

# MA Cultural Astronomy and Astrology

Paper for the Introduction Module

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Student number: 028355

David Rowan

Essay title:

‘What impact do Astronomy and Astrology have on the culture of contemporary life in the village of Avebury?’



Aims, objectives, and outline of the essay:

### Part one:

To undertake a critical analysis of the culture of life in modern Britain, through the lens of the village of Avebury in Wiltshire, with a view to determining whether or not there is a foundation of Astronomy or Astrology behind the seasonal worship and celebrations of both the visitors to Avebury and of the villagers themselves.

To do this we will first need to establish whether or not the structure of the modern expression of the Christian year is based on the cycle of the Pagan Celtic year.

This will be explored by outlining an overview of the Celtic Wheel of the Year and exploring its Astronomical and Astrological basis. We will further examine the possible Astronomical and Astrological background of our modern culture using texts from a wide variety of sources to ascertain whether or not there was an overlaying of Christianity onto the already established Pagan Wheel of the Year.

At the end of this stage we can now address the question, 'Does the celebration of the contemporary Christian cycle of the year in have its roots Astronomy and Astrology?'

We will then look at modern life in Avebury from the perspective of the village now being a meeting ground where two apparently diverse expressions of modern culture meet and possibly clash.

### Part two:

Part two of this essay will present the results of 16 targeted interviews. Information will also be drawn from a number of periodicals and articles from a diverse range of sources.

From this we will be able to ascertain:

Do people travel to Avebury for celebration and worship within and of the site in addition to non-worshipping seasonal tourists, archaeologists, schools, dowsing groups and other clubs i.e. motorbike enthusiasts?

If so, then do the visitor numbers from worshipers of the site increase throughout the summer, in line with the increase in numbers from general tourism, or are there specific times of the year that see these visitor numbers significantly increase ?

Does the timing of these significant increases in visitors who come to worship correspond with the Astronomy and Astrology of the Celtic Wheel of the Year ?

How aware of the Astronomical and Astrological significance of these specific times are the people who purposefully come to be within Avebury at these particular landmarks of the year ?

What social and cultural impact do these visitors have on life in the village, from the perspective of those that live there ? What economic impact do these visitors have on life in Avebury from the perspective of local business ? What social and cultural impact do these visitors have on life in the surrounding areas of the county of Wiltshire from the perspective of the police ?

How much are the villagers, local business people and the police aware of the Astronomical and Astrological significance of these specific days that cause change within the culture of their daily lives ?

### Part 3:

The final part of our enquiry then moves on to explore the impact of Astronomy and Astrology on the modern seasonal culture lived out by the villagers themselves.

Do those that live in the village follow or celebrate the contemporary Christian cycle of the year ? and how aware are those that live in the village of any Astronomical and Astrological significance behind of the timing of their festival year ?

We will explore this through a series of 16 interviews with people who play different and significant parts in the contemporary culture of modern life in Avebury. We will first take a general overview before taking a look at life in Avebury through one year and assessing the impact of Astronomy and/or Astrology on life in the village.

### Part 4:

We can then look to see what conclusions can be drawn:

Do different cultural groups within contemporary society revolve their annual calendar around Astronomy and Astrology unconsciously ?

Do Astronomy and Astrology have an identifiable influence on the fabric of the contemporary culture of seasonal worship and celebration in modern Britain ?

Terms and definitions:

**Culture:**

n.1. The total of inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge, which constitute the shared bases of social action. Collins concise English dictionary page 317.

**Astronomy:**

The study of planets, stars and all cosmological phenomena.

**Astrology:** being in two parts:

**a) Natural Astrology:** The study of the movements of planets, stars and all cosmological phenomena and how this affects the environment and life on Earth.

**b) Judicial Astrology:** The study of the movements of planets, stars and all cosmological phenomena as symbolic representations of the dynamics of subjective human experience and the study of how we may interpret, or judge these symbolic phenomena and correlate them to our experiences and the timing of moments of change and transformation within our lives and the world around us.

**The Celtic Wheel of the year:**

The ancient Pagan perception of the year being a wheel, or cycle of an eternal spiritual rhythm of life death and re-birth manifest through the seasons of nature with specific phases of transition and clearly identified demarcations of time for these phases and their progression.

**Contemporary:**

*Adj.* 2. Existing or occurring at the present time.

Collins concise English dictionary page 284.

### **Contemporary Christian cycle of the year:**

A modern and pervasive view of the Christian year that comprises of the acknowledgement and/or worship of New Year's Eve', Valentines day, Easter, May day, Harvest festival, Halloween, Guy Fawkes night and Christmas.

### **Cultural Astronomy:**

Cultural Astronomy is the study of any cultural meaning the heavens have or have had for human beings... of which astrology is a principal example.' <sup>2</sup>

### **Pagans:**

Those who practice modern Paganism and contemporary Witchcraft.

### **Christians:**

In the context of this essay the term 'Christians' is taken to refer to those who actively or passively follow Christian teachings, traditions and ideology and would identify themselves as being 'non-Pagans'.

### **NB:**

No persons of any other faiths were contacted, or found to be a visitor of Avebury at the time of writing this essay and completing the interviews.

Part one:

## The Astronomical and Astrological structure of the Celtic Wheel of the Year

The Celts saw their worshiping year as a cycle, most often depicted as a wheel<sup>3</sup>.

At first glance this seems to be a division of the year into seasons and sub seasons. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that the Celtic Wheel of the year is comprised of two interrelated cycles: a progressive cycle of the unfoldment of the seasons and a mythical symbolic cycle of birth, growth, death and re-birth <sup>4</sup>.

The unfoldment of the seasons is, at first glance, the easiest to discern.

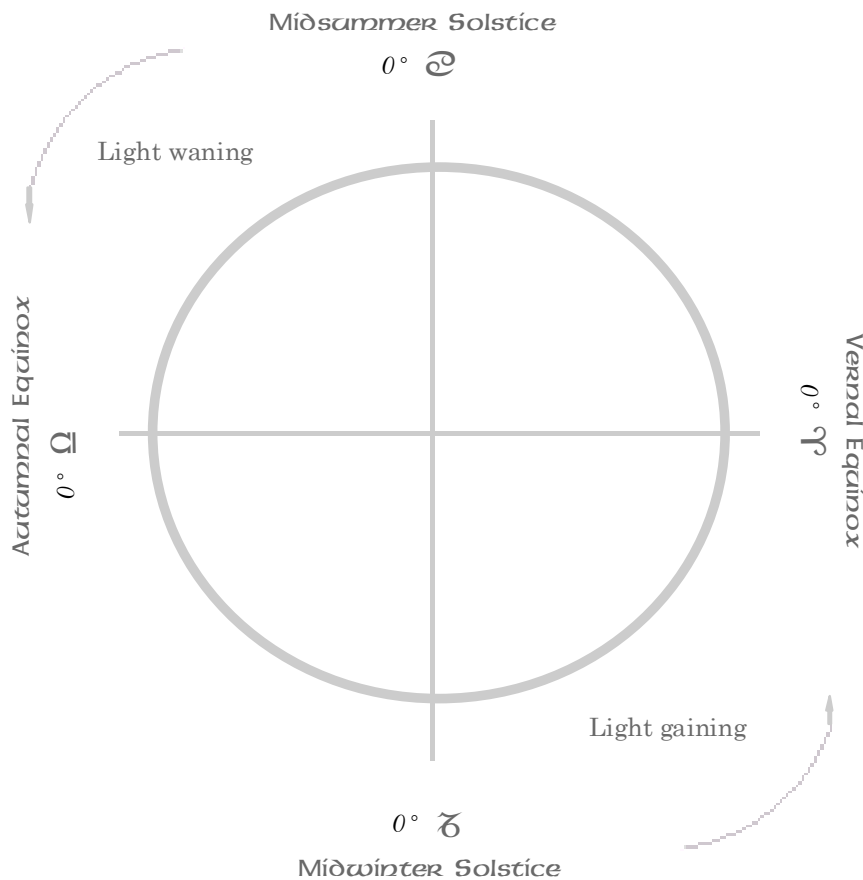
We know from the early studies undertaken by antiquarians such as Dr. William Stukeley who first published his *Stonehenge, a Temple restored to the British Druids* in 1740 and stated that, 'Stonehenge has an alignment to the position of the Sun's rising on the morning of the Summer Solstice' (the exact moment of the Summer Solstice being when the Sun enters 0 degrees Cancer on the ecliptic), to other writers who theorised that Stonehenge connected to the twelve signs of the zodiac and was once capable of predicting eclipses<sup>5</sup>, to modern Professors such as David Kendle and Dr. Alexander Thom, author of *Megalithic sites in Britain* and *Megalithic Lunar Observatories* who, having determined the existence of the 'Megalithic Yard' have proven Stonehenge to be an accurate instrument for measuring and predicting astronomical cycles<sup>6</sup> that the megalith builders and the Druids who were to follow them were able to plot the timing of the seasons and predict the precise moments in the annual cycle of the Sun when the hours of daylight and darkness would be exactly equal and when the hours of daylight would peak and when they would also be at their nadir.

Archaeological discoveries in the late sixties and early seventies revealed, as Hitchin asserts in *Earth Magic*, 'That not just Stonehenge but other megalithic stone circles such as Avebury, Long Meg and her Daughters, the merry Maidens and so on could also be used for extremely accurate astronomical observations: certainly of the sun and moon, probably to predict eclipses and possibly involving the movements of the stars as well'<sup>7</sup>.

For thousands of years people have worshiped and celebrated turning of the year's seasons. 'In past ages Midsummer Eve would have been ablaze with the great fires lit upon the sacred high points of the land', write Janet

and Colin Bord<sup>8</sup>, and, and Frazer remarks in *The Golden Bough* midwinter fires would also have been lit, 'for Midsummer and Midwinter, or, in more technical language, the summer solstice and the winter solstice, are the two great turning points in the Sun's cycle which gives us our seasons and our year and from the standpoint of primitive man nothing might seem more appropriate than to kindle fires on Earth at the moments when the fire and heat of the great luminary in the heavens begin to wane or wax'<sup>9</sup>.

The midpoints between the summer and winter solstice were also noted and celebrated and these are called the Vernal, or Spring Equinox and the Autumnal Equinox.



### The Solar Cycle<sup>10</sup>

We can now see a cycle of light gaining ascendancy and reaching a point of balance at the vernal equinox (Sun at 0 degrees Aries), its culmination at the midsummer solstice (Sun at 0 degrees Cancer), and then its

descending return to the balance point at the autumnal equinox (Sun at 0 degrees Libra) and onward to its nadir and renewal at the midwinter solstice (Sun at 0 degrees Capricorn)<sup>11</sup>.

The common name for the midwinter solstice is Yule and this is still acknowledged today by modern Pagans and has influenced both our contemporary culture and language. We send Yuletide greetings to our friends and loved ones while the chocolate Yule Log now found in supermarkets has its often forgotten heritage in the tradition of burning a Yule Log whose ashes would then be scattered upon field to bring growth and prosperity and luck for the new year now begun <sup>12</sup>

In conclusion then we can say that a facet of our contemporary culture has its roots in astronomical observation: for centuries people in Britain have celebrated the turning of the year at specific points along its cyclic path. This then, is an example of Cultural Astronomy that is still prevalent in our modern world.

Further research into the solstices and equinoxes then takes us from the realm of Cultural Astronomy into the field of Natural Astrology. The act of assigning a meaning of great significance to the astronomical phenomena of these mark points along the solar cycle brings us into the realm of Natural Astrology, for not only were these moments in time important in terms of knowing the hours of daylight or plotting the seasons: there was a Spiritual significance too.

In Eastern Europe: Russia, Austria and Germany the Midsummer Solstice was viewed as the moment of the death of the God of vegetation<sup>13</sup>. While the observation and acknowledgement of these important landmarks in the cycle of the solar seasons was observed and acknowledged as important by the Megalith builders and the indigenous population of the British Isles, these solar-orientated religious festivals were mainly observed by pastoral people in Europe and brought to the British Isles by the Saxons and others who swept westward across these isles at the time of the decay of the Roman empire<sup>14</sup>.

The times in the solar year that were most important to the indigenous population of these islands, and the Celts who followed them, were not the exact moments of the changing hours of the daylight/night-time relationship. It was rather the midpoints in-between these celestial markers that were most important.<sup>15</sup>

The 'Greater Sabbats', or 'Fire Festivals' as they are also known are the most important in the Celtic and modern Pagan traditions and they follow a mythical journey around the wheel of the year. <sup>16</sup>

In one sense they show a drama of the concept of the sacrifice and resurrected God<sup>17</sup>, and in another they reveal, especially when viewed along with the ‘Lesser Sabbats of the Equinoxes and Solstices’<sup>18</sup> a theme of birth, growth, death and re-birth that is both cultural, astronomical, and judiciously astrological.

The ‘Fire Festivals’, or ‘Greater Sabbats’ have an annual timing that correlates perfectly to Judicial Astrology.

There are no obvious ‘significant moments of time’ here, as there are with the Solstices and Equinoxes: there are no easy, or observable measurements of a significant count of daylight hours or apparent astronomical phenomena, and yet these are there to be found with a more in the stellar alignments of Stonehenge that mark the sunsets and sunrises of what is often called the ‘cross quarters’. In fact the dates of these ‘Greater Sabbats’<sup>19</sup> are often a point of confusion or controversy among modern Pagans.

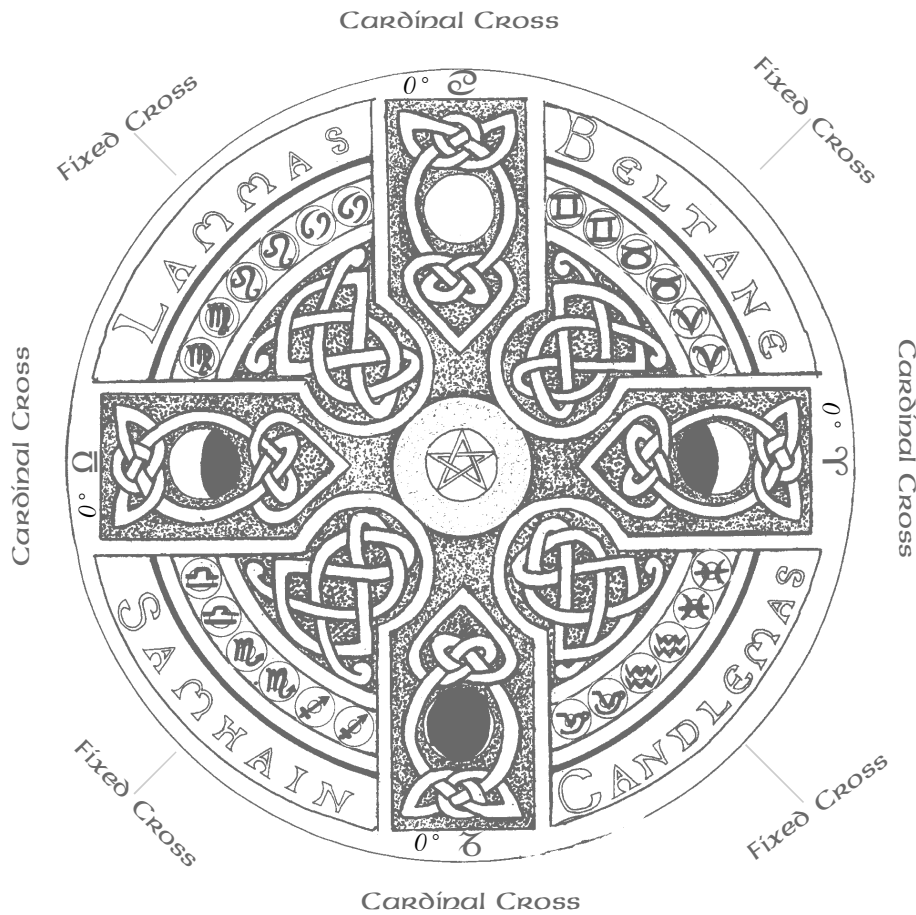
If a contemporary Pagan were to decide upon the times of the ‘Greater Sabbats’ there might well be a little confusion. This confusion comes about for a number of reasons.

The dates for these ‘Greater’ festivals<sup>20</sup> .....

- ☉ ***Imbolg*** (also called Candlemas, Oimele, Imbolc)
- ☉ ***Beltaine*** (also called Beltane, May eve, Walpurgis Night, Cyntefyn, Roodmas)
- ☉ ***Lughnasadh*** (also called August eve, Lammas eve, Lady day eve)
- ☉ ***Samhain*** (also called Hallowe’en, All Hallows eve, Calan Gaeaf, All Saint’s Day)

..... are not traditionally fixed in their dating, and yet have become fixed through the use of calendars – and then confused with the evolutionary changes of calendars.

To further explore this we will first understand the meanings attributed to these ‘Greater Sabbats’ when combined with the ‘Lesser Sabbats’<sup>21</sup>:



### *The Sacred Wheel of the Celtic Year<sup>22</sup>*

The wheel shows the cycle of the Sun within the circle along with the corresponding (for the British Isles) signs of the Zodiac (or months). Layered on top of this cycle is a symbolic cross of a Lunation cycle from new to full and returning to the moment of dark/new.

This displays the correlation of the Luna and Solar cycle with the timing of the Great Festivals. When the Sun is at it's point of being new, and the Moon is in it's 'new phase' then the festival of renewal can begin. When the Sun is in it's full (or culmination) phase (or season) and the Moon is in it's full then it is time for the festival of fullness and culmination and harvest.

If we follow the contemporary timing of the 'Greater Sabbats' and use our Gregorian calendar then we might find ourselves 'out of time' with nature. It is possible to attend a harvest festival, or Lammas, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August and find the harvest has been a little late that year and the food is not yet prepared. Conversely, it is also possible to attend the Lammas festival only to discover that the season was 'early' that year and we have missed the moment of ripening.

In other words, seasons change and yet our calendars are fixed and to add more confusion to the issue the calendars themselves change at times.

'The Gregorian Calendar was adopted in Britain (and in the British colonies) in 1752, with (Wednesday) September 2, 1752, being followed immediately by (Thursday) September 14, 1752'<sup>23</sup>

The modern calendar dates for the 'Greater Sabbats' are most revealing when compared with the 'old' calendar dates:

- ☉ Candlemas - now 2<sup>nd</sup> of February becomes the 14<sup>th</sup> of February.
- ☉ Beltane - now 1<sup>st</sup> of May becomes the 13<sup>th</sup> of May.
- ☉ Lammas - now 1<sup>st</sup> of August becomes the 13<sup>th</sup> of August
- ☉ Samhain - now 31<sup>st</sup> October now becomes the 11<sup>th</sup> November.

The 14<sup>th</sup> of February is a very familiar date as is the 11<sup>th</sup> November. The 13<sup>th</sup> of May and the 13<sup>th</sup> of August might be less familiar in their significance, and that is something we will now begin to investigate.

One way of viewing the turning months of the year was to give them a symbolic representation that illustrated their experiential qualities as well as the natural events of each month as the year progresses. Such a system was widely used and was represented on sundials as late as 1423, as shown in a French 'book of the hours'. Each month is depicted by its correlating symbol and this symbolic system was the Zodiac<sup>24</sup>.

So, we find from the '12 day variance' between the two calendar systems that which ever calendar we choose to use to 'position' any given Greater Sabbat the date will always fall within the same Zodiac month. Some Pagan traditionalists still uphold that it is not Beltane until the

Whitethorn blooms<sup>25</sup>. Given it's seasonal variance this occurrence still falls inside the same Zodiac-month as the 'fixed' dates of either of the two calendar systems..

From an Astrological perspective there is a pattern here that is obviously clear:

All of the Lesser Sabbats, the solstices and equinoxes, mark the beginning of the Sun's return to the Cardinal Signs of the Zodiac: Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn..

All of the Greater Sabbats, the fire festivals, are celebrated when the Sun makes it's way through the Fixed Signs of the Zodiac: Aquarius, Taurus, Leo and Scorpio.

As an Astrologer it would seem only natural to me that the symbolic meaning of the Sun's progress would have been interwoven with that of the Moon and the two luminaries both being in synchronisation at the same points in their cycles is a powerfully symbolic moment.

If we take it that at the beginning of the year the Sun is in the 'new phase' of it's cycle (as it moves through Aquarius) then the moment of Candlemas would be when the moon was in it's new phase also. In other words, it is the moment of Candlemas when there is a new Moon when the Sun is moving through the zodiac sign of Aquarius.

This now moves our findings into the realm of Judicial Astrology and it would be wise here to take stock and now gain further insight into the symbolic meanings of these significant points in the solar cycle.

an overview of:

## The Pagan Celtic Wheel of the Year and its adoption by the Christian Church

## Imbolg:

The festival of Imbolg or Candlemas occurs when the Sun transits the fixed sign of Aquarius. The common calendar date for Imbolg is February 2<sup>nd</sup> while its earlier calendar date would have been given as February 14<sup>th</sup>.

Candlemas means 'festival of lights' and this time is the quickening of the year<sup>26</sup>: the first stirring of the return of light become apparently visible after the long nights of midwinter.

In ancient Rome February was the cleansing time (the water bearer of Aquarius<sup>27</sup>) of Februarius mensis<sup>28</sup>, the ritual month of purification. This is a time of clearing away the old to make way for the new, of preparing the land, or home, or feelings of commitment for the renewal and subsequent rebirth. This time is the traditional wood gathering time as trees allow their deadwood to fall to the floor. This correlates perfectly with one of the symbolic themes of the Zodiac sign Aquarius and Imbolg is the first fire festival of the year, and this is the middle of the season on winter.

Traditionally men and women would pair-up at this time to proclaim either the renewal of their partnership, or the establishment of a new pairing. In view of the adjusted calendar date being the 14<sup>th</sup> of February it is no small co-incidence this correlates with what Christian and contemporary calendars call St. Valentines day. The Pagan Goddess Brigid (Brid, Brigante) associated with this festival becomes supplanted with the Christianised adoption of the recognition of the date February 2<sup>nd</sup> as St Mary's feast of the Candles<sup>29</sup>

## The Vernal, or Spring Equinox:

As we have already stated, the moment of the Vernal Equinox occurs at the point in time when the Sun moves to being at 0 degrees of Aries, measured upon the Ecliptic:- The plane of the Earth's orbit around the Sun extended into space to meet the celestial sphere. From the geocentric perspective, the Ecliptic appears to be the path the Sun follows around the Earth<sup>30</sup>.

Now, in the unfolding cycle of the year the hours of light have come into balance with the hours of darkness. Symbolically, the acknowledgement of this moment lends itself to the realm of Natural Astrology for in the British Isles the Spring Equinox had little relevance apart from noting the ongoing direction of the ascension of light<sup>31</sup>. It would not be until the hours of daylight have risen in ascendancy that the Pagans of Britain would next celebrate the turning of the wheel (Beltane). Modern Pagans observe the moment of the Vernal Equinox as an important marker in time and its ritualistic significance has come to these islands from Europe: it has bought another, slightly later, moment of celebration with it.

Easter:

The word Easter is derived from the Saxon festival of Eostre, a celebration of their fertility Goddess and a name closely associated with Eastre the Saxon word for spring. A Norse equivalent was the Goddess Eastre, who's symbols were the hare and the egg<sup>32</sup>.

As Carlson writes, 'In the Mediterranean region, there was a pre-Christian spring celebration centred around the vernal equinox (March 20 or 21) that honoured Cybele, the Phrygian goddess of fertility. Cybele's consort, Attis, was considered born of a virgin and was believed to have died and been resurrected three days later. Attis derived his mythology from even earlier gods, Osiris, Dionysus, and Orpheus, who also were supposed to have been born of a virgin and suffered death and resurrection as long as 500 years before Christ was born. The death of Attis was commemorated on a Friday and the resurrection was celebrated three days later on Sunday.

There are other Easter traditions that are pagan in origin. The Easter sunrise service is derived from the ancient pagan practice of welcoming the Sun on the morning of the spring equinox, marking the beginning of spring. What we now call *Easter lilies* were revered by the ancients as symbols of fertility and representative of the male genitalia. The ancient Babylonian religions had rituals involving dyed eggs as did the ancient Egyptians.

The Christian version of Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. Modern day neo-pagans usually have their spring celebrations on the day of the equinox. Either way, these celebrations have gone on every year continuously for over 2500 years<sup>33</sup>.

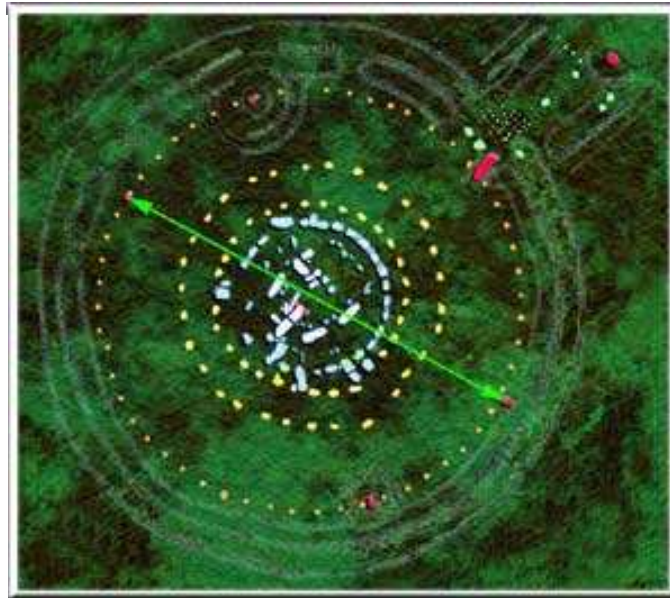
Some Christian scholars strongly dispute the implications of their most holy days being founded upon the ancient rites of Pagan worship<sup>34</sup>, and yet even in the green belt news it is stated: 'Nevertheless, though many Christian calendar customs may be parallel to, rather than derived from, similar Pagan customs, it is fascinating to see the many points of intersection between the religions. Modern Christians look upon the Pagan roots of the Christian calendar in various manners. Some Christians are eager to explore the interfaith aspects of the Christian calendar, while others acknowledge the Pagan heritage but stress the uniqueness of Christianity. Still others see these Pagan roots as reason enough not to celebrate such days as Christmas. Yet the process of Christianizing Paganism started in New Testament times; if Christianity had not adopted customs similar to Pagan ones, it would still be a Jewish sect.'

Frazer goes to great lengths to illustrate how the tradition which placed the death of Christ on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March was ancient and deeply rooted<sup>35</sup> and that all of the Christian festivals have Pagan origins that have their roots in Astronomy and its various systems of attributing symbolic meanings:- Natural and Judicial Astrology.

In the cycle of the year in Britain at this time partners have been chosen and the man has given his lady a ritually charged and decorously painted egg as a potent symbol of fertility (Sun transits through the Zodiacal sign of Aries, the sign of new beginnings<sup>36</sup>). The next stage of our cycle works to bring the abundant fertility of the nature around us and within us to life.

Beltane:

The second of the year's Greater Sabbats is often one of the most widely known and popular. Beltane is known as a fire festival and in the earliest Celtic calendar of the British Isles was the beginning of the first of the only two seasons of the year: the season of summer, with Samhain marking the beginning of winter<sup>37</sup>. We have already found that within Pagan circles the timing of the festivals can often be disputed. We know that Stonehenge has stones that are aligned to the Sunsets on the days of the 'Quarter festivals' (another term used for the Greater Sabbats)<sup>38</sup>.



The Quarter Festival Alignments at Stonehenge

*'Professor Norman Lockyear demonstrated that alignment 14, stone 93 - centre - stone 91, indicates sunset on May 6th, sunset on August 8th, sunrise on February 5th and sunrise on November 8th. These dates, called 'quarter' days, fall centrally into the equinox /solstice pattern to divide the year into eight almost equal parts'.*

These dates fall midway between the solstice and equinox points in the year. We can look more symbolically at the correlation of the phases of the Moon's cycle with the Sun's cycle, as shown previously (at Beltane the Sun transits through the Zodiacal sign of Taurus and is at the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter phase though it's cycle - meaning that it is the time of Beltane when the

Moon is also first quarter while the Sun moves through Taurus - the sign of nature, growth and sensuality<sup>39</sup>). We can know it is the time of Beltane only when the whitethorn blooms<sup>40</sup>, or we can follow the Morris Men who still traditionally dance<sup>41</sup> and 'beat the bounds' on the old Julian which is now called May 13<sup>th</sup>. The contemporary calendar date, and the idea of a fixed date put forward in most modern books on Paganism and Witchcraft is May the 1st<sup>42</sup>.

Contemporary society and its revolving numerical calendar of set dates for seasonal changes do not allow for the fluctuation of the seasons in nature and so it will be interesting to note in the coming interviews how people time the dates of the Greater Sabbats, or even to note if there is a value set upon their timings as there was when Pagans would celebrate Samhain on the night when the veil between the worlds is down<sup>43</sup> - a very specific moment upon which communion with those *no longer here in life* may rest. This would mean the timing is very important and knowing the seasons are conducted from the symphony of the relationship between the sun, the moon and the Earth once more points to Astronomical observations with Judicial Astrology providing the sense of meaning and interpretation.

Beltane then is essentially a time of merry feasting and merry love making. A part of the rite at Beltane would be the moment when couples go into the woods and the forest to joyously embody and bring together the symbolic meeting of the Moon (feminine Goddess archetype) and the Spirit of the Green Wood (masculine, God archetype)<sup>44</sup>. After these 'greenwood marriages' were social activities such as beating the bounds (re-consecrating the territory of the village) and dancing around a May-pole. The May pole represented a huge phallic around which young people would dance: females in one direction and males in the other to 'weave the spell' and ensure the night's success. Outraged with 'pious horror Parliament made maypoles illegal in 1644, but they came back with the Restoration: in 1661 a 134-foot maypole was erected in The Strand'<sup>45</sup>.

The Summer Solstice:

The summer solstice occurs when the Sun transits to 0 degrees of Cancer. At that moment the hours of daylight reach their peak - and now also begin their descent. Symbolically the Sun-God has reached the peak of his power, and now must begin the time of decline. The tide of the year is turning and the 'results' of the 'greenwood marriage' will be known.

Another mythic image layered onto the Pagan/Celtic wheel of the year is that of the cycle of the Oak king and the Holly king. The Oak king is a representation of the God of the waxing part of the year and the holly king is then the God of the waning year<sup>46</sup>. Robert Graves writes in *The White Goddess*, 'In *Sir Gawain's Marriage*, a Robin Hood ballad, King Arthur, who there has a seat at Carlisle, says:

*- as I came over a moor,*

*I see a lady where she sate*

*Between an Oak and a green hollen*

*She was clad in red scarlet.*

This lady, whose name is not mentioned, will have been the Goddess Creiddylad for whom, in Welsh myth, the Oak Knight and the Holly Knight fought every first of May till Doomsday. Since in mediaeval practice St. John the Baptist, who lost his head on St. John's Day (June 24<sup>th</sup> - just after the Midsummer Solstice), took over the Oak King's titles and customs, it was natural to let Jesus, as John's merciful successor, take over the Holly King's. The Holly was thus glorified beyond the Oak. For example, in the Holly-tree carol:

*Of all the trees that are in the wood*

*The Holly wears the crown'<sup>47</sup>*

Lughnasadh:

It is Lughnasadh. The Sun is transiting through the Zodiac sign of Leo - a sign of flamboyant creativity and power. Leo is a sign also of drama, humility and leadership<sup>48</sup>: the days are long and full of sunshine and the bright fields are displaying their prowess in the rippling sea of corn, wheat and barley. It is at Lughnasadh that we begin to encounter the first signs of the waning of the year. In the woodland groves the nettles have lost their lustre and the last of the chicks are now learning to fly. 'Now is the time for us to review all things - that which is to remain, and that which must be pruned away, for the goodness of growth in all things: in plants and in ourselves' declares Buckland in *The Tree*<sup>49</sup>. Lugh is a God of light, of Fire and in the mating cycle we have followed is both a celebration and sadness.

The celebration comes from the time now being that of initiating the harvest. The Saxon word for Lughnasadh is *hlaf-mas*, or loaf-mas and ritual would be carried out at this time to ensure a fine harvest for the people. The sadness comes from the signs of change in the wheel of the year now becoming obviously noticeable. Now the thoughts are of a more distant future - the year to come. If a woman is not happy with 'the results' that have arisen from the greenwood marriages then at this time she can symbolically 'kill off' the partnership and try another partner for a short time, on a trial basis until Candlemas on the opposite side of the year's wheel.

'Tailtean marriages, trial marriages which could be dissolved after a year and a day by the couple returning to the place where the union was celebrated and walking away from each other to north and south were traditionally held at this time. The Tallitean Games were originally funeral-games, held in honour the sacrificed Lugh.<sup>50</sup> The harvest has begun and our partnership is either brimming with pride at the creative prowess or we might find the woman (Goddess in the mythical cycle) pointing the finger of blame and sense the wheel has turned our rising fortunes to that moment of ripeness where now is the end<sup>51</sup>.

The Autumnal Equinox:

At the Autumn Equinox the hours of daylight once more balance with those of darkness. The harvest is now gathered in and yet the Sun is still with us<sup>52</sup>.

This time of balance is a time of stillness, a fleeting moment in which it seems we can enjoy the sun while enjoying the fruits of our labours. But the mythical sacrifice has been made and the wheel of the year now turns the weather towards the oncoming chill of winter<sup>53</sup>.

A Christianisation of this Pagan festival was to rename the day as St. Mathew's Day:

*St. Mathew, get candle new,  
St. Mathew brings the cold rain and dew,  
But St. Mathew's Day, bright and clear,  
Brings good wine in next year<sup>54</sup>*

The image associated with this time (Sun transits to 0 degrees of Libra, the Scales) serves to remind us that the scales of the balance now tipping towards the waning of the light and gathering darkness will, like all scales, once more return to their point of equilibrium, bringing the waxing light of the growing Sun with them next year.

As the High Priestess proclaims in a Lammas ritual from the Farrar's *The Witches Bible*:

*Farewell O Sun, ever-returning light  
The hidden God, who yet ever remains.  
He who now departs to the land of Youth  
Through the gates of Death  
To dwell enthroned, the judge of Gods and men,  
The horned leader of the hosts of air.  
Yet, as he stands unseen without circle,  
So dewlleteth he within the secret seed -  
The seed of new-reaped grain, the seed of flesh:  
Hidden in the Earth, the marvellous seed of the stars.  
In him is life, and life is the light of man,  
That which was never borne, and never dies,  
Therefore the Wise Ones weep not, but rejoice.<sup>55</sup>*

Samhain:

We now come to the last of the Greater Sabbats in this cycle of the Pagan year. Samhain, a fire festival, is celebrated when the Sun transits the Zodiacal sign of Scorpio: a sign of mystery, transformation, transcendence, and death.

Samhain is the dark counterpart of Beltane which greets each summer. For the Celts this marked the beginning of their new year and Samhain was their new year's eve'. For these pastoralists only the minimum of breeding-stock were kept alive and the rest were slaughtered and salted. In nature the woodlands would take on the appearance of death: birds, animals and fish would either migrate or remain hidden in hibernation: the woodlands *looked* dead, but in fact were teeming with life underground - the *Spirit of the Wood* has descended into the underworld.

This turning point of the year, after all the year's work was finally done is the time when a feast can be held with all of the Gods and Goddesses - a feast on All Hallows eve'. It is said that on this night, and only this night, the veil between this world and the realm of the spirit 'is down'. Communications and visitations from ourselves to that realm, and from that realm to our world can be more easily achieved. This, then, is the night of the dead, the night when a feast can be held with absent friends and a communication can be made with those who have already passed from this world: the feast of the dead.

Symbolically, in our wheel of the year, if the mating of Beltane has not been declared successful at Lughnasadh then at this time he may well find himself rejected. If the mating has been successful then he may still be rejected for other reasons - to make sure the new pregnancy is kept as safe as can be, for example. He is now King no more and either symbolically, or as in some rare cases literally, he who was once King will now lose his head: the origin of the *Jack O' Lantern*.

The Farrars write, 'Samhain, like all other Pagan festivals, was so deeply rooted in popular tradition that Christianity had to try to take it over. The aspect of communion with the dead, and with other spirits, was Christianized as All Hallows, or All Saint's Day, and moved from its original date of May 13<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> November, and extended to the whole church by Pope Gregory IV in 834. But its Pagan overtones remained uncomfortably alive, and in England the reformation abolished All Hallows. It was not formally restored by the Church of England until 1928, 'On the assumption that the old Pagan associations of Hallowe'en were at last really dead and forgotten: a supposition that was certainly premature'.

'So Samhain was on the one hand a time of propitiation, divination and communion with the dead, and on the other, an uninhibited feast of eating, drinking and the defiant affirmation of life and fertility in the very face of the closing dark.

Propitiation, in the old days when survival was felt to depend on it, was a grim and serious affair. There can be little doubt that at one time it involved human sacrifice - of criminals saved up for the purpose, or, at the other end of the scale, an aging King: little doubt also that these deaths were by fire.

Later, of course, the propitiatory sacrifice became symbolic, and English children still unwittingly enact this symbolism on Guy Fawkes Night, which has taken over from the Samhain bonfire. It is interesting that, as the failed assassin of a king the burned Guy is in a sense the King's substitute.<sup>56</sup>

**Yule:**

The Winter Solstice occurs when the Sun transits to 0 degrees of Capricorn on the ecliptic. At that moment the hours of daylight reach their nadir - and now also begin their ascent. Symbolically the Sun-God has reached the weakest point of his peak of his power, and now must begin the time rejuvenation and ascend to the majesty that he claims at midsummer. The tide of the year is turning and now the days grow slowly and progressively lighter and warmer.

At Yule the Holly King passes his crown to the oak King, and a log of Oak is kindled to bring protection, abundance and fertility to the new Solar year.

In the Witches Bible we find, 'The Christmas nativity story is the Christian version of the theme of the Sun's rebirth, for Christ is the Sun-God of the Piscean Age. The birthday of Jesus is undated in the gospels, and it was not until 273 CE that the church took the symbolically sensible step of fixing it officially at Midwinter, to bring it in line with the other Sun-Gods such as the Persian Mithris, also born at the Winter Solstice.

As St. Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople a century later, explained with commendable frankness, the nativity of 'the Sun of Righteousness' had been so fixed that 'while the heathen were busied with their profane rites, the Christians might perform their holy ones without disturbance'.

'Profane' or 'holy' depended on your viewpoint, because basically both were celebrating the same thing - the turning of the year's tide from darkness towards light. <sup>57</sup>

Christmas, or, The Saturnalia:

There is a great deal of written work available on the Pagan origins of Christmas and the Roman festival of the Saturnalia. Among the most informative are the following:

A.R. Chowdry writes, "The pomp and hilarity which is attached to the annual celebration of Christmas Day is well known all over the world. It is considered by the young and old as the biggest holiday which is brimful of gaiety and merry-making in the Christian world. Illuminations and decorations on an extensive scale are seen in every street and every house. The elaborately lit trees are a sight of pleasure and beauty for many.

Though the celebration of the Winter Solstice dates from thousands of years before Christ and was once celebrated with rites which had nothing to do with Christianity, a new significance was given to the ancient festival when the Church decided, in the earliest days of Christianity, to celebrate the birth of Christ on a date that ancient usage had made already one of universal respect<sup>581</sup>.

From Gary Turner we find, "As we have seen, the countries of the Roman Empire had a special winter solstice holiday on December 25th called "Saturnalia". During Saturnalia, no-one worked except cooks and bakers. It was decreed that, "Soldiers must lay down their weapons. All men shall be equal - slave and free, rich and poor, one with another".

People indulged in much eating, drinking and revelry, even to the point of masked revelling (masquerades) and riots on the streets! With cries of "Jo Saturnalia!" the celebration would include big festive meals, visiting friends with good wishes for the coming year, and the exchange of good-luck gifts called Strenae (lucky fruits). Friends also exchanged wreaths made of laurel leaves, the Roman symbol of victory and honour. Peoples sometimes carried small trees trimmed with candles to welcome the sun's return. Buildings were decorated with evergreens, symbols of everlasting sunlight. The Romans decked their halls with garlands of laurel and green trees lit with candles. As in the Persian festival of Sacaea, the masters and slaves would exchange places, with the slaves being free to attend the festival in their masters' clothing.

The Calends of January, the Roman's New Year festival, lasted from January 1st-3rd. This is when Roman officials were sworn into office. Between Saturnalia and Calends, they made one continuous festival.

Saturnalia was a fun and festive time for the Romans, but the Christians thought that Saturnalia was an abomination in homage to a disreputable god who had no existence. The early Christians wanted to keep the birthday of their Christ a solemn and religious holiday, not one of cheer and merriment as was the pagan Saturnalia. The Christians were now dedicated to the slow task of converting the pagan Romans.

The early church had to confront these pagan religions and they needed to overcome the beliefs these religions had cultivated in the people's minds. Tragically, religion to these people meant festivals, ceremonies, rites, revelries, the making of artifacts with religious connotations and such like.

However, the early church was free of all these things. Christianity did not look like "religion" to them. In reality, they considered Christianity as another form of atheism! The early Christians did not observe any type of annual celebration to commemorate the birth of Jesus. In fact, during its first 300 years, the Church in Rome strongly discouraged any type of such "pagan" rituals. Prior to the 3rd Century AD, there is little documentation supporting the celebration of Christmas amongst early church participants. However, some traditions say that Christ's birth has been celebrated by some since as far back as the year AD 98!

Early Christian holidays were called feast days. In AD 137, Pope Hyginus ordered the birthday of Christ celebrated as a solemn and holy feast. It became known as the "Feast of the Nativity". The word "Nativity" comes from the Latin word "Natalis", meaning "birthday". A special church service called a Mass was celebrated to honour the Nativity. This newly introduced festival slowly spread throughout the Roman Empire from the mid-2nd Century AD. As the Christian religion continued to grow strong, many Christians began to observe Christ's birthday. Since no one knew when His birthday was, some people celebrated it in the spring and others in the winter.

In the third century, many local assemblies began to commemorate this event each year on January 6th. Initially, this day was set aside to recognize the Epiphany of Christ, or His divine manifestation to the Magi or "wise men" (Matthew 2:1). Later, the celebration also included His birth.

There were many immigrants into the ranks of the Church by this time, but the Church Fathers discovered that they were facing an invasion of pagan customs. Christianity and Paganism began contending, and, for a while, Mithraism was Christianity's greatest contender. But how was the

church to convert the pagans with their December 25th sun-worship festival? It became the policy of the church to "transform" pagan festivals wherever possible instead of trying to abolish them and give the ancient practices a "Christian" significance. It was definitely a clever trick, and the Church was eventually successful in taking the merriment, lights and gifts from the Saturnalia festival and bringing them to the celebration of Christmas.

However, as the Church went about the business of converting the Romans to Christianity, a problem arose. As Christianity spread, the Christians were increasingly tempted to be like those around them, and many of the new converts continued to observe some of the traditional Roman celebrations which were so familiar to them.

In order to appeal to the people, in the hope of winning them to Christianity, one by one of the pagan practices were adopted by the church!

The church historian Mosheim wrote concerning this problem: "The Pagans had been accustomed to numerous and splendid ceremonies from their infancy, and when they saw the new religion to be destitute of such ceremonies, they thought it too simple. The Christians were pronounced atheists, because they were destitute of temples, altars, victims, priests and all the pomp which the Pagans supposed to be the essence of religion; for the unenlightened persons are prone to estimate religion by what meets their eyes. To silence this accusation, the Christian leaders thought they must introduce some of the rites and ceremonies which would strike the senses of the people."

The Church was alarmed by the continuing celebration of pagan customs and Saturnalia among their converts. At first, the Church forbade this kind of celebration, but it was to no avail. Pagan midwinter festivals remained popular centuries after Christ was born. Eventually it was decided that the celebration would be tamed and made into a celebration fit for the Christian Son of God.

Tertullian (a "Church Father") in about 230 AD lamented over all this. He wrote: "By us, who are strangers to Sabbaths, and new moons, and festivals, once acceptable to God, the Saturnalia, the feasts of January, the Brumalia, and Matronalia, are now frequented; gifts are carried to and fro... Oh, how much faithful are the heathen to their religion, who take special care to adopt no solemnity from the Christians."

With so many members of the Church celebrating this pagan Roman holiday, some Christians sought to legitimise the celebration by designating December 25th as the birthday of Christ. This would allow the Christians to celebrate this time of year along with the rest of the population, only now with the blessing of the Church. By choosing December 25th, the Church grasped the opportunity to turn the people away from a purely pagan observance to a day of adoration of Christ the Lord.

The Romans' antiquated and idolatrous pagan holiday looked to excite its believers by celebrating the winter solstice, whereby "light" (that which is good) would have its eventual victory over temporal "darkness" (or evil). The church quickly upstaged the pagan festival commemorating the struggle between "light" and "darkness" by appropriately (and perhaps, divinely) applying Malachi's prophecy regarding the true "Sun of Righteousness" (Mal. 4:2) to the December 25th event: for, in God's Son, the real "Light" (John 8:12) defeats darkness forever more. The birth of Christ as the "Light of the World" was thus linked to the rebirth of the sun. The Church Fathers sought to point the pagan festival's sun worshippers towards Christ as the "Sun of Righteousness", and so drawing away the adorers of the god whose symbol and representative was the earthly sun. If this could be done then the festival in its turn must of necessity grow worthy of Him it celebrated. The Church, in choosing December 25th to celebrate the birthday of Christ, would persuade the followers of Mithras and Saturn to forsake them and turn to Christ.

An early Roman calendar from AD 336 is the first time that December 25th is mentioned as the date for celebrating Christ's birth.

Eventually, December 25th was selected as the official day of commemoration for the Nativity, as the church looked to replace the older December 25th celebration of the Roman pagan sun god, "Sol Invictus". In AD 350, Pope Julius I declared December 25th as the birthday of the Son of God. However, Eastern churches disagreed with this date, and kept their celebrations on January 6th. The Armenians celebrate it on that date even now!

Churchmen hoped that, by celebrating on December 25th, the pagan customs would be forgotten and everyone would just celebrate Christ's birthday instead. When the Church found it impossible through repeated bans to abolish all pagan customs, it "Christianized" a number of them, divesting them of their worst features, and finally incorporated them into the Christian observance of Christmas.

The Church, by making the pagan festival also the Feast of the Nativity, had "sanctified" it, and thus, as Christianity gained ground, slowly but surely changed its ancient worship of the material sun into that of the true Light of the World. The Church had finally succeeded in taking the merriment, the greenery, the lights, and the gifts from Saturn and giving them to the babe of Bethlehem.

One of the earliest mentions of a special feast for the Nativity on the December 25th is in the early church calendar compiled by Furius Dionisius Philocalus in the year AD 354 (although this does refer back to the earlier Roman calendar from AD 336). However, in AD 388, St. Chrysostom wrote that the observing of the festival of the Nativity on December 25th was not yet ten years old!

Church leaders made the four-week period before Christmas a time to pray and prepare for the coming holy festival. They called it "Advent", which means "coming". In addition, so that the new festival should not be lacking in splendour and appeal, the days between December 25th and January 6th, i.e. the days between Saturnalia and the Calends of January, were caught up into one "holy" season, with the birth of Jesus at the beginning and the coming of the Magi (or wise men) to visit the Christ Child at the end. The days between Christmas and Epiphany (which is Greek for "appearance") became known as the "Twelve Days of Christmas".

The practice of celebrating the Nativity on December 25th soon spread to Antioch in AD 375, Constantinople (Istanbul) in AD 380, Alexandria in AD 430 and Jerusalem in AD 450. By the 5th and 6th Centuries, the Nativity was well on its way to being an established holy day for Christians across the Western world.

The Twelve Days of Christmas became a time of continuous rejoicing. In medieval England, for example, each town or village appointed a man to lead all the entertainment. The "Lord of Misrule" had a group of helpers called jesters. Twelfth Night brought the holiday season to a close. Most families had a Twelfth-Night cake to honour the wise men.

Incidentally, the word "Christmas" came into use through the English medieval custom of celebrating mass at midnight on Christmas Eve, the only time in the year when this was permitted. Because of the opposition to the traces of paganism surviving in the Christmas customs, the church created special masses to be performed at midnight, daybreak and morning. Hence, the word "Christmas" ("Christ's Mass").<sup>59</sup>

The combined cycle of festivals we get if we view both the Pagan and Christian based cultures together run in parallel with each other:

Imbolg / St. Valentines Day

Spring Equinox

Eostre / Easter

Beltane / May Day

Summer Solstice / St. John's Day

Lughnasadh / Lammas / Harvest festival

Autumnal Equinox / St. Mathew's Day

Samhain / All Hallows Eve / Hallowe'en, All Saints Day.

Samhain / Guy Fawkes Night

Yule / Winter Solstice

Saturnalia / Christmas

We have established that the origins of the above festivals are rooted in Astronomy, and the symbolic perceptions of astronomical phenomena that take the forms of either Natural Astrology or Judicial Astrology.

Now we can address the question, 'Does the celebration of the contemporary Christian cycle of the year in have its roots Astronomy and Astrology ?'

We can conclude the answer to the question above is yes and we can go onto say that, **'The basis of the structure of our Pagan, Christian and cultural year is founded on Astronomy, Natural Astrology and Judicial Astrology'**

We will now move on to the next part of the essay.

Part two:

Avebury in Wiltshire is rather unique. It is, on the one hand a quiet rural village with a population numbering only hundreds – and it is also a world heritage site. A vast stone circle with ramparts and connections to other major archaeological sites that splay out across the surrounding downs in every direction.



Is Avebury a meeting ground where two apparently diverse expressions of modern culture meet and possibly clash ?

Do people travel to Avebury to celebrate any of the festivals we have explored ?

Do the residents of Avebury welcome their Pagan visitors ?

Do the residents themselves follow any of the contemporary festivals ?

Are the Pagans who come to Avebury aware of the Astronomical or Astrological roots of their seasonal festivals ?

Are the more Christian residents aware of the Astronomy or Astrology behind the cycle of festivities they may follow ?

To answer these questions 16 significantly placed people were approached and agreed to take part in the investigation.

Some of those approached requested their names remain anonymous and this has been respected. When any references are given to people being either 'Pagan' or 'Christian' please refer to the definitions given at the beginning of the essay.

The people approached were:

- ☯ Vicar of the Parish of Avebury
- ☯ a local Druid Priest
- ☯ A person local to Avebury, Pagan in nature
- ☯ Administrator for Avebury CE Primary School
- ☯ David Taylor - Press Officer for Wiltshire Police
- ☯ An Avebury Shopkeeper .1
- ☯ An Avebury Shopkeeper .2
- ☯ A person local to Avebury, Pagan in nature
- ☯ Manager of the Red Lion Public House, Avebury
- ☯ Tourist Information Centre worker
- ☯ Nearby Public House Landlady
- ☯ National Trust Visitor Centre Manager
- ☯ Avebury visitor, Pagan in nature
- ☯ A Pagan family man – resident of Avebury
- ☯ A Christian housewife and business lady - resident of Avebury
- ☯ A family with no overall persuasions and yet with teenage daughters with Pagan sympathies - residents of Avebury

In the first instance I undertook the task of determining whether or not there are significant increases in the numbers of visitors to Avebury at any times that match with the eight Pagan festivals.

The results were conclusive and we shall first look to a CILT report. CILT are The Centre for Independent Transport research in London.

In a report dated 9<sup>th</sup> October 1999 Chris Wood states, 'Travel in relation to religious functions and sacred places is a neglected part of transport policy and environmental study. Likewise, the impact of transport on people's spiritual health is a generally ignored element of sustainable development'. The report covers transport and access issues for all religions and targets, quite specifically, the 'nihilistic invasion of Summer Solstice ceremonies at Stonehenge this year by ravers and New Age (fellow?) travellers'<sup>60</sup>.

David Taylor - Press Officer for Wiltshire Police informed me:

'The vast numbers of people moving to, and from, Stonehenge (and then on to Avebury) are enough of a concern for Wiltshire Police that a dispensation for the event is taken into account in their annual planning. This event normally passes without notice except that in 2002 there were approximately 23,000 people attending Stonehenge and a great many of them moved on to Avebury afterwards for a few days until the Glastonbury festival began.

Of those revellers I'm certain we could say that out of 23,000 there were around 7000 who were there because they were genuinely interested in the stellar event. In Avebury the numbers of in the dedicated who attend all Solstices (we have to assume he might also mean Equinoxes here, and maybe the Greater Sabbats) would be hundreds rather than thousands.

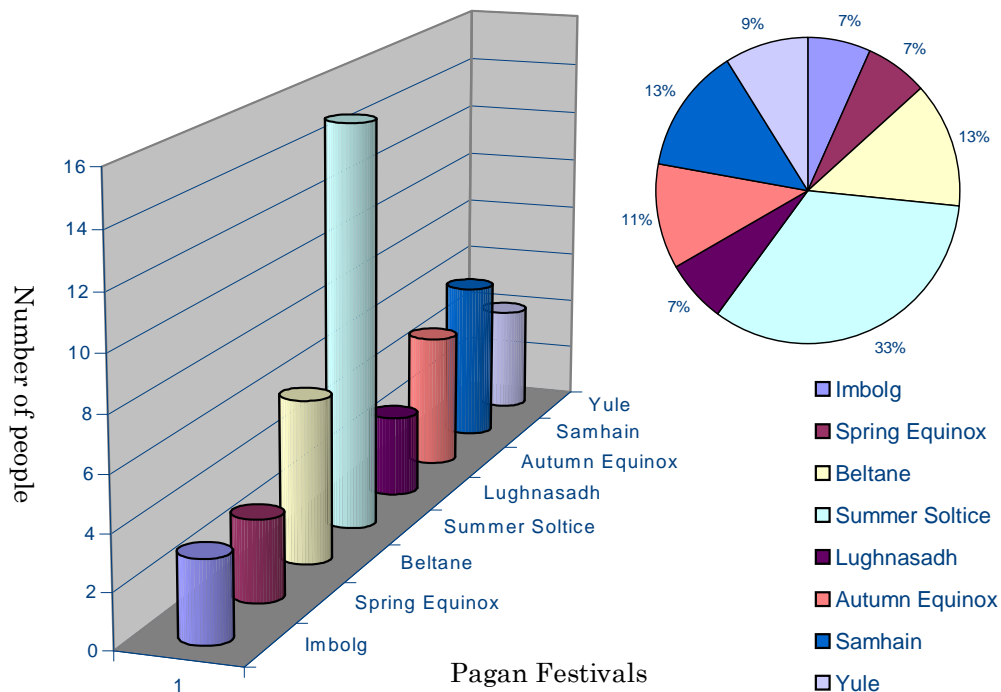
There is a little disruption in the local area at this time: certain roads are closed and parking has to be arranged, although there is no discernable increase in local crime at this time and we do place additional officers in Avebury'.

It soon became obvious that people travelling for the Solstice was the event that caused the most disruption out of any of the festivals in the local area and had the most followers attending.

Thousands of people descending on a small rural community because of the timing of an Astronomical event indicates that a high degree of importance must be placed upon that event for these people. This brings the concept of the Solstice once more into the realm of Natural Astrology.

Out of all the people interviewed the Summer Solstice seems to be a disproportionately popular festival:

**Which of the following Pagan festivals bring more people to Avebury ?**



This shows that Solstice brings in a noticeable 30% more people than any of the other Pagan festivals.

For a reason not entirely understood by any of those interviewed it is certainly the case that large numbers of people have latched onto the Summer Solstice as some form of event that is not necessarily connected to Astronomy in their understanding of the moment.

To quote David Taylor - Press Officer for Wiltshire Police once more, 'Once a month I attend meetings with The Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Stonehenge that includes a diverse range of attendees, and I have had many discussions with the Druid Priests at the Solstice inside Stonehenge itself and even they are sometimes dismayed at the antics of the revellers who latch on to their sacred and special festival. In fact, most of these revellers don't even know when the Solstice is. Most of them think its when the Sun rises in the morning, they all give a whoop and a big shout, but really, the Solstice moment (the Sun moving to 0 degrees of Cancer) can happen anytime on that day - even in the afternoon'.

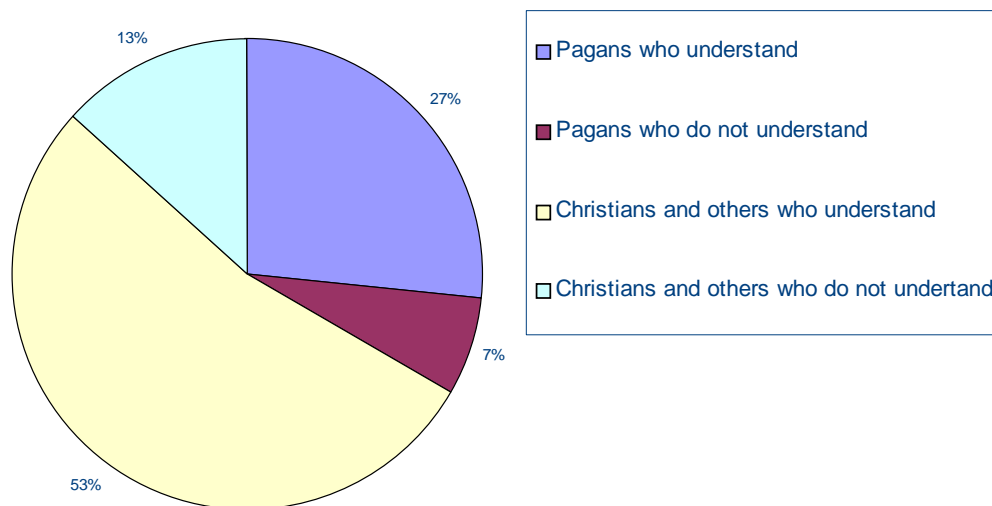
This is a very interesting point. It would seem 'the event is now the event, ' rather than the Astronomy, or Natural Astrology of the significance of that moment.

In fact, even some of those with Pagan leanings who make a deliberate decision to travel to Avebury at this, and other times, were unaware of the Astronomy of the moment - or its deeper implications.

The police are well informed of the Astronomy, as are the Druid Priests such as Philip Shallcrass, the Vicar Warren Sellers to name a few.

The investigation found:

Percentage of those who understand the Astronomy of the Solstice

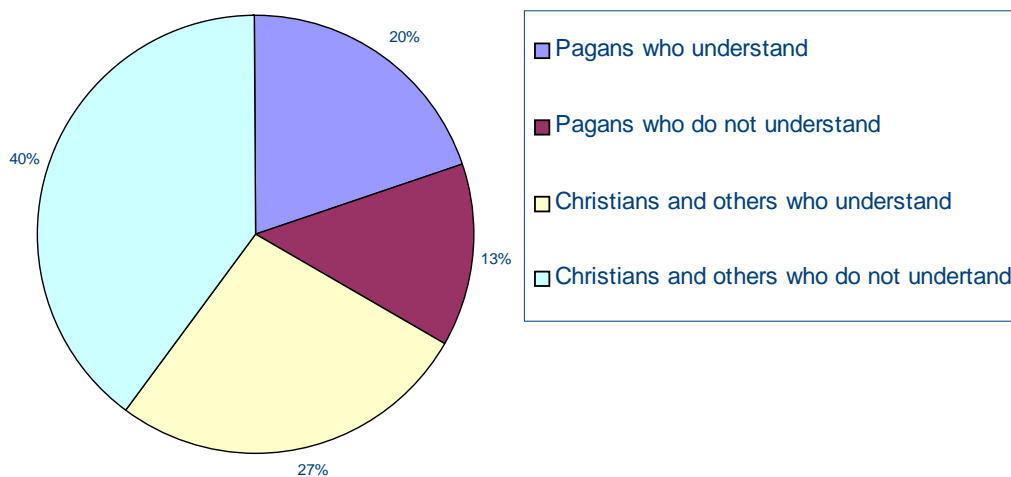


It was a surprise to find that comparing the Christians and the Pagans in percentage terms more Christians understand the Astronomy of the Solstice than the pagans do.

Does this reveal a general knowledge of Astronomy among Christians ?

To find out the question was asked, 'Do you know why the date for Easter keeps changing ?'

Percentage of those interviewed who understand the Astronomical basis for the changing date of Easter



Interestingly, more Pagans understand the Astronomical basis of Easter than the Christians do of their own festival. Two residents of the village explained they thought it would be 'something to do with the dates for setting the school terms', and others were very uncertain. Only the Vicar, Avebury Shopkeeper.<sup>2</sup> and the Pagan family man were able to explain the Astronomy in any detail.

All of those resident in the village said they welcome the Pagan worshipers except Avebury Shopkeeper.<sup>1</sup> who had voiced some resentments. The landlady of the Public House just outside the village also had misgivings about late night drumming, indiscriminate dumping of litter and so forth.

The people who cause such disruption and, for some residents, a high degree of intimidation were quickly separated from the Druids and Pagans who genuinely come into Avebury as a Temple.

The impact of the celebration of the Solstice goes beyond New Age Travellers, Hippies, Revellers and 'Hangers on' :

There is a marked increase in the numbers of people 'who look ordinary'. The landlady of a Public House only two miles outside of the village remarked that, 'We don't let any undesirables in here at all. The door is closed to them. Our income goes up right through from April to September (the general tourist season) and yet on the day of the Solstice it doubles. Quite literally, just through ordinary people coming to Avebury on that one day our takings are double the amount of a normal summer's day'.

This implies that the Solstice is something that draws more than just 'outcasts from society', that there is an appreciation for these ancient rites of worship among the general population.

What can it reveal about the impact of Astronomy and Astrology on the fabric of modern culture though ?

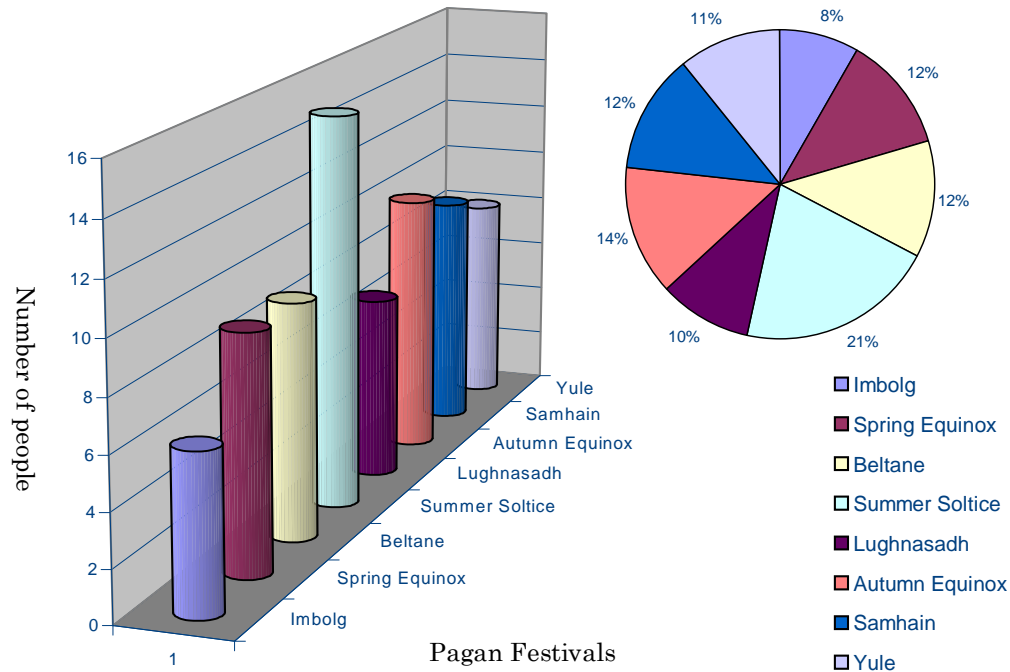
A family with no overall religious persuasions have three teenage daughters all with Pagan sympathies. They all agreed to talk to me in their kitchen and the entire family were aware of both the Pagan and Christian festivals. The father pointed out that Christmas isn't really Christian and I was told that Halloween and Guy Fawkes Night have now blended into one short 'season' of fireworks that start on October 31<sup>st</sup> and end on November the 5<sup>th</sup>. They were unaware of the history of the connection they had just made.

They were sure that the festivals, whatever their origin, have a serious impact on society as a whole: from certain industries revolving around these dates, to people having a general sense of 'where they are' in time.

Conversely the manager of the Red Lion Public House, Avebury, and the lady in the tourist information centre seemed to be unaffected, or unaware that there are any festivals other than the Solstice.

'How aware of the existence of any of the other festivals are the those interviewed ?

**Of the people interviewed there is an awareness of which Pagan festivals ?**



I was surprised to find that even lesser known festivals such as Imbolg (or Candlemas) were generally known to all of the people interviewed. The Solstice still stands out in people’s awareness, and yet, there is a sharing of collective knowledge taking place.

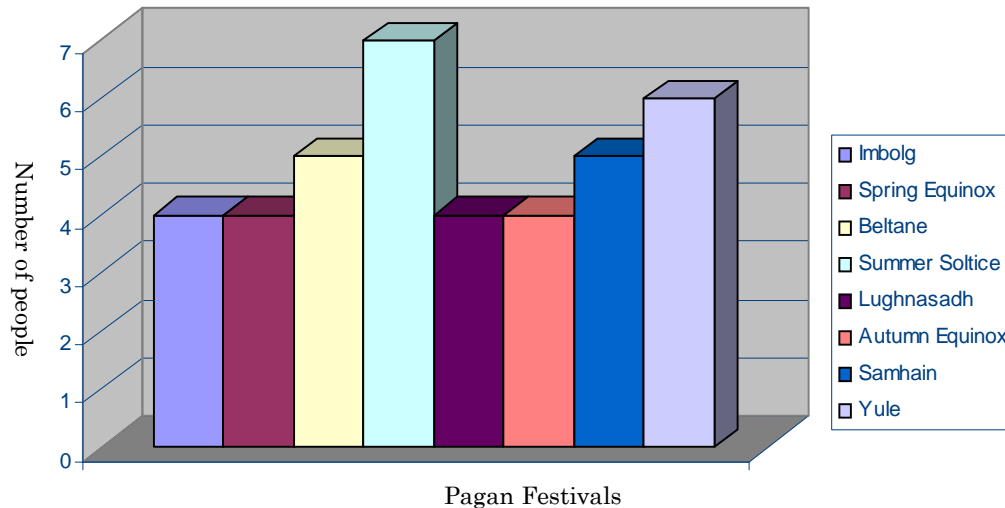
In some cases, such as with the administrator for Avebury CE Primary School there is, ‘A curiosity. I want to know what they (The Druids) do and what they believe. We see them from time to time in the summer among the stones performing what looks like very serious or important rituals. You don’t want to disturb people so you just try to watch without staring’.

In yet other cases, where there is more than a degree of interest, such as with Harvey Appleby a knowledge of the ‘summer’ festivals is considerable and yet the ‘winter’ festivals’ are barely observed. The solstice still stands out as being an important time, a point of high recognition.

Is that because of the sheer numbers of people who attach themselves to the event in our present day and boost the attendance ?

To what extent are the remaining seven festivals attended by those of a more Pagan disposition ?

Those who acknowledge and follow the pagan festivals of the Celtic Wheel of the Year



Interestingly the festivals considered to be the symbolic turning points of the year (Judicial Astrology) by the Celts, and the festivals that are the turning points of the year in Astronomical terms stand out above remaining festivals in equal measure, although only slightly.

There is a pattern of consistency here that reveals the maintenance of a cycle of worship and a dedication lived out through enacting specific rituals and observing the significance of certain times of the year.

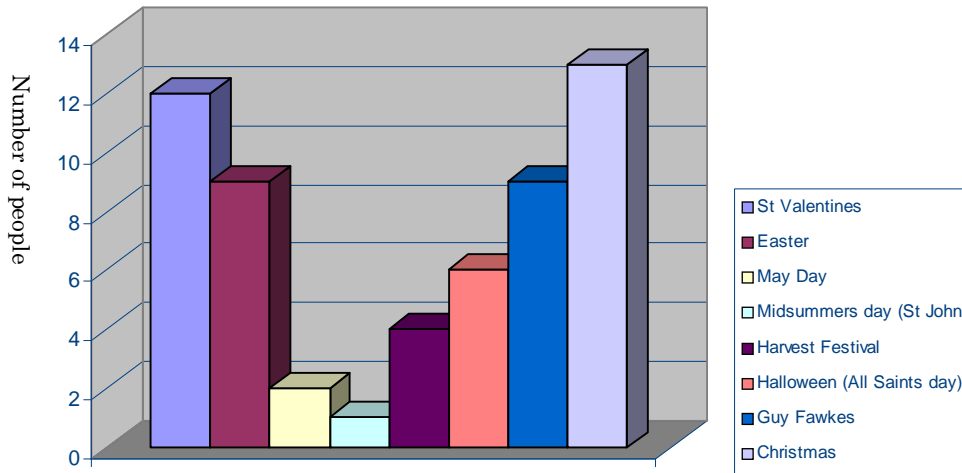
We have yet to determine if all of these festivals are believed to have an Astronomical or Astrological foundation by those with general Pagan leanings. For those who's lives are more involved with ancient Celtic pagan practices the relationship between the Earth, the Moon and the Sun with our ever changing seasons important and very relevant in their modern world.

A local Druid Priest reports, 'At the autumn equinox of 1995 I composed and conducted a complex ceremony for a multi-faith gathering in Avebury. This first rite, intended as a one-off, became a regular occurrence. At one point we were celebrating all of the eight festivals, with between a hundred and four hundred assorted witches, Druids, non-aligned pagans, Christians, Buddhists, Ba'hai and others. The eight festivals mark turning

points within the wheel of the year, when the character of the year or season shifts. Each festival has its own characteristics and significance’.

Will we find the same seasonal pattern in the more Christian year of worship ?

People who acknowledge and follow the festivals of the contemporary Christian calendar



Contemporary Christian Festivals

Here the picture looks quite different. There are defined peaks with midsummer’s day and May day being the most un-observed times of the year. The time for re-affirming a relationship, or casting a new one is very popular along with the festival of gifts and making merry at the end of the year. It might be interesting to follow up this essay in order to discover the reasons for Guy Fawkes Night being as popular as Easter, and Halloween more popular than the harvest festival. Is there a reason beyond the assumption that the times here that have peaked are also the times given most attention by the media and retail industries ?

The second shopkeeper in our snap-shot survey passed on the observation that, ‘There are people who always arrive here for the festivals in all weathers and every season. A smaller percentage of the people, those who take it a little more seriously and those who haven’t got commitments are here every year for every festival. There are times when, to be honest the festivals are loosely organised and certain religion sects celebrate when it’s convenient, so any given festival can be celebrated for a period lasting two/three weeks. Samhain is different, because there is a specific date when the veil is down, so it’ll be a little more booked marked. Same with summer solstice and equinox’

Beltane too is a specific date (assuming here a reference to May 1<sup>st</sup>), you could argue that because of culture, people have to work and make adjustments to attend a festival day if they can. Because of work and our 9 to 5, five-days-a-week culture it's fairly rare that a festival practised on a specific day. For the most part people will come on the nearest weekend, so I suppose you could say this is a case of our modern culture imposing itself on people's desire to follow the Astronomy of the seasons.'

So, we have traced a path from Stonehenge to the Celtic Wheel of the year, to the importation of Solstices and equinoxes, Roman and Saxon feasts of fertility and indulgence. The Christianization of this ancient cycle and now we have it's commercialisation.

Are the people who benefit from these seasonal peaks in industry and commerce aware of the Astronomical timing and deeper meanings behind the dates of these landmarks in time ?

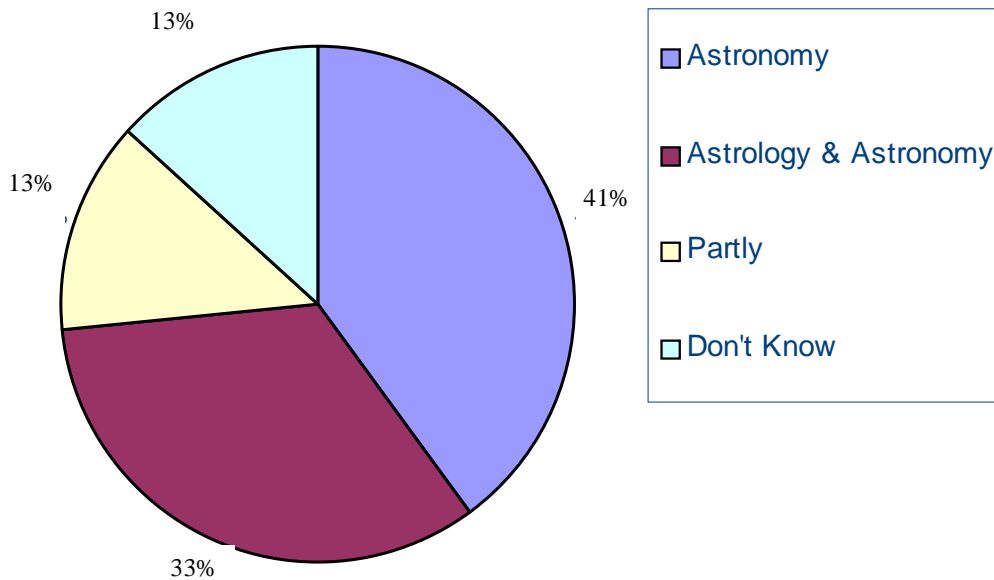
There have been questions raised at the constant moving of the date for Easter, and only those who live in the countryside or work with the land are really affected by the timing of the harvest.

Some of the people interviewed live in rural areas and some in medium sized towns. From their perspective is our seasonal time clock based on Astronomy ? or Astrology and Astronomy ? or neither ?

The Vicar of the Parish of Avebury, had this to say, 'Yes it seems everything is governed by Astronomy. Take the whether and the decisions we make every day, or the seasons and what we might do with a week off we might have. The Christian festivals too are based on Astronomy, it's the lunation cycles that have an effect'. I asked him if he considered that Astrology does have an impact on modern society and he unhappily confirmed that it does.

The following question was taken to all those we interviewed:

Is the common calendar of seasonal worship used by the diverse cultures the co-exist in modern Avebury based on Astronomy or Astrology ?



41% of all those interviewed consider our seasonal calendar to be based on Astronomy, while 33% assert that it is both Astronomy and Astrology that have forged the foundation of our annual feasts and celebrations.

In total this brings the impact of Astronomy on the lives of the residents and visitors to Avebury in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to 54% , in terms of their conscious awareness of the Astronomy that surrounds them and it's significance revealed through the models of Astrology.

These results reveal that Astrology and Astronomy have a high impact upon the contemporary culture of modern life in Avebury and this impact is often unconscious and subtle. We now know our contemporary culture is coloured and shaped by Astronomy and Astrology: from the changes in season to the archetypes and myths that provide us with an unconscious collective template upon which we find order and meaning and our place in our ever changing times.

A final question, for further investigation might now be, 'In what other areas of modern life is there a significant influence from Astrology and Astrology?'

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