

# Yule in Britain

01987, Tana Culain, .K.A.M.

## A Monthly Rune (Traditional)

<b>January</b>	By this fire I warm my hands
<b>February</b>	And with my spade I delve my lands
<b>March</b>	Here I set my seeds to spring
<b>April</b>	And here I hear the birds to sing
<b>May</b>	I am as light as bird in the tree-top
<b>June</b>	And I take pains to weed my crop
<b>July</b>	With my scythe my mead I mow
<b>August</b>	And here I shear my corn full low
<b>September</b>	With my flail I earn my bread
<b>October</b>	And here I sow my wheat so red (Winter wheat)
<b>November</b>	At Martinmas I kill my swine *
<b>December</b>	And at Yule I drink red wine

\* Martinmas, November 11, is a christianization of the Pagan Celtic Hallows when the herds were culled


**M**idwinter has long been a traditional time for celebration and merrymaking in Britain. All of the activities at midwinter were meant to ensure that the season would renew itself and the days would begin to grow longer again. Greenery was brought into decorate the house: evergreen to symbolize the promise of life to come even in the darkest winter; the mistletoe, believed to hold the life of the host tree even when the tree itself appeared to be dead in winter; and the holly and ivy, symbols of male and female, both of course necessary for new life. Carols, some of which survive to this day, such as the Gower Wassail, were sung. The earliest carols consisted of taking hands and singing while dancing in a ring or around a bush, **May** tree, or even an apple tree (as in the case of the Apple Tree Wassail, sung in hopes of a good crop of cider the following year).

The Wassail Carols in particular date back to the Viking invasions of England, about 700 A.D. , when the greeting was Ves **heill**. By Anglo-Saxon times, the greeting had evolved into Waes **thu hal**, meaning "be whole" or "good health". The response was "drink hail" , meaning "I drink and good luck be to you". People would travel from house to house in the village bringing good wishes and carrying an empty bowl. The master of the house being wassailed was expected to till the bowl with a hot spicy ale and then it would be passed around to the carolers.. . .

# Gower Wassail


from the Gower Peninsula of Wales  
(Traditional, freely arranged)

Am                      G                      F                      Em



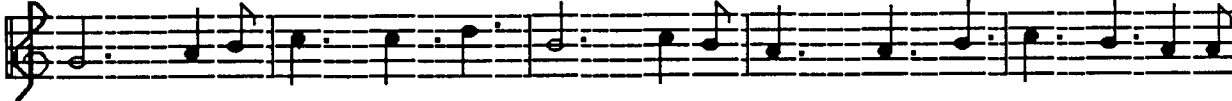
A        was- sail        a .        was- sail        through        out        all        this town.        Our

Am                      F                      C                      E7                      Am




cup it is white and our ale it is brown. Our was- sail is

G                      F                      Em                      Am                      F



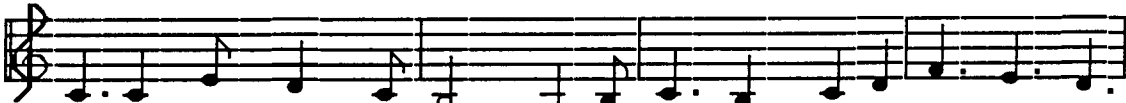
made of the good ale and true. **Some-** nut . meg and gin . ger its the

G                      E                      Am                      G




best we can brew. Fol . the . dol. fol the rol the dol, Fol the rol the

Am                      G                      Am                      F



dol, fol . the . rol . the dee. Fol the der . rol fol the dad- dy- sing

Em                      Am



too . re . lie . doe!

Our Wassail is made of the good Apple tree  
And so our good neighbor we'll drink unto thee  
Besides all of that you'll have apples in store  
So let us come in, for its cold by the door.

We hope that your apple trees prosper and bear  
So that we can have cider when we come next year  
And where you've one barrel we hope you'll have ten  
So we can have cider when we call again.

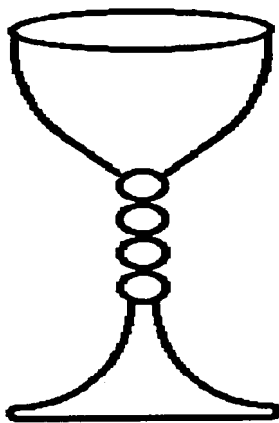
We know by the moon that we are not too soon  
And we know by the sky that we are not too high  
We know by the star that we are not too far  
We know by the ground that we are within sound.

## Yule (continued)

Midwinter was also a time for exchanging gifts and for feasting. Turkey only dates to the 1500's. Much more common were boar, geese, capons, swans, and pheasants. Minced pies were originally made with meat, and with the coming of spices to England during the Crusades, plum pudding became quite the traditional dish. Plum pudding makes a great dish for cakes and wine in the Yule circle, especially if you pour warmed brandy over it and set it afire before the blessing.

While I am writing about midwinter customs in Britain because our heritage in **K.A.M.** is largely Celtic in origin, the Isles do not have a monopoly on Yule. The Romans celebrated Saturnalia for seven days around the Solstice, and it was a time to look ahead and rejoice in the longer days to come. Slaves and masters switched places at table, and presents were exchanged. The Persian **Mithraists** held December 25th as sacred to the birth of their Sun God, Mithras, and celebrated it as a victory of light over darkness. And in Sweden, December 13th was sacred to the Goddess **Lucina**, Shining One, and was a celebration of the return of the light. On Yule itself, around the 21st, bonfires were lit to honor Odin and Thor.

Midwinter has always been a Pagan holiday, so much so that during the 1600's the Christian Christmas was recognized as a celebration based on Pagan customs and was outlawed in England and many of the colonies in America.



## Recipe for Was-sail for 8

3 red apples  
3 oz brown sugar  
2 pints brown ale, apple cider, or hard cider  
1/2 pint dry sherry or dry white wine  
1/4 tsp cinnamon  
1/4 teaspoon ginger  
strips of lemon peel

**Core and heat apples with brown sugar and some of the ale or cider in an oven for 30 minutes. Put in large pan and add rest of spices and lemon peel, simmer on stovetop of 5 minutes. Add most of the alcohol at the last minute so it heats up but does not evaporate. Burgundy and brandy can be substituted to the ale and sherry. White sugar and halved oranges may also be added to, taste.**

## Plum Pudding

1/4 lb. flour  
1/4 lb. currants  
1 tsp. salt  
1/4 lb. sultanas (small raisins)  
1 tsp. allspice  
2 cooking apples, peeled, cored and chopped  
1 tsp. ginger  
1 ounce cut mixed (citrus) peel  
1 tsp. cinnamon  
2 oz. shredded almonds  
pinch fresh grated nutmeg  
Juice and grated rind of 1 orange and 1 lemon  
1/4 lb. fresh breadcrumbs  
1/4 lb. molasses (treacle)  
1/2 lb. shredded suet  
4 large eggs  
1/4 lb. brown sugar  
2 tbsp. brandy  
1/4 lb. dried chopped apricots  
1/4 lb. prunes  
1/4 lb. dates

**Sift flour, salt and spices into a large bowl. Stir in breadcrumbs, suet and sugar. Add fruits, peel and rind. Beat lemon and orange juice, molasses and eggs together and add to other ingredients and set it ablaze!**

**If you haven't got six weeks before Yule to prepare a proper pudding (I never do) a tinned one from Crosse & Blackwell will do fine. Just be sure to always heat the pudding first, no matter who made it, or all the warmed brandy in the world won't help. And don't forget the hard sauce!**