

# SAMHUINN



## FIRE FESTIVAL

EVENTS PROGRAMME 2024

Samhuinn 2024 is back to bring the fire!





# SAMHUINN FIRE FESTIVAL 2024

## A BELTANE FIRE SOCIETY PRODUCTION

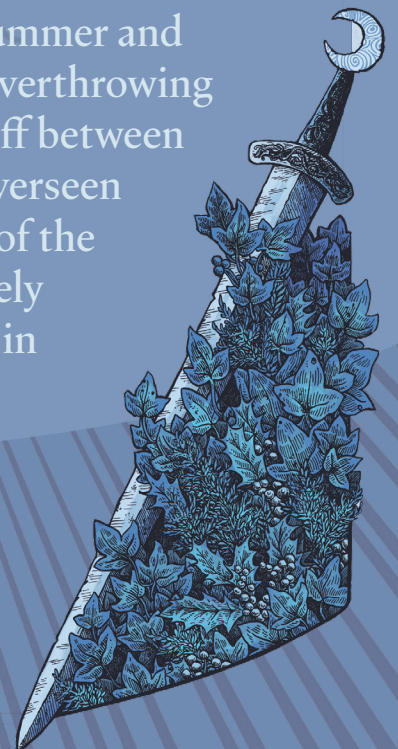
### FESTIVAL OVERVIEW

Counterbalancing our sister event on Calton Hill, Beltane Fire Festival, Samhuinn Fire Festival marks the transition from Summer to Winter with our characteristic mix of fire-play, drumming, and immersive performances. Our Society has often celebrated the other quarter-day festivals, and after the large success of our namesake (Beltane), Samhuinn was our next public event in Scotland, first taking place in 1995.

As the colder months settle in with the turning of the wheel, that familiar crescendo of drums and sparks of flames will burst upon Holyrood Park once again! Samhuinn 2024 is ready to bring the fire!

Join us for Edinburgh's immersive Samhuinn Fire Festival 2024 for a night of magnificent fire-play and acrobatics, amidst a cavalcade of otherworld creatures as we bring in the changing of seasons in Edinburgh and witness the epic battle between Summer and Winter.

Samhuinn Fire Festival is a modern re-imagining of an ancient Celtic festival, marking the darkened end of summer and upcoming rise of winter. The story follows the overthrowing of Summer by Winter, with a dramatic stand-off between the Summer and Winter Queens. This is overseen by the Cailleach, a Celtic representation of the Goddess, or Divine Hag, who ultimately decides each Queen's fate and ushers in the looming, colder months.



# HOW TO EXPERIENCE SAMHUINN

There is almost no wrong way to experience Samhuinn, the exception being that you mustn't interfere with the trained performer's fire play, or start some fire play yourself! Samhuinn is an experience and event which speaks differently to each person, and must be celebrated how you want!

You are invited to witness the epic battle of the Summer and Winter Queens, overseen by The Cailleach who determines the fate of each Queen. Along the way, you'll meet an assortment of characters across the park in the build up to the battle. We recommend witnessing the light of the neid fire at Hagg's Knowe - the neid fire provides all of the light needed for the festival, and you can watch it spread across Holyrood Park to light up Samhuinn. From there, we recommend following your intuition and letting the sounds and characters guide you.

Perhaps at times, you may feel lost, but that's okay! Let the evening move you about the park and make sure to join in with the dancing and merriment!

There will be plenty of overlapping and dazzling acts surrounding you. You may not see everything but don't fret! There is so much to see throughout the night with many acts overlapping and interacting with one another! Whilst you might not have a chance to see everything, you can plan and witness your favourite chapters unfold. Take a look at our fire festival map which shows you where each significant event will be taking place.

We know that audience interaction isn't for everyone. Our friendly performers are excited to meet our audiences and share the magic of Beltane, but also respect and stand by everyone's individual boundaries. Therefore, if you do not wish to interact with our performers we will be providing consent wristbands. You can pick up your wristband at the Box Office Tent on the night of the festival.





# OUR SAMHUINN CHARACTERS



## BLUES

The Blues are the ritual and organisational elders of the festival : they have years of experience of how things could be done, but also what not to do! They help to define and guide the Cailleach, Queens and other groups through the night, acting as a liminal boundary between the worlds.

You can see us at the front of the procession holding the gaze of the Cailleach and guiding things from one moment to the next. (We're easy to spot: the blue paint, with some copper added, is a total give-away). Sometimes we pop up in other places to prepare a space - including ritually cleansing the stage before the court steps onto it.

## COURT

### THE CAILLEACH

The Cailleach is the Celtic Goddess of Death and Rebirth, associated with winter storms. She emerges from her summer form to ensure that the Wheel continues to turn, as it must. She watches over as the armies of Summer and Winter come to blows during which time She Herself, grows into Her power. This culminates in the Cailleach shedding off the layers that no longer serve Her as She prepares to rule over winter.

### SUMMER QUEEN

My Summer Queen represents all the the Celtic female warriors of history and myth. She gives voice to the many silent female warriors who we know from gravesites and artwork but for whom we tell no stories. She represents also the fiery instability of summer under climate change. My Summer can be playful and energising, but is also too cocky, and doesn't give up when she should. She continues to try to fight, and to burn, reflecting how the seasonal transition is no longer easy. And there is folly in this, but also beauty from how hard she tries.

### WINTER QUEEN

Did you know that the Arctic has lost nearly half of its winter sea ice over the last 40 years? The battle against global warming is a matter of survival, especially in the ice-covered polar regions, which experience warming faster than any other areas on our planet. The Winter Queen is the guardian of the winter season but she is also a symbol of Scotland's profound connection to the North - though shared environment, history and culture. Her stoic Winter Warriors and Creatures face significant losses in their ongoing battles against summer, but her endurance, acceptance, and patience are destined to prevail in the end.

# OUR SAMHUINN CHARACTERS

## CRAOBHAN

Craobhan explores the climate change crisis from the point of view of trees from Celtic mythology like Blackthorn, Oak or Ash. As the trees increasingly flower out of season, they realise that they can no longer rely on the Summer Court protection and must turn to the Cailleach and the Winter Court so that they can survive until the warm Spring weather returns and they can start growing again. Leaving the Summer Court comfort zone is difficult, but it's a matter of their very survival.

## LUNISTICE

Lunistice have come all the way from Glasgow to celebrate the Major Lunar Standstill, an astronomical event that happens every 18.6 years with the moon rising and setting at its most southerly point. If you're stood in the Callanish stones, and look toward the figure of the Cailleach in the landscape there, the moon is reborn of the Goddess. Lunistice are present on the night of Samhuinn as moons and standing stones; celebrating the end of their 18.6 year journey, extinguishing their light and being given it back by our Cailleach, before heading on to their next cycle.

## OBSIDIAN

Deep in the heart of the mountain, in the place where fire meets ice you will find Obsidian. A powerful and unrelenting force of nature, Obsidian is a group of warriors aligned with winter. Glinting silver in the firelight, they will channel the chaotic energies of summer as fire to heat their inner forge - toiling to create a mythic sword worthy of the Winter Queen. Using a combination of physical storytelling, fire spinning, and acrobatics, they will convey the creation myth of this sword, and their journey towards a battle with the summer beings in order to bring about the coming of winter.

## PHOTOPPOINT

Photopoint are the volunteer documentary team who ensure that the festival can be witnessed across time and space. We will capture a bit of the magic of Samhuinn – both to share with the world; and to retain in image form so our community can look back at the magic they created once the body paint has been washed off.

## PÚCAÍ

The Púcaí are animal like shapeshifting, trickster fae associated with Samhuinn and November 1st in Irish Mythology. We'll be making the most of the last night of summer; taking you humans and other fair folk on a wild rhythmical ride as we cavort and drum ourselves into the beautiful fierce grip of winter. Our mischievous (but ultimately benign... we promiseeee) antics will sober across the evening as we come into alignment with the season, ready to be civil, good and proper like, for November 1st; Púca's Day. You can find us by following the sound of our drums, or keeping an eye out for our animal elements and modern-neon-punk take on the trickster archetype.



# OUR SAMHUINN CHARACTERS

## REDS

The Reds: Summer creatures of chaos, joy, and desire, these red-painted figures love to play using acrobatics and fire. Cheeky and curious, the Reds see every day as an opportunity for FUN! After awakening at Beltane, they have spent the summer revelling in debauched frivolity and want to draw out the party until the very end. They spend Samhuinn night showing off their skills with dazzling acrobatic displays, but as Winter approaches, their Summer energy cannot last. The Reds will burn bright with fiery pyramids before they are finally snuffed out onstage.

## SAMHUINN STEWARDS

Stewards are the friendly painted faces of the Samhuinn festival. We are the guardians of the liminal spaces, the go-between the audience and the performers, but we also make sure nothing catches on fire that wasn't meant to.

## SAMHUINN TECH

Tech adorn themselves in red boiler suits on the night of Samhuinn. Grounded in the physical world, they ensure the fires stay lit across the park and, along with the Stewards, look after the safety of both the deities and the spirits and the witnesses of the Festival. They arrive long before night falls to prepare the space and they'll be here after the witnesses have departed to return the park to its usual state. By the time they leave, you'll hardly know anyone was ever here

## STORMSPHERE

Stormsphere is a band of storm raising tempestarii who use drums and song, fiddle and strings, movement, dance and ritual to raise the Cailleach's storm. We start the night at St. Margaret's Well transformed into a sacred forge, to craft the Winter Queen's sword. The Cailleach arrives and whips up a storm, transforming the players into a moving music ensemble, with whirlin' skirlin' silk flags and trance evoking music for her procession to the battlefield. Stormsphere conjures the intense sounds for the field battle, with clashing cymbals, pounding drums and powerful vocals. After the final battle between Summer and Winter, Stormsphere will give atmospheric sounds to the Cailleach's unveiling, and crowning of the victorious Queen.

# OUR SAMHUINN CHARACTERS

## SUMMER'S GUARD

The Summer Guard have traversed the Scottish Highlands all Summer long following their Summer Queen. In the face of fiercely unstable climates, they stand together as shards and aspects of the Queen they are devoted to. From resilience and chaos to protectiveness and rage they draw inspiration from the legacies of ancient Celtic warrior queens whose stories have been whispered around fires through the ages. Similarly to their fiery forebears, they channel the intensity and unpredictability of a summer pushed beyond its natural bounds. Through battle and fire they not only celebrate epic sagas of formidable female leaders but also symbolise the ferocity of a modern summer - a season that now burns too hot and rebels against its ancient rhythms. Together, they stand as a powerful force alongside their Summer Queen, challenging the shifting boundaries of seasons and history.

## TORCHBEARERS

What is your fire for? Do you use it to light up a room? to honour and purify a sacred rite? Does it bring joy as you warm your hands and watch it cook your food? Or are you watching with awe and fear as roaring flames engulf everything in their path?

Torchbearers are the living flame, embodying all aspects of the fire and lighting the path even when the way forward seems impossible...

## WINTER'S GUARD

Winter's Guard are the creatures and warriors of Winter that are here to follow the Winter Queen and fight by Her side in the Final Battle. Accustomed to surviving and thriving in the coldest and harshest environments they are not easily defeated - and yet the disbalance between the seasons and accelerating climate change lead to significant losses amongst the Winter's Guard. Winter Creatures draw inspiration from Orkney, Shetland and Norse folklore and mythology - from dreadful Nuckelavee, to curious Wulver, unstoppable Draugr and mighty Valkyrie - they all responded to Winter Queen's summon to join her army.

## VELES

We are a union of Leshys from distant forests, guardians not only of our lands but of all creatures within them. Though we are territorial, whispers of an impending battle have brought us together under the deity Veles to shield what we hold dear. With fire and smudge, we mark our presence, watching from shadows near and afar. Beware: Leshys do not befriend those who threaten the balance of nature. We are protectors and tricksters, and we will defend our realms fiercely.



# SAMHUINN FIRE FESTIVAL 2024

MEADOWBANK



KEY: 1. Neid Fire (on Hagg's Knowe at 7.45pm) 2 - Standing Stones (Cailleach Awakens) 3 - Battle Field 4 - Stage (9pm)



# F.A.Qs

**Where should I arrive?** Please have your QR code ready for scanning, either in print or on mobile. Enter via Horsewynd Gate. Those with children or access needs, please queue on the left hand side of the road - you can collect wristbands for children in the black gazebo on the left.

*If you have additional access needs, please email [access@beltane.org](mailto:access@beltane.org).*

**What time does the procession start and end?** Festival gates open at 6:45pm. We recommend coming along to enjoy the sunset! The procession will end around 10PM.

**What should I wear?** Dress for the weather - as Samhuinn takes place in October, we thoroughly recommend clothing that will keep you warm and dry. As this is a fire festival we also recommend natural fabrics. Loud drumming will take place throughout the night so ear plugs are advised if you plan to get up close to the action.

**Can I bring food and beverages to Holyrood Park?** Alcohol is not being sold on site, but you can bring your own drinks (Please, NO GLASS). We recommend bringing cash for our caterers in case, as there is no ATM on site.

**Are my dogs able to be on Holyrood Park?** Dogs are not allowed – or would particularly enjoy – this fire-focused event!

**What should the size of my bag be?** Please limit bag size to no bigger than an A3 piece of paper.

**Are children allowed at this festival?** Under 16s must be accompanied by an adult with a ticket. Parents and guardians please note - this event contains semi-nudity and uninhibited behaviour. Your discretion is advised. We recommend ear plugs for little ones. Missing persons is located at the Welfare area.

**What if I don't want to interact with characters?** Beltane Fire Society deeply respects people's boundaries and understands that some attendees might not want to be interacted with. If you do not wish to be interacted with, you can collect a consent wristband upon entry (these will be clearly signposted).

**Is this event being filmed?** Yes! While not live streamed, we will later share a festival video on our social channels and website, as there will be film crews on-site capturing the action.

*For the safety of our performers and audience, **please do not use flash photography**. The fire should light up your photos nicely. Re-entry to the festival is not permitted.*

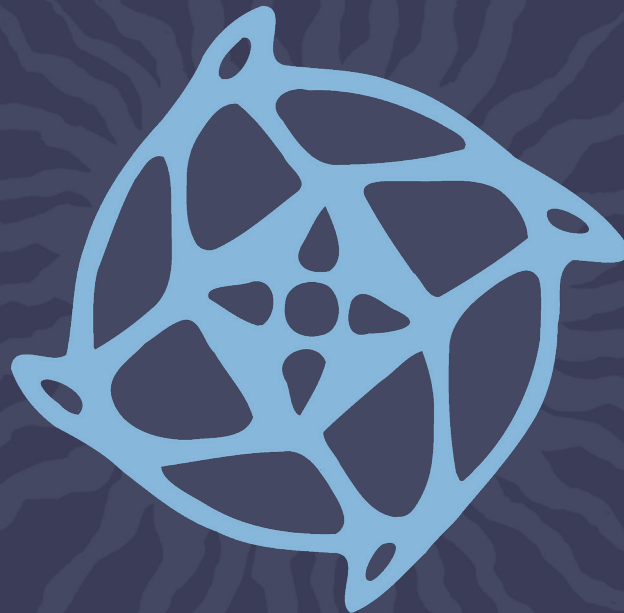


# ABOUT BELTANE FIRE SOCIETY

The Beltane Fire Society (BFS) is a community arts performance charity responsible for putting on the annual Beltane Fire Festival and Samhuinn Fire Festival in Edinburgh, having celebrated these festivals since 1988.

BFS is run by a volunteer Board of Trustees who oversee the year-round operation of the organisation and our dedicated volunteers who keep the fire burning year after year. The Society is funded entirely by donations, charitable grants and ticket sales.

Help us put on more 'fire' festivals by making a BFS PayPal donation.



**Artwork:** Hester Aspland Illustration @hesteraspland  
**Beltane Fire Society** | [www.beltane.org](http://www.beltane.org)  
@BeltaneFireSociety

Taken some great photos? Join the conversation and tag us using #Samhuinn2024

# HAPPY SAMHUINN!