

Norwich Pagan Moot Talks, Walks and Workshops Survey Autumn 2016

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Introduction

There is a general perception that the events run by Norwich Pagan Moot are poorly attended and poorly promoted. Promotion has, indeed, come to concentrate on a FaceBook presence. There is a risk of retrenchment, given diminishing attendance figures, yet the Pagan community is dynamic and growing, and the positive public profile of Paganism has never been higher.

The events consist of two kinds, social Moots and a programme of talks, walks and workshops. There are two social Moots, a Pub Moot on the first Wednesday of each month, at the Coach and Horses on Bethel Street, and a daytime Coffee Moot on the fourth Saturday at the Forum, both in Norwich City Centre. The talks and workshops are held on the third Sunday at the Belvedere Centre on Belvoir Street, a little outside the city centre. Sometimes these are replaced with a walk (summer) or even a public ritual (Yule).

Since September, promotion has been stepped up with paper fliers, posters and 'what's on' lists, and the web-site (www.norwichmoot.co.uk) resurrected. This survey was conceived as a way to find out what the community would like to see from the Moot, particularly in terms of the talks, walks and workshops, which are the events requiring specific organisational effort.

Methodology

The survey was in two parts, a paper questionnaire and an on-line survey, with a link promoted via FaceBook, using the same questions.

The paper forms were made available at the following events.

- Pub Moots of 7th September, 5th October and 2nd November 2016 (although no-one attending the last had not already completed the questionnaire),
- Talks of 18th September and 16th October, and
- from the Moot stand at the Harvest Moon conference on 25th September.

Unfortunately, due to circumstances of placement, very few people visited the stall at Harvest Moon. Forms were also given to individuals in the community away from these events.

The on-line survey, using Smart Survey (www.smartsurvey.co.uk), ran through the second half of October and was harvested on 6th November 2016. People were asked specifically not to complete both paper and on-line surveys.

Response rates

Of 47 paper questionnaires given out, 21 were returned completed, a response rate of 45%. No-one filled out more than one form.

It is not possible to calculate a response rate for the on-line survey as we have no way of knowing how many people saw the survey advertisement. The on-line survey only elicited four responses, made on the 12th and 13th October, just after the survey was announced.

It is possible that some people, who took paper surveys and did not return, them elected instead to complete the on-line survey. The on-line responses did not resemble any of the paper responses, nor each other, so it is safe to assume that no-one completed the on-line survey twice and no-one completed both the on-line and paper surveys.

As so few responses came via the on-line survey, no attempt has been made to differentiate between paper and on-line responses in the results or analysis below, as this would have no statistical significance. The total of responses was therefore 25.

Results

The responses are presented below. Where the same response to an open question has been given by more than one respondent, this is indicated with a number after the response. Square brackets indicate a comment or further information added by the report author. Initial observations and commentary are given at the end of each section.

1 Have you ever been to a Norwich Moot talk, walk or workshop?

Yes 19, No 5, Not answered 1

Commentary

Whilst the survey has not been successful in reaching many people who have not been to talks, walks or workshops, it is still a useful snapshot of the attitude of the existing audience, including some who may be willing to come more often.

2 Which have been your favourites?

- Val Thomas – 7, of which:
 - herb walks – 3
 - straw workshop – 2
 - “workshops” – 1
- Chris _____’s talk on bats – 6
- Bob Percy’s Tarot workshop – 2 (one: “history, symbolism and practice”)
- Bob Percy’s talk on the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram
- Chris Wood’s talk on the Magic of Objects – 2
- Chris Wood’s talk on Hathor (“it included history and some ritual”)
- Francesca Vanke’s talk on the Green Man
- Adam Bear
- Penda
- “A talk on shamanism”
- “Standing stones etc.”
- Talks about Pagan paths
- “Practical ones”
- “All the ones I did (a.k.a. encouraging people to do talks no matter their experience).”
- “I find the talks and walks the most interesting.”

Two respondents also cited Harvest Moon, not a Moot event, one specifically the 2014 conference.

Commentary

It seems clear from this list that people appreciate knowledge well presented and events which get them outside and/or doing things. The popularity of the bat talk is worth noting, as it was not a “specifically Pagan” topic (see question 4).

3 How could Norwich Moot talks, walks or workshops be improved?

Event type

- More walks – 3 (of which, in summer – 2)
- Historical sites [also under ‘topics’]
- More practical workshops
- Some afternoon and evening or whole-day, multi-speaker sessions.
- “It’s difficult as some of us are very solitary and aren’t sure how to introduce ourselves. Maybe a pre meet once in a while?”

Venue and organisation

- Better advertising – 2, of which:
 - “now being addressed”
 - “More advertising outside of the Moot circle of folk.”
- Handouts summarising main points at the end of talks.
- No talking stick!
- Candles and incense
- A more central venue for talks
- More time to talk informally after the speaker, rather than rush away
- Charge more - £4 perhaps [see below, question 7]
- “Organisers being at meetings is good.”
- Include an ‘updates’ section on what is happening.

Topics

- More advanced topics as well as beginner level
- More about wildlife
- Historical sites [also under ‘event type’]
- More “renowned” speakers.

General

- “I thought it was really good.”
- “I haven’t really been to enough of them to comment.”
- “They’re already good.”

Commentary

It seems there is a general satisfaction with the talks, walks and workshops themselves, but with a desire for more of the best. There may be a general issue with the ambience of talks, however, that, for different people, things like having longer to talk socially afterwards, removing the formality of the talking stick, having candles and incense, or ensuring organisers are present, might go some way to addressing. (The last issue, about attendance by organisers, seems odd for the talks, as they are generally there. This is not necessarily the case for the social Moots, and it is possible that, here and in other questions, some respondents may be thinking about these as well. This may be indicated by the suggestion of “pre-meets” too.) Looking at these responses in conjunction with those to question 6 (frequency), there may be an appetite for sessions with more than one speaker, also allowing different perspectives to be compared and inexperienced speakers to gain that experience. The point about an “update” spot is also well made, as there is a tendency to close talks rapidly and not even tell people what’s on next month.

4 What would interest you as subjects for a talk, walk or workshop?

(This section includes the topic-related comments from question 3, and some responses are duplicated under different group headings.)

General

- Seasonal walks
- Beginners' guides
- "More advanced topics as well as beginner level"
- "More about wildlife"
- "Everything, but not things that aren't "primarily Pagan", i.e. beekeeping, gardening, bats, etc."
- "Anything local"
- "All the things. There is no harm in knowledge."
- "As a newcomer to the beliefs and practices of paganism and at the very early stages in my quest for guidance/understanding, it would be nice to have the opportunity to listen and learn about its origins, gods/goddesses, meanings etc. I know I could just read a book but sometimes it's more beneficial to learn from one's experiences."

Magic, ritual and Pagan paths

- Processions [not clear if this means talks or practical]
- Rituals, ceremonies [not clear if this means talks or practical]
- Ritual practices from various traditions
- The differences between paths
- Heathenry
- "Magick"/"Majick" – 2
- Chaos Magic
- Talks/workshops on natural Witchcraft/spellcraft – 2
- "The powers of the elements"
- Magical associations of gems and stones
- History of magic
- The lives of famous Pagans.

Myth, legend and folklore

- Specific deities, goddesses and gods – 2
- Folklore, folk tales and stories – local and UK – 2
- How myths have developed.

Landscape & history

- Seasonal walks
- "A magic walk! Local hotspots!"
- Sacred landscapes – "but with academic rigour!"
- The magic of the Tas valley
- Norwich history – "how 'normal' stuff bleeds into the magical (or vice versa)"
- Historical sites
- "Where to go in Norfolk guide"
- "Anything local"
- "Ley lines"

Systems and techniques

- Divination systems – 10, of which:
 - Astrology – 3
 - Runes – 2 (one: symbolism, one: advanced rune work)
 - Tarot – 2
 - Pendulum dowsing
- Crystals and minerals – 3 (one: magical associations of gems and stones)
- Talks/workshops on natural Witchcraft/spellcraft – 2
- Candlework
- Apotropaia
- Mindfulness
- Meditation
- Chanting & drumming.

Crafts, etc.

- Herbs / herbal remedies – 2
- Growing herbs
- Identification of plants
- Straw/craft workshops
- Hand craft
- Crafts for festivals.
- “Would be good to make something too for work.”

Commentary

There is a range of topics people would like to see offered, which seem to fall into the categories above. Obviously you can't please everybody all the time, and it is interesting to note the conflict between the respondent who doesn't want talks on e.g. bats with the popularity of that talk (question 3). The frequency of events has a bearing here, in that a more frequent programme can more safely have events that individuals do not like, without jeopardising their interest *per se*. Similarly there is clearly a demand for varied levels in the programme, catering for beginners and more experienced people, not forgetting that an expert in one field is likely a beginner in another and *vice versa*. Again, there is clearly an appetite for doing as well as listening. The importance of practical sessions and getting outside to see things is to be stressed. As the comment in question 2 on Chris Wood's Hathor talk points out, even straight talks can include an element of ritual, or hands-on practice. What comes through the topic list quite strongly is an interest in, indeed a desire for immersive exposure to Magic, the sacred landscape (including its myths, history and wildlife), Pagan paths, practical magical and craft techniques, and, overall, learning.

5 Is there anyone you would particularly like us to invite to speak?

(The list is in alphabetical order of surname. Locations are given in square brackets for people who are not local. Names of people in the local community who have not yet given talks and therefore do not have a public profile have been abbreviated.)

- Tina B. on hedgehogs
- Dr Jenny Butler [Lecturer in Western Esotericism and in New Religious Movements, University College Cork]
- Alice C.
- Annette D.
- Vicki D. – 2 (one: on magic in Japan)
- Lon Milo DuQuette [California, USA]
- Gemma Gary [2] & Jane Jacobs [Cornwall]
- Peter Grey [location?]
- Carolyn Hillyer – 2 [Devon]
- Prof. Ronald Hutton – 2 [University of Bristol]
- Kathy Jones [Priestess of Avalon, Glastonbury]
- Glennie Kindred [Derbyshire; her web-site states: “I prefer to work within a 50 mile radius of my home in Derbyshire and I don't do evening talks. My prices are flexible depending on your organisation and length of the talk.”]
- Gareth L.
- Shani Oates [location?]
- Nigel Pearson – 2 [Ipswich]
- Phil P.
- David Rankine [Glastonbury]
- Maxine Sanders [Snowdonia]
- Daniel Schulke [California, USA]
- Kate West
- People from the ‘Hidden Charms’ (magical protection of buildings) conference at Norwich Castle in April 2016. [Most not from East Anglia]
- “I am interested in anyone willing to give of their time and expertise.”

Commentary

There is a mixture here of famous figures and local/regional people with knowledge and/or skill, some of the latter of whom may be inexperienced at speaking. It should of course be read as being additional to the people who have spoken to date (at Harvest Moon as well), particularly those in the favourites list (question 2). It might be useful to think of putting on some multi-speaker sessions, involving a “big-name” speaker and others from the local area. This would also help inexperienced speakers to gain that experience, whilst still ensuring a good audience and a relatively high admission fee (as there would be more than one speaker) to cover the costs of the venue and “big-name” speaker. However, some of the people mentioned are probably beyond our ability to afford, particularly those from the USA (unless they happen to be in the country anyway, with time available). In general, though, the inclusion of unaffordable people should not be off-putting, as some people will inevitably have chosen the people they would most like to hear speak and it is up to the Moot to find a happy medium between on the one hand the wish list and the kind of inspirational

speakers and topics it suggests, and on the other practicalities of cost and availability, and opportunities afforded by knowledgeable people in the region.

6 How frequently would you like Norwich Moot talks and walks to take place?

Monthly (as now) 17

Less frequently (e.g. quarterly) 5

Comments:

- “Perhaps less frequently, but more at a time, make an afternoon of it.”
- “2-3 monthly”
- “Might get more attendance if they were quarterly. People might appreciate them more.”

More frequently 3

Comments:

- “Perhaps monthly, but with ‘extras’.”
- “And earlier.”

Commentary

The programme of monthly events is clearly what is wanted. It is also easier and more effective to promote a regular pattern, as long as the events are planned sufficiently well in advance. However, there is the suggestion that bigger events, such as afternoon workshops and multi-speaker sessions may be attractive. Similarly, occasional events additional to the monthly programme may satisfy those who would like a higher frequency. However, underlying these responses is perhaps the expectation that regular monthly events will indeed be the sort of learning experiences provided by talks, walks and workshops, and that events such as open rituals and picnics should either incorporate talks, walks or workshops, or be extra events.

7 What is a reasonable price to pay for admission to a talk?

(NB workshops would be priced higher as they are longer, involve a trainer's time and materials.)

£3	6
Between £3 & £4	1
£4	8
Between £4 and £5	1
£5	6

Other:

- “Any of these depending on length/content.”
- “Depends on the experience of the speaker and niche of the field.”
- “£10+ (not less).”

Comments:

- “I’m sorry, I don’t have much money. But I would love to watch a webinar of a talk or something and pay.” [£3 response]
- “I think they are reasonably priced - I have no problems.” [£4 response]
- “Minimum £4, could be more for speakers who have to travel a long way?” [£4 response]
- To the rider that workshops would be priced higher: “Fair enough.”

Commentary

There is a nice symmetry about the results of this question, leaving aside the “at least £10” outlier. From a purely financial standpoint, the admission charge would be £4, as those put off at this price would be offset by the revenue, whereas a lower price would not raise the same income. However, as the Moot’s aim is not simply to maximise revenue, but to provide a financially sustainable service to the community, it would probably be sensible to charge £3 (as is now happening) for ordinary talks, in order to maximise attendance whilst ensuring sufficient income to cover costs. Workshops and longer, multi-speaker sessions would, naturally, still be offered at a higher price, although there is then the question of whether workshops could be organised so that there is an evening talk at the normal rate, preceded by a workshop in the afternoon, with its own introductory talk, charged at a higher rate (inclusive of the evening). This would not be feasible for all workshops, but would be more inclusive where practicable. There is also the question of whether people would be willing to pay as much for a local, unknown speaker as for a “big name”, where it would be useful to charge more in any case to defray higher costs. One solution could be a multi-speaker afternoon or day session, including the “big-name” and less well-known speakers, which people would expect to pay more for. This would also give inexperienced speakers some experience.

8 Any other comments?

- “Better PR/marketing is good.”
- “The Moot needs an injection of new folk, simply to add to the pool of attendants. The Moots I have attended in recent years have been incredibly unattended, which makes me as someone who likes to fade to the side a little uncomfortable. Now [written at the September Pub Moot] is the best time to try and get the universities involved, as the students are about to come back. Get adverts in the chaplaincies. Find students willing to assist in societies that can feed in to the Moots.”
- “More attendees needed.”
- “Grateful for the work done to date, but feel some renowned speakers [are needed?], even if this means fewer meetings.”
- “I really wish our community could appreciate how good our Moot is and how hard organisers work.”
- “Thank you to the organisers. Although some things may not be well attended, it's just a case of me finding the courage, time and money. The more information and events suggested with photos [on-line?], the more likely I am to come along eventually.”
- “Just wish I was more confident when attending!”
- “There are already many good offerings - it would be difficult to improve significantly on them.”
- “Looking forward to more...”

Commentary

Firstly, it is worth acknowledging the complements being paid to Moot organisers here. It is easy to feel unappreciated, but people are clearly grateful that the Moot events are being run, even if they do not always attend. Then there is the point about lack of attendance, which was of course the reason for this survey. Increased promotion gets noticed and promotion in varied media means not only more people see it, people see it more; repetition and reinforcement is key to marketing. Furthermore, promotion needs to be broad so as to attract people who are not currently part of the Moot scene. Once attendance figures start to rise, the effect can be self-perpetuating, as “the pool of attendants” gets larger. There has actually (independently of this survey) now been contact with the Multifaith Centre at UEA and more is to be expected, partly through involvement with Norwich InterFaith Link.

Conclusions

The results of this survey and the above commentaries can now be discussed by Moot organisers and others with a view to improving the events offered. There are certain clear points that emerge from this report, however.

- People want the Moot to carry on putting on talks, walks and workshops, but to do it even better.
- A regular programme of monthly events seems to be the baseline, but with other, extra events likely to add to its attractiveness. This also allows a varied programme, so that if the topic one month is not interesting to some people, they are not put off the broader programme.
- Regularity is important, so that forward planning and multi-media promotion are key to people knowing that something will be on. Furthermore, promotion needs to be broad so as to attract people who are not currently part of the Moot scene.
- People want events from which they can learn, but this needs to involve an element of doing as well as listening, whether practical sessions in workshops or at the end of talks, or walking with a guide in the outside world.
- Multi-speaker afternoon or day sessions would allow inexperienced speakers the chance to gain experience whilst still attracting a good audience, and the acceptably higher admission fee could help cover the costs of “big-name”, “key-note” speakers.
- There needs to be a mix of levels, so that beginners and more experienced people find events that work for them.
- In terms of topics, there is clearly an interest in, and a desire for immersive exposure to Magic, the sacred landscape (including its myths, history and wildlife), Pagan paths, practical magical and craft techniques, and, overall, learning.
- However, some thought may need to be given to the ambience of talks, here expressed by various issues raised by individuals.
- £3 would appear, currently, to be the optimum admission fee for talks, but with higher charges for workshops and multi-speaker sessions.