by the phrase is unclear. The Irish Druids seem to have had a peculiar tonsure. The word *druí* is always used to render the [Latin](#) *magus*, and in one passage St Columba speaks of Christ as his Druid.

In many of Stephen R. Lawhead's historical fantasies, however, druids are represented as poets, philosophers, and learned men who were simply misled, and in Sigmund Brouwer's Winds of Light series of six books, they are portrayed as a sect that hid and masqueraded as commoners in an attempt to usurp power in Britain in the twelfth century.

Once the public ordination of Christian bishops in strongly Druidic territories was possible, it was essential for a 4th century bishop to demonstrate comparable powers. [Sulpicius Severus'](#) *Vita* of [Martin of Tours](#) relates how Martin encountered a peasant funeral, carrying the body in a winding sheet, which Martin mistook for some Druidic rites of sacrifice, "because it was the custom of the Gallic rustics in their wretched folly to carry about through the fields the images of demons veiled with a white covering." So Martin halted the procession by raising his pectoral cross: "Upon this, the miserable creatures might have been seen at first to become stiff like rocks. Next, as they endeavored, with every possible effort, to move forward, but were not able to take a step farther, they began to whirl themselves about in the most ridiculous fashion, until, not able any longer to sustain the weight, they set down the dead body." Then discovering his error, Martin raised his hand again to let them proceed: "Thus," the hagiographer points out, " he both compelled them to stand when he pleased, and permitted them to depart when he thought good." [\[1\]](#)

This account partly depends on information from the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1911 and the Catholic Encyclopedia, 1908.

Late Druidic survivals

[[edit](#)]

Ireland

[[edit](#)]

There is some evidence that the druids of Ireland survived into the mid- to late-seventh century. In the *De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae* of [Augustinus Hibernicus](#) (f. 655), there is mention of local *magi* who teach a doctrine of [reincarnation](#) in the form of birds. The word *magus* was often used in [Hiberno-Latin](#) works as a translation of *druí*.

The idea of reincarnation of the soul in the form of a bird is also found in some Christian literature, specifically [apocrypha](#) dealing with [Elijah](#) and [Elisha](#), where the two are martyred and return to preach in the form of birds. There was also the story of [King Arthur](#) reportedly turned into a crow upon his death.

Source: Augustinus Hibernicus. "De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae". *King of Mysteries: Early Irish Religious Writings* edited by John Carey. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000.

Flanders

[\[edit\]](#)

The people of [Flanders](#) and the [Low Countries](#) remained pagan as late as the 7th century CE, when [Saint Eligius](#) travelled from Antwerp to [Frisia](#), preaching and converting them to [Christianity](#). One of the best glimpses of late Druidic practices comes from the *Vita* of Eligius written by [saint Ouen](#), his contemporary and companion. Ouen drew together the familiar admonitions of Eligius to the pagans in Flanders. "It does not represent anything he said in a particular day in order" Ouen cautioned, "but is a digest of the precepts which he taught the people at all times."

Eligius in his sermons denounced "sacrilegious pagan customs." The following excerpted quotes from Ouen's *Vita* of Eligius are instructive, for the negative description they offer of some late druidic practices in Flanders:

"For no cause or infirmity should you *consult magicians, diviners, sorcerers or incantators*, or presume to question them."

"Do not observe [auguries](#) or *violent sneezing* or pay attention to any little *birds singing* along the road. If you are distracted on the road or at any other work, make the sign of the cross and say your Sunday prayers with faith and devotion and nothing inimical can hurt you."

"No Christian should be concerned about which day he leaves home or which day he returns, because God has made all days. No influence attaches to the *first work of the day or the [phase of the] moon*; nothing is ominous or ridiculous about the [Calends of January](#) [what we would call [New Year's Day](#)].

"[Do not] make *vetulas*,*, [little deer](#) or *iotticos* or *set tables [for the house-elf, compare [Puck](#)] at night* or *exchange New Years' gifts* or *supply superfluous drinks* [a [Yule](#) custom]."

- *Vetula*, a little figure of the Old Woman. A Roman would have equated her with [Hecate](#), but precisely who the Old Woman was and what she meant in the pagan [Low Countries](#) cannot be determined.

"No Christian gives credence to impurity or sits in incantation, because the work is diabolic. No Christian *on the [feast of Saint John](#)** or the solemnity of any other saint performs *solestitia* [summer solstice rites] or *dancing or leaping or diabolical chants*."

- The Christian [summer solstice](#) feast of Saint [John the Baptist](#) is still celebrated with [bonfires](#) on June 24th, though the actual June Solstice occurs on June 21 (or 20th) in the Gregorian Calendar.

"No Christian should presume to invoke the name of a demon, not [Neptune](#) or *Orcus** or [Diana](#) or [Minerva](#) or *Geniscus* or believe in these inept beings in any way. No one should observe Jove's day in idleness without holy festivities not in May or any other time, not days of *larvae*** or mice or any day but Sunday. No Christian should make or render any devotion to the *gods of the trivium, where three roads meet* [cf. [Hecate](#)], to the *fanēs or the rocks, or springs or groves or corners*."

- Orcus, a chthonic Etruscan/Roman god of the underworld, who enforced the sacredness of oaths and avenged the broken word. ([An essay on Hades/Orcus](#).)
- *Larvae* ("malignant spirits") in this Latin text more specifically refer to the *Roman [Feast of the Lemures](#)*, propitiating the dead, rather than to the Celtic propitiation, which was at [Samhain](#).

"None should presume to hang any *phylacteries** from the neck of man nor beast, even if they are made by priests and it is said that they contain holy things and divine scripture, because there is no remedy of Christ in these things but only the devil's poison."

- [Gregory of Tours](#) set great store by phylacteries.

"None should presume to make lustrations or incantations with herbs, or to *pass cattle through a hollow tree* or ditch because this is to consecrate them to the devil. No woman should presume to hang *amber* from her neck or call upon [Minerva](#) or other ill-starred beings in their weaving or dyeing but in all works give thanks only to Christ and confide in the power of his name with all your hearts. None should presume to *shout when the moon is obscured*, for by God's order eclipses happen at certain times. Nor should they fear the new moon or abandon work because of it. For God made the moon for this, to mark time and temper the darkness of night, not impede work nor make men mad as the foolish imagine, who believe lunatics are invaded by demons

from the moon. None should *call the sun or moon lord* or swear by them because they are God's creatures and they serve the needs of men by God's order."

"No one should *tell fate or fortune or horoscopes* by them as those do who believe that a person must be what he was born to be."

"Above all, should any infirmity occur, do not seek *incantators or diviners or sorcerers or magicians*, do not use diabolic phylacteries through *springs and groves or crossroads*. But let the invalid confide solely in the mercy of God and take the body and blood of Christ with faith and devotion and ask the church faithfully for blessing and oil, with which he might anoint his body in the name of Christ and, according to the apostle, "the prayer of faith will save the infirm and the Lord will relieve him."

"*Diabolical games and dancing or chants* of the gentiles will be forbidden. No Christian will do them because he thus makes himself pagan. Nor is it right that *diabolical canticles* should proceed from a Christian mouth where the sacrament of Christ is placed, which it becomes always to praise God. Therefore, brothers, spurn all inventions of the enemy with all your heart and flee these sacrileges with all horror. Venerate no creature beyond God and his saints. Shun *springs and arbors which they call sacred*. You are forbidden to *make the crook which they place on the crossroads* and wherever you find one you should burn it with fire. For you must believe that you can be saved by no other art than the invocation and cross of Christ. For how will it be if groves where these miserable men make their devotions, are felled and the wood from them given to the furnace? See how foolish man is, to *offer honor to insensible, dead trees* and despise the precepts of God almighty. Do not believe that *the sky or the stars or the earth or any creature should be adored* beyond God for He created and disposes of them all."



Charles Knight, "Arch-Druid in his full Judicial Costume" etching from *Old England: A Pictorial Museum* (1845)

[\[edit\]](#)

The Druidic Revival

In the [18th century](#), England and Wales experienced a revival of interest in the Druids, inspired by the antiquaries [John Aubrey](#), [John Toland](#) and [William Stukeley](#). The poet [William Blake](#) was involved in the revival and may have been an Archdruid; the [Ancient Druid Order](#), which existed from 1717 until it split into two groups in 1964, never used the title "Archdruid" for any member but credited Blake as having been its Chosen Chief from 1799 to 1827.

John Aubrey was the first modern writer to connect [Stonehenge](#) and other [megalithic monuments](#) with Druidry, a misconception that shaped ideas of Druidry during much of the 19th century. Some modern Druidry enthusiasts claim Aubrey was an archdruid in possession of an uninterrupted tradition of Druidic knowledge, even though Aubrey, an uninhibited collector of lore and gossip, never entered a corroborating word in his voluminous surviving notebooks. [John Toland](#) was fascinated by Aubrey's Stonehenge theories, and wrote his own book about the monument without crediting Aubrey. Toland founded the Ancient Druid Order in [London](#) in [1717](#); interestingly enough, modern [Freemasonry](#) was founded in the same year and the same location, Covent Garden's Apple Tree Tavern.

Druids began to figure widely in popular culture with the first advent of [Romanticism](#). [Chateaubriand](#)'s novel *Les Martyrs* (1809) narrated the doomed love of a Druid priestess and a Roman soldier; though

Chateaubriand's theme was the triumph of Christianity over pagan Druids, the setting was to continue to bear fruit. Opera provides a barometer of well-informed popular European culture in the early 19th century: in 1817 [Giovanni Pacini](#) brought Druids to the stage in Trieste with an opera to a libretto by [Felice Romani](#) about a Druid priestess, *La Sacerdotessa d'Irminsul* ("The Priestess of [Irminsul](#)"). The most famous Druidic opera, [Bellini's](#) *Norma* was a fiasco at [La Scala](#), when it premiered the day after Christmas, 1831, but in 1833 it was a hit in London. For its libretto [Felice Romani](#) reused some of the pseudo-Druidical background of *La Sacerdotessa* to provide color to a standard theatrical conflict of love and duty that was related to [Medea](#), as it had recently been recast for a popular Parisian play by [Alexandre Soumet](#): the *diva* of *Norma's* hit aria, "Casta Diva", is the moon goddess, being worshipped in the "grove of the [Irmin](#) statue".

In the 19th century, some dubious figures arose with outlandish claims and forged documents they claimed were historical. A central figure in this Druidic reinvention, inspired by [Henry Hurle](#), is Edward Williams, better known as [Iolo Morganwg](#). His writings, published posthumously as *The Iolo Manuscripts* (1848) and *Barddas* (1862), are not considered credible by contemporary Druidic movements because it has become impossible to distinguish Williams' inventions from the genuine material. Williams claimed to have collected ancient knowledge in a "[Gorsedd](#) of Bards of the Isles of Britain" he had organized. Many scholars deem part or all of Williams's work to be fabrication, and purportedly many of the documents are of his own fabrication, but a large portion of the work has indeed been collected from meso-pagan sources dating from as far back as 600 A.D. Regardless, it has become impossible to separate the original source material from the fabricated work, and the documents are considered irrelevant by most serious scholars.

An unfortunate result of the reinvention, which took place, ironically, just as modern archaeological and historical methods were being developed, is that it has shaped public perceptions of historical Druidry and continues to shape some modern forms of it. The [British Museum](#) website is suitably blunt:

"Modern Druids have no direct connection to the Druids of the Iron Age. Many of our popular ideas about the Druids are based on the misunderstandings and misconceptions of scholars 200 years ago. These ideas have been superseded by later study and discoveries" [\[2\]](#).

Modern Druidism

[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Neo-druidism](#)



Modern druids in the early morning glow of the sun



Some strands of modern Druidism (also known as Modern Druidry), such as the [Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids](#) (OBOD), are a continuation of the 18th-century revival and thus are built largely around writings produced in the 18th century and later. Members may be [Neo-Pagan](#), [Christian](#), [Modern occultists](#) or non-specifically spiritual (monotheistic or polytheistic).

Calendar

[[edit](#)]

Fragments of a [Druidic Lunar Calendar](#) may be preserved in the [Coligny calendar](#), fragments of a calendar engraved on a bronze tablet, discovered in 1897.

Further reading

[[edit](#)]

- S. Piggott, 1975. *The Druids* (London, Thames and Hudson)
- [Miranda J. Aldhouse-Green,1997. *Exploring the World of the Druids*](#)(London, Thames and Hudson)
- A.P. Fitzpatrick, 199. *Who were the Druids?* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson)
- [The Religion of the Ancient Celts](#) by J. A. MacCulloch (1911)
- [Irish Druids And Old Irish Religions](#) by James Bonwick (1894)
- [The Veil of Isis; Or, Mysteries of the Druids](#) by W. Winwood Reade (1861)
- [DruidWiki.org](#) The DruidWiki offers an opportunity to investigate the feasibility and practicality of providing an oral-like communication mechanism for collaborative projects within the Druid community, using Wiki technology and principles.
- [The Druid Network](#) The aim of The Druid Network is to be a source of information and inspiration about the modern Druid tradition, Druidic practice and the history of Druidry.

External links

[[edit](#)]

- [Lugodoc's Guide to Druids](#)

- [Images of Druids](#)

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