

Dear Sirs,

I have been asked to write to explain the value that Blickmead in Amesbury represents to the Druids, and why if the supply of water to the natural springs are disrupted we will have lost forever something of immense value to world culture, British tradition and the Druids tradition

It is probably best to introduce myself and why my opinion is an informed one.

I am a senior Druid, first initiated in 1999, now leader of a small Druid Group (a grove) with our activities and community engagement centred around Amesbury.

My Druidic CV:

I organised the first Druid led procession through Westminster in 2007/8 where with the consent of the House of Lords we held ceremony around a maypole on their land in front of Parliament. In 2009 I directed my efforts towards having the Druid religion (The Old Pagan Religion) recognised in law, successful in 2010. Also, in 2010 I approached the Mayor of Amesbury and offered my help with community life, which led to the special relationship between our grove and the community of Amesbury is ongoing. In 2011 I represented ancient British Culture to the Aymara Native people of south America, meeting the President of Bolivia. Received praise from the foreign office for this piece of spiritual diplomacy. In 2012 I received representatives from Bolivia to Stonehenge and Amesbury. I have led the Amesbury Carnival procession and have helped to represent Amesbury to Her Majesty the Queen in 2012. She became the first queen of England since the time of Boudicca in AD61 to publicly acknowledge a Druid by shaking his hand. She chose to do so within the precincts of Salisbury Cathedral in full view of high church officials. I have led ceremony at Stonehenge.

In my Druid capacity I have personally been invited to review the archaeological digs of Prof's Tim Darvill and Geoffrey Wainwright in 2008, The Riverside Project of Prof. Mike Parker Pearson and the discovery of 'Bluestone Henge', and Blickmead of Prof David Jacques. We do science too. I discussed my own theory with with the late Sir Patrick Moore that the lunar eclipse might have been important to our ancestors to try and map relative longitude. At his recommendation we conducted our own experiment proving that it was viable, so adding to our science. There are sometimes tensions between archaeology and our religion, such as over the matter of reburial of ancient human remains, but generally we find ourselves with a common thirst for answers that only the ancestors can help to illuminate for us. The Druids are not anti-science.

I have volunteered many times to be a spokesperson for the druids, appearing on Bolivian State TV, The BBC, Chinese State TV, Sky, ITV and many others.

I'm considered by many now to have earned the title 'an expert' although there is always so much more to learn I am shy about claiming this. In this context, Amesbury Abbey / Blickmead, I'm the most expert Druid in existence so I am comfortable sharing my perspective and testament with you.

My grove all devote our 'Druid time' totally for free wherever needed.

Professionally I support myself and my family by working as an IT Consultant. I am no longer long haired. I'm a graduate and a professional. I'm almost t-total and I'm anti-drugs. Just to break any stereo-types that you may hold about modern Druids.

The Value of Blickmead to Druids:

Blickmead Archaeology

The narrative about the Druids told by encyclopaedias and dusty historians seeking sensational headlines are that this 'blood thirsty' religion was killed off entirely in Roman times. Next to nothing is known about it. It was Celtic (Iron Age) and hence not connected in any way with Stonehenge (usually announced with barely repressed smugness).

The public are not encouraged to ask questions that might challenge this conventionally presented view, but there are many questions that will not be silenced, and which remain unanswered. The Modern Druid constantly has this thrown at them as a sort of dismissal of our beliefs: They are either new-age hippy fantasists or perhaps worse, devil worshipping blood thirsty heathens destined for hell.

No-one asks why in the time of Caesar, by his own account, the Druids were spread all across Northern Europe yet if iron age had managed to convert such large territory virtually overnight. Caesar states that the religion came from Britain, and from here, spread out. Shouldn't we be asking not when was it written about by its enemies, but when and how did it start?

The evidence of folk lore is that it has many roots but that the taproot is truly ancient.

There are in fact thousands of folk stories that go largely ignored today by modern historians because having been passed down verbally for so long their provenance cannot be stated and this appears to dismiss them from serious academic study. They amount to a body of cultural content equivalent to the Veda's of India. The Vedas have now won recognition by the UN as a global cultural asset despite being also verbally passed down. I became quite the avid collector of Celtic folk stories and as will become clear later, there is relevance to Blickmead and the Druid narrative about our origins.

In many of the tales our race of men replaces a bronze age race of heroes who in their day had co-existed with the mysterious Sidhe (Pronounced 'Shee') who were the rightful owners of the sacred land, rich in magic and never defeated. They withdrew to the realm of the underworld or land of faerie which exists in parallel with our own. Their occasional appearances in stories over the many centuries attest to belief in them and perhaps to their continued presence among us. To the ancient story tellers, the ancestors had greater rank the further back they go, and whilst there exists a cycle of reincarnation, some wise spirits would remain outside of the death rebirth cycle often inhabiting the body of an ancient tree or stone near to their community. They might then watch over their people and guide them.

Springs feature prominently in the old religion as a place to make offerings and receive blessings, the spirit of the Great Goddess would reside in such places. The Druids themselves were chosen from among the Aes Dana, and their training would take up to 21 years. They were literate as most of the Celtic elite class could speak and write ancient Greek as a result of trade, however it was prohibited for a Druid to write down their secrets. For this reason, many scholars declare that nothing is known about them, but this is not the case. We are fortunate that their community loved telling stories, which included the druids, we have these and their legal system over which they presided.

Imagine if in some future millennium all that remained of the British was a copy of our law, you could work out almost everything about our values and what we hold sacred from this. The Druid

legal system (Brehon Law) was so well liked by the population that it was still being used in Ireland up until its repression by the British in the 1700's.

In order to establish how far back our British priesthood goes in time we need some evidence of continuity of practice, and some evidence that people could have passed knowledge down through the generations. Ideas die hard, so long as someone can give voice to them.

Prof's Tim Darvill and Geoffrey Wainwright in 2008, discovered that small offerings of winter crops such as mistletoe had been posited at Stonehenge probably each year at Winter Solstice, from its apparent abandonment in pre-history through to the 1700's. Someone had clearly retained a reverence for the site and made offerings there, passing this tradition down for thousands of years.

Prof. Mike Parker Pearson discovered many things dating to the period of Stonehenge from inception to abandonment which are intriguing. A small Stone henge at the end of the Stonehenge Avenue intersecting the river Avon was commissioned before Stonehenge, then deliberately had its stones removed and was covered up, then at around the time Stonehenge was falling out of use it was revisited. Who had remembered it was there and how if there was no transmitting of knowledge?

Earlier digs in the 1960's at Stonehenge discovered two Aurochs skulls on the southern entrance to the circle, these bones would have been ancient already when placed into position. There was also discovered nearby a pit containing the remains of a massive party, unique because it appears to be a feast held between Mesolithic Hunter Gatherers and Neolithic Stonehenge Building Farmers.

Prof Jacques discoveries take this lineage of people back to the very root of post ice age Britain and the formation of our society. Because of the water soaked ground at Blickmead, Mesolithic evidence is datable. We know from Blickmead that Britains oldest settlement was in use from 10500 years ago through to beyond 6500 years ago. The People who Built Stonehenge and farmed nearby new and probably married into the people who hunted there and had claim to be the original people or Sidhe.

The Blickmead ancestors may possibly have been the taproot of Druid philosophy, the beginning of our faith. They met and interacted with the people building Stonehenge. The people who built Stonehenge passed on knowhow about sacred objects in the landscape to the last generation we acknowledge as using it. Hidden winter solstice rites continuously performed to 1700's, when the pagan movement experienced a revival. There is at least a chance of data being passed along the generations.

It is at least possible these are THE ANCESTORS of the Druids.

As to continuity of practice:

In the Iron age we know that Druids made a big fuss about Hollie Ivy and Mistletoe, They had sacred white cows that they claimed descended from Aurochs (5 herds still exist today), they revered the Yew and Oak tree, they believed in reincarnation, they made offering to water as the gateway to the other realms and springs were regarded as the place where a river goddess dwells. If you 'touch wood' after a scary thought or throw coins into a wishing well, then you today are continuing druid traditions. We know their eight sacred festivals included the Winter Solstice.

In the Stonehenge landscape there is copious evidence of tree reverence and burial indicative of a belief in reincarnation from multiple epochs.

At Blickmead we have seen evidence that perfect unused microliths have been given to the waters as gifts. Aurochs body parts have been used ritually, and for food. We have seen a small standing stone perfectly aligned north south to divide the day in half with its shadow. There have been many other wonders, but the Druids are excited because our surviving folklore tells many stories of the first people, known as 'the Sidhe' who hunted with stone weapons and who intermarried with the incoming farmers giving rise to the rites of the land. Blickmead is already established this small part of folklore to be memory rather than myth.

Crucial new evidence about a sort of pier into the centre of what was once the water of the upper spring being for ritual purpose ties it in with later 'Druid' practices.

If this narrow strip of archaeologically unique ground is dried out or otherwise changed by the proposed building of a cutting and tunnel, then shame on all of us. This place is where it all began, and it is only just beginning to tell its story. It is more precious even than Stonehenge, for it may even be the reason for Stonehenge. It may also be the seed germ of the only religion Britain has contributed to world belief systems.

Even if Blickmead ancestors never actually had a philosophy in common with ourselves, we choose to respect them as our honorary ancestors and to pay them all due respects as such. In truth we may never know for certain but we have an interesting possibility to pass on to our children, a thread for them to follow, if any remains.

As the ancestors of the ancestors, imagine the significance of this place called Blickmead to an ancestor revering culture. It is highly important to us. Beyond words to explain.

Iron Age Druids (Celtic Period)	Legends of the Sidhe, hunter gatherer people. Sacred Cattle descended from Auroch Gifts of handicraft and tools into springs Sacred Piers to the centre of water Springs sacred Reverence for Oak and Yew Reincarnation, also Ancestor reverence Matriarchal claim to territory Advanced astronomy and metallurgy Winter solstice special. Reverence for trees; Oak and Yew
Neolithic	Great stone monuments Gold and Bronze fine jewellery with immense precision, Advanced megaliths with astronomy. Sacred Aurochs bones. Winter Solstice special. Legends of intermarriage with the Sidhe. Belief in reincarnation, Stone funerary markers, reverence for Oak and Yew
Mesolithic (Blickmead)	Precision micro tools Hunter gatherer lifestyle, original settlers Aurochs sacred Water offerings Water / springs Sacred? 1 st evidence of sundial?

That's a lot of coincidence if no cultural hand-over involved.

Blickmead Spirituality & Community Identity

In 2012 the leaders of Amesbury wanted to have a community connection back to Stonehenge. It was decided that on the eve of Winter Solstice emissaries would be sent to Stonehenge to light a solstice lantern as the sun set. This would then be accompanied by the community from the town in a lantern procession to the Abbey.

Both archaeologists and Druids recognised an uncanny alignment between this idea and the global understanding of what Winter Solstice signifies. The night when the night is longest is when the sun is too weak to bring forth life. The people assembled at sunset to light fires so that when the sun god returns next day, he/she sees that the people kept the light going even in his absence. It symbolises faith that light will overcome darkness, and that life will return after death. Hence, in later times Christianity adopting this time for the official birth of Jesus Christ.

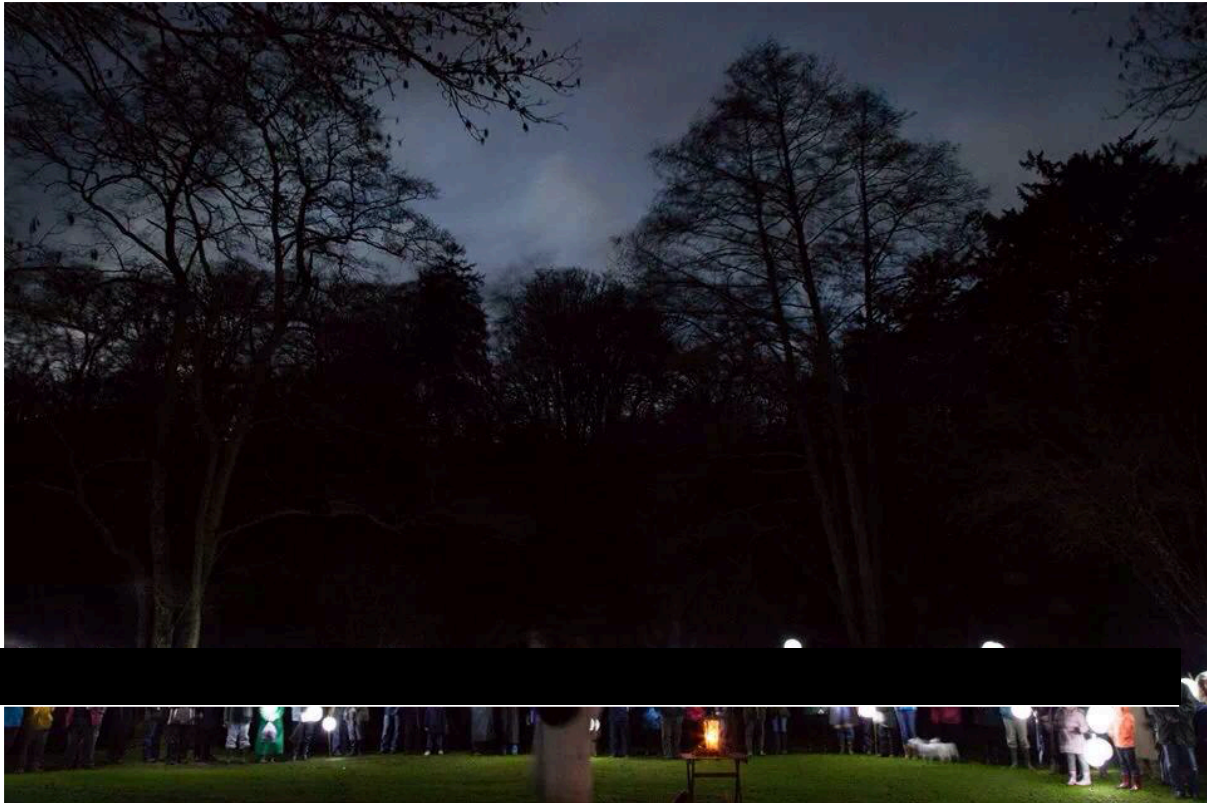
We held a spontaneous Druid ceremony when lighting the lantern in that first year. It was soon made impossible for the community to process back to Amesbury across private land, so it evolved into candle lighting at Stonehenge and the community processing from the Town into the Abbey to greet the lighted candle and a Druid led community ceremony at the lower spring.

It has now become a tradition and is a unique example of pagan and non pagan communities coming together to re-apply and reinterpret an ancient principle for our time. The community in Amesbury has embraced the discoveries at Blickmead and taken the place and the two springs as being a cornerstone of rediscovered identity. With this renewed sense of belonging has come a determination to see all factions of the community uniting for this one event, just as the ancestors nearby at Durrington Walls once did by the hundred thousand.

It has been a great privilege for myself to lead this Winter Solstice celebration, so different to any other. The Grove now have a spiritual home. We name our babies at the lower spring, marry there, and seek guidance from the ancestors there. If the spring were to be destroyed by having its water supply interrupted, we will have lost something unique, precious and irreplaceable. Druids are not funded, we own no land of our own and most of our ancient sacred places have restrictions on their use. Blickmead has been our sanctuary and a place from whence we are relearning the skills of being priests to a real community.

UNESCO and ICOMOS both state that intangible cultural heritage is as precious as the monuments we so obviously seek to preserve, and our government has signed up to international standards. Why is not Blickmead protected both as a place of special scientific interest, but also as a kindling flame of renewed cultural identity and community ritual?

At Blickmead we have our feet stood upon the sacred ground where the Sidhe made their settlement. We have sacred spring water, mature wise trees, and ancestor spirits and nature spirits all around, but without tourist coaches, gift shops and people in orange body armour telling us to move along.



The lantern ceremony at Blickmead

[Blickmead Spiritual Diplomacy](#)

In 2012 her excellency the Bolivian Ambassador to Britain visited Blickmead together with two high priests from her country, who practice a tradition that is at least 5000 years old at a temple called Tiwanaku. Their visit which also took in Stonehenge, Glastonbury and Avebury culminated in a joint ceremony at the spring. This warmed Anglo Bolivian relations at the time and still is having a positive effect now.

I understand that many world leaders, and leaders of peoples who still embrace religions of their ancestors are astonished to learn that in the western north hemisphere, in an industrialised and highly capitalist economy like Britain, there survive a few people who still revere the ancestors and worship mother nature.

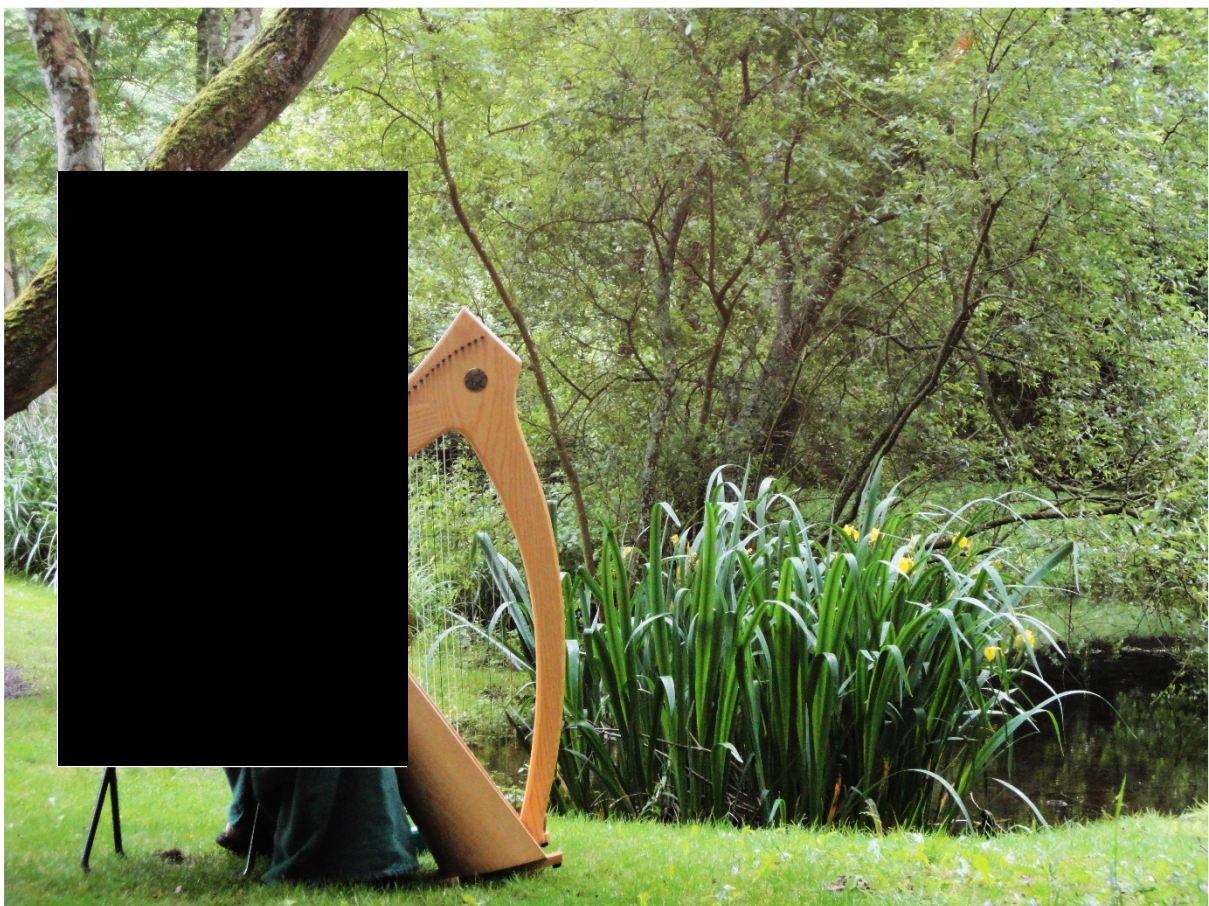
Of course, some choose to go to Stonehenge to be greeted by heritage officials and walked around. There is nothing wrong with this, however, much greater meaning is given to a sincere local welcome at Blickmead by local Mayor and Druids. In a post EU world where the UK has to build relationships with foreign countries not all of whom think as we do or put money above respect for the earth, Blickmead is a huge asset. As are we.

The fact that it sits on private land, and that access must be politely requested and is granted to those respectful of the honour, make this visit especially gratifying for visitors.

I have also hosted visitors from North American indigenous nations, and I wasn't there when it happened, but I believe that former US president Obama's team in the UK also visited Blickmead.



Bolivian diplomats and Amauta priests with our grove at Blickmead in 2012



I hope that this has illuminated some of the value and spiritual significance that Blickmead holds for the Amesbury Druids, and for all modern pagans seeking an understanding and connection with our earliest possible spiritual origins.

Frank Somers (Senior Druid: Amesbury Stonehenge Druids)